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## Hand-Knotted Landscape – Reflections on Outi Pieski's *Our Land, Our Running Colours*

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Outi Pieski, *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, 2015  
Sámi shawl thread, wood, 300cm x 300cm x 170cm  
Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen

### Introduction

One day I overheard a discussion that some teenage boys were having about an artwork exhibited in the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. One of the boys said: 'No fell is pink. They are white in winter, and brownish-green in summer.'

The work at stake here was Outi Pieski's *Our Land, Our Running Colours*. It is an installation from 2015. In 2017, it was acquired for the Kiasma's collections from the 'Greetings from SUOMI' summer exhibition by ONOMA, the Cooperative of Artisans, Designers and Artists in Fiskars, Finland.<sup>1</sup> A little later, in the spring of 2019, this work was installed as part of the exhibition 'Coexistence. Human, Animal and Nature in Kiasma's Collections'<sup>2</sup>.

The materials used in the installation include wood and thread – more specifically stripped rowan twigs and polyester fringe thread that is used in making the shawls of traditional Sámi dress. The fringes have been tied to rowan branches hanging from the

ceiling. The work occupies about 3m x 3m x 1.7m and can be approached from all sides. The colour scheme of the threads is very rich: from basic colours such as red and yellow, to burgundy, pink, light blue and bright green.

- 1 To celebrate the 100th anniversary of Finnish Independence, the exhibition (curated by artists Minna Suoniemi and Petri Ala-Maunus) focused on multicultural Finland and the Finnishness of our time. See 'Greetings from SUOMI', 2017.
- 2 The exhibition will be open at Kiasma until 1 March 2020.

Outi Pieski (b. 1973) is a Helsinki-born visual artist of Sámi origin, who divides her time between Numminen in southern Finland and Utsjoki in the far north of Lapland. She graduated from the Painting Department of the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in 2000. Pieski works mainly with painting, collage and installation. In recent years, she has also participated in various (environmental) community art projects.<sup>3</sup> Her works have been featured in various private and group exhibitions both in Finland and abroad.<sup>4</sup> She is also represented in several public and private collections. *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is the artist's first work to be acquired for the Finnish National Gallery collections.

Pieski's Sámi origin is often more or less present in her art. Northern Sámi, her father's mother tongue, was not spoken at home in Jakomäki, Helsinki, where Pieski grew up. This is a common experience shared by many Sámi who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, and has ties to the history of the assimilation policy pursued by the Finnish state. As an adult, Pieski has studied the Sámi language, culture and handicraft, for example in the Sámi Education Institute in Inari.<sup>5</sup>

I see Pieski's work as a significant part of the exhibition 'Coexistence'. It opens up in the furthest room of the third floor's exhibition space where the natural light almost dazzles on a sunny day. The combination of external and internal lighting reveals the work so that you can sense each thread in detail. The exhibition, curated by Saara Hacklin, Kati Kivinen and Satu Oksanen from Kiasma, looks at the relationship between humans and nature; it asks how humans are interpreted in relation to other organisms. According to the curators, the theme was selected as a result of current discussions dealing with environment, climate change and the Anthropocene.<sup>6</sup> These are also topics that feature in many of the artworks recently acquired in Kiasma's collections.

In this article, I study Pieski's work and its possible meanings as presented in the Kiasma exhibition. Although the exhibition itself is not in my focus, the broader themes of it will run in the background of my analysis. The main question I am posing is how people and landscape become one in this particular work. The article is divided into three parts. I will start by observing Pieski's work in relation to the multidimensional concept of landscape and its materiality. In the second part I discuss the meanings of Sámi handicraft tradition, or *duodji*, present in the installation. It has been said that Pieski is first and foremost an artist whose work can be examined, for example, from the point of view of *duodji*.<sup>7</sup> I am going to deepen this perspective mainly by looking how handicraft – fabric, weave, garment – meets the landscape in the work. I will finish by discussing briefly the idea of nature as a legal entity. This recent trend appears to be an interesting way to think about the meanings of land and landscape in the era of the current ecological crisis.<sup>8</sup>

## To (re)shape a landscape

The work *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is both representational and abstract. Thus it relates to Pieski's paintings, where the details and arrangement of paint seem to form abstract shapes and colour surfaces, especially when viewed close up. However, there are subtle landscapes and momentary descriptions of place emerging from these abstract surfaces. Pieski has said

3 See for example *Rájácumhá / Kiss from the Border* (2017–2018) by Niillas Holmberg, Jenni Laiti & Outi Pieski.

4 Pieski is also one of the founder members of the Miracle Workers Collective which hosts the Pavilion of Finland at the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019.

5 Hautala-Hirvioja 2017, 110, 117.

6 See *Coexistence*, press release, 2019.

7 Guttorm 2018, 35, 41.

8 It must be articulated that my position is that of an outsider of the Sámi culture. By working as an intern on Outi Pieski's exhibition at EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art in autumn 2018, I got into the themes of her art. I am especially interested in the issues relating to nature in contemporary art.

that above all she is a painter.<sup>9</sup> She also defines this work as a three-dimensional drawing in which the contours of the fell landscape are described from the forms of the rowan branches.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the work can be seen as a landscape, as a view of the northern fells. But at the same time the abstractness and materiality alienate the work from this kind of representational character, although it is fascinating and important to notice that this abstraction has a strong foundation in concrete reality.

#### *From visual to transparent landscape*

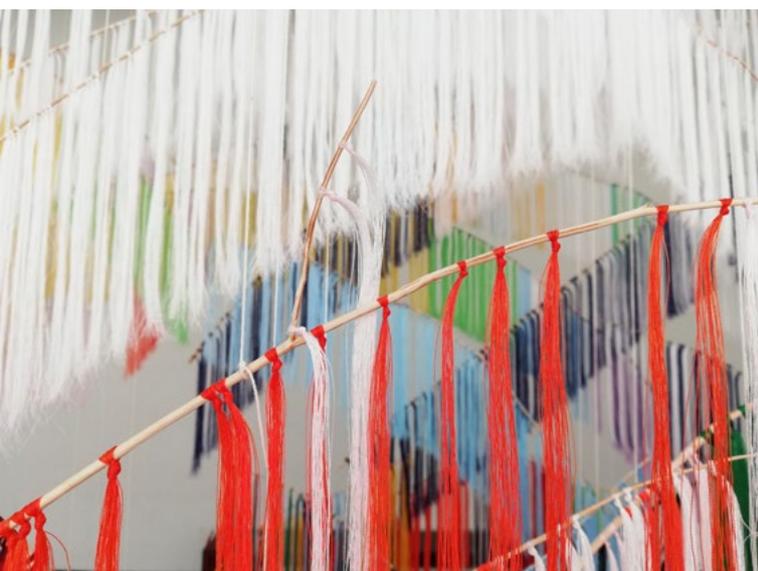
The concept of landscape is highly contextual. Its multiple meanings are already evidenced by the everyday use of the concept both as a pictorial representation and a physical place. By using the concept, you can express the tension between looking at and living in a place.<sup>11</sup> Philosopher Jeff Malpas talks about the 'problem of landscape' referring to the idea of landscape as a visual representation of the world, as a separated view available to our gaze.<sup>12</sup> This is problematic because landscape is never just a visual view, but rather expresses a certain *relation* to place.<sup>13</sup> This relation is significant because it also reveals the necessarily political character of landscape. Our relationship with place always involves some sort of engagement and separation, and thus the social and power-related aspects are inevitably present.<sup>14</sup>

Pieski describes how in *Our Land, Our Running Colours* she has coloured the fells formed by branches with the shawl fringes – in her words with 'our colours', referring to the shawl of the Sámi dress and its diverse colourings. The landscape depicted by Pieski is part of the Sámi homeland that has been coloured with the colours of past, present and future generations living there. In

the work, human presence is both symbolically and materially part of the landscape in which one lives.

In the context of art history, landscape has long been seen as a genre of painting and it is thus strongly combined with pictorial, formal composition and aesthetics. The Western tradition of landscape art has a connection with the representation of nature or environment as a distant object that the viewer can observe from the outside. According to art historian Hanna Johansson, this was made possible by the scientific revolution and mechanistic world view of the 17th century. It made way for the conception of nature as an object of control and manipulation.<sup>15</sup> This is a good reminder that the concept of landscape refers to the *historically* shaped way of seeing, experiencing and appreciating the environment.<sup>16</sup>

The anthropologist Tim Ingold has strongly called into question art history's emphasis on the visual dimension of landscape.<sup>17</sup> He strives for a holistic approach where different



Outi Pieski, detail from  
*Our Land, Our Running  
Colours*, 2015

Photo: Emma Lilja

9 Outi Pieski. Interview for EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, 2018.

10 Outi Pieski. Interview for FNG/Kiasma, 2018.

11 Jäntti, Saresma, Sääskilähti & Vallius 2014, 10.

12 Malpas 2011, 6.

13 Jeff Malpas (2011, 6–7) also highlights how vision has largely been misunderstood as a passive relation to the world. The same way, landscape is inadequately linked to the visual alone.

14 Malpas 2011, 9.

15 Johansson 2008, 224.

16 Johansson 2002, 168.

17 Ingold (2012, 26) rests his criticism on the original, pre-modern meaning of the term: 'The suffix "scape" does not come, as so many scholars have supposed, from classical Greek *skopein*, meaning "to look", but from Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning "to shape". Thus landscape is not land looked at but *land shaped*.'

aspects cannot be separated. In his thinking, the common juxtaposition between natural and cultural landscape, for example, is largely overcome by the *dwelling* perspective. From this point of view, the landscape is a constantly living and evolving record of the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it; through dwelling, people become part of the landscape where they always leave something of themselves.<sup>18</sup> Landscape is neither identical to nature, nor it is a pure human construction. As we are shaping the landscape, we (as human beings) are shaped by the landscape as well.

Dwelling is inextricably linked to the different *tasks* through which human presence acts in a reciprocal relationship with one's environment. What matters is how human beings are moving and dwelling *in* the landscape, not only on its surface or separate from it. Instead of being an object of gaze, landscape is an unending process that includes everyone. It is also a story – a chronicle of being 'pregnant with the past' and thus inviting us to remember.<sup>19</sup>

In *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, the 'colouring' of the fells is executed in a subtle way. The colour does not cover but rather shines through and thus *reveals*. Pieski explains that in the work, she feels the fells as transparent. With this, she refers to the idea that by knowing the terrain well and in detail, you can in a way see behind the fells before you – or at least know (from experience) what lies behind.<sup>20</sup> This differs significantly, for example, from the way we perceive the mountain area by drawing a map from which we can theoretically take over a large area at a time. However, such a map does not correspond to the experience of being in a place. As Ingold points out, we can look, study, analyse and interpret such a view, but yet still not inhabit it.<sup>21</sup> In Pieski's work, the landscape is strongly associated with people's everyday life. The landscape becomes the home district that the inhabitant knows like the back of their hand. This may also refer to *local knowledge* collected over centuries, passed orally from one generation to another. This knowledge is also referred to as 'traditional ecological knowledge' or 'indigenous knowledge'.<sup>22</sup>

### *Delicate, invisible landscape*

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the material rather than the visual aspects of landscape in the field of art history and artistic research. Here, one of the key questions is how land and landscape are used both for practical and ideological purposes.<sup>23</sup> This is related to the broader interest in the material world and its agency (cf. new materialism). However, it doesn't mean that the power of the visual is completely questioned. It's about questioning the ways in which the visual covers up other aspects, such as the economic, social or political, dimensions of landscape.

To demonstrate this, art historians Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson describe how many contemporary artworks 'emphasise not the visible landscape, but the invisible' – that which is not immediately apparent or what we don't usually see in the landscape.<sup>24</sup> I think Pieski brings out this kind of invisibility of the landscape. First, the transparency of her installation reminds us that there is always another landscape behind the visible one. Secondly, instead of deserted fells or wilderness, culture is present and materialised in the landscape. Thirdly, Pieski's work can reveal the presence of history, at least through the

18 Ingold 2000, 189.

19 Ingold 2000, 189. However, Ingold (2012, 203–204) highlights that landscape is not a container of memories, not a depository for durable products. Instead, landscape is a place for memory to be worked actively.

20 Outi Pieski. Interview for FNG/Kiasma, 2018.

21 Ingold 2000, 189; Ingold 2012, 204.

22 See Kivinen 2019. In her article, Kati Kivinen reflects the new meanings of local knowledge in our current time, also the indigenous point of view.

23 Scott & Swenson 2015, 2–4.

24 Scott & Swenson 2015, 6.

change of colours of the shawl threads.<sup>25</sup> Often, history tends to 'absorb' or 'decompose' into the landscape. So in order to find the past hiding in the layers of the earth, the process of becoming invisible must somehow be made visible.<sup>26</sup>

Pieski has made other similar installations using shawl fringes and branches, such as *Halo* and *A Sketch of Transparent Northern Hills*, both from 2012–13, along with *Crossing Paths*, from 2014. Instead of wooden branches, Pieski has also used V-shaped steel parts in *Spirit of the Valley* (2015) and *Falling Shawls* (2017). The repeated defined shape of the steel makes the works more geometric compared to the organic nature of the works using branches.

Sámi culture and literature researcher Kaisa Ahvenjärvi calls these works 'air installations'.<sup>27</sup> When thinking about the term, the work *Our Land, Our Running Colours* somehow reminds me of a mobile – of a kinetic sculpture often suspended in the air and moving in response to air currents (or motor power).<sup>28</sup> Pieski's work also 'breathes' in space; the fringes may move under the influence of air-conditioning or visitor's movements. That's why you could talk about the installation as an 'animated version of paintings'<sup>29</sup>.

When I compare *Our Land, Our Running Colours* for example, to the *Falling Shawls* installation seen in EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art in autumn 2018<sup>30</sup>, my attention is drawn to a different kind of sensitivity that the thin and therefore fragile looking branches generate. The materials used in *Our Land, Our Running Colours* are characterised by lightness. But on the other hand, delicate threads and young branches are the initial force of many of our life-supporting webs. Mobile-like airiness and the transparency of the landscape are a contrast to the massive solidity of the actual fells and to the opacity of the earth. This tension makes me wonder if there is something delicate – but crucial – in the landscape that has been bypassed by the dominant culture. The sensitivity of the work also calls for thinking about the fragility of northern nature, especially as the climate warms up and the threat posed by mining and forestry companies becomes more tangible.

In its fragility the work can be seen to challenge the idea of art remaining forever. As art historian Irene Snarby writes about the art of Iver Jåks<sup>31</sup>, this challenging emphasises the meaning of immaterial knowledge and reflects the thinking of indigenous peoples worldwide.<sup>32</sup> It also makes me think about the tension between timelessness and topicality. Even though *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is timeless in its landscape likeness, it is also extremely topical and addresses the current moment by using subtle symbols of being and belonging.

## To weave a landscape

Apart from being a landscape that depicts the northern nature and one's relationship to it, the work is substantially part of the Sámi culture changing with time. The Sámi are the only recognised indigenous people in Europe, inhabiting the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. There are an estimated 60,000–100,000 Sámi people, of whom about

25 Pieski (Interview for FNG/Kiasma, 2018) says that in the past, there was a time when Sámi people were banned from using any of their scarves other than white ones. Since then, colours have returned to the Sámi costumes. In the work, fringes change from top to bottom, from white to a play of brighter and darker colours.

26 Scott & Swenson 2015, 6.

27 Ahvenjärvi 2019, 109.

28 The term 'mobile' was first used by Marcel Duchamp to describe the sculptures of Alexander Calder (1898–1976) in the 1930s.

29 'Mobile'. Tate's online glossary.

30 The exhibition in EMMA (12 September 2018 – 6 January 2019) was part of an award given to the artist in 2017 by the Fine Arts Academy of Finland. It was curated by art historian Milja Liimatainen.

31 Iver Jåks (1932–2007) was a Norwegian Sámi artist and sculptor who often used organic materials in his works. For him the 'living' of the material was central, and he saw conservation as opposing this idea. See Snarby 2019.

32 Snarby 2019.

10,000 live in the area of the Finnish state.<sup>33</sup> Although Sámi are often referred to as a united people, they are divided into smaller sub-communities based on language, cultural practices and lifestyles.<sup>34</sup> The Sámi land (*Sápmi*) is located in the northern parts of Scandinavia and Kola Peninsula. Today, more than 60 percent of the Sámi in Finland live outside the Sámi land.<sup>35</sup>

### *A multidimensional concept of duodji*

The Sámi handicraft tradition, or *duodji* (in Northern Sámi language), is an important part of Sámi culture and lifestyle. Its origins are in nature and in the knowledge of nature, as traditionally handicrafts almost exclusively use natural materials, such as wood, bone and leather, materials that have been available locally.<sup>36</sup> The concept of *duodji* refers both to the process of manufacturing an object and to the object itself, but also to a wider world view. The maker of *duodji* attaches themselves to a continuum that reflects collective values and norms, an intangible cultural heritage.<sup>37</sup> However, for many Sámi, it is important not to concretise *duodji* into some memory about the past, but to allow it to live and develop continuously.<sup>38</sup>

Interaction and trading with other cultures have had an influence on *duodji* by bringing new materials to the Sámi land. For example the fabric materials such as wool and silk used in traditional Sámi clothing came into use in the early 19th century.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the wooden branches, Pieski has used industrial sewing threads made of polyester in her installation. This shows well that the Sámi culture equally lives for the moment in which synthetic fibres are used alongside the natural ones. As art historian Monica Grini highlights, this can also be seen to challenge established stereotypes – by using polyester thread Pieski emphasises that Sámi aesthetics today is not necessarily just about wood, bone and other natural materials.<sup>40</sup>

Professor of *duodji* Gunvor Guttorm finds it important to distinguish between the conceptual idea of *duodji* and the concrete result of the craft.<sup>41</sup> She also perceives the meaning of *duodji* as twofold in the following way: on the one hand, it is an integral part of the activity and frame of mind of Sámi society, and on the other hand, it is a personal expression more or less comparable to other artistic activities. So it is somewhat different to talk about *duodji* in a traditional context than as part of contemporary art phenomena. It is also essential to take into account the frameworks in which *duodji* and artworks inspired by it are exhibited and interpreted.<sup>42</sup>

According to Guttorm, many *duodji* practitioners use *duodji* as a springboard for their own creative work.<sup>43</sup> Pieski also seems to take inspiration from *duodji* and its traditions; although this seems to be something that does not limit but, on the contrary, expands the field of meanings. By utilizing the *duodji* tradition, Pieski takes artistic liberties as *duodji* involves 'official regulations and compliance with different norms, also community control with its preconditions'<sup>44</sup>. Among the Sámi people, there are constant discussions about how far the boundaries of *duodji* can be stretched.<sup>45</sup> Art historian Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja points out how Pieski, as an artist, can break the rules of *duodji* and combine different elements with one another. In this way she 'exists both inside and outside her own culture and makes art in

33 Valkonen 2009, 11.

34 In Finland, the division is usually done between the North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. See Valkonen 2009.

35 Valkonen 2009, 10–11.

36 Rensujeff 2011, 40; Tervaniemi & Magga 2019, 85.

37 Snarby 2019.

38 Snarby 2018, 65.

39 Tervaniemi & Magga 2019, 85; Pelin 2003, 115.

40 Grini 2017, 310–12. Pieski's work *Golden Coat/Gollegákti* (2006) includes a Sámi dress made from coffee bags and a shawl made from candy wrappings. In this way, she deals with the relationship between tradition and modernity through the choice of materials, among other things.

41 Guttorm 2018, 36.

42 Guttorm 2017, 163, 174–175.

43 Guttorm 2017, 164.

44 Rensujeff 2011, 43.

45 Snarby 2019.



Outi Pieski, shown in 2019  
hanging *Our Land, Our  
Running Colours*, 2015  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery  
/ Pirje Mykkänen

an intermediate area between Sámi and international Western culture'.<sup>46</sup>

*Duodji's* aesthetic impact on visual arts is undoubtedly significant.<sup>47</sup> This can be seen in *Our Land, Our Running Colours*: the visual link to the Sámi dress is quite obvious, even without knowing the *duodji* tradition. However, it is essential to note that the work is a kind of intersection where the Sámi handicraft tradition meets the tradition of contemporary art. Pieski says she wanted to bring out various visual languages through her work.<sup>48</sup> I could see this as a symbol of dialogue between the Sámi and Western world view; as a negotiation between indigenous and majority cultures on how to inhabit this common planet.

As with the *Falling Shawls* installation<sup>49</sup>, Pieski says that in *Our Land, Our Running Colours* the making process is also a key part of the work.<sup>50</sup> The repetitive act of knotting resembles a ritualistic, meditative process through which the artist can feel a sense of belonging to one's own cultural tradition and past generations. According to Tim Ingold, Western thinking often privileges form over process. In that case, the final product becomes an object of contemplation from which the actual work of painting or other making is hidden from view. In many non-Western cultures, however, the opposite is often the case: what is essential is the process or act as a kind of performance.<sup>51</sup> This equates to the understanding of *duodji* in which the working process is at least as essential as the resulting product.

#### *Duodji meeting landscape*

Often, when talking about *duodji*, its ecological dimension is highlighted.<sup>52</sup> Also in *Our Land, Our Running Colours* I interpret

the handicraft tradition dealing with both the human-nature relationship and the nature-culture dichotomy. Even without the knowledge of the Sámi context, you can sense the intertwining of human and nature in the work. Alongside the symbolic meanings, this happens quite literally: threads made by human hands (or industrial machines) – which, of course, in the end also come from nature – have been tied to the 'purer' natural material, the branches. Thus I see the work and the landscape depicted by it as a *node* that essentially connects human and nature. The whole work, or more broadly the landscape, would not exist without this node, the coming together of many different dimensions.

In *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, it is interesting to see how *duodji* and landscape are literally *woven* together. The landscape transmitted by the work is hand-made, or 'hand-knotted'. It's mainly made up of parts of clothing. Tim Ingold also talks about the analogy between landscape and fabric, land and cloth. In medieval times, the land was scaped by the people with foot, axe, plough and the assistance of their domestic animals, just as cloth is woven from the intertwined threads of warp and weft. In the spirit of Gilles Deleuze and Félix

46 Hautala-Hirvioja 2017, 117.

47 Rensujeff 2011, 56.

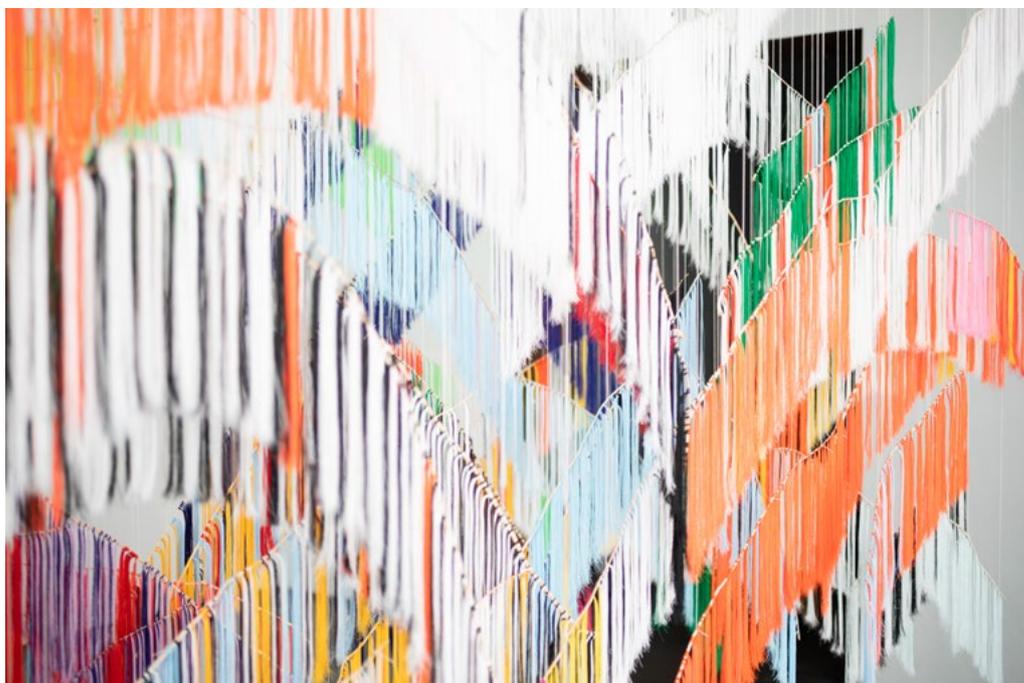
48 Outi Pieski. Interview for FNG/Kiasma, 2018.

49 Pieski executed the *Falling Shawls* installation (2017) together with twelve Sámi women and *duodji* experts. The process of collective making and of gathering together is thus essential when considering the work. See Liimatainen 2018, 22.

50 Outi Pieski. Interview for FNG/Kiasma, 2018.

51 Ingold 2000, 198.

52 See e.g. Pelin 2003, 115.



**Outi Pieski, detail from *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, 2015,  
Sámi shawl thread, wood, 300cm x 300cm x 170cm  
Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma**  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen

Guattari, Ingold draws a parallel between agrarian landscape and woven fabric with separated threads, while the nomadic lifestyle is more comparable to felt fabric in which the fibres are inextricably entangled. Anyway, Ingold emphasises that this distinction is fruitful to see as a coin with two sides, not as a strict opposition.<sup>53</sup>

In Ingold's thinking, every task or action draws some kind of linear movement to the ground, like a straight or curvy path across a field or forest. Together, these lines form a *meshwork* that is woven into the land rather than written on it. According to Ingold, 'the lines of the meshwork are as intrinsic to its constitution as are threads to the constitution of cloth'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, we constantly weave the texture of the land as we wander around a landscape. In addition to human beings, non-human actors such as birds or tree roots are equally involved. For me, the idea of lines and strokes is interesting when considering Pieski's work, because visually the work consists of only these – verticals and horizontals of various kinds, threads reaching out to the ground and branches floating in the air. However, one thread or twig would still be nothing; the work and the landscape are made up of the abundance and encounter of these lines, a temporal network that human being is building together with other actors.

By building the landscape out of the shawl fringes, Pieski brings human presence to the landscape. Kaisa Ahvenjärvi speaks of clothing as a human metonymy, a veil of the body. In her interpretation, the small parts of clothes 'bring the landscape to the skin' and thus describe the human's intimate and bodily relationship to the places and the surrounding nature.<sup>55</sup> By

53 Ingold 2012, 198–201.

54 Ingold 2017, 26–27.

55 Ahvenjärvi 2019, 114.

way of the clothing image, we can dress ourselves with both nature and culture – or rather intertwine with their mutual network. Curator Jan-Erik Lundström makes an interesting note when writing about how the materials and methods of *duodji* in Pieski's works are 'relating soil and skin'.<sup>56</sup> For me, the image of a 'fabric' woven from the surface of the soil and human skin is a little creepy but also illustrative in its tangible nature.

The invisible – both cultural and spiritual – dimensions of the landscape are (at some level) made visible in the work by the use of the *duodji* technique. Researchers on Sámi culture Sanna Tervaniemi and Päivi Magga describe how the signs of Sámi culture in the environment may be so subtle that outsiders fail to see or understand them, and then the landscape is easily seen as a deserted wilderness.<sup>57</sup> In Pieski's work, the handicraft tradition brings out clothing, and clothing, in turn, is used by people who 'use' the landscape around them. Thus, at least some dimension of the traditional knowledge is made visible. It is this very knowledge that shows us how certain places and areas are used. Traditional ecological knowledge 'is both knowledge and skill enabling people to function in their environment'.<sup>58</sup>

### *Duodji in art museums*

According to Irene Snarby, there is 'a long tradition of art critics unable to accept a connection between the aesthetics of indigenous peoples and that of contemporary art'.<sup>59</sup> However, since the late 1980s and the early 1990s, interest in non-Western art has grown exponentially. In particular, some of the groundbreaking exhibitions of that time began to bring works by, for example, black and indigenous artists into the discourse of contemporary art.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, we can still ask who has been given the right to be part of the contemporary art field, and how we value the ways of making art from different traditions.<sup>61</sup>

Objects representing Sámi aesthetics (e.g. *duodji*) have long been displayed only in museums for ethnography and cultural history.<sup>62</sup> This has probably been influenced by the fact that there has traditionally been no need for a separate concept of art in Sámi culture, as aesthetics infused all aspects of life.<sup>63</sup> The concept of art, *dáidda*, was derived from Finnish into the Sámi language in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> This history brings out the tension between the autonomy of art, personal artistic expression and the more collective creation based on the *duodji* tradition.

One might say that it is specifically through *duodji* that Sáminess is made visible in *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, and this is a way of reminding us of the presence of Sámi people in the dominant culture.<sup>65</sup> In Kiasma especially, a museum belonging to the Finnish National Gallery, this dimension is strongly present. In the white exhibition hall, *duodji* tradition could not be farther away from everyday life and set apart from its cultural context. But since, in this case, *duodji* is part of the processuality of the contemporary art installation, it attracts new and interesting, even quite political meanings.

56 Lundström 2018, 33.

57 Tervaniemi & Magga 2019, 81.

58 Tervaniemi & Magga 2019, 82.

59 Snarby 2019.

60 McLean 2013, 169. As a more recent example, 2017 was a significant year for Sámi art: the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) dedicated its annual programme to 'A Year of Indigenous art and thought' to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first national Sámi conference (Tråante 2017). The same year, a range of Sámi artists were represented at 'Documenta 14' in Kassel, with Adam Szymczyk as artistic director. See e.g. Olsen 2017.

61 See e.g. Mostyn 2019. His article 'The Blind Spot of Swedish Art World Exceptionalism' is a revealing example of the existing racial bias in Sweden.

62 Snarby 2019.

63 In the traditional *siida* system there was no place for 'art' in the Western sense, because the nomadic way of life made it possible to carry only what was necessary for survival. See Aamold 2018, 15.

64 This can be seen as a mode of 'conceptual colonialism' dealing with the problem of the universalisation of the concept of art. See e.g. Lohiniva 1999, 124.

65 Valkonen 2009, 269.



**Outi Pieski, *Our Land, Our Running Colours*, 2015**  
 Installed at the exhibition 'Coexistence', the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, 2019  
 Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma  
 Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen

Sanna Tervaniemi and Päivi Magga discuss *duodji* as a symbol of political movement. Here they refer to *duodji* being highly valued again since the 1960s and 1970s. *Duodji*, and the use of the traditional Sámi dress, has become a symbolic gesture that expresses the appreciation of one's own culture, and at the same time distinguishes 'us' from 'others'.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, drawing from *duodji* connects *Our Land, Our Running Colours* to politics: it raises the question of where the boundaries between 'us' and 'others' are drawn; who has the right to the landscape and thereby to the land use in the area. The title of the work also refers to this theme.

In that regard, Pieski's work takes a stand on the position of the Sámi as an indigenous people. For this reason, it can be seen to be participating in the international indigenous discourse and on the other hand representing Sámi contemporary art. But what is so-called Sámi art, is it even reasonable to make such a categorisation? Art historian Hanna Horsberg Hansen describes paradoxically how Sámi art can be anything, but anything cannot be Sámi art.<sup>67</sup> Jan-Erik Lundström points to the dilemma of the Sámi artist: on the one hand, one is bound to one's ethnic identity and preserving Sámi tradition, on the other hand to

<sup>66</sup> Tervaniemi & Magga 2019, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Hansen 2016, 252.

the tradition of modernism and postmodernism through which an artist can produce art 'liberated' from its Sámi origins.<sup>68</sup> According to Lundström, we should avoid all kinds of stereotypical generalisations or assumptions of Sámi art, and instead focus on individual and particular practices.<sup>69</sup>

The concept of Sámi contemporary art is somehow comparable to the term 'Indigenous art' that emerged in recent years. Defining the term is challenging, as already the word 'indigenous' may be quite ambiguous.<sup>70</sup> According to art critic David Garneau, 'Indigenous Contemporary Art' is strongly related to the mode of being 'Indigenous' in our current time. 'Indigenous' (with the capital 'I') implies a particular, chosen and articulated way of representing indigenous peoples.<sup>71</sup> For Garneau, Indigenous art is broadly trying to end the colonial pursuit of universal truth and hierarchy which is making 'others' invisible.<sup>72</sup> In this way, *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is likely to be seen as Indigenous art.

But what kind of role does *Our Land, Our Running Colours* have in Kiasma's collection, as property of the Finnish state?<sup>73</sup> At least within that context, it brings out the Sámi perspective and the history of Finnish colonialism.<sup>74</sup> Thus *duodji* (as part of contemporary artwork) is also welcomed to an art institution. According to Hanna Horsberg Hansen, this institutional appropriation changes the nature of *duodji*: also in Pieski's work the presence of *duodji* invites people to look at, and interpret, rather than to use the object.<sup>75</sup> This shows well the difference between the conceptual and practical dimensions of *duodji*. Gunvor Guttorm emphasises that "the concept of *duodji* should be understood as putting Indigenous knowledge and experience to work".<sup>76</sup> In my reading *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is very much doing this; aiming at making Sámi voices more visible in different discourses.

## To acknowledge a landscape – nature as a legal person

Outi Pieski refers to the human rights granted to nature for example in Aotearoa<sup>77</sup>, New Zealand.<sup>78</sup> This is related to the recent global discussions on the status of nature in our societies. Pieski participates in this discussion in particular through various collaborative projects, such as *Moratorium Office* (2017)<sup>79</sup>, which also affects the way we perceive the more aesthetic works of hers. That's why what is happening in New Zealand – one of the pioneers of the rights-of-nature movement – is also interesting in the case of *Our Land, Our Running Colours*.

68 Lundström 2015, 102.

69 See Lundström 2015, 89–92.

70 The origin of the term 'indigenous (peoples)' relates strongly to the UN and to the discourse of international law. So the concept may be seen as a creation of dominant cultures and colonial practices, though it has been gradually re-evaluated by the ongoing process of decolonisation. See e.g. Valkonen 2009, 141.

71 Garneau 2018, 21–22, 26.

72 Garneau 2018, 31.

73 In addition to the work by Pieski, there are works by Sámi artists Marja Helander and Merja Aletta Ranttila and artist group Suohpanterror in the collections of the Finnish National Gallery / Kiasma.

74 Cf. Hanna Horsberg Hansen's (2019, 93) analysis of the work *Pile o'Sápmi* (2016) by Sámi artist Máret Ánne Sara. The work received much international attention at 'Documenta 14' in Kassel, and was later acquired for the collections of the Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design.

75 Hansen 2016, 252.

76 Guttorm 2017, 164–165.

77 Māori name for New Zealand.

78 Outi Pieski. Interviews for FNG/Kiasma and EMMA, 2018. Also curator Marja Helander (2019) connects the works by Pieski to these rights in the exhibition catalogue of the XXIV Mänttä Art Festival.

79 See *Moratorium Office – advisory service for decolonialist self-determination* by Niillas Holmberg, Jenni Laiti / Suohpanterror & Outi Pieski in collaboration with the Ellos Deatnu! group [<http://moratoriadoaimmahat.org/en/moratorium-office/>].

In 2017, the Whanganui River in New Zealand was granted legal personhood. This means that the river is being treated as a living being with the rights and responsibilities equivalent to a person. In this way, the New Zealand state also acknowledges the special relationship between the river and the Māori tribe living on its shores.<sup>80</sup> This is remarkable because the Māori have been fighting the colonial control of the river since the 19th century. The ecological status of the river and the ability of the Māori people to carry on their traditional livelihoods have declined over the decades as a result of the activities of those in power. Now the law requires the river to be treated as a living entity with all its physical and metaphysical elements.<sup>81</sup>

This internationally acclaimed case is part of a growing global movement aiming at responding to the many threats nature is increasingly facing (climate change, mass extinction, over-use of resources).<sup>82</sup> Already in 2008, Ecuador was the first country in the world to include rights of nature in its Constitution. In recent years, new types of rights have also been recognised in Bolivia, India and the United States, among others.<sup>83</sup>

The phenomenon is interesting when considering Pieski's art, because in many of her works the landscapes become almost like human portraits. Pieski makes it explicit that that she has been thinking about the rights of nature in her works, and that she would be interested in discussing the issue in the Sámi context.<sup>84</sup> Might there be areas in the Sámi land, such as fells or rivers, whose recognition as legal entities would be important? What if the fells represented in *Our Land, Our Running Colours* were persons – or individuals, as researcher in environmental aesthetics, Pauline von Bonsdorff, encourages us to think?<sup>85</sup>

It's good to notice how 'indigeneity' today is almost routinely associated with harmonious ecological living.<sup>86</sup> That's why indigenous peoples are often very closely linked to the rights-of-nature movement and more generally to environmental protection. Political scientist and philosopher Mihnea Tanasescu has studied this interconnection, especially in the context of Ecuador's constitutional change in 2008. First, Tanasescu highlights how giving rights to nature is in a sense redundant for indigenous peoples, since respect for natural environments is strongly involved in their ancestral ontologies. Secondly, the connection between these rights and indigenous peoples is somewhat misleading, as legal history as such has nothing to do with indigenous philosophies. In the same way, speaking of an indigenous attitude towards nature is misleading, because such a generalisation doesn't capture the diversity of indigenous cultures.<sup>87</sup>

For these reasons, Tanasescu uses the term 'indigenous symbol' to describe the *strategic representational role* that the supposed harmony between indigenous peoples and nature primarily contains.<sup>88</sup> In this reading, the integration of indigenous peoples with the rights of nature is most importantly promoting certain purposes. It may be seen as a kind of rhetoric, performative medium. Jarno and Sanna Valkonen, environmental sociologist and Sámi researcher, speak equally about the performativity of the Sámi nature relationship. From this point of view, a certain nature relationship is part of building an identity and a way of political separation. It plays a central and important role, especially in the identity politics driven by the global indigenous movement.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that the supposed harmony has

80 Kivipelto 2018.

81 'The Rise of the Rights of Nature', 2019.

82 The idea of nature's legal personhood was first introduced by Christopher Stone, an American Professor of Law, in his influential essay 'Should trees have standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects' published in 1972. See e.g. Cano Pecharroman 2018.

83 'The Rise of the Rights of Nature', 2019.

84 Outi Pieski. Interviews of Kiasma and EMMA, 2018.

85 von Bonsdorff 2007, 34.

86 Tanasescu 2015, 107. See also Valkonen & Valkonen 2014.

87 Tanasescu 2015, 109–116.

88 Tanasescu 2015, 114, 120. The purpose of this symbol is to obscure the fact that the rights of nature are the creation of lawyers, not directly derived from the world views of indigenous peoples.

89 Valkonen & Valkonen 2014, 34–35.

nothing to do with reality. On the contrary, performativity guides us to critically examine what kind of roles nature relationship takes in practical and particular cases.

In this representational sense, the rights-of-nature movement has become important for many indigenous communities: it has become a way of communicating their knowledge to an outside audience. It has also been an opportunity to strengthen the territorial rights, and thus to improve their position in the struggle against colonial and neoliberal forces. Therefore it has become a case of human rights, too.<sup>90</sup>

The controversial character of nature's legal personhood relates somehow to nature conservation which has partly reinforced the perception of the human as separate from nature and as the ruler of the whole planet.<sup>91</sup> Environmental protection may be problematic also from the point of view of indigenous peoples, as the protection of forests or national parks has, in some cases, restricted and complicated the practice of traditional livelihoods in those areas. So, when it comes to the rights of nature, it is essential to consider not only the value of nature as an ecological entity, but also all of its many cultural and spiritual meanings. In my interpretation, this is what Pieski's *Our Land, Our Running Colours* is standing for.

Because the changes in the law are quite recent, there is not yet much evidence of their actual impact. In any case, the rights of nature hardly offer the solution to our ecological crises. But most importantly, they open up new perspectives as well as opportunities for negotiation and storytelling. Pauline von Bonsdorff talks about the importance of imagination in working on existential and metaphysical questions.<sup>92</sup> Since the human part in nature is undoubtedly one such question, I wonder how nature as a person might activate our imagination. I wonder how we could use this image to consider everybody as an equal part of nature, not above or apart from it, and thus to imagine alternative ways of developing our societies.

Above all, I suggest that *Our Land, Our Running Colours* invites us to think differently, to re-evaluate our perceptions and discussions about the landscape – especially the place of the human being in it. In the same way, when talking about the legal personhood of natural environments, it's a question of communicating, narrowing the gap between different ways of thinking, and looking for a common sense of coexistence. Instead of searching for a 'true' nature relationship, it is precisely the opening of the debate that is of paramount importance.

In this way, it is possible to argue that fells are as much pink as they are brown, as much woven by human hands as natural forces. So the boy I was listening to was certainly not wrong: the innumerable colour nuances of landscapes may feel different in each body. However, in some cases, getting to know more may enable you to see colours that you didn't even know existed.

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<sup>90</sup> Tanasescu 2015, 111, 117.

<sup>91</sup> von Bonsdorff 2007, 49.

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