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Body, Trace, Perception

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How does the artist's body become a medium and a carrier? How does an author explore his or her relationship to the world by submitting to it? In this article, I examine the practice of five young printmakers: Roma Auskalnyte, Inka Bell, Inma Herrera, Emma Peura and Suvi Sysi. They were all born in the 1980s and 1990s and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. The works they make take various forms: sculptural installations, performances, videos and reliefs. Yet all share a strong connection with the tradition of printmaking.

In this article I investigate the ways in which the relationship to the human body is reflected in their artworks. From this viewpoint I trace a relationship to the world, where the artist is exposed to different materialities and open to the surrounding world. The artworks discussed bring forth themes of perception, memories and different materialities, as well as questions of language and technology. What unites the artworks is their ability to reach towards the other, be it a matter of thinking in other ways, looking at history from another angle and thinking about our way of being in another way.

Touch

The Spanish artist Inma Herrera (b. 1986) makes prints, videos, sculptures and performances. Often these works have been inspired by the history of printmaking, its various mediums and working practices. For Herrera, touch is a key topic. For what do we have without touch? Without touch, without someone being influenced, being moved or haunted by the other? On the other hand, an artwork does not come into being without the sense of touch. In Herrera's work touch is present in a very concrete way, as a cast of the artist's hand or as an indexical sign, a fingerprint on a surface.

But in order to encounter an artwork and the possibility for the work to touch us, one needs time and openness. In her video piece *Exploratory Movement* (2017) Herrera covers a sheet of plexiglass with printing ink and then removes it carefully. During the process the

¹ To access the book in Finnish, visit <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe202102053929>.



Inma Herrera, still from
Exploratory Movement, 2017,
 single-channel digital HD
 video, colour, sound, 16:9,
 duration 10:32min
 Photo: Inma Herrera

spectator can read some text engraved on the plexiglass as it is revealed by the wiping of the ink. It is a citation from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, from his main work *Phenomenology of Perception*:

[...] the knowing touch projects us outside our body through movement. [...] There are tactile phenomena, alleged tactile qualities, like roughness and smoothness, which disappear completely if the exploratory movement is eliminated. Movement and time are not only an objective condition of knowing touch, but a phenomenal component of tactile data. They bring about the patterning of tactile phenomena, just as light shows up the configuration of a visible surface.²

In this quote Merleau-Ponty writes about how the knowledge of different properties, like roughness or softness, comes to us through touch – but not without movement. In Herrera's piece we can see how during the process the text becomes visible, is covered and uncovered. Movement and touch complete our perception. Finally there are just enough traces of black ink to make the text legible. The artwork is presented in addition to another video work, projected onto another piece of plexiglass that can also be encountered in the exhibition. However, the spectator cannot read the text from one standpoint; the meaning of the quotation is revealed only if they move about and thus dedicate some time, as well as movement, to the encounter with the artwork.

The relationship between touch and vision is multiple: touch involves losing the distance between an inspected object or another human being. On the other hand touch can also be understood as taking possession of something, understanding it. In the intersensory hierarchy, seeing has its own place. Within Western philosophy, there has long been debate around ocularcentrism: placing vision higher up in a hierarchy of senses connected to knowledge and possessing the object. Vision was especially significant to the thinking of René Descartes (1596–1650). In his treatise *Optics* he compared vision to a stick held by a blind man 'and you may then have been able to notice that you felt, through the medium of this stick, the diverse objects placed around you, and you were even able to tell whether they were trees, or stones, or sand, or water, or grass, or mud, or any other such thing'.³ Descartes

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Transl. Colin Smith. New York & London: Routledge, 2010, 367.

3 René Descartes. 'Optics', in *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry and Meteorology*. Transl. Paul J. Olscamp. Cambridge, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001, 67.



Inma Herrera, *Res-Extensa*, 2019, concrete, plexiglass, ink, spray paint

Photo: Inma Herrera

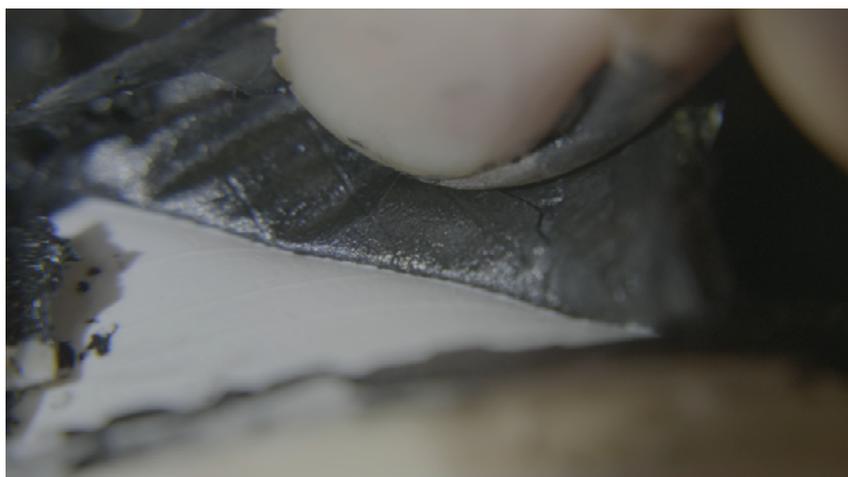
thought that vision functioned like a stick, touching the objects. But as we know, for Descartes all knowledge that comes through senses is doubtful. How can one know that one is not dreaming or is not being tricked by an evil spirit?

In Herrera's thinking, the body and the knowledge one gains through it are both significant. She is interested in the way we can know things through touch and vision. The hand and touch are indeed repeated elements in her practice. In

her sculptural work *Res extensa* (2019) a pair of hands holding a pipe is placed on a pedestal. Some of the fingers are missing, the pipe rests between the thumb and index finger.

In order to demonstrate just how uncertain all our knowledge of the world is, including its *res extensa* (*extended things*), Descartes presents his so-called wax argument:

Let us take, for example, this piece of wax: it has been taken freshly from the hive, and it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey which it contains; it still retains that from which it has been culled; its colour, its form, its size is apparent; it is hard, cold, easily handled, and if you strike it with a finger, it will emit a sound. [...] But notice that while I speak and approach the fire what remained of the taste is exhaled, the smell evaporates, the colour alters, the form is destroyed, the size increases, it becomes liquid, it heats up, scarcely can one handle it, and when one strikes it, no sound is emitted. Does the same wax remain after this change?⁴



Inma Herrera, still from *Flaying*, 2018–20, single-channel digital HD video, colour, 16:9, duration 7:38min

Photo: Inma Herrera

mould. The video work uncovers traces and lines that the fingers are gently touching. It looks as if skin meets skin and the delicate gouges. At points the viewer sees how a knife is used to separate the silicon from the ink. In this slow and cautious process there is something both violent and pleasurable. The touch is gently suggesting, persuading. The artist here comments on how, for her, touch can reveal more details than vision can. It can sense an unevenness that would otherwise have escaped one's eye.

In *Res extensa* the hands seem to be rising from a void to hold the pipe. The cast hands have lost a few fingers. These imperfect hands resonate with the thought of the uncertain nature of expanded things, *res extensa*. For Descartes, the opposite of extended things was *res cogitans*, mental substance. These two were for Descartes mutually exclusive. In Herrera's pieces knowledge gained through the body and touch challenges this idea. Maybe a hand can know, too?

In the video entitled *Flaying* (2018) the artist is slowly separating a thick mass made using printing ink from a silicone

⁴ René Descartes. *Meditations in First Philosophy*. Ed. Stanley Tweyman. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2005, 55.

Body

For Merleau-Ponty, all one's knowledge of the world is gained through one's own particular viewpoint, through the body. Multi-sensory perception is possible only because of our body; and so is our relation to other people and the environment. In fact all of our knowledge is somehow tied to the body. Emma Peura's (b. 1988) exhibition, 'Let The Journey Draw Its Course', at Uniarts Helsinki's Project Room, included multiple pieces made using various techniques. The core of the exhibition was her series of prints *Pool: Peurala, Travel Journal* and the sound work *Memories from Sompio*.

Peura's piece takes the spectator to northern Finland, to the area that later became the Lokka reservoir. The reservoir was part of a project building dams to Kemijoki to produce hydro energy. The dam building had already started in 1945 downstream from Kemijoki. The reservoirs of Lokka and Pirttipahta were completed in the 1960s and they were also part of the scheme. Already at that time hydropower was marketed as environmentally friendly, but all the different consequences of dam building to the surrounding nature, animals and local people, were hardly mentioned. And yet the basins and the Vuotso canal that connects them, did affect many, especially the reindeer herders.⁵ At that time the nature of Lapland was still largely considered as a reservoir, and the voice of local indigenous people was not properly heard. Peura writes in her thesis: 'Here were many fields and superb cloudberry swamps. During the first years, many reindeer drowned in the reservoirs.'⁶

Pool (2017–19) is a map that depicts a piece of this northern region – a region that was filled by the Lokka basin. Peura has been examining old maps and she has looked for information about the area that was flooded in Yrjö Teeriaho's book on Sompio *Muuttuva Sompio* (Changing Sompio) (2011). Peura's map has been printed on Japanese *gampi* paper. The artist describes how this paper is very delicate, precious, and despite its very thin nature is also very durable. The choice of paper bears significance to the artist. The map has been separated into sheets, the size of which equals the traditional topographical map. In theory this map could also be folded and one could orientate with the help of it. The only problem is that the area is underwater. In contemporary maps, the same area is all coloured blue.

Maps are associated with objectivity and taking possession of the landscape. From the phenomenological point of view, they are connected to a linear perspective, to a mathematical model, where the surrounding world is possessed with the help of a formula. For Merleau-Ponty, linear perspective was by nature Cartesian: in this mode the embodied perception was replaced by a model. Yet not all maps are equal. Peura's *Pool* is made of an area that is no longer in existence as a visible land mass. It is an imagined map that includes interpretations and that makes visible something now under water. In the exhibition there was a stone from the foundations of her ancestor's old home, as well as a sample of reservoir water poured into a petri dish. The dish was placed on the map, where Peura's forefathers' home was located, so that one could basically look at the place through water. The map, an objective, bird's eye view of the place, was made prior to the artist taking the trip north.

Emma Peura, *Pool: Peurala, 2017–19*, collagraphy, drypoint, chine-collé, gauze, Petri dish, water from the Lokka reservoir

Photo: Emma Peura



5 Emma Peura. *Let The Journey Draw Its Course (Antaa matkan piirtää)*. MFA final thesis. Helsinki: Uniarts Helsinki, 2020, 14.

6 Peura, *Let The Journey Draw Its Course*, 17.



Emma Peura, *Travel Journal*, 2019, drypoint on 8 copper plates, each measuring 12cm x 16cm, printing ink, elastic band, alkyd varnish

Photo: Emma Peura

The core of Peura's oeuvre is a work called *Travel Journal* (2019), based on a 'travel diary' the artist took with her to northern Finland, to the former homelands of her family in Sompio. This 'travel diary' was displayed as copper sculpture but also as a printed series, where the images of the copper book were displayed together with texts. Peura describes the method she used as 'sitting with the copper plate on my lap. As the journey begins, I place the drypoint needle on the plate. I concentrate on

holding the needle pressed to the copper plate without using much force. Along the way the bus bounces on the uneven road. This makes the drypoint needle move. The movement makes a line on the surface of the copper plate. The drypoint technique is about engraving the copper plate by making scratches. The movement of the bus is making these engravings that I will print after the trip is over'.⁷

On the pages of *Travel Journal* there are both perceptions made along the way and indexical signs from the travelling itself, signs from the bouncing and the turns the bus made. The plates of the book were printed to create a series accompanied by Peura's notes. 'The scenery changed as we drove towards the North. Forest, lakes, fields and those grey, desolate barns. I pressed the needle on the page of copper and let the journey draw on my behalf.'

The idea that a journey can draw, changes the active role of the artist and the way of being in the space. In this set-up the artist is a medium, who transmits different phases of the journey. Things happen to her, and as Merleau-Ponty wrote: 'I ought to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive.'⁸ Peura leaves with her father and brother to go on a trip, she searches for signs from the past and tries to understand. In a way she places herself between past and present as a carrier. In this piece touch is not always friendly or persuasive, but scratchy and abrupt. It is drawing a wound.

The travel journal recounts a scene where the artist tries to explain to her grandmothers in Salla what she is doing: 'This book has copper pages and it weighs a kilo, and this pen is a needle, it is used to draw lines and these lines are travels, and travels are stories and stories are all I have of grandfather

and Armas and Peurala.' By scratching the copper Peura is making visible an aspect of her forgotten family history, and also scratching the collective memory of the nation.



Emma Peura, *Travel Journal*: pages I–XVI, 2019, drypoint on gampi paper, chine-collé on Hahnemühle paper, each sheet measuring 78cm x 106cm

Photo: Emma Peura

⁷ Peura, *Let The Journey Draw Its Course*, 43.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 250.



Roma Auskalnyte, *Titled*, 2017, digital photograph, dimensions vary

Photo: Roma Auskalnyte



Roma Auskalnyte, *Rooftop* (detail), 2018, stone lithography installation, 330cm x 240cm x 160cm, comprising lithographic prints, each measuring 10cm x 15cm, commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

Photo: Roma Auskalnyte

Writing

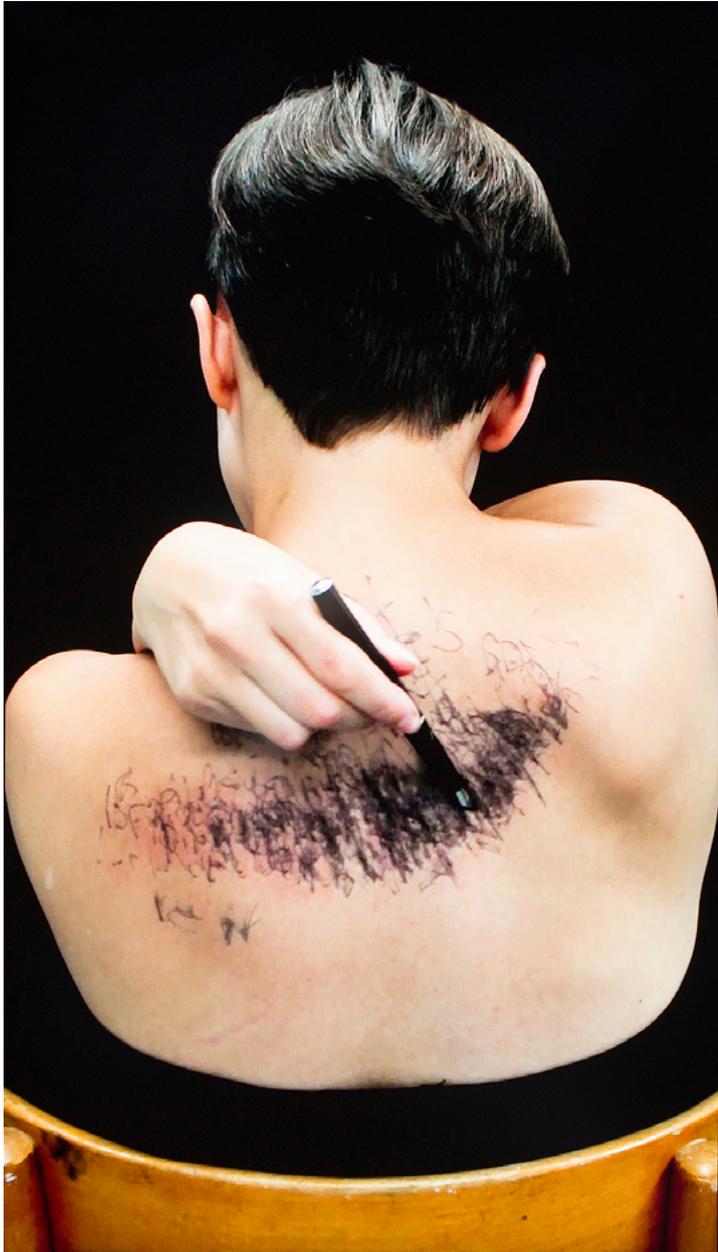
In the works of the Lithuanian artist Roma Auskalnyte (b. 1988) the body is exposed to touch. In her work, the human body is a surface or a carrier for printing, and what touches it, is the word. A photographic work *Titled* (2017) is delimited to the upper part of the chest and lower half of the face. The chest is still blemished, for the skin has the word ARTIST printed on it. The person in the image may be nameless, but not without a title. This piece has its roots in a performance where the artist prints a mark on her body. In this way she takes on carrying the brand of artists. The imprint will soon fade away and so the artishood needs to be possessed again and again. In Auskalnyte's photograph, the person's face is left unseen. Maybe the body is the creation of the artist and she has left her signature on it. Or could it be that we are overlooking the person in the image and only seeing their position and action as an artist?

A certain performativity is typical in Auskalnyte's works. Inscribing the skin of one's own body is repeated in other works too. As a technique printmaking is intertwined with writing, book printing, and repetition. Books, posters, official documents, labels and blankets all are connected to printmaking. For example in *Rooftop* (2017–18) Auskalnyte printed cards in the format of a residence permit and including the text 'Home?' in English, Lithuanian and Finnish. From these cards she constructed an installation that looked like a roof. The implication was that a foreigner must fill in the residence permit card again and again to have a home. Besides its political connotations the work also has a strong relationship to the medium itself: will printmaking offer a protecting and spacious enough home for the artist?

The relationship between body and text is most visible in some of Auskalnyte's earlier works. For instance, in her three-channel video installation *Punishment* (2014), viewers see the artist kneeling on a printing plate. On her knees are the words: 'In

text I trust / In written truth / I believe.' Auskalnyte recounts how according to the story one form of punishment in Lithuanian schools used to be kneeling on dried peas. Here peas have been replaced by a printing plate. The text touches the artist painfully, but the sign will soon disappear. The relation of text, written word and body is clear: the body represents a platform onto which information is being forcefully placed. But the body resists, it has its own will.

The way in which Auskalnyte links the body and writing, reminds me of Franz Kafka's short story 'In the Penal Colony' (1919), in which the commandant of a penal colony explains how an execution machine works to the visitor: the machine engraves the punishment onto the body of the condemned and thus slowly executes them. The conviction and punishment, guilt and suffering are one and the same. An abstract letter of the law becomes flesh. The body experiences and understands text, and this is, according to the commandant, fulfilment. However, in Kafka's story the commandant himself fails to experience this fulfilment as the machine malfunctions and pierces the commandant's body. Death comes abruptly, without understanding.



Roma Auskalnyte, still from *Frustration*, 2015,
 two-channel video installation, duration 10min (loop)

Photo: Roma Auskalnyte

For Auskalnyte the relationship to writing is complicated. *Frustration* (2015) consists of two videos. In one the artist crams lead letters onto her face, as if she is about to suffocate. In the other video, a hand with a pen blindly tries to draw signs on her back. The fumbling in *Frustration* seems to reflect the tension between language and action. 'Everything looks perfect and according to the text it should be this way. I do not see myself there. There is a gap between me and the text about me.'⁹ The groping in Auskalnyte's pieces makes one think of writing without seeing. The philosopher Jacques Derrida describes a moment when he, sometimes, maybe while driving his car, writes blindly, without seeing. The thought is clear, but it is written down without seeing. When the gesture of writing is undertaken blindly, fingers search for the shape of the letters and the text becomes illegible graffiti. The gesture of writing is made from memory.¹⁰

In Auskalnyte's works it is as if the body resists text, that none of the words could reflect the experience in its transiency. This fumbling of writing makes me think of Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*. 'Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason,' she wrote in 1975.¹¹ Cixous challenged women to write, to find a new kind of rebellious writing: 'Write yourself. Your body must be heard.'¹² Cixous argues that women have turned away from their bodies, we are taught to ignore it, to keep it modest. This body is given to the other – but will one get it back, is it possible to win it back?¹³ The writing on the body is connected to the imagery of longing and desire, as in Peter Greenaway's film *The Pillow Book* (1996) or Jeanette Winterson in *Written*

on the Body (1992). In the latter the narrator describes her lover: 'You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark. The pads of your fingers have become printing blocks, you tap a message on to my skin, tap meaning into my body.'¹⁴

- 9 'Everything looks perfect and according to the text it should be this way. I do not see myself there. There is a gap between me and the text about me.' See <https://www.roma-auskalnyte.eu/> (accessed 20 September 2020).
- 10 Jacques Derrida. *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (1991). Transl. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 3.
- 11 Hélène Cixous. *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975). Transl. Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen. *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4. Summer, 1976, (875–93) 879.
- 12 Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), 880.
- 13 Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), 885.
- 14 Jeanette Winterson. *Written on the Body*. London: Penguin Random House, 1992.



Suvi Sysi, *Caused Reflection*, 2017, installation comprising surplus papers from the printing process, monotype; dimensions vary

Photo: Suvi Sysi

Colour

The longing that electrifies the whole body, falling in love, can be caused by colour. Maggie Nelson describes in her book *Bluets* (2009) how colour and losing a lover causes a certain kind of longing: 'And so I fell in love with a colour – in this case, the colour blue – as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns.'¹⁵

Colour has traditionally been one of the most challenging themes for philosophers. How to think about colour? What is colour anyway? Measuring colour seems impossible. Merleau-Ponty thought that colour is inseparable from the material that carries it. The redness of a dress is the redness of the fabric. At the same time colour and the associations it raises, its cultural connotations, are inseparable. In a way it is a matter of intertwining the visible and invisible: red is never just red, but it is always the redness of something, seen in a context connected with other redness and the connotations in different cultures. For Merleau-Ponty, colour 'creates – from itself, to itself – identities, differences, a texture, a materiality, a something...'¹⁶

Suvi Sysi (b. 1990) is interested in the techniques of printmaking, colour and materiality. Sysi's pieces are often installations or sculptural elements spreading into space, where colours glide into each other and glimmer heavily. She works both in the margins of printmaking and in the heart of it. The works make use of the side products of printmaking and in that sense they are heavily dependent on it. It is as though in her works the materials step into the limelight. Sysi recounts how when she started studying printmaking she became aware of the beauty of the surrounding materials, colours, and tools. 'There were piles of prints lying around me. I felt I was right inside the artwork and making of it, and it felt significant [...]. My attention began to move towards the process – to the way in which the artworks and traces were born – and image-making retreated.'¹⁷

¹⁵ Maggie Nelson. *Bluets*. New York & Seattle: Wave books, 2009, 1.

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson, transl. Michel B. Smith. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 141 (*L'œil et l'esprit*, 1960).

¹⁷ Suvi Sysi. MFA final thesis, written documentation. Helsinki: Uniarts Helsinki, 2020, 6.



Sysi's *Caused Reflection* (2017) is a large installation in which thin papers hang from the walls. The work comprises mackle sheets, paper that is used to protect a printing press from spreading colours. These sheets came as a side product of another piece: *Reflect* (2017) is a pile of thick sheets that were printed entirely covered with colours, so that each paper seemed to have been saturated by colour. The experience of being surrounded by slowly growing piles of protecting mackle paper that were used in the process of printing these thick sheets made the artist look at them more closely. And so the impregnated and glowing colour was paired with an installation of mackle sheets, where the colour is more fragmentary and fragile. The mackle sheets that are hanging from one corner of the space make one think of scarves and flags. Moreover,

Suvi Sysi, *Intwine*, 2018, performance continuing for the duration of the exhibition, woodcut hand-printed on Japanese paper

Photo: Suvi Sysi



Suvi Sysi, *Blue Companion* (detail), 2020, installation, ultramarine paint, paper, dimensions vary

Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

it is enticing to think of the mutual dependency between *Reflect* and *Caused Reflection*. The heavy pile of coloured sheets would not be without the fluttery wall of mackle sheets.

Merleau-Ponty writes about encountering the blue sky: the perceiver does not try to possess the blue of the sky, they do not try to reach for the idea of blue, but abandons oneself and dives into the mystery of blue – the blueness of the sky impregnates consciousness.¹⁸ Sysi experiences colours as immersive, she feels them in her stomach. Colours and materials intertwine when paper absorbs colour and then blazes it into the surroundings. Sysi's working connects in my mind to the idea expressed by Merleau-Ponty as 'one perceives in me'; without openness to the colours, to the ability to give oneself to the materials, these works would not exist.

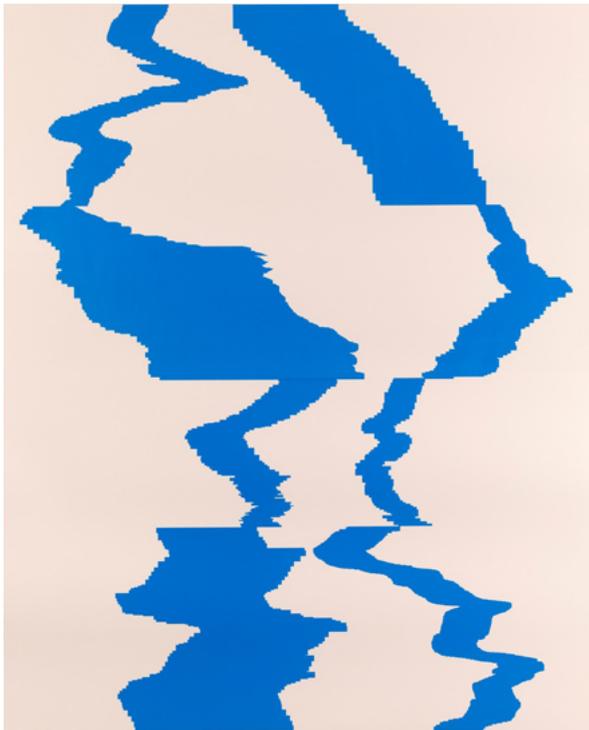
Printmaking is also about time. Just as Inma Herrera's *Exploratory Movement* embodies movement, a changing point of view and time, Sysi's works also invite one to think about these aspects. In her performance *Intwine* (2018), Sysi engaged in making prints from a blue-inked plate for the duration of the exhibition. She hung the printed papers around her to dry, until at the end of the exhibition one could barely see the artist at work surrounded by folded and hanging paper. The title of the work, *Intwine*, means to wrap and in it, the artist was intertwined, and blended with the artwork

Sysi's installation *Blue Companion* (2020) is also about temporality and being *with* an artwork. It is a multipart installation comprising a large roll of paper stood on one end, a chair, Japanese paper hanging from the wall and a blue paint mark on the floor. The word 'companion' in the title refers to someone we break the bread with, someone with whom we spend time together. The artist has been inspired by time and working processes. And undoubtedly also the colour blue. Blue

is often connected with melancholy, but as a colour it has also been very rare and valued. It is an especially loaded and desired colour.

Sysi's *Blue Companion* installation reminds one of a domestic interior. Laid over a chair is a large sheet of paper painted blue. Rolls of paper painted blue are standing on end here and there. Next to the largest roll there is a blue mark trailing across the floor. Sysi recounts how she was alarmed by some water damage that took place at her studio. In the end the damage was relatively small, but Sysi discovered that the piece she had been working on had left a blue imprint on her studio floor. Sysi was inspired by this effect and used the same technique in her exhibition. In the gallery space the blue trace trailing across the floor refers to an absence. It is a sign that something has been here, but is now elsewhere, no longer with us.¹⁹

To be with a colour, to entwine with it, can also appear as the endpoint to some; Maggie Nelson writes: 'I have also imagined my life ending, or simply evaporating, by being subsumed into a tribe of blue people. I dreamed of these blue people as a child, long before I knew such people actually existed. Now I know that they do, in the eastern and central Sahara desert, and that they all called *Tuareg*, which means "abandoned by God".'²⁰



Inka Bell, *Variable III*, 2016,
 serigraph, 140cm x 186cm
 Photo: Paavo Lehtonen

Technique

Like Sysi, for Inka Bell (b. 1981) material and colour also became central. Bell uses different methods and machines to work on paper and other materials for her sculptural pieces. In her early works, one could see abstract patterns, as if made by a machine, but later the works became more sculptural, dense piles. Looking at Bell's abstract pieces I am inclined to think of the limits of the body: has the author's touch, body, perhaps completely disappeared? Has it merged into the colour and disappeared into the desert – leaving us just with the machine? For as Bell points out, working with a machine is also about handing over control.²¹

Bell's pieces reflect the relationship between human and machine, but they also pose broader questions. She has described how she looks for ways to react to the surrounding world.²² The pieces can be seen as attempts to suspend moments, to create some order out of chaos. At the risk of creating even more entropy.

The way Bell works makes one to think of the relation between technology and the human realm. Technics cannot be separated from the arts. Traditionally, in Ancient Greece *poiesis* meant artistic creation, giving birth to something that has not been before. *Tekhne*, in turn, referred to human skills and crafts. The word *technics* as we know it derives from *tekhne* and it is

understood as the human ability to make use of and modify one's environment.²³

Art making is inevitably connected with different techniques and technologies. But how much technique and technology is joined with one's practice may vary. For instance in Bell's *Synchronicity* series (2017) embodiment is present, but in it the machine-made and the human touch alternate. Bell has drawn the abstract images with a computer and after that worked on the image using an analogue technique.

19 Sysi, MFA final thesis, 32.

20 Nelson, *Bluets*, 54.

21 Inka Bell's email to the author, 24 August 2020.

22 Inka Bell, artist's web page <http://inkabell.fi/> (accessed 23 October 2020).

23 See for instance Susanna Lindberg. 'Proteesi, robotti, kyborgi', *Tiede & edistys* 42:3 (2017), (195–217) 195–96.



Inka Bell, Study 5, 2019, laser-cut coloured paper, 12cm x 4cm x 16cm

Photo: Paavo Lehtonen



Inka Bell, Work 8, 2020, laser-cut coloured paper, thread, c. 3cm x 8cm x 1cm (dimensions vary)

Photo: Paavo Lehtonen

This dialogue between technology and the human continues in Bell's practice. Her pieces make one think of weaving. Piling up laser-cut pieces looks like weaving together threads: It is as if Bell weaves with paper. It is not a coincidence that the development of the computer is connected with the invention of early weaving machines and the punch cards used in them. With the punch cards one could direct the machines to create the most complicated patterns.

In Bell's pieces the precision of the machine and its ability to repeat are still very much in interaction with the human. *Study 5* (2019) is a relief made out of laser-cut grey coloured paper shapes. The accuracy of the machine meets the human, as the uneven edges of the piles are the tell-tale sign of human touch: the order in disorder. In turn, in her newest works the machine-made trace can be broken by an uneven paper – paper that has not been properly cut and seems to depart from the rigid order of the piece. Looking at her artworks I am thinking of the complicated relation between the human and technology: technique is not just a foreign prosthesis for life, but different techniques are present in situations where we do not see or think about them.²⁴

Recently Bell wanted to play down the role of the computer and machine, as she is interested in the element of chance. Bell describes how in the *Antimatter* series the focus moved away from the image to the image-making process. The final image was no longer printed mechanically but the artist moved on to explore what happens in the final printmaking phase, she was looking for unevenness and hazards that took place there. As an artistic method, chance has a long tradition. Chance brings up cracks and exceptions to the rules, it opens up to something new. Chance also means that the author needs to relinquish control at least to a certain extent. Hazard has been a very important element for surrealists, for the FLUXUS movement, but also to some extent in digital art. Looking at Bell's minimalist and slightly jagged works it is enticing to think how chance has been especially challenging for machines. If one makes use of the hazardous side of the machine, it is often pre-programmed to create hazard. But human touch can open new possibilities for chance to have an impact.

Conclusion

The five artists discussed in this article are all open towards their own worlds. And yet one could see connection and similar threads between these pieces. All these artists approach their materials and tools from the tradition of printmaking, and at the same time carry it in new directions. They also all share a similar attitude towards working. For instance through the works of Emma Peura, Suvi Sysi and Inka Bell one can explore an open and exploratory attitude to the world, and also a certain kind of relinquishing of control to something else – be that the surrounding environment, immersive colour or paper to be cut. On the other hand, in the works of Inma Herrera and Roma Auskalnyte one can find common themes of understanding one's relation to the

world, to human knowledge and embodied experience, but also questions of materiality and multi-sensuous knowledge. All these artists share the open attitude and the ability to throw themselves into the situation – something that the spectator is also encouraged to do, with all senses.

24 Lindberg, 'Proteesi, robotti, kyborgi', 196–98.