

Collecting traces in the forever changing shoreline

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Before the Living in the Landscape field week, I was thinking a lot about the themes of the school surrounding hydropower. Seeing the previous years' works, I was excited to collect my materials from the surroundings of the dam, to make a beautiful craft project about hope and resilience. I was, however, stunned by the harm done to the landscape in the area of Vuotso, where the field week was held. This realisation pointed me in a different direction, and I decided to proceed with the idea of leaving the scenery as undisturbed as I could.

It is perfectly natural for humans to want to leave a mark in the place they visit, like a carving on a tree, or to take souvenirs, such as rocks and seashells with them. These actions however damages nature, disturb the natural state of the scenery and alter the experience for visitors yet to come. We were visitors during the spring field week, and, as such, I felt a strong desire to leave no trace of our visit in order to be respectful to my surroundings. As the adage says: "Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints."

Fortunately for me, going into this project I didn't have my plans set in stone medium and material



*Figure 1. Footprints on the shoreline in Vuotso.
Image: Mattila, 2024*



*Figures 2, 3 & 4. Small details of the taskscape.
Images: Mattila, 2024*

vice. I decided to collect my material in the form of pictures and figure out the details later. More than just merely focusing on collecting material for my artistic project, I wanted to really take in my surroundings, to relax, have fun and collect memories. Digging around in the shoreline, turning stones, putting them back and climbing on rocks with my camera, I felt a childlike joy in exploring and discovering. Fumbling around along the river and in the project, I finally found my inspiration.

The river landscape is forever changing, water flows, freezes, melts and evaporates, rocks get moved and shaped by the water, moss forms its own little worlds on the stones and the water washes up all kinds of lost and forgotten matter. Tim Ingold wrote that the river is actually fundamentally its flowing. Disturbing that flow, humans turn rivers solely into bodies of water that move on command. (Ingold, 2014). All the movement and temporality surrounding rivers is freshly unique and simultaneously as old as time. There are so many small patterns and colours in the landscape that you would not notice them without spending time and really looking, sometimes even on your hands and knees or lying on your belly.

Ingold argues that when we talk about landscape, we usually just refer to it as a background for action even though it is so much more. We move and live in different landscapes that are forever changing. Ingold uses the term taskscape to further enforce the idea that our surroundings are not just their physical form. A place is also the experiences had while moving around and performing actions in a space. People notice different things that shape the taskscape in their heads. (Ingold, 1993). Keeping all these ideas in mind, I wanted to dive as deep into

our taskscapes's temporary nuances as I could. Embracing the small, the invisible and the ephemeral by making it into a piece of art.

Even before the field week I was playing around with the idea of learning to embroider. From the previous LiLa schools' artworks, the use of handicrafts really spoke to me. After a few tries at home, I had almost abandoned the whole idea as too hard, but then something amazing happened. During the school we had small workshops set up and in one of them we got to embroider on a shared fabric. Strug-

gling and learning together around the same table convinced me that even if the technique would be hard, at least I'd be reminded of those precious moments of us working alongside each other. It also reminded me, more than anything, of one of our school's themes for this year which was hope. In the face of overwhelming things that are out of our control, we could share those moments and have a few laughs together.

Embroidery has unfortunately been defined more as a craft than as art throughout the ages.



Figures 5. Learning embroidery during the field week. Image: Parpala, 2024

Mixing embroidery with “high art” like painting is not traditional, but it’s not an idea that I came up with either. Embroidery has been a tool of political influencing, storytelling, decorating and so much more. Artists now use it to make it possible for people to interact with their work, to honour tradition, as a means of taking their time with their work and to break the barriers between so called high art and craft. (Gittlen, 2017). Wanting to make my work so that the viewer would be able to touch it, while also working with a more familiar medium, mixing embroidery and painting seemed like a logical solution. I knew had to go the extra mile and include embroidery in my own work after seeing the stunning handmade clothes and jewellery made by a local shop owner

The journey from the riverside to pictures to sketches and finally to the embroidery and the final product was not always clear in my head. Even though I usually like to have a clear plan, as a work well begun is half done, this time I quickly noticed that my plans were going to change a lot during the process. American art educator and artist Erica Richard speaks in favour of this kind of fumbling and improvising in art projects. According to her,

being spontaneous might serve us better than being in control all the time (Richard, 2020). Adopting this approach into my own process and letting go of the idea of a perfect outcome, I started leaning towards the thought of letting my final work be mostly traces as that has also been the main theme on my project.

References

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Figures 6 & 7. *Embroidering the shape of water*. Images: Kamu Mattila, 2024