



Figure 1. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

## My Controversial Northern Forest Relationship

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*My recent artwork **Angle of Approach (Northern forest relations)** is a media art piece that studies Finnish forest relations through artistic practice. With this self-portrait, I aimed to experiment in visualizing my nature, particularly my forest relationship and that of my compatriots.*

The Finnish forest relationship is controversial. On one hand, for us Finns, the forest and our close connection to nature are integral to our identity and cultural heritage. On the other hand, many of us intentionally exploit it to the detriment of biodiversity.

In a playful art process, I explored how this relation could be made visible through media arts and performance. The artwork is a contemporary self-portrait and my society being unnaturally (or naturally) awkward in the forest.

*"On one hand, there's the love for nature and its calming qualities; but on the other hand, I cover myself with protective gear and spray to avoid the mosquitoes, horseflies, wasps, ticks, etc. Am I a living representation of a hypocritical Finnish nature lover?"*

– Autio

The artwork consists of a video of a performance I made in a particular spot in a local forest called Ounasvaara, Rovaniemi, which is under threat of being demolished for housing tourists. The Ounasvaara forest is centrally located. It is only 1 km from the city centre and is historically important to the locals. An ongoing debate is about who it is developed for and under what regulations. This artwork also connects to a larger conversation, such as the general loss of biodiversity and exploitation of natural resources. In Finland, we have constant disputes and demonstrations over the policy of forest cutting. Much of the wood goes into paper production and further to kitchens and toilets here and abroad.

The filmed and further edited performance video was projected onto a canvas made of paper towel roll towers. In this case, paper towels represent the trees they came from and a level of vanity and luxury that end up failing



Figure 2. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

both. The second part of the performance took place as I clumsily sneaked behind the rolls of toilet paper and started tumbling the roll towers one by one. A soundscape was added to the piece in the next round of editing, which mostly consists of sounds from nature, such as birds singing and the sound of wind. The sounds were specially recorded for this piece.

The filmed performance experiments with the possible stiff and unnatural connections to the forest. On one hand, there's the love for nature and its calming qualities. But on the other hand, I cover myself with protective gear and spray to avoid the mosquitoes, horseflies, wasps, ticks, etc. Am I a living representation of a hypocritical Finnish nature lover?

The idea worked well. At first, I didn't want myself to be seen as I was pushing over the



Figure 3. Making the artwork. Photo: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

paper towel towers. But in the end, the viewer can occasionally catch glimpses of me. It turned out to be a good addition to the process, as it emphasizes that it is us doing the pushing. Feedback on the artwork has so far been positive. Though some people haven't understood it at all, others have enjoyed the naïve approach to the theme.

Video based self-portraits could be used in art education. This requires more time, and it gives more tools for self-expression because we include movement and sound. ●

## INFO

The video was shot with a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K Pro and edited with Adobe Premiere with the help of Mauri Lähdesmäki.

▼ Figures 4–5. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

