

Emilia Mustajärvi, *Master student in Art Education, University of Lapland*  
Louise de Vries, *Master student in Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University*

## The Thing 2



*Object installation sculpture,  
willow and trash, mixed  
mediums, 240cmx110cm,  
2018,  
Image: Emilia Mustajärvi*

During our time in Russia in May 2018, Emilia and I had a conversation about dualisms. We see them coming back in various aspects of the landscapes that we study. We try to understand why these dualisms exist and where they come from. Through our different disciplines and backgrounds, the same issues intrigue us. Ironically, the arts and sciences are sometimes seen as contradictory. Where the former is associated with emotion, the latter is approached as part of our rational being: a division that is already being debated.

What we spoke about was mostly concerned with how these dualisms have become clear to us through contradictions, which are constructed by our ideas of what reality looks like (or should look like). These dualisms are not just out there in any tangible or obvious way. Rather, they are defined and carefully designed by us. Somehow, we feel the need to create a mental maze of boxes in which we can put things in order to understand them. One of the dualisms that we encountered is related to the division between urban landscapes and rural landscapes. Here, it immediately becomes clear that there is a tension between what we humans touch or change and what we consider to be unspoilt. The unspoilt landscape is easily subjected to romanticized imaginations. For something to be considered natural, it seems that we humans should not have had anything to do with it. In this sense, humans are seen as essentially separated from the natural environment.

When we interpret landscape as a continuous process, we open new ways of understanding our surroundings. Humans and landscapes are relational and defined by and through each other's presence. We do not stand on a sideline, merely gazing at landscapes. In Kozlovka, behind a green field, hidden out of sight, there is a trash dump. This disposed pile of items, ranging from glass bottles to old TVs and pieces of clothing, has become inseparable from the landscape. It is an interaction with the landscape that engages with it. When we "dwell" in the landscape, when we move our bodies through it and interact with it, we take part in its very definition.

This artwork created by Emilia focuses on the contradiction that we humans see between constructed nature and "wild" or "real" nature. It prompts questions about our understandings of authenticity and aesthetics. We usually make a division between natural materials and synthetic materials. For instance, plastic is not considered to be a part of nature. As such, it is not seen as an aspect of the ideal landscape. However, plastics are ultimately made of components, which in their very essence, were extracted from our environment. Even when we are part of nature, we create materials from it that are harmful to it. This is a difficult dynamic, which is hard to potentially accept, not as two sides of the same coin, but the same coin in its entirety.

The objects used in the artwork, *The Thing 2*, are gathered from Rovaniemi, Finland. Emilia collected them in the backyard of the building that she lives in. The rubbish that we saw in Kozlovka is not particular to Russian landscapes. Our positions in different environments can be similar across countries. Our nationalities are not a defining factor when looking at our relationships to landscapes. Rubbish can be found almost everywhere. Through this artwork, we want to discuss the dualisms that support the idea that humans differ from, or are above, nature.