

## **Artikkeli V**

Luostarinen, N. (2023). Building, believing, becoming: Participatory playful land art intervention for creating empathy and meliorism. *International Journal of Education Through Art* 19(1), 59–67 [https://doi.org/10.1386/eta\\_00118\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00118_3)

© 2023 Intellect Ltd.

Reproduced with permission of The Licensor through PLSclear.

International Journal of Education Through Art  
Volume 19 Number 1

© 2023 Intellect Ltd Visual Essay. English language.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/eta\\_00118\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00118_3)

Received 5 December 2021; Accepted 7 August 2022

---

## VISUAL ESSAY

**NINA LUOSTARINEN**  
University of Lapland

# Building, becoming, believing: Participatory land art for empathy and meliorism

### ABSTRACT

*In this participatory land art workshop, nature was used as a play material to represent the motif of metamorphosis while participants role-played herrings for empathy. The aim was to shift the perspective from our materials – which are agentic in co-constituting conditions evocative of empathy – to observing the outcome from a bird’s-eye view. The workshop sought to demonstrate the power of collaboration, by presenting an allegory of the collaboration of herd species such as herrings. Alone they/we are nothing but, with determination and a clear goal, we can create visible change in the environment and in emotions and attitudes like environmental empathy. Earlier research and this case demonstrate how ecological paradigms can be stimulated with the use of place-based art.*

### KEYWORDS

playfulness  
adult play  
empathy  
land art  
artistic intervention  
palimpsest of place  
place attachment

Delivered by Intellect to:

InSEA (id22717280)

IP: 159.255.232.115

On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

[www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com) 59

The University of Turku's 'Baltic Herring Research Project' demonstrates that the current situation of the common herring is a cause for concern. In order to draw attention to this matter with artistic means and simultaneously take hands-on action to deal with eco-anxiety (Pihkala 2020), a two-part land art project was established by Nina Luostarinen. The first part was a prompt for individuals and collectives to create their own pieces of herring land art. The response was heart-warming and the use of materials versatile. The campaign culminated in an open-to-the-public participatory land art workshop on the banks of the river Aura in Turku.

As noted by Kimmerer (2020) and Rose (2021), imagination is one of our most powerful tools and lack of imagination is our greatest challenge. Just as Jenkins (2017) and Cox (2014) state, before we can change the world, we need to be able to imagine what a better world might look like and to develop empathy for the plight of those whose experiences differ from our own. The original invitation prompted participants to imagine what it might be like to be a herring, while the use of land art as a visual facilitator was the core principle of this playful art-based intervention.

Participation required a playful attitude, which was encouraged for a purpose: when we put our adult, controlling minds aside and allow ourselves to be carried away by free play, we can construct new dimensions in our perceptions of a place – and as Nodding suggests, 'nature becomes a spring-board for reflection and poetic association' (2012: iii). The wilderness of the riverbank where this workshop took place enabled participants to find the courage required for this mindless-looking play in themselves: carrying heavy buckets onto a field and pouring their contents onto the ground. Even when the final herring was ready, it was invisible from a normal viewpoint, disguised in the culms. Lailach (2007) describes how land art uses the landscape as an



Figure 1: Samples of participating land art herrings made by families, individuals, homes for the elderly and others. © Photograph credit: courtesy of the workshop participants.

Delivered by Intellect to:

InSEA (id22717280)

IP: 159.255.232.115

On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56



Figure 2: Led by their art teacher, Marja Haapakangas, students from TSYK Upper Secondary School imagined the life of herrings and created sketches of them during their Designed and Built Environmental Art course. Several sketches were merged into the piece that was realized on the field. © Photograph credit: Nina Luostarinen.



Figure 3: The arrival of the drawing material, 18 tonnes of soil improvement chalk. There is no chalk in the soil in Finland, so it must be added for cultivation purposes. © Photograph credit: Nina Luostarinen.

Delivered by Intellect to:  
InSEA (id22717280)  
IP: 159.255.232.115  
On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

[www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com) 61





Figure 4: A yellow line was used to draw the outlines of herring shapes. © Photograph credit: Nina Luostarinen.



Figure 5: Work carried out on the outline was monitored by drones. © Photograph credit: Daniel Nyman.

artistic material. Drones facilitate the exploitation of different angles from which to see the landscape; as obtaining aerial images and shifting perspective is effortless.

This 'invisible' pattern symbolizes the fact that environmental change can become serious before we can truly notice it. Due to change blindness, we see nothing until solastalgia suddenly takes over. Change blindness is a perceptual phenomenon that causes us to fail to observe even major differences if the change is gradual. In mythology, the shift into an animal shape can be very subtle; similarly, in this workshop we did not see the change we made on the ground until the end, when drones enabled us to see it

Delivered by Intellect to:

InSEA (id22717280)

IP: 159.255.232.115

On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56



Figure 6: It took five hours for the participants to draw the figures with chalk. © Photograph credit: Nina Luostarinen.

Delivered by Intellect to:  
InSEA (id22717280)  
IP: 159.255.232.115  
On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

[www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com) 63



from above. And we shape-shifted into fish scales only when we sprawled out on the field. Then, from the surprising, broader perspective, the place's palimpsest was revealed. And we saw that our actions had made a significant change.

As Bertling (2015) demonstrated, place-based art can promote ecological paradigms and empathy with the environment. Sinquefield-Kangas et al. (2022) also suggested that materials are agentic in co-constituting conditions that evoke empathy during artmaking. During this land art workshop, it seemed possible to address wicked problems and eco-anxiety in a playful, fun,



Figures 7a and b: After the hard work, the reward. A drone was flown into the air and the participants plunged to the ground to form the scales of the herring. © Photograph credit: Oliver Eskolin.

Delivered by Intellect to:

InSEA (id22717280)

IP: 159.255.232.115

On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56





Figures 7c and d: Some details of the land art. © Photo credit: Nina Luostarinen.

Delivered by Intellect to:  
InSEA (id22717280)  
IP: 159.255.232.115  
On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

[www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com) 65





Figure 7e: The biggest fish is about 50 m long and the overall land art piece is approximately 80 m.  
© Photo credit: Nina Luostarinen.

aesthetically pleasing and tactile way. With playful art-based interventions, we can seed empathy by becoming another creature and start believing in meliorism. As Baranek et al. (2021) propose, meliorism (a philosophical belief in people's ability to improve lived experience through engaged problem-solving) is a useful concept for describing and orienting actions, given the challenges of our time.

### FUNDING

This project was supported by Foundation Turku 2029.

### REFERENCES

- Baranek, Grace T., Frank, Gelya and Aldrich, Rebecca M. (2021), 'Meliorism and knowledge mobilization: Strategies for occupational science research and practice', *Journal of Occupational Science*, 28:2, pp. 274–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1824802>.
- Bertling, Joy G. (2015), 'The art of empathy: A mixed methods case study of a critical place-based art education program', *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 16:13, pp. 1–27.
- Cox, Jason M. (2014), 'Role-playing games in arts, research and education', *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 10:3, pp. 381–95, [https://doi.org/10.1386/eta.10.3.381\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta.10.3.381_1).
- Jenkins, Henry (2017), 'Superheroes and the civic imagination', Pop Junctions, 27 February, <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2017/02/superheroes-and-the-civic-imagination.html>. Accessed 12 December 2021.
- Kimmerer, Robin W. (2020), *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, London: Penguin Books.
- Lailach, Michael (2007), *Land Art*, Cologne: Taschen.
- Nodding, Helen (2012), 'The enchanted city: A study of the creative potential of the "incidental" in the urban environment', MA dissertation, Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.
- Pihkala, Panu (2020), 'Eco-anxiety and environmental education', *Sustainability*, 12:23, pp. 1–38.

Delivered by Intellect to:

InSEA (id22717280)

IP: 159.255.232.115

On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

- Rose, Steve (2021), 'Our biggest challenge? Lack of imagination: The scientist turning the desert green', *The Guardian*, 20 March, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/20/our-biggest-challenge-lack-of-imagination-the-scientists-turning-the-desert-green>. Accessed 12 December 2021.
- Sinquefield-Kangas, Rachel, Rajala, Antti and Kumpulainen, Kristiina (2022), 'Exploring empathy performativity in students' video artworks', *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 18:2, pp. 145–60, [https://doi.org/10.1386/eta\\_00091\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00091_1).

### SUGGESTED CITATION

Luostarinen, Nina (2023), 'Building, becoming, believing: Participatory land art for empathy and meliorism', *International Journal of Education Through Art*, Special Issue: 'Art, Sustainability and Partnerships', 19:1, pp. 59–67, [https://doi.org/10.1386/eta\\_00118\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00118_3)

### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Nina Luostarinen has a background in puppetry and animation. She works at Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland) in the Department of Cultural Management with projects that combine art with different industries. She is also a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Lapland, Finland. Both her artistic work and research topic are dealing with adult playfulness, serendipity and place attachment.

Contact: Humak University of Applied Sciences, Ilkantie 4, 00400 Helsinki, Finland.

E-mail: [nina.luostarinen@humak.fi](mailto:nina.luostarinen@humak.fi)

Nina Luostarinen has asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

---

Delivered by Intellect to:  
InSEA (id22717280)  
IP: 159.255.232.115  
On: Fri, 03 Mar 2023 05:52:56

[www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com) 67