



Nesting

Practice of emotional safety as a method in visual art

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ABSTRACT

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Practice of emotional security as a method in visual art

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In this written part of the Bachelor's Thesis I research the subject of practice of emotional safety as a method in visual art. I report the artistic process of the series of paintings *Nesting*, my artistic part of the Thesis. The report includes both thematic and concrete sides of the process.

For a deeper understanding towards the subject the theoretical part includes exploring the emotions of fear and unsafety. *Nyt iskee pelko – Pelko tieto- ja kaunokirjallisuudessa ja suomalaisten kokemuksissa*, a book by Marja-Liisa Julkunen and Saara Koikkalainen is used to expand knowledge of the motif of fear. Research material also includes writings of social psychology and life management.

Sources have been chosen from material produced in the 21st century, to best depict the zeitgeist that affects the overall emotional security of a Western person. Miina Savolainen's research work "The Loveliest Girl in The World" and Terhi Kaakinen's Bachelor's Thesis "Security?" are the two reference works that are in the center of attention.

Conclusion summarize the learned information about mechanisms of fear, aspects that have an effect to emotional safety and painting techniques used during the artistic process.

Keywords: painting contemporary installation emotional security safety fear

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern society it seems like everyone is in a hurry to get somewhere. Studies and creating a career path take up time, and there's a pressure to accomplish and succeed also in social relationships. The individualist zeitgeist highlights the continuous need to self-improvement. Digitalization, different forms of consumption and global turmoil happening around the world also occupy a part of the mind's capacitation. Where does it come from and where might does it lead? In this written part of my Bachelor's Thesis I discuss the idea that the prime mover and the end point might be a feeling called *fear*. Lucy Montgomery writes:

Fear is the original sin. Almost all of the evil in the world has its origin in the fact that someone is afraid of something. It is a cold slimy serpent coiling about you. It is horrible to live with fear; and it is of all things degrading. (Montgomery 1926.)

The starting point for my working process was heavily inspired by a book written by Marja-Liisa Julkunen and Saara Koikkalainen called *Nyt iskee pelko – Pelko tieto- ja kaunokirjallisuudessa ja suomalaisten kokemuksissa (Fear strikes now – Fear in nonfiction and fiction and in the experience of the Finns*, translation by the writer). The base idea of the book is that fear is a personal emotional experience, present both in the body and the mind. It discusses the thought that fear exists to protect human life but is disturbing for the life itself if it takes control. The authors debate on the subject by going over different types of literature and musical works, as well as a fear related inquiry they conducted specifically for the book.

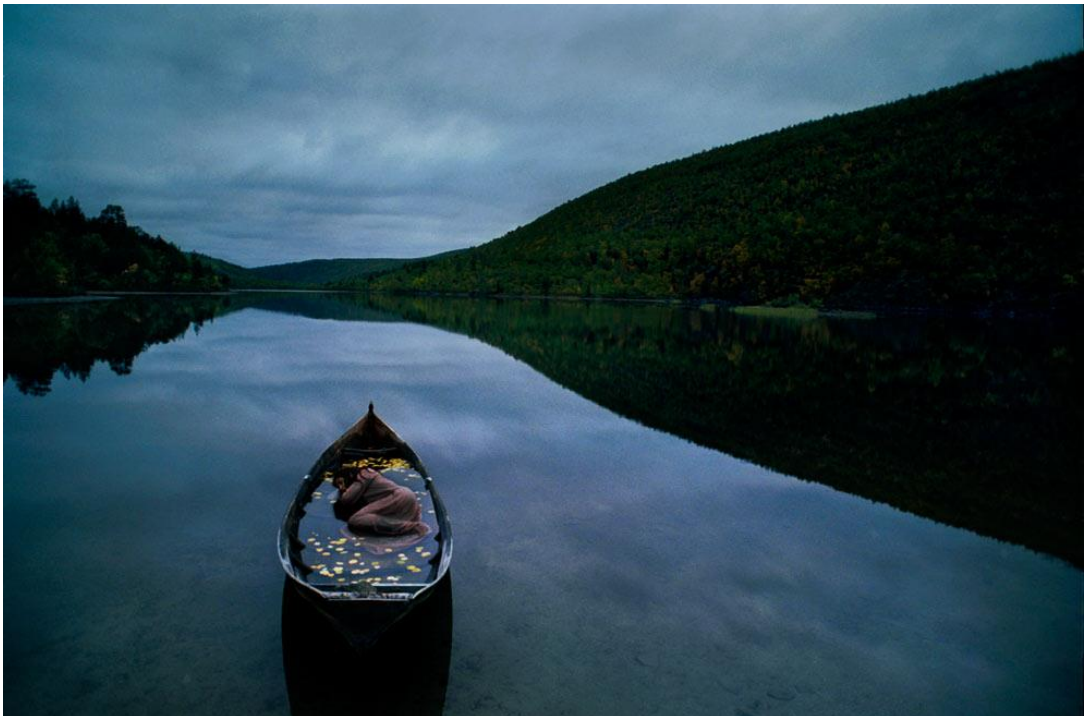
In the theoretical part of this research I'll cover the physiological birth of the feeling of fear, and touch the reasons and phenomena leading to it. I'll discuss the definition of emotional security and the ways that can be used to increase it or at least start paying more attention to it.

In the center of this research of mine are also two artistic projects that I use as a reference work for my own process. The first one is a Thesis work of Terhi Kaakinen. She's a visual artist mainly working with wood and sculptures. In her

Bachelor's Thesis *Security?* She discusses the motif of security from the point of view of a child. I find the research related to mine, since our interests are quite similar what comes to the themes. Also, the way she expresses the outcome with playfulness, mixing up reality with fantasies and fairy tales is very inspiring to me.

I'll also cover a more methodical art project, which has been produced by an art- and social educator Miina Savolainen. Alongside her artistic work she studies, develops and teaches the use of photographing as a therapeutic method. Her work has resulted the method of empowering photography. The method was borne from a project *The Loveliest Girl in The World*. I discuss the background of this project and empowering method in general in this research.

The careers of both artists have started during the early 2000s. Even though the emotions of fear and safety are obviously the most sempiternal of all in human life, it's important to me that my research comes very close to the present moment. This is because the world surrounding us is quite different than it was a hundred or a thousand years ago, even though a human nature and the themes we ponder would still be the same.



PICTURE 1. Miina Savolainen, *The Loveliest Girl in the World*, 1998-2003

2 WHY DO WE GET SCARED

Fear is there to protect us humans. Its ultimate purpose is to help us avoid unnecessary risks and escape from dangerous situations. The feeling of fear creates a need to run from a threat that feels too overpowering. Subjects of fear depend on the person and are partially learned behavior. Within learned fears there are also many 'built-in' fears in humans, mostly concerning natural phenomenon such as darkness, fire and big animals (Julkunen & Koikkalainen 2018, 24). Fear itself is a feeling that appears in every person, as well as in animals. The symptoms include for example shaking, tense muscles, sweating or cold sweats, pressure, vertigo and nausea. (Julkunen & Koikkalainen 2018, 20.)

At its best fear makes a person more aware, conscious and circumspect. At its worst it can fully paralyze, make one incautious or unable of judgement. The feeling works its way through the nervous system and prepares the body to either fight or escape. This is the so called "fight or flight" -mode. (Friislund 2017.) A person can learn a dread very quickly, getting really scared once might be enough. When the person encounters a similar situation the previously felt fear is triggered again. Feeling fear towards something is often an insidious thought process, since it can give false advice. Fear of failure can cause underachieving, and decisions made under the pressure of fear might be short-sighted.

Everyone in the world is afraid of something, and everyone encounters situations which make them very uncomfortable. Fearing the fear itself, however, means that the original feeling – nervousness, dread, anxiety – starts to have consequences. In some cases, fear can lead one to completely avoid the situations that perhaps could wake the unpleasant feelings. Sometimes this can develop into phobia or general anxiety. For example, a person with a social anxiety can end up not being able to leave the house, because going outside could mean encountering social situations.

Psychologist Tony Dunderfelt separates *feeling* and *emotion* from one another; the first one being a subjective reaction towards something, and emotion being the interpretation towards the reaction. (Julkunen & Koikkalainen 2018, 19-20.) This leads to a conclusion, that feeling fear is not irrelevant or immature. The

emotion it causes can be. If trying to suffocate, hide or deny the existence of fear, it can build-up and explode later in a catastrophically manner. (Köhler 2000, 14-15, 20.)

2.1 Where does fear come from

The feeling of fear is affected by both the person's internal and external factors. It is a permanent feeling in us to begin with. It can also be developed and learned through the story of life of an individual; this is affected by childhood development, all of the experiences and what one has absorbed from them. The country and culture one was born, raised and lives in at the moment. One's age, gender, socioeconomic position ethnicity also have an effect.

My own reflections are possibly very different from a person's who lives on the other side of the world. This is first and foremost because I was born and I have lived my whole life in Finland, which is generally speaking a very safe place to live in. Geographically the country is in a good location; natural turmoil or catastrophes do not happen here. Generally people are greatly trusting towards judicial systems and authorities. Criminality is for the most part shown to be minor what comes to international measurements and comparisons; domestic violence and violence in close relationships are however a big problem in Finland (Tilastokeskus 2018.)

The news and social media are painting quite a dark picture of a world that is a dangerous place. That is of course partially true. It is not an exaggeration to say that world has faced and will be facing threats that are globally brand new and unforeseen. Informing and talking about those threats is vital but can turn into something even worse if it overcasts everything that we know to be safe and good.

Psychiatrist Christophe André and cartoonist Muzo discuss this in their book "Petits angoisses et grosses phobies", *Small fears and big phobias*. (André & Muzo, 2004). They point out society to be one of the reasons for people's general anxiety. This is caused by the feeling that we cannot control the world we're surrounded by. Living the everyday life is safer than before, but on the other hand many things around us cause stress and fear to us. This is mainly because the

control seems to be out of our hands; how to handle the persistently growing amount of traffic, how to reduce the pollution of the environment or affect the extinction of species. The complexity of the modern world is causing a lot of questions; how to be able to remember all of the needed identification numbers of different cards and applications, or how to handle running errands in the internet instead of the physical world. (Adré & Muzo 2004, 38-41, 122-123.)

2.2 Emotional safety

Emotional safety is the opposite of feeling anxious or stressed. It is a term used most often when talking about a close relationship, possibly a romantic one. In an emotionally safe relationship one is able to be honest and vulnerable.

Research professor Brené Brown describes that vulnerability is the birthplace of joy, courage and empathy. When we perceive danger, all of our resources move towards assessing that. But when we perceive safety, our social engagement system can focus on creating and connecting. (Boeder 2017.)

“Everyone appreciates the feeling of safety. At least secretly.” (Ekholm & Koski 2013, 134). It is trendier to insist otherwise though; to say that being uncomfortable is making us to give our best, to innovate, and to prove that we are useful (Ekholm & Koski 2013, 134). Unfortunately, constant stress and pressure do not only make us restless, but also shift our focus away from ourselves and our feelings (Hämäläinen 2009, 117).

Even though the term ‘emotional security’ is mostly used when concerning a relationship people are sharing together, I suggest that the concept can be naturally applied to life in general – perhaps to describe the relationship a person is having with the world around them. Some get turned off by the idea of prioritizing safety in their relationship, because they equate *safe* relationship with a *boring* one (Boeder 2017). This couldn’t be further away from the truth. Being safe in a relationship or alone doesn’t erase the possibility for excitement and adventure.

Due to the complexity of a human life it's borderline impossible to find out all the reasons why fear in many of its forms is present in our everyday life. Admitting the presence of it is nevertheless essential, so that one is able to move to the other side of it; to a place called *safety*. Being emotionally secure allows a vast amount of things for the mind to feel; for example the emotions of joy, trust, excitement, learning and creativity. Because all of the feelings aforesaid are tightly linked with my own artistic practice, it's natural to see them face to face in order to reflect their effects. I focus on how to use the feeling of emotional safety in visual art practice, and how to use visual art practice in the creation of emotional safety.

3 REFERENCE WORK: TERHI KAAKINEN – TURVA?

Terhi Kaakinen finished her Bachelor's Thesis "Security?" in 2006. The work consists of a baby carriage carved out of wood by Kaakinen. There's also a big wooden head hanging above the carriage. The purpose of the work is for the viewer to climb to sit inside of the carriage. Kaakinen has also composed and sung a lullaby that is playing inside of the carriage.

My Maternity leave made me think about a child's angle of view, the feeling of security and insecurity. I would like adults to consider and understand how children are feeling this world. – I am thinking about the difference between the feelings of the adults and the children in the baby carriage. (Kaakinen 2006, 3.)



PICTURE 2. & 3. Terhi Kaakinen, Security?, 2006 (Photos: Kaakinen 2006)

In the research Kaakinen ponders how fundamental the subject of safety is to the human nature. A person wants to be held throughout their life, to be under the protection of something or someone higher. (Kaakinen 2006, 8).

When I was looking at Petra lying in the baby carriage, I was wondering how it'd feel to be her. Babies have it so good. I bet it's nice to lay back under a blanket while someone you love is pushing the carriage around in the fresh air. I was thinking how the world would look like. How do I look

from her point of view? What about the lady, who perhaps thinks she's being sweet pushing her face against the child's, babbling to her with a soft voice? – A child feels insecure when a stranger approaches too suddenly. During the first half of a year in the kindergarten Petra was sleeping in her own carriage, when other children were sleeping in their beds. Her own carriage, the sleeping bag, and the familiar smell of them made her feel safe. (Kaakinen 2006, 7. Translation by the writer.)

Kaakinen gives an example of the attachment system of a child. She writes about a situation where a child is at a children's playground with their parent. The child is staying tightly on the side of their parent, until they're completely sure that nothing's threatening them. If something's confusing the child, they'll take a look at their parent's face to decide whether the thing is worth worrying or not. (Kaakinen 2006, 8.)

This is something a child will do for years throughout growing; use their parent's reactions to decide their own ones. If the child falls down and get a small cut in their knee, they need the parent or another to come and calm them down. If the adult panics about the cut, so will the child. And if not, it can be forgotten in few seconds. The adult is the ultimate safety to the child. Carriages, toys and teats are there for children to represent safety. (Kaakinen 2006, 22.)

In an adult's life their safety can be represented for example by their homes. This leads me to think of a situation where an adult doesn't come across with another adult they'd like to share their life with. In this scenario no one else is taking care of them but themselves. This is something Kaakinen is also touching in her thesis: adults have the power of will to decide whether they want to participate in her art work. But – in real life – babies don't get to choose whether they want to sit in the carriage or not. (Kaakinen 2006, 27.)

4. REFERENCE WORK 2: MIINA SAVOLAINEN – THE LOVELIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD

Miina Savolainen is a social educator and a community art oriented photographer based in Helsinki, Finland. She mainly deals with social engagement in her art working. Her work in teaching and developing the use of photograph as a therapeutic method has resulted *the method of empowering photography*.

Savolainen is a member of The Finnish Phototherapy Association. The aim of the association is to promote the use of photograph as a tool in psychotherapy and other therapeutic work, as well as enhance interaction between the fields of art, health and culture (Voimauttava valokuva.) In phototherapy photographs are being used as an instrument to form feelings, memories, thoughts, associations and meanings. This happens in an interaction between the customer and the worker (Savolainen 2010.)

Phototherapy is not an independent form of therapy and the title 'photo therapist' is not being used in Finland. However, the empowering photography is a therapeutically aligned pedagogic method in itself. Savolainen has been educating the method to care- and pedagogist specialists since the beginning of 2000s. The vital premise of the method and of empowerment in general is that you cannot empower another person. Empowerment means the growth process of inner power, that raises from the subject themselves. By using this method, the photograph is utilized to serve one's identity work and to increase the communication between people (Voimauttava valokuva .)

Unnoticed but meaningful aspects that construct the individual or the community can be made visible by photographing. Photographing as an act and the resulted photographs concentrate in supporting the needs of the customer in their life situation, (family) relationships or self-image. It doesn't necessarily need verbal process. It often produces a feeling of intimacy and connection that stem from the experience of being understood. (Savolainen 2010.)



PICTURE 4. Miina Savolainen – Petra Parvikoski, *The Loveliest Girl in the World*, 1998-2003

The Loveliest Girl in the World is a communal photographing project that was started in 1998 by Savolainen. It has been put into practice in a co-operation with ten different young women that grew in the Hyvönen Children's Home. Photographs taken during years 1998-2003 documented the growth of the women. The pure, unbroken world created in the images is juxtaposed with the heavy experiences the modelling women hold. These experiences are sorrow caused by the loss of their parents' care giving, as well as the one-sided visual culture they encounter daily, where women are presented to be objects for other people's desires. (Voimauttava valokuva.)

Photographing holds the ability to blend reality and fiction, and this is used as a healing way in the project. The photos resulted are not representing the usual conception of young girls or children that have grown up in a children's home; they're representing the way these young adults want to be seen. On an emotional level the photograph is a believable evidence of one's own goodness. Acceptance of a self-portrait is a metaphor of a greater self-acceptance. (Savolainen 2010.)

5 ART WORK “NESTING”

The Bachelor's Thesis of mine consists of a written part as well as an artistic part. The artistic part is an art work series of four large-scale paintings, discussing the motifs of safety covered in the written thesis. The paintings are titled *Golden Afternoon*, *Silent World*, *Wind from South* and *The Garden Street*.

The first starting point for the artwork was to seek security, comfort and tranquility. For quite some time I've had problems with managing stress and other straining emotions. This has caused a severe amount of restlessness in me. During the last year or year and a half I've been focusing on the search of calmness, and by this I mean the whole rhythm of my life. I wanted to prioritize these certain emotions in as many of the sectors in my life as possible. The subject of safety has thus been present also in my art practice. During summer 2018 I was able to concretize this into words, when someone told me my paintings gave them a feeling of *safety*.

Recognizing this need to slow down and focus on my mind has felt very important. Visualization practices have been a part of the process, and something that was simple to bind with visual working. Creating mindscapes of safety has been so pleasant I knew some of them had to end up in physical pictures as well.

5.1 About choosing the theme

5.1.1 Own fears

I'm afraid of being the passenger of a motorcycle or a bicycle. The speed feels doubled if I'm not the one riding the vehicle myself and can't see anything that's in front of me. The memories of falling down are too vivid. That tiny moment when I realize I'm about to fall and it's too late to stop it is terrifying.

At some point in my life I would've told my biggest fears to be heights and blood tests. At this moment I'm pretty sure I've outlived. The other chance is that I've just been able to avoid them long enough so that my memory's getting blurry.

Technology and digitalization don't necessarily scare me but make me anxious. Bright lightning, loud noises and continuous clamor do that too.

On the contrary I'm not afraid of walking alone in the night time. I'm not scared of rapists or pickpockets. Being afraid of criminality doesn't sound too familiar to me – many could call me to be too careless or blue-eyed because of that. I'm not afraid of deep water, spiders, rats or snakes. I do fear failure, gaining weight and disappointing people around me. I don't fear my own death, but it'd be my worst nightmare if someone close to me were to die.

I'm utterly afraid of being in front of an audience. Whether it's a formal speech I have to hold or playing the game of Pictionary. This fear causes me a lot of discomfort, since I might encounter this type of situation at any time. On bad days a thought of any sort of social engagement – even making a phone call or a quick visit to a grocery store next door – wakes up anxiety in my stomach. It has to do with me not wanting to present myself to others when I'm not 'at my best'. Anxiousness caused by social situations is in the sense harder to understand than some mentioned above; in social encounters there's nothing that should make me fear for my life – I'm referring to the fear of heights, needles or high-speed vehicles. This anxious behavior and the avoidance it causes is something I've been intentionally focusing on.

5.1.2 Relaxation and visualization

Relaxation is a state of both the mind and the body, where any negative arousal and tension are absent; including anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, stress and so forth. Feelings aforesaid keep the human nervous system in a very active, strained state. Especially stress is the leading cause for mental and physical problems. Simple conclusion traced from is that feeling relaxed is beneficial for the health.

Relaxation can be achieved through leisure time hobbies, vacation trips, spending time with friends – whatever the individual enjoys doing. The tricky thing

is that the relaxation isn't always granted with activities as such. If one doesn't pay close attention and truly concentrate the feeling of relaxation, rest and safeness might just slip away.

That is why I got so intrigued when I first heard about relaxation and visualization practices. Last year I was able to clear enough time for myself to slowly start training these practices. The aim with them – whether it's a practice focused on muscle relaxation, breathing or creating a calming mindscape – is to fully pause everything else for a moment, thus allowing the mind and the body to take a rest. Practices can be used to either bring one's self closer to the current moment, take a break from worrying about the past or the future. The other direction is to try and go little bit deeper into the self, closer to the pleasant memories and feelings existing in the mind. This can be helpful, if being present or grasping the presence feels difficult for some reason.

Psychologist Tuija Matikka writes about seeking peacefulness in an article in Tiede -magazine (Matikka 2012). According to her it is possible to have a more proper view on the world by strengthening the resting mode of our nervous system. According to her, our nervous system works mostly unconsciously and in the ways of a seesaw. When the sympathetic, activating part of the system rises, the parasympathetic and relaxing part lowers. It's been inherited from the human ancestors that the seesaw is more prone to tilt towards being activated, ready to fight or flight (Matikka 2012.)

The inner speech of the mind can be toned down by consciously monitoring perceptions. -- In the daily life we don't pay attention to the body's sensations, because our mind is constantly searching the possible threats from our surroundings. If the intention is to turn on the resting mode, neutral arousal is beneficial (Matikka 2012.)

5.1.3 Safe Place practice

One of the most insightful practices for me personally has been creating a safe place. Purpose of the practice is to create a calming place that is available to enter at any time. If feeling peaceful already, it can be used to strengthen those

positive emotions. It's also helpful after a stressful event or even in the midst of one.

The place pictured can be an existing one or something drawn completely from imagination. It is important to create the place to the smallest detail and benefitting from all of the senses. One should imagine themselves in the middle of the place, being able to smell all the scents in there, to feel the temperature and different surfaces. There can be as much or as little as things that feels comfortable, and nothing and no one can enter the place without permission. When the practices continue the place starts to feel more and more familiar and cozy. That way entering it gets easier each time.

5.2 About medium choices

There was no real confusion with choosing the medium for the art work. During the last three to four years I've been working with moving image. Especially in the beginning of my studies I was very certain that it'd be the medium I'd spend the most time with, and the one I'd choose over others time and time again. I've been exploring similar kind of subjects in my works – dreams, calmness, memories, small intimate moments – exactly with video.

At some point something changed. It felt like the digital working was starting to slow me down, to limit me, rather than lead me forward. It felt like I didn't have enough room to play and try. With moving image the objects and places in the picture are after all things that exist in front of the camera lens.

Two-dimensional working – in this case painting and drawing – has accompanied me since I was a preschool kid. Even though I've worked with digital media a lot, drawing and painting has never completely dropped out of my life. In the autumn 2017 it started to attract me with a whole new strength.

My painting experience and skills consist mostly of working with aquarelle, ink and oil. Painting on canvas with oil can and has been very rewarding at times. On the other hand it can also be slow and expensive – quite tedious all in all. One day when I was thinking these things out loud, I was recommended to try acrylic

paints. At first I wasn't too keen on the idea, since my previous experiences about acrylics have been a bit clumsy. It's a personality quality; if I don't fall in love with something right away it's not too likely that I'll come back to it for a second chance. Luckily, I did do that with the acrylic paints.

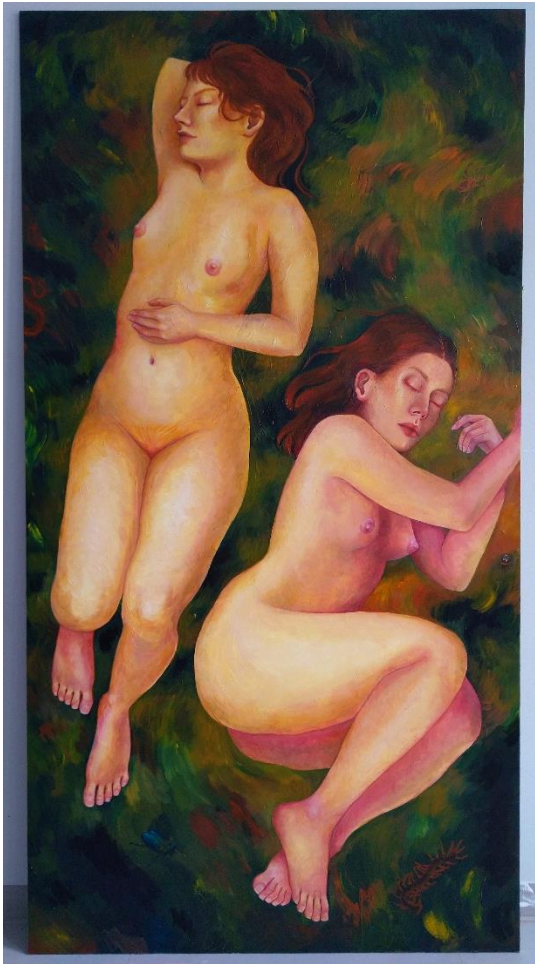
While taking a tour with completely different kind of paints, I also switched the traditional canvas to MDF-board. MDF – medium-density fiberboard to be exact – is a wood product made by applying high temperature and pressure to wood fibers combined with wax. The reason why I've chosen it over natural woods is that it takes in wood glue and paint well, and it is consistent with strength and dimensions.

It holds true that the paintings are fairly light and can be moved with practically no effort, but there are certain stumbling blocks what comes to the thinner board. The biggest one for me was that it starts to warp easily, which is a thing that has happened to me in the past, and what happened during this process too. This time it only occurred with the very last board that was left to ground-paint. I was too hasty with glue and gesso and painted several layers in a row to the same side. Fortunately I noticed the warping right away and was able to fix it; I turned the board concave side facing up, and let some weight sit on the corners of the board overnight.

6 ELEMENTS IN PAINTINGS

6.1 Golden Afternoon / Kultainen Iltapäivä

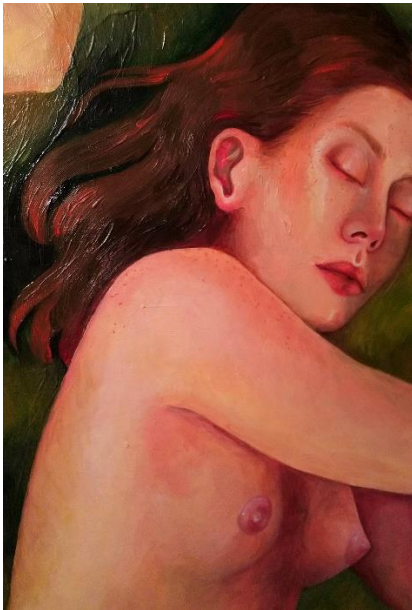
In the painting *Golden Afternoon* there are two females lying down in a meadow on a summery day. They're bathing in the warm light, perhaps just falling asleep, without any clothes.



PICTURE 5. Julia Räsänen, *Golden Afternoon*, 2019

To picture a naked woman is one of the most traditional themes in fine art painting; naked female figures are shown in very early prehistoric art (Sorabella 2008). Through life drawing it has made a permanent stay in my own imagery too. Picturing skin is another topic that's very intriguing to me, and it obviously goes hand in hand with painting nudes. Skin reflects light, and the bones and muscles underneath it gives the shape for it. It is a challenging subject; what are the colors that can occur in it, what's the texture of it, how does it stretch and bend, how can it be abstracted.

By painting skin, it feels natural to me to also explore the subject of intimacy. Picturing skin and body close by can bring up the thought of touch. In “Golden Afternoon” I haven’t specified the relationship that the two females have with each other, but it is to be inferred that they are close to one another. Often exactly the amount of clothes can suggest this; the less there are, the closer the relationship. Whether it’s platonically or sexually, there has to be a certain level of respect when naked or in very few clothes. Any sort of closeness demands precisely that, respecting one another. In that sense picturing nudity is a good indicator for closeness, trust and that way the sense of security.



PICTURE 6. Detail from Golden Afternoon, photograph by Julia Räsänen 2019

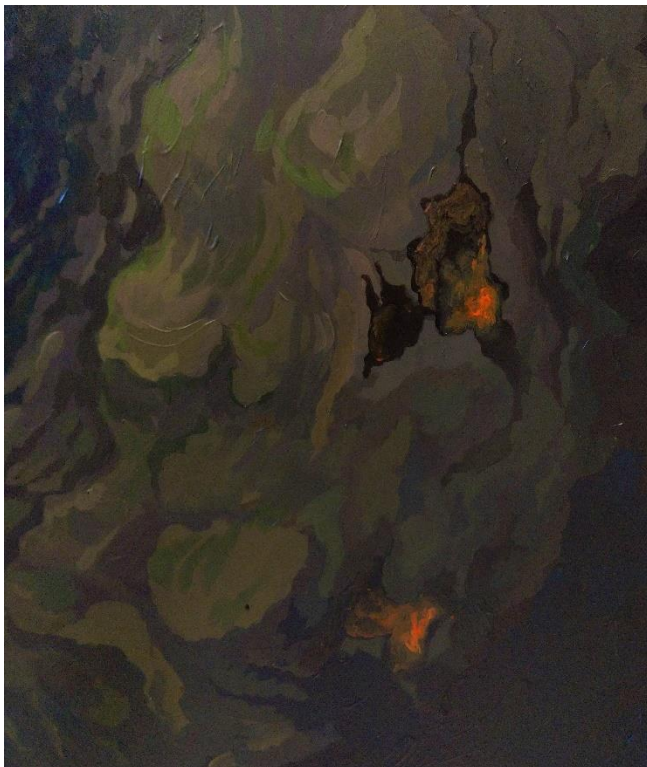
The name “Golden Afternoon” is a reference to my childhood. In the fairytale Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, there’s a poem “All in the golden afternoon. The fairytale as well as the poem were later on captured in an animation by Disney. In the animation there’s a scene where Alice stumbles upon a big garden of flowers. She’s feeling a bit lost after arriving in the Wonderland, and she’s chatting to herself trying to find some sense to it. After saying out loud that she thinks flowers can’t talk, all of them burst speaking. They want to show Alice that there’s a lot one can learn from flowers, so they sing her a song called “All in the golden afternoon”



PICTURE 5. Disney, Alice in Wonderland 1951, Still photo of Alice in the garden singing with the flowers

6.2 Silent World / Hiljainen maailma

Water is an element that is frequently occurring in my dreams. Usually it's something that can be found from the nature; an ocean, a lake or a river. It can also be a shower or a swimming pool. The water isn't necessarily playing the leading role in the dream, but in any case, I usually end up in the water.



PICTURE 6. Detail from Silent World, photograph by Julia Räsänen, 2019

Being in water feels very natural for me, whether I'm awake or dreaming. Water is supporting and in a dream I can breathe underneath it. I haven't noticed that the temperature or the clarity of it would make much of a difference – it always feels equally as soft and purifying.

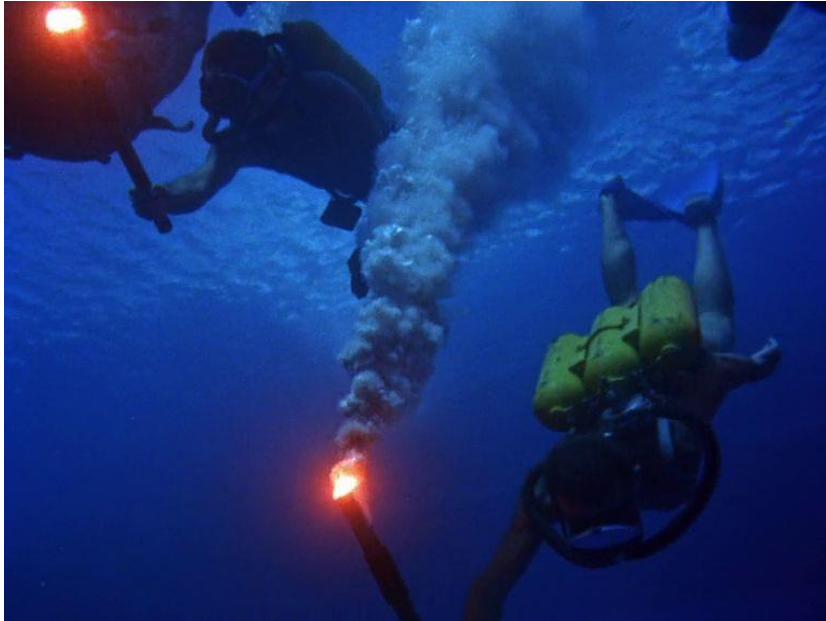


PICTURE 7. Julia Räsänen, *Silent World*, 2019

In the painting *Silent World*, the water stands for the unknown. As well as any other natural environment – deep forests, swamps and mountains – it is fairly unfamiliar to me. I've grown up in a city, where nature was present, but only to the extent I wanted. I have a feeling that no matter the experience, that thought will never completely disappear. The nature will always have the power over a human. Especially when put against each other, in a case where human tries to tame a part of it.

The painting is named *Silent World* to honor Jacques-Yves Cousteau, an oceanographer who lived 1910-1997. He was an explorer, innovator and a pioneer to scuba diving, who studied the sea and all forms of life in water. He publishes a book *The Silent World: A Story of Undersea Discovery and Adventure*. A bit later in 1956 he co-directed a documentary with the same name

(Stewart 2019.) I honor the sense of devotion he had towards his work with the sea. Pointing out the silence that is under the water feels spot on correct, and relevant to the atmosphere in the painting. The silence and the way water reduces any sort of noise is the factor affecting me the most when I'm swimming or picturing myself in water.



PICTURE 8. Jacques-Yves Cousteau & Louis Malle, *The Silent World* 1962, still photo of scuba divers in the documentary

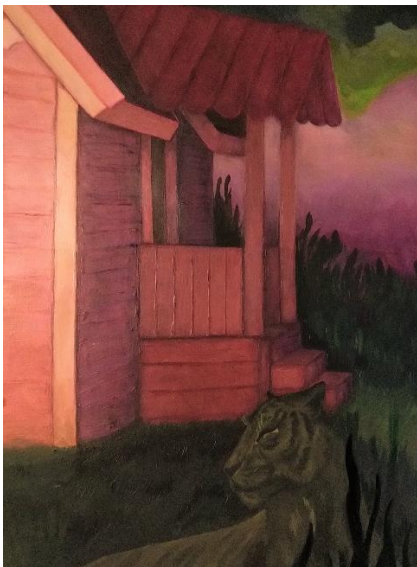
6.4 Wind from South / Lounatuuli

Last summer one of my dearest friends told me about a dream he'd had. In the dream we were spending the night at my childhood home. There's a playhouse in the backyard on my parents' house, built then I was a kid, and we were sleeping there. This is something we actually used to do when we were younger, it made us always very excited to spend the night outside of the house. This time it was even more thrilling, because there were big tigers living in the garden around the playhouse. We were quite afraid of the tigers and despite of trying we weren't able to escape from the house.



PICTURE 9. Julia Räsänen, Wind from South, 2019

Starting to interpret someone else's dream – or to illustrate in this case – is certainly very difficult, since there's no way for me actually understand what the dream looked or felt like. More so I wanted to take the elements out of the dream and build a landscape of its own. The dream combined, to wit, elements that hold very important meanings to me: the emotional bond that I have with this friend, the bond between me and my childhood, and the care I feel towards animals and nature.



PICTURE 10. Detail from Wind from South, photograph by Julia Räsänen, 2019

I didn't want the initial setting to be quite as obvious as it originally was, that the tigers are the one and only threat in situation. I wanted the viewer to also be able to switch the position other way around, so that the tigers are protecting the house from the surroundings. That's why the looks of the felines are rather gentle and approachable while they're having a rest on the grass. To add to the suspense, I painted thundery clouds rolling from the horizon above and dark, bushy plants to the foreground and around the house.

6.4 The Garden Street / Puutarhakatu

The Garden Street is the fourth and thus the last one of the paintings in this series. The order of the paintings in this report is the chronological order that I've finished the paintings in. I wanted to use this order instead of the one that they were presented in the exhibition, since it best captures my thoughts and ways to handle the motifs.

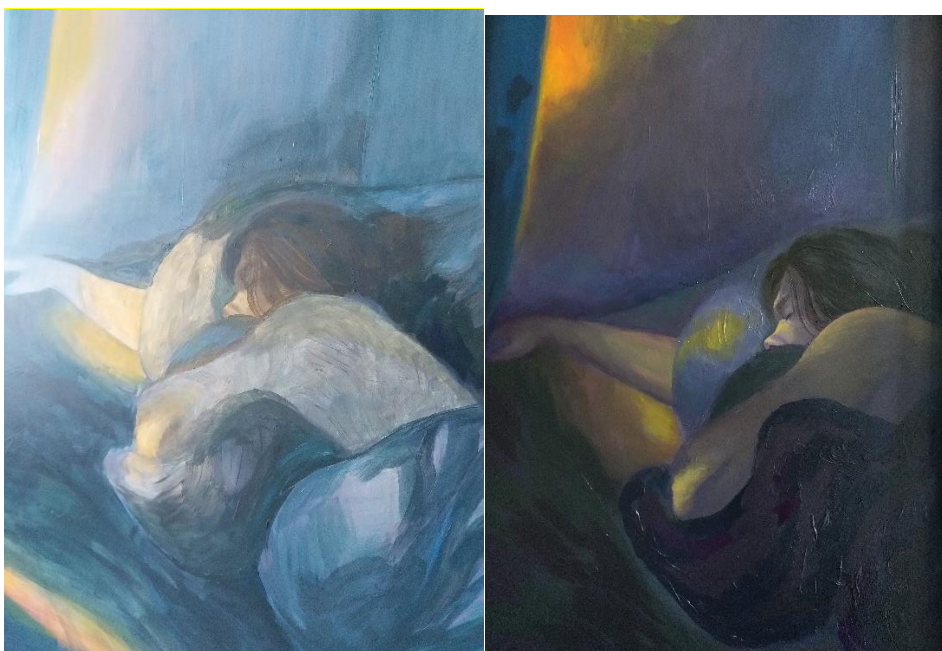
The Garden Street is picturing a nightly bedroom and a figure who's sleeping in a bed. Yellow light is glowing through curtains into the darkness of the room. The viewer can't see too much of the figure, only their shoulders and part of the face covered in their hair is peeking under the blanket. I intentionally hid the identity of the character – in the sense that one cannot tell their gender or age – even though for me it is without a doubt a portrait of my partner and a lover.

Out of the four paintings this one is the most tightly tied to reality, what comes to the elements in it. Surely there's the same kind of calmness, serenity or even stagnation present in all of them, but the nightly atmosphere is grounding the mood even more. Night or darkness are not necessarily calming elements for me per se, I'm more of a morning person. I wanted to capture the specific moment when I wake up in the middle of night, perhaps from a confusing or a scary dream. In that moment, no matter how disoriented I might be feeling I'm instantly calmed down when I realize my partner is sleeping next to me.



PICTURE 11. Julia Räsänen, *The Garden Street*, 2019

The Garden Street, Puutarhakatu in Finnish, is the name of the street I've lived by for almost four years now. Those years contain a huge amount of feelings and people, experiences of growing into an adult. In addition to that, by coincidence the name perfectly ties up with the imagery of my works.



PICTURE 12. Detail from *The Garden Street* after one layer of paint

PICTURE 13. Detail from *The Garden Street* when finished and installed
Photographs by Julia Räsänen 2019

7 INSTALLATION PROCESS

The artwork *Nesting* was presented in Gallery Himmelblau during 4.4. - 28.4.2019. It was a part of Blind Spot Degree Show of the fine art path students of Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The gallery spaces consist of two rooms called Himmelblau and Puuvillasali. The overall size of the space adds up to approximately 400 square meters. When starting to plan the exhibit with the group we decided that the Himmelblau side of the space would be completely lit, and in Puuvillasali we'd cover all the windows. That way the space gets quite dark, and the works there can be lit with spot lights.

I started planning the display of my work with Puuvillasali in mind. In my mind the works and the atmosphere in them would work the best in a dark space with separate, dim lights. I wanted the name *Nesting* to also continue in the way the works are displayed, to plan an installation that would be nest-like. I also ruled out the option to hang the paintings on walls. That wouldn't have supported the dreaminess and lightness of my imagery. Also, the materials and methods I'm using, acrylic paints and MDF-boards, are quite a contemporary way of making art. This was an aspect I wanted to extend even further; to follow a completely different direction than having paintings on the wall in nice frames.

Therefore, I had two strong criteria when planning the installation; the atmosphere of airiness and nest-like calmness. First and most fanciful idea was to hang all of the paintings from the roof, so that they would be floating in the air. In the beginning I wasn't entirely sure how that would've worked out in practice. MDF-board is relatively light as a material, at least with the mentioned 8-millimeter thickness. It's strong when it comes to bending but can't take any nails or screws without starting to crumble.

The buildings that are part of the Finlayson are protected and because of this it's not allowed to screw anything into the structures of the gallery space. This was another thing I had to consider in the planning process. I wanted the works to form a half of a circle. This way in the middle of them would be a space where the viewer could go and be encircled with by the paintings. Hanging the paintings from the roof and having them in a specific form and order turned out to be a too difficult combination. The second option was to have some sort of stands for the

works to stand up on. There were different sorts of sculpture stands available at the gallery. I could've also built them from the scratch. However, I thought any stand heavier or bigger would've taken away from the lightness I wanted the installation to have.

I decided that easels would serve my purposes the best out of the options I had. I've seen this in use a couple of times, displaying paintings on easels, and in all honesty I haven't been the biggest fan of the solution. For sure easels are an earthy, relaxed way of exhibiting paintings, but emphasizing the feel of the painting process have also provoked an unfinished feeling in me. Once I painted my easels with a matte black paint the looks of them were completely changed. In black they looked like a stylish, well-thought choice. The structure of the easels is not too sturdy, which made them almost blend into the installation and its dark background. I also sawed the legs of two of them shorter, so that they wouldn't peek above the painting.



PICTURE 14. Easels painted black, photograph by Julia Räsänen, 2019

The original idea of hanging the works from the ceiling came partly true, since it was possible to do it for one of the works. I chose to hand *Silent World*, since combining the water element with flowing in the air felt really intriguing. This way I was also able to add a little more surrealism to the atmosphere. The actual

hanging was made with hooks and wires. We placed two metal hooks into both the foot and the top of the painting and tightened them together with steel wire. The top hooks were then attached to a wire going up to hooks screwed in the ceiling. The ceiling hooks were already existing from previous exhibitions, which was a lucky chance for me.

Overall the installation turned out just as how I imagined and wanted. The black easels and wires are simple solutions, that let paintings breathe and have the attention they deserve, whilst still creating a put together, professional impression.



PICTURE 15. Close up of the wires and hooks used to hang the painting from the ceiling. Photograph by Julia Räsänen, 2019



PICTURE 16. *Nesting* installation finished in Puuvillasali, photograph by Julia Räsänen 2019

8 CONCLUSION

My whole life I've been in an incredibly fortunate and privileged position, because I happened to be born to this exact society and to this exact time. I grew up in an environment where there were no lack of money or love. In my everyday life I rarely have to worry about my physical safety, public spaces are monitored with security cameras and all my money sits behind locked doors. There are safety statutes concerning everything from groceries to public transport, and insurance can be bought to protect all things existing. If something goes wrong, the Western medicine has got my back.

Despite of the all earlier mentioned signs of safety, at some point in my life worrying started to nag my mind. Feelings of safety and calmness seemed very hard to find or maintain. Every criterion for their existence should have been fulfilled, so I was more than confused. This was a thought that I wanted to dig into with this research.

Studying fear and experiences of fear during the research was very calming in a surprising way. It felt grounding to understand that my experiences and feelings of fear and restlessness were neither exorbitant nor one of their kind. This is very important when trying to heal any sort of sore spots; understanding that all feelings are valid.

Planning and researching, painting the works and writing the Thesis were to do within a certain schedule, following certain rules. This combined with the desire to do my absolute best with my graduation and wanting the result to reflect my skills made the whole process partly really stressful. It became paradoxical; searching for safety and ways to maintain it actually decreased feeling of safety in my own life. Of course, realistically thinking I knew that it would be only momentarily and would most likely go back to normal once I finished working. It was still ponderable for the research observing these feelings.

In the painting process the most exciting part was to take a bit different approach with building the images. In my opinion my strongest skills are in portrait painting, and it's also the most pleasant motif for me. This time, when the purpose was to create a safe space for myself, I started from creating a place and space. Having

a different approach revealed some interesting things to me, which I earlier on haven't cared about too much. It was also very improving practicing things I've intentionally avoided in the past, because they've felt too difficult for me. Perspective, creating a feel of space and playing with the difference between natural and artificial lighting stole a big portion of my attention. Working with the same series of works so thoroughly and long-term, and a need to create a strong background story around the paintings were really rewarding.

Building a painting installation at the gallery space was a new experience for me also. I'm glad I took the chance and didn't go the traditional way but started to experiment with my ideas. This is something I will definitely encourage myself to do in the future too, since the result was so successfully reflecting my wishes and ideas. If I had the chance I would do couple of things differently: picking up thicker MDF-board to begin with and use even more time with planning the installation. This way I perhaps would've been able to hang all of the paintings from the ceiling. This isn't something that bothers me much though, because I enjoyed the installation very much as it was too.

About the works of Terhi Kaakinen and Miina Savolainen – even though their take on artistic practice differs quite a bit from each other – each supported the writing process of the research. It was nice to be able to include two different reference works but finding them wasn't too easy. I feel like emotional security has been a subject of conversation a lot during the past couple of years, whether it had been about mental health, healthy relationships or something else along the line. It's really great seeing these important topics rising up in the public debate. Even better would be to see a change happening in the way a person in the modern society is encouraged to live their life, so that the pace of life would support one's emotional safety. I feel like it would be natural continuum for the debate to start seeing the subject in fine art even more, and I'm looking forward to that.

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