

# Helsinki Biennial 2020:

## Artists

### Paweł Althamer (PL)

**Collaborative art projects and creative play are the things which matter most to Paweł Althamer.**

Paweł Althamer's (b. 1967) communal approach is a key component of his artistic practice. A trained sculptor, Althamer involves his family members, neighbours and people he meets in the street. This collaboration produces sculptures – which the artist calls totems – that are traces of the process that has taken place. His practice also involves moving in the public space and bringing the ways of making art to where people are. During his solo exhibition at HAM in 2019, for example, Althamer expanded his exhibition to Jakomäki, a suburb of Helsinki. What matters most in these collaborative works is not what the end result looks like, but the process itself and creative play.

Searching for your inner boundaries is part of Althamer's art. The artist's own body is the closest subject available to him, and through it he seeks contact with other people. By making art together with others he also provides the participants with the opportunity for a new kind of self-reflection. Althamer has produced collaborative works in a suburb of Warsaw where he has lived for many years. A suburban identity is an important part of who he is as an artist. In his participatory projects, Althamer does not recognise societal or social differences.

### BIOS (FI)

**BIOS Research Unit creates tools for interdisciplinary and artistic collaboration. It undertakes multidisciplinary environmental research and engages in dialogue with stakeholders such as decision-makers, the media and civic society.**

BIOS was founded in 2015 by a group of researchers who felt that the connections between different environmental issues, such as climate change and the use of natural resources, were often missing from public discussion. The media, for example, often saw environmental issues as separate from the economy and politics, creating a need for multidisciplinary work weaving together the dimensions of natural and social sciences as

well as humanities. The aim of the independent research unit, in addition to knowledge production, is to develop research-based societal dialogue with various stakeholders, especially journalists and decision-makers.

BIOS launched with a pilot project in collaboration with the News and Public Affairs unit of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE): BIOS compiled a scientific knowledge base for journalists on seas, forests, food and climate change, amongst other things. At the same time, journalistic methods were developed to improve the communication of environmental issues. Since then BIOS has worked extensively with various partners and projects. Its scientific background document for the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 attracted widespread international media attention. Since its early stages the Helsinki Biennial has engaged in dialogue with BIOS. Currently, the unit consists of eight researchers: Jussi T. Eronen (b. 1978), Ville Lähde (b. 1972), Karoliina Lummaa (b. 1977), Paavo Järvensivu (b. 1982), Antti Majava (b. 1977), Tero Toivanen (b. 1980), Tere Vadén (b. 1969) and Emma Hakala (b. 1984).

## Katharina Grosse (DE)

**Using natural landscapes and buildings as her canvas, Katharina Grosse is a painter of colourful, radical visions.**

Katharina Grosse (b. 1961) is fascinated by how colour can affect its surroundings. In her large-scale in-situ paintings she abandons the confines of the traditional rectangular canvas and uses floors, walls, other structures and natural materials, such as soil, as her support. For Grosse, a painting “can land anywhere: on an egg, in the crook of the arm, along a train platform, in snow and ice, or on the beach.” Her tools are equally diverse: She paints with an industrial spray gun, but has also applied paint with her own hands, as well as rollers and brushes. The result of the painting process is more like a sculpture that emerges from a geographical location rather than a conventional painting.

Grosse says that painting is linked to her way of examining the world. Contemplating the world means simultaneously doing something with it. As a child, she imagined an invisible brush that she would use to paint over the shadows cast through her room and by its objects. For her, painting is an act that emerges from a relationship with a particular place, and embraces the incidents that occur while she paints.

Grosse’s multi-layered, haptic pictures are radical and provocative, making us realise that it is always possible to also view reality differently. Surrounding the viewer her works never leave them unmoved.

## Gustafsson&Haapoja (FI)

**Gustafsson&Haapoja's work features the idea of utopia or the possibility of a different world. The latest project explores how the way of being a human should be adapted so that it enables a more sustainable relationship with the world.**

Gustafsson&Haapoja's collaboration was launched in 2012. The project began by exploring history and society from the perspective of other species, and has progressed to dismantling the concepts of human and animal and how they relate to the mechanisms of racialisation, sexism and social exclusion. The idea of utopia or the possibility of a different world features throughout Gustafsson&Haapoja's work. A new project *Becoming* explores how the way of being a human should be adapted so that it enables a more sustainable relationship with the world.

Gustafsson&Haapoja's art inhabits the mediums of installation and video art, conceptual art and performance. Visual artist Terike Haapoja (b. 1974) and author, scriptwriter and playwright Laura Gustafsson (b. 1983) combine poetry with a documentary approach in their work. The artists' theatre backgrounds are also often visible in the works. The collaboration also highlights the importance of connecting the projects with the surrounding reality through essays, discussions and activism.

Gustafsson&Haapoja's *Museum of Becoming* exhibition, which will open in spring 2020, is part of the Helsinki Biennial programme that will be presented at HAM.

## Hanna Tuulikki (UK)

**Hanna Tuulikki, combines music, performance and visual art in a unique way to tell stories through imitation, vocalisation and gesture.**

Hanna Tuulikki (b. 1982) is a British-Finnish artist, composer and performer, based in Glasgow, Scotland. Her practice spans performance, film and multi-channel audio-visual installation, blending together vocal music, dance, costume and drawing. Her multi-disciplinary projects "investigate the ways in which the body communicates beyond and before words, to tell stories through imitation, vocalisation and gesture". Often exploring music and movement traditions across cultures, she is particularly interested in how bodily relationships and folk histories are encoded within specific environments and places.

Recent projects include *Deer Dancer* (2019), an audiovisual installation considering how imitation of deer behaviour in dance constructs masculine rituals and imaginary landscapes; *cloud-cuckoo-island* (2016), a film featuring a solo vocal improvisation in a natural amphitheatre on the island of Eigg, Scotland, exploring madness, mythology and gender. *SOURCEMOUTH: LIQUIDBODY* (2016), an audiovisual installation inspired by Indian landscapes and the relationship between river-systems, the body, and Kutiyattam theatre; *SING SIGN: a close duet* (2015), performance and installation representing the body-in-communication in relation to gender and the city and *Away with the Birds* (2010-2015), a body of multi-disciplinary work investigating the imitation of birds in traditional Scottish-Gaelic song, featuring a vocal composition composed from fragments of songs woven into an extended soundscape.

## IC-98 (FI)

**Social reflection takes a poetic form in the melancholic works of IC-98. The duo's recent work has dealt with the relationship between living and inanimate nature, and the future themes of environmental destruction and the post-human world.**

Several of IC-98's recent works deal with nature taking over an abandoned man-made environment. These natural processes, the relationship between living and inanimate nature, and the future of environmental destruction and the post-human world are highlighted as important themes in their practice. The duo's work during the latter part of the 2010s draws on post-humanist thinking in which the anthropocentric view of the world is considered in a critical way. The enduring landscapes of the dark and melancholic works reflect natural history across a human time span.

IC-98 is best known for animations that combine classic pencil drawing with digital effects. The end results are slow-moving, poetic images. Their contemplative works can be produced in very diverse material forms. During a career that spans 20 years, the duo has produced artist books, site- and context-specific projects and interventions, films and commissions.

IC-98 was set up in 1998 by Patrik Söderlund (b. 1974) and Visa Suonpää (b. 1968). Their backgrounds are in cultural studies and the visual arts. In their works they combine scientific research, philosophy, ecology and social thinking. For the duo, it is important that their artistic work is rooted in the world and is in dialogue with historical, social and political realities. IC-98 collaborates with a wide range of professionals in the arts and sciences.

## Marja Kanervo (FI)

In her works Marja Kanervo uses everyday objects and temporal layers. She often reveals layers of time by demolishing and exposing, for example, by removing a layer of paint.

“Art doesn’t have to be forever” is one of the central principles of Marja Kanervo’s (b. 1958) practice. The artist’s unassuming works made from everyday elements are usually created in carefully selected spaces, and they cannot be moved from one place to another. Although the artist re-builds some of the works in new venues, her spatial works are non-permanent in nature.

Kanervo, who trained as a painter, became interested in three-dimensional work during her studies. In her work she often brings out layers of time by demolishing and exposing, for example, by removing a layer of paint. The artist creates spaces that both ease and provoke thoughts. Various everyday objects left behind by humans, such as cardboard boxes, plastic bags or glass, are the material for Kanervo’s work. Kanervo is interested in the life that is lived and human traces: Kanervo has collected hair from hairdressers in Helsinki, using it to weave mattresses and pillows. Kanervo’s work *Ryijy* (1992/2013) was created from feathers treated with waste oil reflecting on the irreversible changes that humans inflict on their environment.

## Tadashi Kawamata (JP/FR)

**Tadashi Kawamata uses works constructed from reclaimed materials to make us see our surroundings in a new way.**

Tadashi Kawamata (b. 1953) builds appendages, like parasites, to existing buildings from scrap and other reclaimed materials. The artist wants to use his works to shape the public space. His subtle gestures and full-scale redefinitions provide us with new insights into the spaces that surround us. As the works refocus our attention, we may see things that have always been there for the first time.

Kawamata’s works are constructed in carefully selected locations, often through collaborative processes. It is important for the artist to execute or build his sculptural works together with local groups. The materials he collects eventually take form in a variety of shapes, such as huts, nests, chimneys or connecting bridges. Kawamata has created his works around the world, for example at the Palace of Versailles, where he covered one of the buildings with thousands of wooden vegetable and fruit boxes that he collected from local merchants.

## Laura Könönen (FI)

**In her sculptures, Laura Könönen combines materials in surprising ways with everyday things, such as a telephone booth, a speaker cabinet or a dying bonfire, thus creating new visual languages.**

Laura Könönen (b. 1980) often selects stone as a material as, to her, it symbolises silence without the presence of humans, when all sound has disappeared. “The stone sets itself on a different timeline than the existence of the individual,” says Könönen. The artist combines material in surprising ways with everyday things, such as a telephone booth, a speaker cabinet or a dying bonfire, thus creating different language images with her works. Könönen explains that she wants to bring the melancholy of existence to her works in this way.

In addition to black diorite, Könönen uses materials such as marble, light, sound, steel and glass. Often interlayering her work with her own written metaphors, the artist alludes to various conceptual thoughts and ideas.

## Alicja Kwade (PL/DE)

**Alicja Kwade’s sculptures challenge us to question our perceptions and understanding of the reality around us.**

Alicja Kwade’s (b. 1979) works play with the materiality of matter itself and the emptiness it consists of. According to the artist the world we live our everyday lives in is only based on social agreements we draft about our perceptions of it. Our understanding of reality and what we have learned to hold as solid truths is just based on our limited senses, and as a consequence cannot be complete. To indicate simultaneous states of the same object and finally the existence of parallel worlds, the artist sometimes uses mirror images or reflections, like a window, into another reality. Her works contemplate our relationship with nature, our place in the universe and the continuous transformation of our world, also as broader philosophical questions.

## Tuomas A. Laitinen (FI)

**Tuomas A. Laitinen’s research and work combine ecology, chemical processes, and fiction to create multi-layered situations that blend old and new technologies.**

Tuomas A. Laitinen (b. 1976) is an artist who works with moving image, sound, light as well as chemical and microbial processes. He is interested in ecological issues, the formation of awareness and knowledge, and porous systems. Porous is a concept Laitinen uses to describe morphing boundaries between beings. In his works, Laitinen examines, amongst other things, how different technologies and transmitters influence our experience of the world. According to the artist, the transmitter can be anything through which we encounter the world, such as electricity, skin, spoken and written language, or an individual technology.

In recent years, Laitinen has studied the special type of intelligence of the octopus and has collaborated with artificial intelligence researchers. These multifaceted starting points produce layered installations. They look at human activity in different ecosystems, moving from microscopical particles to society's power relationships. Continuous change, permeability and transparency are key features of the works. Laitinen has been influenced by, amongst other things, science fiction and posthuman philosophies that seek to outline a new foundation for sustainable coexistence on Earth.

## Jaakko Niemelä (FI)

**Jaakko Niemelä's works are often based on personal experiences, various spaces and structures. In addition to traditional materials, the artist uses lights and shadows in his works.**

Jaakko Niemelä (b. 1959) takes over spaces with his large-scale installations. In addition to more traditional building materials, light is a central element of Niemelä's works. He is interested in shadows and darkness and the combination of natural and artificial light. During his 35-year career, Niemelä has worked on his artistic expression using graphics, special installations, video and public works.

Jaakko Niemelä's works are often based on personal experiences, various spaces and the deconstruction of structures. In recent years, he has also become fascinated with the sea and ships, which to him represent symbols of abandonment, sorrow and longing. The artist went on a ship expedition to follow in the footsteps of his distant father, a sea captain called Erkki, and to draft his story using the traces left behind.

Jaakko Niemelä will exhibit a work in Vallisaari as part of the Helsinki Biennial. His solo exhibition will be on display at HAM in spring 2020.

## Mario Rizzi (IT/DE)

**Mario Rizzi deals with broad societal phenomena through the collective memories and individual stories of social outsiders, often forgotten or untold. The artist's films are humane portrayals of people which are left outside of the Western gaze.**

The Bosnian War in the early 1990s was Mario Rizzi's (b. 1962) first contact with Islamic culture. He became interested in people who are easily bundled together into one uniform group and perceived as outsiders in relation to Western culture. For twenty years, Rizzi has portrayed the Islamic world and its transformation. His films have addressed the political movements that emerged in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010. Over the past fifteen years, he has lived for long periods in Turkey closely following its social change.

Rizzi addresses themes of migration, notions of the border, issues of identity and belonging to portray broad societal phenomena. He focuses on people and communities that are easily left outside of the Western gaze. As an artist and filmmaker, Rizzi portrays people with a humane approach. Genuine connection is at the heart of what he does, and he has spent a lot of time with his subjects, in their homes, in refugee camps or wherever they live.

## Maaria Wirkkala (FI)

**Maaria Wirkkala transforms ordinary objects and places into spaces of thoughts, memories and dreams.**

"I work with what I see and what I don't want to see", Maaria Wirkkala (b. 1954) has said. Alongside the material world, Maaria Wirkkala works with the intangible: light and shadow play a central role in her works and time is also one of her elements. The artist transforms ordinary objects and places, such as a basement or firewall, into spaces of thoughts, memories and dreams, or, according to Maaria Wirkkala, states of mind. Her site-specific works ask the viewer to pause and contemplate.

When producing an exhibition for the Helsinki Art Museum in 2014, Maaria Wirkkala's starting point was the history of the Tennis Palace as a sports venue. Sport thus became the theme of the exhibition, a metaphor for world events. This gave rise to the works e.g. *Champion*, *the Critical Point*, dedicated to the ski jumper Matti Nykänen, and *Penalty*, depicting the connection between a football match and a riot.

The scale of Maaria Wirkkala's works ranges from small object compositions to large scale landscape installations. Although Maaria Wirkkala's works are often temporary, she



has also produced permanent works, such as the *Shred of knowledge* (1999) heritage memorial of the Royal Academy of Turku, which studies the monument's intangible nature.