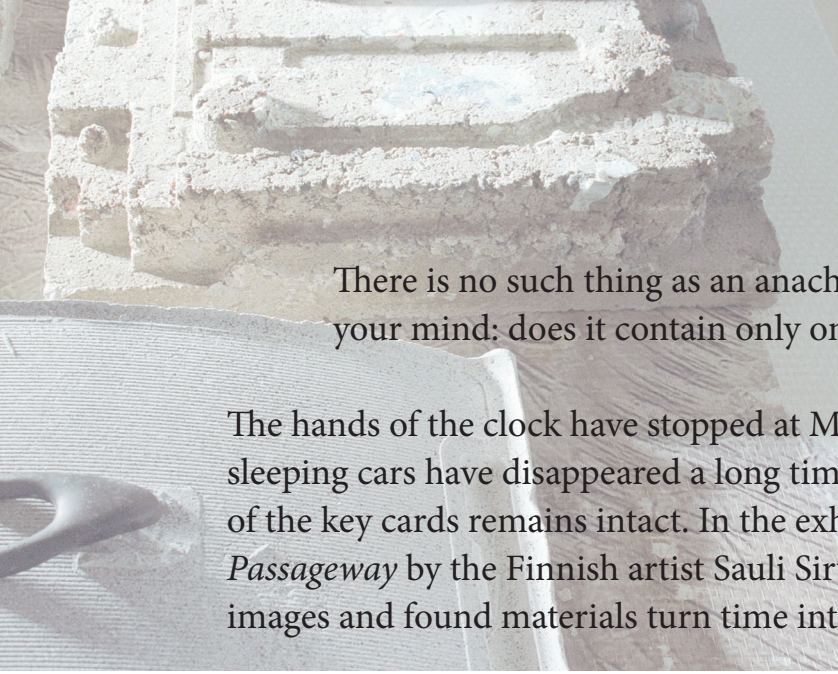


NSFW 2024

Sauli Sirviö
An Odd Old Passageway

Text by Ida Lehtonen



There is no such thing as an anachronism. Look inside your mind: does it contain only one era?¹

The hands of the clock have stopped at MAI. The doors to the sleeping cars have disappeared a long time ago, but the code of the key cards remains intact. In the exhibition *An Odd Old Passageway* by the Finnish artist Sauli Sirviö a palimpsest of images and found materials turn time into wax.²

Photographs are the ground of Sirviö's work yet they don't aim just to point to a moment frozen in time. The places he visits and documents and the materials he collects from them materialize as images and objects that fluctuate between different layers of time. Sirviö searches for spaces in a liminal state: hidden, in ruins, out of function, some soon to be demolished and lost forever. Materials, details, forms, and experiences found in these sites become sculptures and installations in an instant of synchronicity. Each piece follows its lifecycle with no absolute final form: sculptural components transform into new experiments or return to the hard infrastructure³ to become new images and objects.

In his latest work, Sirviö returns also to drawing. A book on the fire security of high-rise buildings,⁴ archival images from the *Picture Collection*,⁵ among others, are drawn copies, copies of copies, that transcend the documentary and turn into fiction.⁶

1. Anne Carson in conversation with Niko Hallikainen. (2024, May 1) "Suuri kirjallinen arvoitus". *Helsingin Sanomat*. <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000010386231.html> Quote translated from the interview. "Sellaista asiaa kuin anakronismi ei ole olemassa. Katso omaan mieleesi: sisältääkö se vain yhden aikakauden?"

2. In the short story "Ajan huone" the character Donna Quijote describes time as wax. From Krohn, L. (1983) *Donna Quijote ja muita kaupunkilaisia*. WSOY. "Aika on ainetta, eräänlaista vahaa."

3. See for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_infrastructure

4. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 01:22:39. "So I was walking down the street, and saw that someone had dropped a book on the fire safety of high-rise buildings. And the book was really carefully scrutinized, as if someone had taken an exam in the subject. And then I was like, I want to make a sculpture of that. I want to go inside it, look at those pages, and collect the information. It's been three days in the freezer now, because I'm afraid of bedbugs. There was a dumpster next to the book when I found it." Translated from Finnish.

5. *Picture collection*. <https://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/wallach-division/picture-collection>

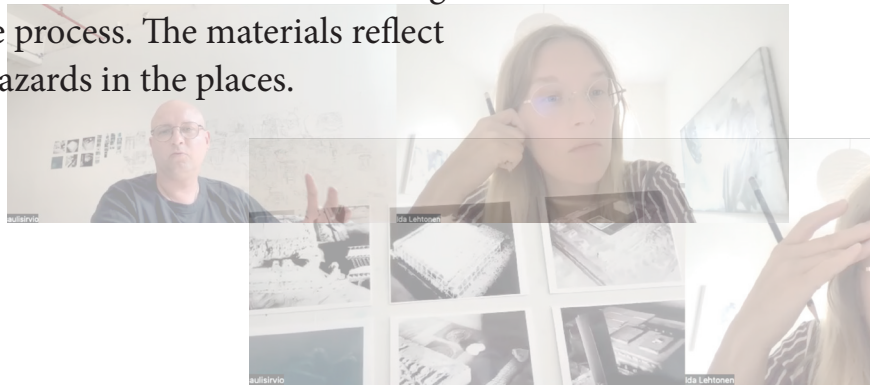
6. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 00:17:04.

Drawing Clouds

In *An Odd Old Passageway* the past, the present, and the future cross paths in three metropolitan areas: in the utopia of Noisy-le-Grand,⁷ the mega infrastructure projects of Pasila,⁸ and New York's high "cathedrals of commerce".⁹ The ruins and the subterranean caches look skywards: the urban wastelands of old industrial areas and waterfronts are being disposed of at an accelerating pace making way for future high-rise buildings. Skyscrapers¹⁰ have taken root deep down in the ground, but permanence is always fleeting. There will always be new ruins.¹¹

“ That is what fascinates me about my sculptures, that they are really fragile, they are flaking all the time. However, that fragility can also be seen in the skyscrapers, it can be seen everywhere: it repeats the reality we are in.”¹²

Aluminium, paper, silver, fibreglass, egg cartons, plastic, pencil, soil, plaster: the materials in Sirviö's installations and sculptures are organic, fragile, sometimes prone to mould, or on the other hand, toxic, even aggressive. "I like the chaotic side of it, I like being in trouble with my materials. You never know what will happen", he laughs as we talk on Zoom. Chaos makes following the materials a natural part of the process. The materials reflect the ephemerality, oddness, and hazards in the places.



7. See for example: Tofani, F. (2024, Mar 13) "Postmodernist architecture in Noisy-le-Grand: Science fiction in the suburbs of Paris". <https://ftrc.blog/architecture-in-noisy-le-grand>

8. See for example: Järvinen, E., Kaarenoja, V. (2019, Feb 22) "Maailmanloppu on lähempänä kuin uskotkaan. Sen voi ymmärtää, jos kiipeää korkealle kalliolle Helsingin Pasilassa ja osaa katsoa oikein". *Suomen Kuvalehti*. <https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/kotimaa/maailmanloppu-on-lahempana-kuin-uskotkaan-sen-voi-ymmartaa-jos-kiipeaa-korkealle-kalliolle-helsingin-pasilassa/?shared=1063835-b2acb5c6-1> "One million tonnes of earth was removed to build the high-rise towers of the "mega hybrid construction project" Tripla shopping mall in Pasila, in Helsinki.

9. The term was first used of the Woolworth building. See for example: Sutton, P. (2013, April 22) "The Woolworth Building". <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2013/04/22/woolworth-building-cathedral-commerce>

10. A literal translation of the Finnish word for a skyscraper, *pilvenpiirtäjä*, could be a cloud drawer or drawer of the clouds.

11. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 00:22:10.

12. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 00:05:30. Translated from Finnish.

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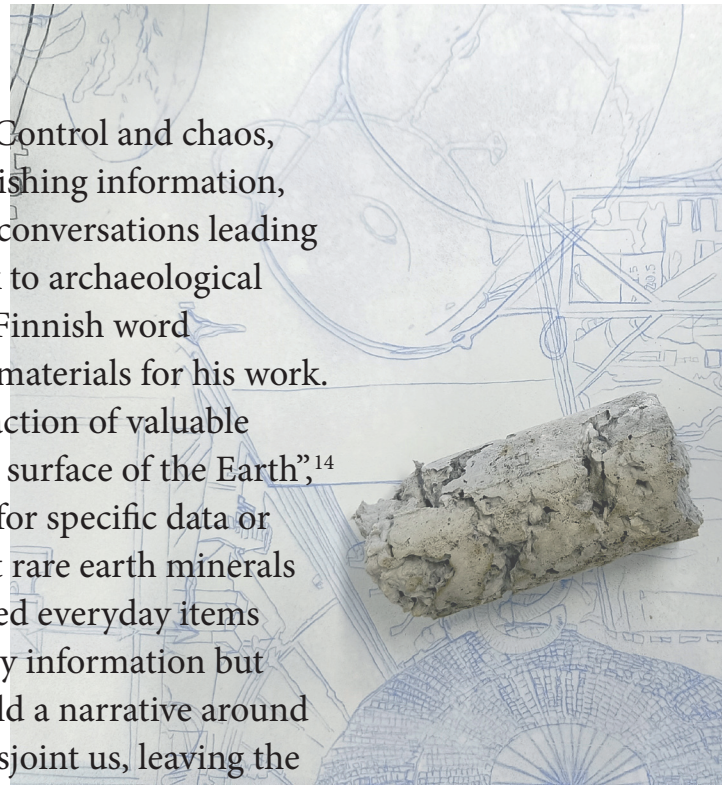
If you think of the city as a sculpture, then we are like inside a sculpture where things happen all the time. Houses flake, the sun corrodes their surfaces, and people produce information on papers that are shredded, some of it is secret, and it can be found on the streets. People come from outside of New York, along the ring roads, they flake and drop stuff, throwing things out of the car windows. I try to collect all that debris around me and figure out how it got there.¹³



13. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 00:58:34. Translated from Finnish.

There is a duality to Sauli Sirviö's practice. Control and chaos, relics and waste, archival practices and vanishing information, preserving and destroying alternate in our conversations leading to the exhibition. Sirviö compares his work to archaeological excavations. At the same time, he uses the Finnish word *louhinta*, mining or extraction of sourcing materials for his work. Semantically, mining can refer to the "extraction of valuable geological materials and minerals from the surface of the Earth",¹⁴ but also to searching through information for specific data or patterns.¹⁵ The materials he extracts are not rare earth minerals as such, but rather debris, soil, and discarded everyday items and materials. The materials always embody information but where the modern archaeologist might build a narrative around the finds,¹⁶ Sirviö follows the material to disjoint us, leaving the temporal dots unconnected. The work is dense in memories, but it is in the nature of memory to blur, change, and take new forms over time.¹⁷ However, even when the images are obfuscated, dim, fragmentary, or only indicative of the original image, they always reveal something to us. Documenting the liminal places is a way to go back in time and remember them even after they are gone.¹⁸ In itself, it is an act against the capitalist objective of forgetting. Philosopher Tere Vadén writes:

Only in the landfill or on the waves of the sea will the true raw material of the capitalist product ideal be revealed: a universal shred that can be anything. It could have been anything and it could become anything.¹⁹



14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mining>

15. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mining>

16. See for example: Fennelly, K. (2023). "Archaeology, Emotional Storytelling, and Performance". *Public Archaeology*, 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14655187.2022.2149683>

17. Koskinen, P. (2024, April 26) "Kaikki tieto ei mahdu aivoihin – emmekä päättä itse, mitä muistiin tallennetaan". *Yle tiedeykkönen*.

<https://areena.yle.fi/podcastit/1-68342556> In the program docent Tarja Stenberg talks about how memory is often thought to "be as accurate as the hard drive of a computer, but nothing could be further away from the truth".

18. Sirviö, S. Zoom call, Sept 12, 2023. 00:59:15.

19. Vadén, T. (2010) *Kaksijalkainen ympäristövallankumous – Pamfletti synnyistä*. Osuuskunta Rohkean reunaan. Quote translated from the Finnish original by Lehtonen, I. "Vasta kaatopaikalla tai meren aalloilla paljastuu kapitalistisen tuoteihanteen todellinen raaka-aine: universaali silppu, joka voi olla mitä tahansa."

Ida Lehtonen is a Gothenburg-based artist working with photography, sculpture, and text. She is currently finishing her MFA at Aalto University in Finland. *Unearthing* is her new curatorial project with a focus on collaborative site-sensitive work.

Images: Sauli Sirviö, *Blueprint I & II*, 2008–2024, mixed media (page 4 & 5), Sauli Sirviö, work in process (page 2 & 4).



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