



Vallisaari Island, photos by Maija Toivanen and Helsinki Art Museum

Helsinki Biennial Announces its Guiding Principles and Objectives for Embracing a New Era

The inaugural Helsinki Biennial 2021, 'The Same Sea', will be held on the Helsinki Archipelago, Vallisaari island, from 12 June – 26 September 2021. Following a year which has challenged ways of being, indefinitely, shifted the modus operandi, and renewed perspectives, Helsinki Biennial invites the global art community to rethink how the world's major art events are staged.

By establishing a responsible approach to exhibition making, advocating a commitment to the local whilst also promoting sustainable tourism, and working within the context of the City of Helsinki and its ambitious climate goals – recently included in the A List of leading cities of climate work in 2020 – Helsinki Biennial aims to offer an alternative framework for biennials in a post-pandemic world. Based on these considerations, it announces its guiding principles and objectives for embracing a new era:

- 1. Helsinki Biennial has a future-orientated vision; it emphasises a responsibility towards art, the environment, and the city's residents.**

Advocating ecological ethics and radical empathy, Helsinki Biennial urges us to rethink pre-existing patterns of behaviour. The cultural history and diverse environment of Vallisaari island sets a strict framework for the biennial, which will use a bespoke programme from the Finnish EcoCompass Environmental Management System to direct production and infrastructure. In addition, the carbon footprint of the inaugural biennial will be measured as accurately as possible across the categories of waste, purchases, energy consumption, and logistics and mobility, in order to define goals and build guidelines for becoming an entirely carbon neutral event (aligning with the city's ambition to become a carbon neutral city by 2035). As a new event within a busy global art calendar, Helsinki Biennial affirms its dedication to creating a new space for art and artists which encourages innovation and responsible action.

2. Helsinki Biennial celebrates the synthesis of art, nature, and the sea. It is committed to creating safe experiences for engaging with art, within the context of open spaces, clean air, and untamed landscapes.

Formerly in military use, Vallisaari is an uninhabited island, just a 15-minute ferry ride from the city centre. Rooted in its maritime location, the Helsinki Biennial marries art with nature's elements, asserting the importance of an exhibition's context and environment as well as its wellbeing properties. Whilst some artworks are positioned along the cobbled, outdoor trail - enabling unrestricted viewing conditions, other installations bring to life individual historical buildings and gunpowder cellars across the island - allowing the flow of visitors to be carefully measured.

3. Helsinki Biennial is dedicated to presenting ambitious work by Finnish and international artists which respond to the world around us.

The inaugural biennial 'The Same Sea' will feature majority new commissions and site-specific works, including those by Katharina Grosse, Jaakko Niemelä, Tadashi Kawamata, Dafna Maimon, and Marja Kanervo. In addition to its actual geopolitical location, cultural history and nature, Vallisaari inspires broader topical questions, including the understanding of interdependence, the relationship between ourselves and others, and the micro and macro worlds that remain outside of normal observation.

4. Collaboration with local organisations and individuals is key to being part of, and expanding, the city's art scene.

Building upon Helsinki's flourishing grassroots and institutional art scene, new alliances and exchanges are interwoven throughout the biennial's exhibition and collateral events programme, 'Helsinki Biennial Inspired'. Both local and international artists have welcomed collaborations with the city's communities, from Margaret and Christine Wertheim's *'Helsinki Satellite Reef'* crafted alongside care home residents, to Paweł Althamer's documentary and VR film *'Seven Prisoners'* produced with the nearby Suomenlinna Open Prison.

5. The biennial should be part of the cultural fabric that provides meaningful parameters for social sustainability.

As part of the city's ambitious cultural vision, Helsinki Biennial strives to enhance Helsinki's social sustainability. Whilst this inherently encompasses investing in artist opportunities (significantly for those who are from, live, or work in the region), it also extends to culturally enriching the lives of its citizens through the holistic attributes of contemporary art. Leaving a lasting legacy of contemporary art on the mainland, a number of biennial artworks – including 2021 sculptures by Alicja Kwade and Laura Könönen – will become permanent features of the city's public art collection.

6. Helsinki Biennial invites all.

Helsinki Biennial is a free event. It is based on, and promotes, democratic and inclusive principles, welcoming both cultural enthusiasts and newcomers. Whilst Vallisaari as an island is an open, public space, artworks and events will also span across the mainland offering added accessibility to the biennial. Maintaining its international scope – 'The Same Sea' features artists from Finland and Australia, Cambodia, Germany, India, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Poland, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, the UK and the USA – Helsinki Biennial will also respond to the pandemic's impact on how we engage with art. It will thus drive creative (and reflective) programming with a focus on embracing local engagement to create meaningful, insightful experiences for global audiences.

For more information on the artworks and artists participating in Helsinki Biennial 2021: *The Same Sea*, click here.

Keep updated on Instagram, Facebook (@helsinkibiennial) and Twitter (@HELbiennial)
#HelsinkiBiennial

The main partners of Helsinki Biennial 2021 include Metsähallitus and Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation, and it is also supported by Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, Svenska Kulturfonden, and Pro Artibus Foundation. The main corporate partner of Helsinki Biennial 2021 is Clear Channel. Other partners include Helen and Artek.

Notes to Editors

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Helsinki Biennial

Helsinki Biennial is an international contemporary art event which takes place on Vallisaari island. Informed by Vallisaari – a former military island fusing wild nature and urban heritage – sustainable and responsible values lie at the core of Helsinki Biennial. Free to the public, each edition will primarily comprise of major new, site-specific commissions by leading international artists. Helsinki Biennial embodies the city's ambitious, cultural vision, committed to developing Helsinki's art scene both on a grassroots and institutional level. A major initiative of the City of Helsinki and Helsinki Art Museum (HAM), the biennial is directed by HAM's director Maija Tanninen-Mattila and the inaugural edition, 'The Same Sea', is curated by HAM's head curators Pirkko Siitari and Taru Tappola. The biennial is further supported by an international advisory committee made up of curators and academics including Kari Conte, Director of Programs and Exhibitions at the International Studio and Curatorial Programme (ISCP), New York; Lena From, Head of Special Projects at the Public Art Agency Sweden; and Joasia Krysa, Professor of Exhibition Research at Liverpool John Moores University and Liverpool Biennial.

Covid-19 Planning and Scenarios

During Spring 2021, Helsinki Biennial will be constructed and the artworks installed on Vallisaari island. Throughout production the biennial team will be closely following Finnish government guidelines and acting accordingly. The biennial is being planned in line with various potential scenarios, including periods of closure and flexible openings; for example, with indoor artworks closed but outdoor artworks accessible. Helsinki Biennial will also create additional digital content and its own Virtual Reality experience, allowing participants to be transported to Vallisaari without actually travelling to Helsinki.