



Samir Bhowmik, Sketch for the work *Lost Islands*, 2021. Performative expedition, video installation, cable installation and assemblage. Commissioned by HAM Helsinki Biennial 2021. Image: Courtesy the Artist.

## The inaugural Helsinki Biennial will open on 12 June 2021 with an extensive programme of art, events and digital initiatives for in-person and remote audiences

Helsinki Biennial will take place for the first time from 12 June to 26 September 2021 on Vallisaari island, located in the Helsinki Archipelago. Uniting the maritime island with the city of Helsinki, the inaugural edition of the biennial, titled *The Same Sea*, will also extend to the mainland, with artworks and events invigorating the Finnish capital.

An extensive programme of real-life contemporary art exhibitions, workshops, events, and educational activities will be available to in-person audiences as permitted by COVID-19 restrictions, as well as a vast array of digital initiatives accessible for remote audiences, including a new collaboration with Facebook Open Arts. Despite the challenges posed over the last year, all announced artists and artist groups\*\* will exhibit their artworks as originally envisioned.

**Maija Tanninen-Mattila**, director of Helsinki Biennial, explains:

*"I believe that in these challenging times, people long for art and cultural experiences more than ever before. As we enter a new reality, it is integral to rethink existing patterns of behaviour and create safe experiences for engaging with art. Helsinki Biennial launches with a future-orientated vision, advocating ecological ethics and celebrating the synthesis of art and nature. The bridge we are building between the Finnish and international art worlds reflects our interest in interdependence, connectedness and mutual understanding across vastly different geographies and cultures. I hope that the biennial will bring all visitors hope, light, and joy."*

**Jan Vapaavuori**, Mayor of Helsinki, says:

*"Access to outstanding art and creativity is crucial for how citizens engage with the pressing issues that we face today. Helsinki Biennial's messages of environmental consciousness, sustainable practice and global interconnectedness reflect the city of Helsinki's own values and ambitions. This world-class new initiative further enhances Helsinki's position as a leading creative hub, adding tremendous value not just for its own residents but also for its position on the international stage."*

## Helsinki Biennial Programme

Helsinki Biennial 2021 presents over 40 artists and artist groups from Finland and across the globe, including 75% new commissions and site-specific works sensitively positioned across its remarkable setting in the Baltic Sea. Approximately one third of the artworks on Vallisaari are located outdoors along marked trails, amidst the natural greenery and diverse flora of the island, and others inside former gunpowder cellars and old residential buildings.

Responding to, whilst safeguarding, Vallisaari's natural environment, the exhibition *The Same Sea* reflects upon the ever-pressing notion of interdependence. Curated by Pirkko Siitari and Taru Tappola, head curators of Helsinki Art Museum (HAM), new commissions embrace diverse themes like nature, borders, identities, human traces, time and empathy. A number of artists have taken inspiration from subjects relating to the daily lives of Vallisaari's former residents and the island's natural landscape and military history, as well as wider topics around the local and global consequences of human activity and alternative visions of the future.

Some biennial artworks are located on mainland Helsinki, including Janet Echelman's aerial sculpture<sup>1.78</sup> which will be suspended above the city's central Senate Square during August; and Helsinki Art Museum, responsible for organising the biennial, will host an installation and series of events by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Antto Melasniemi in collaboration with Finnish furniture company Artek.

Also at Helsinki Art Museum is an exhibition of works by Katharina Grosse. In her first solo show in Finland, *Chill Seeping From The Walls Gets Between Us*, HAM will display two new installations by

Grosse that transform the exhibition spaces into massive, all-encompassing spatial works of art. Grosse has also produced a new site-specific work on Vallisaari Island for Helsinki Biennial.

The *Helsinki Biennial Inspired* collateral programme presents other cultural and artistic events across Helsinki, created in collaboration with the city's services, communities, and residents, and reflecting the themes and motifs of the biennial. For instance, Helsinki's cultural hub and theatre venue Kanneltalo will present the *Climate Confessional*, an interactive, sculptural installation from Finnish design studio Paja&Bureau, which allows users to consider the climate crisis.

Other islands in the Helsinki Archipelago offer inspiration and locations for collateral exhibitions; the neighbouring fortress island of Suomenlinna, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, plays host to two group exhibitions *So long, thanks again for the fish* and *Island of Empathy*.

Throughout its run, the Helsinki Biennial will be brought to life with a programme of artist-led performances, workshops, and talks. BIOS Research Unit will set up the *Vallisaari Research Station* within the island's former fire-fighting depot, hosting seminars and lectures from visiting scientists. Meanwhile artists Dafna Maimon and Andrew Kerton will offer a sensory workshop exploring the digestive system.

## Helsinki Biennial Digital Initiatives

Considering accessibility, inclusivity, environmental responsibility and potential COVID-19 restrictions, Helsinki Biennial has created an exhaustive online and virtual offering which will bring the biennial to audiences remotely.

Digital artworks which feature in the Helsinki Biennial can be encountered on the biennial website, including those by BIOS, Gustafsson&Haapoja, and Niskanen & Salo. Selected biennial events will also be livestreamed on social media, and recordings of performance pieces will be made available online, such as those by WAUHAUS, Samir Bhowmik, Meiju Niskala, and Hanna Tuulikki.

Remote audiences can also join live tours with local biennial guides, who will create meaningful, insightful experiences for those unable to travel to Helsinki. In addition, extensive video interviews with exhibited artists will also be available digitally.

Two new interactive VR experiences have been created to transport audiences to Vallisaari island and embrace the biennial's unique location. Produced by award winning Helsinki-based VR studio Zoan, viewers can immerse themselves in Vallisaari's natural surrounds, discover historical buildings and journey through its changing seasons. The VR experiences will be available on the Virtual Helsinki platform, accessible with devices like HTC VIVE, VIVE Cosmos, VIVE Pro, Oculus Rift and Oculus Quest. The experiences will also be available for download from Oculus Store in June.

Through a partnership with [Facebook Open Arts](#), Helsinki Biennial will present new digital artwork, the production of a new podcast series and a live-streamed talk to investigate digital solutions in art,

responsibility and locality. More details on Helsinki Biennial's partnership with Facebook Open Arts will be announced soon.

**\*\*The Helsinki Biennial 2021 participants include:**

Paweł Althamer*, PL	Jussi Kivi*, FI
ATTAKWAD*	Alicja Kwade*, PL/DE
Pasi Autio*, FI	Hayoun Kwon, KR/FR
Samir Bhowmik*, IN/FI	Laura Könönen*, FI
BIOS Research Unit*, FI	Tuomas A. Laitinen*, FI
Baran Caginli*, TR/FI	Teemu Lehmusrusu*, FI
Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, CA	Dafna Maimon*, FI/DE
Kyungwoo Chun*, KR	Antti Majava*, FI
Janet Echelman, US	Inga Meldere* LV/FI
EGS*, FI	Jaakko Niemelä*, FI
Katharina Grosse*, DE	Meiju Niskala*, FI
Gustafsson&Haapoja*, FI	Niskanen & Salo*, FI/US
Hanna Tuulikki*, UK	Sari Palosaari*, FI
Honkasalo-Niemi-Virtanen*, FI	Outi Pieski, Birit and Katja Haarla*, FI/BE
IC-98, FI	Mario Rizzi, IT/DE
Uwa Iduozee, FI/US	Rirkrit Tiravanija & Antto Melasniemi*, AR & FI
Wanuri Kahiu, KE	WAUHAUS, FI
Marja Kanervo*, FI	Christine and Margaret Wertheim*, AU/US
Topi Kautonen, FI	Maaria Wirkkala*, FI
Tadashi Kawamata*, JP/FR	Zodiak presents: Joni Kärkkäinen & Jukka Tarvainen*, FI
Khvay Samnang, KH	

\*An asterisk denotes a new commission.

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

Keep updated on Instagram, Facebook (@helsinkiennial) 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. Korkeasaari Zoo and the Helsinki Festival are Helsinki Biennial's event partners.

## 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.