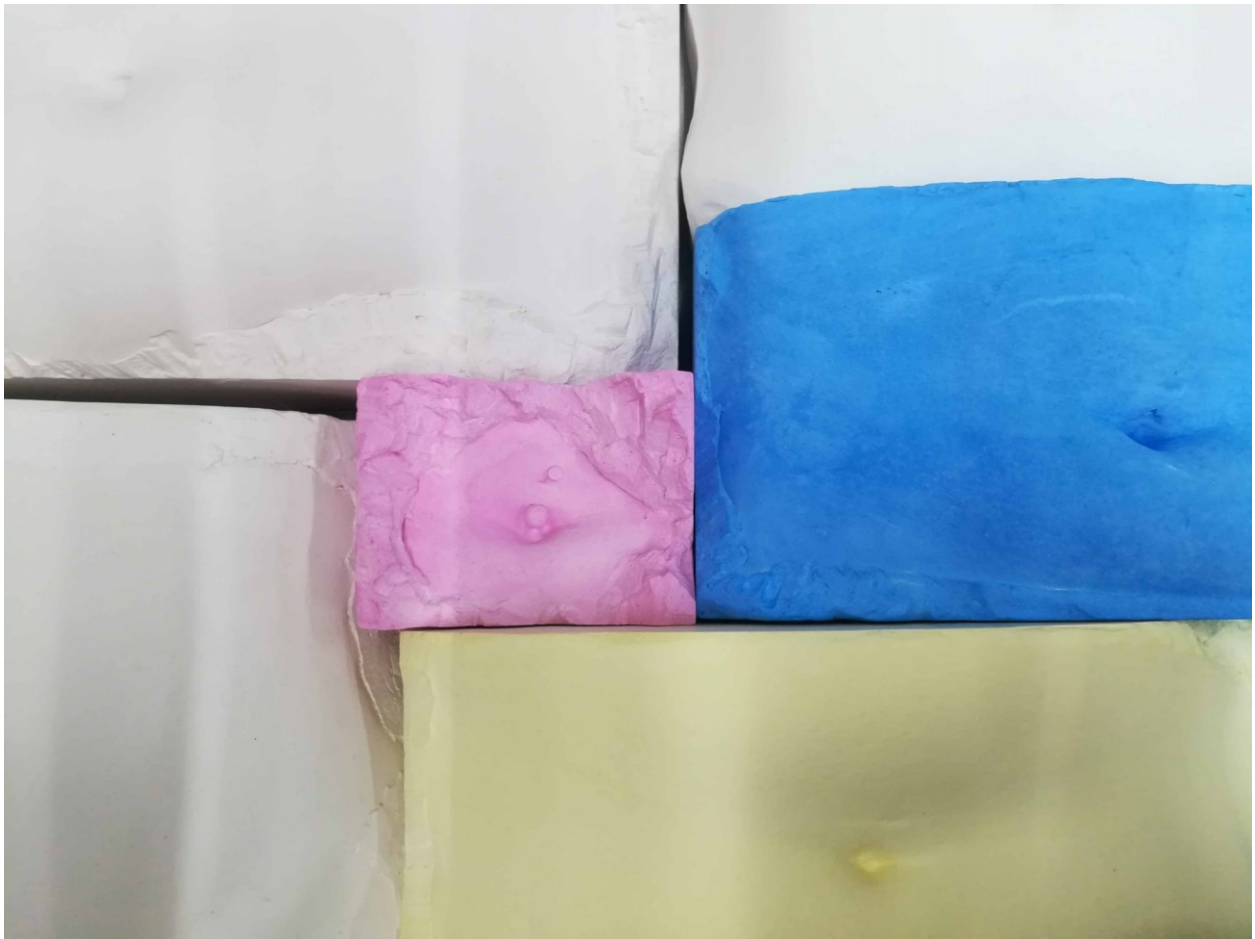


The process of opening and closing the navel with choreographic means

Choreographic thinking with sculptures and bodies

Lin Martikainen
Time and Space Master of Fine Arts program



**UNIARTS
HELSINKI**

X ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

The process of opening and closing the navel with choreographic means: Choreographic thinking with sculptures and bodies (2023)

The written component of the MFA thesis

4.10.2023

Open invitation letter (2022)

Electronically distributed invitation letter during 19.12.2022-9.1.2023. The letter was an invitation for queer people to join in the thesis project. It was distributed through Facebook groups, associations and communities that focus on performance, dance, movement and somatic practices as well as organizing to queer events and communal gatherings. Thank you for the help in spreading the word Trasek ry, Dance Info Finland (Tiekkari), Theater Info Finland (Tinfo), Helsinki Pride ry and UniArts Helsinki Sibelius Academy.

Aukeama - Opening Space (2023)

Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mold making

20.-29.1.2023 Kuva/Tila gallery at the Academy of Fine Arts

Aukeama - Opening space (2023)

Choreographic installation with plaster castings, cast beeswax, sound, crochet and text

5.5.-4.6.2023 Kuva/Tila gallery at the Academy of Fine Arts

Language: Finnish and English

Choreographer and convener of the project: Lin Da

Sculptures, texts and sound design of the installation: Lin Da

Audio technical assistance and co-sound designer for the installation: Frank Rizzo

Napapiiri - Navel Circle (2023)

Dance performance

Performances took place on Sundays 14.5., 21.5., 28.5.2023 at 14.00 at the Academy of Fine Arts

Duration: 75 min (approx.)

Language: Finnish and English

The leaders and performers of the *Navel Circle* expedition: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru and Sora

Convener, choreographer and guide of the trip: Lin Da

Co-choreographers: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora and Stefania

Sound design and music for the performance: Jyri Pirinen

Supporter: The UniArts Helsinki Foundation

Supervisor of the MFA thesis: Julius Elo

Examiners of the MFA thesis: Flis Holland & Katve-Kaisa Kontturi

Supervising professor of the MFA thesis: Daniel Peltz

list of works

Open invitation letter

2022

Sähköisesti levitetty kutsukirje / Electronically distributed invitation letter

Aukeama - Opening Space

2023

Esityksellinen installaatio / Performative installation

Aukeama / Opening space

2023

Koreografinen installaatio ja Napapiiri-tanssiesitys / Choreographic installation and Navel Circle dance performance

Kolme napaa seinällä ja seitsemän napaa lattialla / Three navels on the wall and seven navels on the floor

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Mehiläisvahavalu / Cast beeswax

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Kolme napaa seinällä / Three navels on the wall

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Kuusi napaa ja kolme napaa, joista yksi äänessä / Six navels and three navels from which one with sound

2023

Mehiläisvahavalu / Cast beeswax

6 napaa vaihtelevat koot / 6 navels variable sizes

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

3 napaa vaihtelevat koot / 3 navels variable sizes

Ääni / Sound

6 min 50 s

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Kaksi napaa seinällä / Two navels on the wall

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Vaihtelevat koot / Variable sizes

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Kaksi napaa lattialla / Two navels on the floor

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Vaihtelevat koot / Variable sizes

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Yhdeksän napaa lattialla ja seinällä sekä kaksi napaa äänessä / Nine navels on the floor and on the wall and two navels with sound

2023

Mehiläisvahavalu / Cast beeswax

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Ääni / Sound

6 min 54 sec

3 min 42 sec

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Kaksi napaa, paita ja valjas / Two navels, a shirt and a harness

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Virkkaus / Crochet

Vaihtelevat koot / Variable sizes

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Viisi napaa, valjas ja köysi / Five navels, a harness and a rope

2023

Kipsivalu / Plaster cast

Virkkaus / Crochet

Vaihtelevat koot / Variable sizes

Uniikkivedos / Unique edition

Napapiiri / Navel Circle

2023

Esitys / Performance

Noin 75 min / Approximately 75 min

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summary

The artistic part of my thesis consisted of four parts: an open invitation letter to join in the project published in December 2022, a performative installation in which the people who answered to the open call were invited to come for navel mold casting took place in January 2023, a choreographic installation where 22 cast beeswax navels and 22 plaster castings of navels were exhibited from May to June 2023 and lastly in May a dance performance in which five of the people answering the open call were performing and leading the audience through the participatory work dealing with touch and connections around the navel. This multifaceted body of work, and, for most, a process that started publicly with an open *invitation letter* in December 2022, is called *Aukeama - Opening space*.

The open *invitation letter* was targeted to queer¹ people who were interested in joining the process of exploring with the theme of navel gazing, touch and movement. The process consisted of 13 workshops that took place during the weekends and evenings from February to May. In addition, during January there was the first group meeting as well as one-on-one meetings with a mold making session to kick off the process around the themes of movement, touch and navel. The first meeting and mold making session took place during the Time and Space exhibition from 20th to 29th of January 2023 in Kuva/Tila where I had created a working space inside the exhibition. I used recycled and dyed fabrics to create thin, porous vertical surfaces that were both moving with the airwaves and offering a shelter for the navel mold making sessions. This was a one-to-one performance around touch that took place in a smaller exhibition space behind closed doors where we could hear the soundscapes coming from the other exhibition spaces.

The people who become the working group members of this project via open call were invited to work as part of the group throughout the spring from January to May in the workshop settings where a collaboratively created practice was formed. In May the practice was shared in the form of a public performance as part of the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition. There were altogether three performances that took place at the UniArts Helsinki *Academy of Fine Arts* on 14th, 21st and 28th of May 2023 at 2pm. The performance lasted around 75 minutes starting from the second-floor triangle shaped lobby space and ending in the Kuva/Tila gallery at the first-floor among the installation with navel sculptures.

The written component of the thesis goes through the whole process of creating the work from the first experiment of the navel mold making where the experiential led the way for the questions around the social, political and corporeal to arise. The writing part aims to unfold the *choreographic thinking* that is the reflection surface I work with. As an artist having my background in choreography and dance my ways of working often differ from the ones of my peers, professors and most of the visiting teachers. As a choreographer and dancer, I usually work with other people and the most crucial part of the artistic process is when people are together. The collaborative work goes through the whole process of artmaking which introduces a lot of questions around the

¹ people who are part of the queer community and/or identify as queer.

ecology of the artmaking. The questions of roles in the working group and negotiating around differences in needs are not present when working individually, just to name a couple of things. And when working with others as a choreographer, especially with the performers whether they are professionals or not, there are the bodies, the corporeal being that I work with because when I think choreographically, I think about bodily relations. When I look at art works, I read the work in relation to my being, what the work does to me, how it calls for my attention and to what it cues me to be in relation to. The notions are of course also matters of interpretation, however, these are the questions I have when I meet an artwork. The questions an artist asks vary of course from artist to artist, but, in my approach, there is the thinking with the viscosity, corporeal and senses in relation to cultural and social cues of the environment. The way of working is shaped by my personal interests, dance related choreography education and over 20 years of dance practice. My desire is that the thesis as a whole could work as a mesh between my colleagues working in dance, choreography and fine arts especially in performance, sculpture and sound related practices.

acknowledgements

I want to point out that none of my work would happen if there were no life around me that inspires, supports and demonstrates care.

Thank you Laura Pietiläinen for conversations and the choreographic mentoring in this process. And thank you Arts Management Helsinki for supporting the mentoring financially.

Thank you to my supervisor Julius Elo for support, foresight, structuring and a huge amount of presence.

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James Prett, thank you for all the conversations around the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition, they mean a lot to me.

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Thank you Salla Valle for the feedback and conversations around the *choreographic installation* as well as for documenting this process by taking photos more than once.

Thank you, Alyssa Coffin, for the feedback while drafting the *invitation letter* and for helping with the video documentation of the *dance performance*.

Thank you Trasek ry, Dance Info Finland (Tiekkari), Theater Info Finland (Tinfo), Helsinki Pride ry and UniArts Helsinki Sibelius Academy for the help with distributing the *invitation letter*.

A particularly warm thank you to everybody who responded to the *invitation letter* to work together in the context of this project!

Thank you to those who came for the mold making sessions and had conversations with me!

Finally, thank you to the lovely working group members, Laura, Lätsä, Maru, Nilas, Sora and Jyri, for your commitment, generosity, warmth and joy. Thank you also Stefanía and Fyodor for being part of this journey and giving so much to it.



Catalog image of the thesis work for *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition. Ear next to the plaster cast navel. Photo by Salla Valle.

for the reader

During MFA studies I came to be aware of my practice being about asking questions with the themes of touch, movement and consent. While framing *Aukeama - Opening space (2023)* project I got inspired by two of my fellow students and artists Natalie Eliassen and Katriina Haikala. Eliassen had made the thesis project *Breastfall (2022)* where she invited people to participate in her project for breast casting.² As a thesis project Haikala continued her long lasting *Social portrait - Women only (2017-)* body of work where she invites women to model for her in a performance setting during which she draws them.³ In both of their works I was interested in the involvement of people: especially how the attention was on the bodies of the people who agreed to be part of

² Natalie Eliassen, several conversations around Eliassen's the thesis project, March 8, 2022, till May 17, 2023.

³ Katriina Haikala, studio visit around Haikala's work, March 11, 2022.

the artworks. Both works bring forth the bodies in different ways. In Haikala's work the bodies are present in the performances where they are gazed upon and drawn by the artist. In Eliassen's work the participants are present through the sculptures. While the sculptures are independent bodies, they are also a reminder for the viewer-experencer of human bodies and their diversity. Both works with their own ways suggest value in seeing and making bodies visible through art and in arts. Visual arts has a long tradition of using bodies of women and minorities as muses and representing them through a white cisgender male gaze. The artists mentioned above seem to have an aim to give space to the bodies and body parts that haven't had much attention by their own terms in the western visual arts.

As I started my career as a choreographer with the themes of gender representation, touch and gaze I felt that I needed to focus from the beginning on, in how to collaborate and work with the people in a personal, bodily and supportive manner while creating together. With each art discipline there is history with hierarchies and power dynamics that follow us while we work. They are there whether creating alone or together and need to be addressed if one wants to alter the dynamics. The practice of collaborating with others has informed my approaches on art making and has taught me a lot about the work cultures of various disciplines. Through these collaborations I have gained experience in working with artists that are not professional movers or dancers but have been dancing the works we created. These collaborations and positive experiences encouraged me to call for volunteers for this project. It was the first time I called for volunteers to work with, created a performance during 13 workshop days and worked mostly with queer identifying group members.

When framing the project, I started to think about the human body and its representation from a perspective of queer bodies: how are LGBTQIA+ bodies present or represented in performance and visual arts. What could the frame of the thesis process offer to the queer community in Helsinki? How could I contribute? What am I missing as I am a part of the community? As I have over 10 years of background in facilitating body work practices, years of interest, experience and willingness to develop my practice in relation to the ethical principles of sharing the space and working together I realized it was time to use the gained knowledge for sharing and connecting with the queers around me. Since the two academies of the UniArts Helsinki, the *Academy of Fine Arts* and the *Theater Academy*, are sharing spaces and physically attached to each other, the latter was able to offer spaces for the process where gatherings could take place. This meant that I could host events for free since I didn't need to rent a studio space. I started to form a choreographic project around collaborating, sculpting and movement exploration with a theme of navel gazing.

The theme of researching the navel has its roots in working with the mouth. Since 2018 I have been developing a practice around the mouth by collaborating and working independently with the theme. The research began when exploring the mouth with another choreographer-dancer Elias Girod and composer Lauri Supponen. Two performances around the mouth were created collectively with them, *Circulating Mouthpiece* (2018) and *Mouthpiece* (2020). After those collective creative processes, I have continued the research around the mouth in workshop contexts, for example, in a philosophical course context led by researcher Ilmari Kortelainen in

the UniArts Helsinki Open University called *Philosophy of body awareness*. In early autumn 2022 I took part in a mold making and casting course as a part of my MFA studies.⁴ There I took casts of the inner part, also called as negative space, of my mouth and made mouth plaster casts out of the molds. After exploring the cavity of the mouth, I pondered what other opening of the body I would dare to explore in the context of the course. I ended up asking a new school friend and course assistant if they could make a mold cast of my navel. They agreed, and what happened to me during casting on an experiential level gave impetus to the process of the *Aukeama - Opening space*. In the casting, the touches of different materials, as well as those of my school friend, on and around my navel, generated remarks and questions around the relation between sculpting and touch as well of the navel, touch and the body.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance. *Warm-up ritual*: "wiping with touch". Photo by Salla Valle.

⁴ Mold making and casting course by Kaisaleena Halinen 13.09.-23.09.2022.

In relation to bodies

With the touch of the materials involved in the mold casting process, interesting research objects evoked. In the process of taking the navel mold the touches elicited contradictory thoughts in me as an experiencer in relation to the social and cultural status of the part of the body in question. At the same time the touches seemed to reveal layers where I was both in the present moment where I'm being touched but also with my past through memories I carry. I was left to ponder the navel from the onto-epistemological and ethical terrain as I was reminded of philosopher Edmund Husserl's concepts between experiential and functional, 'being a body' and 'having a body', that he unfolds in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.⁵

In the moment of mold casting, touches of a person and materials with different temperatures reminded me that only a few people touch my navel area. Of strangers the area has mainly been touched by doctors or other parties taking care of my health, whose touch is usually determined, seeking answers to a list of questions and, in that sense, performance and goal oriented. The list is systematically executed through touches that are there to look for and support immediate responses to yes or no questions. In those situations, I don't feel present to the other person as a whole, and I also try to view myself as an object where I detach myself from my own carnality. In order to go through these medical procedures, I observe myself as matter. In addition to being in a survival mode the idea of "having a body" can be also used as a choreographic tool or task to work with the body. However, I wanted to work in this process with the idea of *being a body*: to encounter the group members in a way that takes them in account as whole persons, experiencing carnal beings. To do so I redirected my focus on thinking about touch, how it had been and could continue to be part of the process when working with others.

While my reflection was taking place, I participated in the *Spheres of Care* event organized in Vuotalo where one of the artist-facilitators Aliisa Talja guided an exercise with touch and gaze.⁶ Through the exercise I was reminded of my previous projects and exercises where touch has been present. To be honest, touch to me has been a practical tool to work with as a means to transfer information between bodies, to relate and to create space-time together with other bodies. As a choreographer working with bodies, I approach each of them as an entity that has properties, rhythmicities, movement tendencies, spatiality, materiality, and its own timing as well as way of being in the world. I propose to read bodies as an amount of some things as more-than. The presence of a body in choreographic work of mine is never only symbolic or representational. It is also about the ecologies and politics of bodies. The body is present in my work because bodies are, under, next to, above, inside a body. There wouldn't be a body if not for another body. The relationality of bodies interests me and therefore I keep on being fascinated on how bodies coexist and encounter, touch each other's living. This question is present in my touch-based work

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second book Studies in the phenomenology of constitution*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz & André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Springer, 1989).

⁶ *Spheres of Care* event organized by WAUHAUS x Aliisa Talja x Samuli Laine in Vuotalo 28.-30.10.2022 <https://www.wauhaus.fi/spheres-of-care>

with human bodies as well as with other than human bodies such as fabrics, synthetic hair, ping pong balls and navel sculptures.

In the thesis project the relation of bodies was asked through the navel: how is my navel present in my life. As a dancer I had never really thought about my navel, although I felt like I had spent time with all my body parts throughout many years of improvisation and instant composition exercises. But no. I realized this is an unarticulated part of my body at an experiential level but also in relation to touch and therefore also the world. Touch is a fundamental way of creating relations and tangling with the world. Touch has a transformative quality that informs bodies through multiple senses. According to philosopher, visual artist and dancer Erin Manning “[b]odies interrelate, extending form into matter and matter into form.”⁷ Touch contains risk taking where one doesn't know what exactly the touch calls upon. Manning argues that “[t]o touch entails acknowledging the risks associated with the unknown toward whom I reach when I touch. Touch must always lead beyond where I anticipated it would.”⁸ For me touch is a foundational field of information that moves bodies. As a choreographer-dancer I have trained my bodily sensitivity to listen to the information or cues that touch delivers. Manning proposes that “[b]odies reaching toward are abstract bodies.” Since they are transforming and reorganizing their space-time relations. For her “[b]odies are not discrete entities facing one another in neutral space-time.”⁹ Bodies that are going toward touch are in a state of becoming. The reaching arrives into momentary relationality.¹⁰ Touch as an artistic practice is to gather tools to work with touch and touching. In this project touch was the indicator of the process. The questions about the relationality between the bodies and navels evolved thinking through touch. In the *open invitation letter* that was spread inside the UniArts Helsinki via email as well as through my dance and performance networks to call for volunteers to collaborate with me I asked “[w]hat is it like to touch with a belly button? What kind of a place is the navel? Where does it lead?”¹¹

By framing a collaborative project as my thesis work, I wanted to create space for physical presence, bodily explorations and communication. By translating these desires as questions of “how to” and by looking at what kind of strategies Eliassen and Haikala had used in their works the project started to take on a familiar form as a process-based project. (Since graduating from *Theater Academy's* choreography MA program in 2016 I have worked towards sharing my artistic processes with colleagues and the public in various contexts.) This body of work where the *open invitation letter*, the performative installation with navel mold making, the dance performances with different participation levels and the *choreographic installation* with focus on touch, are concrete steps where I expand my practice with *choreographic thinking*. My main desires for the MFA studies were (among other things) to give time to my practice while learning new techniques and adapting them into my way of thinking with art making.

⁷ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), ProQuest Ebook Central, xix.

⁸ Op. cit., 135.

⁹ Op. cit., xix.

¹⁰ Op. cit., 135-136.

¹¹ See page 63 of this thesis to read the full *Invitation letter*.

choreographic thinking with fine arts

Combining disciplines is a way of rethinking both the art forms and their practices. It's also a challenge since within the disciplines lies a lot of knowledge and means that are entangled with cultural history. The education I have is focused on western art and philosophy which is the context where I situate my practice and look at both choreography and fine arts. In my MFA thesis work I won't go deep into the history of art or philosophy but rather have conversations with some of the artists and theorists that I have found to think about the same matters as I have in my work.

In the context of western art history, choreography and fine arts are intertwined through the artists who were active participants and creators of happenings and other events in the 1960s in New York. The artists from different fields were experimenting within their own disciplines by creating transdisciplinary works. I see my work in the continuum of this transdisciplinary way of working, where the fields of art forms are expanding, and practices mindfully explored within various contexts. Dance and choreographic works have been present more and more in the museums and galleries since the beginning of the 2000. The dance artist like Anna Halprin, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti and Deborah Hay, who were important indicators for the paradigm shift in *choreographic thinking* and influencing the artistic practices of fine artist in the 1960s, have had their works shown in museums in retrospectives as well as in exhibitions showcasing dance and women in arts. My training as a choreographer is strongly informed by their influence on *choreographic thinking* where the emphasis was to look at the relationship of the body with its environment and not be only focused on the execution of the movement composition as it had mostly been in the western dance art until that time.

My practice has been influenced by many local artists like choreographer, dancer and visual artist Anne Naukkarinen, choreographer, performer and artist Sonja Jokiniemi and performance and visual artist Essi Kausalainen who work and create objects and textile items for their performances (in gallery, stage and private apartment environments) and also exhibit them in galleries and museums. In the future I want to discuss more how my work works in relation to gallery spaces and systems of the fine arts institutions. There is a lot to unfold in that sphere and I would be happy to do it with the assistance of the thinking of the art-historian, curator, and writer Victoria Wynne-Jones (and with her book *Choreographing Intersubjectivity in Performance Art*), in the near future. Through her writing I got familiar with queer artist and educator val smith who has also called themselves as "community dance art activist". Reading smith's interviews through *The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi* and discovering them talking about somatics, empathy and sensing as well as thinking about the community building and politics of one's practice awakened a sense of kinship.¹² Since philosopher, visual artist and dancer Erin Manning was a visiting teacher in my studies in *Theater Academy*, I have been returning to her work. At the time, Manning was finishing the writing of *The Minor Gesture* and reading from it to my class as well as discussing the work

¹² See website of the *Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi* to read val smith's interviews <https://www.thearts.co.nz/artists/val-smith>

with us. Thinking about objects and environments choreographing or at least gesturing was fascinating and meaningful to me. During the visit I got to know that Manning is also creating installations with textiles and exploring how the materials invite audiences to participate in co-creating milieus. The starting point for me in this thesis is to think about what is *choreographic thinking* and how *choreographic* works with thinking. Manning argues that:

“[c]horeographic thinking is the activation, in the moving, of a movement of thought. It expresses itself not in language per se but as the pulses across embodiments and rhythms, the durations and spatializations that create a “contrapuntal composition of the complex relationships, patterns, and trends.” [Manning quoting Maria Palazzi.] The contrapuntal force is active not strictly in the mind or in the body but across a bodying-with that activates spacetimes of the composition.”¹³

Choreographic thinking for me is thinking with movement initiated by relationality, intertextual connections and cues within different structures. In the last few years, I have thought about my work as a choreographer from a relational perspective, not only in relation to social choreography¹⁴ but also with it, more so I have thought about the ecology of living and the movement forces within the everyday. The multidisciplinary works that I have produced are all composed with *choreographic thinking* that aims to think about the forces that are present in the space or environment as well as the possible cues that already move bodies there. Manning states that “[...] choreography is a proposition not for the body itself but for the relational force of movement-moving in an ecology of life-living.”¹⁵ For me a choreographic event is built with cues that activate not only an individual body but the whole milieu. These activations are movements themselves that move within a field of movement expressions. Manning’s concept of “mobile architecture” is important in my thinking. Manning describes mobile architecture as “[...] one way of naming the event of choreography’s self-generative force” and “what makes a work work.”¹⁶ In this written work I’m interested in looking at how Manning’s concept of *mobile architecture* goes along with the artistic part of the thesis. In addition, I aim to analyze, with the assistance of her concept, how my work worked and what to think further in the future.

Toward sculpting navels

During September 2022 I took part in sculptor Kaisaleena Halinen’s mold making and casting course as part of my artistic study curriculum. In the course we started the practical part with

¹³ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation’s Dance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 103.

Maria Palazzi, *Introduction: The Objects*. <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu/>

¹⁴ Michael Kliën, 2019. *Join Duke’s Social Choreography Working Group* (Durham: Duke University, 2019), an open invitation to Duke Arts faculty, graduate and undergraduate students from all fields as well as to local thinkers and engaged activist practitioners, published 31.1.2019. <https://arts.duke.edu/news/join-the-social-choreography-working-group/>

¹⁵ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation’s Dance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 100.

¹⁶ Op. cit., 100-101.

experimenting mold making with alginate¹⁷ which translates fine details to casting materials extremely well. Many of my peers experimented with hands, feet and some small objects. I was fascinated by the idea of revealing empty or negative spaces of the body with this technique and material. With my background in working with the mouth I started to stuff alginate into my mouth (after getting the confirmation that it wouldn't be dangerous to the mucosa or if I swallowed some of it). After several molds were taken from my mouth, I began to ponder what other orifice of my body I could still explore with this technique in the context of the course. The navel started to call my attention. Earlier that summer choreographer-dancer colleague Daphna Horenczyk was sharing her artistic practice with me that included an exercise on birth. The exercise was inspired by Buddhist meditation, she guided me through it verbally. While I was doing the exercise, I vividly experienced my navel. As I can recall this was the first time, I ever felt this particular point of my body being the center of my awareness and the active indicator of movement which was very subtle. I felt like I was moving within layers of time, being and moving with time layers of my existence. Manning writes about the relation of the body, movement, space and time:

“Whereas in the active-passive commonsense model, time and space are located as stable signifiers into which the body enters, within a relational model, space and time are qualitatively transformed by the movements of the body. The body does not move into space and time, it creates space and time: there is no space and time before movement.”¹⁸

During the covid lockdowns I often saw the local kindergarten groups circling around my neighborhood in East Helsinki. Once when a group was spending time around a small bosky area opposite to my house, I saw one kid running towards all the things they found (I assume interesting) with their navel. The belly button seemed to be the point they aimed to touch or have contact with. While witnessing several of these encounters taking place between the navel area and different materials like stones and roots on the ground, I could just admire the bodily engagement and technique. The landings on these hard surfaces with the belly button first were smooth and effortless. The navel was leading a way to be with the world: fiercely and joyfully with the most vulnerable and bare part of the body. Witnessing the repetitions of this action transformed and made the quality of the space and time memorable.

The process of the mold making (in the context of the mold making and casting course) with alginate touching my belly and belly button reminded me experientially of the lack of vivacious relation between me, my navel and the world. The alginate layer poured on my navel and belly was first moving with breathing creating some sort of soft and elastic skin between that area of the body and the milieu. After a while when the alginate had hardened, it began to feel like a shield that prevented movement but was at the same time reacting to touch and transferring it. At the same time the process itself felt intimate in a very sensible manner. My body became part of a larger space of relations and encounters with materials, signs and not yet there becomings. Potential of things happening was beautiful and I got curious what could happen if these touches

¹⁷ Alginate as a material for molding and casting explained in *FormX* store's website <https://formx.eu/molding--casting/alginate/index.php>

¹⁸ Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), ProQuest Ebook Central, xiii

were further researched and shared to be experienced by many. With this as a starting point, I posed the question: where could it take a group of people who go towards the exploration of touching with the navel?



Lin looking at the alginate mold at the sculpture workshop in *Academy of Fine Arts* on 28.10.2022. Photo by Natalie Eliassen.

collaborative process

The process of the artistic part of the thesis became public in December 2022 with an open *invitation letter*. The letter was targeted to queer¹⁹ people who were interested in joining the process of exploring with the theme of navel gazing, touch and movement. The process consisted of 13 workshops that took place during the weekends and evenings from February to May. In addition, during January there was a first group meeting, as well as a one-on-one meeting with a

¹⁹ people who are part of the queer community and/or are fluid with their gender identity.

mold making session, to kick off the process around the themes of movement, touch and navel. The participants were invited to work as part of a group throughout the spring from January to May in the workshop settings where a collaboratively created practice was formed. In May the practice was shared in the form of a public performance as part of the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition. There were altogether three performances that took place at *the Academy of Fine Arts* on May 14th, 21st and 28th at 2pm.

The people who were interested in joining the process were asked to fill out a form with questions about their interest to participate in the navel mold making session, how many times they could take part of the workshops (that happened altogether 13 times) and to how many performances they could take part in. The ability to take part in the workshops and performances became the main criteria for deciding which people to confirm their participation and to whom to send rejection letters. In cases where people had equal amounts of dates when they could join the workshops and performances, the emphasis was in the short text each had written about their own interest around the themes where the diversity of the points of views were the main criteria.

In the open *invitation letter*, it was stated that the maximum number of participants were 10. There was a lot of interest towards collaborative working with the navel. More than twenty interested parties filled in the form. In the end 10 people got an email where they were invited to be part of the collaborative process and the others got a message that they were not able to take part of the group but were invited to join for the one-to-one meetings for navel mold making.

inviting volunteers to join

The first group meeting took place on the 20th of January 2023 in Helsinki at the *Academy of Fine Arts* as part of the *Aukeama - Opening Space* performative installation which was part of the *Time and Space exhibition part 1* in Kuva/Tila. The meeting happened on a Friday night when the exhibition had just closed for the day. We met in the lobby on the first floor next to the info desk and from there went into the exhibition space. During this first group meeting I introduced the installation to the group and shared what thoughts and wishes I had for the collaborations and how I imagined that the installation and performance could be like at the *Kuvan Kevät 2023*, but I also emphasized that I was still looking for the form of both of the works and interested in allowing the collaboration to inform the process. To get to know each other I proposed that when each member introduced themselves with their name and pronouns, they would also share a thing or place that they felt related to at that moment. Afterward we collectively read out loud the safer space guidelines and commented on when needed. Finally, there was an exercise that guided the attention to the touch, architecture of the body and its materialities. It ended up also being the first draft of what later was called *the navel opening exercise* which as a practice was present in both outcomes the installation and the performance.

After the group meeting each member came to the one-to-one meeting which took place from 21st to 29th of January 2023 in Kuva/Tila as a part of the performative installation. The installation consisted of a space framed with found, recycled and colored fabrics that were hanging from the

ceiling. Inside the fabric shelter there was a mattress topper with two pillows and blankets accompanied by two benches; one that was covered with yellow cotton fabric and the other with its pine surface naked for the eye. The colors and patterns of all the found textiles as well as the fabrics colored by me were carefully chosen for this space. My desire was to create a working space inside the exhibition that had thin, porous vertical surfaces that were both moving with the airwaves and offering a shelter for the navel mold making sessions. Because I didn't have a budget for this part of the project, it began by going through the fabrics and other textiles that I had to make a decision of the colorscape that I would use. Many of the cotton fabrics come from the estate of my grandparents that then dyed. At that time the decision to use these materials was quite intuitive and entangled with personal relations to the chosen materials. The pattern that I decided to use reminded me of my grandparents and textiles that I tend to see used by generations born in 1930 or 1940. This intertextual reference was personal but also culturally readable and relatable. In the context of the project, it felt meaningful to be surrounded by the textiles that the people who have cared for me have taken care of too. The sense of care was particularly important for me at this point of the process, when I was meeting people in the navel mold castings, where we discussed memories and sensations around the navel and negotiated touch while casting the alginate molds. During the castings the space was closed to visitors. Several meetings were documented with still images, audio or video recordings. On top of the group members there were also volunteers who joined only for the mold making part. This was because I wanted to have kids as models and also had a desire to have more than 10 navel sculptors in the final installation.



Fabric sculptures of the *performative installation* in making. Photos by Lin Martikainen.

joining in the sculpting process

It was important for me that the *invitation letter* gave as articulated a sense of the whole process as possible. My wish was that the people would get a good sense of my working principles as they were reading the text. This was because I knew that the work involved intimate encounters like the mold making session, which would serve as an experiential starting point for the whole process. It was necessary that the participation and interactive role of the group member would be clear from the beginning on. I wanted that the people would get a feeling of an experimental, fun and engaging process with a strong ethical value base.

The mold making process with the volunteers had a clear structure where I met the person next to the info desk of the *Academy of Fine Arts* from where we entered together to the space where the installation was. They could leave their things on a hanger and go to the toilet if needed after which we started to talk about the whole casting process including the plaster casting. All the materials needed for the mold making were laid out on the floor inside, in the fabric shelter, where I explained and showed all the instruments and materials to be used. Before starting the mold making, I asked permission to document the meeting. To my surprise all the people agreed to this. One person told me that she had already thought about the consent before filling out the form online to apply for the project.

The mold making started with navel area cleaning with wet tissue which was usually done by the volunteer. During the mold making process we talked about the navel area and the presence of that body part in each one's life. Some people had a tactile relationship with their own navel, some more with other peoples. The conversations involved memories with other people and navels that had collected things in themselves. Also, there were realizations that the belly button did not have a big role in one's life after birth. There was also curiosity in the air about the relationship with the navel and the belly after the project.

For me the moment of lifting the mold off the navel was every time very exciting. At some point of the week, I started to feel like a birth worker since I found myself saying again and again how wonderful the mold looks. After the mold was ready and off the navel it was time for cleaning the navel area from leftovers of alginate and clay which was holding the frame for the mold in place. This second round of cleaning with wet tissue was mostly done by me.

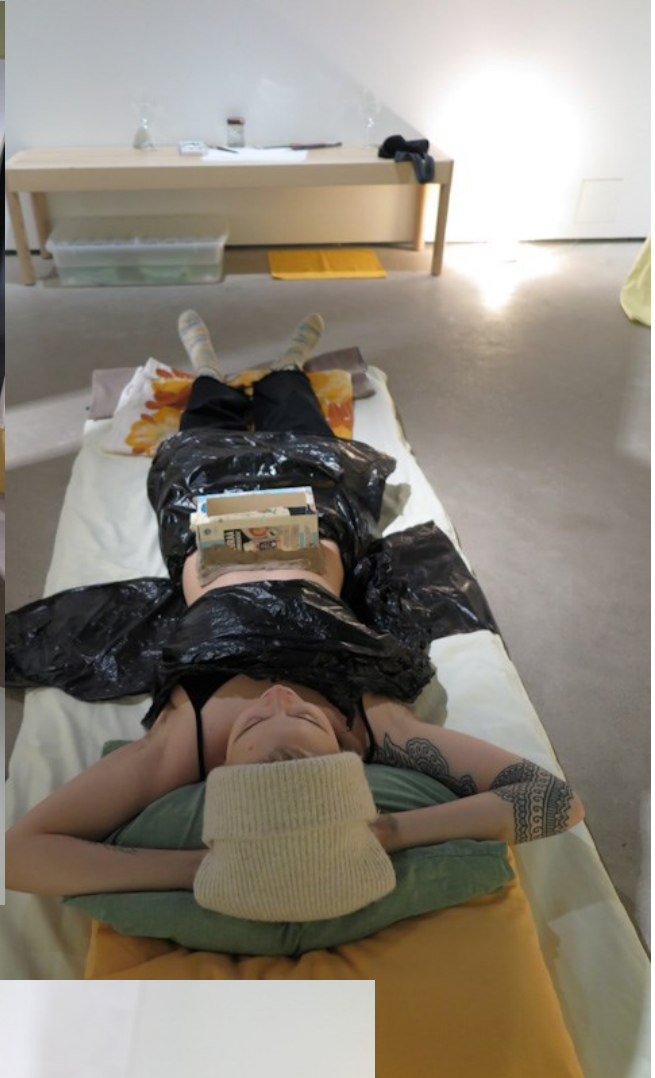
As the volunteer got up from the mattress pad where the mold making took place, I asked them to step next to the wall to have their navel height measured and marked on the wall. I always asked the volunteers to write the height down themselves with their initials. During the week also some exhibition visitors had written down their initials and made a mark on the paper on the wall to sign their navel heights. I found that wonderful.

After measuring I invited the volunteer to leave a color wish of the navel for me. There were acrylics, water, paint brushes, color pencils, white A4 and A3 papers on one of the two benches. The gesture of asking each one to leave me a color on the paper was a way to share the power and role of decision making in relation to the process of creating. It also ended up being an

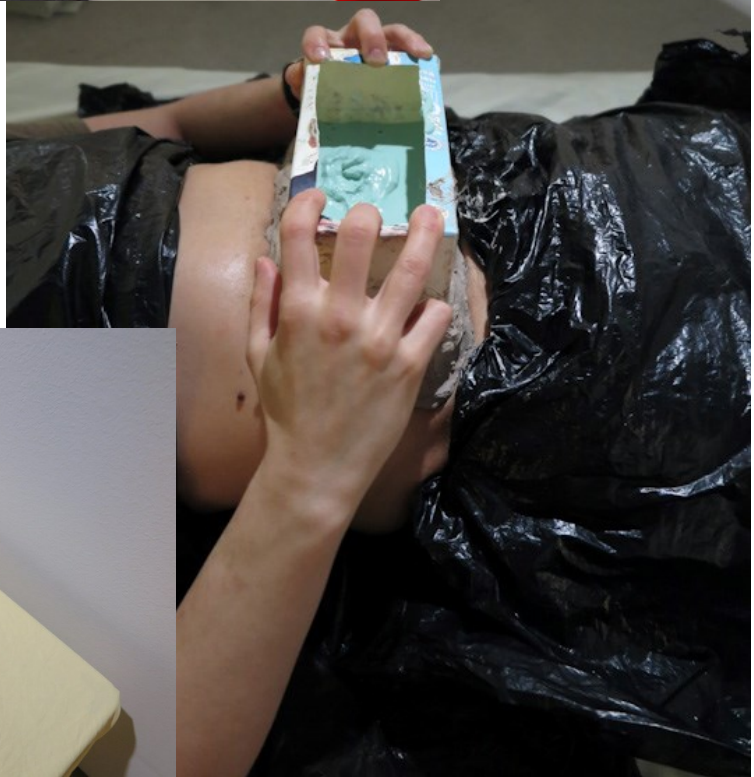
interesting interactive process between several actors: the volunteer who gave the color map, the plaster mix with the powder and water, the pigments that were added to the plaster and me as a color-mixer and executor of the process. I ended up calling the wishes as color/s as color maps because that was how I perceived them and worked with them. The color wishes guided me in the joint choreographic process. The collaborative sphere extended to a point that I felt that I'm just one actor in the process of creation of each sculpture. Yet I had the responsibility of the work and I felt I needed to fulfill as best of my skills the wishes of the volunteers since I had asked them to spend their time reflecting on, or at least thinking, for a moment, about a color that resonates. Many of the people had multiple colors on their painting, drawing or mixed technique color maps which is the reason many of the sculptures ended up being colorful.



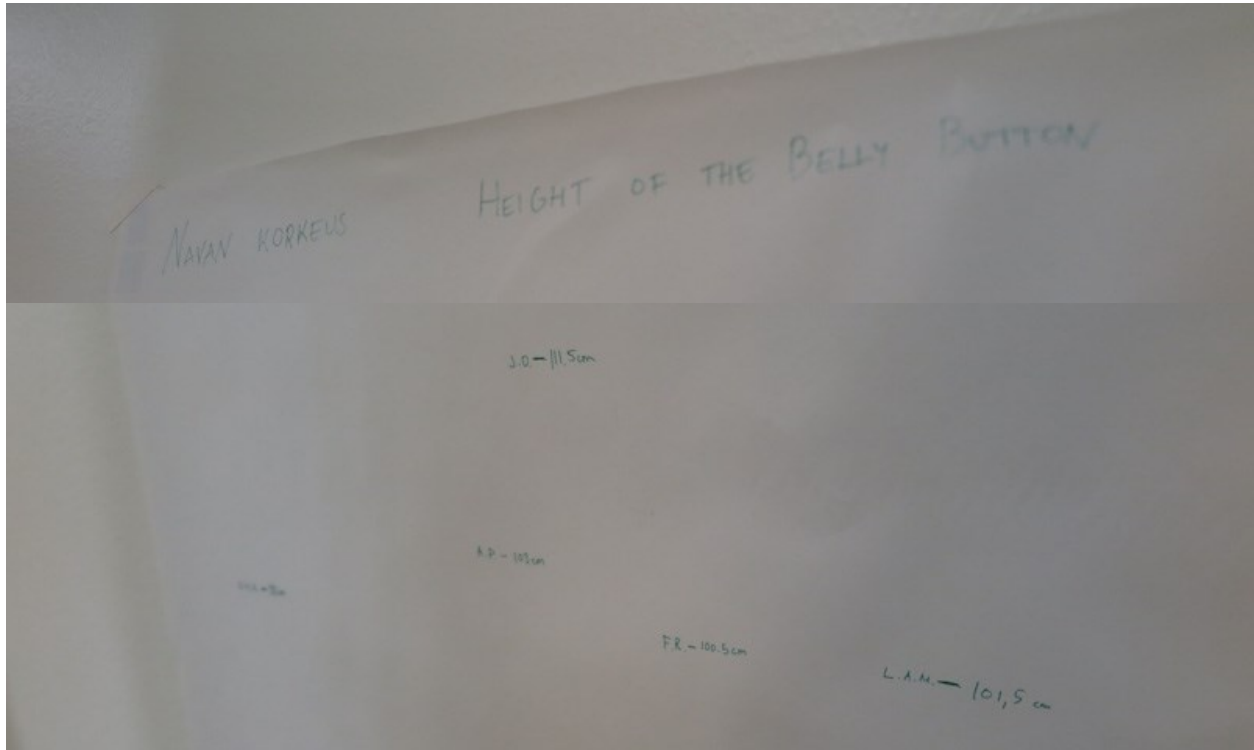
Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mold making. Photo by Lin Martikainen.



Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mold making. Photos by Lin Martikainen.



Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mold making.
Photos by Kristiina Mäenpää (the upper left one) and Lin Martikainen.



Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mold making. Photos by Lin Martikainen.

workshops

In this chapter I will open up the workshop process that I had with the working group. I will share how we worked and what kind of focuses, exercises, challenges, questions and inspirations were present during the thirteen workshop days. The date and the number of each workshop day is stated above each of the workshop day descriptions.

11.-12.2.2023 / first and second workshop day

The first workshop weekend took place in a big white dance studio in the UniArts Helsinki *Theater Academy* (Teak). During that weekend the emphasis was on creating a safe, communicative and trustful working environment where everybody had space to express themselves and to give feedback. I proposed an exercise from Nonviolent Communication (NVC) methodology that I had learned from artist, diversity agent and educator Arlene Tucker at the *Spheres of Care* event.²⁰ The focus of the exercise was in expressing needs towards the collective working. The first physical exercise of the weekend was around skin and was inspired by dancemaker, writer, dance teacher and touch professional Kaisa Kukkonen's *Touch Lab* that took part a few times during the winter 2023.²¹ I proposed an exercise where we started by gazing at the skin and the details of and on it while being aware of the skin being the organ of the body that senses temperatures, pressures and touches. Awakenning the awareness of one's skin, its layers and extends as well as noticing how at the same time skin is holding together and leaking was an important step for thinking about touch: how touch is present in the life of the skin.

Moreover, I guided the group through exercises exploring the shared space as well as the spatial relations of our navels. One more topic that was given attention in the exercises was the gaze. I proposed being inspired by choreographer-dancer Pie Kär's practice where they suggest that dancing is a gift for the others to receive and the gazing is an act of support and a means to get inspired. All the topics we went through were examined physically and further by shifting the roles of spectator and performer. After exploring through the bodily exercises, we formed mind maps around the core topic we were busy with. The map was filled based on the notions, experiences, inspirations and references that were mentioned by the group members.

2.3.2023 / third workshop day

The next meeting took place in the evening on 2.3 in Teak's black dance studio on the 7th floor. There the focus was on exploring how the navel could guide the movement and take the body into space. In addition, the attention was in moving and dancing together through playful exercises. One of them was inspired from dance improvisation and composition exercise called

²⁰ *Spheres of Care* event organized by WAUHAUS x Aliisa Talja x Samuli Laine in Vuotalo 28.-30.10.2022. In the exercise one expresses a need and a feeling that is related to this need.

<https://www.wauhaus.fi/spheres-of-care>

²¹ *Touch Lab* by Kaisa Kukkonen in Humina 30.1.-27.2. at 19-20:30 <https://fb.me/e/3FyD6HMuL>

Flocking in which one person is in charge of creating the movement and the others follow them. Rather than forming a line, the participants are grouped together like a flock of birds. That way, when the leader turns in any direction, the person now in front (of the flock of people) becomes the group leader. This is a great activity because it gives an opportunity for the dancers to pay attention to their own and other bodies, when moving in close proximity as a group, and also learn to be in charge of the situation quickly when they are leading others. Lastly the emphasis was in responding to other people's movement through playful imitation, listening to each other's rhythm while aiming to maintain one's own bodily awareness and sensitivity around the navel. Lastly, we did two rounds of exercise where the emphasis was in creating a score, a movement script, by building a structure first with objects and in the second round with our bodies. The task was to build a structure by placing one object or body there at the time in a way that they would be in physical contact with each other. Then the task was to dismantle the formation in the opposite order until the last object or body was moved away from the space where the building started. Then we were to redo this whole thing again, as precisely as possible, trying to have the same rhythm, positions, ways of touching, gazing and speaking that on the first time we did it. This activity gave us an opportunity to think about how we can remember the positions in space, timing and the gestures around the actions. In the round that we worked with our bodies the question of consent was present among us which was an important part of that exercise.

11.-12.3.2023 / fourth and fifth workshop day

In the next workshop weekend, I aimed to place the focus on establishing routines with warming up the sensitivity of the navel through movement tasks. During the weekend, we discovered collaboratively that a guided opening of the navel exercise would be wonderful to be done always in the beginning of the workshop and a closing exercise would be needed in the end to leave the navel to its own peace. On Sunday we went for the first time to do exercises at the staircase in the *Academy of Fine Arts*. During the previous workshop days, we had established a physical connection between the navel and the anus. The navel had in the exercises the main role and the anus was there to assist and support the dancer to extend the movements of the navel. As our rehearsal on Sunday began at the second floor with the idea to start traveling down the stairs we started to move singularly with the navel-anus guiding the journey. As a development I suggest dividing into two groups and creating chains of support for one person at a time. We also tried variations of flocking exercise on the staircase with the focus on the navel and the anus being in the supportive role. My desire was to include in the performance a haptic sense of connectedness among the navels.

On Saturday the group members created solos based on a task of transferring or transporting something while having the navel as a point of reference. On Sunday each one taught their solos to another person. The idea of mine behind it was that each one could be also bodily and through the articulation of their own creation a creative agent in the collaboration. Later two of the solos transformed into group choreographies that were part of the *Napapiiri - Navel Circle* dance performance in the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition. During this weekend we also did audio recording with those of the group who wanted to take part. My original idea was that we would record

conversations around the navel which would be edited and brought into the installation but while the two recording sessions were approaching, I didn't feel like the directing of recording discussions was relevant anymore. As the session started, I asked the group members if they would be open to offering their navels as listening platforms for another group member to lean on with their ear and translate the sound landscape of the navel area to their mouths and out to the world through their mouth. One of these recordings ended up being part of the *Aukeama - Opening space* installation in one of the three plaster sculptures that had audio coming from them. The audio recording consisted of a verbal description of what the listener heard was happening between their ear and the space that opened up behind the navel. The way the group member articulated the inner world that the body and their imagination co-created sounded (to me) like a meditative story about the world of liquids and air.



Audience-member in *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition listening to the voice-over recorded during the 4th and 5th workshop day.

Photo by Lin Martikainen.

23.3.2023 / sixth workshop day

This meeting took place on Thursday night at the Kuva/Tila gallery space. The provisional plan of the placement of works in the *Kuvan Kevät* had been provided a few days before and I wanted to show the space for the group as well as to see and sense our moving bodies with the gallery space. In the gallery we pondered collectively how the navels of the audience could be approached during the performance. I had a desire to include in the work the possibility to

experience the navel being touched. Touch on the navel was the indicator of the whole process and was an element that I wanted to have in the work. Because the area of the body is intimate, we wanted to offer a tactile experience which had an intention to be pleasant and safe from the point of view of the materials that we used. In the mold-making sessions I rarely touched anyone's navel. The touch was performed by alginate as well as wet and dry tissues. There were some exceptions when I inserted the frame for the mold around the navel, sometimes tiny pieces from the clay that I used to make the frame solid found their way into the navel of the model. Before dripping alginate on the navel, I removed the crumbs with a tissue or if necessary, with a fingertip.

During the evening we talked about professional ear wax cleaners and instruments used in them. Thinking about performing the touch on the navel with instruments made a lot of sense since there were materials touching the navel in the mold-making sessions where the navel cleanings with tissues were crucial and recurring happenings in the choreography of the casting the molds, taking place before and after casting. This conversation inspired me to think about cleaning of the navel being offered to the audience of the performance.

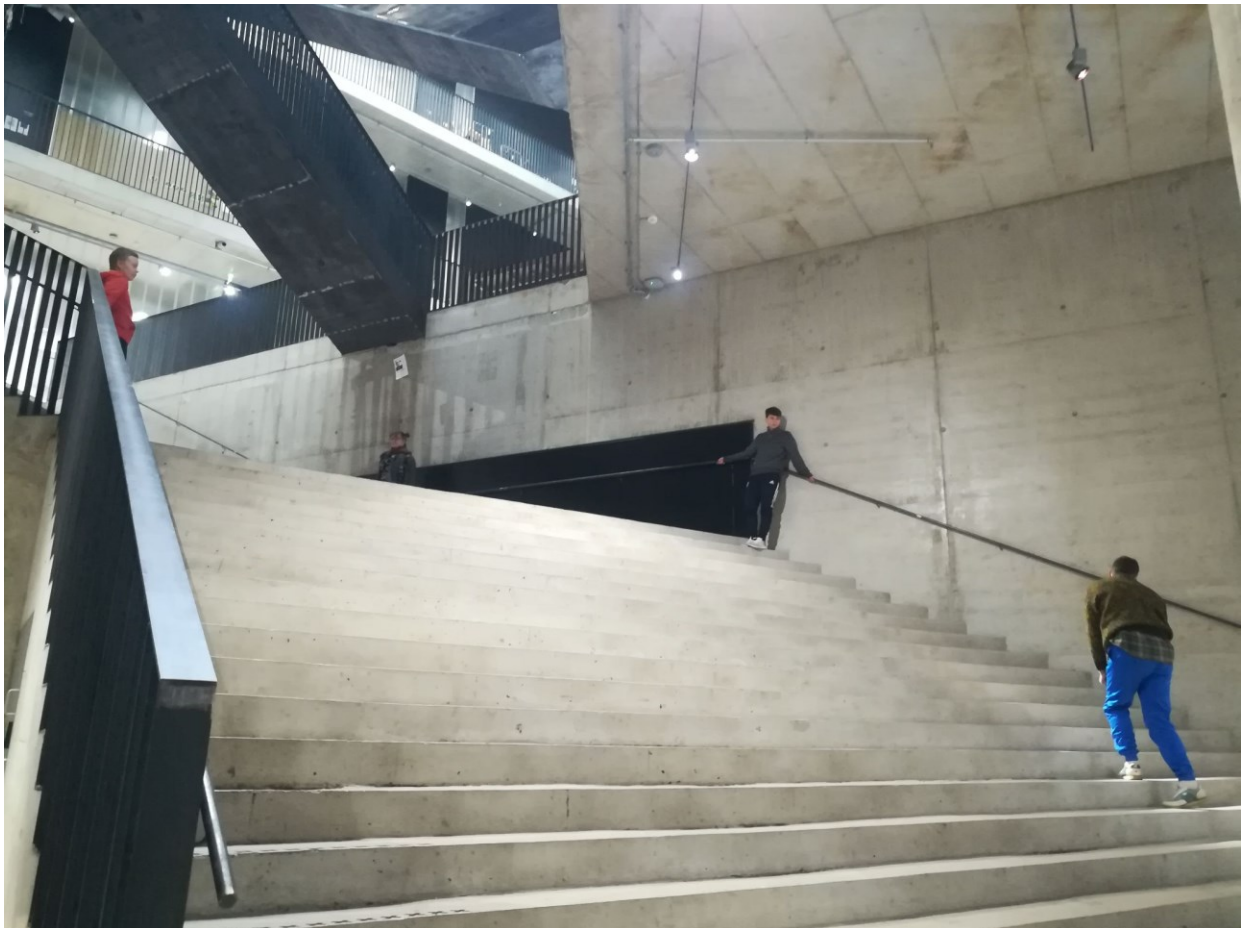
In the end of our workshop, I proposed we would use a thin elastic crochet string I had made to tie ourselves to. Each of us tied the long crochet string around one's waist which made us sense each other's movements when any of us moved further away from another person or two. This was the first try out to connect our bodies to each other by using some object to do so. Sensing the pulls of the one or two people closest to me through the string touching the layers of my skin gave cues or even demanded certain movement directions by pulling my body towards another. At the same time that the string was tightening around my waist, rubbing, squeezing and pressing my flesh it gave the sense of connectedness and relatedness to the others who were part of this chain of bodies. It awakened a sense or a corporeal imagination about an organism that functions as a unit whose way of being in the world is defined by the constraint of the proximity to other parts of the chain. While being playful with moving together in close proximity the action also took me back to a conversation that we had with the group in our first workshop weekend. As we were talking about the whole journey we were starting together, the concepts expedition and the *Arctic Circle* (which is in Finnish *Napapiiri* directly translated in English as *Navel Circle*) were mentioned. The theme of navel expedition started to take form in my thinking while pondering the framing of the performance.

1.-2.4.2023 / seventh and eighth workshop day

On Saturday we started by trying out costumes I brought with me to the workshop. From the concept of expedition, I had a thought that the costume should be in some way connected to outdoor activities, sports and wearing layers of clothes. There wasn't a budget for costume designing, I didn't have money to invite a professional that I knew from before to work with me. Nor did I have time or other resources to look for a student to work with us. It is crucially important to me to get to know the people I work with in order to build a meaningful collaboration with them and there just simply was no time to do that. At this point of the process, I knew that for the work to finish on time I needed support from the people I knew around me. I was very happy and

relieved to have a long-term collaborator and colleague, sound designer Jyri Pirinen, to join the process. Jyri agreed to join the process in March at the point when I still didn't know about the budget for the work and I'm extremely grateful for the trust he had in me and the work. Jyri came to visit the workshop for the first time on the 1st of April at the same time with my supervisor Julius Elo who also visited the performance process for the first time.

From the request of the group, we started to set a group choreography with some specific steps at Saturday's workshop. Before this day I had proposed task-based dances where the focus had been more on each one's own movement exploration within a given task. We started to create the first draft of a *circle dance* choreography together on that Saturday. The circle formation came from our workshop routine. While on the workshop day we moved into the physical exercises we first did the *navel opening exercise* in the circle formation. Saturday's draft was the beginning for the *circle dance* that became part of the performance. It was performed by the group members right in the beginning of the whole work.



One of the workshop exercises taking place at the *Academy of Fine Arts'* staircase.
Photo: Lin Martikainen

On Saturday we were also exploring if the *circle dance* and the following choreography would happen while being tied together with the string. During the weekend I was busy thinking how to work with the string in order to offer the haptic visual information as well as the tactile sense of an organism moving together. At this point I was still thinking that the work would start from the first floor in Kuva/Tila gallery and from there move with the group members into the other semi-public spaces of the *Academy of Fine Arts* where the group members would spread out and each of them would suggest for the audience one kind of perspective to approach or be with the navel.

On Sunday based on feedback and conversation I had with Julius after the workshop on Saturday I focused on proposing more choreographed material for the group. It was a good idea since we already had material created by the group members and the *circle dance* that we started drafting together. Before our workshop I developed further the choreography of the *circle dance* we had done together. The choreographed material structure and offered for the group something concrete that each one could make as their own. At the same time the *circle dance* asked the group members to be present for themselves and for each other since they needed to listen and build common rhythms together with their footsteps.

During Sunday I proposed that a solo score²² of one group member would be translated into group choreography. This solo was made some weeks ago in the workshop when I asked each one to create a solo with the theme of transporting something with the navel and by using the different objects that I had brought with me to the studio. The original name of the solo was *Kohtu* (in English womb) which I suggested to call *Kosketuksella pyyhkiminen* (in English *wiping with touch*) since the touch was the theme of the score when verbalizing it. The choreography became part of the performance. Each performer had their own fabrics with which they wiped different parts of the body in particular ways. It was a repetitive and meditative part of choreography that ended with each of the performers laying their fabric on the floor, taking their shoes off and stepping on the fabric.

22.-23.4.2023 / ninth and tenth workshop day

In January I had shared a Spotify playlist with the group where I had added songs that either mention navel, are in some way inspiring, moving my navel or could be in the soundtrack of the navel. The group members were invited to participate in gathering the playlist. The music in the list served as a soundscape in our workshops when we felt like having music. Sharing of the playlist was the first concrete reference point I shared with Jyri when he joined the working group. For this weekend Jyri had already prepared several soundscapes based on our conversations where I had described the atmosphere and feeling of the moments in the works that I would wish to have music. In between the previous workshop weekend and this one we had time to pingpong with ideas, thoughts and tryouts. At this point I felt like we had found a common ground on what was the nature and the role of sound in the work. As in our previous collaborations Jyri created

²² In this context score means a movement script.

more material as we ended up using in the performance and some tracks were used on another moment in the work as first planned.

A week before this workshop I had prepared and shared a document with the first draft of the script of the whole performance work. The script had in it all the elements that were present in the final outcome. During the workshop we talked and walked through the structure in the *Academy of Fine Arts*.

As a choreographer I needed to still see if the order of the parts was working in the way I imagined. At this point I started to feel nervous if there was enough time to make the group members feel comfortable and confident performing and communicating with the audience during the performance. There were still elements that not everyone had had a chance to get familiar with as most of the group members were not able to attend all of the workshop days. As I talked with Julius, they proposed that in each workshop we have from now on everyone would guide through *navel opening* or *closing exercises* to have practice to instruct it to the public. This was a great practical idea since the exercise was always present in the beginning and in the end of the workshop. The first time guiding the group was probably the hardest for everyone, but I must say that I was just amazed how embodied everybody's guidance was. Each one had something in their articulation that others could get inspired by. While rotating the role of the leader of the exercise we were able to discuss, define and specify the language around the *navel opening* and *closing exercises*.

On Saturday we paid attention to the costumes as I brought the crochet accessory sketches, I had with me. Moving with the accessories made them fall off and lose their visual cues which is why we decided to drop them out of the performance. In the end I prepared two harnesses that were only worn by Jyri and me as the rest of the group was wearing costumes that focused on highlighting the navel area by having a cut on the shirt around the belly button.

On the weekend we work on the *navel care/cleaning rituals* by talking about and trying them out on each other as well as with Jyri and Julius who were present on Saturday. With Julius we are talking about the ways of touching, and they suggested to sense the differences between qualities of touch while touching one's own palms. The next day we spent some time sensing the different materialities of arms and were looking for that same sensitivity when touching each other's navels with the *navel care/cleaning* instruments.

3.5.2023 / eleventh workshop day

For the workshop I had updated the script of the performance with rearticulations of the *navel opening* and closing exercises as well as the ones for the *navel care/cleaning rituals*. We went through them together in the rehearsal. There was also a list of items that the performers, also called as expedition group leaders, needed to have in the performance and I had asked all the group leaders to collect their own set and take responsibility for having it with them each time.

During this rehearsal one person called me and dropped out of the process. This raised questions about the audience capacity of the performance and what was possible to execute with this amount of people in the group. I decided to keep the information to myself and think about those questions after the rehearsal. This was our third last rehearsal before the first performance and there was some nervousness in the air which is common as the premier is approaching. There was obscurity in the way the expedition group leaders were guiding the group downstairs. As Julius came to take part in our rehearsal and run-through of the performance draft that we had, they mentioned to me afterwards that one group member had a proposal for how to score the guiding of the audience downstairs. Julius had been in a different expedition group during the run-through as me and was able to offer me information that they had from the same run-through but from a different parallel of reality. Based on the one person dropping out, the feedback I got from the group members and the discussion I had with Julius after the rehearsal, I was able to make final decisions about the structure of the work and I communicated them to the group via email the next day. I was glad to receive an email that by the end of the rehearsal that things had started to make more sense and with my email there was even more clarity and determination to go toward the next rehearsal.

9.5.2023 / twelfth workshop day

In the end of the last rehearsal, we went through the performance structure with the elements we had even though everything was not clear. The parts we had rehearsed the most went very well and I was very happy to see the group moving together and slowly making the work their own. There were still gaps that needed to be checked out and material that was not familiar for all since there had been some absences.

The aim for this day was to have the first full run-through of the work. I had invited Julius and a choreographer colleague, Laura Pietiläinen, to take part in the run-through. The feedback that we received from Laura who was experiencing the work for the first time was sweet, supportive and generous which was meaningful for our joint process particularly at that point.

11.5.2023 / thirteenth workshop day

During this last rehearsal we went through a lot of details in the articulation of the work. The desire was to agree on common words for the events, places and stories we guided the audience into. At the end of the rehearsal, we did a run-through where I had invited choreographer and dancer colleagues. My original aim was to have more run-throughs because of the participatory character of the work but we simply didn't have time for more during our 13 workshops.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance, handout image. Photo by Lin Martikainen.

queer spaces

When creating queer and LGBTQIA+ focused events and projects I have been asked why. I have been accused of separating people as queer and other. I do not want to make separations or create oppositions. I want to build supporting environments and receive support. Unfortunately, binaries do still exist in the society which makes it unsafe, uncomfortable and hard for many people to be who they are. It's important to facilitate spaces for queer and LGBTQIA+ people so that we can have places to come together and be at ease. It brings joy to hear, to see, to be seen and heard by other queers. I see it as a way of creating and sharing safer spaces for semiotics and somatics to bloom, pollinate and transform. My goal is to create milieus to gain confidence as bodily beings.

(IF YOU WANT TO PAUSE FOR A MOMENT, LISTEN TO MUSIC AND MOVE YOUR BEAUTIFUL BODY, PLEASE DO SO.

MY SONG RECOMMENDATION IS QUEER BY ARCA AND PLANNINGTOROCK.)

important things in facilitating

In the *invitation letter* I named my position as a person who will be “[...] in charge of directing the working groups and formulation of the thesis work, in dialogue with the group.”²³ At the same time the group members were “[...] expected to commit to the process and to actively participate in the dance-based practices and discussions that we will be working with.”²⁴ My role could be described

²³ See page 63 of this thesis to read the full *Invitation letter*.

²⁴ Ibid.

as a *facilitative leader*, who was leading the process and actively making space for participation. In the beginning of the process, I introduced an exercise to be worked in small groups in order to draw people out and to mirror their needs and feelings. During the first meetings the emphasis was on setting common principles, exercising communication and proposing tools for giving feedback as well as expressing needs and uncertainties.

As we did exercises, they were talked through in order to gather ideas, to keep track of how people are doing and to help people to listen to each other. As we discussed the subject matter, we were exploring through an exercise there was a chance to share experiences and link them to the frame of the work. We used mind maps to collect each one's comments which was also a means for validation. With the mind maps it was also visualized that each subject matter consisted of several points of view and by collecting them we were legitimizing differences. By proposing a creative role for the group members, I invited them to develop the work together on a practical level.

challenges for facilitating

The time spent together with the group was very short in comparison to the creation periods I'm used to when I work with other people. A full month is the average time I'm used to having with the performers in the studio. Now we had all together 36,5 hours, in other words one week. In each of the workshops there were a few different members of the group present than in the previous one. From my perspective that made it challenging to plan the workshops and their flow throughout the process as well as to estimate the time that was needed to be used for each aspect of the work. Since the time spent together was tight to begin with, the absences challenged the process and created a pressure on me to keep everyone on board and at the same time to proceed with the project. Because the presence of each working group member was based on volunteering there was no obligation for them to be there. The fragile agreement was based on consenting to my expectation of committing to the process when each of them filled in the application form of the project. The absences occurred due to illnesses and double bookings where the first is inevitable and the latter understandable in this context. The mobile situation was stressful for me, however, something that I was aware of was likely to happen. We started as a group with 10 volunteers and me and ended with 5 volunteers, me and Jyri. People dropping out effected the balance and the energy of the group. As this was the first time I worked with volunteers and with a group from where people just dropped out, I didn't really know how to deal with those situations within the group. Since the overall situation was mobile, I took the drop outs as a part of the ecology of that process. If there was more time, I had put more focus on the effect it may have had on the individuals by doing check-ins.

challenges of time and prioritizing in group work

Toward the end of the workshops, we were prioritizing the sense of comfort and confidence with the content of the performance which meant making adaptations and changes to the roles, to the

used language and words as well as to the participatory encounters performed. I ran out of time and capacity to think and talk through an action plan for challenging situations during the performances with which I mean talking about the safety of the performers during the performances. With my role as guide in the performance I had an overall view on what was going on but that is less safe structure than what I would have wanted to have. As the end of the process often gets intensive, I ponder at what point to talk about the safety in the performance. Perhaps this work could serve as a checklist of to-dos in the future.

Another thing I ran out of time to think about and act upon was to ask the consent from participants of the dance performance to be in the photos and videos. I had too many tasks to handle and didn't have a ready-made structure or form for how to ask for permission. In the end I forgot to take care of it and the documentation just happened. I instructed the peers that helped me with the documentation to do it in a way that people wouldn't be recognized but still there was no consent. Therefore, I needed to approach some people with the question afterwards. My expectation is that the consent, safety and accessibility would be present all the way in the process. I ponder at the moment how to write a performance description in a way that it doesn't unintentionally exclude and make people feel that they are not welcome or that they might be on the way. In the future I'm getting familiar with accessibility guidelines.

sculpting process

During the autumn 2022 there were various material testings around the navel casts. I was looking for a material that would repeat the fine details of the skin like foldings. In the end I turned back to plaster which was my original material option. I enjoyed working with the plaster since on top of its animating character it also gave me a possibility to work on it. The first drafts of navel sculpture were done with using each model's iliac crest (in Finnish *suoliluu*) and lower part of the costal arch (in Finnish *kylkikaari*) as the four corners of the frame for the alginate mold makings. As a result, the plaster castings had different proportions and the sculptures themselves seemed to be taking the gaze more to the individual's body, its size and shape which was not what I was looking for to explore with this work. That's why I decided that in most of the pieces I would use a standard frame that would be placed around the navel when creating the mold.

After a careful consideration I decided to leave plaster framing around the print of the belly button and the skin region surrounding it. I left the framing looking rough after using chiseling to extract the alginate mold from plaster. The craggy surface in relation to the skin of navel and belly highlighted the softness of the body as well as abstracted the sculpted object to be something else than an object copying the aesthetics of ancient Greek sculptures. Using pigments to color the sculptures throughout was a decision that I made in relation to the white marble sculptures that once had paint on their surfaces. I did not want the bodies of the sculptures to have realistic skin tones. My desire was that they could be perceived as utopian or more than human bodies.



Occupying peer's studio space with navel sculptures. Photo: Lin Martikainen

choreographic thinking with objects

From early on I had a desire to create edible sculptures for the installation but as the project proceeded there was no longer a space or need for more elements. However, I wanted to create one more sculpture for the dance performance that would offer to the participants another sensorial proposition to approach the navel. It needed to be something that was either in its tactility differentiating from plaster and beeswax or being edible. In the end the idea of making belly button ice cubes combined both requirements. With the edible navels the particularly interesting aspect was the event-time, the collectively experienced duration for the ice cube to melt. This collectively embodied duration where each body rhythmically attended to the dance or movement of the bodies merging.²⁵

One of the earlier material tryouts was that I would have done an aluminum casting, but the process was postponed due to difficulties of finding people to help me to learn the technique. Because I started the preparation for the aluminum casting, I had made beeswax navels. One day while once again looking at the beeswax navels laying in my studio, I decided to place them

²⁵ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 110.

among the plaster casts. The original idea had been to have small aluminum navels among plaster casts but when looking at the beeswax casts they started to make more sense. The organic material with its particular smell, texture and color was making a wonderful material contrast. It also cued more directly toward the navel whereas the plaster casts also had the sense of skin attached to them. Manning talks about *choreographic objects* as activators of limits that attract a certain kind of collective enthusiasm and approach. For me these different ways of framing the navel area and the materials I had decided to use gave cues that differed from each other. They attracted different kinds of approaches and tentative approaches. The variety of cues were there to attract viewer-experencer's bodies to approach the sculpture bodies as well as to activate "[...] a collective dance of attention."²⁶ For turning the sculptures into choreographic propositions I realized I needed to think about the actual composition of the objects. As I was able to borrow my peer's studio space at the *Academy of Fine Arts*, I was able to think with the objects and invite people to spend time with the works. However, I soon realized that the final composition of work would only happen in the actual exhibition space.



Edible belly button ice cube sculpture for *Napapiiri - Navel Circle* dance performance.

Photo by Lin Martikainen.

²⁶ Op. cit., 113-114.

choreographic installation

Artist Mikko Kuorinki was the first person from whom I heard that proposal to look at the sculptures as bodies. This happened during a studio visit with him in early spring. The articulation of calling the sculptures as bodies was more than meaningful. It opened up the door for me to start to see the works beyond their objectness and materiality. Before this I had thought about the materials and touches of them as well as the form and shape shifting that had happened while working towards the sculptures from the invitation of volunteers to join, to placing the carton box around each one's navel for the mold making, to the mixing water and alginate powder, to pouring pigmented plaster on to the alginate while it lays inside a wooden structure. All these touches that had taken place were between different material forms, their transformation and meetings between skins and the stories around the navel. There was a lot that had happened and informed the work from where it took again time to translate the and situate those happenings inside the artwork to be shared with the viewer-experencers. This process of translating multiple perspectives and layers of my research is thinking that I do through my corporeal practice as an artist and choreographer. My approach towards sculpting and thinking about an installation is done with choreographic thinking. Therefore, I wanted to make it visible in the description of the work by calling the installation a *choreographic installation*. It makes sense to me as a choreographer to think with installation art practice because of its relation to the body of the audience member. Art historian, critic and author Claire Bishop claims that both "installation art" and "art installation" seek to make the viewer-experencer be aware of how the objects are installed in the space and, at the same time, they both aim to make the experencer aware of how their body responds to this composition. Bishop describes installation art being a situation for "[...] an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision."²⁷ A *choreographic installation* is (not a passive theater set or background but) a place of events and happenings where the works themselves propose and call for affects²⁸ through their colors, shapes, placings and relationalities. In the *choreographic installation* I was interested in the change of perspective from gazing to sensing with touch, allowing the sense of touch to guide one's spectatorship and experience with the work. This mixed media work with choreographic approach invited people to think about touch, to touch and be touched, to be reminded of the body and a body part, to become aware of themselves as bodies in the exhibition space, to become aware of others as bodies, to work with kinesthetic empathy, to imaging with the body and to travel in the gallery space with this embodiment. I was paying attention to how the work invites one's body to become part of the bodies of sculptures as well as part of the installation. I wanted to make sure there was space to make decisions to be with the work, not manipulate or force the audience member to spend time with the installation. By stepping into the area in the gallery where the installation was, nothing happened yet, one needed to serve in order to receive. In other words, one needed to reach and travel towards in order to touch and be touched. To lean towards and listen in order to hear the sculpture-bodies.

²⁷ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 6.

²⁸ Victoria Wynne-Jones, *Choreographing Intersubjectivity in Performance Art* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 192-193.

As I was thinking about the materials of the installation I was most and for all interested in creating a work that would invite to receive the work through touch. As a choreographer I have focused on my practice to think how the audience is sensing the work. Sometimes I use spoken language, words or songs in my works, but they are there to add layers not to be the foundations for the work. I wanted to do the same with the installation which is why it was also important for me to call it a *choreographic installation*. Choreography for me is thinking with the corporeal and at the moment mostly with the touch. In this installation I was focusing on tactility and haptics. As Ingvild Torsen writes in her essay *The Persistence of the Body in Sculpture after Abstraction* that the sculptures as themselves without engagement of touch can awaken tactile experiences within the viewer-experiencer.²⁹

When thinking about installing the work it was crucial to sense the sculptures as bodies that are both representations of bodies of people who came to join in the performative installation in January but also independent bodies that have their own “body-subjects”.³⁰ My goal in installing the work was that it would invite the viewer-experiencer to a journey through affects, empathy and touch. With encouragement of choreographer Jana Unmüssig I started to approach the installing of the works through *choreographic thinking* with the question in mind: how these bodies are in relation to each other. What kind of embodied being they propose for each other? Jana also mentioned that she could imagine sound being an important part of the work. Our meeting took place in the first week of April and installing the *Kuvan Kevät* was about to start soon. At that point I was in doubt about the work and the presence of the sound in it. The generous feedback I received helped me to redirect my thoughts and gave me the impulse to continue with my plan of having two to three sculptures with sound as a part of the installation. When the installing in Kuva/Tila gallery began I realized that I could start to work with my skills as a choreographer that composes bodies in relation to the space. On top of the architecture of the space I was also co-composing with the other artwork-bodies that my peers around had installed in the space. I needed to adapt and work with the knowledge I had. I was lucky to have my colleague choreographer-dancer Laura Pietiläinen as my mentor for the installing part. She encouraged me to think with the sculptures by sensing and working with the spatiality and tactility with an open mind. This helped me to lean into my own skills as a choreographer-dancer and work from the corporeal knowledgebase that I had practiced for 20 years.

body of works

For the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition, I created two independent works that at the same time were interconnected through the processes, the *choreographic installation* and the dance performance. The works referred to each other, which was an important aspect for me, since the creation processes were happening simultaneously. Both works informed and co-created each other.

²⁹ Ingvild Torsen, “The Persistence of The Body in Sculpture after Abstraction” in *Philosophy of Sculpture: Historical Problems, Contemporary Approaches* ed. Kristin Gjesdal, Fred Rush, and Ingvild Torsen (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2021), 111, 115.

³⁰ Op. cit., 121-126. Body-subjects used in relation to Ingvild Torsen, who is adapting the thinking of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger.

The decisions to install the sculptures in a way they did arise from spending a lot of time with them in various situations and places within the premises of the *Academy of Fine Arts* and the *Theater Academy*. Each of them became very familiar to me. As a means for composing the sculpture-bodies, I ended up asking which of the sculptures support each other's presence. I began to create tinier installation-units within the whole installation. Each smaller group had their own proposal for being in the space, singularly and as a unit, and cues for the audience members to be, feel, act, touch and so on. Each unit had their own role within the composition of the whole installation. I also thought about the composition of the sculptures in relation to the events of the performance, however, these decisions were only the final touches.



Choreographic installation at the Kuvan Kevät 2023 exhibition. Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The textiles used in the two works came from the desire to have material conversion between them. One of the approaches was to bring things that were in the dance work to the

choreographed installation and vice versa. For example, the rope, the shirt and the harnesses were present in both works. The sculpture resembling the negative space around the belly button was part of the *choreographic installation* and was part of a group choreography in the performances. The tiny belly button sculptures that were made from beeswax were present in the dance performance but as icy cubes that melt on or inside the body of the audience member. The icy navels were offered for the participants of the performance at the end of the work inside paper cups. They were given in relation to the proposal of making a toast for the navel.



A prototype of the costume for the *Napapiiri - Navel Circle* dance performance.
Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The sports t-shirt that one of the plaster navel sculptures was dressed with had been worn by one group member during our workshops. It was the first shirt with the cut around the navel, a prototype, of the costume for the dance performance. The rope and the harness around the waist of one of the plaster navel sculptures resembled the physical sensation that I had when moving with the group during one of the workshops all attached to the crochet string.

The soundscapes coming from the two plaster navels on the wall were called *navel opening exercise* and *navel closing exercise*. They proposed for the viewer-experiencers to be with their navels experientially. The audience member was invited to sink into their imagination with their navel and explore their milieu with the navel. The soundscape was created with the help and support of artist Frank Rizzo who I got to know through sound and seminar courses at the *Academy of Fine Arts*. Frank assisted with some of the audio recordings of the voice-overs, and co-designed sound of the navels. They mixed the tone of the voice-overs to serve the purpose

which was to enforce the sense of being present and to help the audience member to immerse themselves within their own body. The sound sources inside the sculptures were called sound transducers.³¹ They generate sound waves that transmitted the sound through the solid material of the sculpture. One could sense the sound waves vibrating when touching the plaster cast. The pulsations of the sculptures with sound gave a sense of comfort and invited the listener to stay and lean toward the belly button.



Three sculptures with sound. They all had sound transducers in them and foam to reduce unwanted sound resonance. Photos by Lin Martikainen.

³¹ Sound transducer as an electronic device https://www.electronics-tutorials.ws/io/io_8.html

describing the choreographic installation

The *choreographic installation, Aukeama / Opening space*, exhibited in the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* consisted of 22 plaster navels with different color pigments in each of them, one plaster casted negative of a navel, 22 casted beeswax sculptures, two white cubes to sit on, two gray circle shaped sitting pads and A3 size-handouts on a plaster cast platform.



Choreographic installation at the Kuvan Kevät 2023 exhibition. Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The works were situated on the left corner of the Kuva/Tila where the sculptures were both on three walls and on the floor. Looking at the works from the middle of the Kuva/Tila gallery and going through the works from the furthest left were *Kolme napaa seinällä ja seitsemän napaa lattialla / Three navels on the wall and seven navels on the floor* (2023). The three navels on the wall were plaster casts situated on the same height as their models' navels while they stood. They were on the left side of the doorway that takes into a smaller exhibition space within the Kuva/Tila. Two of them were on the wall of the doorway and one on the chipboard wall that was coming out the permanent wall. In this small corner next to the doorway three plaster navels created together with seven casts of beeswax formed one unit. The furthest left one on the chipboard wall was light blue with black details, the second one a mix of light earthly colors like yellow, green, brown, the third one had dominant blue color mixed with white and green. The beeswax navels were on the floor in the corner, some facing up and few laying on their side.



Kolme napaa seinällä ja seitsemän napaa lattialla / Three navels on the wall and seven navels on the floor (2023).

Photo by Lin Martikainen.



Kolme napaa seinällä / Three navels on the wall (2023).

Audience members touching and being touched by the sculptures.

Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The next unit when traveling to the right and on the right side of the doorway is *Kolme napaa seinällä / Three navels on the wall* (2023). All three navels are plaster casts and on the wall on the same height as their models' navels while they stood. The most left one had white frame and rusty green and brown colors, the second was gray throughout the sculpture and the third was white and orange with strong green runoffs. The gray sculpture in the middle is above the two, that are almost parallel to each other and forming the sides of the unit.



Kuusi napaa ja kolme napaa, joista yksi äänessä / Six navels and three navels from which one with sound (2023). Photo by Lin Martikainen.

In *Kuusi napaa ja kolme napaa, joista yksi äänessä / Six navels and three navels from which one with sound* (2023), there are three plaster casts from which the most left is pink and tinier than any other plaster sculpture in the installation. It's closer to the floor situated approximately on the height of the navel when seated on the floor. The next plaster cast navel had a light pink color with light blue runoffs. It's on the floor, navel facing up and one could hear audioscape coming from the navel. In the audio one can hear a person talking, describing a landscape of sounds and sensation while movement is approaching their ear when listening. The sculpture vibrated with the audio and when placing one's skull on the plaster another layer of sound would appear. The sound space had a bubbly and visceral character. Then on the right side there was the third plaster sculpture with violet color. This navel was on the wall also at the height of sitting. Behind the audio navel there were six navels casted from beeswax. They were occupying space along the audio cable that was coming beneath the plaster navel and traveling toward the wall on the floor level. Some of the beeswax navels were facing up and few lay on their side. There were two gray circle shaped sitting pads on the floor, one on the left side of the navel with audio and the second on the right side of the violet navel.

The next unit is *Kaksi napaa seinällä / Two navels on the wall* (2023) made from plaster. The most left one is white and situated on the same height as their models' navels while they stood, however, this navel is facing towards the wall on the right. The second one is a mix of orange, white and yellow runoffs. The navel is at the height of sitting but facing toward the white navel.



Kaksi napaa seinällä / Two navels on the wall (2023).

Photo by Lin Martikainen.



Photo by Lin Martikainen

Then follows *Kaksi napaa lattialla / Two navels on the floor (2023)* both with blue color standing in the corner one behind another. The one in the front was slightly lighter in color. The second with stronger blue pigment looked like it was laying on its right side. It had three wheels on the backside.



Yhdeksän napaa lattialla ja seinällä sekä kaksi napaa äänessä / Nine navels on the floor and on the wall and two navels with sound (2023).

Audience-member in *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition listening and touching the sculpture.

Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The next constellation is called *Yhdeksän napaa lattialla ja seinällä sekä kaksi napaa äänessä / Nine navels on the floor and on the wall and two navels with sound (2023)*. It had two plaster casted navels with audio which one could listen while sitting on white chipboard cubes. In between them on the floor four beeswax navels and slightly above the floor on the wall five navels. The plaster cast the most on the left was the first navel placed on the wall that was on the right side of the corner. This navel had a decomposed green look and an audio scape that was proposing a *navel closing exercise* for the listener in Finnish and in English. The last navel cast attached to the wall was burgundy color with yellow runoffs and framing. The navel had an audio landscape that proposed a *navel opening exercise* rotation with Finnish and English language. The plaster sculptures vibrated with the audio and when placing one's skull, cheek or ear on the plaster another layer of sound would appear. The sound space had a bubbly and visceral character.



Kaksi napaa, paita ja valjas / Two navels, a shirt and a harness (2023).

Photo by Lin Martikainen.

The next unit was on the floor in front of the previously described grouping. *Kaksi napaa, paita ja valjas / Two navels, a shirt and a harness (2023)* had two plaster-casted navels next to each other on the floor. The one on the left with pink color was dressed with a magenta color sports t-shirt that had cut around the navel that revealed the belly button. The t-shirt had on top of it a yellow crochet harness that went over the right shoulder and traveled horizontally through the back to the right side of the chest. The plaster casting next to it had a light pink color on it with light gray runoffs.



Photo by Petri Summanen.



Viisi napaa, valjas ja köysi / Five navels, a harness and a rope (2023).

Photos by Lin Martikainen.



The unit that formed the furthest right edge of the installation was *Viisi napaa, valjas ja köysi / Five navels, a harness and a rope (2023)*. This grouping had in it five plaster casted navels, one plaster casted negative of a navel and A3 size-handouts on a plaster cast platform. Close to the

previously described unit was a navel sculpture with gray and orange runoffs gazing toward the ceiling. It stood on its three wheel-legs. Between this navel and the white cube that one could sit on were two plaster casts, one yellow and one orange. The yellow had three black wheels that it stood on and looked like it carried the orange navel that was on top of it. The yellow below was looking at the direction of the furthest right group and the orange toward the plaster navels that were the most right of the whole installation. From those two navels the one on the left side had white and earthy green runoffs mixed with blue streams on the frame. Next to it was the ultra-light pink navel that had the widest skin surface. It had a yellow belt looking harness around the waist and a rope attached to the white ring that was in front of the body. The rope looked like it was pulling the navel. The emphasis of the movement was present also for the three black wheels that the sculpture was standing on. The other end of the rope was attached to the white cube in the most right. The plaster casted negative of a navel was close to the rope that was pulling. The negative was on the floor. The parts of it that were representing skin were shiny and had a light brown tone. The A3-size handouts were laying on the plaster cast platform that was on the floor between the negative and the *Kaksi napaa, paita ja valjas / Two navels, a shirt and a harness* (2023). Each handout consisted of 5 white 80 grammage papers which were folded from the middle forming two A4s: on one side of the opening of the page text in Finnish and on the other side in English. The handouts had a short, one sentence description of the *choreographic installation*, a page of questions and decisions or desires, a page with experiential text or poem about bodies, touch and liquids, a page that describes the whole thesis process, a page with information about the *Napapiiri - Navel Circle* performance and the last page with credits, supporters and thankyou.

describing the dance performance

Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance took place at *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition on three Sundays at 2pm. The performance started³² from the second floor of the *Academy of Fine Arts*. The triangle-shaped lobby served as a base location or, as we called it in the process and in the performance, a base camp for the performance that spread and traveled inside the building.

There were two ways that the audience could take part in the dance performance by participating or acting as viewer-experiencers. The people needed to then make a decision whether they wanted to come to witness the work from the sidelines or be part of the performance or the expedition, as the context of the participation was clarified in the description of the work. The ones who wanted to participate needed to sign in by sending an email to me where they also told me to which performance they wanted to join. As I confirmed, I offered further information about the venue and its facilities as well as a time and place where they could come to receive their

³² For me this performance began when the audience member had seen the description of the performance or heard about it and decided to take part in it.

expedition group's symbol and further instructions for the journey.³³ In the email they were asked to inform us if they couldn't make it to the performance after all.

The first meeting with the participant took place 5 to 20 minutes before the beginning of the expedition next to the info desk of the *Academy of Fine Arts*. There the participant was asked if they would be okay to travel on stairs between 2nd and 3rd floor as well as between 1st and 2nd floor. The participant got the information of where the preparation for the expedition would start, handout of the performance and the symbol of their expedition group. It was suggested that the participant would go to witness the *warm-up rituals* of the expedition group leaders that began at 2pm. The *warm-up* rituals took place on the second-floor lobby and could be witnessed from the same floor or above.

After meeting with the participants downstairs I traveled up to meet the working group. We had agreed that I check with everyone if they are ready for the expedition. After getting a yes from Jyri, I went to meet the performers, also called as, the expedition group leaders. With the performers we had a routine to take a couple of breaths together in a circle after I had asked how they are. After our collective moment it was my turn as a guide of the expedition to share the information about what is going to happen next.



*Napapiiri - Navel
Circle* dance
performance.

Check-in circle
before continuing.

Photo by Salla Valle.

The guide welcomed everybody to the *Navel Circle* performance. They introduced that the expedition group leaders are about to share their *warm-up ritual* with the audience shortly after. The introduction was talked through a microphone and a small speaker that they were carrying on their lower arm. The information was shared in Finnish and English. It was mentioned that the

³³ To offer this information via email was important since I wanted to make sure the people who signed in knew that they signed in for a participatory performance.

people could witness the warm-up from the 2nd floor or above and that moving around was possible. After the *warm-up ritual* the expedition groups would be formed, and this would be announced still separately and clearly by the guide. They wished all a good navel expedition and then it was up to the performers to start their collective journey as the expedition group leaders.



*Napapiiri - Navel
Circle dance
performance.*

Beginning of the
warm-up ritual of the
expedition group
leaders.

Photo by Salla Valle.

(On the wall: *Body in
morass*, 2023, and
*Intangible presence
crossing borders*,
2023, by Sofia
Haapamäki)

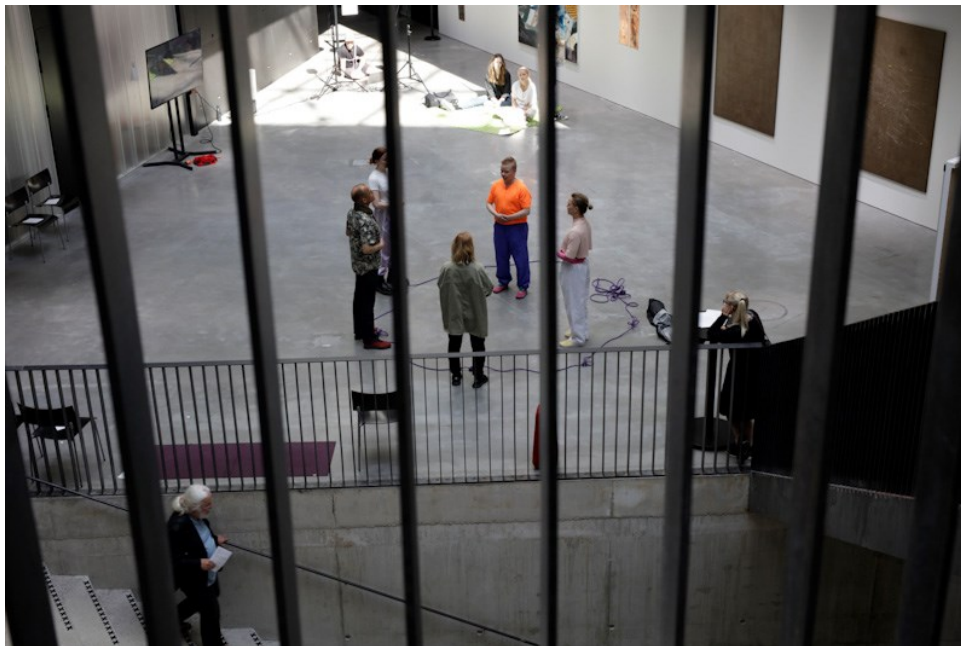
The expedition group leaders began with the *circle dance* that ended in breaking out the circle formation. The collective navel broke into singular navels that were looking for their own motion and rotation in the shared space. When each expedition group leader had found the sense of their own navel they formed a circle of navels. After taking a breath together the navels started to find their ways down with the gravity. The circular and rotatory movements continued on the horizontal level but slower and with more sense of weight. One could sense a navel being in touch with the surface of the floor. The expedition group leaders were using their limbs to push against the floor to move the navel in space. The movement of the pelvis started to appear on each body changing the movement quality to be more elastic around the spine. The wormy bodies one by one found an upright position.

As all the expedition group leaders were standing, they all took out their cream color pieces of fabric. The square pieces were hanging in front of their legs as they were holding the fabrics from the upper ends. Together spread around the space they started to lift the fabrics upward, fabric touching the chin, face and hair. The fabric continued its way down through the back of the head, through the upper back and as the arms rotated out and the fists that hold the fabric lowered there was a moment of pause. Together the expedition group leaders continued taking the fabrics up through the upper back and head where the motion continued its way down while the fabric was wiping the face with the touch. The movement paused again just for a moment once the fabrics came down. Each of them was gazing around them and continuing for the next round of touch. In

the end of the second round the fabric was used to go through the arms as if the arms were washed with touch of the fabric. The third round accumulated to also touch the navel with the fabric after touching through the arms. In the fourth round the movement continued from the backside of the body. The movement didn't stop but the touch continued its way on the back of the ties and through the caves. The expedition group leaders took the fabric below their feet and laid it on the floor, spreading it wide. Then each of them took off their shoes and stepped on the fabric. The choreography with the fabric was accompanied by music made by Jyri.

The guide said thank you to the expedition group leaders and announced it was time to move into the expedition groups. There were three groups (except in the last performance only two since one performer was away) one had their meeting place on the third floor and two on the second floor.³⁴

The leaders of expedition groups went through the guidelines for the journey with the group members, called explorers. The core of the guideline is that the navel expedition is voluntary, and one can finish their journey at any moment. It was also said that the group members might be looked at by the other people while the expedition takes place in semi-public space. The explorers were asked to focus on their own experience and be guided from it. At the same time, however, it was necessary to respect other explorers, as well as the leaders of the expedition and their right to self-definition.



*Napapiiri - Navel
Circle dance
performance.*

The expedition group
leaders are guiding
the members
through the *navel
opening exercise.*

Photo by Salla Valle.

³⁴ The group on the third floor was English and if needed Finnish speaking. The groups on the second floor were Finnish speaking and the one that started its journey from the original base camp was particularly for the ones with a fear of heights (and if needed English speaking).

After the group had talked through the principles the expedition group leaders proposed to do the *navel opening exercise* together. As each of the explorers were ready after the *navel opening exercise* the leaders told them that they would next start the journey down the stairs. They instructed everyone to take hold of a becket of the rope. It was suggested to place the hand holding the becket on one's navel so that the group could be connected to each other's movements via navels. The expedition group leader in the front of the rope would guide the group with their navel's movement and the explorers could follow the way they felt like their navels were moving along. There was no right or wrong way to move. The explorers were encouraged to move with their navels by listening to their desires.

The three groups started more or less at the same time their navel expeditions. While they moved to the staircases the group leader in the front reminded explorers about safety and suggested to hold on to the bar with their free hand. The journey continued all the way down to the first-floor lobby and from there to the Kuva/Tila gallery space. Along the way the explorers were surrounded by other artworks and audience members. The journey was accompanied by music made by Jyri. One could still hear while exploring the movement of the navel in the gallery space. As the group leader found the destination of the exploration, they asked the group to form a circle and wait until the other groups had arrived too.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance. The expedition group leader guiding the members to a journey where they were invited to explore the movement of their navel while being connected to other navels via rope. Photo by Salla Valle. (On the staircase wall: *Exile and Pride*, 2023, by Siiri Korhonen)

As all the groups had found their way down to the left corner of the Kuva/Tila gallery, the guide welcomed them to the origin of the navel enthusiasm, to the source where the exploration around the navel had begun. There was a spring that the explorers could go to admire but first the expedition group leaders wanted to offer, to the ones who wanted, *navel care*.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance.

1) The expedition group leader guiding the members about toward “the source”.
(On the wall the installation of paintings by Tommi Pasanen)
Photos by Salla Valle.

2) Guide of the journey sharing information the destinations and the upcoming program.
(At the background *Paatti*, 2023, by Anna Pekkala)

The forms of *navel care* were then introduced by the expedition group leaders. First, they invited the group members to sit down and offered chairs for the ones that wanted. Then the leaders took out their instruments of *navel care* and started carefully placing them. Setting of the instruments took place in silence after which they told that they would offer three different *navel care/cleaning rituals* with the instruments they had displayed. One was cleaning with air by blowing air through a straw, another dry cleaning with a stick with a fabric head that would be rotated and third one was a wet cleaning with a piece of fabric that was moisten with warm water from a thermos. All the three cleanings were finished with a wipe with a dry piece of fabric. Then the expedition group

leaders³⁵ demonstrated the ritual for the group. The group leader asked if the person wanted a navel cleaning. If the answer was yes, they invited the person to come to the mattress they had put on the floor. The group leader asked which cleaning the group member felt like having and if the person wanted, the group leader performed how the touch of that instrument felt like on the arm. When there was an agreement, the person was invited to lay down and at this moment the other group members were asked to close their eyes and support the ritual with their navels. The group leader said that they would start when the person lifted their shirt up. When the cleaning ritual was performed, the person was asked to stay to support others. The group leaders asked everyone if they wanted to have *navel care*. Once everybody had had a chance to express their wants, the leaders told that explorers could now go and experience the spring around them. The *navel care rituals* and the explorations around the spring were accompanied by music from Jyri.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance.

The expedition group leaders introducing their instruments for the *navel care/cleaning ritual*.



The expedition group leaders introducing the *navel care/cleaning* options and presenting it to the group members.

Photos by Salla Valle.

³⁵ In the group where there was only one expedition group leader, they asked the guide to join for this part.

As the *navel care/cleaning rituals* were performed, the group leaders packed their instruments and stepped around the plaster casted negative of a navel in two lines³⁶. From there they got down in zigzag formation leaning back on one forearm. Then the group leaders simultaneously lifted their shirt and revealed their navels. Making it visible that their navels were on the same line with the negative. Each group leader was holding a straw and the ones most close to the negative placed their straws inside the sculpture that was filled with water. They took the straws to their navels and lifted their thumbs off which caused water from the straw to drip out. After the second round, the next on the line took water from the first one and a line of *navel pools* started to appear. As the navel of the last one on the line was full the direction of the production line was altered. Once the navel of the last one on the line got emptied, they turned on their side towards the others. When the navels were empty the ones closest to the negative placed their straws on the edge of it after which the next one gave theirs and that one was placed on the edge of the negative. This repeated one more time as all the straws were laid down by the water source. Then collectively the group leaders lowered their shirts and stood up.



Napapiiri - Navel Circle dance performance. The public and expedition group members witnessing the appearance and disappearance of *navel pools*. Photo by Salla Valle.

Next one of the leaders spoke in Finnish and another in English proposing to do a guided *navel closing exercise* together in a circle formation. After the *navel closing exercise*, the guide stepped

³⁶ In the last performance where one performer was away there was only one line.

to join in the circle and proposed to end the expedition with a toast. They started to take out carton cups from the bag and hand them out to the person on their right side who was handing them forward, forming a production line of some sort. As all the people had a cup on their hand the guide suggested exploring with the small icy navel sculpture that was in the cup. One could touch the navel with their tongue, take to their mouth, palm or find whatever comfortable way of being with that material object for a moment. Then they proposed a toast for the navel. After a while the guide started to collect the cups from their right-hand side. As all the cups were collected the expedition group leaders stepped inside the circle and formed a smaller circle facing the outer one. They bowed and invited for the second round of bowing me, the guide, and Jyri. The performance lasted around 75 minutes.



*Napapiiri - Navel
Circle dance
performance.*

The public
witnessing and
possibly
participating in the
*navel closing
exercise.*

(Hanging from the
ceiling *Paatti*, 2023,
by Anna Pekkala)

Photo by Salla
Valle.

being with the work

During the time that the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition took place I was taking part in the thesis writing seminar led by Lena Séraphin where I got an assignment to write with my art. The task was to be in the presence of the work, to walk around it and to write about the interpretation or experience with it. I decided to write with the *choreographic installation* when the exhibition was open. I really wanted to write with the dance performance but did not find a possible way to do it. My writing focused on what I perceived including my thoughts and the happenings around the work. Writing a text was another way of documenting the work. The written format can reveal aspects and layers of the work that would not necessarily be tangible through other mediums.

Writing with Art

Lots of colors

Pieces

That whiteness surrounds

Word navel repeats in finnish and english

Napa

There are shadows that repeat the uneven frames of the individual pieces

People stepping over the rope

Few navels are floating on wheels

One is carrying another one

There's quietness in the works and at the same time words that overlap

They address me or someone

One could just pass them

Think oh I know this

They could also stay and touch, listen

There's so much here and little at the same time

A navel looks at me

I feel my own

And my full belly after lunch

I didn't read the words on the paper

Handout was a pit wrinkled or looked like wet

that wetness took my attention

Afterall I know the words inside - I wrote them

With the bodies I sit down and sense the stillness

Is it peaceful

connection and memories

I sat there before

A performance happened here already twice

There was care and concentration

Laughing and smiles, some looking at the phone probably the time

Melting ice inside the body

Skin, on the wall, on the floor, organic material

Working with different materials

How do I look at this

Do i look at it as a choreographer

It travels on the walls, starts to lower down on the floor

You can sit on the floor

On a pedestal
Listen and sense
Follow with your gaze the rope that bonds and takes eyes towards
A body, a belly button, beeswax, plaster
textures, some textiles
Some visitors asks from each other how their navels are shaped
Is this the part of the identity conversation that I didn't understand from HBLs critic
Did the critic look for themselves from the work
Question of identity, individual, community, society, being a human

Both the *choreographic installation* and the *dance performance* invited the bodies of the audience to spend time with themselves among the art works and the other bodies. The works addressed the audience directly and called them to be aware and with their sensing body. In both works the element of touch was there as a language to make sense of the work which as a cueing system consists of risks of assuming and burdening the audience. Manning writes that “[...] to call to touch is never straightforward. For it is a call, and like all calls it asks that it be listened to in certain ways, that it elicit behavior considered manageable under the conditions of the work.”³⁷ To me the touch needs to be framed in the work to be somewhat particular and I see it as part of the *choreographic thinking* of the work. Therefore, the risk in touch and reaching towards the unknown can be experienced as not that risky or open-ended but rather predefined. At the moment I think that the experience with a choreographic work depends a lot on the skills of the artmaker to be aware of their expectations toward the audience as well as the viewer-experiencer's range of sensitivity towards attuning with the activities of the cues. I'm not sure if the potential that the installation work meant to unleash was reached yet for most of the public, but I know based on the feedback that there were also very strong experiences with it.

Overall, I am still rather confused with the installation work because of the feedback that I received from the colleagues from performing arts and dance differentiated so much from the ones I got in the context of the studies. When the audiences with the background in dance were talking about their experiences with the work, I could hear that they had read the cues in the work and been activated by them. Whereas while listening to the feedback in the critics round in the context of the studies I heard comments and questions that I couldn't really understand. The gap in between the disciplines fascinates me while at the same time it is also demanding because of the short period of the studies. I feel like I leave with more questions than I came with. I will keep on pondering what is a sculpture and how to work with the concept in the future. At the moment, I am interested in discovering more gallery-based performance works that engage with sculptures. I am in the process of learning more about the performativity of a sculpture. The dynamic range of a sculpture fascinates me as well as the ways in which it can engage and encounter with the audience.

³⁷ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 124.

toward the end of the text

The whole artistic part of this body of work was a participatory art project in which I took a huge risk of trying out multiple new things at the same time. As I was learning a new technique with mold making and casting, I was also putting myself in a new situation of facilitation as well as getting to know the *Academy of Fine Arts* with its traditions, workflows and focuses. When I got the idea of the project, I was first insecure with it but got support from a colleague. I knew it would be a lot to handle because of the experience of creating collectively but I also thought that it was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn. As my supervisor was also excited by the idea of creating two works side by side, I got the final sense of confidence to continue planning the work. To be honest I feel like that at that point the work had already started: I had a strong sense of the situation where I wanted to invite the audience. The starting point for my performance works often are that I know how the work should feel like for the audience after which I begin to search how to achieve that.

When looking at the first draft of plaster navel casts on my desk and thinking back the feeling that I got when I was chiseling the plaster and getting the alginate out. I was imagining that I was an archaeologist. The exploration I do with the body, body parts and their relations to the past and present are the work I do as an artist. This concrete action of digging something out, hitting material with a tool, made the mining actual. This strong sense of action, search and discovery taking place, here and now in my work was something very different from the experiences I have when I work with other people. There was a sense of satisfaction, excitement, exhaustion and secrecy. I would be the one experiencing the discovery of the ruin first. The work would be revealed to my eyes soon. I could see it, touch it, be with it by myself. When working with others in the context of a performance I am dependent on them. The work becomes to be with the people and by the people. At some point of the process there is the moment of letting go of the work and allowing it to morph in the capable body-minds of the performers. I can carry the experience of the work with me, but I can't touch it while we reach toward each other.

In relation to performance work it was also a very interesting and unfamiliar situation to write a contract for selling art objects. Parts of the *choreographic installation* were bought by the *Saastamoinen Foundation* collection in *Espoo Modern Art Museum*. It was the first time that I thought about my artwork's life beyond my own. In the context of the *Kuvan Kevät* exhibition I often heard performances being called temporary or transient which always made me wonder why those aspects are underlined when talking about performances. Through the experience of packing some of my works for the museum, creating documents for proving the works originality and describing how to take care of them, I started to sense the temporal difference in the life of an art object and life performance. The navel sculptures are among other things a trace of the whole body of work. It feels hard to let go of the writing process and hand out the last part of the thesis because I sense that there will be things that I forgot to say that would have deserved to be cemented to this written component.

As the foundation of my work lies in thinking about the ethics of the practice, I keep on learning more by working with different art-forms, beings, materials and structures. The questions related to collaborating were and continue to be: how to frame the work clearly for others, how to be transparent about the expectations, how to propose collaboration, how to facilitate, how to talk about consent and touch. This was the first process where I looked for and worked with volunteers, the first time I ever did an open call for my project and first time I ever wrote participation verification and rejection letters by myself. This was also the first time I worked with a fine arts institution. Now everything wasn't executed as well as I would have wanted to, but I also see that I'm learning while doing. I also realize that I would have a lot of topics to talk about in this thesis, like politics between the audiences, the works and the gallery context which are to be continued in another time. Something that brings ease is to think of the concept of *beginner's mind* from Zen Buddhism.



After taking down the *choreographic installation* at the Kuva/Tila gallery. Photo by Lin Martikainen.

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Touch Lab by Kaisa Kukkonen in Humina 30.1.-27.2. at 19-20:30 <https://fb.me/e/3FyD6HMuL>

Courses

Mold making and casting course by Kaisaleena Halinen 13.09.-23.09.2022.

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Alginate as a material for molding and casting explained in *FormX* store's website

<https://formx.eu/molding--casting/alginate/index.php>

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Invitation letter

Seeking queer people to collaborate with on a navel gazing thesis work // The call is open until 9.1.

Hi,

I'm Lin, a non-binary queer person, a choreographer-performer, and a pilates and yin yoga instructor. Since graduating with an MA in choreography in 2016, I have for the most part worked as a freelance dance and performance professional in different kinds of working groups. I am currently enrolled in the Time and Space MFA Programme at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki.

I'm seeking queer people to participate in the developing process of my thesis work; people with an interest in formulating a practice that centers around the belly button, touch, and movement, working together as part of a working group, and who would be willing to share the results of this artistic research in the form of a performance over a three day period in May 2023. Participants are expected to commit to the process and to actively participate in the dance-based practices and discussions that we will be working with. It is important that participants have an interest in performing, dancing and movement and a desire to take part in both of the two parts of this thesis artwork. I will be in charge of directing the working group and the formulation of the thesis work, in dialogue with the group.

My thesis artwork comprises two parts, the first of which is an installation made up of belly button sculptures, documented discussions, videos and photographs, while the second part is a performance focusing on the study of the navel through touch and movement.

All adults who identify as queer are welcome to join the working group, with no upper age limit.

Within the group, we will work with ways of making connection with the individual's own body and movement through methods of contemporary dance, improvisation and somatic exercises. No prior experience or background in dance is necessary. The group will include a maximum of ten people.

The group will begin work in January 2023, and continue up until May 2023.

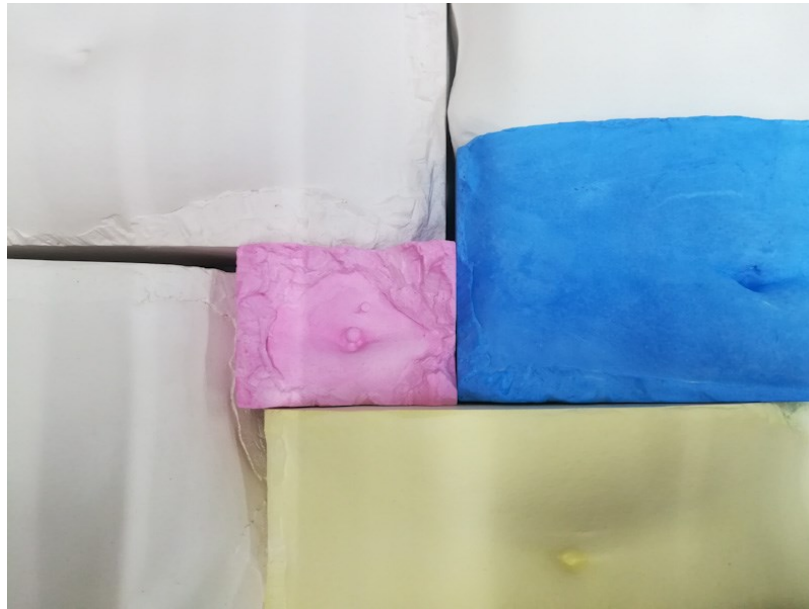


Photo: Lin Martikainen

In my artistic research, I study the navel as an opening space, and its relative similarity to other openings of the human body. The belly button is a corporeal memory of another, a parent. The scarified surface of the navel speaks to me as a haunting trace of a connection to another human, reminding us of humanity's fundamental dependency of one to the other. My work observes what this body part says about itself in the form of sculpture, and also what begins to happen in the interaction between the sculpted object and the living body in a performance situation. As we work with these themes as a group, participants will be asked to be present with their own navels, and to reach both outwards and inwards from their navel, into external and internal worlds. What is it like to touch with a belly button? What kind of a place is the navel? Where does it lead?

I will speak more extensively of the intended work in the first group meeting, including about things that I already know I want to pursue, but also about some of the ideas that are still in process. I will invite each participant to meet with me at the end of January. These one-on-one meetings will centre on shared discussion around the themes of touch and interaction, but we will also take a moment to make a mould of the participants belly button, which will later be used to make a cast sculpture. This sculpture will be part of our group performance and installation. Starting in February, we will meet as a group for workshops at weekends and on weekday evenings. These sessions won't require any preparation from the participants, but I may ask that group members take some time to think about a given topic or question prior to our meeting.

I will be documenting the process of this project with audio recordings, photography and video, which will later be used in the installation part of the artwork. Both the installation and the performance will be part of the Kuvan Kevät MFA Degree exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts in May 2023.

Consent is fundamental to all group work and to the documenting of the situations we will be sharing together. This means (for example) that we should always ask for permission when touching another person, and that nothing should be posted to social media without asking for permission first. Saying 'no' in any situation is always allowed, and the complete thesis project work will be formed by what we have collectively agreed upon as a group.

As part of this project, I offer participants a working environment committed to Safer Space Principles, in which everyone will have the opportunity to explore their individual relationship with their body and their belly button through movement and touch. The specific Safer Space Principles devised for this project will be gone over in detail in our first group meeting. The ethical foundations of this project are confidentiality, everyone's individual right to both self-determination and indecision in relation to the self, and mutual respect. Discrimination of any form will not be accepted in the group, including racism, transphobia, ageism, sexism, body shaming, class discrimination or ableism. I aim to develop how the group works together in collaboration with all participants.

The work will be in either Finnish or English, depending on the requirements of the group. We will use spaces at the Theatre Academy and the Academy of Fine Arts, both in Haapaniemi, Helsinki. Accessibility info for both may be found here:

<https://www.uniarts.fi/en/locations/academy-of-fine-arts-main-building-myilly/>

<https://www.uniarts.fi/en/locations/theatre-academy-main-building-kookos/>

You may apply to participate in this project by filling in the form below. Please also outline your personal interest in participating in the project.

The call is open until 9.1.2023. You can access the form via this [link](#).

Spots in the group are limited, and I will inform all interested parties about the selections by 12.1.2023

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at lin.martikainen@uniarts.fi

Participation in the thesis project is not financially compensated, and taking part is free of charge. If you are currently a student, you may be entitled to study points in your study programme in exchange for participating in this project.

Projected schedule (2023)

9.1. Last day of open call for applications, Monday

12.1. All applicants contacted with news of selections, Thursday

20.1. Group meeting in which we will view the studio spaces that we will be working in, and Lin will introduce the plans for the thesis project, Friday 6pm - 8pm

21.1.-29.1. One-on-one meetings and mould making, Sat-Sun and Tue-Sun, (please choose a suitable date for yourself in the initial application form)

11.-12.2. Collective workshop weekend, Sat-Sun 1pm - 4.15pm

2.3. Collective workshop meeting, Thursday 6pm - 8.30pm

11.-12.3. Collective workshop weekend, Sat-Sun 1pm - 4.15pm + discussion in two breakout groups, one group on Saturday and the other on Sunday, both 4.15pm - 5pm (each group member will take part in only one of these sessions)

23.3. Collective workshop evening, Thursday 6pm - 8.30pm

1. - 2.4. Collective workshop weekend, Sat-Sun 1pm - 4.15pm

22. - 23.4. Collective workshop weekend, Sat-Sun 1pm - 4.15pm

3.5. Evening rehearsal at KuvA/Tila, Wednesday 6pm - 8.30pm

9.5. Evening rehearsal at KuvA/Tila, Tuesday 6pm - 8.30pm

11.5. Evening rehearsal at KuvA/Tila, Thursday 6pm - 8.30pm

14.5. Sharing the performance workshop with the audience in KuvA/Tila, Sunday 1pm - 4pm

21.5. Sharing the performance workshop with the audience in KuvA/Tila, Sunday 1pm - 4pm

28.5. Sharing the performance workshop with the audience in KuvA/Tila, Sunday 1pm - 4pm

I look forward to hearing from you!

Yours,

Lin Da (artistic alias) / Lin Martikainen

Pronouns: they/them

www.lindamartikainen.com

IG: [_lin._da._](#)

PS. Please feel free to share the invitation letter with the people you think might be interested.

other inspirational sources

Books

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O'Neal, Lauren. "*Assembling a praxis: choreographic thinking and curatorial agency*." PhD diss., University of the Arts Helsinki, 2023. <http://www.urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-353-440-7>

appendix

Includes the introduction text of the *performative installation*, the catalog text of the two works part of the *Kuvan Kevät 2023* exhibition, the hand-out of the *Napapiiri - Navel Circle* dance performance and of the hand-out of the *choreographic installation*.

Video documentation of the *Napapiiri – Navel Circle* dance performance available by request.

Catalog text

What is it like to touch with a belly button? What kind of a place is the navel? Where does it lead?

Opening space comprises two parts, the first of which is an installation made up of belly button sculptures and documented discussions. The second part is a performance focusing on the study of the navel through touch and movement.

I study the navel as an opening space, and its relative similarity to other openings of the human body. The scarified surface of the navel speaks to me as a haunting trace of a connection to another human, reminding us of humanity's fundamental dependency of one to the other. My work observes what this body part says about itself in the form of sculpture, and also what begins to happen in the interaction between the sculpted object and the living body in an installation situation. The performance explores the agency of a belly button and studies the navel as the first mouth of the body.

Last winter I was seeking volunteers through an open invitation letter to participate in the developing process of the work; people with an interest in formulating a practice that centers around the belly button, touch, and movement. During this spring the volunteers and I started to work together as a group, and we will share the results of this process in the form of a performance on three days, taking place on 14.5., 21.5. and 28.5.

Introduction text

Performative installation with fabric sculptures and mould making
2023

Lin Da's collaborative process leading towards *Opening space* installation and performance begins in the exhibition. During the winter, Lin has assembled a group that explores the navel through movement, touch and dance. Each group member is going to make a mould of their belly button during the exhibition with Lin. Later the mould will be used to make a cast sculpture which will be part of the upcoming installation and public performances at the Kuvan Kevät exhibition in May. When the mould makings are not in progress, you are welcome to visit the mould making workspace, framed by fabric sculptures.

Napapiirin retkikunnan johtajat ja esiintyjät: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru ja Sora

Koollekutsuja, koreografi, matkan järjestäjä ja opas: Lin Da

Kanssakoreografit: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora ja Stefanía

Esityksen äänisuunnittelu ja musiikki: Jyri Pirinen

Opinnäytetyön ohjaaja: Julius Elo

Tukija: Taideyliopiston tukisäätiö

Kiitos:

Prosessista kiinnostuneet ja sitä tukeneet sekä eri tavoin kannustaneet, ystävät, kollegat, perheenjäsenet, Trasek, Seta ja Helsinki Pride kutsukirjeeni jakamisesta sekä työstä, mitä teette, Amita Kilumanga köysistä, Heli, Jonna, Milla ja Sydney koeyleisöksi asettumisesta, Tero Niskanen ääniteknisestä kanssa-ajattelusta, James Prevett kaikesta avusta, Laura Pietiläinen henkisestä tuesta, Daniel Peltz luottamuksesta, Julius Elo tuesta, tarkkanäköisyydestä, jäsentelystä ja valtaisasta läsnäolon määrästä.

The leaders and performers of the Navel Circle expedition: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru and Sora

Convener, choreographer, organizer and guide of the trip: Lin Da

Co-choreographers: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora and Stefanía

Sound design and music for the performance: Jyri Pirinen

Thesis supervisor: Julius Elo

Supporter: The UniArts Helsinki Foundation

Thank you:

Those who were interested in the process and who supported it and encouraged it in different ways, friends, colleagues, family members, Trasek, Seta and Helsinki Pride for passing on my invitation letter and for the work you do, Amita Kilumanga for the ropes, Heli, Jonna, Milla and Sydney for acting as an pre-audience, Tero Niskanen for the sound technical co-thinking, James Prevett for all the help, Laura Pietiläinen for the emotional support, Daniel Peltz for the trust, Julius Elo for support, foresight, structuring and a huge amount of presence.

Napapiiri - Navel Circle

Napapiiri-esitykset ovat osa Lin Dan kaksiosaista opinnäytetyötä Kuvataideakatemia Kuvan Kevät -maisterinäyttelyssä.

Napapiiri - Navel Circle performances are part of Lin Da's thesis work in Kuvan Kevät exhibition.

Napapiiri on rituaalisia elementtejä sisältävä tanssiteos kosketuksesta, ihosta sekä yhteisyyden hakemisesta ja muodostamisesta.

Napapiiri-esityksessä lähdetään tutkimusmatkalle napaan. Matkan tarkoituksena on tutustua napaan kokemuksellisesti. Yleisö voi tulla mukaan esitykseen kahdella tapaa; seuraamalla sitä sivusta tai osallistumalla mukaan tutkimusmatkaan osana retkikuntaa. Esitykset alkavat Kuvataideakatemian Mylly-rakennuksen toisesta kerroksesta. Sivusta esitystä seuraava yleisö voi liikkua vapaasti kerrosten välillä.

Tanssiteoksen työryhmän esiintyjäjäsenet, Laura, Lätsä, Maru, Nilas ja Sari, ovat tulleet mukaan prosessiin avoimen kutsukirjeen kautta. Prosessi on ollut monivaiheinen ja se on sisältänyt muun muassa napamuottivalun kunkin esiintyjän kanssa. Napavalut osana Dan installaatiota, joka on esillä Kuvan Kevät -näyttelyssä ensimmäisen kerroksen Kuva/Tila -galleriassa. Valujen lisäksi olemme viettäneet aikaa yhdessä työpajoissa, joiden aikana yleisölle jaettava esitys on muotoutunut. Työpajoja on ollut yhteensä kolmesta ja niiden kestot ovat olleet 2,5–4 tuntia kerrallaan. Esiintyjät tulevat erilaisista taustoista tanssin, liikkumisen ja esiintymisen pariin. Yhteiset nimittäjät ovat olleet henkilökohtainen suhde queer-identiteettiin sekä kiinnostus napan äärellä olemiseen liikkeen, kosketuksen ja ryhmätyöskentelyn kautta.

Lisäksi mukana teoksessa on Dan pitkäaikainen yhteistyökumppani äänisuunnittelija-säveltäjä Jyri Pirinen, jonka kanssa työskentely sai alkunsa 2015 tanssielokuvakurssilla Dan opiskellessa koreografian maisteriksi ja Pirisen viimeistellessä elokuvaäänisuunnittelun maisteriopintojaan.

Napapiiri – Navel Circle (name in Finnish for The Arctic Circle) is a dance performance with ritual elements about touch, skin and the search and composition of connection.

The performance leads the participant on an expedition to the navel. The purpose of the trip is to get to know the navel experientially. There are two ways in which the audience can join the performance; by witnessing it from the sidelines or participating in the expedition. The performances begin on the second floor of the Mylly building. The audience following the performance from the sidelines can move freely between the floors.

The performer members, Laura, Lätsä, Maru, Nilas ja Sari, of the dance work have become involved in the process through an open invitation letter. The process has been multifaceted and has included, among other things, navel mold casting with each performer. The navel casts are part of Dan's installation that is on display at the Kuvan Kevät exhibition at Kuva/Tila gallery on the first floor. In addition to castings, we have spent time together in workshops, during which the dance work to be distributed to the public has taken shape. There have been a total of thirteen workshops and their durations have been 2.5–4 hours at a time. The performers come from different backgrounds to dance, movement and performance. The common denominators have been a personal relationship with queer identity and an interest in being with the navel through movement, touch and collaboration.

The work also features Dan's long-time collaborator sound designer and composer Jyri Pirinen with whom they started working with in 2015 during a dance film course, while Dan was studying for a master's degree in choreography and Pirinen was completing his master's studies in film sound design.

Koreografinen installaatio
kosketuksien,
 ihojen ja
 erilaisten materiaalien
kestollisuuksien ja
suhteisuuksien
kuuntelusta.

Choreographic installation
on listening
to the durationality and
relationships
of touches,
 skins and
different materials.

Aukeama-käsiohjelma

Handout of Opening space

miten olla yhdessä

how to be together

osaanko kuunnella itseäni

can i listen to myself

entä muita

what about others

asetan rajani.

i set my boundaries.

lähestyn sinua

i approach you

haluatko tulla kosketetuksi

how do you want to be touched

saanko koskettaa

may i touch

tähän

here

Köysi pidentää ruumiini rajat. Tunnen
painovoiman painavuuden, kun köysi laskeutuu
alas.

Kannattelen päätäsi. (Ainiin sitä ei olekaan.)

Valjaat venyvät ja liikuttavat kehosi pintaa.

Synteettinen kudος kiristyy.

Ruumiit jotenkin erillisiä. Sama vesi virtaa niissä
kuin aiemmin putkistoissa. Sitä ennen ehkä jäänä
jossain.

Valtameren kuohunta sisälläsi.

Navasta virrannut eestaas napapiirilläkin
aikaansa viettänyt molekyyli. Huvittavaa.

Juon navasta.

Ah

Kuuntelen napasi maisemaa. Valtameri sisälläsi.
Ehkä ei niin erillistä. Onko osa minussa vellovaa
tihkunut sinusta?

Nuolaiset ihoani.

Sekoittuvat ruumiit. Välillämme ja meissä,
siellä, täällä ja tuolla. Lämmin sininen koskettaa
vatsani ihoa. On tuttua ja vierasta. Avautuu tilaa.

Kutsun sinut kohtaamiseen. Tuletko?

The rope elongates the outlines of my body. I feel
the weight of gravity when the rope settles
down.

I hold your head. (Oh I see it's not there.)

The harness stretches and moves the surface of your body.

Synthetic tissue tightens.

Bodies somehow separate. The same water flows in them
as before in pipelines. Before that, maybe as ice
somewhere.

The turmoil of the ocean inside you.

A molecule that flowed from the navel back and forth has once
spent time in the Arctic Circle. Amusing.

I drink from the navel.

Ah

I listen to the landscape of your navel. The ocean inside you.
Perhaps not so separate. Has part of what is churning in me
oozed out of you?

You lick my skin.

Merging bodies. Between us and within us,
in there, here and there. Warm blue touches
the skin of my belly. There is familiarity and strangeness. Space opens up.

I invite you to an encounter. Will you join?

Aukeama

Aukeama on monivaiheinen teoskokonaisuus ja prosessi, joka käynnistyi julkisesti avoimen kutsukirjeen myötä joulukuussa 2022. Hain prosessiin mukaan vapaaehtoisia, joita kiinnosti työskennellä oman navan, kosketuksen ja liikkeen kanssa osana ryhmää sekä jakaa työskentelyä julkisen esityksen muodossa osana Kuvan Kevät 2023 -näyttelyä. Yli kahdenkymmenen kiinnostuneen hakijan joukosta ryhmään valikoitui 10 henkilöä, joista 5 on mukana Napapiiri-esityksessä.

Kiinnostukseni napaa kohtaa johtaa juurensa suuhun, jonka parissa olen kehitellyt praktiikkaa yhdessä ja itsenäisesti vuodesta 2018. Tein suuveistoksia syksyllä 2022 muotti- ja valukurssilla, jossa pohdin, mitä muuta ruumiin aukkoa kehtaisin lähteä tutkimaan kurssin kontekstissa. Päädyin kysymään uudelta koulukaverilta ja kurssin assistentilta, voisiko hän tehdä navastani muottivalun. Hän suostui ja se, mitä minussa tapahtui valun yhteydessä kokemuksellisella tasolla, antoi sysäyksen Aukeamalle. Valussa erilaisten materiaalien sekä koulukaverini kosketukset navallani ja sen ympärillä laukaisivat huomioita sekä kuvanveistosta kosketuspohjaisena praktiikkana että navasta erityisenä, mutta artikuloimattomana kokemuksellisenä paikkana.

Päädyin avoimen kutsukirjeen tekemiseen, sillä halusin lähteä tutkimaan, millaisia suhteita muilla ihmisillä on kyseiseen ruumiin osaan. Tammikuun 2023 lopulla käynnistyi Aukeama-projektin ensimmäinen yhteistyövaihe osana Tila- ja aikataiteiden näyttelyä, jossa tapasin työskentelyyn osallistuvat ryhmäläiset ensimmäisen kerran. Tapaamisella puhuimme työskentelyn raameista ja teimme johdollani napaharjoituksen. Yhteistapaamisen lisäksi tapasin kunkin ryhmäläisen napamuottivalun merkeissä, missä keskustelimme muun muassa napaan liittyvistä muistoista ja navan osasta kunkin elämässä.

Kuvan Kevät -näyttelyn installaatiossa esillä olevat napaveistokset ovat pääosin tammikuussa otettujen muottien pohjalta valettuja, mutta mukana on myös muutamia veistoksia jotka ovat syntyneet prosessin aiemmissa vaiheissa. Ryhmäläisten lisäksi napamalleina toimi muitakin vapaaehtoisia, joista suurin osa otti osaa tammikuussa näyttelyssä tapahtuneisiin muottivaluihin. Tällöin syntyi myös päätös napaveistosten anonymiteetistä. Työskentelyssäni minulle on tärkeitä pohtia tekemisen eettisyyttä, valta- ja vastuusuhteita sekä olosuhteita, joissa taidetta tehdään. Aukeaman kohdalla mietin, mitä opinnäytetyökonteksti voisi mahdollistaa. Päädyin ajattelemaan opinnäytetyön tekemistä tutkimuksellisuuden lisäksi sosiaalisesta näkökulmasta, missä painottui ruumiillisen työskentelyn turvallisuus seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen näkökulmasta. Päätös kohderyhmän rajaamisesta seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöihin tuli halusta avata tilaa niin itselleni kuin muille queer-ihmisille tulla yhteen ruumiillisen olemisen äärelle ja luoda yhdessä tilaa tarkastella napaa omista kokemuksista sekä jaetusta praktiikasta käsin muun muassa turvallisen tilan periaatteiden rajaamana. Työpajoiksi nimeämiäni yhteenkokoontumisia oli kevään aikana yhteensä kolme toista, joiden lisäksi kohtaamme ryhmän kanssa yleisöä 3 esityksen verran. Esityksessä jaamme yleisölle työpajojen löydöksiä.

Kirjoittaessani tätä tekstiä työpajoja on jäljellä vielä 3. Niiden aikana viimeistelemme esityksen. Installaatio on viimeisiä viilauksia vaille valmis kohtaamaan yleisön. Toivon, että teoskokonaisuus puhuttelee ennen kaikkea ruumiillis-aistisesti ja saa myös pohtimaan kosketuksen sekä koskettumisen osaa taiteen kokemisesta. Koskettamisen kysymys lävistää koko projektin työstämisen prosessin niin esityksen kuin installaation osalta. Siksikin: kannustan sinua tutkimaan koskettamista. Mitä jos painaisit korvasi kohti puhuvan veistoksen napaa? Mitä jos liu'uttaisit sormesi ihoa veistoksella?

Millainen kokemus siitä avautuu?

Lin

Aukeama - Opening space

Aukeama - Opening space is a multi-stage body of work and a process that started publicly an open invitation letter in December 2022. I sought volunteers to join the process, who were interested in working with the theme of navel gazing, touch and movement as part of a group and sharing the practice in the form of a public performance as part of the Kuvan Kevät 2023 exhibition. From more than twenty interested applicants, 10 people were selected for the group. Five of them are performing in the Napapiiri - Navel Circle performance.

My interest in the navel has its roots in working with the mouth. I have been developing a practice around the mouth by collaborating and working independently with the theme since 2018. I made mouth sculptures in the fall of 2022 in a mold making and casting course as a part of my MFA studies. In there I pondered what other opening of the body I would dare to explore in the context of the course. I ended up asking a new school mate and course assistant if they could make a mold cast of my navel. They agreed, and what happened to me during casting on an experiential level gave impetus to the Aukeama - Opening space. In the casting, the touches of different materials, as well as those of my schoolmate, on and around my navel, generated remarks both of sculpture as a touch-based practice and of the navel as a special but unarticulated experiential place in the body.

I ended up making an open invitation letter because I wanted to explore what kind of relationships other people have with that part of the body. At the end of January 2023, the first collaboration phase of the project started as part of the Time and Space department's exhibition, where I met the group for the first time. At the meeting, we talked about the framework of the collaboration and did a navel exercise with my guidance. In addition to the joint meeting, I met each member of the group for a navel mold casting, where we discussed, among other things, the memories associated with the navel and the role of the navel in each person's life.

The navel sculptures on display in the installation at the Kuvan Kevät exhibition are mainly casts done of molds taken in January but there are also a few sculptures that were created in the earlier stages of the process. In addition to the group members, there were also other volunteers participating in the mold castings that took place at the exhibition in January. At that time the decision was made about the anonymity of the navel sculptures. In my work, it is important for me to consider the ethics of creating, the relationships of power and responsibility, and the conditions in which art is made. In the case of Aukeama - Opening space, I was thinking about what the thesis context could enable. In addition to research, I ended up thinking about doing my thesis from a social perspective, where the emphasis was on the safety of working with one's body from the perspective of sexual and gender minorities. The decision to frame the target group to sexual and gender minorities came from the desire to open space for myself and other queer people to come together as bodily beings and to create a shared space to explore the navel from singular experiences and shared practices, delineated by the safer space guidelines, among other things. During the spring, there were a total of thirteen gatherings named as workshops. In addition to which there will be three performances, where we as group share the findings of the workshops with the public.

As I write this text, there are 3 more workshops left. During them, we will finalize the presentation. I'm adding the final touches to the installation after which it's ready to meet the public. Above all, I hope that the body of work speaks in a bodily-sensorial way and also makes you think about touch and the role of touch in experiencing art. The question of touching permeates the whole process of this work both of the performance and the installation. That's why: I encourage you to explore touch and touching. What if you pressed your ear on the navel of a talking sculpture? What if you were to slide the skin of your finger on the sculpture?

What kind of experience opens up?

Lin

Napapiiri

Napapiiri on rituaalisia elementtejä sisältävä tanssiteos kosketuksesta, ihosta sekä yhteisyyden hakemisesta ja muodostamisesta.

Napapiiri -esityksessä lähdetään tutkimusmatkalle napaan. Matkan tarkoituksena on tutustua napaan kokemuksellisesti. Yleisö voi tulla mukaan esitykseen kahdella tapaa; seuraamalla sitä sivusta tai osallistumalla mukaan tutkimusmatkaan.

Kokonaisvaltaisen esityskokemuksen saavutat ilmoittautumalla mukaan sähköpostitse: lin.martikainen@uniarts.fi
Kerro viestissä, mihin esitykseen haluat osallistua ja monta paikkaa varaat.

Esitykset ovat ilmaisia. Paikkoja on hyvin rajallisesti.

Esitysajat:
14.5 klo 14.00
21.5 klo 14.00
28.5 klo 14.00

Esitykset alkavat Kuvataideakatemia Mylly-rakennuksen toisesta kerroksesta. Sivusta esitystä seuraava yleisö voi liikkua vapaasti kerrosten välillä.

Esityskieli: suomi ja englanti

Kesto: 75min

Työryhmä

Napapiirin retkikunnan johtajat ja esiintyjät: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru ja Sora

Koollekutsuja, koreografi ja matkan opas: Lin Da

Kanssakoreografit: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora ja Stefanía

Esityksen äänisuunnittelu ja musiikki: Jyri Pirinen

Napapiiri - Navel Circle

Napapiiri - Navel Circle (name in Finnish for The Arctic Circle) is a dance performance with ritual elements about touch, skin and the search and composition of connection.

The performance leads the participant on an expedition to the Navel Circle. The purpose of the trip is to get to know the navel experientially. There are two ways in which the audience can join the performance; by witnessing it from the sidelines or participating in the expedition.

For a holistic performance experience, sign up by email: lin.martikainen@uniarts.fi
In the email, tell us which performance you want to attend and how many spots you will book.

The performances are free. Please note the spots are very limited.

Performances:
14.5 at 14.00
21.5 at 14.00
28.5 at 14.00

The performances begin on the second floor of the Mylly building of the Academy of Fine Arts. The audience members following the performance from the sidelines can move freely between the floors.

Language: Finnish and English

Duration: 75min

Working group

The leaders and performers of the Navel Circle expedition: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru and Sora

Convener, choreographer and guide of the trip: Lin Da

Co-choreographers: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora and Stefanía

Sound design and music for the performance: Jyri Pirinen

Convener and choreographer of the project: Lin Da

Sculptures, texts and sound design of the installation: Lin Da

Sound technical assistance and co-sound designer of the installation: Frank Rizzo

The leaders and performers of the Navel Circle expedition: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru and Sora

Choreographer and guide of the trip: Lin Da

Co-choreographers: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora and Stefanía

Sound design for the performance: Jyri Pirinen

Thesis supervisor: Julius Elo

Mentor: Laura Pietiläinen

Professor: Daniel Peltz

Supporter: The UniArts Helsinki Foundation

Thank you:

Kaisaleena Halinen, James Prevett, Tuomo Rainio, Roberto Pugliese, Tero Niskanen, studio visitors, Salla, Doğa, Natalie, Tanja, Kristiina, Sanna, schoolmates who have been present at different stages of the process, KatjaHannele, Jukka, Seppo, Sanja, Pauliina, and a particularly warm thank you to everybody who responded to the open invitation to work together in the context of this project! Finally, cheers for making kin(ships), to care, boundaries and love!

Projektin koollekutsuja ja koreografi: Lin Da

Installaation veistokset, tekstit ja äänisuunnittelu: Lin Da

Installaation äänitekkinen tuki ja apu sekä kanssäänisuunnittelija: Frank Rizzo

Napapiirin retkikunnan johtajat ja esiintyjät: Fri Nilas Lindell, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru ja Sora

Koreografi ja matkan opas: Lin Da

Kanssakoreografit: Fri Nilas Lindell, Fyodor, Laura Ropo, Lätsä, Maru, Sora ja Stefanía

Esityksen äänisuunnittelu ja musiikki: Jyri Pirinen

Opinnäytetyön ohjaaja: Julius Elo

Mentori: Laura Pietiläinen

Professori: Daniel Peltz

Tukija: Taideyliopiston tukisäätiö

Kiitos:

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