

Dark Lines

Works by Ian Bourgeot

Arkadia International Bookshop, 5.11.-12.12.2015



DARK LINES. WORKS BY IAN BOURGEOT

Arkadia International Bookshop, 5.11.-12.12.2015

Anastasia Isakova

Master's Thesis

Praxis Master's Programme

Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki

28.1.2018

Supervisor:

Veli Granö

Examiners:

Maria Hirvi-Ijäs

Kaija Kaitavuori



Book, 2015

Dedicated to my second family
Ian, Liisa, Erika and Thomas Bourgeot



Young Man Wearing a Great-Coat, 2015

Contents

3	Introduction
9	Chapter I : Before the exhibition
10	The Artist Ian Bourgeot
12	Ian Bourgeot in the context of outsider art
13	On selection process
17	Chapter II: Dark Lines. The exhibition
18	Arkadia International Bookshop
19	The space and structure of the exhibition
31	Chapter III: After the exhibition
32	On curating
34	Drawings from Exile and The Home of a Modern Man
39	Conclusion
42	Bibliography
43	Photographs



Green Tram Racing Majestically Through the Winter Night, 2015

Introduction

*There can never be a single story.
There are only ways of seeing.*

Arundhati Roy



Ancestral Home at the Beginning of Winter, 2015

One cold November afternoon in 2014, I was walking in Töölö with my fellow student and good friend Ulla-Maija Pitkänen. I had only recently moved to Helsinki from St. Petersburg, and didn't know the city very well. Ulla wanted to show me a bookstore on Nervanderinkatu, which, in her words, was an extraordinary place. Entering Arkadia International Bookshop, we were immediately welcomed by its owner Ian Bourgeot. Soon his wife, Liisa Bourgeot, also stepped in. I was surprised not only by the amount of books on display, the objects, the furniture and special atmosphere of the place, but also deeply touched by the friendly Bourgeot couple.

A few months later, I experienced the same feeling, as I received a message from Liisa. She wrote to me, suggesting that I might be interested in reading an essay written by her. The essay was about her husband's drawings and represented him as an artist – something quite different from the character of the bookseller, which I had encountered during my first visit to the shop. I was soon to discover also the special nature of Ian Bourgeot, the artist: he had never studied art, and had only drawn in complete solitude, hidden from the public.

I expressed my interest towards Ian's drawings, and was before long invited to visit Bourgeot's warehouse, situated next door to Arkadia. What I saw there made me feel perplexed and excited at the same time. There were piles of possibly hundreds of drawings, from the smallest ones on pieces of paper to five-meter-long canvases. The way they were stored impressed me: put into careful piles

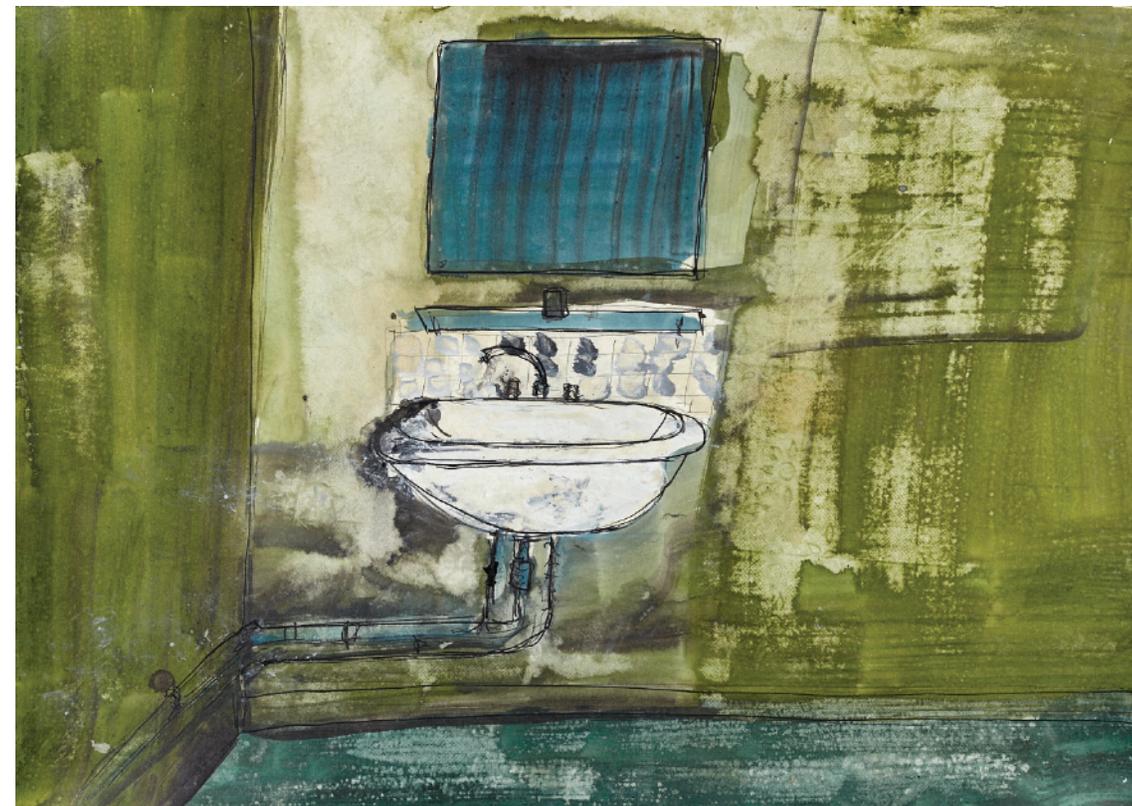
and folders, sorted out into a chronological order. No doubt, the artist was very serious about his work. The world depicted in the drawings was sincere and fascinating, and my curiosity about them grew even stronger. That is why when Liisa, all of a sudden, suggested to me to become a curator of Ian's first exhibition, I did not hesitate a minute.

This is how the story of *Dark Lines* and my active personal engagement in Bourgeot's artistic work - and life - started. I constantly felt the urge to know this artist better, because it was obvious that everything he drew was autobiographical. We did not speak much, but our meetings were quite frequent, and every time we talked, I listened to Ian carefully; each story was of a special value. Sometimes I felt it was extremely hard for him to share stories from his private life and speak about some matters related to his works. But, to me, it was essential, as it brought me closer to the ideas the drawings represented. At that time, I also realized that listening is working too.

Ian was not engaged in the process of selecting the drawings for the exhibition very actively, he would only moderately share his views on intermediate stages of the selection work. The reason behind it was not his lack of interest, but a fact that it was simply too uneasy for him to think that soon such a huge part of himself, his thoughts, his past, and his intimate place of retreat, would become public. Thus, most naturally, Liisa became my main working partner.

Arkadia immediately felt like the obvious and natural space for the exhibition. However, it also imposed some special demands in terms of the hanging: the drawings had to become a natural part of the environment and create a dialogue with the existing space. Entering the territory of the bookshop required a deep level of acquaintance with the place from me, and I spent much time simply getting to know its different rooms, their lights and shadows. The merging of the drawings with the environment of the bookshop was one of the most challenging and serious parts in making the exhibition.

This work is mainly based on my personal experience of discovering the art of Ian Bourgeot. As a student of curatorial studies, I am also profoundly interested in exhibitions' physical organisation in space. During my years of studies I understood that an exhibition space can never be neutral, it is never just a container of artworks, but rather a statement with its own arguments. I have knowingly put this written part of my final work into an essayistic, descriptive way. It helped me to focus better on different stages of the work on *Dark Lines*, where one of the core questions was the exhibition construction and spatial decision-making.



Bathroom at The Ancestral Home After the Great Fire, 2015



Man at His Desk in a Small Room, 2014

Chapter I

Before the exhibition

The Artist Ian Bourgeot

The aforementioned unpublished essay (which already bore the title *Dark Lines*) played a crucial role in the development of my understanding of Bourgeot's drawings and their aesthetics¹. In her essay, Liisa writes that Ian never called what he was doing *art*, and only recently started to associate himself with the term *artist*. In spite of this, he has always had a very serious, if not slightly complicated, relationship with his works: to him they were always more than just drawings, but he could not define exactly how.

Ian Bourgeot was born in London on September 26th 1962. His father was French, and his mother was half German and half Guatemalan. He lived in England, Mexico, Malaysia, France, Tunisia, The USA and Guatemala. In addition, he lived in quite a few other places for more than a month. The two countries that in the end have had the greatest influence on who he has become are the UK and France. Bourgeot studied in Sorbonne University, Université Paris 7 and Wesleyan University between 1983 and 1990. He started and never finished a PhD on the first 50 years of American Cinema.

Bourgeot first visited Finland in the early 1980s and it was then that he became interested in making artistic work for the first time. He worked on carving pieces of wood he found on the streets of Paris, and even wanted to go further and begin to carve bigger sculptures using a chainsaw, but stopped. The carved figures are reminiscent North American totemic symbols (Bourgeot 2014, 1).

Bourgeot never considered attending an art school or academy, since he never believed he would be admitted. "The people I knew who attended such schools knew how to draw and were, in my eyes, infinitely more competent than I was", he says (Bourgeot 26.5.2015). Bourgeot was attracted by conceptual art and even made attempts at producing some, but he felt he would have been incapable of explaining it. He never thought of making art his main activity; he had a keen interest in art, but not as something he could do. "I started visiting museums and galleries in Paris. A retrospective of Balthus is the first that made a true and solid impression on me. An exhibit of Courbet paintings in Brooklyn also affected me much", he continues (Ibid.). The exhibition of Francis Bacon in Paris in 1984 had a deep impact on Bourgeot: "Bacon made me see painting in a new way and he has been very important to me ever since" (Ibid.).

Several things influenced the development of Bourgeot's subjects and his choice of materials. He doodled a lot, mostly with a fountain pen, while listening to lectures at school and university. Later, he would make small sketches in a notebook during coffee breaks between lessons (he used to work as a language teacher). German expressionist cinema (*M* by Friz Lang, 1931) and French comics (or bandes dessinées) from the 1970s (*À Suivre*) had a great visual influence on his aesthetics and ways of drawing.

¹ Liisa wrote it in 2014, after having conducted an interview with her husband. She has always felt passionate about the drawings, and her enthusiasm was one of the driving forces behind the organisation of Ian's first exhibition.

In Helsinki in 2005, Bourgeot rented a studio to work in for the first time. There, he started to produce larger paintings, the biggest of them about five meters long. The materials he used were mainly black ink and coffee as well as gesso and gouache on paper or canvas. "The large sheets of papers were simply tempting. They frightened me a little at first, but I got used to them extremely fast. I think I would like to draw large drawings again. Given the choice I think I would do drawings of all sizes all the time", he says (Ibid.).

During the years leading up to the first exhibition, Bourgeot worked mostly with the size A2. Almost all the more recent drawings have been produced at home, at his working desk, with a considerable speed: in 5 to 15 minutes. "I often start by drawing with a pencil. Then I use a penholder with a nib or a sharpened bamboo stick. Afterwards I use a brush to apply ink (sometimes gouache) often mixed with coffee. Finally, I use absorbent paper to soak of the excess ink and coffee. The brushes I prefer are extremely ordinary gesso brushes", he describes a process (Ibid.).

Besides drawings, there is a number of projects that are connected to Bourgeot's interest in pictorial representation. One of them is his constantly growing collection of images which he has been posting on Facebook almost daily since 2010. The images (of which there are by now almost 14 000) are photographs, film stills, paintings, drawings etc., mainly from the end of 19th century to early 1970s. To me they have been one more way to approach and understand Bourgeot's aesthetics and perception of reality. Bourgeot is interested in the interaction between people and how

they are influenced by the space they inhabit. Although there is a number of common and recurrent scenes both among the Facebook images and his drawings, Bourgeot denies any straightforward relationship between these two visual realities. "I have never used the photographs of my Facebook collection in my drawings. Not even as passing inspiration. But the spirit of my collection of photos is not entirely dissimilar to the one I endeavour to convey in my drawings", he says (Ibid.). People in the past that is called 'modern', is what seems to intrigue Bourgeot the most.

Before the exhibition Bourgeot's way of connecting the drawings with the outer world was through his Facebook account. "I don't have a great urge to show my drawings. I would be grateful for comments, and criticism. I think that I would like people to like them. It would please me. But I fully understand people who don't like them and find there is no value in them" (Ibid.). Once a new drawing is ready, Bourgeot photographs it (or, more recently, scans) and makes a post on Facebook. He says that this system has helped him to free himself from the presence and the weight the drawings represent.

As an artist, Ian has an ability to think independently, to give shape to a thought, not just to draw a subject. His work is honest, and he has his own gaze, which is clear and confident. Although he never had a possibility to draw full-time or attend an art school, he could always find enough time for contemplation and reflection. His aim was never to make money from his drawings, or impress the viewer - it was simply a question of an urge to take part in something deeply human. Ian's

drawings not only enabled me to find art that touched me outside an art museum or a gallery, they also broadened my view on culture in general. “Art is essential to society, to coping with losses. Culture must not be regarded as an engine for growth. We need culture to give expression to our anxiety. To give shape to our imaginings. To bind together all that is otherwise threatening to fall apart” (Karlsson 2009, 179).

Ian Bourgeot in the context of outsider art

The term *outsider art* which describes the art created by people who are unable to fit into sociological, psychological or artistic requirements of culture they inhabit is more than half a century old. It was first used by the art critic Roger Cardinal in 1972 as an English equivalent for the term *art brut* introduced by the artist Jean Dubuffet in the late 1940s to describe “an art that was direct, innocent, even rude and quite contrary to the oversophistication of conventional culture” (Maclagan 2009, 7-8).

When Dubuffet came up with the term, the differences between art brut and the mainstream art world were easy to define. However some outsider artists gradually started to become more and more self-confident to be called outsiders without question as well as many characteristics that once related to outsider art were to be found in the works of artists that would never qualify for that title (Ibid., 163). Thus the term began to assimilate into the dominant culture, from which it originally segregated.

There are some features of Bourgeot’s art, according to which one could define it as outsider. For instance, Bourgeot did not really think of himself as an artist prior to his first solo exhibition. He created works in an isolated situation, used materials that were at hand, did not sign the works, neither did he archive them. He did not have a web site, never applied for grants or artist residencies or belonged to any artist organization. In addition to this, Bourgeot has never completed any training related to the development of his artistic skills. I do not, however, consider the latter as a defining factor, when accessing if a certain work can be defined as art or not. Nowadays, it is not the education that makes someone an artist. The credibility of an artwork is confirmed only when it finds resonance among other artists, curators, historians, and critics.

I personally do not want to generalise the works of Ian Bourgeot by using the term *outsider art*. In the first place, because I think that Bourgeot’s art does not lie beyond dominant culture. On the contrary, it is a significant part of it. One more reason is that the artist himself is too well educated and intellectual person with a strong knowledge of art history and a deep understanding of the current situation in contemporary art. But does it at the end make any difference, if I call Bourgeot’s art *outsider* or not? In fact, I am much more interested in his works as such and their imaginative and intriguing world that I once was able to discover.

On selection process

Bourgeot has produced art works since 1983. Although he had not shown publicly, he certainly had produced an astounding numbers of works, from which a small, carefully selected number was included in the exhibition. The main part of it was made up of his latest drawings (2014–2015). However, several of the selected works, including the largest pieces, dated back to 2005.

The selection of works was carried out by myself and Liisa in a long and rather slow process, which simultaneously helped us familiarise with the enormous material we were dealing with. In practice this meant spending days at Bourgeot’s place and going through piles of smaller works and cleaning the dust off and unrolling the biggest ones. Each of us first made her own pre-selection, and then afterwards the final choice was made together. It represented each of recurrent topics in Bourgeot’s work.

The central theme uniting the works in this exhibition was *The Man*. This is the most recurrent topic in Bourgeot’s drawings. The artist has a very particular way of depicting the character of a man, which has changed only faintly over the years, even decades. In the drawings, the man is often wearing white shirt with a collar and rolled-up sleeves, drinking coffee from a small cup or tea from a plentiful teapot. The place and circumstances he finds himself in seem to affect the colours and forms of his physiognomy. His face is often blue, red or yellow, ears detached from the skull. Frequently we encounter the character in a worried or agitated state, sometimes

even slightly (or very seriously) ill. We find him in different parts of the Earth, in states of tranquillity or disturbance, in solitude or in the company of others – the latter often leading to scenes of violence and assault. Although the man assumes a variety of appearances, the inner character remains unchanging. On one hand he could be perceived as the archetype of man, on the other, he is quite possibly the artist himself.

Bourgeot also draws objects quite distinct from the man. The subject matter of many of them is commonplace objects: teapots, books, vegetables, items of clothing – the objects that attract the artist’s aesthetic attention. Their working name in the exhibition was *Objects on White*. These drawings are frequently inspired by what Bourgeot sees in his actual surroundings. The reason why these drawings strike one as very straightforward is, perhaps, that Bourgeot concentrates exclusively on the object he draws, detaching all the unnecessary details. Also the palette and forms the artist chooses as well as white background are something that makes *Objects on White* so magical and powerful.

Yet another significant theme in Bourgeot’s art has been *The Ancestral Home*. The series is modelled on an existing manor house, but which is not exactly a real place. As for a person who never really belonged to anywhere, the theme of the ancestral home has been always important for Bourgeot, and these particular drawings are full of strong sense of homelessness and displacement. They do not depict specific cities or houses, but represent moments from the artist’s personal memories and fantasies. The house, the gate, the

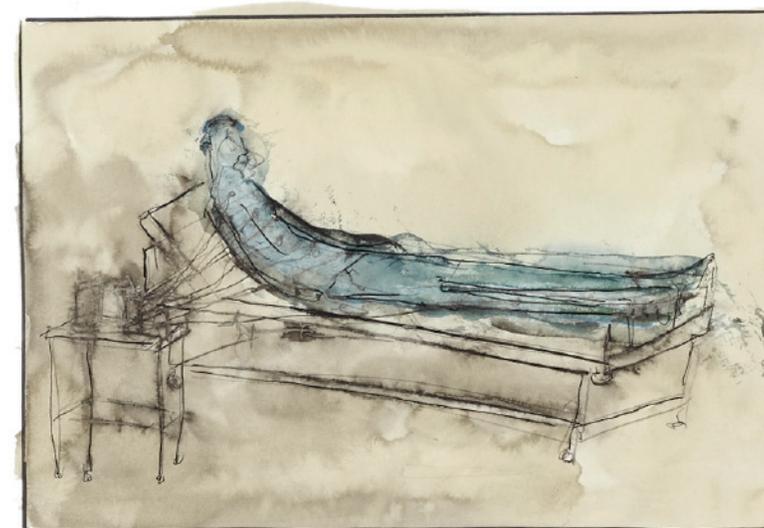
room – have become symbols of Bourgeot's sense of home. Often there are no characters in these drawings, which makes the sense of absence and solitude even more powerful.

In the bigger drawings that are mostly dramatically black or red, produced in 2005, Bourgeot started the themes that repeated themselves in his future works many times: armed soldiers and civilians, violence, pain and death. There are many reasons why *The Military* is a recurrent theme in Bourgeot's art. One is the fact that he has frequently seen the army represent both extreme order and extreme chaos. Four meters long ink painting *Execution* that touches upon this theme most clearly was selected for the main room of the exhibition.

For the same room we also made a selection of drawings from 2014-2015 with scenes that have occurred in Bourgeot's works for many years. A building, a sea, a tree, a room, people talking, reading, eating. Depiction of human life in moments of solitude, quietude or frightful stress is the central theme of these works. The subtle expressions of human life (joys, pains, aspirations, contradictions etc.) in all their manifestations is something that attracts me in them most.

The drawings that date back to 2013 belong to the darkest period in Bourgeot's work. The manner in which they are made differs from the one that followed later. The depiction of pain and weakness in them is very direct, the characters in these drawings are being sick, lying in a hospital bed, are shot dead or executed. Although Bourgeot never spoke to me much about this period of his life, I guess the themes have something to do with the tragedy of his first wife's death in 2007. These drawings were selected especially for *The Chapel* of the bookshop and became a climax of the exhibition.

The question of why, at the end, we chose these drawings over others is, perhaps, above all a question of intuition and taste. However, it does not exclude the fact that Bourgeot's drawings are of different quality. The reason for it is that he never makes actual sketches, and almost never destroys any of his works. This also explains their enormous amount. It is a common practice for Bourgeot to make several drawings of the same subject almost at the same time. For the exhibition, we chose the drawings that in our opinion looked more finished than others, were more complete, had an inner balance. Also, we tried to follow the general colour palette of the works (in 2016-2017 it has changed dramatically) which was mostly light or dark grey, black and coffee brown. Brighter colours as red, blue or green were rather an exception and obviously stand out.



Hospital Bed, 2013



Dawn, 2013

Chapter II

Dark Lines. The exhibition



Arkadia International Bookshop

Arkadia International Bookshop is a large second-hand bookshop and a venue for a wide range of events in Helsinki. It was opened by Ian Bourgeot at Pohjoinen Hesperiankatu 9A in 2008 and moved to the larger premises at Nervanderinkatu 11 in 2012. Now Ian and Liisa are running Arkadia together, and the former premises are closed and not in use any more. At a first visit to Arkadia, it is absolutely impossible to ignore complexity and particularity of its space. The bookshop is a world in itself, a place where one feels secure and comfort.

To me, Arkadia being a semi-public place is also one of those “great places”, which Lucy R. Lippard mentions in her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997), when writing about the public places and quoting the urban planner David Lee and his suggestions about the criteria for “a great public space”: “It is not anyone’s private turf; it should be memorable enough that you would want to have your picture taken there; it is a place you couldn’t wait to go without your parents, a place where there is sunlight sometime every day, and there can be music, poetry, art, and speeches – enough visual drama and/or activity that you can send your out-of-town guests there to amuse themselves while you are trying to get some work done; it should not cost a lot to get to, and it should be clean, but not too tidy. I’d add to this list that it should include a place where peace and quiet is as available as entertainment” (Lippard 1997, 246).

Organization of the space in Arkadia, as well as idea of it being a place, where people are always welcome as if they were at home, is entirely Ian’s creation. For me the bookshop has always been (architecturally and ideologically) Bourgeot’s total artwork, which I would even consider parallel with his drawings. They both are his personal worlds, important parts of his identity and, in a way, continuation of his personality. They tell a lot about how curious Bourgeot is about people and the world they live in.

The meaning of a space is always formed according to its everyday use, people’s movements in it, their perception of, and different senses experienced in it. That is why a place can have as many meanings as there are spatial experiences (Johansson, Saarikangas 2009, 11). Arkadia hosts a variety of events weekly: concerts, theatre performances, exhibitions, literary evenings, talks, etc. However, *Dark Lines* was in no way an ordinary exhibition hosted by the bookshop. It left a deep mark on the place and transformed it forever. It filled Arkadia with new memories, histories, symbolic meanings, even changed it physically. My personal experience of the place is now definitely divided in “before” and “after” the exhibition.

Man and Cross (2005) in The Living Room

The space and structure of the exhibition

Arkadia can be a private and, at the same time, a very social place; it depends on the purpose of one’s visit. The space of the bookshop is divided into several rooms. *The Living Room* is situated upstairs on the street level, and it is, therefore, the natural meeting place, lively and crowded most of times. *The Children’s Corner*, *The Russian Corner*, *The Pool Table Room*, *The Gallery*, *The Warehouse* and *The Chapel* located in the basement are more intimate and good for quiet reading. All these names are pretty straightforward. Each of them comes either from the function of the room, the type of books one can find there, or from what once happened there.

Dark Lines took up the whole space of the bookshop. The exhibition began on the ground floor with *Man and Cross* (circa 2005), a large ink drawing hanging against the bookshelves on the height of approximately two meters from the floor. The drawing was also lit up during the night, and was visible through the windows from the outside. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard compares the lights of a house to an eye: “The lamp in the window is a house’s eye. Through its lights a house become human. It sees like a man. It is an eye open to night. It symbolizes solitude” (Bachelard 1994, 34-35). *Man and Cross*, with its size and visual starkness, was also to set the tone for the entire exhibition; it functioned as an immediate example of the way Bourgeot uses ink as a material and experiments with the scale and technique of his drawings.





Installation view in The Gallery

The rooms of the basement formed the main exhibition venue. The choice of the room for each smaller collection of drawings was in one way or another connected to the story each room embodies. *The Children's Corner*, which holds the collection of children's literature, was used for showing six drawings of simple, often commonplace, objects from 2014-2015. They represented a somewhat curious assembly of things: a kettle, toiletries, a leek, a hanging pig, a banana and a wooden spoon. What connected these drawings to each other was especially the way these objects were represented on an empty white background. The reason we wanted to hang them beside the collection of children's books was the particular simplicity of their form and the naïve manner in which the drawings were implemented.

The Russian Corner and *The Pool Table Room*, which both lie next to *The Children's Corner*, form a rectangular space with a large wooden oval table in the middle. The name of *The Russian Corner* owes to the simple fact that, when the bookshop had just reopened, Arkadia welcomed a large group of Russian and Ukrainian students as trainees, and they enjoyed spending their free moments chatting in the room. The long shape of the space made us think of transforming the wall above the low bookshelves into a portrait gallery. There, we hung a series of nine portraits of *The Man* (2014-2015) and put one bronze sculpture, *Paris* (1990).



Top: Portrait Gallery



Left: Objects on White in *The Children's Corner*



Right: *Paris*, 1990



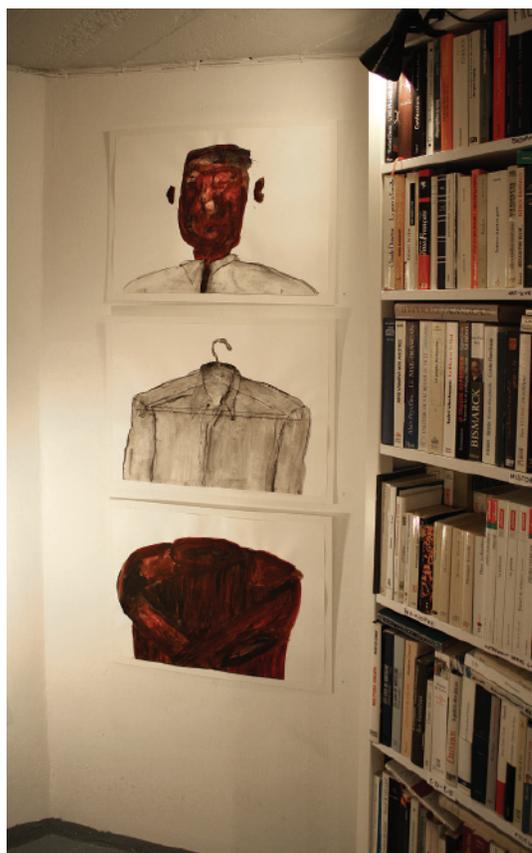
The back wall of the same room showed *The Ancestral Home* series of six drawings, representing a central theme in the whole Bourgeot's work. The idea was to connect the drawings of the ancestral home with the portraits on the opposite wall: we wanted to create a subtle link between the artist's imagined and real past. The bronze sculpture, the earliest work presented at the exhibition, was used as a reference to Bourgeot's actual past, whereas the drawings of the ancestral home are in fact based on a fictional story, existing only in the artist's imagination.

The series presented in *The Pool Table Room* included three drawings hung on top of each other. The first one depicted a man with a red face wearing a white shirt, the second - just a white shirt on a hanger, and on a third - a pullover in deep red colour. We hung these drawings together as they were not only bound together in form and colour, but also connected thematically into their surroundings - portraits and drawings of mundane objects.

The only room in Arkadia that had been used for exhibitions before was *The Gallery*. It was also the only space in the bookshop, which responds more or less to the idea of the "white cube" as a traditional exhibition space. Although we were very enthusiastic about the exhibition and believed in its success, we could not be sure about how it would be perceived by the audience. It was not only the artist, who was exhibiting for the very first time in his entire life, but it was also the curator, realizing her first personal curatorial project

Top: *The Ancestral Home* series

Bottom: Drawings in *The Pool Table Room*



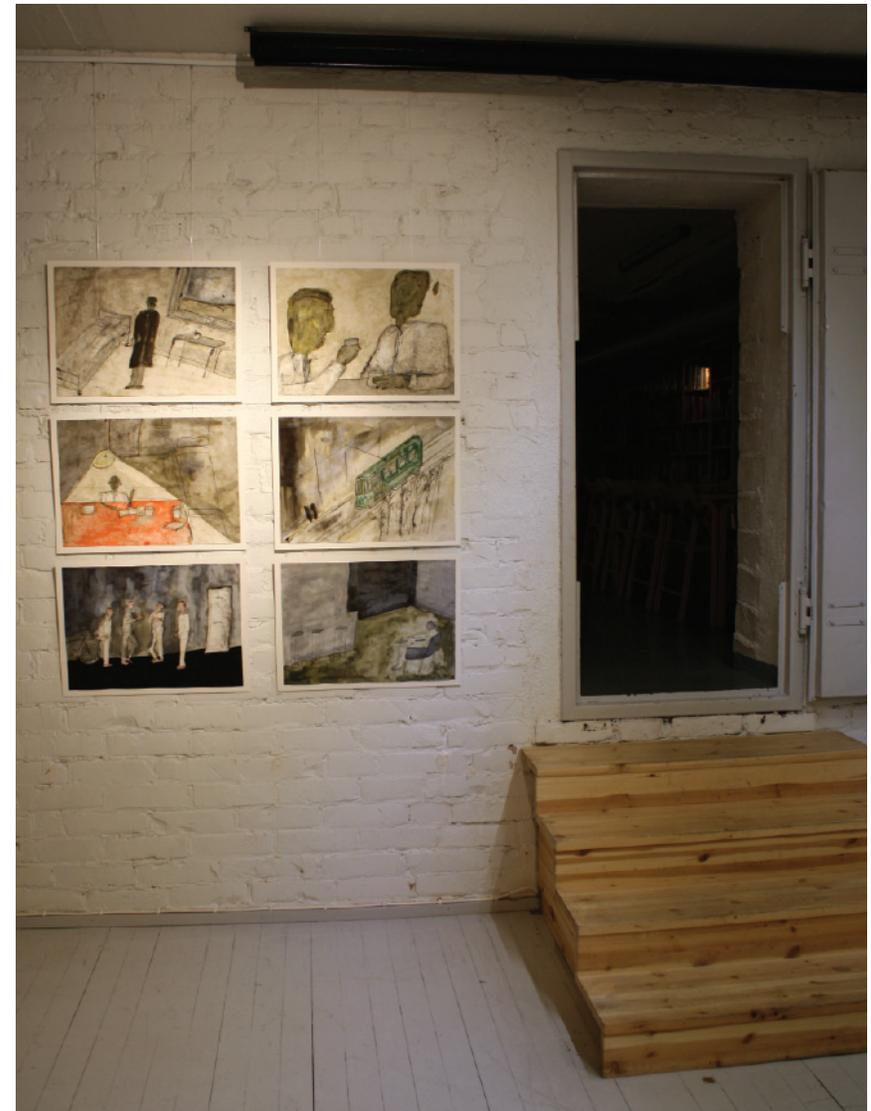
ever. And on top of that we were not even making the exhibition in a traditional gallery space which would "make the drawings art anyway" (O'Doherty 1999, 45). That is actually why we wanted to make sure to have at least one conventional exhibition room inside the bookshop. In case of failure, we thought, it could function as an art exhibition in itself.

In the classical collection of essays about how to deal with the white cube convention, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999), an art critic and writer Brian O'Doherty notes that the 'white cube' is almost the only major tradition in art which has preserved its status in the course of time. The reason for this is the simple lack of alternatives (Ibid. 80). "The ideal gallery", he continues, "subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself" (Ibid. 14).

O'Doherty compares the conventions of creating a gallery space with those of building a medieval church: "The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes a source of light. The wooden floor is polished that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. /.../ The discreet desk may be the only piece of furniture. In this context a standing ashtray becomes almost a sacred object" /.../ (Ibid. 15).

For *Dark Lines*, the most serious rearrangement was made in *The Gallery*. It is a central part of the bookshop, and we turned it into the heart of the exhibition, where the opening ceremony also took place. We wanted to keep *The Gallery* as empty and neutral as possible and had removed its bookshelves with a huge number of books, as well as all the furniture, from the room, and even installed a new lightning system to the ceiling. *The Gallery* is a space without windows, and that is why the lights would play a crucial role in showing the drawings as something of significance. New high-quality spotlights actually changed the display dramatically.

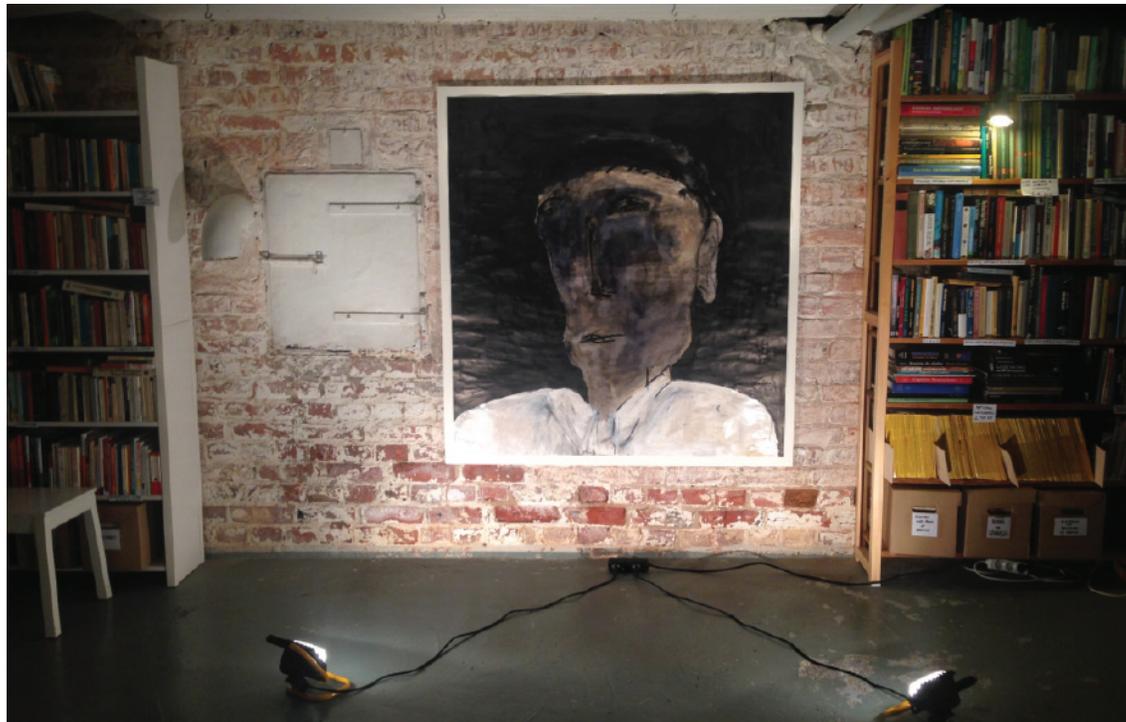
The context of art is the wall it is hung on to, and at an exhibition we always "read" the hanging unconsciously (Ibid. 29). In *The Gallery*, we were dealing with two brick walls painted white, and one red, without a coat of paint. We hung a selection of eleven smaller drawings and two bigger ones against the red brick wall, and it turned out the main wall of the whole exhibition (both in our minds, as in the minds of many viewers). Drawings with a grey, beige and light-blue palette were selected especially to suit the colour and the surface of the wall. Opposite this wall, the largest work of the exhibition, the four-meter-long *Execution* was hung. Its size, colours and subject matter were dramatically different from the other drawings in the room, creating a strong contrast.



The Warehouse used to be Bourgeot's first storage space – hence the humble name. Working with the room was challenging, because the space is quite dark and has just one empty wall without bookshelves. Originally, we planned to hang several drawings against the bookshelves, but later changed our minds. It seemed more powerful not to further fill the space, which was already loaded with books, but rather to create a subtle entity. Finally, only *Portrait* (circa 2005) was chosen for this space. A low ceiling helped us create a very close, face-to-face contact between the drawing and the viewer. We also lit the large work with two industrial lamps which were placed in front of it on the floor, to create a rather dramatic spotlight.

The Chapel is a tiny room at the very end of the bookshop and 'the chapel' was at first just its nickname. Later, Bourgeot actually had it blessed, and since then, a monthly morning prayer has been conducted there by the Reverend Petri Tikka. The deciding factor in what drawings to hang in this little room was *Triptych* (circa 2005) which had already been there for a several years by then, serving as an 'altar piece' for the chapel. The small drawings, which were chosen for *The Chapel* differed quite strongly from the other works of the exhibition, but were drawn in the same manner as *Triptych*. In this small space, the spectator had a feeling of being literally surrounded by drawings. In *The Chapel* the number of works put together and the richness of their themes reached its limits, drawing a parallel with the whole Bourgeot's work, existing in enormous amount.

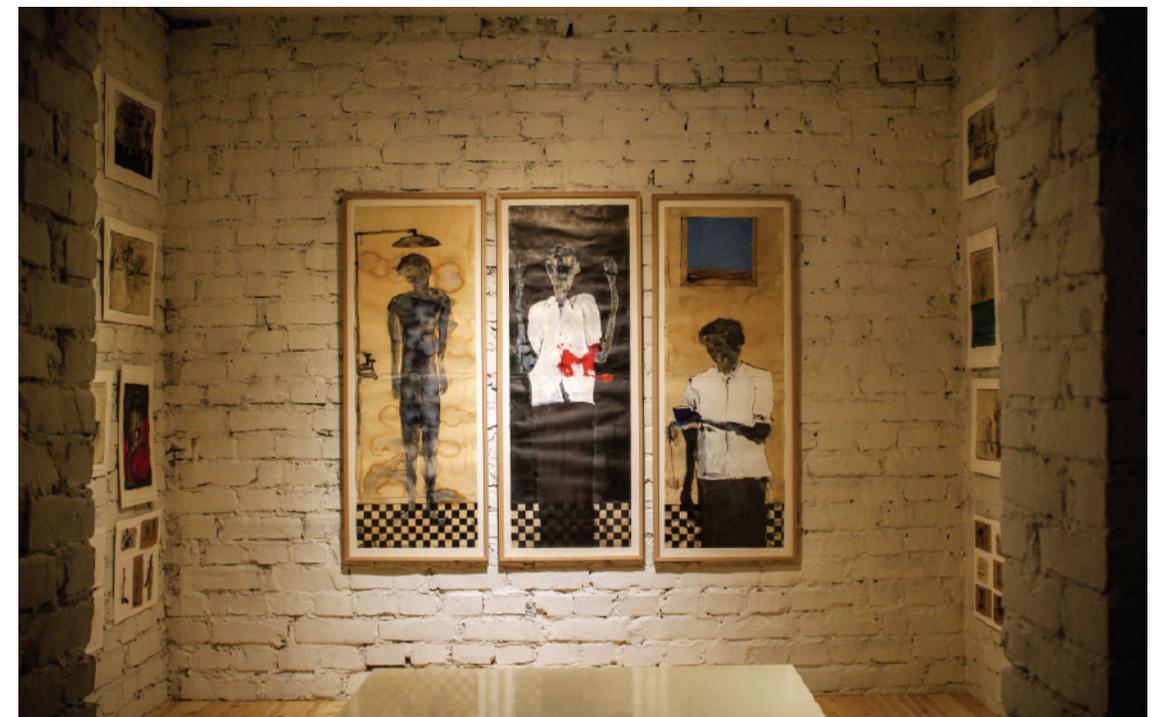
Portrait (circa 2005) in The Warehouse



To find a place for as many as one hundred drawings in an living bookshop space we had to carefully consider its character and identity: the length, height, depth, shape and texture of walls, as well as blind corners, sudden reflections of light, and natural paths of the viewers, which were not immediately obvious. Although we tried to predict all the possible restrictions we could face during the hanging process, it was hard to foresee all the challenges in advance. Some rooms appeared to be extremely difficult. The height of the basement ceiling varied in different parts of the space, walls in each room were of various types, and some of them were not even flat. We were unable to screw hooks into some of the walls and were forced to use hammer and nails. In the end, the hanging depended considerably on the various features of the ceiling and walls, but we were, almost miraculously, able to realise almost all of our initial ideas.

As a whole, what the process of creating an exhibition space inside the existing space of the bookshop required from us, were great sensitivity, intuition and delicacy – and, at the end, some hard physical labour. We tried to predict the movements of the viewer, his bodily presence in the space, and the time spent in front of each drawing, and created a route that would logically follow the way in which visitors usually move in the bookshop. The drawings told a story, which consisted of several smaller narratives with doorways serving as mental boundaries between them. Each one brought one story to an end and started a new.

Installation view in The Chapel





Evening by the Sea, 2014

Chapter III

After the exhibition

On curating

While working on *Dark Lines* our main task was to create an occasion for the first emergence of Bourgeot's works into the public. On one hand, we had to create the most optimal form of showing the works and let them manifest their ideas. On the other, we needed to create a space for the viewer, enabling him to find his own place in relation to the works at the exhibition.

Art historian, critic and artist Terry Smith notes that "exhibiting artistic meaning is the main task of the contemporary curator, to which all other roles are subservient" (Smith 2012, 31). According to Smith, the object of contemporary curating is larger than contemporary art. It is art from the past as well as current and future art. Smith defines curating in this way: "To exhibit (in the broad sense of show, offer, enable the experience of) contemporary presence and the currency that is contemporaneity as these are manifest in art present, past, and multitemporal, even atemporal" (Ibid., 29).

Smith also writes about the differences between curatorial thought and the one of an art historian or an art critic. According to Smith, art-historical thinking seeks to identify the techniques and meanings of works, what connects them to their time and compares them to those made before. Art-critical thinking is concentrated on how the form of an artwork is connected with its meaning, and how they are received by the public for the first time. The curatorial thinking includes elements from both, but it also plays a crucial role in the

process of artworks entering the art world, reaching the audience, circulation in the world afterwards. "Curating precedes critical response, audience appreciation, and the eventual assessment of art historical significance" (Ibid., 41-42). "Curators", he continues, "do everything necessary to bring works up to the point where they may become subject to critical and historical judgment" (Ibid., 44).

Following Smith's idea, I see curator's role as provisional. By making an exhibition of Bourgeot's previously unseen drawings we manifested them as something actual and meaningful for our time, and as something that was going to be significant in the future. By exhibiting works we made them available for appreciation, understanding and interpretation of the public.

I wrote about how we dealt with the space of the bookshop earlier, but never properly mentioned a place of a viewer in it. It was a significant question for us, as Arkadia welcomes dozens of visitors every day. During *Dark Lines* we had two types of visitors at the bookshop: those who came for books and those who came to see the exhibition. For both we wanted to create some sort of mental space that would give a room for thoughts and opinions about the artworks. A writer and curator Mary Jane Jacob describes it as "making a space for experience", "curating the conditions for the audience's own creativity" (Jacob 2006, 141).

We did not have any written information about the works in the exhibition space, just a short introduction text and list of works by the entrance. We decided rather to invest in a publication of an exhibition catalogue. Representing the main idea of the exhibition, it was also a continuation of it. Exhibitions are always limited in time, they open and close, while the publication has a much longer life-span. The catalogue of *Dark Lines* was made for those who wanted to learn more about what they had seen. It was also a source of information about the exhibition and the artist, and we have used it as a medium for spreading the word about Bourgeot's artworks in different places (including art galleries) afterwards. Besides Liisa and myself, the contributors for the catalogue were Finno-Swedish writer and critic Mathias Rosenlund and Australian writer Kristel Thornell, both good friends of Bourgeot. Each of us approached the drawings from a different perspective and brought up various aspects of Bourgeot's art.



Leek, 2014

Drawings from Exile and The Home of a Modern Man

Dark Lines was received very positively by the public and got at least two exhibition reviews. In his article, published in *Apollo* magazine, an independent writer Tom Jeffreys called Arkadia as an exhibition venue “a step forward for Helsinki’s art scene” and expressed his hope that *Dark Lines* “will be the first of the many exhibitions in Arkadia” (Jeffreys 2015). An art historian, curator and my teacher from the Art Academy Pontus Kyander called Bourgeot’s drawings “direct and fresh”².

One of many visitors of *Dark Lines* was a Helsinki-based artist Sasha Huber. She suggested Ian to have a solo exhibition in the *Kallio Kunsthalle* gallery that they were running at that time together with her husband, an artist Petri Saarikko. *Drawings from Exile* opened already in March 2015 and was the second, yet a more modest presentation of Bourgeot’s drawings in Helsinki. It was a series of eight ink and acrylic drawings developing the theme of *The Ancestral Home*. In the works, there was the same looming sense of loss and absence, although the colour palette had become brighter. The drawings depicted places once visited or inhabited by the artist, but now abandoned or existing no more. Calm, silent, still and empty in a curiously emphasized way.

² Kyander published a short exhibition review on his Facebook account entitled *The Amateur, a True Lover* right after the exhibition opened.



Installation views at Kallio Kunsthalle



Some time later, *Drawings from Exile* was followed by *The Home of a Modern Man* – Bourgeot's solo exhibition in Japan. It was organized in the *Gingrich* gallery, Tokyo in June 2017. Initiated by Keiko Murate, a graphic designer, a co-founder of the *Gingrich*, and also an old friend of Arkadia, the exhibition consisted of two parts. First part, the so called pop-up Arkadia, represented a miniature model of the bookshop as well as photographs and books specially brought from Helsinki to Tokyo. Second part presented a range of small (A3, A4 and smaller) ink drawings, which touched upon the themes of memories of the artist's distant past and of a man attempting to build a home in the modern world. Yet again, the works continued this already existing theme of exile.

From some 30 drawings that were shown at the exhibition in Tokyo, less than ten came back to Helsinki. The Japanese audience acquired others. Both Ian and myself were in Tokyo during the exhibition and we could not believe in success the drawings had among the people there. The curiosity of the local viewers about the themes and techniques of the works was astonishing. One of the reasons for it is probably Bourgeot's way of depicting living space, people and objects, which is very close to the one that pertain to Japanese aesthetics. The exhibition in Japan, a country that has always been important for Bourgeot because of his aesthetic aspirations, had a great influence on him. Not only did earthquakes and volcanoes start appearing in his works since then, but it was also a much deeper touch, the consequences of which I am looking forward to seeing in the future.



Exhibition opening at Gingrich





Ian Bourgeot standing outside Gingrich

Conclusion

Dark Lines was an exhibition of hopes, expectations, and of gaining experience. It was actually a departure to something even bigger than it was originally supposed to be. The exhibition brought the art of Ian Bourgeot to the public for the first time, arising questions about the criteria of what is important in the work of art, what is a proper context for exhibiting it, what things are worth thinking about in finding the relation between the works of art and the exhibition space.

For Bourgeot, the exhibition was this crucial moment, after which there was no way back. He became much more confident in relation towards his art and it has become more natural and easier for him to speak about his works ever since. He started to sign the works (and even made a great work of signing all the old drawings), created his own system of classifying them according to the type and size of the paper he used. In addition to this, in summer 2017 he got his first website *ianbourgeot.com* made and even earlier registered at *saatchiart.com* (Saatchi Gallery online), where he was able to sell a number of his works. These are just some of the many processes that *Dark Lines* launched in Bourgeot's life. One important thing I realised after the exhibition for myself: once discovered, Bourgeot's art will never disappear again. This realization makes me feel happy and satisfied.

"Something does not happen unless it happens somewhere" (Robertson, McDaniel 2010, 154). Arkadia became the key context for showing Bourgeot's drawings and revealed this intimate and very close connection between them and the bookshop. Soon after the exhibition we started to think about showing the drawings in Arkadia permanently. It is not yet clear, where in the bookshop they should find their place, but one thing we know for sure: at least small part of the drawings should find their permanent home in Arkadia.

"I chose the house for many reasons. Because it seemed to have supported out of the earth like a tree, so deeply grooved it was within the old garden. It had no cellar and the rooms rested right on the ground. Below the rug, I felt, was the earth. I could take root here, feel at one with the house and garden, take nourishment from them like the plants", - Anaïs Nin, winter 1931-1932.



Men Drinking, 2014

Bibliography

Pressed sources and literature:

Annan Konst / Other Art. Ed. by Staffan Backlund & Borghild Håkansson. Postfuturistic Publishing, 2009.

Bachelard, Gaston 1994. *The Poetics of Space. The Classical Look of How We Experience Intimate Places*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Dave Beech & Mark Hutchinson 2011. Inconsequential Bayonets? A Correspondence on Curation, Independence and Collaboration. In *Curating Subjects: Occasional Table*. Ed. by Paul O'Neill. De Appel: Open Editions, 53-62.

Granö, Veli 1989. *Onnela*. Lahti.

Hannula, Mika 2004. *Nykytaiteen harharetket, kommunikaatioprosessi valkoisen kuution ulkopuolella*. Helsinki: Kuvataideakatemia.

Jacob, Mary Jane 2006. Making Space for Art. In *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* Ed. by Paula Marincola. Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 134-141.

Johansson, Hanna & Saarikangas, Kirsi 2009. Introduction: Ambivalent Home. In *Homes in Transformation. Dwelling, Moving, Belonging*. Ed. by Hanna Johansson and Kirsi Saarikangas, Helsinki: SKS.

Karlsson, David 2009. Quality is yellow. In *Annan Konst / Other Art*. Ed. by Staffan Backlund & Borghild Håkansson. Postfuturistic Publishing.

Kwon, Miwon 2002. *One Place After Another, Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.

Lefebvre, Henri 1991. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell Publishing.

Lippard, Lucy R. 1997. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: The New Press.

Maclagan, David 2009. *Outsider Art. From the Margins to the Marketplace*. London: Reaktion Books.

Nash, Mark 2006. Questions of Practice. In *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* Ed. by Paula Marincola. Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 142-153.

Obirst, Hans Ulrich 2014. *Ways of Curating*. Penguin Random House UK.

O'Doherty, Brian 1999. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. San Francisco: Lapis Press.

O'Neill, Paul 2011. Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O'Neill. In *Curating Subjects: Occasional Table*. Ed. by Paul O'Neill. De Appel: Open Editions, 109-122.

Rhodes, Colin 2000. *Outsider Art. Spontaneous Alternatives*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Robertson, Jean & McDaniel, Craig 2009. *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art after 1980*. 2nd edition. Oxford University Press.

Russell, Charles 2011. *Groundwaters: a Century of Art by Self-Taught and Outsider Artists*. London: Prestel.

Sheikh, Simon 2011. Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator. In *Curating Subjects: Occasional Table*. Ed. by Paul O'Neill. De Appel: Open Editions, 174-185.

Smith, Terry 2012. *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. Independent Curators International (ICI), New York.

Storr, Robert 2006. Show and Tell. In *What Makes A Great Exhibition?* Ed. by Paula Marincola. Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 14-31.

The Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1931-1934. Ed. by Gunther Stuhlmann. New York: The Swallow Press and Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966.

Online sources:

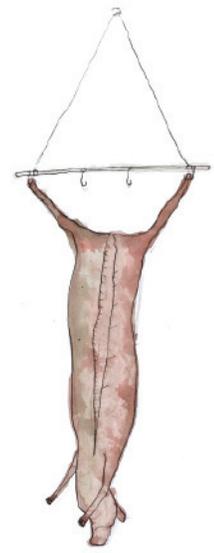
Jeffreys, Tom 2015. *Baltic Diary: The Art of Coffee*. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/baltic-diary-the-art-of-coffee/> (Visited 17.11.2015)

Unpublished sources:

Bourgeot, Liisa 2014. *Dark Lines*. Unpublished essay.

Interview with Ian Bourgeot, Helsinki, 26.5.2015.

Kyander, Pontus 2015. *The Amateur, a True Lover*. <https://www.facebook.com/pontus.kyander> (Visited 4.12.2015)



Hanging Pig, 2014

Photographs

Ian Bourgeot: 19, 37 bottom
Liisa Bourgeot: cover-16, 30-33, 41-44
Linda Haglund: 26, 29
Anastasia Isakova: 20-21, 28
Daria Krasnograd-Efremova: 22-25, 27
Keiko Murate: 37 top, 38
Petri Saarikko: 35 bottom
Katka Vanková: 35 top



The Gate of the Ancestral Home, 2015

I thank Veli Granö, Maria Hirvi-Ijäs, Kaija Kaitavuori, Hanna Johansson, Mia Kivinen and Praxis 14 for their kind support. In a very special way, I am grateful to Ian and Liisa Bourgeot.

