



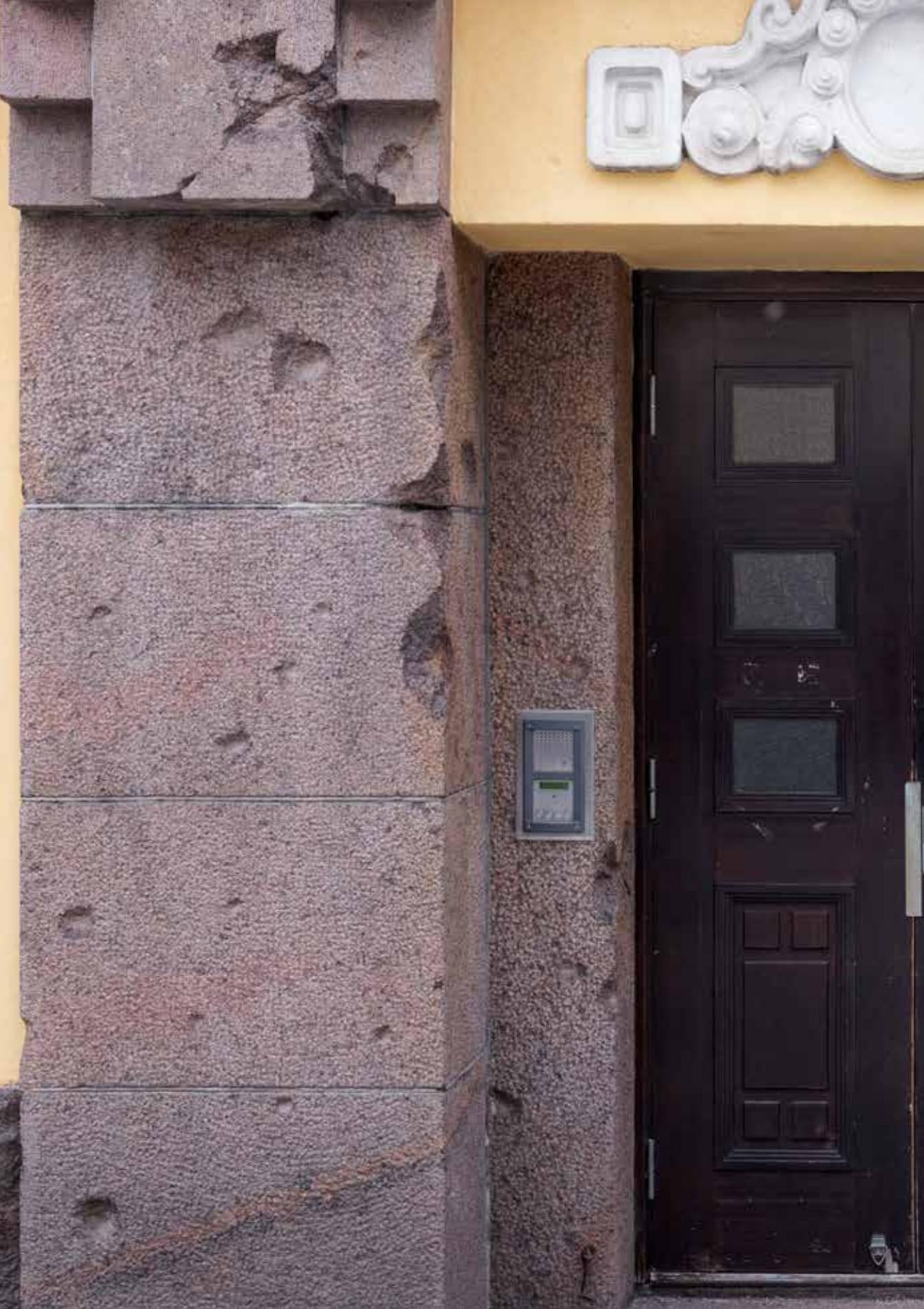
# CLIMBING A MEMORY

PAVEL ROTTS

# **CLIMBING A MEMORY**

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**UNIVERSITY  
OF THE ARTS  
HELSINKI ✕**





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PAVEL ROTTS  
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<sup>1</sup> I apologize if I forgotton someone. If so, it is not because of luck of gratitude but because of surprising amount of people who were ready to help me with this project

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# List of Works

## ***Kuvan Kevät, 12.5-31.6.2021, Project Room, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, Finland***

1. *Climbing a Memory*, performance, Hietalahdentori, Helsinki, Finland. May 2021,
2. *Climbing a Memory*, negative sculptures; variable sizes; concrete, metal
3. *Climbing a Memory*, project website, interactive “climbing guide” 2021
4. *Climbing a Memory*, Project leaflet, paper, ink-jet printing. 2021

## ***Leave no Trace, 8.–24.10.2021, Project Room, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, Finland***

5. *Climbing a Memory* project website, interactive “climbing guide”, 2021
6. *Climbing a Memory*, installation, 300 x 300 cm, resin, plywood, metal, 2021
7. *Climbing a Memory*, performance, duration 60 min. 2021
8. *Climbing a Memory*, installation, concrete and metal sculptures, video works, 2021
9. *Climbing a Memory*, Climbing attempt #1, St. Paul’s church, video work, duration 12:19, 2021





# Summary: Artistic Component

The long-duration art project *Climbing a Memory* is a conceptual research-based project dealing with a physical representation of historical trauma and collective memory about the war in a contemporary city. The project concentrates on the history of the Russian-Finnish wars: the Winter War and the Continuation War. Traces of the Soviet bombings of WWII, which are still visible on the walls in the city of Helsinki, are the main objects of that artistic research. I study these traces using my method that I call “tangible understanding”. I approach them from the climbing perspective, thinking about craters on the walls as climbing routes. Similarly to the pieces of Rachel Whiteread, who describes them as a way to “monumentalize a space that is ignored”, my project aims to draw attention to the origins of these traces by giving the audience a chance to engage with them.<sup>1</sup> I believe that this way of making history tangible can provide a deeper understanding of the historical trauma and its healing processes, which is essential nowadays.

I started the project in September 2019 with the first climbing performance on the facade of St. Paul’s Church in Vallila. During the years 2019 and 2021, the project developed as a series of public performances on the streets of Helsinki. The performances that I called *Climbing Attempts* became a part of my final work for the *Kuvan Kevät 2021* exhibition. I climbed the damaged walls during the performance using the bombshell craters as climbing holds.

During spring 2021, I was taking casts from the bombshells craters around Helsinki. This material implementation of the project was exhibited in all three exhibition spaces of *Kuvan Kevät 2021*: Exhibition Laboratory, Exhibition Laboratory B and the Project Room. The work was represented in the gallery space in parallel with the street performances. Negative casts of bombshell craters made from concrete

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<sup>1</sup> Whiteread 1992

were spread over all three gallery spaces and installed on the walls in random locations as climbing holds in an indoor climbing gym. To help visitors navigate between them, I produced a leaflet containing the list of the casts, mentioning the addresses where every trace was found. In parallel with the exhibition, I created a virtual map of the locations damaged by soviet bombings in the city of Helsinki on the project's website.

After participating in the group exhibition *Kuvan Kevät 2021*, the *Climbing a Memory* project was shown in the form of a solo exhibition in the Project Room gallery in Autumn 2021. The name of the exhibition was *Leave no Trace*. For this exhibition, I produced casts of the bomb craters around Helsinki and used them to create artificial climbing holds, similar to those in a climbing gym. For this installation, I was working with coloured epoxy resin, which is also used for the mass production of climbing holds for indoor climbing. I created a structure inside the galley using negative imprints of the bomb craters. This installation looked like a so-called spray wall - a climbing wall with many holds of different colours in random order. This wall can be seen as an alternative map of the city, its war damage and its memory. Every cast on the wall had a QR code linked with a particular location on the virtual map on the project website.

During the exhibition, there were two public performances where I was climbing this artificial climbing wall and one private climbing session in which I shared the climbing experience with a few other invited amateur climbers.

Negative sculptures made from concrete were also shown at the *Leave No Trace* exhibition. They were installed on the wall of the dark space of the black box - the space of the gallery where the video works are usually shown. These pieces representing lost stone fragments appeared before the audience in a ghostlike, barely visible presence. The galley visitors could not see the casts until their eyes adjusted to the

darkness after entering the room. The casts invited one to sense them by touch rather than register them by vision.

Two videos from the street climbing performances from the spring exhibition were also shown in the black box. The video documentation of the first climbing performance in 2019 on the facade of St. Paul's church in Vallila was exhibited on the wall-mounted monitor in front of the climbing wall.

At the moment, the work consists of a collection of photographs of war-damaged buildings, the virtual map serving as an interactive guide, and two different physical implementations of the work: an artificial climbing wall with colourful resin casts and a series of negative sculptures made from concrete. A series of performances inside the gallery and in public spaces was also part of the project.

## Summary: Written Component

This paper is the written component of my master thesis project, of which the artistic part was realized between Spring 2021 - Autumn 2022. In this text, I analyze the historical background of the project and give it context in the art and culture history field. In the text, I describe the methods of my artistic research and provide a broader perspective on the concepts and ideas which are implemented in my thesis work.

In the first part of the paper, I examine the relationship between art and body using examples from different performative practices situated on the border of merging life and art and using the artist's body in the artwork. The chapter Art and Exertion compares art practice and the notion of practice in physical activities.

The second block, called Climbing and Memory, examines the connection between sport climbing and memory on different levels. While in the *Personal Memories* chapter, I pay attention to the symbolic meaning of climbing in the project. The next part *Climbing as Healing* analyzes the therapeutic role of climbing and bouldering practices in practical psychology and the treatment of depression.

The structure of the paper is nonlinear, and there is a certain level of porosity between parts and chapters of the thesis. Some themes and topics emerge several times in different chapters to introduce the other points of view on the topic by writing about it in a different context. In that sense, the Zoomed-in World chapter combines the therapeutic and symbolic meaning of climbing with an analysis of the various manifestations of trauma in the physical world, in this case, the stone's surface in the city and on the natural rock. The charge of meaning on the rock surface's smallest detail in the mountains is compared with the importance of the cracks and pockmarks left by bombshells on Helsinki city walls during WWII.

The following chapters *Granite as Film* and *Memorial on top of Memorial*, unfold these directions of thinking further by analyzing traces of bombings in the city as the vehicle for historical memory, comparing the traces of war with archival photographs and, in particular, the surface of the stone with the emulsion on the film in the photo camera. In *Memorial on top of Memorial*, I give different examples of memorial work with the traces of war in the city space drawing parallels between bombshell traces in Helsinki with the Sarajevo Roses in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The common theme of memory institutions interconnects the two chapters. The examples of artists, architects and city planners working with the memory of war in different cities such as London and Berlin, help to find the similarities and differences between different approaches and make the point about the role of damaged architecture in memorial culture described as an "ongoing struggle between remembering and forgetting".<sup>2</sup>

The cross-cutting theme of the paper is a relationship between the current war in Ukraine and the collective memory of WWII. The Foreword and Preface, as well as the final chapter, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*, create a loop that lets the paper's main idea surface - that there is no forgotten war in the past, and there is no war, which is somewhere far away. War is always here and now.

## Foreword: Responsibility.

On the 23 of February, Russia celebrates Fatherland's Defenders Day. This day is rooted in the memory of WWII, and it can be taken as an insult if a young man rejects it. Being a pacifist, it never was my day. Still, especially during the last decade, I was against this masculine militaristic celebration of war and threat. I didn't want to be a part of it, especially after the occupation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas.

Nevertheless, family traditions are not easy to work against. So I always was tolerantly patient when my wife's family gave me small presents every 23rd of February. I usually say that I am not a real defender and thank them for the gift. This year it wasn't an exception.

We arrived at St.Petersburg late in the night of February 23rd in 2022. I got my chocolate bar with a little boy in a military uniform depicted on the cover, as a gift for Defender's day. It was harder to tolerate a gift this time because the situation on the Ukrainian border was getting worse. Usually, we were trying to avoid talking about politics with Sasha's parents because we knew long ago that our views would never fit – also this time. Sasha's father watched the evening propaganda programs in the kitchen while I was lying in the bath with my headphones on, watching political opposition channels on youtube from my phone. For two months, all independent analytics were continuously discussing the possibility of invasion, but nobody believed it would happen. But

this night was different. It felt that no one was able to believe that, but knew what was happening. My friend wrote to me - "It seems we are going to see the outbreak of the full-scale war in real time tonight..." It was 4 am and a long day behind. I was sleepy. The war didn't begin at four or half past four, so I went to sleep. I was planning to continue my writing in the morning to be able to finalize my thesis paper before spring.

I woke up late. It was after eleven when I took the phone still in the bed. The first thing I saw was a video of bombs falling on Kiyv. War was everywhere. Just a day ago, when saying "if putin will bomb Kiyv" we were using these words as a metaphor for the impossible, and now it is our reality.<sup>3</sup> Russian troops were already in the Kiyv region. Rockets were falling on Odessa and Kharkiv...

Now, when writing, I can't find the right words to describe the level of shock I felt. Everything I'm saying is shadowed by the long six months when the war became everyday reality. It is hard to see how unbelievable it was when it just started. The rest of the days in Russia were like in a fog. Knowing that some people around me justified the war made it difficult to be there. I went to a silent protest on Nevsky. It was too early for the police to react. I stood for a moment on Vosstania square with the latest issue of Novaya Gazeta independent newspaper with the Ukrainian flag on its cover. The more significant protests took place in the evening but I didn't go there, being afraid to be arrested or beaten by police, as many people were. Some of my friends were arrested too. I felt guilty that I didn't go that night. I wanted to come back to Finland safe, and this was selfish.

I came back smashed. And I also feel guilty telling this. How can I complain about my inner struggles while my country kills people in a neighbouring state on my behalf? I came back to Helsinki without writing a single line of my thesis. But I kept thinking that feeling guilty is not pro-

ductive even if I still feel so. To be able to help the situation I would prefer to be responsible than guilty. Following Hannah Arendt's thinking, while guilt can be harmful and distract from action, responsibility on the other hand can be empowering and conducive to action.<sup>4</sup>

After coming back to Finland I spent a few months in talks, discussions, demonstrations, charity campaigns and other anti-war activities. It was clear that I couldn't finalize my writing by just continuing in the same way as before. My project deals with war memory, but war is no longer a memory. After 24th of February 2022, it's our reality.

Also, another frightening question stuck more profoundly in the back of my mind. Why was I so blind to the reality of war before? Was I aware enough of the existence of war in Ukraine which Russia started not in February 2022 but eight years earlier? Why didn't I feel the reality of the war in Syria, Iraq or Palestine? Did I consider these wars as something far away? Did I think about the previous wars as remnants of the past? What if it always was here and now? Maybe this is why it is essential to carefully treat the memory of war. Perhaps the role of this paper is to examine this issue using my modest case study as a model. I hope these writings will help me to reconstruct my attitude to the trauma of war and the reality of the pain of others.

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4 In Arendt's words: "I don't know how many precedents there are in history for such misplaced feelings, but I do know that in post-War Germany, where similar problems arose with respect to what had been done by the Hitler regime to Jews, the cry "We are all guilty" that at first hearing sounded so very noble and tempting has actually only served to exculpate to a considerable degree those who actually were guilty. Where all are guilty, nobody is. Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal. It refers to an act, not to intentions or potentialities." To read more about Hannah Arendt's distinction between collective guilt and collective responsibility see Arendt 1987







# In Place of a Preface

“On 30 November 1939, Soviet bombers unloaded their bombs on Helsinki, the capital of Finland. Stalin’s ultimatum, demanding the cession of huge tracts of territory as a buffer zone against Nazi Germany, had been rejected by the Finnish government, and now a small Baltic republic was at war with the giant Soviet military machine.”<sup>5</sup> This is how the American author and historian William R. Trotter, who had a lifelong interest in Finnish history, describes the outbreak of the Winter War in the preface of his eponymous book.

The reports on the Soviet air-raids on Helsinki became front-page news for international media of those days. “Peaceful cities and countryside are soon laid waste by the ravages of the giant bombers whose missiles rained death and destruction from the skies. Entire business districts are wiped out. Schools, churches, homes and even hospitals cannot escape the devastating onslaught.” reports voice-over announcer Alois Havrilla in the *Finland Fights!* newsreel.<sup>6</sup> A huge article on the bombings of Helsinki was published in the *The New York Times* the next day.

“At 9:25 a.m. the first air-raid alarm was sounded and ten minutes later three Russian planes were sighted over the city [...] Ten planes in four waves attacked the center of the city and one bomb exploded near Terminus Square, then overcrowded with people seeking evacuation. [...] The Russian bombers apparently aimed their projectiles on the railroad station, the harbor and the airport, but many fell in the central part of the city, with terrific explosions. [...] First bombs caused a panic, the people appeared to be stupefied by the swift onslaught and many stood watching the Soviet planes dart in and out of the clouds while the bombs continued to fall around them. Few run for air-raid shelters. Of the three attacks, the one at 2:45, lasting for fifteen minutes, appeared to have caused the greatest damage because its target was the crowded downtown section. [...] The big Technical High School was totally smashed. Several five and six story dwelling houses in the neighborhood

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5 Trotter 2002

6 Yorke 1940

also were destroyed. How many of the dead remained under the ruins was not stated. The streets attacked were half a meter deep in glass splinters and stones.”<sup>7</sup>

Those quotes from the newspapers are describing the Soviet military attack on Finland in the year 1939 but reading it now one can feel similarities with the events which were happening in late February and March 2022 in Ukrainian cities. The Soviet aggression toward Finland in 1939 and Putin's invasion of Ukraine have much in common.

But let's come back to contemporary Helsinki. On 16 of May 2021 passers-by witnessed an event that took place at Hietalahden tori in front of the former Technical High School. A figure in black sportswear appears in front of the wall of the former High School. The man approached the wall carrying a big soft pad on his shoulder. He unfolds the pad near the granite wall and steps on it with his grey climbing shoes. He touches the granite wall with his palms and fingers. The day is sunny and the stone seems to be warm to the touch. He studies the wall by feel until he finds the place to hold on. The craters on the flat granite wall allow for a grip over their sharp edges and tiny crimps. He steps back, puts his hands into the pack that is fixed around his waist to chalk his fingertips and starts to climb. Random passers-by turn around to see what is going on. They probably have never seen a man climbing up the wall on the public square before. Some of them stand wondering why he is doing that.

However, there are not only unaware-bystanders present. A section of the public that seems to be more informed about what is happening gather on the opposite side of the street to see the *Climbing a Memory* performance.

As one of the visitors, artist Karoliina Korvuo describes that day: “I'm meeting friends from school at Hietaniemi marketplace. It's the beginning of May and we've come to see a performance in which the artist is trying to climb on the walls of buildings hit by bombs during the wars.

The holes left behind work as their handles and steps.”<sup>8</sup> Later on, PhD student and art teacher from Art Academy of Latvia Rita Ļegčijina-Broka wrote about the performance:

“*Climbing a Memory* by Pavel Rotts indicates the space in the city scape. Involve, intrigue, convulse. Past events make no impact on the present unless they are memorialized. Generation of damaged houses and killed grandfathers. Identity of action is achieved by dramatizing personal life’s aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms—the path without a goal. Artistic expression is engaged with pre-verbal meanings of the world, incorporated and lived rather than abstractedly intellectually understood. The tactile sense physically and indisputably connects with time and space. Exploration of materiality incarnates the mental constructions of the unexperienced memory. Thus the earth-bounded structure of buildings construct the feelings about space which otherwise would remain diffuse and fleeting.”<sup>9</sup>

Many places in Helsinki still bear traces of WWII – wounds left by bombshells on the granite of city walls. I study these traces using my method that I call “tangible understanding”. I approach them from the climbing perspective, thinking about craters on the walls as climbing routes. Similarly to the pieces of Rachel Whiteread, who describe them as a way to “monumentalize a space that is ignored”, my project aims to draw attention to the origins of these traces by giving the audience a chance to engage with them.<sup>10</sup> I believe that this way of making history tangible can provide a deeper understanding of the historical trauma and its healing processes, which is becoming essential nowadays.

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8 Korvuo 2022

9 Ļegčijina-Broka 2022

10 Whiteread 1992

# Art and Exertion

## The Artist is Present

In 2008, I participated in the young artists' group exhibition in The Manege Central Exhibition Hall in St.Petersburg. The show's name, *Inventory*, was quite self-explanatory, and it was an attempt to inventorize all the young contemporary artists in St.Petersburg. Not having any other concept in mind, I concentrated on the question of what it is to be an artist of the young generation in St.Petersburg in those days. Thinking about all the great predecessors from Avant-Garde to modern times, I felt stuck in the loop of postmodernist thinking while losing the connection with previous generations and world art history - in the broader sense as many other artists of the post-soviet generation. That was how I felt those days while being a student in a strict and, in a certain way, old-fashioned Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design and studying contemporary art at Pro-Arte - a small art institution funded by the Ford Foundation. Having all that in mind, I created the work for the exhibition called *Relay Race*. It was a long durational performance during which I was running on a treadmill for a few hours a day during the timespan of the exhibition. In the explanatory text the work was described as following: "The problem of a young artist who is aware of himself as a successor of modernism and avant-garde, but operating on the postmodern territory, is expressed as the fate of a relay race runner stuck on the infinite limbo of a treadmill."<sup>11</sup>

Although the show lasted just three days, I was exhausted at the end and had to use a recovery cream and ace bandage to reduce the muscle pain. There was nothing particularly distinguishable about me from an athlete doing cardio in the gym other than I had the red stick in my hand - the relay baton. This blurring effect had led to a series of awkward and comical situations when exhibition visitors approached me with unfeigned perplexity. Some even dared to ask me if I was a part of the exhibition or just training in the facilities.

At that moment, I wasn't familiar with Allan Kaprow's works or his *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, but my intentions were similar. The difference was that while Kaprow examines life in all its complexity, I was more interested in life seen through the existence of a body. In this regard, I could mention the Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinovic and his *Artist at Work*, 1978 or the *Bed Piece* by Chris Burden 1972. While in the case of Stilinovic, the artist slept in his studio and documented it for the artwork, Burden was physically present in the gallery, sleeping in the bed for the entire span of the exhibition. To clarify my point, I must mention two other examples of interest in the physicality of the artist's body. At first glance, it seems that Vito Acconci, *Seedbed* 1971 or Piero Manzoni *Merda d' Artista* 1961 represent a similar approach to my *Relay Race* performance approach.

Similarly to both works mentioned (which mainly focused on the bare essentials of life reduced to bodily secretions) the body of a running artist requires an enormous amount of high-grade fuel, consumes litres of water, burns calories and sweats excessively. Nevertheless, my performance's aim was not to reduce the body to bare physicality but rather the opposite, to represent the artist's body as an extension of the mind. In conclusion, I can suggest that while the performance can be seen as a postmodern gesture in its form, it was closer to modernism by its meaning. Rephrasing the Soviet-Georgian philosopher Mirab Mamardashvili, the meaning emerges as the result of effort.<sup>12</sup> An understanding of the human body as not a pure reduction to physicality but rather the glorification of humankind as the embodied thinking. Despite the shared interest in the existence of artists bodies, my work differs from the examples above. It depicted the artist as an active and vital body in active physical and mental effort.

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12 Mamardashvili says: "Human being is the effort to be human" see Mamardashvili 1997, 119. In the Platonic tradition, Mamardashvili saw the human being as always becoming; being human is "an extended effort," for more information about Mamardashvili thinking see DeBlasio 2017 "Our world is arranged in such a way that the most essential events in it, e.g., law or lawlessness etc. depend on efforts made by every single person. And the effort means that something is not there till an effort is made." Mamardashvili 1997, 235–236

In the *Climbing a Memory* project, such energy-consuming physical activity as climbing is a way of understanding, healing and recovery. The scaling of the almost flat vertical wall becomes a metaphor for overcoming trauma and, simultaneously, a method of artistic research. By changing the position of the artist's body from the tridimensional space of the street to the flatness of the vertical wall, the performance challenges the conventional meaning of its vertical surface. While working not only against social patterns concerning the use of public space but against a physical law of gravity, the artist's body works as an adapter able to transmit invisible messages from one space to another. The *Climbing a Memory* performance, in that sense, is not only a process of reading but also the embodiment of memory into the real physical world through the artists bodily existence.

## Relative Grading

Both my father and grandfather used to be athletes. The first was a weightlifter while the second found himself in gymnastics. They used to be semi-professionals, participated in competitions and spent lots of time in the training gyms. So it was natural that at the beginning of my artistic career I compared it with a path of athletics. One of the difficulties with art for me was the fact that there are no common guidelines or agreed rules to distinguish good art from bad art unlike in athletics, which seemed to have a clear system for judgement.

However, when taking a closer look at different kinds of sport, one can notice that the assumption of a clear judgement system proves to be false. Even if the straightforward scale of achievements is applicable in such kinds of sports as high or long jumps, sprint running or other speed competitions it is getting blurry when coming to sports such as figure skating, rhythmic gymnastics or climbing. There are lots of different opinions about grading the difficulty of climbing routes, the quality of the climber's performance and other things that are hard to judge from an objective standpoint.

Sport climbing is a very young sport that emerged only in the second half of the twentieth century. It is a creative activity which provides a lot of freedom to the athletes who practice it. There is no right or wrong way to make your climb. The best rock climber is not necessarily able to win the World Championship or Olympics<sup>13</sup> and in turn, the winner of the World Cup is not necessarily the one who is capable of climbing the world's hardest, highest or scariest mountain.<sup>14</sup>

However, this is not the only ambivalence common between climbing and art. Some climbers consider themselves artists and talk about their activity of creating the routes on the rock surface as an art practice.<sup>15</sup> Even more literally, some of them are comparing the surface of the rock with a blank canvas when talking about setting the new climbing route on the previously unclimbed crag.<sup>16</sup> The use of visual art vocabulary in the climbing community language becomes more understandable after reading an article *Climbing as Drawing* by art critique Garry Barker<sup>17</sup>. Barker examines the connection between climbing and drawing by analysing traditional Chinese landscape painting. He compares it with the technical drawing of the climbing routes on the face of El Capitan mountain<sup>18</sup>. Walking and tracking through the landscape was a part of traditional Chinese painting practice. The aim of walking for the painter was to experience the landscape before depicting it. This physical connection with the landscape brings a classical Chinese painter close to the experience of the contemporary climber who studies the rock by climbing its surface and draws the route afterwards in order to create a climbing map. Later in the article Barker analyses the practice of several artists who involve climbing in their art. Among them

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13 Burgman 2021

The Olympic Games of the year 2021 in Tokio were the first to include Sport Climbing as an Olympic discipline. Adam Ondra, considered the best climber in the world by the majority of the climbing community, didn't become a champion. Many connect this fact to an immensely complicated and ambivalent scoring system in the games. See Burgman 2021 to listen more about the scoring system for climbing on Olympics 2021

14 Honnold 2021

Alex Honnold and his free solo climbing ascent of El Capitan in 2018 considered as a limitbouldering achievement even though he wouldn't be even qualified into the Olympics according to his own opinion.

15 Ceria 2021

16 Honnold 2021a

17 Barker 2021

18 The sheer granite face of the El Capitan, the rock formation located in the Yosemite National Park in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Central California, is one of the world's best rock climbing destinations.

is Alex Hartley, whose LA climbing work resulted in a book called *LA Climbs: Alternative Uses for Architecture*, the project for which Hartley climbed the famous buildings in Los Angeles in order to find a way to bodily relate to their architecture.<sup>19</sup> These climbings were documented by the artist as climbing route maps placed on top of architectural drawings of the buildings and published in a form of a climbing guide. *LA Climbs* was appreciated not only by artists but also by the climbing community.<sup>20</sup>

Following the idea of climbing routes as drawings, we can find other art projects that involve climbing as a medium. One of them is *Via Ferrata* by Dan Shipside, who, following the path of Italian troops during the first world war, climbed the Italian dolomites using his body as a drawing device. Later on, he transferred this climbing route to the facade of the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art.<sup>21</sup> Chip Duggan For his *Urban Quiet* project climbed the buildings in Chicago taking clay casts from architectural pieces as a trophy from each climb. Bringing them to his studio, he used them to produce climbing holds for his installation.<sup>22</sup> With his project *A Climber's Guide to Eastern State Penitentiary*, Alexander Rosenberg is a fantastic example of site responsive art practice. Reenacting the famous escapes from the former Pennsylvanian prison Rosenberg turns the Police investigations on the escapes into climber's guide drawings of the routes that lead over the prison walls.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it is necessary to mention Matthew Barney and his *Drawing Restraints* series. Barney's attitude toward the relationship between an athlete's body, gravity and performativity of the body's resistance to physical laws, is inspirational for my project on many levels. As he put it, the meaning of practice for Barney as the "training ritual of athletics" brings the physical interaction with the war traces in my work to a new level. The matter of practice and training contains the non-spectacular aspect of the art project, which is very important to

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19 Hartley 2003

20 Buildering.net 2004

Here is one example of climbing community feedback: "Was it worth my hard earned \$44.95? Well as the cashier at the bookstore said, "It's an architecture book; those are always pricey." In my opinion it's a buildering book, and those are invaluable."

21 Shipsides 2012

"Via Ferrata (ACCA) is a rope drawing - made insitu climbing and descending the Coreten clad ACCA building. The rope is attached by magnets placed to maintain and shape the position of the route."

22 Castro 2012

23 Rosenberg 2019

me - the intimate contact with the wounds. As art critic Carmen Winant writes in his article on Barney, “athletic practice denies not only an audience but also the binary terms of winning and losing,” which correlates with my understanding of art practice and the absence of a judicial system. Also, it reflects climbing as a path without a goal. For me, the aim of climbing the wall using traces of war as the hold is not in getting over the wall but in the practice itself. The crucial part of these climbing performances of mine is the idea of an impossible task, the unclimbable route. The climb is impossible in many cases in the *Climbing a Memory* project, but the project only gains profit from that. As Helsinki based curator and writer Anders Kreuger about the *Climbing a Memory* performance: “When you can only fail and fall, but that transforms bad residue into new energy”

Moreover, again Barney’s thinking resonates here “It is as though failure will make the audience feel something they cannot bear to feel... provoking something in other people that becomes unbearable.”<sup>24</sup> A failure in climbing the traces illustrates a painful memory of war as a trauma that is almost impossible to heal. At the same time, it is a part of the “ritual of training”, which is potentially able to make one strong enough to get over finally.

Coming back to the year 2008 and to my running performance at the *Inventory* exhibition I want to recall one detail. By a curious coincidence, on the day of my *Relay Race* performance, the city of St.Petersburg hosted the Olympic torch relay of the Beijing Olympic Games. This occasion makes this work stand close to another example of merging art and sport that I came across three years later in 2011 at the 54th Venice Biennial. The “Track and Field” by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla was the installation in front of the USA pavilion that contained a real US army tank upside down and an athlete running on the treadmill installed on one of its treads. The US athlete in the Olympic uniform was ascending the machine for 15 minutes in an hour to activate the treads of a tank by running on a treadmill. The installation with

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24 Winant 2011

the working tank generated a loud noise and got a lot of attention from biennial visitors. An obvious political aspect is present in this work and the war “a mere continuation of politics by other means” becoming an inevitable topic of discussion.

## Climbing and Memory

Climbing and scaling were always attractive to me. I remember my father speed-climbing a tree to surprise me from above when we were playing hide-and-seek in my childhood. Climbing trees or boulders, running and jumping off garage roofs was a typical activity for me as a child. Now I know that the children’s craving to hang, climb or jump is a seeking for proprioceptive input which is necessary for the sensory nervous system and in particular the awareness of one’s own body.<sup>25</sup> In turn, according to the latest studies, a proprioceptive activity such as climbing actively improves the so-called working memory or short-term memory that is involved in our everyday life.<sup>26 27</sup> The working memory not only makes us capable of performing urgent tasks and decision making but also helps to organise information for the long term use. Hence, the improvement of working memory means better memory in general. I can’t just walk away from this fact as it demonstrates the connection between climbing and memory on a neurophysiological level. Several studies examine the connection between climbing and memory by different means<sup>2829</sup> and multiple institutions around the globe are built around this idea. There is a charity organisation in the United States called *Climb For Memory* which aims to fight against Alzheimer’s disease<sup>30</sup> or the Institute for Climbing Therapy in Austria<sup>31</sup> I will

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25 Kiley 2014

26 Taylor 2009

27 Alloway 2015

28 Pezzulo, Barca, Bocconi, Borghi 2010

29 Boschker, Bakker, Michaels 2002

30 Climb For Memory is a non-profit charity aimed at raising awareness and funds for Alzheimer’s disease by climbing mountains around the world. More information about this organization can be found on [www.climb4memory.org](http://www.climb4memory.org)

31 ICT - Institute for Climbing Therapy, In-house trainings: therapeutic climbing in psychotherapy & experiential education, More information about this organization can be found on [www.climbingtherapy.com](http://www.climbingtherapy.com)

tell more about the role of climbing in psychology and mental health practises in the Climbing as Healing chapter.

A connection between climbing and memory is not only a topic of research for medical scientists and physiologists. The crucial role of memory in climbing is also acknowledged by professional climbers and the climbing community and it has its practical implementations that I will discuss in the following chapters. The metaphorical connection between memory and climbing is central in the series of videos made by the famous Czech professional rock climber Adam Ondra in which he is visiting his hometown in order to climb some places from his childhood. As he says in that video: “there are lots of nice memories and I would like to re-climb some of the routes and boulders...”<sup>32</sup> After mentioning memories he uses the verb *to re-climb* as a derivative from *to recall*. Climbing in the place where he grew up becomes the practice of remembering and recalling his past. We all know this feeling of walking the same path in places of our childhood when the body memory provokes something that is hidden deep inside to wake up. In the same manner, climbing the crags, trees or garage roofs that one used to climb in childhood could provide a similar experience.

When I was three years old, my family moved to the small military town called Luostari, which is situated beyond the polar circle in an area called Pechenga. My father served in the army there. My very first conscious memories are from Pechenga. Among other things, I remember how we used to climb on the singular stand-alone mountain not far from our home. Recently, when searching for open-calls for artist residences, I came across the residency in Nickel town in Pechenga very close to Luostari. Immediately when I saw it, I came up with an idea to go there to “re-climb” my childhood memories. Now, during the war, I feel that it is ethically inappropriate for me to make any art in Russia with exception of political anti-war and anti-putin art projects. Hence, the project of climbing the Salvation Mountain<sup>33</sup> is impossible now. Nevertheless, thinking about climbing the Salvation Mountain in

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32 Ondra 2020

33 Salvation Mountain [Pelastus Vuori] is the original name of the mountain in Finnish

Luostary and the connection between memory and the act of climbing was a part of my path to *Climbing a Memory* project which is a topic of this paper.

## About the Climbing a Memory Project

Some war traces in Helsinki have become an official memorials - they have metal plaques with dates and texts on them, some can be found at the knee height (almost invisible th the eye). Many traces are disappearing due to renovations, but paradoxically or logically, the erasure of traces also leaves a trace. Similar to the process used for the Sarajevo Roses,<sup>34</sup> I fill the craters in Helsinki with resin. I use this material to cast the traces of bombings, the same resin that is in use for the mass production of climbing holds for indoor sport climbing.

The project was started in September 2019 as a part of my Master's Thesis at the Fine Art Academy of Helsinki. During the years 2019 and 2021, the project developed as a series of public performances on the streets of Helsinki. I climbed the damaged walls during the performance using the bombshell craters as climbing holds. The process of finding the path on the wall was similar to an articulation of encrypted messages using my body.

After the final spring exhibition (*Kuvan Kevät*) in 2021, I continued working on the project as my independent artistic work. For the next phase of the project I organised an exhibition *Leave no Trace* in the Project Room gallery in Autumn 2021. For this exhibition I made casts

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34 Abadžić 2022

"Even today, all these years after the war ended, the scars of shells and bullets can be seen on the face of Sarajevo. Mortar shells would leave behind a specific imprint of the impact of the shrapnel in the shape of a flower, like a rose with torn off petals. These spots are remembered for the blood of our fellow citizens. After the end of the war, with the passing of time, many of them disappeared in the reconstruction, but some of the impact holes in the asphalt – known as 'Sarajevo Roses' – were kept as monuments, filled with red paint, a symbol of the bloodshed of the innocents"









of the bomb craters around the city of Helsinki and used them to create artificial climbing holds with coloured epoxy resin. I created an installation inside the gallery - a climbing wall with colored holds - negative imprints of the bomb craters. This wall played the role of the alternative map of the city, its war damage and memory. Every cast on the wall had a QR code linked with a particular location on the virtual map I created for the project.

In the year 2021, the *Climbing a Memory* project exhibited at the *Kuvan Kevät* exhibition got some recognition and was mentioned in the local press, such as *Helsinki Sanomat* and *Hufvudstadsbladet*. In spring 2022, the *Leave No Trace* installation participated in the *Sweet Dreams* exhibition at GLO Hotel Art Helsinki and later was invited to be a part of the *Mäntä Art Festival 2023*.

At the moment, the work consists of a collection of photographs of war-damaged buildings, the project website, with a virtual map serving as an interactive guide and the physical implementation - an artificial climbing wall with the resin casts of bomb traces as holds and a series of performances inside the gallery and outside in the public space.

## Personal Memories

As one of my Finnish peers has put it - we are the first generation who can discuss the topics of the WWII without taking one side or another. During the war, my grandfathers were literally on the opposite sides of the border. One was witnessing the bombardment of Helsinki by the Soviets while the other one survived the airstrikes of the Finnish army in Petrozavodsk. My paternal grandfather, Vladimir Rotts recalls one winter day of 1944:

“We were assigned to the Vivola farmstead, 90 km from Helsinki. I was playing in the yard when I heard a humming sound. It was a Sovi-

et aeroplane with red stars on its wings. I got scared, we had already been hit by airstrikes. So, I hid in my play fort expecting a bombardment.”

While working on the project I was reading the memoirs of a few soviet bomber pilots and air force generals. One of them was Vasily Reshetnikov, a pilot of a long-range bomber who participated in the raids against Helsinki in February 1944. This is how Reshetnikov describes the attack in his book *What's Done is Done*:

The frost was intense and at the altitude of the flight - under fifty. <...> Helsinki met us from the sea. There was already a bombing going on. SABs were densely floating above the port and the city; with incredible density, a vast number of bombs were exploding under them. Our planes flew in a crowd - I wish I would not meet with neighbours. There were multiple targets - factories, stations, barracks, warehouses. Each regiment had its aiming point. Smoke clouded a colossal array, covering the city. Explosions and devastating fires were beneath them. <...> There were so many planes that the anti-aircraft artillery sometimes found them to the touch.”<sup>35</sup>

Can I make a modest assumption with some degree of speculation that the the plane that my grandfather saw from his play fort in Vivola was one of these bombers? Or can I even suggest that it was exactly this Reshetnikov’s plane and the memories from his book are shared memories with my grandfather? I’m not able to check it by any means so this assumption have some viability or not. The event that my grandfather had probably witnessed repercussions of was the Great Bombings of Helsinki which happened in February 1944. It was close to the end of the war and the Armistice Agreement between Finland and Soviet Union was signed half a year later.

At the beginning of the war three years earlier my maternal grandfather witnessed the Finnish airstrikes in my hometown Petrozavodsk on the other side of the Finnish-Russian border. He recalls: “Petrozavodsk suffered from airstrikes: we witnessed two or three bombardments.

There were shelters to hide in when we heard the air-raid alarm. We bound important documents and essentials into bundles and took them with us to the shelter. We left on 20 August. The town was taken on 1 October.”

While living in Finland as a Russian with Finnish roots, I think of the complex relationships between the two countries on a very personal level. In 1939 the Soviet army attacked Finland. Finns defended their independence but lost a part of their territory. In 1941 in the very first days of the Continuation War, my great grandfather died when fighting against the Finnish troops somewhere in the forest of Karelia, and his body was never found. The topic of the Russian-Finnish wars remained mostly silent in Russia and Finland until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It had some space in open public discussion in the 90s from both sides. However, when Russia becomes an aggressor again, it is no longer a theoretical question but a matter of national security and defence of the country, which leads to the decision of Finland and Sweden to join NATO.

As in the old Soviet joke, in contemporary Russia “the future is certain, it is only the past which is unpredictable”. The Russian government rewrites the history on the go like children argue about the rules during the game to adjust it to their advantage. It was long before the full-scale war in Ukraine when the case of Yuri Dmitriev, the head of the Karelian department of Memorial organisation, took place in Petrozavodsk.<sup>36</sup> Dmitriev was imprisoned, and the mass graves in Sandarmokh<sup>37</sup>, which he discovered and studied in the 90-s where, among other victims, around 1000 Finns were secretly killed and buried by the NKVD with bullet holes in the back of their skulls. Now the pro-government Russian historians are claiming that it was not GULAG prisoners killed by NKVD guards who were buried there but Russian soldiers of WWII se-

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36 Yuri Dmitriev was arrested Dec 13, 2016 and accused of ‘preparing and circulating child pornography’. A human right activist Halya Coynash describes this case as “fatally flawed and political trial” For more information about percecution of Yuri Dmitriev see *The Dmitriev Affair: Achievements and Ordeals* 2017 and Coynash 2016

37 Sandarmokh is a forest massif 12 km from Medvezhyegorsk in the Republic of Karelia where thousands of victims of Stalin’s Great Terror were executed. The mass burial was discovered by historian and researcher Yuri Dmitriev and became a memorial to the crimes of Stalin and his regime in the year 1998. For more information about Sandarmokh see *Republican Center for the State Protection of Cultural Heritage Objects* 2012

cretly killed by the Finnish army.<sup>38</sup> Russian does the same trick with its own past, which it does with the Ukrainian present. When the horrifying finds of Bucha and later massive graves of Izum are being uncovered, the government of the Federal State of Russia claims that black is white, war is peace and that “Oceania was at war with Eurasia.”<sup>39</sup>

The position of a Russian immigrant with Finnish roots was never simple, but neither was it ever as complicated as it is now. Since the end of February 2022, whenever I speak Russian in public spaces such as a shopping mall, bus or just on the streets, I subconsciously try not to speak loudly. I immediately think that people around me can think that if I speak Russian, it means that I support Putin and his war. Moreover, I feel the same when hearing some people speak Russian around. I find myself questioning their attitude towards war.

Nevertheless, all this complexity only proves a need for artistic research on these topics. I see the social and political grounds and the necessity for my project in these issues.

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38 A history lecturer at Petrozavodsk University Dr. Kilin put forward a “new hypothesis”, that Soviet POWs executed by the occupying Finnish forces in 1941-1944 might also have been buried at Sandarmokh. See *The Dmitriev Affair: Achievements and Ordeals*. 2017. For more information about this attempt of rewriting history see Yarovaya 2017

39 Quote from the dystopian social science fiction novel and cautionary tale written by the English writer George Orwell.

# The wall of Death

*“You grab these sharp holds, like razor blades. Span as far as you can. So stretched out. I suddenly felt this confidence. I knew exactly how each finger was going onto each hold, where the little ripples on the rock were digging into my shoes.”*

Tommy Caldwell, *The Dawn Wall*, 2017

The traces of the bombing shells that one can find in the walls of Helsinki are just craters on the stone surface. One can pass by without noticing them, however, every trace contains a dramatic story. It might sound pathetic but one can say that life and death are engraved in the wall with these marks. The numbers vary from one trace to another. 80 bodies were removed from the rubble in downtown Helsinki after the first air raid on 30 November 1939, more than fifty people were killed by the bomb on Erottajankatu and Iso Roobertinkatu corner on 8 November 1942,<sup>40</sup> three persons became victims of the air raid in the Kaisaniemi park on 6 February 1944 - the statue of Fredrik Pacius still bears traces of this bombing. There is a certain connection between the rough-to-the-touch materiality of these traces and the bizarre shaped stone edges of famous rock climbing routes that were conquered over the years with multiple attempts by different pioneering climbers, many of whom lost their lives by doing so. However, I have to make a disclaimer that when comparing the traces of the bombings with climbing routes, I don't mean equating deceased climbers with war victims. By comparing the city walls covered in bombshell craters with the natural features of the rock texture, I emphasise the great importance of the surface in both, where every centimetre can mean life or death. A pioneering climber's life is hung on such tiny stone shelves high in the mountains. As Alex Honnold put it in one of his interviews - "Your life depends on the strength of your hands."<sup>41</sup> These craters left by the bombshells, in turn could potentially mean somebody's death or lucky survival, the meaning of which has become undistinguishable after decades have passed since the terrifying air strikes. Nevertheless,

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40 Jokinen 2017

41 Honnold 2017

I want to make it clear that no matter how terrible the fate of climbers who would fall off a cliff are, it was their choice to risk their lives, which is not the case with innocent civilians killed in air raids.

There are many examples of such “deadly walls” in the world of rock climbing. The Wall of Death<sup>42</sup> or the “murderous wall” is the name under which the north face of the Eiger mountain in the Bernese Alps in Switzerland is known among the climbing community for taking the lives of more than sixty climbers since the first attempt in 1935. Over seventy people have died attempting the climb on the summit of K2 - the second-highest mountain on Earth. And the most famous mountain of all, Everest, is literally the world’s highest graveyard for over 200 climbers who never left the mountain.<sup>43</sup>

When I’m looking for climbing route on the surface of the granite wall on Hietalahdentori by touching the edges of the craters left after bombings I’m getting closer to understanding how life and death are interconnected in these pieces of stone. The act of climbing for me is a way of understanding that makes history tangible. My performance is an attempt of comprehension that is translated into a language of touch and movement. This is what I call tangible understanding. The shift from visible to tangible is not just a shift between different senses of perception. From my point of view that shift is changing the entire game.

During six years of my living in Finland, I was thinking about these marks of war around the city as a possible source for an art project but wasn’t able to find a medium through which I could approach this topic. Once, whilst taking photos of bomb craters on the granite wall of Pitkäsilta,<sup>44</sup> I tried to touch it. The surface of the craters, unlike the other surface of the wall, was grainy and reminded me of natural rock.

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42 The well-known memorial in Auschwitz-Birkenau has a similar name. A wall located in the yard at the side of block 11 in front of which SS men shot prisoners is called The Death Wall. This wall keeps marks from several thousand deaths of condemned people who were led to the wall for execution.

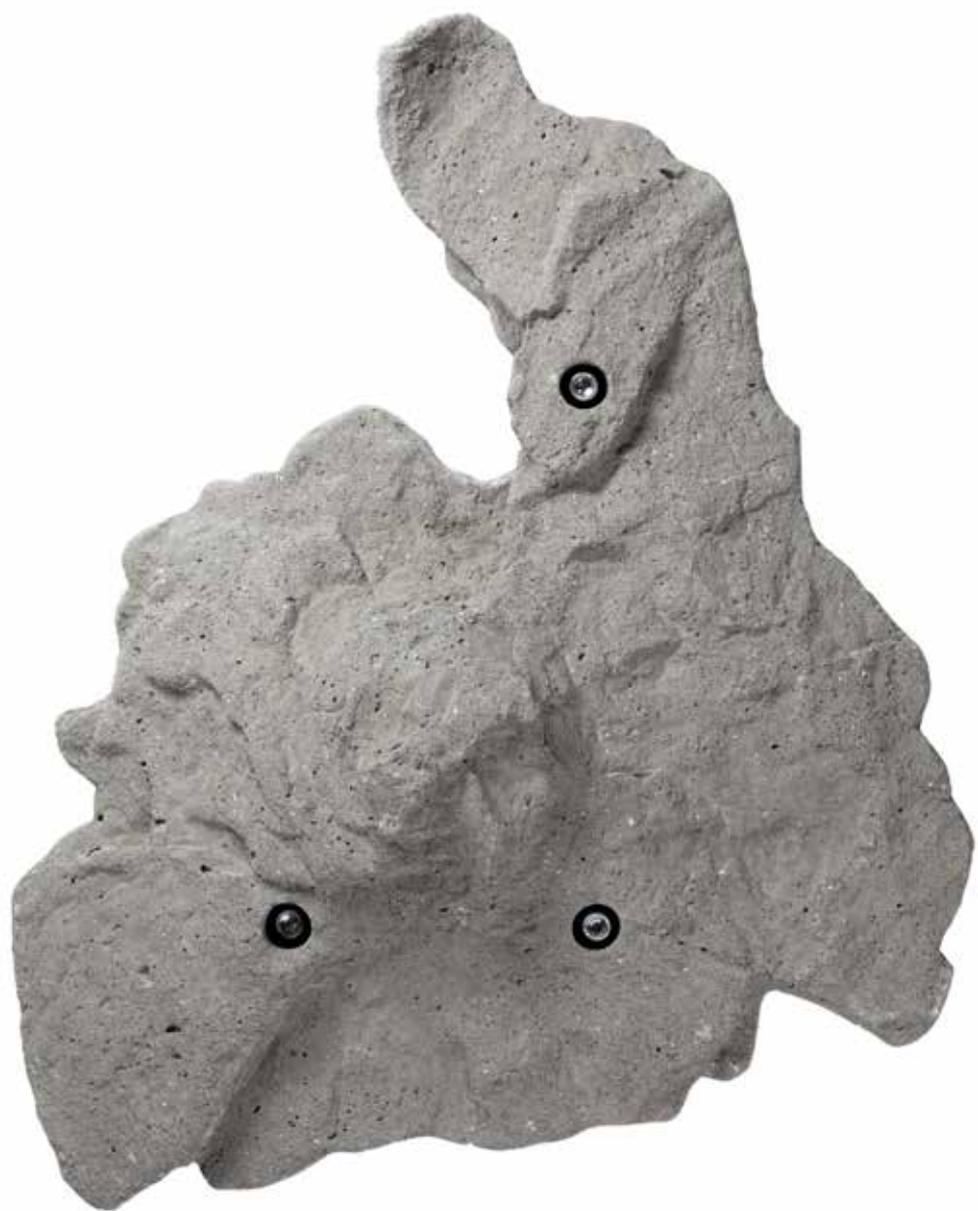
43 Vantine 2010

44 The most visible damage on Pitkä Silta was mostly done in 1918 during the Finnish Civil War in the Battle of Helsinki. But there are also some traces from World War II air raids on the bridge’s other side. Unfortunately, it is impossible for the author at the moment to distinguish the traces from different periods. Still, the traces from both wars (The Civil War and The Continuation War) are confirmed in various sources. For example see Kaupunginmuseo 2012

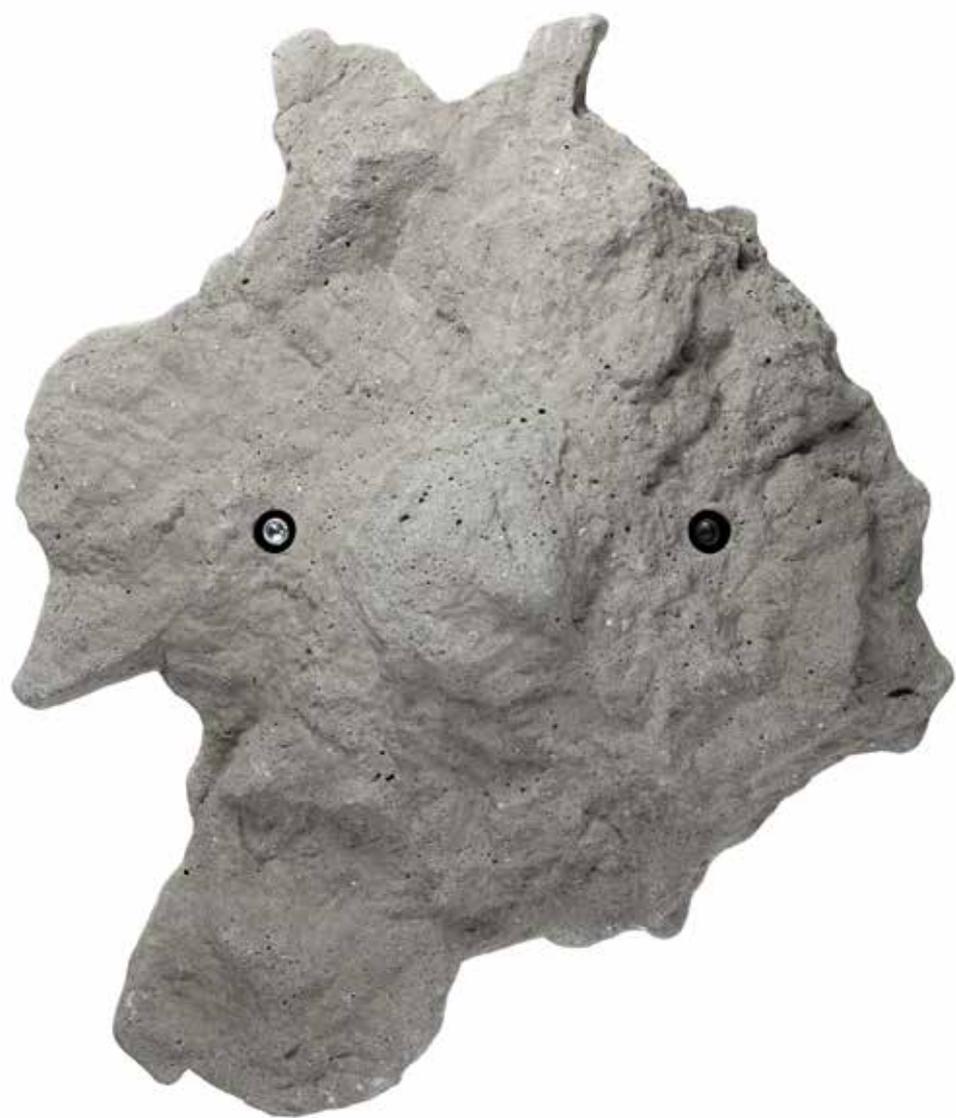














1944 HELSINGIN  
SUOHOJUNTA





It was handy to hook on it. I recalled my first experience with natural rock climbing on the Karelian Isthmus. My perception of these traces of war has changed since that encounter. I realized that during a half-decade of watching them, they became a blind spot in my vision, while the physical contact immediately allowed a new meaning to emerge. It created a connection between my body and these outcomes of dramatic war events. I realized that the practice of climbing these traces would allow me to deeper understand its essence. Similarly, as natural features of the rock determine the level of danger for climbers from relatively safe to extreme balance between life and death, the traces of the bombings on the streets of Helsinki became the material manifestation of the deadly experience of war.

The understanding of climbing under certain circumstances as a practice of balancing between life and death always was self-evident for me. The life of the one who climbs depends on finger strength, and the risk is an inseparable feature of that activity. However, when talking with one professor about my project, I was confronted with a different opinion. “I see it so that you are reducing the dramatic events of the war to the shape of such entertainment practises as climbing.” It was the first time I realized that nowadays, climbing is mainly considered entertainment and the understanding of risk is reduced to an adrenalin rush two metres above the safety mat in a climbing gym. Nevertheless, not all contemporary climbing is of that kind. There is still space for risk, adventure and the boundary experiences on the point of life and death.

My attitude towards climbing in the *Climbing a Memory* project has nothing to do with entertainment. To describe my feelings and thoughts about it I would like to use a quote from the *Grand Solo* documentary on Alex Honnold free soloing El Capitan.<sup>45</sup> The host: “Here is what I don’t understand. One little mistake, one little slip, and you fall and die.” Alex Honnold: “Yeah, I mean, uh, you seem to understand it well...”<sup>46</sup>

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45 Free solo climbing is a specific and most dangerous type of climbing without using any safety equipment such as ropes, anchors and bolts

46 The Great Solo 2018

The traces of the war on the city walls are charged with meaning. This collective memory is so strong that it calls for action. Interaction with these traces by using them as climbing holds in the context of the *Climbing a Memory* performance allows me to build a bridge between the tragic events of the past and the present day. I refer to climbing in that artwork not as a merely recreational activity but rather as a challenging practice where life depends on the shape and the size of the gripping surface and, as Alex Honnold put it, on the strength of one's hands.<sup>47</sup>

Today the old traces of war are becoming urgent again. I feel that I can burn my fingers by touching them. The tragic outbreak of the war started by the Russian invasion of Ukraine is dramatically changing our attitude towards memory. The principles of how we used to work with traumatic memories of the past cannot stay the same.

## Climbing as healing

As I mentioned in the previous chapters, I find it interesting the connection between recalling and re-climbing. Adam Ondra, mentioned above, is not the only climber who works with his memories through climbing. Another peculiar example of dealing with the past through the practice of climbing I found in the climbing documentary, *The Dawn Wall*. The film tells us about the first ascent of the “impossible rock face: the Dawn Wall of El Capitan”<sup>48</sup> by legendary free climber Tommy Caldwell and his partner Kevin Jorgeson. Among other things, there is a dramatic story from Tommy's youth. In the year 2000 during the climbing trip in Kyrgyzstan, a small group of young American climbers,<sup>49</sup> which

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47            However, I have to admit that my performance is safe, and there is no threat to my life or risk of a severe injury. Nevertheless, climbing in safety still links to climbing as a sport charged with danger. In my opinion, the contrast between the real threat to life in mountains and rising one metre above the ground with the use of soft climbing pads only emphasises the difference between the traces of war on the walls and the peaceful life on the streets of a contemporary city.

48            The Dawn Wall 2017

49            The group consisted of four professional climbers: Tommy Caldwell, Beth Rodden, John Dickey, and Jason Smith

Tommy Caldwell was a part of, were taken hostage by militant rebels of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.<sup>50</sup> As Tommy describes the moment of their capture in the documentary:

“The four of us were sleeping in portaledges<sup>51</sup> 1,000 feet up the wall, and we woke up to gunshots, these piercing, close gunshots. The bullets hitting the wall right between our portaledges. We looked down, and you could see these figures. These guys are waving at us to come down.”<sup>52</sup>

The group spent six days in captivity constantly walking through the mountains almost without rest and food. On the sixth day of their captivity, the group of young climbers were left with just one captor who forced them up the rugged cliffs. It was at a point when the cruel reality of the situation became clear to them - no one is coming to rescue them and they have to fight for their lives before the captors will take them across the Afghanistan border.<sup>53</sup> At this decisive moment Tommy had the dare to push the terrorist off the cliff. As a result, they were saved and managed to find their way to a Kyrgyzstan army military base but Tommy was completely crushed by the fact that he killed a person.<sup>54</sup> Tommy recalls:

“After Kyrgyzstan, we’re trying to absorb what had happened. [...] We go to church a few times. [...] We’re just searching. [...] We go to a therapist. It’s like nobody knows how to deal with this situation. I think my way of dealing with it was like, you just get back on the same horse and go climb again. This has always been my safe place, my way to deal with life.”

Tommy Caldwell’s experience shows that climbing can be used not only as a device to work with memory, as it was in the case when Adam Ondra climbs in his hometown but also as a way to heal trauma. But an even deeper connection between climbing and reenactment of a traumatic experience is given by another member of Caldwell’s team -

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50 United States Department of State 2018

51 A portaledges is a deployable hanging tent system designed for rock climbers to spend nights on a big wall climb.

52 The Dawn Wall 2017

53 United States Department of State 2018

54 However it is important to say that the captor eventually survived. His name was Ravshan Sharipov. A few weeks after the group came back to the USA there was news from Kyrgyzstan: Sharipov survived the fall and was captured by Kyrgyz soldiers. Child 2003

John Dickey. Dickey's example comes closer to the idea of "reclimbing" the memories.

In 2011, eleven years after the kidnapping, he travelled back to the same region of Kyrgyzstan to climb there again. "There will definitely be a strong stroll down memory lane and I can't predict how I'm going to react" he told the NPR interviewer on the eve of his trip.<sup>55</sup> In his documentary about the trip John develops this point:

"I had to take some time to think about it because I do have some history there. The hardest part about being kidnapped was not the actual kidnapping, it was coming back to life in the States and trying to deal (with it). Even still I'm understanding the impact of that first trip. [...] I wanted to go back. I was excited to go back. [...] It's at the point in my life when it was good for me to go through this, to come back here and to see these places again that left a mark on my life. It's been plaguing me for a long time [...] My first trip definitely set up a cycle of depression that was really difficult and going back on this last trip *pulled me out of that*."<sup>56</sup>

In the case of John Dickey and Tommy Caldwell, climbing becomes a therapy that helps them to deal with their traumatic past.

However, this healing capacity of climbing doesn't belong only to this very specific example. Multiple studies prove the effect of climbing as psychological therapy against depression.<sup>57</sup> Since the year 2005, climbing practises have been in use in the field of depression and anxiety disorder treatment. In 2003, the Institute for Climbing Therapy was founded in Austria, where practising psychologists and climbers are hosting sessions of so-called bouldering psychotherapy - a combination of talk therapy and climbing.<sup>58</sup> Germany and Austria are currently the centres of that movement. In Germany, several clinics and hospitals have climbing walls so that therapists can prescribe a bouldering<sup>59</sup>

55 Dickey, John. 2011

56 *The Kyrgyzstan Project* 2013

57 Luttenberger, Stelzer, Först 2015

58 ICT - Institute for Climbing Therapy, In-house trainings: therapeutic climbing in psychotherapy & experiential education, More information about this organization can be found on [www.climbingtherapy.com](http://www.climbingtherapy.com)

59 Bouldering is a form of free climbing that is performed on small rock formations or artificial rock

exercise as part of the treatment process.<sup>60</sup> A psychology researcher Katharina Luttenberger emphasises that climbing is loaded with metaphors: “A depressed patient needs to find a hold again in life, or you have to *climb out of your depression*, you have to let go to move on.”<sup>61</sup> Climbing as a metaphor for overcoming is one of the central points of the Climbing a Memory project. The potential for healing a trauma that climbing provides on the personal level is extrapolated in the project on the scale of collective memory.

## A Zoomed-in World

The act of climbing in my project can be considered as the practice of reclaiming the microhistory of the site<sup>62</sup>. Climbing requires complete concentration and a hundred percent focus on the here and now. To understand the level of attention to the wall’s surface when climbing it, I would like to quote The Dawn Wall documentary again. As one of the featured speakers puts it in the film: “This 3,000-foot wall is coming down to millimetres of skin contact on your fingertips. It becomes such a zoomed-in world.” Kevin, Tommy Caldwell’s climbing partner, continues: “It’s hard to articulate the level of detail required. You cannot make any mistake in where you grab the hold and how you place your toe.” The concept of zooming as a metaphor for attention is crucial. We notice only things that are important to us.<sup>63</sup> Human vision can recognize the tiniest changes in a human face in order to read emotions. However, to the untrained eye, different features of the waves in water or a rock surface are indistinguishable and tell nothing. In contrast, for trained climbers, the stone’s surface is an open book they can read by looking at it from the base camp or with their fingertips when up on the wall.<sup>64</sup>

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walls without the use of ropes or harnesses

60 Chrobak, Ula. 2020

61 Chrobak, Ula. 2020

62 Whiteread 1992

63 Hoffman 2016

64 “We evolved to see rocks and rivers, plants and animals, and especially other people.”

A climber operates in a zoomed-in world where every millimetre matters. They see the rock surface differently from other people because, for them, it is not just a random texture but a vital interface that they use to stay safe while scaling a cliff. The act of climbing in the Climbing a Memory project is a zooming device aimed to reveal the agency of traces from World War II in Helsinki.

Similarly to how the rock climbers read the stone's surface, I'm reading the engravings on the wall using my body. They can be seen as ancient Petroglyphs, which were applied to the granite surface in a specific way. The reading metaphor was especially evident in the project when it was shown as a video performance on the big screen in the lobby of the central library Oodi.<sup>65</sup> From that standpoint, the performance can be interpreted as an act of reading.

However, reading is more than a metaphor for climbing. The expression "reading the route" is shared among the climbing community.<sup>66</sup> The features of the stone are like a text for the climbers. They can read and write it down, transcribing these messages into human-readable text that is to be translated into body language when executed on the wall. Besides a graphical climbing map, the climber also has a written map which is represented in narration constructed with body movements and their sequences. We can think of separate movements as letters, while their combinations constitute words, and the pitches can be read as sentences.<sup>67</sup> "I can talk you through all the moves on that particular section of the wall", says Honnold on an evening TV show.<sup>68</sup>

The most difficult and dangerous part of the route on El Capitan executed by Alex in the documentary is the so-called Boulder Problem. In the Great Solo documentary, Honnold describes the boulder problem movement sequence:

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Fields 2019

65 The artwork was shown in the context of the KuvA Research Days 2021.

See Legčijina-Broka 2022

66 Gresham 2022

67 Pitch is a segment of the climbing route that starts and ends with a natural resting feature on the rock.

68 Honnold 2017

“You’ve got your right hand on a crimp, left hand on a side pole, and then you put your right foot onto this dimple thing. Right-hand goes up to a small down-pulling crimp, left foot goes into a little dish, and then you drive up off the left foot into the thumb press. That’s the worst hold on the entire route. So, you get maybe half your thumb on the hold. Then you roll your two fingers over the thumb, switch your feet, left foot stems out to this really bad sloping black foothold. Switch your thumbs. And then reach out left to a big sloping bread loaf type hold that feels kind of grainy.”<sup>69</sup>

Later in another interview, Alex gets even close to understanding climbing from the viewpoint of choreography: “Each movement of my hands and feet are well thought out and very controlled and precise. Every movement of my hands is choreographed, and I am executing a routine.”<sup>70</sup>

This reference to choreography in Alex’s quotation is especially relevant to my project. If the climber’s movements are choreographed, we can look at the climbable traces on the wall surface as at the climbing score. Execution of that score for a climber is the same as reading the notes for the musician. It is necessary to mention that the combination of choreography with climbing is not new. The climbing elements are present in early Simone Forti’s *Dance Constructions* and Trisha Brown’s *Equipment Pieces*. The sequence of dancers’ movements on a climbing wall was a basis for Brown’s *Planes* performance in 1968: “Three dancers dressed in loose-fitting black and white jumpsuits traversed the wall; using the holes as hand- and foot-holds, they slowly climbed across its surface vertically, horizontally, and diagonally”<sup>71</sup> The video documentation of the performance leaves an impression of levitation of the dancers that ignores gravity. The vertical wall replaces the horizontal stage. The similar shift between horizontal that is considered normal and vertical that intervenes in the territory of impossible is the core of another performance of Brown - *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, 1969.

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69 The Great Solo 2018

70 Honnold 2017

71 Sommer 1972

“The piece began when a man, dressed in street clothes, was seen slowly falling, face forward, from the top of a seven-story building. When he was perpendicular to the wall of the building, he began to slowly walk down to the courtyard. When he reached the ground, he was unhitched from his mountain climbing equipment.”<sup>72</sup>

The unconventional way of using conventional parts of everyday reality that stand out from standard norms is a common feature of art interventions in public space when the artist or performer makes something unusual. This way of intervention into an everyday routine was adopted by me in the Climbing a Memory project.

## Granite as Film

Granite is timeless, if not eternal. It keeps the memory. The granite foundation remains even if the bombardment destroyed the entire building. The traces remain on the granite surface. Can we reconstruct past events in every detail by investigating the traces?

The results of the bombings are well documented by photojournalists of its time. One can find plenty of archival photographs of the city which have captured the devastation caused by the Soviet air raids. Comparing these historical photographs with the current street views, one can see that even though most edifices have been rebuilt, the traces of bombardment can still be seen on the granite walls. Even in places where granite was restored, one can see a clear difference between the untouched surface of the stone and the areas patched up with a mixture of concrete and granite crumbs, which fill the craters left by the bombshells.

The traces of the explosions are not just damage but also a piece of ev-

















idence. As photography is capable of capturing the moment that lasts just a fraction of a second and cannot be registered by a human eye because of its ultra-short temporality, the traces of bombshells capture the moment of the exposure as an image imprinted on the wall.

Looking at the archival photograph that was taken on the corner of Kirkkokatu and Meritullinkatu depicting the damage made by the bomb on 4 November 1941, I see the I see splattered matter. The inhuman destructive energy of the bomb exposure is captured in the photograph with extreme clarity of expression. The building walls are powdered with plaster dust, the traces of the smallest particles are spread over the wall as a spatter, and the entire surface is dappled with holes and craters of different sizes. I visited this crossroad to see if the traces were still there. Standing on the Kirkkokatu and Meritullinkatu crossroad, I examined the building from approximately the same position as the photographer back in 1941. The plastered walls stand flat, and nothing but craters on the lower granite part of the wall reminds us of the explosive energy that disturbed these streets 80 years ago. I squat down to have a closer look at the traces. They look like they were painted by Jackson Pollock, splashing the paint drops with expressive hand gestures over the canvas. Nothing remains from this event long ago, but these traces look the same as if the bomb just fell one second ago. And it is partly true, at least for the granite. From the perspective of its geological time, it is just a second past since the exposure. The granite stone was growing under the earth for eternity to be excavated from the quarry. Compared to that endless time, it became a part of the Kirkkokatu corner wall just a second after excavation and was hit by the bomb the next moment. I am looking at it 80 years later or just a second after that bomb fell. Furthermore, it will stay here for the next second or a century after I leave.

There is a profound similarity in how archival photographs and the surface of the city walls keep the memory of events. The walls captured these dramatic events in bomb traces on their surface like the photographs of war, which are nothing less than film emulsions bom-

barded by light particles. If we look at these traces as photographs on the granite surface, the concept of the negative cast assumes greater meaning.<sup>73</sup> The space inside the bombshells craters is a photographic negative lost in archives waiting to be printed. The casting process is a way to get an image from the negative.

While working with archival materials from the Wartime Photograph Archive of The Finnish Defence Forces for the Leave no Trace exhibition in the Project Room gallery, I found that these photographs represent different approaches. While some of the shots only provide visual documentation of devastation caused by Soviet bombs, other photos undoubtedly have artistic qualities. This distinction brings other qualities into the pictures. Numerous photographs are nameless shots taken by unknown war correspondents. However, some are from well-known photojournalists, such as Osvald Hedenström. Hedenström was a pioneer of war photography in Finland and captured many important historical events through his camera lens. While working during his career in multiple central newspapers in the country, he was known for getting exclusive photographs of politicians and generals of his time, sometimes without permission or even when photography was prohibited.<sup>74</sup> That allowed him to capture some events that otherwise would not have been captured and hence remembered. The traces of bombshells on the city walls can be recognised as a documentation of history. “History can become distorted when there is no documentation; a noble fiction upstages the truth and is recorded as history.” writes photojournalists Jorma Blomqvist in the preface for an Osvald Hedenström’s photo album.<sup>75</sup>

Examining the traces of the bombshells on the former Technical High School wall on the corner of Lönnrotinkatu and Abrahaminkatu, I compared them with newsreels and photographs from the War Time Archive. Soon I discovered that these traces, despite the first impression, were not caused by the massive destruction of the Technical School

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73 More about negative space in *Memorial on top of Memorial: Memory institutions* chapter

74 Blomqvist 1999

75 Blomqvist 1999

building on November 30, 1939. The bombshell traces on the technical school are the results of another building's exposure situated on the opposite side of the street, which resulted in its total demolition. This building at the address Lönnrotinkatu 33-35 had been razed to the ground twice, the first time at the very beginning of the Winter War, and at the end of the Continuation War, the building suffered a second time. That building's photos appeared on the pages of a newspaper world-wide. By analyzing these pictures, we can assume that the damage to the Technical School was caused by the shrapnel from the bomb which destroyed the building on Lönnrotinkatu 33-35. After looking through dozens of photos depicting the blazing apartment block, I realized that if we see the granite surface as film, it means that the pockmarked granite facade of the Technical High School building is one of these photographs. This understanding was a revelation for me at that point. Coincidentally, the Project Room gallery where the Climbing a Memory project was exhibited in October 2021 is located in this particular building on Lönnrotinkatu 33-35. This fact inevitably has injected a strong site specificity into this project implementation.

# Memorial on top of Memorial: Memory institutions

*“Casting it in plaster monumentalized a space that is ignored”*<sup>76</sup>

Rachel Whiteread

“An ongoing struggle between remembering and forgetting” is how the architecture historian Sundus Al-Bayati expressed her thoughts about the post-war reconstruction of Berlin city.<sup>77</sup> Many cities in Germany were razed to the ground by bombings, and the post-war urban planning was a challenging and ambivalent combination of restoration, conservation or “opportunity for redevelopment afforded by the bombing.”<sup>78</sup> Most cities affected by the Second World War kept records of war damage and produced damage maps. Based on these maps, municipalities decided on the future of rubble sites and ruins.<sup>79</sup> Plenty of guidelines were developed during and after WWII across Europe, aiming to find the most elaborate approach to reconstruct and preserve the important architectural monuments and city buildings damaged by bombings. The decision-making was complex and needed to consider multiple aspects, from the historical and cultural weight and the ranking of damage to the available sources and shortage of materials. In most case studies and city reconstruction guidelines, primary attention is paid to preserving historical monuments. Nevertheless, already during the war, the idea emerged that the damaged monument, whilst losing part of its value, gains a new value as a war memorial. This idea was introduced in Great Britain in 1945 in the essays by Hugh Casson, Brenda Colvin, and Jacques Groag on architectural proposals for turning the bombed churches of London into memorial gardens. Drawings and texts were gathered under the cover of the book titled *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*.<sup>80</sup> In Great Britain, this discussion started straight after the

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76 Whiteread 1992  
77 Al-Bayati 2021  
78 Larkham 2018  
79 Sedlmeyer, Michler 2019–2021  
80 Casson 1945

destructive air raids of WWII when the question of post-war reconstruction and memorialization was on the agenda. The Times published the letter signed by a group of important cultural figures of that time, which proposed the idea that bomb-damaged churches should be “preserved in their ruined condition, as permanent memorials of this war”.<sup>81</sup> The conservation of war damage as an alternative to restoration seems to conflict with the idea of preservation and restoration of damaged monuments. However, in some cases, the damage becomes a monument, and the new memorial of war emerges on the surface of an architectural landmark. The concept suggested in *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* of the preservation of damaged buildings as memorials we also extrapolated to a smaller scale resulting in the preservation of scars and traces of shrapnel on the city walls.

“Sometimes the damage itself is the memorial, as where the shrapnel scars on several London churches have been left, including St. Clement Danes. A deliberate decision was made in the 2000s refurbishment of St. Paul’s Cathedral to retain such scars, as also happened elsewhere, including in the surviving apse of Coventry Cathedral.”<sup>82</sup> As the author, professor Peter J. Lartham, continues in the same paper - “All memorials are products of complex decision-making processes, but memorialising the contested and dissonant heritage of war and destruction is particularly difficult.”

One of the main questions of the *Climbing a Memory* project is a contradiction between healing and memory, restoration and conservation, and remembering and forgetting. Multiple approaches to the city’s war traces and the grounds for the decision-making about restoration and conservation are interesting to me. Possibly the most peculiar examples of these contradictory approaches is the building on the corner of Jääkarinkatu 2. One entrance to that building has been renovated, and the traces of bombshells are removed. To be more precise in wording, I would say that traces are covered with concrete patches while the neighbouring entrance has remained untouched since 1945, meaning

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81 Clark 2019  
82 Larkham 2020

that all the traces are visible and covering the entire granite part of the entrance gates.

“War memorials are produced through acts of new creation and by the destructive effects of war.”<sup>83</sup> The idea that destruction can be recognized as production and that loss can be conceptualized as the acquisition of new value and meaning, and finally, the idea that the absence of something can be turned into evidence that it had existed brings us to the concept of the negative space.

A negative space - a space of absence often becomes a space for memory. Craters left by mortar shells filled with red resin in Sarajevo known as Sarajevo Roses;<sup>84</sup> footprints of the destroyed Twin Towers in Manhattan turned into giant pools of the Ground Zero Memorial or the bullet traces on the yard wall of Auschwitz concentration camp, known as, The Death Wall. These empty spaces are meant to remain silent rather than tell us something. Especially in the case of ethnically rooted conflicts, such nonverbal memory reservoirs which become an alternative to textual memorial plaques, often failing to be neutral. Dr Mirjana Ristić describes the phenomena of Sarajevo Roses as “silent places of memory which allow passers-by to construct their personal versions of memory and multiple narratives about the city’s history.”<sup>85</sup>

One of the main examples for me of the artist working with memory institutions is a Rachel Whiteread’s Holocaust Memorial in Vienna. Continuing her working method with negative spaces Whiteread created the “inverted non-accessible library”<sup>86</sup> As Whiteread says, describing another work *Ghost*, which was made using the same method of inverted space: it causes the “viewer to become the wall.”<sup>87</sup> From my point of view, the Whiteread method allows the viewer to approach the subject of the work more closely than ever before. It allows being inside it. In the case of the Holocaust Memorial, where the inverted books on

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83 Larkham 2020

84 Abadžić 2022

85 Ristić 2013

86 Foteins Fotografie 2020

87 *Ghost* 1990

the library shelves are facing bypassers with its blocks fore-edges, one can feel themselves inside the book when approaching the monument.

Working with traces of the war is not at all a new idea in the art world. This fact gave the *Climbing a Memory* project plenty of references and sources for inspiration. One of them was a “*Berlin Facaden*” project by Asta Gröting. Working with traces of bombing on the Berlin city walls, she took silicone casts of them. She exhibited these skin-like structures in the Kindle museum in the year 2017 in her eponymous exhibition that I had the pleasure to visit during my stay at an artist residency in the German capital. In Gröting’s words, “I want to look from inside these destroyed walls and facades into the world—as if I could see my own face staring back at me.”<sup>88</sup> In both cases of Whiteread’s and Gröting’s work, we see how the artist breaks through reality’s surface. In the case of Gröting, the reference to the skin brings us even closer to the body metaphor when the artwork allows us to achieve “closer than skin contact” with the subject.

The negative space and materiality of absence are core concepts in the sculptural implementation of the *Climbing a Memory* project. Thinking about that, I imagine these particular particles of stone crushed and smashed on the ground by exposure. Most likely, they were collected with other ash, trash and dust somewhere on a dump in the suburbs of Helsinki and became a part of a city landscape like the Teufelsberg in Berlin.<sup>89</sup> Casting the craters on the walls is nothing but the recreation of the lost matter. At the second exhibition of the *Climbing a Memory* project presented in the Project Room gallery as the *Leave No Trace* installation, negative sculptures made from concrete were installed on the wall of the darkened space of the black box - the space of the gallery where the video works are usually shown. These pieces representing lost stone fragments appeared before the audience in a ghostlike, barely visible presence. I can say that the shift

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88 Gröting 2017

89 Teufelsberg - The Devil Mountain is the second highest mountain in Berlin. The Devil Mountain’s Climbing Tower is one of the oldest artificial climbing walls in Germany. The so-called Devil Mountain is not a natural hill created by tectonic movements or other geological reasons. It is nothing else but 120 metres height pile of debris and rubble left over after the bombing of Berlin city. To read more about The Devil Mountain and similar places in different German cities see Leick, Schreiber, Stoldt 2010

from visual to tangible perception was achieved based on the audience's experience that some visitors shared with me. When entering the room, the gallery visitors could not see the casts until their eyes adjusted to the darkness. The casts invited one to sense them by touch rather than register by sight. By creating the climbing holds from the bomb craters, I'm working with an embodiment on two levels, the first is the embodiment of absence, and the second is a tangible experience.

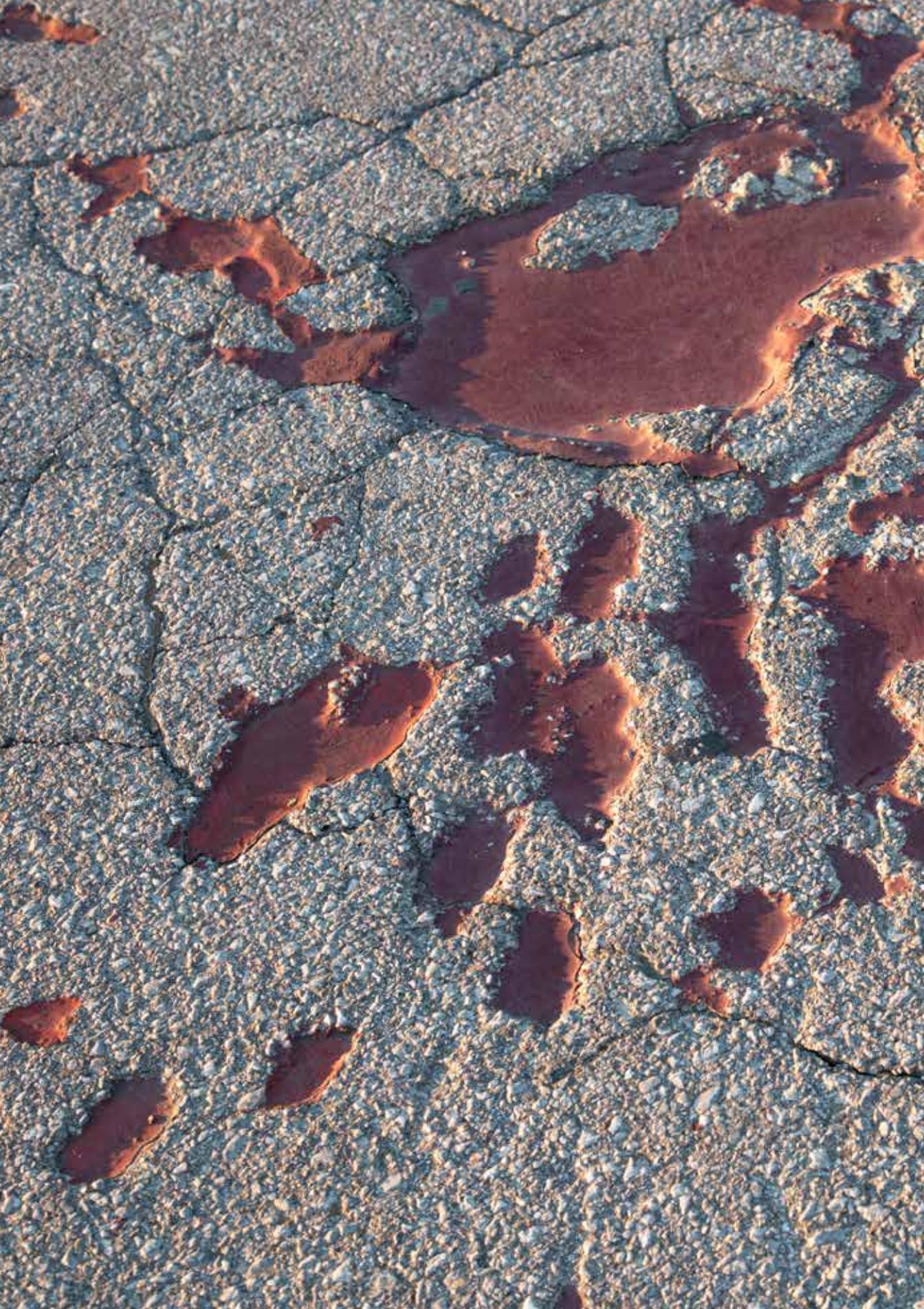
## Where Have All the Flowers Gone?<sup>90</sup>

When I started this project, the time distance between WWII and our time was one of the central subjects. The project aimed to connect traces of the past with the present. The embodiment of these traces was, for me, in a certain way, an act of animation in its Latin meaning "animatus" - "give breath to," and "anima" - "life" or "breath". I intended to give these traces visibility by making them tangible. However, since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, my attitude towards these traces has dramatically changed. Every day, looking at the photographs of bombed Ukrainian cities, I saw the same traces of shelling and bombing. In my eyes, it made the bombshells craters in Helsinki urgent again. They became too visible and almost overwhelmingly present, at least for me, and the idea of animation became contradictory.

As I mentioned in the foreword, I could not finalize this paper in spring 2022 because of the outbreak of the war. I had to step aside and breathe. However, I did not go far away from the topic. During the sum-

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90 The name of the popular anti-war folk-style song written by Pete Seeger and Joe Hickerson. Inspired lyrically by the traditional Cossack folk song "Koloda-Duda". The lyrics are metaphorically telling about the death of soldiers in the war and the circular nature of life: "Where have all the flowers gone?; The girls have picked them every one; Oh, When will you ever learn?; Oh, When will you ever learn?; Young girls; They've taken husbands every one; Young men; They're all in uniform; Soldiers; They've gone to graveyards every one; Graveyards; They're covered with flowers every one; Flowers; Young girls have picked them every one." For more information see Jones 2014









mer of 2022, I continued working on the project outside of Helsinki. A new segment of the Climbing a Memory project was initiated in Narva Art Residency after I studied the consequences of the massive Soviet bombings of Estonian cities.

To get deeper into my research topic, I took a trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina to visit the city of Sarajevo. I wanted to see the Sarajevo Roses for myself, believing that something could open up for me with that encounter. Indeed, the visit to Sarajevo was eye-opening. One cannot put oneself in the place of a victim of war, if one does not have the same traumatic experience. At the same time travelling to the places which became the scenery of some dramatic historical events always helps me to approach the threshold of potential understanding.<sup>91</sup>

Staying for two weeks in Sarajevo helped me to feel the time paradox of this city which has lived a comparably normal peaceful life for over 25 years. However, if one looks at the scars from shelling on the city walls, it seems that the war was here just yesterday. Nevertheless, this visible presence of the war does not stop Sarajevo people from living everyday life: loving, laughing, smiling, going shopping or getting drunk and everything that ordinary peaceful people do. It seems they learned not to notice these painful traces of war or maybe admit them as a natural part of their life, so it does not hurt anymore.

Before visiting the city, I was reading about a constant debate in Sarajevo society about preserving Sarajevo Roses, which are fragile memorials sometimes situated under the people's steps or even on the road under car tires. The article describes Sarajevo Roses as the painful memory of the death of their loved ones for many people in Sarajevo. Another issue is that roses are becoming a point of attraction for tourists, which can also be ethically problematic. However, in practice, when visiting Sarajevo, I felt quite a different attitude in the air.

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91 For example, the visit to the Aushvitz Birkenaw was an eye-opening experience for me. Later on, I watched Claude Lanzmann's Holocaust documentary, Shoah. Claude Lanzmann talks about the importance of the site for understanding the trauma in the interview with Stuart Jeffries for The Guardian. "For a long time, Lanzmann tells me, he resisted going to Poland. "Why would I want to? What would I see?" Instead, he toured the world interviewing Holocaust survivors for his film, pushing them hard to recall their experiences." Later in the interview, Lanzmann says, "Finally, I realized I was meeting people, but couldn't understand what they were telling me. I had to go there. I arrived in Poland loaded like a bomb with knowledge. But the fuse was missing – Poland was the fuse." Lanzmann 2011

Of course, I can't claim that it is an objective picture of reality, but for me, the attitude of locals toward traces was almost shocking at the beginning. They didn't pay any attention to the red resin splashes under their feet and stepped over them without hesitation, whereas I always tried to go around and keep a respectful distance. Eventually, I started to feel stupid. I was trying to show more respect to this history than the Sarajevans themselves. Sarajevo left an impression of a city living its own life with traces on its surface as with freckles on a face. In my current opinion, for those who lived through the four years of the siege and for whom the war was a part of everyday life, these traces were an inseparable natural part of the city. And I, an outsider, must show respect and keep a distance.

This alive and vital picture of Sarajevo's happy people surrounded by walls filled with bullets and bombshells gave me a new vision of the act of animation I was thinking with regards to my project. For a good reason, the war traces were turned into flowers - Sarajevo Roses. That was not just a way to memorize but also to animate - "give breath to" these traces of death. Death and flowers often come together. Flowers are widely used in funeral rituals as a symbol of grief. And there is no contradiction between the fact that flowers symbolize life and vitality and grief, death and sorrow. As the legendary poet, singer and symbol of freedom of the late 80-s in Soviets, Viktor Tsoy was singing in his *A Star Called the Sun* song:

For two thousand years, there's been a war  
A war for no apparent reason  
Wars are for the young  
They serve as wrinkle cures

Red-red blood  
In an hour, it's plain earth  
In two - there's grass and flowers  
In three - it's alive again<sup>92</sup>



I consciously used an example from Sarajevo as something a bit distant and neutral for me in the current situation. However, I have a much closer case of such “animation” in mind. I just don’t feel in the right position to analyze it deep enough, at least because I cannot see it with my own eyes. This example is from the current war in Ukraine.

This is a piece of common knowledge that the initial Putin’s initial plan was to take over Kyiv in a few days.<sup>93</sup> After the plan failed, the Russian army withdrew its forces from the Kyiv region, leaving pieces of evidence of war crimes in their path. The photographs of the streets of Bucha, Irpen and Gostomel were making headlines worldwide. Recently I came across a project by Canadian artist and activist Ivanka Siolkowsky, who came to Ukraine with a humanitarian mission and in parallel with food, clothes and other humanitarian aid, she initiated a project called Bullets of Bucha.<sup>94</sup> An article describing this project tells about how Ukrainian residents of the cities freed from the occupation are coming back to their houses, finding their homes burned to the ground or severely damaged. With residents’ kind permission and support, Ivanka uses her artistic skills to turn bullet holes into flowers. With the help of locals, the movement spread to other places, where residents started to decorate the bullet and shell holes on metal gates and fences around their houses with painted flowers. The photos of forget-me-nots painted over bullet holes in Bucha, which I saw in that article, put everything in place for me - “In two - there’s grass and flowers. In three - it’s alive again.”

After visiting my climbing performance in Project Room, a painter Pamela Brandt told me that her main impression of the performance was the feeling of a young vital body whose living energy interacts with the traces of death. This aliveness and vitalisation go hand in hand with the idea of animation, “to give breath to” the traces of the war; but not in the meaning of reminding of its tragic origin but rather the opposite - to reappropriate them for another unexpected purpose; to give them new meaning and use. In climbing the war traces, I’m not only bringing

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93 Sonne, Khurshudyan, Morgunov, Khudov, 2022  
94 Hassan 2022

attention to traumatic memory but I am also seeking to connect with the future where all of humanity will live, grow, play, love, study, discover sexuality, raise children, wash dishes, sow flowers, take care of elderly parents, skate, climb and do all those things that normal people do in a peaceful life surrounded by the ruins and rubble of destroyed Empires of past.

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**PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF THE**

# **THESIS ARTISTIC COMPONENT**

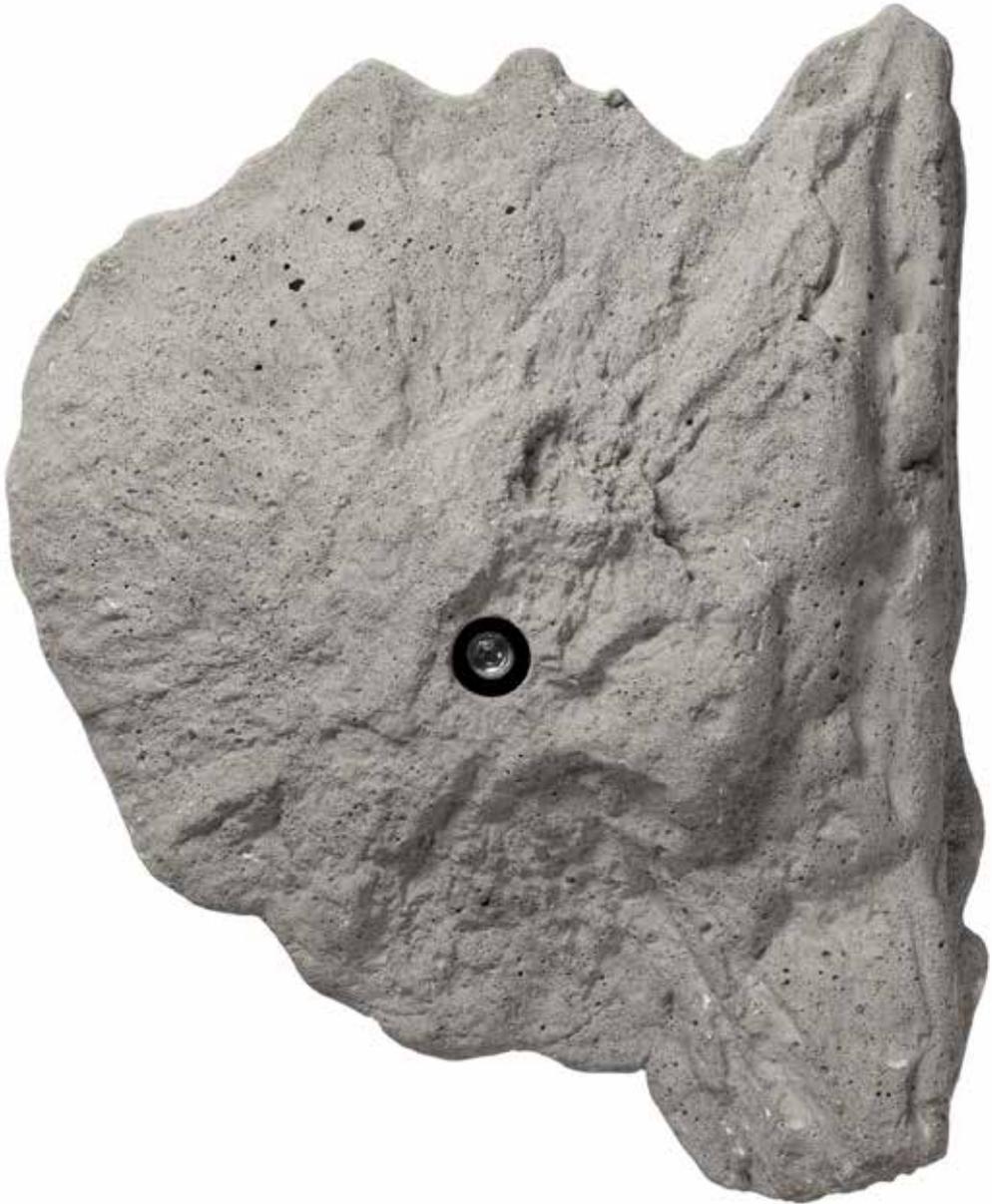


*Kuvan Kevät, 12.5-31.6.2021, Project Room, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, Finland*









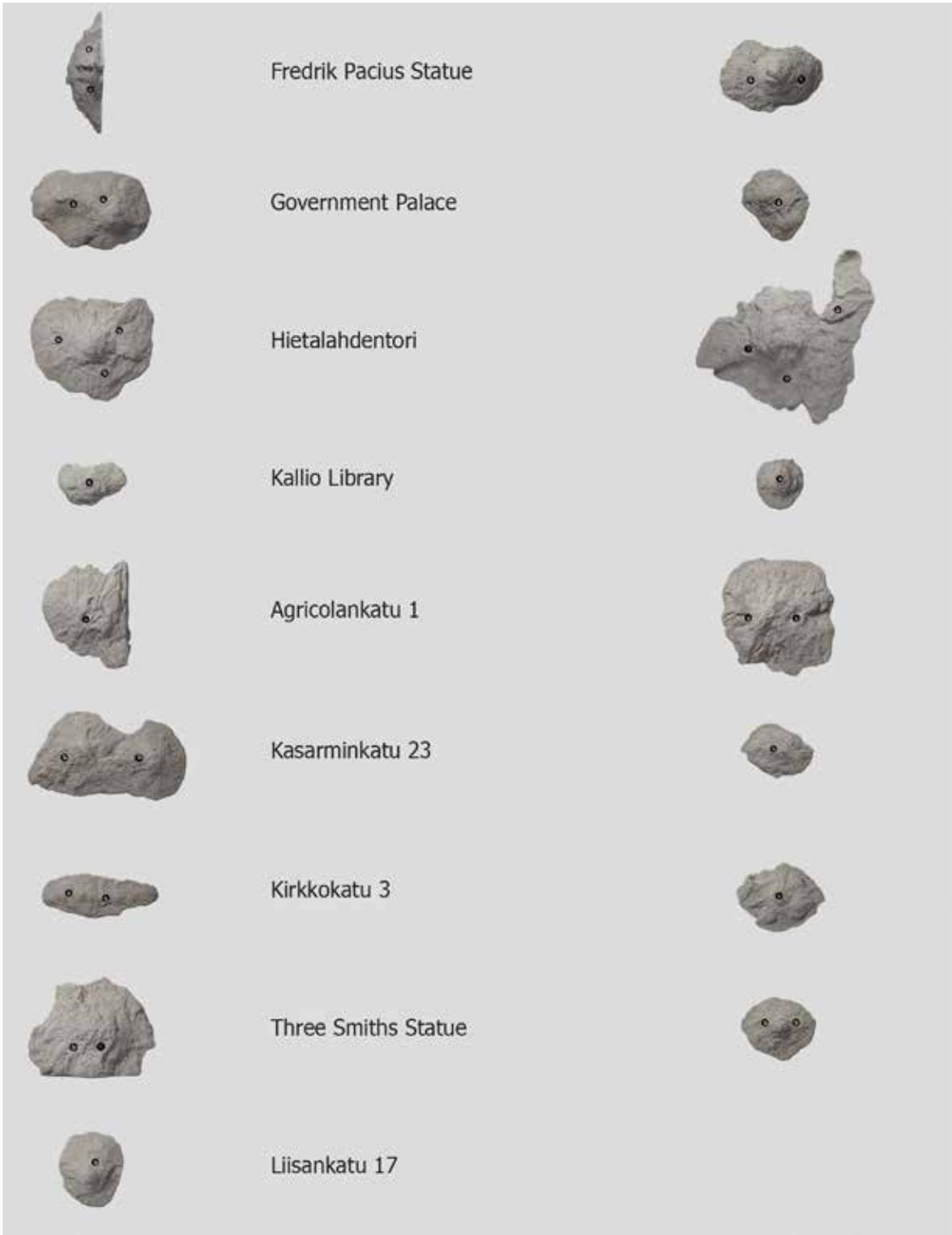
*Climbing a Memory, negative sculptures; variable sizes; concrete, metal  
On the previous page: installation view in the Project Room gallery, Kuvan Kevät 2021*





*Climbing a Memory, negative sculptures; variable sizes; concrete, metal*





Lönnrotinkatu 34



Ässärykmentti Memorial

Meritullinkatu 13



Jääkärinkatu 2

Johan Snellman Statue



Meritullinkatu 29

Metsä Talo



Kasarminkatu 20

St. Paul's Church



Ministry of Defence

Pitkä Silta



Liisankatu 17

Central Railway Station



Metsä Talo

Lönnrotinkatu 34



Liisankatu 16



Pitkä Silta



temenranta

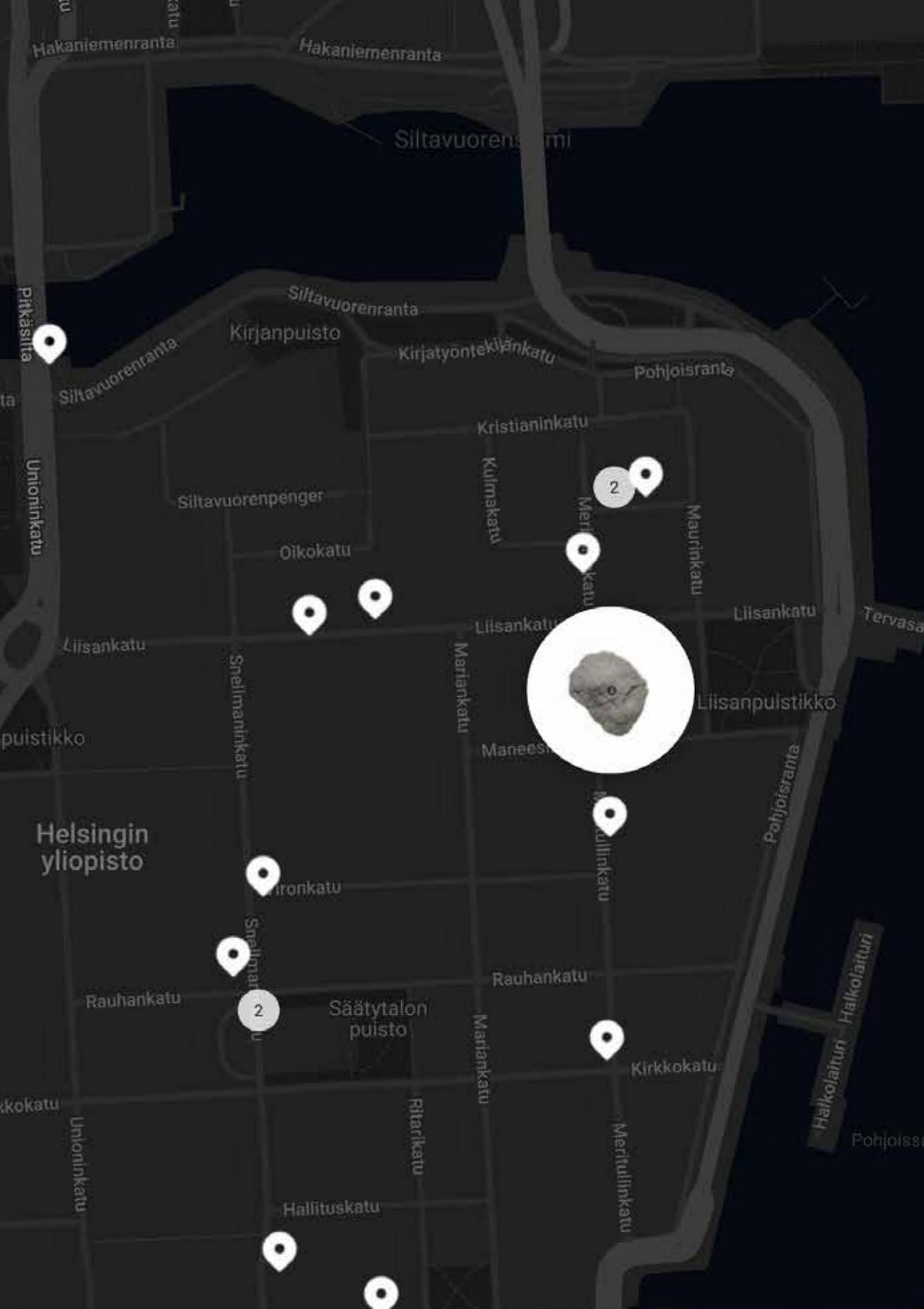
Varsapu

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Fabianinkatu

Fabianinkatu

Kirkko



Hakaniemenranta

Hakaniemenranta

Siltavuorensalmi

Pikkasilta

Siltavuorenranta

Kirjanpuisto

Kirjatyöntekijäkatu

Pohjoisranta

Unioninkatu

Siltavuorenranta

Siltavuorenpenger

Oikokatu

Kristianinkatu

Kulmakatu

2

Merikatu

Maurinkatu

Liisankatu

Liisankatu

Liisankatu

Tervasa

puistikko

Snellmaninkatu

Mariankatu



Liisanpuistikko

Manees

Pohjoisranta

Helsingin yliopisto

2

Ironkatu

Mullinkatu

2

Rauhankatu

Säätytalon puisto

Rauhankatu

Halkolaituri  
Halkolaituri

kokatu

Unioninkatu

Mariankatu

Kirkkokatu

Pohjoiss

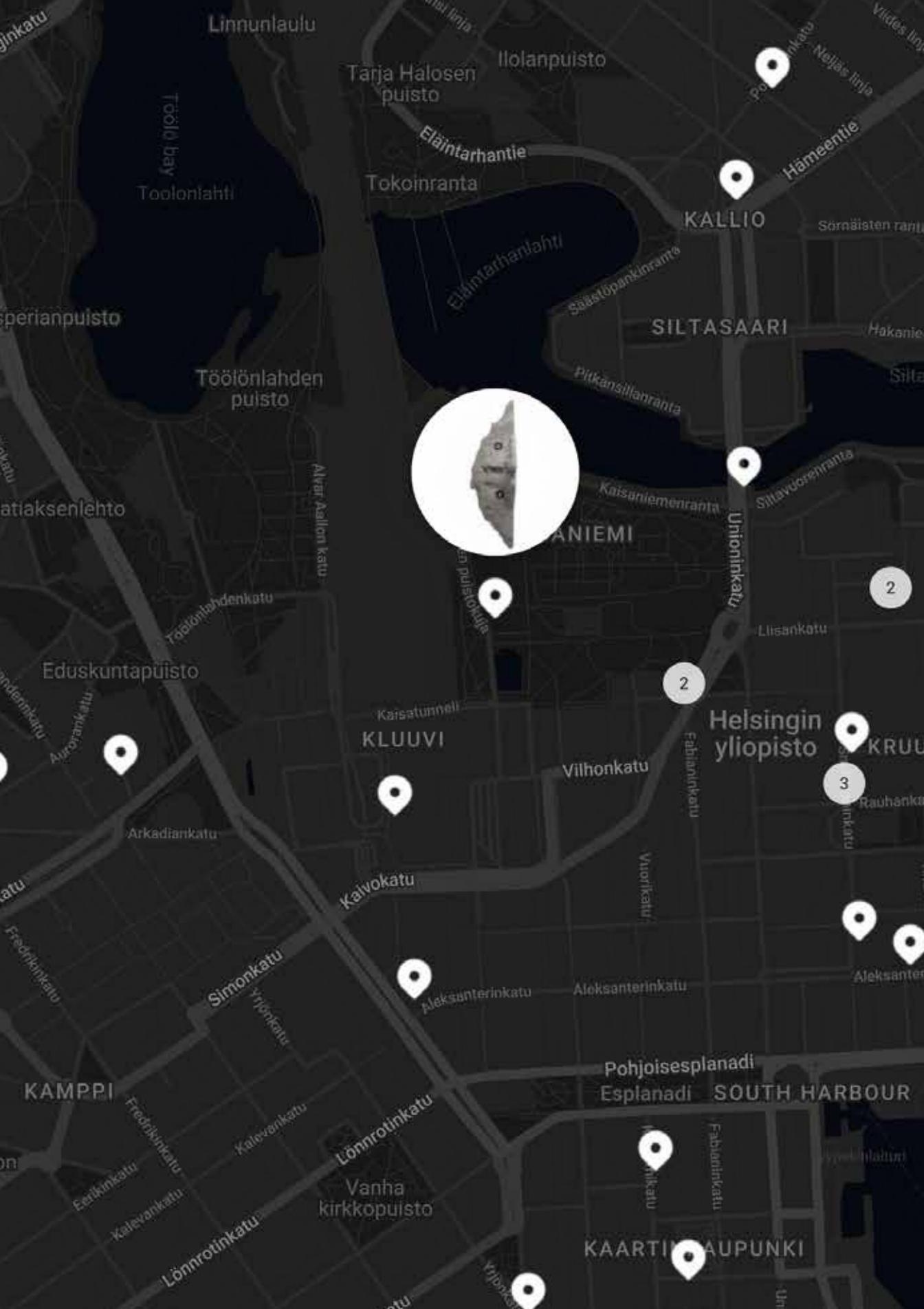
Hallituskatu

Ritarikatu

Merituulinkatu

# Fredrik Pacius Statue





KALLIO

SILTASAARI

KLUUVI

Helsingin yliopisto

KAMPPI

Pohjoisesplanadi  
Esplanadi SOUTH HARBOUR

KAARTINKAUPUNKI

2

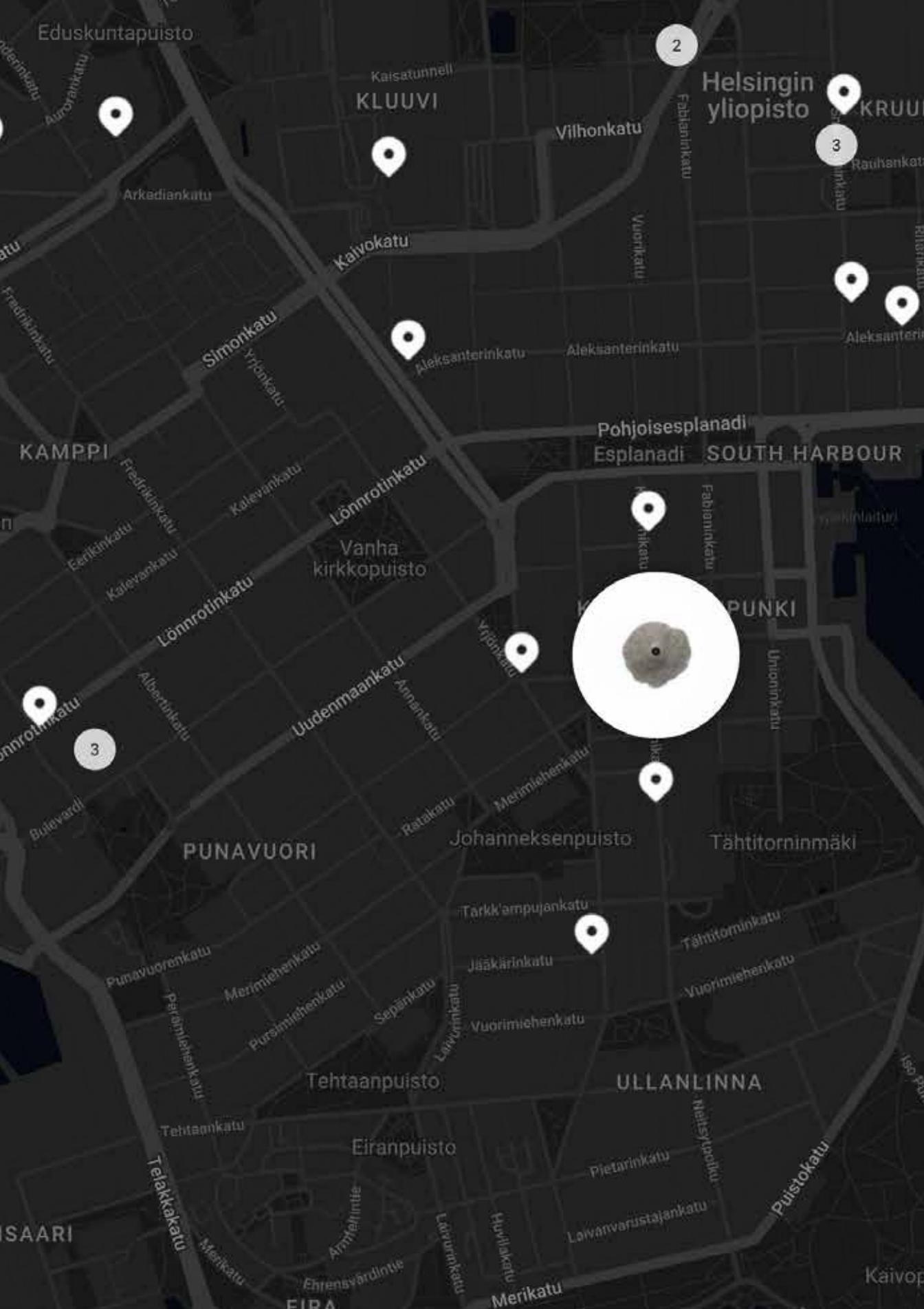
2

3



Archival photograph from Finnish Wartime Photograph Archive SA-kuva





Eduskuntapuisto

KLUUVI

Helsingin yliopisto

KRUU

Arkadiankatu

Vilhonkatu

Kaivokatu

KAMPPI

Pohjoisesplanadi

Esplanadi

SOUTH HARBOUR

Vanha kirkkopuisto

PUNKI

PUNAVUORI

Johanneksenpuisto

Tähtitorninmäki

ULLANLINNA

Tehtaanpuisto

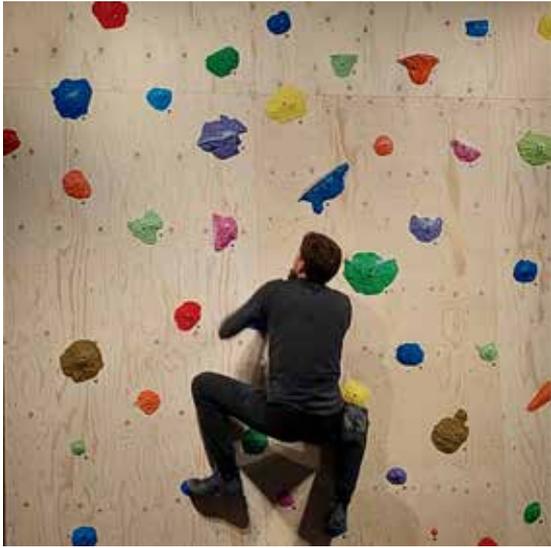
Eiranpuisto

SAARI

EIRA

Kaivop





*Climbing a Memory, performance, duration 60 min. 2021  
On the previous and on the following page: Climbing a Memory, installation, 300 x 300 cm, resin, plywood, metal, 2021*





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*Climbing a Memory, Climbing attempt #1, St. Paul's church, video work, duration 12:19, 2021*  
*On the previous two pages: Climbing a Memory, installation, concrete and metal sculptures, video works, 2021 and the exhibition view.*



