

To Mourn a Time Still Here

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Master Thesis Fine Arts
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My Master Fine Arts thesis project consists of this thesis as the written component and my artwork *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2025) as the artistic component. The artistic component was exhibited during the MFA graduation show at the Academy of Fine Arts (University of the Arts), Helsinki, Finland.

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Caressa Betist (2000)

Youth Singing in a Bunker

2025

Monikanavainen videoinstallaatio / Multi-channel video installation

07:18 min

Youth Singing in a Bunker is a three-channel video installation where a band performs an original song in a bunker. On the two side channels are groups of people watching the performance. Towards the middle, in parts, the groups start to sing along to the chorus line.

URL Full video: <https://vimeo.com/1094389673>

URL Fragment from within the installation: <https://vimeo.com/1086166589?share=copy>

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Bass guitar: Daniel Boswell

Trumpet and backing vocals: Devina Boughton

Drums and backing vocals: Mari Mantynen

Choir: Bálint Barcsai, Adèle Bertrand, Žan Gašperič, Petra Hannus, Sirius Kolunkulma, Maija Korhonen, Anna-Maija Kujanpää, Marjo Levlin, Hellä Meltti, Tuija Ruusumetsä, Elisa Sakko, Wilson Tanner Smith, Aino Utrainen, Anu Vahtola, Pauli Viimaranta, Veera Voima, Ilmi-Emmi Wentzel and Sölvi Steinn Þórhallsson.

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Where We Start: a summary



Fig. 1 Caressa Betist, *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2025, three-channel video installation, 5.1 surround sound). Kuvan Kevät MFA graduation show 2025, kuvataideakatemia, Helsinki. Photo taken from the entrance of the room.

The artistic component

The project I exhibited during the Kuvan Kevät Master graduation show *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (Fig. 1, 2, 6 and 7) was a three-channel video installation with 5.1 surround sound that was played on loop. Upon entering the rather small space, you would immediately walk past one of the three 284 x 178 cm wooden screens that were hung in the space. Positioned at a 90 degree angle from each other. This way the three screens would surround the audience once stepping into the exhibition space. On the center screen was a band. They were playing an original song inside a bunker. A slow song. On both sides of the band – on the two side screens – you could see groups of people watching the band perform this song. Some were standing, some sat on the ground, and others leaned against the grey rock walls. They listened to the song while the drum rhythm filled the space. Towards the middle of the song, a few people on the side channels started to sing along to the lyrics of the chorus-line: *"Luckily, time passes and things change, but sadly, time passes and things change."*

Towards the middle of the song, some people of these groups started to sing along to the chorus line. At the end of the song everyone was singing along as the trumpet soared through the space.

The camera movement in the three videos remained in a fixed position throughout. The only movement was provided by the people in shot who occasionally swayed with the music. The lines were repeated and repeated until the music stopped and the band and groups of people sang the lines two more times. At the end only the trumpet played the final repeating chords. The song played over five speakers and a subwoofer. Making it a 5.1 surround sound set-up. The two side channels had one speaker each, while the other three speakers were placed at the center channel. The sound was divided over the speakers to become directional. Meaning for example you heard the group of people that stood on the left side channel via the left side speaker, and the separate band members were divided over the different speakers that were positioned at the center channel.

The written component

The first chapter of this thesis “Angst, my dear” focuses on the personal and generational sense of existential angst caused by the climate crisis. An experience of angst over losing the present, fueled by uncertainty over the future. Sharing theories by scholars it details how *Youth Singing in a Bunker* thematically embodies this. The second chapter “The Art and Inspirations” lists several performances, (installations of) videos and music that have been fundamental to the creation of, and relate to the artistic framework of *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. The third and final chapter “How We Spent A Time Together: on the Collaboration” provides an account of the relational process of putting the ensemble together. A contribution to academic writing that shares an insight on ‘how art is made?’ This is an insight that is often overlooked in these kinds of writings.



Fig. 2 Caressa Betist, *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2025). Video still, center channel.

I.

Angst, my dear

I woke up again,

Fearing the earth would collide with a burning star.

I felt eerie,

Strange yet

I felt safe, knowing if that would be it

None of us would know

The Themes: *I always yearn for a time that just eluded us*

In early December of 2024 I wrote the poem above that in hindsight would mark my initial interest in, and prompted me to create an artwork focussed on, the feeling that is conveyed in it. A feeling of angst of the future.

The project *Youth Singing in a Bunker* is rooted from angst. Angst of tomorrow, how time can change all I've come to know. Angst of losing a moment I wish I could hold onto for longer. A desire to capture that moment, to not let time pass wherein all inevitably will change. Whether it happens slowly or quickly, I will lose this moment and although I am aware that is a good thing, that time should go on, sometimes I wish it wouldn't, just so I wouldn't have to experience the angst of what the next moment will do to this moment.

I read a line somewhere a while ago.

I always yearn for a time that just eluded us.

I shut the book, paper or pamphlet I was reading and sat on my chair for a little while. I realized I had finally found the words that described my sensibility of angst. I cannot help it, many songs, sounds and situations bring me back to moments I just wish could still be here. Even while I'm still living a time I enjoy, my body becomes fraught for I already feel the angst of losing it. A melancholy for a time still here. And so, I have a great desire to capture time, so as not to lose it. For I'm so afraid I will. *I always yearn for a time that just eluded us and mourn a time that is still here.*

There is of course a paradox in wanting to hold time still. The very act of holding time still, keeps it from passing, keeps it from continuing. And time needs to pass in order for life to exist. To wish it still, is a desire so paradoxically impossible and unattainable that the mere uttering of the longing, saying the words, contradicts itself.

My use of ‘angst’

To understand this text better, I need to explain why I use the word ‘angst’ instead of the, in English, more commonly used ‘anxiety’. The reason is because of my own interpretation of the given words. In Dutch – my first language – the word ‘angst’ is a commonly used word to convey feelings of philosophical, existential dread, usually pertaining to the state of the world. The cause for this feeling can be abstract, like the existential dread I mentioned earlier. But, it can also be specific, occurring after an event. To me, the word ‘anxiety’ does not fully capture this deep sense of dread that I am referring to, as I feel it translates more to feelings of ‘nervousness’ and ‘uneasiness’.

The Angst

The angst of time passing and things changing, though I describe it as a personal disposition, is also felt more broadly in society. The social media generation that I am part of, is reminded on a daily basis how the climate crisis is reaching an impending ‘point-of-no-return’. 2035. 2050. Tomorrow. My generation feels this angst in relation to the future of the world.

I am aware that what I am writing can be perceived as a sort of generalized claim that only this, *my generation* feels this sensibility. This is of course not the case. However, my generation has grown up, from child to adult, in a time where the angst of the impending climate crisis became a topical discourse, whereas generations before have seen the narrative unfold at a later stage in life. This does not belittle or negate those feelings or sensibilities. All it does is outline a distinct difference in our relationships to this crisis.

There is a rising popularity of post-apocalyptic themes in modern media. From the tv-series *The Last of Us* (2023-) by Craig Mazin and Neil Druckman and the film *The End* (2023) by Joshua Oppenheimer, to novels such as *Weather* (2020) by Jenny Offill, to numerous contemporary painters including Rebecca Hasting’s oil paintings from her exhibition *Two minutes to midnight* (2020) (Fig. 3) that present a nightmarish, yet plausible reality, and Alexis Rockman exhibition *A Fable for Tomorrow* (2010-2011), that showcased a selection of his paintings that depict dystopian landscapes of a potential future as a result of climate change. An article from the BBC shares how several studies that examined recent mainstream music, had researched how the lyrics in popular music are also getting significantly more depressive, sad and angry (BBC 2019). In this same article, commercially successful music composer and producer Mike Batt was interviewed on the potential reason for this. He mentioned:

“Songs tend, either deliberately or not, to hold a mirror up to society, or are at least be affected by what is going on in the world. (...) The social media generation is experiencing strongly articulated stress daily. The aggression present in politics and in religious and racial tensions are no greater today than they have always been, but they are thrust more often and more directly into the faces of people. This is bound to reflect in our songs.” (BBC 2019).



Fig 3 Rebecca Hastings, *Two minutes to midnight* (2020, oil on polycotton, 180 x 150 cm). ©James Field.

Several researchers have put forward theories as to why these feelings are so prominent in today’s artistic expressions. Scholars like Brian McDonald and Nirmala Nataraj believe that they are a direct response to catastrophic events. In “After Armageddon: Apocalyptic Fiction through the Ages” Nataraj writes that ‘depictions of the end of the world are usually just as dependent on destabilizing actual events as they are on fantastical ones.’ (2015: 29). Coming from Aristotle’s theory of artistic mimesis where art exaggerates society’s flaws, McDonald argues that fiction expresses society’s current flaws on a more dramatized and larger scale (2012: 9). According to scholar Dominique Dickey the widespread popularity of post-apocalyptic themes in modern media and art should be read as ‘the representation of and response to large-scale contemporary catastrophe’ (2020: 5). This is because it provides a look into the current zeitgeist. As my artwork deals with the uncertainty of time and the sense of angst surrounding the change of time, it prompts the question: How has angst been defined? And how do *I* define angst?

In the 1927 book *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger laid down a foundation for the research on Angst. In his chapter on anxiety (angst), he described it as an existential dread that comes from the realization

of life's inherent nothingness (meaninglessness), as well as saying that it arrives from nowhere: 'Accordingly, when something threatening brings itself close, anxiety does not "see" any definite "here" or "yonder" from which it comes. That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterised by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*' (1962: 231-232).¹ But I wonder if it really does come from nothing or nowhere. I know it can come suddenly, unexpectedly, but I do believe there is a foundation for this feeling to erupt from, one that actually implies the very meaningfulness of life. Psychologist Stanley Rachman argues that anxiety can be described as the 'tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event', or a feeling of 'uneasy suspense' (1998: 2, 3). And so, my perspective is that these "vague events" and "uneasy suspenses" come from learned responses. Whether right or wrong.

In the book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* author Sara Ahmed suggests:

'In anxiety, one's thoughts often move quickly between different objects, a movement which works to intensify the sense of anxiety. One thinks of more and more 'things' to be anxious about; the detachment from a given object allows anxiety to accumulate through gathering more and more objects, until it overwhelms other possible affective relations to the world. One becomes anxious as a mode of attachment to objects. In other words, anxiety tends to stick to objects, even when the objects pass by. Anxiety becomes *an approach to objects* rather than, as with fear, *being produced by an object's approach*. This slide between fear and anxiety is affected by the passing by of the object' (2004: 66).

The angst I am referring to is one relating to the future as well as angst to lose the present. Which are two feelings that coincide, yet they are different enough to be separately mentioned. I find Ahmed's viewing intriguing for the relation to the thematics of *Youth Singing in A Bunker*. As I explained earlier: *I always yearn for a time that just eluded us and mourn a time that is still here*. When I – when we – experience angst over losing time, over what tomorrow could do to it, we are not experiencing angst over losing *the time*, but the *people and places that hold the time*. To capture time is to capture these people and places. They become the objects onto which angst is attached. Perhaps, especially when time with these objects, people and places, is enjoyed. And so, I believe a relationality to melancholia can be made when Ahmed writes "One becomes anxious as a mode of attachment to objects." As this attachment can be taken negatively as well as positively.

The Togetherness

It is intriguing to think of the liminal space within human actions. Humanity is able to create the most beautiful, wondrous, enchanting, magnificent things, as well as causing the most terrifying, horrendous, devastating and monstrous realities. Sometimes when I look at a large group of people together I think to myself – it is a thought, an imaginative, mental understanding, a sudden realization

¹ The original year of publication of *Sein und Zeit* was 1927. However, for this thesis I have used a translated version that was published in 1962.

– that the same object can cause both beauty and terror. Changing in the flick of an eye, unexpectedly.

Leaving me with a feeling of angst.

A group of people singing,

a group of people dancing,

a group of people caring,

a group of people fighting,

a group of people repressing a group of people fleeing.

In *Youth Singing in a Bunker* I wanted to focus on the beauty of togetherness, as a reminder, as a reason to keep hope.

In The Frame: *Youth Singing in a Bunker*

The Lyrics

The song that was sung in *Youth Singing in a Bunker* is a self-written one called *Time Passes And Things Change*. The lyrics of which are:

(verse 1)

*Fields,
Under grey rock skies
Singing lullabies
Until they don't*

(verse 2)

*Madness,
Under fluorescent light
Singing lullabies
Until we don't*

(pre-chorus)

*Oh, we don't know
Oh, we don't know
Oh, we don't know
Oh, we don't know until we do*

(chorus)

*Luckily, time passes and things change
But sadly, time passes and things change*

The most traditional way popular songs are structured is via the 'intro/verse/pre-chorus/chorus/verse/pre-chorus/chorus/bridge/chorus-outro'-structure. Amongst many songs that I listened to to create the sound of the song, were songs from the album *I Could Live in Hope* by American indie guitar band Low. In their music I enjoyed how repetition of melodies and

lyrics structured the songs, rather than the previously mentioned structure. This more loose structure, in my opinion, allows for a way of storytelling through music that flows very organically.

The song that is sung in *Youth Singing in a Bunker* is divided in the following structure:

‘intro/verse(1)/verse(2)/pre-chorus/chorus/outro.’

The lines of the two verses are made with the same rhyme scheme, using different lyrics. The first verse describes a scenario that could be. A life that is lived already inside the bunker. One where the fields of the earth are reconstructed under the walls /skies/ of the grey rock bunker. The second verse has the same chord progression and melodic structure, only now the lyrics speak to a scenario that to a certain extent is already in effect. Where decisions with great eco-political consequences are often made in rooms accessible to only a few, and whose lives are often the least impacted by the choices agreed upon. The description /Under fluorescent light/ acts as a carrier for these rooms, and more importantly for what they imply.

The bridge speaks to the escapist society where knowledge is discarded until society can no longer look away. It mentions /we don't know/ what there is to know /until we do/. The final part of /until we do/ can be read as ‘until we can no longer pretend *as though* we don't know.’

And finally, the two chorus lines hold the key to the whole song. The slight change from the word /Luckily/ to the words /But sadly/ makes for an enormous change in the meaning it conveys. A change that perfectly captures both time and life as ephemerality. In their glory as well as despair, their beauty and terror. These two lines have a melancholic feeling to them, of simultaneous pain, dread and sadness, as well as sweetness and happiness.

After the chorus is sung two times, the choir joins in polyphonically, meaning there were several melodies in which the chorus-lines were sung, that created a complementary sound when sung together. The sound of the trumpet play the chorus two more times. While its echo creeps into the bunkerwalls the trumpet is placed back in its stand and everyone stands still. Waiting for something? Waiting for nothing? The video cuts to black and starts over.

The Bunker

The video takes place inside the bunker of *Vapaan Taiteen Tila*, a bunker owned by the school. This bunker holds a duality: nowadays, it is used for exhibitions and events by UniArts students, but in case of an emergency, it can come in use as a shelter. As it is part of a bigger underground network of bunkers that spans the size of the entire city of Helsinki, that was made as a response to Cold War threats. Though it is not used as a place for refuge at the moment, it can at *any* moment. Later I found out about the Finnish term ‘väestönsuoja’, with ‘Suojaja’ translating to ‘protection’, and ‘vaeston’ translating to ‘people’, ‘citizens’. A debate that is currently held is whether there are enough of these spaces and also where they should be placed.

I was very taken by the normality of bunkers in Helsinki and was intrigued by situating the performance here. In the video the bunker plays its part silently. It surrounds everyone, yet therefore perhaps hard to ignore. There are no alarming red, loud sirens around, no mattresses on the floor and no one is wearing lived-in clothes. It is not clear whether the performers inside the bunker are seeking shelter or if they are watching the music performance of a band. Or both. And so, both of the mentioned scenarios could, in theory, take place. Which was very fitting to what I wanted the location to signify. Stuck in between moments, times and possibilities. The bunker is able to refer to a scenario that is not, but could be.

In the essay “Breaking through - Staying Inside: Imagining the End of the World as a Place” scholar Natalie Lettenewitsch focuses on the notion of a literal locality that can depict or visually refer to the end of the world. She mentions a real/fake dichotomy that signifies a passage to or from the End within the story or narrative (2015: 129). The bunker in my video works in a different way. The installation loops the same fixed video-sequence. The performance only knows one setting: the bunker. Inside the bunker, no one walks off or passes through the space. Everyone stays in place. To start the song again at the every new end. In relation to what Lettenewitsch offered, I did not want to signify an end by letting everyone walk off into a specific direction.

It was a deliberate choice to let everyone sing that time passes and things change, while nothing much changes in the time that passes. Throughout the production of *Youth Singing in a Bunker* there was a moment where I considered all the performers to walk off into the hallway that was behind the band. The music would stop, everyone would continue to sing the song and only the trumpeter would remain standing. Playing solemn echoing notes of the song that would fade into the bunker walls. But towards the shooting, and with advice from my supervisor Tellervo Kalleinen, I decided against this. This scenario would have answered questions I wanted to leave open. I did not want the video, the performance to have a conclusion. Added to that, I thought it was intriguing that the song was so focussed on the loss and gain of time, yet, with every new loop of the video, the same time is experienced again. And again.

The Clothes

The clothes that are worn in *Youth Singing in a Bunker* tell a significant story, parallel to how the bunker functions. During the production I took inspiration from the 2024 film *The End* (Fig. 4) by Joshua Oppenheimer. It is a post-apocalyptic musical about a wealthy family who have been living inside an underground bunker for twenty-five years after environmental collapse caused by climate change. The film tackles big themes of social class, race and first love. But what I took from the film was the storytelling that was conveyed by the costumes alone.

I am a big nerd of these silent forms of communications that are used in the storytelling within films. In *The End*, the clothes of the characters that have lived the longest in the bunker are in a very similar

color-palette to the bunker itself. This, to me, creates the sensation that the landscape of the bunker has shaped their way of thinking and doing. Much like any landscape shapes one's behavior, choices and feelings. In a way they are becoming (have become) their environment.

In an interview with artist Anne Imhof (who I will mention more thoroughly, in the chapter “The Art and Inspirations”), she describes how color played a significant part in her work. She mentions how the items that those in her performances interact with, among other reasons, were chosen for the color that they would add to the scene of the performance. I compared the usage of clothing in Imhof's work to that in Oppenheimer's and realized there was something they had in common: while expressing their own individuality, the clothes of the performers move the story of the film or performance further. I decided to adopt this screenwriting technique onto the participating performers and collaborators in *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (Fig. 5 and 6). They were given very clear instructions on what to wear. They were asked to dress themselves (to their own liking and style) within the color-palette of the bunker: creams, greys, blues and browns.



Fig. 4 Joshua Oppenheimer, *The End* (2024). Film still.



Fig. 5 Caressa Betist, *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2025). Video still, right side channel.



Fig. 6 Caressa Betist, *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2025). Video still, left side channel.

The Three Tableaux Vivants

Coming from a painting background, I often find myself inspired by paintings. As I was looking for art that I could use as a reference for the positioning of the choir in the two side channels, I stumbled

upon this painting from Bendt Eyckermans (Fig. 7). From the beginning I knew I wanted to capture the choir from their profiles. The reason for this is because I wanted it the installation to feel like I was very interested to see the three videos as ‘living paintings’, *tableaux vivants*. To create this sensation, I decided to not make the camera move, and not let any of the choir and band members walk in or out of the frame. This way, everyone remains stuck in the time that is sought not to lose. Eyckerman’s painting inspired me to position the singers in a rather cramped composition in the videoframes. To not focus on the surroundings as much, but focus more on the people in shot.



Fig. 7 Bendt Eyckermans, *A Man Lost* (2018, oil, acrylic and ink on linen, 185 x 146 cm). Collection: Carlos/Ishikawa, London.

The Title

I had several ideas for the title, but in the end I couldn’t decide between: *A Group of People Singing in A Bunker* and *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. The slight change between “*A Group of People*” to “*Youth*” changes a lot. I decided on this because I felt like this piece became a sort of sung reflection of the times we live in, a plea from youth that understands the double consequences of times passing. I also wanted to give a little nod to my history in and love for painting by giving the work a title that is often seen in painting-traditions: when the scene that is painted is described very ‘straight to the point’.

II.

The Art and Inspirations

(Well, more of them...)

The Performances and Videos



Fig. 8 Anne Imhof, *Angst II* (2016, durational performance). Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. ©Nadine Fraczkowski, 032c.

Anne Imhof, *Angst* (2016)

An artwork that deals with the distinct embodiment and subjectivity of angst in the contemporary discourse, is *Angst* (Fig. 8), a three-part performance opera, by Berlin-based artist Anne Imhof. A performance that was largely improvised by the collaborators.² The best way to describe this work, is to say that the work captured the abstract, transitional emotions that are felt by youths of today. Nihilism, hyperindividualism, loneliness, longing, angst, and many more.

I almost envy her ability to convey these feelings in the bleakness that they are. I haven't had the privilege to see any of the three parts of *Angst* live, but I have consumed many videos, photos and

² Imhof's preferred way to reference the performers.

written accounts. There is such fog in all of the documentation. I do not mean unclarity, nor the clouds of fog that are visible in some of the photos. I am talking about a sense of fogginess in the activities of the performances themselves. Many written accounts mention the overload of bigger and smaller things that the performers were doing and that were happening all at once. Someone walking on a tightrope, someone laying on the floor, another sitting, someone else drinking out of a can, someone holding a bird. There was not one thing to look at. No center to make sense of, or from. No choreographed or scored performance. Instead, an anxious display of embodied angst.

Though I was immensely taken by Imhof's approach to the feelings I shared, I knew I wanted to, and needed to approach them differently. I wanted to focus on a sense of hope in my generation's shared experience and sensibility of angst of the future, to capture togetherness as something to take strength from in these times. And rather than exhibit my angst, escape from it, for a moment, through togetherness.

Lina Lapelyte, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* (2019)

An artwork that served as a great inspiration for *Youth Singing in a Bunker* was the performance-opera *Sun & Sea (Marina)* (Fig. 9 and 10) by Lithuanian artist Lina Lapelyte. Which premiered at the Lithuanian pavilion during the Venice Biennale of 2019. Composed by Lina Lapelyte and directed by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, with a libretto written by Vaiva Grainytė. The performance was situated in such a way that it could only be seen by the audience from above. Looking down, you would see a handful of performers laying on towels and foldable chairs, they were all dispersed throughout the space that was covered in sand, made to look like a beach. Dressed in swimwear, some performers were reading a book, others were listening to music from their phones or simply enjoying the 'day out on the beach'. The scene was completed by the children who were running around and making sandcastles.

In the performance-opera, a song about climate change is sung. After the 50-minute run of the performance the humoristic lyrics are able to make you reconsider our collective behaviour towards the climate crisis. The performance exhibits the problematic desire to escape reality rather than face our society's flaws. In essence it draws a bleak picture of current society: all too aware of the threat and reality of climate change, yet we are enjoying the warmer, sunnier, beach days that have come as a result of it. In *Sun & Sea (Marina)* there are a multitude of escapes happening at once that I found immensely fascinating: the performers exhibit an escape through leisure ('day out on the beach'), while the audience of the performance experience an escape by being entertained. Slowly, but surely, both the performers as well as the audience are taken out of this state, as the lyrics of the opera leave no room for escapism anymore.



Fig. 9 Rugile Barzdziukaite, Vaiva Grainyte, Lina Lapelyte, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* (2019, durational performance). Lithuania Biennale Arte 2019, Venice. ©Andrej Vasilenko, artnet.



Fig. 10 Rugile Barzdziukaite, Vaiva Grainyte, Lina Lapelyte, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* (2019, durational performance). Lithuania Biennale Arte 2019, Venice. ©Andrej Vasilenko, artnet.

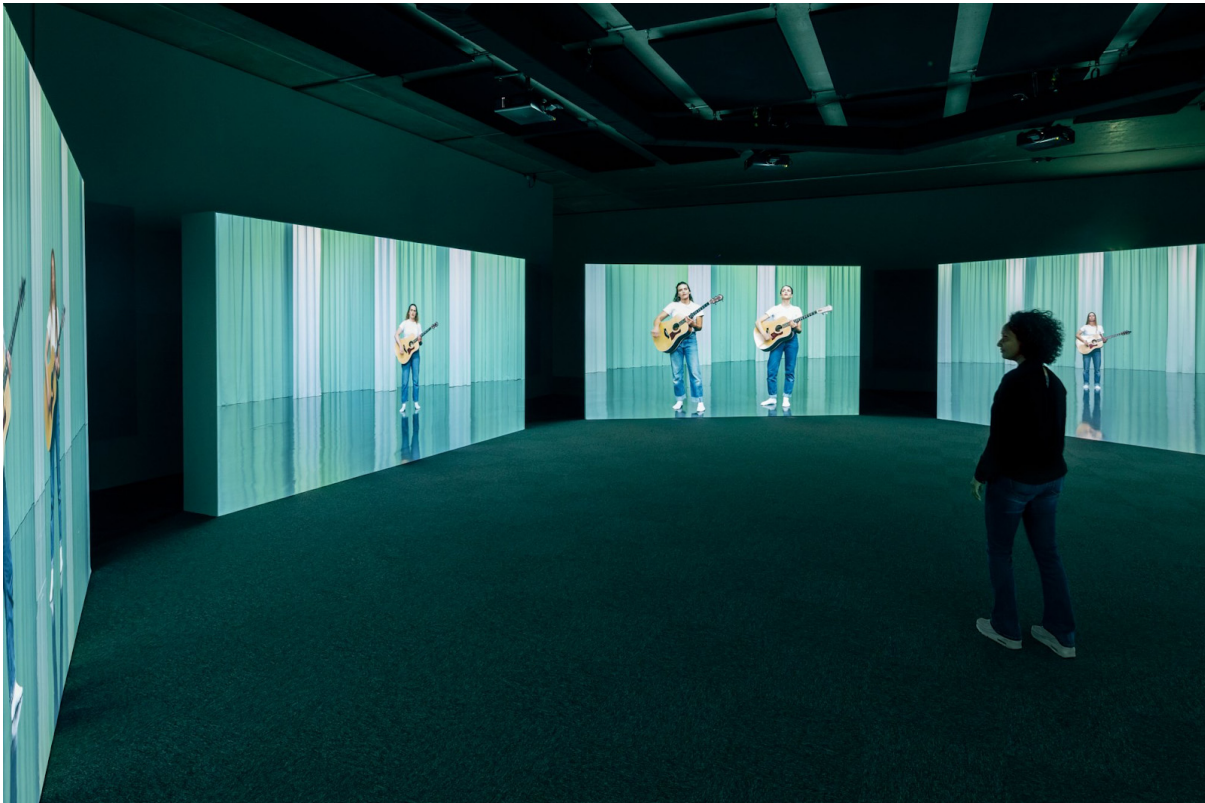


Fig. 11 Ragnar Kjartansson, *No Tomorrow* (2022, six-channel video installation, directional sound, 29 min. 18 sec).
Collection: De Pont, Tilburg. ©Eddo Hartmann, maggabjarnadottir.com.

Ragnar Kjartansson, *No Tomorrow* (2022)

The six-channel video installation *No Tomorrow* (Fig. 11) by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, choreographer Margrét Bjarnadóttir, and American composer Bryce Dessner, is an artwork with a similar sensibility. And also a big inspiration behind my artwork. The performance was initially commissioned for the Iceland Dance Company in 2017, and later on recorded for a video installation that premiered in Kjartansson's first retrospective in The Netherlands 2022 in Museum de Pont in Tilburg. It was here where I first saw the piece.

The screens of the installation were positioned in a circle facing inwards, in equal distance to each other. The audience could enter the circle by passing any of the screens. Once inside the installation, the audience was surrounded by six ballet dancers in simple white t-shirts and denim jeans who were performing a choreographed dance while playing a song on acoustic guitars. The only lyrics they sang were the words */No Tomorrow/*. I was captured by the simplicity and serenity of the piece, the sorrow that was conveyed in such an aesthetically and sonically beautiful piece left me wonderstruck. It was as if the performers simultaneously conveyed the sorrow and acceptance of the angst that there is */No Tomorrow/*. I felt comforted, as well as shaken. It intrigued me.

What *Sun & Sea (Marina)* and *No Tomorrow* have in common are their deep and 'angsty' messages, packaged in incredibly aestheticized, entertaining productions that offer a sense of escape. It made me wonder, what could be the reason for this seeming desire for escapism via aesthetics and

entertainment? Elihu Katz and David Foulkes wrote on the topic of escapism through entertainment ‘People feel isolated which produces the desire to escape, a desire which the mass media are presumed to be instrumental in satisfying’ (1962: 380). Supporting this stance, in the article “Enjoyment: At the Heart of Media Entertainment” scholar Peter Vorderer and co-authors wrote: ‘Entertainment is not a trivial phenomenon. It is a central part of everyday life and a key mechanism through which individuals regulate their emotions, construct social identity, and cope with uncertainty’ (2004: 3).



Fig. 12 Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen (Studio Kalleinen), *Complaints Choir* (2005-, video installation, 90 min.). Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Apr 7 - Apr 17, 2011, Cam. ©Studio Kalleinen.

Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen (Studio Kalleinen), *Complaints Choir* (2005-)

The artwork *Complaints Choir* (2005-) (Fig. 12) by Studio Kalleinen, an artistic duo that consists of Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen, has been of great inspiration for the installation as well as the sound of my *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. It is a video installation that shows a different choir, from different parts of the world, one by one, via the several projectors that are part of the installation. It is very much mentioned in the title: the choir sings complaints. Complaints about work, life, love – all things big and small. It gives a funny, ironic, relatable, but also sad and very telling view into our modern day work-life balance. Exhibiting the feelings of anxiety, boredom, confusion, content, and also joy that come with it.

During a visit to an exhibition at Kiasma museum in Helsinki, I saw this piece for the first time. In a small, dark room, three projections were displayed on three walls. Against the back wall was a large,

sculpture-like, seating area created. I sat down and was very taken by the directional sound. The different videos were not playing at the same time, as they did in my installation. But I found it immensely captivating how, as an audience member, my body moved along to the sound that moved within the installation.

I was, of course, also very taken by the element of the choir. And though the topics that they sing about are at times more ironic and humoristic than the words that are sung in *Youth Singing in a Bunker*, it did inspire me to look more into having a choir sing along rather than only inexperienced voices. This was a conversation I also held with Tellervo Kalleinen, as she was one of my supervisors for *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. She mentioned the importance of who to ask to participate in the project, and what it could convey. Emphasizing that those who join the project, make the project. She also emphasized the significance of what I called the groups of people that joined as singers. Were they non-professionals? Were they singers? Were they actors? Were they a choir?

After the first rehearsal I realized I wanted a soothing sound to escape more from the feeling of angst that started the project. I also looked more closely at what made me feel so captivated by Lapelyte's and Kjartansson's artworks and realized it was the soothing sound of the voices. The messages they sang were bleak – climate grief and no tomorrow –, but the 'beautiful' voices made me linger around in the installation.

The Music

The National, *Vandelyle Crybaby Geeks* (live, 2019)

At the end of all the live shows from American indie-rock band The National, an acoustic rendition of their song *Vandelyle Crybaby Geeks* is performed. This rendition is sung together mostly by the audience. The frontman Matt Berninger gestures to the audience to sing the words, while singing along every now and then. The audience sings the song. In unison. Some of the audience members might sing impeccably whereas others cannot hold a single tune, but in the great wave of the song all of this comes together as one (Fig. 13).³ The immense force that this moment of togetherness holds I see as an inspiring, almost cathartic moment. There is something incredibly emotion-provoking about a large group of people who together sing the same song.

I think a core element of *Youth Singing in a Bunker* was my interest in togetherness in a crowd, being within a crowd. In my artwork I wanted to draw on that experience, translated into a video installation. A great inspiration was this particular rendition of *Vanderlyle Crybabe Geeks*. That

³ In this text I am referring to this moment as experienced live. There is a video recording of one of these renditions uploaded by *Picture this by Sedcas* with the title "The National - Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks (sung by the audience) Live in Lisbon, Portugal" on YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BcnG-TD91w>.

moment where you are enjoying a concert and all of a sudden realize the people next to you are singing the same words, with the same joy, pain, celebration or conviction. You don't know anything about them. You might not agree with their political views, but you are connected at this moment.

In *Youth Singing in a Bunker* a moment of togetherness is created, a moment of scored unexpectedness. It is a layered polyphony of different voices and melodies. I wanted to emphasize the significance of togetherness. In a time wherein groups of people show their devastating abilities, I wanted a group of people singing in a bunker. It might sound simple, but during times wherein such devastations are occurring, I felt the need to capture togetherness as a moment of beauty. In a way, the video of the live rendition of *Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks*, functions as an aspiration for *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. I was aware, while making my artwork, that it had something my work could never have: the audience's, the fans' long stemmed love for the particular song they sing along to. I will dive deeper into this particular aspect, dilemma if you will, in the subchapter "The Questions that arose during the process" of the third and final chapter.



Fig. 13 "The National - Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks (sung by the audience) Live in Lisbon, Portugal," posted December 13th, 2019 by *Picture this by Sedcas*, YouTube, 3 min. 48 sec.

Snow Patrol, *Run* (live, 2009)

I came across a live version of the song *Run* by Irish alternative rock band Snow Patrol after listening to The National's song. It appeared as a suggested song. This is not a band I often listen to, but I was very captivated by the powerful element of togetherness felt in this rendition of the song. The song starts with a solemn electric guitar, the voice of lead singer Gary Lightbody comes in. The audience immediately sings along, loud and clear. In the YouTube video you can even notice Lightbody's excitement and surprise caused by their singing. He then decides to not sing the chorus and let the

audience take the song. At times he helps them with singing the right lyrics. At the second chorus the drums come in, at which point Lightbody and the audience sing in unison.⁴

I remember replaying this particular video and The National's several times repeatedly. The moments that I describe in these songs and videos are very spontaneous. They are powerful because of this suddenness and unexpectedness. In *Youth Singing in a Bunker*, I wanted to (re)create a moment like this, but was aware that by doing so, I would *have* to construct it. It was a dilemma I was trying to find the right answer to. How can I create, construct such a specific moment, that in essence is so powerful because it is in fact not constructed, because it just happens/happened? My answer was to focus on the honesty in the relationships between the people that participated in the performance in the bunker. To be able to look them in their eyes while performing and have, in the construction of this moment, an honesty come through.

Low, *I Could Live in Hope* (1994) & Mazzy Star, *Blue Light* (1993)

The 1994 album *I Could Live in Hope* by the American indie guitar band Low and the 1993 song *Blue Light* by the American alternative rock band Mazzy Star, were advised to me by my other supervisor Ragnar Kjartansson. He advised me to listen to these songs because of the bps (beats per minute) of the drums. A slow drum tempo would allow for the echo of the bunker to not become an issue, but instead become an attribute to the song. These songs use a particularly slow drum tempo of 40 to 45 bps. This would allow space for the chords to wander into. To then arrive in the echo.

Fleetwood Mac, *Landslide* (live, 1997) & Kytteman, *Sorry* (live, 2009)

Another song that inspired the artwork was *Landslide* by Fleetwood Mac. This song gave me a sense of direction in terms of the feeling I wanted to focus on. There is something gutwrenching about the lyrics of this song. */Well I've been afraid of changing/ 'Cause I build my life around you/ And time makes you bolder/ Children get older/ I'm getting older too/*. There is a particular version of this song – again, a live rendition – from 1997, during their concert in Warner Brothers Studios. You can listen to the song on their album *The Dance*. On this rendition, Nick's voice has gotten older, hence adding an extra dimension to the lyrics. The song *Sorry* by the Dutch musician Kytteman, most especially the live version he performed during Lowlands in 2009, inspired me on how to incorporate the trumpet into the song. Because it carries a sense of elevation. The trumpet in this song soars the song to a higher level. It almost felt like it took the song into the sky. I wanted this same feeling, but instead let the trumpet take the song into the bunker walls, confined by the angst.

⁴ The video I am referencing is uploaded by 99xLondon with the title "Snow Patrol - Run (Live @ Oxygen 2009)" on YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= AISnTeet4U>

III.

How We Spent A Time Together: on the Collaboration

As I mentioned earlier, the production of *Youth Singing in a Bunker* came from collaboration. Throughout the process I have learned a great deal on how to lead a collaborative effort and what structural elements ended up being formative for the eventual artwork. In this third and final chapter I want to share my approach to collaboration through the video-piece *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. I feel like there is a lack in academic writing of accounts just on how art happens. The relational process of putting the ensemble together is really important to my practice. This is why I want to include an account of that.

There were different kinds of conversations that lifted the work and helped shape it. Of course, throughout the production there were many formal meetings, but I had lots of small interactions and chats with friends that became formative for the direction of the work. I feel it's right to mention that.

I knew there was a lot to be done to make this project come to life. Though the description “a group of people that sings along to a song performed by a band” sounds like an easy enough situation to create. I knew that there would be many details and elements to consider and take into account. And so, to keep an overview of the whole production, I made a calendar where I had marked down all the important dates for various parts of the artwork. This way, I could focus on smaller tasks, all while still seeing the bigger picture.

Getting the Ensemble Together

To find the right people was the first step of the collaboration. It sounds almost too self-evident to mention, but a good collaboration starts with the right people. My first goal was the band, as I knew that the whole project would fall apart if the band would not consist of the right people. I was looking for people who not only felt the same way towards the musical inspirations as I did, but who were ready to fully collaborate on the song. I found the band members by asking my friends, musicians that had inspired me and by sending (lots) of emails to all the students of UniArts. Via these different methods the band slowly got formed. I had a clear idea of what kind of instruments I wanted in the

song, but I still was open to external influences. For example, when I met Devina and was introduced to their amazing trumpet-playing, I changed the construct of the song to involve a trumpet.

In similar ways I found the right collaborators for the AV (audio, video, light) team. Clear communication from both sides was most important. How many rehearsals can one join? How much time would they have on the day of the official recording? How many times could we meet beforehand to discuss and brainstorm on particular details?

To find the singers that were captured on the two side channels proved more difficult. I think part of the reason for this was my personal dilemma on whether they should be professional singers and performers or participating non-professionals. I had several conversations on this topic with my supervisors. After a while I decided that the presence of three cameras would potentially cause non-professionals to become too self-aware of their movements. And so I started to search for choirs to join the project, at which point my supervisor Tellervo Kalleinen mentioned her friend Veera Voima's choir Roihuvuoren Raakku.

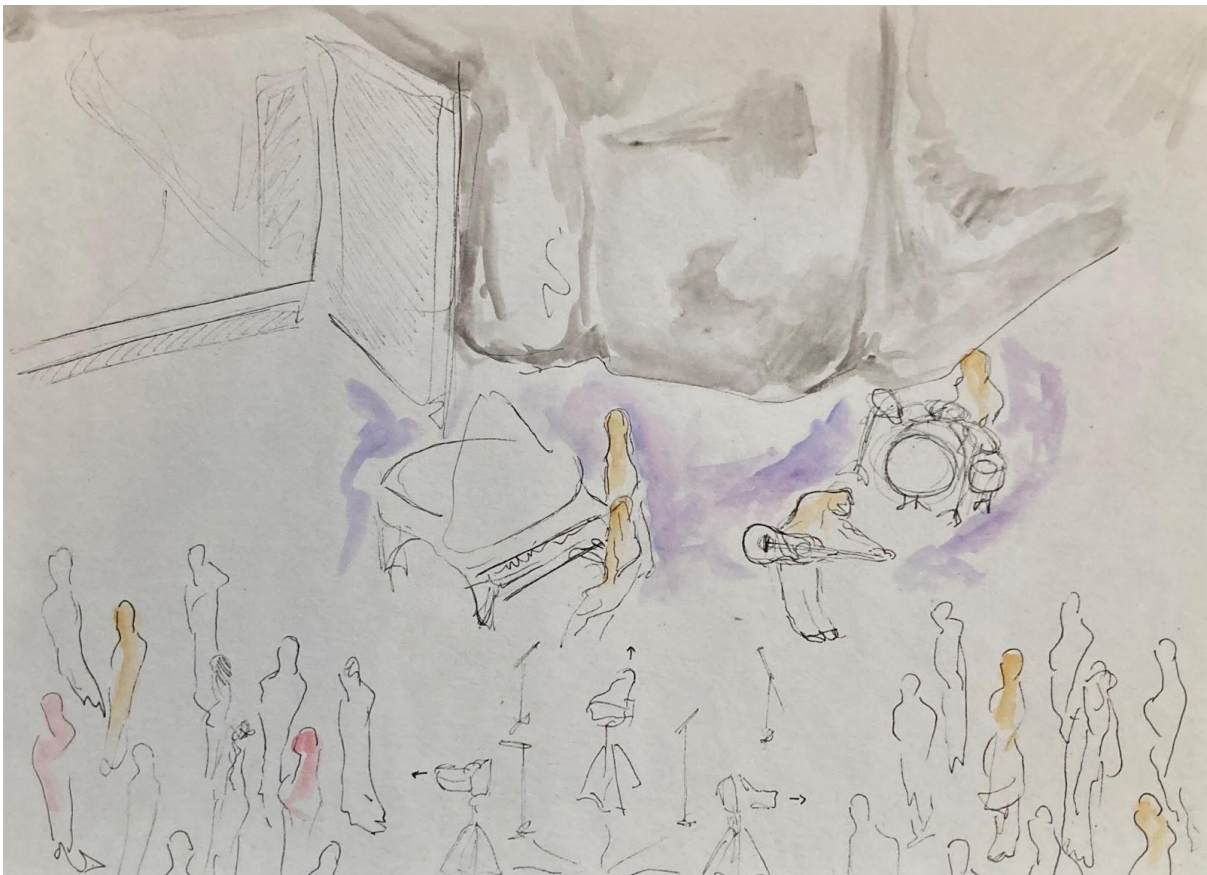


Fig. 14 Caressa Betist, *Youth Singing in a Bunker* (2024, sketch). Private photo Caressa Betist.



Fig. 15 A photo made during the first rehearsal on location in Vapaan Taiteen Tila . On it you can see (f.l.t.r) Roosa Räsänen, Daniel Palpa, Alice Leteissier and Elias Nieminen. Private photo Caressa Betist.

After the First Rehearsal

The look of the three videos

I had a very clear idea of how I wanted everyone to be captured in the videos. I wanted the singers to be recorded from their profiles. This was because I wanted audiences who would enter the installation to feel as though the singers were standing next to them. To mimic a specific concert situation wherein the audience is singing along loudly, and you look to your side and realize the communal moment that is forming at this moment. One where you don't know anything about the people around you, you might have immensely different views on life and yet you find yourself sharing the same space, moment and time.

The first (and only) rehearsal in the actual space, the bunker of *Vapaan Taiteen Tila*, answered a lot of questions and was most formative for the look of the final videos (Fig. 15). On this day we realized that the bunker was actually too small to record the band from the front and the choir from their profiles, while using the camera set-up I had thought of.

The reason behind why I wanted the cameras, and eventually the screens/videos, to be positioned in this 90 degree angle, was because I wanted to leave little chance for the audience of the installation to see everything at the same time. While you look in front of you and see the band, you cannot see the choir that are on both of your sides. Until you look at them, at which point you can't see the band anymore. You cannot take the entire moment in, capture it all at once. You are bound to lose bits of it, while enjoying other parts. Which can be mourned, but also should be celebrated And that is essentially what the lyrics convey when everyone sings:

/Luckily, time passes and things change/

/But sadly, time passes and things change/.

A first and second Assistant Director

During the project I took on the roles of producer, director and performer. I was basically juggling several plates at the same time. I had several conversations about how to best approach this potential issue. I remember going into the production not wanting everyone to have such clear and divided roles to play: the director, the drummer, the cinematographer, the sound engineer. I am not sure why, but I thought of it as too constraining. However, I quickly realized that these roles actually made the creativity flow much more focused: everyone had a personal goal for the days that they joined.

It was after the first rehearsal that I realized the project could not be made if I would not seek out help from a first and also second assistant director. On the day of the final recording this choice alleviated an immense amount of stress from me, as I could fully focus on the performative aspect and trust everyone to carry out their roles to the best of their abilities. It was this trust that I believe is at the basis of a healthy and fruitful way of collaborating.

The Questions that arose during the process

A performance? A video? A documentation?

Sometimes throughout the pre-production, but more often after the installation was hung I received the question whether the artwork was a documentation of a performance, a performance, with the video as byproduct or only a video? My answer: all.

The work in my opinion knows two equally important realities, one is the performance that we did on the 23th of March. It had been windy for quite some time before the day of the shoot and while we were inside the bunker the sun came out. Which made for lovely breaks. I am only trying to say, I remember so much of this day that is not captured in the video. That in my memory, will always remain a part of it. The ephemerality of this specific day, to me, is carried by the performance.

The second reality is the video installation that has captured a time, to repeat for many more days, that was on show during the master graduation exhibition of Kuvan Kevät.

Participatory? Constructed? Spontaneous?

The relationship between the spontaneous situation the work took inspiration from – The National’s live rendition of *Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks* – and the constructed nature of creating the scene, creating the moment, caused many questions throughout the process of making the artwork. Questions such as: was the moment I wanted to capture participatory? Or was it constructed? Did that matter? Did the choir that joined need to rehearse? Should they know the song beforehand? Or can they learn it on the day? Should they have a clear melodic line to sing to create a polyphony? Or can they sing however they want?

Something that I feared was that I would capture a sense of togetherness that was too constructed that it could not breathe any honesty anymore. Though, I knew I had to approach it like the recording of a film scene, exactly because of the clear visual and situational idea I had. We rehearsed several times, and the choir knew what was expected of them. But what was interesting, was that in the choir many singers only joined for the final recording. Having missed most, for some all, of the rehearsals. And so, the moment still had a sense of spontaneity in it. Because of the new and fresh combination of people and setting. For the audience of the installation there was also a sense of spontaneity because of the unexpected singing of the people who were visible on the side channels.

After all the hard work was behind me and the installation was up, I went back during the final weekend of the exhibition. As I sat on one of the stools that I had placed in my exhibition space it suddenly dawned on me. The artwork had become a documentation of the togetherness, of the relationships, the connections, the faces and places I have come to know and love in my time in Helsinki. I believe that the honesty of the work can be found in these relationships. And though the situation is constructed, these relationships are not.

A Moment to Share: the library near Herttoniemi metro station

Exactly one week before the final recording would take place we met with the band and singers at the library near Herttoniemi metro station. Roihuvuoren Raakku was finishing up their own choir practice. After which, under guidance of Veera and me, we did a few rounds wherein we tried out different polyphonies and not long after arrived at a very clear one that was easy to remember and follow (Fig. 16).

After we had completed the final rehearsal, the members of Roihuvuoren Raakku said they wanted to give us something back. They gathered on one side of the library and sang a song to us they had practiced during their previous sessions. Halfway through their song they all walked towards us and grabbed us by the hand. Together we had made a big circle of people, with a small circle of people inside. The big circle moved to the right, while the small circle moved to the left. We all sang and danced together, while everyone was smiling from ear to ear.

After the moment had passed I thought to myself, I will remember this moment. I will take it with me for a long time to come. This time I was too taken by the suddenness of this joyful moment that I had no time to worry about losing it.



Fig. 16 A photo made during our last rehearsal in the Herttonimie library. Private: Caressa Betist. On it you can see (f.l.t.r) Maija Korhonen, Johanna Meltti, Anu Vahtola, Veera Voima, Eliisa Pusila-Pitkänen, Petra Hannus. Private photo Caressa Betist.

Where We End: what is next?

*'I will live with it long enough to see it grow,
I will live with it long enough to see it go,
I will live with all things good until all things bad,
end.
And that they do.'*

After writing this thesis I have come to the realization that 'time' is actually a key theme of my practice. Strangely enough – as it probably is immensely obvious to you, the reader – I had not noticed how deeply embedded this theme is in the topicalities of my practice as well as the mediums I choose. Performance, song, video and in ways togetherness are all immensely time-based. Time's passing makes you lose as well as gain things, people, places, events. I feel a certain melancholia towards this. This melancholia I will dive deeper into. I am especially intrigued by Ahmed's view on angst in relation to passing objects, because of the sense of melancholia I pointed out in the text.

Youth Singing in a Bunker has opened a way of working I had previously only slightly dipped in. One where collaboration through friendship is at the core. As well as one where the ephemerality of performance is captured and translated into video, to live on with different audiences that are experiencing a performance's time held in video. In my artistic practice I have been trying to get to this way of working for longer. I often have a very clear visual image pop into my mind. Positioning performances for video-installations are the perfect way for me to capture those images. This is a method I had not used before starting this Master Fine Arts.

What is next?

Currently, I am working on a project called *Time Keeps Forgetting Me* (Fig. 17). Which will be a continuation of *Youth Singing in a Bunker*. When I first arrived in Helsinki, in January 2024, I lived in an apartment complex in Herttoniemi where I looked down over a children's playground. At the time, it was snowing heavily, and the low streetlights that were on the playground started to look like spotlights. I have always thought to myself, how great would it be to place singers under these spotlights. To have them sing a song while in the middle of the playground, children are making a snowman. To have one camera record this while it slowly moves across the children's playground from left to right, and left to right, and back again. To focus on the sentence "time keeps forgetting me" while making the sound of the song.

It is a sentence I came up with sometime ago and has stuck with me ever since. I feel like there is a sad truth to this line (“time keeps forgetting me”) in relation to the global issue of climate change. For it feels as though every ‘time’ that is given to the issue, it is quickly forgotten and buried under the fast pace of the ‘everyday’. And sometimes it feels as though our capitalist organization of time has led us to lose sense of the precarious nature of our tomorrow.

In this work I will research and capture a moment of being *in waiting*. Using a sentence from Clarice Lispector’s *Água Viva* (1973) as a startingpoint, wherein she asks: Are objects halted time? I will extend this question to: Are people – living, active, being, people – ever halted time? Perhaps, when *in waiting*?

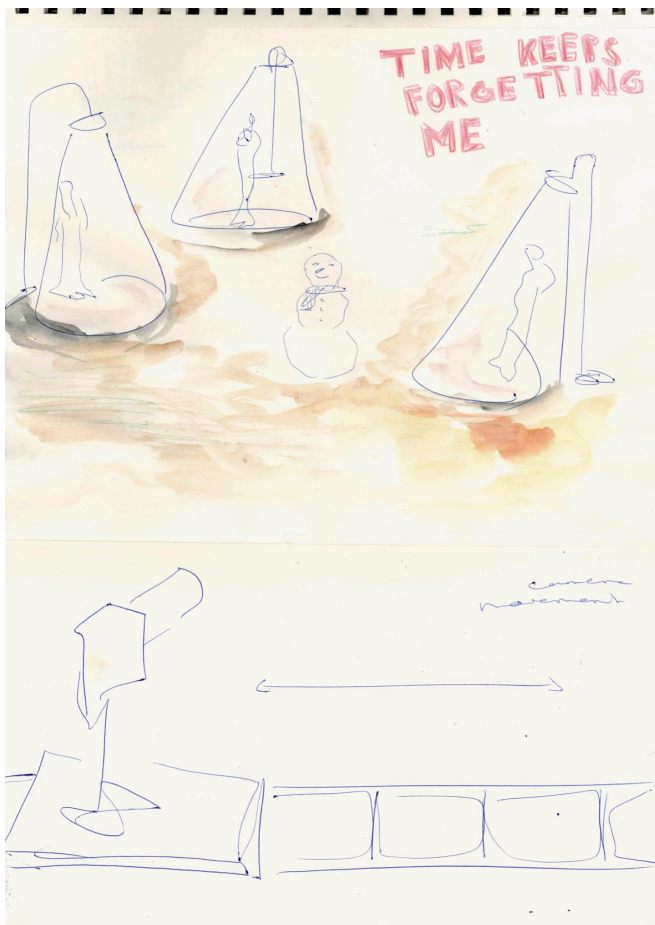


Fig. 17 Caressa Betist, *Time Keeps Forgetting Me* (2025, sketch). Private photo Caressa Betist.

Acknowledgements

The realization of *Youth Singing in a Bunker* comes from earnest and joyous collaboration. I want to take this opportunity to celebrate the hard work and dedication given by everyone involved.

First I want to thank my mother and sister Susanne Thenu and Sylvana Betist, and my uncle Martin Thenu for their unwavering support and advice. To our sweetest dog Arlan. You all fill my heart with the most joy and love, and therefore the worst angst of time passing.

To my supervisors Tellervo Kalleinen and Ragnar Kjartansson. Two artists who have inspired me for much longer and whose practices have helped me shape and better understand my own artistic path. Words lack meaning, when I try to describe what I felt when you both took on the role of being my supervisors. However, here goes an attempt: I feel grateful to have got to know you, and for you to not only have seen my artwork, but to have had deep, critical, supporting and inspiring conversations with you about this particular piece as well as art and life in general. I will continue to follow both of your practices and look forward to the days we meet again.

To Daniel Peltz for your support for the artistic and written component of *Youth Singing in A Bunker*. I was able to share my questions, concerns and drafts with you as well as my successes, solutions and realizations. To Lena Séraphin who helped me shape and refine the written component. Both of your advice have meant a great deal to me.

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Also to the talented musicians, whom I had the pleasure of being in a one-time band with: to the ever whimsical Roy Boswell, your endless rewrites of the guitar's and lyrical melody helped finetune the song to a point I could never have done myself; to our steadiness in the storm Daniel Boswell, your phenomenal bass made my little poem become an actual song; to the inspiring and ultimate 'bad-ass' Mari Mantynen, you joined this project with only six months of drum training under your belt, but you ended up carrying the performance; and last but not least to the ever dedicated and brilliant Devina Boughton, your soaring trumpet still sings in my heart.

I want to emphasize and thank the efforts and great determination of everyone who was part of the

most dreamy AV team to exist. To Daniel Palpa and Alice Leteissier, the cinematographers, your inspiring creativity and openness made my watercolor sketches appear in three fantastic video-channels. To Elias Nieminen and Roosa Räsänen, who engineered and designed the soundscape. You gave your unwavering time and dedication to make it come to life with incredible precision. To Kristian Palmu and Jenny Tallberg, whose preparations beforehand and efforts on set, made the light truly lit up the performance, and in result captured the mood perfectly. *You made us look good!*

I also want to acknowledge the time and heart given by all members of the choir, which consisted of members from Roihuvuoren Raakku choir led by Veera Voima, and my friends. All, in alphabetical order: Bálint Barcsai, Adèle Bertrand, Žan Gašperič, Petra Hannus, Sirius Kolunkulma, Maija Korhonen, Anna-Maija Kujanpää, Marjo Levlin, Hellä Meltti, Tuija Ruusumetsä, Elisa Sakko, Wilson Tanner Smith, Aino Utrainen, Anu Vahtola, Pauli Viimaranta, Veera Voima, Ilmi-Emmi Wentzel and Sölvi Steinn Þórhallsson. You were the beating heart of this performance. Your enthusiasm and energy elevated our song to a place I could have only dreamed of.

Many friends were at the root of this collaboration, many of whom already mentioned. That is why I want to take a moment to also thank my dear friends Navid Afzalnia, Adèle Bertrand, Laura Walter and Sacha Cardoso.

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With love, I thank you all!

Caressa

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