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## **The Udder**

**During the Environmental Art Workshop, which is part of our studies in the Department of Art Education of University of Lapland, we intended to acquaint ourselves with the area of environmental art and to carry out our own project in camp in the village of Kurtakko dated from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of August. The idea was to make a piece of environmental art from willow which was supposed to reflect the historical meaning of dairy farming in Kurtakko.**



The finished udders seen from the duckboard nearby the summer cowshed. (Jaakko Moilanen 2005)

Teuravuoma, situated in the municipality of Kolari, is the largest marsh of Finland (Lappalainen 2000). Villages around the marsh used to be joined to each other by a long duckboard called Telatie. Kurtakko is one of those villages and its inhabitants are now willing to improve the marsh tourism of the area. Consequently The University of Lapland was commissioned to carry out some pieces of environmental art for the Culture Weeks of Kurtakko that would reflect the traditional dairy farming of the marsh area.

#### The Aims of Environmental Art

A work of art is a sort of crystallization of values that enables one to notice the structures and incidents of one's own surroundings. Creating and marking places with different kind of experiences is also one of the aims of environmental art (Hobbs 1982, according to Jokela 1995, 23). Art opens one's eyes to see one's own surroundings in a new way (Jokela 1995, 19-23)

The planning of our work based on the given theme, i.e. the traditional dairy farming of the area, and on Samuli Paulaharju's writings in the book *Lappia ja Peräpohjaa*. We wanted to notice Jokela's aims of environmental art mentioned in the last chapter as well as the principles of place situated art which are, according to

Robert Irving: orientation to the location, to its history, to its stories and holistic consideration of the location during the birth process (Irving, 1985, according to Jokela.1995, 27)

We were in Kurtakko from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2005. First two days we got to know the environment and nature of Kurtakko, planned our work and discussed with the other groups. The planning and making of our works were only part of a larger process, which included the familiarizing with the surroundings; its history and its presence. All of this we were told the former village chief Taru Vaarala and our professor Timo Jokela. Living in a farmhouse and working together gave us experiences of cooperation and feeling of community, which are typical to environmental art.

When planning the work together with other groups and our teachers Timo and Maria we tried to figure out between the designs of every group what kind of combination would work best as a whole. We came up to a solution where all the other groups would make cows out of willow and our group would make cow's udder. All the willow cows and the udder would be placed along the Telatie and later there would be put a wooden board which would have folklores written on.



The workshop was not only about the work but also about being together. This picture is from the lean-to where we mostly worked nearby the summer cowshed. We are plaiting the teats (Jaakko Moilanen 2005).

In the beginning we practiced our senses by getting to know the surroundings of Kurtakko and the nature of Telatie in the light of the things we were told. We made smaller environmental art exercises that based our experience and knowledge of the location. The goal was to make our senses sharper and more sensitive in nature. To create the works we used all the material that would be found in the woods such as leaves, berries and cones and also all the existing

natural and cultural resources such as trunks, logs, footpaths and causeway. This is how we carried out fully the criterion of place defined environmental art.

### Planning

In the beginning we discussed about issues to trading farming and cattle. We ended up with an idea of presenting udder in our environmental art. In this theme we could unite the basic and the main idea of farming as well as the dependency on nature. In udders we could also express feminism and the “mother earth” myth, which are essential things in environmental art (Jokela). In our work feministic udders are presenting earth, which have fed humans during our whole history. This environmental art product is also reminding us about nature’s carrying capacity.

During the planning we considered the possibility to unite sound to the udders. The sound of small bells would be indications to the bells that cows used have. Another idea was to build udders from willow in a way that they would eventually start to root and grow. This way the udders would literally become part of the environment. In the beginning we also thought that the udders could be a kind of a hut, where you could go inside. However, we couldn’t carry out

these plans because we had a relatively short time to build the udders in practice. Also technical affect our planning and eventually we ended up constructing the udders in a very simple way.

### Realization

We decided to place the udder near by the summer cowshed which is by the side of Telatie. In this way the udder would associate with the summer cowshed and also with cows, in other environment the udder would have been harder to recognize. Because it wasn't possible to get the willows of the peace of art to take root and grow, it was made as a part of the living nature by placing it to the environment where it would merge into the vegetation. However, the piece of art rises from its environment because of its shape. Material used were willow and iron wire. The willows were mainly supplied from elsewhere than the final location of the udder. In technical realization our group was guided by Maria Huhmarniemi. The structure of the udder was made of thick willow trunks. It was covered by binding self-made willow ropes and bundles of willow. Finally the piece of art was given the finishing touch by weaving some more willows to imperfect places.



Picture from the structures of the udder. The teats were made separately and added later (Jaakko Moilanen 2005).

### Conclusions

Working in a group was natural and easy though some of us found constant and intensive working a bit hard. However, working and being together helped us to know each others better. We also learned to work as an art community. This was important experience considering our studies in the field of art education. We also got the impression what it is like to work in countryside together and by hand, like people used to do in olden times.

Our work can be classified between the place-characteristic art and place-defined art (Irwing, 1985, Jokela 1995, 20). Making purely place-defined art that is created by the environment wasn't necessarily appropriate or even possible. The intention was to plan the work partly beforehand and to carry it out mainly of material brought elsewhere. Planning was also affected by the fact that the work was ordered and the theme was given.

#### References

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