

# Lulu-journal

Nr.5

“Tidal Ground”

Jan 2019



Vishal Kumar Dar, *Dirghtamas*, 2018, a public light installation in Luleå harbour

*Never did they know  
what the conditions afford  
in the darkness of winter\**

In the darkest months of the year, November through February, Sweden’s northern- most territory, Norrbotten, sees only six hours of daylight. The Luleå Biennial 2018 coincides with this period, and therefore we have taken the darkness of the region as both a necessary and generative premise for our work and thinking.

The title of the biennial, *Tidal Ground*, refers to the gravitational force of the sun and moon—also known as body tide—that causes the earth’s solid surface to stir in a movement parallel to that of the oceans. Light and darkness take the place of one another in rhythmic unison with the surrounding landscape.

The geographical position of Norrbotten, with its proximity to Finland and Russia, has historically

made the area an active military zone. A loaded and strategic frontier from which a whole town, surrounded by five fortresses, emerged from the land to defend it against intruders. This area is rich in water, iron ore, and wood. The extraction of these resources has left deep wounds: silent rapids, gaping pits, a city collapsing into the ground. What role does darkness play in such stories?

The concept of darkness has predominantly negative connotations of fear and destruction. The biennial asks questions about what ‘dark times’ may be said to entail: that social and political forces are also going through a period of tidal movement? Or that darkness is an ever- present condition for us to navigate? Can it, in that case, be understood as a projected space? A space that becomes one with time, where the senses are heightened and new contours may slowly become visible?

With Norrbotten's landscape as our point of departure, and greatly inspired by its contemporary poets, a series of related exhibitions will open in Luleå, Boden, Jokkmokk, Kiruna, and Korpilombolo. Works about muted waterfalls, a fictional wilderness, and waiting for a war that fails to commence, draw parallels to similar stories in other mountains, at other riverbanks and seas. There are works that arise from particular geographies, and others that tie themselves to dreams and let go of the ground. The landscape is a stage where power and abuse play out, but also a place in which we might discover something new about ourselves. What else might we learn from the landscape, its rhythms and its tides? Can we find resistance there?

Eight new artworks was produced for the Luleå Biennial **2018**: Tidal Ground, this issue of the Lulu Journal gathers conversations with the artists who made them.

*Emily Fahlén, Asrin Haidari &  
Thomas Hämén, artistic directors of the  
Luleå Biennial 2018*

\*from Linnea Axelsson's epic poem  
Aednan (**2018**)

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*Snow, Darkness and Cold* is a study of the Udtja region in Norrbotten through a four-channel slide show. In a photographic montage, the moss, lichen and flora of the forest overlap with pictures from anthropological studies, and traces of the military activities that have taken place in the area since the beginning of the Cold War. Through the lens of the camera, we follow Andersson as he traces the ideological transformations of the landscape: In 1958 the Defence Agency built a massive Robot Testing Ground (RFN) in the area, the same size as all of Blekinge county (some 3000 sq km). RFN was the main testing facility in Sweden, established with the ambition to begin a nuclear programme. As the infrastructure expanded, more jobs were created, and the town of Vidsel as well as an airport was built. From there, the people in Udtja's Sami villages were flown out as the military needed space for their training. In 2004, the state produced a report on how international military testing and training on Swedish territory ought to be developed for the future.

*Your work in the biennial's exhibition Snow, Darkness, Cold centres on Udtja, a rural site in Norrbotten. How did you become interested in this place?*

In 2014, I worked on a site-specific piece for Marabouparken in Sundbyberg. There, I did an artistic interpretation of the Defence Research Institute's premises in Ursvik where I compiled various stories about an art collection, a peace demonstration and the nuclear weapons research that had taken place there. In my research, Udtja in Norrbotten came up several times, since part of the nuclear weapons research took place there. Since I have long been interested in landscapes, optics and narratives, Udtja seemed an interesting place to try and read as an area where the unconscious could appear, should I get the opportunity to travel there.

*Can you tell us about your process and what it has been like to work on this project?*

As a starting point for the work, I used a travelogue by the photographer Carl Fries in the STF yearbook from 1924, thinking that the route that he travelled by could serve as directions for the work. Udtja as such is completely fenced and



*Henrik Andersson, Snow, Darkness, Cold, 2018, at Luleå Konsthall*

blocked off to the public, but I had the opportunity to follow one of the rare visits that Ájtte Museum's members' association arranged, which turned out to be a very special experience. We went by car from Jokkmokk and turned onto a dirt road to Udtja. We left buildings behind us and traveled past marshes and lakes into the big forest. After a long while we suddenly stopped at a video-monitored gate and fence, discussions followed on whether we had given over our social security numbers to the military, then we could continue our journey. Our guide told us about Udtja's Sami history. Again we suddenly had to stop and pull over to the side of the road. We had to give way to about 30 caravans that drove past us. Our guide was able to tell us that it was military staff that had celebrated Midsummer in Udtja. Once we arrived in Udtja village we were met by the people there, and a church service commenced, then a generous meal was offered. The trip became a very emblematic experience for me, partly because it exposed conflicts between industrialisation, militarisation and the people in Udtja so clearly, but also because the area, however banal it may sound, reminded me of the Zone in Tarkovsky's movie *Stalker*. Within the gates there is a permanent state of emergency and just as in the Zone, the laws of physics seem to be dissolved.

*How do you consider the question of Swedish neutrality in this work?*

One of my companions on the trip to Udtja told me that the Swedish Armed Forces have not practiced in the area, but that it is foreign arms industry and military that purchase services from the Swedish fortification works. It is obviously too expensive for the Swedish defence. So, the added value extracted from the landscape does not come back to the local area, but ends up





Henrik Andersson, *Snow, Darkness, Cold*, 2018, at Luleå Konsthall

elsewhere. As an example of the complexity of neutrality, it can be mentioned that bombs of the type that have been released over Gaza in Palestine have been tested in Udtja. I think this will come to have a great impact on how we understand landscape and identity from a culture-geographical perspective.

*It is evident in your work how you have used archival sources in combination with material that you have produced yourself. What is the role of the archive in your artistic process, and why has the work has taken the form of a slideshow?*

I think that the human psyche is structured like an archive, everything is there but cannot be picked up all at the same time. Rather, fragments can be placed next to one another to form a montage that suggests a certain narrative. Investigating how an archive is structured, compiled and arranged also becomes a journey through someone's fantasies. Because I have worked with photographic archives, I keep these images in mind when I do my fieldwork and try to recreate the ambivalence they produce in me.

Since I have worked with photographs in various technologies, formats and from different times, I needed a coherent form for the montage to work. Some of the pictures I had found were slides and

so I decided to make a slideshow. There is a certain allure to actually seeing the photographic original, that is, the piece of the film that was in the camera at a given point in time. The slideshow lends the image an ephemeral character in that it is only visible for a short time before it is replaced by another image. Through this flow, a specific relationship between the images can occur with the viewer.

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In a diary entry dedicated to thoughts on the intestine, Ingela Ihrman writes about the flora of the sea and that of the stomach, and about how, for her, gutweed (*Ulva intestinalis*) makes the link between the two – a slimy return to the sea and to the algae that have managed to retain the sun's power so that other forms of life may benefit from it. It is about being a landscape, and being in landscape; about belly fat and crude oil – deposits of energy stored in the earth and in the body form the basis of an extensive artistic exploration that begins in the bowel – a sore spot, and with *Wind Within* (2018) the Luleå Biennial stages its second outcome. In line with Ihrman's previous works, the barely fathomable aspects of nature are channeled through our own bodies.

*Can you tell us about your work Wind Within shown at Gallery Syster, what preceded the project and how does it continue?*

The work *Inner wind* directs the light to a green algae called gutweed (*Ulva intestinalis*). I need it to establish a link between the flora of the gut and the flora of the sea. Right now I work with focus on my stomach – a sore point where energy flows and emotions converge. For me, the stomach is a central but unexplored landscape that I

want to let grow and take shape.

In August 2018, I worked as a volunteer at Koster's Gardens – a home, a restaurant, a bakery and a garden located on an island in Bohuslän. Koster's Gardens use permaculture, a concept that was coined in the 70s, as a response to growing ecological problems in the world, and which, in short, aims to create ecologically, socially and economically sustainable (permanent) cultures.

*What does it mean to give the intestine or seaweed the position that you do when you lift them into the art space?*

I think that all art spaces work as entry points into the world that I create through my art. These spaces are necessary to allow other people than me to enter. It would be lonely and meaningless without them. At Galleri Syster, my gutweed is partly a part of the Luleå Biennial's story about sea, light and sight, and partly an excerpt from my work on the stomach, which I am in the middle of right now.

*How does Inner Wind relate to the idea of a landscape, would you say?*

I have previously been invested in thinking about what it is like to have inner sea inside your body.



*Ingela Ihrman, Wind Within, 2018, at Galleri Syster in Luleå*

From the narrative voice in an episode of the World of Science from the 90s, I learned that the liquid in the egg blisters enclosing mature egg cells in all terrestrial mammals has the same salinity as the water in the ocean where life once arose, several billion years ago. So even today all of us carry this water of life in our bodies. If gut-weed is an intestine, the body's inner wind is the bubbles of gas formed by photosynthesis, which causes the algae to rise up to the surface of the water. The fact that certain seaweeds in English are known as the mermaid's necklace makes the row of air bubbles into a bead chain of farts.

*In addition to Inner Wind in Luleå, you also participated in the biennial's guest feature at the Night Festival in Korpilombolo, where you performed the work Queen of the Night. What was it like doing the performance there?*

*The Queen of the Night* is a performance that dramatises the nocturnal flowering of a special cactus. In old books on house plants, you can read that, until the 1950s, it was normal practice for a proud owner of a Queen of the Night about to bloom to invite their friends and neighbours over for nighttime coffee to experience the flowering together.

It was special for me to perform *Queen of the Night* at the Night Festival in Korpilombolo. Previously, when I've shown the work in different art spaces, there has been a clash between the surroundings and my giant cactus costume made out of tarpaulin rolled into sausages, toothpicks and floor covering paper. In Korpilombolo's community centre, we fit in almost too well. The Ny-lund sisters offered coffee and held a small speech that built up some excitement for what was about to happen. It had been dark out since 14:00. At 10:30 pm, I shimmied into the flower bud, still wrapped in cling film to keep the leaves closed, raised the bud over my head, and knocked out the bone-white petals with the aid of a construction built on an inverted umbrella. The people of Korpilombolo gave out a sound of rapture and delight. I sprayed a cloud of vanilla perfume in the air. Then I withered and crawled out.

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*Detail, Ingela Ihrman, Wind Within*

On the south side of Luleå's central peninsula, in the first and last weeks of the biennial, a monumental light work by the artist Vishal K Dar will play out. Six beams of light from three locations – the crane at Södra Hamn, Cementa's silo, and the barge – will move in precise mechanic rhythm making spatial diagrams in light along the coast, on the water and in the sky. The three sites sit on the edge of the city, separated by 145 degrees. As the temperature drops, the water will become solid and the distinction between ground and water will dissolve. In this way, the work takes place in two steps: when that distinction exists and when it doesn't. With a background in architecture and a deep interest in the scientific understanding of the physical laws of light and space, Dar creates a work in which darkness itself assumes the status of icon. The beams move by a pre-programmed time-index that has them appear and disappear in turn.

*Your light installations are placed at three sites on the south side of Luleå's central peninsula; the barge, the crane, the silos, and they function as a type of clock for the biennial. Tell us a bit more.*

Before we begin, let me share a piece of history about the Crane. There used to be two cranes on this old bay. They were both ordered to be dismantled when the bay was moved. But then the city decided to keep one as a memento, that's the one we see today. A holding onto a moment that gives us an image of the past. The once mighty crane is now rendered motionless, lifeless, purposeless. That's a trauma for the site.

*Dirghtamas* (Long Night) is an urban multi-site work. The installation is not inside an architecture, like my previous works – the chimney at the Shanghai Biennial and the warehouse in Pune – but outside in the open urban space along the edge of land and water. Light is ephemeral. There is no materiality to it, but 'it' makes things visible. It calls focus on the elements that fall in its path and on the surface on which it falls. This phenomenological aspect of light is of immense interest to me because it goes beyond material. It also extends my investigations with the sky-tracking light fixture – an invention from the world war period. The sky-tracker was a device that 'hunted' planes in the dark. Later, it

purpose gets inverted in post war America where Hollywood uses it for movie premieres to 'mark the spot' of the film theatre.

Here in Luleå we can see six beams of light from three locations, places that sit on the edge of the city, separated by 135 degrees. As time grows colder, water become ground, making the edge disappear. Oscillating Beams of light possess these three sites, assuming the form of cosmological clocks, making the large site-objects appear delirious (like a ghoulish leviathan – devourer of labor). The beams of light work like breath for these industrial effigies. It appears as if the stars themselves are being put to work in quiet chaotic darkness. The beams perform to a time-index (schedule) of appearance/disappearance – kinetics of the pendulum that becomes some kind of intertwined balletic oscillation – setting the meter (poetic rhythm) of chaos within the city mandala, industry and war calls.

The sites appear as some sort of strange creatures of a past. Silent, blind creatures. The beams of light as breath and not sight, makes the work appear like an act of possession, suggesting through its ephemerality. And then at some point in time that possession evaporates.

*What is your entry point to this?*

When I was in the Finnish Sapmi in the dead of winter in 2015, I saw frozen landscapes for the first time in my life. I also very quickly realized that nothing in this landscape was 'dead'. The trees had shed their leaves to conserve energy while the sun was out. There was no light, so there was no photosynthesis. The tree was in hibernation so that it could keep living. The river was frozen but not dead. Underneath everything was alive.

I have a background in architecture, and for the last seven years I have shifted my focus to site specific art projects. These sites are largely abandoned, marginalized, out of function. I activate them with beams of oscillating light. As a medium, Light is hauntingly beautiful as a phenomenon, and electric light pushes that phenomenon making because you can control it, you can sculpt it. In the case of *Dirghtamas*, my point of entry is the geography of the city and its objects. I was told parts and pieces of the history of war, of industry, of mining (both the strange new contemporary concept of bitcoins and iron ore),



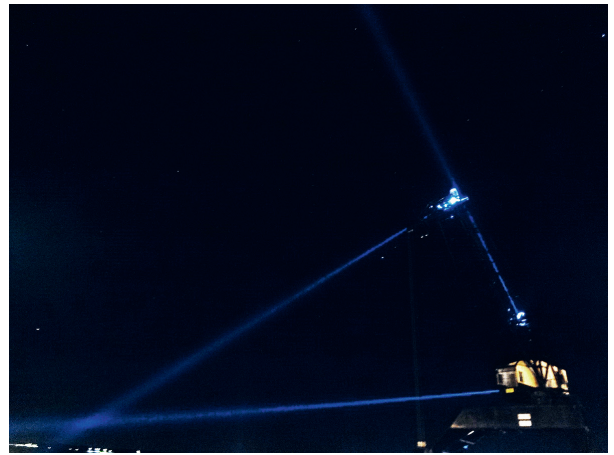
and the presence of (I am told, the largest outside of USA) Facebook data centre. It's interesting to see how the old mines goes on while the bitcoin mining has vanished. I became interested in this multi-layered co-habitation of activities and ideas.

*One aspect of the landscape that we wanted to work with for the Luleå Biennial 2018: Tidal Ground, is the notion of darkness, both literally and metaphorically. The ambivalent aspect of darkness triggered us, can you tell us how you have undertaken this very heavy darkness in the region as your material?*

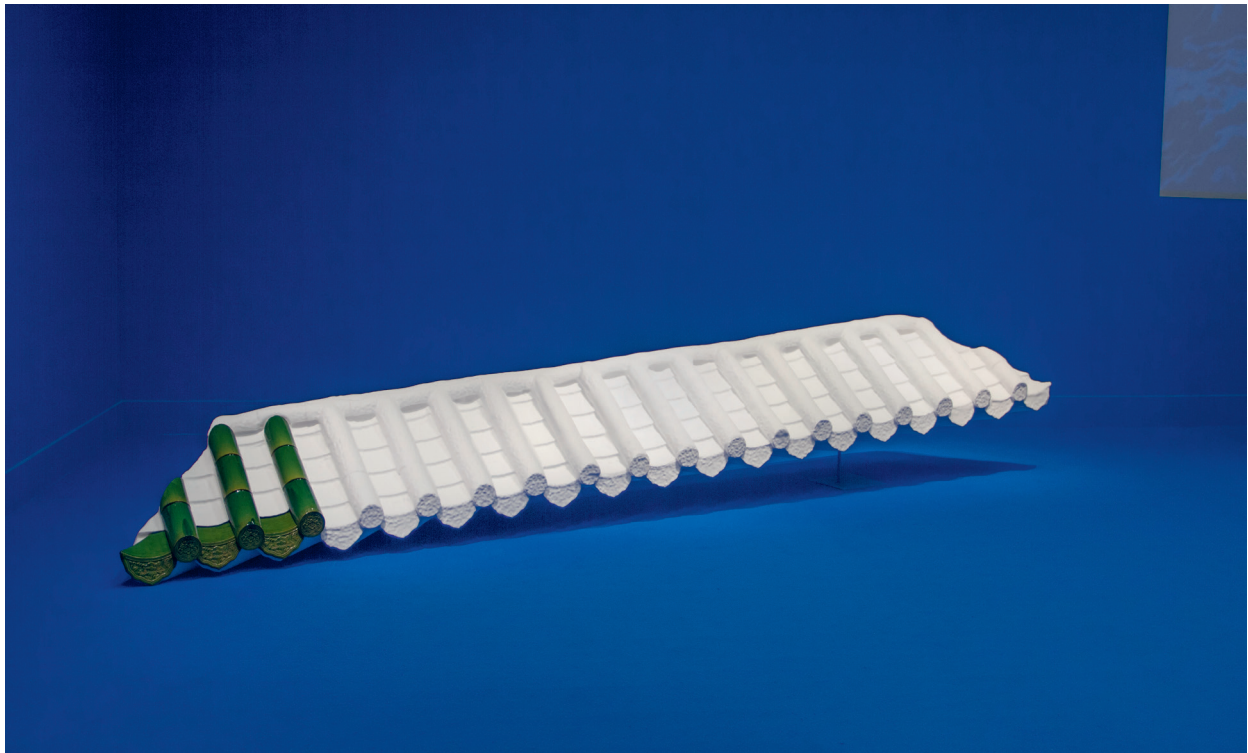
Let me begin with my very own relationship with light. Coming from south Asia, I have a different relation with the sun. The closer we are to the equator, the warmer the light from the sun. This warm light has a physical impact on our body and our minds. In the arctic, the same sun will produce a whole different impact. I feel the absence of such darkness in my part of the world, and that connects my mind and my body to this location in ways I don't think I can express. It's all felt.

The first point of entry is in the title itself - *Dirghtamas*. Dirgh means long, and tamas means darkness. They are absolute translations, they are not metaphoric translations. Darkness could also refer to a state of not-yet-discovered, a state of sleep, hibernation. But here I want to say that for me 'tamas' does not only refer to 'darkness', but also to 'night-time'. Because up here in the north during this time of the year, night becomes day. Then light as a transformative element is quite magical. There is such physicality to this poetry.

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Vishal Kumar Dar, *Dirghtamas*, 2018, a public light installation in Luleå harbour



*Lap-See Lam, Beyond Between & Gwái, 2018, at Luleå Konsthall*

In Lap-See Lam's works *Beyond Between* and *Gwái*, she picks at the idea of authenticity. The desire to consume that which is "strange" or "foreign," from food to images, is turned on its head to become a mirror of ourselves. Like antique sculptures or artefacts in museums are sometimes reconstructed, and have their missing parts returned to them, Lam has collected objects from a soonbygone culture of Swedish Chinese restaurants.

*During the production process you've been researching the local history of Chinese restaurants in Luleå. Can you tell us a little about that and about the conversation you had with the restaurant called Waldorf?*

My starting point for the project was to trace Luleå's first Chinese restaurant: Restaurang China. Located upstairs from a dry cleaner's, the Vasa Pub on Storgatan 61 was sold in 1977 and became the city's first Chinese restaurant. In 1985, Luleå Centrum initiated a comprehensive redesign of the city centre to make space for the regional insurance company, Länsförsäkringar's, large new building in the city. As part of this, the original wooden houses where the restaurant was located were demolished and a space on the ground floor of a new building was offered in its place. Today, Österns Pärla [The Pearl of the

East] is housed in the same rooms but by different owners.

With the help of Norrbotten's archive center, the City Archives in Luleå and the library's newspaper archive, I was able to procure some building inventories, pictures and articles about the restaurant. I posted an ad in Norrbottens-Kuriren, talked to press photographers and asked for traces of the restaurant in various forums on social media. I did not have a finished idea of what I was looking for or what the work would become in the end - but rather took the former restaurant as a way in to a city whose history I was not so familiar with. My meetings with Philip Kuo, co-owner of Luleå's Chinese restaurant Waldorf, were rewarding. The conversation that was supposed to be about Restaurang China opened up to another type of conversation beyond the actual places. After that, the work came to be more about trying to create a representation of what is not visible when you look at a Chinese Restaurant: to show what is not shown, the words that cannot be translated and the gaps that arise between generations.

*Can you tell us about the two sculptural components in your installation, the roof and the chair, and their titles?*

The title *Beyond Between* came about intuitively. For me, those words together recall a sense of transition. The work is about translation, the movement from one stage to another, and what can be lost on the way. It may be when one language is translated into another, when one generation becomes the next, when a memory is transferred, and when a material is rendered as a different material. With this title I wanted to emphasise the feeling of movement and being at a point of transition.

The work is a reconstruction of an interior of a restaurant that no longer exists, and consists of two parts. First, the actual parts from the inner ceiling and second, an extension in white plastic, a kind of roof prosthesis in the style of a pagoda. The prosthesis is developed using 3D scans of the restaurant that were made before it closed.

During the 1970s, the same people that started Luleå's first Chinese restaurant Restaurant China, ran three restaurants in Stockholm and two in Uppsala, one of which was Ming Garden. The interiors of the restaurants all followed the same concept: imported objects and designs from China that were adapted for the rooms with the help of Stockholm department store Nordiska Kompaniet's interior design firm. The recreated roof from Ming Garden, then, existed in a red version in Restaurang China in Luleå. The link between one of Stockholm's first Chinese restaurants, Ming Garden, and Luleå's very first, Restaurang China, as such form a small part of a larger map of the Chinese diaspora in Sweden. A similar green inner roof is also in place in the Waldorf restaurant today.

*Gwái* means ghost in Cantonese and is the title of the levitating chair next to *Beyond Between*. The chair is on loan from Waldorf and placed facing the restaurant. It carries excessively long chair cover that drags across the floor.



*What is the significance of darkness and haunting in this work and prevues works by you? Why is that an interesting construct for you to think through?*

The ghostly aspect has been part of my work since I started documenting Chinese restaurants that are about to close. Abandoned spaces, memories, languages in translation and cultural displacement can be linked to the idea of haunting. The ghost first emerged in my 3D-scanned restaurant environments in the form of digital fragments and glitches and then gradually emerged as a character. In *Mother's Tongue*, a work by me and Wingyee Wu, the Chinese Restaurant is a future ghost and the story's protagonist. In this installation at Luleå Konsthall, the figure emerges from the dark in the form of two memory-objects: a roof prosthesis and a ghost chair.

*Tell us about how you have chosen to present the works in the room and its references to archeological exhibitions.*

I have looked at how artefacts are exhibited in museums and how they are often presented with material as speculative support columns. Fragments that are rebuilt for instance with plaster, where it is made clear what is old and what is constructed. At this type of museum there is a distinct idea of historical authenticity, which becomes interesting in relation to the narrative of the Chinese restaurant. It is a place that testifies to the spread of the Chinese diaspora through small businesses; how it reflects an exoticised image of the Chinese but at the same time expresses its own cultural affiliation. A simultaneously fictional scene and entirely real place in the lives of many people in a new homeland. In this way, Chinese restaurants are important places for understanding how ideas about ethnicity take shape, where interiors can be investigated as ethnographic objects.

At first sight, the roof looks like it is made out of plaster, but actually it is 3D-printed in expanded polystyrene. The contrast between these materials, ceramics against the polystyrene, produces a sense of both separation and reunion. The works are presented as if in movement, as the roof prosthesis is tilting, and the chair levitating.

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## → Karl Sjölund

The fortresses at Rödberget, Pagla, Mjölösjö, Degerbergs and Gammelång together constitute the expansive fortification of Boden. Here, the artist and musician Karl Sjölund has created a site-specific installation about waiting for a war that never commences.

Boden is a town, which, in every way, has emerged as an effect of the military strategies of centuries past: should a Russian attack on Sweden occur, it would be necessary to go through Boden (to avoid ending up either at the bay of Botten or lost in unruly mountain terrain), but such an attack never happened, and military-technological development would since render the speculations around which the fortifications at Boden were designed obsolete. In his work, Sjölund examines the tragic logic of war, and its phantasmagorical dimensions. With artefacts related to Swedish military history, archive material, video, sound and found objects, Sjölund has constructed a kind of theatre of things. A music piece collaged from concrete and organ-composed fragments resounds throughout the various rooms. The work is an attempt to reproduce the aspects of war that pertain to the senses; the more abstract or psychoacoustic phenomena, and the fantasies necessary to underpin the war-complex: the logic of the arms race, tinnitus in the moments after a bomb blasts, the image of the enemy.

*Can you tell us about the work A sense of war and how the idea for it came about?*

For the biennial I have produced an installation. The work is called *A sense of war*. What has been shown at the Rödberg fortress is related to another work, which will be an audio play, or some form of radio theatre. I started working on the audio play two years and a half years ago, and two years ago I went to Boden for the first time with the intention of collecting material for it. The text material that provides the foundation for the installation in the biennial will eventually be published as an audio book. And one of the reasons for this is that, in my work as a librarian, I've noted the dramatic increase in the popularity of audiobooks that has taken place in recent years. The vast majority of commentary about this trend tends to be very critical, and I am too, since much what is published in that format was

not intended for a spoken medium. However, since I come from music and sound art, I see audiobook as an opportunity to open up a way of communicating that is often forgotten in the art world: poetry read aloud, or poetry that has been manipulated by the various tools of audio technology.

I have a lot of experience as a musician, in a certain sense, although I have not felt very comfortable writing songs or melodies and that kind of thing. What interests me more are practical, everyday sounds; the specific sounds associated with certain industries or professions, sounds particular to various trades. A friend of mine, Simon Frank from Luleå, introduced me to sound processing on the computer when I was a teenager. So the sound sculpture is something I have worked with a lot in computer environments. For



*Karl Sjölund, A Sense of War, 2018, at the Rödbergs fortress in Boden*

the biennial, I wanted to move away from that a bit, the pre-recorded and sculpted, to instead find ways to generate sounds from and with the things that are inside the fort. And somehow arrange them harmoniously, and structure the sounds in a way.

*You did not grow up in Boden, exactly, but do you have any memory of being close to that landscape and having a feeling of war?*

Absolutely, I grew up between Boden and Luleå, in a small town called Sunderbyn and around the entire area and also in Luleå, although Boden is the hub of it, there are military facilities. During my upbringing I saw military convoys, and I was often in Boden because I had relatives there and everywhere in Boden the presence of the military is quite obvious. I also remember mischievous cycling trips as a teenager to the abandoned and disused forts.

*What has it been your intention for visitors to the Rödborg fort to experience?*

I approached the audio book with a kind of cut-up method, working from an enormous amount of source material consisting of military manuals, and instruction books from the military etc. In the same way, with the Rödborg fort, I wanted to find things there, in the structure of the building and in military life in Boden more generally – objects, stories, texts, film, etc. – and get these things to speak in a language that is not allowed by the military. Just as in all other civic institutions, in addition to the identity that projected rationally, there is a kind of subconscious in the military. Something that the military itself cannot touch without undermining its own state-supporting legitimacy. It claims to be a kind of ultimate guarantor for the maintenance of reality as we know it, but for this to work, a presentation or simulation of this reality is required. In many cases, the only thing that distinguishes the military from the paranoiac is that the paranoiac does not have the same legitimacy to keep secret the reasons why they believe they are being persecuted. With this, I want to somehow profane this sanctified function of the state; play with it, and, as they say, “bring it down to earth”.

*And the work reflects military rationality?*

What I have focused on is where this language, the military rationality, cracks. And I have tried

to speak from the blindspots of its thoroughly rational and completely logical construction, and show how it is a language full of paradoxes and logical knots that make it compulsive in a way that is actually has very little to do with rationality. And one such a blindspot, which is included in the work as well but has a more prominent place in the audiobook, is the spy. I have investigated this figure in a simultaneously ironic and serious way; how the spy is a logical engine in the military. When a nation defends itself, it has to assume that an enemy could be in place, and from this assumption a whole apparatus of safeguarding nothing is activated. That movement has been very instrumental as have all the paradoxical events that follow it. I am not the first to think about it in that way. For instance, a book called “The Tartar Steppe” by an Italian modernist writer named Dino Buzzati came to me during the process. It is a not particularly great novel, but after what I have said that about Boden’s fortress, one might think that the book is about that. It is about an Italian soldier who spends his whole career at a desert fort, waiting for a barbarian horde rumoured to live beyond the desert to attack, but it never does. His wait becomes infinite in a way that makes you feel that time and place have completely dissolved.

*You use the term “psychoacoustic”. What do you mean by that?*

It’s not something I am in any way an expert in, but a psychoacoustic phenomenon is when something is heard that does not have any other origin than what is inside your own skin. Some effects such as blood movement in the body, which in some, absolutely silent, situations can actually be heard, or hallucinations, and I would also suggest that tinnitus is a psychoacoustic phenomenon. There are some parts of the work that are inspired by a horrible movie called “Come and See” from 1985 about the Nazi invasion of Belarus. The film follows a little boy who flees in panic throughout the film. The bombs and the blood and the shit and the dirt chase him like a flood. In one of the most terrible war scenes I have seen, a bomb explodes close to him, and the diegetic sounds are phased out and replaced by the boy’s tinnitus, his disorientation, how he tries to collect himself, pressing against his ears in panic and pain.

*How has it been to work with surroundings as particular as those of the Rödborg Fort, and in*

*a place that also functions as a museum?*

Sally Sundbom has been very important and helpful, but also the guides at the fort. They were there with me several times before working on the biennial, and have shown me the confidence to let me loose in there myself. Now I have even got my own pair of keys. In this way, it is a very generous museum, but they have no experience whatsoever of anyone engaging with and processing their collection in the way that I have done. So that's new to them – though I haven't been in their way, so they haven't noticed me so much. It feels like a bizarre and exciting collaboration, because these are two completely different worlds that collide. Everyone who works there has a background in the military and it is funny to talk to the kind of people whose entire professional life has taken place there. Even when making regular conversation about something practical or the weather, it sounds like an order. Both scary and charming. At first, I wanted to completely rebuild their exhibition, but that wasn't allowed. But there are huge areas that are not utilised as part of the museum, which fits very well with how the work turned out in the end. I've found a perspective on things that relate to cracks; the invisible, inaudible and unconscious parts of war. And it is the generals' mess hall, and their innermost chambers that constitutes the main exhibition space. And that fits in thematically.

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*Neda Saeedi, Garden of Eden Moving: A Petrified Tribe, 2018, at Luleå Konsthall*

Neda Saeedi's *Garden of Eden Moving: A Petrified Tribe* looks at events of modern history in relation to the Bachtariis tribe, and the how its nomadic culture and way of life dramatically changed when the Iranian state elected to contain them within the boundaries of Shooshtar-e Noe. The town was constructed around the industrial production of sugar with fields of sugarcane planted directly adjacent to it. This is where other local people, as well as the nomads residing throughout the region, were to work. Saeedi works with highly symbolic materials. Control, the significance of the cattle and the double nature of the sugar are all central to the work, which touches equally on issues of pollution and ecology, and the formal aspects of architectures of confinement.

*How did the project Garden of Eden Moving: A Petrified Tribe start?*

The project started almost 2 years ago when during a trip to south Iran, I visited the city of Shushtar-e Nou. The first thing that struck me was the design of the city, which to me appeared highly controlled and suffocating. Knowing the city was a very "successful" and prize-winning architectural and urban planning project, I started to do some research to find out more about the background of this development project. The work looks at events of modern history in relation to the Bachtariis tribe, and how its nomadic culture and way of life dramatically changed when the Iranian state elected to contain them within the boundaries of Shooshtar-e Noe in the 70's. The town was constructed around the industrial production of sugar with fields of sugarcane planted directly adjacent to it. This is where other local people, as well as the nomads residing

throughout the region, were to work. In my artistic research I am interested in urban landscapes, and the relationship between the human body and architecture: the value, materiality, power/powerlessness and ownership of the body in relation to the construction of a building or the expansion of urban development projects. For that reason this specific place and its history and the different parties involved in it caught my attention.

*What do we see in the exhibition, and what is the role of the materials that you have included in the installation?*

As the point of departure of my installations is actual physical places and the circumstances around their crystallisation, the materiality of the sculptures is often borrowed from the aspects of the (hi)story I am about to narrate. The medium of installation allows me to unfold the multi-layered images and narratives as an experience while at the same time condensing them into a singular form where the complexity of the content is retained, but displayed in a tangible way. The specific materiality and form of each piece tells a part of the story. In this case, for instance, the sculptures are made out of sugar, which is the material that formed the basis for the city, and even the entire development project. Control, the significance of the cattle and the double nature of sugar are all central to the work, which touches equally on issues of pollution and ecology, and the formal aspects of architectures of confinement. Also concrete has a potent appearance in my installation which of course has a strong tie to the era of modernisation and industrialisation.

*What are your thoughts on art's potential in relation to hidden or forgotten histories? What is your work "doing", do you think?*

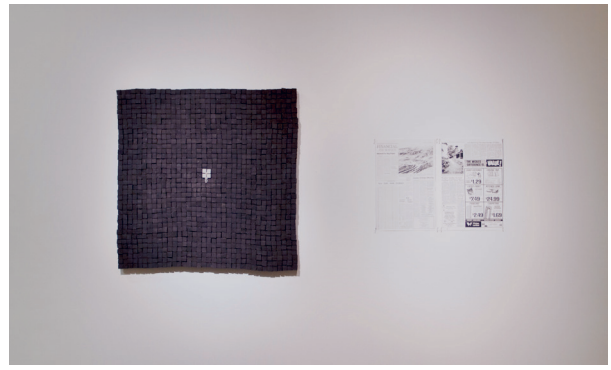
In my opinion art has the power to put a spotlight on certain parts of history that have been





hidden or oppressed throughout time, and conventional and institutional historiography. Also as it has the capacity to exit the sphere of academia and talk to people directly. Of course it doesn't have the power to solve the problems it addresses, but rather to raise awareness, curiosity and interest. In my work I try not to romanticise the past, but rather to foreground that part of history in order to highlight its consequences. Because this is not a singular case that happened decades ago in Iran, but a formula that has been repeated in different parts of the world in different ways. Spending time in Norrbotten was important to me in order to get see how the situation I address is mirrored in this particular geographical context.

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## → *Alexandros Tzannis*

The majestic drawings of Alexandros Tzannis build spaces. They invite the onlooker to walk into and between them. Hung on steel structures, the paper bends like a wave over the frame. The motifs are abstract, drawn movements in detailed layers that, when looked at more closely, resemble maps or topographic figures. The work is part of the series *Blue Black Layers Over the White Cities* for which Tzannis has drawn, among other places, his hometown Athens – its layers of emotion, history and crisis veiling it in darkness. For the biennial, Tzannis has expanded the series with an additional four drawings. The drawings contain references to the colour palette of steel extraction: the grey metal, the glowing red of transformation, and the white smoke emanating from the material as it cools. One of the drawings is exhibited in the lunch restaurant Malmen at SSAB Steel mill in Luleå.

*Would you like to say a few introductory words about your artistic practice?*

I consider myself a painter, even though I usually make sculptures. I choose my materials in relation to situations, the one that is best suited to design and develop my ideas. Thematically, my work is balanced between the past and the

future, between utopia and dystopia. I am interested in how these extremes are balanced in the present.

*In the biennial, the ongoing project Blue Black Layers Over the White Cities is on view, how did this work come about and what is it about?*

The project *Blue-Black Layers of the White Cities* began three years ago when I was invited to do an exhibition at the State of Concept in Athens. I worked with a spatial installation consisting of two sculptures, ceramics and large-scale drawings made with ballpoint pen, suspended on iron frames. The exhibition as a whole served as a kind of personal metaphor for the city of Athens: beloved scenes, walking paths and hidden places. The idea was to map the city without creating a clear overview. I wanted the viewer to understand that the maps I drew and the places I told them about would be almost impossible to find, unless they followed the route stated. While I was drawing on the paper with ink and ballpoint pens (a time-consuming process) I began to think about when I lived in Vienna 10 years ago and how people often referred to Athens as the *White City*. This notion became the starting point for the work's title *Blue Black Layers over the White Cities*, because on top of the white layer, blue and black ink was added. For me, these became emo-



*Alexandros Tzannis, Blue-Black Layers Over the White Cities, 2018, at Luleå Konsthall*





*Sea Horizon at the SSAB steel factory in Luleå*

tional layers over the white city of Athens, blue layers of melancholy and black layers of darkness. The work began during the years of crisis in Greece. The entire exhibition at the State of Concept was named after the work and then my mapping of the city continued with the additional maps of places in where I was invited to exhibit: Paris, Cyprus and now Luleå. My materials are consistent, I like the ballpoint pen because it is common and simple, something that is used in everyday life. I also like the idea of overcoming the material boundary and creating something impressively big. When I make the drawings, I usually get help from friends to cover the three to five layers that the drawing usually consist of. The collaboration becomes part of the process. I want the large scale of the works to give a feeling of being in the middle of architecture, in the middle of the city.

*How has Luleå and Norrbotten inspired you in the production of your work?*

When we started the conversation about my participation in the Luleå Biennial and presenting a continuation of the series *Blue Black Layers over the White Cities*, I began to do research on Luleå and Norrbotten. I was interested in contradictions between the heavy industries and nature, Sweden's neutrality, and military activities in the area during the Second World War; how the northern territories are exploited for their resources by the south; the quiet and calm life one lives close to the nature, but also the aesthetics of the futuristic industrial areas, their production and wealth and the ecological problems that follow. These are tendencies at play in most modern cities. I began to make maps and drawings to highlight underlying structures. I was drawn to the infrastructure of the industries, the steel factories and the thoughts of an activity that goes on out of sight, or under ground. I wanted to

draw what we don't see. The four new drawings that I produced for the Luleå Biennial contain maps of the city, tracks from the railways, simple floor plans from steel factories, mental labyrinths and two sea horizons.

*And the work is also linked to personal memories?*

Yes, the steel industry in Luleå was what I was first drawn to when I started to work on the new commission. After a while I understood that there was a personal reason for this, stemming from memories of my childhood: I used to spend my summer holidays on the Greek island of Serifos looking for beautiful rocks and minerals along the shore – I think I wanted to become a geologist at the time. At Serifos there had been iron mines since ancient times and this is where the myth of the cyclops plays out in Homer's Odyssey. The mine's activities resumed in the 19th century and continued until the 1960s. Around 2000 people lived and worked there under terrible conditions. In 1916 an individual worker started an uprising and a strike. For a few days, the island was occupied by the workers who demanded better living conditions. This was the first time that the eight-hour workday proposal was raised in Greece. This story and my personal memories are reflected in biennial drawings: the materiality of the steel, the shape of a labyrinth, – to dig where you stand. In addition to the collection of works shown at Luleå Konsthall, one of my drawings is also on view in the entrance and lunch restaurant at SSAB's factory in Luleå. The drawing *Sea Horizon* carries a stamp with the number 1916 – a memorial for the iron workers protest on Serifos but also for today's ongoing struggles for workers' rights and resistance.

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*Archival images from Serifos and its mine, from Alexandros Tzannis' research material.*

Northern Sweden's wealth of moving water is what has made the country one of the world's foremost when it comes to using clean and renewable energy. But this has a price. During the 19th century, the rivers were expanded to an industrial scale. The natural waterfalls were manipulated with dams and enormous concrete reservoirs. The lives and habitats of animals as well as humans were changed, disturbed or even eradicated. Sacred ground was cleared with modern machines. Who remembers the waterfall that was closed off, or the stream that was silenced? *In Memory of a River* shows Örn turning to art history to find documentation of the lost waterways – only there have images of them been preserved. But who was it that portrayed the rivers; whose gaze is the source of our collective memory?

*How did you start working on  
In Memory of a River?*

The project begins with the fact that I live next to the Lule River, and have lived there for many years; that I ended up next to such a large and powerful river, and that such an incredibly amount of water flows past. Then I started to travel around in Norrbotten to look at the other rivers. I often found myself at Råne River, and thought it was so cozy and nice. But I never dwelled on the Lule River, and then I began to understand why: the whole river is extremely industrially developed. And later, a few years ago, my husband Tomas Örn and I began to travel around and look at the hydropower, with no aim in particular. And we began reading. I was fascinated by the fact that there was only a small trickle of a waterfall left, that nature had been rebuilt so tremendously, and it no longer seemed so strange that I had not thought it was so nice. I think that it is difficult to understand the landscape because it is so new and redesigned – there are no old structures left.

*And how did this work lead to your engagement with the National Romanticism of Swedish art history?*

I began to fantasise about the lost waterfalls, which the height they must have had since it is possible to extract so much electricity from them. And then I started looking for them on old maps, but they don't really seem to be there. Instead, I



*Anja Örn, In Memory of a River, 2018,  
at Luleå konsthall*

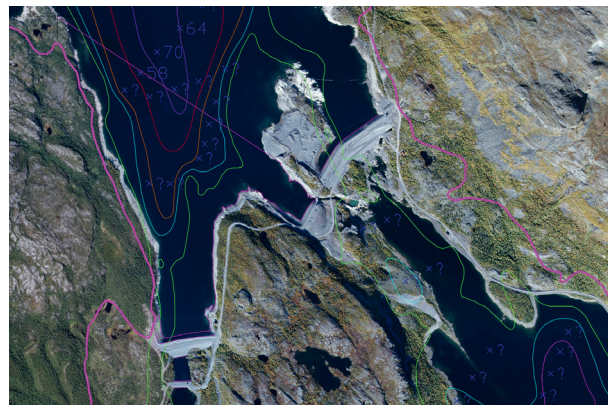
found the waterfalls in the paintings that artists made up here at the turn of the last century, the time of Swedish romanticism. So the history of art became a starting point in the process, but also the fact that the artists were exclusively men; it was the men's gaze and the men's memories and the paintings remain at a men's museum in Stockholm. But finally I found a woman – Lotten von Düben – who had photographed the waterfalls during the late 19th century. Then it became exciting because it was a female point of view. At the same time, her work was also in the vein of national romanticism. Along with her husband, she travelled north to photograph the Sami, and these studies are unpleasant. But she also started to turn the camera towards nature. In my imagination, I think she understood that it was wrong, and was going in a different direction, mentally.

In parallel with this research, I came in contact with the researcher Berta Morata, who is a doctoral student at LTU (Luleå University of Technology). She also makes pictures of the river that I think are very beautiful, even though she does not see them as such: "I'm just making maps, what's pretty about that?". She collects information. For me, it is about visualising what is happening throughout the river valley; it is about electricity, transport and flows, and it becomes highly complex, it also includes a temporal aspect. She has also become aware of this colonial critique, but that is not what her research is about.

*One of the biennial's central themes is the concept of darkness. How would you think about that in relation to the story that is told in your work?*

The river water is dark, it is so filled with soil. And then there is the whole dark story, when we turn and twist the material, Berta and I. She ex-





plains how we get out a lot of energy from the river, but also how a terrible amount of energy goes into exploiting it, all that concrete, all the power lines. She says that keeping the power lines clean produces carbon dioxide. Although it is environmentally friendly electricity, it is also brutal in several ways that are not immediately apparent. It is also dark in the way that an artist I met who lived by the river described it. During her childhood the rapids outside her house were shut off. She experienced it as “a silent darkness”.

*Your project takes the form of an essay film, but you’ve also made sculptures of rippled rapids in aluminium. Can you tell us about the sculptures?*

They were on my mind for a long time. When I started thinking about the waterfalls, very early on they turned into a metaphor – I think art can be like that, sometimes. I had the idea to portray the waterfalls that no longer exist. So in that sense they are free: they do not represent any particular waterfalls. I think of the falls and the rapids as personal, they sounded different and looked different. One can probably see the sculptures as a kind of tribute to nature – that nature can be worthy of that. There is something loving about it, too, to also let yourself pursue what’s beautiful.

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## Lulu-journal

Lulu is how Luleå first appeared in writing in **1397**, a name of Sami origin that can be translated as "Eastern Water". This is the title of the Luleå Biennial's journal, published once a month from August **2018** through February **2019**. Across seven issues, through text, image and film, readers are offered different points of entry to the biennial's overall theme: the dark landscape. All issues take as their starting point a public artwork in Norrbotten. The Lulu journal is made by the biennial's artistic directors and invited guest editors. It is published on the biennial's website and can be downloaded for printing. [www.luleabiennial.se](http://www.luleabiennial.se)

## Colophon

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