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# SPEAKING BACK

DAVI MUITALSAID DEKOLONISEREN  
DECOLONIZING NORDIC-NARRATIVES

3/6 - 1/10/23

**KUNSTHAUS HAMBURG**



Muitaliigo dunnje aktage / ahte mii orrut Sámieatnamis / Dajaigo son /  
ahte dát lea Sápmi / Dovddastiigo maiddái / ahte dát lea min / Ii suige fal hupman /  
primitiiva kultuvrra / aktageardánis olbmuin / ii suige fal dadjan /  
ahte sii bukte čuvgehusa

*Wurde Dir erzählt / dass wir in Sapmi leben / wurde gesagt / dass dieses Samenland ist /  
wurde zugegeben / dass uns das Land gehört / Hoffe da war kein Gerede /  
von einer primitiven Kultur / von einem einfachen Volk / hoffe niemand behauptete /  
dass sie uns Zivilisation gebracht*

*Did anyone tell you / that we live in Sámiland / did they say / that this is Sápmi /  
did they acknowledge, too / that this belongs to us / I hope they did not just talk /  
about a primitive culture / simpleminded people / I wish they did not maintain /  
that they brought us civilisation*

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää

Gida ijjat čuovgadat / Des Frühlings Nächte so hell / How light the nights of spring

1980

# Oaidnetmeahttun Sápmi / The Disregarded Sápmi

Áile Aikio

**Čáhni lea girjái, eallin lea girjásut /  
Life is as diverse as a woodpecker is  
mottled**

According to a Sámi saying life is as diverse as the woodpecker has spots. The same could be said for the manifestations and impacts of Nordic colonization of Sápmi that has over time taken over all aspects of Sámi life. Starting with forced Christianization of the Sámi and the outlawing Sámi religion and spirituality, building on the demarcation of state borders and prohibition of the migration of the Sámi and their reindeer between the summer and winter lands, ending with the takeover of all Sámi land and water by the national states as well as their assimilatory policies that aimed at the elimination of the languages and cultural and societal practices of the Sámi.

One aspect of colonialism is the appropriation of Sámi cultural heritage in the European knowledge production. Sámi heritage—in all its forms eg. objects, music, folklore, societal traditions and traditional knowledge—and Sámi individuals—both living and dead—were utilized in creating and maintaining hierarchical and racialized categorizations of peoples and cultures where *white* Europeans were placed on top. In the name of research, the remains of our ancestors were stolen from their graves, and their skulls and bones were measured, categorized, typed and traded. In the name of education and entertainment, our foremothers and

forefathers were exhibited in zoos for the exotic hungry audience.

This colonial legacy still burdens the Sámi people on individual and community levels through personal experiences and intergenerational traumata. Combined with ongoing colonialism in its many forms, it threatens the survival of our people.

Today the Nordic countries are often seen as the star pupils: they are democratic welfare states with high living standards, quality healthcare and education systems, as well as strong social security systems. In addition, the Nordic countries are known as advocates for democracy, gender equality and minority rights. The less known Nordic narrative is the ongoing violations of the Sámi human and land rights.

Though the Sámi position and situation has improved in many ways during the late 1900's and early 2000's, the fundamental questions of Sámi self-determination and land rights has remained an unresolved issue leading to the deprivation of Sámi livelihoods. The Nordic colonialism has not ended but it has taken new forms. *Stállu*, the old ogre in the Sámi cosmology, is still very much alive and even today threatens the lives of the Sámi, though now dressed up in new clothes. For example, the urge for green energy has brought wind parks to Sápmi alongside the mines and other old ways of colonial appropriation of Sámi land and its resources.

Even the Sámi nonetheless benefit from the high standard of the Nordic countries and the services offered by the welfare state. Compared to other Indigenous Peoples, the Sámi are in many ways privileged. We have, for example, equal opportunities with other citizens to utilize education and health care services designed for and aimed at the majority population. At the same time, the politics and policies of the well-fare states providing these services prevent us from leading a Sámi life, living as Sámi.

As long as there have been museums, there have also been Sámi collections. From the Sámi perspective, this collecting activity meant dislocating Sámi cultural heritage from its original networks, in particular *duodji*, Sámi handicrafts, and other objects made, used and owned by the Sámi. Sámi objects were removed from their Sámi context, and hence the connections between the objects, the land their materials derive from and their makers, users and caretakers were ruptured. Once placed within a museum collection, the objects were redefined and re-categorized within the European epistemological framework and assigned new meanings; from here on they exist to serve primarily the needs and interests of the non-Sámi.

The notion of art was adopted by our ancestors among other ideas and novelties they found useful. In Sámi world, the concept has been redefined

and adapted to better fit into Sámi epistemologies and interests. Sámi art has never existed totally separately from *duodji*, and still the boundaries of Sámi art and *duodji* are fluid. By and by Sámi art has grown and gained importance, and today it is an essential way to express ourselves, a novel form for our storytelling. Art opens up opportunities, means and venues to tell our stories, it points out grievances, comments on past and present. And above all: art is a way to imagine and reimagine better futures for our people, for our land and all the beings dwelling on it. Sámi art and art-making, as well as *duodji* and *duddjon*, *duodji*-making, are a radical means of decolonization and a way to counteract and fight against commodification of Sámi heritage, individuals, societies and land.

Sámi art and Sámi artists have played a fundamental role in Sámi decolonization processes. The Sámi art has constructed political awareness and highlighted colonial power relations and structures that have negative effects in Sámi lives. The Sámi artists were at the forefront of the Alta controversy\*\* in the 1970s, where they drafted and raised the first Sámi flags. Today Sámi art and *duodji*—especially in the form of *gákti* (Sámi dress)—have become important means and visual symbols for all Sámi decolonial movements.

Prominent for Sámi art is its potential to imagine alternative and noncon-

forming realities, possibilities and Sámi futures. Sámi art is a Sámi practice of reimagining and reconstructing decolonial Sámi realities and futures beyond colonial harm. Only through decolonization we can ensure healthy Sámi futures where Sámi way of life is possible; futures where we will not only survive and exist, but thrive and resurge, heal from the colonial traumas. Here it is important to note that Sámi decolonization does not just serve the Sámi. Decolonization is beneficial for us all, as living in this colonial world is harmful for humans and more-than-humans alike. Colonial practices and realities caused through them, together with over-consumption and the dogma of economic growth at the cost of excessive use of natural resources, endanger the future of our planet. It endangers our existence. Sámi art and the realities founded on solidarity it calls forth can act as alternative visualizations what the world could be like or what kind of realities we could also choose to enact.

Sámi art opens up new possibilities and makes space for alternative practices, policies and epistemes to exist and flourish.

### **Rievssatlávkkiiquin/By Ptarmigan Steps**

According to a Sámi proverb, after the polar night the days grow longer by ptarmigan steps; each day is a bit brighter than the earlier. This reminds us that progress in decolonization might be hard to spot and may stand out only later, in retrospect. Only when the light prevails are we able to understand how dark it was before and how much we have accomplished.

\*\* The Alta conflict unfolded between 1968 and 1982. The Sámi stood together with environmental activists and protested against the extension plans for hydropower in Finnmark, northern Norway. Even if they did not succeed to stop the hydropower plants, their protests had a huge impact on Sámi politics in Norway. (Source in German: Wikipedia)

# Sissel M. Bergh

MAADTH (ROOT), 2019 • Tree root, pine tar, stones, concrete ◉ MAADTEGEN  
VUELIE (SONG OF THE ROOT), 2019 • Ink on paper, bark fleets

*Listen to the song of the root.*

*It sings that it is enough now.*

*It sings of overflowing all with care.*

*It sings of listening in.*

*The enforcement shall end.*

Sissel M. Bergh's work operates between scientific and artistic research and investigates the connections between mythology and historical facts. She is particularly interested in the connection between Norwegian and South Sámi culture, of which significance in the Norwegian and Swedish contexts has been largely neglected in academic research. In a combination of cartography and linguistics, Bergh traces this meaning in her drawings, installations and videos in connection with landscape, mythology, language and the naming of places. The artist understands language as an expression of lived reality. "The land is described in the Sámi language with diverse terms that emphasize different aspects, such as mountain formations, valleys or different types of forests and rivers. The naming of places forms an oral map which could be used to navigate and remember the land by its visual or sensual qualities."

The two works shown in the exhibition literally create a web of meanings. The uprooted tree takes on a special role in South Sámi culture, where it symbolizes *Maadterahkka*/Mother Earth and equally establishes a connection to the ancestors and the past. In her work MAADTEGEN VUELIE (SONG OF THE ROOT), the artist visualizes specific references to meaning in the phonetics and spelling of the South

Sámi language. *Maadth*/root in Sámi cosmological thinking addresses a kind of measurement for outreach, distance, and proximity, and how things are connected and stretching out from us. Even the word for horizon comes from *maadth*.

At the same time, the root system can also be read as a reference to linguistics and genealogy. In her large-format drawing, the artist places these in a clear context with "racial biology" and territorial claims to power. The root also represents, in a negative sense, the alienation from original or inherent relations. These references become visible in the portrayal of historical figures such as the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus who is considered the founder of modern botany and zoology. Natural sciences of plants and animals are still based on his binary nomenclature and systematic categorization developed in the 18th century. His portrait appears in the upper right-hand corner of the drawing, to which the category "monstrusus" is assigned here; a term that Linnaeus himself coined in the categorization of the human "races" and attributed to those who had "less human traits". Next to him is the portrait of Herman Lundborg, who founded the State Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala, Sweden, at the beginning of the 20th century. A third figure on the left side

of the drawing is Gustav II Adolf, who, in the early 17th century, played an important role in the establishment of the hegemonial power of Sweden, that became one of the primary military forces of Europe and that intensively expanded into Sápmi territories.

Through the branching roots in the picture, these figures and their violent language are painfully entangled with the symbols and animals of Sámi cosmology. Together they entwine around the center, the *aernie*/the fireplace, where the Sámi goddess *Saarahkka* is located, who is considered the protector of (unborn) life. The drawing itself takes up the floor plan of a *gâetie*, the traditional Sámi dwelling, but can also be read as a form of the spiritual Sámi drum, which was originally used for prophecies and healing. It is considered particularly sacred. Bergh thus

tells of the culture and epistemology of the Sámi on a pictorial and linguistic level, which—contrary to the logic of Linneau’s separate categories—is based on connectedness. At the same time, the artist shows how deeply colonialism has penetrated Sámi culture. However, she pushes it to the margins of her representation in an emancipatory sense and clears the way for her own, Sámi perspective of the world.

○ **Sissel M. Bergh** (b. 1974 in Tråante/Trondheim, Norway/Sápmi) is a Trondheim-based visual artist and researcher. She makes installations, films, paintings, drawings and objects, as well as collaborative projects. She received her education from Oslo National Academy of Fine Arts and University of Technology, Durban. She has lived and worked in Lusaka, Zambia—were she co-founded the Munandi Art Studio.

## Annika Dahlsten & Markku Laakso

CAMPFIRE IN A ZOO, 2019 • 6-channel video installation • HD-video, colour, sound

CAMPFIRE IN A ZOO (2019) is an installation of puppet animations based on a family story of Markku Laakso’s ancestors who in a Sámi group toured Germany as a part of racist exhibitions, also known as “human zoos”. From the late 19th century to the 1930’s, the Hamburg based animal trader and zoo director Carl Hagenbeck was one of the pioneers to organize such “Völkerschauen”. In these exoticizing performances non-European peoples participated in pre-scripted shows that followed more stereotypical expectations of the audience than their own will.

These demeaning, derogatory and dehumanizing shows emphasized the supposed primitivity and alleged racial

inferiority of the exhibited peoples. Sámi groups were present already in the first shows, and all together more than forty Sámi shows by Hagenbeck alone toured in European cities. While some of the performers from non-European countries reported later that they were proud of having represented their culture abroad, others complained of having been forced to perform in fantasy costumes and paid badly. Some of the participants had been captured from their homelands, others died on tour as they had not been vaccinated and thus had no resistance against European diseases. Often, their dead bodies became objects of racially oriented anatomy.



Nonetheless, Hagenbeck persistently claimed his shows to be “authentic” and “ethnographically valuable”. The animations of **CAMPFIRE IN A ZOO** responds to this claim by creating an entirely fictitious world—both genuine and staged just as the Sámi performers themselves were in this situation. The main character in the film is the 14 years old Veikko, Markku Laakso’s great uncle. In 1930, he and his parents took part in the “Polar-Schau” caravan. The film script is loosely based on the diaries of one of the caravan members, Máhte-Dánel (Daniel Mathis Haetta). Dahlsten and Laakso use cinematic means to put distance between

themselves and the story of Laakso’s ancestors. By using puppets they can assume the roles of their relatives in the German zoos.

○ **Annika Dahlsten** (\*1975, Vaasa, Finland) and **Markku Laakso** (\*1970, Eanodat/Enontekiö, Finland/Sápmi) are visual artists from Finland who work both as independent artists and as a collaborative duo. In their mutual work they focus on photography, animation and video art. Dahlsten & Laakso explore the documentary nature of photography, staging, and the questions of the real and the authentic. Their works have been on display in various museums and galleries both in Finland and abroad.

## Marja Helander

**BIRDS IN THE EARTH**, 2018 • HD-video • 11 min ○ **MONCHEGORSK**, 2014 • Diasec • 75 × 105 cm ○ **KIRUNA**, 2014 • pigment print on aluminium • 75 × 125 cm

Marja Helander’s photographs and videos often highlight the given tension between the Western urban way of life and the culture of the indigenous Sámi communities. Many of her works feature humorous, grotesque or absurd scenes in which the clothing, everyday objects or actions of her protagonists—whose role the artist often assumes herself—blatantly clash with the challenges, realities and living conditions of Arctic nature.

In other works, such as the photographs shown here, it is the destruction of nature resulting from massive human intervention that takes centre stage. The at first glance atmospheric landscape images of the tundra turn out, on closer inspection, to be violated or dead nature, henceforth serving nothing but the industrial exploitation of raw materials.

In the Sámi world view, nature is sacred and valuable. Inorganic things are likewise considered to be alive. Many things are regarded as sacred, such as mountains, deep lakes, striking stones or trees in a landscape. Against this background, even the gloomy, apocalyptic landscape images may appear as sublime representations. The work **KIRUNA** (2014), for instance, shows a mountain ridge that seemingly is illuminated by the moon emerging from darkness. Only at second glance one may discern that this fjäll is not just an ordinary landscape from the Arctic regions. The Swedish state-owned company LKAB has over the years transformed the original mountain into a gigantic heap of waste by mining the world’s largest iron ore deposit—a mine operated on Sámi territory.

The photograph **MONCHEGORSK** (2014) shows the nickel and copper smelter located in the eponymous town on Russia's Kola Peninsula, likewise one of the traditional areas of the Sámi people. To meet the smelter's energy needs, in addition to a large hydroelectric power plant built in the 1930s, a nuclear power plant was also installed there in the 1970's.

Marja Helander grew up in Helsinki remote from her Sámi roots, without having learned the language and socialized in the culture of her ancestors. Her artistic work is thus always to be understood as a quest for means to reconnect with Sámi culture, but also as a strategy of self-empowerment directed against colonial territorial claims and capitalist-oriented exploitation of nature and living spaces still effective today.

Her film **BIRDS IN THE EARTH** (2018) was inspired by the 100th anniversary of

the independence of Finland that offered no space to the Sámi as a national minority. The young ballerinas wearing white tutus embody a typical Western dance tradition based on rule-abiding choreography. Set in the landscape of the Sámi areas in the north of Finland, the dancers give the impression of tamed animals in wild nature. In brief moments, however, a newly awakened self-confidence and strength surfaces, as towards the end of the film when they dance in Sámi costume in front of the mighty pillars of the Finnish parliament, breaking out of the swan-like mannerism.

● **Marja Helander** (b. 1965) is a Sámi photo and video artist whose works focus primarily on her identity between the Sámi and Finnish cultures. After graduating in painting from the Lahti Institute of Fine Arts, Helander obtained a Master's degree from the University of Art and Design Helsinki in 1999.

## Minna Henriksson

**NORDIC RACE SCIENCE**, 2016/2023 • Acrylic pen on wall • various dimensions

**NORDIC RACE SCIENCE** is a large wall drawing, which is a survey of the central figures and institutions involved in scientific racism in the Nordic countries between 1850s and 1945. The starting point for the work has been a collaborative research in 2015/16 by the artists together with archaeologist Fredrik Svanberg, then head of research at the Swedish History Museum.

The work introduces many race scientists active in the Nordic countries who measured human skulls of dead and living people in order to categorise

peoples into 'races' and place them in hierarchical order in relation to each other. This pseudo-science which was taken into an extreme with the murderous 'Nazi eugenics' was popular widely in the Western countries in the 19th and early 20th century. In all Nordic countries it was one of the most respected and state supported scientific disciplines.

The so-called 'Aryan-Germanic race' was regarded as the highest human development, and the Nordic scientists placed their own ethnicity as a part of it, or in its close proximity. Research circles

of scientists from the Nordic countries and Germany were created, exchange of human remains as 'specimens' and the hosting of research trips of German scientists to the Nordics strengthened the Nordic-German connections. A shared ancestry was composed where the Nazis borrowed heavily from the Norse mythology and culture.

Class played a role in this fictitious science, and the elite and notable representatives of cultural and scientific achievements were often defined as the most 'racially advanced'. In all the Nordic countries indigenous people were an object of research, and their oppression was justified by their supposed 'racial inferiority' verified by the pseudo-science.

Next to the anatomists, geneticists and race biologists practicing the racist science, the wall drawing also includes collectors of human remains, institutions and patrons as well as artists who produced images of the constructed white 'Nordic race', and the 'exotic others'. The close relation between fine art and race science proves how, in its time, the race science also exerted great influence on many other fields: when race science was deemed unpopular after World War II, in various fields its products still keep influencing our world view.

The work **NORDIC RACE SCIENCE** addresses a topic that has not been adequately dealt within the Nordic countries. Swedish race scientific institutions are relatively known but respective projects in Finland and Norway, funded by these

governments, have been much less discussed. A reason for the silence could be that many of these scientists were respected members of the national elite, and the Nordic countries were united in various networks around the science.

The drawing has been previously exhibited in several artistic and scientific contexts. For this exhibition Henriksson has expanded it from inter-nordic connections to an examination of contacts with the scientific racism practiced in Germany.

Henriksson's work at the Kunsthaus Hamburg is accompanied by a panorama display of Nordic landscapes, mostly from Sápmi. Some of the photographs used are taken by the race scientists themselves, some by people who in various other ways contributed to the science, while yet other photos have appeared in publications promoting Nazi ideology. Although devoid of people, the approach to the landscape speaks of a similar distance and instrumentalization of the subject, as do the photographs of people, who were "race scientifically" researched.

● **Minna Henriksson** (b. 1976, Oulu, Finland) is a visual artist working with a disparate range of tools including text, drawing, painting and linocut. She studied art in Brighton, Helsinki and Malmö. Henriksson's work relates to leftist, anti-racist and feminist struggles, and aim at highlighting positions of power and oppression. The works are based on research and often draw from real historical events. In 2017 Henriksson was awarded with the Anni and Heinrich Sussmann Award of artistic work committed to the ideal of democracy and antifascism.

# Hannimari Jokinen

MIRABILIS L., 2023 · Wardian Case, tea plants *Camellia Sinensis*, photography, anagrams, wall paper

The artist, grown up in a multi-ethnic family in Finland, deals with questions of post/coloniality. In the early noughties, she presented pieces on migration, followed by collective work-in-progress deconstructions of colonial monuments. At European and West African frontiers, she and her artist colleagues searched for vestiges of globalisation.

In the installation *MIRABILIS L.*, Jokinen examines the close connections between natural sciences and racial anthropology. She asks to what extent even today our knowledge and approach of the early modern era is shaped by mechanistic worldviews of the early modern era and the Cartesian division of soul or mind and body. Indeed, in botanical gardens colonial fragmentations of nature and in anthropological archives racist classifications of humans become visible and evident.

The artist installs a *Wardian Case*, today referred to as an “artefact of the Anthropocene”. For the first time in history, in this airtight and portable greenhouse, developed by the British botanist Nathaniel B. Ward (1791–1868), almost all crop plants could survive the long ship passages. This revolutionised the colonial plantation economies on all continents. Nevertheless, to fully isolate a plant from its natural environments turned out to be an illusion since with the soil, entire ecosystems traveled with the crop: Seeds of invasive species, plant diseases, and insects that destroyed harvests.

The Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778)—the botanical abbreviation

“L.” in the installation title refers to him—sought to establish an economically self-sufficient Swedish kingdom. In his botanical garden in Uppsala, he aimed to acclimatise overseas plants to the Nordic climate. He envisaged plantations of tea, saffron and ginger in the icy tundra where Sámi peoples would work on.

Linnaeus not only classified plants, minerals and animals but humans. He became a pioneering European naturalist to categorize people according to their skin colour and supposed superior and inferior character traits. He was followed by the many who established the Western dominated “scientific” racism that often enough proved to be a crude figment of their imagination.

In Jokinen’s terrarium tea plants grow, a colonial commodity from China that at the time was coveted in Europe. The plant pots bear stickers, yet instead of describing the properties of the tea plant in the Linnaean system, they are labeled with anagrams of fictitious factions of humans that, in Dada-style, lead all racial classifications ad absurdum. The photos on the stickers are from the archives of the world’s first state-approved Racial Biology Institute in Uppsala/Sweden. Showing only backs of people’s heads, the images „resist“ any biased voyeurism. The wallpaper plant motif is taken from the inside pages of the photo albums in the Uppsala archives.

Jokinen’s video traces back “racial theorists” in the Nordic countries and their networks in Germany. Their collected skulls and skeletons are still in European anthropological institutes. In 1873, the

Swedish anatomist Gustaf Retzius traveled through Finland's rural regions, plundering human remains and burial objects from cemeteries as well as taking body measurements from the living, collecting hair samples, clothing and "ethnographic" objects. In Sirpa Humalisto's family memory the unpleasant encounter with Retzius still lives on. 150 years ago, her widespread relatives became again and again victims of the degrading body measurements.

○ **Hannimari Jokinen** (\*in Helsinki, Finland) is a visual artist, curator and author. She studied applied linguistics, culture management and cultural education in Zurich and Hamburg. Her artistic practice includes participatory and interventionist art projects in urban space, community art, film, photography, spatial installations, performative city tours on the subject of migration and coloniality. Jokinen researches, writes and teaches on the topic of urban space. In the past decade she has cooperated in projects in West Africa and on the European frontiers. Since 2003 she is a member of Working Group HAMBURG POSTKOLONIAL, in 2019–2022 she was active in the Advisory Board for the Decolonization of Hamburg at the Ministry of Culture and Media.

## Marjo Levlin

◇◇◇◇◇  
DIVIDUAL INDIVIDUAL, 2017 • 5-channel video installation • 19:25 min.

In her work, the Swedish-speaking Finnish artist Marjo Levlin combines images, objects and phenomena likely to raise questions and thus initiate a process of reflection and research. Coincidence plays a central role in this approach, as a principle and working tool that gives rise to novel and unexpected results. Starting out in the field of painting, Levlin has in the past twenty years focused on short films and installations in which she deals with personal, social and political themes.

The 5-channel video installation *DIVIDUAL INDIVIDUAL* revolves around the myth of a "pure Nordic race" and the fears of "miscegenation" spreading among the Swedish speaking Finnish upper class at the beginning of the 20th century. The Swedish anatomist and anthropologist Anders Retzius had developed a "skull index": pseudo-scientific measurements aimed at finding out what part of the population had a "long skull" and

thus belonged to the assumed "Germanic" or "Nordic race", and who belonged to the "Finnish, East Baltic" or "Sámi race" with an allegedly "short skull". Subsequently, the physician and eugenicist Herman Lundborg founded the world's first state-run Racial Biology Institute in Uppsala/Sweden. It was now the new medium of photography that superseded the caliper as a (pedagogic or illustrative) tool for the "classification of the races"

Levlin's work deals specifically with the "racial-biological" research and propagandistic "public enlightenment" conducted by the Florin Committee (nowadays Folkhälsan), which had a study carried out in three Swedish-speaking regions of Finland in 1914. The whole population of the western Finnish municipality of Malax/Österbotten, for instance, was medically examined, and the skull measurements of all inhabitants between

the ages of 25 and 40 were recorded anthropologically. Presumably, the skulls of the artist's great-grandparents were also measured. The results of the examination were—as might be expected—more than ambiguous: the population was determined as “mixed”.

The video installation shows numerous photographs of heads and bodies from Lundborg's archives of “Finnish types” living in Sweden and of portraits of Swedish speaking Finns at the time commissioned by the Florin Committee in Finland. The film footage of butterflies and a butterfly collection make reference to Harry Federley, the first professor of genetics in Finland who, in addition to being a world-famous zoologist and entomologist, also was an advocate of eugenics. Federley was a leading member of the Florin Committee and had also conducted research at the University of

Jena, among other places, where he established contacts with German “race researchers” such as the zoologist and physician Ernst Haeckel.

In the Nordic countries, the racial anthropology pursued by Sweden led to drastic biopolitical measures that mainly affected the poor population. Until the 1950's, around 60,000 people were sterilized in Sweden, in Finland around 11.000, mostly women, often coercively. In the Swedish majority society, ideas of a particularly *white* population are still effective today and have led to a notably restrictive migration policy.

● **Marjo Levlin** (\*1966, Graz, Austria) originally studied painting in Finland. Her artistic practice often deals with collected or found objects that serve either as material or inspiration for her projects. Her work deals with both social and political issues, often in an indicating, subtle mode.

# Britta Marakatt-Labba

DEATTÁN/NIGHTMARE, 1984 • Embroidery • 55 × 55 cm ○ OAIVESKÁLŽŽUT/SKULLS, 2017 • Embroidery and applique • 27 × 27 cm ○ RAHKKAN/CRACKLING, 1986/2014 • mixed media • 110 × 200 cm

Through her work, Britta Marakatt-Labba creates narrative threads tracing the conditions that have shaped the lives of the Sámi both in the past and the present. Based on her embroideries, collages and assemblages, she tells stories deriving from the Sámi cosmology which—interwoven with philosophical and autobiographical notes—address questions of collective identity. She at the same time finds evocative metaphors for issues of colonization, environmental destruction and global warming which she contrasts with scenarios of resistance and self-determination of the Sámi communities.

Stitched on white fabric, her pieces describe vast, boundless snowy landscapes: the subarctic tundra, coastal panoramas and the sea. They are images of movement, of reindeer migration, in which the seasons and years are interlocked in cycles, and history is seamlessly interlaced with mythology. The circle appears repeatedly: in the form of a *lávvu* (a tent dwelling), a fireplace or a reindeer enclosure, likewise as the sun, the firmament, micro- and macrocosm. The oval, in turn, symbolizes the sacred Sámi drum. Marakatt-Labba's depiction of real and imaginary spaces are populated with figures and gatherings of people referring to the patterns of such drums.

In the embroidery DEATTÁN, giant rats are the alien forces that invade a *lávvu* at night: they have come to devour the sleeping people and take their place in the beds—a metaphor for the colonization of Sámi life which, up until today, permeates even the private sphere

thought to be safe. Centrally depicted is the fireplace where the bloody scenario escalates. In the Sámi household, the cooking area is traditionally the place of *Sáráhkká*, the protective goddess of the house, of pregnant doe cows and pregnant women. The goddess is worshipped by Sámi women and men alike. Now there are bloodthirsty rats encroaching on this sacred space and destroying human lives.

“We should not believe that dead people are dead,” says Marakatt-Labba, “their souls are still among us.” In OAIVESKÁLŽŽUT, rows of skulls are arranged within a circular space, supplemented by streaks indicating pieces of human skeleton. With this image, the artist protests against the widespread grave robbing that was committed more than a hundred years ago in the name of “racial biology”. Anthropologists, traders and adventurers plundered Sámi cemeteries and sold bones and grave goods at a great profit to institutions, museums and private collectors. Skull measurements were undertaken to prove that the Sámi belonged to a non-*white*, allegedly “inferior race”, legitimizing the Sápmi land grab by the majority society and leading to brutal long-term biopolitical measures by national governments towards the Sámi population. In recent years, bones have been rep(m)atriated to the Nordic countries, and the Sámi ancestors have found their final resting place. However, also German anthropological collections still contain skulls from the North that are awaiting their return.

In RAHKKAN, it is Marakatt-Labba's father who is depicted wandering with his herd of reindeer. At the end of the Nazi occupation of Norway in World War II, the Sámi were driven from their land and the scorched earth policy destroyed large parts of their villages and livelihoods. Marakatt-Labba's father, however, was not to be deterred and led his reindeer across the Swedish-Norwegian border to their usual grazing grounds—despite the danger of the militarized zone and landmines littering the terrain. This required him to carry a special pass from the Swedish authorities, a copy of which can be seen here. It states that it was strictly forbidden to support the Norwegian resistance movement or help fugitives cross the border. Marakatt-Labba's assemblage also includes a flour sack used by Ger-

man troops, embroidered with weapons and helmets—much like a bitter greeting from the past—next to a stamp that is also embroidered. When the rivers in northern Norway are in flood, such reminiscences from the Great War tend to reappear.

● **Britta Marakatt-Labba** was born in 1951 into a reindeer-herding family in Badje Sohpar/Övre Soppero. She studied textile art at Gothenburg University and in the late 1970's joined the artists' collective Mázejoavku, pioneers of contemporary Sámi art. The group had set out to combine *duodji*, traditional Sámi arts and crafts, with *dáidda*, contemporary art. In 1978, together with her fellow artists and environmental activists, she protested against the expansion of hydroelectric power in Alta/Finmark and was imprisoned along with 900 other protesters. The artist was represented at documenta14 with her 24-metre-long embroidery HISTORIÁ that also deals with the legendary Alta conflict.

## Katarina Pirak Sikku

AGÁLAČČAT BIVTTASTUVVON SOHKAGOTTI IVNNIIGUIN/IHKÁT ÁJTTEGIJ BÁJNOJ  
GÁRVODUM/IHKUVEN AAJKAN MAADTOEJ KLAERIEJGUJMIE GÅÅRVELDIHKIE/  
PERPETUALLY DRESSED IN THE COLOURS OF THE ANCESTORS, 2021  
(Documentation of intervention in the Uppsala University archives)

Katarina Pirak Sikku has spent many years studying Swedish “racial science” along with Sámi storytelling and cosmology. Based on both experiences related to colonialism and the notion of nature as a living subject, Pirak Sikku's art not only contributes significant work on remembrance, but also creates a striking image of self-empowerment and resistance.

In a series of art works, she has explored the policies of “racial biology” of the Swedish national and welfare state, whose extensive practices affected the

Sámi population and other minorities in the early 20th century until the 1970s. In her art Pirak Sikku draws on documents, voices and witnesses of these racist research practices and their effects up to the present. The range of her works includes the early photographic series DOLLET (2006), in which the artist staged herself as an object of body measurements.

The exhibition SPEAKING BACK relies on the documentation of a site-specific work that she produced temporarily in the



archives of the former Institute of Racial Biology in Uppsala in 2021. After lengthy research, Pirak Sikku created covers of cloth for the 42 albums that contained photographs of Sámi people who were victims of body measurements and forced “anthropological” photography for “racial-scientific” purposes. Based on the individual design of these covers composed of specific coloured fabrics, ribbons and embroidery, the artist refers to the traditional clothing of the respective regions or communities to which the persons depicted in the albums belonged.

One of these albums includes pictures of Karin Stenberg (1884–1969), from the municipality of Arvidsjaur, who was a pioneering advocate of Sámi issues in politics, education and culture. The cover that Pirak Sikku designed for this photo album is supplemented by a leather pouch with pewter thread embroidery made by Stenberg herself. On another cover, the artist applied a belt from her grandmother. The work **AGÁ-LAČČAT BIVTTASTUVVON SOHKAGOTTI IVN-NIIGUIN/IHKÁT ÁJTTEGIJ BÁJNOJ GÁRVO-DUM/IHKUVEN AAJKAN MAADTOEJ KLAERIEJ-GUJMIE GÅÅRVELDIHKIE/PERPETUALLY DRESSED IN THE COLOURS OF THE ANCESTORS** (2021) is an attempt to pay tribute to those who have been subjected to the racist gaze of body measurement and photographic categorization and cataloguing. By enveloping the photo albums in the colours and patterns—and thus

the stories—of their own culture, Pirak Sikku turns towards her ancestors with a protective gesture of care.

Pirak Sikkus’ artworks provide insight into the distressful experiences of the Sámi people that have as yet received little attention from majority society. Her works invite us to deal with Nordic colonialism and thus overcome the ignorance, silence and unwillingness to remember. Her interest could just as well have been aimed at forced enrolment in nomadic schools, expulsion or forced Christianisation, she says. For her, addressing the topic of “racial biology” is only one part of a broader story concerning the ongoing struggle against the consequences of colonization, settlement policies and the exploitation of natural resources such as grazing lands, fishing waters and mineral resources. It is a struggle for recognition, equality and, as she points out, spiritual or intellectual autonomy.

● **Katarina Pirak Sikku** was born in Jåhkåmåhke/Jokkmokk, Sweden/Sápmi where she lives and works. Pirak Sikku has a Master’s degree from Umeå Academy of Fine Arts at Umeå University. She has participated in numerous exhibitions in Sweden and abroad. Her work **GÁLLOK/KALLAK** was acquired by the Stockholm Moderna Museet in 2020 and is the first work by a Sámi artist in the museum collection. Pirak Sikku has recently published her book *Árbbehárpo/Arvstrådarna*, a treatise on racial biology, Swedification and forced resettlement of the Sámi that also plays a part in her own family history.

# Hilde Skancke Pedersen

BASSI VÁRRI (Sacred Mountain), 2020–2021 • Textile, silk chiffon, sound • 750 × 150 cm

The large textile collage **BASSI VÁRRI** (**SACRED MOUNTAIN**), 2020–2021 by Hilde Skancke Pedersen is the image of the mountain *Hakŋalančearru/Hanglefjellet* that is sacred to the Sámi and located in Sápmi, eastern Finnmark. The artist has assembled the many shades of grey of the exposed rock based on used T-shirts and jersey fabrics, thus drawing on waste and everyday materials to create an image of a landscape very familiar to her since childhood. The name *Hanglefjellet* in today's Norwegian sounds akin to “the ailing mountain”, which seems to suggest that this bare rock is the symbol of a dying nature. The artist also remembers being intimidated as a child by this mountain without vegetation. However, in the course of her life, it has grown dear to her and she has photographed it many times, finally paying tribute to it through this and a further textile work. With the title *Bassi várri* (Sacred Mountain), she not only refers to the special significance of this mountain for the Sámi. The title can also be read as a reference

to her basic attitude towards nature as an asset worthy of protection. Not only this mountain is understood as sacred; also other of her works are a silent but insistent reminder to pay the greatest respect to nature and its various manifestations—to approach the land with reverence in order to be able to better protect it as a habitat in all its facets. Skancke's work at the Kunsthauus is accompanied by a sound collage by Sámi musician and composer **Halvdan Nedrejord**.

● **Hilde Skancke Pedersen** (\*1953, Hámárfeasttas/Hammerfest, Norwegen/Sápmi) is a visual artist as well as a playwright, author, scenographer and designer for theatre and dance productions. Her work in these different disciplines is visibly influenced by life in Finnmark and Sápmi in general. The culture, nature and climate of this region, but also of other places she has travelled to, have a special influence on her art in the form of ideas and impulses. Skancke Pedersen is politically active, among other things for artists' rights, and has taken on alternating positions in Sámi and Norwegian artists' organisations.

# Outi Pieski

REMATRIATION OF A LÁDJOGAHPÍR—RETURN TO MÁTTARÁHKKÁ, 2017–2021 •

Wallpaper, Ládjogahpir and Fierra (sámi headgear and wooden inlay) from the collection of Museum am Rothenbaum, Hamburg ● THE 47 MOST WANTED FOREMOTHERS, 2019 • 48 C-Prints, framed

The works Sámi artist Outi Pieski is presenting in the exhibition are part of a large-scale project entitled LÁDJOGAHPÍR—THE FOREMOTHERS’ HAT OF PRIDE. This long-term art and research project was conceived in close collaboration with archaeologist Eeva-Kristiina Nylander. The *ládjogahpir* is a towering headdress worn by indigenous women in the Northern part of Sápmi of Norway and Finland from the mid-18th century until the end of the 19th century. The *ládjogahpir* is an emblem of a broken cultural and knowledge tradition that has been separated from its origins and, due to the effects of colonialism and forced Christianization, has since existed predominately as a historical narrative in ethnological museums.

From the middle of the 19th century, Laestadian pietism had gained influence in Sápmi. In the Laestadian movement, the *ládjogahpir* was given new meanings. So the wooden support built into the high hat, the *fierra*, was assumed to be the “seat of the devil”. As a result, the Sámi women in the movement forsook to use of their *ládjogahpir*, just as other colourful and richly decorated Sámi attires were doomed to be worldly and sinful and altered to plainer ones. The narratives of the Laestadian movement likewise demonized the Sámi female guardian goddesses Sáráhká, Juoksáhká and Uksáhká who have a significant roles in the Sámi world view. This, alongside the other societal changes, deprived the positions of the Sámi women in Sámi society.

Contrary to forced religious re-interpretation, the *ládjogahpir* is today understood as a symbol of a complex Sámi cosmology, in which a balanced relationship between the sexes was valid before colonial, Western patriarchal ways of thinking took hold in Sápmi.

The re-appropriation of knowledge related to the *ládjogahpir*, its crafting and the women who wear it, is a form of decolonial feminism that underlies the project developed by the artist Outi Pieski together with the archaeologist Eeva-Kristiina Nylander. In the photo series exhibited here, they thus make it a point to indicate the provenance of the cultural assets held by European museums. At the same time, they reclaim the forgotten knowledge that was lost or reinterpreted—along with their cultural heritage—in the archives of the museums. The photo series, therefore, is not only a critique of the museums’ continuing colonial claims to ownership of Sámi cultural heritage, but also the ‘rematriation’ of knowledge concerning the *ládjogahpir* and its wearers through art. Together with *duodji* masters, they share the findings of their research in their community and collectively explore crafting techniques and forms of design. With this artistic practice based on research and revitalization, they make it clear that the *ládjogahpir* is not merely a museum object of the past but rather is worn with pride today, testifying the self-empowerment of Sámi women and their culture.

○ **Outi Pieski** (b. 1973) is a Sámi visual artist based in Ohcejohka (Utsjoki), Finland. Since graduating from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki (2000), Pieski has exhibited internationally, most recently at the Venice Biennale (2019); the Gwangju Biennale (2021); the Biennale of Sydney (2022); Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm (2022) and Gropius Bau, Berlin (2022). Outi Pieski is represented in many collections and has received several awards, including the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts Award (2017), and the Finnish Cultural Foundation's Grand Prize (2020).

**Eeva-Kristiina Nylander** (b. 1972) is a Finnish archaeologist and has just defended her PhD from the university of Oulu, Giellagas Institute (Institute for Saami Studies) in Finland. She has worked in Sámi museums in Norway and Finland, as well as in the Historical Museum in Sweden, for example. Nylander is specialized in Sámi collections in Nordic and European museums, ethical questions and repatriation.



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Künstlerische Leitung/Artistic Director:  
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Kuratorin/Curator: Anna Nowak

Kommunikation/Communications:  
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Reza Hosseini, Jonas Kolenc, Daniel Vier,  
Jochen Weber



Kunsthaus Hamburg  
Klosterwall 15  
20095 Hamburg  
+49 40 335803

info@kunsthaushamburg.de  
www.kunsthaushamburg.de

Öffnungszeiten/Opening hours  
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Marja Helander, Birds In The Earth, Filmstill, 2018

