

# Invitation

My feral artefact 'Invitation' takes place in a small park Apollonpuistikko in Etu-Töölö, Helsinki. The park is located on top of a small hill and is surrounded by other buildings, one of them being my own apartment. It consists of a small grass field surrounded by a low fence. Around the grass field there is 9 benches in a row that seem to be facing towards the middle of the park. The whole place is filled with straight lines and angular corners, leaving very little space for nature to find its own form. That doesn't seem to be the point though as the park is made to perfectly fit in the centre of the buildings, seemingly offering a piece of nature for the people and dogs living nearby. Sometimes coming off as hostile, mostly because of the simplicity and emptiness while sometimes even welcoming, there is a lot to unravel.

During summer this place is usually filled with people enjoying the warm and sunny days with either neighbours and friends or just by themselves. I have also had my fair share of the place during those times, and I have to say, sitting here in the sun and listening to my favourite podcast, the morning coffee has never tasted better. The same doesn't go for autumn and winter though. As the air is getting colder and colder, the park seems to lose some of that life and vibrance it once had. Changing from a place where people chose to come and spend time to a place they now only pass by leaves me wondering about what is left. To whom is this place for and why is it the way it is?



When you see an empty space what does it feel like? Are you afraid or do you feel at ease? Is there something missing or is it a pure form of perfection? Maybe you feel your best when you are alone. Maybe your own thoughts are the best entertainment there is. Or maybe you crave connection. The sense of belonging and understanding you can only get from others. Do you want to observe or take action? You can sit here if you want. But you have to make a choice.

## O b s e r v i n g

I started to observe and engage with the park; sitting on the bench, walking around the area, observing how everyone behaves in the space, paying attention to the smallest details. I listened and recorded the sounds and discovered a much boarder soundscape than what I was expecting. Seemingly a tranquil moment in the evening turned into an interesting combination of nearly overheard conversations, constant sounds of the apartment doors from people leaving and arriving, cars driving, wind moving the leaves and a branch falling from the tree to the ground.

I also wanted to know how the place feels. Why is it that we so rarely touch anything in outdoors spaces? And why can I still imagine almost exactly how everything in that park might feel against my hand? Sometimes during the summer we might walk bare foot at the beach and notice how the different rocks feel when we walk over them. Some might hurt because of their hard edges, some might feel pleasant because of their smooth and warm surface. At this park, I wanted to gain a comprehensive sense of the surroundings so I touched the tree, the wooden benches, the grass, the concrete, the fence and the small rocks I never noticed there were a huge amount of.

I observed peoples' behaviour in the park. What did they actually do there and how was the space being used. You could easily spot the ones living right next to the park, some came to sit on the bench with too little clothes for the weather and smoked a cigarette. Some walked their dogs and talked to the phone simultaneously. Many were in a hurry and just passed the park with another destination in their minds. Watching peo-

ple walk in the park and mapping their routes in my head I suddenly noticed the low fence that surrounded the grass field. Obviously I have seen it countless times before but only now I paid attention to it and its nonexistent purpose. As I was observing the peoples' behaviour, I realised that the fence had a clear effect on how and how much people went to the park. If you wanted to go inside the grass field you had to cross the fence and if you had a dog with you, they had to jump over it. I saw some situations where the owner had to lure the dog to jump or they just simply carried them to the other side. So, why is there a fence marking off the park area and the area where the benches are? Usually parks are made to invite us to come and stay. But this park was surrounded by a fence as if you were never suppose to go there in the first place. Was it an area we were just suppose to look at from the distance? Suddenly I became aware of all the thing that didn't make sense. The whole place felt like an artificial cube, planted in the middle of an urban landscape.

## What has been

I searched the history of the place, I thought it would be interesting to see how it has looked before. Maybe it was more in use 100 years ago. Maybe there was a garden that brought joy to everyone that chose to stay there. Maybe there was even more trees that offered shelter from the sun and rain. Or maybe it was exactly the same.

I found these pictures from the archives of Helsinki City Museum. They have been taken from the exact same place in 1970. In the pictures you can see a group of children playing at the sandbox. There is benches around, one old lady sitting on one of them but the place still feels quite inhospitable. A lot of empty space and very little going on besides the children.

I find it interesting how we create these spaces for communal use but in reality they don't seem to meet the needs for connection. A connection between people and a connection between people and nature. Instead, this park is filled with empty space and various norms and restrictions. Everything is shaped to fit inside these tight corners. The bushes behind the benches are shaped angularly, imitating the shapes of the streets and building walls. All the benches are placed in a strict row facing towards the park with nothing but one tree inside. A fence is preventing people and dogs from going to the middle without a clear reason.

All these norms and rules tell us how to act in a space. They tell as which way to go and where not to go, were to sit and where not. It is rare that we break the rules and decide to do something different instead. We might not even notice these rules exists.



Helsinki City  
Museum 1970  
(Rista, Eeva)

## The Artefact: Invitation

I wanted to challenge the concept of this park. Could this place be something else? Or could I somehow bring out the silliness of some of the choices here? What story does this empty space tell?

I created a photograph series highlighting and questioning the relations in this space. They aim to raise questions about to whom a place belongs and what is the purpose of it. I wanted to break the norms and rules we are used to and offer something new to consider. I wanted to create contrast between nature and human-made objects by placing them in unusual ways. How does the meaning of the chair or the tree change in these pictures? What kind of new stories and scenarios does it provoke? Does that empty space tell you something?

I haven't paid much attention to his park before and my guess is – neither have others. In the end, many of us are passive when it comes to our surrounding or things that do not hold any personal meaning. And that kind of scares me. What if no one cares?

With small gestures, I wanted to create confusion. Some sort of change to reality as we have come to know it. Change order, structure, pattern. Suggest another option. Send invitation. Leave room for speculation.

Do you accept reality for what it is? Do you think reality can be changed? Who decides what is best for you or best for this place? Do you ask questions? Do you give answers? Are you even interested in questions?

I invite you to sit here and look around. What do you see? How do you feel? If this park was an animal, what would it be? What would it say? Would it be satisfied or hungry for more?

As I was taking the photographs, I noticed some people were observing me from afar. They seemed curious for what I was doing. Children at a playground next to the park gathered in a group and just stared at me. A couple of people walked their dogs in the park but avoided looking directly at me. No one asked me anything. I guess when you are doing something weird some people choose to avoid you.

Couple of weeks after I brought the same chair outside but this time there was snow everywhere and the temperature had dropped even lower. I placed the chair in the middle of the park and sat there for a moment. Reactions from other people remained the same. Nobody really cared. I wonder what would happen if I left the chair there longer? Would that make a difference? Maybe I could set a new norm everyone would come to follow.



