

A wide definition of communal art could be one from Teemu Mäki; when ever an artist works with people, this is community art. There are, however, more narrow definitions, for example within art education, where community art is said to build or empower a community. Sometimes it may be clearer to talk about participatory art, which perhaps does not lay such big expectations of a community on the project's shoulders. end quote.

I am interested in inspecting community art within the timeline of a project. Let's say an art work starts with an idea that does not involve a community, but is defined, for example, as participatory art. However, once the work is evolving, some groups or communities are activated and have communal and / or empowered experiences with it. We could say that the participatory art work has changed into community art. We can also imagine this happening the other way around, community art answering to the definitions of participation.

When working closely with people for an art piece, it is difficult but important to define what is being done, so that it is possible to set clear goals for the work. The fact that the work and its definitions change on the way is a natural part of the lifeline of an art work.

I will present you with some examples of my own work and research to talk further about community art.

in 2013 I directed a participatory performance and a documentary film called Fellman's field about a subject that is still today a tabu for many Finns. Almost hundred years has passed since the Finnish civil war, yet still many of us know very little about it. The subject is silenced because of its awful nature and the incredible violence and pain it caused, but denying it today does not in my opinion create empathy. I believe empathy is increased by knowing and accepting our shared history.

I ran into this tabu a few years ago when I was planning to cover the statue of our national hero marshal Mannerheim with red flowers. I received permissions for the project from all authorities, until suddenly I was sitting opposite the director of the museum of modern art: Why red flowers, I was asked. Our nation had been divided into reds and whites in 1918 and Mannerheim represented a white leader. The permissions for the project were cancelled.

I had ordered the 18 000 carnations, so I decided to use them for another painful subject: I swapped jobs for a moment with roma people begging on the streets. I was begging and the roma people involved gave away flowers for free. On the second day philosopher Thomas Wallgren, priest Kai Sadinmaa and poet Roman Polansky decided to come begging with me. Did the work change into community art at this point? The roma beggars were seen from a different perspective to the usual one and received, suddenly, lots of hugs.

Returning to Fellman's field read more next page.

it was the biggest prisoner camp of the Finnish civil war, where 22 000 red prisoners spent over a week with no shelter nor food. People starved to death, died of diseases and were executed. What would 22 000 people standing on the same field look like today? I invited 22 000 to take part in the performance and 11 000 came.

It was a safe way to bring people together around a silenced subject. The feedback for the project was phenomenal. One woman explained her grandparents had taken part in the performance and because of it, had later invited their whole family to their home to discuss the family's history for the first time. They had said: It's our time to talk now. The woman had only known that something had happened in the past that was not allowed to be asked about. The experience of opening up the history together had brought the family together in a completely new way. Another kind of feedback came from a business man, who had held a grudge with a colleague for years. Meeting by accident in the performance they had resolved their differences and ended the grudge with a hug. Different kinds of communal events were started because of the performance: Lahti city received a notable donation for organising a museum event around the topic of the civil war, and two people interviewed for the documentary film received grants to write their memoirs.

This subject is still relevant and I continue working with it, next on the 23rd of July at Jättömaa Festival in Finland with Veripellot performance, and next year in Spain at Franco's war monument with a performance called Valle de los Caidos, organised for 33 000 people.

I end with flowers, with a piece of work of flowers, that I feel started as a participatory project but ended as community art. Oulu Art Museum asked me to make an environmental art work and I suggested closing Pakkahuone Street in the city center from traffic and filling it with roses to make a carbon sink. Rose seedlings in rose gardens are changed every four years and taken to the landfill. At the time a whole rose garden was about to be shut down, as it is not profitable to grow roses in Finland nor Europe any more, only in Africa. Chinese, Dutch and German businesses are buying land in Africa to plant roses, making it again a colony.

A hundred thousand big rose bushes were transported to Oulu and distributed by volunteers on the street. The people of Oulu took the work to their own hands during its first day. They organised birthday parties, dances, dance and song performances, a music video shoot, stealing, caring for the flowers, picnics, drawing classes, poetry readings and yoga classes on the street, and in the end everyone was free to pick up roses to take home. Within 13 minutes the street was empty of roses. People actually ended up fighting for the flowers and the police had to be called in to settle the disagreements. It is strange that this often happens with works that involve flowers: the romantic images of the beginning end with violence caused by greed. Last year I heard that because of the positive feedback this work received, the city board of Oulu has decided to try out having the Pakkahuone street as a pedestrian street. In the end the piece had an ecological affect on the city community.