

[04.02.23]

I try to remember the room without looking at the pictures I took that day in January. In my memory, the space overlaps with that of many other galleries I've visited: the white walls, which are never so white, full of marks and scratches, evidences of the passage and intervention of other artists; the wide glass window on the street, a transparent space where we have learned to lay out informations as on a web page; the second-hand, thrift-shop furniture arranged in a corner of the room, as to make it less visible and remark its non-belonging to the gallery, where the gallerist and the artist-turned-surveillant sit through the day killing time and hoping for a fruitful interaction with the visitor. Not an artist or a gallerist myself, I have had my time sitting at one of those desks as well, counting people entering the room, hoping to recognise in the way they looked at art or moved around the space the gestures and attitude of a collector.

Indeed, one of the applications of quantum physics on anatomy theories suggests that our brain works faster than the eyes in building the world around us. The brain uses the many information it stores to create our images of the things we are looking at, with sight we just notice the differences between our mind-image and what we have in front of our eyes. At Maa-Tila, this unusual element was the floor tiles. Clashing bright, worn-out ceramic tiles drawing black, abstract flowers on a dusty yellow background. Or at least, this is how I remember them. Actually, I don't remember them at all - I just remember one of them, turned against the pattern, a tile which breaks the order of the floor. I remember the attitude of the tile over its design. On the day we visited, it was that tile which sparked my interest in the history of the space. When was it built? And what did it host in the past, before being turned into a gallery? The gallerist told us that supposedly the space was first a flower shop, later turned into a home and an artist studio. This is when I also noticed the mark left by the fireplace on the wall - I didn't see it before.

[14.02.2023 - On an aeroplane from Milan to Helsinki.]

While I'm reading the above description of the space, I try to remember the space and its details by myself too, since I was also there that day, but I find nothing except for a big bankness in my brain. I'm now sitting on an aeroplane that is carrying me back to Helsinki above the lands. The air here is extremely hot and dry, which makes me feel an annoying stiffness inside my nose and my body, under layers and layers of winter sweaters, it is damp and sticky. I try to type down my thoughts as I try to retrieve some fragments of the image of the space, but I get constantly distracted by the hot temperature of my phone's body which makes my fingers sweaty and even more sticky. I try hard to remember the space, to visualise it and put it in words in my own version, but I seem to not be able to escape from Dylan's description: it has overlapped on the image in my mind about that specific time and space and I could only revisit my memories through these words.

The floor of the space was covered with greenish square tiles that had some continuous geometric patterns flowing through, perhaps some multilayered circle that takes at least four tiles to assemble. They had flower-wave shaped boards with some tiny rock-flecks around as decorations. Although the circles-cutouts were bright yellowish white coloured, their silhouettes were drawn by thick lines of Venetian red colour. Apparently my memory differed a lot with Dylan's, because I'm not sure if there were black and abstract flowers on these

tiles. And I think the background colour of these motifs was definitely a grey olive green, maybe with a little bit warmer tone, but definitely not dusty yellow.

I remember the moment when Dylan had made me notice the one tile that is turned against the general floor pattern, we both squared down to observe it from close and had a below conversation:

“Look!”

“Ah wow!”

“This is interesting.”

“Yep! I wonder who would have done something like this...”

“Mmm..”

Then Emma told us that this space used to be a flower shop, somebody’s apartment, an artist’s studio. She pointed to the corner farthest from the door, showing us the traces of a fireplace: there was a tiny triangle area by the corner, where the pattern of ceramic tiles was suddenly interrupted, replaced by a piece of concrete. I thought it would be nice to bring a fireplace back there. A fireplace in a flower shop, where flowers are surrounded by the fire and watching.

[14.02.23 - In the kitchen, while waiting for the water to boil.]

We stick to memory - we have started this project by remembering a visit to the space where the exhibition is going to be. But mine and Xiao’s memories already differ - we have been there at the same time, so these memories are old the same amount of days.

[20.02.23.]

Tiles are meant to be placed on the floor, to be looked at from above, to be walked upon. They have determined position - next to the others, and are designed to be juxtaposed, to create the pattern they singularly cannot recreate. Would it be an exercise in accrochage to display paintings like tiles? Which relations would be instaurated between paintings when they have to be displayed one next to the other, in an order decided by their own design? What if they would be displayed horizontally, to be looked at from above to be walked upon?

[22.02.23 - Sitting in front of the desk in my room in Helsinki, evening, I have a big cup of green tea with me too. I give myself 1 hour to write.]

“I’m not sure if I would like to make a painting which will be walked upon.”

That was my first thought when I read Dylan’s text, although I like the idea of reflecting on the ways of perceiving a painting - both physically and through perspective. But why wouldn’t I want to make a painting to be walked upon in the first place? Is it because I’m worried about the painting as a fragile object which would not be able to handle the steps of people, or was it a sort of impediment of mind, a “wrong” thing to do? Maybe both, perhaps the thin

film of dried oil paints are indeed too weak to resist constant walking with shoes therefore get quickly tainted, broken, and the pigments scratched away. Moreover, according to the Western institution of arts (how should I call this?) from which my artistic identity is formed, paintings - historically understood as an *image* - are not supposed to be perceived as physical bodies. An image is a visual representation of two dimensions, it's bodiless and only ought to be looked at. A painting is an image but also an object, it can be looked at, touched, modified, squeezed... as long as it's in an artist's studio. Once it's out of there, it immediately becomes a bodiless image. I'm kinda thinking about Buren here..

Ok, it's 22:02 now, I ran out of time.

[24.02.23.]

I formulate my thoughts in Italian and I put them down here in English. In Italian, the painted object, consisting of a piece of canvas stretched between frames, is called *quadro* or *tela*. While *tela* hints to the material on which paint is applied, the canvas, *quadro* refers to its shape - squared. It therefore defines the boundaries in which the image exists. It is a geography. Indeed, since its conception, artists have explored the possibilities of the relation between the painted image and its geography. One of my favourite paintings was created by Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts around 1670. It is named "Reverse of a framed painting", and it represents nothing but the reverse of the painting, or rather, what are its constitutive elements, which the image usually conceals: the wooden frame, put together by some nails, the nude canvas, and a note attached to the canvas with what seems to be wax, maybe it's cataloguing number. I think of it as a sort of thought experiment, a key to which to attune. How do you display a painting which represents its back? When I think about this, I think in images. My thoughts flow from a sort of internal dialogue I conduct with myself in Italian, to the arrangement of images in the blank space of my mind, to traducing these thoughts in English to share them on this page. Xiao, will read them in English, maybe try to imagine which words I might have thought in Italian, probably continue to wonder about these in the Chinese he uses to talk with himself.

What will happen to this room, between the two of us? A room which we haven't visited since, but we constantly keep talking about. It's a space or a void, that is defined by a position we barely remember and locate in our memories. Yesterday, I glanced by chance at the pictures of the room, and saw the tiles. They are different from what I described, but still, conscious of the difference, I would use the same words, being unsure that my memory, though freshened, is still valid. We could just now enter so many different descriptions of those tiles that you would be able, from these, to replicate the floor of the gallery. They would all be different, because you will have to put those words into painting.

[28.02.23.]

I've acquired the ability to speak different languages since I was born, and in the course of time, by using them in different occasions about different subjects, my relationship with these languages have taken different directions. Chinese is almost only for my mother, I use it to report things happened to me weekly; I speak only Italian with Dylan, with which we talk

about painting, food, and books; I like to listen to news in German in the morning, although I don't always quite catch their meanings; English is like a colleague, whom I work with everyday but could never feel too close...but what is the language that I'm using while I'm thinking? To think is to go around something insistently, to partially visualise it again and again, to formulate thoughts in mind and have them carried back and forth but never fully grasped. From this perspective, thinking is like a language in itself, an endless attempt of sense-making, therefore perhaps trying to think in one specific language is to translate, to describe the *thoughts* in words, just like now.

Painting is also a kind of translation, whether words into figures, memories into significances, or gestures into images, there's always some direction(s) taken (how can I put this? I feel brain drained), from one language to another, a constant transitory state where meanings, acts, agencies and materials circulate and inter-exchange. I also "accidentally" had a glance of the pictures that I've took of the tiles (I was way too curious after Dylan told me that he looked it by chance, so my brain kinda manipulated my scrolling finger yesterday when I had to show my friends some other pictures), and I was pretty shocked about how different it actually looked comparing to the descriptions of how they looked in our memories. I was thinking of making a canvas that would have the same size, shape and pattern of the tile (maybe can also be stepped on), but now I'm having trouble because I don't know which tile I'm making the painting (translating) from. Dylan said that they are all valid and I think so too. Perhaps all three tiles? Or as he said, *We could just now enter so many different descriptions of these tiles that you would be able to replicate the floor of the gallery*, how about a wall of tile-paintings? A replication of paintings of every piece of the tile on the floor...maybe then maybe we need to first go back to the space and account the number and write a description for each single one of them? What if the patterns of different tiles don't coincide? I don't want tile(-paintings) that are not matched....

[03.02.23 - In Oslo airport, waiting for my flight to Venice.]

I wonder, whom are we talking to? To whom are we addressing this text? I wrote my previous entries assuming it would have been read by someone else, not me nor you. Why pretend? Am I talking to this third person or to you?

Since we live far from each other, most of our ideas are shared through text. Short texts mostly - we brainstorm via Whatsapp or direct messages on Instagram, sharing notes, some ideas, images that might inspire us or suggest new directions to take or new projects to start. It's a continuous exchange of ideas, light and serious, and Whatsapp has become our workshop. Moving between different platforms one would be able to create an atlas of all these exchanges, a network where information is shared back and forth, absorbing and including whatever sparks our interests.

Here now we are recording this process, and transforming it into the cohesive linearity of text, which has a beginning and an end - our words entered in a log that includes a date and a context of where we are writing from. It looks like the script of a play, where a brief note explains to both the reader and the actors - they at times coincide no? - what attitude should the actor adapt to. Are we scripting our ideas of an exhibition, of the relationship between curator and artist, between collaborating exhibition makers?

I have seen in your Instagram stories, a few days ago, a picture of the gallery. The tiles appeared briefly on my screen, soon replaced by the next image. Now, I recognize the tiles' quality of brevity, which they obtained by appearing in one of your stories. This image flashed in my sight and existed for 24 hours on your profile. I wonder what happened to that image now?

[06.03.23 - Evening, it's 22:49.]

I feel extremely exhausted now. I had a long long day by jumping between driving school, studio, gym and then I've just been doing the online driving theory test again and again for two hours. Now I feel a bit sick, but the exam is on this Thursday and I can't afford to waste the 40 euro fee.

Meanwhile I haven't been able to catch up with my writing/thoughts here for three days. This is the fourth day, I broke the rule and now I kind of feel bad about it. It was very fun to have this intensive back-and-forth writing three days in a row, when I had time for it... but now when things are piling up, then this mission just became somehow heavy to think about. However, although it's hard to think about this before I started to write, now the words are just flowing, I type as I'm thinking.

Last week I visited the space again, because it was Elina & Idda's opening. I brought a metre with me in my backpack so I could measure the precise size of the tile as I'm there in the exhibition. I was a bit embarrassed by the idea of conducting such a weird act on somebody's opening so I thought of doing it really quickly and discreetly: the problem is that I'm too lazy to visit it properly another time just for measuring something. Same as for writing this text, or going to the gym regularly.

Luckily when we got there it was late, still many people inside and the space was covered in a dark green light (which created a great atmosphere to the space, but as I heard from the artists later, it was not supposed to be the 'normal' exhibition lighting, they've switched for that night because the 'normal' light was too dazzling), poor visibility, so I had a chance to do it very quickly without being noticed. I didn't have a place to write down the number, so I texted Dylan on Whatsapp: "16, 16cm". As I stayed in the exhibition for a couple of minutes more, I wasn't sure if I'd read the measure correctly, so I measured again and tried to swiftly read the number under the dim green light by placing my nail on the number to bring it closer to me. I texted again to Dylan: "17 cm".

As a back-up plan, I also took a picture of the tile with my feet, so maybe later I can verify it in my studio by measuring my feet. Later that night I was bored, so I posted it on IG as a story.

[07.03.23 - 09.03.23 - On the Notes app.]

I wrote this note on my iPhone's app. I thought it was more comfortable for me, as I was on the train. Words and thoughts flow differently on the Notes app, my approach to writing is

more sincere, essential. The Notes app is a transitory space too. These notes are disposable, and since these words are digital, they appear lighter and less important.

Also, working on a shared document, I feel a certain uneasiness at the idea that you could read while I write, and read my words as they appear on the page, before I put a period on the sentence.

When I received, unannounced, your texts with the measurements, I immediately understood that you measured the tiles. I wondered how you did it, during the opening of someone else's exhibition. It's fun to read it now here. Those texts are another example of how we work, of how a messaging app and the immediacy of texts has become not just a tool, but a workshop. Our ideas are shared and recorded as small texts. I often use the search function to browse this register and recover past ideas, or look at the media folder to find the images we shared of the things we saw and read, and found interesting to share.

I remember that the catalogue of an exhibition - it was probably one curated by Harald Szeemann - included all the telegraphed messages shared between the curator and the invited artists. Thoughts, doubts, requests, agreements, even arguments. We are now writing all this down in this document, responding to each other's entry, committing ourselves to leave all thoughts and ideas in this space, but would we be able to transfer here the same process that we practise when talking or texting?

It's now time for me to copy and paste this on the document. But what if I would reverse the order of these paragraphs? You can't reverse texts - they are registered on the chat based on their position within the conversation and the time they were sent. But here I can mess up my words, edit them after they have already been written. Which kind of exhibition journal would this be?

[16.03.23 - Morning, 10:31.]

10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15.03 - It has been six days without me being able to write my part of the text, a lot of things kinda happened during these couple of days and I wasn't able to focus and be productive. Sometimes energy comes and goes, like waves.

Now I'm sitting here writing this text in Kuva/Tila, I'm here doing invigilation for the exhibition which is supposed to open at 11 am and I came here early, so, I will be able to sit in the middle of the entire empty space just for writing. The morning sun in the early spring of Helsinki is very low and extremely candent. Although it does not heat that much, the pale and bright light that shone in through the four metres high windows semi-blinded my eyes. My hands are a bit sweaty as well, it created a moist and slippery feeling with the warmed metal surface of my laptop. This is how it feels right now to write in an exhibition space. Sitting in one exhibition space to write about another exhibition space doesn't feel like cheating. Afterall, as Dylan was saying in his Iphone notes, wasn't this text document itself also another exhibition space?

*It's 11 am now, I have to go to open the door of the exhibition space and put the stand outside, I will be right back.*

*It took me precisely two minutes to do all these things, now I'm back.* Now I'm sitting back here to write, although this exhibition space is still empty, but I no longer feel this vast emptiness belongs to me anymore - by leaving the door open, anybody could step in and share this space with me. It's an open space now. I don't like the idea of an open space for working which makes me feel like I'm being watched and where my work is a performance, or at least the potentiality of it being like this. I don't know what Dylan is doing right now, but I can see his icon is appearing on the top-right side of my screen with a claret circle and his face staring at me, and his cursor that has the same colour is hovering in the beginning of this text - what is he doing? Is he watching me writing these words right now? Or probably he just opened his laptop and is now working on some other texts with this tab open. But his icon is just one small image with his face, staring forward and smiling, I can't know what he is doing. This writing document is also an exhibition space, now for us, later for everybody else, when we cease to write and all pages are printed, physically transferred into ink and paper, attached to the exhibition space of Maa-tila.

But what about the physical space of Maa-tila? I kinda stopped to think about it as we went away with our thinking-chatting-writing-catching process, or is it really possible to *talk about* the physical space of a place? If we perceive the conversations or texts as spaces themselves - just like this text as an exhibition space by itself - then what is the space that is *talked about*? Are we only trying to approach a space with other space(s)? This reminds me of a citation about definition of *place* from from Yi-Fu Tuan's book *Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective* (1974):

As location, place is one unit among other units to which it is linked by a circulation net; the analysis of location is subsumed under the geographer's concept and analysis of space. Place, however, has more substance than the word location suggests: it is a unique entity, a "special ensemble" ...; it has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning.

What does a *circulation net* mean here? Is it our "spaces after spaces" approach also part of this circulation net, that every place is constituted by other spaces therefore every space could become a place as well? *A Place...is also a reality to be clarified, and understood...from people who have given it meaning:* is Maa-tila becoming a place because of the people who have "lived" there - by engaging actively with its history, physical space, and also discursive spaces? Or is this writing document also a place, through the temporary dwelling of Dylan and I, where we put thoughts and build it on its length?

[19.03.23.]

Are these pages part of the gallery or of the exhibition, or are they an extension of both of those? Writing our thoughts and reflections on the project beforehand, what are we doing here? What will these pages stand for when the exhibition will be on?

In the process of curating art exhibitions, words are usually accessories. They are either placed in the catalogue or on the wall, instruments used to explain the ideas of the curator or to introduce the viewer to the work of the artist. They are an essential quality of the curator too. Being able to write well and to explain clearly with their words the concept and the project of the exhibition is considered to be a rather important aspect of this role. The words become the only way to reveal the machinations and clockworks of the exhibition.

In our shared passion for science fiction we both read books where places exist only in their descriptions and the logics and relationships that, within the story and the narration, make them places - the relation that the characters have with their surroundings, the scene and passages the surroundings hosts. If that is true to every novel, science fiction, which imagines worlds and spaces beyond our experience is more than so - where these fictional spaces get to exist through the events in the novel.

The gallery might be considered a fiction, as it's the exhibition. Elements, words and objects, sound light and experiences are meant to converge through the manoeuvre of an initiator, a fire starter, a curator.

Rather than a dump for thoughts, these pages are records of events that lead us to this show. Trying to extend the exhibition backwards - we create records that manifest its presence and its existence even before it opened or that the works that are exhibited were created. These notes serve to the fiction of the exhibition, creating a legacy or a lore, of which the exhibition becomes part of.

[24.03.23 - Morning.]

20. 21. 22. 23 ... I'm constantly late, therefore always feeling slightly guilty when fabricating my reflections on site. I think there are too many questions that we have been posing here, questions that do not necessarily have a conclusion. However, I like the expression of these text as a legacy or a lore of which the exhibition becomes part of, if we ought to consider the exhibition as a *place* rather than a *space*, then perhaps it is necessary to perceive it as a sort of fabric of dwelling, where different stories, fictions, lived experiences are interwoven together.

In his essay "Imperialist Landscape"(1987), W. J. T. Mitchell has talked about landscape as a medium:

...landscape is best understood as a medium of cultural expression, not a genre of painting or fine art. ... There certainly is a genre of painting known as landscape, defined very loosely by a certain emphasis on natural objects as subject matter. What we tend to forget, however, is that this "subject matter" is not simply raw material to be represented in paint but is always already a symbolic form in its own right, The familiar categories that divide the genre of landscape painting into subgenres - notions such as the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque - are all distinction based, not in ways of putting paint on canvas, but in the kinds of objects and visual spaces that may be represented by paint.



Following his ground of reasoning, and combining the idea of “exhibition - place - dwelling fabric”, therefore it is not too far for us to think of the exhibition as “symbolic form in its own right” as well. The exhibition, before being assigned any kind of art medium (of paintings, sculpture, video, installations or mixed), subject (on feminism, on trauma, on ecology) and message (perhaps? I think nowadays is pretty rare that an exhibition is assigned with some strong message...) or maybe location? (in an apartment, garage, garden, or institutional spaces), is already a medium within itself.

*But aren't these elements essentially parts of constructing an exhibition? Can we really talk about exhibition as a medium in itself without thinking about its subject and location? This perhaps sounds a bit redundant, sorry I'm a bit confused with my own thoughts now. I will try to elaborate it a bit better next time.*

[24.03.23 - On the train back from Milan.]

Yes, we are posing too many questions to which we barely have time to try to answer. But probably leaving them open here, we can address them in another shape as we progress with this project. I will however pick up one to reason with and where to start. *Can we really talk about exhibition as a medium in itself without thinking about its subject and location?*

Where do we trace the limit of an exhibition and how do we define one? It is possible to start from the objects in the exhibition, or just one. One object, and assuming there are more, the other ones and the relations will tie them together. There might be some words - the captions, and the introductory texts too. There are relations with other objects there too: the texts the author references directly or not, the words which influenced their thoughts, which appear as quotations or that just become apparent to an informative reader. But it's not just that - there are the relations which the readers make with these words: all the time they heard or read them, and in relation to what. The same for the works - may they be new works or older works, that they are seeing for the first time but which remind them of something, or that they had already seen exhibited somewhere, in relation to other works, or that they might even have encountered on book, or social medias, or even movies. This is just supposing we are talking of what commonly falls into the definition of “artwork”. Because if an exhibition comprise for example a design piece, which may exist in more than one copy, the replica of it, although with a different biography, will hold stand for its idea and be seen, at the same time, in more than one place, in relation to more objects, in exhibition born under different themes. The objects will be exhibited somewhere, in a place as physical as a museum or a gallery, or as digital as a website or a curated social media account. Then, if the object is in the museum, one should count its relation with the space: either the white walls, or the squeaking wooden floors, heavy brocade curtains, golden windows intarsia, beaten rugs, spotted wallpapers, dusty pillows in new fabrics which motifs replicate that of the appearance that the palace's interiors took when, in a certain age in a certain time, that certain arbiter of taste was charged with the decoration of it and that an interior historian studied up to the last detail and tried to recreate acquiring pieces from different collection which don't really belong to the palace but to the same age and time, to the same artisan or whose creator was just influenced by the style of the palace... and placed there, to give the visitor an image of what it must have looked like and felt visiting it at that age. And then, these object will find a space in time - a present which is inextricably linked with the past

which inhabited that space - the different exhibitions that took place in that gallery, the different curators that shaped it and the other artists that had shown there, the writers who mentioned it, what was there in that space before the building was built, and who built it with which purpose. The context of the age in which it was conceived, and its geographical context, the city, village or town where it is located, and its inhabitants, the famous ones as well as the less celebrated ones. And all the other buildings in the city, those deemed cultural upfront: what is the mission of this exhibition space and why does it differ so much from the others, and if it is not - what is this space usually dedicated to? Why was it considered a suitable space for an exhibition? If one would not be so anthropocentric, they may also wonder which other elements inhabit it - the plants which surround it - copiously or scarcely - and whose pollens are inadvertently swept in by the wind or the sole of the visitors' shoes, the animals which live around there or even in there, on a macroscopic or microscopic level. When the exhibition is in a digital place, one could even turn their gaze to the surrounding in which they are while scrolling through it, or the path they followed through links and websites, to get there or even wonder where the servers that host it are located and what does the place look like there (one could even wonder it for this text too). This could even be asked about all the objects in the exhibition (usually the provenance is specified for those which are deemed prizes of the nation of institution which now possess them) at time it's even shrouded in the suggestive mystery of the "private collection" which arouses the curiosity about the owner of such an object (and their story, and deeds). Let's not even talk about travelling exhibitions - those who have travelled and carry the history of their journey - and those which will travel and that anticipate it. All the other mediums in the exhibition should be considered too: from the nails that keep a painting in a wall, to the wall itself - was it part of the original plan of the building or was it built for the exhibition? - and the cases, armoires, tables, shelves and other display furniture, which at times are created for the exhibition or maybe were created for a specific exhibition and then used and reused. Or they are a staple model, found in a dedicated shop, or designed specifically for the museum, maybe adjusted for a special object. Then there is the catalogue, where the exhibition is either represented or extended with texts, images and other references, at times a rich bibliography, which explain the research which went into its conception. And the team which was involved in designing the graphic of the catalogue - which might not be the same which designed the captions and the texts - and why they were chosen for this, as well as the shape of the catalogue and its material, its project.

To this one has to count the exhibitions which might have inspired the exhibition maker, and which they try to reference or hint to in the way they display the objects, or to which they respond, finding that these objects previously weren't exhibited in the proper way and so... If looking retroactively, one should also consider all the texts that followed the exhibition and tell about it, in newspapers, books, diary notes of their visitors, signatures in the visitors' book, their visual representations, the post on social media and their captions and the different reappropriation, both when they quote the source correctly and when, most interestingly, they don't, causing productive confusion...

This long stream of thoughts, where I went up and down my words adding examples when they came into my mind and where I thought they would fit (so, the order in which you read them - and in which I reported them on the page - doesn't follow the order in which I thought them and wrote them) stands here just as a little portion of what one should consider when trying to draw the boundaries of the exhibition and define what it is and the extension of the

medium. It is true that one cannot possibly take all of this into consideration and much of the things touched here might only be reported through fiction, rather than a thorough analysis. But I like to think of exhibition as possibilities - what they could have included and did not, what they talk about and do not, what can be included and is not - a discourse of which the form is as malleable, in its understanding and interpretation, as the idea it centres around. It is a project - both in its conception and in its present - an open one, whose legacy stands for continued speculation. Therefore I'd wonder if talking about an exhibition one should also look at the path it takes when considering all these elements, in this extensive net of relations which can be followed like veins in either direction, not considering the exhibition a start nor a destination, but just a spot in a wide network.

[25.03.23 - Invigilating an exhibition.]

Wow, that was a really complex reading experience for me. While reading the second paragraph, my eyes went back and forth at least four or five times before they eventually slowly closed.

[29.03.23 - Evening, sitting in front of the desk with a tea.]

Now I'm back and finally I'm able to re-read through all the text on which previously I failed so many times. I think what is interesting is that, although this time I seem to have successfully made sense out of it, now when I'm writing my brain is blank again on what I've just read. I can't recall any clear course of the lines when I started to shake my head, there are only some sporadic details of the paragraph, fragmented in words like *dusty pillows*, *travelling exhibitions*, *website links*...etc. It kinda resembles a post-experience of exhibition-visiting: it might feel full and overwhelming while being on site, but afterwards nothing often can be remembered with perhaps only a feeling of being intellectually washed/challenged left. Personally speaking.

However, back to the subject of *the* exhibition which is supposed to take place in Maa-tila (physically, but also ideally), my question is, what are we doing now? Or what are we gonna do? If this text is already an exhibition that we're currently working on, then what is its relationship with the Maa-tila exhibition? Or do they belong to the same exhibition? Are we gonna create a series of ~~niee~~ objects according to this text, as we originally planned? But then what objects? (I think right now I'm having a bit of difficulty imagining any kind of objectification of the previous texts, perhaps because I'm a bit panicking now).

And what will be the name of the exhibition?

[04.04.23.]

When I imagine visiting the exhibition, I cannot figure out what the weather outside the gallery is like. In Italy, where I am now writing, the days would already remind me of the previous summers. But would it still be cold and snowy in Finland? I've never spent a May there. I wonder if I will worry about sliding on the ice to get there or which light would enter

from the window in Maa Tila. And how long will the day be? Will the gallery close in the evening when the sun still clears the sky?

I don't know yet which paintings you will paint for this exhibition, we only briefly talked about it. But I wonder which will be visible from outside the gallery. I wonder also where our words will be shared. Will these pages become a catalogue or be arranged on walls? It feels presumptuous to write these things down. Somehow it feels like these conjectures should stay on paper as notes, sketches jotted down on a notebook. Not to be shared as thoughts that I know will be exhibited, including in the exhibition the possibilities of what it could or would have been.

One way the exhibition could go, why not paint all the walls with the motifs of the tiles, hang the paintings upside down, and use them to break the pattern?

One would be able to see it from outside. It was in the cold breeze of the morning, with a coffee in hand, that I peeked through the big window on the street to look at the room, covered in the strange, unclear motif of the repeating tiles.

Strange and unclear because, even though starting a tile, it would be difficult to check in the motif of the one next to it copied it precisely. If the replica was exact, or not. In the imagination, these motives are moving and unresting, assuming a different shape as soon as my mind fixes on a detail.

[07.04.23 - Evening, laying on bed.]

Well I don't think in the end of May/beginning of June it will still be cold and snowy in Finland. It would probably be hot enough to have shorts on for people walking around in the city. June would also be the brightest month of the year, ~~darkness~~ brightness that never goes away - pity that the space would not be left open as long as there's light: the middle night exhibition on which the sun never sets.

We have almost only two months left until the opening of the exhibition, but I still don't have much clue what we're gonna do with it - not talking about which paintings I will paint for this exhibition. Or perhaps we had some concrete ideas at the beginning of this thread, maybe I should go back to check it.

...

Ok, I just quickly checked the previous texts. We've been talking about Maa-tila's tiles, exhibition space, paintings, writing space... I think I have something in mind for some paintings to be exhibited now. Do you remember the two paintings of the 3D exhibition architecture of the project room exhibition that I've made in 2019? I dedicated myself so much to the application for the show there that I've made a full 3D demonstration of the exhibition hoping to get the front space of the project room, since the structure of the whole exhibition was conceived for that particular spatial relation. Eventually I got the backspace so I had to change everything about the exhibition, but I painted down the 3D model of the space and included it in my show as a reminder of a potential parallel exhibition in the same

space. I think this could be a good painting for this exhibition, although it has nothing much to do with the space of Maa-tila, but now Project Room doesn't exist anymore even as an exhibition space, so what kind of parallel exhibitions are we talking about here?

About the "tile painting": it has been already one month since last time I accidentally added way too much liquid paint on top of it, the surface of the painting finally stopped being sticky. Nevertheless, today when I tried to touch it with my finger I could feel the half-liquid texture slightly gliding under the soft and wrinkled film of the polymerized oil surface - it felt like touching somebody's flesh and skin. I thought that perhaps a "heavy-flesh-skin-tile-painting" could be a good idea for the show? A painting that everybody could not only look at, but also hold in hand, it weighs like a tile but feels like grandma's hand, and then they may stroke the painting's wrinkles, very gently!

What else?

[08.04.23 - Right after a call.]

*We are speaking over the phone about the exhibition and commenting on Xiao's entry.*

*It's hard for me to keep track of our quick conversation and put it down as notes here*

*Xiao asks me for a title, but I don't know how much I can't think about it without having a clear idea of the works that are going to be there*

*Yu wants to print this text and place it all over the place*

*I want some pictures from his archive and some new produced about the documentation*

*Maybe a title that sums up what we are working on?*

I'm not going to edit the notes above, I tried to write them down while on the phone with Xiao. We ignored the rule that we set and decided to talk over the phone about this project. It is much easier to do it "live". We have been writing down interesting words, but the time it takes to read what each other has written, comment on it and write down our stuff, doesn't really help the conversation. Ideas get diluted with time and so it doesn't feel like we can pick up anything to go with over the project.

Xiao suggested finding a title, saying it helps him with visualising the exhibition. I feel like the other way around though. It's not that I didn't think about it yet, but I feel I need to know which direction the project is going towards and which works will be featured in to find one. But over the phone I realised I was relying too much on that, while what probably should be the focus of this exhibition is the process with which we are working. Therefore I am reevaluating some references I had for the title. One is the book by Roberto Calasso's "Cento lettere a uno sconosciuto", which translates to English like "One hundred letters to a stranger". Roberto Calasso was the editorial director of the Italian publishing house Adelphi, and the book is a selection of the texts he wrote on the back of the cover of the books published by Adelphi. These are his letters to a stranger - a short comment and introduction

to the book picked up, a way to get to the mind of the right future reader, to either convince them to read the book or to discourage it to pick a reading they wouldn't be interested in. These are also the comments of an avid reader and lover of books, on the books which he contributed to select and publish under his tenure at Adelphi. How do you encapsulate in a few lines the book you want to present to a future reader, how do you write an invitation on reading? Somehow it is what we are doing here. We have been writing about what this exhibition might be or would be, or what in the process of its realisation our interests are focused on. We are inviting ourselves to explore the exhibitions we are imagining, explaining what we think these could elaborate on, or we can elaborate on, without having to describe them or tell what they will contain - is the exhibition the sum of works it contains or the result of a process, which culminates in the event which unfold in a certain time and place, has a duration and a title? We are no strangers to each other, but we are constantly building our expectations about a project which is yet to happen.

Reading Xiao's entry, I wondered about his suggestion. I think these paintings would be great, but I want to explore this further. Among his works, there are many which document parts of his exhibitions or works which he has created or displayed. I like them because they become documentation and they register part of his way of working. There's one I remember well which shows his "table painting", which is, as well, a painting-display of some materials he arranged on the canvas, among which, a painting. I also remember one of a series of sun-washed books arranged along a window, but that has been sold, so we won't be able to use it I guess.

What I would like him to work on though is as well the documentation that we are finding for this exhibition. I have contacted the Helsinki Municipal Museum to have some information about the building and its creators, after I have found in a digital archive a picture of it taken in 1927. At the gallery's address, the building used to be a canteen, or at least in the picture there's a sign written with "Ruokala".

I report here what one of the staff from the museum, wrote me.

The building in Pääskylänrinne 10 is located very near the historic harbour of Helsinki and the many industrial facilities and factories over there. In the photo that I have found online, it is possible to see for example the gas container of the Sulvilahti gas factory. The building at n.10 contained workers housing and mainly small one room and a kitchen apartments. He pointed out that these were not the smallest type of homes at the time and one may suppose that the apartments were probably meant for skilled workers and their families. Since the need for public cantinas was of course strong there were probably some or many at the time in the area. He briefly checked the original plans and said that they showed that the shops on the first floor were ordinary shops, so the cantina was not planned in advance. Some of the shops were just transformed to a cantina, so it seems. There were many financial models for building workers housing. This building was an owner occupied housing company called "Pääsky" (swallow, a bird nesting close to the sea), were the occupants owned and run the building as a company. Master-builders Jaakkola and Lumiaho were planners who did many similar projects in the fringe of the city, for workers housing companies. One of the most well-known is Merikatu 9 (1907) on the other side of the city, near the southern harbour and dockyards. This is a house were the master-builders were also owners themselves, and where they also lived. You can see the similarities in architecture stylistically. The museum

doesn't have a list of houses these master-builders planned, but he supposed there could be a dozen or so buildings by these planners. They might also have planned wooden houses for workers' companies, but these might have all disappeared since.

I wonder if we would be able to see the original planes of the building or if those will ignite our imaginations as the tiles and the story of the flower shop did. If Xiao's could find also among these some things that he could paint, it would be interesting to have some paintings of the documentation and "research" material for this exhibition.

[12.4.2023 23:51 - On a night bus to Milan.]

I'm on a night bus to Milan now, I just landed at the airport of Bergamo half an hour ago. It has been raining and the air is humid and wet as the bus runs on the highway. It runs so fast and quietly that it almost feels like skiing in the foggy darkness, with only occasional interruptions of rays of street lamps that would penetrate through the misty window at a sudden, moving shadows quickly forward, then everything swiftly returns into the dimness.

I thought I should write something to contribute to the building process of the unnamed exhibition in Maa-tila, but I found hardly to be concentrated - my lower back is slightly hurting from the stiff sitting posture kept long in journey and my left leg is numb but I could still feel a strange pain on the skin there, that appeared this morning and the area has been moving slowly over the day like some sort of organic being. Google said it's probably some kind of nerve pain, I'm not sure if I should trust it, but it doesn't bother me that much the idea of having a problem with my body.

Before I try to write something about Maa-Tila, I've been also trying to continue Foucault's History of Sexuality, which, to put it simply, seems to reside all in power and pleasure. I'm not sure if I've grasped enough from the few chapters that I've been reading early on the plane, I feel my brain is really confused now. Maybe I should not try to continue to squeeze some drops of productivity now. Perhaps it's ok that I read something without understanding anything from it, and/or trying to work on an exhibition but got no result.

[30.04.2023]

I have ignored these pages for long, though I have not accumulated words to write to fill the gaps left by these days of inactivity.

I had been given the task to find a title for this exhibition, but I couldn't think of one, so I'm now listing a series of words that come to my mind when I think about this exercise:

Stelle tardive  
Upwards  
Capovolto  
Storto  
Interruzione  
Graffi  
Tempo passato

Sopravvivenza  
Resistenza  
Sbiadimento  
Aperture  
Scorci  
Scorze  
Configurazioni  
Riconfigurazioni  
Riallineamenti  
Risignificazioni  
Riassessamenti  
Orcellari  
Tellurium  
Catalogo  
Collezione  
Sequenza  
Successione  
Addizione  
Somma  
Glimpses  
Gay Science  
Memoria  
Invenzione  
Economia dell'imperduto  
Recupero  
Interferenze  
Sovrapposizioni  
Ricicli

And some notes that flash in my mind, picked from texts that I saved for my doctorate research:

“«Le idee si rapportano alle cose come le costellazioni si rapportano alle stelle», scrive Walter Benjamin nella Premessa gnoseologica del suo saggio sul dramma barocco tedesco. «*Passages*» di Parigi: la critica deve essere un esercizio di rammemorazione, dove «quel che è stato si unisce fulmineamente con l'adesso in una costellazione»”.

“A metalogue is a conversation about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject. Only some of the conversations here presented achieve this double format. Notably, the history of evolutionary theory is inevitably a metalogue between man and nature, in which the creation and interaction of ideas must necessarily exemplify the evolutionary process.”

I wonder what this says about me, but I like the writing style of Walter Benjamin and especially the words he uses, the metaphors he makes, the similitudes he draws with his writing. In his essay on German dramaturgy, Benjamin writes that ideas are like constellations, connecting points far both in time and distance and ideas far in time and



space. When I use the word constellation in my work, I always trace it back to the definition and the use that Benjamin does in his texts. Constellations, the ones drawn in the sky, are fascinating examples of the power of our imagination and of the way we build, through stories, the foundations of our understanding of the world. Constellations turn the large, immense bodies of stars into points for us to play on drawing lines and building images that we can see only through the stories that accompany them. They also flatten the depth of sky - a depth in both space and time, we ignore that these points are enormous spheres of burning elements that shine at a distance in space and time that we can hardly conceive. Even for the stories and the names that accompany them. For me, they come from the Classical world. Pointing them in the sky and telling their names revives the stories of the gods and heroes they are borrowed from. It revives names and figures that were, once, part of the daily and lived experience of the inhabitants of the classical world.

Like for the light of the stars, travelling light years of distance to reach the canvas of our night sky, there is no immediacy in language or communication - both the sounds of our words and the light gestures of our body arrive delayed to the other's eyes and ears. Even though for an immensely small fraction of time, we live and communicate in constant delay.

This project is an exercise in delay - a project where ideas have been shared every three days, and they have to be thought of, reflected upon, diluted before taking shape. We read each other's messages and get to them after weeks. Time got diluted as waiting and patience - but it also turned a process usually made by ideas and things shared in voice into registered conversations that extended and redefined the time of our exhibition, adding another point to this imaginary constellation.

I also report here some lines from another exchange with Helsinki City Museum, regarding the tiles which ignited this project. The tiles that I showed in the photo may be the original ones for the building. In Vilhovuori there was a factory of tiles and fajances, called Company Andsten at the time, which may have been the source of these Jugend style tiles.

[02.05.23.]

Doing some more research online, I have read something more about this company and found some drawings and etchings of the factory, located on a shore in Vilhovuori. It is written it was one of the first and more important companies of tiles and fajances of Helsinki, one of its major producer and exporter, commercing tiles and majolicas even in the nearby countries. In Helsinki's city library are even collected some of its price-lists and catalogues, some of them translated both in Russian and Swedish. The catalogues show the range of beautiful stoves they were producing, each precisely illustrated inside stylish rooms and accompanied by the outlines and measurements of the space they occupy. These images make me think about the traces left on the floors of Maa-tila and wonder if maybe, instead of a fireplace there, it was actually one of these fancy stoves. I have downloaded all these materials to show them to Xiao. Soon I will fly to Helsinki and stay there to work on producing this long fore-written exhibition with him.

[03.03.23.]

I am in the studio staring at the painting that I made from the picture taken of the building in the 1910s that we found online. Now the list of works is getting more consistent. Some are drawn from my archive and somehow make sense in the production of this exhibition. Also I have started the process for some book paintings - one, that I had already finished, I had to remake because it was purchased before the starting of the exhibition.

It is curious to look through my archive from the perspective of this show. Works and paintings that were made for other occasions or referencing memories I could scarcely grasp by looking at the pictures I took now are analysed through the space of Maa-tila, its tiles, elements, traces, the stories we have read or heard about during this process. It is interesting how, looking at them on the pc with Dylan, we actually stopped in front of some of the pictures, without having to say anything but thinking that they would have fitted the exhibition.

We have thought about adding a painting of the room of the gallery as it is now, or better, as it looks in a picture found online. In a sort of blank state, with nothing happening inside - no exhibition, or better, no artwork shown in it, no person inside, just the white walls, an empty table, the tiles on the ground.

However, we are still in search for a title for this project.

[05.05.03.]

The frustration of this kind of exercise and project lies in the deaf distance between one response to the other. With Xiao I'm in constant communication - we continuously talk over texts or over calls. But we decided to keep - apart from some exceptions - our conversations related to this project on these pages, therefore asking ourselves to adapt to a different time - not the apparent immediacy of texts, but to the long analogic time of some sort of old time correspondence.

In "Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore", one of his most inventive novels, Italo Calvino wrote "Non mi raccontare di più. Fammelo leggere" (don't tell me more about it. Let me read about it). So we often say to each other, when our daily conversations roam towards this topic. We are making each other read our thoughts on this now soon upcoming exhibition. In this free flow of thoughts, looking back and what we did and the way we worked, I think about the title for this project. I remember some lines from the correspondence of the Italian poet Eugenio Montale. Out of them, I wrote down on my notes these words: "cibarsi di nuvole" - "feeding on clouds". I won't think too much about these, but somehow I feel like they catch, with all their possible meanings, the way we worked, our posture towards this project, our role of correspondents, the consistency of these words and of the ideal exhibitions we jotted down on these pages, the ideas we exchange with each other about our works and researches, which I came to think about now as some sort of fodder.

I'm going to propose this title to Xiao and see what he thinks about it.

[07.5.2023]

Now, since the exhibition is soon, I write here the working plan that I have drafted for me and Dylan to follow until the opening.

Notes on working documents:

Feeding on Clouds

Dylan Colussi, Xiao Zhiyu

Maa Tila

31.2 - 20.6

Keywords

- A continuous fictional revisiting of the space through collaborative writing
- Recreating of objects from the narration of the text
- Approximately 6 pieces

Production Plan

Text writing : <b>Mostra - MAA TILA</b>	Whole time
- Intensive period (3 days from another person) April	till 11th
- Slow writing (2 weeks from another person)	till the end
Work Production	
- Slow production April	till 11th
- Intensive production	23.4 - 20.6
About six pieces + the printed writing text	
1. <del>Painting of the tile</del>	
2. <del>Painting of the old building/street</del>	
3. Drawing of the plan (100 x 55 cm pencil/mark pen on paper)	
4. Painting of the interior of the space (60 x 35 cm)	
5. Book painting: Art writing in Crisis // topophilia	
6. Exhibition Structure to host elements?	
7. Postcard painting (40 x 30?)	

Press materials

1. Provide press materials to Maa Tila 15.5  
Communicating the participation of Dylan
  - a short exhibition text (free form, with your bio)  
Text text text  
My Bio: Xiao Zhiyu (CN, b. 1995) is a Helsinki-based artist. He explores the notion of exhibition as a medium through material discursive

practices of painting, where the convergence between the contemporary perception of images and the formation of painted objects takes a central role. He obtained his MFA in Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Arts Helsinki after his BFA in Painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze. His upcoming exhibitions include three solo shows at Maa-tila, SIC space, and Helsinki Art Museum Gallery in Helsinki, two group exhibitions: "We took it for granted" at Palazzo Ducale, Genova and "In Continuous Dialogue II" at Vapaantaidetila, Helsinki.

Dylan's Bio:

- a poster for printing. (Here is a link to a folder with specifications for the poster)

Poster making together 11.5

- Communication of the opening: 30th of May

2. Communication

- 1 mood board 15.5
- different stories towards opening

3. Invitation 24.5

4. Documentation 29.5

5. Opening 30.5

6. General post 31.5

7. Exhibition view 02.6

We are commenting on this over the phone. Dylan will arrive in Helsinki on the 10th so we can then start to work together.

Ps, I also photoshopped Lucy Mckenzie's wall painting on the wall of the painting of the empty space of the Maa-tila picture found online. Perhaps it has something to say about the clouds as well?

[14-05-2023]

Some notes while I write the exhibition text.

This work has been an exercise of distance in time and space, which we visited through our recollections and to which we gave a sort of form with our words. Our working methodology privileged intuition and coincidence over precise calculations and design.

Asking ourselves to write down our thoughts and reply to each other every three days we resisted immediacy, elapsing the time of our words. About one of the towns he walked in his

“Le Città Invisibili”, Calvino writes “the memory of a city is redundant and it resets its sign so that it can begin to exist”. Our redundant memories are those that we picked from the gallery: the out-of-place tiles, the marks of the fireplaces... Which also involuntarily became the starting point of this process, which somehow circles around the relationship between the measurements of Maa-tila’s space and the events of its past. A space that we have fictionally revisited over and over again.

I have come to think about Xiao’s painting here as a research tool, useful to materialise the images and documents that attest this imagined past, and the instruments that we had used access these plural temporalities.

There are places that exist in a form which is already in our mind, and we settle our imagination over the space that we have visited, only to notice similarities and incongruences. The transformative space of a project space, which adapts month by month to a different interpretation - to a different project. Though defined by its perimeter and framework, it always absorbs the new meanings that hosts within it.

[23.05.23 - In Xiao’s studio.]

These days in the studio we have been working on the show. Being together in the same place, it is of course difficult to keep track of this document and of all of our exchanges now. They all happen directly, immediately in front of the works, quickly, essentially helped by the trust we have in each other’s opinions. It is exciting to stand in this moment in the studio and look back and then look forward to the exhibition to come. I wonder here which reactions happened between the intuition and the realisation of this project.

Some of the ideas that come up during these days spent together in the studio make actually much more sense if I read again what we suggested at the beginning of this process, however I didn’t remember writing them. Some others evolve from ideas which took forms on other media - sketches and drawings on pages on our notebooks, which we decided not to insert here. But the final display will include them and the ideas we drafted, in the forms or paths not taken.

I’m quoting here an exhibition that I admire and won’t mention, talking about a reference which was used by its curators - the Garden of Forking Paths. Through our display, the objects that we have included, the words on these texts, one attentive, curious eye might find the paths that we have decided not to follow, finding a way to the many exhibitions which might have resulted through those different roads. Somehow this is an exercise due to the visitor of an exhibition, and a reward towards its maker - expecting that this exhibition survives not only through the pictures taken, but also through the continued treading through the paths it has delineated.