

Suvi Parrilla – talk at TEAK-festival, Helsinki 2006

Virgin Mary with Her Bad Habits Appears from The Curtain of Dead Grandmother - Performance Documentation as a Piece of Art

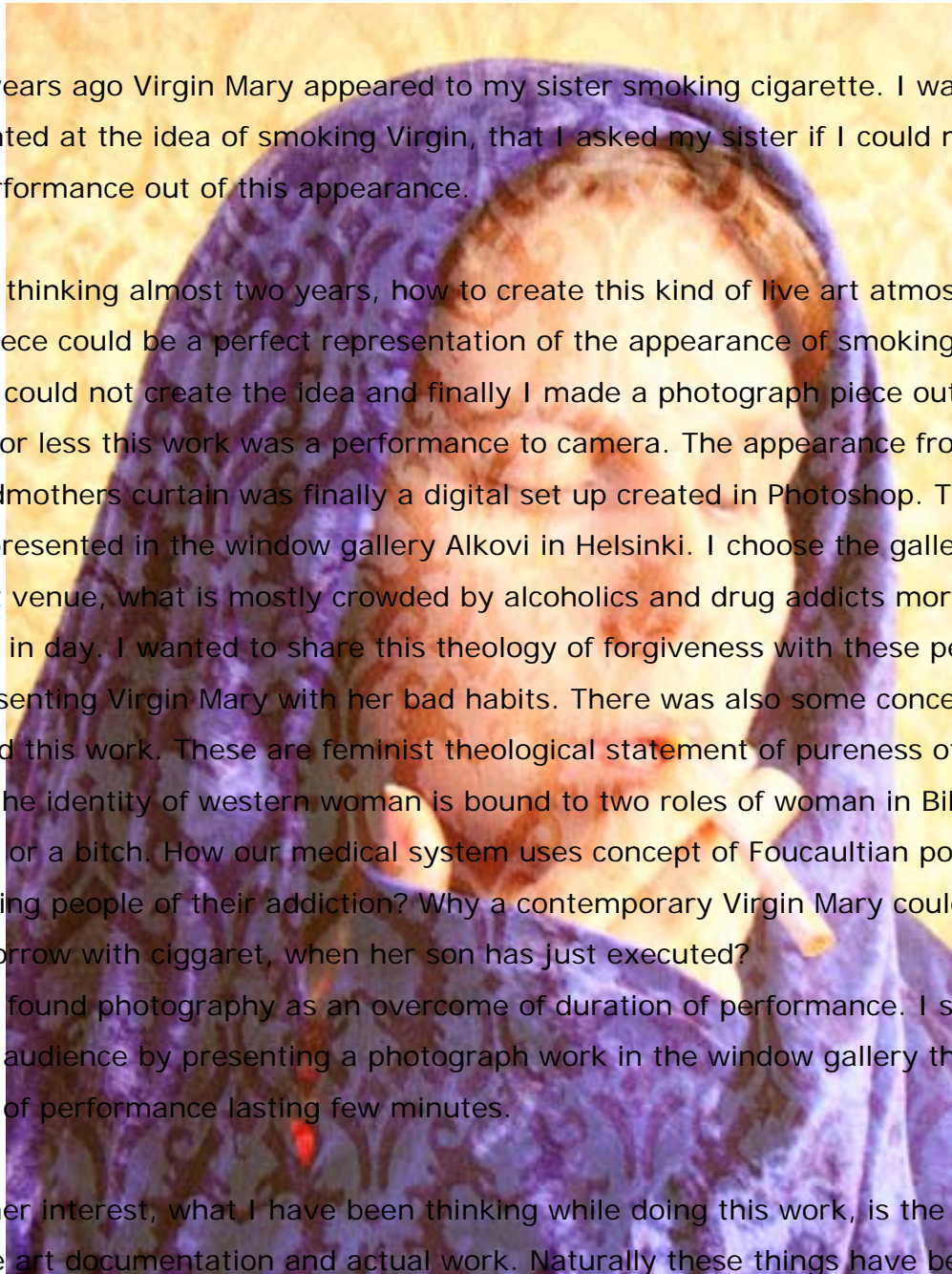
Few years ago Virgin Mary appeared to my sister smoking cigarette. I was so delighted at the idea of smoking Virgin, that I asked my sister if I could make a piece of performance out of this appearance.

I was thinking almost two years, how to create this kind of live art atmosphere that the piece could be a perfect representation of the appearance of smoking Virgin Mary. I just could not create the idea and finally I made a photograph piece out of that. More or less this work was a performance to camera. The appearance from dead Grandmothers curtain was finally a digital set up created in Photoshop. The final piece was presented in the window gallery Alkovi in Helsinki. I choose the gallery because of street venue, what is mostly crowded by alcoholics and drug addicts more or less 24 hours in day. I wanted to share this theology of forgiveness with these people by representing Virgin Mary with her bad habits. There was also some conceptual ideas behind this work. These are feminist theological statement of pureness of Virgin Mary. How the identity of western woman is bound to two roles of woman in Bible, to be a virgin or a bitch. How our medical system uses concept of Foucaultian power by accusing people of their addiction? Why a contemporary Virgin Mary could not relieve her sorrow with cigarette, when her son has just executed?

I also found photography as an overcome of duration of performance. I simply catch more audience by presenting a photograph work in the window gallery than showing a piece of performance lasting few minutes.

Another interest, what I have been thinking while doing this work, is the relationship of live art documentation and actual work. Naturally these things have been in the air and essays before. Here I could mention the famous essay of Philip Auslander *The Performativity of Performance Documentation* what is comparing the documentations of Yves Kleins *Leap into the Void (1960)* and Chris Burdens *Shoot (1971)*.

The work of Yves Klein is a photo manipulation. There he is jumping from the third floor window to street. Yves is really jumping to the free wall, but not from the third



floor, but to the net in the studio space. Chris Burden was really shoot in the arm. Because the performance could be done only once, the documentations was extremely important.

Obviously the essence of my piece *Virgin Mary with Her Bad Habits Appears from The Curtain of Dead Grandmother* is in the same caste with Kleins work *Leap into the Void*. The work was done in studio space and photo manipulated later.

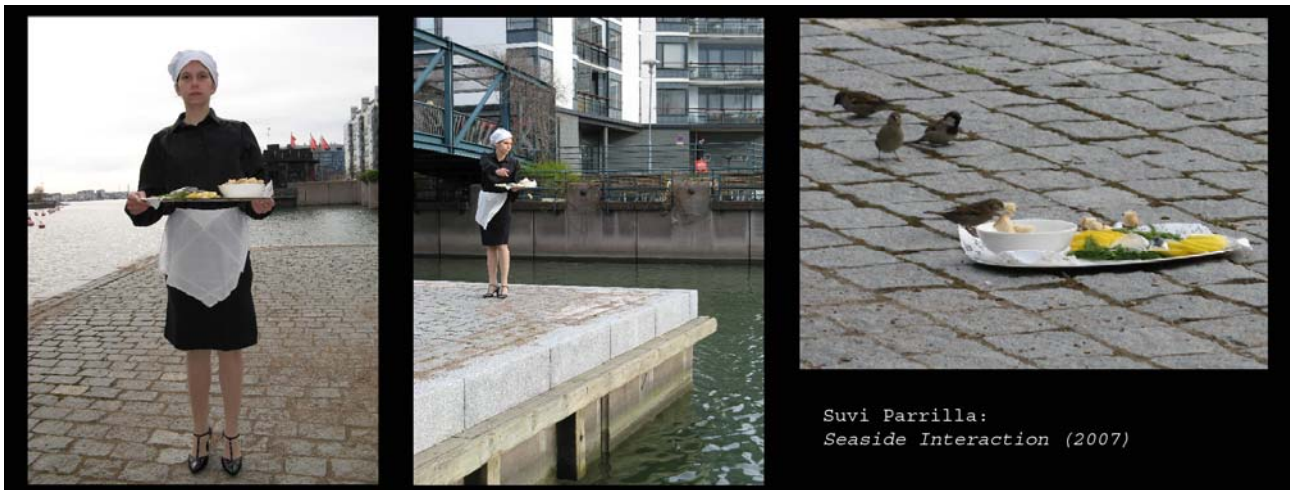
When I showed my portfolio first time to new professor of fine arts department in UIAH she asked me "what are you selling?" I was quite confused of this question. I answered her that between performance and live art, artists are selling their work and the documentation. Our professor is sculptor and I understood this question of selling is highly important in her area. Performance artists do not need that much storage space than sculptor do and the costs of art productions are not that high. But her next comment was even more surprising. She related my work with Cindy Sherman´s photographs. Later it really pushed me to think of the documentation of my work. I was showing her a photograph document portfolio, not video´s. More or less a man could read my face in different type of cultural roles as a representation of Shermans work, even I have never been thinking it that way. But finally, this is what I have left. This is the material of my work in my portfolio. I should represent a documentation what is the best possible representation of my work. But I have also a literal description of my work in portfolio.

Performance art as it is, is very much bounded with time, space and presence. The presence is one of the key things in live art. It is the aspect that coordinates live art to fetish. Audience really have to be there at particular time to see the actual piece of art. Audience have to document the show with their own cameras to proof to themselves that they really have been there. As photographer Antti Ahonen said in this age of digital cameras the moment what is not documented is useless life.

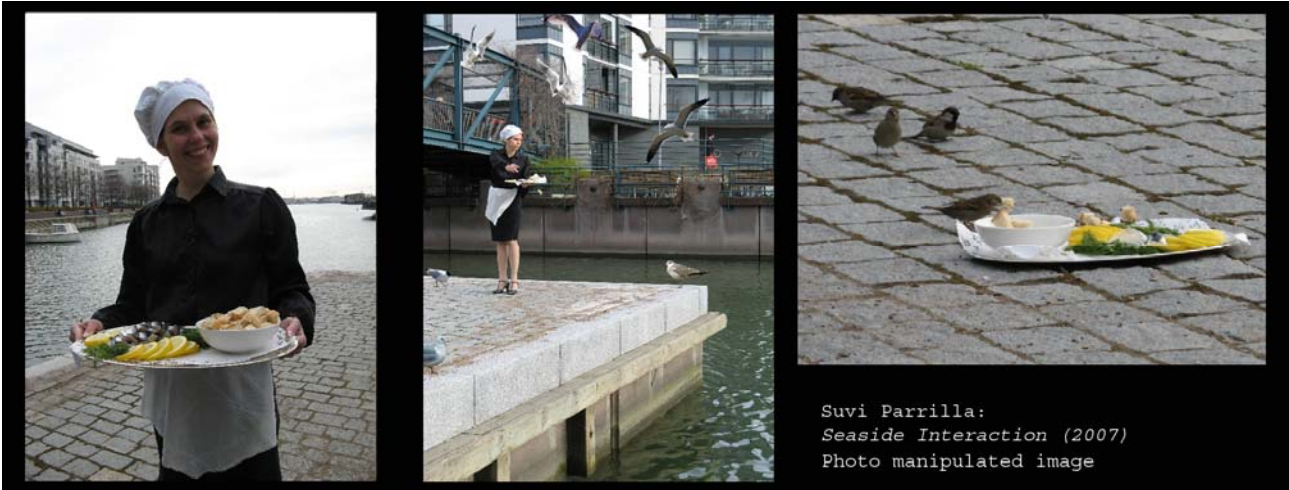
Even how professional and established live artist are we having today, we can suddenly find out that artist do not have very good quality documentation of his or her work. Why is that? Is the artistic career been finally useless? I am not going to answer this question, but I make couple of more. How about Yves Klein and Chris Burdens artistic qualities? Would they been that highly recorded today without photo or film documentation of their works? The answer might be negative. Even how much

live art wants to keep its essence in the live, it desperately needs documentation as well, to stay alive.

What is good quality documentation then? It is something where observer can get a good picture of what is going on. Unfortunately documenting live action is relatively hard work to do. There are photographers who are specialized to document live activities, such as sport or dance. How about the performance art documentation then? Photographer should be aware what is going to happen next, to catch the highlight of the performance. Often it is necessary, that artist tell to photographer or cameraman, what is going to happen and when. Still the documentation can fail.

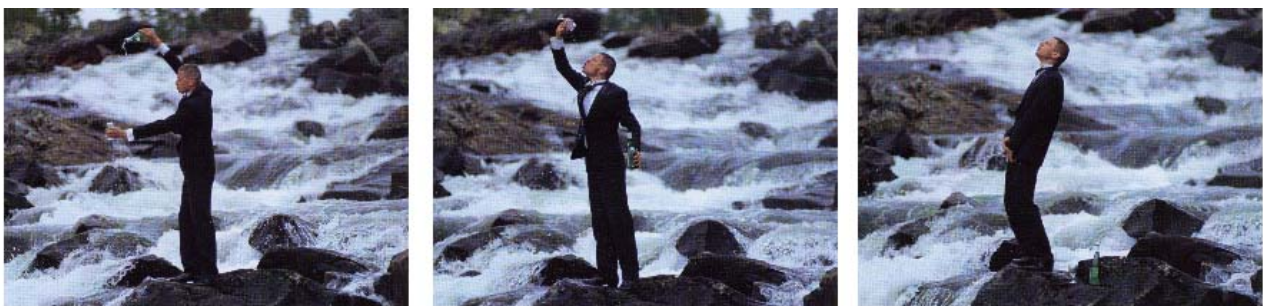


Here I show you a couple of images of my last performance *Seaside Interaction* done in this May at La Bas-festival, Helsinki. It was a try out to interact with nature in Helsinki seaside, by feeding seagulls. The interaction was success, because seagulls came to the air when I started to feed them. They were still too shy to take baltic herrings into bills, because of number of audience. Actually interaction succeeded more better with local sparrows and doves. My photographer did not success to get me together with any bird in the same photo, because of the fast movements of birds. As you see from these images, it is relatively hard to find out, what is going on? It may be that these images can give wrong information of the show in portfolio.



That´s why I have also created this photo manipulated version of the work for my portfolio. Anyway this is fake image of my performance. Still I do believe that this is part of documentation. But this is reproduced image for the promotional usage. Is this also a new piece of art? If I set it up into gallery space and create a photo exhibition out of it, it obviously is. Then it is not anymore only a documentation of my performance, but also a new piece of art.

Many good art works have a story behind them. A performance art documentation can be shown as an independent artwork and I believe it should be shown like that. Anyway the documentation is not a performance itself.



Roi Vaara: *Tapahtumat virtaavat yhteen* (1990)

Here I show a couple of more examples: Here we see a documentation of Roi Vaaras work *Events stream into one* from year 1990 photographed by Harri Larjosto . Photos are obviously photographed during the high moments of the show. The performance was done in Tsumnujoki, Lappland. We cannot see any audience in the photos. But was there any audience at all? Maybe the performance was done to the camera.



Annu Wilenius: *Underground Air* (2005)

The next series of images is titled as photography art. Here we see work of Annu Wilenius, *Underground Air* (2005). The work could be a performance as well. Artist herself is digging the ground on the seaside and graving a balloon into the sand. If we are comparing these two works and if we try in the same time to forget which one was a photography art and which one was performance art, can we really make the difference? In the both of photo series we can see the action and good quality photograph. The only difference is, that Vaara's piece was photographed by photographer, but Annu Wilenius have been photographed herself. We can assume, that the performance of Wilenius could not be continuous.

Liveness of live art is irreplaceable, but further we create and study the history of live art, we have to admit the importance of documentation.

This importance should be, and now days it is, included into studying programs of live art, but also included into further education of professional artists.

Live Art is having also this desperate need to develop to established art form. In Finland live art is still in the underground, but obviously there is a raising interest to it, also between museums and art world. At this stage, the need of good quality documentation raises more. Of course it is artists choice, how deep in underground they want to stay. A lot of performance artist are afraid of administrative side of art world, what is including qualities like production and commerciality. But to work for art, artists have to have earnings as well. To make good art man have to concentrate of what he or she is doing. The problem of incomes between performance artist puts them face the problem of determination of art what they are doing. It is common that performance of live artists (and here we have already two determinations) are presenting themselves in funding applications as new dancers, experimental theatre makers, media-artists and what ever. This is one of the reasons why performance art has it's mystified aura, where no one really knows what is this about and where are the disciplines of this art form.

We cannot blame artworld, because we are the artworld. But it is the certain type of educational or administrative system what has unconscious affect to artist to develop their art into direction what is simply easier to sell. The question is not about selling your soul to the artworld. The question is simply the state of living.

Finally the reason why I ended up to make a performance to camera, was to test these ideas. How far from live art I finally can go and still be here in this seminar of live art to talk about liveness in my work?

In *Virgin Mary with Her Bad Habits Appears from The Curtain of Dead Grandmother* I used a photographer to make performance to camera out of it. Still I needed to repeat the action several times to get perfect photos. Digital image manipulation also pushes the work to be more theatrical set up than pure performance. Finally this work can fail to be a performance to camera, but it is photography art. Finally I still made an artistic process, where idea of performance transformed to 5 photos.

