

Dear Mr. Aki Kaurismäki,

My name is Nina Kurtela and I am visual artist from Croatia. In last couple of years I have been often mistaken for being Finnish due to my name. According to Finnish friends and colleagues Nina Kurtela have all the characteristics of a typical Finnish name. Followed by surprising number of anecdotes related to this coincidence, apart from the fact I started to have a lot of fun with it, I gradually saw the potential to develop a project.

My interest in getting in touch with you lies behind the fact that this project named "Khora" is - by coincidence (or maybe not) - in a special way connected to your artistic work.

My family name Kurtela has a long history from the Dubrovnik area in south of Croatia; it is recorded in the city archive as early as 17th century and it has absolutely nothing to do with Finland. This random connection to the nordic country with such a specific language through the sound of my name awoke my curiosity towards at one hand understanding how you construct your own historical identity through the bonds of the family, mother tongue and the place of your upbringing and on the other hand how you in times of exile recreate identities of belonging on arrival to a new location.

I started my research with questions such as; Would it be possible to find performative mechanisms that enable me as a young Croatian artist to become Finnish? How would this performance of national identity construct a new kind of practice? What is at stake once I attempt to absorb the culture of a distant culture? What are the privileges of being a Nordic citizen/artist? What would happened if I randomly put myself in the process of understanding, learning the Finnish culture and social system, in order to assimilate myself to become Finnish and experience socio economic benefits of this welfare state.

My initial aim was to investigate economical, political and cultural power relations questioning different monetary and social values by drawing a symbolic parallel between two polarities: Nordic and Balkan.

Following this ideas I was invited to HIAP artist in residency program in Helsinki to continue my research. During my stay at KAAPELI in search for my finnish identity, I struggled a lot with my idea not really knowing how to continue this process. Until I came across your Dubrovnik neon sign in the basement of your bar. Later I realized that the same neon sign appears in your movie Kauas pilvet karkaavat that I watched many years ago. For some reason this discovery was very inspirational for me. I found the key that shifted my focus and helped me continue my work. Following above mentioned topics I went a bit further and got more and more interested in the idea of fictional space of a certain places and how can they be marked by presence and absence in various ways...

According to Derrida "Khora" is a radical otherness that "gives place" for being. In that sense we can look at the place as experiential space, something that is existing in our minds, that is transformative and subjected to change.

As the idea developed I was invited to make an exhibition in Gallery Flora in Dubrovnik where I proposed to place blue neon sign Helsinki (almost as a replica of your Dubrovnik sign) on the facade of the gallery and simulate temporary bar in the garden.

The exhibition/site specific intervention will open this summer on 25th of June. I know this sounds a bit out of the blue (and it's a very late notice too), but if you by any chance happen to be around Dubrovnik around those dates you are very warmly invited to join us at the opening of the Helsinki bar in beautiful Flora's garden. It will be simple, not pretentious gathering, mostly supported by the local independent art scene which is quite small in Dubrovnik. It would be very special to have you there.

Furthermore, I am curious to know what does Dubrovnik represents for you and how come it appears in your movie? Does it have a special meaning or it's just a random coincidence? If you have anything you would like to share with me, any related stories or thoughts i would be very excited to hear/read them.

My vision is to eventually create a video essay about this work, about this two neon signs, about this two cities - Helsinki and Dubrovnik - that would provide viewers with experience of two polarities, two different atmospheres – northern and southern by questioning notions of naming, identity, nationality, territory, home, landscape and its fictions. Maybe our correspondence /dialogue can somehow be part of it. I would be happy to hear back from you.

Warm greetings from the south.

Nina Kurtela