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Annual Report

**PUBLICS** 



## **PUBLICS**

PUBLICS is a curatorial agency with a dedicated library, event space and reading room in Vallila. The organisation explores a "work together" institutional model with multiple overlapping objectives, thematic strands and collaborations. The space functions as a public space with a library of over 6000 publications. PUBLICS hosts talks, events, exhibitions and performances in collaboration with other partners in the city, nationally and internationally. PUBLICS is an educational platform and a critical agency where artists, students and communities are invited to engage with social issues, as well as gain and share knowledge through various discourses. These initiatives develop in parallel with longer-term curatorial projects.

PUBLICS is a producer of new artistic projects driven by social concerns, and creates connections between diverse groups, as an open, ethically-led platform for critical debate and collaboration. PUBLICS operates under the Artistic Direction of Paul O'Neill together with Program Manager Eliisa Suvanto. In 2021 the organisation hired a third full-time employee, Samantha Lippett as the Curator of Learning, to plan and execute PUBLICS' learning program. This included the new PUBLICS YOUTH Advisory Board, offering paid positions for a group of young people who actively support both decision-making and implementation of the annual program. PUBLICS fills a middle area in-between the small initiatives and bigger institutions, by providing an important link, support and consultation. PUBLICS is dedicated to support dialogue between the local and the international. PUBLICS pays an equal standard fee for every artist/ curator in four different categories. Annually, an elected board of professionals approves mission, vision, and oversees the program policy.



OEI installation detail (2021) and workshop, The Month of Books
Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

# **ACTIVITIES**



Dave McKenzie: Surpass (2021) and Willing (2021), PUBLICS Coupling

Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

In 2021 the core activities of PUBLICS were: the Open Up network and program, connecting Helsinki-based professionals with international institutions and communities; the festival Today Is Our Tomorrow, presenting alter-futures being enacted; the SHAPE platform as a means of supporting other local organisations and initiatives; and the development of PUBLICS YOUTH Advisory Board as part of a network with PRAKSIS (Oslo) and Index (Stockholm): three small-scale organisations dedicated to collaborating with young people to curate new models, formats and modalities for future publics. PUBLICS' new Curator of Learning was recruited to work with public outreach and to connect with schools, educators, partners and young people. The appointment followed an extensive and in-depth recruitment process. Samantha Lippett was selected because of the unique trans-disciplinary attributes and experiences of working across and between the disciplines of curating contemporary art, pedagogy and community practice.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic inevitably influenced the format and scale of PUBLICS program throughout the year. Energy was put into imagining ways and approaches as to how to adapt to the constantly changing and challenging circumstances, whilst supporting the artists, curators and other collaborators with whom we are committed to. Hence, the PUBLICS outreach placed emphasis on more intimate meetings, bringing smaller groups of participants together. Throughout 2021, PUBLICS hosted mostly small-scale in person gathering and online events, which enabled PUBLICS to keep focusing on its digital, and on-line formatted program, and strengthen on-going collaborations.

## TIMELINE

### **PUBLICS COMMISSIONS:**

1 Mar – Ongoing, ACROSS THE WAY WITH... in collaboration with Shimmer 10 Mar – 8 Apr, Today Is Our Tomorrow: Agnė Jokšė, Sandra Kosorotova, Anni Puolakka and Marta Trektere, in collaboration with The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Narva Art Residency and NAC of Vilnius Academy of Arts

12 Jun, Nightfall / Videvik by Merike Estna

26 Aug – 19 Sept, PUBLICS Coupling: Maryam Jafri & Dave McKenzie, in collaboration with PALO art productions, co-production of the book Maryam Jafri: Independence Days

## **PUBLICS EVENTS & PARAHOSTING:**

22-24 Jan, Papercuts by Chih Tung Lin and Riikka Thitz

6 May, Third Space Collective: *Intimacy & Collaboration*, with Sepideh Rahaa, Ana Gutieszca, Ceyda Berk-Söderblom and Moe Mustafa

12 Jun, Launch of SHAPE, in collaboration with Kuntshalle Kohta

16 Jun, NO NIIN Listening Session with Golrokh Nafisi and Jyotsna Siddharth

30 Jun, Academy of Moving People and Images Listening Session with Maryan Abdulkarim and Ahmet Öğüt

6 Aug, Globe Art Point Listening Session with Tampere Intercultural Art collective 18 Oct, Artists at Risk (AR) Listening Session with Grammo and Timeka Suspect 5 Nov, XOSPHERE: Matti Raita, Ava Imogen, Atheer Soot, co-curated with Moe Mustafa 17 Nov, XOSPHERE 2: James Hoff and Atheer Soot

## THE MONTH OF BOOKS:

24 Sept, Scaling Without Squeezing with Kathrin Böhm, Mick Wilson and Paul O'Neill 24 Sept, Public Enquiries Park Lek and the Scandinavian Social Turn, book launch with Kerstin Bergendal and Mick Wilson

24–25 Sept, OEI (Jonas (J) Magnusson & Cecilia Grönberg): staying with editing & localizing publishing, exhibition and workshop

29 Sept, Results and Prospects: Seven Years of Rab-Rab Press, talk by Sezgin Boynik 7–9 Oct, Conference In Character, with Teen Advisory Boards at Index and PRAKSIS

8 Oct, Fake Star book launch with Ahmed Al-Nawas, Minna Henriksson and Ott Kagovere

9 Oct, *Curatorial Feelings* book launch and talk with Eloise Sweetman, Jason Hendrik Hansma and Flis Holland

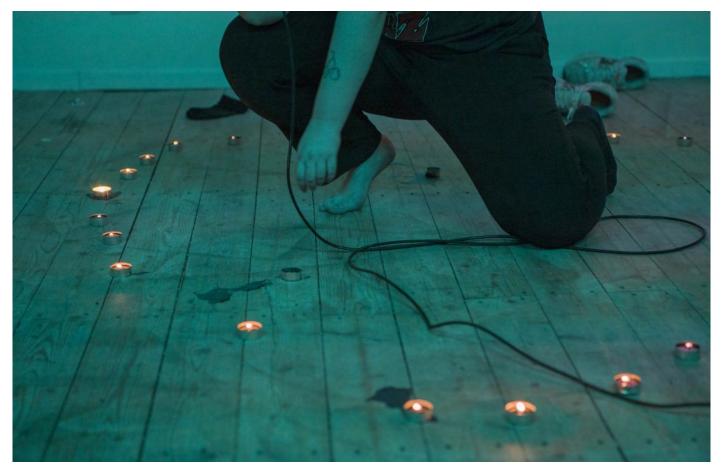
9 Oct, Superchair by Tuukka Kaila (Rooftop Press)

9 Oct, *Parts (for Muuri): scores* with Maarit Mustonen, James Prevett and Kaisa Siirala 22 Oct, *Exercises in Togetherness*: Asiya Wadud, James Hoff, DeForrest Brown, Jr., Zelda Zine (Eveliina Lempiäinen, Santtu Räisänen, Sophia Mitiku & Autuas Ukkonen), in collaboration with The Finnish Cultural Institute in New York (FCINY)

23 Oct, Lecture by Pierre Lequillon

23 Oct, *Death to the Curator* discussion with Rosamaría Bolom, Jonna Karanka, Sepideh Rahaa and Sakari Tervo

## PROGRAM



Marta Trektere: Painless Youth. Photo: Luryanas Skaisgiela

## **PUBLICS COMMISSIONS**

TODAY IS OUR TOMORROW: AGNĖ JOKŠĖ, SANDRA KOSOROTOVA, ANNI PUOLAKKA AND MARTA TREKTERE

Today Is Our Tomorrow is an annual transdisciplinary festival, initiated in 2019 by PUBLICS. The festival, taking a different form each year, supports intersectional ecologies and diversity of thoughts, practices, identities, and their experiences through its collaborative methodology and co-productive commissioning approach. In 2021, three Baltic organisations, The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Narva Art Residency, and NAC of Vilnius Academy of Arts, in collaboration with PUBLICS co-commissioned three works by artists Agnė Jokšė, Sandra Kosorotova, Anni Puolakka, and Marta Trektere, available through various online platforms.

Oestrus Youth by Anni Puolakka and Marta Trektere explored collaboration, trust and hybridity as meaningful tools to cope with the human condition. Due to the pandemic, the performance took place through Instagram stories. Oestrus Youth was a mash-up of two performances in which both artists were involved in each other's work as a visiting performer and a supporter. Performances included music by Kaspars Groševs and ITU (Anni Puolakka and Miša Skalskis) and costumes made in collaboration with designer Karolina Janulevičiūtė.

WEEDS FEED! was a tactile publication and a care package with texts, artworks and herbs compiled by Sandra Kosorotova, and distributed from PUBLICS and online. From an in-depth

study on food capitalism and land stewardship, to fermental health and the possibility of feeding each other, the publication encompassed ideas of care-taking as an artistic practice; how we can transform excess energy into a rewarding co-existence of humans and other-than-humans. *WEEDS FEED!* included texts by Sean Roy Parker, Sandra Kosorotova, Ann Mirjam Vaikla and artworks by Olga Tjurina, Vera Lantsova, Lena Sabinina.

Unconditional Love by Agnė Jokšė was video work and an ongoing inquiry into entangled cross-generational family relations and their role in the claim of kinship. Several interlinked chapters explored themes related to care, compassion, and love through the lens of intergenerational relations constituted in parallel to the societal and political changes in Lithuania when transitioning from the Soviet Union into the independent state of today. Following its premier, Unconditional Love was shown as part of the 14th edition of the Baltic Triennial: The Endless Frontier.

## MERIKE ESTNA: NIGHTFALL / VIDEVIK

Nightfall / Videvik was a site-responsive public art commission and solo artist' presentation by Estonian artist Merike Estna. Nightfall / Videvik comprised of a four-windows painted installation entitled Päev looja läind (The Day Has Gone), two large-scale framed paintings, Magama (To Sleep) and Unenägu (A Dream), and a hand-painted 62 paged bookwork Videvik. For the show Estna used semi-descriptive images and illustrations alongside excerpts, in Estonian and Finnish, of Lydia Koidula's poem Õhturahu. Throughout Estna's work, Koidula's poem literally took over, intervened and inhabited PUBLICS multiple spaces, its windows, walls and library shelves. Estna's residency in Helsinki was supported by the Saastamoinen Foundation. Two of the newly commissioned works, Magama and Unenägu, were acquired by Kiasma.



Merike Estna: Nightfall / Videvik (2021). Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

where two artists/ practitioners are introduced to one another for the first time and show together because of some common concerns within their practices. For the first edition, two solo shows by two internationally renowned artists Maryam Jafri and Dave McKenzie were in dialogue, co-mingling with each other. Both artists juxtaposed text and image to dissect their collective, political, and personal meanings. Each artist explored multiple forms of personal and 'public address' to make sense of how language, communication and the document are evershifting representational forms.

The first *Coupling* was the result of a new collaboration between PUBLICS and PALO art productions, who co-produced Dave McKenzie's work for the exhibition. During the exhibition PUBLICS co-produced a new artist's book Maryam Jafri/ Independence Days, (Walther and Franz König & TAXISPALAIS, 2021) with essays by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Paul O'Neill and Nina Tabassomi. Two works produced for PUBLICS Coupling, *(Dis)appearance Online* and *Independence Day* by Maryam Jafri, were acquired by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA).

## ACROSS THE WAY WITH...

Throughout 2021 PUBLICS continued to Parahost curatorial studio Shimmer (Eloise Sweetman and Jason Hendrik Hansma) with an project ACROSS THE WAY WITH... where artists, poets, philosophers and curators from around the world were invited to explore the notion of intimacy online readings. PUBLICS Parahosting began in the Autumn of 2018, and has grown into a key method of decentering its own curatorial authorship, and as an essential means of working together without boundaries or containment. Through Parahosting, PUBLICS supports its parasites, para-institutions, para-guests, and has grown into a flexible, evolving, expanding and, sometimes messy, program.

In 2021 PUBLICS co-commissioned readings from: Mercedes Azpilicueta, AA Bronson, Ruth Buchanan, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Amalle Dublon, Dehlia Hannah & Nadim Samman & Julian Charrière, Flis Holland, Sasha Huber & Faith Mkwesha, Grace Ndiritu, Kira O'Reilly, and Mia You.

## **PUBLICS EVENTS & PARAHOSTING**

## LAUNCH OF SHAPE

SHAPE platform was introduced to the public on June 12th at Teurastamo. SHAPE is a new online resource for Helsinki's contemporary art landscape, a mapping of art spaces and public events across the city. Initiated by PUBLICS and Kohta, SHAPE highlights current public events, spaces, times and locations. Users and visitors can browse upcoming activities as well as find out more about their initiating organisations. SHAPE is organized around eight main categories of activity: Books, Events, Exhibitions, Festivals, Initiatives, Museums, Supports, and Workspaces. The program of the launch included DJ/live-sets from Tuomas A. Laitinen and MYÖS collective, and live music by Frank Frank Frank.



Launch of Fake Star with Ahmed Al-Nawas, Minna Henriksson and Ott Kagovere, The Month of Books Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

#### THE MONTH OF BOOKS

The Month of Books program included: ACAB; Asiya Wadud, James Hoff (Primary Information) & DeForrest Brown Jr., Zelda Zine; Arctic Art Book Fair / Mondo Books; The Temporary Bookshelf; Jonas (J) Magnusson & Cecilia Grönberg (OEI); Third Space Collective; Eloise Sweetman, Jason Hendrik Hansma (Shimmer) with Flis Holland; Sezgin Boynik (Rab-Rab); Maarit Mustonen and James Prevett (Parties for Public Sculpture) with Kaisa Siirala; Kathrin Böhm, Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson and Kerstin Bergendal; Rooftop Press; Nick Thurston; Pierre Leguillon; Jonna Karanka and Sakari Tervo (Sorbus); Ahmed Al-Nawas, Minna Henriksson and Ott Kagovere; Conference: In Character with Index and Praksis and their Teen Advisory Boards.

The Month of Books was a month-long program organised by PUBLICS between 24 Sept – 23 Oct focusing around book-related artistic practices and other bookish things. For four weeks The Month of Books hosted an evolving exhibition of and about books, workshops, pop-up bookstores, readings, interventions, discussions, and book launches. After prolonged restrictions, PUBLICS Library gradually reopened its sliding doors with The Month of Books, which took place in the context of PUBLICS Library – an ever-growing and evolving public library with a dedicated bookstore.

## XOSPHERE: MATTI RAITA, AVA IMOGEN & ATHEER SOOT

In 2021, Moe Mustafa in collaboration with PUBLICS initiated Xosphere. The first live ambient event with Matti Raita, Ava Imogen & Atheer Soot invited visitors to detach from the rapid pace of the urban present and indulge in the floating world of Xosphere. Visitors were invited to join a journey of atmospheric and meditative sound to escape worries and put minds at ease. Xosphere continued PUBLICS' Listening Sessions, previously held online with local organisations.

### **XOSPHERE 2: JAMES HOFF & ATHEER SOOT**

For the continuation of Xosphere, PUBLICS and Moe Mustafa invited internationally renowned New York-based artist James Hoff (PAN) to join Helsinki-based Atheer Soot on stage at PUBLICS. In dialogue, the two artists operate at the intersection of social critique, aural pleasure, and the emergent publicness of music. Each artist played new works in relation to the other, during a public listening session. James Hoff extended his investment in distributed parasitic forms, presenting new audio works composed from earworms and tinnitus frequencies biographical to his own interior experience.



## PUBLICS LIBRARY & LEARNING PROGRAM

PUBLICS is an educational resource where critical learning, knowledge production and discursive programming are integral to its curatorial approach. At PUBLICS, contemporary art production, and discursive practices are in constant dialogue through its multiple learning strands. Taking the form of PUBLICS Library, and its public programmes of Talks, Events and Commissions, these overlapping strands are organised alongside PUBLICS YOUTH program, placing art education, critical research and publicness at the centre of curatorial practice.

In addition to the material library, PUBLICS hosts events linked to the library, as well as educational and collaboration-based research projects. PUBLICS Library is a space dedicated to critical social thinking, learning, education, representing concepts, theories and practices of curating contemporary art, education, history of curating, culture and social theory, public art and activism. The library includes 6000 books, catalogues and other printed matter. Online catalogue holds information on all titles and makes it accessible prior to the visit to the library. PUBLICS Library is open once a week on a regular basis with consistent opening hours and by appointment. Visitors are provided with a space to read, learn, discuss and research. To keep the library up-to-date, new titles are bought monthly, incorporated into one of fourteen existing categories.

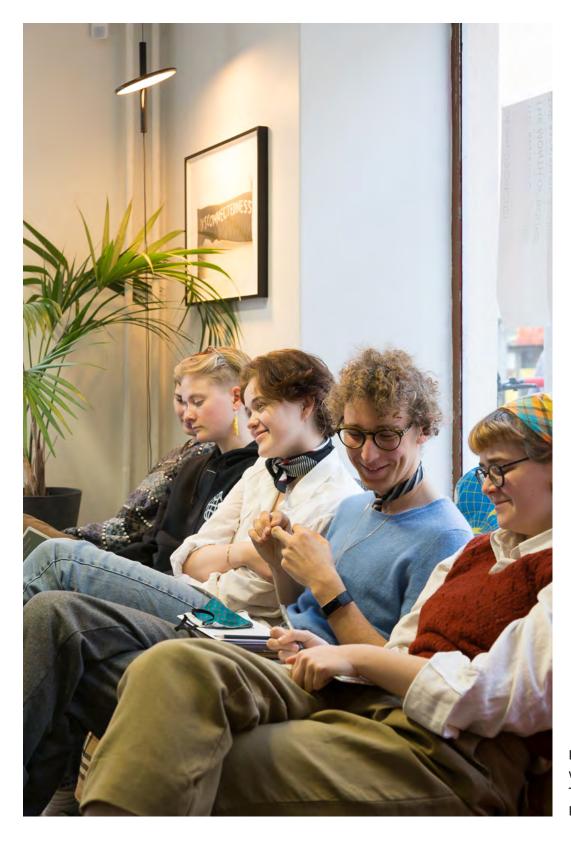
PUBLICS has organised a series of events emphasising the importance of publishing including book launches with publishers, authors and designers; The Month of Books, a year-to-year project bringing together different publishers in order to focus on book-related practices; Coupling, a series of collaborations in between two or more artists that are deeply linked to the library as a starting point or a source of materials, ideas and possibilities.

## **PUBLICS YOUTH**

PUBLICS YOUTH Advisory Board is a new long-term education and employment opportunity for Helsinki based 18-21 year olds. This annual role offers young individuals experience of curating contemporary art and opportunity to implement their ideas as to how PUBLICS and the wider field of arts and culture can provide young people with better access to the creative field now and in the future. Beyond contributing towards PUBLICS programme in Helsinki, the group will continue our ongoing collaboration In Character, with the Teen Advisory Boards at Index Foundation (ITAB) in Stockholm and PRAKSIS (PTAB) in Oslo.

In 2021 the partnership was further strengthened with In Character collaboration where Teen Advisory Boards of both Index and PRAKSIS shared their gained knowledge through a conference, a publication, podcast and a website. For PUBLICS this was furthermore an opportunity to launch PUBLICS YOUTH Advisory Board by learning from these two organisations and teenagers who had already had significant experience working with this model.

This recruitment of first PUBLICS YOUTH followed after a period of local outreach and an Open Call announcement that ran from November to December 2021.



In Character: Conference with Index and Praksis Teen Advisory Boards. Photo: Noora Lehtovuori

## OPEN UP TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK

Open Up is a four-year long cultural project (2020-2023), co-funded by the Creative Europe program, that aims to bring to the surface and promote under-represented artists and cultural workers. OU aims to help them establish sustainable practices via the project's training and activities and workshops. Throughout 2021 alternative plans for Open Up were discussed together with the partners based on the national situations and local health and safety regulations.

In 2021 PUBLICS developed its two laboratories: NOT YET (current FUTURE FUTURES) and PARAHOSTING. Plans for NOT YET Laboratory focused on outreach, building future communities and gatherings as part of a training program/ large-scale city-wide public art commission with artist Jeanne van Heeswijk with whom PUBLICS began developing a public artwork in December 2019. In early 2021, van Heeswijk together with Joy Mariama Smith came to Helsinki on a much delayed month-long residency in Helsinki hosted by Saastamoinen Foundation to work with Helsinki-based artist Ima Iduozee, Iida Nissinen and Vishnu Vardhani. However, the residency was cut short as Helsinki went into lockdown and all in-person meetings, public gatherings were suspended. The limitations of working internationally during the pandemic continued. The year 2021 was more focused on local engagement and audiences, with less interaction with international partners than expected. ALREADY NOT YET Laboratory then developed into FUTURE FUTURES Laboratory, focusing on strengthening the youth engagement locally.

PARAHOSTING Laboratory included Listening Sessions that gathered small-scale independent and non-profit initiatives, and freelance cultural workers, creating a space to widen institutional knowledge and share concerns and points of interest. The Listening Sessions started and developed conversations on how Helsinki's cultural scene is working, and could have been done differently. In order to continue our work through the ongoing pandemic restrictions, the sessions were held both online and in hybrid format. In 2021, the Listening Sessions were organised by Third Space Collective (with guests Ceyda Berk-Söderblom and Moe Mustafa), NO NIIN (with guests Golrokh Nafisi and Jyotsna Siddharth), Academy of Moving People and Images (with guests Maryan Abdulkarim & Ahmet Öğüt) Globe Art Point (with guests Juha Ahonen, Maikki Kantola, Luiza Preda, Ilaria Tucci and Ruby Gupte) and Artists at Risk (with guests Grammo Suspect, Rainbow Ambassador Kenya and Timeka Suspect).

# **PARTNERSHIPS**

Aalto University, Academy of Fine Arts, Academy of Moving People and Images, Artists at Risk, CCA Estonia, Finnish Culture Institute in New York (FCINY), The Finnish Institute in London, Flock Network, Frame Contemporary Art Finland, Globe Art Point, Index Foundation and ITAB, Institute of Modern Art (IMA), Keep It Complex, Kiasma, Kohta Kunsthalle, Latitudes, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA), Lugemik, MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Mondo Books, Museum of Impossible Forms, NAC of Vilnius Academy of Arts, Narva Art Residency, NO NIIN, Nuori Taide, PALO art productions, Parties for Public Sculpture, PRAKSIS and PTAB, Rab-Rab Press, Rooftop Press, Saastamoinen Foundation, Shimmer, The Showroom, Studio Julia, TAXISPALAIS Kunsthalle Tirol, Temnikova & Kasela, Third Space Collective, Uniarts Helsinki.

Open Up Network: Pierides Foundation (Cyprus), University of Picardie Jules Vernes, (France), Autonomous University (Barcelona), FRESCO (Netherlands), Panepistimio (Greece), New Hand Lab (Portugal), Valand Academy (Sweden).

## ADMINISTRATION

The supporting association behind PUBLICS is Checkpoint Helsingin Tukiyhdistys, born in 2013 in a moment where the political imagination was open to envisioning the economic and cultural benefits of making a grand investment in the arts. Instead of putting the energy into criticizing, the association has taken this momentum seriously and worked towards the most interesting roadmap enabling the local cultural field to develop in dialogue with the international scene. In 2021 board members were Adelaide Bannerman, Taru Elfving (chair), Bassam El Baroni, João Laia, Axel Straschnoy (vice chair) and Pilvi Takala.

In 2021 the board met four times. The Spring meeting was held via Zoom on 30/9/2021 and the Annual General meeting on 15/12/2021, both online and at PUBLICS. A recruitment team was formed separately and the interview process was carried through by Taru Elfving, Adelaide Bannerman, Paul O'Neill, Eliisa Suvanto and Marti Manen as an external advisor. PUBLICS had three full-time employees, artistic director Paul O'Neill (1/1–31/12/2021), program manager Eliisa Suvanto (1/1–31/12/2021), and as a new curator of learning, Samantha Lippett (1/9–31/12/2021). The organisation employed one intern, Valentina Černiauskaitė (4/10–31/12/2020), as part of her studies in Vilnius Academy of Arts. Saskia Suominen was hired as an assistant, first for the Today Is Our Tomorrow festival (22/3–30/4/2021, 6/2021) and then to support Merike Estna's commission in June. Throughout the year PUBLICS employed professionals to work for projects and commissions.

In 2021 PUBLICS main funding support came from the Kone Foundation (up to 50% match funding), Creative Europe Program (Open Up developed in partnership with 7 institutions across Europe), Erasmus+ Youth in Action program of European Union (In Character project developed in partnership with Index and PRAKSIS), the Finnish National Agency for Education (between 2021–23 to support the Open Up), Arts Promotion Centre Finland, the City of Helsinki, the Baltic Culture Fund (Today Is Our Tomorrow Festival) and Saastamoinen Foundation (Residencies of Jeanne van Heeswijk, Joy Mariama Smith, and Merike Estna).

Näyttelysuositukset, Today Is Our Tomorrow, Helsingin Sanomat, 26.3.2021

Sanda Kosorotova launches Weeds Feed!, EKA, 10.3.2021

Agnė Jokšė, Sandra Kosorotova, Anni Puolakka and Marta Trektere at Today is Our Tomorrow, Nordic and Baltic Young Artist Award (NBYAA), 12.3.2021

Krista Mölder ja Sandra Kosorotova osalevad 2022. aastal WIELSi residentuuris, Postimees, 24.11.2021 Tarptautinėje parodoje pristatomas naujas Agnės Jokšės video kūrinys "Besąlygiška meilė", Artnews.lt, 22.3.2021 Agnė Jokšė: *Unconditional Love*, Neringa Lithuanian Capital of Culture 2021

Today is Our Tomorrow with Agnė Jokšė, Sandra Kosorotova, Anni Puolakka and Marta Trektere at PUBLICS and online, Echo Gone Wrong, 9.3.2021

Online | Anni Puolakka and Marta Trektere participate in the transdisciplinary festival 'Today Is Our Tomorrow' with performance 'Oestrus Youth', Echo Gone Wrong, 1.4.2021

Tarptautinėje parodoje pristatomas naujas Agnės Jokšės video kūrinys, Voxart, 23.3.2021

TV galerija "Indivizijos" su Agne Jokše, LRT, 1.3.2021

'Borderlessness' by Merike Estna, Echo Gone Wrong, 19.6.2021

Open Up -hanke antaa äänen marginalisoiduille taiteilijoille, Opetushallitus, 29.09.2021

SCENARIO Reports, Futures shaping art/art shaping futures, Oct 2021

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