



AN ART PARK IN HYVINKÄÄ FOCUSING ON FINNISH VISUAL CONTEMPORARY FOLK ART

Throughout history, Hyvinkää has shone as the home of many respected artists, such as Helene Schjerfbeck, Tyko Sallinen and Yrjö Saارينen. Next summer, Hyvinkää will rise to the spotlight as a city of art, where Finland's first art park focusing on Finnish visual contemporary folk art will open. The Middle of Nowhere art park will present a wide range of ITE art (Finnish visual contemporary folk art) with the aim of increasing awareness of ITE artists and art.

Behind the project are two friends Pertti Riikonen and Teijo Monni. They met for the first time in the early 90s in Hyvinkää. From that meeting began a friendship that lasted more than 30 years. Both have operated on their own as entrepreneurs, but a joint project has not been found so far, although it has always been talked about over the years. In the end, 2020 was a year of change for those two friends.

"Corona spring 2020 was a scary, confusing and heavy period. We sat on the giant terrace of Senaatintori in Helsinki in the summer and thought about the past spring. Everything felt very unreal and the uncertainty of the future made us decide that night, let's do something together. This moment transported us through many coincidences to the fairy-tale and imaginative world of self-taught artists, which brought us a smile on our faces again and faith in the future. We met interesting, sensitive, talented and very kind people. We heard stories about life, destinies and dreams and saw wonderful works and incredible art environments. In our opinion, ITE art did not get the attention it deserved, and we came up with the idea of our own art park. A park where visiting people would feel and experience the same emotions that ITE art evoked in us."

A suitable place for the art park was found in the spring winter of 2022 in Hyvinkää, a small rural village Kaukas. An old summer apartment in poor condition, an untended apple orchard and collapsed yard buildings were located on the property. What made this place particularly fascinating was the ruined old market garden, the mossy stone legs and the untouched forest behind the courtyard. This property provided the perfect setting for the self-taught artists' imaginative works of art. When we contacted the artists, we noticed that we were received really well. This created the belief that there was a need for such a park and it was welcome, also from the point of view of the artists. *We wanted to build the park into an original and fairytale-like wonderland. We decided at the very beginning that the park would be built using recycled materials as far as possible.*

Work on the property started in the spring of 2022. The first summer was spent cleaning the environment and buildings and building access routes. The work outside continued well into the fall, and when the snow came, we moved indoors to repair the old main building from the inside. The year 2023 was a time of intense construction. Municipal technology was obtained for the property, duckboards were built in the forest and on the ruins of the greenhouse. The construction work of the container cafe started, and the works were already partially in place.

In January 2024, we participated in a Helsinki travel fair and the park was officially launched to the general public. We received a lot of positive feedback at the fair. The public seemed to like the concept and many promised to visit the art park next summer.

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