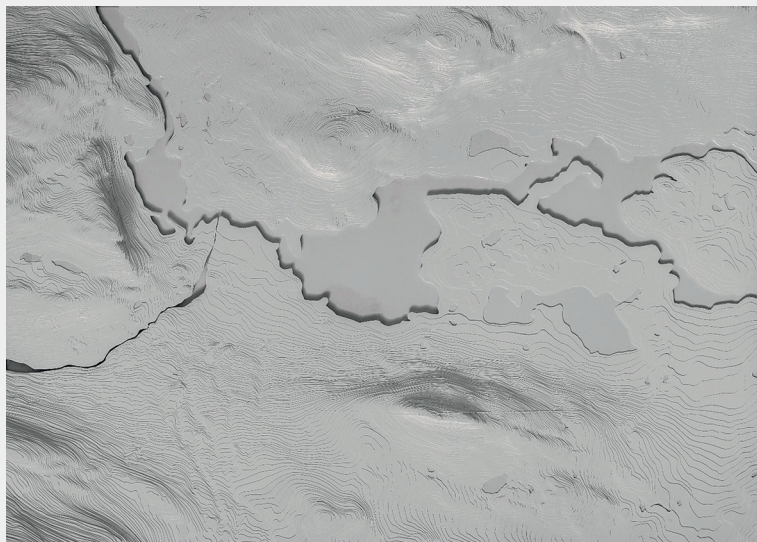


A Line in the Arctic Wilderness

Juhani Pallasmaa



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Tapio Wirkkala's Saivaara Monument, 1978

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Márcia Nascimento (b. 1982), **Nuno Costa** (b. 1984).

They have a Degree in Architecture from the University of Minho (DAA-UM, 2007) and a Master Degree from the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC, 2009).

Since then, they run their activity as architects developing their own works from which should be underlined the project Tapio Wirkkala's Saivaara Monument, awarded with grants, among others, from the Arts Council of Finland (TAIKE, 2014) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG, 2017).

They are co-founders of Kärjäkivet (2019, onwards).

Synopsis

“Kärjäkivet” is a periodical publication of thought and criticism that was born from a wider project developed around a proposal which was never accomplished, concerning the Saivaara Monument, elaborated in 1978 by the legendary Finnish artist Tapio Wirkkala.

“In 1975, the President Urho Kekkonen expressed as his wish that his monument should be placed in northwestern Lapland, on the Saivaara mountain. [...]”

How to make a monument on a site that is naturally so beautiful that one cannot take away anything from it, neither is man able to add anything to it? Tapio Wirkkala ended up with a proposal in which all the materials of the monument have been picked from the mountain itself.

The monument consists of a straight, paved, almost imperceptible path crossing over the Saivaara mountain. Five stones will be raised from the mountainside to the summit of the mountain, [...]. These stones will form a circle, similar to the court venue stones of the old days [called in Finnish as “Kärjäkivet”], on which the wise men of the village got together in order to decide about common matters. The one who has the strength to climb up the stony path may sit on these stones, look at the landscape and think. This artless monument is not going to change or destroy the landscape.”

Tapio Wirkkala Rut Bryk Foundation Archive, 1978

In this sense, this publication intends to accomplish, not in form but in content, the idea of Tapio Wirkkala for the Saivaara Monument: the creation of a place where men of all races and colors can gather together to think.

For that purpose, an online platform was created where different invited authors gather together through texts, illustrated and edited in small booklets, expressing their thoughts on architecture, art and culture in general, with the Saivaara Monument as the main driver.

Based in Portugal, it is published, as a general rule, every quarter, by adding a new text that can be viewed or downloaded online.

Editor's Note

Márcia Nascimento
& Nuno Costa



Saivaara field from sea plane, 2014.

© Márcia Nascimento.

The first text of this publication would obviously have to be in charge of Juhani Pallasmaa, who does not need any presentation, even because we would surely miss words to do so.

We knew, even before starting this whole adventure, of his deep friendship with Tapio Wirkkala, so it seemed obvious to present him first hand our proposal of work around the Saivaara Monument. We were convinced that the beginning of the project would depend on the reaction we got from him: if he found it interesting, we would develop the project, otherwise it would end at that moment.

It is easy for us to recall our first meeting in 2012, in Santiago de Compostela. There was, of course, a lot separating us. On the one hand, he did not know us at all; on the other hand, we felt an enormous respect imposed by his name. However, it was enough for him to hear the words “Tapio Wirkkala” and “Saivaara” to change his body language and to soften his face, saying warmly and with emotion: “Please, just do it!”. From that moment, we knew that this was a journey without return.

Since then, Pallasmaa has been instrumental in helping with this project: he wrote fundamental letters of recommendation to raise funds; he helped us prepare the trip to Lapland - taking time to give us a ride and show Otaniemi; he made the connection between us, the Wirkkala family and the Tapio Wirkkala Rut Bryk Foundation, and ended up generously writing the following text, purposely for this first edition. Thank you very much, dear friend Juhani!

We would also like to thank the Tapio Wirkkala Rut Bryk Foundation, for allowing us to access and disseminate original material from its archives, the Asociación Maria Reiche, and all the authors who kindly granted their images, such as Rauno Hilander and Matti A. Pitkänen (through his family).

Finally, we welcome and thank all those who visit us.

A Line in the Arctic Wilderness

- Tapio Wirkkala's Saivaara Monument, 1978

Juhani Pallasmaa,
Architect,
Professor emeritus,
Writer ¹



The legendary Finnish designer Tapio Wirkkala (1915-1985) is known internationally as an exceptionally versatile designer of refined objects in glass, porcelain, wood, plastics and various metals from stainless steel to bronze, silver and gold. He was also a brilliant sculptor, specially in laminated plywood, as well as a graphic and exhibition designer. His countless designs combine a formal and geometric simplicity with a sensuous feeling of phenomena of nature. His designs often echo forms of animal bones, plants, leaves, ice and movements of water or snow drifts. His scale stretches from postage stamps and bank notes to architectural projects and the urbanist fantasy project for *The City of Future 2000* at the Brussels World Fair in 1958. Regardless of Wirkkala's international fame, his commemorative land art project in an immense scale for a remote and isolated fjeld, a rounded arctic mountain, in the wilderness of northwestern Lapland, 300 kilometers north of the Polar Circle, is not widely known. The project is essentially a linear footpath, over 2 kilometers long, leading from the foot hills of the fjeld, from two opposite sides, to its fairly flat top the rising and partly stepped pathways end in a circular configuration of five large stones at the top. In the ancient times, the tribal leaders of the North gathered to discuss and decide on collective matters at similar symbolic stone rings. In a way, these ring configurations are predecessor for modern parliament buildings. The ancient Nordic word for these important and honoured places of collective decision making is "t(h)ing", whereas the Finnish equivalent is "kärjäkivet" (literally "court stones") referring to the supreme place of justice. Wirkkala's East-West oriented linear path enabling access to the top from two opposite sides, commemorates the 26 year-long presidency of Urho Kaleva Kekkonen, who served as the President of the Republic of Finland in 1956-1982, and his contributions to the East-West political and cultural relations. Kekkonen was a respected statesman and mediator, and his highest achievement in international relations was the Conference on European Security and Cooperation in Helsinki in 1975, in which 35 heads of states participated. The five "court stones" on top of the fjeld directly refer to Kekkonen's five presidential terms.

¹ The writer of this essay was an intimate friend of Tapio Wirkkala and his family from 1968 onwards until Tapio's death in 1985, and Rut's in 1999. The friendship with the two children of the artist couple, Sami, a designer and Maaria, a ceramic and installation artist, still continues. The writer made fishing trips to Lapland with Tapio and his designer son Sami.

Tapio Wirkkala's Saivaara Monument sketch (view), 1978.



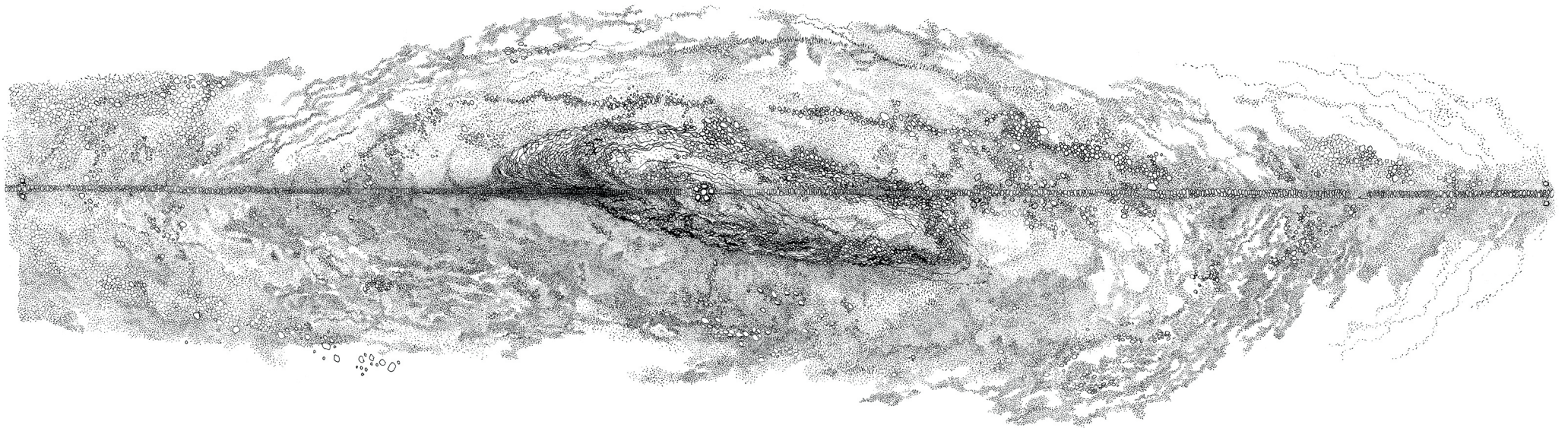
Tapio Wirkkala preparing graylings at a campfire with his son Sami and a reindeer herder.

© Matti A. Pitkänen

Like Tapio Wirkkala, President Kekkonen was an eager fisherman, skier and camper, and he had a log cabin near the Saivaara fjeld, which can be seen from his cabin site. Kekkonen used to host important political, industrial and economic leaders at this cabin, which gives another meaning to the symbolic group of “court stones”. Kekkonen and Wirkkala had become friends, and certainly their shared interest in the arctic wilderness connected the two individuals. Both men also shared an exceptional directness in their attitudes. They had become to know each other as Wirkkala designed unique objects, often with an arctic ambience, as gifts to foreign heads of states during Kekkonen’s official state visits.

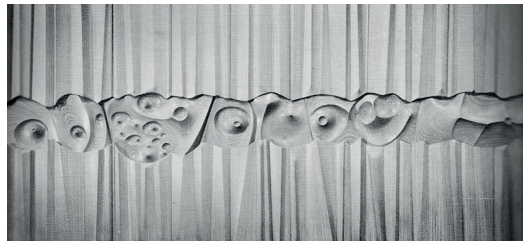
Tapio Wirkkala and his family had a deep personal relationship with the North and the Sámi reindeer herders. In the late 1950s he purchased the oldest original Lapp house of the region next to Lake Paadar and the mouth of the Lemmenjoki River, known for its beauty and gold panning activities. Tapio renovated the old house and eventually built a large new log house and several additional small structures on the lot, such as sauna, boat house and fire wood shelter. The entire family spent annually several months at every season in the Lemmensuu house, where Tapio worked on his design projects, such as carving molds in blocks of graphite for his glass objects, while his wife, Rut Bryk, worked on her ceramic pieces and textiles. Tapio was an avid hiker, camper and fisherman, and in 1976 he built a remote fishing hut in the north end of Iijärvi Lake, roughly 95 kilometers northeast of the Lemmensuu place.

This remote hideaway was used mainly for serious fishing to stock Wirkkalas’ Helsinki household for the winter months with salted trout, white fish and grayling, and smoked fish preserved with a method developed by Tapio Wirkkala motivates his frequent journeys to Lapland in an interview followingly:



Tapio Wirkkala's Saivaara Monument sketch (plan), 1978.

© Tapio Wirkkala. TWRB Foundation.



“Ultima Thule”, 300x900 cm laminated plywood sculpture,
1967.

© Tapio Wirkkala. TWRB Foundation

“For me Lapland has become something which loads me like batteries. It has become like a rope I can grasp when I feel sinking. When I am agonized by noticing the European abundance with its side effects, the smell of the sweat of egotism and ambition. When I feel like sinking and the pain is strong I leave and go to Lapland. For me it has become a means of contemplation and survival”.²

Due to Wirkkala’s deep personal relationship with northern Lapland and its indigenous people, the Saivaara monument was planned as a minimal intervention in the fragile arctic nature with frail lichen growths, which are the main food of the reindeer. The path was to be made of natural stones collected from both sides of the footpath. The Lapp fjelds usually have endless rock and stone deposits as a consequence of the last glacier. Wirkkala had experience in laying natural stones through making the several fireplaces of his various houses. The significant ecological and ethical motif was to guide hikers on their way up to the top of the fjeld to the stone pathways on the opposite sides, away from the slopes with lichen and dwarf birch, where reindeers habitually calf. As the Saivaara fjeld is 40 kilometers away from the nearest vehicular road, large numbers of visitors could not be expected to visit the monument, and the visitors would mainly be experienced ramblers. Besides the demanding hike accross rough fjeld areas, the destination can be reached by small sea plane and helicopter, or by snow mobile in winter time.

An interesting feature of Wirkkala’s pathway is that it was intended to be geometrically straight in horizontal projection, but it followed the natural contours of the fjeld in section, and, consequently, it is a randomly curving line in the side view and spatially. Lines appear in natural landscapes in four categories: edges, profiles, routes, and boundaries. Edges are borderlines between areas of different character (edge of a lake or swamp), profiles are the silhouettes of forms (profile of a mountain), routes are paths of movement (rivers, roads and pathways of humans and animals), and boundaries are man-made separations of land areas (state borders, limits of land ownership). The straightness of a line in the landscape emphasizes

² Pallasmaa, Juhani, “Silmät sormenpäissä – Tapio Wirkkala, esineiden runoilija”, Suomen Kuvalehti, 1985: 22, 72.



A Line in Japan, 1979.

© Richard Long. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2019. Photo: Richard Long

its man-made origin – animal paths in the nature are always less determined in their directionality. Wirkkala makes a poetic comment on paths in the wilderness:

*“Many are the signs of silence. Paths in a silver forest. They are reindeer paths that never lead anywhere. They weave in and out among the fallen trees, trees which no one will ever raise, or end on the banks of a lake. The waters and hills have no direction, they are infinite”.*³

The Saivaara project was presented as beautiful pencil and ink pen drawings in Wirkkala's hand in 1978. He had spent some time on the site studying the inclinations and other conditions of the slope and the sizes and characteristics of stones for the pathway, through measuring, sketching and photographing.

President Kekkonen was a controversial political figure due to his unchallenged political authority, and especially during his last years in the office, there was a growing opposition to his sometimes authoritarian ways of governing. Yet, it was totally unexpected that a land art project in the most remote wilderness, honoring the President, would evoke forceful politically motivated objection in the press. The artistic qualities of the project were not discussed or evaluated publicly at all, and the project was never put in the context of contemporaneous international earth and landscape art. Apparently the objections were aimed against the cult of the President rather than Wirkkala's project. Even Wirkkala's realistic and ethical ecological considerations were bypassed and the project was presented as a violation of arctic nature. The opposition even persuaded some of the local reindeer herders against the project, although Wirkkala had personally supported the Sámi people in many ways, and even the first design for the Sámi Museum in Inari, which was intended to strengthen their identities, was designed by him.⁴ The Saivaara project had been initiated by Kekkonen's closest circle of friends, who usually accompanied him at the cabin near the Saivaara fjeld. However, after the first public criticism appeared, they totally disappeared from the scene, and the criticism was directed to Wirkkala, the

³ Tikkanen, Birgitta "Tapio Wirkkala", *Me Naiset* 1972:7, 51-52.

⁴ Siida the Sámi Lapp Museum and Northern Lapland Visitor Center was designed by Juhani Pallasmaa and opened in 1998. The permanent exhibitions were also designed by the architect in collaboration with Tapio's son Sami. The Museum was the first cultural building project in Finland funded by the European Union.



Gran Espiral María Reiche. Nazca Lines, Peru.

© María Reiche. Asociación María Reiche.

artist, who naturally felt deeply hurt. The project was dropped and surrounded by silence. As a consequence, Wirkkala's pioneering land art piece was nearly forgotten, irrespective of the fact that it is unparalleled in the history of Finnish art, and landscape design. The Saivaara Project can be compared with contemporaneous landscape and earth art projects, especially in the USA. Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969-70) in the Mormon Mesa, 80 miles from Las Vegas immediately comes to mind. The monumental earth work is essentially an immaterial and imaginary line crossing the void between two huge rock excavations on the two sides of the canyon; the piece resembles the aligned open sight of a rifle. Another memorable land art project in the same scale is Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977) in New Mexico, which is a 1 mile by 1 kilometer field with regularly spaced high stainless steel rods with their tops set on exactly the same elevation to create a fictitious horizontal plane. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on Great Salt Lake in Utah was one of the earliest land art projects. It is a spiral configuration laid of stones in the shallow salt water of the lake. However, the most amazing land and earth art work of all time is the immense group of geoglyphs executed as shallow depressions and incisions in the soil of the Nazca Desert in southern Peru. These nearly unbelievable earth drawings were made in 500 BC and 500 AC. The entity consists of straight lines and complex figurative motifs. The entire area of earth drawings encompasses nearly 450 square kilometers, and the largest figures can only be appreciated from the air.

Like the Saivaara project, all these earth works are located in uninhabited wilderness or desert areas. Wirkkala's linear footpath also evokes numerous linear projects by Richard Long, executed as foot marks by walking repeatedly along the line, or laying stones as a line on a mountain side and desert floor, or on a gallery floor. In fact, Long made a few of his walking pieces in the wilderness of eastern Lapland in 1983, five years after the Saivaara project, in the vicinity of the Iijärvi Lake, Wirkkala's refuge Tapio himself had carved a huge laminated plywood sculpture, entitled "*Ultima Thule*" - 400 by 900 cms in size - for the Montreal Expo in 1967. This abstracted image of a linear river that has carved a channel



Saivaara Monument paper model 1:2000. 2015

© Márcia Nascimento · Nuno Costa. Photo: Fuco Reyes

in the Lapp landscape with its cascading water, could well have introduced the idea of a line across the landscape in the artist's mind.

In 2011 a thorough book on the entire life's work of Tapio Wirkkala entitled *Eye, Hand and Thought* was given as a gift to the young Portuguese architect couple, Nuno Costa and Márcia Nascimento.⁵ The designer's uniquely subtle approach to design appealed to them, and they were especially impressed by his project in remote Lapland. They had been interested in "absent architecture", architectural projects that are somehow concealed in their landscape settings. They began to study and research the forgotten project of Wirkkala, and later even made a demanding journey of four days to Saivaara in August 2014; they reached the top of the fjeld on 2 August. They also studied the archives of the Bryk-Wirkkala Foundation to find material on the evolution of the project, and other archives to trace the details of the political attack on the project. Finally, they compiled an exhibition on the project which was shown in Madrid in 2015.

The exhibition was later shown at the Design Museum in Helsinki in 2016 and the Municipal Art Gallery in Barcelos, Portugal, at the turn of 2017-2018. For the exhibition they produced a precise white model of the project in its surrounding landscape of fjelds. The model shows the beauty, experiential richness and poetic power of Tapio Wirkkala's line in the solitary arctic wilderness.

⁵ In August 2012 the couple came to meet the writer of this essay at the San Martin Pinario Monastery in Santiago de Compostela in Spain, and after that encounter Pallasmaa could provide advice and information for their research and exhibition project as well as for their journey to the wilderness. They made the journey to Saivaara with Sami Wirkkala's son Sebastian and his wife, who are both trained wilderness guides.

Bio Author

Juhani Pallasmaa (born 1936), is a Finnish architect, educator and writer who has worked, taught and lectured in several countries since the 1960's. His design works extends from town planning and architecture to exhibition, product and graphic design and artistic work. His interests as a writer range from architectural theory to anthropology, cultural philosophy to animal architecture, and art criticism to cinematic expression. His work and writings have been published widely in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia.

Books by Juhani Pallasmaa include:

Animales arquitectos: el funcionalismo ecológico de las construcciones animales (Lanzarote 2001); *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki 2001); *Alvar Adto – Villa Mairea 1938-39* (Helsinki 1998); *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (London 1996); *The Melnikov House* (London 1996); *Animal Architecture* (Helsinki 1995) and; *Language of Wood* (Helsinki 1987).

Juhani Pallasmaa's awards include:

Finland State Award 2000; The UIA Jean Tschumi Prize for Architectural Criticism 1999; Fritz Schumacher Prize for Architecture, Germany 1997; Russian Federation Architecture Award 1996; Helsinki City Culture Award 1993 and Finnish State Award for Architecture 1992.



KÄRÄJÄKIVET

Finnish word meaning “court stones” or “circle of stones”: places of judgment (originally iron age graves), where judgments were held and justice carried out, accordingly to the Finnish National Board of Antiquities.

In the ancient times, they were important places where the primitive leaders of the North got together in order to discuss and decide about common matters.

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