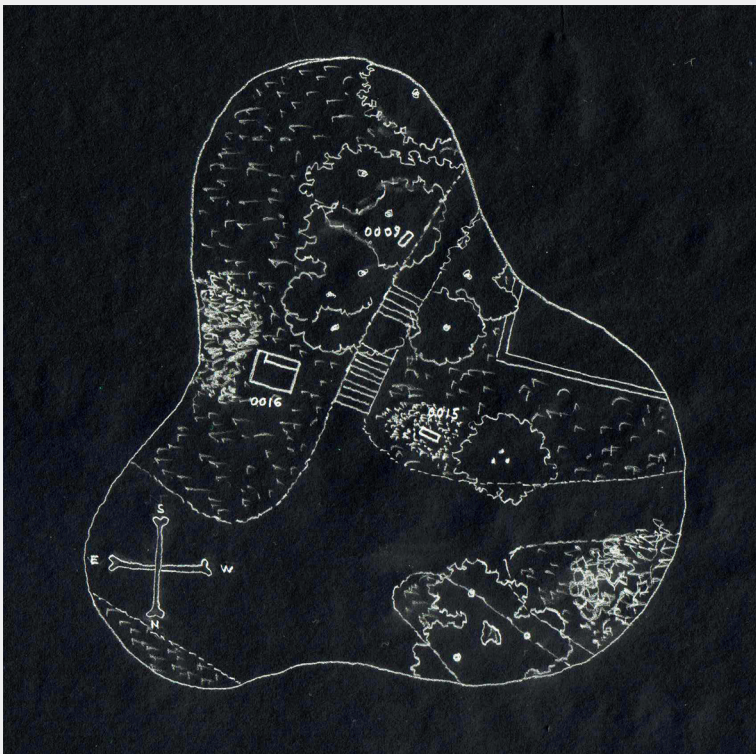


Three Graves in Helsinki

Carlos Puente



Three Graves in Helsinki

A Winter Story

Carlos Puente

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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

This first sequence of four issues from *Käräjäkivet* is now ended with the first fiction story of the overall editorial project. It is a literary creation by the architect Carlos Puente, who generously enabled us the publication of this unedited short story that has the Hietaniemi Cemetery as its main background.

Certainly is not necessary to say it in order to appreciate the beauty of the text, but it is irresistible and perhaps may be pertinent for the reader to refer the circumstance that the author is currently living in Finland or the fact that himself was the architect of the wonderful extension from the Cemetery of Camarma de Esteruelas in Madrid. However, here the most evident thing is that Carlos offers us, first of all, a sincere compliment to the Finnish culture. Then, for instance, makes us think about the different dimensions of Architecture. The cemeteries as spaces that keep things, stones, rests etc., but that can also be places of memory, imagination and ideas. As in the beautiful poem of Tonino Guerra, where the house is not simply a limited cage that contains all kind of objects but rather a place of infinite thoughts that are so light that can't be contained by its own physical limits.

In his book called *Idas y vueltas*, in the epilogue illustrated by images of Mies, Lewerentz, Corbusier and Pikionis, all pictured with their backs turned, Carlos wrote the following:

"The masters always have broad backs and always are available to carry us over them. They promise us paths through which we will find wonders. We just have to keep our eyes wide open."

Can the reader freely think that with this quote we want to make an analogy with Aalto, Waltari and Wirkkala, after all, the main characters of this story. It could well be. But actually we are thanking Carlos, that led us to find the splendor of life in a place where before we saw little more than the harshness of death.



Cemetery Extension in Camarma de Esteruelas (Madrid), 1995.

© Architect Carlos Puente. Photo: Eduardo Sánchez

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A Winter Story

Carlos Puente,
Architect

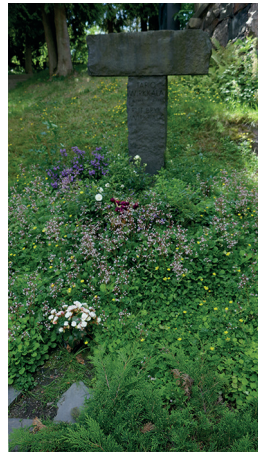
In Helsinki's Hietaniemi Cemetery, Sector 21 houses illustrious tenants from the world of arts and letters. In three of the graves in that area—0009, 0015, and 0016—rest, accompanied by their wives, Mika Waltari, Tapio Wirkkala, and Alvar Aalto (the last by both his wives, Aino and Elissa).

Aalto's and Wirkkala's graves are close to each other, perhaps due to trade affinity; Waltari's not too far away.

Their shapes, and the way they present themselves to the stroller, differ quite a lot: classical and guarded Aalto's, rustic and feral Wirkkala's, modest and tidy Waltari's.

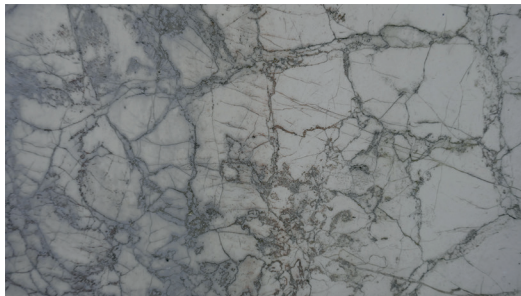
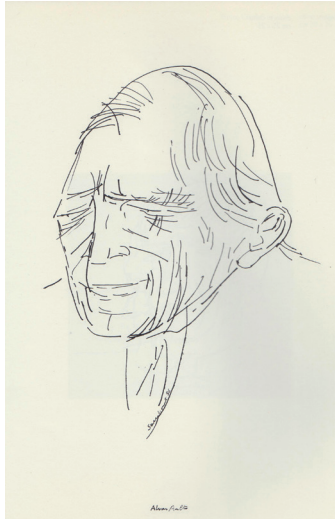
In the largest one, Aalto's, the inscription is engraved on a big white pavonazetto marble headstone. As in the architect's portrait painted by Roberto Sambonet, an intricate filigree of lines traverses the marble, which on the left side is cut into the profile of an amphora, bringing into view a dark stone that lines the back; in front of this emerging background, half an Ionic capital rises. The ensemble has the resolute will to not go unnoticed, and its stone proscenium stands ready to receive the homage of bouquets and crowns.

Wirkkala's, to the right if we look at the graves from the front, and hardly six meters from the other, erects, in precarious balance, a dark stone crux commissa that is the capital letter of its occupant's first name. Coarsely carved, stuck on the grass and surrounded during summer by a heap of small flowers in colorful disarray, its horizontal arm prevents the names carved on the vertical stone from strolling toward Lapland—at least Tapio's.



Alvar Aalto's, Tapio Wirkkala's and Mika Waltari's graves in a summer day.

© Rosana Rubio and Carlos Puente



Between them, a sand path takes us to some steps that elevate us to higher ground where, to our left, we immediately find the Waltari's grave. It's the smallest of the three. Its tombstone has a metal lantern as a companion (the path is dark in the world of the dead), and hostas, now dormant, as well as ferns, edge it. In the inscription, in capital letters, the ae's do without their horizontal rung and transport us to Egypt. Right in front, on the other side of the narrow path, Tauno Hannikainen conducts forever Sibelius's *Valse triste*.

The first two graves look to the north to blind us during our contemplation of them; the third, as could be expected, to the left bank of the Nile.

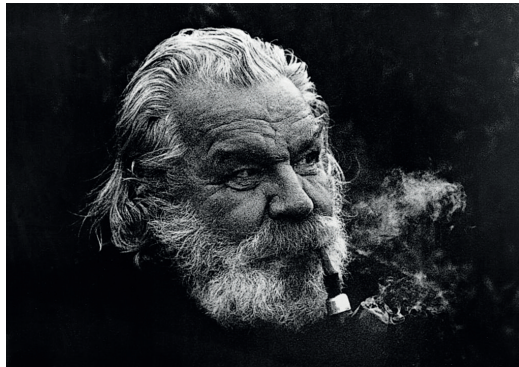
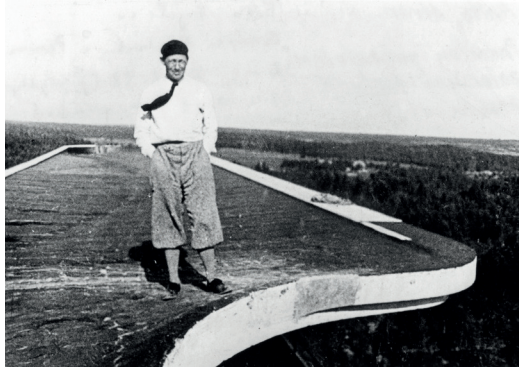
In the coldest and darkest nights of the dark and cold Finnish winters, surprising and little-known things tend to happen in this place, one of which I'm about to tell you.

There is no moon. There are no visitors either and, of course, there are no squirrels. It's 2 a.m. and the sky is greenish, just like when the Lady of Cold is about to appear in the Moomins' winter. Tove Jansson, by the way, also inhabits this cemetery, but she won't take part in our story.

Alvar Aalto's portrait. 1956; Marble of Alvar Aalto's grave.



The “scenery” in a winter morning. Above Wirkkala’s grave, in the background at the right hand side, Waltari’s grave, with its metal lantern.



In reality, the person who appears, leaving grave 0016 stealthily to avoid disturbing his wives, is Aalto; he walks (although I don't think this is the most appropriate verb to explain the displacement of a dead person), dressed as Tintin, up to grave 0015, where Wirkkala rests. He gives a little tap on the tau's hat, and Tapio appears right away, with trekking boots and smoking a pipe. In the white whirlwind of his head, it's hard to distinguish hair from smoke.

A second later they are already sitting on the nearby steps that go to the Waltaris' grave. Right by them we see, without knowing how they have appeared, several bottles of Finlandia vodka and some Ultima Thule glasses. Aalto and Tapio are talking. Talking? Some will say that what sounds like voices is really only the light creaks of the frost, but I tell you they are talking. What are they talking about?

Aalto mentions how much better it is, in the long run, to be given an award for designing a vodka bottle instead of for making a flower vase, judging by the yield that, since Tapio arrived in the cemetery thirty-four years ago, they are getting from the stockpile of bottles the award granted him, especially during such inclement nights as tonight. Tapio comforts Alvar, reminding him of the spark of emotion he must have felt seeing the shape of the lakes from the air and imagining their transformation into glass. Aalto's face becomes dreamy. "Ah! Those airplanes . . ." Aalto was always more into flying; Wirkkala, however, as we would say in Spain, was from where the ox steps or, better said, from where the reindeer steps. How many icicles must have fallen on him during his treks! You can see them in the shape of his glasses.

Alvar Aalto on top of the roof of Paimio Sanatorium, 1932; Tapio Wirkkala, 1984



They hardly ever speak about Finnish architecture and design, and if they have ever spoken of it, I will not replicate their opinions here. I will only say that Alvar grumbles a little when the subject of the wooden cage where his boat is shut away in Muuratsalo comes up, or when Tapio asks him, with a wry smile, about the neighbors that are rising in the south side of Park Töölönlahti. Other than that, most of their relaxed chats are about the Mediterranean when Aalto sets the tone, or about the tundra at the border with Norway when Wirkkala takes the lead; after the third drink, Wirkkala needs to be restrained so he won't run away to fish for thymallus and roast them in a skewer. In the last few years, he has also been very excited about two young Lusitanian architects who have resurrected (what a word to use in a cemetery!) the idea of Urho Kekkonen's memorial in Saivaara; however, even though in his current situation he is not in a hurry anymore, everything goes so slowly . . .

All of a sudden, the faint but growing murmur of a psalmody joins our two characters' voices: "I, Sinuhe, the son of Senmut and of his wife Kipa, write this. I do not write it to the glory of the gods in the land of Kem, for I am weary of gods . . ." Aalto and Wirkkala turn around to see how, unhurried, sliding on the stairs without touching the steps, arrives Mika Waltari. He is in a dark velvet robe with light-colored trim, a white silk scarf at his neck, and Moorish slippers. It may seem like a scarcely suitable attire for the climatological circumstances, but we need to keep in mind that Aten heats up a great deal.

Aalto and his son admiring a seaplane in Turku; Wirkkala in Saivaara, 1978.



Alvar Aalto presenting the Lunning Prize to Tapio Wirkkala, 1951.

© LehtiKuva Oy (Press Photo)

Alvar and Tapio welcome their neighbor, and as good hosts, making room for him between them, they offer him a drink. No, they do not have Egyptian beer from the Eighteenth Dynasty, nor do they have Chartreuse, but they do have vodka. After he accepts it, they let him go on with his monody.

“... why shouldn't we drink wine and be happy in the place the river has brought us to? For it is a beautiful place and we are hidden by the reeds. Storks are crying among them, and I see others flying with outstretched necks to build their nests; the waters gleam green and gold in the sunlight, and my heart is as arrowy as a bird now that I am freed from slavery.”

Time passes slowly and more than a bottle has already gone down. Aalto, who has been showing signs of impatience for a while, can't contain himself any longer and says, “Mika, skip all this boring pharaonic intonation and go straight to the middle of the book, where you speak about Crete.”

And then Waltari, his gaze lost in some spot where a light that could melt all the ice in Finland shines, recites:

“Nowhere in the world, then, have I beheld anything so strange and fair as Crete, though I have journeyed in all known lands. As glistening spume is blown ashore, as bubbles glow in all five colors of the rainbow, as mussel shells are bright with mother of pearl...”

Alvar and Tapio open their mouths so wide that the latter loses his pipe.



Mika Waltari and Tapio Wirkkala. Milan Triennale, 1953.

© Waltari Family Archives

“Their art is strange and wayward. Every painter paints as the fancy takes him, heedless of rules, and he paints *only* such things as in his eyes are beautiful. Vases and bowls blaze with rich color; round their sides swim all the strange creatures of the sea. Flowers grow upon them, butterflies hover over them, so that a man accustomed to an art regulated by convention is disturbed when he sees the work and thinks himself in a dream . . .”

Tapio springs up, snaps his fingers, raises his arms in a cross (commissa), and starts to dance a full-blown sirtaki.

“ . . . Buildings are not imposing like the temples and palaces of other countries, convenience and luxury being the aim rather than outward symmetry. Cretans love air and cleanliness; their lattice windows admit the breeze . . .”

Alvar joins the dance.

Hours go by. It's past 8 a.m. A sort of blurry brightness can be glimpsed in the southeast. The three figures and their bottles and their glasses are dissolving in the air like a hazy mist. But their whispers . . . The whispers stay there; they tangle up on the stones of the graves, they hang from some tree, and if you go to this cemetery and listen attentively, even on a summer day, you may hear a word, or a sentence . . . I heard them. I swear.

Bio Author

Carlos Puente, was born in Bilbao in 1944. He studied architecture at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM) and graduated in 1972. Until 1979, he worked as a collaborator in the office of Alejandro de la Sota, and later in association with Víctor López Cotelo until 1990. Since then, he runs his own office. He currently lives in Finland.

He was professor at the ETSAM in Madrid from 1996 to 2009, and visiting professor at other architecture schools.

His work has been subject of various exhibitions and publications in different countries, and obtained different awards and distinctions, among which should be highlighted:

1987: The Architecture Prize of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid (COAM) for the City Council of Valdelaguna.

1991: The García Mercadal Prize of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Aragón (COAA) for the Zaragoza Library.

1994: The European Community "Europa Nostra" Medal and Diploma for the Restoration of the Palacio de Linares in Madrid.

1994: The European Community "Europa Nostra" Medal and Diploma for the Restoration of the Casa de las Conchas of Salamanca.

1996: The IberFAD "Alejandro de la Sota" Prize for the Ciempozuelos House of Culture (Madrid).

His work has been shown at the Spanish Architecture Biennials 1991, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2005 and 2016.

In 2008 Arquia published his "commonplace book", *Idas y vueltas*.



KÄRJÄKIVET

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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