

# Lulu-journal

Nr.3

"The Pit"

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*Snacket. Photo: Masha Taavoniku, 2018*

On the lawn at the outdoor swimming pool in Malmberget stands the public artwork *The Talk* made by the artist Elsie Dahlberg-Sundberg. The sculpture represents two people sitting opposite one another in conversation. One is passive, with legs crossed, the right elbow resting on the thigh, and the hand supporting the head. The other enthusiastic, leaning forward with legs wide apart and the fists clenched. *The Talk* sits in a space between Välkommaskolan, Svanparken, the indoor sports arena and the ice skating rink. It was in this sports arena that many of the strike committee meetings were held during the Great Miners' Strike of 1969–70. Today, Malmberget is in the middle of an extensive evacuation process, and by 2032 most of the town will be gone. Houses are demolished or moved, and people leave their homes. Before long, *The Talk* will also be lifted and installed someplace else.

People living in Malmberget understand the conditions on which the existence of their com-

munity depends. Even if having to move will be painful, it is also, for some, eagerly anticipated. The specific circumstances to living in Malmberget have provoked a desire to leave. How can you feel safe in a house that seems likely to collapse at any moment? To ensure the continued activity and expansion of the mine, people will now move, and for the most part settle in the neighbouring town Gällivare.

It has evidently been easier to construct a media narrative about the evacuation and relocation of Kiruna, a city some 120 kilometers away. Malmberget sits in the shadow of Kiruna as a model city for city planning. In a conversation in this issue of the Lulu Journal, the artists Agneta Andersson, Britta Marakatt-Labba and Lena Ylipää argue that the relocation Malmberget is actually more visible and brutal. Both the built environment and the nature around Malmberget carry physical wounds, making the story of this town harder to spin into one of success and pro-

gress. The obstacles to such a narrative might in fact be too many and too glaring.

Slowly we get closer to the darkness.

Passing The Pit that splits Malmberget in two, to the human grief and the anger around the evacuation,

and by looking back to see the pride of the labourers that spent most of their their lives working in underground mines.

In the essay The Hole Masha Taavoniku describes the places where she grew up, whereof some are represented through a series of photographs. The essay reflects on the mechanisms of memory and the complex feelings surrounding the gradual disappearance of an entire society. It is accompanied by illustrations with the title Boom, conceived by the artist Olivia Plender in response to the text.

Malmberget has a long tradition of powerful labour unions, but the strength and radicalism of these organisations became especially evident during the miners' strike in the late 1960s, as portrayed by the filmmaker Lena Ewert. From the book Strejkkonsten [The Art of the Strike] by Ingela Johansson is an interview with the miner Ove Haarala, in which he confesses his love for working underground. Researcher Margareta Ståhl has written an introduction, Gruvfanor i norr (Mining Banners of the North), to the various banners that represent the miners' unions in the region.

Johansson's video My father worked is a montage that relates the physical labour of fathers to the history of Workers' Educational Association, exemplified by the Ashington Group from Northumberland – an artist group consisting of miners that was widely exhibited between 1934–1984. Archival material from the correspondence between the group and Whitechapel Gallery is intertwined in the narrative. The questions we asked Andersson, Marakatt-Labba and Ylipää are mainly founded in an interest in their working conditions. What is their experience of working as artists in places where the mining industry has been the very condition for the construction of society? Societies, which now are undergoing comprehensive evacuations and infrastructural transformations.

There is not one talk to be had about Malmberget. Rather, a new one starts every day. But

there are attempts to portray, disseminate and reproduce stories. This issue of the Lulu Journal is one such attempt.

*Ingela Johansson and Masha Taavoniku,  
editors*

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue: Agneta Andersson, Lena Ewert, Ove Haarala, Britta Marakatt-Labba, Olivia Plender, Margareta Ståhl and Lena Ylipää.

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*Ingela Johansson is an artist and writer. She recently participated in the Portable Landscapes exhibition at the Latvian Center for Contemporary Art in Riga. In 2013 she released the book The Art of the Strike: Voices on political and cultural labour during and after the miners' strike, 1969–70 (Ed. Kim Einarsson & Martin Högström, Glänta produktion).*

*Masha Taavoniku is an art historian and writer. She works for the choreographer Cristina Caprioli, in the non-profit association ccap. She has previously worked for more than 10 years in the Swedish trade union movement.*

→ *The Hole*

Masha Taavoniku

In a few years, Malmberget will no longer exist as it used to. It is a mining community under evacuation, which has long been characterised by movement. Before the iron ore was discovered, Sami people lived in and moved around this region. Much later, nightly vibrations spread from explosions in the mine through the ground into bodies and the foundations of houses. In the middle of Malmberget is The Pit – a massive hole caused by the mining operations that splits the community into two halves, and testifies to the conditions for its entire existence.

When I arrive in Gällivare by night train, it is hot. It is a summer we will remember. In the future, someone might say that it was 30 degrees for almost all of July. On the trees and bushes the leaves hung like dry dish cloths until, a few weeks later, they loosened and fell as if it were autumn. Some trees even dropped their branches. People will say that it was impossible to think or work, but that we nonetheless had to, even though fields and gardens lay parched and the open office landscapes were even hotter than outside. And no one will forget how the rain still failed to make an appearance as the forest fires reached their peak. Grandmother says it has been hot for too long. The stories will all be different, but the protagonist of all collective memories in the future will be the heat. Even before I go to Malmberget, I decide to cycle up the mountain to be close to all the places I wonder if we will remember. It is strange to know that everything will soon be gone. On the roads in between Gällivare and Malmberget I say it out loud, because it comes as a surprise:

*– I don't remember the air smelling this much of forest.*

The scent of the forest disappeared from memory faster than the perfumes we used in high school. *CK One or Tommy Girl*. Perhaps it was because the forest was always just there that I can't remember a beginning or an end to its scent. The body effortlessly recalls all roads and



*Photo: Unknown, Year: Missing*

shortcuts, but in Malmberget, many of them are disrupted by a fence that marks the areas in risk of collapse; areas that continuously expand to include more land. The fencing encloses the 200 metre deep and 21 acre large pit, which separates the eastern part of the town from its centre in the northwest. A huge hole, barely visible from ground level, just above one of the mountain's over 20 ore bodies.

During the 17th century, long before the railroad reached Malmberget, Sami people discovered the first ore deposits, which were later mined in small quarries just north of The Pit and transported by ackja!. When the mining community and the railway were established, people had to let go of the place that was before. Even those who stayed soon saw the transformations of the environments around them. In the mid-1900s large-scale mining begun with explosions underground. The cavities that occurred where the ore was extracted led the surrounding mountain to collapse into the voids. And slowly the voids moved closer to the face of earth. At the end of the 1960s, in order to avoid that masses of ground material would fall into the voids, LKAB started to remove the top 30–40 metres of soil in the area. On New Year's night in 1971, the field broke in and The Pit was a fact.<sup>2</sup>

In the book *Post-Industrial Landscape Scars*, the cultural geographer Anna Storm uses the scar as a metaphor to describe places that have been marked by different types of industries. Storm believes that Malmberget, which still has an active mining industry, differs from post-industrial societies where the industries have been shut down. The difference is time: the landscape's contradictory healing processes, and continuous changeability. Due to its specific circumstances, the location does not only represent the past,



Photo: Unknown, Year: Missing

4 although prospects for the future are uncertain. Storm writes: “The situation is liminal, like a scab, vulnerable and easily turned into a wound once more.”<sup>3</sup> It takes more time for a wound to heal when everything around it keeps moving.

Much of what I think I remember shifts as I move around the town. High up on the mountain, among the old wooden houses in the area called Kilen, I have to find someone to ask how to get to the centre of Malmberget. The streets and paths are not the same as before. The scab is itching. But it’s not just me who’s different – that misremembers and no longer is able to recognise myself or the places around me – the landscape also testifies to a long and ongoing transformation. In this similarity between us, I find comfort. It’s as if it doesn’t really matter, what I, up until this point, believed to understand and remember about Malmberget or my relation to it. The darkvoid in the landscape liberates and makes room for fragmentary stories of what has been and what may come. Chronology glows in its absence, but I get the feeling that it’s okay. I have not come here to write history.

In the actor, playwright and director Mattias Fransson’s radio series *The boy who never stopped digging*<sup>4</sup> (2016) a hole in the ground contains utopian potentials. The series takes place in a small village in Västerbotten. One day when

9-year-old Johan runs through the woods, he finds a shovel leaning against a tree. He grabs it, and starts digging. Hours, days, months go by and Johan continues to dig.

– *Stop digging now, Johan!*

– *Johan, dinner’s ready!*

After a while, more and more people join the excavation. In less than a year, one of the shops in the village sells over 700 shovels.

– *It felt better when we were digging, you see.*

*Everyone had the same goal; everyone wanted to achieve something.*

The hole in the forest gets deeper, and in the end some of the people who have been digging decide to make a settlement inside it. They inaugurate a public square and open shops, a health clinic and a pizzeria. It takes half a day, it is said, to get to the bottom of the pit. At its edge, hundreds of metres above, is a point of assemblage for people still living in the village. The hole has a magnetic pull.

– *I’m here to try and find, well ... Find answers and, you know, when you look down here you get in touch with something ... Something infinite.*

In Malmberget, The Pit has swallowed parts of the town as it used to be. I thought I came here to regain something I had lost, or maybe forgotten, but it turns out I've come here to dig. In the centre, like most other restaurants and shops, Danne's Street Kitchen is empty. The 11-storey apartment building Focushuset, where my grandparents lived for a few years, is dilapidated but beautiful. All stairwells that smell of old cigarette smoke, for me, are this exact stairwell. All cigarettes smoked are those of my grandfather, even though he stopped smoking a long time ago, and is no longer even alive. The cracked asphalt roads that continue in the enclosure behind the fence end abruptly at the edge of The Pit. Perhaps those who have lived in Malmberget their whole lives have been driven to accept the malleability of the place as well as their memory of it. Storm believes that LKAB's evident dominance over the town has resulted in a lack of articulated and shared views among the population.<sup>[5]</sup> Instability is a part of everything. It echoes in the conversations. It is one with the anger, hope, even, and especially, the ground itself.

I can't see The Pit properly. The fence prevents my body from getting sufficiently close and my eyes can't see through the trees and bushes that grow wild on the other side of it. It is said that it is best seen from above. Views of The Pit in Malmberget and of the Aitik opencast mine outside Gällivare show nature as a wound caused by the immense exploitation of the resources. An industry that consumes the land, feeds the inhabitants, and displaces the people indigenous to it. In the publication *At the edge of The Pit: People's experiences of living in Malmberget today* (1995) Karin Johansson recalls the conversations she had with people about their life by The Pit. During one of the meetings, the Malmberget-resident Marie Ridderström says:

"In a way, it's like Mother Earth. You open up the ground. It's almost like after a difficult childbirth. Mother Earth is defiled and then stripped of her valuables. Then the mother is left behind to die, maybe. Then the ore comes out into the world. The iron is useful to a lot of people, but bad things are made of iron as well. Weapons and ammunition, for example. (...)

"The Pit reminds us of the mortality of everything. It makes our perspective on life seem so limited. You get a heightened sense

of life from it. It's like living next to death."<sup>[6]</sup>

For the first ten years of my life, I lived just a few hundred metres from the fence at the junction of Norra Kungsallén and Majorsgatan. The lupins have come here to prevail, they grow in the garden and outside it, encroaching on the neighbour's plot. When I look through the kitchen window, I can see straight through the house. All the furniture, lamps and curtains are gone. The people who lived here have moved. Probably they were bought out by LKAB and now live in another house in the new area Repisvaara or someplace else in the adjacent town Gällivare. Little by little, Malmberget will be dismantled, and LKAB are expected to complete the evacuation and urban transformation by 2032.<sup>7</sup> Empty villas lay scattered all over town. Feelings are ambivalent: that heightened sense of life is not recognised by everyone – sometimes, other, more urgent, things have to come first. A number of the town's inhabitants are still waiting to move out of their houses even though they want nothing more than to leave Malmberget. The blasts from the mine and their aftershocks create fear. Beds move about, waking people up in the night, and many are worried that their house will collapse at any moment. In a report from Swedish Radio's newsprogramme Ekot, (2012) Kurt Hansson says:

"We are prisoners in our own home. You can't sell it for a reasonable price, so that you can buy something else. It's like a big dog kennel here. And who wants to live in a dog kennel? It makes me so angry that they keep treating us like this. They ought to move away all of Malmberget, so we don't have to deal with this misery."<sup>8</sup>

The evacuation plan is extensive as new areas and replacement housing need to be built. Since 2012, more people have been evacuated, but many still remain in Malmberget. Within a couple of years, the neighbourhood of my childhood home will be behind the fence. For other areas, it will take longer. From the street, I can see that the roller blinds in my parents' old bedroom are still there. It's almost as if someone not from here has come to tell me how to react to the fact that soon my childhood home will be no more. Though I did not realise it at the time, I now know that our home started disappearing already as we moved away, becoming more and more estranged as time went by. The time has come to replace that roller blind. As I cycle away, I think

about the big silver birch that stands outside the window of the room that used to be mine, and hope that it will make it through all of this.

A few days later I'm in the car in Luleå, about **250** kilometres from Malmberget. Outside the window is SSAB's steelworks where the ore extracted in, among other places, Malmberget is transported by train. I'm reminded of what Marie Ridderström said of the different uses of iron. Germany has long been one of Sweden's greatest iron ore trade partners. During the Second World War, **25** percent of the raw iron supply in Germany came from Sweden. At the end of the **1930s**, most of the exports went there. Because Swedish ore also has an especially high iron content, the German steelworks could save on labour as well as power in the blast furnaces.<sup>9</sup> It was from the port of Luleå that the ore was transported to Germany. The transport even took place from the other end of the railway, in Narvik in Nazi-occupied Norway. Many protested against the Swedish trains, which, during the war, were freighted with German military and iron ore. However, in spite of these protests from the allied countries as well as other parties, Sweden continued to export steel to Germany throughout the war. Steel that strengthened German warfare, and as such impacted the war as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

My brother says that the lake next to the steelworks is always around **20** degrees. It is said that the fish that live there grow faster than fish elsewhere in the area. Dad says that when he used to work on the ore transportation trains, if he put his hand against the window, he could feel the heat from the steelworks. I remember when I went in the train with him from Luleå to Gällivare, how the only trace left of the reindeer that had been run over on the way down were meat scraps and blood stains in the snow. When spring came, the snow melted.

I dig, without knowing exactly what I'm looking for, but I'm getting closer. Malmberget lives in the body, and the wound that itches is not only in the land, but also on the surface of the skin. In **2001**, LKAB had the idea to refill The Pit and heal the traces and wounds left on the landscape by the mining industry. But the logistics were difficult and the dust from falling rocks and boulders that were dumped into the hole spread like a blanket over the whole town. Everything got dirty and, over time, as one side of the wound was aided, the other began to grow worse. It was as if

nature refused to cover up the violence that had been inflicted on it.

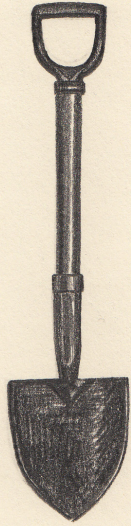
In **2009**, LKAB discontinued the project. The hole, simply, could not be filled.

1. An ackja is a Sami sleigh drawn by reindeer.
2. Norrländska Socialdemokraten [Social Democratic Newspaper of Norrland], "Gamla Gropen lever upp igen", **2012-03-22**, <http://www.nsd.se/nyheter/gallivare/gamla-gropen-lever-upp-igen-6803172.aspx> (Accessed **2018-07-02**)
3. Storm, Anna, Post-industrial landscape scars [Electronic resource], New York, New York, **2014**[**2014**], p. **154**.
4. *The boy who never stopped digging* is available to listen to in Swedish on the website of Swedish Radio. Part 1: <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/719749?programid=3171>  
Part 2: <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/719750?programid=3171>
5. Storm, **2014**, p. **153**.
6. Johansson, Karin, *Vid kanten av Gropen: människors upplevelser av att bo i Malmberget idag: en nutidsdokumentation* [At the edge of The Pit: People's experiences of living in Malmberget today], Gällivare kommuns folkbibl., Malmberget, **1995**, p. **12**.
7. LKAB, "Två samhällen blir ett", **2017-08-27**, <https://samhallsomvandling.lkab.com/sv/malmbergetgallivare/tva-samhallen-blir-ett/> (Accessed **2018-07-10**)
8. Sveriges Radio, "5 000 bor vid gruvgröp som rasar i Malmberget", **2012-11-04**, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=5334372> (Accessed **2018-07-02**)
9. Fritz, Martin (red.), *En (o)moralisk handel?: Sveriges ekonomiska relationer med Nazityskland* [(Im)moral trade? Sweden's economic relations with Nazi-Germany], Forum för levande historia, Stockholm, **2006**, p. **153-154**. [https://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/material\\_file/skriftserie-2-en-omoralisk-handel.pdf](https://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/material_file/skriftserie-2-en-omoralisk-handel.pdf) (Accessed **2018-07-12**)
10. Storm, **2014**, p. **25**.

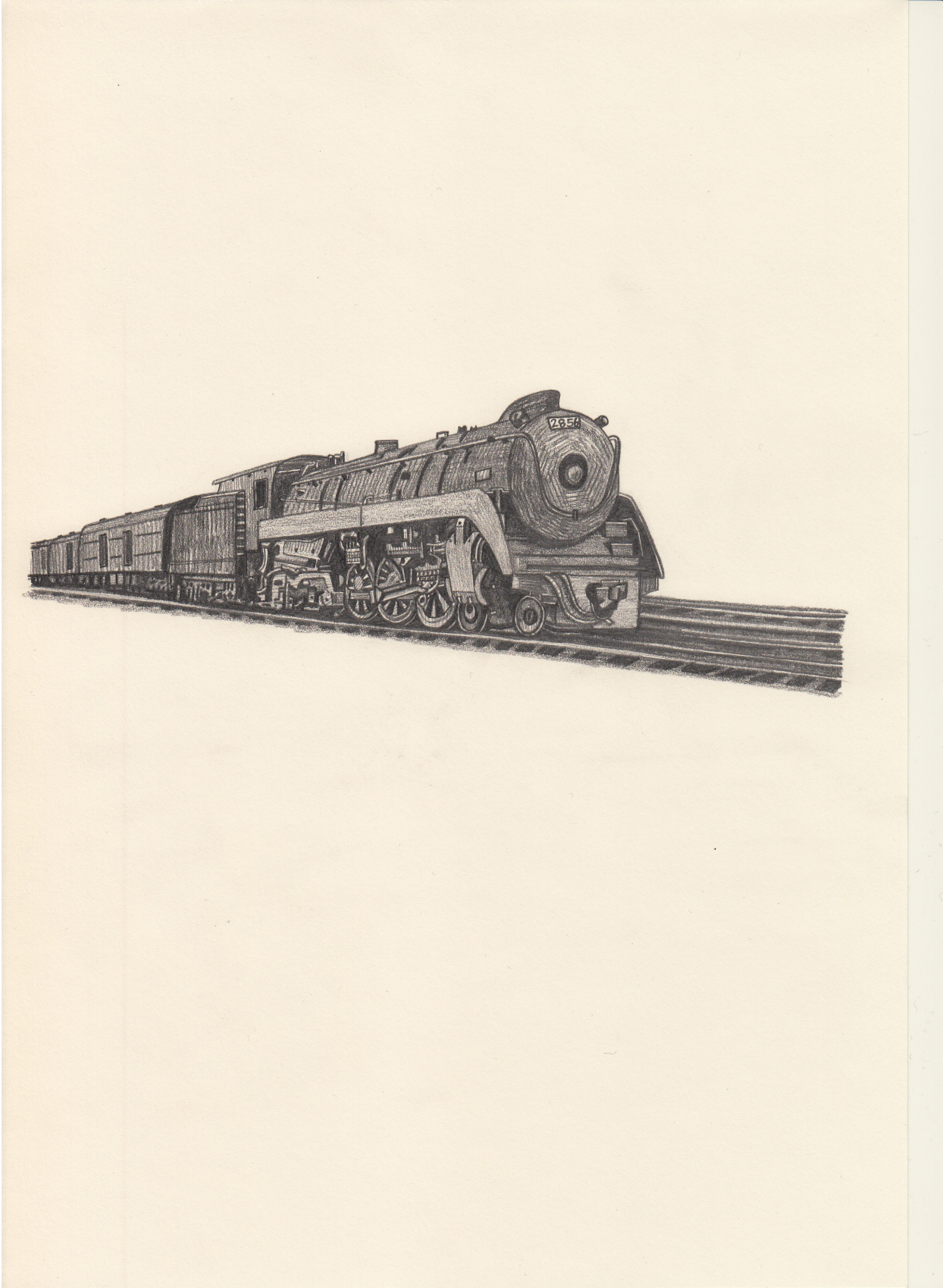
→ *Boom*  
Olivia Plender



Olivia Plender is an artist, born in Great Britain, and currently an artistic researcher at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm. Her work often involves research into histories of social, radical and religious movements. The work is manifest in a wide variety of forms: installations, drawings, videos, banners, costumes, performances and comics. Plender's drawings for the Lulu Journal are concerned with Sweden's involvement with the weapons industry and the role of mining in the North. Plender has exhibited in museums internationally. Solo exhibitions include: Maureen Paley Gallery, London; Arnolfini, Bristol; MK Gallery, Milton Keynes; Gasworks, London; Marabouparken, Sundbyberg, Sweden.









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→ *Some pictures from Malmberget (and one from Luleå)*  
Masha Taavoniku



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→ *Interview with Ove Haarala, from the book “The Art of the Strike”*

Ingela Johansson

Ove Haaraka, former miner and member of the strike committee, in conversation with Ingela Johansson. Malmberget, 2010.

IJ: Can you tell me about your upbringing and your career as a miner?

OH: I was an errand boy at LKAB here in Malmberget. Then I went to the mining school, a good school, the first educational programme that LKAB had. In my family, where I grew up, my brother got to go to school, and I had to work – that was just how things were. My little sister was a latecomer. My father never worked in a mine, he was a builder. And since became the Ombudsman for The Swedish Building Workers’ Union in 1956 or 1957, my interest in the trade came second. My political interest, I suppose, was there to an extent. But in 1957 I went to a festival in Moscow with young people from all over the world. That really stirred my interest, and made me among the first to try to break with the old communist party. I encountered an incredible amount of opposition in my Youth Federation. I was a member of DU, Democratic Youth. There were a lot of conflicts there. That’s why I calmed down politically and started working with the unions instead. I was a secretary in the mining board for many years.

I started working as a miner after the recruit in Kiruna. That was in 1960 - from then on, I was underground for 39 years. The best workplace in the world. Absolutely wonderful. You longed to go to work – vacation was the worst thing I knew. To be digging in the sand somewhere abroad would drive me mad. It was the job, the mining maps and the camaraderie that made me like it. I only worked four months above ground, they were the most terrible months of my life. I didn’t think the jargon and the conversation was the same as what I had experienced underground. I’ve been a part of such a fantastic development underground, from using hand-held carbide lamps to battery-powered lighting attached to the mining helmet.

IJ: There’s a strong political engagement up here in the ore field at Malmberget. Why its that?

OH: Historically, I think it has to do with the

feudal system. I grew up in Koskullskulle. That mine was owned by Germans. Germans, Austrians and Czechoslovakians scattered all over the place after the First World War and passed power back and forth between them. I think it is a remnant of the feudal system that we all had to be united against the employer regardless of political opinion. Koskullskulle was a particularly strong communist stronghold with a strong union. I was not a member of it, since it disappeared before I started working. The mining chief was very strong - even though social democrats and communists always argued and fought. In the past, when crisis really erupted, we would only have one opponent, the one who fucked us over all the time... That kind of solidarity was especially present underground. There, you have to protect each other, even if you mostly worked on a contract. It did not matter - you have to help each other all the time, otherwise you’d get yourself killed. That made for a nice community.

IJ: The community that you describe can be experienced today through documentation. I’ve seen Lars Westman and Lena Ewert’s documentary *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised...*

OH: I had a lot of luck with Lasse Westman and Lena Ewert. Perhaps it was because Lasse and I got along well, and Lena and I, too. I borrowed Lasse’s Pentax camera, and photographed a little where Lasse didn’t have access, he was not allowed in everywhere. I was lucky enough to end up in the small negotiation delegation, the one that met LKAB first, together with Kurt Nordgren, the second chairman of The Swedish Trade Union Confederation. I was one of the few underground workers in the Strike Committee. There weren’t really so many underground workers in the Strike Committee. Actually, it was not miners who were in the majority in the Strike Committee, neither in Kiruna nor in Malmberget.

IJ: VWhat do you mean, the miners were not the majority in the committee?

OH: Most of them worked above ground.

IJ: Was that a significant division?

OH: Yes, it was, even if the industrial principle from 1963 meant that we all went under the same professional title. Previously, the Electricians’ Federation and the Transport Association were involved in LKAB. We became miners in 1963-1964 and had the trade union in Grängesberg. I have to say, I enjoyed my time at LKAB, except when I was above ground.

## → *Mining Banners of the North* Margareta Ståhl

The researcher Margareta Ståhl has made a summary of banners from the turn of the century, which are filed in various departments belonging to Gruvarbetarförbundet (the Miners' Confederation). The text closely resembles an inventory, something that Margareta Ståhl spent many decades devoted to at the Swedish Labour Movement's Archive and Library. She is Sweden's premier banner expert.

Read more in "Vår enighets fana: ett sekel av fackliga fanor" (1998), LO, 1998, and "Vår fana röd till färgen: fanor som medium för visuell kommunikation under arbetarrörelsens genombrottstid i Sverige fram till 1890" (1999), Linköping: University of Linköping, 1999.

1. Luossavara-Kirunavara Workers' Union - the organisation that eventually became the Miners' Confederation's 12th Division - was formed in 1900 and, after two years of operation, acquired this banner, which is probably the inaugural emblem of their association. Previously, they had a demonstration banner with the association's name and foundation date.

2. The Swedish Mining Industry Workers' Union's 4th Division in Malmberget acquired this banner in 1933, decorated by the banner-painter Johan Adolf Hellberg (1871-1935) in Torshälla. Their first banner was inaugurated already in 1897, but was lost in the great Folkets Hus fire in Malmberget in 1953.

3. The 80th Division of the The Swedish Electricians' Federation in Malmberget first flew this banner in 1954. On the red cloth, local symbolism is paired with the lighting rod associated with the trade. The nearby mountain Dundret is pictured with the emblem of the federation above. Its backside bears the dictum "Organisation is Power" over a hand holding a torch with a sunrise in the background. The banner is made at Lindblad's flag studio in Örebro.

4. The Miners' Union's 40th division in Svartöstden, whose members work in Luleå's ore harbour, introduced its ensign one week before the first of May in 1908. It shows a mining carriage framed by a wreath of oak leaves. The adages on the back read "Unity gives Strength" and "Proletarians Unite" in a circle around the earth.



1.



2.



3. (front and back)







4. (front and back)

→ *Lena Ewert*  
– *and the great miners' strike*  
Ingela Johansson

In 1970, the film-maker Lena Ewert, together with her colleague Lars Westman, made the film *Comrades, the Opponent is Well-Organised*.

*To the Strike Committees  
Kiruna, Malmberget and Svappavaara*

*When the strike is over, there must be a document that says what the strike really was about and for Swedish workers to take part in. When I (Lena Ewert) was here before Christmas, I saw that no filmmaker is working to make a comprehensive depiction of it all. That's why Lars Westman and I arranged money during Christmas to do this.*

*We have the tools (cameras and tape recorders) and know how to operate them, but the only ones who know what ought to be said in the film are you miners.*

*Lars and I agree that we do not want to be "thinkers and interpreters", but rather to put our knowledge about film-making at your disposal, and for you to feel that this is your film, and that it speaks your language.*

*When the film is complete, the strike committees will be given copies that can be displayed in, for example, Folkets Hus and other premises across Sweden.*

*(...) So far, we have filmed public meetings with an emphasis on the workers in the "audience". We hope that with this you have understood that we are not driven by a frenzy for "newsworthiness", and that the internal meetings and other things we wish to film are strictly confidential.*

*In addition, we are discussing the possibility bringing editing equipment to Kiruna for the film's completion. Because that part of the work must also be done together and be supervised by the miners.*

*Comradely greetings,  
Lena Ewert och Lars Westman!*

I met Lena Ewert in connection with my research on the Great Mine Strike winter 1969-70 in the Malmfälten - where nearly 5,000 miners employed at LKAB put down work for five weeks. The filmmaker Lena Ewert was one of the many cultural workers who came to show her solidarity with the workers, and engage with their situation. "The mining strike created a crack in the facade of Sweden's cosy self-image of the People's home- and radicalised cultural life in Sweden". This is approximately what I write in the preface to my book *The Art of the Strike*.

My idea as an artist was to create a project through which to investigate the historically important, and in my generation perhaps forgotten, miners' strike through the solidarity that emerged in the wake of the 68-movement. At that time, I sought an art world beyond competitiveness, market value and commodification. Why not look back at the specific examples from the strike, which concerned solidarity? is what I thought.

During these years, the relevance of the strike has been confirmed, if, for instance, we turn to the struggles faced by the unions. Not least, the ongoing conflict in the port of Gothenburg today reminds us of how important it is to protect the right to strike. And in addition, the strike among the workers in the same port in November 1969, three weeks before the mining strike, is what ignited the wave major strikes in Sweden in the 1970s.

The result of my research has taken the form of a book and exhibitions about one of Sweden's most radical strikes and its cultural output some 40 years after the event. I have been thinking a lot about whether I have done those on strike as well as all involved cultural workers justice? An impossible task, of course, since I can only try to interpret impressions using my tools as an artist. In retrospect, I think that what I faced does not come close to the responsibility that Lena Ewert felt weighing on her shoulders, together with her colleague Lars Westman, to disseminate one of Sweden's largest labor market conflicts throughout the ages.

In 1969, Lena Ewert is looking for a different political reality, away from the urban environment and away from the caustic debates surrounding the films she contributed to during the Film School years. Ewert, who previously participated in the most radical film productions of the late

1960s (The Record Years 1966, 1967, 1968 and The White Sport, which were made at the Film School), now wants to design a film project for herself. She embarks on a new challenge, causing her to taking a different kind of political and social responsibility as a filmmaker no longer in school. Ewert goes to a strike meeting in Kiruna and experiences a very strong strike. Soon afterwards, she invites the filmmaker Lars Westman to return with her, and see it for himself:

*I went up there because Lena had been to Kiruna and seen that it was a very strong strike. Lena and I needed to get away from everything in Stockholm, it was that sort of period in our lives. I drove a Citroën cabriolet, it was cold, and we arrived five minutes before the strike meeting began. We started filming right away, without asking, we just went in. They saw us, we were the only ones who filmed, the others had their cameras switched off. Lena and I did not think the strike would last so long, we had no plans to be gone for so long. We did not have money for it. But we decided while we were up there that if no one else does this, then we'll have to do it, we'll make it work.<sup>2</sup>*

19 Together with her friend Lars from her student days at the Documentary Film School, who had just made the controversial film *Conveyer Belt* about workers at LM Ericsson's factory, she begins a dialogue with the miners that resulted in *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised* (1970).

They put SEK 90,000 towards the film. A sum they accumulated through stipends, bank loans with the help of the strike fund as creditor, and their own funding. In one of the hundreds of committee protocols from the strike, it is noted that 10% of the net income from public screenings of the film should be distributed as the Strike Committee saw fit.<sup>3</sup>

Other filmmakers from the alternative scene also supported them. Filmcentrum, made up of a group of young political activists, was perceived as an alternative to the heavy institution of the Film Institute, and supported urgent society reportage. The first agitprop films, according to the writer and filmmaker Carl Henrik Svenstedt, came from France to Stockholm around 1968. Filmcentrum helped and contributed a editing equipment that they sent up with Ulf Berggren to Gällivare. Carl Henrik Svenstedt from "Film-

centrum" since followed with the money they had collected:

*I have tried to figure out how much money it was. I remember being ashamed because I thought it wasn't a lot, but nobody knows or remember how much money it was. But I asked Lena what this meant, solidarity from the bottom up, so to speak. She said there had been no film if they had not received the support, there is no question that it was absolutely crucial to the project. It was a great scene to walk into: you arrive in Gällivare, and there, inside a barrack, are Lasse Westman and Lena Ewert, editing. It was midsummer night, it was bright outside, and there were always two miners with them, because it was part of the socialist concept that workers would be there to check the quotes. So it was out of this material and these chaotic conditions that the film *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised* came, and, as far as I can judge, it is one of the best resistance films that have been made when it comes to raising the issues of the working class.<sup>4</sup>*

The film *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised* does not contain a single interview, they captured everything as it happened, in situ, because they understood the material to be an invaluable testimony to the time. But the film is not as spontaneous as you might imagine.

19 While they enjoyed strong support for their film among the miners, they were also aware of the responsibility that came with it. Some of the precautionary measures they were had to contend with are to give a vow of silence, and to keep recorded material from internal meetings in a bank vault, to be retrieved only as approved by the Strike Committee. The Strike Committee would also approve which scenes from the 21- and 27- mandate delegations could be included.<sup>5</sup> An editing committee was eventually formed of six representatives from the Strike Committee together with Ewert and Westman.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the people I've met over the years recall the courage of the miners in speaking to large crowds in sports arenas and town halls; that they were able to take the floor to not only speak freely and from the heart but also with great rhetorical skill. There were many strong voices among them, such as: Harry Isaksson, Elov Luspa and Martin Gustavsson. The strike is well document-

ed, so it would not be possible to distort the story of one of Sweden's most radical strikes. For the first time, a strike could be followed through film, television and radio. Unfortunately, the media was quite reluctant to document the process because of how wild the strike was, and not sanctioned by the Swedish Trade union's Confederation (LO). LKAB was one of Sweden's largest state-owned companies and an industrial crown jewel. The only ones that let the cameras roll as much as they could were Ewert and Westman.

The strike was surveyed and monitored even by IB. It was a sensitive situation - the strike constituted a threat to democracy and the Social Democratic government party, together with the LO, did everything to break it.

The spaces in which the strike took place, the mining towns Kiruna and Malmberget, have changed dramatically. Soon, they will no longer even be in the same locations. Malmberget has been eradicated, and the community forced to migrate to Gällivare because of the mining industry. Two thousand homes, as well as association rooms, the church, sports facilities, the bathhouse, the iceskating field, schools and retirement homes will be moved or demolished. Also in Kiruna you can witness houses rolling away on trailers to be move to the newly planned town. But the mental traces left in the spaces where the striking miners congregated, such as the town hall, will not be erased. That strong feelings about the strike remain with the children of the miners and their families was something that really affected me. One miner I called up to ask out about the strike said that enough is enough: he had no more to say on the matter. He wanted to rest and find peace in his soul in the final years of his life. Lena Ewert took the strike extremely seriously, and came, also on a private level, to identify with the place - Malmberget was never a temporary retreat, but somewhere she would stay on and that provided her with a family for a long period of her life.

For me, *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised* is an important document of its time because it was made with workers, for workers, and as such will always remind us of the people who were behind the strike. The persistence and accuracy of Ewert in portraying the strike as democratically and true to her principles as possible, has fascinated me immensely. These were not a normal circumstances for making a film. This happened while everything was still at stake, and all of



Stillbild från Kamrater, motståndaren är välorganiserad. Filmen finns att se på Youtube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5FBQzRuIwo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5FBQzRuIwo)

Sweden held its breath. To be so strong in coping with this kind of division of labour, responsibility and pressure from within the film crew, but also the pressure from the outside, the controversy of the strike, is admirable. This is what Lena Ewert herself said at a strike meeting:

*... the most important thing about the film is that it is the miners' own view on the matter that its expressed. That the miners after the strike have their own film with their view on the matter is very important because many different interpretations in the form of books, radio and television programs will be made. It is about time that the workers have their own film.*<sup>7</sup>

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E-mail Interview with Lena Ewert, 4 August 2019, from the book *The Art of the Strike*.

Ingela: When you look back on the three films you made during the 60s today, what strikes you as the deriving force behind your engagement with political film? (*The White Sport, The Record Years, Comrades, the opponent is well-organised*).

Lena: All films are political. (To not take a stand is also taking a stand). I chose to make films that portrayed events that were beyond myself. I know that even in this type of film, I am also the one who sees, hears, and makes decisions in the editing room, that is, interprets what I've seen. But after many years of working in theatre and after a Bergman-inspired film school experience, I needed to direct the camera lens away from myself.

Ingela: What did The White Sport, with group 13, mean to you as a filmmaker?

Lena: It was a confirmation that cinema films can work with the same speed as reportage journalism, and at the same time, relay with detail and objectivity. (Investigative journalism was not on mainstream TV then). And also that all you needed to find a way of working was to have time, a camera, raw film, a sound recorder, and to not hesitate to show up! After the filming (which was the smallest part of the work effort, time-wise) this collaborative spirit of finding resources for developing, cutting, sound recording, etc. continued. It was the beginning of working collectively for me. One consequence of our enthusiasm was that the project received support from many sides, even outside of Group 13. (Rock Studio was at our disposal, their lab, mix studio, etc.) Another lesson that I learnt was that the Film School was not free of the power structures of the rest of society. The film school director Harry Schein and then-chief of police, Carl Persson, agreed that the unedited film material should be made available to the police for them to identify demonstrators. How the two of them had their hopes snuffed is another story. The lesson I took from the mainstream media's treatment was, among other things, that the film, despite the explicitly collective structure behind it, was dubbed "Bo Widerberg's film". (He was on set for three days, and, besides, was busy filming *Elvira Madigan* that summer.)

Ingela: Did you see yourself as part of the 68-movement?

Lena: Yes. In the 60's unorganised. My sympathies were with the Leftist Youth League (which later broke with the mother party, Left Party Communists, after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia). In the 70's, after we had finished working on the film, I was more active in organised local work, like distributing and writing for Stormklockan. I also wrote for Folket i Bild, Kulturfront, NSD, Aftonbladet and others.

Ingela: Why was the mining strike especially important to support?

Lena: The mining strike represented a force that had the possibility to change society in a fundamental way: the demand for influence was strong and clear. Also the demands on salary, and safer work environment received strong support and was subsequently followed up in the logging industry, at Volvo and other places. The Social Democratic Party, as the governing party, was put to the test, and its internal crisis made increasingly visible.

Ingela: What was it like being a female cultural worker in Malmfälten? There is a kind of macho culture in the mines. Did you take a feminist perspective with you?

Lena: A society mostly characterised by heavy industry of course gives way to a certain kind of socialising. In Malmberget, men were completely dominant in mining underground. In Kiruna, there were more women doing similar work. To have a job gives influence. Film jobs were certainly unfamiliar to most and were seen as soft labour. My work with the film about the strike, and the later films for SR TV, was dependent on contact with Stockholm. It probably didn't flow as simply as if I had had the opportunity to meet in person. As for "Macho", I thought that the one holding the camera was given a higher status than the one holding the microphone. But surely this applies in Stockholm, too?

Ingela: Did you perceive the working class to have a key function in terms of driving societal change – that if there was to be a change, it would have to come from the working class?

Lena: The strength of the working class is crucial. But to be successful in changing a society such as Sweden's depends on the collective strength of a wider spectrum of the population.

Ingela: What were your working methods? From the actual filming to the editing room, representatives from the Strike Committee were present throughout the process – in that sense, it was a collective effort. How do you think that worked out?

Lena: The process that took place after the strike, I had not expected. After returning to the work, there was a fatigue in terms of continuing to value and go over the strike. I think not talking about what had happened was a way to avoid the risk of igniting further fragmentation. This was also reflected in the work of the editing team. In the end, we were asked to attend meetings and check the editing and audio. We were careful about protocols and decision-making. We felt the need for transparency, and to really go by the book.

Ingela: How do you think the film was received in the cinemas across the country?

What kind of expectations were at stake?

Lena: A lot of problems arose during distribution. Filmcentrum was helpful. A support group was also formed for the film's distribution, to make sure it was not hushed.

1. From manuscript by Lena Ewert for speech at assembly in Kiruna in 1969.
2. Lars Westman in conversation with Ingela Johansson via Skype, 14 March, 2012.
3. Protocol from the strike committee, 12 May 1970, Archive of the People's Movement, Luleå.
4. "What is the significance of the exhibition as medium in relation to the 68-movement?", seminar at Tensta Konsthall in collaboration with the institute for contemporary history at Södertörn University, Tensta, 17 April 2013.
5. Protocol from the strike committee, 12 May, 1970.
6. *Comrades, the opponent is well-organised* is not the only film that was made about the strike. Also Lars Israelsson and Margareta Vinterheden, who grew up in Malmberget, produced *The Miners' Strike 69-70*. Further cultural productions were made about the strike and the miners, among others: Kajsa Ohrlander's *Poems from Malmberget* with miners' wives, and Narren Theatre's *Solidarity – Workers' Power*, a play about a strike inspired by and partly made in collaboration with miner families in Malmberget.
7. From the book *The Art of the Strike*, Glänta 2013. Strike meeting in Kiruna town hall, 29 December, 1969.

→ *Conversation with the members of the artist group Koncentrat*  
Agneta Andersson,  
Britta Marakatt Labba &  
Lena Ylipää

The artists Agneta Andersson, Britta Marakatt-Labba and Lena Ylipää are three out of eight members of Koncentrat. Koncentrat was formed just over ten years ago as a collective that members, together or individually, can rely on to work on artistic projects, process culture-political questions, or collaborate with others in various activities.

*You come from Malmfälten, Sápmi and Tornedalen, respectively. What is it like to work as artists so far from the cultural and artistic infrastructures that have developed in many cities?*

Lena Ylipää: My focus is on what I have around me. On geography and time, the people in my vicinity and what they do. My cultural background is the basis of my investigations and their outcome, and I use different methods for building content and form. In my process, I appreciate conversation and collaboration, and often work with Anita Ylipää.

After studying at Konstfack, I moved to Lainio, 110 kilometres outside Kiruna, and since a few years I also live in Boden. That I have been able to work close to my place of birth has been very important, both for me personally, and for my work as an artist. To be so far from the centre of the art scene was considered problematic when I moved back to Lainio in the mid-nineties. That there actually is a lot of interesting art activities going on in the northern part of Sweden and the Barents region was not recognised then in the same way as it is today. The question of the centre and so-called periphery has become a hot topic, which is both interesting and pleasantly surprising.

Britta Marakatt-Labba: Since the very beginning, I have embroidered scenes that testify to the everyday life in Sápmi, our mythology, and significant political events. I was born into a family of reindeer hunters who moved between Sweden and Norway. Oral storytelling has always been central and as children we were encouraged to experi-



Lena Ylipää, *Högalidsgatan 3, 1989 (detalj)* 2015

ment and work creatively. The pictures I make come out of this cultural background. My hope has always been that the audience will become curious and ask questions, and that the stories I tell can deter prejudices against Sami people as a group.

Because I have travelled and exhibited extensively, larger art institutions have begun to find me. I live in Övre Soppero in the Kiruna municipality, and have no big problems working with art where I am. But it has to be said that it hasn't always been a walk in the park. A diligent work ethic and great faith in what I am doing have been necessary to get me to where I am today. Through lectures and workshops, more and more people have also begun to recognise embroidery as an art form.

Agneta Andersson: In my most recent work, I have returned to large-scale coal drawings. Contrasts in black and white have become very important in expressing the sadness and frustration that I and many others feel, faced with what is happening in our city. The motifs are taken from Kiruna, where I grew up and since returned to after going to art school. Being an artist is not easy, and being an artist in Norrbotten is especially difficult. Nowadays, I live and work in Luleå, and can consider Kiruna with a bit more distance.

Between my art practice, money-job and love, much of my life has been about facilitating participation and visibility for art in my community. At various places in large and small venues, art has been shown and appreciated by all ages. Public education has been and continues to be an important part of my thinking in terms of the role art can play in our individual as well as societal development. I have great hopes for Kiruna's new institution The Art Museum of the North – Norrbotten County Museum. My dream is that art will have a more prominent role in Norrbotten's society. Art moves us and reflects our lives. It has a creative and positive power.



Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Flytten*, 2016 155 cm × 75 cm

*Your respective practices are all strongly connected to the landscape, nature and the places around you. Many of these sites transform continuously due to the long ongoing mining and exploitation of the land. How do you experience these changes?*

The sites in Malmfälten are small and they are there for the sake of one industry in particular: the mining industry. Many of the smaller places struggle with dwindling populations and a harsh distribution of tax funds. Conservative attitudes in the public sector make for a narrow consideration of what is worthy of support and investment. Other ideas about what society requires to facilitate a good and full life are not given much space to develop. Even when the establishment expresses willingness to think outside the box, that too is based on traditional thinking. In spite of growing desire to develop a wider business sector around tourism and culture, production and heavy industry are continuously prioritised. When the company profits, the city profits. People have jobs and can buy a stimulating time off outside the city. When investments are made in the field of culture, or, for that matter, in urban planning, they do not utilise the knowledge and experience of local artists. Outside of acting as jurors for scholarships and exhibitions, there is a need for broader participatory structure, where our voices may also be heard.

As the mining industry and the demand for minerals grow, the land is further exploited. It is unsafe to live in a society where financial profits in the short-term trump people's need for clean nature and recreational areas, as well as the fields of employment that require space for animal welfare. Few people consider that our incredible nature, which represents hard currency, should be protected for the future and for future generations. What are we leaving for them? But this insecurity spawns thoughts that are useful to an

artistic practice. A practice that concerns what goes on in Malmfälten. What does the future look like? Will there be housing and work? Perspectives from Malmfälten and the northern part of Tornedalen can contribute particular challenges, lots of ideas and important questions about how we treat our nature, what needs we have as humans, and what a possible future might look like.

*You mentioned that smaller towns in the area suffer from decreasing populations. What is your view on the fact that cultural workers often move or choose not to return after their education?*

It is never good when cultural workers leave. Who can conduct a factual discussion, and ensure a nuanced and critical discourse, if the only ones left are people who think in economic terms? Society loses its spark. There is no opposition left. The artists ask other questions and see things from different perspectives. The Kiruna municipality has not been good at taking care of the artists who left for education, and since came back to settle in the city. After a while, the few who had decided to stay end up moving anyway. We have noticed a tendency for those who return after education to be mostly women.

Thanks both to the culture-political efforts of artists, and major changes in the distribution of state resources to regional culture, the appreciation of art and artistic practice has increased in Norrbotten. In Kiruna specifically, awareness has heightened significantly in the wake of the city's relocation process. Through the application of the 1% rule, several large public design projects will be commissioned, and together with the Norrbotten region, a regional art institute will open in the new town hall. The possibility of building this institution has been discussed for many years. It is through the rigorous and consistent efforts of artists that this regional art hub will finally be realised.

The hope is that this institution will encourage artists to work in Kiruna for shorter or longer periods of time. However, additional municipal support for the artists who want to settle and work in the city is necessary in order to reverse the trend. Any city needs a kind of "critical mass", a number of professional artists, to create an interesting environment to work in. People are afraid of this. Artists bring critical thinking, questioning and progressive or alternative ideas. For that reason, it would be great for people who recently



trained in the artistic fields to become involved in the projects that will make Kiruna and its residents congregate around its relocation and future development.



Agneta Andersson, *Utsikten*, 2013  
Kolteckning 250 cm × 150 cm

*What are your thoughts on how Kiruna as a city has handled (and marketed) its relocation and transformation? For us, it is clear that the evacuation of Malmberget has not been packaged and treated in the same way. What do you think the reason for this difference is?*

There were strong and interesting voices that have made Kiruna's transformation fit for media coverage, and disseminated the story to a wider public. That these types of projects are so difficult to predict the effects of does not help. How do you communicate a future that you cannot see? It is sad to note that the process in the two places has been described so differently, and that Malmberget has fallen into the shadow of Kiruna in the media. In Malmberget, the change is so noticeable, so visible. Perhaps too brutal to be used in a marketing campaign.

*In the media, Kiruna has often been described as an exemplary city. How do you feel about this idea? And allowing yourselves to speculate, do you think the new city can improve relations between the people living there?*

Urban transformation processes are based on concepts like "The City of the Future", or the "Model City" that is "Unique" and "New". This fosters great knowledge, will and courage. But a city and its government does doesn't become functional only by changing its clothes, its surface or its slogan – old antagonists and bad habits will not go away. A Model City must constantly innovate its pattern, colours and behaviours to deserve that name, otherwise there will be no real changes. Right now we don't know how

the future will be, but it is up to us citizens to exercise our influence and act reasonably. When political groups get a taste for power, conflicts often arise.

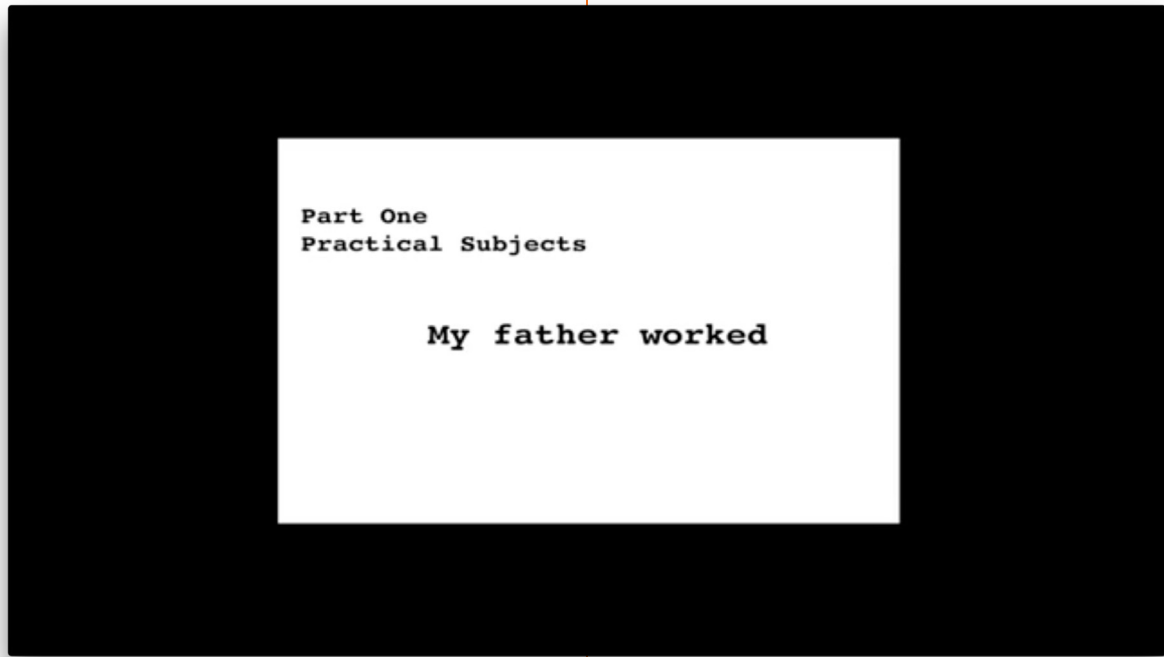
The issue of housing is a very important issue for Kiruna. If you want a well-functioning society, everyone must have somewhere to live. If housing is lacking, neither the population nor the tax revenue increases. Where should those who decide to stay live? Low-income housing is also necessary, since not everyone gets a fat pay-check or have two incomes to support a family. Kiruna has always been a multicultural city and there is lots to learn from how the population has been integrated over the course of the city's short history. We have to be alert to the possibility of the many changes sparking division between people. What is the value of being a resident in Kiruna? Is it to have a good enough salary that you can buy a new snowmobile, and take a camper van up to the mountain? How do we create the conditions for a valuable day-to-day life in the city?

*Finally, could you tell us about Koncentrat, and how you as a group have worked to influence local cultural policy?*

In a small community, questions are often attached to people rather than to your professional role as an artist. That makes it difficult for individual artists to pursue artistic or cultural policy issues. The security and the relief that Koncentrat provides is, at least partly, the reason why we have even been able to, and wanted to, be active as artists here at all, especially considering that artists tend to be alone in their work. It has been very important to be part of a group that really is this part of the region. That not only represents, but is Malmfälten, Sápmi and Tornedalen.

We use our skills in many different ways as we we engage with the local and national art scenes. Eventually, we hope to be a self-evident part of how Malmfälten develops, despite the fact that several of our members choose to work elsewhere. Koncentrat resonates far beyond the borders of this municipality, and our colleagues around the country have really managed to put Malmfälten on the map – that alone is a great achievement. Our willingness to provide more opportunities to encounter and experience art, even in our own neighbourhoods, is important for our collective thinking. That positivity has really strengthened our creativity and endurance.

→ *My father worked* (2010)  
Ingela Johansson



<https://vimeo.com/88739642>

## Lulu-journal

Lulu is how Luleå first appeared in writing in **1397**, a name of Sami origin that can be translated as "Eastern Water". This is the title of the Luleå Biennial's journal, published once a month from August **2018** through February **2019**. Across seven issues, through text, image and film, readers are offered different points of entry to the biennial's overall theme: the dark landscape. All issues take as their starting point a public artwork in Norrbotten. The Lulu journal is made by the biennial's artistic directors and invited guest editors. It is published on the biennial's website and can be downloaded for printing. [www.luleabiennial.se](http://www.luleabiennial.se)

## Colophon

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