

Finnish Writers in Youkobo 2016

Finnish Writers in Tokyo in cooperation with the Union of Finnish Writers, Helsinki and Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo

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Foreword

Hiroko Murata

Hosting artists and researchers since 1989, Youkobo has established itself as a site where overseas artists can engage in creative activities and research, while it also hosts creators recommended by international organizations with which we have partnerships. The program introduced here is a new engagement initiated together with The Union of Finnish Writers, Suomen Kirjailijaliitto (UFW), an organization that gives support to writers from Finland.

Initiated first through an introduction to UFW in 2015 by Ulla Kinnunen, the culture and communications manager of The Finnish Institute in Tokyo, a visit to Youkobo in February 2016 by Mr. Suvi Oinonen, a representative of UFW was arranged and, based on a memorandum of understanding signed with the organization, the residency program began with the hosting of three writers for one-month periods in the autumn of 2016 (September to November). The program is scheduled to continue in the spring of 2017, with the hosting of three more writers between March and May. UFW is an organization that gives multifaceted support to Finnish writers, working with a number of international residency programs to create opportunities for artists to undertake research in other countries, among which Youkobo was selected as the residency base within Asia. This brochure includes essays contributed by the first three writers (one participant was joined by her collaborator, making a total of four participants) to join the program, who wrote about their stay in autumn of 2016.

FWU Writers in Residence in 2016

September 1-30, 2016 Hannu Väisänen

October 3-30, 2016 Tiina Lehtikoinen

November 2-30, 2016 Malin Kivelä & Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo



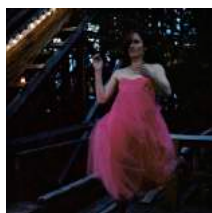
Hannu Väisänen

Born in Oulu, Finland. Lives and works in Paris, France. He is best known for his autobiographical novels, theatrical scripts, paintings and photography. His works can be found in the collections of a number of Finnish and European art museums, and he has also made public works for the cities of Oulu and Helsinki. Väisänen's illustrated book *Kalevala* was published in 2000. Väisänen received the Finlandia Prize for literature in 2007 for *Other Shoes*. He won the State Prize for visual arts in 2008 and the State Prize for literature in 2015. He is represented by Galerie Forsblom.



Tiina Lehtikoinen

Poet. Lives and works in Tampere, Finland. She has published five collections of poetry and contemporary aphorisms. Mixing the personal with the political in her work, the resulting fragmentation of language reflects the interruptions rendered by the surplus of information in today's Internet age. The historical moment we are currently living in is characterized by the loss of ability to dream and experience freely and, in consequence, she considers it of paramount importance that imagination and sensibility be released again. In addition to being a poet, she is also a visual artist working with different media such as moving image, installations, drawings, and collages. Lehtikoinen has taught creative writing since 2005, and is a member of The Union of Finnish Writers. She is also ex-editor of Finnish poetry magazine *Tuli&Savu* (Fire&Smoke; 2013-2015).



Malin Kivelä

Novelist based in Helsinki, Finland. So far she has published three novels as well as plays and children's books. She is also involved in the performance field. In her writing she tries to explore new forms and develop a kind of a physical writing, rather than relying on purely narrative forms. She is interested in the things in life that are left aside, not talked about, not considered important, often go unnoticed, or lie hidden in our daily lives.



Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo

Born in Finland where she continues to live and work, Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo writes in her mother tongue, Swedish. Writing mainly in prose, she has also written children's literature and several plays for the stage, in addition to scripts for radio dramas. She has also published her essays and short stories in various anthologies, magazines and newspapers. Her fourth novel, *In transit*, was published in 2016. She was awarded the Runeberg Prize, a national literary award in Finland, for her novel *Fem knivar hade Andrej Krapl*. She is also active within The Swedish Writers' Union of Finland, and is the Artistic Director of the literature festival Vasa LittFest, Finland. She is one of the chief editors of the literary magazine *plump*, and teaches Creative Writing at Åbo Akademi University. Her latest performance play *Imperfekt*, written and performed by Taivassalo and Malin Kivelä, had its opening night at the Finnish Institute in Berlin, Germany 2014.

Reflections on Youkobo Art Space

Hannu Väisänen

I had a chance to work and stay in September last year at Youkobo Art Space in Tokyo as an “artist in residence.” The Finnish association of Writers had earlier that year concluded an agreement of collaboration with this “microresidence.” I was the first Finnish writer at Youkobo Art Space. This was of course a great privilege.

The so called “microresidence” usually means a smaller, more homely residence than those big artist residencies all over the world. I personally know some of them (Cité des Arts in Paris, Scandinavian Center in New York, Athens, and Rome etc). In a microresidence people make acquaintances quickly, the building/buildings are smaller, they often remind one of private houses and they also receive fewer artists than bigger institutions. This is the case with Youkobo and it is mostly positive. The threshold seems to be lower.

My role as the first Finnish writer was of course quite different compared to other visual artists who lived at Youkobo Art Space during my time there. My living and working space was not a traditional artist’s studio but a western-style, modern, spacious two-roomed flat. The flat was very practical in many senses and above all it was very quiet. Especially for a writer, this is one of the basic conditions for concentration. Some of the social evenings and interesting artist meetings gave the necessary variety to my otherwise quite busy period in Tokyo.

I happened to be in Japan and in Tokyo at the very moment when my work was quite pressing. I was preparing a new book “The Ancestors” to be published in March this year, the book I mainly wrote and illustrated during my stay in Tokyo. At the same time I also participated at numerous events organized by the Finnish Cultural Center in Japan. Thus time didn’t allow anything more than a modest view of Tokyo. It looks like most of the people in Tokyo are really in a hurry all the time. That feeling of constant bustle seized me as well and even though I consider myself quite hardworking, I had the impression of not having time for the essential.

Sadly enough I did not see all those things I had planned, things that I thought were so indispensable. I had a long list of different sights, museums, architecture, gardens and so on. I had an intention to compare different districts of Tokyo. But soon I understood that this task had to be postponed.

One of the real problems with Youkobo Art Space -this is my personal opinion, of course, and some colleagues might think I am wrong- is the distance from the center of the city. (If there is any, or there are several) Every time I wanted to go to the center, I had to plan very carefully in order to see as much as possible in a very limited time and in order to get back to my place by midnight. Every trip, including one or two museums, took me always the whole day. Tokyo is a metropolis and the distances are relative. One month becomes soon very short.

The bicycle soon became my best friend. (Even though its mark was LOPETA which means STOP IT! in Finnish.) Without a bicycle my stay would have been much poorer. It also made good for a writer who tends to sit, motionless, for hours in front of his computer. My bicycle took me to the nearest big railway station (Ogikubo) where I had the biggest choice of getting towards the center of Tokyo.



I have to remark that I have been several times in Japan and the country has become quite familiar to me. During my previous stays, I was mainly in the Kansai area. Tokyo and the neighborhoods were still quite unknown to me, even though I had visited Tokyo quickly during my earlier trips to Japan. I have learned a little Japanese, and I express myself very clumsily but that has never been a real barrier. Nothing is as pleasant as exchanging drawings with the locals when you don’t find the right expression. That is why I always have a little notepad in my pocket.

Everything concerning my getting settled and lodging at Youkobo Art Space went without any difficulties thanks to all the staff of the residence. I learned quite quickly how to move around in the neighborhoods, found the supermarkets, hardware stores and software stores and restaurants and “sushi trains.” It is known that Japanese people are very helpful and this I remarked once again, several times. Even though my Japanese is so clumsy, all my basic problems were solved. I have a special love of getting lost, just in order to begin a long chat with the locals.

I fell in love with the Japanese Post! I was preparing the illustrations for my next book and had to send several times by express parcels back to Finland. Workers at the Japanese Post helped me with utmost kindness to fill in all those forms, and without panic. And always the parcels arrived safe and punctually.

I lived and worked the month of September in Tokyo. In October I continued my work at Osaka. I have a long-range project with Japanese, an Osaka-based Bunraku troupe, and by leaving Tokyo I changed the staging completely. I had an exceptional opportunity to compare two completely different artist residencies. A friend of mine, an architect and his architect’s office has recently been taken on the task of renovating an old Osaka town house in order to transform it to a residence for foreign writers, photographers and artists. The renovation work had not yet begun and I lived -all alone- in slightly less comfortable conditions than in Tokyo. But the extreme beauty of an old traditional Japanese town house was a great compensation for the lack of air conditioning and other deficiencies. It was luxurious to drink tea or wine sitting on a door stone of the inner garden during those still sweltering evenings of October. Both in Tokyo and at Osaka I was in a way a guinea pig, testing the conditions of an artist/writer in residence. Both had advantages and inconveniences. A nice comfortable flat in Tokyo. But very far from a city that I wanted to know better. And on the other hand an old town house in bad shape waiting for the necessary renovations. But only fifteen minutes from the city center.

If I could suggest something to Youkobo Art Space, it would be this: A city tour always when a new group of residents arrive. I am not talking about a sightseeing tour, neither museum visits. I am talking about tours in order to understand the structure of the metropolis called Tokyo, to understand the distances, difficulties to get from a place to another, the physiognomies of different districts. These tours should of course be made with public services. I am quite sure this kind of city tour would help many of us, especially those who come to Japan for the first time. Most of us come to Japan in order to deeply immerse ourselves in the essentials of Japanese culture and everyday life, its myths and manga and contemporary art. This is, I suppose, the main reason why we have chosen Japan and Tokyo as our residency destination. It should have an impact in our future work; possibly even make us produce something new. To approach that new source of inspiration should be relatively easy, which does not mean that the creator should be carried everywhere on a chair in honor. Sometimes a slight resistance creates energy, too.



INSIDE THE GREAT BUDDHA AND OTHER GREAT MEMORIES

Tiina Lehtikainen

1. Walk
2. Talk
3. Take pictures
4. Breathe

I arrived in Tokyo in early October. I was tired after spending the weekend at the Turku book fair in Finland and having not been able to sleep on the plane; I spent the whole night playing Mahjong and watching new Japanese films, so at the beginning of my residence time I had terrible Jet Lag.

One of my first clear remembrances is our visit to Yokohama. It was a sunny Friday. Hiroko, Tatsuhiko, Radek and me headed out of Tokyo early in the morning. In Yokohama, we visited many different museums. Artworks were colossal and I felt tiny and ashamed, because I had forgotten to print business cards.

In Chinatown, we saw a dancing dragon in a schoolyard and there were nice lace curtains in the windows of a taxi. In the afternoon, we went to KAAT (Kanagawa Arts Theater) to see Chiharu Shiota's exhibition *The Locked Room*. I was so enthusiastic about the exhibitions that I thought even the huge colourful video screen in the corridor was a work of art. But it wasn't. They presented a television program of gymnastic exercises.

The following night was windy and I was scared that an earthquake was coming. It never came. Something quaked only in my head. The next day, I decided to change the title of my upcoming book.

I had expected that in Japan there would be sublime things everywhere. It's not true, but still I was surprised by how contradictory and ambivalent contemporary Japanese culture is.

I visited many Shinto shrines, museums and old bookstores, but I also spent time in Harajuku and in the manga streets of Akihabara. In Tokyo, the holy and superficial things and places exist side by side and constitute a special ensemble that is still in harmony.

In the second week, I got lost on my way to Mori Art Museum in the Roppongi area. I have always been quite good at orienteering, but this time something went wrong and I ended up in a nunnery. Three nuns talked to me in Japanese and I could only repeat the words "Sumimasen, wakarimasen". Finally one of them sketched me a map. I expressed my gratitude and when I was leaving one of them remarked: "God bless you." For a moment I wondered which god she meant.



The cherry on top of my residence period was my trip to Kamakura. I took the morning train from Shinjuku to Enoshima where I changed to the local tram. In Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine area I saw a traditional wedding ceremony, in Hase Kannon Shrine hydrangea flowers were blooming beautifully, in Kencho-ji I climbed to the marvellous Hanso-bo and in Kotoku-in Shrine area I finally met Kamakura's Great Buddha. Actually, I went inside the Buddha statue, because if you pay some money, you are welcome to step into the holy statue. The idea was totally absurd, "being inside The Great Buddha" — hello world, I'm that girl. There was no heart inside Buddha, just convex pecs.

My relationship to Japan is quite literary oriented. When I wandered in neon lights at night in Shinjuku, I thought about Shusaku Endo's novel *Scandal* and its repulsive male protagonist. In the evenings when I cooked different Japanese foods in my apartment, I dreamed of being kin to a shy girl in Banana Yoshimoto's novel *Kitchen*. In Japanese bath houses, I caught an atmosphere that is familiar to me from Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's stories, etc.

But I also came up with some new stories and ideas.

One story appeared to me when I saw Yabusame performed in the shrine area near Youkobo Art Space. In this traditional competition an archer on a running horse shoots three special arrows at wooden targets. I don't believe in power animals, but horses still always awaken me and my imagination.

I got my manuscript ready during my residence period, and thus I met my target or my goal.

Last night at Youkobo I got a text message from my sister. Our old cat Nala had died. On the plane I wrote a poem to my cat lady whose fur was red like flames or the sun. My time in the "Land of the Rising Sun" was over.

During the Christmas holiday I had finally time to think about my trip. It's almost two months since I came back. I got many momentous experiences in Japan, but if I should summarize the whole month in just a few words, those would be: to walk, to talk and to take pictures.

Those three habits offered me a way to get a small taste of Japanese culture. But the most important thing was breathing. I did my yoga exercise every evening and settled down. I mourned off the sorrow that had nested inside me during the time I wrote my previous book. Little by little I felt more cheerful and started to goof around by myself. When Maneki-nekos (the talismans) greeted me in Imado Shrine, I raised my hand and waved back.

But I'm not writing a story about happy cat at the moment. Or nuns or The Great Buddha.

But you never know, maybe one day some of those memories will emerge in my short stories. "Truly happy memories always live on, shining. Over time, one by one, they come back to life," like Banana Yoshimoto says.



From the best selling memoir *The life of Malin* (2074):

CHAPTER 523: JAPAN, NOVEMBER 2016

Malin Kivelä

What I remember:

the absence of illness. The flu disappearing as soon as I board the plane in Helsinki. Something dissolving, already there. Fleeing from home. That's what I did at the time.

Opening my eyes at the station: The colours, soft. The pace, peaceful. The station as if embedded in a cloud.

I stepped down into it. The humidity embraced my body, arid from autumn.

The first cup of tea: the burnt and brown one. The welcoming of the beautiful staff of Youkobo Art Space, which is still running, by the way, and as blooming as ever. Murmuring something about our planned performance, immediately getting asked the right questions, my thankfulness, the relief.

I remember drifting. Going by train, bus, metro, bike, foot. Running in the park among strange birds. Losing all sense of direction. Amused and interested, by everything, by myself in this country, so lost and trying. Knowing only two words of Japanese.

Loving the food, the style, the control. Everybody friendly. Seeing one piece of trash on the ground. One in two weeks – even though there were almost no official rubbish cans in the streets.

Sorting my rubbish, confused at first, then more and more obsessive.

I remember Kyoto. Looking dreamingly at the green mountains, but getting lost in the tourist floods instead. Spending all my money in smoky cafés. Running after a geisha, secretly photographing her in a traffic light.

Finding a graveyard

the only peaceful spot

a stone city

over the hills

with water bottles for the dead on the graves.

Throwing my money at an annoying bus driver

I couldn't behave

like the Japanese.

Staying up late

every night

I couldn't waste my time sleeping during these weeks, heightened.

Reading a book about a Finnish woman falling in love with Japan.

Dancing butoh with a legend

or the son of a legend

and the friend of another

79 years old, he had some rare integrity about his body, some space around him, won by experience?

He played a cheesy version of *Amazing Grace* over and over and I understood something by the movement or his directions or his interest or of myself or about the fact that he was human, too as much as me.



At the embassy, photo by
Roleff Kråkström



In Kyoto, photo by an employee
at Yoshimizu Inn



Geisha



My new lifestyle

I remember buying more or less authentic ninja costumes and spying, hiding, having snacks, checking our phones, buying sodas from a vending machine, pedaling in a boat on the pond, getting stared at and photographed as ninjas during one hot Sunday as part of a festival. Answering huge questions in the shades of green leaves. Performing the guerrilla session at night, people not knowing what they saw. Black shadows where they shouldn't have been. A child getting trained by his mother, him running, her biking, him crying, her shouting, him almost throwing up, her being firm. The questions of childhood, of being a child, of competition, of what's important, right there in our faces in the dark. The ninjas waved, the boy stared, in silence.



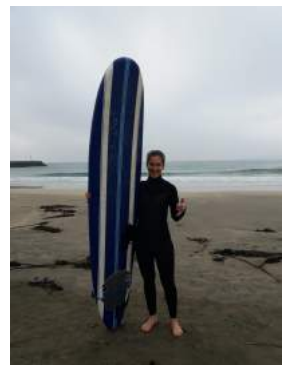
Ninjas in the park

I remember eating sushi
and noodles
and mochi
and all kinds of fish
and rice, rice, rice
feeling healthy and strong
oh those days
when I thought I was old but I wasn't at all
Drinking sake
and more tea
and skyping with my children late at night
they moved about all the time on the screen
and put their round heads very near
the picture got stuck
Riding the train, the bus, the metro
all the time
all the time
and walking
and surfing in the Pacific Ocean
22 degrees in November
with Sagawa, who had moved there only for the surf
he worked in a nearby hotel at night to be able to sustain the surfing life style.



Champagne in Shibuya, photo by
Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo

I remember almost fainting at Tokyo Station coming back, breaking into a cold sweat and having to buy an ultra sweet drink with plastic-like crushable balls of all colours to pick me up. (Since then my favourite drink, besides my daily dose of champagne, of course – the secret of my old age.)



Wannabe surfer, photo
by Yukio Sagawa

There was something about that voyage.
I wrote almost nothing. But in my head something started. I trusted it. I loved it. Anything's possible, also regarding literature. Especially regarding literature. Art. There were some new pathways fabricated in my brain. I was far enough, long enough from home. Suddenly the novel I had been planning for years seemed possible, even desirable. Not difficult. I can write. My way is mine. Even if I get old I can still dance. I love being in a state of constant surprise. And, as we know, this novel, called *The Heart*, was published only two years later and became the dearest one so far (see chapter 530). It was the Japan effect. I knew I had to keep it inside of me, nurture it. My Japan. Softly. In a friendly manner. Relaxed. Trusting. Sleeping. Eating only good food, mainly sushi. This is what I learned. This is how I float.



Malin in 2074

Once I rode a bicycle in Tokyo. The wind was humid, mild. The sun was hot and I had just washed my hair. Nobody saw me. I drove on the right side, I drove on the left side. Nobody cared. Was I invisible? A component of colour, heat and moving energy. A mere part of the landscape. Suddenly I was me.

You and me, Youkobo

Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo

I went to Japan, Tokyo and Youkobo with three things on my mind: to rest, to flee the well-known in search of the unknown, and to work on my three projects. Yes, all good things come in threes.

I never expected to get everything I was longing for, but I did, and even more. I got to be in-between languages – always thrilling for someone who every day works deep down in her own language. I got to see things that inspired me, meet people who showed me their perspectives on things, and I got to be in new environments and cultures that had an impact on me – and therefore surely on my art as well. I'm sure I do not even know how much I gained, yet.

1. Ninjas in the park

I partly shared this month at Youkobo Art Space with Malin Kivelä – we have realized a lot of projects together, in particular theatre and performance projects.

We spent an intense week together in Japan working on an upcoming performance called *I AM NINJA*. We did a lot of planning as well as research – we went, for example, to the Ninja Museum of Iga-ryu.

As a part of our coming project we also did a one-day performance within the *Trolls in the Park* festival during our stay. The idea was to combine the mystery and mythical nature of and ideals relating to ninja and ninjutsu with everyday life actions such as drinking coffee, Instagram-scrolling on the phone, buying a soda, strolling in the park, etc. We also included a two-hour Ninja Bureau of Advice, where you could get life advice from the Ninjas, based on the ideals we have found using trusty sources on the internet.

How do we react to things, and how do we perceive the unexpected? What is the difference between being a woman in your 40s today, and being a Ninja? Or what are the similarities? The ideals of Ninja are pretty much the same as our own.

Ninjas in the Park was not only a very useful research demo for *I AM NINJA* – it is also linked to another coming series of performances, *ANIMALS*, in which we will dress up as animals and do similar park attacks. For example: Squirrels in the park. We will harass people having a picnic in the park, beg and steal food, but also just skip around and be cute. And the same goes for the other animals: we're combining things these animals really do – but here very seriously done by animal-dressed grown-ups – and things animals do not do, like the squirrel or the fox standing under a tree smoking a cigarette, sending messages from a phone, taking selfies, etc. The things we want to explore and express here are pretty much the same as those of the Ninja performance in the park. We will also set up an Animal Bureau of Advice: life advice as – for example – a fox would put it. The aim is still to look at ourselves and the world through the unexpected.



2. SCANDORAMA

SCANDORAMA is the project I am referring to as the “secret project” in my residence plan, mainly because I did not want it to be official information at that stage, but also because it was so new at the time that it was hard to tell if it was going to be realised or not.

SCANDORAMA is a storyline for a graphic novel, and I’m thrilled to say that I finished it during my stay at Youkobo, and it’s going to be published. This process went really fast: In August I had my first day off after finishing my novel *In Transit* (published this fall) and as soon as I relaxed, this graphic novel story burst into my brain. I just had to get up from bed and started to write a brief storyline. I started to write on it more seriously in October, while at a residence in Berlin, Germany, for two weeks, and finished it here in Tokyo, very suitable in the land of Manga. It was really an intense project, quite straightforward, which is the opposite in many ways to my novel *In Transit*.

SCANDORAMA is a dystopia set a few years or decades in the future.

3. BORDERPROSE

Borderprose is a fragmentary novel concerning limits, bounds, borders and borderline. I have no idea what this will be or become, it’s just very minimalistic prose, close to poetry, but still with the urge to tell a story of some kind – I still do not really know which story, and I hardly know the characters that are passing by... I had only a few pages of this novel to write when I arrived to Youkobo, and just a few days left in Tokyo when I finished *SCANDORAMA*, so I was just pleased to read the material and have it in mind, rather than actively write on it. It felt like getting started with something new, nevertheless. And without a writing project – I’m all lost.

But then again, I felt that the most important thing for me during my stay was really to get lost and find the unexpected; in Tokyo, and in me.

Youkobo, all of you – you stole my heart, and I’m thankful and blissed!

