

Why Do Shoes Rub and Other Questions

It is *Summer*. Someone shuffles out into a windswept field. Weary, they stretch, turn their socks inside out, and wiggle their corn-covered toes in the sunlight: “Look at my most precious possessions, everyone!” Sure signs of a life lived, of work done, of remaining in touch with the sock-lined reality of the world.

“Much of it is uncomfortable,” the corns remark, “rather like us.”

“And us,” chime in the rotting terrace, the guest relieving themselves around the corner, the rabbit nibbling the gardeners’ dill (RIP), and the message scrawled across the wall.

Why Do Shoes Rub and Why Be Beside Yourself? The museum is more than a building. It extends beyond its walls, spilling into the backyard, the flowerbeds, and the street. In this inside-out exhibition, artworks encounter – vulnerably yet stubbornly – the weather and the changing seasons, urban birds and animals, neighbours and distant visitors, wanderers and revellers. Here, art gets plenty of fresh air and rain. This is an exhibition in the backyard of the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM), about the life of a backyard. Its title could just as well be ***Why Do Shoes Rub and Why In My Backyard?***

Alongside the artworks, sunflowers rise in the garden, their heads turning east every morning. ***Why Do Shoes Rub and Why Do Young Sunflowers Chase the Sun?*** As hyperaccumulator plants,¹ their roots remain entwined with the landscape’s industrial past. Unnoticed by anyone, they quietly go about their work, while their densely seeded flowerheads seem to hold ghostly traces of the raves once held here, the former days of the Tallinn Power Plant, and a far more distant time, when this place still lay beneath the sea. Or more recently, of a place where people fought, kissed for the first and the last time, and watered their fellow gardeners’ flowerbeds on days of drought.

The end of summer is quietly drawing near. *Autumn* is lurking just around the corner. August = Sunday. There is still freedom, still holiday, but school, work, and all the business of taking things seriously are about to begin. Routine, domesticity, and diligence loom on the horizon. Is time the true protagonist of our experience, or has the clock harnessed it and taken centre stage? Here, however, clocks keep time with cheerful disregard for such discipline. EKKM is two decades’ worth of dust settled into a crack in the wall – dust no one has quite managed to wipe away. We promise ourselves we’ll deal with it tomorrow, when things are quieter. Or perhaps the day after... From a corner we have yet to discover, a secret question slowly seeps out: perhaps the title of this exhibition should really be ***Why Do Shoes Rub and Why Is Everything Always Unfinished?***

¹ Hyperaccumulator plants absorb exceptionally large amounts of heavy metals from the soil, gradually cleansing the ground in which they grow. Sunflowers, for example, can take up and remove contaminants such as arsenic and caesium-137.

Dissatisfaction hangs from the belt like a well-worn tool; by now, it is almost impossible to imagine a world without friction. ***Why Do Shoes Rub and Why Is Discomfort Accepted as Self-Evident?*** Whatever unsettles us keeps changing, always finding new ways to make itself known. But how do we keep going when there is so much to care about? And who, then, is supposed to take care of the museum? And why don't I cry petrol? Why can't I find a job after finishing school? Why can't I ever seem to get a beach body? Why?

Complaining will get us nowhere, though there is a certain pleasure in it. An inner fire keeps urging us onward, our hands in our pockets, our stride unrestrained. I slip my hand into my pocket, searching for my keys. There is nothing in there. But now that my hand is inside it, the pocket is no longer empty. Its potential has been realised. When I pull my hand out, the pocket collapses back into emptiness. Once again, it holds the potential to be used, to be filled. Wait. I slip my hand into my pocket again. It is empty, but there is still something in there. Not a thing, exactly, but the absence of one. There is a hole in my pocket.²

Why Do Shoes Rub and How Do You Find Emptiness in a Pocket? Perhaps EKKM is precisely the lint in your jacket pocket no one has turned inside out for years. The older we get, the more lint, scars, wear, overgrowth, and all manner of accumulated odds and ends we have gathered. ***Why Do Shoes Rub and Why Doesn't Anyone Ask for ID Anymore?*** is EKKM's anniversary exhibition. It celebrates the museum itself, but even more so the artists, cultural workers, and visitors who have shaped this place over the years. It is only through you that this building has become both a monument and a social sculpture, carrying within it the energy of twenty years of gathering together and making art.

May this day last for weeks to come. We will set the table and invite you over, and as we excitedly begin telling stories about EKKM, someone among us will ask: "***Why Do Shoes Rub – and What Else Would You Ask of This Museum?***"

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Exhibition artists: Alexei Gordin, Bogna Luiza Wiśniewska, Eric Andersen, Finnegan Shannon, Flo Kasearu, Herman Halliste, Marta Konovalov, Rait Lõhmus, Taavi Piibemann, The Complaints Choir of Tallinn & Florian Wahl, Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen

Artists with works in the EKKM collection and authors of works created for or left at the museum: Dénes Farkas, Edith Karlson, Erik Hõim, ENKKL (Loora Kaubi, Katariin Mudist, Inessa Saarits, Lisette Sivard), LLRLLRR (Laura Linsi and Roland Reemaa), Helena Keskküla, Jass Kaselaan, Johnson and Johnson, Marge Monko, Neeme Külm, Margit Säde and Tanja Muravskaja, Raul Keller, SELJO126, Sigrid Viir, Uwe Schloen, Yvette Bathgate and Jake Shepherd

² Adapted from Johannes Luik's Master's thesis *Pocketbook* (2022).

Space designers: Mari Möldre and Margus Tammik

Curator: EKKM's extended team (including: Anita Kodanik, Brigit Arop, Evelyn Raudsepp, Jake Shepherd, Johannes Luik, Kadi Kesküla, Katariina Kesküla, Martin Kirsiste, Rasmus Einman, Yvette Bathgate)

Technicians: Ats Kruusing, Eugenio Marini, Erik Höim, Hans-Otto Ojaste, Reigo Nahksepp

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