

**Pavilion of Finland at the 57th International Art Exhibition –
La Biennale di Venezia:**

***The Aalto Natives* by Nathaniel Mellors and Erkka Nissinen**



Nathaniel Mellors and Erkka Nissinen: *The Aalto Natives*, 2017. Courtesy Frame Contemporary Art Finland / Ugo Carmeni

Pavilion of Finland presents *The Aalto Natives*, a collaboration between artists **Nathaniel Mellors** and **Erkka Nissinen** at the 57th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Individually known for their irreverent and often comedic story-driven work, Mellors and Nissinen focus on various clichés surrounding Finnish history and national identity for *The Aalto Natives*.

Conflating ideas and tropes from archaeology, anthropology and science fiction, the work re-imagines Finnish society through the eyes of two messianic outsider figures, Geb and Atum, who are represented by talking animatronic puppets.

The story presents Geb and Atum as terraforming higher beings, who re-visit the Finland they have created millions of years earlier, and who try to make sense of the culture that has

developed in the meantime. They are engaged in a dialogue in which they introduce a series of video vignettes on Finnish creation mythology, contemporary Finnish society and their vision for the future of Finland.

Within this narrative framework, Mellors and Nissinen playfully critique religion and the nature of human existence, to reveal the systemic flaws at the heart of cultures dominated by rationalism and the fetishization of progress.

Various visual idioms – including HD videos of old school Muppet-style puppeteering, 3D CGI, and hand-drawn stop-motion animation – conjure the universe and psychology of their characters. These different media and technologies are synchronized into a dynamic and immersive theatrical experience.

Curator **Xander Karskens** says “*The Aalto Natives* explores themes such as the invention of the nation state and the origins of culture by way of absurdist satire. Dressing its intellectual ambitions in deceptively comical gear, the work addresses the complex challenges our globalized world faces today, like neoconservative nationalism, intolerance, and class polarization.”

The installation is accompanied by *The Aalto Natives – A Transcendental Manual*, a publication designed by Studio Remco van Bladel, Amsterdam, and co-published with Mousse. The book (ISBN 9788867492169) is distributed by Mousse, and can be ordered by mail from Frame Contemporary Art Finland at info@frame-finland.fi.

About the artists and curator

Nathaniel Mellors (1974, Doncaster, UK) studied at the University of Oxford’s Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, and the Royal College of Art in London. Mellors is an advisor at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam and a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, in the UK. In 2011 Mellors was the recipient of the Cobra Museum Amstelveen’s Cobra Art Prize and in 2014 he was awarded the UK Contemporary Art Society Prize. Mellors lives in Los Angeles and Amsterdam.

Erkka Nissinen (1975, Jyväskylä) studied at The Slade School of Fine Art in London and gained an MFA degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, Finland in 2001. Nissinen was awarded the Illy Prize at Art Rotterdam in 2011, and the AVEK Prize for media art in 2013. Nissinen lives in New York.

Xander Karskens (NL, 1973), curator of the Finnish pavilion, recently assumed the post of artistic director at the Cobra Museum of Modern Art in Amstelveen. Prior to this, he was responsible for the contemporary art programme and collections at Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem.

Frame Contemporary Art Finland is the Commissioner of the Finnish Pavilion in the Venice Biennale. It is an information centre and advocate for Finnish contemporary art. Frame supports international initiatives, facilitates professional partnerships, and encourages critical

development of the field through grants, visitor programmes, curator residencies, seminars and talks, exhibition collaborations and network platforms.

Partners and supporters

The main partner for The Aalto Natives is the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, alongside Visit Finland and the City of Jyväskylä. The main supporter of The Aalto Natives is the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, together with the Mondriaan Fund and the Saastamoinen Foundation.

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