

It Used to Be a Castle

Marta Frėjutė and Sallamari Rantala

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The title *It Used to Be a Castle* immediately places the viewer in multiple contexts that both complement and contradict each other. On the one hand, it combines a serious, if not even a bitter, context with a lighter but no less important one – evoking history (in the broader sense), archaeology, the discovery of castles' ruins, the imaginative narratives that follow, and the heavy context that comes with them (the creation of various metanarratives, etc.). At the same time, this 'heavy' context – likely overused and tiresome – is set aside to make way for castles of a different kind, built on the shore not for eternity but with the full knowledge that they will vanish within hours.

Archaeology and geology in this exhibition retain a certain romance, one that emerges as we dig deeper into the earth, encountering remnants we can barely recognize. Here, crumbs take on multiple meanings – like a handprint, a delicate two-dimensional trace of a body that also has – or once had – legs, a head, a belly button (Frėjutė's *We Were Here*). The stained glass with palm prints brings several elements – often restricted to highly guarded territories – closer to the viewer and everyday life. These include Stone Age cave art, typically reserved only to a select few, and stained glass, which for centuries has served as an inaccessible cavity of coloured light in sacred spaces. In the exhibition, this heritage calms down, descending from its slightly frustrated grandeur to meet the viewer; the light becomes hazier, and the handprints draw closer to those we accidentally – or perhaps deliberately, as a joke – leave in flour while cooking in the kitchen.

Let us return to the crumbs. In this exhibition, they can also refer to sand – rock that has crumbled into the tiniest fragments, abandoning solid formations and gathering into an entirely different state of being. In Rantala's works, sand seems to be reborn as a new kind of 'rock' – a bit like shelves, volumetric, yet not the kind on which one could actually place anything. Shelves, seemingly a very human object, point to something beyond humanity – something not entirely human. If you think about it, geological layers share a certain logic with shelves. However, instead of cups, there is basalt; instead of books, there is chalk. Rantala's works, made from sand mined in the Vilnius area, reflect local existence in the present. In a world where few dwellings remain untouched by materials extracted from various corners of the Earth, these 'shelves' of locally sourced sand seem to restore a connection to place. And yet, in a sense, the objects made of sand grains mirror the same logic as global dwellings: these dwellings, like Rantala's works, are composites of elements from different origins.

At this intersection of archaeology, geology, and everyday life, the so-called *sekretai*¹ emerge – perhaps the most fragile archaeology in the world. Its practitioners bury beauty, already anticipating the future joy of discovery. A fossil just two minutes old! Yet, in some cases, measured in terms of joy, it is equivalent to a millennium (Frėjutė's *Sekretai*).

¹ *Sekretai* (plural of *sekretas*, related to the word 'secret') is a Lithuanian childhood tradition of arranging flowers, leaves, shiny candy wrappers, or other tiny objects under a piece of glass in the ground. These compositions are then covered with soil and later unearthed, often shared among friends as a secret.

Finally, between the *sekretai* that have just been hidden – and immediately unearthed – and the quarry where sand has been mined for millions of years, something emerges. It is actually so close to what happened minutes ago, yet in human perception, it may seem much closer to the sand of ancient times. Consider that strange bottle that appeared on the market when you were just a baby – a bottle containing a liquid that cleanses both stomach and sink with equal effectiveness: is it more like the *sekretai* you had hidden from yourself, or is it closer to something poorly understood, worn smooth by time, and no longer legible? (*Frėjutė's Based on a True Story*).

The castle will soon be washed away. But for now, there is still time to see it.

Marta Frėjutė is an artist living and working in Vilnius. Her artistic practice explores the intertwining of fiction and memory within shifting historical contexts and their reflection in everyday life and myths. Frėjutė holds a Bachelor's degree in Architecture and a Master's degree in Contemporary Sculpture from the Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA), where she is currently pursuing a PhD and teaching. Her work has been exhibited in group shows at the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC), Vilnius; the Polish Sculpture Centre, Oronsko, Poland; the Naples Physics Museum, Italy; FORM Gallery, Perth, Australia; Atletika Gallery, Vilnius; Locomotif Gallery, Lentvaris, and more. In 2022, she held a solo exhibition at Artifex Gallery, Vilnius.

Sallamari Rantala is a Finnish artist currently living and working in Vilnius. Her work crystallises from observing the movement and transformation of materials in her surroundings. Combining drawing and material-shaping techniques, she often creates relief-like works that blur the boundary between surface and three-dimensionality, creating hints to compositions and stories hidden within their reciprocal relationship. Rantala has had solo exhibitions at Å-galleria, Turku, Finland; Våga se Space, Stockholm; and Verpėjos, Marcinkonys, Lithuania. She has also participated in group exhibitions at the CAC, Vilnius; VAA Titanikas, Vilnius; and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, among others. She was the winner of the JCDecaux Prize in 2020.

Curator: Eglė Mikalajūnė

Exhibition Architect: Vytautas Gečas

Designer: Eglė Ruibytė

Translator and Language Editor: Alexandra Bondarev

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