

Tuula Närhinen:

Optical Sight-Seeing – Enacting Space by Stereoscopic and Lenticular Displays

My [ongoing research project](#) sets out to develop an artist-led, empiric approach for studying analogue imaging technologies. It endeavours to understand the repercussions that photographic images may have in orienting the human sensorium and in underpinning our worldview. Taking the spectator's embodied experience as a starting point, I have conceived installations that create idiosyncratic visual realities of their own. These artworks actively involve the spectator by proposing the viewer become an eyewitness to virtual or kinaesthetic manifestations of space. With my examples, I suggest that visual art practice may provide a site for questioning theories of vision and for reflecting visually.

Drawing from the study of physiological optics, illusionist imaging techniques as well as their related scientific and media cultures, this presentation focuses on two visual art projects that harness optical instruments, such as the stereoscope and lenticular displays, to create immersive 3D effects without any electricity involved. Both artworks encourage the spectator to bodily engage with analogue still images. Instead of black boxing the technologies implicated, my installations demonstrate that the viewer's bodily engagement with the experimental setups allows instances of situated knowledge to arise.

My first example, a project entitled *Between the Eyes (2019)* invited the audience to peep into stereoscopic viewing devices to witness quirky sensations of depth and to compare these spatial illusions with the standard human scope of vision. A collection of slide viewers was equipped with different stereographic pairs, all designed to generate a wide range of depth effects and sensations that may arise from varying the distance between the left and the right eye views. In experimenting with the premises of retinal disparity, the work challenged the anthropoid vantage point with the following question: How would it feel to see the world through a pair of eyes which, instead of the usual five centimetres, were only a few millimetres, 15 cm, or up to several meters apart from each other?

Peeping into the viewing devices, the spectator was confronted with stereograms that showcased unusual binocular configurations, conditioned by a body scheme different from ours. The interplay between the two eyes generated embodied spatial experiences that could be grasped only by the act of looking. In doing so, the organically established link, that in normal circumstances unknowingly connects a perceiving body with a given sensation-of depth, became explicit and acknowledged. Thus, the spectator's bodily enactment and engagement with idiosyncratic renderings allowed exploring latent, epistemic and cognitive aspects that condition our perceptions of space. And moreover, reflecting on the immanent corporeal, aesthetic and epistemic determinants that underpin human vision, let us fathom imaginary bodies and more-than-human life worlds.

My second case study features a large-scale public artwork entitled *Tervetulijat [Saluters]* (2025), commissioned for the general hospital in the small town Hämeenlinna, 100 km north of Helsinki. The artwork was designed to structure the long street-facing façade and to break the monotony of the austere building complex with a kinetic photographic frieze.

The work comprises fifteen large photographs, each of them spliced and printed on 5 cm wide vertical slabs of an aluminium grille. The series of architectural grilles is integrated into the

ground level wall. It was originally designed to cover air vents and to camouflage fire exit doors behind a linear bar structure. Being part of the building's functional features, the series of grilles also serves as analogue barrier screen displays for a procession of dreamlike shadow figures that greet the visitors and point the way toward the new main entrance, located in the middle of the busy Ahvenistontie traffic-scape.

Animated by the viewer's movement, the giant shadows appear before the passersby, only to vanish again when viewed head on. The eerie figures reveal themselves from an oblique angle and suddenly dissolve back into the surface when the viewer faces the wall directly. Seen from the slant, the interlaced fragments are optically fused to unfurl a lingering human-animal shape that turns or shifts direction before the eyes of the passersby.

Whereas stereoscopy draws from binocular disparity and the convergence of the two eyes, this artwork builds on parallax, an optical phenomenon related to the viewing angle. It borrows from anamorphic art as well as from an old illusionist technique, originally attributed to the French painter Gaspar Antoine de Bois-Clair in 1692. Bois-Clair fabricated reversible lenticular reliefs or 'turning pictures' where two different portraits were interlaced and combined into one double portrait. Seen obliquely from the right, the relief of triangular wooden strips revealed the portrait of the king, whereas the facets on left side of the painted relief displayed the queen's likeness.

My examples suggest that optical instruments such as stereoscopes and lenticular displays may transform the concrete eyewitness perspective into a potential prospective of 'sight-seeing' where ephemeral spatial illusions may let us momentarily set aside the here and now. Animated by the observers' gaze, the two-dimensional renderings generate emphatic kinaesthetic 3D-illusions. Not unlike the 19th century '*stereoscopomania*' that launched people to adventurous journeys straight from their Victorian parlours, my installations serve as a 'placeholders' for an interactive 'image event' that interferes with normal perception, dislocates our gaze and transports us in another world. Stereoscopes and illusionist setups give rise to an embodied immersive eyesight that works the virtual into authentic real-life circumstances. And more importantly, grounded in our optical and cognitive capacity to synthesise images, these techniques do not only allow virtually visiting some actual, existing places, but they even permit us to explore hypothetical spaces and to fathom speculative realities. Which again may encourage us to re-consider the anthropoid vantage point and to imagine what falls outside the scope of human cognition.

Reflecting on the peculiar ways in which visual perception and virtual imagery are instrumentally conditioned and corporeally intertwined, I wish to contend that artworks and visual art practice may contribute to a wider understanding of images' capacity to inhabit their immediate environment, to interact with the spectator and consequently, to literally orient us by 'taking place' in the natural world.

(1000)

Keywords: stereoscope, lenticular relief, anamorphic art, artistic research, binocular

This proposal could fit one the following categories suggested in the CFP:

- **Performative approaches:** practices that mobilizes images to think, intervene, or co-create with communities and sites.
- **Latent geographies:** how the thinkable shape of places are formed and emerge through capture, modelling, and search.

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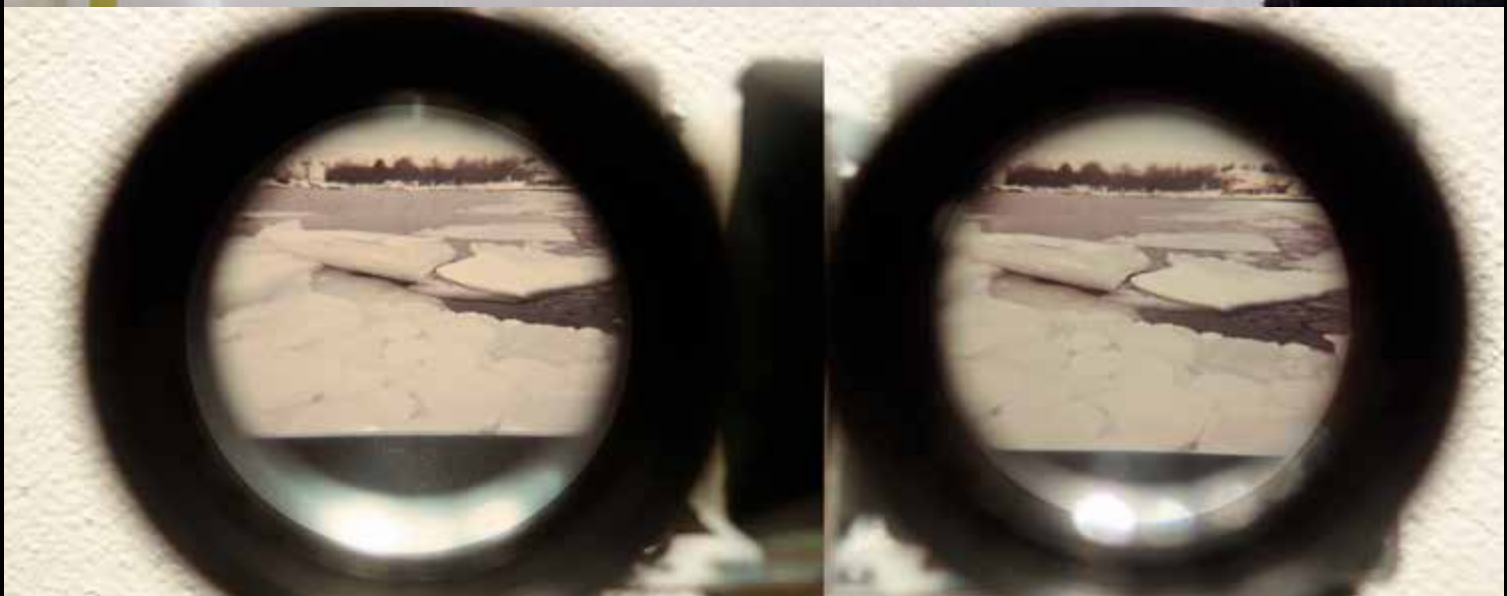
A photograph of a man with a shaved head and glasses, wearing a dark jacket, looking through a door peephole. The peephole is a black, funnel-shaped device mounted on a metal door handle. The man's face is in profile, and he is looking directly into the peephole. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

BETWEEN THE EYES



BETWEEN THE EYES (2019)
In *Paradoxes of Photography*, group show curated by Mika Elo
Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki 13.5.-28.8.2022















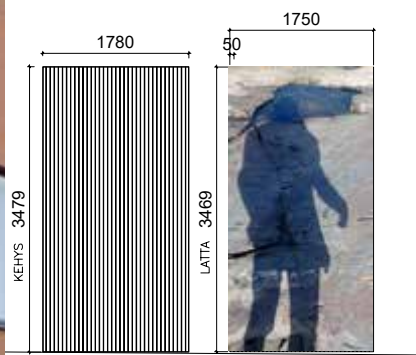
TERVETULIJAT

Ahvenisto general hospital, Hämeenlinna (2025)

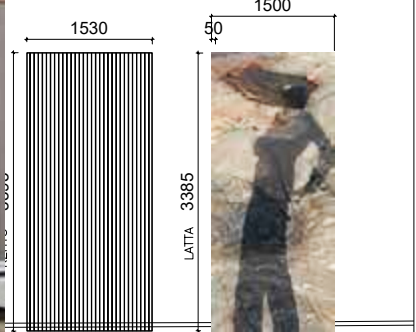


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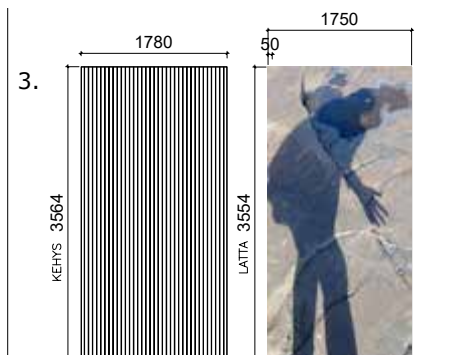
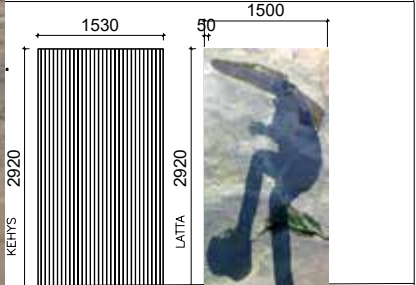




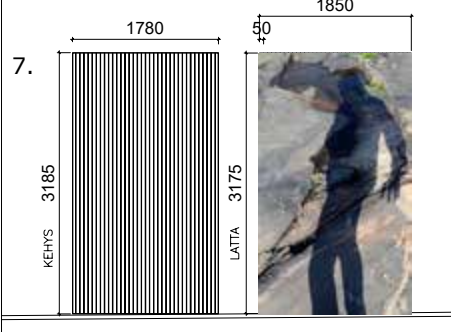
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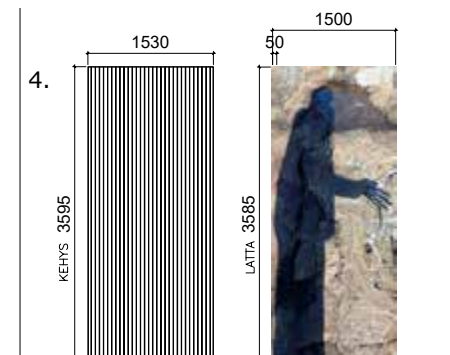
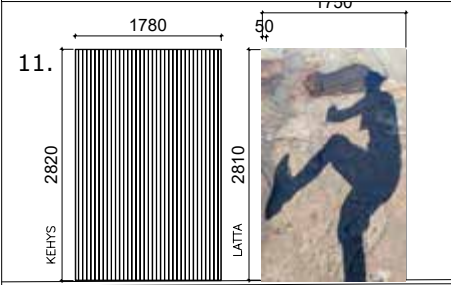
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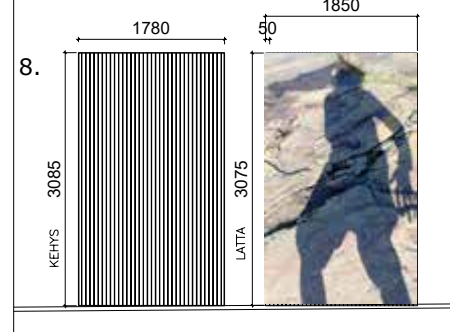
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