

Jaakko Kahilaniemi | *Mining your Business*

Exhibition: 10 September – 23 October 2021



Jaakko Kahilaniemi,
Mining Your Business,
2020

Persons Projects | Helsinki School is thrilled to present Jaakko Kahilaniemi's solo exhibition *Mining Your Business*. The exhibition presents photographic works from Kahilaniemi's series *Nature Like Capital* (ongoing series since 2018), in which he explores the complex and contradictory relationship today's exploitative society has with nature and the difficulties in finding a mutual path for a future. In his works he questions the role of the individual in the environmental degradation caused by global climate change.

Jaakko Kahilaniemi works as a visual artist and photographer in Finland and is part of the Helsinki School movement. He is drawn to places of radical interference between humans and natural forces, whether it be environmental pollutions or the aftermath of a forest fire. Kahilaniemi captures his surroundings with the directness of black-and-white photography, letting the image speak for itself, yet always includes a playful and poetic visual twist. His visual language unveils its secrets by challenging the viewers to step outside their preconceived comfort zones and look at the broader context of where we fit into the nature of all things.

Central and eponymous in this exhibition is the triptych *Mining Your Business*. The photographs show three mining factories in Finland, owned by the severely criticized gold producer Dragon Mining. *Mining Your Business #1* depicts the Kutemajärvi goldmine in Orivesi, which was closed in 2019, leaving the nearby waters and lakes polluted. *Mining Your Business #2* is taken in Sastamala and depicts a former nickel and copper mine, which was closed in 1995. However, the concentrators are used until today to process ore from the nearby mines. The Jokisivu goldmine in Huittinen, captured in *Mining Your Business #3*, is nowadays in use for gold mining even though it has ruining effects on close by lakes. Through repetitive photographing Kahilaniemi created a collage, in which gold dust seems like a burn mark, setting the surrounding landscape on fire. Shiny chunks of gold turn out to be gilded ash, which trickles like polluted rain on the remaining forests and lakes.

Kahilaniemi often works with dots, painted on the inside of the framed glass, to playfully break up the images of natural disaster. However, behind this visual detail there also lies a decisive commentary about every human's impact on the ecosystem – the "unknown factor" as the artists names it. *Going Crazy*, *Flow over Flow*, and *Foreign Factor* reveal the destruction of natural forests due to storms, floods, and fires in Finland caused by climate change. A viewer standing in front of these works will

see his or her own reflection mirrored in black dots. By seeing your own reflection in these images, you are forced to question your role in the context of environmental degradation – you see yourself unmistakably as part of the picture, not only as an uninvolved observer. In *Coal Goals* and *Peat Pile* Kahilaniemi reflects upon the enormous amount of coal and peat extracted to provide for the insatiable need for energy. Like an infographic, white dots in *Coal Goals* present the use of coal from the coal mountain in Merihaka, close to Helsinki. Each dot represents Helsinki's monthly usage of coal from 2000 to 2018. Though this work is scientifically substantiated and has a political connotation, the white dots have an aesthetic appeal, which leaves the viewer with a contradictory feeling. It is remarkable how Kahilaniemi connects the accuracy of a scientific approach with a poetic view of nature.

His conceptual work *Fistful of Peace* illustrates this notion very clearly. The photograph pictures five olive trees, which Kahilaniemi has planted as a symbol for peace in the clear-cut forest in the Tampere region in Finland. The olive trees could not even survive their first winter in this barren earth and cold landscape. A red line, burnt in on the surface of the glass, marks the over 3800 km long journey those olive trees had traveled from Greece to Finland. The line runs down like a painful crack, a trail of blood or a red thread – the associations can be wide. This work raises the question: is it possible to make peace between nature and humans? Kahilaniemi leaves the question open and focuses on us as questioners instead. Even if they show us the environmental damage in unsparing black and white, Kahilaniemi's works always incorporate a glimmer of hope: just as one is part of the destruction of nature, one can also be part of the reconstruction. His works do not neglect the possibility of creating peace between nature and humankind – even if it only lasts for a summer.

Jaakko Kahilaniemi was born in 1989 in Toijala, Finland. He lives and works in Helsinki. Kahilaniemi studied Photography at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, where he graduated in 2018. His work was presented in group exhibitions, including *New Perspectives Through Photography – 25 years of the Helsinki School*, Taidehalli (Helsinki, 2021), *A Fresh Breeze From the North!*, Kunsthalle St. Annen (Lübeck, 2020), *Nurture, Nature*, Galerie David Behning (Düsseldorf, 2020), and solo exhibitions, including *100 Hectares of Understanding*, The Finnish Museum of Photography (Helsinki, 2016). He was a finalist for the Grand Prix Tokyo International Photo Competition in 2019, won the ING Unseen Talent Award at Unseen Amsterdam in 2018 and was a finalist for the grand prix du jury photographien at the Festival de Hyères in 2018.