



Listan viimeinen(2019)

From the series: 'News from Home Kärämäki'

Digital print 50x70 cm (Lambda C-print)



Roomaankin Kärämäen kautta!

From the series: 'News from Home Kärämäki'

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Kaksi ilmapalloa

From the series: 'News from Home Kärämäki'

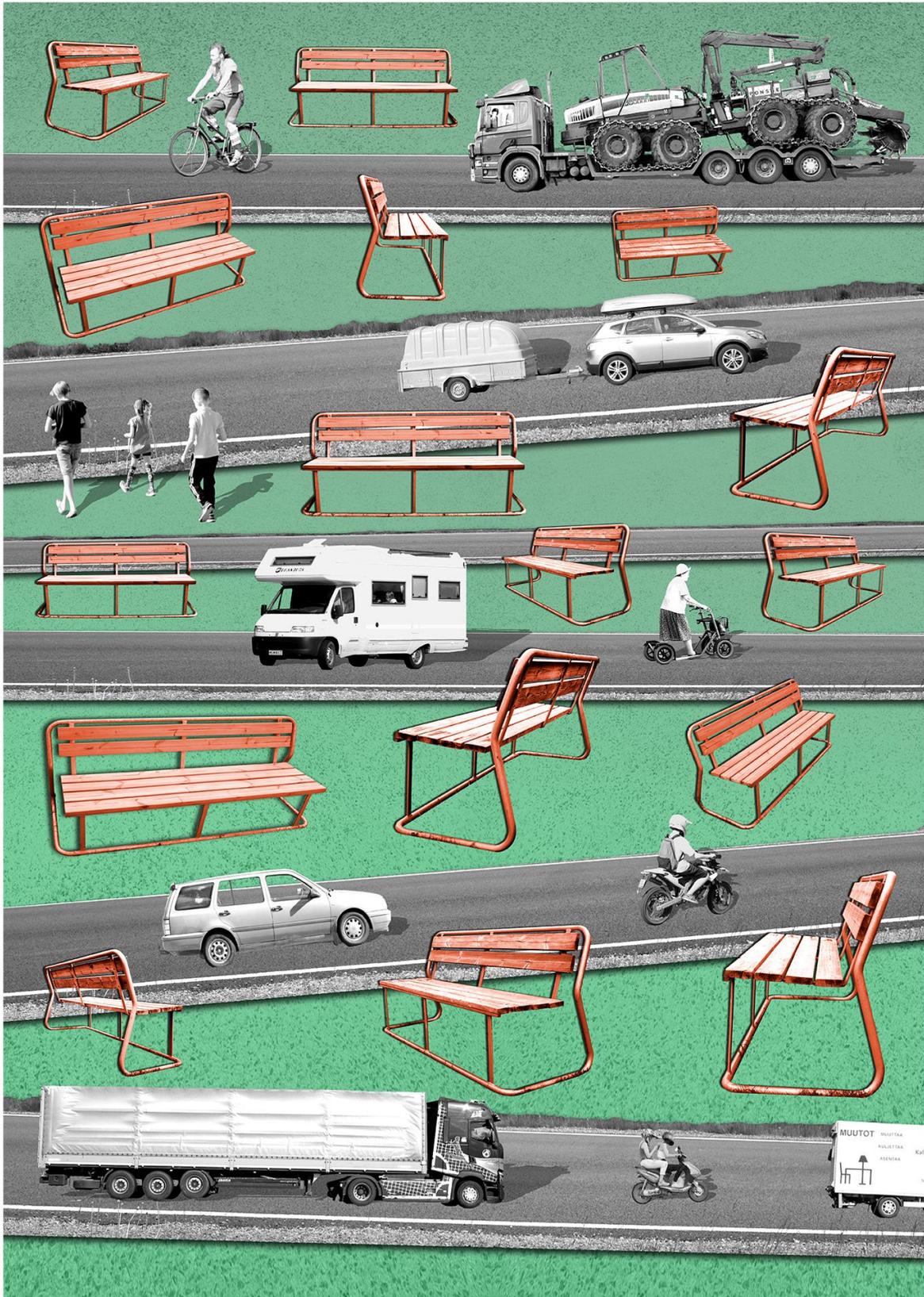
Digital print 50x70 cm (Lambda C-print)



Vene on tulessa

From the series: 'News from Home Kärämäki'

Digital print 50x70 cm (Lambda C-print)



Ole hyvä ja istu

From the series: 'News from Home Kärsämäki'

Digital print 50x70 cm (Lambda C-print)

Listan viimeinen



Kärsämäki literally means 'snout (Kärsä) hill (mäki)'. Exactly how it got this name is a mystery. One popular story is of two men hiking, who had a break on a hill. They paused long enough to smoke a pipe on this hill, yet as they continued their journey the pipe was accidentally left behind. As the pipe looked like a snout, when it was later found on the hill, the place became known as Kärsämäki.

To the present day, a recent study ranking the attractiveness of all the 313 municipalities in Finland ranked Kärsämäki last. Such studies add to a sometimes negative narrative of this rural place, geographically central but far from Finland's popular areas. Maybe it's the strange name, the lack of services or the quiet surroundings. Being located near the centre of

Finland, it is a place considered 'on the way' more so than an end destination.

Perhaps this unattractiveness relates also to how the media frames Kärsämäki. In the media, the only stories that reach the wider world are ones about Kärsämäki being the location for Finland's only case of mad cow disease, the bizarre love affair between a man and a pig, and the controversial opinions expressed by some community leaders.

In 2019, as Kärsämäki celebrates their 150 year anniversary, most locals laugh at this perceived unattractiveness. Instead they share different stories of its history. They talk about the Lapps living originally in this area and how Stone Age artifacts have been found here. How it was the battleground for the Finnish war and how there was a brief skydiving phase up until the 1970s. They also talk about the legend of 'king skier' Aappo Luomajoki, who has been buried in the local cemetery for a century. Only competing once he was in his 40s, he would convincingly beat the other competitors all half his age. The locals will also proudly talk about the old church that was demolished in 1841 and the resurrection of two architecturally famous new ones. It is these churches and the people associated with them that continue to play a major role in the town's culture.

All of this history is easily missed when 'passing by', not attractive to media headlines and also hard to measure in any list of 'attractiveness'. Perhaps with the locals, this is totally fine.

Roomaankin Kärsämäen kautta!

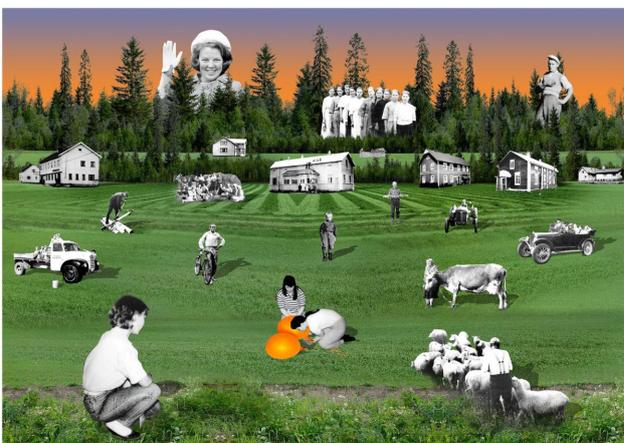


The poet Lauri Johannes Pesonen wrote, “on your way to Rome you will first pass through lovely Kärsämäki”. The inspiration for this line relates to Kärsämäki’s reputation as a stopover town on the E4. As part of the European Long Distance Path that leads from the Swedish border in the North to Helsinki in the South, over three million people a year pass through Kärsämäki, a town of about 3000.

It is in Kärsämäki that one’s long journey is forcibly interrupted by three large roundabouts, various zebra crossings and countless blue signs. Each serves to slow the traffic enough so their attention goes to other signs and needs, convincing them to stop over for a toilet break, cheese tasting, second hand shopping, art viewing, an ice cream, a smoke, a pizza or a coffee.

The locals don’t really mind why you stop, as long as you do. While agriculture and exports bring in some income, and the florist, supermarket and hardware store caters for locals, many rely on the pockets of those passing through to survive. When the roundabouts arrived in 2003 therefore, it was a positive intervention and investment that brought a sigh of relief. For, without such investment, the talk of a possible bypass leading around Kärsämäki might have some truth. And so while this road is busy, noisy and splits the town in two, it is also loved.

Kaksi ilmapalloa



On the 31st of January 1938, 40 orange balloons were released in the Netherlands. A few days later, two of these balloons were found 2,500 kms away in Kärsämäki.

These balloons were released as part of a competition organised for the occasion of the birth of the Dutch Princess Beatrix.

All the students at the Sint Ursula school

in Roermond, The Netherlands, participated. Inside each balloon was the name of the student and a message written in the international language Esperanto. The students included the sisters, thirteen-year-old Greta and eleven-year-old Mia van Ass. On the day, Greta was sick and unable to release her balloon, so Mia decided to tie the balloon of her

sister together with her own. It was these two orange balloons that were found far away in Kärämäki.

At the time, this story gave Kärämäki international attention in the New York Post. While the balloons soon deflated, the community memory of this event remained. Over 70 years later, in 2012, the municipality decided to celebrate the event by building a small Dutch-style windmill in the town. It now sits quietly and slightly run down in the corner of a carpark, with a Dutch and Finnish flag flying either side. For those stopping in this car park with a focus on food, a smoke or a toilet break, it often escapes attention. It's not an attraction that will be written about in the New York Post, but if you put a euro coin in it, it does make the windmill spin.

Paikka johon parkkeerata



The major artery of Kärämäki is the highway that runs through its centre. The large parking space around the petrol station and supermarket therefore, can be seen as the heart. It is a place for holidayers to pause for a smoke or ice cream on their journey elsewhere. A place for truck drivers to park and put their feet up for a while. It is also a place for the locals.

For many young people in this town, the parking place provides the backdrop for their social life. The amount of people that travel through daily greatly outnumbers the total population. As such, the car park provides a spectacle of new people. Some locals sit in their cars towards those arriving. Others drive a constant circuit around the carpark and nearby roads, seemingly scouting for something that maybe they don't even know. The carpark is also a chance for the young locals, usually on bikes, to do a wheelie and perhaps impress any passing eyes.

As long as the highway continues to run through this town, the seemingly mundane parking spaces will continue to play an important role. For the travellers that stop there, it is just a momentary space, is the shadows of their chosen destination. It will soon fade from their memory as they venture beyond. For others however, it is a central space and an integral part of their daily social life. For these people, it is anything but momentary and meaningless, it is instead where life happens.

Vene on tulessa



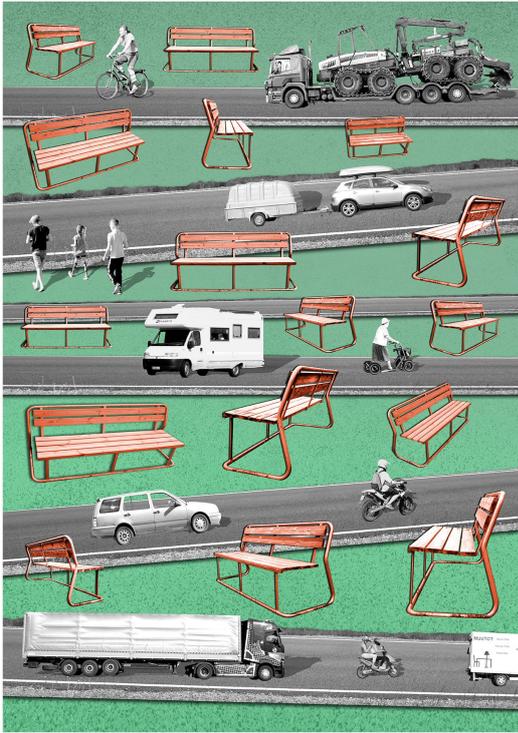
The major river that runs through Kärämäki is the Pyhäjoki, a name that means 'holy river'. However, before rushing there for any spiritual healing, it must be said that it is one of a number of rivers in Finland going by this name and there is no proof of any healing properties. Despite not being original in name, it is a beautiful river.

This beauty is the reason why the town's first church was built right next to it in 1765. It was by the river also that the priest residence was located. This is where the legendary vicar Berndt Leonard Frosterus lived in the late 19th century (and some say still lives, as a ghost). Alongside being a figure of religious guidance, Frosterus was a man respected also as a writer, craftsmen and farmer. Frosterus now has a street and building named after him and it is said some locals today still plant their potatoes on the day first laid out by Frosterus. It was at the church and by the river then, that the heart of Kärämäki first lay and today continues to be a focal point, as a place for locals to fish, swim and relax upon its edges.

Like much of our relationship with nature, the river has a further history of not only beauty but also purpose. Before the construction of roads in the area, the river was a water road to transport people and resources. During the winter this involved skiing over the water and when it was flowing, people chopped trees and made boats, to mobilise themselves and other objects to a new home.

It was from the river also, that the area of Kärämäki drew inspiration for their coat of arms. Under the municipal law that came into force in the late 1940s, all Finnish municipalities had to have their own coat of arms. As a result, a large couple of decades of municipal design began with many competitions. In Kärämäki, the design came from the famous heraldic Gustaf von Numers. The design was a blue wooden boat, which holds 7 red flames. The stories around the symbolism of this vary. Some say the seven flames represent the seven different tribes or families that created Kärämäki. Others tell the story of an outsider boat which had come to plunder houses, but was instead burnt down by the Kärämäki locals in retaliation. Whichever is true, and perhaps it doesn't matter which version is correct, the coat of arms is proudly displayed throughout the city today.

Ole hyvä ja istu



Most people's view of Kärämäki is from the seat of their car or one of the petrol station's carparks. For those that venture further, it is usually to seek a view of the famous Shingle Church, just a short walk from another carpark. What most people miss therefore, is a vast series of alternate viewing locations - the town benches.

A noticeable feature of this town of 2659 people, is the high quantity of benches spread around the main footpaths. While the benches are new and comfortable, they are rarely occupied and instead stand as dormant urban sculptures.

This lack of use might relate to their placement, a seemingly random decision without thought to the view they look on to. While some of these

benches orient the sitter towards beautiful green forests and singing birds, many others look directly at a busy road, a lamp post, the back-side of a building or up someone's private driveway.

A lack of use may also owe to the fact that by sitting on a bench one inevitably makes themselves part of the urban sculpture. Instead of the bench being a relaxing place, the sitter becomes an exhibition piece for the thousands of cars driving past daily as well as the locals seemingly unfamiliar with this usage. Whatever the reason for their emptiness, you can't help but feel sorry for these benches. So functional but lacking willing sitters.

DESIGNS POSTCARDS



Postcard series: 'News from Home Kärämäki'

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