

## ON CARING AND CARRYING

In the exhibition *Car(ry)ing*, Emelie Carlén connects an architectural context – Paimio sanatorium in Turku, Finland – with aspects of a personal narrative, reframing the visit as an embodied experience. In doing so, the artist deploys methods from her former research-based projects, investigating the realities and ideals of a particular sociohistorical moment through the material setting of a specific building.

Carlén's installation situates *Caring*, a video work documenting a visit to Paimio sanatorium, within a constellation of new sculptural works. Together, the sculptures construct an evocative scenography, layering sensory stimuli and setting up an enveloping sense of place through presence. The exhibition creates a narrative divided into parts which subtly interconnect, forming a video essay without words; a visual story made textural and aural.

The opening sequence of Carlén's video work shows the arrival to Paimio, taking in the first views of the building from a moving vehicle as it pulls up beside the entrance. The initial impression of the sanatorium's vast external façade and flat deck-like roof is reminiscent of an ocean liner, a massive building on water, gliding in and out of frame.

An antidote to crowded cities and the spread of disease such as tuberculosis, the sanatorium as an architectural model both encapsulated and concretised the ideals of Modernism. Designed and constructed to prioritise the health of its residents, it provided a medical context – treatment made manifest through architecture. Designed by Alvar Aalto and completed in 1932, the sanatorium was conceived as "a medical instrument" to deliver respite and recovery through rest, fresh air, and sunlight. An ideal implemented on a holistic scale: furniture, interior architecture, architectural design, and the building's location within vast panoramic pine forests.

The small details captured on camera are gently revealed during the film, like small shining objects hidden beneath a soft cloth – the artist draws back the felt blanket to share her viewpoint as visitor to the Paimio sanatorium. The sunshine yellow linoleum that creeps up the walls, negating the corner where floor meets wall, softening the hard lines, eliminating that groove where dirt, dust and germs might collect. The cut-out in the wall profile which allows the window to open inwards, presumably enabling both cleaning and the inward flow of fresh air; the timeless mechanisms of the windows, demonstrated by the sanatorium's guide, who gesticulates animatedly in explanation. All are observed and recorded in a careful gathering of details both human and architectural. The sporadic

presence of pine needles is a subtle nod, a reminder of the setting of the sanatorium, the exterior to its interior: the surrounding forests visible beyond.

The spatial installation of Carlén's exhibition underlines an axis of horizontality which is echoed in the video work. Channelling the gaze of the visitor – or perhaps even of a patient – the camera moves steadily for the most part, drifting as if on water, and only occasionally wavering to take in the view. Shifting down, level by level as the elevator descends.

At one point in the video work, the camera pans past an architectural model on display inside of the building. We have entered inside this model of the sanatorium, and it is filled with minute individuals, with bodies. Medical contexts are by necessity impersonal, sterile, with ubiquitous repetitive details and a sense of uniformity. They are also a carrier of and container for bodies. A context for providing care.

The colour of the felt fabric matches the linoleum which runs throughout Paimio sanatorium, absorbing the footsteps of its residents, workers, and visitors. The legs of several sculptures have a sharpness, an angularity of functional furniture which stands in stark contrast to the softened edges found elsewhere. Strong yet fragile, the sleek lines of the formed steel appear effortless; they do not willingly reveal the time-consuming effort and care dedicated by the artist. Calling forth references from Modernist furniture such as that of Eileen Gray, the placement of these sculptural works elaborates on a thematic and motif of horizontality present in the video work.

Views of the sanatorium are overlaid with an audio layer evocative of a parallel narrative unfolding; the slight squeaks of radio waves which translate the steady and strong rhythmic pulse of the artist's unborn child. The heartbeat a constant throughout the period of carrying, yet only heard outside of the body on a few rare occasions during the wait. The weight. Carrying and caring. The sonic frequencies layered in here as a hint that reveals the invisible yet ever-present I; the one that holds the eye of the camera.

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