

AARK

Archipelago Art Residency
in Korpo Finland



Candy Chang & James A. Reeves

/ You just spent one month in Korpo: How was it to spend Christmas in Korpo, so far from everything you know?

Candy: Spending the holiday season in Korpo was the perfect retreat to rest, read, and finish our book. Renja and Benkku hosted a wonderful Christmas Eve dinner and gave us a lovely little Christmas tree. We celebrated the beginning of a new decade in the sauna at AARK. Afterwards we stood on the rock pier by the ferry and thought about our lives with the sound of the waves and a million stars. We will miss watching the sublime slow-motion sunrises from our apartment window and frolicking in the plushy forests. We thought magical forests in movies were an exaggeration until we walked the Barefoot Path with the light of the low winter sun. What an inspiring sanctuary of nature and public installations.



James: We are night owls so we love Finland's winter darkness. Being surrounded by so much nature is unusual for us, and it took some time to become familiar with silence. This made our Christmas feel much more spiritual. Walking through the forest felt almost ceremonial, the sense of geology operating at scales beyond our comprehension.

Spending the holiday season in Korpo was the perfect retreat to rest, read, and finish our book.

/ How did you ended up here in Korpo?

44

James: We lived in Helsinki ten years ago and we wanted to return to Finland to enjoy a quiet Nordic winter and focus on completing a book about our most recent project. We read about the AARK residency, and it sounded like the perfect place to catch our breath and stare at the sea. We've enjoyed meeting people at the Cinema Club, and we also attended a service at St. Michaels on Sunday. We don't understand Finnish, so the sermon was purely tonal—and it was comforting.

/ How did that year living in Helsinki affect your life?

James: I'm very grateful for that year in Helsinki. Not only because of the friends we made and the elements of Finnish culture that inspired us, but for the broader perspective it gave us. America is such a noisy and weird beast, and it's frighteningly easy to believe it's the center of the world, particularly when you're living in New York City. By contrast, Helsinki feels like such a sensible and dignified city. Living there helped me better understand America's neurotic psychology as well as the idiotic myths of nations that shape and oftentimes warp our identities. But in short: living in Helsinki was fantastic and we dream of living there again someday.

Candy: Our life in Helsinki was mahtava because of the friends we made at Nokia and beyond. Like Mr. Roger's neighborhood, we all lived within blocks from one another and we hung out with an intensity I had only experienced at childhood summer camp. It reminds me of how much your relationships shape your memory of a place. I've never had so many picnics in my life. No one in Finland takes warm weather for granted. The motherland of sauna also turned us into life-long converts. Ever since living in Finland, sauna has played an important role in our well-being. We go to sauna regularly in New York City, and we have enjoyed being toasty in the traditional wood-burning sauna at AARK.

/ What are the foundations of your work?

Candy: We make public art installations that envision the future of ritual in an increasingly alienating world. Loneliness, anxiety, and stress have been called health epidemics of our time, and our politics and media are dividing us in increasing ways. We create spaces that invite people to reflect and anonymously share their inner lives, particularly their anxieties, grief, and hopes. These spaces reveal how much we are not alone in our struggles. They can also shine a light on our emotional health as a community and where we need help.

45

/ I understood that in the month that you are in Korpo you are working in a book. Can you tell us about that?

James: We recently finished a public art project in Los Angeles called Light the Barricades. It was part of an exhibit on the history of walls at the Annenberg Space for Photography. Our public installation reimaged the wall as a site for contemplating our inner obstructions. We created a series of three light boxes across the city that connect the rituals of pilgrimage and silent contemplation with a modern fable and illuminated artwork.

Candy: During the exhibition, we collected over three thousand handwritten reflections from visitors about the barriers in their lives. Many of the responses are about distraction, self doubt, addiction, fear of judgment, grief from the loss of loved ones and difficult relationships. They console me and also give me the courage to share my own struggles and what has helped. How can you open up more in your own community to help someone else feel less alone? That might be one of our greatest service to others. We're using our time in Korpo to organize and present these responses in a book about the project.

**Thank
you
Candy
& James!**

<http://ritualfields.com/>

