

The Circus Horses are Under the Weather

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Our project comes from Kerava, a city in southern Finland, just 20 minutes away from Helsinki. Kerava has been a city only for 90 years. The city really started developing when the first railway in Finland was built from Helsinki to the city of Hämeenlinna. The railway passed Kerava and soon the trains also started stopping there. The industry grew fast due to Kerava's good location and accessibility. The town grew on brick, wood, rubber and metal industries which gave work for the growing population. But the town also grew with the circus and the fairground as its curiosity.

In 1979 people of Kerava gathered to the city center in the opening ceremony of the Circus Monument. A few years back, an enthusiastic prominent figure, Aune Laaksonen had had an idea to celebrate the history of Kerava with a new monument. The monument was to commemorate the Kerava based circus and fair ground family Grönroos-Sariola, who started their business in 1888.

The Sariola family made Kerava their home and stayed in town for the winter with their exotic animals and artists. Many of Kerava's beloved stories and legends were born with the family's colourful way of living.

Money for the monument was collected by local people by numerous events. A bank account was opened for donations. Nearly everyone pitched in somehow or another. Even the materials for the horses were received by a donation.

The monument was designed by Finnish sculptor Heikki Häivöja and a theater mask maker Antero Poppius. The intention was to make a functional piece of art that would allow the same kind of joy as riding the carousel does.

Five fiberglass horses were made in a mould taken from 19th century carousel horse that once was the showstopper of Sariola's biggest carousel. The horses were given black, white, grey and brown colours that imitated the real horses. Placing of the monument changed the town's public space for it was placed in the beginning of the main street blocking the cars and making it a prom for the people.

In the opening speech people were encouraged to lift their children to ride the five horses, and so they did. The monument gathered the children and made the place so desired that even kids from other towns wanted to visit the spot. There were sometimes queues for the most desired white horse.

Some thirty years later the days of glory seemed long gone, the circus horses were under the weather. Legs and tails had gone missing, the horses were covered in tags and dirt and the once shiny paint was coming down. The horses obviously needed a good amount of love and care.

In 30 years also Kerava had changed. The monument stood earlier on a spot next to a lively prom with shops. Now the monument and its surroundings seemed deserted and the businesses seemed to have moved further down the street. The children's joy was nowhere to be found.

In 2013 The Kerava Art Museum and the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences launched a pedagogical conservation project to restore the horses. We wanted to share our journey of caretaking with the Kerava people. The aim was to raise knowledge of the circus monument, to lift the curtain of the museum work and allow people to participate in the future of their beloved monument.

We collaborated with a local elementary school, Kerava Museum and the Urban Environment Unit of Kerava.

A class of school children were in the core of our project. They were following the process from the beginning and working with the conservation students. They were also given classes on conservation and its aims, the history of the monument and the history of the fairground in Kerava. They also learned about sculpting in a workshop given by a Finnish artist. They collaborated in condition reports and an exhibition held at Kerava art museum.

The children were given a task to spread the knowledge about the project. They were expressing their thoughts and sharing their knowledge to us and to a wider audience through a blog. They also did a short film that was shown in every elementary school in Kerava.

Along the children's project we also invited people to participate in different ways. We asked the people to contribute to our project by share their memories and stories of the monument. By engaging people we were able to look closer to the function and different meanings of the art work. The memories played a significant role in the value analysis but they also helped us in sharing the importance of the monument back to the people. It wasn't the voice of museum workers or conservators telling why the monument should be taken care of, but by the people themselves. We needed the people to fall in love with their horses again, so that they would care for them in the future with us.

We shared our knowledge as we got further in our investigations and the aim was that people could be at the same page with us as the project went on. We used social media, a blog and a Facebook-page, as an information platform. But we also did a window exhibition for people that are not engaged in social media. The idea was to make the exhibition as accessible as possible.

We also made a few gift items, a temporary tattoo, a reflector and a magnet. With these items people could take the horses and their tale with them from the museum gift shop and spread the "news".

At the very end we published a book that told the whole story of the process. The book also widened the perspective with the history of the original carousel horse and the history of the carousel as a form of amusement. People's memories and pictures were published in the book as part of the monument's history.

By engaging people to the process we got them talking about the horses and sharing their thoughts and memories not only with us but also among them. The local press also followed the project with enthusiasm which helped us to share the process.

At the end we organized a big celebration for the home coming gallopers and made the day special for the local people.

The conservation process began with two types of studies: the materials and the significance of the monument. We needed to form a picture of its tangible and intangible elements. Only by combining these studies we found out what we had in our hands and what should we do with it.

As a starting point of the conservation project we used documentation made with the children, archival information from the Kerava Museum, interviews and memories from the community. The artist Heikki Häiväoja, age of 84, was interviewed as well as the lady behind the monument, Aune Laaksonen, who passed away recently. Material analysis was made by Metropolia, including cross sections, colour measurements and a radiograph of the whole horse.

The radiograph revealed that the iron armature inside the horse was poorly attached and corroded. It had to be renewed and strengthened. From the cross sections we learned that the horses were painted many times and the gelcoat layer on glassfibre was quite thin. Sculptors

Heikki Häiväoja and Aarne Jämsä provided valuable information about the materials and construction of the monument. Both of them were interviewed by the conservation students.

The remedial conservation project seemed to be very demanding. Condition of the monument was poor. Structurally the monument was not solid, Two horses were missing a front leg one missing a tale, and all the horses were stained with dirt and graffiti. At some point we discussed about a possibility of making new horses by using the original mould because it seemed difficult to find a workshop who could carry out the demanding conservation-restoration work. Metropolia doesn't have a workshop suitable for glass-fibre work. Finally we were lucky to find two sculptors, Noora and Kimmo Schroderus, who had been working with glassfibre earlier. They have a fully equipped workshop, with professional personal safety equipment.

Overpaintings were removed, rusty iron armature was partly replaced with stainless steel, new legs and tales mended. The horses were painted with colours as close as possible to the original colours. Over the years the horses had switched places like in a carousel. Now the set-up was restored back to the original.

Significance 2.0 analysis was used as a key to unlocking the meaning of the monument, and to study the intangible elements of the monument. Significance 2.0 was originally published in 2009 by the Collections Council of Australia. Significance 2.0 is used to define the meanings and values of a cultural heritage item or collection through research and analysis, and by assessment against a standard set of criteria. The significance assessment is a collaborative and transparent process and it should take into account that Circus monument may hold different meanings and values for different groups and individuals.

According to the consultations carried out in Kerava it seemed clear that through functionality the Circus Horses had made their way to the lives and memories of the Kerava people. They played significant role in the memories of the childhood in Kerava. According to the memories collected and interviews conducted functionality was the most important value for the community. Functionality was then chosen as the ideal state of the monument. "Ideal state", a concept from Barbara Appelbaum, is very useful in defining the realistic goal for the conservation-restoration process. "Ideal State" is always a real historical state.

The conservation-restoration process was planned to reach the goal of functionally and usability. In practice the inner structure of the horses was strengthened, loose parts were attached in a reliable way, and the paint coating performed in the way that it can last wear and tear.

In this process we failed to deliver the ideal state of the monument because safety regulations seemed to be stronger than the experience of the people. A new pedestal, which makes climbing on a horse more difficult was designed. Horses are strong enough to carry new riders as the ideal state proposes and people are making their own minds about safety. They keep on riding and allowing the children to ride the horses anyway.

Conclutions

What did we gain by engaging school children to our project? The children collaborated with the conservation students. They were our primary source of information about the horses and childhood. They were also the ones that showed us how to ride the horses, and why some spots were more damaged than the others. The children also collaborated significantly by helped us sharing their information about the project. They did it from a child to a child.

By involving children we were forced to look closer to our ways of speech about conservation and public art. We also created new ways of working. For example the documentation form

developed with the children will be used in the future to follow up the condition of the monument.

What did we gain by opening the process instead of just making it behind closed curtains? We were able to show that conservation is a process that does not happen overnight and that it involves decisions. We wanted to show that both tangible and intangible should be studied carefully before decisions are made. We were also able to share knowledge of the local history to a new public. The public got to learn how a community can change their own town by working together. From an idea of a person to a monument that changed the structure of a town, this piece of art is quite convincing evidence of community power.

But maybe most importantly, we gained the sense of engagement with the community. We were able to demonstrate that public space and in this case public art create private memories and experiences that are beyond the creators intentions. And that those experiences are of value. In our opinion people should have a stronger role in what is happening in their public space.

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