

Ulrika Sparre, EAR TO THE GROUND

2 October–22 November 2020

Index Foundation, Stockholm



Consider a stone. It is earth and time compressed. A slow and continual exertion of pressure, a solidifying under the weight and mass of material that comes from and makes up the earth. Of time itself.

A desert, a stone, traces of time. Can we see time? Can we feel time? Or is it something to be heard?

Ulrika Sparre works with stones and their qualities. In her work she focuses on specific characteristics of stones to open up the spectre of time widely. Stones have their own temporalities, a longevity unthinkable for humankind: they were here before us and will continue to be here after us. Amongst their seams and fault lines we can perceive glints and glimpses of past realities, histories sedimented and pressed together. Stones and minerals explain –quietly– something about life. Ulrika Sparre decided to listen actively to them.

Listening to stones allows a secret language to appear; every stone presents a certain type of sound and a certain vibration. Using contact microphones, Ulrika Sparre selects places far away from the marks of human civilization and puts her ear to the ground. The inner sounds of the stones come to us as a lost language, as a slow continuity and earthly rhythm. Vibrations and temporalities, waves in the form of sound or light.

The exhibition presents a film, sculptural works and also hides some stones within its structure. Not everything can be seen, it's also a question of attention. In her film we can observe a landscape and some of its details; we can appreciate the abstract and physical aspect of this specific landscape. Through the film, we hear the sound of the stones while Ulrika Sparre is listening them. Sound surrounds our bodies and it is through sound that another form of communication is established.

Curator Marti Manen



Ear to the Ground (wandering rocks)

A conversation between Marti Manen and Ulrika Sparre

Marti Manen: Listening to stones. We could start with many angles, from practicalities to poetics. Let's start with the idea of time. For me, it's interesting to think about these stones being there before and after us. I can't stop thinking about possible misunderstandings while listening. Is it possible to think about an old and lost language that we are trying to listen for? How do you relate with the idea of time?

Ulrika Sparre: I believe humans constantly value existence in relation to one's life. In other words, how long one's own life is. The imagination of a stone is a way to put eternity and aging in perspective. Perhaps the stones hold this inexplicable language which can be understood from the beginning of time and throughout the imaginable future. A stone could provide us with all the answers, even the origin of human existence. Holding a stone in one's hand is like holding millions of years. Stone is the only material we can imagine which will survive us, and breaking or carving into the stone's surface is in some sense irreversible.

MM: So there is a sort of asynchronicity between us humans and stones. The stones have another rhythm and temporality, and to listen to them could be a way to stop our time or adapt it to the millions of years before and after us. Would we get answers from listening? Would we hear echoes of ourselves or would we only hear emptiness?

US: And how much do we share with stone? We have several minerals within our body, which stay behind as our bodies decomposes. This reminds me of being a child playing at the beach. I would find tiny, beautiful pebbles. I remember I would preserve them by swallowing them. Then the mountain would stay within me, another possible way to shift perspective on material and time.

MM: In your film Ear to the ground (wandering rocks) there is combination of seriousness, humor, symbolic moments, and this simultaneous feeling that there is a lot going on, while at the same time, nothing happens. Tell me about the narrative construction. How did you create a mood that makes us want to see more?

US: Stone is a material perceived as silent, but at the same time, the emotional charge of stone is personal and highly present. So how does one hear the voices of stones?



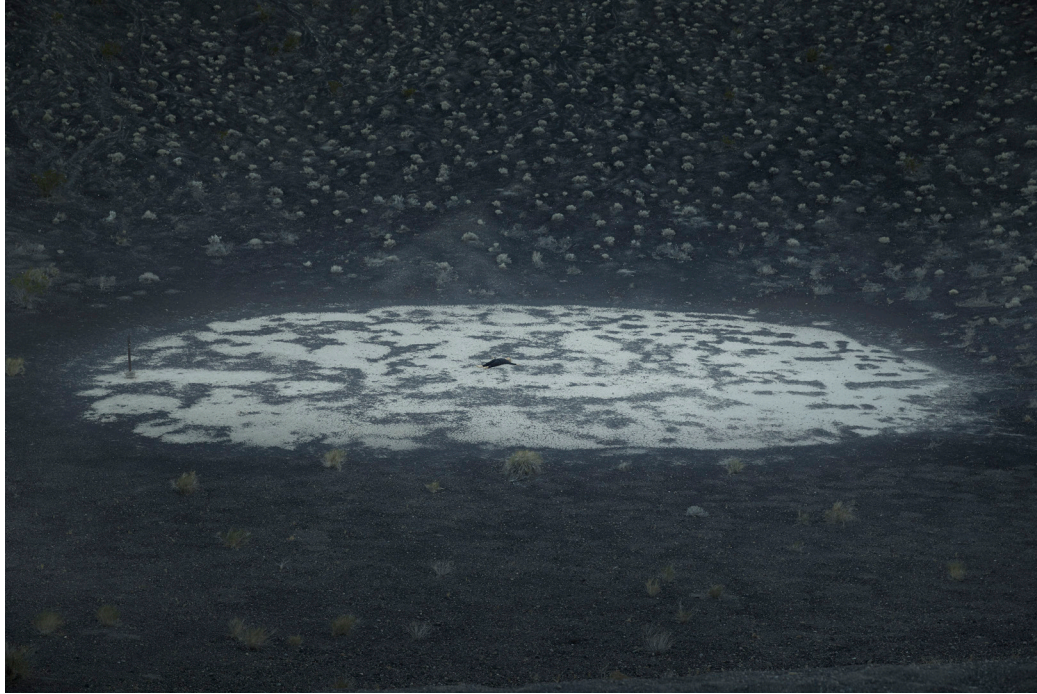


Most people can relate to the idea that a stone has had a very personal influence on them at some point in their life. Perhaps as a landmark when walking on a certain path, a collection of stones from a specific place or memorable trip, a gravestone, or a gem for healing or for its symbolism. Stones from all around the world emit energy and are considered by many to possess intrinsic powers. People often use different rocks and minerals for higher aims whether in healing or some type of transformation. By arranging and placing stones in different formations, the relationship of the stones can create immaterial vibrations. This landscape and the sounds found within it raises emotions. Nature itself is regarded as a place associated with tranquility and truth, and is described as the inviolable core of human existence. The forest wanderer stands as a real example to all sincere truth-seekers. Many revelations have been told as a result of experiences in natural landscapes, for example when climbing a mountain. Scientifically speaking, when you lift your gaze further away from your body, towards the horizon, your mind becomes clearer. This experience is the opposite of how we move about in a city where we often keep our sight lines close to us, in order to navigate in such spaces. Abraham Maslow also talked about "peak experiences" that can be perceived in the overwhelming beauty of nature. But what about a shift from looking further away to observing a stone's and its vibration? Can this create a narrative which triggers several bodily dimensions?



MM: I was born and raised in Barcelona, a city with little connection to nature. The sea is there, but it's mediated by an urban beach. The mountains are there, but they are constructed as parks. Because I wasn't in contact with wild nature, the idea of nature became a threat to me. I still feel extremely out of place in a forest, and can't read or understand its codes. I perceive it as dangerous. You talk about vibrations, and we could approach that from physics or from an almost religious approach. How do you feel about this duality?

US: It's interesting to regard this as a part of human nature: the duality of every feeling in relationship to nature itself, but also diverse perspectives as a subjective reality. We can value our relation to mountains, cities, and forests as relationships to other species, where of course a mutual understanding develops into a feeling of safety. This applies to both physics and religion where seeking knowledge is a common goal. The fear of wild nature, as you mention, has probably always been present amongst humans. Most people have distanced themselves from nature.



Half of today's population now live in cities. Somehow we have reinvented tools for interventions in nature, where everything from GPS to new kinds of survival kits and fabric have been developed for our contemporary field trips into nature. In my experience, we have a very instrumental approach to nature, and at the same time, high expectations on what it can bring us, as if nature can save us.

MM: Your use of technology is interesting. Viewers see your microphones and recorder. We can see the technical part of your process. Does the technology present in the film somehow separate us from a romantic idea of nature or some sort of almost religious experience of it?

US: The starting point for the project *Ear to the Ground* is a searching for the spiritual and the physical in nature, and also how these relationships are created and transformed. I have performed several field recordings of rocks where I reflect on what we perceive and take with us from an experience of a specific space or object. With the use of contact microphones, vibrations are absorbed from wanderings, from stones themselves, and from the deserted landscape. I have always been interested in faith and how holistic thinking is created in the minds of humans. Listening to one's own voice is central. But what is this voice? Technology today has given all of us our self-connecting tools, constantly mirroring ourselves and providing answers. By using contact microphones, I can pick up and enhance seemingly undetectable vibrations, questioning how aware we are of our surroundings. The headphones and microphones provide us with an extra antenna, a kind of tool which people constantly use in daily life. We always talk about our disconnection with nature, but what tools do we have to connect back to it? Perhaps this is what we will be left with in the end, and perhaps it is our only alternative.

MM: The landscape in the film is amazing. It sometimes becomes almost abstract.

US: Yes, familiar, but also very hard to access. This feeling often strikes me in this kind of landscape. It is often very hard to navigate through nature, and we are not adapted as humans to live in this type of environment.

MM: I would like to talk about distance and proximity. We can feel the details but also embrace the magnificence of the place, going from one to the other somehow seems logical.



US: All our senses are used when understanding a landscape, as we move our feet or touch the surfaces of rocks. I'm trying to mirror the experience of my body in the landscape. Those who observe from a distance are not involved, as Bruno Latour claims. I want to break our distance and the perception that there is a nature that is apart from us. Is this even possible? In order to face the threat of climate change, we must give voice to non-human actors —the gardens, the cities, the stones, the glaciers. I want to investigate how our relationship to what we consider nature can be reevaluated by giving it a voice and a possible language. Nature is a heterotopia that is experienced very individually, but at the same time, the concept of nature is general. Perhaps by repositioning our perspective, we can give rights to our environment and to non-human actors in our world.

MM: I like this idea of giving a voice to non-human constructions. It opens the idea of language and communication, and parallels the flexible grammar of poetry.

US: Yes, though this is something we can not understand, since we have not yet learned to speak the language. Or maybe we've just forgotten how to communicate this way. How one can be present with a stone.

Exhibition Program at Index

<http://indexfoundation.se/exhibitions/ulrika-sparre-ear-to-the-ground>

Talk: Artist talk with Ulrika Sparre, followed by book presentation of *Ear To The Ground*, Art&Theory Publishing.

<https://www.artandtheory.org/?isbn=9789151943824>

Podcast: Listening to the stones, with Sue Spaid and Ulrika Sparre. Index podcast n.09

One to One with Ulrika Sparre, Sun 15 November, 12:00-15:00

GLOWING LAND

Agate / Anderson Mine AZ Specimen W2

34° 18' 34.2"N 113° 16' 32.0"W

Teresa Solar: RIDE RIDE RIDE
26 oktober - 26 januari

Ulrika Sparre: EAR TO THE GROUND
2 oktober - 22 november

Betänk en sten. Det är jorden och tiden sammanpressad. Ett långsamt och pågående utövande av tryck, ett stelmande under vikten och massan av materia som utgör jorden. Av själva tiden.

En öken, en sten, tidens spår. Kan vi se tid? Kan vi känna tid? Eller borde vi höra?

Ulrika Sparre arbetar med stenar och deras tillstånd. I hennes arbeten fokuserar hon på stenarnas specifika egenskaper för att öppna upp och vidga tidsbegreppet. Stenen har sin egen tidsrymd, en evighet otänkbar för mänskligheten: de var här innan oss och kommer fortsätta att vara här också efter. I deras sömmar och sprickor kan vi ana glimtar av forna verkligheter, sedimenterade historier som pressats samman. Stenar och mineraler förklarar – tyst – någonting om livet. Ulrika Sparre lyssnar aktivt till dem.

EAR TO THE GROUND
(undertryckt, 2020)
Death Valley

GLOWING LAND, 2018
Darwin, Inyo County, California

Apote / Andromeda Moon #2
38°16'54.27"N 113°16'52.07"W

Argentine Cactus / Cactus
34°10'12.57"N 113°13'11.27"W

Blidar / No wall
59°06'14.71"N 18°48'54.47"E
56°46'57.91"N 17°57'50.97"W
56°40'52.66"N 17°33'45.72"W
64°48'36.07"N 14°00'56.47"E
32°26'28.91"N 62°47.57"E
59°20'54.07"N 18°01'59.27"E
87°12'14.97"N 16°54'39.07"E

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Photo Lou Mouw / Index Foundation



GLOWING LAND
Darwin, Inyo County, California

Aragonite Caliche with Some Calcite
34° 10' 12.5"N 112° 51' 31.2"W



Within the wall

59° 08' 14"N 18° 48' 44E

36° 16' 5"N 117° 35' 30W

36° 40' 52.68"N -117° 33 45.72'W

64° 48' 06.9"N 14°05' 08.4'E

32° 29' 2S 19°16' 24'E

59° 20' 54.0"N 18°01' 49.2'E

57°12' 14.9"N 16°54' 59.0'E







EAR TO THE GROUND (wandering rocks)

9.04 min HD video and audio

In the 2nd video in the series, Ear to the ground, our human search for truth and the conditions of human existence is investigated, reflecting how the artist perceives the land of the desert. With the use of contact microphones vibrations from the wandering stones and the deserted landscape is absorbed.

<https://vimeo.com/364065335>

PW Wandering rocks

Still from video





EAR TO THE GROUND

ULRIKA SPARRE

Ulrika Sparre (b. 1974) lives and works in Stockholm. She received her education at Konstfack and Gerrit Rietveld Academie in the Netherlands. She works with installation, sculpture, photography, film, performance and sound. Her work has been shown at Färgfabriken in Stockholm, Reykjavik Art Museum, Haninge Konsthall, Artipelag and Interaktiva Institutet, among others. During fall 2020, Ulrika Sparre participates in the exhibition Norðrið (North) at Listasafn Árneseinga. www.ulrikasparre.com

In 2020, she published the book “Ear to the ground” with Art & Theory Publishing. The publication takes the reader on a visual journey, providing an overview of the artworks, photographs, and material collected throughout Sparre’s project of the same name and features essays by Johan Redin, Sue Spaid, Virginia MacKenny, Virginia Marano, and Jacquelyn Davis, as well as an interview between the artist and Marti Manen. Read more on the artist’s website. Take a look inside the book <https://www.ideabooks.nl/9789151943824-ulrika-sparre-ear-to-the-ground> www.artandtheory.org

PRESS

Review by Magnus Bons konsten.net/ulrika-sparre-pa-index/

Brillo Vox Ulrika Sparre and Jenny Danielsson <https://www.brillovox.com/voxtv>

See All This 379 Women in the Arts <https://seeallthis.com/en/magazine/current-issue/>