

## CURATORS TEXT

**Curator**

Lisa Rosendahl

**Curator's text**

Curator Lisa Rosendahl at The Public Art Agency has put together the exhibition *Extracts from a future history*. Here she writes about the exhibition and presents the idea behind the overall theme "extraction".

**Extraction – from the earth, in outer space, and from within the human body.**

We most often associate the phenomenon of extraction with the exploitation of natural resources, as in mining operations. But in the digital age, the concept has expanded to also include completely different phenomena, such as large-scale data analysis and digital currencies, and the commodification of emotions and relationships through social media. The exhibition *Extracts from a Future History* brings together artworks on the theme of "extraction" and the city of Luleå in an attempt at mirroring this societal change.

Since 2014, Public Art Agency Sweden has invited artists to represent the

Since 2014, Public Art Agency Sweden has invited artists to represent the transition from industrial society to postindustrial era, presenting exhibitions in different areas of Sweden through the series Industrial Society in Transition. The final segment of the series is the exhibition Extracts from a Future History, taking place at several sites around Luleå in November 2017.

Over the last decade, Luleå has experienced an identity shift from a city dominated by steel production to a global, high-tech hub. Contributing to this development is the decision by Facebook to place its European servers in the city, not to mention the excellence of Luleå University of Technology. Further inland, in Kiruna, mining company LKAB and space center Esrange continue to advance in their respective directions: deep down toward the center of the earth, and further out into the darkness of the universe. And outside the city of Boden, digital currency is being extracted at top speed in one of Europe's largest Bitcoin mining operations.

For the exhibition Extracts from a Future History, Public Art Agency Sweden has invited artists Raqs Media Collective, Lisa Tan, and Anja Örn, Tomas Örn and Fanny Carinasdotter to create new artworks taking the city of Luleå and the region of Norrbotten's relationship to extraction as their starting point. The exhibition also includes existing artworks by Yuri Pattison and Eva Stina Sandling related to the same theme.

The idea for the theme of the exhibition arose during a visit to Datavägen (Data Road) in Luleå, with Facebook's server halls on one side of the street and the offices of Northland mining company on the other. My experience of the physical convergence of the mining and data industries made visible the many links between them that had not previously been obvious to me. The goal of the exhibition is to stage meetings between the city of Luleå and the artists' works, which similarly can inspire thoughts about how society and its relationships to the industrial processes that largely define Sweden's economy have changed from the 1950s to today. The exhibition's central metaphor of the shift from iron ore to data is conceived as an introductory idea for the artists to problematize and expand upon in various ways through their artworks.

On Datavägen, high-voltage conductors sing with electricity from the hydroelectric power plants in Messaure and Porsi, initially constructed for heavy industry and now one of the main reasons energy-intensive data companies have chosen to establish themselves in Norrbotten. At the same time, the world's largest social network is humming behind Facebook's impermeable façade. The linguistic connection between "mining" and "data mining" (extracting information from large quantities of data) becomes clearly revealed here: these industries both contribute the logic of extractivism. The algorithms that drive today's flow of data play the same role as gunpowder once did in the old iron mines. The connection is not only linguistic, but also concrete: rare-earth metals are essential for computer hardware and mobile phones, which like the village street and the workplace have become a new infrastructure for our social and emotional lives. But should we also ask ourselves if there are other similarities between the extraction of Earth's decreasing natural resources and the exploitation of humankind's social and emotional abilities? Perhaps emotions should also be understood as a limited resource, just like fossil fuels?

From the 1600s onward, the ore fields of Norrbotten have provided the world with metals that played a decisive role for the world economy. Many colonial relationships have been built on iron ore from the North: between the Swedish State and the Sami people, as well as between the great powers of Europe and their conquered territories in other parts of the world. Contemporary forms of global exploitation look somewhat different. Today, the exploitation and transformation of common resources into capital happens not only on oil and ore fields, but also at home in front of the computer. For companies like Facebook and Google, the personal data that we, their many billion daily visitors, leave behind on their websites are just as valuable as the 75,000 tons

of iron ore that LKAB extracts from Kiirunavaara mountain every day.

Furthermore, research shows that our interaction with new technology will not only change our behavior in the long run—it will also reshape our brains. Just as mining weakens the bedrock and redirects the flow of groundwater, our brains and thought patterns are physically reshaped by the infrastructure we interact with on a daily basis. Maybe the explosive use of social media, the commodification of personal information, and the tendency of algorithms to drive our attention should therefore be compared to a new form of colonialism that doesn't only exploit but also invades and changes our ways of thinking and feeling?

By installing the artists' contemporary works in some of Luleå's classic 1950s buildings, I hope to stage thought-provoking double exposures of different layers of time, materials, and ways of seeing the world. Maybe the meetings between the artworks and the cityscape can help us see daily life and our present moment in history from different perspectives—just as the convergence of the mining industry, hydroelectric power, and server halls on Datavägen in Luleå did for me.

Curator: Lisa Rosendahl

