



Experiencing a Lament Performance in a Mire Emotions linked to Nature and Unsustainable Lifestyles

Abstract

The article addresses the topical issue of environmental emotions from the perspective of individual experiences of environmental art reception. The research focuses on how the audience experienced lament performances by singer and musician Noora Kauppila in natural mires in Finland, and it asks the research question: What kinds of environmental emotions have laments in the mire provoked, and how are emotions contextualised in audience interviews? Art performances in the mire have become part of a growing international mire trend in the 21st century. I understand mires as a living heritage that reflects the diversity and inter-connectedness of heritage elements (e.g. practices and knowledge concerning nature) experienced by community members and individuals. The effectiveness of art (lament performances) is linked to reception research, which has not previously been applied to mire art performances. In the debate on the impact of art, the experiential perspective has been marginal. In the interview material, individuals' experiences reveal strong emotions about the endangered environment. The lament performance transformed a mire into a culturally appropriated space for the collective and individual processing of emotions regarding a fragile natural environment. The interviewees reported unwanted changes in their own surroundings, and their feelings about the changes were reflected in the observed decline in the habitats of birds and other mire animals. In a broad sense, the article offers insights into the meanings and changes of an individual's relationship with nature. The research evidence suggests that a communal context is needed to deal with environmental emotions, especially negative emotions like sorrow, hatred and grief. Likewise, the individual accounts reveal a need for a communal change in abandoning unsustainable lifestyles. The article is based on research that has been undertaken as part of the 'Mire Trend' research project at the University of Eastern Finland.

Keywords: environmental art, sustainability, human-mire relationship, art reception

Introduction

Mire art is a diverse and long-established field of art that is constantly taking on new forms (Laurén et al. 2020; Laurén 2006; Latvala-Harvilahti 2021; Kaukio 2022).¹ The background informing this current trend is that, ever since environmental art first began to enjoy success in Europe in the 1970s, mires along with other outdoor areas have been used for artistic purposes (Huhmarniemi & Jokela 2019). Environmental art is art made in nature or in the cultural environment, and it can take the form of a work, a process or a single event. It makes people aware of their environment, encourages pro-environmental behaviour and creates new meaningful relationships with the environment. In environmental art, moving the same material and form to another place changes the work and may create an entirely new work. An environmental artwork is seen not only in a particular place but as constantly living in time, in specific local cultural and social conditions. (Marks et al. 2014; Hannula 2002; Tieteen termipankki 25 January 2023; Naukkarinen 2003, 76–78.) In parallel with the re-activation of mire artists in the 2000s, mires have deliberately been harnessed by society as spaces of well-being (Nikkilä & Korhonen 2008; Gearey 2021). This article traces how laments performed in a mire are experienced by the audience when environmental problems dominate the social debate. The research question is as follows: What kinds of environmental emotions have laments in the mire provoked, and how are emotions contextualised in audience interviews?

In the 2000s, both in Finland and internationally, a new approach has been adopted to organise the activities that are distinct from the previous use of mires. The new approach includes festival-style swamp football and volleyball competitions in ex-peat production fields as well as various mire art events and performances in natural mires (Laurén & Latvala-Harvilahti 2021), but it did not include laments until Finnish musician and singer Noora Kauppila realised her art project *Dirge on the Mother's Grave – lamenting as a tool of collective grief in the era of eco anxiety* (2018–2019). Kauppila's mire art could be experienced as a tour, which is atypical in the field of mire art. More common are individual performances, organised as part of an event. Tours were carried out in cooperation with the local associations of the Finnish League

1 The research is part of the University of Eastern Finland's Mire Trend research project (2020–2023), which studies the changing cultural heritage of mires in Finland. In the research group, the cultural use of mires is examined based on different thematic areas of interest: my own contribution to mire art from the 21st century was well suited to providing an overview of the cultural heritage of mires in the fields of mire sports, media and literature, and the soundscape of the mire. Using interviews and personal observations, I aim to understand the current forms and impact of mire art, how it is experienced in the mire and what messages artists want to convey in their work.

for Nature Conservation and the cultural services of the localities where the performances took place. In the first year, Kauppila's lament performances focused on the natural mires of northern Ostrobothnia. In 2019, the tour moved to central and southern Ostrobothnia and Häme. After the tour, Kauppila's lament project has been performed in the capital of Finland, Helsinki (Music House 2019, the park of the Finlandia Hall as part of the UN Alliance programme 2020 and Seurasaari Open-Air Museum 2021).

The core of my analysis is based on audience interviews (2020) concerning Kauppila's performances in the mires of Pilvineva in Veteli, Karvasuo in Seinäjoki and Torronsuo in Tammela, Forssa (2019). The audiences ranged in age from children to the elderly. The artist's encounter with the audience has been analysed based only on the interviews that I conducted with adults. My work and contact with Kauppila only began after her tours in the mires, which is why fieldwork during her performances in the mire is not included to this study. I interviewed Kauppila face to face and was in the audience in the park at Finlandia Hall in 2020. The interview and my experience in the park increased my understanding of the interviewees' discussions of the performances. Kauppila also helped me with making audience connections. Since this article is about her tour, I felt it was ethically important to give Kauppila a look at the forthcoming article before publishing it. After the referee reviews, she has read the manuscript version of the article and the translation of one word in her quote was clarified.

In Finland, debate on the protection of mires is currently quite topical. Mires are part of the local landscape and therefore also play an important role for many people, including on an emotional level. However, not everyone in Finland is familiar with mires, even though there are so many of them in the country. They also look different depending on the type of mire, and moving around in them depends on the water content of the mire in question. Brown peat bogs that have been converted into energy use look quite different than natural watery mires or ditched mires. Mires, their use and their importance have nevertheless been much discussed in Finnish society. Mires are controversial landscapes, and tensions thus exist between public authorities and citizens, for example when it comes to peat production areas and environmental damage. One of the key issues is the serious risk of pollution accumulation in mires and water bodies from the mining industry. (See, e.g. Lindholm & Heikkilä 2006; Khan 2020.) For example, in southern Ostrobothnia the coexistence of peat policy and ditch restoration is an everyday occurrence for locals.

Mires and peatlands are referred to by various names, such as bogs, wetlands and swamps. I will use the concept of mire, which refers to a peatland where peat is actively being formed (International Peatland Society 30 Octo-

ber 2022; Ojanen et al. 2021). Both in Finland and internationally, research on mires has mainly focused on the natural science perspective. Globally, undrained natural mires are habitats for a wide range of biodiversity and provide important ecosystem services that benefit human communities. The main ecosystem services are biodiversity maintenance, carbon and water storage, solution retention and water regulation (Clarke & Rieley 2019, 11). Cultural studies and qualitative, ethnographic methods provide access to the cultural use of mires and the reception of art in nature. The current climate crisis and the need for a sustainability transformation requires that everybody join in the effort of preserving them. (SYKE Policy brief 2021.) Participatory mire art is an international trend. For example, the Swedish Swamp Storytelling project invites people directly to confront environmental problems (Swamp Storytelling 2021). The environmental crisis has also sparked school collaboration in Lithuania, with artists, researchers and students working together as part of the Swamp School project to promote the vital ecosystem of the mire (Swamp Pavilion 2021).

The hypothesis is that (mire) art as a social construct has the power to transform society step by step, together with other sectors and tools at society's disposal (Hiltunen et al. 2022; Siivonen et al. 2022). Thematic analysis is guided by the combination of the concept of environmental emotions and theory of art reception. To answer the central research question, the article first presents the core aspect of Noora Kauppila's lament performance. Theoretical perspectives on the impact of lament performances are discussed, after which the research material is introduced. Then, the text proceeds to an analysis of how three interviewees experienced the lament performance and the environmental emotions it may have awakened in them. Finally, the article presents some important conclusions.

Noora Kauppila's performance *Dirge on the Mother's grave – lamenting as a tool of collective grief in the era of eco anxiety*

The Karelian tradition of lamenting is part of living heritage, practised today by musicians in their public performances as well as by individuals to deal with their own emotions (see Silvonon 2022; Hytönen-Ng et al. 2021). Multi-disciplinary research on lamenting is still abundant, but the roots of the research extend back to the 19th century (Stepanova 2014, 7).² The subject has

2 Early Karelian performers did not think of themselves as performing music; lamenting was a community ritual practice, used especially at various crossroads in life, such as weddings, funerals or going to war. From this point of view, new research on laments has approached the tradition as a cultural practice, which is also perceived as a musical phenomenon. (Silvonon 2022, 81.)

been studied from the perspectives of folk music, ethnomusicology, folkloristics and other forms of cultural and gender studies, ranging from early fieldwork and encounters between performers to research based on listening to archival recordings (see Tenhunen 2006; Silvonen 2022). As a genre, laments combine different forms and styles, content, audience, reasons for lamenting (i.e. social and cultural functions), as well as situational and usage contexts. Laments are ritual poetry using traditional lamenting language to express not only collective themes, but also the singer's personal sorrows (Stepanova 2014, 36–37). In modern times, however, the tradition has benefitted from increased global connections between them. Noora Kauppila (2020, 83) describes her feelings as follows: 'Performing the laments as stage art has felt contradictory and it was only in the mires that they seemed to be placed in a natural setting for the first time.'

In this article, I am not exploring laments as such, but the effectiveness of the environmental art form as experienced in the mires, as audience members recount their experiences in interviews. The interview with Noora Kauppila reveals the structure and aim of the performance and provides the background for the audience interviews. Kauppila says that her preferences have changed over the two years preceding the interview, as she has spent a great deal of time in the mires. What fascinates her about mires is their healing nature; the mires make you pause: there is depth, unpredictability, silence to them: 'The fascinating thing about the mire is that you see the open sky quite differently than elsewhere.' For her, the mire reflects the symbolism of life and the values of a slower pace of life. She did not want to write down the message of the performance in the leaflet. (Interview, Kauppila 25 February 2020.) During the interview, Kauppila emphasised the freedom attached to the audience's experience of the mire performance:

I would like people to have some experience of it; I have not as an artist wanted to define what it is. *It's personal* for everyone -- I wanted to show the beauty of the mires and a certain theme of presence -- I have tried to build up in a way, even if I schedule the sunset towards the end of the performance and look at the directions, how it, even though I am not a dancer, how I position myself in relation to the sunset, uses the echo of nature, light and so on; it can *deepen the experience*. (Interview, Kauppila 25 February 2020.)

Noora Kauppila makes use of the idea of ritual art (which is an old form of social art), whose central aim is to connect with something larger than oneself. In ritual, the focus is on change or transformation (Tieteen termipankki 18 August 2022). Kauppila sees lamenting as one way of dealing with

the confusion surrounding environmental concerns. The performance lasts about an hour and features new Karelian-language laments composed and written by Kauppila herself. One of the laments uses the Karelian language metaphor of cranberries to refer to children. Similarly, the mire symbolises the mother. Kauppila also performed a lament of thanks, and another song accompanied by one of the most important instruments in Finnish folk music, a small kantele. Through her artistic work, she highlights the uniqueness of mires in terms of their biodiversity, as carbon sinks and stores, as well as an experiential landscape. Kauppila cherishes the endangered Karelian language and the traditional Karelian laments. Although the title of the performance highlights a collective mourning, there are other emotions expressed in the performances as well. Alongside grief, she has included tones of sadness and anger as well as tones of hope and gratitude. As a further consideration, lamenting makes mourning public, but it also allows listeners a personal level of grief. Thus, the performances evoke emotions and prompt later discussions about the state of the local mires. (Interview, Kauppila 25 February 2020; Kauppila 2020, 81–83).

In Finland, peatlands have been cleared for fields, peat has been extracted for fuel and, above all, peatlands have been drained to promote forestry (See *Turvetyöryhmän loppuraportti* 2021). Mire art can thus be organised in various mire environments, e.g. in areas that include ditched mires, in mires facing ecological restoration and in those in a natural state or peatlands that are used for peat energy. Each of them could be suitable for a specific art theme and method. Kauppila's lament performances deal with grief and loss, and they include wildlife, birds and the natural landscapes. Heavily mechanised landscapes in the process of restoration, which show more human than animal activity, would have changed the atmosphere of the performance. Kauppila thus influenced the starting point of the experience through her choice of performance venues. Particularly, the audiences arrive at a natural mire, and not a peat bog, and she justifies this decision as a preservation of hope:

I think peat bogs are so ferocious and impressive, there's something really cool about them visually. But I didn't want to take the laments directly to the edge of the peat bogs, because I wanted to preserve *the aspect of hope* in some way. (Interview, Kauppila 25 February 2020.)

Furthermore, the positioning of the audience in the performance, and the boundary conditions assigned to the audience (such as their encounter with the artist), may influence the experience. When performed outdoors in a mire environment, like in Kauppila's case, the art event breaks the estab-

lished conventions of a live concert (cf. Heinonen 2020, 13; Bourdieu 1987, 205; Hamilton 2020; Pihkala 2019). An art performance in a mire setting involves unforeseen factors, as weather conditions are strongly present in the immediate art experience, as are smells of nature.

The audience of approximately 10–20 (max 50) people helps create an intimate space during each performance. People met Kauppila at the car park near the performance venue and later escorted the audience back. From there, they walked together to the performance site. Kauppila explained to the audience what her laments are about and handed out leaflets with the lyrics of the laments in Karelian. She had also translated the lament from Karelian into Finnish, entitled *ABEUDUNNUO – A cry for a lost land*:

This cry was born out of the mining industry and the environmental lobby. It *mourns the transfer* of flourishing land and life force to commercial, environmentally destructive use, using the vocabulary and metaphors of old bridal laments. (e-mail to the author.)

The middle of the performance included *The Wolf spell*, where Kauppila ran away from the audience, and on her return, played the role of a wolf making noise. Kauppila told me that the *Wolf spell* section came about when she became excited about the proverb ‘No wolf gets lost in the mire’ (25 February 2020). Here, one can find mythical intertextual references to writer Aino Kallas’s novel *Sudenmorsian* [*The Wolf’s Bride*] (1928 / translated into English 1930). Set in the 17th century, ‘Sudenmorsian’ is depicted as a mire that attracts a female witch (Laurén 2006, 49), with the mire functioning as a supernatural place where the protagonist can transform herself into a werewolf. While lamenting, Kauppila feels the mire come to her in the form of watery tears. Emotions and affectivity are linked to laments, where the emotions of sadness and suffering are combined in a certain sense of awe. The grief is transmitted to the audience, and it is common to cry at this point; when lamenting, Kauppila uses a traditional weeping cloth, which is seen as a material sign of laments (see Silvonen 2022).

Artists draw on the emotional and affective cultural heritage of mires, but they also reproduce it in a future-oriented way (Adam & Groves 2007; Birkeland 2015, 173). The cultural meanings of the mires extend to the layering of the soil. Cultural activities like lament performances are key drivers in building places of hope and resilience (see Beel et al. 2017, 460). Resilience is best enhanced in relation to future-orientated action by an improved ability to accept the loss and changes that occur (see Holtorf 2018). Tensions may arise with respect to the concept of nature since it is given many meanings that stress either the resources that can be used or the view that people are

part of nature. Consequently, how people can both use and protect nature in their everyday lives remains an open question. (Henttonen et al. 2022, 14; see Hankonen 2022.)

Theoretical perspectives on the impact of lament performances in the mire

I approach lament performances as an art form that may affect the audience in many ways. Here, the main aspect involves examining environmental emotions through the interviewees' experiences of traditional, but renewed, lament performances (see Latvala-Harvilahti 2021, 2022). The effectiveness of art is linked to reception research,³ which has not previously been applied to lament performances in the mire. Traditionally, reception research has been used to study the relationship between literature and the reader in relation to the text, but since then, other artistic genres have also been considered (Tieteen termipankki 14 October 2022). Study of the reception of art relies on the interpretation of the interviewee's verbalised experience. Cultural studies bring cultural meanings and individual values to the study of ecological crisis. This is important because the arenas of engagement with climate change are situated in the present day, and the awakening to action and agency occurs through everyday contexts, landscapes, lay knowledge and meaning making (Hamilton 2020, 2, 30).

The study of experiences is central to the human sciences, which seek to understand different social and cultural situations and activities (Rinne et al. 2020, 5). Mire art is experienced subjectively, with the focus being on one's own sensations. The art element creates the experience lived in the environment (e.g. Sepänmaa 1994). Emotional engagement with the mire has been reported as personal attachment, love and identification, especially when living nearby (Flint & Jennings 2021). Studying the impact of lament performances in the mire provides knowledge about the welfare effects of arts and culture (Crossick & Kaszynska 2016). Together with research on the reception of art, the most recent contemporary art research trend also includes an examination of works as a discussion of the future: Huhmarniemi and Salonen (2022), for instance, have tried to identify what kinds of future images the works of art invite us to imagine regarding the relationship between human beings and the earth.

3 Recent themes in reception research cover cultural differences in art experiences (Yli-Mäyry 2011) and YouTube users' discussions of nature campaign films, especially considering connotations and metaphors that reflect values (Olausson 2020). On the other hand, the emotions and feelings of the viewers in dance performance influence the valuation, but the performance itself, as well as the interaction between the audience and their environments, lies at the heart of value formation (Moisio 2022).

Feelings related to environmental issues are labelled with the umbrella term *environmental emotions*. Various artistic events deal with environmental anxiety from the perspective of ritual examination and underline the importance of understanding the scope of the phenomenon (Pihkala 2021, 9). The people who gather in the mires may also feel sadness about non-environmental issues, too. However, the presence of mire nature and the thematic linking of laments to, for example lost land, deepens the connection between their sentiments and nature. The role of the lament performer is to be the voice of the community and the interpreter of the feelings expressed on behalf of nature. As part of environmental art, the laments in the mire emphasise sadness and concern, as environmental emotions. Although environmental emotions include worry, fear, guilt, responsibility, shame and anxiety, fortunately not all emotions are so gloomy. People's sense of belonging also brings with it feelings of joy, relief and even pride, which further inspires hope. Environmental grief and feelings of loss have been widely studied internationally, and, for example, grief has been linked to concrete changes, while anxiety can be accompanied by restlessness and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness (Pihkala 2019, 100–101; 2021; similar feelings are connected with *climate emotions*; see Pihkala 2022; Hamilton 2020; Bowman 2019, 298, Henttonen et al. 2022, 24). Although research on environmental emotions has mainly focused on the experiences of young people (Ojala 2016), concern about the environment is not exclusive to young people.

When experiencing art in general, emotions convey information from the personal frame of the experiencer (Rannisto 2015, 121). Art feeds thinking, suggests frameworks for interpretation and creates an interaction between the artwork and the perceiver in its environment. This process creates what is known as co-awareness. What people most expect from art is that it will provoke thought and bring new perspectives on familiar issues, even to the extent of questioning one's own values. It is noteworthy that there is a positive presumption in assessing the impact of art. (Kantonen 2021, 335, 340; Heikinaho 2021; Menninghaus et al. 2017, 2.) According to the classical view, the experience of art is created when the artist, the artwork and the audience meet in an individual and culturally bound 'process of experience' (Yli-Mäyry 2011, 268–269). In the debate on the impact of art, the experiential perspective has been marginal. Instead of hard-to-choose metrics, the impact of art is better understood by asking how people experience and give meaning to participation in the arts (Lehikoinen & Vanhanen 2017, 12–13; cf. Kantonen 2021, 319). However, the individual's contribution to the impact debate has also started to receive more attention (Virolainen 2015, 101–102; Hormio 2020, 106–107).

Mire art has several ritualistic features and symbolic dimensions: the place is delimited, the audience experiences the performance closely together in nature, while the mire also represents the human mind. As environmental art, mire art acts as a channel for the articulation of emotions. I share the notion that mire art is not just about self-expression and works, but above all about experience and exploration, producing and sharing meanings. Mire art provides a holistic and multi-sensory framework for the interpretation of knowledge. The mire can empower the audience to pay attention to the details of the mire environment. The embodiment of the audience's experience is enhanced by insects crawling on the skin, birds that may be seen, the ground and plants that can be felt against the body (Latvala-Harvilahti 2022). A lament performance places the nature directly on the experimental stage. The mire as a material platform affects aspects of embodiment and sensory memories and builds multi-sensory meanings for what is experienced (see Kajander & Koskinen-Koivisto 2021). The biocultural heritage of mires consists of, for instance, value of biodiversity, local knowledge, experienced landscapes and place-related memories (Latvala-Harvilahti 2022; Russell 2021). The mire environment, like the human body, serves as a medium that creates meaningful features for the transmission of art (see Hietala et al. 2020, 235).

Interview material from the audience

The knowledge gained from the interviewees includes values, emotions and worldviews. Interviewees recounted their memories of a lament performance a year after the experience, but the narrative strongly conveys what was experienced at the time and its individual meanings. Each interviewee had a freedom to talk about his or her experiences as they wished, and the final material product, an interview, was constructed in dialogue with the interviewer, who interpreted the narration using the key analytic concepts. The interviewees (two women, one man) were early middle-aged persons, born between 1970 and 1980. Due to pandemic, I conducted the interviews, each lasting about 40 minutes, by telephone. I did not request any preparation for the interview. However, prior to the interview, one of the participants tried to write down her own experience of mire art. I refer to interviewees in the text by a sequential code (starting with H_Y1) and use Kauppila's name with her consent.

I used a thematic framework that began with an exploration of the interviewee's background and their human-mire relationship. Already in the introductory questions for the interview, the interviewee could compare the childhood of today's children with their own and consider the extent to which people enjoy experiences in nature now compared to in the past. Apart from one audience interviewee, being in nature had been part of the interviewees'

leisure activities throughout their lives. The interviewees did not represent people who felt alienated from nature. In their case, it would have been interesting to compare the effectiveness of art with others. However, for two of the audience interviewees, the lament performance was their first experience of art performed in a mire, and they were also unfamiliar with laments. The mire environment was familiar to most of those interviewed, though. Each interviewee's existing human-nature relationship is an important element behind the experience of mire art and emotions. Understanding the importance of the mire on a personal level was considered in connection with the importance of the ecology of the mire.

When conducting the interviews, environmental emotions were not the main theme of focus. The material, however, proved that emotions were important part of the lament experience for all the interviewees. In recounting the experience of the lament performance, the interviewees verbalised their understanding of the strain on the environment and the need for sustainability transformation. During the interviews, time was allowed for themes to emerge, and the interview structure could be described as quite informal. In the analysis, while the interview material plays the key role, my own experience of Kauppila's performance in the park surely had an impact on my writing, too. A telephone interview affects the dialogue and the information produced in the interview differently than a face-to-face interview. In my experience, the interviewer does not control the interview process as much as in a face-to-face interview. In telephone interviews, listening plays a more prominent role, and this also applies to listening to silence. The space given to the interviewee to continue or stop should be interpreted without gestures or eye contact. The situation is challenging and requires patience.

'Natural phenomena happen in us and in our bodies' (H_Y1)

Torransuo, the location of Kauppila's performance, was not a particularly familiar place for the interviewee quoted above (b. 1978), and it was her first time at a mire art performance. However, she had been taking her children to the mire for educational trips, as 'nature had been her playground' as a child. Her own relationship with the mire had developed around a bog pool near her home, and the scents of the mire. In her family, nature was not seen as a separate place to go out into, but more as an everyday environment. The interviewee wondered about the difference between her own childhood experiences of nature and that of today's children: for example, do children today have their favourite trees? A vivid human-mire relationship is part of a culturally constructed relationship with nature (Laurén et al. 2022, 3–4). However, in accordance with previous research (see, e.g. Laurén 2006, 127–128),

the interviewee understands that her own actions can influence her children's relationship with nature. The field of art and art education has long been concerned with creating a dialogue between humans and non-humans as well as promoting fairer and more sustainable lifestyles (Meyer-Brandis & Taipale 2022). Through its collaborative activities, it aims at a more ecologically and socially sustainable future (Järvinen et al. 2020).

The Torronsuo performance had elements of participatory art, as the audience was invited to participate in a workshop related to the theme of environmental concerns (Kaitavuori 2021). Kauppila invited participants to this workshop through an advertisement placed in the local newspaper, and Kuvio (a cultural association in southwest Finland) also shared the ad on social media (below):

Do you want to look at environmental grief and crying in a Karelian voice in a group? The workshop is part of the 'Dirge on the Mother's Grave' project, where the facilitator will create a lament/song based on the workshop and incorporate it into a performance in September in a mire in the Forssa region. In the workshop, we will reflect on environmental concerns in ourselves and as a phenomenon in society. Participants will learn about the tradition of laments in music and poetry, and if they wish, will be able to try lamenting as part of a group. The workshop is free of charge. The first 12 participants will be accepted. (Kuvio 9 June 2019, Facebook.)

The interviewee participated in the lament workshop. She had not heard about laments from anyone before, but she intuitively went along with it. She says she felt an intense sense of climate change-related anxiety and exhaustion with 'the modern machinery'. In her lament, she is addressed by way of embodied experience, self-consolation and self-compassion, and her experience is set against the backdrop of a busy contemporary life. Particularly, she felt a strong personal need to experience a new kind of connection with the world.

The interviewee described how the rush turned into calm as Kauppila led them through the village of Torro. A beautiful landscape opened up before them, but as they moved into the mire, the interviewee was nervous about the sinking nature of the soil. She described the situation as dreamlike, where the artist is nearby and guides them to the spot. After describing the move, the interviewee burst into tears. She explained that there is no place or space in everyday life for dealing with feelings of concern and sadness about the environment, and she extended these feelings for the environment to human beings. Climate change is a topic that she feels other people are avoiding and evading. The concern for people is extended in the narrative to reflect an alienated way of life that is being questioned. Through her work, she has seen that

even in nursing, there is no time for a patient and for gentleness, but rather work has become mechanical. She believes that people's lives should not be so stressful when there is also the beauty of nature around us. I understand from her emphasis that for people who need tools to deal with their emotions, laments open the floodgates. The immobile mire and the artist facing the audience created a sense of hopefulness. As someone who has intensely experienced mire art, she then wondered about the nature of people and their ability to be enraptured by nature in the future: 'Will people be able to quieten and calm down in front of something like that? How strong is that capacity in people? Will the capacity for that be lost in a few generations?'

The interviewee was delighted to return to the experience of mire art. She found Kauppila's singing, playing and performance in the mire to be infinitely beautiful, and for her the mire art was strong and magical in a way she had not expected. Although I did not focus on human well-being in the research interviews, earlier research evidence demonstrates that the health and well-being effects of the natural environment are both short- and long-term (Salonen 2020, 19). It is clear from the interviews that the mire art experience provided relief on an emotional level. The importance of leaflets is underlined in her interview in a completely different way than in the others. She read the words and names of the laments from the leaflet only after the performance, when she noticed the lament on the disappearance of the species. But at the location, she concentrated on experiencing and sensing the performance.

I start crying when I remember it. (Laughs first, then sobs). I spent this morning trying to write down why it was such a powerful and intense experience. There was something about the fact that we humans have environmental anxiety, and that was the theme...

On the other hand, prosperity is underpinned by the realisation that no one is alone in their climate woes; humanity is facing the challenges together. As can be seen from the above quote, the mire art experience can be particularly evocative, and the aim in articulating it is to convey its meaning. It is then a question of an immediate sensory and emotional experience – a holistic sensation. Intense experiences around sensations and emotions are affective, which can be difficult to describe in an interview (Heinonen et al. 2020, 11–12; see also Kantonen 2021, 334–335.) The interviewee had tried to prepare for the interview by finding the right way to describe her positive experience. The meta-meaning of the expression 'we humans' could be seen as an emphasis on agency: humans do not meet the environmental concerns of other animals and plants, but humans are capable of acknowledging and sharing the feelings of concern related to the environment.

There were about twenty people at the lament performance in the Torrónsuo mire. She says that the audience was seated on picnic stools about 5–10 metres away from the performer. She admittedly does not remember the reactions of other audience members or whether there was applause at the end of the performance, but the intensity of the experience may explain the lack of recollection; she says that she herself shed tears heavily. As the performance was in Torrónsuo, it was naturally linked to the mining plans known to the local inhabitants.

Researcher: What do you think about the mining issue?

Interviewee: It is, yes – I am concerned, and I am very much against them. In a way, [there was] this idea that somehow, *we should be able to find another kind of way of being and living*. This digging up and depriving the land somehow seems to go on and on. It is very distressing that they constantly come with news, and yet somehow it remains very unclear where we are going. (sighs) Have they been able to prevent it – how much? It seems to me that there are two kinds of people: those who see things a little differently, who can look at things differently, see other values that need to be cherished, and those who are not capable of doing so at all. I have grown up in such a way that I have been the object of ridicule and belittled when I have taken care [other things]. I would like nature, forests and mires to have their own value, and not to be overly interfered with and subjected to machinery.

She said that there are two kinds of people: those who see other values and those who are not capable of doing so. The latter group of people have become familiar to her, as her words have not been taken seriously when she has spoken aloud about her environmental concerns. She was happy to have been able to work through her own tears in a lament workshop, sharing her sadness at the eutrophication of her home pond because of the mine, the springs being clogged and the water not flowing as it used to. She stressed that everything is connected to humanity: humans are not disconnected from what is happening in nature, but not everyone is connected to their emotions. Feelings of anxiety are attached to nature more than to the continuous digging up and exploitation of the land. As such, the lament performance did not evoke new feelings about the environment, but rather brought to the surface feelings that already existed, both about the mires and the forests. But at the same time, the responsibility for a more sustainable transition extends beyond the borders of personal life.

Emotions are expressed in laments through words, affective grammatical forms, melodies and non-verbal means (Stepanova 2014, 100, 280). During

the performance, the interviewee focused on the moment. She described the experience as overflowing with sound, song, music, silence and landscape. The interaction with the birds was experienced as part of the mire art: the cranes responded to Kauppila's call, something that could not be done indoors. But for this interviewee, the most memorable part of Kauppila's performance was *The Wolf spell*:

Taking on the character of an animal. As she ran and disappeared into the mire and then got up again. What a wonderful mother earth we have, a layer like this, where we all eventually go; it swallows us up and then creates something new, when we think on a long-time span. There are thoughts and experiences that do not come up in everyday life. *A strong sense of connection with nature, we are all connected to each other through a performance like that.*

Art provides cultural value to its experiencers by broadening their perspective and inspiring their imagination. The post-humanist approach (see, e.g. Karkulehto et al. 2020) reflects the tendency to see humans as part of nature, but not above other species. In the performance, following the detachment from the human figure gives space for personal reflection and a sharpening of the narrator's relationship with nature, where 'mother earth' is clearly seen as a precious and introspective place that acts, engulfing us, and thereby creating something new. At the same time, the audience as a community is transformed into one. In a very emotional interview, she said that tears also spontaneously flowed among members of the audience while she experienced the performance. She described the features of the mire as primordial; a world that influenced the experience, perhaps because of fear, mysticism, scents and the element of water.

From the standpoint of art reception, the interview draws attention to two themes expressed by the interviewee: first, the human being who is not detached from nature, and second, the emphasis placed on the 'visionary role' of the artists. The use of the 'we humans' form expands the perspective of the individual, and the interviewee found the work done by the artists to be of utmost importance. Artists such as Kauppila have, in the interviewee's opinion, a new ability to envision. As a ritual, the heart of the laments lies in the role of the performer, where Kauppila acts as a mediator between different realities, emotions and times.

'The mire gives permission to grieve' (H_Y2)

The second interviewee (b. 1976) was part of the audience at a lament performance at Pilvineva mire in Veteli, Kaustinen. In his home region of Lapland, na-

ture was always a close part of everyday life. He described his childhood nature as a necessary challenge. Mires were part of his childhood environment, and it was common to go out into nature with family members. In describing his relationship with mire, he reported that feeling a hate for the mire is to word it too strongly. Rather, he finds mires to be fascinating, beautiful, mysterious places with their own vegetation. He also associates the wilderness with his well-being, talking about a family-owned, unoccupied mire. On the one hand, it has an emotional value as a pristine part of nature, but on the other hand 'It can proudly be called *Rapasuo* [*"The Dirt Mire"*]- a place where I can go to cry'.

The interviewee had not participated in mire art events before. He described performing mire art as a return to the roots of humanity. The interviewee considers nature a more natural venue than indoor concert venues and advocates taking art performances even more often into nature. In his experience, there are fewer and fewer people in concert halls. He recounted that Kauppila led the audience to the venue and gave them seats for the concert. The audience helped the performer and tried to wipe the instruments dry from the rain that had started to fall during the performance. The audience did not talk aloud or make eye contact with each other until the end of the performance. Then, the sun set behind the performer in a colourful glow, and the audience looked at each other wondering whether to react to the situation. The interviewee took a couple of photos of the 'insane sunset', but the performer was so preoccupied with lamenting that she did not notice the photos being taken.

The interviewee described the mire art experience as 'enchantingly powerful', and as a performance he would go to again and would recommend to others. The downpour was a surprising element in the performance, one which also had a significant impact on the soundscape. He says that the roar that blended in with the flow of water and noise of the rain showers swallowed up all the other sounds, which meant that the distance between the audience and the performer could not be great. The interviewee said that the show lived up to his expectations, as the weather and small group size made the experience even more intimate. The rainy weather and watery ground underfoot drenched the audience, with people remaining in their seats for an hour in their rain gear.

In general, art poses questions, offers experiences, invites us to observe the world and to confront chosen perspectives (Hietala et al. 2020, 206). In mire art, this can be done by a sense of playfulness, too. Earlier I referred to Kauppila's transformation into the role of the wolf in her performance. The interviewee felt the wolf role to be moving, not only for himself and the rest of the audience, but also for the performer. He joyfully described *The Wolf spell* as the performer's own retreat and initiation into a conversation with the mire, and as a request for permission – i.e. 'give me permission to be here in your arms'. He described the agreement as being made not only with the

mire, but also on behalf of the audience: 'We get to share together, the public and nature, to come together for a while. We are part of the mire.' The plants and animals of the mires are interlinked in mire art as a biocultural heritage, part of a site-specific entity (Latvala-Harvilahti 2022). Through art and the biocultural heritage of mires, a profound cultural level that reflects worldviews and values may thus be reached. For example, by questioning the current nature-consuming way of life, such a dialogue addresses the relationship between humans and nature and its manifestations. (See Siivonen et al. 2022.)

During Noora Kauppila's lamenting, the interviewee felt the sadness and awe among the audience members, and tears also came into his eyes. He said that the occasion was accompanied by a permission to cry together. At this point, I asked: 'Is there any environmental sadness involved in being in the mire?' To which, he replied:

Well, there in the mire, the experience is still that the *mire gives permission* for that grief, and *the presence of the mire somehow maybe made it even more cleansing* than if it was done in some man-made spaces - - and given what has happened in the world during the year, the same experience now in the autumn would probably be even stronger, because of what has happened in the world (e.g. forest fires) and everything; so then, perhaps it would be more conscious and a fiercer expression (pause) as an emotional reaction.

You know, I cried this morning at work — when I heard the news — when an area of forest half the size of Finland is burning in America. (Interviewer: It is absolutely shocking.) Even now I am crying. Yes, it is shocking.

Although the local mire is understood to invite visitors to show grief, the lived experience is not only interpreted in a local context. In the previous emotional part of the interview, the narrative shifted from the art performance itself to broader social and political connotations. At the beginning, he sought expressions and words to articulate the mire as an agent of nature that gives him permission for grief. But thereafter, the purifying essence of the experience became emphasised by the place itself. There was a slight pause in the narrative, and as the interview was not face to face, I cannot know the cause. However, during the pause there was clearly an emotional shift towards global natural disasters, and despite the seriousness of the situation, to (indifferent) Trumpian politics. The theme of environmental grievance encompassed the theme of mire protection and mining, and he said: '...the mining companies' obsession with destroying mires is something ... (pause) I just get a deep, sad feeling. I do not know what to say.'

The interviewee talked about species loss and its effects. Environmental and land-use themes require discussions about the global value of the mire zone, and particularly the key role of mires as ‘the lungs of the world’. The interviewee was clearly frustrated by the slow reaction speed and general lack of response from decision-makers at a time when information on biodiversity and its importance is readily available. However, he said there is hope in the wisdom of the younger generations. He further stressed that the mire is a good place as it is (without humans), that it is good to learn to navigate and appreciate it, and that it does not need to be cleared. The view that nature is better off without people was evident without my having to raise the question. But he reported feeling that it is also a place where you can ‘politely ask nature’s permission, enjoying what it gives you’. In that way, at the individual level a lament performance plays an essential role in the building of resilience.

The interviewees articulated in different ways what may be equally powerful experiences. The mire landscape as an experience is not static and the same for everyone either; rather, it is unique and time bound (see Silvennoinen 2017). It is not necessarily easy to find the words to describe experiences over the telephone, where gestures and facial expressions are not part of the communication process. It was striking that crying emerged as one of the markers of the experience of laments in the interviews.

‘In the mire, the public becomes a community’ (H_Y3)

The third interviewee (b. 1975) is a volunteer in the field of mire conservation. Describing herself as a ‘passionate lover of mires’, she has a strong personal emotional attachment to mires because of her own local mire, which she described as being ‘raped by peat production’. The destruction of the mire is one of the greatest tragedies to have occurred in her lifetime. At the time of the interview, 18 months had passed since the destruction of the mire, but it still evokes rage, sadness and longing in her. She relates strongly to the changes and did not visit the mire for six months before it was destroyed, to leave it in peace. The influence of the mire’s perspective on one’s own behaviour towards nature is quite exceptional, and the peace of the mire refers also to the mire animals as mire users. She is in favour of defending mires and hopes that the value of the mire ecosystem will be seen and understood without human intervention. She attaches a high degree of importance to the mire as a habitat, and she also looks at it from the point of view of birds:

The cranes lived there and saw traffic there in the mire. Now it is completely stopped; it is all dead and quiet [in] that mire. There is no life there. All the birds that used to nest there have now found somewhere in the fields. *It saddens me to think* what the

crane thought when it first returned to the meadow and realised that, damn, there's nothing here anymore.

Climate change is not just a headline for the interviewee. Its consequences in her own home environment are tangible and have already happened: 'It is all dead and quiet [in] that mire. There is no life there.' If the mire as a living heritage has meant following the mire's fauna, then the opportunity to do so has been lost. Her feelings of misery are also associated with thoughts of a crane. This raises the question, is the grief felt by a human and a crane the same and of equal value? The recent 'plant turn' in performance art, meaning, for instance, strengthening the co-agency of plants, can help people reflect on their relationship with other forms of life, especially in the mire, where the presence of plants in their own performance space and habitat is obvious (see Arlander 2022, 470, 487, 489).

It was not the first time she had been to the Karvasuo mire in Seinäjoki, where the laments were performed. On the day of the performance, she did not think anyone would come to the unaddressed venue on a weekday evening and in harsh weather, even though the performance was free. However, there were several dozen people in the audience and the weather unexpectedly improved. The interviewee had expected a 'mire conservation hipster crowd', but most members of the audience were pensioners.

The interviewee said that the gentle breeze, colours and setting evening sun in early autumn created a magical space for the art performance. The audience formed a semi-circle in three places in the mires, depending on where Kauppila was performing. Some of the audience members sat on their camping chairs, while others, like the interviewee, stood still 'with their eyes fixed' on the performer. The audience was quite close to Kauppila, and in many ways the traditional division of roles between performer and audience was thus broken. The Karelian laments were performed first and last, with *The Wolfspell* in between, which she felt was the most memorable part. Kauppila first played the kantele, then closed her eyes and was silent for a long time. Then she began to growl, yawn, howl and finally ran off in laughter 'really far' in her wolf's clothing. 'It was really powerful, though; I had a child with me and a friend, they were highly impressed too.' At this point, some of the audience members wondered if they should move too, and some did. However, Kauppila came back with a screech of an owl and a wolf's howl, making the audience realise that the show was still going on.

The interviewee feels that the artists are nature conservationists and that they have the right to say that mires must be protected. She sees mire art as a potential way to influence the cause of mires, with the value of the mires expressed in the mires themselves. On the other hand, she feels that 'mires

should be left alone, i.e. the idea of mires as noisy arenas for public events does not appeal to her. However, the laments were not played through amplifiers; they were experienced through the pure human voice. The soundscape of the laments was further combined with the presence of nature and animals, as well as the sound of the wind. At a quiet point in the performance, a crane flew overhead, which the interviewee felt was part of the choreography. As the performer vocalised the role of the wolf, they could hear dogs howling in response in the distance. The interviewee understood that the theme of the laments was the loss of the mires and remembers Kauppila handing out a leaflet about their background:

I had previously taken the attitude that we would go to the mires to sing, and she wanted to organise performances of this kind *on behalf of the mires*; I took the themes as grief in the face of the loss of the mires. For me, it was secondary what was sung in the laments.

The mire as a natural environment is temporarily transformed through artistic activities. The mire becomes a cultural space, where the public gathers to appreciate mires that were previously underestimated or prioritised purely for economic purposes (see Jones 2009). Sustainability transformations require that changes take place in all social systems to ensure ecological and sustainable development (SYKE Policy brief 2021). The interviewee noticed that the older women in the audience were moved during the performance, but she was not affected in the same way herself. All the people there were overwhelmed and impressed after the performance, and some gave feedback to the performer. Another thing that made the performance remarkable was that they were not left alone. After the performance, Kauppila escorted the audience back to their cars in the dark and returned alone to retrieve the instruments she had left behind. The overall effectiveness of the performance does not need to be found between the lines of an interview, and the elements of safety and of a shared experience was present from start to finish. As the interviewee said: 'the performance took you into the spaces. But the performance is still in the back of my mind a year later.' It was also vastly different from what she had otherwise experienced. She explained that there are many good things about art in nature:

The ears are retained when the music is not as loud out there as elsewhere; you can be outside and the atmosphere, the community of the audience, is completely different – it's so unique, *it's intense to experience the art*, and apparently, to perform it -- in every way more intense than indoors.

The interviews that I have analysed above open a new layer of understanding environmental art – mire art – through lament performances. By working together, artists and environmental organisations can create experiences in nature that also raise people’s awareness about mire protection and the importance of mire nature.

Conclusions

Mires combine well-being and concern in an interesting way. Besides being interested in art, a concern for nature is clearly a factor in people’s choice to attend a mire art event. From newly produced interview material, three interviewees described their experience of the performance *Dirge on the Mother’s grave – lamenting as a tool of collective grief in the era of eco anxiety* by musician Noora Kauppila. Her performance had an environmental theme, as the audience heard a lament entitled *A lament for the lost land*, which was performed in a mire overshadowed by mining plans. The lament performance transformed a mire into a culturally appropriated space for the collective and individual processing of emotions regarding a fragile natural environment. Crying and weeping are essential to laments, and as such, the performance can be seen as a shared ritual that emphasises concern and sadness. The cultural knowledge generated by the interviews provided much-needed information on art as a tool sharing for environmental emotions.

The audiences were quite small (max 50) in all the performances, ranging in age from children to the elderly, but all my interviewees were adults. The physicality, emotions and physical closeness of both the artist and the audience were stressed. Interviewees verbalised their experiences as being mesmerising, powerful and charmingly intense and emphasised that the mire environment is magical. The atmosphere of outdoor art was unique and intense, not least because the audience became a community in quite an unusual way, which makes the performances different than those of indoor concerts. Kauppila was able to influence the reception of art by creating a safe experience of art in nature from start to finish. The shared, peaceful, artist-led transition from the car park to the venue and back again at the end of the performance is clearly a key part of the experience, one that reinforces the well-being aspect of the art. The interviews also reflected the interviewees’ background experience with nature as a place of well-being.

I asked interviewees about the kinds of environmental emotions that laments in the mire provoked and how they contextualise such emotions. The first interviewee addressed her concerns not only towards mire nature, but also to busy people and everyday life. The concern arose from a *realisation of the need to change people’s unsustainable way of life*; for her, mire art immedi-

ately created a strong connection with nature. The second interviewee extended this concern to the level of global, nature-destroying politics, but he also reported finding solace in the mire and in mire art. He associated hope with a generation of young people. In a third interview, the concern was more for cranes that cannot find their former habitat when they return to the mire, but at the same time, this interviewee highlighted the role of artists as defenders of mire conservation. In addition, the interviews highlighted feelings of helplessness, worry, anxiety, anger and frustration. Many interviewees mentioned experiencing anger and frustration especially in relation to the wider context of the degradation of nature. In the interviews, the experience of the art performance was the main theme touched upon, but the interviewees' other accounts of their feelings about nature broadened their understanding of environmental care and other environmental emotions. Two interviewees cried during the interview when relating their descriptions to global climate concerns and their sadness about the destruction of nature. The interviewees also reported unwanted changes in their own surroundings, and their negative feelings about the changes were reflected in the observed decline in the habitats of birds and other mire animals. Two interviewees described a vivid interaction between Noora Kauppila and mire birds, with the cranes responding to Kauppila's calls. The above elements of the performance were further seen as enhancing well-being, and one of the interviewees offered a forward-looking perspective to people's relationship with nature by asking whether people will still be able to be enraptured by nature in the future, or whether this skill will be lost. With these points in mind, there was a call for more art performances to be held in nature and for more visits to nature as a child.

The rich biocultural heritage of mires is now being contextualised anew by art projects. The amount of data in this study is small, but the understanding of experiences gained through the interviews opens a dialogue about the reception of mire art and the need for a collective processing of environmental emotions and cultural transformation. Mire art invites us to gather together in an event where emotion, not speech, dominates. Perhaps that is precisely why the effects are so powerful.

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Archive material

All the interview material will be archived in the Finnish Literature Society, in the Joensuu branch archive.

Artist interview with Noora Kauppila, 25.2.2020, in Helsinki.

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H_Y1 20.8.2020.

H_Y2 17.9.2020.

H_Y3 9.9.2020.

For all the interviews, the interviewer was Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti, University of Eastern Finland, Mire Trend research project.

The lyrics for the lament *ABEUDUNNUO - A cry for a lost land* were obtained from artist Noora Kauppila.

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