

albert braun

me, myself,  
nykarleby and i

autobiographical  
map  
of the town  
of nykarleby

#### Inviting spaces

Albert Braun's artworks, often various kinds of installations, attract the viewer, sometimes quite palpably and sometimes more discreetly, but always clearly. Yet, clarity does not mean that there is a given interpretation. One can regard the work of Albert Braun as the creation of spaces or as a framework for actions and events, that seem to reflect everyday matters, but which aren't everyday at all. They aim for interaction between the audience and the work, and so they remain unforgettable to the visitors. The memory remains alive, because the works of art do not convey any connection with accustomed life, but rather create space for imagination and reflection.

*Pauline von Bonsdorff*



**Me, Myself, Nykarleby and I.** Autobiographical MAP of the town of Nykarleby. Many years ago, I read a book by the Swedish author Ola Larsmo. Of all the things that were in the book one has stayed in my mind, and that is the bit where he writes about how some of the blocks in the district that he grew up in were forever engraved into him. "Important strata of my self," Larsmo writes, "are arranged in the same way as three or four blocks in the older parts of Solnas." And that's the way it is, our surroundings inscribe themselves into us. And sometimes we also inscribe ourselves into our environment. This is a map of Nykarleby. A small town among small towns. **Borgaregatan Street 18.** At the top of the hill is a yellow, two-story wooden house. My aunt lives there. Many years ago, I used to be in the



house in the summer time to see my cousin of the same age. We lay in the attic and read, sometimes we cycled down into the town. Two, three minutes down the hill. Nykarleby is no bigger than that. People always seemed to have time on their hands. They cycled, swam, and went around in tracksuits, writing their names in exercise books that had been put out in little boxes. The boxes were placed in the forest around the town. If you wrote your name in the books enough times you could win a prize. Not that the prize was the important thing, the important thing was to exercise and keep fit. My cousin said that in Nykarleby you could go to school in a red tracksuit, and nobody would tease you about it. I thought about that. A red tracksuit. It seemed to be easier to live in Nykarleby than to be a Finnish





immigrant in Sweden. So then we eventually moved back to Finland and to **Borgaregatan Street 3**, the same street, but further down the hill, towards the river, I thought life would be easy. No more fights, not always having to look over your shoulder, being able to walk along any street you wanted. We rented a flat in a low wooden house, old, as though it had grown attached to the ground. It is said that General von Döbeln, who served the Swedish King Gustaf IV Adolf, once lay wounded in this very house. That was in 1809, the year that Finland was split off from the kingdom of Sweden and became part of the Russian Empire. It was hard to think of von Döbeln in our house: cold, draughty,

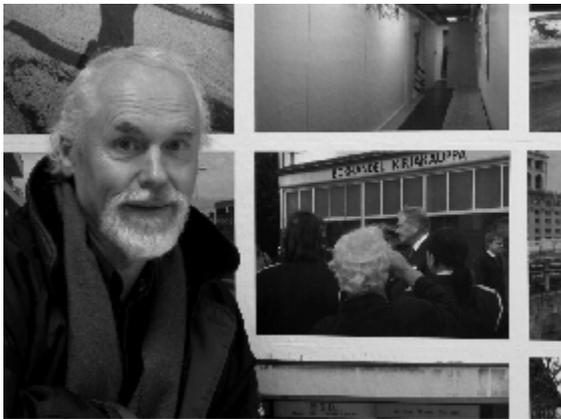


the floors sloping towards the street, as though they wanted to throw us out, furniture and all. And they might have actually done so. If you stood in the middle of the garden you could see how, day by day, the house sank deeper and





That was presumably before he lost his arm. Although that is not quite certain. He moved quickly, and whirled the only arm he had in front of him. When women came to the shop, he neighed like a stallion and pawed the ground with his hind leg. A pal and I worked in his shop one summer. Despite the fact that his animal instincts were never far from the surface, Furniture-Kalle was a businessman of the new breed. He said there is no such thing as furniture so badly damaged that it cannot be fixed with wood glue and teak oil. So that was what we did, we glued cracked furniture and applied teak oil to the joints. They became like new, and they were sold at that price too. Furniture-Kalle



tried to get our family out of the house. He stood in the entrance hall and whirled his arm and roared that he would buy us out. The furniture shop needed to expand. Dad said, next time they would come for Kalle in an ambulance. That was unnecessary. He died all by himself, and we moved to **Bankgatan Street 11**. We shared the house with the town bookshop. Us upstairs and the bookshop downstairs. The bookseller was called Shakespeare. He liked cats. Ours was called Narjana and was always lying in the bookshop window. Narjana had moved there before we did, so you might say all we did was follow the cat. Directly opposite our house was Restaurant von Döbeln. From my window I could see right in. At weekends, I saw my aunts dancing by, and before I knew it I was sitting at a table there myself,





with sweaty hands and a roving gaze. Gradually, my parents moved away from home, to **Mellangatan Street 11**, and I was left alone at Bankgatan Street. I went to The Cellar Grill, which was my second home and stood on **Östra Esplanadgatan Street 12**. The few girlfriends that I had, worked at the Cellar Grill. If we want to be really precise, there was only one. But it felt like she was many, since the years went by and she changed. My pals and I did not change so much. We drank our coffee. Occasionally we sat in a car and drove around the Esplanade, into the square, and then back to The Cellar Grill. My girlfriend became a historian, I began telling stories. And many years after I had



left Nykarleby, I wrote a novel about the town, about this very district. I called the novel **Döbelns Alley**. And here it stands, by the river, the town's heart and soul. It is said that General von Döbeln once lay wounded in a yellow house



**Albert Braun** (b. 1958 in Germany) studied at the Hochschule der Künste Berlin(West) 1978-1985. He has been a lecturer since 1988 at Novia University of Applied Sciences - Department for Fine Art, Media and Design in Nykarleby. Lives and works in Nykarleby, Finland. **Selected Exhibitions and Projects:** 2008 - Kunsthalle Nürnberg (GER), 2007 - Luftmuseum Amberg (GER), 2006 - Pori Art Museum (FIN), 2005 - Vector Gallery, Iasi (RO), Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (SRB), City Art Museum Helsinki (FIN) 2003 - Österbottens museum (FIN) 1998 - Sali Gia Gallery, London (GBR), P-House Gallery, Tokyo (JPN), Art Foundation, Seoul (KOR) 1996 - Galleri Stefan Andersson, Umeå (SWE). **FinnFemFel-projects** (selected): 2008 - Künstlerhaus Wien (AUT) 2007 - Galerie der Künstler, Munich (GER) 2005 - Museum for Contemporary Art, Belgrade (SRB), City Art Museum, Helsinki (FIN) 2003 - Studio Gallery, Budapest (HUN) 2002 - trans-art, Trondheim (NOR) 2001 - Platform, Vasa (FIN), Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma (ITA) 2000 - Gummeum im Raitenburger Schloss, Kallmünz (GER) 1999 - Gallerie Konstakuten, Stockholm (SWE) 1998 - Künstlerwerkstatt Lothringerstrasse, Munich (GER). Active member in **Platform** and projects with **Cheap Finnish Labour** (CFL): 2010 Vasa Konsthall, Galleri Elverket (FIN) 2009 - Platform (FIN) 2007 - Venice Biennale, Pavillion of Turkey (ITA), XX1 Gallery Warsaw (POL). email: albert.braun@novia.fi, www.albert-braun.net