

## An Historic First: Indigenous Artists transform Nordic Pavilion into Sámi Pavilion for the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in 2022



From left to right: Pauliina Feodoroff, Máret Ánne Sara, Anders Sunna. Photos by Per-Josef Idivuoma, Marie Louise Somy, Erik Persson.

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Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) announced, from the Sámi Parliament in Kárášjohka, in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, that Sámi artists **Pauliina Feodoroff**, **Máret Ánne Sara** and **Anders Sunna** will represent Sápmi, their Sámi homeland, and transform the Nordic Pavilion into the Sámi Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in 2022. This is an historic moment: the first time that Sámi artists are presented exclusively in a national pavilion at the Biennale Arte, and the first time the Sámi are recognised as a nation in a pavilion bearing their name.

By appointing Feodoroff, Sara and Sunna to transform the pavilion, OCA Norway – the commissioner of the Nordic Pavilion for the Biennale Arte 2022 – aims to draw attention to the excellence of these Sámi artists, as well as the international relevance of their individual and collective histories. Their art emphasises the urgent situation experienced today by many Sámi – and other Indigenous people worldwide – concerning self-determination, deforestation, land and water governance. Specifically these Sámi artists engage with the struggle to maintain the reindeer herding and fishing that are central to their existence. The artists reflect upon these concerns by drawing from Sámi ways of being and knowing, producing work of great power. This makes them extraordinary within the art world of today.

The Sámi are the Indigenous people of the Scandinavian Peninsula and large parts of the Kola Peninsula, which today is divided between Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. Sápmi is the Sámi people's own name for their homeland. The transformation of the Nordic Pavilion into the Sámi Pavilion is an act of Indigenous sovereignty that highlights the relationship of the artists to their homeland Sápmi, an area that pre-dates the concept of the Nordic region, and presents a pavilion that encompasses all of the lands and people of what was originally a borderless region. It is a symbolic reversal of colonial claims that have sought to erase Sámi land and culture.

**Katya García-Antón**, Director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, lead commissioner of the Nordic Pavilion, comments: 'The global pandemic, the impact of climate change and worldwide calls for decolonisation are leading us all to focus on alternative possibilities for our future and that of our planet. At this pivotal moment, it is vital to consider Indigenous ways of relating to the environment and to each other. The artworks of Feodoroff, Sara and Sunna in the Sámi Pavilion present compelling visions of how these relationships operate, from a Sámi perspective. As leading voices of their generation, these artists' works counter the impact of colonialism upon their lives and, in so doing, connect with the experiences shared by so many people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in our world today.'

The exhibition in the Sámi Pavilion will be curated by a group consisting of Sámi scholar **Liisa-Rávná Finbog**, OCA's Director **Katya García-Antón** and Sámi nature guardian **Beaska Niillas**; assisted by **Liv Brissach** (OCA Project Officer) and **Raisa Porsanger** (Sámi artist and OCA Project Officer). The project also benefits from an international group of advisers consisting of Wiradjuri interdisciplinary artist and scholar **Brook Andrew** (Artistic Director of NIRIN, 22nd Biennale of Sydney 2020; Associate Professor, Fine Art, Monash University; and Enterprise Professor in Interdisciplinary practice. The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne) and Anishinaabe curator (Art Gallery of Ontario, Turtle Island/Canada), artist and educator **Wanda Nanibush**.

## Artists:

**Pauliina Feodoroff** (b. 1977) is a Skolt Sámi theatre director, artist and nature guardian from Keväjäu'rr, in the Finnish part of Sápmi, and Suõ'nnjel, in the Russian part of Sápmi. Feodoroff has advocated for Sámi water and land rights in her previous role as President of the Saami Council and as an artist working to combine various fields of knowledge at the intersection of ecological conservation, theatre and film. In 2018 her cross-disciplinary project *What Form(s) Can an Atonement Take* used Sámi land-care practices, bringing together local and scientific knowledge to protect the waters and surrounding lands of the Njâuddam river in the Finnish part of Sápmi.

**Máret Ánne Sara** (b. 1983) is a Northern Sámi artist from Guovdageaidnu in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. She is known for experimenting with a range of materials and approaches that make visible the political and social issues affecting the Sámi people. Her works are often made from materials deriving from the sustainable practice of her reindeer-herding family, including reindeer bones, hides and intestines. Her installation *Pile o' Sápmi*, composed of 400 reindeer skulls and legal documents, was showcased at documenta 14 in Kassel, 2017. The installation was recently purchased by the National Museum of Norway in Oslo.

**Anders Sunna** (b. 1985) is a Northern Sámi artist from Kieksiäisvaara, in the Swedish part of Sápmi. Sunna's politically charged artworks narrate the history of the oppression of the Sámi people and specifically address his family's five-decade long struggle for their land rights as forest reindeer herders. With powerful imagery and political satire, his paintings, graffiti, sculptures and installations depict how abuse of authority and power lead to the exploitation of land and natural resources, forced displacement, and racial persecution of Sámi people. Sunna was recently commissioned to make a site-specific mural for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, NIRIN, 2020. The work made connections between the colonial project of Captain Cook and the issues faced in Sápmi.

Following the Sámi custom of learning from elders of the community, the artists will benefit from the individual guidance of the following elders: Feodoroff, will be guided by Sámi educator and professor emerita **Asta M. Balto**; Sara by reindeer herder and Sámi knowledge bearer **Káren E. M. Utsi**; and Sunna by Sámi professor of law and juoigi (practitioner of joik, the Sámi musical practice) **Ánde Somby**.

## Commissioner

As a co-commissioner of the Nordic Pavilion in Venice, Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) takes the curatorial lead of the Pavilion in 2022. OCA is a hybrid arts foundation, supporting artists based in Norway and Sápmi, founded in 2001 by the Norwegian Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs. OCA's work focuses on two areas: curating (exhibitions, research trips, publications and discursive programmes), as well as funding and support (providing grants, research trips and residency schemes) to foster a two-way exchange with the international arts scene. Under the direction of Katya García-Antón, OCA has launched a deep engagement with the North – turning conventional thinking on its head to see this northern region and the Indigenous lands of Sápmi as a tipping point of thinking around urgent issues within the arts, such as the environment and social justice. OCA's programme works to forge creative alliances that dismantle colonial and canonical pasts and presents, including those within its own institutional structures, in order to imagine new forms of being and doing for the future

## The Nordic Pavilion

The Nordic Pavilion, designed by Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn, was completed in 1962 and has since been a space for collaboration between three nations: Finland, Norway and Sweden. The co-commissioners from Sweden and Finland for the Nordic Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia are **Gitte Ørskou**, Director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden and **Leevi Haapala**, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma / The Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki, Finland.

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Pauliina Feodoroff, courtesy of Per-Josef Idivuoma

## BIO - Pauliina Feodoroff

Pauliina Feodoroff (b. 1977) is a Skolt Sámi theatre director, artist and nature guardian from Keväjäu'rr in the Finnish part of Sápmi and Suõ'nnejel, in the Russian part. She connects various fields of knowledge – Sámi, artistic, scientific – in theatre and film projects and also in political activism and ecological restoration projects. She is known for the film *Non Profit*, 2007, and the play *CO2lonialNATION* that premiered at Giron Sámi Teáhter, 2017, which questioned colonisation and its consequences in Sápmi through a Theatrical Truth Commission. She gained a Masters in theatre direction and dramaturgy from the Helsinki Theatre Academy in 2002 and has worked as the artistic director of Takomo Theater and the Rospuutto Theatre Group, both in Helsinki, Finland. For the theatre festival Baltic Circle Helsinki in 2017 she curated the artistic and discursive program 'Vuosttaš álbmogat / First Nations' which concentrated on colonisation in the Nordic countries. Several Sámi artists, including Anders Sunna, participated in the program.

Feodoroff's family are Skolt Sámi reindeer herders originally from Suõ'nnejel on the Kola peninsula in the Russian part of Sápmi but were forced to move to the Finnish part when the Russian borders were drawn and closed in 1944. She was born in Keväjäu'rr on the Finnish side but considers the dispossessed lands as her ancestral homeland. Feodoroff is an advocate for Sámi water and land rights and has served as President of the Saami Council. She was a co-writer of the document proposing a Truth and Reconciliation Process in Finland in 2019.

Her current work is concerned with industrial deforestation and its role in the collapse of the biodiversity of rivers and fishing customs. Her practice is also concerned with the role of modernisation and government policies in destroying the collective models of existence and governance of the land that underpin Sámi society. She has worked to preserve the reindeer herding in forests on the Finnish side and has investigated the impact of land extraction by mining companies in the Russian part of Sápmi. Feodoroff is an active collaborator with the Snowchange Cooperative particularly on the project 'Näätämö River Co-management Plan', where she coordinates the ecological restoration and management project of the Njáuddam (North Sámi: Njávddam, Finnish: Näätämö, Norwegian: Neiden) river system, a vital river on the Norwegian and Finnish sides of the Skolt Sámi areas. The project aims to use Sámiland-care practices and local and scientific knowledge to protect and restore the waters, fish spawning areas and surrounding land of the river. In 2018 this inspired the cross-disciplinary project 'What Form(s) Can an Atonement Take' and the restoration of the rivers Vainosjoki and Kirakkakoski was completed in 2019.

In 2015 she collaborated with Snowchange Cooperative on a performance in Sápmi titled *Life in the Cyclic World (Our Songs Have to Change) If We Wish To Change* for the Rospuutto Group, which raised awareness of the Climate Change Risk Assessment Report and pushed for the publication of a scientific article written by Tero and Kaisu Mustinen called *Life in the Cyclic World*. The article provides witness statements by Indigenous peoples of the North about climate change and their interpretations of what climate change is. The CAFF Process commissioned the report, but would not publish it without editing, which the Indigenous communities involved disagreed on. With Feodoroff and Snowchange's efforts, the Report was published in 2016.

Feodoroff has contributed to several book projects including *Queering Sápmi*, a project by Sarah Lindquist and Elfrida Bergman that challenges gender norms and offers storytelling about the lives of queer Sámi persons, – and the *Eastern Sámi Atlas* by editors Tero Mustonen and Kaisu Mustonen, published by the Snowchange Cooperative, 2011.

Máret Ánne Sara, courtesy of Marie Lousie Somby



## BIO - Máret Ánne Sara

Máret Ánne Sara (b. 1983) is a Northern Sámi artist and author from Guovdageaidnu in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. Sara is a founding member of the Dáiddadállu Artist Collective in Guovdageaidnu and is part of a new generation of Sámi artists who work to maintain and improve the rights of the Sámi communities. She is known for experimenting with varied materials, approaches and collective art actions, and her artistic practice makes visible the political and social issues affecting the Sámi people, especially the reindeer herding communities, with a critical view on ongoing colonialism. Her sculptures and installations are often made from materials deriving from the sustainable practice of her reindeer herding family, treating the bones, hide and intestines of the reindeer in the customary manner and transforming them into contemporary artworks.

She is best known for the piece *Pile o'Sápmi*, an installation of 400 reindeer skulls and legal documents, showcased at documenta 14 in Kassel, 2017. The installation was recently purchased by the National Museum, Norway. *Pile o'Sápmi* is also the title of an ongoing art project and protest movement involving fellow Sámi artists in solidarity with her brother Jovsset Ánte Sara, in his contestation of the Norwegian government in court.

The title of this project refers to *Pile o'Bones*, in a city currently known as Regina, Canada, where buffalo skulls were piled in huge mounds during the massive slaughter of buffalos by settlers, a colonial tactic to force the Indigenous First Nations away from their lands and livelihoods.

*Pile o'Sápmi* has taken various forms, as installations with reindeer skulls, and as jewellery pieces made from reindeer bone porcelain (pointing to bone china, a British invention imitating porcelain by using buffalo bones as raw material). As her brother's court cases proceeded, Sara installed various versions of *Pile o'Sápmi* in relation to the different trials, with installations outside the District Court in Deatnu/Tana, the Court of Appeal in Romsa/Tromsø and in front of the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo during the trial at the Supreme Court. The various versions have also been exhibited at Tenthaus, Norway; The Queen Sonja Art Stable, Norway; Kunstnerforbundet, Norway and Nuuk Art Museum, Greenland. *Pile o'Sápmi Power Necklace* was displayed in the exhibition 'Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness', curated and produced by OCA in 2018.

Since studying illustration at Arts University Bournemouth, UK, the artist also works extensively with collages and prints depicting madness and anger at governmental power abuse through the expressive use of Sámi symbolic and identity markers. Sara has also worked as journalist and editor of the Sámi youth magazine Š, and has published two novels, *Ilmmid gaskkas (In between worlds)*, 2013, and *Doaresbealde doali*, 2014. She was nominated for the Nordic Council's Children and Young People's Literature Prize 2014 for *Ilmmid gaskkas*, her debut novel which was published in Northern Sámi, Norwegian and English.



Anders Sunna, courtesy of Erik Persson

## BIO - Anders Sunna

Anders Sunna (b. 1985) is a Northern Sámi artist from a reindeer herding family in Kieksiäisvaara, in the Swedish part of Sápmi. Sunna's politically charged artworks narrate the history of the violence and oppression against the Sámi people and very specifically address his family's five-decade long struggle for their right and acknowledgement to be forest reindeer herders. Due to governmental politics, the family lost their reindeer ear marks, a customary practice that manifests the individual ownership of reindeer and the right to work as a herder. Sunna calls himself a 'guerrilla Sámi', using his artistic practice to empower the Sámi community. With powerful imagery and political satire his paintings, graffiti, sculptures and installations depict how the abuse of authority and power lead to the exploitation of land and natural resources, forced displacement, and racial persecution of the Sámi people.

Sunna was featured in the exhibition 'Ábadakone / Continuous Fire / Feu continuel', in the National Gallery of Canada, 2019, and the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, NIRIN, 2020, both focused on Indigenous artists. For NIRIN he was commissioned to make a site-specific mural at the Campbelltown Arts Centre. The mural, titled *SOAÐA*, was created on-site in dialogue with local Aboriginal elders in Campbelltown, Australia. Sunna had two solo exhibitions in 2020: in Adde Zetterquist Art Gallery, Saltdal, in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, and *Exploration Target – Area Infected* at Varbergs Konsthall, Gothenburg, Sweden. Sunna is currently a part of the Bergen Festival Exhibition 2020 at Bergen Kunsthall with a painting commissioned by and in collaboration with Sámi artist Joar Nango (the main Festival Exhibition artist).

Sunna studied fine arts at the Konstfack College of Arts in Stockholm during 2006–2009 and at the Umeå Academy of Fine Arts 2004–2006. He has been commissioned to create a range of public artworks, amongst others at the Sámi University College in Guovdageaidnu and the Alta secondary school in the Norwegian part of Sápmi; and notably in the courtroom in the district court in Gällivare, Swedish part, 2013, where many legal cases on Sámi issues continue to be raised today. In 2016 he collaborated with Máret Anne Sara on stage visuals for the concert 'Lapp Affair – Unfinished business' at the Arctic Arts Festival in Harstad, Norway. He has also collaborated with the Sámi musician Sofia Jannok with a graffiti performance for her music video 'We Are Still Here', 2016.

Sunna's works have been exhibited widely in Sápmi and internationally. OCA presented Sunna in 2017 when he made the scenography exhibition in connection to 'Museums on Fire!', a symposium considering the entanglement of the colonial legacy of art institutions, with the spaces and processes through which Indigenous artistic practices, past and present, are addressed.



From left to right: Katya García-Antón, Liisa-Rávná Finbog, Beaska Niillas. Photos by Eirin Torgersen.

## Curatorial Group

**Katya García-Antón** is Director and Chief Curator of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA). She graduated with a BSC as a biologist, conducted two years of predoctoral field research in ecology and behaviour in the Amazon and Sierra Leone, and transitioned into the arts with an MA in 19th- and 20th-century art history from The Courtauld Institute of Arts, London. A UK and Spanish citizen, she worked at The Courtauld Institute of Art, BBC World Service (Latin American Broadcasts), Museo Nacional Reina Sofía Madrid, ICA London, IKON Birmingham, and as director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain (CAC) Genève. She is responsible for more than seventy exhibitions of art, architecture, and design of practitioners worldwide.

She curated the Nordic Pavilion, Venice Biennial in 2015, the Spanish Pavilion in the São Paulo Biennial 2004 and in the Venice Biennial 2011, co-curated the Prague Biennial 2005, and co-curated the flagship exhibition 'Gestures in Time in Qalandiya International Biennial 2012' in Palestine. In 2015 she launched Critical Writing Ensembles, a platform dedicated to stimulating the research and writing of art history that extends beyond the western canon (including South Asia and Indigenous worldviews).

She devised 'Thinking at the Edge of the World: Perspectives from the North' in 2015 as an ongoing program of knowledge-building (exhibitions and symposiums) addressing the histories of the North – including Arctic and environmental questions – and specially facilitating the empowerment of Sámi artistic practices and histories. In 2015 she launched Critical Writing Ensembles, a platform dedicated to stimulating the research and writing of art history that extends beyond the western canon (including South Asia and Indigenous worldviews). She devised 'Thinking at the Edge of the World: Perspectives from the North' in 2015 as an ongoing program of knowledge-building (exhibitions and symposiums) addressing the histories of the North – including Arctic and environmental questions – and specially facilitating the empowerment of Sámi artistic practices and histories. In this regard, García-Antón has placed particular emphasis on advocating for, and implementing decolonial, transformative and Indigenising practices and programs. She is chief curator of the upcoming exhibition 'Actions of Art and Solidarity', Oslo, and is currently devising a program activating decolonial thinking from the perspective of the Afro-Norwegian communities in Norway in collaboration with various of its members, which will run until 2022.

**Liisa-Rávná Finbog** is a Sámi scholar and duojár from Oslo, Vaapste, and Skánit in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. She is based in Oslo where she is currently pursuing a PhD in museology from an Indigenous perspective at the University of Oslo. As a long-time practitioner of duodji [Sámi practices of aesthetics and storytelling], she has combined her practice with an Indigenous research focus which looks into duodji as a Sámi system of knowledge.

Her dissertation, which is titled 'It speaks to you' – making kin through people, duodji and Sámi museums looks firstly into how the epistemicide following the colonisation of Sámi worked to disrupt the knowledge contained in duodji. Secondly her research traces the work that is being done in Sámi communities today to re-remember practices within

duodji and in the process negotiate Sámi identities, and how museums with their vast collections of Sámi heritage objects play into these processes. Extending from her research, she curated the seminar 'Dåajmijes Vuekie – the material expressions of Sámi aesthetics', which was convened during the Sámi Art Festival of 2019.

The same year she was also the curator of a seminar convened jointly by Office for Contemporary Art – Norway (OCA) and Norwegian Crafts (NC) relating to the United Nations International year of Indigenous Languages, titled 'Báassjoeraejken Tjïrr – Workshops and conversations on Indigenous languages, aesthetic practices and landscapes'. She is currently a collaborator on the research project 'Mediated Arctic Geographies' which aims to look at how Arctic geospheres are aesthetically shaped and mediated to become vehicles of environmental, [geo]political and social concerns. She is also a collaborator on the research project 'The Space Between Us' that strengthens intellectual relationships among nations with shared colonial histories in the three areas of Canada, Circumpolar and Pacific connecting to digital and new media technology in the future. She has recently contributed an article to the collective work 'Research Journeys In/To Multiple Ways of Knowing' (2019), which looks into Indigenous ways of reclaiming knowledge from museums.

**Beaska Niillas** from Deatnu in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, is among other things a father of two, Sámi duojár, hunter, gatherer, nature guardian and politician. Nature has been in the centre of his life since childhood. Growing up, the land was his playing field and his friend. He has done a lot of different things in his life, but the only formal education he has is a certificate of apprenticeship in duodji. For some time, he also worked as an actor in both Beavvváš Sámi National Theatre and Giron Sámi Theatre. After that he was a teacher and then went on to work as a fisherman.

For the last ten years he has been active in Sámi politics and also defended Indigenous land and waters in Sápmi and beyond. Beaska Niillas plays a central role in three major projects exploring Sámi sovereignty: 'Ellos Deatnu!' (Long live Deatnu!), a group declaration of a moratorium around Čearretsuolu, an island on the Deatnu River in Sápmi, to oppose a new government led fishing agreement harmful to the river and to Sámi life because it removes many local Sámi fishing rights and transfers them to outside recreational fishing; 'SuperSápmi', an Indigenous podcast founded and recorded with Sámi fisherman and nature guardian Áslat Holmberg, bringing Sámi, Indigenous and allied voices together to discuss Indigenous knowledges as well as the impact of colonialism on Indigenous and specifically on Sámi everyday life; and 'Siidaskuvla', a collaborative project by Sámi scholars, artists and nature guardians who seek to reconstruct the knowledge of the siida (the Sámi community structure), and discuss how it could operate as a Sámi governance structure today.

## Assistant Curators

**Raisa Porsanger** is a Sámi artist and art worker from Leavdnja and Kárašjohka in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. She lives in Oslo and holds a BA in Fine Art from Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHIO). Her interests lie in mediation of Sámi contemporary art, and she has curated two iterations of OCA's exhibition 'Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness' (whose initial version premiered in Oslo, 2018), in the Sámi Dáiddaguovddáš in Kárašjohka/Karasjok in 2019 and Sør-Troms Museum, Trondenes Historiske Senter in Hárstták in 2020. She conceived the exhibition design for the Sámi Artists Union 40th anniversary exhibition '40 jagi' in Alta Museum in 2019. She is currently facilitating an upcoming opening exhibition for the new National Museum of Norway in 2021. She has been employed in OCA as Project Officer since January 2020.

**Liv Brissach** is an art history graduate with a background from the University of Oslo (MA) and University College London (BA). She has experience as a freelance art writer for Billedkunst, Kunstkritikk and Munchmuseet on the move among others. During her studies, she worked as a project manager for the exhibitions 'NorskArt and Juvenarte', both initiated by ANSA – Association of Norwegian Students Abroad. She has also explored her interests in the intersections between art, ecology and technology as curator for Kunst-i-Festival in Nord-Trøndelag. Liv has worked as a Project Officer at OCA since December 2017.