

The Finlandia Gallery

Marjo Levlin: Heading West, Coming
Back

September 21, 2023 – January 31, 2024

Artist Reception: Thursday, September 21, 7:00 –
8:30 pm



Marjo Levlin, 2022, Oblivion film still

HANCOCK, MI – HANCOCK, MI – The Finlandia Gallery will present ***Heading West, Coming Back***, an exhibit by Finnish artist Marjo Levlin at The Finlandia Gallery, located in the Finnish American Heritage Center (FAHC), Hancock from September 21, 2023 to January 31, 2024.

A reception for the artist will take place at the gallery, Thursday, September 21st, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. with an artist talk beginning at 7:20 p.m. The reception is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.



Marjo Levlin, Installation view of *Heading West, Coming Back* exhibit

Heading West, Coming Back tells the story of late 19th century migration from Finland to the United States. “It is also a journey from the village of my youth, Maalahti (Malax), in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, to California and Colorado,” says Levlin. “The exhibition is about dreams of a better life somewhere else, about memory and how very soon the history of ordinary people passes into oblivion... The past is so much like the present and contemporary immigration.”

Between 1821 and 1929, a total of 350,000 people emigrated from Finland to the US. Among them, 1,600 were from Maalahti. Some of them were adventurers, but most left because they had no choice. Many immigrant Finns arrived in the United States at a time when the best lands had already been settled, and often ended up working in regions where work was hard and life was difficult.

With its supply of European immigrants, the conquest of the American continent continued towards the west as railway lines were laid and cities grew; labor was in demand, and the conditions for workers varied. Finns' skill with the axe and their inventive method of felling gigantic trees uphill to prevent them from splitting were appreciated on the West Coast. By contrast, in some mining areas in the Rocky Mountains, Finns were discriminated against and even forbidden to work; one of the reasons cited was race.



Marjo Levlin, 2022, Oblivion film still

"I began my search for the all but forgotten story in my father's grandmother's decaying cottage in Maalahti," says Levlin. "The few photos, letters and documents I found there led me to follow in the possible footsteps of my father's

grandparents. The journey took me first to libraries and archives in New York and then on to similar places in San Francisco. From there it continued to the north towards the redwood forests on the West Coast, and then turned east to the Rocky Mountain mining areas and back across the continent to New York and back to Maalahti in Finland.”

The exhibition is an installation of mixed media created by Levlin on her return to Finland. **Oblivion – O Blif Igen!** is a film on display that chronicles Levlin’s travels from Maalahti to the United States in 2013. The documentary film explores the themes of forgetting, searching and the places she encountered on her journey.

During her travels, Levlin also discovered stereoscopic pictures, turn-of-the century images that typically depicted the grand landscapes, tourist attractions and architectural landmarks of the American West. Levlin was intrigued by the contrast these images depicted in comparison to the realities of immigrant life that her ancestors experienced. Levlin incorporated the technique of stereoscopic pictures into a digital stereoscopic performance that touches on the themes of immigration, history, memory, and the search for change and progress.



Marjo Levlin, Chrystal Portraits, 2022

Marjo Levlin studied in Finland at Vapaa Taidekoulu(1990-91), at Taidekoulu Maa(1992-96) and at the Academy of Fine Arts (2008-10) with a MA at the Department of Time and Space/Moving Image. She has participated in solo and group shows in Scandinavia, Germany, France, Morocco and Belarus. In 2022, she received the prestigious Arts Promotion Centre 5 year grant and in 2021 she was awarded the Risto Jarva Prize by the Finnish Film Foundation for the film ***Ellipsis***(2020) at Tampere Film Festival. Her work is in the public collections of Kuntisi Museum of Modern Art and the collections of Stiftelsen Pro Artibus. In 2013 she participated in a residency at The Finnish Cultural Institute in New York City.



The artist Marjo Levlin

Grants from Konstsfundet, The Arts Promotion Centre Finland(TAIKE) and Finlandia Foundation, National enabled the exhibit at the Finlandia gallery. The installation ***Heading West, Coming Back*** (2015) was funded by Oskar Öflunds Stiftelse, The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland(SKF), The Arts Promotion Centre Finland(TAIKE) and The Promotional Centre for Audiovisual Culture(AVEK).

“Heading West, Coming Back” is on display at The Finlandia Gallery through January 31, 2024.

The Finlandia Gallery is located in the Finnish American Heritage Center, 435 Quincy Street, Hancock, 906-487-7500 or email gallery@finlandiafoundation.org Gallery hours are

9:00am-4:00pm Monday-Friday.