

A BOOK OF ONE-TO-ONE ART

Edited by Timo Harju

NTAMO

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One-to-One

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KULTTUURIOSUUSKUNTA ILME

”During the early 70’s, [Joan] Jonas would frequently
perform for an audience of one
– artist Richard Serra, with whom she was living.”

Howard Junker,
Joan Jonas. The Mirror Staged.
Art in America.
Vol. 69, 1981, 87–95.





Dmytro Grynov, *(Dis)connect*, Kehä 2024. Photo: Anniina Kettunen.

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HELLO!

I AM A BOOK.

Is my weight resting on the table in front of you? Or am I already on your lap? Are you holding me in your hands? Notice how I look. How does it sound when my pages turn? Please, smell me. When you read me, you can be one-to-one with me, even if it's not entirely clear what that one-to-one is like. Some people think that books offer them places to retreat from constant communication, places where they can be alone and think. Likewise, it is surely undeniable that books are places accessible not only to the living. The dead can enter as well, and others who live far away.

I contain the voices of dozens of artists. They are talking about artworks in which they spent a moment with one person at a time. In these works, they danced, they drew, they wrote for that person. And then for a completely different person, and then another, over and over again. An audience of one got to listen to a private concert, to hold sculptures in their arms, to be buried in flowers or build worlds out of wooden blocks. In many of the works, people talked. In some, they were completely silent and looked each other in the eye. In one work–or, wait, actually in two–they lay in coffins. In some, the participant had more clothes on and in others less. Most of the time, there was no one else there to see what was happening. Sometimes it was important that other people around witnessed the encounter, in one way or another. If being together with a book is a source of wonder, it was at least as much so in each of the works that I will tell you about. Often they were created precisely because the artists were fascinated by what kinds of meanings such one-to-one moments might take on. And even more so because the significance of these works has been immense for both the creators and their visitors.



Henna-Maria Hanhineva & Satu Hakamäki, *The Ones Who Bear Flowers,* Kehä 2018. Photo: Pirjo Lempeä.

I was written as part of the One-to-One Art project, which was funded by the European Union's Creative Europe program. The aim of the project has been to weave a network around one-to-one art. There are many artists in different countries who are inspired by this art form, but very few opportunities to work with it. Until now, information about the works and the artists behind them has not been collected in one place. Artists often lack both peer support and funding, which makes committed, in-depth engagement with the format difficult. As part of the project, artists have been sought through open calls for works – and it turned out that many actors in the art field were willing to help with the dissemination of these calls. The One-to-One Art project has also organised the Kehä Festival of one-to-one art in Oulu, Finland, and the One-to-One Festival in Oeiras, Portugal. Numerous workshops have been led. Some artists have been offered a residency period in Klanjec, Croatia. The project has produced the One-to-One Podcast. An online portal has been launched, bringing together presentations of artists, organisations and events from across Europe. Also, a symposium of one-to-one art has been held.

One-to-one art is practised particularly in three contexts: as applied art in care settings; at contemporary art events that emphasise performance or site-specificity; and as part of immersive performances, good examples of which are Pirjo Yli-Maunula's productions for Flow Production in Oulu, *The Book of Rooms* by Tehdas Theatre in Turku, and the works of Punchdrunk in London. Of these contexts, the One-to-One Art Project has focused on the first two. The Project, which ran from 2023 to 2026, has been led by Cultural Cooperative ILME, Gato Escaldado, and House Collective.

I am not a project book in the sense that I would merely recount the work done during the One-to-One Art project. Thoughts and art exercises from further back in the past have also been written on my pages, for example from the work of the Tapiiri writers' collective in Turku, around the turn of the 2000s and 2010s. In particular, my paragraphs cover the Kehä Festival, which has been held in Oulu ten times since 2015. To a large extent, I am a retrospective of the Kehä Festival, though I do not stop there. The idea behind Kehä is that the works are presented both as a public art event and on a tour of different social and healthcare institutions. In these social and healthcare settings, art has long been made for one person at a time, because this makes it easier to take their individual and specific needs into account. Often, artists independently arrive at similar solutions in hospital wards, activity centres, or residential care units for children without knowing about one another's work. Kehä aims to bring together artists from both the field of applied art and experimental contemporary art. The festival begins with a day reserved only

for the artists to share their experiences with one another. You can prepare to welcome an audience by first receiving something for yourself. The day offers time to rest, eat together, and have a sauna.

I was edited by the writer and community artist Timo Harju. He founded Kehä Festival after moving to Oulu and finding himself professionally alone. The festival has been a way to make an event together with wonderful people and to invite interesting artists to visit – first from Finland, and more recently from all over Europe and a few other parts of the world, too. The most recent open calls have received around three hundred proposals each year, which has meant demanding curatorial work. Before Kehä, Timo had made one-to-one art by writing *´heard-word poems´* – poems written down directly from another person's speech – especially with older people living with memory disorders. A book of these poems has also been published (*Korvarunoja,* with Veera Vähämaa, ntamo 2019). Before the heard-word poems, Timo had already written hundreds of *´poetry portraits´*: looking at a person and writing a poem about what he saw, as a gift to them. The idea for the poetry portraits had originally emerged from an exercise in Laura Mannila's body-oriented psychotherapeutic group. Then and there, the task was to look at how another person stands when they are simply just standing, and to stand in the same way, and to describe to them how it feels. Timo found the exercise extraordinary, and somehow the experience gave rise to a desire to write poems with the same kind of intimacy. One-to-one writing has been the biggest thing Timo has discovered as an artist. He wanted to share the experience with others who had made a similar discovery. This is how Timo often recounts the history of Kehä. It could also be told from the perspectives of others who have helped build Kehä as part of its working group, for example in the voice of Henna-Maria Hanhineva, who steered Kehä alongside Timo in its early years, or Aino Granlund, Kehä's long-time producer. Still more could be written about the journey of the Croatian project partner House Collective or the Portuguese Gato Escaldado with this art form. However, I shall focus here on some of the artists selected for Kehä. It is endlessly fascinating to hear them tell, within me, how they came to make their works.

As a book, I wish to remind you that it is not only people who talk to one another; we books talk to one another too. The conversation between books is endangered and irreplaceable. Surprisingly few books have been published about one-to-one art. While editing me, Timo has read Rachel Zerihan's *Strange Duets: The Cultural Politics of One-to-One Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), which, according to its back cover, is the first ever monograph devoted to the art form. The book traces the history and cultural contexts of one-to-

one performance, particularly in Britain and the United States. It analyses not only works that are very different from one another, but also different events in which works have been presented to audiences. Zerihan examines the social significance of the works and provides tools for critical analysis. Earlier, she published a shorter *Study Room Guide* on the subject, freely available for download from the Live Art Development Agency's website. Another book Timo has read is *It's All Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* (Intellect Books, 2016), edited by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson. The British artist Adrian Howells is, arguably, still one of the best-known practitioners of one-to-one art. In his intimate and carefully constructed works, he both made and received confessions while in drag, at the same time cutting a participant's hair or doing their laundry. He bathed and fed people, and laid in bed with them in spoon position. He washed and kissed their feet. In 2014, he took his own life. The book is a book of mourning, in which his friends also write extensively about artists' ability to cope, and about their wellbeing. Apart from these books, Timo is yet to find others. I long for more books that would talk with me. I am now published in both Finnish and English, so that I could have as many conversations as possible.

My structure is as follows: The book begins with two essays. In the first one, Brian Lobel introduces the artistic and thematic possibilities of the art form as well as its economic difficulties, focusing in particular on performance. One-to-one performance has a documented history[1], a substantial number of practitioners, and a recognised, if marginal, position within the field of *live art*. In the One-to-One Art project, we have wanted to make room for practitioners of other art forms to explore one-to-one as well, which is why the project is called One-to-One Art rather than One-to-One Performance.[2] In the second essay, Lena Giuliano describes writing in the moment, directly for another person. In doing so, she also introduces the project.

1 One-to-one performance is usually not recognised as an art form of its own. Instead, it is depicted as a part of performance art in general. Mentions of one-to-one works can be found here and there when performance art is discussed from the 70's onwards, more in this millennium.

2 Tuomas H. Laitinen points out in his book *How Audience Bodies Form* (Uniarts Helsinki 2025) that the terminology of performance differs between Finnish and English. In Finnish, you really need two words to cover the English term 'performance art'. There is the word ***performanssi,*** which is a lot more narrow term than performance. ***Performanssi*** refers only to a very specific (and much US-based) tradition of performance that can be dated back to the 60's, and which emphasises the body and actions of the artist. In Finland, ***performanssi*** has been done mostly in the context of visual arts. On the other hand, there's also the word ***esitys,*** which is a somewhat wider term that refers more to audience contact, and has a link to performative arts. Sometimes the English word performance translates as ***performanssi,*** sometimes as ***esitys.*** The UK-based 'live art' shares a lot with ***esitys,*** but it's not a direct equivalent. The dominance of English in an international art scene can make it hard to remember that there are local art traditions not fully graspable in English. Using the very general term one-to-one art is also a way to make space for local distinctions. Here, the term one-to-one is used consistently instead of the other widely used, but more recent term, ***´one-on-one´.*** One-to-one seems to be a somewhat wider and more neutral term of these two since one-on-one easily summons the connotations of combat or intercourse.

The heart of me as a book is formed by, and most of my pages are filled by, the conversations between Timo and other artists. The vast majority of these conversations took place on the café stage at the Kehä Festivals, were published as *Kehä-talk* or on *One-to-One Podcast* on Spotify, and were transcribed for me. Only some of the conversations could be included, and only some parts of them. Through his choices, Timo has tried not only to make the diversity of the art form visible, but also to focus on the subtle differences between works that are otherwise close to one another, and on the exchange of ideas they can have with each other. The editing has left many fascinating artists and works seemingly outside my covers, but their influence can still be felt between the lines.

After the conversations comes a selection of art exercises. These invite art professionals and teachers to experiment with one-to-one sessions, hopefully using methods from beyond their own field as well. The exercises may bring joy for people doing art as a hobby, or for social and healthcare workers, or you. They include longer exercises that may sound quite highbrow, but also smaller-scale, down-to-earth activities. As the choreographer Silja Tuovinen says in one dialogue, art is at its best in rehearsal studios, when something begins to reveal itself and we don't yet know what it is.

On my very final pages, there are quotes from the audience. They have left, now that the art works they took part in are over. I hope you will find plenty of quiet space in me to reflect, and space to get excited–that is, if something here ignites you. Reasons to leave and reasons to come back. A place to prepare for being just the two of you. Space to be together. Just the basics.



Seija-Leena Salo, *A Pitch About Breasts*, Kehä 2018. Photo: Pirjo Lempeä.

It's all in your lap or nowhere.

Nina Rantala

This book plunges into an art form known as 'one-to-one' in which the artist presents her work to only one person at a time. Although little has been written about this genre it is already being practised both in Finland and abroad in a startlingly wide variety of ways. Pioneers in the field of performance and beyond, including the editor of the book Timo Harju, offer an introduction to the secrets of international one-to-one art.

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The other can tell me whatever he wants.

I won't interfere with it.

And I won't walk away from it.

Johanna Latvala

I was giggling inside all the time

because it was so fun!

Katri Rauanjoki

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