



Fig. 1—Garjjat/Kråkene/the Crows (textile work) by Britta Marakatt-Labba (1981): it refers directly to the demonstrations against the hydroelectric exploitation and damming of the Alta river. The landing crows are policemen coming from afar. The camps by the the three Lavvo tents counts both Sami and non-Sami demonstrators (period: 1968-1982).

After having seen Britta Marakatt-Labba's exhibit [Moving the needle](#), I wanted to use what I had learned from the exhibit on stars and citizenship: sidereal citizenship. But how to proceed: if there is knowledge in her works—indeed, I think there is—where and to whom does it belong? The exhibition is open for visitors at the [National Museum](#) in Oslo. With the dedication of many of her works to location and movement makes it impossible to think about this. The artist herself is internationally acclaimed ([DOCUMENTA14](#)). She works from here atelier by Badje-Sohppar (Sapmi).

I.e. about 30km south of where she was born in the village Áđevuopmi/Idivuoma. She is bound by family-ties to the world of reindeer-herding she is evokes in her work; from the vantage points of nature, routes, cosmology and politics. The exhibit spoke to me, as it does to a crowds of enthusiastic visitors, as she does not only show her art, but the visitors become part of something for a little while. That is, visitors in that sense. From what I could see there were three kinds of visitors: (1) people with a Sami link; (2) people with history as oppressors; (3) strangers from the art world.

I belong to the latter category. Through my work at the art school—Oslo National Academy of the Arts—I stick to the luggage from the art world: making me not a complete alien, but a *stranger* visiting Britta Marakatt-Labba's world; which is not only her world, but belongs to Sapmi. It is a large territory across the Nordic countries and Russia, defined by the people who live there: the reindeer herders are cattle nomads, who live by an *ethos* of taking *only* what they need and *not* exploiting nature. This is the kind of statement structuring the exhibit here and there: museum texts.

By working and exhibiting as an artist—one might ask—is Britta Marakatt-Labba's a stranger in her own world? In [Georg Simmel](#)'s sense, being a stranger is not negative: the stranger is someone in whom locals typically confide (not rarely with thoughts and messages they would not share amongst themselves). Alternatively, the artist is a contributor to an changing contemporary Sami people, with their own political institutions, educational system and culture (and, of course, *art*). 'Take what you need and make do with it's: does that apply in *this* domain as well?



Fig. 2— Stargazing (Britta Marakatt-Labba 2001, Aquarell). Part of the exhibit Moving the needle at the National Museum in Oslo 2024. Recurring theme in her work. For instance, the full assembly of Sami travellers in the exhibitions central codex.

In this handout I can only ask. I have forbidden myself of coming with answers. For instance, I can ask: why is the circular motif—the enclosure—come to organise the exhibit in a peripheral sector devoted to harsher *political realities*, facing it the realities of *society*, *cosmology* and *dreams*.

Within it a more domesticated and stable narrative of the Sami as time-long reindeer herders. And in the *centre* a circle with her long work Historja (History) coiled in a circuit, where it was exhibited over a long stretch in a straight line, when exhibited in Kassel at dOCUMENTA 14 in 2017?

Whether/not this arrangement spoke to me, I consider irrelevant to the present discussion: it is an artistic/curatorial choice made at the National museum. Does it invite appropriation (by the museum and the audience)? Hence the paradox, which concerns me here: indigenous ideas and work, speak to us only on condition that it is *not* appropriated. It is only as such that it can speak to the part of me which is indigenous: not in the Sami sense, but as a citizen of the earth. It invites a *terrestrial* scope, which e.g. Bruno Latour counterposes to the online (extraterrestrial) global citizen.

That is, that *other* part of us that doesn't belong here, but to whom everything belongs. It is a contradiction in terms, and it is driving us over the cliff. It is part of the outer circle of the exhibit where the cartography of herders—unfolding in Britta Marakatt-Labba's work—meets a cartography of fixed boundaries (which entitles the owners to take whatever, how much they want and rule over people). A small embroidery shows a document in Norwegian language from WWII in embroidery: "it is strictly forbidden to help refugees across the border to Sweden": Jews & others.

In this work, there are also embroidery of guns. In other parts of the artist's cartographic work parking signs and the exploitation of natural resources in the area is shown. The story of Sami protesters against the [windmill plant in Fosen](#), is part of the context: [Fosen](#) is part of [Sapmi](#) in Norway, that the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled as an infraction against human rights, though without consequence for the existence and continued running of the plant, in these traditional grazing areas: this has happened in [more than one ruling](#) from the Norwegian constitution's [§112](#).

The fact that Norway has *no* constitutional court may have something to do with the matter. However, it is part of a broader family of ideas on constitutional rights in Europe: the constitution determines the legality of laws, but is not itself implemented as law (the constitution has jurisdiction on laws, but only laws have jurisdiction in reality). Society is not ruled by the constitution, but by the laws that have to be in agreement with it. Which is how public corporate projects may be in violation of the human rights—which are included into the Constitution—yet not be deemed illegal.

As anyone knows who are acquainted with this sort of ruling will have observed, they belong to the realm of *complication* (which is ever the signature of the powers that be): it is, as one says, complicated. While the method of inclusion of human rights in the constitution in 2014 was monadic, its application within the legal body/jurisprudence is dyadic. This is of importance here, since the *constitution* broadly features the national as a *monad*, not unlike the Britta Marakatt-Labba's artwork—which does exude a constitutional spirit for Sapmi—while *legal practice* is dyadic.

It raises the question of whether at all we can think a constitution, a legal body and jurisprudence in its *entirely* as a monad. When I look at Britta Marakatt-Labba's work as a constitutional codex, the question arises *how* and *what* one can learn from it: being an *art-work* rather than set in writing.



Fig. 3—Bortom alt I/Beyond everything I, Britta Marakatt-Labba (2023) needle work. Photo: OSL contemporary. What is contingent within and beyond the camp, what acts and speaks through a mesh of silence? \$, S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub> and little a? The divided seal, signifiers of signifiers, stops and shifts... a line of questions ending up with something else than what we can take.

Can practices other than dyadic emerge from it? In other words, *avoiding* to make glib interpretations and explanations of Sami cosmology, life and politics, can we learn from, or better, *with* it? Could we, for instance, use it as a starting point for a psychoanalysis of our *environment* (putting nature, as it were, on the couch)? Perhaps make it *ferment* a bit with Lacan's vinegar?

In his three-partite explanation of why *stars do not speak*, Lacan lists three reasons: 1. they have nothing to say; 2. They have no time for it; 3. they have been silenced. Does the ultimate reality of human beings express a similar condition? It is a question anyone can ask after seeing Britta Marakatt-Labba's exhibition.

What will nature reveal before this psychoanalyst, about its moods, states and current [hysteresis](#)?