

The Finnish Astronautical Society's 60th Anniversary Film

Axel Straschnoy (1,2)

(1) Finnish Astronautical Society, Finland, (2) Kolme Perunaa Space, Finland (axel@kolmeperunaa.space)

Abstract

The Finnish Astronautical Society's 60th Anniversary Film is an artist film on the past and present of the Finnish Space Programme. It deals with the history of Finnish futurism and space exploration, focusing on the activities of the Finnish Astronautical Society—an organisation founded sixty years ago to advance space exploration.



Figure 1: Matti Lepomäki looks for a fallen rocket at Ämmässuo.

1. Introduction

Finland's space-faring plans got their start in 1959, when four inspired teenagers dreaming of building a rocket of their own and flying it to space created the Finnish Astronautical Society. They started from scratch: looking for fuel formulas in books at the US library in Helsinki, setting up an amateur lab where to produce it, performing countless tests, fabricating tools, and calculating rocket trajectories by hand over very long weekends. Slowly, others joined them.

Today, the Society continues to be the place for people interested in space and space-faring. Its main activities are organising model rocket launches and publishing a quarterly magazine on space exploration.

Compared to the Apollo programme, the history of the Finnish Astronautical Society is a marginal one. However, in a world where only a handful of countries have the capability to launch rockets into space, the Society's history is a shared one.

2. The 60th Anniversary Film



Figure 2: Heikki Karppinen poses with the laminar wind tunnel he has installed in his attic.

Interested in space exploration, I joined in 2017 and began participating in its activities. I started by documenting the model rocket launches but soon realised that the Society was not well known, that there was very little information on how or why it had been started. As I began my research on its history, the launch videos grew into an in-depth portrait.

I interviewed its funder and early members about the history, tracked the only existing film recording of an early text launch as well as photographs of the first models, current members spoke about their interest in rocketry and I recorded countless launch sessions. The material was edited into an artist film, that focuses on the spirit of the Society and its members. Like all portraits, it aims to capture the subject's character.

3. Artistic Strategies

According to the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros do Castro, in Amerindian perspectivism to know something is to take its perspective. To attain knowledge, Shamans take the perspective of animals.

Taking to heart this maxim, I believe it is important not to make artworks *on* a subject but to make artworks from the perspective *of* a subject.

I shot the film from the point of view of a member; in order to disturb as little as possible the activities it portrays, I kept the crew to a minimum.

As an artist, I believe it is important to give something back to those who allow you to peek into their lives. The film is also my gift to the Society on its 60th Anniversary.



Figure 3: A rocket launches from the frozen sea in front of Otaniemi.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The Finnish Astronautical Society's 60th Anniversary Film is the first step in writing the history of the Finnish space programme. The interviews it includes were recorded using oral history techniques and the society has now in its archives their unedited versions. Others will hopefully take my work as a departure point for further research into an interesting and understudied topic.

As an art project, the film and its associated events are making the Society known beyond the small circle of people who were aware of its existence. It is only the beginning, but as the film is presented the story of the Finnish Astronautical Society will reach curious people around the world.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the Society's present and past members for their support for this project as well as for their predisposition to answer my questions and appear on the film, in particular: Mika Jalava, Timo Toivanen, Sampo Juustila, Mika Jarvenpää and Matti Lepomäki. The film could not have been done without the financial support of the Kone Foundation, AVEK, the Arts Promotion Center Finland and Svenska Kulturfonden.