

# Naviten

Johanna Ulfsak  
Soft Copies

Please read this text carefully before you start your experience. If you have any questions or are not sure about anything, ask someone.

Keep this text in a safe place, you may want to read it again.

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What constitutes *Soft Copies*?

Larger than life baby-whoppers painted onto textile, that appear as separated from their mother and are devoid of any specific gender or race indicators. This traditionally woven textile, that is 9m wide and 2x1m high, takes its initial measures from a standard volleyball net (9m x 1m). It is held up by two post-like supports. Initially 1-meter-wide sheets are stitched together into a two-meter-wide textile by a quilted scar tissue.

What is the recommended dose?

Sufficient dose is reasonably knowledgeable. It is recommended to avoid needless presumption of excessive parallels, metaphors and personal assumptions or pre-conceptions (and/or their projection onto the author). Nevertheless, they should be noticed and seized, just to be able to be aware of their existence, as they do exist. They do. It is also recommended to keep in mind that recommendations are recommendatory. Like with any game, it has its rules, and these rules have to be taken seriously, because it is not a game.

When should you be extra careful while experiencing *Soft Copies*?

If you perceive yourself as living in the age of viral transmission of baby pictures, and don't comprehend (nor want to comprehend) its cause and/or purpose. If you are or were or plan to be a mother. If you are or were a net player and/or a networked person.

What happens if I forget my dose?

If you forget to take your dose, remind yourself as soon as you remember. Try to remember the differences between something privately intimate and publicly shared. Write them down and try not to forget. Then go on as before. This is not a game.

What are the possible side effects of *Soft Copies*?

Excessive parallels, metaphors and personal assumptions or preconceptions may come to mind. Heightened perception of normativity and general social pressure. Vague fears towards the future and additional doubts in considering the present. Urge to abandon image-based social media. In extreme cases a desire to join the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement might emerge.

If you are concerned about these or any other side effects, talk to someone.

Text:

Artist:

Johanna  
Ulfsak  
Esko

# How

My father spends half of his days on Geni. He digs through digitized church record books, chases down connections and evidence, which he then carefully adds to what he has already found. He has got as far back as someone born in 1707 named Jaan. It isn't completely certain, but better than nothing, because at some point back in the past, it becomes untraceable.

I am simultaneously an original and a copy. Being born is the supreme form of reproduction. I was born after someone's face and someone will be born after my face and who knows maybe someone will be born after their face and at some point in the future, it becomes untraceable.

This gives rise to some head-spinning feelings, if you stop to think about it. But generally, I don't stop to think about it seriously, none of us do. We play in life's surface layer and we try not to fall through. *Homo ludens*.

Some lines from Alliksaar come to mind when I think of this Johanna Ulfsak work, which unites traditional handicraft with contemporary art: "the tapestries of feelings are woven awkwardly, long and wrong." The slowness of the weaving itself contains some poetic generalization that is hard to put into words. The generalization isn't associated with the specific artist, although she repeatedly emphasizes the importance of slowness. Is the completely technical and practical slowness of handicraft a symbol of the biological slowness of the passage of human generations? Slowness that always remains slow no matter how fast the world has become? Is the physical game here a symbol of human life vanishing without a trace, like the positions of the volleyball players' bodies are not recorded in the air, leaving the viewer with only a momentary sense of the possibility of a life force bridging the abyss of time? And why volleyball? Why, why volleyball? Yes, there are a good many unanswered questions in life and the truth may not necessarily be revealed now. Maybe in a few hundred years or when the yarn runs out.

Artist:

Ulfsak

Text:

Kaunistoore

Johanna

Wetlik

HELLO!

I don't know, mum, I don't really like him that much, not at all in that sense. Yes, I understand he's from a good family and so on, but I don't know, they only got christened like 2 days ago or so. But I really think marriage isn't something you should do just for a title and land. No, I have only seen some blurry miniature portrait and I can't base my decision on that and it's not just about appearance, anyway. For example, I read that novel *Sir Lancelot and Lady Guinevere* and honestly, I think you have to get married to someone you've at least met in person. There has to be some attraction and you could have something in common. That guy seems really thick, they're totally unenlightened there in the North. They live like some Mongols, with horses in the same room. Depressing. Probably talks only about horses; look at what he is wearing on that miniature portrait, like heraldry everywhere. A complete redneck.

Yes, I know we need descendants. Yes, I know, Melisanda is having her seventh - but so? Their vassals don't obey them and everything is screwed up. She told me that they have sex only through a hole in the bed sheet. What do you mean "blasphemy", mum, "sex" is a totally normal word. It is. They say the word in Florence and God hasn't struck them down like Sodom and Gomorrah. And it's something you shouldn't feel you need to do only because you need descendants. And she has stretch marks and a saggy belly, nothing helps, they even promised some witch they wouldn't burn her if she fixed it, well, the witch prescribed some exercises for her abs and then they burned her after all.

The chat demon is getting low on energy. Hold on. I'll go into the bedroom, got to feed it.

Unbelievable, that demon is new and if you don't feed it all the time, then there's no talking because it doesn't send anything. No, it's never been dropped, only on to the carpet. Yeah, it saw a rat behind the tapestry and started thrashing and fell to the carpet. No-no, otherwise it's nice, nice outercase and it displays funny pictures, too, better than the previous one, we get along well. I like that it is more personalized and can understand when I am sleeping and doesn't make noise when a call comes in. Chinese magic is cutting edge, I tell you, if we were only using the Bible to this point, we wouldn't be talking right now, mum. So it isn't that everything from abroad is bad. You yourself wear only silk and silk - so why don't you wear fur if you don't like China.

So no. There's foreign and then there's foreign. Take that Nizhny Stockholm. It's something totally different; they don't even speak Latin, how can I talk to him? And he has a son from a previous marriage, pretty soon there will be washing of dirty laundry, I don't want to get involved in all that toxic stuff, like get poisoned or something.

Mhm. Yeah, well, dad's always like that. He'll calm down. I can talk to him, too. Ah, you know what, coming back to that other thing. That famous troubadour Ott de le Pland and his courtesan. They were on tour in India, seven whole years, like there was a war too but they still went and were successful and maybe it's the first cross-cultural success story like that. But anyway, they brought back a child from India, because the courtesan was raped some years ago by some bandits during a minor military incursion when they were at the wrong place at the wrong time, and can't have children now, and so they brought back a super-cute little child from India, lots of personality and knows how to play chess. MOTHER! Listen, I have to turn off this demon now. Ciao.

Text:

Wetlik

Artist:

Wetlik

# Vitamiin

Lilian Hiob:

Johanna Ulfsak is weaving a 9x2m volleyball net featuring oversized babies and scar tissue. When I saw her presentation, I thought the image was very baby-hostile. Humongous babies and volleyball players - seems like someone might hit the babies with a ball. As a parent, what do you think of the balls and the babies?

Siim Preiman:

That's a cool idea that the babies might be hit when someone plays ball on that court. It brings in a new association to violence. I think she said what's happening to these children is a spectacle. It reminds me of how I was searching for birth videos on Youtube before my son was born. I found some Youtuber couples who had been broadcasting together for years and now that they were having a baby, they would

be broadcasting that too. So you get a 25-minute programme of how they're giving birth at home and then finally the baby is shown to the camera. I remember thinking, "Wow, now this is *The Truman Show*." It is the fortune or misfortune of the baby that

he was born to a Youtuber family. His first steps, words etc are for millions to see.

No one will ask his permission. This too is a violent spectacle of the child.

LH:

I was also thinking about how parents often make their child do a particular sport. They want him to be the best at it. They're living their own dreams through their child.

SP:

I had to sell my saxophone to feed you, so now you must become the best jazz musician in Estonia!

LH:

Exactly! I used to be a swimmer and would encounter parents who were absolutely obsessed with their child's training and with her becoming the best at it, they would be buying her the best swimsuits etc. Philosopher Donna Haraway who's known for her quote "Make kin not babies!" thinks, for example, that instead of having babies, we should be rethinking the family model: live together with our closest ones in groups going beyond the heteronormative family model. According to Haraway, communities that aren't based on blood relations, gender, race or religious beliefs, or even species, offer an opportunity for moving forward from the destructive anthropocentric era.

*Text:*

Artist:

Ulfsak

# Hanna Laura

*Brother, you bring the flax to me spun,  
who will braid it for me?\**

Where flax roots coil,  
ancestors braided  
with soil, there  
the toil of untangling,  
one fiber at a time,  
the grain of living  
passed down.

*Sister, I bring it to you braided.*

*Brother, you bring the flax to me braided,  
who will warp it for me?*

There, warm glow  
of the garret.  
Mother, hands  
on the loom,  
thins out wounds,  
each yarn in tune.

*Sister, I bring it to you warped.*

*Brother, you bring the flax to me warped,  
who will weave it for me.*

There, tender body  
unhesitantly  
heart to heart.  
How many mother's  
heartbeats  
to weave  
the child onto earth?

*Sister, I bring it to you woven.*

*In italics* Sumerian Song, 1750 BC.

Text:

Kaljo

Artist:

Chisak

Ulfsak used an eloquent expression when introducing her work: the grotesqueness of reproducing humans. And that made me think.

Our choices for becoming a mother are limited in Estonia. The law strongly favours giving birth, especially 'natural birth'. Pain, injury and fear must be endured. A real woman can do it. And a real woman definitely becomes a mother.

In Estonia, surrogacy is illegal. Wikipedia says:

“According to KarS § 132 lg 1, it is an offense to carry over someone else’s egg cell or a human foetus produced from that cell to another woman who plans to give away the baby after giving birth to it.<sup>1</sup> Although neither a surrogat mother nor a woman who intends to become a mother through surrogacy can be punished by Estonian law, surrogacy remains unlawful. According to the laws presently in effect, the medical worker who sees the prodecure through, can be punished.”

In Estonia, it is also impossible to voluntarily choose cesarean section for delivery. “Cesarean section comes with a number of risks that put the woman as well as the baby in danger. Therefore, cesarean section is only performed if medically indicated, and not upon the wish of the woman,” said the gynecologist and the head of the West Tallinn Central Hospital’s women’s clinic doctor Piret Veerus to ERR. “The decision to deliver a baby through C-section must always be medically clearly substantiated, it is not a decision that’s taken easily.”<sup>2</sup> Even panic fear is not a good enough reason for doctors to allow a woman to choose C-section. The alleviation of that fear if possible, is dealt with already from the early days of pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>

Sterilisation is an option in Estonia, although women who are under 35-years-old must have given birth to at least three children or there must be medical indication to allow for it. In the Republic of Estonia, sterilisation is regulated by Termination of Pregnancy and Sterilisation Act (25.11.1998). Sometimes it feels like in Estonia, a woman is like a well maintained copy machine, whose technical functions are clearly prioritised over her psychological well-being and individual choices.

1 *Criminal Code* §120, RT I 1999, 38, 485. Visited Aug 16th, 2018.

2 *Doctors: C-section is still too risky to simply allow it*. ERR, October 4th, 2017. <https://novaator.err.ee/634157/arstid-keisriloige-on-endiselt-liiga-riskantne-et-seda-niisama-lubada> (visited October 19th, 2020) .

3 Ibid.

Text:

# Bogie

**reproduce** *vb* -ducing, -duced **1** to make a copy or representation of **2** *biol* to produce offspring **3** to re-create >**reproducible** *adj*  
**reproduce** *vb* **1** = print, copy **2** breed, procreate (*formal*), multiply, spawn, propagate

**reproduction** *n* **1** *biol* a process by which an animal or plant produces one or more individuals similar to itself **2** a copy of a work of art **3** the quality of sound from an audio system **4** the act or process of reproducing > *adj* **5** made in imitation of an earlier style:

*reproduction furniture*

>**reproductive** *adj*

**reproduction** *n* **1** = breeding, increase, generation, multiplication **2** = copy, picture, print, replica, imitation, duplicate, facsimile; ≠ original

*\* Entries from the Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus Essential Edition, Glasgow: Collins, 2020.*

Artist:

Text:

Dracastel

# Magdalena

In the middle of the court is a fabric, pulled taut, splitting the spectators into two camps.

Strange and formless larger-than-life babies are painted on the fabric.

Fragile, transparent, spreading out.

The fabric is in turn divided in half along its full length by a long, almost healed-over wound, which seems to be covered by a protective scab.

Someone says the babies on the fabric symbolize the start of life - *tabula rasa* - from which we all begin our journey before we choose a side on the playing field. People become anxious.

"Thus, the wound denotes the unhealable rift between the two sides?" someone asks.

A silent understanding dawns on those on the playing field.

Someone suggests, optimistically, that perhaps they symbolize childlike joy and simplicity instead? Because the love of the game is what's important, not the winning.

The others nod at that, smiling, but actually they all know already that it is a competition where there can be only one winner.

At first moving around hesitantly, looking for a place that feels right, people finally start choosing a side. Looking carefully at who is on what side and whom it would be worth playing with on the same team.

People examine the people on the other side of the field, looking at their tense faces through the thin fabric. The players on both teams think nervous thoughts.

Are they really adversaries? Or are they downright enemies? Perhaps it would be better if they were just playmates? Will the wound heal completely during the game? What are they playing for, anyway? Life and death? The future of the children hovering above the court who are divided into two sides by the scarred wound? Are there any winners in this game at all? Or will it last forever, with players only substituted during the game?

Will I play in this game until the end?

No one in the spectators dares to be the first to throw the ball. No one wants to hit the first serve. Maybe no one has a ball. The players become anxious. And where is the referee?

The first serve.

The ball whistles through the air. A cry, contact, whistle. Shoes squeaking on the boards.

A flurry of steps, drops of sweat, thumps, whistle.

Pause. Whistle. Repeat.

The game is full of suspense and the sides are equal. No one gives up. Serve, volley, another one, whistle.

The players are tired and commit many errors. Serve, volley, another one, whistle.

No one knows the score.

A heavy serve, a volley, the ball whizzes through the air, frightened looks in the eyes, a shout and...

The ball hits the net. The middle of the net.

The wound tears.

The colourless threads flow across the floor in full sight of the silent players.

The final whistle sounds.

Artist:

Utsak

Text:

Maavik



Johanna Ulfsak is the only artist I know whose primary medium is a loom. Ulfsak's work is sensitive and distinctive; she is interested in the hierarchies prevalent in society - life's fragility along with its conflicts and humour. The long and meditative work process is important for her works. It's a process where signs of manual activity become the main navigational markers: the imperfections, flaws of woven fabric, the added stitches.

The work created for Artishok, *Soft Copies*, is a conceptual sequel to *Old Scar*, which depicted Naivist human figures locked in a power struggle, painted on a fabric stretched over hospital patient screens. Who will come out on top or on the bottom, who is in and out? *Soft Copies* consists of two 9 × 1 m hand-woven parts stitched together, pulled taut between two volleyball net posts. The woven net depicts slightly abstract and weird larger-than-life babies floating in the air without umbilical cords.

In this work, the artist has captured quite a lot of controversial topics - the emotional work attributed to women, children as a taboo theme for contemporary art and also neo-conservative slogans connected to forced pregnancy and the pro-life movement. Knowing Johanna, I can't fail to mention the sci-fi, dystopian interpretation of the work.

Ridley Scott's series *Raised by Wolves* - where human "copies" gestated outside the uterus are being raised by artificial intelligence on a distant planet far away from conservative views and religious wars - offers plenty of thematic material.

The net does not only separate high and low, us from them, or soft from hard, but also joins, in one space, amateur mass sports events with elitist biennale art, and the conservatives' notions of human reproduction with far-out sci-fi visions. It remains to be hoped that Ulfsak's net functions in Estonian society as a massive dream catcher that will capture the EKRE far-right-populist party's "sporting interest" in making women's choices about their bodies for them.

Artist:

Ulfsak

Text:

Säde

Johanna

# Maria

I still like going fishing. You wake up early, when it's still dark. You turn on the light and get a fire started in the stove. Drink hot tea. Put your overalls on and walk down to the beach. Mirror-smooth water, sun just risen, pink and flushed. From time to time, flounders jumping with big bounds. Pure pleasure to watch. You push off in a boat and row away from shore with calm oar strokes. You let the boat drift for a moment and light your pipe. The water reflects the colours and forms of the new days with remarkable fidelity. Heaven on Earth, as the saying goes. You enjoy a few more moments of the sacred solitude and the breathtaking beauty of the world and then you take up the oars again into a strong grip. There's still a ways to go to get to the nets. From afar, you hear the barking of the village dogs, their salutations to each other. The village starts quietly stirring. It is time to pull the net up. It seems especially heavy today. You tug and tug until you realize what you have caught this early morning. The net is brimming with at least ten toddlers, staring up at you with wide eyes. You definitely weren't expecting that, but what can you do, they have to be hauled up and deposited on shore. When you reach the shore, you call the neighbour to help and together you take the net up to the village green. There are two posts ready, spaced the right distance apart, for pulling the net on to. Then it's just a matter of waiting and watching. The toddlers, who had dozed off in the meantime, start stirring. First, they open one eye, then the other. They start looking around. By that time, the older village children have arrived and each group - the older kids and the catch of the day - start checking each other out. The older ones know that the little kids really like playing. In particular, a big red ball catches their attention, and they lob it back and forth with a high trajectory. The little ones really like that: they start tittering and giggling. The net shakes with their laughter - it's a funny effect, and sets them off again. As the laughter dies down, they start climbing down little by little. Cautiously but with surprising agility. The older kids have got in line and are waiting expectantly. Everyone wants one of the toddlers to take home with them but patience is in order. It's the toddlers who pick their brothers and sisters. They can't be forced. They patter around, without a care but studious, giggling, looking at things from all sides. And if you're lucky, they come and take you by the hand. Then you go home proud, and show your parents your new sister or brother.

*Text:*

*Artist:*

*Utsak*

*Luiga*