



## Through watching, a sense of belonging

Genom att se, en känsla av tillhörighet

**Carola Björk**

Humans need to belong. Disconnection can lead to self-destructiveness and violence against others. This performance concerns the capability of being in compassionate relationships.

In recent years, research has located human empathy in the mirror neuron and shown that empathy can be developed. And is relational. Now we know that the mirror neuron system is connected to areas of the brain that control tactile and visual experiences. That: To watch someone else being touched activates a sensation of being touched myself. It is this "tactile empathy" the performance, which is part of a bigger research study where I investigate the relation to art making, takes an interest in.

For 20 minutes I intend to remove paint from a painting, in silence. Behind me I have people sitting, observing. A hypothesis: By watching my contact with the canvas, a feeling of being touched is generated in the observer.

I will repeat the scrubbing, move across the surface and return to places I have been to before. To get rid of the paint – a (psychological) pattern, I need to repeat the action. The observer repeats and returns, with me. Together, "we set out for Ithaca." This is an aim. The purpose of the performance is to try out an idea I plan to develop further, where repetition is key element. Its through repetition new neurological pathways are created in the brain. Another hypothesis: The situation "watching - being touched" activate the mirror neuron system in the observing individual and can with repetition strengthen the neurons.

I require space, chairs and to hang a canvas. Initially I make a 5 minute presentation. Participants will be instructed to watch and write down experiences in the notebook found on the chair, which is left behind. Data collected will be used in further research. We end with 5 minutes reflections.



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## Biography

**Carola Björk** is a mixed-media artist, art therapist and researcher, working with found objects, painting, sculpture, photography, installation and text. Her work is rooted in every day life situations and touch upon relational bonds and its influence on self-agency. In early adolescence Carola lost contact with her mother which in a natural way has developed into research on emotional wounds and the quality of care and attention. Fundamental subjects is transformation and presence. Carola holds a MFA in Fine Art, MA in Art Therapy, MA in The Theory of Practical Knowledge and BA in Philosophy. She has participated in international conferences in the field of Art & Health and Artistic Research. Since 2023 Carola is board member of The Swedish National Association of Art Therapists (SRBt).

## Recent Publications

Ridley, S. (red.). (May 2027). **Photographing stabilize inner emotional chaos and create resilience.** Book chapter in *The Use of Photography Across Mental Health Treatment and Beyond*. Routledge.

**Resonant-state expansion. Art making enhance bodily presence which affect the feeling of being here, now. The starting point of compassionate actions.** Scientific poster at "Resonance", the 16th SAR International Conference on Artistic Research in Porto, Portugal, 7-9th of May 2025.

**Lite-writing as a way to get in touch with emptiness.** Oral presentation at "Memory and Trauma International Conference" with London Center for Interdisciplinary Research. England, London. 3rd of December 2023.