

## Alison Wiklund

### Exhibition of art-work at Sipoo Main Library, Nikkila 6-31 of July 2015: Celebrating the unique Finnish archipelago for more than 30 years....

The story began in 1982..... Following an animated conversation on the wild shores of **Kallvik** with my friend and fellow artist, **Anitra Lucander** (1918-2000) – when she suggested our exploring the remote island of **Jurmo**.... So, in **1982**, we boarded m/s *Uto* moored on the river Aura (the first ferry to connect the city of **Abo** with **Uto** – the most S. Westerly island in the Finnish Baltic sea). After many hours of travelling southwards, stopping at different islands along the way.... our little ferry finally arrived at the sheltered harbour of **Jurmo** island.

“**Jurmo**” **Per Mattsson** (1937-2000) - hale, hearty and smiling - waved as our ferry neared the little wooden jetty in **Jurmo** harbour. After securing our little vessel to the dockside.... he jumped onboard to unload the vital supplies for this island’s tiny community. The afternoon sunlight shone over this rocky wilderness....that seemed to float between a vivid blue sky and a glittering sea...The air was fresh with the scent of heather just beginning to bloom....as we walked several kilometres along the rocky path from the sheltered harbour - toward the small cluster of wooden houses of **Jurmo** village and eventually to **Doris Lindstroms’** house - where we stayed for the next week....

The island of **Jurmo** was born of fire, carved by ice.... and shaped by wind, water and snow.... Many centuries ago – **Jurmo** became home to wandering monks and later to Swedish-speaking fishermen and farmers.... As we explored its ancient history, striking landmarks and rock formations, we also met the friendly, tight little community that lived all year round on the 2 farms (**Bengtfolks** and **Norrgranäs**): **Goran Johansson**; **Osten Mattson** (1938-2009) and his wife, **Aino** ; “**Jurmo**” **Pär Mattsson** (whom we had met earlier on the jetty) , his wife **Pirjo** (1943-2008)and young son, **Klas**; **Agneta Andersson** was away but her father, school-teacher **Paul Andersson** (1912-2004) was at home, smoking fresh flounder and promptly offered these to us, as well as colourful tales of the islanders’ resilience and survival - in spite of **Jurmo’s** remote location and unpredictable weather.

However, that memorable first visit to the island of **Jurmo** in **1982** made a deep, lasting impression and ignited a spark – a desire to visit the many nearby islands in the unique Finnish archipelago: **Söderskär** (closer to Helsinki), **Korpo**, **Iniö**, **Aspö**, **Signilskär**, **Gärskär**, **Lökholm**, **Borstö** and **Uto**....among others....Subsequent friendly interactions with the islanders themselves, led to further exploration of other islands and islets which sparkled like jewels in the vast Baltic sea...

Finally it was in **Uto** in **1989** where I met **Gunnar Andersson** – the former **Uto** lighthouse keeper and who, with his late wife, **Ethel**, extended generous hospitality and who then introduced me to **Kökars Oren**, **Gärskär**, **Borstö**, **Stor Hamnskär**, **Kalkskär** and finally, **Sandvik Harun**....

Each island has its distinct character and own special magic: weathered, wooden fishing huts and lighthouses, breeding sea-birds, rugged vegetation, dramatic, colourful rock formations and assorted “communities” of stones. Dominated by ever-changing skies, these rocky shores have eventually attracted some tough, bent pines, alder (haapa), birches and rowan trees, delicate wild flowers, wispy grasses, as well as breeding grounds for seals and myriad migrant feathered visitors...

Indeed, it is thanks to **Gunnar Andersson** that, in 1990, I first beheld the wild rocky silhouette of **Sandvik Harun** and his beloved **Alskärshuset** (which he and his father had dismantled and brought to **Sandvik Harun** from **Knivskär** island many years ago).

**Haru Gubben** has long been the “spirit guardian” of **Sandvik Harun**. He sits high up on his stony “throne” from which he surveys his rocky kingdom....Every visitor to the island is required to pay their respects to this noble being and, upon arrival at the summit of **Sandvik Harun** - one is often greeted by his representative - a feathered friend perched on **Haru Gubben’s** “throne” .... His kingdom has included the 5 fishing huts clustered around the harbour: **Alskärshuset Söderhuset Eljershuset Brännskärshuset and Hästvikshuset** and these very individual dwellings have a rich history - each “speaking” of their individual struggles to overcome the elements and ensure for their owners - a modest living from the annual harvest and sale of herring....

However, it was in Gunnar Andersson’s **Alskärshuset** – located close to the wooden jetty - where I usually stayed. If it rained, a cosy fire burned in the hearth and, seated by the small window – I could observe the changing moods of the 4 other “sisters” across the bay.

Since then and over the years, all these kind folk have been unfailingly generous with their time and hospitality and always ensured that, whatever the weather - a boat could take me from Jurmo to nearby **Sandvik Harun**, my beloved refuge.....

This small exhibition seeks to celebrate the unique character of the Finnish archipelago...with the hope that this may remain unspoiled for future generations. At the same time, this modest display also reflects my own appreciation toward all the islanders who have shared their island homes, particularly **Gunnar Andersson** and his late wife **Ethel**, from **Utö**: for their generosity and for guiding me to so many special islands, for introducing me to **Sandvik Harun** and their beloved **Alskärshuset**. And latterly - **Agneta Andersson**, the current owner of **Sandvik Harun**, for her support in facilitating my continued visits to that unique island...

So it is to **Sandvik Harun** that I have returned again and again – to bond with its “inhabitants” of weathered fishing huts and trees, migrant birds, bright flowers, mossy carpets, waving grass....and dramatic rock formations... Here, in this rocky paradise, there is time and space to ponder and revel in all the elements: storm clouds, windy and sun-lit coves, tumbling rocks and a glittering expanse of crystalline water stretching toward an unending horizon. But above all – **Sandvik Harun** is a refuge, a nourishing haven of peace and inspiration...



Photo: Torsten Stjernberg in 1990

**Alison Wiklund Sipoo, Finland June 2015**