

PLEASURE

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Jukka Korkeila
Elina Merenmies
Anna Retulainen

PARVS



Anna Retulainen: *Home*, 2016
oil on canvas, 250 × 330 cm

Contents

- 7 Foreword
Maija Tanninen-Mattila and Pauli Sivonen
- 9 Introduction
Mika Hannula, Laura Kuurne and Sanna Tuulikangas
- 13 Painting 1992–2017: From the Personal to the Public,
from the Detail to the Communal
Mika Hannula
- 33 Everyday Light and Shadow from Home and Abroad
Jukka Korkeila
- 61 On Practice and Concepts
Elina Merenmies
- 85 Painting
Anna Retulainen
- 105 Passion for Pictures – The *Pleasure* Exhibition at the Serlachius Museums
Laura Kuurne
- 149 Three Encounters
Sanna Tuulikangas
- 181 The Gaze and Desire – On the Experience of Encountering a Painting
Mika Hannula



Elina Merenmies: *Gold*, 2008–2010
tempera and oil on canvas, 33.5 × 40.5 cm
private collection

Foreword

The *Pleasure* project consists of the publication you are now holding, as well as two exhibitions featuring three contemporary artists: Jukka Korkkela, Elina Merenmies and Anna Retulainen. The project is a co-production between HAM Helsinki Art Museum, the Serlachius Museums and curator Mika Hannula. The title is a reference to the gratification we experience when we engage in a lingering exchange with a painting – whether as an artist or as a viewer. Amid the visual glut of the digital age, *Pleasure* offers an antidote in the form of a ‘slow art’ experience: it invites audiences to gradually open their minds and indulge in a mindful, meditative encounter with the paintings.

HAM will host a joint retrospective of the three artists curated by Mika Hannula. The retrospective presents a well-rounded selection of highlights from the oeuvre of these three key figures in Finnish contemporary art, spanning from the early 1990s to the present day. Their contemporary works will be paired with a small selection of older paintings chosen by the three artists from the collections of HAM and the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation. Parallel to the HAM exhibition, the Gösta Art Museum in Mänttä will open a twin exhibition curated by Laura Kuurne featuring new works by the artists alongside paintings from the collections of the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation. A documentary featuring interviews with the artists will be screened at both exhibitions. The documentary is scripted and directed by Marianne Zilliacus.

This book highlights the exhibition’s themes and the artists’ oeuvre from a variety of perspectives. In what follows, Korkkela, Merenmies and Retulainen share insights into their lives and the joys and challenges of painting, revealing how art has broadened their international horizons – for all three, painting is a way of connecting with the surrounding world. In his two essays, Mika Hannula reflects on the intricate complexities of art appreciation and pleasure, while casting a look back at social upheavals and philosophical paradigm shifts which have altered the course of art history. In her article, Laura Kuurne analyses the theme of pleasure in relation to selected paintings from the collections of the Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation, shedding light on affiliations between the old masters and contemporary painting. Sanna Tuulikangas describes her encounters with the three artists in the midst of their working on their new paintings for the exhibitions.

We would like to express our warmest thanks to all three artists, Jukka Korkkela, Elina Merenmies and Anna Retulainen. We are also indebted to our curators Mika Hannula, Laura Kuurne and Sanna Tuulikangas and everyone involved in this project for their excellent input and collaboration.

Majja Tanninen-Marttila, Museum Director of HAM Helsinki Art Museum
Pauli Sivonen, Director of the Serlachius Museums



Introduction

Let's start with a bit of a riddle. How do we produce and bring together a plurality of acts and viewpoints, all on the same theme, so that the assembled whole is more, much more, than just the sum of its parts? I.e. how do we get the disparate components and constituents of the whole into a mutual interaction, so that it sets in motion something special, something marvellous, even something extraordinarily beautiful, something that cannot be traced back to its starting points?

What we have here is exhibitions in the plural. The exhibition has one theme, but there are two exhibitions. The exhibition's theme is the expanding and deepening pleasure that comes with a painting, both with making it and with being present with it – a pleasure that actively shapes the direction of the act, situating it via the past, articulating it in the present, and reaching forward into the future. It is a pleasure that is always located on both an individual level, in every detail, and also generally, in the entirety.

The theme of pleasure is actualized in two exhibitions that are interlinked, yet brought about in distinctive ways. The first of the exhibitions opens at the Serlachius Museum Gösta in Mänttä. The other will, in turn, take place at NAM. The structure of both exhibitions reinforces the desired active relationship with the past. In Mänttä the exhibition's three artists – Jukka Korkeala, Elina Meremies and Anna Retulainen – are in an organic interaction with the museum's collections and collection spaces. In Helsinki the focus is on the formation of the arc of each artist's oeuvre up to now: the exhibition combines works backwards and forwards, and brings out the background to the new works. Also included, concretely, in Helsinki is the painting tradition, with works that the artists have picked out of both museums' collections.

But how, then, does this combining, mixing and gathering together of the various dimensions of different sub-factors, different time levels and experiential qualities take place? What is being sought after and wanted here? It is a matter of practice in itself, of a highly prolonged process, in which a whole, a coherent exhibition, is created and shaped one act at a time. The internal logic of this act starts from and always returns to conversations, to interacting and being present with the works. The necessary information and awareness are participant in the continuous reshaping of the process.

Jukka Korkeala: *Clairvoyant*, 2016
oil on canvas, 90 x 24 cm

The exhibition process is about information that arises from practice, and which is not so much found as confronted. And yes, precisely there and then, that experiential encounter is seen in relation to the objectives, the possibilities and impossibilities, the dimensions, the facts and fictions permitted and prohibited by the structure, that are all to hand. It is a matter of listening, of being vulnerable and ready to be and to try to maintain a mutual interaction between the different parties – the artists, time, space, works, expectations and hunches, doubts and also fears.

It is about listening that is by nature emphatically active, not just static reception. Listening that, keeping keenly to the principles of critical hermeneutics, means that, first, we have to be ready and open up to giving that other the chance to be present and to tell their story using their own ways and means. First, we give the other a space and an opportunity, a possibility. And, only after that, do we constructively relate what we have seen and experienced before to what we have just encountered.

Encountering means lingering, it means waiting, seeking patience, and the longing for it. It is an act that even has a name: *the art of listening* (Back 2007). Or: *the art of almost*. I.e. an act that lets things come, but lets things go backwards, too – back and forth. Listening as a readiness and as an ability to take on a challenge. As closeness, as coming close and staying close.

Or, rewinding the other way and using a different type of movement metaphor. We do not follow or hunt anything at all. Instead we move towards something. It is a matter of listening, of being present with the works and the makers, with a space and situations. It is an interaction that does not try to gain control, not categorization, not the packaging of readymade replies. To repeat: it does not run after anything. It can be in a hurry, and it is, of course, highly sensitive and wavering, and often impossible, too, presence and its envisioning, but it is a goal, a desired direction in which to move. It is a movement each of us towards one another. Aiming at and being towards.

Listening to the works, the artists, ourselves, the location and localization, and seeking presence is not magic, not mystical. If that something is very concrete, then it is everyday. Rotationally symmetric gravity: from opposite to alongside, and always back again, to that beside which affects the opposite. Both counterforce and light force, too.

It can be scabby and onerous, and then it can be beautiful and handsome – and almost just about anything in and into between. In any case, it is always both discursive and physical. It is a matter of a continuum of acts, of immersion and commitment. Of our bringing about a whole, in which we respect each individual act and work as well as we only ever and for ever can and are capable of. It is an attitude of a content-driven act in its very self: *the art of almost*. That which never resolves, never ends, but in which the essential thing is the shaping of movement and of being mutually moved, and sometimes even bringing about – their perpetual upkeep.

An ever-deeper, cumulative series of acts, which has its own underlying factor: its name is dialogue. Dialogue as a reciprocal commitment, which

is what it is only and solely if it is a continual challenging and continual stalking, a demanding and yes, a pleasure. A pleasure in and about the fact that what we are doing has meaning, it has its own background, it has its own contemporaneity, but it has its own future, too. It is a dialogue that does not seek consensus, but the kind of thing that is called by the term, the beautiful thought: *the loving conflict* (cf. Ricoeur 1999, 12).

This type of interaction is a dialogue that takes and gives, tends and brings alongside. It means facing depth-plumbing, deep-reaching contradictions, problems and setbacks, not underestimating them, nor glorifying them, either. A curve ball that always comes back to the thrower – from one receiver to the next, and always, always a little changed, more special, to the next one. The common space and situation, in which the ultimate commonality is constructed on the foundations of passionately wanting to create and reshape that space and situation. Carrying the responsibility and the freedom for it.

A simultaneously loving and loathing coexistence and shared action, which relies on the voices of all the different parties being present. Personally, in their own way, with their own body, with their own voice. The desires, needs and biases, obsessions, of the artists, the works, and even the curators, once again all in the plural. Neither a harmony nor a cacophony, not even a rough compromise or zero-sum game, but rather as something different – somehow and as something that does not derive solely from prior information and assumptions. It is pleasure about movement and about being in motion, about the fact that something is occurring and happening. It is what it is: productive, pleasurable activity together and separately.

And it is not – not even though we promised this at the beginning – it is not a riddle in itself. It is everyday life, in which there are no short cuts, no emergency exit. It is an activity that respects multifacetedness and maintains polyphony, in which pleasure causes us, always and again and again, to try – to seek out and to carry out ways and means of going deeper, of finding silence, and, yes, of the thing in itself: interactive presence.

On this occasion, in the painting and about the painting, with them, along with them, through them. Not forever, not endlessly, but momentarily, sensitized, exposed – in the details, but far and away in a physical, and not at all a linear, but a perpetually unity-seeking and intertwined narrative, in a continuum.

The curators of two places, two exhibitions, one theme
Mika Hannula, Laura Kuurne and Sanna Thulikangas

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Mika Hannula

Painting 1992–2017: From the Personal to the Public, from the Detail to the Communal

A painting.

A painting of the world, a painting in the world. Above, below, beside and between – and going round the corner, returning back, and always making a new departure.

A painting.

The timeframe for the *Pleasure* exhibition is simultaneously private and public. It is the former by dint of what the numbers in everyone's timeline and rolling train of experiences look like. At such a time they were born, they dressed this way and that when they went to school, it was from this viewing angle and in this counterlight that they graduated from high school, and with this attitude and approach that they began their studies. And it is this last in relation to the pivotal and even dramatic events in society that combine and separate the individual, the individual in the community.

The timeframe for an essay dealing with the *Pleasure* exhibition as a whole is and occurs between 1992 and 2017. The starting shot has been chosen according to a very early artwork by Elina Meremies, which is in the exhibition. The painting *Gold*, is significant for Meremies; it is a picture that originated in an image that appeared in a dream, from which there has developed a kind of symbol of depth, of what and of how a good life and a meaningful painting are sought after. A painting, along with and via which the arc of her acts takes shape and finds its place, its commitment. (See the conversation with Meremies, Hannula 2015, 38)

At the same time, it is one of the oldest works in the HAM's exhibition. And, meanwhile, 2017 – surprise, surprise – is the year when the exhibition's most recent works have been made, and when the exhibition itself opens. I.e. an exhibition that purposefully, structurally and in its content unites past, present and future, bringing together not just the background to, and new works by, each of the three artists, but also foregrounding paintings from history, from

Elina Meremies: *Gold*, 1992
tempera on canvas, 170 × 270 cm
private collection

collectors. The exhibition, thus, has its own specific contemporary history, which is inevitably and unavoidably linked to a broader context, the history of painting.

This essay traces both individual events and the part they play in the whole, using the concept of the social imagination, an idea derived from the work of the modern classic figure in sociology, G. Wright Mills (2015). This concept is described in a book in which Mills establishes the foundations and the basic tools for simultaneous, constructively critical analysis of the alternate taking of the lead by the personal and the public. The fact that in this essay sociology has been deliberately and precipitately replaced by the social and the communal is explained by the way that we envisage the objective. Instead of a certain process of methodological development, the objective is a certain cohesiveness of practices, and the unpacking and pondering of the meanings formed in communicating them.

What is Mills's imagination about? Underlying it is a view according to which no real, communal event has been meaningfully analysed unless it includes, continuously and in incessant interaction, both directions and factors: the micro and macro levels. It is fundamental that both require and need each other – as a support and as a sparring partner, as security and as a counterforce, and as a sounding board. Equally fundamental is that these components are combined in practice: how, where and why some systematic series of committed acts associated with history is repeated, revised and produced.

But perhaps even more central to Mills's thinking is what imagination is in itself. For Mills, imagination is not at all remarkable or peculiar. Going via the other side, and laying the table of assumptions and expectations, this means emphatically that the significance of the imagination in the articulation and envisioning of reality is so central and significant that it cannot be left to flakiness, frolicking and affectionate folly.

And why so? Because imagination is a force and a resource that is dear to and used by all of us, and with its aid we are capable of a dual motion. A motion in which a) we want and are capable of exchanging and changing viewpoint, putting ourselves in the adversary's position, imagining things from other people's starting points, and shifting perspectives, and in which b) we are capable and able to combine different components and dimensions of the experience world in a way that opens things up, and does not limit them, and which brings to it new meaning formations and the carbon footprints of synchronized swimming.

Was that sufficiently clearly expressed? Without gaps and in a delightfully windblown way? That's what I think, too. So that's that for Mills, for social imagination that becomes an event in communal interaction. And now, now, to painting. To practice. To the spiral and the arc.

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The both mental and physical horizon of the *Pleasure* exhibition, as also the comings together and divergences of that horizon, are anchored in the word pairs: possibilities and impossibilities, opening up and closing down, changes and transformations, and past-present-future. They are concretized in wide-ranging social events that have directly touched anyone, almost anywhere, and which are in no sense secrets. In this case we mean events of the last two decades or so, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the 'Cold War', globalization, and, already a little more particularly, the home-spun recession – both mental and economic.

The focus of attention is thus not on permanence, not on comprehensiveness, nor even on categorization. This essay believes in and trusts in movement – and in moving others, as it also does in empathy, in being moved. By bringing us and by coming, together and separately, to thinking together – moving towards it, perhaps even momentarily arriving there. It is not segregation, not classification, not even compartmentalizing explanation. It is what it is: unifying, bringing together and seeking to get away, closeness and distance, eye contact and peering into the far distance, wandering aimlessly. It is an attitude and a goal, all at once and separately, it is both/and, not either/or.

The act is also a repetition, doing the same thing partly always repeating it, but via that repetition seeking out and adding something new, something special, to that act. This is a matter of the birth of the act, of localizing, of growing, its intention and its intensity.

This essay gives an outline of what the individual does via the experiences of three painters, adding in the curator's own self-reflection. Correspondingly, the communal frame with its public events, but always and ever with its particularized effects, goes along with it into the mix. In the background – as light and shade.

The Individual Experience of the Painting

What was the personal and individual change and transformation that came along and showed itself to be true at the start of the 1990s?

It is not the intention, via this question, to signal some grievous riddle. It is a matter of something very much simpler, something noticeably more strongly everyday, something associated with everyday experience. It is a matter of numbers and of the order of events.

It is a relatively undisputed fact that, if the persons X, Y, Z and D were born at the end of the 1960s, that modestly automatically means that, taken on and assuming the average, they are beginning their studies and making the transition, well, somehow hereby ergo anyhow therewith on all fours, stumbling towards adulthood (read: responsible for what they do and for what they don't do). And this is a trajectory that coincides with the breaking up of an especially influential jigsaw puzzle, not to mention the fragmentation of a previously accepted whole truth.

It is not solely a matter of facts, but of lived emotional states, of feelings and moods, of its simultaneous porosity and rawness. In the midst of the events themselves, you are inside the events, with no possibility of looking and analysing. In the midst of everything and nothing. In the midst of events that have been given names like structural transformation, banking crisis, and mass unemployment. We see and we experience images in our minds – something has ended and something is beginning. But what and how?

In visual art and in culture more broadly this meant the retreat of one version that was assured in its power. An evasive movement, alongside which, not instead of it, there came, without so much as a by your leave, a plurality of different and dissenting interpretations of the same reality. The one became many, and the assumed clarity and consistency a hotchpotch. This could be called an opening up or even the margins spreading to the centre.

These examples do not keep to any precise calendar or logic of product development, rather they become events with a time lag, and sometimes even under cover of shadow. The clearest perception of this plural reality is waking up to a situation in which the act itself is already an organic part of the whole. And it is so in such a way that you are no longer really able to imagine what you are looking at and how you are looking at it, without what only a moment ago was not allowed to be or could not yet be part of it.

One example of these simultaneously comprehensive yet practical breakthroughs is Jukka Korpela's work from 2004 that for an excellent reason is present in the exhibition, and which goes by the title *Red Shift*. The work is a culmination of an observation that Korpela has articulated clearly and patiently, but not emphatically, throughout his career, with reference to the fact that he has not seen it as so very important to emphasize the theme of gender orientation, because, well, it is, in any case, already so powerfully and blatantly, as well as expressively, there in the works and the exhibitions.

I remember my first sight of the work as if it were yesterday. I definitely remember, quite definitely. Believe me. The giggling, the magnificence, the pride at being allowed to be and to take part in this transition – in painting. A transition that is pictured; what does it contain, what happens in it? A white space, which on this occasion, despite its clinicalness, with the aid of the painting urges us to go beyond and to dare to be something other than the given and the assumed. We get to be in the event of the painting, which both depicts and creates reality. In an event in which, to my mind it is absolutely one and the same whether the painting's physicality is coloured this way or that – it opens up quite definitely publicly and meaningfully, and yes, above all corporately.

If we go back from the example to the whole picture, in visual art the names of the key schisms and divisions are just about as well-known as the above-mentioned international developments. The game changed, the field opened up, and it totally disintegrated. Collective culture became a multi-channel, multi-media phenomenon, which nevertheless still persisted among and was fuelled by educated climates. What had been quite precisely regulated and coordinated



Jukka Korpela: *Red Shift*, 2004
acrylic on canvas, 160 x 200,5 cm
Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

quite abruptly erupted into a mutual competition and a stand-up wrestling match between different versions of reality.

We know, we are aware. We remember. And yet it is good to list the basic elements of the change. The number and quality of the available tools were revolutionized. There was a shift from being an equipment sport at least a tad closer to being content-led. There was a shift from a totally precisely regulated education towards international opportunities and markets – both in terms of where and what each person studied, on an exchange or for the whole course, and also in terms of how and where exhibitions were held and who arranged them. Added to that, and perhaps most quintessentially the whole thing was imbued and emburdened with an outright compulsion to say and to tell something about the changing environment, in which each one tried, inevitably partly failing, to ponder who I am, where and how I am, and who I would really want or dare to be.

We talked and we were enthusiastic, we were so excited. We talked about reality. About what we did not know and which constantly vanished out of our hands and our comprehension, but which, regardless of that, regardless of everything, was so very tangibly real.

Structurally that reality was inclined elsewhere. All four of us have lived and strided in that elsewhere, abroad. Some more, some even more. All the same, a unifying factor may well always be that it, nevertheless, wasn't all that important where you ended up, but where you wanted and were able to get away from. From Pello to Berlin or Brussels, and from Parainen to Paris or Prague – via Stockholm, of course.

The central feature of the experience of painting was and is how things come together – arriving and returning to a collective surge and pot of influences. I.e. how you reacted to changed circumstances and situations, and how you negotiated and orienteered within them – in diverse acts, in the actualizations and articulations of works.

These solutions and choices were something other, very much other, than just a list from a CV or a news agency. They were visible, they were realized, they became events in the works, in the acts, that are now present in this exhibition. Both as individuals and as a complete whole. As both one and many. They are visible in the traces they left behind, in the moments of being moved and in their defiance of stagnation.

It is seeking. It is lingering, finding footprints and purposely losing track of them. And it is life – observing and undergoing direct hits and slow sinkings. It is something other, very much something other, than static, stable or serene socialization. It is an intermittent learning to get along with reality: being capable and letting reality challenge you. It is rough, scabby even, but also possibly impossibly beautiful.

It is painting that is present, painting that does not run away, does not seek refuge, not purity, not abstraction, but which turns towards you. From evasion to the vacancy between, to communicating. Towards existence, being and spaces, together and separately. In the painting.

The Contextual Coordinates and Experimental Coordination of Experience

If we switch channels and turn our periscope away from individual doings and the solutions that occur within practice, away from continuums and dead-ends, towards a broader whole, and yet still staying within the manifold field of painting, the most central themes of 1992–2017 form a triad.

This is a matter of the reality of the painting, which it is perhaps more meaningful to open up with the question of the painting's visibility and narrativity, i.e. of the relationship with from what and how things are done. Added to that, the question is about the relationship of the act of painting with its own background, its heritage, with the contradictions and cross-stitches that well up out of it, sometimes even highly fruitful misunderstandings, too. And the third, missing element is a larger-scale, more distinct transformation. Here, we are talking about the thing itself, about what versions of the modern and of modernity have been present and in use. We are also talking about the relationship of the acts on an analogue-digital axis.

Let us begin with the easiest. Let us begin with painting's relationship with reality. This topic is necessarily easy, because it has no public or valid solution. It is naturally a matter of processes, of specific experiments and choices. In the background indisputably this lamentably uninteresting refrain: for the wolf and the lupine, the flower sighing on a slope is supine – the purported, and, of course, frequently hoped-for like the rising of the moon, death of painting.

But what, if anything, would the bad die of or develop dents. Perhaps the question of death can at best be momentarily overcome, while by no means being beatable, if it is compared to the side-slips in the processes of producing meanings. This implies a direct, shared context with a claim that has already plagued the interpretation of several decades of literature, a claim that Roland Barthes (1993, 106) got it into his head to annoy us with: The author is dead. Just like the death of painting, this assertion was accompanied by a loud collective sigh that made no attempt to conceal its satisfaction.

Et-naï-ly.

Unfortunately that sigh was invalid. It was not too early, not too late, it was lopsided, i.e. incommensurable. The fact that hopes and reality do not coincide – on the playing fields of the defenders or opponents of painting – is, of course, not so very strange, because the movement was so surprising and strong, the movement from the one and the definite towards the many and the complicated.

Despite that, that incommensurability takes us back to localness, to details. There is no public, all-encompassing painting, plastic-worm fishing or carpet beating. There are innumerable different versions that are disparate and yet the same.

In the wake of the upheavals of the 1990s, painting was pushed aside by procrastination, creativity and creeping close to the wind, by its paintfulness and pecuniary pressures. Painting was indeed suddenly very trivial, and this viewpoint established itself in the moving image, emphatically through and with the aid of the ever-developing digital technology. Painting did not keep up; it was old-fashioned, all a bit sort of limp and lacklustre.

All claims that were absolutely, necessarily and very positively totally true, but only and solely as long as in this incommensurable game we carried on the hunting and hallucinating among the will o' the wisps of technology. An undeniable reversal, in fact, turned into an odd sort of head start, if the goal for the act's stakeholders and its context had not actually been comprehensiveness, speed and quantity, but rather, if its essential characteristic actually shifted towards – however fumblingly this happened, but in any case shifted towards – slowness, depth and mutual interaction, presence. Inside the multiple series of acts, in a move from painting to painting and back again.

And, in this situation, the impossibility of painting, in fact, became its most profound nature, its possibility. Not glorifying slowness, but via respecting and developing the mutual interdependence of acts: An act that was tactful, tiptoeing, bold and surprising. Not to say: pleasurable.

And what about the relationship with tradition, with the background to the painting and the rear-view mirror, with its structured rhythms? This tangle of problems is opened up simultaneously, since, when we think about how well or how very badly painting, on the timeline 1992–2017, travels across the borders and the fences of contexts – and at the same time, in what version of the modern it, at any one time, sets itself up or claims to be on the opponent's side, resisting, in the grandstand or even more or less on the field of play, too?

From the ability of painting to travel we got, if not information, then at least guidelines, i.e. a premonition-like vision assembled via anecdotes, as to how the role of painting is defined on the fields of International exhibitions. It is nothing new that in biennials and other major, and thematic, entities painting has been like some poor-devil orphan. In the best case it has just about been tolerated, brought along as if out of pity, and because this brave, new digital world, too, is showing that it is on the side of the weak and the pathetic – as long as it is put somewhere in a corner, out of the way and not eclipsing the attention-hungry.

Painting's reverse advantage is that it is not apparently fast or brisk. It is still struck in its heritage, in the muddy terrain whose special collateral effect is that it does not reveal itself as quickly and easily as massive spectacles assume and demand. Painting, in itself and by itself, is slow, weak even, and it takes time and trouble – above all from the viewer. Added to that, it demands and demands concentration, the ability to listen to differences of rhythm, from those who choose the works and who make the exhibitions.

And that, that is very rare, if we look at who makes these biennials and how. This is not a judgement, not even a nicely house-trained criticism. It is an observation of facts and a solid statement. We don't need names or titles, the numbers are enough. The logic of biennial-like spectacles is that they have mass and volume. There are always a massive number of artists and an impossible number of viewers. Stopping and spending a moment in silence is forbidden. Strictly forbidden.

We are faced with the banes of post-capitalist, pervasively productized everyday life. We are faced with billions and yet more billions of chains of

ones and zeroes, between which there is no room for longing, no *nostralgia*, no *bashfulness*, no *astonishment*, no *arrhythmia*, no interrupted caresses.

I.e. everything that painting is on the side of, if that painting is able to be and to become, to move close to that which is characteristic of it, that which makes sense and is possible for it. Not as a product, but as a movement as a movement that is filled with failure, contradictions and wounds.

Colouring it the other way round. The fact that painting is, as *betifs* its nature, partly on the fringes of zero-sum games, does not make it fine or radical in itself, nor even an opponent of the colonizing power of the productization of everyday life. This makes it different, and divergent. It makes it an alternative, but an alternative that always reverts to being a cross between the actual and the potential. It is and can be, but it is not yet. It is only just becoming, perhaps possibly and sometimes happening, becoming an event. In eye contact, in presence, in an experience that always goes equally over and under, to one side and, may the one bless us and save us, alongside.

And that, dear friends and friends of friends, is already an exceptionally great deal in itself. As a starting point, as an opening shot and as a perpetual return destination. As a concentration, as a series of acts that culminates by going round the corner, as a continuum.

What, then, is the difference between modern inevitabilities and limitations and the digitization of an increasingly totalized everyday life? Pragmatic internal logic, that which makes each work, in a mutual comparison, more intense or more loose – or instrumental logic, that will not stand for anything other than immediate utility values. A significant degree of difference or leaving out a highlight in your lightweight daytime make-up?

Painting's answer is found on the surface, in its colouring, in its calibration. And it is present in the seeing of the painting, in lingering in front of it, in looking with it (see Gadamer 2000, 43). One against one, or, that is, one plus one, gaze and object, albeit many other factors can be involved. But it is a personal relationship, that looking. The painting is in space, it is in time. It does not move, it can neither be shared, nor duplicated, nor copied.

A painting is local. It can be tiresome, tasteless and very unfinished, but it is and remains there, where and how it is. Its characteristic permanence and immobility is a protection, which is a help if you are able and dare to come out of there. It deforms and ends up as a dubious refuge, if you stay in its harbour under the protection of a flagship of convenience, in the shelter that goes to the point of excess.

But painting does not need that straightjacket, not a refuge. It needs, demands and seeks out interaction, being in the world. Not by just any means at all, not with just any forms and methods, but rather only and solely with those that it has close to it, potentially controllable and actualizable ones. And it is not a transparent list, it is not a shopping, nor even a practical-to-do list. It is the limit values of assumptions and expectations, the starting points. Never, not ever anything but, no more, no less.



Anna Retulainen: Three drawings from the series *Memory*, 2010–2012
 Ink on paper, 52 x 61 cm each
 Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

The painting waits. It loiters and lingers. It moves obliquely and even anxiously. It seeks and finds, but finds only so that it will be capable of, and enjoys getting lost and starting to look for something new.

The differences and the boundaries are clear. On one side, a gravity-defying proposal according to the digital worldview, on the other side, raw and sweaty everyday life, in which localness goes red in the face and specks of dust bring on a ferocious sneeze.

This is not just a matter of choice. It is a matter of values, of diversity and of understanding the inner logic of a particular way of doing things, of protecting it, both from itself and from what is around it. It is above all a matter of the reciprocal movement of the parties and subfactors contained in the world of the act – of carrying things through to the end and of being anchored, so that the process can start and once again set off elsewhere.

A painting in the world, a painting about the world. Beautifully, handsomely, not unforgettingly, not enviously. Participating and giving, giving in and forgiving.

Forgiving it that it cannot, that it can never be, perfect, that it can never get the act finally finished, and for that very reason – one day and one act at a time – to try nevertheless, despite everything, to try to move towards and against that impossibility, that meaningful unattainability, the potential of encountering.

It is not, it is not allowed to raise or productize out of it the virtue of inevitability. It is a deepening of the act, a localization and the momentariness of the singular. Painting here and now – from the moment into yesterday and into what is to come, into assumption and experience.

For Personal Reasons, No Others

If we ask the three artists in the exhibition: Why do you paint, and how have you been able to sustain and find new nuances and twists on a committed practice that happens in a continuum for two decades already? the answer is the same for all of them: compulsion, it is life, the everyday, the unavoidable, it is a way of being and of living – of taking and giving, and attempting to stay together, not to fall apart.

This is a response that contains a great many assumptions and preconditions. There is a lot, if not everything, in it. It is always and ever a matter of not *what*, but *how*.

And what else could illuminate, not explain, but give a bit of direction to why and how, for example, Anna Retulainen was able and capable to face the big, so big issues in the series *Memory*? The mother's hands, which have a past, a present and a future presence – an arc and a bridge, which combines and separates, makes visible and covers over.

They are a mother's hands, decrepit hands, beautiful hands, hands that say too much and too little at the same time, hands that and in which there accumulates almost everything, almost anything that has meaning. I.e. real meaning. The situation of the acts in the series is a fact. Anna Retulainen

sits and keeps an eye on things, watches and wonders. She is present, at her mother's deathbed. This is terminal care, coming to be there and going away. It is not very beautiful, not easy, but extremely demanding and distressing.

A state and a situation which contains everything in everyday life and from everyday life, from birth almost to death, from primary school to choices of profession – and from which we cannot get away. What do we do? How do we deal with it, how to try to go through those countless hopes, fears and desires, needs and instincts, through what is going and coming, growing and disappearing in relation to our own parent, who is dying at this moment, who is in no way any longer rationally present. How do we translate the pain and rage into something that opens up and lets something go, without it dismissing the memory, but rather producing it and bringing it along in a new and special way?

This personal compulsion, this imperative, contains a freedom and a duty – to do and to carry on with what we feel is reasonable, as part of ourselves, as a way of being present in reality, of bringing out parallel versions of how, where and why we are as and how we are.

The reasons are always and of necessity private. But, at the same time, they are also public, connected with others: other makers, other artists, with different figures in the field, with the surrounding society, and its social-political and historical framework.

And this connection, understanding it for yourself personally and voluntarily is how and why the movement stays and remains. A movement between one and many – and back again. A movement from a detail to the whole, a movement from the individual to a continuum that is bigger than the work. A movement from meaning to meaningless, from success to failure, from frustration to opening up.

It is a matter of how what was, what is and what will be are intertwined together, and of what kinds of articulations and actualizations are made and produced through them and with their aid. It is an awareness of how and to what we are organically and meaning-wise linked, an understanding of with whom we are walking and talking. That even if you are doing it alone, you should not be, not remain, alone.

This connection between different times, places, mental states and imageries is called "historically affected consciousness" (Gadamer 2004, 122). This is a consciousness that is localized and which locates. It is realized in meaningful acts, both in language and in the gestures of painting. It is not an answer or an end result, but rather a starting point. How and where each act starts and begins its movement. This awareness is based on a preintention, on the strange, but not mystical belief and hope that the act has meaning, even if it feels quite vague and even vain. Drawing and painting, dabbing, now, with Indian ink, and splashing about with paints, a grown-up human being, from one day to the next. The very idea, and how dare you?

The allied freedom and duty to do what matters to you – and to move towards that content, that ever-changing and varying challenge. The freedom

to do things differently, to seek, to find and to lose, and the duty to do it as well, as passionately and as doggedly as you can, dare and are able to manage.

It is a matter of hope, of the hope of painting. Of the hope that is essentially a part of an individual act, a series of acts, of one painting gesture, one framed picture, in one big whole, as part of a painting exhibition that unites your own and others', the one's and the many's, histories, the past's, the present's and the futures – in a way that has to be targeted and focussed.

You look at the painting and it looks back. Your gaze meets and finds a counterpart, existence's counteraction. The viewer is affected – something stirs and moves. The permanent, which is, in a sense, both the same and yet ever-changing.

The years come, they do not wait, they show no mercy. In front of you is the letter *p* as in *painting*, and it is followed first by 92 and then by 17, to which are linked, respectively, the numbers 19 and then 20. The years, they can be counted, and yet they are not seamlessly comprehensible. The numbers are important, like buoys, but they are not the goal, not the moon, not the sky, not even a star. The numbers add structure, so that the movement with the simultaneity of past, present and future gets permission to be and to leave, to make a distinction and to create closeness. A motion that is always finite and never complete.

It is repetition, you cannot get away from it, cannot get free. But what kind of repetition, a continuum of doing? The kind that is capable of finding new and different dimensions, or the type of repetition that curls up into itself, is afraid of experiments and leaves itself a prisoner of what already exists?

In this exhibition the choice, the volition and the space that precede it, are clear, very clear. The choice is a both/and strategy and way of envisioning existence to communicate the information according to which that repetition is perpetually sloping in both directions. There are no guarantees, no certainties, there is only the desire and the compulsion to do what you do, when you do what you feel and see makes sense and is important.

Borrowing from another kind of language game, this is a matter of a three-part work, in which the indeterminacy of the content of the repetition is actualized. The following quotation of a set of ideas is from Sigmund Freud (1914), for whom these conceptual spirals, cycles and word pairs were linked to the way we are capable of dealing with things, dramatic or no matter how everyday things, that have happened in the past. Freud formulated this historically affected consciousness in an alternation between remembering, repeating, going through and envisioning of the relations between things. This is a coming out, a bringing out, a going through what has been brought out, and through and with that, a reworking of things, an analysis, a combining and unpacking of relationships and unrelatednesses. And back again, returning to the beginning and to movement.

All of these require and need one another, being in a powerfully mutually interdependent relationship. It is a matter of, for each state and situation, unpacking and envisioning what is essential and what is not at any time. So, where do we come from, what is our relationship with the act's earlier traces

and also its scars? Where are we now, and how are we able to challenge this nowness? And further: what roads and paths are opened up with the aid of those past and present interpretations, and what have we already, unconsciously even, shut down and made impossible?

The painting stays, but it does not stop. The repetition comes, but the painting cannot be allowed to regress. It is not a product, not something self-evident, but a frame that provides a place and space for experiments, and failures, too.

All of these, together and jointly, independently and subjectively, are present, on the spot, involved, in the mix. They are very concretely present in the *Pleasure* exhibition, in which the past embraces the future, and the present pulls the hair, in a nice way, of both the preceding and the following step, stumble and blunder, too. Series of acts that have been intentionally brought together so as not to give rise to a linear travel guide, but rather a mutual caring for and cloaking of one another of different time levels and emotional wavelengths. A transmission that does not exactly go precisely, and in which the grief is absolutely guaranteed to swim into your pullover, but where the grief and weakness, the problems and inevitable tragedies, do not overwhelm, but take their space, their place – in the whole.

The painting asks, and stays to listen to the response. It is in no hurry anywhere. It is present here and now – personally, always individually, together with the common, the shared and the shareable.

Respectfully and disputatiously, not escaping into consensus, but accepting the contradictions. Boldly, mischievously, à la zany insouciance, but never vulgarly, not grossly.

Painting is a being towards that is demanding, fatal, but never cold, not disconnected or an onlooker. It is being close, coming close, being able, bothering, managing and wanting to call things into question and to doubt – and doing so in a way that opens up, does not set limits. In ways and with means that, instead of a negative prohibition, search for and seek out a committed and supportive being together.

Painting has a connection with hope, love, the ability to be present and to care. Despite everything, facing all hardships, not yielding, but caring, communicating.

It is like, like a big, big... riddle.

.....

What was it? A big what? How do you meet it, how do you face it?

A big riddle?

An environment, a context, a playground. Interaction, coherency and cracks in the tracks. A strong gust of wind and a bizarre cackle. A backdrop and a framework for events, in which any act at all forms part of other acts, of continuums of them – and in which it tries to envision its own individuality. Both in the social imagination and in historically affected reality, within their

communication and framework, in the boundary conditions of contexts. It is a matter of how this background affects, moulds and shapes the act: its preconditions, its preparations, and its reception, life cycle and life energy.

The big riddle – the strata of imaginings and communal tales – deals with a time and a date, with the feeling of possibilities and limitations before and after the act, with how, where and when the artwork is made. It concentrates on the framework that creates a starting point for the act and on which the act, in due time, also sets itself up and positions itself. So, what is under inspection here is the simultaneous background and future of the act, the creative activity. It has to be faced, taken under control, personally and voluntarily – and an actualization of an interpretation, a positioning of it in the continuum, brought about.

It is a matter of how each one of us is capable of producing images and stories, and, at the same time, always about how these images and stories that are anchored in a community develop there, these ceaselessly expanding and contracting images and stories, affect us – bring about a movement in a way that is very often unconscious, lingering, unobtrusive and yet exceptionally meaningful.

The aim is no less a thought and idea than participating, feeling ourselves a part, seeking out interaction. In the words of Susan Sonntag (2009, 72), when she dealt with her relationship with Roland Barthes, the big riddle is and remains. It is not solved. Instead of our hunting down a single truth so briskly and busily, we can opt for another road. A road that honours and respects the act, the artwork. Its simultaneous singularity and communality. "The point is not to teach us something particular. The point is to make us bold, agile, subtle, intelligent, detached. And to give pleasure."

.....

It is clear that, when examining the communal imagery and its active version, imagination, we are continually browsing on a highly abstract level. At the same time, this compels us ever and always to join the stories to the examples offered by a particular time and place – however base or tasteless they may be. We are also continually on a journey between two different stops, between two mutually dependent parking places. We go from the community to the individual and back. It is social and singular, too. It is shared and also, for its part, indivisible – certain things are translatable between the different parties, but certain things always remain covered up, inside the pullover and package of individual experience, in the nylon and the crannions, even if they are artificial. But that movement, it stays. We are constantly on a journey from the public to the specific and back again. What is always certain is the alternate lead-taking and interaction between each of the parties.

It would be uncommonly pleasurable if we could say that, as sure as the appearance of mutual dependence, is the prevailing mutual respect and acceptance, but that does not quite yet reach as far as the applied model of

communal imagery. The resistance and time lag that at the same time draw our attention to the way that imagery is always dual and concurrent in character: it is real and attained, yet at the same time future-oriented and change-seeking – although that change is never necessarily positive in itself.

The ode to joy of enlightenment rings out, but it also has a counterforce anchored in the karaoke bar. The job-sharing song in which someone goes up and someone goes down, even if, when going up and down, they still meet but very rarely. It is dead certain that it is always productive: something happens, something changes and something no longer comes back again. It breaks, becomes whole – whatever rattles rattles, in its own emptiness or in its illusion of completeness.

Because that which is, it is. It is the way it is, but it is not given like that, neither neutrally nor naturalistically. That which is, it is produced and made. It is the reality that is currently in force. Continually and in a continuum. Time and place, community and individual. Sympathetically and incessantly, in side-slips and heading straight for the picture, head on, in your face

It is both/and, not either/or.

It is a space. Not just any space, but that particular space there and then. In the exhibition, together and separate, extending into the past, reaching for the future, happening here and now. Making and producing a communal image, and also envisioning and analysing it, means that this space is made into a situation. It changes from public to particular. Out of a space a situation is created. Via experience the situation of a space may become an occasion – i.e. an event involving productive activity.

In that case the situation of the space generates an occasion, where those who participate in the space experience spatiality. It is an act that has both a mental and a physical dimension. Physically, spatiality is an acute awareness of where you are and how you are, as also of your possibilities for shaping and creating spatiality. Mentally this is a matter of producing the images that have the power in this spatiality. Never alone, but always operating in that specific context.

Space, situation, occasion and spatiality. The concept acquires time-specific and site-specific content, the outcome of a productive activity. The image becomes sharper, it is actualized, it becomes an event. A story that is shared and which is retold to others; it is disputed and it is argued about, but it is carried on – in the historically affected continuum of consciousness. In everyday life, how else. In that everyday, big little, little big story that likewise goes quite according to expectations, and yet – so that it stays meaningful – really surprising, and riddlesome. It is likewise a liberation and a giving in, a going along, a taking part, and also throwing yourself into it, being influenced.

Telling a story, over and over again. Opening and opening up, participating and feeling yourself a part of things – inventing and finding, surprize and wistful longing. Movement and trajectory, frame and content.

A big story and a big riddle. As yet not anything at all in itself, neither good nor bad, not particularly exciting or frustratingly boring. It is a starting off and

a shot, as also a pothole, for productive activity, for telling stories, for making them happen and sharing them, for listening to them and for perpetually developing them.

It requires actualization and articulation. Taking part and giving back.

A great communal story that is and occurs in everyday life – in its great riddlesomeness. Both in how it is possible that, despite everything, we can manage and are able to maintain faith in life, as also in the way that every now and then, very rarely, but nevertheless, we notice something, we experience something that changes the moment, its momentariness into something splendid, beautiful and handsome. The invisible into the visible, into the experienced.

The great story, its riddlesomeness. It is and it belongs to us.

In the exhibition, as a whole, and in every individual work. From painting to painting – in the painting.

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Jukka Korkkela: *Guardian of the Soul*, 2012
oil on canvas, 38 x 35 cm
Turku Art Museum

Jukka Korkkela



Jukka Kortkeila: *Between Two Worlds*, 2010
oil on canvas, 30 x 30 cm
private collection

Jukka Kortkeila

Everyday Light and Shadow from Home and Abroad

I *Amor est pons ultra tempus locos mundos*

Starting in January 2013, I got to spend six months in Italy in Villa Lante as part of the Finnish Institute in Rome's artist residency programme. Villa Lante is located on the Janiculum Hill between Trastevere and the Vatican and has a fantastic view over ancient Rome. It was difficult to concentrate in my studio when I could look out the window and see the Pantheon. Villa Lante is a Medici-style, box-like renaissance villa that was built in the first half of the 16th century for Pope Leo X's datary Baldessare Turini.

When I was in Rome I got to witness the election of Pope Francis after Benedictus XVI suddenly announced that he was vacating the post. Villa Lante is only 1,5 km from the Vatican. When Francis was chosen, all the churches in Rome – over 900 of them – began to ring their bells at the same time. There was no need for Facebook or CNN to know what was going on.

My time in residence also involved working. I tried to create a small-scale exhibition in an urban setting that would have taken place at Villa Lante and Basilica Santa Maria in Ara coeli (Saint Mary of the Alter of Heaven), with Leo X as an historical figure and pope, a telescope as an aid to visual observance, and *AMOR EST PONIS ULTRA TEMPUS LOCOS MUNDOIS* posters. I wrote the following text about the project:

“This year (2013) is the 500th anniversary of Giovanni di Lorenzo de’ Medici becoming pope. Leo X is in a way responsible for the fact that we Finns can live and work in Ville Lante. In a certain sense, everything that happens here has his blessing, even though he passed away a long time ago. I want to draw attention to the fact that Leo X was an important pope and patron for artists. There are not many signs of Leo left in Rome because he took the Vatican to the brink of bankruptcy, and when he died the creditors took everything they could lay their hands on. Villa Lante is one of those rare places where signs of Leo X’s pontificate remain. For this reason I would like to build a ‘gazing bridge’ across the city, from Ville Lante directly to the Santa Maria in Ara coeli wall. Ara coeli was an important church to Leo X, and he made a barefoot pilgrimage there from the Vatican. The church has a statue that was posthumously dedicated to his memory. It looks funny as it had to be made without a model and other artists’ versions of Leo X were used as the source material. In the sculpture, Leo X has turned his gaze to the sky.”

The 'gazing bridge' would have spanned the gap between Ville Lantte and the 'altar of heaven', the Santa Maria in Ara coeli wall. In theory and practice this 'bridge' is love, which is also Rome's secret and powerful name (Roma spelt backwards is amor). Love is a bridge that transcends time, places and worlds. Based on this symbolism I made the AMOR EST PONS ULTRA TEMPOS LOCOS MUNDOS poster, which would have been placed on Villa Lantte's wall, from where Santa Maria in Ara coeli is visible. The other poster would have been placed on Santa Maria in Ara coeli's external wall. This poster could have been seen from Ville Lantte with the aid of a telescope. The intention of the work was to make people consider what happens after they leave this material world. I wanted to say from my heart that love is the eternal bridge that joins us to our late loved ones who have passed over to the other side.

We contacted all the necessary bodies in Rome and tried to get permission to realize the work, but we were refused. I have tried twice before to put on similar works, the first time in 2005 when it would have been in Helsinki Art Museum on the outside wall of the Tennis Palace, but the building company refused the application. The second time I tried was in autumn 2012 in Rovaniemi. I attempted to obtain permission to place my posters on a building site fence around a local shopping mall, but again the application was refused. It seems like contemporary art doesn't always have a place in the cityscape, or at least the attitude towards it is too conservative. I didn't find space for my work in Rome or Helsinki, on a church, shopping mall or art museum wall, so it feels as if art has to live wild in the public space, in among all the adverts. The exhibition didn't have an opening because the work was already on the streets of Rome, where it will live until somebody takes it away.

II Two Flowers – Flowers Are Memories of Paradise

Who are the flowers? 'He and a flower.' They are both flowers, pure and unblemished. One of the flowers reminds me in a certain way of the ox-eye daisy (*Vilgare Leucanthemum*), which is called *Baldursbrá* in Icelandic. When I was recently in Reykjavik my friend saw these posters and said that the androgynous figure reminded her of Baldura, the ancient Scandinavian god of innocence, beauty, joy and purity. Sometimes works are appropriately open to interpretation, and opening up their meaning and understanding them takes time. Some works also uncover something in your own subconscious, and the process of interpreting the works says something about the interpreters too. The way that these posters are interpreted also depends on the interpreter. My view is that there are two flowers.

It's about loss and our attitudes towards it. The death of a loved one reminds us of our own death. It's an encounter with oneself and one's own existence. What awaits us after we pass through the gates of death? What happens when a person stops existing in this material world. What happens when the ego is stripped of everything that it's tried to hang on to? Death is the eye of the needle that strips us bare of everything material. What happens when I get to the head of the queue and suddenly it's my turn? Will someone come to meet me when it's my time to go? Hopefully it will be somebody I know, maybe even grandma. Whoever comes, it will be somebody important and dear that there are soul connections with, and they will come to meet us with flowers. This is the reason that flowers are memories of a lost paradise.

The English word *religion* is derived from the Latin *religare*, which could also be translated as *re-connect*. This contains the idea that religion re-connects us, but to what? The Christian religion's answer to this is clear: one of its most important words is resurrection, the idea of



Jukka Kortela: *Look For the Life of the World to Come*, 2014
oil on canvas, 94 × 84 cm
HAM Helsinki Art Museum

life continuing on the other side after death. So death in this world means birth in another, and it's a reason to rejoice. Religion connects us to the other side of time and matter, to an invisible world and infinity. Perhaps this finite world is just a bubble inside infinity. Two flowers tells a story of people's spiritual existence.

In Germany there is a way of meeting artistic challenges: Joseph Beuys challenged others in his day with the words: every human is an artist (*Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler*). Martin Kippenberger answered that every artist is a human (*Jeder Künstler ist ein Mensch*). I will continue this chain by accepting the challenge, except that I will replace 'artist' with 'spirit': 'Every human is a spirit'. (*Jeder Mensch ist ein Geist*.)

III

Report from Belgrade

I went to Belgrade for the first time at the beginning of June 2012 for the *Good Life* exhibition. I was looking for a spiritual guide or advisor. My idea was to find somebody who could speak with the 'dead' and use that advice and instruction from the other side as a catalyst for the creative process, or a place that my work could grow from, but the task that I had set myself and others proved more difficult than I had imagined. To my surprise, I couldn't find any spiritual associations in Belgrade or any mediums who advertised to the public. I looked under every stone and searched every blind alley in my hunt for a 'communicator' for me and my work. I'd hit a wall and had no leads that I could follow.

Days passed, but eventually I began to uncover something interesting when I found a contact who introduced us to the daughter of Radovan 'bioenergy' Karadžić, who disappeared during the Balkan War in the 1990s and became one of the world's most sought-after war criminals. He hid in plain sight in Belgrade, working openly as a certain kind of 'bioenergy

worker' who specialized in sexual problems.

Over the years he had transformed himself into something unrecognizable, and he had a long white beard and ponytail when he was eventually found hiding behind the name Dr. Dragan David Dabić. This ultimately led us up another dead end, but a second lead got us a meeting with the editor of *Third Eye* magazine, who told us that the only person in Belgrade who talks to 'dead' people is 'Boran Stanbuck'. We managed to get his telephone number and tried to get him to agree to meet us, but he was very unwilling and eventually refused outright because he spontaneously 'saw' that I would 'block' all his spirit contacts. At the end of the call he said: "This guy that's looking for me is a 'door' with no handle that can only be opened from the other side". He then put an end to the conversation and hung up.

The *Good Life* exhibition, which was part of the *October Salon* series, was held in the old Belgrade stock exchange, which was the Institute of Geo-physics (Geodetski Zavod) during the communist era. After the wall came down it was left to go to wrack and ruin. Together with the exhibition curator Branko Dimitrijević I chose a room to work in – it had many doors, but they all lacked handles. This happened before we embarked on our quest to find a medium. Coincidence or not, sometimes things fall interestingly into place, showing through repetition that coincidence is not an option. What did the missing door handles mean and symbolize? Was each closed door a lost opportunity or was each missing handle a rejected attempt to enter, a symbol of my spiritual condition that 'Boran Stanbuck' had revealed? When one door closes, does another door open?

A new thread appeared with the opening of the exhibition and I had to follow it to the very end: a promising medium had been found in a village called Zlot, near the district of Bor, the homeland of the Vlach community, and we left on 21.9.2012. Bor is a Serbian word meaning

'pine', so we were on the trail of the lonesome pine! Vlachs are an ethnic minority in the eastern corner of Serbia who have their own language and have preserved their own customs since pre-Christian times, although they have now fused with Orthodox traditions.

We reached Zlot and found the medium's house at the end of the longest taxi ride of my life, but she wasn't home. On the porch outside the door was her gravestone – her date of birth inscribed on it, the date of death still blank. We waited a long time and when she returned it was already dark. She said right away that she didn't work when it was dark, or she was afraid to work after darkness had fallen, but she agreed to make an exception for us. She said she had been a so-called trance medium, but once when the session ended she was unable to awaken from the trance and spent several days in a coma. She got such a fright from this that she stopped working as a trance medium and instead became a kind of village wise woman, or folk psychologist, that people could consult on all kinds of different matters. She was very perceptive and understood almost immediately that I am gay, even though I hadn't told her. However, she then suggested that I would still get married and have children, because otherwise I would die alone in hospital. When I told her that my former partner Mikko had committed suicide, she said that I have suffered enough and she would accept no fee for the session.

Even though I didn't find spiritual guidance in Serbia, I made a spiritual space for the exhibition, a non-physical installation in the form of a room painted completely blue with a silver thread in the middle, running from floor to ceiling to symbolize the bond between body and soul. In the corner of the room was a skeleton covered with a white sheet, and as we were in Serbia it was real. I couldn't refuse because they had gone to a lot of time and trouble to acquire it, so I went to light a candle for the unknown bones in the Orthodox

cathedral next to the hotel. In Mediterranean

countries, places like Italy, for instance, the custom is to leave a photo of the deceased on the grave. These photos are made on ceramic plates, and I commissioned some for the installation with scanned pairs of palms.

like hands emerging from the dazzling light, forming a circle around the spectators. The meaning of this was to symbolize pairs of hands reaching from the other side to support us. I also put a text on the window in Latin, our dead language: *Lux Lucem Sequitur* (light follows light) and on the door I put a poster that read, *What is indestructible, inviolable and immortal? PS. We all have it!* I also posted these up on streets around the town. The work manifested the presence of absence and the immaterial.

IV

An Encounter at the Cemetery

On Friday 27.5.2016 I was in Hamburg for an exhibition. Our intention was to continue hanging my exhibition at Künstlerhaus Sootbörn before the opening that evening, but I arrived too early so nobody was there and the doors were locked. I decided to go for a walk to the neighbouring Niendorf Cemetery (Neuen Friedhof Niendorf), where I'd never been before. I walked a little while and got slowly lost as I wandered along from one grave to the next, reading the texts on the headstones. I stopped in front of a certain grave that had a familiar epitaph: ES GIBT EIN LAND DER LEBENDEN UND EIN LAND DER TOTEN UND DIE BRÜCKE ZWISCHEN IHNEN IST DIE LIEBE (There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love). The previous day I had hung my poster installation on the wall at Künstlerhaus, one of which, from 2013, read AMOR EST PONS ULTRA TEMPOS LOCOS MUNDOS (Love is the bridge that spans time, places and worlds!)

When I told the story of finding the gravestone I was asked, "Where is the quote from?" I said that I didn't know the source of



Jukka Kortela: *Silence Envelopes Music*, 2011
oil on canvas, 135 × 195 cm
private collection

the epitaph, but that my own text had been inspired: it has come through me, but it doesn't feel like it came from me or that I made it up. Nina Hagen sang about opening up a channel to heaven in the song *Universelles Radio*:

“Ich fahre in seinem Automobil
immer in Richtung Ewigkeit
und immer mit dem einen Ziel
und ich rede mit mir selbst
ich bin mein Radio
mein eigenes universelles Radio...”

The direction is always eternity, and I am only ever talking to myself (or with someone?), and I am my own radio of the universe, *O sole mio*... Messages from the heavenly channel? If the artist is an open channel, who sends the messages and ideas? Who are the messages meant for? God or Jesus has been a source of inspiration to many artists, including Nina Hagen. Does God speak through us? Beethoven always thought so. Additionally, someone on the online video channel was worried because they had a recurring nightmare from which they would awaken at night in a state of stupefying fear and anticipation wondering: What if we have not yet witnessed Nina Hagen's final form? We haven't – we've yet to encounter Nina's spiritual form as she's still here with us.

The contents of the gravestone epitaph and the poster I made have a common theme: life after death and the connection between the living and the dead through a bridge of love. What does it mean that these two similar texts have encountered one another? For me, the text has a personal meaning through the repetition of the same content, but it would not have meant the same to somebody else. What is the connection here? Why did I 'happen' to find this gravestone with the text on it? Perhaps it's a lead, a small message, confirmation that life isn't random but a collection of all the things that we are meant to encounter and experience? Sometimes we need confirmation of our

conviction, a touch of the past on the present and future time. We all receive messages, but noticing them requires an open and intuitive mind.

V

The Journey from Grief to Joy

“It turned into an icon!” exclaimed Erkki Pirhola. He had just walked in to my exhibition on the last day, five minutes before the gallery closed in early February 2014. There was something very perceptible in Erkki's observation. I had painted an exhibition commemorating Mikko as part of the grieving process, and I had experienced a fierce joy because there is light within grief. The process didn't end with that exhibition, but something did, or found its end: peace. I have not painted Mikko out of my life, but it started a slow release from grief and a return to life, towards the world.

After Mikko died I lived with one foot in this world and my other in the next, and I painted only him because I couldn't paint anything else. Time heals all wounds was the clichéd advice that I heard too many times, but it's true, even when the advice wasn't based on personal experience. Time marched on, but it included a lot of hard work that I did to survive and heal so that I could get on with my life and live it while I was still alive. One sign that I had moved on was that I was gradually able to paint something apart from Mikko. I tried all kinds of things, but what exactly could it be? After the exhibition everything felt empty and my artistic work had no direction. The reels of death and transcendence were still running but I had to let them go, at least to some extent. In a certain way death has already marked me. I've looked at the other side and there's nothing there that scares me. Death is a door we walk through, and we leave everything material behind us when we leave and exit this world.

How does one look at life with death, and live in balance with death? Death is not the foe:

it's a friend that takes us home. In Orthodox churches the congregation stands to worship God. This has the very special meaning that we are ready to leave, right at that moment. The door to the other side can open at any time, and we can fall through it. Life here can end in an instant and we have to be ready. We should enjoy this life as a gift and be ready to leave.

This is the trick of how to continue living. Love has a healing power. Nobody can survive without love. Apart from the sphere of heavenly love we are physical beings that need physical forms of love, such as physical intimacy and affection from another person. Our loved ones who have gone to the other side hope that we will continue our lives and they will not be jealous. Love there means sharing: all the negative and difficult emotions stay here with the body in our world. In a state of clear, higher consciousness we understand more deeply what love and sharing mean.

Talking about my exhibition *Sons Sauci* (September 2016), Henry Wuorila-Stenberg said that I had moved from sadness to joy; which was true. Joy has grown and taken the place of grief as my primary feeling. Meeting another person has been the key, and life has possibilities again: even though the vase of my life shattered into thousands of pieces, it's come back together again. The vase has clearly been broken, but now it's stronger and more durable. The love of another person heals the deep wounds of the heart. Love protects it, and gives life new joy and direction. The feeling of joy makes the world a beautiful place again. The desire for a new life has taken away my hope of getting out of here, or at least the desire or need has been muted and returns less often. I feel good in this body that I'm in, but I don't always feel good in this world, with all its heavy aspects that I'd sometimes like to flee. New joy and a lust for life have given my artistic work a direction, and art is a by-product of life.

VI "How Long Is It Since You Focused Purely on Enjoying Yourself?"

Enjoyment is the material little brother of joy. A person seeks pleasure and struggles to find it. (At this point in the proceedings it would be good to listen to some music, perhaps Wim Mertens' *Struggle for Pleasure*, the music from the film *The Belly of an Architect*, which will stimulate the listener and open up an appropriate emotional state for the further reading of this text.) Pleasure is a sword that cuts both ways, for good and for bad. I see it as a fundamentally positive thing, but staying positive requires keeping it within bounds.

I noticed the above headline recently in a certain Finnish women's magazine when I was queuing in the K-market supermarket in Eastern Pasila in November 2016. It was accompanied by a romantic image of beautiful and bold kissing. The media manipulates us powerfully and endlessly towards pleasure and consumption. Pleasure has become socially acceptable and is pursued with the appropriate devotion. The question can also be turned and rephrased: "How long has it been since you denied yourself pleasure?"

The dictionary definition of pleasure links it with human activities that produce a lot of enjoyment, such as food, sex and movement. This definition creates a direct bridge to the material dimension, which is in turn linked to the bottomless pit of physical pleasure that many modern people have fallen into with no hope of returning undamaged. Western culture is that of the prodigal son: material pleasure and spiritual emptiness. This represents the culmination of one of Western society's problems, namely that nobody can get enough, as the Rolling Stones perceptively pointed out back in May 1965 with their hit record (*I can't get no Satisfaction*). People are always demanding more. Pleasure is three steps away from addiction, which can make a positive thing negative and destructive. What happens after

pleasure? (Pleasure gives rise to its opposite: giving it up). Should we stop at the edge of pleasure or keep on going? Can less be somehow more? It's a thought that has nothing to do with modern minimalist architecture (architecture has never been a good way to let go); rather it's a hope for a simpler life, the richness of silence and the beauty of giving up.

After pleasure comes the end of it (post-hedonism). How can one move from pleasure towards ending it? This is connected to life's biggest exercise in letting go, which is usually enforced rather than volunteered for, or understanding the necessity of giving up, which is in itself a step forward. The self understands the goal, fighting and struggling towards it, but still it doesn't always work because the flesh and the self are weak. This sometimes leads to paradoxical interim results and crashes, but then you just have to get up and try again. This is a daily struggle that involves suffering and pleasure.

VII Back to the Future

During a visit to Berlin, Henry Wuorila-Stenberg presented my work to Professor Bernd Kobenig, and he was enthusiastic about it so I studied in his class when I came to the city in September 1997 on an Erasmus exchange after my final year at the Academy of Fine Arts. When I left Helsinki airport my suitcase was so full of acrylic paints and CD's that it was terribly overweight, but I packed the extra colours in my hand luggage and the journey could continue. I was a newcomer, in a new town that I'd visited twice before. I had got myself into a position where all the doors were open and Berlin was a city of endless opportunity, even then. It was 1997 and I had nothing to lose.

Things could not have gone better for me. At first I lived in a bedsit on Bauszell Strasse in Moabit in West Berlin, which was close to Hochschule der Künste. I went to school and

tried to work hard but I couldn't work in class because I had an allergy to turpentine and my other classmates were of the opinion that it's only possible to paint using huge amounts of the stuff. I tried to get round it by working at night in the school corridors but that didn't really work out, and after a couple of months the plastic electricity box in my bedsit began to smoke instead of heating up the water for my shower. It was time to find a new place, and I found a big, cheap two-room flat in the east, at Duncker Str. 68 in Prenzlauerberg.

The street was in the kind of condition that you'd expect after the Second World War and the gdr. Three houses on the street were squatted, but it didn't take long for it to go upmarket and all the Swedes decided to live there. The flat had coal heating and you had to buy briquettes from the shop at the corner and carry them all up to the third floor, fill up the oven and burn them. On winter mornings it was always freezing cold when I woke up and the whole rignarole had to start all over again. I worked at home in one of the rooms in the house, a so-called *Berlitzimmer*, until I noticed that I was living in the middle of a full-scale renovation. A huge skip appeared in the yard and the building

was surrounded by scaffolding. All the other people in the building had already moved out or disappeared. I was living alone in the house and I could hear the renovations going on. All kinds of things happened in our neighbourhood. One day a customer in the small Schultzeiss Eckkneippe pub on the corner had an itchy back. He solved the problem by standing over the threshold, half inside and half outside the pub, and scratching his back on the doorpost, and it didn't bother him a bit when I stared as I walked past. Then at the end of

Next spread
Jukka Kortekala. *The Story of a Man with One Testicle*. 1997
acrylic on canvas, 174 x 275 cm
HAM Helsinki Art Museum



one particularly drunken evening I heaved the television out the window into the yard below. Maybe this was my comment on Germany's 'clubbing culture', which is just as unbarable today. In any case it was high time to find myself another new apartment, and I moved back west, to a nice, modernized two-room place on Kalkreuth Strasse on Nollendorfplatz, and continued working at home.

In Berlin, black is a protective colour which shields you from the stranger's gaze and unwanted attention because Berliners have established a way of casually passing comment on each other's appearance in the street: "That (yellow) scarf looks like shit!" means that you are deviating from the norm, or that you're not normal. Berliners voluntarily enforce group discipline upon each other in the street, and they don't have a varying or pluralistic concept of fashion: black is the only colour, if the rest of the world agrees or not. One can witness this by going to a Kunststewerke opening and seeing the real Berlin artist community there, all clad in black from head to toe like an art clone army that is conspicuously sure of how stylish it is. Everything that deviates from this sea of black is an aesthetic crime in Berlin. This is reason enough to dress colourfully: to show one's true colours and avoid being mistaken for a local.

Another way to shock a Berliner is to smile at them, which a local would only do under duress: In particular, smiling at passers-by on the street can give those stiff Prussians quite a shock. Smiling breaks the deep-rooted Prussian sense of order and entrenched Berlin rudeness (*Berlin blüht hart!*). This tough attitude is often linked to the Berliner's favourite style of humour, *Schadenfreude*, which is the only real form of humour that exists in the German capital: it's only funny if your friend is having a bad day, or the worst day ever. I never really got to grips with this Berlin rudeness (which is not personal but is rather systematically aimed against everyone equally), group discipline and *Schadenfreude*, which is linked

to small-mindedness and is born of a lack of love. In a certain way Berlin feels like a kind of spiritual black hole. One reason for this is that Berlin is a clearly pragmatic materialist and atheist city.

I received a grant from a Finnish cultural foundation to work in Berlin, which made it possible to prolong my stay. The previous year I'd met Kristi Mikkola when she visited the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki as a teacher. On the way to my studio she informed me that 'you should be on your knees when I come to see your work.' I wasn't confused by this encounter, I thought it's just a big-wide-world thing. Kristi helped me later and introduced me to Ulrich Gebauer, who had a gallery in Mitte on Tor Strasse 220, in an old East-Berlin apartment. At that time, apart from Kristi Mikkola, Gebauer also supported other Nordic artists, including Nina Roos and A. K. Dolven. The Berlin art world was at its peak at the turn of the century, before money saturated and diluted everything.

At the height of summer 1998 I was at Berlin's annual Christopher Street Day Parade, which is organized by the LGPR community in honour of the 1969 Stonewall riots, when the drag queens in Stonewall Inn, New York decided they'd had enough and began to physically resist the police, who were on their way to arrest them. In a way these brave drag queens began the gay movement that is celebrated in Berlin at the end of every June with the parade. It was very moving and liberating to see several tens of thousands of homosexuals, lesbians and transgender people marching through Berlin, stopping the traffic and partying with the regular (heteronormative) city-dwellers and everyone getting involved. There was every colour of skin and degree of hairness and body-mass index; whiskered Germans who were past their sell-by date riding by on tandems in long dresses; and gothic vampire lesbians mingling with androgynous birds of paradise. I cried when I saw it for the first time. It felt so good in contrast to Finland at that time, when only

a few dozen LGPR people would come out onto the streets to celebrate Helsinki Pride. And if you remember a few years ago when there was a gas attack against Helsinki Pride (in 2010), it makes you think how far apart Helsinki and Berlin are in this sense. This freedom has been and still is the best thing I've found in Berlin, and it still pulls me back.

I held an exhibition in Gebauer's gallery the following September. Sometime in spring I received a call from Anneli Ilmonen, the director of Tampere Art Museum, to say that I had been chosen as the 1999 Young Artist of the Year, along with Janne Kairala and Janne Räisänen. Sometimes you get a stroke of luck, and it was quite a windfall. I spent the whole spring and summer painting for the Berlin exhibition, where I met Mika Hannula for the first time. Gebauer published a small catalogue for the exhibition and Mika wrote the text. Looking at the catalogue, the text and the works in the exhibition take me straight back to that time.

'A fragmented, precarious and ever-changing reality' is the state of our consciousness and our constant state and of being, and Mika adds to this with a quote from Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' communist manifesto: 'All that is solid melts into air', which again brings me back to these thoughts I aired earlier about the nature of material reality. Something is repeating or manifesting here. I am again in Germany in a different time, situation and place, and in a certain way I see that the circle has closed so that a new round can begin from the end to the beginning. The future is here and I can also see the end: *Wir sind nur Gast auf Erden*: we are only here as guests.

VIII

On Working

'...art is so important that it also demands to be forgotten now and then.' I presented this idea fifteen years ago already in the book linked to the exhibition series *Stop for a Moment, Painting*

as *a Presence*, in which Mika Hannula was the interviewer.

Art will settle under the skin if it is allowed to do so, and it won't leave easily. Working and its cycles can hold you hostage so tightly that they invade your dreams: this leads to so-called dream-working, which is an over-wound method of working. I have personally noticed that it's good to break the working process every few days, otherwise there is a danger that the working process becomes unarticulated and highly sprung, which in turn destroys the balance that the working process demands. Artistic work is actually an endless process of seeking, finding and losing balance. This is also helped by taking breaks and getting a little distance to the work. The point is to find that delicate balance between work and time off. I need time and a life without art. One needs to return or recover from art. A break from work or forgetting about it invigorates the mind and allows you to come back to it with a fresh perspective. It's not just the protestant work ethic that brings results to the maker of creative works, it also requires creative laziness, the joy of working that springs from freedom and liberation from the need to succeed. Ideas or the right kind of workflow don't just appear out of nowhere. You have to wait for them and coax them out, and sometimes failure succeeds in opening the door to work and creativity. Nobody really knows how the creative process works: sometimes it skulks in the shadows, sometimes it walks in the sun and burns the soles of your feet like hot asphalt. Therein lies the beauty and joy of the work, because we don't know what the next moment – or tomorrow – will look like.

It would be interesting to bring all the works to the exhibition that I've done in the last two years, for instance, including all the ones that were stillborn, those bungled disasters that have gone in the bin or been shoved into the darkest corners of the storeroom, hidden from view. This would show all the works I've done within a certain period, the whole process from



Jukka Korkeala: *Ambient Hawaii*, 1998
 acrylic secco and charcoal on canvas, 140 x 420 cm
 Malmö Art Museum

the weakest to the strongest links. It would be very enlightening because not even Picasso produced pearls every time – his work included glass beads and weak works too. Being allowed to fail is fundamentally human, but does our time allow this to be displayed? Are we any more allowed to make mistakes? As our reality becomes more Americanized and mediocre with the rise of X-factor and Idols-style shows, there isn't any room for failure. If someone fails, do we give them another opportunity to grow, develop and continue?

Failures and mistakes are always a part of a successful work. They lie beneath the surface. They are not visible with the naked eye, but they can be felt, and you can be sure of the feeling. Success is always bounded by the mental image that the maker has of a successful work. Failure happens outside this comfort zone, so a 'failed work' doesn't correspond with the mental image that the maker has of a successful work. Objectively thinking, failure is not what people generally think it is, especially when the work passes through several artistic crises and doesn't really fit with the old image of a successful work, but remains outside this mental vision.

An artistic crisis can come from failure or an accumulation of mistakes. Crisis is a force for change that gets work moving. This moving and shifting is connected with heavy emotional rollercoasters that are fuelled by feelings of failure, especially when the work has unexpectedly moved outside the bounds of a successful work. An artistic crisis is an event that nobody brings on voluntarily because humans don't volunteer to change. This change and natural resistance to it causes suffering within the work, which is also within life. The crisis can be viewed as a positive force for change that renews the work. Life might need work to change, but it doesn't inform me in advance.

On the other hand, art does not represent the highest level to me, even if it's wedged



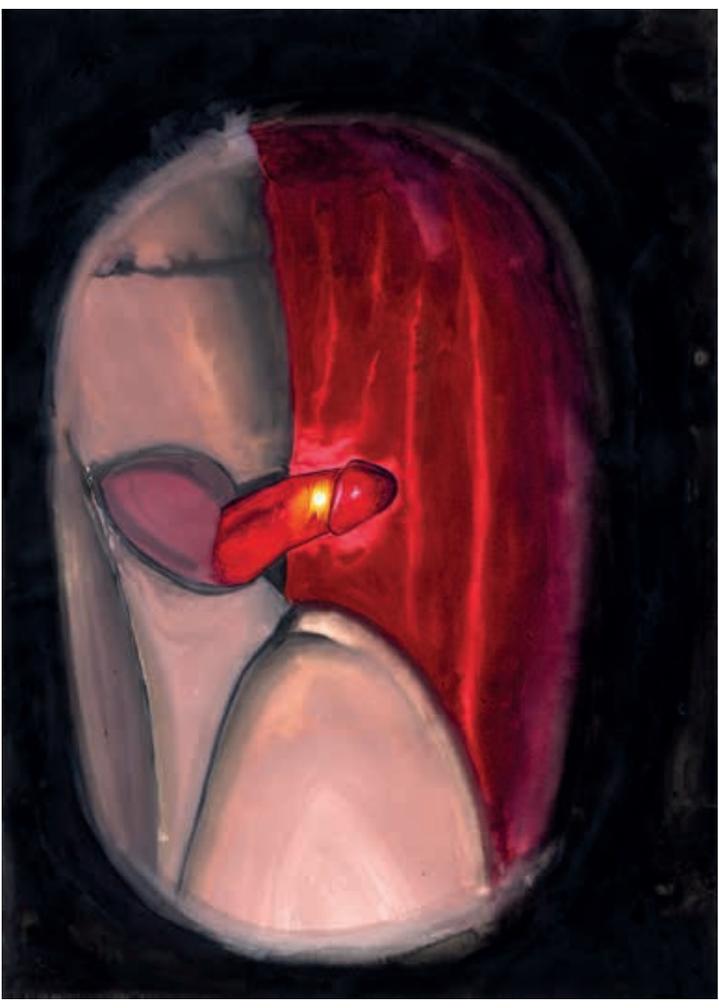
Jukka Korkkela: *Firestarter*, 2005
ink on paper, 150 x 230 cm

Next spread
Jukka Korkkela: *Sit-Eat-A-Lot and Pause Boy Face
a Moment of Truth*, 2002
watercolour and ink on paper, 150 x 200 cm

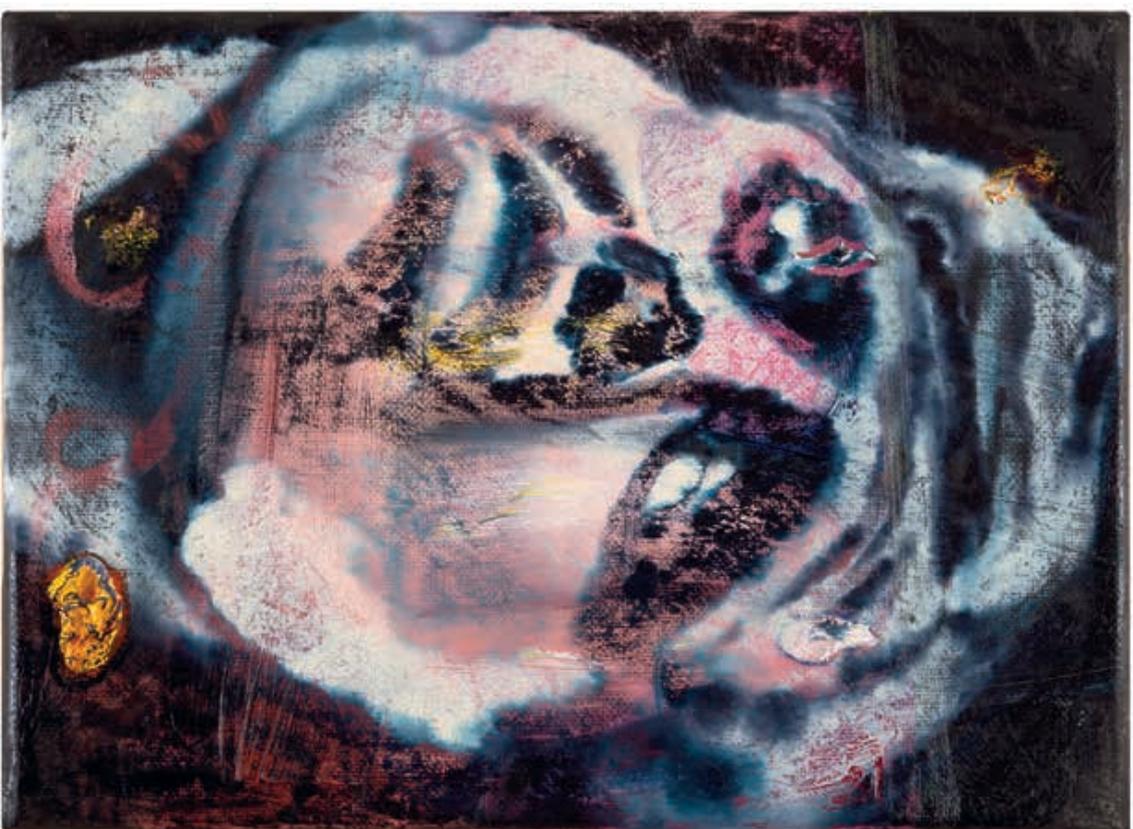




Jukka Kortela: *America's Combustion*, 2010
oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm
Gothenburg Museum of Art



Jukka Kortela: *End of Sunset*, 2007
watercolour on paper, 42 x 59.4 cm



Jukka Korpela: ...And Below Was The Lake of Fire, 2011
oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm



Jukka Korkkela: *The Morning*, 2012
oil on canvas, 219 x 257 cm
private collection



Jukka Korkkela: *The Light within me is Darkness*, 2012
oil on canvas, 217 x 140 cm
private collection

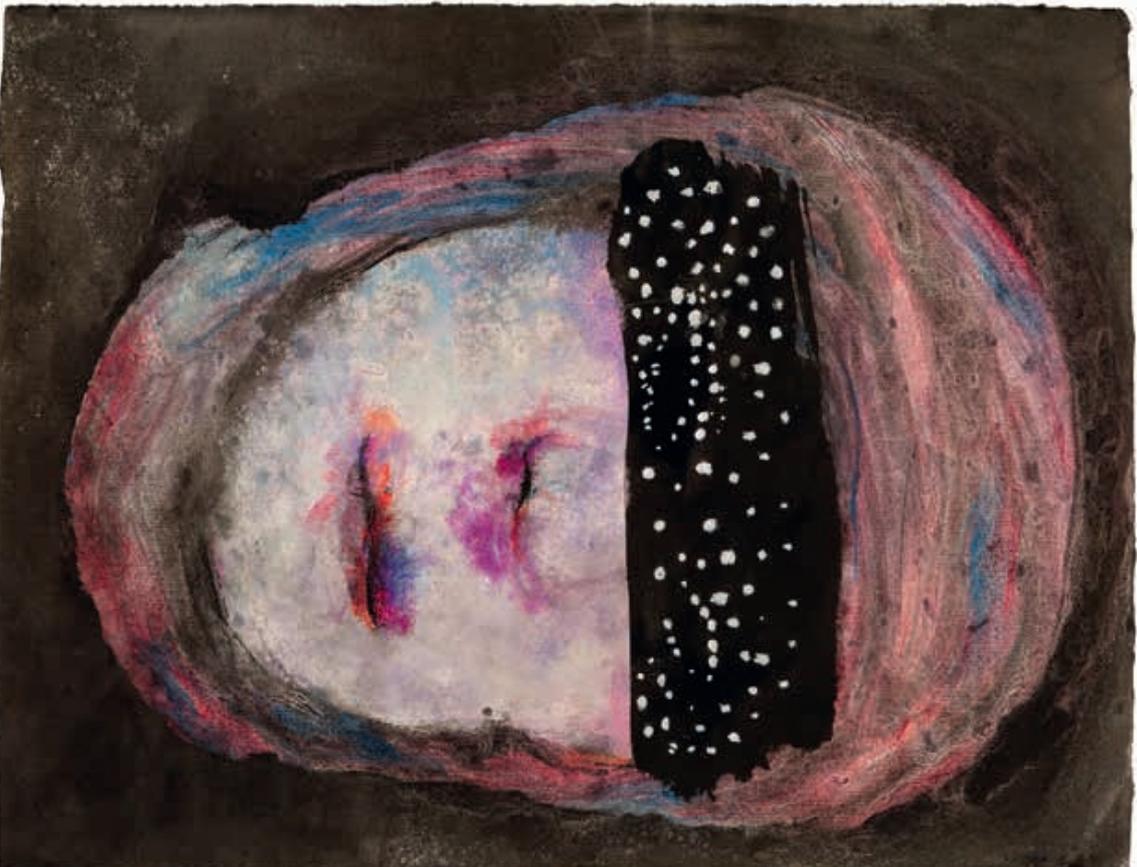


Jukka Korkkela: *This Moment is Forgotten,
but God Remembers Everything*, 2012
oil on canvas, 219 x 119 cm
private collection

Elina Meremmies



Elina Meremmies: *Soaring Aloft Upon*, 2016
tempera and oil on canvas, 166 x 146 cm
private collection



Elina Meremies

On Practice and Concepts

Doubt

Doubt goes with the territory. Anger is quite amusing when it's like a slash that helps you finish the work. These kinds of fits happen quite regularly. I can't help wondering how it really happens. First you are struck for who knows how long, then you begin to doubt if the work is even worth doing, and then suddenly you have the brush in your hand and you're working away furiously in the last moments. Sometimes the final result looks rather deliberate, even though it's actually been done without any forethought, and the action is something more akin to boxing, or some desperate messing about or struggle, than painting.

Every work involves at least some subtle, constricting doubt. It goes with the territory and in general it's very well justified – it's quite normal for a work to be out there at the border and often it's not wise to proceed, you just have to give it time and see if something will come out of it later. Or sometimes you can just feel that this is never going to work. In that case the rubbish bin or the fire offer the only solutions. There is an understanding that the work has got off on the wrong foot or set off in the wrong direction, but in the best case you are simply proceeding too fast, and there is no way of knowing how the story ends before some time has passed. It's essential, whether

it makes sense or not, that something rises to the fore to become the main focus, and then a lot is sacrificed – sometimes too much and everything is lost.

I always think that creative work involves both constructive and destructive power, otherwise it won't be completed. Anger can channel itself quite awkwardly sometimes, so that the rubbish bin gets a little too full of impaled drawings. There's nothing you can do about that. It comes down to the fact that you're angry with yourself. As a hobby, the destructive frenzy is quite expensive because drawing paper doesn't come cheap.

Tact Knowledge

Tact knowledge? It's really a good and interesting subject. Saint Porphyrios Kafsokaliivi (1906–1991), who was recently declared a saint, is a very important sacred person to me. He didn't attend any schools, but he knew (and also learned from books) an incredible amount of information about medical science, astronomy, engineering and chemistry, and he later exchanged a lot of ideas with scientists. He was able to find wells and waterways and was astonishingly well-informed about geology and construction.

He was diagnosed with over 20 diseases, and at the end of his life, despite being blind, he was able to pray in his quarters and receive an unending stream of people, and phone calls in particular. With the phone beside his bed he could call his spiritual children and warn them

Elina Meremies: *Mask*, 2009–2013
ink on paper, 31 x 24 cm
private collection

of dangers or comfort them, or give advice before he was even asked. He cautioned on the dangers of environmental toxins and bad eating habits and founded the organic farm at the Chrysospegi monastery in Crete. He said that the church is a spiritual hospital that everyone could come to seek healing. He encouraged everyone to confess their sins fundamentally and throughout their entire lives with their Father confessor if possible. I could write many pages about him, but this is the first thought that tacit knowledge brought to mind.

I have thought that such a man is like the universe taking a step in the right direction, considering the way that industry and the destruction of the environment has gone and is currently heading. That's perhaps enough said about the most important saint of our time and the miraculous knowledge that he had. My own knowledge is very limited in comparison and applicable in very different situations, if any. In my youth the first thing I noticed in my works was that they expressed an upward shift and internal movements that I hadn't intended. I thought: I'm making moving paintings. Often, when I produced a large amount of pictures on different materials and drew on small pieces of paper, future events began to form in the paintings, and it was quite an uncomfortable realisation. That kind of thing can give you a fright. On the other hand, during the creation process for the works, I felt very strongly that I was in a certain place and encountering someone, and that was far removed from any rational view of the world. Painting gradually led me towards quite miraculous experiences.

I've always shed away from the idea that people would take prophesising seriously, unless the fortune-telling is useful to someone, which it usually isn't. To a certain extent I've also loathed the concept of the subconscious because it's given too much power, as if all instinctive human behaviours and bad behaviour would be natural. It's not. In a way it's been very difficult for me to believe in

anything, I've been very critical, but despite that I became a Christian.

I believe that everything that strives for peace and freedom and love and purity is tacit knowledge, but it doesn't function properly in irresponsible and undisciplining hands. I can't say any more about that yet. There's a certain difference between good and evil that is always revealed; it does come to the fore. It's very difficult to achieve the ability to be discerning; it's a huge, lifelong goal for people. I still have a long way to go. I would also say that, at least in my own experience, it's impossible to achieve without God's help.

Prayer and Painting

Every work or job is a prayer if it's blessed by prayer, no matter if it's peeling the potatoes or emptying the outside toilet. According to certain standards, painting could be compared to prayer, or even playing the violin or gardening. But it is none of these.

It's a mistake to claim that painting's prayer because painting can spring from any starting point, from sadism or hedonism, for instance, but prayer is a significant area of life, and dedication to it requires purity (I myself am nowhere near that). That's if you really want to enter the Kingdom of God, to adore and become like God, as I suppose the New Testament apostles did.

I have noticed that, as I age, the relationship between the amount of prayer and the quality of my work is quite clear. In other words, if my work is not of a high standard, it's likely that I haven't been praying enough, and it can also be concluded that I've been otherwise self-indulgent, and all that is probably revealed to the spectator.

When I was young I lived in a time of grace with my work. I suppose all young people experience that in one way or another at some stage. I strongly believed that God wanted me to work artistically, even though I didn't try to

justify the idea to myself at the time, and faith didn't mean anything to me; rather it was really quite embarrassing. But then I was able to paint such wonderful things that I didn't know I was capable of, and I could work tirelessly and persistently. I didn't need sleep, food or my comforts. I just ploughed bravely ahead through the dangers I lived a rough, gypsy life for many years.

The desire for comfort is quite an enemy in all of life, even if it doesn't manifest at the workplace or when one is working. If you take too much comfort in worldly pleasures and aren't awake any more, all your creative work can suffer. For me, it manifests as mistakes in the art, weak execution and carelessness. Unknown sins and transgressions against our loved ones can also be quite a block to activating God's mercy. This is what icon-painters are taught: 'First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift'; were Jesus' own words in the Gospel on prayer and the Eucharist. It sounds very demanding and limiting, but giving yourself the easy way out is not recommended in this case. On the other hand, when a person becomes humble and confesses their transgressions, God's power and mercy rushes in and amazing things happen by the grace that God is always ready to give us if we are ready to live according to His will.

Christ himself urged his disciples to pray increasingly, so we can think it has been a duty and a goal for all Christians. This call and idea of prayer bothers me because I'm afraid that I'll be left halfway, incomplete, a little like a flower that grows a stem but doesn't bloom. But to me, prayer has its own place in painting, drawing, walking, and so on. In the best-case scenario I can even pray in my dreams.

'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me' is the phrase I try to learn to repeat in my mind as often as possible. But no, painting isn't prayer. Just like motherhood, which I have experienced as a great and sacred task, painting is so difficult that it's also led me to prayer. The

fact that I originally chose this profession has led me to the church and brought me closer to God. In the end, my family's livelihood and survival was dependent on the fact that there was painting, me, and some third party whose existence I was aware of: the Truth, and everything I want to follow.

Women have traditionally been seen as people who 'make things up'; after being the first to see Christ's empty grave the other apostles are said to have claimed that the women had fabricated the tale. A woman's experience is always, how would you put it: not important, and that's good, even if it sounds odd. Women are always knocked off their pedestals and doubted. In a certain way it's a source of automatic humiliation and 'the meek shall inherit the earth'. I don't know what the meek will really inherit, we'll see (heh!), but a certain invisibility is useful at times. They can spend their lives off the radar because they're not important, and they can do great things that nobody makes a fuss about. It's also very unfair in certain ways, of course it is, but I would be more disturbed if I was always noticed and I was needlessly put on a pedestal. That's the heavy burden that men carry.

And then: God is the power behind everything and it's absurd that my whole life has been lived in such a way that nobody, or almost nobody else, can understand what my life is about. The whole reality I live in is just between me and God and the Father confessor and a few close friends, and the world rejects it as completely mad.

Desire and Passion

I don't have much to say about desire. Let's move onto passion. My passion has perhaps been strange; it doesn't rise in a typical way. It's ridiculous to claim that I would be enthusiastic about God, but maybe I am, even though I feel like I'm all the time chasing after worldly vanity. I don't know. There are desires and maybe quite humiliating passions such as chocolate, beautiful things that are linked to the world and

the comfort it brings. They are far away from God.

All this has something to do with tacit knowledge, but it's very hard to put your finger on it. It's certainly there, even if there's no way of knowing. In the moments when you know you're in the right place at the right time, especially at work, and I can't wait to feel that way again.

I feel passionate about work. This year I have been drawn into a whirlwind that's been hard to bear and I've hardly been able to wait to start painting. My home and my workplace in Lallukka artists' home is getting large-scale renovations done that were supposed to be ready months ago, so I haven't been able to follow my usual rhythm of working daily, and sometimes I can't work at all. I've had to accept my lot, unbearable though it is.

The Liturgy

"We thank You also for this Liturgy, which You have deigned to receive from our hands, even though thousands of archangels and tens of thousands of angels stand around You, the Cherubim and Seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft upon their wings, singing the triumphal hymn, exclaiming, proclaiming, and saying..."
Johannes Chryssostom

It's a great joy and relief. It's an incomprehensible power in a person's life. An acquaintance came over last Sunday when I was going to the liturgy again, and he began to shout profanities in a funny way when he realized where I was going. Later he came back in a slightly different mood, and I said that I prayed for him and he immediately accepted it. Sometimes the Church seems to bring out very strong, unconscious reactions in people, because they have a deep, enormous longing.

On the other hand, the Church is an easy thing to talk about. The Church is this and the Church is that, and many people feel that they know it. I knew little of the Church myself before I began to attend regularly. I have found a sweet comfort from the Church and many kinds of astonishing changes in my life, for instance a certain order and balance and a kind of fragile and space-creating connection with people. The decrease or complete disappearance of bad and harmful habits from my life has also been a big thing for me.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is quite a normal thing to me, in my own body too in fact, but especially in painting. A woman's body goes through many hard phases, just as nature intends of course, but living through them is far from pleasant. A person also ages and changes, and it can happen very quickly. When you're painting, sometimes something ugly turns into something wonderful, and vice versa, and often there's a metamorphosis to the opposite side. Why it goes like that: all or nothing, upside down and back-to-front. I have no idea.

In my paintings metamorphosis has been unexpected from the start, but at the same time I've always recognized it. I've not thought about it or tried to push it in any particular direction in advance, but I have naturally noticed that there are some elements in a painting that set me free and are favourable from the point of view of metamorphosis and growth. It's a little like a dance or some instinctive movement, but still a surprise at the same time. It can happen while painting icons or monsters, but of course in different volumes.

Eliina Merenmies: *The Old Woman's Melancholy*, 2014
tempera and oil on canvas, 171 x 105 cm
The Saastamoinen Foundation Art Collection /
EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art



But how will my caterpillar become a butterfly, and will it become one at all? I can't answer that: it's directly linked to creation and remains unexplainable. The most you can say is that in order to succeed you have to believe, and that's easier said than done. It's as if my whole life is at stake in the painting, everything I want to say needs to be said. What if you cannot do it? Often it comes very close to that.

Hopelessness

I have a habit of telling my students that hopelessness is forbidden. Don't go there or hang around there, and don't even glance at it.

I've learned that there is no healthy form of hopelessness. It's difficult even for me to remember sometimes when I'm finding myself in great distress, but it's true.

It's best to stick with hope and get mad or don't get mad and so on, but if hopelessness peeps out from the corner then you might as well put your coat on and leave the atelier. Hopelessness offers me nothing.

Hope

If hopelessness is forbidden, there is only hope, as there needs to be something.

I need to say a bit more about hope as it's a large and difficult area to understand. For me, it's linked to prayer. A plea, an attempt to get close to God; it's an undertaking to relinquish my own will, and in a certain way my life, and to wait. And I don't just wait, I receive, and the experience also produces a great hope.

Suddenly I saw hope as a personal experience: hope can fill a person abundantly and make one regret and ask for forgiveness; forgive and be forgiven. This is how I see it. I've never found it in such a patently clear form anywhere else, and in my view nothing gives and builds hope as powerfully as forgiveness and regret and a humble attitude towards people. And if someone finds hope from

the Ideapark shopping centre, or decorating or buying a ticket to Rome, in a way it's an understandable illusion. It's finite, however – the effect lasts maybe half an hour and then you have to get some more.

Pay attention all you kind souls: this doesn't mean that you should immediately make up with everyone and bow to their wishes, or that all those enemies would turn into gentle teddy bears: it means that as far as it's in our hands, there is peace. That is how I see it. There are always two sides to the story. A truly stable hope isn't easy to achieve – it demands humility and peace.

Abroad

Being abroad has been a building block for my own identity. It happens to everyone automatically, perhaps a bit more strangely when you live a long time in another country.

I have chosen and accepted things into my life on the principle that everything good is welcome. And good can be of a kind that you have to wait to find out if it's good after all. In France, where I spent the longest time, on-and-off until the end of the nineties, I learned to speak to people I didn't know and nag strangers and be quite pushy if I had to be. I also learned that strange attitude to shout at all times. And there's a lot of shouting there. To a certain extent I lost my face and my cool there, but I didn't care. Nobody knew what I did or who I was, nobody was interested because I was female... It's quite a wild feeling the first time you disappear in front of someone's eyes.

Baudelaire's book *Poor Belgium!* is quite an accurate description of the strange disgust-hate-love relationship that emigrants experience there (Baudelaire was a Frenchman in Belgium). Brussels was wonderful and at the same time complete nonsense. I visited for the first time at the end of the eighties. How could I express it? Later I was wiser and I understand how things influence us secretly: Belgium's

strange decadence struck to me like a leech and I didn't notice a thing.

It came from a peculiar sense of freedom – there was something delightfully permissive and at the same time nearly all Belgians dress in exactly the same way (an odd phenomenon that as I remember already disturbed Baudelaire in his day). I didn't dress like the Belgians, rather I just threw on whatever made me happy. I felt like a child there, like I could do anything. For instance, a cafe wouldn't close if you were sitting there. Once a cafe owner even fell asleep holding onto the beer tap on the counter because I'd stayed so late with my friend playing pinball.

In the early 1990s in the Czech Republic the new millennium was dawning and I could see pollution and environmental destruction, the future, the Tavivaara mine. I saw young people who were quite sick, and I lived in an environment where the air wasn't fit to breathe, full of black smoke and ash. Terrifying landscapes, distressing realities. I think I went elsewhere to find out who I was and where I came from and the answer was quite confusing and full of additional notes in brackets. I also went to find out what was really going on, where was life and where was death and where is reality and where is the lie. I found important signposts. I met all kinds of skiers and fanatics over quite a broad scale. I lived in squatted houses and sometimes I even lived in a car.

I never need to search for a topic: they are all up here in my memory. Sad subjects, important joyful objects. Today I heard the jackdaws screeching in the yard and the sound immediately made me think that they are calling me to work. Wild birds fly and shout themselves hoarse, and I immediately get into painting. It's always been that way and always will be. I went looking for it somewhere even though I could have found it here in Tôöbö just as easily. But I made a circuit, for better or worse.

Striving

Deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Christ. Striving is obedience to God. In principle. On the other hand, I don't even really know what striving is. I can only know what I've seen, experienced and absorbed up until now. It's not a lot if I compare myself with people who live in monasteries and caves. Striving is growth, movement, not staying in one place. It often goes so that several years later I am already thinking about something linked with striving in a different way than I am now. I live in abundance and comfort in the middle of Helsinki, and my life is secular and full of mostly mundane concerns. Something has struck from all that fumbling around, and I understand a few things from personal experience. Regular attendance at church has gradually become an irreplaceable part of my life. In the church it's like being with family: I can always return home, always take refuge there. I have been able to experience healing and I've received a lot of comfort in my lonely striving and pain, a wonderful comfort that I can't put into words.

In monasteries people pray for the whole world with a heart full of pain, with the kind of prayer that I will perhaps one day be able to reach. I have read about it. It is in a way the goal of striving, unceasing prayer in the heart. Especially prayer on behalf of something or a person or the world, prayer that brings a stab to the heart, where the soul and body and one's whole existence are part of the prayer.

It's not possible to pray without striving, however. Youth is a time of grace and enthusiasm, even if you're doing it all wrong. When you're young some things come together in a funny way, even if you've done nothing

Next spread
Elina Merenmies: *Garden*, 2015
tempera and oil on canvas, 169 x 278 cm
The Finnish State Art Commission



to help, but as you get older you get more responsibilities and on the other hand your powers decrease. That's the way it goes, as far as I can see.

Since I was young I have loved to read The Bible, and to this day, for the last couple of decades, I have read a piece of it almost daily. There is something about it that is undeniably holy and it has a powerful effect on the soul and the mind. I have opened it a little like I would open the door to the church, poked my head into God's temple between the covers of the book. In certain stages of my life I have been in great distress, and sometimes I've read it for hours at a time, day by day, and survived and received help. You could say that this reading habit, and later on the contribution of the church, has helped me survive bad anxiety. A love of God and faith in God's help has grown through reading that beloved book: the amount of help has increased and that increase has become like some kind of dance. My whole life is steps that contain God's meaning and grace. And all this fits into the Bible, and of course hopefully also ceaseless prayer and, first and foremost, faith.

Painting

I have to be grateful for this work because it's a very humbling job. You don't get above your station but rather live your whole life in shame. Sometimes people have called me gifted and said that everything looks easy to me, but it's not true. It's as far from the truth as you could get. When I was a student I saw people that really were gifted. I was just persistent to the point of agony, and even after that everything is still wretched. I don't want to complain about my misery but let's just say that even though there are wonderful moments of happiness in my work, there is always a feeling close to humiliation that someone more gifted would surely do this much more easily, heh heh!

But that's the way it is, being gifted is not enough, you also have to strive. The endless

work can be completely ridiculous and useless if you don't get the job done. You have to train a lot, think a lot, and push through with force if you have to. And a certain feeling of shame, a suspicion that everything has been spoiled, is actually sometimes your best friend in the studio.

And then the looking, my painting moves around a lot in the way that I see all sorts of things in the work, and sometimes things slip in that I didn't originally mean. Not everything goes – I'm a terrible pedant! I'm like a jobsworth customs official that doesn't allow just anything into her universe!

Some people might think that a branch in the forest on a tree somewhere is just right, but to me it's pathetic, and I can't rest until I've added a gram of colour to it or tortured myself with it for a week. Or I've removed two other points, and yet again those with no dedication don't even notice the difference. Of course, if I take 300 branches and play around with them manually, maybe then something eventually changes in someone's eye. This aspect doesn't mellow with time, but remains completely the same, or gets worse. It's sometimes puzzling, and a secret ingredient slips in.

A few years ago I visited the Valaam Monastery by Lake Ladoga, and after I returned I wanted to paint that great subject into yet another large painting depicting a forest. I visited the gates of the All Saints monastery, and even though I had just decided that I had painted enough forest, I changed my mind and decided to do one more before leaving that subject alone, at least for a while. The All Saints monastery is one of the Valaam hermitages, and I knew nothing about it before that visit – even though the monastery area has featured in my paintings since 1992. I made the large painting ready in torturous stages as usual, and it finally appeared in my exhibition at Galerie Ahava in 2016. All I can see in that painting at this stage is that there is nothing in it that disturbs my eye and that it's a forest, a very thick one. But

many people came to me with tears in their eyes and said that this painting is their home, a place they yearn for. I heard this from so many people from different backgrounds, and they were all very touched and joyful.

Next spread
Elina Merenmies: *Valley of Vision*, 2010–2013
tempera and oil on canvas, 169 × 278 cm
private collection

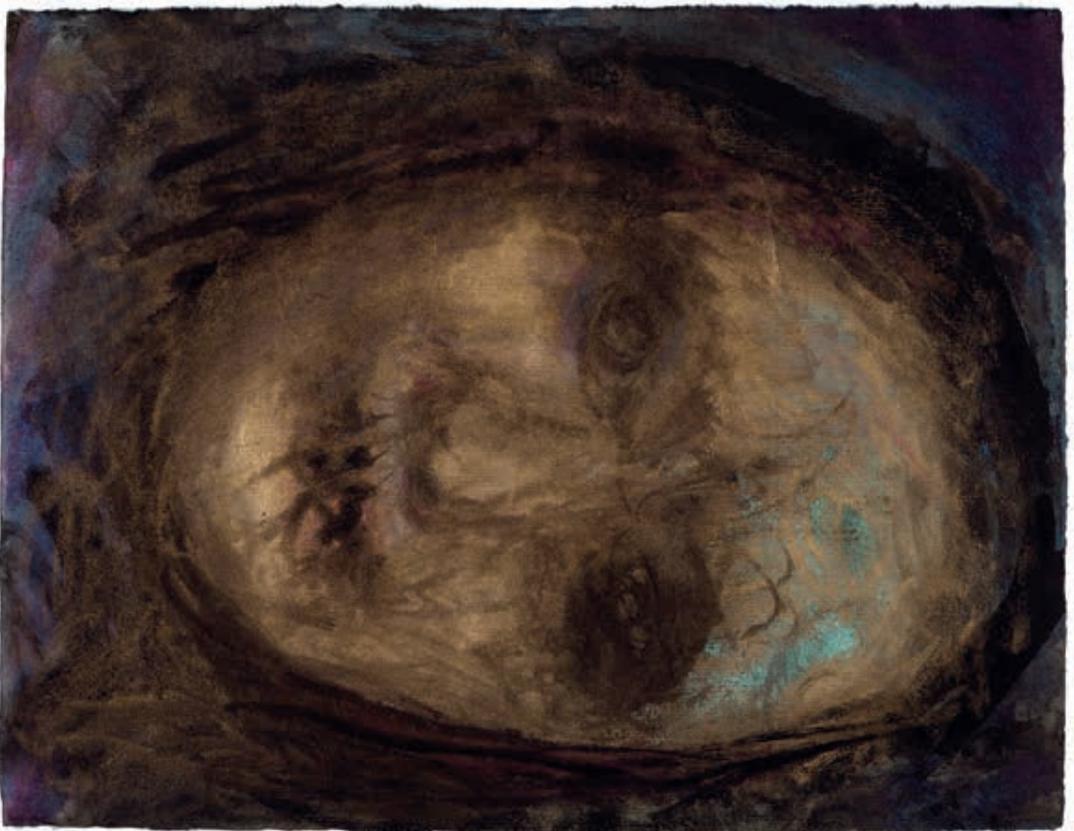




Elina Merenmies: *Pig Mouth*, 2012
ink on handmade paper, 53 x 38,5 cm
HAM Helsinki Art Museum



Elina Merenmies: *The Trees Are Coming*, 2013
ink on handmade paper, 53 x 38,5 cm
Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation Art Collection, Rovaniemi Art Museum



Eliina Merenmies: *Friend*, 2013
ink on paper, 31 x 24 cm



Eliina Merenmies: *Egyptian*, 2013
ink on paper, 31 x 24 cm
The Saastamoinen Foundation Art Collection / EMMA - Espoo Museum of Modern Art



Eilina Meremies: *Rays*, 2011
tempera and oil on canvas, 33 x 42 cm
HAM Helsinki Art Museum



Eliina Meremies: *Monkey*, 2013
ink on paper, 45 x 37 cm
Pori Art Museum

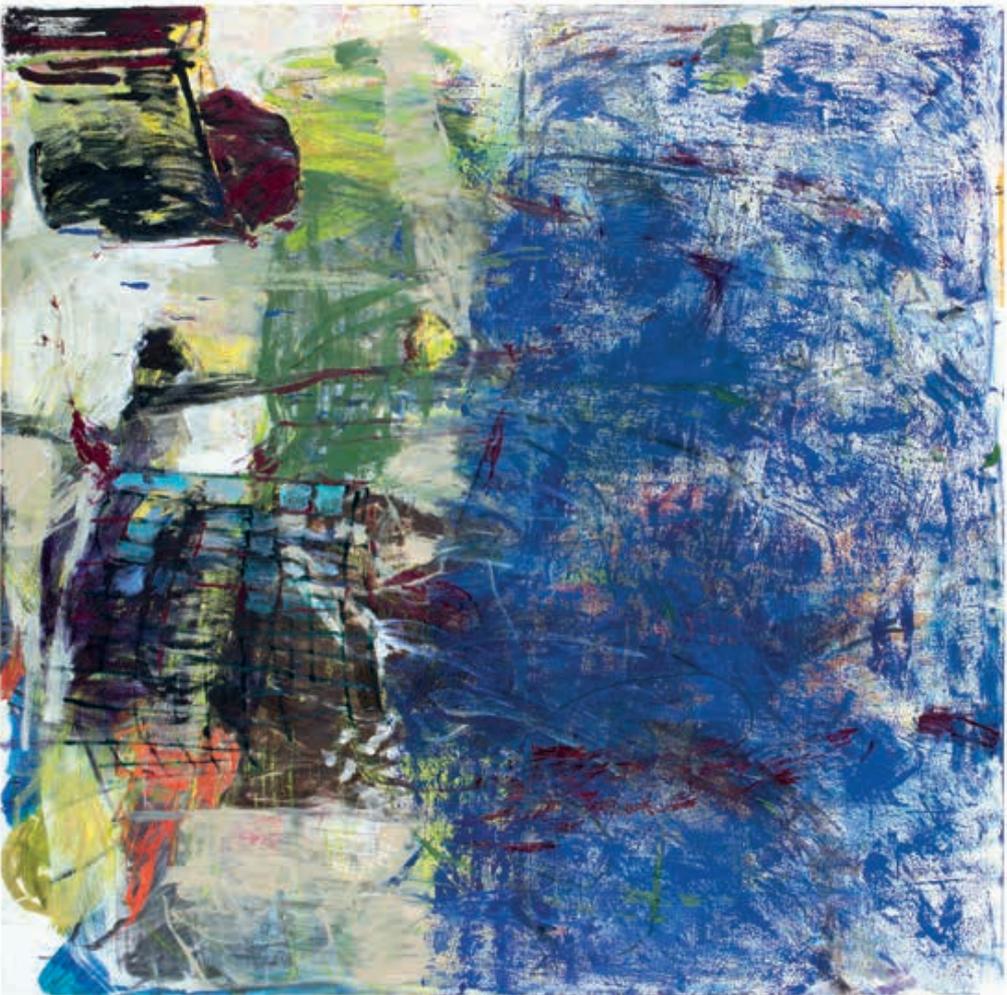


Eliina Meremies: *Lines of Delight*, 2012
ink on handmade paper, 51 x 37,5 cm
private collection



Anna Retulainen

Anna Retulainen: *Plein Air: End of September, 2016*
oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm



Anna Retulainen: *Rat trap*, 2017
oil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm

Anna Retulainen

Painting

These short paragraphs say something about my paintings, my life and my self. I cannot live in any other way. I write down mundane observations. They say something about the way I work. Painting is part of me: I cannot separate it from my everyday world or my life, nor would I want to.

Rome

This period of my life began eleven years ago. I walked the streets of Rome all through the spring with no destination in mind. Now I have returned. I walk and seek out my old routes. I'm surprised by how easily I've found them. It's rare for the view from the top of Gianicolo Hill to be so clear. The sky is cloudy and the showers earlier today have cleared the air. The mountains beyond the city can be clearly seen. I can even pick out the different towns and villages on their slopes.

I sit in the darkening atelier. I have sometimes worked here, but it's not mine any more. I'm here as a guest, just for the night. I have rejoiced in this atelier: painted, drawn, fallen in love, drunk wine and grappa. But the view has been lost; the trees have blocked it off. In my day you could see the whole city from the terrace, but now there's only dense foliage. Hopefully the gardener from the convent will cut the trees back so that the view won't be forgotten. There's thunder: lightning flashes and it starts to pour.

During the day I walked old familiar routes, from Villa Lante to Piazza del Popolo by way of Campo dei Fiori and Piazza Navona. I ate ice cream, I walked and I tried to hold on to my mental images. The scissor shop near Piazza Rotonda was gone, replaced by a boutique selling colourful shoes. I was disappointed because I wanted to buy a pair of scissors.

I like Rome better in the winter, when the streets are quieter – it's dark and rainy and the lights reflect off the wet streets. Tomorrow I'll walk to a cafe behind the Vatican for breakfast and then buy some pecorino romano cheese from the market hall. The sky is flashing and rumbling, the thunder has already lasted several hours, it's a long time since I've been in a proper thunderstorm.

The Upper Terrace at Villa Lante

Green parrots are flying all around me. I don't remember that they came as far as the house before. They shout and chase each other. I could hear shouting late last night from the prison below too, their cries answered by their visitors down below. Prisoners, friends and relatives all communicating with each other. A parrot lands very close to me. There's heat in the sun and another clear view of the mountains behind the city. The whine of a car alarm. The call of the parrots. In front of me a monastery and prison. The church bells are ringing in Tivoli. Familiar sounds and smells. Light so bright

it hurts your eyes. A feather falling to the ground. Are green birds' feathers white? Pine trees, I remember painting them when I worked here. Roman streets are narrow, labyrinthine. That's why I can never see far ahead or find my bearings. Here the cars swerve around you; in Berlin they knock you down. For lunch yesterday I ate six pieces of different-coloured ice cream. For breakfast I had a peach and a pot of coffee, I walked a lot better than it would in Finland. I walk down the hill and remember my old route. I find the stairs and slide down them. I continue along the river past the Vatican and turn off at Sant'Angelo. People are rushing in the opposite direction. They all have somewhere to go. It's warm already. Yesterday's thunderstorm lasted several hours and it rained cats and dogs, but now the sun is shining.

Bar

I order a beer and get lots of little plates of finger foods with it. The bar is full of people of all different ages, loudly chatting and empathising with each other. Smells and sounds are part of Italy, and part of my memories of this land. Old ladies eat colourful ice creams: there's still plenty time before dinner. Like this neighbourhood. Prati isn't full of tourists, the people in the cafes and bars are local and the market hall is fantastic. The ladies have gathered round the table next to me and new ones are all the time arriving. They're drinking glasses of Aperol spritz and eating little snacks. Nothing has changed, except the scissor shop has gone. I can still get tramezzino from my favourite place and pizza rossa from Forno Campo de' Fiori. Yesterday it rained, today it's sunny. Rome is just like it always was.

Palm Island

I'm in Africa, in Grand Popo, looking out at a palm forest in the distance. I'd like to walk in the forest but I'm afraid of snakes. In any case,

I'd have to get over the water. Swimming is dangerous and I don't have a boat. The forest looks thick, impenetrable, but tempting too because I've never been in a palm forest. I dreamed of the forest nearly every day, wondering what it would be like to walk there, how it would smell and what kind of light it would have. The forest looked very different at different times of the day and many times I heard thunder rumbling behind it. The island was like a stage prop in front of these dark, nearly violet-black thunderclouds. The sense of unreality was emphasized because I never got there. I always looked from afar, dreaming on the other side of the river. Maybe the forest only existed in my imagination? Now the palm island has changed in my mind to become almost white. It's empty because I can't access the memory. I think of white as emptiness, a quiet colour.

Henley Beach

Henley Beach is an endless stretch of white sand. I was young, 16 years old, and I spent wonderful days there hiding among the dunes. Time had disappeared. There was only the sea and sand and me and my friend Abra. We lay in a small dip formed by grassy ridges, out of sight and hidden from random passers-by. There was nobody else on the beach: only the endless view; the sea, which was never quiet; and us. The sand was almost like dust, so fine it would stick to your skin and when it was wet it was almost as hard as asphalt. It was the perfect material for making sandcastles. I had sand in my clothes and hair and I remember when I came home, Mary was annoyed by the sand. Once I spent the night at the beach with my friends and the sea woke us up early in the morning: we hadn't realized that the tide would come in so far.

It's 30 years ago now since we hid among the dunes, but the memory is still as strong.

Koala

I saw a koala. It was sitting high up in the neighbour's eucalyptus tree. There was a hard wind blowing and I wondered how it could sit there so calmly. It disappeared but would come back now and again. I never managed to see it walking on the ground. It was too fast. Apparently koalas come down into cities from the hills when the heat becomes unbearable. Maybe they're searching for water. I put a cup of water under the tree but I never saw it drink. Now there isn't a cloud in the sky. It's hot, so hot that you can feel the heat immediately in the morning as soon as you walk out the door. The light is strange: blue is different here than in Europe. The rush hour stretches on and on, big SUV's filling the streets and going nowhere. Public transport is at a standstill, not that there's much of it. Busses don't have their own lanes and walking will get you there faster, but the heat outside is intolerable. I'm not sure any more if I must return to Henley Beach. Water and the sea are the same all over. The rhythm of the waves repeats itself. I walk with the dog on the beach at Victor Harbour. This beach is long, the water is cool just like almost everywhere here. The opposite shore is Antarctica.

Berlin

Grey. I can't see properly. I can't see contours or details. A grey curtain has covered the city. My vision has deteriorated terribly quickly and it scares me. I listen to music. I see it in my mind exactly, in the clearest, brightest colours and images. The sky is grey, the houses are grey and the river is grey too. Colours and shades have disappeared – the world is flat, almost two-dimensional. Nothing happens and nobody says anything. If I would say something, it feels like nobody would hear or listen. I can hear car tyres on the wet asphalt. It's not raining, but greyness wets the roads. I listen to Smetana while I wait for their concert in December. There are still leaves on the trees. The leaves

are a tired green. It's been too warm, so the autumn chill hasn't brought out the reds and yellows of the leaves yet.

Weissensee Jewish Cemetery

A memory that's so far in the past that I can't make sense of it or understand it.

I walked to the cemetery to see if the leaves had already fallen, but the trees were still a deathly green. I would have liked to wade through the dry, rustling maple leaves. The light in the cemetery was still green. When I got back home I drew the green light. The cemetery is the only place that isn't grey. It's a delicate green. The light is filtered through the high trees. The trees have been growing for decades and have formed a canopy over the cemetery, and evergreen ivy grows around their trunks. The rhododendron bushes are massive, many metres high. Trees grow in the middle of the cemetery, knocking over gravestones and claiming the space for themselves. Gravestones are covered in green moss. When leaves fall from the trees, the green light disappears, but the greenness of the land is preserved by the ivy that covers it. I walk a familiar route through the allotments. The gardens are waiting for spring. Only cabbages are left, just like back in Finland.

Spirits

There's nothing that I want to paint. It all feels pointless and frustrating. It hurts physically. But I carry on obsessively because I can't do anything else. It feels like there's no option. I don't know what I'd do. I don't know how and the most difficult thing is perhaps the fact that I don't know why. I wonder if I should drink spirits.

Silence

I've been quiet now for over a week. I haven't talked to anyone apart from necessary sentences



Anna Retulainen: *Weissensee Jewish Cemetery*, 2016
oil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm

at the shops or buying a travel ticket. I've said thank you and asked questions. Silence feels good. I don't want to share my experience and I don't really want to be part of other people's experiences either. When I paint or draw, my experience becomes reality. Otherwise they are only private memories. These quiet days and weeks are the best. It's easy for me to hide in my own thoughts and concentrate on painting. I don't go to exhibitions, I don't look at art. I strive to distance myself from all influences so that all that remains are my own thoughts and starting points. I listen to music – alone.

Writing

Do I dare to write only for myself? Is that kind of thing even possible? I hate writing because I'm scared that someone will read the text. I'm also afraid that someone will see my painting. I love painting, despite the fact that once more I don't know what to paint. I always have a fantasy of what I want to paint and what my work will look like. Those kinds of fantasies are yet to be fulfilled, which is perhaps what keeps me working. I listen to Dvorak's *From the New World* as if I'm hoping to find a solution.

Summer Cottage

I sit inside and listen as someone or something tries to chop my cottage to pieces. I don't care, but anyway I intend to renew the cladding in the spring.

Otherwise it's quiet. It looks like September, it smells like September. There hasn't been any frost yet, though: even the cress is still growing.

Loneliness

I sit quietly alone, listening. I look out the window at the branches of the trees and the thinning leaves. The garden will soon sink into silence. It feels good and relaxing. I'd like to drop into silence too. I paint and draw, and

people see my work. That's enough. I'm tired of discussions, they disturb my concentration. In my youth I dreamed of moving to the wilderness or to a small island where I could watch the sea and paint. There would be nobody there, nobody to talk to. Maybe I can live as a hermit in the city too.

Rat

I haven't caught the rat and it hasn't eaten the poison I've set out for it. I've tried to catch it all summer, but with no success. I've followed it and I know its routes. I know how to tempt it but it won't take the bait or walk into my trap. Neither do I believe that a hedgehog is living in the house I built for it. I saw the rat climbing up the neighbour's plum tree after leftover fruit that it could store for the winter. It swung skillfully around the thin upper branches of the tree.

Journey to Work

In the morning I garden. I build paths for the pumpkins above ground so they won't cover the land with their tentacles. I tie the plants to one another so that they won't fall and snap in the wind. I carry hundreds of litres of water to the pumpkins and cucumbers so that they'll grow big and juicy. I pull out the weeds and thin the jungle.

Then I cycle through the woods to my studio. I go the long way round and meander. I don't seek out the direct route but rather try to make the ride last as long as possible. I ride along paths over stones and roots. Cycling to me means being entirely alone, focusing before beginning to paint.

On my way home I stop to talk to the cows and greet the ponies at Annala before I return to my cottage in Kumpula.

I've followed this same route all autumn, even after I moved back home to Kallio. First I rode to my cottage and from there I continued

to my studio. Along the way the cows would look at me and I thought that during the summer they might learn to remember me. Sometimes they walk back and forwards, sometimes they lie down and chew the cud.

Fear

Tomorrow I will dig the land. I want to be in peace before leaving in the evening to go and meet people I don't know. The thought scares me and disturbs my peace-of-mind.

Disturbance

Again at the cottage. It's warm and I've lit candles. I can't concentrate, my thoughts wander and I don't know where to start. I've focused the whole day on the fact that I have to be somewhere in the evening. And tomorrow I'll spend half a day thinking that I was somewhere the previous evening. I can't find the beginning of my thoughts. I have to get inside my own world and I have to be left there in peace.

Waiting

Tomorrow I will cover all the furniture that's going to stay outside for the winter and the pergola too. I will plant garlic and tulips next week. Then there is nothing to do but wait for 5 months, and everything will begin again. I know that the time will fly and when I'm lying awake in bed at night I can plan what I'll plant next summer. I don't need to worry about paintings or whether I've failed. Rather, I can worry about what disease the raspberries have and if it's possible to cure it and what vegetable seeds to plant where. I've done a painting of this year's arrangement, so that I remember. Now everything is ready for the winter. I'm planning to keep on painting in the garden and paint in the winter too if it's possible. The season has turned at last and everything that I repeated all summer has vanished.

Rat

The rat is still alive. I found one dead rat, apparently a cat had broken its neck. But it wasn't my rat, which I saw almost immediately after I found the carcass. I'll carry on trying to catch it next spring.

Apples

Tomorrow I'll gather the last winter apples. The winter apple tree is old and half-rotten. It has three trunks, two of which might break off this winter. The apples are red and good to eat, and the tree gives a good crop. I've made many paintings of the apple tree. I want to remember the tree if it dies this winter.

Bird

The bird is pecking again at my cottage. I run out and shout at it but it's already gone. The noise must come from it pecking against the cladding. Otherwise it's quiet, the only sound is the ticking of my wall clock. I haven't moved the clock back home yet, I won't take it until I turn the heating off and leave the cottage to hibernate over the winter and wait for spring. I'm yearning for the spring already! All my works should hopefully be ready by then. There's no need any more to fight with paintings, even though I'm already quite sure that this won't come to pass.

Dream

Strange noises again. I don't know if it's an animal or a human. If I was to live alone I could well imagine myself in a small cottage in the middle of the forest. Alone and quiet. My day would be spent chopping wood, keeping the place warm and carrying water. I would do simple things to stay alive. In the summer I would grow vegetables, hopefully enough to last through the long winter.

City

However, I do love opera and concerts. I love to watch the colours and images that music brings to mind. I don't so much listen to music as watch it. Again, though, I don't want to share my experience with anyone, apart from perhaps by painting.

The Days Becoming Shorter

It's the middle of October. It's only 5 o'clock in the evening and I can already sense night beginning to fall. The clocks will go back in a couple of weeks. Then it will be pitch black already at this time. I like the dark. I like it for the same reason that I like the increasing light in the spring: it brings change. The landscape changes. My life is divided up according to the seasons. I remind myself that I really must look for a better light for my bicycle. I want to dare to ride in the dark forest again. The feeling that I dare to do something is a great source of joy to me – the fact that I've beaten myself and my fear. As I paint I go through the same thoughts and feelings. I run from bogeymen hiding behind the trees, the shadows that chase me. Stones and stumps come to life and move before me. Not before I reach them do I believe that they are only part of the landscape. My breathing returns to normal until another shadow starts to come after me.

Hopefully there will be snow. I like riding on snow and ice. Then the forest is not so dark and it doesn't hurt so much if you fall.

Grey

I sit outside on the ground and paint. It's cold. I'm wearing my husband's boots, three pairs of woollen socks and a down jacket and trousers, but still the cold finds me. I can no longer see contours properly, but I can make out the fall sunflowers. They're the only thing left alive in the garden.

At the Cottage Again

Morning. It's almost sunny. The wall clock is still ticking, but otherwise it's quiet. I'm thinking about what to paint. The scene in my mind is completely white. I have to go somewhere, do something so that I could find or dream up something to paint. Now in my thoughts I circle the emptiness. I don't remember anything, and everything that I originally imagined and planned to paint has disappeared or been erased. I have erased paintings too, scraped off all the paint that comes loose. The floor underneath becomes a colourful mess, shreds of paint curling round each other and up above is the canvas, scraped clean, containing only memories, fragile fragments of the painting.

Sound

Once again, someone or something is hacking at the cottage wall.

At the Cottage

Wonderful peace. A flame on the candles and the ticking clock. The day after tomorrow I will paint outside. First I have to move the paintings that are ready from here to the studio and the canvasses I prepared this morning here to the cottage. All this moving takes too much time. Things move too slowly and are overly complicated. Painting itself becomes difficult too because I've been used to painting in the safety of a studio. The wind blows the canvasses over, the rain makes them wet, the colours are lost and bits of rubbish fly onto the painting. Paintings don't dry in the damp cottage, canvasses stretch and tighten according to the varying humidity in the air. And I feel embarrassed if somebody sees me. But still, I enjoy it. Working outside feels right and real. I'm committed to this place. This is my life. I don't need to invent anything. I'd rather be here than anywhere else.

Summer

What happened in the summer, or have I forgotten already? The harvest from the garden was huge. I didn't give the plants enough water, which led to the cucumbers, and pumpkins being affected by mildew and their leaves turned a spectral grey. The taste of the fruits was excellent, however, and they grew big and juicy. Fourteen large pumpkins and dozens of huge cucumbers. There were plenty of berries and apples and plums too – too much in fact. I don't remember any more if it rained or was it warm or windy. Summer has become a memory that I'm groping around to find.

I dug the earth and moved the plants. I tied the plants to each other to make it possible to move and live in the garden, which looks like a jungle. In the studio I painted everything there was. I hammered stakes into the ground to support the plants. I painted them too. I cycled along forest paths to my studio and painted my complicated, winding route. I tried to remember where I rode and where I stopped to greet the ponies and cows. My route stops at the place I exit the forest and step inside the garden gate. I painted my boat trip to an island in Sipoo. I painted the apple tree that I sit underneath in the evenings. I write in the cottage because I find a lonely peace there that doesn't exist anywhere else.

How I Paint

How do I paint that I don't really know, that I'm not really sure? How do I paint a memory? The outline can't be clear, and the colour can be no more than a suggestion of something. I remember how in primary school we were painting and I was given the subject 'summer holiday', and I couldn't come up with anything. Eventually, as I remember, I drew my cream-coloured canoe. I was in primary school, 11 years old, and I hated canoeing.

Painting is slow. Layer by layer I near the end, at which point the painting might say

something about the thing I want to remember. I search for an image that I believe I will recognize if I can depict it. Brush marks speak of fragility and also irritation with myself because I can't access the memory. Apparently fast tracks are slow. I have replicated them many times, erased them and replicated them again before I eventually allow them to live.

The Rat

I've set a new trap for the rat. I haven't given up yet.

England

I leave for London and Oxford. I'm going to see if there are still cows and horses on Port Meadow. There might not be cows because it's already the end of November, but horses live there, or at least they used to. I'm also going to meet Whistlejacket at the National Gallery.

At the Cottage Again

I'm quite sure that I've lost my notebook. All the words that I wrote at Villa Lante, gone. Those memories that I wrote down in the thunderstorm and the evening dusk in the atelier have vanished.

Paintings

Why don't I paint people?

I have no interest in people. None whatsoever. I don't think that describing thoughts and feelings requires portraying people, and I don't personally think that pictures of people are interesting. I paint my loneliness, silence.

Anna Reclamant: *Whistlejacket*, 2012

oil on canvas, 292 x 246 cm
Pori Art Museum



Silence can be powerful and sparkly, but it's quiet. I don't miss communication with others or shared moments, feelings or ideas.

I dreamed about this when I was young, now I'm perhaps closer to it than ever before. The wind, the rain, the seasons and me. Everything changes, continues and repeats. I prefer to be an observer, following events.

There's a strong wind today, almost a storm. I work on the same painting for three days outside. The wind blows the painting over.

Cardboard plates, which I use as palettes, fly up into the air with the leaves. It's grey, and grey contains powerful, warm colours at its core.

The landscape surrounds me on every side. It doesn't lie before me; I'm inside it. I haven't managed to finish the painting yet. I still have two days to paint. Then I leave for Berlin. When I get back it will be too late. The grey will have become more coherent and spots of colour will have disappeared. So I believe.

When I return from Berlin it has snowed.

I was right. In the small cottage were three paintings, and it had been buried in a snowdrift.

The Rat

The rat still hasn't touched the poison. Both traps are empty. I don't think it lives here any more.

Autumn

At the same time as my work in the garden came to an end, I also stopped painting the studio. During the summer, painting followed the same rhythm as life in the garden. Now that rhythm has been lost.

I still paint my changing everyday existence outside. I follow the landscape. It feels right and understandable. Working in the studio feels phoney and distant. The summer feeling that painting is the most fun thing I do, a power that keeps me alive, changes in a heartbeat to pain. I don't find any reason to start new works, and

if I think I have, a moment later they become meaningless.

Walking

I leave for Berlin, where I walk alone and am quiet for two weeks. I stretch a canvas onto the wall, thinking this might become the first part of a series of paintings called *Diary*. Everywhere is grey, every day it rains and it's a damp cold. I walk many times through Alt-Treptow and always stop to admire the jetty on the river. It begins and ends in the middle of the water and you have to swim or go by boat to get there. It's attached to a rusty old barge. One day the barge was attached to an angular, homemade, sky blue boat. The story of the barge makes me wonder: what is it and why is it there? Apparently it's been here a long time already. I wonder if it's afloat or is it stuck on the bottom. I don't know how deep the river is.

At home I paint a clumsy memory of my walk. I wipe the painting clean many times. I add colour and hope it will succeed, even by accident. On the eighth day the painting is ready. It's not an accident. I have once again found the joy of painting – this time not by digging the earth but by being quietly alone. *Alt-Treptow* is the first part of a series of paintings. It will speak about loneliness, being outside and quiet walking and cycling. It's quiet and calm. I don't do well inside.

The Cottage

I'm at the cottage for the second last day. Tomorrow I'll switch the heating off and take home the still-ticking clock on the wall. I leave my wet paintings at the mercy of the weather inside the cold cottage. Then I run to the forest because I want to find peace. The cottage is quietening down for the winter. I'm afraid that I won't be able to write anywhere else. Until now I've only been able to concentrate at the cottage.

Presence

Is it possible to paint something in which I wouldn't be actively present in spirit? And even if this might be possible, would there be any point? What is presence in a painting? Presence is either there or it isn't, but is it possible to even pursue it? Is the only possible starting point my own presence in the situation, which acts as a starting point for a painting?

Samu said today that in the three most recent paintings which I made outdoors there is a stronger sense of presence than in my earlier outdoor works. I've tried to understand what he meant by that. And why? And does this come from the fact that I've been alone and focused? There was nothing else to think about. I sometimes miss Africa, Berlin and Togo, not because I would want to go and visit somewhere so far away and alien, but because I had nothing else to do there but draw and paint.

The Wild Boar

I'm walking in Grunewald. I always go there when I feel oppressed by the uniformity of the city and the people around me. The forest has an autumn light. The clocks moved back last night and the days are already quite short. There isn't a cloud in the sky and the sun is shining low, dazzling me through the leaves of the trees. Long shadows paint stripes across the forest. The trees are red and yellow, the ground covered in leaves the colour of yellow ochre. There isn't any undergrowth, or it has died off. There are no blueberries, lingonberries or other evergreens like I'm used to in Finland. The trees are more spaced out here so you can see much further than in a Finnish forest, and I've always hoped that I might spot a wild boar. Their tracks are everywhere. The land is like it's been ploughed. The boars have obviously been foraging here with their tusks. Now I see a large boar making

its way across the path. It has impressive, long tusks. The old boar has definitely been disturbed by the people who have been drawn to the forest by the sunlight.

Rain and Greyness

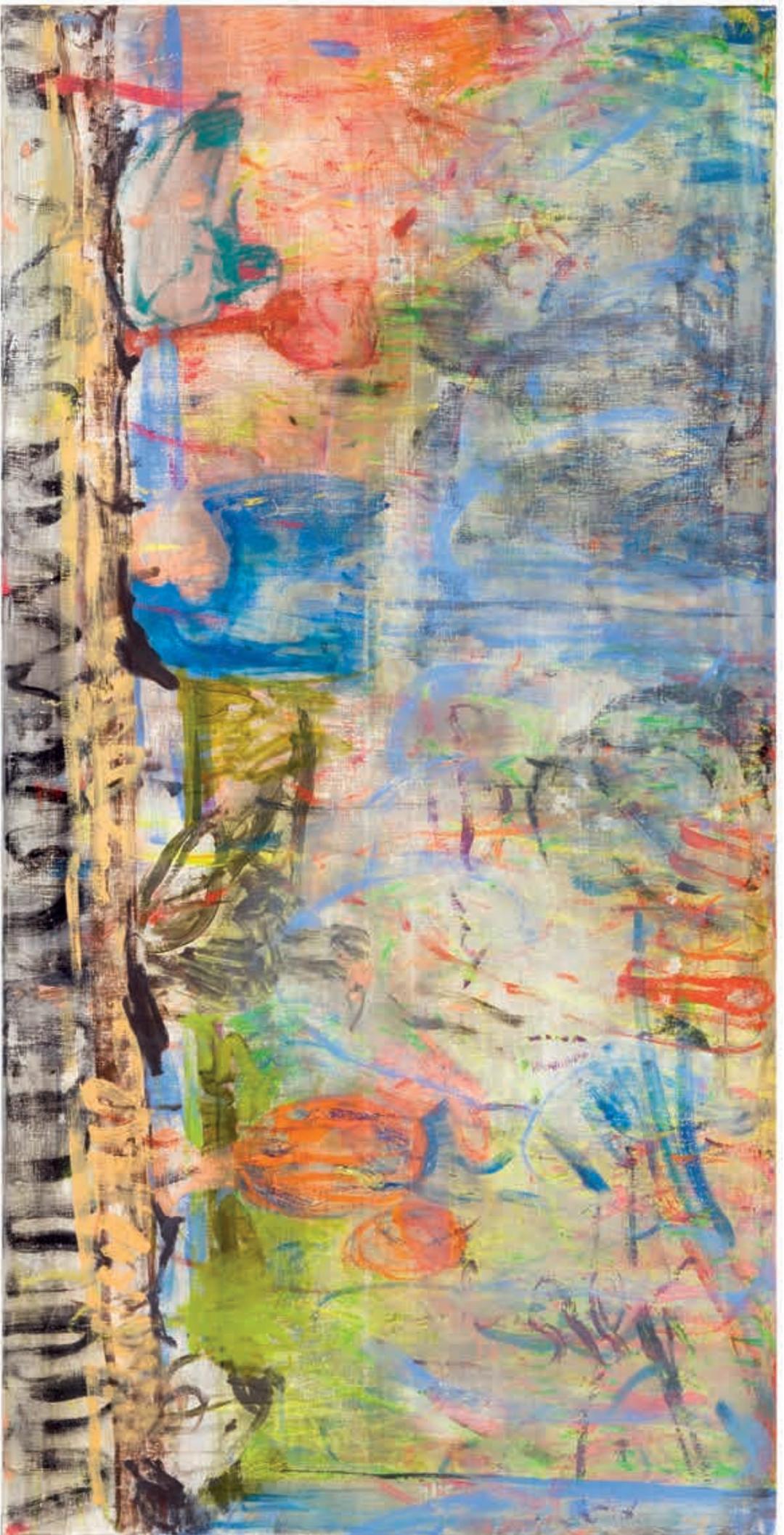
There's drizzle again. The landscape is grey, and through the window I hear the sound of cars on the wet asphalt. I have already painted greyness. My painting series *Diary* begins with greyness, about how I can hardly see. The grey air lingers between me and my object. It makes me think that there is no landscape in a painting, only the space between me and the landscape: air.

Snow

November and snow. The light has come back. I return daily to look at the freezing sea. Its unfrozen parts still reflect the colours of the sky or greyness, but the grey is different from the grey of the ice. Yesterday was the first big snowfall. I rode my bike in the forest, the wind was blowing and I felt present and alive. I rode over the piles of snow and laughed.

Wolvercote

Part of Port Meadow is covered in water and I have to walk the whole way to Wolvercote to meet the horses. They don't seem to have access to the Jericho end of the common, which would have been a lot closer to Oxford town centre. The journey lasts several kilometres, but the scenery is beautiful and the sun is shining in a blue sky. I stop to draw the horses and the Cotswold hills behind them. I walk and remember moments that I've spent here and elsewhere in the English countryside, wandering and cycling around. I yearn to go back. There's nothing here to capture my attention. I am alone and happy. I sit in a bar on the Thames and drink a beer.



Anna Reutainen: *Last Supper - Memory of Childhood Home (Birds)*, 2010
oil on canvas, 100 x 200 cm
private collection



Anna Reutilainen: *Still Life Plum*, 2003
oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm
Finnish National Gallery / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma



Anna Reutilainen: *Go Bananas*, 2008-2009
oil on canvas, 170 x 160 cm
Amos Anderson Art Museum



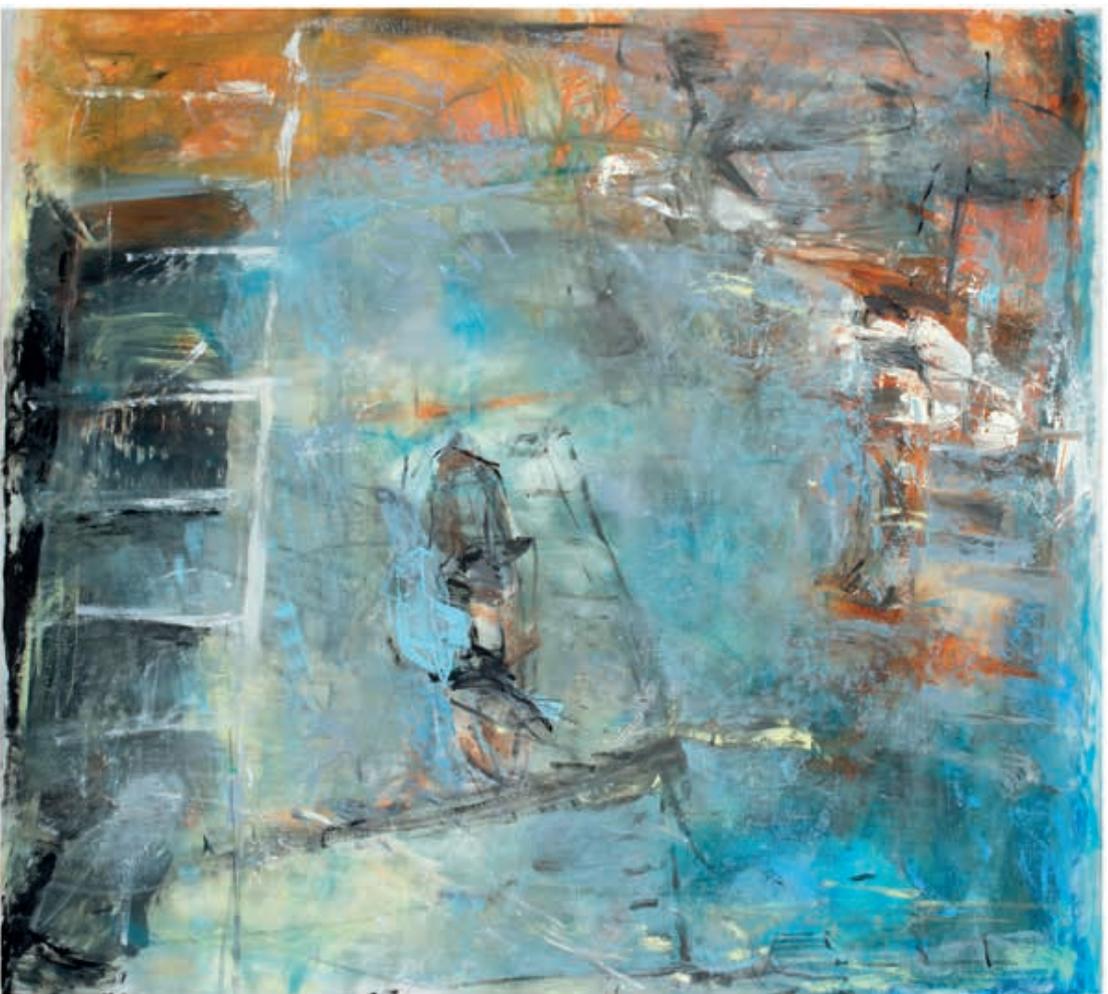
Anna Reulainen: *Studio Summer 2012*, 2012
oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm
Sara Hildén Art Museum



Anna Reulainen: *Studio Gbecon*, 2013
oil on canvas, 200 x 250 cm
Pori Art Museum



Anna Reulainen: *Diary: Wild boar in Grimewald*, 2017
oil on canvas, 200 x 180 cm



Anna Reulainen: *Diary: All-Treglow*, 2016
oil on canvas, 200 x 180 cm



Laura Kuurme

Passion for Pictures The *Pleasure* Exhibition at the Serlachius Museums

In January 2014, my employer Pauli Sivonen, Director of the Serlachius Museums, outlined a plan for an exhibition at the Helsinki Art Museum to feature works by Jukka Korkkela, Anna Rutilainen and Elna Meremies. The three artists were invited to select their personal favourites from among older paintings in the collections of the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation and then to produce their own new paintings to display alongside them. We decided to additionally stage a smaller, parallel exhibition in Mänttä featuring new works by the same three artists together with a selection of paintings from the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation's collection. The curator and creative mastermind of the HAM exhibition is Mika Hannula, who knows all three artists personally and has followed their careers closely over a period of decades. He envisioned the show as a three-artist retrospective united by a common theme: *Pleasure*.

But whose pleasure are we talking about? I dig for answers by brushing up on my co-curator Mika's earlier writings. His book *On Painting – Essays and Discussions* transports the reader into a stormy sea of concepts such as praxis, narrativity, corporeality and spatiality. Within this conceptual framework he discusses the joy of working with one's hands: "[...] When successfully executed, artistic praxis is a physical endeavour that yields something inimitable, something that is not attainable by any other means. [...] And that thing is joy. [...] By refining and articulating a self-contained system of logic, [successful artistic praxis] produces something real and true, something that ought to be called by the name it deserves: joy and pleasure. But pleasure is not the premediated outcome; rather it is the by-product of the creative process. It is anchored in the process, yet also a separate constituent in the praxis of the good life." (Hannula, 2015, p. 33–35)

What we are talking about, then, is the pleasure engendered by the act of painting – the joy that is born of focused concentration and the freedom to search and experiment. When I asked the exhibiting artists what thing

Ellen Theaslett: *The God of Spring*, 1941
oil on canvas, 89,2 x 60,7 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

gives them the greatest pleasure in the art-making process, their answer was unanimous: it is not seeing a finished painting on a gallery wall, but the process itself, the condition of being so immersed in the moment that time itself stands still and the world of the senses fades into oblivion. Painting offers many other forms of pleasure, too: the joy of small triumphs, the thrill of conquering one's fears, and the elation of answering one's true calling.

But let us return for a moment to Mikka's writings. Citing Hans-Georg Gadamer, he comments on the necessity of 'tarrying' during the viewing of an artwork, and the dynamic state of anticipation induced by this languid self-reflection and heightened moment of consciousness: "Beyond doubt, what we are speaking of is nothing other than pure, unadulterated pleasure." (Hannula 2015, p. 67) I undersign Mikka's sentiment – and I would further

add that pairing historical works with contemporary art offers the attentive spectator the pleasure of discovering connections between the past and the present and – vicariously, through images – celebrating their own place within a historical continuum. The exhibition's theme thus not only denotes the artist's pleasurable, lingering interaction with the painting, but also the gratification experienced by the viewer.

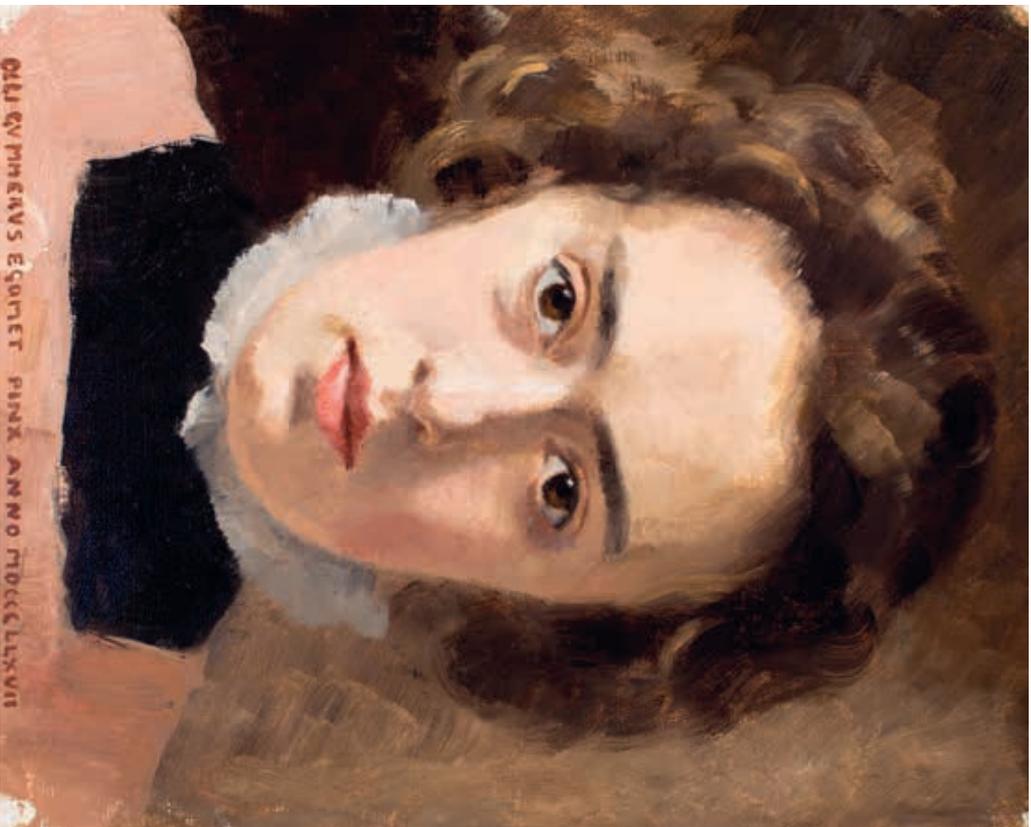
In the midst of these thematic ponderings, we set about the business of curating the show. First the artists sift through a digital catalogue of thousands of works in the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation's collection. In May 2015, the three artists, Mikka, and a team from HAM visit the Serlachius Museums in Mänttä, where the artists step into our 'inner sanctum', the art storage facilities. As our museum technician pulls up paintings for viewing, I study the artists' facial expressions, conjecturing whether their choices are purely intuitive or whether they are already planning the new works they intend to paint. All three artists appear to make their choices quickly and effortlessly.

Without a moment's hesitation, Anna confidently chooses a painting by Victor Westerholm (*Cows in the Birch Forest*, p. 149), a sketchy rendition of a cow captured in a few quick brushstrokes. The motif has personal significance for Anna, who passes cows every day on her way to work. Her other choices, too, are paintings that evoke hazy memories of old, familiar places. Although the painting might not fully correlate with the original experience in its outer manifestation, it is still the trigger that brings the memory back to life. One such work is Toshio Bando's *A Monkey* (p. 153), which Anna associates with two specific moments in her past, and Ellen Thesleff's *Three Figures in a Landscape* (p. 138) and *The God of Spring* (p. 104), both of which invoke memories of Australia. As an admirer of Thesleff's great courage as an artist, Anna plans to tread in her footsteps by experimenting with something she has never tried before: after a long career as a studio painter, she intends to make an intrepid new foray as a *plein air* painter.

I notice Jukka pausing in front of Gallen-Kallela's *Stubble Field*, a sketchy *plein air* piece depicting a hunting party led by Gösta Serlachius. The same painting also catches Anna's eye, who adds it to her list as well. The other paintings eyed by Jukka are spiritual or religious in content, and sombre in tone.



Akseeli Gallen-Kallela: *Stubble Field*, 1917
oil on canvas, 60 x 44 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Olga Ehrström: *Self Portrait*, 1897
oil on canvas, 34 x 27 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

I instantly dub him the storyteller of the group, as the paintings he selects all portray episodes that seem to connect to a larger narrative. Jukka sifts through hundreds of paintings, finally selecting Francisco de Zurbarán, Yrjö Salinen and Hngo Simberg, a threesome revealed to possess an instant kinship. Jukka, too, embraces an unmistakable element of narrativity in his oeuvre, which often addresses the theme of loss and surrender – a common subject in art history.

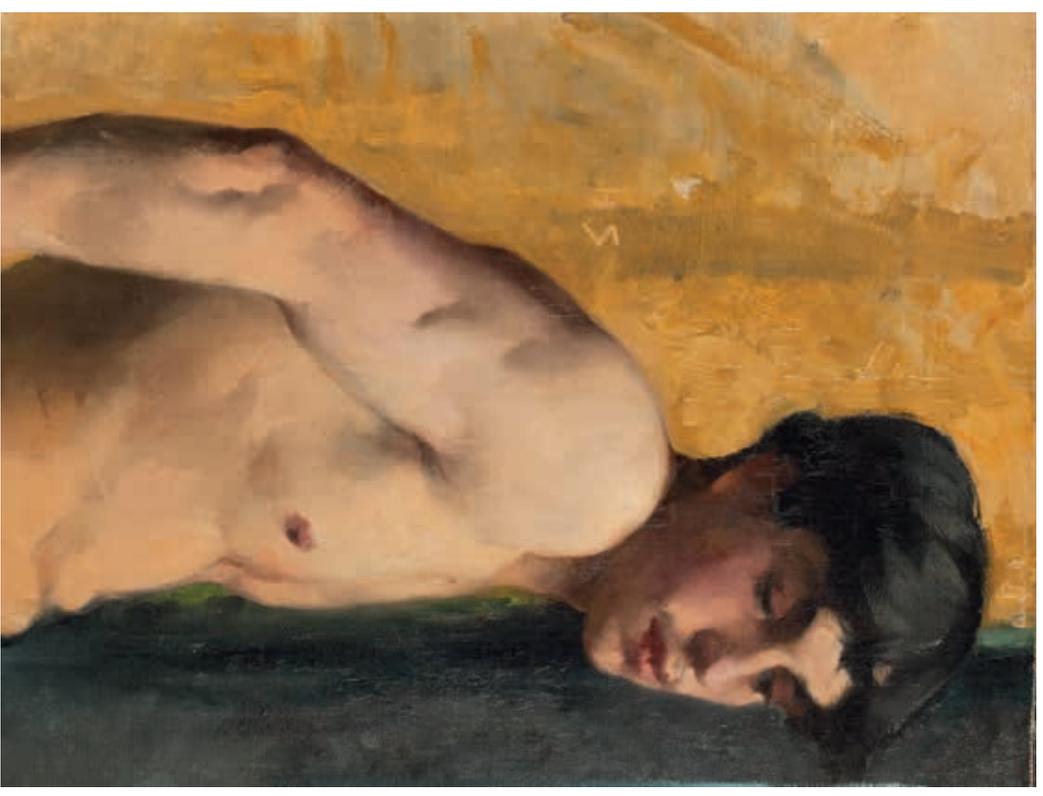
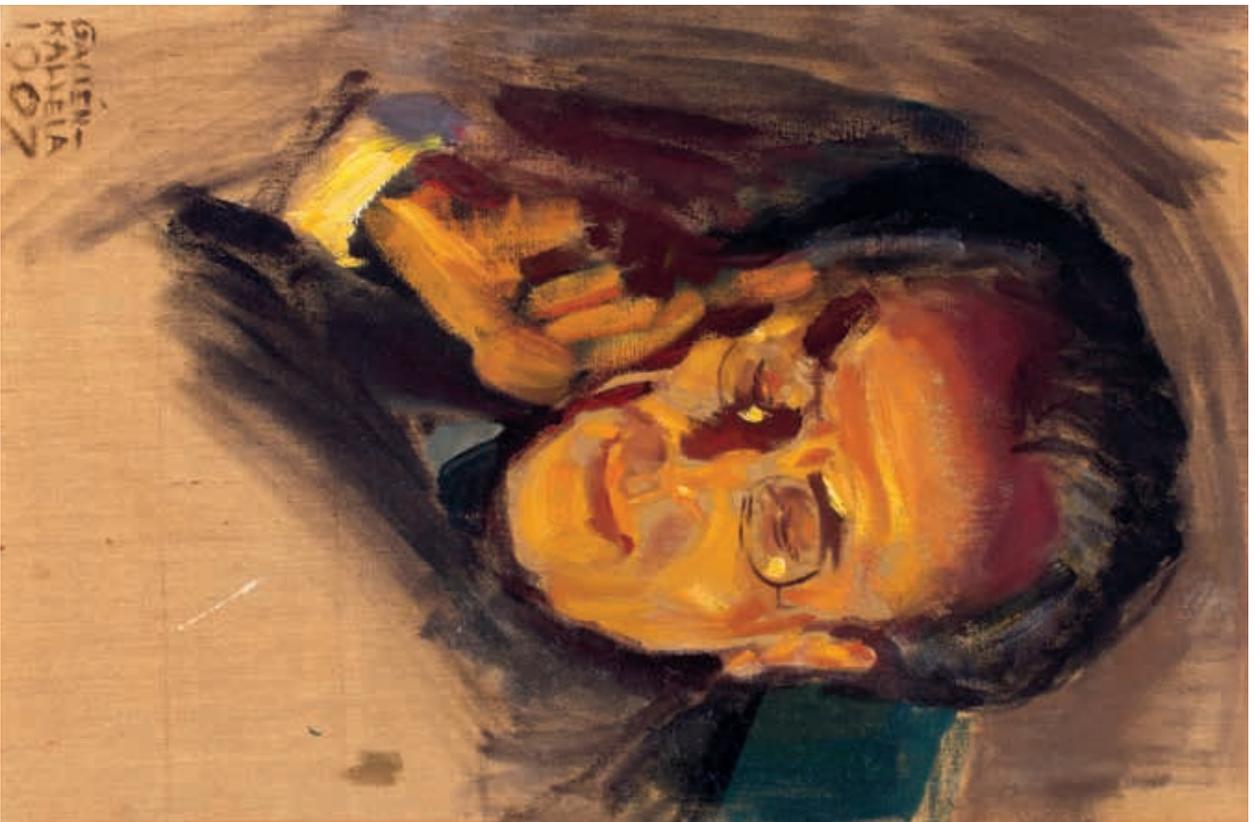
The paintings chosen by Elina vary radically in style, which comes as no surprise given as she herself is a master of many styles and techniques – a painter impossible to pigeonhole. Choosing intuitively, she selects works that speak to her both aesthetically and on the level of ideals. Among them is a religious, mystical painting, presumably authored by Jan Wellens de Cock, *The Temptation of St. Anthony and St. Paul* (p. 160), which portrays a menagerie of bizarre creatures reminiscent both of Hieronymus Bosch or many of Elina's own paintings. She also chooses turn-of-the-century Finnish artists, including Olga Ehrström's *Self Portrait* and Akseli Gallen-Kallela's sketched portrait of the architect Eihel Saarinen (p. 159). Another work she chooses from the same period is Maria Wiik's small-scale portrait of an old woman (p. 136), which Elina pairs with her own paintings of clouds personified in various human guises.

All three artists have an intimate relationship with art history: all have travelled extensively, studied old masterpieces in museums, and have developed a deep appreciation of the legacy of western art. On occasion, they consciously weave links between the past and the present, drawing inspiration from existing works as an impetus for new directions in their art. Although old art serves as the catalyst, the new painting is usually far removed from its original source.

Based on the content of prior interviews and my own conversations with the three artists, I conclude that they paint because they *must*: they paint only when outright compelled to take up the brush. The canvas is a puzzle that must be unlocked; its content cannot be decided beforehand or outside the process. They also regard art-making as a privilege: total immersion in their work fulfils a deep personal need for all three artists – albeit the process is never quite painless. "Painting was his world and his mode of existence," wrote the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty of Paul Cézanne (Merleau-Ponty, 2019, p. 113) – and he might just as well have been describing of any of our three artists. Ultimately, however, our contemplations on art-making and the pleasure of viewing art are not necessarily relevant to Anna, Elina or Jukka. The only thing of consequence is that they paint: all else is secondary.

History Rewisted – The Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation's Collections

Occasionally one comes across a work in an exhibition that exudes a profound sense of the artist's great dedication or passion. There are many such works in the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation's collection. The artist's pleasure might be evinced by the languid rhythm of the brushstrokes, or the unmistakable affection apparent in the treatment of theme. Aesthetically, certain works are simply a joy to behold, or they enchant us with their



Helene Schjerbeck: *Male Nude*, c. 1882
oil on canvas, 46.5 × 36 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *Portrait of the Composer Gustav Mahler*, 1907
oil on canvas, 57.5 × 38 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

sheer technical brilliance. Turning to content, then, pleasure and its moral consequences constitute a recurring theme in art history. In what follows, I will reflect on this thematic legacy in connection with art-making, the viewing experience, and the artistic depiction of hedonistic extravagance.

Extraordinary intensity is palpable in Akseli Gallen-Kallela's *Portrait of the Composer Gustav Mahler* (p. 110), which is painted in the throes of fiery inspiration. The Finnish painter and the Austrian composer met in Finland in 1907. Gallen-Kallela spent three hours intensely studying Mahler's intriguing facial features on a sailing trip in the archipelago one late autumn's day. When the party returned to warm themselves by the fire in Hvitträsk (home of the architect Eilén Saarinen), Gallen-Kallela put up his easel and began sketching the composer's portrait. One hour later, he presented the finished painting to his sitter. (Gustav Mahler's letter to his wife, dated November 7, 1907. In: d'Asfeld M. & R. 1979, p. 156–158.) Great tenderness is the predominant emotion evinced by Helene Schjerfbeck's *Male Nude* (p. 111): the young painter appears to have derived aesthetic pleasure from studying the youth's finely formed features.

The physical pleasure of painting and the sheer joy of celebrating exuberant colour are vividly conveyed by Ellen Thesleff's paintings. Both in the case of Thesleff's and Reutimäen's paintings, we gain a distinct sense of the artist having lingered at the canvas, refusing to let it out of her hands until it was truly good enough. The joy of painting is perhaps not as effortless and ebullient as the finished painting might suggest, however, as each ostensibly spontaneous brushstroke might well have been preceded by a hundred false starts. The joy of painting derives from the artist's extreme focus and immersion in the physical process. Painting elicits both ecstasy and frustration, even agony, and the two are sometimes inseparable.

The immaculate details painted by the old masters are a pleasure to admire, but not only for their aesthetic merits. As our eye traces the graceful arcs of the brushstrokes, admiring their painstaking skill, we find ourselves transported back in time, united with the painter, a human being similar to ourselves, who toiled with his brush centuries ago, meticulously dabbing at this very canvas or plank of wood that stands before us here and now. How many years have passed in the interim? What momentous events in history have unfolded since the moment this physical object, this painting, came into existence? Did the artist derive personal pleasure from his exquisite skill – was he happy with the result?

Pleasure is something we usually experience with our senses, and a heightened sensual experience is invoked by many works by the old masters. Our sense of touch is tickled by immaculate studies of texture such as *A Young Girl with a Prayer Book* by a 16th century Master of the Female Half-Length.

Master of the Half-Lengths (attr.):
A Young Girl with a Prayer Book. 1520–1540s
oil on panel, 40 x 30 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation





or Jan van Ravesteyn's *Portrait of a Dutch Courtier*. We can almost feel the embroidered threads and starched lace collars delighting our fingertips.

The ability to convincingly capture textures and tactile surfaces was among the requisite talents that were highly admired in 17th century Dutch art. Certain artists were able to portray fashionable lace collars with such immaculate exactitude that their paintings could even serve as lace-maker's patterns. (Lehto 1994, p. 7) Back then, four centuries ago, exquisitely executed garments and accessories were not only a show of the artist's skill, but also an emblem of the sitter's wealth and social standing. Today, contemporary artists might display equal technical skill and even choose traditional painting techniques, but with no other motive than to express a personal creative vision – as in the case of Elina Meremies.

Since the dawn of art history, the portrayal of hedonistic indulgence has always carried a moralistic message preaching the virtue of moderation. The still life genre witnessed a surge in popularity in 17th century Netherlands thanks to enthusiastic art patronage among the growing ranks of the wealthy middle class. As Dutch trade flourished, imported goods and exotic novelties figured as recurrent motifs in many still life compositions. Amid growing affluence, morality and the good life emerged as a focal theme in Dutch culture (Tuominen 2016, p. 11–19). Many 17th and 18th century still life paintings thus address the theme of vanity and the transience of all living things: life is short, even the finest wine will eventually spoil, all luscious fruit must perish, and every bloom must inevitably wilt.

Still life compositions brimming with over-ripe fruit evoke the pleasures of the palate, yet also remind us of the fleeting ephemerality of all living things and the inevitable day that we must relinquish earthly pleasure. A good example is Michelangelo di Campidoglio's *Still Life with Fruits and Venetian Glass* (p. 129), which simply oozes juicy indulgence. Another work vividly evoking the senses is *A Man, a Wine Bottle and a Tambourine* (p. 116) by Jusepe de Ribera, which depicts a gent holding a *fiasco* – a wine bottle in a traditional straw basket – in one hand and a tambourine in the other, in what art history recognizes as a classic allegory of taste and hearing. (See e.g. Ferrino-Pagden 1996) The brightly lit face is thrown into relief by the sharply contrasted dark background, the black eyes so deep in their sockets that we cannot tell whether they return our gaze. The somewhat bloated face and ruddy nose suggest that the reveler has failed to exercise the virtue of moderation and has dulled his senses through wanton excess.

The Greengrocer (p. 117) by Pieter Aertsen at first glance appears to depict an innocent market scene, but closer inspection reveals numerous allusions to the temptations of the flesh, evidently intended to awaken our moral sensibilities. The pumpkin was widely recognized as a symbol of adultery,

Jan van Ravesteyn: *Portrait of a Dutch Courtier*, 17th century
oil on canvas, 56 x 45 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Josepe de Ribera: *A Man, a Wine Bottle and a Tambourine*, 1631
oil on canvas, 52,5 x 75 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

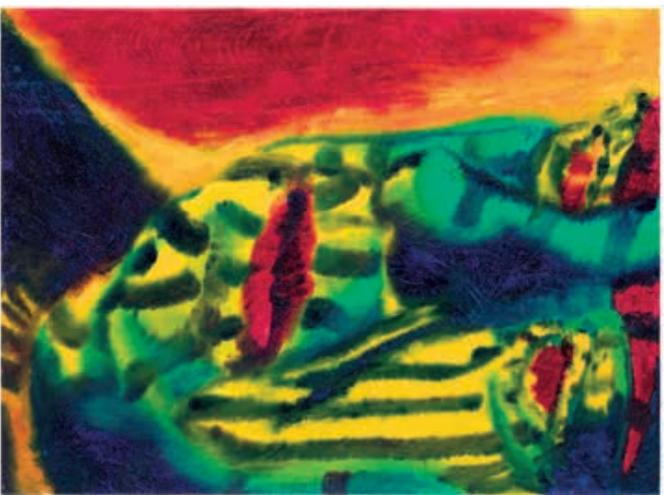
Pieter Aertsen: *The Greengrocer*, 16th century
oil on panel, 114 x 90 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation





David Teniers (The Younger): *The Temptress*, 1637
oil on panel, 44 × 38,5 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *The Temptress*, 1890
oil on canvas, 51,5 × 42 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Jukka Korteila: *Regnum Lachrimarum* (The Realm of Tears), 2016
oil on canvas, 40 × 30 cm & 40 × 30 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

and the presence of birds is a reference to pandering (Tuominen 2016, p. 53–54). In Dutch and German, the verb *vogelen* (derived from *vogel* or 'bird') is a reference to copulation. With one hand the vendor grabs the fowl by the beak, as though attempting to silence it. With the other hand he lifts the lid of the basket, exposing the hen and rooster nestling side by side. A woman leans in towards the man, generously displaying her cleavage, while the man meets our gaze with a remorseful expression on his face, as if lamenting his treachery. As a foil to the scene in the foreground, the figures next to the church in the background – a man, a woman milking a cow and a dog, symbolizing loyalty – are represented as the paragon of the good life.

The Temptress by Akseli Gallen-Kallela (p. 118) is a similarly moralistic caveat against the temptations of the flesh. Painted centuries after Aertsen, it conveys its message far more overtly: the nude seductress proffers a goblet of wine and an apple, like Eve in the Garden of Paradise, brazenly coaxing us to succumb to indulgence. The misshapen face – conceivably hinting at physical abuse – is contrasted with the lithe, youthful physique, as if to underline that no good will come of yielding to temptation. The art historian Anna Korreainen has furthermore discussed this painting in relation to the temptations of colour, which Gallen-Kallela's contemporaries likened to the seductive powers of feminine wiles. Would-be artists who studied painting in Paris in the late 19th century were warned against yielding to the temptation of colour at the expense of rational, objective *disegno*. The artist Charles Gleyre was among the teachers who cautioned students not to succumb to the lure of colour too soon before artistic maturation, for it was unseemly for an artist to be swept up in the pursuit of pure hedonistic indulgence. As Charles Blanc sternly warns in his *Grammaire des arts du dessin*, "[...] design must maintain its preponderance over colour. Otherwise painting speeds to its ruin: it will fall through colour just as mankind fell through Eve." (Kortelainen 1998, p. 51–57)

The genre that most directly deals with the theme of transience is the *vantitas*, which depicts symbols alluding to the end of life. The *vantitas* exposes the fleeting nature not only of sensual pleasure, but also the transience of secular learning, as denoted by the symbolic items – an hourglass and a human skull – laid out on the table in David Teniers the Younger's *The Philosopher* (p. 119). Symbols of learning such as books, musical instruments and maps – as exemplified by the philosopher's globe in Teniers' painting – caution the viewer against the vice of overweening pride in learnedness. (Fuchs 1978, 115) The theme of loss and surrender similarly runs through many of Jukka Korteila's recent works; indeed *Regnum Lachrimarum* (The Realm of Tears) can be interpreted as a contemporary take on the *vantitas*.

The Storyteller's Choice: Surrendering Pleasure – Jukka Korteila

Jukka has recently given much thought to the hedonistic, materialistic tendencies of contemporary culture. These days we permit ourselves to voraciously seek pleasure in every way imaginable. But once pleasure is attained,



after Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato: *Virgin and Child*, 17th century
oil on panel, 40 x 54 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Francisco de Zurbarán: *St John of the Cross (Juan de la Cruz)*, c. 1650
oil on canvas, 132 x 95 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



it must eventually be relinquished – usually at the point where we no longer have a choice. Could we perhaps master the virtue of moderation and forgo pleasure as a conscious, voluntary decision?

Regnum Lactimarum is a diptych of two identically sized canvases positioned closely together. The rich, full-bodied colours of the first canvas are reiterated as a pale, brittle echo in the second canvas. The cheek, too, is no longer round and full, but saggy and sunken. Something has been lost in the intervening space between the two canvases. The theme of loss also hangs heavily in the paintings by old masters chosen by Jukka for the *Pleasure* exhibition, such as the small-scale, vertically accented *The Entrance to Zion* by Hugo Simberg and *The Convent Brothers' Farewell* by Yrjö Sallinen. Religious narratives such as the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary deal with the theme of redemption, but in human terms, their story is a tale of grim loss: Christ meets an untimely, violent death, while Mary faces the cruel fate of witnessing the death of her child.

Jukka and I exchange emails in which we discuss his work and the theme of surrender – how we must all, sooner or later, give up everything that we have. Jukka writes: “Surrender goes on in parallel with all the other internal processes that we go through in life. It’s not something that happens separately, but in relation to everything else we go through.”

Every pleasure in which we indulge – and every pleasure we must forgo – unfolds as a separate frame in a reel of film that we keep spooling forwards and backwards. We cannot see the big picture or grasp the significance of each individual frame until we reach the end of the reel; only then are the meaningful chapters of the narrative revealed to us.

Some of the works chosen by Jukka from the Setlachius Fine Arts Foundation’s collections portray grand narratives with a capital G. Two featured in Mänttä revisit some of the most frequently reiterated motifs in art history: *Virgin and Child* (after Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato, p. 122) and a classic hagiographic motif, *St. John of the Cross* (Francisco de Zurbarán, p. 123).

Aesthetically speaking, Jukka’s art is a far cry from 17th century Spanish and Italian masters: he is an urban painter with a forceful style and a striking palette. He has no interest in recapturing the spirit of canonical works by emulating traditional painting techniques. Indeed at first glimpse, his paintings appear to have nothing whatsoever in common with the old masters. A closer look nevertheless reveals a definite kinship between Jukka’s personal philosophy and the religious art of past centuries, and also with the still life tradition, just like 17th century still life painters. He ponders the challenge of striking a balance between pleasure and moderation. A fondness for narrativity, too, is a visible element that Jukka has in common with old religious painters.

Rogier van der Weyden, atelier: *The Descent from the Cross*,
contemporary replica, 15th century
oil on panel, 83 x 58,5 cm
Gösta Setlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Jukka Kortela: *Man and a Ball of Light*, 2016
oil on canvas, 33 x 33 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

The narrative of early Christian art was veiled in symbolism, as the Christians were a persecuted group who communicated in an esoteric language that only initiates could understand. In later art, too – both religious and secular – we find recurring esoteric symbols that reveal their meaning only to those with the requisite background knowledge. A good example is *The Deposition from the Cross* painted in the studio of Rogier van der Weyden in the 15th century (p. 124). Although the tightly cropped composition reveals only a small portion of the ladder and the crucifix is partly obscured and virtually abstract, anyone raised in a Western culture will instantly recognize this scene as portraying Christ being taken down from the cross after his crucifixion. Contemporary audiences familiar with the Bible or art history will even be able to identify the characters in the scene: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Fifteenth century audiences were most likely able to ‘read’ religious art even better than we are today, as they were well-versed in the established pictorial conventions of interpreting biblical narrative. (See e.g. Fuchs 1978, p. 9)

The Deposition from the Cross is highly concentrated in its narrative structure, like a potted summary of the story’s key highlights. This painting attributed to the studio of Van der Weyden does not depict a recognizable location, nor does it bother with capturing a convincing illusion of depth. The ornamental patterning behind the figures in fact accentuates the scene’s two-dimensionality, tightly focusing our attention on the lifeless body of Christ and the deep, stoic grief etched on the faces of the figures carrying him. The same can be said of Jukka’s paintings, too: he eliminates all extraneous elements and focuses purely on capturing naked emotion.

As opposed to traditional religious painters, contemporary painters are no longer compelled to illustrate a pre-existing narrative, but are instead free to create their own new reality. Jukka enters a dialogue with the religious paintings he selected for the *Pleasure* exhibition, but what he offers us is quite the antithesis of a grand narrative: he shares micro-narratives from the viewpoint of the unassuming everyman. His diptychs *Regnum Lacrimarum* and *The Nose Knows* are like fragments extracted from a larger narrative that is concealed from us. Contemporary viewers can employ their cinematic literacy in reading the meaning of Jukka’s identically sized canvases, which resemble film negatives. Our imagination is instantly triggered to decipher what has been omitted from the scene: what happened before and after and – more pertinently still – what happened *in between* the two frames that was never captured on film? Jukka’s paintings do not sum up events or narrative turning points, but instead they awaken questions: what happened and why?

The mask-like faces in Jukka’s paintings are also linked to religion through the carnival tradition popular in Catholic regions of Europe. Jukka professes sympathy for the figure of the tragic clown: “I know why the clown cries, and there’s nothing remotely funny about it. Laughter is a human defence mechanism – a reaction provoked by fear.”

Although Jukka’s paintings are narrative, they do not illustrate any particular story. As noted by Mika Hannula: “When a painting creates its own reality,



Blas de Ledesma: *Fruits and Vegetables*, c. 1623/1624
oil on canvas, 97.5 x 136 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Michelangelo di Campidoglio: *Still Life with Fruits and Venetian Glass*, 17th century
oil on canvas, 74.5 x 59 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

it does not copy or replicate.” It “connects the past with the present. It makes history part of the living present.” (Hannula 2015, p. 59) Borrowing from Paul Ricoeur, Mika theorizes that narrative is a coping mechanism helping us to make sense of everyday life. Also painting – as part of our everyday reality – is articulated and comprehended through the lens of narrative. (Hannula 2015, p. 62) To reformulate this notion in simple, everyday terms, when we interpret the things that happen around us, we tell ourselves a story about ourselves, and it is through such stories that we process everything we experience. It is easier to understand our own and other people’s choices by connecting them with a pre-existing cause-and-effect continuum.

The ‘feel’ of a painting is often difficult to capture in words. Such is the inherent nature of visual narrative: it eludes verbalization. One way of unlocking the slippery meaning of a contemporary painting is to engage it in a dialogue with older art – though adding the disclaimer that Jukka’s new paintings are not a conscious, direct reference to the older art he selected for the exhibition. One of the paintings from the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation’s collection that instantly caught his eye was Zurbarán’s *St John of the Cross* (p. 123), which depicts the 16th century Spanish mystic – later canonized as a Roman Catholic saint – who wrote verses describing the journey of the soul through a dark night of hardship, struggling to be reunited with the light of the Creator. Zurbarán portrays the saint against a sombre background holding a skull and a crucifix. The mystic’s face is upturned toward the light, bearing an expression that might variably be interpreted either as bewilderment or yearning. Bewilderment is also written across the face of the male figure in *Man and a Ball of Light* (p. 126), who gazes agog at the celestial spectacle materializing from the dark background, black as the soul’s dark journey toward the light. The viewpoint is everyman’s, but the narrative is grand and eternal: it is a micro-representation of universal emotions and experiences.

‘The Kin of Angels’ – Birds by Elina Meremies

Elina Meremies has a special relationship with winged creatures. Since the beginning of her career, she has shown a particular fondness for painting birds, bees and flies. This special connection originated in her childhood, when her grandmother made a practice of nursing injured birds. The artist-to-be attentively observed these wild creatures as they timidly crept among the furniture. Birds are also symbolically related to the Orthodox faith, which plays an important role in the artist’s life. Elina describes how the Lintula Holy Trinity Convent holds a special celebration in the woods every summer, where the birds sing in chorus with the congregation – singing is a shared pleasure for both people and birds.

Winged creatures also feature in the paintings chosen by Elina for the *Pleasure* exhibition. An owl forms the central motif in *Fruits and Vegetables* (p. 128) by the Spanish painter Blas de Ledesma, while an entire menagerie of strange beasts – some levitating off the ground – appears in *The Temptation of*

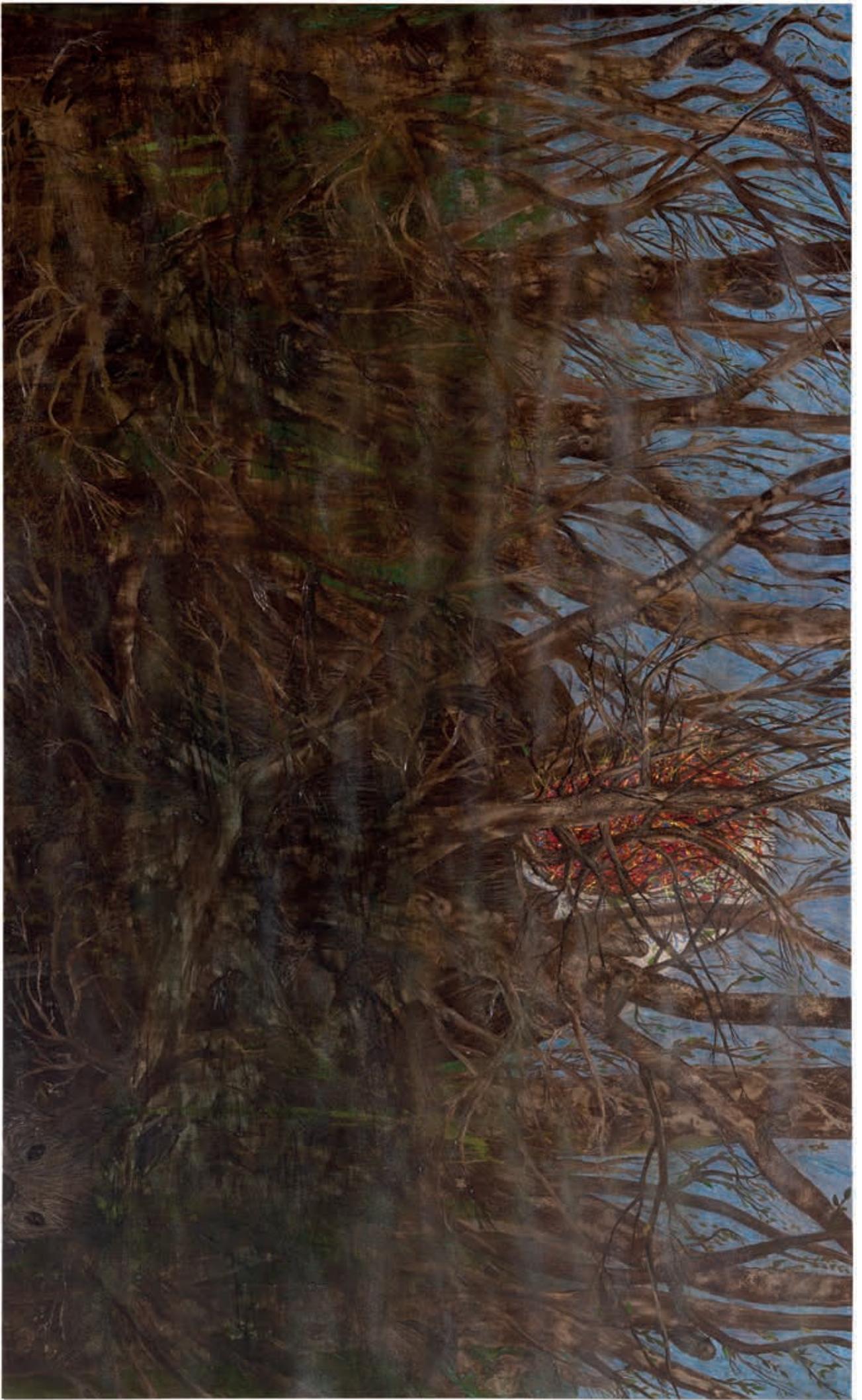
St. Anthony and St. Paul, a painting presumed to be by Jan Wellens de Cock. The imaginative creatures could easily be from Hieronymus Bosch, or even from one of Elina’s own paintings. Another of Elina’s picks is *Still Life with Fruits and Venetian Glass* (p. 129) by Michelangelo di Campidoglio, which portrays a sumptuous platter of food visited by a delicate butterfly, framed against a sombre background. In 17th century still life paintings, the butterfly commonly symbolizes a life unfettered by worldly desires (Fuchs 1978, p. 111) and the eternal cycle of life (Tuominen 2016, p. 67).

Ledesma’s still life composition has an unsettling atmosphere. A barn owl is perched on the vegetable basket, its eyes fixed and vigilant. In its talons, it clutches its prey, a dead bird, perhaps a song thrush or fieldfare. Every detail of the gorgeous harvest feast is rendered with meticulous precision, crisply defined against the dark background – though ‘delicious’ hardly describes the appearance of the food in the pallid, ashen light. The painting exudes an air of menace to contemporary viewers unfamiliar with its symbolic connotations.

The owl is a creature with many symbolic meanings. In Europe it traditionally represents Athena, the virgin goddess of wisdom, and is hence associated with knowledge, perspicacity and erudition. In old Dutch art, the owl also symbolizes insanity. As a bird of the night and a watchful hunter, the owl is also believed to be a messenger from the underworld and a harbinger of death and illness. The timid, nocturnal predator has various negative associations in vernacular mythology: many cultures shun the owl as the embodiment of evil spirits, calling it by grim epithets such as ‘bird of doom’ and ‘angel of death’ (See e.g. Cavalli-Björkman 1986, p. 22; Liedtke 2007, p. 299; Biedermann 1993, p. 297.) It appears significant, then, that Ledesma has consciously positioned the owl in the middle of the composition. Is the painting an ill omen of sickness and death, or is it a variation on the *wantias* theme?

Elina sees a direct kinship existing between her paintings and this 17th century still life: “It could have been painted by a cousin of mine!” she quips with a laugh. Wit and weightiness alternate in a perpetual dance in Elina’s speech and art. Like Ledesma’s still life, she portrays the world realistically, yet in such a way as to transform the figurative elements into a representation of the artist’s inner reality. The familiar is tinged with a sense of the uncanny. Many of Elina’s paintings capture the same oppressive sense of menace as Ledesma’s still life, that same concentrated inking of terror. The ominous mood is often heightened by a fastidiously woven web that clings to the surface of her paintings, forming an impenetrable barrier between the viewer and the crowded illusory space behind it. Together they create a claustrophobic atmosphere by bringing the foreground uncomfortably close to the viewer.

Next spread
Elina Meremies: *Evening Prayer*, 2015
tempera and oil on canvas, 109 x 180 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

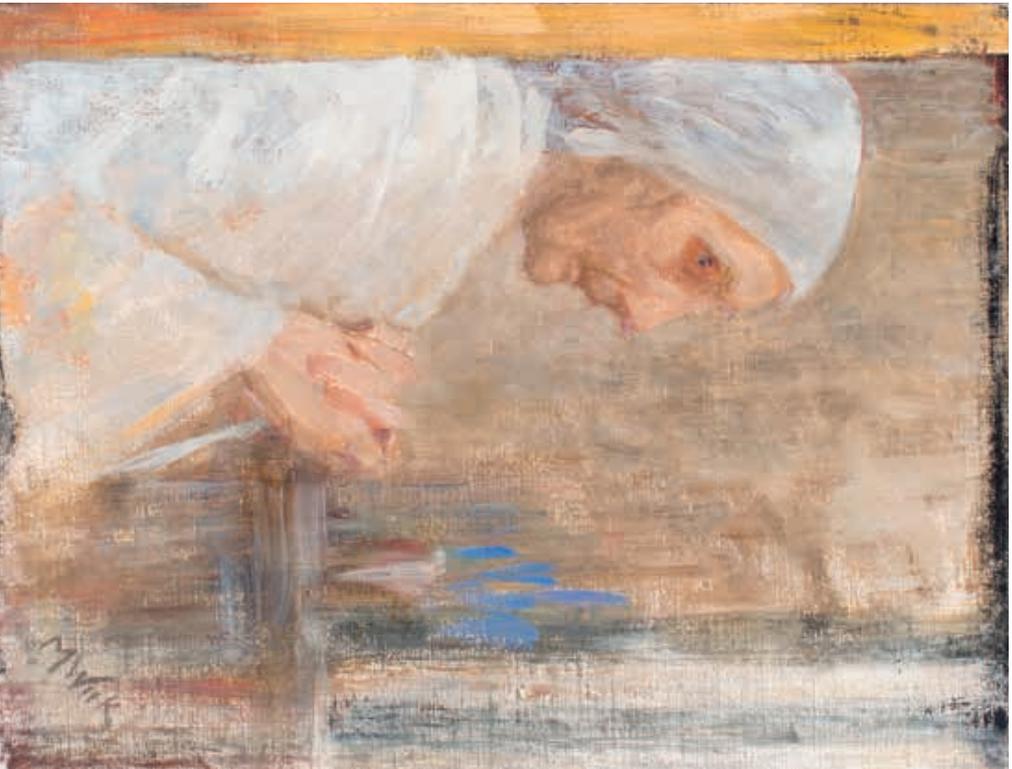




Elina Meremies: *Closer*, 1995–2016
tempera and oil on canvas, 46 × 38 cm
private collection



Elina Meremies: *Baby Cloud*, 2016
tempera and oil on canvas, 57 × 45 cm
private collection



Maria Wik: *An Old Woman in White*, c. 1899
oil on canvas, glued on cardboard, 27 x 21 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

An illustrative example is *Evening Prayer* (p. 132–133), in which a thicker of tangled branches in the foreground partly obscures a disquieting human figure peering from behind it. The figure looms surprisingly near, as if dabbling to escape the clutches of the thicker. The only splash of colour in the painting is the bejewelled cluster in place of the figure's face. This colourful apparition in a headscarf conjures associations with early spring and Easter; as if nature were expectantly waiting for the first green buds to appear. It takes a moment before we notice the flock of birds that has descended on the branches and the herd of sheep grazing in the background. Solitary, forest-dwelling figures appear recurrently in Eilina's iconography, often symbolizing a prophet or crier in the desert whose mission is to warn and comfort others. The figure made its debut while Eilina was living in a polluted rural village outside Prague, and it has kept reappearing in her oeuvre ever since.

Evening Prayer was partly also inspired by a private experience. It was spring and Eilina was going through a challenging time in her life. She sat by the window early one morning, trying to recover from the grief she was experiencing. All at once she noticed some birds sitting in a tree, three species in all. Eilina went to fetch some coffee and when she returned to her seat, she noticed that there were now five species of birds sitting in the tree. After a while, two more species joined them. The sudden appearance of so many different birds all in the same tree was a source of amazement, delight and reassurance for the artist. The wood pigeons – her favourite bird – and the large flock of smaller feathered creatures were like a gentle message from nature, assuring Eilina that she was not alone and that everything would turn out for the best.

Recently Eilina has been working on a series of paintings depicting clouds in the sky, another motif springing from her fascination with winged creatures. These cloud paintings – which hover somewhere between reality and fairy-tale – seem dispassionately detached, as if transcending the cares of everyday life. The faces hidden among the clouds take us back to our childhood, to lazy summer days spent lying in the grass and spotting shapes in the clouds as they roll by. Clouds and sky are recurring motifs in art history. Clouds first emerged as a thematic motif in their own right in 17th century Dutch landscape paintings, in which the sky filled two-thirds of the canvas, dwarfing the flat landscape framing the bottom of the composition.

In Christian art, clouds occupy a realm between two worlds: they are presented in realistic, earthly form, yet they also serve as symbols of the kingdom of heaven. Angels appearing among clouds invariably play an important role in Christian art, whether as witnesses, guardians, helpers or bearers of tidings. The ceiling frescos of Baroque churches create the illusion of clouds carrying the portrayed figures into the domain of the Heavenly Host.

¹ At Easter time, Finnish children traditionally go 'trick or treating' dressed as Easter witches in colourful headscarves.



Ellen Thesleff: *Three Figures in a Landscape*, late 1930s
oil on canvas, 80.5 x 90 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

Eliina's paintings likewise occupy a domain between the visible and the supernatural worlds. If we situate her art within a broader historical continuum of religious painting, we are impelled to ask: do we, the viewers, stand in for the biblical figures that normally appear in religious paintings? If so, what are the faces hidden among the clouds trying to tell us? Eliina herself says that her clouds carry vestiges of human joys and sorrows, suffering and yearning, while they also carry traces of something heavenly or divine.

Of the three artists in the *Pleasures* exhibition, Eliina's style and technique owes the clearest debt to her historical precursors, but the content is very much the unique fruit of her imagination. Early in her career, she painted quick, expressive compositions, but after switching to oil and tempera, her technique grew slower and more meticulous. In her drawings, she favours ink and ink wash. Her wide artistic range is mirrored by the works she has chosen from the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation's collection, which include 16th and 17th century paintings as well as Finnish art from the 19th and 20th centuries. Throughout the project, she has kept her mind open to new, unexpected pairings.

One such pairing is a small-scale profile of an old woman who appears to be praying painted by Maria Wilk (p. 136), which Eliina has chosen to display together with paintings of clouds and sky. Religion and meaningful encounters with the animal kingdom – even when of an ineffable nature – have always held deep significance for Eliina. She will never forget her many special encounters with birds, just as she will always cherish a text by Saint Porphyrios of Katsokalivra, the blind Elder who describes little birds as 'angels of God', for they sing the Creator's praises alone in the wilderness where no one but God can hear them.

United in Courage – Anna Retiainen and Ellen Thesleff

I arrive at Anna's studio in August 2016 to find an enviable number of paintings propped against the walls – paintings large and small, brimming with vitality, obviously painted by an artist with a powerful physical presence. The floor is strewn with everything an artist might conceivably need: plastic, disposable plates and cups, paints and brushes.

The pairing of Anna and Ellen Thesleff seems almost self-evident: the two artists resemble each other in many respects, not least in their vigorous brushwork. My initial assumption is that Anna will pay homage to Thesleff with large, stunning paintings rendered in forceful brushstrokes evincing a palpable sense of physical presence – classic 'Retiainen', in other words. In the studio I instantly spot a work that answers this description: it is an eye-catching, monumental, horizontal piece with splashes of blue and pink jumping off a pale yellow background in shades highly reminiscent of Thesleff. We pause to observe the painting bathed in oblique sunlight and we together agree to exchange it from the exhibition. Anna has no desire to loudly clamour for attention alongside a painter she so greatly admires – instead, she wishes to pay tribute to her sister in spirit in a less obvious way.

The smallish landscapes leaning against the walls of her studio have all been painted in her allotment garden. Anna has spent the past months working outdoors like a traditional *plein air* painter, observing the ephemeral qualities of the moment and recording her observations on canvas, never retouching the work after returning to the studio. This marks a bold departure for a painter who normally paints in the studio, working from memory, guided only by the dictates of the composition, removing a detail here, adding another there. The courage to enter new territory was precisely the quality that inspired Anna to select Thesleff as her pair for the *Pleasure* exhibition: for Anna, pleasure is about conquering fear – the joy gained from overcoming something that initially seemed insurmountable.

Although there is no obvious external parallel between these two painters of different historical eras, a closer look at their careers and personal choices reveals Anna and Ellen to be kindred spirits. Ellen has been described as a self-critical, strong-willed woman who chose her own path in life. The many colourful stages of her career attest to a bold, uncompromising artistic temperament, starting with her decision to quit art school because she found the teaching methods old-fashioned. She was among the first Finnish painters to discover the symbolist movement in Paris in the 1890s, but she appears to have been indifferent to its literary content. (Siniisalo 1998, p. 9–11) She eventually abandoned her early sombre-toned colourist style in favour of a bright, exuberant palette in the early 1900s, yet she split with the Septem Group of colourist painters immediately after their first exhibition in 1912. (Ahtola-Moorehouse 1998, p. 77) Based on my personal observations, Anna's personality shows a similarly uncompromising maverick streak. Both are cosmopolitan artists with a keen knowledge of art history, and both borrow elements from art's existing legacy, while nevertheless retaining their own distinctive voice.

Humans and nature are fused in organic union in the imaginative landscapes of Thesleff's later career. (Tihinen 1998, p. 48) The figures in *The God of Spring* (p. 104) and *Three Figures in a Landscape* virtually melt into the natural surroundings. The three graces – vaguely reminiscent of Botticelli – are swept up in a swirl of movement along with the landscape around them. There are no human figures in Retulainen's *plein air* paintings, and yet humanity – in the person of the artist herself – has a palpable, in-the-moment presence in her work. The artist's sensory impressions and perceptions are vividly present, whether captured in the intense damp of a rainy day or in the rich, burning hues of a hot August afternoon. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ideas and creativity are born of direct, spontaneous engagement with the world. He theorizes that we make no distinction between ourselves and other objects, because the visible world and our perceptions of it are inseparably intertwined. Merleau-Ponty's theory blurs the boundaries between the subject and the object, the senses and the intellect. (Hautamäki 1993, 34)

Given as Anna is such a powerfully corporeal person, it seems pertinent to reflect on her *plein air* paintings in the light of Merleau-Ponty's theoretical



Anna Retulainen: *Plein air: The Last Day before the Frost*, 2016
oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm



Anna Retulainen: *Plein Air: Shimmering Summer's Day*, 2016
oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm



Anna Retulainen: *Plein Air: After the Rain*, 2016
oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm



Anna Reulainen: *Plein Air: In August*, 2016
oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm



Anna Reulainen: *Plein Air: Bitter Winter's Day*, 2017
oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm

emphasis on corporeality. Her *plein air* paintings do not depict a distant horizon viewed from afar, but an outdoor space with which she physically interacts. The artist is literally part of the landscape she observes: she is inseparable from the garden in which she spends hours occupied in physical labour. She knows her small patch of land inside-out; it is literally connected to her body. The garden is also the subject of her large studio paintings, in which she records her day's labours: "[...] Quality, light, colour and depth [...] are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them," writes Merleau-Ponty. A similar idea is expressed by Cézanne's remark "nature is on the inside" (Merleau-Ponty, p. 424)

Thesleff's works from the 1930s and 1940s exude a similar sense of physicality in their vigorous brushwork. When we stand before a painting by Anna or Ellen, we can easily imagine the artist's determination and exuberant creativity. Ellen is said to have come and gone as she pleased; when exasperated, she was liable to rip her canvases to shreds. (Pettersson 1997, 56) Anna has in turn revealed that many of her paintings are born during fits of aggression.

Both artists convey a spirit of uncompromising will, yet also great sensitivity and subtlety. Colour plays a vital role for both artists. Anna is furthermore a synaesthete: she sees words and hears music as colours. If she hears a musical arrangement that is the 'wrong' hue, it spoils the whole concert. Similarly, if a painting is too 'noisy', it must be removed from the studio before she can settle down to start a new canvas.

Ellen's home base in Finland was Casa Bianca, her family's villa in the rural landscapes of Muurle, where she enjoyed taking long walks and rowing with her sister. (Pettersson 1997, p. 61) For Anna, too, walking is an important part of her artistic practice. Her home base in Finland is her allotment garden in Helsinki. Walking, cycling and gardening are just as crucial a part of her process as painting. Her paintings are visual journals revisiting her past, yet they are less about specific events than moods of the moment, such as the feeling of being lost on the streets of Berlin or a chance encounter with a wild boar in forests tinged with gold in the autumn light. These remembered experiences also awaken recollections in the viewer's mind, giving our memories a tangible, visible anchor. The viewer's private experiences thus stand in as the new content of the painting and, ideally, the moment of viewing the painting becomes a meaningful new memory in the viewer's life.

Ellen led a reclusive existence in Muurle, preferring to keep her own company. She avoided the local community and left all social contacts to her sister, with whom she lived until her death. (Pettersson 1997, p. 61) In my conversations with Anna, she repeatedly expresses a similar intense desire for solitude. She has little need for socializing and would prefer to avoid the social obligations that come with being an artist. Spending ten days alone in Berlin, doing nothing but painting in solitude in her apartment, is an empowering rather than a lonely experience for her. Interestingly, both Ellen and Anna rejected the traditional role of wife and mother.

A desire to broaden their geographical horizons is another feature uniting the two artists. Ellen lived in Paris and Florence; Italy was her second home. Anna has travelled extensively and lived in many places abroad, including Australia, Rome and Paris. Her second home is Berlin. Both artists' oeuvre bears the stamp of their cosmopolitan mindset. Some of Ellen's landscapes could just as well be of Italy as of Finland, for her intention was not to faithfully record her impressions of the scenery, but to create a wholly new reality. Correspondingly, Anna's work is always pure Anna, regardless of whether she derives her subject matter from her allotment garden in Helsinki, Paris or Berlin. Ellen and Anna do not paint content or landscapes; what they paint, in a word, is paintings.

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Anna Retulainen: *Commute*, 2016
oil on canvas, 260 x 200 cm

Sanna Tuulikangas

Three Encounters

I met with three artists and studied their work, looking back at their past and hunting for clues of new directions in which they might be headed. Afterwards, I reflected on what these three artists have in common. All three are roughly the same age, all three are friends, and all are Finnish. All three are painters. All most definitely have a sense of humour – albeit of a complex variety – and all, in their respective ways, are champions of otherness. Their commonalities are in fact numerous, but the differences between them must be experienced firsthand through their art.

Encounter 1: Anna Retulainen in her Herrtoniemi Studio

There was a brief snowy spell in Helsinki around mid-November 2016. I trudged through the slush to Anna Retulainen's studio in the east Helsinki suburb of Herrtoniemi. Anna arrived by bike, as she does every workday. Sometimes she spends hours pedalling through thick snow, always taking a complicated detour, never the straightest route, and she repeats the same process on the way home again.

For Anna, physicality and the visualization of movement are integral to her painting process. In other respects, too, physical activity has an important role in her life. She has found that weeding the garden, for example, is similar to painting in the trajectories traced by the body. She has painted a bird's eye interpretation of her daily bike ride, tracing a figure eight from the Kumpula allotment gardens to her Herrtoniemi studio and the various landmarks along the way. In the bottom corner there is a patch of deep blue sea, but her 'map-scape' is otherwise painted in hazy, near-pastel shades, the off-pedalled bike route thrown into relief in black.



Viktor Westerholm: *Cows in the Birch Forest*, 1886
oil on panel, 53,5 x 37,5 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

Anna's detours pass through the Viikki Research Farm, where she often stops for a tête-à-tête with the grazing cattle. Instead of directly painting cows, however, Anna depicts her bike route instead; she processes what she has seen and experienced on her journey by translating her thought processes into a diagrammatic form. These days Anna focuses exclusively on her own process; she no longer cares to visit exhibitions or view work by other artists, as this distracts her from the peaceful inner sanctuary she inhabits when she paints. It takes time to achieve such total focus – and without focus, there is no point in painting.

Anna lives to paint and paints to live. Her outlook on life and painting – as well as her view of older art – has changed recently. Her earlier works – such as her still life compositions and pieces like *Whistlejacket* (see p. 89) – teem with allusions to art history. Now she is at a point in life where she feels she has seen too much art; she no longer has any interest in borrowing motifs from paintings in museums. Her current works are powerfully linked to her personal life and private experiences.

Last summer and autumn Anna painted a series of small-scale landscapes in her allotment garden and on Helsinki's beaches. She completed each piece *en plein air* from start to finish, deliberately exposing herself to the elements. Inspired by her older-generation precursor Ellen Thesleff, these *plein air* paintings express a newfound desire to immerse herself in real life, to escape the confines of the studio, and to connect her art more immediately with whatever she is and whatever she is doing. Anna has said that *plein air* landscape painting is the boldest choice she could make as a contemporary artist. Here Thesleff provided her with an inspirational role model: in both art and life, Thesleff showed exemplary courage in doing and painting exactly as she pleased.

When painting outdoors, the artist's perceptions are greatly influenced by the changing weather and seasons. When it is raining, or when it is very hot or cold, there is limited time for observing and painting one's impressions. In the darkness of autumn, there is barely enough light to paint. And when light is in short supply, the artist must resort to trusting the impressions preserved in her body memory and the trajectories of the hand. She cannot simply press the 'pause' button and resume painting at her studio, for then the connection – that moment of genuine presence – would be irretrievably lost.

As an antidote to these paintings born of immediate sense impressions, when Anna paints in the studio, she seeks to recapture fleeting memories of past events and places. She strives to coax them forth through figurative expression, teasing them out with the strokes of her brush, whilst accepting their hazy unreliability – memories can never be photographically accurate.

After spending several months in artist residency in Africa early in 2014, Anna fell seriously ill. Being hit by the sudden realization of her own mortality froze her in her tracks and totally changed her attitude to life. All at once she was struck by a sense that she had nothing to lose, and with this came a tremendous sense of freedom. Another significant experience, the death of her parents, further reinforced this sense of liberation. This inspired her to start



Anna Retulainen: *Bankombe, Monkey*, 2016
oil on canvas, 150 × 150 cm



Anna Retulainen: *Gambie, Monkey*, 2016
oil on canvas, 140 x 166 cm



Toshio Bando: *A Monkey*, undated
oil on canvas, 33 x 23,5 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

a series of works on the theme of remembrance, the first of which were drawings of her mother's hands (see p. 22). Anna did these drawings during their last days and weeks together, compelled by an urge to preserve the memories etched on those all-too-mortal hands.

The paintings from the Serlachius Museums selected by Anna for the *Pleasure* exhibition are all, in one way or another, linked to her personal thoughts and memories: they are much like visual incarnations of her private reminiscences. *A Monkey* by Toshio Bando is associated with her stay in Africa. The ape motif also appears in two of Anna's own paintings: in the yard of a house viewed from a boat, and at a communal well. *A Solitary Island* by Mauno Markkula – a stylized painting exuding a child-like naiveté – evokes the mood of warm climes with its palmy palette. For Anna the painting recalls the time she spent in Australia, especially a house that was once dear to her, the only place she ever called home. She describes her rendition of this house in the painting *Home* (p. 4) as 'a slapdash affair': the crude brushwork evinces how memories can never be crystal-clear. "When I paint, all the colours, gestures and rhythms are filtered through my memories. My perceptions grow hazy when I strive to retrieve an old familiar colour or form, because all that survives are fragments of lived life." (*On Painting*, p. 10)

Sand Dune (p. 15) is a *plein air* work painted by Elin Danielson-Gambogi in Brittany in 1884. The sharp shadows in the harsh, bright light and the stark blue of the sky realistically evoke a temperate southern climate. Inspired by this painting, Anna set off on a three-week trip to Australia to revisit familiar places, but the dunes of the beaches failed to inspire her. Instead, an old familiar house captured her imagination: the koala in the tree in the yard recalled the chained ape in Africa. The artist's memories thus came full circle.

Just like the older landscapes she selected for the exhibition, Anna's new paintings exude a sense of the hot southern sun and the pale glow of electric lights at dawn or dusk. We discern the silhouettes of houses, but the landscape remains hazy, impossible to identify. The coarse brushstrokes intentionally obscure what we see, cloaking memories in a veil of mist. Anna never adheres to any particular technique: she chooses whatever style of brushwork happens to serve the content.

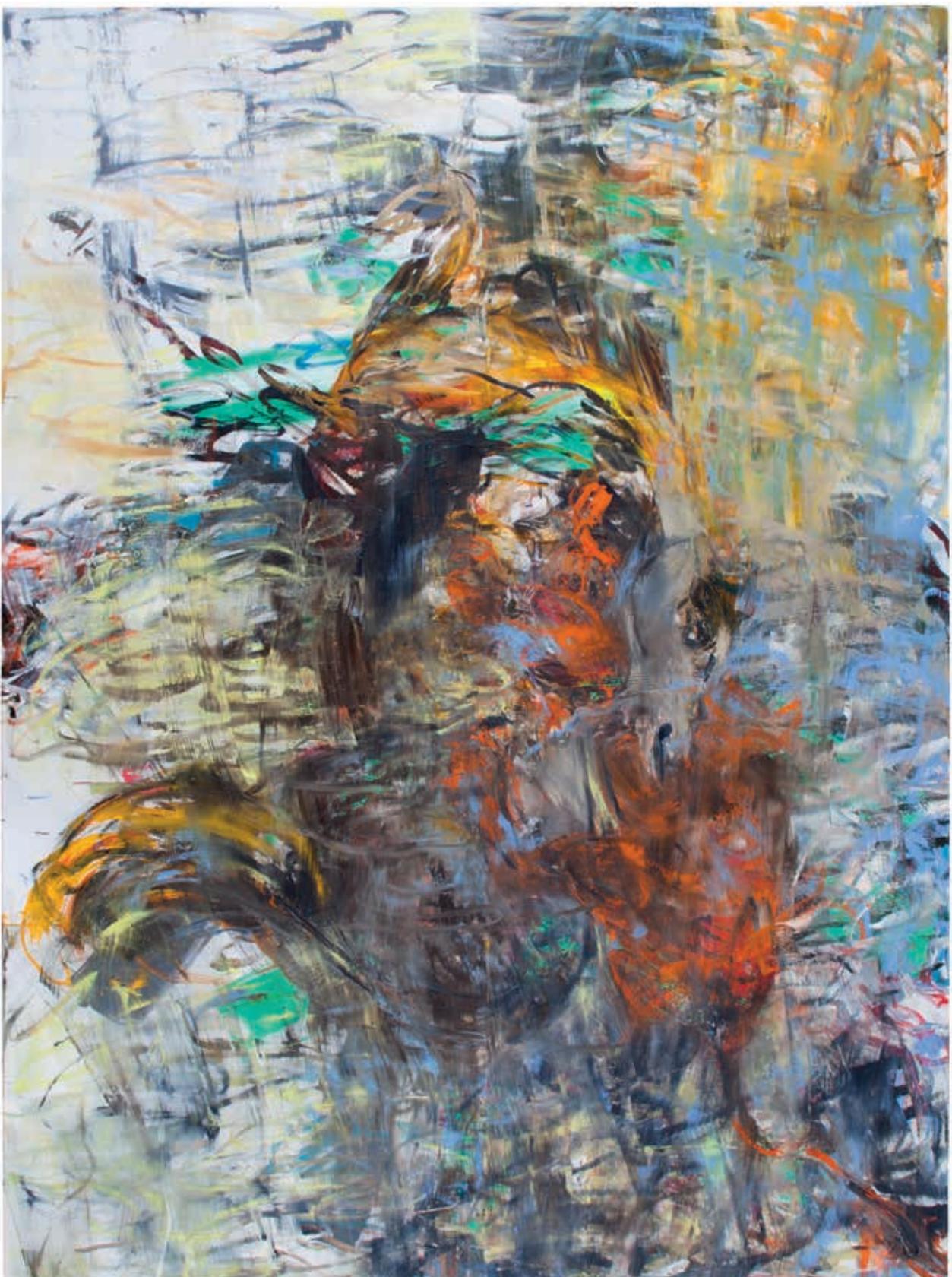
A further example: Anna has painted one of her favourite spots in Berlin, the suburb of Weissensee on the former east side of the city (see p. 84). Rendered crudely in thick layers of eye-popping colour, the painting does not portray an amusement park – contrary to what the colours initially suggest – but a Jewish cemetery. In the foreground we can clearly make out children's tombstones. The artist, in her own inimitable way, seeks to connect with history and the



Mauno Markkula: *A Solitary Island*, 1940–1950s
oil on canvas, 35 × 27 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Elin Danielson-Gambogi: *Sand Dune*, 1884
oil on canvas, 33 × 46 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation



Anna Reulainen: *Lion Attacking a Horse*, 2012
oil on canvas, 220 x 300 cm
Finnish National Gallery/
Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma



human destinies tied to this particular place. With this painting, she addresses a historical legacy by offering her own unique interpretation of the atrocities of the past. She felt compelled to paint this history-haunted place which, for all its ghosts, is beautiful, and therefore intriguing. She, from within her subjective boundaries, preserves collective memories for posterity. Anna believes that a painting can be feared in the same as we fear people who are different from ourselves. In both cases, the encounter is clouded by prejudice. She thus aims to dispel obstacles in the path of a genuine meeting by being as open and honest as possible about her intentions. Portraying the general through the lens of the personal is the most salient content that a painting can ever convey.

Encounter 2: Eilina Meremies at the Lallukka Artists' Residence

At first I had trouble finding the right entrance. The Helsinki artists' residence known as Lallukka was under renovation. Fortunately one of the contractors pointed me in the right direction. Eilina Meremies had recently moved to her sunny new studio in autumn 2016, forcing the longest-ever break she has ever taken from her art. After six weeks, she was burning to get back to painting.

Her new, larger workspace provides enough room to work on larger canvases. At the moment she is planning a painting nearly three metres tall, its monumental scale inspired by the lofty subject: a sky full of clouds. Eilina first began painting clouds as an art student, though back then she felt she was not mature enough to tackle such a challenging subject. Clouds have indeed appeared in her paintings throughout her career, mostly in the form of mist or haze. Now, however, she feels ready to paint



Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *Portrait of the Architect Eliel Saarinen* (sketch), 1907
oil on canvas, 30 x 29 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

Eilina Meremies: *Summer Night*, 2016
tempera and oil on canvas, 146 x 97 cm

clouds in a bolder form. In her most recent exhibition at Galerie Anhava, Eilina filled an entire room with paintings of clouds, each with its own affably intriguing personality. These cloud characters drifted into her consciousness as she lay on her sickbed looking up at the sky over Töölö Bay. During her illness, the billowing apparitions seemed to materialize like a gift of solace from 'the master painter of the heavens'. Eilina paints dream-like figures and landscapes inspired by inner visions, literally plucking them from thin air. Rather than being pure figments of her imagination, however, they are the synthesis of reality and the emotional responses evoked in the artist. Her paintings can also be interpreted in relation to her strong bond with the Orthodox Church. The same themes keep



recurring faithfully in Eilina's oeuvre. She sees herself as a courageous artist in that she dares to paint exactly as a five-year-old or teenager would – which of course applies purely to the subject matter, not to her technical prowess, which is plentiful after a long career in the visual arts. She is neither embarrassed nor inhibited by the thought that child-like subject matter might be inappropriate for a professional artist.

The examples of older art selected by Eilina for the *Pleasure* exhibition are eye-catching paintings that touch upon the world of beliefs and ideals. She finds them "inspiring, but in unpredictable ways." Reality inevitably creeps up and claims its place in the creative process. Recently Eilina has taken a special interest in landscapes and the portrayal of people and animals, as evidenced also by the works she selected for the *Pleasure* exhibition. "But I've observed that the harder I strive to attain my ideals, the further they slip away from me." For instance her having chosen *Portrait of the Architect Eitel Saarinen* by Akseli Gallen-Kallela (p. 156) relates to her desire for a faster tempo of handling the brush as a welcome reprieve from her usual slow, meticulous process.

Her latest paintings are set in a place she calls 'Lepers' Island', a community of pariahs that lives secluded from the rest of the world in a lush, garden-like sanctuary. As children, many of us were terrified by tales of this hideous biblical illness viewed as synonymous with forsaken, disease-ravaged, barely human amputees. Although treatments have radically improved since biblical times, leprosy remains an ever-present blight in many developing countries, and social taboos prevent sufferers from receiving the help they need. Such appears to be the cruel fate of the characters in Eilina's paintings, each of whom is, in some way, unfit for society. They symbolize the feared other, a thing so deeply dreaded as to require quarantining.

The great empathy that Eilina feels towards all living things comes through in her art. Empathy, combined with macabre humour, injects a ray of hope that undercuts the melancholia of her art. Even on Lepers' Island, the sky appears to be forever blue.

One of her paintings – rendered in rapid, vigorous brushstrokes – depicts a figure that appears to radiate light, or perhaps, quite the reverse, sucks in all the light around it. A swarm of bees takes the place of the figure's hands. Are we perhaps witnessing a resurrection, the moment of liberation from worldly suffering? Another painting – a near-perfect square – depicts a vaporous figure partly condensed as flesh, its eyes staring from a skinless face. The figure occupies a parallel universe populated by a weird assortment of beings. In a third painting, all we can see is the figure's hair floating among foliage, with purple wisps of cloud floating in the sky above. Faces have focal emphases in these paintings, as they often do in Eilina's art. Significantly, the faces are demorphed or obscured in some way, as if the artist wanted to disguise their

Jan Willems de Cock: *The Temptation of St. Anthony and St. Paul*, 16th century
oil on copper, 28 x 21 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

true feelings or intentions. Perhaps they are part of a puzzle that the artist has been unable to solve.

In the Bible, clouds symbolize angels, and the Bible is an extremely important book for Elna. She reveals that her paintings depict both people and angels, albeit in human guise. Comparing the practice of art to the ascetic worshipping practices of eremitic monks, she sees the painting process as taking place in a figurative wasteland in the midst of an eternal struggle between good and evil.

Both in its style and religious content, *The Temptation of St. Anthony and St. Paul*, a work evidently painted by Jan Wellens de Cock – and one of the works chosen by Elna for the *Pleasure* exhibition – hits right at the heart of her personal philosophy; Wellens de Cock has unleashed the full force of his imagination in his strange gallery of human-beast hybrids and other fantastical creatures mingling amidst Biblical figures. It is no surprise that this particular piece caught Elna's eye: the dark-toned palette, the imaginative multitude of characters and the eternal struggle between good and evil directly echo her own work. Already back in 2002 Elna stated that the world appears to her like a version of Limbo painted by Hieronymus Bosch (*Stop for a Moment – Painting as Presence*, p. 41).

Birds (1992) is an early painting that strikes a chord with Elna's latest cloud paintings. It portrays a face with a screaming mouth protruding from a flock of birds in flight. *Bride* (see p. 166) in turn depicts a figure whose face is obscured by a veil of vapour pulled along by a white bird that creates violent ripples in the sky, while two other birds look on calmly from the side-lines. The mood of the paintings is not ominous, however. The flying creatures in Elna's paintings can be interpreted as angels, bearers of heavenly powers, with a mission to drape a veil of hope on the shoulders of the solitary figure.

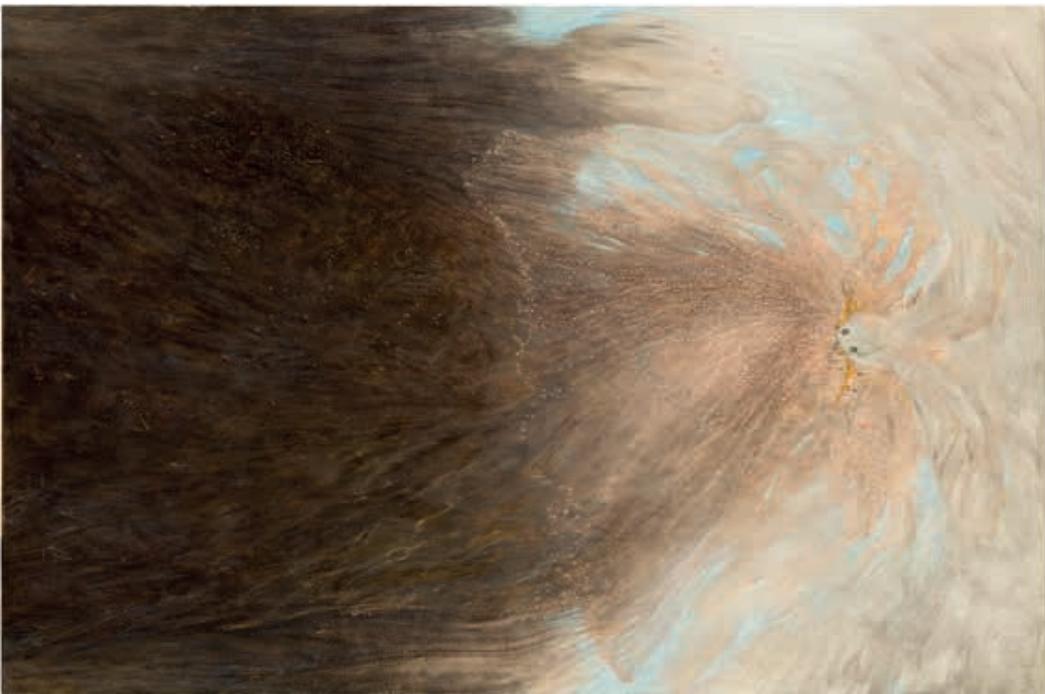
Not only birds, but also bees – another symbolically powerful winged creature – appear recurrently in Elna's oeuvre. Bees represent forces of good; they exist to serve. Like birds, bees reflect Elna's long-standing interest in the relationship between humans and animals, which has fascinated her since childhood. Bees are disciplined soldiers that remind us to honour God. While living in the Czech Republic many years ago, Elna accidentally stepped on a beehive and was startled by the enormous swarm that instantly appeared around her. Instead of screaming and bating the bees away, she froze in her spot and asked them for forgiveness. The swarm left her alone and flew away. Throughout her life Elna has had many similar experiences of deep oneness with other living creatures.

Elna Meremies: *Birds*, 1992
tempera on cardboard, 170 × 130 cm
Sara Hilden Art Museum





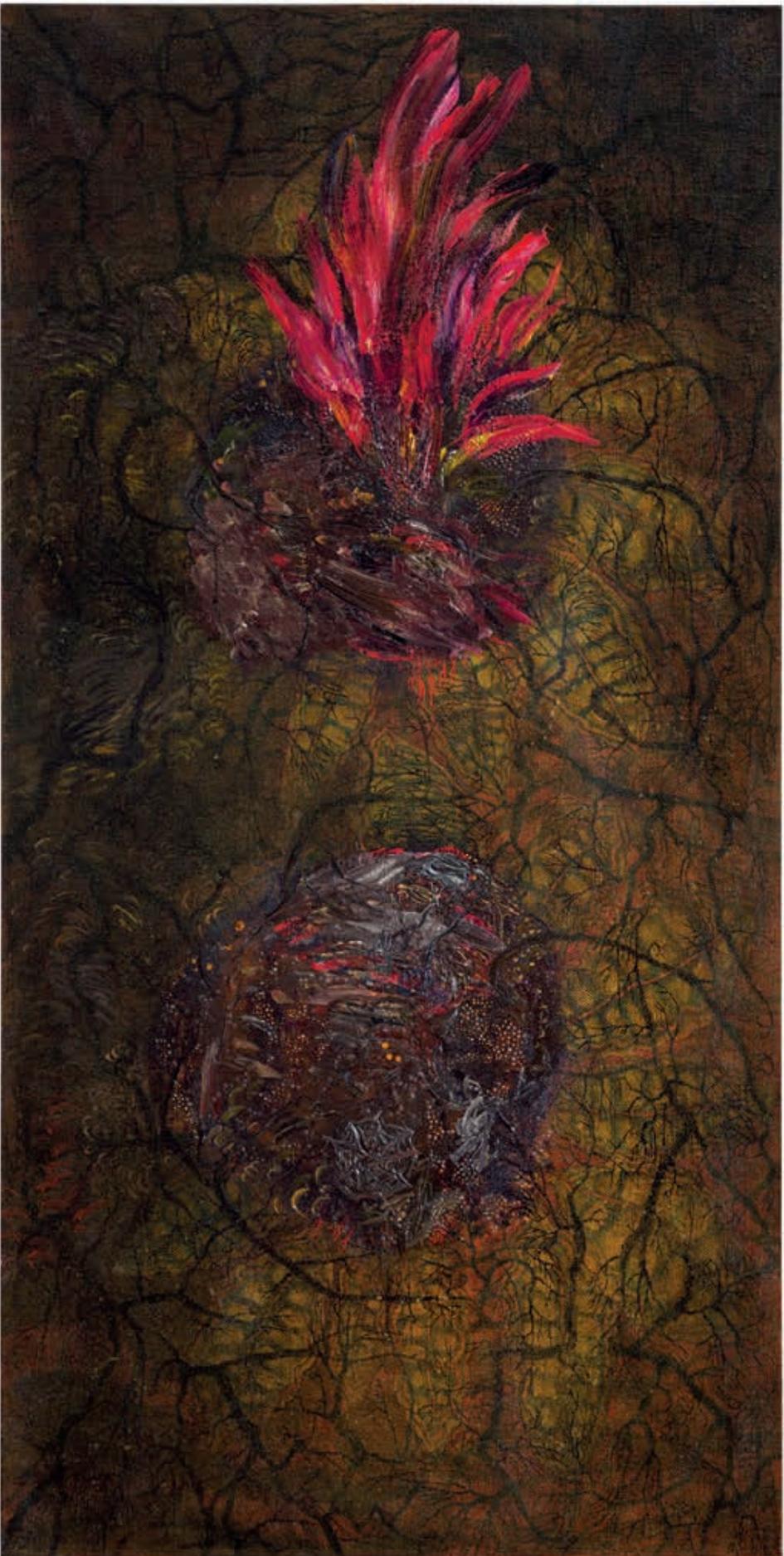
Elina Merenmies: *Formido*, 2004–2006
acrylic and oil tempera on canvas, 170,5 × 251 cm
The Heino Art Foundation



Elina Meremies: *Bride*, 2015
tempera and oil on canvas, 146 x 97 cm



Elina Meremies: *Ère Viant*, 2005–2009
tempera and oil on canvas, 160 x 140 cm
Sara Hildén Art Museum



Eliina Meremies: *Last Flowers*, 1998–2013
oil and tempera on canvas, 50 x 100 cm
private collection

Encounter 3: Jukka Korkkela in Frankfurt and at his Ortenberg Studio

We met at Frankfurt Railway Station on a crisp, clear day at the end of November 2016. We walked across the bridge to the Städel Museum, which houses a marvellous collection of western painting from the early Renaissance to the contemporary era. Near the end of our visit we paused in front of a painting by Sandro Botticelli, a portrait of a divinely beautiful young woman. It reminded Jukka of the vintage decoupage scrap that he collected as a child which – along with comic books – was his initiation into the world of visuality and art. On first appraisal, Botticelli's painting and vintage decals seem to have nothing whatsoever to do with Jukka's art, and 'beautiful' is certainly not the first adjective that springs to mind in connection with his paintings. I cannot help noticing an intriguing clash between Jukka's personality and the content of his art.

Commenting on his sources of inspiration, Jukka has said: "A painting might be inspired by something that acts as a gateway opening up something within me. It's like taking a step towards cosmic oneness, which first entails mindfulness and quiet contemplation." (*On Painting*, p. 113). The artist does not choose his gateways, nor can he force himself to step inside. He might have a particular picture in his mind, but at some point during the necessary steps of the painting process, the original (mental) image must be shattered to allow a new, autonomous image to break free and come forth.

Sometimes Jukka uses a pre-existing image as his source material. Recently he has been using a black-and-white photograph of Pope John XXIII, a figure with whom he became fascinated while staying at the Villa Lante (The Finnish Institute in Rome) in 2013. Jukka developed a special fondness for 'Il Papa Buono' (The Good Pope), an exemplary, saint-like defender of the poor. Born the fourth of fourteen children to a poor family of Italian sharecroppers, the pope had a personal investment in his papal agenda. He died in 1963 and was canonized by the Catholic Church in 2014. His feast day is 11 October, which is neither the day of his birth nor death, but the commemoration of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. By strange coincidence, the same day happens to be Jukka's birthday. According to Jukka, there is no such thing as coincidence – as this case proves.

Hanging on the wall of his new studio in the small German town of Ortenberg is a series of small paintings portraying Il Papa Buono. Happy to work on a small scale, Jukka feels no compulsion to switch to larger canvases. The pale, somewhat colourless facial portraits of the pope are set against a background of purple – traditionally the symbol of penance – or dark blue, the traditional colour of the Virgin Mary's robes. In one of the portraits, the pope wears lipstick and eyeshadow, making the holy man seem more human and approachable, whilst also relegating him to a dubious category outside normality. Jukka's varied interpretations of the pope consign him to otherness: the sacred becomes the profane.

Jukka's recent paintings highlight the great significance of the pope both as a subject and symbol. By painting the pope over and over again, Jukka makes



Jukka Korkkela: *Papa* (Pope), 2016
oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm

him a member of his close inner circle, whom he is in the habit of portraying repeatedly in his work. He depicts the pope as a powerful incarnation of empathy; a gently smiling avuncular figure who wants nothing more than to offer everyone the equal right to a better future.

It is no surprise that Jukka readily identifies with the Good Pope, considering how his own most striking personal features are his empathy, sympathetic engagement and genuine concern for the future of humanity. And yet – as an antidote to excessive pathos – humour is pervasive both in his outlook and artistic practice, in which he permits himself to indulge in a bit of fun and silliness.

Alongside the pope, the figure of the clown – or a friend wearing a clown's mask – is another recurrent motif in Jukka's paintings. We all don masks and perform various roles in different situations. The classic clown with the bulbous red nose is an archetypal figure with long-standing symbolic significance: throughout history, clowns have availed of their cloak of disguise to voice stinging social critique, whilst cunningly evading accountability. The mask is a distancing element, while comedy offers a vehicle for subversive commentary on the anomalies of everyday life. The clown's white face has traditionally symbolized death. The bulbous red nose – the signature emblem of the circus – appears as a disembodied element in a few of Jukka's most recent paintings. Jukka claims to have no idea where it came from or what it means. As the title suggests, *Four Noses* depicts four red noses, one in its customary mid-face position, while three others float among the red hair of a man in a blue shirt. *Three Noses* in turn portrays a character whose real nose is painted red, while two other 'real' noses protrude as appendages from either side of his head. Do the multiple noses perhaps represent the crisscrossing roles we play in life? The uncanny, surreal nasal motif adds a layer of meaning that is difficult to capture in words.

The thematic impetus for Jukka's recent paintings came from the *Sans Souci* exhibition in autumn 2016, which pondered the theme of life after loss. Living in a Catholic community has undoubtedly had an impact on Jukka's art, although it is difficult to guess what path he might choose next. The *Pleasure* exhibition features a two-piece ensemble from his autumn gallery exhibition: *Coming and Going* & *Libidinal Laughter Machine* (p. 178–179). The first title refers to the recurrent pattern of ebb and flow that tends to characterize all human relationships. The sepia-toned painting depicts a ginger-haired clown getting into a turquoise car, his paint-smearing rump revealing that he has slipped and fallen flat on a paint palette. We are made spectators of a comic episode that invites good-natured laughter. The second painting depicts six reddish ducts of flesh that droop sadly like a rooster's wattle in what the title suggests is a reference to sexuality. Empathy meets exuberant cheekiness, without a trace of self-pity.

Red, the colour of life and carnality – and also the colour of martyrdom – has an overarching presence in Jukka's artistic oeuvre. Red is the background colour of *A Man from Pakistan* (1963, p. 174), a work by Åke Mattas chosen by Jukka



Jukka Korhela: *Frau Kraft mit vier Nasen*
(Mrs Power and the Four Noses), 2016
oil on canvas, 90 x 24 cm



Jukka Korhela: *Frau Kraft mit drei Nasen*
(Mrs Power and the Three Noses), 2016
oil on canvas, 40 x 90 cm



Ake Mattas: *A Man From Pakistan*, 1962
oil on canvas, 55 × 46 cm
Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation

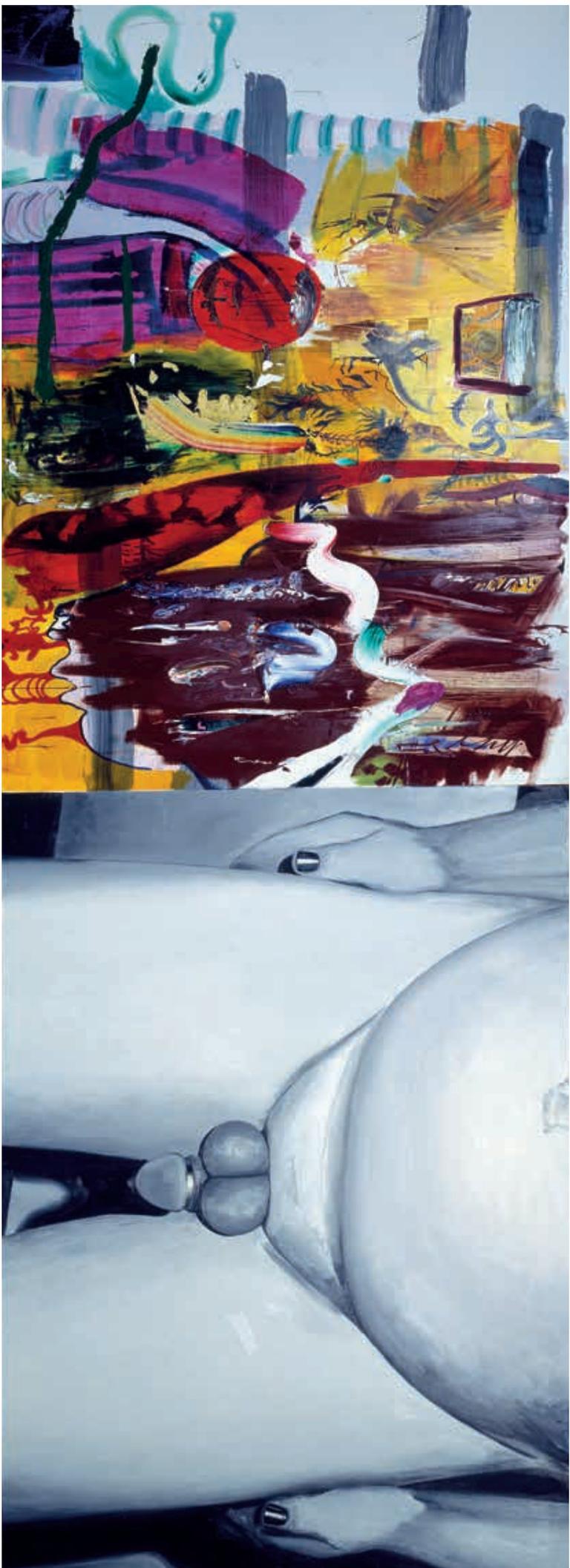
for the *Pleasure* exhibition. Mattas portrays the foreigner in broad, sweeping brushstrokes, dressed in a universally neutral white collared shirt, the sitter's sidelong gaze evading eye contact. The man is the very embodiment of otherness. He is the innocent prisoner of the role he has been designated. It is in relation to his otherness that we, too, are forced to define ourselves.

Jukka's empathic understanding of the condition of otherness traces back to his childhood. Until third grade, Jukka lived near Hättelinnala psychiatric hospital in Hämeenlinna, where his parents both worked. The children were in the habit of playing on the hospital grounds, oblivious to the potential dangers lurking there. The children thought nothing of the erratic behaviour of the hospital inmates, who led unusual, often tragic lives: their oddity was accepted as normality. It was through this childhood experience that Jukka developed his highly tolerant and broad-minded personal interpretation of otherness.

Roughly a decade ago Jukka stated that his overriding mission as an artist was to take part in public debate and advocate an agenda of inclusiveness and diversity with his paintings. Mainstream culture tends to force popular iconography into a rigid, stereotypical mould, and Jukka believes such conformism is something that artists should challenge with their art. Taking a stand through art is a slow process, however: it takes years before ripples of change take effect. Having always departed radically from mainstream norms, Jukka's imagery has undoubtedly challenged our ideas about difference and otherness, nudging us in an ever more tolerant direction.

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Jukka Korkkela: *Hope*, 1995
acrylic and oil on canvas, 165 x 460 cm



Jukka Korhela: *Libidinal Laughter Machine & Coming and Going*, 2015
acrylic and acrylic secco on canvas, 80 × 60 cm & 100 × 80 cm
private collection

Mika Hannula

The Gaze and Desire On the Experience of Encountering a Painting

The gaze and desire. Seeing, experiencing and encountering, interaction and presence with and along with the work, right?

Something gets and gives a push – to look more closely, to look better.

Somehow we are able and capable, not just of looking, but of seeing. Now and then, quite rarely.

It runs and it goes, until it stops and starts again. From opposite to alongside and always back again – the unique in the universal and the universal localized, actualized.

The gaze and desire. What do we see when we look? What do we desire when we look for something, something deeper, something meaningful?

I

The gaze. It never goes out or comes back equally. It projects, it messes around. It goes over, comes under. It intrudes and irritates, nastily, even. Encountering, encountering founded on mutual respect is the exception. That, there and then when the gaze and its object form an interlinked momentariness. Corporeal, participating and exposed.

Just like: steady/ing yourself in a speedily spinning motion – or then perhaps not.

The variations of the gaze. Seeing, looking and staring. And from there there accumulates, from there there develops, from there there is an envisioning – via thousands of repetitions, learning, not with an attitude, from there there comes what is called observation. The act that is in itself always two-directional, interactive. We look at and we are looked at. Or: you are the visible and the see-er.

Simultaneously, and yet not in equilibrium or equally, but in relation to, seeking it, modifying it.

If and when we are all a part, if not participants, why do we talk about the malevolent gaze, the evil eye? How could we get away from overly banal, hostile images? How might we envision the gaze as a participatory act that is neither this nor that, but which is always inevitably and necessarily both/and – a part

of the problem, in the centre of the whole rending and racking trajectory of the circle of interpretation.

The gaze is not innocent, not natural. It is a productive activity. The gaze focuses. It makes and pictures reality. And the object. It looks back. It demands attention, an invitation to dance, staying on the dance floor, not surreptitiously fleeing from it.

But: in itself it is not bad, not good, not even good in a bad way. It is a productive activity that misrears only and solely that one and the same, that assumed certainty.

Question: you see all sorts of things, millions of images and impulses roll and readjust themselves onto the retina, onto the display terminal, projected onto the wall. But what do we see? And what is the difference between mere general, superficial seeing and concentrated looking that goes on in a depth sounder?

Integrity and intensity. As also this: pleasure.

The gaze that is something else. More and less. Simultaneously. Surprising and familiar, unexpected and stunning – liberating? Through the past into the future, into the existent.

II

Desire. A little like the gaze. One of the basic functions: what is left without it, why in principle do anything at all?

A key issue and a necessity. And yet in such shaky condition, in disrepute.

Why, oh why – have you forsaken us?

Desire. Desire desire desire. Passion and play. Desire. Desireeeeeeeeeee. Lots of e's, a little tea, without milk.

Desire. A six-letter word. I repeat. A little like the gaze. It does not end in a draw, not in harmony, it only goes here and there, rebounding, without kowtowing, but getting knocked about. It seeks, but does not find, and enjoys it – the seeking.

Desire's nuances, risks and boundary zones. A conscious activity, yes, quite definitely. At the same time, unconscious, just as clearly, incessantly. All at once, both, not separately, but simultaneously, and yet not equally.

Desire. It strikes, it misses the mark. It flusters and panics. It subsides and slackens off until it rattles down the steps and bangs its bounce. Once more, no less.

And oh what a moment it is, too. Smiling and carefree, so remorseless and so precious in its non-existence – an opportunity to get and to be closer, to move and slide a lot closer than the Framework of physicality gives in and gives way.

Close, closer.

III

A man's desire, a woman's desire – a sense of power.

We all desire. We all want. Something somewhere somehow. Hopefully. It is not a matter of what, but how – and how in relation to where we come from, what we are and where we are going. In power relations, responsibly, dutifully.

As fellow human beings, as co-spectators.

It does not go away, not even in the pouring rain, nor even with good-mood hobbies. Power, it persists, but how does it persist, and what traces does it leave behind? – that is our concern, our responsibility.

Desire, not passion. Desire that draws in and deceives. It makes us do things that are, nevertheless, perhaps not worth our doing. No no no and once again no. And yet.

Desire and the gaze. They cannot be disconnected from power, not from subjugation. But do they, do the gaze and desire always and forever have to stay in the grip and the prison of power and subjugation (not forgetting submission)? Would it not be possible to look and to desire in a way that participates in interaction, respects its partner, favours interaction and is protective of it?

In the painting, about the painting?

A question, a series of questions, that has no answers. There is only a certain direction, a premonition. I.e. a fragrance, not a smell. The direction that we believe in, albeit doubting it, too. That it would be possible, reasonable and pleasant. Acts, series of acts, that would lead somewhere other than where we started off. Acts, a series of acts that would result in more than just the sum of expectations and assumptions.

Something more, something beautiful and handsome.

Real, reciprocal and risky, too.

IV

Let's take a counterargument. The way of envisaging reality that, starting as early as the end of the 1960s, has asserted that no, that reality no longer even exists. It has turned into a simulation, into hyperrealism, in which the surface of the sign is the only thing that means anything. And and and and is all that is left.

Jean Baudrillard, more than thirty years ago now, got it into his head to propose that the relationship between image and reality (in this context between the gaze and desire) is impossible. Baudrillard (1983, 1) envisaged the development of the image and representation as a four-part breakdown, albeit not a tragic one in itself. This four-stage process has the following levels:

- 1) The image corresponds to and depicts reality, both exist and make sense.
- 2) The image masks, skews and distorts reality. A rift has occurred, which can no longer be repaired.

3) The image masks and conceals the fact that reality no longer exists – there is only the surface, images.

4) The relationship between image and reality, the gaze and desire has ended, it is no longer faulty or distorted, it has evaporated, ceased. There is nothing pure and genuine other than the simulation of reality.

Thus vanish, thus disappear the differences, the sorrows and the charms.

No more distance, no fine-tuning and no piecework in the relationship between active and passive, not the subject not the object, not existence and manifestation. It's all the same, one and the same. And, in Baudrillard's words, the place where we end up here and now is: "The desert of the real itself" (Ibid. 2).

V

And what about the counterargument to this counterargument? A cosy quilt named Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A warm and gentle one, i.e. phenomenology. Something comes from there and is found there. Intersubjectivity, instead of a readymade space and gaze, becoming open to 'commerce' or interplay, and being, being towards the world. With it, along with it, and mixed in with it.

Speeding, accelerating, and as if coming to a halt against a wall – starting at the wall, seeing, perceiving, all sorts of lovely junk and sparkles in it. Not just giving the present moment a tug, but also calling together, taking a look at, the future and the past. Whereupon, and thus in this case, the relationship with all the levels of time is active. For example, coming from behind the movement of the horizons of perception, when possibly the relationship is no longer a time-lag, but something else. If and when remembering is giving the past "the efficacy of renewal or 'repetition', which is the noble form of memory." (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 68.)

There we have the body, the fleshy element, the component. There we have the object, that which and what is looked at. Each of them is, and is so simultaneously and in two-stroke. Seeing and visible. Not outside, not separate, but modulating, being modulated. Appearing, not withdrawing.

Merleau-Ponty calls this both/and state and situation, this constant pressure and potential, a very special paradox. I.e. a kind of space of circumstances and issues, a relationship that is a bit, as it were, unrelated. It comes across as impossible, even if it is very clearly both experienced and perceived, looked at and desired. One aspect of this paradox is that we are always in that in-between space, the visible and the see-er. Instead of equilibrium what is required is participation, throwing ourselves into it, and the ability to attend and to attain momentary fixed points, elastic experiences.

But Merleau-Ponty opens up the nature of the paradox itself using the terms 'immanence' and 'transcendence'. We reach the deepest caves of perception, open quarries, from which a lift perpetually brings and takes away, up and down, up and down. And because the issue is complex, and highly susceptible

to misjudgement, quoting directly: "Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given." (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 16)

What this means is this and that if there is an itch, it is best to scratch it. Or this: whether this or that should pass, don't leave a drop in your glass.

Or then, for instance, thus: a contradiction, an unresolved one.

And in this case the somewhat peculiar way of depicting this contradiction is left in the background. We can put the word paradox to one side and in its place take a description of space and time that contain the energies and impetuses that just have to be there. It is then a matter of this: a riddle. Not some cheap or vulgar joke. Not house-trained tinkering, no. It is a matter of an unattainable ethic, its evaluation, respecting it, but also laughing with it, seeking out that relationship, gravitating towards that relationship.

A riddle and a premonition. And yes, pleasure.

In practice the simultaneity of immanence and transcendence thus means that in the gaze experience, in the act that motivates the desire to move and to reach, to touch, to bring something about, what is in it is on site and situated as both presence and absence, too. Not either/or, but both/and. And in a way that does not revert to or merge into a round figure, not a dead heart, not harmony.

It winds and whines, it creaks and crushes. As we said before, it is simultaneity, but not equality. They are distinct, but in it together. Committed to one another, stubbornly not getting away – aware of their mutual dependence, and yet still attempting to break out with a crash.

Up and down, forward and back – in perspective. In a rhythm in which the gaze and desire do the work and also enjoy their results, the momentary fruits.

But that immanence and that transcendence. They are not given, not constants. They are relative, and they are always incomplete in themselves. And that is why, that is why they need, they demand, they simply have to gravitate to the opposite camp, so that they will again, even for a moment, get to be in their own playing position, home.

It is a local and localized presence, which leaks out. But it is a presence that, nevertheless, stays together, in a heap. And it is that transcendence, that meta-level that goes beyond the situation, a level that in turn is also incomplete, deficient. It never covers everything, it never gets everything dealt with. It always has to reserve time, away from the public to the private, so as to get hold of the public for a moment, at least as somehow more public, not just as a caricature of the public.

Something is known, its direction, but you can't have everything, because then the issue would already be decided, and nastily unpleasantly struck. But we are somewhere, or rather where we are we can't stay, because we need movement, to be moved.

Presence, absence, babbling and silent. And demanding, oh so wonderfully demanding. And rare, to be sure.

Rare.

The gaze and desire. That which is accentuatedly present beside you, and that which extends elsewhere, into the public. That which is something and is it one-on-one, in a relationship.

But they all, these all. They are not up in the air, they don't live in a cupboard. They are temporal, and they are spatial. They have their time and they have their place.

Where how when, why and what.

If we think of place and space, that double attachment, we get a relationship between the public and the private. Not as a certainty, but as an interactive response, as a basis, as a primer. We have a public level and we have a private level. And they are combined in the gaze, in bodily perception that is fed by desire.

So we take what exists and what is given. The public. That which we get to refer to with the English word *space*. I.e. space, the essence. And then as an opposite pair we get the English word *place*. I.e. a place and a manifestation. Bearing in mind: always together, never separate. Always constructively situated, never externally, duplicitously. Inside the structure, producing variations on the structure, modifying them – sometimes even extending into the structures, affecting them.

Space and place, essence and manifestation, public and interpretation.

Between them the all. It goes by the name of an encounter, the gaze seeking out a way and locating itself. An encounter that is already present in the starting point, in a both/and fine adjustment between space and place, essence and manifestation, between times, an embracing of communication.

It is what it is. A promise, not a fulfilment. A possibility that expects and demands, obliges fulfilment. Not in heaven, not even floor seven of a department store, but in social commerce.

In an actualization of space and place taking it in turns to lead. I.e. where the gaze and desire meet the past, present and future, i.e. where the personal and the private fine-tune a version that is an actualization, articulations of that moment – creative activity.

I.e. this and that themselves: producing the content of a concept, an act or an issue in that situation in relation to the act's own historically affected consciousness, deepening it, developing it.

Simplifying, but not banalizing. It is a matter of modifying the content of the word and the act of how a certain act acquires its momentary value-laden content – i.e. how and with which desires, hopes, fears and needs that one and that private are produced and interpreted in the public.

Nothing else. In no way a bigger deal or any more peculiar than that. The encounter in time between space and place, in the gaze and in desire, in which there is actualized an interpretation, a version of the public that is in itself present and absent, coming and going, and yet real, oh oh and ah ah ah so real.

Volatile, deficient, unfulfilled.

Yes. It can be that, too. That encounter. Annoying, sad and dull, boring. Chance-taking, flirtations and unsuitable, fomenting restlessness, riven with impotence. It can be frustrating, cantankerous, sloppy and feeble, insipid even.

The encounter can be anything and any way, because it does not exist in itself, but has to be made and realized. Made into an event. Always and especially, one case at a time, one after another, but always in itself, in relation to its environment. With no guarantees, with no mental winter tyres.

The gaze and desire, in the body, from the body and into the body. It separates and it unites, it is solitary and rich, affirmative and critical in nature, the yap of the lapdog and setting up beside the assumed enemy, even dozing off there, but always, always with your pants on.

It is more, and, at the same time, less than one plus one – or one followed by another one. This relationship, this presence that actualizes the existent does not revert to an even distribution, it does not contract in advance into the given and the shared. It is present in the touch of perception, in its reflexivity – in the way the see-er and the visible are linked, are associated together. The movement that is based on continual, simultaneous lead-swapping; on the way we seek both distance and closeness. The gaze knows and anticipates the touch that brings about the next spiral, rotation and trajectory, a mutual integration, in which both parties are together and separate – each one affecting the other, each one being affected by the other. Movement and a track that contain a potential, a possibility for opening up, for movement somewhere that does not yet exist, into something special and different. (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 185, see also Butler 2015, 53)

The starting point and eternal point of return for extra time is the relationship with and attitude to being in the world, in a way that is 'both' and 'and' – plus freedom and duty. Not bad bad bad, not good good good, but something and somehow from in between, there between – interpreting, going deeper, being influenced.

Encountering as a challenge, as a challenge to being awake – to being in and through time, to making space, and also to pleasure.

Encountering. Call and transmission, social commerce. Anticipation and expectation, an assumption of what and where – not forgetting how.

Encountering face to face. Viewer and work. The power to influence and to be subject to influence. Not in a gloomy way, nor cute, but something else – as something else. The gaze, desire and experience.

A present surreptitious danger, a precondition for taking a turn and for influencing – as also for being influenced. Going along with it, throwing yourself into it.

Strength and power, openness and vulnerability. Intense woundedness, its possibility, its ceaseless being there beside you. Not melancholy, not overkill. It is something else, something other than

the state of being of the one doing the expecting. There is a tension there, when you are able and capable of exposing yourself, not submitting.

Encountering. Individual, one-to-one. Not repeatable, not copyable. And yet, and yet it happens in a continuum, within a framework of similar encounters – in a promise of a continuation, of the next and the next after that.

Longing, yearning and pain. Unattainable and yet moving towards it.

It is one and one, but not alone. It knows where it comes from and it anticipates where it could go. And in between is everything – the encounter.

The actualization of time and place, becoming an event.

A promise of closeness, of the intimate. What else do we want, what else do we long for? Pantares, rose bushes and rollicking highroads?

I promise to take you as you are and to give you a chance to become something even more, and more alive, than you are to begin with – to get you to achieve the potential that is in you, that which awaits awakening, waking up and breath. I wait and let the expected values grow – towards the skies, towards forbidden fruits, impossibilities. And those expectations are not in the way.

They are not obstacles. They are supporting pillars, aids.

I am waiting for you and you are waiting for me. We are waiting – we are being activated. In perception, in the body.

We are inadequate and yet possessed. Too much and too little – both are out of the question, neither is accepted. Instead let's take an encounter, being/face to face, deepening presence, caressing it, and also rejecting it.

The gaze and desire. The work and the viewer. Let space, let space and place, its essence and manifestation become, happen. Head-on and roundabout, spiralling and orbiting, going deeper.

I look at the painting and it looks back at me. This is where it starts and this is where it returns to. The gaze and desire – mutual respect and the interaction involved in social commerce.

That's everything, absolutely everything. In the shade, in the gaze. In the painting.

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