

ARS
FENNICA

HENNA AND PERTTI NIEMISTÖ
ART FOUNDATION



ARS FENNICA 2021

EIJA-LIISA AHTILA | ANNE-KARIN FURUNES | JESPER JUST |
VIGGO WALLENSKÖLD | MAGNUS WALLIN

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HISTORY & AWARD



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Taru Elfving
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Svala Vagnsdatter Andersen
Lars-Erik Hjertsröm-Lappalainen
Kai Kartio

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Sometek - sometek.fi



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HISTORY & AWARD

The Foundation

The Henna and Pertti Niemistö Art Foundation – ARS FENNICA sr was established in 1990 to promote the arts by opening up new channels for Finnish visual art internationally, by providing artists with inspiration in their creative work, and by encouraging interest in and respect for the visual arts among the general public.

To achieve its goal, the Foundation awards the ARS FENNICA Prize in alternate years to one visual artist in recognition of individual artistic work of outstanding quality. The prize includes a cash prize of EUR 50,000, an exhibition presenting the nominees and an online catalogue, which can be freely downloaded from the Foundation's website.

The prize will be awarded in two stages. An award panel appointed by the Foundation's Board nominates the candidates and also an international art expert, who then chooses the prize winner. The candidate artists

have variously been from Finland, the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and the St Petersburg region. The permanent chairman of the panel is MD Leena Niemistö and the alternating members are Kai Kartio, Director of the Amos Rex Museum, Leevi Haapala, Director of the Kiasma Museum, and Kari Vehosalo, Visual Artist who won the 2017 award.

The candidates for 2021 are Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Anne-Karin Furunes from Norway, Jesper Just from Denmark, Viggo Wallensköld from Finland and Magnus Wallin from Sweden

The ARS FENNICA 2021 exhibition is in the Hämeenlinna Art Museum from 15 October 2021 to 3 April 2022.

The winner will be announced on February 10, 2022. Prior to that, the public has been able to get to know the nominees, select and vote for their favorite.

HORIZONTAL, 2011
6-channel projected installation
16:9 | *Audio 5.1*
→



TARU ELFVING
IF ONE WAS MANY

A majestic spruce dances in the wind to a curiously dissonant rhythm. Split into six moving images to capture it in its full height, the tree can only be invited life size into the exhibition space when presented horizontally. The portrait lays bare the limitations of human perspective, while also bearing witness to the liveliness of the spruce. Wind sets the atmospheric tone of the soundscape. Trees creak and branches swish, composing a sequence of unruly tunes. Birds call from outside the image frame. A tiny human figure stands at the foot of the tree, slightly off-centre. The human reveals its inadequacy to the task of a measuring stick of everything, when the scale of the tree is taken as the standard.

PHOTO: PETRA KOTRO

“Can one be shaken with surprise by something one knows through and through?”

THE ANNUNCIATION, 2010
3-channel projected installation
16:9 | Audio 5.1

“Can one be shaken with surprise by something one knows through and through?”, the voice-over wonders in *The Annunciation* (2010). Art history serves as a starting point for the re-presentation of the encounter between an angel and a young woman. Recreation of the scene concentrates on the rehearsals. The supporting characters, such as the eavesdropping servants and birds portrayed in the Renaissance paintings of the scene, also have a prominent role as silent witnesses. As carrier pigeons perform their own rituals beside the human performers and peer at them from above as if from the eaves of a church, the centre of attention begins to sway.

The paintings represent simultaneously the miracle of the immaculate conception and the rational enlightenment worldview. The meeting of spirit and flesh is ordered by linear perspective. In Ahtila's work, however, the incompatibility of different beliefs and viewpoints opens up a space for rehearsing the interrelated notions of human, woman, divine and animal anew. The miracle lies here in the possibility of multiple parallel realities.¹ More than witnesses, birds act as guides here, giving us wings to ways of seeing otherwise. Rather than transcendence of mind or spirit over matter, they may promise flight from the species loneliness of humans.² This is the work of wonder, before any attempts at understanding.³

The inquiry into how to portray a tree has led to a plethora of further questions in **Eija-Liisa Ahtila's** practice over the past decade: Who or what can be seen or heard as a protagonist in moving image narratives? In the installation *Horizontal* (2011), a single tree poses an elemental challenge to technologies

based on human senses and historically specific conventions of representation. Yet it also unsettles assumptions about the singularity of viewpoint and of being. Across the screens, the tree performs its plurality. What might appear as an individual is actually a knot of relations. It is part of a multispecies

community and dependent on microscopic interactions as well as planetary forces. How to picture this multiplicity of perspectives?



POTENTIALITY FOR LOVE, 2018

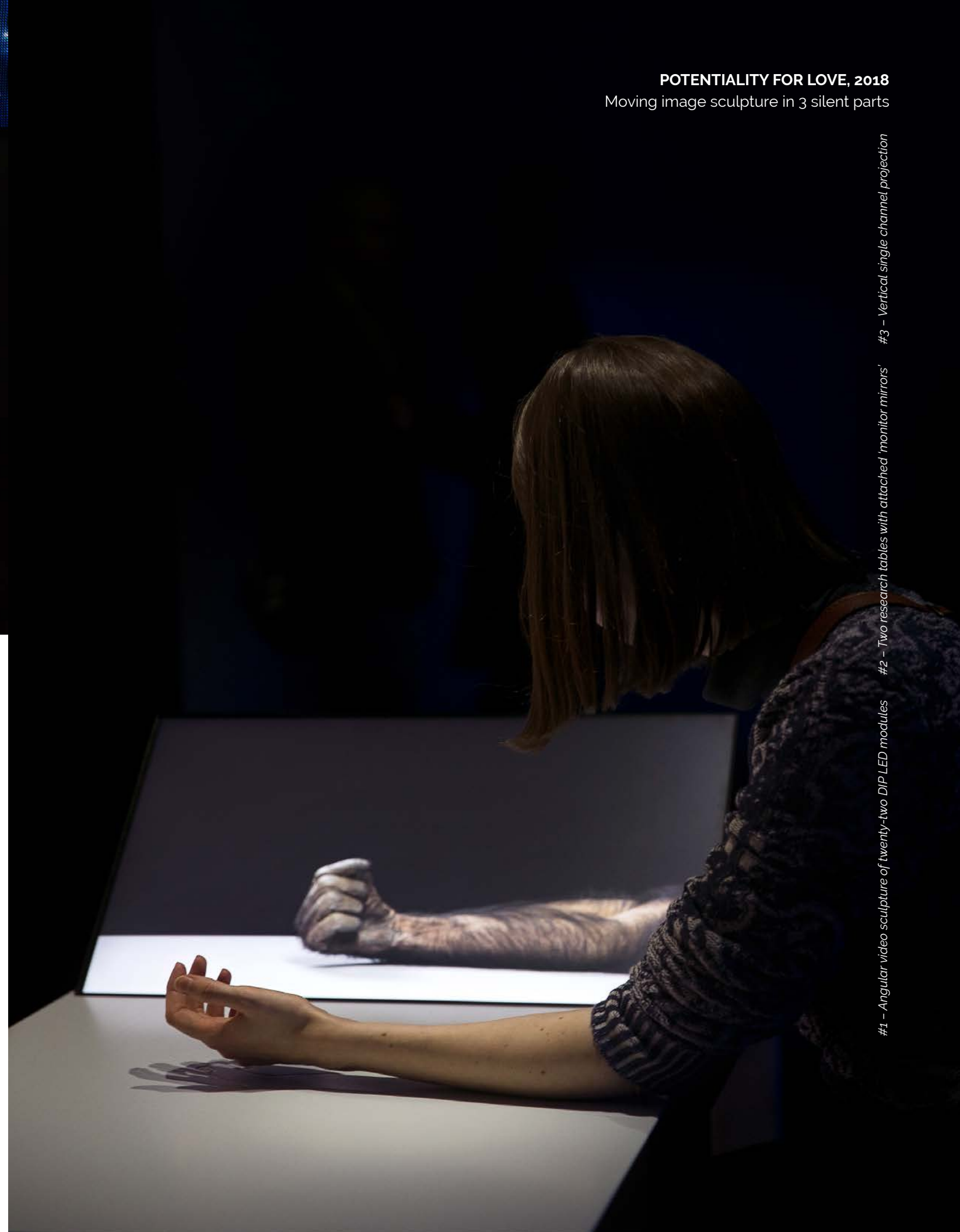
Part #1 – Angular video sculpture of twenty-two DIP LED modules

Potentiality for Love (2018) explores the miraculous web of life further in search of our expansive capacities for attachment. The mother, repressed and revered in Western culture, is portrayed as a figure floating in space in the LED video sculpture *Memory of Mother*.⁴ Without fixed coordinates or grounding, she appears cosmic yet ordinary. When the viewer moves closer and the figure approaches them with her arms open for an embrace, she slides out of focus into material colour pixels and to a zone of haptic vision, where no clear-cut distances prevail.

On the two Experiment Tables, the viewer witnesses their own outstretched arms transform into those of another ape. When our eyes and nerves tell us

something other than what we have learned to believe, the distinctions that guard the boundaries of our selves falter. Yet irreducible differences remain, even across enmeshment. The same and the other just no longer appear as opposites. As a chimpanzee glances at the viewers from the video *On the Threshold*, there are no words as mediation, no way to see what the other animal sees. With no storyline or even sounds as guidance, the installation *Potentiality for Love* offers a silent situation for recalibrating our senses as viewers.

POTENTIALITY FOR LOVE, 2018
Moving image sculpture in 3 silent parts



In Ahtila's earlier works the protagonists are in a constant state of becoming, entangled in a web of intimate relations woven across generations, historical and geographical distances, and beyond human kinship. The works subtly disrupt normative understandings of rational agency and individualised sense of self in the face of death, the suffering of others or mental breakdown. Neither the bounds of the subjects nor of their homes appear tightly secured, but rather compassionately, even defiantly, open and malleable.

In the multi-channel installations the storylines are

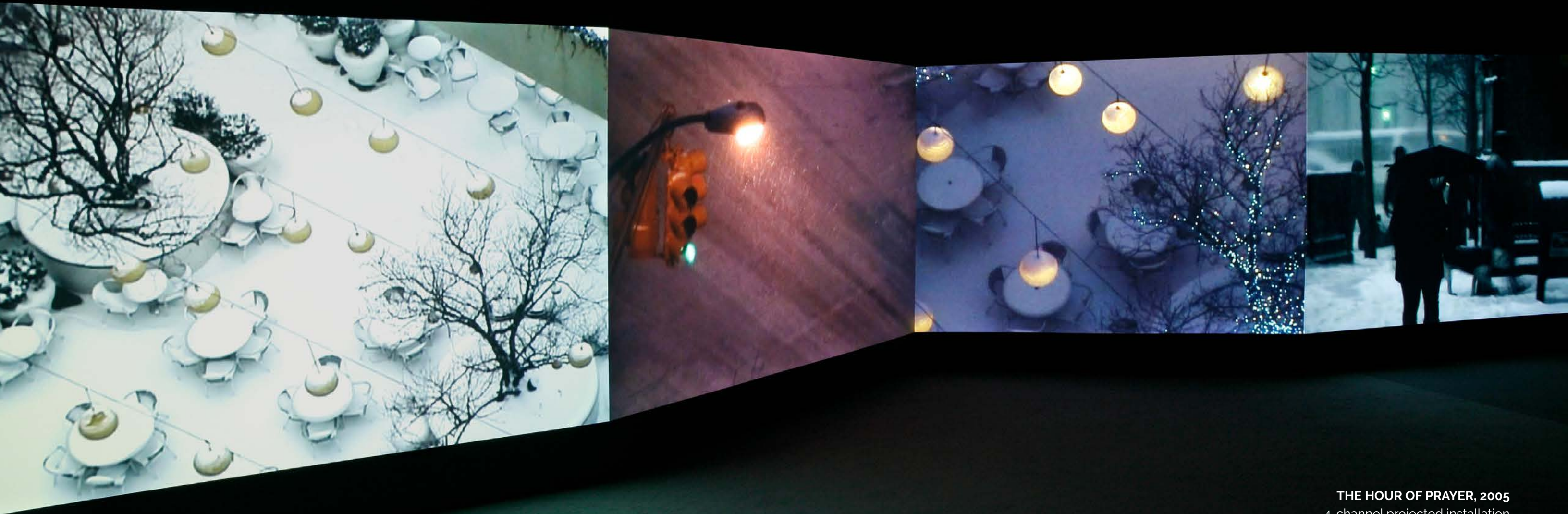
pieced together by the viewers as they navigate between multiple views on the scenes of events. The protagonists often address their words to the viewers, inviting them into the realm of the unfolding narrative. Beyond a medium for messages, speech acts as a means of reaching towards others. Sounds also flow over image frames and break loose from linear time, while the protagonists hear voices across distances. In classic cinematic narration, when words fail, the body takes over from the mind. Ahtila's works question this dichotomy as the protagonists, for example, bark at each other. What if they are not out of their minds, but rather negotiating their porous

boundaries? What if our languages - spoken, visual and narrative - are not up to the task of keeping us in touch with/in the world?

Rituals, endings as beginnings, are often at the heart of her works as they attend to relations in need of care. *Hour of Prayer* (2005) tells of grief over the loss of a family member, a dog, and of deep attachment between species. The personal narrative resonates also with the urgency of ecological grief in the face of the environmental crisis. "Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories," as **Donna Haraway** writes. How to make kin and to see eye to eye with those,

who have a radically different sense of the world? Other beings cannot simply be placed within the frames previously reserved for human subjects, without these frames with their underlying ideas and ideals also being transformed.

The embodied and imaginative capacities of humans for feeling and becoming with others are emphasised in Ahtila's works. It is not only birds that get to fly in her work, but human protagonists also shake off the shackles of their habitual perspectives. Guided by a sense of kinship beyond cultural, gendered or species divides, their flights are carried by the experimental potentialities of moving image.



THE HOUR OF PRAYER, 2005
4-channel projected installation
4:3 | Audio 5.1



“It is not only birds that get to fly in her work, but human protagonists also shake off the shackles of their habitual perspectives.”

THE HOUSE, 2002

3-channel projected installation
16:9 | Audio 5.1

Studies on the Ecology of Drama (2014) examines how moving image narration and its elements - composition, framing, focus - could allow for a multiplicity of parallel perspectives. Moreover, how could it attend to the interdependencies between these divergent views on the world? Birds take us up to the boundless air space, but also teach us that time is not one. Humans live in slow motion in the eyes of a swift, while our existence is merely a glimmer in the long durée of the life cycle of stars. Could we learn from the metamorphosis of others on how to transform our perspectives?

Her earlier works were described as human dramas, yet recent installations suggest after all. Fiction is a powerful tool to expand horizons, to air our minds and blow away dated notions of human exceptionalism. Letting go of the scripted narrative, Ahtila has opened her process of experimentation increasingly for unpredictable factors. Viewers, meanwhile, are invited not so much to thread together stories anymore, but to enter a "pluriverse" of perspectives.

Both the development of Renaissance perspective and its Modernist fragmentation took part in the societal transformations in Europe at the time. How can the methods and means of art align with the changing world and worldviews today? How to picture, for example, a forest as a complex ecosystem and a heterogeneous community, rather than as a place or a resource, a field of trees, measurable by human gaze and lense-based technologies? How to become part of the forest like a tree, merely a perspective, more or less, amongst many?



INSTALLATION VIEW, Marian Goodman Gallery New York

STUDIES ON THE ECOLOGY OF DRAMA, 2014

4-channel projected installation

16:9 | Audio 5.1

REFERENCES

- ¹ The work quotes Jacob von Uexküll on the idea of differing time-spaces of living beings. Jacob von Uexküll, *A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men* (1957).
- ² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Tecahings of Plants* (2013).
- ³ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993).
- ⁴ Unlike video projection, in a led-sculpture the technology, light and the image are materially experienced in the space, while the image can only be clearly seen from a distance.
- ⁵ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (2008).
- ⁶ Mario Blaser & Marisol de la Cadena, *Pluriverse. Proposals for a World of Many Worlds* (2018).

“How to become part of the forest like a tree, merely a perspective, more or less, amongst many?”

FROM EXHIBITION "GESTURE", 2018

Galerie Anhava, Helsinki

photo: Jussi Tiainen

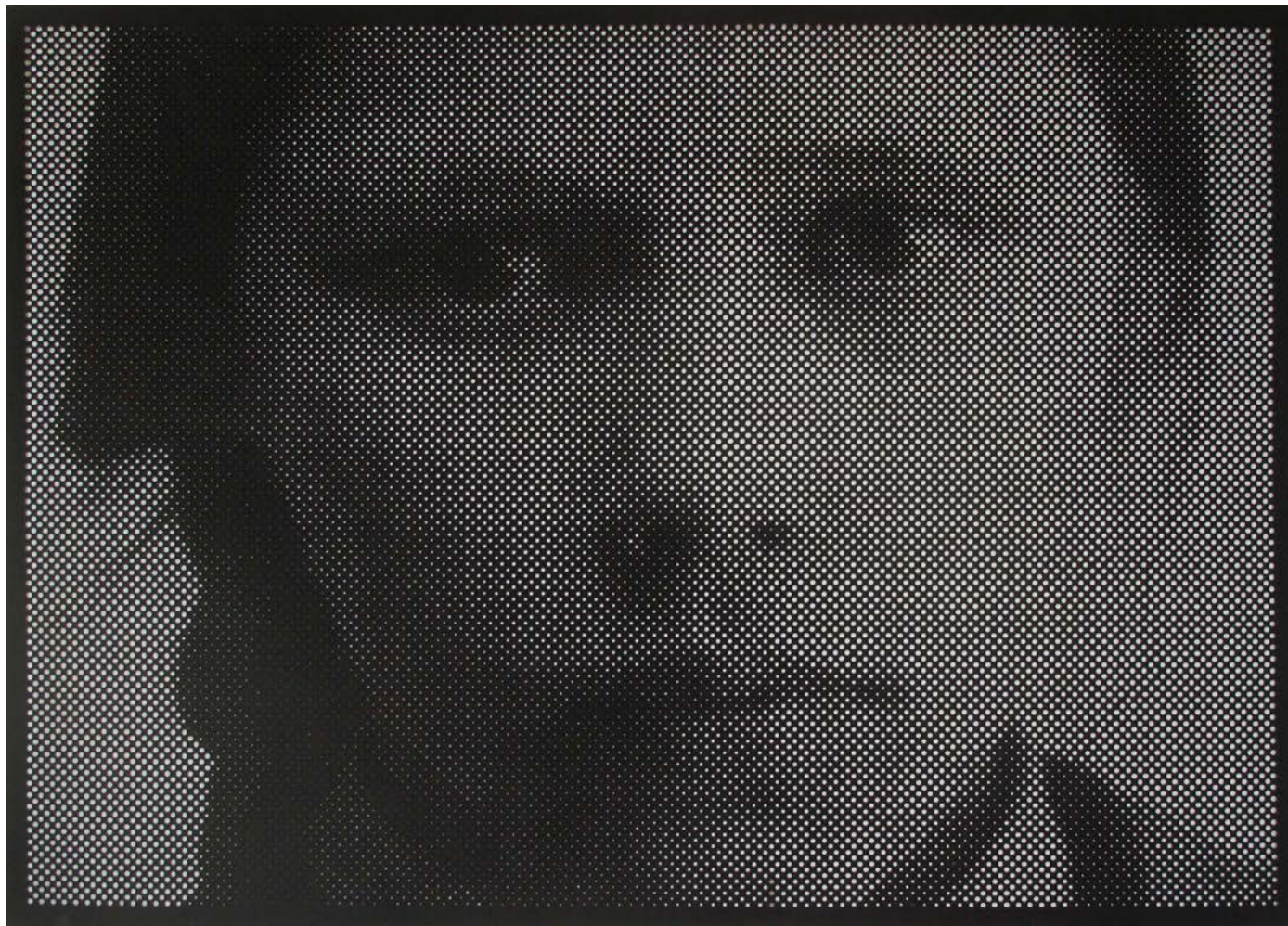


MAARETTA JAUKKURI

SEEING BEYOND THE IMAGE

Portrait is and has been a long-time interest in **Anne-Karin Furunes'** art. We are not dealing with the traditional portrait where the artist observes a model and creates a likeness by drawing, painting, sculpting, or photographing. The models here are in pictures of persons discovered in various archives. They often tell stories of the tragic events of the 20th century and how these events affected individual people and their lives. Among these we find photographs of shockingly young German soldiers in Norway during the second world war, Jewish women sent to Nazi Germany, victims of eugenics in Sweden, women criminals in prison.

PHOTO: PETRA KOTRO



PORTRAITS OF PICTURES VI, 2009

acrylic on canvas, perforated 160x240cm

On the other hand, her art includes pictures of red insurgents in the civil war 1918 in Finland and also of the women volunteers fighting along with the men. She found these surprising pictures haphazardly categorized in the archive of the Military Museum in Finland.

The archival pictures are often small in size, and their technical quality is modest. Furunes concentrates on faces and crops the images in a way that leaves none of the attributes that could reveal the person's social position. It is surprising to see how much a bare face actually reveals about the person but also about the time, or the spirit of the time, when the picture was taken.

When looking at these portraits, the viewer surprisingly experiences an eye contact with the person in the image. There is a moment when we feel that the person is looking back at us. The perforation technique used by the artist makes the picture to resonate with the changing light of the room as well as with the viewer's movements. The image becomes an optical, kinetic experience.

It does not seem important to know who these people actually were as the effect of the images is dominantly visual. Their background can be traced on basis of the information of the reasons for their having been documented together with the information of where they are archived and why in a cer-

PORTRAITS OF PICTURES VII, 2007

acrylic on canvas, perforated

tain category, or without any.

Photograph, however, is only the premise for Furunes' work. The technique she is applying is to pierce by hand different sizes of dot-shaped holes on a canvas or a sheet of paper. The sizes of the holes let light pass through them in varying degrees. When a work is to be shown outdoors the same technique is carried out on aluminium plates by machine. Anne-Karin Furunes has continued to experiment the qualities of the perforation technique by projecting light on a white paper with a figure pierced on it. The image appears as a half-tone photograph on the wall or other surface behind the paper.

The pictures that originally were used for bureaucratic ends of recognition and surveillance have been, through this process transformed into portraits. The purpose of this makeover is to see the portrayed person as a fellow human being, an individual, and a victim who has lived through tragic historical times.

While looking at the archival pictures, Anne-Karin Furunes seems to be accommodating the personal worlds of the portrayed persons. In a certain sense, she engages in "translating" these pictures into portraits. Nothing is actually changed, instead she delves into the background of their tragic fates, sees the individual with her reasons for acting the



PICTURE OF PORTRAITS II, 2006

acrylic on canvas, perforated



PICTURE OF PORTRAITS II, 2006

acrylic on canvas, perforated

way she has done, or the ways different ideologies or politics have isolated unwanted people, or crushed their dignity and beauty. She transfers the pictures into another context by seeing and revealing the profound humanity that we all recognize when our eyes meet those of the portrayed persons.

“She transfers the pictures into another context by revealing the profound humanity that we all recognize.”

A document has been transfigured into art and the crucial aspect in this process has been the artist's ethical aspiration which, in art historical terms, echoes the tradition of the theme *Ecce homo-behold the man*.

A further aspect of this transformation can be traced to the new definition of aesthetics as presented at the time of the Enlightenment by the German

philosopher **Alexander Baumgarten**. **Hans-Georg Gadamer** has referred to Baumgarten's definition which sees aesthetics as the “art of thinking beautifully” (*ars bene dicendi*) and recognized how it reso-

nates with the classic definition of rhetoric as the “art of speaking well” (*ars pulchre cogitandi*).¹

Besides portraits Anne-Karin Furunes has used landscapes and pictures of plants and flowers. One of her public works

is the aluminium façade relief at the house dedicated to the Norwegian poet and nationalist **Henrik Wergeland** (1808-1845) in Eidsvoll Norway. The house was inaugurated 2005 to mark the centenary of the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian Union.

PORTRAITS OF PICTURES, 2007

2 Murals, painted and perforated aluminium, 1075x714cm

Telenor, Bergen, Norja | photo: Øystein Klagegg





CALVING GLACIER IV, 2013

acrylic on canvas, perforated

based on photo by Geir Winge Gabrielsen / Norwegian Polar Institute Tromsø

In the present Ars Fennica exhibition, the works shown are of glaciers as they are melting and breaking into free floating ice rafts. The metaphor used of these incidents is 'calving glacier' and it is met both in English and Norwegian. The documentary images come from the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromsø where they have documented melting glaciers for over fifteen years.

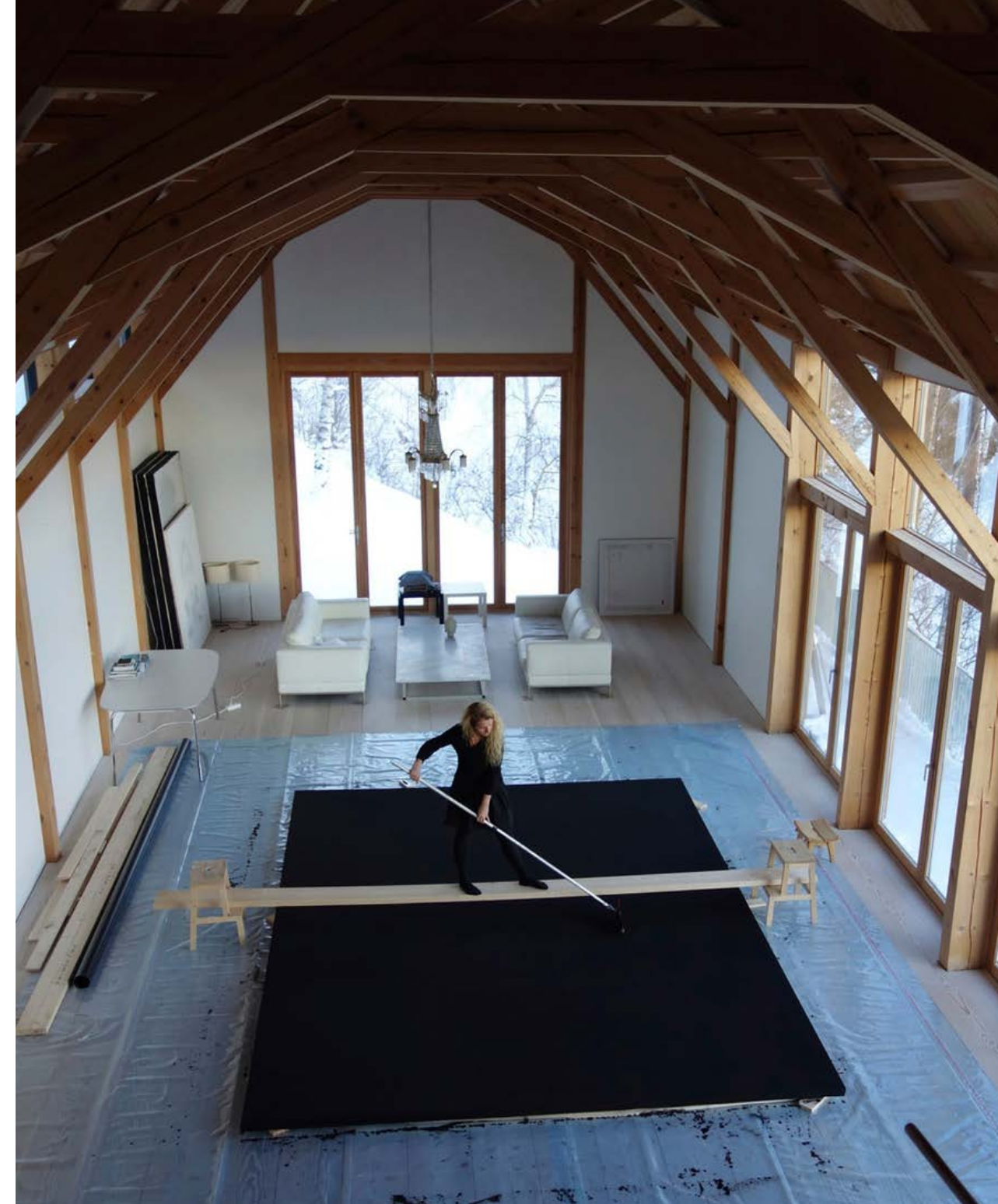
Glacier as a motif belongs to the category that in aesthetics is defined as that of the sublime signifying things that are limitless and beyond control. Their

beauty, however, can be admired at a safe distance. This is no longer the case. Melting glaciers is a global threat and concerns us all. We are causing shocking, irreplaceable damage to nature. In this case, the issue is further of the sensitive polar area.

“Metaphor used of these incidents is calving glacier”

We all are responsible. The offenders cannot be identified as we all are. We are living a collective nostra culpa moment, or actually an epoch. This, however, also includes an unprecedented responsibility for nature and for one another.

ANNE KARIN-FURUNES
artist working in her studio



When looking at Anne-Karin Furunes' paintings, the experience is different from that of viewing traditional paintings. We see round holes of varying sizes, reflections, and changes of light. We are aggregating these in our minds into meaningful images. Indeed, the title of the artist's first solo show in 1994 was "It's All in your Head". The spectator takes an active role in perceiving the image and creating a

meaning. The experience is born and opens up by concentrating on the parts and the moments.

REFERENCES

¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 1998, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, toim. Robert Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK



CORPORÉALITÉS, 2020

Installation view, Perrotin, New York

photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



INTERPASSIVITIES

SVALA VAGNSDATTER ANDERSEN

It is always a question of space. Even when at first glance **Jesper Just** is obviously a video artist, the screen always involves its surroundings, transgressing two-dimensionality and spilling its content into site-specificity. This exchange between the physical setting and digital images is ongoing through Just's oeuvre, every work breathing the air of the exhibition space, its history or somewhere in particular. Boundaries between presented and represented spaces seem to blur in various ways when technology evolves into sculpture and the moving pictures connect subtly with external elements. Thus, Just's body of work,

PHOTO: PETRA KOTRO

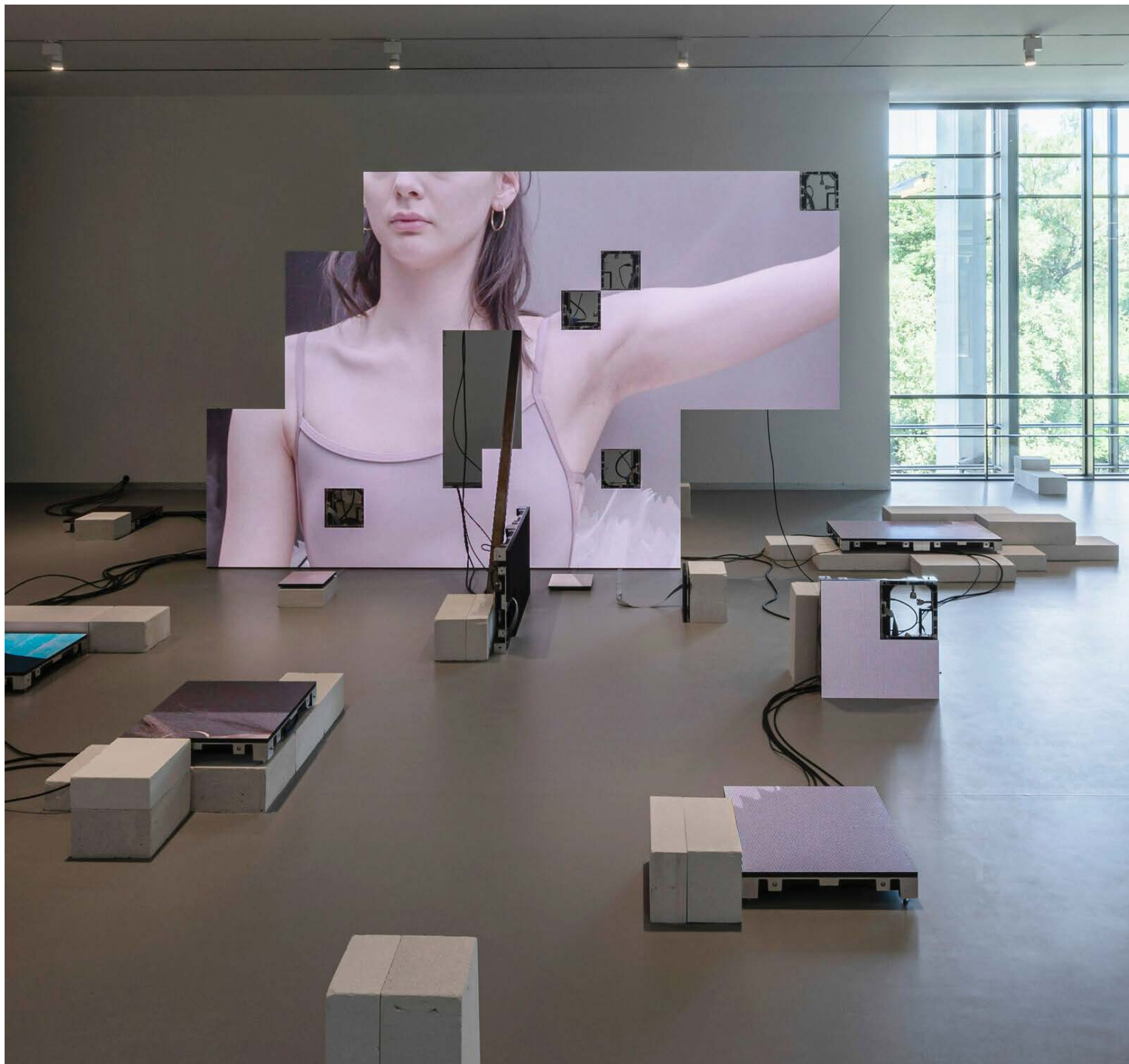
which started out questioning categories of sex and gender, broadened towards gently dissolving rigid categories between seeming opponents like nature and technology, passivity and agency, space and image.

Likewise, it has lately become unclear whether a work by Just is under construction or slowly ruining, scattering bits and pieces around it. When high technology seems to be supported by a beam of steel an odd interdependency is formed. We cannot know for certain whether the beam is some leftover scaffolding, a temporary repair or the restoration of a work which has returned from the future. This way, an eerie timelessness is introduced as chronology seems somehow short-cut and progress returns – not with a vengeance, but tentatively treading unknown waters before our eyes.

The blurring of causality in accordance with the out-of-balance chronology manifests itself throughout Just's later works. Thus, multiple circuits connecting actors on screen with soundscape and electrical and sculptural elements are structuring several video installations and performances as well as interconnecting art works. Creating a network of meaning and visual elements the circuits



“It has lately become unclear whether his works are under construction or slowly ruining, scattering bits and pieces around them.”



CIRCUITS (INTERPASSIVITIES), 2018

Installation view, SMK Statens Museum for Konst

photo: Anders Sune Berg

“The artworks just seem to happen.”

amplify each other between works like the ballet performance *Interpassivities* (2017), *Circuits* (2018) and *Corporalities* (2020). The enhancing interchangeability between artistic elements loop the spectacle into never initiated effect machines. The art works just seem to happen.

The missing initiation stresses the dissolved opposition between passivity and action. Further, the acting subject is questioned through intertwined circuits which indicate non-hierarchical relations between elements like human bodies, technology, and nature. When the classically disciplined ballet bodies move on the LED-screen in *Corporealities* they do so as a reaction to impulses from an electronic muscle stimulation system and not by human will. The bodies are connected, lightly touching or

“We are the props, the bystanders who make the space perform.”

holding on to one another. Each electrode is wired to a single tone on a piano which remains hidden in the video installation. When music is played the dancers' muscles contract and an odd micro-choreography is performed. The idea of an autonomous human subject is suspended as the bodies are being danced rather than dancing to the music which is played out of sight. Likewise, music as ballet accompaniment is cast against character as it here physically moves the dancers' limbs like a faceless puppeteer. The electro-body circuit takes the initiating subject out of operation.

This de-centered agency in Corporealities is mirrored in the displacement of emotions. The ambient feeling is produced through the soundscape, *Pavane in F-sharp minor* by **Gabriel Fauré**, a piece of high romantic classical music. The music is performed very slowly, tentatively pausing and falling out of rhythm almost like a music box playing an uneven tune. Instead of the dancing bodies moving the audience with their expressive spectacle, the music plays the part of both an affective catalyst providing feeling and an effective entrepreneur manipulating muscles. At the same time, the music as a structuring element appears elusive, introvert and dissolving, imitating the wounded technology and the withdrawn human bodies.

Just's later installations abstain to invite the spectator. No main character takes the lead driving a

narrative forward. Often the spectator starts out with a feeling of being lost, having entered the exhibition through the wrong entrance, being late for the start (because there is none), feeling uncomfortable because there are no seats or indications of how and where to experience the spectacle. Nevertheless and oddly so, the almost immanently closed and never quite initiated effect machines have already taken the spectator into account. We are the props, the bystanders who make the space perform, we are the emotional mirrors, and we amplify the installations' feeling of displacement, the site-specific enactment of being out of place.

The closed circuits which variously curve through the works thus initially appear withdrawn, but eventually crack open and turn their inside out for the audience to see. By dancing the body by electric impulses the work applies the smallest meaning-bearing unit of dance, the muscular spasm, the morpheme of dancing expression. The intrinsic ambience of the installations is contradicted by an externalization which involves us in the hardware, the electrical installations, and the bodily physiology. The art machines meet their audience inside out.

From the very outset, Just's works have been deconstructing categories and oppositions concerning identity and gender, body and technology, center and margin. At the same time, the works challenge the art genres, mixing and stretching practices like



CORPORÉALITÉS, 2020

Installation view, Perrotin, New York

photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



“Whenever the spectator feels lost in a Just installation, she is exactly in the right place.”

sculpture, video, installation and conceptual art. No one genre predominates the others – the distinct Jesper Just aesthetics blur boundaries and make the genres appear as one seamless techno-poetic network. As a trademark, the techno-poetry permeates Just’s later works. The technology is not only a practical media solution for presenting artistic content, it is part of the imagery, contributing to the

placid beauty expression of the works and equally sharing agency with humans and natural elements.

So, whenever the spectator feels lost in a Just installation suspecting to have taken the wrong turn somewhere or having ended up in the engine room, she is exactly in the right place to perceive the art work from the inside out.

CORPORÉALITÉS, 2020

Installation view, Perrotin, New York

photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli



KAI KARTIO
TRANS. TERO KONTTILA

ABOUT VIGGO

It's a pleasure for me to write about the art of **Viggo Wallensköld**, but I can't be objective. Viggo's work touches me deeply, but it's not only that. We became friends in the 90s in the Sinebrychoff art museum where Viggo was serving his mandatory non-military civil service while I was working as a curator. When you know an artist personally, you end up looking at their work through the prism of their personality. Especially so if the personality is as memorable and the story as unique as Viggo's.

Growing up, Viggo's path was in a way laid out for him. He was the heir of the great mansion of Stensböle, near Porvoo. The estate was governed by Viggo's grandmother **Gunvor Wallensköld-Rotkirch** who

“When you know an artist personally, you end up looking at their work through the prism of their personality.”

did not see eye-to-eye with her son. Viggo's father, the eccentric artist **Ivan Wallensköld-Rotkirch**, was first and foremost a conservationist. Protecting the vast primeval forests on the mansion

grounds was an issue dear to his heart. His mother, however, had a more conventional view of running the estate. Her priority was to ensure that the historically significant mansion setting stayed in good condition. Consequently, Gunvor Wallensköld-Rotkirch decided to donate Stensböle to the Svenska Litteratursällskapet, the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland.

Due to the distant relations between the family, Viggo rarely visited his grandmother. But as a child, Stensböle must have seemed as something of a fairy-tale destiny in waiting. The donation of the mansion was an enormous life-changing event, further emphasized by his father's enormous disappointment, bitterness towards his mother, and concern for the forest.



MORNING, 2020

oil on canvas, 120 x 90cm

private collection

“Models are typically naked or half-dressed, often with both male and female sexual attributes.”

Did losing this pre-determined, binding identity lead to some type of a feeling of detachment for Viggo? As an adult, he reconnected with his grandmother, became close with her, and came to understand the burden he had avoided by having the upkeep of Stensböle lifted from his shoulders. Would Viggo even have become a painter and author if his grandmother had not donated the mansion? In any case, the memory of Stensböle certainly lingers in Viggo's artistic expression.

As the only child of two painters, an artist's life was a familiar and natural progression for Viggo. Through studies in art history and at the Art Room of University of Helsinki, he found his way to the Finnish Art Academy School in 1990. Following some experimentation as a student, the themes and broad lines of his production were remarkably well laid out by the time he graduated in the mid-90s.

His early pieces *Spring* (1994) and *Morning* (1994) contain all the features that Viggo's art was to become known for: a quiet indoor setting with a solitary character that physically deviates somewhat from

the ideal of the time. The titles often contain times of year and day, filled with anticipation and longing. Viggo would paint variations of his most important themes over and over again.

One could imagine that the art pieces would be bleak in their depiction of strange or deformed characters. But this isn't the case, as the works resonate with peace and respect. To Viggo's characters, their body is something to which they can't help but calmly resign: this is me, I have no choice over the matter. The idea of body as a prison is at its most tangible in works where an amputated body is kept artificially alive. In these pieces, the atmosphere is serene and melancholy, yet not oppressive.

Viggo's models are typically naked or half-dressed, often with both male and female sexual attributes. Sexuality is always present in his paintings, but not as direct action or tension but rather as an element of bodily existence and its inherent problems. Sexuality is part of your given form to which you must simply resign yourself.

WINTER, 2020
oil on canvas 165 x 100cm

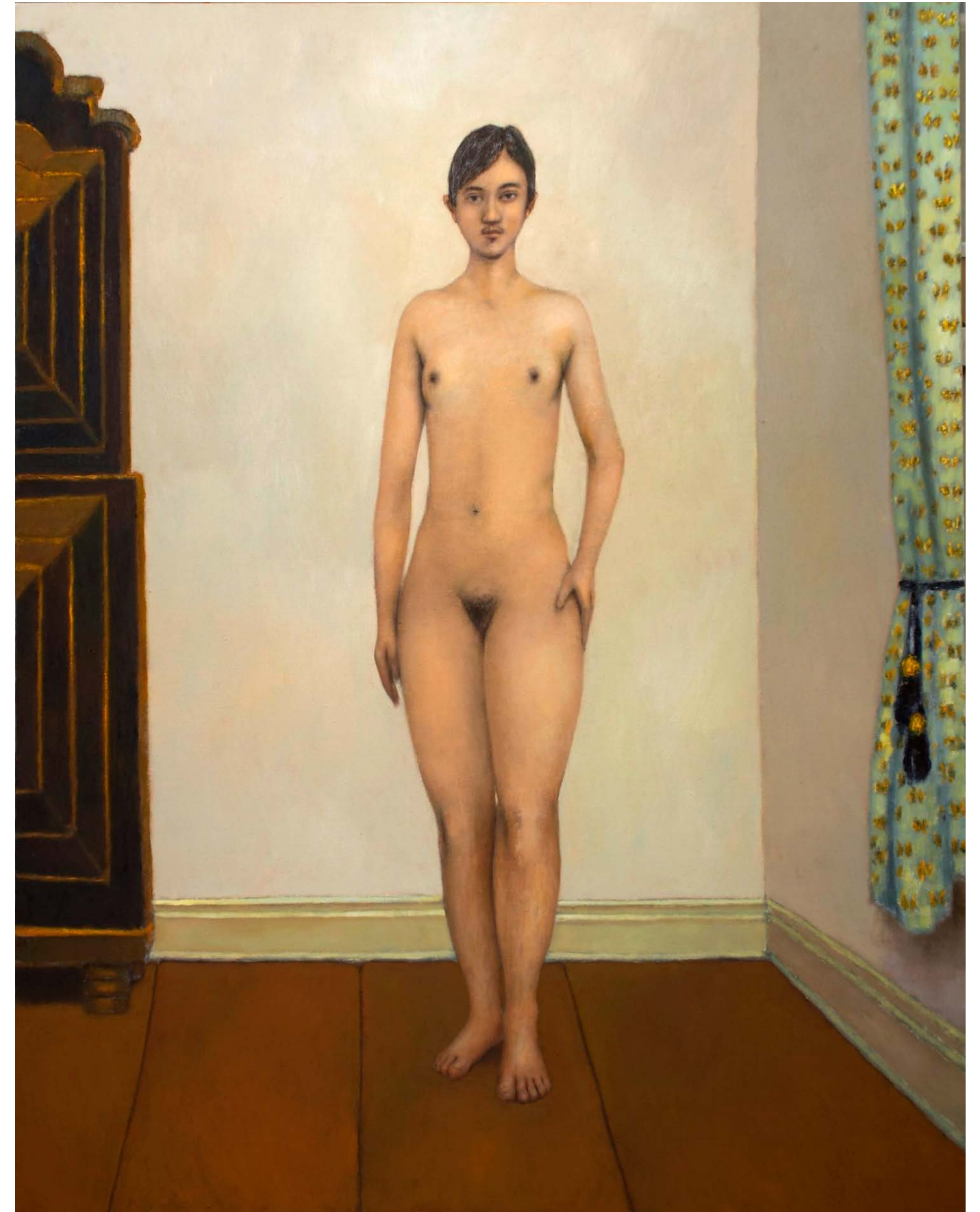
Some works have titles that allude to history or nobility: *Princess, Realm, Legacy, Red Room, Private Collection, Duchess...* In these works, in the way they reference traditional portrait paintings and interiors, it's easy to see links to Viggo's personal history and family background. The connection is most glaringly evident in Viggo's more recent paintings that are based on old photo albums from Stensböle.

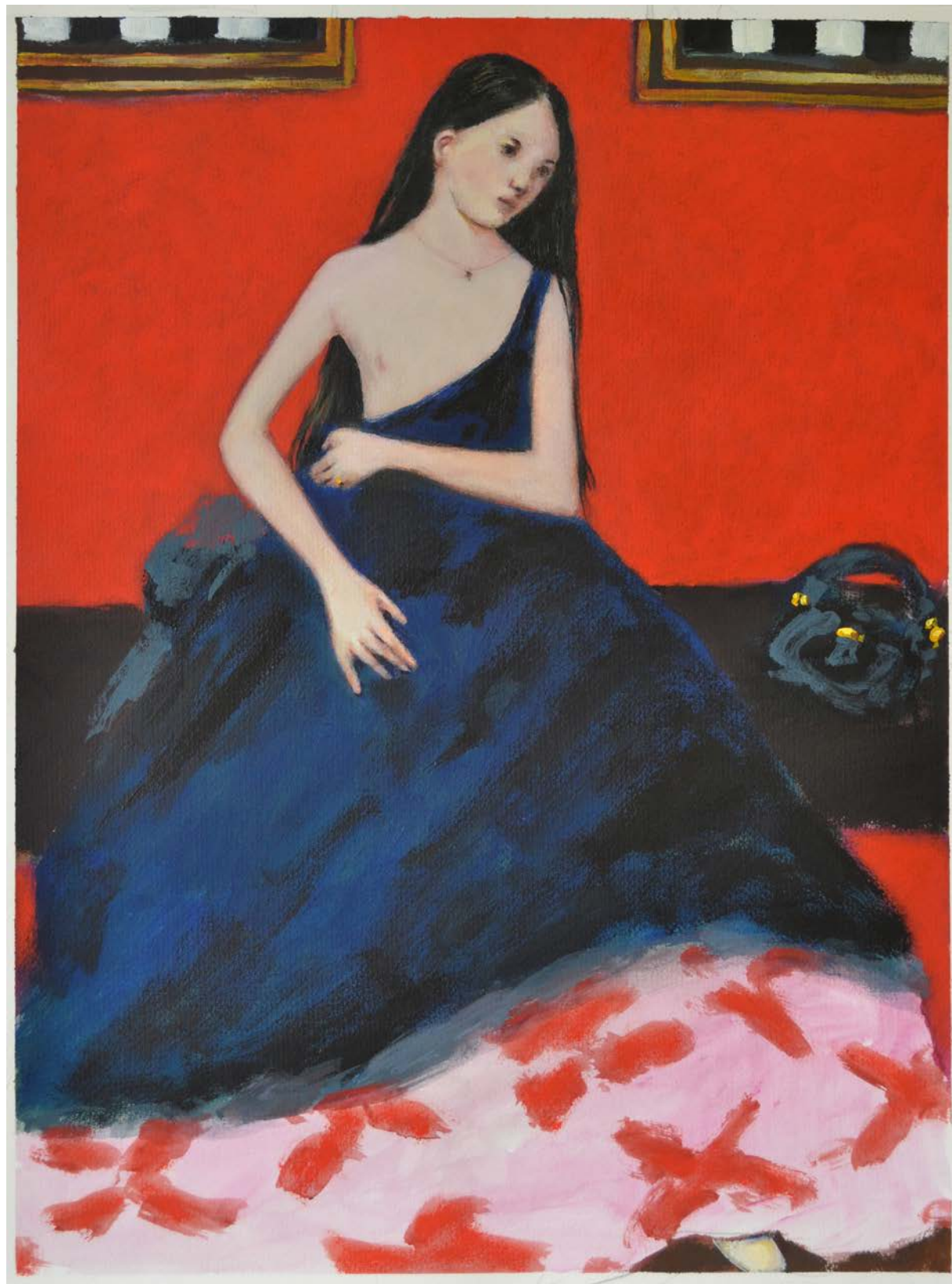
Throughout his career, Viggo has used two quite different painting styles in parallel. One is a technique with clearly defined lines based on thick layers of paint where a dry, harsh paint surface evokes the style of **Balthus** whose works Viggo greatly admires. In Viggo's works painted in this style, the colour surfaces often contrast and glow in a way that recalls the icons of Novgorod. Since childhood, Viggo has been interested in icons and the Orthodox culture, perhaps due to the influence of his mother, renowned for her icon painting. His interest in icon art is also evident in Viggo's composition and, in a certain way, in how he depicts people.



“It’s easy to see links to Viggo’s personal history. The connection is most evident in Viggo’s recent paintings, based on old photo albums from Stensböle.”

PRINCESS, 1994
oil on canvas 180 x 140cm
Kiasma





BAL, 2012
acrylic on paper 56x42cm
private collection



PRIVATE COLLECTION, 2012
acrylic on paper 45x42cm
Amos Rex



Viggo's other painting style is based on running paint and vivid brush strokes with translucent colours. Viggo has favoured this style especially in recent years, in his paintings based on family photos. However, the style has always been present in his works, especially in smaller landscape depictions.

Viggo's books and book illustrations are a completely different story. His first book, about the fictional mycologist Anatolij D. Mbdrinov, was published in 2005, and more books have followed, especially in the last few years: *Anatolij D. Mbdrinov through the eyes of his peers* in 2016, *Stroganoff: Anatolij D. Mbdrinov's studies* in 2018, and last year's *Unexplored fungi, now and then: The research of Anatolij D.*

Mbdrinov.

With these books, where the wildly expressive illustrations play a significant role, Viggo has practically invented his own genre of prose. The bewilderingly imaginative storytelling can sometimes leave the reader out of breath. They are also a vehicle for Viggo's anarchistic sense of humour. Reading *Stroganoff*, I was laughing so hard that my spouse had to come in to see if I'm ok. On the other hand, his latest book, *Unexplored fungi, now and then*, strikes a more melancholy tone.

How will Viggo surprise us next?

“Viggo has practically invented his own genre of prose. The bewilderingly imaginative storytelling can sometimes leave the reader out of breath.”

LIFTING THE FUNGI, 2018

Illustration from *Stroganoff* -book



UNNAMED, 2016
installation with 5 OH projections
20m x 2,5m

LARS-ERIK HJERTSTRÖM-LAPPALAINEN
TRANS. LIISA MUINONEN-MARTIN

ZERO POINT 1:1

This exhibition is a situation. It is real, but were it not for you, it would not exist. What happens at the exhibition, happens within you – it concerns you specifically. There are the documents, the animations, but beyond those, how the exhibition happens, and the fact of it actually happening, that depends on you: your past, your aspirations, your class background, your health and all the other events and characteristics that happen to have come together to create the individual that is you. It's important to note the distinction between situation and installation. An installation turns all of its constituent parts into art objects and relegates the viewer into a supporting character whose purpose is to fulfil

PHOTO: PETRA KOTRO



a pre-determined function. What **Magnus Wallin** sets out to do is to capture something documentary within art itself, which installation does not allow for. And the viewer should not be implicated as art but invited to engage as themselves. The concept of situation comes from **Simone de Beauvoir**. The brilliance and strength of this concept lie in the fact that all our individual circumstances constitute links

to a world we all share. And that world is very much implicated in our circumstances too. This is to say that our existence provides no neutral ground and allows for no safe distance, such as might relieve us of our individuality or exempt us from this shared world. And the same applies to Wallin's art too.

Shot and assembled with scientific precision, the

photographs of subversive bodies in *Unnamed Film*, (2017) are most immediately recognisable as documents. But, rather unexpectedly, the monochromes in *Are You in Pain? – Not Anymore* (2021) turn out to constitute a series of documents too. These particular documents reference **Kazimir Malevich's** *Black Square* (1915), often cited as the "zero point" of painting. Lest the point be misunderstood: by turning his attention to the simplest painting of them all, Wallin is not attempting to write himself into the art history canon. What he is interested in is the function of that "zero point".

Take the Celsius scale as an example. Celsius can be used to refer to a unit that indicates a difference or range between two points on the temperature scale or to a specific temperature, i.e. 0 or 100 degrees Celsius, temperatures that are defined by a factual observable reality. The "zero point" at 0 degrees Celsius is not determined by its proximity to +1 degrees Celsius or -1 degrees Celsius but by its relationship to the freezing point of water. So there are circumstances under which you could state that water began to boil at less than 100 degrees Celsius but then you would simply have to adjust to that reality and re-calculate the units based on the boiling point. It follows that variation in the zero points observed is possible.

That is why it matters that Wallin has created such a multitude of monochromes. Their number highlights

the monochrome as a situation that can be repeated with variations; not as a unique event in history but as a unique form. That is why Wallin has reproduced Malevich's exact dimensions at 79.5 cm

“Wallin sets out to capture something documentary within art itself”

ARE YOU IN PAIN? - NOT ANYMORE, 2016

79.5 x 79.5 cm

from exhibition *7 monochromes and a smiley*
Oslo Kunstforening

X 79.5 cm exactly. The repetition serves to foreground the form, and the choice of the 1:1 scale

underlines its status as the document recording the moment in which a black square became art for the very first time. This act of becoming is an animation. (And the series of equidistant monochromes displayed against a high-gloss white wall readily call to mind a film reel.) Animation gives life to objects, just as the monochrome animates solid colour. And a living object is what we recognise as art.

The title of the work derives from a line in **Charlie Chaplin's** *Limelight* (1952). In fact, the words "are you in pain?" appear a total of three times.

"That's all that matters," Chaplin says.

The monologue seems to be his to be or not to be moment, a chance to explain to someone who's recently attempted suicide that life, our ability to create, is the single most marvellous and mysterious thing in the universe – and something the would-be suicide was willing to simply throw away. Pain matters, because only pain can destroy the creative freedom, afforded to us by our imagination and our intelligence, that sustains the inexplicable capacity of space, cold and dead, to create new life. But this is precisely why the other factors that determine the reception afforded to an artwork – zeitgeist, trends and old-age among them – constitute forms of suffering. The question gets asked one final time when the ageing, past-it star delivers his magnum opus, and strikes out, artistically obsolete and socially irrelevant. "Are you in pain? Not anymore." The artist and his work have been seen on their own terms for one last time. Then comes death.



METHOD, 2011
material: 3 human skulls
21 x 43 x 15 cm

"Method left my fontanelle exposed, vulnerable and open to art."

I believe that this take on life and art, on creativity and reception and the issue of visibility are all present in Wallin's work too. Animation for him is a question of medium. And when it comes to his monochromes that medium is blood. And fragments of bone too. Human bone... The challenge lies in allowing the blood and the bone to be present, as themselves, free of symbolism, unencumbered by metaphor. The monochrome lends itself ideally to precisely this purpose as it resists the creation of unintended figurative meanings. Meaning is not a matter of narrative, of telling, but simply accepting blood as blood is not enough because as a medium, as a substance, blood generates metaphor-like meanings. Consider the life-giving nature of blood. Is it a symbol or not? This ambiguity generates a distance that forces us to remain outsiders. That is why the medium needs to be experienced, as a smell lingering in the space or as a sensation within the body. And that is what Wallin excels at. It's no easy feat. But my eyes grew bloodshot watching his *Horizon* (2005), my teeth were set on edge by his monochromes and his *Method* (2011) left my fontanelle exposed, vulnerable and open to art. This is art becoming part of my own organic existence.

This is art as double vision. For just as the art enters the body, the soul recoils from the medium. I've seen people leap backward when they realise what the artworks are made of. This is a material that you see with your body; you see it, as you feel the self-same material inside yourself. These bodies have no respect for boundaries. In this exhibition they insinuate themselves close to my body as it reflects off the glossy white wall, further away than the misshapen bodies (the monochromes) hung upon it. Similar use of reflection

*“I’ve seen people leap backward
when they realise what the
artworks are made of.”*



ELEMENTS, 2011

film installation with projection, 3D animated
16:9 HD

has featured in his earlier works, including *Mission* (2009) and *Cylinder* (2012).

The reflections between the monochromes themselves give the space a vague, all-encompassing quality. There is no outside. And yet it is lent a sense of life and vitality by the dual presence of these bodies. In this space, I am at my own mercy, my body as lonely as the others. Open and closed, like Unnamed, running on a loop. It serves as a reminder of the bizarre nature of this situation; at once wholly individualistic and yet completely universal.

Many, **Marcel Proust** among them, have had the experience of an artwork gazing back at them. This is the challenge issued by Wallin's monochromes: you are to view them with a gaze that does not wish for them to avert their eyes or look away from you. It is only in that moment of double seeing that you can truly experience them. Unnamed, a video displayed outside of the room, is about persuading the people featured in it to look back at you and meeting their gaze. That's what's required, no more, no less. On some of the photos, the eyes have been removed by the scientists that took them. Wallin's response has been to provide new eyes by layering the images up. As in the other room, the bodies can be seen, they become visible, through one another – as if that was a condition for truly seeing them! Sometimes the eyes have been redacted but, later, the black fades and the eyes re-appear to return your gaze. Once or twice I thought I could see a chest rising and falling. An incredible moment. This marks the zero point for how I want to view my fellow human beings from now on.

ELEMENTS, 2011

film installation with projection, 3D animated
16:9 HD

***“This marks the zero point for
how I want to view my fellow
human beings from now on.”***

