

MARI SUNNA

Paintings

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galerie anhava

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As an artist, Mari Sunna (b. 1972) invariably manages to evoke a sense of familiarity while remaining enigmatic at the same time. All her works are instantly recognisable: it is apparent whose mind, thoughts, and brushstrokes have created them. Sunna's sensitivity, vigour, and confidence that borders on sleepwalking are qualities that are impossible to miss.

And yet it is also the case that her most recent paintings are never similar to the works she has produced before; they do not look the same.

Examples of Sunna's previous works include paintings of faceless girls and faces that are almost terrifying to behold. Stylised portraits joined together by compact colour surfaces and characters with multiple arms and legs that express a multiplicity of motion. Portraits composed of small, cell-like structures and abstract compositions. Spiritualised, almost incorporeal female figures.

In her most recent paintings, Sunna has taken the internal contradictions of the painting to the extreme: the factual flatness and the mirage of space, the static nature of the painting and the illusion of explosive speed. These paintings, just like all other works by Sunna, form a coherent whole that is organised in its own terms. The works evoke a sense of utter strangeness, and yet they seem bewilderingly familiar. It is easy to see traces of Sunna's longstanding interest in the boundary between figurative and abstract art in the paintings. The reality portrayed in these works fluctuates somewhere between the magic of Tarot cards, our shared reality, and spiritualised hallucinations. They evoke a sense of perplexity and joy in the viewer.

According to Sunna, she has recently become interested in visionary artists, such as Guo Fengyi and Aleksandra Ionowa, figures who do not fit comfortably in the canons of contemporary art. In her practice, Sunna wishes to avoid paintings that "look like contemporary art", refusing to follow pre-existing patterns of any kind. Indeed, Sunna's works comprise a form of self-reflection that may bring surprises even to the artist herself – although the concept of "self" is, in part, an uncharted measure.

– Ilona Anhava

Mari Sunna has in recent years taken part in exhibitions organised at e.g. Galerie Burster, Berlin (2020); Museum of Art and History, Brussels (2018); Palfrey Space, London (2018); Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta (2017–2018); Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2015–2016); and Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan (2015). Sunna's works are part of several important art collections both in Finland and abroad, such as Saastamoinen Foundation's art collection, the Aspen Collection, Deutsche Bank, the Nordic Watercolor Museum, the Saatchi Collection, and the UBS Art Collection. Her works have also been acquired for many private collections in Finland and the Nordic Countries, the Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the USA.