

ULLA JOKISALO

Wordplay

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galerie anhava

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Galerie Anhava is pleased to open its 2025 exhibition programme with **Ulla Jokisalo's** *Wordplay*.

Jokisalo's art is rooted in language and narrative. Her works combine the techniques of handcrafting, photography and cut-out with philosophical and conceptual reflections on the nature of childhood and memory. The recurring grey-haired figures of dolls and humans in her new works are woven into broader themes regarding the flexibility and fragility of memory and the mystery of childhood.

The aspect of creating by hand is a vital starting point for Jokisalo. Her process begins with notes in her sketchbooks and, following a meandering trajectory, culminates in the final framing of each piece. In this exhibition, Jokisalo's conceptually and linguistically oriented approach is inspired by images of her mother's childhood. Drawing from an extensive image archive, she prints, cuts, colours and embroiders the images. The resulting works seem to follow the principle of "Être composé" – an assembled, "compound being". The toolkit encompasses a camera, a computer, as well as thread, needles and a paintbrush.

Alongside its linguistic-philosophical approach to craft, Jokisalo's practice is also circumscribed by the surrealist tradition she embraced in her youth. The titles of the works, such as *Fort-da*, *Être composé* and *Doppelgänger*, point the viewer towards the key concepts that inspire Jokisalo's art. In addition to individual pieces, the exhibition also includes the series *Lapsuuskuvasto*, where Jokisalo's distinctive practice of layering black and white photographs creates a fascinating imagery that blends fairytale elements with the allure of Gothic horror.

The *Wordplay* exhibition evolved over a space of several years, with the works reaching their final form in 2024. In some instances, the artist revisits themes she has explored in the past. Jokisalo considers every exhibition a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art – where every unique piece is the result of a long, complex process.

The title of the photographic piece *Noema (mina ja äitini tänä vuonna 2024)* is a reference to **Roland Barthes's** famous conception of photography. The motif is an image of a daguerreotype from the 1850s/60s that Jokisalo found in a magazine and saved back in the 1970s. It was not until the 2000s, by which time the clipping had grown fragile, that she used it in *Noema*, replacing the eyes of the girl and her mother in the original image with photographs of her own eyes and those of her mother. This simple pictorial gesture is a distillation of many of the defining elements of Jokisalo's practice: the use of found and personal imagery side by side, undercurrents of fear and care spilling in opposite directions, the reimagining of motifs, and layering of temporal planes. Previous versions of the work are from 2009, 2010, 2013 and 2017.

Art is a total embodiment of the artist's thinking, encompassing every choice and action. Ulla Jokisalo returns to her studio again and again, to the fearless motion of creative freedom between image and language, and begins constructing a new work, an assembled being that finds its form through her process.

Ulla Jokisalo's 70th birthday exhibition is dedicated to her mother.

Ulla Jokisalo (b. 1955) lives and works in Helsinki, where she began her artistic career in the early 1980s. She studied photography at the University of Art and Design from 1977 to 1983. She subsequently taught photography as a professor at the same university from 2002 to 2004 and as artist professor from 2004 to 2009. Jokisalo held retrospective exhibitions in 1993 (Kuopio Art Museum) and 2001 (Helsinki City Art Museum). Her numerous accolades include the Finnish State Art Prize in 1984 and 2001, the Finnish Cultural Foundation's Grand Prize in 2001, Pro Finlandia in 2010, and most recently the Finnish Art Society's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023. Jokisalo's works feature in several collections both in Finland and internationally. Her recent participations in collection exhibitions took place at the Brooklyn Museum 2024, Turku Art Museum 2023, Wäinö Aaltonen Museum 2022, and LACMA, Los Angeles 2021. Jokisalo's latest solo exhibition, Imaginations of Freedom, was held at HAM Helsinki Art Museum in 2018–2019.