

ELINA MERENMIES

The Birth of Creatures

6 – 30 March 2025

The eighth solo exhibition by **Elina Merenmies** at Galerie Anhava presents paintings and ink works created during the past two years, as well as drawings from the artist's recent travels in the Eastern Mediterranean. Drawing on historical accounts, literature and religious texts, the works branch out in multiple directions, while always forming a timeless, internal world of their own. Miraculous events, devastation faced by mankind, and hope and solace rising from the ashes acquire a unique, deeply moving form in the artist's layered expression.

The themes and visual references in Merenmies's work have always crossed temporal boundaries and borders between inner and outer realities. In the new works, the historical strata of the places Merenmies has visited expand timelines even further: in recent years, her journeys have included Greece, Jerusalem and, most recently, Egypt at the end of 2024. The settings of ancient, myth-laden events and the experiences she encountered on her travels left a lasting mark, giving birth to the works of the exhibition.

In Egypt, Merenmies painted an icon depicting the construction of the Tower of Babel on the exterior wall of a Coptic church in Anaphora, and in her spare time, drew impressions from the travels on the rough paper of her sketchbook. Its pages captured the mythical burning bush at Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai's expressive trees, the pyramids, and the profile of the Sphinx. The tiniest wonders receive the same significance in Merenmies's ink drawings as the great wonders of the world. A round cobble, spotted from the dormitory window grows a face and gets lifted up from the desert grass to greet an equally tiny mole. Elina Merenmies creates works that are extreme mysteries – irresistibly enigmatic, and simultaneously dazzlingly clear in their straightforwardness.

A marvellous light radiates from her paintings, often emanating from within a human figure or creature. The inner glow is a quiet, secret sparking deep within a forest or in the recesses of a desert cave. The wild, raging fire on the other hand reveals its full destructive power in the paintings: a smouldering human body lies in a pyre, and in another, sparks in the fist of a charred, defiant figure mirror the destructive blaze on the horizon.

Many of the artist's motifs have accompanied her for a long time. Alongside skywards reaching branches, birds and other creatures conjured by her brushstrokes, appears the figure of a serpent, slithering up to Adam in Paradise, or rising up as if in flame from a blood-red stream on the antechamber of chaos. Beyond acting as the revealer of secrets, the serpent can also be seen as a harbinger of change and a symbol of new beginnings. Out of ashes, fresh growth can appear, and great tears can give birth to winged creatures of light.

– Aleksandra Oilinki

*A new book spanning the last twelve years of the oeuvre of Elina Merenmies (b. 1967), titled *Everything Shows*, was published in November 2024 in connection with the artist's solo exhibition of the same name at Turku Art Museum, where some of the works now on display at Galerie Anhava were first exhibited. Merenmies's works appear in major Finnish public and private collections as well as in the collections of several European art museums, such as the British Museum and Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, and in numerous international private collections. In recent years, her work has featured in both solo and group exhibitions, among them Turku Art Museum (2024–2025), Amos Rex (2022), Helsinki Art Museum HAM (2022; 2024), Nordiska Akvarellmuseet (2019), Norrköping Art Museum (2017–2018) and Serlachius Museum (2017–2018). Alongside her artistic practice, Elina Merenmies has served as rector of the Free Art School since 2020.*