

HELI HILTUNEN

You shall sit upon emptiness and hold on to air

12.3.–5.4.2026

galerie anhava

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In the burgeoning light of spring, Galerie Anhava presents **Heli Hiltunen's** colourful and contemplative exhibition *You shall sit upon emptiness and hold on to air*. Here the artist takes further steps away from words, photographs and fragments of personal archives familiar from her earlier works, instead opening herself to the painted image. With her new paintings and drawings, Hiltunen creates for herself a path made of traces, memories and stains – a place to step into.

When she paints, Hiltunen feels like a dog following its nose, or a blindfolded child trying to find her way through a garden or upending the order of a doll's house. What matters is the process; what is essential is the courage to stop, to face dead ends, to change course and reorganise what has been experienced. Painting for Hiltunen is a wordless journey towards some soothing quality, like managing chaos or tolerating uncertainty. Ascribing meaning and creating order in an age that feels perilous. She is fascinated by how little it takes – just an image – for something come to existence.

Hiltunen's landscapes are laminated with imagined and experienced places: rolling fields in Normandy, layers of a summer garden in the Gulf of Finland, ruins of romantic literature, hopes and dreams. In the works, time builds up in layers, alternately condensing and dissolving, accelerating and slowing down. Bright greens, luscious reds, lilac purples, quiet grey, rich ochre and glowing orange are rendered in layers of oil and acrylic paint, pencil, oil pastel, and coloured pencil. A ghostly reverse side of the image emerges on the paper, rendered in dark ink. In the photographic work that opens the exhibition, Hiltunen returns to a stage image familiar from childhood. Theatricality is also present in the diptych that dominates the end wall of the main gallery. Like a backdrop for a theatre play or an old photograph, it invites us to imagine a different world.

Settings are formed within the landscape and among the trees, with interlaced stretches of sky, rough annual rings, the curvatures of valleys and treetops mingling with summits. The journey unfolds along playful patches of sunlight, delicate coral-like branches, the smooth surfaces of stepping stones, reflecting puddles, resolute dots and dashes. The chosen routes and the traces they leave shine through one another. For Hiltunen, paintings are like quiet, breathing creatures that do not shout or explain. The observations they depict are softly blurred and the memories unreliable, yet meaningful, steady, cherished. There is only light, colour, presence, time, and a place from which the human figure is absent.

– Oona Latto

*Heli Hiltunen (b. 1960) graduated from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in 1990 and has since held solo exhibitions and participated in group exhibitions both in Finland and abroad. Her most recent major solo exhibition, *Sydämen oppivuodet*, was shown at Hyvinkää Art Museum in 2024. Hiltunen's works are held in numerous Finnish and Nordic collections, including those of the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, HAM Helsinki Art Museum, Sara Hildén Art Museum, and the Saastamoinen and Wihuri foundations. Hiltunen was awarded the prestigious Ars Fennica prize in 2001.*