

Painting Now in the Baltic Region



Alexei Gordin, *In Your Head*, 2016

The Fund of Päivi and Paavo Lipponen, People's Culture Foundation. Photograph: Petri Virtanen

The Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in [Helsinki](#) attempts—to like many museums that are not the main centre of attention—to walk a fine line between global ambitions and community roots. One does not need to spend too much time in town to hear some critical remarks. “I wish they would not underestimate their audience,” a local artist told me, referring to the museum’s educational way of addressing art. Another artist pointed to the museum’s eagerness to be “contemporary” and “international”, which at times blindfolds the staff to potential close by. However, the two goals, local and [global](#), do not necessarily have to contradict.

Two recently opened exhibitions offer the opportunity for a closer look. The first is a show by Helsinki-based artist Maija Luutonen, who was

awarded the newly launched Kiasma Commission, sponsored by the Kordelin Foundation. The second is a group presentation titled *There and Back Again*, featuring artists from Finland and the Baltic region, whose work has been acquired for the collection.



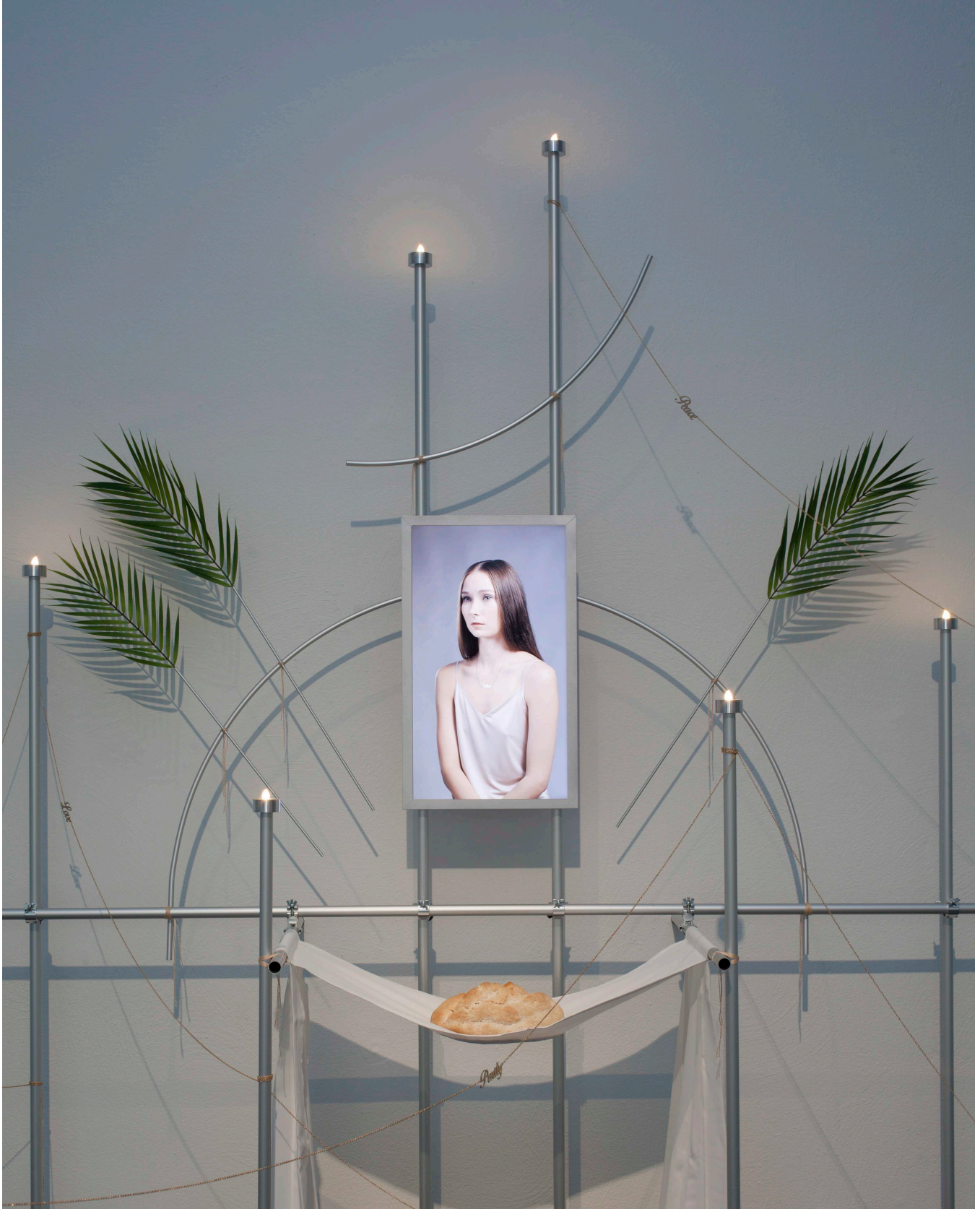
Karel Koplimets, Case No 13. *Waiting for the Ship of Empties*, 2017

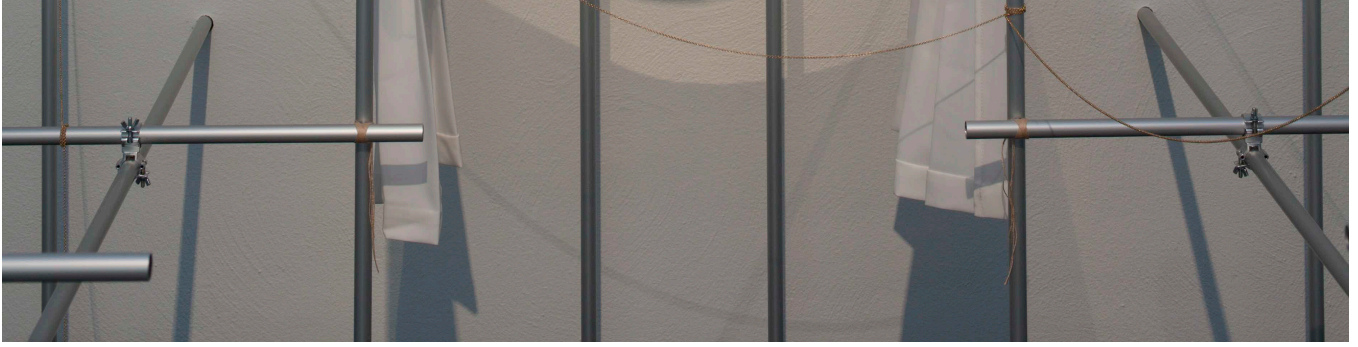
Photography: Manuel Mägi

Kiasma follows a collecting model based on widening the circle. Starting from Finnish art, it becomes broader, from direct Baltic neighbours, to Europe and Russia. Jaan Toomik from Tallinn, Estonia, has an early video piece called *Dancing Home* (1995) on display, showing the artist dancing nervously on the deck of a ferry boat, played in a loop to the point of irritation. But through that, he casts a clear physical presence.

Riga-based artist Daria Melnikova presents *Rooms 3 Follow Me* (2015), which consists of an altarpiece comprised of minimal metal tubes and a number of electric candles, built around the photo of a young woman. The piece, with its strange, cool aesthetics, was inspired by present-day Baptist

churches, mixed with elements of popular culture. The artist is interested in routines traced in working spaces or, in this case, places of worship. The piece, with an additional soundscape, makes you wander between heartfelt faith and fake belief.





Daria Melnikova, Room 3 Follow me, 2015

In five newly-commissioned works by Latvian born, Helsinki-based artist Inga Meldere, [painting](#) and print technique are mixed. Photographic images form a base layer, on top of which brushwork is added, sometimes subtle, elsewhere in colourful stripes, counterbalancing or hiding the image underneath. Viewers move close to the work to find out what, in fact, they are looking at and this perceptual focus makes the piece attractive and, literally, superficial. The main concept is happening on the surface, in the interference between layers of print and paint.