

Mikko Hintz



Interviewed by Elīna Zuzāne

04/06/2012

I am meeting German-born Finnish artist Mikko Hintz (1974) at the artist's temporary studio in Riga, where Mikko has been living for the last four weeks and preparing his new exhibition "You're hello I'm goodbye", which opened on June 2 at "Kalnciema ielas kvartāls" exhibition space and will be on view through June 30.

Arterritory.com, however, has already familiarized with Mikko's work, when he had an exhibition "Enough is Enough" at the Estonian gallery *Temnikova & Kasela*, together with Latvian painter Inga Meldere. Since then Mikko has stepped away from layering paints and pigments, instead choosing to explore a rather different technique – silk-screening. But even though the medium has changed, the philosophy and the thought process behind his works have remained intact.



Did you have a clear vision for the exhibition "You're hello I'm goodbye" before you came to Riga?

I came here with two artworks in my pocket ["Fune" and "Onde Mol"], which were created a long

time ago – they are about 15 years old, but somehow they connect with the recent works as well. You can find a path and then you pick up what's going on. During my stay in Riga, however, my ideas mostly developed in the process; while I was working on some of the concepts, others came to mind. You just have to keep them in your memory.

Could you tell me a little bit more about the philosophy behind this exhibition?

There are several points of approaching this exhibition subject. On one hand, I found the silk-screening technique very interesting. Somehow I realized that it allowed me to bring together very different practices; I can reach out different ideas that do not have a sensible connection. Printmaking in general, and also photography, allows the artist to put his thoughts on one line. In a picture you have a perspective, you have several depths, but somehow this technique makes it flat, it flattens the image. I tried to create or pick out images that are in a way “not quite there yet” – that are not reached, that leave an impression that there could be more, or that there might be something waiting. When I look at these artworks I see that there is something looking back. Somehow there are almost entrances inside the work but you need to conclude it yourself. When people view any work of art, I have realized that they usually start looking for some reason. They try to find faces or figures. (laughs). I think it's a basic human thing – to locate something lively. Although these artworks are very diverse, I believe that you can somehow connect them together. It's something that you cannot avoid. When you look at them you connect these elements and I like that.



On the other hand, lately I have been thinking about this particular concept of boredom, which I actually stumbled over in Heidegger's [Martin Heidegger] biography. When I read it, I was in an absolute agreement with his philosophy. Somehow these ideas that Heidegger expressed felt like walking on a parallel street. I found that it connected with the process of painting – to feelings, which I am quite familiar with.

Does this mean that you often welcome boredom in your life?

(Laughs) It's a word that of course describes the feeling as in "I'm bored" but Heidegger explained his idea as steps that you go through during this process – it's a confusion that leads to somehow feeling connected. In this boredom you step back and become passive, which in turn leads to uneasiness. I find it very similar to the process of painting. You usually start working with a lot of energy and you hope that this idea will work, but what happens through this travel from the starting point to the end, is that you see that the idea has to change in order to work out. I think it's a general thing – the illusion and the reality. You start with the illusion and then you confront the reality, at which point you have to make a jump. I also think that between the illusion and the end-work, you have a feeling of somehow being ashamed or confused. You don't really know what to do but then you try and step forward. In a way it's unavoidable. In the last couple of shows I tried to explore this idea of getting confused and having many possibilities. In the process of painting I used many, many layers of paint with many ideas on top of each other, and then in the end it became a dead end.



Photo: Kalnciema ielas kvartāls

I recently saw a documentary about the German artist Gerhard Richter, where he explained that the process of creating art to him means a limitation of actions – each brushstroke limits his next move, until he is left with the dead end.

I think it's a good point. I mean – the second you decide to put a brush on the paper or canvas, according to the illusion or the idea you have, it's already a mistake. We human beings want to keep our illusions perfect. It's also a good idea, as, when you really hit the screen or push the button, you cannot go back. In that sense I would agree with Richter.

Actually, I really enjoy getting to know the thought process that other artists go through and the way they try to explain it to others. There is a different connection and it's mainly a physical connection when an artist is talking about his or her work. In this case, it is very realistic – this sense of the physical talking about the reality and illusion. I don't mean it like "I take the hammer and then I hit

the sculpture”, but how they describe the artwork – the allegories that link to the pictures, the words they use. I enjoy when artists try to describe how to get inside of their work, how to work this thing out.

When you talk about illusions, however, many times this type of works have more to explain than there is to see. By this I mean stories that are not actually your own and you don’t really know what you are talking about. It’s usually just like this – “I made a painting because I saw the movie” or “this painting is about this movie”. I find it more interesting when an artist tries to explain how to read the work in an unusual way. There is a real beauty in this difference when people use stories that are around.



I think it was Cage [John Cage] who said – “When you start painting there are million people breathing on your neck, but as you continue they become less and less in numbers. If you are lucky, in the end you are left with yourself.” This somehow describes what I talked about earlier – in the beginning there are many ideas and illusions, but as you continue working you realize that you cannot embrace it all, that your hands are not long enough.

You just mentioned your interest in the link between an artwork and a language. Has it influenced the way you name your artworks? How did the name “You’re hello I’m goodbye” appear?

I like to collect phrases. “You’re hello I’m goodbye” I found in a song but it easily links with an earlier show I had. It was called “On enter ok, on exit ok” [at *The Academy of Fine Arts*, Helsinki, 2001], which basically meant “come in and get out”. This time, however, it’s a contradiction in a single sentence. They are two parallel movements - like when kicking a ball and the ball flying over the goal; or trying to kick the ball but not being able to do it. It’s a miss. If you try to draw a picture, these diverse movements create a vacuum, openness. It’s a misunderstanding and a part of everyday life. I hold on to this idea, when trying to figure out what these works are about.

The title of each artwork, however, was constructed of a weird language. I keep them quite abstract or I translate them into different languages and try them out. Art is a language for me and in that sense I try to find words that somehow sound phonetically relatable. I think that the most interesting sounds come from a combination between Swedish and German. They are really beautiful.



Being half German, have you explored or wanted to explore the contemporary art scene of Germany?

No, I moved quite early but looking at Germany from Finland it seems very interesting. To be honest, there has been a general move from Finland to Germany. It is also happening within the art scene – many artists have moved to Berlin but this movement is also bringing a lot of things back. The institutions follow these artists and then they bring back ideas. That is actually quite great because it carries new views.

Sometimes I have thought about moving there. It's still an open subject. I don't know what will happen. Maybe. It's not a big deal for me – in the sense of a career choice. When you grow up with two languages, it's like you are always not really there, but not there either – when you are in Finland, you look back at Germany; but when you are in Germany, you look back at Finland. It's kind of a floating life. I guess it's a natural thing.



This year Helsinki is carrying the title “World Design Capital” and Helsinki in general has been deeply linked with design. Do you think that maybe this has overshadowed the Finnish contemporary art scene?

Although previously the interest in art hasn't been that high, at the moment we are starting to see things change – education process is happening. Artists are starting to expose themselves more and people are becoming more and more interested. Things are getting better.



I think that design has the ability to connect many different fields. The fusion of the Helsinki University of Technology (HUT), the Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration and the University of Art and Design proves that. You can easily spread design – you can use design everywhere. In that sense art is maybe not as accessible. Art is not so moldable. If you talk about objects – paintings or sculptures – you can place them, but they are very different from design. I think that people just haven't been used to art but it's something that you can learn – to look at art. And then you want to see more.

Mikko Hintz sends many thanks to Nordic Culture Point, Katrina Sauškina from silkscreen studio LUSTE and Una Meiberga from "Kalnciema ielas kvartāls".