

# Jaan Toomik. Theatre of Gestures

Jaan Toomik, one of the most renowned Estonian artists in the world, is a very interesting and controversial figure. At the end of 80s, when the Baltic region was involved in radical political changes, his work transited from neo-expressionist painting to post-conceptual and post-mediatic practices. These two aspects cohabit in the exhibition *Theatre of Gestures*, curated by Andris Brinkmanis – Latvian-born, Milan-based curator. The exhibition heralds the return of Jaan Toomik to Riga after a 10-year long absence and it is hosted at the Mūkusala Art Salon. The gallery space showcases a selection of recent paintings, sculptures, as well as film and video works conceived by Toomik between 2008 and 2018. New and older film and video works are displayed alongside a less familiar part of Toomik’s artistic output: his paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptural pieces.



Jaan Toomik, Theatre of Gestures, Riga

The title *Theatre of Gestures* comes from the analysis of the Latin etymology of the noun “gesture” (*gerere* – bear, wield, perform). It stands

for the movement of a part of the body, used to express an idea or a meaning, or an action performed to convey an intention. A form of expressivity genuinely nonverbal that indeed well fits the soul of the Estonian artist's works. Something always mutable that overlooks the medium or shape they assume. The exhibition attempts to reconcile all these different aspects of Toomik's output into a temporary "montage" within the exhibition space. More personal and somewhat raw paintings, comical sculptural pieces, drawings, prints, and a series of video and film works coexist on display, assuming a character similar to that of the singled-out frames or props for a possible film or theatre play.



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The curator insists on the concept of gesture; in his critical text, he mentions Eisenstein's concept of «mise en geste» (transposition of character into gesture), and the theory of *gestus* that Bertolt Brecht introduced into the field of theatre – where an illocutive *gestus* lies behind each act of enunciation. The gesture that Toomik's works embody aims to profoundly challenge the modern conceptions of the work of art. The Estonian artist goes beyond the definition of art-objects (paintings), more or less static in meaning and value over time; he actually questions aspects of making, by activating aspects of temporality, in order to connect in conceptual and material ways to viewers at a later time.



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Even though it comprises a large number of paintings, the exhibition is not a static display of canvases. Toomik himself has declared that his interest in painting vanished right after he started studying painting at the art academy. He soon started experimenting with all kinds of art making – performance, installation, conceptual art – something that is apparent in this Riga exhibition. The show is a continuous movement made of a paradoxical succession of still images. A stance that interrogates what seems to be the very matter of art: its capability to pose questions and not to provide answers. An exhibition in which Toomik's work reveals its presence, its spectatorial relationship, its capability to be ungraspable, despite its real presence.

Jaan Toomik: *Theatre of Gestures*, curated by Andris Brinkmanis, is on show at the [Mūkusala Art Salon](#), Riga until April 12, 2018