

Kunstraum, 21 Roscoe St, London EC1Y 8PT

## Merike Estna: fragments from the shattered toe



**Title :** Merike Estna, fragments from the shattered toe, Kunstraum, London, 2017.

**Website :** <http://kunstraum.org.uk/>

**Credit :** Courtesy the artist and Temnikova & Kasela, Talinn. Photographer: Benjamin McDonnell

## **Merike Estna: fragments from the shattered toe**

**Kunstraum**

**29 September - 25 November 2017**

**Review by Brenda Guesnet**

**In one of the earliest online browser games 'Curve Fever', multiple players each control a differently coloured 'curve' – a single dot that turns into a solid, snaky line as players command it to either turn left or right. To win the game, you have to continue navigating your curve across the playing field while preventing it from colliding with any of the other lines, creating obstacles for your opponents along the way.**

Most likely, this game has been long forgotten, or was never even very widely played. Merike Estna's solo exhibition 'fragments from the shattered toe' at Kunstraum, London, brought it back to mind: not only do her paintings have colourful, thick lines running erratically across large-scale surfaces, she also makes painting itself seem as playful and effortless as a 1990s computer game. But luckily for us, Estna's work is not presented on flat screens, but enwraps the viewer from different sides of the room with varying materials.

'damage was reparable' (2017) is painted on a thick piece of unstretched canvas hanging across the wall like a curtain. Here, Estna has painted a mop opposite its bucket – due to their black outlines, these objects seem to be hovering on the pastel surface of the painting, ready for action. Estna's labyrinthine lines connect these two familiar household objects to each other, tracing a myriad of possibilities like an algorithm for snakes and ladders.

The central element of the exhibition, however, is 'toe, toe, toe, go, go, go' (2017), a large plywood stage covered entirely by Estna's painting, that welcomes the audience, as well as performers, to stand and walk on top of it. Here, emoji-like hand gestures gently command the user into different directions, guided by zigzag lines that resemble jelly worms.



'fragments from the shattered toe' (2017), the work which lends the exhibition its title, quite literally embraces the viewer: it is a wearable rug, hanging from a trapeze, and gorgeously painted with a pink and turquoise marble pattern. Black hands (or gloves?) are woven into the fabric, but look graphically designed – a further example of Estna's clever interweaving of digital techniques with traditional materials.

Since Curve Fever was released in 1995, digital interfaces are increasingly competing for our attention at all times. They allow us to consume contemporary art alongside Kermit memes, play Candy Crush while receiving e-flux newsletters, and to express genuine affection using virtual heart emojis. As the boundaries between high and low, mundane and sublime, and handmade and coded thus become increasingly blurry, Estna's work cleverly exploits the seductiveness of digital surfaces and designs by mimicking them through painting and craft techniques. 'fragments from the shattered toe' turns painting into an ever-shifting, dizzying game, and invites us to come out and play.

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