

FRÄULEIN PRINT #4/2020: THE SHELL-STUDDDED COSMONAUT

vor 44 Minuten

Fräulein cover star [Kris Lemsalu](#)'s artistic interventions and performances are reminiscent of mythical rituals, offering connection and comfort in times of lockdown.

Art has always docked with myth. Beyond the conscious, under obvious connections and effects, there is something hidden within the depths of culture: images, archetypes, stories, feelings, and memories, which, in their fleetingness, can only be grasped and best shared through allegory, dreams, hallucinations. We need people— artists— who can feel and properly express.

Estonian-born Kris Lemsalu is a catcher of dreams and myths. Her performative and sculptural works stand on the threshold, emerging in a state of which Novalis says: *„We are near waking when we dream that we dream.“*

When confronted with Lemsalu's art, it becomes apparent that one is dreaming or wandering through a world that is more confused and complicated, more mystical and older, than what is seen in our everyday life. Her performances resemble shamanistic rituals; her works of art are cultural artifacts made of porcelain, fur,

shells, wool, silicone. Apart from their materiality, one never knows whether they come from a distant past or a distant future. there are strange idols with eight arms and bloated bodies, and there is a mixture of shrine and fountain which could also be envisioned as a temple, of which caused quite a sensation at the Venice Biennale.

Often, it is about nothing less than the human being in the cosmos, of eternal life and death, of the transition from matter into the ether. For example, in the work *Father is in Town*, hybrid beings undergo artistic metamorphoses: two figures are entangled on the floor, their porcelain dog faces licking each other in a typical dog-like greeting, however their hands and feet are human.





For two years, Kris Lemsalu has worked with her husband Kyp Malone, the musician and artist. Malone created the soundtrack for a joint exhibition of theirs at KW in Berlin. At the beginning of the artistic maze, a large boat in the shape of a swan floats upon a blue tarp, awaiting the spectator. More hybrid animals and creatures follow. On the occasion of this exhibition, Lemsalu told Deutschlandfunk Radio: „I am processing the various phases of our relationship and playing with different myths surrounding the creation of this world.“ The swan is a symbol of fertility as well as monogamous fidelity. The jaguar and hare represent ego, or alter egos, of the two artists. Other works negotiate gender politics and practice social criticism.

In the modern age, if not earlier, our culture seems to have become wholly devoted to logic, technology, and science. But the mystical and the irrational always lurks. Kris Lemsalu unveils this conflict like no other: playfully offering comfort through peculiar means. Here, the uneasiness in culture which Freud spoke of in his last great text, the conflict between drive and the rules and norms of controlled culture- is undermined and simply dissolved. This neo-modernist ritual becomes a happening through Lemsalu.

The art magazine *this is tomorrow* described the performance of Lemsalu during her Estonian contribution to the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019 as follows: „Music has traditionally been used in rituals to negotiate relationships among self, society, and the cosmos. It can create a fleeting sense of community. The vocalist seems to have gone into a trance, guided by the hypnotic rhythm. She emits a loud bellow thrumming with an intensity that resonates through your stomach, trespassing the surface of your body and tingling your soul. A shaman turns around the fountain, touching the lumpy and shiny ceramics, which activates the water running from twelve vuvlas.”

This is not much different from how Aztec ruler Moctezuma's priests would have received Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés as the returning god Quetzalcoatl at the gates of 16th century Tenochtitlan, then the capital of the world. Only, at that time, no one

was filming with their iphones, uploading the scene to Instagram. Through social media platforms where her performance was shared, you can see irritated, concerned, and also amusing audience members watching and following the procession as if they were a community; a growing cult. Discomfort with one's own past culture and existence was blown away.





For the interview with Fräulein, Kris requested spitfire questions, as it is a time when the Coronavirus threatens her family and way of life in lockdown in New York City. It became a questionnaire of wondrous wordplay, which we share with our online readers below:

Jung or Freud (why)?

I've been going to the Jung library here in New York and slowly feeling that dude more.

Superheroes you would like to perform with (why)?

I grew up with Soviet animation; superheroes for me are like the hedgehog from "Hedgehog in the Fog" and the mosquito from "The Tale of Tsar Saltan."
I believe this trio could really rock the art world.

"Everyone is an artist." True?

Everybody can be if they wanted to, but Beuys definitely was one of a kind.

"My secret is: I'm not made of sugar, I'm made of porcelain." Your feelings about this quote?

Actually, the quote describes the very feeling...

America, Land of the Free?

Bollocks!

3 inner states of mind you can live with.

Up till now, I've had to live with all of them.

3 inner states of mind you can't.

At the moment, sadness, anxiety and boredom are pretty present, but I can continue living with them.

That time you met the sublime (and got away)?

Inside Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgement...

Art is...

...necessary.

Art should be...

...giving keys to the houses that did not exist before.

Warhol or 3D print?

Warhol in the living room, 3D print in the bedroom.

The human condition, 2020?

To be revealed.

The story your grandmother or -father told you that you never forgot...

...that you're born with your biggest enemy – yourself.

At the beginning, there was...

...Fear.

Which culture of any place at any time would you like to have lived in?

...locked in our flat in Brooklyn, I'm dreaming of dancing on the beaches of Ibiza in the 60s.

Psychoanalysis or Psychedelic Rock?

All the psycho-technical support one can get!

The lyrics from any song stuck in your head...

"Put the lime in the coconut" is engraved inside my wedding ring.

Lenin or liberté?

Both are seductive; words that start with L always feel good in the mouth.

"Art begins with resistance." – Andre Gide. Your thoughts on this?

Everyone's art may begin with something different.

Poetry or pottery?

There is much more poetry in pottery than pottery in poetry.

The first 5 things that come to mind when you think of "birth."

B like boredom

I like irreversible

R like resistance

T like terrifying/terrific

H like hole

Venice or Hiiumaa?

Culture and nature are both crazy to look at.

I need both.

Light or night?

Whatever comes next.

"I never paint dreams or nightmares. I paint my own reality. – Frida Kahlo. Make sense to you?"

As long as it makes sense to her.

Speaking of dreams: What was the one that overwhelmed you most while dreaming it?

When dreams merge with reality, potential babies are made.

The most beautiful Estonian word and what it means...

...Ema ja isa (mother and father), because I miss them.

Life after death could be like...

...nothing else.

The need for storytelling in a digital world...

...has not decreased.

The taste of independence...

...between coca cola and banana.

Kanye or Coltrane?

Alice Coltrane.

"Great artists suffer for the people." – Marvin Gaye

Everybody suffers. Nothing against spirituality, but I do not have a messianic view on artists.

Can there be a relationship of two equals?

There already is a relationship between two equals.

Your favorite ride?

My way or the highway.

How can we overcome?

We can try to be one whole person each before we gather.

Hope or dope?

Always hope for dope.

What do you really think about when you are performing e.g. at a museum?

Mostly about performing, but "when is it over so can go and have a glass of wine with friends" comes easily.

All things must pass?

Some don't, even if you wish.

5 places to visit...

...Lenin's Mausoleum, Antidote Apothecary in Greenpoint, desert of Mongolia, Eduard James Sculpture Garden, and friends' places.

Say a little prayer?

I don't.

This allows you to be at peace...

...when I'm able to come and go.

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Birth

The beginning of everything.
The pleasure.
The pain.

Life

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Interview: Tobi Mauss

Photos: Joseph Kadow

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