

Nurturing Layers

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Nurturing Layers

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Master's Thesis: Written Component and Photographic
Documentation of Degree Shows.

University of The Arts, Helsinki - Academy of Fine Arts
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X ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

Summary

The Masters of Fine Arts thesis project consists of an artistic component, which was shown in two parts: the annual MFA degree show *Kuvan Kevät 2021* (12.5 - 31.6.2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki) and the solo show *Illuminated Tales* (10.12.2021 - 02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki). Both exhibitions adopted silkscreen printing technique as the main medium for expression. They explored the theme of the different facets of emotional life within figurative contemporary artworks. The other part of the thesis project is the written supporting text as seen here.

Loneliness was the central theme of my work *Diary Thoughts* in *Kuvan Kevät 21*. I had arrived in Helsinki during the first lockdown period of COVID-19 and had little contact with other students or people in the community. The work I developed reflects the feelings of isolation.

The second exhibition was in the front room of the Project Room titled *Illuminated Tales* and acted as a continuation of *Diary Thoughts*. The images reflected on how emotional experiences refer to questions regarding identity and belonging.

Both exhibitions contained medium and large scale silkscreen digital collaged works in a pictorial narrative way.

The written component *Nurturing Layers* aims to reflect on and document the artistic investigation, process and methodology. It contains a description of each artwork, the preparations of the two exhibitions' artistic work and includes photographic documentation.



Loving Sisters, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

List of Works

Kuvan Kevät, 12.5- 31.6.2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki

- *Foreignness 1*, 2021, silkscreen print on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr, 55.5x72 cm
- *Foreignness 2*, 2021, silkscreen print on non-woven fabric, 55.4x72 cm
- *Hidden Inside*, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca 32 gr, 104.5x60 cm
- *Not just a wooden toy*, 2021, silkscreen print on LYNX paper ca 300 gr, 53.5x79.7 cm
- *Once we were together*, 2021, silkscreen mono-print on book cloth, 104x84 cm

Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki

- *1990s Love*, 2021, silkscreen print on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110 cm
- *Once on the Silk Road*, 2021, silkscreen print on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110 cm
- *Loving sisters*, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca. 32 gr, 100x132 cm
- *Soft*, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca.32 gr, 53x100 cm
- *Games and emotions*, 2021, silkscreen on Revere silk 300gr, 211x222 cm
- *Birthday's Eve 1*, 2021, silkscreen print and silver leafing on Revere silk paper 300gr, 63x48 cm
- *Birthday's Eve 2*, 2021, silkscreen print on Hahnemühle 100 gr, 63x48 cm
- *Isolated*, 2021, silkscreen monoprint on Hahnemühle 100 gr, 48x63 cm
- *No way Home 1*, 2021, silkscreen on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr,

105x125 cm

- *No way home 2*, 2021, silkscreen & collage on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr, 105x125 cm



Games and Emotions, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

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Preface

The process of my artistic work consists of immersion and reflection on the surrounding environment. It acts as a tool for me to make better sense of the world. By exploring from the inside to the outside, my work focuses on the interior human self. In order to fully understand, I have had to go to the past and find the individual things that have stayed with me over time. These are the things that can transcend and have meaning to others as well.

Flashbacks are a great part of my inspiration references. I take memories and put them in a new context, I use them as a source to tell the reality within evidence by sharing and interpreting the good and bad circumstances and experiences.

At first, I turned to photographs as a source for inspirational material. They are strongly connected with memories and I like to collect them, re-build them as well as to add personal objects to them. I use images from art history for the mystery and memory they carry.

Faces of people with fading figures are recurring elements in my thesis works. The way they look and the background environments differentiate in regards to the story they tell.

In my work practice, I use pieces of different photos and layer them to make a new image. The meanings created by the layering continue to alter and convert, where the working process is a way to understand the undefined. Some of my old family photos have been transferred into a base for my work, and some art history masterpieces have been reinterpreted through my images.

Portraiture is very topical in my practice. I present my ideas and questions through human figuration and structure. For me, a portrait is a story and a deep connection, and it is something beyond the physical figuration. It is more like a representation of identity and background.

About Artistic Component

Background and Practice
Methods

Thesis Project: Part I

Thesis Project: Part II

Background and Practice

In the spring of 2020, I left my hometown of Damascus and moved to Helsinki to further my master's studies. It was exactly on March the 11th, the day when the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak of a global pandemic. After a few days, the lockdown started in Finland and online communication was the only possible way to connect with others. This was a little more terrifying for me as a person who just arrived and was trying to make a fresh start, create a comfortable space, and build a network. Instead, I found myself in a sort of complete isolation, people were avoiding any kind of meetings in person, the metro, streets, and even supermarkets were calm and semi-empty.

For some reason and during that time my mind was filled with flash-backs. Every time I was down, I found myself thinking of a happy moment in the past and what life used to look like without all this current stress.

Memories of the past gave me peace and security. They were lively coming back and the old sounds, places, colours, and feelings were feeding my thoughts. They offered me inspiration for my imagination to create an ideal image of the past.

During the isolation period, my practice was limited to my new tiny place with no access to a working studio or a printing workshop for almost 3 months. Newspapers were my only working materials, coming through my letterbox every day, images of advertisements, news, and graphics. I had lots of them so I decided to keep practising my work through paper collage, though after a while, the printed images and material of the newspapers became a limited source for me. Due to the lack of technical support and access to the university's facilities, I transferred my work into digital.

I started to use figures from my family albums and from the public domain. I combined them with details and individual fragments from my favourite renaissance paintings, the textures, colours, and the rich sensations of the portraits fascinated me.

Foreignness 1, 2021, in its digital edition, picture by Natalie Hamada



Methods

Combining Digital and Manual Work

Interpreting the characteristic qualities of the digital work into the manual involves a very wide range of outputs and impressions, which made a new area of investigation for me to explore and practice.

Through my work process, the digital image is translated into a materialised surface. The way ink is applied and the structure of the surface have a great impact on the printed image. The colour saturation comes from the pigments of the liquid inks, and the contrast is in the quantity of the printed layers as well as from the richness of the colour compositions.

The converting process is a way for me to understand how to enhance the depth and widen the capacity of hand-printing.

Sketching with Photoshop and Combining Layers

Using photoshop, I do the first stage of the making process, the sketching. I like to try many compositions and make them work together to tell a story. It is like a jigsaw puzzle. I start by collecting all the needed pieces for my image and then I keep replacing them until they make sense to me.

For the second part of the making process, which is to convert my digital work into silkscreen, I split the image into multiple colour layers and mostly bitmap each of them. I prefer to start by printing from the lightest colour layer to the darkest. In my work, the colour layers are meant to combine and overlap precisely.

In my practice, I like to use bold colours, such as the primary colours: yellow, magenta, and cyan. In addition I add neon orange, neon pink, lemon yellow, and gold. They are attention-grabbing and a source of energy. For me, they act as metaphors for morals, landscapes, and people.

The way colours are juxtaposed affects the way we feel them. A certain colour arrangement and opposition can make a certain impression. Colours are visual vocabularies. They convey emotions and can reveal a layer of meanings and senses.

In my work, dreams and memories from my childhood and home are rendered into colours. I apply usually 6 to 12 layers of different colours to get the final image, where each layer is a space of dots, and each dot is overlapping or side by side with the other dots. They are separated but in the viewer's eyes they are combined while looking at them.

As light is the reason why colours appear to us the way they are, and the type of it can be different from one place to another. I think my colour palette has some kind of connection to the places I have lived in. In Damascus, I used to feel the light warmer, more intense, and somehow more sharp. It creates lots of tension and contrast, where the objects around are bright and shiny. In Helsinki in winter, light is cool and smooth, on a snowy night, the light can be colored with bluish shades reflecting within the surroundings.



Foreignness 2, 2021, during the printing process, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Stenciling to make a textured layer

Throughout the screen-printing process for this project, I have been exploring manual stencilling using newspaper, tape, and fabric. Each has its own characteristics in how it affects the print.

I used newspaper to make stencils to cover some parts of colour I wanted to keep on the printed surface before adding the next layers. However, it was also a source of texture for the print. I did this by removing the newspaper piece from the backside of the mesh after printing and then printing the layer again. The newspaper marks can leave randomly thin-wrinkled lines and smudged textures of ink, which can prevent the ink from going through evenly when reapplying the layer without wiping. In order to maintain the mesh surface, I wiped it with water every second or third print.

To make a texture with tape, I used white semi-sticky tape on the backside of the mesh, as this keeps it in place while the squeegee moves. I covered a specific area with small pieces of tape randomly, printed, and then removed the tape and printed again where the previous ink marks were on the screen.

With fabric, it was different. I placed the fabric under my printing paper and set the fabric corners with small weights. The fabric was not stretched so strongly on the printing table which allowed the fabric texture and lines to be visible in the print. I used this technique with thin printing papers, such as Kozo paper, and non-woven fabric because of their lightweight quality, translucency, and fiber texture.

The manual stencilling worked randomly as a way to give some dramatic effects to my prints, yet the process is still in progress.



Pictures from the stenciling process, picture by
Natalie Hamada

Thesis Project: Part I

Kuvan Kevät, 12.5- 31.6.2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki

The first part of my thesis artistic component was part of the *Kuvan Kevät* 2021 exhibition alongside forty-five fellow students. The work was inspired by my 2020 personal diary, and it was a reflection of the first lockdown experience in Finland.

The living conditions after Corona at the same time as my move to a new country have pushed me to reflect on the emotional difficulties that one could assume many other people experienced during the COVID-19 time.

As a response to my need to understand the unfamiliar situation, my work thematically has focused on the beginning experience of loneliness, emotional life and how much this can be controlled by confusion, fear, and tension.

Diary Thoughts (2021) was a set of five portrait silkscreen prints that dealt with the complicated sides of an inner self and how much adulthood and childhood can be emotionally connected.

At the Exhibition Laboratory I had a wall approximately 8.5m wide to exhibit my work. The works were attached to the wall using nails and magnets which allowed a little space behind the image and thus created a shadow as a floating effect around them. The prints were adjusted in one line horizontally where the portraits' eyes were in the same position so as to give them more degree of intimacy in the space.

The series contained five artworks as follows:

- *Foreignness 1, 2021, silkscreen print on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr, 55.5x72 cm*
- *Foreignness 2, 2021, silkscreen print on non-woven fabric, 55.4x72 cm*
- *Hidden Inside, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca 32 gr, 104.5x60 cm*
- *Not just a wooden toy, 2021, silkscreen print on LYNX paper ca 300*

gr, 53.5x79.7 cm

- *Once we were together, 2021, silkscreen mono-print on book cloth, 104x84 cm*

The Works Series

In the following text, I am presenting a description of my works. By giving background information, I am offering the intention and purpose that led to the artistic method. The aim is not to guide the viewer's way of looking at them, but rather to leave space for personal interpretation and discovery allowing for the images to be open for the audiences' contemplation and imagination.



Exhibition view, Diary Thoughts, 2021, Kuvan Kevät, 12.5- 31.6.2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki. picture by Petri Summanen.



Foreignness 1, 2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, picture by Petri Summanen.

Foreignness 1

2021, silkscreen on Hahnemühle 350 gr, 55.5x72 cm, edition No. 3 of variation editions (7+1 A.P)

Foreignness 1, was the first work I made in this series. It is a self-portrait in profile pose, and it was followed by another work with the same title. Both of the works deal with the state of feeling isolated.

The lockdown in Finland lasted for three months whereas in Syria it lasted for many years. It wasn't my first time facing such a solitary life condition, yet it still felt unfamiliar to me.

During the 2020 lockdown in spring, I spent lots of time working daily at my tiny living place, which I turned into a studio workspace. At that time, I had not decided where I wanted my work to go. It was a process and the ideas were coming up as I was working. It was more like an open practice in depicting an unfamiliar life condition, and an urgency to visualise a certain feeling I had. For that, I had to look closely around and more deeply into myself.

During that phase, I started to be more interested in digital collage, collecting images, editing, and rebuilding them. The image kept developing all the time, faces, fragments, colours, and shadows were coming in and out during the making process.

The colours in this work represent the contrasting and mixed feelings I had. Magenta, orange, and cyan, against a warm yellow background created a delicious composition to my eyes. I usually tend to use warm colours due to their strong effect in expressing emotions and demanding attention.



Foreignness 2, 2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Foreignness 2

2021, silkscreen print on non-woven fabric, 55.4x72 cm, edition No. 4 of variation editions (5+1 A.P)

Foreignness 2 is a self-portrait that follows the previous one. It is the same figure as a child with similar feelings but at a different time. The work is inspired by my first kindergarten portrait photo in 2000 and a painting by Angelo Bronzino from the 16th century ¹.

The work presents a moment of insecurity with the contrast of the calm facial expression. The main figure is centred and presented with a counterpart of another fading figure in the background. In association with the emotional inner self, the blurred figure shadow reappears from beneath the colour acting as a metaphor for the feeling of not belonging. It is looking at the situation differently and perhaps with neutrality.

The composition of colours in the image contains an earthy colour palette. It was done with eight colour layers. The softly blended strokes of lemon yellow inflected in neon orange and gold create the effect of an invisible source of light indicated in the eyelids. It pulses through hair and seeps into a part of the shoulder then spreads slightly across the scene. While the other figure stays completely in shadow, which shows the unsettledness between the dark and light.

I returned to Bronzino's painting due to the common mystery in the painted girl and the portrait photograph I was working on. The composition and perspective of the painted body, arms and shoulders suited the image I had in mind.

¹ López-Linares. 2011. Bia di Medici, Vintage by López-Linares- Blog. Accessed 01/01/2021.

Angelo Bronzino, Portrait of Bia de' Medici, around 1542, oil-tempera on wood painting.¹



¹ Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, 2022. Portrait of Bia de' Medici-Agnolo di Cosimo Tori, known as Bronzino- The Uffizi Museum. accessed 10/01/2021

A portrait photo of me in 2000, picture by school photographer.





Anton Raphael Mengs, Double Portrait of Archdukes Ferdinand and Maria Anna of Habsburg Lorraine, 1770s, oil on canvas.¹

¹ Le Gallery Degli Uffizi. 2017. The King of Spain's Grandchildren. Exhibition 19/9/2017-7/1/2018. Accessed 23/2/2021.



Not Just a Wooden Toy, 2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Not just a wooden toy

2021, silkscreen print on LYNX paper 300 gr, 53.5x79.7 cm, edition No. 2 of (7+1 A.P)

A child sitting on a wooden toy is shown with a painted head, a real photographed body, and a background of different photographs erased partially and layered.

Through modification and reinterpretation, the work explores the ties between computer-generated and the hand-made. The print consists of six layers of inks, the four primary colours, a warm blend of muddy brown, and a light tone of grey.

For my collage work, I like to crop heads, bodies, and backgrounds from random images, and save them as types and patterns in my working materials. I think this way of working has a relation to my childhood because the jigsaw puzzle was my favourite game of building compositions.

The process requires focus and concentration, yet it's relaxing and revealing at the same time. It's like a mindful exercise. The visual information comes through the eyes to the occipital cortex to be processed and integrated into the brain by spotting patterns, exploring forms, and learning compositions. The target is to arrange chaos and solve equations, which can give the brain a rush of dopamine when the target is achieved.

The work was inspired by an old family picture of my father in the 1960s, and a painting of Anton Raphael Mengs,¹ from the 1770s (Picture on page 25). I felt a connection between the two images and I decided to cut a head from the painting and place it on the collage composition of the photos. The face of the young boy by Mengs represents the confidence and courage of an adult person. I used this face to express more curiosity about childhood time, that is represented in my work.

¹ Le Gallery Degli Uffizi. 2017. The King of Spain's Grandchildren. Exhibition 19/9/2017-7/1/2018. Accessed 23/2/2021.



Once We Were Together, 2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Once we were together

2021, silkscreen mono-print on book cloth, 104x84 cm, one edition.

The work reflects on emotional experiences. The image captures a still moment in the life of a mother and two daughters. The mother and older child gaze outward at the viewer while the younger sister is there with a blurry face. The three figures' features are meant to show their certain characteristics, which are made by the impact of their emotional experience. The blurred facial details of the younger child compared to the mother and older sister represents a lack of experience, fragility, and innocence. While the intense navy blue colour around the other figures represents their amount of cautiousness and apprehensiveness.

The print was done through three layers and was a limited edition printed on book cloth. The surface of the fabric material was textured and mildly colour resistant so that the ink stayed on the surface, and colours remained intense and thick.



Hidden Inside, 2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Hidden Inside

2021, silkscreen print on Kozo ca 32gr, 110-60cm, edition No.3 out of (3+1 AP).

The work confronts the ability to observe and understand one's own emotions.

Here the figure stands out from the dark surroundings. The colours in the background appear as layers of crusts that cover the inner self, in an expression of its complexity and depth. The colours become darker towards the deeper layers where the ghostly blue-like figure symbolises the inner self.

The work is a revival of an image by Peter Paul Rubens in his portrait work titled Eleonore von Gonzaga (1598-1655)¹. I returned to this work as a source of inspiration and did a reinterpretation of it.

When doing a revival of an art history masterpiece, I am interested in the manipulation of the image rather than what it contains. By taking the mystery of an old portrait and recreating it within a contemporary brightly-colored style by removing its original aura, and turning it into a mundane subject.

I found the painting of Ruben's as a good scope to be invented in a new form. In the painting, the face of the young girl and the way she stands with her steady left hand evoked some amount of eagerness when looking at it.

Making the figure in a new composition, shown as older, in a full-length and life size portrait, it is meant to invite the audience in. While following the position of standing and the fine face details, I wanted to keep the mysterious influence of the original character. The background has been re-designed to function with the mood of the new figure and replace its objectivity.

According to Walter Benjamin in his book *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), when discussing the aura,

¹ Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie. 2019. Eleonore von Gonzaga (1598-1655), Kaiserin, im Alter von zwei Jahren, Kniestück, europeana. Accessed 21/1/2021.

“We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.”²

Transferring iconic images from art history into the present age is an interesting way for me to explore the bridge between the classical and new forms, reproduce my memories within a similar aspect and perhaps also to fulfil my desire in imitating my favourite portraiture style with a contemporary interpretation.

“An original is a creation motivated by desire. Any reproduction of an original is motivated by necessity. The original is the result of an automatic mental process, the reproduction of a mechanical process. In other words: inspiration then information: each validates the other.’ The mechanism of creativity is itself complex, continuous and collaborative, and the significance we attach to it is a variable qualified by its every manifestation and ‘reproduction’.”³

When thinking about what is between original and reproduction, I find that my work’s inspiration can be in the combination of the reproduction of original memories and the present-day.

² Benjamin, Walter 1935. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Prism Key Press, 17.

³ Lambert, Susan 1988. *The Status of the Reproduction- The Image Multiplied: Five Centuries of Printed Reproductions of Paintings and Drawings*. Eds. Ruth Pelzer-Montada. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 141.



Peter Paul Rubens, Eleonore von Gonzaga at the age of two, ca1600s, oil on canvas. ¹

¹ Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie. 2019. Eleonore von Gonzaga (1598-1655), Kaiserin, im Alter von zwei Jahren, Kniestück, europeana. Accessed 21/1/2021.

Thesis Project: Part II

Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki

Illuminated Tales was the second part of my thesis artistic component, and worked as a continuation of the first part in *Kuvan Kevät*. The exhibition was a solo show that took place from December 11th, 2021 until January 2nd, 2022 in Project Room, Helsinki. The show consisted of works in all sizes, small, medium, and large scale and was exhibited in the front room of the Project Room space. Some of the works were installed on the wall using magnets and nails and others were attached to cardboard pieces and nails hidden behind the works so as to show the paper material as an important part of the work and to use the paper edges as a frame providing marginal space around the image.

The exhibition contained 10 artworks:

- *1990s Love*, 2021, silkscreen print on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110 cm
- *Once on the Silk Road*, 2021, silkscreen print on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110 cm
- *Loving sisters*, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca. 32 gr, 100x132 cm
- *Soft*, 2021, silkscreen print on Kozo paper ca.32 gr, 53x100 cm
- *Games and emotions*, 2021, silkscreen on Revere silk 300gr, 211x222 cm
- *Birthday's Eve 1*, 2021, silkscreen print and silver leafing on Revere silk paper 300gr, 63x48 cm
- *Birthday's Eve 2*, 2021, silkscreen print on Hahnemühle 100 gr, 63x48 cm
- *Isolated*, 2021, silkscreen monoprint on Hahnemühle 100 gr, 48x63 cm
- *No way Home 1*, 2021, silkscreen on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr, 105x125 cm
- *No way home 2*, 2021, silkscreen & collage on Hahnemühle paper 350 gr, 105x125 cm

The exhibition text was as the following:

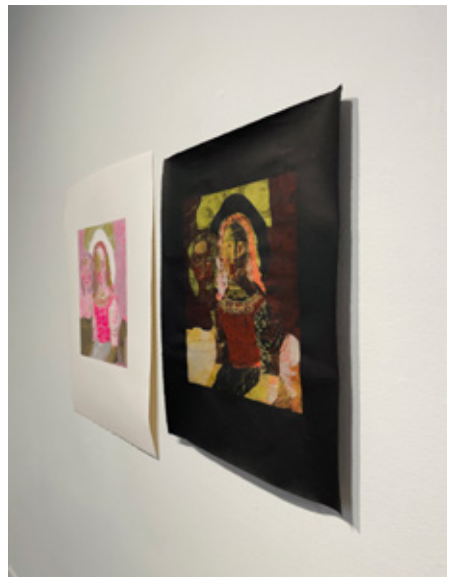
Illuminated Tales is a series of portraits about the unspoken and intricate emotions; convictions, concerns, nostalgia, faith, and love.

The artworks are intended to touch upon and reveal the complexity of an inner self, and they are narrative, allegorical, and inspired by personal experiences.

The process of the work relies on merging details of images that have a connection to art history, vintage photos, and family albums, where the combination of the disparate figures can provoke different interpretations.

From digital collage to printmaking and especially silkscreen, I apply several transparent layers of hand-printings and through a process of adding, wiping, stencilling, and obscuring. I let the unpredictability feature of hand printing to be essential to the making process.

Exhibition View, Birthday's Eve 1 and 2 from Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, Picture by Natalie Hamada





1990s Love, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

1990s Love

2021, silkscreen mono-print on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110cm, edition No.2 out of variation editions (2+1 A.P)

1990s Love, was the first work I made in this portrait series. It describes a contemplative moment of harmony between three figures. It tells a happy story of the birth of a child. The figures are centred and their hands are held in a symbol of love.

A family is most often the first social environment where we develop our first sense of belonging and identity. The work reflects on emotional experiences one can have through the early stages of contact, which can help lead to emotional functioning later on.

The work was produced as a limited edition, printed on Revere Silk 300 gr paper with a textured surface. The characteristics of the surface, the material formation, and its thickness had a significant influence on the final image and the appearance of the details. The formation of this paper is made of 100% cotton which provides a good colour quality for silkscreen. The ink sits on the surface for a little while before soaking in and drying.

The thickness of the paper material plays a crucial role in the amount of warping a paper can show when it is dampened. The more thickness the less warping. For me, 300 gr or thicker paper works well for screen printing. It might still wave slightly but in tolerable amounts.

While printing this work, I used two different kinds of inks, sebek and acrylic. The structure of sebek inks compared to acrylic can be more watery, which causes a little warping in the paper. In this work, I used the warping to get a dramatic effect in the image by applying the next ink layer when the surface was still a little damp and uneven.

The image was inspired by a picture of my parents.



Loving Sisters, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada

Loving Sisters

2021, silkscreen print on Kōzo paper ca 30 gr, 132x100 cm, edition No.4 out of (6+1 A.P)

Soft

2021, silkscreen print on Kōzo Paper ca 32 gr, 53 x 100 cm, edition No.4 out of variation editions (9+1 A.P)

Continuing from the previous work *1990s Love*, *Loving Sisters* also reflects on primary emotional development during childhood.

The work is a portrait of two figures as siblings. The way they look and their faces is meant to reflect their internal feelings. They are dressed in bright outfits symbolising naivety. The position of them holding hands is as if their individuality is almost disappearing.

The older sister looks gloomy as she is holding her younger sibling. She looks somewhere away and she seems to have a better understanding of life. She is a little merged in the society, which is reflected in the colour of her outfit. The image details have a slightly mixed effect between digital and manual as to give more a sense of otherworldliness to the scene.

The effect of virtual and real world mixture has led me to follow with another work titled, *Soft*. The work was meant to draw attention to the mix of digital and the real. In a sense that it also exists in daily life especially after the pandemic, when looking and relying upon screens was more than ever before.

Both of the works were printed on Kozo paper to achieve smoother details and a more transparent appearance, where the long and tough fibres of Kozo make it well absorbent and suitable for water soluble inks as in silkscreen printing.¹

¹ water soluble inks: defined as inks that use water as the main solvent for carrying pigment.



Soft, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.



Exhibition View, Loving Sisters from Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada



Once on The Silk Road, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Once on the silk road

2021, silkscreen monoprint on Revere silk 300 gr, 77x110 cm, edition No.1 out of variation editions (2+1 A.P)

Back in the days of 1998 in Syria, trains were still running between the cities. This was before they were severely compromised as a result of the ongoing situation. As a kid, I used to travel with my family by train between the south coastal and northern area. I enjoyed seeing the harmonised colour shades of the varied landscapes, hills, plains, mountains, forests, and the coast.

In my memory, the vibrant colours of the rainbow used to be clear in the sky. The olive lands and citrus trees as far as the eye could see. From my small window in the fast train the scene appeared to me as a continuous colour palette of green, gold, and earthy colour tones, while a rosy sunset was smoothly reflecting through the window glass, mirroring and overlapping with the surrounding.

While printing this work, I was exploring random stencilling techniques using pieces of newspaper. When I liked a shade of colour, I covered it, so it could be still visible after printing the next layer. While tearing stencil pieces, covering a colour, and pulling the ink, I forgot about the planned image and followed the work rhythm.

The work is inspired by a picture of my mom and I on the train in 1998.



Games and emotions, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hammada.



Games and emotions

2021, silkscreen mono-print on Revere silk paper 300 gr, 211x222cm, one edition.

The year I turned 18, life started to shift and the day to day the feeling of insecurity and stress was widespread. News was constantly watched on Syrian TV and conflict stories were the most common conversations, nearly every night.

It did not take so long till it was called a war, though It took me longer to process what that situation means. Being alert, aware, and on guard for the whole period of war and perhaps even after it ends.

For years, almost daily, the news I read and heard about was of victims and the destruction. However, daily life had to continue despite the incredible insecurity everyone there was experiencing.

During the toughest of war times I was immensely scared for my family. Losing a loved one or seeing them suffering was often a scenario playing in my head even when everything was ok.

Games and Emotions presents a narrative allegorical scene for coping with fears. It is of a pregnant figure carrying a child and they are surrounded by dogs leaning towards them. The figures are placed close to the viewer with an anonymous background showing the hidden side of the inner self as a ghost. Dogs are guardians and helpers and they are showing their love and devotion while also asking for attention; I see this as a metaphor for how one feels about loved ones.

As for the printing, I used 18 large screen frames and printed the image as a limited edition on six pieces of Revere silk paper, each 105x111 cm. The final size of the artwork when putting the pieces together was 211x222cm.



Exhibition View, Games and emotions from Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.



Birthday's Eve 2, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada

Birthday's Eve 1

2021, Silkscreen print with silver leafing on Revere silk paper 300gr, 63x48cm, edition no. 4 out of (9+1 AP)

Birthday's Eve 2

2021, silkscreen print on black paper 100 gr, 63x48cm, edition no. 3 out of (9+1 AP)

This is a continuation of the previous work and it reflects on the topic of fear.

“In 1960 Eleanor J. Gibson and Richard D. at Cornell University conducted a study that determined that people are born with only two innate fears: the fear of falling and the fear of loud sounds. The study evaluated depth perception among 6 to 14-month-old infants, as well as young animals. Researchers placed the subjects on a platform that had plexiglass just beyond its edge to it to see how many of the subjects would actually step over the “visual cliff.” Most of the subjects, both children and animals, didn’t go “over” and step out onto the plexiglass. The fear of falling is an instinct necessary for the survival of many species”.¹ This would suggest that the rest of the fears we have are learned at a young age and they develop over time.

Birthday's Eve 1 and 2 introduce the idea of learned fears as a state of mind, and they reflect on the fear of ageing.

Two of the works were printed with similar colour palettes but on different papers, where the colours altered up to the surface.

The warm white Revere was very different to the image than the one on black Hahnemühle; where the gold became more bold and shiny, and neon pink turned into a navy red. I added neon orange to give it a feeling of fantasy and added contrast. Silver leafing was a way to give a source of light and dreaminess to the scene. By using a brush I drew the lines with glue on the paper surface then I applied the silver leaf and tapped it gently.

¹ Kounang, Nadia. 2015. What is the science behind fear?, CNN. Accessed 3/7/2022



Birthday's Eve 1, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada



*Exhibition View, Birthday's Eve 1 and 2 from *Illuminated Tales*, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.*



Isolated, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Isolated

2021, silkscreen monoprint on Hahnemühle 100 gr, 48x63 cm, edition No.2 out of variation editions (9+1 A.P)

Due to experiencing isolation in a double way by moving to a new country and the pandemic, it was inevitable that I thought more about the human need for belonging, whether it is a choice or is an essential.

The human survival mechanism is so that we mostly pay attention to negative things rather than positive ones. Negative feelings can be seen as a threat, and as a reaction, we need to run away from that threat and protect ourselves. If loneliness is a threat, the feeling of belonging helps against it. Belonging allows one to feel loved and secure and it works in contrast to being disconnected.

The portrait shows a figure from the profile against a black backdrop. The purpose of the sided pose is to not have a direct encounter with the figure's eyes and physicalities. I want to provoke attention towards the inner self, the contrary feelings and thoughts. The overall palette I used was light shades of lemon neon yellow, orange, and magenta as to give more amount of contrast to the image, which was shown on a white wall background.



No Way Home 1, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

No Way Home 1

2021, silkscreen on Hahnemühle 300 gr, 105x125cm, edition No. 4 out of variation editions (8+1 A.P)

No Way Home 2

2021, silkscreen and collage on Hahnemühle 300 gr, 105x125cm, edition No.5 of variation editions (5+1 A.P)

A general definition of the sense of belonging refers to the personal experience we have when we involve ourselves in an environment and be part of it.

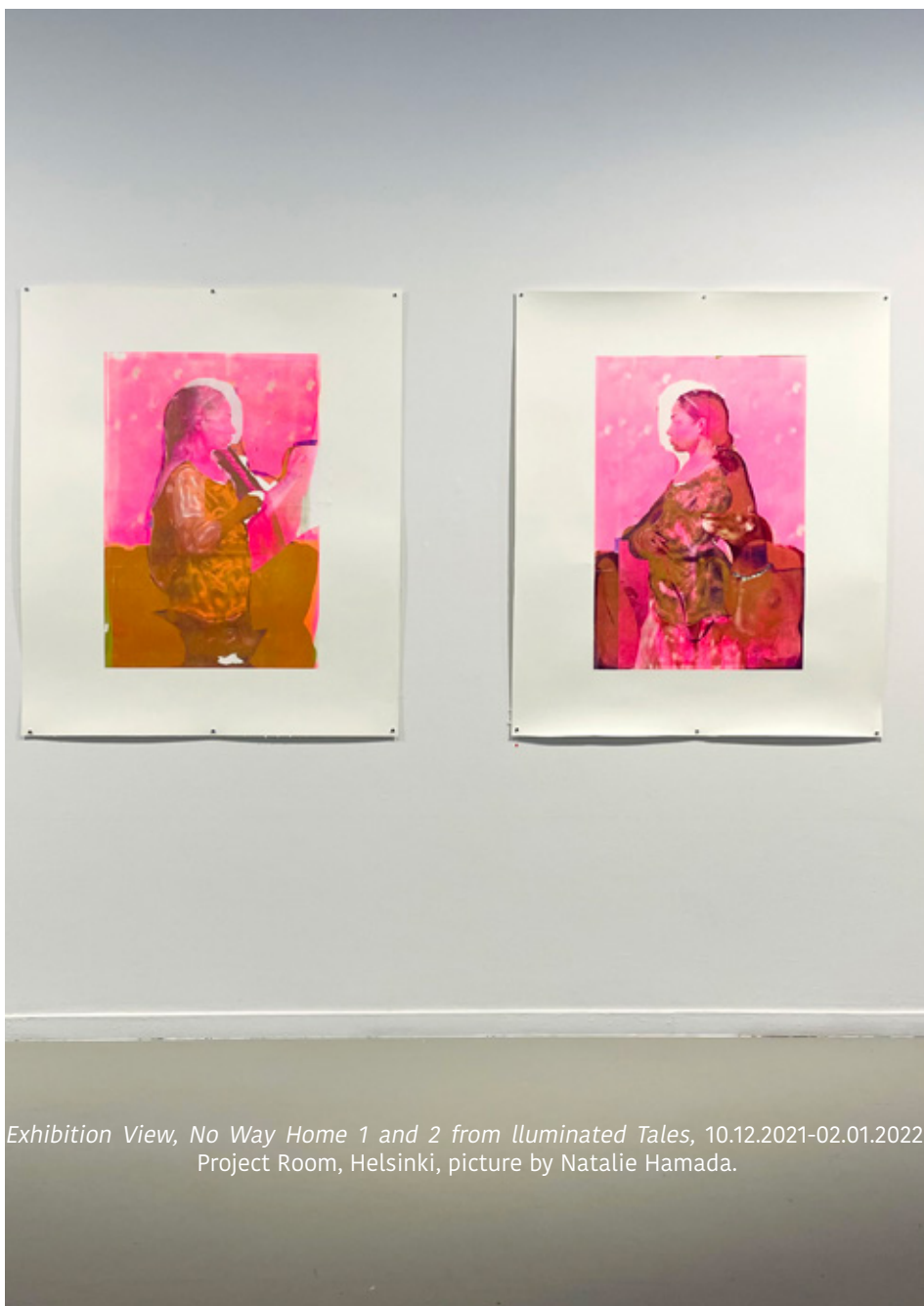
As social life was going slowly back to normal in Finland after a year and a half of my stay here, it was time for me to meet with people, and make connections. The loneliness was gradually fading away, and a stable feeling of security was coming back into my daily life. Walking on the iced roads was not as threatening anymore, moving around the city without using maps, seeing familiar people by coincidence, receiving presents on birthdays and friendship days, were things that let me feel like I'm not new or stranger anymore. Perhaps it was the feeling of belonging.

The work was presented as a pair of two images mirroring each other. The images reflect on two sides of the concept, to belong or to not.

The works were printed on Hahnemühle-1548 paper 300 gr with a softly structured surface. The paper formation has durability and absorbent qualities, which let the colours soak deep into the paper and appear granulated on the surface when applying multiple layers.

Some parts of the work were collaged on top of the original print with a mache handmade glue. The glue is a mixture of one part flour to three parts of water, mixed at a temperature until getting a thick glue-like consistency.

I did the collage aspect after stretching the print on a wooden board. For stretching; I dumped the paper well and covered it for a few minutes with plastic wrap. When the work was evenly dumped I attached it to the wooden board with stretching tape on the edges. As the paper I printed on was in a rolled package, the edges of the paper had a degree of curving, which made the stretching stability a little more challenging on the wooden board. For that, I had to use a stabiliser on the edges all the way every 5 cm in 45 degrees to provide a good stability during the drying process.



Exhibition View, No Way Home 1 and 2 from Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Conclusion

Throughout the master's program at the Academy, my work practice has been about exploring ways to combine computer-generated and manual working methods. Without a doubt, the courses I attended during my studies had a great influence on my working process and the development of my project.

The combination of the chosen medium and digital influences allowed for more fluidity and pushed the limits of my figurative images. The basis of this medium combination came from the link between graphic design and printmaking. I wanted to better understand the idea of repetition and sifting. I think it was a kind of natural pairing, which produced some new outputs. As well, by figuring out new ways to minimise difficulties in the printing process through shortening it and looking at it from the two angles, digital and manual.

Analysing and breaking the colours of the image into layers and dots, creating a distinct sense of flatness or depthlessness were essential to the practice. The experiments focused on building forms, making colour relations, examining stencilling methods and paper materials. The steps taken were based on trial and followed the workflow.

The thesis artistic work has allowed me to explore silkscreen printing outcomes on a broader level; as a contemporary artistic medium, its possibilities, its different perspectives, and its technicalities.

The physical process of this technique and its impact in creating random effects while printing made the making of the works very enjoyable. Some examples are: when colours bleed out around the edges showing the colour separation and image structure; or when the streaks, gaps, manual blockages, and a little of misregistration create irregularities in the passage of ink through the screen; or when pouring too little or too much can cause blotches that add a sense of pictorial alienation to the scene.

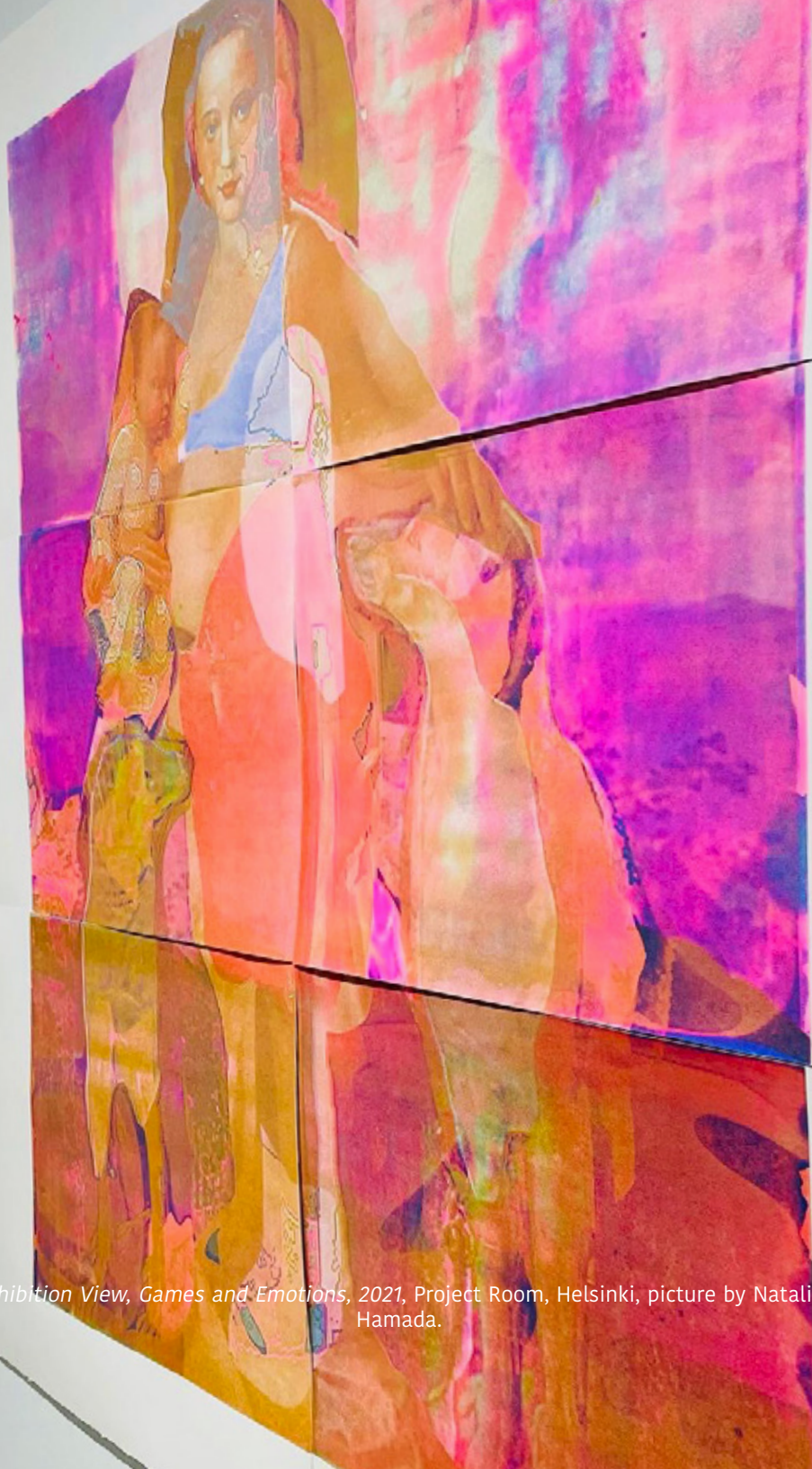
The written contemplation has confirmed my feeling that screen printing was a perfect vehicle for my artistic experiments. It functioned as a tool for expressing my anxiety of the current situation in contemporary

life. Starting with the rich and thick uniform ink and ending with the velvety saturated surface of the print, and the syntax of colours on it, where the technique was an open practice to convey more feelings and thoughts, including all the invisible labour of maintaining and cleaning the screens. In other words, the idea of the matter that goes through the mesh and matter that stays behind reveal the theme of my artistic operation. Using visuals and memories that got held back and stuck with me as sources for my work made me consider the medium more as a continuation of the concept than just a practical way to create it as a work of art and perhaps this clue would affect my artistic directive in the following years.

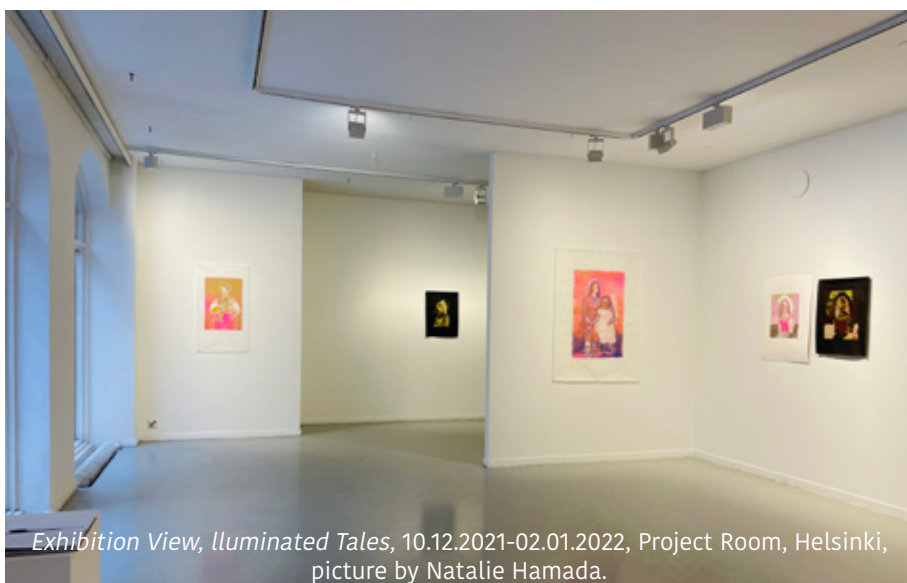
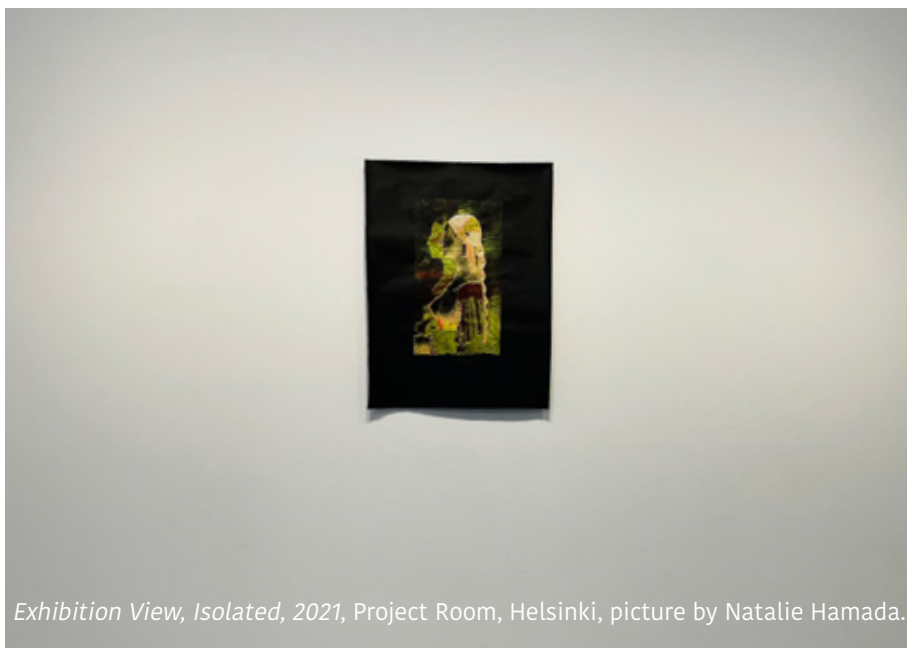


Soft, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

Documentation of Works



Exhibition View, Games and Emotions, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.





Exhibition View, Loving Sisters, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

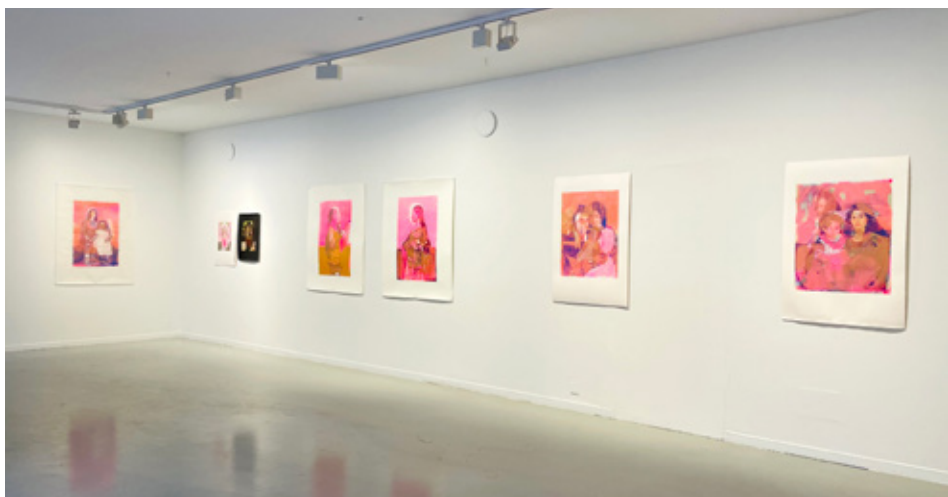
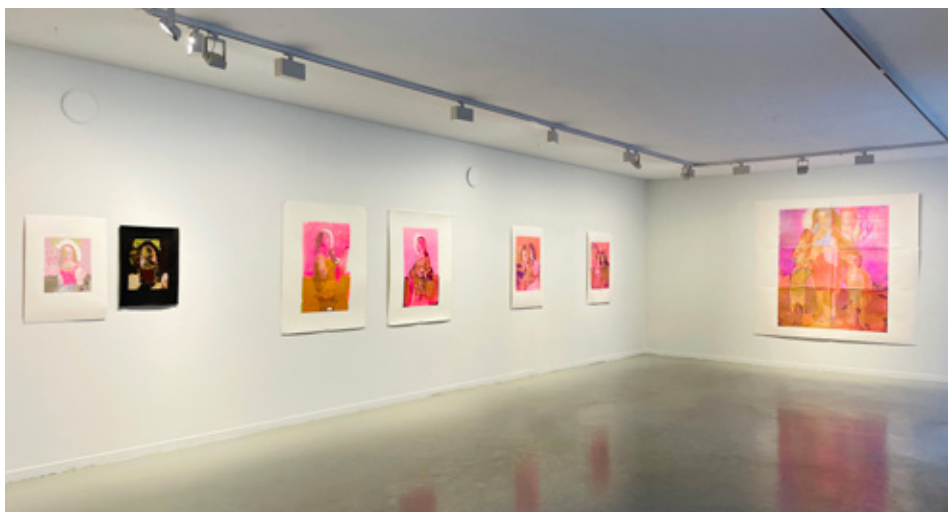




Exhibition View, Soft, 2021, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.



Exhibition View, Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.



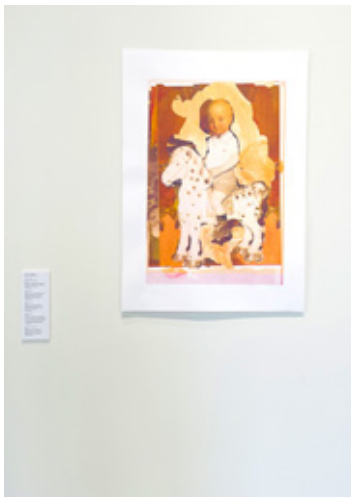
Exhibition View, Illuminated Tales, 10.12.2021-02.01.2022, Project Room, Helsinki, picture by Natalie Hamada.

*Exhibition view, Foreignness 2, 2021, Ku-
van Kevät, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki.
picture by Natalie Hamada.*

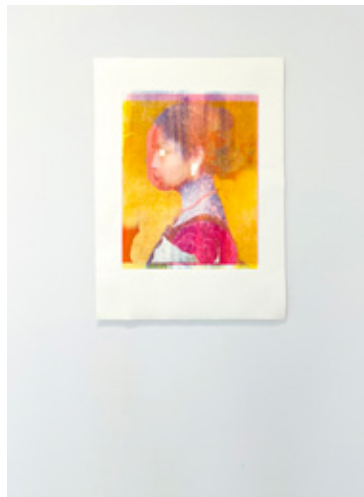


*Exhibition view, Hidden Inside, 2021, Ku-
van Kevät, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki.
picture by Natalie Hamada*





Exhibition view, Not Just a Wooden Toy, 2021, Kuvan Kevät, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki. picture by Natalie Hamada.



Exhibition view, Foreignness 1, 2021, Kuvan Kevät, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki. picture by Natalie Hamada.



Exhibition view, Diary Thoughts, 2021, Kuvan Kevät, 12.5- 31.6.2021, Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki. picture by Petri Summanen.

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