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Summary

My thesis consists of this written dissertation and three oil paintings *Yellow Flowers*, *Red Flowers* and *The Car* that were at Kuvan Kevät degree show at Kuva/Tila from the 7.5-5.6.2022. The text has images alongside of the process, the final paintings, and some of the art works that I am referring to. My degree show paintings are all painted on the linen, the chosen media is oil painting, although as preparatory work I sketch and photograph. I have six chapters on my thesis. I talk about the importance of painting to me, about the theories and artists that have influenced my thinking and painting, I also talk about the process in the studio.

In the first three chapters, I talk about what compilation of various sources impacts my thought process and the art making, how sometimes I do not even recollect myself where something came from. I tell about how my own life experiences have impacted the perspective that I look at things from and about the contrasts of two cultures that I have lived half and half of my life and how that have shaped how I see things. I focus on the theories about female artists, how women artists have been hidden in the history of art. I try to show that the history of art is unilateral, women have been undervalued makers of art and often more on the role of the model or muse, the object of male gaze and how I try to shift that gaze in my paintings and how I as a female painter paint women from different perspective. I open about why women's emancipation is important to me and how I became to be interested on the subject.

In my discussions about studio, I reveal about the process in the studio, its frustrations and trance like states. In my text I emphasise how feelings and intuition play a key role in the making of art. I explain how important part of the process simply is just looking at the work, either when drinking tea in the studio while staring and analysing at the freshly added brush works on the unfinished paintings or looking at the surrounding world when out and about, because anything seen, felt, heard can be a spark to a painting.

In the last three chapters, I delve more into the power struggles of gender in both the past and today's art world. I touch on the financial side of today's art market and what impact that has. Finally, I talk about my Kuvan Kevät paintings in the light of above-mentioned heavy subjects with a tone of excitement to painting and I summarise my time and experience in Kuvataideakatemia.

Works of Art in the master's degree show

Yellow Flowers, oil on linen 160x120 cm

Red Flowers, oil on linen 159x118,5 cm

The Car, oil on linen 160x119 cm

Thank you

Supervisors: Jenni Hiltunen, Eeva-Riitta Eerola

The examiners: Hannaleena Heiska, Hanna-Reetta Schreck

Tutors and visiting artists

Colleagues

My family and loved ones

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1. Introduction

New painting project starts from a chaos in my head. I have an inkling what I am about to do but not too clear plan. There needs to be room for play and experimenting. I am drawn to bright colours, they attract me. There are unwritten rules in art that are often tied up to the current period we live, those rules manage what is accepted in art, yet at the same time rules in art are like rules in fashion, ever changing, one day popular, the next day replaced by new directions. What really matters and impresses me in art is when someone has been putting lots of passion and enthusiasm, someone who is doing work that make the artist themselves tremble when producing it.

In my practise I follow clues that lead me, it is often quite intuitive but not entirely, it is a conversation and deeper connection to my thoughts and senses. When painting, I manage to get to places in my head that otherwise I do not have access to. With the help of essays by professor Tarja Pitkänen-Walter and psychoanalyst Johannes Myyrä I unravel about intuition and feelings in the process of art making in my text. Even though looking from the outside at someone painting the exercise comes across as quiet, lonely, relatively calm, while inside the artist's head there can be sparks and fireworks shooting off. Big part of the painting process is trying to tune in with the media (oil paints) and to learn how the paints behave, different pigments and even different brands do not act the same way. The ability to learn how the paint and pigments act is crucial for an artist as it is the very means to communicate and express the artists aim. It is always exciting to mix different colours too and to find new colour combinations. I am talking in my text about materiality, process, and art theory on female artists. I also like to emphasise how atmosphere and feelings in paintings matter to me. My paintings are compilation of various elements that interest me and are my driving force.

2. Women artists

To me important thing in painting is the love to the art itself, I enjoy seeing art and it feeds into my own practise. The actual working in the studio when I get to be the active maker of art, is the most precious time for me. Unfortunately, the time I get to spend in the studio is limited because of my duties to my family and financial restrictions, I often go for months without doing my painting practise, in those times I paint and draw in my imagination. Painting never ceases to excite me, I always find interesting new ways and new artists that inspire me, as the history of painting goes very far back it means it is rich, but it is also unilateral. Women have been repressed in the western patriarchist culture and the gender roles have been very different to what they are today. As a woman myself and a mother of four daughters I find this subject interesting and important, I also find the power unbalance saddening as so many of these women have not been able to fulfil their potential or the works of art that they have been doing have not been recognised and taken seriously. (Hessel 2022, 16-18). The subject is also interesting to me because I live in quite a free world, yet I still have these obstacles that limit my art practise (and I know that lots of artists try to balance with being able to pay their bills and practising art). Combining family life and practising art is extremely challenging to me. I value the time when I have been doing my masters art degree and having the studio at Kuva to make my Kuvan Kevät paintings.

I am interested in the whole spectrum of painting whether it is cave paintings like the ones I saw in Värrikallio in Hossa (close to my hometown), church paintings in old Italian churches or today's contemporary art. The way I create art is strongly shaped by my own life experiences, for example the fact that I grew up in a beautiful small town in the north of Finland where seasons, temperatures and nature are extreme, whereas in contrast to that living another half of my life in a hectic city in London has equally shaped me and my thinking. The Psychoanalyst Johannes Myyrä describes this merging of art and life together in his essay *Psychoanalysis as Art*:

Art has the ability to reveal us our own life but also the power to reveal another life, a style for a writer or a colour to a painter is not just mere technique but a way of seeing things. It is the means to reveal when direct and conscious measures are not sufficient: The differences in how we comprehend the world around us, those differences that would just stay as our personal secrets if art did not exist. Only with the help of art we can step outside ourselves, we get to know what someone else sees in the world, that is not the same as the world we see, and those scenes would have been otherwise unknown to us just like those sceneries in the moon are to us. Despite of just seeing one world, the world that one sees, with the help of art, we are able to see multiple worlds and this way we have as many worlds to see as there are unique artists. (Myyrä 2014, 42. Translation Tiina Tuovinen)

The experience of two different cultures and societies has had a remarkable part to play in my life. Moving to live abroad made me realise that certain things that I took for granted when younger, were not given elsewhere for example gender equality. So often in London I witnessed political debates from TV where all the members of the parliament taking part in the discussion were male. It slowly opened my eyes to realise that women in the history of art, philosophy, science et cetera were generally not well known.



Ageing boyband and the wrong notes, oil on paper 29,7x42cm, 2019. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

The role models we see as children has a big impact to what we dare to dream of becoming as adults. If girls do not see female role models in science, art, politics how would they think of becoming one themselves. In Finland women are in much better position, our previous government was famously formed of five parties all its leaders were women, this is not the case in my second home England, neither is the case in most countries. This has fed into my own art practice, it has challenged me to think about the imaginary that I want to produce and portray, that is often women.

The National Gallery in London has grown to be such a special museum to me. It is grand, its rooms are classically beautiful and there are many different sections to see historical paintings and to learn about the Western art history. The imagery in the paintings is most often depicting stories from the bible, often vivid scenes of rape and violence. In today's culture we have the entertainment of violence mainly in the form of films and series, people do enjoy watching brutal programmes like the immersively popular Game of Thrones. In The National Gallery's enormous collection of over 2,300 are works from men and only 27 works by women. (The National Gallery) In 2018 the museum acquired self portrait by the artist of Italian Baroque, Artemisia Gentileschi. An oil painting, *Self Portrait as Saint Catharine of Alexandria*, from 1615–17. It was purchased for £3,6 million. (The National Gallery 2018) The National Gallery held an exhibition of Artemisia Gentileschi in 2020–2021, that I was lucky to visit. This exhibition was an eye opening to me, I was flabbergasted that such great *master* (in this case mistress) is not better know with general public! There was an intensively dramatic painting called *Judith slaying Holofernes* and next to it a version by Caravaggio. The violent painting depicts a scene from the bible, the dramatic beheading of Holofernes on the foreground, spurting with blood while Judith still actively cutting the neck with the help of her maid. Such demonstrated violence inspired disgust and admiration amongst art historians in the past, such as Anna Jameson. (Jameson 1834) As the painting is painted by a woman and the perpetrator in it is female too, this has caused feminist scholars to champion Gentileschi as a "feminist" artist. (Greer 1979) (Garrard 1989) Gentileschi suffered sexual abuse from her art teacher Agostino Tassi that her father Orazio, a follower of Caravaggio, had appointed him to teach her painting. Her father filed a sexual violation suit against Tassi.

After the rape had occurred, Tassi evidently assured Artemisia that he would marry her, she would have been viewed as his “property” thereafter. Further incidents occurred. During the trial, many attempts were made to discredit her reputation with exaggerated charges and unbelievable witness. She was even tortured by a sibille, or thumbscrew, under which she did not falter from her story. The trial became more emotionally distressing for Artemisia because Tuzia, a family friend, had acted as a procuress and had betrayed the young artist’s trust. Tuzia testified against her at the trial. Despite the credibility of Gentileschi and Tassi’s terrible reputation, he spent only eight months in prison with the case eventually being dismissed. The trial must have been humiliating for Artemisia, and she was likely looked upon as a sexually promiscuous thereafter, regardless of her true behaviour. (Shang 1992)



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. Oil on canvas, 1620. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

Gentileschi's style in painting does not fit into the stereotype image of how women paint with a trace of delicacy, weakness, gracefulness or femininity thus she's been characterized as "unnatural" woman. In the words of Margot and Rudolf Wittkower, she is 'lascivious and precocious girl'. (Keith Christiansen & Walker 2001) Writers have been troubled with Gentileschi's violent depiction and often blamed her life's dramatic events as the cause for it. (Parker & Pollock 1981, 21) It has been extraordinary how hard it has been to except that a woman can be a skilled artist whose creation can be filled with emotions of repulsive violence to ferocious fury.

Gentileschi is my heroine. When I discovered her, I wanted to find other female artists throughout the history to today's contemporary artists. Coincidentally in 2019 British art historian Katy Hessel released *Great Women Artists* book featuring over 400 female artists to feed my curiosity. Luckily I was able to see some of those womens artists in London galleries that were introduced to me in the book. Throughout this process of looking into female artists I discovered so many important painters to me, to mention few there are Lisa Brice, Antonia Showering, Jenna Gribbon, Karyn Lyons, Jenny Saville, Vanessa Raw, Cecily Brown, Helen Frankenthaler, Nicole Eisenman, Danielle Mckinney, I actively look at their works when I paint in my studio. Just thinking about their works makes me want to start painting. Of course male painters are equally important to me too, for example Salman Toor, older works by Peter Doig, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon are my top ones and very dear to me. Somehow these women painters give me hope and empower me, make me feel that it is possible to me too to be an artist even if it is in those restricted circumstances that I have. I actively look at their work when I am in a studio, especially when I am stuck in my painting I find it extremely helpful to turn into these artist that have the ability to spark my imagination. Bringing all these female artists from the past and contemporary to light is to fix the

wrongdoing that has been going on for so long in the history, but it is also expanding the variety that painting has to offer to us, all of these artists paint from their different perspectives and that is so exciting!

3. Studio

“The Sun was pouring his nourishment onto the street and into the buildings, and when I looked over to the spot where Beggar Man and the dog had died, I saw that they were weren’t dead at all – that a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them.”
(Ishiguro 2021, 37)

I have tens of art books from the library with marks on the important pages, scattered in my studio. On one of them there is a picture of Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* painting. The painting is surrounded with mystery I read. Maybe the girl in the painting was their servant, maybe Vermeer liked her young beauty. On my collection of photos, I have a picture of my teenage daughter looking moody, staring on her hand where she is holding something. My imagination makes connections between the painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and the photo of my daughter. I think about how the girls are both young, yet they can be depicted from different perspective, I want to make a painting of a young girl in a way that shows them in the light of autonomy and even certain attitude, not just an object of gaze. Intentionally I want ‘the gaze’ to be shifted from where it has been in the history of art.

Female body has been the object to create images in advertising, it has been dominant in the imagery in pornography- always available to be the object and instrument to heterosexual male artists. Critical feminists were able to conclude that women have not been excluded as carriers of meaning but they have been excluded as the users of imagery, to give meaning and produce imagery. (Rossi 1999, 37. Translation Tiina Tuovinen)



Reference image of my daughter. Photo Tiina Tuovinen



Planning painting. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

I have a book about Pontormo, I look at the images daily in my studio. There is a painting *Carmignano Visitation* by Pontormo. The clothes the ladies are wearing are painted in such vivid colours, pink, orange, green and blue. I usually under paint with orange, it shimmers through the layers of paint. The way paint behaves intrigues me; it excites me as different pigments behave very differently. I like to allow the paint to also have its way and its nature, that way there are happy and unhappy accidents in the process.

I enjoy the whole process when I start preparing the canvases, there is planning and making calculations, measuring, cutting the long woods that are given to us by the university. I enjoy when I go to the woodwork class and use the machines, it is physical and even when I get allergic reaction to the saw dust, there is still tingling excitement because I know that all the thrilling painting work is to come. There are many bouncing feelings when I know that I am at the beginning of my painting process, and everything is possible. There start to be a buildup of

lots of enthusiasm, worry, fear, happiness, and raw ideas, and somehow in the end to my surprise (and every time it is a surprise because during the painting process there are moments of absolute hopefulness), new paintings will emerge. I stretch the linen to the frames I have built, then I wet it, add two layers of gesso. After that the canvases are beautiful and clean, shining white. Some people find white canvases threatening, I see endless opportunities and at this point my hands are itching to get started. I start to underpaint the white canvases with orange, yellow or some other colour that will help me with layering oil paint on them, the bright paint from underneath will shine through and that will liven up the painting. This all feels ritualistic, and it is a pleasure. I always take such care to build my canvases. I want them to be neat and perfect, I prepare them to have the best painting I have ever made. All this is a warm up for my upcoming painful, frustrated and joyous battle because that is how painting feels like, it will drive me mad and in those moments of serious self-doubt I wonder how I ever managed to make any paintings ready, yet during the process there will be the feelings on the other end of spectrum, I will feel euphoric and it feels like I am riding at the top of the world.

I have a collection of photographs and drawings from over the years; these I use as my references. The photos are often of people, but also something that I have seen and thought that I might use them for some of my paintings. I draw almost daily; it relaxes me and connects me to my thoughts, it tunes my senses and helps me to think. I find drawing also good practise for hand and eye coordination. I like to stick the references on to my studio wall, my thoughts and ideas start to race. It usually takes me some time until I get to the state of flow, beginnings feel often sticky. As I go on painting something suddenly clicks. In my painting process I am looking for this moment that Professor Tarja Pitkänen-Walter talks in her essay.

Core of painting process is when this uncontrolled epiphany happens. When the image that the artist has been working tirelessly messes up and turns into something entirely new, I experience excitement and I feel energised. I feel released from the prison of boredom that my mind was just a moment ago. (Pitkänen-Walter 2014, 56. Translation Tiina Tuovinen)

Professor Tarja Pitkänen-Walter mentions *vitality* as important factor in painting and that has also been thriving force in my practise. One reason I love oil paints so much is because they are so unforgiving. I can work and rework layers on them when I am searching for something that lives up the painting. When that happens, I have this strong feeling that the painting is

charged with energy and I feel energised too, it makes me happy when I have managed to transport the energy to the canvas with my brush mark.

4. The exclusion of women

Hefty art history book by E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (1961) gives a tour to art history from ancient times to modern era. The 650 pages book only mentions one female artist on it. H. W. Janson's 750 page campus classic also left women out until the authors son decided to make some addition to it later on. (McGill 1986) Based on this it would be easy make conclusions that women were not practising art at all. "The twentieth-century art historians have enough sources to show that women artists have always existed, yet they ignore them." (Parker ja Pollock 1981, 6). In 19th century Britain the Royal Academy was prestigious art institution, from its 34 founder only two were women. The famous painting *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771–72) Johann Zoffany depicting in a group portrait of 35 gentlemen preparing for life drawing class. Zoffany has placed the two founding female members Angelica Kauffman and Mooser as portraits hanging on the wall.



Johann Joseph Zoffany (1733-1810). *The Academicians of the Royal Academy*. Royal Collection Trust, London. 1771-1772, oil on canvas, 101.1 x 147.5 cm. Photo Flickr Commons

It took hundred years until the next women were allowed to attend the Royal Academy. The fact that women were not allowed to attend the life drawing/ painting classes explains why Kauffman and Mooser are paintings on the wall in Zoffanys painting. (Vickery 2016) Denying women to attend life drawing/ painting the naked life model put women in huge disadvantage. The works of art that were valued and respected, were scenes from bible stories and history. If you could not master to paint the human body, you did not possess the crucial skills needed. This way it was easy to exclude women from the artistic community. This helped men to achieve more powerful position in artistic hierarchy, who ruled what was demanded and were judges for the art that was valued. (Parker ja Pollock 1981, 115)

In today's world the roles have shifted partly. Majority of art students that are chosen by merit are women (66%) yet commercial galleries are still showcasing more men (in 2018

68%). (Frieze 2019) On BBC documentary *Recalculating Art* tells how art made by women sells the tenth of the price of men.

Still paintings capture the highest price in auction. The most expensive painting ever sold – *Salvator Mundi* by Leonardo da Vinci – fetched \$450m while the world record for a female artist, Georgia O’Keeffe, is just \$44.4m, a tenth as much. The living artist Jeff Koons holds the record of \$91m in comparison Jenny Saville \$12.5m. Helen Gorrill, the author of *Women Can’t Paint* has studied the prices of 5,000 paintings all over the world and the figures are gruesome to read, every male artist making £1 while women earning only 10p in comparison. “It’s the most shocking gender value gap that I’ve come across in any industry at all,” she told in the BBC Radio 4 documentary, *Recalculating Art*.

(Sieghart 2022)

These are auctions and most often the artists do not receive money from these sells. The world of auctions is more on the side of finance, yet these art auctions still have influence what kind of art is valued and respected in our society and that has indirect effect on what art is deemed as ‘good’ art in the certain period. Those who have money have power. One of the reasons why women were repressed in the past was that in the patriarchic culture the white men had the power.

Gorrill stumbled across another startling finding. While the value of a work by a man rises if he has signed it, the value of a work by a woman falls if she has signed it, as if it has somehow been tainted by her gender. “That’s just absolutely mind-blowing.”

(Sieghart 2022)

How has the lack of women in the canon of art history effected on the confidence of female artists? How does it effect on the confidence of art collectors and art buyers? If art universities are happy to take female students to their programme, then where does it starts turning against women artists? Some female artists have told that once they announced that they are pregnant their galleries dropped them by as it would be too risky to buy their work as they will not be as committed to their careers. (Sieghart, *Recalculating Art* 2022) Then why are we still having a society in 2024 that is so unfair for the second sex? Not all news is bad though. It was delightful and refreshing that Venice Biennale in 2022 was so heavily showcasing women. Also, big and important museums are finally waking up to this unfairness and slowly rebalancing their collections.

We live on the times of modern capitalism, wild globalisation, the unlimited power of money, neo conservatism, racism, sectarianism, obsession to individual worship, fanaticism in social media, kissing the ass of political clowns and tyrannical general opinions. (Myyrä, 2014, 47. Translation Tiina Tuovinen)

I am about to finish my Master of Fine Art studies and the art world scares me; it feels so harsh and I can relate to psychoanalysis Myyrä's above mentioned rant. Yet I do feel hopeful that there is an air of change for bigger platform to groups who have been underrepresented, the art institutions are battling more with this issue. Just like those women throughout the history have been practicing art in the circumstances they have been living, I know that I will continue my art practice, my love to painting is so strong. As we live in this capitalistic world and art is very much part of it, I do think that there is a different side to art too (sometimes even softer side) that is powerful and has a lot to offer for the viewer who gets something from it that enriches their being, whether it is intellectually, emotionally or in some other way that gives meaning to them or new ways of seeing or experiencing.

5. Feminine style

Linda Nochlin in her essay '*Why Have There been No Great Female Artists?*' finds the whole question and questions like this, involved in feminist "controversy", falsifying the whole nature of the complex issue. According to her, feminists fall into the trap to dig out examples worthy or insufficiently appreciated artists from the history, from the genres of flower painting to Angela Kauffman. (Nochlin 1988, 147) In her opinion this reinforces negative implication and does not question the assumption lying behind the question *Why Has There Been No Great Women Artists?* Griselda Pollock also agrees that this question can only be answered by defensive explanations. (Parker & Pollock 1981, 49) The second issue Nochlin sees is the belief of the feminists on the feminine art scene, on the women's experiences, social situations and that their points of views are different to men's and would be logical if

their art was somehow more obviously or explicitly feminine in its style or in its expressive manner, or different in its greatness. (Nochlin 1988, 148)

While the members of the Danube School, the followers of Caravaggio, the painters gathered around Gauguin at Pont-Aven, the Blue Rider, or the Cubist may be recognized by certain clearly defined stylistic or expressive qualities, no such common qualities of “femininity” would seem to link the styles of women artists generally, any more than such qualities can be said to link women writers, a case brilliantly argued, against the most devastating, and mutually contradictory, masculine critical clichés, by Mary Ellmann in her *Thinking about Women*. (Nochlin 1988, 148)

The art works of certain time/ era have more in common and might have peculiar essence rather than art specifically from either female or male gender. Nochlin further argues about the lack of evidence and misconception of feminine style or themes in painting, for example the expectation that feminine paintings would be depicting domestic environment and scenes, but actually these were popular amongst Impressionists males such as Renoir, Monet or decorative Post-Impressionist painter Bonnard. Renoir has said himself that he painted with his prick, while Picasso compared painting with the act of lovemaking. (Chadwick 2002, 279) Women were used as objects and the act of painting something that is sexual and comes from a virile man. The assumption that women would paint domestic scenes is a false and not valid. Nochlin is highlighting the naïve misconception of what art is, pointing out that the problem is not the feminists’ concept of what femininity is, “art is not direct personal expression of individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms”. (Nochlin 1988, 149) She argues that big part of being an artist is to learn and be taught about the material;

It involves a self-consisted language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be

learned or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation. (Nochlin 1988, 149)

She goes as far as admitting that there have not been any great women artists and then also stating that comparing it that there have not been any great Inuit tennis player nor any black American equivalent masters in the history of art. (Nochlin 1988, 150) In Nochlin's opinion the reason for the lack of great female artists, is the social hierarchy, the domestic roles of women and lastly in the way in which institutions have been ran, women have been excluded and left outside, and discriminated against. The isolation of women from a cultural context makes them seem like they did not have a part at all. Pollock on the other hand argues that there have been great women artists and is more focused on the ways in which they have managed to practice art despite the restrains. Pollock further explains that "because of the economic, social, and ideological effects of sexual difference in western, patriarchal culture, women have spoken and acted from a different place within that society and culture". (Parker & Pollock 1981, 49). Her concern lies more on the ignorance of modern art history about the existence of women artists. She is arguing effectively how women have been producing art in those circumstances they have been living in and often used different mediums or have perhaps had a different visual vocabulary to men at the time. Women have always been creating but sadly men did not take women's needle works or flower paintings very seriously - although does that make them less valuable? Also, the nineteenth century bourgeoisie time valued children in a whole new way and the attitudes placed women to bring up their own children. Is 'female art' successful once the emphasis on the female has been removed? In my art, I like to play with these clichés of female artists.

I often use my own children as models in my paintings, emphasising on the subtle way that I am a mother even though I do not create mother daughter paintings but as my references and models come from my immediate circles of people, then frequently that is also my children. I

also like to use flowers or gardens; women were known to be flower painters (less important subject) and gardens represent places that are controlled not on their wild state, these symbolise control and the past struggles. Flowers are also sexual, yet again I build the meaning in subtle way, more in a hidden way just like women artists have been hidden.

6. Kuvan Kevät

To me painting is about trust, I must trust myself. When I paint, it is always complicated and not straight forward, it is about problem solving. I might start with a clear plan that I soon discard. I need physical exercise before I enter the studio, that way my mind is more peaceful, and I can find concentration. I always stand up when I paint. I listen to podcast or music. At some point I am dancing when I am painting. Professor Tarja Pitkänen-Walter talks in her essay *the Relationship between Art and Psychoanalyses* about vitality and its effect how we do things for example “the tone we use when we say good morning, how we put our clothes on, how we brush our hair (do we do these things aggressively, gently, passionately...) this is how we give importance to the things we do.” (Pitkänen-Walter, 2014, 60. Translation Tiina Tuovinen).

Painting is beyond of being just about feeling or conceptual thinking it is much broader area; it is an interaction between body and mind. Painting operates beyond verbal discursive logic where its meanings emerge from the rhythm, fusions of colours, the feeling of material; how runny, thick, loose, layered, airy the painted brushstroke is (the artists handprint). (Pitkänen-Walter, 2014, 60. Translation Tiina Tuovinen).

She emphasises;

Painting is about the communication with the material and what the artist is depicting; how the artist manages to deal with the material and the subject. How well does the artist manages to interpret their thinking through material. What is the outcome of three things:

the artist, the subject and the material.” (Pitkänen-Walter, 2014, 60. Translation Tiina Tuovinen).



View from Kuvan Kevät paintings, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

In my Kuvan Kevät exhibition I had three paintings, *Yellow Flowers*, *Red Flowers* and *the Car*. The people in my paintings are vehicles to enter the world what I want to depict, in the *Car*, the car is the character. In February Russia attacked Ukraine, I felt sad and paralysed. I found painting hard; I kept being stuck at painting the windows in the backdrop buildings on *the Car* painting. Painting felt meaningless. I started to think a lot about life and realise that big part of what makes my life so meaningful is art and music. To me music and art come hand in hand. Music is so powerful and helps me in everyday life. Music creates soundscapes, takes you to places in your head that you will not otherwise reach to, I want my paintings to work the same way but of course through visual senses. My paintings consist of landscapes of emotions, collections of my references, atmospheres that I have read in fictional books, music, art history and life around me.

Yellow Flowers is my version of reclining young woman. The painting is depicting an adolescence in amidst of greenery and an old building with classical pillars showing at the background. Yellow shines through the layers and the atmosphere is intensively scorching hot. On the left above her legs there is a rainbow shining through the grass. The painting process was terrible fight from the start. I painted the first layer with the brightest yellow I could find. O' it looked insanely yellow every time I entered my small windowless studio in the morning!



Studio view, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen



Yellow layer, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

I found it a struggle to add new layers of paint on top of the yellow, all the colours kept turning sort of dirty looking. *The Yellow Flowers* was the last one I finished on the process of the paintings. As a starting point I used a reference photo of my oldest daughter. As male artists have been using women most often as sexual objects in paintings, I like to emphasise on the history's "domestic women" and often use my own daughters as my models. Also, men often depicted young girls as the object of their sexual desire, I painted mine from the perspective of the inner feelings of adolescence. In the image of *Yellow Flowers*, the young lady is quite arrogant looking and completely absorbed in her own world. Above her head in the painting there grows St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), plant with small yellow flowers. In Ancient Greece it was considered to provide protection from devils and evil spirits. I wanted to make a little nod to one of my favourite artist Jean Michel Basquiat, the flowers are like a crown on her head, Basquiat often painted crowns. Towards the end, the painting process became auto pilot like. I had one pop song on repeat, I felt euphoric, it felt

like my hand was just having a life of its own, it kept painting the greenery fast and I was in trance: “The enjoyment in the making of art is when you lose yourself, it is when you experience freedom.” (Pitkänen-Walter 2014, 57. Translation Tiina Tuovinen)



Yellow Flowers, oil on linen 160x120 cm, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

In the *Red Flowers* there are two characters, lost in their own moment. There is a younger blonde person at the front looking at something on her hand and another dark-haired character with sunglasses, who has placed her nose inside a red flower to inhale the intoxicating scent while her sausage fingers are holding the delicate velvety petals. They are in a park with foliage, trees and flowers, the sky is looming unnaturally blue. This painting started with when I was looking at Vermeer’s *A Girl with Pearl Earring* and Pontormo’s the *Deposition from the Cross* images of paintings. The pearl has been a symbol of purity and chastity in the history of art. I hid the pearl in the young girl’s hand that she is looking at, signifying that those afore mentioned things are the girl’s private business and not dependant

on the gazer and the viewer does not even know what the young girl is looking at. The colours of the white T-shirt and its soft under colours are influenced from Pontormo's the *Deposition from the Cross* painting. The dark-haired lady is influenced by my friend, she has a way with flowers and the reference image of her is from the Queen Mary's Garden in London.



Red Flowers, oil on linen 159x118,5 cm, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

The Car painting scenery is from London where I lived for 18 years. There is a blue car at the foreground. On the right of the car there is a park that is surrounded by beautiful white fence. The road that the car is on is dizzyingly hilly. At the back of the painting there are Victorian houses. The reference scene that I used is around the corner where I lived, little greenery surrounded by Victorian houses, hiding place from the hectic city, a tranquil square that I have been sketching many times while listening to bird singing with the faint hum of cars at the background. The painting was making its way for a long time and to some way I made a version of it years ago. It has longing and emotions. It is a place where I have been

spending time with my good friends and watching my children play but it is also a place where I have been contemplating when things have not been so good. It is a place where I enjoyed warm summer evenings, having picnics, playing football with my kids, eating ice lollies and strawberries. I wanted to create a charged and unarresting scene. The garden is securely behind the wall, controlled. The car is symbolising action. It is missing its driver even though there is the feeling of movement in the image, just like female artists have been missing opportunity for their full potential.



The Car, oil on linen 160x119 cm, 2022. Photo Tiina Tuovinen

In Kuvan Kevät I had all the three paintings hanged on the wall next to each other located in the big exhibition on the ground floor Kuva/ Tila space. They had plenty of natural light from the opposite big windows. My paintings burst with saturated colours blending the elements from reality with fantasy.

Epilogue

The series of paintings in the Kuvan Kevät degree show are continuity of my practice, I will continue with the same subject matter in the future with new twists. At the beginning of the pandemic, I had a break from painting because of duties as a parent required so. It has been amazing to paint again and more than anything it makes me happy. There are times when I am not able to paint because I have children to take care of, but when I do get to spend time in my studio, I truly value the time, I work hard and there is this feeling that painting is something magical in this world. Because I have these obstacles and I cannot fully emerge myself to painting practise at this stage in my life, I find it interesting how other women have been managing and are managing to practise art. In the summer 2023, I had an exhibition in London where I had small scale paintings for practical reasons, I had to ship the paintings there from Helsinki. There were new elements to me in that process, I was painting from my imagination without any photo reference. Also, until then I have painted more the scale that I had on Kuvan Kevät degree show paintings, it was refreshing and took some time to learn to use a small brush and work the brush differently. That is what excites me about painting though, each painting is a new start and there is ever so much to learn. Just by using different scale or pigment that you do not normally use, shifts the whole game and you are out of your comfort zone.

The Kuvan Kevät process was very valuable experience. The meetings with my supervisors were important and I found them helpful, they challenged me , I received many useful colour combination tips, it was good to get feedback regularly during the process and my supervisors introduced me to new artists to look at. It is always fascinating to hear how other people view my works. Also, all the conversations with colleagues and tutors guided me to understand more about my practise and pushed me to contextualise my ideas behind the paintings. Each person saw and interpreted the works differently of course, there is not just one way to interpret them as they are a product of so many different elements. The most pleasurable part was the time I got to spent on the studio with my paintbrush. I find it hard to write and talk about my own paintings as they are so important and personal to me, yet I have noticed that writing my thesis has taught me to understand my own practice more. Often the paintings and ideas behind them feel like a big blob in my head and putting them to writing has cleared that out to me. I am grateful that I have been able to be part of the painting master's degree. It had made me grow as an artist and I have had the pleasure to meet many interesting and talented people and to make long lasting friendships.

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