



# RESTLESS STILLNESS

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Master's Thesis in Fine Arts  
1 October 2025

**UNIARTS  
HELSINKI**

**X ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS**

## S U M M A R Y

The Master of Fine Arts thesis project consists of an artistic component, which was displayed as part of Kuvan Kevät exhibition from May 17th to June 15th, 2025, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, and a written component titled *Restless Stillness*. The artistic component of the thesis comprises two charcoal drawings, *Before* and *After*, and eight photopolymer prints, *Restless Stillness I-VIII*.

One of the main subjects my thesis revolves around is time. I explore time both as subject and as structure. It appears as movement within narratives, as a temporal frame, but also as something to examine in itself—the ways we perceive it in life, in visual art, and in comics, along with the similarities and differences between those perceptions.

Another central subject of this thesis is the portrayal of women smoking in art. The portraits of a woman smoking become a guiding thread through this framework, the main narrative. I consider how the smoking woman is not just a portrait, but also a reflection on gender inequality. In my work, however, the act of smoking becomes a gesture of reclaiming space and expressing resistance.

I also play with context and content—how one shapes the other. When images are placed in sequence, side by side, their meanings begin to shift. The gaps between panels and portraits hold as much weight as the images themselves. The act of smoking, in a sense, takes place in these spaces between. I examine the relationship between fine art and comics in the context of medium and form, exploring questions of time in narratology, juxtaposed images, and non-linear storytelling.

As an artist working across fine art, comics, printmaking, and publishing, I explore the definitions, similarities, and differences between these traditions through the lens of my own work. Rather than setting strict boundaries, I reflect on how I approach narrative in art through the language of comics.

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# INFORMATION ON ARTISTIC AND WRITTEN COMPONENTS

## **Artistic Component**

*Restless Stillness*, 2025

Series of 8 photopolymer prints, each 32 × 35 cm

*Before and After*, 2025

Two charcoal drawings, each 90 × 120 cm

The artistic component was exhibited in Kuvan Kevät exhibition, at the White Studio at Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki.

Exhibition dates: 17.5.2025 – 15.6.2025

## **Written Component**

*Restless Stillness*

Submitted 01.10.2024.

All images included in the written component of this thesis are photographed by Ivanda Jansone.

## **Supervisors**

Inka-Maaria Jurvanen and Hanneriina Moisseinen

## **Examiners**

Martta Heikkilä and Pilvi Ojala

## LIST OF WORKS

1. *Before (Ennen)*, 2025

Charcoal on paper, framed without glass, 90 x 120 cm

2. *After (Jälkeen)*, 2025

Charcoal on paper, framed without glass, 90 x 120 cm

3. *Restless Stillness I, (Levoton tyyneys I)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

4. *Restless Stillness II, (Levoton tyyneys II)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

5. *Restless Stillness III, (Levoton tyyneys III)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

6. *Restless Stillness IV, (Levoton tyyneys IV)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

7. *Restless Stillness V, (Levoton tyyneys V)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

8. *Restless Stillness VI, (Levoton tyyneys VI)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

9. *Restless Stillness VII, (Levoton tyyneys VII)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

10. *Restless Stillness VIII, (Levoton tyyneys VIII)*, 2025

Photopolymer gravure, edition of 5, 32 × 35 cm

B E F O R E

## STARTING FROM THE END

*I am entering the White Studio. The first thing I notice is my own work: the two large charcoal drawings and a row of prints in the far, opposite corner. I'm not sure if it's because it's my work, or simply because it's placed in the opposite corner from the entrance and has an intensity in its black and white contrast. There's a glow, a certain light that seems to come from it. A strong, triangle-shaped shadow falls under the framed charcoal drawing in the corner. The two charcoal drawings are both one piece but also two separate pieces. I see the drawings clearly from a distance, but the prints invite me to come closer. Their size demands intimacy. Each print casts a small shadow. The rhythm is consistent; the spacing between each print is even. The series invites movement along its line. The sequence of eight prints fits narratively between the two drawings. The two large charcoal drawings and the series of prints are displayed close to each other, suggesting they form a whole. The texture of the charcoal drawings is matte and soft. I can almost taste the charcoal in my throat, I don't want to, but I know its taste. A slight shine from the fixative catches the light, but otherwise the surface reflects very little. There's no glass in front; I fully feel the matte surface. The prints have a deep matte black, slightly flatter than the charcoal drawings. Their black is intense yet detailed—a black banana on a black wall still reveals its form.<sup>1</sup>*

## RETURN TO THE BEGINNING

This paper follows the illusion of past, present, and future, with its three sections titled *Before*, *During*, and *After*. However, in reality, these times do not move in a straight line, much like artwork, this paper and time itself.

In my practice, I am not moving toward something entirely new, but instead exploring where I came from. Where did I come from? In this context, the question is not only biographical, but artistic. I try to understand what has shaped me—emotionally and intellectually. Moreover, I came to realise that it is impossible to explain the origins of my work without speaking about the early influences that shaped me, and the interests they've sparked that still follow me in my artistic practice.

In my artistic work, I'm most curious about the things that are beyond my understanding, things that feel out of reach. It is not necessarily that I'm hoping to

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1. Reflections written during the Kuvan Kevät exhibition on 12 June 2025, while observing artwork in the exhibition space.

know or explain them by the end, but rather, they give me a reason to explore, to test, and then to reflect. This is where surrealism has always spoken to me, not as a fixed style, but as an attitude toward reality. And this attitude begins with the belief that the world is not limited to what is logical, visible, or easily explained. Like the surrealists, I see reality as layered and unstable, and I aim to create works that hold this tension between what I know and what I imagine.

My early interest in art lies in surrealist artists like René Magritte, Frida Kahlo, and M. C. Escher, among others. Although neither Kahlo nor Escher were formally part of the Surrealist movement, their work carries its spirit. Escher's prints feel like invitations to question how we perceive the world. With repetition and gradual shifts, he makes time and movement visible within the stillness of a single image. His lithograph print, *Relativity*<sup>2</sup>, and woodcut, *Metamorphosis*<sup>3</sup>, reveal how a single image can be both static and in motion, an idea that resonates with my own interest in the threshold between comics and fine art.<sup>4</sup>

My path into visual narrative and comics has been shaped more by cinema and animation than by comics themselves. Dreamlike worlds, such as those of Andrei Tarkovsky and the surreal visions of Luis Buñuel, have shaped my storytelling far more than any single comic ever has. Their works showed me that time in a story can slow down, circle back, or disappear, and that silence or uncertainty can be even more powerful than words or action.

Soviet-era animations, such as *Hedgehog in the Fog*<sup>5</sup> and others, have profoundly shaped my perspective on the world. The dense fog, eerie sounds, and fleeting encounters with animals create an atmosphere that is both surreal and unpredictable, with constant uncertainty throughout the film. A similar surreal atmosphere and sense of unpredictability characterise much of Soviet animation. That's not surprising—it gave artists a way to deal with life under an oppressive system. Using symbolism and experimental imagery, they tackled themes of war, loss, censorship, and identity, carving out a rare space for truth-telling despite heavy political control. Those childhood animations left a deep mark on how I see both life and art. They carry

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2. M.C. Escher, *Relativity*, 1953, lithograph, 39.1 x 40.6 cm, Cornelius Van S. Roosevelt Collection, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/54256-relativity>.

3. M.C. Escher, *Metamorphosis I*, 1937, woodcut, 29.3 x 100.6 cm, Cornelius Van S. Roosevelt Collection, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/54211-metamorphosis-i>.

4. M.C. Escher Dutch Printmaker, Draftsman, and Illustrator; *The Art Story*, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/escher-mc/>, accessed September 18, 2025.

5. *Hedgehog in the Fog*, directed by Yuri Norstein, 1975.

with them a particular aesthetic that has stayed with me, one that I now inhabit and continue to work within.

Suzan Pitt's animation *Asparagus*<sup>6</sup> has been a safe place for me to return to, a source of courage and self-validation. I go back to watch it whenever I need it. The film is wordless yet overflowing with imagery: shifting rooms, masks, endless patterns, and asparagus as a symbol of sexuality unfolding like a daydream. For me, it is a story about a woman in a patriarchal world, navigating gender roles, but also about a woman as creator. Pitt herself described the film as follows:

"I thought of it as a beautiful symbol of sexuality. From that I made a visual poem about the creative process, taking the role of the magician/artist as the protagonist who ushers the viewers through her search for the essence of the creative forces which rule and drive our existence."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, I look at Francesca Woodman's photographic work. Her art explores the female body and identity, while also addressing the dimension of time. Woodman often used long exposures, which created motion blur in her images. Captured motion gives her photographs a sense of impermanence and the passage of time. The same impermanence I get from photographs of Rodney Smith. His work is detached from the era, frozen yet hinting at what came before and what came after. Smith employs strong composition, staging, and controlled lighting. Additionally, the black and white aesthetics in their photography have been an essential influence on my own aesthetics.

Bridget Riley's geometric shapes and optical illusions bring another layer to my influences. Her op art plays with perception, rhythm, and repetition, making static images seem to move. Her work introduces a sense of time, perhaps not directly shown, but felt.

All these early influences have shaped me, and I cannot set them aside when discussing my artistic work and its origins—they continue to guide me on my path. They surface in my work as cinematic light and edited moments in a black-and-white world—performative, surreal, and carefully composed.

These images of my influences, whether moving or still, engage with time in different ways. Yet I only began to recognise a more profound curiosity about time when I

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6. *Asparagus*, directed by Suzan Pitt, 1979.

7. *Asparagus*; *Suzan Pitt*, accessed September 16, 2025, <https://www.suzanpitt.com/asparagus>.

developed an interest in comics. As I see it now, every artwork contains a sense of time. The question is not whether art engages with time, but how.

## BEGINNING THE WORK

I may work within surreal atmospheres, but my process always begins with a plan. I like to know, at least in basic framework, where I'm heading and what I hope to achieve by the end of a project. I leave just a little space open for the process to surprise me, but the overall direction and framework is usually clear. Of course, it doesn't always follow the script. As I work, I inevitably discover things that shift my thinking and might change the next step.

In January 2025, I began an especially intense period of planning, as the time until the Kuvan Kevät exhibition felt suddenly very short. I had only a vague sense of what I wanted to create, some scattered thoughts, nothing yet concrete. The only certainty was my wish to make a work, a narrative, in which time would be registered at two different speeds within the same story. Time is essential in storytelling, but time is also very mysterious. Tarkovsky said that we understand less about time than almost anything else, yet we rely on it the most.<sup>8</sup> In stories, time is not just a measure; it is a mood, a tension, a heartbeat. It shapes how we experience events, and how they live on within us. I intended to explore the nature of time, not just as a concept, but as something that can be experienced in different ways. I wanted to play with its perception.

This idea of parallel timelines became the framework for my work, the structure that holds everything together. In many ways, it is the core, the essence of the piece. The narrative I chose to tell grew within that framework. It is almost a companion to the main idea, a way to give the concept of time a body and a voice. The story exists to serve the exploration of time, while time itself shapes the way the story unfolds.

As for the story itself, from the very beginning, I knew it would focus on a woman and, directly or indirectly, would connect to me as a woman. I intended to seek out an unknown, ordinary woman from the past and, through my own story, bring hers into the present. This also meant moving through different layers of time in how women are represented, which ties directly to my main subject of interest- time.

During my initial conversations with one of my thesis supervisors, Hanneriina Moisseinen, she suggested that I explore the archives of the Finnish Literature

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8. Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time*, 58.

Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, SKS) for this matter. However, searching for written traces of ordinary women from the past proved to be more challenging than I expected; women appeared most often under categories like “witches” and “unordinary people” - sometimes described as manly or unusually strong, but mainly with no achievements other than that.

While reviewing the archive materials on traditional and contemporary culture, collected by Samuli and Jenny Paulaharju, one woman in particular stood out to me: Eeva Kurtti. Paulaharju described her as “an old ugly crone living in Kierinki, Sodankylä. A reader of spells, maker of charms, healer. A believer in spirits and a seer.” The note is dated June 25, 1920. In the photo, she has a pipe in her mouth, eyes steady, looking past the camera. Her lips press tight to hold the pipe in place.<sup>9</sup>

Kurtti’s description above may also reveal an attitude toward the lower classes. However, this made me think of the fact that even a hundred years later, women who do not conform to society’s norms are still called witches. And how women’s appearance has always been discussed openly, without hesitation. Much has changed over the years, yet many things remain the same.

The pipe caught my attention. Smoking, I imagine, was neither common nor widely accepted for women then; it was a step into a man’s domain. Earlier in my process, I had considered the burning cigarette as a visual element to measure time. The image of Kurtti brought that thought back to mind. I never built a narrative around her, but she became a thread, leading me towards pipes, cigarettes, and the quiet defiance they can carry.

This led me instinctively to Sarah Lucas’s self-portrait *Fighting Fire with Fire*, a work that had made a strong impression on me. When I looked at it again, I immediately knew my work would revolve around women smoking cigarettes—not the act itself, but the discourse surrounding it. I decided to use this seemingly unimportant act as a prism through which to open a larger picture of how women are viewed. I began searching through art history for other examples, portraits and self-portraits from different periods, where women are shown smoking.

It’s hard to retrace the exact sequence of these thoughts, but from them came a decision to bring together two classic fine art genres, portrait and still life, within the form of a comic. In the following chapters, I will share the thoughts and frameworks that guided my work, along with the processes through which it took shape.

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9. Paulaharju, *Pk. 1. III. 1933, b)22303-22759, 22663, 64.*

D U R I N G

## FINE ART VS COMICS

What happens when storytelling enters the fine arts? How can the intimacy of a comic page hold the conceptual and material weight of visual art? These questions have been central to my practice. These questions have become my primary motivation. As an artist working across both fields, fine art and comics, printmaking and publishing, I am drawn to the in-between space, where disciplines meet. I will not analyse these here in depth from a definitional point of view, but rather reflect on what comics mean to me and how I look at narratives in art through the lens of comics. By comics, I mean primarily visual storytelling in the context of form and medium.

“The culture of postmodernism has, in fact, created the possibility of conceptualising comics as a site for serious artistic creation. At the same time, a small number of creators have moved to occupy the position of comics artist, and an even larger number of critics have been prepared to accommodate them in this position. (...) Nonetheless, the comics world remains a challenge to the art world, a distinct field of creative endeavor that is still only tentatively welcomed.”<sup>10</sup>

These two art fields each have their own history and status, and they have been and still are seen as separate categories.<sup>11</sup> For me, however, the difference is not about categories but about how each medium moves through time and space.

I find myself thinking that fine art often emphasises the singular image, a kind of stillness and contemplation, while comics feel rooted in narrative and movement. Yet I do not see these distinctions as fixed. After becoming familiar with comics and studying them, I began to notice how often works of fine art reminded me of comics. Sometimes it is a matter of structure, images placed in sequence. At other times, it is the sense of narrative or movement hidden within a single image.

One of these kinds of encounters occurred when I became familiar with Finnish printmaker Outi Heiskanen’s work. Her prints are strongly narrative, while remaining rooted in the traditions of printmaking. In her printing process, she employs both montage, which involves combining two or more images to create a new subject, and composition, where several plates are printed on the same sheet, either overlapping or side by side. Sometimes Heiskanen divides the copper plates into smaller parts

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10. Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 13.

11. Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 18.

or covers the sections when printing. She also has created collages from torn prints, which she glued together. Her process embraces controlled randomness. Her work *Extended Family*<sup>12</sup>, for example, shows bust portraits of humans and animals arranged in a sequence, almost like an archive or family album.<sup>13</sup> Many of her works I read as comics, as storytelling. I find myself looking for the connections and narratives between the “panels” or in images within singular print, like in Heiskanen’s prints *Mila-Repa II*<sup>14</sup> (1985–1986) and *Mila-Repa III*<sup>15</sup> (1986). These two works are exciting to compare: the imagery of the plates partly repeats, but because she arranges them in new compositions and contexts, their meaning shifts and new narratives emerge. Heiskanen shows beautifully that narrative can exist within a single image.

I also approached Inka-Maaria Jurvanen’s triptych *Lewdness of Disintegration*, 2010-2019,<sup>16</sup> through the lens of comics. Jurvanen later agreed to be one of my thesis supervisors. In our conversations, she noted that my associations with comics in her work were not apparent to her, yet our ways of approaching and thinking about time in our work are very much similar. She has said that she is interested in how an image can create the experience of events happening both simultaneously and sequentially.<sup>17</sup>

Another artist whose work resonates strongly with the world of comics is Risako Yamanoi. Her work is highly narrative; at times, she uses clear panels within a single print, at other times, two images placed closely side by side suggest a connection, and through that, a story. In her work, she explores how we construct personal narratives from memories and the objects that surround us.<sup>18</sup>

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12. Outi Heiskanen, *Extended Family*, 2002, etching, aquatint, drypoint, combination, 32,8 x 37,4 cm, Sara Hildén Foundation.

13. Exhibition catalog of Exhibition at the Sara Hildén Art Museum 2005, Outi heiskanen, 10.

14. Outi Heiskanen, *Mila-Repa II*, 1985–1986, 44 × 53 cm, aquatint, drypoint, etching, Finnish State Art Commission, <https://www.kansallisgalleria.fi/fi/object/639666>.

15. Outi Heiskanen, *Mila-Repa III*, 1986, mezzotinto, etching, 70 × 85 cm Finnish National Gallery, Collection / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Skop collection, <https://www.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/619773>.

16. Inka-Maaria Jurvanen, *Lewdness of Disintegration*, 2019 - 2020, 69 × 81 × 121 cm, birch plywood, pencil, Finnish National Gallery Collection / Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, [www.kansallisgalleria.fi/fi/object/3793248](http://www.kansallisgalleria.fi/fi/object/3793248).

17. Jurvanen’s work was exhibited in Kiasma from 12.1.2024 to 12.1.2025 as part of the ‘Feels like home’ exhibition.

18. Risako Yamanoi *A box for*, exhibition at G gallery 2.8.–27.8.2023, <https://www.taidegraafikot.fi/nayttelyt/risako-yamanoi>.

Another distinction often made between comics and fine arts lies in the medium. However, in the context of printmaking, I see clear parallels with publishing, as both share the same origins. Since the mid-19th century, however, they have developed along different paths, with printmaking striving for the status of fine art; yet, their original purpose was the same: to spread information—a message in the form of an image or word—through duplication.<sup>19</sup>

Still, not so long ago, printmaking works were seen as accessible: anyone could purchase a print at a low price, and with large editions, the work remained affordable while still being a genuine artwork. Printmaking was therefore often described as a democratic form of art, an idea that remains a topic of discussion today. In contemporary practice, however, big print editions are uncommon, and their prices are often close to those of unique works.<sup>20</sup> Unlike publishing, printmaking retains distinctive handmade qualities, such as the pressure of the press, the grain of the paper, or the raw edges, which make each print unique.

Publishing, especially in comics or book form, still belongs to a world of circulation and accessibility. Where a print might be hung on a gallery wall and encountered alone, a comic or zine is held in the hands, read through time, shared or passed on. If a book, especially in the context of comics or self-publishing, is a democratic object, made to be held, read, and passed around. A fine art print, on the other hand, feels more like a meditative object, asking for stillness and sustained attention.

In the contemporary white-cube exhibition format, artworks are often given generous space, suggesting that each work should be encountered separately, as an autonomous object, independent of others, and disconnected from the outer world. When works are placed close together, they begin to interact, generating new relationships and meanings.

Juxtaposition—placing two or more images, or image and text, side by side—is a common way of creating narrative and meaning. It can work through contrast, similarity, association, or reversal. Juxtaposition may occur within a single image, between two images, or across an entire series, even extending over several strips.<sup>21</sup> Narrative, as such, is part of curating fine art exhibitions. One strong example of

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19. Timeline of Art History. The Print in the Nineteenth Century, *The MET Museum*, accessed September 26, 2025, <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-print-in-the-nineteenth-century>.

20. The Differences between Prints, Multiples, and Editions, Shannon Lee, *Artsy*, accessed September 26, 2025, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-differences-prints-multiples-editions>.

21. Mikkonen, *The Narratology of Comic Art*, 252.

creating narrative by juxtaposing images was the Gothic Modern exhibition at the Ateneum.<sup>22</sup> It was curated to create a dialogue between artists from different periods, while also shaping a straightforward narrative from darkness to light. The artworks were hung close to each other, suggesting the narrative and relationship between them.

With my thesis work, I aimed not only to explore the intersection between fine art and comics and question the boundaries and definitions that shape how we understand both. I began this project with the mindset that I was making comics, eight panels, simple in structure, yet rooted in narrative and movement. I also call it comics to challenge how we think about the medium, to shift perception in some way. I treated my panels as comics in both format and intention, choosing to publish them as a handmade book in only one or two editions by binding together polymer gravure prints and calling it a comic book. What I set out to show was that by definition, these works are comics, but through their methods, materials, and display, they begin to function as fine art. This duality was essential to me: to question the assumption that comics belong to publishing and art belongs to the gallery.

To my surprise, however, the work began to evolve as I made it. The boundaries blurred not only conceptually, but physically and visually. What started as a statement became a space of discovery, where I no longer had to choose between categories, but could work within the space between them—a liminal space.

## THE TEXTURE OF TIME

Time passes more quickly in the mountains than it does at sea level. The difference is small, but it's measurable. With the timepieces of specialized laboratories, this slowing down of time can be detected between levels just a few centimeters apart: a clock placed on the floor runs a little more slowly than one on a table. Albert Einstein understood this slowing down of time a century before we had clocks precise enough to measure it. Time is affected by gravity, by distance, by motion. It is not a fixed constant, but a relative phenomenon, strongly related to one's location in space.<sup>23</sup> I find it interesting how this scientific truth resonates with the way viewers experience artwork—deeply tied to one's position in space.

A still image, such as a classical portrait or a still life, appears to pause time. It captures a single, selected moment. However, I am more interested in what lies

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22. Gothic Modern: From Darkness to Light, Ateneum Art Museum, 4.10.2024–26.1.2025.

23. Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, 9-11.

outside the paused frame: the moments before and after, the unseen passage of time that shapes the present and what is still to come. My work explores how a solitary image can be transformed into a narrative—something that lives and moves through time. It also examines how the meaning of an image changes when it is placed in sequence and in context. In this shift, a single, timeless image becomes a timeline, a story. I explore the nature of time as it unfolds within two parallel frameworks. The perception of time is left open to the viewer, shaped by their own observation and interpretation.

“History is still not Time; nor is evolution. They are both consequences. Time is a state: the flame in which there lives the salamander of the human soul. Time and memory merge into each other; they are like the two sides of a medal. It is obvious enough that without Time, memory cannot exist either. (..) Time cannot vanish without a trace for it is a subjective, spiritual category and the Time we have lived settles in our soul as an experience placed within Time”<sup>24</sup>

Andrei Tarkovsky regarded time as the very substance of cinema itself. In his book *Sculpting in Time*, he even writes of time with a capital letter, emphasising its fundamental, almost sacred role in his work. He often uses extended shots with minimal cuts, which allow the audience to experience time as a duration rather than a compressed sequence. Tarkovsky saw cinema as a medium that unfolds in time but evokes eternity. In his films, time shifts fluidly between past, present, dream and memory. Time resists clear boundaries, and this reflects how humans actually experience time.<sup>25</sup>

The narrative unfolding in my work is not necessarily linear, either, even though it may suggest linearity. It is layered. These timelines move at different speeds, like overlapping realities or memories. They intersect but do not align. I am interested in the tension of how meaning emerges when different layers of time coexist side by side without merging into a single truth.

Comics, unlike more traditional forms of art, are fragmented and relational by nature. They present their meaning in the space, in transition, between panels, and invite the reader to experience them as a whole. The viewer is an active participant, filling in time, causality, and feeling.

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24. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, 57-58.

25. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*.

Narratology has long focused on the temporal structure of narratives, especially the distinction between story-time (the order of events in the story) and discourse-time (how those events are arranged and presented). Perhaps the most obvious element for manipulating temporal order is through the relations between panels, which invite the reader to connect them and fill in what is missing. A change from one panel to the next does not always mean time has passed—it could just show the same character or object from a different angle. Still, temporal shifts between panels are so common that readers often expect them by default.<sup>26</sup>

Comics can create temporalities that go beyond linear panel-to-panel progression, using open-ended logic and simultaneity. For example in *Building Stories*<sup>27</sup>, words and images unfold at different tempos, showing both memory and aging at once. The old landlady tells about her memories relating to her dislike of dolls, but the reader simultaneously sees her aging in this passage from a young child into an old woman.

Other great example is Matti Hagelberg's *Kekkonen*,<sup>28</sup> —imaginary biography of the former Finnish president Urho Kaleva Kekkonen. Hagelberg uses a panel-within-panel structure that lets two storylines run side by side: the president's surreal adventure inside a whale and the Hagelberg's interview in the corner of main panel. These parallel sequences are distinct yet complementary, showing how comics can layer multiple times and narratives within the same page.<sup>29</sup>

I adopted Hagelberg's approach to use a panel inside the panel in my own storytelling. This structure allows one narrative to unfold on the surface while another runs alongside it, creating layers of meaning. In this way, the page becomes not just a sequence but a dialogue between multiple stories. I chose two classic fine art genres—portrait and still life—as my subjects. I aimed to explore what happens when time enters these still forms, what comes before and after that moment.

While in Western culture we typically think of time as linear, our experience reveals it to be far more fluid and layered. Memory puts the past in the present, and anticipation takes us to the future. Surrealists also rejected the rational, clock-bound view of time. In dreams and the unconscious, past, present, and future merge into a single entity. Breton and other Surrealists valued the layering of cultural, personal,

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26. Mikkonen, *The Narratology of Comic Art*, 36.

27. Wares, *Building stories*.

28. Hagelberg, *Kekkonen*.

29. Mikkonen, *The Narratology of Comic Art*, 43.

and collective histories in an image. In Surrealism, time is felt rather than measured. A moment can stretch endlessly or vanish in an instant, depending on perception. Time is not simply a measure; it is a type of texture. Time can stretch, condense and replay. Time is something formed by emotion, attention and imagination.

The strong contrast of black and white in my work is not accidental; it is a conscious choice, a visual argument in itself. I am drawn to black and white as a visual language — and even more specifically, to blackness in contrast with white. There is something uncompromising in that relationship. Both of my methods, printmaking and drawing with charcoal, support this aesthetic: raw, focused, and reduced to what feels necessary. It may be a form of resistance in a world saturated with high gloss digital colour and image overload. A focus on substance. A search for clarity in a chaotic world.

In a context of time, black and white carries a certain timelessness, even though it references the past, like early photography, film, and printmaking. Colour is often tied to context, culture, technology, and trends. In contemporary settings, art without colour can feel more open to interpretation and, therefore, free from the constraints of time, space, and cultural context. It strips away distraction, demands focus, and invites engagement with form, structure, and emotion.

## AFTER THE PORTRAIT

When I was a child, I wanted to be a boy. I wanted to be a boy and later a male principal of a primary school. I sensed that boys were allowed to do things girls were not. I did not question it at the time. Only later did I realise that what I was really expressing was a desire for equality and an early instinct to challenge gender roles.

In my early teenage years, I started writing poetry. It was my way of dealing with adolescent angst. With the help of my mother, a woman who had access to a computer, and another who knew how to bind a book, we created my first poetry book together. It was a self-illustrated, hand-stitched, leather-covered, small object. I entered it into a regional poetry contest in my hometown of Cēsis, Latvia and won first prize.

Years later, when I revisited those poems, I noticed something strange: I had written all of them in the masculine first person. I remember, as a teenager, justifying it by telling that it simply sounded better that way, and nobody ever commented that it was an unusual way of writing for a girl. Now I understand it differently—it was an unconscious response to the roles and expectations that surrounded me. They are

so deeply rooted in social structures and often so subtle that it's sometimes hard to recognise them—unless you step outside the environment where they are constantly reinforced. Additionally, it was a result of the underrepresentation of women in literature.

As part of one of the narratives in my thesis work, I set out to explore what it means to be a woman in the eyes of others, not as a subject to be observed just from the outside, but from within. I wanted to work with myself, through myself, as a woman and as a woman artist. However, I also draw on the voices and echoes of other women, not just my own. Their stories became mirrors, fragments through which I could search for a shared language, a thread of connection that could stand as a metaphor for equality. Something quiet but insistent.

I see my work as a self-portrait, but not in the traditional sense. It is not about likeness; I did not study my own face or my own life in any literal way. However, these works resemble me in essence and defiance. They are mine, and they are every woman's. We exist. Look at us. We act on our own terms, and we do not ask for permission. I wanted to shift the gaze. When I recontextualise this imagery, its meaning bends. In my work, a woman holding a cigarette is no longer just a passive figure posed with a cigarette; she is smoking actively. Moreover, it happens between the panels, in the space between the portraits. The act becomes her own. A gesture reclaimed. Art history, like history itself, has long celebrated male achievements, particularly those of white, Western, and authoritative figures. These are the names we are taught and the stories we hear. I am moving within that framework, but by changing the context, I also change the narrative.

The main narrative features a woman smoking a cigarette, posed in ways that draw inspiration from the history of visual art, spanning from the 19th century to the present day. Pictures of references in order of sequence: Nan Golding *Suzanne with Marlboros*<sup>30</sup>, Auguste Leveque *Portrait of Suzanne*<sup>31</sup>, Édouard Manet *Plum Brandy*<sup>32</sup>,

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30. Nan Golding, *Suzanne with Marlboros*, 1980, cibachrome, 60.9 x 50.8 cm, Collection Fotomuseum Winterthur, gift George Reinhart, <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/collection-post/suzanne-with-marlboros-new-york-city>.

31. Auguste Leveque *Portrait of Suzanne*, 1866-1921, oil on canvas, private collection.

32. Édouard Manet *Plum Brandy*, 1877, oil on canvas, 87.6 x 64.1 x 5.7 cm, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, <https://www.nga.gov/artworks/53034-plum-brandy>.



Figure 1. Eight portraits of women smoking, charcoal on paper. Photograph by Ivanda Jansone.

Alfred James Munnings *Study for Miss Hancock*<sup>33</sup>, Picasso *Young woman holding cigarette*<sup>34</sup>, Salvatore Fiume *A Susette*<sup>35</sup>, Fabio Hurtado *Travel Readings*<sup>36</sup>, Sarah Lucas *Fighting fire with fire*.<sup>37</sup> (Figure 1)

The portraits I chose are not accidental. I wanted the sequence to begin and end with poses by female artists, shifting the narrative within a tradition where portraits were often painted by men. The works by male artists I selected for the way the

33. Alfred James Munnings *Study for Miss Hancock*, 1878-195, oil on panel, 35.6 x 25.4 cm, The Munnings Art Museum, <https://www.artrenewal.org/artworks/study-for-miss-hancock-recto/sir-alfred-james-munnings/58993>.

34. Picasso *Young woman holding cigarette*, 1901, oil on canvas, 73.7 x 51.1 cm, The Barnes Foundation, [https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/objects/5120/Young-Woman-Holding-a-Cigarette-\(Jeune-femme-tenant-une-cigarette\)](https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/objects/5120/Young-Woman-Holding-a-Cigarette-(Jeune-femme-tenant-une-cigarette)).

35. Salvatore Fiume, *A Susette*, 1956, <https://www.fiume.org/en/project/paintings>.

36. Fabio Hurtado *Travel Readings*, 2010, oil on canvas, <https://www.fabiohurtado.com/archive-fabio-hurtado-art/the-reading-fabio-hurtado-art>.

37. Sarah Lucas *Fighting fire with fire*, 1996, digital print on paper, 73 x 51 cm, Tate collection, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lucas-fighting-fire-with-fire-p78449>.

women sit and hold the cigarette, ensuring a smooth visual transition from one panel to the next. At the same time, I kept in mind my intention to span three centuries of artists.

In the history of visual art, there is a noticeable pattern: women are often holding cigarettes but rarely caught in the act of smoking them. Particularly in artworks created by male artists. This may seem minor, but it reveals a deeper cultural restriction around female expression. In this series, however, the cigarette burns down frame by frame, becoming a quiet metronome that measures time and silently defies the constraints of traditional representation. I intend to show the ways such borrowed art-historical poses change meaning when positioned inside of sequential narrative.

The image of a woman smoking in art is full of symbolism. Its meaning, though, has shifted over time depending on cultural, political, and feminist contexts. A cigarette in a woman's hand, especially in the late 19th century and early 20th century, often functions more as a visual prop than an active behaviour. It is a carefully placed symbol and meant to suggest modernity, rebellion, or sexual independence, but always contained. She holds the symbol but does not engage with it. She appears independent, but the control remains elsewhere. Actually, blowing smoke, inhaling, or exhaling can look too powerful. In contrast, female artists, especially from the 20th century onward, have often used smoking to claim space and disrupt these quiet restrictions.

In 1967, the artist VALIE EXPORT made a radical gesture by giving up both her father's and husband's names and taking on a new identity, marking her arrival on the art scene. In VALIE EXPORT—SMART EXPORT, she poses defiantly in the spirit of the late 1960s youth protests, holding a package of Austrian Smart Export cigarettes with her own face and logo on it.<sup>38</sup> Artists like Sarah Lucas or Nan Goldin show women not only holding cigarettes but owning the act of smoking. The cigarette becomes a tool of confrontation, not just a decorative object. The message is clear: I am not your fantasy, I am in control.

The last portrait of the narrative I borrowed from Sarah Lucas's "Fighting Fire with Fire," and it is a key portrait to the entire narrative. It is one of Sarah Lucas's most iconic self-portraits. It is provocative and layered with irony that mocks the persona

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38. VALIE EXPORT, *VALIE EXPORT SMART EXPORT*, 1970, gelatin silver print, 31.5 × 29 × 11 cm, MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147167>.

of male film icons. Since the early 1990s, Lucas has knowingly used traditionally 'macho' postures to challenge the dominant gender norms found in mainstream culture. Cigarettes are often used as crude stand-ins for male genitalia, poking fun at masculine bravado and dominance. Smoking carries an image of toughness, rebellion, and nonchalance. Lucas uses it to give her female subjects a don't-care attitude, a gritty, masculine-coded resistance to being looked at or controlled.<sup>39</sup>

I chose to use the image of a woman smoking cigarettes in my work for two reasons. The first was to measure time. It is like a quiet clock ticking and showing time passing. The second reason is the symbolic weight of cigarettes and the act of a woman smoking itself. For me, placing a woman in the act of smoking is about reclaiming presence, being active rather than passive, embodied rather than aestheticised.

This ties directly to the title of the work: *Restless Stillness*. It's a contradiction, but it captures how I experience my role as a woman. Coming from a male-dominated environment, I've learned to navigate my role as a woman somewhere between calmness and restlessness, between being controlled and being in control. These structures are deeply embedded in culture and language and are not always easy to recognise as inequality. It's often difficult to tell where my own choices end and where society's demands begin.

With charcoal drawing *After*, a self-invented portrait pose, I wanted to set the woman free and let her finally exhale the smoke of all cigarettes she has been smoking (or not smoking) for three centuries. In this drawing, I also introduce myself as an artist-creator, the person behind the drawing. Hand comes into the picture and brings the story to an end by finishing the burning cigarette. Another timeline, another reality enters the narrative.

## BEFORE THE STILL LIFE

Vanitas still life paintings use symbolic objects, such as withered flowers and fruits, to point to the shortness of life, the futility of earthly pleasures, and the certainty of death. Their hidden meanings have always fascinated me, but in this paper, I will only touch on them briefly, sharing a few thoughts behind my own choices.

Continuing the theme of feminine versus masculine settings, for the still life, I intended to play with the symbols of masculinity and femininity. I chose the banana

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39. Collings, *Sarah Lucas*, 75-92.

as a symbol of masculinity and the lemon as a symbol of femininity and fertility. As time passes, the banana slowly merges into the background, revealing its shape just slightly, while the lemons shrink only somewhat over time.

In the charcoal drawing *Before*, I wonder what happens before the fresh flowers and fruits of a still life are arranged, displayed, and captured. Where do they come from, and who brought them? I aim to connect everyday life and consumerism to the artwork, thereby linking the outside world to the pieces in the gallery.

## DURING

The process became connected to the theme of time in many ways: from practical considerations to the mental spaces I found myself in while working on the project.

The first phase of my practical work was to decide which artworks I would borrow for the pose of a smoking woman. From around thirty works, I selected ten, sketched them on small papers, and put them out on the table, rearranging them, changing the order, and replacing some, until I arrived at eight and achieved a smooth transition between them. Eight felt like just the suitable number: enough to stretch the burn of a cigarette, yet condensed enough to mark the changes of withering still life.

The borrowed poses I started to draw are not exact copies of the original poses; they are shifted, a second before or two seconds after the moment captured in the source. The hand has moved slightly, and the head has turned just a little.

After sketching the poses I planned to draw, I began drawing the first portrait. Once it was ready, I would photograph it alongside my freshly arranged still life, capturing the very start of the process. I planned to then move on to the second image, and when it was complete, place it within the decaying still life, documenting both the changes in the still life and the pace of my drawing. However, I abandoned this idea due to the limited time I had. If something did not work out as imagined and changes were needed, I would have had to start over, and I was afraid I would not be able to finish the work in time. As mentioned before, I want to be in control of my work, know where I am going and leave just a little space for accidents. The time restriction became my motivation to first draw all eight panels of portraits of the smoking woman and only then photograph them within a withering still life of tulips and fruits.

The original drawings of the portraits of the woman were intentionally excluded from the final exhibition. This choice referred to the relationship between the original and

the printed image, much like in the context of published comics, where the print is the work the audience encounters, the originals often stay hidden.

I photograph all portraits in the set of changing still life during the period from 26 February to 17 March.<sup>40</sup> I always photographed around the same time of day, relying only on daylight and hoping the light would remain consistent in each image. Fortunately, the weather was mostly cloudy at that time of year, so the changes in light intensity were minimal.

During the process, I often thought about the layers of time—both physical and contextual—that I was working within. I began with images from art history and translated them into charcoal drawings. Then I placed the drawings in a still life and photographed the setup. After that, I processed the digital photographs and printed them onto film. I put the film on a polymer plate and created the gravure image during exposure, measuring the exposure length in 55 units. Here, the unit is time, which is slightly longer than a second. I then washed the plate and dried it for 15 minutes in the heat closet. After that, I hardened the matrix with a second exposure, three times longer than the main exposure, 165 units. With that, the matrix was ready for printing.

During printing, I often felt I was working with the past in many ways. However, my mind was constantly in the future: how I would finish the series, how it would come together in the final exhibition. Parallel to this, the beginnings of images felt layered and distant, buried deep in the past, as if they belonged to another time.

I used old newspapers in the printing process to keep workstation tidy, it was quietly absurd to read headlines from a year or two ago while making work meant for a future audience. I moved between the echo of the past and the pull of the future, holding both in the present moment of making.

I discarded my initial plan to make a book from intaglio prints the moment I laid them out on the table. I felt a strong pull to show them on the wall, as a sequential series of prints placed close together. Because I had set out to challenge definitions and boundaries between comics and fine art, this change was not easy to accept. I think of my work on the wall as a deconstructed book. Later, justifying my decision to

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40. Picture I 26.2. at 12.53 Cloudy; Picture II 28.2. at 13.02 Partly cloudy; Picture III 3.3. at 12.45 Partly cloudy; Picture IV 5.3. at 12.35 Cloudy; Picture V 7.3. at 12.41 Partly cloudy; Picture VI 10.3. at 13:00 Cloudy; Picture VII 12.3. at 12.42 Cloudy; Picture VIII 17.3. at 12.54 Partly cloudy.

display the works in a gallery space on the wall rather than in a publication, I realised that the space and context of the exhibition were the reasons for the change. As this was a show where over 40 students participated, I wanted to be recognised and ensure that visitors saw my work. However, it does not mean that the book format does not belong in the gallery. The book requires a more intimate atmosphere, I think.

The two charcoal drawings were the last works I made. They act as the book covers of my central storyline, like an open spread—two images side by side. They are the *Before* and *After* of the main story, *Restless Stillness*. Together, they form a single image divided by time, interrupted by the sequence of eight intaglio prints. One drawing holds the time before the still life, the other the time after the portrait.

After the Kuvan Kevät show, I returned to my original idea and made a book from the prints. I exhibited this book alongside the original charcoal drawings of a woman smoking in my solo show at Vallilan Panimo Gallery, from September 3 to 30, as part of the Helsinki Comics Festival program. In that context, my work became comics. It makes me reflect on how strongly context shapes content, and how the form, place, and setting in which a work is presented can profoundly alter its perception.

A F T E R

## REFLECTING MY SUBJECT MATTER AND PRACTICE

My work originates from the logic of comics; they are fragments of narrative, structured in panels, implying time and movement. By translating these narratives into the language of fine art and handprinting in small editions, the works shift in function and in atmosphere. They slow down. They become objects not just for reading, but for looking and spending time with. In merging these two worlds, I explore where the logic of one resists the other. In this space, readers are also viewers, and panels are also portraits or still lifes. What ties my work together is time—both as uncertainty and as structure. It slips away, but it shapes everything. The story does not rest entirely in the drawings or prints—it lives in the spaces between them, in the act of the viewer connecting what is seen and what is left unsaid. In those gaps, meaning begins.

My practice resides in the in-between: between fine art and comics, print and publication, stillness and movement, the personal and the collective, also in-between the panels, in between realities, and in between definitions. This thesis work, with all its components, visual and written, has helped me realise where I stand with my intentions.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Where am I headed? What is my destination? I cannot give a final answer. It is not that I am lost, but that the act of searching itself has become more valuable than arriving. In my future work, I will continue to explore time as a temporal structure, as well as its role in narrative discourse.

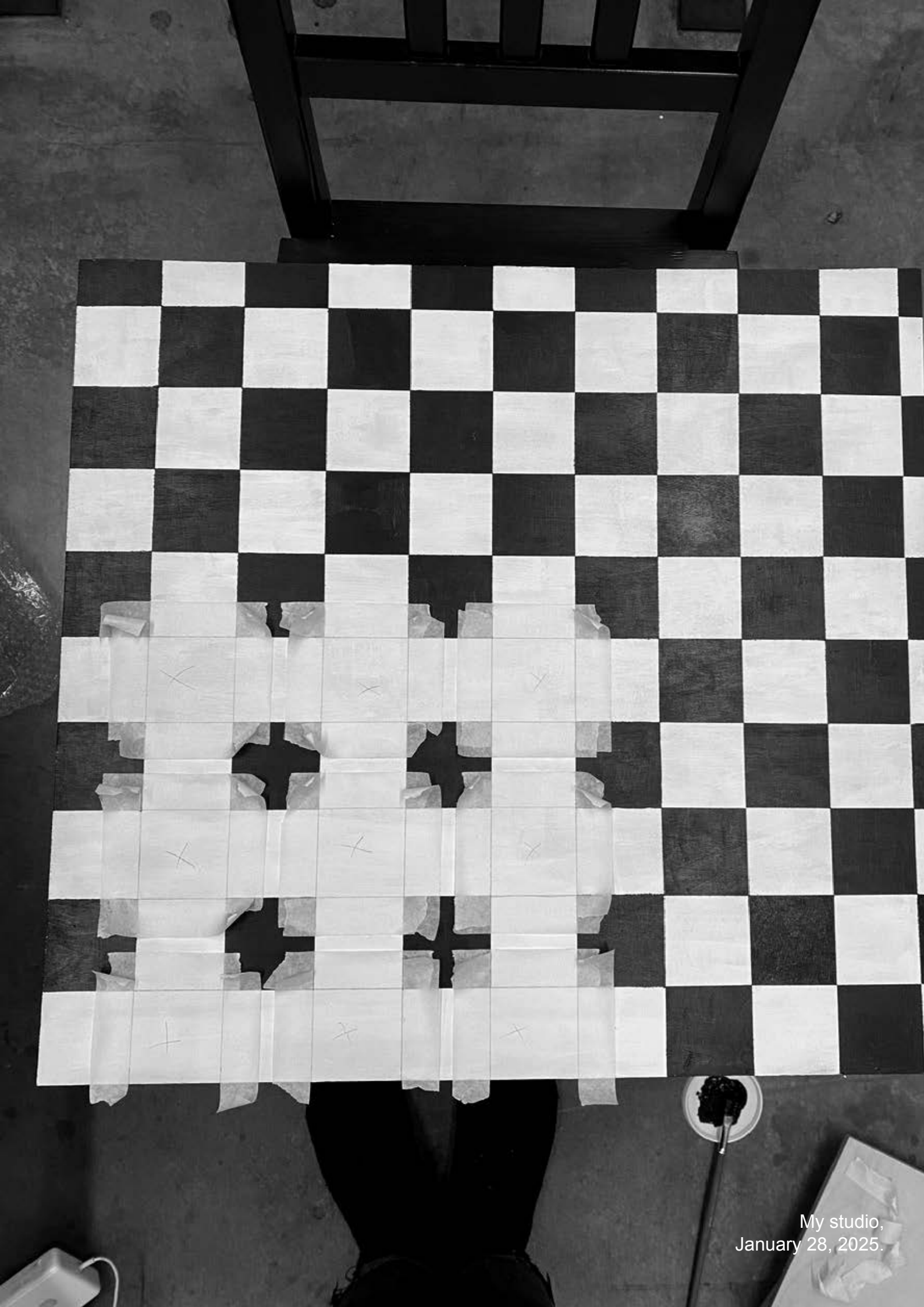
It is a liminal space, what interests me, where stillness is moving, and restlessness holds movement. I will be moving between mediums and traditions. Most likely I will work within the rhythm of comics and the intensity of fine art and create a form of art which is not fully claimed by either of the art fields, but also by both.

I want to see how far this space can stretch. Could a single panel hold the weight of a novel? Can a series of still lifes be interpreted as a comic without a conventional narrative? Could a comic book be the exhibition by itself? I imagine future projects where page, wall, and book communicate with each other, and where the viewer's own movement—turning a page, stepping closer, pausing—becomes an integral part of the storytelling. A space where time is not only shown but also felt.



without speech  
without speech

My studio,  
January 22, 2025.



My studio,  
January 28, 2025.



My studio,  
February 19, 2025.



My studio,  
February 26, 2025.









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My studio,  
March 19, 2025.



My studio,  
March 22, 2025.



My studio,  
March 25, 2025.



My studio,  
April 7, 2025.



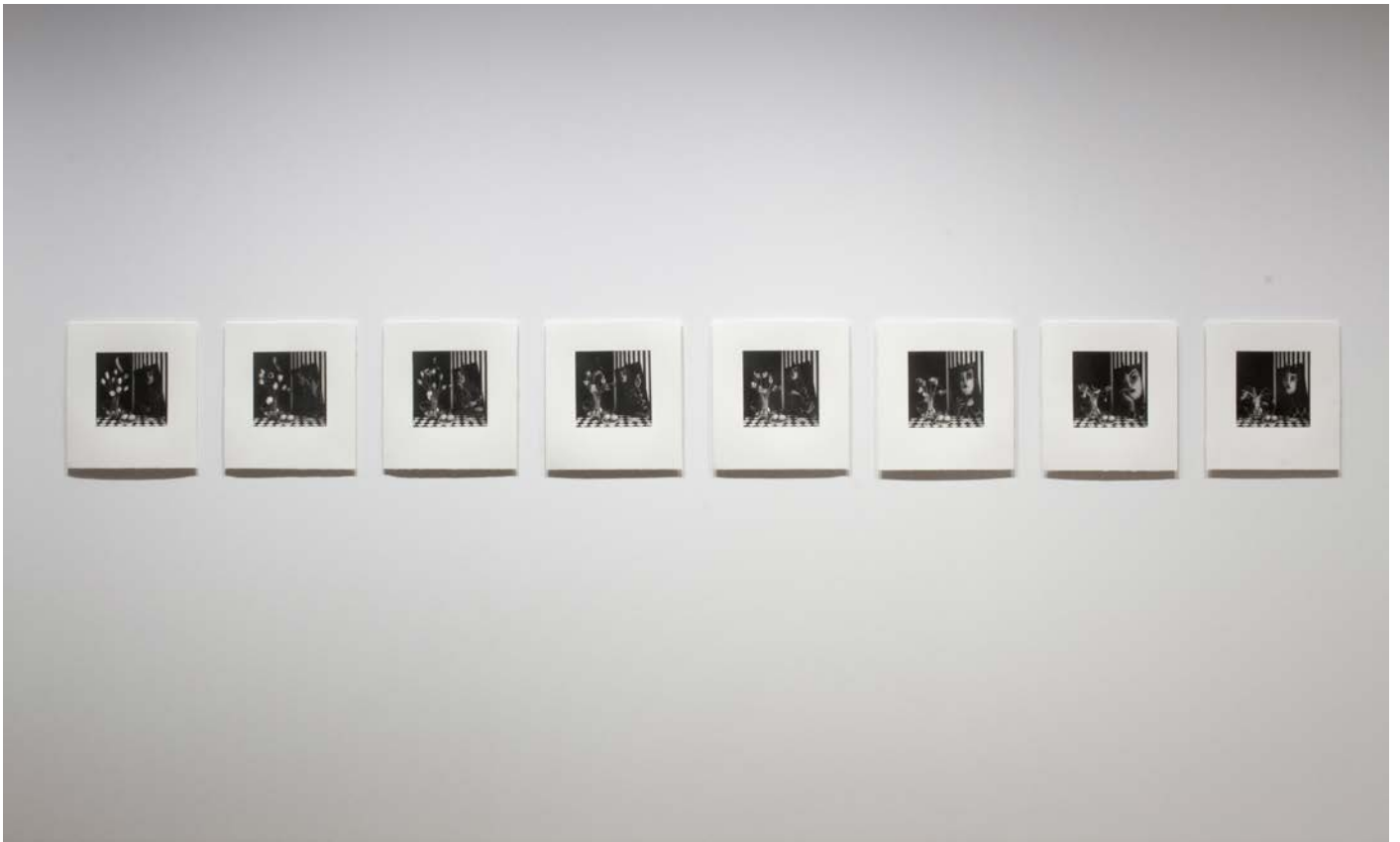
White studio,  
April 15, 2025.



White studio,  
May 27, 2025.



White studio,  
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White studio,  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have taken its present form without the generous support of my teachers, supervisors, colleagues, friends, and family. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of them.

Thank you!

Annu Vertanen

Tatu Tuominen

Inka-Maaria Jurvanen

Hanneriina Moisseinen

Miina Aho

Maria Valkeavuolle

Nelly Toussaint

Dua Rizvi

Janina Haapanen

Jone Mutka

Eero Savolainen

Tero Savolainen