

ART MUSEUM OF ESTONIA

KADRIORG

The Art of

Adaptings

15.09.2023–  
03.03.2024

Exhibition at the Kadriorg Art Museum



Curators: **Madli Ehasalu and Triin Metsla**

Artists: **Sophie Durand, Elo-Reet Järv, Sandra Kosorotova, Kärt Ojavee, Uku Sepsivart, Denisa Štefanigová, Paco Ulman and Kristina Õllek**

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**With the support of**



A collage of works on the cover: Johann Elias Ridinger. Two deer. 1768. Art Museum of Estonia; Johann Elias Ridinger. Deer. Ca 1740. Art Museum of Estonia; Elo-Reet Järv. Green Nest. 1989. Estonian Artists' Association

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# The Art of Adapting: An Altered View on the Environment

*The future is an art of tuning in, an ability to be in dialogue with other forms of life. All means necessary for doing that already exist within the human being, and have always existed. There is no need to be ashamed of these means: they must be noticed and benevolently applied. We have the necessary prerequisites for that. (Hasso Krull)*

A new time demands a new awareness: an ecological awareness to be exact. It is somewhat dark and scary being in that new awareness, but those thoughts and feelings cannot be ignored. We need to learn to live with them and to **adapt**. Amidst those thoughts, we become aware of ourselves as a species and of our trans-species actions that have an irreversible effect on the living environment. The best of the remaining choices is a symbiosis with nature and a perception of human beings as part of a greater ecological network, which requires cooperation and a responsible attitude towards all life.

An awareness of natural culture and its relative importance in contemporary society is essential. It is an understanding that has brought the Anthropocene to the threshold of coping with deep ecological issues and forces us to think about what lies ahead for humankind. One of the most highly regarded philosophers of our time, Bruno Latour, discusses the actual indistinguishability between nature and culture in his seminal book *We Have Never Been Modern*, referring to the artificial duality that

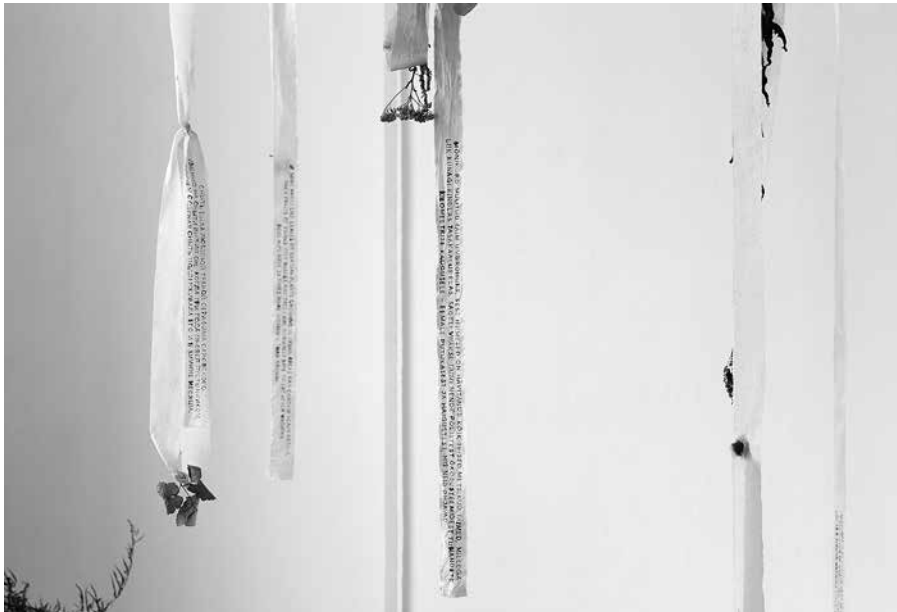
modernism tried to achieve: the separation of nature from culture. However, the gradual disappearance of the natural environment and global problems no longer allow us to separate nature and culture, but force us to acknowledge their unity and call on people to **adapt**.

*The Art of Adapting* explores how we habitually perceive, interpret and value **natural environments** and our **co-species**. The exhibition observes the approaches of contemporary artists to nature appreciation and the **de-aestheticising** of nature rooted in **ecological aesthetics** and **ecofeminism**. The borders between humanity and the natural environment have been shifted in the exhibition halls with the help of art: critical contemporary artists and works from the collections of the Art Museum of Estonia provoke discussions on **biodiversity, variability, co-species, dependency relationships, eco-anxiety** and **sustainability**. In dialogue with the above-mentioned artworks, contemporary artists and old masters give viewers food for thought: what was the natural environment like in previous centuries, how have artists approached the environment, and how has this approach changed under the changing environmental conditions? Several interpretations are rooted in the artists' personal relationships with consumption and their use of materials, conveying a wish to come up with more hopeful future scenarios.

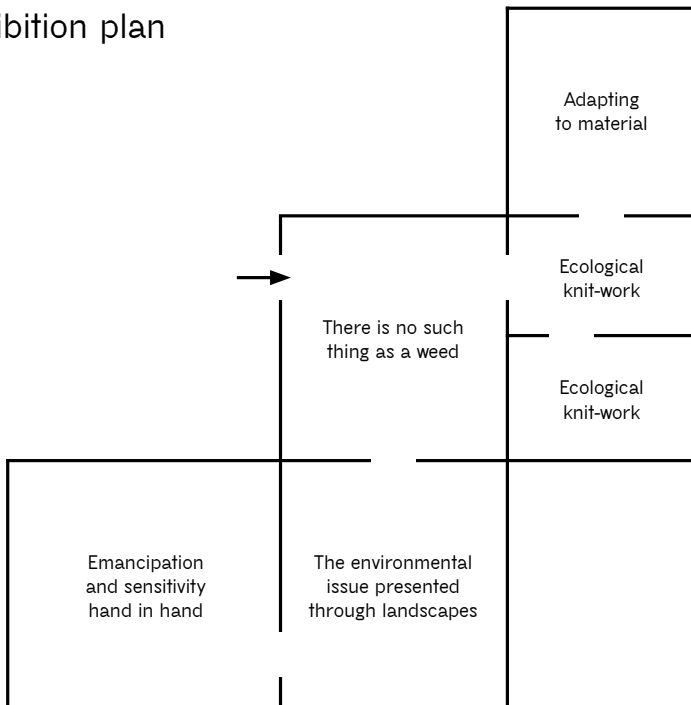
At the core of the exhibition is also the **adaptability** of the participants and compilers: they have used pre-existing works and design elements or have adapted, rediscovered and placed them in new environments. One of the aims of this exhibition is to think about sustainable curating and a sustainable culture industry (low costs and productivity, existing works of art and slow transport), which can lead us towards a more viable cultural sector.

Curators Madli Ehasalu, Triin Metsla

Sandra Kosorotova. Grass-roots: How to Resist Like a Weed? 2021/2023. Photo: Paul Kuimet



## Exhibition plan



# There is no such thing as a weed

*A weed is a plant considered undesirable in a particular situation, growing where it is not wanted. (Wikipedia)*

As far as plants are concerned, there is an established value-based classification that has evolved over the course of time: there are significant or cultivated plants, and those that are of low value and are classified as weeds. Such a classification may be based on aesthetics (especially in the case of flowers) or on the principle of being useful to human beings. Classifying a plant as a weed alters its value and significance; it allows us to forget that each plant has a role in the broader ecosystem and that its “usefulness” may become evident in relation to other species.

Treating plants as equals requires adapting and more horizontal thinking, allowing the ground elder or the nettle to be as valuable as the rose. In uncertain times one should let go of established values and appreciate a biotic community rich in species. It is a fact that the cornflower was once considered a weed.

# Sandra Kosorotova (1984)

## 1 **Grass-roots: How to Resist Like a Weed? 2021/2023**

Edible and medicinal wild plants picked in Kadriorg, paints extracted from plants, non-violent silk, items from the foreign applied art collection of the Art Museum of Estonia  
Courtesy of the artist

In her works, Sandra Kosorotova deals with such topics as identity, sustainability and self-care. The media she most often uses to illustrate these topics are texts and textiles, which is also the case in this room. In her work, “weed” is a broader metaphor for the human impact on the natural environment. The work highlights how treating certain plants as “weeds” is an act of violence: in everyday language, the word is associated with destroying, rooting out and plucking. In the Anthropocene, such a fight against the natural environment seems out of line.

To accompany the work, Kosorotova has carefully selected quotes from various authors (including adrienne maree brown, Richard Mabey, Robin Wall Kimmerer and Sinikka Piippo) illustrating the medicinal, political and poetic essence of “weeds”. The messages have been written on strips of non-violent silk, with natural paints extracted by the artist herself from “weeds” or kitchen leftovers.

The work reassesses the attitude towards “harmful plants”, whether alien species or plants identified as weeds. Kosorotova also uses it as a broader identity-political image in her art, finding links between the latter and the pejorative language used in describing weeds or supplanting “the other”, which can equally be characterised by the conservative political stance as protecting the national identity.

The artist’s works are displayed in dialogue with the foreign applied art collection of the Kadriorg Art Museum. The items in the showcases reflect the artist’s intention of bringing together the natural environment and art.

# Ecological knit-work

Anthropomorphism as the attribution of human qualities to the non-human has been a source of both consolation and alienation in our relationships with nature: throughout different periods in history, it has helped us understand and relate to the world better, but it has also supported anthropocentrism, distancing us from the rest of the natural world.

In their book *Dark Ecology*<sup>1</sup>, the representative of contemporary ecological philosophy Timothy Morton discusses a redefined ecological awareness that recognises the interconnection and interdependence of all living creatures. In their fight against humanocentrism, Morton promotes a deeper ecological awareness in which the borders between human beings and the environment fade, leading to greater symbiosis. In this context, anthropomorphism can be a double-bladed sword: on the one hand, it may foster empathy and sympathy towards other creatures if the association is made along familiar pathways, but it may also support the belief that human beings are above nature and separate from it. Dark ecology encourages us to overcome our belief in human supremacy and to accept that all forms of life are interwoven in a complex meshwork of relationships. Perceiving ourselves as a wider ecological knit-work, we can develop our sensitivity to all forms of life and work for a smoother coexistence by being more economical and responsible.

<sup>1</sup> T. Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York; Columbia University Press, 2016.



# Johann Elias Ridinger (1698–1767)

## 2 Deer. Ca 1740

Etching

Art Museum of Estonia

## 3 Two Deer. 1768

Etching

Art Museum of Estonia

## 4 Lying Deer. 1767–1768

Etching

Art Museum of Estonia

Johann Elias Ridinger was a German painter, engraver, applied artist and publisher. The versatile artist was active mainly in Augsburg and Regensburg. He was particularly appreciated for his engravings of animals and hunting scenes. Ridinger's etching *Deer* depicts a deer with malformed hoofs, which was considered an interesting and rare find in those days. The etching was later included in the series *An Exact and Real Depiction of the Most Amazing Deer and Also Other Peculiar Animals Who Have Been Hunted, Shot, Caught Alive or Kept etc. by the Great Masters Themselves* (1740–1768), with several prints depicting deer with malformations.

The series of engravings depicted deer with malformations or in unusual poses, referring to noblemen's fascination with collecting unusual items and natural phenomena in curiosity cabinets, which are known to have existed since the 14th century. These wonder-rooms exemplify the relationship between human beings and nature in those days: admiration and a sense of awe at the diversity of life forms. By the end of the 18th century, such a manner of collecting had become obsolete, and separate scientific collections emerged, which studied nature in a more systematic way. Such a development reflects the transition from a purely aesthetic appreciation of anomalies to a deeper understanding of ecology and the need to preserve and protect the natural environment.

## **Elo-Reet Järv** (1939–2018)

### **5 Wants to Become a Butterfly. 1996**

Leather, wire and coating colour  
Estonian Artists' Association

### **6 Solidly Prestigious, Made of Good Leather. 1989**

Leather, timber and sculptural mould  
Estonian Artists' Association

### **7 Journey Over the Small Hills. 1997**

Leather, coating colour and sculptural mould  
Estonian Artists' Association

### **8 Green Nest. 1989**

Leather and sculptural mould  
Estonian Artists' Association

Elo-Reet Järv was an Estonian artist known for her anthropomorphic leather sculptures. Järv created works of art that resembled living and breathing organisms, wielding the meaningfulness and magic of living creatures. Leather is a natural material, part of the cycle of emerging and disappearing, life and death. For Järv, it was important that the titles of her works were concise in conveying their messages or moods. Her leather sculptures imitate the forms of living organisms and convey their shapes and movements, making the viewer sense the presence and personality of the objects.

When Järv began creating sculptural objects, her oeuvre changed direction from functional applied art to the more experimental liberal arts. Järve's favourite technique was plastic modelling of leather. Creating leather sculptures is a time-consuming process which includes creating the initial form out of plasticine, then making a plaster cast, and finally stretching and forming the leather. Järv used curves in the surface relief and leather paint to convey the vivacity and spirit of the textures of wildlife.

Elo-Reet Järv's art is versatile and mutable; it evolved together with the artist and changed as her perception of the world changed. Her sculptures deal with issues such as life and death, and the duality of goodness and violence. They are expressions of a rich imagination with extraordinary sign systems. According to the artist, her works were influenced by elements of nature: shapes of trees, ripples on water, the play of light, and the roughness and patterns on rocks and tree bark.

Elo-Reet Järv  
Photo: Art Museum of Estonia



# Adapting to material

Materials are essential. The use of materials began in the Stone Age, when weapons, tools, jewellery and shelters were made from bones, fibres, feathers, shells, hides, clay etc. The Industrial Revolution (1760–1840) ushered in an age of unprecedentedly rapid industrial and economic growth that changed the course of development of the entire world, and as early as 1862 Alexander Parkes introduced the very first man-made plastic: Parkesine, which was marketed as an alternative to ivory and horn. Parkes discovered plastic while trying to develop a synthetic substitute for shellac to provide water resistance. According to estimates, a total of 9.2 billion tons of plastic were made between 1950 and 2017. By 2050, the annual production of plastic is expected to be over 1,100 million tons, and no change is foreseen in global trends in the demand for plastic. The majority of the plastic produced is not reusable, it ends up in landfills or contaminates the environment. Plastic contamination can be found in all of the large water bodies in the world; plastic waste creates garbage dumps in oceans and pollutes ecosystems on land, which has an impact on human beings and all other species.

The issue of materials is critical; human beings need to further adapt and reorient. Reuse and recycling of materials, upgrading, organic and smart materials and other technologies are potential solutions. The selection of a material increasingly includes an ethical component.

# Kärt Ojavee (1982)

## 9 Ashtrade. 2021/2023

The 2021 research was completed in cooperation with Studio Aine  
Further development in 2023 by Kärt Ojavee  
Glass, found objects, beads, jacquard and tapestry  
Courtesy of the artist

The installation rooted in the oil-shale mining residue of north-eastern Estonia consists of textiles designed on the basis of material and photographic elements. Their substance derives from a place where 230 million tons of ash have been formed into hills stretching across 800 hectares. The hills piled up here compensate for the loss of oil shale, the sedimentary rock that is used to produce energy.

In this artwork, a conspicuous contrast to this artificial grandeur shaped in the process of large-scale industrial activity is the image of human hands carefully modelling precious beads of the ash or transforming the landscape into a work of art. On closer inspection, the rosary-like beads turn out to be containers of future materials, waiting to be opened in an alternative future where the meaning of the material has changed completely.



Kärt Ojavee. Ashtrade. 2021/2023  
Photo: Anu Vahtra

Studio Aine has studied ways in which innovative carbon-neutral technologies are driving a re-evaluation of the residue hills previously regarded as hazardous: these technologies make it possible to extract minerals and metals. Taking into account the global shortage of resources, the hills can now be viewed as future currency, traded fraction by fraction and bit by bit between industries that are in need of critical raw materials. The project highlights the shift in defining the value of waste, simultaneously shedding light on those who look after these desolate and wounded landscapes.

The detail of a view of the residue plateau, captured in a time-consuming textile technique, has been juxtaposed with an industrially made tapestry, creating a link between the aesthetic landscape and the use of the material. For the artist, it is visually and content-wise related to Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. The era, the landscape and the figure in that painting are from a wholly different context, but there is a discernible dialogue between the two situations and periods.

## Unknown artist

### 10 Tower-shaped ivory object with a puzzle ball. Undated

Ivory carving

Art Museum of Estonia

This is a version of the Chinese puzzle ball: the central part is a multilayered carved concentric ball, while the top and bottom are decorative elements. Such puzzle balls have also been called “devil’s handiwork” and their execution has been associated with spirits: no human being is believed to be capable of creating a thing so exquisite and perfect. The earliest mention is in a document from 1388, where the elaborately carved balls are referred to as *guī gōng qiú* or “devil’s work balls”, but no puzzle balls have been found from that period. The elaborate craftsmanship of these works fascinated European tourists, which led to German craftsmen making their own ivory puzzle balls.

The object was carved out of ivory, traditionally done in one piece and multiple layers. The different layers can be aligned according to the larger holes. Ivory was related to knowledge or “scientific taste” for many Europeans. This valuable material was often among the gifts to European leaders and aristocrats. Chinese and European consumers appreciated ivory for its delicate appearance and luxurious quality, but it also played a part in political and commercial alliances. However, ivory has never been a neutral material: its past is closely associated with colonial politics.

Ivory was first used in China nearly 4,000 years ago, and for centuries the raw material was “recycled”: the tusks of extinct mammoths were used but, later, tusks were imported from India, causing great suffering to elephants. Regarding ivory as a luxury material is still problematic: animals are hunted merely for the sake of opulence.

# Co-existence of companion species: admitting inter-connectedness

*Symbiosis is perhaps the clearest example of such a co-existence. "Life forms do not simply live by our side: they live inside us. We are strangers to ourselves. So close is the other. Ecology means intimacy." Symbiosis means co-existing with something unknown: we can never fully perceive it, yet it is our innermost essence. That unknown is just as alive as we are, even more so, because our lives could not go on without it, while the unknown could just as well go on living without us.<sup>1</sup>*

The notion of co-species covers various living creatures: pets, farm animals, wild animals, and even plants and micro-organisms, who all share the same ecosystem and influence one another. Understanding fellow species is based on the perception that animals are not just passive objects or resources for human beings; they have their own subjectivity, emotions and intelligence. Therefore, it is important to recognise co-species as partners and companions of human beings sharing a common living environment.



The most significant seminal text on this topic is Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*<sup>1</sup>. Haraway delves deeply into the phenomenon of companion species, highlighting the mutual dependence and cohabitation of human beings and animals. She emphasises that the co-existence of companion species is more than just the relationship between people and animals; it embraces all living creatures, who share the same world with us. Co-species help us establish connections beyond the anthropocentric view of the world and increase our sensitivity towards nature and other species. John Berger's essay *Why Look at Animals?*<sup>2</sup> is also worth mentioning: it deals with the historical and cultural aspects of the relationship between people and animals. The author accentuates how the human experience has always been closely linked to animals, influencing our identity and perception of the world. Berger calls on his readers to look at animals not as objects but as fellow creatures with whom we share space and experience.

Understanding co-species entails developing empathy and comprehension, and caring for other species, admitting that we are all part of the same ecosystem. That includes being aware of the impact of our activities on nature and making an effort to preserve and protect biological diversity and natural habitats. Accepting and recognising the importance of co-species may foster the development of a more balanced and sustainable society, in which the contribution of each and every creature is worthwhile and significant.

<sup>1</sup> H. Krull, "Argilistikum ja arheliitikum: Timothy Morton veider essentsialism." - *Müürileht*, 21.07.2021. From: T. Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> D. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> J. Berger, *Why Look at Animals*. Penguin UK, 2009.

# Uku Sepsivart (1988)

## 11 Michelangelo's Assignment. 2017

Video. 30' 00''

Courtesy of the artist

## 12 Object Without Interpretation. 2011

Wood, chewing

Courtesy of the artist

Uku Sepsivart's work expresses the dynamic relationship between the sculptor, animals and nature, revealing a deep understanding of our coexistence with other species. The artist is fascinated by nature and its processes, and highly values the intertwining of human and animal lives.

Sepsivart has drawn inspiration from Michelangelo's quote on the existence of a sculpture inside a block of stone. Here, nature becomes a metaphor for the stone which has hidden potential, and the sculptor symbolises the artist whose task is to bring out that potential. As co-creators, birds decide on the creative process of the art work: how and when to create and complete it.

Sepsivart's cooperation with animals, for example with beavers and bees, respects the ways that animals become companions, co-creators and partners in human activity, rejecting the idea of anthropocentrism. The artist's contemplations on opportunities for working together with animals without forcing or harming them reflect an ethical and appreciative approach. Such cooperation and the process art derived from it testify to the fact that companion species shape each other's lives, triggering new forms of creativity and understanding. This is in line with Haraway's vision of companion species based on mutual care and consideration.

Uku Sepsivart  
Michelangelo's  
Assignment. 2017



## Unknown artist

### 13 Jonah in the Mouth of the Whale. Ca 1780–1880

Polychromy and oil on softwood

Art Museum of Estonia

The sculpture depicts the Old Testament legend of the disobedient prophet Jonah, whom God sent to warn the sinners of the city of Nineveh, but Jonah tried to escape God's command by ship, got caught in a storm, and ended up in the belly of a whale. The whale vomited Jonah out on the coast of Nineveh, where he completed his mission. From the point of view of the ecological turn we might ask whether the animal is a helper, an intelligent companion or simply a tool? The Christian view of animals has traditionally focussed on the perception suggested by the First Book of Moses: human beings rule over Earth and its creatures, thus being in the centre of the universe. Such an anthropocentric approach may, however, damage biodiversity, as human beings serve their own interests at the expense of the needs of other species.

Although the sculpture has been dated between the end of the 18th century and the last quarter of the 19th century, its earlier history is not fully known. *Jonah in the Mouth of the Whale* is a wooden sculpture that might previously have been a modelled hanging sign. It dates back to colonial times and is associated with colonial trade, helping to explain the impact and meaning of co-species on human lives and society in a historical and cultural context.

# The environmental issue presented through landscapes

Landscape and sea have always been major topics in fine arts. The surrounding nature has inspired artists to depict it in various manners depending on the formal preferences, ideals and agendas of the era. Appreciating nature and treating it as a separate theme in art is a rather recent phenomenon, reaching its critical culmination in current times. In the 17th century, landscapes mainly served as backdrops for portraits or paintings on religious, mythological or historical themes but, with the arrival of Romanticism at the end of the 18th century, landscape painting developed into an independent mode of self-expression, in which the painter could express his or her own emotions, such as fear and the anguish of self-discovery or sadness, but also show an appreciation of nature.

The landscapes in this room have various roles. The “sublime” category of romanticist art involves showing nature’s unfathomable, divine power to intimidate the viewer with the raw power of nature. It serves as a warning to those who wish to exploit nature, such as industrialists, suggesting that nature embodies God’s ire. Similar attitudes (without the religious content) can also be found in today’s art, which is classified as the art of the Anthropocene. The contemporary artist does not use nature as a backdrop or a means of expressing emotion, but prefers to address critical topics related to anthropogenic environmental issues. Landscape has been granted agency in works by contemporary artists, calling for saving, appreciating and preserving it.

## Kristina Ōllek (1989)

### 14 **Feeling with the Water Jelly. 2020**

Pigment ink printed on aluminium, museum glass and a silicone-coated (UV) showcase frame  
Sunly collection

### 15 **They Breathe Water. Bioaccumulation No 2: *Silicon Ostreoidea*. 2019**

Showcase frame coated with Diasec TruLife acrylic and sand, oyster shells from the Zeeland region, a support leg, silicone and a foundation mattress covered with sand  
Courtesy of the artist

*They Breathe Water. Bioaccumulation no. 2: Silicon Ostreoidea* (2019) and *Feeling With the Water Jelly* (2020) are parts of Kristina Ōllek's long-term project *Filter Feeders, Double Binds & Other Silicones* (2019-...), which is based on research and personal observations of the anthropogenic impact on marine ecosystems, focussing on the North Sea and its filters: blue mussels, oysters and the expanding population of jellyfish. Both works draw attention to the surrounding environment and the increasingly greater threats that it faces due to human activity.

Kristina Ōllek. *They Breathe Water. Bioaccumulation No 2: Silicon Ostreoidea*. 2019



In 2018–2020, the artist resided in the Hague, on the coast of the North Sea, where she developed an interest in sea water filtering organisms. These organisms function as filters by removing contaminants from the water, and they are regarded as the engineers of the marine ecosystem. They breathe water and are used as bioindicators to monitor the conditions of the marine environment. Being sedentary, they represent the given environment: their populations, shell structures, behaviour, and the levels of certain elements or compounds in their bodies indicate the amount of contamination in that particular marine ecosystem.

Jellyfish can easily live and breed in a marine environment that causes problems for other organisms: rising water temperatures, acidification of sea water, and hypoxia or dead zones. The jellyfish population actually benefits from those changes: hence it is believed that if sea water remains polluted and environmental conditions keep deteriorating, jellyfish may become the dominant form of marine life, just like 500 million years ago.

In her work *Feeling with the Water Jelly* (2020), the artist has created a jellyfish out of non-animal materials, juxtaposing gelatinous organic and synthetic substances to manipulate the viewer's perceptions. In view of current human activity, the sea is a bearer of bad news in Ōllek's works, and the sea requires more attention and intervention.

## Unknown artist

### 16 Storm. 17th / 18th century

Oil on wood

Art Museum of Estonia

Kristina Õllek's works are in dialogue with the painting *Storm*, by an unknown artist. At first it was considered to be a painting, or a copy of a painting, by the renowned 17th-century Dutch landscape painter Salomon van Ruysdael. It has also been attributed to Adam Pynacker, another Dutch painter, known for his Italian-style landscapes. The painting's actual author and date of completion are still unknown.

The painting shows influences from various periods, and therefore its message is somewhat ambiguous. The dramatic story line and the emphatically romantic composition with a stormy sea, rocks and people waiting to be rescued suggests that the painting was made later than the 17th century, because at that time seascapes mainly focussed on shipping, sea voyages, discoveries, trade, battles and establishing colonies. The sea as a romantic force of nature entered art in the middle of the 18th century. It emerged in the romantic trend of classicism represented by the French painter Claude Joseph Vernet. He created several stormy seascapes in which we can see either ships in dire straits or people who have escaped storms. It is possible that the dramatic scene depicted in *Storm* suggests that the divine power of nature affects people in general, as well as the artist's emotions.

## Wilhelm von Kügelgen (1802-1867)

### 17 Deluge. 1833

Etching

Art Museum of Estonia

This is the second sheet of the second folder of the four-part series *History of the Kingdom of God*. The series consists of illustrations for texts explaining the Old Testament in terms of God's actions with regard to humanity. The author of the text is the German theologian, pastor and writer of religious texts Friedrich Adolph Krummacker (1767-1845).

The narrative of a huge, all-destroying deluge originated in the region between two large rivers in Mesopotamia, where the danger of a flood was always imminent. Besides the Bible, variations of that story can be found in texts from Ancient Greece and India: there are recollections of an all-destroying flood after which life began from scratch. Illustrations of that narrative usually depict people trying to save one another, but in Kügelgen's picture a man on a raft is pushing a woman with a baby away. The scene illustrates why God tried to destroy human beings: they had become too malicious and selfish. A man on top of a cliff has raised a fist towards the sky and is cursing God instead of praying.

Curiously, there is a bird hovering in the sky above the scene of tragedy. Since the dove who brought the good news about the water having receded appeared much later in the story, this bird is possibly going to perish with the rest of life outside Noah's Ark. On the other hand, this might be a reference to the dove with the olive twig as a sign that there would be new life. In today's context we could see this as referencing human activity that damages the environment on a daily basis, but there is no guarantee that a dove will bring us the olive twig: perhaps the messenger will perish before reaching the boat, as in Kügelgen's work.



## Paco Ulman (1980)

### 18 Wasteland (series). 2018

Print on cardboard

Courtesy of the artist

Paco Ulman's approach to landscapes in the series *Wasteland* is both aesthetic and existential. Ulman's works play a significant role in this room: they feature the wasteland in a way that has previously been left out of the canon of landscape painting.

Ulman's landscapes seem haphazard, empty, no-man's lands. These quintessential snapshots do not need restless waves, sunsets or grand mountain views to be impressive. The photos of the *Wasteland* series depict nature on the outskirts of urban residential areas, in a thicket behind a garage or on deserted plots of land. These spots exist outside the urban environment and the oversaturated virtual world, offering peace and rest. They seem like landscapes designed for urban hiking.

You can't see people in these pictures, but there are traces – a plastic bag, oil canisters, dumped tyres, furniture, etc. – hinting at negligent human activity turning the landscape into a wasteland: a place where unwanted things can be discarded.

Paco Ulman  
Wasteland (series). 2018



## **Julie Hagen-Schwarz** (1824–1902)

### **19 Landscape with a Traveller. Undated**

Oil on canvas

Art Museum of Estonia

Julie Hagen-Schwarz was one of the first woman artists in Estonia. She mainly painted from life, adhering to a manner of depiction free from academic role models and limitations. At first she painted mainly flowers, but then moved on to portrait painting. In the 1870s, her attempt to adapt to Realism rendered her style somewhat flat and photographic. The years spent in Rome on a scholarship are regarded as the period of maturation in her oeuvre: in addition to landscapes, portraits and genre paintings, she also made paintings in the “superior” historical genre.

The study depicting a traveller walking along a road may be from the artist’s Italian period, because such romantic pictures of a solitary pilgrim were rather widespread in the first half of the 19th century, but the tower in the background could very well be that of Rakvere Castle. Whatever the case, the scene clearly expresses the romantic ideal of freedom, in which a human being and nature make up a harmonious whole and natural phenomena embody human emotions: dramatic clouds and the somewhat gloomy landscape hinting at a recent storm may refer to hardships in life, while the warm and bright sunlight shining through the clouds suggest faith and hope for a better future, symbolising human aspirations for light (knowledge, a more virtuous life, etc.).

## Alexandre Calame (1810-1864)

### 20 Sunrise in the Alps. 1863

Oil on canvas

Art Museum of Estonia

The Swiss artist Alexandre Calame was a distinct figure in 19th-century landscape painting and immensely popular in his lifetime, yet nowadays his works are rarely displayed in museums, because salon painting has moved to the periphery of the canon of art history. Calame's landscapes were at times sugary bourgeois salon paintings, highly appreciated by the French Academy of Fine Arts (Gold Medal of the 2nd Order at the 1839 salon exhibition), but they could also manifest an ardent dedication to landscape. Calame's true-to-nature manner of depiction can also be associated with the Düsseldorf school of painting, which renounced the academic beauty ideal and inclined towards naturalness and rationality.

Calame had a life-long interest in landscapes. Although he painted landscapes in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands on his journeys, the majority of his works depict the Alps: different cantons of Switzerland and the peculiarities of their nature. Glaciers, emerald greens, the white frothy water of rapids, storms that can split trees, fluffy clouds, colourful cliffs half-hidden in mist and lit up by rays of sun: these are things that Calame felt to be true in nature.

Calame's compositions differed from the established canon: he might place a slope or a large cliff in the middle of the composition, surrounding it with views into the distance, whereas the objects in the foreground were elaborated with exceptional exactitude and attention. His mountain landscapes seem overly sentimental from today's point of view, but that is partly due to the peculiarity of those landscapes: sunrises and sunsets in the mountains are characterised by special light effects, and a bright pink or an incandescent orange glow is a much more common occurrence in the Alps than on the plains.

# Emancipation and sensitivity hand in hand

Emancipation is one of the central notions in eco-feminism, referring to the empowerment of women in society and to achieving gender equality. Emancipation as a notion can also be related to liberating nature from human control and exploitation. The reduction of the importance of women and of nature are interrelated, and the re-evaluation of both is a significant step towards a more viable and just society. Eco-feminists criticise capitalism, patriarchy and other structures that facilitate the destruction of nature and the degrading and abuse of women. They emphasise the special connection women have with nature, and highlight women's contributions to environmental protection and sustainable development.

The sensitivity of eco-feminism lies in its focus on vulnerability and interdependence. The movement stresses the need to preserve and respect nature and to recognise the rights and well-being of women. Works in this room deal with the emancipation of nature and women from the point of view of eco-feminism, emphasising the link between the two spheres by showing how the liberation of one is related to the liberation of the other, and striving for balance and sustainability.

## Sophie Durand (1993)

### 21 Scene: [A] Nest(s) Assembled. 2023

Feathers from a dead cygnet, found a year ago in Paljassaare, a bed, bed linen, my mother's childhood blanket, natural clay, branches, twigs and clay from Paljassaare, floor mats, sand, incubator lamps, a piece of string, orange peels, Bird's Nest Essence facial masks, pencil, ball-point pen, paper, photo, reed, a ladder and bronze twigs.

Courtesy of the artist

Sophie Durand's site-specific spatial installation *Scene: [A] Nest(s) Assembled* combines sculpture and performance. It uses the form language of theatre and anecdotes, as well as archival materials and personal experiences to study expressions of memories. The sensitive choice of details in Durand's use of materials renders the creation of the world as a dream. The artist experiences the bird protection area of the Paljassaare peninsula as she wanders through the landscape, and that experience unleashes a playful Umwelt of genesis and extinction, childhood and home-making, and various geographic locations.

The materials used in the installation have been borrowed from nature. They create an environment in which viewers can experience a connection with nature, leading them to contemplate how they could live in harmony with it. Durand's work is an upgrade of the spatial installation presented at the young sculptors' award exhibition in 2022: bronze twigs, replicas of the twigs found in Paljassaare, have been added to the original installation, as well as bird's eggs modelled from natural clay, feathers and a ladder. The installation conveys a narrative of a character who finds organic material on the peninsula and uses it to build a nest. The performative aspect of the work is suggestive and consists of the movements and work of the imaginary inhabitant. The inhabitant enters and leaves the room, gathers twigs in the morning and builds nests in the evening. The viewer thus enters into a ritual room.

## Leesi Erm (1910–1989)

### 22 *Civilisation*. 1976

Mixed media and artificial material (artificial fibre)  
Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design

Leesi Erm's carpet *Civilisation* represents the opposition culture versus nature, and emphasises the need to find a balance in the relationship between nature and humanity. When the work was created, the Soviet economy was driven by a faith in progress, which manifested itself in the exploitation of natural resources and development of technology. Erm's work, with its nature motifs, conflicts with that tendency.

Leesi Erm was a pioneer of avant-garde textile art in Estonia. Her work is characterised by bright colours, poetic-lyrical expression, and innovative materials and techniques. She experimented with various materials: wool, linen, artificial fibres and feathers. She also improvised with braiding techniques, which resulted in fresh and innovative textures. In her later works, Erm focussed on tapestries, enabling her to move away from applied art and closer to fine and decorative arts.

Although her best known works dealt with national themes and nature, the work displayed at this exhibition is the single-tonality, subdued *Civilisation*, with a rich surface texture. The design consists of leaf motifs and a dotted line that captures the viewer's gaze. According to Erm, her favourite colour was white, although that aspect of her art has not received as much attention in discussions of her oeuvre as her figures and national motifs. The elegant and tasteful carpet is imaginative and playful. From the 1960s on, Erm's works became more and more abstract, while she continued to depict nature, attempting to disclose the inner structure and rhythm of natural forms and to capture the different moods of nature.

# Denisa Štefanigová (1995)

## 23 Woman-Tree. 2023

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist

Denisa Štefanigová is a Czech painter who focusses on depicting fluidity and emotions. Her paintings merge imaginative bodies with fantasies, study the hierarchy of species and manifestations of sexuality, and reflect social changes and perceptions of what is socially acceptable and normal. As a result, Štefanigová's grotesque and symbolic works reveal emotional and cognitive landscapes that create new ways of existence.

In the painting *Woman-Tree*, a female figure merges with a tree, manifesting a joint existence with a natural form. The main focus of the work is the fluid existence between human and non-human subjects, in which no living creature is separated from another or untouched. The artist has been influenced by the symbol of the limitless water that flows in all of our bodies and unites us all, suggesting a constant change and renewal. Here, the eco-feminist principle of the unity between human beings and nature is expressed: the merging of the female figure and the tree emphasises that all living beings are mutually connected and depend on nature. This work also manifests the ability of women to be bearers of life and nature, highlighting the power of femininity. Denisa Štefanigová's painting, suggesting a liberation of attitudes, recalls Paul Klee's etching *Virgin in a Tree*, which criticises the conservative traditional gender roles of the early 20th century and the suppression of women in society.

Denisa Štefanigová  
Woman-Tree. 2023



## Paul Klee (1879–1940)

### 24 *Virgin in a Tree*. 1903

Etching

Art Museum of Estonia

Paul Klee's etching *Virgin in a Tree* deals with the liberation of women from restrictions established by society, and suggests that women are capable of being sources of nature and creativity. The German title of the work is *Virgin (Dreaming)*, which amplifies the poignancy of the theme. Rebelling against his classical art school education, Klee presented a radically distorted female nude in this series. By creating a parody of the typical allegorical approach to the female body, he expressed his alienation from the bourgeois conservatism of mainstream art and a wish to trust his imagination. Here we see a woman cast into a twisted tree and grotesquely distorted: an image opposed to the romantic, idealised female nude. The gloomy face of the virgin, entwined with the tree in an uncomfortable position, suggests that she is about to give up her dreams of motherhood and is turning into a dried-up tree.

Humour, lyricism, and intimacy are some of the qualities that characterise Paul Klee's imaginative oeuvre. *Virgin in a Tree* is one of Klee's earliest etchings. It is part of the series *Inventions* (1903–1905), which consists of ten prints with symbolic undertones, combining stylisation and decorativeness with irony. The series was inspired by Klee's trip to Italy in the autumn of 1901. Instead of feeling elated after the journey, he concluded that in the 20th century, one could only be an heir or an epigone to the grand masters. He expressed his disappointment and social critique through the series, which was poignant and quickly became popular. According to Klee, he depicted the truth about the glorified yet imposed virginity that was worthless (from the artist's letter to his friend Lily Stumpf in Munich in 1906). Thus, *Virgin* can be interpreted as a protest against early-20th-century social relations and the rigid constraints of moral norms.



# Biographies

## ARTISTS

**Sophie Durand** (1993) is a visual artist whose practice extends from the intersection of sculpture and performance, where she deals with commemorative representations that are situated physically in time. She draws on the formal model of theatre and the transitional nature of a theatre performance. Durand's works have their origin in anecdote, archive and memory, which are directly accessible to, collected by her or based on her own experiences and observations, and the focus of all work is to activate archive and memory to form. Although these forms vary, all of her works can be categorised as memory images.

**Elo-Reet Järv** (1936–2018) was an Estonian leather artist whose legacy consists of 41 book bindings, nine guest books, three albums, 21 boxes and 250 sculptures. She was inspired by memories of her beloved parents, as well as by the ancient cultures of Estonia and the East. In her works, she expressed her concern for processes taking place

in society. At the beginning of her artistic career, Järv created book bindings and boxes, but later ended up making sculptures. Her leather sculptures were unique in Estonian art, and she was an unparalleled and outstanding artist whose oeuvre has had an impact and still serves as a source of inspiration in the world of art.

**Sandra Kosorotova** (1984) studied fashion design (MA 2016) and graphic design (BA) at the Estonian Academy of Arts (MA 2016). Kosorotova's oeuvre positions itself in the border area between visual arts and design, and it deals with topics such as criticism of neoliberalism, identity, self-care possibilities, community and sustainability. In her works, she mainly uses a combination of textiles and texts, as well as recycled materials. In 2022, Kosorotova was a WIELS art resident in Brussels. Her works have been displayed at the Riga art biennial RIBOCA, the Kumu Art Museum, the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia, the Contemporary Art Centre in Latvia, the Tallinn Art Hall and elsewhere.

**Kärt Ojavee** (1982) is an artist and designer whose works combine new technologies with traditional handicraft techniques. Ojavee has a conceptual approach to textiles: she studies their historically established meanings and possible future uses. In addition to research and creating new materials, she also deals with music, stage decorations and costume design. Kärt Ojavee studied textile design at the Estonian Academy of Arts (MA, 2004), where she defended her PhD thesis *Active Smart Interior Textiles: Interactive Soft Displays* in 2013, as a result of which a series of hybrid materials and interactive textiles were created, uniting traditional and contemporary technologies. Since 2014, she has been working as a senior researcher at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

**Uku Sepsivart** (1988) has a BA (2009) and an MA (2015) in sculpture from the Estonian Academy of Arts. During his studies he also trained in Finland. In 2009, Sepsivart had an Erasmus programme internship at Villu Jaanisoo's studio, in 2013–2014 he was an exchange student at the Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts, and in 2015–2016 had an internship at Antti Laitinen's studio in Somerniemi, as well as in Wuzhen, China. He has participated in several exhibitions in Estonia and elsewhere. In 2012, Sepsivart received the Young Artist's Prize, awarded jointly by the NGO Noor Kunst (Young Art) and the Estonian Academy of Arts. In recent years, Sepsivart has seen his art practice as a natural process, and

has sought opportunities to co-create with nature.

**Denisa Štefanigová** (1995) graduated from the department of contemporary art of the Estonian Academy of Arts. In her MA work *Violet, show me how tender you can be? (Shades of Love & Desire & Infidelity & Truth)*, Štefanigová revealed the sexual nature of paints and brush strokes by using paintings, videos and dolls. She is continuing her research and work on the same topic. She completed her BA studies at the faculty of art (FaVU) of the Brno Technical University in the Czech Republic in 2019; she also studied at the faculty of fine arts (Facultad de Bellas Artes) of the Bilbao Academy of Arts in 2017, and was an art resident at the GEDOK gallery in Stuttgart in 2018. At the moment she is participating in the art residency programme Easttopics in Budapest, Hungary.

**Paco Ulman** (1980) is a Tallinn-based architect and photo artist, known mainly for his metaphysical still lifes in the contemporary urban space. As a photo artist, Ulman mostly deals with urban space issues that he encounters in his daily practice as an architect, shifting the notions of time and space, as well as the categories of space and representations of space. His most important solo exhibitions to date have been *In Tallinn* at the Hobusepea Gallery in 2009, *Tallinn-Helsinki-Stockholm* at the Tallinn City Gallery in 2011, and *mememe* at the Hobusepea Gallery in 2014. In 2012, Ulman won

the Sadolin Prize for contemporary art. He has worked as an architect since 2001 (Ars Projekt, AB Kosmos, Arhitektuuriagentuur and Allianss Arhitektid). In 2013, he was one of the co-founders of the architectural bureau Mudel Arhitektid.

**Kristina Õllek** (1989) is a visual artist based in Tallinn. Her media include photography, video and installation. She focusses on representation processes, geological matters, marine ecology and the study of anthropogenic environments. Õllek's approach is based on research, which she intertwines with her own fictitious and speculative perspective. In her latest projects, Õllek has observed marine living environments and new technologies, including related geopolitical and ecological conditions. Kristina Õllek graduated from the department of photography of the Estonian Academy of Arts (BA 2013 and MA 2016). She received additional training at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule in Berlin (2012) and at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam (2016).

## CURATORS

**Madli Ehasalu** (1988) is a curator and art worker with a background in semiotics and art history, and is fascinated by activating art works through site specific and performative approaches. She is the founder of the project rooms of the Galerii Mihhail (Gallery Mikhail) and 1. märtsi galerii (Gallery of the 1st of March), the purpose of which is to study topics related to the living environment and social well-being within the framework of neoliberal criticism. Currently, she works as the Communications and Project Manager of the Tallinn Art Hall, and continues to integrate art into broader social discussions.

**Triin Metsla** (1991) is an art researcher, curator and promoter of culture projects. She is currently working on a doctorate in art history at the Estonian Academy of Arts. As an art researcher she is interested in post-humanist fields of research: the intertwining of environmental issues and the visual arts in sustainable practices and trans-human aesthetics. Her latest projects include a performative workshop on co-species (with Krõõt Juurak and Alex Bailey), *My Pet Has Me and I Have My Pet*, and the co-curated exhibition *Leviathan: the Paljassaare Chapter* at the Kai Art Centre in 2020.

**Kadriorg Art Museum**

Weizenbergi 37

Tallinn, Estonia

Additional information:

[kadriorumuuseum.ekm.ee](http://kadriorumuuseum.ekm.ee)

