

A Fairy Tale about Jüri and Mari

Postimees 26.08.2004
Riin Kübarsepp

Merike Estna's paintings "Adventures of Jüri and Mari"
Until August 27th at Vaal Gallery

Estna is specifically a product of the media generation. That's why it is not neither condemnable nor any wonder that as an educated painter she uses comic book and much repeated ad clichés. Sooner, it is natural.

The author presents a sour-sweet mixture of goodness, fondness, naivety, indecencies and grotesque, menacing wickedness.

Meister Eckhart has taught how being alive and liveliness leads to "joy". But nowadays they say, "joy" but mean, "pleasure".

At the same time, in view of Estna's exhibition, it is not that easy to understand this kind of difference since from time to time we also live in the "world of joyless pleasures".

Merike Estna's works are characterized foremost by playfulness and courage to apply absurd, sexist, military and even a little cruel strategies in a compact form.

According to Wittgenstein a game could be a competition or not, be of interest to one or more persons, require special skills or not. In this case, we are dealing with a situation where paintings are playing and manipulating with us.

The active dialogue between rabbit women including phrases like "What an ugly bitch" and "Call me, I'm thinking about you" is actually a reflection of the reality of our everyday lives.

Ironic exhibition

The alternative art school Academia Non Grata where the young artist studied from 2000 until 2001, has certainly its part to play in the young author's development as an artist. It is likely that the last year's spring semester spent at the Canterbury Art School in England is to blame for the ironic quality of the current exhibition, which has its dose of sharp English humour.

At the same time, this girl is very well informed about the dispute and from the point of view of ordinary intellect, unhealthy view of the world that is part of the cult cartoons "Beavis and Butthead" and "South Park".

To us as Estonians, folk art, folklore and ethnography have always been sacred.

But if you encounter this in the form of a bonnet on the head of almost photo realistically painted part-nude, then, instantly, new re-assessed values and images of a popular saying “to get under a bonnet” (to get married) are formed.

Miniature collages that are clearly put together from porn magazine scraps entail, also, motifs from mitten and belt patterns and from heartwarming knee socks knitted by your grandma.

A shy flaxen-hair

Because of the text and dialogues intertwined into the pictures as in comic books, Estna clearly belongs to the same Pleiad as Marko Mäetamm and Kaido Ole (who, by the way, is also her teacher).

From here we can draw the parallel: when Marko (Mäetamm) and Kaido (Ole) personified and conducted the art project John Smith then the shy flaxen-hair Merike Estna stands behind the exhibition, “Adventures of Jüri and Mari”.

Estna’s main objective is to create a convincing illusion of reality without living it herself, to create a genuine “me” without being it herself. In this way, without being short-circuited, the artist has created a field of pictures that will short-circuit the viewer.

The fairy fantasies of kids in squirrel hats dancing in circle generate benign infantilism now already in the second wave of neo-pop.

Fortunately or unfortunately, we are dealing with a young, artistically not fully developed author whose style is still fresh and so to speak, “unspoiled” and the most important fact is that she is painting.