

At Gallery Vaal, squirrels are jumping and bunnies are playing around Squirrels or bunnies? Funny in any case.

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The young artist Merike Estna paints serious things funny and sexy things goofy.

The young artist Merike Estna's solo exhibition, "The Adventures of Jüri and Mari", which title tells us more about the event than we could expect, was opened at Vaal Gallery on Tuesday. We won't meet those characters at the gallery, but we do meet the childlike atmosphere of the Tip and Täp, Tiku and Taku, Miku and Manni, Agu Sihvka and the biographies of Jussy's seven friends.

Already at the door, we are seized by a suspicion that somebody must be pulling our leg. The characters in Estna's huge paintings have been painted with a rather photographic love but they are far from being hyper realistically callous. A gentle touch of humour has been painted into these pictures right from the beginning.

This reminds us that she begun her art studies at Academia Non Grata, within Peeter Allik's sphere of influence where grotesque and photographic quality always supported each other. A touch of the gross shovel and axe comicality has also remained in Estna's pictures, but, here, it has become more sophisticated, visually more ironic including the urbanized person's ambivalent sarcasm and knowledge about the power and vanity of mass culture. I believe that she has caught this mentality from her later studies at Estonian Academy of Art and Canterbury Art School in England. I think that there she become aware of the tactics of pop culture on the front line of mass brainwash. And exactly there did her need to announce her awakenings to the spectators arise.

Estna scrapes as a butterfly

In her paintings, we can see a lot of women, from little girls to conspicuously mature babes. It also strikes the eye that in spite of their age, they are usually stuck into bunny or squirrel hats. The "Bunny was jumping under the trees, in such a good mood was she" from the kindergarten times inevitably grows into becoming the playboy-like frolicking in the commercials of erotic phone calls and in picture metaphors with rabbit ears indicating an animal sex drive. Estna touches upon this serious subject only briefly, flying across it as a butterfly because next to social criticism she is also entertained by the sexual charge of the pictures. Sometimes she is joking about it, and sometimes enjoying herself in it. In this way, she remains in the ambiguous spirit of neo-pop – mocking and chiming with everybody else at the same time.