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EMMA autumn 2010

EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art's changing exhibitions for the autumn season, 29.9.10-9.1.11, consist of three different exhibitions and an installation. The thematic hangings *Red* and *Entre chien et loup* continue in the Saastamoinen Foundation Art Collection.

100% SILK – The Story of Chinese Silk

More than any other fabric in the world, silk carries millennia of cultural history within its filaments. Silk is interwoven into art, language and literature, as well as into court culture, interior furnishing and modes of dress. The cultivation of silk was one of ancient China's most important achievements, and it continues to play a profound role in Chinese culture. The exhibition at EMMA introduces visitors to the history of silk, from early finds to the present day, not forgetting the silkworm itself.

In China the silkworm was considered a sacred insect capable of uniting heaven and earth. Over 5000 years ago, people began to protect and breed silkworms, and to make a variety of products out of the silk that they produce. For as long as silk has been known, it has represented art and technology in perfect harmony, along with exquisite craftsmanship and mythical ornamentation.

For thousands of years, silk manufacture was preserved in China as a closely guarded state secret and the prerogative of the Imperial court, before being secularized and becoming a source of livelihood, a luxury and export product, and a tool of diplomacy and politics. 'Sericulture' only reached Europe in the 6th century.

The exhibition includes more than 100 textiles, spanning the entire story of Chinese silk. On display are: silk fabric from the Neolithic Era; Jin silk with dragons and phoenixes from the Period of the Warring States, who fought for the control of the Yangtze River; different styles of Han and Tang-dynasty silk textiles from various places along the Silk Road; and unbelievably intricate works produced during the Ming and Qing dynasties by the Imperial textile factories on the lower Yangtze; plus some magnificent modern silk garments.

The exhibits come from the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou. The exhibition is also part of the Zhejiang Cultural Festival 2010.

On display in EMMA's upper entrance hall are silk evening dresses from several decades of Finnish Independence Day Celebrations. There are wild-silk creations by gifted Finnish designers and dressmakers, including for the President of the Republic **Tarja Halonen**.

The Chinese-born director Yue-Qing Yang's documentary *Footbinding – The Search for the Three Inch Golden Lotus* is being shown alongside the exhibition. In it she explores the background to the footbinding tradition that began in the Tang dynasty.

The Chinese government banned footbinding in 1911, but the practice continued to some extent into the 1930s. As many as four billion Chinese girls, including the director's own mother and aunt, were forced to undergo this painful process. The documentary lasts 46 minutes and is in English.

Jorma Puranen

The photographic artist **Jorma Puranen's** (b. 1951) exhibition is partly a retrospective of his works from 1992–2010. It includes more than 50 works from various series of pictures, chromogenic colour prints and black-and-white photographs.

The **Imaginary Homecoming** project lasted several years, and was a result of many coincidences and working phases. The subject of this series of works is photographic portraits of Sámi taken on glass negatives, which Puranen found in the archive at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. He decided to enact an imaginary homecoming for the portraits, and return the pictures to their original landscape. He re-photographed them, printed them on film, mounted the transparent portraits on acrylic sheeting, and made a pictorial installation out of them in the fell landscape.

As with the Sámi pictures, the starting point for the multi-part **Where Compasses All Go Mad** is a set of arctic photographs. Here Puranen went over to a more generalized history of expeditions and conquest. He uses history in a multidisciplinary way, alongside the Sámi pictures, the work's visual aspect consists of images from Arctic expeditions to the North Pole at the beginning of the 20th century. Puranen wanted to create an imaginary space open to a variety of interpretations.

In the **Shadows, Reflections** series Puranen has photographed old bourgeois portrait paintings so as to awaken to life the past of the people in the pictures. The pictures became visual signs with their own cultural significance. The works now being shown at EMMA have been shot from portraits in museum collections in Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands.

The **Sixteen Steps to Paradise** series came from thinking about what he could photograph in his own garden without having to make long photographing trips. Puranen shot these works with their flowers, trees, shadows and reflections via shiny, black-painted acrylic sheets, which he took into his garden, 16 paces from his door.

Icy Prospects is the last of the series depicting the northern landscape. The images are of the arctic landscape, and in them landscape and reflection of the landscape meet. The works are reminiscent of 19th-century historical romantic painting. The title of the series comes from stories about arctic expeditions and from tourists travelling to the North Cape, who marvel at the landscape opening out before them.

Juba Tuomola: Viivi and Wagner

Jussi "Juba" Tuomola's (b. 1965) *Viivi and Wagner* is Finland's most popular comic strip. A sizeable readership of all ages sees it in their newspaper in the morning, and more than a million albums of strips have been sold. The EMMA exhibition of a hundred strips (in Finnish) and some of Tuomola's oil paintings also sheds light on the process of making the comic strip. Compiled by the critic **Heikki Jokinen**, it approaches *Viivi and Wagner* via five different themes.

The Pig as a Big Child: Wagner's trademark is zany whims and odd ideas. They say the Devil makes work for idle hands, but in Wagner's case idle trotters lead to unique insights.

In a Relationship: What kind of relationship can a woman and a pig have? Surprisingly varied and workable, at least judging by Viivi's and Wagner's everyday experience. The reason is simple: despite their differences, underneath it all, the two characters care deeply for one another.

The Roar of Reality: Occasionally, social reality intrudes into Viivi and Wagner: trains are cancelled; a neo-liberal picks the raisins out of a bun; or Wagner runs for President. This is part of the strip's multi-dimensional charm, it does not exist in a vacuum or simply stare at its own navel.

Unconscious Alchemy: Reality exists in the form in which we accept it. Viivi and Wagner have their own unpredictable reality, and its limits are made to be broken. Wagner turns into a meat-stock cube, a tree grows inside him, and a door at home leads into his subconscious.

Philosophy of the Everyday: It is actually odd that two creatures with such different values as Viivi and Wagner have are able to 'live' together, in both senses of the word. Viivi's views on vegetarianism, ecology and the status of women have little impact on Wagner. Still, they get along.

The exhibition is accompanied by a book (in Finnish) *Sika ja muusa* (pig meets muse), published by Arktinen Banaani. This is based on the same themes as the exhibition, but not all the strips are the same. There is also an article on the nature of the Viivi&Wagner comic strip by the editor of the book, Heikki Jokinen.

Accompanying Programme

Katja Tukiainen's *Good Heavens!* will be winning over thoughts and emotions in this autumn's accompanying programme. Tukiainen's painting installation is about the artist's alter-ego figure Mademoiselle Good Heavens, who tries to fit into a shallow, white space, leaving us wondering when we got too big to enjoy art. Tukiainen's theme extends to the guided-tour, workshop and Art Fairy Workshop Parties and Art Cocktails programme, and to the *Matkalla* (On the way) project by the young people of the SOS Children's Village's. Aided by Tukiainen, the youngsters get to play a thought game and explore their sense of self.

The programme accompanying the exhibitions has meet-the-artist events, guided tours, and things to see ranging from silk to comic strips, for people of all ages. For children the hit of the autumn is the visit by the Korkeasaari Zoo Educator and a chance to observe the life of the silkworm. EMMA's *Shortcuts* spread out to the Saastamoinen Foundation Art Collection. Refugee Woman of the Year 2010 **Nasima Razmyar**, author **Sinikka Nopola's Eila** and **Rampe**, and Rap artist **Signmark** have made their personal artwork choices for the Shortcut routes. The year's end culminates in an event for young people, **EMMA rokkaa (EMMA rocks)** 13.11, the main act being **Haloo Helsinki**, with the Finnish Association for Mental Health and the Rocklada tour 2010 also taking part.

Photos: www.emma.museum/press

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