

Tallinn Music Week: A dialogue of art and music



A painting by Estonian artist Malle Leis (Tam Gallery)

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4/7/2015 12:05 PM

Category: Culture (<http://news.err.ee//Culture>)

Once again, in March, the city of Tallinn captivated more than 20,000 attendees, both Estonians and visitors from abroad, at the seventh annual Tallinn Music Week hosting a dizzying array of international and homegrown performances against the backdrop of its fascinating Old Town.

This year was a special year, as the Estonian Contemporary Development Center (ECDC) curated the first edition of Tallinn Music Week Arts, a special program featuring a host of exhibitions and events connecting music with art. Some of the most popular art galleries in Tallinn were involved: EKA Gallery, Rundum Space, Kanuti Gildi Saal, Temnikova & Kasela, Vaal, Tam and Fahle Galleries.

Vaal Gallery presented a memorable exhibition called 'Dark Side of a Poppy' by Lauri Sillak aka Laurentius and Tam Gallery featured 'Yellow Summer' by renowned artist Malle Leis.

The flower-painting series by Laurentius was accompanied by a music performance by Anett Demjanov and Marita Lumi. Each musician was wrapped in a "zither-skirt" (kannelseelik or harfseelik in Estonian), which is actually a stringed instrument made of recycled materials - a unique contemporary design piece developed by acoustic engineers at Tallinn University of Technology. The conical shape of the skirts evoked the blooming of the painted flowers, mirroring same the images on canvas, enhancing the feeling of spreading music all around.

At Tam gallery, the Tibetan singer Drukmo Gyal performed with the Estonian guitarist Taavi Peterson, against the background of Malle Leis's marvellously colored nature-paintings.

Meanwhile, at Fahle gallery, portraits by photographer Jaan Klõšeiko and a music performance by the Estonian composer Allan Vainola kept onlookers engaged. An interesting satirical analysis of Estonian musical heritage was presented by two young artists from the Estonian Academy of Arts - Helena Keskküla and Art Nõukas. They restaged the mechanism of 'estonianization' of Western songs, which was a rather common practice during the Soviet occupation and analyzed how the shape of the songs has changed through the decades.

A different perception of music was analyzed by the contemporary London/Basel-based artist Sophie Jung with her exhibition called New Waiting at the Temnikova & Kasela Gallery. Different objects, both from the digital age and handicraft traditions, were installed on the floor. She sang some lyrics taken from the archaic alpine yodel repertoire, while walking around the gallery and watching her phone. In this way, the objects and the feelings were totally decontextualized and the ancient music could be felt as something faraway and missed in the current digital era.

A similar atmosphere could be felt at Kanuti Gildi Saal, where Rundum (the independent Tallinn-based Creative Platform) organized the exhibition called 'Sensitive Nature of Becoming'. The exhibition was a collaboration between four Estonian artists: Mari-Leen Kiipli, Art Nõukas, Kristin Reiman and Tarvo Hanno Varres. Their artworks, respectively 'Taking Off', 'I Was Always Here', 'Wrong Place Loitering' and 'Recording Floor', dealt with various questions such as how to be in a state of becoming?" and "How to approach oneself by way of forgetting oneself?" Through videos, video installations and other means, the artists also analyzed the concept of inner and outer tempo.

Austrian-American director Jem Cohen in his drama film 'Museum Hours', screened at Tallinna Kunstihoone dissected an interesting topic: When reading about art or absorbing works in a gallery, it's often the case that a person feels detached from art or unable to understand its value or meaning. But by separating oneself from the academic approach, one can perceive art with fresh insight. It can become a

reflection of the shapes of the world or a crossroads of explorations, seeing art in every single thing and feeling surrounding us.

Throughout the week it was interesting to see art was spread everywhere - not only art galleries - in order to involve the public and create a fresh, young and open-minded atmosphere. A café called Must Puudel, for example, hosted the illustrations of the Estonian artist Kaspar Tamsalu and an event venue called 'Erinevate Tubate Klubi '(Unique rooms club) in the Telliskivi area was decorated with a Plantier-brand installation of plants.

Creating another unique atmosphere in Kultuurikatel, interior designer Ott Kangur and multidisciplinary artist Marit Ilison, as part of the experimental program Classical Music Rave, designed an installation combining superb elements of sound and light in the industrial cultural venue of a 100-year-old power plant.

For first-time visitors to the festival, it can be a total surprise to see how a small country like Estonia is so full of initiatives and innovation connected to music and art, which are both deeply rooted in its history, while embracing contemporary cutting-edge art forms. The Festival dually links both past and present, and the Baltic shore to Northern Europe, serving as a cultural bridge.

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