

ART MEETING

Text and photos by Hannes Leo

KARI MERIKANTO

Visit the Theater of Art Join the Cosmos Voyage



Above: Kari Merikanto in the exhibition opening telling of his works. Right: Timo Olavi Jalkanen giving the exhibition opening speech and Markku Mäenpää making live radio broadcasting to Järviradio.

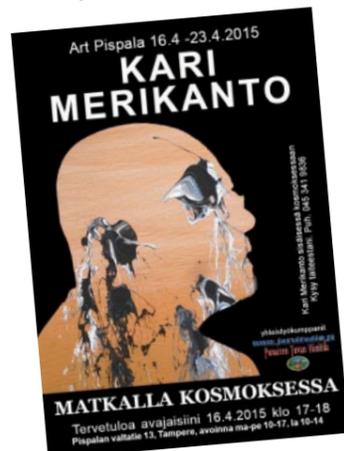
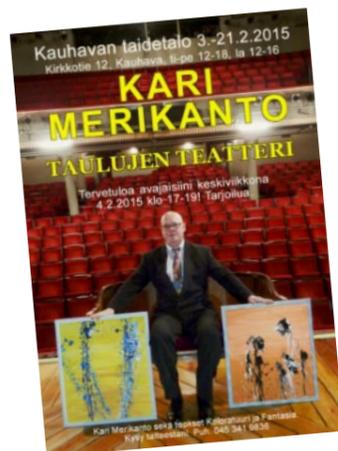
I meet artist Kari Merikanto in Theater of Art exhibition. Color schemes of the works on the walls change group by group, and create transforming emotions.

Yet, a first glance at each work reveals similar surprising painting technique.

- We are in "The Art Theatre Show", traveling in the cosmos - from the time before the gravity existed, through the birth of life to this day, says Merikanto.

I will start his interviews in front of the work *The Birth of Gravitation*, from such cosmic era that during my journalist career I have never before been dealing with.

Kari Merikanto exhibition posters



The names of the works take far away in time and space: *The Birth of Gravitation*, *The Birth of the Cosmos*, *Space Stream*, *Code of Life*, *Primeval Sea Lives*, *Born in the Sea*, *Fantasy of the Life*, *At the Other Side of the Sun* and *On the border of Green Galaxy*. How you artist Kari Merikanto came to such a world?

- The theme was born when a sufficient number of works I made using my new technique was ready. When they were grouped together side by side by color, an impression of the cosmos and the birth of life was truly born. New works supplement the story all the time, Merikanto says.

We walk in an art exhibition from room to another. The color palette and visual dynamics of the works transform group by group to different one, as well as cosmic names. Long journey in time in the universe takes only few meters walk.

Close look to the works reveals color twists that create an extra dimension to them. Photos I saw in advance, did not give the right conception of the works. These must be experienced as authentic, should I say must be felt personally inside.

- True, those color twists create three-dimensionality that photos can not show. I create works layer-by-layer in several stages. In my works a great secret is hidden, that every viewer will discover inside themselves when they look at them. It is a feeling that no one else can explain, Merikanto says mysteriously.

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Excerpts from Kari Merikanto exhibitions opening speeches



Taina Myllyharju
Tampere Art
Museum Director

When I saw Kari Merikanto's works I said right away that he is Finnish **Jackson Pollock**, who was abstract expressionist and best-known action painter in the world. This style is included in informalism in Finland (*L'Art Informel* in French, "Art without form").

Abstract expressionism was born after the Second World War, when during the cold-war. when several European artists moved to the United States, wanting to break free from European art genres. They wanted to do something that was their own, bold and stunning. They painted on large canvases spontaneously and with emotion, in nonfigurative way.

Jackson Pollock was one of the first representatives of this style. He laid canvas on the floor and dripped and spread paint on it randomly but with an idea. The result was fractal patterns and shapes, similar maybe when the world and the life were born. Just like what Kari in these works has reached.

I encourage Kari to paint on even larger canvases. He does not disclose to us what his technique is, that creates mystical colors wrapping around each other. Names of his works lead me to new worlds.

I wish you Kari Merikanto to go forward bravely where no man has gone before.

Color streams of these Merikanto works take viewers to the voyage to the world creation or evolution - which way the viewer wants to experience it. Of these works the word surrealistic may come to mind. However, simultaneously they are amazingly natural, as life itself. When watching some of them it is even hard to believe, that they are made by human hands.

After seeing a number of these works, I started observing phenomena which generate similar senses: a whirlwind that took dry leaves to the sky, wildly flying bird flock, living flame, or the waves on the sandy beach. In these works there is something similar, dialogue between systematic and random. This kind of abstract art sets free both the artist and the spectator. These works generate a personal feeling, into which no one else can give advices. The artist's abstract expression turns into viewers abstract Impression. I'll comp Taina, Jackson Pollock is re-born and renewed. I hope and believe that these Kari Merikanto's cosmic stories and views go to live around the world.



Timo-Olavi Jalkanen
Sara Hildén Art Mu-
seum Executive Board



Birth of Gravitation



Code of Life



Primeval Sea Lives

Do we need a sense of realism or emotion?

I walk past dozens of works. They create changing feelings and sensations. The lack of realism and references to culture makes my brain function somehow in other way. You can't see squares in Merikanto's works. Not in the nature either - human invented the square.

Before this exhibition I knew that Merikanto has been compared to **Jackson Pollock**, whose work *No. 6* (later famous as *Convergence*) was exhibited in Helsinki Art Hall in 1954. The artist/writer **Oiva Pollari** wrote of the work: "I refuse absolutely to retain this kind as art, however if it is, then also overturn ink bottle stain on a cloth is art". Are you afraid of similar reactions because these works are nonfigurative?

- I've done and I do realism and many other art genres. These works I do because they come inside of me, without imitating anyone or thinking of genres. Artists throughout history have been criticized even fiercely. From that museum professional's comparison of me to Pollock, I am just excited, Merikanto smiles.

Later a movie was made of Pollock, and his work was sold at 140 million dollars, being the all-time second most expensive work. After creative period Pollock started boozing heavily.

- I do not know if they make a movie of me or pay millions of my artwork - now they are quite affordable. Though boozing I do not start, Merikanto laughs.

On the way to the world

We have walked through the exhibition and stop beside the work *At the Border of Black Hole*. We have traveled a long cosmic journey. But where does Merikanto's art direct in the future?

- I make more larger works with this technique, that enables my first really big exhibition, presumably in France. It is nice to see whether feelings that people experience there are similar than here, Merikanto ponders.

Thank you and good luck with the world trip of your cosmic voyage! Pictures on the web: www.karimerikanto.com

