

Salla Tykkä: A Reverse Chronology

The appearance of a young female protagonist – played by or evoking the artist herself – in Salla Tykkä's work plays a central role. In photography, Tykkä has continued the lineage of women artists using themselves as their subject. The presence of such self-reflective women enables an investigation of gender roles to take place that Tykkä articulates, for example, through an examination of Oedipal conflict in *Power*. The trilogy of films, of which *Lasso* and *Thriller* are the first two parts, follow the path of a girl into adulthood, her internal struggles and sexual awakening. Where *Thriller* touches upon the inner demons aroused in the girl as she reaches puberty, *Lasso* portrays the surprise discovery by her of a young man engaged in a private activity. Interestingly, Tykkä has described the relationship between the protagonists in *Lasso* as that of siblings, which is to deny the latent sexuality between the pair.

Direct references to illness and extreme behaviour are evident in the early photographic series *Sick, More Sick, the Sickest One* which begins, seemingly innocently enough, with a girl sitting in a café. It is only on closer examination that we notice blood is dripping from her ear. Her rapid demise is charted via a hospital bed to the arguably more sinister hot sweat of *The Sickest One*. From this basis, *Bitch: Portrait of the Happy One* examines celebrity status and the self-hatred that glamour may conceal. In the 1997 video work of this name, we see a woman in evening dress, Tykkä herself, emerging from a limousine onto a red carpet, surrounded by her adoring public. The first work in which music plays a central role, her exit is also accompanied by subtitles revealing:

I hate my self.

I hate my body.

I hate my life.

I hate you.

I hate my hair-and my dress.

I have been ill for so long that I do not know myself anymore. The obsession of being a perfect looking woman has cost me my soul. That is why I do not give a shit about other people though it may look like I do.

In conversation with Francis McKee, Tykkä speaks openly about her personal journey through recent work, beginning with early and self-therapeutic photography and video exemplified by *My Hate is Useless*. In this, her most literal and documentary-style piece, we witness some of the internal rage Tykkä was feeling at the height of her anorexia, accompanied by the poem:

Night-

Why am I afraid of you the same way I am afraid of the others?

I am gaining weight and it feels like I am drowning.
I eat an apple and flush it down with water.
Then I go for a jog thinking what I can eat afterwards.

I am sane. I am not sane.

Night-

I wish you would come.

Seeds that were sown during the making of *My Hate is Useless* can be traced, albeit in a more lateral way, in her later pieces. Exercise, for example, is a recurring theme in many of the works, from the boxing in *Power* to the girl returning from a run in *Lasso*. Significantly, many recent works relate closely to the Finnish context of the artist's home, from the architecture of summer houses to the snow-covered landscape. In conversation, Tykkä has identified the photographs of the *Pain, Pleasure, Guilt* series as an important moment for considering the interface between inside and outside. Often alluded to through the use of windows as a physical but transparent barrier, distinct from the typical metaphor of public and private, she describes this more as a desire to escape from an inside.

Listening to Salla Tykkä, we also learn more about her relationship to music through the deliberate use of the emotive potential of scores from other films and popular culture in her films. Rather than allowing appropriation to dominate, it is clear that this is only one element in her increasingly complex practice, used to evoke a mood or a memory. The other references that enter her work, particularly considering the potent visual imagery of the film trilogy, are as multifarious as the readings that the audience can make. Tykkä has transcended the need to use her artwork to rationalise her own emotions and, in doing so, she has entered the realm of intersubjective relations.

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