

VIRIÖ

Piia Keto
8–30 March 2019

The illustration exhibition Viriö (shed) by **Piia Keto** (b. 1978) consists of patterns and their dialogue around us. Keto has created a home-like space at Galleria Kuvitus, complete with wallpapers and furniture. The slogan “every-day beauty”, used frequently in the 1950s and 1960s, is also an apt description of Keto’s world. The illustrator draws inspiration from weaving looms, embroidery patterns, pockets, knives, jewellery and woodwork. She has studied old handicraft techniques and modernized them through the means of illustration. Her work is fresh and modern. Known especially for her black-and-white retro style illustrations for Finnish design brand Arabia, Keto’s use of colour is soft and insightful. The soft brown and neutral tones are accentuated by the powerful blue, the cheery mint green and the warm, gentle apricot yellow in between. The soothing horizontal and vivid vertical lines simultaneously form a plain yet rich surface.

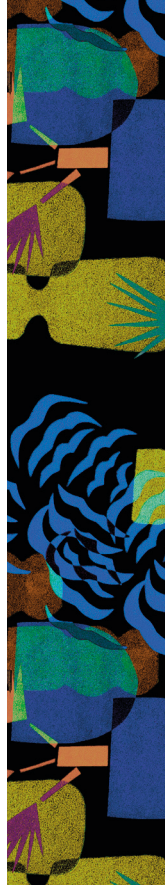
The exhibition is a journey of the mind into the world of textiles. I started off with Dora Jung’s damasks and embroidered fill patterns and followed the common thread that twisted and turned, becoming an abstract path into the world of warp yarns. I have approached the Viriö project by examining the collections of museums, treasures found in attics, old tools, photographs and letters, bridal chests and the parts of weaving looms.



Keto’s exhibition also offers an intriguing glimpse of the hierarchies in contemporary art. Regarded as feminine and homely, textile work began to be held in higher esteem in the art world fairly late. However, now we can already talk about a wave of contemporary artists following in the footsteps of Anni Albers and Lenore Tawney, including the likes of Leonor Antunes and Ann Cathrin November Høibo. The open-minded attitude of Keto towards materials and their natural characteristics also brings to mind the teachings of Bauhaus and the pictorial weavings of Anni Albers, which are designed for viewing. In the 2010s, several Finnish institutions of contemporary art have exhibited artwork shaped from textile materials. Yet two-dimensional pieces, industrial artwork as well as furnishing and art textiles are still rarely regarded as art.

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While Dora Jung called herself first and foremost “an artisan” and only then “an artist”, Piia Keto calls herself a storyteller. Among other themes, she has reflected on the role of women as makers of handicrafts in her work. Keto’s exhibition can also be regarded as part of the haptic resistance against a life spent largely online, a movement that is becoming increasingly common in the art world.

I have grown up and studied at a time when new technologies, oozing with modern possibilities, rode roughshod over the old. I myself combine both in my work: the possibilities of modern technology and traditional manual skill. I want to showcase traditional Finnish handicrafts and their manufacturing methods in a new way before the knowledge and skills are lost beyond reach.

My working method has always been materials-based stream of consciousness. For this exhibition, I chose techniques that force me to work calmly. I have punched hundreds, if not thousands of holes in paper to embroider patterns on it. I have sewn rug tuft and fringes and eventually transformed them into surfaces. I have peered on the reverse side of my work and discovered interesting elements there.

The inspiring Viriö project has only just begun, but it has already become a soul-tickling source of creativity and excitement for me.

One of Keto’s most recent large pieces is a wool carpet inspired by Minna Canth, which is on display in the new Oodi Helsinki Central Library. Viriö continues a series of pieces, which Keto began with ceramic rugs in 2016.

Text:
Piia Keto and Veera Pekkinen
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