

# Apila Pepita

# HELLÄ

# TATTOO



29.1.–14.2.2021

**A**pila Pepita is an accomplished

wielder of the pen. Their passion for drawing

began with comic books and quickly expanded

into other fields. Apila Pepita's illustrations have been seen in numerous books and currently they are working on illustrating five different books. The illustrator opened the door to the wide world of tattoos in late 2019. Their colourful comic book-like tattoos have been very popular and the tattoo machine has been whirring away happily despite the additional challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Apila Pepita's tattooing style has been inspired by modern Korean tattoos while their background as a comic artist remains visible. The illustrator finds inspiration in popular culture, anime, the Internet and memes. In their colourful tattoo templates, Japanese *fairy kei* meets *goblin core*. As a starting point, the illustrator designs tattoos that they would like to have themselves.

At the centre of the *Hellä Tattoo* exhibition are the tattoo templates, "flashes", that are presented in the form of *flash sheets*

familiar from the tattooing world. Flashes may be ordered as original works on one's skin, and some are unique, meaning that the illustrator will use them only once. *Hellä Tattoo* demonstrates that holding an exhibit can allow illustrators to promote their work in a whole new way compared to what art exhibits usually aim for.

Studies have been conducted on the connection between tattoos and art and aesthetics that aimed to discover where tattoos place in the field of arts. *Tattoos borrow from the traditional artforms and create their own culture. They also challenge us to ponder the notion of what art is. A tattoo is a work of art that can be viewed as an image, but the analysis must also always include the bearer of the work: the person.* (Anna-Liisa Koskinen, 2019)

Flash posters are a traditional staple of tattoo parlours. The posters show ready-made tattoo templates, or "flashes". Flashes are also often on display in flash books and/or folders. The customer may choose the flash they like or ask the tattoo artist to create a new one inspired by the flashes. As of yet, there is no Finnish word for a flash.

Having tattoos involves many psychological aspects and questions: why do people have tattoos, what kind of images do they choose to have on their skin and what do the images mean to the individual. For Apila Pepita, it has been important to visually include queer culture into Hellä Tattoo's tattoo templates. The illustrator wishes to offer the LGBTQAI+ community the tattooing imagery that they have been longing for. Caterpillars transforming into butterflies serve as metaphors for transsexuality and cute animal figures can offer escapism to queer folks.

Originally, flash meant quick assembly line -type of tattooing that rose to popularity in the USA in the 1940s. The same flash template could be used on multiple people as quickly as possible. Today many tattoo artists consider the thought of mass production odd. A tattoo must express individuality and customers most often want a completely unique tattoo. Traditional flashes are still also created, but they are varied with slight changes to make them unique for each bearer.

The tattooing trade has gone through a monumental shift since the rise of the Internet. Nowadays customers rarely walk into the tattoo parlour to browse flash folders when looking for their next image. The marketing of tattoos has mostly moved online, and tattoo artists now publish flash collages on Instagram.

**Apila Pepita Miettinen** (b.1991 in Siilinjärvi) is an illustrator and comic book and tattoo artist who lives and works in Helsinki. They have studied graphic design at Aalto University and completed a minor in illustration as part of her M.A. studies. Apila Pepita realises activism through the means of art and often deals with issues related to gender and mental health.

[apilapepita.com](http://apilapepita.com)  
[apilatattoo.com](http://apilatattoo.com)

The **Hellä Tattoo** exhibit is named after tattoo parlour **Studio Hellä** (Tender). Apila Pepita founded the parlour operating in the Katajanokka neighbourhood at the end of 2020 together with **Ahma Hokkanen**, **Sasha Kretova** and **Haley Lykantropia**. Studio Hellä's goal is to mix illustration, comic books, fine arts, design and drag. The imagery in the tattoo industry has traditionally been more on the dramatic and dark side, and here the pastel-hued Studio Hellä brings a refreshing change.

Words: Veera Pekkinen  
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Sources:  
Koskinen, Anna-Liisa: "Musteella merkitty minuus – Tatuoinnit taiteena", University of Helsinki, M.A. thesis, 2019  
Miettinen, Apila Pepita: emails 12.1.2021 and 17.1.2021



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