



THAUMATURGY

Milena Huhta & Luganski

7/2–2/3

The intimate joint-exhibit of illustrator **Milena Huhta** (b. 1988) and photographer **Diana Luganski** (b. 1980) brings the central figures of Slavic folklore into the modern day in a way that combines illustration and photography. The exhibit is also a journey back to the days when fairytales were passed on orally and intended for adults. It was their Slavic background and shared aesthetical tastes that brought these two artists from different fields together, and they call each other kindred spirits. Both have been inspired by old fables since they were children.

“One of my favourites was Doré’s illustrations for Dante’s Divine Comedy. Haha, it’s pretty grim for a child but I still love those pictures very much.” - Milena Huhta.

The exhibit consists of a series of six portraits. The portraits were taken by Luganski and Huhta has added a new layer to them that transforms the modern models to timeless figures from mythology, such as Baba Yaga, the omnipotent witch, or a legendary warrior princess. The power of colour photographs is usually in their realism. However, this time the illustration takes over and turns models into living dolls and a part of Huhta’s fantasy world. The exhibition includes a video based on the portraits and an altar-like moodboard that expounds on the creative process behind the exhibit and presents its sources of inspiration that range from delicate herbaria to imagery from pop culture.

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Texts:

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References:

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Bilibin: Sammakkoprinsessa. Weilin & Göös, Espoo, 1977

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Milena Huhta. Article in the online publication Stell Magazine 19.6.2017

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True and false

Maybe it is because the authentic and untouched photo is considered to be so "sacred", but photo manipulation that combines photography and illustration has been a more common occurrence in advertising (Givenchy, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, YSL...) than in art. However, the post-processing of photographs has a long history behind. Also contemporary artists such as Ulla Jokisalo have created new layers in their photos with embroidery, ready made image material etc. Before the digital era and image processing software it was literally manual labour. Usually the goal was to give an impression of reality, and attempts were made to hide the use of the manipulation techniques.

Georges Méliès (1861-1938), a magician and a pioneer of cinema, was one of those who thought to use the photograph in a different way. He wowed audiences in the 19th century with his illusion theatre performances that featured photos of ghosts, auras that surround people and even "ectoplasm". Lewis Carroll used photography to prove that fairies exist. A while later the art of photo processing was taken up by avant-garde artists such as André Breton, Salvador Dalí and Man Ray. They did not set out to document the external world, but instead focused on the internal reality: dreams and the subconscious, desires and dream futures, mystical landscapes. Everything was possible, because everything was made by hand: sets were built, cut & paste was used, photos were coloured by hand and drawing and photo became merged. From the field of Finnish illustration, Pikku Siljan unisatu (Little Silja's Bedtime Story, 1945), a children's book written and illustrated by Otso Pietinen, deserves a mention here. The images in the book were created using a dream-like photo montage technique: the backgrounds and different elements of the images were photographed separately and put together by cutting out the needed element from each photo. The arrangement of the pieces was photographed and the resulting negative was used to make drafts, parts of which were coloured.

The Thaumaturgy exhibit uses illustration in a very similar way: as a visual effect that reinforces the absurd atmosphere that breaks with everyday reality.

Huhta

The fickle line between the magical world and everyday reality is one of the main recurring themes in Milena Huhta's illustration work, and the new exhibit takes this theme to new heights. Here Huhta repeats and creates variations of her themes, ranging from the aesthetics of cruelty to sensitive femininity. Her characters are both vulnerable and strong at the same time. "I try to portray inner conflicting emotions and what it feels like to be a female." Milena Huhta has been drawing since she was a child. "Drawing has always been a way of escapism for me; like a portal to another world."

Many of the characters featured in the exhibit are familiar especially from the illustrations of Ivan Bilibin, a pioneer of Russian graphics and stage design. To Bilibin, being Russian did not mean being limited only to the confines of one's own culture. For instance, Bilibin highlighted the importance of Japanese art in his artistic development. Milena Huhta is also an admirer of Japanese artists such as Takato Yamamoto, Junko Mizuno, Yoshitaka Amano, Kuniyoshi Kaneko and Aquirax Uno. Huhta's psychedelic illustration style has elements from various different sources: fantasy and science fiction, folk art, old school anime (especially shōjo) and her visual communications studies in South Korea. Huhta is inspired by fashion, dreams, literature and gothic style and the related music (deathrock, cold wave). She constantly scours the Internet for new sources of inspiration and says that she is addicted to the flood of images pouring in from Pinterest and Tumblr. With commissioned work, the brief helps me out a lot. I like to bring my own vision to the mixture and think of my own take on the given subject. It's beneficial that I'm endlessly interested in so many things!

Luganski

Luganski is known for her dark-toned portraits. The photographs in the exhibit were taken in the summer and autumn of 2018.

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