

Anders Härm

Ene-Liis Semper's New Video Works

[Translated from Estonian by Tiina Laats]

[739 words]

Estonia



EUROPSKA PRIJESTOLNICA
KULTURE



This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the info@institute.hr.

All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, www.institute.hr.

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020**. Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

Anders Härm

Ene-Liis Semper's New Video Works

*Looking at my past from the side seeing myself queuing for death and love.
Urs Fischer "Notes about 'Now'"*

Ene-Liis, would you like your dreams to be recorded? Maybe just once – to understand why this special atmosphere in my dreams makes me so dependent on it.*

With some surprise I discovered that, excepting the exhibitions done together with Kiwa, Mark Raidpere and Marko Laimre, the current one is only the second Ene-Liis Semper's very own display in Estonia, after the powerful 1997 breakthrough exhibition in the Vaal Gallery. These two personal 'brackets' contain too much to be discussed here and now. Like with most exhibitions of Ene-Liis, this one displays only new works as well. Society loves to regard Ene-Liis Semper as nothing else but a pretentious and shocking person provoking scandals whose charm it simultaneously admires and dreads; the trash and society press crave a scandal so there would be something to write about; critics thirst for radicalism, for the same reasons. Everything is even too predictable, isn't it? And yet, her author's position does not much differ from that of the romantics or expressionists. Her works focus on being here, on the human existence, however simple that might sound. But what if ... the core of humanity itself has changed, maybe it's no longer what it used to be, or what we'd like it to be? Or what that tiresome petty bourgeois of a moralist craving for sentimentality might think. And besides – what's the point of talking about shock art at the level of both criticism and society at a time when the performance society has turned the bloody pictures of the police crime report into cosy family entertainment? We should really prefer the subtlety of Simper's explorations of existence, the charm of deeply perceived states of affect that

by no means always culminate in the terrifying catharsis of symbolic suicides or in masochist rites of violent scenes.

Ene-Liis is the precise mechanic of human existence, and her works are first of all concentrated psychological experiences. Starting with the most archaic, basic elements of psychological experience – the affected reality (joy, sadness, fear, etc.) and ending with considerably more sophisticated psychic representations and situations. If to believe Julia Kristeva, creation is the witness of an affect, an adventure of body and signs, in order to change the affect into rhythm, signs and form. 'Semiotic' and 'Symbolic' become the communicative traces of affected reality. (I like that book, because it's about joy, sadness and fear.) Kristeva talks about literature, but her claim still holds true for art too, without major reservations.

Ene-Liis Semper's works could be regarded as grasping for Thing. Thing, however, cannot be really perceived. Gérard de Nerval has noted that although a human being almost never sees the sun in his dreams, he is often aware of the presence of some supernatural light. It is a light without representations, a thing without an object. Thing is exactly that – imaginary sun, bright and dark at the same time.

Semper uses her body like a sculptor uses his material, modelling it as a mirror surface of psychological experience. Video is the format, framing of experiences that give it its final structure. The most characteristic feature of video art is, paradoxically, the absence. There is nothing on connotative level that would better signify the nature of video art than the absence of complex film-like structure. This is the central conventional code of video art, which is not inherited from film or TV, but the classical static forms of art, such as painting, photography or sculpture. Video art is primarily a pictorial-figurative and not a pictorial-narrative structure. That conventional code can be fought or not, but its existence is inevitable. Video art thus requires maximum concentration of experience and creating of a visual image that has been carefully worked out until the very last detail, something that Ene-Liis knows almost to perfection.

Her pictorial language is, as a rule, ascetically laconic and exhibits few symbols, naturally with a few exceptions, but it is at the same time powerfully captivating. Her works completely overwhelm the viewer. The functioning principle of her oeuvre is almost the same as at their creation – attaching themselves, like leeches, to the depths of the viewer's body perception, they bring out the oscillations and impulses of his own emotions.

* Raimundas Malasauskas. "Ene-Liis Semper" – Tema Celeste, Contemporary Art, Summer 2001.