



#FOCUSFINLAND

ARCO Madrid

Feria de Madrid , Apdo. de Correos 67.067, 28042 Madrid, Spain

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FROM PLAYFULNESS TO MELANCHOLY: ARCO'S FINNISH FOCUS

BY JOHN GAYER

This year, as part of ARCOmadrid's ongoing quest to promote the best in contemporary art to Spain and the world, the fair set its sights on northern Europe and instated Finland as its guest of honor. Launched in 2011 as part of the fair's 30th anniversary edition, the 'Focus' initiative broadens the art market perspective by highlighting the gallery scenes in various European countries. *#FocusFinland* stands as the fourth installment. (Previous presentations showcased scenes in Russia, the Netherlands and Turkey.) Not being ones to shy away from a good opportunity, *#FocusFinland*'s organizers have put together a program that will ensure the presence of Finnish art will be felt at the fair and beyond it. With the inclusion of a Collateral Program so expansive that it outsizes each of the previous participants' parallel presentations, Finnish art's presence will not only be evident across Madrid, it will also continue through the spring.

The idea to feature Finland in this year's fair developed out of conversations between ARCO director Carlos Urroz, gallery owner Kaj Forsblom and Raija Koli, director of Frame Visual Art Finland. It soon expanded to include Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma curator Leevi Haapala, whose track record includes curating *Stressed Beauty* for 2010's *Art Paris + guests*, as well as *#FocusFinland*. When questioned on the project's evolution and his role as curator, Haapala noted that though *#FocusFinland* generated many new initiatives and collaborations, his prime goal was to present a total picture. It was noticed that ARCO's board was not fully aware of the variety and depth of Helsinki's gallery scene and this only served to underscore the need for this approach. So it was decided a series of high profile solo exhibitions would be mounted—one for each gallery plus the Focus Pavilion.



Jiri Geller, *Sugared II* (2013) painted resin, carbon fiber, steel; Courtesy of the artist and Frame Visual Art Finland, photo: Vilhelm Sjöström. At ARCOmadrid with Showroom Helsinki.

The final selection consists of thirteen galleries. Eleven of the galleries and Heta Kutcha's video installations, which will be showing in the Pavilion, were picked by Haapala. They form the core presentation and provide an excellent snapshot of what Helsinki has to offer. The scope ranges from top commercial spaces, like galleries Anhava, Forsblom and Helsinki Contemporary, to the artist-run Forum Box and Sinne, a non-profit. Their shows will transmit a sense of the playfulness and melancholy that informs the Finnish mindset, of cultural globalism's influence on Finnish art, of Finns' relationship to nature and their love of cartoons. The chosen artists include Antti Laitinen (Galerie Anhava), whose *Forest Square* – a systematic classification of a 100 m² parcel of forest – made an impact at last year's Venice Biennale. Also not to be missed are Niko Luoma's intensely chromatic geometric prints (Gallery Taik Persons), Perttu Saksa's brooding exploration of human likenesses (Photographic Gallery Hippolyte), Leena Nio's energetic and often nightmarish depictions of ordinary things (Galerie Forsblom), and animations by IC-98, a multifaceted practice recently chosen to represent Finland at the 2015 Venice Biennale (Galleria Heino).

The Paris based curator Manuel Segado has selected the young upstarts SIC and graffiti oriented Make Your Mark to round out the gallery survey. Whereas SIC will be presenting work by each its nine artists, Make Your Mark is promoting the work of Finland's most widely known graffiti artist. This man investigated graffiti in and around Helsinki before starting to paint and views his sprayings as anthropological research into the phenomenon. His tag is Egs. Both presentations will be located in the fair's Opening section.



Leena Nio, *Girl II*, 2013, oil on canvas; Courtesy of the artist and Frame Visual Art Finland. At ARCOmadrid with Galerie Forsblom.

Taru Elfving, Frame's program head and the coordinator of #FocusFinland's Collateral Program, says the fair is about much more than just showing artists and their work. It offers the opportunity to uphold existing relationships and forge new networks between like-minded people and organizations at multiple levels. Numerous spaces, for example, have co-curated elements of the program so that they sync with their mandates. Thus Otto Karvonen's *Alien Palace Birdhouse Collection: Helsinki – Madrid* will be hosted by CA2M, an art center focused on examining cities, and ¿FINLAND?, a group exhibition spotlighting emerging talent jointly produced by two Spanish and four Finnish curators, appears at Sala Alcalá 31. The introduction of artist-run Espacio Trapézio to ecological issue-oriented Finnish art group Mustarinda triggered a collaborative project and the six-week-long residency project involving Essi Kausalainen, Mikko Kuorinki, Jaakko Pallavuo and Nestori Syrjälä at Matadero Madrid will culminate in the exhibition *El Ranchito*. Moreover, the latter initiative will be reciprocated with a residency project for Spanish artists in Helsinki next autumn.

Supplementing the gallery exhibitions is a significant number of film and video screenings. La Casa Encendida will screen films by Erkki Kureniemi, as well as Mika Taanila's documentary on this electronic music pioneer. A series of films by the director and film historian Peter von Bagh forms part of Filmoteca Española's program; Von Bagh, whose career spans six decades, has received praise from the likes of Chris Marker and is a master at documenting the history of everyday life in Finland. One will also be surprised and entertained by the Cairo percussionists playing hard and hollow sounding loaves of bread in Helsinki-based Adel Abidin's *Bread of Life* at The Finnish Institute. Lastly, another highlight takes place at the Reina Sofía Museum when Aki Kaurismäki gives a master class as part of the program *After the Shipwreck – The Cinema of Aki Kaurismäki (1983-1996)*. Described as "cinema based on the paradoxes and fault lines of contemporaneity," *After the Shipwreck* is the first Kaurismäki retrospective to be screened in a modern art museum context.



IC-98, *A View From The Other Side* (2011) HD animation; Courtesy of the artist and Frame Visual Art Finland. At ARCOMadrid with Galleria Heino.

For visitors to ARCOMadrid 2014, #FocusFinland will add up to being an exceptionally informative and wholly unique experience.

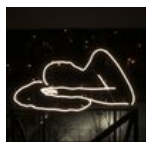
—John Gayer

(Image on top: Niko Luoma, *Systematic collapse R to B*, 2013, pigment print; Courtesy of the artist and Frame Visual Art Finland. At ARCOMadrid with Galerie Taik Persons.)

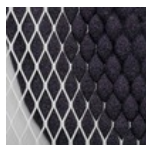
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