

Aarne Jämsä

"Aarne and Arja"

John Gayer

For most people, life at home implies maintaining a series of traditions and routines. But in "Aarne and Arja," a series of sixty watercolors depicting his life with his partner Arja between 1998-2004, Aarne Jämsä reveals that not every day passes smoothly in the Jämsä household. On view at Kiasma in Helsinki until November, these works read like droll excerpts from a diary. Fantastical scenes, intimate moments and household repairs enrich the day-to-day existence of two people who live life in the nude.

Each glimpse of this pair bubbles with emotion. Whether engaging in a warm embrace—in which Arja pinches Aarne in the rear—or heated confrontation, we see a fractious shared existence. Arja stomps on Aarne's chest in one painting, and in another their ghost-like forms hover together near the living room ceiling. Evidence of Jämsä's dry wit is everywhere. A baseball cap, for example, has been integrated into his Egyptian costume. A peaceful moment shows the pair watching a home movie that is simply a film of their house. A few pictures are pretty vicious: Arja's head in a garbage pail, Arja glaring across a knife-covered table at Aarne's gashed body.

For Jämsä, the home teems with activity and inspires the imagination. Through a combination of his lively palette and continuously changing perspectives, Jämsä delineates the inherent complexity and richness of a life together. Co-habitation necessitates political collaboration, manual labor, and anger management. The daily drama of this couple's life sucks you in, quickly replacing the initial surprise at the lack of attire. □

