

La SCALA / Professor Pekka Mattila's opening speech

Dear Riitta

Hyvät naiset and herrat, ladies and gentlemen

It is truly a singular pleasure to be opening an exhibition in actual physical space. As a member of the Board of the Finnish National Gallery I have mostly been attending digital openings since the spring.

Riitta is in many ways a very special artist. I personally am fortunate not to have to resort to comparisons here to extol her extraordinariness. Personal experience and commitment are always the best proof. My own collection and those of the companies I manage include more than twenty works by Riitta from different stages, in different materials, and from different points in her long career. At home my living room wall is in fact adorned with the very same tapestry that hung in my childhood bedroom, in a new arrangement and a new place, but with the same meanings.

Riitta has been a very important mentor for my journey into the world of visual art. Art already became a very natural part – not just of festive but also – of everyday life and existence in my childhood years, and I have subsequently carried on that same development as a collector.

Riitta does not take art too solemnly. Finnish is rich on this point: serious and solemn are two different things. Taking things solemnly is always a bad sign, taking things seriously is important for success and meaning. Fortunately, Finnish gives us a chance to distinguish between the two.

Riitta is exceptionally adaptable – to put it in researcher's language, versatile – for example, her use of materials switches from animation to watercolour, from wood to pastels, from fabric to picture surface. At the same time, her mode of expression is preserved and has endured throughout the years and decades. Her signature style is clear, and that is a feature by which, as I see it, we can always recognize a very mature and authentically matured artist.

On the other hand, Riitta's art is highly inclusive – each audience member sees and experiences it in their own way. The most swiftly transient, and also the youngest, audience members see the works' fantasy and caricatured figures. Those who stop are intrigued by the technical virtuosity of Riitta's treatment of materials. Some get interested in her plays on words: in how skilfully humour and truth – both fun and serious – can interplay. The best-read audience members get the satisfaction of recognizing interdisciplinary references in Riitta's works. Her own well-readness is evidenced by her numerous books, in which metaphor and allusion, along with respectful quotation, unfold.

Riitta's works can be read on many levels. At least one of those levels is accessible to all who see and experience them. The ability to speak to and give sustenance to everyone is a rare one. The comparison with the world of Tove Jansson's Moomin books may be overworked, but it is still apt. Jansson's content opens out to children, teenagers and adults in different ways, and always with new meanings. Riitta achieves very much the same thing in the realm of visual expression.

Helsinki Music Centre is a perfect stage for Riitta's works, in which content and structure are always also joined by music. The grand piano and the hare undergo a visual metamorphosis. Sound and shape converge, become one.

I wish you success and joy.

English translation: Mike Garner