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Painting a Cinematic Tableau Vivant
Master's Thesis

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Introduction



The Coronation of Napoléon in *Desirée* (1)

For my Master's work I am painting a screenshot from the 1954 film *Desirée* (directed by Henry Koster). This frame on its own turn is a *tableau vivant* of *The Coronation of Napoléon*, a painting commissioned from Jacques-Louis David in 1806-1807 to commemorate the actual coronation that took place in 1804.

Paintings are long known to have inspired many great film directors such as Andrey Tarkovsky. Although Tarkovsky did not attempt to imitate or recreate paintings directly by re-staging a painting, he utilized similar pictorial means of rendering space in order to achieve his intended emotional impact¹. Finding out about these subtle ways of incorporating painting into film would have been too wide a topic, so I decided to concentrate on the literal re-enactments of painting in cinema in the form of living pictures, or *tableaux vivants*.

Working with combining both the cinematic re-enactment and the original painting has led to an interest in the pictorial qualities and how and what can help to define a picture from the rest of the world or film in order to see it as an image. The most specific quality that helps to define images - stillness - can be better understood through the re-enactment of paintings in a moving medium. Stillness is a non-human quality, as being alive is strongly connected to motion and changing physical states.

¹ Pallasmaa, J. *The Architecture of Image. Existential Space in Cinema*. Rakennustieto OY, Helsinki, 2001, pg 71.

Working mostly with images makes one question the possibilities of using univocally visual and painterly tools for researching an image and has also led me to question more my own connection to the textual tools and their similarities and differences from painting.

The Coronation vol 2 painting is, in terms of dimensions, stepping back to the historical size of the original painting. The detailed painting of David has undergone many transformations. First, it was made into a film scene, which was pirated resulting in small copies circling the world wide web. The next transformation occurred with me taking a frame from this low-quality footage and blowing it up to the original size. Step by step, the image started to deteriorate. The image went through several translations and mutations due to the nature of deconstruction – a single big painting was divided into 12 separate pieces and ended up with modified forms, colours and new painterly qualities.



Comparison in a chronological order (2)

Written and Visual Tools

*“Writing is simultaneously thinking and doing, both observing the world and creating it.”*²

As I write, the text appears on the computer screen, similar to brushstrokes whilst painting. Both text and brushstrokes can be seen as traces of thought forming new realities, traces which one has always to step back from to see the whole and then return to again. By being far, one can see the whole better, but to edit, one has to step closer and possibly lose track again.

What is most intriguing about having to write about one’s work is whether proper research can be done mainly or even entirely without words.³ This is especially evident in a situation where writing is not one’s primary tool and other visual ways of working could be seen as more beneficial and unique to an artist.

The connection with written means in my practice is more linked to using singular words instead of full prose, as previously I have worked with concrete words as starting points for generating new works. I have taken a word as banal as ‘painting’ in the work *Maal* (2014) or ‘object’ in *Object Forum* (2012) and used the image search results that resulted after using different online search engines. In these pieces, I have used the word as a tool to bring together seemingly unrelated images and create galleries that are not linked in terms of content and often stand far apart from each other. In these projects, the visual and textual are interconnected and inseparable.

In my experience, making art starts from the concept for the artwork. It is crucial to know what am I doing and why. This should be also easily put into a written expression. From a linear textual conception I can start to make and experiment with the ways of making. The idea itself is not necessarily something everybody has to know in order to experience the artwork. It will surely extend the artwork but an interest

2 **Hannula**, M.; Suoranta, J., Vadén. T. *Artistic Research -Theories, Methods and Practices*. University of Gothenburg and Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Sweden 2005, pg 40.

3 **Hannula**, M.; Suoranta, J., Vadén. T. *Artistic Research -Theories, Methods and Practices*, pg 119.

towards the displayed should start from the visual experience of the viewer becoming intrigued and wanting to add another dimension to the work. Also, having the concept is very convenient and practical just as a premise to start working on something.

I always try to find methods that can be exploited and used multiple times to make a series of works which could lead to future creations, which potentially could remain unfinished and infinitely extended. Any particular work is just one possible outcome for a concept, which could potentially have many other kinds of artistic techniques or approaches. Instead of ideas, I prefer to explore formulas and algorithms that can be exploited for as long as required or even returned to later on.

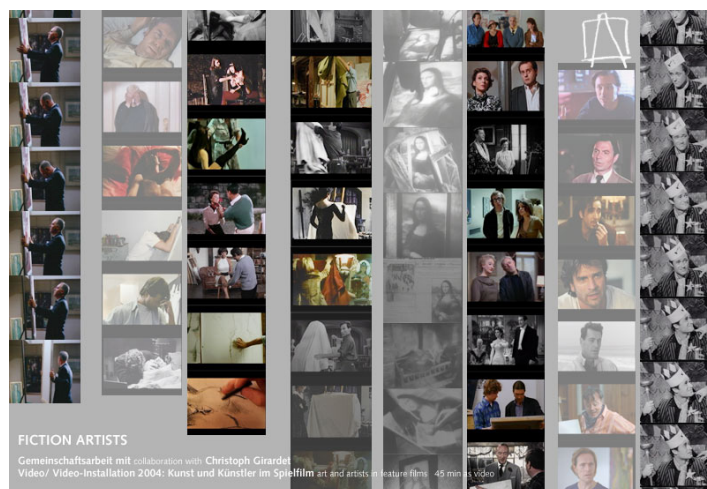
The writer Mika Hannula, in a book directed to Fine Arts master's degree students, has questioned the role of language in art, claiming the textual has started to dominate over the artwork, disturbing even the regular viewer. He cannot see how something that is visually based has started depending on the play of words surrounding it⁴. Hannula arrives at the conclusion that art talk and being able to place oneself in a discourse is connected to the fact that any form of self-expression will always involve a measure of self-protection, and that we ought to be careful how we communicate and with whom⁵. Words can be seen as the protective bubble wrap around the artworks.

Out of ways to conduct visual research, perhaps the best genre to consider is the collage film. Besides American-Swiss Christian Marclay's well known *Clock* (2010), which researches the notion of time, the German video artist duo Müller and Girardet have visually analysed the stereotype of the artist in feature films in their *Fiction Artists* (2004) as well as conducting visual research on the films of Hitchcock. Using previously existing film material, they group it into different sections thematically, which allows the viewer to see the emerging regularities, giving a better understanding of the subject. Müller and Girardet both make collage films, which have a new value of their own as art works, as well as researching the use of visual art tools, shedding new light on our understanding of artists, formats and the process of painting. But is it possible

4 **Hannula**, M. *Everything or Nothing*. Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts, 2005, pg 9.

5 **Hannula**, M. *Everything or Nothing*, pg 15.

also to do something similar in painting? And what could be possibly researched by doing so?



A selection of frames from *Fiction Artists* (3)

The curator and theorist Jonatan Habib Engqvist has said that in painting everyone is working on their own, and in dialogue with an array of utterly different things and that we are not standing on the shoulders of history, as we do not have a common point of departure⁶. This tendency has had an impact on me and provided distance, allowing me to see myself as a part of a wider picture and not get too lost in being a painter *per se*. I believe that the modernist idea of having one's own style or handwriting is obsolete and we have to accept that the ways of working in painting can vary greatly from project to project. This can be seen as a result of the postmodern condition of contemporary culture being inseparable from everything we do. According to Lyotard, the postmodern is an incredulity toward metanarratives which is a result of scientific progress leaving us without one big organic narrative. Lyotard also emphasizes that no self is an island, as each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before². This is what makes Engqvist's idea of any common point of departure an utopia.

1 Rydén, J., Engqvist, J. H., Bength, K., Sandström, S.(edt) Studio Talks: Thinking Through Painting. Stockholm: Arvin's + Orfeus, 2014.

2 Lyotard, J. F. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.

7 [tps://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/lyotard.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/lyotard.htm) (accessed 1 May 2016)

An Image Begins with Stillness (and Ends with Motion)

Even if there is no agreed upon term or common quality available to define painting as such nowadays, there are still certain qualities that separate an image from the rest of the world. The quality that is integral to any painting or image or photograph is stillness. *Tableau vivant* is literally translated as ‘living picture’. There is a counter tension present in the very core of this notion. As soon as there is something alive, there is movement included. This is a paradox - a picture that is denying its own premise of being separate from the world within its own stillness.

To define something as still or moving we require a point of juxtaposition. A tableau vivant has more motion than a still life but less motion than a cinematic moving frame. Using tableau vivants in a narrative film structure interrupts the rest of the film, as the static cuts into the narrative flow. The art historian Steven Jacobs has written that tableau vivant is anti-cinematic in the sense that it prefers stasis over movement⁸. The moment actors try to become a tableau, the film slows down and the image starts. After the staging of the tableau, the film continues, but the filmic and the pictorial can never quite meet.

The Estonian director Martti Helde, in his *In the Crosswind* (2014), undertook something unique which no one properly attempted before — making a whole feature-length film that consists entirely of tableaux vivants; even Wikipedia has given the film a special mention under the page for ‘tableaux vivants’⁹. By doing so, he created a new format of film that sits between the notions of a cinematic and pictorial experience.

In a screening at Kinomaja¹⁰ in Tallinn, the director mentioned that he will never make a film like this again, as making it was such a complicated and extensive process, especially as they did not use any special effects for achieving this stillness, requiring the actors to practice being perfectly still.

⁸ Jacobs, S. *Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, pg 115

⁹ Tableau vivant https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tableau_vivant (accessed 1 May 2016)

¹⁰ Screening at Kinomaja (Müürivahe 50, Tallinn) 24.03.2015

Every time they started a take, Helde would shout “No breathing!”. So the whole process of making this kind of film was fighting against basic human biology in order to maintain a perfectly still image. Stillness is a very specific quality that makes us aware of being presented an image, and that image distances itself immediately from reality, becoming something that is mediated and separated from the rest of the natural world. This method served well for Helde’s film, as it confronted history from the point of view of himself, who never saw the 40s in Soviet Estonia. In order to really place oneself into it, it can be seen as a postmodern experience, which is merely a collage of images. It is a mediated and distanced experience, as even by going into and through the images, they still remain flat, still and inwards.

Yvon Chabrowski, a contemporary artist, has a different approach to playing with this kind of stillness. She says herself that the slowness of the re-enactment and the freezing of the movement in tableau vivants takes something of the inevitability of the plot away – and thus opens a space of possibilities¹¹. So she is not holding on to the inhuman stillness of an image, but instead focusing on the natural human body reactions which come about with the difficulty of maintaining the still position of becoming the image.



A frame from *Afterimage/Protest* (4)

11 Chabrowski, Y. Official web site. <http://www.chabrowski.info/works/afterimage--protest/> (accessed 22 Feb 2016)

In her video piece *Afterimage/Protest* (2013), the casually dressed actors walk into a white studio background and take specific positions of sometimes dramatic looking media images of protests. Then they stay in that position for a minute or more, so that human movement becomes apparent in making some of the positions more ambiguous. Some also develop into more dramatic ones – figures start to tremble, sometimes even reminding of crying or the opposite, becoming comical. Her ambiguous work creates a dichotomy between the movement and image in the sense that the actual rebellion was a real happening, but the only clear conscious movement in the video is of people casually marching in to take their positions from behind the eye of the camera. As for humans it is very hard to maintain a motionless position for a longer time, especially in demanding positions, we see the inevitable clash between the humanly and the pictorial, as the image was taken within less than a second in order to remain sharp. It also becomes an icon of its own, losing the touch with direction or intent of a movement that was actually part of the protest.

Paintings and images have always had a very flattering yet nihilistic quality of not caring if someone sees them or not; they just are out there, not necessarily even trying to engage us. It is only our deliberate wish to engage with them. Tarkovsky has talked about this through the notion of distance, which always stands between the picture and the viewer, something that is always marked out in advance. This creates a certain reverence towards what is depicted, thanks to which it would never occur to anyone to identify a picture with life, in contrast to the cinematic image, which has not got such a distinguished sensation of distance¹².



Two stills from *An American in Paris* (5)

¹² Tarkovsky, A. *Sculpting in time : reflections on the cinema*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2005, pg 178.

In the musical *An American in Paris* (1951), the sets with paintings and drawings in the background serve for entering a different logic-led space, where the narrative stops and the fantastical begins. The static quality of the image allows for the story to be put on hold and for the characters to be examined in a totally different and more abstract way, as normally the pressure of the narrative is omnipresent in film, as our everyday linear way of existing gets transferred into the film. People sitting down in the dark become one with the film only by stopping the linearity of their own lives in order to be in another one. Becoming one with a more still picture, that of a painting, allows one to escape linearity as such and become suspended in the “pool” of the image.

In the film *Desirée*, where the frame used for the *Coronation vol 2* painting comes from, the director has chosen to insert only one of these tableaux vivants, distinguishing it from the rest of the film. The scene of the scandalous coronation of Napoléon adds to the film an epic moment of glory, as the whole big-scale set has been built just to re-enact this painting. In the moment where the crown is placed over Joséphine’s head, just after Napoléon has crowned himself, the film reaches the cathartic moment of becoming the original painting of the coronation by Jacques-Louis David. The rest of the film has no common logic with this set-up, as the writer and director Charles Tashiro has said regarding this exact tableau:

A narrative film can not become a painting without putting the story in pause. As the dynamic forces within the frame come together to find that privileged instant evoking a canvas the actors, camera and decor cease to move to the logic of forward movement and seek rather a point of static fixity. This self-consciousness is the measure of success; the moment of spectacle pushes the viewer outside to savor the image and temporarily forget the narrative to refer to a commodity beyond itself, crowning the story with a public image¹³.

13 Tashiro, C 1996. When History Films (Try To) Become Paintings. *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Spring), University of Texas Press, pg 20.

It is almost as if aside of the actors playing their parts in the film, the whole scene becomes an actor itself, trying to act out the painting; the whole scenery becomes activated as a signifier for something that is not present, but what we could possibly relate to. Suddenly the presence where everything appears to be out there turns into a negative space where everything is actually absent. The missing component is the original, though everything convinces to be it. Jean Baudrillard has said that in art there is a dual strategy: an impulse to annihilate, to erase all traces of the world and reality, and the contrary resistance to this impulse¹⁴. Jacobs sees that tableau vivant translates painting's flatness, its two-dimensionality, into the three-dimensional and by doing so tries to introduce of the real into the image – the living body into painting – thus attempting to collapse the distance between signifier and signified¹⁵. The acted out image seems to be artificial, whilst it actually is just stepping back to the stage where the original painting stems from – a live figural composition.



Ways to re-enact a painting. (6)

Tarkovsky sees no point in re-enacting paintings in this manner, saying that he has never understood attempts to construct a *mise-en-scène* from a painting, as all one will be doing is bringing the painting back to life to be rewarded with superficial acclaim: ‘Ah, what a

¹⁴ **Baudrillard**, J. *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*. New York : Semiotext(e), 2005, pg 108.

¹⁵ **Jacobs**, S. *Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures*, pg 95.

feeling for the period!', 'Ah, what cultivated people!' – at the cost of also killing cinema¹⁶. Beatrice Farwell has also spoken against this idea by noting that the more a film on art succeeds as a film, the less likely it is to increase one's understanding of painting, so that actually it serves the opposite purpose. When a painting is set into motion by means of cinematic devices, the illusion skillfully created by a Rubens or El Greco is lost. Instead of animating a painting, tableaux vivants in cinema petrify or mortify it¹⁷. The basic composition that becomes the most emphasised aspect of a re-enactment can be a very small part of the painting in the sense that there can be two totally different authors for the same setup, just as in art school, many different styled visions are created from the same still life through painting it.

Jean-Luc Godard, with the tableaux vivants in his film *Passion* (1982), intersects living pictures into a film studio background, so that the film is about making a film and switches to living pictures naturally.

Painting represents one singular viewpoint where we see the action from. Godard uses the camera to enter these ready-set paintings from different angles, using also a variation of lighting for some of these (Rembrandt's *Night Watch*). In so doing, the medium of film offers Godard the possibility of getting inside the paintings¹⁸.



Two re-enacted paintings crossing in *Passion* by Godard (7)

16 Tarkovsky, A. *Sculpting in time : reflections on the cinema*, pg 78.

17 Jacobs, S. *Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures*, pg 116.

18 Jacobs, S. *Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures*, pg 111.

Pasolini, in his *La Ricotta*, also approaches the re-enactment of painting just like Godard: the film is about making a film and the paintings are the sets for the fiction within the fictional film. In both works, the self-referential aspect is thus explicit and, strikingly, both films-in-the-film consist mainly of tableaux vivants based on famous paintings¹⁹.

The tool of having these paintings as a post-modern appropriation inside the film makes the scenes with these kinds of settings less cheap and more campily self-aware, as camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a "lamp"; not a woman, but a "woman." To perceive camp in objects and people is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater²⁰.

The scene of the coronation in the film *Desirée* serves no major role in the storyline; it is just a theatrical living picture inserted to the film. Pasolini and Godard have in their films many different shots with tableau vivants, which actually incorporate the implications of using them in the film, rather than exploiting paintings to create historic validity. *Desirée* showcasts only one tableau straight as a scene. The differences between the original painting and the film are mostly caused by the format and studio atmosphere, which takes away the golden colours and majestic spacial experience displaying Notre-Dame de Paris and the ceremony. The scenery embraces the artificiality of the studio atmosphere as it ends up plastic-looking and cropped. In comparison to the original painting, the re-enactment is the cheap pirate version of the original.

Additionally, the shifts between cinema and painting influence the result. What separates film and painting is that the latter is a material practice and that materiality of matter lies at the core of this kind of creative practice. Dance, theatre and fashion, as embodied practices, engage the matter of bodies for example. Film-making in its own turn is an intense relationship between a myriad of human and non-human actors - lights, cameras, editing machines, actors, editors, film-makers and directors, to name just a few of the assemblage²¹. Staging a painting into a film makes the image go

19 **Jacobs**, S. *Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures*, pgs 11-12

20 **Sontag**, S. *Notes on Camp*. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html> (accessed 1 May 2016)

21 **Bolt**, B. & **Barrett**, E. (etd) *Carnal Knowledge. Towards a New Materialism Through the Arts*. London,

through all these processes, by the end of which it will look significantly different.

Walter Benjamin, in his iconic text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, compared a painter to a magician and cameraman to a surgeon, as the first maintains a natural distance from reality but the other penetrates deeply into its web²². Also, the pictures of these two are different ones, the first a total one, and the other a fragmented collage. In Benjamin's opinion, the fact of the film medium going through all these permutations of reality with mechanical equipment results in a reality that is completely free of this equipment. Making pictures come alive by ending their stillness with a re-enactment in a film medium can be seen as an act of liberation, saving pictures from their inhuman captivity of stillness. The *Coronation painting vol 2*, in which a film frame is rendered back as a painting, can be seen as an act of violence, in that sense.

²² **Benjamin**, W. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm> (accessed 5 April 2016)

Poor painting



The snapshot used for the *Coronation painting vol 2* has been taken as an exact constellation of Napoléon's coronation depicted on the painting of David from a pirated version of the film *Desirée*. There was also a copy of a segment from the coronation in YouTube, where I discovered the footage, but it was modified for Italian television, which meant the whole cinematic frame had been cut down to 4:3 resolution and had lost most of its focus, with the colour turning yellow and the image blurring.

The cropped coronation scene from Italian television (8)

Hito Steyerl writes on how the (poor) images lose their quality and exhibition value, which is replaced by cult value in the sense that they are images in motion, open for use and appropriation, during which they will also finally get 'used up' and deteriorate²³. This analogy is known from the natural world where the state of matter is in constant flux. Man-made images stand apart from these systems, but can be seen following similar rules. When a person's eyesight starts to deteriorate, only then does seeing align with the rest of the body, revealing the physicality of what we sense as virtual. Only when the smartphone breaks down and we take it apart does the complex construction of the effortless touch with the virtual world reveals itself from the inside.

Painting can also be seen as a part of this type of deterioration. Even there is a different materiality at stake, the images find their way into paintings by going through many distortions during the process of observing and painting. Afterwards the images can find their way back to the digital landscape via multiple visitors' smartphones continuing the circulation (until getting used up).

23 Steyerl, H. *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012, pgs 32-44

Painter and writer Jan Rydén has said that the painter, while creating an external representation of an internal one, recognises the creation of new affordances, and these external representations help to create one we couldn't come up with by pure thinking²⁴. Paintings help to translate the psychology of an image and person depicted in it, allowing reflection on the ways we see visual data and recognising certain details in it. During the creation of these new affordances, some other details get destroyed and are replaced by new qualities. The interdisciplinary artist Danielle Boutet sees art forms as models of the psyche: forms of thinking, ways of being, forms of experience, and forms of the psyche's life²⁵. An image is always more than a picture; it is a state of encounter²⁶.

One of the reasons why it feels easy to work with low resolution images is that their randomness and trashiness makes them more easily approachable. Walter Benjamin has expressed that some works are more translatable than others, not that it is an essential quality of certain works to be translated, but rather, that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability²⁷. This links to Steyerl's ideas of the poor image as something that has a greater flexibility of usage and Tarkovsky's ideas on a good script, which can never be a perfect piece of literature, but needs to leave space to form together with the visuals.

Steven Jacobs sees that the artistic interest in tableaux vivants has grown recently in both contemporary art and cinema, marking a moment in their history with the return of representation, depiction and use of appropriation without completely removing the self-referential attitude of modernism²⁸. This attitude could be reflected in the need for holistic artistic practices with a logical core or recognisable handwriting present throughout one's artistic career. This is a very deceitful and illogical way to define artists producing images that have nothing to do with the actual contemporary context of a printed image-dominated society. Printers are a commodity everywhere and are known as the easiest machines to reproduce an image visually similar to the virtual one.

24 **Rydén**, J., Engqvist, J. H., Bength, K., Sandström, S.(edt) Studio Talks: Thinking Through Painting, pg 48.

25 **Bolt**, B. & **Barrett**, E. (etd) Carnal Knowledge. Towards a New Materialism Through the Arts, pg 33.

26 **Bourriaud**, N. Relational Aesthetics, pg 18.

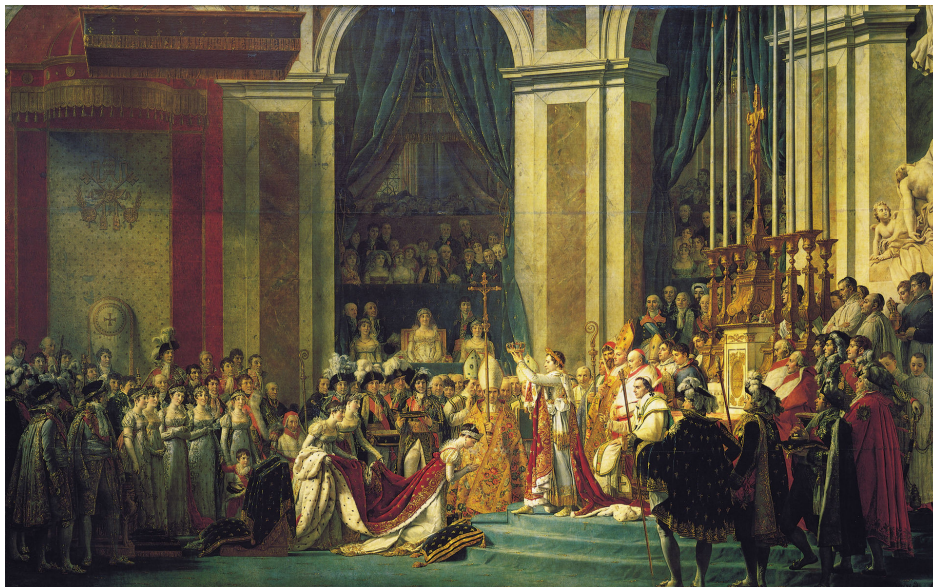
27 **Benjamin**, W. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", pg 254.

28 **Jacobs**, S. Edinburgh Studies in Film : Framing Pictures, pg 94

If we were to define painters in this context they could be seen as imperfect or ‘bad’ printers. The new qualities created can be seen actually as clumsiness or an inability to be better than a neutral Canon PIXMA printer. Rydén has suggested that we conceive of painting not as a medium, but as a production of signs that is perceived as highly personalised²⁹. A painter can never escape their own personalised traces, which does not necessarily have to be seen as a good thing.

4.1 Image

For my master’s project I am re-painting a screenshot from the film *Desirée* (1954), that is in its own turn a re-enactment of Jacques-Louis David’s painting *The Coronation of Napoleon* (1806-07). The Coronation was ordered by the French royal power for the event of 1804, with the painting completed in 1807. The whole painting is a careful construction of who is present and where each person is placed. Seemingly present are also some people who did not actually attend the ceremony, such as the mother of Napoleon Maria Letizia and his brother Joseph. That did not mean that they could not be later added to the painting.



The Coronation of Napoléon by Jacques-Louis David 1806-1807 (9)

29 Rydén, J., Engqvist, J. H., Bength, K., Sandström, S.(edt) Studio Talks: Thinking Through Painting, pg 42

Restaging a painting as a frame of the cinema brings up a myriad of questions on why this is done. The reason to exploit a painting might be to do with validating the historical atmosphere in order to make the film more credible. Living in an era before photography, the tools for documenting the coronation were limited to painting. The difference between painting and photo documentation is that in the first, fiction might fuse with the real. The balance between real and fake becomes blurred and can be flexible to the needs of the people commissioning the painting.



A frame from *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (10)

Tarkovsky, in comparing cinema to painting, sees the main difference as while filmic images can be taken and confused with life and reality, a painting never can be such; its premise is the distance between what is depicted and who is watching it³⁰. In a way, a person would never even assume that a painting is a truthful representation, which might happen with a photographic one. The experimental filmmaker Harun Faroucki's film *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988) attempts to open up the discussion on photos by using as one of its main photographs an image taken from a woman in a Nazi concentration camp. While analysing her gaze, the narrator states that it is the same look she would have walking down a boulevard, though the situation would never allow this kind of reading. It is the cut-off image that allows the film to explore the fleeting immediacy of that particular moment, and opens up new connections the same way Chabrowski's *After Image/Protest* (2013) does by focusing on the artificiality of an out-of-context moment. Jörg Becker warns regarding Faroucki's film that one must be just as wary of pictures as of

30 Tarkovsky, A. *Sculpting in time : reflections on the cinema*, pg 178.

words and need not look for new, as yet unseen images. Rather, he continues, one must work with existing images in such a way that they become new³¹. This is something I intended with *Coronation painting vol 2*. After having touched, through contact, every inch of the image, the whole sensation of the painting changes from an image to an inhabited space. This is the space for new connections and meanings to emerge, from the expressions on people's faces into the space where the painting is placed, and how the people outside watching it and becoming part of the installation by their own narrative lived experience.



Touching the Canvas exhibition view 2015 (11)

The viewer does not necessarily need to know the idea behind the work, but what I am hoping to convey is what Baudrillard calls the aura of simulation, which also exists besides the aura of authenticity³². So even not knowing the idea, one could see the historic background of the 19th century and that these are not real era costumes but fake ones, as the colours are flat and the details minor.

Susan Sontag has said that when something is just bad (rather than camp), it's often because it is too mediocre in its ambition, suggesting that the artist has not tried to create anything really outlandish which could be seen as "too much," "too fantastic" or "not

31 **Farocki**, H. <http://www.vdb.org/titles/images-world-and-inscription-war> (accessed 25 April 2016)

32 **Baudrillard**, J. *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, pg 108.

to be believed'³³. The film *Desirée* represents a wish to create a rich presentation of a gigantic and detailed live painting. Still, one can see that in comparison to the original depicted costumes, the ones presented in the film look like cheap props. I am trying to follow the principle of attempting to make something campily big, which means the image itself rests relatively poor in comparison to the rich and detailed expression of David's original painting.

According to John Berger, in the age of pictorial reproduction the meaning of a painting is no longer attached to it but becomes an information of a sort, and, like all information, it is either put to use or ignored, carrying no special authority within itself³⁴. With the current project, I am also not interested purely in the visual image itself, but more in the transformation aspect when a painting has been incorporated into a scene of a film and from there, rendered back into a painting by the artist, relating to both of the previous sources.

When Yvon Chabrowski restages Istanbul and Cairo protests in *After Image/ Protest*, the connection with centuries-old paintings becomes apparent, as they remind us of those figural compositions of Jacques Louis David, for instance. Irit Rogoff, the founder of the Visual Culture department at Goldsmiths University, has said that in the arena of visual culture, the scrap of image connects with a sequence of film and with the corner of a billboard or the window display of a shop we have passed by, to produce a new narrative formed out of both our experienced journey and our unconscious. Images do not stay within discrete disciplinary fields such as 'documentary film' or 'Renaissance painting', since neither the eye nor the psyche operates along or recognizes such divisions³⁵. An artwork can be experienced even briefly whilst passing by, but it might stay in one's inactive memory, allowing future connections to occur the way one might recognize David's painting restaged in a film frame.

33 **Sontag**, S. Notes on Camp. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html> (accessed 1 May 2016)

34 **Berger**, J. Ways of Seeing. London: Penguin Books, 1977, pg 24

35 **Jewitt**, C.; van Leeuwen, T. Handbook of Visual Analysis. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008, pg 63

4.2 Scale

The format of the painting is as similar as possible to the measures of the original painting (6,21 x 9,79 meters), but due to the different source format, the new painting created is the same width, but the height is proportional to the screenshot image of the film, resulting in a painting of 3,85 x 9,79 meters. By this major cropping, the focus moves from the gothic splendour of Notre-Dame cathedral to the people.

When relating back to the original scale and blowing up the image, one faces a point where information gets lost. The rescaling is led by an interest in placing the image within certain physical borders. The images we come across in the internet and cinema do not have a specific size (besides the given pixels, which can be modified as well); they can vary from theatre to theatre or from smartphone to a wall projection. Blowing up a mediocre quality image allows the gray zone of change to take over, where it becomes more a question of translating or interpreting the information. This is primarily present in the action of projecting images onto canvas and drawing the pencil outlines. Later on, when painting the marked areas, there is a moment of losing track and making a mistake by mistranslating colour fields. Though everything is planned and calculated, each step creates minor shifts which result in bigger failures.

4.3 Sections

The painting consists of 12 pieces in total. Sectioning up the painting creates painterly glitches. Normally the emphasis of the image is focused on the edges, as this is where the image has been cut off from. Within my work the interest falls to the cutting points of the image. The pieces are handled separately, creating tonal differences between different pieces. The images shift and do not match but still form a whole that is far from the technical complexity and preciseness of the painting of David.

4.4 Mutations

During the blowing up and transforming of the projection onto the canvas, similar colour patches unite, forming new kind of blobs. New characters emerge. Many interesting mutations occur during the projection and also in the painting process while trying to match the surfaces and colours. All similar coloured spots form amoeba-like blobs and shapes that actually are not present in the image, but get created in the process of approaching the image and understanding it in order to reproduce it again. So it can be argued that the objects are even more becoming the surface, as these blobs often interconnect different areas of separate forms and people depicted.



A detail from Coronation Painting Vol 2 (12)

With *Coronation painting vol 2*, the original image gets destroyed and transformed as it becomes painting, as the web-downloaded image is blown up to the scale of the original painting. But the paint can also have a different understanding of matter and form that connects directly and are dynamically: matter as material flows and intensities and form is a non-stable “diagram of a process of becoming”³⁶ *Coronation painting vol 2* is a still image but tries to outline the state of becoming with the motion of painting strokes made with sponges.

36 Bolt, B. & Barrett, E. (etd) Carnal Knowledge. Towards a New Materialism Through the Arts, pg 25.

Judith Eisler, an American artist who works with painting VHS defects, has said that for her each canvas is, in many ways, a fight between abstraction and representation³⁷. Her paintings create that by depicting the visual effect of stopping an image on a VHS player. In my painting, the image is visible and recognisable, but looking at it close approaches the notion of an abstract painting.



Judith Eisler Linda Manz (2009) (13)

4.5 Installation

The painting is installed standing like a fake wall for a film set apart from the actual wall. As the painting is ridiculously huge, it becomes a wall of its own. This way of presenting the image tries to engage more than the actual background, flatness and superficiality of the image. The claim is that the image is not something natural in its essence, but is a construction. The classical still lifes are pure constructions, but we do not seem to question them. We are confronted by an image but there is always a back side to an image or to the illusion of having any given image. When a painting is displayed on the wall it is actually a clever way to face people with an image that appears to be natural. Having gotten used to seeing images on the wall, the idea of the back of the painting or more importantly the back of an image gets lost. *Coronation painting vol 2* stands on its own, becoming a physical object observable from both sides. On the backside it reveals its facade and single-orientatedness. The painting is not set up just to be a painting but is set up for something else; it is just the setting in a way taking the pressure of being a painting away from the actual piece.

³⁷ Eisler, J. <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/judith-eisler/print/> (accessed 1 May 2016)

Prologue to the *Coronation painting vol 2*

Maal (2014) was the first project on the way of arriving to the *Coronation painting vol 2* piece, as I extensively worked painting found images. By feeding the word “maal” (a ‘painting’ in Estonian) into Google search engine I was confronted with a wide variety of images, as the word had many meanings in different languages. I painted 78 of them into real paintings on canvas. As an artist I felt not anymore responsible myself for the image content created for the exhibition, as the responsibility shifted over to the search engine. I am interested in what not caring about the content of the image means in the context of art and especially painting, which is often concentrated on original image making. I also did not necessarily have to enjoy the images in order to paint them as I was focusing on the most popular results only. When using an already-existing image, one has the ability only to modify the method of painting, which is nonetheless a very wide realm. The style of the *Maal* paintings was not photorealistic, though the content was recognisable and the style depictive. This kind of style choice was essential to my working as it helped to stress the fact that the work was something more than a painting of a photograph, but an independant new work of its own.

A large part of the motivation was to define a painter in the context where it is easy to produce the images straight away, with full details. Choosing not to print but paint can still be related to printing as I liked to call my engagement with the images “bad printing”. This gave me an opportunity to look at the modernist ways of painting, to the creation of one’s own signature style as not something that is to be celebrated, but as a basic failure of “psychological human printing”. Also the fact that the original content images were not often of good quality made painting them easier, as with another recent project *Afterlife* (2016). I was painting 11 artists’ works from images also found in the Web, including my own, which set me in a completely different situation, where there actually could be a real reaction to the works or complications happening.

With *Touching the Canvas* (2015), I focused on the feature films on artists’ lives, which was a step towards the current project. I took screenshots of the moments the impersonated artists touched their canvases. I was intrigued by the idea that I would be going through the same moment for making the image to appear as an artist, as the role of the actor was to appear painting not actually painting for a purpose. In this project I was for the first time combining different

canvases as an installation (juxtaposing 4 canvases next to each other and having 4 partitions on each canvas). I was thinking about leaving the work in unfinished, with the white spaces which served to unite the frames together in a pattern and give lightness and air to the whole work in order to animate it. That is why on the gallery tour in Tartu (January 2015, Loading) I also decided to continue painting the work as a part of the attempt of looking at a finished work as unfinished. The white spaces were also gone over with large white brushstrokes so one could actually see them. This was a also a tool to animate the painting and point more to the gesture.



Original work on the left by Artor Inkerö and *Afterlife* (2016) on the right (14)

Conclusion



Detail from the transformations (15)

Writing about one's work is necessary to communicate ideas and create a safe space for artistic experimentation and growth. Painting a picture can be seen as an exploration, and with *Coronation painting vol 2* it was an attempt to see how the different inputs and output materials relate to each other, and what kind of communication the original painting, its translation into the film and then painting made from it, will have with each other. With painting it is important to understand the information on the film, in order for new painterly affordances to be created.

An image taken from the web is easy to use because of the poor quality of the image and its lossiness. The painter does not necessarily rectify or improve the image; quite the opposite, as a painter can participate in the process of the inevitable deterioration of the image. As the painter is not a printer, at least not a good one, shifts and mutations are inevitable. Even the digital deterioration of image quality, can be seen as part of larger cultural trends. Painting is an inhabited space of encounter. It is a part of life to be integrated into everyday lives and memory space, where new connections can be linked to it in the future, as even a random package cover in a shop can have a direct connection to a Renaissance painting. With the *Coronation Painting vol 2* I hope to discover ways to research an image by only using visual tools. My project is a painting of 12 separate canvases from a screenshot from the 1954 film *Desirée*, which is a tableau vivant of *The Coronation of Napoléon*, lead me to the investigation of pictorial qualities with an emphasis on stillness. Comparing painting to cinema and seeing the connections between them helped to understand the specific qualities and attributes of each medium as I concentrated on reinterpreting

the literal re-enactments of painting in cinema in the form of living pictures – *tableaux vivants*. Bringing pictures to life can end their stillness and set them free from stasis, which in itself is not a natural quality of life. Living pictures in films stand separate from the world, in a way a printed picture does, but they give us a three-dimensional access to an image, with losing its painterly qualities and just becoming a piece of information.

Estonian Abstract

Kinolinastunud tableau vivant'i maalimine tagasi maaliks

Käesoleva magistritöö praktiline osa on maal Jacques-Louis David'i maali "Napoleoni kroonimine" (1806-1807) taaslavastusest 1954. a filmis "Desirée" (režissöör Henry Koster). Filmi kaudu on maal saanud elavaks pildiks - tableau vivant'iks. Maalin filmist peatatud kaadri tagasi maaliks, mis on David'i originaalmaali mõõtmetes, mõlemad 9,79 m laiad. Teos ei ole sama kõrge kui Davidi originaal, sest filmi ekraaniformaat on piklikum, mistõttu originaalkõrguse 6,21 m asemel on kõrguseks 3,85 m. Davidi maalist minu maalini on originaal läbi teinud palju muutusi. Esiteks sai sellest stseen Kosteri filmis, millest on tehtud väiksemad piraatkoopiad, mis üle maailma internetis ringlevad. Sellise madala kvaliteediga koopia põhjal sai raamistik minu magistritööna valminud maal. Davidi maal on ka läbinud dekonstruktsiooni protsessi: ühe suure maali asemel on magistritööna valminud maal jagatud 12 eraldi osaks, muutunud on vormid, värvid ja maalilised kvaliteedid. Teost eksponeeritakse mitte seinale kinnitatuna, vaid iseseisva konstrueeritud seinana ning maal on vaadeldav mõlemalt poolelt, paljastades pildi lavastuslikkust. Maali ning dokumentaalset fotot eristab peamiselt see, et maalis võib fiktsioon hõlpsasti reaalsusega seguneda. Napoléoni kroonimist ei olnud võimalik fotole talletada, mistõttu oli maal sobivaim suursündmuse jäädvustamiseks. Maalil on kujutatud ka tegelasi, kes tegelikkuses tseremoonial ei osalenud. Pildi paigalseisak võimaldab ka vaadata kujutatud hetke lahusolevalt kontekstist, kus see esineb. Yvonne Chabrowski taaslavastab protestiaktatsioonidest pärinevaid fotosid elavateks piltideks, mille käigus isoleeritakse päriselt aset leidnud tegevused nende välisest kuvandist, luues uusi žeste ja tõlgendusvõimalusi.

Töötades peamiselt piltidega ning kasutades maalikunsti vahendeid, tekib küsimus, kas on võimalik pildi kohta rohkem teada saada kasutades visuaalsele kunstile omaseid mittesõnalisi vahendeid. Kõige edukamana näen visuaalse uurimuse žanris kollaažfilmi, selliste autorite loomingus nagu Christian Marclay või saksa kunstnike duo Müller & Girardet, kes töötavad leitud videomaterjalidega, analüüsides kunstniku kuvandit ja aja mõistet eri filimidest pärineva materjali kõrvutamise kaudu. Tegu on korruga nii kunstiteoste kui ka mitteverbaalsete uurimustega. Kroonimismaali "tagasimaalimisega" originaalforma-

ti osalen, analoogselt internetis levivate piltidega, algsete piltide lagunemisprotsessis. Nii fotode projitseerimisel lõuendile, kui ka õigete värvide segamisel tekkivad eri alade vahel uued ühendused. Kunstniku pildiloome ei ole kunagi neutraalne nagu printeril. Täna printerite poolt domineeritud maailmas võib kunstnikku näha ka “halva printerina”. Magistritööd maalides tekkisid pidevalt vead nii värvide tõlgendamisel kui ka värvilaikude määratlemisel. Pilt muutus järjest pinnalisemaks ning 12 osa, millest maal koosneb, ei sobitunud omavahel enam täpselt kokku. Hito Steyerli sõnul on pildid internetis pidevas ringluses, kaotades järjest kvaliteeti, kuid elades edasi uutes tõlgendusvõimustes. Näen end osana selles ringluses, hoolimata maali teistsugusest materiaalsusest. Samuti võib maal igal hetkel leida läbi nutitelefonide tee tagasi digitaalsesse keskkonda.

Analüüsid peamiselt filme, mis sisaldasid endas elavaid pilte, (tableaux vivante), nagu Jean-Luc Godardi “*Passion*” (1982) ning Pier Paolo Pasolini “*La Ricotta*” (1962), tekkis küsimus just piltidele omasest kvaliteedist, mis eristab neid ülejäänud maailmast. Erinevalt filmist *Desireé* oli mõlemas nimetatud filmis tegu filmi lavastamise kujutamise ja režissöörid tegelesid maalide sissetoomisega teadlikult ja mitmetasandiliselt. *Desireés* on lavastatud vaid üks maal, mis on camp’ilikult pompöösne ning ajaloolised kostüümid näevad välja konstrueerituna. Hetkel, mil Napoléon enda kroonimise järel krooni Joséphine’i pea kohale asetab, luuakse otsene ühendus ajaloolise maaliga. Stseen näitleb maali nagu näitlejad mängivad tegelasi ning ainus, mis tegelikult puudub, on originaal. Tarkovski ei näe maali üks-ühele taaslavastamisel mingit mõtet, kuna just maali maalilisus on see, mis kaob, järgi jääb vaid figuraalne kompositsioon, millel ei ole maalilisusega mingeid seoseid.

Samuti on filmi kulgemises olemas lineaarsus, millesse pildilisuse loogika ei haaku, vaid lõikub. Erandiks on Martti Helde film “*Risttuules*”, mis koosnebki ainult elavatest piltidest. Nende saavutamiseks tuli kasutada aga peaaegu ebainimlikke vahendeid, sest täielik liikumatus (isegi ilma hingamiseta) ei ole elavale inimesele omane. Pildi peamiseks iseloomujooneks on liikumatus ja paigalolek, mis elava pildil puhul on vastuoluline, kuna tegu on elus ja liikuva pildiga, kuid ometi tajume seda ülejäänud maailmast lahusolevana. Omamoodi võibki maalide taaslavastamist filmides käsitleda kui stseenide vabastamist ebainimlikust pildilisusest.

Magistritööna valminud teos on loogiline jätk leitud pildimaterjaliga tegelemisele, seeriates “Maal” (2014), “*Touching the canvas*” (2015) ning “*Afterlife*” (2016). Projektis “Maal” huvitas mind sõna kui tööriista kasutamine, Google’i otsingusse sõna “maal” sisestades sain huvitava kogumi erinevaid fotosid, millest 78 omakorda maalideks maalisin. See oli esimene projekt, kus loobusin täielikult oma pildiloomest ning kasutasin ainult leitud pilte, millele ligipääs oli lihtne just tänu nende anonüümsusele ja madalale kvaliteedile. “*Touching the canvas*” töös kasutasin esimest korda erinevaid lõuendeid ühe maali loomiseks. Neljal lõuendil oli igaühel neli kaadrit kunstnikke kujutavatest mängufilmidest, kus kunstnikku kehastav näitleja puudutab lõuendit, mida ise omakorda elava kunstnikuna maalideks maalisin. “*Afterlife*” sisaldas endas 11 erineva kunstniku varasemate tööde maalimist. Lähenesin kunstnikele nõ “kaarega”, läbi interneti nende töid otsides, kuid ometi teades, et need on minu kõrvalseisvakunstnikuomad. See andis mulle erakordse sissevaate eri kunstnikelähenemisnurkadesse ning erinevalt teosest “Maal”, oli võimalik sellele saada ka kunstnike vahetuid reaktsioone.

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List of Images

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3. A selection of frames from *Fiction Artists* by Müller and Girardet <http://www.volker-schreiner.de/FA/FictionArtists.html> (accessed 2 May 2016)
4. A frame from *Afterimage/Protest* by Yvon Chabrowski <http://www.chabrowski.info/works/afterimage--protest/> (accessed 1 May 2016)
5. Two stills from *An American in Paris* (1951), directed by Vincente Minelli
6. Ways to re-enact a painting. Found from the Internet: http://www.partyfiesta.com/es/tienda-online/carnaval/terror/1671_176384_disfraz-cuadro-el-grito-adulto (accessed 5 May 2016) and <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/569846159074179521/> (accessed 5 May 2016)
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Documentation



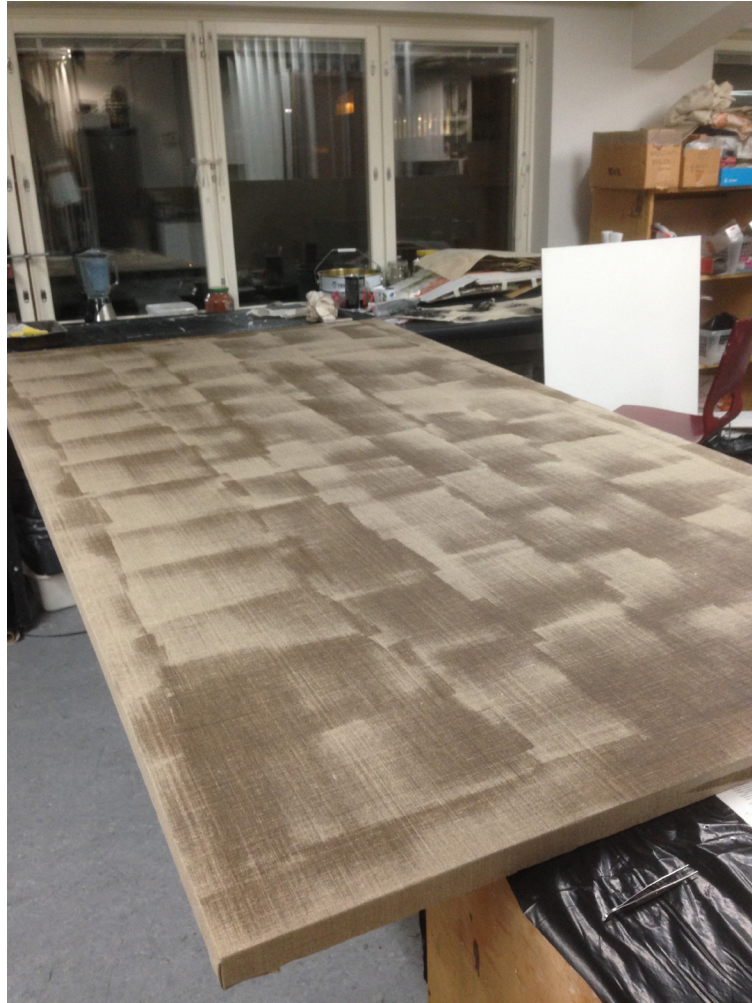
Making frames at the Sculpture Department of the Finnish Academy of Arts.
Learning how to use the wood cutting machines.



Frames ready, yet without the support crosses in the painter's project space at the Finnish Academy of Arts.



The joys of not having to stretch the linen canvas as it gets tight just by using the gelatine glue on it. The left canvas has been primed, the right one is not primed yet. To put on the canvas just gently attach it to the back without pulling the linen too hard, so that the frame under it would not start to move. Feel the natural bend of the fabric, leaving in the curve on the side panel of the wood, whilst the canvas touching the upper and lower edge of the frame.



In the material studies class at the Finnish Academy of Arts working with Malla Tallgren. This canvas has the first layer of gelatine on it. 28 g of gelatine dissolved into 1 liter of water (at 60 degrees) applied at a temperature of 40 degrees with a wide brush. First applying the central part, then the edges in order not to get any glue on the wood. The brush is kept at a close angle to the canvas, trying not to rub it into the linen as this layer is just to protect the fabric from the second layer of gelatine. It is important to be careful of making no double layer at the meeting point of brush strokes or letting the gelatine run down excessively from the brush.



Adding the second layer with 35-30 degrees. Due to the temperature, the gelatine is less runny and can be applied as a thicker coat. The excess will be scraped off with a round edged spatula once the gelatine cools down a little on the canvas. Malla Tallgren emphasizes that every linen is different and needs different temperature gelatine coating. The final result should be received with these two coats, as having a third layer might make the gelatine more unstable.



Projecting the images onto canvas and drawing the outlines with pencil.



Trying out different tools for the painting. Most of the sponges turned out to be too fragile as they were damaged by the uneven surface of the painting. Finally the small beige oval sponges turned out to be the most resistant, which I used for the whole painting.



Painting sponges



Working in my studio. Using the computer screen to match a colour with a correct area.



Working in the studio vol 2.



The only place where the painting fits in its full size, is the project room floor of the painting department. These canvases are at different stages of priming.



The English seminar with James Prevett, which is an hour long class, where the artist is not allowed to speak about their own work, but all the students speak about the work instead. This was a great way to see what the image does without knowing the background story and helped me to start writing the thesis.

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Education

2013 — MA of Fine Art (painting), Estonian Academy of Arts.

2015 — Painting, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. (exchange studies)

2009–2013 BA of Fine Art (painting), Estonian Academy of Arts.

2011–2012 Fine Art (4D), Central Saint Martins, London. (exchange studies)

Solo exhibitions

2015 Acting Painting at the French Institute of Estonia, Tallinn

2014 Maal at Draakon Gallery, Tallinn.

2011 17 Moments of Spring at MÄRZ project space, Tallinn.

2009 Private Beauty with Lylian Meister at HOP gallery, Tallinn.

Group exhibitions

2016 RE:VIEW – 2 projects on appropriation and archive in the Exhibition

Laboratory, Helsinki. Curators Annika von Hauswolff, Harri Monni.

- 2015 96 days, 2312 hours, 138720 minutes, 8323200 seconds in the Free Art Space, Helsinki.
- 2015 REVIEW. Towards Gender Parity: Quality and Fairness in the Art Market at Võru City Gallery
- 2015 Annual exhibition of Estonian painters “Maal kui vaal” at Vaal Gallery, Tallinn
- 2015 Lack of Art at Kanuti Gild, Tallinn. Curator: Hanna Parman
- 2015 Pussy Envy at Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn.
Curators: Anna-Stina Treumund & Stacey May Koosel
- 2015 Copies at Tallinn City Gallery.
- 2014 Books! at Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn. Curator Kaspar Tamsalu.
- 2014 The Hypnotist Collector at NAUart Gallery, Barcelona. Curators: Stacey May Koosel and Marisa Gomez
- 2013 “M“, Annual Exhibition of the Painters Union of Estonia at Vaal Gallery, Tallinn.
Curator Kristring.
- 2013 With. Without at Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn. Curator Vano Allsalu.
- 2013 MUUTTUUM at Pärnu Art Gallery and Draakon Gallery, Tallinn. Curator Vano Allsalu.
- 2012 Art of Collecting, International Tallinn Applied Art Triennial. A collaboration with Lylian Meister. Curator Love Jönsson.
- 2012 Object Forum at the Wellcome Collection, London. A group show with students from Central Saint Martins. Curator Rebecca Amy Stanton.
- 2012 Rubbings at Central Saint Martins, London. A group show with Fine Art students.
- 2011 Rewind-Play-Forward, Kaunas Textile Biennial, Lithuania. A collaboration with Lylian Meister.

2010 Contradictions, Estonian Artist Union annual exhibition at Tallinn Art Hall. Curator Enn Põldroos.

Prizes

2012 Art of Collecting Triennial, Kaido Ehasoo prize.

Publications

Art of Collecting Triennial, curator Love Jönsson 2012, Tallinn.

Contradictions, curated by Enn Põldroos in the Tallinn Art Hall 2010 .

Study trips

Liverpool Art Biennial 2014.

Working Experience

2011-2012 Volunteer at the Chisenhale Gallery, London

2011-2012 Artist assistant to Matthew Noel-Tod, London.

2010 Artist assistant to John Higgins in Polymer Art Container Residency, Tallinn.

Workshops

2014 Lucy Harrison KUNO workshop Hidden Echos.

2012 Workshop / performance lead by NOT NOW I AM BUSY collective in Polymer Art Container.

2010 Tallinn/London +-2, Tallinn and London, led by Eve Kask.

Katarina Meister - Painting a Cinematic Tableau Vivant

May 2016

Advisor's Review

In 2013 I first met Katarina Meister as a student in my History of Media and Popular Culture course at the Estonian Academy of Arts. In the past three years, I have watched Katarina follow a steady and promising path of artistic and professional growth.

Katarina's 2014 solo show, *Maal* at Draakon Gallery consisted of 78 small paintings depicting Internet search engine results for the word 'maal'. Her research follows similar lines of inquiry used in media and visual culture studies, particularly how the media affects our perception and creates symbolic meaning. In 2014 I invited Katarina to participate in *The Hypnotist Collector* (2014), an exhibition in Barcelona, Spain with works by Eva Sepping, Jaanus Samma, Erki Kasemets, Marge Monko, Kristina Norman, Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet. The artworks explored the hypnotic effect of media, and dimensions of propaganda. Having collaborated with Katarina twice as a curator, I know she is a pleasure to work with and a consummate professional.

Katarina's background in filmmaking and video art has given her a different perspective as a painter. She takes a semiotic approach to analyzing media images and interprets them through a variety of lenses, adding great depth and dimension to her work.

The concept behind *Coronation Painting Vol 2.* was in its very first incarnation a carefully choreographed scene based on ancient Roman ritual - the coronation of Napoleon as Emperor in 1804. An elaborate and symbolic show of pomp and circumstance, that resulted in Napoleon crowning himself. The scene was later documented in Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Coronation of Napoléon* completed in 1808. The painting already differed from the original scene as people who were not present (such as Napoleon's mother and brother) could be added. In 1954, Marlon Brando starred as Napoleon in Henry

Katarina Meister - Painting a Cinematic Tableau Vivant

Koster's 1954 film *Desirée*. The coronation scene in the motion picture was faithful to the Jacques-Louis David's painting, morphing into a tableau vivant. The scene from *Desirée* was captured again as a digital screenshot, and its poor quality image was reproduced once more in Meister's painting *Coronation Painting Vol 2*.

Meister boldly takes on the paradoxes of converting three dimensional space into the two dimensional plane of paintings, the moving image into the still image. This visually interpretive system of data transfer loses information and detail with every reproduced copy that is made, resulting with a deteriorated, lossy image. Meister references Baudrillard's 'aura of simulation' as the immediate goal of the painting is to show the information lost in translation. She describes how the camp qualities of the image were transmuted by each successive copy, losing its ability to overwhelm with the cheap props and costume jewelry used in cinematic historical reproductions.

It has been an honour to work with Katarina on her Master's Thesis 'Painting a Cinematic Tableau Vivant'. Katarina's thesis is a creative and theoretical investigation into the reproduction of images through a variety of mediums and filters. *Coronation Painting Vol 2* is an ambitious project physically and conceptually, the mere scale of the 12 paintings (3.85 x 9.79 meters) turn the work into a intimidating installation piece, the large scale adding to the distortion and reinterpretation of the scene from *Desirée*. I look forward to seeing how Katarina applies these artistic and theoretical investigations into her future work as an artist and a scholar.

Date: 8.05.2016

Name/Signature:

Stacey Koosel

