

Marko Mäetamm and Jonathan Watkins, emailing
in preparation to the exhibition

July 6 – August 4, 2017

Jonathan Watkins: Marko, hi. It's been a while. How are you?

Marko Mäetamm: Thanks for asking really, I am fine, although it has been a super busy spring-summer so far, I have never had so many different things coming in a row with only one-two days in between. But I feel I really good. I have a good feeling about how things are at the moment. I have had some struggles lately with how to move on with my art and stuff. I was dealing with mainly domestic issues and family stories for some years and had a large show in Estonian Art Museum 2015 where I draw all these things together. And after that I wasn't very sure about it anymore. I felt kind of lost. Now I feel I am more connected with things again, the world has entered into a new era and it really speaks me and I feel like I need to speak back.

Jonathan Watkins: The title of your exhibition at *kim?*, I'M ONLY STREAMING, is neatly pertinent...

Marko Mäetamm: [A lot of the] material in the show is very much like just scrolling news stream in computer smart phone. Not putting values, not thinking if I like it or not, just streaming. This is how I feel it is these days - we are actually drowning in this constant and never ending flow of information, we don't take time to analyse, we just read titles and think ok, this is interesting, I will come back to it later. But we never do because there are new titles, new news, new facts. We also don't know what is fake and what is true and probably we don't even care. It is like looking at some pattern, rich in different details and colours. And I think we are only learning to read this pattern at the moment. We learn to distill important information out of this constant stream. Streaming is probably the new reading.

Jonathan Watkins: In this vein, the reflexivity and fluidity of your work is very appealing...

Marko Mäetamm: ... I don't know if I am even looking particularly for some links between my works. In the other hand I think there are actually links between everything we do, the author is the link. We all see things differently and I would rather trust the viewer to find his/her own connections and links. In the other hand again - talking more precisely about this show there are works which are more about domestic issues, family stories, and also works which are more about things that are happening in society around us. These things are equally important for me to talk about and to share with other people.

Jonathan Watkins: It's a wild world these days, isn't it? I like the idea of you speaking back to it with an absurdist sense of humour... Is there anything else we can do, something to make the world a better place? My wife is having a baby in the new year - it's true! - and so this question is occurring to me a lot these days. Or are we condemned simply to watch the world get wilder?

Marko Mäetamm: This question resonates with me and brings me back to the time when I had my first child with my first wife back in the end of the 80s. I was still a student of first year in art university then. I remember thinking, or actually not even thinking but sensing or having a strange feeling that this generation will see some cataclysms or fatal things and may not have their normal length of life even because something is going to happen. I remember telling this to my sister and she said she has had similar thoughts. It was completely out of the blue, I don't remember any particular reason to feel that way but this is how it was.

Today the world feels way more on the edge of the cliff then back then. And to be honest I don't believe one person can do something to fix it. Because I don't think it is even broken or needs to be fixed. I

believe we need to accommodate it somehow, we need to accommodate ourselves in this constantly changing situation. This is like living in a house that is in constant change. Today the kitchen is in ground floor, tomorrow in is the basement, then it is on the second floor. The door we came in last night is now where yesterday we had a widow etc. If you can not acclimatise with it you will die out because you can't find refrigerator in the morning. And to acclimatise you need to observe and accept it. And as an artist I believe I can help people to acclimatise. And of course making art helps acclimatise myself and probably this is why I am doing what I am doing.

Jonathan Watkins: It is interesting to think that we might need to evolve into more quickly evolving creatures. Darwinism, to the second degree ... our child could be a transformer! Alternatively, in the face of a too-quickly-coming extinction of the human race, as Stephen Hawking suggests, perhaps some super-smart ones could make spaceships to zoom away from the mess we've made here on Earth, towards paradise on some other planet. Hopefully, without suicide bombers on board. Speaking of which, do you have a theory about such self-destructive behavior?

Marko Mäetamm: I am over fifty and comparing my parents my children are already almost like transformers, I think. How they handle all electronic equipment and use internet, how much they know about everything. And some people already have chips under their skin. Our cat also has a chip! So...! Self destruction is an interesting thing. I think of it sometimes because I can see it a lot in people's behavior. I can see it in myself a lot, too. There must be some function for it I think, otherwise it would degenerate.

So much music and art and literature, I also believe science is made by very self destructive people. Pushing your limits to the red line and even beyond. Maybe this is the only way to achieve something really remarkable in life - to be able to be self destructive towards yourself. And sometimes it slips out of control. Probably this is very human behavior, although it sounds completely in the opposite. There is definitely a strong connection with desperate need to achieve something big, consciously or unconsciously.

Jonathan Watkins: There is a theory - Freudian possibly - that as we were unable to witness our own births, we are subconsciously driven to be spectators of our own deaths. As if to compensate ... On another note, today I got the plans for the installation of your *Just Checking* video. i.e. with the narrow winding black corridor that leads to scrolling SMS texts. Such a labyrinthine journey reminds me of the agonizing that often precedes a short text. It's not easy to be easygoing. A light spontaneous thought can be so difficult and contrived. You won't believe how long it took me to write that last sentence!

Marko Mäetamm: Well, easy going is the hardest thing.. Especially if you are not easy going.. I never felt myself easy going and I have always envied people who in my opinion are. Same thing with me - people often think I am very easy going guy who sits in his studio and makes, tongue in cheek, funny works. This is exactly what people have told me about how they think of me. That shows how different it is how we see ourselves and how other people see us. And I believe that we all think that everybody else has much better life, much less problems etc. This is pretty human.

In art I have also preferred possible simple solutions. Rather low tech than high tech. Rather primitive than highly sophisticated. Rather emotions than thinking. Somebody said to me recently that there is so much animal/animalistic (I don't know the right word) in my art - all that shit and blood and patterns of basic human emotions and behavior). I had never thought of it but this is probably exactly how it is. I always prefer real life experience to theory and I want to offer the viewer something that is possibly close to my lived experience, my feelings which are often very basic and primitive.

Summer, especially if it is that short as it is in our region here in The Baltics is tricky indeed. People totally switch to some different mode from the end of June to half August. Kind of a dead time when it is so hard to concentrate and be busy. It is all in the air, and you just get that weird message - holiday-holiday-holiday (sounds like Mayday) with your antennas. Although I must admit I have learnt to ignore it. If I really have some deadlines then I do what I need to do of course, I am a reasonable man.

Jonathan Watkins: 'Holiday, Mayday'. This could be the chant of a suicide bomber ... or, more benignly, the Protestant spoilsport in all of us. My last question: do you think sometimes that art is too much like religion?

Marko Mäetamm: Art is too much like religion...? To be more clear - for me religion and belief which are often put together are not totally the same thing. Belief for me is something that comes from deep inside and I could also call it "need". Religion is a form or a structure to make this inner belief or need visible. It's like casting it to some particular shape. Like a sculpture is the final solid shape of the original idea.

So if to think of this question again - if art can be a religion then yes - absolutely. And for many people. Art world is like a cult - certain written and even more often unwritten rules how to behave, how to act, how to dress even (in black!!!). How to communicate, write e-mails etc etc. Most of the rules doesn't seem to have any logic or even sense but they become very meaningful when you happen to misunderstand or ignore them - then you immediately see the consequences. Also strong hierarchies in every possible level - between institutions, between people.

There are lots of people in this art world who have nothing to do with any inner belief or need but they are very good at operating in this great Kafkaesque structure and use it for their own good. And there are people who have both - a great inner belief or need plus skills how to operate in the structure for their own good. And there are also people who have very strong inner belief or need but they don't literally give a shit about all these rules, hierarchies and so on.

So to put it short I think there are lots of people to whom art is always like religion. And lots of people for whom it isn't. But maybe I didn't answer to your question at all ...?

Jonathan Watkins: [No, it's] perfect. I'll edit (very slightly) and send, cc'ing you. A thousand thanks.