

Emma Sarpaniemi

May 9–June 1, 2025

**Emma Sarpaniemi** presents a selection of previously unseen photographic self-portraits in her first solo exhibition at Helsinki Contemporary, *Snake Lifter*.

Through the medium of photography, Sarpaniemi transforms herself into multiple characters while remaining unabashedly herself. She describes her photographs as a springboard for the viewer's imagination. It is rewarding to analyse her photographs not only as constructed images, but also as performance documents: what matters most is the experience they convey. For Sarpaniemi, the camera is a tool for processing emotions, contemplating the world, and defying norms. The experience of womanhood is a recurring theme that runs throughout her oeuvre.

Colour often has focal emphasis when Sarpaniemi composes an image. When creating a self-portrait, she considers how the colours will 'dance' together, which shades are pleasing to look at, and how colour interactions can be employed to create tension and evoke emotion. Primary and complementary colours are her enduring favourites. The colours in *Snake Lifter* mark a mood shift in her oeuvre: moving beyond bright primaries, her palette now also accommodates browns and earthy tones. Ephemeral moments, the constructed nature of her characters, and the expression of emotion are foregrounded in her latest photographs.

Sarpaniemi constructs her characters not only through colours, but also through objects and shapes. Buildings, objects and costumes are evocatively interwoven, blurring the line between the imaginary and the real. Landscapes, domestic interiors and settings such as a children's playground serve as backdrops for her self-portraiture. A shy-looking clown seated on a slide echoes the garish colours of the monkey bars, while the polka dots on a hobby horse spread across the rider's legs and face. The artist's worlds expand beyond the image itself, invading the frames and passe-partouts.

Creating art is an ever-evolving process for Sarpaniemi. Just as a snake sheds its skin every few months, Sarpaniemi creates a new 'skin' for herself with each new character, emotion and gaze that she captures with her camera. Each self-portrait is part of herself in some way, and photography is a process of constant self-invention.

*With thanks to Kone Foundation for funding the artist's work and to the Arts Promotion Centre Finland for supporting the exhibition.*

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