

DAMIEN & THE LOVE GURU

Melanie Kitti
Reverse Cry

30 August – 31 October 2025

Titled *Reverse Cry 1–7*, Melanie Kitti's new frescoes are not quite sculptures and not quite paintings. The series is made with a technique similar to the so-called lime paintings (*kalkmålningar*) of medieval churches found in Småland and Skåne, where the artist grew up and now lives, and in Denmark, where she first began working with the method – lands rich in limestone. Like the church paintings, Kitti's works present a muted, earthy palette. They are materialised through a variety of substances both unstable and permanent: slaked lime putty paste, washed river sand, pigments, plaster, and hessian.

Accreted in layers over time, Kitti constructs these sculptural paintings by combining lime putty with sand and applying the mixture to a base, then adding pigments mixed with limewater to chemically bind the colours to the wet lime. She works within the limited time window before the mixture sets, carving and scraping the surface to reveal previous layers and textures. When the carbonation process sets in, the works are once again turned into stone. This ritualistic cycle of addition and subtraction, where stone is transmuted into a liquid before being worked over, treated, and left to become stone again, appears as much an uncovering as a making.

The notion of unearthing something past and forgotten, yet significant, is reinforced by a recurrent motif across the series: dinosaurs. Freud likened the work of psychoanalysis to that of the archaeologist, as both are involved in excavation. Here, as many artists do, Kitti in a sense takes on both of these roles. Still, there is a difference between dusting off and reconstructing inert ruins and artefacts, and reviving ancient creatures that were once alive and, according to popular belief, terrifying. Robert Smithson, an artist obsessed with dinosaurs, once reminded us that the etymology of "dinosaur" derives from the Greek words *deinos* (terrible) and *sauros* (lizard).

There is a distinctive attention given to these so-called terrible lizards in Kitti's works. Her close-ups suggest intimacy: the single foot of a Brachiosaurus, the dinosaur made iconic through the *Jurassic Park* franchise; the skeleton of a Stegosaurus, one of the most misunderstood dinosaurs, long believed, falsely, to be among the least intelligent of its kind. A crocodile, a solitary, robust survivor of the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous, melts into the little legs of the artist's daughter. Monstrous yet tender hybrids. A continuity is suggested. The Marian icons and flower decorations of the Scandinavian church paintings have here been replaced by what may stand in for the beasts of our pasts, both personal and collective. And the beasts seem not only to have been accepted, but perhaps even made mundane.

In other words, Kitti's hybrids establish a lineage stretching from contemporary, historical time back to prehistory. "Jag bodde i en tidigare tid," Kitti writes in one of her poems accompanying the exhibition ("I lived in another time," with *bodde* also implying dwelling, inhabiting a time). In another of Kitti's poems, we can read, in all

caps: “JAG VILL INTE INNEHÅLLA ROPET SOM JAG ALDRIG ROPADE”, which in translation sounds something like: *I do not want to contain the call I never called*. Is this call something externally imposed, and to be rejected? Or does the sentence express an intention not to hold back any calls, however much one is silenced?

Working across material processes and the written word, Kitti explores vulnerability, memory, and the trauma of inheritance. Her frescoes and poems seem to aspire to reach into an expanded historical unconscious, carrying, in the words of Canadian poet Lisa Robertson, “the breath of multiple temporalities into the present, not to protect or to sanctify the edifice of tradition, but to vulnerably figure historicity as an embodied stance, an address.” For Robertson, this is “the poem’s most important gift to politics.”

The exhibition *Reverse Cry* may point to a future that is also the past, returned in another form. Perhaps it invites us to reconsider inheritances forced upon us, and to redeem those once rejected or buried, allowing them to resurface and be seen anew, without judgement.

— Marie-Alix Isdahl