

Artist interview:  
Rauha Mäkilä

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**Jaakko Uoti:** Your paintings have been described as snapshots of fleeting moments and everyday situations. Could you tell us about the process behind your paintings—do you use photographs or other visual notes as aids, for example?

**Rauha Mäkilä:** Painting is a way for me to structure the world, and at the same time, my paintings act as a mirror to reality. However, I can't always be sure where everything begins and ends. I am interested in everyday life, days that follow one another, days when perhaps big events happen, completely unbeknownst to us. In the best case, we understand what happened only afterwards, in hindsight. The same seems to apply to the process of creating and completing paintings.

My phone is full of visual notes, and my studio is stacked with photographs. From there, I can pick the ones that best suit the current situation and incorporate them into the process.

**JU:** You often depict loved ones—family members, friends, pets—and everyday situations in your paintings. People usually take center stage in your work. How do you select subjects from different situations and characters, and how do these elements ultimately come together as a work of art?

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**RM:** My daughter has often been a model for me, and she sometimes says in mundane or amusing situations that I should take a picture of her at that moment and use it as the starting point for my painting. This has given me confidence that we are, so to speak, playing the same game and that she is okay with me using her as a model.

I see people as beautiful and unique, but when I paint, I don't always achieve the result I hope for. I am often surprised when a work is finished, because it may be completely different from what I had planned. I have not decided whether I consider this surprise element to be a positive or a negative, but perhaps exactly because of all this I often return to studying people in my paintings.

I remember reading an interview with Swedish artist Mamma Andersson, in which she mentioned that her painting process always contains traces of her previous works, like the annual rings of trees. With each new growth ring, you carry all the previous ones with you. I find this idea fascinating, and I'm sure it applies to many visual artists.

**JU:** It's interesting to hear how creating these “picturesque moments” has become a kind of game between you and your daughter. In general, what are your thoughts on the relationship between an artist and a model? How does painting your own daughter differ from painting someone you've "found" in an old photograph, for example?

**RM:** The human figure provides an accessible and relatable starting point for reflecting on many things, and it is an excellent narrative tool. When I work, I don't really think about my relationship with the model; I find it more of a hindrance and a limitation, because I'm not directly painting a portrait, at least not for this exhibition.

**JU:** Your works are particularly painterly—they emphasize brushwork, color and color combinations, and the construction of a composition. What does painting mean to you at this point in time?

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**RM:** In this day and age, where images are consumed quickly and in digital form, painting is a space where I can linger. It is slow, manual work that emphasizes the human factor, mistakes, layering, which, all in all, I think is only positive. Painting serves as an excellent counterbalance to a world filled with perfect images. I would like painting to function partly like a book: a book has the ability to transport us elsewhere and change the way we see the world.

**JU:** I was struck by the different clothes worn by the people in your paintings: for example, the gymnastics outfits in the *Kauniainen* painting, the costumes in *Halloween 2024*, the elegant coats worn by some of the women in your works.. Are you interested in clothes as a subject?

**RM:** I don't think it's worth trying to interpret a painting or search for meanings by reading the image. I always find it more interesting to see how the brush has moved across the canvas and how the different parts of the work have been constructed using colors or shapes. With a bit of luck, the choice of colors and the shapes of the clothes may tie the work to the present moment and, on some level, reflect the spirit of the times.

**JU:** Colors play an important role in your work, and this is also reflected in the world of your paintings. Could you tell us about the significance of color where certain colors come from, what meanings they carry?

**RM:** Color is the material and starting point in my work. I may consciously or unconsciously gather certain colors around me, go through them in my mind, and consider which ones would work together, supporting each other.

When painting, I also think about how I can get the colors to meet at the right angle inside the image, bringing out the best in each other. Excessive harmony is, of course, boring, and changes in rhythm, small cracks, and so-called “wrong” color choices are important for the whole.

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**JU:** Your new exhibition features several vertical works. Some of the paintings are very tall and narrow. How did you end up using this type of canvas?

**RM:** It all started with a lack of money, which led me to make painting bases from leftover wedges in my studio; I simply tried to see which ones could fit together and if had a matching support grid. I then became attracted to this tall and narrow shape, and as my financial situation improved, I ordered more canvases of this type.

**JU:** Your new paintings also feature statues that are interestingly parallel to the people in the paintings. How did statues and sculptures come to be in your paintings?

**RM:** I found a box of old photographs at our family cottage. Many of the pictures were from my grandparents' travels, and often they featured people standing or posing in front of a fountain, a statue, or a sculpture. The pictures stuck in my mind, and I was left wondering how we choose the moments that are worth immortalizing, and what kind of memories we want to leave behind — what certain photographs or objects in our homes say about us.

I have had a photo of Mamma Andersson's work *Floden* saved on my phone for a long time. I took the photo at the exhibition *Runtom Hill* in the Malmö Art Museum in Sweden. The painting has fascinated me for a long time, and I've tried to figure out what it was that appealed to me: was it the sculptural language of the painting, the colors, or all these things together? In the end, I couldn't figure it out, so I decided to try to incorporate the sculpture, or in my case, the shape of a garden statue, into a painting, referencing it while still respecting Mamma Andersson's painting.

**JU:** In addition to statues, your works also feature “metapaintings”: paintings within paintings. What interests you about this theme?

**RM:** How we relate to viewing, what we view, and why. What we consider important, what we value, and why. And at the same time, these metapaintings serve as a reminder that what we are looking at is always a constructed image, not reality.

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