



ESTONIAN CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY ART



La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Estonian Pavilion announces details of *The House of Leaking Sky* by Merike Estna at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia



Merike Estna, photo by Marta Vaarik

Location: [Patronato Salesiano Leone XIII](#)

Artist: Merike Estna

Curator: Natalia Sielewicz

Commissioner: Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA)

Dates: 9 May to 22 November 2026

The Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art presents *The House of Leaking Sky*, a new exhibition by Merike Estna, curated by Natalia Sielewicz, for the Estonian Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Throughout the Biennale, Estna paints in public view, transforming the act of painting into an ongoing performance.

Merike Estna is an internationally recognised Estonian artist whose practice centres on painting, often extending it into space, objects and performance. She approaches painting as a live, durational act, foregrounding time, labour and the ongoing process of making.

In *The House of Leaking Sky*, Estna begins with a blank canvas installed in the pavilion, activated by an initial gesture in which she pours paint directly onto the floor. She continues painting daily in public view,

with the surface gradually saturated with colour, gesture and form through repeated acts of work and presence. As she works, Estna wears garments developed specifically for the project in collaboration with fashion designer Lilli Jahilo, drawing on historical dress and conceived as part of the performance. By the close of the exhibition, the paintings will come together to form a single expansive work across twenty-two canvases.

By inviting audiences into the unfolding of the work itself, Estna unsettles entrenched divisions about where art, and by extension where women, are permitted to exist. Painting slowly and in public view foregrounds the visibility of the painter, placing her practice in dialogue with longer histories of women artists whose work was often shaped by domestic labour and family life. The project calls to mind the figure of the *pittore senza opera*, the painter without recognised works, a condition most often embodied by women whose practices were absorbed into patriarchal studios or excluded from official histories. Figures such as Marietta Robusti Tintoretta, whose paintings circulated within her father's workshop without independent attribution, and Lavinia Fontana, who sustained a professional painting practice while supporting her household, form part of this lineage. *The House of Leaking Sky* brings these histories into the present.

As the artwork develops, the pavilion is shaped around Estna's working process. The exhibition architecture, designed by research-based studio D_P_S, founded by Diogo Passarinho, has been developed in close dialogue with both the building and Estna's evolving painting. A bespoke construction system allows the work, composed of multiple canvases, to be gradually assembled across the church walls as it grows, enabling the painting to expand vertically and laterally in response to the proportions, surfaces and material conditions of the historic space. Once complete, the work is expected to be one of the largest paintings created during the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, measuring approximately twenty-two by six metres.

The exhibition extends beyond the canvases onto the floor of the pavilion, which is covered with ceramic tiles painted by the artist, while everyday studio objects such as ladders, platforms, tables and painting tools remain present and in use. These elements are not staged but form part of the conditions under which the work is made. In this way, the boundary between public and private, studio and home begins to loosen, and painting unfolds across surfaces, objects and gestures, becoming part of the rhythms of daily life rather than a separate, finished display.

Living in Venice with her family throughout the Biennale, Estna brings motherhood into the conceptual structure of the project, drawing on myths of creation in which world making unfolds through care, repetition and maintenance. Here, creation emerges slowly through everyday gestures such as gathering, tending and sustaining, where waiting is not passive but charged, and continuity is produced through endurance. In this way, Estna weaves together meditations on motherhood with the lineages of women artists who carved paths towards artistic self-determination.

Merike Estna says, *"For a long time, I have been fascinated by the question of how painting could be more a part of life, rather than a precious object cut off from its actual environment. How could painting stay alive? Over the years, I have made several attempts towards this, for example painting as a picnic blanket, paintings as robes to wear, painting as a floor, or painting as a flag. Following this, more recently I have started to think that painting is most alive when it is still being born. I also aim to shift attention away from finalised results and towards the process."*

Natalia Sielewicz, curator, says, *"Merike Estna continually pushes toward open-endedness, imagining painting as something that might bleed beyond its formal boundaries, remain unfinished, or require ongoing care. Her works fold back upon themselves the duration of time invested in sustaining them, making maintenance, repetition, and part of the painting's meaning—one that will engage visitors beyond the opening days of the Biennale."*

The House of Leaking Sky will also host a project titled *The School of Strange Weather* from 11 to 16 August. During this period, Estna will offer the pavilion as an open-ended platform for Contemporary Art MA students from the Estonian Academy of Arts, where she has been a professor since August 2025. Departing from the initial idea of the pavilion as a living organism and foregrounding process rather than product, *The School of Strange Weather* will transform the pavilion into an open platform. Over the course of a week, students will present their performative practices as the pavilion undergoes a period of transformation and experimentation.

The exhibition is housed within the former Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Venice's Castello district, a space marked by layered histories and architectural transformation. The interior features an early twentieth-century ceiling fresco by Giuseppe Cherubini depicting *The Glory of the Virgin Mary*, alongside traces of the building's later use as a community space and gymnasium. These overlapping sacred, civic and everyday histories form an active backdrop for Estna's evolving work.

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Notes to Editors

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Estonian Pavilion Location:

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About Merike Estna

Merike Estna lives and works in Tallinn, Estonia and in Mexico City, Mexico. She graduated from the painting department at the Estonian Academy of Arts (BA, 2005) and from Goldsmiths, University of London (MFA, 2009). She has received several Estonian art awards, among them the Hansapank stipend (2004), the Eduard Wiiralt Grant (2005) and Konrad Mägi Prize (2014). From 2017–2023, she was an associate professor at the Department of Painting at the Estonian Academy of Arts and a professor of contemporary art since 2025. Estna was among the recipients of the national artists' salary between 2020 and 2022.

About Natalia Sielewicz

Natalia Sielewicz works as chief curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Her curatorial work engages with themes of feminism, the politics of affect, and the impact of technology on contemporary subjectivity. In her practice, Sielewicz navigates the boundary between the personal and the universal, frequently turning to autofiction as a curatorial strategy. At the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, she has curated numerous exhibitions, including *Maria Jarema. Cracked Modernism* (2026, together with Éric de Chasse) *The Dark Arts. Aleksandra Waliszewska and the Symbolism of the East and North* (2022, with

Alison Gingeras), *Agnieszka Polska: The Thousand- Year Plan*(2021), *Paint Also known as Blood: Women, Affect, and Desire in Contemporary Painting*(2019), *The Ministry of Internal Affairs: Intimacy as Text* (2017), and *Private Settings. Art After the Internet* (2014).

About the Estonian Pavilion

Participating since 1997, this will be the fifteenth time Estonia will be exhibiting at the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. The Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art is the official representative of the Estonian exposition and it is funded by the Estonian Ministry of Culture.