

The Ever Changing Same

By Mika Hannula

What you find depends on what you are looking for. But no, not only that, what you might get is also dependent on how you are able to connect the dots: specifically, how you can make and shape connections between the past, the present and the future.

One thing is for sure, one thing is certain: the Finnish born Amsterdam based artist Kristiina Koskentola is a master of constructing such connections. In her case, it is not only about connecting the dots, but what it comes down to is activating both the nearness and the distance of what we do when we do what we do. In short, it is the politics of the ever changing same.

For Koskentola, on a very apparent and out-spoken level, these connections are made and re-activated between spirituality, ancient healing methods and religion. This is a kind of list that should draw our attention to its structure. It's not a relationship between two parts and partners. In this game, in this crime of participatory passion, it never laments into either-or constellations. It is an open-ended set-up with a minimum of three elements - elements that do not break even. They go under or blow over, seep through, and do not stay static.

If the game of shaping connections and creating connotations would only remain on abstract levels, Koskentola's practice would be easier to dismiss. Because surely, we have all heard it before, discussions about East and West, and not to forget, the Other. But no, no, no. Koskentola goes faster than we can say "hei hoi ja rommia pullo"¹ into the details, the nuances, and sure enough, out from the neutral zone and into the danger grounds.

Thus, let us also be more specific. It is a tool and an object that is found in

both series of Koskentola's works: in the series of the hanging photographs called *Dialogue with the Flows*, and in the work, a set of photographs, called *Equilibrium*. This "thing" in question has a name; in fact it has as many names as it has ways and places of utility. In English, the common term for this "thing" is not a substantive, but a verb: cupping. So, the "thing" is the object with which this act of cupping is performed. Just to give another example, in Finnish it is called "kupata", which in itself is already worth mentioning since that wonderfully simple word has such richly embedded connotations. It simultaneously refers to swindling someone out of their money, idly waiting around and a third meaning which we will discuss in detail in the following paragraphs.

But the point with Koskentola's way of taking this "thing" into the central stage of both photography series is, well, something else. She does what she does so extremely well: she points out what happens when a transfer takes place between an object's functionality and its metaphorical means, from former to latter, while, at the same time, making us aware of both the roots and routes that this very "thing" has gone through.

And this, this brings us to the primal level usage of this very "thing". We get a glimpse of it in the *Dialogue with the Flows* series. There are cups on the back of the person, eating into his skin. The act of "cupping" generates a very simple but effective causal effect. This is the act of sucking something out. What is sucked out, with the act of cupping, is already present in these hanging photographs. It is what is inside us, and no, it is not water. It is blood. This is an act of medical enterprise that is used both in the West and in the East. Not necessarily in your local "arvauskeskus"², but in the so-called more experimental and alternative practices of medicine.

But how does this "thing" travel? For me, personally, before it travels anywhere, it takes me back to the past. While looking at these works of Koskentola's, especially these effortlessly hanging pieces of photographs, I am looking at many things. I see what I see as the works of art, but also, next to them, I have an image of an old woman who is being treated with these devices. Allow me to rephrase, whom I see is my grandmother, whose image is actually not that old but it is I who is very young. We are at the local public sauna, not far from where my grandparents used to live. They, and the public sauna, with its ancient means of cupping practice are gone. But the memory stays. There is a trace of it in me, a deep one, which is now activated. What I remember is colour, the colour red. It is what I see when I

go around the sauna rooms, looking for my grandmother. I open doors, and finally, I find them. A big woman, dressed fully in white, takes care of my mother's mother. My grandmother is being cupped, she lies on her stomach, and I remember this: there is blood inside the cups, some of it seeps through the gap between the cup and her skin. I remember her face, my grandmother's face. It is solemn, pleasantly still, immersed in enjoyment. She realises that I am looking at her. Her eyes still closed, she says: "Wait outside, there is too much blood here".

03

I did not go away. I was not scared. I was mesmerized by this activity that I had heard of, but never seen. Henceforth, I have never tried it myself. But I remember the sweet stillness of my grandmother lying there, quietly, in a moment of peace, without any hesitations whatsoever.

In connection, and in comparison with Koskentola, linking also to her overall oeuvre of work, there is that aspect of abjection. Something is exposed, something that is normally kept inside and at least not thematized. But the awareness of the other subject, the recognition of the "alien" matter is not unpleasant. It is not either titillating, or voyeuristic. It is the act of connecting things with one another so that what comes out of the equation is not the sum of its parts, but well, something else, something unexpected.

When I look at these works, I find something I both looked for and something that comes as a surprise. Something that activates both the roots and routes, again, on so many amazing levels, in discussion of how things are used, where we come from and where we might be heading.

With Kristiina Koskentola's works, I see and I feel, and I see and I feel with. I see and feel connections emerging. Here, with the symbolic force of the cupping devices' set-up in *Dialogue with the Flows*, I see what you also see. Sure, it is a kind of cross. But what kind of a cross? Where does it come from, what does it refer to? I do not know. But what I do know is that when I look at this cross, I literally touch a cross, a cross that I carry around my neck. It is made of silver, not the original, but a remake of a cross that was found in a grave. The original cross can approximately be dated to the year 1050. It was found less than 1000 meters from where I was born and raised. Now, it sits proudly in a vitrine in the Finnish National Museum. This cross is special with figures on it. On one side, in a very simplistic style, is an image of a woman. And naturally, on the other side, is a man. The point of my story is: this cross was there, and it had a particular meaning before this

site of southern Finland was even Christianized. Whether we acknowledge and recognize this or not, things do travel, in uncontrollable and often very interesting and unpredictable ways.

I carry this cross, and I see and feel this cross in the works of Koskentola. It is the game of the ever changing same. It is the politics of differentiation³ that exists while we make these moves, while we make and celebrate the act of connecting the dots.

1 Hi ho and the drunken soldier.

2 Local word for a state run health centre, literally standing for 'arvaus' as in to guess and 'centre' as in a centre.

3 Of politics of differentiation, the acts of a difference talking to another difference while both are eagerly and willingly listening to each other.