

Exhibition Information

Eija-Liisa Ahtila real characters, invented worlds

9 November 2002 – 12 January 2003

'Ahtila uses film to dramatise the movements of the day-dreaming mind'
Laura Cumming, The Observer

Expressions of love, sexuality, anger, fear, forgiveness and other emotions abound in **real characters, invented worlds**, a selection of works in video and photography by Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila.

In **Gallery 2** the widely acclaimed installation **Consolation Service**, 1999, explores themes of forgiveness and reconciliation through the break up of a marriage. The two adjacent projections offer slightly different views of the same events – one concentrating largely on the events, the other offering a more emotive perspective. Typical of Ahtila's work, it combines recognisable domestic situations with moments of unconventional fantasy and emotional crisis.

Inside the entrance of **Gallery 1** is a group of photographs collectively titled **Assistant Series**, 2000. These images are produced as part of the preparation for the films. In their own right they exist as 'documents of a certain situation, atmosphere or incident.' Like the video installations and films, each group of 3 or 4 images offers different views on an event, person or place. These evocative images offer no certain story and we are left to determine for ourselves the exact situation that might connect the images.

In the next room is most recent work in the exhibition, **The Present**, 2001, consisting of five short films displayed on television monitors. These are fictional dramatisations written by the artist after she had conducted

interviews with women who have developed various psychological neuroses. As with her other works Ahtila adopts a variety of well-known styles from television, music video and cinema to present strange characters in recounting scenes from their daily lives.

Today, 1996-1997, is a study of the relationship between a father and daughter explored in the extreme circumstances that follow the death of the man's father. Each of the three screens again offers a different view - the first, a frank unsentimental account from the adolescent daughter, the third from the distraught father. The second account, a view of wider society and its problems, comes from an ambiguous figure - the father's mother, the girl's grandmother, another unrelated character or perhaps the girl herself in the future.

Me/We, Okay, Gray, 1993, like **The Present** were originally broadcast on Finnish television between advertisements. These films adopt the sharp editing and quick dialogues that we associate with commercials but, disconcertingly, they explore complex and confusing issues and unlike advertisements, they offer no simple message. The films are presented on television monitors amidst domestic furniture, heightening the sense of familiarity and, in doing so, accentuating the unsettling content.

The last room contains **Dog Bites**, 1992-1997, photographs of a woman captured in a variety of poses mimicking a dog. The work provides a precedent to subsequent depictions by the artist of human characters adopting animalistic behavior to overcome

problems in expressing themselves in a conventional manner.

List of works in the exhibition:

Gallery 2

Consolation Service

1999

23 minutes, 40 seconds
DVD installation

Shown every half hour on the hour and the half hour.

Collection of Kiasma, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki
Courtesy of Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc, New York.
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Gallery 1

Assistant series

2000

6 Colour photographs

Collection of Sammlung Hauser & Wirth, St. Gallen
Courtesy of Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc, New York.
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The Present

2001

DVD installation
5 x 30 seconds

Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach
Courtesy of Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc, New York.
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Today

1996/ 1997

10 minutes
DVD installation

Collection Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner, New York
Courtesy of Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc, New York.
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Me/We, Okay, Gray

1993

DVD installation
3 x 90 seconds

Collection Ringier, Zürich
Courtesy of Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc, New York.
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from the series **Dog Bites**

1992 – 1997

8 Colour photographs

Collection of Janine and Thomas Koerfer
Courtesy of Galleri Roger Pailhas, Marseille
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Eija-Liisa Ahtila was born in 1959 in Hämeenlinna, Finland. She lives and works in Helsinki. She began to exhibit internationally in the early 1990's. In 1999 she exhibited in the Nordic Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale where her work, *Consolation Service*, received an Honorary Mention. In 2000 she was awarded the prestigious Vincent van Gogh award for contemporary art in Europe. Her work is held in many major museum collections internationally.

real characters, invented worlds is the first time Eija-Liisa Ahtila's work has been shown in Scotland. This exhibition follows two major retrospective exhibitions in 2002 at Kiasma, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki and at Tate Modern, London.

There is more information about Eija-Liisa Ahtila and her work in the books and catalogues to be found in the Information Room next to the gallery entrance.

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate Dundee DD1 4DY

T: 01382 909900

www.dca.org.uk