

G A L E R I E F O R S B L O M

Leena Nio: *Improved Paintings*

Galerie Forsblom, 5.2.-28.2.2021

Leena Nio's (b. 1982) new paintings are all about layers — both physically and symbolically. Layering has always been Nio's signature technique, but this time the concept is taken to the next level. Nio experiments with a new technical idiosyncrasy in each of her exhibitions, with each painting taking its cue from a minor, commonplace occurrence. The mundanity leaves plenty of room for both the painting process and the viewer's interpretations to unfold freely.

Like many peers of her generation, Nio collected stickers and Victorian die-cuts in her childhood. These "stickers" have now found their way into her paintings. The glossy, lacquered pictorial elements hovering on the surface of the canvas are — despite being hand-painted — deceptively reminiscent of stickers or die-cuts. They are like emojis added to a text message. Or Instagram posts with added stickers and filters. The paintings in the exhibition achieve the same effect: using 21st-century tools, they take the message to the next level. With her add-on flourishes, Nio also self-reflexively comments on her process. Often finding it difficult to know when to finish a painting, she adds the final sticker as if dotting an "i" or crossing a "t."

The surplus layers add many possible interpretations to her paintings. Her paintings are timeless, yet the add-ons link them powerfully to the contemporary moment. Her work abounds in allusions to art history, starting with her conscious decision to leave exposed patches of the raw, unpainted linen canvas, a device often used in classical painting. The irresistible union of historical allusions and stickers creates a clever conceptual and visual interplay of ideas.

After earning a master's degree in visual arts from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Nio was awarded the Finnish Art Society's Ducat Prize in 2010. In 2021 she will complete a large-scale public artwork for Finnoo station on Helsinki's new Länsimetro subway line. Also coming up this year is a multidisciplinary piece for the Espoo Museum of Modern Art EMMA to be completed together with her husband, Kalle Nio. Nio's work is found in significant Finnish collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the Saastamoinen Foundation Collection, and the Sara Hildén Art Museum.