

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

Emma Helle: Manque

Galerie Forsblom, 14.5.–6.6.2021

Emma Helle's (b.1979) latest sculptures express the artist's longing to visit places she is unable to go and her desire to be reunited with loved ones distant or departed, as summed up by the title *Manque*, from the French *manquer*, meaning 'to miss'. One of the places the artist especially longs to visit again is Paris, whose rich art history is invoked by her new sculptures. Their details evoke echoes of real places including the decorative doors of the Notre Dame, the spiral pillars of the Church of Saint-Séverin, and the sculpted deities of the Pilier des nautes.

As part of her creative process, Helle often studies and draws sketches of existing works from art history, which might be anything from a 19th century ornamental figurine to a classical marble sculpture. Her sculptures examine how the human body has been represented in the Western Canon of art history, which has tended to highlight certain body types while relegating others to the margins.

The artist has been working with clay since her childhood. As a young girl, she used to sculpt miniature figures from mud she found in the schoolyard. Finally, her mother decided to sign her up for pottery workshop. Today Helle's studio is found a former rubber factory, the oldest parts of which are made of clay bricks fired at the neighboring brickworks. Helle's choice of material carries new resonances when examined from a contemporary perspective. Clay is traditionally looked down upon as an artisan's or woman's material. In recent years, however, clay has also begun to invade galleries and other contexts of high culture, sometimes revisiting forgotten works from art history. Many contemporary sculptures evoke terracotta maquettes by Renaissance sculptors or china figurines that once graced the shelves of well-to-do upper-class homes. A similar referential tension resonates in the lumpy forms of Helle's richly detailed ceramic figures, which she combines with a sweet color scheme of pastels.

Helle is a graduate of the Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts. Her work is found in many private and public collections, including Helsinki Art Museum HAM, the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the State Art Collection, the Sara Hildén Art Museum, the Saastamoinen Foundation, the Wihuri Foundation, and the Pro Artibus collection. She has held many solo exhibitions at venues including the Turku Art Museum, and

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she has taken part in group exhibitions at the Mänttä Art Festival, Kunsthalle Helsinki, and the Espoo Museum of Modern Art EMMA.