

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

Kirsti Tuokko: Night in Town

Galerie Forsblom, October 25-November 24, 2024

The figures in Kirsti Tuokko's paintings are inspired by fashion magazines, passers-by on the street, and people in cafés and at exhibition openings. Tuokko paints observations on the way people dress and pose, meditating on their strategies of presenting themselves. As the title suggests, the exhibition depicts nights on the town and the moods of the following morning. Tuokko paints on the reverse side of plexiglass, keeping the surface smooth and glossy like the pages of a high-end fashion magazine. The artist's interest in her theme stems from a mixture of pleasure and deep guilt. Her art addresses a great contradiction: both fashion and art bring pleasure and joy, but the production and consumption of material objects is fraught with ethical dilemmas.

The androgynous posers in Tuokko's paintings straddle somewhere between the private and public spheres. They seem to size up their own image, while also imagining how they are perceived by others. They pose as if they were appraising their own reflection. After investing effort into dressing up for the evening, they steal one final glance in the mirror, as if asking themselves: do I make the grade? When they step out of the door, the performance can begin. Surrendering oneself to the gaze of others is daunting, and yet visibility on the social pedestal is exactly what the figures in the paintings seem to desire.

Tuokko's paintings are akin to traditional portraits in the way they present the subject dressed in their best finery against a blank background. But they also contradict this tradition: in old-world portraits, the model was expected to sit still for hours, whereas Tuokko's figures seem irrepressibly eager to disappear into the night. Tuokko transforms the aloof sitters of traditional portraiture into abstract representations of humanity and the ethos of our time.

Kirsti Tuokko (b. 1943) studied to become an art teacher at Helsinki's University of Art and Design. She completed additional studies in graphic design at the University of California, Berkeley. Her work is held in the collections of the Finnish National Gallery, HAM Helsinki Art Museum, Tampere Art Museum, Wihuri Foundation, Saastamoinen Foundation and numerous private collections. Tuokko is also the creator of many public artworks.