

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

Emma Helle: Dress Codes for Rivers

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Emma Helle has drawn inspiration for the reclining figures in her new sculptures from personified river deities she has encountered on her travels, most recently in Roman fountains. Like many cities, Rome was founded on a river, for flowing water is literally the source of all life, but also a symbolic fount of fertility and prosperity. Throughout history, rivers have transported not only people and goods, but also thoughts and new ideas. Rome's fountains pay tribute to the river running through the city and to the life-sustaining power of water.

In ancient Greek mythology, the father of all rivers was Oceanus, a bearded man with bull horns. Oceanus lost one horn in battle, which became the mythical horn of plenty, symbol of fertility and abundance. In Helle's sculptures, the horn of plenty has emptied its contents all over the voluptuous, hedonistic figures, which are decked in flowers, vines, fruit, gilding and all manner of lavish details. The figures defy categorization, blending inseparably with their surroundings. Shaped from clay transported by flowing water, they are raw, imperfect, and coarsely textured, yet their surfaces shimmer in vibrant colors. They proclaim freedom and the right to revel in their inherent materiality.

Throughout art history, exotic fruits and plants have symbolized abundance, but also wealth and power. Helle's sculptures seem to question what these symbols mean today, as they are available to everyone on supermarket shelves. How have visual symbols of wealth and abundance changed in modern times, and who ultimately has the right to wield them?

Emma Helle (b.1979) is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts. Her work is held in collections including HAM Helsinki Art Museum Ham, the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the State Art Deposit Collection, Sara Hildén Art Museum, Saastamoinen Foundation and Wihuri Foundation. She recently held a solo exhibition at Turku Art Museum, and she has participated in group exhibitions at the Boston Museum of Fine Art, the National Museum in Stockholm, Mänttä Art Festival, Helsinki Art Hall and EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art.