

EIJA-LIISA AHTILA

On Breathing

5 September – 4 October 2025

79 rue du Temple, 75003 Paris

Opening Reception: Friday 5 September, 6 - 8 pm



ON BREATHING. Single channel installation. Image 4K UHD.
Audio 2.o. 9 min 23 sec. Crystal Eye 2024.

Can a tree be a protagonist or a space? How would that affect the rules of showing the story through action? —Eija-Liisa Ahtila

Marian Goodman Gallery Paris is pleased to present a new exhibition by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, which will feature the French premiere of two new large-scale video installations, *ON BREATHING* and *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27', 2024*. A master of cinematic installations, Ahtila challenges the idea of moving image perspective and constructs an experience of several co-existing temporalities and spaces for the viewers. A continuation of her research over the last decade, the works in the exhibition each explore in their own way forms of ecological narrative and their modes of presentation. Since abandoning a more anthropocentric viewpoint, Ahtila has been seeking to make visible the non-human world, with a focus on trees in particular. While *ON BREATHING* depicts the subtle intertwinement of tree branches with the morning mist, *APRIL* captures the silent passage of one season to the next through spatial movements among the trees and the attentive observation of a forest ecosystem.

On the ground floor of the gallery, the nine-minute projection *ON BREATHING*, 2024, is a visual poem in which the focus is the slow and hypnotic movement of the evaporative mist surrounding an oak tree. This morning phenomenon is typical of autumn and winter conditions when the sea remains warmer than the surrounding air and ground. The displacement of the fog and its sound in the branches poetically suggest a vegetal respiration: *"The air around the oak tree seems tangible, and the space inside it becomes actual, as if the breathing of the tree were, for a moment, perceivable."*

Ahtila, who frequently deploys multi-channels and split-screen installations to simultaneously unfold several aspects of one narrative, superimposes layers of video to conjure different temporalities. The wandering of the fog and its interplay with the leaves, the rhythm and the camera angles, all result in a unique, animated tableau.

Considering her recent works as a continuum, Ahtila notes that each creative process naturally leads to the next. Since 2011, she has gradually replaced human protagonists with trees and living organisms, resulting in a series of works that address the ecological narrative within the moving image. This new direction questions the contemporary relationship between nature and humanity, as well as the artificial boundary between us and other living beings. *"I have attempted to develop visual approaches and methods of storytelling that might show us a way out of anthropocentrism and enable the presence of nonhuman species in our imaginary,"* explains Ahtila.

On the gallery lower level, *APRIL ≈ 61°01' 24°27', 2024*, first exhibited at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands, immerses the visitors in the forest of Aulanko Nature Park, Finland, near Ahtila's hometown. Known as a natural environment unsullied by human activity, the forest was filmed for two consecutive seasons in 2022 and 2023, between the end of March and May. If the title of the work evokes the month associated with the regeneration of nature, the 12-meter-long, 8-channel installation shows the subtle transition from late winter to summer. The suite of sequences follows a chronological order, showing the forest from the first moments of snowmelt on the left to the premature arrival of summer on the far right.

The scale and horizontal nature of the installation are reminiscent of her iconic work *Horizontal*, 2011, which came from her desire to represent a giant spruce tree in its entirety. Ahtila not only chose to capture the tree by filming it in several horizontal sections, thus avoiding the distortions inherent in the use of a wide-angle lens, but she also decided to present the tree as an horizontal installation on a series of six projection screens.

With *APRIL*, the forest as an ecosystem — where trees and a multitude of organisms and plants constantly interact with each other — is, for the first time, the center of the artist's attention. The source of the work stems from life in a forest where each singular being is an integrated element of the whole, and the whole is simultaneously within that singular being. To create a cinematic language suited to her subject that immerses us in the forest, the camera movements in the eight sections are fluid and asynchronous, alternating between slow motion and momentary stops. “*The theme of APRIL is the spatiality of being, the constant change and shape-taking of the forest, that is its fundamental quality,*” says Ahtila.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland in 1959. She has been honored with numerous prizes over the past two decades that include, most recently, becoming Commander, First Class, of the Order of the White Rose of Finland (2020). She works and lives in Helsinki.

Ahtila's work has been widely exhibited since the early 1990s. *Horizontal* is prominently featured in *The Power of Trees*, on view until 14 September 2025 at Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art, Kew Gardens, Richmond, near London. Most recently she has had solo exhibitions at Serlachius Manor, Finland (2024); Kröller-Müller Museum (2024), The Netherlands; the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, US (2022); the National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania (2021); the M Museum, Leuven, Belgium and the Serlachius Museum Gösta, Mänttä, Finland (both 2018). She has also had solo exhibitions at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, Australia (2017); Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2016); Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York and Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (both 2015); Kiasma, Helsinki, Finland (2013); Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2012); Carré D'Art, Nîmes, France (2012); Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico (2012); Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois (2011); Parasol Unit, London, UK (2010); Jeu de Paume, Paris, France (2008), amongst many others. Ahtila was a jury member at the Venice Film Festival in 2011 and the President of the Jury at the FIDMarseille in 2013 (Festival international de cinéma de Marseille).

Marian Goodman Gallery champions the work of artists who stand among the most influential of our time and represents over five generations of diverse thought and practice. The Gallery's exhibition program, characterized by its caliber and rigor, provides international platforms for its artists to showcase their work, foster vital dialogues with new audiences, and advance their practices within nonprofit and institutional realms. Established in New York City in 1977, Marian Goodman Gallery gained prominence early in its trajectory for introducing the work of seminal European artists to American audiences. Today, through its exhibition spaces in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris, the Gallery maintains its global focus, representing some 50 artists working in the U.S. and internationally.

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