

Osmo Rauhala

Remember to Forget Everything

Osmo Rauhala (born 1957 Siuro) is one of Finland's most internationally successful visual artists and a seasoned organic farmer. Rauhala's path as an artist is exceptional: in addition to an extensive artistic output, he holds as many as three academic degrees, and he has a profound understanding of environmental sciences and philosophy. He is also actively involved in the public debate on environmental issues.

Rauhala can be regarded as one of the pioneers of the international movement in Finnish contemporary art. He held his first solo exhibitions in Tampere and New York in 1989, after which he moved ahead in his career in Europe and other parts of the world. He has had 60 solo exhibitions and has participated in more than a hundred group exhibitions across the world. Rauhala still works part of the year in New York.

In Finland, his best-known artistic works are the interior panel paintings of St Olaf's Church in Tyrvää, Sastamala. Rauhala's major achievements in Finland include the Young Artist of the Year Award (1992), Suomi-palkinto (Finland Award, 2009), the Church Cultural Award (2009) and the Pro Finlandia Medal (2017).

In Rauhala's work, art and nature are inextricably intertwined. His roots are deep in the land: ever since his youth, he has run his family farm in Siuro, Nokia, and he has enlarged it to a viable EU farm of 170 hectares. Rauhala became environmentally aware at a young age. As a secondary school student in 1975, he began protecting a brook running through the farm, which is the habitat of one of the most endangered species: the freshwater pearl mussel. In the late 1980s, he became familiar with organic farming in the United States, and he has persistently promoted this agricultural system ever since.

Rauhala's comprehensive humanistic-scientific approach is clearly reflected in all his works. They often depict natural themes, which combine with his clear and recognisable expression. Rauhala represents analytical art, which refers to subjects outside itself and creates a synthesis of science, philosophy and nature experiences. The exhibition presents Rauhala's paintings and video works from the 2010s.

Osmo Rauhala's works are composed of layers and resemble archaeological excavations in this respect. We invite you to look at these works of art in the same way as people have looked at pictures for centuries. In addition to a visual experience, the works offer a vantage point to many phenomena on which we will provide more information as the exhibition progresses. The works contain several levels of sign systems and references to various disciplines: mathematics, biology and philosophy.

"I paint to understand myself and my environment. Whether or not our language and the concepts that we have created can interpret the system on which we are dependent is crucial for the interaction between people and nature."

Osmo Rauhala, New York, 1989

The aim of Rauhala's pictures is ambitious. He seeks to describe the most important phenomena of humankind, such as evolution, DNA and consciousness. Rauhala has concerns about whether the languages that we use are able to structure the reality that we live in. Today, language is our most important feeler, and its task is to in time identify harmful changes in our environment. Basically, it is all about surviving.

Evolution

Evolution is the change in the heritable characteristics of species populations over multiple generations. Over millions of years, combining the genome of two different parents has become the dominant method of reproduction. Part of the genome is maternal, i.e., it is always inherited from the mother. *Ovulation of Evolution III* refers to this maternal line while drawing parallels between it and the ornament resembling ovaries that travels through art history. The decorative ornament has been passed on and transformed throughout western art, and it has been associated with feminine meanings to an increasing degree over the course of time.

Game Theory

The role of natural selection in the theory of evolution is studied with the help of the mathematical game theory, among other concepts. It studies the strategic pursuit of gain by agents. Game theory is one of the hybrid tools of science in the 21st century. It is also applied to economics, biology, social sciences and technology. The shape of the paintings in the *Game Theory* series refers to the sliding puzzles that Rauhala used to do as a child. The aim was to arrange the eight pieces in numerical or alphabetical order.

Big Bang

One of the great primeval stories of humankind is the origin of the universe. The origins of energy and matter are unknown. According to scientific understanding, all the matter in the universe today was once a dense point until it exploded 14 billion years ago. It then started to form structures in new ways and continued to expand. It is not known whether this expansion will continue forever or whether everything will contract again to the same point. *Double Big Bang* depicts a hypothesis according to which matter alternately expands and condenses to explode in another place. In this sense, the cosmos would follow a cycle similar to that of life when it changes from a seed into an organism and vice versa.

DNA

Deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA is the main molecule of life. It contains the genetic information of the cells of all organisms and of some viruses. The information required for the building of a functioning organism is stored in the base sequence. A (adenine), T (thymine), G (guanine) and C (cytosine) refer to the nucleotides in the DNA double helix. According to Rauhala, DNA is one of our world's greatest stories, as it is common to all living organisms.

“Human beings cannot create life from elements alone. Not even a primitive unicellular bacterium can be created in a laboratory without an existing genome. It is like a sourdough starter handed down from generation to generation in a wooden bowl. DNA is a combination of letters that is of critical importance to us, but we do not have any manual for correcting it. In order to survive as a species, we will one day need to fully understand its importance. Until that day we will just have to adapt to the mechanism developed over billions of years and maintain the conditions in which this code can function.”

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Ray

"In the early 2000s, I read a book about Pythagoras in New York for months and while I rested my eyes, I frequently saw in my mind rays swimming. It caught my interest in this species, and later I discovered that the fish is exceptionally intelligent."

Osmo Rauhala

Robert C. Morgan, an art historian from New York, has stated that the ray often appearing in Rauhala's paintings is not reduced just to an illustration of scientific knowledge. Rauhala's way of picturing the ray also exceeds the symbolic level: it is more than a symbol of consciousness. The high level of ray self-awareness can be sensed in the paintings, and it perplexes the viewer. The experience of dissimilarity and similarity is utterly special.

Pythagoras was an ancient Greek philosopher, who devoted his life to the study of mathematics. Through the ages, there have been individuals among artists who have sought to reach higher levels of consciousness by studying scientific phenomena. The link between Pythagoras and rays in Rauhala's vision is connected to consciousness: the ray is presented in the same way as artists in extremely confident self-portraits where the artist stares piercingly at the viewer (such as the famous *Self-Portrait* painted by the German painter Albrecht Dürer in 1500). The ray demands attention. Does nature look at the observer? Or is this a self-portrait of a human being portrayed as a "ray" – after all, it is a mirror self-recognition test determining self-awareness.

Mirror Self-Recognition Test

According to evolutionary theory, important cognitive skills have developed independently in different animal species. The mirror self-recognition test (MSR) has been developed to study the intelligence or self-awareness of animals. It is used for studying how an animal reacts to a spot of colour marked on its face when it looks in the mirror. Species that have successfully passed the test include chimpanzees, Asian elephants, magpies, orcas and bottlenose dolphins, whereas horses, dogs, cats and other domestic animals as well as children under 18 months have been reported to fail the test.

In 2016, a study on a mirror self-recognition test done on manta rays was published. It was a newsworthy event, as the rays recognised themselves in the mirror and fish had not been regarded as a particularly intelligent animal species before. Recognising oneself is a preliminary stage of self-awareness on which one's identity is built.

"The mirror self-recognition test reveals differences in the ability to think, but it is not likely to be able to measure all aspects of consciousness. For a visual artist, the method is a fascinating laboratory of mental images thanks to its visuality."

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Horizon

There are many things in the world that cannot be understood through scientific research, our language systems or our known senses. In addition to the familiar and recognised, our environment contains unknown elements through which we try to steer and on the basis of which we make intuitive decisions on the future. All this has a significant impact on our life.

“Our consciousness is as great a mystery as the origin of life. Even if we were able to create an organism with an ability to copy itself, would it also have consciousness? And what would this consciousness be like? Faced with this question, our certainty ends. Consciousness has for centuries been linked to the soul, language or our ability to recognise ourselves in the mirror. Most recently, discussions have focused on which organisms have consciousness, can animals understand themselves? And if they can, what rights should they have?”

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Giant squids with a length of over 10 metres dwell in the depths of the ocean. Not much is known about the species, as it is difficult to study in its natural habitat. Scientists are interested in giant squids, as the species has a very sophisticated nervous system and eyes that are exceptionally large for a species living in the dark.

The life of the giant squid is beyond our horizon, in the unreachable depths of the ocean. The giant squid is like Narcissus who rejected all others and fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water – an unattainable being.

Remember to Forget Everything

From the perspective of neuroscience and psychology, both remembering and forgetting are active functions. The human mind does not store stories, it builds them. Memories are strengthened by connecting events with emotions; objectivity is lost.

The Socratic paradox states: “I know that I know nothing”. This wisdom is based on scientific scepticism that protects the integrity of a conscious person. Consciousness as a characteristic of the human species has been passed on by hundreds of generations, but no human wisdom has been stored in DNA. We inherit our ability to learn, but not all the knowledge that our parents had. Wisdom and information about the world are transferred through experience and various sign systems. In this, language, science and art play an important role.

“The development of consciousness can be seen in the evolution of life. It can be described as steps in which ability and consciousness are present in different proportions to each other.

At the bottom, is a being that is not conscious of itself and does not understand its inability. There is no progress.

In the next stage, the being becomes aware of its inability and desires change.

The third – and according to many, the highest – step has been reached when we have become capable and we are also aware of this.

However, the matrix provides one more option: a capable person who is not aware of their abilities. Ultimately, this instinctive user of tacit knowledge may be the top product of evolution. Therefore, remember to forget everything.”

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