

## EXHIBITION REVIEW | Worlds Colliding in Joonas Kota's Virtualized Sceneries

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**Artist:** Joonas Kota (b.1976) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki 2003. Kota is represented in both private and public collections such as Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art and Helsinki Art Museum - HAM. The artist lives and works in Helsinki.

**Exhibition:** [JOONAS KOTA Virtualized Sceneries | Zetterberg Gallery | 26 January -19 February](#)

**Images:** Courtesy of Zetterberg Gallery and the artist

Semiotics - also called the study of meaning-making - used to be my favorite course in communications school. It wasn't until much later that I realized semiotics can fundamentally change the way we perceive and understand the world around us. Everything becomes much more relative, meanings and ideas are more fluid, flexible and less restrictive.

As a language in itself, visual art is charged with sets of signs and symbols coded into the works. Their interpretations are determined by a strong correlation with the viewers' reference system, cultural background or experiences. We see what our eyes have been trained to see. In our effort to make sense of what we have in front of us, we often de-code images according to a previously-set way of thinking.

It was also semiotics that first sparked my interest into the works of Joonas Kota. *Virtualized Sceneries*, his current exhibition at Zetterberg Gallery, brings into focus the space in-between the visual image and its meaning. What happens if we try to delete our reference system? Is it even possible to read a work, when we cannot translate it into a language that is familiar?

Kota showcases three series of works, all borderline between abstract and figurative: *Transcendent Diamonds*, *Broken Forests* and *Degradable Emoji* icons. The titles already hint to an inadequacy. Nothing is what it seems to be in Kota's worlds, where reality in itself, symbolic reality and transcendental meet and become inter-changeable.

The *Transcendent Diamonds* are oil on wood works, carefully crafted into the shape and appearance of precious gemstones. Seen from a distance, one could swear the diamonds are three-dimensional, but the illusion tames and the surface gradually flattens as you approach them.

Kota is calculated, precise and meticulous in his work. Each painted *Diamond* is a meta-image, a picture in another picture. It is here that the borders between reality, symbols and transcendental fade away and all dimensions unify, only to part again a few seconds later. Presence and close observation are essential, as Kota's works do

not reveal themselves in a frugal glance. It takes time, patience and silence to discover the serene landscapes and figurative elements embedded into the *Diamonds'* clean-cut facets.

*Broken Forests* spring out of matt black backgrounds in soft shimmers of blue, turquoise, red, green and yellow on large-scale canvases. Eyes slowly brush the surface of each work, in search for recognizable shapes and forms. Finally, leaves, waters and tree shadows settle in, guiding the gaze towards familiar nature snapshots. Still - the images are far from being complete and grasping them is not without struggle. Kota's skilled hand shifts the depth of perception on each element. As they appear and disappear from the darkness, the shimmers become highly charged and dynamic.

A set of oversized *Degradable Emojis* await for a virtual chat about the perfect holiday stereotype. An ocean wave, a palm tree and a slice of melon - symbols of a great vacation at the seaside - look positively jolly up until you come across the darkish, smudged landscapes on their surface. Discreet images reveal a tempest-like weather, in a contrasting mirror reflection of the shell they inhabit. The mind goes back and forth, caught in the great gap between these two opposite worlds.

No matter which series they belong to, Kota's works have one distinctive element in common: light. A light that sets free overcast skies in gloomy landscapes, that breaks the hard surface of gemstones and pierces through heavy masses of black. It shines victory on the other side and - if only for a brief moment - it might indulge us to catch sight of the divine.