

OUTI HEISKANEN

Outi Heiskanen was born in Mikkeli, in the south eastern lake district of Finland. She spent her early childhood in the small rural community of Köyliö. Her father was a veterinarian and her mother an enthusiastic amateur performer and actress and also a grower of fantasy gardens. Outi often accompanied her father on his rounds and took to drawing both animals and people on these visits. The imprint of these early experiences is to be found in all of Outi Heiskanen's work.

She describes her graphics as belonging to three groupings: Manifestoes, Wind Bush, and the Corner of Shame (The Dunce Table). They deal with three childhood memories: "Father playing cards with his mates, the tinkling sound created by chess pieces when the case is emptied on the table," and "Arriving in Esther's yard as thunder clouds are gathering in the sky."

All of the groupings deal, on some level, with the mysteries of marriage. The works which depict "The Corner of Shame" deal with human wretchedness in its nakedness. Outi comments that the shifts in colour values provide a key to reading the content of her work.

The flashes of childhood memories intertwined with the experience of life lived to the fullest gives Outi's work an ageless immediacy. She provides moments of recognition for "every-woman."

Outi writes this about her memories of her maiden aunt Esther's yard:

There remained nothing, except that tiny moment when I saw washing, like sails, flapping on the line. Then I knew nothing about menstruation or puberty or menopause. There, with the impending thunder, they sent their last message, a longing, of fleeting virginity...

Later in the middle of the icy arctic sea of marriage we lie awake in our double bed. I think to myself This memory is as vague as my child-

hood

memory of white hens, books and porcelain doorknobs is bright.

I can't even remember what happened. Did he say it — or I.

Is it something about being cold. It is a sigh, which might be heard: Esther; and then the speaker might be me. Or: Scaupduck; and it would be me and he would be the speaker.

Outi's friend Mirja Vänni has collected the following musings of the artist regarding her work "The House of Cards," which consists of suits of "The Fisherman's Family," "Hermits and Frogs," "The Animal Empire," and "The Trump."

Well, it is kind of an unstable construction that house of cards. The classic classical game forms its foundation. The old card hierarchy has been dismantled; all hierarchies are dismantled and all numeric orders have been dismantled. It has been made even more fragile than the traditional house of cards.

The tragedy in this game, however, is hidden elsewhere, not in the disintegration. The sorrow is not in the fragility. Taking apart is here a part of putting together.

It just has those suits. They are as ambiguous and as unsuccessful as families and marriages can be. But when we play on regardless, there is always some new family in a state of gestation.

A family is not the only cell, there are also groupings.

Aside from multiplying by biological means these cards also multiply by luring.

The destructive, and the biting, and the hurting increases, and the portion

of the black spreads from one suit to another. Oh yes, the most terrible are the trumps and the most monstrous of them is the twin monster Mirja Vänni.

Both sides of Mirja Vänni are typical unenlightened people, who because of this quality are full of ambition and passion for humanity, and are the most wretched of the wretched and — arouse the greatest envy.

Just like a peacock can be both pompous and the most splendid spectacle of nature; the festive birds in the trumps are the gems of human wretchedness. The monsters do good and evil with equal gusto. Through their own monstrosity they testify to the beauty of passivity and phlegmatism.

Their longing is so strong that even the animal empire is excited by their longing. They attract tigers and hares.

The odd hermit trump is capable of talking with animals through super-human effort. Longing provides this awesome strength.

There is a kind of magic in Outi Heiskanen's work which draws the viewer through shared experience either on a conscious or a subconscious level. Her blending and blurring of the human into a total picture of life — animal and plant, is sobering and invigorating. It frees one from the constraints of the vertical dynamic of culturally induced presumptions. And time, as we usually perceive it, loses its meaning. Outi's works confirm Einstein's observation: "For us the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, albeit a stubborn one."

Outi has expanded the sharing aspect of her work through performance art. In 1973, she and several friends (Mirja Airas, Hannu Väisänen and Pekka Nevalainen, among others) formed a group called "Record Singers." The group gets spiri-

— a graphic artist, a performance artist

by Annu Mallinick

tual sustenance from “The Noteworthy Street Mystic Walter Gorge;” Twin Monster Mirja Vänni — author; Tide Huesse — The Russian Woman and a sensual director of a slaughter house; and also from Matti Karjula, Freddie Gunst and Riitta Åkerstedt.

The group, which publishes its own Xeroxed newsletter, functions as The Bellini Academy, The Jollas Chamber Theatre, and The Rag Parade Foundation, granting scholarships etc. They publish a record cover that announces their pieces: Reinhardt, the Neon Miracle, Hurrah Plastic

Life, The Hairy Woman, The Wreck of the Titanic, The Ruin, and To the Other Side of the Old Board Fence. The activities of the Record Singers are spontaneous; they sing and act, create “first-aid theatre,” lightning performances,...

The passion, exuberance and humour



Outi Heiskanen, Finland's Artist of the Year in 1986. Elements of her graphic art reappear in her performance art: tent dwellings, a sense of wretchedness, hermits, strong contrasts of light.

Photo: Sakari Viika, Finland.

that are characteristic elements in Outi's work are aptly described by this article in *Record Singers News* (Jan. 1974), entitled "The Record Singers are Building:"

How to combine a bread factory floating on a lake, its furnace spouting visionary leaves that stick to the palate and a mansard temple studio with russet Helsinki taxi drivers from the '50s for caryatides. Ingredients: cardboard, spangles, fluff, and lovely wet mud mixed with vast quantities of spittle. Just braiding and brushing, smoothing and drilling. The result: a seamless, rickety space, and oh what a fragrant surprise! When it glides into the canal, cabbies flock to the deck, accordions in hand, and O. Heiskanen rests in a four poster bed under the mansard roof, waving a banner that reads: THIS IS NOT A FAIRY STORY. Mirja and Vänni flaunt their shiny bakers' caps, and languidly raise their floury palms in salute, while Pekka hovers in the air, a seagull with a Holy Host in his beak.



*I Accuse, (etching, aquatint, drypoint).
(One side of the Twin Monster Mirja Vänni)*

THE RAG PARADE FOUNDATION

Dearest X

We're only festival workers, that's our karma: opening curtains, arousing carnival spirit, poking the revellers with sticks and rods, chasing and mocking them, dragging wallflowers out onto the arena; blindfolding observers and passives, leading them up in front and declaring them heroes or saints; marrying dwarfs to giants and generally scampering about like fools in everyone's way as if it were a matter of life and death. Just try arranging a party, and then count up the visitors who claim they've been swindled, saying they've been misled intentionally, the flow of their thoughts interrupted, the animal in them aroused, their coats dirtied and themselves required to take part and conjure up their hidden talents, even genius. And all you wanted to do was to assemble a sanctuary; you bought French bread and red wine, lit candles and gave everyone two rhubarb stalks for trying out corner joints for an octagonal temple studio. But the fire alarm sounded, and by the time you got to the roof with a hose in your hand, the guests were shouting: "We've got a pyromaniac for a fire chief!" There you are, by Bacchus: arranging parties is a risky business, a breathtaking, tight-rope walk, but since the sacred mountains of Kailas in Tibet were our destination, we shall not surrender; we'll take the whole lot with us, props and all, to a place where the air is so clear that we'll be able to see each other's private verandahs and lookout spots; where we can glide information, each on our own kite from one snowy peak to the next, resting our eyes in the depths thousands of feet away, at the centre of the earth, at the bottom of the pit from which the bloodshot eye of human wretchedness stares up at us, the iris shining like lapis lazuli, a mirror into which we descend like swans into the first inciting blue eyelet in the lake when the spring thaw begins.

Outi Heiskanen has travelled extensively and her work speaks a universal language. She has held numerous exhibitions — group and individual — both in Finland and abroad. Among the exhibition venues are: Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Faroe Islands, New York, San Francisco, Moscow, London and Seoul.

Her work is represented in collections the world over, from the Tel Aviv Art Museum to the Minneapolis Institute of Art. In 1986, Outi Heiskanen was elected "Artist of the Year" of the Helsinki Festival Weeks, and this year she received a major Belgian government award for art.

I am grateful to her for providing the material for this article at such short notice. Kiitos!

Annu Mallinick is currently working to complete a degree in Philosophy, Art History and Developmental Psychology at York University. She is the Arts Co-ordinator and a member of the Board of Canadian Friends of Finland, a non-profit organization that promotes cultural and academic exchange between Finland and Canada.

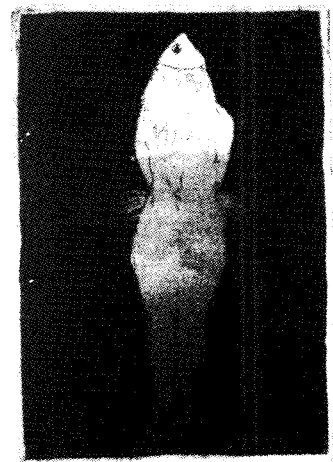
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Fish T (etching, aquatint).



The Dream, (etching, aquatint, mezzotint).



The Bride's Lament, (etching, aquatint).