



Katrin Koskaru

Portfolio • EV

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About the artist

Katrin Koskaru's painting focuses on the way power and violence blaze a trail through history and into our minds; the way the clues and signs they leave behind in time are lost; and the way architecture, a vector for ideology, helps the process along. Collection of information underpins a significant part of the work of this artist, as she scrupulously monitors the military scene and accumulates articles, images and videos gleaned from the press or the Internet, some of them first-hand accounts by people in conflict zones. This material, subject to the hazards of translation and broadcasting, inevitably emerges shrunken, turning war into a refractory subject. Katrin Koskaru's painting relies on this entropic continuum. She erases, abolishes signs, retains the marks left by the application of wash. Margins (discrepancies?) are a feature of quite a few paintings, while collage - paper on polyester, for example - renders the surface more complex. Diaphanous and unpredictable, watercolour comes to terms with the accidental, highlighting a certain fragility. The tools, moreover, are unimpressive - the ballpoint, for instance - and Karin Koskaru juggles with the instability of pastel and bleach to make newly formed images vaporise. The figurative dissolves into nebulous, abstract landscapes, leaving the spectator feeling blinded. Destruction

is the name of the game. The luminous flashes that seem to flood each composition cannot but remind us of the atom bomb. In this atmospherically rendered painting there must surely lie the possibility of representing what cannot be represented.

– Antoine Camenen for L’ahah, 2019.
(english translation : John Tittensor)



Katrin Koskaru is an Estonian painter born in 1977. She lives and works in Tallinn, Estonia.

A graduate of the Royal College of Art in London and the Estonian Academy of Art, Katrin Koskaru has shown her work in group exhibitions at the Kumu Museum in Tallinn in 2007 and 2012 and at the Tallinn Art Hall (Tallinna Kunstihoone) in 2014. She has also had solo exhibitions at Marlborough Fine Art Gallery in London in 2014, Galerie Pascaline Mulliez in Paris in 2016, Tartu kunstimajas, Tartu art space, in 2019, and Galerie Hobusepea in Tallinn in 2021.

Katrin Koskaru has been supported by the association L’ahah since its creation in 2017; she had a solo exhibition there in 2020 entitled *The line of little figures*.

Statement of the artist

My practice is about space, landscape, cityscape and atmosphere within it. Architecture is sign of power and I like to use the architecture or its ruins as a tool to understand the space and its history. I'm particularly interested in military space. I like to trace back the past and see how it connects to now. The subject matter is very complex and almost overwhelming and I verge between abstraction and representation. The starting point is not abstraction itself but rather architecture. It's fascinating for me that painting retains its conventionality no matter how serious topic it tries to process. To me painting is a part of mark making and information processing. Soviet avant-garde architecture and aesthetic of Bauhaus school are all part of my influences.

The frequent and violent increase of ruins is very intriguing subject for me. So I usually start with research. I collect images from newspapers and Internet. They are mostly about war, violence, human resentment, demonstrations, destruction and ruins. My work simultaneously deals with the ability or disability of the medium of painting. Since painting depicts something instead of telling something. For me it seems once I'm in the studio I'm already faced with the failure between

the depicted subject and the way of the depiction. There is no specific form for visualizing fear or painting silence that is falling above the house recently bombed by drones. I'm interested how this, often very indisposed subject can be approached aesthetically.

I often start with little drawings and watercolours from those newspaper photographs. In the studio I deconstruct the photographs and almost dematerialize certain images, as if tracing the invisible. My work is characterised by a chain of reduction in colour and in representational guides. The lines and grids are documented through repetitions and differences appear between those repetitions.

- Katrin Koskaru, 2015.

Artworks and
exhibition views

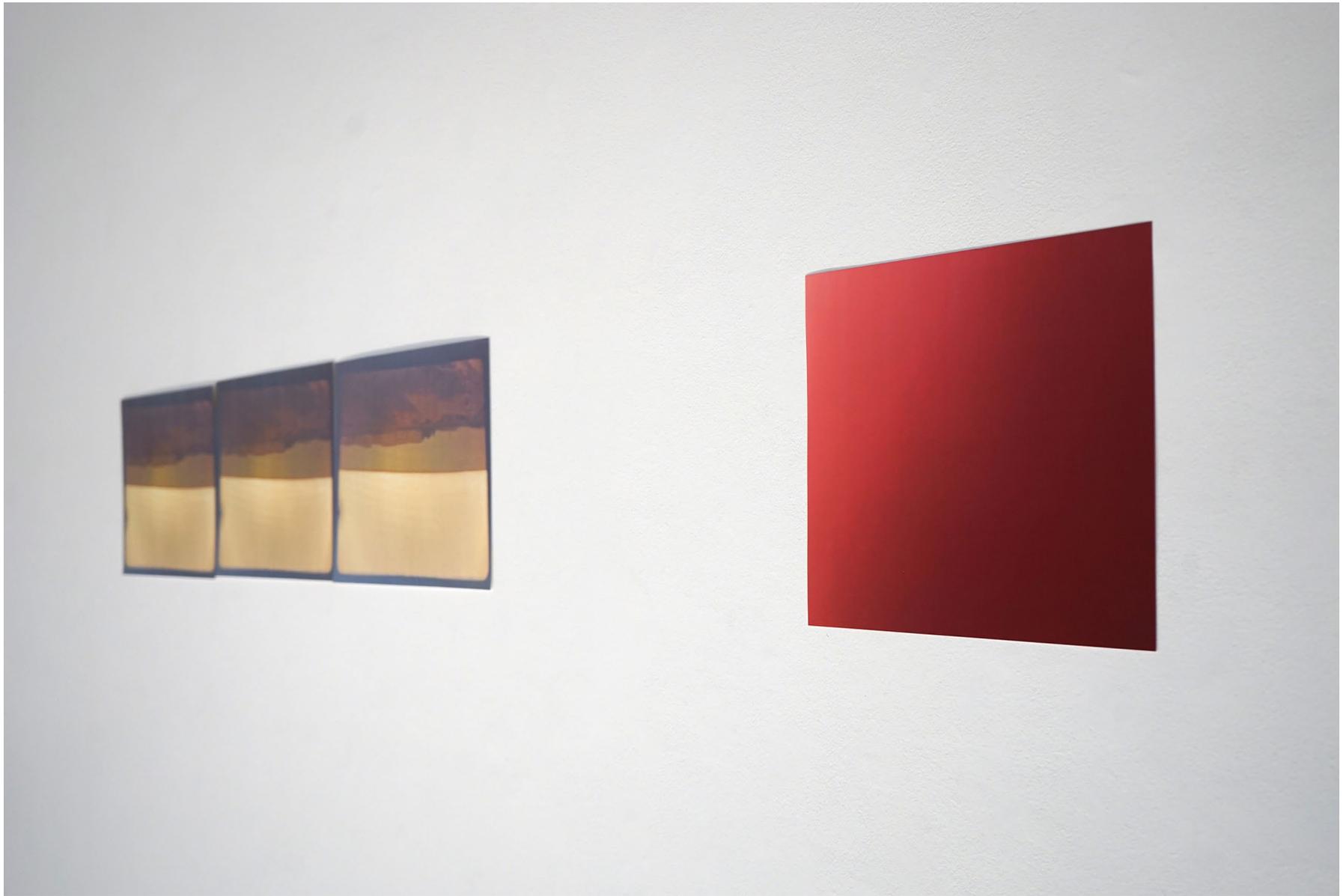
Exhibition view
*Engine Noise from
the Sun*, Hobusupea
Galerii, Tallinn,
Estonia, 2021

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



Exhibition view
*Engine Noise from
the Sun*, Hobusupea
Galerii, Tallinn,
Estonia, 2021

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



Exhibition view
*Mine varju! Mine
varju!*, Tartu
art house, Tartu,
Estonia, 2019

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



Exhibition view
*Mine varju! Mine
varju!*, Tartu
art house, Tartu,
Estonia, 2019

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



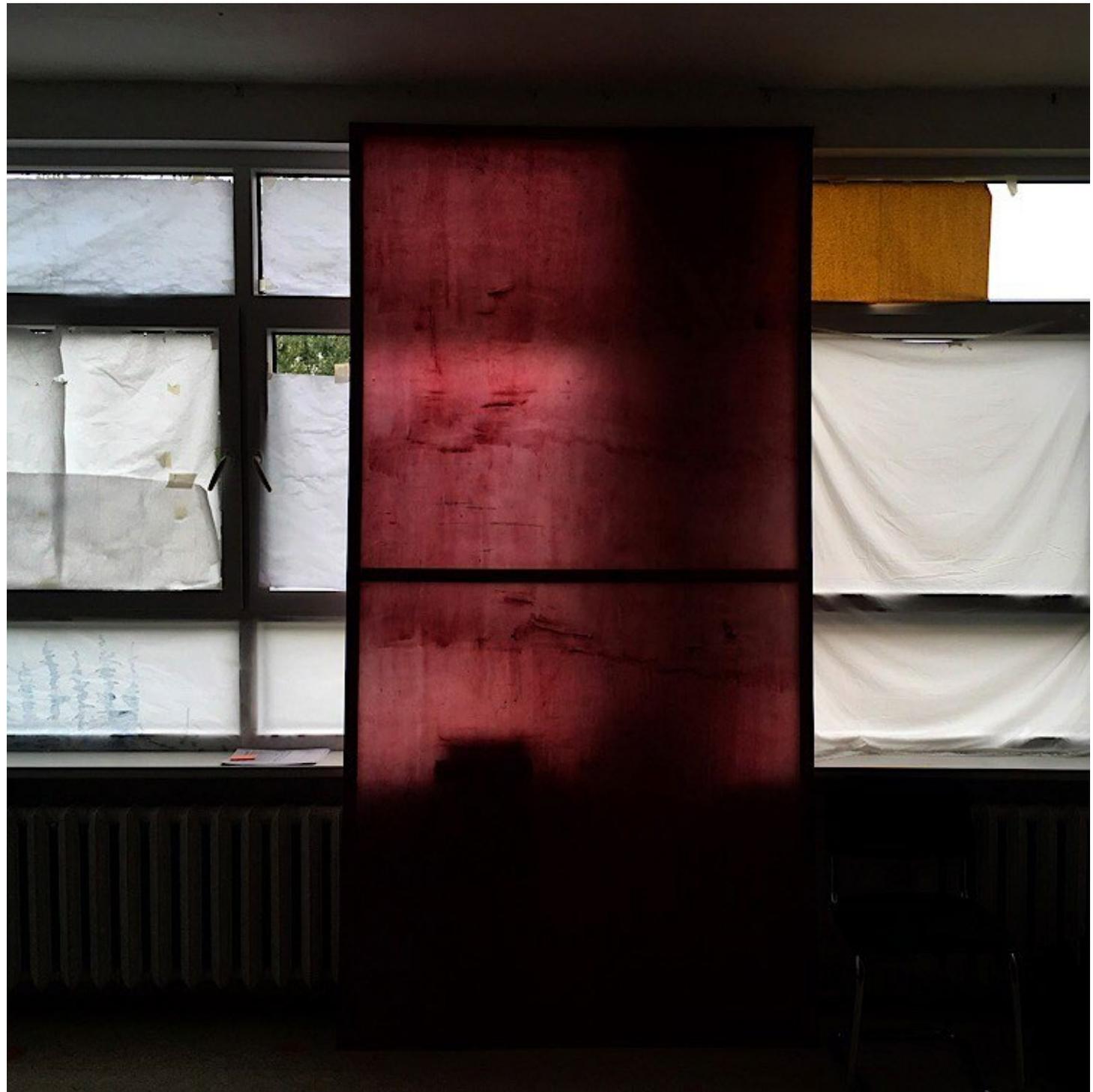
Exhibition view
*Mine varju! Mine
varju!*, Tartu
art house, Tartu,
Estonia, 2019

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



Exhibition view
*I Eat Sky, I
Excrete Sky...*,
2017

photo © Katrin
Koskaru



Exhibition view
*I Eat Sky, I
Excrete Sky...*,
Kumu Art Museum,
Tallinn, 2017

photo © Katrin
Koskaru and Kumu
Art Museum



Exhibition view
War Poem, Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez,
Paris, 2016

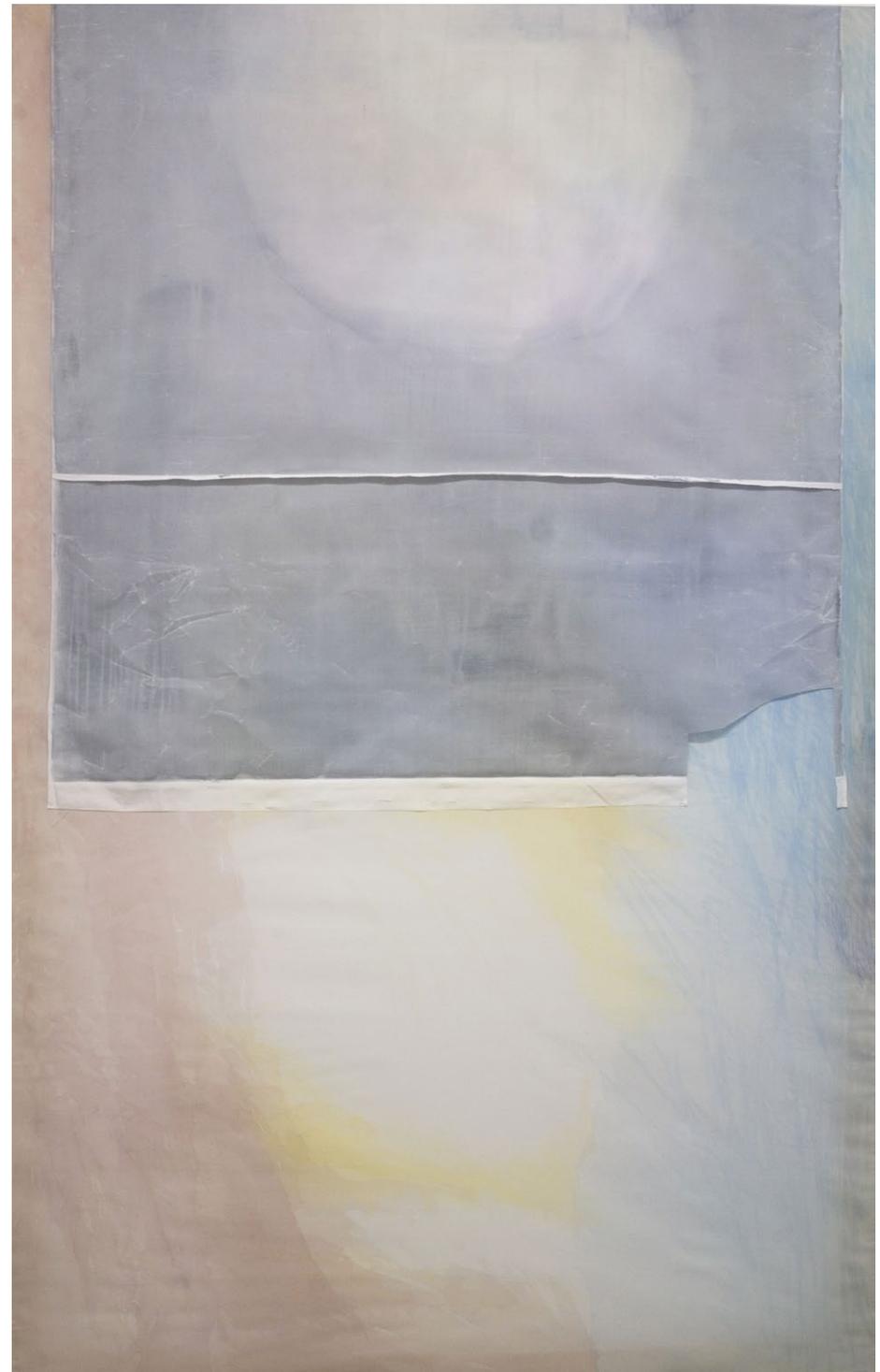
photo © Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez



Untitled, 2016

watercolor and
pen drawing on
polyester,
214x138cm

photo © Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez



Exhibition view
War Poem, Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez,
Paris, 2016

photo © Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez



Exhibition view
PA(Y)S(S)AGES,
Galerie Pascaline
Mulliez, Paris,
2014

photo © Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez



Come to close
quartet. 12, 2014

watercolor, bleach,
pencil on cotton,
240x150cm

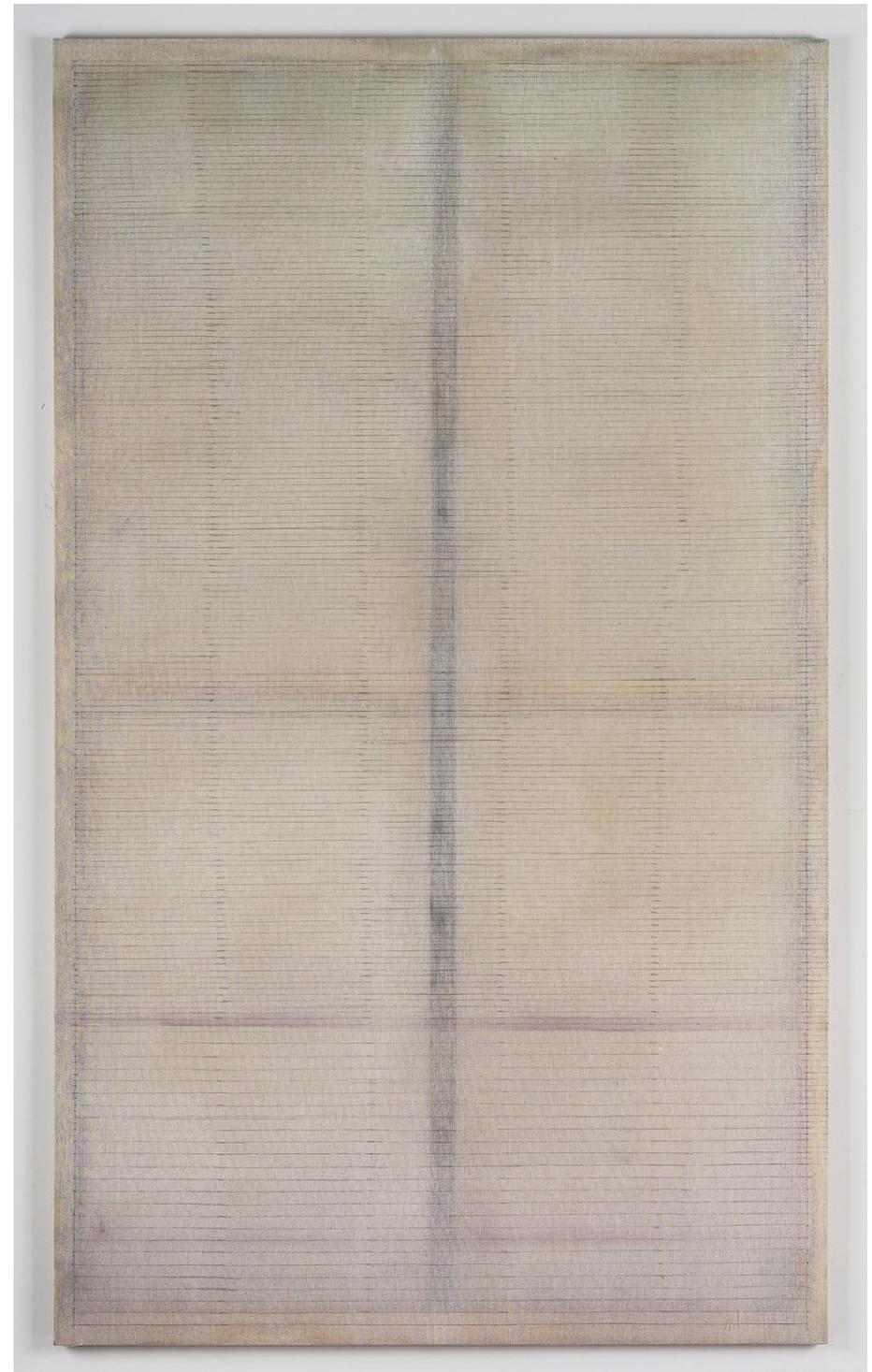
photo © Marlborough
Fine Art gallery



Come to close
quartet 35, 2014

watercolor, bleach,
pencil on cotton,
214x128cm

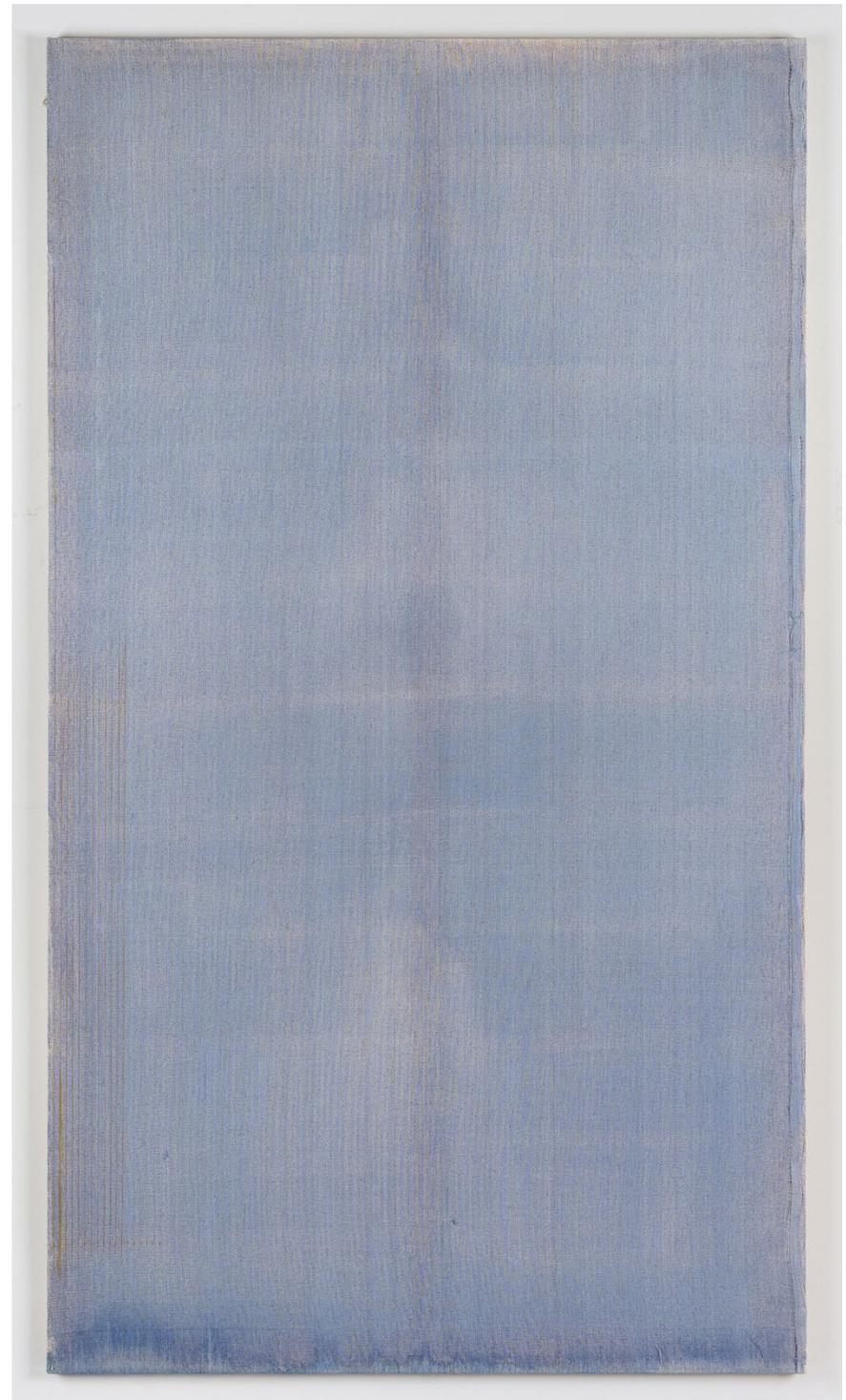
photo © Marlborough
Fine Art gallery



Come to close
quartet. 41, 2014

watercolor, bleach,
pencil on cotton,
214x122cm

photo © Marlborough
Fine Art gallery



*Come to close
quarters. 47, 2014*

watercolor, bleach,
pencil on cotton,
214x138cm

photo © Marlborough
Fine Art gallery



Fort I, 2013

oil on linen,
200x170cm

photo © Galerie
Pascaline Mulliez



Duga 3, 2012

oil and charcoal
on paper,
220x143cm

photo © Royal
College of Art,
Londres



Kreenholm, 2011

oil on linen,
200x170cm

photo © Royal
College of Art,
Londres



Interview with Sonia Recasens

«Shadows in a time of peace»

Sonia Recasens: Would you define yourself as a painter?

Katrin Koskaru: I don't know.

S.R.: Could you tell us why you are attracted to this medium historically connected with imperial, colonial and capitalist conquests?

K.K.: Imagine you are taking a walk. You are in the middle of nowhere, a gravel road running between some old fields. The landscape is slightly undulating, no house can be seen. It is spring and the dandelions are blooming, they are everywhere. By the road, there is a sign that says something like that: "Behind this sign, everywhere your eyes can see there was a battlefield. It has been battlefield many times but one time it got very bad. It was raining and that made blood flow faster causing blood-rivers. Those blood-rivers formed quickly lakes of blood where horses stood up to their knees..." something like that. Now, there is something between those lines, between those dandelions and horses and lakes that I need to explore. I use painting.

S.R.: So, in a way, your attraction for painting is related to your fascination with War. You grew up in the 1980s and the 1990s in Estonia, a country that was part of the Soviet Union until 1991. Did this political and military context marked

your memory, influenced your feelings towards landscapes and painting?

K.K.: Yes, it did. As a child I wondered about the expression: « We live in Peacetime ». What does it mean? So, it will be Wartime after this? Why? When? How come it is Peacetime and there are so many soldiers on the streets? From my kindergarten, I could see lot of parachutists in the sky. They were so amazing, so pretty against the blue sky! Then my father told me that they were all soldiers and it was part of their training. How disappointing! Cold War came to my consciousness later. And here we are now many years later: our Freedom and Peacetime are protected through constant preparations for the Wartime, big investments into military equipment and training. I do feel like I am waiting this silly game to end. But I am silly.

S.R.: It is like you translate the memory of these bruised landscapes through evanescent paintings that envelop the viewer in a strange atmosphere. In your previous works, like War Poems gleaned from the press or the Internet and newspapers, images of wars, that you erased, deconstructed through your process. Could you tell us more about this passage from figuration to abstraction?

K.K.: I collected whatever was on the news, or something I read about related to military activity, or any image that represented violence and power, directly or not. I felt I need to do something with them but didn't know what. Also, I kept in mind that I was and I am still living in Peacetime, but not in

the sense of time but in geographical sense. How do I process what is happening around me? There was no point for me to paint photos as they were. It would be too straight forward. No poetry and so hopeless. There was so much information and yet no possible conversation. So somehow, I started focus on unsaid words, shadows and screams I could not hear. I zoomed in.

S.R.: Could you describe more precisely your process, the way you work, experiment with the supports (canvas, polyester, etc.) and techniques (oil, watercolour, pen, etc.)? The texture is also very important in your work.

K.K.: For now, I use watercolors and mostly polyester fabric. I love that this fabric is as synthetic as it gets. If I enter in my studio, all the hair on my head stands up due to the lot of static electricity that is in the room. I cover this synthetic, electric material with layers of watercolors. Until they get thicker and heavier and lie on my studio floor like big sheets of skins. If I don't work on them, I try to keep my mind open and to think about the process that is going on while building something, touching other materials or scribbling or drawing with what I have in the studio, hence the pens and felt pens. Anyway, that's on the perfect day.

S.R.: In your painting, we can feel a particular attention to the fabric, to the texture of the canvas. The canvas is not only the support of the painting, but rather an integral part of the art work. I read that you first studied textile design. Can we say that painting starts with a piece of fabric?

K.K.: I don't think I have ever bought ready-prepared canvas. It has always been cheaper to do everything from scratch. I used to buy raw linen from fabric shops, heat a pot of rabbit skin glue and prepare the canvases. The way linen smells after first coating of glue-I loved all this process. I don't weave my own canvas. But I did get the habit of sensing the fabric by rubbing it between my fingers. I would love to be able to touch paintings in museums. So yes, it all starts with a piece of fabric. Soft, scratchy, absorbs water, resists water, covers up something or see-through, Jesus, and many other things- all fascinating.

S.R.: The light is also very important, because looking at your work I have the feeling of being immersed in a halo of light. Sometimes warm, sometimes colder...

K.K.: Painter's tools... light and shadow... Where there is a light, there is a shadow and I love shadow. Snowless winters in Estonia are grey. I mean really gloomy grey. It feels like grey grows out of the ground; it attacks you from every side. And this grey world doesn't have shadows. Or maybe everything is one huge joint shadow. It feels like being locked in an echoless room. It starts to play with your senses. Luckily, we have lamps, shadow makers.

S.R.: In your recent work, the painting become more sculptural, with a strong physicality. Could you explain us this evolution?

K.K.: I don't know if I can. Like you said it has evolved. It is something that progresses in the studio. I think at one

point I felt I had fallen too deep into abstraction. It felt necessary to come back, to have a form, a figure. To make sense and understand my own relations to this earth, the loss of it. The infinity of it. I don't know yet where it will lead me. Or if this is a Path. But it's interesting.

S.R.: Can we say that somehow, you create figures from these vaporous landscapes? I understand that you engaged in a deep reflection on the ecological issue. Is it a way to explore this sense of urgency and loss?

K.K.: Admiration and compassion towards any living creature is what I care about. And then there are those known or yet unknown relationships between us all that are interesting to me.

Curriculum vitae

Katrin Koskaru

Born in 1977 in Estonia
Lives and works in Tallinn,
Estonia

SOLO-SHOW

2021

• *Engine Noise from the Sun*,
Hobusepea galerii, Tallinn (E)

2020

• *The Lines of Little Figures*,
L'ahah #Moret, Paris (F)

2019

• *Mine varju! Mine varju!* Tartu
Art House, Tartu (E)

2017

• *He fell silent*, Egg Visual
Art, Livorno (I)

2016

• *War Poem*, Galerie Pascaline
Mulliez, Paris (F)

2014

• *Come To Close Quarters*,
Marlborough Fine Art Gallery,
London (UK)

2006

• *Anna Politkovskaja*, Gallery
Haus, Tallinn (E)

GROUP SHOW

2017

• *Anu Pöder. Be Fragile!
Be Brave!*, Kumu Art Museum,
Tallinn (E), curator: Rebeka
Põldsam

2015

- *House For Hanging*, with Margarita Glutzenberg and Sanja Todorovic, Westminster Waste, London (UK)

- *Explosive Standards*, La Petite Galerie, Paris (F)

2014

- *Can't Go On, Must Go On*, Tallinna Kunstihoone, Tallinn, Estonia

- *PA(Y)S(S)AGES*, Galerie Pascaline Mulliez, Paris (F)

2013

- *RCA Show 2013*, Royal College of Art, London, United Kingdom
- *RCA Secret Postcards*, Howie street, London (UK)

2012

- *Archaeology and the Future of Estonian Art Scenes*, Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn (E)

- Summer Show, RCA, London (UK)

2011

- *RCA Work In Progress*, Royal College of Art, London (UK)

2007

- *Continuous Past. Signs of the Soviet Era in Recent Estonian Art*, Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn (E)

- *8am till 5pm*, with Alvar Reisner and Elis Saareväli, Vaal Gallery, Tallinn, Estonia

AWARDS AND RESIDENCES

2018

Résidence, L'ahah, Paris (F)

2015

Résidence, Galerie Pascaline Mulliez, Paris (F)

2013

Valerie Beston Studio Award (UK)

2012

SA Archimedes, Kristjan Jaak Grant (E)

2006

Faculty of Fine Arts Graduate Grant (UK)

2004

Margaret Kevendi Grant (E)

EDUCATION

2011-2013

Royal College of Art, London, MA Painting

2002-2005

Estonian Academy of Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, BA

1998-2002

Tartu Art College, Textile Design, Diploma

Publications and press review

2019

- Interview with Sonia Recasens, «Shadows in a time of peace»

- Krista Piirimäe, «Pilguheit süngesse tulevikku» [«Glimpse into a dark future»], *Tartu Postimees*, September 3

2017

- Jennifer Boyd, «A Tactile Dialect of Strong and Soft and Spiked: Anu Pöder at Kumu Art Museum», *Afterall*, August 2017

2016

- Marie Maertens, «Les abstractions de Katrin Koskaru», *Connaissance des arts*, February

- Lucien Rieul, «Notre rencontre avec Katrin Koskaru» *Les jeudis arty*, April

2014

- Hunter Braithwaite, entretien, *Kunst.ee and Art:icurate*

2013

- *People de la Muse a typical Artist poem 2013*, publication by graduate students of the painting department of the Royal College of Art, London

2005

- *22+Young Estonian Artists*, éd. Karin Laansoo



L'AHAH

ahah : French masculine noun.

An opening in a plain wooden fence permitting or extending a view.

L'ahah offers visual artists personalised, long-term assistance in the form of tools - exhibitions, publications, collaborations, encounters with the public, transdisciplinary events - specifically adapted to their respective approaches and practices. The goal is to enhance their outreach and thus help support contemporary art. L'ahah currently has thirteen artist-members working in a variety of media.

L'ahah has two exhibition spaces in Paris's 11th arrondissement and an experimental venue in Ris-Orangis, in the city's southern suburbs.



ARTIST-MEMBERS

Claire Chesnier (1986, France), **Jean-françois Leroy** (1982, France), **Enrico Bertelli** (1959, Italy), **Anne-Charlotte Yver** (1987, France), **Vincent Hawkins** (1959, UK), **Jeffrey Silverthorne** (1946, USA), **Katrin Koskaru** (1977, Estonia), **Lena Amuat & Zoë Meyer** (1977 & 1975, Switzerland), **Charlie Boisson** (1980, France), **Bernard Gaube** (1952, Belgium), **Vincent Dulom** (1965, France), **Ran Zhang** (1981, China)



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