

JOHANNA KESTILÄ

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Your journey through various materials has led you to create unique textile paintings. Can you discuss a specific material that has greatly influenced your work and how you incorporate its qualities into your artistic practice?

I have earlier said that I am a material-oriented artist. For me it means that I can take any material, like an old piece of tape, and it may inspire me, becoming part of the work. Nowadays, the material itself doesn't feel as important to me as my working approach; the material is just a tool. My ability to observe and examine things is what matters most, and I've used photography as a part of my creative process for a very long time. Each work has hundreds of variations of the directions it could take, and I explore these variations through photography."

The process of deconstructing and reconstructing your work is fascinating. What drives you to break down what may initially seem finished, and how does this act of reimagining contribute to the final piece?

The entire artistic process is a dialogue between me and the painting. I want to keep the process as light and playful as possible. Although making art is an important and big part of life, it's good to remember that the truly significant things in life usually relate to other people, not to paint or canvas.

I never cut a painting; I tear it. It's about having the freedom to do anything to the painting; it also serves as a reminder that art isn't too serious, as a painting can always be reassembled again and again. Rearranging also allows for the possibility to intensify the painting's atmosphere, and that is one of the most interesting phases of the process for me.

You mention breaking free from traditional artistic boundaries. How do you define those boundaries in your practice, and what does it mean for you to challenge or redefine them?

When I set out to create a piece of art, I don't think of it as just making a painting; the structure of the work and the base material are just as significant as the paint. I see my works as part of life and its flow, and they are just as unfinished as a person.

In today's world, at least in Finland, artists often follow a specific stepwise path only to be considered credible. I reject all of

that; in my view, an artist's role is not to follow a set path just because it's customary to do so. This creates uncertainty and fear, and I don't want fear to direct my art-making. Maintaining artistic freedom has been incredibly important to me.

Your textile paintings incorporate elements of space and density in intriguing ways. Can you elaborate on how you manipulate these elements to evoke emotion or create dialogue within your pieces?

I always have a thought or event that I start exploring. It follows with me throughout, and I search for a context in which to place it in my mind. During the process, I seek various everyday visual cues from the surrounding world, including messages and shopping lists. It is all part of an interpretation related to the story, so my life at the time of the artistic process is strongly connected to my works.

I work more extensively with the canvas itself; it might have holes or seams, or it might be damp or wet. The painting adapts to the base, while the base also shapes the meanings of the painting. I practice the lines a lot, even for several days before painting, to make the line as flexible and smooth as possible. My process has evolved over many years into what it is now.

Given your background in visual art therapy, how does this experience inform your artistic process? Do you find that your work serves as a form of therapy for yourself or for your audience?

Studying art therapy brought me a sense of freedom because, in art therapy, I work with art but not as an artist. In therapy, art is just a means to an end. Working with art therapy has also brought many new meanings to the process of creating art; things don't always need to be so complete, and art doesn't always have to be so refined.

Creating actual art doesn't feel like a therapeutic process to me because I'm always trying to push my art to a slightly better, sharper level. However, I have received messages from several people who have seen my works and have told me that they gained affirmation and freedom in their own art from my pieces."



Those moments, acrylic, crayon, ink, and sesame oil on canvas, 47.2x35.4in