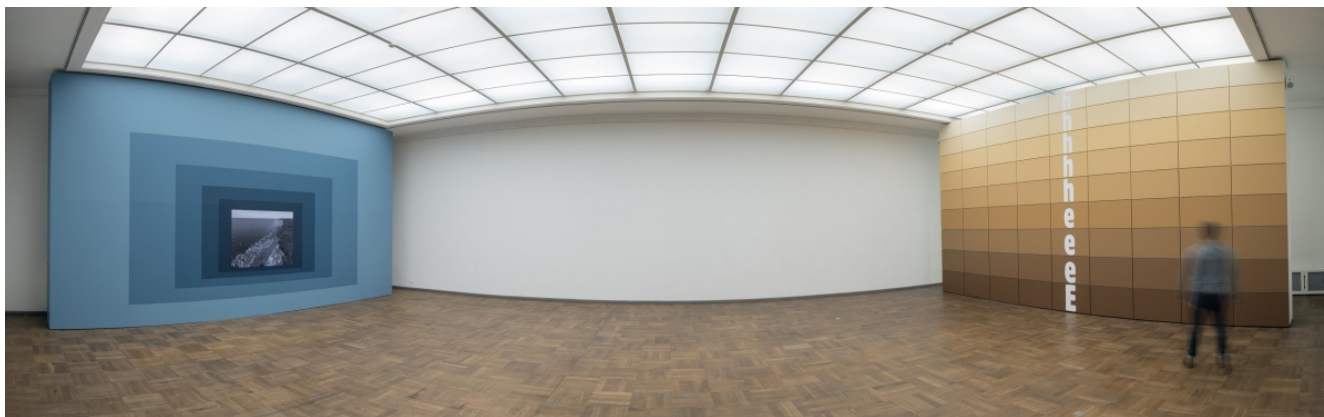


Photo reportage from Kaido Ole's solo exhibition at Tallinn Art Hall



Panorama of *The Origin of Estonia and The End of Estonia*, Tallinn Art Hall, 2016. Photo: Karel Koplímets

CURATOR'S DISCLAIMER Anneli Porri

What can I say to complement a painter who has more words than a writer, a better capacity for self-reflection than a psychoanalyst, a philosopher's aspiration of capturing the absolute and a healthy dose of self-criticism from a good upbringing? Does an art critic have anything else to add? Looking at the ongoing careful reception of Kaido Ole's exhibitions, it seems that criticism itself is sensing its futility. If Ole's art is not a topic of discussion for art theorists, then there is all the more reason to believe that we could instead find out more about him through economics, materials engineering or philosophy. I, however, do not possess these tools. The only thing I am certain of is the methodical nature of his work. So let us proceed on this.

The structural strictness and self-discipline of Ole's work is externalised in his paintings, the concepts of which are always rigidly in place before the painting starts; the series are based on either a comicbook-like narrative, the exhibition space or a modular system that only the artist knows; likewise, the colouring and light-dark contrast are precisely set by chromatic scales (which are only known to the artist, but are easily deducible). In the same way, the technical content of the *Nogank Hoparniis* paintings was preset – formally, Ole is building on the 2012 Kumu and 2014 Art Hall Gallery exhibitions. If at Kumu he exhibited a number of still lifes that were balancing on one wheel and comprised of real figures, realistically painted ones as well as abstract shapes, then in the Art Hall Gallery he combined similar objects into manlike characters with different personalities. Now he has taken the next step in attempting the most difficult assignment in academic painting – the thematic figurative composition. This should cause a small smirk to appear in the corner of the mouth, but should also be taken completely seriously: through painting scenes on different subjects, Kaido Ole is attempting to put his finger not only on what is essential in a given subject field, but also on what is ambiguous. The subjects are family, work, war, death, sports, art, leisure...

Kaido Ole describes his own thesis statement: "The logical follow-up to my earlier work, as it would be in classical painting studies, is to take on the final master painter's examination – a multiple-figure thematic composition where people and objects can finally live and act together in all kinds of natural circumstances. In short, although I am painting genre art, it is not purely in any established key of realism, but in this eclectic, promising and personal parallel realism that I have developed over the past few years."

Parallel realism is probably the best term for an arbitrary style-amalgam of different realist painting in which elements of both surrealism and hyperrealism can be found, and where the subjects of some paintings correspond to those by 19th century realists, while the pathos of some pieces is socialist or pop realist. Ole primarily uses the means of light, shadow and perspective to create systems that seem extraordinarily real, but here he uses an important technique to contrast illusion and reality: in every painting, in addition to what is a corporeal and almost tangibly spatial and physical construction, there is some unrealistic element – a broad brushstroke, a spill of colour on the canvas that seemingly exists outside the world and lighting scheme of the painting. With this painterly gesture, he turns around the conventional spatial relation of the understanding that a painting should be like a window: the only thing that is real in the painting, that actually exists, is the brushstroke or colour, the rest is an illusion. The use of this technique was especially clear at the *Still Lifes* exhibition. Another reason to believe that the scenes are taking place in a parallel world is the lack of an environment – Ole's composite people are operating in some invisible room. They cast downward shadows, but no floor, walls or ceiling are in sight.

Kaido Ole is definitely someone who figures in attempts to define contemporary Estonian art and the art community has high hopes for his creative development. An artist's body of work, which usually tends to be tied to the name of the author, is actually a heterogenous mass of creative statements that may also have been collective works in co-operation with students or other authors and in which "the being of the author" reins itself in considerably and does not conform to the expectations of the public. There may also be whole exhibitions, public and correctly presented, that deviate from the creative homogeneity (for example, *Meeting and Hymn* in 2007). In these cases, the author has either knowingly or through experimentation digressed from the uniform path. These exhibitions can, in a way, be excluded by the author's authenticity function. Likewise, amongst the paintings at *Nogank Hoparniis*, there is an odd photo, albeit surrounded by a painted illusion. To generalise according to Foucault – the author is the constant, but creation is disruption, the name of the author attempts to tie everything together into a body of work, but the pieces resist because they contain different discourses.

Then again, Ole is a very convenient author for his viewers, because in every innovation, there is a reference to his earlier known work. At this exhibition as well, something familiar can be found: in two of the paintings we meet the bubblehead-man from the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s; the background of *The Drum of Choices* is the circular spectrum from *Questions* (2008); *Dance Night* repeats the speaker motif of 2003–2005; in the background of *War* there are two burning houses from the exhibition *Attention, Matches!* (2006). What is most bizarre, however, is that an approach to abstract painting, dating back to the so-called search for an original style at the beginning of Ole's professional career as an artist, has sneaked in, disguised as some body parts between clearly outlined fields of colour.

The tension is apparent, but Ole casually paints situations where something has inevitably gone wrong or is no longer under control – to him, the motifs that are destructive and pose a physical threat are central – the matches beat up a man, a house burns down, someone is cutting off their fingers in a race against time, two cars have been in a crash, the bubblehead-man is smashing a porcelain trinket with a hammer, ejaculating on rose petals or using the artist's hand as a urinal; in the end, the author's head outright explodes. His most obvious fears are material damage (fire), the loss of certain values in life (the bubblehead-man's destructive behaviour) or physical abnormality, disability, helplessness (finger amputation, explosion). At the exhibition of still lifes, the danger lurked at first in becoming unstable –

all the still lifes are balancing on wheels or ignoring gravity and other laws of physics in some other way. All of this is supported by the presence of the discourse that painting is the only tool that enables to make statements that differ from the physical world. This is also how the *Freaks* and many characters of this exhibition stay put together – only in the world created by the artist.

At the *Nogank Hopaniis* exhibition, Ole undertakes a massive existential destruction, a move that almost seems to be blasphemy – he lets a whole nation disappear. The two murals *The Origin of Estonia* and *The End of Estonia* have been specially conceived for the large room at the Art Hall. They signify the starting point and ending for the Estonian narrative, binding between them the people walking in the hall as well as the rest of the exhibition.

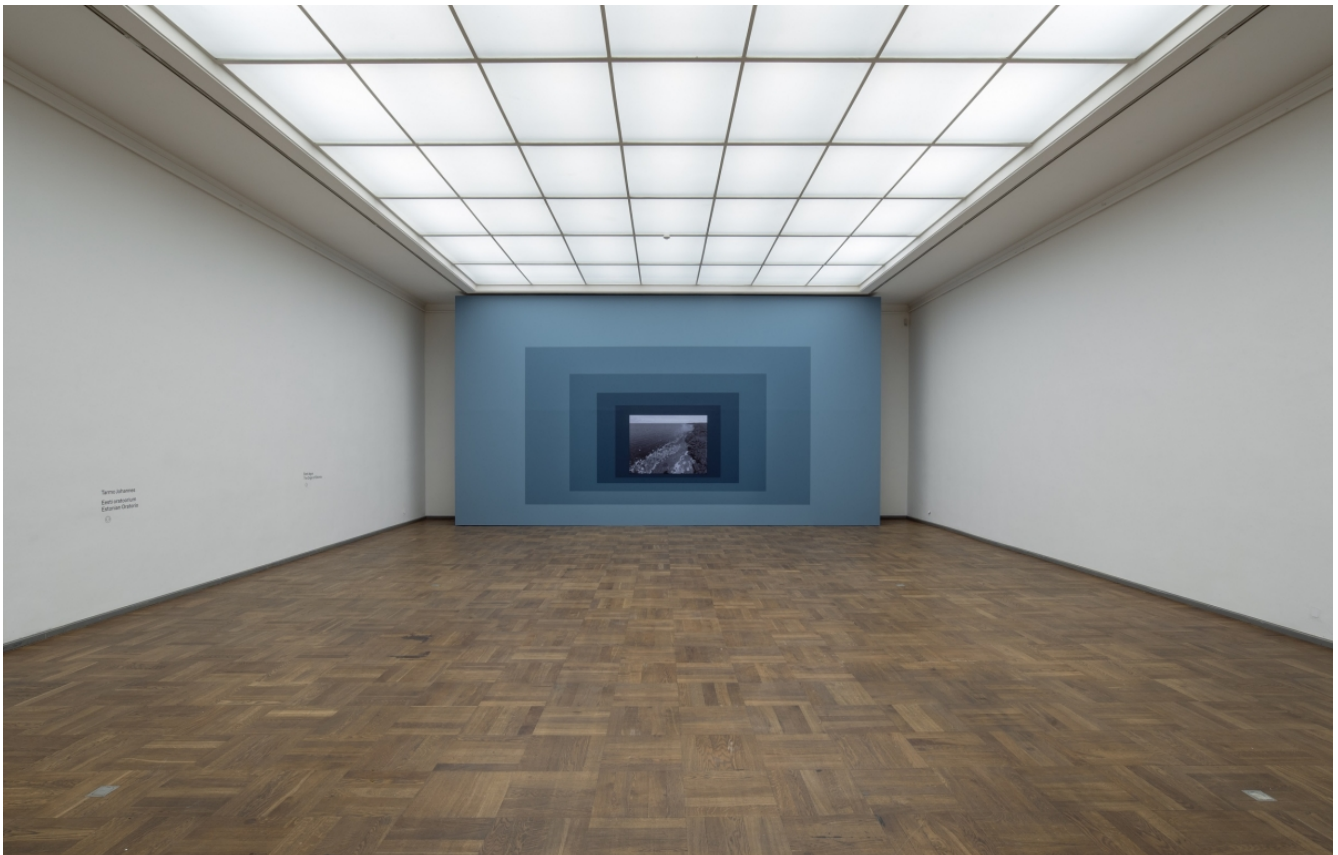
For the murals, Ole will collaborate with flutist Tarmo Johannes, who is set to compose an interactive piece especially for the exhibition hall. Each day of the exhibition, Johannes will record new material for that day: "*Estonian Oratorio* is therefore a large-scale musical work lasting more than a month and will keep developing, growing and changing in form with the composer during the whole time the exhibition remains open. Concentrating every day on recording the motifs for that day is like entering a prayer hall, performing a routine that repeats from one day to the next, and at the same time is like stopping within time, which keeps rushing on by." Outside the Art Hall itself, a stereo version of the sound installation will be available online in real time at <http://tarmo.webhop.net:8000/radio>

The Origin of Estonia takes a look thousands of years into the past, where Ole has focused the lens of his time tunnel and is attempting to capture on a surveillance camera an event equivalent to the primeval bang of Estonianness – the arrival of the first Estonians to the shores of the Baltic Sea: "The open arms of the vast sea glimmer before him, it is hostile, yet cool, withdrawn, yet welcoming, more mysterious than the forest, more homelike than the starry sky, the end of a world and the beginning of another." [1] True, there is nothing left of Lennart Meri's sensory magnificence in Ole's piece, there is only a purely logical fact. Likewise, the sigh of the last Estonian that fades into eternity is a mere logical conclusion. We, however, have to live our lives now, swaying between these two boundaries, and to live it as *nogankhopaniis* as we can.

What is *nogank hopaniis*? These are made-up words in a made-up language that can mean absolutely everything that we can come up with. What we can come up with is, at this exhibition and why not in life in general, the measure of all things. If we can think of it, we can say it. Or to depict it, like Kaido Ole does. Furthermore, with his made-up words, Ole signifies the intensity of living; the pleasure derived from painting, thinking and pondering over life; the condition of the creative flow; the joy of life or any other impelling, vital and all-encompassing frame of mind where taking action as well as solving problems is challenging and engaging. In a state of mind like this, some fundamental notions about life in general could reveal themselves.

Kaido Ole
Nogank Hopaniis
From 17 December 2016 to 5 February 2017
Tallinn Art Hall
Curated by Anneli Porri

[1] Lennart Meri. *Hõbevalge. Reisikiri suurest paugust, tuulest ja muinasluulest. Sine loco*: Eesti Päevaleht, Akadeemia, 2008, p 14.



Kaido Ole, *The Origin of Estonia*, 2016. Photo: Karel Koplímets



Kaido Ole, *Nogank Hoparniis*, exhibition view, Tallinn Art Hall, 2016. Photo: Karel Koplímets



*Kaido Ole, The Drum of Choices. Oil, acrylics and a textile appliqué on the canvas, stainless steel frame with remote control, 187 × 197 cm, 2016.
Photo: Karel Koplímets*



Kaido Ole, *Nogank Hoparniis*, exhibition view, Tallinn Art Hall, 2016. Photo: Karel Koplímets



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