

Annual Exhibition of Tartu Artists

The annual exhibition of Tartu artists, functioning on the basis of an open call, is an old format not so common in the contemporary context. Traditionally the works selected by the jury formed the exhibition.

This structure of free submission of works chosen by aesthetic value lost its adequateness a long time ago, but not in the context of Tartu. Here the traditional value systems are rather hermetical and mummified, and the annual exhibition format has still its role to play, judging by the sole fact that every year it is the most visited exhibition.

Since there are none common aesthetic values to agree upon, the exhibition format could not function anymore, supported solely by the need to somehow symbolically monitor the diversity of the local art scene. Having tried to reform the format in different ways Tartu Art House recently settled on a designer led exhibition solution. To put it short, works are gathered on the principle of open call, just the traditional jury's place is taken by an exhibition designer, who chooses the works, and designs the exhibition according to his/ her vision.

Video artist and painter Jaan Toomik was invited for collaboration in year 2012. Having looked at the works, he made a principal decision not to leave out any authors, finding himself in a situation with 98 authors and altogether ca 150 works (of which 106 got exhibited) that had in common not so much more than the sole fact of their existence. Thereby comes the biggest problem – how to arrange the exposition of this whole of works but avoid paradoxes in it that would cause misinterpretation of the original idea. I must say Toomik managed to solve the situation and proved that the format can work. We might not be used to it anymore, but it is still possible to go to an exhibition and watch individual works hanging on the wall, rather than looking at the exhibition space as a conceptual whole, which for contemporary critics such as myself, is normally the only way to perceive an exhibition. So in a way Toomik's design opened for me a way of looking at art I had not forgotten, but never actually known.

The exhibition is set together from authors and works which follow the open call, so the annual exhibitions representativeness depends on who is willing to participate. In this respect it does not give a 100% overview of the art scene in Tartu. Missing, for example, text based conceptualism, which takes remarkable place in overview exhibitions of Estonian contemporary art. In this particular case, this is the only thing missing as other tendencies are in the show, though not represented in the best possible way perhaps.

Tartu is famous for its stencil based street art, which has found its way to halls of Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn, and was reproduced (the proper way, without asking, in the night before the opening) on Tartu Art House wall. Art Collage sculpture department have been saving place for the best Estonian young sculptures, but this year the professors were lazy and the students no good. But, for example, Tartu University painting department made a good impression as well as the private school for amateur painters Konrad Mägi Studio. So one can say painting dominates in this year's exhibition, underlying the legend Tartu being a city of painters.

Jaan Toomik himself while designing the exhibition verbalised two main tendencies – landscape in different forms and body-centered model handling where the surrounding is forgotten altogether. This formed the central opposition of exhibition taking up the main hall. Everything else was displayed discretely, according to aesthetics.

The exhibition is open on 22.12. 2012. – 13.01. 2013 at Tartu Art House (Vanemuine 26, Tartu)



Exhibition designer Jaan Toomik standing on Kristina Sokolova's work "Stair".



Installing the exhibition.



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One of renown Stencil artist's in Tartu, MinajaLydia's "Myrtle Corbin".



Eva-Leena Miksson "Give me time to set the plowshare", a typical but rather mediocre example of Tartu Art Collage sculpture department works, but here bay one must admit that all of the good sculptors who have grown out of the Art Colledge have reached their maturity when in MA studies at Estonian Academy of Arts.



Laura Põld "House". One of the most interesting graduates of Tartu University painting department (MA 2009.). Currently lives and works in Vienna.



View of the landscape section.