

Fish don't live in water that is too pure

As a child Eeva Tervala wanted to be a horse and a mother. She also wanted to fly, not like an eagle, confidently majestic, but rather like a butterfly which, on fragile wings flies tens of thousands of kilometres. Does art need anything more than this? "Space, time, strength and fluidity" – the four concepts that Tervala now talks about – were already evident in her dreams as a child. The unconscious grace and beauty of a horse, the strength and movement of its quivering muscles, but also its horsey smell. Motherhood – birth, death and nature's endless cycle – the fact that nothing stops; beauty in the midst of pain, sweat, blood and crying out. Not only the force of life and the power of continuity but also the belief in these, a belief that in itself demands strength.

When the artist is a woman, it is easy to be trapped into clichés and talk of sensitivity and beauty. But Tervala's aim is not simply something sweet and delicate. "If water is too pure, fish can't live in it." She demolishes beauty, picks holes in it and scratches off all unnecessary adornment. She risks taking an image to its limit and these risks add imperfections to her work, tarnish it, leave empty spaces, insinuate danger. Tervala lives with nature in a perpetually interactive relationship, sometimes even obsessively, but mere illustration is not enough for her. Confrontation and conflict are also involved.

Natural history is also a form of cultural history. "Napoleon came back from Russia because it was so damn cold there". Looking at beauty and cruelty inevitably implies duality. When Tervala focusses on a spider she offers us a vision of it as hunter and as prey. It is easy enough for the viewer to identify with the victim but there is also the viewer's own vision of the object. And along with this, the knowledge and awareness of those incredible butterfly wings and spider webs. "Spiders have been on earth for over 300 million years – a species that has neither a digestive tract nor jaws, yet it survives – this is what catches hold of our imagination."

But as I have said we are not talking about mere illustration. "A watercolour, even a good one, is nothing more than a tool. Watercolours and drawing are like words. Incredibly beautiful words exist but they need some kind of context in which to be put." With words as with images, essence

and structure, nature and culture live in constant dialogue. Good art is always a combination of

"enigma and method". Everything must have its structure, causality and reason. There is never only one

point of view. "The spider web is as much a trap as a vital necessity."

Art, nevertheless, is art and an image must work as such. Form incorporates space, time, strength and fluidity – movement and the rhythm of movement. Eeva Tervala draws from observation as well as from memory. She is also a teacher of dance and has always pictured movement. In her depiction of dance, the use of space and movement with its transient nature creates tremendous tension between what is observed and what is remembered. Where and when does observation end or memory begin? What comes from the memory in the painter's hand, or from the dancer's body and the knowledge it embodies? Movement flows like the water in a water colour. "The presence, speed and immediacy of water" that precedes the process of drying, the silence, the creation from memory.

Among the visual arts, sculpture is close to Tervala's heart. Even immobile, sculpture organizes space. In sculpture as in dance, space and time unite. "What stays behind, what lies in front...a bit like time itself." It is space, however, that particularly fascinates and intrigues Tervala and she has made a concerted effort in her work to 'get away from walls'. "My experience of movement is what motivates me. When I see an empty space I feel happy. The flow of the work, how it moulds space, this type of energy is what interests me."

An artist can try to change the world and offer new ways of looking at it, trying to show what cannot be seen. But Tervala also wants to remind us of the need to "enjoy each moment". Fate and the power of essential elements are objectives for which she strives, "adjusting to the inevitable while remaining strong". What might we take as the basic theme in Tervala's work? "The idea of what would be important if everything were in danger?"

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from the book "Kosketuspintoja", Kustannus Oy*