

Marja Helander To Curate the Mänttä Art Festival In 2019

The Mänttä Art Festival has selected Marja Helander (b. 1965) as the curator for the 2019 exhibition. Helander is a Sámi photographer, video artist and film-maker with roots both in Helsinki and Utsjoki. In her work, she has studied various themes including her own identity between the Finnish and the Sámi culture.

Since 1992, Helander's work has been exhibited in two dozen solo exhibitions and over 50 group exhibitions in Finland and abroad. At the 2018 Tampere Film Festival, Marja Helander was awarded the Risto Jarva Prize for her film *Eatnanvuloš lottit, Birds In The Earth*.

For Marja Helander, the Mänttä Art Festival is a familiar event from years back. She has participated in the exhibition twice, in 1995 and 2005. She particularly remembers the 1995 exhibition with 164 selected artists. – Every time I have taken part in the Mänttä Art Festival, it has been a happy experience with a great sense of community, she recalls.

In her art, Marja Helander often builds from her own background between two cultures, the Finnish and the Sámi culture. – But I don't feel that all of my work should revolve around this theme. I have worked with other subjects here and there, Helander notes. As an example, she mentions her photographic series shot in New York. – I am at peace with it. I'm fine with being called 'a Sámi artist.' And if it isn't mentioned, that's fine, too.

What drives Marja Helander as an artist is curiosity and the willingness to always learn something new. – This is why making video art and short films has been so inspiring after a long career in photography, Helander says. – Lately I have found that I miss working with my hands, and that's why I will probably be working on three-dimensional pieces next.

When selecting the artists for the XXIV Mänttä Art Festival, Helander has several criteria. The most important theme she wants to discuss at the exhibition set in Pekilo next summer, is environmental issues: What happens, when humans rule the land and natural resources? – At the moment, many artists are creating artworks about global warming and nature, as it is such a hot topic, Helander says.

– However, this approach won't be shared by all the contributors, so it won't be strictly an exhibition about the environment. Some of the artists share the Northern dimension, Lapland and Northern themes. For me, the main goal is to curate the exhibition into an experience that leaves the guests with a strong emotional impact, Helander explains. – One thing it won't be is boring, she concludes.

The artists for the XXIV Mänttä Art Festival will be revealed in February, 2019.

The Mänttä Art Festival has been organized by its founding association 'Mäntän kuvataiteen ystävät' since 1993, first as a biennial and, since 1999, annually. Last year, the festival was awarded the prestigious Finland Prize, recognizing its long-standing work in the field of Finnish contemporary art. Since 2002, the main exhibition venue has been Pekilo, a former animal feed refinery in the Mänttä centre.

The XXIV Mänttä Art Festival will be held on 16 June – 1 September, 2019.