



# Ludmilla Siim.

## THE GLIMMER OF BEING

23.02.–29.05.2022

Tartu Art Museum has the honour of hosting Ludmilla Siim's (b 1938) extensive and colourful retrospective exhibition *The Glimmer of Being* on the first two floors of our leaning building. The exhibition for the first time brings together Siim's paintings that are part of the canon of Estonian art and the works she made in over forty years after emigrating to Finland.

Ludmilla Siim was born on 20 November 1938 and until 1945 lived in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. The artist's mother worked at the botanical gardens as an accountant and her father worked as a smith. Ludmilla's memories of Alma-Ata are mostly associated with her mother and the botanical gardens, and with her father and reading books. She enjoyed spending time with books, either reading or having her father read to her. The books were quite diverse, from fairy tales to American literature to Greek mythology. The influence of the latter can be found in the artist's oeuvre.

The artist's mother, who was from Estonia, longed for the homeland of her childhood, and so the family arrived in Tartu, that had been ravaged by World War II, at the beginning of the spring of 1945. Ludmilla began her studies at Tartu's School #2 (currently Miina Härma Gymnasium), but in 1953, due to conflicts with her classmates and on her mother's machination, she transferred to the Tartu School of Visual Arts.

Ludmilla graduated in 1958 from the Tartu School of Visual Arts with honours. The only opportunity to continue her studies and receive a higher artistic education was to attend the Estonian State Art Institute in Tallinn, but she hadn't decided yet which specialisation to choose. The decision to study painting was made for her.

Ludmilla Siim.  
Art Museum of  
Estonia

The painter Ilmar Kimm (1920–2011), who taught at the Art Institute, was invited to the defence of the graduation works in Tartu. He recommended to Headmaster Rimmel that Ludmilla apply to the Department of Painting.

Ludmilla studied in the State Art Institute of the ESSR from 1958 to 1965. Ludmilla's graduate work was titled *Laboratory* (1965) but, even after the painting was presented and marked, she still didn't receive a diploma. She had to work three additional years as a teacher in an art school and only then did the institute give her the diploma. In 1965, Ludmilla started teaching art in School #46 of Tallinn (currently Tallinn Pelgulinn Gymnasium). Among the students at School #46 were the future painter Andres Tolts (1949–2014), the painter and later video artist Ando Keskküla (1950–2008), the painter Urmas Pedanik (b 1949) and the architect, installation artist and printmaker Jüri Okas (b 1950).

After her compulsory work as a teacher, Ludmilla received her diploma, started her career as a freelancer and entered the Estonian art life at the end of the 1960s. Until her departure from Estonia in 1977, she had a lot of influence on Estonian art, and the art life of the 1970s cannot be covered without mentioning her. That decade is characterised by depictions of urban landscapes and urbanised environment. Her works from that time were influenced by pop art, hyperrealism and surrealism. They focus on space and people. Figures are usually in the foreground and the space behind them seems to stretch out infinitely.

When Ludmilla lived in Estonia, she was a renowned artist who participated in numerous local and pan-Soviet exhibitions. Leaving Estonia closed a very important chapter in Ludmilla's life. Due to her departure, she was included in the list of artists who were forbidden in the USSR. She was erased from the cultural and artistic memory until the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed and she could once again participate in exhibitions in Estonia. Ludmilla Siim's membership in the Estonian Painters Association was restored only in 2005.

In Finland, she had to adapt to new artistic standards since figurative painting was not popular. Ludmilla described the start of her

life in Finland in an earlier interview: "My world view remained the same but the question was how to make myself artistically visible. The approach I had used to exhibit in Tallinn was not acceptable in Finland, and they didn't understand the things happening in Estonia. Art was ruled by restrained minimalism, which was definitely non-figurative since people were not depicted. This had an influence on me since I saw that easier imagery can be used to reach artistic truths."<sup>1</sup>

Ludmilla was generally successful in adapting to living in Finland. From 1989 to 2003, she was a teacher at the centre for adult courses at the Helsinki Artists' Association. From 1992 to 2000, she taught art at the Munkkiniemi community centre (*Munkkiniemen monitoimitalo*), and from 1996 to 2020, at the Finnish Centre for Pensioners (*Eläketurvakeskus*).

Besides teaching, which became full time at the end of the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s, Ludmilla was named in 1992 as a member of the exhibition committee of the Helsinki Artists' Association. She held this position until 2000. In 1998, she was elected to the board of the association for two years.

The period 2000–2020 was characterised by Siim's active participation in exhibitions: altogether there were seventeen solo and group exhibitions, including eight in Estonia. One of the most significant in Estonia was the 2011 double exhibition with Jüri Palm in the Kumu Art Museum *Alone in the City. Ludmilla Siim and Jüri Palm*, curated by Liisa Kaljula and Eha Komissarov. This was Ludmilla's first large retrospective.

A significant contribution to presenting Ludmilla's oeuvre has been made by the private collector Mart Lepp, whose collection contains a number of her works and who curated her exhibitions in the Tallinn Central Library (2019) and in the art gallery of the Estonian Parliament (2020), which have kept Ludmilla visible in Estonian art life.

Ludmilla Siim is an artist with an intriguing life. She is a diverse author who has adapted to different styles and themes. Her creative biography contains over four hundred works and she has participated in more than forty exhibitions.

Portrait of  
Andres Ehin.  
1974.  
Oil on canvas.  
120 × 139.5.  
Tartu Art  
Museum



Curator: Kristlyn Liier  
Exhibition design: Kristi Kongi  
Graphic design: Madis Katz

Exhibition team: Indrek Aavik, Richard Adang, Nele Ambos, Tanel Asmer, Maarika Espenberg, Indrek Grigor, Joanna Hoffmann, Mare Joonsalu, Margus Joonsalu, Jaanika Kuznetsova, Katrin Lööke, Julia Polujanenkova, Kristel Sibul, Anti Saar, Peeter Talvistu, Kristo Tamm, Ago Teedema, Urmo Teekivi, Mae Variksoo

Lenders of the works: Estonian History Museum, Art Museum of Estonia, Estonian Artists' Association, Ludmilla Siim's collection, Tartu Art Museum, University of Tartu Art Museum, Viinistu Art Museum, Marko Kasur, Tiit Kõima, Mart Lepp, Meelis Vulp, private collections

Thanks to: Anu Allas, Darja Jefimova, Loit Jõekalda, Liisa Kaljula, Jaak Kangilaski, Marko Kasur, Tiit Kõima, Mart Lepp, Teemu Mäki, Tiina Määrmann, Liisi Tammest, Meelis Vulp, Vaal Gallery

Supporter: Cultural Endowment of Estonia



<sup>1</sup> Malle Atson, Ludmilla Siim – kunstnik ja kunstiopetaja. – *Opetajate Leht*, No. 10, 11.03.2005.



# Ludmilla Siim

(until 1962 Ludmilla Kurbatova, from 1979 Milla Siim-Kaasinen)  
Born 20 November 1938 in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan (today Almaty)

## EDUCATION

1947–1953 Tartu's School #2 (today the Miina Härma Gymnasium)  
1953–1958 Tartu School of Visual Arts (today the Tartu Art School)  
1958–1965 Estonian State Art Institute (today the Estonian Academy of Arts), painting

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

1971 Estonian Artists' Association  
1978 Finnish Painters' Union (*Taidemaalari liitto*) of the Artists' Association of Finland (*Suomen Taiteilijaseura*)  
1978 Helsinki Artists' Association (*Helsingin Taiteilijaseura*)  
2005 Restoration of membership in the Estonian Painters' Association

## SELECTED EMPLOYMENT

1992–2000 Member of the exhibitions committee of the Helsinki Artists' Association  
1998–2000 Board member of the Helsinki Artists' Association  
1999–2002 Kuvasto ry, representative of the Artists' Association regarding copyright

## TEACHING ART AND OTHER ART-RELATED ACTIVITIES

1963–1965 Instructor of the preparatory courses of the Estonian State Art Institute, Tallinn  
1965–1969 Art teacher at Tallinn's School #46 (today Tallinn's Pelgulinn Gymnasium)  
1981–1984 Design of industrial products  
1989–2003 Instructor of courses at the Helsinki Artists' Association (*HTS Aikuisten kurssikeskus*)  
1992–2000 Art teacher at the Munkkiniemi community centre (*Munkkiniemen monitoimitalo*), Helsinki  
1996–2020 Art teacher at the Finnish Centre for Pensioners (*Eläketurvakeskus*), Helsinki

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1971 Tallinn Art Salon  
1973 Tallinn Art Salon  
1975 Tartu Art House  
1979 Helsingin Taidetalo  
1980 Malkki-Galleria, Tampere  
1990 Galleria Bellarte, Helsinki  
1991 Kaapelitehdas, Helsinki  
1991 Galleria Villa Carlo, Turku  
1992 Galleria Bellarte, Helsinki  
1993, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001 HTS Sisustusliike ZAZA, Helsinki  
1996 Galleria Rauta, Helsinki  
1998 Vaal Gallery, Tallinn  
2002 TIEKE, Helsinki  
2008 Vaal Gallery, Tallinn  
2011 Kumu Art Museum (exhibition with Jüri Palm)  
2019 Tallinn Central Library  
2020 Gallery of the Estonian Parliament, Tallinn

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1968–1976 state spring and autumn exhibitions, Tallinn;  
state youth exhibitions, Tallinn and Tartu  
1971 Tallinn Art Salon (with L. Lapin, A. Keskküla and A. Tolts)  
1972 Baltic Painting Triennial, Vilnius  
1973 Exhibition of Baltic States, Moscow  
1975 Baltic Painting Triennial, Vilnius  
1975 Pan-Soviet portrait exhibition, Moscow  
1975 Pan-Soviet portrait exhibition, Vilnius  
1976 Tartu Art Museum (with P. Mudist and T. Pääsuke)  
1976 Group exhibition, Gdansk  
1976 Group exhibition, Kiel  
1979 Retretti, Punkaharju selected exhibition  
1981 International group exhibition, Stockholm  
1983 Le Salon des Nations, Paris

Front page: (Detail of) Red Gladiolus.  
1974.  
Oil on canvas. 65 × 71.  
Tartu Art Museum

(Detail of) At the Edge of the City.  
1976.  
Oil on canvas. 120 × 145.  
Private collection

1984 Selection of Finnish artists, Paris  
1994 Draakoni Gallery (with P. Hütönen and J. Toivonen), Tallinn  
1998 Kaapelitehtas, Helsinki  
1999 Art Summer, Pärnu  
2000 Tartu Art House (with S. Toivonen, J. Toivonen and M. Heiskanen)  
2000, 2001, 2003, 2004 HAA summer exhibition, Helsinki  
2003 Memorial exhibition (Omar Volmer), University of Tartu Library  
2007 *I Love Helsinki*, HAA 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition, Suomenlinna  
2008 Viinistu Art Museum  
2011, 2014 Moscow International Art Salon  
2018 Spring exhibition, Tallinn Art Hall

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

1972, 1975 Prize of the Baltic Painting Triennial  
1975 Artist of the year, named by the cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*  
2016 Honorary member of the Estonian Artists' Association

## COLLECTIONS WHERE HER WORKS APPEAR

Estonian Academy of Arts  
Art Museum of Estonia  
Tartu Art Museum  
University of Tartu Art Museum  
Tallinn Art Hall  
Viinistu Art Museum  
International Confederation of Unions of Artists, Moscow  
Eläketurvakeskus, Helsinki  
Embassy of Estonia, Helsinki  
Le Salon des Nations, Paris  
Tradeka, Helsinki  
Elanto pääkonttori, Helsinki  
Comex Oy, Helsinki  
Siuntion kylpöla, Finland  
Numerous private collections in Estonia, Russia, Finland, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the USA

<https://www.maal.ee/milla-siim-kaasinen>



TARTMUS

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