

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
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Press release

KRIS LEMSALU

Keys Open Doors

November 16, 2018 – January 20, 2019

Press conference: Thursday, November 15, 2018, 11 a.m.

Opening: Thursday, November 15, 2018, 7 p.m.

The Estonian artist Kris Lemsalu creates complex sculptures, installations, and performances that fuse the animal kingdom with humankind, nature with the artificial, beauty with repulsion, lightness with gravity, life with death. She revives traditional techniques and methods to combine animal bodies and porcelain objects with found (natural) materials such as furs, leather, seashells, wool, or paper in theatrical installations that whisk us off into a world of the fantastic imagination.

Spanning a wide range of media and modes of production, Lemsalu's multifaceted oeuvre incorporates elements from performance art, found objects, manufactured pieces, and music. Her multimedia creations attest to her passion for detail, hinting at a critique of society by revealing tensions between the politics of gender, art-making, nature, and time-honored craftsmanship. The fragile aesthetic of her ceramics clashes with bold colors and forms bursting with energy that make for formidable visual impressions. Lemsalu is fascinated by the possibility of making objects that are not aestheticized—their physical presence is narrative rather than representational. In her self-portraits, she often reinvents herself as a creature blending masculine with feminine features, surrounding herself with a new reality whose complexion and character are perpetually shifting.

Seeking to erase any distance between herself and her objects, Lemsalu not only presents her installations as self-contained constructions, she also uses them as stages for performances in which her sculptures become an integral part of her attire. A characteristic example is the installation *Whole Alone 2*, her piece for the 2015 Frieze Art Fair in New York. Perhaps her best-known work, it consists of a large ceramic tortoise shell resting on a waterbed. The artist herself spent eight hours each day for the five days of the fair lying motionlessly inside the shell: in the thick of the action and yet ensconced, a delicate body encased in a rigid second skin. The work is a kind of costume, disguising the wearer while circulating in a public setting populated by buyers and sellers, art-world insiders and tourists. Asked why she slips inside some of her pieces but not others, she explains: "Some works somehow demand my bodily presence. When the installations get bigger and bigger, sometimes I feel like my body is necessary as a material to balance it." This equilibrium and the constant interplay between heaviness and lightness, between stability and fragility are central features of her works, which know no hierarchy of materials and do not make a distinction between things and bodies.

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Most recently, Lemsalu has collaborated with musicians to add yet another dimension to her performances. *Going, going*, a live performance interweaving sculptures, animated videos, music, and spoken words she created with the New York-based visual artist and musician Kyp Malone, premiered at the Performa 17 biennial in New York. Also in 2017, she joined the singer-songwriter Glasser on the stage during the DRAF Evening of Performances in London.

Lemsalu's performative sculptures and sculptural performances often quote ancient myths and rituals from different cultures. In her exhibition in the Grafisches Kabinett, titled *Keys Open Doors*, she positions two guardian figures that vaguely recall Sumo wrestlers on both sides of the curtained window, which is designed to represent a door to another world, a gateway to the light. The artist's unique visual language transforms the gallery into a stage. The fabulous creatures are both headless bodies and disembodied faces, stewards and custodians; the keys resting in their hands, they bear responsibility and hold the power.

Kris Lemsalu studied ceramics at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, and then at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, and the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Born in 1985, Kris Lemsalu lives and works in Tallinn, Estonia, and Vienna.

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.
Curators: Verena Österreicher and Annette Südbeck

Publication

An artist book is published in conjunction with the exhibition.

Kris Lemsalu. *Albummm*

Photo album, hard cover, cloth linen individually glued with applications, handwritten and stamped, 100 pages with 100 analogue photographs

Concept: Kris Lemsalu

Numbered edition of 300

Secession 2018

Distribution: Revolver Publishing

Curators' guided tour

Friday, November 23, 2018, 4 p.m.

Guided tour through the exhibitions by Ed Ruscha, Philipp Timischl und Kris Lemsalu with Bettina Spörr, Annette Südbeck and Verena Österreicher

Press images

Installation views are available for download at <http://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell>

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office@secession.at, www.secession.at
Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm
Permanent presentation: Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Opening hours:

Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm

Holiday opening hours:

Monday December 24 and Tuesday December 25 closed,

Monday December 31 closed, Tuesday January 1, 2019, open from 12 noon – 6 pm

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