

PRESS RELEASE

History comes full circle with Finnish artist Sirpa Särkijärvi's March 2019 Exhibit at *Joseph Nease Gallery*.

DULUTH, FEB 18, 2019 — For the first time, *Joseph Nease Gallery* will feature an artist from outside the United States with an exhibition of over twenty new works from Finnish painter Sirpa Särkijärvi.

Since opening in October 2017, the contemporary art gallery has facilitated artistic exchange in Duluth by bringing in artists from around the country, and in particular from throughout the Heartland and the Kansas City region, where Joseph and Karen Nease previously owned a gallery. The upcoming March 2019 exhibition, titled *Transcriptions*, will mark a sharp departure from this trend.

Recognized for her dynamic style of acrylic painting, at once fluid and expressive, Särkijärvi is based in Turku, a city on the southwest coast of Finland about two hours west of the capital Helsinki. She was born in Muonio in the Lapland area of Finland north of the Arctic Circle. Särkijärvi's travels have taken her far from Finland where she is an established figure in the Finnish arts scene. Her work has been shown in Spain and Berlin and draws inspiration from her experiences in places as distant as Beijing and California.

Wanderlust shows her that commonality of human experience across cultures exists, and appropriately is one of the central themes in Särkijärvi's art. The title of the series of paintings she began to produce in 2015, *Transcription*, references her artistic process of soaking in the environments she visits before translating them to the canvas.

"The idea behind the name is that these aren't just about my inner world, but that I kind of write notes on a paper according to what I hear or about what I perceive," Särkijärvi told Finnish newspaper *Turun Sanomat* in 2017. "Everything comes from the surrounding world, what I see and experience, and what other people experience. I turn it into a picture, like as if it were an engram of our time."

Her *Transcription* series blends the portrait and the landscape traditions to create hybrid compositions in which the subject and the background discernibly influence each other. Särkijärvi's earlier painting series going back to 2011 typically depicted a lone person, often female, in surroundings that were identifiably interior or exterior spaces. In 2015, she shifted her focus to place a greater emphasis on the individual or individuals in a field of emotionally-charged color.

"Previously the human figures were inside interiors and landscapes, but now they have gone inside each other," Särkijärvi stated in the same *Turun Sanomat* article titled "Scenery Enters the Human."

With this technique, Särkijärvi captures the effects of culture, the modern world, and the sometimes hidden pressures that weigh on individuals, especially women.

A 2011 Särkijärvi painting titled "Shovelman" caught the Neases' attention at the 2015 *Dark Days, Bright Nights* exhibition at the Kemper Museum in Kansas City. Enlivened by Särkijärvi's inimitable swirls, including a near-neon shade of yellow that illuminates a male figure against a backdrop of somber gray clouds and birch trees, the piece dazzled the Neases. They asked to purchase it on the spot without knowing anything about the artist or her background which led to Joe communicating directly with the artist.



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Two years later in 2017, Joseph Nease Gallery opened in Duluth. With an initial gallery roster set, they did not know that Särkijärvi had received a grant from Finland to exhibit internationally. But along the way, Joe had let Sirpa know that he was opening a gallery, and plans for the upcoming exhibition evolved out of the correspondence that ensued.

Coincidentally, for this pairing of artist and gallery, Duluth turned out to be a perfect location: “Right at the outset, the Finland connection seemed like a suitable fit for the region, especially in view of the many Scandinavian immigrant communities that settled along the north and south shores of Lake Superior,” said Joseph Nease.

As it turns out, Särkijärvi herself had distant ties to the region.

“Sirpa told us that her grandfather visited the iron range area along the north shore before the Second World War,” said Karen Nease. “According to Sirpa, he planned to migrate to Minnesota. But when he went back to Finland to bring his family over, World War II broke out and he wasn’t able to return.”

In a sense tracing her grandfather’s travels in the 1940s, Särkijärvi will be in Duluth for the exhibition’s opening reception at the gallery and will be able to spend a few days here seeing the area.

“It’s interesting to see how multiple generations of Sirpa’s family have been drawn here,” said Joseph Nease. “We’re very pleased to help write a new chapter in a story that started decades ago, so to speak, by showcasing Sirpa’s work in Duluth.”

For a chance to meet the artist and see the newest paintings in the *Transcription* series, be sure to attend the opening reception for *Transcriptions* at Joseph Nease Gallery on March 22. More than twenty of Sirpa Särkijärvi’s paintings, all completed in 2018, will be on display at the gallery until June 1, 2019.

Sirpa Särkijärvi was born in the Lapland town of Muonio in 1974. The Turku-based painter’s systematic process of working with fluid acrylics on a horizontal canvas has distinguished her within the Finnish art scene and abroad, with exhibitions in Spain and Berlin, as well as Helsinki; and Kansas City, Missouri in the United States. Her paintings are known for their swirling, flowing colors and tension, reflecting themes from gender and behavior norms, to marginalization, exclusion, and power. For more information on Sirpa Särkijärvi, visit the gallery websites and the artist’s website sirpasarkijarvi.com.

Joseph Nease Gallery is a contemporary art gallery located in the downtown art district of Duluth, Minnesota. Similar in scope to its progenitor in Kansas City, Missouri, the gallery features exhibitions of painting, sculpture, installation, and new media by artists regional, national and international. Since its October 2017 opening, the restored building at 23 West First Street has established an arts destination providing educational and social opportunities for art lovers, collectors, and visitors to the north shore of beautiful Lake Superior. For more information on Joseph Nease Gallery, visit josephneasegallery.com.

For more information, please contact Joseph Nease Gallery Manager Amanda Hunter at manager@josephneasegallery.com or by phone at 218-461-8380.



Sirpa Särkijärvi quotes from: "Scenery Enters the Human," *Turun Sanomat*, published Oct. 23, 2017.



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