

## Kris Lemsalu *Peace @ 295 Church Street*

Margot Samel is pleased to announce the gallery's inaugural exhibition with Kris Lemsalu, and Lemsalu's first US solo show, *Peace @ 295 Church Street*. Multidisciplinary artist Kris Lemsalu is both artist and performer, a creator of scenarios in which art and life interpret each other. She has exhibited at prominent venues worldwide over the past two decades, often using her performances to activate her sculptures, yet her work has always been in dialogue with the physical immediacy of space. For *Peace @ 295 Church Street*, Lemsalu continues in this spirit, conjuring seemingly entropic elements and connecting chapters of her own practice in a series of ceramic reliefs exhibited alongside a new site-specific installation and her much-lauded installation *Mysteriously conceived and deeply felt* from 2018.

Lemsalu follows a mantra of sorts, that each material she uses is treated with the same amount of care. The artist's most precious mementos—gifts from her friends and family or beloved childhood tokens, with their accumulated histories of meaning—become elements of form and structure, archival, and shrine-like. She is guided by her instincts in this regard: what to let go of and when? Although this question is familiar to all artists, for her the irrevocability of parting with or displacing a part of herself is ever-present. Personal keepsakes, collected tchotchkes, textiles and previous artworks form unlikely affinities, humorous and perverse formations that amplify the unpredictability of the present moment, reconstituting our contemporary uncertainties and confusions into something clearer.

In *Mysteriously conceived and deeply felt*, an amalgamation of ideas and themes integral to her practice is expressed with dynamic material fluency. Two figures with lips for heads, like the Virgin Mary cradling an infant Christ, are wrapped together in the blankets that Lemsalu slept under as a child. Several feet, cast from Lemsalu's mother's feet, provide a foundation. The feet dip into metal basins connoting the labor of care, of washing and cleaning, and allude to her memories of bathing in similar vessels growing up in Soviet-era Estonia. Even as the figures' unusual anatomy registers as comical, Lemsalu trusts that the constituent elements will tell their own story. This mode for visualizing performances of the self and the female bodily experience which pervades her work, merges the past with the present moment, the personal with the everyday. Incorporating mementos into her work is a way for Lemsalu to remember—to trace what was happening at the time they came into her life, and to relocate this part of herself into new generative conditions.

The comparatively bounded forms of her ceramic reliefs are positioned along the walls of the gallery like the stations of the cross, but in this

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chapel the pictures reflect a series of transgressive propositions. The reliefs are built upon the time-worn shelves of Lemsalu's kiln inflected with fire marks and pooled glazes accumulated over ten years. They reveal the durational process of slowly and gently tending to a wood fire, central to the Anagama technique she uses. Many of the ceramic elements in her sculptures are produced by casting or dipping objects in clay and because of this the original materials are often destroyed, transferred into ceramic copies that preserve all of their minute details. Each of the ceramic reliefs contains a frenzy of animal and bodily forms which can be read as psychologically intricate clusters but are also markedly open-ended.

While Lemsalu's reverence for material artifacts recognizes a life force in all objects, it also suggests the transportation from one state to another. It follows that the works themselves are conceived in a dream-like state. In *Give us a Song*, a human-like figure positioned in front of a piano turns to the viewer, arms held comically in the air—perhaps our master of ceremonies, or the resident lounge-pianist—like many of Lemsalu's characters it takes on a role encompassing the surrounding environment and the viewers' forms of social organization. Unexpected alliances of material and the improvisational appearance of the work suggest its ephemerality, a provisional configuration, beckoning the viewer into an experience akin to durational performance. Lemsalu marks out space for what feels like an encounter hanging delicately in place, proposing multitudes of meaning that are not easily distilled.

- Anna Ruth Yates

Kris Lemsalu (b.1985 in Tallinn, Estonia) lives and works in Tallinn and New York. She studied at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, EE; Danmarks Designskole, Copenhagen, DK; and the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, AT. Lemsalu represented Estonia in the 58th Venice Biennial (2019). In 2020 she was awarded the Grand Prize from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. Her recent exhibitions and performances include: *A Snail's Tale* with Kyp Malone, High Line Art, New York, US (2021); *It's a Family Affair* with Kyp Malone, Hunt Kastner, Prague, CZ (2021); *Going Going* with Kyp Malone, Den Frie, Copenhagen, DK (2020); *Love Song Sing-Along* with Kyp Malone, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, DE (2020); *Love Song Sing Along (Once Again With Feeling!)*, with Kyp Malone, Kai Art Center, Tallinn, EE (2020), *Keys Open Doors*, Secession, Vienna, AT (2018); 4LIFE, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London, UK (2018); *Mysteriously Conceived and Deeply Felt*, Mavra, Berlin, DE (2018); *The Wild Ones*, Kendall Koppe, Glasgow, UK (2017–2018). Selected group exhibitions include: *The Well of Wisdom*, Meetfactory, Prague, CZ (2022); *Airing Dirty Laundry* with Kyp Malone, 7th Athens Biennale: Eclipse, Athens, GR (2021); *Diversity United. Contemporary European Art*, Moscow - Berlin - Paris, Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur, Bonn, DE (2021); *Roots and Ruins*, curated by Rael Artel, Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn, EE (2020); *Human After All*, Prinsessehof National Museum of Ceramics, Leeuwarden, NL (2020); *Up to and Including Limits*, Muzeum Susch, Zürich, CH (2019); *Metamorphosis. Art in Europe Now*, Fondation Cartier, Paris, FR (2019); *There and Back Again*, curated by Kati Kivinen and Saara Hacklin, Kiasma, Helsinki, FI (2018); *Steps to Aeration*, curated by Sarah McCrory, Tanya Leighton, Berlin, DE (2018); and *The Hierophant*, curated by Aaron Moulton; *Metamorphosis*, curated by Zdenek Felix and presented at KAI 10 / Arthema Foundation, Düsseldorf, DE.

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