

Kris Lemsalu *One foot in the gravy*

*New Year's morning—
everything is in blossom!
I feel about average.*

–Kobayashi Issa

Margot Samel is pleased to present *One foot in the gravy*, a solo exhibition by the Estonian multidisciplinary artist Kris Lemsalu (b.1985, Tallinn, Estonia). This is Lemsalu's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

One should acknowledge, with infinite joy, the fact of being alive. We should celebrate our existence and recognize its fragility in every moment. It's easy to forget, to get distracted by mundane circumstances of our day-to-day life. On the other hand, life's impermanence may induce panic, an all-encompassing fear that leaves us searching for answers. Still, we are resilient to becoming just another customer at Café Gratitude, its slogan ringing in our ears like a mosquito — *What Are You Grateful For?* Baruch Spinoza introduced the concept of *conatus*, which illustrates the internal drive of every being to persevere in its existence. The *conatus* is inherent to every substance; it is the engine that propels life. However, older philosophies get boiled down to artificially made bite-sized snacks at Café Gratitude — *Live Laugh Love* — pushing us to habitually flee from quick, feel-good moments.

Celebrating life doesn't seem to intimidate Estonian artist Kris Lemsalu. Her work emphasizes, with absolute honesty, life and its different stages. This direct form of communication is not new to the artist. In 2019, she presented the work *Birth V - Hi and Bye* at the Venice Biennale which was an unmediated exploration of cycles relating to birth, life, death, and (fortunately) rebirth. Lemsalu continues her celebratory, inquisitive, and pagan journey in her exhibition at Margot Samel. We are welcomed with a grand altar inscribed with "VITA", each letter created with an anthropomorphic character that references Baubo, a figure from Greek mythology associated with vitality and renewal, famed for making Demeter laugh in her most tragic moment. This figure often recurs in Lemsalu's work, appearing with a jaw (or vulva) as a head, wearing a pair of cargo pants with tongues leaning out from its utilitarian pockets.

Tongues multiply in various sizes and formats throughout the space. Sometimes they are raised like the bright flag of a grand country, other times they rest on a rocking chair, contemplating life. The tongue is a familiar symbol in Lemsalu's work. The artist often correlates the body part to the Hindu deity Kali, a controversial figure, who in the ecstasy of an uncontrolled dance, extended her great tongue to drink the blood of demons, resulting in a triumph over negative forces. Kali's tongue is a symbol that evokes both laughter and fear, simultaneously bestowing life

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and death, creation and destruction.

When we enter the world of Lemsalu's work, our experience functions as a ritual. Each work acts as a rite that celebrates our *conatus* and the perseverance of our existence, shamelessly celebrating our fragility and the passage of time, commemorating life with flowers, with one foot deep into the gravy.

–Enrique Giner de Los Ríos

Kris Lemsalu (b. 1985 in Tallinn, Estonia) lives and works in Tallinn and New York. She studied at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, Estonia; Danmarks Designskole, Copenhagen, Denmark; and the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Austria. Lemsalu represented Estonia in the 58th Venice Biennial in 2019. In 2020 she was awarded the Grand Prize from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include: Donatella. Spiral of Life, Tartu Art Museum, Tartu, Estonia (2024); Chará, Art in Public Space – KÖR, Kunstplatz Graben, Vienna, Austria (2023); Rinky Dink Babe, Kendall Koppe, Glasgow, UK (2023); Peace @ 295 Church Street, Margot Samel, New York, NY (2022); Angels Gone Pissing, Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn, EE (2022); Love Stories, Meyer Kainer, Vienna, AT (2022) A Snail's Tale with Kyp Malone, High Line Art, New York, US (2021); 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, Estonia (2020); Keys Open Doors, Secession, Vienna, AT (2018); 4LIFE, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London, UK (2018); The Wild Ones, Koppe Astner, Glasgow, UK (2017–2018). Selected group exhibitions include: Earth Spells, Witches of the Anthropocene, Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, London, UK (2023); THE PARTY. Between representation and turmoil, MAK Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, AT (2022) Growing Out? Growing Up? Contemporary Art Collecting in the Baltics, Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga, LV (2022); We'll Be Right Back, You Just Keep Playing!, Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn, EE (2022); Jean-Marie Appriou, Amy Feldman, Louisa Gagliardi, Kris Lemsalu, Conny Maier, Sofia Mitsola, Tobias Pils, Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, CH (2022); 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); Human After All, Princessehof 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 / Arthena Foundation, Düsseldorf, DE. Lemsalu's upcoming solo exhibitions include Chará, Belvedere 21, Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna, Austria (2024) and a solo presentation at Magazin 4, Bregenz, Austria (2024).

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