



Post Internet and Contemporary Painting

Salla Kuoppamaa

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ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
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SALLA KUOPPAMAA:
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The purpose of this thesis was to theoretically observe and analyze a contemporary painting practice happening in the post internet era. Post internet is a definition of the wholesome global culture environment of today, risen after the moment of common internet access and entitled to the standard existence of the internet everywhere and for everyone. Post internet is a layer in the culture and on a constant emergence affecting the society.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is discussing the nature of post internet and showcasing examples of contemporary painting that have physical and traditional mediums: observing influences of post internet in contemporary, physical painting. Throughout the artwork examples are pointed influences of the post internet era; influences that can be analyzed within the subject matters, visual styles and processes. The examples chosen for the theoretical analysis are interesting for supporting the continuum and development of contemporary, physical painting.

This paper also includes a report of an artistic part of the thesis: a series of works consisting of two oil paintings and two mixed media sculptures. The artworks are introduced with artwork statements reflecting the post internet era.

Key words: Contemporary art, contemporary painting, post internet

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“We should keep in mind that the artistic appropriation of philosophy does not entail an extensive discussion or rigorous critique of its theories and conclusions. That part is left to academic discourse. Artistic practices apply, transform, mirror, echo—and occasionally also precede—the findings of philosophers. One can of course criticize this appropriation as merely acting on the level of buzzwords. But the opposite suspicion can also be raised: perhaps the philosophical statements in question were written exactly for that purpose.” (Heidenreich 2016.)

1 INTRODUCTION

Since people were in caves, they have made art and have continued to do so until the present day. Cave art “represents the earliest surviving evidence of the artistic instinct in early humanity” (Kiely 2022). Just as language allows us to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others, art allows us to express ourselves in a way that goes beyond the barriers of culture or language. Art speaks to us on a raw and fundamental level, and has the power to evoke emotion, inspire, and provoke thought. And this is reflected by art’s prevalence through the cultural eras and changes in mediums, from the early etchings on a cave wall, through to the use of digital art on devices such as tablets, smartphones or computers.

Painting has had an essential role in European art history, since the cave art, through the Renaissance, to the modern art. As the technology developed and the invention of the camera challenged the ideas of painting, could the newer technological inventions seen as a continuum of developing the painting as well. Sylvia Walker (2021) talks about contemporary painting in their article *Contemporary Painting: A Complete Overview* as “Painting is an age-old practice of smearing colored mud on wood or woven fabric. From a contemporary point of view, it has become and still is a valid medium for human exploration and expression, with persistently recurring themes such as beauty, tradition, desire, the body, and spirituality, to name a few. What makes painting unique in a fragmented and postmodern era is the ability to offer a sense of completeness and integrity.” (Walker 2021.)

“Technological innovations drive the evolution of human societies. The success of innovations depends not only on their actual benefits but also on how potential adopters perceive them and how their beliefs are affected by their social and cultural environment.” (Tverskoi, Babu and Gavrilets 2022.) As technological development continued emerging, artists have found new mediums for expressions. New media art is a form of art which uses emerging technologies. Oliver Grau (2021) talks about new media art as “New Media Art is a comprehensive term that encompasses art forms that are either produced, modified, and transmitted by means of new media/digital technologies or, in a

broader sense, make use of “new” and emerging technologies that originate from a scientific, military, or industrial context. Along with its emphasis on the “new,” New Media Art signifies an explicit difference—or *différance*—with art practices that make use of traditional, in other words, “old,” visual media”, and “Evidently, much of New Media Art challenges the very foundations of an object-centered understanding of art, in particular with regard to its characteristics of interactivity, nonlinearity, immateriality, and ephemerality, and its intricate interrelation between artist, artwork, and spectator”. (Grau 2021.) “Just like the sciences, art has the power to revolutionize the world. It reflects our ever-changing culture and has the ability to alter society’s values” (Factor 2017.)

An important part of modern life, as a result of technological and cultural development, is the existence of the internet. Ani Petrosyan (2023) analyses worldwide internet usage: “All around the world, the internet continues to transform how we connect with others, organize the flow of things, and share information. With its growing influence on individual consumers and large economies alike, the internet has become an increasingly vital part of our day-to-day lives” (Petrosyan 2023.) Also, Petrosyan (2023) analyses a static about worldwide digital population telling, that in 2023 there were 5.18 billion internet users worldwide, which is 64.6 percent of the global population. That means that in 2023 almost two thirds of the global population is connected to the worldwide internet.

2 POST INTERNET

2.1 What is post internet art?

Stefan Heidenreich (2016) talks about the name of the term post internet “The term “post-internet” did not spread because it was well defined. On the contrary, its ambivalence and its openness allowed it to resonate widely. Its prefix “post-” is borrowed from notions like the “postmodern” or the “post-digital.” “Post-” used to mean “after,” but now it also includes “beyond” and “deriving from.” It confirms and denies at the same time, exerting a kind of double bind. It says: we belong to the internet, knowing that the internet is over. We are digital, but it does not matter, because that is just what everybody is. “Post-” also presumes to know the border of something: post-internet means we believe that the end of the event called “the internet” is somewhere in sight, in the same way that postmodernism served first of all to consolidate modernism into something we could have conceivably moved beyond” (Heidenreich 2016).

In an article *What Is Post-Internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement*, Ian Wallace (2014) talks about artist operating in post-internet: “In the same way that postmodern artists absorbed and adapted the strategies of modernism—fracturing the picture plane, abstraction, etc.—for a new aesthetic era, post-Internet artists have moved beyond making work dependent on the novelty of the Web to using its tools to tackle other subjects. And while earlier Net artists often made works that existed exclusively online, the post-Internet generation (many of whom have been plugged into the Web since they could walk) frequently uses digital strategies to create objects that exist in the real world.” (Wallace 2014.) Patina Lee (2016) supports the idea that post internet happens outside the internet with a statement: “Post Internet Art addresses the Internet (period), and not Internet Art.”

Since we live in the global, materially interdependent world as well as in “the age of digital interdependence” as is stated in the Report of the UN Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (2019), can be stated that the digital- and physical culture are intertwined globally. The UN specialized agency

for ICT's states in an article Facts and Figures 2021: 2.9 billion people still offline (2021), that "An estimated 37 per cent of the world's population – or 2.9 billion people – have still never used the Internet." (The UN specialized...2021). "The digital divide is a term that refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communication technology (ICT), and those that do not or have restricted access. This technology can include the telephone, television, personal computers and internet connectivity" Katie Terrell Hanna (TechTarget n.d.), defines the term digital divide. Even an estimated one of a third of the world's population is experiencing digital divide can be stated that people experiencing the divide are still linked to the global affects of the internet. In the web of global interdependence, in some way influenced by the existence of it. Therefore, as a further argument can be stated that the internet influences whole global community. That means that post internet is a global cultural era; a layer in the culture across the globe, on a constant emergence, created by digitalization. And this phenomenon influences contemporary art.

2.2 Post internet and contemporary painting

Art is a reflection of its time, and from a contemporary point of a view, contemporary painting is an interesting reflector. In contemporary painting, the subject matter, even if it is chosen to be faded out, becomes conceptual. No matter if the process is an intuitive build up, what is chosen to be told with the paint gives a conceptual meaning to the subject. Different mediums give different contexts for the same subject and one way of thinking how to keep contemporary painting relevant is to examine about the connection between the subject matter and painting as a medium. European painting has been developed through church art, the Renaissance and modernism. Since the early times of painting, the subject matter and eventually the detachment from it, has been essential.

Internet is intensely essential part of modern, everyday life. With post-internet is meant the time after the moment of discovering the internet, the internet has been seen, experienced. After the internet, post internet, has become an initial feature of the global community's culture.

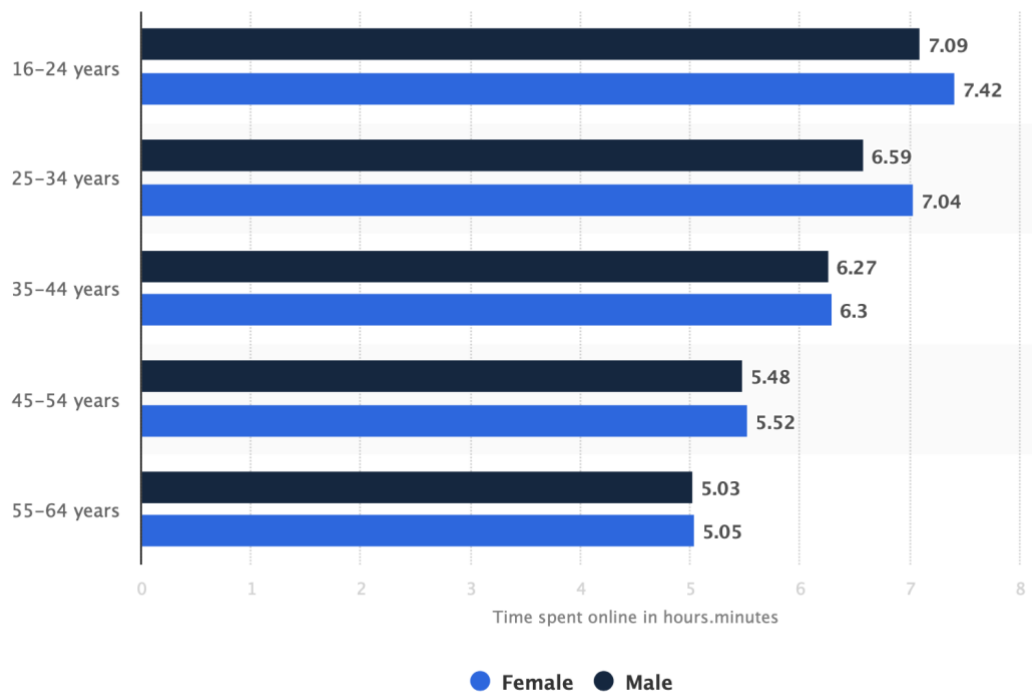


FIGURE 1. Average daily time spent using the internet by online users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2022, by age and gender (Petrosyan, 2023)

Two thirds of all Globe's population between the age of 16 to 64 are using internet several hours a day (FIGURE 1.). Since painting has remarkable roots in the common understanding of what art is, it is interesting to analyse contemporary painting and find reflections of the society from it; observe contemporary subjects to observe societies values. Post internet must be showing with different focus point in different areas of the globe. Yet it is interesting to think how artist with different cultural backgrounds are absorbing a certain common internet culture and combining references of it with their own geographical culture and physical practice.

It is also interesting to ponder the philosophy of post internet with being aware that it is very common for artists to search for visual inspiration online. We see a lot of art through our phones. The use of internet in displaying art is today ordinary and a lot of originally physical artworks exist in online gallery spaces.

The images and contents, both searched and scrolled that are seen on a personal device, are curated by the internet algorithms. When an artist goes to a studio to work with a physical artwork, can be argued that the algorithms are affecting the subject matter and the visual expression in the traditional medium, in contemporary painting.

3 ARTIST AND ARTWORK EXAMPLES FROM CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

Post internet in contemporary painting can be seen as a direct influence in the themes of the artworks. It can be shown for example in the subject matter: internet culture influenced subjects, objects, and visual styles. Post internet can also be seen present in the process of creating the physical painting: using digital tools in creating a physical painting.

The artists chosen for the review below are artists that are having a strong presence online and have been brought to my personal social media feed by the algorithms.

3.1 Chloe Wise

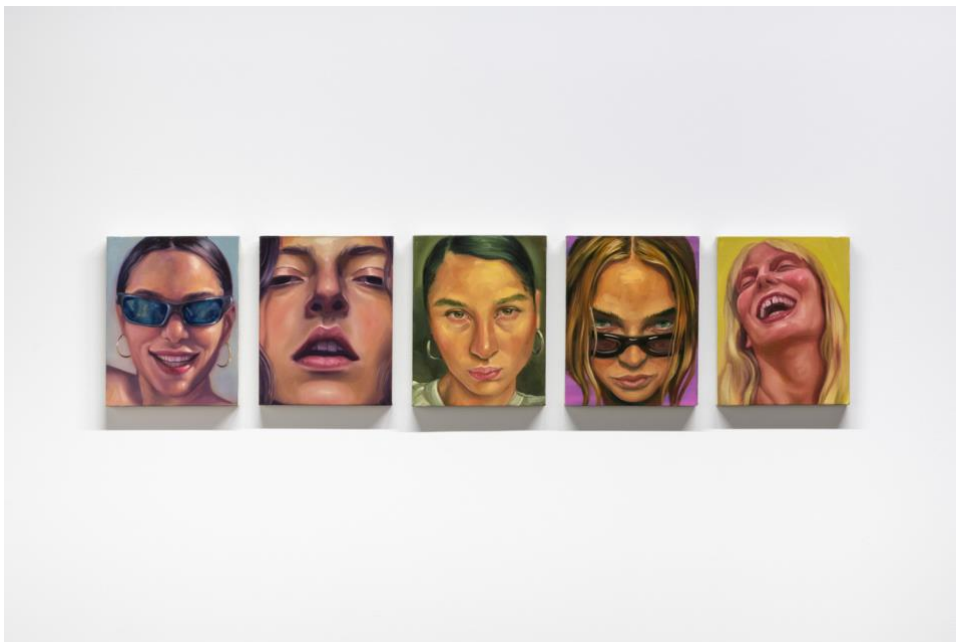
Chloe Wise (b. 1990) creates paintings, videos, sculptures, and installations that are rooted in societal critique and self-deprecating humor (Artsy n.d.). In their article Marina Pérez (2019) analyses Wise's solo exhibition *Not That We Don't* as "Wise's portraits continue along this theme; consumption goods and sexualized bodies become one and the same. The image of feminised bodies is used to project the ways in which commercialisation ultimately settles on this recurrent signifier. Wise looks to the consumptive habits built around digital and consumer culture with parody and sarcasm." (Pérez 2019.)

According to the conversation between a journalist Alex Leav and the artist Wise in an article *In the studio with Chloe Wise* (2022), the two are discussing about Wise's contemporary painting practise. Leav begins with "Your work is so successfully 'of the moment' - exploring the intricacies and absurdities of consumer culture and social media - that it feels apt for it to start in a digital form. I'm curious as to whether you agree, and what you think painting these images (bringing them into an arguably traditional format) does to them" (Leav 2022.)

Wise continues with "That occurs naturally for me and without too much forethought. The use of easily available digital tools has become second nature in both image creation and everyday life. I don't think there's anything

groundbreaking about my use of these tools, or the translation of images from digital into a traditional visual format. These actions feel fluid to me.

I do think that photography and painting are at direct odds in what they aim to capture; photography can represent fleeting, instantaneous moments successfully, but does so at such an accessible scale that we don't necessarily think about the product in the same highly valorized way. Painting inherently takes a different stance in temporal terms. It represents a moment that is likely aware of itself as lasting, or intending to last, and is, as such, divorced from the real fleeting nature of time. If painting is untainted by time, then painting must be quite self-important; it exalts an image or subject in a way that implies commemoration or value. In that sense, the same composition, when represented using photography, may be indistinguishable from an advertisement, especially online, where the line between consumer culture and personal expression are so blurred, they are essentially null. The same image, when represented by paint, underscores the banality of this collapse further, a self-important portrayal of a consumer moment as a highly valorized/personalized discrete object." (Leav 2022.)



PICTURE 1. Chloe Wise: Run amok for the hills, out of steam in the family, 2022, oil on canvas

In Wise's paintings in *Run amok for the hills, out of steam in the family* (2022), the portraits' style, the way the images are captured with the 'camera angles' and the facial expressions, are referencing to the style of portraits present in social media in 2020s decade. Based on the conversation between Wise and Leav, the analyze of Pérez and the paintings, I analyse that Wise's practise has strong features of post internet art.

Like Wise described in the interview by Leav (2022), above, they translate digital images into traditional visual form. The styles of the images in Wise's painted portraits are recalling as selfies; self-portraits taken with a smartphone front camera. In a digital format smartphone selfie person can see themselves while they are taking the picture. The front camera of the phone works like a mirror in showing a real time camera view on the phone screen that is facing the person taking the selfie. A person taking the smartphone selfie can take the control of their self-portrait easily, and while these pictures are commonly shared online can a person taking the selfie control the digital image of themselves. Selfies are commonly shared on the internet and these self-portraits are in major place in shaping the beauty standards, and values of beauty, in our era. Wise's, intentionally or not, post internet influenced interpretation of a traditional subject, a portrait painting, is with the subject matter reflecting our current society's values of beauty, culture and art.

3.2 George Rouy

"George Rouy's (b. 1994) fleshy nudes—often painted in pink, blue, or muted earth tones—bulge and blur against abstract backgrounds. While the artist has cited 15th-century painters as influences, his work is decidedly contemporary: Rouy's compositions evoke both soft-focus camera lenses and digital glitches. For Rouy, the body is a tool for storytelling. As he contorts his figures into curious poses that threaten to bump against the canvas edge, he explores the ambiguities of gender and sexuality" (Artsy n.d.). Rouy is viewing through the prism of digital culture "drawing on contemporary sociocultural issues and changing attitudes towards sexuality and the body as well as ancient and

medieval portraiture” (Timothy Taylor n.d.). The artist statements are explaining Rouy’s connections with digital culture and traditional medium.



PICTURE 2. George Rouy: Faked Real, 2022, acrylic and oil on canvas, 190 x 300 cm

PICTURE 2. George Rouy: Faked Real, 2022, is part of an exhibition Belly Ache the painter Rouy created in 2022. The paintings in the “Belly Ache exhibition perfectly reflect this agile mindset with refreshing off-handedness. Some of the figures are almost ‘glitches’, a scramble of the digital and reality which itself is reaching obsolescence. And for good reason: in life today, we see as many - if not more - digital bodies than real people on our smartphones or the web” (Le Gall 2022.)

In an interview of Rouy by Olivier Zahm (2022), Rouy is telling about his process. The interviewer (Zahm) begins with asking how Rouy starts a painting:

“OLIVIER ZAHM — What’s your starting point for a painting?

GEORGE ROUY — I normally have a collection of photos, of found images, stuff found on the Internet — poses or just certain types, like a tone — from which a work or a series of works can come” and

“OLIVIER ZAHM — Images, social media, the Internet — the digital world — are actually liquid time. Every picture replaces another.

GEORGE ROUY — But then it goes to the idea of the physical. Once you have that in a painting, in your creation, it’s there — it exists” (Zahm 2022.)

Rouy’s subjects and process is linked to the ideas on post internet art. Rouy is creating physical artworks that are reflecting the modern, digitalized, internet culture. Rouy’s painting style can be read to be inspired by glitchy digital art. The painting *Faked Real* (2022), (PICTURE 2.), through its name is suggesting of belonging both in the intermediate space of romance as in the space between digital and physical realms.

4 MY OWN WORKS

4.1 About the process

I started creating the art works for the up-coming degree show RAW in Autumn 2022 and continued with them until the Spring 2023. I wanted to observe my relationship with nature and technology and explore those subjects with my favourite mediums which are oil painting and mixed media sculptor. Building a painting from oil, layer by layer adding new thoughts as I go, I combine images from different photographs taken by me and pictures of memories. My favorite theme to explore in my art is bodies and their relationship to the surrounding spaces around them. I am exploring how a space creates a certain context.

I started my research of topic by observing my body movements and stillness' together with my surroundings. I research associations with certain movements in certain spaces. I am interested in the dialog between the present body and the surroundings. When I translate those ideas into a painting, I explore performative body presence in relation to detached reality; what happens to a certain body language when brought on a painting that is as a surrounding a different space than a physical space around a body of performance.

As I delve deeper into my artistic exploration, I find myself captivated by the interplay of light and shadow. The way light works with a body, shapes its contours, fascinates me. It is through these interactions that I seek to convey the presence and the profound impact of the surroundings.

In my quest to explore these feelings, I like to work with oil paints. Also seeking to bridge the two- and three-dimensional representations in a series when feeling to highlight something with sculpting. My creative process is an ongoing dialogue between intuition and intention. In the beginning I have a concept or a vision, but the process needs to have its freedom to suggest. It is in the act of creation that I find solace, a sanctuary where I can translate my observations and reflections. I find myself constantly drawn to the liminal spaces that exist between reality and imagination, between the corporeal and the ethereal. These in-between realms

become a playground for my imagination, where the boundaries of the physical world blur and new possibilities arise. Painting often feels to be the most exciting medium to translate these thoughts with. Through the fusion of bodies and environments, I try to find new perspectives, provoke introspection.

The time spent between me and a painting is a dialog as well as is the research part of the body and the surroundings. Learning to follow one's heart and write 'intuitive' with brush strokes. Keeping the memory of first glance when building the form. Letting the light come through from core to surface. It is a dialogue slow and awfully awkward one, sometimes. Sometimes I am living inside the painting. With painting I escape the time, it's ever-present though; dried brushes on the palette keeps me reminded.

4.2 Where Them Berries At

Where Them Berries At is an oil painting that explores the interplay between the physical and the virtual reality. Portraying a female figure immersed in virtual reality and by the title being engaged in the act of searching berries, the space is navigating between the physical and the digital realities. The figure is reflecting of physical presence and engagement with the environment.

The lack of berries in the scene acts as a symbol of the climate change, the potential loss of biodiversity, disrupted ecosystems, and the reverberating effects on human sustenance and wellbeing. The act of collecting berries becomes a metaphorical gesture, representing a reclamation of our primal connection to the earth. The figure's physical engagement in this task, while immersed in a virtual reality, symbolizes the balance between embracing technology's potential and maintaining an authentic connection with the nature. The VR headset is suggesting that the figure might not be searching for physical berries.



PICTURE 3. Salla Kuoppamaa: Where Them Berries At, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 cm, 2023

4.3 Lily Pad

I find it interesting how water lilies' goal is to reach the surface of water. They start from the lake bottom reaching towards the Sun. Lilies breathe underwater until they touch the air. But they are not meant to stand in the air, their purpose is to reach into an interface place. By nature, the plant seeks to float on the surface between water and air, in firm connection with the earth and the sky.

The idea for Lily Pad sculptor came from when I was painting water lily leaves on another painting in the series, and I wanted to highlight the beauty I feel about the leaf by sculpting one as well. To me water lily leaves symbolize childhood

summers. Childhood nostalgia is a strong grounding emotion, and the dearest ones of mine are related to the summers. Summer to me has always meant swimming in lakes a lot. I remember when I heard how pike fishes live in between the water plants. The leaf has beauty, but below lurks danger. As an adult now, I could not go swimming among the lilies.

Reflecting on the journey of water lilies and the symbolism they hold; one cannot help but draw parallels to the complexities of our own lives. Just like the lilies that strive to reach the surface, we too yearn for connections and a sense of purpose. A smartphone screen, often seen as a portal to a vast digital world, is a metaphorical surface—an infinite deep pond or a hole in the ground revealing the skies above. As information pops up on the screen, our actions resemble the gentle ripples of a water lily in waves. In this modern age, the juxtaposition of the beauty of water lily leaves with the hidden dangers lurking below speaks to the challenges we face as adults. While the memories of childhood summers spent swimming among the lilies remain dear, we find ourselves confronted with the realities.



PICTURE 4. Salla Kuoppamaa: Lily Pad, mixed media, 20 x 20 x 3 cm, 2023

4.4 Scroll and Chill



PICTURE 5. Salla Kuoppamaa: Scroll and Chill, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm, 2023.

For the painting "Scroll and Chill," I wanted to capture the essence of a contemporary digital experience by portraying a figure engrossed in scrolling through a smartphone. The painting is exploring the relationship between humans and technology, while also the connection between humans and nature.

In the painting, the act of scrolling symbolizes a form of comfort and escapism that can be found in the digital realm. By emphasizing the feeling of ease

associated with scrolling, I wanted to picture to the allure and addictive nature of the online scrolling. It serves as a gateway for distraction, enabling individuals to temporarily detach themselves from their immediate surroundings.

The figure's presence in the forest suggests that the smartphone serves as a distraction from the experience of being in nature. The contrast between the vibrant, organic environment and the screen draws attention to the potential loss of connection with our natural surroundings due to our preoccupation with technology. At the same time, the painting conveys a sense of harmony between the figure and the nature. It hints at the idea that despite the influence of digital devices in our lives, nature remains an inherent part of our existence. The figure's comfort in laying nude and scrolling through the smartphone in the forest is reminiscent of the ease with which one navigates the virtual world from the comfort of their home. It suggests that nature is home, too—a place where one can find solace and familiarity.

"Scroll and Chill" serves as a contemplation on the evolving dynamics of our relationship with technology and the nature. It invites viewers to reflect on the interplay between comfort and escapism provided by the digital realm and the sense of belonging and tranquillity found in nature. The painting prompts to consider the balance we strike between the engagement with technology and the connection to the world around us, ultimately encouraging to seek a harmonious coexistence between the two.

4.5 VR Goggles

To me post-internet points a new layer of meaning of the physical existence, in the digital era. I wanted to sculpt a figurative object and chain the sculptor to the exhibition space, and with the site-specific presentation of the artwork ponder dimensional relations of physical and digital worlds. Chaining the VR Goggles sculptor to the exhibition space, the artwork invites contemplation on the multifaceted dimensions of our existence, as influenced by the digital landscape. It poses the question of whether a virtual reality metaverse is on the horizon,

amplifying the discourse on the blurring boundaries between real and artificial worlds.

The sculptor and the installation of it is drawing inspiration from Paula Rego's Dog Women paintings, which are portraying womanhood through animal-like body language. VR Goggles incorporates positioned on the floor, seemingly in a state of anticipation. This arrangement suggests the goggles' yearning to be embraced by their owner, symbolizing the invitation to immerse oneself in an artificial reality. Exploring the post internet, unveiling the connections and tensions between the physical and digital while referencing to Rego's expression of behaviour, VR Goggles are placed resting on the floor, almost like waiting for their owner to pick them up and letting the goggles to show them an artificial world.



PICTURE 6. Salla Kuoppamaa: VR Goggles, mixed media, 45 x 40 x 40 + 300 cm, 2023

4.6 Installation



PICTURE 7. Salla Kuoppamaa: Installation view, 2023

The installation of the series (PICTURE 7.) in Gallery Himmelblau in March 2023. For my works I had a space in a room with a lot of natural light, which worked well with the artworks.

Before installing the artworks, I tried the set up with few different ways, both using photoshop and physically in the gallery. I experimented with various arrangements, ensuring each piece resonates harmoniously with each other. It became evident that the sculptor with the chain demanded a central position, placed in front of the wall. As approaching the installation, gaze gets drawn to the presence of the VR Goggles sculptor. This serves as a gateway to the digital realm and sets the tone for the exploration of the interplay between physical and digital realities of the series.

4.7 Conclusions

I wanted to observe nature and environment and I did. In conclusion, my artistic journey in creating the works for the RAW degree show, for my bachelor's thesis, has been a deeply personal exploration of the relationship between nature, technology, and the human body. Through the mediums of oil painting and mixed media sculpture, I have sought to capture the essence of this interplay. In summary, my artworks in the RAW degree show have been a visual dialogue between intuition and intention, exploring the themes of nature, technology, and the human body.

5 DISCUSSION

In my own practice I relate to the ideas of post internet art. I am a digital native who spends a lot of time online, I am affected by internet culture daily, and I utilize digital tools in creating physical artworks. Digital culture as a reference source feels mundane to me. I think that thought proves that post internet is part of my practise.

The thesis explores the relationship between post-internet culture and contemporary painting, and within my own works those phenomena are combined with subjects matters of relationship between human, nature and technology.

Thesis argues that post-internet art, which emerged after the widespread adoption of the internet, is a global cultural era influenced by digitalization; the thesis suggests that post-internet is a global cultural era. The thesis also suggests that contemporary painting reflects the values and influences of post-internet culture.

The introduction sets the foundation by highlighting the historical significance of art and its ability to express emotions and provoke thought. The notion of post-internet art is discussed, emphasizing its ambivalence and openness. The term "post-internet" signifies both belonging to the internet and recognizing that the internet is over or has changed. Post-internet artists move beyond the novelty of the web and use its tools to tackle various subjects.

In the thesis the connection between post-internet and contemporary painting is explored. Contemporary painting is viewed as a reflection of its time, with subject matter becoming conceptual and detached. The thesis argues that post-internet has influenced contemporary painting. The discussion of artist examples further illustrates the relationship between post-internet and contemporary painting.

In the last part of the thesis, in the report of the artistic part of the thesis, it is verbally explored the relationship with nature and technology with using oil painting and mixed media sculpture and reflecting post-internet art theory to analyse the thought process behind the subject matter. This personal exploration aligns with the thesis's argument how contemporary painting reflects the influences of post-internet culture era. Overall, the thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the connection between post-internet culture and contemporary painting.

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