



KAISALEENA HALINEN

Mourning

9.1.–1.2.2026

Layer by layer, piece by piece, a human being is created and formed. In the same way, one also departs—piece by piece, layer by layer. For a moment we exist in candle flames, in fragrant beeswax, in thin smoke. Fragments of our existence remain in the thoughts of the living, in photographs, and on gravestones. Movement is continuous as great gates are opened and closed. Do we exist only as long as we are remembered?

The works in Kaisaleena Halinen's new exhibition are dominated by elements of existence and transience. One of her starting point has been Hans Holbein the Younger's painting *Der tote Christus im Grab* (*The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, 1521–1522). It is a painting that deeply unsettled Fyodor Dostoevsky when he visited the Basel Art Museum in 1867. Measuring two meters in width and thirty and a half centimeters in height, the work is disconcerting already by its proportions alone. Dostoevsky's wife, Anna Grigorievna, wrote in her memoirs about her husband's reaction before the painting: "He stood motionless for twenty minutes, and it was evidently difficult for him to control himself. His agitated expression foretold the onset of an epileptic seizure." Dostoevsky returned to the painting in his novel *The Idiot*, where Prince Myshkin exclaims upon seeing the work: "That painting could make some people lose their faith." Holbein's painting is realized at the intersection of the experience of human death, the inexorable laws of nature, and Christianity. In a similar way, different elements intersect in Kaisaleena Halinen's works. Bone and charred wood have grown together. In decomposing, slowly vanishing parts of organisms, icy, glass-like berries grow—signs of living matter. Calla lilies, the stately flowers of death, formed from ash, travel in their black carts. In the reliefs, candles burn; memories, thoughts, and prayers for the absent are embedded in plaster and beeswax.

Every grief is different; every loss and longing forms its own universe. We are built as much from what is unattainable as from what has been attained. We are shaped by losses, renunciations, and yearning. When a person—someone we may at times have taken for granted, as ordinary—leaves us, they become ever-present. Gradually, our memory constructs its own story of them, shaping them from fragments and parts that may be true. True or not, the human figure remains.

If Holbein's painted dead Christ, through his humanity, caused someone to doubt his divinity, are we capable of seeing divinity in the humanity of the deceased? I cannot say; I do not know the answer. The Hungarian writer Imre Kertész wrote: "The only path to freedom passes through memory." In Kaisaleena Halinen's works, the gates of memory are slightly opened. A person builds their memories until it is others' turn. Then we are only a trace in time, an imprint in plaster. Let us hope that gentle hands will carry us then.

Hannu-Pekka Björkman
actor–writer

Kaisaleena Halinen (b. 1973, Turku) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 2002. She works primarily with sculpture, installations, and site-specific works. She has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in Finland and abroad. Her works are included in the collections of Amos Rex, EMMA – Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, Saastamoinen Foundation, Sara Hildén Foundation, Tampere Art Museum, and the Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art. In autumn 2028, a retrospective solo exhibition of her work will be presented at Sara Hildén Art Museum.

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