

Swim to the Ocean Floor



Exhibition „Confession Pool“
August 19th – September 5th at EKA Gallery
Artists: Pille-Riin Jaik, Liisa Jugapuu and Helena Keskküla

Review: Stacey Koosel

Three talented young artists who recently graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts, Liisa Jugapuu (who studies now MA in the painting department), Helena Keskküla (who graduated with a BA from the sculpture department) and Pille-Riin Jaik (who graduated with a BA from the photography department) collaborated together as a collective in an exhibition at EKA gallery entitled „Confession Pool“.

Visitors were admitted to the exhibition space one at a time, they were asked to take a postcard in with them with ghostly images of one of the artists (Helena, Liisa or Pille-Riin) with the words „I Have Something To Confess...“ written in pink on the front of the cards and blank empty space on the back. The objective was to fill in their card with their own confession and bring it back out to the attendant waiting behind a desk at the exhibition entry/exit.

Inside the dark and private gallery space was a minimalist, modernist OCD heaven. When entering the space the visitor is first faced with a transparent plastic curtain, that gave the illusion of some privacy. Onto the plastic transparent curtain the projected

images of the three artists like a trio of cherubs or Saints. Once behind the transparent curtain the viewer found a large cloud like cushion on the floor, once again made with a transparent fabric that showed the inner cotton wadding lining. A television screen showed the video of blue skies and fluffy white clouds projected onto blinds and a hand cleaning the blinds. Finally, and most importantly – in the corner was a small Lucite table, that forced the visitor to kneel on a comfortable pad to use the table, this is where you made your confession after some meditation in the compassionate darkness. Once the confession card was filled in by the visitor it was given back to the gallery attendant behind the desk. In return the visitor could select from a desk drawer another card, this time with someone else's confession written on it.



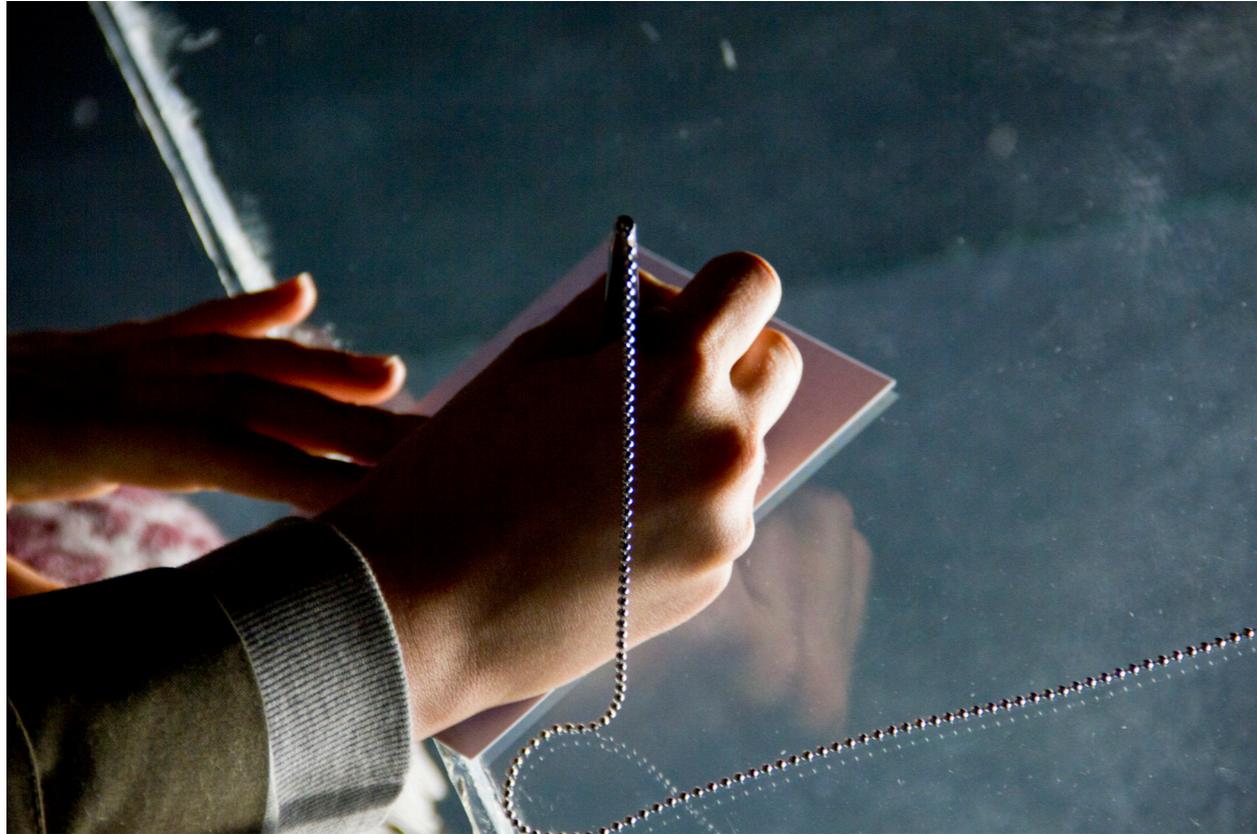
It's thrilling and at the same time a bit of a burden to be the caretaker of someone else's confession. Some visitors of course take the confession lightly, others have come out visibly shaken or even crying. As for myself, I confessed that I did not know. My own confession was abstract to remain anonymous and vague. But the card I picked in return had a real confession, one of personal torment and despair. The card I pulled read „J'ai peur d'être tombe amoureux d'une autre fille...“ which means I'm afraid I've fallen in love with another girl. This confession was troubling to me, as perhaps it was a secret – and I had to hold someone else's secret now as my own. It took me some time to decide if I could share a stranger's secret. But I decided that this visitor was no longer alone with their torment, he (or she) had someone to share their burden with, and that someone was me, but now you too.

Liisa Jugapuu stressed the importance of confessions in this project. She said:

„The most important thing about this exhibition was to expose anonymity while remaining anonymous. This liberating feeling, that I can say it out loud, but to whom, I

don't know. The thing, that maybe you exchange your most intimate secret with somebody who is complete stranger."

Confessing to a stranger in this written and anonymous way is like yelling into the darkness. The pool of confession cards are exchanged, as each visitor takes home with them someone else's confession. The name of the exhibition „Confession Pool“ was taken from a Madonna song called „Swim“. Helena Keskküla remixed the pop song into an ethereal, lush, dreamy background soundscape for the exhibition. The lyrics from Madonna's song speak of how she can't carry the burden of her sins anymore, how they felt like a curse that would force her to „swim to the ocean floor“.



The religious iconography and references were used lightly but effectively, much like the pop star Madonna used a charged, biblical and iconographic name to deliver her own brand of modern aesthetics. The modern confessional booth was playful and interactive, the clouds, ambient music and meditative video gave the visitors a soft space to reflect. The aesthetics of a church were in continuous use with the attendant behind the table with cards, the kneeling stand, the cherubs, clouds, the video that urged the purging of secrets, and the aural landscape that ushered in a meditative trance. As Helena Keskküla explained:

„We built the exhibition on religious elements by playing with the formal aspects rather than the contents. We took instead the vague and kitsch aspects of religion.“

„Confession Pool“ could easily be linked to ongoing discourse on contemporary subjects such as privacy, surveillance, anonymity and man's eternal need for some form of spirituality, which is sometimes found in organized religion. However for me the most powerful aspect was the interactive bait and switch and the aesthetics of the

artistic trio. At first the visitor thinks they are just there to contemplate and confess, but as a last task – they are asked to take with them someone else's confession. This takes the visitor out of their own self-absorbed, neurotic mind and makes them empathetic



to the suffering of others. The aesthetics are pure light estrogen - feminine in a virginal sense. I was at once reminded of Sofia Coppola's debut 1999 sleeper hit „The Virgin Suicides“ and Coppola's similar use of fuzzy, floating, dreamy cues to juxtapose the underlying darker, murkier, faster moving waters.