

OLA KOLEHMAINEN
NIKO LUOMA

January 24 – March 15, 2024
Opening: January 27, 5pm

This double exhibition at GALERIE NIKOLAUS RUZICKA showcases a selection of new photographic work by **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** (b. Helsinki, 1964) and **NIKO LUOMA** (b. Helsinki, 1970). Both artists focus on capturing space, time, and light, which their works vividly render through a wide variety of photographic processes. **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** and **NIKO LUOMA** are members of the first generation of the “Helsinki School,” a group of artists who trained at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture in Espoo outside Helsinki since the 1990s. The defining trait of their practice is that they harness the photographic process as an instrument of conceptual thinking. Careful visual study, cooperation, and an ongoing exchange of ideas are central to the movement’s evolution.

NIKO LUOMA presents two new series titled *The Garden/My Garden* and *Ark/Qui*. In these works, the artist explores ideas of the present, a perpetually fluid temporal continuum that is informed by our recollections and habits of seeing. The title *Ark/Qui* pairs the Latin word “arca” (box) or “arcanus” (mysterious, secret) with “qui,” which means “here” in Italian and “who” in French. The combination of words hints at what recollection in its complexity can be and signify. The works, created solely using the technique of classical analog photography, reveal a confluence of thousands of colorful points, a delicate dance coalescing in the larger image of a single circle. The deliberate affinity to the Pointillist works of the French painter Georges Seurat, who composed entire pictures out of closely spaced round brushstrokes in varying colors, reflects **NIKO LUOMA**’s admiration for this late-nineteenth-century style. In investigating the momentum, **NIKO LUOMA** also pays homage to the American composer Morton Feldman, whose avant-garde musical pieces relied on repetition, variation, and an extended time format.

In the series *The Garden/My Garden*, the artist engages with the fragility of existence and the inexorable passage of time. The works reference the philosophy of ikebana, the classical Japanese art of flower arrangement, and the minimalist aesthetic of Japanese gardens. The motifs of his photographs are rigorously straight or wavy horizontal and vertical lines that generate an imposing spatial depth and absorb the beholder’s gaze. To produce the individual motifs, the artist manufactures stencils that he positions in front of his studio camera’s lens, illuminates in different hues, and then captures on film, a process he repeats with different combinations of form and color until a pattern of irregular overlapping color fields emerges on the negative. Since the early days of his career, his focus has been not on the action before the camera but rather on what is happening inside the device. The works in this series are also reminiscent of baroque Netherlandish flower still lifes, which concentrate diverse seasonal blossoms in a single painting. An adaptation of Man Ray’s photograph *Dust Breeding*, taken in Marcel Duchamp’s studio in 1920, adds to **NIKO LUOMA**’s paraphrases of masterworks from the history of art.

In his first exhibition with the gallery in 2021, **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** presented large-format works from the series “MVSEVM,” for which he visited a series of storied museums. The ongoing project was sparked by **OLA KOLEHMAINEN**’s collaboration with Susanna Pettersson, formerly general director of the National Museum in Stockholm.

For this exhibition, **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** has created a series of new works in other renowned European museums that preserve collections with centuries-long histories. The works transport us to central scenes of European culture including the Belvedere and the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna), the National Museum (Stockholm), the Uffizi (Florence), the Louvre (Paris), the National Gallery (London), and the Prado (Madrid). Probing the traditions and influences of art history and their circulation through the eras, the artist’s photographic studies raise the question of how the past informs the present, a process of mutual influence that unfolds a metanarrative strand in the history of art. “Museums function like time machines,” **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** says. “Greek and Roman sculptures, masterworks of the Renaissance, and their contemporary interpretations come together in this project and undo the impact of time.”

Using the means of photography, **OLA KOLEHMAINEN** extricates celebrated masterworks like *Gabrielle d’Estrées and One of Her Sisters* by an artist of the School of Fontainebleau, Maestro del Crocifisso Corsi’s Crucifix, or the *Open Book* of an anonymous German Renaissance painter, some of which have left a lasting imprint on our visual memory, from their original contexts of presentation and reassembles them in fragmentary form. Areas of overlap and distortion result in reinterpretations and detail views of paintings that toy with our perceptions of defined pictorial motifs. History as fixed on the canvas oscillates between distant past and present as the dimension of time takes on tangible significance, inspiring a new way of seeing.