

SIRKKU KETOLA

A Body Called Paula

February 16 – March 18, 2017

Opening Reception
Thursday, February 16
6:30-8:30 pm



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SIRKKU KETOLA: A BODY CALLED PAULA

BY DARYL VOCAT

“I believe that we learn by practice. Whether it means to learn to dance by practicing dancing, or to learn to live by practicing living, the principles are the same. In each, it is the performance of a dedicated, precise set of acts, physical or intellectual, from which comes shape of achievement, the sense of one’s being, the satisfaction of spirit.”

—Martha Graham¹

In Sirkku Ketola’s *A Body Called Paula*, the printed, paper ribbon is a central motif. Part installation, part performance, the work evolves with each new appearance. The word “Paula” references both the name of a female character Ketola embodies during performance, and the Finnish word meaning snare or string. In this instance Paula is a character, and an idea; Paula is a maker, and is also meant to entice. Ketola’s printed ribbons meander and droop, physically marking out space and time. They are not just objects to view, but are also records of process and motion. Large-scale printed works conjure up visions of their creation. The ribbons unfurl giving impact through size, but are also easily portable. Their form provides Ketola practical solutions to making art with a strong impact, and portability for ease of travel. Ketola first started working with ribbon printing in 2010 in Australia where the process of problem solving began. Her experimentation and learning eventually resulted in the exhibition *Still Hearing the Whispers of the Queen* at the Turku Art Museum in Turku, Finland (2015-16).

Whether in studio or in performance—a distinction not always apparent—Ketola prints repeating photographic images on 25 metre long rolls of paper. *A Body Called Paula* is made over time in the gallery space. The art evolves and grows throughout the duration of its exhibition and includes multiple performance printing sessions. *A Body Called Paula* changes based on space,



experience and repetition. The images Ketola starts with are photographs, the gathering of which she refers to as a form of note taking. Through acts of observation and editing, Ketola's process is propelled forward. She crops, doubles and mirrors her photographs, and once processed they become stencils for her four-colour screenprinted ribbons. By manipulation and repeat printing, the photos form continual patterns with a recognizable, but disorienting, appearance. No longer photographs alone, the final printed images show evidence of translation and gesture. They start as complete photographs, are torn apart into layers and recombined through screenprinting.

A Body Called Paula marks the mastery of a printing process, and the beginning of a new long-term, multi-city project for Ketola. Each exhibition of the project responds to its previous site of creation, with stops currently scheduled in Toronto, Turku and New York. Ketola creates each work with a process of wandering, photographing and printing. New ribbons are created using imagery gathered from the previous locale, tracking the artist's journey and tying one performance to the next. Each component exists on its own, gathering further history and context with each addition. Once complete, the full project will culminate in a museum exhibition of all the ribbons.

During the course of her working process, Ketola began to notice the performative aspects of creating large-scale screenprints. The work demands precision, thoughtfulness and a specific set of motions—all functional aspects of process. Ketola's working method has elements of gesture, repetition, rhythm and character contained within. Precise movements are required to ensure proper alignment of the printing stencil. Ribbons of paper are positioned, printed and redirected to create a continuous block of pattern. A poetic reading of these

necessary components speaks about intention, perspective and the passage of time. This is where opening up the process of labour to the public eye becomes performance. To quote dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, “Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul’s weather to all who can read it.”² It seems this is precisely what Ketola aims for with her work; for movement to speak not just of movement, but also of ways of looking, and ways of enacting narrative.

With an honesty of movement, and awareness of screenprinting’s history of commercial production, Ketola performs her printing as the character of Paula. Through an awareness of performance, Ketola enacts a version of herself she describes as being a “metaphor for humanity.” The character is one that oscillates between worker and queen; the unthinking drone, and the decisive ruler; the body that performs, and the head that engineers. This intersection of control and improvisation is something printmakers know well—how to make dynamic art using processes typically overflowing with premeditation. The character Paula comes from a process used for repetition, a process of multiplication. A body named Paula produces, and keeps producing until body or machine gives way.

In Ketola’s artwork, physical labour is used as a way to create meaning and space for thinking. Ideas and concepts flow through acts of making and doing. Through repetitive motion and physical manipulation of materials, her concepts come to life. The work acts not as an explanation of ideas, but as an invitation or offering. *A Body Called Paula* is understood through the passage of time, and through observing the places where movement, control and translation all come together. The artist enacts motion, controlling the printing of each screened image. Ribbons record moments where gesture activates the inanimate, marking the flow of time, and telling stories through process. In turn, these actions and objects are seen, interpreted and understood by viewers, each in their own idiosyncratic way. What viewers walk away from the work with is not just a product of looking at an object, but also a product of reading a story without words.

¹ Graham, Martha. “An Athlete of God.” *NPR - This I Believe Series*. NPR, 4 Jan. 2006. Accessed 4 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5065006>>.

² *Ibid.*

Artist Bio

SIRKKU KETOLA

Sirkku Ketola (b. 1973 in Turku, Finland) works and lives in Finland and stays regularly in Belgium. Her mind is fed by the northern silence and the urban streets of Europe. Her exhibitions have passed through international borders in a variety of galleries and museums. Renowned as a screenprinter, she is often solicited to teach and lecture in art academies. She speaks although the quiet allures her. She describes herself as a civilized savage.

Author Bio

DARYL VOCAT

Daryl Vocat (darylvocat.com), born in Regina, Saskatchewan, is a visual artist living and working in Toronto. Solo exhibitions include Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina, SK); Thrush Holmes Empire, Open Studio, and York Quay Gallery (Toronto, ON); SNAP Gallery and Latitude 53 (Edmonton, AB); Eastern Edge Gallery (St John's, NL); Blackburn 20/20 (New York, NY); and Malaspina Printmakers Gallery (Vancouver, BC). He has participated in group exhibitions in Canada and beyond, including the internationally touring exhibition *Further, Artists From Printmaking at the Edge*. His work has been acquired by the New York Public Library Print Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, The Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, The Saskatchewan Arts Board, and the City of Toronto. His artwork has been published in *YYZine* (YYZ Gallery, Toronto) and *Printmaking at the Edge* by Richard Noyce (published in the UK).

Images

Cover: *A Body Called Paula* (work in progress), 2016, performance, screenprint on paper, installation and print dimensions variable. Photo by Caron M.

Interior: *A Body Called Paula* (work in progress), 2016, performance, screenprint on paper, installation and print dimensions variable. Photo by Sirkku Ketola.

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