

**SALLA
TYKKÄ**

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Salla Tykkä was born in 1973 in Helsinki, Finland.

She has been working with photography, video and film since 1996 and in 2003 graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki.

Tykkä's work is mostly concerned with memory, of both sight and sound, and the power influences that exist within everyday life.



ABOUT THE WORK

Tykkä's dramatically-edited footage plays with **cinematic** structures and is often set to familiar, grandiose film scores.

Since 2008, Tykkä has been completing a trilogy of films, each exploring a different notion of **beauty and perfection**, and each informed by **the colour white**.

The Palace comprises an installation featuring all three works: *Victoria* 2008, *Airs Above the Ground* 2010 and *Giant* 2013, which has been co-commissioned by BALTIC. This is the first exhibition to present the trilogy together and also marks the international premiere of *Giant*.

"The three films on show at BALTIC are made from 2008 – 2013. They are all describing one subject from my own memory. These are subjects that I considered beautiful in my youth. To me they represented something complete, a dreamlike perfection, and were reflecting the mentality of western humankind.

*After reading essays by John Ruskin I started rethinking these images. I understood how the search for beauty and perfection has always been connected to political power and how certain aesthetics advance the growth of fascism. I felt how strongly these kind of images are affecting our minds and shaping not only our aesthetics but also our ethics, our understanding of 'us' and 'the others'."*¹
– Salla Tykkä



ABOUT THE WORK

Victoria 2008 shows a blooming water lily, opening and closing as if dancing in a slow motion ballet. Tykkä's speeded-up film records the gentle oscillations of the lily, surrounded by its huge, flat, green leaves in a dark pool.

Victoria documents the nightly blossoming of the giant water lily; a ten minute time-lapse of the plant's life cycle as it unfurls its petals in the dark. The lily blossoms over two nights, once a year. The first night the flower is white but, upon opening for a second time a day later, its colour has changed to pink. European explorers brought *Victoria Amazonica* and *Victoria Cruziana* back from South America to Europe and named them after Queen Victoria. Tykkä considers the plant a symbol of colonial power and domination in the 19th Century.

The Victoria lily has leaves that can grow up to 3m in diameter making it the second largest single leaf of any plant in the world. Its thorns, found on the 'ribs' on the underside of the leaf, are sharp enough to puncture rubber. The leaf structure inspired the architecture of England's first greenhouse, the Crystal Palace, in 1851.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

The Victoria flower opens up to 40cm wide and floats on a submerged stalk nearly 8m long. This plant species is over 160 million years old, making it 10 million years older than the earliest ancestor of modern birds.

Tykkä first became interested in Victoria lilies as a child, having spotted one in Edgar Rice Burroughs' 1920 movie, *The Son of Tarzan*. Interestingly, the flowers don't actually grow in the jungle. This one was filmed in the Botanical Gardens in Helsinki. As a child, Tykkä visited the Gardens with her Grandmother, specifically to see this plant and admire its beauty. However, as the lily blossoms nocturnally, she was unable to appreciate its appeal.

Victoria is accompanied by Austrian composer Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No.5*. This 10 minute score is a wordless love song to his wife, Alma, written in 1901.

- List everything you have noticed about *Victoria*.
- How does it make you feel?
- This lily was filmed in Helsinki's Botanical Gardens. How does this information change how you feel about the artwork?
- How important is the musical score accompanying this piece?
- Imagine *Victoria* without music. How might this change the way you feel about the artwork?



IN MY OPINION

- Spend time watching *Airs Above the Ground* 2010. What are your immediate thoughts?

Airs Above the Ground, focuses on the Lipizzan horse, the oldest existing pedigree breed in Europe. Developed in the 16th Century with the support of the Habsburg Monarchy which ruled Austria and Spain, the breed became closely associated with the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.

Tykkä believes the breed to be a controversial one, with undesirable qualities of the horse bred out to leave a pure and remarkable legacy. Lipizzan stallions have powerful hindquarters and are bred to perform 'haute école', or 'high school' dressage which includes stylised and highly controlled jumps, kicks and poses known as 'airs above the ground'. Developed to test and further train the control and relationship between military horses and their riders, these moves were never employed in combat as the 'airs' would have exposed the vulnerable underbelly of the horse to foot soldiers. These moves are not seen in modern, competitive dressage.

Born with dark coats, the Lippizan horses gradually turn lighter until they are completely white.

The work questions the uncertain line between nature and cultivated nurture, contrasting footage of young foals running through wild woodland with adult stallions completing feats of dressage.

The soundtrack evokes power, control and grandeur: breath forced from the horses' lungs and the stamp of shod hooves on packed earth is accompanied by J.S . Bach's *Mass in B Minor* 1749.

- To what extent does your opinion change, the more you find out about this artwork?
- Tykkä believes the Lipizzan horse to be products of a political pursuit for beauty, strength and power. What do you think?
- How important is it for artworks to evoke discussion and challenge? How big, or small, a part does this play in the purpose of art?

IN MY OPINION

Both *Victoria* and *Airs Above the Ground* explore characteristics of beauty and what might be considered beautiful. They document the changing colour of white; blooming to pink in *Victoria* and ageing into its dazzling brilliance in *Airs Above the Ground*.

Explore the idea of white:

- What does it make you think of?
- Choose some words to describe white.
- Use your white words to create similes using as and like; as cold as ice, as pure as new fallen snow.
- Make a list of all the white things you can think of.
- Imagine white as a feeling. Describe it.
- Imagine white as a sound. Re-produce it.
- Imagine white as a smell. Explain it.
- Research white and its meaning in other cultures. How do they compare to your original understanding?
- Collect a series of white objects and curate them. Title your collection and make labels and extended interpretation for your items. Think about how visitors might interact with your collection. Remember to photograph or record it some way.

Use all your ideas from the activities above to create a poem about white. Read the poems *What is White?* By Mary O'Neill (KS2) and *Is White a Color?* By John Matthew (KS4) for inspiration.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Giant 2013 features the leading junior gymnastics team of Romania.

The film is shot in Romanian cities Onetsi and Deva, located in the historical region of Transylvania, at boarding schools for artistic gymnastics.

The gymnasts start training at 4 years old and practice for 5 hours each day.

A soundtrack of interviews with the gymnasts and their trainers, relayed by both the artist and then a translator, accompanies images of them in training and of their empty gymnasiums. Archive footage from a film made in the 1970s using the same locations is also incorporated, revealing a continuity in picturing this sport and the structure of recording it.

Tykkä describes gymnastic culture as a relic of dictatorship in Romania, using its aesthetic to reflect the values of a totalitarian society. From 1947-89 Romania was a communist state and became famous for its success in gymnastics at the 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympics and after; the team always performed in white. Tykkä believes these performances can be seen as symbolic of the communist society's ideals of discipline, strength and beauty in order to legitimise its leadership.

Tykkä herself was an artistic gymnast until she turned 15. Interestingly, this piece shares its name with a gymnastic skill. A Giant is practiced on the uneven bars by women and the parallel bars for men and sees the gymnast rotate 360 degrees around the bar. Tykkä was always unable to perform a Giant, afraid her hands would slip and she would fly off the bars.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Find a space. Sit comfortably. Watch *Giant* 2013.

Think about what you are watching.

Consider the sounds that accompany this film.

Reconsider the silences.

Try answering the questions Tykkä poses to the gymnasts.

Do discuss your thoughts with a friend.

How comfortable do you feel as the audience?

Imagine the stories that Tykkä cut from the film; what didn't make it?

Find something about this film that you think other people might have overlooked.

Draw the movements the gymnasts are making.

Make marks to the music.

Fold paper to create a viewfinder and focus on one part of the screen.

Stop and look again.

Start to think about what you would document in a Salla Tykkä style.

Be the artist. Use your mobile phone to make your documentary.



HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

In *Victoria* 2008, Tykkä has created a 10-minute time-lapse film. This time-lapse technique of taking a sequence of frames at set intervals allows the artist to record changes that take place slowly over time; when the frames are shown at normal speed the recorded action seems much faster.

- Make your own time-lapse artwork.

Think about how you document this; you could use notebooks, sketching, record times and dates, use a camera, video recorder, your mobile phone or ipad.

Until recently many people did not question the authority of a photograph or film and its ability to be truthful; believing the old adage 'the camera never lies'. This, perhaps naïve, assumption is being radically tested, and in some cases overturned, by the advent of computer generated images because the original film can now be manipulated.

All photographic, video and film images have been shaped by the technology that the artist chooses to use. Images are shaped further still by a process of selection, editing, and manipulation.

As a result, each and every photographic image is therefore made or constructed, rather than being a window into the world.

- How possible is it to capture a particular moment in time, as it actually was, through film or photography?
- What are you unable to capture using this medium? How important are those 'missing' elements to understanding a moment in time?



- To what extent do you believe everything you see?
- In what circumstances do you question the film, video and/or photographic imagery you encounter?
- Who or what has a duty to be truthful in the way they use film and photography?
- How important is it for art to be truthful?

HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

There are many reasons why an artwork might stir up strong feelings. Perhaps it is beautiful, or totally the opposite; perhaps it carries some symbolic meaning or has associations that touch you in some way; maybe it reminds you of old memories or a scene from a story that is particularly personal. Perhaps it's all of these things, or something totally different.

- Which Salla Tykkä film evokes the most powerful personal reaction for you?
- Use it as the focus for a piece of writing.

Think quietly about your subject and note down everything that occurs to you. Let go of all your immediate preoccupations and keep your subject in the forefront of your mind. Don't strain for great thoughts or especially fine phrases: just aim to keep the ideas flowing and jot them down as they come up.

Call to mind all the associations that your subject has for you. Don't be concerned if these seem very personal or even eccentric. Don't try to be too rational. If something emerges that seems irrelevant, write it down regardless.

- Think about the memories that Tykkä's artwork stirs in you. Write notes about them. Be as thorough about this as you possibly can be:
 - Pinpoint your memory. Where were you? What do you remember about your surroundings?
 - When did it happen? What happened just before? And just after?
 - Are you alone in this memory? Who else was around at the time?
 - What does this memory smell like? Remember, most scents are combinations of different odours.
 - What were the colours like? Be precise about the shades.
 - What did you feel? Think about the feel of the clothes you were wearing, the sensation of touching objects or surfaces.
 - What does this memory sound like? Remember voices, noises, sounds going on in the background.
 - If you could only describe one aspect of this memory, what would it be?
 - Once your memory notes are complete, use them to write a short piece of prose.

HERE'S ONE I MADE EARLIER

"They are all describing one subject from my own memory. These are subjects that I considered beautiful in my youth. To me they represented something complete, a dreamlike perfection..."²

Salla Tykkä

Tykkä's 3 films explore her own youthful understanding of beauty; a gently blossoming lily, the graceful precision of the Lipizzan horse, the rhythmic tumbles of trained Romanian gymnasts.

Tykkä's view of beauty has changed as she has become older and more aware of the political, cultural and historical ideals that surround her subjects.

- What do you believe to be beautiful about Tykkä's artworks?
- In what ways are her artworks not beautiful?
- What does 'beauty' look like?
- Explore 'beauty' and its meaning in other cultures and at different times in history. How do these ideas compare with your original understanding?
- Who sets the standard for beauty in your society?
- How does this standard influence you?
- Take a moment to stop and think about yourself. What is beautiful about you? Share your thoughts out loud.



FURTHER RESEARCH

LEE FRIEDLANDER/EDGAR RICE BURROUGH'S THE SON
OF TARZAN/JOHN RUSKIN/EIJA LISA-AHTILA/
LIISA ROBERTS/SAMI SÄNPÄKKILÄ/STIINA SAARISTO/
JARI SILOMÄKI/GUSTAV MAHLER/JS BACH/
CARRIE SCHNEIDER/ MARKUS COPPER/
VELI GRANÖ/IKKA HALSO/PEKKA JYLÄ /MIKA TAANILA/
ERKKI KUENNIENI/REIJO KELA/ANNI RAPINOJA/
MATTHEW BARNEY/SHIRIN NESHAT

LITERACY KEY WORDS

Habsburg

Cinematic

Aesthetic

Dressage

Time-lapse

Grandiose

Fascism

Beauty

Continuity

Frame

Edit

Evoke

Trilogy

Oscillation

Simile

Symbolic

Manipulate

Selection

Memory

Installation

Colonial

Communist

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Contemporary art is incredibly diverse and wide ranging and can be used to support teaching and learning as part of an entire learning experience.

Contemporary art challenges, exposes and explores cultural and social issues and identities, investigating their meaning through a wide range of practices. BALTIC's programme aims to build pupils' confidence and encourage aspirations, develop their visual language and creative thinking as well as furthering their artistic skills, encouraging students to offer opinions and take risks in response to such visual, cultural and creative stimuli, safe in the knowledge that art has no wrong answer. Contemporary art can be used to generate creative thinking in all subject areas, supporting and offering transferable learning across the curriculum.

BALTIC offers a variety of workshops, talks, artist sessions and research opportunities for primary, secondary and post-16 students. Many are free.

To book a session, arrange a visit or chat about an opportunity, please contact our Schools and Colleges Programmer, Vicky Sturrs on 0191 440 4929 or vickys@balticmill.com

SALLA TYKKÄ WORKSHOP

SUITABLE FOR EYFS, KS1&2 AND SEND / FREE

Pupils will explore Salla Tykkä's *The Palace* through looking, drawing, describing and sound activities, working as individuals and in groups.

Exploring colour, subject matter, inspiration and meaning, pupils will share opinions on, and offer critical judgments about, Tykkä's films.

Pupils will collect drawings and make marks in response to the films and their sound tracks before creating their own artwork specific 'sound picture'.

Inspired by Tykkä's exploration of the colour white and ideas of beauty, pupils will develop their own word banks to produce a group performance poem.

This session is tailored to the needs of your group, making it age appropriate, for EYFS up to the top of Key Stage 2. It lasts 1 hour and is suitable for up to 35 pupils.

INTRODUCTION TO... SALLA TYKKÄ

SUITABLE FOR KS3, 4, POST-16 AND SEND GROUPS / FREE

Led by BALTIC staff, this introduction to Finnish artist Salla Tykkä's exhibition will explore her inspiration, ideas and concept.

Through facilitated discussion and debate, pupils will critique the exhibition and learn more about Tykkä's perception of white and beauty and how this is explored in her work.

Students will discuss the subtleties of the artist's experimental documentaries and the potential controversies that surround her subject matter.

This session is tailored to the needs of your group, making it age appropriate, and lasts 30 minutes. *Introduction to...* tours are suitable for a maximum of 35 pupils.

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

ARTIST STUDIO SESSION

SUITABLE FOR EYFS, KS1,2,3&4, POST-16 AND SEND / £100 HALF DAY,
£200 FULL DAY + VAT

Practical art workshops delivered by one of BALTIC's experienced artist facilitators develop your pupils' creative inspiration, influences, skills and techniques. Artist Studio Sessions give your pupils the opportunity to get initial inspiration for projects, develop new artistic practices, work closely with a practicing artist and take creative risks.

Use the exhibitions as a focus, come with a ready-designed project, or leave it to BALTIC to create a bespoke session from your ideas and desired outcomes.

BALTIC's artist team have diverse interests and workshop skills including sculpture, printing, textiles, installation, photography, drawing, animation and sound work to name only a few.

Artist Studio Session's can take place at BALTIC or at your school and include all materials.

CROSS CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

- Art, Craft and Design
- English
- History
- Science
- Geography
- PHSE
- Computing

USEFUL LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BALTIC

balticmill.com

BALTIC Multimedia Database

archive.balticmill.com

BALTIC Primary School Resources Bank:

balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/primary--early-years/resources

BALTIC Secondary School Resources Bank:

balticmill.com/learning/schools-and-colleges/secondary-colleges/resources-secondary

Salla Tykkä

sallatykka.com/web/index.php

Salla Tykkä Vimeo site

[vimeopro.com/yvonlambert/sallatykka/](https://vimeo.com/yvonlambert/sallatykka/)

REFERENCES

- 1 TYKKÄ, Salla. *A Dream of Beauty*. *Dazed Digital*, 2013 [viewed 5 December 2013]. Available from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/17993/1/a-dream-of-beauty-salla-Tykkä-interview>
- 2 ibid

IMAGE CREDITS

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Airs Above the Ground 2010

Production still by Alan Kucar.

Courtesy the artist.

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Salla Tykkä

Airs Above the Ground 2010

Production still by Alan Kucar.

Courtesy the artist.

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Salla Tykkä

Victoria 2008

Courtesy the artist

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Victoria 2008

Courtesy the artist

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Salla Tykkä

Airs Above the Ground 2010

Production still by Alan Kucar.

Courtesy the artist.

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Salla Tykkä

Giant 2013 (production still)

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Giant 2013 (production still)

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Salla Tykkä

Victoria 2008

Courtesy the artist

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Giant 2013 (production still)

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