

Elina Nissinen
hunajakuu
15. – 31.8.2025

Ancient desires, ancient fears Curatorial Essay

*The weapon is modest,
but the possibility of
action is close by—and
infinite.*

from “Anal Terror” by Paul B. Preciado

Elina Nissinen’s exhibition *hunajakuu* delves into Dionysian states where intoxication, fermentation, and overflowing excess blur the boundaries between matter and spirit.

The night-time is often described as a time when various physical and mental thresholds can be crossed; mysterious events and metaphysical transformations take place under the moonlight. Night-vision is narrow in tone, the scarcity of colour enables other senses to sharpen.

In the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus—the god of wine, transgression, and intoxication—nighttime rites dissolved the boundaries between reality and hallucination, self and collective. In ecstatic and often violent rituals, Dionysus’s women followers, Maenads, were believed to possess occult powers. They carried *thyrsi*, fennel wands tipped with a pinecone, capable of both miracles and deadly force.

In the rituals, these women—whether believed to possess occult powers or not—were able to subvert gender roles, embracing free sexuality and aggression. Across patriarchal cultures, female sexualities, along with the transgression of gendered boundaries, have been systematically suppressed: both through the control of bodies and desires, as well as restricting the transmission of embodied knowledge outside sanctioned systems of patriarchal production. The fear of the feminine and queerness is the fear that patriarchal control will fail.

Dionysian rites were multisensory orchestrations: endless streams of wine; rhythmic music and chants; potent scents of flowers, fermented fruit, animal musk; carnal pleasures, sweat, and other bodily secretions – abundance and destruction both viscerally present. Today, nightlife is certainly more regulated, yet clubs still prime our bodies for nocturnal behaviours. These affective environments invite a controlled loss of control, a space where the night-self can leak into the world and into others.

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But if patriarchal capitalism fears femininity and queerness, it fears equally the pleasures of excess and the desires that exceed heteronormative bounds. What cannot be controlled, however, is the affective, molecular desires towards other bodies.

The scent designed by Masi Tiitta for the exhibition holds tuberose at its heart. This white flower that blooms during the night is often described as seductive and carnal; its erotic charge comes from indole, an aromatic compound found in human intimate areas and secretions as well as in rotting flesh. After all – honey and rot share a pungent sweetness.

Heavy, overripe, intoxicating, indole is the molecular communion with both human intimacy as well as our earthly connection to other living – and dying – beings.

The Dionysian cults already knew this: intoxication is a spatial, collective experience, chemically enhanced.

TEXT BY REMI VESALA

Lou

List of works

Mesisauva

2025

aspen wood, paraffin, scent, hi-hat stand, anal pearls (stainless steel, silicone)

scent: tuberose, eucalyptus, rubber, white musk

Dionysoksen pyydys

2025

cellulose insulation (recycled wood fiber), glue, wall paint, metal wire, recycled paper

Elina Nissinen

Elina Nissinen is a visual artist based in Helsinki. Working primarily with varying sculptural materials, their practice is spatially oriented and often collaborative. Nissinen's work raises questions on meaning-making, different modes of ambiguity and the affective. Addressing the connection between the material and the invisible worlds, their work explores the overlap of the queer with the matter(s) and manifestations of the transcendental and the mystical

Nissinen holds an MFA in Fine Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of the Arts Helsinki (2024), and an MA in Arts from Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (2018).

Scent: Masi Tiitta

Curator: Remi Vesala

Production: Lou, in collaboration with rendezvous

Artist would like to thank:

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Masi Tiitta

Masi Tiitta works as a choreographer, director, dramaturge, and member of various working groups in the field of contemporary performance. Interested in interdisciplinary approaches in the arts, he has collaborated with dancers, actors, visual artists, and musicians. His works have been presented, for example, at Helsinki City Theatre's Stage for Contemporary Performance, Contemporary Art Space Kutomo, and Zodiak – Center for New Dance. He is also a perfume enthusiast and shares fragrance recommendations when asked.