

Sanna Kannisto

March 14–April 6, 2025

Sanna Kannisto's latest exhibition explores the gestures and unique personalities of birds through photography. Her avian photography is distinctive for her unusual technique of constructing field studios in natural settings. While shooting, she is attuned to the birds' gestures, postures, and expressive presence. "Certain moments make photography meaningful to me, such as when a bird chirps, flutters its wings, grooms itself, cleans its beak, cranes its neck, competes for a place on the perch, peers at me with a certain look in its eye, or nestles up against a companion," describes the artist.

Kannisto's art engages in commentary with the history of portraiture, the still life genre, and traditions of scientific illustration. Her photographs are the combined outcome of meticulous planning, surprise and chance. Some of her compositions are 'hand-crafted', combining multiple images or different moments in time. The thing that has always intrigued her about photography is the tension between reality and photographic representation. In the final stages of creating an image, Kannisto describes herself as striving to strike a balance between the natural and man-made or "constructed natural". "When I compose an image, I also construct a narrative, and the viewer then completes the story in their imagination," says the artist.

The exhibition's title, *Gestures*, reflects the artist's interest in the relationships between birds and their means of communication. A Japanese study published last year revealed that birds communicate using symbolic gestures. The Japanese tit (*Parus minor*) flutters its wings in a particular way to signal an invitation for its mate to enter the nest first, suggesting that birds understand abstract messages on a level previously unrecognized by humans. Another study has revealed that the male Eurasian jay is able to anticipate its mate's specific appetites and bring the female the exact treats she desires. Birds are scientifically proven to have highly developed social skills. Studies even suggest that birds might possess a 'theory of mind', as they appear to be capable of making a distinction between their own mental states and those of others.

Kannisto has been photographing birds in Finland and around the world for over a decade, offering her unique insights on the acceleration of environmental change. The past ten years have seen a drastic decline in bird populations all over the world, including Finland. The crested tit – the species portrayed in one of Kannisto's diptychs – was formerly an endangered species, but is now on the critically endangered list. In her recent works, Kannisto has expanded her avian menagerie to challenging new species such as crows, owls, woodpeckers, hawks, bee-eaters and swallows. During her field work, she collaborates with ornithologists and bird ringers. She has received permission for her projects from the Finnish Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The birds featured in *Gestures* were photographed in Finland and Italy.

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