



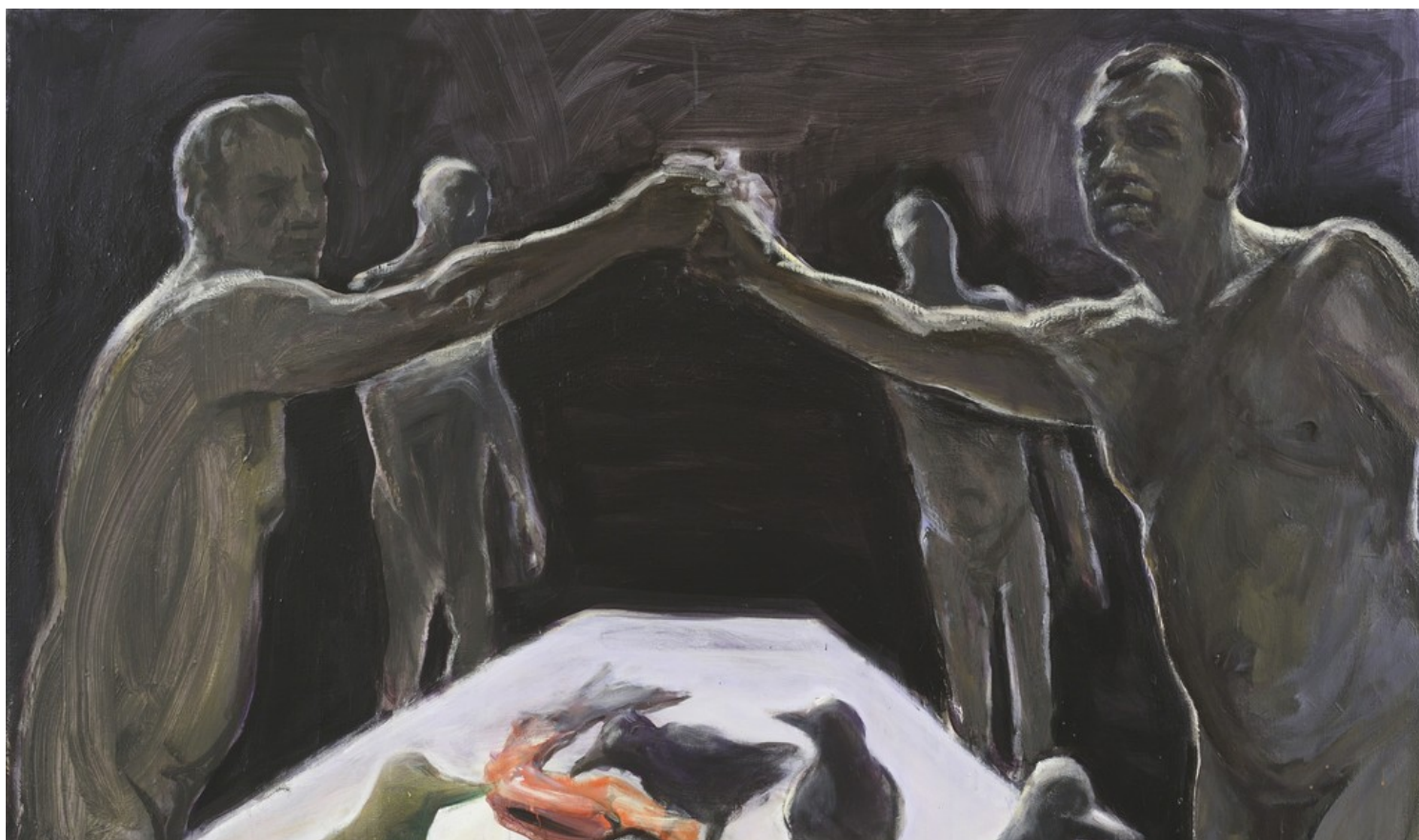
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# In “Smells Like Old Men’s Spirit,” Estonian Artist Jaan Toomik Explores Virility and Mortality

In Jaan Toomik’s current show at Temnikova & Kasela, cheekily titled “Smells Like Old Men’s Spirit,” the Estonian artist puts himself at the center of his work, and riffs on the name of a seminal Nirvana album, to plumb the complexities of aging.

**ARTSY EDITORIAL**

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**Jaan Toomik**

*Smells Like Old Men's Spirit*, 2015

Temnikova & Kasela

Though best-known for his work in video, Toomik is also a painter and a performance artist. Greatly influenced by the volatile political situation in the former Soviet Union—and his personal experience serving in the Soviet army as a young man in the early 1980s—Toomik made the leap, while in art school in the late '80s and early '90s, from neo-expressionist painting to post-conceptual performer. "Smells Like Old Men's Spirit," represents his work across all three genres, where Toomik uses own body, in various states of contortion, as his subject. The show provides an intimate glimpse into the shape-shifting environment and, more existentially, identity of an artist who is approaching the later years of his life.





Jaan Toomik

*Self Portrait with Cut Penis. Homage to Van Gogh*, 2015

Temnikova & Kasela

Jaan Toomik

*Balance II*, 2015

Temnikova & Kasela

In *Self Portrait with Cut Penis. Homage to Van Gogh* (2015), Toomik is naked. The subject's masculine pose and defiant expression stand in contrast to the painful sight of his genitals—or where his genitals would be—apparently cut off and bandaged. The allusion to castration, paired with the wan color of his skin, come together as a potent and playfully sarcastic allegory of aging. Other works take a less visceral, but similarly nightmarish approach to the subject. Paintings (all 2015) like *Balance II* and *Action II* represent hellish, Hieronymus Bosch-esque scenes, where heads are fused to arms instead of necks, and bodies are naked, entangled, and obscured. In this topsy-turvy world, the aging body is malleable, monstrous, and unfamiliar.





Jaan Toomik  
*Balance I*, 2015  
Temnikova & Kasela

In their companion pieces, *Balance I* and *Act I*, ghostly figures gather together, their faces obscured by steamy, surreal surroundings. Have their failing bodies eclipsed their individual identities? Or, more optimistically, are they shedding their egos, and finding balance and companionship, as they age? All of Toomik’s works seem to raise similar questions. Exploring these concepts in video, painting, and performance art, the artist confirms his status as one of the more notable artists born out of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

—Bridget Gleeson

*“Smells Like Old Men’s Spirit” is on view at Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn, Estonia, Nov. 6, 2015 – Jan. 9, 2016.*

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