

Preliminary assignments

The Philosopher exhibition by Meta Isæus-Berlin at the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art



Meta Isæus-Berlin with the installation *Awakening III* in the background. Photo: Mia Lindqvist

Meta Isæus-Berlin (b. 1963) is an internationally renowned contemporary artist from Sweden. *Filosofi* ('The Philosopher') exhibition is her first solo exhibition in Finland. *The Philosopher* exhibition is **a retrospective**, meaning it offers a comprehensive display of Isæus-Berlin's art, from her earlier works to her latest creations.

Think about the following before your visit:

What object brings you comfort or security, or which item belongs in the home?

Think about the object. Try to think of an object that is not an electronic device. Write down the name of the object so you remember it when you visit the museum.

The Philosopher exhibition is displayed for the first time at the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art in Vaasa. **Do you know the difference between modern art and contemporary art?**

To put it very briefly, modern art is an umbrella term for art movements that emerged after the beginning of the 20th century, such as surrealism and impressionism. **Contemporary art**, on the other hand, refers to art created in our lifetime (roughly since the 1960s).



Meta Isaeus-Berlin, *Almost as Usual*, 1997, the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Liisa Palomäki

The Philosopher exhibition by Meta Isæus-Berlin features many **installations**, which are physical works created specifically for and in the space. These installations may look like rooms, featuring familiar elements such as furniture. **However, it is important to only look at them without stepping inside the artwork or otherwise touching them.**

You are allowed to bring your phone and **take photos of the artworks, but *not* of other people.** **At the end of the visit, the students will evaluate their museum experience on the Art Testers platform.** Leave your outerwear in the bus, if possible, or in the coat racks at the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art. For safety reasons, bags or backpacks are not allowed in the exhibition rooms.

If you have time, take the Kahoot quiz with the school groups before visiting the exhibition. You can also take the Kahoot quiz after the visit.

The visit, what's going on?

It is impossible to define what art is. Many artists have pondered this and broken the many definitions of art. In the early 20th century, the concept of **readymade art** emerged, where fully functional objects were taken into exhibition spaces and given a new name. Readymade art was part of modernism. The French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) is often regarded the inventor, or 'father', of readymade art. His piece *Fountain* caused a great deal of criticism both among viewers and within the art world. The 'fountain' was actually a urinal brought into the exhibition space and it effectively broke the definition of art. Even today, contemporary art evokes a sense of strangeness or unfamiliarity for many, and some people say they don't understand it.

Do you like contemporary art? Do you find contemporary art strange or unfamiliar?

Give a thumbs up or thumbs down when you hear the question.



Meta Isæus-Berlin, *The Mirror of Arcadia*, the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Liisa Palomäki

Duchamp's name has also been mentioned in conjunction with Isæus-Berlin's works which represent contemporary art. Many of the works in the exhibition feature familiar elements and objects related to everyday life. Almost everyone living in Finland has a place to sleep, eat, and spend time, where they can go after school or work. Most people call this place 'home'. Things related to home can evoke all kinds of thoughts; for example, a chair might remind someone of their mother if it used to be in her kitchen, or water might bring to mind a warm bath – or fear if it reminds them of an accident occurring in or near water. The Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud used the term *Unheimlich* (in English, 'uncanny') to describe an experience made up of contradictory elements, where the familiar and homely become frightening and disturbing. Are there things you fear because of a memory or event associated with them, or things that you fear in general?

Water is one of the elements in Isæus-Berlin's works For Isæus-Berlin, water means presence. For the audience, water may signify something completely different, and **their interpretations are not wrong**. In the exhibition, you will also encounter the work *Awakening III* (2024), which features a bathroom overflowing with water. When creating the piece, the artist was envisioning a neat and tidy home, where all surfaces are polished. For the audience, the piece may be baffling. This piece has particularly been compared to Duchamp's *Fountain*, which at the time broke the definition of art and launched new artistic movements.

During the museum visit, the artworks will help you explore your own mindset and worldview. You can also write down any thoughts the artworks evoke in you. No thought is wrong, but neither is it correct. Often, the viewer may have a completely different interpretation of a work than the artist – which is one of the reasons why art should be seen as valuable in itself.

Isæus-Berlin's installation *Chair Beside Bed* (1996) resembles a bedroom, featuring a bed, a chair, and a lamp. Viewers can see their own reflection in the artwork, and some people were offended when the piece was revealed at the Venice Biennale in 1997, as some interpreted it as symbolising death, or water birth. The artist herself said that the work reflected the concept of Freud's theory of the *Unheimlich*.

What artist depicts themselves as a koala?

The exhibition provides a full picture of the scope Meta Isæus-Berlin's work.



Awakening III (2024) Photo: Liisa Palomäki

The exhibition's curator, Exhibition Manager Maaria Salo, talks about the artist and the exhibition:

'The Swedish artist Meta Isæus-Berlin has repeatedly explored the theme of *family* in her work. Childhood experiences guide the individual and even leave their mark on future relationships that begin after the early years. Memories are stored and 'filed' in the subconscious. According to the artist, her childhood was marked by philosophical ideas, ranging from Kant to Hegel and Kierkegaard, from both of her parents. Based on this experience, the artist created her own *philosophy*, which serves as the unifying theme of the exhibition.

Post-visit assignment

Pupils create a miniature sculpture of an object selected in the preliminary assignment during the museum visit. The sculpture is shaped from wire in the studio space of the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art.

Each student takes their sculpture with them back to school. Set up an exhibition of the sculptures in the school hallway or classroom and photograph the artworks.

You can share the photographs on social media using the hashtags #vaasanmuseot #taidetestaajat #kuntsinmodernintaiteenmuseo #suomenkulttuurirahasto #svenskakulturfonden. This way, you'll likely come across artworks created by other Art Testers.

In the museum, you can also leave your mark on the Art Testers' collaborative artwork on the studio floor. The finished collaborative artwork will be published on the Vaasa Museums' Instagram and Facebook at the end of February 2025.



Meta Isæus-Berlin, *Love potion*, the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Liisa Palomäki

Also remember to evaluate your visit on the Art Tester platform, as every piece of feedback is important! The visits are free of charge for schools and are funded privately (by the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland), which is why feedback is so important.



Meta Isæus-Berlin, *The Transparency of the Past*, 2004, the Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Liisa Palomäki

Thank you and welcome!

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