

Ars Fennica

Finnish Art Now

Scandinavia House
58 Park Avenue, near 38th Street
Through April 12

Finland has its own version of the Turner Prize in Britain: the Ars Fennica Prize of nearly \$50,000. It has been awarded annually to an artist from Finland (or occasionally from another Nordic country or a Baltic state) since 1991. To judge by this soporifically mild show of work by the four 2007 finalists, all from Finland, the country's artists are polite and well behaved compared with confrontational Turner finalists like Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin.

The winner, Markus Kahre, is a gimmicky sculptor. His main piece takes the form of a small room containing a chair, a desk, a lamp and a mirror. The mirror is really a framed opening in the wall, affording a view into another room that exactly mimics the first room. Someone should tell Mr. Kahre that this trick has been played before.

A better piece of visual magic by Mr. Kahre involves a lens that projects a luminous, blurry view of the surrounding gallery into the outline of a window on a wooden panel. This creates a mysteriously vivid illusion of a miniature lighted room.

Two finalists paint dreamy landscapes. On canvases measuring around 8 by 6 feet, Elina Merenmies creates illustrative visions of dark forests made of densely layered, all-over patterns of leafless trees and branches. In "Burning Mother" a screaming, bug-eyed head hovers in a gloomy, misty forest that is partly overlaid by a network of branching red tendrils resembling human veins and arteries.

Ms. Merenmies works best with ink on paper. She draws pictures — sometimes blurry, sometimes sharply detailed — of car-



ELINA BROTHERUS

"Bathers," part of a video triptych by Elina Brotherus, from "Ars Fennica" at Scandinavia House.

toonish trees and people who resemble characters in an old gothic movie.

A seemingly sweeter vision is projected in Anna Tuori's pseudo-kitsch paintings: confectionery colors and alternately wispy or vigorously gestural brushwork conjure sentimental, vaguely Asian landscapes populated by monkeys and wan, youthful figures. The paintings coyly hint at forces of corruption or psychosis underlying the saccharine surfaces.

The fourth artist, Elina Brotherus, presents large, bland photographs of the ocean and an image of a woman with her back to the camera, looking out toward distant mountains like one of Caspar David Friedrich's romantic travelers.

More interesting, given its hu-

man specificity, is her triptych of video projections showing people of both sexes quietly skinny dipping in peaceful waters. They are curiously relaxing to watch, and in that regard are consistent with the whole exhibition's somnolent effect.

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