

# Let's talk about body, food, identity and art

## with Tiia-Riikka Hietanen

Hello, I'm a Tiia-Riikka Hietanen. And uh she her, but I I would say anything goes, but those mainly I would say. And um I am uh I used to be and also I still am a teacher. Finnish um uh Finnish and a literature teacher mostly at the middle school. But I'm also a visual artist nowadays.

And I'm still studying arts in uh uh Turku Arts Academy and I'm based here in in Turku. I was born here but I spent many years in in the capital in Helsinki but now I'm back here and this is great.

### Can you tell us more about how you combine food gender and art?

Thank you. And first of all, I would like to include the body because the body as an entity is a very important thing to me too.

But I would like to start by saying that I'm a as a well as a 42-year-old woman, I'm a product of this very strong and one could say even like violent like diet culture her. And, um, which I feel like has been or was very female centered.

But I would say like these days, uh, however, it has, um, it has changed a bit, maybe unfortunately, I feel like, uh, um, the food has become even more a politic, um, issue within males too and, uh, also I feel like there's more pressure within this issue for attempt two.

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But um if I go on by um uh explaining my art, it's like I mostly depict the body and uh to be more precise my own body. And I So, I concentrate on um fat body. And um Well, I used to as a as a kid and as a young person, I used to paint and draw a lot.

But then I kind of like went for this more safe career option and studied linguistics and became a teacher which I really liked too and I still teach somewhat to make money.

But um well yeah I was I was saying when I started to paint like more professionally like a couple years ago I immediately was drawn to my body and I started to paint it. I started to like take photographs of myself and then paint it and I also make prints.

And um yeah, I would say like I'm in this like intersection of body and food and also gender and um I would say like food is a very I'm interested in that because it's a very it's a complex matter. I don't know. Uh at the same time it's a happy thing.

It's a very mundane thing and but it can it's it can also be so like in a way evil and complex and uh such a pleasure too. So but hardly at least not for me it's hardly ever anything so like neutral in a way.

But yeah, there are these like huge like expectations on how to how you should like look like and eat to maybe so to say something like this.

## Well, just few things.

Yeah. Also, I just when I was thinking of the of the questions, I understood it's like it's hard to kind of like put these things together in the in the small space, but yeah. And also I would like to say I kind of feel like I'm just like in the in a way in the beginning of every everything. I'm in the, I don't know where my art goes, but yeah, this kind of stuff.

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## Why are you so passionate about these themes and also about art?

Yeah, um I would say it's because uh this is about art. I Well, I'm so happy I went back to art after we were separate for so long.

And I don't regret like leaving my day job and um you know starting to study art even if um it has um well it's sometimes it's a bit tough to make the end to me to make to work and um and then to study at the same time. But um I feel like this is an important topic. It's mostly for this.

It's important for me personally. Um, I don't know. I have uh I would say um this has been like helping myself to get along with these issues so to say. Um, like um I've been let's say like uh Well, I would like to think that personal is political too.

And even though I'm painting mostly myself, my body at least for now, it might change in the future. I've been interested in in painting my, for example, my friends too, but uh I feel like uh even though I'm painting myself, it can it's it can be in a way not just myself, but anyone if it's understandable in a way.

I mean, I would like to kind of like liberate the fat body from the outside like pressures. That's what like I mean it's like um because all my life I've been feeling the strong pressure from outside to like to change something in my body and I was put on a diet when I was 13 and I'm not the only one.

This is uh many people face this things. But also I would like to say it's like I don't I I um well, I don't want to paint. I don't mean to paint like uh like it's not like a some kind of like a utopia like utopian uh state, but more I'm opting for maybe some like neutrality in a way.

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And um yeah. Well, maybe some utopia too. I'm actually I'm leaving to our residence on next Monday to paint and to this small city in North Karelia in North Karelia, Finland. It's going to be cold even colder than here in Turku and I have time to paint there and well I like to move on like intuitively so I don't know what will happen.

But yeah. But yes I I feel like this is It's an important topic because this is important for me personally and also it's like fat bodies receive so much pressure to change and so much hatred. And just like I mean yeah that's very annoying.

### **What is in your opinion uh the biggest challenge facing feminism today?**

Oh, um yeah, I was thinking like feminism and also like the gender issues and uh I really um I'm not sure, but I I think the biggest problem, the biggest challenge is the rise of uh right-wing politics and um how would I say?

I don't know if this the right word, but like the like conservatism like neo-conservatism something like this and which I can also see I mean it's because sometimes as a teacher I see that teenagers are sometimes more conservative than their parents which is like in a way weird and so I'm very concerned about this kind of tendency.

I mean, many things some things seem to Sometimes I feel like things are getting forward like LGBTQ+ rights, but then also I feel like there is some kind of like new hostility towards these things too.

And we in Finland have this right-wing horrible sorry not sorry horrible right-wing government and we've seen a really like spike in racism like open racism and stuff like this. Yeah. Yeah, so this kind of small stuff. And yeah, I don't really yeah, I think this is it. I think so.

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## What will be always in your opinion, the next challenge for feminists maybe in 10 years?

Well, I guess this is this is a hard one.

I would I think the things I mentioned um in the like um in the how do you say it? Like in that that earlier question they keep uh keeping they keep uh keeping us busy and activists and uh well humane people but I mean I would like to say that I would like to see even like stronger wave of well this is not a challenge but this this would be like the opposite of it.

I would like to see a stronger wave of people like uh I can't remember the word in English but like taking care of the rights of others like what's oh sorry like minorities and yeah and I would like to see even more like intersectionality among feminism and yeah something like this.

## Can you tell me three names of women who've made always in your opinion history of feminism or three women that inspire you?

Yeah, uh I wasn't I didn't know these should be like European was it like because I actually I'm still going to go with these three that I was thinking of but they're not European.

Uh well, I have um but they are like I would like to name artists Judy Chicago like uh this like first generation and feminist artist and also Georgia O'Keeffe who has been a very like such an inspiration for me and I don't know if she even like thought herself as a feminist but lived by feminist ideas like wasn't married and lived out like a mobile life and was very independent and then I would like to mention uh Sylvia Plath whose

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autobiographical poems and novels have made a really they have been very important to me in in some way.

## And is there anything that you would like to say that we haven't asked you about?

Well, I would like to This is kind of a greeting for everyone.

I would like to I mean, it's so easy to fall into the trap of hopelessness these days in this world. But I still would like to I would like everyone to remain hopeful even if it's so hard sometimes, but good things happen too and you can always resist.

Try to try at least and also I would like to I have from very like early on I I kind of I have this like motto or slogan which is very easy and I like to it's ILO, LEPO, TOIMELIAISUUS in Finnish and it's In English, it's a joy, rest, and action, and uh I think that could be a good motto for anyone.

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