



Artist: **ISLAJA**
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Band web: <http://www.islaja.com>

Contact:

Fonal Records / Sami Sänpäckilä
+358505841486
sami@fonal.com
www.fonal.com

Islaja is the recording alias of Merja Kokkonen, a musician and visual artist from Helsinki, currently based in Berlin. A regular contributor to the more psych/folk and improv oriented *Kemialliset Ystävät* and *Avarus*, Islaja's recordings are by contrast almost entirely self-contained, reflecting the more personal nature of her music, and a natural affinity towards an independent/DIY aesthetic. Her fourth album for Fonal (following 2008's excursion on *Ecstatic Peace* for the live document *Blaze Mountain Recordings*), "*Keraaminen Pää*" (or 'Ceramic Head') contains many shades of black. It also bears witness to a shift in perception and execution; yet the thread that weaves it's way through all Islaja's work remains resolute, visible and intact.

If Islaja's previous albums for Fonal appear to exhibit a more overtly pastoral nature, this in part feels coincidental, or secondary to something much larger and more difficult to define. From the earliest Islaja recordings, Merja has made the simplest of instrumentation work to her own ends, displaying a disquieting combination of innocence and fearlessness, and a seemingly innate ability to transcend the confines of a genre. It is the same singular approach and vision that informs '*Keraaminen Pää*' – born largely of whatever instruments were to hand, if the sound has shifted into more electronic terrain, it remains as immersive and subtly evocative as ever.

When sketching out the dimensions of Keraaminen Pää, Islaja was clear about one thing: the album should have a soul within, preferably silky thin and translucent, like a jellyfish swimming around in the ocean. During the recording process, however, Keraaminen Pää turned into a heavy, robot-moulded disc of clay. It spins, shines, pops and crackles, all the while escaping definition. Thoughts fill the insides of Pää like a stern row of type letters. They reveal the artist's restlessness but also betray a desire for harmony.

'*Keraaminen Pää*' is the first Islaja album to feature English translations of Merja's lyrics. Whilst singing in her native tongue has never proved to be obstructive (at times it can even seem more suggestive), for those not conversant with the Finnish language, these translations shine a light that makes things seem almost iridescent. The sense of mystery is not lost; words cut fresh question marks from the shadows, suggesting new worlds and possibilities, real or imagined.

The songs on *Keraaminen Pää* were written, composed, and recorded on three continents over a period of three years, with Islaja performing, recording and mixing the majority of the album herself. The recordings may recall the waves crashing on the Bight of Benin, the frogs croaking on Lantau Island, the starry sky above Roihuvuori, Helsinki, or maybe a one-euro pizza in Berlin. These songs travelled with their writer for a long time, acquiring new layers during and after the trips, perhaps lending the lyrics their predominantly domestic focus. Less fractured and more fleshed out than previous Islaja recordings, the songs still careen recklessly on both sides of the middle lane, pulsing and shifting with a life of their own:

Islaja has left the forests and moss-covered paths behind. Through an underground tunnel, she wandered off towards the city and found you again. She came in through the door as you were taking out the rubbish. Or through the window you opened on a summer's night. Do you feel as though you're not alone, even if there's no one else in the house? Look around you and you'll see – Islaja, petrified into a ceramic head on your window sill, on your television set.

Islaja has toured the world extensively, playing Thurston Moore's ATP in 2006, and supporting Animal Collective across Europe on their 2007 tour. She was part of the *Approximately Infinite Universe* European tour 2008 alongside Skaters, Fursaxa, Axolotl, Es, Blevin Blectum, Samara Lubelski and Tomutonttu. Her next set of UK dates are scheduled for September 2010, with details TBC. Other dates include shows in Germany and Finland. Tour in Japan and China will follow in October. Details from www.fonal.com/concerts.php

Press info and pictures: http://www.fonal.com/pressmaterial_islaja.php