



DOHA  20°C–28°C TODAY

LIFESTYLE/HOROSCOPE 13

PUZZLES 14 & 15

### Round & About

Jazz at Lincoln Center Doha brings you its latest edition of the 'Jazz in the Park' series.

# 3



### Community

The French embassy is contributing to Goût de France-Good France along with seven restaurants in town, which will pay tribute to French cuisine.

# 7



### Pop Spot

Electro-pop trio Years & Years new single, King, has stormed straight to number one on the UK chart.

# 16



**WATER IS LIFE:** Eskilsson's art installation at the Sealine Camp in Mesaieed.

# Water, the muse

Swedish artist Tina Eskilsson's thematic sail makes waves, this time in Doha. **P4-5**



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**2015**

**WADING INTO THE WATERS: Swedish artist Tina Eskilsson with the two paintings she made during the symposium here in Qatar.  
Photo by Anand Holla**

**By Anand Holla**

By its very nature, water is boundless. For centuries, artists have aspired to be inspired by its character; to imbibe, reflect upon, or borrow from its traits. Leonardo da Vinci called it the driving force of all nature; Bruce Lee suggested we must all become shapeless and formless, like water.

As is its nature, water managed to first trickle in, then gush copiously and eventually seep into almost all of Tina Eskilsson's work as a thematic emblem. Soon after the veteran Swedish artist dove into the world of art in the late '80s, she

would find herself increasingly immersed in art set around water.

“Water is not only the ultimate metaphor for life, but it also helps me express what I want to say with my art. Water has three different states and it’s very exciting when it changes from liquid to ice to gas. Also, it’s so crucial for life, but it’s so dangerous, as well,” Eskilsson says and smiles, “Pictures speak better than words, so I can’t explain this beyond a point.”

That’s alright because her art — installations, paintings, drawings, videos, site specific art, graphic art, sculptures and public work — does that for her. Eskilsson was among the 50 artists from various countries who took part in the recently held third edition of the Al Asmakh International Symposium of Art, a week-long residency set in a fully-equipped Sealine desert camp in Mesaieed.

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Eskilsson, who has been a darling of Sweden’s art scene, has exhibited everywhere from the US to Turkey, from Iceland to Brazil, and her trip to Qatar demanded something special from her.

Braving the Sealine desert breeze, her art installations featuring transparent water- filled, droplet-shaped plastic bags suspended from a rope was another step forward in her creative exploration of, among other aspects, the indestructible nature of the water cycle.

As the Symposium culminated with a full-fledged exhibition at Wyndham Grand Regency Hotel, her two beautiful paintings on display, too, were centered on the theme of water.

Referring to one of the paintings, of three birds on a puddle of water, Eskilsson explained, “The birds will fly, nothing will be lost, everything will change but water will stay and it will always be the same. We are drinking the same water that the dinosaurs were drinking. We say we must save water but it’s

the same water we are using — you can't put new water into the system. So the point is we must not pollute water so that it is of use to everyone."

Eskilsson's art possesses the power to compel the viewer to reflect. For instance, her thought-stirring visual installation *Ice Light and Shadows* put ice, water, light and sound in a darkened gallery space, tapping open one's mindspace to ponder. In her review of Eskilsson's debut show in the US, Leah Ollman of *Los Angeles Times* wrote in October 2006, about the installation: "In a dedicated space, Eskilsson has suspended five conical icicles over clear plexiglass boxes and trained a halogen lamp on each pairing."

Ollman observed that the installation drew its strength from the objects' shifting states; solid becoming liquid, clear elements casting dense shadows.

"As the icicles melt, their drops reverberate in the troughs and send quivering, patterned shadows onto the walls and ceiling," Ollman wrote, "Time, gravity and temperature grow more pronounced. With its single chair, the installation feels like a meditation chamber, where one can contemplate the aqueous equivalent of an hourglass."

The 50-something artist is at ease in trying all techniques, mediums and forms. "I want to explore all the things I don't know how to handle," she says, her eyes lighting up, "I want to be surprised. I want to feel like a child. That's when I can relax and take in the adventure without feeling pressured. Of late, I have turned my focus on installations as I get to use the space to add meaning."

Her translation of emotions and ideas across mediums appears seamless. For her sound installation *Let's Swim*, typical summer sounds were recorded at a bathing place at Ängbybadet, Stockholm, in July 2001.



The following winter, the sound of birds, waves, and voices would reverberate through four large speakers set up at the same beach. People walking by in the snow could experience a summer scenario in the winter connected to their memories of the place.

The same goes for her installation titled Reflection, which was essentially a circular floating mirror in the sea that appeared like a hole in the water. "Waves change

direction in the mirror. The hole grows and disappears as the installation moves," says the note to the installation.

When asked about her signature minimalism, Eskilsson credited it to time. "It's been a long while since I started out," she muses, "and I think it takes a long while to become true to your art and make it simpler and simpler. To take away everything that is unimportant — that is the hard part because you must know what to leave. You may think it's easy to make it simple but it's the most difficult thing."

As for her videos, take We'll Meet Again for starters. The deeply personal film that plays on loop was shot at a lake in southern Sweden where Eskilsson spent all her childhood summers.

"The summer after I lost both my parents, I spent every morning trying to find a picture or a sequence to express my grief. It was a creative as well as a healing process.

Unexpectedly beside the grief, I also felt some kind of relief as I let the camera sink under the water.

The pictures go from the depths to the sunrise over the calm lake," she explains. The most significant and heart-breaking chapter in her journey as an artist happened around 15 years ago. It was what Eskilsson calls her first big exhibition. It was held in a massive space in Sweden's Jönköping Art Museum.

Titled *Whatever Happens*, the intriguing installation featured 20 cast hands extended out, successively holding lesser water. What did the gesture mean — asking or giving? “It could have been anything,” Eskilsson says.

Before she began working on it, Eskilsson went home to her town as her mother was unwell. “My father had large hands. So I decided to mould his hands just for fun,” she recalls, “And the mould is exactly your hands, you know, it even has those lines that say how long you will live and everything.”

Soon, Eskilsson made more casts of hands of friends and neighbours mimicking that gesture. “As I worked on this, my mother was still sick but my father suffered a heart attack and passed away. That was a huge shock to me,” says Eskilsson, pointing out that the exhibition’s title of ‘*Whatever Happens*,’ also means ‘*Whatever Hands*’ in Swedish.

Life, as it often does, presented her with a confounding dilemma. “I was baffled — should I stay with my mother and forget about the most important breakthrough I will ever have? Then, my mother told me to carry on with the exhibition. I ended up using the situation to make the exhibition a lot more personal,” Eskilsson recalls. Interestingly, the big hand at the end of the series was her father’s and it was the only hand that was completely dry. “It was a coincidence that the water wouldn’t stay in his cast hand,” Eskilsson explains.

“That’s because I had forgotten to tell him to cup his hands a little and he had held it out rather flat,” she continues, “All the other hands, including my little son’s hand held water when I poured some into them. But none would stay in my dad’s hand — it would run out. This surprised me because I hadn’t planned this.” Water, again, stood in as a metaphor for life.

“Life can’t be still; it’s always a movement towards death. Otherwise, we would have plastic flowers in this vase. But

then, they wouldn't be so beautiful," Eskilsson says, throwing a glance at a vase full of fresh flowers in the hotel lobby, "The limited time has some beauty about it and that's why we enjoy a unique, special moment, but not really appreciate or relish things that we get too easily or frequently."

Art, for Eskilsson, fills in all those existential blanks. "To me, art is a need," she says, "Some of us constantly wonder about our existence, very much aware that we are here for a limited time. But most people don't think that way. They live like they will live forever. I wish I could."

Eskilsson can't help but feel aware of each passing day. She says, "Somehow, through art, I want to express the pressure of life. But I also believe that it won't end, it only changes shapes and forms." Water or life? "Water is life



**HOLDING WATER:** Some 20 cast hands holding water in *Whatever Happens*, left, and, a close-up



**WATER CHRONICLES:** A still from *We'll Meet Again*, left, and another one from her video installation *Bubble Talk*.



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