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Parallel Indigeneities, Art Worlds and Frictions

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This Ruukku issue has been edited as part of the research project *Taking Back the Museum - Opening the Space of Community Museums to Recover the Art of Indigenous People*(2021-2025), funded by the Kone Foundation, which brings together artistic research and Indigenous studies. In our call for contributions, the authors were invited to join us in reflecting on the questions about the art of Indigenous people and the coexistence of multiple art worlds.This *RUUKKU* issue, on the theme Re-Imagining, builds on the Art of Research VIII conference, held at Aalto University's School of Arts, Design and Architecture in Espoo, Finland, from 30 November to 1 December 2023.

The focus in artistic research has shifted from outlining the relation between art and research to multidisciplinary collaboration (Elo 2022). Through sustainability transformation, we have become aware of the need to find new kinds of relations between groups of people, species, environments, and forces of nature. In artistic research, and in art more widely, the art of Indigenous peoples is currently topical, as Western artists and researchers are challenged to think in a more holistic and responsible way by Indigenous peoples' practices in perceiving themselves as part of the environment. The focus in Indigenous art is not that often on the creative individual – instead, art reminds us about the interaction between human communities and forces of nature.

Those living on traditional livelihoods in the communities of Indigenous peoples acknowledge their dependence on the forces of nature, exchange gifts with them, and often refer to them with family terms. Both Sámi people and Mexican Wixaritaari refer to themselves as "the children of the sun". The starting point in art is to build and maintain relations between humans, past and present, animals, plants and forces of nature; and in these relations, receiving, perceiving and listening are as important as saying and doing. Different forms of art are significant in different ways. Worlds are built by means of sound, movement, stories and objects, in which humans, animals and forces of nature – like rain and wind – play an active role.

In preparing for the final exhibition of the research project *Palaamisia – Different Points of Return* in the Kuva/Tila gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, and at the same time editing this issue, the curating group wrote the following in the

presentation text: “The arts, languages, knowledges, and objects of Indigenous peoples and peoples originating of Global South are usually presented according to Western taxonomies in archives and museums, and Indigenous relational concepts, theories, and practices are not considered sufficiently. Additionally, the strength of community is often forgotten when it comes to keeping language and culture as a whole alive.”

In selecting art to be presented and published – often meaning well – the gatekeepers of the art and research worlds have also come to, in a colonizing way, define the kind of Indigenous art that will receive attention and support, and in what kind of contexts. Decolonising the practices of art is a slow process, and it often starts within the researchers themselves. In postcolonial research, the researcher’s self-reflecting research is called *homework* , as opposed to *field work* (see e.g. Kuokkanen 2010). It is also important for an artist-researcher to identify the colonising history, knowledge and practices in their own art field as well as other research fields they draw on, such as ethnography or history, particularly in the place addressed in the research.

On the other hand, the ethnographic research tradition applies several good practices. Ethnographers are traditionally inclined to learn the Indigenous language. Knowledge about the language helps in perceiving the theory, aesthetics and axiology of the Indigenous people. Researchers not familiar with the language, when lucky, find Indigenous artists and researchers to collaborate with, and also to function as translators or language teachers and help the external researcher to identify the divisions and relational concepts of the Indigenous language. Knowing the history helps the researcher to recognise colonial preconceptions and ethnographic ignorance, and to better understand the experiences of the people they encounter.

Indigenous-oriented artistic research stems from the definitions, values and aesthetics of the Indigenous peoples themselves. Decolonising Indigenous art forms, materials and aesthetics is often connected to language revitalisation, respect for the history and theory of the Indigenous people, autonomy, and environmental protection (see e.g. Morris 2019, Finbog et.al. 2022, Pirak Sikku 2022). Art activism in Sápmi and all over the world often acknowledges that it is in their own language that human beings think and theorise (Seurujärvi-Kari 2011).

Similar types of language disappearance and revitalisation patterns recur among different peoples and in different times. The modernization of the society results in a tepid view of the decision-makers towards the language and culture of Indigenous people, and Indigenous parents stop speaking their own language to their children, because they believe that the children will not benefit from learning the language. Growing up later, the children are troubled by the loss of the linguistic and cultural traditions, and with other representatives of their generation feel excluded from their own culture (Stordahl 1997). Having grown up, many of

them study their parents' language, and search the archives for information about the art and culture of their ancestors. In some communities, the language is both disappearing and revitalising at the same time (see e.g. Pasanen 2010, Seurujärvi-Kari 2012, Sarivaara & Keskitalo 2016).

Eight expositions were selected for this issue. Three of them (Marija Griniuk; Mirja Liisa Hiltunen & Maria Huhmarniemi; and Korinna Korsström-Magga) discuss the community art made in Sápmi, three of them discuss the ritual-based art of the Mexican Wixárika people (Lola Cervantes; Hanna Ellen Guttorm, Lea Kantonen, Pekka Kantonen & Juan Carrillo Rios; and Lea Kantonen), one discusses the songs of the Taiwanese Tao people (Johannes Kretz & Wei-Ya Lin), and one (Anna Nygren) discusses the connections between art made by autistic artists and Indigenous peoples. The focus in seven expositions is on visual arts, and one exposition focuses on music. Several contributors live in or near Indigenous communities, and at least two of them are Indigenous themselves.

All expositions, apart from one, describe a collaborative perspective, and emphasise the collaborative nature of artistic work. The authors maintain that artistic collaboration has several tasks: building a social space and selfperception in the community (Griniuk, Hiltunen & Huhmarniemi), recovering the traditional knowledge of the community (Guttorm et.al., Kretz & Lin), engaging with divine ancestors (Kantonen), and offering outsiders information about the community and its political aims in a way that breaks down stereotypes (Korsström, Cervantez, Nygren). Most of the expositions approach Indigenous communities from the position of the designer, project leader or executive director of an art project, and power relations are thus inherent in the collaboration subject to research.

In addition to the publications selected for the issue, we have asked Outi Laiti to contribute to the issue's Voices. In her text, Laiti opens the exhibition she has curated, *Digital Natives? Saami*[1] *Games Now!* Sámi culture has included a rich culture of making and playing games. From traditional games, where the materials could have been, for example, reindeer toe bones, today the form of gaming has increasingly shifted to the digital environment. At the Kumma Galleria in the heart of Helsinki, the exhibition brought to light a contemporary living culture, while at the same time reviving the outdated way of presenting northern Finland in the form of Lapland-themed souvenirs. What was essential to Laiti was the preservation of culture, its development and reaching a wider audience. The exhibition as such had value; now that it exists, there is a possibility for continuation.

The Research Catalogue's underlying aim as a publishing platform for artistic research is to provide a platform to parallel with the tradition of scientific publishing, a platform that is more open and freer, stating the requirements for

1. Sámi, Sami and Saami are all correct ways of writing. In this issue of Ruukku, different writers use different spellings.

publishing artistic research more explicitly. The topic of the issue being Indigenous art and the co-existence of diverse art worlds also makes it interesting to also discuss this particular publishing format and how well the format of the expositions supports the voices of diverse worlds. The publications chosen for this issue have benefitted from the freedom to use colors and position the text and media files unrestrictedly. Layout choices make it possible to create untypical rhythms for reading the text in the expositions. The reader is in a way challenged to make choices in experiencing the expositions; on how and in which order to dwell into the topic. Dismantling or challenging such conventional practices have their place, even if they were but minor challenges in our lives.

12/6/2025

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