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Artistic Thinking and Pedagogical Practice

**PILVI PORKOLA, AINO-KAISA KOISTINEN
AND LUIS GUERRA**

How does an artist teach and do research? How does artistic thinking work as a starting point for pedagogy, and how is it realized in practice? How does making art feed into teaching, and correspondingly, how does pedagogical philosophy serve as inspiration for teaching practices? How is artist pedagogy related to social and ecological issues?

These were some of the questions that spurred the decision to put together this RUUKKU issue on artist pedagogy. With *artist pedagogy*, we refer to artist-led teaching and thinking, where the artist's experience and understanding of art serve as the foundation for pedagogical practice. While *art pedagogy* can be understood as a broad concept encompassing various teaching and learning situations in which art plays an integral role, artist pedagogy specifically focuses on teaching provided by artists (Erkkilä-Hill 2024; Kauppila & Rouhiainen 2024).

Art and teaching are usually seen as separate practices, with art being defined by its apparent freedom and pedagogical activity guided by a strong understanding of interaction and dialogue. However, as this issue demonstrates, these factors are by no means mutually exclusive. In the thinking and actions of artist-teachers, they are interrelated, though it can be challenging to identify their similarities and how the practices intertwine. What is clear is that artist-teachers' experience of making art and working as artists influences their teaching. For example, performing artists' experience of performing or interactive practices related to performance are highly applicable to teaching in many ways (Porkola & Laitinen, forthcoming).

Theoretically, one could argue that the artist-pedagogical approach aims to refine the experience of making art as a factor influencing teaching and to highlight the special knowledge of their own field that artist-teachers have. Artist pedagogy thus seeks to conceptualize the knowledge and experiential understanding of artist-teachers in their field. To put it simply, artist pedagogy draws from the artist-teacher's practice and methods of making art. That said, artist-pedagogues not only draw on their personal experience but also utilize a broader understanding of their respective fields of art in their teaching.

Artist pedagogy does not emerge in a vacuum. Throughout history, artists have continually reflected on the pedagogical aspects of their own practice, and these reflections remain an essential source of inspiration for artist pedagogy today.



Across different periods and movements, artists have developed modes of working that merge creation and teaching, whether through workshops, studio visits, or collective actions, revealing that artistic practice itself embodies a form of inquiry and learning distinct from other modes of teaching. Building on these legacies, which are still undertheorized, we understand artist pedagogy as part of an ongoing historical dialogue in which artistic thinking and educational practice co-evolve. In this context, art functions not only as the subject of teaching but also as a methodological framework for experimentation, reflection, and social transformation. Contemporary approaches extend this lineage by emphasizing the ethical and affective dimensions of teaching as an artistic act. Thus, artist pedagogy emerges as both a continuation and a transformation of historical practices, rooted in art's capacity to question, connect, and reimagine the conditions for mutual collaborative learning.

Moreover, artist pedagogy can draw on various theoretical discussions and frameworks, especially when artist-pedagogues are also researchers and sometimes study their pedagogical praxis.

Artist pedagogy can be influenced, inspired, and strengthened by pedagogical education, whether that education is specifically aimed at artists or not. At the University of the Arts Helsinki, where we were all working, when we started putting this issue together, university pedagogy in the arts has been taught for the last decade or so. According to Heli Kauppila and Leena Rouhiainen (2024, 25): “Studies in university pedagogy in the arts have largely been based on the collegial exchange of ideas and peer learning among the teaching staff, and it has strengthened the sense of community experienced by the participants.” In this sense, an important aspect of artist pedagogy is building communities and sharing experiences, practices and knowledges.

We like to think of artist pedagogy as an open-ended, ongoing process that includes the idea of continuous learning related to both making and teaching art. Indeed, one could argue that pedagogy is always about learning as a teacher (see also Kauppila and Rouhiainen 2024, 25–26). Teachers can learn in educational training, but learning also often happens in the practice of teaching. Learning from and with students influences the teacher's future pedagogical choices. For an artist pedagogue, teaching can inspire novel ways of making art, which may, in turn, lead to novel artist-pedagogical choices. This makes artist pedagogy such a fruitful topic for (artistic) research and reflection.

Like art itself, artist pedagogy is deeply intertwined with societal phenomena and discourses. According to artist, researcher and pedagogue Raisa Foster (2017, 52) art's pedagogical potential for transformative learning lies in its capacity to imagine otherwise. When it comes to artist pedagogy, we argue that the teacher's role is often to create space for this sort of imagining (see also Koistinen & Porkola 2024).



In this issue, we wanted to bring together artist-pedagogue-researchers from different fields to explore and share their pedagogical experiences, philosophies, and practices. We were interested in artistic thinking as a foundation for teaching, and in how the teacher's artistic practice influences their pedagogy. We aimed to highlight the embodied, positional and political dimensions of artist pedagogy. Yet, we did not want to impose only one understanding of artist pedagogy on the contributors, and their expositions of this issue reflect different – yet often intersecting – views on pedagogy.

The issue includes nine expositions and four voices which, together, clearly demonstrate that artist pedagogy is as diverse as art and the artists themselves. Artist pedagogy is situated: while it is grounded in each artist-teacher's artistic practice, it supports experiential knowledge. Artistic knowledge is the maker's knowledge – knowledge in practice. Different practices, both theoretical and applied, are vividly reflected in the artists' texts, and they use different concepts to describe artistic and pedagogical practices.

The research showcased by artist-teachers is often practice-based and workshop-oriented, where theory and artistic practices are deeply intertwined. Art is frequently taught through exercises, proposals, and gestures – suggestions for what students and readers might try and for how to approach the subject experientially.

We therefore hope that this issue conveys that artist pedagogy does not return to fixed definitions; like art itself, it takes diverse and creative forms of expression. In their exposition “Queer-identiteetti ja -tunteet lavalla, sen takana ja opetus-työssä” (Queer Identity and Affects Onstage, Backstage, and in Teaching Work), **Timo Tähkänen** explores how practices of queer listening, through the lens of drag performance, can open new perspectives on the artistic process, pedagogy, and interaction. In the exposition, Tähkänen interviews their drag persona, Maimu Brushwood, about the drag performance and the theoretical thinking surrounding it. Tähkänen approaches the topic from the “bucking listening”, which can be understood as an active and resistant gesture aimed at fostering more open and diverse interaction. They combine artist pedagogy with queer pedagogy to focus on norm-criticality and the plurality of knowledge formation. Tähkänen's concept of artist pedagogy is based on sharing experiences and knowledge generated through artistic work in pedagogical contexts. For them, the artistic process serves as a tool for both knowledge creation and teaching, enabling the construction of learning situations grounded in experience, dialogue, and incompleteness.

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen's and **Susi Nousiainen's** exposition “Herkistymisestä – Harjoitelmia ja suuntia veden-kanssa-kirjoittamisen taiteilijapedagogiikkaan” (On Becoming Sensitized - Practices and Orientations for Writing-with-water as Artist Pedagogy) posits a hydrofeminist, situated praxis of *writing-with-water*. They describe their approach as “poetic searching” and contextualize this search within



feminist posthumanism and new materialism, as well as feminist, environmental, and artist pedagogies. For Koistinen and Nousiainen, writing-with-water is about becoming sensitized to one's position *against, as, and with* the waters of the world – a process of learning about being an artist in the world. Their work is grounded within multidisciplinary and multi-art writing studies, connecting the exposition to timely discussion about what writing as or in artistic research might mean.

Sara Ilveskorpi's exposition, "Veden laki – Uudistavaa taiteilijapedagogiikkaa hahmottamassa" (The Law of Water: Towards a Regenerative Artist Pedagogy) discusses artist pedagogy in the context of regenerative education. The exposition is based on a place-specific intervention that describes the artist's learning process. Using the concept of *strong sustainability*, Ilveskorpi reflects on the contradictions between sustainability thinking and their artistic practice that emerged during the intervention. Their main finding is that the goals of regenerative education are entangled with societal expectations, goals, and moral concepts. Ilveskorpi argues that artistic work is not exempt from the responsibility to act in an ecologically sustainable manner. Art is as dependent on ecological relationships as any other aspect of life. By committing to strong sustainability, it is possible to develop innovative, regenerative pedagogies. The exposition culminates in a manifesto that outlines the ecological impulse behind Ilveskorpi's artistic and pedagogical principles and practices.

Naomi Zouwer's and **Affrica Taylor**'s exposition, "You, Me, The Lakes and The Storm Water Drain," is a collaborative effort between two human authors – an artist, researcher, and arts educator, and a retired environmental educator and scholar – and their more-than-human writing companions, "The lakes" in Finland and "The Storm Water Drain" in Australia. "In-line with the emerging practice of naming Country as co-author in Australian academic publications," as stated in their exhibition, these waters are listed as co-authors, which emphasizes more-than-human agencies in creative work. Instead of artist pedagogy, Zouwer and Taylor draw on the work of Emily Pringle concept of *artist-led pedagogy*, referring to the ways an artist serves as a guide in meaning-making through practices of art. Through dialogic discussions, included in the exposition as audio files, and personal diary-like entries of texts and images, the authors weave a complex situated and collaborative web, where different positions on creative work lead to different pedagogical insights.

Maarit Magga writes about the Sámi *duodji* tradition and practice, to combine this artisanship with art pedagogy. In "Taiteellisen duodjitutkimuksen tiloissa – Laavustudio pedagogisena ja taiteellisen kokeiluna" (Artistic Duodji Research Spaces: The Lean-To Studio as a Pedagogical and Artistic Experiment) Magga provides background on Sámi culture, where the concept of art is relatively new, whereas craftsmanship has longstanding traditions. In her pedagogical research project, LaavuStudio, Magga examines the conditions under which duodji is



created and how it might be presented in public spaces. Her pedagogical approach draws from key elements of Sámi culture: interaction between humans and nature, the relationship to land and territory, and a sense of belonging to a community. By doing so, Magga's artist-pedagogical thinking brings together Sámi understandings of embodied knowledge and traditional know-how. One key challenge is to consider how living duodji carries intergenerational knowledge; another is how it evolves over time and gains new interpretations through art and research.

In "Drawing as a journey, nonhumans as teachers, learning as creation: Sensory Drawing Methods for Curating Experiential Connection with Nature," **Jane Remm** explores how inclusive and sensory drawing can become a tool for reconnecting with the more-than-human world. Her approach invites participants to slow down, observe, and feel part of a shared ecosystem through embodied, participatory artistic practices. Remm proposes using drawing as both a method and a meditation, to counteract contemporary alienation from nature and to foster awareness of interdependence and care. Through drawing walks and workshops in natural settings, she examines how artistic practice can function as a form of environmental pedagogy, deepening our capacity to notice, imagine, and relate to nonhuman species.

Halla Steinunn Stefánsdóttir, A. M. Elkjær, Markus Tullberg, and Stefan Östersjö present a team exposition. "Sharing (in) the Lab: Artistic Research in Higher Music Education," critically addresses the systemic inertia of Western higher music education, where traditional master-pupil hierarchies often constrain creative growth. The authors propose the artistic research laboratory as an alternative model, an embodied, student-centred environment that nurtures experimentation, reflection, and agency. Drawing on their own experiences as artist-researchers, they argue that such laboratories can renew pedagogical structures to foster inclusive and sustainable modes of learning. Through this reimagining, music education becomes a collaborative and exploratory practice in which students can actively shape their artistic and educational trajectories.

In "Everything is Here: On Nomadic Scenographic Learning in Everyday Environments," **Raisa Kilpeläinen** explores how found and lived urban spaces can serve as sources of artistic and pedagogical insight within performance design. Drawing on art-based action research and supported by site-sensitive photographic reflections, Kilpeläinen proposes a nomadic, environmentally responsive approach to scenography. By merging performing arts, design, visual arts, and pedagogy, she calls for ecocreative and sustainable practices that embrace observation, experience, and mobility as central modes of learning. This work envisions scenographic practice not as fixed production but as an adaptive, relational engagement with place, opening up pathways toward more sustainable forms of artistic and educational practice.



In “Accompanying Public Amateurs and Ignorant Generalists: Propositions for (Experimental) Pedagogical Approaches to PhD in Art and Scientific-Artistic Projects,” **Ruth Anderwald** and **Leonhard Grond** share insights from their extensive experience in supervising doctoral artistic research. Reflecting on their work within the Doctoral Programme for Artistic Research at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and the Doctor Artium programme at the MDW University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, they advocate for experimental and collaborative models of guidance. They embrace design thinking, reflexivity, and somatic learning, proposing strategies such as pooled supervision and “epistemic decompression” to sustain artistic inquiry within uncertain or limit-oriented processes. These methods aim to foster plurivocal, sustainable, and independent research cultures, where candidates are supported as they navigate the unknown and develop their own resilient, transcultural artistic practices.

Many of the expositions in this issue turn to the more-than-human in their artistic practice and pedagogy – and three specifically present a common more-than-human artistic collaborator, water. This interest can be connected to the growing concerns expressed by artists, researchers, and teachers alike to develop their practices in more ecological ways (e.g. Foster, Mäkelä & Martusewicz 2019). The interest in thinking with water arises from the ecological and social crises around water today: human relations to the waters of the world are changing due to increasing floods and drought. Together with talk about privatizing water, these crises serve as a reminder that water is essential to sustaining life. In the Anthropocene, artist pedagogy needs to consider the role of the more-than-human in artistic practices, knowledges, and pedagogies. In all three expositions dealing with water, more-than-human relationality is seen as something that can greatly contribute to artistic thinking, practice, and pedagogy; such relationality foregrounds knowledges and spaces for not-knowing that cannot be otherwise expressed.

Finally, we have invited four contributors to share their voices on artist pedagogy.

First, professor **Magnus Quaife** defines artist pedagogy broadly as how artists both teach artists and research about it. In “What is Artist Pedagogy?” Quaife stresses the artist-teacher’s understanding of art’s characteristics, such as the processes involved in making art, art as a phenomenon, and art practices. Writing in the context of fine arts, Quaife emphasizes the artist-teacher’s knowledge, which is based on both their own experience of making art and discursive or dialogical approaches to teaching, delivered most often in tutorials and group critique. In addition, Quaife asks questions about the relationship between art education and society: to what extent does art education reflect social changes, such as the impact of new technology and social media on individualism? To what



extent should art education seek to change society? In a plural, fragmented, and constantly changing world, artist-teachers must ask themselves critically what values form the basis of their teaching.

Second, in “Artistic Thinking as a Cornerstone in Teaching Art,” professor **Jaana Erkkilä-Hill** argues that artistic thinking is important in artist pedagogy: “in teaching art, there is no use in theories that are not based on experiential knowledge, the artist's ability to think visibly and invisibly, in sounds and silences, through movement and bodily experiences.” For Erkkilä-Hill, an artist's expertise in their field is more important than pedagogical training. What becomes essential, then, is the “artists' way of looking at the world and its various phenomena, the artist's capacity to take another point of view and question the normative thinking of their days.” Furthermore, Erkkilä-Hill connects artist pedagogy to learning as teaching, that is, to letting the students influence the artist-teacher. They contend that even though teaching and making art at the same time may be taxing, teaching can be approached as part of one's artistic practice, continuously enquiring into the essence of art and teaching.

Third, it is a widely held belief that art cannot be taught. If this is the case, what is the role of an artist-teacher, asks university lecturer **Heli Kauppila** in “A Teacher as a Ghost or Who is Afraid of Teaching?” Kauppila distinguishes between learning and teaching and notes that art education has been dominated by subject knowledge specific to certain fields of art, which is often accompanied by an avoidance of verbalization. The factors that unite the fields, such as creativity, expression, and the artist's voice, are not only vague but also difficult to verbalize. When we consider the future of art education, should we dismantle the gatekeeping and exclusivity of these established models and structures in order to preserve the diversity of artistic activity? Kauppila asks.

Fourth, **Luis Guerra** presents artist pedagogy as an ethical and political act. It is a practice that moves beyond mere instructions to become a form of communal, transindividual healing. Drawing inspiration from the French pedagogue Fernand Deligny, Guerra argues that the educator's role is to create situations that allow something new and unexpected to emerge. This approach to teaching becomes an act of care and imagination, one that holds the fragility of the moment of learning. An act of care is also a form of reparation. To repair means to acknowledge the wounds – social, ecological, or cultural – that shape our realities, and to act to encourage renewal. Artist pedagogy repairs by creating new forms of relation and collective memory, grounded in shared experience sustained by a collaborative tissue formed at the gesture of pedagogy.

We hope that this issue leads to new pathways rather than conclusions. We invite you onto paths that meander, cross, and intertwine through the diverse geographies of artistic teaching and research. To teach as an artist is to remain open to uncertainty, movement, and transformations. The texts gathered here



invite artists, researchers, and pedagogues to pause, to listen, and to attend to the subtle gestures that shape their own practices of learning and sharing. We imagine this issue as a space of resonance, where thinking, making, and teaching echo through one another, revealing the fragile yet generative bonds that keep them together. May these reflections nurture further conversations, experiments, and collaborations, and may they remind us that every moment of teaching as an artist is also a moment of creating worlds still to come.

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