

RUUKKU Taiteellisen tutkimuksen kausijulkaisu
Studies in Artistic Research
Tidskrift för konstnärlig forskning



Issue 20 (2023)

ARTIVISM

Editorial

ruukku.journal.fi

Long Live Artivism!

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Our Artivism issue is inspired by dismantling the contemporary conception of art and by a space where working methods, contents, and ideals produced by art have changed. This also enables negotiations and struggles between various conceptions of art. The art-historical contexts of activist art are rooted in 20th century avant-garde, German expressionism, and feminist art and in the anti-war and anti-racist civil rights movements of the 1960s. In the history of science, activism has been an essential part of European intellectuals' self-understanding and operating culture. Today, as conceptions of art have changed, conceptions of science are also in flux. Small movements towards science activism, a new kind of integration of theory and practice, are emerging in Finland.

Here up north, where the writers of this issue's foreword live and work, one of the most current collectives of activist art is *Suohpanterror*. Comprising Sámi activists and artists, Suohpanterror is the epitome of art that seeks to draw attention to the rights of the Sámi people and grievances they experience, such as discrimination, racism, and the colonisation of Sápmi, the Sámi homeland. The north is also related to media artist **Arttu Nieminen's** video work, *Aktivismia Aalistunturilla* ("Activism on the Aalistunturi fell"), included in the Voices section. The work engages in the discussion in which environmental activists and Elokapina (Extinction Rebellion Finland) protest against the timber logging Metsähallitus started on Aalistunturi in the Finnish Lapland. In addition, the Voices section includes artist **Aram Han Sifuentes'** interview conducted in Chicago. In a discussion with **Brandon Bauer**, the artist describes the aim of her *Let us vote!* exhibition. Working with sewing techniques and multiethnic and intergenerational groups, the artist claims spaces for immigrant communities. Sewing circles become a place of empowerment and protest, a forum for the questions of democracy, citizenship, and political participation.

Politically transformative and critical art plays a central role in fights for environmental protection, gender diversity, and antiracism. Activist art, being often radical, searching for something new, and integrating people and environments, is tied to power-knowledge relations. In this issue, we approach artivism as performative art related to questions of power, matter, and representation as well as their relations. We focus on the fact that art, in its various creative forms, includes political objectives. At the same time, we explore the ways political action can be creative. Artivism, based on the interests of a researcher, artist, activist, and various communities, may be connected with personal and political objectives related to subjugation, resistance, and empowerment. Artivism as a form of artistic

practice may also be quiet, tentative, experimental, and searching. Sometimes, it leads to social changes. At other times, it appears as slow, nearly invisible movements and powers.

The Artivism issue's expositions demonstrate that activism requires constant improvisation and imagination. Familiar from discussions about colonialism, decolonisation, and indigenous people, the concept of epistemic disobedience aptly describes activism. In addition to challenging information produced by mainstream science, epistemic disobedience can be used to challenge the established methods of art production. In the context of artistic research and activism, it is interesting to study the social and art-related consequences of challenging established ontological and epistemological questions. How does the artist-researcher position themselves when activist art is part of a public space that reaches beyond galleries and the art world? What happens when art is based on personal and political experiences of subjugation, resistance, and empowerment? It is possible to see the concept of "marginal" differently and question what is taken as given.

The research expositions are related to the following themes, creating new, partly tense relations between the phenomena:

Gian Luigi Biagini (Anartist) challenges the control of space in capitalist society. According to Anartist, control follows the standardising logic of capitalism. With performative installations implemented near the Helsinki Central Railway Station, Biagini's aim is to create cracks and breakages in this concept of space. Biagini reflects on the relationship between artistic and scientific practices and states that the first mentioned arises from the subconscious and the anarchic-bodily need of expression. Artistic practice is not directed towards a clearly defined object of knowledge, as scientific practice, according to Biagini, is.

In recent decades, the development of human and social sciences in particular has proven that the scientific objects of knowledge may also be unclear and that scientific practice may also be directed by anarchic-bodily needs. Scientific and artistic practices have come closer to each other, recently influenced by material threats to humanity's future: biodiversity loss and climate change. These threats are forcing us to give up on the 18th-century belief in progress and the anthropocentric worldview based on controlling nature.

Pekka Niskanen's research exposition explores three gardens that are geographically located far from each other. Two of the gardens, the *Sahrawi sandoponic garden* in southwest Algeria and the *Helsinki Sandoponic Garden* presented at Helsinki Biennial 2023, are connected by innovation. In these gardens, a combination of sand and water is used instead of traditional soil. The Helsinki Sandoponic Garden is part of Pekka Niskanen and **Mohamed Sleiman Labat's** artistic research project, *PHOSfate*, initiated in 2018. *PHOSfate Garden* deals with injustices faced by the Sahrawi people and the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea. The refugee situation is part of global inequality and injustice, whereas eutrophication

causes trauma for the Baltic Sea and people living along its coastline. Recovery and healing from trauma are the viewpoints linking the third garden, *Paris Community Garden*, and the *Helsinki PHOSfate Garden*. The *Jardin Truillot* community garden in Paris was created after the 2015 Bataclan terrorist attack to help people living close to the theatre. With the gardens, Niskanen engages in discussions on environmental rights and ecological justice. Recognising and acknowledging injustice is an essential part of activism. The primary place of resistance is not in art: it also takes place in the collective environmental and garden dimensions.

Kaisu Koski explores the work of the interdisciplinary research group *Citizen Surgery Collective* initiated in 2020. The group consists of artists, critical posthumanists, anthropologists, and activists in the UK and the Netherlands. The collective draws attention to species justice, challenges animal-based food systems, and reflects on cognitive dissonance related to meat. In the exposition, Koski explores how performative, participatory, and fictional practices can make various phenomena experiential. The collective challenges our conceptions of species and interspecies relationships as well as our relationship with food and the injustices of our food systems. The interdisciplinary collective and its rituals are part of a social change and creation of alternative futures.

Marija Griniuk's exposition is related to Lithuanian architecture and public art as well as to meanings, created through art, dealing with Lithuania's Soviet occupation and colonial history. Lithuania's cityscape was drastically changed during the 1950s–1980s, when the country demolished buildings and public artworks carrying historical memory and replaced them with new ones. Griniuk has studied the movement and change of public spaces since 2012. Researcher-artist has lived in Vilnius and Kaunas, both of which are cities with drastically changed cityscapes. In the works, Griniuk uses the concepts of memory, remembering, and body, exploring the relationships between personal, political, and remembering. Many of the public monuments and buildings reminiscent of the Soviet era were demolished right after Lithuania's independence in 1991. However, during 2012–2015, statues were still merely covered up with ornamental elements, such as copper plates, or relocated elsewhere. For decades after the Soviet era ended in 1991, Lithuanian national pride was intertwined with painful memories of the past. In her *Construction* (2012–2016) series, Griniuk invites us to participate in an aesthetic dialogue instead of forgetting. Griniuk reflects on an artwork's creation process in moments when signs of Lithuania's painful past were demolished from the public cityscape. In the works, memory is embodied as artwork.

Fabiola Hernandez Cervantes and **Maria Huhmarniemi's** exposition, *Sewing for material sensitivity, from traditional to activist sewing*, portrays the encounter of Nordic wool and Mexican insect-based wool dyeing techniques in the landscape of Lapland. Aphids have been used in dyeing for thousands of years, and Cervantes brought this ancient knowledge to Lapland. In the exposition, Cervantes and

Huhmarniemi portray and build a bridge between ancient indigenous knowledge and contemporary art research. The work seeks to dismantle colonial epistemicide by revitalising traditional knowledge and to turn artistic research and theory into concrete practices through craftivism, the use of crafts as activism. Using dyes from aphids in crafts addresses America's colonialist history and indigenous peoples' resilience under centuries of colonial oppression. The history of colonialism and resilience unites Mexican indigenous peoples and the Sámi people of Lapland, as do traditional crafts and related knowledge. This knowledge and craftsmanship are alternatives to the Western digitisation frenzy that increasingly alienates people from the fruits of their labour, from themselves, and from other people. Craftivism appears as practical anticapitalism and decolonisation.

Heidi Pietarinen and **Amna Qureshi's** exposition, *Life Between Art and Blood*, is based on their bioart project. In the project, they distanced themselves from conventional materials, methods, and laboratories by using reindeer blood as a living design tool. The exposition explores materialistic production or practice in which blood can be considered to have special agency. The synergy between blood, insects, and other organisms and animals produces new design solutions. Through art-based research, the exposition combines biotechnology, bioart, and visual cartography and science. Bioart criticises and challenges mainstream bioscience by establishing foundations for new research questions and groundbreaking technologies. The use of blood challenges researchers' thinking and turns experiences from materials into knowledge. The blood helps to make space for designing present-focused and sustainable surface patterns.

In the form of a podcast consisting of text and music, **Nat Grant** and **Nicky Stott's** exposition, *Terrania*, examines the post-climate catastrophe world from gender, queer, and disability perspectives. In addition to sound, the exposition includes oil pastel illustrations. The podcast drama about forests and climate emergency was created following the COVID lockdown in a collective moment in which the global health threat was over but the awareness of climate and environmental crisis increased. The podcast seeks to turn this awareness into action. In the podcast, gender, queer, and disability perspectives intertwine with poverty and homelessness themes, forming an anticapitalist work of art and a call to action to the barricades.

The issue includes **Leena Raappana-Luiri's** lecture in which graphic design, taste, ideals, and art evaluation can be understood as political and aesthetic forces in the visual realm.

Artivism overlaps with the world's material dimensions and materialistic contradictions. It is a pursuit of change, movement, and a non-essentialising way of approaching the world and society. We invite our readers and experiencers to join us in this ongoing movement!

We thank the peer-reviewers for their invaluable contribution to this issue.

Rovaniemi, 1 October 2023, on the Day of Miina Sillanpää and Civic Participation

9/11/2023

RUUKKU – Studies in Artistic Research. Publisher: The University of The Arts Helsinki, Aalto University, University of Lapland. www.ruukku.journal.fi

This editorial was originally published in a webpage format. This PDF, created in 2026, has a different layout and visuals.

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