

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



Issue 18 (2022)

# **RESPONSIBILITY**

Editorial

[ruukku.journal.fi](http://ruukku.journal.fi)

Image by Marinos Koutsomichalis 2019, Vatnajökull, IS.

# Responsibility in/with/for Arts and Artistic Practices

**BILGE MERVE AKTAŞ, MIRA KALLIO-TA-  
VIN AND MAARIT MÄKELÄ**

In this issue of RUUKKU, we are unpacking the notion of responsibility in/with/for arts and artistic research with five expositions and three voices. The RUUKKU issue Responsibility supplements the Art of Research VII conference organized on 3-4 December 2020 at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland. Expanding the discussions from the conference, we invited scholars whose work tackles the idea of responsibility to contribute in this issue.

As introduced in the call of this issue, responsibility intertwines with the essential questions of power, historicities, control, freedom, availability and care, which accompany the acknowledgement that we inhabit this planet with other people, species and materials. Responsibility has often been discussed as part of politics, justice, ethics and judgement, linking it with power and human agency. When we think of someone being responsible for something, we assume that that person takes ownership of their decisions and their consequences.

Taking responsibility means that the responsible person is able to act or be part of an action, is caring for that action, and is willing to be attentive to its results. Thus, responsibility comes with personally or collectively relating to situations that one feels responsible for, and in extension, having a sort of empathy and caring relations towards it.

With the ontological turn towards relationality and understanding humans as being in constant becoming, along with emphasizing the effective role of humans in materialization, responsibility has become an embedded ethical condition while entangling with the world (Washick et.al. 2015). Donna Haraway's (2016) term response-ability refers to ethical sensitivity and acting in accordance with that. Response-ability is not an externally imposed set of commitments or rules to pre-existing and pre-conditioned situations. It is rather nurturing and expanding capacities for developing a sense of responsibility to live for and live with others. One fundamental point in Haraway's conceptualization is that it aims to cultivate collective knowing and doing. In this, responsibility is also internal and requires hard work.

In the context of artistic research, collective or individual, responsibility can be understood as a standpoint or as an attitude that activates critical thinking and

diversity of caring practices. Artistic researchers Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén (2014, p. 5) provoke us that in the context of artistic research a duality between freedom and responsibility exists, as in any act of interpretation. They refer to finding the balance between the two as creating the context, reminding us how it always requires to be *articulated, formed, discussed, maintained and renewed*. Following such responsibilities, artist-researchers create their situated and non-static inprocess contextualization.

Exploring different contexts, in our call, we invited artists-researchers to consider responsibility through their own work, others' works or collaborative works to revisit established ideas from a new perspective, and to produce thinking, knowledge, experience, perhaps new praxes and poetics from this perspective. Some initial questions that we raised were: What might responsibility mean for everyday practices in a time when the entire life on the planet needs urgent reconsideration? What kind of caring activities a responsible life on this planet might entail? How does artistic research embrace the enmeshed relationship between humans and the environment, including its difference from non-human actors?

The selected expositions tackle responsibility from a wide selection that demonstrates what current artist-researchers feel responsible for and care about. The expositions contribute to the conversations on existing with others and to collective being and doing. The selection brings forth topics, such as landscape, culture, body politics and artistic process into discussion through a variety of artistic practices such as photography, video work, gastronomy, improvised music, performance, clay work, and drawing. The authors discuss individual and collective responsibilities towards the self, the world, and groups of humans and nonhumans.

Additionally, this issue inadvertently presents the responsibility of artist researchers when it comes to sharing one's own practice and research. The performative and practice-oriented aspect of artistic research often unfolds in idiosyncratic ways. Artistic research usually develops through situated knowledge and experiences. The research process often emerges in ways related to the particular conditions in which the research and practice are taking place. For this reason, the research context, methods, setting, and articulation also become situated and require finding specific ways of elaboration. The selection of expositions we have in this issue demonstrates how artist-researchers take responsibility when it comes to making use of tools and writing styles to explain and argue for their thinking. This issue includes five expositions with the following content.

**Marinos Koutsomichalis** discusses conducting landscape-related artistic research in hybrid, maximalist, materialist, and performative ways. In the exposition "Exploring North Nordic Landscapes in a 'hyper-constructive' Fashion", Koutsomichalis explores the Nordic region by advocating hyperconstructive methods. He proposes a hyper-constructive method as a methodological toolkit appropriate

for creative and post-phenomenological geographical research. With the exposition, Koutsomichalis demonstrates how to implement multi-modal and multi-sensorial tools in landscape research. With its multi-modal and interactive design, the exposition itself functions as a hyper-constructive way of discussing exploring landscapes through experiences of humans and other-than humans.

Tackling responsibility as a body-political act, in their exposition “*Gestures and Incriptions in Ceramics and Sound: A Combined STS, Queer Marxist and Artistic Research Approach to the Study of Reproductive Politics*”, **Rebecca Close** discusses reproductive politics through a theoretical and artistic lens as part of daily negotiations. By studying artistic gestures and inscriptions, Close discusses fixed and hierarchical structuring of biological and social reproduction while offering artistic methods of research for queer Marxist scholars.

In the exposition “*Solastalgia: Layers of Caring*” **Karin Emilia Hellqvist** presents an autoethnographic experimental project where audio works were created in collaboration with her two colleagues. Motivated by the concerns regarding the climate crisis and the melting ice, Hellqvist explores the sounds of the Arctic ice with the help of violin and digital tools. By performing with ice, she explores the sustainability-related notion of solastalgia, which is simultaneously “a mourning of what is already lost and the fear of what the future may bring”. Hellqvist aims to start conversations with the public regarding shared concerns and care for the ice.

From a cultural perspective, in the exposition “*Connected Alone*” **Arja Anneli Kastinen** examines the traditional kantele music of Finland. By studying the history of kantele improvisations in the Karelia region, hosting workshops, and improvising with kantele, Kastinen presents ways of doing research on oral traditions through oral means, such as by having artistic explorations. She presents various videos of performances with kantele to discuss improvisation as a part of creative practice. This exposition tackles responsibilities towards traditional knowledge and practices and at the end questions the function of music as an experience: a private journey and internal communication as well as a shared communal performance.

**Mike Croft** explores responsibility through drawing and conceptualizing void in the exposition “*Responsibility towards the Void*”. Building his discussion and thinking on the notion of the Other, Croft explores various responsibilities embedded in the creation of art works. Through eloquent presentation of his artistic journal entries, drawings, videos and photography, Croft openly displays his thinking process and supports the viewer/reader to follow his thinking. Through visuals and texts, the exposition discusses void, space, and absence as well as lines, visions, representations, and simulations. By referring to the viewer/reader while structuring the text, Croft also tackles the responsibility of the authority, in this case the author, and the viewer’s experience with the art work.

In addition to the five expositions of this number, we are presenting three contributions in the voices section. In his contribution “*The Three Phases of Artistic*

Research”, artist-researcher **Mika Elo** brings a retrospective reading of the research through practice landscape and how the field has been developing. He also speculates about the next steps of the field in light of how things have been evolving. This is followed by two *Lectio praecursorias* from doctoral defenses. **Arja Karhumaa**’s presents the opening lecture of their doctoral defense which took place in 2021 in the fields of visual communication design and **Hanna-Kaisa Korolainen**’s shares the opening lecture of her doctoral defense from 2022 in the field of art and design.

We want to thank all the artist-researchers who submitted their works and contributed to this issue for their interest in the topic and for their patience during the process. We are also grateful for the generous work that the reviewers have done. We invite all the readers to take a look at the expositions in this issue to ruminate on the topic of responsibility in their own fields.

Words by the co-editors of the issue, Bilge Merve Aktaş & Mira Kallio-Tavin & Maarit Mäkelä.

30/09/2022

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