



ISEAS 2017

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About ISEAS

Katja Juhola

This book tells the story of ISEAS or International Socially Engaged Art Symposium which was arranged in Raasepori, Finland, in autumn 2017. It was a ten-day event with thirteen foreign and eight local artists. Interventions, that is, different artists doing work together with various communities, took place in nine institutions of the Raasepori social sector or comprehensive school. The symposium ended with three art exhibitions.

Katja Juhola – artistic director and curator – background

I have participated in several international symposiums and noticed how rewarding it is to the development and increased understanding of one's own work, when visual artists coming from different cultures work intensively together. Participation in the symposiums inspired me to arrange this symposium of social art in the small artist residence I own in Mustio, Raasepori, Finland. I studied environmental and communal art in the Arts Academy of Turku from 2007–2008 and have since carried out several projects of communal art in both Finland and abroad. ISEAS was the second art symposium and first socially engaged art symposium I have arranged. I worked as the artistic director and curator of the ISEAS project. I also invited Mari Krappala, DA and docent of cultural studies (Aalto University) to work as a mentor. The artists I invited using my personal international networks.

Background of ISEAS

ISEAS was my final thesis for master of culture and arts, Master's Degree Programme

in Applying Arts, Turku University of Applied Sciences. The work began in July 2016. I charted artists I knew, applied for grants, sought possible partners for cooperation and drafted contracts with them. For the symposium, I curated artists from different fields at both international and local levels to work together in pairs or small groups. Thirteen artists from the U.S., Turkey, Iran, Switzerland, Italy, England, Germany, France and Singapore participated in ISEAS, completed by eight Finnish artists as their working partners. Using methods of socially engaged art they worked in nine institutions of the social sector and the comprehensive school in Raasepori. One international group formed a documentation team of three people who videoed and photographed the ten-day event.



Photo: Fabio Cito

ISEAS or international socially engaged art symposium

Objectives

In addition to the creation and realisation of the symposium, which made the core of my final thesis, I wanted to bring to light meanings that arose in the mutual interaction between the artists as they lived and worked together during the project. To collect data, I used questionnaires, asked for diaries to be kept, and took part in the mentoring sessions. I inquired about pre-expectations and asked the artists as well as community members and leaders to do some reflective writing after the end of the interventions.

The symposium comprised sections for work, events and publication. Both artistic and scientific methods were applied in the project. The curating process of the work pairs and the construction of the exhibitions were based on artistic procedures, while the analysis of the working period built on scientific work models including mentoring, observation, questionnaire forms and interviews. Besides material collected according to a plan, I received personal letters from community members, email feedback from community leaders and written material from the artists before the interventions were carried out, as well as reflection at the end of the symposium.

On home turf

According to Miwon Kwon,¹ an artist only benefits from home turf at the beginning of the projects, and so it was in ISEAS, too. The significance of Miwon versus the local artists was only accentuated during the planning stage. During the intervention, all artists worked equally. The artists had shared their working methods when they applied for ISEAS, expressing their preliminary ideas and wishes concerning a possible community. When the artist is not local, it is the curator's duty to work as an intermediary between community and artist – as a matchmaker of needs, wishes and knowhow.² Miwon Kwon considers one of the objectives of communal art to be the creation of temporary alliances between different people.³ One of the crucial moments was curation of the artist pairs and the choice of a community for them. The needs of the communities were charted in discussions with the target personnel; during the process, we also learned what material and costs the artistic interventions were to be accomplished with. My research during the symposium concentrated on the interactive relationships between the artists.

Discussion as art

I joined the mentoring sessions guided by Mari Krappala, where we discussed the ongoing interventions during the symposium week. In addition, I asked the artists to write down, either anonymously or with their own name, their feelings during the symposium in a copybook made available in the residence or directly to me by email. At the beginning of

¹ Kwon, Miwon (2002, 135). *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

² Kwon, Miwon (2002, 136). *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

³ Kantonen, Lea (2010, 72–73) *Yhteisötaiteen estetiikkaa*. In Kantonen, Lea (2010). *Ankaraa ja myötätuntoista kuuntelua: Keskustelevaa kirjoitusta paikkasidonmaisesta taiteesta*. Helsinki: Kuvataideakatemia.

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the symposium, the artists wrote to me about their expectations and at the end, sent a reflecting letter on how they thought the project had succeeded. We also carried out a joint reflective session with all the artists and some community members during the opening of the exhibition in the gallery Perspektiivi in Tammisaari.

I used the following questions to collect data on the mutual interaction between the artists during the symposium:

- How did they support one another?
- What new thought models were created?
- How did the artists develop in their own careers?
- What thoughts did living together evoke in the artists?
- What did the artists think about working in the community?
- How did local and foreign artists work together?
- What did the artists feel they received for themselves from the cooperation?
- What were the friction points and what specifically should be developed to improve the work?

At the end of the symposium I sent the members of the communities a questionnaire, met them for reflection, and received feedback from them. We discussed how they felt the symposium had affected their everyday life, what turned out to need improvement, whether they would be interested in continuing to work together, and what possibilities there were to share the artists' salary costs in the future.

The symposium made socially engaged art part of the Raasepori culture for some time, both in the communities and as a working field for the artists. The artistic interventions introduced the artists' professional skills to the communities during ISEAS. Together with the artists, the community could momentarily rise above the customary space of everyday. At the same time, the interventions created something new in the artists' own creative work. In interventions of this kind, the working logic of art, artistic methods and the pedagogy of the artist develop interactive spaces, situations and ways of working that

empower creativity, improve working conditions, develop skills and support change in the community.⁴ With the help of the artists, the communities could enter an international atmosphere and make themselves heard in the form of interventions and exhibitions. Art brought meaning to life and created joy and content.



Photo: Fabio Cito

4 Lehtikoinen, Kai,, Pässilä, Anne., Martin, Mari & Pulkki, Maiju (2016, 8). Taiteilija kehittäjänä: Taiteelliset interventiot työssä. Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Teatterikorkeakoulu.

Making communal art in a symposium

According to Grant Kester's dialogic aesthetics, art happens in an inner dialogue within a community. Even if the work leads to a visual display – an exhibition that can also be an artistically significant work, the art itself has, nevertheless, taken place earlier in the process and dialogue engendered inside the community during the art intervention.⁵ One of Grant Kester's favourite artists is American Suzanne Lacy. Lacy's art project *Turning Point* in Vancouver, Canada, was a socially engaged artwork involving young women. She gave the young women a chance to make themselves heard, as well as a space for something new to be born.

“For us, the process of coalition and community building is an integral part of the artwork. Similarly, the mass media aspects are designed as a public face for the art. Pulling the whole process together, a final performance serves as a celebratory ritual that brings the diverse themes and people together in a public site. But it is this networking and community building, the support of gender-aware policies and sensitivities, the mentoring and relationships formed, that will form the lasting legacy of this project.” (Sharon & Lacy 2010, 130–146)

My share in ISEAS was, like Suzanne Lacy's, the creation of the project as a whole, and acting as a bridge between people and communities. It was work close to the role of a curator. Yet I felt more like an artist than a producer, because in everything I do, I put aesthetic vision before financial interest – I always start from art, so I worked as an artist on a work of art. ISEAS was my artwork. I believe in the artist's possibility to help our society change in a more positive direction; to be able to understand each other and be understood, we

⁵ Kester, Grant, H. (2004, 82–85). *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

must be able to share emotional states.⁶ With the help of art we can influence a person's feelings, and feelings very often steer our behaviour in everyday life; art can therefore help us challenge our world picture and our encounters with new people and cultures. Art gives us balance and helps us apprehend reality which otherwise might be left in the dark.⁷ Our society has changed towards better appreciation of temporary or vanishing art. Art that engages in interaction with everyday life and its inhabitants.⁸ Art helps create equality.

Relational aesthetics

According to French curator and art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud, art, when socially engaged, happens in interpersonal relationships – the artist cannot carry out her or his work within relational aesthetics without someone there to participate. To happen, art needs a “me” and a “you”.⁹ In the intervention *Bilingual Murals* that took place in schools in Mustio as a part project of ISEAS, two Iranian performance artists and two local artists met each other and the pupils for the first time during the symposium week. By means of participatory theatre, the artists led the pupils to play, relax and encounter otherness. As participants, the schoolchildren were bound to the structures of our society, but could in this mirror play encounter the unfamiliar – otherness – in a safe and familiar context. The artists (“me”) needed the schoolchildren (“you”) for their artwork to be realised. The work saw light, in accordance with Nicolas Bourriaud's ideas, in the relationships between people.

⁶ Mäntymaa, Mirjami, Luoma, Ilona, Puura, Kaija & Tamminen, Tuula (2003, 459–465). LÄÄKETIETEELLINEN AIKA-KAUSKIRJA DUODECIM, Tunteet, varhainen vuorovaikutus ja aivojen toiminnallinen kehitys. Viitattu 6.9.2017 <http://www.duodecimlehti.fi/duo93467>

⁷ Lehtonen, Kimmo (2016). Voiko taide muuttaa maailmaa? Turun Sanomat 02.04.2016

⁸ Carpenter, Beverley & Nevado, Susana, (2012, 52). Meri Valvoo & Pallomeri: *Ethico-aesthetic interventions in public space*. Turku: Turku University of Applied Sciences.

⁹ Bourriaud, Nicolas, Pleasance, Simon & Woods, Fronza (2002, 64). *Relational aesthetics*. [Dijon]: Les presses du réel.

Challenges of dialogue aesthetics

Jay Koh, a communal and activist artist born in Singapore writes about the interactive relationship between Chinese and Irish artists in his article “Artist’s Research Text on Methodology” in *Ni Hao – Dia Duit* (“Good morning”) in 2007. He writes how the Chinese participant had felt like an animal exposed in a zoo which people came to stare at. By contrast, the Irish participant had found the interaction and discussion particularly fruitful.¹⁰ In ISEAS, too, there was dialogue between Asian and Europeans, and it was very interesting and completely unexpected. You can read more about this in Chapter *Kärkulla Samkommun Urban Shamanic Experience* in Joan Marie Kelly’s article.

Jay Koh criticises Kester’s dialogical aesthetics in his article. According to Koh, works of communal art come in several deep layers, cultural, political, religious, etc., which work in the background to enable a successful dialogue between individuals.¹¹

Art as a third space

Today, studies of art and well-being pay increasing attention to the value of artistic experience, rather than health impact. Heidi Fast writes in her article in the review *niin&näin*:

*“I don’t think, however, that the impact on well-being is reducible to what art can give to the ill and outcast, for example. It is also essential what types of understanding we, as a community of humans, can gain by tuning in to voices that evade linguistic meanings or never even enter the circle of conventional verbalisation.”*¹²

10 Koh, Jay (2010, 195–196). Artist’s Research Text on Methodology. In Kantonen, Lea (2010). *Ankaraa ja myötätuntoista kuuntelua: Keskustelevaa kirjoitusta paikkasidonnaisesta taiteesta*. Helsinki: Kuvataideakatemia.

11 Koh, Jay (2010, 200). Artist’s Research Text on Methodology. In Kantonen, Lea (2010). *Ankaraa ja myötätuntoista kuuntelua: Keskustelevaa kirjoitusta paikkasidonnaisesta taiteesta*. Helsinki: Kuvataideakatemia.

12 Fast, Heidi (2017, 30). *Sanaton ääni ruumiillisena kohtaamisena Huomioita sensibiliateetistä ja virittäytymisen*

With communal art, I often feel that something magic happens, something other than pre-planned – a power that bursts forth and grows from within the community. Homi Bhabha speaks of a “Third Space” that can create something new and hitherto unidentified, a new meaning and look. These “Third Spaces” can be created specifically by means of art, and they open the possibility of identification through otherness, which can act as a power source in building identity.¹³ Art symposiums form a “Third Space” in the Bhabhian sense, a space that becomes a hybrid larger than the sum of the individuals, where the artist’s identity changes and is solidified.

Together

As I have observed, the art field is undergoing a major transition and development, and what is taking place in the cross-fertilisation of different art fields is particularly fruitful. Work in pairs and groups held the key role in the communal art projects of ISEAS. As the length of the interventions was limited, mine and the local artists’ advance work was significant in the success of the projects. As Pablo Helguera states, successful SEA projects are linked with a local artist’s networks and a profound understanding of the participants arising from the artist’s long-term work. That is the reason why, when an artist is asked to create an SEA project in connection with an art biennale, for example, the result may appear put together in haste. The artist’s home-turf advantage is then missing, and unless the artist has a knowledgeable, understanding and pre-working local partner, there is simply not enough time to create a good SEA work.¹⁴

kyvystä. Tampere: niin&näin 3/2017.

13 Rutherford, Jonathan (1990). The Third Space interview with Homi Bhabha. In: Ders. (Hg): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207–221.

14 Helguera, Pablo (2011, 19–20). *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books.



Photos: Katja Juhola



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photo: Katja Juhola



Photos: Katja Juhola

Internationality as key

Through ages, artists have wanted to share their work and ideas with other artists. In my project, internationality was a fundamental and significant thing in both communal work and the interrelations between the artists. In all interventions, a new perspective to the everyday life of the community opened by the presence of an international artist was clearly apparent – everyone needs an opportunity for self-expression and making themselves heard. Everyday life got a new perspective in the communities as its members were given a chance to present themselves to an international artist.

Miwon Kwon sees communal art as part of site-specific art. Somewhat similarly, I felt that ISEAS worked as a community.¹⁵ The artists were individuals separated from their different backgrounds and contexts, who at my request, took part in ISEAS and worked to create a community bound to a place and time.

Symposium as a work of art

The symposium was my personal work of communal art where I created a space and location for artists to share and discuss communal art, and as a consequence, new networks, flows and channels came into being. The symposium served as a stimulus to many artists.

What culminated as the most important aspects in the project were international artists living together, interaction related to that, and new ideas born from it. Internationality was also a key issue to the communities. It was named as the most important thing in nearly all sessions of reflection.

¹⁵ Kwon, Miwon (2002, 44–55). *One place after another: Site-specific art and locational identity*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

According to Pablo Helguera, Socially Engaged Art or SEA arises from and is dependent on the community which it simultaneously changes and builds.¹⁶

ISEAS International Socially Engaged Art Symposium

The artists were in residence for two weeks, arriving and departing at different times. The symposium interventions had been agreed to take place in one week, i.e., week 34. The local artists did not live in the residence, but overnights or visited during some days. The symposium paid for the residence, food, drink, and art materials for the display and openings of the exhibitions. Every artist was liable for their own costs of arrival to the symposium. This has been established practice throughout the world in symposiums where I have participated.

The artists who participated in ISEAS: Artistic director and curator Katja Juhola (Finland), mentor Mari Krappala (Finland), artists: Lasse Lampenius (Finland), Linda Lemaire (France), Peta von Karis (Finland), Sanya Torkmorad-Jozavi (Iran,London), Satu Halonen (Finland), Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi (Iran/Milano), Matti Nordling (Finland), Delphine Manet (France), Jan Jämsén (Finland), Joan-Marie Kelly (USA/Singapore), Päivi Pätsi (Finland), Julia Pooch (Germany), Pipa Nikula (Finland), Clarice Zdanski (USA/Italy), Evrim Özeskici (Turkey), Vittorio Tonon (Italy), Patrik Lemberg (Finland), Maximilian Fliessbach (Germany). Photographs Fabio Cito (Italy) Videos Franco Umbertini (Italy) and Denis Gorenc (France).

The presentation of the interventions follows the same pattern in every part project: first, a photograph, followed by a presentation text written by the artists themselves and also put on display in the exhibitions at the end of the projects. After that, another photograph and my reflections on the part project.

¹⁶ Helguera, Pablo (2011, 9). *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books

A photograph showing a woman and a baby sitting at a table. In the foreground, a person's hands are seen playing with food, possibly a skewer. A bowl of food is on the table. The background shows a window with a view of greenery.

You may play with food

You may play with food

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnsXXQC80b4&feature=youtu.be>

Linda Lemaire and Lasse Lampenius arranged a workshop for the children and adults of a family café run by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare in Karjaa. Both were inspired by the paintings of Italian Renaissance painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, where the artist uses vegetables to construct portraits instead of still lifes.

Everybody must have heard the rule, “don’t play with food”. In this workshop, playing with food was allowed. Children from 1 to 4 and their parents meaningfully participated in the workshop. The works are creative, beautiful, and full of colour and different structures. All material was unhazardous. The ingredients used in the workshop were what everybody might find in their kitchen: coffee, sugar, spaghetti, ketchup, food colouring, beetroot juice, blackberry soup, carrots, lentils, beans and much more.

Lampenius & Lemaire



Photo: Katja Juhola

Kurd artist Kozeen Shiwan’s food art was exhibited in the Helsinki Design Museum in October 2017. Similar to Lasse Lampenius and Linda Lemaire, Kozeen Shiwan, too, finds food full of meaning – a material in art that appeals to emotions. To Kozeen Shiwan, food is not just something to fill the stomach with: with his food performances, he wants to tell his entire life story.¹⁷

“Food is not just food, but something much deeper. To me, it’s like a film or book. A single supper may be a life-changing event.”¹⁸

Lasse and Linda’s project was challenged by the lack of a common language, which we overcame with the help of an interpreter. After the initial discussion over skype, Lasse called to tell me that food as a theme was difficult and unpleasant to Linda. She was reluctant to throw food away after the artistic work and had, in fact, therefore suggested that they paint a mural inside the Mannerheim League’s Jumbo Park. Lasse had already accepted the change of themes. I felt disappointed – it seemed that something important would be slipping through my fingers, and I said as much to Lasse. I encouraged them to hold on to the food theme and promised to be present at the second Skype discussion, which we took at my place.

The intervention began to take shape during the second discussion. We talked a great deal. Food as material is a powerful element. Food is sacred. You must clean your plate, and not throw away food. We have all been taught that children in Africa are dying in hunger, unless we clean our plate. We are overweight and many have a highly complex relationship to food, and yet the world has been unable to overcome hunger, no matter how dutifully we clean our plates. Food, in other words, is a deeply personal and political theme.

¹⁷ Väkevä, Valtteri 2017. Keittiömestari Kozeen Shiwan tarjoaa Designmuseossa tökkäyksiä illallisen muodossa. Helsingin Sanomat 22.9.2017s

¹⁸ World class Pop-up dinners in the Design Museum. Referenced 22 Sept.2017 <http://www.designmuseum.fi/fi/events/pop-up-illallisia-designmuseossa/>

The intervention was a one-day event in the family café mentioned above. Lasse and Linda used candy colouring to dye pasta in dazzling new colours. Besides pasta, the material included lentils, peas, rice, coffee, blackberry juice, beetroot juice, etc. The children were delighted, and works were being created with ease and deep concentration. Linda and Lasse were both surprised how good the project proved and how aesthetic the works turned out. Discussions with parents were a major part of this intervention. They were inspired to arrange another workshop with the artists in the ISEAS house. Thursday was agreed as the day, and it was also the day of open house in the artist residence.



Photos: Katja Juhola



Photos: Katja Juhola

Bilingual murals

This unique project brought together Finnish and Swedish speaking children and four artists initially unknown to each other. The artists wasted no time in teaming up in a working and warm community. The whole experience: getting to know the schools combined with building the workshops from the viewpoint of socially engaged art had a powerful impact on us who arranged it. The objective was to get people to meet each other and collect memories to be immortalised later in both schools in the form of a mural. Art was the common language that helped people work and express themselves. We as artists want to spread humanity, art and peace through our work.

*Peta von Karis, Sanya Torkmorad-Jozavi,
Satu Halonen & Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi*





Photo: Fabio Cito

The two basic education schools were the first communities I was in touch with when I started my work in ISEAS. Local schools are dear to my heart, because of my own child; I know the staff and the staff know how I work. I have done art interventions in both schools in earlier years, which have been very successful. That made everything easy and we were received with open arms.

Satu Halonen, director of drama expression and artist and stage designer Petri Horttana alias Peta von Karis were our local artists. Our international artist was visual and performance artist Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi, who was born in Iran but has worked in Milano for the last seven years, using the methods of communal art to create a social and cultural space in a city block that has traditionally been the haunt of prostitutes and drug dealers. I met Sanya Torkmorad-Jozavin (born in London to Iranian parents) at the opening of the Venice Biennale in spring 2017, where she worked as an assistant to Michael Cole in the Pavilion of Humanity. Sanya is a BA Hons Costume for Performance graduate at London College of Fashion and works within visual and performance art.

We had our first Skype meeting together in summer 2017. The team would work together in two different schools of basic education, with over a hundred pupils. Both schools said they wanted to paint on walls. My wish was to mix language and age groups and open a view to doing things together. The children participated in a performative day led by the artists, where art was created in dialogue between students of two small schools and four professional artists. The whole consisted of self-portrait characters created by means of dressing-up games. The art took place in an interactive situation. This material provided murals in both schools, which stayed there as souvenirs of art made together by artists and children.

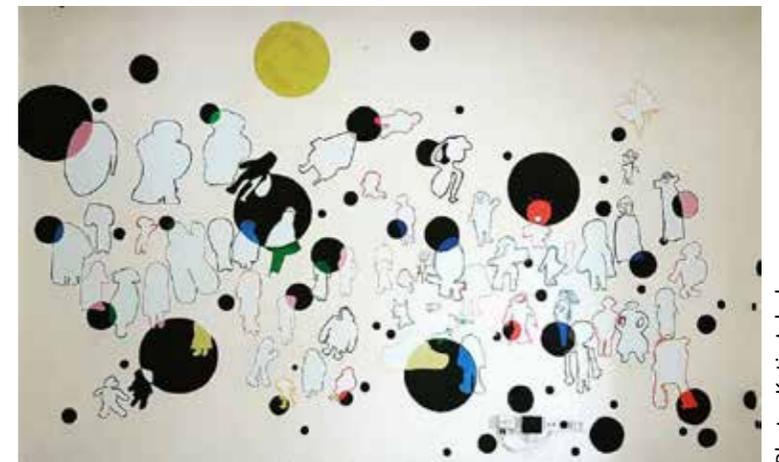


Photo: Katja Juhola

“The art week proved a far more complicated thing than we had expected. The children were excited to participate, particularly as there were real artists from both Finland and abroad. They also liked going to work in another school. To some it was a fine experience to hear different languages and see that they actually understood quite a bit. Others were delighted by the inspiring theatre game. Some would also have wanted to participate in painting the work. One was a bit left with the feeling that it would have been nicer, if all the children had been able to busy themselves and participate. But all in all, it was an extremely good experience and left lovely memories to the children at least, and everyone was proud of their own contribution to the creation of a work of art. Furthermore, children of two different schools now share an experience, and that brings them together. Thank you. :)”

Maj-Brit Saarinen-Rahikainen, teacher of the Mustio school of basic education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3JQ05rptwQ&feature=youtu.be>



Photo: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito

The flexible education class of Karjaa
upper secondary school



The flexible education class of Karjaa upper secondary school

Delphine Manet & Matti Nordling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdCG1dOBGBE&feature=youtu.be>

Delphine: We first met only to talk about carrying out the project. Matti was unavailable for the first day, so I had to begin on my own... I sat there in front of the young people, and they felt distant. They listened alright and looked at the pictures I showed them, but did not communicate. I talked about our project... no reaction. The teacher tried to suggest that they participate... and some accepted to. They didn't know where to begin. I suggested they choose a colour for the theme. They played with different colours and at first picked up some of the sombre ones... until slowly, they opened up. They began to speak to me in English. Then suddenly they mustered the courage and began to use the colours and have fun. The colours filled the surface and formed into pictures. The first hesitating strokes grew into bold experiments. The next day I felt as if I had always been there. On Wednesday, we began painting for the Karjaa Pride parade. The idea was to paint a big canvas full of words that build hope. I suggested to the teacher that they could cut the canvas into small pieces and sell them. That would allow everyone to participate in their own way. Each one of us is unique and we all take part in our own way in the development of humankind.

We all have our place here... and we need to learn respect.

Matti: I couldn't be there on the first days, so Delphine started the project on her own. On Thursday, we were all at the school together the whole afternoon, helping the young people a bit in their work and finally discussed the theme and the project as a whole. The young people were pretty quiet, but received very well what we told them about the work. During the week, we were in contact regularly and discussed how the work was progressing. Finally, the teacher told us how the pupils had experienced the project. The teacher was very happy.



Besides being a professional painter, local artist Matti Nordling is an art therapist. Matti and I have known each other for over 20 years. I met French visual artist Delphine Manet in an international art symposium in Gernik, Romania, in 2016. In France, Delphine works for instance as a leader of art workshops for criminal delinquents.

There were last minute changes in this project. The intervention was supposed to take place in the young people's house, but the staff could not get anyone to participate, although we had signed the agreements in early spring 2017 already. I was informed about the cancellation of the intervention two days before the start of the symposium. I got into contact with the special teacher of the Karjaa upper secondary school, inquiring about their willingness to participate in ISEAS. The teacher had read about the project in a local newspaper and was happy to join in. The changed timetable caused problems in Matti Nordling's participation. The idea had been to work in the local youth centre in the evenings, and Matti was committed to his own work during the day, which he could not change within the new timetable.

I was at the school with Delphine ready to start the work. I knew many of the students from before, and the young people were eager to engage. The feedback from the intervention was incredible. A young person who had not spoken a word to anyone for two years participated – and spoke English. The teacher was deeply moved. All the young people in the whole class got engaged voluntarily.

I received the following feedback from teacher Laura Meretniemi-Peltola:

Hello,

- *Art is not exactly near the students' everyday life, so I was a bit nervous about hopping along in the project.*
- *I was surprised to see how well the pupils received Delphine and accepted to cooperate.*
- *Everybody jumped over the language wall and bravely spoke English.*
- *Soon everybody was busy doing something; the air was buzzing with activity.*
- *Many excelled themselves: "I'd never have thought I could do something like that. I've never painted anything in my life."*
- *A few students have continued to paint in the workshop room, and one may have found their calling in life.*

Thank you, Katja, for thinking of us :)

Laura



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photo: Katja Juhola



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photo: Fabio Cito

Kårkulla Samkommun – Urban Shamanic Experience

Jan Jämsén and Joan Kelly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrvv255h7D0&feature=youtu.be>

Jan Jämsén is a visual artist inspired by the practice of Shamanism. Visual artist Joan Kelly uses art to facilitate and create communication between minority and majority groups. Jämsén and Kelly have in their cooperation created new versions of Surrealist André Breton's game, "Le cadavre exquis nouveau", while engaging in art exchange and feedback communication between Finnish women in need of extra support and Singaporean students of engineering and art. Both groups listened intently to a recording of Shaman drums which can evoke experiences from the subconscious. The Singaporean students lay down on their backs in a dark room to listen to the recording. After that, they began to paint on canvas. The Finnish women listened to the drumming and began to paint immediately, with some saying that they could feel the rhythm of the drum in their body when they painted. This exhibition contains paintings by both groups. Finally, both groups met virtually by Skype. All were amazed at how much we can learn from each other.

I first met Kelly in an international art symposium in Italy in summer 2016, and again in the opening of the Venice Biennale in spring 2017, where we planned her and Jan's project together and discussed how to take it further.

Kelly has completed several projects of communal art, so the conception was familiar to her and she also understood the objectives of the intervention. To Jan it was a new situation, but his and Kelly's cooperation went smoothly. I was there in Kårkulla during the intervention and talked to the participants. Everybody seemed enthusiastic and motivated. I spoke



Photo: Katja Juhola

Swedish with them, apologising for my somewhat clumsy performance. Hanna Grandell, who participated in the intervention, sent me a feedback letter – entirely in Finnish.

Email from Hanna Grandell 30 August 2017:

Hi, I want to write you a letter now and will try to do it in Finnish, but if I get stuck, I'll put in some words in Swedish.

I'm Hanna Grandell and I'm on a border, exactly the border we're going to pull down, I too am working to pull down the border because people shouldn't be put in categories but it's so easy to take that way.

I'm a bit like a mermaid who lives in two worlds but she's pretty lonely on that border.

I enjoy being there deep in art and philosophy there's plenty of room to be different, I have lots of different opinions and I like people because everybody has so much inside their heart.

I wish I could become a better listener because then some might perhaps come out and begin to believe in their own voice and opinions, and I think that would be a good thing.

I've done a lot of work to find myself, I was nobody at first. I only heard other people's voices and their opinions and that was the whole truth, I was everyone's friend except my own, now I'm no longer everyone's friend but my own best friend and that's the most important thing because I'll always have to be with myself.

It's pretty funny that when one's a friend of a lot of people and can then feel lonely and then when I'm my own best friend I can be alone but I don't feel lonely.

This project is really important, because now one can see that everything's not so black and white, that even if some things are a problem in everyday life and you have to live in a house where you can get help you can still be able to do art, and though there are different languages art does not need the same language and that helps remove the borders between people. Life's pretty awful these days in a lot of places in the world so it's now important that people begin to see each other and get all kinds of positive experiences.

Thank you for making something of your idea that is this ISEAS, because often many people have good ideas but they don't have the energy or courage to realize that idea, so I'm so proud of you.

I hope you know how to be proud too and feel that pride although a lot of others are there too.

Thank you for all this and I understand that you have a lot to do at the moment so I understand very well if you don't write me an answer now.

*Thanks from all my heart I wish to you
Hanna Grandell*





Photos: Fabio Cito and Katja Juhola



Eteva

Eteva

Impressions

Julia Poock and Päivi Pätsi, ISEAS Symposium

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkRBprW05lc&feature=youtu.be>

When Katja told me that we'd be working with people in need of extra support, Julia was sceptic as to what they might be able to do, how we should go about things with them and how they would understand us. Julia comes from Germany and speaks no Finnish.

All doubts vanished in a flash. We needed neither words nor language to communicate. The atmosphere was warm and open. Everything was settled by using our hands, even our proposal of wind chimes and other instruments.

Päivi has worked in all sorts of places guiding artistic activity. She wondered if the project would in any way differ from her daily work. Even this doubt proved groundless. Arranging the art exhibition and open house together with the Eteva people made everything special. We created art on equal terms.

To paint was important – that was said to us loud and clear. We hadn't planned doing painting, so it was painting that made the project their own.

Colours, wind chimes and musical instruments were all created together with people who know how to enchant. It was a moving experience, and we are happy about the time we spent in the ETEVA house.



Päivi and Julia got to know each other's works by email. I met Julia in Orta, Italy, in an international art symposium curated by Vittorio Tonon in summer 2016, where she was together with her husband Maximilian Fleissbach.

Päivi I met in the Eteva house in spring 2017, when we agreed on the timetables together with her and the leader of the Eteva house Sari Ojamaa and itemised the material at our disposal. Päivi and Julia worked together with the group of the Eteva young men on Monday and Julia alone on Tuesday morning. On Thursday, the young men of Eteva came to build the exhibition in the artists' residence. The group used various recycled materials

to make instruments to hang from the branches – there were wind chimes, small drums and maracases.

I met the group in Gallery Zebra after the symposium. The top and most lasting memory for them was working together with Julia and Päivi on equal terms, the trip to the artists' residence in Mustio, getting to know the other artists and taking part in Lasse and Linda's food workshop. In the gallery, we watched the video and photographs of the symposium and discussed the project as a whole. Missing Julia and Päivi permeated everything. At first the men had been uncertain what they were supposed to do and why they were doing anything in the first place. It made them laugh when I told them that Julia, too, had felt uncertain. The reflection was cast throughout, like a ray of light, by pride over one's own work and the fact that one had been part of an international working community. Julia was missed and everybody wanted her to come back and wished they could pay her a visit.

Leader Sari Ojamaa's feedback by email, October 2, 2017

The clients were splendidly taken care of all the time, both here in the office and in Mustio. The event was beautifully arranged and people were friendly. It was great to have foreign visiting artists, who were absolutely wonderful people. In fact, the clients wished that they could come along next time, too, if this is arranged again. All in all, a splendid event which I hope will continue in the years to come.

Sari





Photos: Katja Juhola



Photos: Katja Juhola

Attendo Rosinne assisted living residence
& Kaskimaa nursing home



Attendo Rosinne assisted living residence & Kaskimaa nursing home

Pipa Nikula, Clarice Zdanski, Evrim Özeskici & Vittorio Tonon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOmNmaegSlM&feature=youtu.be>

“Our project involved work with adults who were physically or mentally challenged. We spent three days in two different residences, Rosinne and Kaskimaa. We wanted to paint sheets with which to cover a ‘kota’ hut. A kota is a place that brings people together. The inhabitants and staff of the facilities welcomed us openly and with enthusiasm. In one residence, our idea was to create a “Wishing Tree” or “Tree of Joy”, a spontaneous painting project. We made small things to decorate the tree. In both facilities, the inhabitants were asked what brought them joy and what they wished. Their words are written in the ribbons that also formed part of the work.

The project is important, because through art, we can communicate with others regardless of language or physical or mental state. We want the chance to develop our work further not only in Finland but also in our own countries and elsewhere. People want the world to be their home, even if they are bound to just one place. Written by the whole group together.”

I know Vittorio Tonon from a symposium of communal art arranged in Scampia, Naples, in 2013. Clarice I met in an art symposium arranged by Vittorio in Orta, Italy in 2015, and Evrim in an international art symposium arranged in Poland in summer 2017. Pipa Nikula, a local photographer and mental health worker, I have known for years. The idea

was originally that both communities would have a work pair with a local and an international artist. The local artist had to opt out at the last moment, which changed the whole concept. For a while, I was at a loss how to rearrange the situation all over again; it would have felt harsh to tell the international artists who had already bought their flights that the project was cancelled, and the community that was so much looking forward to the event. I finally decided to have a single large group with its work supported by linguistic help from one local artist in the two, rather challenging, communities.

The works were created on the premises of the Rosinne assisted living residence and Kaskimaa nursing home. I visited both places during the interventions. To me, as a communal artist, it has always been important to present the flow of the process and the final work to the public, to be criticised by established artistic argumentation. Members of the community have been there to produce the material and perhaps also build the work that the artist had planned. In this case there was a hut built of painted cloth, a wishing tree with its related wordings, and ceramic mobiles constructed on the artist’s ideas. The public participated in the formation of the work which far surpassed anything individual – a complete work to capture the imagination and no longer in need of a context of how and when it had been created, although it was exhibited in this particular exhibition space.

The huts in the exhibition were put up in the gallery Perspektiivi. We had a huge excess of cloth at our disposal, considering the size of the huts. The output of the intervention amazed me. There would have been enough material to build a whole village of tents! But I wanted all the works to be exhibited, so we ended up covering the walls and floors of the huts with paintings both inside and out. They turned out colourful and beautiful. Members of both communities were present in the opening. I spoke to them about their works and they gave me feedback. They were obviously proud of their achievement. The residents of Kaskimaa and Rosinne took part in the joint session of reflection after the opening. Their contribution was enthusiastic and they expressed their thanks for having had the chance to be part of an international unit and wished that the artists would come back soon to work together with them again.



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Fabio Cito

Hi!

The presence of the artists was such a great thing to us. It brought some colour and creativity in the middle of our everyday lives. The residents were excited and happy about having been able to do something different. Many had doubted their own skills, but experienced success. Doing things together was a marvellous experience.

The works were brilliantly brought out in the exhibition and watching the video was very exciting to our residents. Through the video, the inhabitants felt part of a larger whole.

-Anita-

Anita Dufholm

Head of the Assisted Living Residence

Attendo Larosette / Rosinne

Hi, sorry to take so long to reply, but here are the residents' opinions on what the presence of the artists and participation in the exhibition meant to them:

- Quite good. To be outdoors. Would love to do it again.
- A good moment to pass, 'Twas nice to do art on a sheet, a welcome change, good guiding, and enough. The art exhibition was just lovely. Lots of people looking at what I'd done.
- Not bad. Abstract art was great. It was great to see one's own works in the opening.
- A nice thing, don't remember too well, but they spoke English. More art events please, art is always super.
- Got no kicks from it, don't care 'bout art.
- I don't remember the whole event.
- 'Twas fun to paint patterns, nothing to improve, really, don't remember what else.
- 'Twas nice to paint with colours. The best was food with the men (the artists). My dad's

an artist, too. It's best when you can make birds on a sheet.

- Quite good, the best was when I could work freely as myself. I liked the idea of a tepee. Brought good feelings.

- We had to speak English, that was great. The interview was in private and that was super. When I saw my own work there, I felt confused, in a good way. Well planned the whole thing was, through and through. Would like to see them (the artists) again and work together. Painting on a sheet is brilliant, when you could do it nice 'n easy. Would've been even better with some background music. One resident, who didn't speak, answered with a thumbs up for nice or thumbs down for bad, as follows:

It was nice, likes art, wants to do it again, would be nice. As for what to improve, answered that it was cold, and indoors would be better.

- Well organised, the painting and the opening were good, the place was good. An artwork for oneself would have been nice, a pillowcase for everyone, for example. Would be nice if something like that would come again.'

With good wishes for further work together:

Liisi Astala

Kaskimaan Hoivakoti Oy

Kaskimaa Nursing Home

Executive Director



Photo: Fabio Cito



Photo: Katja Juhola

Hagahemmet

Patrik Lemberg & Maximilian Fleissbach

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxLESZ63sgA&feature=youtu.be>

An art symposium with a social aspect was new to us both. We were both glad to be there, in a vigorous international art community that created an inspiring and positive atmosphere. Our music was very well received in the Hagahemmet in Tammisaari.

Our work was based on improvisation. Maximilian played classical piano and Patrik played harmonic-melodic bass guitar, playing Swedish ballads and reading Swedish poems. We felt that we created a unique musical repertoire, which worked splendidly in this old people's home, and would certainly elsewhere, too.

It was inspiring to see how it enriched and empowered the senior citizens and staff of the old people's home to create musical performances. Even though the elderly were not actively involved in performing the music, it was obvious that their presence in the music gave them direct, spontaneous joy and energy, which was mirrored back on us.

Music, like visual art, is a universal language where we all participate, independent of our active, physical participation – a dialogue is bound to happen. This has been an enriching experience to us both. Thank you.

“Listen to the silence inside you – it is the basis of every journey.” Written by Patrik Lemberg as a result of joint reflection.

Local musician and artist Patrik Lemberg worked together with German classical pianist and visual artist Maximilian Fleissbach in the Hagahemmet old people's home in Tammisaari. I met Maximilian in an international art symposium arranged in Orta, Italy, in 2016. Patrik and I visited Hagahemmet together in July 2017. We discussed the arrangements of the ISEAS week with nursing officer Tina Ekholm. At Tina's request, the performances began every day first in the dining room, where old people who were still able to live at home would come. After that, Patrik and Maximilian would move over to play in the wards. There were four wards in Hagahemmet, and they visited each one during the intervention week.

I visited Hagahemmet during the symposium week and talked with the nurses. They told me they had a surveillance form to estimate the old people's condition on a scale from -2 to +2. Thanks to the intervention, everyone had scored the highest value +2. ISEAS, in other words, had a real health-enhancing effect. Music activated both body and mind. The effect of music can be observed in many ways, including changes in heartbeat, blood pressure, respiratory pace, etc. Harmony is the heart of music; it activates feelings and can carry the listener far away into the past.¹⁹ I spoke to Tina Ekholm again after ISEAS, and she was really grateful for the event. She felt that the intervention had a big positive effect on the elderly, in terms of their vitality and responsiveness.



Photo: Fabio Cito

¹⁹ Heikkilä, Tuula, Paloheimo, Leena & Taipale, Ilkka (2000, 97–98). *Mieli ja taide*. [Helsinki]: Mielenterveyden keskusliitto.

The documentation team

The presence of the documentation team was very important to the symposium. In its communal form, art often takes place inside a process, and a documentation enables an artwork to be shown or repeated to the public. The video links to interventions in this article are filmed by either Ubertini or Gorenc, while the photographs were taken by Cito or me. There were three exhibitions, one in gallery Zebra in the Raasepori centre of photography in Karjaa, displaying about 70 photographs of different interventions by Cito and with a video compilation of ISEA by Ubertini and Gorenc running on a video projector. The cultural café Kallas in Mustio exhibited Cito's photographs of the interventions in Mustio schools, as well as Lemair and Lampenius's work *You may play with food*. A video compilation was also running in the gallery Perspektiivi in Tammisaari, where Kaskimaa and Rosinne tents and wishing tree as well as the Kärkulla paintings were also exhibited.



Photo: Katja Juhola

Video photographers Franco Ubertini, Italy and Denis Gorenc, France

I was tempted by the project. I'd be working together with another photographer and editor (Franco Ubertini) on the week's artworks by the ISEAS artists of communal art. When I arrived in Mustio and began to work I realised that it was going to be more than just an experience, it would also be a bit of a challenge. Filming in several workshops and editing in four days, enough to trigger a panic attack!

After a talk with Franco Ubertini, we decided to bring the artists' intentions and feelings forth more clearly. In this project, time set a tight framework, which meant that the contents turned out to be more important than carefully polished technique. We hope the video brings out exactly this.

I learned many things from ISEAS. Language is not a limitation; rather, we can work across language borders, even with no common language. To work in an international atmosphere is fantastic!

I want to thank all the Finnish people for their kindness. Katja's mother for her work during this symposium, as well as Katja's husband for his work and Victoria for lending us her computer. Finally, my thanks go to Katja who gave us the chance to get to know a new kind of art symposium.

Fabio Cito, photographer, Italy

I'm a photographer by profession and work as a curator in the annual international symposium of socially engaged art in Scampia, Naples. I met Katja there in 2013.

When Katja asked me to reflect on ISEAS, I couldn't help comparing it with my own symposium in Naples. The circumstances were completely different: Scampia is one of the toughest areas in Italy. Criminal organisations rule, and the state gives no support. Unemployment and poverty have given the CAMORRA a chance to penetrate deep into the inhabitants' social behaviour. Scampia is encumbered with stifling structures, lack of freedom, fear, mistrust and violence. The annual symposium of socially engaged art now celebrating its tenth anniversary brings the Scampians spiritual freedom by means of art. The presence of international artists opens the door a crack to the world and the opportunities outside, by means of art. In Scampia, too, art takes place in a process, which means that the end result is not the most significant contribution of the work.

In Finland, of course, the situation is quite different. The objective of artistic work is not to free people, as they are completely protected by the state; they are free, and have no stifling structures.

The ISEAS symposium was a moment of harmony in my life, and one where I could spread information. Friendships of strong ties were built, and it was not difficult to feel loved and appreciated. It was meaningful to share together everything we had accomplished. I was very happy to visit the communities during the interventions, which oozed powerful feelings, and see how they were transformed into artworks... the explosions of colour made my heart swell. We approached others, and knew that we are not alone.

Evaluation and conclusions

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People have asked me on many occasions how one gets to participate in an art symposium. It is a question of networking. I used my personal networks to enable local artists to network in the international field. As not all the artists who participated in the symposium were established makers of communal art, participation in ISEAS opened a door to a new field of art to some of them. Some of the artists noticed that they had earlier acted in a similar field without realising that it was part of the art context. And as many of my artists also acted as curators, they were inspired to organise a symposium of communal art in their own country, too. Through social media, my project met with international interest.

Turkish artist, doctor Evrim Özskici wanted to introduce the ISEAS working method to the professors of his own art university. After participating in ISEAS, Mahmoud Mohammadi was able to put his own work in Milano better into words. He also became interested in doing research on communal art. Päivi Pätsi wrote in her letter to me:

The above is my long introduction to why the ISEAS Finland Symposium was so important to me personally. Communal art is anything but egotistical. I met countless people who felt that being an artist is a completely reasonable solution. I came to know many of them. I got ideas for my present work as an art pedagogue. The experience gave rise to new dreams.

I may not want to do what my art teachers in my art university TaiK did and become a part-time teacher and part-time artist. Perhaps I want to become a bit like you, Katja. I think it's important to bring artists together and support them in being artists, particularly after they have completed their studies.

Sanya Torkmorad-Jozavi wrote in a reflecting letter as follows:

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“... Personally, I thought my contribution to the ISEAS Finland Symposium would be insignificant; I was incredibly nervous before commuting here, as I felt I was not qualified or experienced enough to be recognised as an artist myself. I have spent my professional life as a freelancer working for clients, producing other people's visions. That's why I identified myself coming to merely assist professionals. Since leaving, I feel like I left a trace of myself, my passion and perspective to impact the artists who I really felt valued my presence and opinion. It is a credit to them for being the beautiful and accepting free spirits and staying there for the journey. I did not expect to leave Finland as a greater version of myself, and everyone involved has motivated me to continue to socialise and create with various people in different forms. The whole production of ISEAS taught and inspired both myself and others so much, and I'm so grateful to have this in my memory.”

Kai Lehtikoinen and Anne Pässilä, who acted as researchers of the ArtsEqual project coordinated by the art university, introduce in their book on the artist as a developer speaking practices that today prevail in the art field and aim at separating “free” art from “applied” art. The writers, however, define the freedom of the artist to mean specifically that the artist can freely choose the concept within which to work. Applied art does not kill free art, nor should art be hierarchised; instead, art should be approached by critical thinking which acknowledges the right of someone who shares an artist's freedom to participate in social development by offering their skills and observations as part of discussions that are significant for social progress.²⁰

In her article “Applied 'art' challenges Art”, Krista Petäjäjärvi brings forth the value debate currently going on in the art field concerning the position of applied art in the hierarchy. It is a fight over resources. The more traditional art field is getting worried that an

²⁰ Lehtikoinen, Kai., Pässilä, Anne., Martin, Mari & Pulkki, Maiju (2016, 23). Taiteilija kehittäjänä: Taiteelliset interventiot työssä. Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Teatterikorkeakoulu.

already too small pool of finance is allotting money to art that has features of social work. The fear derives from seeing art as an absolute value. It is a fear that art as art will not be enough in the future. Krista Petäjäljärvi points out that the discussion is affected by applied art not having completed its own identity work yet. Applied art is still an undefined area.²¹

The work of the artists in the communities gave valuable information to the communities and through them, to the town of Raasepori. I hope my cooperation with Raasepori has also been productive, so that applied art will continue to be part of the town's urban development. The borough distributed information on my project in its internal media at the end of September, and our new mayor Ragnar Lundqvist paid a visit to the Mustio school of basic education during the intervention, stating that the project was exactly what the town needed. How it will be applied to practical decisions remains to be seen. When the project was over, I also discussed with the town's cultural officer and was promised that they would think about possible ways of making ISEAS an established practice in Raasepori.

An art symposium can be compared to artist-in-residence events that offer the artists an easy way to slip into work in different cultures and contexts.²² Different from these residences, symposiums are shorter and often allow many artists to live together at the same time. During the last ten years I have participated in several art symposiums of more than one week and thereby learned how symposiums are structured and organised. Financing comes to different symposiums in different ways. There are sponsors of art, millionaires who love art, or a symposium might be financed by an art institute or with the help of grants or towns. There is a wide range of financing methods. What they have in common, however, is the supply: the artists pay for their flights to the venue, and the symposium pays for accommodation, food, drink, material, a catalogue and an exhibition. There is no

21 Petäjäljärvi, Krista (2017, 29–33). Soveltava "taide" haastaa Taiteen. In Juppi Pirita & Tanskanen Ilona (toim) Taiteen moniammatilliset kontekstit. Turku: Turun ammattikorkeakoulu.

22 Kokko-Viika Irmeli (2010, 146–147). Paikasta paikkaan – taiteilijaresidenssit taiteen tuotannollisina ympäristöinä. In Kantonen, Lea (2010). Ankaraa ja myötätuntoista kuuntelua: Keskustelemaa kirjoitusta paikkasidonmaisesta taiteesta. Helsinki: Kuvataideakatemia, 143–152.

lack of such art symposiums throughout the world, they come in hundreds if not thousands – in Asia, Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, etc. – and they have their own networks of artists helping the curators invite artists to the symposiums. No written data on this global network is available. This is something I want to take a closer look at in future.



Photo: Katja Juhola

“...participatory art rests on the belief that everyone has the right to create art and to share the result, as well as to enjoy and participate in the creations of others. Shaping your own cultural identity – and having it recognised by others – is central to human dignity and growth. If people can’t represent themselves culturally how can they do so in any other way, including politically? If people are only imagined and portrayed by others, how can they be full, free and equal members of society?”
(Researcher François Matarasso)

“You wanna fly, you got to give up the thing that weighs you down.”
(Writer Toni Morrison)

Mentoring artists

By Mari Krappala

In the symposium

The symposium is structured to include a week or two of intense living and spending time together. Thus its basic idea differs from artist in residence, where communality is not necessarily in focus and work is mainly carried out individually or in teams. The artists who participated in the ISEAS (International Socially Engaged Art Symposium) were both invited and selected from applicants. About half were already familiar with communal art and had worked in different social situations, though not everyone had followed the methods of communal art or processes typical to the field before. All artists were used to analysing their own art projects, but group processing and analysis were unfamiliar to many.

Picked from conversations

Mentoring has become part of art processes. Its growing in popularity among different professional fields has encouraged both individual artists and art projects to start combining mentoring sessions with their work. The idea of mentoring is to guide, support, clarify details, seek new directions and link the work to one’s own earlier work or the history of some (artistic) style or field.

I acted as mentor of the artists in ISEAS. We mainly discussed in small groups consisting of artists working on a joint project of communal art. Each group came to be mentored 1–3 times. One mentoring session lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours, 1.5 hours per group on average.



Photo: Katja Juhola

I have selected for this chapter a few themes central to communal art that emerged in discussions on the processes of 21 artists. We generally talked about the aesthetics of creation, where art is used as a means of communication and the work itself is the most central part of the communal art. Towards the end of the symposium we also rejoiced in the works created, which were brought to exhibitions and then kept by their makers as souvenirs.

Some of the artists were familiar with mentoring. Some participated in such sessions for the first time. I also gave every artist the possibility for a one-to-one discussion. Two wanted it, the others I met in groups.

Structure of the mentoring sessions

The mentoring took place in Mustio's Solhem, the house where the foreign artists stayed. I lodged in the attic about half the nights of the symposium. Each group came to the mentoring when it suited them. Sometimes we sat outdoors by an open fire, sometimes in the kitchen in Solhem, and one group had their last session in a profoundly Finnish sauna. Most mentoring sessions took place at evening time, often only after dinner. Many of the groups worked together with their target groups every day, so postprandial was the only time available, and also a good moment to reflect on the day's work. Some days one of the groups stayed in Solhem to work on their material, which gave us a chance to hold longer mentoring sessions even during the day.

In terms of mentoring, the groups differed greatly from each other. The differences were related to the working methods used by the group, conceptions of art and interaction with the target group. With some groups, we discussed group dynamics quite a bit, while in others the melody of working together appeared naturally in tune and there was less need to go through the relationships with the artist group and the world of values.

The themes discussed in mentoring arose from the artists' own needs. With some, we discussed details, with others, the big picture. Some groups were clearly polyphonic, so one question would be discussed from everyone's point of view, while in other groups the work

was done in more uniform working processes, and a narrative continued from one artist to the other. Listening to the others' opinions opened the intense creation process into a multi-layered work field. Sometimes, besides the artists and target group themselves, there was a need to discuss the impact the assistants and the public had on the work.

How to mentor communal art

The mentoring session was built on discussions between the artists, with me joining in to clarify something or introduce a new opening. At times I asked a question in disharmony or changed the angle from which their creative process could – and sometimes also should – be viewed. I might also target the question to a particular artist, when I heard her or his thinking resonate or sound in disaccord with the way the other artists in the group were thinking. Sometimes the artists put questions to me, and I would offer alternatives or clear some space for shared imagining. When questions of ethics arose, we pondered how the work would appear from the viewpoint of another individual or group, what our personal responsibility was and how we confront another person and perhaps support them during the process.

Particularly in projects like ISEAS, where artists unfamiliar to each other and rep-



Photo: Fabio Cito



Photo: Katja Juhola



Photos: Katja Juhola

resenting different (art) fields work intensively together for a short time, little time and energy is left for self-reflection, understanding the other person's point of view or assessing the creative process. It then helps to have someone from the outside present during the discussions, a mentor who will both guide the themes that call for discussion and take up new angles. It is easier for an outsider to spot points in the discussion where there is friction or lack of communication. In relation to the group, the mentor can question and comment from a neutral stand.

The field of communal art is particularly in need of some kind of guidance or assessment as an ongoing process, regardless of how much experience the artists have in the field. Multiple actors are in play in communal art, objectives may be in conflict with each other, and desires that are not easy to articulate may be at stake. Communal art may also have to face the internal power structures of different institutions, accept regulations and limitations of work and consider the expectations and dreams of target groups. Sometimes the processes are hampered by the lack of a common language or other physical or mental factors that restrict communication. Reflection on different angles is then essential for the work to proceed further.

How to write about the mentoring process

The artists knew that what they said would be used in the symposium papers. To write about the sessions in a way clashes with the very idea of mentoring. After all, the talk is often internal to an ongoing process and the material is confidential. Very open and perhaps delicate matters are taken up during the sessions. To publish them as such and so that the artists in question can be identified simply won't do. On the other hand, the sessions also included moments of insight and revelation accompanied by laughter, joy over meeting another person, how art was created and how it inspired and opened new doors to those present. With such themes, hiding the identity was no longer so relevant.

It is essential that the demanding and socially important art field that communal art is, as well as its methods and challenges, should be processed in general discussions and also made available to readers. Written assessment does not only document individual processes, but also brings the experience to a more general discussion. It is abstract reflection on communal processes and – on permission – a written analysis of themes that have come up during the mentoring sessions.

The mentoring sessions opened up points of view, queries, ideas and critique, all essential to the development of the art field. I pay particular attention in the material of the mentoring sessions to what is exchanged between people and how reciprocity works. The material opened into a wide sceptre of existing concepts of communal art processes (and also new ones, I dare say, such as collective gaze, empathetic painting, etc.), flows of events, the joy of doing, and concrete, imaginary and ethical problems arising from the work.

What we talked about

We can now speak of the transformative power of communal art as an existing phenomenon and no longer a mere dream. The artists described moments when the viewpoint of

an individual member of a target or artist group concerning a phenomenon processed by the individual or the group changed; fear of encountering the other person vanished and was replaced by the courage to move and play, to be someone else for a moment and view one's doubts from a new perspective. Confidence in one's own doing increased in the target groups, as did the strength to encourage others. It was also a powerful experience for the group to see how one was able to finish an exercise that had seemed daring or challenging. Sometimes a change was visible in how a person simply realised that they had been heard.

We noticed that regardless of the stage of the artist's life cycle, it is possible to develop new kinds of ways to do or think about art that differ from one's own visual or performative language, both as an object/process and the process as an object. Different thinking was related to the methods or unfolding of creation – the costumier performs, the art pedagogue learns, the modernist artist does conceptual art collectively and in contents – food even as an art object has powerful connotations, one's own painting becomes part of an installation, sound produces the form of the painting. As a meta-question we pondered which artist or artist group was imposing their desire in a given case.

In some of the processes the plunge into a different kind of creative work brought up ethical questions. Individual artists asked themselves, for example: Am I capable of doing this, am I doing wrong, why don't I understand how the other artists can think so differently? Some artists were fully adaptive to the simultaneity of multiple voices and differing opinions joining together. One artist even planned to continue their own artistic creation on a



Photo: Katja Juhola

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problem turned ethical, because they also questioned their own earlier thinking and elaborated on their ways of working.

As the symposium only lasted ten days, no serious conflicts had time to develop between the work or target groups. Time was short, but enough to get to know other artists, find a working rhythm together with them and finish the work within the existing resources. A longer process would have allowed more room for individual artists' personal intentions. The curation of the artist groups, too, contributed to the all in all harmonious working together. Conflicting ideas and ethical attitudes were brought up during the mentoring sessions, but quite soon reflected back to the artists themselves. This is at least partly explained by the fact that our time for discussion was also limited. Some artists defined their artistic nature somewhat anew, some found confirmation to an idea they were developing – and some did their artistic work just like before, without undergoing any particular processes of change.

During the discussions, a need arose among the artists to chart the group's own values together with their target group in order to determine what was significant, what needed to be discussed or what ought to be worked on further. There was a Finnish artist present in each group who was already familiar with the area. Some had forwarded information on the target group and venues to their foreign workmates in advance. Not all, however, had met their target group or familiarised themselves with the workplace before the start of the symposium. The curator had acted as intermediary in finding interesting targets for the artists and informing them of the wishes and restrictions of the target groups and institutions.

We talked about how it felt to engage in direct action with the target group. There were linguistic challenges and resources to weigh, the group dynamics between the artists needed to be developed, and understanding the others' needs took some learning. The artists whose target groups were easily accessible talked about the birth of a collective experience. The reactions of children in their groups, for example, were so easy to read that their engagement in the work – also with changes made in mid-process – was achieved, according to the artists, with flying colours. However, even those who had worked with adults spoke of the effectiveness of the engaging elements. At times the “flying colours” were almost invisible, but still revelatory as an experience.

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The artists frequently returned to the theme of collectiveness during the discussions. Social interaction between them and the target groups was regarded as art. Making art and chatting with artists increased the collective consciousness of the whole group. This was specifically elaborated during the events arranged for everyone together, such as the open house in Solhem, the vernissage in the art gallery adjacent to the library in Tammisaari or the end discussion open to everyone in the library.

Open house

During the days of the open house Solhem hovered between order and chaos. I participated in the event and engaged in small discussions with the artists and the public. Some artists were planning a small-scale exhibition on the work done together with their target group, while some had in mind a workshop where all the guests could participate. Instead of the sunny day we had hoped for it rained, so all activity had to be moved indoors.

The distinction between target group and artist was blurred during the event, causing both joy and bewilderment. The happening with all its activity was a work of art in itself, perhaps even more so than the objects that remained in the house. It came close to situationist art with people gathering together in the evening to talk, make art in a guided way and do unusual deeds. The kitchen table was in use for workshop activity while the other rooms served as spaces for writing and painting on the walls and putting up live shows. A display resembling a wind chime hung from the ceiling in the hall. Everybody was served food. Music played in the house and someone sang.

There is a virtue for change in laughter, and just pleasantly spending time and doing things together reveals something important about the community, the individual and how we relate to our environment. We realised that we could have taken these light and playful “revelling” activities even further. Part of the communal art work might even have been triggered by simply spending time together. The artists could have interpreted the situation to create artistic activity out of it.

By means of being, playing and eating together, the target groups would presumably also have started to give rise to opinions and dreams that clashed with each other. A target group is not a homogeneous group of likeminded people. It is united by something but at the same time consists of people of all kinds. The evening of the open house gave a hint how significant matters might be collected simply by spending time in one place. They might concern the political opinions of the members of the community, concrete needs for change or perhaps utopian ideas. When communal art work sets off in this manner, it approaches activism as a field of art that tackles political injustice.

End discussion

The last mentoring session was a discussion arranged for the whole group after the opening of the symposium exhibition. A small number of members from different communities were also present. We went through every part project and discussed them. Because the target groups were so different in nature, the questions mostly focused on the starting points of the communal work, how the artistic situations were arranged and how the target groups found motivation to work. We also talked about how the artists in different groups reacted, if a person or several people resisted engagement. In some groups they would stay to watch what the others were doing, while in others, they were assigned a specific task. We also discussed how contact was achieved with the target groups. To some of the groups this meant a set of different methods by which individual artists encountered their target group members, while to some, contact involved using a joint, partly improvised method. The presence of live-artists in the group had a notable effect on the course of the collective activities.

We discussed whether the idea was to help the community by teaching them new artistic working methods, to use art to find ways of expressing oneself, or perhaps to work together communally without an artistic bias – or if the underlying wish was simply to share a particular situation, event or space with a specific group.

Others besides me must have been musing what a diverse group of artists had been

working together for ten days. Simply to live in the same house, eat, go to the sauna, throw a party or two or just be together was considered a rich and valuable experience. The work of the leader of the symposium in all its variety and originality and, all in all, carried out with such a big heart certainly contributed to the fact that so heterogeneous a group could work in a space that was in fact somewhat too small for living and working together in harmony.

Finally, we went through key words, word lists and concepts that everyone had in mind after the week. The voice recording is now lost and most of the words forgotten. I wondered whether to ask the group for them again by email. In the end, I decided to ask for something else:

My dear artist friend, it has been half a year since we met. I still think about you and I am thankful to you for our conversations and also for some of your art works that I have at my home now.

Now I have a wish for you. We lost the recording of the last conversation after the opening, and sadly forgot most of the words you said described the work. I also thought you might have forgotten what your word was. So let's construct a new list.

Please, could you create a new word, which has not meant anything until now, which describes your ISEAS work in Raasepori. And please add a small description, what it means. In any language you wish.

It will be published in our catalogue. I hope you have time to send it to Katja and me by the next weekend, March 18.

I also understood during the end discussion that there could have been more of the mentoring moments with the 21 artists during the week. Each could have concentrated on a single theme that had arisen during the process and which everyone could have weighed

with their project in mind. My other post-thought was that some of the mentoring sessions might also have included representatives of the target groups, the special groups selected for the symposium, and school classes. They were present during the end discussion, some only to listen, but some also to ask questions and comment on the work of the artists. Their ideas would have made a valuable contribution to the discussions. Still, we did collect their feed-back in other contexts.

Which, as a matter of fact, are art works, the work itself or the objects produced? In some groups, individual works by target group members were exhibited, while some artists built a collective work of the material created together with the target group. Art also takes place in passing moments, as immaterial activity – ideas, talk, gestures, and facial expressions – and can still leave far-reaching tracks.

What if next time...

What if, when doing communal art, instead of starting from the space of the community itself, we should travel together somewhere unfamiliar to everyone? Might such a transfer in its unfamiliarity reveal something of what was going on in the community? Perhaps it would even manifest itself as a surprise to the community. And would that give the artists a freer hand in the work together? One's own place with its assistants is safe and easy. Yet there are invisible walls and things taken for granted, inbuilt rules and frames for how to behave. If unfamiliarity with the space were a shared experience to both artist and target groups, it might let silent, individual voices emerge and open a space to act differently for the whole group.

What if the work started with silence? Instead of accumulating heaps of information, everyone would be quiet. It might be difficult for some, but everybody would find some kind of a place in the empty space. The space would in a way begin to be created as moulded by the group. No one would know in advance how it was going to look. When there is

a group with a shared common nominator, whatever that may be, and a group of artists who have found it out, the work might even take the wrong direction. What if in this new community silence should produce, between the target group and the artists, some new, perhaps imaginary, perhaps political space which they would then begin to dismantle with the community's own resources and the artists' working methods – after all, there is no lack of imagination on either side.

Even more open-endedly, what if an artist should collect their own target group in a particular place but with no specific common nominator, or by a descriptive invitation without naming a specific place? The whole idea of group work would then emerge from something hitherto unplaced. Perhaps ultimately even so that no names or introductions had been collected during the process? Something, regardless, would have been made public. And a group of people, group members and artists, would leave the place carrying a memory of significant activity and a deeper level of awareness. We would then be talking about social aesthetics, which is a way of producing, interpreting and presenting art so that contact is made between aesthetic awareness and the surrounding public.

New concepts created by the ISEAS17 artists to describe their communal artwork

We are still waiting for them. By the end of March we had received one concept, *archaeluminous* – the word I came to think of. We used archaic techniques to light up minds and the subconscious.

Many thanks to all the artists for the discussions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goEdwM32fHs&feature=youtu.be>

The Urban Shamanic Experience

Joan Marie Kelly

Introduction

I am currently teaching full time at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. At the start of a new semester an invitation to participate in the International Socially Engaged Art Symposium Raasepori Finland piqued my curiosity, despite it being held during teaching semester. I saw this as an opportunity for my students as well as myself. The Director of International Socially Engaged Art Symposium (ISEAS), Katja Juhola proposed that the Finnish artist Jan Jämsen and I collaborate to create a social art piece that incorporates engagement between ourselves and a community of women living with a range of disabilities in a state assistance program in Finland called Kårkulla. I would bring my students into this collaboration as a means of creating a context that provokes the students will have to respond to circumstances that they have not confronted previously. Not having a model to solve problems will put the students in a position to be inventive and creative. The challenge will also be for me to curate the means of the collaboration. What similarities and differences between all participants can we play on and develop? I hoped that beginning a conversation with Jan Jämsen would spark a fruitful idea for our collaboration. Upon asking him questions about his life and artistic practice, I learned that the origins of the imagery in his artwork is informed by the discipline of Nordic Shamanism. I immediately knew this was the idea and inspiration I was looking for.

This was the beginning of a compelling and surprising collaboration between Nanyang Technological University students in Singapore, two artists: myself and Finnish artist Jan Jämsen, and a community of women at the Kårkulla Center who cope with a range of dis-

abilities and or mental health issues that brings them to attend the center each day. Some of the women have flats of their own outside the Kårkulla therefore are quite able, however most live at the facility. A majority of the woman have Down Syndrome, but I do not know the status of why the women need assistance nor did I ask.

The title of this social art collaborative piece between ISEAS, Kårkulla, Jan Jämsen, myself, and NTU is “The Urban Shamanic Experience.” At the conclusion of this collaboration, I considered it successful. How is the success of a social art piece measured? Can it be measured? Identifying of the meaning of success of a social art project / piece will change according to the intention of the artist, context and the opinions of the participants. I have identified the success of “The Urban Shamanic Experience” by contrasting the responses of the participants during and after the collaborative events. I’m looking for a transformation of perspectives towards of each other. This is the goal of the socially engaged art or participatory art I facilitated with this project and others. Other examples of creating the context for transformative experience that I have already completed are: “Hidden In the City Yet in Clear View” and “Young Girls Living a The Girls Center at Ziat, Fez Morocco.” It is important to first explore the breath of my current projects in order to provide further context for the particular collaboration of the Urban Shamanic Experience.

“Hidden In the City Yet in Clear View”

This collaboration was between NTU students and both Bangladesh and Indian migrant construction workers. Work permits for foreign construction workers numbered 284,900 in 2017 according to the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore in 2017.¹ The students pass migrant laborers working in their communities everyday of their lives yet never have any direct engagement with the men. Typically, this sets the stage for only knowing each

¹ Singapore Ministry of Manpower website, <http://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-work-force-numbers>

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other through gossip and media perspectives. Upon giving the design brief to the students to create an artistic engagement with the migrant workers, the students communicated that they viewed this project as charity work, seeing themselves as better people than the workers. The students viewed the relationship as the students giving of themselves to the workers. Although, through the engagement with the workers, the students had a complete transformation of their views. The students were very creative in the development of their engagements. One student group exchanged spiritual practices, bringing the men to their Chinese Buddhist temple, and participating with the men at the Hindu temple. Another group invited the two workers to their home to cook and share a meal with their Chinese family. Another exchanged language lessons and yet another conducted a food judging contest where the migrant workers tasted and rated typical traditional Singaporean dishes. After learning about the lives, hardships and experiences of the men, the students verbalized a great respect and admiration for the men. They identified with the men in comparing the choices and opportunities each have in life, realizing the men are struggling to achieve the same things the students want in their own lives. The men got great satisfaction out of the exchanges but they didn't have the transformative change of perspective the students had. In the future I want to be mindful as to how to create equal benefit between participants. In the context of Singapore I'm satisfied if I can create social change one person at a time by opening the views of my students so that later in life when they are in positions of decision making, they will have the empathy and forethought to make inclusive and just decisions.



Figure 1. Two of the students were hip-hop teachers. To break the ice students invited the workers to a night of games and dancing. (Photograph courtesy of Scott Nathaniel)

Young Girls Living at The Girls Center at Ziat, Fez Morocco

This collaboration was between The American Language Center-Fes and Arabic Language Institute Fes, Director David Amster, Community Service Club, The Girls Center at Ziat, and Nanyang Technological University. This experience began in 2016 when I received an invitation from David Amster, to work with the young girls living at The Girls Center Ziat in collaboration with the Community Service Club, a group of university students actively involved in actively contributing to social wellbeing of their community.

The girls living at the center are girls ages nine to seventeen. They are wards of the state. When a girl reaches eighteen, she is released and literally walks out support, which leaves her vulnerable to prostitution and trafficking. Some of the girls are allowed to attend school and some are not because they are deemed criminals. The “criminal” girls are given sewing lessons as a means to support themselves in the future. How they got here, or what they did, is not discussed. How and why the classification as criminal is issued is not something that is discussed with me. Each girl has their individual traumatic story. For some, it is simply that their mother could not afford to feed them.

The aim was to instil confidence in the girls, and countering the idea that they are outside society by creating portraits of the girls that uplift their image as well as engaging the girls in a series of art making workshops. The workshops involved actively paying attention to individual artwork made by participating girls and giving them experience with a task completed from conception which took the form of their own sketches to execution and reflection upon the finished product. The drawing workshops are tailored to draw out each girls’ talents and curiosities, while also teaching the elements of art and design principals.

To sit to have your portrait painted is traditionally a position held for a person of economic privilege. I paint each girls’ portrait to symbolically raise the status of the girl by adorning the girl’s images with fruits and floral arrangements give them a sense of beauty and regal sentiments, heightening a sense of pride in the young girls.



Figure 2. Portraits of Narjis, Iman and Fatti, by Joan Kelly

In December of 2017, I managed and guided the painting of a 33-meter mural inside the compound of the Girls Center at Ziat designed and executed by the girls and the help of Community Service Club and myself. The aim was to give the girls first-hand experience with all the steps of accomplishing a large endeavor from the first steps of developing ideas, turning ideas into a design, finalizing the design to final execution of the design onto the wall. Lastly, reflecting upon the outcome and making changes according to the conclusions of the reflective stage. The hope is, with participation in all stages of the process, the girls will be able to develop problem solving skills and transfer this knowledge to other tasks and challenges.

I applied my strategy of not asking the girls their backgrounds. I prefer to allow

myself to discover who they are from their responses and what they want to reveal to me. Undoubtedly, something comes up that lets me know and remember that there is so much about their lives I do not and cannot know. Over the course of this experience the girls never openly complained to me, except for the last day of working when a small group of girls asked me if the prisons in the USA are better or worse than this.

To stimulate local empathy by sharing the girls' artistic accomplishments with the community, perhaps I could gain their support for the girls. Local university social work and psychology programs could collaborate their work with some of the girls' needs. The girls lack basic self-care skills leading to poor hygiene. With the support of local beauty salons perhaps we could have a regularly scheduled beauty day. In this way I am trying to transform the perceptions local people have of the girls, while trying to transform the girls' perception of themselves.



Figure 3. "We are Family". Ilham, putting her arm around Joan Kelly as she paints Ilham's portrait on the wall as part of a large mural. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly.)



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

The girls at Ziat drawing to find the sketch for the mural (fig. 4). The girls executing the mural (figs.5–6). (Photographs courtesy of Joan Kelly)

The Urban Shamanic Experience-Finland

Finnish artist Jan explained the imagery in his practice is visualized during very deliberate listening sessions to a type of *Nordic Shamanic drumming*. I immediately associated this with the introduction to drawing I usually execute. I want the students to experience a relationship between mark-making, color and emotion by asking them to discover marks and forms to represent the sensation of what they hear or touch. The way I do this is to prepare a selection of music and hang large pieces of paper on the walls and on the floor. I ask the students to make marks that respond to each section of music. Next, I've prepared cut fruit and other very textural objects and placed them separately into individual black bags. I ask each student reach into the black bags without looking inside and experience what they touch. They make mental notes of this sensation. I ask them to find words that describe their experience. They go back to their easel and make marks and forms that respond to the sensations. What emo-

tions does the sense of touch provoke? Can we visually understand the relationships between the forms the students create and the sensation they felt?

During that first conversation with Jan we decided to make responses to the Shamanic drumming as the center of our collaboration. Visualizing the Shamanic drumming corresponds directly with the initial touch / sensation exercises I had already plan for the introduction of drawing. We would have both groups, the NTU students and the Kårkulla women make paintings in response to the shamanic drumming. After the students listened to the Shamanic drumming, the second stage for the students would be to write about what they envisioned and experienced while listening. The students will record these experiences through color, mark and form in paintings and drawings. The third phase entails me taking the paintings of the students over to Finland. Jan and I would work together to facilitate the women at Kårkulla to make a response to the Shamanic drumming. The two groups would then meet via SKYPE to exchange ideas and discuss their shared experiences. After the discussion on Skype there would be an exhibition of all the collaborations experienced at ISEAS. The Kårkulla / NTU paintings of the Urban Shamanic Experience would be exhibited as part of the multi-venue exhibition of ISEAS.

Approaches to Collaborations with People of Diverse Backgrounds, Minority Communities, Including Race, Physical Restrictions, and Economic Deprivation

My first interactions with communities living with assistance was in Baltimore, Maryland (USA) at Keswick Multi-Care medical facility and my first experiments in transforming perceptions through artistic practice. A young man named Robert, who had cerebral palsy and quite deformed in body, arms and hands and no verbal ability was watching but would not participate with the group. Instead, I met him independently. I lodged a carving tool in between his twisted knuckles. He began to cut away from the block of clay creating his

own figures. Armed with the tool he joined the group who had been using their fingers to sculpt. From then on he joined the group creating, in all his free time.



Figure 7. (left) Robert, with a tee-shirt he designed. Figure 8. (right) I obtained funding for lunches. I asked the children living in the local homeless shelter if they would assist our clients in exchange for a daily lunch. It worked out beautifully. The engagement of these two communities had a racial dimension too. Most of the clients were white and the homeless children were African American. I was interested in the role of the African American children being needed by the white adults. (Photographs courtesy of Joan Kelly)

The two principal approaches to working with people with physical disabilities, that I developed during this time in Baltimore, have stood the test of time. The first principle is that everyone can work / make. The first step in getting to know the client is to see how open they are to using the movable parts of their bodies to manipulate the art materials. This may mean sculpting with the elbow or paint with the brush in their mouth. If they are shy and not as explorative, my philosophy is that I am their artistic tool. If the artistic decision-making about the form, color and content of the piece is the client's, the decision maker has authorship over the piece, even though I assist with the materials.

The second principle is not to ask about diagnosis. I want to approach the work with an open mind where I explore the person I am working with without any assumptions and without seeing from my cultural context. Through the act of artistic making, I want the participants to take on a new identity of artist. Thus leaving behind the identity of their disability or whatever the difference is between the participants and the greater society.

I again relied upon these two guiding principles to explore and get to know the women at Kårkulla. The creative interactions were our points of engagement. The engagement constructs the considerations and knowledge we have of each other. Harvard psychiatrist, Dr. Richard Mollica describes his approach to counselling people with trauma as having to abandon all currently held theories, opinions, prejudices, and biases and *see* what is actually present² As a Yale University Divinity School student, he learned to take a critical approach to interpreting biblical texts called the exegetical method or *exegesis*.³ Exegesis is a critical interpretation of a text. It aims at exploring the precise meaning of a passage. Each word and phrase are reviewed from the cultural context from which it was originally written. The text is dissected into its historical origins. Dr. Mollica transfers this discipline of critical interpretation of written texts, to carefully translating the words and terms used by the refugees he is counseling.⁴ For this reason a practitioner from a foreign country can never work alone with a community of another country or with a community from which they have no direct cultural context.⁵ Dr. Mollica did not conduct interviews with female Cambodian refugees alone. Another female Cambodian refugee who had developed an independent life and could now reach out to help other Cambodians conducted the interviews.

At the root of all art making and in my position as a painter, the core, paramount process of painting is a process of surrendering all preconceived ideas and *seeing* freshly as

² Mollica, Richard. *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (n.p., Harcourt Inc., 2006), p. 15.

³ Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds*.

⁴ Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds*, p. 17.

⁵ Mollica, *Healing Invisible Wounds*, p. 17.

a means to discover. Through decades of engaging with painting, I bring this approach to my work when engaging with people of diverse communities. The art is the point of encounter between us. It is through observation and conversation during the acts of *making* that I come to know the communities and participants. As the work develops I see parts of myself in the community I'm working with. I know the community through this relationship. The artwork is a physical entity connected to our encounter. Art becomes a manifestation of an experience, visualizing a history between us. Collaboration in making of art becomes a device to explore the unfamiliar.

Sarah Schuster writes that little attention has been paid to the capacity of sight to forge relationships or to build reciprocal understanding between self and other.⁶ Schuster refers to the canvas as a *site of mediation*, and discusses artists painting the portraits of the *other* as a process of recognize(ing) ourselves in the other and the other in ourselves and portrait lets us engage in the process of recognition and identification. The most complex and meaningful portraits are a record of the sitter and artist navigating the unknown territory of relationships.⁷

Role of the Teacher

My approach to Social Art is also through another door, that of pedagogy. When teaching painting students, I do not approach them as a subject authority feeding knowledge to the student. I think of myself as a co-producer with the students. I will initially introduce ideas. The real learning happens while putting the introduced ideas into action by doing in close proximity to each other, allowing observation and dialogue. Reflective dialogue between all participants in the classroom including myself happens throughout the process as well as at the end. Paulo Freire is critical of the “banking” model of education. Teach-

⁶ Schuster Sarah, “Invisible Personas” *Painting as Social Art*, Joan Marie Kelly (2018) pp. 6–7.

⁷ Schuster “Invisible Personas” pp. 6–7.

ers “deposit” information in a student to generate obedient workers in a paternal social system. I also reject the authoritative dynamic between teacher and student while also acknowledging that the teacher will never be seen as equal by the students. Freire notes the distinction between authoritarianism and critical pedagogy retaining authority.⁸ Clair Bishop applies this framework to the relationship between participatory art and pedagogy as traced in *Artificial Hell's stating*:

*[a] single artist (teacher) allows the viewer (students) freedom within a newly self-disciplined form of authority . . . rather than a utopian space of undirected, open collaboration.*⁹

Distinguished theoretician Jacques Rancière's discusses the dynamics of equality of intelligence between teacher and student in a seminal text, *The Ignorant School Master*.¹⁰ He describes the nineteenth century teacher Joseph Jacotot teaching a class, where he has no common language between himself and the students. He speaks French while the students speak exclusively Flemish. Jacotot resolves this by reading a bilingual book with the students. Jacotot and the students learn the other's language by comparing the two languages as part of a bi-lingual reading process. Rancière is not interested in the learning outcome but emphasizes the democratization of the relationship between student and teacher. Jacotot acts upon an *equality of intelligence* between himself and the students, yet their roles can be different from each other. Rancière is not implying that all intelligence is equal but is interested in discovering what can be achieved from the relationship dynamic of equal respect between teacher and student. I come to the pedagogy as social art from this approach of mutual respect.¹¹

8 Friere, Paulo, in Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, (London: Macmillan, 1987) p. 102.

9 Clair Bishop *Artificial Hells* page 267.

10 Rancière, Jacques, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). For a good critique of Rancière's essay see Ross, Kristin 'Rancière and the Practice of Equality,' *Social Text* 29 (1991): pp. 57–71.

11 Rancière.

I take an approach in agreement with Paulo Freire in Latin America and Henry Giroux in the USA, who propose a teacher's role as facilitating a students' empowerment through collective non-authoritarian collaboration (footnote here to reference a text or article by Giroux).¹² Freire acknowledges that hierarchy can never be completely erased.¹³ I am not teaching in a political vacuum. I am in a university situated in a cultural context of Asia where hierarchy plays a visible role and the role of a teacher has been traditionally an authoritarian one. At present this is more relaxed but I must realize that all of my students were raised in a system that viewed the teacher as authority.

I view myself as a co-producer of knowledge, energy, discoveries along with all participants. The entire group motivates the direction of learning as well as how and when I see the need or perfect timing to inject stimulus and critique. I listen to the students' voices visually as well as what they say to me. I am searching for connections. I am trying to see what is unique within what they are showing and telling me. I then make suggestions as to how they can emphasize and expose their unique attributes. I am not pushing them into a mold of what I think is *good art*. All preconceived ideas of what I think their piece should look like must be washed away. I need to listen with my senses and intellect being atune with this unique individual. The students and the community may give input to a participant driven decision making as part of *responsive* curricula.

Often, I take on the role of facilitator. I “set the scene” for the participants learning. I stage the program and content while being flexible to respond to the participants and revise the curricula when needed. I will stop and hold reflective discussions, a participant-driven decision making process. I feel strongly about making decisions inclusive. The students are experiencing the collaboration differently than I am, therefore I need their input to consider fully next stages and developments.

12 Giroux.

13 Paulo, Friere, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, eds. Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (London: Macmillan, 1987) p. 102.

Pedagogy as Social Art Practice

Pedagogy as social art practice has possibilities to locate inside and outside the classroom. The engagement takes on a life of its own stimulating the direction of the programming and in turn leading to surprise outcomes. I view the entire world as accessible to my students for engagement. With the developments in technology, as long as I have a willing collaborator on the other side of the world we can access and engage anywhere. Bishop describes Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's attitude towards her social art piece, *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, 2002–09 as a “mobile School” using the whole city as a base for operations.¹⁴ Bishop questions why *Arte de Conducta* is referred to as a work of art? Why isn't it simply referred to as an educational project that Bruguera undertook in her hometown?¹⁵ I apply that question to my own social art practice as pedagogy. Bishop states that one possible answer to Bruguera's perspective of the educational facility she created to be art instead of a school, is her own authorial identity as an artist. I am of the same opinion, that my identity as an artist shapes the view of my pedagogy as art. The educational methodology I develop incorporating experiential learning through engagement with other collaborators outside the classroom is social art practice.

Socially Engaged Art: Kårkulla and NTU

In addition to discussing this collaboration, there is an advantage to understanding my background and the students in Singapore so the decisions I make while working on Social art as an educational means will be understood.

¹⁴ Bishop, Clair. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London: Verso, 2012), p. 248.

¹⁵ Bishop, C., *Artificial Hells*, p. 249.

Context is Everything

I am American and Irish and have been teaching in Singapore for the past twelve years. Therefore I am very familiar with the attitudes and behaviours of Singapore as the multi-cultural society as well as the attitudes and behaviours of my students that are not only cultural but also reflect the very outcome oriented education system rather than process orientation.

Social art of any kind hinges upon the complexities of the social and environmental context of the participants involved in the work. Therefore what is executed and achieved in one location with groups or communities will not transfer to another context of communities and location. Each social art event must be crafted for the specific communities and locations involved. Possibly due to my experiences with perceptions, my greatest interests in my art practice are with dismantling preconceived attitudes and ideas that are not rooted in lived experiences.

Singapore as Context

In Singapore there are three major ethnic groups that make up the total population, which are the Chinese at 74.2%, Malay at 13.2%, Indian 9.2%.¹⁶ There is pressure on all students to have a college education. The students feel tremendous pressure to perform to a certain level with a specific standard. They see no room or allowance for alternative tracks. A goal is put in front of them and the steps are spelled out as to how to get there. The outcome is stated and must be achieved.

I strive to dislodge this system by setting up challenges without clear outcomes, without identifying the steps to get there and often not knowing the outcomes. The challenge is the exploration. I am trying to teach my students to feel comfortable with ambiguity

¹⁶ <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/singapore-population/>.



Figure 9. “The Comfortable Prisoner”. A drawing made by an anonymous engineering student. I feel this drawing is a very good example of how many students feel. Notice everything is perfect in the room. In Singapore we have everything, yet no room for individual identity. (Courtesy of anonymous NTU student)

and the realization that the developmental process one needs to go through to get anywhere interesting or inventive is worthwhile. Many students tend to think starting over is a waste of time. Again, remembering the recommendation of Harvard psychiatrist, Dr. Richard Mollica to abandon all currently held theories, opinions, prejudices, and biases and *see* what is actually present.¹⁷ Once in Singapore I felt I needed to wash all my responses from my mind to see what was in front of me. An example of this is my idea of violence which being American is daily blood and blatant inflicted pain covered in the news media. A student said to me, “Prof Kelly, I’m so boring all I did my whole life is go to school and come home and do four hours of homework.” It took me awhile to realize I did not recognize the violence in Singapore. I am American, my idea of violence is from the violent images on TV news at night. But without the bloody images, keeping your child like a prisoner is form of violence.

¹⁷ Mollica, Richard. *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (Harcourt Inc., 2006).

Learning Through Lived Experiences: Art as Engagement Between two Communities

Lived experiences create the strongest, most lasting impressions. They are what sticks in one’s memory emerging years later when incited. If I facilitate the context of the learning, by creating an engagement between two different communities, the students learning through their own lived experiences. The situation is such that the students experience and then reflect on what they did and what happened. They come to their own conclusions. All people learn more deeply and have more meaningful outcomes when they experience and come to their own conclusion. It is the same for a scientist in the laboratory. The participant engaging in the experiment has much more benefit than reading about the same process. One day when my students are in a position of power my hopes are that the opportunities they had to engage with communities different from themselves through the social art collaborations I facilitated, will enable them to see beyond presumptions and ideas seen every day and taken for granted. My hopes are that this perception is clear enough to discern oppression and structural injustice. Lee Anne Bell defines social justice as both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. . . . The process for attaining the goal of social justice, we believe, should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change.¹⁸

¹⁸ Bell, pp.1–2.

The Urban Shamanic Experience: Kårkulla, NTU, Jan Jämsen and Joan Kelly

There were two issues I was aware of and saw as potential learning positions for both sets of students at the onset of this collaboration. I have two classes, both beginning students; art students and engineering students taking an art class. Both being beginning students I treat them the same in the aims of the collaboration. First, the ambiguity of making a response to the Shamanic drumming without a model for what a response looks like. There is no right or wrong outcome. This has the potential to be stressful for the students from Singapore who have little to no experience with relying on their intuitions for knowledge. The student might be looking for what the teacher wants, trying to anticipate strategies to obtain a good grade. Second, we are collaborating with people the students would have little experience with. Having a disability, and being of unconventional age for a bachelor's degree is unusual in the Singapore context. It is important to note that I didn't know the women at Kårkulla therefore I could not make an inference of how they will be impacted by the collaboration.

After viewing the video Jan made of the landscape in Finland narrating the history of Shamanic practice and role of Shamanic drumming in his artistic practice. I took the students to a local exhibition at the Singapore National Gallery of Yayoi Kusama, a Japanese artist whose life work is an intuitive response to every issue she was interested in, from personal emotions to political statements.¹⁹ Her work is bold, takes on many forms; it is obsessive and overwhelms a space. I hoped her work might open up the students, giving them permission to feel whatever response they would have to the drumming is valid.

¹⁹ <https://www.nationalgallery.sg/see-do/highlights/yayoi-kusama-life-is-the-heart-of-a-rainbow>.



Figure 10. NTU Students laying on the floor of a dance room inside the university listening to the Shamanic drumming. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 11. After listening they sat up and began to write down the memories of their visions. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)

The students brought in old bed sheets or table clothes for their painting surfaces. We wrapped them around large pieces of plywood and clipped them in place. They immediately went about making brush strokes on the old bed sheets.



Figure 12

Students Teo Hsin Wei (fig. 12) and Natasha Jumari (fig. 13) painting their responses to the Shamanic drumming. (Photographs courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 13

The student responses to the constant beat of the drumming ranged from an impending doom to a meditative retreat. Although a few of them wrote that they have never done anything without a plan before, and felt unsure as to how to respond, most found their way. Their self-doubt came out more in the end discussions in comparison to and after they met and saw the work of the women at Kårkulla. They spent two hours painting while the drumming played in the background. The painting students concentrated, exploring and experimenting with different methods of applying paint. The engineering students seemed lost. They drew similar imagery of conventions such as fire, a tent, and / or a piece of wood or a drum. They did not know how to approach making marks. Some began looking at their cell phones for images. Other looking around copying their neighbor's ideas. Their images were literal, while in the paintings students were able to give a more visceral response. Here are a few of the images and written statements by the students:



Figure 14. Drawing by Yeni Susanti.

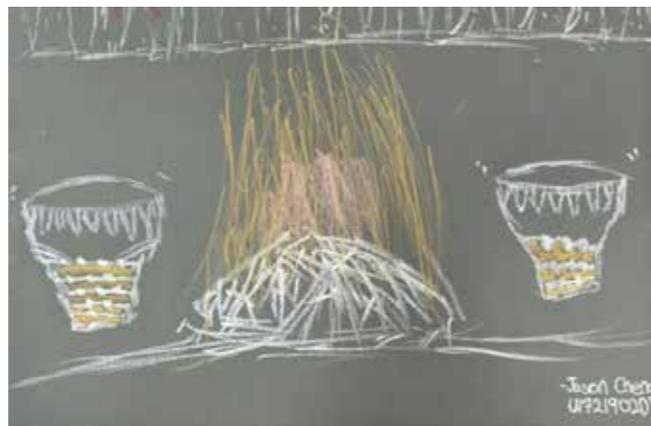


Figure 15. Drawing by Cheng Kuan Yong Jason

The two examples shown above (figs. 19–20) are the results of the engineering students. Half the class drew a picture of a fire, despite us having spent a great deal of time discussing a more visceral response to their experience, such as in Yayoi Kusama's work.

Impending: voices from the students

Student #1. With the consistent drumming, I saw a field burning slowly as something appears to be approaching. The explosion of strokes on the canvas signifies fear as the constant drumming hints at the arrival of something dreadful and ominous. The warm colour palette with red as the dominant colour suggests violence, which is further intensified with the short, choppy strokes, the smears and the dragging of paint across the surface.²⁰

Student #2. The meditative session was calming and relaxing. With my eyes closed, I saw a black expanse in which spirals and concentric circles rippled with each drumbeat. As time passed, they seemed to form pathways, linked with lines. The pathways occasionally advanced quickly and receded gently, somewhat like a pulse. I have attempted to capture the receding spirals with the blue strokes and the more aggressive advancement with the red.²¹



Figure 18. Untitled By Ang Ching Hui (Photograph courtesy of Ang Ching Hui)

Figure 16 (left). "Impending" by Lee Jia Zhen. (Photograph courtesy of Lee Jia Zhen)

Figure 17 (right). Painting By Jon Lee En. (Photograph courtesy of Jon Lee En)

²⁰ Zhen, Lee Jia. "Impending." Artist statement, 2017.

²¹ En, Jon Lee. Statement, 2017.

I was trying to get the students to open up with this activity but for Ang Ching Hui it gave her the feeling of *oppression*. In her own words:



I think suppression was one of the dominant things I felt . . . I found myself in first-person view, lying in the darkness on top of some firewood, surrounded by silent, angry, red and orange figures holding spear-like weapons.

However, as I placed my brush on the canvas and the painting progressed, I wanted to not be suppressed by those angry creatures, I wanted to give them hope or perhaps form a bond or friendship with them. Perhaps I had been thinking about how I could get myself out of that situation not by violence of screaming or fighting but by peacefulness.²²

Qai wrote: When I was asked to paint my vision, I recreated the exploding sparks of blue behind my eyes.

Figure 19. "Journey of Miscellany" by Qai (Photograph courtesy of Qai)

The Artist Statement by Natasha Jumari explains

This painting is not a visual representation of the shamanic drumming, but a reaction to the experience it brings. Thus, it is not so much a translation of the same work in different mediums. It is a medley of various visions, which had transported the artist to places she had never seen, and seized her with sensations she never felt. It is a concoction of acrylic; a conglomeration of colours, that paints the experience of death – from the very last moments, through a ritual passage, and finally introduces viewers to the Other Side.

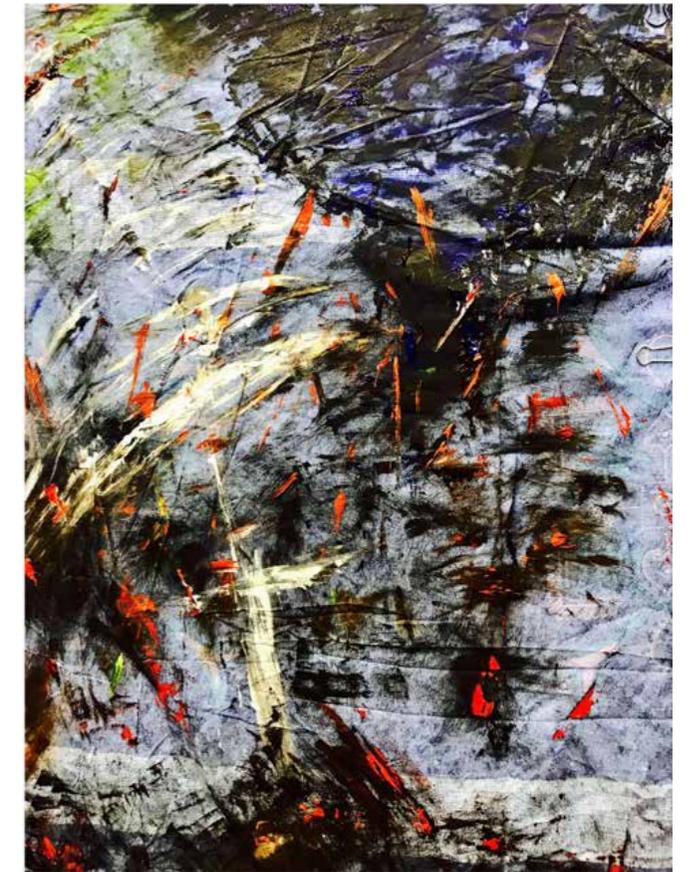


Figure 20. "Days to Death" by Natasha Jumari (Photograph courtesy of Natasha Jumari)

Arriving in Finland

After meeting most of the other artists at our cabin headquarters, Jan arrived. Together, we reviewed or critiqued / discussed all of the paintings and drawings from the NTU students and read the written statements. We then met with the women at Kårkulla, and introduced the project. Not wanting the work of the students to influence the women, we did not show the women the work of the students yet.



Figure 21. Jan Jämsen and Joan Kelly introducing ourselves and the project to the women at Kårkulla. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 22. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)

The magic began to happen the next day when the women began to work. The Kårkulla women did not find it necessary to listen to the music before painting. They listened while they painted. They dove right in literally. The students in Singapore painted upright on easels. The women at Kårkulla worked flat on tables choosing the size of their painting surfaces. As soon as the drumming began the women also began to work. The two women with largest canvases Hanna and Andrea began to pour the paint over their canvas, choosing the colors. They put their hands right down in the paint moving their entire bodies to the steady rhythm of the drumming. There was no holding back. Many other women took the brushes and made dots and marks on the canvas with the rhythm of the drums.

Many of the women used rainbow colored circles to symbolize the drums. It was a hypnotic atmosphere as if the women went to another place entirely. They never looked at us for approval. They were absorbed in their own thoughts, and creative process of making. Jan and I felt like intruders or voyeurs, watching a very personal act that should be private. The women stayed in their hypnotic like state for two hours. We all felt completely drained after the experience, even Jan and I, who did not create anything.



Figure 23. These two women at the front of the room Hanna Grandell (left) and Andrea Westerlund (right) proved to be out of the ordinary in the way they could release themselves from all of life and tune in to their inner voices. Hanna began to complement the drumming from the soundtrack with a rhythmic tapping with her hands full of paint. The marks and shapes reflected her hands following the rhythm of the drums. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)

After the first day of intuitive response, on the second day Andrea and Hanna both began to find personal iconography buried in the shapes and marks they had made the first day (fig. 21). But the second day the women could not endure the tension of the steady beat of the shamanic drumming another day. Jan instead played music influenced by shamanic drumming, which the Kårkulla women agreed was more calming.



Figure 24.
The color palette of the women at Kårkulla was noticeably different from the color palette of the students in Singapore. The students work consisted of greys, blues, blacks, and dark reds. Many of the Kårkulla women used pure color. (Photograph's courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 25.

Collaboration over SKYPE (Perhaps communications instead of SKYPE?)

My student assistant, back in Singapore kept in touch via text message while I was in Finland, before the SKYPE dates. He informed me that after learning of the community we

were collaborating with in Finland – people with disabilities and needing assisted living – my students did not know what to anticipate about the coming SKYPE session. Some of the students thought it could be very depressing to meet this community.

The first day we connected with the painting students we were using a laptop. It was small but we could see all the students in a group, on stools, looking at the screen. The students could not see the whole group of Kårkulla women at once. I held the laptop and we came around the room speaking to each woman. The women explained the process that drove them to create each painting. Although their written statements about their work was self-assured, the students looked very shy, possible even scared. They said very little if anything when we held up their paintings. The body language showed everyone sitting up straight, without talking. Much to the shock of Jan and I, many of the Kårkulla women stood up and spoke in English! Before this happened, Jan and I were not aware that they were multi-lingual! They impressed us more with the confidence in which they spoke about their work. On the other hand, the painting students did not stand when I addressed their work and needed to be coaxed to speak.



Figure 26.
The women are asking NTU students questions about their paintings. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 27.
The women are asking NTU students questions about their paintings. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 28. Kårkulla Women explaining their work to the NTU students. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 29.

A Second Online Communication

The second meeting was with the engineering students. We were ready with a large screen in a separate room with all the women sitting with their paintings in front of them. The students again looked stiff and very unsure of themselves. No one was answering me. They stared into the screen at us. It being their second meeting, the women were ready. They were anxious to talk about their work each one trying to steal the show from the other. All of the students were sitting straight up on the stool in comparison the women, who were all sorts of shapes, ages, and hair color. The students kept staring. The women competed for attention. I gave a little introduction and they began. Hanna spoke first, about moving her body to the rhythm of the beat. Jenny Marie Lundstrom spoke second. She had a bright green square painting that through the center she scratched the jagged line recognized to symbolize a heart beat on an electrocardiograph or heart monitor. She says one sentence *“this is a heart beat to life or die.”* Jan expanded on Jenny Marie’s interpretation equating the drumbeat with the heartbeat, an involuntary body movements. He described the heartbeat as a tunnel from

the physical space to a shamanistic space and Jenny Marie’s painting depicting this transitional space. Jan’s interests lie in making connections, not focusing on the transformation of preconceived ideas we all hold of social stigma, as I am. He makes connections by seeing and interpreting ancient archetypal forms in present imagery. He opens historic lineage, connecting the present maker to the ancient past. The ancient signification of the forms, are reinterpreted as identifying the character of the maker. The maker then feeling a connection and belonging. In the context of working with people with disabilities, I am interested in transforming perceptions of being identified by and of the disability, to that of a maker and an artist. Jan enriches identity by bringing into view core attributes of the maker’s inner being in relation to ancient heritage. He saw this as especially pertinent for the women at Kårkulla because they are different, because of the types of assistance they need in their lives, and they are Swedish / Finnish not pure Finnish. The Swedish / Finnish are a minority in Finland.

Each of the engineering students came up to the front of their room to speak about their work. The students clapped in applause after each one of the women spoke. It was a vibrant exchange. The women were still a much more lively group than the students, testifying to the inspiration and commitment to their work.



Figure 30.



Figure 31.



Figure 32.

Fig. 34 shows how we looked on the screen to the students. I’m assisting Hanna in getting her painting in front of the screen. Fig. 35 shows the students beginning to smile as the women spoke. Then the excitement got to be contagious and the students clapped for each of the women. (Photograph’s courtesy of Vishaka Mantri)

As the session went on the women's enthusiasm mounted and the students became more animated.



Figure 33. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 34. (Photograph courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 35. Here we are.
(Photo: Katja Juhola)

My observations were that the students were amazed at the abilities of the women who are labelled as disabled. I had not told them much about the women except for the fact that many of them had Down Syndrome. Anxiously, I waited to speak with the students to hear their reactions first-hand to the women and their work when I returned to Singapore.

The Exhibition



Figure 36.



Figure 37.



Figure 38.

The tee-pee is the work of another ISEAS group. NTU students and Kärkulla Women's work are displayed on all the walls. (Photograph's courtesy of Joan Kelly)



Figure 39.

Conclusions: Responses from Singapore

Upon my return home to Singapore I immediately gathered the students together to discuss their responses to the exchange with the women from Kårkulla. When asking what is your first response to the women and their work? The first word uttered was “*amazing*”. The women are amazing. The second response was, “*we should be more like them*”. What was it, exactly, about the women that they thought they should be more like? They were impressed with the way the women could let their whole selves go, even their bodies were involved in the drumming.

The engineering students noted that many of them drew representation images, where the women drew lines and forms that evoked feelings. I asked them why they thought that was. Their first response was that the cultures are different and the Singapore culture is very “*materialistic*”. “We associate things with objects.”

Another student began to explain, “in Singapore there is only one option, like primary school, secondary school . . . everywhere else there are other options such as home school, private school, you have options. In Singapore, there is just one path, instead of any other way.”

The students came to a conclusion that it is the cultural differences that made the two groups respond so differently. We discussed the effects of living in the urban environment as opposed to how they feel when trekking in nature. Only one student had gone trekking in his lifetime and that was in Hong Kong not far from the urban center. This student said he felt more “*connected with himself*” when he was in nature. One of the painting students commented that she thought it was going to be *depressing to meet disabled people*, but that by actually meeting them they were very surprised because the women “*are having more fun than we are*”.

I asked the students how they felt about learning from women living with assistance and with disabilities. The ones that spoke up said they were very surprised and that they enjoyed getting to know the women. They liked the color of the women’s paintings. It is important for the students to reach their own conclusions. They need to reflect upon their own experience. This way it will be a significant and enduring experience that will change future behaviour and perceptions. A final testament to the success of this collaboration was my evaluation scores from the students in both classes, that were overwhelmingly positive.

Responses from Kårkulla

Jan and I sat around a table to hold a reflective discussion with the counselors at *Kårkulla*. They brought it to our attention that among the group there was a woman who has been depressed and therefore not participating for several weeks, yet during this project she participated fully making a bright colourful painting. They wanted us to know that the women are not usually so aggressively vying for attention. They felt the women were very eager to show their work and felt empowered by the realization that they were teaching the university students. All the counselors agreed that this was a positive experience for the women. They noted that the experience gave the women an opportunity to be assertive and self-assured getting the full attention of everyone when they spoke.

From the point of view of teaching the students, we discovered ways the university students can learn from women with a variety of disabilities. The students perception of someone with disabilities was changed for the positive. They realized their lack of confidence in their own voice and grasped the importance of trusting this voice from within. They took a look at the idea that there are a lot of differences between what people value in life.

Hanna Grandell wrote a text message to Katja Juhola director of ISEAS after our collaboration. Most importantly, Hanna acknowledges the value of exchanges and collaborations between communities. She writes:

*This project is very important because now it can be seen that everything is not so black and white. Even though some people have problems in their daily life and have to live in a house with help they can still create art. Even though there are different languages with art you don’t need to share a language. This helps to remove boundaries between people.*²³

²³ See her full text in this publication, p. 44.

I have had several women friend me on Facebook and Instagram. Two of the women, Hanna and Andrea, have been carrying on conversations about my students, offering ideas to me as to how to stimulate the students' confidence and sense of freedom in the future. Several of the women asked if we can continue this collaboration. I think we can have another exchange later this semester. I could give each community the same theme from which to make a piece of art about, such as asking the question: What does home mean to you? Something as simple as that could be very insightful transporting my drawing and painting classes into a sociological investigation.

It was indeed a rich experience adding a sociological complexity to a beginning painting and drawing course. I look forward to creating new opportunities similar to this inspired by this experience.

Sustaining Connections

Since this collaboration I have not yet been able to add an exchange to my class syllabus immediately. I will be looking for opportunities for this. Jan has been at Kårkulla twice a week for another four weeks. He did a project titled The Cosmic Tree. Jan spotted a massive cherry tree that had fallen in the forest. He brought these massive ten foot branches in to the Kårkulla workspace. With a light weight paper mache the women sculpted small animals of their choice and hung them on the tree. These animals signified their animal nature. Jan then presented the pictographic script of the ancient Nortic Runes, a language spoken by Germanic-speaking peoples which Jan can read. Each woman chose a symbol and Jan told them the meaning of the symbol they chose. For example one woman chose a symbol of an archers bow. Jan explained to her that this signified the ability to know things that will happen in advance. Each woman sculpted the pictographic symbol they choose and hung it on the tree. They placed the tree on display in the window of the center. Jan made another digital date with me while working at Kårkulla this time with Facebook Messenger. I was able to see their work and say hello to the women.

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Constructivity and Restitution: A Reflective Essay on Socially Engaged Art and ISEAS Finland

Clarice Zdanski

Preface

The following guiding principles have informed this paper:

- “Visto da vicino nessuno è normale – Close up, no one is normal”, a quote attributed to Franco Basaglia, the controversial founder of Democratic Psychiatry;
- ‘constructivity’, not in the mathematical sense, but a borrowing from the Italian word *costruttività*, or being constructive, in a figurative sense, or the desire to put ideas into practice, in a positive spirit of collaboration;
- ‘restitution’, or taking and giving back, inspired by one of ISEAS’s video crew, Denis Gorenc, who saw his task at the symposium as one of ‘restitution’;
- ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern’ – William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*;
- ‘Imagination and memory are the only way I can escape my diving bell’ – Jean Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*;
- ‘The door to the invisible must be visible’ – René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*.

In this subjective, narrative account, they are the threads which ramble back and forth amidst the infinite questioning that took place within myself while I was at the symposium, and that continues today.

ISEAS Finland

When Katja Juhola invited me to take part in ISEAS Finland – Finland’s first socially engaged art symposium, I was eager to accept. I took part in this symposium for these reasons: to do a socially engaged art project, preferably on an international level; to increase my practical knowledge and personal acquaintances/friendships among artists, especially socially engaged or ‘sustainable’ artists; to further develop my own interest as an art educator in contexts where I might take students to study during my travel seminars in studio art, like ‘Sustainability and Art in Europe’ or ‘Sustaining the Arts in Umbria’, where a period of residence and collaborative effort on a shared project are essential to the creative process. After a bit of wrangling with the university where I teach (the symposium coincided with the fall semester’s first week of class), I managed to get approval to go. I’d envisioned a project for a community ‘patchwork quilt of drawings’, songs and tales that would grow out of prolonged engagement – days of drawing and singing and telling tales – in what I had imagined as a community center type of situation, where members of all age groups could come together and benefit from my experience as an art instructor by sitting in on drawing lessons. If they did not want to do the lessons, they could draw on their own, or just simply stay together and whatever came out of that experience would be assembled into a work of art of some sorts, to be installed/performed in a public place.¹ For organizational reasons, the project was modified various times, so that in the end I found myself working as executor of a project that was not totally of my own devising, and with three other artists rather than just one.

¹ The original project was to be entitled ‘(S)CONCERTO - (DIS)CONCERT: A DRAWING QUILTING BEE: SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART INVOLVING DRAWING.



Photos: Fabio Cito



Photos: Katja Juhola

After a great deal of shapeshifting, the project we four artists were assigned would produce a teepee to symbolize togetherness, unity and the principle of ‘no one excluded’. Branches of wood from the forest would be used as supports draped with old sheets that we and the residents of the halfway houses we worked with, Rosinne and Karkimaa, would paint together. A spontaneous second project, a ‘Tree of Joy’ or a ‘Tree of Hope’, was also produced by the Rosinne group. Residents painted a tree that one of them had chopped down, and decorated it with small modeled objects that they had made and with ribbons where they had written their wishes for happiness. At the end of the symposium, all works produced would be on display for a month at a local gallery. Something of the storytelling and community experience of my original idea remained, but the modified project was rather different from what I had imagined, mainly in terms of the participants we would be working with. Looking back on those days at Raseborg, Franco Basaglia’s words – *Close up, no one is normal* – come to mind, because they are so richly resonant with the many feelings that I experienced and the many questions that emerged as three artists and I worked on a twin project at two different institutions in the Raseborg area, Rosinne, a halfway house for adults with psychic challenges, and Karkimaa, a country residence for adults with more complex assisted living needs.

The project presented immense challenges for us artists on many levels. The first and most immediate were logistical: communication amongst ourselves and visualization of the art work. Our team consisted of Pipa Nikula, a photographer from Finland, Vittorio Tonon, a painter and sculptor from Italy, and Evrim Ozeskici, a painter from Turkey. Pipa did double duty as she was Finnish, and served as our interpreter for the Swedish or Finnish-speaking Rosinne and Karkimaa residents who did not all speak English. For that matter, we faced a few communication problems of our own as Vittorio and Evrim did not speak English very well. I was worried about how we would communicate amongst ourselves, let alone how we were going to communicate with the residents of the centers, but in the end this problem resolved itself. Once we started working, the magic of art took over and words somehow did not seem to be so important. This was the beauty of the project. As for visualizing the final work of art, this hung over our heads like a sword of Damocles,

first of all because none of us had designed the project, so had been relegated to the role of mere executor of someone else's idea. Of course, this is an age-old way of working – artists have always been commissioned to create works largely dictated by the wishes of their patrons – but the problems we faced were compounded by the fact that we had never seen the gallery where the final exhibition would be held. Moreover, we had no idea as to what our materials would be, nor what the dimensions of the work were supposed to be. In short, we knew none of the basic things that any artist wants to know before getting down to work. Thus, various tensions emerged almost immediately and reappeared at times during the workshops as the four of us tried to reconcile our different ideas about how to implement a project whose final form we could not envision.

Coming to terms with the nature of socially engaged art also put us to the test. How do you determine and assess the level of social engagement in a project? How do you resolve the conflict between social utility and benefits to users on the one hand and the aesthetic aims of art, the quality of the art product and the personality of the artist on the other?² Our project was emblematic of this conflict. Reconciling different ideas about how to implement the project was no easy task. Pipa, a photographer and therapist, approached it with the benefits for the participants as her main concern. She was more involved in storytelling and getting the residents to express their hopes and desires, and also had the advantage of being able to talk freely with all of them as they spoke the same language. I felt as though my other two partners, both practicing painters, had instead set 'Art with a capital A', as their focus – that is to say, what the overall theme to give to the painted sheets should be, how to organize the composition, how to put the paint on the surface, etc., almost as if we were conducting an art class. As for myself, before I even arrived at the symposium, I'd realized that focusing on the finished project was not necessarily going to work – that the persona of the artist was not important. In such projects, the artist acts as

² For a concise overview of issues involved in evaluating socially engaged art projects, see Jan Cohen-Cruz, 'The Imagination and Beyond: Toward a Method of Evaluating Socially Engaged Art,' available at <https://artisticactivism.org/2016/02/how-do-you-measure-the-impact-of-socially-engaged-art/>.

a mediator, an enabler, a vehicle. In fact, once we'd got started, I sometimes felt as though all of us artists were not necessarily on the same wavelength, and this was disconcerting.

Visto da vicino nessuno è normale – Close up, no one is normal. Upon arriving at Rosinne, as we were taken to the spaces where art materials were kept and shown what our materials would be, I carefully observed my working environment, and was struck by a strange sensation that I, an intruder, was upsetting a world order or that I indeed was the



Photo: Katja Juhola



Photo: Katja Juhola

one who was not normal. Doubts about the project set in, as did doubts about myself, about art, about what I'm doing in the world. This painful process, however, gave way to a profound meditation on the nature of art education and art as social practice – on society's need for the artist's work in everyday life in general. Period. Not only among the physically and psychically challenged, but among everyone.

The impact of working with the two institutions, Rosinne and Karkimaa, brought up two sets of questions that I inevitably link back up with my own work as an art educator. First and foremost, 'Who benefits from SEA?' And then, 'Can art save the world, and how?' Of course I will not even attempt to answer these questions in the limited space available to me in this paper, but I will try to share some preliminary reflections.

I. Who Benefits from Socially Engaged Art?

Should SEA try to help only people with 'documented' handicaps or disabilities, or with people who are institutionalized, or who have some kind of problem with society? How to proceed?

ISEAS Finland³ dealt with a wide variety of social interventions, which is what made the project so interesting: senior citizens' centers, schools, centers for disturbed youth – all benefited from the art projects that were carried out on their premises. In retrospect (and perhaps in any event), I ask myself if the idea of socially engaged art cannot be extended to simply raising awareness of the need for art among 'normal' people. This question opens up two paths for the artist: how to work with inmates or residents of limited-access social institutions (halfway houses, prisons, hospices); how to implement social action as community action and in the curriculum of art departments.

What happens to the artistic experience? Should the artist's persona, aesthetic concerns, and respect for artistic/craft processes be subordinate to community building?

Jan Cohen-Cruz's opening comments to his essay on evaluating socially engaged art provide a useful description as to what socially engaged art is:

³ <https://iseasfinland.com/>

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...art that aspires to affect, rather than be about, the social issue it addresses. It is about artists who create a process, environment, or event that they put directly into social situations, unconstrained by the parameters of galleries and performance spaces. I have been zealous in wanting such art to be more valued than it typically is, and to be held to criteria that fit its purposes rather than to purely formal or financial metrics of art, yet such art is tricky to evaluate. Indeed, it is often difficult to recognize as art. It is less about an object than a relationship, and rather than intended as a complete manifestation of an artist's imagination, it is purposely incomplete, requiring social interaction to reach fullness.⁴

Working at the Rosinne and Karkimaa projects was exhilarating while we were at work, but stressful because pressure was on us to produce something that would be worth seeing in a gallery. Much of the residents' art work was guided by us or even traced onto the sheets as designs for the participants to fill in with paint. In fact, at Karkimaa, much of my time was even spent loading paintbrushes for participants who had difficulty doing so themselves. I was happy to do this but felt that the exhibit – the art-world-oriented final goal – was at odds with the creation of a sense of well-being among the residents there. Moreover, the idea of building a relationship ('constructivity', which I will return to later as a criterion to be considered in evaluating socially engaged art) over time remains a great unknown. A strong bond was created between ourselves and the participants, but given the kilometers that separate them from Vittorio, Evrim, and me, we cannot know if that bond will remain over time.

Fortunately, the final 'artistic' results of these projects – what Claire Bishop calls 'the visual and conceptual rewards'⁵ – were well worth looking at, but we three painters had little to do with the final installation, and when we went to the opening, we were as surprised

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, New York: Verso, 2012, 245-246.

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as the Rosinne and Karkimaa participants who were able to attend the exhibition opening. In a project in which the dominant goal was the production of a dynamic experience for participants, the production of complex artistic forms also emerged, but the final works were heavily guided by the overriding concerns to have the participants produce 'something artistic'.

What about the finished product? Should museums and galleries make discursive and dialogic products a part of their exhibition program?

Indeed, what about it? Those participants who were able to attend the opening at the end of the symposium were delighted that their works shown in a gallery setting and appreciated by those who attended. Likewise, they expressed a sense of fulfillment at seeing their project encapsulated in a finished product. Hence, from the outset, could we not also think of formulating socially engaged art projects with a high level of 'visual and conceptual rewards', where artists are willing to put their skills at the service of a higher aim, and where their own personality is subordinate to the final, collective product, passing on their greater knowledge of artistic techniques and materials to participants?

Artists and instructors have much to share. Museums, galleries, and similar institutions can make discursive and dialogic products a part of their exhibition program. Over the past three years, I have implemented art education projects through my studio-art travel seminars at the university where I teach, Franklin University Switzerland.⁶ As I write this, I have just completed one of these courses, which marks the tenth year of my collaboration with a local bed and breakfast/art center, La Fratta Art House,⁷ in the context of these travel seminars in studio art at Franklin University.

I discovered the Art House in 2007, when I had to bring some paintings to an exhibition near Umbertide, and needed a place to stay for a few nights. Once I got there,

⁶ <https://www.fus.edu/study-abroad/academic-travel-program>

⁷ <https://www.corsiceramica.it/en/>

I thought the Art House might be a good place to ‘make a class operate like a work of art’.⁸ Ten years have passed since I brought the first group from Franklin to La Fratta in a one-credit course focusing on the region of Umbria, ‘Making and Studying Art in the Heart of Italy’. Over the years, the aims of that course have given birth to many summer travel seminars in Umbria, and since 2014, La Fratta has hosted my students to carry out the main project of a three-credit course on ceramics that also takes them to Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy. Travel is crucial to the course, not only because of the significance of the places we visit to the history of art and the history of ceramics (Faenza, Assisi, Florence in 2018), but more importantly because of the idea of the artistic process as an inner voyage. Not only are new regions of the world discovered and explored – so are new regions of the self and one’s place in the world. During the central part of the trip, five to six days at La Fratta in a sort of symposium or art residence, the group works on a thematic project. Since 2015, local institutions, the University of Perugia’s Galleria di Storia Naturale (Natural History Gallery) in Casalina (PG) and the Museo Dinamico del Laterizio e delle Terracotte (Brick and Terracotta Museum) in Marsciano (PG) have hosted us for short exhibitions of the students’ creations.⁹

In these courses, students gain firsthand experience with the creative process in a traditional sense, from the artist’s *primo pensiero* to its complete realization in the finished work of art, with an exhibition and exhibition literature. Moreover, in visiting important monuments and art collections, they see how the nature of learning to make art works has changed from Giotto’s time to the latter half of the twentieth century and down to our own day. In the intense period when the group produces the project, they must also learn to live and work together among individuals and to live by the rhythms that the artistic

⁸ Félix Guattari, ‘The Ecosophic Object’, in *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, translated by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995; see also Bishop, ‘Aesthetic Education’, in *Artificial Hells*, 241–274.

⁹ <http://www.cams.unipg.it/musei-orti/galleria-di-storia-naturale>; <http://www.sistemamuseo.it/ita/2/musei/56/marsciano-umbria-museo-dinamico-del-laterizio-e-delle-terrecotte-di-marsciano-palazzo-pietromarchi/>

processes and techniques require – not an easy task for students who in many cases are approaching artistic creation for the first time.

The course, entitled *Studies in Ceramics: Northern and Central Italy*, is designed to introduce students to basic hand-building techniques (pinching, coils, slabs, press molds), various types of glazes and coloring techniques (majolica, raku, luster, patinas) and places of importance in the history of art, ceramics, and ceramics production in Italy (Faenza, Marsciano, Florence). A shift from functional to sculptural occurs while working on the project at La Fratta. Once back in Lugano, the course concludes with a final sculptural project.

The success of these projects indicates that, with a great deal of planning, the ‘constraints’ of exhibition and/or performance spaces can be turned to a project’s advantage.



Photos: Katja Juhola

Luca and I usually begin brainstorming for a project months before the course begins. After the first years of experimentation, we opted for thematic projects in which each individual produced an art work that could be appreciated as such in its own right, but that would acquire fuller meaning when inserted into a collective art work produced by the group, thus adding a powerful social-experiment impetus to the course. Throughout the years, many projects have been carried out: Land Art 2010; Interventions 2011; Cities – spring semester 2012; Tower of Babel – interim 2012; Planets – spring 2013; Religions – interim 2013; Eclectic Autumn: Masks – fall 2014; Anatomical Dreamcatcher – summer 2015; A Bestiary in Masks – fall 2015; Message in a Bottle/Message in a Bowl – summer 2016; Tales of Metamorphoses – spring 2017. In the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2017, exhibitions of the works were organized in conjunction with the University of Perugia's Galleria di Storia Naturale in Casalina. In 2015, students studied medieval bestiaries, masks, the history of zoology and taxidermy, the biographies of famous natural historians like Charles Darwin and his contemporary and founder of the Perugia museum, Orazio Antinori, and principles of facial alignment in a transhistorical project that contemplated the fate of man and nature in the Age of the Anthropocene. For the following edition of the course, we worked with the same museum, but used the collections as inspiration for zoomorphic vessels inspired by myths and tales of metamorphoses from all world cultures. Most recently, we were hosted by the Museo Dinamico del Laterizio e delle Terracotte in Marsciano for Inside – Outside, where the participants' ideal stories are told on the inside of one bowl and the outside of another. Each individual's pair of bowls can be appreciated as a work of art in its own right, yet each contributes to a harmonious, yet diversified whole. Through art we discover the world and come to know each other better; through our relationships, we discover ourselves, each other and other parts of the world – inside and outside, hence there is also a pronounced element of social experiment in these projects. At ISEAS, too, living together and collaborating on a shared project was a key element to the symposium's success. Such projects need not be confined to the university or to the schools. Why shouldn't artists – or museums or city cultural officers for that matter – put forward such intellectually stimulating projects for the general public? Why not make 'visual and con-

ceptual rewards' a priority in creating socially engaged art?

Therefore, in creating projects of this sort, I identify with the aims set forth by Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells*: to train a new generation of artists (but why only artists?) to deal self-reflexively with their own art works and Western/world art tradition; to train students not just to make art but to experience and formulate a civil society; to apply the criteria of experimental education and of artistic projects.¹⁰ The art projects described above have met with great satisfaction on the part of the institutions and their users. However, they require intense effort and emotional commitment from the instructor/artist. How effective they are among the students who produce the works will remain to be seen. Again, as Bishop points out, 'One of the first questions that tends to be raised in relation to pedagogic art projects concerns the composition of the student body.'¹¹ The students in these seminars do not always enroll because they are interested in ceramics or in Italy, but because they need the course for core requirements. It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that not all students are artistically engaged, results of some sort are always obtained, and everybody learns something new in the process. Traveling with students, I am not just their teacher, but also a guest and collaborator with other artists, so it is enjoyable to relinquish my normal role for an instant as I, too, participate in a project that is not wholly of my own designing. Again, as at Rosinne and Karkimaa, a period of self-questioning and transformation; the miracle of art again takes place.

My experience as an art instructor bears comparison with Joan Kelly's, another contributor in this publication.¹² As an artist, art historian, art educator and professor at a university dedicated to the importance of visual arts to an education in the liberal arts, I feel that space for the dialogic, for communication, for democracy in the teacher/student relationship must exist. However, art involves learning techniques; embracing a LOVE OF WORK and the meditative state that concentrated work induces must occupy a place of

¹⁰ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 246–248.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹² *Sopra or sotto*, pp 88–123.

central importance. I see my work as an art instructor as socially engaged, but there is a difference in my university work and the projects we carried out at Rosinne and Karkimaa. Every individual's creative urge – whether the individual be considered 'normal' or not – is an overriding, primary concern in all situations. However, I see it as a pretext, a part of our human nature. I take for granted, and do not confuse it with the manual skills or knowledge of processes and materials that have to be taught. There is nothing democratic about measurements, recipes, materials, and the like. With clay modeling and ceramics, the first lesson begins with the humble material of clay.

Many of the concerns in a setting with a primarily socially engaged emphasis emerge as collateral benefits in the university setting. That is to say, when working at Rosinne and Karkimaa, Vittorio, Evrim and I were not concerned at all about teaching the residents about different ways of applying paint to different supports, or to how artists have done this over the centuries. We were mainly concerned with placing artistic procedures at their service so that they might experience a greater sense of self-fulfillment through the completion of an art project that would be shown in an art gallery. In the university studio art course setting, a whole host of different considerations come into play: does my course 'match' those of other universities? Does it respect commonly held notions (if we can speak of such nowadays) of what a particular medium, discipline or body of knowledge is? If not, what does that say about the discipline in question and what can be done about it? These commonly held notions associated with a particular body of knowledge must be passed on to the student, who will then make them his or her own and in doing so take responsibility for that discipline. This sort of concern does not necessarily emerge in a situation/event/happening/project that uses art as a vehicle/agent/cure.

The question of assuming responsibility for the subject/area of knowledge is also important, as is the question of restitution – of taking and giving back – and maybe even the concept of a *contract*: in registering for a university course, somewhere it should be understood that the student (like the teacher) is willing to acknowledge or accept his or her own ignorance (or at least the limits of his/her own knowledge/experience) of a greater whole or body of knowledge that he/she must submit to.

What about art as 'cultural volunteering' – awakening people to the need to make a place for all forms of art in society? Does one have to be a professional artist to do it? Is there room for the 'professional artist' in today's society? What happens to Beuys's idea that everyone is an artist, then? Why even have art?

Perhaps we need to do more in all realms of society, that is, to seek:

...a cultural framework ...whose aim should be to enrich the lives of all citizens in many different ways... Communities need access to, and facility with, the tools that come with arts practice in order to find meaningful ways to express their values. Actively involving communities in arts practice (as against product consumption) is the essential starting point to the exercise of generating community-owned expressions of what matters to them.¹³

'What matters to them', indeed. There is no culture unless communities make a conscious effort to preserve symbolic and effective expression of what is meaningful to them, of their values, of what they wish to achieve; there is no culture unless creative capacities – arts skills, including everything from classical music to carpentry – are nurtured and developed. Socially engaged art must reach all levels of society, and everyone – not just experts or artists, and not just the socially disadvantaged:

Yes, it is wonderful to live in a society in which those who choose to devote their entire lives to art are cherished and respected. But this should not diminish our own confidence in making meaning, it should not allow us to become lazy, embarrassed, passive witnesses, silent consumers, mere customers. The new rhetoric is 'engagement' – the first engagement we should have is with arts practice.¹⁴

¹³ John Hawkes, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning*, Foreword by David Yencken, (n.p.): Common Ground/Cultural Development Network Victoria, 2001, iii, 24.

¹⁴ Hawkes, *Ibid*, 24.

Social engagement is a means to safeguard that aspect of ourselves that makes us human: art. It is not just that everyone is an artist, as Beuys maintained: the very urge to make art is what has created our world.¹⁵ After all, our hands, which have enabled us to build and create the most fundamental necessities for life, are what distinguish us from other creatures, and manual activity is an important part of brain development.¹⁶ Art teaches the value of work, from the initial concept, through all phases of production, to experimentation, refinement and perfection. It teaches respect for process and materials; it requires an enormous presence of mind to constantly observe, to be willing to make mistakes and to learn from them. It requires humility, the ability to succumb to the dictates of process and to the properties of the materials we work with. As a creative activity, it frees us from the trap of rote learning. The artistic project, like life, is unpredictable. There might not be a correct answer, and if you repeat a project, you might not get the same results. Respect for work and processes is also valuable for understanding where there is room for creativity, spontaneity and experimentation, and where there is not.

Contemplating the dimension of social engagement in art has led me to a profound meditation on the nature of art, work and life. Until a few centuries ago, 'art' work was a vital necessity, especially 'minor' or 'applied' arts like ceramics, which produced vessels for fetching and storing water, for cooking, eating, drinking, bathing and transporting merchandise, for prayer and ritual. Today's complex economic crises have in part been caused by a crisis in our conception of work. If there is not enough work for everyone, or if it is no longer necessary for everyone to work, what are we supposed to do with ourselves? If we no longer know how to make or do anything, what will become of us?

¹⁵ See also the fascinating theories of Nigel Spivey, *How Art Made the World: A Journey to the Origins of Human Creativity*, BBC Books, 2005.

¹⁶ Frank R. Wilson, *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, (n.p.): Pantheon Books, 1998.

What about new outlets for art education and choices of career paths? Outside the academy setting, art can be inserted in 'normal' school and university curricula. Concerns (benefits) on the students' end are not so different from those of people with handicaps. Maybe we all live in a sick world where we all suffer from a lacking inner dimension. Maybe everybody could benefit from an artist or art educator who helps to explore creative urges.

At ISEAS, after our opening at the local gallery in Raseborg, the artists and the participants in the three projects exhibited there gathered to discuss the week's developments. We were asked to sum up in one word what the symposium had meant to each of us. I have already referred to mine above: *constructivity*, using the word as it is used in Italian (*costruttività* means the ability to produce something, industriousness, concreteness, or the will to put ideas and proposals into practice). I have also mentioned the word of a member of our film crew, Denis Gonec: *restitution*, or giving back. After taking in so much during the week of intense activity, our work as artists was to give something back. Finally, one of the staff members of one of the institutions – Karkimaa I think – did not just have one word, but she said something that was crucial to setting up any kind of collaboration between artists and institutions. She said that doing 'creative' things is rejuvenating, and that they as staff welcome the idea with open arms, also because their work is so often bound to routine tasks like emptying the bedpans and checking the lab sheets of the patients and residents. The artist in the institution brings in something new. These words/ideas should be added to any scheme for evaluating socially engaged art projects.

To go back to *constructivity*: construction was taking place on various levels. The ISEAS symposium was important for constructing a network of relationships, establishing contacts and forging relations with various local institutions. In some cases, it raised awareness for the need to be more attentive to art programs within their structures. ISEAS also clearly shows how much construction still needs to be done in the field of art education everywhere. The field of social action should be included as part of traditional studio art training, as a viable new career path in an era when the artist has no recognized social

status¹⁷, and when much of the manual training of artists is being relegated to machines or computers. Social policy and social action are beginning to appear in university curricula as an option for interdisciplinary courses of study, including my university's Sustainability and Social Justice major, which also includes studio-art travel seminars like my *Sustainability and Art in Europe* and *Sustaining the Arts in Umbria*.¹⁸ I consider myself primarily a maker, but recognize the need to incorporate studio art as a means of academic expression and, in my courses, I try to work both ways: encouraging students to implement social action and studio art projects across the curriculum, and increasing the academic content of the studio work, that is to say, helping students with writing and creating presentations about their work.¹⁹ Finally, much construction is done in establishing contacts, friendships and working relationships with other artists. Here Denis's wonderful word *restitution* is fundamental – somehow whatever you do must be a sort of giving back. So is Claire Bishop's concept of Aesthetic Education:

... everyone can learn something from these projects: it allows specific instances to become generalisable, establishing a relationship between particular and universal that is far more

17 'There are no universally agreed definitions of what constitutes a professional artist or what employment status that artist may hold. While some artists are employed in the traditional sense, most are not and many work on a temporary or irregular basis, and there is no common understanding of what constitutes being self-employed, a freelancer or an independent contractor. Additionally, in the current survey, some respondents chose to report only for a narrow range of artists, such as visual artists.' See Gary Neil, 'Full Analytic Report (2015) on the implementation of the UNESCO 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist'. https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/analytic-report_g-neil_sept2015.pdf, 49.

18 Randy Kennedy, 'Outside the Citadel, Social Practice Art is Intended to Nurture,' *The New York Times*, 30 March 2013. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/24/arts/design/outside-the-citadel-social-practice-art-is-intended-to-nurture.html>.

19 Another aspect emphasized by Cohen-Cruz: 'I would be remiss not to mention a criterion for the evaluator: writing in a way that is accessible to everyone who has been part of the project, whatever their profession or education. Theorists sometimes undervalue such writing but accessibility and depth of thought are not mutually exclusive.' <https://artisticactivism.org/2016/02/how-do-you-measure-the-impact-of-socially-engaged-art/>

*generative than the model of exemplary ethical gesture... the aesthetic state is merely a path to moral education, rather than an end in itself.*²⁰

This leads to my second set of questions: Can art save the world, and how?

2. Can Art Save the World, and How?

By opening up the infinite inner universe to people in physically confined spaces

'Imagination and memory are the only way I can escape my diving bell'
Jean Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*²¹

'The door to the invisible must be visible'
René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*²²

One of the most poignant realizations I had while working with the residents at Rosinne and Karkimaa was how important the artistic dimension is as a release, an escape – as transport to another realm – for people whose movements are restricted. I do not have a great deal of experience with working in institutions like these, but first grasped how important this might be with the experience of one of my closest friends in hospice for the final months of his life. After two harrowing years of preparation for a liver transplant, the cancer had spread and he was taken off the transplant list in a very cruel manner. He tried

20 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 272

21 Dudzinski D. The diving bell meets the butterfly: identity lost and re-membered? *Theor Med Bioeth* 2001;22(1):33-46; Phipps R. A view from the inside: The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. *J Head Trauma Rehabil* 1999;14(1):89-90.

22 René Daumal, *Mount Analogue: a Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing*, Boston: Shambhala, 1992, 14.

courageously to live a 'normal' life, but after two episodes with falling into a comatose state, he realized that he could no longer take care of himself. He was a person who did not bear solitude well, and despite a pretty continuous stream of friends who went to see him, he found himself alone on 1 November, All Saints' Day, an important Italian holiday. When he called me, his voice broken with sobs, I went immediately.

Niki was a tremendously creative person, but was having problems getting started on some creative projects he'd been thinking about. When I got there that day, he was inconsolable, and continued to sob his heart out. I realized I'd have to help him somehow or I, too, would be in the same state. So art came to the rescue. In a corner, he'd piled up a pair of zebra skin high heels and some other things that he wanted to do a painting with. We took some colored pencils and paper, went down into the hospice courtyard, which was pleasant enough in the cold but sunny weather, and I taught him how to make thumbnail sketches so that he could get his ideas out in tangible form. I made him some little templates, leaving spaces where the soles of the shoes would be attached to the painted panel, so that he could experiment with different backgrounds. It didn't take long. A few colors, getting out a few ideas, and the sobbing stopped. The beauty of the scene – the afflicted man becoming absorbed in his creation, haloed against the setting sun – still moves me today. Like an epiphany, it fills me with joy even now as I write this. Within a few days, Niki had finished the shoe picture, and started others. He finished several more works of art before he died two months later.

I also saw this process at work during our projects at ISEAS Finland, especially for the people at Karkimaa, who faced more limiting physical conditions than the residents of Rosinne. Many diversely able people or people with terminal illnesses, or people confined to a restricted environment for whatever reason – wheelchair, hospital room, assisted living facility, prison – can benefit from the voyage into themselves, into the universe that is art. This process and this dimension is what we should be aiming for in projects of this sort.

Making inroads into our overpopulated yet impoverished inner dimension. Closed in our narrow senses five, as William Blake might have put it, humanity loses touch with manuality, physicality, and the senses

'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern'
William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

I have described my work as an art educator at great length above, so I will not re-elaborate that material here. Suffice it to say – as I did above – that there is no reason why the types of project soliciting the involvement and cooperation of art institutions (museums, galleries, concert halls, etc.) and participants making art or engaged in performance need not be confined to the university or to the schools. Artists, museums, city cultural officers, directors of foundations – everyone should combine their efforts to put forward such intellectually stimulating cultural and socially engaged projects for the general public with a high priority placed on 'visual and conceptual rewards'. In a world where our senses are being more and more hemmed in by the 'diving bell' of telecommunications, art – by exploring the dimension of our imagination and our memory – will give us a glimpse into infinity. And with a sense of urgency (if not emergency)²³, artists will reveal that their principal task is to remind us that we have a soul.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, I am delighted at having had the opportunity to participate in the ISEAS Finland symposium, mainly because it has plotted out further directions for plans of new courses of action in the cultural and artistic sphere in addition to the ones I am already involved in as an art educator and artist. If ISEAS cannot be repeated every year, it should recur with a frequency that permits continuity. It is especially important for the participants in the workshops to be able to establish lasting relationships with artists so that they

²³ See the very interesting discussions in Santiago Zabala, *Why Only Art Can Save Us – Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency*, New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2017..

can experience meaningful visual communication and deeper satisfaction in creating art. Katja Juhola has cast her nets in very vast waters and brought in quite a miraculous catch. The miracle is that a model for the socially engaged art symposium has been developed, consisting in providing a panorama of this multifarious area of research and launching a call to all artists to include social engagement in their agendas. In an era when many might question the aims and ends of contemporary art, the message that comes through is very profound: art can play a very important role in society; it can transcend physical barriers and enable people to communicate on multiple levels, enabling us to grow and share our experience.

Clarice Zdanski
1 April 2018

Authors

Katja Juhola, Finland, Founder, Art Director, Artist, Curator

Art is not just one possible way to change the world – it is already acting as a concept vital to society! Art is research into basic meanings. Art must be given the freedom to make something happen or nothing at all might happen; art must be given the freedom to break things up and leave its mark to modify or build something new.

I am 42 years old, mother to a 15 -year-old boy, and married to the musician Jukka Juhola. I have studied social and environmental art in Turku University of Applied Sciences, Art Academy (2007) and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2010 and Master of Art 2017 from the same school.

I've done a number of social art projects in Finland and abroad. In recent years, I have worked on Installation Moving Roots, which has been exhibited in Finland, Russia, Iceland and Italy. I have also made video works and my work Nature Boy has been exhibited in Germany - Berlin, and Italy -Torino, and France -Paris.

I want to improve my chances to act in the international arena, outside Europe as well. As an artist, I think I can influence people's well-being and give art the possibility to open up new perspectives on thinking – both as private individuals and at the societal level. I'm not afraid of hard work, I am a conscientious and effective worker, and I like to read and writing is not a problem. I set my goals high, and I always try to do my best. I stay on schedule. I speak and write English and Swedish. I have a brave, fearless, and open personality.

Joan Marie Kelly, USA, Social Art Practitioner & Visual Artist

Joan Marie Kelly has been living in Singapore and teaching Art since 2005 as a Senior Lecturer at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. She is a member artist of Blue Mountain Gallery, one of New York's longest running artists' cooperatives, now located in Chelsea heart of the art district in New York City. She has pursued a career of art making, as objects; paintings and ceramics. Yet Asia inspired her to develop a social art practice where she refers to herself as an Urban Ecologist, one who investigates the ecosystem of the city initiating artistic encounters with migrant and marginalized communities. Art became a means to witness the environments and daily lives of communities that are often represented by constructions of the media. She has conducted social art workshops in neighbourhoods of

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Kolkata, Shenzhen and Singapore, empowering people through creativity, often the experience inspires her paintings. 2017, she is the 2nd prize winner in the Glover Painting Prize, Australia. Her recent solo exhibitions were held in Blue Mountain Gallery New York City, Smith College USA, New Delhi India, and Fez Morocco. Recent Biennale's include, Beijing, Izmir, Turkey, Korea, and Casablanca. A 2012 publication "Zones of Contact: The Public Art of Joan Marie Kelly" includes an essay by New York Art critic David Cohen and 30 colour photographs of her paintings.

Mari Krappala, Finland, Mentor and Writer

Mari Krappala (b. 1968, lives in Turku) is a writer, art theorist, curator and mentor. Her writings and curatorial projects focus on transdisciplinary art, collective productions, art & science projects and socially motivated art. She is a docent of cultural studies in the Aalto University, the School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Helsinki. Her PhD work dealt with contemporary art processes, photography and Luce Irigaray's philosophy of the ethics of sexual difference. She teaches art theory, artistic research methodology and supervises MA and PhD works. She has curated several international exhibitions, shows and live art happenings in Finland and abroad. At the moment she is doing curatorial work with the independent art groups in the interartistic fields. She has co-curated art projects in collaboration with Finnish and local artists in mental health centers and prisons in Italy and Spain. Her recent writing and curating topics deal with an emphasis on articulations of borders, roots, rhizomes, and nature connections, focusing on real and imaginary ways of living with them. She writes fictions from theories.

Clarice Zdanski, USA/Italy, Artist, Art Historian and Art Educator

Clarice Zdanski's work has always been concerned with the place of art in society. Her research work in art history, which ranges from the Italian Renaissance to art and travel in late nineteenth century Europe and current practices in art education, has always been concerned with how art is studied and its place in society. Zdanski's writing on art has been published in scholarly journals and websites, and her art work is in private collections in Europe and the USA. She currently teaches studio art and art history in the Visual Communication Arts Department at Franklin University Switzerland.

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