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## Making Pictures as a Method of Teaching Art History

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### Abstract

Inspired by the affective and sensory turns in the paradigm of art history, this article discusses making pictures as a method of teaching art history in Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training (Qualification in Visual Expression, Study Programmes in Visual and Media Arts and Photography). A total of 25 students majoring in visual and media arts and photography participated in the research, studying art history by visual means and reflecting on their learning experiences. This article follows the principles of contextual subject-related didactics, where contemporary conceptions of the discipline and the objectives of the curriculum direct the choice of instructional approaches. The study shows that making pictures motivated the students to study art history and develop practical skills within the discipline in accordance with the curriculum objectives. In visual terms, the kinesthetic and haptic qualities associated with making pictures brought affects and emotions to art historical inquiries, which built bridges between art history and the students' life-worlds.

## **Introduction**

Since the final decades of the 20th century, art historians have written about paradigmatic changes in art history, referring to new direction in the research topics, practices and methodologies involved in the discipline. These changes can be roughly summarized as movements from exact and objective attempts to classify and categorize the art of past times to a range of approaches to studying and interpreting past and present visual cultures, as well as the processes involved in making and interpreting art (Belting, 2002; Kraynak, 2007). Following the pictorial turn in the humanities and social sciences, many art historians have begun to call for an art history that is more closely anchored to the visual qualities of works of art and to experiencing them (Harris & Zucker, 2016; Mitchell, 2008; Moxey, 2008). Growing interest in the reception of art along with an increased emphasis on the active role of spectators – as constructors of meaning and participants in art processes – have strengthened the conception of art history as a dialogue between the present and the past, as well as between different people and cultures (Bal & Bryson, 1998; Belting, 2002; Kraynak, 2007; Sienkewicz, 2016). In addition, affects, emotion and the senses have been included among the new approaches to creating art history (Lauwrens, 2012; Zwijnenberg & Farago, 2003). It is therefore clear that art history has changed, but has the teaching of the subject followed suit?

According to Donahue-Wallace et al. (2008), there is a serious lack of pedagogical literature associated with art history. Although pedagogy in art history is not a well-researched topic, some work on the subject does exist. However, this tends to focus more on the content and goals rather than on teaching methods. Slide-lectures, seminars and excursions have established themselves as traditional teaching methods for art history (Donahue-Wallace et al., 2008; Nelson, 2000; Stöppel, 2010). The increase in the development and discussion of alternative instructional approaches at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to be connected with the emergence of constructivist and experiential learning theories and changes in the paradigm of art history.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mary Erickson (1993) identified three traditions of teaching art history in American elementary and secondary schools: teaching art history as artworks, as information, and as inquiry. While the first two traditions mainly concentrated on formal principles, subject matter and the style recognition of works of art, the third encouraged students to go beyond their course books and to use their own perceptions and experiences of art and culture – as well as life in general – when constructing art historical knowledge. This student-centered approach to teaching art history has formed the principal basis for various dialogical, collaborative and problem-based methods of teaching art history in schools ever since (Chanda, 2007; Erickson, 2001; Phelan et al., 2005; Trafti, 2004). In discipline-based art education (e.g. Dobbs, 2004; Erickson, 2004) and multi-cultural art education (Blocker, 2004; Sabol, 2000), art history is considered to provide students with a

cultural framework through which they learn to know and appreciate not only the art and cultures of different times and places, but also themselves and other people. However, a recurrent notion in the research literature claims that these ideals of teaching art history are seldom realized in practice, because teacher-centered lecturing on the formalistic features of works of art still dominates the teaching of art history in schools (Curtis, 2001; Trafi, 2004), while lectures and text-based methods retain their traditional position within universities (Elkins, 2008; Simons, 2008).

Recent discussions on the teaching of art history have focused on new technical implementations – such as digital images, computer-based interactive methods and e-learning (Donahue-Wallace et al., 2008; Harris & Zucker, 2016; Simon, 2003; Simmons, 2008). They seem to share the conclusion that new technologies can motivate students as well as enrich their observations when analyzing works of art and other objects of visual culture.

Inspired by the picture-oriented, emotional, affective and sensory approaches of recent art history, this article discusses making pictures as a method of teaching art history in Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training (Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression, Study Programmes in Visual and Media Arts and Photography). The cornerstone of this article is the conception that a teaching method is not only a tool for transmitting the propositional substance of a subject, but also – and more importantly – a practical procedure that creates opportunities for training in the practices and skills typical of it (Lewin, 1995; Phillips, 1998). This approach implies methods of learning-by-doing.

The research is based on a teaching experiment in which 25 students majoring in a studio arts-based degree of Visual Expression studied art history through picture-based methods and reflected on their learning experiences during their studies. These reflections form the empirical data of the research. The article follows the principles of contextual, subject-related didactics (Martikainen, 2011), in which teaching methods are developed and chosen on the basis of the analysis of the subject, as well as the curriculum of the specific level of education in question. I begin by discussing the recent changes in the paradigm of art history, concentrating on pictorial, emotional, affective and sensory turns. After that, I sketch the contents and goals of art history within the curriculum of the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression in Finland, while discussing the conceptions of humanity, knowledge and learning embedded in the curriculum as objectives directing the choice of instructional approaches. This is followed by a description of making pictures as a teaching method. In the final chapters of the article, I analyze students' experiences of the teaching method and conclude by discussing the results of this experiment within the framework of contemporary art history and the curriculum in Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression.

The key research questions are: What kinds of learning experiences does the method

generate? How do students' experiences relate to contemporary art history and the contents and goals of art history within the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression curriculum? What can we say about the appropriateness of making pictures as a teaching method within this educational context?

### **Paradigmatic Changes and Turns Towards Pictures, Emotions, Affects and Senses**

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, representatives of the new art history began to criticize the art history that had gone before for its focus on the formalistic analysis of works of art. In their view, the formalistic approach had separated works of art from their social roots (Ferne, 1988). Inspired by critical theory, new art historians wanted to shift the focus of art history to the problematics of culture, ideology, structures of power and politics, which mirrored the biases of the linguistic and cultural turns in the humanities and social sciences at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ferne, 1988; Pooke & Newall, 2008; Zijlmans, 2008). This shift of perspective caused changes in the epistemology of art history. Instead of being neutral and objective, knowledge of art history was regarded as positioned: constructed, interpreted and narrated from various points of view (Chandra et al., 2016; Kraynak, 2007; Zijlmans, 2008). Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field of art history has widened in many ways. Instead of merely tracing and reconstructing artists' intentions and contexts of artistic production in the past, art historians have become increasingly interested in the ways in which different audiences perceive experience and interpret the products and processes of visual culture (Bal & Bryson, 1998; Pooke & Newall, 2008). In addition, research on contemporary as well as non-European visual cultures has transformed art history from a euro-centric history of high art to a multi-voiced art history comprehended as a dialogue between the past and the present, between different cultures as well as different methodological approaches (Chandra et al., 2016; Kerin & Lepage, 2016; Kraynak, 2007; Zijlmans, 2008).

Echoing the ideas of the pictorial turn (Mitchell, 1994), several recent art historians have expressed their concerns that works of art and objects of visual culture – as material and visual objects – are in danger of being swallowed up by various contextualizing approaches of new art histories (Kraynak, 2007). Instead, they have called for art history that is more closely connected with the visuality and materiality of objects of visual culture, as well as the ways in which viewers experience them (Moxey, 2008). This turn towards the visual has been accompanied by an emphasis on visual literacy that refers to the ability to interpret and produce visual messages meaningfully, not only in art but also in the practices of everyday life (Elkins, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Simons, 2008).

Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art history was regarded as a field of connoisseurship which valued reason and objectivity. Emotions and affects had no place within the discipline, but were rather features of art criticism detached from the scientific and objective pursuit of art

history (Kraynak, 2007). By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dichotomy between reason and emotion was increasingly being questioned in the social sciences and humanities, and affects and emotion were gradually introduced into these sciences as perspectives based on which the social world and the people within it could be discussed (Hemmings, 2005). Such approaches also found their way into art history and became acknowledged as the emotional and affective turns of the discipline (Koivunen, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2001). These turns towards affects and emotion can be understood as expressions of dissatisfaction with poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches to power and social structures; this dissatisfaction was felt by critical theorists and cultural critics who wished to alter and extend the perspectives within which e.g. culture, identity, subjectivity and body are discussed (Clough, 2008; Hemmings, 2005; Koivunen, 2010).

In the literature on the emotional and affective turns, the uses and definitions of emotion and affect vary from more or less treating them as synonyms to clearly distinctive concepts, depending on the context in question (Koivunen, 2010). Emotions are often regarded as conscious and nameable, whereas affects are unconscious impressions that can only be felt bodily (Massumi, 2002). Emotions are sometimes understood as cultural and social, whereas affects are viewed as biological and physiological (Koivunen, 2010). Whereas many theorists view affects too as being socially and culturally influenced or constructed, this definition cannot hold for all affects (Clough, 2008; Hemmings, 2005; Wetherell, 2012). So long as we are aware of the various approaches to affects and emotions, their conceptual distinction is of no major relevance for the purposes of this study. What is important, instead, is that they both refer to experiential substrata – embodied experience – merging body and mind, acting and thinking, emotion and reason, subject and object and thus bridging the Cartesian dualism (Clough, 2008; Hemmings, 2005; Wetherell, 2012).

Apart from the emotional and the affective, the turn towards experiencing art has also been referred to as the sensory turn of art history (Jay, 2011; Lauwrens, 2012). By emphasizing the corporeality of experience and knowledge, all such turns are inspired by phenomenology and especially by the Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of the body (Lauwrens, 2012). While all of these turns share dissatisfaction with the logocentric approaches of art history, sensory scholars additionally challenge the prioritization of vision at the expense of the other senses and advocate the inter-connectedness of all sensory – or embodied – experiences (Lauwrens, 2012). Furthermore, sensory scholars pointedly pay attention to the fact that non-visual works of art are also studied within the discipline. However, these recent turns do not seek to completely reject the contextualizing approaches of art history, or retreat into a non-discursive sphere of experience only, but offer an alternative approach to making art history in which the role of the emotions, affects and senses is not undervalued (Lauwrens, 2012). This challenges art historians to include the dimensions of embodied experience in their analyses, which may require reforming the art historical vocabulary and developing innovative mixed- or multi-

media representations of art history. Likewise, this is also a challenge for teachers of art history.

### **Art History in Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Training and Education, Qualification in Visual Expression**

Art history is not simply an academic discipline; it also refers to content integrated into the curricula of e.g. the visual arts, history, religion and languages at various levels of education. This article discusses the teaching of art history in Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training in Visual Expression, within Study Programmes in Visual and Media Arts and Photography.

In fact, the concept art history is not explicitly mentioned in the Visual Expression curriculum published by the Finnish National Board of Education (2010). However, when the curriculum is read through the lenses of contemporary art history, numerous substance-related references seem to indicate the existence of art history. Such references include e.g. the history and communication culture of graphic design, visual arts and photography, the visual tradition, the stylistic features of images of different eras, cultural and historical messages, and traditions and the current state of the community. Together, they form a perspective combining the past and the present visual culture which – on the basis of contemporary conceptualizations of the discipline – can be defined as art history.

The qualification requirements of the curriculum postulate that students must be able to “recognize and date stylistic features and trends in graphic design, the visual and media arts and photography and take the historical and cultural perspective into consideration in their work” (Finnish National Board of Education 2010, p. 29). They are also expected to “discuss their works in relation to the visual tradition” (p. 50), “use cultural and historical messages and contents in interpretations of images” (p. 39) and “position their working process within traditions” (p. 97). Verbs used in connection with tradition include e.g. discuss, use, comment, recognize, date, select, interpret, analyze, proportion, and position. These learning objectives and choices of verb – among others – reveal that art history in the curriculum refers to both knowledge of the visual past and present and its application when interpreting and making visual culture products.

Communication, media skills and active citizenship number among the key competences in lifelong learning imparted by the curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010). These competences cover visual literacy skills, including the students’ own critical assessment of media and other visual culture products, and their production of meaningful visual messages. Art history plays an important role in the construction of meaningful visual messages, since, “in order to do this [i.e. create meaningful visual images], a person working

in the field needs to have keen observation skills, a visual point of view, expressiveness as well as knowledge of traditions” (p. 235). Furthermore, cultural competence – in the form of knowledge of different cultural values and skills in taking such values into consideration in everyday interaction and visual products – plays a key role in art historical and cultural competence as defined in the curriculum.

Aesthetics is also regarded as a key competence in lifelong learning (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010). It is viewed as a responsible way of acting, whereby account is taken of the objectives of culturally sustainable development in art and in everyday practices – whether this involves choosing the materials, techniques and contents of the works of art, or working as a team member. In addition, the curriculum explicates the importance of experiences and emotions in everyday life by emphasizing the ability both to produce them through visual expression and to appreciate “other people’s visions and ways of expression” (p. 193) in order to promote mutual well-being.

The various aspects of art history covered by the above-discussed curriculum in Visual Expression can be divided into five approaches: a formalistic approach, contextual approach, semiotic approach, participation in art and culture, and value-related cultural skills – and all of these are merged in practice. The five approaches are largely compatible with recent biases in the paradigm of art history. However, the practical quality of art history insofar as it concerns skills in interpreting and creating visual products is vigorously emphasized, forming the distinctive characteristics of art history in the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression. The instruction of art history must provide students with opportunities to practice and learn these skills.

The teaching of art history in the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression curriculum is guided by the concepts of humankind and knowledge as well as the substance of art history. Within the curriculum, the concept of humankind as knowing, feeling and acting members of society can be described as holistic. This idea is based on Edmund Husserl’s and Martin Heidegger’s existential-phenomenological concept of humankind which seeks to dissolve the Cartesian division between mind and body (Rauhala, 2005). Embedded in this holistic concept of humankind is the epistemological assumption that knowledge is not only intellectual and conscious but also bodily and unconscious and includes the aspects of experience and tacit knowledge. In addition, the curriculum emphasizes the vocational competence and skills required for practical work assignments and activities, which indicate methods of learning-by-doing (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010).

The picture-making method discussed in this article represents an attempt to transform key conceptions in contemporary art history and the objectives of the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression into pedagogic practices. It follows the principles of learning-by-doing

(Dewey, 1953; Schön, 1988) and is built on the foundations of constructivist and experiential learning theories (Dewey, 1938; Matthews, 2000; Phillips, 2000; von Glaserfeld, 1995a). In this research, not only the cognitive, but also the sensory, emotional and situational factors that connect students to their life-world are considered to belong to the constructivist frame (see Kolb, 1984; von Glaserfeld, 1995b). Making pictures as a teaching method involves the provision of instructional arrangements based on which mental and bodily learning processes are combined in grasping art history in order to build skills in visual expression and interpretation. In addition, such a method involves making an invitation for emotional, affective and sensory substrata to be merged in the study and creation of art history.

The learning tasks involved in making pictures were applied in a number of ways during art history studies. Students explored aesthetics and the functions of non-western ritual masks and were asked to make contemporary ritual masks connected with the phenomena of contemporary life and their own experiences (figures 1 & 2). In another assignment, they studied the visual cultures of the Stone Age, ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome and designed CD covers applying their findings on the visual features typical of those eras (figures 3 & 4). Medieval ornaments were studied by making woodcuts representing the initials of students' own names (figures 5 & 6). After studying the chronology of styles in western art history, students drew pictures of trees based on a variety of styles of visual expression and summarizing the characteristic features of trees in the form of a visual essay (figures 7 & 8). Students majoring in photography explored and expressed styles by making their photos follow the same logic (figure 9). Historical changes were observed and reflected on by modernizing old paintings and sculptures (figures 10 & 11). Non-European cultures were studied by creating visual products that expressed the values and aesthetic characteristics typical of such cultures (figure 12). In these assignments, making pictures was regarded as a mode of visual and embodied exploration of art historical topics, whereas visual products were understood as the visual outcomes of learning processes that demonstrated knowledge, skills and competence. The assignments were rounded off by presenting the visual products and ideas connected with them in class and discussing them collaboratively.



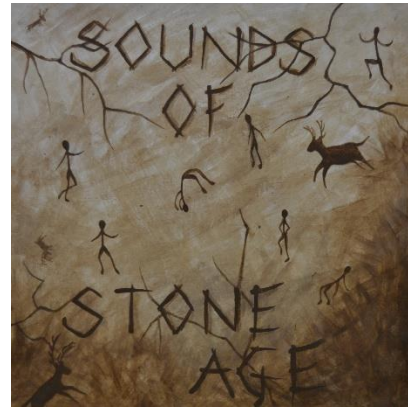
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*Figure 1. Ritual mask protecting from over-technologization*



*Figure 2. Ritual mask helping to calm down*



*Figure 3. CD cover, Sounds of the Stone Age*



*Figure 4. CD cover, Sounds of Egypt*



*Figure 5. Medieval initials*



*Figure 6. Medieval initials*



*Figure 7. Baroque tree*



*Figure 8. Surrealist tree*



*Figure 9. Cubist landscape*



*Figure 10.* Modernized version of Auguste Rodin's Thinker



*Figure 11.* Modernized version of C.D. Friedrich's Wanderer



*Figure 12.* Visual exploration of Buddhism

### **Students' Experiences of Making Pictures as Part of Art History Studies**

A total of 25 students majoring in the visual and media arts and photography participated in the research and produced data reflecting on their learning experiences of making pictures as a learning method in art history. It should be pointed out that other learning methods – such as discussing works of art, writing reflective essays and visiting museums – were also deployed during the course, but only in a minor role. In fact, the written reflections on learning experiences were primarily intended to be learning processes, and were only secondarily viewed as data for the research. The study design can be loosely understood as small-scale action research in which the students participated in developing the appropriate and motivating methods of teaching and studying art history (see Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

The data was analyzed using content and discourse analysis. Content analysis was used for sorting, classifying and summarizing the data (see Cohen & Manion, 1995; Schreier, 2014), whereas discourse analysis was used to discuss the data within the frame of contemporary art history and the curriculum for the vocational qualification in Visual Expression (see Fairclough, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1989). However, in practice these methods were interlaced since both could be used to analyze the choice of words and concepts, as well as themes and meanings (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002).

### ***Students' Responses to Making Pictures***

Aside from six students, the participants in this study had never studied art history before. When asked to state what they expected from art history lessons, the students most commonly referred to knowledge of styles of art history, artists, old art, the development of art, and works of art, while the answers to questions about teaching and study methods included lecturing, writing notes, writing essays, reading texts, looking at slides, and theory. It became

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evident that expectations had been influenced by previous experiences of teacher-centered methods of teaching history and art history at school.

*We will study old artists and works of art. (Student 6)*

*Students write notes based on lectures. An exam will be held at the end of the course. But I hope that there will be more to it than this. (Student 13)*

*Like history in general: notes, reading, learning. (Student 22)*

Making pictures as a method of teaching and learning art history clearly deviated from the students' expectations. Almost all students found this methodological shift inspiring and motivating, while most reported that studying art history turned out to be fun and the atmosphere in class was positive.

*It is surprising that studying art history can be this fun and interesting. This was due to practical assignments. They made learning easier. Theory was also taught interestingly enough. (Student 4)*

*Previously, learning history had been about cramming and learning by heart, but the related studies are now more practical and based on visual observations and exercises. (Student 22)*

The almost complete absence of critical voices was noteworthy. On this occasion, only a few comments were made at the beginning of the course, in which a couple of students wondered how visual exercises contributed to the study of art history.

*My opinion is that the exercises were ok. I learned through them and they were fun. (...) Making pictures as a means of studying history is great, but I don't understand what it has to do with historical knowledge. (Student 8)*

*Drawing and painting aren't necessarily needed, because "real" art historians don't have to be good at drawing. I think visual exercises were more like tools for understanding art historical topics. (Student 24)*

Even these students clearly acknowledged the appropriateness of making pictures as a teaching method, but did not consider skills in creating pictures to form part of art history. It should be noted, however, that the study program involves the education of visual artisans rather than art historians. When, during the course, the relevance of making pictures as a teaching method was discussed with the students, it became clear that some students had expected art history lessons to be more traditional, focusing on lectures and reading and

writing assignments. Immediate account was taken of such feedback and more opportunities and guidance in the written exploration of art history were arranged.

### ***Making Pictures as a Visual Exploration of Art History***

Most of the students described making pictures as a process of learning or reflecting on art history. Such choices of words revealed that they did not regard visual assignments as merely “drawing” or “painting,” but as essential ways of studying art history.

*Practical, visual tasks are always the best. It is interesting to study and learn art history by making pictures yourself. (Student 2)*

*When I made my own witch drum, I learned in greater detail about the cultural and visual traditions of witch drums. In addition, making the drum was fun. (Student 19)*

The students believed that making pictures had increased their knowledge of styles, artists, techniques, modes of expression and materials. Making pictures made them much more aware that art history concerns the skills involved in applying knowledge, as well as knowledge itself.

*Through art history, you can also gain a new understanding of yourself and your own life. Art history has given me the courage to analyze and interpret not only art but my visual environment in general. (Student 11)*

*Art history is not only knowledge of past events and art historical styles. The interpretation of works of art is important as well (...) trying to figure out what they tell about their times, people and cultures. (Student 14)*

Awareness of the links between an era and work of art was regarded as important when studying art history. The students’ experiences indicated that making pictures developed their skills in observing works of art from various perspectives. Learning assignments, where paintings from different periods were compared with each other, or where old paintings were modernized, activated the students to read paintings and interpret their visual messages. These reflective tasks motivated them to study the past and the present – and their own relation to them.

*I think that making pictures helped me to gain a deeper understanding of how times have changed and to observe the changes that have occurred in art. When modernizing the painting, I had to pay very careful attention to the original work of art and its style and expression. (...) I learned to view works of art from the perspective of their times. (...) and*

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*thought a great deal about how the same thing would be depicted in different times and the factors (e.g. events and ideas) that change art. I also paid attention to current and contemporary art: what modes and methods of expression are used and the subjects that this typically involves. (Student 16)*

The primary, pedagogical aim when making pictures was to take account of the students' own thoughts and experiences of different works of art – and to integrate them into the study of art history. However, the students' comments revealed that tasks in which they were asked to modify or visually comment on various works of art created an eagerness to study the backgrounds of the artworks. Making pictures therefore generated self-motivated interest in reading art historical literature.

*When I made sketches of the painting, I couldn't stop looking at the woman's face, hair and the light around the head. I thought she must be an important person, maybe a Saint, but she was not an angel. I just had to know the story of this painting and so I started reading. (Student 11)*

*Making pictures as a method of studying art history is more interesting than just reading books or writing essays. When making pictures, I concentrated more closely on the subject - and wanted to search through the background information, because I became interested. (Student 21)*

Making pictures was understood to be a visual means of studying art history. Visual exercises focused the students' attention on the visual quality of the works of art they were studying and generated further motivation to read about the backgrounds of the works.

### ***Grasping Art History by Making Pictures***

Making pictures not only helped the students to understand the subject, but also activated them to reflect on their own ways of thinking. Visual assignments combined concrete procedures for making pictures with abstract thinking, thus providing a link between conscious and unconscious learning processes in which haptic and kinesthetic experiences seemed to enrich their conceptions of art history. These embodied dimensions of learning can be described as understanding by doing.

*The theme of my project was completely unfamiliar to me. I couldn't understand how Polynesian tattoos were made. But when I drew the patterns of the tattoos myself, I understood that – as a matter of fact – the patterns were simple, but were entwined in a highly complex manner. (Student 11)*

Many students shared the opinion that visual methods of teaching and studying art history

were more efficient than verbal ones. Visual processing of the topics was felt to occur at a more personal level, which led to intimate learning experiences.

*When you only read about art historical styles, you don't understand everything. But when you make pictures you can use your own creativity and study in your own way. (...) When you make pictures, you have to apply your knowledge visually. This helps you to understand better. (Student 17)*

*When you have the chance to make something visual about a subject, you learn much more than just by writing about it. (Student 20)*

Visual assignments appealed to the students' creativity and imagination. When processing art historical topics visually or studying works of art through visual means, the students felt that they could steer their study process and make decisions themselves. This seemed highly motivating.

*Honestly – the most inspiring assignments in the whole semester. (...) The instructions were clear and gave us the freedom to decide what to do. Right from the beginning, you had to think a great deal and plan carefully. (...) This freedom encouraged you to make your own decisions and follow your own preferences. Our motivation lasted till the end. (Student 23)*

*I could use my creativity and imagination in these tasks, so I wasn't just copying the original pictures. (Student 12)*

The students regarded visual tasks as effective ways of exploring and reflecting on art historical topics and works of art. This concrete method of making by hand helped them to understand – or grasp – the subject-related phenomena. The students experienced visual processing as leading to deeper learning experiences than verbal processing. In addition, a sense of self-regulation and the opportunity to use one's creativity and imagination were viewed as highly motivating.

### ***Thinking and Feeling Through and with Pictures***

Making pictures emerged as a multilayered activity in which conscious and unconscious – as well as discursive and non-discursive – levels of knowing and experiencing merged. Focusing on a visual activity seemed to strengthen the students' sense of themselves.

*Through art, you can gain a deeper insight into your own self. When you paint, you forget everything else. It's a kind of meditative state of being. You become conscious of yourself and (...) learn new things about yourself. (Student 14)*

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Several students experienced making pictures as a way of identifying themselves with the artist's creative process, or with the era and culture of the work of art. This resembled the projection of emotions typical of aesthetic experience.

*When I made my sculpture, I began to think about how these kinds of sculptures were made in the culture I was studying – and I understood how demanding sculpting must have been with those prehistoric tools. My appreciation of the culture increased tremendously. Somehow, I felt as though I was time travelling into a past culture. My understanding became deeper. (Student 12)*

Some of the students described their experiences of studying works of art through making pictures as so intimate that the original works of art seemed not only to direct, but even to determine, their visual processing. In other words, the works of art seemed to tell their stories to the students and become animated and personified in the process.

*It is interesting to go inside the painting and let it live its own life. (...) I began to think that, when I painted a picture, it could tell other people a wholly different story to the one I had in mind. One painting can tell many stories. (Student 15)*

*In the exercise of Finnish art, my thoughts evolved as the work proceeded. It was fun to search for new pictures to be attached to my work, one picture led to another picture effortlessly. (Student 10)*

The students were very open-minded when studying the works of art by visual means. A dialogue seemed to develop between the students and works of art, to the extent that the works of art challenged the students' ideas.

*When you study works of art, you can find new sides of yourself or question your existing opinions. Sometimes, you may even begin to see the world in a different way. (Student 5)*

Visual processing of works of art seemed to cluster knowledge and experiences, resulting in conscious and unconscious reflections on art and self. The distance between works of art and students seemed to diminish or even disappear when students projected their emotions onto the works of art, or when challenging picture-making techniques helped the students to identify themselves based on the skills of picture-makers from the past. Furthermore, this fusion seemed to intensify the way in which works of art were experienced, providing the artworks with the capability to tell their own stories and challenge the students' ways of thinking.

### ***Visual Assignments Motivated the Students to Study Art History***

Most students reported having learned about both art history and visual expression through picture-making assignments, which they regarded as highly rewarding and motivating. This dual benefit concretized the important role played by art history in vocational expertise associated with visual expression.

*My opinion is that visual assignments are very good ways of learning (...) I like such tasks because, through them, I can develop my skills in making pictures and learning about art history. (Student 4)*

Art history lessons opened up a historical layer concerning the versatile intentions and methods associated with making pictures. The students regarded the visual messages, modes of expression and structures of artworks, as well as the materials, techniques and tools for making them as components of art history as well as elements in visual art. Art history was therefore regarded as useful and applicable.

*I learned a lot from the material I used and gained new ideas on how to develop it further in my work. (...) I developed my collage technique and learned how to mix color shades that match old newspaper clips. I had to think about the message of the painting carefully in order to play with it in my pastiche. (Student 13)*

*Studying art history through making pictures helped me to understand and interpret art. I have learned to construct more conscious visual messages in my own work, because I know more about culture and different ways of expression. (Student 20)*

When completing visual assignments, the students operated on both sides of the pictures – as makers and viewers. They therefore interpreted and produced visual messages by reflecting on their choice of visual elements in relation to the intended meanings. This operational attitude to art history seemed to motivate the students and reveal the subject's present tense to them in providing tools for observing, discussing and experiencing contemporary visual culture.

*It would be difficult for an artist to talk about his art in public, if he didn't know anything about art history. (Student 13)*

*I am now more interested in art history, because I have noticed that it says something about both us (contemporary people) and contemporary phenomena. (Student 17)*

Operating on both sides of pictures also seemed to broaden – and clarify – the functions of art for the students. These functions ranged from self-expression to social influence and getting in



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touch with the primitive or animalistic dimensions of being.

*For me, self-expression is the most important dimension of art. Through pictures I can (...) share things I cannot express verbally. Art can mediate messages from the subconscious. (Student 10)*

*For me, the most important task of art is to produce experiences, and in this way to create a contact with other people through art. (Student 9)*

*Through art, people can escape their everyday routines, rationality and norms of society. To get closer to the primitive human being/ animal that has been lost – almost completely. (Student 14)*

Art history was also conceptualized as an arena of self-exploration and identity creation. It seemed to provide a perspective against which the students could mirror their thoughts and visual products. This shows that art history was no longer merely a school subject on the pages of books but gained importance in terms of personal growth.

*Knowledge of art history develops students' conceptions of the world and helps them to understand it better. The better you understand the world, the better you understand yourself and your way of making pictures. You learn to know yourself better as a person and an artist. I think history has a significant impact on the present at both individual and general level. Understanding history helps you to understand where you come from – for me, it is a way of finding and accepting myself. (Student 16)*

*I have gained more self-assurance in terms of my works of art and life in general. I define myself through making art. It is such an important part of me and my identity. (Student 19)*

Through assignments related to making pictures, the students developed a concrete realization that art history was not an inert subject within the study program on visual expression, but made a significant contribution to their construction of vocational expertise in visual expression. The picture-making based method also helped the students to cross the barriers between different courses and subjects on the curriculum.

### **Learning Experiences within the Framework of Contemporary Art History**

The students believed that they had learned a number of things by making pictures. These included e.g. knowledge of art history, skills in analyzing works of art, creative visual expression, use of imagination, skills in self-oriented learning and even new kinds of self-esteem. In addition, making pictures seemed to activate a reflective approach to knowledge.

Learning by making pictures thematized the dual contexts of art history (Bal & Bryson, 1998) – that of making works of art and that of interpreting them – which motivated the students to compare and critically analyze both contexts. A comparative study of this kind – what John Tosh (2008, p. 21) calls “thinking with history” – conceptualized art history as a dialogue between the present and the past. Through such a process of comparative observation and reflection, the students learned to locate not only the products of visual culture, but also their methods, functions and expressional intentions within the framework of visual culture. According to recent art historical research, this forms an important precondition for the development of critical visual literacy (Simons, 2008; Mitchell, 2008).

Visual assignments were experienced as the construction of skills in interpreting visual culture. This experience corresponds to Rudolf Arnheim’s (1974) conception of making pictures that can enrich visual perception beyond the language-bound functions of identification and categorization. W.J.T. Mitchell (2008, p. 13), for his part, supports a similar view, claiming that haptic experiences positively contribute to understanding the visual. Apart from enriching the processing of the visual, this embodied quality of experience also opens up possibilities for personal growth, since it has “the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection,” as Hemmings (2005, p. 549) puts it.

According to the students, their learning processes were deepened by visual means of studying art history. They felt that visual assignments enabled them to both express and internalize contents whose mere verbal explication was challenging. Not all aspects of visual experience can be captured verbally (Arnheim, 1974); but the non-verbal processing of such experience can be profound, as Barbara Maria Stafford (2008, p. 32) points out. Making pictures supported this idea, as it seemed to generate learning that interlaced conscious and unconscious levels of action in which intentional learning processes were furthered by unintentional learning processes whose quality and contents were directed by works of art and visual experiences of them, as well as the visual activity itself. This echoes W.J.T. Mitchell’s (2005) ideas about pictures as subjects. Thus, making pictures emerged as an action combining explicit and tacit knowledge, where the explicit and implicit as well as reason and emotion merged.

When reflecting on visual assignments, the students referred to experiences of imagining themselves as part of different cultures and historical times, which Mary Erickson (1995) regards as an important element of art historical understanding. It seemed that the sensory qualities of making pictures loosened up the control of discursive logic, thus fading out the boundaries between the works of art and the students. These experiences are reminiscent of the feelings of empathy (*Einfühlung*) that Friedrich Vischer and Theodor Lipps conceptualized as the “interjection of emotions” and “projection of one’s own life” into

lifeless objects such as works of art (Verducci 2000, pp. 67-69). According to Verducci (2000), imagination plays a key role in this kind of empathetic experience. This research suggests that the kinesthetic and haptic qualities of visual activities connected with observing works of art generate an imaginative response that is not only mental but also embodied. This may also apply to other methods of learning-by-doing.

In addition to experiences of empathy, making pictures generated experiences of joy as well as deep concentration on visual exercises resembling flow experiences that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) characterizes as full involvement and enjoyment of the activity. These experiences clearly contributed to the motivation of studying art history and – together with experiences of empathy – provided art historical inquiries with emotions, affects and sensory experiences in accordance with the recent directions taken in the discipline (e.g. Di Bello & Koureas, 2010; Harris & Zucker, 2016; Lauwrens, 2012; O’Sullivan, 2001). Furthermore, it seemed that these experiences built bridges between art history and the students’ life-worlds, contributing to the significance of art history at a more personal level.

The purpose of this study is not to argue that visual methods alone are sufficient when teaching and studying art history. However, the study does demonstrate that visual assignments were experienced as motivational methods of studying art history that improved learning processes. In addition, making pictures as a concrete method of learning-by-doing developed skills in working with art history in accordance with the objectives of the curriculum in Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression.

In this experiment, the participants were students majoring in Visual Expression, which may partly explain the positive outcomes of the research. However, it should be pointed out that skills in drawing, painting and sculpting play only a minor role in this method of studying art history. Its main objective is to diversify the verbal processing of art historical topics in order to construct operational skills in art history, promote visual literacy – and enhance the integration of emotions and sensory experiences to form learning processes. In addition, it provides students with experiences of using a range of techniques and materials to make pictures, which may constitute a rewarding and motivating insight into art history regardless of the level of education or field of specialization in question.

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