





Preface

When we started NNAC – the Nordic Network for Art Consultancy in 2019, we wanted to create a space for discussion, collaboration and learning in the field of public art curation. It was important for us to explore our field of practice by forging relationships between art consultants and curators working with public art in the Nordic countries. What it is we do and how?

The network meetings exceeded our expectations. Thanks to funders, collaborators, colleagues and above all the members from the Nordic countries, for trusting the aim and the quality of the project, for generously sharing knowledge, perspectives, and reflections on public art consulting during webinars, and the NNAC meetings in Oslo, Gothenburg, and Helsinki.

Four years of networking ended up coinciding with national elections, new policies within the field, a global pandemic and war in Europe. Our priorities were a collegial environment for advice, feedback, and inspiration, and creating a community and a sense of belonging. The dynamics of the network spanned from the individual public art consulting practices to Nordic and international perspectives, always coming back to the importance of sustainability. Beyond the member's individual processes: the collaborative process of NNAC put emphasis on more sustainable commissions, public art processes and living environments.

We would like to thank Christine Antaya for her careful moderation and editing, which gave voice to the network process. By compiling these different perspectives on working with public art in the Nordic countries, we hope the vital insights of this field report will contribute to a better understanding of the practice of art consulting and its importance and impact when it comes to creating our shared spaces.

/Linda Wallenberg
/Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg

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Introduction



Christine Antaya
Sweden

This publication collects texts written by art consultants and curators who were part of the Nordic Network for Art Consultancy, a project funded by Nordic Culture Point 2019-2022. All of them have extensive experience of working with public art, which includes engaging with ideas about contemporary art and public space, as well as the more pragmatic processes of commissioning, production, planning, and installation of artworks.

There are many similarities in how public art is commissioned and produced in the Nordic countries, but there are also differences. As is observed in the conversation between the founders of NNAC Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg and Linda Wallenberg, the methods and arrangements for working in this field are often influenced by the practices of the country's governmental public art agency.

This is exemplified in Kristin Saeterdal's chapter on working as an art consultant in Norwegian municipalities. In describing her work as an artist and art consultant, the text outlines how the public art scheme created by KORO (Public art Norway) for government projects has influenced how art consultants are hired on the regional and municipal levels.

The development of the field in Finland is charted in a conversation between Maija Kovari and Miina Pohjolainen in which they discuss the past decade and trace the links between local and global trends in public art.

Swedish art consultants Ann Magnusson and Madelene Gustavsson's text is an in-depth description of

working on an art project for a hospital, detailing the challenges of long-term projects, and also highlighting one of the key tasks of the art consultant: to make everyone involved comfortable with and able to endure a certain degree of uncertainty.

Vibeke Christensen and Tina Skedsmo share their experiences of working with two politically controversial public art installations in Oslo, reflecting on the challenges of the role of the curator and producer in the age of rapid digital dissemination and increased geopolitical tensions.

In an interview with herself, the Danish artist and art consultant Marie Markman gives a humorous and highly instructive account of her practice as an art consultant and argues that to ensure artistic diversity, it is important to have a diverse group of artists, curators, and other art mediators.

Anna Jensen's reflection on public art and her own practice as an independent curator working outside of institutional frameworks also describes the duality of the work: navigating concrete, visible and material problems, but also engaging with "with feelings, possibilities, hauntings, and enchantments."

The notion of a double role returns in Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg's chapter. She describes the profession's relationship to the artworld as characterized by a simultaneously being an insider and outsider.

This publication is an attempt to open up this area of practice in the Nordic countries and shed light on the daily negotiations of public art production. It works as a summary of the discussions held during the NNAC project, but the chapters are also vital snapshots of the state of art consultancy and public art curation. A report from the field, to be brought along into the future of the field.

Conversation with NNAC initiators

Linda Wallenberg and Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg



Linda Wallenberg
Sweden

Christine Antaya: *When did the two of you meet for the first time?*

Linda Wallenberg: In 2008, I think. We had both worked with the artist David Svensson and he suggested that we meet. The field of public art curation was very different then. Very few people were working as art consultants. I came from a job at Wanås Konst, in southern Sweden, and was used to working with large site-specific works outdoors.



Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg
Sweden

Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg: In 2008, if you weren't an artist it wasn't possible to work with public art as an art consultant or independent curator in state and municipal projects. At the time I was working on art projects with construction companies.



Christine Antaya
Sweden

Have you ever worked on the same project?

LW: We've never worked together on a public art project. NNAC is the first time we've collaborated on an entire project. But we've always kept tabs on each other. Early on, I was working on a project in Västerås and organized a national seminar on public art with Public Art Agency Sweden. I invited Åsa-Viktoria to that.

ÅVW: Linda showed an interest in freelancers and invited us as if we were part of the inner circle, which was very important.

LW: Jessica Segerlund – who now works for Sweden's national centre for architecture and design – and I had run a residency programme for curators in southern Sweden. It was a time when Swedish art institutions barely recognised the independent curator as a

professional category within the art world. I was used to noticing and reaching out to freelance curators.

You both appear to be very self-made. Hearing you talk about these early stages of your careers, it seems like you both have a long history of creating things for yourself if what you were interested in or needed didn't exist. In light of that, the NNAC project seems like a very natural progression.

ÅVW: I think it is. And at the time we recognized that in each other, a certain openness and willingness to just go ahead and try things.

LW: Both of us are quite pragmatic and want things to happen. I guess you could say we have a propensity for production. Later on we also both ran companies and had the managerial role in common, at the same time as we were trying to change things within the art world. Being a curator could be quite lonely.

ÅVW: Some of my friends call me an entrepreneur. In some contexts that's almost an insult, haha... In the art world it's better to be called a pioneer.

LW: Whether or not we were pioneers, it was a period of a lot of change. More and more people in Sweden started working as freelance curators and art consultants. And that has contributed to the need for NNAC. We were seeing more art consultants working on public art projects, and we wanted to start a conversation.

How did you come up with the idea of a Nordic network?

ÅVW: The embryo of NNAC was "Konst camp," an initiative that was similarly about creating a dialogue between colleagues. The idea was to invite curators to pay a fee and then spend two days at a countryside venue, with discussions and dinner.

LW: But no one had time for that, spending the night and everything. So we had to create something that was more attractive. When the Oslo and Helsinki biennials

were announced, that became a starting point for creating a network project spanning over several years. Sometimes small initiatives are good, but sometimes it takes something bigger and more ambitious.

ÅVW: In a sense, we wanted to create what the two of us had when we were starting out, a context for meeting other art consultants. In addition to discussing all the specific issues connected to curating public art projects, we would also see art together and talk about it. That became a model for NNAC. We organised all the network meetings to coincide with art events, in order to experience the art scenes in the cities we met in and always include reflections on art in our discussions. That combination was crucial.

How did you find the art consultants from the different countries?

The partner organisations we have collaborated with, mainly the main government organisations working with public art in the different countries, were involved before we invited the members. They helped us find potential members.

The network has been quite small, which has facilitated more in-depth and informal discussions. Was this an important aspect for you as organisers?

ÅVW: A small, core group was important in order to create that informal space. We wanted it to be sharp, formal, informal, comfortable and generous. And financially and professionally sustainable.

LW: We were careful to make sure we could pay for everyone's expenses. They were giving us their time. We also tried to limit our own labour on this. We didn't apply for grants from more than one funding body and we created the structure of collaborating with the partners who gave us a lot of support. They have participated in seminars without financial compensation, and helped us with infrastructure around the seminars and so on. That was really great.

The funding from Nordic Culture Point was for generating a network, not doing a lot of administrative work, and that really shaped the way we worked, and networked!

In addition to helping you with the infrastructure, the public art organisations in the various countries also gave presentations and participated in discussions. What did you learn from that, as individual art consultants?

LW: I learned that there are a lot of similarities between the Nordic countries, but also how the structures set by the government authorities really shape the field and the roles within that country. Like how the model developed by KORO (Public Art Norway), initially built on the idea that only artists worked as art consultants, has affected the entire field there.

In Finland a network of freelance curators and art consultants was established early on, but there are much fewer art consultants in the country as a whole. And it is much less common for artists to work as art consultants. Taike (The Arts Promotion Centre Finland) for example, has much more of a supportive role, providing a service rather than governing the field.

ÅVW: I think the partners were a really good counterpart in the discussions. That there was a receiver, in a sense, to the points and questions that were articulated was very meaningful. We were able to test our ideas, or even potentially influence them.

LW: I agree that the discussions in NNAC have been great. It has also been interesting to see how the partner originations have changed just over the course of the three or four years that we have been doing this. How they work, what they call things. KORO are changing their model. In Sweden the policy on "Designed living environments" has continued to be developed and implemented. All this has been good for the discussions.

And what about your colleagues, what did you learn from meeting art consultants from the other Nordic countries?

LW: That we've been able to talk about processes, the nitty gritty, has been vital. We haven't had to first establish why art is important, or explain what it is we do. Everyone needs platforms like this, contexts in which we can presuppose a level of knowledge and then learn from each other.

ÅVW: I also think it has been important to reflect on what our skills are. Despite all the development there has been, the role is still kind of self-made, and there aren't many opportunities to think about our expertise. They include being a project manager, being able to work with art works that aren't necessarily what you would have chosen, and collaborating with a variety of professions.

LW: It was such a relief when we got to a point where we could stop talking about our backgrounds. Whether we were artists, curators or academics and so on. It took a while, but in our final meeting it didn't come up at all. Now it's just obvious that the network, and the profession, benefits from difference.

ÅVW: There can be a hierarchy around titles. This connects to discussions we've been having about being both an insider and an outsider in the artworld. It has to do with who we work with. For example, it can be useful to have a title that works in a construction context, even though it might be less recognized in the artworld. But as Linda said, titles and educational backgrounds are irrelevant, the focus should be on what we do.

LW: The significance of the Nordic collaboration has also changed over the course of the years of the network. We've seen how there are dreams about working more together across the borders, and also working more towards the mobility of artists. This felt particularly poignant and relevant, first during the pandemic, and then with a war in Europe. Networks are important.

ÅVW: We could be satisfied with just observing our differences and what we have in common, when it comes to curating and producing public art, but I think there was also an interest in collaborating and developing together, over time.

Two years after the foundation of NNAC, the Swedish Curator's Association was founded, a non-profit association with the aim of "representing, protecting and promoting the professional, economic and social position of curator." The issues they are initially pursuing have mainly to do with recognising the curator as a professional category in the arts field, for example making curators eligible for grants from the Swedish Art Grant Committee. Is the formation of this association an important development and how does it affect you as art consultants? Have you or your colleagues joined?

ÅVW: I have become a member. The other Nordic countries already had such associations. It's important to talk about the curatorial field and labour conditions, and to be able to have an association that can be our voice on these issues. As art consultants we have a curatorial practices. I'm excited to see what the association will do and which role it will play..

LW: It's important that Sweden now has an association. A lot of the work we do as art consultants entails being the person with art expertise, representing the art field in different ways. I hope that the association can strengthen the role of the artistic director, we don't talk enough about artistic direction - the curatorial work - being an artistic skill, even less so when it comes to the public art field.

ÅVW: I think curators in the Nordic countries in the future will want to specialize more, for example in public art.

What are some of the biggest challenges for art consultants right now?

ÅVW: The financial situation, and, in Sweden, political uncertainty.

LW: I think it's the structure and the financial side of the commissions. There needs to be more security in the commissions. The commissioning bodies often have a lot to learn, this goes for both public institutions as well as private. In our work we are continuously contributing to their expertise, but often they don't have the resources or motivation to preserve it and use it. It's a big challenge that there may be funds to invest in public art, but the commissioning body doesn't have up-to-date expertise.

ÅVW: I think the field also needs to develop and become more sustainable in terms of people not getting burnt out. There are a lot of substandard contracts and impossible working conditions.

It's important to keep looking after freelancers and independent actors. That there are commissions that make sense for us to work with. Economically, but also socially sustainable. What we need as freelancers is time for development and networking.

It's also about having reasonable expectations of what we are supposed to bring to the table. Sometimes we end up in situations where there is an unreasonable burden of responsibility because we are freelancers without the same mandate as the employees. We have to be clear about what works for us.

LW: It's also important that we can keep having the role of working with and for the artist's process, but also for the artwork itself in the end. A lot of important issues are linked to this: the arm-length principle, instrumentality and so on. Art needs to be allowed to be itself. Here, our function is very important.

That's what it's all about, isn't it, the artwork itself?

ÅVW: Exactly. Working with the artist and supporting them is a vital part of what we do, but in the end the artwork is what's important, what endures. Whether it's a physical presence, or something that lives on in people's minds.

The public art scheme in Norway's counties and municipalities



Kristin Saeterdal

Norway

Through the meetings we have had in NNAC, it has emerged that the work as an art consultant isn't entirely the same in the Nordic countries. In Norway we have a public art scheme with guidelines for art projects financed with public funds. It is this scheme that I would like to describe in the following chapter, and in particular the role of the art consultant. The purpose of the scheme is twofold: to create commissions for artists and art for the public.

I am myself active as a visual artist, working on exhibitions and commissions. Although I have a working grant and can apply for project grants for exhibitions, I sometimes need additional sources of income to make a living from my art. Therefore, in addition to being an artist, in recent years I have had several assignments as an art consultant. For me, this is a good combination and I find that my artistic practice enriches my art consultancy work, and vice versa. The fact that the consultancy work is freelance and project-based means that I can adapt it to my general work situation. The art scheme is designed to make it easy for artists like me to take on assignments as an art consultant, while maintaining an active artistic practice.

As I mentioned, the purpose of the scheme is twofold: commissions for artists and art for the public. Commissions for artists include both public art commissions and assignments as art consultants. Artists often have the skills and administrative abilities needed to carry out consultancy work. In society in general, work is becoming increasingly specialised and professionalised, and in the future, this may threaten the art consultants who are also artists. There is currently a lack of training and consultancy courses

for artists. I believe that it is important for the art field to maintain the possibility for artists to work as art consultants, as it strengthens their economy and thereby the art field as a whole.

Art is exempt from the Public Procurement Act. The Act is intended to help ensure that the public sector acts with integrity, so that the general public has confidence that public procurement is carried out in a way that benefits society. The public art scheme is intended to ensure the values that are otherwise safeguarded by the Public Procurement Act. The art scheme must ensure transparency, equality, and democracy in the process to guarantee that the taxpayers' money benefits the public. The curatorial work that the art consultant does in these projects is largely the same as with other types of funding, but there are stricter requirements for how funds are spent when public money is involved.

In recent years, other professional groups within the art field, such as art historians and curators, have also joined the scheme and can take on assignments. The requirement for those taking on commissions is that they are self-employed (ENK, enkeltmannsforetak) and not registered as a limited company (AS, aksjeselskap). In Norway, artists are typically registered as ENKs. As such, the aim is not to maximise profits and returns, but to receive a reasonable salary for the work that is carried out. As an art consultant, I get a fixed hourly rate and a financial framework that is set at about 10-15 percent of the art budget.

A brief history

The activist campaign Kunstneraksjon-74 (Artists' Action-74) resulted in three demands, one of which was the increased use of artists' labour. In 1976, parliament decided to set up Utsmykkingsfondet for nye statsbygg (The Decoration Fund for New Government Buildings). In 1978, artists were given the right to negotiate with the state, and the demand that a certain percentage of the construction costs should go to art was largely met through the scheme for the decoration of new government buildings.

In 1992 the name was changed to Utsmykkingsfondet for offentlige bygg, which from then also comprised construction by councils and municipalities. In 2006, the fund changed its name again to Public Art Norway - KORO (Kunst i offentlige rom). The word 'decoration' was interpreted as mere decoration of buildings, and KORO was now to stand for a view of art that promoted active, reflective, and critical expressions.

In 2014, there were more changes. KORO was no longer to be responsible for managing the scheme for county and municipal authorities. Since then, several counties and municipalities have adopted their own schemes and guidelines. These are largely based on the guidelines adopted by the Ministry of Culture in 1999, also known as the KORO scheme. The scheme has changed over the years since then, but the main objective is the same as before: commissions for artists and art for the public.

In addition to KORO and the municipal and county schemes, there is a growing field of art in public spaces in Norway that is funded by other means than the public sector, such as private companies, foundations, and others.

Professional policies

Since the artists' campaign of 1974, Norske Billedkunstnere (the Norwegian association of artists, NBK) has worked to ensure that public funds are allocated to art in the form of commissions to artists, so that more people can make a living from art. This is still an objective for NBK. The umbrella organisation comprises some 20 artists' organisations, both regional associations and professional groups. The regional associations run 15 art centres around the country. These are local resource centres that act in the region to ensure that the scheme is maintained, functions as well as possible, and is introduced in municipalities where it has not yet been adopted.

How can we ensure that money allocated to the arts to the greatest possible extent goes to artist? In the art scheme, the mechanism for this is three-fold:

1. Artists receive commissions for public buildings and facilities.
2. Art consultants who are also artists are appointed to curate and project manage the commissions
3. An art tax of 5 percent is deducted from the artbudget; this goes to the Visual Artists' Relief Fund (BKH).

The art tax is a solidarity tax that funnels a portion of the price from the sale of art back to the community where it becomes funding that can be applied for. BKH awards grants and support to artists and art projects from these funds. Art budgets in public spaces are often quite large and therefore constitute an important part of BKH's activities.

Description of the scheme

In Norway, legislation regulates public procurement. This does not apply to art as art is unique intellectual work as opposed to an ordinary good or service. Therefore, art can be commissioned/purchased directly from an artist without following the legally mandated steps. This can often seem strange to municipal employees unfamiliar with the scheme, that an artist can receive a large commission without having to compete for it based on price, quality and so on. Artists can also be paid large advances, which is unusual in most other contexts. However, calls for proposals are often held among invited artists, which is a great way to select the best art projects. In these competitions, it is not the price that matters, but the idea and how the proposal relates to the goals of the art plan.

In government projects, KORO negotiates the art projects with the users/owners. In municipalities, there is a shorter distance between the public and municipal employees/politicians, and it is therefore more important to work closely with the user/owner in an art committee, so that the public feel ownership of the art. Municipalities spend tax money on art in an often-tight municipal economy and can face harsh criticism. Therefore, the work of an art committee is vital in this situation. The art committee consists of representatives from different groups: users, owners,

and architects, as well as the art consultant, who has special responsibility for all art-related matters.



Laila Kongevold and Stefan Christiansen
...Trojaner?, 2022.
Ringsaker school,
Brumunddal. Photo:
Laila Kongevold and
Stefan Christiansen.

The network of consultants and the curatorial opportunities portal

KORO established the network for curators and art consultants and now approves applications from art consultants, curators, and others with a relevant background to the network. Here, clients can find qualified individuals. The online portal was launched in 2016. All consultancy assignments are advertised there, and an email is sent to the consultants when new assignments are posted for which they can apply. This is a good approach for both the consultants and the municipalities, as consultants are often needed in various parts of the country. Applying for a consultancy assignment is meant to be simple; a short application text with a CV is required. All this makes it easy to find and apply for different assignments, without taking a lot of time and effort. This makes it possible for an artist to work as a consultant.

RSU

Once the art consultants have applied for the assignment, the list of applicants goes to the Regional Cooperation Committee, RSU, which consists of a visual

artist, a craftsman, and an architect, who have been elected by the artists' organisations. The RSU recommends one applicant for the assignment. The client has the final choice of consultant, but they usually follow the RSU's recommendation. In the choice of consultant, the RSU tend to consider factors other than those a commissioning body would, such as artistic considerations. In the past, the RSU would also approve or comment on the art plan to ensure that the objectives of the scheme were being met, for example that as much of the budget as possible would go to professional artists. The RSU scheme has been abandoned in several places and constitutes one of the factors that vary when the different municipalities have adopted their own art scheme.

Open pre-qualification

An important professional policy goal for the artists' organisations is to give more artists the opportunity to receive commissions. One way in which the consultant can do this is an open pre-qualification call in which artists can present themselves. This can be quite labour-intensive for the art consultant, so it can only be done in projects with a certain budget. The art consultant will support the artist throughout the production process, so that an inexperienced artist will also be able to safely carry out an art project. An open pre-qualification call also offsets the risk of an art consultant repeatedly using their own network and working with favourite artists.

Documents

The scheme also offers document templates for the key documents in art projects, such as contracts, competition regulations, time sheets, art plan templates, hand-over agreement, use agreement between owner and user, and so on. These are based on KORO's scheme and adapted to the municipalities' own schemes.

The art committee

At the art committee's first meeting, it is important to review the roles in the committee so that everyone has a good understanding of their roles. The expertise of the art consultant should play an important part

in the work of the art committee. Most art committees work on the basis of consensus, but part of the clarifications at the first meeting should also include a review of who has voting rights.

The art plan and choice of artists

The art committee jointly develops an art plan, which is drawn up by the art consultant. The plan should describe the curatorial framework and the overall objectives of the artwork. It constitutes an important guiding document for the art committee going forward. The art plan should detail the process of the art committee, what kind of art is desired and why. It is also important to justify the choice of artists. In addition, it should include a budget showing how much is spent on the artists and the art consultant and the calculation of the art fee.

Hourly rate for art consultants

Every year KORO negotiates an hourly rate for art consultants with the state. The fee can be paid as an hourly wage with tax deducted, or an invoice can be sent. Art consultants who send invoices must be registered for VAT. The fixed hourly rate is low compared to the usual rates for consultants in the private sector. But as a self-employed artist it's okay because the work doesn't involve many expenses and time spent obtaining commissions. I am therefore satisfied with this hourly rate, but if I had run a limited company full-time, I would have had problems making ends meet.

Conclusion

I have wanted to describe in which ways the public art system in Norway differs from many other professional fields. The tendency in society in general is towards larger and larger companies taking bigger shares of the commissions. I believe that the art scheme will continue to change with the times, but I hope that it will still be possible to be both an artist and an art consultant in the future.

Empathy, contradictions, and talismans

Thoughts on the work of a public art consultant in Finland



Maija Kovari
Finland

The founder of consultancy firm Public Art Agency Finland, sculptor and architect Maija Kovari sat down with artist and curator Miina Pohjolainen, the agency's art coordinator, to discuss changes in the Finnish public art field and art coordination in practice, the formation of an art consultant's expertise, and the future of the field.



Miina Pohjolainen
Finland

Maija Kovari has worked in many roles in the public art sector, as an artist, architect, and art consultant for more than a decade. Miina Pohjolainen has extensive experience as an artist and curator researching and producing independent art projects in public spaces.

Public Art Agency Finland is a design and consultancy company whose primary aim is twofold: (1) to facilitate collaboration between artists and customers in public art production, especially in the conceptual and early stages of the process, and (2) to compile regional or district specific public art programmes and art competitions for cities and municipalities.

MP: You have worked in the public art field in various roles over more than ten years; how would you say that Finnish public art has changed in that time?

MK: When I founded Public Art Agency Finland, there were around ten freelancers who worked as public art consultants, alongside other commitments. Many freelance consultants have in fact now been hired by cities or municipalities to run public art projects, which initiatives such as the new Museum Act have made possible. Large cities have also started to include more public art curators in their museum institutions. The private sector now consists of a few small companies

of more than one person, and some individual artists also work as art consultants on a freelance basis.

Another big change is simply that more public art is produced these days – there are more commissioners of public art both in the city and municipal organisations as well as private companies. This leads to improved employment opportunities for artists in the field of public art. Cities and municipalities have recognized that art can help to create meaningful and interesting urban spaces, which relates to the idea of attractiveness and inter-city competition for the skilled work force and taxpayer base. The fact that art can answer a need for attractive public spaces and serve the city in its own brand development has now been acknowledged. This is perhaps a more global trend in total, which is reflected in big cities as well as smaller areas.

Recently I've been thinking about how artworks are like magical talismans. Before, when public art was less common, it may have more explicitly carried the story of a specific person or historical event. In these cases, the artwork introduced a layer of meaning to the site, and acted as a symbol of a national narrative. Does such an expectation exist for contemporary art, that it should endow a space with depth of meaning? For instance, when it comes to rural or slowly developing regions with negative population growth, there's often a notion that art projects can transform a dilapidated city square into a meaningful meeting place, even if the art itself does not directly lead to a population increase or boost in services. Is this the way it should be, and does it work in the first place?

MP: I was recently reading Johanna Ruohonen's study on post-war Finnish public art (especially murals) and the development of art-related policies as the welfare state was being constructed. Ruohonen says that in this time a certain patronizing idea of civil education and the formation of a national narrative held sway, related concretely to the modern welfare state and the archetype of an ideal citizen in such a new world order. I have observed that nowadays this

national myth is not as conspicuously presented; instead the stories of certain cities or places have gained prestige and art is expected to build up the identity and brand of such local communities – a place abuzz with potential.

MK: I can relate to that. When I was in Singapore getting to know and research the local public art scene, here was a sense of public art seen as part of civil education and building national identity. In Finland the local narrative in big cities such as Helsinki or Tampere is paradoxically linked to the global: “we’re going along with the cutting edge as respectable actors who recognize these global trends”. In growing cities the locality is in relation with the global and becomes more general; the art discourse in these cities itself arises largely from international hot topics and current affairs. Art projects connect with these broader discussions on topics such as identity politics, societal disparities, and the climate crisis; whereas in small areas we can recognize the local pride over a church organ factory or some other phenomenon that ties in with the region’s history. Therefore, locality is developed differently in different places, from different starting points and reflections.

MP: Moving back to the subject of art consultancy as a profession, what do you think about the professionalism and expertise involved? What comprises an art consultant’s expertise, and what skills are required for the job?

MK: First of all, we should probably define what art consultancy is. This field is very diverse, and there are many paths into working in the field, from urban activism to commercial consulting. Public Art Agency Finland acts alongside the public administration, within the parameters of the pre-set goals of cities and municipalities. So, we use our own expertise to serve the needs and objectives of our customers, and we cannot directly challenge the activity of city organizations in the same way that freely acting individual activists can. Then again, we can speak directly

with those who commission the work, and bring things together through that. Expertise also means presenting the best practices and strengthening sustainable models, and not capitulating to poorly functioning or unequal methods.

For me, an art consultant is first and foremost a diverse and multidisciplinary agent who combines varying sets of values and goals in meaningful ways. So being professional starts with a certain empathy and ability to understand and listen to the desires and necessities of disparate communities, to identify with them and communicate those necessities to the other concerned parties. Goals may include the artist’s freedom of expression and artistic vision, the financial interests of a construction company, or the long-term intentions of a city’s development strategy. Our task is to negotiate sometimes contradictory aims in a way that enables the coexistence of all agendas. The common goal is always high quality, but this quality may mean different things to different instances.

MP: I think of art consultancy as a type of translation or dissemination. The work involves transmitting information and conventions from one field or institution to another, while respecting various viewpoints. It’s through the mediated “translation” that common ground can be gained. This need for a form of mediation can vastly alter the way things are done and it also makes it possible for different spheres of expertise at different levels to learn from each other. On a general level, this is about building trust; every project has to find the best way to work together and to understand the goals of each collaborator – which may not be mutually exclusive – and also to listen to the concerns and fears that different groups might have. An additional element in this social-artistic drama is the audience, all people who come into contact with the art in their daily lives. This group is extremely heterogenous when it comes to backgrounds and viewpoints.

MK: Right, and the audience member is on the receiving end, they are the final customer. So we are trying

to create something that is significant and resonates with them in some way. I have trained in two different disciplines and both of my degrees have also taught me to view the world through different value systems. My experience from different fields of study has taught me to live with certain discrepancies and to navigate the sometimes choppy waters of differing expectations and requirements. It has certainly been of use in my work as an art consultant.

MP: How do you see the future of the field?

MK: My dream is that cities would have increased access to information on what art actually is and can be, and how it can be introduced into public spaces. Artists also deserve opportunities to develop their knowledge and showcase their work to broad audiences in these contexts. I hope that the role of art consultants will grow to be more involved in the content of the art exhibited, and that we would be less relied upon to work in PR and basic administration and organisation. I want our role to extend to be more specific or then to become redundant, if everything starts working as well as possible.

MP: It's difficult to pinpoint what my dream for this field would be. One problem from an ecological standpoint is the life span of an artwork. In Finland, architecture and buildings from the 60s, 70s and even the 90s are currently being demolished. I hope that we can move away from the idea of single-use architecture and that art could help to build sustainable public spaces or other built environments. There is some discourse about the ecological sustainability of public art production, but practical applications are still in their infancy.

Another thing is the diversity among artists working in the field and open attitudes toward the ways in which public art is produced. We should find the courage to create diverse built environments, not cookie-cutter solutions that are aimed exclusively toward people with certain socio-economic privileges.

MK: Perhaps it has to do with expanding a more general idea of who is accepted and how diverse our conception of human existence can be.

MP: Public art can also be very powerful, and may produce reactions of anger or annoyance. It's okay if some people aren't on board. Even though an installation or mural may decay over time, public art can speak to issues that are important currently, or that deserve attention, if it creates a true link to some contemporary concern. I think that the nature of public spaces includes a basic presumption of debate.

MK: If instead of imagining our dreams we took a look at where the field is actually currently headed, I believe that art consultancy will invite many new actors to the field, and current active individuals will use that synergy to specialize even further. Some can focus on practical coordination and production of artworks, while others can go into strategic work and help envision new movements, either by creating art programmes or other strategic work. When this wave of specialization occurs, I hope that various actors will recognize one another and the skills they all bring to the table

Text mentioned in the conversation:

Ruohonen, Johanna (2013): *Imagining a New Society: Public Painting as Politics in the Postwar Finland*. University of Turku.

Reflection: The work of art consultants in public spaces



Ann Magnusson
Sweden



Madelene Gunnarsson
Sweden

In 2016, Linköping University Hospital in central Sweden was inaugurated after a decade of extensive renovations and extensions. In the construction process, several artists were commissioned to produce site-integrated works for the new parts of the building, both indoors and outdoors. The process also included a large number of newly purchased art works that were added to the hospital collection. The project manager for the art was Ann Magnusson, who runs the Stockholm-based art consultancy firm AM Public. This chapter takes its starting point in her work as an art consultant in a larger organisation, in this case the owner of the hospital, Region Östergötland (the county authority). Based primarily on the collaboration with the artist Morag Myerscough and her artwork *Mood colour tweets*, made for one of the central corridors in the hospital, the text highlights some of the different expectations, skill sets, and conditions involved in the role of an art consultant.

New conditions for art

The art consultancy AM Public has been active for more than 20 years and its clients include the Swedish state, municipalities, counties and private businesses. Examples of clients include Public Art Agency Sweden, Stockholm Art, Vasakronan, Stena Fastigheter and Uppsala municipality. The assignments vary from management of art programmes in large-scale urban development projects, with a variety of actors involved, to purchasing and assembling art collections for individual locations and contexts such as hospitals, churches, schools and residential environments. These assignments typically include feasibility studies and development of art programmes, as well as project management and specialist expertise in working with

site-specific and building-integrated art. They may also involve art of a more ephemeral or temporary nature. The duration of assignments can vary widely, sometimes lasting several years. AM Public was first commissioned by Region Östergötland in 2010 and the collaboration is still on-going. This long-term commitment has allowed for the development of mutual trust and collaboration on several levels.



Morag Myerscough
Mood Colour Tweets
Photo: Kajsa Juslin

The engagement has coincided with some major changes in the field of public art. In the 2010s, the issue of public authorities having to comply with the Public Procurement Act (Lagen om offentlig upphandling – LOU) when purchasing art was raised. After several appeals, Region Östergötland began work on reviewing the extensive regulations governing public art purchases. Ann Magnusson, who was hired as an art consultant at the time, was given a supporting and advisory role in the process of developing guidelines for procurement, bases for tender evaluation and award criteria.

The changes prompted a review of the approaches and processes in public art projects in the region. The bureaucratisation has led to a significantly larger administrative apparatus for all those involved in an art project, with complicated application procedures



Morag Myerscough
 Mood Colour Tweets
 Photo: Morag
 Myerscough

and increased requirements in terms of accessibility, security and maintenance. At the same time, the art consultancy profession has become more specialised and professionalised. Today, art consultants are in increased demand by both private and public commissioning bodies.

Mood colour tweets

One of the artists appointed early on to work on a commissioned proposal for the university hospital was British artist Morag Myerscough. She has completed several high-profile commissions for hospitals and

schools, characterised by bright colours and organic patterns. The site for Myerscough's commission at Linköping University Hospital was a long main corridor. Some parts of it originated from the existing hospital building and other parts were part of the new extension. In dialogue with the architect, Myerscough decided to add something that would permeate the entire corridor and make it easier for people to find their way around the hospital. The artist's final proposal was a work that would reflect the different emotions of a whole year. For some time, Myerscough had been tweeting what she called "mood tweets," consisting of two short tweets a day based on the colours she was experiencing at the time, for example "blue" and "red." Based on these tweets, Morag Myerscough developed a colour system that was then translated into an abstract pattern for the entire corridor wall.

The artwork Mood colour tweets is hand-painted on approximately 600 wooden panels and runs along the entire wall of the main passage between the north and south entrances, as well as on the tenth floor. The warm colours are intended to generate a flow of experiences for those moving through the corridor, from intense to more tranquil and stripped-down parts. Shades of black interrupted by brilliant hues of pink, yellow and red move rhythmically across the surfaces and the flow can be likened to a landscape which opens and changes as you pass. The installation was completed in 2018 and is now an integral part of the hospital environment. However, the process was marked by several twists and turns, complicating as well as enriching the artwork.

Art as a collaborative process

Art in shared environments emerges from the encounter between individuals, groups and organisations – all woven into a context of rules, attitudes and ideas that largely determine what is possible. Unexpected events and contacts are also part of the process of creating the artwork. For the art consultant, this means that a typical workday can be spent negotiating and meeting with the various parties involved in and affected by the proposed artwork. For example,

a sudden change to a seemingly trivial detail in the building plan can have a major impact on the artwork. During the preparatory work for Mood colour tweets, such a situation arose. For the artist, who had already come quite far in developing the concept, a redesign of the corridor wall represented a fundamental change, as the line of sight was broken up and the work could not be displayed as the coherent narrative it was intended. The alteration prompted many project meetings where the art consultant worked on clarifying the nature of the artistic process and the importance of adhering to the framework that had initially been set. Disruptions like these also often put a strain on the artist, who may need support in order not to lose momentum and direction. Overall, managing a public art project relies heavily on communication skills and the ability to coordinate the different professional roles that are expected to work together. It also requires an ability to shift to a broader perspective and to understand how artistic ideas can be translated into spatial design.

The extension and renovation of a hospital takes a long time and it is common that reorganisations and staffing changes take place during the construction process. At the same time, the precise implementation of art projects requires working in long-term partnerships at various stages of production, in which the knowledge of the artist and the long-term commitment and experience of the client are often crucial. Major changes in an organisation therefore also affect the art. Before the planning of the extension and remodeling of the main corridor of the university hospital, an art programme was developed in consultation with the responsible project team. The art programme highlighted the central location of the corridor and the fact that the art would be experienced by many people – both those who visit the site daily and those who are only there temporarily. When Morag Myerscough presented her proposal to the project team, the reactions were positive. The artwork could be interpreted in a variety of ways, it facilitated orientation in the building, and added colour and energy to an otherwise undynamic environment. The proposal was accepted, and the artist

was commissioned to create the work. Several years later, after staffing changes, the issue of accessibility was raised. Arguments were made for why Myerscough's work would not be suitable for people with various disabilities. The colourful pattern, which the previous accessibility officer had perceived as a wayfinding aid, was now highlighted as distracting and confusing, thereby impeding access to the corridor. The artist, who at this stage was in the process of realising the work, was faced with radically new circumstances. Could the work even be completed?

The Region's arts officer and the art consultant responded by inviting representatives from the concerned associations and groups to a meeting. During the meeting, the artist spoke about Mood colour tweets before



Morag Myerscough
Mood Colour Tweets
Photo: Kajsa Juslin

the art consultant took over and responded to the participants' apprehensions. Towards the end of the meeting, several participants expressed how they appreciated being seen and listened to. For them, it was crucial to have a deeper understanding of the artistic concept and to have someone respond to their concerns. The meeting concluded with all of the involved parties supporting the completion of the artwork.

This example demonstrates the pedagogical work involved in the role of the art consultant, both in terms of negotiating with the client and in dialogue with the users. It also shows the importance of interpersonal encounters during the development of a permanent work, and that more opportunities should be given for critical reflection, both individually and collectively. Art often provokes questions and emotions that require both empathy and experience to respond to. Time and space are important prerequisites in order to perceive and respond to the expectations, needs and desires that surround an art project. At the same time, sometimes the dialogue needs to be limited – for example, when the artistic integrity risks being compromised. Håkan Nilsson, professor in art history at Södertörn University, argues that one of the profession's key skills is to be able to maintain a double view. This includes looking from many different perspectives, having the ability to switch vantage points and at the same time keeping the image of the artwork alive over time (Nilsson, 2021, p. 23).

The tension between the predictable and the unpredictable

Running large site-specific art commissions as an art consultant means constantly renegotiating and responding to each specific situation. One of the great challenges for the art consultant is to give everyone involved in an art project the courage to stay with a certain degree of uncertainty about what might transpire; to allow for different fantasies about the site and give the artist room to act within the structure. Among the most challenging and interesting aspects of working with public art is that no one knows from the start exactly what the result will be. In an art commission, the artist is encouraged to propose something unique for a specific site. For the artwork to emerge, deepen in content and interact with the world, the artist cannot fully relate to what the client might expect or want. Too many modification demands often result in empty universality, resignation in the face of outdated norms, misguided notions of right and wrong, and homogeneity. At worst, the artwork becomes completely mute.

The practice of the art consultant is thus largely about being a carrier of the art throughout the process. That entails keeping commitment, visions, desires, drives and dreams alive. In this role, the art consultant deals with a range of activities that connect the processes of commissioning, selection, production, mediation, public engagement, and so on. The art consultant needs to be able to read and make room for the artistic process, and to imagine how something might develop in terms of scale, form, energy and space. This requires a holistic approach to what art can do, as well as taking into account what it cannot do. While it can sometimes feel like both artist and art consultant are drowning in technical and practical problems during a construction process, art consistently demonstrates a remarkable ability to allow for personal and meaningful conversations along the way – unexpected and deep alliances emerge that bring life and energy to the project. Morag Myerscough herself has expressed how art can elicit the liberation of thought in these encounters: “Things that make you think about other things.”

In conclusion, art in public space is about investing in a long-term process that requires time and commitment, where relationships are cultivated and tested, where insights emerge and grow. All the courage, collective expertise and commitment that is built into Mood colour tweets as a project is also built into the artwork and the experience of it. In this way, art can represent a hopeful future, one in which we can come together and build something sustainable despite our different backgrounds and experiences.

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What's at stake?

Politically charged public art in the 2020s



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Explicitly political contemporary art and conflicts of opinion are both vital elements in a modern, democratic society. Ephemeral public art projects make it possible to address urgent and topical issues. Art's essence is freedom of speech and as such, defending its autonomy is a democratic responsibility. Yet how do we as public art producers and curators navigate a situation of increased geopolitical mistrust, harassment of artists, and rapid digital dissemination with real world impact? How do we sustain art's autonomy and respond to art's influence on our conceptualization of the world and ourselves?

In this essay we investigate what scope of possibility public art has when it comes to raising politically controversial issues in society today by looking into two ephemeral art projects curated and produced by Kulturbyrået Mesén. In both these art projects, separating art and artist is almost impossible. Gelawesh Waledkhani (b. 1982) and Ahmed Umar (b. 1988) bring their personal histories into their artworks, undeterred by forces seeking to silence them. Born in Kurdistan and Sudan respectively, both Waledkhani and Umar came to Norway as refugees. As the artistic project is interwoven with individual battles of resistance and emancipation, the two artists manage to address issues of freedom of speech and identity in a way only they can: their narration is their own, the emanating voice deeply personal and the gaze direct. Still, the issues the artworks touch upon are global in outreach and potential impact. The political has now become deeply personal.

Visibility and discourse

Waledkhani's *Rojava: The Women's Revolution* and Umar's

Carrying the face of ugliness are ephemeral art projects produced for public places in Oslo, Norway. The temporary nature of these projects renders them especially equipped for raising issues of current interest. Particularly at Oslo Central Station we have the possibility to swiftly showcase artworks of impassioned topicality, for instance by re-curating already existing works as we did with Umar's *Carrying the face of ugliness* during the fall/winter 2022. The exhibition space in Rosenkrantz' street, however, is a six-metre-wide wall for showing original artworks, oftentimes produced in situ. This wall is reserved for art that encourages freedom of speech and public debate. Here, Waledkhani's *Rojava: The Women's Revolution* was shown in 2020.

Temporary artworks provide opportunities that permanent works do not. For instance, there are fewer considerations concerning maintenance and the range of possible materials is drastically expanded when decay and decomposition are not an issue. Especially when working in public space, ephemerality could be both a quality and a method. Without anyone owning the work, the artist may be more daring in subject matter as well as choice of material. Knowing the artwork will eventually be removed, artists can take a greater risk both concerning their oeuvre and the statement they are making. Especially important for artists and curators working in the public space, ephemerality allows for working with very timely subjects.

As the advertisement industry has clearly demonstrated, visual images influence our conduct and beliefs. In the exhibition arena in Oslo Central Station, where travellers amount to some 150.000 each day, the mere volume of visitors demarcates the art projects as influential. Public space, physical as well as digital, is "permeable, both bounded and unbounded, local and global, contested, mutable and socially contingent" (Hall and Robertson 2001:19-20). The text seeks to demonstrate the potential impact, consequences, and outreach of art in public places. By reference to Waledkhani and Umar's separate artworks, the text will show how art in public places is political, "never simply decorative" (Miles 1997:61).

Public art exists within a discursive urban context. Discourse, as it is inseparable from the duality of utterance and silencing (production and repression of “truth”), relates to power as either instrument, effect, or hitch. Furthermore, discourse’s knowledge production makes up the foundation for authorisation and execution of power. Therefore, the struggle to break free from the system for signification (oppression) is essentially situated in the language of discourse, i.e., the space in which conversation can happen. It is also the space in which we, as producers and curators of public art, facilitate certain expressions, in certain sites. Thus, public space, providing specificity of site to public art, must be understood “to encompass the individual site’s symbolic, social, and political meanings as well as the discursive and historical circumstances within which artwork, spectator, and site are situated” (Deutsche 1988:14).

Furthermore, as the world has become more globalised and people share and discuss art and politics online, artworks sometimes take on their own life. The context in which art is reproduced, shared, and debated both online and in the media entails both increased visibility and international impact as well as threats of violence and silencing, threatening freedom of speech and democratic values.

Rojava: The Women’s Revolution

In Gelawesh Waledkhani’s monumental drawing *Rojava: The Women’s Revolution* (2020) seven women stand out against a plain white background. The intricate, black lines of the felt pen give form and movement to the women’s jackets. Formally, the composition is split horizontally in three: the first dividing line following their shoulders, separates the black and white clothing and equipment from the lighter, softer rendering of the heads and faces with their colourful headdresses. The third, upper part consists of a single quotation in red letters: “A society can never be free without women’s liberation.”

The women’s torsos melt together, forming one large, communal shape. The slings crisscrossing their bodies

Gelawesh Waledkhani,
*Rojava The Women’s
Revolution*, 2020
(detail). Photo:
Vibeke Christensen,
Kulturbyrået Mesén.



further accentuates the formal compactness and simultaneously signifies the bond between the women. These women are taking to arms against the terrorist organisation IS (The Islamic State) in Rojava, on the Turkish-Syrian border in Western Kurdistan. The ongoing revolution calls for democratic autonomy, peace amongst religious groups, and equal rights for women. Waledkhani’s group portrait is a representation of real women she has met, asserting the importance of the female Kurdish resistance. In 2015, the year of the famous battle of Kobane, Evangelos Aretaios wrote from his visit to the front:

In the wider Middle East since the nineteenth century and before that, the female body is one of the most important symbolic battlegrounds between modernizers and reactionaries. Today, here in Syria, this fight is to death. (Aretaios 2015)

Waledkhani’s monumental drawing highlights the importance of women in the revolution and the quote “A society can never be free without women’s liberation” speaks to the Kurdish commitment to create a democratic, autonomous administration in which women and men are equals. The extensive focus on gender equality that characterises the revolution is largely based on the writings of author and philosopher Abdullah Öcalan (b. 1948) who Waledkhani quoted in red, large letters in her artwork for

Rosenkrantz's street. Öcalan founded the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers' Party) in 1978 and is serving a life sentence in Turkish prison after being labelled a terrorist, yet his writings on decolonization, democracy and gender equality continue to influence the Kurdish resistance and spark hope amongst the all-female militia. The weapons that the women in Waledkhani's drawing are carrying, demarcate the role of the woman in the life-and-death fight for freedom in Kurdistan, and symbolise ideological convictions challenging patriarchal views on gender in radical ways. Facing threats of slavery, sexual violence and death, these Kurdish women are reclaiming the power of the female sex, also taking advantage of the IS' fundamentalist belief that whoever is killed by a woman is not allowed into heaven.

The gaze directed out of the picture arrests the beholder as the woman becomes the individual face of the revolution, evoking pathos by virtue of the graveness of expression and demanding accountability. It is a gaze refusing the categorization of a patriarchal system for signification, a symbol of the women reclaiming the power to act on their own terms – even in the face of death.

The headdresses are colourful focal points. A piece of clothing as much as a symbol, the headdress becomes central in understanding conflicts of identity and freedom, inasmuch as it is impossible today not to associate it with the ongoing revolution in Iran. Against the monochrome of the women's torsos, the headdresses are important in providing each woman with an individual identity. Noticeably, everyone wears it in a different way and one woman has removed it. This leads us to inspect the headdresses more carefully, both what is actually represented and what is covered up. As such, the stand-out pieces of clothing turn into a play on cover and reveal, a formal approach to the representation of the female body with a longstanding tradition in art history. Simultaneously giving symbolic form to a reality where female bodies are being policed by others, as well as highlighting the women themselves as autonomous beings. Thus, it offers

insight into ways of seeing, of the patriarchal gaze upon the woman.

In Waledkhani's work, the woman who has taken the headdress off becomes a nexus where political ideology intersects with the life of a woman. The drawn lines of her hair merge with those of her skin, in a drawing technique that references Kurdish weaving tradition. The thin and swirling lines bear witness to a particular movement of the hand, an expression of a female artisan tradition.

The controversy of a word

Having utilised a quotation by the former leader of the PKK – importantly, never declared a terrorist organisation by Norwegian authorities – the artwork received a lot of media attention and overwhelming negative response from Turkey. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded the municipality remove the artwork, proclaiming Oslo was supporting terrorist propaganda. Likewise, the Turkish ambassador in Norway Fazlı Çorman called it an “insult,” also stating the municipality is being “used by supporters of the Norwegian branch of the PKK” (Ekroll and Ask, 2021). This seems to indicate that both artist and curator are PKK supporters, which would be a serious and ill-informed opinion of the professionalism of both Kulturbyrået Mesén and the broader extent of the Norwegian art field. Not only does this statement ignore the artistic process as a whole, but it fails to understand the curatorial process as transparent and democratic.

However harsh the rhetoric and great the Turkish efforts to have the artwork removed, 3 February 2021 Oslo Culture Committee declined their demands, unequivocally supporting Waledkhani and freedom of expression. Ambassador Çorman then wrote a letter to all 59 members of the Oslo City Council, asking them to “correct the city authorities' inconsiderate support and glorification of terrorism” (Ekroll and Ask, 2021). 17 January 2021, Oslo City Council unanimously voted for the artwork to remain on view with Vice Mayor for Culture and Sports, Omar Samy Gamal,

calling freedom of speech “a pillar in a free democratic society” (The Department for Culture and Sport; Mesén). Waledkhani also received joint support from the Association of Norwegian Visual Artists (Norske Billedkunstnere), Young Artists’ Society (Unge Kunstneres Samfund) and The Center for Drawing (Tegnerforbundet)(Norske Billedkunstnere; Unge Kunstneres Samfund and Tegnerforbundet, 2021). Even though Öcalan is a controversial person, the quote is universal. Speaking on behalf of all oppressed women, the wording should not be contentious. However, in the ears of some men/regimes the quote in itself becomes problematic. In 2020, one would think that acknowledging women’s place in a free society would be indisputable, but unfortunately, the reality is that women’s liberation is still controversial in many places today.

Gelawesh Waledkhani,
*Rojava The Women’s
 Revolution*, 2020
 (detail). Photo:
 Vibeke Christensen,
 Kulturbyrået Mesén.



Once more, we witness a displacement of focus, from the women depicted, to the man referenced. As such, Turkey’s arguments and the larger debate is based, predominantly, on an abstraction of artistic content. As Waledkhani herself has stated: “My artwork, which the Turkish government is trying to remove, is meant as a message to all the women of the world that fighting for one’s rights is worth it” (Waledkhani, 2021). *Rojava: The Women’s Revolution* is a portrait of women, an artwork on its own terms yet also an opportunity for marginalised voices to assert themselves.

Gelawesh Waledkhani
 drawing. Photo:
 Vibeke Christensen,
 Kulturbyrået Mesén.



The demand to remove the artwork should therefore also be understood as a refusal to relate to that which is actually represented and interpret it within the frame of reference that is the canvas. Noticeably, it is an unwillingness to respond to the artwork as art – intrinsically autonomous – but rather deem it a solely political manifestation.

Öcalan’s writings uphold the philosophy of Jineology that comes from the Kurdish *jin* meaning woman, *jiyan* meaning life, and *azadi* meaning liberty. It is a philosophical orientation and a movement claiming to build democracy, socialism, ecology, and feminism. Should we not be able to view Öcalan’s quotation regarding his work as an author and philosopher, in the same manner that we not only tolerate but are able to praise the work of Knut Hamsun, even though his affiliations with the Nazi cause is widely known? Taking the literary object as a starting point and investigating Öcalan as an author and feminist philosopher, may produce insight and empowerment beyond a black-and-white picture of violence.

Yet, the nature of public art challenges the borders of autonomy and discourse. As public art “defines and makes visible the values of the public realm and do so in a way which is far from neutral, never simply decorative,” the artwork has a clear political side

Ahmed Umar

Carrying the face of ugliness, 2018.

Photo: Kulturbyrået Mesén.



(Miles, 1997, p. 61). That side, however, need not be a direct utterance of support or rejection of any political movement as such. The debate that arose as Waledkhani's artwork was exhibited in Rosenkrantz' street shows that even today, merely arguing the freedom of art in the public space is a political statement. The fact that a single quotation within an artwork has generated such strong reactions shows the power of definition inherent in art. Art's essence is freedom of speech and as such, defending its autonomy is a democratic responsibility. Waledkhani touches upon this when she writes of Turkey's reactions to the artworks as "nothing but an attack on the freedom of speech" (Waledkhani, 2021).

Art and geopolitical unrest

The core of the matter then is not only protecting freedom of speech, but also actively providing space for speech. In turn, this will not diminish the right but enforce it. Both challenging contemporary art and conflicts of opinion are vital elements in a modern, democratic society.

Waledkhani undoubtedly risks a lot by exhibiting *Rojava: The Women's Revolution*, even in Norway where freedom of speech is protected. In fact, constitutional protection of human rights, gender equality, transparency, and democracy are characteristic of the

Nordic countries. Yet, in the mind of Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, it is a terrorist hotbed. Ambassador Çorman's accusation of the municipality acting in the PKK's interest speaks of such geopolitical mistrust.

When the Swedish and Finnish NATO bids were blocked by Turkey, Waledkhani's artwork resurfaced in the news, manifesting its transnational impact. In July 2022, *Aftenposten* wrote: "When Erdogan speaks of the Nordic countries and Norway as nests of terror it is reasonable to believe he refers to Kurdish groups. It is the opinion of the Turkish government that groups supporting the PKK are allowed to operate too freely. They do not like what they consider to be obvious support of the PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan" (Aukrust, 2022).

Ahmed Umar

Carrying the face of ugliness, 2018.

Photo: Ahmed Umar, BONO.



Carrying the Face of Ugliness

The images making up Ahmed Umar's photo series *Carrying the Face of Ugliness* are portraits of people that are not allowed to live as their true selves. The eight black-and-white pictures, of which four were shown in Oslo Central Station, Ski Station, and Oslo Airport Station show the artist standing in front of the person being portrayed. The gesture is bold, powerful, and raw in expression, and blown up to 10 x 10 metres makes a monumental impact on the square.

In 2018, Umar travelled back to his native Sudan and

met people from LGBTQ+ community prohibited from living openly as their true selves. Until 2020, homosexuality was punishable by death in Sudan. Although never put into practice, the law still resulted in people being assaulted. The people Umar portrays risk social stigmatisation, isolation, persecution, and death. Inspired by the Sudanese proverb “Carrying the face of ugliness” – meaning confronting an issue and taking on the blame for others – he decided to do a series of portraits within the community. In lending his face to his subjects, Umar gives a face to the struggle for queer rights on behalf of people who are silenced, unable to stand up for themselves. In some photos, Umar is dressed in some of the subjects’ personal items, or their hands lock in a clutch so intense it can be read as connoting the violence of the regime. The portraits show individual gestures of love, fear, and resistance together with Umar’s protective presence, a brave stand-in for a burden shared. His powerful gaze directed towards the beholder forces us to take their cause to heart.

Ahmed Umar
Carrying the face of ugliness, 2018.
Photo: Kulturbyrået Mesén.



The backgrounds are simple, consisting of concrete walls and sometimes a square window centred in the composition. The formal contrast to the organic lines of the human body is striking. It is a document of the conditions in which the pictures were taken: on private

property, against hard walls with closed shutters bringing associations of having to hide. The idea of a lack of freedom, of a world not willing to accept diversity – effectively grey – and of small-scale resistance looms within the image.

There is a duality in the portraits, a shift between strength and vulnerability, individual expression, and anonymity. This is true also of the accompanying texts where everyone depicted is given the chance to tell their story, their fears and hopes for the future.

In a simultaneously visceral and poetic way, Umar’s *Carrying the face of ugliness* can say something about what is at stake: both the brutal realities marking the everyday life of his subjects and that which queer people all over the world face every day. Their stories concern us, on a both national and global level, and demonstrate how we might find hope and strength in each other’s experiences.

Erasing a face

In January 2023, two of Umar’s photographs exhibited in Oslo Airport Station were subjected to vandalism. The person(s) responsible had deliberately cut/torn out the parts of the picture showing Umar and the other two subjects. It is not known who did it or why, but the erasure of the people, and not other parts of the images, surely means the damage was intentional. The vandalised artworks provoked a sad and ghostly feeling, not at least because the elimination of the subjects within the portraits evoked the violence and persecution of queer people. Furthermore, on the opening night of the exhibition in September 2022, Umar was confronted by an enraged man telling him to “respect” the laws of Sudan, responding with agitation to both the accompanying texts, the pride flag, and Umar’s speech. Instances such as these speak of the risk of harassment Umar and Waledkhani face every day, and also demonstrate how public space in Norway is challenged; how freedom of speech is still contested. The Turkish mass reaction and the anonymous vandalism are two very different attempts at reducing the space for others, threatening the scope of possibility for

the politically charged public art and surely making us consider our incentives and risks.

Politically charged public art today

Both projects touch upon some key issues concerning art in public places – from the production to the encounter with the work. Seeing how artists are facing repercussions such as these, the curator and producer of art in public spaces must investigate and define their own role. As tendencies in our contemporary world are seeking to narrow the scope for expression within public space, navigating the discourse and managing public art projects grows more complex. What is the scope of possibility for politically charged public art today? What do we actively make space for, and what do we passively accept? Where do we draw the line, and who's hand is guiding the pen?

Precisely because public art in a sense imposes itself on the public, the mechanisms for producing it must take into consideration the many facets of urban life and adapt for multifarious readings or experiences with the artwork. Public art “is not only the private expression of an individual artist; it is also a work of art created for the public, and therefore can and should be evaluated in terms of its capacity to generate human reactions” (Cohn, 2008, p. 177). This speaks to public art's importance but also its challenges. Within a context of increased political tension, the freedom of speech and artistic expression are more important and fragile than ever. As the risks that the artists are facing turn more perilous, how do we sustain their incentives?

In the broadest sense, artistic productions and the discussions that arise around them in the urban space – “never successfully colonised as an art space” – are political (Miles, 1997, p. 15). Both Rojava: The Women's Revolution and Carrying the face of ugliness can say something about the conditions for freedom of speech today. As they thematise suppression and acceptance, they also touch upon the vulnerability of political systems. Umar lends his face to individuals and collective struggles; they belong to the ones portrayed,

yet the values they are fighting for are global. Umar even dreams of organising the first ever pride parade in the Arab world, in Khartoum in 2030. In a similar way, Waledkhani's act of solidarity consists of giving a collective battle individual faces and taking on a voice for those who are silenced. Although the artworks find their points of reference in Kurdistan and Sudan, and in the issues women and queer people encounter in those parts of the world, the challenges remain relevant in Norway, not to mention in a changing Europe.

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Art consultancy in Denmark

How has the profession developed and what are the visions for the future?



Marie Markman
Denmark

The text is an interview with myself about my practice as an art consultant. The interview took place in winter 2022/2023.

Interviewer Marie Markman (IMM): I'd like to talk to you about a few different things, Marie: about the process of working with art and the built environment in Denmark in general, and how you work with it specifically. I would also like to hear about your visions for the field and how you aim to work for the realisation of these. I know you through your work as an art consultant, most recently under the Danish Arts Foundation's art consultant scheme for the period 2019-2022, previously under the Ministry of Defence's Property Agency and also Aarhus Municipality, but in preparing for this interview I searched online and found out that you are actually a sculptor? This was a bit of a surprise for me and I want to start by asking, why did you become an art consultant – was it that you couldn't make a living from your art?

Art Consultant Marie Markman (MM): Wha... well, thanks for being so direct... As you mentioned, I started the art consultancy work under the auspices of Aarhus municipality. It was actually a coincidence that consulting on public art has come to play such a big role in my professional life, and also that I have had experiences that make me believe that we as a society need to invest significantly more in this area than. I was appointed to sit on Aarhus Municipality's Visual Arts Committee from 2011-2013, where I consulted on the art projects in Dokk1 – Aarhus' new public library – but also worked on art commissions in schools and the healthcare sector. I see art consultancy as a really important job! For me today, if I spend half my time

developing my own artworks and half my time promoting the art of others, as an art consultant, then my professional life makes sense.

IMM: Those are big words Marie, we are in the midst of a biodiversity and climate crisis – which your own art is also about. What is it about public art that you find so important that you don't spend all your time on your own artistic work?

MM: Public art, other people's art, my own art – the whole range is important. Fundamentally, I find that art can open up our world, make us comprehend the incomprehensible, move us, and make us think and consider perspectives and relationships that we might not have thought important before experiencing the artwork.

What makes the work with public art so exciting is that we all, regardless of whether we habitually go to museums or other places where art is a priority, get the opportunity to encounter art. The government policies mean that we can encounter really high quality art in all sorts of places in our society – in tax authority buildings, in military barracks, in universities... In many ways, in my own life, I find that the work of an art consultant is a gift. I also find that my background as an artist gives me skills that my partners benefit from in my consultancy work. It is easy for me to see and communicate the potential of art when it comes to the work of other artists.

IMM: Simply because you are so used to seeing and thinking about art? Is it perhaps also a bit liberating to relate to someone else's work rather than your own?

MM: I was asked at one point if it isn't ever difficult to be a consultant, because I might want a particular commission myself. I actually found the question a bit insulting, because I see my own art and my consultancy as separate spheres. I love the process of developing my own work, it's a privileged space for me. At the same time, the energy of the processes where I might have to set the framework for an art project, and work with an art committee to find the right artist to make

a piece, is an equally privileged space. It's so exciting, together with other professionals and/or lay people, to create that space where everyone's knowledge feeds into the project – I learn so much and get to think about so much that I'd never would have arrived at on my own.

IMM: Would you like to tell me more about the regulations and policies related to building integrated art in Denmark?

MM: In Denmark, since 1984, 1.5% of the craftsmen's sum* has been allocated to art commissions in connection with government construction projects. The Danish Arts Foundation is legally responsible for ensuring that art of a high professional standard is created, and in order to meet this obligation the fund has a tradition of appointing professional artists to carry out the work.

My first assignment in government construction was the Skagen Rescue Station under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence's Property Agency. That was in 2015, and here the Ministry of Defence Property Agency and Jutland's military facilities, rescue stations and employees were a new consulting context for me. This was made possible because for a number of years, starting in 2011, I had advised Aarhus Municipality on art. The municipality, inspired by the government scheme, had politically adopted a percentage rule for the integration of art in municipal buildings (in recent years, other municipalities have also chosen to introduce a percentage rule). The work meant, among other things, that I visited municipal nursing homes and mediated and discussed art in this context, and I also sat on the art committee in connection with the prestige library building Dokk1 and discussed art with, among others, Realdania, Denmark's most influential building fund. The Danish Arts Foundation recommended me as an advisor to the Ministry of Defence's Property Agency based on work for Aarhus Municipality.

These have been very different contexts, but I have always been filled with optimism after meetings

because the expectations on art are sky-high, whether it is about creating good experiences for citizens with dementia or visitors to the main library, Dokk1. We believe in art – and despite the fact that art budgets are often small, this is where we believe that change can be made, that something special can occur – especially beautiful, especially thought-provoking, especially provocative and new, especially anything...

IMM: I'd like you to be a bit more specific – this a bit pompous, and I think it's a bit of a postulate that art makes such a difference! You're talking about everyone, across social divides having the opportunity to encounter the art?

MM: I hear what you're saying – when we are talking public art in the form of building-integrated art I think it's both about the processes and the facilities that end up having works that the employees or visitors to the space can encounter. Perhaps I can address some of what you are asking about by talking a bit about the commission for the Skagen Rescue Station. The first meeting was between the head of the Skagen Rescue Station, the project manager from the Ministry of Defence's Property Agency and myself. I had prepared a presentation about government policies on art and showed examples of artworks that have been realised with very different budgets. A small work in a nursery and a large-scale work at Dokk1 – both of which I had consulted on, and the point was that a work is not necessarily better because it had a large budget. What is important is diversity – and different types of budgets can contribute to that by enabling different types of works. As I drove home from Skagen after the meeting, I wondered if it was as powerful to deliver a presentation to two people in a break room as I would if I were standing in front of fifty people on a government board or at an art academy. I came to the conclusion that it was as it should be: that as an art consultant I create the best opportunities by always taking mediation very seriously and believing that those I work for can make me wiser and better in my work, and thus together we can develop the right art project.

As part of the consultancy process, during this period I developed a method for how I can actually qualify lay people in the appointed art committee, to make their own decisions about art. A method in which I always start by getting to know the place and the people who are connected to the place. A method in which I start by being a "guest" and in which I have asked those who work or will work in the place in question to tell me about their "culture," and also the architect and the developer to tell me about their visions for the architecture and any other frameworks for the project. Then I set about finding artists who I think will be inspiring to them, and over a three or four-meeting process, the art committee only makes the final decision on an artist when everyone agrees on the way forward. In my first presentation I always present one artist that I think is just what they want, and then I present two artists that will challenge them but that I think will grow on them. Often the process ends up with artists who may have been rejected after my first presentation being pulled back into the process at a later date. My experience is that ensuring a process where there is the possibility of several meetings over a few months enables us to build a shared "space," in which so much can be done.

In Skagen, two years later, we ended up with a painting that is inserted into a concrete wall in the hall where the rescue station's boats are stored. A brand new rescue station has been built and the wall is cast to for holding the painting. In terms of subject matter, the painting contains references to the work carried out from the rescue station, but the image also contains a recurring figure that features in the artist's other work – people in white shirts who look slightly disoriented. It is not clear whether the rescue workers in the picture are actually rescuing people, whether a person is actually standing on the water, or what is happening. For me as a consultant, the special thing about the assignment was that in the process I learned that what you might think was a hidden workspace is actually a place frequented by a lot of people. In the process, we even faced the possibility that we could get extra funding if we reconsidered the placement

of the art for what might appear from the outside to be a more public space. I had to present that to the user group, with some trepidation, because I feared that more money for art might disrupt what we had arrived at. It didn't, and we were given a new perspective on Skagen painting (the Skagen painters were a Scandinavian artist colony in Skagen in the 1880s and early 1890s), which we traditionally encounter in the town's museum, both in terms of subject and context. Going back to what you asked about, I would say that the processes around integrating art are actually as important as the works themselves, because a good consultation process can help lay people enter the space of art with curiosity and openness.

IMM: I'm listening, but I'm also thinking that in some ways it's "a lot" for "very little" also that huge sums of money must be spent on art, given these extensive processes? There's also an increasing focus on art in urban development projects, do we need art everywhere?

MM: You're right that there's a lot of art, but the budgets aren't huge. In 2017, I participated in a PhD defence at the University of Copenhagen around Kunstcirkulæret (the Danish one-percent rule) and how it is managed. The thesis was written by a staff member of the Danish Arts Foundation and the Agency for Culture and Palaces. I was there because, in my opinion, the area is important as it offers a wide public a great opportunity for artistic experiences, and in the long run also contributes to a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Like you, I had the idea that large sums of money must be spent each year on art in the context of the Kunstcirkulæret. The PhD candidate gave the example that one year the total budget was about eleven million DKK for the integration of art in construction. That was a total surprise to me. To put the amount in perspective, I can mention that it is less than it costs to build 250 metres of motorway in Denmark.

IMM: But my impression has been that building-integrated art is really where the big money is. Why do you think that's a perception that many have?

MM: I think it's a combination of the fact that there really are some pretty amazing works being realized in this area, and that the funds that are allocated to art in general are often contentious. I find that this contributes to us (many of us) losing sight of what is actually being allocated. Since the scheme started in 1984, a diversity of relevant works has been created, and as part of the public awareness around funds allocated to art, there has been political attention to the scheme at times. The art community has been concerned that there might be a political majority in favour of abolishing the scheme, and the Danish Arts Foundation has therefore been extra vigilant about the quality of advice it guarantees.

I do understand the fear that the scheme might be abolished or the funds reduced, but I believe, on the other hand, that publicising the potential of art is the only way to ensure that the grants are not just slowly diluted at a time of constant reconsidering of political priorities. Since I started working as an art consultant in 2011, I think more and more that those of us in the art world need to be proactive and advocate for higher funding and strive for visibility when discussions arise about whether we as a society should allocate funding to art. What I encounter in discussions with people outside the artworld – when I dare to be unsnobbish and try to make the art accessible – is faith, hope and joy in art, and also openness to art that may seem strange.

In my consultancy work I meet many people who have little to no experience in art, and often a collaboration can start with scepticism about why we should spend money on art. At a military garrison I had a conversation that started with "why should we spend a million on art when we our healthcare system is underfunded?" and which ended with a reflection on what we ourselves appreciate when we visit buildings that others have passed on to us – and the answer is art and cultural heritage. Art and cultural heritage is something that we ourselves travel the world for, something that we buy reproductions of and find important to surround ourselves with. But we often only end up in that notion

after the putting forth the idea that perhaps the art money would be better spent on hospital beds. And when such conversations come up in my consultancy work, I don't have a ready answer. In a way, we find the answer together in the conversation. And when everyone opens up in conversation and becomes curious, art often ends up feeling like a possibility because it allows future generations to perhaps revel in works that we question today and in dark moments may consider as a society not to prioritize.

IMM: It sounds a bit naive Marie, we see in lots of places that funds for art are not prioritized. In a Danish context, for example, we have recently seen that funding for ambitious art visions and projects in hospitals, under the auspices of the Danish regions, have been cut because art is not a legal requirement in those contexts?

MM: I think it is really important that art is made a legal requirement in the future, also in municipalities and regions. But to return to what you are asking about, there are also different attitudes in a Danish context when it comes to how we should act internally on this. In the context of building-integrated art, criticism has been raised on various occasions of the tradition in which it was practicing artists who were appointed to provide advice on public art for government agencies. In 2019, in search of the best way to handle its responsibilities, the Danish Arts Foundation established a corps of art consultants from which authorities can choose in connection with construction projects. The majority of art consultants today have an art theory and/or curatorial background, and the Danish Arts Foundation is increasingly responsible for standardising its advisory processes.

For me, diversity is created by both working with different methods in terms of process, and by the fact that those used as consultants have different backgrounds. In the past, the Danish Arts Foundation mainly used consultants who were practicing artists – now it mainly appoints consultants who do not have a background as artists. The question I ask myself is: why

can't we ensure diversity in those we choose as consultants? If we have diversity at the consultancy level, my experience is that this automatically results in the final artworks being more diverse.

IMM: It doesn't sound like you have that much respect for the Danish Arts Foundation, nor that you find them agenda-setting in a visionary way. And does it matter what background an art consultant has?

MM: Then I haven't expressed myself clearly. My experience is that the Danish Arts Foundation is a significant professional authority. The foundation's statements are listened to, and we must safeguard this by being professionally ambitious and ensuring diversity at all levels. The scheme for building-integrated art is, as I see it, about ensuring forward-thinking art in government buildings – and also about ensuring that art which might otherwise have difficult conditions is protected. In this respect, I believe that the Danish Arts Foundation should set the framework for consultancy – and I believe that we should work with a varied framework and also with different types of consultants. I think that the level of consultancy is a bit like art – as a lay person you don't know the extent of what to ask for, and therefore you need the inspiration and certainty that comes from the Danish Arts Foundation providing guidance.

I would hate to say exactly what the specific skill sets of artists and other professionals are, but I think we make the world of art smaller than it needs to be if we don't ensure diversity on the level of consultancy. I wish the Danish Art Foundation would be more curious than it is about how equality between disciplines can contribute to the art we and future generations will encounter in government buildings. I think it's a sad thought that we as professions have to fight for a seat at a table that only benefits from all of us being there.

IMM: I would also like to hear about your visions for the field and how you will work for the realization of these?

MM: I want to point to a future for public art where we as professional artists, curators and other art mediators do not operate out of fear that the field of public art will be politically de-prioritised, but where we mediate all the beautiful and relevant works that the scheme creates.

My hope is that we will proactively seek to create a scheme where funding for art is also provided in relation to civil engineering – including motorways and other infrastructure. In addition to all that public art brings, I am sure that it will open up new worlds for us all if the scheme is extended – and make us think, sense, discuss, meet, be provoked..

I would like to mention an artwork which is the result of a process I was part of in 2012–2014 in Aarhus Municipality. The funds were actually allocated in connection with the construction of Dokk1, but a decision was made to prioritize funds for a work on the site surrounding the building. Something that would have automatically been funded if there was a percentage rule of municipal and state civil engineering and landscaping.

In the process of selecting the work, I experienced the biggest discussions about which work to choose that I have experienced in my work as an art consultant. I myself passionately advocated for a sculpture, which was presented as a completely austere and simple conceptual work, where the artists would buy 1.5 million DKK worth of bronze, which would be poured into Aarhus harbour, and would then be shaped by the waves of the sea, after which the work would be hoisted up from the bottom of the harbour and placed on the harbour front and named after the Olympian Greek god of the sea, earthquakes, storms and horses. .

I was excited by the idea that all citizens of Aarhus would be invited to witness this spectacular gesture and that we would be able to stand there on the waterfront together and see the art being created. And if the bronze would explode when it met the waves of the sea and end up in a thousand little pieces, which would

then be mounted all over the waterfront, I could only point to the work because I thought the artists' idea and consistency were original, and because I wanted lay people, indeed everyone, to be able to experience this – the potential of art. The work ended up being something else, and in the process it changed so much that I, as the consultant, had to tell the builder that it was a different work than the one I had indicated. There was no spectacular event where 1.5 million worth of bronze was poured into the sea and all citizens were invited, and in the meantime the work was as well installed somewhere in another city.

And you can now ask me why I come here with a story that someone might think will provide political arguments for building 250 meters more motorway rather than integrating art into our construction – art that is both for us now and for future generations. I believe that the potential of art is the discussions it generates as much as it is the works of art themselves. I believe that our priorities around art as a society – and its dissemination – is an important and valuable part of our democratic society, and I would like and will work for us to dare to extend this beautiful tradition to government civil engineering, so that funds are allocated to art when we build motorways, for example. What a celebration, what conversations and experiences it could enrich us with.

IMM: Is there anything you want to add, that we haven't talked about?

MM: I want to come back to the point that an artwork isn't necessarily better because it was more expensive. A big budget can do some things, a small one others – both levels are important. What's important is diversity – and different types of budgets can contribute to that, because it enables diverse works. Different types of consultants and different types of consultancy processes can also contribute to that. For me, it's about whether we dare to do something special, to take special risks and venture onto what is sometimes shaky ground, and that's as artists, as consultants, as civil servants, as lay people and also as politicians.

IMM: Thanks for talking to me today, Marie.

* The craftsman's sum covers both materials and labour hours, and the calculation is made exclusive of VAT. The following is excluded from the calculation: maintenance, energy modernisations, costs of special technical installations (which go beyond the normal supply of the property), landscaping works – but not those which have a direct impact on a building. The 1.5 percent rule covers 'office buildings'. University buildings are not subject to the rule, as university buildings are financed via finance bills, and here a total art allocation of DKK 6 million per year is used, which is distributed via special calculation.

Public art as a communal force

A future of unofficial public art and strategies for working beyond politically sanctioned art



Anna Jensen
Finland

In 2022 these things happened: Russia started a war in Ukraine, and activists used major museums and famous artworks in big cities as platforms for their activism. In Ukraine, among all the terror and fear, we witnessed how as an immediate reaction to the Russian invasion, public monuments were covered with sandbags, statues were covered in protective materials and buildings were protected with bubble wrap, plywood and aluminium. Art was a priority when it came to protecting and preserving. Elsewhere, however, famous paintings inside secured museums were exposed to public demonstrations: the Just Stop Oil coalition threw tomato soup on Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery in London and Letzte Generation activists glued their hands to Monet's *Les Meules* at the Barberini Museum in Potsdam.

At the very least, these examples show us that art has power, and the role of public art in distributing and presenting this power is crucial. Ownership and care are felt towards famous paintings in museums – even passionate love. Local and national memories and histories become materialized and manifested in public artworks. Therefore, it matters what kind of public art is created, where, who is making it and who is experiencing it; who is taken into account in the processes. Art can suggest new and alternative realities, new societies, and new ways of being. It is often in the frontline of new ideologies and innovations. Public art is, or at least it should be, a showcase for these emerging ideas, forms, and worlds.

Why do we have public art?

Projects realized in public or semi-public space often open up space for discussions that wouldn't otherwise

be possible, and they can also highlight the importance of public spaces. As art has always been a tool for approaching phenomena that cannot fully be explained and an instrument to understand experiences that cannot be verbalized, these acts make it possible to produce, collect and mediate new knowledge. Art is not merely a decoration in the public sphere, but an actor that can by interrupting compel us to think, see and do differently: to experience and explore, without the element of revelation or conquest. (Jensen, Encyclopaedia of in-betweenness, to be published)

When we think of public art, we often think of central squares and bronze statues – famous men on their dashing horses, monuments of war and victories, or, on the other hand, playful and colourful works of wall art decorating grim institutional spaces, schools, and health centres, or murals aiming to enliven and refine sad “concrete ghettos.” But public art is more than this. If we take a closer look at the concept of “public,” we can also gain a better understanding of public art and its multiple meanings. Public, according to the dictionary, as an adjective, means “of concerning the people as whole,” “done, perceived, or existing in open view,” or, as a noun, “ordinary people in general, the community.” Public art concerns people, and it is done, perceived and exists publicly, in and open view. And, public art is a matter of communities. In *Mapping the Terrain – New Genre Public Art* Suzanne Lacy defines new public art (that still seems to be “new”, even if the book was published in 1995): “This construction of a history of new genre public art is not built on a typology of materials, spaces, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention.” (Lacy, 1995b, p. 28)

Communities have always used art to create and mediate knowledge and it has an important role in connecting people. We draw, sing, dance, and drum, we document important events and figures, we tell stories, and we pass knowledge forward. Public art is such an essential and integral part of societal and communal actions and activities that as a phenomenon it sometimes becomes almost invisible, until there is a controversial work

that is debated. Public art becomes publicly discussed when a national monument is questioned, no matter how horrible the history related to the person portrayed is, or when something collectively considered “ugly” is installed in a public and shared space. These kinds of debates are important because they show the passionate emotions concerning public places and public art, and they provide places for negotiating and justifying diverse artistic practices. Neither public art nor public space are self-evident certainties, they need to be constantly negotiated and defended.

These arguments are often related to the turn in public art. For a long time, public art was about statues and monuments in prestige locations. Now these monuments are being dismantled and questioned and a new genre of public art has shifted its focus from objects to events, relations, and more inclusive practices. These are not always immediately accepted, or even recognized as art. “We don’t need another hero,” as the 10th Berlin Biennial stated. Curator Gabi Ngcobo framed the question of power and heroes as a question of history, time, and space:

For me a hero is a question of power. Power is powerless when it is not used to empower. It becomes toxic when abused, when it becomes a tool to silence, oppress, violate, or dispossess. A hero is also a question of history, of time and space. In recent years we have seen how certain “heroes” are betrayed by the passage of time and others do not cross borders neatly. This is why we are still protesting against street names, institutions, and monuments celebrating historical figures whose legacies are controversial, here in Berlin and in many parts of the world.
(Ngcobo et al., 2018, p. 32)

Public art presents heroes, but it also manifests demarcations, battles, intersecting power relations and the revisiting histories and historical figures. Unofficial public art is an ally in this protest and project of refiguring public spaces.

Official art versus antagonistic art

Political theorist Chantal Mouffe has called public space “a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted.” (Mouffe, 2008) Art marks these battlegrounds, makes the battles visible, and is a way of confronting these different hegemonic projects. It can be a heterogeneous element among structured and normative public space. To be this, art needs to challenge the existing power relations and expectations. Sometimes this might mean working on the threshold of the politically sanctioned. What is politically sanctioned and what is not can at times be arbitrary, and public art can make these structural absurdities visible. Different environments and different groups and communities need and create different kinds of art and practices. All kinds of public art are required. We need the official art programmes run by local museums, and the one percent art projects governed by municipalities and construction companies – art that animate our lived environments and also provide income for artists – but we also want public art that is research based, experimental, even anarchist and asks questions instead of providing answers.

Public art defines what our surroundings look like, but also what is being publicly understood as “valuable” or “beautiful.” Public art defines who is seen as an artist or creator, as possible audience, or worthy of artworks. Sometimes these regulations and expectations concerning public art are hidden underneath but sometimes they are clearly articulated, like when Nacka municipality in Sweden in 2018 gave guidelines that art should be “socially positive, peaceful and respectful.” But in a society that is not socially positive, peaceful, and respectful, art – that invariably reflects, documents, and comments its surroundings – can hardly be only positive. Public art takes part in public discourse, and therefore it should be permitted to be polyphonic and diverse. Still, the value of public art is usually only openly discussed when the established artworks are in threat. In moments of crisis, they are protected as manifestations of national identities or monuments of locality, but when it comes to funding contemporary public art, the willingness



Ramina Habibollah
*Evergreen Inner
Jungle, 2021.*
Photo: Shubhangi
Singh.

is often non-existent. Who gets to make the decisions about our shared spaces and what are these decisions based on? For public art to reflect the diversity of today's societies the art itself should be diverse and realized by diverse groups. This will not be the case as long as the art taking place in the public sphere is controlled by a small group: the local art museum and maybe two curators responsible for the public art, or one art coordinator working for a whole municipality. Neither will it happen if the gatekeeping is in the hands of city officials and councils lacking sufficient knowledge, time, and resources.

During the four years of NNAC we have gotten to know the similarities and differences in how public art is managed in the Nordic countries. Together we have discussed the roles of art consultants and curators, but also met with funding parties, municipalities cities and their officials. We have discussed public places, their possibilities and possible limitations: who are we working for and under what conditions. When art happens in public sphere, who benefits? Are we making art to increase the profit of large construction companies, or is it for the residents and communities? Art creates memories and preserves them: whose memories are being preserved and celebrated and who is being erased from public sphere? As curator Magdalena

Malm notes: "Art does not only raise issues of public space, it also has the power to perform it." (Malm, 2017, p. 8) Can art reach those often excluded from public places and public discourses and bring conflicting narratives together?

My perspective on public art is based on contemporary art, activism, and my practice in the independent field. Working outside institutions has been a conscious choice, even if independence is always relative. With my collective(s) the practice was initiated as part of Aalto University's MA programme that focused on combining artistic practice and research. Teaching and projects were taken from classrooms, studios and gallery spaces into public and semi-public places and happened in a close relation to the society around it. The immediate contact with the public became part of the practice and the feedback turned to be part of the process of creating new projects. Because of the limited resources the practice was founded on what already existed, and due to the distant locations we needed to find new ways of documenting and mediating what was being done. This starting point has developed into a position where we are often more flexible, able to adjust to changes and situations, and can provide critical perceptions than the established institutions. For each project or exhibition, we create a new working group consisting of artists and professionals from other relevant fields, like biologists, ecologists, academics, writers, who share their knowledges and together with us create a programme in a chosen location. The events are always free and open for all.



Leena Reittu
*Evergreen Inner
Jungle, 2021.*
Photo: Shubhangi
Singh.

After the pandemic it was noted by the politicians and decision makers how these kinds of smaller, independent initiatives were more resilient. This again led to public conversation about cultural funding, the discourse ignoring the fact that the one does not exist without the other – we need institutions that create and maintain permanence and we need independent and flexible doers who can experiment, create new, question, and pioneer new things. In my practice I am able to consider new ways of working within the public sphere

and revisit ideas about public art. This also means close collaboration with different cities – collaboration that is not always a success. When *The Truth About Finland* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2017) project was realized in 2017, when Finland celebrated its 100th year of independence, as a publication and two exhibitions – one in Helsinki and one in Pori – Pori city withdrew from the agreed exhibition venue. The project, including one hundred A4 presentations about Finland by a diverse group of artists, cultural workers and researchers, was publicly referred to as “hostile.” In the end collaboration with the local music festival Pori Jazz made it possible to realize the project in a planned manner, in a different location. Last year in Helsinki, a city that in its strategy papers promotes how all kinds of art and culture are produced all over the city and how the cultural workers should be served according to the “one desk principle,” we had to negotiate for more than a year to be able to rent a city owned building that had been standing empty for more than ten years. And even after the negotiation and prearranged contract, the city tried to retract one week before we started installing. Art presents a heterogeneous element in cities that aim to be homogeneous places: “Most cities are working on different means to reduce the aspects of public space there and turn them into homogeneous places that are completely reserved for the exchange of commodities: homogenizing the appearance of streets, rebuilding whole streets as shopping malls or turning streets into business improvement districts, to mention a few,” as the Ligna group that creates situations and interventions in urban places writes. (Doherty, 2009, p. 142)

Cities need art and culture, and they are not blind when it comes to the surplus value created. However, their practices and methods do not always match with their strategies and goals, and often their ideas and hopes about the art and culture do not meet those of the creators. In the Annual Review of Public Art 2022 edition my colleague Eliisa Suvanto and I wrote “While cities are happy to accept the brand benefits of art, instead of providing the support they have advertised, they have made the implementation of art almost



Opening of Pori Biennale 2022.

Photo: Erno-Erik Raitanen.

impossible. Municipal support for art projects is relevant not only because art adds value to cities, but also because other funding models for public art projects may be unattainable.” (Jensen and Suvanto, 2022, p. 25)

Cities all over the world are to an increasing extent using art as a tool to improve different neighbourhoods: this has an impact on what is accepted as art (see Nacka) If all art in public sphere has similar aesthetics and aims, how does this respond to the question of ownership? Are we providing art that only resonates with certain audiences, or can we communicate with a diversity of publics? Artist and writer Suzanne Lacy writes that “New genre public art calls for an integrative critical language through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art.” (Lacy, 1995a, p. 43) What does this mean for those making art, and what forms can this responsible art take?

Memory politics and changing communities

Working in public or semi-public spaces affects the practice of a curator or a consultant. Curating is not only about choosing artworks, but also about deciding who is presented in our shared environments. Curator Maura Reilley defines curatorial activism:

“Curatorial Activism” is a term used to designate “the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring

that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether – and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.” (Reilly, 2017)

Also, the artwork itself might not be the final outcome, but the process that is pushed forward by it. A temporary intervention can be just as meaningful as a permanent statue. In our book *Intervention to Urban Space* academic Taina Rajanti, artist Denise Ziegler and I explored intervention as a strategic tool, and contemplated the meaning of a place, artistic experience and historical layers as constantly changing phenomena that can expand beyond the logic of reason: “Urban space is common space, and shared via corporeal

Michaela Casková
Pori Biennale 2022,
Small Talk #9 Walking
through, taking in,
soaking up and again.
Photo: Erno-Erik
Raitanen.



experience. Interventions can alter the physical experience of space, the way it is used, and they will often launch a chain of thought. For example, both spoken language and the streets of the city can create meanings beyond the logic of reason. Streets both tell of the past of the city and point to its future. They can also disappear. Reactions to artworks or acts at hand can even lead to long narratives in which people reminisce about a space and related experience. A space gains meaning in layers for those who experience it and hear about it. The experience of intervention can also spark the need to share it by discussing the artwork and the thoughts that it arouses.” (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 23)

However, whether something is temporary or permanent is a highly political question. Often the everlasting monuments presenting values in that space and time considered eternal are installed in the most visible, most valued places in city centres amid tall buildings, while the suburban neighbourhoods and smaller cities need to settle for “lesser works”: works that have other motives – often participatory or communal projects aiming for somehow uplifting the area and the citizenship or ownership – and other expectations when it comes to their permanence, form, and aesthetic. One could hardly imagine the murals today covering most of the concrete landscapes built in the 60s and 70s being painted into the walls of administrative buildings or cultural institutions. Not to mention the architecturally valued city centres. But even when the murals are officially accepted and painted by professionals or results of participatory communal projects, they are not always wanted or appreciated by the residents. Nor do they appreciate every exhibition, art event or the theatre happening in their neighbourhood to be “participatory” or “communal”. While the new art also often happens in already culture-filled environments, like city centres where the theatres and museums are placed, or the rapidly gentrifying old industrial areas, the need for art and events can be even more acute in suburbs and rural areas. The Porin kulttuurisäätiö collective has been creating events and exhibitions in diverse places for almost ten years and



The Truth About Finland
Kallio Kunsthalle,
 2017. Photo: Niilo Rinne.

encountered an urgent demand for art, encounters, and experiences. Independent curators and artists can respond to this need, but they cannot provide the permanence that is also required outside central areas. Even the short-term small events can be difficult to organize in sites where the administration have no understanding of art and culture. In their strategy papers, cities like to emphasise how they support art and encourage all kinds of events and want art to be accessible for all, everywhere in the city. In practice, there often is very little will to make things happen. This means that the "official" art - that is, large-scale, permanent, or much-publicised - in public



Pori Biennale 2022.
Nylon collective.
 Photo: Erno-Erik Raitanen.

space remains in the hands and control of few, the museum or the officers depending on the municipality, and all other artistic activities take place on the border of legality. While the guerrilla art and art that escapes comprehensive guidelines can create pleasant surprises and be a tool for increasing critical understanding, it often lacks continuity and rarely provides sources of livelihood to its makers. This doesn't mean that guerrilla art or temporary projects are somehow less important, quite the opposite. If the democracy of public space is to be increased, the public should be represented and taken into consideration in all its diversity. Art is a way of creating and

storing memories, and we cannot store only memories of the few, neither does it make sense to only perceive public histories and places from the perspectives of those in power. While the world changes, the art should be able to adjust to these changes. Meanings around public works change and are being deconstructed. Art can surprise, disturb, and marvel, like we wrote in the catalogue for the 2022 Pori Biennale – Visitors:

Even in societies considered democratic, some voices are louder, some lives more visible, and often public art ends up strengthening these positions instead of reconstructing or questioning existing structures. Art preserves, presents, and creates memories, and memories create local identities. Celebrated figures are captured as monuments in central locations, and it is relatively uncommon to re-evaluate if the attention is deserved or not. Simultaneously behind the official façade of the cities, different kinds of actions are taking place and alternative narratives are being told. While monuments are reserved for the few and chosen, we all leave marks and traces. These marks and traces from the past and present lives and visitors add to the senses of places – the soul of a place that charms us and haunts us. Art is a way of approaching this soul of a place, and a way of mediating that experience. It can surprise, disturb, and marvel. It affects, and it enchants. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2022 p.12)

Strategies for future

When I joined NNAC I wasn't sure if I was in the right place: I do not consider myself primarily as an art consultant and my relationship to public art is complex. I do work in public, but the work is self-initiated and often resisted more than supported by authorities.

It turned out that NNAC was exactly the place to reflect these experiences, learn from colleagues, share and create new strategies and create better understanding of the complexity of the field itself. We spent many hours defining what is it that we, in fact, do and are, who do we collaborate with, who do we work

for, and what are the main challenges. Every project brings new questions and provides new answers. And, it seems, there will always be more questions than answers, and this, I believe, is one of the many powers arts has.

Public art is not detached from the world or other contemporary art. Quite the opposite, it happens in a very direct contact with its surroundings and the world around it. As Patricia C. Phillips writes: "Never an independent, autonomous event, public art is embedded in the political, economic, and ethical considerations of cities and communities." (Lacy, 1995b, p. 64). Therefore, it could even be the flagship for new ideas, forms, and practices in art. This requires courage and tenacity from those working with public art, as the work always happens in a network of intersecting motivations, hopes, and expectations. Proposing alternative and unexpected ideas is always a risk, but a risk worth taking, and a risk that is part of practicing arts. This is especially important in the current political situation. The rise of the right-wing politics also means the rise of conservatism and conservative ideas when it comes to art and culture. Defending public art also means defending public places. Making art in different environments keeps these places alive but also makes them visible. Presenting diverse practices and practitioners creates space for new.

Pori Biennale 2022.
Erika Weiste, *Bird ghost and pomegranate*. Photo Erno-Erik Raitanen.



Pori Biennale 2022.
Anni-Anett Liik,
*Unnamed foreign
body*. Photo:
Erno-Erik Raitanen.



Making art in public space is about paying attention: paying attention to the location, its history, residents, stories, atmospheres, putting these in the context with the larger picture. It is more than just rational work, and in a rational world this is what is sometimes hard to articulate to the funders and customers: that we work with feelings, possibilities, hauntings, and enchantments. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* Rebecca Solnit calls this kind of activity “the practice of awareness,” and I propose that this practice of awareness is one of the key strategies in public art:

The practice of awareness takes us below the reasonableness that we’d like to think we live with and then we start to see something quite fascinating, which is the drama of our inner dialogue, of the stories that go through our minds and the feelings that go through our heart, and we start to see in this territory it isn’t so neat and orderly and, dare I say it, safe or reasonable. So in the practice of awareness, which has gone on for centuries after centuries and millennium after millennium, human beings have asked themselves, Hmmm, how do I engage this process in a way that I don’t become too frightened by what it might unfold or too complacent by avoiding it? This is the delicate work of awareness. (Solnit, 2017, pp. 198–199)

Art consultants, or independent curators, are the experts in answering the Hmmm question Solnit presents. We need to answer that question of safety and complacency not only to ourselves, but also the cities, municipalities, funding parties, private customers, artists, audiences, present critics, and sometimes the future critics too. In one of the conversations during NNAC meetings we compared our work to the work of engineers – we design, we build, we maintain, and we provide solutions, we invent, and we analyze – but instead of only working with the concrete, visible and material, we also need to take the invisible and the yet unknown into account. We negotiate, and we reconstruct and revisit ideas of public art and public place, as well as the phenomenon of art itself. We consider new locations and new working methods and propose new and alternative options. All this surely is not easy, but at its best it is highly satisfying!

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Insider and outsider

The art consultant in the art world



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My intention in this essay is to reflect briefly on our discussions within the NNAC and my own relationship to the insider/outsider perspective on the role as art consultant/project manager and curator of public and semi-public art. More could be said, of course, and further theories, perspectives and voices could be added to the discussion, so consider this as a contribution to the ongoing process and dialogue between colleagues.

In our initial discussions within NNAC, we charted and analysed our role together. We work in different ways on a consultant basis with public and semi-public art, and our talks focused specifically on the complexity and diversity of our skills. We navigate clients, artists, political visions, citizens, legislation, organisations, activities, and so on – with art as our platform and point of departure. This complexity requires a broad expertise in our own field, but also a receptiveness to, and interest in, the contexts where we operate. Our specific field has one foot in the art sector, a world that comprises the people and institutions that – mostly professionally – engage in producing, buying and selling, promoting, protecting or writing about art and who work both nationally and internationally. The other foot is planted in the infrastructure of the society where we live and work day to day, both nationally and internationally, which affects us beyond our professional lives and identities. In that sense, our field is also directly connected to the private sphere – people in every phase of life and the challenges they entail. Based on the above argument, an insider/outside perspective on this role was formulated in relation to the art sector, where our agency touches on both the idea-based perspective

on art within the art sector, and a more practical, negotiating and pragmatic perspective, outside the institution.

This insider/outsider perspective was first presented by the secretary at the NNAC meeting, Christine Antaya, in her summary of our first meeting in Oslo; it caused me to reflect on how I myself relate to it. An insider who is based in the art sector, and outsider to the context, where the art is produced and for whom, including any contacts with the commissioning body, municipal and private developers and various administrations in the public sector. And target groups consisting of people who, in their everyday lives, work and/or live in the environments where the art is produced.

The idea of an insider/outsider perspective made my own relationship to the art sector feel more meaningful. It simply made me feel more energetic and free to think of art as an important part of a larger context, a cog in the process of building society, and an exploration of what art can be in this context. That is: meeting people through art and artists, in places where they exist in both a private and professional capacity. This is also where the insider/outsider perspectives meet, in their shared interest and basis in different artistic practices and how these are visiblised and produced.

In our talks about the insider/outsider perspective, this was identified as an important potential when working with public art: working on the outside. The art world's principal spaces consist of the white cubes of art institutions that form a backdrop to artistic freedom. When dealing with art in the public domain, we need to relate more flexibly and receptively, as the "space" and the artist's freedom to act must be negotiated and agreed on interactively with other interests and in accordance with the requirements on public spaces. An insider/outsider perspective is comparable to a movement in and outside one's own discipline, agenda, expectation – a mediating role that can be combined with other disciplines and fields

of interest to identify and create spaces that can be claimed by freedom, a spatiality in both the physical and visionary sense, without compromising on artistic relevance.

This often requires the art consultant, art project manager or curator to have a genuine interest in people, regardless of their knowledge of contemporary art, and an understanding of and preparedness for the challenges that interaction in a broader context entail. A successful collaboration is one that is imbued with participation, cooperation and sharing of experiences between several fields of expertise and activities, with mutual openness and respect for each other's knowledge. This is also where mediating skills are needed, skills where an outsider perspective or a more objective view of what is going on can be decisive to problem-solving, thinking outside the box, generating and exploring new ideas and angles. This also applies to the ability to communicate and guide processes with a broader group of people, for instance, within an organisation, where the outsider is not hampered by general conventions, social norms or hierarchies that may impact on decision-making and opinions. Both producer and client may often need support in order to be more explorative. But an outsider perspective can also make you feel excluded, vulnerable or isolated – especially in the role of an art consultant, a position that is comparatively invisibilised and unclearly defined or identified. In that situation, each individual is left to create their own version of their role.

To help the NNAC visiblise and define the role more clearly, we consulted Stina Bäckström, associate professor of philosophy and senior lecturer at the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge, Södertörn University¹, to explore themes such as professional judgment and experienced-based knowledge in relation to our practice. Two workshops were held, where we shared our experiences of situations where our expertise had been questioned or belittled, focusing on our own interpretation of the meaning of and ability to apply our own sensitivity to “pick out” what was essential. We supported each other in formulating and

identifying contexts, specifically relating to the conditions, objectives and meaning of our practice. Based on the experience of how we had chosen to handle and moderate strong emotional impulses and reactions – when they threaten to “take over” or warp perception of the situation – we together looked at difficult situations with contradictory requirements, where we had felt exposed and lonely. This highlighted an ethical dimension in our professional judgment, the obligation to consider the best alternative at every stage of the process. Our experiences were linked to mediation in relation to both the physical work of art, and to the art process and to the negotiating process as a whole.

The outsider/insider perspective was a way to visualise and reflect on the role, identifying our experience-based knowledge, and clarifying our working conditions and specific expertise.

Public and semi-public art has historically held a less prestigious position than art that is exhibited in institutions. This should not be mistaken for quality, but reflects on the context and the relationship between client and artist, where public and semi-public art has been controlled by capital and factors such as utility and beauty.² Over the past 20 years, however, the threshold between public art and art institutions has been lowered, since many artists have taken an interest in developing processes and practices that contribute to urban design. This is carried out, for instance, by addressing social and ecological issues, making room for dialogue and discussion and participatory processes. In this way, players in contemporary art have taken a more active part in planning, negotiating and producing our communal spaces. Other contributing factors are issues of permanence, design and time, where public art is increasingly allowed to be temporary and process-based or consist of more ephemeral materials, i.e., a type of art that is closer to the nature of art shown in museums and galleries. Public art is increasingly a result of interdisciplinary collaborations: between art, urban development, civil society and architecture. This means that the insider/

outsider is even more crucial as a mediating party, and that a broader spectrum of curators, artists and architects are interested in working in this field, which, in turn, helps to reformulate what art in public environments can be.

In several Nordic countries, moreover, the field of operation for art consultants and art project managers has opened up, from being reserved for artists with their own practice, many of whom work part-time, to including other professional capacities, such as art historians, curators and architects. This has helped to develop and nuance the role.

In dialogue with our Nordic partners from TAIKE, the Public Art Agency Sweden, KORO and the Danish Arts Foundation, we identified the need to define our expertise from several perspectives, depending on the challenges in our respective countries. Henry Tehro from TAIKE considered how the mediating and proactive role of the consultant could become – if, alongside planning, coordinating and producing art projects, it could also be more explorative in reforming urban planning and urban design using art and artistic practices. Åsa Mårtensson, then at the Public Art Agency Sweden, looked at phenomena such as New European Bauhaus and the corresponding Swedish Gestaltad livsmiljö, and the mediating consultant as a vital link to ensure the inclusion of art and artists in bridging the gap between the world of science and technology and the world of art and culture. An aspiration for the future is that we establish ourselves as a given party in the urban design process, alongside other professions and skills, and that we are able to maintain the potential of the insider/outsider position as a mediating party in relation to the art, our surrounding environment and the people and places involved.

1. *Frågan om konstens nytta är konstnärens dilemma*, by Katarina Jönsson Norling, <https://www.kro.se/konstnaren/konstnaren-nr-1-2016/fragan-om-konstens-nytta-ar-konstnarens-dilemma/>



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Christine Antaya is an art critic and freelance writer living in Malmö, Sweden. She is a regular contributor to the Swedish daily newspaper Sydsvenskan and the Nordic art journal Kunstkrutikk. Her writing has also appeared in Konstperspektiv, Artforum, and Frieze, among others. She holds an MA in Art History from University College London and currently teaches art criticism at Linneaus University (2023).



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Vibeke Christensen works as a curator and public art producer in Oslo, Norway. She is currently the manager at Kulturbyrået Mesén which she founded with her colleague Kristine K. Wessel in 1999. Christensen has 23 years of experience working with public art, both with ephemeral public art in urban spaces as well as with permanent art projects in schools, libraries, and hospitals.



Madelene Gunnarsson
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Madelene Gunnarsson is an art consultant, curator, and writer. She has worked as an art producer at AM Public since 2012, where she works with extensive art programmes and art production. She also works as a public art consultant for Norrköpings kommun and Göteborgs konst. She has studied at CuratorLab, Konstfack University of Arts Crafts and Design and Art history at Uppsala University.



Anna Jensen
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Anna Jensen is a curator, researcher, writer, artist and feminist based in Helsinki, Finland. Jensen's practice is site-specific and embodied and it is based on collectivity, friendship, and joy. The aim is to create ecologically and ethically sustainable practices, and reconsider notions of local and global, curating, canon, and politics. Jensen is a founding member of Porin kulttuurisäättö, an artist-curator collective formed in 2013.



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Maija Kovari works as a sculptor specialising in site specific works in public space. She also runs Public Art Agency Finland, a consultancy that creates public art programmes, organises public art competitions, and coordinates public art projects in collaboration with museums and municipalities. She holds a master's degree in architecture and a bachelor's degree in fine arts from University of Tampere.



Ann Magnusson
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Ann Magnusson is the founder and CEO of AM Public. She has fifteen years of experience as a public art consultant, project manager and curator on both national and municipal levels. Among her public and private clients are: Statens konstråd, Stockholm konst, Vasakronan, Stena Fastigheter and Uppsala kommun. She has studied sociology and architecture and holds an MA in Art from Konstfack, University of Arts Crafts and Design.



Marie Markman
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Marie Markman is an artist and art consultant based in Aarhus, Denmark. She is the founder of Farmen (The Exploratory Research Laboratory) in Frederikshavn. With its three acres of land, Farmen is the physical development framework for Markman's interdisciplinary art and research projects, as well as for her consulting work on public art and art and climate adaptation. She holds a PhD in artistic research based on the dissertation 'Landscape sprawl - an artistic response to living in the Anthropocene' from 2015.



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Miina Pohjolainen is an artist-curator based in Tampere, Finland. She currently works as a public art coordinator for Public Art Agency Finland. In her curatorial and artistic practice, she is interested in the interconnections of spatial development, democracy and art. She holds an MA in Curating, Managing and Mediating Art from Aalto University, Helsinki.



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Tina Skedsmo works with curating and communication of public art in Kulturbyrået Mesén in Oslo, Norway. In December 2022, Skedsmo graduated cum laude from the University of Bologna, Italy with an MA in Innovation and Organization of Culture and the Arts having written her thesis on Tracey Emin's The Mother (2022). She also holds a BA in Art History from the University of Oslo.



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Kristin Tinsa Sæterdal is an art consultant and artist living in Oslo, Norway. She has a Diploma in Architecture from The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (1989), and the Architectural Association School of Architecture London. Sæterdal has completed Commissions as art consultant for thirteen municipalities in Norway. Sæterdal combines art consulting with an active artistic practice.



Linda Wallenberg
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Linda Wallenberg is a curator and art consultant living outside of Västerås, Sweden. She is one of the initiators of NNAC, and the director of Linda Wallenberg konst, focusing on public art commissions and contemporary art exhibitions outside of the contemporary art context. She has worked at Wanås Konst, Farawaysoclose, Västmanland County Museum, Uppsala Municipality, and currently works as Process Manager of Public Art at Västerås konstmuseum.



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Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg is the founder and CEO of ArtPlatform AB. She is based in Stockholm, Sweden and is one of the initiators of NNAC. ArtPlatform works to strengthen knowledge in the field of public art in collaboration with a wide number of public and private clients. Working with both temporary and permanent art projects as well as strategic development, ArtPlatform implements and develops art in relation to organisations, community building and planning processes.

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Art consultancy - Curating and
project managing art in the public sphere

By Christine Antaya, arts writer
Oslo 15 - 18 October, 2019



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Shortly after being asked to contribute to this project, I mentioned it to a gallerist I was chatting with. “Ah, art consultant,” he said, “that’s an easy job. They’re handed a bag of money and then they go art shopping.”

Comments like these highlight the need to strengthen and delineate the contours of the profession. Art consultancy – working with the selection/planning/production/mediation of art collections and site-specific art works chiefly for public space – is a fairly invisible profession, a behind-the-scenes activity, but decidedly not limited to “art shopping.”

Moreover, the question of what an art consultant does is rendered more urgent by a general need to deepen the conversation about the curatorial in relation to art in the public sphere, which in turn is more relevant in an age in which the notion of a public sphere is compromised, be it by commercialism, privatisation or populism.

NNAC – Nordic Network for Arts Consultancy

Arts professionals who work with public art in advisory, curatorial, planning and project managing capacities in the Nordic countries often work alone and are not necessarily organised in formal networks or associations. Practices and structures vary between and within the countries, but the Nordic countries also have several things in common, not least owing to art historical similarities, such as the legacy of twentieth century modernism and the welfare state, and current trends of urban expansion.

In the spring of 2019, the Nordic Network for Art Consultancy was initiated by Swedish art consultants Linda Wallenberg (of Linda Wallenberg konst) and Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg (of ArtPlatform). The impetus was to strengthen the role of the freelance arts consultant and create an arena for those active in the field to come together and exchange ideas, experiences and best practices. Participants were selected based on an open call that was put out in collaboration with KOR0, the Norwegian government’s professional body for art in public spaces, and Taika – Arts Promotion Centre Finland in Finland, and in Sweden by a direct invitation.

The network secured funding for a three-year period, during which three meetings, in Oslo, Helsinki and Gothenburg respectively, were planned. The geographies were selected to reflect the Nordic collaboration, but



also to coincide with relevant art events arranged in the cities around the time of the gatherings. The first network meeting was held in Oslo in October of 2019, to coincide with the launch of new art works in the Oslo Biennial.



After a couple last minute cancellations and reshuffles, the final group consisted of two members from Finland, three from Norway and three from Sweden (including the initiators), two curatorial assistants, and a writer. I, the writer was, invited to over the course of the three years participate in the

meetings, moderate the closing discussions, and to write articles summarising the respective gatherings.

As Oslo was the first meeting, and indeed the first time most of the participants met, time was devoted to individual presentations of each member’s practice, in addition to discussions of key issues identified in advance by the initiators, such as the definition of an art consultant, what skillset is required, how to sustain the aspects of artistic practice and protect artistic copyright, and the significance of the Nordic dimension.

What is an art consultant?

In initial documents, NNAC was short for Nordic Network for Art Consultants. In a semantic manoeuvre this became the more accommodating Nordic Network for Art Consultancy, so as to avoid too much hair-splitting about the various professional titles used by the members.¹

Moreover, the differences that emerged in the individual presentations didn't ultimately have to do with titles, but with whether the art consultant worked alone, in a company that employed at least one more person, or in a more loosely organized collective; some of the consultants also habitually initiated – and secured funding for – projects, whereas the majority were commissioned (for instance by municipalities or real estate companies) to work in existing construction and public art projects.

However, the significance of these differences dwindled in light of the shared practices and challenges that became apparent when specific examples of projects were presented. These included permanent art works for pre-schools, hospitals, residential areas and nursing homes, temporary art works in major train stations and a contemporary art biennial in a smaller town. Attendant difficulties were related to technology and materials, working outdoors, with multiple stakeholders, and so forth.



The answer to the foundational question during the Oslo meeting – “Is it important to formulate a definition of an art consultant?” – was a simple yes. The importance of this was motivated by the need to make the role understandable, emphasize the significance of the profession and distinguish the role from others. Formulating the field is important to the client and other stakeholders – art consultancy assignments are always collaborative – but also

¹ The participants in Oslo self-identified as, for instance, curator, (public) art consultant, artistic leader, project manager, (public) art coordinator and creative producer. This had to do with their particular professional histories, the conventions in the different countries and of the commissioning bodies. In this article I will use the term “art consultant” when referring to network members and others working with curating and project managing art projects in the public sphere.

important in relation to those wanting to work in the field. What education is relevant? What are the skillsets required?

Another reason for why a definition is important is the need for the profession to define itself so as to avoid others doing it for them (the above-mentioned gallerist, for instance). This came up during the third day in Oslo, when institutional collaborators and counterparts were invited to hear presentations from KORO, the City of Oslo Art Collection, and take part in the network's discussion.² In that conversation comments ranged from exasperation (what are the specific expertise you bring to the table?; can anyone call themselves an art consultant?) to encouragement (it's an advantage having different views defining the profession; you have to formulate your own field; it's good to have multiple voices influencing what is visible in the city).

When the collaborators were asked what skills they would ascribe to the role of the public art consultant, the answers included: interpreter between different fields, be a good ‘salesperson’ in order to convince everyone why art is important, a good knowledge of the art field, the same skills as a curator (which includes believing in your intention and knowing what good art is).

The Nordic Countries

The benefits of having a Nordic network – rather than associations on the national levels – were described during the meeting partly in practical terms. The individuals who work with art consultancy more or less full-time form a fairly small group and it makes sense to find strength in numbers across the borders. Nordic alliances may be fruitful for sharing best practices and learning from each other (not least because members in different countries aren't necessarily in competition with each other for the same assignments), initiate collaborative projects and find new sources for funding.

The international nature of the network was also motivated in terms of disregarding borders, in response to tendencies of increased nationalism and policing of borders in the Nordic countries. In addition to this, topical issues such as environmental and social sustainability and the changing conditions of the public sphere aren't only national concerns. Taking all this into consideration, cross-border collaboration could be described as all the more vital.

² The guests were from KORO, Public Art Agency Sweden, Helsinki Art Museum, the City of Oslo Art Collection, Taika – Arts Promotion Centre Finland.

Certain characteristics of the countries' respective practices, tendencies and histories can still be discerned. Norway has a quite formalized system, where KORO has a catalogue of art consultants and curators to which arts professionals (artist and curators) have to apply and meet certain standards in order to be included. In Sweden there are few professionalized art consultants who work as curators and consultants



fulltime. In Finland the term art coordinator is more common than public art consultant, but the profession is undergoing changes and developing (this goes for all the countries). There are also various recently launched or planned university programmes, specifically in Norway and Finland, which are geared towards working with art in the public sphere.

The changes affecting the professions in the respective countries, according to the NNAC members, include the KORO system being reformed in Norway and overall urban expansion, in particular a lot of private companies building in the cities, which potentially means an increased demand for public art. In Finland the demand isn't mainly coming from the state, but from the municipal level and the private sector. In Sweden, the role is potentially influenced by the government's new policy for designed living environments ("Gestaltad livsmiljö"), and the law about public tendering could contribute to the role being simultaneously strengthened and yet trivialised by becoming more administrative.

Working with art in the public sphere

The idea of what art in public space is has undergone significant changes in the past five decades or so. The notion of public art as monuments or permanent fixtures in architecture has evolved into expanded notions of sculpture, socially engaged projects and temporary art works. This is of course happening in tandem with major shifts in what characterizes the public sphere, and how conversations are carried out within it. In more recent years, Public Art Agency Sweden, for instance, have adapted to this shift by becoming more involved in urban planning and developing

more ephemeral works, fuelled by "an artistic idea or curatorial concept," rather than a client or a place.³

There is also a more anecdotal change associated with these shifts: public art has gone from being fairly unfashionable to being more theorised and discussed – more popular, in short. But the curatorial in relation to art in the public sphere is still a relatively anonymous field. Trude Schjelderup Iversen, curator at KORO, has written: "It is startling that a field this implicated in social hierarchies, power issues and politically heated themes has scarcely been regarded as an object for substantial consideration, research and criticism (this is changing, fortunately)."⁴



An additional tendency in public art which was mentioned by NNAC members, as well as by the collaborators, is an expansion of the field in rural environments, which constitutes a significant challenge in terms of the specific expertise required as well as with regard to the question of this potentially contributing to, crudely put, "a gentrification of the countryside."

The challenges related to working with public art projects in collaboration with actors from "non-art" fields include thinking about how to initiate dialogues about artistic value and how to defend complexity. The NNAC members had all encountered difficulties in this regard, ranging from architects or municipalities subsuming the artist's or curator's ideas into their work, to the art consultant being replaced by a project manager with a background in communications and PR.

In the discussions the example of Nacka was mentioned, a wealthy municipality on the outskirts of Stockholm which recently came under fire for a street art festival in which the artists were asked to "recode the DNA of street art", from "war, struggle" to "peace, softness" and from "subculture, underground" to "popular, in the midst of society." In the week following the Oslo meeting, Nacka made headlines again, this time in their call for artists to make works in connection to new subway stations. The municipality wanted the proposed art works to use the public transport authority's specific shade of blue and to address the various

³ Magdalena Malm in conversation with Andrea Philipps, *I det gemensamma. Konst, samhälle och komplexitet*, Art & Theory Publishing, 2017, p. 24

⁴ Trude Schjelderup Iversen, *Critical Issues in Public Art - Offentlige samtaler om kunst og sammenhengene den inngår i*, Kunst og kultur, 2016.

construction companies in positive ways. In Swedish daily newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, arts writer and journalist Anders Rydell dubbed this 'post-art', denoting advertising, design or products that imitate art in order to borrow what constitutes artistic value: "exclusivity, integrity and mystery."⁵

These tendencies, where politicians attempt to use art for various purposes, represent a challenge when working with art in the public sphere, one perhaps made more difficult by the circumstances of working alone in a freelance capacity. Hopefully, NNAC will be able to function as a support structure in these issues.

Mediation and invisibility

The notions of invisibility and transparency ran as an undercurrent through several of the conversations in Oslo. Making decisions about art in the public realm is a powerful position. Is there a need for more transparency with regards to the art consultancy processes?



An area which could benefit from more visibility is the profession and skillsets, to make the commissioning bodies more aware of what to ask for, and also in order to better collaborate with others in the field. NNAC itself can constitute an arena for transparency in terms of being able to share and pursue concerns regarding working conditions, processes and compensation.

However, invisibility can entail flexibility and being able to have a more free process, moving behind the scenes and working in favour of

artistic values, allowing for flexibility in a process and milieu that may be described as rigid and bureaucratic.

Related to issues of visibility and accessibility, the term 'mediation' emerges as an important touchstone, specifically when describing the

⁵ Anders Rydell, Nu ska konsten "spegla finansierers värderingar" ("Now art is supposed to mirror the values of the financier", Svenska Dagbladet, 2019-10-24.

relevant skillsets for an art consultant. Mediation denotes reconciling parties who disagree, in this case being an intermediary between the different interests, professions and personalities in a project, but it also means relaying a message.

The Swedish curator Maria Lind has described mediation as being "about creating contact surfaces between works of art, curated projects, and people, about various forms and intensities of communicating about and around art".⁶ She writes:

Although there is an abundance, even an overproduction, of traditionally didactic activities within art institutions today, I believe that now is the time to think more and harder about the mediation of contemporary art. About whom we as artists and curators want to communicate with, and the associated questions of how art actually functions in contemporary culture. This sense of the word, which in the museum context is associated with public programming, audio guides, wall texts, workshops and so on, is more of a challenge in a public art context, and over the course of the conversations in Oslo it became clear that this is something that needs to be emphasized and further explored. How is public art mediated and how can it be opened up for critique?

What should NNAC do? Conclusions from Oslo

On the final day of discussions in Oslo, the following points were discussed by way of a definition:

- NNAC members are arts professionals with the expertise to work with artists, architects, developers, local stakeholders ('users', residents) and public officials to produce and mediate site-specific art works for either public or private developments/spaces
- They can be retained to oversee the selection of an artist and to ensure the artistic value of the finished project
- They can initiate their own projects, in collaboration with artists, municipalities, property owners etc.
- The required skills include flexibility, project management skills (with an emphasis on seeing things through), deep familiarity with artistic practice, excellent knowledge of the art world, negotiating skills, pedagogical and mediation skills

⁶ Maria Lind, Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating No. 4: Why Mediate Art? Mouse Publishing, 2012.

For its members, NNAC could act as an arena for reflection and voicing common concerns. Specific activities for the network to consider include the possibility of issuing joint statements and writing op-ed pieces, strengthening the profession by fostering contacts with universities (developing internships and mentoring), and creating public guidelines, a sort of "Introduction to public art consultancy."

The art consultant acts in an arena where contemporary art practices converge with issues related to public policy (regarding arts and culture, housing, social policy, urban planning etc.). It is also a field which is influenced by, and indeed occasionally invites, public opinion. The knowledge and experience accumulated in such a role constitutes a potential resource, within the network, but also for a wider circle. NNAC can provide a plurality of voices, and views that supplemental to those of larger state institutions working with public art. ~





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Helsinki 10 – 11 June 2021
(Online event)



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From Oslo to “Helsinki”

The Nordic Network of Art Consultancy was formed in 2019, on the initiative of the Swedish Arts Consultants Linda Wallenberg and Åsa-Viktoria Wihlborg who secured three-year network funding from Nordic Culture point. Several art consultants and curators were invited to participate, and three network meetings, planned to coincide with major art events in the respective cities, were planned: Oslo in October 2019, Helsinki in June 2020, and Gothenburg in August 2021. The first meeting was held as planned in Oslo in 2019, a meeting which I summarized in a previous article.

In the early spring of 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus spread around the world and the Helsinki biennial was postponed, the Hanaholmen cultural centre which was to host the NNAC meeting was temporarily closed, and the NNAC Helsinki meeting had to be put on hold. Several webinars were scheduled between the physical meetings and these continued throughout 2020 as planned. Invited speakers at these online events included: Christel Sverre, Curator, Kunstbanken, Norway; Stina Bäckström, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge, Södertörn University, Sweden; Rasmus Roiha, Managing Director at Finnish Software and e-Business; Silja Leifsdóttir curator for the Norwegian Sculptors Society in Oslo.

The spring of 2021 was more hopeful, but June was unfortunately too early for travel, so the decision was made to move the Helsinki meeting online. Still hosted by Hanaholmen, the Swedish-Finnish Cultural Centre located on the island of Hanasaari, the original programme was reduced to two days,

and the second day, with invited guest speakers, was open to professionals involved or interested in public art processes, from the public art consultant, curator and coordinator’s perspective. An online presentation of the Helsinki Biennial at Vallisaari Island was also included in the seminar.

It was fitting, after more than a year of closed borders and travel restrictions, that a lot of time was devoted to learning more about the conditions for public art consultancy in the respective countries, specifically Finland. Even though everyone was at home in front of their screens, there was still a feeling of immersion in different places and practices. In addition, a sense of shared experiences and challenges ahead in terms of the pandemic effects as well as democratic and ecological sustainability, rural development and city planning underpinned the talks and discussions.

Network meeting 10 June – the third year of the network

The NNAC meeting was devoted to sharing experiences of the network so far and hopes and ideas for the future. Despite the online fatigue that many have felt after more than a year of social distancing, there was a consensus among the members that the online workshops had been very useful. One member who has been working as an art consultant for some 20 years mentioned how NNAC was the first context in which they were able to meet and discuss with professional peers in the same field: “These are complex practices and it’s very important to be able to share experiences.” Another member talked about the importance of learning what is going on in public art in other countries: “NNAC is important because now I can say ‘In Sweden they are doing this’.”

Several members mentioned the role of the network in relation to the pandemic as well as political trends of populism and fiscal austerity in the respective countries: “Initiatives like NNAC are needed more than ever”; “We need peer support and colleagues. Locally and internationally”; “We need to tear down borders, which are higher after the pandemic.” There was also a broad consensus that having the physical meetings coincide with major art events was a good idea and the members reflected upon the value of seeing art works together.

As in Oslo, the question about diversity in practices and structures came up, but now more in terms of it being an asset, the different positions (individual entrepreneurs versus companies with employees; more research based practices versus producers etc.) enriching the network and it being apt that the members represent the diversity of the public arts consultancy profession.

As for the future of the network, there was a strong agreement that the network was important and should go on in some form and become permanent. Several members mentioned that the most important thing was perhaps not primarily to grow, but to build on the existing foundation and make things more stable. Linked to this, the aspect of balancing the personal and professional and the need for more informal conversations was raised.

What should NNAC be doing?

- Collaborate in producing events together
- Collaborate with small institutions, for example developing residency programmes (this could be good way to forge long-term relationships with the regions and a way to increase visibility)
- Work to help the next generation
- Work on creating sustainable practices & businesses
- Put pressure on the municipalities to work with freelance art professionals
- Does NNAC need a subtitle which explains that arts consultancy can entail a variety of things?
- Inviting colleagues from Denmark and Iceland

Seminar 11 June

The first speaker was Henri Tehro from TAIKE Arts Promotion Centre Finland, who spoke on "Considerations on the role of Public Art consultants in Finland". Terho was speaking from two perspectives, at Taike he is responsible for a new public art advisory service, launched in the autumn of 2019, and he is also the chair of the Finnish State Art Commission. The objective of the public art advisory service is to promote new public art and commissions for artists, political commitment for public art programmes, and good practices, such as organising competitions for public art and creating good negotiation policies and contracts in the field.

Lastly, an objective was also to promote advisory, consultancy and curatorial roles in public art, simply because Terho and his colleagues have observed that the more they use individual experts, freelancers working in the field of public art, the more interesting works they are getting, the more they are talking about public art, and the more they are promoting good processes. This leads to a better environment for public art in general.

Terho listed a few examples of how Taike is supporting public art consultancy in Finland: promoting regional public art programmes, developing models for how public art can be connected to city planning processes, working with municipalities. Here Taike sees a clear need for various kinds of consultancy work.

When it comes to the Finnish State Art Commission, there are no guidelines or policies in place regarding working with art consultants, which sets them apart from Koro in Norway and Public Art Agency Sweden. However, the commission is currently involved in projects where external arts consultants are used.

What are the possibilities for a private art consultant in the field of public art in Finland?

In Finland the public art field is mostly run by the art museums and smaller towns without museums have municipal cultural services. But in the past two decades there have been clear tendencies of a need for separate art consultancy professionals in Finland. This is connected to urban development - residential areas with art programmes included in the planning processes - and large-scale hospital building projects, in smaller towns as well as cities. Both these instances require long term commitment. The museums and municipalities don't necessarily have the manpower to deal with these long-lasting processes, up to ten years.

There is no exact number of individuals, but Terho estimated that there are some 20-30 people working with public arts consultancy and curation. Before the year 2000 there were practically none and it is still a very young and fragile field. Most of them are freelancers, individual entrepreneurs, and the agencies with more than one person are very few and small, which leads to difficulties in procurement practices. It is also a challenge that expectations on public art consultants and curators are not uniform, there is no clear consensus of the nature of the profession.

Nora Nerdrum, head of the arts section and curator at KORO Public Art Norway, gave a talk titled "How does public art happen?", in which she detailed the history of Koro and the importance of the curatorial turn (abandoning a committee model in public art projects and giving the curator a stronger mandate).

Koro's role is twofold: to ensure that as many people as possible encounter a diverse range of high-quality artworks in public buildings and other public spaces and also to contribute to the development of contemporary art and provide artists with commissions and incomes.

Nerdrum introduced three factors that she believes are important to the work Koro does:

- An interdisciplinary approach. All Koro's projects are followed by an internal interdisciplinary project team which allows for a more comprehensive perspective on an art project. The insights of the

various sections are taking into taking into consideration throughout the process.

- Working methods that are predictable as well as flexible and under continued development.
- Artistic management of the art projects carried out by curators.

For many years, all projects were carried out by so called art committees: the architect, the builder, the user and the art consultant. Today most projects in Koro are realized with a curator – production-working group model in which the curator has close contact with the architect and builder. The title “production working group” signals that the mandate of the group is not to evaluate art and artistic expressions but to ensure practical details.

But there is of course still a responsibility towards the public and anchoring is important in all stages of the process. Nerdrum stressed that this not just be with a single representative, but the need to involve several employees/residents etc. throughout the process.

Koro is currently working on strengthening their strategy for diversity and representation, rethinking how to work more inclusively, in the art projects as well as in the organization. In this they are looking for new ways of approaching and engaging the audience.

Issues of sustainability in relation to public art and urban and rural development were raised by Åsa Mårtensson of Public Art Agency Sweden. Mårtensson talked about how the challenges we face in terms of social segregation, a decrease in democratic values and climate change call for interdisciplinary collaboration between a wider range of professions.

The Swedish policy “designed living environments” (“Gestaltad livsmiljö”) is important because it recognizes that in order to achieve a higher quality in building, artists and designers need to be involved. Similarly, at the end of last year the EU declared the New European Bauhaus Initiative, aiming to connect the European Green Deal to our living spacing spaces and stating that “it’s a bridge between the world of science and technology and the world of art and culture.” In building that bridge the art consulting could bring vital knowledge.

Public Art Agency Sweden sees the artistic or critical gaze of the of the artist as a quality in itself, for example in urban planning where there can be a lot of talk about ‘building the good city’, but there isn’t always room for questioning what a good city is. When an artist comes into a project and asks questions like ‘who’s going to live here’ or through their art tries to illustrate technical presumptions, that could be a way to reset the plan ahead and maybe start asking truly relevant questions.

Mårtensson talked about the importance of the art consultant role in building trust between different sectors early on in public art production, and the art consultant or curator’s importance in more rural contexts, being able to set up an organisation and working across sectors in smaller municipalities with limited experience of that type of collaboration.

Panel discussion (Henri Terho, Nora Nerdrum and Åsa Mårtensson)

Points made during the panel discussion:

- Public art has been very controlled in Finland, on the other hand, there are a lot of grassroots activities, a field of artists operating as free artists in the public sphere
 - We need to look at development not as a straight line, but more like an ecosystem. Not look at a “Finnish” way of doing things or a “Norwegian” way, but look at this together. Challenges having to do with ecological and democratic sustainability are something we face together. Official meetings like this are important, but we could also meet in more in formal ways.
 - One of the most important tasks Koro has going forward is educating art consultants and curators around the country. There is a lack of curatorial knowledge especially in the northern part of Norway. Very relevant to work on that, in order to approach projects from a local level.
 - The pandemic has halted many art and construction projects, at the same time there has been a surge in interest in works of art in public space.
 - Public art consultancy and curating is a highly specialised profession, the limited number of customers make the field very vulnerable.
 - It’s not just the art consultant that is vulnerable. The whole art world is. This network is a good example of strengthening the profession. But we also need to merge with other fields. We need to get into architectural educational in universities and spread or knowledge in a wider context. Many people in building and development know very little about contemporary art. And an art consultant is also something very abstract for many.
 - The sustainability issue is very important. Ecological and cultural – people having a right to culture. The art consultant can highlight the importance of this.
 - Good architectural planning is a crucial component for increasing the welfare of the people living in the environments and public art has a role in this. That kind of ideology is very strong now in architectural policies and development programmes, and I think it will be the future for all of us.
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- We are living in an environment where planning no longer is only a technocratic issue but more and more about living in a good and healthy and enjoyable environment.

Coda

The day before the Helsinki meeting, the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (Myndigheten för Kulturanalys) published the report “Så fri är konsten” on the effects of cultural policy governance on artistic freedom. In it several shortcomings and risks in Swedish cultural policy in its current form in relation to the ideal of artistic freedom and the arm’s length principle, were identified. When it comes to art in the public sphere, the report found several examples of cultural policy measures in relation to public art and design which were interesting from an arm’s length perspective.

Generally, these were municipal initiatives in relation to public art that were perceived as improperly controlling artistic content. For example, the town of Sölvesborg in Southern Sweden which has stipulated that the leisure and culture committee is to ensure that “[Swedish] cultural heritage be given prominence in public art” and that “timeless and classic art” which “harmonizes with the town’s history, local identity and built environment” should be given preference over “provocative contemporary art”.

Political overreach is one of the challenges in the field of public art, and an example of the importance of having a network of independent art consultants and curators in the field of public art. For support, learning, organising and building strength.

At the Oslo meeting we toured the biennial and were also invited to the studio of one of the members who is an artist. As the Helsinki meeting was conducted online there were no such opportunities for informal conversation and seeing and talking about art together, although the seminar included a wonderful presentation of the Helsinki biennial by Kristiina Ljokkoi. Perhaps this is why the topic of art – the importance of it, the question “what is art”, understanding the multiplicity of it, whose art is seen and even circling back and discussing specific works at the Oslo biennial – was raised repeatedly in the members’ discussions. Hopefully, the Gothenburg meeting will provide ample opportunity for more such discussions.

Finally, at the Helsinki meeting several members raised the difficulty of finding time in busy practices for these sorts of activities. But as one member stated, we should never be too busy to meet our colleagues and get important peer group support.



A special thanks to our collaborators:

HAM Helsinki Art Museum
KORO Public Art Norway
Oslo biennale
Public Art Agency Sweden
TAIKE Arts Promotion Centre Finland
The City of Oslo Art Collection



NORDIC-BALTIC
MOBILITY
PROGRAMME

Culture



A commentary for NNAC article
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Special advisor, Public art
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July 2, 2020



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At first, I'd like to point out the importance of using an observer in a multi-annual project as NNAC. In professional networks, the meetings tend to be full of debates and the intensity of discussions occasionally demands observers. The series of observation articles that NNAC offers is of great value in tracking the changes in the approaches and the agenda!

An important point of departure is the variation and the national differences in the roles and in the very definitions of "an art consultant". It is good to analyze the differences to aid mutual discussions in the future. The professional roles bear many expectations that differ both personally and nationally. The focus in the future could at best be in the shared professional possibilities for the art consultants. Both the roles, that the public sector art consults/curators have, and the possibilities that the private sector consulting companies might have are rather different in different countries. The key question is to what extent do the public bodies leave the field for private companies available. Public art is closely connected with the public power structures, so what really are the possibilities for the private sector professionals to get involved?

As for networking possibilities, a good starting point seems to be learning about the best practices and exchanging ideas on working with public art and public sphere. It would be worthwhile to investigate the possibilities of Nordic cooperation in higher education for public art curators as well. Also, it would be essential to explore the possibilities the consultants have in working in other Nordic countries and the ways in which artists too could find new international opportunities, as public art markets still tend to be rather national in focus. Could a Nordic network

of art consultants also aid artists and open new possibilities for them across the borders in the Nordic region?

The active network in NNAC comprises of ca. 10 professionals from three countries. It might be important yet to verify what kind of expertise do they represent and to what extent are the members representative of the whole variety of consultants in each respective country. What is the more general professional field of consultants nationally? Are the consultants to fulfill plans as coordinators or producers of art projects? Or are the consultants also investigating and reforming the nature of planning through means of arts? What can be the proactive role of a consultant? In addition, a market survey would be of good interest: what is the actual scale of business opportunities in the field of public arts consultants?

My final remarks: I would definitely like to know more about the proposed lifespan of the network. Is NNAC a project with a three-year plan or is there a prospect for more long-term and structured cooperation in the Nordic scene as well. Is there a need for a long-term network commitment, and are there structural (and maybe financial) possibilities for that?

Henri Terho

Special advisor, Public art
Arts Promotion Centre Finland



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In response to the NNAC article
by Christine Antaya

By Åsa Mårtensson
Former project manager for the government assignment to strengthen develop-
ment of knowledge within public art and designing common environments
Public Art Agency Sweden, 30 april 2021



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Former project manager for the government assignment to strengthen development of knowledge within public art and designing common environments
Public Art Agency Sweden, 30 april 2021

Dear network,

Thank you for the invitation and for asking me to contribute with a response to Christine Antayas article.

The initiative of a network for art consultancy is longed for, and much needed. As the article states, practices differ, not only according to the role given to each practitioner in their own specific context, but also between our different countries. This is probably the case with most professions in a world that is rapidly becoming more complex.

The challenges we face in terms of social segregation, a decrease in democratic values and climate change, calls for interdisciplinary collaboration between a wider range of professions. This was one of the reasons for the Swedish parliament to launch the politics of Designed living environment in 2018. We need to cross professional boundaries and collaborate in new ways to solve challenges ahead. What makes Designed living environment unique is that to be able to achieve a higher quality in building, artists and designers need to be involved in designing our future cities. At the end of last year, the EU declared The New European Bauhaus initiative aiming to connect the European Green Deal to our living spaces. Stating that "It's a bridge between the world of science and technology and the world of art and culture". In building that bridge, art consulting can bring vital knowledge to secure the role of art and the artist.

Set against a background of politicians recognizing the need for art to play a bigger role in designing our environments, we need to look ahead. The role of art consulting not only needs to be defined within a context much broader than participating in new buildings being realized, but also encompassing the actual planning of an area or a city. In Sweden we are now seeing universities offer courses on designed living environment. This could be a great opportunity to lift the role of art consulting, and to engage in a dialogue that reaches outside the boundaries of the art world. If we want art to be a natural part of developing society, we need to include architects, city planners, landscapers, environmentalists, antiquarians, citizens and many more. We need to articulate and strengthen the role of art consultancy and engage in interdisciplinary development.

Our rural environments are rightly pointed out as a challenge and an area that calls for specific knowledge. During the pandemic, our big cities are experiencing a rapid movement of people moving out of the city to live in smaller towns or the countryside. Many of Sweden's councils are now selling land for development they never anticipated a year ago. Will these new environments include public art? If they do, will there be professional knowledge to guide the process?

The Nordic countries share a history, and there is still a strong contemporary bond between us. Our indigenous people, the Sami culture, have never recognized borders. Sapmi not only stretches across Norway, Sweden and Finland, it also presents a rich culture where contemporary art plays an important role. Viewed from a global perspective where democracy and freedom of speech is under threat, we need to seek what we have in common and build resilience together.

Åsa Mårtensson

Former project manager for the government assignment to strengthen development of knowledge within public art and designing common environments. Public Art Agency Sweden.



A special thanks to our collaborators:

HAM Helsinki Art Museum
KORO Public Art Norway
Oslo biennale
Public Art Agency Sweden
TAIKE Arts Promotion Centre Finland
The City of Oslo Art Collection



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Curating and planning public art in the Nordic countries
NNAC – Nordic Network for Arts Consultancy
Final network meeting, Gothenburg 16 – 20 November, 2021

“My dream for the field is diversity,
then we will have diverse art.”



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In 2019, Linda Wallenberg and Åsa-Victoria Wihlborg secured funding for a three-year pilot project on art consultancy in the Nordic countries. A small number of professionals working with curating and planning public art in the Nordic countries were invited to form a network which would meet in person three times over the course of the years, and in between those events meet online for regular webinars. The meeting in Gothenburg was the third and final meeting, after Oslo in October 2019, and Helsinki in June 2021 (postponed on year due to the pandemic, and finally held digitally).

After some last-minute cancellations, ten members attended the Gothenburg meeting (five from Sweden, three from Finland, one from Norway, and one from Denmark). I was invited to participate in the network as a writer and moderator. This article is a summary of the discussions that took place in Gothenburg.

The members’ meeting took place at Gallery SVILOVA, and the programme also included tours of the Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art with the curator Lisa Rosendahl and a number of external speakers were invited over the course of the four days.

The public art curator and consultant

In a survey on municipal public art, published in a research anthology commissioned by Public Art Agency Sweden, art historian Håkan Nilsson writes that several of the interviewed municipalities stated that the process of planning and commissioning works of art in the public realm

has become increasingly professionalized and bureaucratized in recent decades.

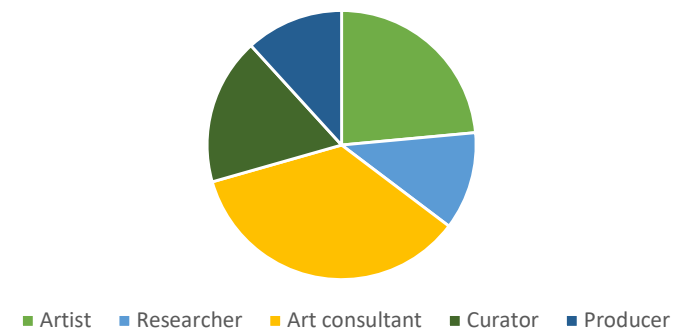
As Nilsson also notes, in a different chapter, on the state of public art in Sweden in the new millennium, the field has been affected by regularizations and privatizations. As a growing sector involving more and more participants, it has also become further specialized and public art commissions are increasingly being handled by “private curators and art advisors” who are hired by municipalities and the private sector to handle everything from civic dialogue to choosing the artist and site for the art work.

These facts are reflected in the initiative to form NNAC: with an increasing number of professionals working in the field there has been a need for some kind of outlet or unifying professional body. The issue of bureaucratization, especially complicated procurement processes, has also been discussed by the NNAC members in all three network meetings.

The diversity of the field, these “private curators and art adviser” was also reflected in the diversity of the attendees of the three meetings. The group comprised freelancers working on their own or in collectives, working in or running companies with at least one employee in addition to the owner, as well as former freelancers who have recently become municipal employees working the city planning or public art departments.

During the members’ brief presentations of themselves, the following types of projects were mentioned: curating public art projects, production aid for public art projects, organising public art competitions, art strategies for municipalities, curating site specific exhibitions, collaborations with architects, facilitating cross-sector collaborations and devising art strategies for new neighbourhoods.

The educational backgrounds of the members present in Gothenburg included art history, curating, fine art, architecture, landscape architecture, cultural studies and social work. An attempt at quantifying the members, according to what words they use to describe themselves, might look like this:



This is a schematic summary based on conversations and website bios, but it is interesting to consider what the ratio between these identities would look like extrapolated to all the individuals working with curating and planning public art in the Nordic countries. Perhaps matters are complicated by the fact that titles are sometimes interchangeable with identities. For example, for those who identify as artists, this is often the first title that they mentioned. It is also possible that in a pie chart of all individuals working in public art curation, the "artist" slice would be larger than it is here. The issue of artists working in the field was also discussed at the final day's seminar, specifically in the Danish context, which is mentioned at the end of this article.

Risks and precarity

A benefit of NNAC being a three-year project became clear on the first day in Gothenburg as the members also gave a brief presentation of how their practices have changed in the past three years. This gave rise to a number of interesting discussion points.

Obviously, the impact of covid was a topic. One member expressed how their first experience curating an outdoor art event after a long period of lockdown made them question whether they had lost her "touch" during the pandemic, observing that perhaps not being able to see art changes your own practice.

Reflections of the past three years also inevitability became a discussion about precarity. One member decided to take a temporary position as a public art curator for a municipality, as they weren't getting the big, longer term projects, which made it difficult to run a small art consulting firm with one employee. Small companies can also be vulnerable in relation to the sometimes complex procurement process which means that larger companies have an easier time getting clients.

The difficulties of working in larger projects with clients such as municipalities when only one person from the organisation is involved in the project was also raised: "Municipalities can be great clients, but often you work with one contact person. If they get sick or go on leave – you're stuck working with someone with no knowledge of art or the project."

Other threats included art consultants sometimes competing against architectural firms, with no art knowledge, for the same contracts; few opportunities for reflection, a constant push to move on to the next project; set art budgets, as the construction project gets more expensive, the art budget stays the same, despite also being affected by supply shortages etc.; the challenge of reaching a variety of artists, and not

just the ones who are good at writing proposals.

Why art consultancy?

While reflecting on their respective practices, the specificities of the fields, and the motivations for working in it, came to the fore. Art consultancy allows for a pedagogical aspect and creates spaces for conversations. One member talked about how working with art in public space or buildings opens up for conversations with and between groups (non-art professionals and members of the public) that would otherwise perhaps not occur at all. This is one way in which the practice is fundamentally different from exhibition curating.

A challenge, and perhaps an attraction, when it comes to curating public art is that the art consultant often acts as the sole representative of 'Art' in contexts where most of the people involved have no specific art knowledge or perhaps interest. Furthermore, working with site-specific work can be seen as a form of silent knowledge, that is, difficult to communicate and teach, and also difficult to verbalise in funding applications.

The definition of art was also a topic of discussion, sometimes not in purely metaphysical terms, but rather in terms of the pushback that is sometimes required in projects where art is not differentiated from architecture, or the art consultant's fee is considered "art" when it comes to the budget.

"The ideal client"

On the second day, the members were asked to reflect on the topic of "the ideal client." One member said: "I used to think that someone in the arts sector was the best client to work with, but now I like working directly with construction companies, then we are the ones with the art knowledge, working with for example a municipal arts department and a construction company can sometimes feel like having two clients, two wills to take into account." Another member observed that an engaged client is always the best, as opposed to them being invisible or taking the back seat.

A lot of the thoughts on the topic of the ideal client had to do with reliability and diligence, and time and control. Time in the sense of not rushing things, creating time in the beginning of the project to create common ground, allowing for long-term projects with the time to develop something together, and acknowledging the thinking process as part of the project, not just meetings and site visits. The issue of control had been raised in previous discussions, the clash between art and (the client's) need for control for example. In relation to imagining an ideal client, it came up in the case of being open to surprises (good and bad), being

curious about what the art consultant, and art, can do, and to trust the art consultant's experience.

With regards to reliability and diligence, points that were raised included the importance of a realistic budget and timetable, having clear expectations on the goals for the project, being committed to their own strategies, and not only assigning one person to work on the project. The ideal client also takes responsibility for calling to meetings and taking minutes at the meeting, in other words, taking charge of the overarching administrative duties.

New European Bauhaus

In the Helsinki meeting, Åsa Mårtensson from Public Art Agency Sweden brought up the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and the potential for art consulting to bring vital knowledge to that project, but this was not discussed in any detail. In Gothenburg, the organisers had invited Ulf Dahlnäs from HDK-Valand, Academy of Art and Design to give an introduction on the topic.

NEB was announced by the president of the European Union, Ursula von der Leyen, in her State of the Union speech on 16 September, 2020. Von der Leyen described the NEB as being "about bringing the European Green Deal closer to people's minds and homes. And making tangible the comfort and attractiveness of sustainable living." NEB is:

a forum for discussion
an experimentation lab
an accelerator for new solutions
a hub for global networks and experts
a meeting place for citizens interested in the topic.

In general terms, NEB has been described as a platform to promote collaboration between thinkers and implementers, a bridge between the world of science and technology and the art and culture world. Ulf Dahlnäs observed that that very few Nordic actors have responded to the competitions announced thus far in the project. The members speculated that this is likely in part related to the funding structures of the EU and the membership countries.

In Sweden, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning has been tasked with coordinating the NEB collaboration. The other authorities involved in this group are: the Swedish Energy Agency, Vinnova, Architects Sweden, The Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design, Formas, and the Federation of Swedish Innovation Companies. There is thus an emphasis on

architecture, construction and technology. In the discussion following Dahlnäs's presentation, one member observed that the metaphysical questions of the original Bauhaus seemed absent in NEB, in which, for example, the issue of reconnecting with nature is tied to technological issues rather than existential.

In sum, NEB still appeared as a bit of an enigma, and there were also related concerns that this ties into a tendency in art where there is a demand for a certain type of artistic practice, one which is easily communicated in terms of sustainability and the common good, and that it is important to safeguard art's diversity.

A team of researchers at University College London noted in a paper on the subject that the original Bauhaus certainly had its flaws – "the disappearing of diversity, the careless ignorance of impact, the top-down hierarchies of maestri" – and that which version of the Bauhaus is carried into the NEB is crucial. The authors stress the importance of trans-disciplinarity, and that "accessing art and design's capacity for purposefully holding ambiguity and uncertainty will be key to ensuring that we do not shirk from complexity and contestation, but that we embrace it."

Future of the network

In the final members' workshop, the future of the network was discussed. The funding was granted for a three-year period, and no further activities after the Gothenburg meeting were planned within the project.

The following questions were discussed in the workshop:

What has been the most valuable part of the network so far?

- To find Nordic colleagues
- Strengthening our arguments
- Time to reflect, and to think collectively
- Defining the role of the art consultant
- Meeting institutional collaborators, gathering around our role
- Getting to know the systems in the different countries
- New perspectives, learning from the members' diverse backgrounds
- Understanding challenges and possibilities
- Feeling of community
- Discussion without competition

How can a network like NNAC function sustainably in a longer perspective?

- Secure funding
 - Travel and hotel needs to be covered
 - Share the role of hosting meetings and webinars
 - Finding ways to disseminate our knowledge to others
-

What questions are most relevant for NNAC to focus on?

- Sharing national practices and structures
- Professionalizing the role of the art consultant
- Fee recommendations
- How to verbalize our silent knowledge
- Who we are and what we need, what society needs
- Can we initiate a research project on being part of the initial phase on urban planning?
- Can we inspire planners to think differently?

What collaborators do you think are most important for the future of NNAC?

- Strengthen and deepen existing collaborations
- Urban and rural planners to discuss how art can be part of early planning

In what way do you see that NNAC:s work could continue after 2021?

- Having a project manager who gets paid
- Annual event, nordic perspective, organized in different places
- Secure funding
- Keeping it small and intimate
- Popularize information and distribute our knowledge (inspire, teach)
- Think tank for public art

Specific ideas for the future were 1) a network open to membership applications, with an elected board and potentially a large annual event 2) a more formal professional organization 3) a public art think tank.

Overall, there was a lot of support for keeping the group small, with the possibility of in-depth connections and informal reflections in addition to the more professional discussions. However, this does not seem like a sustainable model in the long run, when it comes to benefitting the field in its entirety. Several members identified future activities of the network as having to do with research and/or popularizing information about the role of public art and the art consultancy profession. Forging long-term collaborations with the public art institutions in the respective countries, and ensuring that the activities of a network/organization/think tank remain relevant to these institutions were also key points made. Given all this, the group concluded that some sort of think tank would be the most feasible and relevant form for NNAC to take.

The importance of “passing the torch” and alternating host countries was also emphasised. It should also be acknowledged that as the founders of the network live and work in Sweden, as does the writer of the summarising articles, there has at times been an emphasis on Swedish publications, terminology and conditions, which may have been unavoidable, but for a truly Nordic perspective, an alternating, or more mixed, organising body would be preferable.

Think tank

In 2018 Public Art Agency Sweden released a research report on the current state of research on public art in the Nordic Countries, and in a wider international context. In it the writers emphasised the impotent role played by agencies outside academia, such as Situations and the think tank iXia in the UK. Both organisations have since been dissolved, but maintain online archives that can perhaps be useful in thinking about what a think tank can do. Situations, founded by Claire Doherty, summarised their approach to public art in a set of principles, which can serve both as inspiration and reminders.

1. It doesn't have to look like public art.
2. It's not forever.
3. Don't make it for a community. Create one.
4. Build space for the unplanned.
5. Withdraw from the cultural arms race.
6. Demand more than fireworks.
7. Don't embellish. Interrupt.
8. Share ownership freely, but authorship wisely.
9. Welcome outsiders.
10. Don't waste time on definitions.
11. Suspend your disbelief.
12. Get lost.

The focus of an art consultancy think tank would of course have to be slightly more narrow than simply “Public Art”, perhaps also with an emphasis on practical questions. Based on the discussions in Oslo, Helsinki and Gothenburg, possible questions for a think tank focusing on curating and planning public art might include:

- What are the implications of the rise of the private sector in public art commissioning? How can that sector be approached?
- What kind of jobs do we as art consultants want?
- How do we understand the multiplicity of art? What types of art are promoted? Which artists are invited?
- How can we address competition between larger companies and freelancers working on their own?
- Mentorships, internships, collaborations with universities in order to ensure that specialised knowledge is not lost

Meeting the collaborators

w with invited collaborators from Taike, Finland; Public Art Agency Sweden; the City of Gothenburg and the Danish Art Foundation, participated digitally.

Patric Amsellem, the Director of Public Art Agency Sweden, argues that there is a momentum now in Sweden to use the 1 % rule, but that there is a lack of curators who can shepherd these projects. The agency currently has 10 procured curators/art consultants for working with the art collection, and 4 curators/art consultants for working with permanent works.

Lotte from the Danish Art Foundation held an informative presentation on how the organisation in 2019 formalised the use of art consultants. Now there is a focus on skillsets rather than educational background. She stressed that the skills involved are both administrative and curatorial, being able to facilitate the entire process, and thus being experienced is important from the very beginning. Prior to 2019, mainly artists were procured as art consultant, but that changed when the foundations started requiring quite a long list of skills. This upset the artist's union and there was much debate at the time. Ten art consultants were procured under this new system, and when their contracts expire in 2023 the process will be evaluated.

Moderated discussion

The new Danish model gave rise to a discussion about education and mentorships. No new graduate would be able to work as an art consultant for the Danish Art Foundation. Public Art Agency Sweden also agreed that there is a lack of curators, very few people meet the demands. There are perhaps more curators than ever coming out of the universities now, but working with public art is very different than planning exhibitions in galleries and museums. Small art consultancy firms do not have the resources to take on interns or act as mentors. Public Art Agency Sweden does however have a number of junior curators, as a way to train professionals in the specificities of public art. In Denmark, artists are trying educate themselves further in order to qualify, but the Danish Art Foundation believes that this is a very practical field where theoretical knowledge alone will never suffice.

This led to a discussion of larger companies perhaps being more sustainable, and able to conserve and pass on knowledge. However, several of the participants also argued the benefits of staying small. The representative from the Gothenburg City Planning office put it this way: "I want to work with the small group, the tight group, or just one person." Having larger companies isn't a magic solution, and as one member put it: "My dream for the field is diversity, then we will have diverse art."

If the field can be summarised in one sentence, it would have something to do with flux and change. Just over the course of NNAC's three years a lot has changed, when it comes to the systems and policies in the

different countries, procurement processes, EU initiatives, and the art/world at large. And so, the conversation should continue.

Coda: A City built on sludge

The founders of the network wanted all the meetings to coincide with larger art events in the city in question, which ended up being the Oslo, Helsinki and Gothenburg biennials. From my perspective, Gothenburg was the city that became most viscerally present during our stay there, for example with the fact of historical buildings being built on timber foundations in deep mud reoccurring in several presentations.

The city of Gothenburg also came to the forefront in the detailed presentations given on the new artworks planned for the West Link project, one of the largest infrastructure and urban development projects in the history of the region. Three new train stations are being built which will be connected by a new underground railway through Gothenburg to relieve traffic at the Central Station. NNAC member Ann Magnusson (who has been procured as an art consultant on the project) and Andreas Roth, curator at Public Art Agency Sweden talked about the art works that are planned for the new train stations, which will be completed in 2026: Eternal Employment by Goldin+Senneby, Rainbow Snake by Huang Yong Ping, bLINK by Katharina Grosse, and Tongue and Groove by Danh Võ.

What also set Gothenburg apart was that the theme of the 2021 edition of Gibca relied heavily on the history of Gothenburg, taking its starting point in Franska tomten ("the French Plot"), a piece of land in the harbour that was traded for the Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy in 1784. The site visit and introduction by curator Lisa Rosendahl was an absorbing example of engaging site specifically. Standing there together was a form of embodiment of the "silent knowledge" that so often has been referred to in conversations between NNAC members. A very apt conclusion to the three years.



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What are the processes involved when artworks are placed in public space? What characterizes the work of an art consultant or curator working in this context? How has the field developed in the Nordic countries in recent years?

This publication collects texts written by art consultants and curators who were part of the Nordic Network for Art Consultancy, a project funded by Nordic Culture Point 2019-2022. It works as a summary of the discussions that were held during the NNAC project, but the chapters are also vital snapshots of the state of art consultancy and public art curation in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. A report from the field, to be brought along into the field.

