

# Thematic Issue on Re-Imagining Artistic Research

# PROCEEDINGS FROM ART OF RESEARCH VIII EDITORIAL

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## ABSTRACT

This special issue explores contemporary efforts in rethinking artistic research, especially in relation to its boundaries, methods, formats, and collaborations across fields of knowledge and practice. As artistic research sets itself firmly on its own scientific grounds, its relational and affective potential expands beyond the fields of visual arts. This potential is explored in this special issue as artist-researchers engage in re-imagining research in arts, architecture, photography, design, craft, and education. Through these collective efforts, we expect to contribute to understanding the impacts of artistic research and emphasize its importance in shaping research in a broader sense.

## KEYWORDS

*Artistic research; Art of Research Conference; artistic research methods; reimagining.*

## Introduction

In the past three decades, artistic research has moved from a field of little recognition to a solid research ground. From the seminal publication by Christopher Frayling in 1993 (Frayling, 1993), when a first proposal to acknowledge the validity of artistic research in the fields of arts and design was laid down, much has changed. A series of novel frameworks expanded Frayling's proposal of research in/to/through arts and design, suggesting that the ways of artistic research are often more complex and fluid than his initial proposal (cf., Borgdorf, 2010; Candy, 2018; Leavy, 2020; Varto, 2018).

By the 2010s, the term 'artistic research' stood solidly in academic grounds (Schwab, 2010) and began to further the discussion, moving the focus away from a call for recognition to a call to rethink research in its own terms. In this initial consolidation and reconsiderations, efforts around artistic research have enabled novel ways of disseminating research work. For example, with the inclusion of multi-media supports to publish academic research (see JAR, 2024; PARSE, 2024; Ruukku, 2024). In this way, artistic research allows a reconsideration of practices around publications, policies, organizations, amongst others (Quinteri, 2023).

As part of these efforts, the Art of Research conference series has, since 2005, contributed to the discussions

seeking to not only establish artistic research as a field of rigorous enquiry, but also to catalyze convergences—and divergences (Mäkelä & Routarinne, 2007). The last edition of the series, in its eighth issue, took place in December 2023 and saw a manyfold increase in number of submissions, confirming the solid position of artistic research in academic context today. The theme of the conference revolved around the concept of Re-Imagining, reflecting on how artistic research often turns to past events in order to project unforeseen futures, or to re-imagine possible futures. This recognizes two traditions that entangle in artistic research: the assessment of prior existing facts in research, and the latency of unforeseen futures in the arts. This overarching theme unfolds into three sub-themes: re-interpreting, re-placing, and re-visioning, creating opportunities for discussion within and beyond the visual arts.

## Re-Imagining Artistic Research

This special issue brings together twenty-two full paper-contributions presented at the conference, reworked into articles for the *Research in Arts and Education* journal. They address diverse perspectives on artistic research and stem from a wide range of fields of practice. The perspectives explore matters of posthumanism, care, relationality, heritage, performativity, to name a few. While most of the contributions do speak from the field of arts and artistic practices, other voices coming from fields such as design,

architecture, photography, museology, natural sciences, and crafts enrich the explorations.

The Table 1 exposes these contributions and proposes a categorization, based on the conference themes and authors' indications, to further understand the novel directions in artistic research. It makes visible how artistic research enables a reconsideration of traditional research approaches, methodologies, and media, supporting research in arts, design, and many adjacent and/or tangential fields. It is relevant to note that each article may contribute to more than one conference theme and fields of knowledge. However, in this categorization we have selected the most prominent theme in our interpretations for clarity and simplification.

## Re-imagining

As an overarching theme, many works subscribe to re-imagining as a concept to rethink artistic research, its methodologies, and processes. The temporal aspects of the theme – going back to take another look to imagine the past for future – is well epitomized in Carla Hamer's article "Reimagining past histories and experiences through performative photography and auto-ethnography." The work was a way to apply a performative approach to the photographic medium and the creative practice to re-imagine, rather than to represent, her Danish grandfather's story, who emigrated to Argentina and played chess with his brother in

AUTHORS	TITLE	THEME
Carla Hamer	Reimagining Past Histories and Experiences through Performative Photography and Auto-ethnography	Re-imagining
Dolejšová et al.	Feral Experiments in CreaTures Co-Laboratory	Re-imagining
Felsing & Cornut	Re-Imagining the Collection of the Kreis Family	Re-Imagining
Field	Museum of Extinction: The Field Ornithology Collection	Re-imagining
Kocsis et al.	From Art Introspection to Selfie Co-creation: Looking for Clues from O’Doherty’s “Inside the White Cube” to Improve Evaluation and Design in the Attention-Experience Economy	Re-imagining
Mahler	Traversing the Unknown in Research through Art and Design	Re-imagining
Martins	Collective Care Towards Homeostasis in the Collective Body	Re-imagining
Pott	Re-imagining Artists’ Relationships with the Past: Recreation, Attention, Transformation	Re-imagining
Blair	The Exhibition as Assessment: Design Research in Architectural History	Re-interpreting
Lindgren	Primed Figures - Reimagining Architectural Drawings as Technological Mediators	Re-interpreting
McNab	Our Spectral Gardens: Hilma af Klint’s ‘Ten Largest’ as a template for our synthetic present.	Re-interpreting
Vega et al.	Making Things that Change: Reconsidering the Fluid Nature of Creative Productions in Research through Art, Design, and Craft	Re-interpreting
Bradfield	Future (Re)view - Re-ing and (Re)reading “Future (Re)vision: A Few Reflections on Recollection, Reception and Response in Practice-Based Art Research or: Hindsight isn’t always 20/20”	Re-interpreting
Chicunque Agreda et al.	Inter-Weavings of Practice and Research in the Tšombiach (Woven Sashes) of the Kamëntša Biya People)	Re-placing
Maier et al.	Returns: Back Stitch Methodology as a Reflective Approach to Artistic Research	Re-placing
Oktay	Creating Intimate Places for Close by Heart but Physically Apart People Through Remote Embodiments	Re-placing
Suomi & Mäkelä	Exploring Ecological Relationality Through Architectural Practice	Re-placing
Gomez	When Eros Drives Artistic Research	Re-Visioning
Gouveia	My journey through the 1980s and 1990s as an art student and young artist	Re-visioning
Järdeemar et al.	Maye Ma Leka – Reframing Congolese- Swedish Colonial Entanglements	Re-visioning
Juhola	Forest Disputes: Socially Engaged Art and Forest Science for Understanding Sustainability Challenges	Re-visioning
van IJken	Sleutelen as photographic gesture	Re-visioning

*Table 1. List of articles, their short summaries and identified theme. The order of the articles on the table reflects the order of the articles in this special issue.*

Denmark through correspondence. According to Hamer the concepts of performativity and temporality are crucial to the artistic re-imagining, or taking another look imaginatively, and re-enacting the game by playing chess photographically through *WhatsApp* with a close friend in Buenos Aires. Questions of distance, temporal and seasonal differences as well as new kind of bond between players emerged. According to Hamer these methods allowed her to further thoughts about authorship, performativity, and the experience of time in relation to art practice. This act of doing rather than documenting was perceived as the creation of a separate or distinct dimension of a simultaneous sense of intimate presence and spatiotemporal distance.

Like Hamer, Natalie Field uses ethnographic methods studying the temporal aspects of her artistic research. Where Hamer's enquiry is more personal as auto-ethnographic research is, Field's draws more societal and environmental conclusions, as many of the articles presented in this publication. Field is particularly focusing on the loss of biodiversity through her article "Museum of Extinction: The Field Ornithology Collection." She studies the material and temporal aspects through taxidermy and argues that the re-representation of animal materialities in art and artefacts has the potential to re-form culture in the time of the sixth extinction. Through this project she works to make the invisible, loss, visible. The collection animalARTefact in Museum of Extinction, explicitly incorporates dead animal bodies to draw attention to narratives around extinction.

According to Field the physical manifestation of the *Museum of Extinction* "is a shrine to the fallen: a dark, quiet, and intimate sanctuary for reflection." According to her, the project takes a critical approach to institutionalized forms of animal representation. The act of taxidermy as artistic practice, Field argues, creates an opportunity to become more self-reflective as a mediated experience of the animal-other.

## Re-interpreting

The concept of re-interpreting comprises the idea of looking back to look further and into the future in a new way. It is aimed to shift the focus on unwanted, and on the world-view emerging from it, as the previous interpretations do not work anymore. The aspect of change is in the core of re-interpreting.

In the article "Making things that change: Reconsidering the fluid nature of creative productions in research through art, design, and craft," Vega et al. focus on change as they re-interpret the role of artefacts in artistic research. They make a case that this change is much more fluid and interwoven to the actual process of creation rather than seeing the creative productions merely as products to reflect upon in artistic research. The authors, as creative practitioners, argue that this kind of examining can produce wider societal implications over their value beyond academia. This can be epitomized

as knowing-through-making things that change throughout the creative process and discussing it. The authors state that research conducted through practices of art, craft and design often emphasize artifacts as meaning carriers rather than meaning makers. They argue that the process “allows us to reconsider how the things we make have the ability to change and *change us*, allowing for a richer understanding of their affective potential within and beyond the realm of our research practices”. In the times of accelerating change in all fields of life and environmental contexts, this approach not only helps the creative practitioners to navigate in their continually changing fields, but also to inform that change.

Marsha Bradfield on the other hand studies change of art research and academic writing formats in her article “Future (Re)view - Re-ing and (Re)reading “Future (Re)vision: A Few Reflections on Recollection, Reception and Response in Practice-Based Art Research or: Hindsight isn’t always 20/20.” The method of inquiry is a dialogue between her and art historian, which is also an emerging method of knowledge creation and reflection on artistic research.

The article presents *re-ing* as a critical and creative method for experience-based learning. It dwells on change in the thematical re-interpretation from the Art of Research conference II in 2012 to VIII in 2023 through the theme of re-ing. For the author it has also been a journey from PhD student to PhD supervisor, which portrays another level of a change in viewpoints and context. It is also a journey into recognizing

how every region and school has a different take on artistic research. Far from seeing this as a challenge it makes the newly established field living and breathing, enabling it to renew itself. As Bradfield puts it, the conferences help to map the field. It also enables the dialogue between the co-authors and researchers, between participants, and as a form of knowledge creation. It is a way to sharpen the arguments as dialogic art, making the collaboration greater than the sum of its parts, while also challenging the convention of academic research.

## Re-placing

Societal and environmental aspects are very much present in the theme of re-placing. This attunement is clear in two articles that both can be read as re-placing the thinking on their object of study and the narrative of being.

In the article “Inter-weavings of Practice and Research in the Tšombiach (woven sashes of the Kamëntša Biya people)” by Chicunque Agreda et al. socio-environmental entanglements are explored. Here, the indigenous weaving craft narrates their socio-cultural heritage through the collective process of doing, feeling, discussing as well as reflecting the daily life and understanding of the world. According to Botero et al. the experiences that arise from the daily chores and their associated knowledge are the ones that allow narratives to be woven even over generations, the *tšombiach* is a highly

concrete way of embodying relationships that are documented and interwoven with day-to-day life. The tšombiach is no longer just an object but becomes an experience, a memory, and a relationship. In this way, weaving produces a territory.

The environmental aspects of re-placing are very present in the article “Exploring Ecological Relationality Through Architectural Practice” by Maiju Suomi and Maarit Mäkelä. The human centered thinking was re-placed and extended to non-human entities in architecture as an act of place making through the design of the Alusta pavillion in Helsinki. Alusta is an attempt to raise awareness towards pollinators through architecture, and strives simultaneously to activate a philosophical and political discourse on the ontological basis how we built our environments. Its transient and continually changing nature gives another aspect of understanding architecture not merely as a product but as a process. The article explores how post-humanist and eco-feminist perspectives of entanglement and relationality challenge human exceptionalism as a basis for making architecture. It is re-placing the thinking of understanding nature and its beings merely as resource to human enterprises and wellbeing.

## Re-visioning

In re-visioning the cross-cutting themes of socio-cultural and environmental contexts in artistic research study the actual

essence of making change. How we can take a new position towards conditions and understandings that no longer takes us to sustainable and justifiable paths, and enhance understanding, re-thinking, and acting upon it. The focus in the two portrayed articles representing the different crosscutting themes is in engagement.

Järdemar et al. discusses cultural aspects and change through artistic research project in Congo by exploring a repressed part of Swedish colonial history by unboxing and unfolding a hidden trove of photographs and films amassed by Swedish Missionaries in Congo. The research portrayed in the article “Maye Ma Leka – Reframing Congolese- Swedish Colonial Entanglements”, is, according to the authors, an attempt to engage differently and explore the future making potential of the historical materials for Congolese communities. Preservation of archival material conjoins the past with present and future.

The forgotten and uncategorized material by the missionaries can also offer another look which is “less bound by previous frames and instead have an opportunity to reframe the materials based on decolonial ideas and counter-archival practices.” This reframing outside the established narratives through artistic practices can challenge the discursive institutional frame and introduce alternative counter narratives through engagement with locals and artist-researchers in contemporary societies.

Katja Juhola, on the other hand, studies activist art's potential in promoting environmental awareness and community engagement in her article "Forest Disputes: Socially Engaged Art and Forest Science for Understanding Sustainability Challenges." Since 2017, Juhola has brought locals, experts, researchers, and artists together in this case in Lapland to cooperate and mediate the current environmental issues through conversational art. According to Juhola "the synergy between art and science takes shape as artists and naturalists collaboratively develop a socially engaged art concept centered around a specific predetermined theme." Juhola argues that open discussion and trustworthy atmosphere present in conversational art making helps to deal with environmental anxiety and gives hope to act upon for better future as well as extend the discussion to a broader influence on social discourse.

## Conclusion

Discussions on artistic research's ability to affect is present in much of the contributions that comprise this issue, as a particular relationship to effecting change is drawn. Rather than seeing the change as incremental, many of the articles challenge the very essence of our worldviews and thinking. Artistic research is engaging societies and people in meaningful and new ways. There is also an apparent interest in taking discussions beyond academia. Several articles take dialogue either as the basis for their art practice or as a method for their research.

Another aspect present and common to the articles is their special relationship to time. Re-visiting the past in one way or another through artistic practice was present in many articles. Taking another look through artistic research was seen as enabling new pathways to the future and towards new understandings. This was seen also as a tool for healing and care as well as cultural manifestation where there was none. Another relationship to time was to understand the art processes as evolutionary rather than as products and artifacts, seeing the actual making of art as interactive process between the artist and the creation. In addition, various articles put the boundaries of artistic research—if any—to test, by asking what kind of knowledge creation we can give rise to in artistic research. The variety of fields represented in the articles and within articles give rise to a new kind of learning, recharging the fields, and imagining together. The playfulness of re-imagining is in many cases translated into more responsible and ethical actions with the world.

The works in this special issue greatly expose how artistic research engages with historical, envisioned and imagined temporalities. As we re-imagine together new directions for artistic research able to decenter generalist notions of artistic research as a self-centered practice, we begin to better understand the dimension of the affects that such research practice can bring.



