Constructing Sami national heritage

Encounters between tradition and modernity in Sami Art

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This article will explore the construction of Sami national heritage by analysing works from the touring exhibition *Gierdu*. The 27 artworks on display in *Gierdu* all belong to the RiddoDuottarMuseat's (RDM's) collections, comprising 1 200 artworks acquired since the early 1970s.[1] The collections, previously called The Sami Collections, are housed in Karasjok and was the first Sami cultural institution established in Norway. It opened in 1972 in a modernist building partly designed and decorated by the late Sami artist Iver Jåks (1932-2007).

The establishment of one's own cultural institutions has been part of indigenous people's self-determination; to claim the position of subject has been a strategy to counteract the previous objectification in museums and art galleries.[2] In the Norwegian part of Sápmi, both political and cultural Sami institutions have evolved in response to the cultural revitalisation the last 40 years.[3] Initially, The Sami Collections was mainly a museum of Sami cultural history, but one that also collected art. A committee of Sami artists has selected the acquisitions, and artists from all over Sápmi are represented. The art collection, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Sami Parliament, is one of many examples of the institutional affirmation that have taken place.

In Sami, the title *Gierdu* means "connection" or "circle", which relates to the traditional Sami understanding of time as cyclic rather than linear. The subtitle of the project, "Movements in the Sami Art World", addresses the project's goal to show movements in Sami art, and the dynamics and diversity in contemporary Sami art practices.[4] RDM cooperated with SKINN (*Se Kunst i Nord-Norge*) to curate *Gierdu,* which opened in 2009.[5]

The objects for exploring the construction of Sami cultural heritage will be works that were on display in *Gierdu,* not the entire collection. The exploration

divides the works into two categories: First "Duodji and tradition", then "Dáidda – The contemporary art practices". The motivation for this division is the fact that it still prevails both in the definition of Sami art provided by Sami Artists' Union and in RDM's description of the art collection.[6] Consequently, the exploration will in addition reconsider this division.

Descriptions and analyses of the selected works will serve to elucidate my argument about the existence of twinning, appropriation, dialogues and encounters between tradition and modernity on various levels in Sami cultural heritage.

Heritage, tradition and modernity

The concepts of heritage, tradition and modernity will be important in the exploration, as the relation between them and their connections to space and time. Heritage means different things to different people even within the same culture. Law scholar Derek Gillman claims in fact that heritage is not an objective fact about the world, but instead a social construction built by different contributors.[7] Thus, the construction is dynamic and will be a result of negotiations between cultural positions.

Tradition is a dynamic concept as well. According to the social anthropologists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively re-interprets them. In other words; tradition is not a bounded entity made up of constituent parts – it is, rather, a process of interpretation; attributing meaning in the present, while making reference to the past.[8]

Ethnologist Owe Ronström draws a distinction between heritage and tradition, applying literary scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept *chronotope.* Bakhtin borrowed the term *chronotope* from mathematics and applied it in literary criticism almost as a metaphor expressing the inseparability of space and time. In the literary artistic *chronotope,* spatial and temporal indicators fuse into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole, he claims.[9] In literary theory and philosophy of language, the *chronotope* is how temporal and special configurations are represented in language and in discourse. Applying the concept *chronotope* discursively, Ronström claims that "While tradition tends to use time to produce *topos*, place and distinct localities

…heritage tends to use place to produce *chronos*, specific pasts that are more loosely rooted in place".[10] He claims heritage and tradition are two different "mindscapes" operating in different interfaces. Tradition produces a closed space you cannot move into unless you are an insider by birth or marriage. Heritage produces a more open space almost everybody can move into operating with open sources and interfaces. Ronström also claims that customs, rituals and expressive forms, such as narratives, music and dance, are central to tradition, while the physical monuments, groups of buildings and sites are central to heritage.[11]

However, according to Sami literary scholar Harald Gaski, the construction of Sami cultural heritage is different and the relation between tradition and heritage is less clear-cut than Ronström claims. While Ronström underlines the importance of physical legacies in the construction of heritage, Gaski points to the importance of memories transmitted orally in the construction of Sami cultural heritage.[12] Narratives and storytelling belongs to such oral tradition. Ronström connects narratives to tradition, while Gaski connects it to heritage. Still, oral traditions and storytelling are constructions of the past in the present weather considered as tradition or heritage.

The relation between heritage and traditions on the one hand, and modernity on the other, has been a frequently debated topic and object for negotiations in the construction of Sami cultural heritage.[13] According to social anthropologist Vigdis Stordahl, a dichotomy between tradition and modernity was typical for the first years of the Sami ethno-political movement in the 1970s.[14] One consequence of this construction was that the "traditional" art (*duodji*) was considered authentic Sami and connected to a specific past. The "modern" art (*dáidda*) was considered to be non-Sami, hence more in line with "Norwegian" or "Nordic" art. According to Handler and Linnekin, such a dichotomy stems from the conventional understanding of tradition as a core of inherited culture traits, whose continuity and boundedness are analogous to that of a natural object.[15] This traditionalisation of *duodji*, explicitly referring to some elements of the past considered as tradition, is less prominent in the current Norwegian Sami discourse.[16]

Recently, many researchers have been more concerned with a dynamic conception of the relation between tradition and modernity, than the dichotomy described by Stordahl from the 1970s. Anthropologist M. Estellie Smith has pointed out that "traditional" and "new" are interpretive and relative, rather than descriptive terms. She also points out that many non-Indo-European speakers, such as the Sami,

have a holistic, rather than linear view of time, as they see the present as the future of the past.[17]

There are also understandings of the relation between tradition and modernity underlining difference or reciprocity rather than dichotomy. Sociologist Anthony Giddens understands the relation between modern institutions and pre-modern culture's way of life as discontinuous and connects modernity to certain distinct social forms like the nation state and organisation building.[18] Philosopher Marshall Berman, who questions the relation between tradition and modernity as discontinuous, provides another perspective. He is more concerned with modernity as a broad and inclusive concept, emphasising how modernity creates conditions for dialogue among the past, the present and the future. He defines modernity not as the opposite of tradition but as any attempt by men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernisation.[19]

In recent years, indigenous and Sami researchers have also questioned the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Political scientist Rauna Kuokkanen argues that taking for granted a dichotomy between tradition and modernity makes the epistemologies of indigenous peoples invisible. She suggests that research instead should seek to give a voice to indigenous ways, traditions and methods. According to Kuokkanen a linear view of time, where "pre-modern" stands as an opposite to "modern", or "tradition" vs. "modern", does not adequately describe how indigenous people understand time.[20]

The religious historian Jelena Porsanger says that according to her knowledge, indigenous concepts of tradition do not seem to rely on any kind of opposition to something that is non-traditional. She understands tradition as an entity in a constant process of change, deriving from indigenous concepts of time, space and knowledge. This points out that "traditional" in an indigenous (not only Sami) context means "cumulative and open to change", and that the concept "traditional" represents generations of experiences, careful observations and trial-and-error experiments. Porsanger also points to the Sami concept of time as cyclical, in constant movement and never-ending, as reflected in the exhibition title *Gierdu*.[21]

Both Porsanger and Kuokkanen claim that the relation between tradition and modernity is structurally similar to appropriations, dialogues and encounters, rather than oppositions. Consequently, *chronos* is not rooted in a specific past; neither is *topos* a distinct locality in their understanding. Art history has also proven the relation

between tradition and modernism as a gliding scale rather than oppositions. As art historian James Elkins points out – art history is different stories of the art from the past, constructed in the present by a way of storytelling.[22]

Duodji and tradition

The concept *duodji* is almost impossible to translate from Sami into other languages. While the common distinction is drawn between "art" and "sloid", "craft" or "handicraft" with reference to functional aspects of the object; the makers' training as artist or craftsperson; place, process and the result; *duodji* has a broader meaning. *Duodji* also embraces an understanding of nature and gathering materials, as well as identity and spirituality.[23] This understanding of duodji is deeply rooted in the culture where it belongs. Sami *duojár* and art historian Maja Dunfjeld describes Sami culture as a dynamic space between the sacred and the profane world.[24] As an example of this specific, Sami *topos*, she mentions the organisation inside a turf hut, a *goahti.* The open fireplace was the pivotal point. This was also the site for the female goddess *Sáráhkká*. She was daughter of the sun, protecting the home, family and fertility among both humans and animals.

The rest of the *goahti* was organised around the fireplace with one sacred part to the north, and a profane part to the south. The organisation had of course a practical purpose, but at the same time it mirrored the Sami cosmology and pre-Christian religious beliefs connected to it.[25] Dunfjeld understands *duodji* within the same dynamic space; between the sacred and the profane. This implies that the objects produced for practical purposes had spiritual properties as well.[26]

Duodji as practice has a strong significance as Sami identity marker. It constitutes a paramount example of the closed space of tradition, in Ronström's sense of the word, which reserve it for practices that are inaccessible to outsiders. Four works in *Gierdu* have a visual resemblance with *duodji*. How do these works take part in the construction of Sami national heritage?

Institutionalisation and deconstruction of tradition

Båtskål (Boat bowl)

In 2004, Jørn Magnus Rivojen Langseth (b. 1954) made *Båtskål (Boat bowl)* from one piece of birch wood.[27] A carving of four triangles mounted together as a cross on a small piece of horn decorates the wooden, polished surface of the bowl. Shape, material and decoration in *Boat bowl* are reminiscent of the traditional *náhppi* (a small milk pail for collecting milk from reindeer).[28] However, as professor in *duodji* and *duojár* Gunvor Guttorm points out: due to changing function, the form of the *náhppi* has changed historically – ultimately because the Sami society has gone through cultural changes.[29]

One such important cultural change, affecting the form of the *náhppi,* was the phasing out of the dairy economy in reindeer husbandry during the 1950s. As no one collected milk any longer, there was no need for the utensils intended for this practical purpose, but *duojárs* continued to make the *náhppi* evolving weight, handle, and ornamentation to serve aesthetical purposes, rather than practical.[30] *Boat bowl* is a good example of this change, because it could never fill the practical purposes of a *náhppi* as milk pail*,* but should rather be understood as a response to a more recent cultural change; the institutionalisation of *duodji* within the art museum and art galleries.

However, the little carved cross is identical to ornamentation connected to the *náhppi.* Since all ornamentation in *duodji* has specific meanings as conveyors of moral imperatives as well as cultural and religious values, the little carved cross has a specific meaning as well.[31] According to Maja Dunfjeld, the cross is a symbol for thought or meaning.[32]

The cross is not just a decoration, but opens up an extended, dual space connecting *Boat bowl* both to a museum context as aesthetic object and to a specific Sami tradition and use of symbols. This use of symbols would perhaps not even be understood outside the Sami community – and its use by non-Sami "outsiders" would find little if any acceptance. *Boat bowl* is an example of how *duodji* tradition has been modernised and institutionalised into the realm of Sami aesthetic art museum objects at the same time as ornamentation and internal codes connect the object to a specific, Sami tradition.

Assemblage of *chronos*

***En förgången tid* (*A time passed*)**

In 2008, Folke Fjellström (b. 1940) made *En förgången tid* (*A time passed*).[33] This is a three-dimensional assemblage constructed of eight different wooden objects. Two flat objects rise horizontally from the circular base and meet at the top as a sledge front. Another flat object resembling a ski rises alone. Two poles connected to each other at the top, rise and cross the sledge front. Suspended from the top of the crossing of the poles, there is a *guksi* (cup) in a plied rope. Slightly off the centre of the base, there is a small object looking rather raw in contrast to the other objects that have carved ornaments. The objects all resemble utilities possible to categorise as *duodji.*

The title of the work refers to these objects in a way that may site the making and use of them in a time that has passed. However, the assemblage of rope, *guksi*, ski, and sledge front could have a certain duality of reference, also signifying something more abstract. The raw decentred object at the circular base could function as a sundial casting shadow at the circular base. The suspended *guksi* reminds of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. If this is the case, then the assemblage does not represent re-purposing of utilities made in a time that has passed, but rather *chronos* itself and different ways to measure it. Whichever way we look at it, as objects from Sami *duodji* tradition or instrument for measuring time, this assemblage leaves no doubt. Installed in the art space, together with other items of Sami national cultural heritage this is an object for aesthetic, not practical, use. The ambiguous references to *chronos* in title, objects and assemblage could point to the Sami conception of time as cyclical, in constant movement. A time that has passed is not a loss if we understand time as circular rather than linear.

"Useless" utility or tradition as a companion on life's journey?

Čuvges mátki III/Ljus resa III (Bright travel III)

Anna-Stina Svakko's (b. 1967) bag *Čuvges mátki III/Ljus resa III* (*Bright travel III*) from 2007 is constructed of three pieces of white, woollen fabric and one piece of white reindeer leather attached to plexiglass handles.[34] On both sides of the bag, there is a horizontally and centrally appliquéd fish skin decorating the white fabric. Two small slices cut into the fish skins provide spaces for text: *eallin* ("life" in Sami) and

livet ("life" in Swedish) in one slice. In the other slice, the text is *always with me*. Turning the bag around, we find the same text written in another language: *life, life* in one slice, and *alu mu mielde* ("always with me") in the other.

Bright travel III is reminiscent of bags made of reindeer leather to store coffee and keep it dry. Coffee bags, still used and produced in Sápmi, are constructed from four pieces of leather in the same way as *Bright travel III*. As in *Boat bowl* and *A time passed,* the form and use of materials are reminiscent of traditional *duodji*. However, something is different. A traditional coffee bag is all made of brown reindeer leather closed with a rope of plied leather strips. There are no handles attached to the coffee bag as in *Bright travel III.*

For several reasons *Bright travel III* is impossible to use for storing coffee. The coffee would stain the white woollen fabric, which in turn would be unable to keep the coffee dry. Besides, the coffee would run out of the bag because it lacks proper lid and anything that suggests a closing method. It may fill the purpose of a handbag, but the best would be to leave it on display as an aesthetic object. The texts points to the characteristically dual and double-sided function as bag and aesthetic object with a range of references to *duodji.*

A bag is what most women always bring with them. This also applies to the Sami traditions connected with the bag, as to the making and use of it.

To keep away the evil

En magisk sølvkule (A magic silver ball)

Randi Marainen's (b. 1953) *En magisk sølvkule* (*A magic silver ball*) (Fig.1) made in 2007 consists of a silver ball suspended from the gallery ceiling by a silver chain.[35] Five small rings connect to the underside of the ball, which in turn are interlocked with five bigger rings. The work imitates the form and material of a hanging button used at different times and for different purposes. In the 14th Century, the button was highly regarded as decoration on the dresses worn by noblewomen in Northern Europe and in the Nordic countries. Later, the button has decorated belts and collars of the Sami dress. The same button was also used inside the baby's cradle (*gietkka*), decorating the three ribbons stretched in front of the baby's face.[36]

Johan Turi, the first Sami author to write about his own culture in Sami, mentions these buttons and their different purposes in his book *Muitalus Sámiid Birra*

(*An account of the Sami*). For practical reasons, they were there for the baby to look at and pass away the time, and served the same purpose as a rattle. In addition, the silver buttons were also there to protect the babies from exchange by the "underworld" of *Uldas*.[37]

Ethnographer Phebe Fjellström also mentions this dual property attributed to the button in her writings about Sami silver. She writes that, in certain circumstances, decoration was probably not the only purpose of the button. There was in fact a prophylactic purpose as well – to protect against diseases.[38] Fjellström describes how a combination of practical as well as spiritual features is ascribed to the same object. As mentioned previously, this duality is an important property for *duodji,* and very well exemplified in the hanging button.

In the 1970s the button found new applications, as the young activists in the ethno-political movement wore it with pride as a decorative pendant signifying their Sami identity. The button still fills this function.

A magic silver ball is fifteen cm in diameter, while the traditional hanging button used in the cradle is much smaller (about one cm in diameter). The size and weight of *A magic silver ball* makes it impossible and dangerous to put inside a cradle, to wear as decoration on a dress, or as a pendant. However, the enlargement is rather a visualisation of the extent of histories connected to the object of the same shape, and gives weight to the importance of it.

In the encounter with this artwork, we can see or at least imagine the past in front of us in present time. We can experience how a silver button used 700 years ago – appropriated from the non-Sami culture – is still in a process of constructing heritage, adding new significance for the future in reference to the past. In the gallery space, the object has no practical function. Yet as art, it might still have the ability to provide protection and keep away "the evil" inside a gallery-room.

Duodji **as art**

The four artworks analysed above are connected to a Sami *duodji* tradition through aspects of form e.g., they were chosen of raw natural materials shaped in ways that lend themselves to particular uses. Also the duality of functions including symbols that connect with a particular Sami tradition and to some degree material and crafting techniques connect these works to *duodji*. Historically, the purpose and use of the

objects decided their form. Still, the form was always in a process of change or development linked to social changes. When the social life changed, the function of the utilities changed – and then the form changed.[39] Indeed, the four works demonstrate how this process continues. In a contemporary art practice, the traditional functions as utilities do not decide the form anymore. What has happened is an institutionalisation of *duodji*, emphasizing the aesthetic properties rather than the practical.[40] In addition, at display in an art institution, the objects become subject for interpretation. This institutionalisation is at the same time a modernisation of *duodji,* applying Giddens' understanding of modernity and institution building.

The institutionalisation of *duodji* taking place here is different from previous attempts to include indigenous people's art in modernity's art- or museum institutions. There has been an academic debate related to indigenous and non-western art, labelled as "primitive" art on the one side, and western and modernist art on the other.[41] The difference draws on the late 19th Century institutional categorisation of human-made things, and the study of these artefacts divided between art history and a branch of anthropology called "material culture studies". The achievements of western fine artists became the preserve of the art historian, while the art of non-western or indigenous people, such as the Sami, became a field for anthropology.[42] In this division, non-western objects were classified as either primitive or ethnographic artefacts, as reminders of early man, or as exotica.[43]

With the emergence of 20th Century's modernism, this changed to some degree. Some objects formerly labelled as "primitive", suddenly became works of "sculpture". Early modernist artists admired the "primitive" artefacts on display in museums. In their encounter with such works, they found what they described as an aesthetic power absent in the western canon of art.[44] The distinction between the aesthetic and the anthropological was then soon institutionally reinforced. Art galleries displayed non-western objects for their formal and aesthetic qualities, while ethnographic museums presented the objects in a "cultural" context.[45] This institutionalised distinction between aesthetic and anthropological discourses coincided with the western colonisation of indigenous people. Consequently, the power to tell the difference was in the hands of the colonisers.[46] There was also a distinction in time and space between western and non-western art. What was distant in space became the distant in time.[47] Non-western art represented a *chronotope*

"there and then", while western art was characterised by its space in the present – "here and now".

In RDM's collection, and in *Gierdu*, the power to define is in the hands of Sami artists and curators. This does not mean there is no negotiations going on, but the distinction between *duodji* and *dáidda* is no longer hierarchical or resting on dichotomies. The four works categorised as *duodji* rather exemplifies heterogeneity and the dialogues and appropriations going on. The modernisation and institutionalisation of *duodji* exemplifies Berman's idea about how modernity creates conditions for dialogues among the past, present and future. Although the practical functions of *duodji* fades away, the duality described by Maja Dunfjeld as a space between the sacred and profane prevails. The small, carved cross in *Boat bowl;* the different ways to connote *chronos* in *A time passed;* the ambiguous texts at *Bright travel III,* and the enlarged version of the hanging button *A magic silver ball,* express similar dualities as well.

The duality found in the four works is not necessarily a negotiation between the sacred and the profane, but rather something, that blurs the *chronotopic* status of the objects. The objects described as *duodji* take place in construction of heritage representing a *chronotope* that signifies "here and now", concerning formal and institutional categorisation. At the same time, the use of specific symbols, materials and shapes evoke memories and histories as they are actualised and retold in the present. This creates the *chronotopic* duality that connects to the "there and then", as it simultaneously signifies a "here and then".

Dáidda – The contemporary art practices

The *duodji* concept and discourse characterised the analysis of four works in the previous section, while the title of this section is *dáidda.* This implies a *partial* change of discourse as we move over to the western art concept and its turf that has been the art categorised and analysed within an art historical context. In a traditionalising context of Sami art, as in the 1970s, *dáidda* was perceived as "inauthentic" when it came to assessing its value to the Sami cultural heritage, while the legitimacy within art history has been granted.

The selected artworks represent different media found in *Gierdu*: photography, painting, three-dimensional objects and assemblages. I will argue that there is in fact an underlying discourse connecting also these works to a duality familiar in *duodji*.

Photography and identity

Marion and *Modern Nomads*

Arnold Johansen's (b. 1953) photograph *Marion* from 2005 consists of two merged photographs of one woman photographed in daylight twice sitting in the same room, in the same *en face* position, but dressed differently.[48] Since the light is the same in the two, the time span between the exposures must be very short. The photographs are sliced vertically into many pieces, and then every second strip is re-assembled and folded side by side like an accordion. Thus, when you look at the picture from one side, you see the woman in jeans and t-shirt. Viewed from the other side, she is wearing a green *gákti* and a yellow shawl. From the front, you can see fragments of the woman in both outfits, while at the same time one is blocking parts of the other.

The *en face* portrait is reminiscent of and connects *Marion* to former ethnographic portraiture – like the photographs taken of Sami people in the 19th Century by Roland Bonaparte. In its turn, this evokes ideas from his time about identity as something essential and reflected in physiognomy.[49]

The woman dressed in a *gákti* probably represents tradition, while the same woman dressed in jeans and t-shirt assumedly represents modernity. However, in the picture, the two different identities are interconnected, indeed inseparable. What you see depends upon your own position or perspective as spectator, and your willingness to move as you see. Nothing in the picture tells what comes first leading to the other. Because the change of outfit can go both ways, the chronology is not obvious, and the model can change from *gákti* to t-shirt or the opposite. The relation between tradition and modernity becomes one entity rather than two, merged, depending upon each other. Through this interconnectedness of two Sami identities in one picture, the artwork *Marion* visualises the heterogeneity of both tradition and modernity.

Marja Helander (b. 1965) participated in *Gierdu* with two photographs from the series *Modern Nomads* exhibited first time in 2002.[50] Helander works within a

photographic genre of motifs wherein female artists in particular reflect upon their own identity, making self-portraits. She presents herself as the subject of her photographs, and thus becomes both the subject and the object of her staged pictures.

In *Sieidi, Várjavuotna* (*Sacrificial stone, Varanger fjord*), we see a woman cross-country skiing in an open landscape in the twilight. She is wearing dark sunglasses and a modern, green, yellow and red tricot ski outfit. We see her passing a *sieidi* (sacrificial stone used in the pre-Christian Sami religion) without noticing or paying any attention to it.

There are several anomalies in this picture. One is that the protagonist wears sunglasses although there is no sun. Another is her outfit, which would be more suitable for a competition at an arena than for the landscape in which she is pictured. However, the colours of her outfit may be a reference to colours also used in the *gákti*. The colours, the landscape and the *sieidi* seem to situate this person in Sápmi. At the same time, she seems alienated in her outfit and sunglasses.

In the other photograph, *Ánnevárri* (*Mount Annivaara*), we see a woman wearing a blue *gákti,* a red hat, a woven belt, and a white shawl. She is walking under a gigantic power line on a snow-covered mountain plateau. The vast landscape and the size of the power line make the woman appear small.

Mount Annivaara also depicts the woman alienated in her environment. She is dressed in a *gákti* that you would probably not find today. An adult woman wearing *gákti* today would compose her outfit from colours and materials far more as a personal statement than the woman in the photograph does. "Marion's" *gákti,* her shawl and combination of colours are in this respect more plausible as an outfit someone would wear today. Another sign of her alienation is the power line stretched across the mountain plateau making her small and displaced.

Both of Helander's photographs can be read as representations of a person alienated in relation to what is presumably her own Sami culture. Indeed, they address and reflect upon relations between tradition and modernity. You can choose to be modern, wear modern outfits and pass old religious markers without noticing, like in *Sacrificial stone, Varanger fjord.* Another option is to choose tradition wearing the *gákti*, walking into the nature polluted by modernity's need for electric power as in *Mount Annivaara*. Both choices lead to exclusion and alienation from the Sami culture, rather than to belonging and inclusion. Helander's anomalies become paradoxical related to Sami culture and demonstrate a need for dialogues and

negotiations between tradition and modernity, underlining the nomadic character of identities as reflected in the title of the series *Modern Nomads,* rather than the stereotypic.

Paintings as dual spaces

Turning point and *Eahkedis albmi/Kveldshimmel (Evening sky)*

There are several paintings in *Gierdu.* Synnøve Persen's (b. 1950) painting *Turning point* (Fig. 2) from 2000 is one of them.[51] The rectangular painting is composed of squares and rectangles partly covering each other in different colours.

As much as *duodji* is a specific, exclusively Sami tradition, an abstract painting such as *Turning point* is part of a modernist tradition. By applying the abstract painting as her medium, Persen gives a painterly and artistic expression for her position as a Sami artist; a position challenging the relation between tradition and modernity, indeed. Persen graduated from Oslo Academy of the Arts in 1978. After graduation, she returned to Sápmi and took part in the foundation of the Sami Artist Group (*Mázejoavku*) in Masi. She also participated in the foundation of both the Sami author's union and the Sami artists' union, where she had the position as head for several years. The Sami Artist Group was established at the same time as the demonstrations against the Alta-Guovdageaidnu hydroelectric dam project escalated. Starting as a local protest, it quickly developed into a national political struggle for Sami rights as indigenous people. One part of the demonstrations was a hunger strike in front of the parliament in Oslo in 1979. Persen was one of the participants. With the demonstrations, which lasted from 1970 until 1981, a Sami cultural revitalisation took place.[52]

Persen's political and artistic practice has been parallel in time, though connected to two identities; an artist trained within the context of modernism, and a Sami political activist fighting for fundamental rights as belonging to an indigenous people. In her hands, by her paintbrushes and paintings, modernist art becomes part of Sami heritage. As with all abstract art, there are no references to the world outside, neither any representation nor narrative, just a flat surface, the shape of the support and the properties of pigment.[53] Modernist art has no "authentic" "ethnic" origin, neither has Sami art in Persen's abstract painting. As in traditional *duodji*, *Turning point* creates a dual, dynamic space. In this case, the space is not between the sacred

and the profane, but between tradition and modernity, demonstrating the logic of what Porsanger and Kuokkanen claim; the relation between tradition and modernity is not as oppositions, but rather appropriations, dialogues and encounters.

Outi Pieski (b. 1973) participated in *Gierdu* with the picture *Eahkedis albmi*/*Kveldshimmel* (*Evening sky*).[54] The picture is categorised in the catalogue as a painting, but it combines several materials and techniques as an assemblage.

Different pieces of cotton fabric printed with flower patterns form a background for the painted circle that covers most of the surface. The paint leaves the textile visible as a background. Attached to the pieces of fabric there are small pieces of metal foil that draw a halo on top of the painted circle. A textile ribbon printed with flowers, partly covered by paint from the circle, runs vertically along the right edge of the picture.

The fabrics are reminiscent of materials used in the Sami women's summer *gákti*. Hence, these textiles belong to a vernacular Sami culture. At the same time, they capture the place traditionally occupied by the "neutral", colourless canvas of the western painting tradition.

The metal foil can be a reference to the significance of different metals in pre-Christian Sami religious practice.[55] The use of materials and signs from the vernacular culture and pre-Christian religion combined and composed into a "painting" pushes the aesthetic conventions of traditional painting and creates a dual space. *Evening sky* is abstract and representational at the same time. It combines abstraction in the painting with the representation of elements from Sami vernacular culture, religious beliefs and practices.

Contemporary practices unveiling the spiritual

Hornild (Hornfire) and *Jag har fångat dem alla (I have caught them all)*

Aslaug Juliussen's (b. 1953) work *Hornild* (*Hornfire*) (Fig. 3), made in 2005 is one work of a series based on the same form, the ball, and the same materials, leftovers from reindeer slaughtering, in several variations.[56] The repeated form gives the impression of a big sphere. In *Hornfire,* purple-dyed reindeer hair covers the surface of the ball. Several pieces of reindeer horns of the same colour rise vertically from the surface as spikes or as flames from a fireplace.[57]

Hornfire relates to Sami traditions in many ways. Not specifically visual ones, but rather to everyday life and practices. A generation ago, every part of the slaughtered animal was carefully collected and used for specific purposes. This practice was grounded in tradition and points to a concern about environment and ecological matters, as well as a respect for all living material, a need for food as well as raw material for *duodji*. However, today horns and hair are usually treated as waste after slaughtering because there is no need for these materials anymore. Juliussen reverses this process by collecting the horns and hair at the site of reindeer slaughtering, but for a new purpose – artmaking.

The hair and horns used in *Hornfire* are reminiscences of a dead body, though these materials could also be a reference to previous religious practices sacrificing body parts – a gesture of giving something back to nature. Although the missionaries banned this practice, it continued nonetheless, and may still do so today in some concealed, subversive forms. Collecting the material from the dead animals and then reuse them as material for an artwork, makes *Hornfire* to a reminder of the past materially as well as abstract and spiritually mediated within a contemporary art practice.

Britta Marakatt-Labba's (b. 1951) picture *Jag har fångat dem alla* (*I have captured them all*), made in 2004, is an assemblage or mixed media work.[58] The outline of a fish drawn by a thin pencil is featured in the centre of the paper. An authentic fish skin covers the body of the fish. There is an open slice in the skin, allowing us to see inside the body. Inside, there are five small human heads on row all facing the same direction as passengers inside a bus or plane. Another human head, similar to the five, is in the position of a pilot on the part of the skin covering the fish's head. The human heads carry different Sami caps embroidered with thin, coloured thread.

Sami mythologies and legends often inspire Marakatt-Labba's art production, which is also the case in this work. The cosmology connected to the religion divided the world into three parts: an underworld, an in-between world – where the humans lived, and an upper world. The *noaidi,* a central mythological figure was the only one able to travel between the worlds, but needed help form a fish in order to reach the underworld.[59]

The title of the picture refers to a narrative about how the fish has saved the people who are inside it, but it also points to the strong belief that humans and

animals used to live in close relationships depending upon each other spiritually.[60] The picture can thus be understood as an illustration of the dynamic realm between the profane and the spiritual world.

The five small heads in this embroidery are also featured in a much bigger composition by Marakatt-Labba; her epic, untitled frieze displayed at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway.[61] In the frieze, the five heads signify five different Sami languages.[62] If the five heads inside the fish signify the same in *I have captured them all*, then we are witnessing a kind of rescue of the Sami people and their languages by the fish, which transports them to another world. References to Sami mythologies and spirituality is much more explicit in Marakatt-Labba's work than in Juliussens's, but still there is a hidden code, speaking to the insiders.

Heritage – reconstruction of a *topos*

The production of art today does not take place in isolated studios, cultures or nations, neither in Sápmi nor in the rest in the world. Quite the contrary, art is produced through dialogical exchanges, appropriations and encounters. *Gierdu* provided many examples of such encounters. The objects in *Gierdu* that resemble *duodji* apply traditional forms and materials to new functions as aesthetic objects. This is a kind of institutional appropriation and inclusion of art previously excluded from art institutions. At the same time, the appropriation also works the other way around; objects identified as *duodji* become art; they evolve aesthetically aiming at people to look at them, and interpret them, rather than to use them.

Works categorized as *dáidda* have a guaranteed position within the art institution. What is at stake concerning *dáidda* is rather the legitimacy as specifically *Sami* art. How can modernist art be a part of the construction of Sami cultural heritage? As *duodji* installed in an art gallery constitutes an appropriation by *duodji* of spaces for art, so too modernist art inside a Sami collection become Sami art. This inclusion creates a space between tradition and modernity where Sami art can be everything, though not everything can be Sami art. This is the outcome of another appropriation and situates Sami art in a new position regarding traditionalisation. While in the 1970's, *duodji* was the element from the past considered Sami art, today modernist and contemporary art becomes traditions and then in turn will be

traditionalised as well. This is an example of how what comprises the traditional and the modern is constantly reinvented.[63]

Pieski's, Marakatt-Labba's and Juliussen's works are examples of how contemporary practices introduce another appropriation. This appropriation mirrors a contemporary art practice influenced by spirituality and mythology. These influences was previously attributed to non-western art, excluded from the field of art and assigned to the field of anthropology. According to art historian Ruth Phillips, contemporary art practices have reintroduced magic, ritual, movement, sound and associative meanings to the gallery, from which such distractions previously were removed.[64] In the works of the three, we can recognize this reintroduction not as form or objects, but as the abstract part of Sami heritage: the mythologies, legends, beliefs and religious as well as domestic practices. The works appear to be in close connection with the dual properties of *duodji* – between the sacred, the profane and in addition – the aesthetic.

The construction of heritage evolves continuously. The most important effect we can see on Sami cultural heritage in *Gierdu* is the reconstruction of its *topos*. This *topos* shares the structure recognised in *duodji* as a dynamic space between the sacred and the profane. However, rather than a dynamic space between the sacred and the profane, this reconstructed space relates to tradition and modernity and the dynamics in appropriations, encounters and dialogues taking place between different *chronos*.

Notes

[1] RDM is an abbreviation of RiddoDuottarMuseat/The Sami Museum Collections.

[2] More about the relation between indigenous people and western museums and art institutions see: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,* Cambridge, MA, 1988, pp. 215-254.

[3] Paul Pedersen and Asle Høgmo, *Sápmi slår tilbake: Samiske revitaliserings- og moderniseringsprosesser i siste generasjon,* Kárášjohka, 2012, p.19.

[4] Eva Skotnes Vikjord and Irene Snarby (Eds.), *Gierdu: Bevegelser i samisk kunstverden/Sirdimat sámi duodje- ja dáiddamáilmmis*, Bodø, 2009, p. 7.
In addition to the touring exhibition, *Gierdu* consisted of seminars, a catalogue, and a website http://gierdu.no (12.05.2016).

[5] SKINN is an abbreviation of a publicly funded organisation mediating art in northern Norway (Se Kunst I Nord-Norge).

[6] The distinction appears in the Sami Artists' Union's definition of Sami art. See: Synnøve Persen (Ed.), *Sámi Dáiddárleksikona/Samisk Kunstnerleksikon,* Alta 1993, p. 8-9 and at the RDM webpage http://rdm.no/norsk/samisk_kunst/ (12.05.2016). The distinction also appears in numerous texts about Sami art. See: Hanna H. Hansen, *Fortellinger om samisk samtidskunst,* Karasjok 2007, p. 13f.

[7] Derek Gillman, *The Idea of Cultural Heritage,* Cambridge, 2010, p. 66.

[8] Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition: Genuine or Spurious", *The Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 97, No 385 (Jul-Sep), 1984, pp. 273-290, p. 287.

[9] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* Michael Holquist (Ed.), translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, TE, 1981, p. 84.

[10] Owe Ronström, "A different land: Heritage production in the island of Gotland", *Shima: The international Journal of Research into Island Cultures,* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2008, pp. 1-17, p. 9.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Harald Gaski, "Introduction: Sami culture in a new era", in Harald Gaski (Ed.), *Sami Culture in a New Era: The Norwegian Sami Experience,* Kárášjohka/Karasjok, 1997, p. 11.

[13] Vigdis Stordahl, *Same i den moderne verden: Endring og kontinuitet i et samisk lokalsamfunn,* Karasjok, 1996, p. 97.

[14] *Op. cit,* p. 96.

[15] Handler and Linnekin, 1984, p. 273.

[16] On traditionalisation see: Tom Mould, "The Paradox of Traditionalization: Negotiating the Past in Choctaw Prophetic Discourse", *Journal of Folklore Research,* Vol 42, no. 3, September-December 2005, pp. 255-294, p. 261.

[17] M. Estellie Smith, "The Process of Sociocultural Continuity", *Current Anthropology,* Vol. 23, no. 2 (Apr.), 1982, pp. 127-142, p. 132.

[18] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in Late Modern Age,* Stanford, CA., 1991, pp. 15-16.

[19] Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into the air,* New York, 1988, p. 5.

[20] Rauna Kuokkanen, *Boaris dego eana: Eamiábmogiid diehtu, filosofiijat ja dutkan.* SÁMIacademica 2. Kárášjohka, 2009, p. 168f.

[21] Jelena Porsanger, "The problematisation of the Dichotomy of Modernity and Tradition in Indigenous and Sami contexts", *Dieđut* 1/2011, pp. 225-252, p.239f.

[22] See: James Elkins, *Stories of Art,* New York/London, 2002, pp. xi-xv.

[23] Irene Snarby, "Duodji as Sami experiences in contemporary art", *Jaskadit jorrá jurdda/Stille vender tanken (Silently the thought turns)* by Iver Jåks, in Hanna Horsberg Hansen et al. (Eds.), *Beauty and Truth/Čáppatvuohta ja duohtavuohta: Dialogues between Sami art and art historical research,* Stamsund, 2014, pp.16-21, p. 16.

[24] Maja Dunfjeld, *Tjaalehtjimmie: Form og innhold i sørsamisk ornamentikk,* Tromsø 2001, p. 65.

[25] *Op. cit,* p. 72.

[26] Maja Dunfjeld, *Tjaalehtjimmie: Form og innhold i sørsamisk ornamentikk,* Snåsa 2006, p. 44.

[27] Jørn Magnus Rivojen Langseth, *Båtskål* (*Boat bowl*), 2004. Birch wood, horn. 12 x 21 x 8,5 cm. RDM collection, SD 0735.

[28] Dunfjeld 2001, p. 185.

[29] Gunvor Guttorm, *Duoji bálgát: En studie i Duodji,* Tromsø, 2001, p. 63.

[30] Nils Oskal, "The character of the milk bowl as separate world, and the world as a multitudinous totality of references", in Marit Anne Hauan (Ed.), *Sami Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People,* Tromsø/Stamsund, 2014, pp. 79-89, p. 85.
[31] Dunfjeld 2001, p. 205.
[32] *Op. cit*, p. 186.
[33] Folke Fjellström, *En förgången tid* (*A time passed*)*,* 2008. Wood, horn, 161 x 92cm. RDM collection, SD 0803.
[34] Anna-Stina Svakko, *Čuvges mátki III/Ljus resa III* (*Bright travel III*), 2007. Plexiglass, wool, leather, silk, fish skin. 28 x 20 x 10 cm. RDM collection, SD 0782.
[35] Randi Marainen, *En magisk sølvkule* (*A magic silver ball*), 2007. Silver. 52 x 15 cm. RDM collection, SD 0774.
[36] Phebe Fjellström, *Lapskt silver: Studier över en föremålsgrupp och dess ställning inom lapskt kulturliv,* Uppsala, 1962, p. 46ff.
[37] Johan Turi, *Min bok om samene.* Translated by Harald O. Lindbach from Johan Turi, *Muittalus sámiid birra,* 1910, Karasjok, 2011, p. 28. Available in English: *An Account of the Sámi: A Translation of Muitalus Sámiid Birra Based on the Sámi Original.* Karasjok, 2012.
[38] Fjellström 1962, p. 50.
[39] Gutttorm 2001, p. 63.
[40] Oskal 2014, p. 85.
[41] See: Hanna Horsberg Hansen, *Fluktlinjer: Forståelser av samisk samtidskunst,* Tromsø, 2010, pp.133-145.
[42] Ruth Phillips, "Fielding culture: Dialogues between Art History and Anthropology", *Museum Anthropology,* Vol 18, issue 1, 1994, pp. 39-46, p. 39.
[43] Clifford 1988, p. 198.
[44] Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood (Eds.), *Art of the Twentieth Century: A reader,* New Haven/London, 2003, p. 16.
[45] Clifford 1988, p. 199.
[46] *Op. cit*, p. 197.
[47] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object,* New York, 1983, p. 11f.
[48] Arnold Johansen, *Marion,* 2005. Photography and folding technique. 138 x 105 cm. RDM collection, SD 0667.
[49] Roland Bonaparte visited Finnmark 1884 together with the photographer G. Roche. He photographed 139 Sami persons *en face* and in profile.
[50] Marja Helander, *Siedi, Várjavuotna,* (*Sacrificial stone, Varanger fjord*), 2002. Photography. 39,5 x 40 cm. RDM collection, SD 0724. Marja Helander, *Ánnevárri* (*Mount Annivaara*)*,* 2002. Photography. 48 x 39,5 cm. RDM collection. SD 0657.
[51] Synnøve Persen, *Turning point,* 2000. Painting, oil on canvas. 152 x 146 cm. RDM collection, SD 0491.
[52] Hanna Horsberg Hansen, "Sami Artist Group 1978-1983: A Story about Sami Traditions in Transition", in Charis Gullikson and Sandra Lorentzen (Eds.), *Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People*, Tromsø 2014, pp. 89-105, p. 92f.
[53] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An anthology of Changing Ideas,* Oxford, 1998, pp. 754 -760, p. 755.
[54] Outi Pieski, *Eahkedis albmi/Kveldshimmel* (*Evening sky*), 2001. Painting, acrylic on textile and metal foil. 150 x 150 cm. RDM collection, SD 0669.

[55] Dunfjeld 2001, p. 259.
[56] Displayed at solo exhibition *HornVerk* at Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim, Norway in 2006.
[57] Aslaug Juliussen, *Hornild (Hornfire),* 2005. Styrofoam, dyed reindeer horns and reindeer hair, 80 x 75 x 75 cm. RDM collection, SD 0789.
[58] Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Jag har fångat dem alla (I have captured them all),* 2004. Fish skin, embroidery and pencil drawing on paper. 68,5 x 88,5 cm. RDM collection, SD 0634.
[59] Åsa Virdi Kroik, "Djuren: Beskyddare, budbärare och vänner", in Åsa Virdi Kroik (Ed.), *Etter förfädrarnas sed: Om samisk religion,* Stockholm, 2005, p. 22.
[60] See: Virdi Kroik, 2005, pp. 14-25.
[61] Britta Marakatt-Labba: *Untitled*, 2007. Embroidery on linen, 40 x 2400 cm. UiT – The Arctic University of Norway.
[62] Tone Kristine Thørring Tingvoll, "Et stykke samisk og nordisk kunsthistorie: Britta Marakatt-Labbas broderier", *Ottar,* nr. 2, 2010, pp.19-24, p. 23.
[63] See Mould 2005, p. 260.
[64] Phillips 1994, p. 43.