

REPETITION AND DIFFERENCE

TROMSØ ACADEMY OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND CREATIVE WRITING 10 YEARS

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In 2007, Tromsø Art Academy accepted its first students in the BA program in the art department at Tromsø University College (Høgskolen i Tromsø, HiTø). Much has happened since then: Tromsø University College has become part of the University of Tromsø (UiT) - The Arctic University of Norway; and the Academy has added a division of creative writing, as well as a complete curriculum offering the BA, the MA, and research fellows in the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. Ten years have passed since the startup, thirty-five years since planning began. It is time for a turn toward retrospection; the time has also come to go forward. In this perspective, the question also arises as to the initial profile of the Academy¹. What was it, and what happened to it?

This text has been written with a background in the relevant documents upon the issue, literature about the education of artists, and texts about art, art-history and philosophy that are useful for reflection. This text has also been composed from a subjective viewpoint based on the author's personal experience in various roles at the Academy: as a participant in the startup process, as a guest teacher and part-time employee from 2007 until 2013, and as a full-time employee since 2013.

To speak of art education in terms of an academy of art situates that education in a long, prestigious history of the educating of artists. The chronicle of academies of art in Europe reaches back to 1563 when *Accademia e Compagnia delle Arti del Disegno* was founded in Florence by Cosimo de' Medici, the city's most powerful man. Some years later, in 1577, the *Accademia San Luca* was established in Rome, where the church and pope were important in definitions and assignments of tasks. In 1648, *L'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* was founded in Paris with the king as patron. From the outset, the academies were far from free. The students had few opportunities for their own development, but were to learn to copy the great masters and later professors. What they learned took place under a strict regimen. An important element in academic art education was to raise students above the level of artisans, so education was not merely practical but also theoretical. Via studies in such fields as anatomy, history, literature, and mythology--in addition to examination of works by the great Renaissance masters--academy students were to acquire the knowledge necessary to become artists.²

Another important aspect of the education was based on a hierarchy of genres in painting that has existed up to the present. Highest status in this hierarchy was given to historical

painting, which typically was to demonstrate the greatness of the patrons of the academy (church, king, or nobleman). In this genre, artists could dazzle viewers with their education and wide knowledge. Thus, landscape painting had low status. Painting nature did not require the same "formation" as history painting. The academies which were eventually established in the European capitals were little different from each other, which gave them a relationship to an international discourse. The same hierarchy of genres existed everywhere. It was an authoritarian system, always in the mainstream of art, with the task of serving patrons. This was the case until artists began breaking out of the tradition in France in the 1800s, establishing their own "salons."

Academies of art in Norway

In Norway, the first art academy, the National Academy of Art (Statens kunstakademi), was founded in Oslo in 1909. The academy was run by the Visual Artists Board (Bildende kunstneres styre), with the national Ministry of Church and Education as the highest authority. This leadership structure put great power into a few hands. Those on the arts board affected the education of new artists by recommending new professors and jurying the content of an important exhibiting context, the Autumn Exhibition (Høstutstillingen). Painter Christian Krohg was professor and director from the founding until he stepped down in 1925.³ Through the years, there have been clashes in the academy between figurative and abstract painting, and between realism and abstraction in sculpture. What was acceptable in the academy has often been far from what the world of art accepted.

In the 1960s, the National Academy of Art was criticized for being a sleepy institution with professors who had been there too long and where students modeled and painted living nudes for three years, at the same time as the art scene outside was characterized as an explosion. The next decades are described as blossoming and pluralistic, before a paradigm shift occurred in the 1990s in which there was finally a break with the past. This shift also brought the academy into the contemporary art scene.⁴ In 1974, the National Academy of Art became a college under the university and college law. In spite of much opposition the National Academy of Art became part of Oslo National Academy of the Arts (Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo--KHiO). After KHiO introduced a faculty structure, the former National Academy became part of the Faculty for Visual Art in 2004.

In Trondheim a professional art curriculum, Trondheim School of Art, began in 1946. Backing the initiative were younger forces who created an uproar against the life of art as it was shaped between the two world wars and during World War II. They represented a new generation that stood for radicalization in technique and to a degree in politics.⁵ In

1 To simplify, I also use the name the Academy.

2 Linda Walsh. 1999. "Charles Le Brun, 'art dictator of France'", in Gill Perry and Colin Cunningham: *Academies*,

Museums and Canons of Art, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, pp. 55-187, p. 92.

3 Åse Markussen. 2009. *Akademiet: Kunstakademiet i Oslo 1909-2009* [The

Academy of Art: Oslo National Academy of the Arts 1909-2009], Oslo: Aschehoug, p. 19.

4 Markussen. 2009. pp. 100ff.

5 Sture Lian Olsen. 1984. *Kunsthøgskolen i Trondheim: Kunstakademiet i Trondheim* [The Art School in Trondheim, Trondheim Academy of Fine Art], p. 14.

background, they were artists and people interested in the arts who lived in Trondheim, along with artists with connections to the city who at that time studied in Oslo. The founders were radical, but the instruction they practiced was rather similar to that of the European academic tradition. Artist Håkon Bleken, a former student at the school, says that when Oddvar Alstad, one of those who took the initiative, began as an instructor at the school, directions were established and a measure of assessment was in place. The way he painted was good; something else was not.⁶

Artist Aage Gaup says in an interview that when he started at the school in a 1973 sculpture class, realism and figuration were taught. Anatomical understanding and drawing coquis after nude models were compulsory. First in the mid-1970s came instructional energies, as with Siri Aurdal that led to students being introduced to modernism and abstraction.⁷

In 1979, the school became part of the college system, in 1987 a national academy of art. From 1996 on, it was incorporated into Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelig universitet) as an institute within the Faculty for Architecture and Visual Art.

In Bergen, West Norway Academy of Art (Vestlandets Kunstakademi--VKA), was founded in 1973 as a private college initiated and run by the Visual Artists Association in the city.⁸ The forerunner of VKA was Studieatelieret in Bergen, a one-year evening school founded in 1949.⁹ The vision for VKA was that it would be different and modernist, an alternative to the National Academy of Art in Oslo. In 1981, VKA became a national institution. In 1996 it merged with the National College for Art and Design and became Bergen National Academy of the Arts (Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen). Since 2017, the education has been part of the Faculty of Art, Music, and Design at the University of Bergen.

Both in Trondheim and Bergen higher education in art was thus established by new, radical forces that wanted to create something innovative that opposed existing patterns of education. When there was a movement to begin higher art education in Tromsø, the same desire for innovation and separation from existing practices was present. Nonetheless, there was also a desire that the education would connect with a long tradition of artist education and with an international discourse. To emphasize this situation, the institution offering this education in Tromsø, was called an art-academy.

Several elements in this educational tradition are worth examining in connection with the Academy in Tromsø. One was the desire to establish an education that opposed existing versions and offered an alternative. Secondly, there is a concern over the academy tradition's orthodoxy: namely, that once

an education is established, a new orthodoxy tends to arise, new rules for what is considered correct and true. How has the Academy in Tromsø positioned itself in the tradition?

Plans and clarifications for art education in the north 1980-2005

As with the establishments in Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim, there were artists who initiated a higher education in art in Northern Norway. Additionally Arts Council Norway (Norsk kulturråd) played a role. When Sami artists held the first annual meeting of the Sami Artists' Union (SDS) in February 1980, a Sami art school/academy was one of the agenda points. SDS had then received an inquiry from artist Ivar Jåks about the case. He was on a subcommittee of Arts Council Norway that had the charge to examine the need for an academy of the arts in Northern Norway. This academy was planned to include a Sami division, and Jåks asked SDS to develop a framing proposal about how such a division could function.¹⁰ At that point, no art education was available at any level in Northern Norway, but in the aftermath of this and other initiatives, several forms of such education have been established over the years.

Ivar Jåks did not receive the framework proposal he had requested. An education subcommittee formed by the annual meeting of SDS rejected the premises for a Northern Norwegian academy of art with a Sami division. Instead, they wished to develop their own educational institutions: a Sami academy of art in the Nordic countries with connections between schools and academies of art all over the Nordic countries, included a future Northern Norwegian academy of art.¹¹

SDS took their case to the Nordic Saami Council requesting political support for its idea of a Sami academy of art. They visualized the academy being in Davvi Latnja (Nordens Hus, Karesuando, Finland). If this project turned out to take a long time, SDS wanted to establish a temporary education connected to the Sami Artist Group and their studios in Masi.¹² Two years later, in 1981, the plans were for an "autonomous Sami art curriculum" following the model of Greenland's art school in Nuuk, still alive in plans for SDS's future activity 1982-1984.¹³ Many years would pass before the Sami art school became a reality. Finally, in 2011, the Art School in Karasjok opened, operated by a foundation largely founded by Karasjok municipality.

Education in *duodji*--traditional Sami handcraft--has been established at the Sami University of Applied Sciences in Kautokeino. The BA program graduated its first students in 2011. The following year an MA program in *duodji* began.¹⁴

Parallel to the subcommittee of Arts Council Norway, a second committee worked to establish an art education in North-

6 Magni Moksvik Gjelsvik. 1988. *Kunstmaleren Oddvar Alstad: Hjerne og hjerte [Painter Oddvar Alstad: Brain and Heart]*. Trondheim, pp. 57-63.

7 Hanna Horsberg Hansen. 2010. *Fluktlinjer: Forståelser av samisk samtidsskunst, [Lines of Flight: Understandings of Sami Contemporary Art]*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tromsø, p. 95.

8 Nina Malterud and Astri Kamsvåg. 2009. Interview with Morten Krogh. «Et kunstakademi må være godt plantet i samtida»/"An Academy of Art Must Be Strongly Rooted in the Present," Bergen National Academy of the Arts, yearbook, pp. 16-23.

9 www.bergenbyarkiv.no/bergenbyleksikon/arkiv/142382 read 15 March 2017.

10 SDG archive: SDS edition 6/80, 24 March 1980, Synnøve Persen.

11 SDG archive: SDS edition 27/80. 15 June 1980, Synnøve Persen.

12 SDG archive: SDS edition 48/80. 29 October 1980, Synnøve Persen.

13 SDG archive: SDS 28/82, Spørreskjema i forbindelse med forarbeidet til

«Kulturplan for Nord-Norge», Usignert [Questionnaire in connection with preliminary work on "Culture Plan for North Norway." Unsigned].

14 *Duodji* is the North Sami concept of traditional Sami handicraft.

15 Kajsa Zetterqvist. 2002. "Til Iver [To Iver]," in Bjarne Eilertsen et al. (eds.):

ern Norway. Artist Per Adde, a director in NNBK (Northern Norwegian Visual Artists), was concerned with how northern Norwegian youth could become qualified for acceptance into art academies. He approached Nordland County, which began a process that resulted in Kunstsolen i Kabelvåg (the Art School in Kabelvåg) in 1983.¹⁵ The school, which later became Kunst- og filmfagskolen i Kabelvåg, recently began offering a BA program in motion pictures and works closely with the Academy in Tromsø.

Iver Jåks shared membership on the education subcommittee of Arts Council Norway with artist Kajsa Zetterquist. She tells that in addition to a future program in art education, the subcommittee also had the charge to establish an art museum in Northern Norway. The subcommittee easily reached agreement about the museum, but discussions were intensive and inconclusive about an academy of art. The result was the 1985 establishment of the Northern Norway Art Museum (Nordnorsk kunstmuseum) in Tromsø, but the question of the academy would take far longer.

Fourteen years would elapse between the founding in Kabelvåg and the reappearance of higher education for artists in Northern Norway on anyone's formal agenda. The University College in Tromsø, in a January 1997 resolution by the executive board, sent forward an application for a course of study in visual art. The application came after a proposal by a subcommittee chaired by HiTø's Kjetil Solvik. The proposal came after a round of hearings and was met enthusiastically in Northern Norway but not by federal education officials. In 2000 Professor Oddvar Løkke of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (Arkitektthøgskolen i Oslo--AHO) put forth a plan for a course of study that was later revised by HiTø lecturer Øystein Cruikshank. The curriculum emphasized an international orientation and the innovative via inclusion of many forms of expression. Not even this work was deemed acceptable by central authorities. Not until spring 2005 did representatives from the Norwegian parliament committee on religion, education, and research (Kirke- utdannings- og forskningskomite) give the plans a positive response. At that point, the government proposed in the federal budget to institute a fifteen-student program in visual-arts education in Tromsø.¹⁶

Preliminary project

Artist Geir Tore Holm was hired as project director for the preliminary project starting 1 April 2006. His mandate was to work in close consultation with a professional reference group and have responsibility for development of proposals for the profile and then the plan for a course of study for a BA program.¹⁷

The mandate for the reference group for development of the

profile of the education can be summed up in four main points:

- The education shall to the greatest possible degree be complementary to but also innovative compared to the three existing programs of academy education in Norway.
- The education shall be positioned in relation to national and international courses of study in art education.
- The profile shall be discussed in the light of already existing areas of competence and professional achievement at Tromsø University College.
- The profile shall reflect to the greatest possible degree comparative, regional strengths and particular needs.¹⁸

Tromsø University College rector Ulf Christensen emphasized that the course of study in art education should not only be something the college could be proud of but an actual bright star, a shining light. The University College was simultaneously in a merger process with the University of Tromsø (UiT). Art and culture were to be a central element in the profile in the merged UiT, and he promised that the course of study in art education would have a central place in the future professional faculty of the arts.¹⁹ There were indeed some clear formal frameworks, such as the formation of a course of study, and there was a mandate to develop a profile emphasizing the visionary and ideological superstructure.

The project director and reference group had several meetings where the first three points in the profile mandate received the greatest attention. Also discussed was whether the education should be called an academy of art to include the freewheeling collective practice of contemporary art and reflect an ambition to represent a point of confluence, a meeting place for creative energies of various kinds. The project director particularly wished to discuss the broader meaning of an education that was "complementary and innovative" and how this would then become part of the profile as well as the plan for the course of study.

Thus, the project director researched the history of art education and relevant versions of it in Norway and the Nordic countries. He was also concerned with establishing a dynamic structure with strong professional grounding, connecting with instructors possessing great energy and competence, acquiring strongly appropriate facilities, making the course of study appealing for actual applicants, and giving the course of study resources so that it could become preeminent in accordance with the ambitions at the beginning of studies in 2007.²⁰

Seminar: educating the artist anno 2007

In the midst of this process, Tromsø University College via

Ofelas: Iver Jåks veiviseren, UiT, Tromsø: Ravnetrykk [Ofelas: Iver Jåks' Guide, University of Tromsø, Tromsø: Ravnetrykk--RS] pp. 59-61, p. 60.

¹⁶ Minutes from first meeting of the Reference Group for Visual Arts Education. University College Tromsø. Orientation by Ulf Christensen. 31 March 2006.

¹⁷ The Reference Group had the following members: Magne Amundsen, chairman, youth culture house Tvibit; Kjersti Andvig, visual artist; Gerd Bjørhovde, provost, University of Tromsø; Kari Doseth Opstad, lecturer, University College Tromsø; Hilde Hauan Johnsen, visual artist, professor, Bergen Academy of Art and Design; Knut Erik Jensen, filmmaker; Arnold Johansen, visual artist;

Inghild Karlsen, visual artist.

¹⁸ Education in Visual Art. Organization of the work. Minutes from meeting between rector, director of the University College, dean AFK, administrative director AFK, and director of studies, December 2005.

¹⁹ Minutes from first meeting of the Reference Group for Visual Arts Education, University College Tromsø, 31 March 2006.

²⁰ Note to the Board, University College Tromsø, 29 May 2006. Visual arts education. Geir Tore Holm.

the project director invited guests to a two-day seminar with the theme of *Kunstnerutdanning anno 2007* (Educating the Artist anno 2007). At the seminar, speakers were to talk about art education from various standpoints. With the exception of members of the reference group, participants were artists and representatives of varied arts and educational institutions. The conference was part of a discussion heading toward the startup of the Academy of Contemporary Art and at the same time sought to give an update and orientation to the current educational situation.²¹

The first speaker at the conference was the rector of Malmö Art Academy (Konsthögskolan i Malmö), Gertrud Sandqvist, on the topic "Challenges in Contemporary Art Education." She spoke of her own experiences establishing art education in Malmö and had good advices about setting up the Academy in Tromsø. She said it would be impossible to establish a new school without some people being disappointed. Opposition and disappointment in some quarters, however, were something the school needed to address. She also pointed to the need for dynamism and the avoidance of holding fast to old structures. Thus, her advice was to be careful about which structures one builds up at the beginning: they will stay in place. Instead, she emphasized the importance of a few, but important structures, because, after some years, you will meet the challenge of renewal without losing the original foundational idea.²²

The structures she proposed involved development of good exchange programs, having studios, being flexible about hiring and appointments, and not least being curious, never satisfied, and alert to hiring teachers who adapt well to students and their needs. She also emphasized in her speech that the students were the "suppliers" in the system and that the education must therefore be substantially directed by what the students want to work with. Their "language" had to be the starting point. In other words, as she pointed out: the school cannot speak just one language, but many.

Artist and professor at Bergen National Academy of the Arts Jeremy Walsh, spoke about the development of education of artists. After a historical overview of changes and directions in art education since the 1930s, he concluded with the idea that education of artists consists primarily of what takes place among and between the people who are present in a school. Such a place, he asserted, can be a channel of communication that helps the school open its own doors. In the discussion after the speech, this dynamic conclusion was followed up, and it was pointed to the necessity of open course works, so that those at the school could fill them out at any time.

Architect and professor of urbanism at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) Knut Eirik Dahl presented an engaging, visionary lecture about what an academy of art might could mean for Tromsø and the world. He proposed

that an academy of art would spur on the cultural component in the northern regions: students and teachers together would have the opportunity to formulate Tromsø anew in the world.

Later the reference group brought forward Gertrud Sandqvist's lecture as a source of direction.²³ The rest of the presentations were interesting case studies about the origins of various art education programs such as one in Ramallah by Henrik Placht and the curriculum in *duodji* at Sami University in Kautokeino by Gunvor Guttorm.

The conference had scarcely any impact on the profile of the new program, which by and large already was composed. However, the visions, wishes, and advices shared in the seminar, in addition to the inclusion of many participants in the process, was perhaps important for the academy's legitimacy locally, nationally, and internationally.

The profile

At a June 2006 meeting of the reference group a profile for the education had begun to emerge. In September, a draft was complete. The project director presented it to the reference group, which had comprehensive comments. Based on the commentary, the project leader reworked his draft such that it could be sent forward. College director Britt Elin Steinveg gave the reworked proposed profile to the board in October without recommendations for further changes, and the profile was accepted at that point.²⁴

The academy of art is to educate artists at a high professional level and contribute to new competence in the field of art. The education will be based on artistic integrity and freedom.

The academy of art will be the world's most northerly. The location is Tromsø in Northern Norway, gateway to the Arctic. The city is a natural midpoint of the circumpolar regions.

The region is rich in resources, natural surroundings, and culture. The natural setting has abundant contrasts and is spectacular. Habitation is widespread, socially and culturally complex, and marked by effective adaptation to the setting and commercial enterprise.

In this great field of potential, the academy of art is to develop artistic practice. Here, exploratory and critical contemporary artists, conscious of their surroundings and contexts, are needed.

The academy of art is to be an innovative center for contemporary art. Tromsø, with its size and character, is well suited to be a starting point for engagement and active presence. The professional milieu in science and culture and the city will be natural arenas of contact for the academy of art.

A strong basis in the local and regional situation, via an understanding of the complexity of place and region, gives

21 Email from Geir Tore Holm, 15 September 2006, to the author of this article.

22 Minutes from the conference *Educating the Artist anno 2007*, written by the author of this article on assignment from Geir Tore Holm, September 2006.

23 Minutes from Reference Group meeting 29 September 2006. Geir Tore Holm.

24 Profile for the new art-education curriculum. Proposal for adoption by University College director Britt Elin Steinveg, Archive reference 2006/298/411.

potential for a global orientation. The academy of art is to be a forum, with students and employees working actively in international contexts and obtaining experiences from them.

Through engagement and interchange, the academy of art is to connect with knowledge and networks. Insight into cultural, social, and ethnic differences will strengthen opportunities for development of sustainable artistic practice. Understanding of the interconnection between circumstances in nature and culture--ecology--will be emphasized.

Study at the academy of art should enable students' social orientation via their own development, fundamental tools of analysis, and use of communication equipment. Varied knowledge of society and nature is to be integrated into the specifically artistic. Theory is interwoven into practice.

*The art academy is to require a great degree of independence among the students, powers of orientation and formulation, and skills in carrying out projects. A fundamental openness, mobility, and flexibility is to assure student influence and possibilities of development.*²⁵

The profile responded well to given elements of the mandate. It had a strong anchoring in Tromsø and the North. Consequently, the profile implicitly pointed to the creative and complementary aspects of art education in Tromsø. In a note about the profile's context for the board of Tromsø University College, Holm wrote that the profile was based in an international contemporary art discourse and had a definite standpoint and focus that no other art academies had developed at that time. He also pointed out that the geographical placement was used as a resource and that the location presented a particular responsibility to develop exploratory and critical art practice in that region of the country. He further asserted that an innovative and sustainable art practice demands a great degree of openness and power of orientation that can only be encouraged and nurtured by vigorous dialog.

An international contemporary art discourse

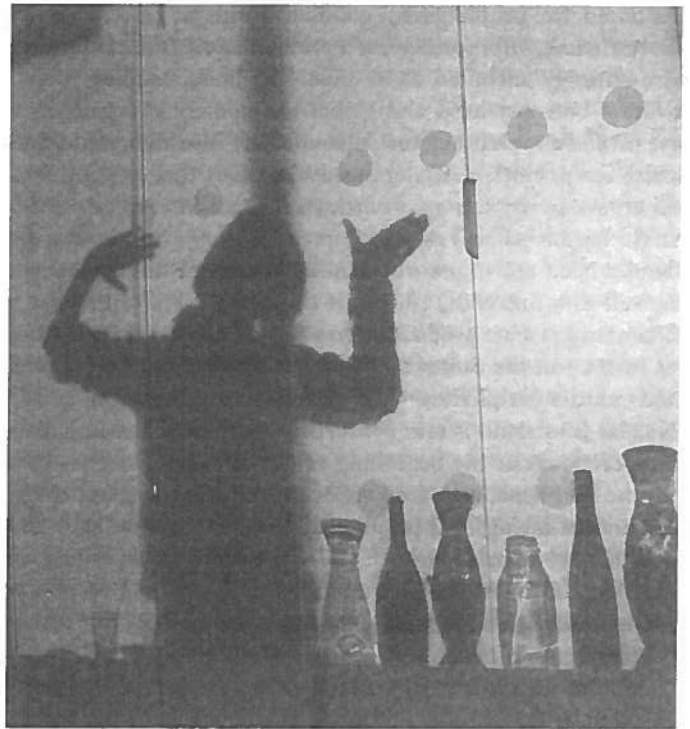
After some years, however, the profile was set aside as a strategic and defining document, as professor Sandqvist had hinted to at the seminar in 2007. This was met, however, with opposition and criticism from earlier employees and students.²⁶ Why did this happen?

The reference group that composed the profile was concerned that a visual arts education in the North would not become provincial. Thus, the curriculum had to position itself in terms of an international contemporary art discourse.²⁷ A defined relation between center and periphery, local and global, was therefore one of the premises underlying the profile. The education was to have a local anchoring that would yield "potential for global orientation" and "gather experiences from international contexts," as the profile formulated it.

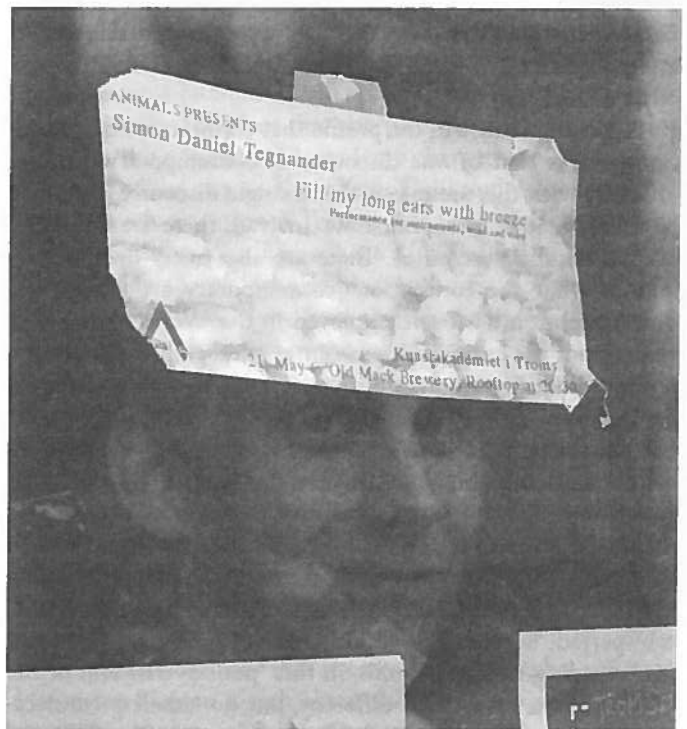
²⁵ Profile for the new art-education curriculum, University College Tromsø, Archive reference: 2006/298/ 411. Signed by Britt Elin Steinveg.

²⁶ See Åsa Sonjasdotter. 2014. "Form,

funksjon, kontekst"/»Form, Function, Context" in Jesper Rasmussen, *Det Jyske Kunstakademi 1964-2014*, Det Jyske Kunstakademi [Jutland Art Academy 1964-2014, Jutland, pp. 54-58. pp. 59-63 English text.



Students come from all over the world and speak different languages. Photo: Hanna Horsberg Hansen



Simon Daniel Tegnander (BA student 2012-2015) inviting to his semester exhibition spring 2013
Photo: Hanna Horsberg Hansen

²⁷ Profile for the new art-education curriculum, University College Tromsø, Archive reference: 2006/298/ 411. Signed by Britt Elin Steinveg.

As noted, the profile gave a good anchoring in place and site. Nevertheless, after some years a problem arose: the profile was also strongly anchored to its time. The understanding of the relation between local and global has namely changed since the profile was written. The Australian art historian, critic, and artist Terry Smith is among those who assert that creating sites for artistic practice, images of the world, and connections in the world has broadened as artistic practice today. In this way, art defines itself out of parochialism and chauvinistic nationalism as well as a universal, global art discourse.²⁸ He notes that a decentering of art production has occurred, a movement from an interest in the center to an increasing attention to political and cultural peripheries.²⁹ The French artist, curator, and critic Nicolas Bourriaud is also concerned with understanding contemporary art at the beginning of the 2000s and argues that for the first time in history, art of this time is the result of international dialogs. He proposes that centers cannot be found and that art instead shows us the way toward an experience of disorientation that explores all dimensions of the present and draws lines in all directions and spaces. The result is that artists become cultural nomads regardless of where they come from.³⁰

The same experience gradually unfolded at the Academy in Tromsø: we did not find ourselves in a cultural or artistic periphery—we were in an international connection. Sami artists have long shown and known this. They rejected the idea of being an appendix (Sami department) of a Northern Norwegian art academy on a periphery. Instead, they situated themselves internationally with the idea of their own Sami Nordic course of art education.

Another premise in the profile that connects with the previous one is that of one discourse of contemporary art. The difficulty with this premise is that a single discourse could not be found neither then, nor now. Instead, there are and were several, parallel discourses. There are also many understandings of what the conception “contemporary art” comprises. The conception has been employed in the Western art world throughout the entire previous century and earlier, either connoting something that is from the same time or as a synonym for “modern.” Since the end of the previous century, the term has been used to denote a special form of art situated in its own historical space, in an art-historical context almost as an epoch or period.³¹

As the concept is applied in the profile, it must be understood as a period conception. If that was the case, the profile indicates that the Academy should be situated in that “modern” period, but actually within a narrowly restricted part of it. According to Terry Smith, in this “period” (the end of the 1900s), there were three different, but nonetheless connected tendencies or streams in contemporary art. The first, and perhaps most visible, was the continuation of modernism’s practices, beliefs, and desires. In this stream, we find the most

famous and best remunerated artists of the present moment in 2010, he asserts. However, this direction was then threatened and was in the process of coming into the shadow of a second stream resulting from the transnational alteration in questions concerning the world.

This second stream directed attention to art that chiefly lied outside the Euro-American centers. The art often involved a post-colonial critique and was concerned with questions around identity, nationality, and tradition. Many artists in exile concerned themselves with those same questions, as did artists with a critical perspective who were found in the centers. This type of art filled the greater part of international exhibitions, especially biennials, and was purchased to an increasing degree by museums and others.

The third direction Smith identifies consists of an increasing group of young artists who worked on a smaller scale. They were more modest, but their ambitions were as important as those of practitioners in the other streams. These artists, who could also be architects and planners, emerged collectively, in loose networks, or as individuals. They explored sustainability in nature and social relations within a framework of ecological values. Their work was a clear response to a planet in crisis. Questions they rose involved problems with contemporary patterns of consumption or consumerism, and they examined alternatives. They shared no style, preferred no method, and did not necessarily have a shared vision of the world. What they shared, was that their works constituted the art that emerged from circumstances in which simultaneity is central.³²

With Smith’s attempt to identify the three streams, it is easy to recognize this final one in the Academy’s original profile, especially expressed in formulations like “Through engagement and interchange the academy of art is to connect with knowledge and networks” and “Understanding of the interconnection between circumstances in nature and culture—ecology—will be emphasized.” Thus, we can say that the profile also established a genre hierarchy within the prevalent streams Smith describes, in that the profile links itself to a definite direction.

The given mandate and the resulting profile effectively reveal an academy of art and its presuppositions in a particular place. Just as with the established academies in Trondheim and Bergen there was a desire to institute a new form of art education different from and opposed to already operating courses of study. What the profile did not attend to was the element of time embedded in such a document. It would become clear that Gertrud Sandqvist was right in what she asserted at the conference: after some years, the challenge for the academy will be to renew itself without losing its fundamental idea. That challenge did in fact confront the Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Writing.

After a few years, it became necessary to set the profile aside as a strategic document. There were several reasons.

28 Terry Smith. 2010. “The State of Art History: Contemporary Art”, *The Art Bulletin*, 01 December, Vol 92 (4), pp. 366-383, p. 380.

29 Per Bäckström and Benedict Hjartarson. 2014. “Rethinking the Topography of the International Avant-Garde: Introduction,” in Bäckström and Hjartarson (eds.), *Decentering the Avant-Garde*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 7-35, p. 8.

30 Nicolaus Bourriaud. 2009. “Altermodern,” in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, London: Tate Publishing, p. 20.

31 Dan Karholm. 2011. “On the Historical Representation of Contemporary

Art,” in Ruin and Ers (eds.): *Rethinking Time: Essays on History, Memory, and Representation of Contemporary Art*, Södertörn philosophical studies pp. 19-20, p. 19.

One was that parts of the profile became obvious givens. It was surely important to point out that “The academy of art is to educate artists at a high professional level and contribute to new competence in the field of art” when there was a new education at the University College of Tromsø. However, as a university curriculum, which it became after University College merged with University of Tromsø, this was all obvious, understood without needing to be said. It is what is done at a university. The same applied to the need for “a great degree of independence among the students, powers of orientation and formulation, and skills in carrying out projects.” It is what is expected of all students at the university and is spelled out with great clarity in the current study plans and course work.

A second reason the profile needed to be set aside involved its directive, content-oriented premises and artistic situating within a particular direction in contemporary art. The profile indicated that the place-related connection to Tromsø ought to offer the creation of a particular responsibility to develop exploratory and critical art practice in the region. This gradually became an odd premise driven more by the need for what society perhaps required at that time than by what the students sought. The starting point of an artistic education cannot, however, be driven by external demands. As is stated in the profile, the program should be based on artistic integrity and freedom. Such freedom and integrity runs contrary to a demand to be “critical” and to orient studies to a particular region of the country or genre of contemporary art. It may be a good vision or goal, but they cannot be definitive or directive.

Conceptions such as nature, ecology, and culture--and the consciousness around such interconnections in artistic practice--were important then and still are. Furthermore, our students have since then brought other themes into play: queer, racism, terrorism, and migration are areas of political questioning that have stood high on the agenda among our students. Street art as activism is a new genre that has been institutionalized in the past few years. We have also noticed this. Another major change involves the interest in materiality, objects, and techniques--interests that are much greater among current students than was the case ten years ago.

To respond to changes in contemporary art is important both to have a function in the present and to offer students an education for the future. This is not at all in conflict with the original profile, which also emphasized “a deep openness, mobility, and flexibility [which] is to assure student influence and possibilities of development.” Rather than merely assuming a global art world students should orient themselves in, the Academy today is more concerned that students will challenge the status quo in the art world and will generate new premises for the world to come. Thus, it was necessary to set aside the profile as a strategic, unitary and defining document. Anything else could have led to the creation of a new orthodoxy.

Today's challenges

The long European tradition of educating students in specialized academies of art has advantages and disadvantages. The authoritarian, powerful professoriate, driven by patrons with their needs and moneybags, should have been left behind. The same is true of genre hierarchies and art being asked to “fit into” established contexts. As a replacement, we ought to circle the idea that art must be free and that it is this freedom we must put in place so that our students at the Academy receive it. In a curriculum encouraging free art and free artists, it is not simple to measure knowledge, skills, and general competence, as we must do along with every other academic discipline when we formulate the curriculum. As art education gradually is packed into big faculties or departments of universities, it becomes all the more important to create frameworks for that ensure freedom and give students opportunities for development.

The starting point for the studies currently, is thus to a great degree situated in the artistic practice the students develop through study in this specific place, Tromsø, understood in terms of geography, politics, and forms of discourse. The way plans for curricula and subject matter are formulated today, emphasis is on giving students the opportunity to develop the tools they need technically and theoretically so that they can create art, set it into relevant contexts, and reflect on their own practice.

Across the years, the Academy has had students from around the world. Students and former, graduated students, today form a nucleus in the city's art milieu, currently considered by many to be the most interesting and innovative in Norway.³³ It is not merely the city and place that give perspective to the education. It is also the opposite: the academy changes the city, changes the story of the city, as Knut Eirik Dahl understood prophetically. An education from Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Writing has been a kind of guarantee that has given students work, scholarships, and prestigious residencies after they graduate. Many from the BA program have gone on to MA studies elsewhere in the world.

Repetition and difference

History has demonstrated that to start something new and creative can take time, but what happens when the new and creative are no longer new? Experiences from Oslo and Trondheim have shown that even if a curriculum at the outset was challenging the status quo, it put in place a new orthodoxy that closed off new thoughts and forms. The academy in Bergen was the first to take modernism into its offerings, even though the break with modernism had already begun, says the artist and first rector Morten Krogh about the establishing of VKA. He also argues that an academy of art must be solidly rooted in the present, and that the work of consolidation and further development is important once the early pioneering days are over.³⁴

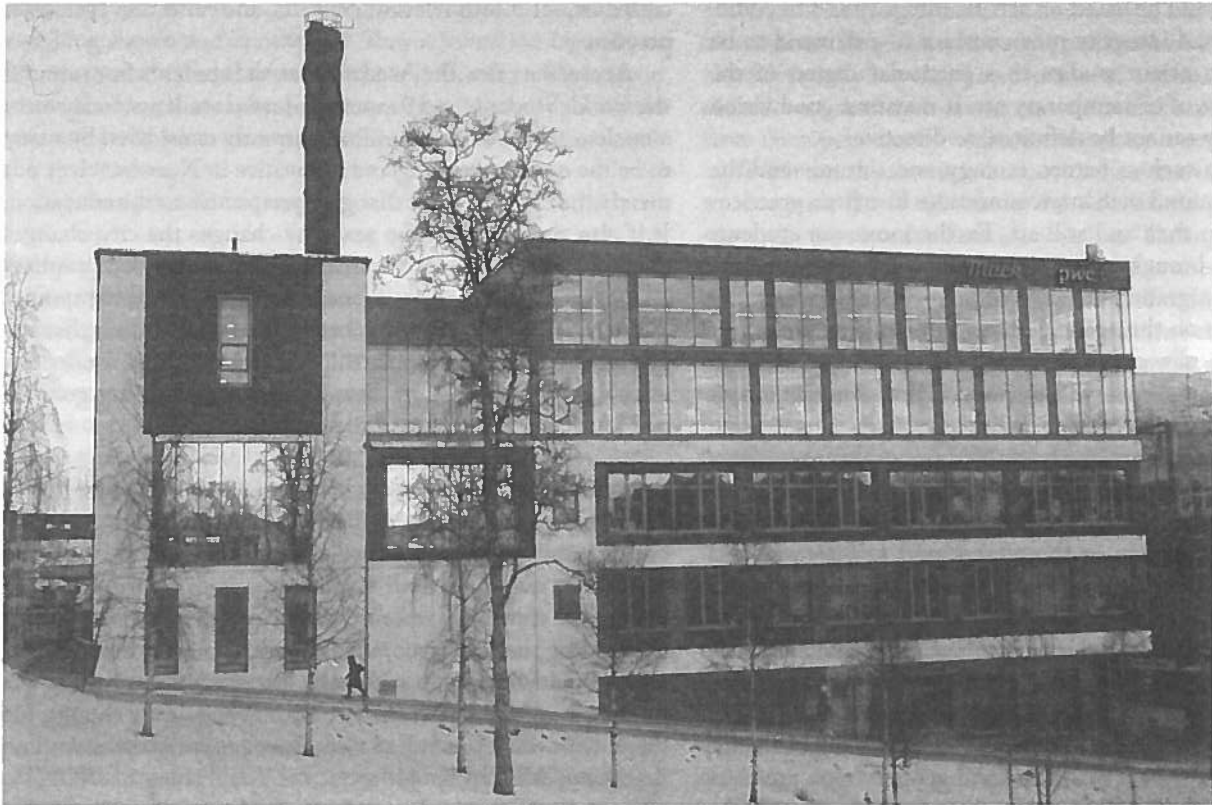
32 Smith. 2010, p. 380.

33 See Arne Skaug Olsen. 2017. “Den lange, harde kampen”, *kunstkritikk.no*, 17 February 2017. Read 8 May 2017.

34 Malterud and Kamsvåg. 2009. pp. 20ff.

Sometime in the future, a new academy of art will perhaps be founded in opposition to those existing today. Regardless, one hopes that the Academy, at every point in time and as best it can, will be rooted in its place and contemporaneity. The hope is also that orthodoxies in artistic practices do not establish themselves. If the Academy flourishes in these ways, it will mean that the institution never can become complacent or self-satisfied, that there will always be criticism, and that the school will always be given eyes and ears for welcoming the new.

Two concepts from philosopher Gilles Deleuze can illustrate this: repetition and difference.³⁵ By repetition, he means what happens as a result of ingrained institutional patterns and regulations, as when students must progress through a program of studies that is identical for all in the same place and time. Nevertheless, how the repetitions take place produces a difference: no students go through the education in the same way with the same result. Everyone goes through the same forms, but the formation the students shape will always be different. They will speak different languages. These mutable formations will, hopefully, always shape the profile of the future for the Academy, again and again as it erases the previous.



Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Writing is located in the citycenter of Tromsø, reflecting the environments. Photo: Hanna Horsberg Hansen

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*, London: The Athlone Press, p. 136.