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Making Pictures, Writing About Pictures, Discussing Pictures and Lecture-Discussion as Teaching Methods in Art History

Jari M. Martikainen

Abstract

This article discusses making pictures, writing about pictures, discussing pictures, and lecture-discussion as methods of teaching art history in Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training (Qualification in Visual Expression, Study Programmes in Visual and Media Art Photography). A total of 25 students majoring in Visual Expression participated in the research by studying art history using picture-based–visual and verbal–methods and reflecting on their learning experiences. This article introduces the concept of ‘contextual subject-related didactics,’ by which conceptions of contemporary art history, together with the objectives and aims of the curriculum, guide the choice of teaching methods. The article argues that various picture-based teaching methods intertwine reason and emotion, generating profound learning experiences in the field of art history, and developing knowledge of art history and the skills requires to act on the basis of such knowledge.

Introduction

The paradigm of art history has undergone drastic changes since the final decades of the twentieth century. These changes can be roughly summarized as a move from the formalistic categorization and classification of past Western “high art” to the study of contexts, discourses, and experiences connected with the production and perception of visual culture at large, including that of non-Western cultures.¹ Various contextual approaches have recently been supplemented by approaches that focus on the visual and material qualities of artworks, as well as the emotions, affects, and sensory experiences generated when perceiving them.² Art history can no longer be regarded as just a coherent, common practice or a uniform method or theory, rather a pluralistic field of study that includes ambivalent and even contradictory biases and practices. However, a common denominator between various approaches taken in contemporary art history seems to be interest in the ways different audiences perceive and interpret objects of visual culture.³

Art history is widely taught at various levels of education, either as a discrete subject or integrated with other subjects such as visual art, history, and language. The pedagogy of art history nevertheless has remained a curiosity among research topics within the discipline,⁴ perhaps partly due to the lack of scientific forums specialising in the field, as well as the tradition of art history teaching anchored in slide lectures, seminars, and excursions.⁵ The pedagogy

¹ Hans Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte: Eine Revision nach zehn Jahren* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002), 143-44; Janet Kraynak, “Art History’s Present Tense,” in Elizabeth C. Mansfield, ed., *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institution* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 87.

² Martin Jay, “In the Realm of the Senses: An Introduction,” *The American Historical Review* 116: 2 (2011): 307-15; Jenni Lauwrens, “Welcome to the Revolution. The Sensory Turn and Art History,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 7 (2012): 1-17; Simon O’Sullivan, “The Aesthetics of Affect. Thinking Art Beyond Representation,” *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 6:3 (2001), 125-36.

³ Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte*, 27; Kraynak, “Art History’s Present Tense,” 91.

⁴ Kelly Donahue-Wallace, et al, “Introduction,” in *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 9, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9, 11; Robert S. Nelson, “The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art “History” in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Critical Inquiry* 26:3 (2000): 423-429; Daniela Stöppel, “Kunstgeschichte unterrichten – aber wie?” in *Das Institut für Kunstgeschichte in München: 1909-2009*, eds. Daniela Stöppel, and Gabriele Wimböck, (München: Institut für Kunstgeschichte, 2010), 94-113.

of art history has been discussed more vigorously in art education research. This includes, for example, discipline-based art education⁶ and multicultural art education,⁷ in which art history is understood as a valuable cultural framework that provides students opportunities to understand and appreciate not only the art and cultures of different times and places, but also themselves and other people.⁸

Research on teaching methods has recently gained more attention within the discipline of art history, illuminating the variety of pedagogical approaches teachers constantly develop and implement in the field. These include active learning methods⁹ that involve students more directly in the learning process: for example, comparing current and past societies and their arts,¹⁰ studying works of art through verbal and visual means,¹¹ or discussing objects meaningful to them from an art historical perspective.¹² Furthermore, recent pedagogical literature in art history addresses the integration of technology such as digital images, computer-based interactive methods, e-learning,¹³ and

⁶ Stephen M. Dobbs, "Discipline-Based Art Education," and Mary Erickson, "Interaction of Teachers and Curriculum," in Elliot W. Eisner and Michael D. Day, eds., *Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 701-24, 467-86.

⁷ Gene H. Blocker, "Varieties of Multicultural Art Education: Some Policy Issues," in *Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education*, 187-99; Frank R. Sabol, "Studying Art History through Multicultural Education Looking-Glass," *Art Education* 53:3 (2000): 12-17.

⁸ Jacqueline Chanda, "Achieving Social and Cultural Educational Objectives through Art Historical Inquiry Practices," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 41:4 (2007): 24-39.

⁹ Jillian Coorey, "Active Learning Methods and Technology Strategies for Design Education," *The International Journal of Art & Design Education* 35:3 (2016): 337-47; Kirsti Lonka and Elina Ketonen, "How to Make a Lecture Course an Engaging Learning Experience?" *Studies for the Learning Society* 2-3 (2012): 63-74.

¹⁰ Marice E. Rose, "Encouraging Integrative Learning through Current Events and Learning Portfolios," *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal* 3:2 (2009): 1-7; Rose, "A New Approach to Teaching Roman Art History," *Classical World* 110:1 (2016): 119-36.

¹¹ Amanda Allison, "Identity in Flex: Exploring the Work of Nikki S. Lee," *Art Education* 62:1 (2009): 25-31; Jacqueline Chanda, "Art History Inquiry Methods: Three Options for Art Education Practice," *Art Education* 51:5 (1998): 17-24.

¹² Marice E. Rose, "Object Lesson: Using Family Heirlooms to Engage Students in Art History," *Art Education* 65:4 (2012): 47-52.

¹³ Donahue-Wallace, "A Tale of Two Courses: Instructor-Driven and Student-Centered Approaches to Online Art History Instruction," *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, 109-118; Donahue-Wallace,

social media¹⁴ to facilitate novel kinds of student-centered and collaborative instructional practices. New digital applications have enabled virtual excursions to museums and architectural sites all over the world, as well as the reconstruction of past architectural environments through 3D-modeling tools.¹⁵ Multimodal digital environments generate multisensory experiences, fostering students' emotional involvement in art historical topics.¹⁶ Resultingly, various student-centered methods and virtual applications enabling new forms of active learning are being added to teacher-centered lecturing and text-based methods that still dominated the teaching of art history in schools and universities at the beginning of the new millennium.¹⁷

This article discusses teaching art history as part of Finnish Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training in Visual Expression, within the Study Programmes in Visual and Media Arts and Photography. The Visual Expression pathway results in a three-year studio arts-based degree where students study and apply various methods and materials used in studio arts. After graduation, they either find employment in assisting jobs in the field of visual culture or continue their studies in the Universities of Applied Sciences or Universities majoring in Visual Arts in order to obtain qualification to work as artists, photographers, or visual arts teachers, to name a few examples. This article is based on an experiment in which twenty-five students majoring in Visual Expression studied art history through picture-based methods that followed the principles of learning-by-doing, then reflected on their learning experiences.

"Introduction," 1-12; Geoffrey Simmons, "Motivating Participation in Online Art History Courses: Issues and Ideas," *Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies*, 119-29.

¹⁴ Judith A. Finch, "Visual Literacy and Art History. Teaching Images and Objects in Digital Environments," in Danilo M. Baylen, and Adriana D'Alba, eds., *Essentials of Teaching and Integrating Visual and Media Literacy. Visualizing Learning* (Cham, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer Publishing, 2015), 237-50.

¹⁵ Kristin Huffman Lanzoni, et al, "Wired! and Visualizing Venice: Scaling up Digital Art History," *Artl@s Bulletin* 4:1 (2015): 20-39; Jeffrey Schrader, "The Standardization and Management of Digital Media for Instruction in the History of Art," *VRA Bulletin* 34:2 (2007): 5-7.

¹⁶ Finch, "Visual Literacy and Art History," 237-50.

¹⁷ Rebecka A. Black, "Manifest Orientalism: Roots of the Teacher Centered Approach in Canonical Art History Texts," *Review of Arts and Humanities* 4:1 (2015): 1-6; James Elkins, "Introduction: The Concept of Visual Literacy, and Its Limitations," in James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (New York, London: Routledge 2008), 3; Jon Simons, "From Visual Literacy to Image Competence," *Visual Literacy*, 87.

This article begins by discussing the recent pictorial, emotional, affective, and sensory approaches to art history and maps the objectives of art history within the Visual Expression curriculum. This is followed by a description of the picture-based visual and verbal teaching methods used in the experiment, as well as with an analysis of the students' learning experiences. In conclusion, the results of the experiment will be discussed within the framework of the curriculum in Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression, as well as contemporary art history.

Pictorial, emotional, affective and sensory turns of art history

Towards the end of the twentieth century, many art historians expressed their dissatisfaction with the logocentric approaches of their discipline, which focused on cultural, ideological and political discourses following the ideas of the “linguistic turn” and “new art history.”¹⁸ In their opinion, art history had become alienated from the works of art themselves. They made vigorous calls for a return to art history more closely anchored in the material and visual qualities of works of art and other objects of visual culture.¹⁹ This approach was part of the general shift of perspective in the humanities and social sciences, known as the “pictorial”²⁰ or “iconic turn.”²¹

The phrase “pictorial turn” refers not only to the increase in various forms of visual culture, but also to the multiple roles that visual culture plays in everyday practices and interaction.²² In reaction to the ‘linguistic turn,’ the “pictorial turn” thematized the word-image relationship, drawing attention to the fact that meanings are not only constructed and mediated verbally, but also

¹⁸ Eric Fernie, *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999), 21; Kraynak, “Art History’s Present Tense,” 83-84, 91-97; Elizabeth C. Mansfield, “Introduction: Making Art History a Profession,” in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, 12; Grant Pooke and Diana Newall, *Art History: The Basics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 29-31.

¹⁹ Kraynak, “Art History’s Present Tense,” 91-97; Keith Moxey, “Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 7:2 (2008): 131-46.

²⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²¹ Gottfried Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder,” in Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 11-38.

²² Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.

visually.²³ This laid an emphasis on the importance of visual literacy, understood as the ability to act meaningfully in the visual social world. This includes, for example, being able to express one's intentions visually and interpret other people's visual messages.²⁴

Following “the death of the author,”²⁵ the reception of art aroused vivid discussion, since the meaning of artworks was no longer tied to the intentions of the artist but was open to what we would now call various “crowdsourcing” interpretations.²⁶ Echoing the constructionist epistemology entailed by the “linguistic turn,” not only art historical knowledge but also perceptions and interpretations of artworks were understood as being historically and culturally constructed, which increased interest in the ways in which different audiences perceive and interpret the visual.²⁷ It is clear that the “pictorial turn” did not reject contextual or semiotic approaches but harnessed them in the discussion of perspectives on producing and interpreting objects of visual culture. At the same time, however, some proponents of the “pictorial turn”—such as W.J.T. Mitchell²⁸—also addressed the non-discursive realm, paying attention to the potential of works of art and other visual objects to reveal themselves to beholders in a manner beyond verbal articulation.

The non-discursive dimension of art and visual culture has also been pursued from a different angle within contemporary art history, with emotion, affects, and senses being included among the approaches taken. This development

²³ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.

²⁴ James Elkins, “Introduction,” 1-9; Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds., *Critical Theory Since 1965* (New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2006), 1256-58.

²⁶ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History: Discussion of Context and Senders,” in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 243, 251-52; Pooke and Newall, *Art History*, 100.

²⁷ Kraynak, “Art History’s Present Tense,” 91; Kitty Zijlmans, “The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art Systems,” in Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, eds., *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 135.

²⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

gave rise to the concepts of “emotional,” “affective,” and “sensory” turns.²⁹ Until the end of the twentieth century, art history was regarded as a field of connoisseurship that valued reason and objectivity and disregarded the emotions.³⁰ The dichotomy between reason and emotion became increasingly questioned in social and humanistic sciences, as a result of which affects were introduced as an approach to discussing the social world and people within it.³¹

In the literature on the emotional and affective turn, the definitions of “emotion” and “affect” vary from regarding them as more or less synonyms to stating that they are clearly distinctive concepts.³² Defined roughly, emotions are usually regarded as cultural and social constructions in the realm of consciousness, whereas affects are regarded as biological and physiological responses in the realm of bodily sensations.³³ In addition to the affective and emotional aspects, the turn to experiences and sensations has also been conceptualized as a “sensory turn” that emphasizes the role of the corporeal and non-visual qualities of experience.³⁴ Despite mutual differences, all of these turns share a dissatisfaction with logocentric approaches to art history. However, they do not support a complete reversal from contextualising and semiotic approaches to the realm of sensations but advocate integrative approaches dissolving the Cartesian dualism between reason and emotion, and mind and body.³⁵

²⁹ Jay, “In the Realm of the Senses,” 307-15; Lauwrens, “Welcome to the Revolution,” 1-17; O’Sullivan, “The Aesthetics of Affect,” 125-26.

³⁰ Robert O. Bork, “Art, Science, and Evolution,” in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, 191; Verena Krieger, “Einführung: Zeitgenossenschaft als Herausforderung für die Kunstgeschichte,” in Verena Krieger, ed., *Kunstgeschichte & Gegenwartskunst: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag), 8-10.

³¹ Clare Hemmings, “Invoking Affect. Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” *Cultural Studies* 19:55 (2005): 548-67.

³² Anu Koivunen, “An Affective Turn? Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory,” in Marianne Liljeström, and Susanna Paasonen, eds., *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences* (Routledge: London, 2010), 9-10.

³³ Koivunen, “An Affective Turn?” 9-10; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

³⁴ Jay, “In the Realm of the Senses,” 307-15; Lauwrens, “Welcome to the Revolution,” 1-17.

³⁵ Hemmings, “Invoking Affect,” 563-65; Lauwrens, “Welcome to the Revolution,” 7-9, 16.

Art History in the Curriculum of the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression

In the Visual Expression curriculum, art history is regarded as an important component of vocational expertise when working in the field of visual arts and photography. The qualification requirements of the curriculum explain that students must be able to “recognize and date stylistic features and trends in graphic design, the visual and media arts and photography, and take the historical and cultural perspective into consideration in their work.”³⁶ Students are also expected to “discuss their works in relation to the visual tradition,”³⁷ “use cultural and historical messages and contents in interpretations of images,”³⁸ and “position their working process within traditions.”³⁹ These learning objectives reveal that art history in the curriculum refers both to knowledge of the visual past and present and to its application when interpreting and making visual culture products—which corresponds to the conceptualisation of visual literacy.⁴⁰ In addition, the curriculum explicates the importance of experiences and emotions in everyday life, by emphasising the ability to both produce them through visual expression and to appreciate other people’s “visions and modes of expression” in order to promote mutual well-being.⁴¹

The curriculum emphasizes the vocational competencies and skills required for practical work assignments and activities.⁴² Art history is regarded as a “toolkit” of the past and present visual culture, where its importance is based on its applicability as a larger cultural perspective: a toolkit students can use to position their own visual products in the visual culture at large in terms of their materials, techniques, visual expression, and contents. In the same manner, art history provides students with tools for interpreting past and present works of art and other forms of visual culture. This practical orientation suggests a shift towards teaching methods that create opportunities

³⁶ Finnish National Board of Education. *Requirements for Vocational Qualifications. Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression, Visual Artisan* (2010): 29.

³⁷ Ibid, 50.

³⁸ Ibid, 39.

³⁹ Ibid, 97.

⁴⁰ Elkins, “Introduction,” 1-9; Simons, “From Visual Literacy,” 77-90.

⁴¹ Finnish National Board of Education, *Requirements for Vocational Qualifications*, 193.

⁴² Ibid.

for learning-by-doing,⁴³ in terms of using art history both to interpret and make visual culture products. In addition, the holistic conception of humankind⁴⁴ and constructivist and experiential learning theories⁴⁵ on the curriculum emphasize the active role of students as acting, thinking, and feeling constructors of their own vocational skills.

The teaching methods used in this experiment—making pictures, writing about pictures, discussing pictures, and lecture-discussions—are an attempt to operationalize art history in accordance with the objectives of the curriculum, as well as the recent biases of the discipline discussed above. All of these methods are anchored in pictures and focus on reflecting on the visual qualities and thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise when making, perceiving, and interpreting pictures. These methods try to create learning situations whereby students confront pictures in various ways and from various perspectives and express their responses verbally and visually. This arrangement shifts more responsibility for the learning process to students, providing them with possibilities to train and develop skills in interacting with art history. As a result, teaching becomes mentoring or scaffolding in terms of the various supportive strategies that help students to achieve both their personal learning goals and the skills required for the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression.

The Finnish educational system has stressed an active concept of knowledge and active learning methods since the curriculum reforms of 1990.⁴⁶ In vocational education, this approach is visible in implementing various methods of learning-by-doing, framing the choice of teaching methods in this

⁴³ John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 11-37, 156; Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 22-31.

⁴⁴ Lauri Rauhala, *Ihminen kulttuurissa – kulttuuri ihmisessä* (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 2005).

⁴⁵ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1938); Michael R. Matthews, “Appraising Constructivism in Science and Mathematics Education,” and Dennis C. Phillips, “An Opinionated Account of the Constructivist Landscape,” in Dennis C. Phillips, ed., *Constructivism in Education: Opinions and Second Opinions on Controversial Issues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 161-92, 1-16.

⁴⁶ Hannele Niemi, et al, “Epilogue: What Are Innovations in the Finnish Educational Ecosystem?” in Hannele Niemi, et al., eds., *Finnish Innovations and Technologies in Schools. A Guide Toward New Ecosystems of Learning* (Rotterdam, Boston. Taipei: SensePublishers, 2014), 166.

teaching experiment as well.

Making pictures as a teaching method in art history involved an attempt to integrate the subject concretely with studies in Visual Expression, as well as to combine the sensory experiences of making pictures with the processing of visual data, which W.J.T. Mitchell⁴⁷ regards as a way of intensifying and enriching observations and interpretations of works of art. Making pictures was understood as a means of visual thinking or thinking through and with pictures, which provides an alternative to the mere verbal processing of art historical topics and can integrate affects and emotions with profound learning processes.⁴⁸

Learning tasks for making pictures were applied in multiple ways during art history studies. Some assignments had students study the styles of different periods as visual explorations of various—including non-Western—cultures and compare the past and present by modernising old works of art. (See Figures 1-5). Students also made contemporary ritual masks, applying the concept of ancient objects to contexts that reflected students' own thoughts and experiences of the contemporary world (Figure 6). Visual products and the ideas and experiences generated by making them were ultimately presented in class and discussed collaboratively.

Writing about pictures aimed at creating opportunities for the students to verbally explicate their thoughts and emotions concerning art and art historical topics. This element was essential in terms of constructivist learning theory, since it enables students to become aware of their thoughts and emotions and critically reflect on them.⁴⁹ It is likewise critical in art history, as verbal explications of analysis and interpretations of works of art can reveal one's own positions and help students to realize the constructional and contextual nature of their own—and all—thinking.⁵⁰ In addition, writing about pictures was intended to provide students with motivating opportunities to learn how to seek and use background information when explaining and justifying their

⁴⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?" in *Visual Literacy*, 13.

⁴⁸ See Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*; Barbara M. Stafford, "The Remaining 10 Percent: The Role of Sensory Knowledge in the Age of the Self-Organizing Brain," in *Visual Literacy*, 32.

⁴⁹ Scot Danforth and Terry Jo Smith, *Engaging Troubling Students: A Constructivist Approach* (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 2005), 40-42.

⁵⁰ Natalie Selden Barnes, "Hands-On Writing: An Alternative Approach to Understanding Art," *Art Education* 62:3 (2009): 40-46.

interpretations of works of art.

Writing assignments were based on pictures. Many of them focused on registering the visual elements and structures of works of art, visually studying pictures from varying contextual perspectives, and interpreting works of art both individually and collaboratively. These were written quickly, on the basis of students' own perceptions and imagination, without reading any literature. The course involved one major writing project in which the students chose a painting that they reflected on and analysed individually in three stages: at the beginning, middle, and end of the course. The first stage was written on the basis of students' own perceptions, but the last two required students review relevant literature. These different approaches targeted development of the students' visual literacy and improvement of their understanding of various contextual ways of interpreting and conceptualising art.

Discussing pictures was a more spontaneous and collaborative form of verbal processing, developing conversational skills on art historical topics. By adopting various conversational roles, students learned how to express and justify their own views, as well as appreciating those of other students. As a collaborative and dialogical teaching method, discussing pictures enabled peers to play an active role in studying art history.⁵¹ Von Korgh, Ichijo, and Nonaka⁵² regard discussion as a creative activity in which tacit knowledge based on physical sensations and emotional reactions is articulated. In this research, discussing pictures was regarded as a student-centered method, whereby students' observations, interpretations, and emotional reactions when perceiving pictures could direct the course of teaching and studies.

Conversation during art history lessons was based on pictures of artworks and primarily concentrated on their visual qualities and modes of expression. Despite choosing the pictures in advance, during the lessons the teacher stayed in the background, giving the students the opportunity to direct the discussion to topics that emerged as important and meaningful in the situation. Via this deliberate choice, the teacher did not seek to "mediate" between the pictures and students but encouraged them to form their own relationship with the works of art.

⁵¹ Danforth and Smith, *Engaging Troubling Students*, 41-42, 112-13.

⁵² Georg von Krogh, et al, *Enabling Knowledge Creation: How to Unlock the Mystery of Tacit Knowledge and Release the Power of Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-14, 181.

Lecture-discussion constituted a more structured, collaborative teaching method in which the teacher's main role was to create a discussion framework and direct the learning events by providing background information and choosing discussion topics and visual material elucidating the theme. This was used either as an introduction to a specific theme or as its summary. Constructivist and experiential learning theories do not encourage teachers to use lecturing as a major teaching method, since this does not encourage students to construct and use information actively.⁵³ Bearing this in mind, lecture-discussions were deployed as a more activating⁵⁴ or engaging lecture⁵⁵ that involved observing and discussing pictures from various perspectives. The purpose of lecture-discussions was therefore to introduce and demonstrate different approaches to art history in practice, as well as to perform them collaboratively. In addition, lecture-discussions sought to guide students towards using the appropriate art historical terms and concepts when discussing works of art.

Students' Responses to Various Teaching Methods

A total of twenty-five students majoring in Visual Expression participated in this study and produced data reflecting the teaching methods and their learning experiences during an art history course. These reflections formed the empirical data of the research. After each assignment, students were asked to describe and reflect on their study experiences in writing. The data consists of eight questionnaires, in which students reflected on their individual learning processes and the contribution of different ways of learning or teaching methods to their learning experience. The main questions were: how did you find the assignment? What did you think, feel, experience, and learn when

⁵³ Kenneth J. Gergen, "Social Construction and the Educational Process," in Leslie P. Steffe and Jerry E. Gale, eds., *Constructivism in Education* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995), 19, 31-35; Kenneth R. Howe and Jason Berv, "Constructing Constructivism, Epistemological and Pedagogical," in *Constructivism in Education: Opinions and Second Opinions on Controversial Issues*, 30-31; Ernst von Glasersfeld, "Cognition, Construction of Knowledge, and Teaching," in Michael R. Matthews, ed., *Constructivism in Science Education: A Philosophical Examination* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 21, 26.

⁵⁴ Annamari Heikkilä, et al, "Relations Between Teacher Students' Approaches to Learning, Cognitive and Attributional Strategies, Well-Being, and Study Success," *Higher Education* 64 (2012): 455-71.

⁵⁵ Kirsti Lonka and Elina Ketonen, "How to Make a Lecture Course," 63-74.

doing the assignment? How did you find the method being used in terms of studying art history? Was the method suitable for you? How would you like to improve the assignment? The study design can be regarded as small-scale action research, whereby the students were involved in developing motivational methods for teaching and studying art history.⁵⁶ From the students' point of view, the process could also be described as autoethnography, wherein they analysed their own learning styles as well as experiences of studying art history.⁵⁷

The data was analysed using content and discourse analysis. Students' written descriptions and reflections of their study experiences were sorted, classified, and summarized using content analysis⁵⁸ to gain insight into their opinions and study experiences and the ways they interpreted them. These findings articulating students' voices were discussed within the framework of contemporary art history and the curriculum in Visual Expression, using discourse analysis to draw conclusions about the appropriateness of the teaching methods applied in this case study.⁵⁹ In practice, these methods were interlaced, because both could be used to analyse the choice of words and concepts, as well as themes and meanings.

Making pictures

Making pictures was described as a process of learning and reflecting on art history. The students did not consider visual assignments as merely "drawing" or "painting," but as essential ways of studying art history.

⁵⁶ See Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge, and Action Research* (London: Falmer, 1986), 158-66, 186-90; Stephen Kemmis, "Exploring the Relevance of Critical Theory for Action Research: Emancipatory Action Research in the Footsteps of Jürgen Habermas," in Peter Reason, and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (London: Sage, 2001), 92-93, 100-01.

⁵⁷ See Carolyn Ellis, et al, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12:1 (2011), Article 10.

⁵⁸ See Margrit Schreier, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in Uwe Flick, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage, 2014), 170-83.

⁵⁹ See Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (London: Sage, 1989).

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

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

Awareness of the links between an era and artwork was considered important when studying art history. Learning assignments where old paintings were modernized motivated the students to study and compare the past and present across cultures and societies. At the same time, they reflected on their own relationships with the past and present.

“I think that making pictures helped me to gain a deeper understanding of how times have changed and to observe the changes that have occurred in art. When modernising the painting, I had to pay very careful attention to the original work of art and its style and expression...I learned to view works of art from the perspective of their times...and thought a great deal about how the same thing would be depicted in different times and the factors (e.g., events and ideas) that change art. I also paid attention to current and contemporary art: what modes and methods of expression are used and the subjects that this typically involves.” (Student 16)

The primary pedagogical aim when making pictures was to take account of the students’ own thoughts and experiences of different works of art and to integrate them into the study of art history. However, the assignments created an eagerness to study the backgrounds of the artworks and generated self-motivated interest in reading art historical literature.

“When I made sketches of the painting, I couldn’t stop looking at the woman’s face, hair, and the light around her head. I thought she must be an important person, maybe a saint, but she was not an angel. I just had to find out about the story of this painting, and so I started reading.” (Student 11)

“When making pictures, I concentrated more closely on the subject—and wanted to search through the background information, because I became interested.” (Student 21)

Many students shared the opinion that visual methods of teaching and studying art history were more efficient than verbal ones. Visual processing of the topics was felt to occur at a more personal level, which led to intimate learning experiences.

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

Making pictures emerged as a multilayered activity in which conscious and unconscious levels of knowing and experiencing merged. Several students experienced making pictures as a way of identifying themselves with the artist’s creative process or with the era and culture of the work of art. This resembled the projection of emotions typical of aesthetic experience.

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

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

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

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

Most students shared the opinion that they had learned a lot about both art

history and visual expression through picture-making assignments. This dual benefit concretized the important role played by art history in vocational expertise associated with visual expression, which increased the students' motivation to study art history.

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

The students regarded visual tasks as effective and motivating ways of exploring and reflecting on art historical topics and works of art. Making pictures was understood to be a visual means of studying art history. Visual processing of works of art seemed to cluster knowledge and experiences, resulting in conscious and unconscious reflections on art and self to the extent that the distance between works of art and students seemed to diminish or even disappear when students projected their emotions onto the works of art. Furthermore, this fusion seemed to intensify the way in which works of art were experienced, providing them with the capability to tell their own stories and challenge the students' ways of thinking.

Writing about pictures

Most of the students said that written assignments helped them to concentrate on observing and studying works of art as well as other topics, resulting in intense learning experiences.

*“I had a chance to delve into the work of art better and reflect on it, because I wrote about it. Through my writing I understood the topic better and realized what the Islandic sagas tell about. I became more interested in them.”
(Student 16)*

*“Through writing assignments, I have learned to observe pictures in more versatile ways. When I studied the painting of Dali for a longer period of time, I found new layers in it. Maybe I understand the painting better now.”
(Student 4)*

Some students were of the opinion that there should always be a written assignment in connection with visual exercises, because their verbal reflection deepened the learning process and understanding of the subject. In addition,

reading and writing about artists and the backgrounds of artworks provided students with tools for analysing works of art.

“Visual assignments, where we had to modernize an old painting, didn’t inspire me that much. It was good that we also had to write about it, because then we had to study the backgrounds of the painting and the artist as well as reflect on them. If making pictures is used as a method of studying art history, there should always be a written assignment connected with it, because that makes you study the backgrounds.” (Student 11)

“I chose William Blake’s God as an Architect...Blake’s biography and training in graphics helped me to understand his special mode of expression. The strong religious background explains the theme of the painting. The artist’s inclination to mysticism was conveyed through the colours and atmosphere of the painting.” (Student 12)

Written assignments, in which the students studied one painting of their own choice in three phases and from three different perspectives, helped them to study the painting more carefully and reflect on it in more versatile ways in terms of the structure of the work of art and influences acting on the artist. These assignments showed, in practice, how works of art are open to various approaches and are ambiguous in terms of their possible meanings and interpretations.

“I chose Salvador Dali’s painting The Persistence of Memory...As the project proceeded I began to notice more ‘things’ in the painting. When I closely observed the structure of the painting I began to see the elements of the composition—such as the golden section, use of triangle composition, and the balance. When I studied other paintings by Dali and read and wrote about them, I found out and noted for myself that he had been influenced by Leonardo da Vinci as well as Cubism...I now know more about the painting and can see more things in it.” (Student 22)

“During this process, I have learned more about the artist and how to observe this (as well as other paintings) from various points of view.” (Student 15)

Many of the students themselves were surprised by their improvement in observing and analysing works of art, which in turn strengthened their trust in their own abilities. This was considered an empowering experience.

“William Blake’s God as an Architect...My perceptions are now more thorough...I couldn’t imagine in advance how far I could go with the analysis—it really opened my eyes... You can find various levels of interpretation, but it requires that you are willing to make an effort to learn.” (Student 12)

Careful observations of artworks and studying them with the help of the literature required in writing assignments also made students reflect on their own ways of thinking and review their opinions.

“Pablo Picasso, Las Meninas...In the beginning, I regarded Picasso’s technique as very simple. But when I familiarized myself with the objectives of the style, I realized that the painting is not randomly slapped on.” (Student 7)

“I began to think that the painting is more serious. Now I also understand that Miro didn’t necessarily have precise plans but may just be painting from his ‘subconscious’ without thinking too much. Maybe this contributes to the possibility of interpreting the painting in many ways. I like the painting more and I understand it better.” (Student 16)

When students reflected on works of art in different ways during a longer period of time, they seemed to feel more closely connected with them. The relationship was not only cognitive, but also seemed to acquire emotional qualities.

“I began to consider the painting as being more important to me when I learned more about it and its painter. It was rewarding to note how I developed a deeper understanding as the analysis proceeded. It was important that the analysis process lasted longer and consisted of several phases.” (Student 12)

The students regarded written exercises based on their own research projects as important means of widening and deepening their knowledge of art history. In addition, different approaches to written exercises seemed to help the students understand knowledge of art history as positional and works of art as being open to various interpretations.

Discussing pictures

Discussion during lessons was lively. The students engaged in observing and discussing pictures and openly expressed their thoughts and feelings.

Discussing pictures was experienced as fun, and the atmosphere in class was positive and relaxed.

“The lessons are relaxed. You can always give your opinion.” (Student 8)

“Art history is much more fun and interesting than I thought. You don’t have to sit quietly and just listen during the lessons.” (Student 24)

A new art historical theme—e.g., period of time or style—was introduced to students by asking them to observe a set of pictures connected with the new theme. They were asked to look at the pictures and reflect on them, first in groups and then with the whole class, in order to identify what they could conclude and learn from the visual material. This picture-based and student-centered method was experienced as motivating.

“A good way of introducing a new topic. Working in small groups is useful, because then you take your time and discuss the paintings with other group members.” (Student 19)

“This is a good way of getting in touch with new topics. Not cramming, but learning collaboratively...through interaction.” (Student 22)

Discussing pictures was evaluated as an important method of teaching and learning, because it gave the students the chance to verbalize the visual aspect while anchoring their verbal comments in the visual. This was regarded as very useful and motivating.

“When we are learning about the history of visual art, it is also important to have a visual understanding of art historical styles. Pictures are the best way of learning for this purpose, because you learn most by observing and discussing pictures.” (Student 17)

“Observing and discussing pictures helps me to understand the topics we are discussing; e.g., when we talk about art historical styles, I don’t necessarily understand everything, but when I see pictures of it, I learn more.” (Student 20)

In most cases, students began to interpret works of art collaboratively. They reported that this was an efficient way of learning, in which the possibility to comment on paintings and hear the comments of fellow students was experienced as highly instructional.

“It’s great to give my own opinion, because then I also realize how differently people think about and interpret art. When I hear the interpretations of other people, I can see new dimensions in the works of art and learn to analyse them better...It’s useful to hear other people’s thoughts and opinions on art.”
(Student 22)

“I think you learn to look at works of art from various perspectives when you get the chance to hear other people’s thoughts.” (Student 18)

Some students found it challenging to discuss pictures and express their own thoughts and opinions on works of art. Upon noticing this, the teacher began discussion sessions by asking them to discuss the works of art first in small groups and only then to share the main points with the whole class. Some students experienced this as an empowering method giving them more courage to speak in class.

“I like this method of studying, even though I am shy and don’t like to express my opinion...But it was good that we had the possibility to discuss our ideas in small groups. This can give you the courage to participate in discussions with the whole class.” (Student 6)

For many students, discussing pictures was a meaningful way of reflecting not only on works of art but also their own thoughts and emotions. This verbal-visual method seemed to connect art history effectively with the world of students.

“I like this way of learning. I think it is very important to recognize and reflect on your thoughts and feelings about works of art so that you can become aware of them.” (Student 16)

“Conversing about works of art has been fun and has helped me to memorize things. We also discussed emotions...and laughed a lot.” (Student 19)

Discussing pictures was experienced as a motivating way of studying the history of art, because it developed art-related communicative skills. This encouraged students to talk about art not only in the school context, but also during their free time.

“I have also begun to talk about art with people in my free time. I started to observe art in a different way...Art history is useful, because you learn to talk about art with other people and to comment on works of art.” (Student 3)

The students thought that this method of discussing pictures was an important form of collaborative learning, where individual points of view contributed to a broader understanding of art and art history. This developed skills in interpreting art and helped the students to realize that works of art can be interpreted in many ways. Some students regarded discussion as important in terms of constructing links between their life-worlds and art historical themes. In addition, such discussions had the potential to empower, since many students reported that they had gained the courage to discuss art and express their viewpoints in public.

Lecture-discussion

Most of the students had expected the teaching of art history to consist mainly of lecturing. It became evident that this was due to earlier experiences of history and art history teaching at school, where lecturing had been the main teaching method, which the students regarded as undesirable. However, during the current studies, students' attitudes to lecturing were more positive, because it was combined with other methods rather than being the only teaching method.

“I thought teaching was more about lecturing and that students wrote down a lot. But it wasn't like that. The writing of notes was well arranged...not too much writing, only the most important things. It was interesting to hear background knowledge. There could be more of this kind of teaching.” (Student 2)

“I didn't know in advance that we would do so many exercises of various kinds. Lecturing plays a minor role. Much more relaxed than I expected. I have learned a lot.” (Student 20)

Writing notes during lectures was problematic. Some students believed that it helped them to concentrate on the lecture, whereas others found it very difficult to listen and write notes at the same time.

“In the beginning, writing notes was easier for me, but then we had lecturing and writing notes at the same time—and I didn’t learn anything, because I couldn’t concentrate on both listening and writing simultaneously.” (Student 9)

“Writing notes helps me to learn and remember things.” (Student 1)

The lecture-discussion method was not only teacher-centered, but students could also direct this with their comments, questions, and needs. The teacher prepared the teaching frameworks through the choice of key topics and visual material, but the contents of the lessons were constructed through interaction between the students and teacher. This interactive dimension of the lectures seemed both to inspire and surprise the students.

“The lectures have also been interesting. During other lessons I am sometimes sleepy, but not here! The lectures are not boring, the atmosphere is relaxed, and we can always interrupt and spend time on conversations. We can always give our opinions, which is great.” (Student 19)

“Teaching has included various methods. We have always had time for questions and conversations.” (Student 15)

Only one student found lecturing to be the most beneficial teaching method. However, a more common opinion was that lecturing is useful to some extent, but other methods contributed more effectively to learning.

“Personally, I think that lectures are maybe the most important method I have of learning and remembering things, because then you focus solely on the subject matter.” (Student 17)

“Lectures are useful and prepare you for exams. However, I think that I learn more when discussing pictures.” (Student 20)

Some students found lecture-discussions to be a welcome variation in the midst of other more conversational and reflective methods of learning.

“My thoughts don’t stay focused during lectures, so it’s not so useful for me. But sometimes it’s ok and relaxing, because you don’t feel like discussing things all the time.” (Student 10)

The students’ comments on the lecture-discussion method emphasized the role of cognitive skills and rationality, and there were no references to more experiential dimensions of learning. Most students agreed that lectures provided them with important insights into works of art and art history in general. Otherwise, the responses were diverse. Some students found both lecturing and writing notes a useful way of learning, whereas others found it difficult to concentrate on listening and writing at the same time. The chance to participate and pose questions and comments during lectures was motivating. However, this method drew the fewest comments from the students, and the scope of the comments was very narrow, mainly being focused on the gaining of knowledge.

Discussion

The data showed that students were capable of analysing different teaching methods and ways of learning, as well as evaluating their contribution to learning art history, which suggests that their metacognitive skills had developed well. The students also compared different teaching methods, even though this was not explicitly requested. This can be regarded as a result of learning-by-doing, whereby different aspects of learning become intertwined.⁶⁰ They felt that different teaching methods combined theory and practice in a way that improved their skills in applying art history—a conclusion that corresponds with previous studies of learning.⁶¹ Knowledge and the ability to use it were considered equally important, which suggests that, in substance, art history should be viewed as a combination of propositional and performative skills.

All of the teaching methods used in this study were considered appropriate and

⁶⁰ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 82.

⁶¹ Nancy Winitzky and Don Kauchak, “Constructivism in Teacher Education: Applying Cognitive Theory to Teacher Learning,” in Virginia Richardson, ed., *Constructivist Teacher Education: Building a World of New Understandings* (London, Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press, 1997), 59-83.

useful. This may be partly due to the fact that students had already been used to active learning in prior schools, since the Finnish educational system has a long tradition of implementing methods of active learning at all levels of education.⁶² The students' comments on the lecture-discussion method emphasized the role of cognitive skills and reasoning; there were only a few references to the more experiential dimensions of learning. The students regarded writing assignments based on their own research projects as important means of widening and deepening their knowledge of art history. Versatile approaches to writing assignments seemed to help them understand art historical knowledge as contextual and artworks as being open to various interpretations. The method involving the discussion of pictures was regarded as an important form of collaborative learning, where each student's individual viewpoints contributed to a wider understanding of art and art history. Students regarded discussion as a good way of bridging their life-worlds and art history. In addition, the discussions had empowering potential, since many students reported that they had gained greater courage to discuss art and express their viewpoints in public.

Making pictures was the teaching method and way of learning that was most frequently and widely commented on. More than any other teaching method, it was thought to generate rich cognitive, bodily, and emotional experiences, as well as intimate and profound learning experiences. Making pictures interlaced knowledge of the past with present experiences that seemed to bridge the gap between the present and the past. Furthermore, it intertwined objects belonging to various visual cultures with students' own processes of making pictures, which seemed to intensify the dialogue between them and generate experiences of empathy and appreciation of various cultures and their modes of visual expression. The possibility of combining art history with the drawing skills, painting, and sculpting practiced in other Visual Expression courses was considered highly motivating.

All experimentation methods were based on observation and reflection on various pictures. The pictures seemed to tell their stories through their visual qualities.⁶³ As a result, the learning processes employed were not only the results of students' intentional construction of meaning, but the pictures also directed the process through their visual qualities. The students commented on the difference between verbal and visual approaches to studying. It became

⁶² Hannele Niemi, et al, "Epilogue," 166.

⁶³ See Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*

evident that they regarded visual learning activities as more intimate and personal, which may be due to the fact that visual assignments generated more emotional responses than verbal assignments. To conclude, picture-based teaching methods seemed to interlace the explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge.

The students' reflections revealed that visual and verbal assignments based on various means of expression created cognitive conflicts,⁶⁴ because the visual element could not be thoroughly verbalized, and the verbal element could not be visualized. However, it was precisely this incongruence between the visual and the verbal that seemed to loosen the grip of discursive logic and furnish processes of studying art history that included more experiential substrata. Operating between the verbal and visual was regarded as both challenging and motivating.

Students reported that their learning had focused on pictures and skills in operating with pictures, the key learning result being skills in visual literacy, which were divided between skills in understanding visual meanings and skills in expressing meanings visually.⁶⁵ Art history was viewed as the key contributor to visual literacy skills, while these skills were considered to form the core of art history itself. In addition, visual literacy was regarded as more of an operational skill than just an intellectual pursuit.

Conclusion

Teaching methods are never neutral frameworks but conscious or unconscious “statements” on the subject and its epistemological and ontological assumptions.⁶⁶ This study suggests that teaching methods in art history should be understood as representations of art history that correspond to contemporary conceptions of the discipline as well as in terms of the curriculum objectives at a specific level of education. This kind of contextual, subject-related didactics takes account of the fact that art history is taught at

⁶⁴ See Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (Savage, MD: Littlefield Adams Quality Paperbacks, 1975); Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

⁶⁵ See Elkins, *Visual Studies*; Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*.

⁶⁶ See Henry A. Giroux and Peter L. McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989).

different levels of education, guided by various objectives, and aimed at various outcomes. This study suggests that it would be beneficial for teachers to conceive of the substance of art history as consisting of two components—the propositional and performative—and as including both knowledge and the skills required to apply such knowledge.

In the curriculum of the Vocational Qualification in Visual Expression, art history has the role of providing students with a larger cultural framework that helps them to interpret objects belonging to visual culture as well as proposing their own visual products. These two processes can be synthesized to create skills in visual literacy.⁶⁷ The curriculum also emphasizes the role of aesthetics and emotional development in connection with art and art history. The picture-based methods used in this experiment succeeded in operationalising art history in ways that enabled students to learn skills appropriate to contemporary art history and the curriculum's objectives.

Making pictures, writing about pictures, discussing pictures, and lecture-discussion as teaching methods of art history are not innovations as such. However, their application in a student-centered manner seemed to contribute to the development of both the propositional and performative substance of art history. Teaching methods that interlaced verbal and visual elements, reason and emotion, and thinking and acting activated students to use their entire life-world as a resource in their art history studies. This kind of holistic and integrative approach to teaching based on multiple media may be a key factor when promoting profound and meaningful learning experiences in the field of art history.

⁶⁷ Simons, "From Visual Literacy," 85-89; Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, 23, 34, 73-74.

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Examples of Students' Work



Figure 1: CD cover, visual exploration of the Stone Age.



Figure 2: CD cover, visual exploration of ancient Rome.



Figure 3: Visual exploration of Australian aboriginal art.



Figure 4: Visual exploration of Buddhism.



Figure 5: Modernization of Caspar David Friedrich, *The Wanderer* (1818).



Figure 6: Modern ritual mask bringing eternal youth.