INSIGHTS INTO ART
UNIARTS HELSINKI’S YEAR 2017
The dance company TADaC, made up of Uniarts Helsinki’s dance performance master’s students, premiered Elina Pirinen’s choreography Kosto I-IX in January. The piece focused on fantasies of revenge and incorporated various kinds of emotional landscapes. "There’s a fantastic new generation of dancers entering the field", praises Pirinen, who herself is a Theatre Academy alumna.
University of the Arts Helsinki (Uniarts Helsinki), now five years old, represents the very best in music, fine art, theatre and dance education in Finland. Our goal is to rise to become an international pioneer in education and research. We have a strong belief in the important role that art and art education play in solving the problems of the future and in building a better life for us all. Our vision, ‘Art creates the future’, means that we want to be part of creating a future where artists, art researchers and educators play an increasingly active role in society.

Educating young artists is at the core of what we do but we are also strengthening our position as a research university. The focal points of our research are art pedagogy, artistic research, and the history of music and other fields of arts: these focus areas were all provided additional resources for the current year. Our multidisciplinary consortium project, ArtsEqual, received continued funding from the Academy of Finland last autumn. In this, the biggest art research project in the history of Finland, we look at how art as a public service could help promote social equality and wellbeing.

Our university is growing increasingly international, with already one in five students coming from outside Finland. Our fields of art are also equipped with strong global networks. Last year, we cooperated with other European arts universities in creating a research pavilion, which, for the second time ever, presented artistic research in a unique way. The pavilion took place in Venice coinciding with one of the most famous arts events in the world, the Venice Biennale. The pavilion attracted a lot of positive attention strengthening the visibility of artistic research. The next research pavilion will take place in 2019. QS World University Rankings, which compares universities globally, ranked our Sibelius Academy as the sixth best in the world in the field of performing arts. This fantastic result says a lot about our strong international reputation.

We are continually developing our cross-artistic educational content, some examples of which are already up and running: the study units in musical theatre, sound art and working life skills for artists. In autumn 2019 we will also launch a master’s degree programme in writing to strengthen the fields of literature and writing in Finland and enabling them to develop internationally.

Our fundraising campaign Art is a Gift, which came to an end last summer, proved a great success. The end result was 4.8 million euro, which, together with the State’s matching contribution, resulted in a significant addition of 10.3 million euro to the university’s capital. We will continue to strategically develop partnerships and private funding also in the future.

Many thanks to the entire university community for your dedicated work during these first five years. A warm thank you also to our many partners, investors and other valued interest groups for continual and fruitful collaboration.

JARI PERKJÖMÄKI
RECTOR
TRANSFORMING WORK
ART OFFERS SPACE TO INVESTIGATE TECHNOLOGY

The current role of artists as producers of meaning is an indicator of what our work will look like in the future, writes Tuomo Rainio, lecturer in art and technology.

What happens when you combine fine art painters and programming? Or when a filmmaker builds himself a camera?

Art and technology have always existed side by side. Both have undergone great transformations, but art has always been made in relation to the technology of the time. In that sense, the times we live in now are not exceptional, even if digitalisation has raised some interesting questions in relation to technology.

What is new, however, is that we have moved on from the time when technology was the domain of engineers alone. We need diversity in the debate on the social impact of technology, and we find it by listening to humanists, especially artists.

We should also consider talking about technology in ways that don’t begin with technology itself. Art can be a starting point. Since art comes into its own when it articulates the experience of being, it could open up, for instance, the relationship between man and machine in ways that can’t be done in the language of technology or economy. This would make art useful in creating technology that is more human.

I don’t see existing technologies or devices as finished methods, but rather as starting points that can be adapted and also misused. Emphasising an experimental approach to technology, is something I also want to relay to my students.

In the borderland of artistic autonomy, where art and non-art meet, we find interesting points of crossover. These intersections between art and science, or art and technology, help us make new connections.

I encourage my students to explore these border zones, because they are key in helping us discover something new. Correspondingly, art can also provide an exceptional platform for technology or science, a chance to discuss them from a surprising perspective, or in a manner that deviates from the norm.

The power of art lies in its ability to create meaning. I believe that the uncompromising spontaneity and ability to produce meaningful experiences that characterises the artist’s work is a good indicator of the nature of future work and its challenges.
Artistic competence can be used to solve the challenges of the future, in business as well as in the public sector.

Grief is often wordless. It is something you can feel in your entire body. So why not express it through the body, for instance, by dancing? This idea comes from Marja-Sisko Pohjola, a dance artist who created the concept of dance prayer – now a commercial product available for anyone, for instance for the funeral of a loved one.

Paula Tuovinen, Vice Rector of Uniarts Helsinki, names Pohjola as an example of how art can infiltrate society in new ways. “Artists have an increasingly permeable relationship with society. The myths surrounding artists are a thing of the past, and romantic notions of artistry crumbled a long time ago. Of course, we still find genius conductors, for instance, but most artists are increasingly working outside the traditionally artistic institutions.”

Tuovinen gives more examples: researcher Satu-Mari Jansson has employed methods from the theatre in coaching corporate leaders; visual artist Timo Tähkänen is working at a service centre for dementia patients; and visual artist Tiitus Petäjäniemi works from the premises of a legal firm. “Petäjäniemi makes art at the office and then observes the impact of his work”, explains Tuovinen.

The borders between art and traditional working life are, in other words, falling away. At the same time, the creative fields are experiencing rapid growth. In Great Britain, the creative industry has been the fastest growing sector since 2008. Also in Finland the number of people working with art, entertainment and recreation has increased by more than 30% since 2005.

Tuominen believes there is still scope for society to utilise artists in a broader context than it currently does. They could play an active role in solving the challenges of the future, in the corporate world as well as the public sector. This is also something Uniarts Helsinki is preparing for: the most significant research project at the university, with a view to reforming society, is ArtsEqual. It investigates the impact that artistic activity and art pedagogy have on equality, and how they can be used to prevent, for example, marginalisation.

Role-playing in preparation of working life

The changing role of the artist has also meant that an increasing number of artists are working as entrepreneurs. According to the most recent (2016) career follow-up survey, 11% of Uniarts Helsinki graduates either have a company or work as freelancers or independent entrepreneurs. The corresponding average rate for all universities taking part in the survey was 3%. “The situation has changed completely from the years when support systems for the arts were put in place. Take actors, for example: their income now comes mainly from elsewhere than the theatre. We do need to remember, however, that one reason for the increase in entrepreneurial artistry is sheer necessity”, says Tuovinen.

A successful entrepreneur needs other skills besides creativity and vision. That is why Uniarts Helsinki has introduced modules to help prepare students for working life. The university’s shared teaching platform, the Open Campus, has developed study modules to meet the need for working-life skills and entrepreneurial know-how. “One popular course has been “Working life LARP”, in other words a course where students get to role-play assignments that an artist may face in working life. Studies include practicing how to apply for grants and making offers”, explains Tuovinen.

A lecturer specialising in working life skills will also begin at Uniarts Helsinki this autumn, with the aim of bringing more mentoring and sparring partners to the students. Two special programmes for artists will also launch in autumn 2018, teaching, for example, the development of art-centric service concepts.

But wait a minute. Wouldn’t students of many other fields also benefit from role-playing working life? Along with artificial intelligence and other digital innovations, more and more graduates will find themselves in the role of employer or entrepreneur. We are on the cusp of a huge trend, as Tuovinen states. “Artists have always experimented with the work of the future. They will be the ones pointing the way to what the future will look like, also in other fields.”
STUDY MODULE IN MUSICAL THEATRE TO COMPENSATE FOR LACK OF TRAINED ARTISTS

Musical theatre is popular in Finland, but there is a lack of education in the field and therefore of artists specialising in the genre. To address this gap, Uniarts Helsinki has launched a multidisciplinary study module in musical theatre for students with varying backgrounds in theatre and music. “This education is absolutely necessary. Musical theatre is its very own field of art and competence, and also a big employer”, says Anna-Sofia Tuominen, an acting student who decided to take the new module.

Tuominen is hoping that the new module would also promote the development of musical theatre as a field of art. “I love musicals. The illusion of the theatre is at its most honest there – people don’t normally break into song in the middle of everything! But there is also a critical aspect to this art form, and there is a lot to criticise in the commercial world of musicals. This university-level education enables us to join the discussion.”

STUDENTS DEVELOPING TÖÖLÖNLAHTI

Helsinki Music Centre, Finlandia Hall, the Kansalaistori square, and soon also Helsinki’s main library Oodi – there is plenty of space and culture around the Töölönlahti bay area. But how do we get more people and life there?

This question is being explored in a development project for Töölönlahti, in which Uniarts Helsinki is one of the contributors. Master’s in Arts Management students interviewed organisation leaders active in the area, and the City of Helsinki will continue to develop the area based on the findings.

“The project was a success thanks to clearly defined aims and responsibilities. Students got a chance to network and take part in a project of both national and international significance. It was a pleasant surprise that the City wanted to hire one of our students to continue work on the project”, says Professor and Head of Arts Management Tanja Johansson.
JULIA AND ROMEO AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE

“I will probably never forget that phone call when Jussi called and asked if I’d like to come on board”, says Olli Riipinen. Riipinen plays Romeo in director Jussi Nikkilä’s Julia & Romeo at the National Theatre. Many of the actors in the praised production, along with Riipinen and Satu Tuuli Karhu (who plays Julia), are students or alumni of the Theatre Academy.

“The list of things I’ve learned is so long. How to take charge of a large space, both physically and mentally, how to make your voice carry without microphones, Shakespeare’s text... This has been a big challenge but also such a fantastic experience”, says Karhu.

Both Riipinen and Karhu say that the tips and encouragement they received from experienced colleagues were priceless. Although rehearsing was intense, the progress of their course didn’t suffer as they earned study credits from the production. It also formed part of Riipinen’s thesis project.

CONFIDENCE BOOST FROM FOREIGN RESIDENCE

Visual artist Maria Pääkkönen spent the last year at the Jan van Eyck international residence in Maastricht. “Going abroad gives you a new perspective. Finland is a small country, and it is definitely good to see what kind of art is being made elsewhere and how the art community operates in different countries”, says Pääkkönen.

At Jan van Eyck, Pääkkönen met artists, curators and other people involved in the arts from all over the world. “Our discussions were enlightening and broadened my understanding of art. My confidence about my own work also grew when I saw the rich scope and value of different working methods.”

Pääkkönen’s time at the residence was enabled by the Saastamoinen Foundation. The Foundation supports the internationalisation of visual arts education by funding, for example, visiting lecturers, mentoring, and residence periods.

LOOPS IN KAIJA SAARIAHO’S MUSIC

Last autumn, the Sibelius Academy arranged an international workshop titled Creative Dialogue IX, at which students of composition and string instruments worked together with composer Kaija Saariaho, cellist Anssi Karttunen and electronic music specialist David Poissonnier.

“It was interesting to get to be part of making new music. Working with Saariaho on her new piece was especially rewarding. An absolutely fantastic experience and format”, enthuses violin student Onni Toikka.

This year’s theme was electronics - all pieces had to incorporate it in one way or another.

“It was so much fun. For instance, in the Saariaho piece, we had access to pre-recorded loops that we switched on as we played. Another task was to record your own playing”, describes Toikka.
In March, I took part in a panel debate on sexual harassment in the workplace. Many participants prefaced their comment by saying “Now that the discussion is already fading somewhat...”. I wanted to jump up from my chair and shout “It is not!” Because I hope and believe that the debate about sexual harassment, assault and the misuse of power sparked by the #metoo movement of 2017, is only just beginning.

I studied to become an actor at the Theatre Academy in the early 1990s. Since then, both the education itself and society as a whole have undergone a massive change. This winter I have been following the debate on abuse of power with a sense of relief: we are finally talking about this!

In the theatre and cinema industries, the debate has already expanded from sexual harassment and assault to reflect on how the arts could better promote diversity. For a long time, art has told the stories of those in power. The debate is welcome: the ability to identify hierarchies enables us to tell the stories of those who have no power in society.

Young artists are now considering the ethics of their work in a completely different way than before, writes Professor of Acting, Elina Knihtilä.

Working methods do make a difference, because the creation of a film or a theatre performance is above all a collaborative endeavour. The end no longer justifies the means, even if art is made with the end result in mind.

As a Professor, I myself wield power. The discussion that is now taking place makes me look in the mirror too. What kind of power do I use in my work or my public appearances? The crucial thing is to identify your own blind spots: my own background strongly determines my values.

The discussion about harassment, assault and the abuse of power is only just beginning because it is not just a tick-the-box-and-move-on type of issue. Processing the individual cases that have come to light, or putting good practice into place to prevent harassment in the future are not enough. We must make analysing the use of power a part of our everyday working culture.

The most important takeaway from the discussion so far is that the power structures have become visible. Only when visible they can be evaluated and challenged. For this, artistic education has to offer tools. Transparency requires constant maintenance – and this applies in equal measure to art, art education and other areas of society.

Elina Knihtilä
Actor and Professor of Acting
at the Theatre Academy of Uniarts Helsinki
The purpose of arts education is not to give ready-made answers, but to teach students to ask questions. Over the last few decades, the Finnish society has become increasingly pluralistic. Urbanisation, secularisation, immigration, liberalisation of values and the increased appetite for travelling have all changed the environment in which artists operate. In 2017, the #metoo movement brought sexual harassment and misuse of power into the public debate. On the other hand, the nature of the debate has intensified in recent years, and racism, for example, has increased.

What do these social changes mean for arts education and what is their impact? Rector of Uniarts Helsinki Jari Perkiömäki brings up the notion of how traditions and critical examination of these traditions can coexist.

“University, as an environment, enables the dialogue and, sometimes, friction between different perspectives. Its purpose is not merely to pass on traditions, but to give students different perspectives and tools that they can use to develop their own artistry and to also engage in the social debate”, says Perkiömäki.

Perkiömäki emphasises that education is not there to give students ready-made answers. Instead, it strives to offer students the skills needed to come up with their own thoughts and interpretations and to work as responsible artists. “Our three values – skill, courage and inclusivity – are closely intertwined. Good education equips students with skills, meaning the mastery of tradition, but also with the courage to challenge that tradition. A sense of responsibility over others and inclusivity are what make this coexistence possible.”

Building courage by breaking boundaries

Course design is one of the ways the university helps its students to become more responsible artists. New courses cross boundaries between art disciplines, give opportunities for gaining international experience and consider the diverse nature of society. For example, students in the international Degree Programme in Global Music collaborated with asylum seekers and, in a course led by Hanna Brotherus, students worked with recovering addicts. Students from the Academy of Fine Arts’ time and space programme carried out a development cooperation project called “Expressing exclusion” in Nepal. The Master’s Degree Programme in Ecology and Contemporary Performance has explored how artists could participate in solving challenges posed by the climate change.

Diversity is also at the centre of Minja Koskela’s research. Koskela is a doctoral researcher in the field of music education at the Sibelius Academy. Her research focuses on how gender, culture and racialisation are seen in the everyday context of Finnish music education. “My objective is to find out how we could make teaching even more equal and democratic”, says Koskela. One major impetus for Koskela’s research was the refugee crisis that reached its peak in autumn 2015, and the resulting debate that, at times, revealed blatant racism.

So it’s clear that artists and researchers are encouraged to be bold, but exactly how active and daring are Uniarts Helsinki’s own experts in the social debate? Ville Sandqvist, Director of the Centre for Joint Studies at the Theatre Academy, encourages the university to take on a more leading role. “We could adopt a much bolder identity as contributors and debaters in society. I think the most effective way of teaching students how to participate in the social debate is to lead by example, by taking a stance and creating platforms for discussions.”

Minja Koskela agrees. A forerunner who values diversity must constantly look in the mirror and challenge their own actions. “A multicultural society can become more equal only by becoming aware of the prevailing hegemony and then challenging it and by engaging in constant dialogue with different cultures and individuals.”
PROMOTING EQUALITY IN ART HOBBIES

The school day starts late for the young ones. Their evenings are filled with hobbies and the days grow long. But the option of hobbies is not open for everyone. Art hobbies in particular are usually reserved for the children of university-educated parents with good incomes. This became apparent in Uniarts Helsinki’s ArtsEqual research project on the Finnish Children’s Cultural Centers.

The research found that the threshold for participation could be lowered if art hobbies were arranged in school facilities in connection with the school day. This would also make the daily routine easier for many.

In Uniarts Helsinki’s new pilot project, pedagogy students run Art Clubs in a few Helsinki area schools in the mornings before the school day starts. The aim is to promote equality in art hobbies.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: FOUCAL'T AND CLIMATE CHANGE

What do climate change, French philosopher Michel Foucault and acting have in common? The answer: at the very least Anu Koskinen’s artistic research project, “How to Embody an Ecological Catastrophe”, which brings Foucault to the stage. The research has resulted in the performance Tältä Planealta (From this planet), which premiered last spring.

Foucault studied power in different forms, which makes him well-suited to investigating an ecological catastrophe. Koskinen drew upon the theories of Foucault already in her doctoral thesis, which focussed on the emotional states of the actor. “When I was completing my doctoral thesis, I got frustrated with just writing. Foucault is close to my heart, but I want to connect him to movement, to the use of our bodies. It was a wonderful moment for me, getting to bring Foucault physically to the stage as a character.”

The research is funded by the Kone Foundation.
FALSTAFF MEETS THE BRITISH ROYAL FAMILY

The Giuseppe Verdi classic, Falstaff, was the final production of the cohort of Sibelius Academy’s opera students who started their course in 2015. The story was given a modern twist by setting it in the context of the British Royal Family. The comic opera was directed by Ville Saukkonen, and its theme was aging. The orchestra was conducted by Professor Markus Lehtinen in collaboration with Greek-born conducting student Kornilios Michailidis. The production formed a part of Michailidis’ thesis project. The acclaimed stage design was created by Sampo Pyhälä.
INSPIRING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

**APPLICANTS ADMITTED STUDENTS**

7.5% of all applicants were admitted to Uniarts Helsinki.

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**

Uniarts Helsinki has 1,968 students.*

**COMPLETED DEGREES**

A total of 164 students came to Uniarts Helsinki as exchange students or went abroad via an exchange programme.

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

15% of bachelor’s and master’s degree students and 21% of doctoral students come from outside Finland.

**EXCHANGE STUDENTS’ SATISFACTION** *

Best ranking out of all Finnish higher education institutions in the categories:

- quality of content of courses
- quality of teaching methods
- integration with local students

* National feedback from Erasmus exchange students 2016–2017

**INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYEES**

11.4% of our teaching and research staff come from outside Finland.

**INTERNATIONALISATION**

Percentage of international teaching and research staff

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* The total number of students. The number of full-time students (FTE) is 1548.
RESEARCH WITH AN IMPACT

THREE RESEARCH CENTRES

- Centre for Artistic Research (CIAR)
- Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts (CERADA)
- History Forum

PUBLICATIONS BY TYPE

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Number of researchers:

- 22 researchers
  (Academy of Finland research fellow, researcher, postdoctoral researcher, university researcher)
- 63 professors
- 34 doctoral trainees
  (employed by the university)

EXTERNAL RESEARCH FUNDING

2.0 million euros
of external research funding

Amount of competitive research funding which is reported also to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

STRONG UNIVERSITY WITH NETWORKS

PUBLIC ARTISTIC ACTIVITY

- Exhibitions: 52
- Concerts: 758
- Theatre and dance performances: 451 (44 premiers)
- Commissioned concerts (Primo events service): 105

RESULTS OF FUNDRAISING

Art is a Gift campaign collected 4.8€ = 10.3€ million under the government’s matched funding scheme

INCOME STATEMENT 1000 €

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TOTAL INCOME

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SURPLUS/DEFICIT

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PERSONNEL FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)

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Heidi Partti
Teacher, researcher and Professor of Music Education

It is rarely a good idea to make sharp distinctions between art and science, writes Professor of Music Education Heidi Partti.

I became a researcher gradually and by accident, as a result of looking for my place in the world. I got caught up in questions, musings and conceptualisations. You might say I never really made the transition from studies to working life. Fortunately for me, it’s possible to make a career out of asking questions.

I investigate points of crossover where the wider socio-cultural reality melts with – or crashes into – the everyday life of the classroom. I’m fascinated by changes and phenomena that unavoidably get attached to social mechanisms, while at the same time challenging individuals to ponder their own values and goals. For instance, how does digitalisation challenge our understanding of musicianship? Or how does multiculturalism affect the contents of music teacher education?

My work as a researcher requires me to constantly cross borders. Music education is a field where the lines between different sciences get blurred. I jump between behavioural sciences, the arts, philosophy and cultural research in order to find new theoretical routes. In modern research, how we delineate methods is constantly changing, and most of the time it’s not a good idea even to distinguish between art and science. The researcher works as part of an international community of peers. That is why we need to have both the will and the ability to cross borders between countries, languages and cultures. For me, this is one of the best parts of the job, and something that’s closely connected to my most important discoveries and most fun adventures. At the same time, crossing cultural borders forces us to face the limitations of our thinking and the edges of our personal comfort zones.

In addition to researching, I also teach. For teachers who also do research, the ability to knit together theory and practice is extremely important. Sometimes research takes the form of recommending measures, at other times it guides the planning of the syllabus. It seldom offers any readymade operating guidelines. What it should offer, however, is tools for thinking outside the box and the kind of reflection that helps us understand and reform the world around us.

The researcher and the teacher also have their own boundaries that should not be crossed. Commonly agreed boundaries create a sense of security. It is the responsibility of each researcher-teacher to keep the ethical compass in working order and be clear about the difference between education and indoctrination, between influencing and spouting propaganda.
RESEARCH ACROSS BORDERS

Multidisciplinary research produces knowledge that helps us challenge social injustice. Uniarts Helsinki’s core value is to bring research and art ever closer together.

Arts research is exceedingly breaking new ground. And this is exactly as it should be. According to Lauri Väkevä, Vice Rector in charge of research and doctoral studies at Uniarts Helsinki, multidisciplinary research plays a crucial role in providing decision-makers with new information and challenging social injustice.

“There is much activity on the research front at Uniarts Helsinki in 2017. The university’s three new research centres were strengthened with internal resourcing and received additional funding from the Academy of Finland. The Centre for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts (CERADA) focuses on researching art pedagogy, the Centre for Artistic Research (CiAR) targets artistic research, and the History Forum researches art history.

Borders between universities have also been crossed. Collaboration between Uniarts Helsinki, the University of Helsinki and Aalto University resulted, for example, in a seminar at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art. The emphasis was on the networking of researchers within the arts. “We are in the process of establishing two shared professorships with a multidisciplinary profile. One will be based in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki, and the other at Uniarts Helsinki.”

The idea of strengthening the multidisciplinary aspect is not just intended to support impactful research, but also to promote the individual career paths of researchers, summarises Väkevä.

In the global arena

Art research is not only becoming more multidisciplinary, it is also becoming more networked internationally. Lauri Väkevä is especially happy about the research pavilion, which was arranged in connection with the Venice Biennale last year. “The pavilion was unique. It brought, for the first time, a research perspective to this internationally significant visual arts event. Representatives from all our different fields of art participated in the pavilion, making it stand out from the mainstream Biennale programme.”

So what kind of understanding can you gain through multidisciplinary research? Uniarts Helsinki already has a number of interesting examples to showcase. Professor Heikki Ulmonen participated in a multidisciplinary research project where his group investigated the impact music and background noise have on our choice of food in supermarkets, fine dining restaurants and lunch restaurants. The project combined food science, sociology, architecture, music research and economics.

Visual artist and Dean of the Academy of Fine Arts Jan Kaila collaborated with archaeologists and used items from a transit camp for German soldiers in Hanko as material for his artistic research. Markus Rissanen, who defended his doctoral thesis last year, combined approaches from fine art, maths and cultural history in his investigation of basic shapes used in art and science – meanwhile solving, as the first in the world, a certain mathematical hypothesis.

Susanna Hast, Research doctor at the Theatre Academy whose background is in researching international relations, is studying corporeal techniques in proximity to war. In her research, she uses interviews and movement analysis to investigate how capoeira is taught at the Zaatar refugee camp and how cadets are trained at the National Defence University.

Research at Uniarts Helsinki is also increasingly stretching outward from the academic community, says Lauri Väkevä. “When it comes to researching the arts, Uniarts Helsinki has assumed the role of facilitator with a responsibility of calling together the whole field. This serves the art world but also the whole of society.”
OPERA – ELITISM OR ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE MASSES?

Say the word ‘opera’, and equality may not necessarily be the first thing that comes to mind. Academy researcher Liisamaija Hautsalo’s research project, Politics of Equality in Finnish Opera challenges our understanding of the perceived elitism of this particular art form. “By international comparison, we create an astounding amount of opera in Finland”, says Hautsalo. Small community productions that deal with local topics are often very popular. The equal nature of opera can also be seen in books on the subject and in experiments with different forms. The topics of Finnish operas range from plumbing renovations to municipal politics, they can be implemented as puppet theatre or animation, or even feature disco music. “The notion of the welfare state that was established in the 1960s is still a strong influence. Its central message is that all culture belongs to everybody”.

DECISION-MAKERS COMPOSING MUSIC

When Sibelius Academy’s music teacher programme celebrated its 60th anniversary last year, the idea was to do it with a certain panache. “The arts play an important role in society, but the attitude towards them is quite cold at the moment”, explains the Head of Music Education Max Tabell.

As part of the celebrations, music educators invited decision-makers to compose a piece of music for Finland’s 100th anniversary. They used same approach as in the Kuule, minä sävellän! project, in which children compose music for orchestra under the guidance of students and professional composers. “Sure, it was lobbying, but we wanted to do it in style and offer decision-makers an experience. The high quality of direction took them by surprise.”

At the same time the strengths of music education were highlighted, for instance its wide scope and foundation in research.

ARABIC WRITING IN SNOW

Bluish white photographs are placed upon springs organised in rows. The photographs show Arabic text written in snow, forming a pathway. “I’m a third-generation Tatar living in Finland. The text is a letter written by my father to his father in 1940, in the Tatar language, which I walked out in the snow in an East Helsinki suburb. I felt that this artwork allowed me to act as a bridge between the public and private spheres – between public space and personal language.”

Doctoral student Niran Baibulat from the Academy of Fine Arts exhibited her installation, Access to Landscape, at Uniarts Helsinki’s research pavilion, which took place in Venice, in connection with the Venice Biennale.

The research pavilion brought together networks of artistic research from the Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe. Over the course of five months, the pavilion showcased three exhibitions of modern art and hosted over forty multidisciplinary artistic events.
I love my home in the Kannelmäki district of Helsinki. I’m a runner, and I can access a park straight from my own doorstep. When I see something beautiful while out running, I stop and take a picture. Last year I added the hashtag #Suomi100 to all my nature shots. It was so interesting to live in Helsinki as an American during Finland’s centennial celebrations. I also received the special honor of getting to contribute to the festivities myself as a performer.

I study bass trombone at the Sibelius Academy. In spring 2017, we got the opportunity to apply to join a symphony orchestra consisting of students from the Sibelius Academy and the Juilliard School; two music schools that are both placed in the top ten in a global ranking. The orchestra, formed in honor of Finland’s 100 years of independence, was conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. In the fall, we went on a tour that took us from Helsinki via Stockholm to New York. It was such a fantastic opportunity to get to play alongside some of the best students in the world, and under the leadership of a top conductor. What made the biggest impression on me was the passion that both the students as well as Salonen himself showed for music.

The highlight of my second year spent in Finland came when I got to play with students from the Juilliard School under the direction of Esa-Pekka Salonen, writes student Danna Nelson.

Performing in the US was special also in the sense that it was my first visit to my homeland in a year. I literally felt like I was part of two cultures at once. My Finnish friends in the orchestra asked me for practical advice about New York, while the American students were astounded to see how much rye bread and salmon I was eating for breakfast at the hotel.

A week before Finland’s Independence Day we performed a concert together with the Kymi Sinfonietta. A magical moment happened during that concert. Right before the concert started, I saw a young girl in the audience who looked a little bored. After we had played Sibelius’ second symphony, she was smiling. I started to cry. Coincidentally, Sibelius’ second symphony is important to me personally, because it was playing in my headphones on the plane over here when I first arrived and saw the Finnish forest from the plane window.

In honor of Finland’s 100 years of independence, I can also add that I’m really grateful for the high-class education and opportunities that Finland has offered me. In the future – when I am a professional musician – I hope to be able to give something back to this country.
Performances, concerts and exhibitions form a vital part of our students’ growth into artists. Last year we celebrated and interpreted Finland’s 100 years of independence.

In 1967, water began streaming into Lokka, a village in the area of what is now Sodankylä. To regulate the water amount from power plants in the Kemijoki river, a giant artificial lake was built. Over 600 people, Finns and Sámi, had to relocate elsewhere. One person who grew up in the reservoir area was the late grandfather of Emma Peura, a student at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Last year Peura drew a map of the Lokka area. The artwork was named Allas (reservoir or pool), because that is what the locals called it, not a lake. “Lokka was my grandfather’s cherished home. It was very traumatic to have to leave. Those who moved away called themselves ‘reservoir evacuees’. I investigated old maps and drew a new one, marking as clearly as possible all the things that were left under the reservoir, such as villages, string bogs and reindeer pastures.” Peura’s map became one of the artworks featured in the Academy of Fine Arts’ Finland 100 exhibition Kriittinen kartta (‘Critical map’). While inspecting the map, viewers could listen to an audio piece where Peura’s father shared her grandfather’s stories. The exhibition, held at the Academy of Fine Arts gallery Exhibition Laboratory, was a culmination of a course run by visiting professors Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen.

Twelve artists participated in the exhibition. The shared starting point was to look beyond the centennial celebrations in an effort to broaden our understanding of different phenomena bubbling beneath the surface. “Together we selected visiting artists to come and discuss with us, and we toured the country both with them as well as separately. The length of the course made it possible for students to discover a theme that was in dialogue with their personal history as well as with the wider society”, says Tellervo Kalleinen.

Art is not made in a vacuum

Uniarts Helsinki arranges over 1,400 events per year. Last year the total number of visitors was over 72,000. Public performance is always an essential part of arts education. Students of the Theatre Academy tackled the 100th anniversary of Finland’s independence by carrying out, under the leadership of director Juha Hurme, a tour of evening entertainment called Suomi 100 000. The boisterous and humorous look at Finnish history was performed at 16 village halls around Finland.

Sibelius Academy students had the opportunity to engage in an intense international collaboration as they formed a joint symphony orchestra with students of the Juilliard School in New York.

The teachers of Uniarts Helsinki are also active as artists. According to Telervro Kalleinen, the joint teacher-student exhibition project was a great success. “The students had a bold and creative take on Finnish history. It was wonderful to get to meet the young generation of artists and learn from them as much as they hopefully did from us.”

Interaction with the audience is another important part of exhibitions and performance. Art is always in dialogue with society, often adopting a critical stance. The Academy of Fine Arts’ Kriittinen kartta project also included a ‘Dependence party’, arranged at the gallery during the exhibition. Each artist could bring a guest that somehow related to their artwork. Peura invited her Sámi relative Hilkka Magga, an expert in the Lokka area and the history of the Sámi people. The Allas artwork took a critical view of the history of the Lokka area.

“I am happy about Finland’s independence, but nothing is simply black and white. There is a lot of difficult stuff too. I want my artwork to serve as a reminder that these things have happened”, says Peura...
Exhibition Laboratory, one of the galleries of the Academy of Fine Arts, became an even more versatile venue than before in 2017. In October, the newly-built stalls were filled with an audience taking part in a symposium of painting. The symposium was organised in connection with an exhibition, titled Constellations, curated by Professor in Painting Fergus Feehily. The participants included international and Finnish artists, recently-graduated alumni, and students. The exhibition also featured unique items acquired from archives and private collections.
NATIONAL LANDSCAPES THROUGH THE CAMERA OBSCURA

Lighting design student Alexander Salvesen’s thesis project Minds capes Landscapes was carried out in an unusual setting: Salvesen and his team took the piece on tour around Finnish national landscapes, from Kilpisjärvi to Hanko. The team put up a tent out in nature and reflected the surrounding landscape on the wall via the lens of a camera obscura. “The landscape is always creating new scenography for the piece, affecting how viewers perceive it. It is strongly underpinned by the notion of the versatility of nature, of bringing people out into the landscape in order to appreciate what we have around us”, says Salvesen.

One of the financial backers of the project was Metsähallitus, a new partner institution of the Theatre Academy. One particular aim of this collaboration is to use art to enliven Vallisaari island in the Helsinki archipelago.

A FIELD TRIP BEYOND THE SURFACE

“It’s a completely different thing to see pictures of artworks than to actually travel to see them, meeting curators and other people in the art business. We got to go a lot deeper than the surface.” This is how Ingrid Orman, who is studying to become an art curator on the Praxis programme, described a spring-time field trip to Athens. She took part to acquaint herself with the Kassel Documenta 14 satellite exhibition.

The trip was part of a course on Athens, run by the head of the master’s programme Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger and Nikos Doulos, who is from Athens. According to Orman, who works as a producer for Espoo City Art Museum EMMA, studying in the Praxis programme has meant a great deal for her professional development. “The quality of teaching is really good.”

FOR THE LOVE OF ART

Uniarts Helsinki’s fundraising campaign was completed in summer 2017. The campaign exceeded its goals outstandingly: when taking into consideration the government’s matched funding scheme, the overall sum mounted up to 10.3 million euros.

Uniarts Helsinki received donations from private donors, foundations and corporations. The Saastamoinen Foundation and Louise and Göran Ehrnrooth Foundation were the biggest sponsors. Many donors felt that giving support for education was an investment on Finnish art and its future. “The donation is a token of what I personally find meaningful. Through art, we can discuss current affairs and experience something that can’t be communicated in the news. Finland has incredibly talented artists, and I want this to be the case also in the future. Good education gives the skills needed for creating art”, says private donor Anu Karessuo.

The fundraising campaign also left its mark on people’s everyday lives in Helsinki. The university collaborated with visual artist Katja Tukiainen and produced a community-engaged artwork at the Kamppi Shopping Centre, where passers-by were invited to take part in creating a large painting.