



Article V

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*Knitting circle performance at the TATE Liverpool. The conversations moved in the memories and bodily experience of knitting
Image: Annamari Manninen, 2018.*

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Heritage as a verb



In 2017, at Tate Liverpool in the United Kingdom, my colleagues and I organised an art performance where we invited the visitors of the gallery to join us to knit in a traditional knitting circle and reflect their relationship to knitting. This performance was part of a week-long *Tate Exchange* exhibition, entitled *From Mittens to Barbies* and it was organised by the international Arts-Based Education Research (ABER) network. The network aimed to develop higher education research and the exhibition was organised as a collaborative event with different types of participatory artistic actions to model ABER practices and discuss their outcomes. We believed that knitting together in an art gallery would be rather unusual, compared to the traditional setting of knitting circles taking place in people's homes, and would bring innovative perspectives to the traditional, sometimes perceived as commonplace, practice of knitting. The rhythm of knitting created an intimate space for dialogue where true values and multiple meanings of cultural heritage could be negotiated. These negotiations remain particularly timely with the Council of Europe's (2020) *Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, also known as the Faro Convention.

Faro promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to society and seeks creative ways of developing and managing community heritage (Council of Europe, 2020). The convention's philosophy has moved away from a conservation orientation (static) towards recognizing the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process (active) of defining cultural heritage. Smith (2006) calls this kind of heritage understanding a performance or act of embodied meanings, remembering, and effects. These principles apply also to performative dimensions of contemporary art in which art is seen as an action inviting people to engage instead of encouraging them to passively observe as an audience (Sederholm, 2002; Hiltunen, 2012). Combining traditional handcrafts with contemporary art practices through intergenerational and intercultural approaches creates an open space for dialogue where the values and the perceptions of

cultural heritage can be negotiated (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2018). At this intersection of traditional handcrafts and contemporary art, I see the possibilities of weaving together traces of traditional and innovative uses of heritage. The active meaning-making of cultural heritage, an objective of Faro, requires a view towards aspects of diverse values and interpretations of cultural heritage in striving for a sustainable future (Théron, 2009).

In this chapter, I aim to follow the spirit of the Faro Convention and examine how traditional knitting circles as an art performance set in the context of an art museum stir discussion on the contemporary meaning-makings of traditions as cultural heritage. The framework for my study comes from the ABER network's research project, *The Pedagogical Turn to Art as Research*, that aims to develop arts practices in doctoral programmes around the globe. This article is also part of my broader research interest in developing higher education in the arts through the principle of cultural sustainability. I am especially interested in the intersection of craft traditions and contemporary art, particularly how perception of the tradition either deepen or change when brought into a new context.

I have based my research on the methods of ABER and Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR) (Jokela, 2019). At the core of ABAR research activities is interaction among participants, and the researcher is usually an equal participant in the action. My data were generated through dialogic participation, observation, and documentation of the art performance at Tate Liverpool. To gain knowledge, especially on crafting as action, I utilised the theoretical studies of *Making as Method* (Fitzpatrick & Reilly, 2019) that discusses crafting as an embodied knowledge and seeks its innovative uses in research.

From object to process: Faro perspectives on cultural heritage

The term *cultural heritage* is usually connected to the protection of historical monuments. Fojut (2009) explains that this rather narrow connotation has roots in the past when, starting from the mid-1960s, heritage action concentrated on conserving valuable heritage sites and heritage discourse was strongly expert-dominated. He argues that expert-lead conservation policy strengthened the limited definition and made heritage practice exclusive. Previously, the ordinary populace was not involved in cultural decision-making, and conservation of heritage was seen as its main mission (Fojut, 2009).

In the late 1990s, the focus gradually changed. Balancing among local, regional, national, and international interests in heritage was considered a necessity. This laid

the foundation for the Faro Convention that entered the scene internationally in 2011 (Council of Europe, 2020). The greatest difference in Faro from previous heritage conventions is the shift of perspective from conservation to developing interest in the social and cultural benefits of cultural heritage (Fairclough, et al., 2014). Faro builds on the collective heredity and seeks ways to promote understanding of the meaning of common European heritage. Faro stresses everyone's equal rights to participate in cultural life and simultaneously emphasizes individual and collective responsibility to respect the cultural heritage of others. Fundamentally, Faro takes steps to involve heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society that promotes cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2020). The value of heritage is recognised in conflict resolution, in economic regeneration, in education for citizenship, and in promotion of sustainable development (Fojut, 2009).

In suggesting *heritage* be coined as a verb, I refer to Faro's way of defining heritage as a socially constructed process of remaking. The shift from recognising only the knowledge of experts to validating the agency and ownership of everyone turns heritage into an action rather than a noun (see Smith, 2006; Fairclough, 2014). When heritage is seen as a socially active process, the intangible aspects of heritage rise to the surface, including knowledge-related crafting skills and traditions of making. Heritage as a verb also invites innovative approaches to examine and seek new meanings for old traditions in contemporary culture. Innovation does not necessarily mean progress into something new and fancy, but instead innovation holds potential in helping people view valuable tacit functions in a new light.

Professor of heritage and museum studies in the Australian National University, Laurajane Smith (2006) argues that all heritage is actually intangible. While objects and localities may exist as identifiable sites of heritage, what makes these valuable and meaningful, in fact, are the present-day cultural processes and activities undertaken around them (Smith, 2006). Although it is not meaningful to translate cultural heritage only as private and personal, it is inevitable that heritage conveys deep personal values and meanings. Smith (2006) continues that heritage is about negotiation, about using the past, about collective or individual memories, and about new ways of being and expressing identity. Heritage includes the concepts of *identity*, *power*, *memory*, *place*, and *performance* (Smith, 2006). Recognising these dimensions of heritage on a personal level helps individuals to perceive the ingredients of their cultural identity and sense of belonging in a larger historical and regional cultural continuation.

Making, Embodiment and Memory

Today, we are resurrecting our mothers' and grandmothers' activities (Lippard, 2010). Traditional local knowledge with long historic roots is a valuable form of cultural heritage for contemporary culture, and traditional crafting skills and various purposes for handcrafting finds new meanings in the generational chain (Härkönen et al., 2018). Passed down from one generation to the next as an embodied practice, crafting is a social process for empowerment, action, and expression (Fitzpatrick & Reilly, 2019). My roots are in Central Lapland in Finland where knitting has been a commonly mastered skill for generations, and it is still taught in schools, so my two sons also know how to knit. It has long been a part of the northern Finnish cultural tradition beyond cultural boundaries. I recall my grandmother knitting at every possible moment in between her other domestic duties, and Sámi duodjar Gunvor Guttorm (2015) speaks about her mother and grandmother finding time to knit to get a break from responsibilities. While sitting down to knit, they had a chance to rest and find space for themselves (Guttorm, 2015). I have continued my mother's and grandmother's knitting enthusiasm in using the craft as a medium for my artistic expression.



Figure 1. Woollen Sceneries 2017. In this artwork, I have examined a landscape experience through knitting. The mittens were used as reference for the knitting circle at the Tate gallery. Photo: Elina Härkönen, 2017.

People have gathered together for centuries to share their stories through crafting to construct beauty, meaning, and culture from whatever they had on hand (Fitzpatrick & Reilly, 2019). Knitting circles have long traditions, and they are often connected to charity work and to religious life. Ford (2006) argues that, although usually perceived as a woman's hobby or social event in her spare time, these knitting circles have held deeper meaning. For instance, one purpose of some circles has been to produce prayer shawls for people in need. As a ministry, these groups have attracted women, and occasionally men, from all walks of life and all age groups (Ford, 2006). Like Ford, Lippard (2010) highlights the common perception for women's crafting as 'hobby art,' and for a number of years, traditional crafts, like Native American Navajo rugs, gained public attention only if re-presented through male artists. This has affected that crafting as art has often been considered a private activity, mainly for personal reasons (Lippard, 2010).

According to Ford (2006), knitting itself has been seen as a meditative, spiritual activity, and the knitting circle meetings would start with an hour of complete silence. This is used to settle the mind and move into the rhythm of knitting. Only after the silence would discussion start, in which concerns, life situations, and helpful knitting tips are shared (Ford, 2006). If the maker is alert, handcrafting can stir versatile perceptions through all the senses that guide the making, and the making is realized by the movements of the maker's body (Kojonkoski-Rännäli, 2014). Craft does not, however, reside in the body but moves between the maker and the object being made (MacGill, 2019). Similarly, this principle applies to artmaking. Ufan (2010) speaks about the importance of the bodily experience in the making; repeated actions enable transformations in ideas. This increases the depth and expansiveness of the made artwork. As more externality is incorporated, transparency fades, and the unknown appears (Ufan, 2010). This exchange is connected to the qualities of the aesthetic learning processes that Hellman (2019) describes as supporting the unexpected linking of objects, thoughts, and areas of knowledge, as well as the disentanglement of what is already known. Arts-Based Education Research (ABER) aims to achieve similar outcomes, especially for art educators. Sinner (2019) refers to Turchi when she says that art scholars in higher education should break with tradition to become a new tradition, no longer an exception but the rule, and to form a body of art that is historical and contemporary at the same time. This is how tradition and innovation meet through art education, in formal and informal settings.

Through bringing a traditional knitting circle to the museum context, we wanted to test if such an act would make visible the tacit knowledge often hidden in the embodiment of knitting and provide a channel for tradition to emerge through the means of art

performance. The performative nature of contemporary art often appears in interaction processes and initiates new meaning-making for ordinary practices. Sederholm (2002) stresses that performative expression is not closed to more than one interpretation but offers alternative ways of acting and perceiving to the prevailing cognitive structures. Its contextuality, temporality, and materiality tie the expression to action, and in communal contexts, the aspects of communication, creation, and being present can create meaningful encounters for individuals (Sederholm, 2002). Hiltunen (2012) sees the possibilities of performativity in arts education to channel private bodily experiences of art to be collectively shared, enabling larger audiences to participate in the art. Performativity taking place at the intersection of social interaction, feelings of togetherness, and symbolic kinship leads to empowerment and emancipation (Hiltunen, 2012). Performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language in determining what is real (Barad, 2003). Through making the bodily experience visible, artisans can understand and find new meanings for the common way of perceiving the world.

Working with heritage through the means of crafts and the arts offers possibilities to develop embodied knowing and attaching to forgotten memories through the sense of material and through the rhythm of making. According to Crouch and Parker (2003), embodied practice enables people to remember past events and rework the events through the present. They emphasise that in the doing, moments of memory are recalled and reactivated and, thus, may be drawn upon in new combinations of signification. The past can never be understood solely within its own terms; the present continually rewrites the meaning of the past (Smith, 2006). Crouch and Parker (2003) remark that by acknowledging the links between memory and remembering, and linking these with the idea of heritage, we can obtain a more nuanced understanding of the emotional quality and power of the cultural process of heritage. This reinforces the idea of heritage, not a passive subject of management and conservation or tourist visitation, but as an active process engaged with the construction and negotiation of meaning through remembering (Smith, 2006).

Arts-based Research and Making as Method

One of the objectives of the broader Tate Exchange, *From Mittens to Barbies*, in which the knitting circle was one of five participatory events, was to model and investigate the emerging Arts-Based Education Research (ABER) practices through a comparative international study of doctoral programmes. The aim of ABER, for instance, is to provide practice-based tools for art pedagogies to research and develop their effectiveness and

to investigate art as a source of knowledge (see Sinner, 2019). ABER embraces practice-gained knowledge. It is against seeing art as subordinate, an exotic component of research, and places creative process at the core of knowledge production in educational research practices (see Adams, 2019). My methodological choices form a hybrid approach in which ABER defines the framework and the motives for action. Through my research, I aim to contribute to ABER, and as an arts educator-researcher, I examine my own work and seek key development points.

With my research focused on action and outcomes, my tools for creating the action, collecting the data, and analysing the data came from Arts-Based Action Research (ABAR). Jokela (2019) describes ABAR as case-specific and developmental research that follows the traditions of action research, which is formed as part of qualitative research. It has cyclical processes of research that include the definitions of objectives and research tasks, planning, theoretical background work, artistic work and similar interventions, reflective observation, conceptualisation, and the specification of objectives for the next cycle (Jokela, 2019). The research process and results were documented, and this documentation was used as research material. As a team, my colleagues, Maria Huhmarniemi and Annamari Manninen, and I participated, documented, and reflected on the collected observations of the action. After the first gallery day, the knitting circle moved into the workshop area where I was the main person responsible for the action. For five days, I continued the research by marking in a research diary about discussions with the participating knitters and about the bodily experiences gained through the performance.

My research orientation was phenomenological. I aimed to view the researched phenomenon, knitting as social process in the gallery space, with a new point of view and to be aware of my own conventions of knitting as a form of action. Based on Husserl (cited in Anttila, 2006), this reduction in phenomenology means becoming aware of the unexpressed mechanisms that direct the researcher's thinking and action. Faulkner (2017) and Fitzpatrick and Reilly (2019) speak about the use of process-oriented craft to explore reality, create something new, disrupt usual ways of thinking, and create embodied experience.

Knitting as a Performance of Remembering

The *Tate Exchange* was designed to be a platform for research-based creative work of artist-students from five different partner institutions from Europe and Canada. The event encouraged gallery visitors to engage practically and creatively with the theme



Figure 2. All set for the museum to open and the knitting to begin. I had brought my family tapestry with me to represent home. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2017.



Figure 3. When hands started moving, memories started to flow. Some were more talkative than others, but the making was mutual. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2017

or social issue brought into focus by the artist-students (Adams, 2019). Many of the students explored creative body-awareness practices and sought responses from the participating audiences contributing to these research projects (Adams, 2019). When my colleagues and I planned our part of the *Tate Exchange*, we were met with a warning from some of our partners that knitting as a method would not be approachable to many because, assumedly, people do not knit anymore. That somehow supported my own perception at the time; I connected knitting only to the northern circumpolar countries. Although we did consider some contemporary artistic alternatives to knitting after this remark, we quickly settled on our initial aim to bring traditional crafting into a contemporary context. I was prepared with a worst-case scenario in which people would not participate but only observe our art performance.

Our initial aim was to knit swatches of meaningful landscapes and discuss memories related to the scenes with the participators during the week. This was based on my artwork *Woollen Sceneries* (see Figure 1) that was displayed at the gallery as a reference work. I had knitted my experience landscapes to mittens from my art education trip to Iceland.

To reveal hidden connotations of knitting and start conversations about heritage values, we utilised citation in our art performance. In practice, citation means that certain norms or habits are taken out of their usual contexts and presented in new settings to change or highlight their meaning (Sederholm, 2002). We were not completely sure what to expect when we planned our performance, especially when we received the initial impression of knitting being a forgotten practice. We could foresee that the museum context would influence the conception of the knitting circle that usually took place in cosy home environments. We knew that our partners from the network would definitely join,



Figure 4. Many people were almost sad they had not kept their knitting active. Many promised they would henceforth continue this practice. Fast knitters managed to knit several swatches, and they shared the landscape experiences these knitted pieces represented. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2017.



Figure 5. My colleague, Maria Huhmarniemi, with a GoPro shows her knitting hands reflected on the wall. It created a fun public dimension to the otherwise intimate knitting practice. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2017.

but the participation of other museum visitors was questionable. First, people walked around and observed what we did. Then, they gradually started to take part, especially when we sought contact with them. Later during the week, some people specifically searched for us. They had heard about the possibility of joining the knitting and came for that reason.

It was truly overwhelming how people from all over the world, women and men, children and elderly, started coming and participated in our knitting circle. As it turned out, knitting was not unfamiliar to people, quite the contrary. The landscape theme worked as a launching point for the making, but it quickly became apparent that it was the activity of knitting itself that people wanted to discuss. It seemed unimportant for them to produce a completed piece while joining the circle, but instead it appeared important for them to talk about their experiences, memories, and previous knitting achievements. Some people showed knitting techniques to others, and lively comparison ensued as to whether people were used to knitting in Continental or English styles.

Fitzpatrick and Reilly (2019) point out that crafting requires us to listen to our bodies and allows us to identify differently with our social context. It was interesting to notice that almost immediately when the knitting started, people began to discuss and share intimate memories with people they had just met for the first time. This mutual activity of bodily making seemed to help the memories flow and to help people socialize with strangers.

Fitzpatrick and Reilly (2019) remark that when craft-making practices are employed in the research process, they can provide a significant way to tap into hidden stories that reside in our bodies and in our pasts and that shape our current understandings and positions. This philosophy is in line with the ABER method. Almost

everyone who participated in the knitting circle shared a memory of a grandmother, a mother, or a father who had knitted in their childhood. These memories were related especially to post-war eras when the generation who rebuilt the war-torn country knitted more frequently than people nowadays. We were told that knitting was used to rehabilitate war injuries in the United Kingdom, which encouraged the men in societies to learn how to knit. In some countries, knitting and crocheting were male jobs in earlier times; it was only later that women in these societies found knitting. It was truly a surprise to my colleagues and I how common and universal was the memory of knitting. Smith (2006) points out that collective memory has particular emotive power, and unlike professional historical narratives, it is an important constitutive element of identity formation.



Figure 6. The workshop space had a cosy sofa that invited people to socialize and knit even more. Some people came in groups and immediately entered into the full rhythm of knitting. The piece on the floor is a collection of the knitted swatches during the week. Photo: Elina Härkönen, 2017.

Knitting was described as performative: it was perceived as meditative to sit down and knit during the hectic day. The atmosphere became harmonic and leisurely. The act of knitting also made the participants reflect on their own making. Some described it as automatic, something that needed no attention. To some, it was a forgotten skill: “I use to know this well but haven’t knitted for years. I want to re-learn this!” Taking the needles and yarn and starting to knit prompted the bodily memory of the skill. Smith (2006) stresses that memory becomes particularly powerful when it takes root in the concrete, which works to give further emotive power through the tangibility of its representation. Knitting brought to mind other forms of sensing as well: smells, atmospheres, rhythms. “I have sweet memories of my grandmother knitting but just realised my children won’t have the same since I don’t knit. Oh no! The tradition may die.”

Besides the awakened memories and the new enthusiasm to knit again, I saw the knitting circle in the museum shift a focus. Early in the exhibition, it was apparent that people wanted to talk about the very essence of knitting. The focus of knitting circles in home environments is perhaps concentrated on socializing, where knitting is the motive for joining. In the unusual museum environment, the focus was on the act of knitting and its meaning-makings.

When we think about shared heritage processes, ideas about collective and habitual memory allow us to acknowledge that sharing memories and, perhaps more importantly, engaging collectively in the act or performances of remembering help to bind groups or populations together (Smith, 2006). By the performance of remembering, Smith does not speak about the creative aspect related to remembering but refers to the conscious act of visiting sites or museums where the heritage can be viewed, experienced, and reflected. Adapting and expanding Smith’s concept, I consider our art performance of knitting in the Tate gallery a performance of remembering. The utilization of bodily experiences and unusual space as a citation to a universally known tradition brought back unexpected and forgotten memories. The negotiation of heritage values was truly meaningful through the artistic experimentation.

Conclusion

The Faro spirit calls us all to active participation to map the valuable cultural heritage of Europe. When my colleagues and I prepared for the Tate Exchange, we did not foresee that instead of only a northern circumpolar tradition, knitting was actually a universal collective memory and experience. Everyone we met and we met people from all around

the world, remembered some family member knitting, or they knitted themselves. The art performance of the knitting circle became a shared performance of remembering.

The broader framework of my article was to offer insight to what the active and intangible nature of cultural heritage might be in the context of the Faro Convention. When seeking to identify what dimension of cultural heritage is valued and can hence be considered as common, the means to active and true participation needs to be sought. If people can perceive heritage as accessible, familiar and shared, participation becomes motivating and genuine. The value and meaning of heritage as a component of everyday life increases. This way heritage becomes a verb. The embodiment in the art-based activities performed at Tate, revealed an abundance of knowledge that probably could have not been reached through other means. I can relate to Adams' (2019) summary of the Tate Exchange serving as a platform for extensive discussions and having a rich and varied range of ideas coming from the visitors.

The responses of the participants to the knitting art performance served as a reciprocal eye-opener. The art performative citation of bringing the traditional knitting circle into a new context, in this case the art museum, helped bring the meanings and social dimensions of knitting into a new perspective. The innovation in this activity, the citation, served to bring insight and allowed the participators to reflect on their experiences in a context dedicated to the act of knitting. The seemingly commonplace event, the collective making and coming together, contained layers of tacit knowledge and hidden experience that came to the surface. From this exchange, I suggest that seeking heritage values is more effectively noticed and determined when they are experienced in a new environment.

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