

Timo Jokela: Scholarly career

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Timo Jokela's scholarly career has been characterised by a long-term commitment to developing research, methodological, and conceptual tools for art education and artistic practice that emerge from their own disciplinary foundations. The continual intertwining of practice and theory, together with a northern perspective understood as a worldview, cultural framework, and field of action, gives his research its distinctive character. The research paradigm developed by Timo Jokela and Mirja Hiltunen, both long-serving professors at the Faculty of Art and Design of the University of Lapland, has guided research and development in art education since the 1990s. Under their leadership, place-based art education research has been conducted through Art-Based Action Research. In these studies, art is understood simultaneously as a means of knowledge production, pedagogy, community participation, and societal engagement.

Jokela's research career unfolded during a period of transition when both art education research and artistic research were seeking their place within the Finnish university system. Art education was becoming established as an independent field of inquiry at the same time that the first doctoral dissertations in the discipline were being completed and the methodological foundations of artistic research were being defined within Finnish universities. The Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland was among the environments where scholars reflected on the kinds of knowledge artistic practice can generate and on how the distinctive nature of art could be taken into account in research methodologies. At the same time, publication forums dedicated specifically to art education research were relatively few, creating pressure to conduct interdisciplinary research and communicate findings to readers in educational sciences, social sciences, cultural studies, and the arts.

From the outset, Jokela's scholarly objective has been to transcend disciplinary and professional boundaries. He has consistently emphasised that research in art education should not remain confined to internal disciplinary discussions but should engage in broader societal, cultural, and scientific debates. This objective is evident in both his research themes and his publication record. Art education has been examined in relation to environmental issues, community development, cultural policy, tourism, well-being, design, and sustainability challenges. Consequently, the audience for this research extends beyond academics to include teachers, artists, cultural practitioners, designers, civil servants, and decision-makers.

Jokela's academic career coincided with a period of rapid internationalisation in Finnish university research. Publishing in both Finnish and English has proceeded side by side throughout his work, enabling his research to address local needs while contributing to international scholarly discussions. The northern perspective has provided a distinctive point of departure: while his research has remained firmly rooted in northern and Arctic regions and their communities, it has simultaneously participated in global conversations on art education, community art, place-based approaches, sustainability, and decolonisation.

When examining Jokela's life's work, it is also important to remember the practical conditions under which much of his research was conducted. A significant portion of his career took place before established online conferences and AI-assisted academic writing emerged. Building international networks, participating in international research collaboration, and producing scholarly publications depended largely on academic craftsmanship, personal contacts, and long-term cooperation. In this context, research communities and the ability to develop new initiatives gradually over decades became particularly important. This developmental, collaborative, and future-oriented research ethos has become a hallmark of Jokela's scholarly legacy.

In this chapter, I examine Timo Jokela's scholarly life's work through five intertwined themes: pioneer of Art-Based Action Research; developer and theorist of place-based art education; architect of Arctic art and circumpolar collaboration; mediator between local knowledge and scientific knowledge; and leader of research communities. These themes reveal a scholar whose work is methodological, conceptual, pedagogical, and societal. Its impact is evident in research, education, and artistic practice alike.

Pioneer of Art-Based Action Research

One of the most significant aspects of Timo Jokela's scholarly career has been the development of Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) (Jokela, 2018, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018, 2025a; Jokela et al., 2015b; Jokela et al., 2019). It originated in the late 1990s, when art education, as a relatively young academic discipline, was seeking its own research identity (Jokela, 2006, 2019). Research in the field relied largely on qualitative methods adopted from other disciplines, while artistic research primarily emphasised reflective and autoethnographic approaches grounded in artists' own practices. Jokela and Mirja Hiltunen recognised the need for a research strategy that could address the practical and developmental knowledge needs of art education while preserving the central role of art in the research process. Hiltunen's doctoral dissertation (2009) subsequently provided an important foundation for later methodological development, particularly in artistic and pedagogical work in Northern communities.

As a result of sustained research and development efforts, Art-Based Action Research emerged as a research strategy that combines the foundations of action research, arts-based research, and artistic research in a novel way (Jokela, 2013, 2017, 2019; Jokela et al., 2015a, 2015b). Within this framework, art functions simultaneously as the object of research, a means of generating data, and a mode of knowledge production. Artistic processes are integral to research interventions, the interpretation of research materials, and

the presentation of research findings. Jokela's work has been methodologically pioneering: together with his colleagues, he has systematically articulated a research strategy that integrates artistic practice and scientific inquiry while serving both practical development and academic knowledge production.

Practitioner and Theorist of Place-Based Art Education

Alongside his methodological work, Jokela has been a central developer and theorist of place-based art education. In his research, northern environments, local cultures, communities, and ecological questions are understood not merely as contexts for action but as active foundations for knowledge formation, learning, and meaning-making. Jokela has contributed significantly to understanding how art education can strengthen people's relationships with place, local histories, and ecosystems while fostering community engagement and ecological responsibility. This line of inquiry originated in his own environmental art practice and its conceptualisation within interdisciplinary environmental education research, first in Finnish (Jokela, 1995, 1996, 1997) and later in international scholarship (Jokela, 2008a, 2012). Schoolyards often provided settings for place-based art and environmental education (Jokela, 2008b), while community-based art education developed as a parallel strand of work in collaboration with Mirja Hiltunen (Jokela, 2021; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2023).

From an early stage, Jokela's studies emphasised relational thinking, in which people, communities, cultures, and environments constitute one another through relationships. In this sense, his work anticipated several perspectives that later gained prominence in international scholarship, including becoming with (Haraway, 2016), intra-action (Barad, 2007), and correspondence (Ingold, 2017). In Jokela's research, learning does not occur separately from the environment but through relationships with places, landscapes, materials, cultural practices, and other living beings.

In research on environmental and community art as well as place-based art education, Jokela has contributed to pedagogical approaches in which observation of nature, material engagement, embodied experience, and the deepening of place relationships form the basis for ecological understanding (Hiltunen, 2016; Jokela, 2016; Huhmarniemi & Hiltunen, 2018; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). Central to this work is the view that art education can strengthen individuals' and communities' relationships with their environments while supporting broader cultural and ecological sustainability transitions.

Within Jokela's research environment, attention has gradually shifted from anthropocentric perspectives toward recognising the agency of nature, other species, and ecosystems. Art education is understood not merely as increasing environmental awareness but as supporting deeper values, relationships, and ways of being in the world. Art enables experiential and emotional connections with multispecies environments in ways that can foster ecological responsibility and sustainable living. Jokela's work has demonstrated how art education provides tools for recognising, making visible, critically examining, and reimagining human-world relationships within communities.

This relational perspective on art and education was brought together in the edited volume *In Relation to the World: Environments as Openings for Learning* (Suhteessa maailmaan: ympäristöt oppimisen avaajina), edited by Päivi Granö, Mirja Hiltunen, and Timo Jokela (Granö et al., 2018), in which learning is examined through the relationships among people, environments, and communities. In recent years, such thinking has become increasingly relevant in posthumanist and new materialist discussions that recognise the significance of non-human actors more strongly than before (Barrett & Bolt, 2013; Bennett, 2010).

Jokela has also made an important conceptual contribution by developing the notion of ecoculture. Through this concept, he has described the characteristic intertwining of nature and culture in Northern regions, where community

practices, livelihoods, artistic expression, and the environment form an inseparable whole (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024; Jokela, 2025a). The concept provides an alternative to dualistic modernist thinking, which separates nature and culture as well as art, craft, and design. In Jokela's research, the cultural traditions, contemporary art, and everyday practices of northern regions appear as a continuous dialogue among tradition, the present, and the future; the local and the global; and humans and the more-than-human world.

As a developer of place-based art education, Jokela's most significant contribution has been demonstrating that place itself is an active agent in learning, cultural identity formation, and the creation of sustainable futures (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2025a). His work has shown how art education can connect local knowledge, community action, environmental relationships, and global sustainability challenges in ways that have profoundly influenced both Finnish and international developments in art education. He continues to advance this research, engaging with emerging scientific concepts and paradigms (Jokela, forthcoming; Huhmarniemi et al., forthcoming).

Conceptualising Arctic Art and Building Circumpolar Collaboration

One of the most significant achievements of Timo Jokela's scholarly career has been his contribution to Arctic art research, education, and international collaboration. Just as his work on Art-Based Action Research provided art education with a new methodological foundation, his efforts in Arctic art opened a new arena of research and discourse for Northern art and design disciplines. Jokela has played a central role in shaping the conceptual, scholarly, and institutional frameworks of Arctic art and art education.

In Jokela's thinking, Arctic art is not merely a geographical category but a cultural and political concept that makes visible the distinctive ways of knowing, living, and creating associated with northern regions. He has examined Arctic art in relation to locality, community engagement, environ-

mental relationships, sustainability, and cultural diversity (Jokela, 2020; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a, 2020b). At the same time, the concept of Arctic art provides a framework for considering how art can participate in discussions about Northern communities while strengthening regional cultural vitality and agency.

In conceptualising Arctic art, Jokela has emphasised the interconnectedness of cultural and regional decolonisation (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025b). His work has contributed to discussions of how Arctic regions and cultures have historically been represented through external, often colonial, perspectives. Romanticised and simplified depictions of Northern nature have long dominated Arctic representations in both art and popular culture (Chartier, 2018; Gismondi, 2019). In response, Jokela has approached Arctic art as a practice grounded in local experiences, cultural diversity, and the voices of northern communities themselves, while also broadening the concept toward more holistic modes of making characteristic of northern cultures. He has pointed out that, for example, Sámi culture and many other northern nature-based cultures do not draw sharp distinctions between art, craft, design, and practical activity (Guttorm, 2015; Hautala-Hirvioja, 2014). This perspective challenges established classifications within the Western art system and opens alternative ways of understanding art as an integral part of culture, environment, and collective knowledge-making.

To support sustainability-oriented, culturally sensitive, and dynamic approaches to Arctic art and art education, Jokela has authored and edited several handbooks and guidebooks (Jokela et al., 2024b, 2024c; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2025b).

Because the concept of Arctic art often evokes traditional and historical forms of expression, Jokela and his colleagues developed the concept of new genre Arctic art to describe dialogical, socially engaged, public, and political forms of contemporary Arctic art (Jokela et al., 2021). The concept draws inspiration

from Suzanne Lacy's (1995) notion of new genre public art, in which artistic meaning is created through interaction with communities and social issues. The concept has provided a more precise framework for discussing artistic practices that address cultural, social, and environmental issues in northern regions through contemporary art (Jokela et al., 2021). Scholars have since adopted it in discussions (Huhmarniemi & Lande, 2025; Ruotsalainen, 2024, 2026).

A complementary model of new genre Arctic art education has also been developed (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024), emphasising the pedagogical possibilities of art, collaborative learning, and cultural participation in Arctic contexts. Together, these concepts have become established within international Arctic research and educational networks as frameworks for describing socially engaged, future-oriented artistic and educational practices emerging from northern perspectives.

Jokela's contribution to Arctic art research therefore extends beyond individual projects and publications. Its significance is evident in the concepts, research networks, and scholarly conversations that have established Arctic art as a recognised field of research and practice. At the same time, he has helped build a circumpolar cultural dialogue in which northern regions are approached from their own perspectives and where art functions as both a mode of knowledge production and an instrument of social engagement.

With Two Ways of Seeing the North: Mediator of Local and Scientific Knowledge

A further significant dimension of Timo Jokela's scholarly life's work is his role as a bearer and mediator of local knowledge. His childhood, youth and part-time residence along the River Ounasjoki in Kittilä, his active participation in local communities, and his profound familiarity with the region's environment, culture and history have provided the foundation for a

form of knowledge that, in international scholarship, is often associated with the concepts of the Elder and the Knowledge Holder. For many communities, Jokela has appeared not only as a researcher but also as a knowledgeable member of an older generation whose understanding of Northern environments and cultures has been formed through decades of experience, participation and community relationships.

Throughout his career, Jokela has carried out both his research and artistic practice within the river communities of the Ounasjoki, bringing together local knowledge, community art, and scholarly inquiry (Jokela, 1997, 2025b). In his long-term work, the Ounasjoki emerges as an ecocultural actor intertwined with the area's history, livelihoods, identities and collective memory. This perspective is particularly evident in the community art project *Meän vapaa Ounas* (*Our Free Ounas*), which combined the history of river conservation, local memories, and contemporary environmental concerns through participatory artistic practice (Jokela, 2024). The project exemplifies an approach characteristic of Jokela's work, where art functions as a means of collective remembering, local participation, and strengthening environmental relationships. At the same time, it reflects his distinctive position within the Ounasjoki region: he acts simultaneously as artist, researcher, knowledge holder and community member, continuously bringing local experiential knowledge into dialogue with academic understanding.

This position may be understood through the framework of *Two-Eyed Seeing*, a concept discussed in Indigenous scholarship (Bartlett et al., 2012). Its central premise is that the world can be understood simultaneously through local, experiential knowledge and through scientific knowledge, without subordinating one to the other. In Jokela's work, local familiarity, environmental relationships and cultural understanding have remained in constant dialogue with scholarly knowledge production. Many of his most important contributions to place-based art education, community art and Arctic art research have emerged from precisely this dialogue.

Jokela's significance therefore extends beyond the knowledge he has produced as an academic researcher. He has also served as a mediator of knowledge between generations, communities and knowledge traditions. His work shows that building a sustainable future requires both scientific understanding and the wisdom that comes from local experience, cultural practices, and long-term familiarity with particular environments. In this respect, his life's work embodies a form of double vision: the convergence of the perspectives of a local knowledge holder and an academic scholar.

Leader of Research Communities

One defining dimension of Timo Jokela's academic career has been his sustained commitment to building research communities. His influence is therefore visible not only in publications and concepts but also in the communities, networks and collaborative structures that have enabled the production of new knowledge and the development of the field itself. Throughout Jokela's work, research has been understood fundamentally as a collective endeavour in which knowledge emerges through interaction among researchers, students, artists, communities and experts from various disciplines.

This recognition came in the form of his appointment as a UArctic Chair for 2022–2024. UArctic Chair appointments are awarded to distinguished scholars whose work strengthens research and educational fields of strategic importance to the Arctic region. In this role, Jokela advanced research and educational collaboration among UArctic member institutions and thematic networks while fostering new partnerships across the wider Arctic community. The appointment reflected his long-standing work as an international network builder and advocate for northern perspectives.

Perhaps the most visible expression of this work has been the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) network of the University of the Arctic,

which Jokela founded and led for many years. Established in 2012, the network has brought together educational institutions in art and design, researchers, students and cultural practitioners from across the circumpolar North around shared research, educational and developmental objectives (Jokela & Coutts, 2018a). The network's importance has been particularly evident during a period when ecological, cultural, and societal issues concerning the Arctic have gained increasing international attention.

Among the most significant outcomes of this collaboration has been the *Relate North* book series, which Jokela has edited for many years with Professor Glen Coutts. The series has become an important body of scholarly publications that has strengthened the visibility and impact of Arctic art education internationally (Jokela & Coutts, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018b, 2019, 2020, 2021; Coutts & Jokela, 2022, 2023). The series has continued beyond this period, and Jokela remained an editor in the 2024 volume (Jokela et al., 2024; Huhmarniemi et al., 2025). Equally important is the fact that this work continues through the ASAD network and its ongoing activities.

Through ASAD, conferences, publications, mobility programmes, and research projects have been implemented, with influence extending well beyond individual initiatives. The network has provided an important platform for the conceptual development of Arctic art, design and art education, while also contributing to cultural policy discussions. At the same time, it has strengthened Arctic art's position as a distinct field of research and education and highlighted the cultural specificity of northern regions in international discourse.

Building research communities has also been central to Jokela's work at the University of Lapland. What began as a small group of researcher-art educators gradually evolved into the Northern Art, Community, and Environment (NACER) research group, now internationally recognised as a centre for Art-Based Action Research, place-based art education and Arctic art

research. Within this group, numerous doctoral projects, research initiatives and international collaborations have been carried out. It has also become an important environment for doctoral education across several generations of researchers.

Jokela's influence is further reflected in the continuity and development of research themes within the community. Numerous doctoral dissertations have been completed under the supervision of Jokela and other members of the NACER leadership team, particularly Mirja Hiltunen and Maria Huhmarniemi. These include dissertations by Ainalinpää (2019), Griniuk (2022), Heinonen (2025), Härkönen (2021), Jónsdóttir (2017), Joy (2018), Luostarinen (2023), Korsström-Magga (2025), Manninen (2021) and Rinne (2021). I myself wrote this chapter as one of the doctoral researchers supervised by Jokela (Huhmarniemi, 2016). Across these dissertations, themes such as Art-Based Action Research, place-based approaches, community art education, posthumanist thinking and ecological sustainability have been further developed and refined.

A distinctive characteristic of this research community has been that individual projects have not remained isolated undertakings. Rather, they have become part of a broader scholarly conversation in which concepts, methodologies and practices are developed collectively. This work continues today. As Jokela celebrates his seventieth birthday, three of his doctoral candidates are preparing to defend their dissertations: Isomursu (forthcoming), Lintumäki (forthcoming) and Stöckell (forthcoming). Additional doctoral theses are expected in the years ahead.

One of Jokela's most significant achievements as a community builder has been his commitment to co-authoring. In Jokela's practice, research has been approached as a collective process of knowledge creation. This is reflected in his extensive co-authorship with students, doctoral researchers, colleagues and international partners. These collaborative publications have also served as a

form of researcher education, enabling younger scholars to participate in international academic dialogue as members of a research community.

Conclusion

The significance of Timo Jokela's scholarly work can be seen in how art education research is currently conducted and understood. His work has encouraged researchers, educators, artists, and students to view knowledge as collectively constructed, rooted in practice, and oriented towards the future. Within this research culture, art, pedagogy, research and societal engagement are understood as intertwined practices of knowledge production and social influence.

Together with Mirja Hiltunen, Jokela has demonstrated that art and art education can function simultaneously as means of learning, research, societal participation and cultural renewal within northern ecocultural contexts.

Throughout Jokela's work, research has been conceived as a relational practice: a dialogue among places, communities, cultures, environments and diverse ways of knowing. As the developer of Art-Based Action Research, a theorist of place-based art education, a conceptualiser of Arctic art, and a builder of research communities and international networks, he has contributed to strengthening a mode of scholarly thinking in which local and global, experiential and scientific, artistic and pedagogical forms of knowledge can work together.

It is precisely at this intersection of art, research, place and community that the most significant and enduring legacy of Timo Jokela's academic career may be found. The impact of his work is visible in the emergence of new research directions, the development of research communities, and the strengthening of research identities in art education and Arctic art both in Finland and internationally.

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