

ART IN RESEARCH

THE ROLE OF ARTIST'S EXPERIENCE

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START

PROJECT: Art-based case study about distance running

SUBJECT OF RESEARCH: The changing relationships between visual arts and sports

OBJECTIVE: To deal with the possibilities of combining artistic work with more traditional research methods. The special interest is in the potential of opening up the artist-researcher's experience when focusing on the artistic work. The artworks are going to be exhibited and evaluated as a part of the research, but what is the role of the artistic work behind the works?

I will present one artwork focusing on distance running – **The Attempt to Run Helsinki** – as a case study about using artistic practices in a research project that deals with both visual arts and sports. This work was a part of the first of three art projects that will form the artistic part of my study. In this first project, the following aspects relating artistic work to sport were considered:

- ✦ What can the use of artistic practices provide to sports?
- ✦ What are the general consequences of using artistic practices as a part of research?
- ✦ How can artistic practice be applied to research?



Images of the other works in the project are available at:
www.mattitainio.net/lenkillagalleria.html

The Process

My notion is that the artistic work is an aesthetic process, an experience. In that process the chosen material is formed into artworks and at the same time the forming of the material changes the way the artist understands the subject matter of her work. An artist-researcher should be able to decode and use this comprehension in her research, not only the analysis of the finished works of art. In my research as a whole, I see the artistic work as a way of formulating questions, which cannot yet be expressed verbally. The artistic work guides to better formulated questions and thoughts that are relevant to the research and can be used as guides when worked with academic methods. The process together with the finished works have also the possibility to provide the answers. The essential problem is in making this tacit element of the artistic work and practices visible in the written research. I'm suggesting that it is not possible by observing and interpreting the finished works of art only.

Running for Art

Running, especially distance running is regarded as sport with no explicit artistic qualities. The act of distance running can not be called beautiful as, for example, the act of figure skating is. In serious running it is only the time that makes the difference – no style points are given. The hobbyist running is often motivated differently, but the aesthetic element of running is not a usual reason for a runner.

When I started to prepare my project in the autumn of 2006, I had already been engaged in leisure running for some years. For the purposes of the project, I decided to run more frequently and be more focused with my exercises. This decision and the experiences that followed, alongside my previous running experiences, influenced the focus of my artistic work.

The Path to the Artwork

The primary intention of my art project was to present a subjective inside view of running and runners, utilizing the potential of the visual arts. I wanted to address those aspects of running that I found interesting myself, and to possibly combine them with those that are generally topical within the running community. Additionally, I wanted to produce something that demonstrated the potential of employing artistic practices in running.

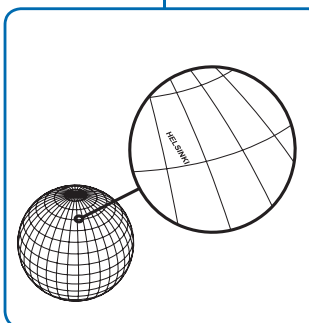
I have not bound my artistic work to any particular medium; the process starts with a subject and an idea and then proceeds to an appropriate medium. Studying the subject steers the process to the right material and media. I think that the art is not in the craft, but in the way the subject and the ideas are handled in the artwork. This does not mean that the medium is irrelevant, but it must resonate with the idea of the work.

An Attempt to Run Helsinki

Running is, for me, also a means of seeing places. As a result, I regularly design new routes and enjoy running in new places. This is not an attitude common to all runners, and many are happy with a regular route which they are in many cases always running in the same direction. These diverse attitudes to running routes made me think of alternative ways of choosing them and the possibility of using artistic reflection in the process of designing a running route.

My thought of designing running routes as part of the project then led to the idea of running something on a map. I chose the city of Helsinki.

A running route is usually chosen on a practical basis. Normally, the length of the route should fit the exercise in one's program, the start should be conveniently near, a loop is a preferable form, and if possible the route should go through pleasing environment. When I planned the Helsinki-route, none of these usual conditions were used. The route was chosen with other principles in mind; it must be in Helsinki, the line must form the word Helsinki and it had to be large enough to be visible on a large-scale map. These conditions are irrelevant to the normal manner of choosing a running route. They served only my artistic idea, but at the same time lead the runner (me) to see the city from a new perspective, encouraging him to find new ways to



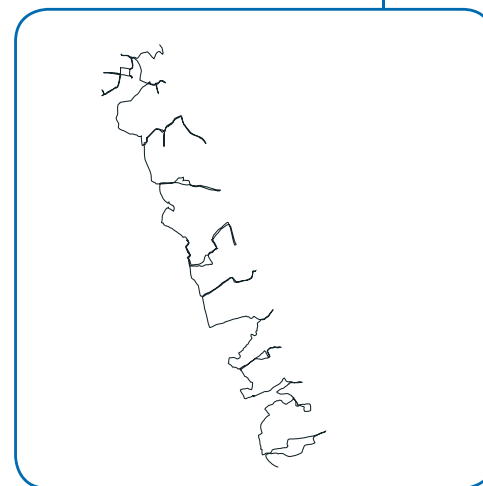
travel through the city. The 35-kilometre route is long enough to also make one think about the sanity of distance running, especially when running up and down the same streets. The route was recorded by carrying a GPS-device while running it and the GPS-data were used as material in the artwork.

Arriving to the described solution, which looks obvious and simple, was a result of several simulations of the route with maps and the computer. No tests in real running situations were made before the final run that was transformed to the exhibited work.

The exhibited **Attempt to Run Helsinki** was composed of three prints mounted on aluminium. In the first panel from left the print is a grey-scale map of Helsinki, where the printed letters H-E-L-S-I-N-K-I run from north to south. In the middle panel there is a list of street names filling the whole area. The letters are white on a dark grey background. In the third panel, there is the same map as in the first one. Only the appearance of the text has been changed; now there is a rickety, meandering line approximately in the same place, where the letters in the first panel were. The line forms a readable word "Helsinki". The work shows how an idea becomes a plan that is executed; in every stage of work there are alterations that cumulate in the line in the last panel. A public run in the same route was also planned; an open invitation was made available at the exhibition in the form of a flyer, and I spread the word both through the gallery invitations and through Finnish runners' discussion forum in internet. I had a few registrations for the run, but unfortunately all of them were cancelled.

The various elements of this work are more meaningful with some knowledge of Finnish sport history and the traditions of the environmental arts. It is told that, by dominating the distance running in the early Olympic Games, Finnish runners literally ran Finland onto the world map.

In the environmental arts, on the other hand, there is a tradition of art works made by walking predetermined routes and presenting these works on maps. These references may provide extra meaning to the work, but are in no way essential to understanding it. What is important is the challenge that the work presents to the conventions of running, by demonstrating some new possibilities for the runner's experience. In addition, the work is an intervention into the conventions of moving within a city. This kind of unconventional choice of routes can reveal a new face of the city, even for a long-term resident.



FINISHING LINE

An artistic project makes it possible to produce a double exposure of the subject: the academic research and the artistic work will open different views into both art and sport. The result of the project presented here was a visual presentation of distance running from a point of view where the conventions of sports are bypassed. When the focus of the view is moved away from the usual objectives of competition, exercise and health, other aspects of running become visible.

During the process of making this work of art I became more convinced about the effects of artistic work on research. Working with academic research steers the artistic work by directing it to a certain starting point. Afterwards, the artistic work is independent from research: the research does not actively steer the artistic work. However the questions raised by it guide the work. The main objective of the artistic work is to produce good art. On the other hand, the artistic process contributes to the research by creating new approaches for academic research; it raises questions, and may even start to form the initial answers to these questions, by probing the subject with another set of tools. Not all of these aspects are visible in the final artworks, as they have to be traced from the sketches and notes made in the course of the work. Thus, in order to appreciate the relationship, the artistic process must be diligently recorded at all stages of elaboration, along with the artist's intentions.

In my case, the final artworks belong to the research, but do not contribute very much to the written research. I see that the part of the artistic work that advances the research takes place during the elaboration of the artworks and while making them, not through finished works. The images of the artworks, used as illustrations of concepts, help the reader to evaluate the progression of the research as well as the artistic process. The images fill in the gaps that can not be filled with the written text. I would suggest that the aesthetic experiences gained from the artistic work as a whole, from the first vague ideas to the finished artworks in the exhibition, are what contribute most to the research.

The process and the experience of the artistic work are more significant to the research than the artworks themselves, and it is the knowledge-building portion of the artistic process that must be incorporated into the research. The artworks will make their own contributions as final evidence of the process, but remain nearly mute for the purposes of explicating the research unless the artistic process as a whole is unveiled in the text.

Artification and Its Impact on Art
www.artification.fi

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