

SARI KARTTUNEN

Kuvataiteilijoiden koulutusurat

Ammattiopinnot Suomessa ja ulkomailla

Educational profiles of visual artists.
Professional studies in Finland and abroad



TILASTOTIETOA TAITEESTA N:o 37
FACTS ABOUT THE ARTS No. 37

Taiteen keskustoimikunta
Arts Council of Finland
2006

© Sari Karttunen ja Taiteen keskustoimikunta

Kansi: Kari Piippo

Taitto: Jussi Hirvi

ISBN 952-5253-60-0

ISSN 0788-0278

F.G. Lönnberg

Helsinki 2006

Facts about the Arts
Publication no. 37
The Arts Council of Finland
Helsinki 2006

Sari Karttunen

Educational profiles of visual artists

Professional studies in Finland and abroad

English Summary

Scope of and Background to the Study

This publication reports the findings of a survey pertaining to the level of professional training among visual artists in Finland. It is based on data gained from the registers of visual artists published by the Artists' Association of Finland (AAF). Established in 1864, the AAF is the umbrella organisation for the nationwide visual artists' occupational organisations.

The study has been conducted as a background survey for the project 'Young artists on the threshold of internationalisation'. Young is here understood to mean aged 35 or less, and the focus is on visual artists defined widely to include not only the traditional categories of painters, sculptors and graphic artists but also artist photographers, media, video, action, performance, community and environmental artists. The project maps out changes in the job and identity of visual artists due to globalisation as well as other major trends in late modern society and post Fordist working life.

The study also serves the project 'Artists' professional training' which has been carried out at the Research Unit of the Arts Council of Finland since 2002 and will be concluded in 2006. Providing data on the overall training careers of visual artists, it functions as a case study for the project. Such information is not available from official statistics which are limited solely to the highest level of training obtained, as are most questionnaire-based surveys of artists.

Main Research Questions

The study set out to tackle the following questions:

- *How do the levels and places of training for visual artists vary according to age, gender and specialisation?*
- *How common are foreign studies among visual artists, and how does this vary according to age, gender and specialisation?*
- *In which foreign countries have visual artists studied, and how does their geographical orientation vary according to age, gender and specialisation?*
- *What is the training profile of young visual artists in particular?*

Data and Methods

The project on the internationalisation of young artists is based in its entirety on several types of data and methods: documents and registers, exhibition catalogues, press articles, and interviews. The strategy is initially to approach the topic indirectly, and not to interview artists until the theme frame has been specified on the basis of an analysis of data gathered unobtrusively.

Previously, another background study was completed on artists who had applied for and received travel and residence allowances from the Arts Council of Finland between 2000 and 2004. In that study, grant registers were used as the main source of data.

The data for the current study were taken from the registers published by The Artists' Association of Finland. These registers are of the Who's who type in content and form, and are based on information gathered from individual artists by means of questionnaires. Two recent AAF registers were utilised: one released in traditional book form in 2004 (*Kuvataiteilijat 2004*), and the other launched on the Internet in January 2006 (*Visual Artists' Internet Registry*).

The AAF currently represents five professional medium-based unions of individual artists: The Finnish Painters' Union, The Association of Finnish Sculptors, The Society of Finnish Graphic Artists, The Union of Artist Photographers, and The Artists' Association MUU ('Other'). The last two organisations were founded in the late 1980s and joined the AAF in 1994 and 2001 respectively. The AAF also includes The Union of Finnish Art Associations which comprises 40 local associations.

Methodologically, the representativity of the AAF registries is of crucial importance for the reliability and validity of the study. It is necessary not only to count the response rate among the members of artists' organisations, but also to evaluate the correspondence between the membership and the total population of people who practice visual art as their job in

Finland; union members are automatically admitted to the registries, while outsiders have to submit an application and are pruned by a special jury.

Study Population and Representativity

The study population consisted of 1,986 artists, of whom 90 per cent were either full or candidate members of the five nation-wide artists' organisations. Representation varied between 64 per cent for The Union of Artist Photographers and 87 per cent for The Society of Finnish Graphic Artists (Table 1). Half the study population were Painters, while Artist Photographers remained the smallest specialisation with an eight per cent share (memberships overlap to some extent).

Table 1. Representation of artists' organisations in the study population based on the FAA registries (N=1 986)

Organisation	Total membership 2004*	Number in study population	Represented in study population, %	Share of study population, %
The Finnish Painters' Union	1,279	985	77	50
The Association of Finnish Sculptors	343	296	86	15
The Society of Finnish Graphic Artists	334	292	87	15
The Artists' Association MUU	357	257	72	13
The Union of Artist Photographers	247	157	64	8

* Both full and candidate members. An artist may belong to several organisations.

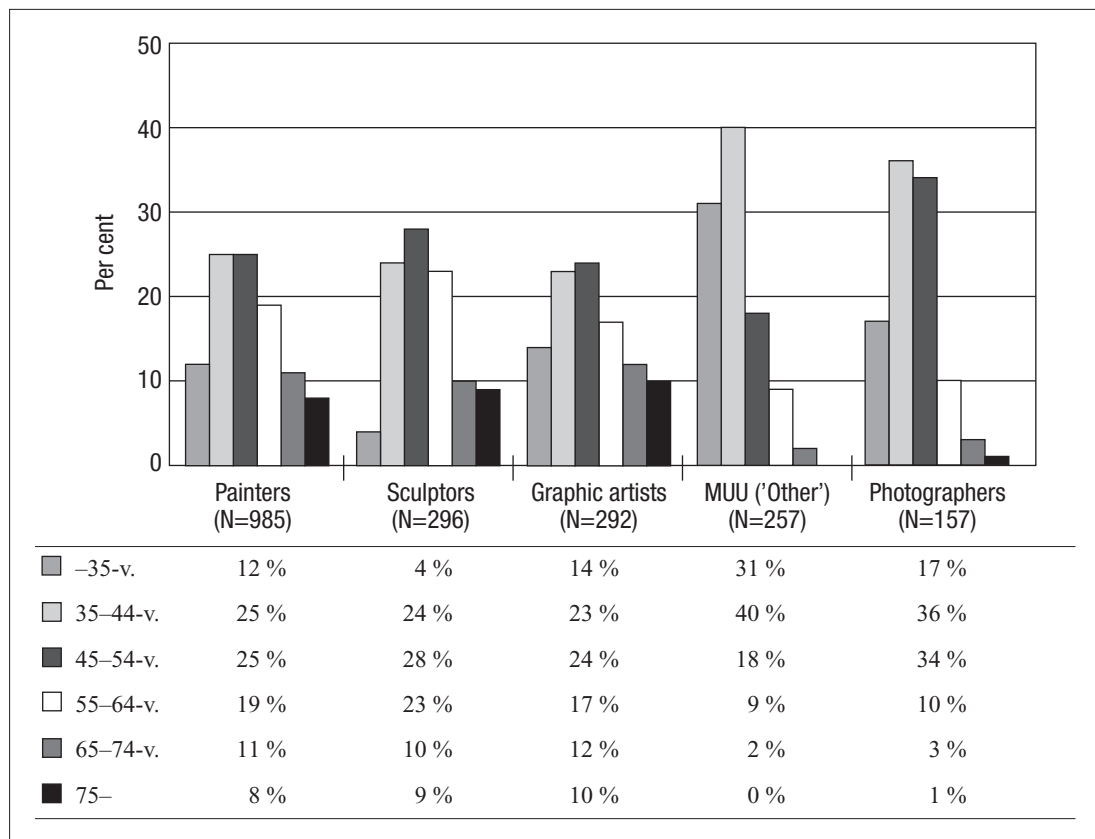
The gender distribution among the study population was relatively even, the proportion of females being 52 per cent and that of males 48 per cent. The share of females grew constantly towards the youngest age groups (from 38% among those over 65 years of age to 67% among those under 35 years) (Table 2).

Table 2. Study population by gender and age group

Age group (years)	Women	%	Men	%	Total	%
Less than 35	165	67	82	33	247	100
35–44	290	59	202	41	492	100
45–54	259	51	253	49	512	100
55–64	169	47	191	53	360	100
65–74	79	38	131	62	210	100
75 or over	62	38	103	62	165	100
Total	1,024	52	962	48	1,986	100

Over two-thirds (69%) of the population were between 35 and 65 years of age; the share of young people remained at 12 per cent, while nearly one fifth had passed the general retirement age for Finns. The average age of the population was 51 years, but the age distribution varied considerably according to specialisation (Figure 1). Members of the long-established unions were on average older (Painters 51, Sculptors 53 and Graphic Artists 52 years) than those of the newcomers (Artist Photographers 45 and MUU Artists 41 years). Women averaged 49 and men 54 years of age.

Figure 1. The study population, by organisation and age group (N=1,986), %



The youngest generation among the population, who were of special interest in the study, differed from the average in terms of gender, as was already mentioned, and affiliation as well. Every single artist aged 35 or less was either a full or a candidate member of at least one nationwide artists' organisation. According to the AAF, only a few applications by non-members within this age group were submitted, thus severe pruning by the jury did not explain their absence. The union distribution among the population varied a lot according to age. Two-fifths (40%) of the youngest generation were members of the newly established organisations MUU and Artist Photographers (20% of the total population).

The response rate among union members was on the whole better than is usual in research questionnaires. Among the study population, however, the representation of the youngest age group was lower than average for most unions. This was in part due to the fact that a selection of candidate members was listed in an appendix with a minimum of details to save space in the book-form register. As no data on training for these artists were given, they had to be removed from the study population. All unions except for The Artists' Association MUU ('Other') have candidate members.

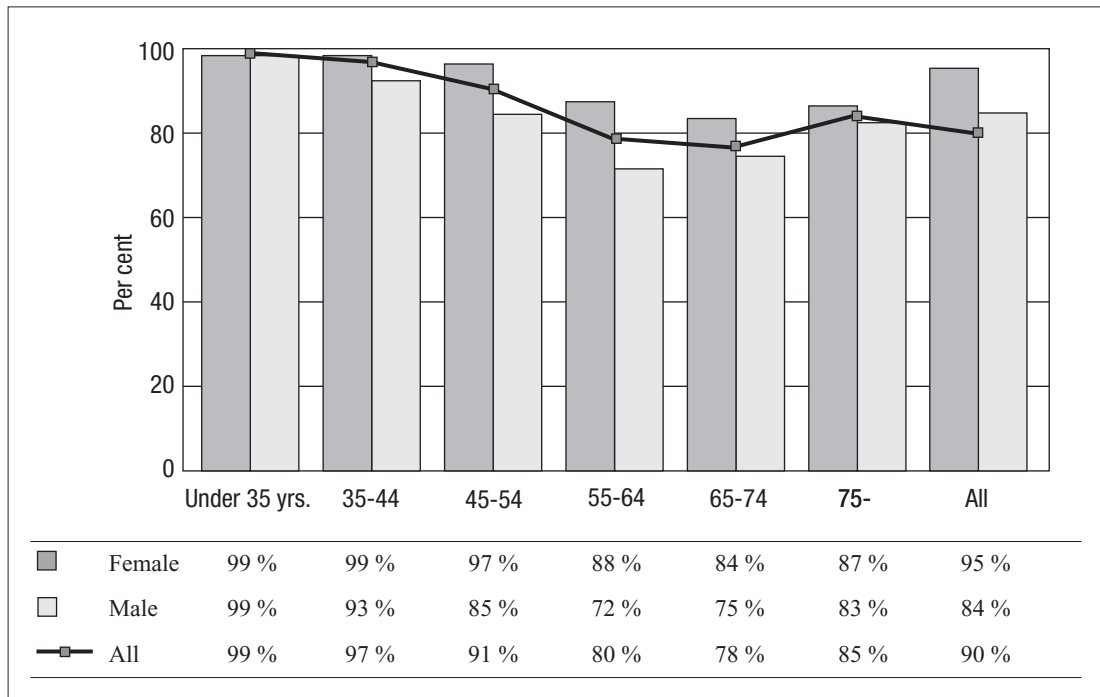
Moreover, the absolute number of young artists, only about 360 (including those in the appendix), represented in the AAF registers remained low taking into account the fact that altogether 300–400 persons graduate from secondary, polytechnic and university level education in the visual arts each year. Some of them, of course, find employment outside the art sector, and have no reason to affiliate themselves with the AAF. A few may refrain from making the application, not deeming themselves to be mature artists yet. Nonetheless, it is obvious that a number of practising young artists prefer to remain non-organised, and hence fall outside the scope of this study. There are some indications that interest in traditional forms of organisation is declining among young artists (as is the case among the young in general), but there is no accurate information available on the topic.

Main findings

Nine out of ten artists in the study population had obtained some professional training in visual art (including related fields, such as architecture and design) (Figure 2). As many as 86 per cent of artists had studied in Finland and 25 per cent abroad (21% in both). The level of training varied between age groups so that it grew constantly from the second oldest generation (78%) to the youngest in which it approached one hundred per cent (99%); the oldest generation resembled the middle-aged with an 85 per cent share. In all age groups except the youngest, women showed a higher

level of training than men. There was some variation in the level of training across specialisation; the percentage of autodidacts varied between six for Graphic Artists and 18 for Artist Photographers. Male photographers, in particular, had a lower than average level of training in art (72%), while their female colleagues were highly educated (98%).

Figure 2. Training in art obtained by the study population by gender and age group (N=1,986), %



Training acquired abroad turned out to be supplementary rather than substitutive. Actually, only three per cent of the study population had studied solely abroad, moreover there were several immigrants among them (Figure 3). Among the youngest generation the percentage of artists with foreign training was as high as 41, but only one per cent of them had studied exclusively abroad; 43 per cent of females as against 37 per cent of males within this age group had studied abroad.

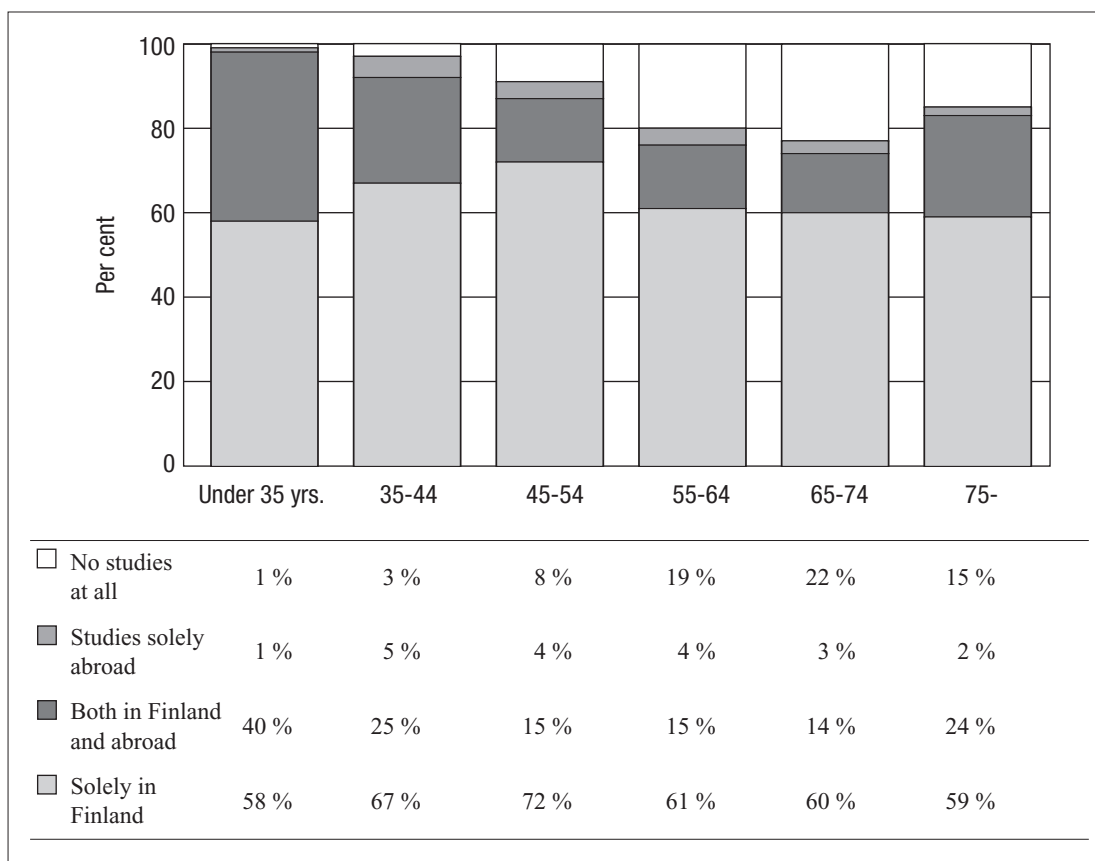
France was the most popular individual country in which Finnish artists have travelled to acquire tuition, Britain came second and Sweden third. The availability of European Union exchange programmes was reflected on the choices of the youngest generation, for whom Britain came first, France second and Germany third. The United States emerged as second or third on the lists of the middle-aged artists (age groups 35–44, 45–54 and 45–64).

Almost a third (31%) of the study population had been trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki. Its share varied according to age group so that only 27 per cent of the youngest generation but as many as 41 per

cent of the oldest generation had studied there. There were significant differences between affiliations as well; for the other unions except for Artist Photographers the percentage of Academy students varied between 27 and 43. Only four per cent of photographers had studied at the Academy, while 55 per cent had attended the University of Art and Design Helsinki. This university came second for the total population with a 25 per cent share, and the Free Art School of Helsinki, specialising in painting, came third with a 15 per cent share. Among the youngest generation, the polytechnics launched in the 1990s showed a considerable share, several of their art departments being based on established, formerly independent art schools, e.g., the Turku Polytechnic Arts Academy or the Lahti Polytechnic Institute of Fine Arts.

Three-quarters (74%) of the youngest generation of visual artists had achieved a tertiary level degree in art either in Finland or abroad. Two in five young artists had taken (at least) a Master's degree.

Figure 3. Training in art by the study population, by age group and country (Finland/abroad) (N=1,986), %



Discussion and Conclusions

Compared with the findings of earlier studies from the 1970s and 1980s, the data show a considerable increase in the educational level of Finnish visual artists. The proportion of practitioners with training in their own field is currently very high in visual art, perhaps even the highest of all art forms (except for architecture). Recent studies, however, also show that the effect of training on income level is exceptionally weak in visual art and that the median income for visual artists actually remains the lowest among all artists in Finland. Why do visual artists, then, choose to spend so many years at art schools? Firstly, formal degrees may be precious in arts-related (typically teaching) and non-artistic jobs at which visual artists work to finance their practice. It is also safe to assure that young artists, who face stiff competition in the over-crowded field, seek for further incubation in art schools. These institutions moreover provide working space and other resources, including social networks which have a crucial role in the formation of reputation and which also spread information on job opportunities. Access to foreign exchange programmes is also gained through art schools.

The findings point strongly to the conclusion that formal qualifications have become a requirement for the occupation of visual artist in Finland. Even though the job is not closed by means of degrees or diplomas, the level of autodidacts has dropped to one tenth and is practically zero for the youngest generation. Within the study population, this may reflect the entry criteria of the artists' organisations which nowadays emphasise art school attendance in addition to artistic level evidenced by works and exhibitions.

An issue raised for further research is the status of The Artists' Association of Finland and its member organisations within the visual arts field. The AAF Registry, which was used here as the main source of data, may be interpreted as an attempt at monopolisation of the occupation and guarding of its boundaries. Published since 1943, the Registry still plays a significant role in the art market, but its function among artists calls for further inquiry, especially when it comes to the youngest generation and those interested in the non-traditional media and types of artistic activity. One of the recent changes in the artistic field is supposedly the weakening power of established domestic gate-keepers.