

Sámi Art and Aesthetics

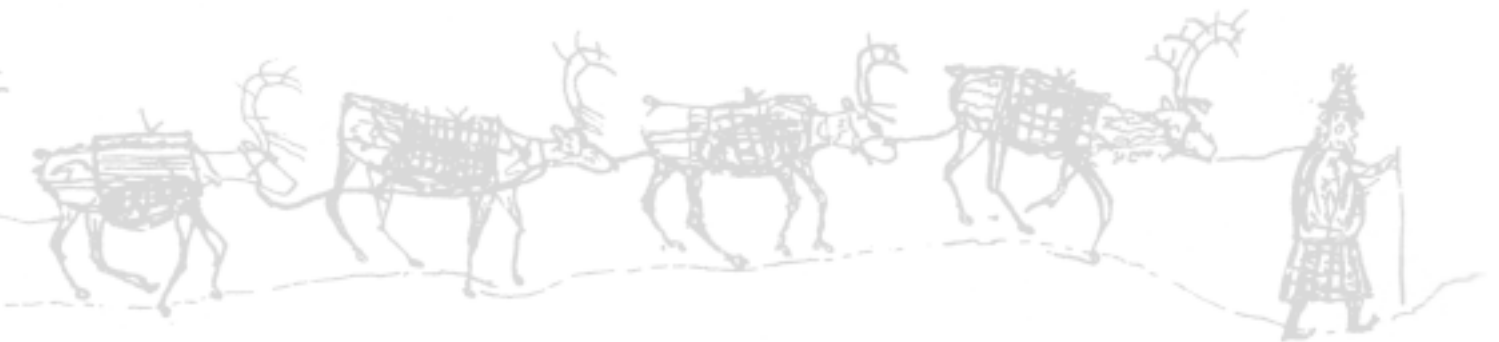
Contemporary Perspectives



Edited by Svein Aamold, with Elin Haugdal and Ulla Angkjaer Jørgensen

Sámi Art and Aesthetics

Contemporary
Perspectives



Sámi Art and Aesthetics

Contemporary Perspectives

© The authors & Aarhus University Press 2017

Graphic design and cover: Jørgen Sparre

Type: Joanna Nova

Cover art: *Ja, lihkastat gitta doložis* (And, the movement from the past),

Daban Da (Asbjørn Unor Forsøget and Gjert Rognli), 2005, video

Cover photo: Gjert Rognli

Drawing on pages 2 and 3: Johan Turi, *Reindeer with packsaddles*.

E-book production: Narayana Press, Denmark

ISBN 978 87 7184 505 1

Aarhus University Press

Finlandsgade 29

DK-8200 Aarhus N

Denmark

www.unipress.dk

International distributors:

Gazelle Book Services Ltd.

White Cross Mills

Hightown, Lancaster, LA1 4XS

United Kingdom

www.gazellebookservices.co.uk

ISD

70 Enterprise Drive, Suite 2

Bristol, CT 06010

USA

www.isdistribution.com

Published with support from the Research Council of Norway

and the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education,

The Arctic University of Norway.



PEER
REVIEWED

Contents

Preface

Introduction

- 13 Unstable Categories of Art and People
 Svein Aamold

Representations: Colonialism and the Struggle for Indigenous Self-definition

- 31 Hybrid Iconoclasm:
 Three Ways of Picturing the Sámi as the Other
 Rognald Heiseldal Bergesen
- 49 Art History in the Contact Zone:
 Hans Zakæus's First Communication, 1818
 Ingeborg Høvik
- 69 Representing the Hidden and the Perceptible:
 Johan Turi's Images of Sápmi
 Svein Aamold
- 99 Traditional Sámi Culture and the Colonial Past
 as the Basis for Sámi Contemporary Art
 Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja
- 121 The Sculpture of Iver Jåks and the Question of Sámi Aesthetics
 Irene Snarby

Critical Terms:
Duodji, Contexts, and Ethnographic Objects

- 141 Decolonial or Creolized Commons?
 Sámi Duodji in the Expanded Field
 Charlotte Bydler
- 163 The Power of Natural Materials and Environments
 in Contemporary Duodji
 Gunvor Guttorm
- 179 Indigenous Aesthetics:
 Add Context to Context
 Harald Gaski
- 195 Strange Objects:
 Ethnographic Objects in Between Self-Presentation
 and Contextualisation
 Christian Spies

Negotiations: Contemporary, Indigenous Art and Architecture of the North

- 211 Strategies of Monumentality in Contemporary Sámi Architecture
Elin Haugdal
- 239 Travelogue: Karukinka-Kangirsuk
Still Images From Video
Geir Tore Holm
- 249 Performing the Forgotten:
Body, Territory, and Authenticity in Contemporary Sámi Art
Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen
- 267 Blubber Poetics:
Emotional Economies and Post-Postcolonial Identities
in Contemporary Greenlandic Literature and Art
Kirsten Thisted
- 297 Contemporary Sámi Art in the Making of Sámi Art History:
The Work of Geir Tore Holm, Outi Pieski and Lena Stenberg
Monica Grini

Afterword

- 327 The Modern and the Modernist in Twentieth-Century Indigenous Arts
Ruth B. Phillips
- 331 *Index of names and places*
- 335 *Index of subjects*
- 339 *Authors Presentations*
- 346 *Map*

Preface

During the last decades we have witnessed an increasing interest among art historians, critics, theorists, literary scholars and anthropologists using postcolonial approaches and indigenous methodology — in Scandinavia and beyond — in the art and art history of the indigenous Sámi people. Simply put, we may describe this interest as twofold. On the one hand, it focuses on the production of new knowledge of works of art, crafts (*duodji*), architecture and aesthetics in Sápmi, the areas of northern Scandinavia and the Kola peninsula in which the Sámi traditionally live. On the other hand, it represents ways of rethinking some of the established European foundations within the academic disciplines of art history and its related, humanist fields of investigation. In this respect, the Sámi Art Research Project (SARP) at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, initiated in 2009, stands as one of the first interdisciplinary and international research projects to have investigated these and other related topics.

This anthology presents some of the most notable results of SARP. We hope its texts will inspire and expand future research regarding the indigenous art, crafts and architecture of peoples living in the northern, sub-arctic regions of Europe, America and Asia. It is our firm conviction that such research will contribute to a better global understanding of art practices and institutions in these regions, and shed light on questions such as how the various forms and genres of art influence and interact with different social, economic, political and environmental spheres, to name but a few. Regardless of where people live, we hold that many of the issues and problems presented here are not only relevant to but also highly significant for ongoing discussions regarding these matters globally.

Our sincere thanks go to all the members of SARP for their contributions. These are the Norwegian and Sámi-Norwegian art historians Monica Grini, Hanna Horsberg Hansen, Irene Snarby and Tone Tingvoll; the Sámi artist Geir Tore Holm; the Norwegian philosopher Ståle Finke; the Swedish curator Jan-Erik Lundström; the Swedish art historians Charlotte Bydler and Dan Karlholm; the Danish literary scholar Kirsten Thisted; the Finnish art historian Tuija Hau-

tala-Hirvioja; and the German art historians Birgit Mersmann and Christian Spies.

We are also deeply grateful to our external collaborators. Some of these collaborators have a Sámi background, i.e., the artists Aslaug Juliussen, Joar Nango and Sara Margrethe Oskal, the artists and art historians Maja Dunfeld and Gunvor Guttorm, the art historian Kjellaug Isaksen, the philosopher Nils Oskal and the linguist Lene Antonsen. The other prominent allies of our project are the art historian Ruth B. Phillips and the curators Greg Hill and Christine Lalonde, Canada; the art historians James Elkins and Dylan Miner, USA; the art historians Rognald Heiseldal Bergesen and Ingeborg Høvik, the film scholar Monica Mecssei, the literary scholar Knut Ove Arntzen, and the curators Charis Gullickson, Svein Ingvoll Pedersen, Sigrun Rasmussen and Leif Magne Tangen, Norway; and the literary scholar Anne Heith, Sweden.

The Research Council of Norway, the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, and the Nordic Culture Fund, Copenhagen deserve our profound gratitude for the funding of SARP and for their administrative support. We also thank Riddoduottar Museat in Kárášjohka (Karasjok), the Art Museum of Northern Norway and Tromsø kunstforening in Tromsø for their collaborations. Last but not least, we are indebted to Jacob Hukill, Jørgen Lund and Sharon Rhodes for their contributions in preparing this anthology, and Aarhus University Press and our editor Sanne Lind Hansen for bringing this project to fruition.

Svein Aamold
Elin Haugdal
Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen

Introduction

Unstable Categories of Art and People

By Svein Aamold

What are Sámi art and aesthetics? Why does this question challenge some of the traditional axioms regarding Western concepts of art, aesthetics and art history? This anthology puts forth contemporary perspectives on the art, *duodji*, architecture and aesthetics of the Sámi together with situations related to Greenland. Most of the articles are grounded in empirical studies. They present case studies, methods, terminologies and theories inspired by multidisciplinary, postcolonial and indigenous research. Our threefold intentions are to highlight the objects, activities and events of the Sámi people and their relevant contexts; followed by questioning the long-standing Western hegemony within established art historical academe; and, finally, suggesting new perspectives on par with current trans-disciplinary studies of indigenous cultures and civilisations.

These texts are perhaps best understood as what Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago call incursions.¹ These fifteen articles and one artistic project raise more questions, methodologies, proposals and hypotheses than answers. We propose neither a survey of Sámi or Arctic art (which has recently been done), nor a history of Sámi art or a coherent *theory* of Sámi aesthetics.² Academic research on Sámi art and aesthetics is still a young enterprise. Apart from the surveys referred to above, most publications in these fields are catalogues and books produced for the occasion of exhibitions or one-off academic articles — albeit there are a substantial number of these.³

Sámi (as well as Greenlandic) artists living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are participants within larger social and historical processes of assimilation politics and the rise of indigenous resistance, ongoing struggles for self-definition, and global collaboration among indigenous peoples in international organisations and negotiations. These historical, as well as contemporary, operations are highly consequential within the fields of art and aesthetics. Historically, Sámi artists working outside established, Sámi traditional crafts were obliged to assimilate, to become part of the modern and centralised Scandinavian or European institutionalised art world. The universalist aspirations of Western modernism are no longer tenable. In our studies, the answer to the

question ‘what may be considered an artwork?’ does not depend on whether the work corresponds to ‘conventional Western ideas about art’ or not. Instead, we want to argue that the answer depends on ‘the *place* of the artwork, artistry, and the functions and agency or agencies’ in its realisation.⁴ Our anthology argues that contemporary Sámi and Greenlandic art is ‘a place of *enunciation, identification, and negotiation*’ in which ideas and practices of several cultural or artistic traditions can be seen as confluent or, alternatively, in mutual opposition.⁵ What is also at stake here are the *contexts* of art, its production, its reception, and its potential for putting different meanings or interpretations on both the local and global levels to work.

The Sámi are the only recognised indigenous people of Scandinavia, and thus the northernmost indigenous people of Europe. Their rights are codified in the C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organisation.⁶ Norway and Denmark are among the 22 countries that have ratified C169. On a smaller political and juridical scale, Finland and Sweden have also recognised the right of the Sámi to call themselves an indigenous people.

Sápmi, the land the Sámi traditionally occupy, has been divided by state borders since the eighteenth century. This Sámi area spans the interior woodlands and mountainous regions of the border areas in the south and middle of Sweden and Norway; the sub-arctic coastal areas and inland fells of the northern parts of Sweden, Norway and Finland; and the western part of the Kola peninsula in Russia.⁷ While most Sámi still live in this area, a significant portion of the population has migrated to other parts of Scandinavia and North America. To a large extent, this is a result of modernisation processes and assimilation policies.

There are no exact, recent statistics regarding the size of the Sámi population. Questions regarding ethnicity are no longer part of census taking within the four countries of Scandinavia. Further, the policy of assimilation, which in Scandinavia was especially strict from around 1850 to the beginning of the 1960s, resulted in many Sámi taking on the culture of the majority population of the country in which they live. Its effects are still influential. A third reason — which hinders estimates of the Sámi population — is the contested definition of Sámi-ness.⁸ Estimations of the Sámi population vary from 60,000 to 100,000.⁹ Recent calculations tend to agree that more than half of all Sámi live in Norway. The second largest Sámi population live in Finland, the third largest in Sweden, and, in Russia only a small population of around 2,000 persons are known to be Sámi. The Ter- and Kildin-Sámi within the Russian Federation have not been recognised by the state and have therefore not been able — or allowed — to or-

ganise their own institutions in the same ways as the Sámi of the Scandinavian countries.

Our anthology also raises questions as to what we may understand of the Sámi, or the Greenlanders, as a people. Can we abandon an essentialist definition of the latter term? Neither the Sámi nor the Greenlanders constitute stable identities that, in the words of Bruno Bosteels, are 'derived from a preordained essence that would have been racially, ethnically, linguistically, culturally, or ontologically definable'.¹⁰ The idea of 'the people', Georges Didi-Huberman argues, 'as a unity, identity, totality, or generality [...] simply does not exist'. The notion is a 'heterogeneous composition' which includes 'the living and their dead, the bodies and their spirits, those of the clan and the others, the males and the females, the humans and their gods or even their animals'.¹¹ The coexistence between peoples is an important element here. The Sámi have been marginalised, especially since the nineteenth century, both legally and politically with regard to other citizens and to political institutions in all of the countries in which they live. A recent study based on three large surveys of the Sámi population within Norway concluded that such marginalisation is no longer present. One of the possible reasons for this is that Norwegian citizens who have also registered as Sámi have the right to vote (and participate) in the elections of the Sámi and the Norwegian Parliament. The authors in this anthology discuss the substantial internal differences regarding both political activities and responses to questions of self-definition, identity and belonging. In sum, the statistical data vary significantly depending on factors such as age, occupation, gender and country.¹²

How can we understand the concept of the art of Sámi or indigenous peoples of the Arctic regions, and what does it enable? An interpretation depends on the contexts in which the terms are being used. For example, the Northern Sámi concept of 'art', *dáidda*, was introduced in the 1970s and based on the Finnish term *taide*. As a European or Western invention dating back to the eighteenth century, the term is problematic with regard to both non-Western and older practices that are referred to as 'art'.

Traditionally, the semi-transhumant cultures of Sámi hunters and, from the sixteenth century, reindeer-herders were organised in a *siida*, a structure that includes the families that constitute a village (especially during winter) based on common access to natural resources in the areas in which they live. The *siida* has no place for 'art' in the European sense referred to above. As transhumant herders, gatherers or hunters would carry only what was needed for the subsistence and protection of people and animals. The population also includes

the stationary Sea Sámi, who, since the fourteenth century, have been living by means of fishery, hunting and farming in the northern coastal areas of Norway.

Whether transhumants or residents, the Sámi treasured their tools, clothes and equipment for their practical utility, their symbolic value (for instance, as a marker of a specific *siida* or family) and their beauty (formal or decorative qualities such as shape, patterns, composition, colours, materials, techniques, endurance, and craft). We may initially distinguish between an object which is intentionally well-shaped with regard to its use(s) and decorated or ornamented, such as, in Northern Sámi, *gákti* (a jacket or coat), *giisá* (a box, also wedding box), *gietskka* (a cradleboard), *goavddis* or *meavrrresgárri* (a holy drum). Their stylistic qualities adhere to — and perhaps also correspond to — traditional European ideas of aesthetic value. On the other hand, as discussed in my article on the works of Johan Turi, the term *hávski* (pleasant) comprises more than a gratification of the senses. It includes the idea of a place and time in which it is pleasant to act or to rest. Thus, we may suggest that Sámi aesthetics also include (in Northern Sámi) the *goahti* (turf hut), the *lávvu* (tent), and other elements of Sámi settlement when erected and situated in such a way that it would be good (pleasant) for humans, their animals, and nature with regards to both physical and spiritual values. This understanding differs radically from Kant's concept of beauty as 'disinterested pleasure', in the sense that the judgement of taste is free of desire and consists of the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding.¹³ As the following articles demonstrate, there is also a deep understanding of environmental and political values at stake here.

In the following articles, the meaning of the multifaceted concept of aesthetics is discussed within these and other settings. Although we do not reach a conclusive understanding, we do hold that aesthetics is fundamental to an understanding of the art of the Indigenous North. The philosopher Michael Kelly thinks of aesthetics as 'critical thinking about the affective, cognitive, moral, political, technological, and other historical conditions constitutive of the production, experience, and judgment of art'.¹⁴ Aesthetics, then, should be regarded as more than questions of beauty, sublimity, autonomy, intentionality, expression, meaning, etc. With regard to projects of art, aesthetics may also invigorate ethical and political issues, the uncanny or the abject, the nature-based or site-specific, the processual or relational, or the like.

The invention of the term *dáidda* also makes another question pertinent: Is it possible to include traditional Sámi objects and contemporary Sámi *duodji* — the Northern Sámi term encompassing wide-ranging types of crafts, agencies and world views — in a contemporary conception of Sámi art? What, then, might be the differences between a modern or contemporary work of Sámi art and the rich Sámi tradition of *duodji*? The Sámi *duojarat* (practitioners of *duodji*) have,

of course, long produced objects to sell to tourists and ethnological museums, such as the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, and the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo. Further, Sámi drums were confiscated by state authorities since the seventeenth century, and were kept for a long time in deposits out of view of the public. One motive behind their confiscation was to fight Shamanist religious practices and convictions among the Sámi and to complement Protestant missionary activity. As we see them today, the symbols on the drums are representative of Sámi Shamanism and religious beliefs, but they are also reinvigorated in later works of art whose meanings are related to Sámi ways of life and worldviews.

The Native American (Cherokee) artist, essayist and poet Jimmie Durham has proposed substituting the noun 'art' with the verbs 'work' or 'act':

On the practical day-to-day level of working, the vocabulary of art leads us into [...] false certainties, foolish mastery, and into repetition, which is surely a sin against the future. There is no need to worry about losing one's base or 'identity' [...] when situated within a new set of objects and social environment. The task is to focus on that moment and to work (or, I might say, 'to act'). If one brings too well-planned a strategy and 'experience' to the task, one remains in some personal past, and begins to make lies.¹⁵

Durham regards traditional Western conceptions of art as based on preconceived strategies, and thus as belonging to the past. In order to free art from such 'false certainties', the artist must act upon his/her immediate, physical and social environment.

Another viable ingredient in interpretations of contemporary art (whether indigenous or not) is to refer to our involvements not only as actions but as events. An event is, according to Gilles Deleuze, 'the potential immanent within a particular confluence of forces'. An example is 'a tree's changing colour in the spring'. The event 'is not a disruption of some continuous state, but rather the state is constituted by events 'underlying' it that, when actualised, mark every moment of the state as a transformation'. Such a change has no preconceived goal, but represents 'a momentary productive intensity' in what Deleuze calls a becoming. As such, the event challenges 'us to think differently and to consider things anew'.¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek's understanding of an event 'as an effect which exceeds its causes' is also relevant here. Its basic feature, he states, is 'the surprising emergence of something new which undermines every stable scheme'.¹⁷ Their differences aside, these understandings of an event are useful with regard to our discussion of the term 'art' in the Sámi and Greenlander contexts. While an event is an immanent change, it is not a creation which has been planned and then is made according to preconceived norms. As such, both 'art' and 'event'

may include objects, actions, bodies or media including artistic freedom. They are realised as effective, however, only when met with or acted upon by their spectator(s), audiences and the shifting contexts within which they take place. The results, the effects, of the event will only become clear to us after the fact. We may, in addition to this, also consider the concept of an event as a transgression of the idea of the artist as originator, as a subject or even as a distinct closed entity, separate from the world. The work of art interpreted as an event is incompatible with traditional Western concepts of art and beauty. It provides for an understanding of the potentialities of contemporary art as a becoming that goes beyond traditional concepts of identity and indigeneity.

The present anthology is a result of the focus on northern Scandinavian regions and the Sámi people in art history and related studies at the University of Tromsø, Norway, since the turn of the century.¹⁸ An early example of this is the late Eli Høydalsnes, who questioned traditional ideas of 'the North' as a cultural construct in mainstream Norwegian art history. Pertinent to such a construct is *belonging*, the idea of being connected to a specific place and/or of representing a specific, 'Northern' identity.¹⁹ Such thinking invokes problematic dichotomies of 'them' and 'us', or 'centre' and 'periphery'. Høydalsnes suggested three modes by which to overcome this impasse: empirically based studies of art, artists and art institutions in the northern regions; historiographical studies on how these regions have been 'inscribed' in art historical research; and, finally, postcolonial and indigenous methodologies that put into practice nuanced perspectives of historical as well as contemporary art and aesthetics.

Further, in 2001 Maja Dunfjeld and Gunvor Guttorm, Sámi academics and practitioners of *duodji*, published pioneering doctoral dissertations based on practical-aesthetic experiences as well as research.²⁰ An important follow-up to this was the appointment of Gunvor Guttorm in 2010 as the first professor of *duodji*, at the Sámi University College in Kautokeino, Finnmark. Sámi arts are also the focus of Hanna Horsberg Hansen and Monica Grini's dissertations.²¹ The international 'Sámi Art Research Project' (SARP), launched in 2009 in the department of art history at UiT, has laid the groundwork for extended research on Sámi and indigenous art, including the present study. In fact, the majority of the contributors to this volume are members of SARP.²²

We have cautiously divided the anthology into three parts. The first discusses Greenlanders and Sámi as seen by non-indigenous explorers and scientists, i.e. by the colonisers or persons they commissioned. This part also opens discourses regarding the indigenous art of the North, focusing on artists with a Sámi background between the early twentieth century and the turn of the millennium.

The second part considers some of the important — but also contested and problematic — terms brought to bear in discussions of indigenous art, especially the Sámi concept *duodji*. The third part is dedicated to a variety of negotiations of contemporary art and architecture in Sápmi and Greenland.

The state administrations of seventeenth and eighteenth century Sweden were probably the first to finance scientific research on the Sámi population. Sweden's borders with Finland and Denmark, which included Norway at the time, were first set in law in 1751. The traditional lives of the Sámi population of northern Scandinavia were legally secured in a codicil to that law. The art historian Rognald Heiseldal Bergesen discusses seventeenth century illustrated scientific reports and publications by the Swedish scholar Samuel Rheen, the German-Swedish scholar Johannes Schefferus and the Dutch artist Jan Luyken. Based on the interpretations of a few illustrations and the texts to which they adhere, Bergesen reveals complex strategies employed when dealing with the Sámi as the *other*. The images contain elements that somehow conform to the authors' own Lutheran worldviews; however, the motifs are also laid out as examples of strange, pagan Sámi worldviews which threaten established Christian values. These texts and their illustrations speak to movements as well as counter-movements of renewal, inclusion, differentiation and exclusion of the Sámi. Bergesen presents the concept of hybrid iconoclasm as a way to discuss and question any simplification of postcolonial dichotomies connected to processes of othering.

Mixed outcomes regarding the British expeditions in the Arctic widens the contexts of Bergesen's analysis. The art historian Ingeborg Høvik introduces the term *contact zone*, as defined by the literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt, to describe social spaces of encounters between coloniser and colonised characterised by highly asymmetrical power relations. Her example is *First Communication*, an early nineteenth-century reproduction of a drawing originally created by Hans Zakæus, one of the first documented Inuit to arrive in Britain. The various roles of Zakæus as an Inuit and a stranger in a British context, and as a servant of the British empire — and thus both an insider and an outsider in the Arctic — are, according to Høvik, 'mirrored in the reproduction of his drawing'. She argues that the image allows for a reading of three events pertaining to the encounter between the British and the Greenlanders. Further, by comparing Zakæus's illustrations with images made by John Webber from the third of Captain Cook's voyages to the Pacific (1776–80) and with works by the 'first' Greenlandic artist, Israil Gormansen, she is able to characterise Zakæus' illustration both as a 'counter-narrative' and as part of a 'colonial programme'.

Johan Turi was the first Sámi writer and artist to publish a secular book with his own illustrations about the Sámi (*Muitalus sámiiid birra*, 1910). Turi wanted to