

Artist writing as an artwork and as a research

Expanded Guidelines for the PhD Programme Candidates in Preparation for an Artistic Research Project

This research programme is open not only for the (fine) arts postgraduates, but also for the postgraduates in art theory or other humanities disciplines. The main criterion, however, is a convincing record of published or exhibited works of creative writing within contemporary art.

Brief overview of the research topic

This doctoral research topic aims to overview a range of artist texts and offer a way (or ways) to overcome the distinction between theory and practice—a rift that art PhD students, tutors and administrators often find so frustrating. By combining the writing practice and the identification of relevant cases, the research will aim to discover the traits that both adhere to the requirements of a PhD programme (production of new knowledge, etc.) and enable the freedom of creative writing.

The research into this topic would be highly beneficial for both artistic and academic communities because it would clarify the specifics of the doctoral writing in arts and establish the criteria transferable to other doctoral projects in the field of art.

Research aim: ensure the conditions for an artist to carry out the research and come up with a single piece of (written) work—an artistic project that would pass both as an artwork, and a research.

Preliminary research objectives:

* Overview the range of contemporary writing samples and identify the traits that would conform with the dissertation requirements; analyse

the dissertations by the Lithuanian and/or foreign artists;

- * Evaluate the practices and examples of artist writing with the intent of using them as style guides for art doctorate students;

- * Analyse the use of rhetoric as a research method in art writing (for instance, in many foreign art doctorate programmes, artistic practice is acknowledged as a main research method);

- * Try out different styles of writing and structural methods for the construction of texts and meta-texts;

- * Come up with the dissertation format that would adhere to the criteria of both a research paper and an art project; produce and defend the dissertation.

Research context guidelines

In Lithuania, an art doctorate (practice-based PhD in arts) programme was introduced only as late as 2010, and while we already saw the graduation of 12 art PhDs, research writing (producing a dissertation as a text) remains one of the biggest challenges. A PhD student often has to produce two dissertations: one as a series of artworks or an exhibition, and another as a text that corresponds to the academic requirements. However these requirements are not too different from the academic requirements of a scientific research, and the latter were created without taking into account the specifics of artistic production and its methods. Therefore there is an obvious need to adapt these requirements to the arts dissertations and offer a solution to avoid the problematic doubling of a dissertation. This can be best achieved through practice—i.e., through the production of writing examples and successful defence of dissertations.

In recent years we saw an increasing amount of literature in support of the idea that both academic and scientific rhetorics can be stylish and artistic. Here we can mention Helen Sword's books *Stylish Academic Writing* (2012) and *Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful*

Academic Write (2017). However literature on the specifics of writing for an art PhDs is still almost entirely lacking.

Since the 1980s, visual arts saw the increasing number of texts that function not only as a reflection but also as a creative method (see *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, 2012), but it still remains unclear how a PhD-grade artist writing should look like. However, there are some examples of successfully defended dissertation texts written by the art doctorates. For example, we have a case of Katrina Palmer, a sculptor and a Royal College of Art graduate, who successfully defended her dissertation "Reality Flickers: Writing With Found Objects And Imagined Sculpture" (2006–2012) as a piece of artist writing. The format of her dissertation is complex and self-reflexive, while formal aspects that correspond to the academic requirements are intertwined with fiction. She managed to present sculpture as a narrative writing. The artist herself regards this (textual) work as an artwork (sculpture).

Another case that successfully exemplifies the possibilities of a non-conventional dissertation format is an educology dissertation defended in the form of a graphic novel. Columbia University (NY, US) graduate Nick Sousanis' dissertation titled "Unflattening: A Visual-Verbal Inquiry Into Learning in Many Dimensions" received multiple awards, including—quite unexpectedly—an award for "excellence in humanities." His graphic novel analyses how the interconnected elements of a comic open up new possibilities for creativity and learning that would otherwise remain inaccessible through writing alone. The researcher himself regards his novel as a collection of philosophical essays that employ various images and metaphors. The critics argued that the said dissertation "does not comply with the conventional forms of scientific discourse and offers readers both an impressive work of graphic art and an exhaustive research into how humans create knowledge."

Preliminary stages of the research:

1) The analysis of texts by artists, ranging from the works that use text as a main medium (instead of painting, photography or sculpture) to art

writing that would comply with the requirements of the texts in art theory or philosophy. Some of these texts were essays in peer-reviewed and cultural publications, others were monographs, and yet others were humanities dissertations, while most of them published before the time when artists had a chance to study for their PhDs.

2) Investigation and analysis of artist dissertations. Sampling the dissertations that *a)* have both research and creative elements fused together into a synergic whole, and *b)* dissertations that bear the elements of artistic or fiction writing.

3) Reflection on the artistic practice of an art doctorate student. The research would employ an individual style of writing, and would be submitted in a textual form that would comply with both the Lithuanian laws for science and education, and the PhD regulations regarding academic dissertations, while at the same time passing as an art project (artwork).

Brief overview of a programme for the creative part

Text is an important part of every dissertation: it not only allows for an introduction of a research process and its results, but also is (or can be) a means of creativity in the sense of employing the means of artistic speech and rhetoric. This is evident in contemporary art practices that involve an increasing number of artworks based not (only) on image or sound, but also text: essays, short stories, librettos, plays, novels, comics, etc. These works not only migrate between contemporary art and literature, and sometimes even philosophy, pedagogy and other disciplines, but often are acknowledged as inter-disciplinary.

Text and its relationship with creative practices are among the most sensitive topics during both the second and the third cycles of art education, and this question is often addressed through collaborative involvement of tutoring artists and academics. Every artistic research has its own significance, which is why finding the most appropriate methods is crucial.

However, the dissertations are often written with the aim to produce or 'extract' new knowledge from artworks because we are still lacking in the clear criteria for distinguishing between the MA and PhD-level artworks, as well as for knowing when the new knowledge is created and a contribution to the field of research is made. Up to this day Lithuanian higher education produced 21 dissertations in the fields of art and design, and text plays rather different roles in each of them. The selection features a variety of genres: from analytic essays, through reflections on creative methods, up to literary texts that feature some research elements.

We can also find the examples of referential paraphrasing or imitations of art theory dissertations guided by rather formal criteria of PhD writing. In these cases artists seem to show no intention of discovering their own unique style of writing that would reveal the strengths of their individual artistic approaches: by thoughtlessly employing the style of writing inherited from social sciences and humanities, they only expose their inexperience in academic writing. This thematic art doctorate programme seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice and allow the PhD student to focus on producing a single work that would employ both research and creative elements while complying with the formal practice-based PhD regulations. In order to have a better idea about how to make their work function both as a creative method and a research, and in order to help them find a format that is most suitable for their own artistic practice, practice-based PhD students would start their studies by learning about the historical context of various styles of artist writing and the overview of relevant research questions.

All queries on the research topic should be sent to one of the potential supervisors: vytautas.michelkevicius@vda.lt