

Tuuli Lähdesmäki (Jyväskylä): Exploring Gender in Finnish Visual Art. From Margins to the Center, from the Center to Peripheries

Gender is today one of art history's mainstream perspectives in Western countries. However, the position of gender aspects has only been established in art history during the last decades and it still produces both public and academic discussions regarding its bases and aims. Nevertheless, the situation of the study of gender aspects has strengthened continuously since the 1970's. The aspects which formed were marginal in art history in the 1970's have become acknowledged in the 20th century. These aspects have even evolved into common components in art history curricula in Western universities and everyday practice in art institutions, such as art museums and criticism.

Due to the fact that issues of gender have been of interest for art historians and other visual culture researchers for decades already, it follows that gender aspects already have a tradition in the visual field. Furthermore, these aspects and their main focus have changed during the decades. The changes have reflected both general interdisciplinary academic discussions on gender and political discussions of the women's rights movements of the past decades. The influence of these discussions has not been restricted to research and analysis of art and visual culture. Besides the academic point of view, the aspects have had an effect on artistic production. In the visual field, theoretical discussions of academia and artistic practices have developed side by side and influenced each other. Academia has been interested in contemporary artists and artworks which deal with gender questions. Likewise, contemporary artists have been interested in theoretical views and ideas of gender.

Academic discussions and artistic practices based on gender include a geographical dimension, which creates a hierarchy pertaining to an ideological center and periphery. Academic discussions and artistic practices on gender have been elaborated upon via the example of some influential researchers and artists in the centers of the disciplines of gender studies and art history. On the periphery, researchers and artists have followed ideas formulated in the centers and applied them to local conditions. Even though the influences diffuse quickly in international academia and global art fields, discussions and practices still form hierarchical structures among discussion leaders and receivers. In regard to gender aspects, discussion leaders in art history and visual culture studies, as well as influential artists have often come from the United States and Great Britain. Particularly, the position of American artists has been dominant in general discussions on gender related art. This can be partly explained by the fact that American art has often dominated the art scene since the 1960's. The research done in English speaking countries has also obtained a leading position in academia in many fields. In art history the theories and approaches of American and British researchers have been well-known, particularly in new areas of research such as gender.

In the Finnish art scene, gender aspects were brought into focus in the 1980's. Additionally, researchers started viewing art historical material from a gender perspective by the end of that decade. Since then, gender related research has strengthened and closely followed international discussions and approaches. In this

article I will analyze the general changes of gender approaches in the research and practice of visual art and explore how Finnish art history has been affected by these changes and applied them to the research of Finnish art. Thus, the article will give a development and interpretation overview of gender aspects in the Finnish art scene and research of Finnish art.

Focus on Women

The roots of gender aspects in the research of visual art rest in the feminist movement of art history. This was a reflection of the political feminist movement during the 1960's and 70's in Western countries – particularly in the United States. As an ideological and political movement, the feminist activism of the 1960's and 70's is seen as forming the second phase or wave of feminism. The women's rights and suffragette movement at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century is seen as forming the first phase of feminism. Furthermore, poststructuralist and postmodern ideas in feminism are interpreted as the third phase (e.g. Rossi 1999, 18-20). The shift of feminism from political activism to postmodern philosophy has also changed the historical interests and approaches to gender in visual art. Even though the interests and approaches have a certain chronological history, simultaneously different points of view and aspects have influenced and existed in the academic writing of art history and research of visual culture.

The beginning of the second phase of feminism is characterized by a woman-centered approach to ideas, practices and objects (Saarikangas 1991, 237). In general, it emphasized womanhood and often included in its political agenda views in which characteristics seen as feminine were referred to as superior to masculinity and masculine counterparts. The dominant masculine values were aspired to be replaced by feminine ones, which often were seen as being biologically formed. This kind of point of view, which celebrated womanhood, has been described as essentialistic: it relays its ideology to the unchanging character of biological sex (Rojola 1996, 175-176; Kontturi 2003). The understanding of gender as a social phenomenon was challenged by the biological world view.

The feminist movement as political activism and a theoretical approach had its counterpart in artistic practices in the 1970's, particularly in the United States. Female artists, who were inspired by the feminist movement in the 1970's, eagerly expressed their experiences of being a woman in their art. These expressions covered both critical views on the state of women, such as criticism of traditional female roles and misogynic attitudes towards women, as well as celebrations of womanhood. In the expressions of the celebration of womanhood the female body and its features, female sexuality and motherhood were brought into focus (Rose 2001, 576; Tickner 1987, 268-270). For example, female bodies and womanhood were venerated in several works of art with the vulva form – the forbidden, hidden, mysterious, sexualized and desired body part was aimed to be turned into a positive and empowering symbol of women. This kind of open and emphasized veneration of womanhood is visualized for example in the well-known installation of the American artist Judith Chicago. In a piece called *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), Chicago set a triangular table with thirty-nine place settings, each commemorating an important woman from history or mythology. Each place setting features a placemat with the woman's name and artworks relating to her life: a napkin, a bowl and a plate. The plates feature a butterfly, flower-like sculpture or a painting symbolizing the vulva.

Another feminist strategy of female artists during the 1970's was to turn their view from women to men as an object in art. In this sense, they changed the traditional roles of men and women in art (Tickner 1987, 266-268). In the traditional roles, men had been the subjects, the viewers and makers of art, and women had been the objects. This kind of changing of traditional roles occurs for example, in paintings by Silvia Sleight. The American artist has portrayed naked men in poses, which are often seen in the paintings depicting women. In her works, men are lying on beds and pillows, and are resting in groups, for example in a Turkish bath.

These kinds of feminist strategies characterize the reflection of the feminist movement in the 1970's American art scene. These artistic expressions can be seen as profoundly political in their social context, but their content and execution were not yet necessarily especially analytical on the concept of gender. Focus on the veneration of women, or on the male gaze, still treated women and men as separate categories and as biological sexes without questioning the formation of the concept of gender.

The woman-centered approach in artistic practices additionally influenced the Finnish art scene, but with a delay. Several Finnish artists started to explore womanhood and worked with expressions of femininity during the 1980's and 90's. The gender experience was of particular interest amongst the younger generation of female artists, such as Henrietta Lehtonen and Heli Rekula. Emphasis on the female body at its different states of life gets its visual cavalcade in Kiti Luostarinen's film *Naisen kaari* (*The Woman's Curve*; 1997), in which she shot over 50 women, undressed and dressed, discussing their relationship to their body. Womanhood, female experience and sexuality have continued to inspire Finnish female artists in the new millennium as well. Expressions of the female body are turned into monumental measures in Mimosa Palen's sculpture *Mobile Female Monument* (2007), in which a giant vulva is taken to a public space. The sculpture consists of a two and a half meter high rubber vulva, through which the receivers can crawl into a silk-covered dark womb. The entire sculpture is placed on wheels. As a performance, the artist has been pulling the sculpture to public places and asking the audience to crawl into the sculpture.

In the research of art history the woman-centered approach evoked a new interest in the history of female artists and their work. One of the profoundly influential texts of the time was an essay by the American art historian Linda Nochlin, who asks in the title of her essay: Why have there been no great women artists? In her essay she wonders why the so-called great masters of art are always men and why the women artists are not mentioned in the history of art. She demands that art historical research material be diversified, taking into account the works of art which were left out of the canon of traditional art history (Nochlin 1971). These kinds of views have motivated several art historians to write regional, national and global histories of female artists. For example, in the book *Art, Woman, and Society* (1990) American art historian Whitney Chadwick writes a history of female artists starting from the Middle Ages and ending with Western modernism. This kind of approach, which aims at lifting the female agents from oblivion or margins to art historical awareness and fame, concentrates on female artists as people, often exploring the lifespan, position and production of the artists. The gendered structures of art historical writing are not necessarily criticized or questioned (Saarikangas 1991, 234).

Nonetheless, the writing of histories of female artists has been an essential phase in the change of art historical thinking, leading it towards a more gender sensitive approach. In Finland, this phase took place at the end of the 1980's and

during the 1990's. The female artists of the so-called golden age of Finnish art were particularly brought into public awareness by several exhibitions and publications. Art historian Riitta Konttinen commenced her research on female artists of the golden age with the book *Suomalaisia naistaitelijoita 1880-luvulta* (Finnish Women Artists of the 1880's) in 1988. The research emphasizes the female artists at the end of the 19th century as a specific co-operative group. Konttinen also uses the concept *taitelijasisaret* (artist sisters) in describing the assumed solidarity and friendship of the female artists of the golden age (Konttinen 1988, 17-18; Konttinen et al 1994). Since her first book, Konttinen has written monographs on several Finnish female artists, such as Eva Cederström (1989), Fanny Churberg (1994), Elin Danielson-Gambogi (Konttinen & Savojärvi 1995), Venny Soldan-Brofeldt (1996), Helene Westermarck (1996), Maria Wiik (2000), Anna Sahlstén (2001) and Helene Schjerfbeck (2004). The massive mapping of Finnish female artists by Konttinen has ended with the book *Naistaitelijat Suomessa keskiajalta modernismin murrokseen* (Women Artists in Finland from the Middle Ages to the Turning Point of Modernism, 2008), which describes the history of Finnish female artists from the Middle Ages to the turning point of modernism. Basic research on the 'forgotten' female artists has changed the canon of Finnish art, which previously covered mainly male masters.

Questioning the Patriarchal Structures in Art

Soon after the first researchers had aimed their interests towards 'forgotten' female artists and expressions of womanhood, followers started to analyze in closer detail why the canon of art and the art field had been and still were profoundly patriarchal. Researchers explored why the institutions of art, such as artist education, museums, collectors and art criticism, excluded female artists. These kinds of questions form a base for the feminist social history of art. One of the main studies of this point of view is a book *Old Mistresses: Woman, Art, and Ideology* (1981) by the British art historians Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker. They were interested in, for example, the concept of the artist in history. The researchers focus their critical analysis on concepts such as the 'great masters of art' or the 'old masters' and how concepts are gendered in art history. The title of the book indicates the patriarchal structure of concepts and language in general – 'old mistresses' as a female counterpart to 'old masters' produces profoundly different connotations. If the woman-centered approach represents the first generation in feminist art history, the emphasis on feminist views in the social history of art represents the second generation (Saarikangas 1991, 235). The focus of the research was directed towards power mechanisms and hierarchies, and oppression was analyzed through Foucaultian ideas.

In Finnish art history, the social historical approach to gender-related issues in art has continued within the general social historical interests of art historians. Eeva Maija Viljo has researched Finnish sculptors, designers and architects and widened the point of view through including female sculptors, designers and architects and their working conditions, evaluation and status in the 20th century (Viljo 1984; 1987; 1998). Gendered practices in Finnish artist education and careers of female artists have also been of interest to Finnish art historians (Viljo 1987; Suominen-Kokkonen 1987; Jämsänen 2001; Willner-Rönholm 2001; 2004). In these studies, the gender of artists and gendered practices in art institutions are seen in relation to social class. Social background seems to influence the material and mental possibilities of women when establishing a career as an artist, particularly at the end of the 19th century and

at the beginning of the 20th century. Female artists who chose (could choose) a career as an artist came more often from the more open-minded and wealthy social class, while male artists more often belonged to the poor social stratum (Jämsänen 2001). Nevertheless, social status did not ease the dismissive reception of art by female artists. Although the gender-related social history of art sometimes comes close to Marxist views of cultural studies, it is rarely emphasized in contemporary research.

In international academic art historical discussion poststructuralist and postmodern views broadened the field and its research objects during the 1980's. In general, social, semiotic, linguistic and psychological influences changed the foundations of the discipline. As in many other disciplines, this change is named as 'new' (new art history, new history, new musicology, new geography, etc). One of the consequences of the new influences was a renewed interest in language and gendered practices of language use. The language in the discussions and texts about art was and is often approached in the frames of French poststructuralist feminism, which includes theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. The fascination in language extended the focus of art history to the writing of art history – researchers started to explore how gender is consciously and unconsciously written into art history.

Academic interest in language and its mechanisms which form gendered hierarchies and power structures was also reflected in artistic practices during the 1980's, particularly in the United States. In the works of Barbara Krüger, words and short sentences were attached to photographs forming arrangements with feminist contents. For example, in the piece called *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face* (1983) the sentence is written with separate words on the side of a picture comprising a female portrait. As the works of Krüger are often interpreted, the featured sentences are addressed to the male viewer and actor while the speaker and object – the pronoun 'I' in the work – is seen as female.

In new art history, gender issues were brought to another level. Instead of focusing on gender as two separate categories and a bipolarized matrix of the gendered world, the production of gender difference and the gendered system of representation were seen as essential to explore. Rather than concentrating only on women and men as social agents with particular characteristics, researchers became interested in femininity and masculinity as discourses in cultural and social practices. As, for example Griselda Pollock declares, the approach of "[f]emininity" does not invoke any empirically experienced notion of women. It refers to a position within language and in a psycho-sexual formation that the term 'women' signifies. As a position, therefore, and not an identity, a fiction produced within that formation, femininity may be something of which its defining Other, masculinity, speaks, dreams, fantasizes. It signals at the same time that, which subjects living and thinking from that position labeled 'women' have to contend as an imposed or created positioning. It is also a structure and realm of experience women subjects need to explore since it may not be known to us, given its configuration through certain patterns of discourse and psycho-sexual formation under phallic Law." (Pollock 1988, xvii-xviii)

In Finnish art history, the research of gendered language use in the art field already began in the 1990's. Harri Kalha (1997, 236-261) opened discussions regarding the gendered structures of Finnish design discourses of the 1940's and 50's. Additionally, Leena Maija Rossi (1999) analyzed the concept of politics, particularly the politics of feminism, in Finnish contemporary art discussions in *Taide*, the nation's key art journal. Production of genders and gender difference is approached in these

studies as a discursive mechanism, which creates femininity and masculinity and their connotations in art and design. Following the example of Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, Tutta Palin has explored the gendered occupational titles of artists in Finland (e.g. *taitelijatar*) as well as gendered language use in describing and evaluating art made by female artists (Palin 2004a). Gender discourses and gender difference are also applied to the analysis of space. Architectural space has been interpreted as the construction of gendered practices, which form both feminine and masculine spaces, spaces for specific gender and gender difference. Gendered power mechanisms influence the use and experience of the public and lived space, as Kirsi Saarikangas as indicated in her studies (1993; 2006). In Finnish art history, gendered space has also been analyzed in paintings. Tutta Palin (2004b) has shown how the milieu portraits genre of the 19th century is structured with gendered practices in which space behind the depicted person contributes to the painting's meaning making processes. Space and the objects in it refer to masculine or feminine connotations. Anna Kortelainen (2002) similarly interprets the meanings of objects in space in Albert Edelfelt's paintings at the end of the 19th century. Gendered objects in the background of the paintings uncover feminine and masculine meanings.

Analytical approaches to gender difference and representations of gender have also influenced artworks of Finnish female artists during the 1990s. In Marita Liulia's multimedia work *Ambitious Bitch* (1996) gender is defined and explored through images of women and texts referring to Western feminist thinkers and gender theorists. The artwork's point of departure is manifold, including different kinds of views on femininity, womanhood and gender identity. Art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi sees Liulia's work as an example of the politics of third phase feminism, in which womanhood is seen as multilayered and the diversity of various feminisms are taken into account (Kontturi 2003).

One of the important concepts in the third phase of feminist thinking is gaze. The issue of gaze is based on an assumption of a certain viewer position, which is formed by a receiver during an image viewing process. The gaze has been seen as gendered and researchers have often referred to the 'male gaze' as a starting point or norm in patriarchal visual culture. The male gaze is seen as a use of power through which women have been sexualized and materialized as objects (e.g. Pollock 1988, 66-73). During the 1990's theories on gaze have widened to include aspects of race and sexual orientation. The gaze is seen as not only sexualizing women but also sexualizing race. The heteronormative culture is seen as influencing the receiving processes of images, which, nevertheless, can also be interpreted and produced from an alternative point of view (e.g. Bal 1996; Pollock 1999). Several artists have also explored the problem of gaze in their work. American artist Cindy Sherman is well-known for her series of untitled photographs, in which she poses dressed as different kinds of women. Her early works of the 1970's imitate still pictures of black and white movies. Her works of the 1980's and 90's refer to different kinds of roles of contemporary women, and additionally women in the portraits in art history. In her works, Sherman shows how the gaze shapes the interpretation of women in images. She suggests, through the deliberate nature of poses featured in her works, that she is the object of someone's gaze – an object of masculine desire. Thus, the controlling male gaze acquires voyeuristic connotations.

The concept of gaze is often used in analysis, which combines psycho-analytical approaches to visuality. Psycho-analysis, which uses the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, has been used in art research, particularly in the analysis of sexuality and traumas. In the psycho-analytical reading of art the

sexuality, fetishes and desires of an artist, in addition to their cultural context, are seen as manifesting in expressions, topics and details in the images (e.g. Pollock 1999). As Kate Linker has stated, with psycho-analysis researchers and artists try to understand the construction of the gendered subject and, in the end, disarm the whole phallogocentric social order (Linker 1995, 212.) In Finnish art history psycho-analytical methods have been used when researching individual artists and the reception process of their works (Stewen 1997). In addition, these techniques have been used in research which focuses on images of alternative sexuality and pornography (Kalha 2001; Kalha (ed.) 2007; Tihinen 2002; 2008).

Queering the Gender

At the end of the 20th century the art field became more diverse and the borders of art and visual culture in general became more flexible. Additionally, expansions of the field reflected the interests of art historians, who began analyzing images of everyday visual culture. This kind of imagery had previously been explored, for example by semioticians and media theorists, whose ideas firmly influenced the formation of cultural studies as an academic discipline in the 1960's. As a visual component of cultural studies, researchers in western academia started to illustrate a perspective towards visual cultural studies in the 1980's and 90's. Some researchers have defined visual culture studies as an independent discipline. Others have seen it more as a movement, which concentrates on the analysis of visibility with multidisciplinary methods (Vänskä 2007, 64-65). However, gender issues have been essential components of visual culture studies.

Since the end of the 1990's, visual culture studies have been particularly strong in the research and education of the art history unit and Christina Institute, at the University of Helsinki. Research interests have centered particularly on gender theories and the politics of gender in visual representations. Besides works of art, researchers have been interested for example, in advertisements (Vänskä 2002; 2006a), television commercials, television series (Rossi 2003; 2007) and pornography (Kalha (ed.) 2007; Kalha 2007).

Approaches of visual culture studies often emphasize perspectives in which class, race, family, ethnicity, and nation are understood as mediating both women's cultural production and representations that deal with configurations of gender and sexual difference. Globalization, rapidly shifting demographic and geographic realities, and new technologies have transformed perceptions of the world. These factors have prompted more critical consideration of the ways that gender and sexual difference may be mapped within questions of geography and culture (Chadwick 2002, 7-17). Western researchers in contemporary visual culture studies, particularly in the United States and Britain, have been profoundly productive in analyzing relations between gender and concepts of ethnicity and race. Particular interest has been placed on black people as 'others', and how they have been sexualized in visual representations in Western countries. These kinds of views on gender politics have generally not yet been applied in the Finnish context, even though demographic and ethnic questions would offer interesting points of departure for research in Finland as well. A remarkable opening for discussion on images of ethnicity in Finland was an exhibition by the Finnish artist Irmeli Huhtala in 2007 in the Finnish Museum of Photography. The exhibition was titled *Koti etsii ihmistä – romanikuvat mainoksissa* (Home looking for people – Roma images in advertisements). In the works, the artist had photo-

graphed people from the Roma minority advertising different everyday products in fictional advertisements. Focusing on the 'invisible' minority of Roma people in Finnish media culture challenges the one-sided images of Roma people and offers a test for (non-Roma) receivers to study their reactions and presuppositions.

In visual culture studies interest in the production of gender and gender difference usually covers the interest both in women and femininity as well as men and masculinity. However, some male researchers have criticized feminist movement-based approaches to gender. These scholars have found an ideological home in the loose movement of Men's studies, which particularly stresses the research of masculinity and male identity. Subsequently, the construction of the male gender and diverse representations of masculinity have been analyzed in several studies by art historians (e.g. Solomon-Godeau 1997).

Furthermore, male artists have explored gender representations and norms, in addition to the roles of men in art. Similarly, as female artists have used their own bodies as subject matter, male artists have photographed and exhibited their bodies in expressing the myths and reality of masculinity. British artist Steven Tynan has posed with his children in his photographs as a kind and loving father, whose relationship with his children is depicted tenderly and affectionately – comparable to the ways that the relationships between mothers and children are often depicted. Moreover, Tynan exposes his naked body in his works posing as a vulnerable and insecure object in front of the viewer, as women are often depicted. Similar use of the body occurs in the works of several Finnish male artists. For example, Kari Soinio has photographed his naked body in a series titled *The Return of the Hero*. From pictures of the series it is sometimes difficult to decipher as to whether the figure in them belongs to a male or female body – the gender features merge intertwining the feminine and masculine features. Soinio is presenting a male body which does not fit to the ideal image of masculinity, but which, at the same time, is an exceedingly common male body.

Over the last decades, gender aspects in visual art have also been broadened by the views and ideas of queer theory. Its roots in general are in the political human right movement of homo- and transsexuals in many Western countries during the 1970's and 80's. Queer theory focused its criticism towards the previous bipolarized understanding of gender, and instead emphasized the socially, discursively and performatively produced variety of genders and sexual identities. The focus of the approach in visuality is on the diverse representations of sexuality in visual culture – how sexuality and sexual identities are produced in art, commercial pictures and in other everyday imageries. As an approach in visual culture, it tries to demolish the conventional way of looking at pictures and interpreting them, and criticizes the normative meanings of images – for example stereotypical depictions of gender and sexual identity, or an automatic heteronormative world view. For instance, this criticism has been theorized with concepts of the 'oppositional gaze' (hooks 1992, 115-131), and 'resisting reading' (Fetterley 1978). In the process of researching visuality, concepts refer to an interpretation, which questions the normative assumptions of gender and sexuality in images. They also indicate an understanding of how the normative images of gender and sexuality produce these assumptions. The images not only reflect the surrounding reality, but they also actively produce it. Thus, queer theorists in visual disciplines want to stress the emergence of the representations, which do not obey the ideal view of femininity, masculinity or the normative view of sexuality. Another important concept in queer theory is 'gender performativity', by which Judith Butler has referred to the performative production of gender (Butler

1990). In the research of visibility, this concept refers to views on how genders are performed in art, artistic processes and images in general. The performance of gender is in Butler's view interconnected with power structures in society and culture, which implies that some performances are seen as more valuable, decent and dominant than others (Butler 1990, 1-6, 25-34).

Queer theory in Finnish art history has been significant during the turn of the millennium and in recent years. Particularly, in the art history unit at the University of Helsinki, and in Christina Institute, queer views have been emphasized in the gender-related visual cultures studies. Heteronormativity has been criticized and alternative queer views have been analyzed for example from television commercials (Rossi 2003), films (Kalha 2004) and advertisements (Vänskä 2006a). The term 'queer' has also been used in Finnish visual culture research via Finnish translation. For instance, Annamari Vänskä has translated the term into 'vikurointi' with which she refers to connotations like 'figuring' and 'disobedience' (Vänskä 2006, 16a). Thus, the image and gaze can be seen as queer (*vikuroiva*) referring to modes of representation and interpretation, which emphasize identity categories (gender and sexual) considered outside the normative. Queer-theoretic views have additionally been applied to older Finnish art. In recent years several studies have been published on Magnus Enckell, a well-known Finnish artist of the so-called golden period of Finnish art. His bi- or homosexuality has long been known of but not written or spoken about. In recent studies, art historians have begun analyzing his very sensual male motives from the queer point of view, explaining the difficulties during the past century in discussing Enckell's works of art. Queer contents in his works had been previously rejected, ignored or explained from normative views (Kalha 2000; 2005; Tihinen 2008).

Furthermore, many contemporary artists have explored views which queer-theorists have raised. One of the Finnish artists interested in these views is Aurora Reinhard. She has produced several works in which people whose gender identity is not obvious or normative are depicted. For example, in her video work *Boygirl* (2002) three biological girls talk about their identities, which they cannot identify simply as female or male. As a counterpiece to the work, Reinhard created a video piece, *Female* (2003), in which three female-to-male-transsexual woman discuss their identities. Reinhard has also dismantled gender difference of the sexes in her picture series *Gender* untitled (2001), in which the photographed figures cannot be categorized with strict gender norms. As Annamari Vänskä has stated, Reinhard has queered the femininity and masculinity, and explored the 'grey zones' of gender and sexuality in her works. Thus, her works are queering (*vikuroida*) normative imageries by bringing non-normative representations of gender and sexuality into focus (Vänskä 2006b, 139-140, 146).

Conclusions

Within two decades Finnish art history and the research of visual culture have advanced significantly in regards to views on gender, starting from the historical woman-centered approach and transforming into a more critical and problematizing approach to gender identities and sexuality. Although the transition of issues has been fast, all the phases of gender views have been necessary steps in the shift to more analytical approaches. During the past decades the position of gender aspects in the discipline of art history has also changed. At a seminar, one researcher of

gender issues in art history pointed out that during his research the focus of his study had shifted from the margins of the discipline to being closer to the center of it. Finnish research on gender issues in visuality has become more and more internationally current and follows sharply the international discussions and movements of the topic.

The change of the approach to being more critical and analytical in its nature has implied that views within the gender approach have become more diverse. Likewise, the third phase of feminism is seen as being multilayered and as including several feminisms (Rossi 1999, 18-19). Gender aspects in the research of visuality vary and additionally include contradictory views. Even views on the sex/gender distinction have lately been brought into public discussions among researchers. For example, while Annamari Vänskä has emphasized constructivist perspectives on gender (Vänskä 2008), Sara Heinämaa has criticized the view and brought to the discussion views which criticize purely constructivist points of departure and stress both biological and socio-cultural factors in the formation of gender difference (Heinämaa 2008). However, research on gender has established its position in the field of art history. Its focuses and theoretical patterns may be transformed along with the rapid change of contemporary society and culture, whilst however, maintaining its interest in gendered practices and gendered systems of representations.

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