

**STINT Teaching Sabbatical at the School of Art,  
Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, Arizona State University,  
by Dr. Kajsa G. Eriksson, University of Gothenburg**

FINAL REPORT

1. PRECONDITIONS AND ACTIVITIES

My STINT program have been at the department of Art Education, School of Art (SOA) at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts (HIDA) at Arizona State University (ASU).

<https://art.asu.edu/> School of Art is situated at ASU main campus in Tempe, this campus is ASUs' largest and have approximately 57 000 students. U.S. News & World Report ranks the ASU School of Art MFA program in the top 20 nationally, with three of the school's graduate focus areas ranking among the nation's highest – 5th in Printmaking; 7th in Ceramics; 9th in Photography.

ASU's president Michael Crow, is a former executive vice provost and professor at Columbia University, and he has a very specific vision for higher education. His vision is to make higher education similarly committed to excellence and *access*. In the article "It's time to end the obsession with college exclusivity" from 2019 he states:

"Closing the achievement gap between equally capable students from lower- and higher-income families requires rethinking the way universities bring in students from all backgrounds and ensure that family income is not a predictor of college success. And we must do this at scale."

ASU is therefore a representative of a new kind of university in US, that prides themselves on how many they manage to enroll and graduate rather than how few students the university accept each year. I was also particularly interested in the way ASU connects the mentioned accessibility with interdisciplinarity and innovation. From my point of view ASU

offers an endless amount of activity and opportunity, and at the same time you find things simultaneously acting on a local and traditional manner. These two forces make happy coalitions at times, but they also act and exist separately.

My academic contact has been Dr. Joanna Grabski, head of the School of Art (SOA), my main contact and help during my stay has been Dr. Cala Coats, Assistant Professor and program manager at the department of Art Education. <https://art.asu.edu/content/cala-coats> I was also a colleague of Dr. Bernhard Young, Professor in Art Education <https://art.asu.edu/content/bernard-young>

The agreement for my STINT program at the Herberger Institute (HIDA) was that I was expected to teach one class. Already in March 2019 I had a meeting with Joanna Grabski deciding that I would teach a topic course, and that I had the freedom to decide the topic. I was suggested an undergraduate course with a maximum of 20 students, and that the students would be able to get both art and art education credits from taking the course. I decided that I wanted to relate the course to my art practice and research as much as possible including, experimental art, the outdoors, the public and arts-based education, so I came up with the course “Experimental Art in Public Space”. It was also decided that I would teach Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30 AM – 1:15 PM, not including a lunch break. The class would start on August 22 and finishing on December 13 and the classroom was the same for the whole semester.

Early August when I had arrived I put together the syllabus for the course and stated the course description, learning objectives and student learning outcomes as following:

“Experimental art in public space and artistic development. The course will utilize arts based methods like living inquiry, material and performative mapping, interventions and events, in order to explore how artists engage with and change public spaces, and simultaneously change themselves and their artistic practice. The course themes are agency, performativity, material, documentation, everyday life and sustainability. The students are expected to bring previous abilities of artistic practice, techniques and methods as part of 3 assignments, and final project, artistic technique, material or medium is of free choice for the assignments.”

“Students will critically and creatively examine the concepts of interventions and experimental art in public space through performative and arts-based methods to develop the student’s art practice conceptually, relationally, and sustainably to build experience and confidence in making experimental art in public space.”

Student learning outcomes:

- Ability to critically reflect on concepts of public space, artistic intervention, experimental art making, and sustainability.
- Understand how to explore public spaces and the environment through art based methods
- Ability to utilize engagement in everyday life and the environment as part of art making
- Familiarity with the history of experimental art in public spaces.
- Ability to plan and perform experimental art in public spaces, in group and individually.
- Ability to reflect on, describe and present artistic development through experimental art in public space.

Simultaneously I had to design and decide the assignments that I wanted to include, and decide how much percentage each assignment was going to be “worth” in relation to final grades. In retrospect I realize I could just have made final grades with only a final project, but using the system of assignments gave me the opportunity to get the experience of grading in the US university system conducted at SOA, ASU.

This is parts of the grading information the students got in the course syllabus:

Attendance/Participation/Preparedness - 20 points  
Assignment 1 - 10 points  
Assignment 2 - 15 points  
Assignment 3 - 20 points  
Final Project - 25 points  
Readings - 10 points  
Total - 100 points

Since US students take many classes every semester sometimes up to 5-6 classes a week, the expectation of time that the students work outside class is limited, especially in relation to a Swedish teaching context. I was unprepared that I could not expect the students to work many hours outside class. My class was assigned only 4 hours extra work outside class, and this made me rethink some of my teaching. I was also not prepared that the students “shop” for classes, this happens the first week of the semester. This means that the student sign up for more classes than they are able to take. They visit the class for one or two lessons and then decide if they are going to enroll. The whole enrolling system is connected to costs for the students so the “shopping” is understandable from the perspective of paying for higher education. There is no guarantee that you will have *any* students at all signing up for your class. This creates a pressure and stress for the professors, since having no students or very few is seen as a failure. From another perspective it is a way to keep the courses “up-to date”, outdated classes will just not have any students. I could see that there were new and timely topic courses every new semester. I felt lucky to have 15 students enrolling for my class and I had only one drop-out.

One of my interest in applying for the STINT program Teaching Sabbatical was to experience the diversity of students in an US university. Also the Arizona State University was a great place to come to, since the university’s policy of accessibility and inclusiveness. This results in groups of students with a multi-facetted background, both socially and culturally. At ASU many students have Mexican or Native American heritage, and also African descent. There are also large group of international students.

As it turned out the students that had chosen my class not only differed in background, they also came from a wide array of art subjects. The 14 enrolled students majored in the following subjects; Printmaking, Photography, Art Studies, Intermedia, Digital Culture, Art Education, Fashion and Architecture. I had hoped to get the chance to experience teaching heterogeneous groups of students as part of my STINT program, and I really got what I bargained for! It was a challenge to manage an individual oriented teaching, and at the same time most of my teaching had to happen with a full group within class hours. I had to slightly alter my project oriented teaching towards more in-class activities with the whole group. I

also realized that I had to spend teaching time making this highly differentiated group into a collaborative group that could be part of each other's learning process.

In my teaching sabbatical I was also interested to learn more about how the professors worked with integrating art and community into their teaching. Therefore I had the opportunity to observe the course *Art & Community* taught by Prof. Gregory Sales <https://herbergerinstitute.asu.edu/profile/gregory-sale>

The description of the *Art & Community* course:

“Through studio practice, research and presentations this course will explore intermedia social art practice, public practice, art/life practice, relational aesthetics, community-based projects, and other critical theories and conventions that engage art and community.”

The experience of Prof. Sales teaching made me realize how the professors connect their own artistic practice, artistic research and teaching. It also made me experience how realize the freedom professors can develop context and framework around their teaching in deep collaboration with society, and explore and develop new formats of arts-based teaching through this. In Swedish higher art education there is also a high degree of collaborations with the society but rather with established companies and art organizations. Here, the connections was more personal and with another landscape of communities. In the US communities are to a high degree running through people's voluntary work and without state funding.

I also had the opportunity to discuss, experience and read about the class *Saturday school* lead by professor Bernhard Young. This course gives an excellent example of how higher education, research and collaborations with society (samverkan) can coincide through teaching courses with multi-purposes.

This is the description of *the Saturday School* course:

“The implementation, discussion, and evaluation of art instruction for K-12 populations. The emphasis in this course will be on the art instruction of children ages 5-15 yrs. The class will include teaching Saturday classes in the Eleanor A. Robb Children's Art Workshop. Each student is required to develop definite lesson plans or a set of procedures to teach a series of lessons to children enrolled in our Saturday Classes. The specific ten Saturday mornings

that we will teach and work with children should be free from other responsibilities in order to meet these requirements.”

This class integrated a model of teaching where the student taught at the Art Workshop that gave the Art Education valuable first-hand experience in teaching groups of young people, and at the same time young people in the ages of 5-15 was given the opportunity to attend inexpensive art classes in an advanced and professional setting.

My teaching at the ASU used different forms of traditional and experimental Arts-based teaching methods, and pedagogies were informed by recent arts-based educational research. I was therefore happy and grateful to be invited by Dr. Coats to co-organize a 2-day symposium with the title: *Imaginative Futures: Arts-based Research as Boundary Event*.

<https://sites.google.com/view/imaginativefuturesasu/home>

This gave me the opportunity to curate a panel and invite artists/art educators to an experimental panel session. My first step taken to distribute the result is a visual essay in the on-line *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* (JSTAE) link:

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jstae/> The symposium gave me a great opportunity to meet other scholars and PhD students at the ASU from other departments, and also to meet Art Education and artists from other universities like Arizona University (AU), Hartford University and more. I engaged two of my students as part of the panel, and one of the students are collaborating with me as a photographer for the visual essay.

During my stay I also attended ASU seminars, for example one organized by the Desert Humanities <https://humanities.asu.edu/desert-humanities-attunement-desert>

<https://ihr.asu.edu/desert-humanities>

ASU offers a lot of events, and you can find a great deal of networking opportunities, but ASU is huge and to find the right people and events was sometimes difficult. It is really up to you to seek out collaboration opportunities or people of interest. Shelley Stephenson, Senior Director of International and Special Initiatives. Unfortunately the School of Art did not organize many social events useful for networking and to meet other SOA professors. I attended all the openings and open events at SOA, and I also went to two of the Faculty meetings, but still meeting faculty and having the time and opportunity to network was difficult. Some professors rarely attended and there were no time set off for network. As a

STINT program fellow I find the hosts' ability to provide social events crucial for the success of networking amongst the teaching colleagues. At the ASU I found that my academic contact trusted that the general abundance of events at ASU would make up for the lack of social events at the SOA. My understanding is that an Art Faculty at a State University might not have the funding to be able to provide the time and the money for an extensive program of social events that can include networking opportunities for a STINT program fellow.

## 2. TEACHING RESULTS AND COMPARISONS

As a professor at the ASU you meet your students on a regular basis for a whole semester, either one or two days a week, and you meet in the same classroom if nothing else is decided. This creates a nice rhythm of teaching, and it also makes it possible to have a relational pedagogy as the foundation of your teaching, since you spend so much time together. Art subjects are of course special since the student groups are rarely more than 20 students, this also make a workshop based and relational pedagogy possible. The professors *own* their courses, especially the topic courses. In order to be successful you have to relate both to the teachers and the students interests. In my opinion this set up creates a good foundation for the development of new and interesting pedagogies. My experience in Sweden are different, here we use the "course plan" (kursplan) as the steering document to regulate the undertakings of the teacher and the student, the document both regulates the teaching and the studying. I have come to realize that the stated learning outcomes in the Swedish context alters the relationship between the professor and students making it into a transaction of knowledge rather than a shared time of learning.

In Sweden, you would look at the learning outcomes and try to fit them with different teachings situations, you can rarely design the teaching as a semi-open process where the teaching evolves as part of the development in class. To make it possible to engage with a relational pedagogy is therefore in my opinion more difficult in Swedish higher art education than in an American higher art education. I see the development in Sweden as quite recent, and part of the implementation of Bologna process and the academication of higher art education, that I have naturally been part of. The Teaching sabbatical at ASU have shifted my

perspectives on this a great deal, and I will bring this new experiences into my continuous work at the Gothenburg University.

As stated before many professors teach in close relation to their art practice and research, this makes the courses highly specific in many ways, both in content, form and experience. In Sweden on the other hand the course plan describes the content in detail of the course, as a teacher you interpret it but the main idea is that anyone with the right competence could come in and teach the course. You are many times asked to come into a class and hold a lecture or workshop in relation to certain learning outcomes and by doing that the person responsible for the course (kursansvarig) can “check the box” for certain learning outcomes. This alters how you teach, or alters the possibilities for what kind of pedagogies you can actually use or develop in class. What I find negative is that the students will start to “check the boxes” for learning outcomes as part of their learning process, and this in turn makes them detach from the actual person teaching rather than starting and engaging in relating to the teacher’s knowledge and research in a deeper and more complex way. This creates a situation where a Swedish teacher of higher education supposedly replaceable, in an US context, that specific course you attend as a student might disappear if the professor leaves their position. I find that the way learning outcomes is used run the risk of making knowledge into a transaction rather than into relational process of becoming knowledgeable.

I can see benefits of the Bologna system but it has in my opinion de-humanized the teaching situation, making it into a transaction and an agreement. From my teaching experience at ASU I have come to realize how much the Bologna system affect my teaching and my ability to develop certain pedagogies. The Bologna process have just recently been fully implemented in higher art education in Sweden, and in combination with the situation of a rise in stress and stressful working environment in many universities there is a tendency to use learning outcome as a way to make teaching more effective, this usually means finding ways to minimize the time teachers spent IRL with the students. I think this is a development that is not benefiting the development and the value of pedagogical skills in higher education in Sweden.

How much is pedagogy valued at the school of Art? This question is hard to answer since I didn’t have access to an overview of pedagogical strategies by SOA or HIDA during my stay.



Colleagues did not bring up the topic of pedagogy except at the Art Ed. dept. I did hear about a seminar for teachers on arts-based education by artists, organized by the SOA teachers open for all. The head, Dr. Grabski never discussed my pedagogies. I didn't get the impression that pedagogy was a priority at the School of Art. Focus was laid on your competences as artist and/or researcher and if you could make the work of your students noticed in society, through exhibitions, screenings or media attention, and also if you were able to integrate funding and "selling" education as part of your teaching position. For some classes it was obvious that the artistic style of the professor was adopted by the students without critical reflection, in a traditional master-apprentice style of pedagogy. This made some students excel in artistic skill related to artistic techniques and be successful, the students unable or less inclined to adopt a style of a professor made less progress. This traditional style was not used by all professors but it still existed at SOA.

The general knowledge of art history was very low in my class, SOA have some renowned professors in art history so this came to me as a surprise. Maybe this was due to the differentiation of majoring subjects or that the art students of today rather look for art on-line, for example *Instagram art* and Youtube rather than making sure they relate their work to a historically based art canon. The branding of oneself and the idea of becoming famous as fast as possible through on-line activities were a topic brought up in class. This tendency is similar to a Swedish context but in my opinion more emphasized at SOA.

The main problem teaching at the School of Art that I, and this was also confirmed by the students, was that the professors were acting in a stressful work environment. The professors had to do a lot of teaching, and also make sure to enroll more students by engaging in activities of "selling" the education, and teaching and developing short summer courses. On-line teaching was supported and Dr. Grabski was running a project of her own to develop a digital platform for on-line art education. My situation was special, I only had one course, most professors have three courses, meeting graduate students and have a lot of other things they have to attend and run during their work hours. Many of the professors live far away, some in California, I have no idea how they managed with their time. As I stated earlier, I didn't hear about any opportunities for the professors to develop teaching skills and their pedagogies. In other faculties at ASU I know that you could get rewarded for pedagogical skills.

I do think there were some really interesting teaching happening, but the reason for that, in my opinion, depends on the teaching skills and competences of professors not the support by SOA. The students also travelled far to get to class, sometimes travelling three hours on a daily basis. The students showed a lot of stress and anxiety, mainly their stress came from taking too many classes, having one or more jobs, having no money or having anxiety or fear how to cope with life and manage to support themselves economically after finishing school. I got the feeling from asking the students that the main fear came from an unsecure life situation depending on the lack of social security system for all in the United States. So little needs to happen, for things to go really bad, like if you get sick or if someone in your family get sick. Also, the fact that many jobs have such a low salary makes it hard for someone to build an art career since you might end up running multiple jobs and having little or no time and energy to build an art career.

As mentioned before the group consisted of students of various backgrounds, with different subjects as their majors and with (as I got to know them better) very different personalities! I had planned my course in a way that it would start very structured with a strong basis in group activities, and it would slowly move towards more individual work, making the final project a reflection on how they have reached a development of their individual artistic practice through experimental art in public space. In the beginning of the course the week would mainly consist of one lecture, one or two short readings, and one workshop. Through the process I used different feedback exercises to understand what the students' experiences were and what kind of expectations they brought with them to class. The complexity of the group made me realize that I had to put more emphasis on the group dynamic, I did this by intentionally doing a lot of workshops where the group collaborated together in different kinds of constellations. I also invited the students to be part of the process in making the groups, and by that understand and be part of the objectives I used to put different groups together. On the most part this worked out really well. They constantly tried out new group constellations, some working better than others. This became part of their participatory experience as part of the class, and made up for the fact that I had less opportunities to build collaborations with community outside ASU.

Because of the high heterogeneity of the group I had to leave behind some of the complexity and depth of content, and I could not expect everyone to enter class with a similar, or even nearly similar understanding of the readings. Instead I gave the students more examples of artists, their work and their methods. Neither could I expect all of them to have the same level of independence when developing their art practice, especially since they had such a different practices.

My strength in teaching is group and individual feedback, this together with a project orientated teaching is common in Swedish higher art education. You usually have a long-term assignment stretching for half or a whole semester, ending with presentations, and maybe an exhibition. The teaching are mainly group or individual feedback and discussions on the students' individual work. At SOA this was sometimes also the case but the teaching was much more carried out giving smaller assignments that could be done partly during class hours and with a final project in the end of the course. The final project would demand more, and/or bring the smaller assignments together adding reflections.

In my class the students could be expected to do 4 hours of work outside class, this in comparison to a Swedish context is very little! In Sweden the students usually don't have more than one or two classes running parallel, and you can expect them to work independently most of the hours of the week. This meant that I had to do more workshops than usual in class, it meant I used shorter workshops outdoor as a major teaching format, together with lectures that I connected to the workshop. I enjoyed setting up teaching in this format, especially since I could easily alter the workshops and add content.

In the third part of the course (Assignment 3) I asked the students to develop their own art practice using the methods of experimental art in public space. I organized parts of the teaching as both smaller group and individual feedback (handledning). The difficulty relating to planning time was that the amount of students in relation to class time only gave me very short time for feedback. Class ended at 1.15 PM and the students had to go to other classes, and there was nothing I could do about that. This made me develop my feedback skills so that I could make the most out of a shorter amount of time. I prefer a longer time for feedback but I also realize it is possible to do things on a shorter amount of time if the feedback sessions are organized with a certain repetition. I felt confident that my skill of giving feedback on the development of artistic practice worked well as a teaching pedagogy

in this heterogeneous group. The set up worked well especially for the less talkative and less independent students in class. The feedback on one on one was especially useful for less independent students and the only teaching method that would enhance progress, especially for one student that was only in her second year. It also gave me the chance to work individually with each student and be very specific on *their* development, this is crucial in art education.

The students' inability to engage in critical reflections were one aspect that I had to work on through the whole semester, critical perspectives, on phenomena in general, on one's own art practices and others art practice. Especially to foster a critical perspective of one's own work was really hard for the students. They rather wanted to please me by doing *exactly* what I asked for, this proved hard since I design open assignments, and explicitly ask for them to develop and present critical perspectives. It made me realize that I expect students always to reflect critically. In the future I want to take this into consideration and differentiate when critical reflection should be more emphasized and more be acting in the background.

Another difference was that the students were used to hand in their art work to their professors for assessment. That meant in a sense detaching themselves from their physical and material work. I never really wanted or needed to have their work to look at for a longer time, for me the presentations of their work was enough. I found that the students sometimes lowered the ambitions on the work since they knew they had to leave it with the professors, using cheaper material or techniques that could duplicate easily. The students adapted to not handing in their work and for assignment 3 and final project this was not a problem.

For the final project I had the student to critically reflect on their own development, this gave me the chance to handle the differences in levels of knowledge and skill in the group. Since the question in the final project concerned their own development, the starting level of skills and knowledge became less important, instead the level of development was assessed. This made it possible to give final grading without making too much comparisons in the group. I think my ability to use learning objectives as the foundation for assessment and grading as in the Bologna agreement from a Swedish context proved to be useful.

The grading through the course and the final grading was an adventure. I set out to give low grades, partly since my expectations of time put into the first assignment was lower than I expected as mentioned earlier. Also, I thought could use the whole scale of grades A-D. After the grading of Assignment 1 I had an outcry from some of the students, one student told me that “getting an - A is like getting a B”, implicitly a B was almost like a Swedish U (fail) for this student. On the one hand the students that have only As through their education can graduate with honors and this will be stated in their graduation documents, and important for future job opportunities, so it is an understandable reaction. On the other hand the students feel that lower grades is not acceptable. This have created a culture where students both argue and challenge professors on their grading. Students do get and accept a B, but a B is the absolute lowest you can give if the students show up in class and do the assignments, even if the result is low. This makes the student have a high attendance in class but the student engagement in class can be more difficult for the teacher. In worst case you have student bodies in class rather than bodies and minds. I was lucky to have mainly engaged students, and the teaching where we went outside doing workshops worked out in this regard.

I eventually did understand how to use the grading of the assignments and the final project leading up to final grades. I made a decision that I would keep higher grades as long as the students did the work required. I also made this decision transparent. I told them that since I was expecting them to *experiment* as part of their assignments I would assess their willingness to experiment, not only the artistic outcome, and also that they could expect higher grades as long as they engaged sincerely and bravely in the experimentations. The background for me making this decision was another professor deciding to give the same higher grades to the whole class depending on the un-assessable nature of the knowledge content and pedagogy of the class. This was an interesting turn of events for me. I don't find the US grading system regulated in the same manner as in Sweden. We grade using the Bologna agreement with a strict use of learning outcomes and this was not the case at the School of Art at ASU.

### 3. ACTION PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

I have found new knowledge and perspective on how the Bologna agreement have changed and influenced higher art education in Sweden. On one hand I can see where it is useful, one example is designing assessable assignments and adding transparency and management control of content of courses. On the other hand I can see how the Bologna process have fostered transactional personalities as part of both students and teachers. Both teachers and students relate, and have to relate to the learning outcomes before considering useful, interesting and timely pedagogies and content. This creates a movement from the professors' knowledge and research to pre-stated learning outcomes. These are usually written by someone else on a management level. This seem to create teaching situations and pedagogy that evolve slowly and keep courses at a status quo. Pedagogy and course content is seemingly moved from teachers to management level, even if the management is the teachers, it is usually not the same person writing the course plan that teaches the course. My plan for the future is to consider my choice of pedagogies as a first step when planning my teaching, and the second step consider the learning outcomes. I believe pedagogy, methods and teaching formats contains as much knowledge as the stated contents.

I really enjoyed and thrived from having so much time with the students, also to have a sense of rhythm of the teaching of the class. I cherish the time I spent with the students, the large amount of time proved to be important in order to know if they developed any real use of the intended knowledge of the class.

The opportunity at SOA to intertwine your own research and teaching due to the professors' freedom of the design and topic of the class proved to be a great experience. I could more easily combine teaching and my own research. One good example was the students reading of RAIN, RAIN is part of the research project REGN/RAIN that I developed together with artist/teacher/researcher Fredric Gunve. The students decided place and format of the reading, and they also documented it. Check it out here, preferably using 360 degrees LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXzEGlaEn18&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR03z66VuRzh-Cqzb9YE1OZbxj7j4VG-zJvOE3qM9N8faD1pQbTZ0uxYSRs>

The experience of doing this reading together made a great impact on the students, and I could see how this experience of direct action really made them see new possibilities in their own work. I felt I got a confirmation on by pedagogical ideas on learning in the arts. An effective learning is to be part of an experience, not only run your individual project or hear someone talk about art done by someone else. Not only to show examples but to act and be the example, both as a teacher and a student, together. In the future I will be careful not to accept the format of traditional lecture in a routine way when acting as teacher. I will ask for spending more time with the students, use more workshops, the outdoor and nomadic pedagogies.

Back at Gothenburg University I have started a series of weekly letters describing my experiences, sharing knowledge, material, links and network from my STINT program at SOA at ASU, to my colleagues at HDK-Valand Academy. I will continue to have contact with my main colleague Dr. Cala Coats at ASU, and follow up on some of her work and teaching in the spring, and I will also stay in touch with two of the other professors, and two of my ASU students.