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Author(s): Luukkanen-Hirvikoski, Teija

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Nina Robbins, Suzie Thomas, Minna Tuominen,
Anna Wessman

ICOFOM

University of Jyväskylä, Open Science Centre



Editorial team:

Nina Robbins (editor-in-chief)
Suzie Thomas
Minna Tuominen
Anna Wessman

Proofreading:

Karl Robbins
Dorothea Breier (her own chapter)

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ICOFOM

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Between Private and Public – Corporate art collecting and collaboration with art museums in Finland

Teija Luukkanen-Hirvikoski

Abstract

In this chapter, I discuss corporate art collections as part of national cultural heritage and semi-public collections. Corporate art is seen through the lenses of collecting, various professions and corporate social responsibility (CSR). I highlight the motives and the meanings of visual art in the context of business and practices of collection development, with the similarities and differences to museums and the museum profession. The essence of corporate art collecting is connected with business objectives, and thus this field of collecting differs in many ways from the objectives of museum collections and ethics. The main motives for corporate art collecting are aesthetics, well-being, CSR, corporate image and branding.

Professionalisation of Finnish corporate art took place during the 2000s, but it is not as widespread as it is in large companies in North America and Central Europe. Art-field professionalism generally indicates an increased focus on clarifying collecting policies, questions of displaying art and audience engagement. Sometimes a semi-public collection becomes public. Collaboration between profit-making companies and museums is also discussed. In Finland the public sector is still the main patron of the arts, and corporate art collecting and partnership deals with museums are supplementary means of financing of culture. The time span of the chapter covers mainly contemporary culture.

Key words: corporate art collections, corporate social responsibility, private patronage, professionalisation, semi-public collections

Introduction to Corporate Art Collecting

During the last three decades corporate art collecting has been discussed by scholars and some research has been also carried out in Finland. Different aspects of corporate art, such as the motives for collecting, nature of collections, professionalisation of corporate art and communication possibilities of fine art in business, have been researched, mainly by Western scholars.¹ Despite the

1. See for example Barendregt et al. 2009; Becker 1994; Behnke 2007; Hoeken and Ruikes 2005;

increasing literature and publicity of collections and collectors, it is still difficult to picture an all-inclusive understanding of corporate art because of the diverse development of collections and their parent companies. Research is often case-specific and access to private materials may be limited, or documents may be fragmental. There are no domestic catalogues of companies which maintain art collections. Information on Finnish collections is also scarce in the *International Directory of Corporate Art Collections*, which is the leading source publication for the topic.²

This chapter is based on my PhD thesis, *Corporate Art Collections in Finland – Collecting policies, practices of displaying art, and meanings of art in business* (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015) and selectively updated case studies relating to collection disposals and corporate partnership with museums. The case studies in my PhD were 25 Finnish and four European corporate art collections. The companies represented various branches of business, from manufacturing to services, and the size of the collections ranged from 200 to nearly 7500 works of art. These Finnish companies altogether owned around 29,000 works of art. The research was multidisciplinary, with three different theoretical frameworks: the theories of collecting, various professions, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The fieldwork was carried during 2006–2007 and updates continued until 2014. The data were collected through thematic interviews, on-site observations and a short questionnaire. The informants were responsible for art purchases and collection management (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015). Fine art and economics are not seen as being opposing dynamics in this chapter.

Some concepts of museum studies can be applied to research on corporate collecting, such as the concepts of collecting and collections. I discuss collecting as a social process introduced by Susan Pearce. Referring to Pearce's three modes of collecting – collecting as souvenirs, as fetish objects and as systematics – I regard corporate collecting being closest to systematics. The selection process and the role of the corporate curator is important, but without the objective of “filling a gap in the collections” (Pearce 2005, pp. 14–18, pp. 28–33). Due to the special context of business, collecting has differences when compared to the collecting practises of families and individuals. Corporate collecting is generally based on written rules and values of business organisations instead of private passions. Compared with the private consumption of art, the corporate curator spends the company funds on art purchases, not his or her personal funds or tax revenues.

Jacobson 1993; Kottasz et al. 2007 and 2008; Landensperger 2002; Leber 2008; Lindenberg and Oosterlink 2011; Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015; Martorella 1990; Ullrich 2004; Wu 2003. MA theses on corporate art have also been completed in many countries, two of them in Finland, with a third forthcoming.

2. Despite fragmented information, the *International Directory of Corporate Art Collections*, that has been published since 1983 by The International Art Alliance, is the major source of information on companies that have collected or has collected art. Nowadays the catalogue lists nearly 800 companies worldwide and is updated regularly. The publisher has both printed and online editions.

Quoting previous research on corporate art (Martorella 1990, p. 4; Witte 2009a, p. 34) and applying the definition of collection by Susan Pearce (2005, p.15, p. 159) it can be concluded that corporate art collection consists of all art in a collection which is founded by a company or corporate foundation. As Arnold Witte notes, there is no universal understanding of corporate art collections, since the concept of art varies and sometimes the products of the company or other artefacts than works of art are included in a collection (Witte 2009a, p. 34). The element of displaying should be added to the definition of corporate art, since a collection is displayed on the company's premises (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015, pp. 58–59), as seen in figure 1.

Today a typical Finnish corporate art collection comprises around 400–800 works of art created by canonised Finnish and regional artists. The largest Finnish corporate art collection currently numbers around 3000 works. The focus in many companies is on maintaining and displaying the collection instead of acquiring new. This means that corporate support in the form of art purchases of the latest Finnish visual art is currently modest.



Figure 1. Works of art in the collection of Fortum Art Foundation in Espoo 2017. Photo by the author.

Differences With Museum Collections

There are a few essential differences when comparing corporate collecting with museum collections and collection management practices. Business activities and profit-making objectives impact companies' interest in launching and maintaining art programmes. Corporate collections are highly fluctuating, which is the main difference to public collections, especially in regard to collection disposals. Permanence is essential for museum management (see also Levä, this volume). Business enterprises do not have any public liabilities relating to the collecting or preserving of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. That is the role of a public museum. Companies can even disregard the ICOM's *Code of Ethics for*

Museums but of course they abide by national and international legislation on cultural properties (see also Eero Ehanti, this volume). Without the obligation to follow museum ethics, this means, for example, that collection disposals can be made quickly and decision-making may be based on one person's vision or a sudden change in collection policy. But as Nina Robbins shows in her research on collection disposals in Finnish art museums, disposals are multidimensional questions and burning issues in the museum field too (Robbins 2016).

Another example of ethics and differences to museum collections relates to collection management and the expertise involved in it. Apart from corporate foundations, the people responsible for collection management in Finnish companies seldom hold degrees or have work experience in the arts and culture. Their expertise is usually in economics, communications, human resources or business administration. There are a few external curators and art advisors who assist boards of directors and art committees of companies, but professionalisation in the area of corporate art is not widespread in Finland. In 2015 nearly one third of the 25 Finnish corporate art collections were professionalised, meaning that companies had employed a curator or had established a non-profit foundation (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015). When a company or foundation recruits a specialist in the arts and culture, ethics and museum practices are applied to daily work. There are case-specific differences in the professionalisation of corporate art, but generally speaking, professionalisation in corporate collecting started to take place in North America and Central Europe in the 1980s to the 1990s (Behnke 2007, p. 228; Jacobson 1993, p. 9; Leber 2008, p. 284; Martorella 1990, pp. 140–141; Witte 2009a, p. 38, pp. 46–48; Wu 2003, pp. 212–213). In Finland the same development began slightly later. External art market professionals and interior designers are sometimes involved in decision-making, for example when new facilities are finished, monumental art is commissioned and questions of financial values or authenticity are seen as important.

The general economic situation affects on corporate art collecting (Barendregt et al. 2009; Martorella 1990; Wu 2003). When the economy is booming, corporate art programmes are developed, and during a recession collecting declines. When essential changes take place in the business environment, such as mergers or changes in market position, these are usually reflected in collection policy and practices. According to Christophe Behnke (2007, p. 231) museum collections have a more secure existence than does corporate art. Some companies have established art or cultural foundations to take care of their collections and to provide a more stable environment for them. Today several corporate art foundations in Finland co-operate, and they have established the Association of Finnish Fine Arts Foundations (*Suomalaisten taidesäätiöiden yhdistys*, STSY), which is a similar network to, e.g., the Netherlands Association of Corporate Art Collections (*Vereniging Bedrijfscollecties Nederland*, VBCN).³ In contrast to companies with the objective of profit maximisation, corporate foundations are non-profit

3. Further information on STSY available at <http://stsy.fi/en/home/> and VBCN: <https://vbcn.nl/EN/> [Last accessed 28 June 2019]

organisations aiming for the public good. Corporate foundations operate closely with their parent company in regard to financing and the composition of board members (Minciullo 2016). Sometimes there is a division between corporate collection and the collection managed by a corporate foundation, although both collections are displayed on the same premises and the same personnel is responsible for collection management. In such cases, art of low economic and art historical value is managed by the company and the foundation takes care of the more valuable art. In-house hierarchies within a collection refer to the appreciation of art, and sometimes the most valuable part of the collection is defined as museum quality. These works of art are loaned to public exhibitions and are the collection highlights (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015).

Usually the whole collection, or at least the majority of it, is displayed at a company's premises. This is one of the differences to museum collections. Small storage areas exist for damaged works of art or art that will be relocated or disposed from the collection. Only two Finnish collections out of 25 were located in permanent storage, because of new facilities and changes in architecture. Questions of public vs. private, especially from the point of space and patronage, concern corporate collecting. The origins of public and private dimensions are political in nature (Ruohonen 2013; Wu 2003), but in corporate art collecting these are practically linked to accessibility and funding of the arts. I discuss corporate art collections as semi-public collections. From the perspective of space and financing they are collections that can be seen as something between public and private. On the one hand, working places are usually places with limited right of access. On the other hand, corporate art involves different kinds audiences, such as personnel, owners and clientele, or even wider audiences in cases when the collection is displayed on the internet or in a public exhibition (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015, pp. 104–105). It should be noted that companies have no obligation to display their collections in public or to support the arts, but many companies have an interest to do so, or have commissioned or donated site-specific public art.

Documentation and contextual information separates museum collection from other collections (Robbins 2016, p. 69). All but one Finnish corporate collection out of 25 were inventoried, but there were many differences in the quality of information. Basic information, such as the name of the artist, title of artwork, the year it was completed and acquired, size, materials and location, was recorded. Financial values or purchase prices were generally included. Collections were photographed, but in many cases the inventory data and photographs were kept in separate databases. Only corporate foundations and a few other companies had web-based or tailored databases similar to museums. Sometimes there was additional information, such as exhibition history and conservation details. Except for corporate collections that are professionalised, it is a common practice that the inventory is conducted by secretaries or assistants, and updated by students of art history. When financial values are needed or are updated, there is an external art advisor or art dealer recruited for evaluation. When compared to these valuations and art market databases, it can be noted that sometimes financial values of corporate collections are either undervalued or overvalued

(Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015). That is because some art lacks a resale value. The other problem is that updating financial values usually takes place on a long-term basis, when short-term changes in the art market might be ignored.

From Wallpaper to Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes

The majority of Finnish corporate art collections were established and developed during the 20th century. A few financial, insurance and wood processing companies had made their first art acquisitions at the end of 19th century but collecting became more systematic only later. The roots of early corporate art were in commissioned Finnish landscape paintings and portraits of top management. Some companies even had a role as patrons for individual artists, and their works of art became the origins of corporate collecting. After Finnish independence in 1917, corporate art, as well as fine art, generally had national dimensions. Nationalism had an impact on art for many decades (Pettersson 2012; Robbins 2016). Finnish landscapes, mainly rural and sometimes depicted with production estates, agricultural work and figures and scenes of Kalevala mythology, as well as national and business heroes, were at the core of early corporate art. Corporate art collecting quickly increased during the economic boom in the 1980s and after the years of domestic recession at the beginning of the 1990s. In the 2000s, collecting slowed down and collection management, as well as collection policies, are under reassessment in many companies. Some companies showed more interest in displaying their collections and gaining other publicity for their art programmes, rather than expanding the number of artworks in their collections (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015, pp. 300–302).

What are the motives for corporate collecting? As table 1 shows, there are several overlapping motives for it among Finnish companies. The reasons for collecting are similar to what has been found in previous international research on corporate art (Barendregt et al. 2009; Becker 1994; Jacobson 1993; Kottazs et al. 2008; Leber 2008; Martorella 1990; Wu 2003) but there are differences among the emphases of various motives. In summary, corporate art is mainly linked to human resource management, corporate social responsibility, communication and branding. These motives indicate that there are practical reasons for corporate art collecting, with extrinsic values of art being emphasised.

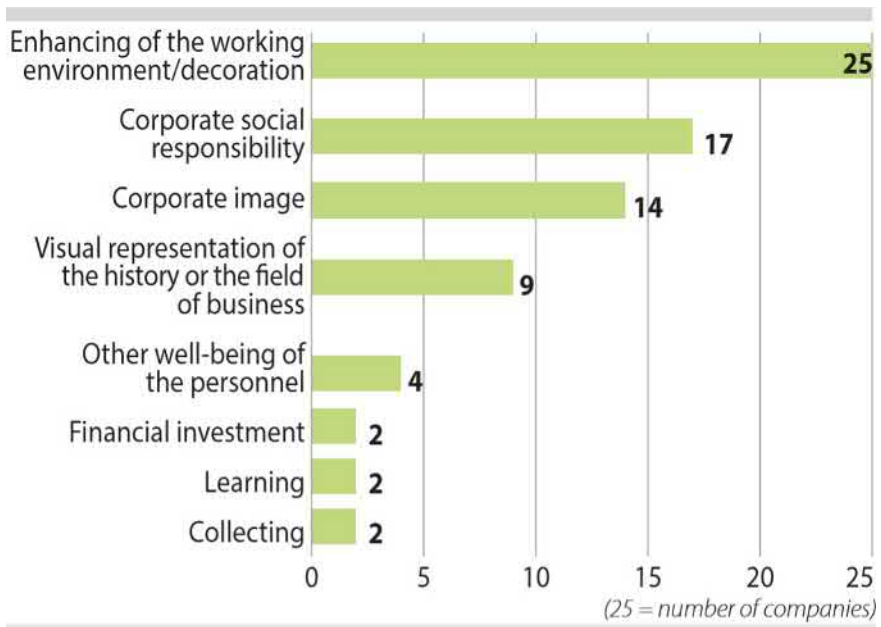


Table 1. Motives for corporate collecting in Finland 2006–07. ©Teija Luukkanen-Hirvikoski.

According to Finnish respondents, the most important motive for corporate collecting is to create an inspiring and comfortable working environment. This has been the main reason for corporate collecting over the decades, and this is connected to the well-being of personnel and corporate image. But does corporate art enhance individual performance, well-being or competitive advantage? It is widely assumed, especially among scholars of arts-based learning, that art has a positive impact on people and business performance. The impact of art on well-being or business performance is difficult to evaluate, since it is implicit and may appear only in the future.⁴ Regarding personnel, further research on art's impact at workplaces is needed.

In the future, the aesthetic and well-being aspects of corporate art may have different emphases, at least in some branches of business, due to open-plan office designs, digitalisation and branding. Some companies that operate nationally or globally tend to design all their premises similarly, so that the experience and brand become familiar to customers in different cities. This development is happening in Finland, for example, on some customer service premises, where there used to be corporate collections on display. When aiming at visual similarities in an office design, original works of art do not fit anymore with branding objectives. However, this is only the Finnish case. For example, the front offices in many European financing businesses look both different and extravagant, since collection highlights are located in spaces where clients enter, and these spaces and art are tools for building and communicating a corporate image. Referring to

4. See also Denise Sumpf's research (2005) on Siemens long-term art programme *Kulturzeiten*.

table 1, Finnish respondents reported that other aspects of well-being relating to personnel were provided outside the collection, in the form of in-house art clubs and corporate support for art hobbies, such as compensation for entrance fees.

Some 17 out of 25 Finnish respondents reported that they wanted to support young or local artists and local galleries by purchasing and displaying their works of art. They also said that this aspect of collecting is part of their CSR activities. CSR, corporate image and representing the history of a company or branch of business can be discussed together, because they all have a connection to reputation, which is intangible capital. The origins of CSR are in the idea of sustainable development and corporate philanthropy. In Finland corporate philanthropy related, for example, to health care and children's day care, as well as to the leisure time of workers, before the welfare state became stronger in the 1960s. There are many definitions for CSR, as well as arguments for and against it. In short, CSR is generally understood as business ethics and voluntary activity towards society and the environment that goes beyond what is required by legislation. It is a self-regulating activity with economic, environmental and social dimensions. Some examples of CSR are corporate support for the arts, climate protection projects or humanitarian aid. It should be noticed that despite the terms philanthropy and responsibility, corporate art programmes are not charity work. As many researchers of CSR have noted, an understanding of responsibility is time-, culture- and case-specific. Critics of CSR see it mainly as a marketing tool (Buchholtz & Carroll 2009; Carroll 1999; Dahlsrud 2006; Fleming & Jones 2013; Garriga & Melé 2004).

Permanent and temporary exhibitions of corporate collections on the internet with open access are rare in Finland. Copyright fees and the slow professionalisation of corporate art are the main reasons for this. Many large European companies present their collections and art policies on their websites and in the social media. In Finland, mainly corporate art foundations have information on collections and foundations on their websites, and curators usually communicate in the social media. Gaining positive media attention and publicity are important for any business. Corporate collecting and displaying collections are ways to show that a company is interested in its surroundings by supporting the local and national art worlds, and that it takes care of the well-being of its personnel. Art collection also communicates values such as creativity, risk-taking, prosperity, diversity, humanity, nationality or internationality (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015). There are lots of differences in practices regarding how companies apply corporate art in branding, but since the focus of this article is on Finnish corporate collections and collecting, it is not possible to discuss corporate image and branding issues in more depth.

As table 1 shows, investment value, learning and interest in collecting art were minor motivations for Finnish corporate collectors. Surprisingly, art was not considered a financial investment, although some valuable Finnish corporate art collections do exist and commissioned monumental art requires a lot of funding. Some Finnish respondents were reluctant to discuss the economic

value of their collections. This aspect also came out also in Rosanne Martorella's research on North American corporate art. According to Martorella, companies avoid discussing the economic value of art because they have to ensure their stakeholders and the public that all decisions have been carried out on solid ground, and thus it may be more comfortable to mention well-being or support for local artists than to speak of art that has a low financial value (Martorella 1990, pp. 43–44). In Finnish collections there are also works of art with hardly any financial or resale value, for example, the portraits of top management and amateur art. The majority of the portraits depicting top management are commissioned from canonised artists, and according to the archive materials, the prices paid to these artists are sometimes higher than, for example, other works of art by the same artists. The values of portraits are usually linked to a corporation's image and history, and sometimes to local or national histories, which have other values than just financial.

As others have noted, tax deductions sometimes motivate companies to collect and run art programmes (Jacobson 1993, pp. 13–17; Higgs and Salzmann 2012, pp. 111–115; Kottasz et al. 2008, pp. 239–240; Martorella 1990, pp. 25–26; Wu 2003, pp. 23–24, pp. 218–219). This economic advantage can be considerable, since the prices of fine art on the international art market are much higher than in Finland, and large companies invest in sponsorship programmes from six to eight figures in euros or in US dollars. Finnish tax legislation is different compared, for example, to France, the UK or the United States. So far, there are no tax deductions for business or individuals on art purchases or donating funds to public collections.⁵

Aesthetic values and the autonomy of art were important for respondents who represented family-owned companies and co-operative businesses. Even during recessions, these companies continued to make new art acquisitions. This suggests that these types of companies are more open to using art as part of their CSR programmes. Two CEOs representing family-owned companies reported that their art purchases were based mainly on aesthetic reasons. However, few respondents working in co-operative business regarded the quality of art or the artist's position in the art world as the most essential criteria when considering new works of art, with this being the case in only one fifth of the 25 Finnish companies.

Outside the White Cube and Public Obligations

In the following sections, I briefly introduce what kind of art Finnish companies collect and how collection management, including disposals, is managed. This information is derived from interviews and archival material from my PhD. At times, personal taste and ideas of good Finnish art were starting points for collecting. The concept of good Finnish art was mentioned by respondents, and

5. Finnish tax legislation enables tax deductions on sponsorship and philanthropy for arts and science, but not on art purchases by private companies.

it referred to canonised art and themes representing Finnish landscapes and culture, as well as traditional techniques of art such as oil paintings and bronze castings, along with stone and wooden sculptures.

Today most companies, and all Finnish corporate foundations, have collection policies and written rules, which generally follow the values and visions of the parent company. Art is supposed to communicate these values, and at the same time help make the company unique (Kottazs et al. 2007; Martorella 1990; Wu 2003). For example, financial and insurance companies highlight financial strength and modernity, so these companies have traditionally collected works of art with high economic and art historical values. In Finland this means canonised art, for example by Helene Schjerfbeck, Akseli Gallén-Kallela, Pekka Halonen, Eero Järnefelt and other artists representing so-called the Golden Age of Finnish art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Financial and insurance companies are good examples of the changes in corporate image and business activities. After the 1960s and 1970s, non-figurative art became important in Finnish financial companies because of its connotations to modern times, without an emphasis on nationality. Today diversity, creativity and internationality are values of many large companies. In many European countries this means that international contemporary art is the core of collecting, but Finnish corporate art is mainly Finnish modern and contemporary art, because companies do not purchase as much art as they did two or three decades ago.

Few Finnish companies have adopted the example of IBM developed in 1937–1940 to collect art of all the countries they do business with.⁶ These collections have artworks by international artists, but the focus of the international part of the collection is mainly on Scandinavian, Baltic or Russian art, and the collection is usually exhibited in the headquarters in Finland. For example, there are two corporate collections representing the wood processing industry that comprise a substantial part of international contemporary art. The first one is the result of a merger with a German company and the collection developed by a German CEO, while the second one relates to the anniversary year of the company, that was purchased by it. The latter collection is on display in the company's headquarters in Finland, and the German collection is located at the company's German branch. Art as a cultural ambassador, meaning that art of the company's country of origin is displayed in foreign offices, along with artists of that country (Wu 2003), is not widely favoured by Finnish companies. Corporate art navigates a complex combination of national legislation, different cultures and religions (Horowitz 2011; Rectanus 2002). Transnational companies have especially taken these regulations into account in their collection policies since, for example, displaying nudes is forbidden in many Arab countries. Besides culture, there are safety issues, such as fire safety relating to staircases, that do not allow the use of certain materials and mountings.

6. See further information on IBM's art programme in Jacobson 1993, pp. 10–13.

I have grouped the 25 Finnish collections into two main categories based on their contents, which is one way to classify collections. The first category is eclectic, and the majority of Finnish corporate art collections fall into this category, because of diverse collection development and changing collection policies. The second category is thematic. These are usually based on regional or emerging art or themes linked to the business of the company or certain artistic movements, such as naïvism.

One interesting difference within the culture of collecting contemporary art relates to photography and media art. Despite its recognised status as being collectible (Horowitz 2011) and the international success of much Finnish photography in the art world, the majority of Finnish companies avoid collecting photography and media art. Referring to the interviews with Finnish corporate art curators, this avoidance of photography was based on the traditional concept of art favouring oil paintings, stone, metal and wooden sculptures and works on paper, such as drawings and prints. Video art was regarded as difficult because of the moving images and loud voices. Still, there are screens in the entrance halls and lobbies of large companies where business presentations or news are running. Besides the traditional concept of art, it can be interpreted that those respondents without art-field expertise do not know all the possibilities for displaying media art, and their understanding of media art is limited. Avoiding collecting photography and media art in Finnish corporate collecting is deliberate, and is thus one difference when comparing corporate collections to museum collections. Art made of very fragile materials and materials that will vanish is avoided in corporate collecting because of security reasons and the context of collecting.

Sometimes regional, uncanonised art or even amateur art is regarded as collectible. Uncanonised art is favoured among companies that concentrate on young, emerging artists or on regional art. Currently there are two annual corporate art awards awarded in Finland. Both companies purchase the winning work of art for their corporate collection. Each year the awards are connected to a specific theme, such as innovation, networks or an artistic medium such as sculpture. In both cases, the collection is linked to corporate social responsibility programmes and participation. Participation in these cases means that either the personnel or exclusive clientele can vote on their favourite work of art, but the jury makes the final decision as to the winner. Both companies co-operate with external art-field professionals in organising these awards. One company designates the award for young visual artists under 30, the other for all visual artists.

When doing business outside the art world, the workplace is a different kind of context for art experiences than are museums and galleries (Rectanus 2002, p. 49). Besides security, there are matters of individual taste and visual perception. People usually visit museums and public art exhibitions voluntarily and do not spend years or decades looking at the same art while working. Nor do all employees share the same concept of art as do corporate curators. Among personnel and management there are people that enjoy art, hate it or simply ignore

it. As noted before, there is very little research regarding empirical material on how personnel experiences corporate art (Becker 1994; Martorella 1990; Witte 2009b; Wu 2003). This applies to the Finnish context as well.

Corporate art collections are sometimes characterised as conservative. Due to the context of collecting and displaying art, certain themes are deliberately avoided in corporate collecting (Martorella 1990; Wu 2003). Certain themes are regarded as difficult to display in museums too (see also Thomas, this volume). In companies, overtly sexual, political and religious artworks are generally disregarded because companies avoid possibly creating controversy among their key stakeholders. This policy may be changing with the increasing professionalisation of corporate art, and in cases where art is an essential part of the company's image, as well as a platform for entertainment. There are already examples of this among large transnational European companies that organise worldwide touring exhibitions of their collections. In their projects, they take various clients into consideration or collect art that deals with social problems or sexual identities. It is difficult to communicate diversity and show serious interest in contemporary art if some themes or techniques are neglected. There is only one Finnish corporate collection that includes, for example, a single artwork by Robert Mapplethorpe. However, line drawings and naïvism with sexual or political themes are regarded as acceptable. This interpretation is based on the formal qualities of artworks and on their distance from realistic representation. Finnish sauna (bathing) culture depicting nudes at their summer cottages or on the beach is considered decent to display at workplaces. Bathing nudes are often linked to nature or garden themes, which are usually regarded as acceptable.

The majority of the 25 Finnish companies acquired new works of art, either from galleries, other exhibitions or directly from the artist's studio. This is different from Behnke's findings, where art fairs were regarded as an important source of art for corporate curators (Behnke 2007). Only a few corporate curators visited art fairs, and only five out of 25 Finnish companies purchased art from auction houses. Besides explicit collection policies, things such as mergers, gifts, exchanges and coincidence characterise the shaping of many Finnish corporate art collections. Works on paper in large editions, small size sculptures, design objects and craft products have been popular business gifts. These are usually included in corporate art collections, and they generally are the first items considered when disposals are discussed.

The Phase of Large-scale Disposals

According to Susan Pearce (2005) the selection process is fundamental in collecting. It has an even more fundamental role when disposals are carried out. As Nina Robbins argues, collection disposal has been a delicate and debated subject in Finnish museums. In principle, the idea of a collection disposal conflicts with the objectives of a publicly-funded museum. A lot of tacit information and questions of ethics are involved in this last phase of collection management. However, attitudes of museum professionals towards collection disposals have

recently changed. Active collection disposals are regarded as part of collection management, and deaccessions and disposals have also been carried out in Finnish art museums (Robbins 2016). Collection disposals not involving economic problems or bankruptcy are a quite new phenomenon in Finnish corporate art as well. There are, however, many examples of disposals from European and American corporate collections, and some corporate collecting policies stress the constant circulation of artworks. Christie's and Sotheby's have corporate art departments, which also conduct private sales, but Finnish auction houses do not have special departments for corporate art. Businesses have different reasons for disposals than do memory organisations. The criteria for collection disposals in companies follow mainly case-specific interpretations of CSR, as well as changes in top management, business operations or environments with revised collection policies (Higgs 2012; Leber 2008; Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015; Martorella 1990). Instead of ethics, questions of corporate image and finances are more relevant when collection disposals are considered in companies.

Traditionally, only single or small groups of artworks have been disposed of in Finnish corporate collections, but during the 2010s several large-scale disposals were carried out. What were the motives for these large-scale disposals? I will briefly introduce some recent cases of disposals in corporate art. The first regards portraiture. Portraits of board members and CEOs are examples of the changing nature of preferences of corporate curators. Finnish business has a long tradition of commissioned portraits, which are in most cases displayed in boardrooms, corridors and auditoriums, as figure 2 shows. Large collections often comprise dozens of portraits representing CEOs or other board members. Today, a few of them are usually on display in each collection, and the rest are either put into storage, donated to other collections or sold. Some respondents who were working as CEOs or board chairs said that they did not want the company to invest in portraits anymore. This culture of displaying business heroes, which are mainly males in formal suits with an office view in their background, seems to be changing. As noted in previous research, the tendency to separate ownership and leadership sometimes results in collection disposals or terminating a corporate collection altogether (Barendregt et al. 2009; Betts 2006; Leber 2008). Alongside changes in organisation culture and people who are responsible for corporate image, the legitimisation for disposals is gradually taking place.



Figure 2. Portraits of top management in SOK's Art Collection. SOK is a co-operative with a long art collecting history. The portraits are permanently displayed in the conference room of the headquarters in Helsinki. Photo by the author.

In 2017, Finland celebrated its centenary of independence, which also increased corporate art activities. There were many public art exhibitions in Helsinki, but also touring exhibitions elsewhere in the country. One exhibition organised by

the Finnish Chambers of Commerce even displayed hundreds of portraits of past and current business figures, and it was designed to be experienced online. The pictures with context information were collected from various companies. This was a kind of counterattack to the prevailing attitude of hiding the portraits of top management. Due to copyright fees, it is not available online anymore.

The second case represents a financial institution and the largest scale of collection disposals in the history of Finnish corporate art. The information of this case is based on unpublished annual reports in 2013–2016 and the minutes of the board meetings of Art Foundation Merita in 2015–2017. Art Foundation Merita was founded in 2002, and the foundation is linked to Nordea Bank Finland. This collection, together with its predecessors, is one of the oldest corporate art collections in Finland. At times, the collection numbered more than 10,000 works of art, while today the number is around 1000.⁷ During 2013–2015 the foundation disposed of thousands of works of art, retaining the art objects with the highest economic, historical and art historical values. Selling was the major way that these disposals were put into practice. When collection disposals are carried out in companies, there are no disposal hierarchies, as there are among Finnish museum professionals, who consider donations to other public collections as the most acceptable, and sales as the least desirable method of disposal (Robbins 2016, pp. 174–175). Art Foundation Merita established a pop-up sales room at the Nordea premises in Helsinki, and sales were also organised in bank offices. These sales were advertised in newspapers and on the internet. The prices of artworks were set deliberately lower than the prevailing price level of the Finnish art market. In addition to these public pop-up sales, about 100 works of art were sold at auction houses, based on their high economic value, and a few works of art were donated to charity.

During the last two decades, the number of bank offices and employees has decreased, as many financial services and operations have been digitalised. Open-plan office design has reduced the number of walls. Together with these changes in the business environment, and according to the minutes of Art Foundation Merita, new branding objectives of Nordea Bank were the reasons for large-scale collection disposals. Disposals from the collection of Art Foundation Merita gained plenty of media attention, since the collection is well-known and appreciated in Finland. Some journalists were even a little confused when reporting on sales of artworks seen to have national importance, but local people loved to purchase art at modest prices from a well-known collection. When corporate art is sold to anyone who is interested, interpretations of national heritage may reawaken, as happened among journalists in this case. The sales reached the financial objectives set by the board of the foundation. After this large-scale disposal, Art Foundation Merita has extended its scholarship programme, and the foundation collaborates with the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki.

7. Further information on Art Foundation Merita available at <http://www.artmerita.fi/en/foundation> [Last accessed 28 June 2019]

The third case of collection disposals relates to museum collections. Instead of numerous new acquisitions, Finland's centenary year 2017 made corporate art more accessible to the public. One case of corporate contribution to museums, and a result of active collection disposal, was Nokia's donation of 27 works of art to the Espoo Museum of Modern Art. According to press releases and the museum's own exhibition information, this donation related to the centenary year, and was a manifestation of Nokia's CSR programme. An interesting point in the donation is that the company disposed of art that was mainly created by canonised international artists such as Bill Viola and Anselm Kiefer, whose art is very rare in Finnish collections. My interpretation is that this donation comprised such contemporary art that could make Nokia's collection somehow blue-chip and unique compared to other Finnish corporate collections, which mainly lack international contemporary art.

Disposals from corporate collections are usually made by three different types of gatekeepers, which relate to the phases of professionalisation of corporate art. The first group consists of individuals without any art field background. The second group is a board or art committee including an art field professional or professionals. The third group is corporate curators specialised in the arts and culture. As the motives for collecting are multidimensional, so are the reasons for disposals. Collection disposals result from changes in the business environment and top management, office architecture, taste, fluctuating attitudes towards the idea of corporate social responsibility and professionalisation (Barendregt et al. 2009; Leber 2008; Martorella 1990; Wu 2003).

Business Collaborates with Art Museums

Corporate art is a visible phenomenon in-house, but also outside a company's premises in the form of collaboration with art institutions and events. Typical forms of corporate support for art museums are loans of artworks for exhibitions, donations to museum collections, sponsorship and partnership programmes (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015; Oesch 2002; 2010). For example, in Frankfurt the Städel Museum displays collections of German corporate art, and the museum has received numerous private and corporate donations.⁸ In Finland the STSY and the Amos Anderson Art Museum (now Amos Rex) in Helsinki have collaborated for over ten years. This partnership has produced seven public exhibitions with art education programmes, exhibition publications and numerous corporate social events. From 2017 onwards, the STSY has changed its exhibition policy, and today it aims to organise touring exhibitions in various Finnish cities and art museums, as figure 3 shows. In Finland, the increased number of corporate foundations has influenced the growth of public exhibitions of corporate art, based on the objectives of the foundations.

8. Further information on the Städel Museum's private support and corporate partnership available at <https://www.staedelmuseum.de/en/support> [Last accessed 28 June 2019]



Figure 3. The STSY's exhibition *One Hundred Years, A Thousand Meanings* (2017) with online publication and numerous art education activities, was organised in collaboration with the Jyväskylä Art Museum. This exhibition was the most-visited one in 2017 at the Jyväskylä Art Museum. Photo by the author.

If museum ethics can be avoided in corporate collecting, companies do follow the ethics of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The ICC has published guidelines for marketing and advertising, and principles of sponsorship and corporate social responsibility are included in the guidelines.⁹ There is a lot of literature on sponsorship and different definitions of it (Lewandowska 2015; Olkkonen 2002). Below is the definition by ICC:

The term “sponsorship” refers to any commercial agreement by which a sponsor, for the mutual benefit of the sponsor and sponsored party, contractually provides financing or other support in order to establish an association between the sponsor’s image, brands or products and a sponsorship property, in return for rights to promote this association and/ or for the granting of certain agreed direct or indirect benefits. (ICC 2011)

Corporate partnership with art institutions refers to co-operation, communication and shared expertise, as Kaija Kaitavuori shows in her chapter on corporate partnership agreements carried out in the Finnish National Gallery. It is a more profound activity than corporate donating or putting company logos on the walls of an exhibition hall. It is a relationship that implies the combination of resources and expertise for maximising kinds of outcomes. Results can be, for example, exhibitions, art education programmes or other kinds of audience engagement (Lewandowska 2015; McNicholas 2004). Since the 1990s, corporate sponsorship

9. Further information on ICC's guidelines for sponsorship available at <https://www.icc.fi/wp-content/uploads/ICC-Consolidated-Code-of-Advertising-and-Marketing-2011-English.pdf> [Last accessed 28 June 2019]

and partnership programmes have become frequent in Finnish museums (Oesch 2010), which is about a decade later than elsewhere in Europe.

The fear of losing the autonomy of art or an art institution is one of the main obstacles to developing partnership programmes in museums (Alexander 1996; Borchardt 2009). Sometimes this fear is justified, but as Victoria D. Alexander shows in her research on American museums, the sponsor usually does not put pressure on exhibition programmes or other functions of museums, because they are interested in audiences and good publicity (Alexander 1996). Such fear rarely exists in companies, because collaboration with art museums and events is seen as part of the marketing mix. Companies are interested in well-educated, middle and upper-class audiences, which are frequent museum visitors too. But as Wu (2003) notes, corporate sponsorships and partnerships bring one's brand outside the museum to exhibition halls. Besides artwash (Evans 2015), CSR programmes have been criticised for their emphasis on short-term activity. The general economic situation also impacts corporate partnerships with art institutions. As project work has become more frequent, companies constantly search for new projects to support for their CSR programmes, and thus support for art institutions may be short-term (Borchardt 2009, p. 71).

During the last two decades there have been many international examples reported regarding ethical problems relating to corporate collaboration with art institutions. These are usually related to the financing of art institutions, public exhibitions of corporate art collections, especially sponsorship. For example, the Liberate Tate movement and its interventions in London (Evans 2015) ended some sponsorship agreements. So far in Finland, similar public criticism and activism are almost absent regarding corporate partnership with art museums. The reasons for this may be that the funding of arts is mainly based on state patronage and other public sector funding, and the support of oil companies is not so visible in Finland as in the UK. As Pekka Oesch (2002 and 2010) notes, Finnish companies do not have enough information on culture and possibilities for collaboration. According to the cultural economist Ruth Towse, the mixed economy of public and private ownership is typical of the cultural sector in developed countries. The main difference between countries is the balance of public and private funding, and how the funding of arts is provided (Towse 2010).

According to the annual museum statistics published by the Finnish Heritage Agency,¹⁰ the Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki, for example, has established and renewed sponsorship and partnership programmes for many years. However, few other museums in the capital city region have regular corporate partnership activities, with some museums doing this only occasionally. The majority of Finnish museums do not have any corporate support. In recent years, the annual sponsorship support varied from thousands to half a million euros per museum, which means under 1% of annual budgets of Finnish museums (Finnish Heritage Agency 2019). Usually the department of communications or the museum

10. Further information available at <https://www.museotilasto.fi/> [Last accessed 28 June 2019]

director take care of corporate partnerships, but compared to large art museums in Central Europe, personnel specialised in corporate partnerships in Finnish museums is virtually non-existent. As Wu (2003) notes, the museum director is a key figure between the museum and business initiatives.

There are many motives among companies to support the arts and heritage. Some of them are CSR programmes, growing globalism, competition among companies, neoliberal economics the privatisation of culture and the experience economy (Borchardt 2009; Lewandowska 2015; Pine and Gilmore 2011; Rectanus 2002; Wu 2003). The Western debate on art vs. economics has a long history and still exists, but at the same time many successful partnerships have also been carried out in Finland, based on win-win objectives and shared expertise (Luukkanen-Hirvikoski 2015). New audiences and funds are the major advantages for museums, but there have been failures as well because of incompetence and conflicting objectives of partners. Corporate collaboration with art institutions definitely requires further research.

Conclusions

In the business context, fine art goes beyond decoration. The motives for corporate art collecting are linked to prevailing organisational culture and case-specific dimensions of human resource management, corporate social responsibility, communications and branding. Corporate collections can be discussed as part of national cultural heritage. Due to changes in the business environment, the nature of corporate art is constantly fluctuating, which involves crucial questions of power, expertise and ethics. In business, the values and appreciation of art are generally based on practical needs and the external values of art instead of on altruism. As semi-public collections, the accessibility of art and available information on collections are restricted.

The public discussion on privatisation of culture and research on sponsorships and corporate partnerships indicate that corporate art programmes will also concern many Finnish museums in the future. Donations, exhibitions, art education and sponsorship agreements are some examples of corporate interventions in art museums. Corporate support for the arts is supplementary financing for culture in Finland. Successful partnership programmes with business require new competences and leadership in museums, due to the of different values and activities of partners.

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