



# Contribution to an understanding of the knowledge base in the field of visual arts

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## Defining the field

There are two different perspectives from which the field of visual art may be discussed, which are related to either before or after the artwork is finished. Traditionally, finished works of art are studied by humanistic fields like art history and philosophy of art. This represents an outside perspective that takes little interest in the process leading to the artwork, and regards the knowledge base in the visual arts as belonging to the humanistic fields. This understanding veils what is going on when art is produced. Seen from the inside, from the artists' perspective, the field of visual art is a making discipline with a knowledge base that does not belong to any established scientific field, but all the same may draw knowledge from all of them. Making disciplines arise from making practices and find their identity in the interplay between theory for practice and the exercise of theory. Traditionally, artists were regarded as craftspersons without a field of knowledge, but for the tradition of their craft, that was different from scientific disciplines. But although the visual arts depend on material expression, and artists work with their hands, they also use their thinking abilities in their work. This side of the artistic work has been underestimated since artists basically communicate through their artworks, and not through words or scientific texts. The written theses in Hovedfag (MA), however, demonstrate that artists are able to write about their work if they are taught how to do it.

## Characteristics of the artistic process

The process of making art involves separate stages; the process starts with a task, commission or idea; that ignites the visual idea, motif or content of the artwork to be; which then generates the artistic idea or the planning of an actual piece of art, materials, composition, and form; then comes the concrete implementation, preparation and execution, of the previous ideas; and finally the finished work of art. Along this process the artist has to have different kinds of knowledge.

## Types of knowledge

Artists need knowledge to (do something), as opposed to traditional disciplines that acquire knowledge about (something), which consists of a combination of theoretical and practice based knowledge:

- general theoretical knowledge;
- theory for practice;
- knowledge of confidence;
- knowledge of practice or skills.

The general theoretical knowledge implies an understanding of the history of art and aesthetics, the social role of art, and scientific topics of relevance.

Theory for practice deals with the knowledge connected to the artistic process, and may be classified in three basic categories, related to:

- premises, ideas, intentions;

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- techniques, materials, including artistic processes; and
- reflections about finished works of art.

Knowledge of confidence relates to an understanding of subject matter, which is thought through practice in a milieu or tradition.

Knowledge of practice or skills is the individual ability to realise and implement her/his ideas into artworks.