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The Association of Art Teachers in Finland

**110 Years of Collaboration and Development of
Art Education**

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Abstract

The Association of Art Teachers in Finland, Kuvataideopettajat ry, turns 110 this year. It is the oldest pedagogic subject teachers' association in Finland. The association's operation is based on the collaboration of active art teachers and voluntary work. Among approximately 800 members there are teachers from comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools, art schools and future teachers studying in the field. The association's mission is to develop art education and improve art teachers' positions as well as maintain the connection between Finnish art teachers.

Keywords: Art teachers' association

This article clarifies how The Association of Art Teachers in Finland (see <http://www.kuvataideopettajat.fi/>) has cultivated Finnish art education. Finnish art education began to evolve through the founding of The Association of Drawing Teachers in Finland. In the summer of 1906, in the Grand Duchy of Finland, still under the rule of the Russian Empire, a conference of teachers took place. In the conference, the drawing teachers



Image 1. Art teachers of Tampere visiting Graffiti-painters

had their own department. Drawing had only come to Finnish schools in the latter part of 19th century and the status of the subject was low: the equipment and spaces were inadequate and the teachers had no qualifying training. The chairwoman of the drawing teachers department *Anna Sahlstén* suggested the founding of an association to advance the teaching of drawing and strengthen its place in Finnish schools. The idea received a strong support and the association's statutes were accepted in August 22, 1908 in the Finnish senate.

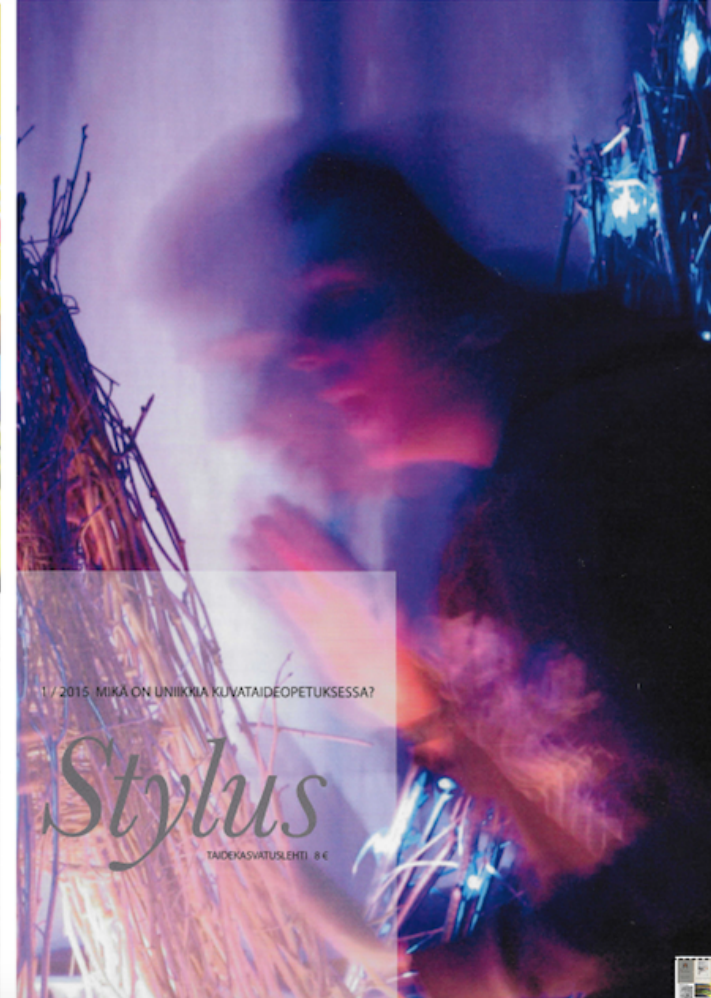
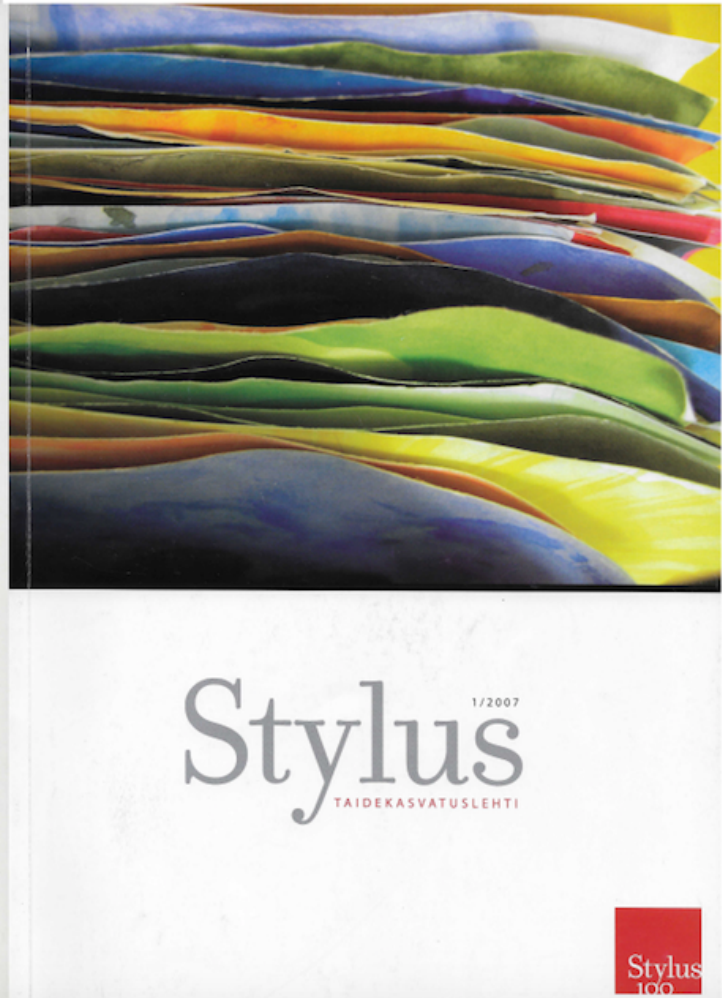
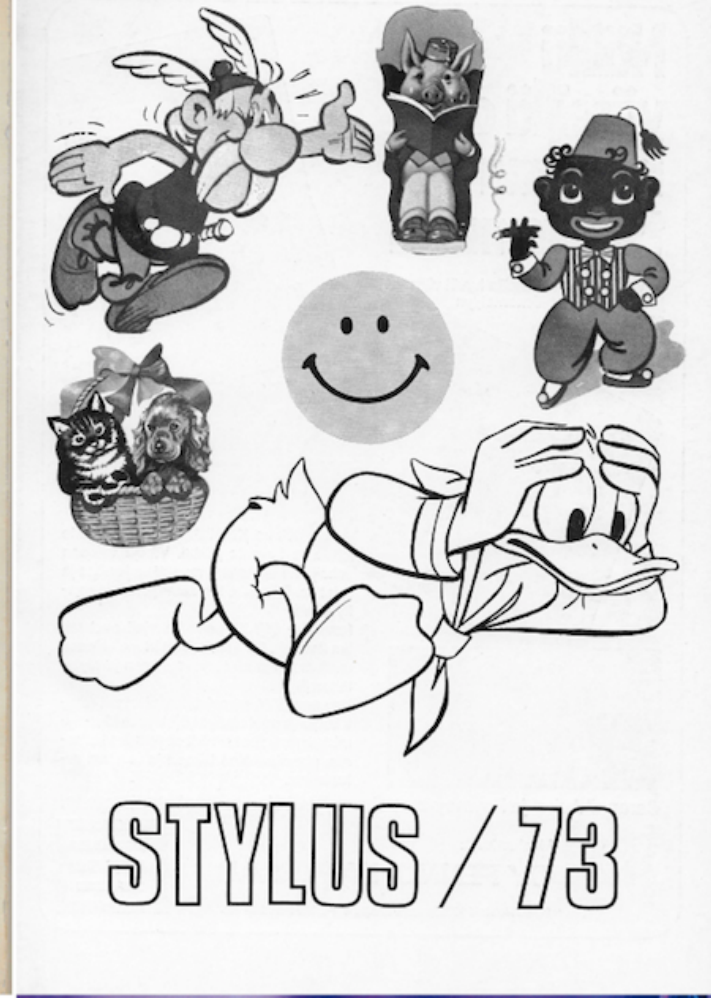
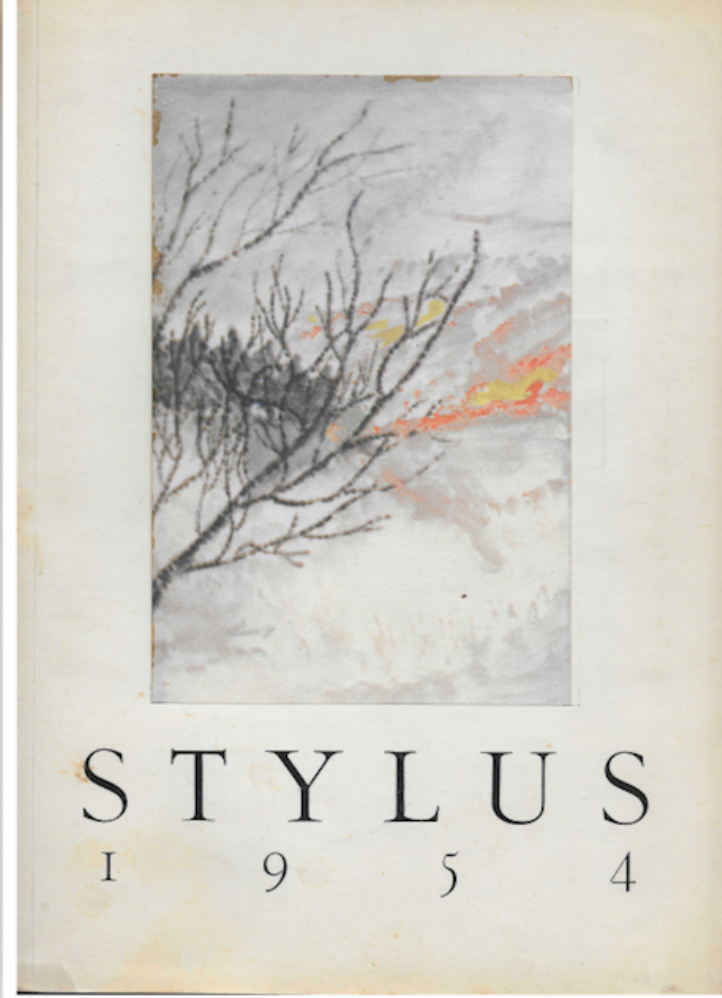
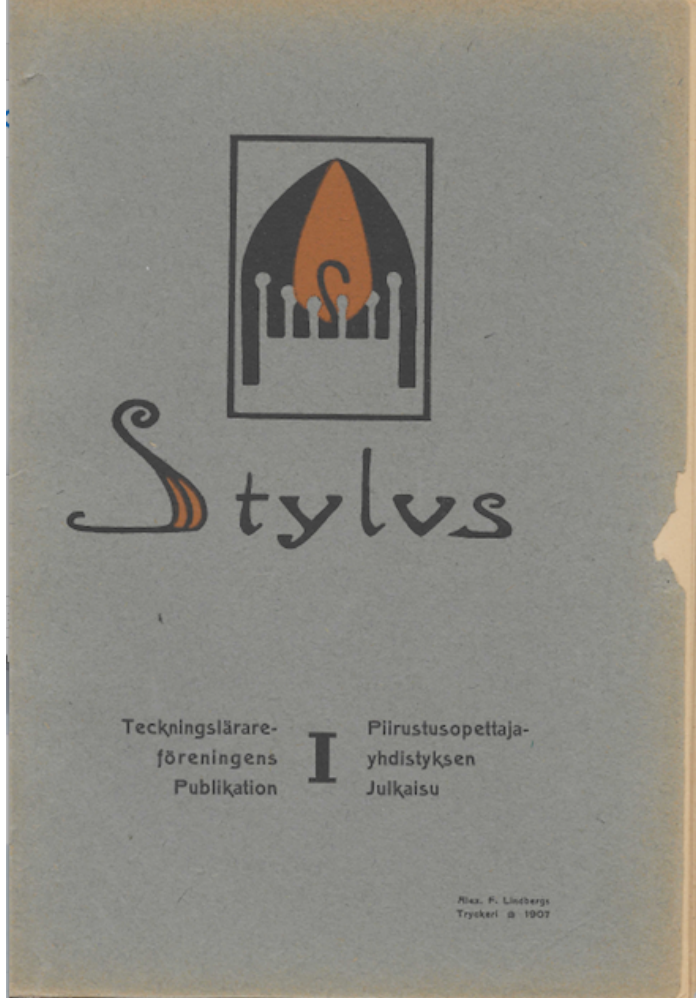


Image2.

Covers of *Stylus* magazine



Image 3. Art teachers learning new methods in Spring seminar 2016

Thanks to the active work of the association, the subject soon got more lesson hours and a government committee was founded to make suggestions for matters concerning the organising of teaching drawing. The committee's 1909 finished report contained propositions that concerned the status and distribution of lesson hours of the subject the inspecting of teaching, guidelines for the curriculum, and arranging of teachers training. The independent schools in Finland and Finnish school system development was central in the first decades of 20th century. New ideas and European ideologies were adopted gradually into Finnish educational system. (Kapari, H. 1907; Cederholm, H. 1928; Veräjälä, M. 1966).

The association's name, since 1999, has been The Association of Art Teachers. Improving art education's status in Finnish society and especially in the field of education is still one of its priorities. The association has actively promoted changes in the curriculum over the decades and has contributed to the founding of art schools and art teacher training. The association has networked with organisations central to field of education to obtain topical education political information to be able to establish the central views of our own subject.

The basic mission of our association is to develop and strengthen Finnish art education, which has remained relatively the same throughout the years; whereas the subject's central content has evolved and broadened vastly. Today art teachers' training and the art education's research in universities is of a very high quality. The mission of the Association of Art Teachers in Finland is to improve art education in schools and for support in particular for working teachers and help them develop their subject and share their experiences. The organisation is actualizing this mission by publishing a magazine and holding annual training seminars. Our association continues to publish the magazine called *Stylus* since 1907. From this publication interesting discussions of art education can be found spanning over a hundred years. The first issues reported activities as well as encouraging articles about why the teaching of drawing was important. Influences came from international congresses and from across Europe. It seems that educating the people and teaching good taste were the central goals. Different drawing methods were

exhibited and suitable themes for artwork were discussed. Naturally the conversation already included the pedagogic views that teaching ought to take in account the students' level of development and their interests in different topics (Veräjälä, M. 1966).

In the articles of magazine, written by the members of our organisation, the mission of subject was still discussed. In the discussions among the teachers of the field as well as the articles in the paper showed the development of the Finnish society and the opening connections to the world outside of Finland. No less than eight Finnish drawing teachers participated in the art teachers' congress in Bern in 1904. Inspired by the congress, the participants wrote enthusiastic articles published in the beginning *Stylus* issues to share their experiences and international influences.

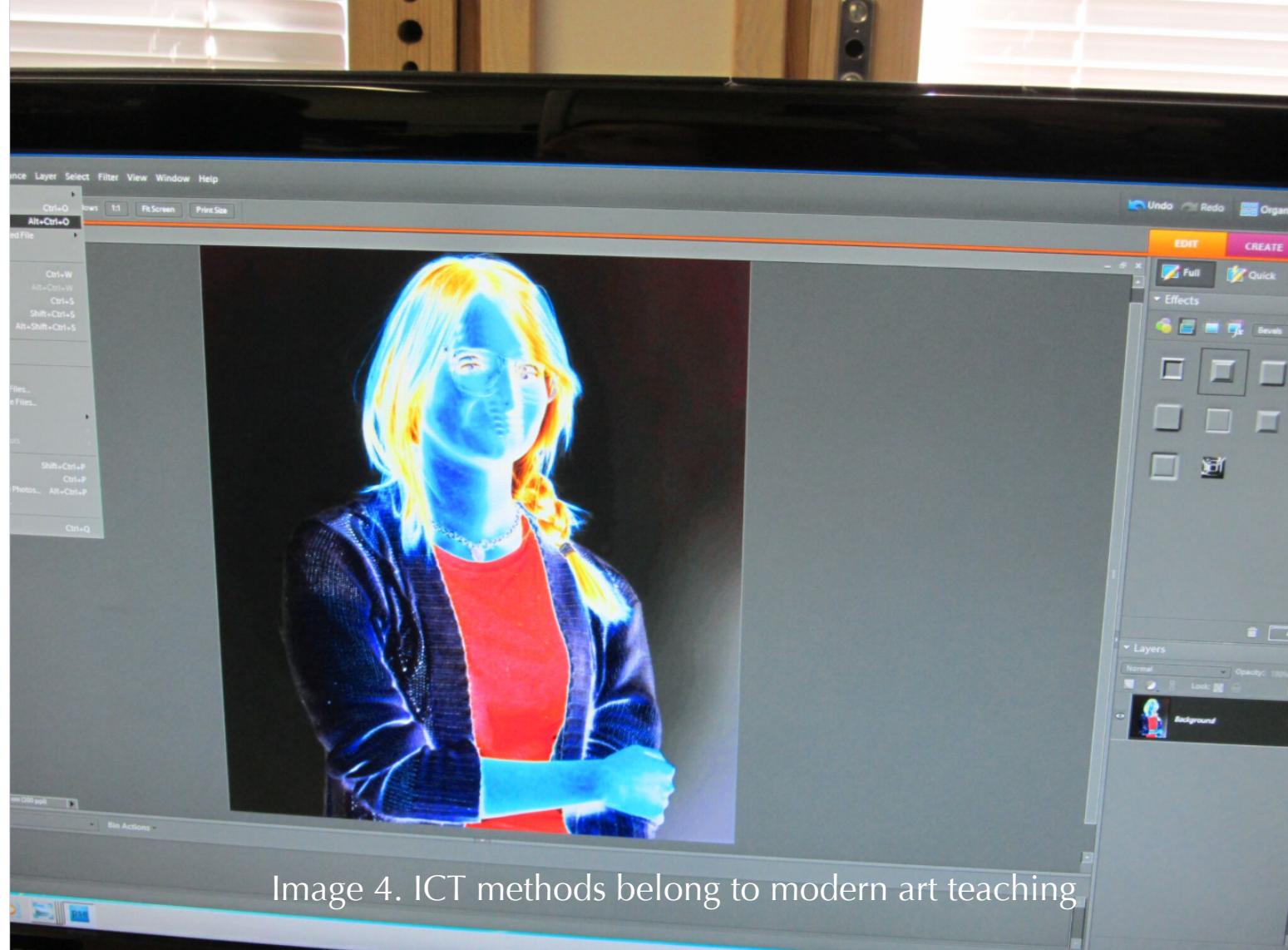


Image 4. ICT methods belong to modern art teaching

Participation in international art education events and reporting from them has been active ever since the Bern congress; especially the InSEA-congress experiences are shared regularly. Other northern collaborations have also been strong. The sister associations of northern art education gather twice a year for the *Nordisk Samrådet's* meeting.

The most concrete regular form of collaboration is the biannually conference in each northern country held as a summer course: *Nordisk Kurs – NK* (<http://nordiskkurs.blogspot.fi/>). Finland participated – and in our turn held - Northern Courses since 1971. This year once again it is Finland's turn and in June 2016 the Northern Course: Energy and Movement will be held in Tammisaari (see Piironen, L. 2007; Stenman, J. 2007; Tolvanen, H. 1907).

The visual phenomena that in some way ties art and the teaching of art have greatly grown in quantity. As I'm reading the *Stylus* of today, I feel that art education in Finland is progressively and strongly tied to current times. Art teachers actively follow the topical questions in art, media culture, and society. In the field of art education reforms have been made before they're even brought into the official curriculum. This seems to be the case in the new national core curriculum that shall be put in place from August 1st, 2016 (the Finnish national Core Curriculum, 2016). The phenomenon-based learning, ICT-skills, and cooperation with other subjects are highlighted in it, which aren't entirely new innovations to modern art teaching.

In addition it is interesting to see the different values, opinions, and views of different Finnish art teachers. From the pages of the magazine, one can find ideas and thoughts of enthusiastic, oriented, art teachers that don't necessarily always concur. The planning and execution of teaching is based on personal art views. One specified binding syllabus does not exist and rightly so. Teachers' pedagogy isn't too restricted. It is precisely the diversity and personal touch for teaching that makes the exchange of thoughts so rewarding.

Art and visual culture is in constant flux and change. The association of Art Teachers in Finland takes care to improve teaching and maintaining the discussion. One example of this is the organisation of professional training. From the very start, one of the association's important activity has been annual gatherings and seminars. It has become a practice that every

year art teachers hold a two-day seminar, one in autumn and one in the spring that gathers teachers from across the country to discuss current questions in the field of art education. An important aspect of the seminars is to exchange experiences and learn new things from lectures and workshops. Different training events are organised around Finland and the themes are chosen from current phenomena in art, the school world, or drawn from local special features.

Today, the ease of maintaining contact with colleagues and sharing information has also evolved and art teachers share knowledge and experiences more and more through modern communications technology. Through the association's email, web-site, Facebook, twitter, and Instagram (#kuvis, #kuvisope) we share information about current training events, contests, happenings and topical phenomena and education political matters

(<https://www.facebook.com/Kuvataideopettajat-275375700657/?fref=ts>.) In addition, Finnish art teachers enthusiastically discuss topics in more informal communities in social media. Links, hints, photos, questions and answers to difficult situations are easily shared.

Discussion

The 110 year-old association still holds central training events that address topical questions in art education and work as a



Image 5. Colour pyramid made by students from schools in Tampere

meeting place for colleagues. As well as Stylus, still holds its important place by sharing information as well as developing social contacts. The connections available through modern technology are also essential. The important for the people working in the field is that there are ways to develop contacts and collaborations In many schools, the art teacher is the only representative of their subject and to whom the association offers support amid the constantly changing visual culture. Cooperation with teachers of other subjects is important to art teachers and will increase even more according to the new curriculum. The association upholds the international collaboration of art teachers by networking with Finnish InSEA and international InSEA.

This year we celebrate the 110 year old association and the collaboration of Finnish art teachers. The year culminates in autumn 2016s celebratory seminar in Helsinki. Proudly, our association is the first organised pedagogic community, supports art teachers proactive action, and the impact and advancement of both art education as well as society.

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