

“It takes courage  
to promote your own cause,  
as no-one else will promote it.”

ELINA JUOPPERI is an artist who has lived in Paris for a long time and recently returned to Finland, to the capital region via Lapland.

Are the artist fees realised in Finland in the best possible way?

They are not realised at all. Well, I am not a very famous artist, but from the 10 exhibitions that I have had in Finland in the past three years, I only received a fee for one of them. That was in the State Art Museum Ateneum (currently known as the National Gallery), where I asked for it. When I then complained about how small the fee was, they paid me a bit more. That money was spent on train tickets from the North of Finland to Helsinki to see the space and plan the exhibition. In the end it was plus-minus-zero. All I gained from the exhibition was glory.

I have worked for years as a waitress and put money aside. Now the savings are gone. For one of the museum exhibitions I got 2000 euros, which I applied for. First I asked the museum whether they had any budget. There was no budget in that case, so I said that I will apply for a grant, but that they should help me with that. In the end I applied for the grant by myself, as they were not even aware of that grant existing. The grant went completely into the installation structures, timber for

shelves, etc. No exhibition fee was left for me. Then this museum said that I should be grateful that they are giving the space for me for free, and not charging rent for it. I was shocked and amazed. I think I sent them a bit angry email explaining that the purpose of a museum is the presentation of works; historical, cultural and art works – it is their job to have exhibitions! Why would they even ask me for this kind of gratitude? In the end it went quite conflictual, both before and after the exhibition. But they agreed to pay for the transportation of works from Rovaniemi to this place. At that time I lived in Paris and I would have understood if they said they would cover the trips from Helsinki, not from Paris. But it was completely weird that it was from Rovaniemi, when I have no connection with Rovaniemi. If I remember right I took my sisters' car in the end and drove with that. I paid my own travels to Rovaniemi. But then they paid the per diem. Of course I was grateful for that. But I couldn't help wondering how it is technically possible, to pay per diems but not salary (per diems are paid to employees). They also covered the hotel for the duration of the installation. Even that is not

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always completely obvious in Finland. In France it would be. I ended up paying approximately 1 000 euros from my own savings, as well as 2 000 euros that I received from the Multicultural fund of the Arts Council, which was given for this particular exhibition.

I am really amazed how museums are so far apart from artists in Finland, when you compare them to France. It is as if they would have nothing to do with each other, two separate units, which are fighting against each other. Instead of artists moaning about museums taking their money, and museums saying that they cannot afford to pay artists, they should join forces in approaching the exterior “front,” that is the decision makers, how is it possible to do this job, if we don’t get money. I would hope for more synergy. That is why you first have to ask whether there is budget. And if there is not, you can think together how to raise funds.

But can it be that the museums do receive money but they spend it on something else than artist salaries?

I used to work as the museum technician at the Aine Art Museum in Tornio. The salary was very low; the working week was 36 hours, and I received 1 600 euros/month (minus tax). Museum workers’ wages are quite bad compared to an average Finn’s salary. Museums are doing an important work preserving the culture. Nevertheless they function with very small budgets, where all the money goes to salaries of the workers and for the maintenance of the building. The municipalities do not give money for the programmes. That is a very big problem. I demand that artists have to be paid. The Kuvasto fees (The Visual Artists’ Copyright Association) are ridiculously

and shamefully small. But I do understand also from the point of view of the museum, that in front of you there is sitting some politician, who couldn’t care less about art, and then someone is calling and asking why you need to give more to art, when there are not enough diapers for the elderly. Quite many museum directors have to work in this kind of climate. We should join forces in fighting for art. If we would get more money to the museums, slowly we could also start to pay for the production of artworks. But it must be true that there are people in the museums, whose attitude is negative: generally being that we do not know how to do things differently, because we never did it that way before.

I heard a story from a Finnish folk musician. He went to play a concert for free, the organisers could only afford to pay his travels. But after the concert they came with an enormous flower bouquet. With this gesture they were elevating their own reputation in front of the audience. They could have given the musician those 30 euros instead, which went to the bouquet. These kinds of things could be done differently.

Quite readily museum workers like to think that all artists are living on grants and get their salary from there, the same way as they have their monthly income.

Well, not in the North of Finland, there artists are not so much on grants. But they perhaps think that it is not the concern of the museum whether the artist gets paid or not. The museum’s concern is only whether they get an exhibition for free. Instead of asking the museums, why don’t you pay us, we would send that letter to the heads of municipalities, and ask why

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did you not include this budget line in the budget of your museum. Especially the Left and the Greens should be addressed with the question whether it is right that in their municipality there are people working without getting paid for it; that is, the artists, of course.

Is the Kuvasto fee the same thing  
as the artist fee?

Kuvasto is only an interest organisation. To some extent I have heard museum people cursing Kuvasto, asking where the money is going, that it is not even going to the artists, but to run that system. In these situations I have replied, that it is up to you to start paying each artist independently, whether they belong to Kuvasto or not. Artists would then not need to be part of Kuvasto if they got a payment anyhow. Nowadays a museum does not need to allocate the Kuvasto fee if the artist agrees to give their work for free to the exhibition. However, here the problem lies in the position of negotiation. It is very difficult for an individual artist to start a negotiation about anything when you are faced with a big institution. If you start a legal process, the institution has more power of influence. But no-one would start a row, we artists are just happy to get our work on display somewhere.

And one easily gets the reputation  
of a difficult artist, and the word  
spreads in the museum circles that one  
should not work with that artist?

Maybe there is some of that fear. But if one thing is foreign to art, that is fear. Art and being an artist should include courage, in doing your own work, but also in other issues. I am talking about an artist's responsibility. It takes also courage to

promote your own cause, as no-one else will promote it.

Do you have experience of  
museums trying to avoid paying  
the Kuvasto fee?

Personally, I do not have such experience of them avoiding the Kuvasto fee. I have been thinking of joining Kuvasto, but then on another hand, the fees are so small, that I haven't bothered. Nevertheless, I always ask for an artist fee, and I think that in at least one exhibition the members of Kuvasto got a payment, but I did not, although I asked for it in writing.

Are artists in the North of Finland  
members of Kuvasto?

I don't know if they are. But a colleague told me that they are not, because no-one pays the fees anyway. And one artist said that they resigned from Kuvasto a few years ago, because they were told in a museum in the North of Finland that if they were part of Kuvasto, their works wouldn't be shown. Later on they joined again, because I encouraged them to. But, to some extent, I have heard talk that it is not worth joining because then you don't get invited to exhibitions.

Have you paid rent for a gallery?

No, and I will not. One has to understand the difference between a gallery and a museum. It is amazing that in Finland there can be works on sale in a museum. Works on display in a museum should be there only because the museum has wanted to exhibit some topic through the artwork. It is not a commercial exhibition. The works are there to tell about the political situation, art tendency, emotion, whatever. Purpose

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of museums should be to improve the society. We have to differentiate them from commercial galleries, which earn their living by selling art, as well as enabling the living of the artist.

Have you had an exhibition  
in a gallery where you have had  
to pay rent?

A space where you pay rent is not a gallery, it is a rented space. I have not had exhibitions in rented spaces!

I have not understood why these spaces are titled galleries, as they charge rent from artists. A gallery is a space where the gallerist sells art. It means that the gallerist sells, not that the artist sells. An artist can sell works at home as well. So the gallerist sells, and the artist pays rent in the way that the gallerist takes a certain percentage of the sold works. It can be quite a lot as well, often it is half of what is left after production expenses. With the half that the gallerist receives, they pay the rent of the space, their own salary, maintenance and lunch expenses. Often gallerists are wealthy people, who are selling to their own circles. They have to possess a telephone book. It is their know-how that they can sell artworks to someone. I would not mind paying someone to make phone calls to museums and private collectors, speaking highly about my work and trying to get it sold.

Where do you position the rented  
spaces, artist run spaces in your idea  
of the art world?

I understand that they use the name gallery because it refers to selling, which is non-existing in Finland. Tell me honestly, if you apply for an exhibition slot in a gallery, and it takes place once in

ten years, is there someone there who is calling around all possible people, collectors and others, trying to sell your work? Do they even know your work so well that they can sell it? What do they do there in order to sell? I have never shown in these rented spaces, so I do not know. That is why perhaps MUU gallery should change their name to MUU exhibition space, to clarify that it is a space of an association.

How do artist-run spaces in  
France raise the rent money if the  
artist doesn't need to pay rent?

There artists do not need to pay. It is basically grant money which pays the rent. But the difference is that the grant applicant is the *centre d'art* and not the artist. I think this makes a lot more sense. So, the *centre d'art* receives an annual amount. I would imagine it would also make it easier for the grant-givers, when instead of receiving a grant application from ten artists or fifty artists for the same venue, there would instead be only one application from the exhibition venue. It would then be used for the exhibitions, just as when the artists are the applicants. However, the artists would not need to apply themselves.

But can you imagine that there  
would be some mistrust from the grant  
givers toward the exhibition venues  
about whether the programme is high  
enough quality? Can it be that the  
grant givers want to decide in the end  
which artist's exhibition gets funded?

But it would be enough for the exhibition venue to say what they plan to do during the year and what is their budget. They would know the whole artist list for the year. Also the rented spaces determine their exhibition programme sometimes

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1,5 years earlier, and still the artist applies for the grant. And good heavens if you don't get one, what do you do then!?

You have committed to having  
the exhibition, maybe written the  
contract already as well...

Yes, that is why it would make so much more sense that the exhibition venue would write the application. Why to burden artists with that, do they not have enough work without this grant application hassle? If there is a paid person in the gallery, would it not be the task of that person to apply (a.) for an annual grant for the exhibitions (b.) sponsorship money?

So in France the money  
circulates in a different way, directly  
from the funders to the galleries  
and exhibition venues. In Finland it  
goes through artists.

Yes, and it burdens the artists a lot. If you do not get the money, you are screwed because you have promised to have the exhibition. It is a huge risk.

But could it be that the grant givers reason that they save money, when they do not give funding directly to the venues for all the 12 months, but instead they give it directly to artists, although not everyone gets it? So, for example, they only give funding for 10 out of 12 months, and the rest have to manage somehow.

They could give instead the 10-months' amount to the venue as well, and then the venue would need to divide it equally among the months. So that none of the artists personally carry the risk and consequences.