



Seminar

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Modern Art and the Visual Brain: Why Art Emerges for Image Fragments

Tuesday, 25 May 2021, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic, the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:

<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/65525187674>

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ABOUT JUSSI SAARINEN

After receiving a PhD in Psychology from the University of Helsinki in 1989, Jussi Saarinen was a post-doctoral Research Fellow at Bela Julesz's (State University of New Jersey) and Dennis Levi's labs (University of Houston). He has also been a Visiting Scientist at Riitta Hari's MEG neuroscience lab (Aalto University) and at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. Currently, he works as University Lecturer of Perception and Cognition at the Department of Psychology and Logopedics (University of Helsinki).

Saarinen's recent research – published in such journals as *Vision Research* and *Journal of Vision* – focuses on cognitive mechanisms underlying implicit (non-verbal) visual memory and learning. For example, Saarinen, together with Crista Koski and Ilmari Kurki, has employed statistical *Classification image* methods in testing whether decay in implicit visual memory could be a random process, or whether some visual features could be more prone to fading. Preliminary results suggest that the relative weighting of image components in visual memory does not change as time passes – implicating, counter-intuitively, that forgetting is not feature specific, but that memories are corrupted in a random fashion.

At SCAS, Saarinen will elaborate on the notion that modern art may partly echo the characteristics of mechanisms underlying human visual perception and memory.

ABSTRACT

The role of visual perception and memory in an artistic experience is discussed in my talk using modern art as a context to explore how compositions consisting of a few rudimentary image fragments can still evoke vivid and emotional visual scenes. In other words, how do contour fragments and colour patches – such as those in the masterpieces by Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Lichtenstein – form a work of art? I will highlight two different mechanisms: (1) implicit ensemble encoding of both elementary features and abstract attributes and (2) short-term and long-term visual memory with a focus on the mechanisms of memory decay. An argument is presented that these mechanisms could be part of the artist's repertoire of *intuitive neuroscience*. They may also serve as the subtle instruments used to achieve Wassily Kandinsky's aesthetic goal of '*pure, universal, and spiritual visual art*'.