

Abstract

SLS Seminar: “Between Activism and Escapism:
The Significance of the Arts and Humanities in a World of Crises”

Santeri Vuori
smvuor@utu.fi
9.9.2026

Elokapina and Återställ Våtmarker on the limits of art activism

I examine as art activism the Elokapina and Återställ Våtmarker protest where red paint was sprayed on the facade of the Finnish Parliament House on 25.9.2024. While the media condemned the protest as “vandalism,” Elokapina’s media representative called it a “political work of art” ([Yle 25.9.2024](#)). Elokapina often uses art in activism, but the unauthorized painting of the pillars of the Parliament House is fundamentally different from, for example, the non-disruptive “Red Rebel Brigade” (2019–) performances. However, this protest has received little academic attention and thus warrants further examination.

By examining images from the protest, and the respective activist organizations’ press releases and public social media content, I argue that the protest can be seen as a form of art activism due to its aesthetic features: the red paint, the publicly staged performance, and the imagery it produced. I propose art researcher Martin Lang’s “militant aesthetics/art” and artist-activist Pyotr Pavlensky’s “subject-object art” as a conceptual framework. “Militant art” falls within the realm of art activism, but it is essentially confrontational and prepared to break the law. In Pavlensky’s work the reactions of those in power become art objects themselves. This presentation deals with the question of possible conceptual tensions between art and activism while attempting to bridge the gap and open up perspectives for both art and activism to find more effective ways to tackle contemporary challenges.



A Photo of the protest moments after the activists were detained by security. Courtesy of Återställ Våtmarker, 25.9.2024