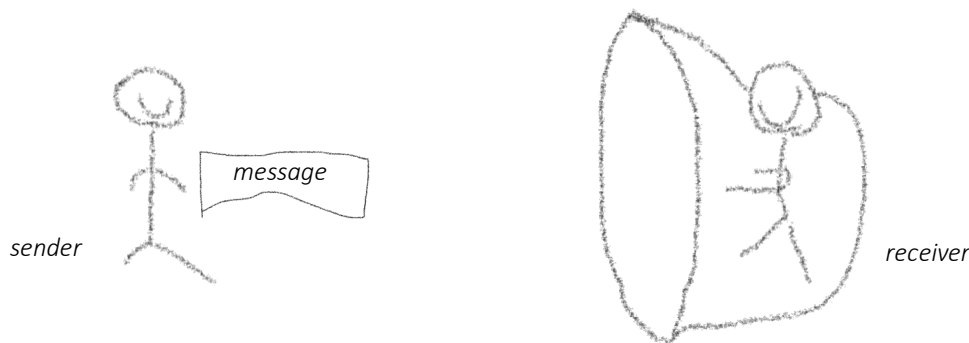


## Whose voice is being heard?

It's ultimately up to the receiver of the voice. The voice can send the same message, in the same way, over and over again, to the same receiver, without being heard. Or the message might be understood differently each time it is being sent, to the same receiver. Or the message might have been received by the receiver, but the message has not been heard. And the sender and the receiver might both be unconscious about what they are sending or receiving, respectively, simultaneously or not. Or the message might be being heard, if the voice or the receiver is changed (altered, exchanged). Or the message has been heard by the receiver without the sender knowing. See picture number 1.



Picture 1: Illustration of communicating a message from a sender to a hearing receiver. Åsa Bladh 2022.

Is the voice only interested in expressing itself or is the voice expecting receipts like responses/actions of the receiver? Does that mean the voice can never be heard, without a dialogue with the receiver?

What is a voice and what does it mean - the expression, "being heard"? That is something I wish to reflect on, starting with this essay, with the long-term purpose to contribute to my understanding of how to get my own artistic voice heard.

I aim to write with a bush-like style i.e., not like a tree with a nice obvious stem logic, holding branches. No, like a bush with wild and unforeseen branches, enfolded once you look inside or behind another branch, disconnected or connected by the eyes, but definitely connected by spirit and root.

## The title

Let's start to rock the title of this essay and the foundation it spurs from. Whose voice is being heard? Actually, it all started with a reading mistake by me. I kept reading a sentence of a theme repeatedly, for two months. In my mind, I interpreted the sentence of this particular theme into something it wasn't, every time and completely unconscious about the mistake.

Then, when I translated the sentence from Swedish to English, my mind cooked for a few days and suddenly – I discovered it all! I had read the sentence but not understood the message, i.e. I had listened (read) but not heard (understood) the message of the sentence.

The Swedish sentence was “Vems röst får höras?”

My interpretation of this Swedish sentence was “Vems röst blir hörd?”

My English translation of my interpretation ended up in the title of this essay “Whose voice is being heard?”

But the English translation of the original Swedish sentence is closer to “Whose voice can be heard?”, where the verb can is more referring to allow, than to the verb may. Allow is implicating that there is someone or something – a kind of filter function - selecting which voices that are being allowed to not just speak but also which voices that are allowed to be heard.

## Art pieces and legislations

In Sweden, we try to control art pieces like photographs and sculptures in different ways, based on legislations, in order to protect the creator and its art pieces from being disused or altered<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Swedish Intellectual Property Office - PRV, Copyright, <https://www.prv.se/en/knowledge-and-support/glossary/copyright/>, November 25 2022.

The legislation covers numerous areas like when and how an art piece is published to the public, by whom and that it - after the death of the creator - won't be reproduced in such a way that it violates the interests of spiritual cultivation of the art piece<sup>2</sup>.

Even art pieces that have no clear owner have got a name in the legislation - orphan works - and they are controlled by an EU-directive<sup>3</sup>.

## Art pieces' freedom of speech<sup>4</sup>

The author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie<sup>5</sup> speaks in a TED-conference about the danger of a single story. She says, amongst other things, "Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories" and that we need to hear more than one story in order to avoid "risk a critical misunderstanding".<sup>6</sup>

I strongly agree with her - whether the first hand story originates from your own thinking or someone else's voice, you need to find other stories to expand and understand the gray scale of the story i.e., the gray scale of life, to simply survive as a species. Cause it's there – in the spaces in between everything and nothing, in the greyscales – that kindness, resiliencies and love thrives.

I believe freedom of speech<sup>7</sup>, with regards to an art piece, might be seen differently from various perspectives – there are more than one story to an art piece. For instance, Lars Vilks<sup>8</sup> art piece, "Profeten M. som rondellhund"<sup>9</sup>, has engaged many different views and generated discussions all over the world, during many years<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Artists' Association of Sweden - KRO, Vem har eller kan ha upphovsrätt?, <https://www.kro.se/upphovsratt/upphovsratt/>, November 25 2022.

<sup>3</sup> EUR-lex Access to European Union law, Document 32012L0028, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012L0028>, November 25 2022.

<sup>4</sup> NE Uppslagsverket, Yttrandefrihet, <https://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/yttrandefrihet>, December 2 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Home, <https://www.chimamanda.com/welcome/>, December 2 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The danger of a single story*, [Film], TEDGLOBAL, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> NE Uppslagsverket, *Yttrandefrihet*.

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, Lars Vilks, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lars\\_Vilks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lars_Vilks), December 2 2022.

<sup>9</sup> SVT, Historien om Lars Vilks, <https://www.svt.se/kultur/konst/historien-om-lars-vilks-fran-2007-till-i-dag>, December 2 2022.

<sup>10</sup> SVT - Tvärsnytt, *Ulf Johansson om publiceringen av Lars Vilks rondellhund.*, [Film], SVT Nyheter, 2021.

The artist explained<sup>11</sup> his message, his intention, with his art piece called “Profeten M. som rondellhund”:

“...the provocation was directed at art, what was allowed in art. An artist makes a scene, then the world behaves in different ways, explains and interprets....”

The art piece was refused by the exhibitor the day before the vernissage, due to fear of security.<sup>12</sup> The art piece itself had a strong voice, but wasn't allowed to speak, it was censored.

Viewers of art might be seen as consumers of art? And all rights reserved are fully the viewers, automatically? Yes, that's my conclusion after having read the homepages of PRV, Swedish Intellectual Property Office's<sup>13</sup> and KRO, the Artists' Association of Sweden<sup>14</sup>.

The intellectual capital rights<sup>15</sup> of an art piece does not exist. Which feeds the thought that viewers of art pieces could be seen as consumers when they create the monologues and dialogues with the art pieces in their minds. They take a bite, chew it a bit and taste it. Some of the consumers are taking it even further when they cook a meal of their own, using the art piece as an ingredient.

For instance, the journalist at the newspaper who wrote a chief editorial column about freedom of speech and used the art piece “Profeten M. som rondellhund”, as an example for his article's message. On one hand I guess you could say that the art piece's voice was amplified, but you could also argue that the voice of the art piece was altered by the journalist, he cooked a new meal. A meal that turned out to be tasted by more people of

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<sup>11</sup> Dagens Nyheter, Teckningen som startade allt: Lars Vilks fortsatte vara stolt över sin Muhammedhund, [Film], Dagens Nyheter, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> SVT, *Historien om Lars Vilks*.

<sup>13</sup> Swedish Intellectual Property Office – PRV, Our business, <https://www.prv.se/en/about-us/our-business/>, November 25 2022.

<sup>14</sup> The Artists' Association of Sweden – KRO, Konstnärernas Riksorganisation, <https://www.kro.se/the-swedish-artists-association/>, November 25 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Swedish Intellectual Property Office – PRV, Intellectual property rights, <https://www.prv.se/en/knowledge-and-support/glossary/intellectual-property-rights2/>, November 25 2022.

which a number was feeling poisoned by the meal and blamed the artist and tried to kill him.<sup>16</sup>

Another story of the art piece “Profeten M. som rondellhund” is the voice of the symbolism. The artist used mainly two shapes in the sketch - a man and a dog - which together with the title of the art piece, got loaded with strong symbolic contradictive values within a specific religion, the Islam. The artist had to live the rest of his life under police protection.<sup>17</sup>

How does this affect me, in my artistry – will I self-censure my own art in order to avoid making potential viewers upset?

Yet another story of the art piece “Profeten M. som rondellhund”, is when the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm refused to accept the art piece as a gift from the artist 2015, with the motivation that it is an art piece still in process of creation, amongst other things, and they as a museum do not want to be a part of the creation process.<sup>18</sup>

This is very interesting – the art piece was finished by the artist nearly a decade before the offer to the museum and still the museum sees it as an art piece in process of creation, i.e. they consider the art piece as being continuously created by the viewers of the art piece, around the world. This implies that an art piece’s original voice and message can only be kept if the artist makes sure to archive the art piece, without showing it for anyone. I wonder which criteria the museum uses when evaluating whether an art piece is being finished or not or is this maybe an example of political censorship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, performed by one of the most prominent cultural institutions of Sweden?

The Swedish artist, Hilma af Klint<sup>19</sup>, might be seen as an artist using the archive principle when she wrote in her testimonial that her spiritual works were only allowed to be shown

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<sup>16</sup> SVT, Historien om Lars Vilks, <https://www.svt.se/kultur/konst/historien-om-lars-vilks-fran-2007-till-i-dag>, December 2 2022.

<sup>17</sup> SVT - Tvårsnytt, *Ulf Johansson om publiceringen av Lars Vilks rondellhund.*, [Film], SVT Nyheter, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> SVT, Moderna museet vill inte ha Vilks rondellhund, <https://www.svt.se/kultur/konst/moderna-museet-vill-inte-ha-vilks-rondellhund>, December 2 2022.

<sup>19</sup> The Hilma af Klint Foundation, About, <https://hilmaafklint.se/about-hilma-af-klint/>, December 2 2022.

for the world twenty years after her death as the world wasn't ready to embrace her art pieces until then.<sup>20</sup> The Hilma af Klint Foundation is the owner of her art pieces.<sup>21</sup> Is it more likely that the artists' original voices and messages in their art pieces, are being heard, if the art pieces are being guarded by a similar foundation like the Hilma af Klint Foundation?

Another Swedish artist, Öyvind Fahlström, sent his paintings to an exhibition at the Art School "Konstakademin" in Stockholm, 1959. The exhibitor thought pieces of the packing material – the palette – was a painting as well and hung it besides the real paintings. When the artist visited the exhibition, two weeks after the opening and discovered this, he wrote on the back of the palette "OBS! Detta är ABSOLUT INTE ett konstverk, utan ett emballage!".<sup>22</sup>

Artists commenting on each other's art pieces or artistry, with art, are inspiring voices I think, even amusing sometimes. Like the graduate student from Art School Konstfack<sup>23</sup>, Björn Kjelltoft, when he painted tulips and eyes on recycled plastic bottles to his examination exhibition 2002 questioning the ownership of daily life's forms and patterns. All referring to the often used tulips and eyes by the artist Ulrica Hydman Vallien<sup>24</sup>. She reflected back to him by creating tulip-and eyes-painted glass bottles. On the press-release of her exhibition it said "Tack Björn!".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Hilma af Klint Foundation, About, <https://hilmaafklint.se/about-hilma-af-klint/>, December 2 2022.

<sup>21</sup> The Hilma af Klint Foundation, The Foundation, <https://hilmaafklint.se/the-foundation/>, December 2 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Sveriges radio, Men är det konst? Lars Vilks och Fahlströms palett, <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/men-ar-det-konst-lars-vilks-och-fahlstroms-palett>, December 2 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design, About Konstfack, <https://www.konstfack.se/en/About-Konstfack/>, December 2 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Liljevalchs, Ulrica Hydman Vallien, <https://liljevalchs.se/kalender/ulrica-hydman-vallien-en-paradisattack/>, December 2 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Facebook, Ulrica Hydman Vallien, <https://www.facebook.com/ulricahv/posts/1752135861500093/>, December 2 2022.

## Conclusion

Once an art piece has been shown for someone else than its creator, you give the viewers the freedom of speech, regarding the art piece's voice as well as message. As an artist you can have an intention, a title, an explaining text or similar to your art piece, but that is no guarantee that the viewer agrees on it, with you as a creator. The reading, understanding and interpretation of your art piece is noncontrollable. The freedom of speech rules, seen from the view of the art piece, spoken by the viewers.

I chose to see my art pieces as multilingual dialogizing art – they will speak with different voices and different messages given by the viewers, in their dialogues. And that is fine by me as the creator. Actually, it's beautiful to being allowed, via the art piece, to be part of the continuing creation process inside someone else's heart, soul and mind. It might even inspire to dialogues between people, engaging them in each other, ultimately weaving the cobweb of mankind. That is a beautiful circle of life, I'm being invited to as an artist.

In my artistry I wish to stand tall and rooted like a pine tree from my childhood's forests, as well as sustainable over discourses, cultures and clock time, regarding the art pieces I've been part of creating and their respectively voices and messages.

### *The voice of the pine trees<sup>26</sup>*

*Let the wind blow*

*Let the rain drip*

*Let the snow fall*

*Let the mist embrace*

*Let the day glow*

*Let the night conclude*

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<sup>26</sup> Åsa Bladh, *The voice of the pine trees [poem]*, Essay "Vems röst blir hörd?", Gothenburg, 2022.

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