COLOUR ASCETISM AND SYNTHETIST COLOUR

COLOUR CONCEPTS IN TURN-OF-THE-20TH-CENTURY FINNISH AND EUROPEAN ART

Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in the Arppeanum Auditorium on the 6th of June, 2012 at 12 o’clock

Helsinki 2012
Opponent
Professor Bettina Gockel,
University of Zurich

Front cover
Detail of figs. 1 & 4

ISBN 978-952-10-8046-3 (paperback)
ISBN 978-952-10-8047-0 (PDF)

Unigrafia
Helsinki 2012
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Colour Ascetism and Synthetist Colour – Colour Concepts in turn-of-the-20th-century Finnish and European Art

VÄITÖSKIRJA/DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
This study proposes a point of departure for the study of images which in Finnish art history have tended be read as an expression of style, ideas or movements toward a study of a specific palette and the two-colour practices at the turn of the twentieth century. I am adapting the notion of painting as a ‘deposit’ of a colour consciousness in a specific turn-of-the-twentieth century context.

The focus of my investigation is on Finnish and European artists who used the new colour concepts, colour ascetism and synthetist colour in their paintings. As my examples I have chosen the Finnish artists Väinö Blomstedt, Magnus Enckell, Axel Gallén, Pekka Halonen, Eero Järnefelt, Helene Schjerfbeck and Ellen Thesleff. Thus, explaining these painters’ use of ascetic or synthetist palettes must take into consideration a much larger context and time span. In discussing these concepts of colour, and to illustrate the long tradition of colour ascetism, I will draw on such precursors as Eugène Carrière, Édouard Manet, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and James McNeill Whistler. These artists and their personal palettes were important, not only to Finnish, but also to many artists around the turn of the twentieth century. Although considered artists of the modern period, they looked to the past for their inspiration on a restricted palette: Spanish art, Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Early Renaissance were among the sources of art as they were the inspiration for Finnish artists too in the 1890s. They all developed their personified ascetic palette. It is my intention to show that acromatic art and ‘anti-colourism’ is a much broader and more significant phenomenon in western art than has hitherto been believed. The muted, restrained, ascetic colours were the key element in depicting modern melancholy, silence, inwardsness and harmony in painting.

For synthetist colour I will present Paul Gauguin and his followers Paul Sérusier, Jan Verkade and Maurice Denis who have now be studied from the point of establishing a synthetist colour practice of tertiary close-tones which differs from the use of pure colours. Finnish artists who explored the synthetist colour range are Blomstedt, Gallén and Järnefelt. Synthetist colour was used to enhance the non-mimetic effect, the surnaturelle, which was to be the expressive force in painting. The key words for synthetist colour are vision, dynamism, primitive, emotion, sensation and dream image. During this period in Finnish art ascetic and synthetist colour can
be seen as parallel colour practices away from the mimetic range. The adoption of these new palette practices also brought innovations in painting and in the use of different mediums such as tempera and gouache. The time of traditional oil painting was changing. This colour-conscious art was created to present new content. This study offers new readings of nineteenth-century art, assessing the wider resonances of artists’ debates on colour and medium as they tested the limits of painting as a new ‘language of colour’.

AVAINSANAT/KEYWORDS
Colour ascetism, synthetist colour, Finnish art, Western art, technique, nineteenth century, early twentieth century, Symbolism
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As an undergraduate student I had the opportunity to work as a curator for a turn-of-the-20th century women artists’ exhibition and for five years in the Halosenniemi atelier-museum of the artist Pekka Halonen. These experiences triggered my interest in the use of colour and I was fascinated by the complex role of colour in paintings, which, as I explored further, changed from a skilfully-learned palette practice to a more individual approach, resulting in very individual experiments during the 1890s and early 20th century. It is therefore with profound gratitude that I think of my supervisor and teacher Riitta Konttinen, who gave me the spark and opportunity to work on women artists. Her many sources led me to look beyond the conventional but most of all she acted as my guide throughout this long journey. My thanks go also to Riikka Stewen, whose lectures introduced me to the intriguing world of Symbolism. I am also grateful to Riitta Nikula whose enthusiastic example and advice encouraged me to approach an international career and write in English.

I suppose that, from the outset, colour has always attracted me, studying painting during my school years, and now, looking back, this seems one reason which eventually led me to study art history. Another reason would be my great-grandmother Anna Bremer-von Bonsdorff whose paintings have always surrounded me and whose somewhat tragic life and enigmatic figure have acted as my background inspiration. A third motivation to venture into this confusing area may be that during the Halosenniemi years in the 1990s I probably handled thousands of paintings by Halonen and his contemporaries and was constantly intrigued by their painting techniques, brushwork and colour practices. But as I came to look at the history of art I was puzzled by the neglect of colour in describing and accounting for the styles of historical periods until, working on my master’s thesis, I discovered John Gage’s studies on colour. I had the honour of corresponding with him, but sadly, he will never see the outcome of my efforts.

I am truly grateful to my pre-examiners: Professor Annika Waenerberg, University of Jyväskylä and Professor Bettina Gockel, University of Zurich. Their suggestions on how to improve my manuscript have directed my attention to sections of the text where my argumentation has been, at times, confusing. I am, in particular, grateful for their complimentary remarks, which increased my confidence in my work. I should also like to extend my thanks to supervisor Renja Suominen-Kokkonen who took a great interest in my research and followed the process closely. Particular thanks are due to custos Ville Lukkarinen, who has been of a great help in the final completion of the work, which I often thought would never end. Also important to my research has been the inspiring Summer School arranged by
The Finnish Doctoral Programme in Art History that I attended; for their comments and encouraging remarks I wish to give warm thanks to Graig Clunas and Sarah Wilson.

Working on the dissertation naturally required periods of full-time research and I wish to gratefully acknowledge the financial support that I received from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Art Foundation Merita, Anna och Signe von Bonsdorffs släktfond and the University of Helsinki.

Many fellow graduate students and colleagues have contributed to this study but I feel especially indebted to Siina Hälikkiä, Marja Lahelma, Kati Lintonen, Riitta Ojanperä, Susanna Pettersson, Anne-Maria Pennonen, Hanne Selkokari, Maija Tanninen-Mattila, Ira Westergård, Johanna Vakkari, Johanna Vuolasto, all of whom have over the years commented, supported and given me advice, encouraged, listened to my complaints and contributed to my study. Space does not allow me to name everyone. My warm appreciation also goes to the kind and patient staff at the department of Art History at the University of Helsinki, Finnish National Gallery, Ateneum Art Museum and the Central Art Archives. Many thanks also to the Tuusula Museum and Harri Silander for their support.

There are also many from whom I have benefited through enlightening discussions and who helped me to acquire material important to my research. Here I wish to thank Stella Bottai, Kenneth Conkey, Frances Fowle, Laura Gutman-Hanhivaara, Rodolphe Rapetti, Rupert Shepherd, Paul Smith and Joseph McBrinn.

However, I would never have managed to write in English without the relentless proof-reading of my texts, which was carried out by native English speaker, Valerie Vainonen. During the entire span of the writing process, she corrected errors and translated parts from French to English as well as provided suggestions on fluency. I am fully responsible for all remaining errors.

Thanks are also due to my close friends, family and relatives who have involuntarily become part of my research life but who have supported me through the hard times.

Finally I wish to acknowledge the immense debt I owe my lovely family, Olli, Kristina and Robert. For many years they tolerated my periodical absence and have shown patience and loving support making me proud and priviledged to have such a wonderful family – and yes, this book is finally finished.

In Porvoo, on my birthday April 24 2012
Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff
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INTRODUCTION

1. COLOUR ASCETISM AND SYNTHETIST COLOUR IN FOCUS

Colour is implicated in physics, chemistry, physiology and psychology, as well as in language and philosophy, yet it is solely a visual art that has engaged simultaneously with most or all of these branches of knowledge and experience. Thus, knowing art goes a long way towards knowing colour and its history. And what is a painting if not colour on a surface? It is therefore astonishing that there are still so few art historical studies on colour. Recent decades have seen a new interest in colour and its practice in Western art. However, whereas these have usually been broad surveys on colour in art that may stretch from antiquity to abstraction,\(^1\) or focusing on one artist,\(^2\) this study aims to approach the question of colour in late-nineteenth century Finnish and European art firstly through the thought and practice of certain artists in this period as examples, and secondly by examining the use of colour in their paintings. Their methods and practices of using colour were, of course, reflected in the intellectual and social climate of the period, just as they in turn contributed to it. This study focuses on the conviction that colour is a contingent, historical phenomenon whose meaning, like language, lies in the particular historical context in which it is experienced and interpreted. Thus, it can be investigated in the same way as any other art historical phenomenon.\(^3\)

Grounded in a close study of the original art objects, the main focus is on artists’ ideas on colour and meaning. Inevitably, the primary interest is on two different colour schemes, colour ascetism and synthetist colour, which are my main concepts. The study addresses the complex relationship between the traditional (mimetic) practice of using colours and the new views on technique, medium and colour with which the artists explored a more individual, non-mimetic palettes and the impact these had on turn-of-the-twentieth century painting.

But what are these colour concepts? My master’s thesis (2000) concentrated on defining the term ‘colour ascetism’ and how it became an important signifier

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3 Gage 2006, 7.
of symbolist painting in Finnish art. The reason for this was simply because there was no unifying term or concept for this kind of a restricted palette although it was used by many artists at the time. I aimed to show how this important ‘non-colourist’ tradition had tended to be forgotten or ignored by art historians even though it has often been mentioned in the analysis of paintings of the late nineteenth century. I also argued that colour ascetism has never previously been used as a unifying colour concept of the period.4 In this study, however, I have broadened my approach to the synthetist use of colour which can be seen as the counterpart of the ascetic palette. This will also ensure that the study pays more attention to the historical context. My aim is to reflect on these two different ways of using non-mimetic colour in late-nineteenth century painting and to elaborate my ideas on their cultural meaning.

I wish to show that the new ideas on colour and meaning were mainly established through the opposite ends of the colour scale, almost achromatic ‘ascetic’ with sparse colours of mainly black, brown and white and chromatic ‘synthetist’ with blazing colours such as yellow, violet, blue, red, orange and green. It should be noticed that these palettes were actually part of a long process and played a significant role in the art of the modern period.

The subject of this study — Colour Ascetism and Synthetist Colour — Colour Concepts in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Finnish and European Art — proposes a point of departure for the study of images which, in Finnish art history in the past, have tended be read, for example, as an expression of style, ideas, or movements such as Symbolism or National Romanticism, toward a study of a specific palette and colour practices. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century visual art is probably one of the most intriguing and multifaceted periods during which many colour theories began to be developed by both scientists and artists. This aspect has not been studied in Finnish art, although colour issues are often mentioned in analyses of paintings. This study also differs from more recent phenomenological or psychological approaches to study colour in art. The reason for my choice of comparative historical approach is because this study aims to bring out a longer time span with a large group of artists and their contexts to establish the two colour concepts of the period. From here I hope to find answers to the questions why they chose these palettes and what the circumstances were that led these artists to a profound change in the interest in colour and meaning.

The focus of my investigation is on Finnish and European artists who used the new colour concepts, colour ascetism and synthetist colour in their paintings. Although I will concentrate on the turn of the twentieth century and reflect this

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through Finnish art in order to establish why and from where Finnish artists employed these new colour concepts, it is necessary to study its diverse historical background and sources, particularly since these are known to have acted as the direct starting points for the artists in question. Thus I will present European artists and their artworks as examples; however, the main focus will be on the artworks of Finnish artists. There will always be more paintings to look at and examine, hence my coverage is obviously selective rather than inclusive, while my arguments are intended to stimulate rather than foreclose debate in the field.

As my examples for representing the new colour practices I have chosen the Finnish artists Väinö Blomstedt (1871–1947), Magnus Enckell (1870–1925), Axel Gallén (1865–1931), Pekka Halonen (1865–1933), Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937), Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946) and Ellen Thelesff (1869–1954), all of whom used and developed these colour concepts in their art. They were international and very much aware of the new trends of the Parisian art world where they studied and stayed. Thus, explaining these Finnish painters’ use of ascetic or synthetist palettes must take into consideration a much larger context and time span. In discussing these new concepts of colour and to illustrate the long tradition of anti-colourist art and especially colour ascetism I will draw on such precursors as Eugène Carrière (1849–1906), Édouard Manet (1832–1883), Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898) and James Abbot McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). These unique artists were important, not only for Finnish, but also for many artists around the turn of the twentieth century. Although many of them are considered ‘modern’ artists, I will propose here that they looked to the past for their inspiration on a restricted palette: Spanish art, Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Early Renaissance were among the sources for European artists as equally they were the inspiration for Finnish artists as well in the 1890s. It is important to note that they all developed their personified ascetic palette, but as such they all (traditionally) belong to different movements in art such as Impressionist (Manet, Whistler) or Symbolist (Carrière). Interestingly from a colour point of view, and as my master’s thesis presented, they all belong to the tradition of anti-colourism, and more precisely to colour ascetism.

This study focuses on the pivotal role played by colour in European art at the turn of the twentieth century. It is my intention to establish that colour ascetism should

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5 It should be noted that these artists are chosen as examples giving a sufficiently broad view in establishing the use of these colour concepts in Finnish art. Also these artists show most clearly the shift towards a colour-conscious art. There could be many other artists as well, such as Hugo Simberg and Beda Stjernschantz, but in order to keep the study within limits I have concentrated on this group of artists. This is also the case with the European examples.

6 Although Whistler is an American-born artist, this study considers him as ‘European’ since he spent most of his life and career in England and France.

7 In my master’s thesis I also studied Chinese and Japanese art as sources for new ideas on the ascetic palette. von Bonsdorff 2000, 36-46.
be seen as a considerably broader and more important colour practice in Western art than has hitherto been believed.\(^8\) The reason for this is that earlier studies on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century colour have been made mainly from the standpoint of the so-called colourism or chromaticism, such as Impressionism and Fauvism, whereas ‘non-colourful’ achromatic and colour ascetic art has frequently received only a brief mention in colour studies of the period.\(^9\) The focus on the art historical study of colour in the nineteenth century has dwelt almost solely upon colourful and bright colours.\(^10\) Impressionism and the study of optics marked a special moment in the history of colour, however, in the 1860s many chose to explore with almost an achromatic range. The adoption of colour ascetism brought also innovation to techniques and mediums used in painting.\(^11\) Although artists were able to access more varied colours,\(^12\) for some reason they chose to limit their palettes to two or three main colours. As I will argue, the simplification of the colour range to muted, restrained, ascetic colours was to suggest connotations such as melancholy, stillness, spirituality, intimacy, silence etc. in painting.

It is interesting that although this limited colour scheme has been given many names in the analysis of paintings, from monochromacy to reduced palette to muted colours etc. it has still not received attention as a widely-used colour practice. As I concluded in my master’s thesis (2000), this deficiency in art historical research that treats ascetic colours as “non-colours” or, as has been pointed out in many studies, as colours that serve only to emphasise line and form, is a delusion, even though ascetic colours are the main element in such iconic works as Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), Whistler’s *Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother* (1871) and Puvis de Chavannes’s *Poor Fisherman* (1881). Also the soft, intimate and monochromatic art of Eugène Carrière, a nowadays unknown artist but one who, in his time, had many followers, pushed colour ascetism to new limits – in the 1890s to total monochromacy,\(^13\) as did Magnus Enckell. The reason for this

\(^8\) Although I have presented this colour term in my master’s thesis, which was written in Finnish, this study aims to present it as a colour concept, and to a wider public alongside the concept of synthetist colour.

\(^9\) For example, John Gage has pointed out “the greatly reduced palette of Rembrandt” and also discusses the colour black in the chapter “Matisse’s black light”. Gage 1999, 18-19, 228-232. Gage uses the term ‘anti-colourism’ and draws its long tradition from Pliny the Elder and Roman times. Gage also mentions American modernist artists, such as Ad Reinhardt, who connoted the asceticism of Chinese monochrome painting. Gage 1999, 18-19, 228-232. Riout 1989, 81-98.


\(^11\) It should be noted that Impressionism did not strictly speaking have an impact on Finnish art whereas plein air-painting and Naturalism were preferred by leading artists such as Albert Edelfelt and Helene Schjerfbeck.

\(^12\) For the commonly used colour range used by artists of 1850 onwards, see Callen 2000, 137-153.

\(^13\) With ‘monochromacy’ this study means a painting which is done with only one colour, the base working as the other (light) colour. For example: Eugène Carrière, *Paysage et route sinuose* (ca. 1898), 27 x 28 cm, oil on canvas, Carrière cat. 869, Rapetti 2008, 269.
may be that the oddness of ascetic colours has been treated quite negatively in both contemporary and later art history which in the modernist vein wanted to focus on bright colours favoured by the art market. It is important to note that their reduced, ascetic palettes were from the outset noticed and mentioned in many contemporary and later analyses of these paintings and it was also the reason why Finnish artists were interested in them. What these artists shared was a mutual interest in a modern, inter-textual way of referring to ancient art, Old Masters or Eastern art by subject and colour. However, I will propose that ascetic colours reflected a wider colour tradition with, for example, a reduced palette of blacks, browns and whites, where creativity was grounded in an expanded subjectivity and the necessary cultivation of “images of the mind”. The ascetic palette was considered at the time as innovative, and as this study will propose, it should be considered as part of the movement which paved the way to a new colour-conscious phase in European art. This colour concept will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

For *synthetist colour* I will present artists who are known to have influenced Finnish artists to adopt the bright, synthetist palette. These include Paul Gauguin (1848–1890), who later taught Blomstedt and Halonen, his followers the Nabis Paul Sérusier (1863–1927) and Jan Verkade (1868–1946), who also had contacts with Finnish artists and who exhibited as guests in the Finnish Artists’ Exhibition of 1893, and Maurice Denis (1870–1834), who was also known as the theorist of the Nabis and whose writings spread the knowledge of synthetist art in Europe.\(^\text{14}\) The synthetist palette was developed when, in Pont-Aven, the well-known experiments with the non-mimetic palette and a flattened surface of Gauguin and Emile Bernard triggered a new method of using colour.\(^\text{15}\) The famous *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)* (1888) was created by infusing a vision in a Breton landscape and referring to it with both subject, extorted form and moreover with enhanced, unnatural colours. Even though, in a European context, the ascetic colour scheme preceded the synthetist palette, in a Finnish context they seem a parallel phenomena.

*Synthetist colour*, as I have chosen to call it,\(^\text{16}\) consists of bright, saturated, usually mixed colours, which were used to enhance the non-natural effect, the *surnaturelle*, abstract qualities in painting. It is important to note that the artists themselves

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\(^{14}\) Maurice Denis’s articles and writings were read also in Finland and later his book *Théories 1890-1910. Du Symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*, published in 1912, became known in Finland.

\(^{15}\) I have chosen not to include Emile Bernard in this study since his influence cannot be traced in Finnish art and he is not mentioned in artists’ letters or other archival material of the study. Also Bernard’s art and especially his palette in his 1890s paintings do not reflect the ideas on close-tones or other synthetist ideas. Also Rodolphe Rapetti, too, groups him stylistically with Cloisonism and intellectually with mystical Symbolism linked to Josèphin Peladan’s ideology. Rapetti 2010, 47-52.

\(^{16}\) Even though it is a much-researched subject in studies on Gauguin, for example Silverman and Jirat-Wasiutynski, it has not been used as a colour term in connection with the Synthetists: Gauguin, The Nabi Group etc.
shared a deep interest in colours and in their palette. Gauguin’s notes, for example, indicate that he considered the colour range as a key expressive force in painting. In Finnish art this palette was explored by some artists, such as Blomstedt, Gallén and Järnefelt, who created mystical landscapes and mythological scenes with potent synthetist colours. There are certain colours that artists often used, and with colour theorist Chevreul’s idea of juxtaposition, violet, blue, blue-green, green, yellow, orange, red, mauve and pink were preferred with the idea of enhancing the power of colour. The key words for synthetist colour are vision, dynamism, primitive, sensation, emotion and dream image (rêve).

It is, in fact, crucial to note that something completely new and groundbreaking occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. The break from the mimetic colour range, where colour is used to create, for example, a landscape with ‘natural’ light and shadow as truthfully as possible, was the aim in painting, culminating in plein-air practice and Naturalism which was the most prominent ideology of late-nineteenth century Finnish art. To depict light effects was also the aim of the Impressionists although they treated the canvas very differently. Can these new colour concepts be seen as the opposite of Impressionism or the use of colour in Naturalism for example? It should also be noticed that ascetic and synthetist colour schemes flourished during the era of Symbolism and it seems that these practices continued in modern and abstract art. What I further hope to establish is that this was as special as finding the optical, primary colours of, for example, Impressionism, Fauvism and Expressionism in the 1900s. The idea that colour and its practice had specific meaning for certain kinds of painting, such as symbolist or monumental and decorative, was a new and important concept in Finnish art in the 1890s.

The purpose of this study is to establish that colour ascetism and synthetist colour as such give a painting meanings and as such may be studied in the same way as, for example, form, subject or composition. Experimenting with flat and shadowless surfaces with a medium other than oil was also part of this break from tradition. As I will later show, ascetic or synthetist colour was ingrained with certain connotations and was a key element for artists wanting to incorporate in their art modern concepts such as historicity, spirituality, musicality, harmony, synaesthesia or immateriality – these concepts were among the topics widely discussed in the art circles of the artists mentioned and also connected them to the modern aspirations of the turn of the twentieth century. But were these new colour practices a parallel phenomena? It seems that the ascetic palette was used by Manet in the 1860s and by Whistler

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18 Artists got to know Chevreul’s theories mostly through the writings of Charles Blanc. E.g. Silverman 2000, 467.
19 Such artists as Matisse and Kandinsky, for example, and in Cubism, Suprematism and Minimalism for example.
from the 1870s onwards. Furthermore, we could ask should the synthetist palette be seen as developing from the principles of the Impressionism? Be that as it may, I will argue, that in many cases colour was actually the first element to be deformed, manipulated and simplified and not merely line and form as have traditionally been cited from Heinrich Wölfflin to Clement Greenberg and even today.

I will further postulate that the abstract ideas or elements such as musicality and spirituality, so highly valued in this period, were not first introduced through form, composition or subject, but through the idea of colour harmonies. Thus the idea of simplification, colour harmony and abstraction in painting goes back considerably further than, for example, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian or Kazimir Malevich. This hypothesis requires close-reading of some specific artworks of the Finnish artists referred to, as well as of European artists in order to establish colour ascetism and synthetist colour – in Western Art. I will likewise demonstrate that, irrespective of whether the painting was created with oils, gouache or tempera, colour itself became highly important – signifying deeper meaning and abstract thought in painting. The conviction that, with the methods of ascetic or synthetist colour a painting worked as a mediator of divinity and spiritualism, was a mutual aim for these artists. As I will later show, these affective, emotional and psychological depths were mostly created by these colour schemes.

1.1 ON THE DISSERTATION

The study proceeds in four parts within a thematical and comparative framework. Three of the chapters (2, 3, 4) present visual analyses, offering a kind of gallery of paintings showing the new colour concepts. The first part of the study will introduce the study’s questions, state the methodological framework and sources and explain the colour concepts introduced here. It will also present a selected, general historical background from which the question of colour and specific palettes emerged in nineteenth-century Finnish art.\(^\text{20}\) Without these principles and ideas this multi-structured period and its multifaceted art could not be studied.

To draw a comparison between Finnish and international artists, I will introduce artists who were pioneers of both ascetic and synthetist colour schemes, but more importantly the ones who are known to have influenced or to have been connected to Finnish artists.\(^\text{21}\) Carrière, Manet, Puvis de Chavannes, Whistler and later the Nabis (especially Paul Sérusier and Jan Verkade) and Paul Gauguin were all important

\(^{20}\) Part 4. is to introduce international readers to a wider background and ideologies of the period which Finnish art historians are quite familiar with.

\(^{21}\) There could be more artists such as van Gogh or Cézanne but those chosen are the most frequently mentioned in contemporary critics, artists’ letters and journals.
for many Finnish artists. These artists were mentioned in the 1890s in discussing
Finnish art, in artists’ letters, journals, periodicals and in art criticism. Chapter
2.3 sets Gauguin and the Nabis in Brittany and Paris, responding actively to a
world of popular piety. Their development of contrast in form, space, and subject,
with a special interest in the synthetist palette, was a great inspiration for such
Finnish artists as Blomstedt, Gallén and Järnefelt. Here the themes of sacral and
visionary subjectivity that Gauguin explored in his paintings, and his development
of techniques of “abstraction” in composing them are examined. Gauguin was also
the teacher of Blomstedt and Halonen who, in Paris during the winter of 1894,
learned straight from “the apostle of freedom in art”, as they called him.

The second part of the thesis will focus on early modern Finnish art and the
simplification of the palette in 1890–1906.22 This period witnessed a burst of new
ideas on colour and medium in painting. The period has also been called the ‘Golden
Age of Finnish art’ and there has been much research on the period and artists
in question. However, this study proposes a new insight into the motives and
methods of artists. Thus the focus will be on colour and how it was practiced and
understood by Finnish artists. The study will concentrate on the years when ascetic
and synthetist colour were most acute in Finnish art. After 1906 the reaction to the
post-Impressionist colourist and expressionist influence of the Fauves and other
modern movements changed Finnish art again and most artists turned away from
these colour concepts towards a more expressive mode or at least to one responding
to neo-Impressionist colour theories.23

In part II the first chapter will show how artists became familiar with the new ideas
on mural art and decorative painting which were used as a new mode of presenting
concepts such as historicity and the ancient, mythological past inspired by the
national epic, Kalevala. The quest for imitating the fresco had many implications
for artworks which were to emphasise the ethereal aspect of art. Here the concept
of a total work of art is also discussed. Clearly not all modern paintings depict
modern or contemporary subjects but the relationship between subjects, technique
and medium, or means of representation, was a persistent concern for artists in
the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

22 A more recent term in Finnish art history to cover the period of 1880-1920, which witnessed many styles
and movements.

23 Traditionally in Finnish art history the so called ‘colourist period’ is said to begin in 1908 after the debates of
the Finnish Art Exhibition in Paris. Some artists, such as Magnus Enckell, who curated the exhibition, and
art critics, such as Gustaf Strengell and Sigurd Frosterus, started to promote the neo-Impressionist colour
theories of the Belgian artist A.W. Finch who had established himself in Finland. They wanted Finnish artists
to adopt the palette of pure colours and paint the strong effects of light and shadow. If we study the paintings
of, for example, Ellen Thesleff and Pekka Halonen, it is clear that the change to strong more primary colours
and expressive brushwork began before 1908, more or less in 1906. On colour issues, see von Bonsdorff
Chapter 3.2 studies synthetist colour in Finnish art and especially the concepts of 
paradise lost and sacred nature. The last part of the study, chapter 3.3, which 
concentrates on colour ascetism, aims to show how colour harmonies and contrasts 
were used to emphasise such frequently used concepts of modernity as melancholy, 
musicality and intimacy in painting. In the final part, conclusion, I will draw together 
previously discussed topics, analyses and arguments to make a closing statement on 
the various conditions and different factors that helped to establish the conditions 
of the period under investigation during which the new concepts of colour could 
flourish.

1.2 SOURCES

Defining the turn-of-the-twentieth-century history of colour in Finnish art requires 
many different approaches. My primary material consists first and foremost of 
selected artworks which best reflect the new colour concepts colour ascetism and 
synthetist colour. Sources vary from artists’ letters, colours studies to exhibition 
catalogues. Following Mieke Bal’s notion that “concepts should also frame, articulate 
and specify different analyses”\(^\text{24}\) this study will concentrate on specific works and 
their artists as examples which best show the change to colour and meaning. My 
material comprises many artists and a large number of artworks. This is why it is 
important to use concepts that frame the vast quantity of material and also allow 
it to focus on the new interest in and practice of colours.

On the one hand, I will use primary material such as artists’ letters and other 
archive material which throw some light on how and where the artists acquired their 
new knowledge of colour. I aim to discover what interested them in colour issues, 
thus giving focus to their comments on colour. Secondly, this study uses sources 
which strive somehow to reconstruct the intellectual, mental climate and working 
environment of the artists, their writings and those of their critics, contemporary 
exhibitions reviews and art criticisms.\(^\text{25}\) Also these sources have been selected so that 
they focus on colour issues and interests. Furthermore, this study aims to explore 
the sources of ascetic and synthetist colour from the aesthetic discourse and art 
theories of the period to the aspirations of the artists themselves. This is why the 
study concentrates on finding as many comments on colour as possible from the 
artists themselves while also keeping a close relationship with the historical context 
of the artists in question. This research requires knowledge of the main colour


\(^{25}\) It should be noted that this ‘reconstruction’ is not possible as such, but to study this era it is possible to build 
a general socio-historical and mental framework in which artists created their artworks.
theories although they are not at the heart of this study since it seems that the artists in question did not follow any particular colour theory as such but developed their colour-conscious art from the basic sources of the time such as Charles Blanc and evidently from each other. As a teacher Gauguin almost certainly introduced his pupils to his ideas on colour although the palettes of Väinö Blomstedt and Halonen did not use the same kind of synthetist, bright palette.

Focus is placed on the letters and comments of the artists which provide a link to their thoughts and aspirations. Although artists did not dwell on colour matters, some views are shared in their correspondence and in printed sources, such as press reviews and memoirs. Some artists such as Gauguin, Maurice Denis and Paul Séruisier wrote manuscripts and published their theories. It is interesting to note that late-nineteenth century critics were interested in and commented on colour issues, reflecting the nature of the preferences of the time. For Finnish ‘commentators’ Blomstedt’s letters to fellow artists are the most interesting and revealing. In his diaries, which were later published, the prominent and well connected artist Albert Edelfelt who represented an older generation, expressed another more cosmopolitan point-of-view. He also taught Magnus Enckell, for example, and loaned him his Parisian Avenue de Villiers atelier. Edelfelt also helped others to get established in Paris and was the promoter of Finnish art, for example, in the 1900 World Fair. Both Blomstedt and Edelfelt described prevailing conditions as well as their own opinions of art. This can be said also of other artists, like Axel Gallén and Halonen.

In addition, as I will demonstrate, the consciousness of history brought about many new meanings and modes in art which in many cases were depicted by a change in palette – by reducing colours to either ascetic or synthetist. The move towards non-nimetic art can be found in various sources – from Old Masters to Early Renaissance, from archaic art to Japanese and Chinese art. This ‘fusion’ is reflected in the art of the period in question and it is interesting that there are paintings which include references to all these aspects. This requires a focus on the conditions prevailing where the artists lived, travelled and worked as much as on the aesthetical and theoretical climate of the period. Although this study is aware

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26 The focus will be on the writings which are from the period 1890–1906. Thus Séruisier’s ABC, which was published 1920, is not concluded.

27 Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905) is known in Finnish art history as some sort of central figure, or even, as Kortelainen points out, a national hero, the first internationally-acclaimed Finnish artist in the Parisian art world of the 1880s and 1890s. He made his debut in the genre of history painting but gradually continued towards plein air painting, Naturalism and is also known as a peintre des femmes. In her PhD dissertation Kortelainen examines the paradoxical association of a masculinist professional image with the feminine subject matter in the case of Edelfelt’s representations of women, Japonisme and his studio. Edelfelt’s collecting practices, the commercialised Salon and the feminine quotidien in Paris are examined as overlapping spheres. Kortelainen 2002, 467.

that a complete reconstruction of the art or the ideas of artists is not possible, it will try to examine the material selected with a broad attitude.

Concentrating on the artists’ context brings to the fore socio-historical sources. Due to the vast amount of material that exists, this study has concentrated mainly on those writings and writers known to have been the most influential. For example, the French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire’s (1821–1867) writings reflected the new ideas of the period which lived on into future generations. Also articles on French art and philosophy were published in Finnish magazines, such as Finsk Tidsrift and Valvoja. There was also the short-lived Ateneum -periodical which was made up of contributions by artists, writers and designers. In the early-1890s many articles on Symbolism and the texts of Baudelaire, for example, were published in Finland and Scandinavia.29 Critics and theorists like Baudelaire, G.-Albert Aurier and Émile Zola were widely published and read in Finland and in Europe.30 One of the reasons why Baudelaire’s ideas were so widely known was that the Symbolists embraced his poems and writings and kept them in circulation but, as Marshall Berman (1997) has pointed out, it is important to note the form in which the prose poems of Paris Spleen first appeared: as feuilletons composed by Baudelaire for daily or weekly mass-circulation in the Paris press. These normally appeared on the paper’s first or centre page, just below or opposite the editorial, and were meant to be one of the very first things the reader would read.31 Also it is interesting that the poems in Paris Spleen did not present themselves as verse, an established art form, but as prose, in the format of news. In Baudelaire’s time, the feuilleton was an extremely popular urban genre, featured in hundreds of European and American newspapers.32

It should be noted that the primary sources and material, (such as paintings and drawings) are the artworks and their colour in their prevailing condition studied during from the 1990s to 2011.33 Studying these artworks in many exhibitions has been most useful. While there is not a huge interest in questions of colour or technique, it does not follow that there is a lack of interest in the subject. Many enthusiastic responses in exhibitions on retrospective blockbusters to artists’

29 Baudelaire’s writings were known to Finnish artists who followed the French press and periodicals. Almost all of them read French, German and some even English. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 22-25.
30 Artists like Edelfelt, Schjerbeck and Thesleff also commented about them in their letters.
32 On the feuilleton, and its connections with some of the nineteenth-century literature, see Benjamin, Baudelaire, 27ff; Berman 1997, 147-148.
33 This study is aware that the colours are unstable and in some cases may have changed. This is not, however, as much of a problem when studying colour ascetic art as it is when studying synthesis art where the pigments used have been more unstable. In the case of Gauguin there have been many studies on his paintings by conservators on which this study is able to rely. See Wasiytynski & Travers Newton 2000, 1-16.
painting technique have been frequent from the 1980s to the present day. Some of these big exhibitions have proved to be essential to this study, to mention only a few, in 2002 From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso. Toward Modern Art in Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Whistler and Maurice Denis exhibitions in Musée d’Orsay and in Glasgow and Gauguin Tahiti in Grand Palais, Paris. All the museums collections and exhibitions helped me to study the paintings closely which is a must when examining colour issues in paintings. This is not a study solely on colour nor is it a research with a socio-historical approach but aims to be an amalgamation of both. During the study it has become evident that there were so many things which caused artists to adopt an ascetic or synthetist palette that it is not even possible to study all the issues. Some aspects such as japonisme and (pictorial) photography are left for a later review since they would require a profound study. Thus the various sources which have been chosen for a reason are examined in this study, as we will later see, and provide an overview of the various sources of colour that artists themselves studied and used in their art.

In trying to establish the various sources behind the change in the use of colour in turn-of-the-twentieth-century painting, the approach is twofold. Firstly, I have endeavoured to concentrate on such studies and research that reflect either the conditions of the period under investigation or on the history of colour which forms the basis of the beliefs and tradition according to which the artists were educated. Secondly, I have tried to gather the threads of the main colour theory and ideologies known to the Finnish artists in question. The most comprehensive and wide-reaching studies of colour and its history have been presented in John Gage’s investigations from Colour and Culture to his most recent book Colour in Art (2006). Also Charles Riley’s Color Codes (1995), which, like Gage’s works, emphasises the cultural context in studying colour in art, has been very useful to my study. Gage’s approach to colour and its history, which reaches from antiquity to abstraction, provides a basis as to how this was experienced, while Riley’s wide conception of colour in art, music and philosophy gives an insight into how complex an issue studying colour can be. More specific studies on colour are, for example, Anthea Callen’s studies on nineteenth-century colour practices particularly painting techniques.

Also some recent studies on Gauguin have concentrated on colour. Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski and H. Travers Newton Jr. published Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin (2000) which reinterprets Gauguin’s art by reconstructing his painting techniques and their meaning. Using Gauguin as a case study, they show that technique provides historical evidence on aesthetical and cultural meaning. Important for this study is Debora Silverman’s Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Search for Sacred Art. (2000) which traces Gauguin’s and Vincent van Gogh’s (1853–1890) interest in colour and meaning by concentrating
on the historical context of the artists. A similar historical approach to colour can be found in two impressive recent publications, Margareta Tillberg’s *Coloured Universe and the Russian Avant-Garde. Matiushin on Colour Vision in Stalin’s Russia* (2003) and Matthias Krüger’s *Das Relief der Farbe* (2007), which allow for a strict historical investigation of the use of colour in contrast to the phenomenological and psychological approaches.

A revival in interest in art history research into Symbolism has recently taken place, which has been reflected in Europe and North America particularly in lively exhibition activity, as well as in articles and books. Significant publications include Henri Dorra’s *Symbolist Art Theories* (1994). This study also aims to make use as far as possible of original sources such as Maurice Denis’ *Théories 1890–1910* (1912). However, the exhibition catalogues *Puvis de Chavannes* (1994), *Näkyjää haaveita, ranskalainen symbolismi 1996–1908* (1994), *Paradis Perdu, L’Europe Symboliste* (1995) and *Eugène Carrière (1849–1906)* have filled the gaps in respect of certain lesser-known artists. It is clear that since my master’s thesis, artists such as these have aroused much wider interest and have also been the focus of many publications and exhibitions. In 2002 Serge Lemoine’s extensive exhibition and catalogue *From Puvis de Chavannes to Matisse and Picasso. Toward Modern Art* brought to the fore the vast influence Puvis de Chavannes had on European art.

One of the main works on Symbolism is Rodolphe Rapetti’s *Symbolism* (2005, 2007). This exceptionally wide research throws light on the complexity of Symbolism and introduces also Finnish artists such as Axel Gallén. Of the new symbolist research, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (2004) by Sharon Hirsh throws light on the issues of modernity, urban life in Europe and concentrates on the context of the artist. Both Hirsh and Rapetti explore the symbolist movement as a wide cultural and sociological change that was part of modern society. On the other hand Salme Sarajas-Korte’s dissertation *Suomen varhaissymbolismi ja sen lähteeet* (1966) remains the most comprehensive study on Finnish symbolism and its sources. Her PhD work throws light on its various sources: the dissertation’s bibliography and Sarajas-Kortes’ study on Finnish and French archives and original sources have helped my research. Of the more recent studies on Finnish symbolism, Riikka Stewen’s books and numerous articles have presented entirely new aspects of Symbolism.34 On the literary front Pirjo Lyytikäinen has pointed the way towards new interpretations of Symbolism publications she has edited, *Katsomuksen ihanuus* (1996) and *Dekadenssi* (1998) open up new paths for research by studying Symbolism on an interdisciplinary basis. Many Finnish exhibition catalogues introduces many of the artists studied here, for example the *Magnus Enckell* catalogue (2000) looks

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at Enckell’s art from viewpoints of gender and phenomenology. In conjunction with the large *Pekka Halonen* (2008) exhibition a comprehensive catalogue containing several articles by international and Finnish experts was published. In respect of Finnish art there are many important publications.\(^3\) To name just a few, Riitta Konttinen’s biography on *Helene Schjerbeck* (2004) and Ville Lukkarinen’s many books and articles on Halonen and Finnish art have been useful. Likewise Annika Waenerberg’s studies especially on Eero Järnefelt and Halonen shows a new interest and viewpoints on Finnish art. Also Marie-Sophie Lundström’s recent PhD dissertation *Travelling in a Palimpsest. Finnish nineteenth-century painters’ encounters with Spanish art and culture* (2008), which deals with the concept of Modernism, throws light on the admiration for Spanish masters in Finnish art.

To establish a new insight into colour issues and to give a wider view of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Finnish and European art this study aspires towards a broad examination of the various sources that affected, inspired and supported the artists in establishing their own personal palettes of either ascetic or synthetist and, in some cases, in exploring both colour extremes. Sources used in this study are presented in more detail in parts I and II.

\(^3\) When it has been possible, I have used an English translation of the book or catalogue.
2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND ARTISTS’ INTEREST IN COLOUR

Benefiting from some recent contributions to the field of colour and culture, the thesis will focus in general on the meaning of colour in painting and examine the changes in colour use occurring in Finnish and European art towards the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century from the viewpoint of artists’ contexts. My intention is to present a study of colour in a hermeneutic way from both a horizontal and vertical perspective, i.e. both on its own terms in its own time, and from a perspective of today’s science. The horizontal way corresponds to the first purpose of my study, which is to place colour ascetism and synthetist colour in its contemporary context. The vertical perspective serves the second purpose: to present these colour concepts in a way comprehensible to scholars of colour and art history.36

The study deals with a wide range of artists and paintings so the two concepts of colour which I have chosen will specify and frame the work. However, my aim is not simply to document artists colour practices, medium and technique – these materials and their transformation into artworks – but to demonstrate how both materials and paintings are intimately, inseparably constituted by and within the cultural matrices that produced them. While methodologically grounded in a social history of art informed by history of colour, this study privileges the physical pictorial object and the evidence that can be read from it through both visual and scientific scrutiny. Readings that result from examination of ‘painting’ and the complex processes of change in colour practices entailed in all aspects of artistic production are mediated here by analysis of the key cultural determinants of artists’ priorities in the nineteenth century, comparing Finnish and European artists.

This study of colour ascetism and synthetist colour in Finnish and European art has two main objectives. First, to present a new approach to understanding the history of colour in painting during the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries differing from that which has become conventional; in other words, as a series of avant-garde movements from Post-Impressionism to Post-Modernism. And I will put emphasis on the notion that the ‘new art’ and new ideas on colour came by looking back to tradition. Second, to present a survey of the history of art in the light of this new approach to colour with two defined colour concepts, which may be of interest in seeking a new aspect of twentieth-century art and which also pays due regard to painting as a cultural activity deeply embedded in other social, religious and intellectual activities while subject to pressures from the fields

36 This method is also used by Margareta Tillberg in her study Coloured Universe and the Russian Avant-Garde. Matiushin on Colour Vision in Stalin’s Russia (2003).
of economics, politics and ideology. Emphasis is placed on the artists’ individual achievements inside the societal nexus within which the achievements take place. This is merely one attempt to present a different view of the art of these centuries.

Defining the main concepts of colour ascetism and synthetist colour is an important part of my thesis. As Mieke Bal states in Travelling Concepts in the Humanities (2002), “concepts need to be explicit, clear and defined”, in this way they will help to articulate and understand one’s abstract representations of the object. Concepts should also convey an interpretation, keep us in check and enable a discussion on the basis of common terms.\(^{37}\) Thus, the defining and explanation of these colour concepts form the heart of this study and they are needed to explore the colour practice of this period. The problem is that in many cases colour terms are not defined and are used very ambiguously as a mere appendage of style. However, in accordance with what Bal suggests, my concept of colour ascetism has changed during the course of my research. From the outset, colour ascetism seemed to be a much larger phenomenon than a mere part of the symbolist movement. In fact many artists, such as Manet or Schjerfbeck, who used an ascetic palette were not Symbolists. Thus colour ascetism should not be used solely as a signifier of a symbolist style or movement but should be regarded as a colour concept of the modern period.\(^{38}\) Bal goes on to say that “concepts should also frame, articulate and specify different analyses”.\(^{39}\) Likewise the role of concepts is to focus interest on the colour issues as a separate approach to examine the art of this period. And, since the material comprises many artists and a large number of artworks, it is important to use concepts framing the vast quantity of material which allow us to focus on the period’s practice of colours: to amalgamate the concepts of colour ascetism and synthetist colour with the study of the cultural context of the artworks.

I will also analyse the meaning of colour itself, as John Gage has done in his groundbreaking books,\(^{40}\) in which he empasises that the historical explanation of an artwork is as important for the logical basis of its interpretation as for the reconstruction of its historical and social context. But where Gage’s contextualising focus is on a number of different colour periods and their contexts, mine is focused on one period, albeit an extended perspective. To find the ‘historical dimension of colour’, I aim to examine the paintings and colour-language of the period.\(^{41}\) In addition, in order to observe as far as is possible the artists’ understanding of


\(^{38}\) The term ‘modern period’ in this study is used as a time period which stretches from the 1860s to the 1900s. In Finland we nowadays use the term ‘Early Modernism’ when considering the period 1890–1920 in Finnish art.


\(^{41}\) The paintings, which are analysed later, have all been studied closely in situ, since photographs cannot be fully relied upon when the study-case is colour in a painting.
colour issues and why they developed their non-mimetic palettes, I have deployed a variety of methodological tools.

To confront the difficult issue of colour as a concept and practice, this study adapts the notion of painting as a ‘deposit’ proposed by Michael Baxandall (1972), who analysed the fifteenth-century Florentine painting he studied as “a deposit of a social relationship”. Baxandall introduced the notion of the *period eye* which includes the importance of culture for the understanding of art. It is a hermeneutic method with a deep focus. The *period eye* is a set of learned conventions that differ from one country to another and from one century to the next. It represents religious, commercial and social conventions as a two-way relationship of horizons shared by both producers and beholders, conclusive for how works of art are to be understood. In the same way as Baxandall, I consider visual traces, in my case the new colour concepts, to be important deposits of information. Thus I shall extend this framework to Europe and to Finland (1860–1908) to suggest painting as a *deposit of a specific colour-conscious culture*, at a specific context. This is why this study will concentrate on a highly significant period in Finland from a political, cultural, ideological and particularly an art standpoint where it seems that colour and meaning became an important part of painting. Since I aim to bring together the colour concepts in a historical and cultural context, the concept of *modernity* should be addressed. I will argue that the actual ‘modernity’ of the Finnish artists enterprise lay in these material practices and what they were understood to mean, rather than simply in the subject matter these complement. I will show how their *choice* of materials and methods combined to help constitute the modern as visual.

Following Baxandall’s notion that an artwork is a ‘deposit’ of more than aesthetic issues, the focus thus shifts to the context of the work. As Oscar Bätschmann says in his *Guide to Interpretation: Art as Historical Hermeneutics* (2003), “an artwork’s historical explanation is as important for the logical basis of interpretation as for the reconstruction of the artwork’s historical and social context”. Bätschmann also states why interpretation should focus on what renders a work visible in terms of its materials, colour, depiction, composition and content. Or, as he says, when put differently, in terms of the multiple relationships between the various aspects of *form* and *content*. This way the interpretation of the painting and its colours should begin from a hypothesis of the open and revealing work of art that should provide a basis for this hypothesis by exploring the essential difference between thought,

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42 This approach is also used by Debora Silverman (2000) and Margareta Tillberg (2003); Baxandall (1972) 1988, 1-108, 151-153.

43 Rather than decoding the semantics of colours, which is the more commonly used method in iconographical studies by art historians, Baxandall reveals the intricate codes behind the use of expensive pigments in Renaissance painting, by studying the contracts and thus revealing the social relationship of the painter to his patron. Baxandall 1988, 3-11.

44 Bätschmann 2003, 178.
habitus, and social conditions on the one hand, and the artwork made up of colours on a canvas on the other.\textsuperscript{45} This kind of interpretation where one considers the artwork in itself, or its colours in particular, does not aim to propose the exclusion of contextual or historical explanation, but rather that the two concerns must be linked.

As another concept important in comprehending and examining the modern turn to a new consciousness of colour I will adopt Frederic Jameson’s concept of ‘historicity’. In his study \textit{A Singular Modernity} (2002) he has pointed out an important fact, namely that Romanticism and its modernity come into being only after history itself, or rather historicity, the consciousness of history and of being historical, has appeared. Interestingly, it is thus history as such that enables this new attitude towards the present. This is the judgement of the future on the present, which was attributed in 1735 to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and of which we find strong forms all the way down to Sartre.\textsuperscript{46} Jameson argues that the present cannot consider itself as a historical period in its own right without this gaze from the future, which seals it off and expels it as powerfully from time as it was able to do with its own immediate precedents.\textsuperscript{47} Certainly, as Jameson proposes, when late Romanticism begins to feel dissatisfaction with what is still perceived as a reactive stance against the classical, the concept of modernité is born and Baudelaire mints a usage that is presumably still with us, the signal advantage of which seems to lie in its new-found independence from all such historical oppositions and antitheses. But even this development is dependent on changes marked by the coming-into-being of the category of the classical itself, which no longer coincides with what was earlier identified as ‘Antiquity’ (or ‘les anciens’). It is a momentous development in which a good deal of the nostalgia and fascination with the past, alongside the pain of the Epigone’s inferiority, have fallen away.\textsuperscript{48}

Indeed, as Jameson demonstrates, the most dramatic moment in Jauss’s narrative of the fortunes of ‘modernus’ comes precisely at this point: when the ‘quarrel’ between the Anciens and the Moderns, as it were, unravels and undoes itself, with both sides unexpectedly coming to the same conviction, namely that the terms by which the judgement is to be adjudicated – the superiority or not of antiquity, the inferiority or not of the present and of modern times – are unsatisfactory. The conclusion on both sides is then that the past and antiquity are \textit{neither} superior nor inferior, but merely different. This is the moment of the birth of historicity

\textsuperscript{45} Bätschmann 2003, 179.
\textsuperscript{46} Jauss 1970, 34.
\textsuperscript{48} The other notion noted by Jauss is the opposition that historically contrasts the characterisations of ‘classic’ and ‘romantic’, but which can also be seen to have a more general significance. Hans-Robert Jauss, ‘Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität’, in \textit{Literaturgeschichte als Provocation}, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970. Jameson 2002, 21.
itself: and the historically new consciousness of historical difference as such now reschedules the deck, leaving us with a new word for the present’s opposite: the classical.⁴⁹ Jauss concludes his narrative at this point, touching only in passing on that other indispensable dimension of historicity, which is the future.⁵⁰ Yet the future’s inevitable judgement on both our past and the actuality of our own present will play an equally significant role in our own dealings with the modern and modernity.⁵¹ As this study aims to reveal, this new consciousness of history – of being historical – is clearly apparent in the attitudes and the practice of colour of the artists studied here.

This interesting dualistic attitude presents itself especially in Baudelaire’s writings. The counter-pastoral images of modernity, as Berman (1997) calls them, belong to the late 1850s, the same period as ‘the Painter of Modern Life’ where, in an 1855 essay “On the Modern Idea of Progress as Applied to the Fine Arts”, this counter-pastoral theme first emerges. Here Baudelaire uses familiar reactionary rhetoric, not merely on the modern idea of progress but on modern thought and life as a whole:

*There is yet another and very fashionable error which I am anxious to avoid like the very devil. I refer to the idea of “progress.” This obscure beacon, invention of present-day philosophising, licensed without guarantee of Nature or God – this modern lantern throws a stream of chaos on all objects of knowledge; liberty melts away, punishment (châtiment) disappears. Anyone who wants to see history clearly must first of all put out this treacherous light. This grotesque idea, which has flowered on the soil of modern fatuity, has discharged each man from his duty, has delivered the soul from responsibility, has released the will from all the bonds imposed on it by the love of beauty(...). Such an infatuation is a symptom of an already too visible decadence.⁵²*

It is important to note how Baudelaire stresses that without gazing on history man loses himself to ‘superficial’ progress. Moreover, Baudelaire’s term *modernité* articulated a sense of difference from the past and described a peculiarly modern identity. Modernité, in this context, does not mean merely of the present but rather a particular attitude to the present. Such a self-conscious experience of modernity developed only during the mid-nineteenth century. These two aspects – the transitory or the fleeting, on the one hand, and the eternal on the other – were

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⁵⁰ Jauss 1970, 34.
⁵¹ Jameson 2002, 22.
two sides of a duality. This duality is also well represented with colour as, for example, by Whistler, in his self-portrait, referring to Rembrandt through the use of the brownish palette of the late Rembrandt, or Puvis de Chavannes, modulating the allegorical painting to modern vision and imitating ancient fresco with a matte, greyish surface. Even though the subject was of the present, the medium looked to the past. This modern dualism is addressed in more detail in part I and in Finnish art in part II.

In his article *Impressionism, Modernism and Originality* (1993) Charles Harrison likewise argues that the relationship between modern life and modern painting is not to be established solely through the examination of the social, historical and economic circumstances in which the art was produced. However important contemporary events and ideas may have been for (impressionist) painters and however important it may be for us to be aware of these, the identification of their works as ‘modern’ is inseparable from the question of their aesthetic merit – a question which cannot be addressed without some formal analysis of painterly effects. But what are these painterly effects? Surely they can mean sketchy brushstrokes and the flatness of the surface, as has conventionally been seen, but what of colour? If we address the question of materiality and medium, the use of colour should be at the heart of that question.

In her book *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (2004) Sharon Hirsh, on the other hand, has rightfully demonstrated that this difficult goal of using tangible form to reference intangible ideas was accomplished through careful manipulation of both style and subject. Such heavy manipulation, moving away from the glossy thin and detailed application of oil paints favoured by the academic painters of the nineteenth century, characterises the artist’s work, a form of non-compliance with traditional rules of representational art. By introducing extreme manipulation of form, colour, and technique, artists announced to the viewer that their art was not an illusion of reality but rather a jumping-off image into the realm of ideas. With these manipulations of the surface and particularly in the case of *colour ascetism*, artists aimed to achieve a transparent mistiness which suggested a mysterious realm. Also, it is crucial to note Baudelaire’s use of fluidity “floating existences” and gaseousness that “envelops and soaks us like an atmosphere” as symbols for the distinctive quality of modern life. Fluidity and vaporousness will become primary qualities in the self-consciously modernist painting, architecture and design, music and literature that will emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. We will encounter them, too,

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54 Harrison 1993, 141-157.
55 Hirsh 2004, 3.
56 Hirsh 2004, 3. Hirsh sees that this aspect affected only the Symbolists, but here it will cover all artists in question.
in the thought of the deepest moral and social thinkers of and after Baudelaire’s generation – Marx, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche for whom the basic fact of modern life is that, as the Communist Manifesto states, “all that is solid melts into air.”57 As Hirsh has pointed out, the key – and the challenge – for the Symbolist was to realise this blend as a balance of references to both sides of Baudelaire’s correspondences: the image from real life but also the dream of another. In his 1886 “Symbolist Manifesto” the French poet Jean Moréas explained this as a kind of delicate line trod by the artist. Moréas warned first of being too precise and too descriptive (which would effectively deny the role of the image as symbol), but also warned against ‘over-abstraction’, or submission to style (because such abstraction, he believed, would lose the reader).58 This ‘vaporousness’ of modern life manifests itself in the works of Whistler but even more so in the fantômes synthétiques of Eugène Carrière.59

One of the substantial accounts of this important chapter in art history is offered by Mark Cheetham in his study, The Rhetoric of Purity. Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting (1991). Cheetham explores the historical and theoretical relations between early abstract painting in Europe and the notion of purity. For Gauguin, Sérisier, Mondrian, and Kandinsky – whom he calls “the pioneering abstractionists” and whose written and visual works Cheetham discusses in detail – purity is the crucial quality that painting must possess. Purity, however, was itself only a password for what Cheetham defines as an ‘essentialist’ philosophy inaugurated by Plato’s vision of a perfect, non-mimetic art form practiced by the founders of abstraction. Cheetham’s strategy in consciously bringing these traditionally opposed ideas together is to create a new set of tensions between them in the context of early abstract painting and thereby to unsettle the normative purity. Yet purity in this context is indeed rhetoric in the classical, pejorative sense: its repetition seeks to persuade, it longs impossibly for the immaterial in the material, it is attracted to the promise of an historical security for decidedly historical reasons. Like Socrates and Plato, the artists on whom Cheetham focuses became rhetoricians in spite of themselves by pleading art’s case both plastically and theoretically. Art is thus at best a way to purity, but where does this leave art once perfection is achieved? Put another way, Cheetham argues that the abstractionists inadvertently constructed an inverted hierarchy between purity and rhetoric by making the pure rhetorical. In trying to escape the danger of this ‘impurity’ in the self-transcendence of art, artists

57 Berman 1997, 144-145.
sought silence, the pure transparency and presence of the non-mimetic ideal.\footnote{Cheetham 1991, xii-xiii.} This was, of course, also the aim of the artists who used an ascetic palette as well.

Turn-of-the-twentieth-century visual art is probably one of the most intriguing and multifaceted periods during which many colour theories began to be developed by both scientists and artists. As John Gage (2005) has demonstrated, the most influential of these was the scientific colour theory *De la Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs* (1839) of the chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul. His study on colour harmonies and contrasts had a major impact on the Impressionists. But for artists in general the most popular theorist was Charles Blanc, who, in the vein of Chevreul, wrote his book *Grammaire des arts de dessin* (1880).\footnote{Gage 2005, 174-175.} This is also one reason why this study concentrates specifically on this period which witnessed extensive interest in science and especially in the developments in optics, rays of light and dark light, x-rays etc. As Sixten Ringbom (1970) has rightfully pointed out, at the same time various substitute religions emerged among artists during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Rosicrucianism, masonry and magical sects – embraced, for example, by the French Synthetists with varying degrees of conviction – were apt to underscore the role of spiritualism in general.\footnote{Ringbom 1970, 23.} And for Finnish artists, what some of them called the ‘New Spiritualist Epoch’ introduced ideas of spirituality through Leo Tolstoy’s writings and in particular through Theosophy.\footnote{We know that Halonen and Blomstedt read Édouard Schuré’s *The Great Initiates* (first ed. 1889) and A. P. Sinnet’s *Esoteric Buddhism* (*De individes lāra*, 1889) and also the symbolist periodicals *Le Coeur, La Plume* and *The Studio* magazine. Gallén is known, for example, to have read the symbolist magazine *Revue Encyclopédique* and *Taarnet*, a Danish symbolist art journal in 1894. Schjerfbeck read most of the French reviews and *The Studio* magazine as did Enckell, Järnefelt and Thesleff. With the exception of Halonen, all these artists were educated and read at least French, German and Swedish, which for many was their native tongue.} Also Rudolf Steiner’s popular lectures were held in Helsinki.\footnote{Tillberg 2003, 174.} This search for immateriality, transparency and purity in painting were, as I aim to present in this study, experimented with both ascetic and synthetist palettes and new painting methods. This aspect will be examined specifically in part II.

### 2.1 TRADITION AND INNOVATION

The nineteenth century is characterised in art histories as an era of innovation: in the production of the artist’s materials, in their usage and in the ‘modern’ styles of painting they generated. As Anthea Callen (2000) demonstrates, science and technology provided artists with a greatly extended range of materials and pigments,
and colour-merchants retailed a burgeoning selection of ready-made equipment, including painting supports. The symbolist writer and critic Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907), however, placed emphasis first, not on the new techniques and the technologies that fuelled them, but on the ‘new age’.\textsuperscript{65} Therefore, it is essential to consider not only the relationship between technological change and artists’ methods, but also the ‘new age’ of which both were a product. A legacy of the nineteenth-century Darwinian concept of ‘progress’, the idea of technical innovation, along with its artistic concomitant, the avant-garde, has until recently dominated histories of French art, divorcing the innovatory from its origins in French society and culture, and thus from the complexity of its meanings. ‘New techniques’, new technologies, cannot be separated from the ‘new age’. Interestingly, unspoken in Huysman’s remark is the implication ‘old’ – old techniques, old masters – a history of materials, of artists’ techniques, to be resurrected, restored to knowledge and deciphered. Also implied is the idea of decay and change, reinforcing the new self-consciousness of history, of quality and durability in art, and of the need to conserve or restore past art for now, and to create new art for the future.\textsuperscript{66} These concerns were shared by many artists who experimented with new materials, from van Gogh to Gauguin, or Finnish artists like Gallén and Halonen. These topics come up especially in the discourse of decorative and mural art.

It is important to note that novel subject matter, the ‘painting of modern life’ is not, this study will argue, the central issue of modernity in painting from the 1860s on: as Callen (2000) states, modern subject matter was adopted by many artists whose painting was by no means ‘modern’. Nor does she see novel materials as the motor of innovation. Instead, Callen contends that new ways (in as much as they were new) of seeing and representing were determined by differences in observing and experiencing the world, and that the constitution of these differences in painting depended on finding new techniques and ways of using the materials of painting.\textsuperscript{67}

As Briony Fer states in \textit{Modernity and Modernism. French Painting in the Nineteenth Century} (1993), the terms ‘modern’ and ‘modernity’ in art are not a matter of fixed definition but are relative and subject to historical change.\textsuperscript{68} A ‘modern’ art practice is constructed out of a sense of difference. We could even say that the modern is a form of difference, and that from the mid-nineteenth century, at least as far as painting is concerned, it entailed a particular relationship between the kinds of contemporary \textit{subject} and \textit{treatment} that we find in, for example, Édouard Manet’s work. Fer goes on to say that one way of describing the difference is to draw

\textsuperscript{65} Huysmans 1975, 28.
\textsuperscript{66} Callen 2000, 1.
\textsuperscript{67} Callen 2000, 1.
\textsuperscript{68} Fer 1993, 10-11.
attention to the way in which Manet’s *Berthe Morisot with a Fan* (1872) appears to break up the surface of the painting into distinct and sketchy brushstrokes.\(^6^9\) Manet painted the small, sketchy *Berthe Morisot with a Fan* with large expanses of modulated blacks in her dress and in the brown of the wall. To Fer this painting seems almost to flaunt its own absence of detail and to make a virtue of not allowing the viewer to piece its parts together. This is an interesting issue but Fer does not see the attention to the simplified ascetic colour scheme. I would suggest that the enigmatic in this painting, in which the artist Berthe Morisot is seated in a chair, covering her face with a fan, the difference is also constructed with only a few colours of black, dark brown and white.

Sharon Hirsh (2004), on the other hand, states that, in the handling of pictorial space, the Symbolists were perhaps the most audacious. In direct contrast to their realist predecessors, who naturally sought to create a believable illusion of space within the boundaries of their two-dimensional works, the Symbolists revealed that beautifully-expressed unreal and ultimately spaceless world in deliberately complex spatial relationships. In this respect much symbolist work seems influenced by medieval hieratic scale, especially as it incorporates non-traditional perspective and even a lack of proportion among the objects depicted.\(^7^0\) The uneasiness and tension were also created by colour contrasts. With Edvard Munch (1863–1944) and also van Gogh, the colours themselves worked as symbols, as in medieval art. But uneasiness and tension are well presented by Manet, in such works as *The Balcony* (1868–69), in which tension and even anxiety are enhanced solely with strong contrasts of colour.\(^7^1\) What I further aim to establish in this study is that, by using colour, artists sought to refer to an abstract level such as moods and feelings: tension and uneasiness or sorrow and melancholy for example, were the preferred concepts used by colour-conscious artists of the period.

To be more precise, this shift towards the use of a non-mimetic palette was a widespread phenomenon in European art. It is obvious that, after the long tradition of mimetic representation, where colours were intended only to complement form and to create an illusion of natural light and shadow with ‘natural’ colours, ascetic or synthetic colours constituted an entirely new approach to art. ‘Non-naturalistic’ or ‘non-mimetic’ colours and their symbolic effect on a painting represented a break from the long mimetic tradition in Western art to the way of using the palette to signify the artists ‘inner vision’. In the vein of Baudelaire, new subject matter required new techniques; just as there were appropriate forms that the modern in

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\(^7^0\) This is also noted by Silverman 2000, 105; Hirsh 2004, 6.

\(^7^1\) This discussion on ‘poisonous green’, see Gage 1999, 39, 64.
art could take, so too there were inappropriate forms. In these terms, as Fer (1994) states, painting might not be inherently modern – by virtue, say, of the techniques used – but modern by virtue of the context in which they were produced, and in relation to other representations.72

As this study will later show, the choice of medium was a particularly important question to which artists reacted in different ways. Many chose to use mediums other than oil on canvas, traditionally the only official medium. One of the responses to this shift towards certain mediums at the end of the nineteenth century was a revival in decorative mural art in Europe, specifically in response to symbolist theories; for the Symbolists decorative frescos were the ‘truest form’ of painting. As Patricia Townley Mathews (1986) states, the art critic and painter G.-Albert Aurier was very much a product of his own time and his importance, therefore, lies in his clear and certain formulation of the art theory of the period, especially as understood by the synthetist group surrounding Gauguin.73 They saw mural art as a link with primitive art, the clear, stylised surfaces of which were the object of the artists’ admiration. At the same time they sought to achieve the symmetry and harmony of ancient colours and lines. This monumental mural art and more specifically its decorative elements were also adopted in Finland in smaller easel paintings. This issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.1. as well as in connection with the ideology of dualistic admiration of the ancient fresco along with the modern concept of historicity adopted from Baudelaire.

Moreover, at the heart of the analysis are two contending approaches to pictorial practice with a paradoxical shared goal: to achieve spiritual ends through the plastic means of pigment, canvas, and in some cases primer. The artists’ quest for sacralism and spirituality immerses them in developing stylistic practices to de-materialise the physical surface of the canvas as much as possible, by ascetic or synthetist colour; and, by emulating the matte permeation of the fresco, they sought to efface the distance between a deficient material world and the ineffable world of dream and the divine.74 In my opinion, this change – in which the medium became a part of the content – was also the main signifier of early modern Finnish art and also, in some cases discussed here, European art. As I hope this study will establish, colour was being developed to express a new kind of aesthetic language in art which took its inspiration not only from new techniques but the old and ‘ancient’. I will argue that ‘modernity’ and artists who painted the modern from 1860s onwards found the ‘new art’ by looking back to Old Masters and their colour practices but by experimenting with the notion of historicity – and not by copying.

72 Fer 1993, 10.
74 Silverman points to this aspect with Gauguin. But I see it as relevant to all the artists examined in this study. Silverman 2000, 6.
2.2. COLOUR THEORIES AND COLOUR HISTORIES

Colour has always constituted a difficult subject in art and in art history. As many studies, from the Renaissance onwards, have shown, colour was, with few exceptions, a subordinate value in art. In addition to the technical problems inherent in producing vivid pigments, artists (or art historians) did not seem to consider colour as important as composition, subject, line, or perspective. Traditionally, the focus on and meaning of colours craved attention specifically in allegorical religious art. Attention shifted towards colours in the nineteenth century, when impressionist and later symbolist artists concentrated on modern colour theories, optics and science. The tightly logical, left-brain attitude that ruled Western culture for six hundred years has viewed colour with a certain suspicion. It was generally believed that people who responded to colour rather than to line were not wholly trustworthy. Interest in colour was somehow instinctual and primitive, indicating a Dionysian cast to one’s psyche rather than the restrained and Apollonian one appropriate to a proper man. Colour precedes words and antedates civilisation and is connected to the archaic system. Infants respond to brightly-coloured objects long before they learn words or even complex purposeful movements. This may be regarded simply as an example of the way in which cognition is more actively engaged by contour and contrasts of value than by colour, a view that, during the Renaissance, lay behind the appeal to disegno, in the interests of imitating both nature and the art of antiquity.

It should therefore be stated that this study has two challenges. The first is that painting technique and colour – when it is discussed in art histories – has commonly been used to reinforce a narrow ‘history of styles’, tied to the modernist canon, and technical innovation is portrayed as a mere appendage of style, as the material proof of artistic avant-gardism. Thus linked with style, and as Callen (2000) rightfully points out, technical innovation is reduced to a fashion accessory. It becomes simply a measure of ‘advanced’ taste, losing the culturally specific meanings of that particular historical moment in the society that produced it. Indeed, technique and colour have been particularly susceptible to what has been a process of depoliticisation: modernist art historical debates have traditionally deployed questions of technique to privilege formalism, justifying the divorce of art from history in order to define painting as self-referentially autonomous, and painting as having no meaning.

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77 Gage 2006, 200.
78 For an important feminist critique of the partiality of the modernist canon, see Pollock 1988, 50 ff.
79 See, for example, Bomford et al 1990, which reiterates this position; Callen 1991, 599-608; The techniques of individual painters are systematically addressed and with attention to the complexities of such problems in Jirat-Wasiutynski and Newton 2000; Callen 2000, 1-14.
18. Pekka Halonen *Winter Landscape* (1895). Oil on canvas, 76 x 57 cm, Harri Silander’s collection. Photo: Harri Silander
beyond purely aesthetic. Social histories of art have complicated this narrow, ahistorical reading with nuanced interpretations which situate nineteenth-century painting within the cultures that produced them.⁸⁰ Therefore this study is devoted to a consideration of artists’ writings and pronouncements on colour.

The second is that colour has not, by itself, been the focus in art history. A dichotomy is still present in art historical studies. The well-known priority of line before colour – the ancient battle between disegno (which covers both ‘drawing’ and ‘design’) and colore (which includes pictorial colouring, painterly handling and the pigments and media that create it) – flared up every hundred years or so, notably in the famous fifteenth- and sixteenth-century rivalry between Venice, which Gage calls “the great emporium of artists’ colours”,⁸¹ and Florence through the bitter dispute in the nineteenth century between the followers of a linear Classicist, Ingres, and his extravagant colouristic rival, Delacroix. Critics, too, can be divided along these lines and it is amusing to separate the colouristic Walter Pater from the avowedly linear Bernard Berenson or to trace the ambiguous course of John Ruskin between his traditional adherence to line and his secret passion for colour in Turner. The debate now seems to be about nothing very significant. The meanings of disegno and colore were never clearly defined. Moreover, just as Venetian painters, such as Titian, were both outstanding draughtsmen and happy to join the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, founded in 1563, so artists trained in Florence, such as Michelangelo, were not only brilliant colourists but, as the Sistine Chapel frescoes now reveal, also able to handle pigments in a free and painterly way. There are many Renaissance examples of both painterly drawings and linear paintings and analyses made in the course of conservation have shown that the habit of improvisation in the course of executing a painting was far from being a purely Venetian practice.⁸² As Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) comments, the Venetian practice, best exemplified in Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), where “the brightest possible colours are admitted, with the two extremes of warm and cold, and those reconciled by being dispersed over the picture, till the whole appears like a bunch of flowers.”⁸³ For some reason there has always been a need to introduce rival pairs in the history of colour, here Rubens and his bright palette and Rembrandt with a more subdued palette.

But from whom does this opposition come from? From the art critics, artists or art historians? It is interesting to note how socio-historical issues affected the way in which ‘colour’ was perceived. As in the later disputes between Delacroix and Ingres or between the Salon painters and the Impressionists in France, Gage (2006)

⁸⁰ Callen 2000, 1.
rightfully points out that we are dealing as much with local rivalries and art politics as with substantial aesthetic issues. When, in the early-seventeenth century, El Greco (1541–1614), who began his career as an icon painter in Crete but subsequently developed his technique in Venice, made the unusual claim that colouring was more difficult than drawing, he was thinking not of the highly contrasted and saturated colours characteristic of his mature style, which are also evidence of the continuing influence of Byzantium, but rather of the problem of identifying and representing the colours of nature. As so often in this period, colour was understood as it had been in Italian theory primarily as a matter of truth to appearances.

Heinrich Wölfflin’s Principles of Art History solidified the division of art into linear and painterly (which Wölfflin distinguished from coloristic) models, but the rift had long been established. For French theoreticians of the nineteenth century, such as Charles Blanc, colour was female and line male: “The union of design and colour is necessary to beget painting just as is the union of man and woman to beget mankind, but design must maintain its preponderance over colour. Otherwise painting speeds to its ruin: it will fall through colour just as mankind fell through Eve.”

This ambivalence can be clearly seen throughout the history of colour. In ancient Greece certain philosophers appealed to experience of the painters’ use of pigments to explain their notions of the nature of colours and their mixture in matter but, from Aristotle onwards, they were also very much aware that the surface appearance of colours is highly deceptive: “We do not see any of the colours pure, as they really are, but variously intermingled with others”, wrote Aristotle’s follower Theophrastus, author of the only surviving early Greek treatise, On Colours, who knew that the surface appearance of colours is not to be trusted. This is an idea that means essentially that it is the context of colours as well as their immediate physical stimulus (the internal or surface structure of the objects that reflect some wavelengths of light and absorb others) that determine how they are seen. And it is an idea which has continued to preoccupy artists, at least up to the Op Art of the 1960s, and notably in Josef Albers’s Interaction of Color (1963), where the proposition that “In visual perception a colour is almost never seen as it really is – as it physically

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84 El Greco, The Opening of the Fifth Seal (The Vision of St John) (1608-14), oil on canvas, 222.3 x 193. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Greco’s sharp, strident colour, as abstract as his elongated, gesturing figures, is testimony to his belief that identifying and rendering the colours of nature are more difficult than drawing. Gage 2006, 99. Finnish artist Helene Schjerfbeck was inspired by El Greco’s paintings which she, as far as we know, saw from prints, made later in her career many variations from his paintings.

85 Gage 2006, 97, 99.

86 Song 1984, 61-62.

87 For Aristotelian legacy, see Kemp 1990, 259, 264.
is” was demonstrated in a visually exciting way by comparing how a single colour may be made to look like two different colours by contrast with its surroundings.\textsuperscript{88}

One issue, frequently mentioned when artists discuss colour, is the ambivalent and nerve-wrecking instability which often shows itself. Whistler, a champion of colour, also struggled with it: “My God! Color - it’s truly a vice! Certainly it’s got the right to be one of the most beautiful of virtues - if then a splendid bride with a spouse worthy of her - her lover but also her master, - the most magnificent mistress possible!” (Whistler 1867)\textsuperscript{89} Even Albers, arguably the strongest champion of colour of our time, had to admit, “Colour deceives continuously.”\textsuperscript{90} And as Riley notes, it is so deceptive and difficult to handle, mainly because it is so powerful in its effect, that it drives artists and musicians to despair.\textsuperscript{91} Riley also claims that habits of association still persist. Line and the rational, the structured, the formal, the honest, the reliable frame of mind, even moral rectitude, seem inseparable. Colour is identified with the emotional, rhapsodic, emancipated, formless, and even deceitful aspect of art. The question of primaries is just one of the controversial issues in the modern study of colour. As a study of what artists and musicians say about colour, together with the principal writings on colour of philosophers and psychologists and a few literary examples of colour symbolism, and colour’s role in music and literature has a rhetorical basis. One of the main tropes is synaesthesia, which is important not only with respect to Baudelaire and the Symbolists but, as Riley interestingly points out, also as the key to later understanding the role of colour in the work of Kandinsky, Spengler, Joyce, Huysmans, Scriabin, Jung, van Gogh, Rothko,\textsuperscript{92} and so many others considered in this study.

Since Goethe’s time colour held a prominent place in philosophical language as both figure and topic.\textsuperscript{93} Perhaps most significant of all, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s last work, \textit{Remarks of Color}, remains the closest that philosophy has come to a definitive study. The search for what is primary is not just a philosophical question


\textsuperscript{90} Albers’s book is largely concerned with demonstrating the relativity of colour perceptions, for example, how a single colour may be made to look like two different colours by contrast with its surroundings. Albers 1963, 1.

\textsuperscript{91} Stravinsky abandoned himself to it in \textit{Le Sacre du Printemps}, then reinvented himself in with the clear neoclassical works of his last years. Riley 1995, 7.

\textsuperscript{92} Sir Isaac Newton, whose revolutionary \textit{Opticks} (1704) is based on seven primary colours, is echoed by the early-twentieth-century work of Wilhelm Ostwald. A. H. Munsell, one of this century’s most prominent theorists, determined that there were five. Most of Wassily Kandinsky’s paintings and teaching exercises are based on six primaries, whereas his Bauhaus colleagues Paul Klee and Johannes Itten adhered to systems based on five. One of the basic concepts of colour analysis has defied consensus throughout history, leaving philosophers and practical colourists scarcely closer to a resolution of these discrepancies than they were a century ago. Riley 1995, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{93} Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1799–1832) published his \textit{Theory of Colours} (\textit{Farbenlehre}) in 1810.
but an urgent matter for painters, composers, and writers eager to tap material that is both original and universal. In a century dominated by the rhetoric of purity in art and the need for simplifying painting and sculpture to rediscover its most basic elements, chromaticism has proved a major force, and as Riley (1995) points out, the paintings and theories of Malevich, Mondrian, Newman and Stella demonstrate this. The “innocent eye” yearns for unbroken, meticulously prepared expanses of colour. A similar quest for purity through chromaticism has touched literature: Baudelaire’s essay on vibratory colour is generally acknowledged as the first modern prose poem. As Riley claims, art reaches for an elemental point of origin, colour rather than line serves as the basis for each new renaissance of purism.94

To understand why colour is a difficult issue in art history it should be noted that, even to the question of what colour is, no straightforward answer exists. Presented in this rather bland verbal formula, colour is, as Gage (2006) demonstrates, a scarcely plausible notion for the ‘physical’ element in colour is simply a set of wavelengths that impinge on the eye and have, as yet, no identity as what we understand as ‘colour’. This physical element is not ‘colour’, but variable types of radiant energy which are ‘really’ out there in the world, but invisible. Even the human visual system does not produce ‘colour’, since the mechanisms of the retina simply convert physical into electrochemical energy, which is fed into the nervous system and ultimately into the cortex of the brain. One set of retinal photoreceptors, called ‘cones’, is receptive to wavelengths of light around 420 nanometres (units of frequency); another to wavelengths of around 530 nm; and a third to frequencies of around 560 nm, corresponding roughly to our perceptions of blue, green and red. These are the ‘primary’ colours of light. Yellow, however, which appears at a wavelength of 580 nm, and is usually regarded as an unmixed colour, is thought to result from the interaction of the ‘red’ and ‘green’ cones. The retina records and transmits sensation, not perception, and the recognition of even a single colour depends upon complicated cerebral processes, such as inference and memory. ‘Colour’ is thus, first and foremost, a question of psychology. The gap between colour sensation and colour perception can be illustrated by the fact that the human eye is capable of discriminating between many millions of colour stimuli (the fact that various researchers have put the number at between one and ten million suggests that these figures are not based on empirical studies, but are extrapolations from a limited database), of which the brain chooses to perceive and record only a limited number.95

The discovery in the early-nineteenth century that there are as few as three different types of cone function in the retina depended on the much earlier reduction by painters of the distinct categories of colours to three ‘primaries’. These were

94 Riley 1995, 5.
95 Gage 2006, 7-8.
not the primary colours of light, red, green and blue, but red, blue, and yellow, which it was thought – with some justification – could generate the whole range of colours by mixing. By the later Middle Ages there were examples of mixed colours – green from blue and yellow, for example – where specifically green pigments were rare and costly; and the tool for mixing, the painter’s palette, begins to make its appearance in Europe around 1400. The development of oil painting during the Early Renaissance hastened the extension of mixing by inhibiting undesirable chemical reactions between particles of pigment, which were now sheathed in a film of protective oil. The new Renaissance interest in naturalistic painting depended on the capacity to match the various colours of nature with pigment mixtures. But artists were also fascinated by the idea that, symbolically as well as practically, the three ‘primary’ or ‘primitive’ colours could encompass the whole world of colour, an idea which appears for the first time in treatises on art in the second half of the sixteenth century. It is interesting to note how the primaries themselves became tinged with ideology.

What is important is that artists express a great diversity of views also on similar aspects of colour and exemplify this diversity in their work. Even after Isaac Newton had, in the seventeenth century, united light and colour, for visual artists they were by no means the same thing. Newton demonstrated that colour was simply a manifestation of various wavelengths of light but visual artists continued to think of it as far more complex. Colour had opacity as well as transparency, it could be shiny or matt, it had surface texture as well as hue, and, above all, it had an intrinsic tonal value (saturated yellow, for example, was lighter than saturated blue), and these were all vital components in structuring the visible world. The idea of most enduring concern to artists to come out of Newton’s Opticks (1704) was complementarity, which, as we saw, emerged from his observation of the colours of thin plates. At the end of the eighteenth century these polarities were linked to new investigations

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96 Wilhelm von Bezold’s Colour Circle, from The Theory of Color in Relation to Art and Art-Industry 1876. Bezold was a Munich physicist and meteorologist, but his book is one of the earliest by a scientist to be directed specifically at artists. Unlike Moses Harris’s symmetrical circle, von Bezold’s circle is asymmetrical since it not only incorporates the newly-identified light primaries, red, green and blue, and their complementaries, blue-green, purple and yellow, but also recognizes that, perceptually, the areas of each colour are not equal. Gage 2006, 8-9.

97 Gage 2006, 8.

98 Colour-mixing had been little practised in antiquity for largely ideological reasons: nature should not be interfered with by man; mixture produced change, which was a bad thing. But there were also good chemical reasons why it was risky, and it could produce unpleasant visual results. Gage 2006, 8-9.


101 Sir Isaac Newton, Colours of Thin Plates, from Opticks (1704). This side view of two thin transparent plates pressed together and producing what came to be known as ‘Newton’s Rings’ shows the opposite colours by transmitted and reflected light, and is probably the first illustration of what came to be known as complementarity. Gage 2005, 153-154; Gage 2006, 36.
of the sequence of coloured after-images, seen when the eye is fatigued by a strong
colour stimulus,\textsuperscript{102} and also to the contrasting colours of the shadows cast by the same
object lit simultaneously by two lights. The powerful resources of modern light artists
have made the production of after-images notably easier.\textsuperscript{103} What is interesting, as
Gage (2006) points out, is that around 1800 researchers in Germany and France
described these involuntary pairs of contrasting colours as ‘complementary’, and
throughout the nineteenth century complementary contrast was widely regarded
as the most harmonious because it constituted a union of all three primary colours:
red, for example, was opposite to green, which was an equal mixture of the two
remaining primaries (yellow and blue).\textsuperscript{104} Maximal contrasts of this type had long
been used by artists: highly saturated reds and greens were particularly favoured
in late-medieval German painting as well as in stained glass.\textsuperscript{105}

Moreover, in the context of the scientific positivism of the nineteenth century,
complementary contrast was seen to be the unique key to colour harmony, which was
given the force of law in an internationally influential book, De la loi du contraste
simultané des couleurs (1839), by Chevreul. Although Chevreul had a conservative
taste in painting and tended to favour the subtler contrasts of similar hues, his
large book, which was translated into English and German essentially as a guide to
harmony, became a catechism of complementarity for many artists and theorists.
The most significant theorist was certainly the French critic and historian Blanc,
whose Grammaire des arts du dessin (1867) was read by many of the French
avant-garde painters in the crucial decade of the 1880s.\textsuperscript{106} Another great nineteenth-
century physicist and scientific populariser, Hermann von Helmholtz, ascribed the
success of Goethe’s Farbenlehre (1810) not to its scientific validity (which he found
negligible) but to its opposition to Newton’s theory. Helmholtz considered ‘poetic’
expression to be more easily accessible to the general and artistic public,\textsuperscript{107} and
wrote: “We must look upon his theory of colour as a desperate attempt to rescue

\textsuperscript{102} Robert Waring Darwin, Ocular Spectra, from Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, LXXVI,
1786. This diagram shows the progressive sequence of coloured haloes seen when a black dot is focused on
for some time. Darwin was one of the first researchers to investigate systematically the contrasting colours
generated in the eye when it is stimulated by a strong light or colour. His scheme of contrasts was close to
that in ‘Newton’s Rings’ and fed into the theory of complementary colours around 1800. Gage 2006, 47.

\textsuperscript{103} Dan Flavin (1933-1996), for example, has made a particularly striking use of them in a work such as Untitled
(to Pat and Bob Rohm), from 1969, when even a brief exposure to the intense yellow/green of the piece
induces a strong purple/violet after-image suffusing the whole of the surrounding white gallery walls. Gage

\textsuperscript{104} Gage 2006, 49.

\textsuperscript{105} For example The Trinity with Christ Crucified (Austrian), c. 1410-40

\textsuperscript{106} Blanc argued that the greatest French colourist of the Romantic period, Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), was
a thoroughly scientific painter who had absorbed and used Chevreul’s ‘mathematical rules of colour’. It was
almost certainly this imprint of a much-admired painter from the earlier part of the century that attracted
young artists to the complementary scheme, undoubtedly so in the case of the most uncompromising of them,

1853.
from the attacks of science the belief in the direct truth of our sensations.”^108 In 1840
the edited and annotated edition of Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* was, not surprisingly,
to be listed approvingly by the Pre-Raphaelites.\(^109\)

One of the most influential artists to adopt the notion of the “scientific” use
of colour was the neo-Impressionist Georges Seurat (1859–1891) who believed
that art was essentially harmony, and that harmony was achieved by using similar
elements as well as opposites. But unlike his friend and supporter, the one-time
Impressionist Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), who, with Seurat, adopted the dotted,
neo-Impressionist technique, the younger painter was at first far more inclined
to use high contrasts than close tones. In 1887 Seurat described himself as an
‘impressioniste-luministe’, and it is clear that his chief objective as a painter was to
reconstitute light by means of colour. Already in his schooldays he had had access
to Chevreul’s ideas through the writings of Blanc, who had illustrated a technique
of optical mixing with small dots of colour, a method which came to be the chief
characteristic of neo-Impressionist handling.\(^110\) Seurat must have been impressed
by Blanc’s description of Delacroix’s hatchings of pink and bright green in the flesh
painting of the cupola at the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris, which created in a dark
place ‘an artificial light by the play of colours’.\(^111\) Interestingly, Seurat too, explored
the both ends of the colour scale.

Furthermore, there are also some interesting and surprising accounts on
colour by Seurat. Still more significant, the only surviving note taken by Seurat
from Chevreul is from a passage not on hue but on tone: “To put a dark colour
near a different but lighter colour is to heighten the tone of the first and to lower
that of the second, independently of the modification resulting from the mixture
of complementaries.” As Gage sees this, and what it is clear from his many conté
crayon drawings,\(^112\) is that Seurat first conceived his compositions in terms of light
and shade; he had, after all, been trained at the École des Beaux-Arts where the
traditional values of chiaroscuro were still very much on the agenda. And Blanc, twice

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108 von Helmholtz 1853, 54; Glanville 2004, 29.
109 Kemp 1990, 305.
110 Chevreul’s impact on artists has been extensively studied by G. Roque, *Art et Science de la Couleur: Chevreul
111 Eugène Delacroix, *Dante et les esprits des grands hommes* (1841–45), circumference 20.40 m. In this large-
scale architectural decoration, he developed a technique of broad hatching in contrasting colours, which mixed
optically at a distance and earned him the reputation of being a ‘scientific’ painter. The salient advances on
Chevreul’s more primitive and symmetrical complementary scheme were that a spectral red was now opposite
a greenish cyan-blue, blue was opposite orange-yellow, and yellow opposite the reddish natural ultramarine.
These more nuanced complementaries appear in a number of Seurat’s paintings, notably *A Sunday on La
Grande Jatte* (1884–1886), but they still coexist with the Chevreulian pairs and until the end of his short
life Seurat continued to conceive of the complementaries in terms of the now-superseded sets. The *Grande
Jatte* was the first major manifestation of the neo-impressionist dotted technique, devised to replace palette
director of the École des Beaux-Arts, included a substantial chapter on chiaroscuro in his Grammaire, concluding that colouring in painting was nothing but a more nuanced light and shade. Seurat’s teacher at the École, Henri Lehmann, was himself a master of chiaroscuro and co-author of an article on the subject published by the school. As we shall see, darkness had always been a major element in the making of images. Leonardo da Vinci planned, but did not execute, a study of shadow in seven parts; and there was a well-established tradition, even in Newton’s day, that colour was inherent not in light but in darkness, which was the sum of all colours. But is what Seurat executed in his black-and-white drawings really chiaroscuro? Seurat’s Le couple (1884–1885) and his many black-and-white conté crayon studies, of which this is one, show that he was very interested in a strong tonal armature – a tonal structure for each of his major compositions. And as Gage points out, Seurat’s approach to colour had far more to do with psychology than with the objective phenomenon of light.113

Nevertheless, as Chris Stolwijk (2008) points out, van Gogh was inspired by Seurat’s one black and white work Woman Singing in a Café Chantant (1887, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam), which his brother Theo had bought in 1888, and “rediscovered his old love of the expressive and evocative power of working with the simple contrast of black and white”.114 It seems that these black and white works were not just preliminary works for coloured paintings but as such works of working with tonal contrasts. It should be noted that in most colour ascetic art the chiaroscuro is reduced to minimal and the emphasis is on contrasts and two-dimensionality. Moreover, as I see it, colour ascetic art was not about constructing shadow and light - quite the opposite - flat surfaces were contrasted with colour fields and all light effects were reduced to a minimum as in Manet’s and Enckell’s art and the soft graduality of tonality in the art of Whistler, Puvis de Chavannes, Schjerfbeck and Thesleff.

The Palette

The question of colour has also a practical aspect for artists. The palette too is an important tool. The spectrum and the palette are surface arrangements for selection and organisation; but the spectrum is a natural order, whereas the palette’s main rule of organisation depends on usage. Customarily, the most frequently-used colour is given a bigger, special place on the palette. A testing ground for colour effects, the palette stands as the intermediate stage between the tabular surface of the canvas

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113 Gage 1999, 210-217; Gage 2006, 55-56.
and the painter’s conception of how the work’s colour should appear.  

John Gage demonstrates, as he comes to Delacroix, the eventual subjectivity and individuality of the palette from the nineteenth century on. Delacroix, like Whistler, loved his palette. And the extraordinarily complicated arrangements of both painters shows that the tool had become an even more personal thing than it had been in the eighteenth century. Again the 1860s seem to be a watershed, when the tonal setting going back some 250 years ceased to be regarded as a norm. The power of the palette grew to such a degree that it became a stronger influence on an artwork than nature itself. The growing practice of laying out a series of pre-mixed tints and of limiting the possibilities of mixture in the process of painting was, in effect, to impose a more-or-less nuanced grid onto the perceptions of the motif.

This pre-compositional model earned the palette a status comparable to the painting itself. That is why the word palette applies not only to the artist’s implement but also to the colour selection of specific works e.g., “The palette of Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon is dominated by flesh tones and a pale blue” or the signature colours associated with a particular artist or even of a school, “the silvery tones of the Barbizon school”. What is significant is that the beginnings and ends of artistic careers are often marked by a change in palette. Picasso’s blue and rose periods are probably the best-known examples of this and every school of art is associated with a palette, such as the greys and blues of the Barbizon school, the bright blues and oranges of the Fauves, and the dependence on black, white, and grey of the Minimalists. Or, as this study proposes, the muted earthly browns, blacks, greys and whites of the ascetic palette users and the bright, mixed violets, oranges and greens of the Synthetists. As Riley notes, this all-purpose term for the individual colour realm served music critics and architects as well, occupying a place in the vocabulary of the arts that is more than technical.

In so far as a personalised palette is concerned Gage (1993) traced the appearance of the palette in self-portraits and paintings from the Early Renaissance through the nineteenth century. Much of Riley’s book is directed towards the study of individual palettes or the palette associated with single works in an effort to show how signature colours perform. What is clear is that nearly every major painter has a signature colour or palette, from Vermeer’s blue and lemon yellow to van Gogh’s very different blues and yellows, or Barnett Newman’s red, Yves Klein’s blue, the

118 Gage 1993, 180-188.
120 Gage 1993, 177-189.
121 Silverman 2000, 256-258.
greens of Degas and Chagall. Hegel’s “grey on grey” and the vivid reds of Jung’s mandalas, the azure of Mallarmé, or the yellow of Proust and the gold and white of Scriabin are all as individual as any feature. Colour and identity are intriguing albeit virtually irreconcilable properties, not just in terms of signature styles but vis-à-vis the genetic factor that makes everyone see colour in a different way and the complexities of light and conditions that make colour itself change so rapidly.  

Sharon Hirsh (2004), on the other hand, points out that colour also adopted deliberate distortion of the natural as a means to evoke non-nature. As with line, this could be described as an imprecise reference to hues existing in nature, reflecting a heightened sense of colour and its evocative powers in the late-nineteenth century. Like their neo-Impressionist contemporaries, artists were well aware of recent colour theories such as those of Charles Henry, who in the late 1880s proposed that each colour carried with it a psychological effect. But while Seurat quickly translated this theory into a blatant painterly application of Henry’s “happy” shades of orange, yellow, and red, or “sad” colours of blue, green, and violet, the Symbolists were more interested in the subtleties of such theory. With the knowledge of the inherent psychological impact of colours, the Symbolists experimented with anti-naturalistic colour. Although, as Hirsh points out, the “red grass” of Gauguin’s Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)(1888) is well-known, such boldness was not a common ingredient of Symbolism. Here Hirsh interestingly differentiates the bold synthetist colours of Gauguin from Symbolism. She continues that, by limiting colour contrasts to a narrow range of “nearly monochromatic” arrangement, as in Jan Toorop’s The Three Brides (1893) or by introducing tertiary, or even “off” colours in opposition to the “pure colours” beloved by the Impressionists, the Symbolists could rather visualise the obscure but evocative colour sense often found in symbolist poetry. Tonal colouring, using one or two colours at most, also avoids all suggestion of line and creates the illusion of form by arrangements of one soft mass against another. Through these unusual colouristic manipulations, images managed to suggest natural colour while at the same time creating symbolic evocations. This comes very close to describing ascetic and synthetist colour, but Hirsh does not see these as parallel phenomena since she looks at them from a style point-of-view.

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122 Riley 1995, 10-11.
123 Paul Gauguin: Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel) (La Vision après le Sermon. La Lutte de Jacob avec l’Ange, 1888), oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh. See image: http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/artists-az/G/3374/artistName/Paul%20Gauguin/recordId/4940
124 Jan Toorop’s (1858–1928) work is a good example also of the many new techniques being used in symbolist art. The Three Brides (1893) is executed with pencil, black and coloured chalk, white highlights on brown paper. 78 x 98 cm, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo. Image in Rapetti 2005, 162.
125 Hirsh 2004, 5-6. Italics are added by author.
3. MAIN CONCEPTS: COLOUR ASCETISM AND SYNTHETIST COLOUR

One important fact which has been a starting point for this study is that most of the art historical studies on colour seem to be interested only in chromatic values. To put it simply “a colour is not considered ‘colour’ unless it is a bright one”. A good example of this is Leonard Shlain’s comment in a study of art and physics “while many sun-drenched, vibrant paintings containing bright colours were produced in the Renaissance, a casual perusal of any comprehensive art collections reveals the Stygian darkness of most art before the modern era”.126 Interestingly, and what this study aims to explore, this ‘most art’ has not been in focus from the point of colour. Riley (1995) is one of the few exceptions to have noticed the ‘other side’ of chromaticism. As he points out, the history of modern art is replete with examples of artists reining in their chromatic instincts. Georges Braque’s brilliant fauve landscapes give way to the brown and silver palette of high Cubism.127 The same could be said of Pablo Picasso’s colour periods, although his concerns with colour would need thorough research and be a study of its own. It is important to note that the preference towards a more subdued palette or to bright colours is relative and changes in time. In the 1880s and 1890s ascetic palette was regarded as positive and elegant and strong, pure colours vulgar.128 It seems that in general after 1910s this attitude changes and bright pure colours are experienced more positive.

It is interesting to note how Gage (1999, 2006) shows that darkness had been an important element in the perception of coloured structures, whether in the world or in painting, but it may seem paradoxical that this is a good starting-point for an investigation of colour in psychology at large since, in many parts of the world and at all times, darkness, and in particular its principal representative colour, black, have been seen in and as a negative light. A survey of Mexican students in the 1960s, for example, showed that black was the colour that generated the most subjective associations, all of which were negative: death, depression, and so on. This survey was typical of many investigations into colour preferences – important for the fashion and marketing industries – conducted by researchers in experimental

126 Shlain 1991, 171. Italics are added by author. This study do not claim that all the ‘dark’ works before the modern era are ascetic. Just that there are many kinds of works that should be studied from the point of view of colour.

127 To make a comparison with a more recent artist, in 1993 Brice Marden traded his richly-coloured monochromes for austere black-and-white paintings that resemble Chinese calligraphy, on which he created a group of subtly coloured, large paintings called ‘the Cold Mountain series’ in honour of a group of ancient Chinese poems. Riley 1995, 7. Although this study does not study contemporary art, this is an interesting link because of the interest of turn-of-the-century artists who, in their own time, were influenced by the monochromatic ink paintings of Chinese artists.

128 For example Edelfelt comments this aspect in an article on English art and Whistler. “Modernt engelskt måleri”, Finsk Tidskrift 1884; Edelfelt 1905, 93-94.
22. Pekka Halonen *Mild Winter Day* (1902). Oil on canvas, 73 x 87 cm, Private collection. Photo: Harri Silander
psychology since the discipline’s beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century. But, with the exception of a wide-ranging but inconclusive study by the German psychologist G. J. von Allesch, based on experiments conducted in the early years of the twentieth century, artists have rarely been drawn into the discussion. In the context of the fascination with light among French painters around 1900, it is perhaps hardly surprising that, for masters of black such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), Manet and Henri Matisse, this colour could be given a positive twist later in the 1910s only by being itself seen as a light. Camille Pissarro once observed to Matisse that Manet ‘made light with black’. This painterly interest is strikingly parallel to a contemporary phase in French physics, which was at this time much concerned with the non-visible areas of the spectrum, notably X-radiation, and in which ‘black light’ was a new concept – but one that was very soon abandoned by science.

But what made Matisse turn to the idea of black as light? As Gage (1999) demonstrates, the concept of black as a colour (not simply as a darkener) had been much debated in painterly circles since the Renaissance, and by the close of the nineteenth century had been more or less generally accepted. Yet this justifiable scepticism towards the intrinsic relationships of specific colours to specific shapes should not blind us to the fact that they have nonetheless, for centuries, been a recurrent concern among artists. The modern scientific view that the rod system of human vision – which processes light levels but not wavelength – is older than the cone system – which processes wavelength (i.e. hue) – seems to have been strikingly anticipated in Pliny’s account of the historical development of ancient Greek painting, which began with pure line, moved on to chiaroscuro, and only later began to use colour. In medieval times painting in monochrome, often in imitation of sculpture, – although medieval, like ancient, sculpture was often coloured – continued this early practice, and the fifteenth-century development of monochrome engraving, the prelude to the nineteenth-century graphic art of photography, which was only much later able to find intrinsically photographic means of introducing colour, suggests that monochromatic images have usually been more or less adequate to satisfy our curiosity about the look of the world.

So how should we study the anti-colourist art that so many artists produced? What was the impulse and the histories behind this approach? Vincent van Gogh, on the other hand, started in the vein of Dutch tenebriist (painters of the shadow)

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129 Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Zacharie Astruc* (1866). Renoir and Manet were among those artists whom Matisse felt had transformed black not only into a colour, but also into a light. Gage 1999, 228-232; 2006a, 62.


131 Gage 2006, 95.
palette, creating his *The Potato Eaters* (1885)\(^{132}\) or *Loom with Weaver* (1884)\(^{133}\) with few, brown, grey and white colours and continued his career to a rich and vibrant palette of pure colours, but again changed his palette many times. In 1885 while painting his *Potato Eaters* Van Gogh wanted to paint “DARKNESS that is still COLOUR”, and to this end turned to Delacroix’s colour theories, which he studied in books by Charles Blanc and Théophile Silvestre.\(^{134}\) Or Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who also had his ‘black period’\(^{135}\) which has not been studied from the point of view of colour.

I would argue that these ‘colourless’ periods should receive more attention, since it seems that they were deliberately developed to a non-mimetic range and to get a more wider picture of what was going on in the late-nineteenth century art we should not discard the ‘darker side of chromaticism’ just because the earlier modernist tradition thought only that bright colours should be in focus. As I see it, when colours serve only to create an illusion of natural light and shadow, they are subordinate to *disegno*. But when, in the late-nineteenth century, the colour scale was stretched to almost achromatic range, it was applied for a reason. As I aim to show, the case of non-mimetic colour is much more complex and should be studied from both ends of the chromatic scale since they both tributed to the process of dematerialisation and abstraction in painting.

**Colour Ascetism**

As stated earlier, studies of nineteenth-century colour have tended to be made mainly from the standpoint of Impressionism and Colourism.\(^{136}\) Since colour ascetic art has frequently received only a brief mention in colour studies I have chosen to examine this ‘non-colourist’ method and palette from various starting points. Firstly, a reason for this approach is that, in Finnish art particularly, the ascetic palette deserves to be defined as a widely-used colour practice since it played such a significant role in turn-of-the-twentieth century aesthetics. Even though this period is well researched, it has not been examined from the point of view of colour. After the strong tradition of Naturalism and its representation with colours that served only the mimetic aim, ascetic or synthetic colours constituted an entirely new approach to art. Secondly,
because the colour references in Finnish art are varied and no unifying terms or concepts have existed, even though colour issues are repeatedly mentioned in the analysis of paintings. To give an example of the problem, Sarajas-Korte (1966), when analysing Magnus Enckell’s works sees this kind of ‘absence of colour’ as intended only to enhance disegno, contours and form, which she sees as the most important feature in symbolist painting. Sarajas-Korte calls Enckell’s art ‘synthetism’ and states Impressionism’s “light-hearted colour and superficiality” as the opposite of what symbolist artists aimed for. She maintains that sensual and emotional colour was to be avoided in symbolist art, but nevertheless sees Gauguin’s art too as ‘synthetist’. A more recent example is from Monica Schalin (2004), whose dissertation on Ellen Thesleff’s technique considers her 1890s works as “natural” although she mentions her ascetic works. Moreover, the problem arose from the question of how, if ascetic colour range was only to enhance contours and form, one could study works that had no strong contours, as was the case with many of Thesleff’s delicate paintings (fig. 32) or Eugène Carrière’s misty art? This ambiguous attitude toward ‘non-colourful’ art which has not been seen as a wider, international colour practice with historical references, it should be defined. I also aim to show how this important concept has been ignored by art historians, even though the words ‘ascetic’ and ‘asceticism’ have often been mentioned in the analysis of certain paintings. This is evident, especially, in studies on the Finnish artist Magnus Enckell and in the analysis of paintings by James McNeill Whistler.

From the outset of my research I have been fascinated by the background of the limited palette, the “absence of colour”, the ‘anti-colourism’ in art and by its historical recurrence in time. I concluded in my master’s thesis (2000) that this colour practice can be considered neither solely as a colour concept of Symbolism nor specifically as being born from this. And as its name indicates colour ascetism refers to a certain colour scale in painting which, in art literature, has traditionally been described as limited colour spectrum, subdued tonal range, limited colour

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137 Sarajas-Korte 1966, 7, 177-179.
139 Earlier e.g. Sarajas-Korte mentions “ascetic colour of Enckell”, when describing works of Enckell, but does not discuss or analyse the term, or see it as an art historical colour tradition. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 176-179; This is mentioned by many art historians, from Puokka to Reichel 1978, 29-32.
140 For example, some art historians, like Robert Pincus-Witten (1984), Denys Riout (1989) and Charles Riley (1995), have considered Whistler as the pioneer of the monochromatic painting. And John Gage discusses ‘ascetism’ among American painters since the 1940s. Gage 2006, 203-204
141 Pincus-Witten uses the term anticolorist when considering Cy Twombly, but I find this too negative a word. Pincus-Witten 1984, 99. Also Gage uses the term ‘anti-colourism’ and draws its long tradition from Pliny the Elder and Roman times. Gage also mentions American modernist artists, such as Ad Reinhardt, who connoted ‘ascetism of Chinese monochrome painting’. Gage 2006, 202-205.
143 Stevens on Whistler’s and Hammershoi’s palette. Stevens 2012, 152.
scale,\textsuperscript{144} reduced palette, monochromatic (\textit{peinture monochrome}),\textsuperscript{145} tonalism,\textsuperscript{146} black colourism\textsuperscript{147} and archaism or where a painting has simply been described as minimalist or having absence of colour.\textsuperscript{148} While this kind of palette has been given different names I consider \textit{ascetism} the term which best describes it since it answers the question of what \textit{kind} of colour is used.\textsuperscript{149} The word ‘ascetism’ is abstract and descriptive; it implies the turn-of-the-century’s tropes of restraint, ‘non-emotional’, higher spiritualness, simplicity, purity and starkness – all the connotations that many artists aimed for during this period. Thus it is also a period term with connotations to the ‘modern world’, its society and cultural infrastructure. Moreover, this widely-used colour practice needed a unifying concept from which it could be studied.

As I presented in my master’s thesis, this colour practice is based on a few ascetic colours which dominate the work. The colour selection usually consists of black, brown, grey and white, mainly used as \textit{contrasting} pairs of black – white, brown – ivory. Other colours which are used mixed with the previous dominant colours tend to be green, blue, and earth tones of reddish brown, umbra, sienna and ochre. Thus it is not completely \textit{achromatic} (black, white, grey). In colour ascetism colour was not applied for creating light and shadow - quite the opposite. It was to reduce this element and to create colour surfaces which emphasised shadowless two-dimensionality. Within colour ascetism there are three different technical methods, such as \textit{tonality, contrasts} and \textit{monochromacy}.\textsuperscript{150} As earlier stated, the main reason for choosing the term \textit{ascetism} is that tonality, contrasts and monochromacy can, of course, be used for ‘colourful’ works as well.\textsuperscript{151} Another reason is the problem in using ‘monochromatic’, which is the most commonly used term in art historical literature and which tends mainly to mean ‘a painting done with few colours’, but, since there really are completely monochromatic paintings done entirely with one colour, I chose to use the term \textit{colour ascetism} which may be applied to all these painting methods and techniques.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Monrad on Puvis de Chavannes’ and Hammershei’s colour scale. Monrad 2012, 40.
\item Pincus-Witten 1984, 43-46.
\item e.g. Sarajas-Korte 1998, 37.
\item e.g. Ahtola-Moorhouse 1998, 36-42, Sarajas-Korte 1966 8, 176-179
\item All the other above-mentioned terms could also be applied to bright colours, except black colourism and subdued colour.
\item von Bonsdorff 2000, 70-76, 112-114.
\item e.g. Whistler: \textit{Nocturne: Blue and Silver-Chelsea} (1871), \textit{Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso} (1866) which are almost the opposite of ascetism. They are tonal but full of shimmering, bright colours.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In this study, I hope to establish colour ascetism to a wider audience. Before my master’s thesis (2000) the term ‘colour ascetism’ as such had not previously been used as an art history term. Early in my investigations of Finnish and European art of the 1890s it was clear that I needed a new tool, a new term for describing the reduced and limited palette of the period. The word ‘ascetism’ reflects the attitude of the artists who wanted to create art which would be based on a few well-chosen colours. Together these qualities form a sufficiently restricted and controlled appellation for a multi-faceted colour tradition. Although I will concentrate on the consideration of colour ascetism at the turn-of-the-century and reflect this through Finnish art, it is also necessary to study its diverse historical roots, particularly since they are known to have acted as the direct starting point for the artists in question.

In his recent article Under the Colour of Darkness (2004) John Gage has also opened up the historical aspect of anti-colourist tradition. He sees the new principles of colour as based on the elaboration of new visual polarities during the eighteenth century, polarities which were essentially psycho-physiological. The investigation of complementary after-images, going back especially to Robert Waring Darwin’s work in the 1780s, and the largely associative identification of warm and cool colours which seems to have emerged rather earlier in the century were clear indications of a new subjectivity in the understanding of colour. These attitudes to darkness and colour did not end with the Romantics. Gage (1993, 2006) describes this anti-colourist tradition as limited palette, linking this with the Dutch tenebrists who “reduced their palettes virtually to monochrome”. Gage names Hals and Rembrandt as the precursors of the limited palette and mentions van Gogh as the admiral of Hals “who discovered twenty-seven blacks in Frans Hals”. Also the Finnish artist Helene Schjerbeck recalled later that she studied the use of black colour from Hals.

As Gage demonstrates, in his earliest paintings Vincent van Gogh used a good deal of black and in the Potato Eaters (1885) even mixed what he considered to

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152 As a term ‘colour ascetism’, ‘L’ascetisme chromatique’ is now used by Rodolphe Rapetti who learned about my research through my conference presentation in Strasbourg: Colour Ascetism in Finnish Art at the Turn of the 20th Century. 27.6.1999 Musée d’art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg. See Rapetti 2008, 41. In Finnish art history it is now a widely-used concept, for example, Kilpinen, Tuulikki & Catani, Marina Kaleidoscopic exuberance and colour ascetism: Edelfelt’s portrait of Aino Aksel, 1901, Modern Art, New Museums. IIC Guggenheim musée, Bilbao, IIC Congress Preprint 2004, 129-132.

153 e.g. Magnus Enckell writes of the impact of Spanish art in an article published in the Ateneum review in 1906. It should be noted that I have chosen to study those artists who were frequently mentioned, but to keep the study in limits, I have concentrated on some, but there could be many others as well.

154 Gage points out that even Turner, who was the hero of the Chromatists, did not turn his back on the traditional theory of chiaroscuro (shadow and light). Turner’s lifelong engagement with monochrome engraving and his continuing love of black ruled that out of court, and in a lecture in the late-1820s he turned one of the earliest symmetrical colour circles based on complementarity, from Moses Harris’s Natural System of Colours (1776), into a demonstration of the relative tonalities of the three primary colours. For Darwin: Gage, John, Colour in Turner: Poetry and Truth, 1969, 13, 42-52; for warm and cool: Gage 1999, 22-23.


be the three primary colours into the light tones of his sombre masterpiece. It should be noted that here colour symbolism is central. Van Gogh connected the arduousness of the labourers’ hard life and work, formalised in the painting by using colour which he compared to that “of a very dusty potato, unpeeled of course” and by putting in a coarse pigment crust. In the preceding year, in Loom with Weaver (1884), also a labour scene, van Gogh used an ascetic, limited colour range with different tones of brown and white. Famous for his vivid complementary colours, it is interesting that van Gogh too had his own anti-colourist period. It should be noted that he was not alone in experimenting with different palettes; many artists e.g. Whistler and Eero Järnefelt, explored both ends of the colour scale in their art.

There are four very different artists, each of whom developed his own colour ascetic art and became very influential during the 1890s, especially within the symbolist circles. The decorative and monumental mural art of Puvis de Chavannes was admired by artists and his enigmatic easel painting the Poor Fisherman (1881) was one of the iconic works which had to be seen by all young artists coming to Paris in the 1890s. The intimate and enchanting art of Eugène Carrière had many followers even though today his art has been mainly forgotten; in the 1890s Maurice Denis noted the unique artist’s pervasive stylistic and philosophic influence referring in 1892 to a “School of Carrière”. With his tonal and musical art as well as with his unique diversity Whistler influenced as an artist, polemist, designer and critic. His “total work of art exhibitions” were well-known and also discussed in Finnish art circles.

When Maurice Denis wrote of Le Salon du Champ-de-Mars l’exposition de Renoir in the Revue Blanche of 25 June 1892:

*Should we say, for instance, that Puvis de Chavannes, Whistler, Carrière are admirable masters? No-one denies this. We prefer to state that we would like to see them in more discrete and calmer places, and that even if there are very beautiful canvases they are in poor surroundings. The young impressionist or luminist school in particular seems to misuse a series of somewhat vulgar tones to express light.... This young school is extremely strident; it should turn to M. Whistler*

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157 Later under the impact of Impressionism in Paris, he loosened and lightened his palette, and even re-interpreted the colour of his beloved Japanese prints - Hiroshige’s Plum Garden -Kameido (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) is a particularly striking example - in terms of the new chromatics of complementarity. But he never lost his love of black and white, which he continued to regard as a primary pair. Van Tilborgh 1993, 50.


159 Denis 1912, 14.

160 Albert Edelfelt, the leader of the younger generation of Finnish artists, went to see Whistler’s “Arrangements in grey and flesh colour exhibition” in London in 1884. In her PhD thesis Anna Kortelainen has discussed Edelfelt’s relationship with Whistler’s art. Kortelainen 2002, 387-405.
to learn how to use grey [manier les gris] or return to the already out-
dated fashion of couleur crayeuse and imitate M. Puvís de Chavannes
(Denis 1912)\(^{161}\)

But what is Whistler’s way “to use grey” his manier les gris and the couleur crayeuse
of Puvís de Chavannes’s advocated here by Maurice Denis? In Puvís de Chavannes’s
first major works of the 1860s the artist introduces his particular kind of ascetic
palette, created especially for monumental and decorative painting – the famous dry,
matte, pale, greyish palette – that gave the illusion of fresco painting on plaster, the
couleur crayeuse as Denis called it in his critique of the Salon 1892. Whistler, on the
other hand, is mentioned for his way of “using greys” in his paintings. Interestingly,
Denis also berates the vulgar use of colour of the young Impressionists and the
luminist school, urging artists to take as their model Carrière, Whistler or Puvís de
Chavannes.

The champion of ascetic colour contrasts was ‘the painter of modern life’ –
Édouard Manet. This innovative technique was practised by Manet who created
modern works by using sharp black contours and a very limited palette based on
black, brown, grey and white. Although his audacious Olympia (1863) is probably
the most analysed painting of the period, this study aims to show how Finnish
artists in particular were interested mainly in the formal innovations of the painting
rather than in the scandalous reputation it once had. It then hung in the Musée de
Luxembourg. It is true that this was an entirely new generation of artists but I would
argue that the innovative aspect of this painting lay in the powerful aesthetic ideas
that were created by the two-dimensionality and strong contrasts of light and dark
colours without shadows;\(^ {162}\) black contours and white skin on white sheets; white
model and black maid and black cat. The only bright colours in the painting are the
red taches in the flower bouquet and shawl. Actually the entire painting is based
on three colours - black, red and white. As the American critic S. Hartmann stated
in 1898, while admiring the simplicity of Puvís’s compositions and the rhythms
of his colours, “without him, Manet, Monet and Whistler, originality in modern
painting would not exist\(^ {163}\).

\(^{161}\) “Dirions-nous, par exemple, que Puvís de Chavannes, Whistler, Carrière, sont d’admirables maîtres? Personne
ne le nie. Nous aimons mieux faire cette remarque, qu’on les voudrait voir en des milieux plus discrets et
plus calmes; et que s’il y a de très belles toiles, elles sont fort mal entourées. En particulier, la jeune école
impressioniste ou luministe nous semble abuser, pour exprimer la lumière, d’une série de tons plutôt vulgaires,
... Cette jeune école est terriblement bruyante: qu’elle s’adresse à M. Whistler pour apprendre à manier les
gris; ou bien qu’elle revienne à la mode déjà surannée de la couleur crayeuse et qu’elle imite M. Puvís de

\(^{162}\) My view differs from that of Clement Greenberg: Greenberg argued that the only legitimate concern of
modernist art was art itself; furthermore, the only rightful focus for an artist in any given form or genre
was the nature and limits of that genre: the medium is the message. Thus, for instance, the only permissible
subject for a modernist painter was the flatness of the surface (canvas, etc.) on which the painting takes the
place, because "flatness alone is unique and exclusive to the art". Greenberg 1966, 100-110.

\(^{163}\) Brown Price 2002, 207.
There’s nothing greater in Manet’s work than a certain portrait of Berthe Morisot, done in 1872 (...). Above all, it is the Black, the absolute black, the black of a mourning hat and the little hat’s ribbons mingling with the chestnut locks...that affected me. The full power of these blacks, the cold simplicity of the background, the clear pink-and-white skin...the tangle of locks, ties, ribbon, encroaching against her face; this face with its big eyes, vaguely gazing in profound abstraction, and offering, as it were, a presence of absence. (Paul Valéry “Triomphe de Manet” 1932)\textsuperscript{164}

But it should be noted that Manet’s preference for black and a contrasted palette begins with his Baudelairean works,\textsuperscript{165} The Absinthe Drinker (1858–1859), inspired by Velázquez’s subdued palette.\textsuperscript{166} Manet continued with the ascetic and simplified palette especially in his portraits like the mentioned Berthe Morisot with a Bunch of Violets or Berthe Morisot with a Fan (1872) and the Portrait of Georges Clemenceau (1879–1880).\textsuperscript{167} Manet used sparse, ascetic colours but also soft, muted colours of ‘soft muddiness’ that he adopted from Spanish art, particularly from Velázquez.\textsuperscript{168} Manet was the most celebrated end-of-the-century artist but it is interesting to note that not so many artists adopted his contrasted palette. From a later generation, Carrière’s misty art, fantômes synthétiques,\textsuperscript{169} was created also by contrasts, but with a very different soft, sweeping technique, usually with two dominant colours – brown and ivory or black and white. Carrière went furthest of all and painted canvases with only one dark colour, the light base being the light colour which glows through where needed. This monochromatic painting, which was the most extreme colour technique, was adopted by only one Finnish artist Magnus Enckell, who, instead of oils, used black watercolour and white paper as the ‘other colour’ (fig. 4).\textsuperscript{170}

The methods of ascetic palette, tonality, contrasts and monochromacy, were very different in technique but they are all based on the few ascetic colours with which the painting is executed. Tonality is based on the use of one unifying colour to tone the whole painting. Whistler used grey as what he called his ‘Key Tone’\textsuperscript{171} and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cachin 1995, 75.
\item Hanson 1979, 3:37.
\item Édouard Manet: The Absinthe Drinker (1858–1859), oil on canvas, 180.5 x 105.6 cm, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen; It should be noted that not all Spanish works’ were ascetic in colours, for example The Spanish Singer (1861) is quite colouristic, as is the famous The Fifer (1866).
\item Édouard Manet: Berthe Morisot with a Bunch of Violets (Berthe Morisot au bouquet de violettes, 1872), oil on canvas, 55.3 x 40.5 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nummid=100102
\item Portrait of Georges Clemenceau (1879–80), oil on canvas, 94 x 73.8 cm, Musee d’Orsay http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nummid=1141
\item For Manet’s engagement with Spanish art, see Tinterow 2003, 48-51.
\item Charles Morice, Mercure de France 2, April 1904, 84. Bantens 1983, 191.
\item von Bonsdorff 2000, 70-76, 84-90.
\item Whistler used also blue (nocturnes), turquoise blue (Cremorne) and pink (Venice series) to tone his works, although, these paintings are not, of course, colour ascetic works.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Puvis de Chavannes mixed either pale grey or white to get the ‘mother tone’ in his easel and mural works. This tonal technique was widely adopted by many artists of the 1890s who, captured by “puvinismé chavannisme”, flocked to the Pantheon, Sorbonne or the Musée de Luxembourg to see his works. One enthusiast was the Finnish artist Ellen Thesleff who was passionately fascinated by the monumental, tonal art of Puvis de Chavannes and the soft monochrome art of Carrière (figs. 31, 33). It is interesting that from 1894 onwards also Helene Schjerfbeck’s delicate, ascetic palette links her to the same group (fig. 27). In each of these cases reduced, ascetic colours were guiding the process towards the simplification of the surface in their art. Also Whistler’s fluid, tonal art was an inspiration to many artists in Europe. In Finland his art clearly affected at least Schjerfbeck and Eero Järnefelt, a fact that was also noticed by many critics of the time.

Through my investigations it has been evident that ‘anti-colourist’ art is a recurring phenomenon in the history of the visual arts which, in both Eastern and Western art, has always had its moments. Chinese monochromatic ink painting holds a powerful place in Chinese art, the Japanese took their influences from Chinese to zen painting before it was introduced in Europe. In western art, however, colour asceticism is well-known through various artists such as Manet, with his ‘Black Spanish period’, inspired by Velázquez and Zurbarán, whose mystic art is based entirely on a strict ascetic palette. Interestingly, also Jaakko Puokka (1949) in his biography on Enckell names a ‘Spanish period’ after his ‘French period’. It should be noted that when mentioning Velázquez’s art, I am here referring more to his reduced portraits which were so striking in their simplistic power. The same may be said of the Dutch painters Hals and Rembrandt in his later years. All these artists were much admired by Manet, Carrière and Whistler as well as by the Finnish artists Enckell, Schjerfbeck and Järnefelt. It is clear from, for example, Whistler and Manet to Schjerfbeck and Järnefelt that related to colour ascetic painting is an admiration for the Old Masters and ancient art: artists sought out and borrowed ideas from European and non-European art history. In the international ambience of Paris Finnish artists too found the latest modern, but also the archaic art treasures of the Louvre. From this melting pot came their enthusiasm for the “primal sources of western art” as it was then seen, in other words, Italian and Early Renaissance fresco painting. All this was reflected in the change in understanding colour in a new way.

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172 One could include Claude Monet’s later period also tonal, his enveloppe, but it would need a different study of its own.
174 This aspect has been very hard to trace due to the fact that artists did not differentiate Chinese from Japanese art. This Far-Eastern art can be addressed as japonisme.
175 Puokka 1949, 145.
There is also another reason why the ascetic palette became so influential. Modern times needed a new language for the ‘new art’. Even though these artists all looked to the past for inspiration with their specific palettes they created a modern language in art: they included inter-textual levels in their paintings; a contemporary subject with a reference of gesture to the Old Masters or suggesting timelessness with subject with a reference to ancient fresco technique. Both these approaches were evident in colour ascetic art. This echoes well the ongoing discourse of their time. On the one hand, Baudelaire had stressed that without the gaze to history man loses himself to ‘superficial’ progress whereas, on the other hand, Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote in 1893 that the very notion of ‘Modernism’ was the concurrent conflict between two opposite responses to the hectic fin-de-siècle existence. Today, two things seem to be modern: the analysis of life and the flight from life — . Reflection or fantasy, mirror image or dream image. Here I would extend von Hofmannsthal’s idea and claim that colour ascetic art can, in fact, be seen as art which grew from (self)reflection, as a mirror image and from the analysis of life. The idea of historicity and inter-textual references presents itself, as I will show in the next part of the study, in colour ascetic art.

Furthermore, the artists’ aspiration to spiritualism, the dematerialisation of the real became the ideal; the neo-platonic awareness inspired artists to work on the basis of true art. These aspirations towards a mysterious and immaterial art of a voyant, a seer, derives from Baudelaire’s theories where the poet is a genius not only through his ability to create, but also through his ability to perceive. As already stated, since colour asceticism does not appear merely in the symbolist period, I would suggest that neo-platonist thinking especially could be where Carrière and others who used an ascetic palette may have found sources for their ‘immaterial’ art. These ideas grew up around Baudelaire during the 1860s and interestingly this is the time when colour asceticism started to be used in the works of Manet, Whistler, Puvis de Chavannes and in the 1880s by Carrière. The dualistic Baudelairean quest was also for something eternal and spiritual which was contained in colour and given central importance in nineteenth-century art which strove to depict the modern world and the world beyond the visible. The ascetic palette also brought innovative aspects to painting which was developed by Finnish artists too. As I will argue, muted, restrained ascetic colours were the key element in depicting connotations like melancholy, stillness, spirituality, mirror image, ‘inner

177 Rapetti 1996, 15-16.
world’, isolation, musicality (tonality) and intimacy and was an essential part of dematerialisation in modern painting.

The manner in which colour ascetism became linked with turn-of-the-century art is quite complex and, for this reason, deserves closer study. From the point of view of the history of colour, there is a clear gap in the nineteenth century and between artists such as Seurat and Kandinsky.\textsuperscript{180} Even though artists of that period such as Manet, Whistler, Cézanne, Vilhelm Hammershøi,\textsuperscript{181} Khnopff, Gustav Klimt and even van Gogh, probably the most famous artists of that time, are very well studied, their colour-conscious art which also includes the non-colourist periods has, however, still not been studied comprehensively.

\textit{Synthetist Colour}

The reason this study claims synthetist colour as a colour concept is that it needs a defined concept which differs from the primary colour palette used by the Impressionists.\textsuperscript{182} Although the art of the Nabi Group and especially the art of Gauguin have been studied, the fact that synthetist colour as a concept has not been studied as a wider colour practice in European art is surprising, particularly since it was one of the key elements in the liberation from the mimetic conception of art. It is important to see that a synthetist palette was used widely in Europe and among Finnish artists such as Väinö Blomstedt, Axel Gallén and Eero Järnefelt.

So often mistakenly repeated in art historical literature, the synthetist colour range is not the same as that used by the Impressionists. Although Gauguin’s art is very well researched, from Mark Roskill (1970) and Belinda Thomson’s many books to a recent study on his colour by Debora Silverman (2000), to name only a few sources, it is still mistakenly stated that he used un-mixed pure colours in his synthetist works. This mistake probably comes from the fact that Gauguin started with an impressionist palette but, in 1888, as we know, he developed the synthetist mode with Emile Bernard in Pont Aven, Brittany, painting the breakthrough canvas \textit{Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wresting with the Angel)}(1888). Bernard, on the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{180} Many “colour historians” have taken as their examples Georges Seurat and Wassily Kandinsky. There is, however, a big gap between them and the history of colour has been somewhat one-sided. These artists were, of course, famous for their analyses of colour but as artists they were also highly individual. There are many artists who were interested in colour and developed their own palettes at that time.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Not even the Danish Vilhelm Hammershøi, who used a colour ascetic palette all his life, has been studied from the point of view of his palette.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Even though it is a much-researched subject in studies on Gauguin, for example (Silverman and Wasiyutynski), it has not been used as a term or concept in relation to the Synthetists. Cloisonism likewise cannot be used here since it refers to the form of the painting and not to colours. It is important to note that synthetist colour was also used as taches, without strong contours, as many of the Nabi artists did, for example Vuillard and Bonnard.
\end{itemize}
other hand, developed his palette with a cloisonist idea, which differs from the
synthetist colour scheme in its black contours and singular colour fields. As Philip
Ball (2001) states, Gauguin used most of the modern colours, cobalt blue, emerald
green, viridian, cadmium yellow, chrome yellow, cobalt violet, and a mixture of
coaltar blue and barium sulphate called Charron blue, but seldom applied them
from the tube. More precisely, Prussian blue and ultramarine were the only colours
Gauguin commonly used unmixed, as a substitute for black.183 It should be noted,
as I have seen from examining the paintings, that Gauguin painted contours with
dark Prussian blue and not with black as has sometimes been stated.184 Gauguin
was, of course, a leading figure for the synthetist palette but there were many others
who shared the new vision of synthetist colour, which was used to enhance the
non-naturalistic effect, the surnaturelle, abstract qualities in painting. The Nabi
Group, keen followers of Gauguin, worked on their own synthetist art and, for
instance, Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier and Jan Verkade all developed their own
unique synthetist palettes of strong, saturated colours.

Synthetist colour consists of bright, usually mixed tertiary colours which were
used to enhance an emotional effect. Following the notion of Chevreul’s idea of
juxtaposition, with yellow, violet, blue, red, green, orange were preferred along with
the idea of enhancing the power of colour to its extreme.185 Gauguin’s notes, for
example, indicate that he considered the colour range as a key expressive force in
painting.186 It is crucial to note that, as Gage (2005) has stated, Gauguin’s quarrel
with van Gogh sprang partly from his distaste for the polar contrasts favoured by his
friend. More importantly, from the point of defining synthetist colour, Gauguin came
increasingly to work with ‘mysterious’ tertiary close-tones and subtle resonances
of bluish-greens, purplishreds and orange-yellows.187 It is important also to note
that Gauguin was interested more in the “harmony and not the contrast, for what
accords, not what clashes”.188 The purpose of choosing a bright synthetist palette
was to enhance the power of emotional colour.189 As Gage points out, although
Gauguin showed little interest in colour theory as such, the colour system later
published by Sérusier, with its emphasis on warm browns and cool greys and its

184 See for example Silverman 2000, 105.
185 Artists got to know Chevreul’s theories mostly through the writings of Charles Blanc. Here Blanc is discussing
Chevreul’s laws of colour in a section on maximising colour effects: “Prenez deux couleurs complementaires:
juxtaposes, elles s’exalient mutuellement”. Blanc, Charles, Grammaire des arts decoratifs: Decoration
Silverman 2000, 299-301.
187 Gage 2005, 197. Gage uses The Loss of Virginity (1890-91), oil on canvas, 90 x 130. The Chrysler Museum,
Norfolk, VA, Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr. (s.1977) as an example.
189 Silverman 2000, 467.
avoidance of a complementarity of pure colours, may to a large extent represent Gauguin’s views.\textsuperscript{190} Maurice Denis, in particular, follows this idea on colour and used a signature palette of shimmering browns, blue-greens, pale greens and yellows, as in his \textit{The Muses} (1893) and \textit{Landscape with Green Trees} (1893).\textsuperscript{191} A similar palette was used by the Finnish artists Väinö Blomstedt (fig. 1).

What was the aim or idea of Synthetism? A work of art could not leave confusion as to the value of the objects i.e. the signs depicted, and thus the spectator had to be \textit{brought to a state of mind} in which he or she did not doubt the symbolic power of what they depicted. The objects in themselves had no value but were mere words, with no other meaning. For this reason, in Aurier’s view, the unconditional task of the artist was to choose between the multiplicity of Nature; to simplify, to utilise only general and significant lines, forms and colours. The artist had the right to exaggerate, to muffle and deform, not only in accordance with his own viewpoint but also in order to clarify the idea he sought.\textsuperscript{192} It is important to note that synthetist artists aimed to \textit{synthesise} three features: first, the outward appearance of natural forms, second, the artist’s feelings about their subject, third, the purity of the aesthetic considerations of line, colour and form so that colours directly affected the senses. Synthetist colour as a symbolist technique may thus be considered a colour tradition developed specifically in the spirit of Aurier and Baudelaire.

It is therefore important to recognise that the profound bipolarisation of Symbolism could already be seen in the early 1890s. Around the same catchwords – idea, symbol, mystery, synthesis – two opposing paths grew up which were distorted and changed by different artists. Within the symbolist movement an independent desire for a bold renewal of art emerged alongside the affected pursuit of old stylistic ideals. Considered from this standpoint, we can see that colour ascetism and synthetist colour fall primarily within the former innovative circle of Symbolism. It is also important to note that Synthetism and synthetist colour as such are not the equivalent of Symbolism, which was a broad artistic movement. The term \textit{Synthetism} was first used in 1877 to distinguish between scientific and naturalistic impressionism and in 1889 when Gauguin and Emile Schuffenecker organised an \textit{Exposition de peintures du groupe impressioniste et synthétiste} in the Café Volpini at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. The confusing title has sometimes been mistakenly associated with Impressionism. Synthetism emphasised

\textsuperscript{190} Sérusier 1950, 29, 94-95; Gage 2006, 48.

\textsuperscript{191} Denis, \textit{The Muses} (1893), oil on canvas, 171.5 x 137.5 \textit{Muses (Les muses, 1893)}, oil on canvas, 171 x 137.5 cm, Musée d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumuid=160; Information on the painting see Gaëtan 2006, 128. Denis, \textit{Landscape with Green Trees (La procession sous les arbres, Les arbres verts 1893)}, oil on canvas, 46.3 x 42.8 cm, Musée d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumuid=110580

\textsuperscript{192} Sarajas-Korte 1966, 42-43.
two-dimensional flat patterns, thus differing from impressionist art and theory. Synthetism, on the other hand, is considered in this study as an artistic mode and it is also a concept which differs from Symbolism towards a more specific vein of the symbolist movement.193

It should be noted that one of the main interests synthetist artists shared with other Symbolists was a central concern for the production of large decorative schemes – or at least the conception of a pictorial aesthetic linked to architectural space. As Rapetti (2005) reminds us, even though no major works were actually executed until after the turn of the twentieth century the years between 1900 and the First World War saw the production of murals by major symbolist artists such as Odilon Redon, Ferdinand Hodler, Edvard Munch and Maurice Denis. Aurier’s famous definition of art which should be ‘decorative’ also implied conditions that applied to the formal characteristics of painting in general, including, as we have seen, easel painting. Nevertheless, dreams of murals and frescoes stirred the minds of the synthetist artists from the 1890s on. Thus, in the wake of Gauguin, the Nabi Group felt that the issue of mural painting was fundamental, notably from the standpoint of a synthesis of arts in the spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement spearheaded by William Morris. Maurice Denis was the most active in executing murals. For example, in 1898, after creating some decorative works in private homes, he received his first commission for a religious work for the chapel of the Collège Sainte-Croix in Le Vésinet. During these years the Nabis generally favoured a wall-like flatness in their paintings, along with the regular division of the surface into vertical and horizontal lines that emphasised the painting’s architectonic potential.194 Like Puvis de Chavannes’s paintings earlier, these paintings were done with oils and attached to the wall. But the colours were very different from those of Puvis de Chavannes. Denis preferred enhanced bright colours, mixed to emphasise the non-mimetic effect, alongside the curved line with which he created the overall synthetist decorative surface.

What are the historical sources of synthetist colour? And what inspired Gauguin to give up impressionist primary colours and develop the palette towards more resonant close-tones? One reason was surely bright coloured Japanese Edo art which he collected,195 and which in those days generally had a strong influence on all artists. The bright, evocative, powerful palette of Gauguin and the Nabis was inspired, as has often been stated, by Japanese woodcuts. Sharply contoured and

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193 Synthetism is sometimes considered the same as Symbolism. Under the influence of folk art and Japanese prints, and medieval glassworks the term Cloisonism, was a style given its name by the critic Édouard Dujardin in response to Emile Bernard’s cloisonné enamelling technique. Rapetti also uses the term Cloisonism as a style of flat areas of colour and when explaining the style of a painting of Bernard, Anquetin, Gauguin and the Nabis. Rapetti 2005, 111, 116-123.


195 The reproductions on the walls of his Parisian studio in 1894 tell us of other objects of his admiration in Utamaro’s woodcuts. Fréches-Thory 2004, 87-88.
brightly coloured woodcuts were very popular from the days of Manet and Whistler up until the 1890s when almost all artists were familiar with the ‘Japonaise cult’ which reigned in Paris. Finnish artists like Albert Edelfelt and Pekka Halonen also collected artefacts and woodcuts for their homes and were influenced by Japanese art. Sometimes synthetist art and Japanese art were linked to mean almost one and the same.

I would argue that the concept of synthetist colour has a more straightforward history than colour ascetic art, which can be traced from “the Great Venetians” to Rubens and Delacroix and finally to Gauguin and the Nabis. It is interesting that, and as Bridget Riley (1995, 1999) demonstrates, Delacroix used colours in a middle tone and together, making a subtle, near complementary, contrast in the heart of the painting such as in The Women of Algiers (1834, Louvre). This offers a startling clue to Delacroix’s colour thinking. Reflected lights and luminous shadows tend to appear as mid-tone colours – ‘demi-teints’ as he called them – and he noted this pitch as being ideal for the perception of colour. Delacroix’s intellectual influence was largely exerted through his friend, Charles Blanc, the founding editor of the magazine Gazette des Beaux Arts, who popularised his work and his ‘theories’. It is in this vein that Gauguin and the Nabi Group later developed their understanding of enhanced and effective, tertiary synthetist colour.

There is too, however, the bright, jewel-coloured art of the Pre-Raphaelites, who likewise had a spiritual and religious quest, as did many Synthetists including Gauguin and the Nabi Group. How much did Gauguin know about pre-raphaelite art? It has been established that PRB colourful art was seen in Paris as early as 1855 and impressed Delacroix and others. As Watkinson (1990) states, with the Pre-Raphaelites it was the radical change brought about in response to colour, a new sensibility that was the most important and far-reaching. It was important not just because it was so marked, sudden and dramatic, but because it immediately extended beyond the field of painting into the decorative arts. One of the marks of the finest Pre-Raphaelite work was, and still is, the exciting and disturbing power of its colour – very much the least naturalistic aspect of the painting. The brotherhood painters and their associates went beyond the frank recording of the green of trees and grasses, the bright pure hues of flowers, and reintroduced into painting ranges

197 Riley mentions Cézanne as a leading colourist after Delacroix, who, like Delacroix, rediscovered Titian’s colourspace, initially by being attracted to Rubens, and then by recognising Veronese as the principle interpreter. Riley 1999, 50. I am grateful to Bettina Gockel for pointing out this aspect of the Rubensian palette.
198 Delacroix’s intellectual influence was largely exerted through his friend, Charles Blanc, also a close friend of Chevreul. Blanc may have presented these views in an overly dogmatic, quasi-scientific manner, but in fact both Delacroix and Chevreul arrived independently at similar conclusions in understanding the structure of colour contrasts. Riley 1999, 50-51.
199 Here I am referring to such artists as Rossetti, Millais and Holman Hunt who used very bright colours.
and relations of colour unused in European art since the Middle Ages – an alarming array of blues, greens, violets and purples, used not simply because they were there to be painted but chosen for their powerful emotional effect. It was not, of course, simply the colours but also their combination that compelled attention and provoked these effects. It was a decisive move towards modern painting, where we expect art to disturb, to remake and extend experience rather than to recapitulate the perfected system of form. It should be noted that in this sense Gauguin and the others were on the same track as the Pre-Raphaelites.

What gave the idea for creating such a palette? What kind of emotions did it create? Later, Gauguin went on to work with Vincent van Gogh in Arles and painted, for example, the Yellow Christ (1889) which embodied the idea of symbolic colour. Yellow, which dominates the painting in many different shades, was the symbol of martyrdom. This is also emasculated in Gauguin’s later Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ (1891). Indeed, synethist colour preferred to take a metaphorical path, as in Munch’s use of Prussian blue, a colour that Nietzsche identified as subversive because it was partly composed of vitriol, to outline some of his portraits. It may also be said that the synethist palette was preferred by artists who shared a deep interest in colours, psychology and especially in the emotional effects of colours. As John Gage (2006) states, it is also important to note that developmental psychology has long used colour as an important index in the acquisition of knowledge in infancy, and, with the emergence of an ideal of a childlike apprehension of the world in Romanticism and Modernism, this research soon fed into visual aesthetics. One should also note that here, more than in colour ascetism, singular colour in itself became a symbol that worked as an autonomous sign of meaning in painting.

Mark Roskill (1970), on the other hand, demonstrates the important fact that one of the colour diagrams which had attracted Gauguin in his studies was the colour-star adapted by Blanc from the version in Études céramiques by Ingres’s pupil, J.-C. Ziegler. In this colour-star primary and secondary colours were given their usual names, but tertiaries were much less susceptible to standardisation, so that Ziegler had devised for them the quite personal terms of ‘sulphur’, ‘tusquiose’, ‘garnet’ and

200 Watkinson 1990, 6-7.
201 Gauguin leaves for Brittany in February and again stays in Pont Aven, joined by Charles Laval and Emile Bernard. Yellow Christ (1889), oil on canvas, 92 x 73, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York, General Purchase Funds 1946; Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ (Portrait de l’artiste au Christ jaune, 1890–91), oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumid=69344
203 Gage 2006, 61, 64. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), the Romantic Idealist educator, introduced into infant teaching his well-known ‘gifts’ – sets of nursery toys with abstract shapes and bright colours, some of which could be used as building bricks, and all of them designed to encourage creative play. The ‘gifts’ had a profound effect on, for example, the modernist architecture of the American Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959), who was brought up on the Froebel system, and who proclaimed: ‘Fortunately, human beings are really childlike in the best sense when appealed to by simple forms and pure, bright color.’
‘nasturtium’, as well as the technical terms indigo and cadmium (yellow-orange), which Blanc changed to ‘bellflower’ and ‘saffron’. This volatility in the names of tertiaries, not to mention those of their ‘unnameable’ derivatives, must have held special appeal for Gauguin who used these nuances extensively in paintings of the 1890s, such as *The Loss of Virginity* (1890–91) and *Manao Tupapau* (1892). Gage considers that these works show where colour became the chief vehicle of mystery. It is interesting to note how Gauguin stresses the enigmatic sphere of colour and its sensation and connects it with musicality:

*Since colour is in itself enigmatic in the sensations which it gives us (note: medical experiments made to cure madness by means of colours) we cannot logically employ it except enigmatically, every time we use it not to define form [dessiner], but to give musical sensations which spring from it, from its peculiar nature, from its inner power, its mystery, its enigma (...).*

Within the group, Paul Sérusier’s colourful *Talisman* (1888) became a formula for a new abstract art. Sérusier stated that the painting introduced the Nabi Group to the concept of the work of art as “a plane surface covered with colours in a certain order.” *Talisman* represented Sérusier’s initiation and embodied the *purification of nature’s forms* urged by Gauguin. The small painting became a powerful mnemonic device, a memory not only of Sérusier’s seminal lesson, but also of this lesson’s prescription to paint the essential, the abstraction. As Silverman states, this nineteenth-century specificity will also introduce the way in which Gauguin’s emphasis on painterly abstraction and flat surfaces of colour was formed by a desire to “efface reality,” as he once called it – moving matter to spirit through the paradoxical physical medium of paint. This aspect was important also to the Nabis, who, in many ways, wanted to emphasise spirituality, and synthetist colour enhanced this vision.

Of the artists who used a synthetist palette I will discuss those who particularly influenced Finnish artists or who were known to them. It seems that the use of synthetist colour was a brief but intense period in Finnish art. Artists who chose to take on the bright, synthetist palette wanted to depict symbolist connotations,

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204 Roskill 1970, 267; Gage 2005, 190, 206.
205 Paul Gauguin, *The Loss of Virginity* (1890–91), oil on canvas, 90 x 130. The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA, Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr. (8.197)
208 Cheetham 1991, 30-31; Riley 1995, 74-75.
such as spirituality, sensation, emotion and the primitive in their artworks. This was achieved mainly by synthetist colours, and, surprisingly, not always by a cloisonist style of strongly contoured flat surfaces. As Pierre (1994) mentions, Gauguin’s works became a gospel not only for the Pont-Aven School and the Nabi Group, but also for artists the world over – Hodler, Munch and the Finn Gallén, to mention only a few.210 It is also particularly interesting that during winter 1893–94 two Finnish artists were pupils of Gauguin in Paris. Blomstedt and Halonen studied under Gauguin in his studio for only a couple of months but this profoundly changed their lives and art. This meeting between Gauguin and the Finnish artists will be studied more closely in the next part of the study. Another interesting fact is that Gauguin’s followers, the Nabis Sérusier and Verkade had contacts with Finnish artists in Florence and also exhibited as guests at the Finnish Artists Exhibition in Helsinki in 1893. This study will also address Maurice Denis, since as a critic, writer and artist he influenced artists in Finland and in Europe although this connection is more abstract. Denis also used a very unique palette and the fact that this study aims to expand the view of the synthetist colour concept and the spiritualist attitude makes Denis’s art topical in this context.

As this study has noted, in 1893, Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote that the very notion of ‘Modernism’ was the concurrent conflict between two opposite responses to the hectic fin-de-siècle existence. Today, two things seem to be modern: the analysis of life and the flight from life – – . Reflection or fantasy, mirror image or dream image.211 Here I would extend von Hofmannsthal’s idea so that synthetist colour would then, as a parallel concept of ascetism, depict the flight from life, the fantasy and the dream image. I would argue that the idea of the primitive, the sacred and primordial life was depicted with synthetist colour. The key words for synthetist colour are vision, dynamism, primitive, sensation, emotion, energy and dream image (rêve). It is important to note that artists themselves shared a deep interest in colours and in the emotional as well as the aesthetic effect of their palettes.

In addition, the notion of the phenomenon of colour ascetism and synthetist colour is still an ongoing process and the end of Symbolism did not as such mark the end of colour ascetism which, in the early years of the 20th century,212 continued successfully in the work of such Finnish artists as Halonen, Järnefelt and Schjerfbeck. In the later work of Whistler and Carrière too the ascetic use of colour they had adopted grew still more pronounced. Colour ascetism ended as a main colour concept in Finnish art as a consequence of “painting light and colour” in the vein

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210 Pierre 1994, 152.
212 It should be noted that many famous artists who worked with the ascetic palette died at the end of the 19th century and in the early 1900s; Puvis de Chavannes 1898, Whistler 1903 and Carrière in 1906.
of neo-impressionist colour theories and expressive Colourism which many artists adopted after 1906.\textsuperscript{213} Ellen Thesleff's art, for example, changes completely in 1906 and the reaction to a more expressionist and more colourful palette is found in Finnish art from 1906 onwards.\textsuperscript{214} It can be seen that the turmoil of Fauvism, neo-Impressionism and Expressionism totally impacted both European and Finnish art in the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

As I stated in my master's thesis, the final “death blow” to colour ascetism at large was given by the Salon d'automne 1905, the exhibition at which the Fauves made their début.\textsuperscript{215} With their strong, bright colours and new expressiveness they wanted to shock in both form and colour. In the opinion of the colour scholar Charles Riley (1995) this marked the greatest leap forward in the direction of the autonomy of colour art.\textsuperscript{216} What is interesting is that Riley linked the Synthetists to what he calls the ‘chromaticism of the Fauves’. He states that in 1905 Die Brücke, in Munich Blaue Reiter, Munich, all of these followed in the footsteps of Sérusier and Gauguin. In France the next steps were being taken ‘toward an absolute art of colour’. The wild outburst of chromaticism released earlier by the Nabis and in 1905 by the Fauves foreshadowed the growth of Abstraction and Expressionism later in the twentieth century. The importance of colour to both these general movements is fundamental. As Gage points out in his illuminating discussion on the liberation of colour from nineteenth-century academic rules, the tight relationship between canvas and palette was put in its place. By liberating colour from its referential or mimetic grounding, the Fauves set the ball rolling toward abstraction and, by enlisting the forces of mind-jarring bright oranges and yellows, they discovered a direct path to the “primitive” emotions that had for ages – arguably since the glass of Chartres was put in place – remained dormant: “The chief function of colour should be to serve expression as well as possible” declared Matisse.\textsuperscript{217} But is the synthetist colour of richly saturated and mixed colours the same as the Fauves used? It seems that it was not. Contrary to colour ascetism, it was only used within synthetist art. This is why the study uses the term synthetist colour. Denis, for example, did not continue with the synthetist palette in the 1910s when his vocabulary changed

\textsuperscript{213} Generally the term ‘colourism’ is used in Finnish art of this period 1906-1913. The Frosterus–Järnefelt debate on “painting light and colour” 1908. E.g. Wennervirta 1950, 314-319; Colour ascetism, on the other hand, continues exceptionally into the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century work of some artists e.g. Einar Ilmoni. Other artists discussed in this study had moved towards neo-Impressionism or Colourism not later than the 1910s.

\textsuperscript{214} Usually the period of ‘Finnish colourism’ is set to after the Paris Salon d’automne 1908, where Finnish art was criticised to be dark and old-fashioned, but it seems that many artists had already changed their colour practices before the exhibition. See note 23. On the exhibition, see Ojanperä 2001, 370.

\textsuperscript{215} This does not mean that the ascetic or synthetist palette was abandoned completely; some artists continued to use these palettes but most turned towards expressionist or neo-classical colour schemes which include more colours.

\textsuperscript{216} Riley 1995, 76

toward a more religious and classicist themes. Denis turned to a more accentuated palette that could be described as a neo-Classical palette of more pastel tones. It should be noted that this kind of a soft-toned palette was used also by Eero Järnefelt in his 1910 works. In Finland after synthetist colour, Colourism entered a new phase when Axel Gallén was asked to join the Die Brücke exhibition of 1906 in Berlin. Magnus Enckell, on the other hand, formed the Septem Group in 1912. Generally speaking the Septem artists each represented the new post-Impressionism in Finland. Interestingly, artists such as Enckell and Thesleff, former champions of the ascetic palette, changed their art completely to a more expressive brushwork and pure colour.

If the synthetist palette inspired Fauves and the Expressionists, it should be noted that, although colour ascetism was used by fewer artists after 1906, it continues in new forms from Cubism, Suprematism, Minimalism, American Modernism to contemporary art. It should be noted that, contrary to the synthetist palette, the ascetic palette was used within many styles and movements. In general different personified colour schemes started to flourish at the end of nineteenth century and it seems that ascetic and synthetist colour were among the first impulses to establish colour as an autonomous part of a painting.

In addition, what has traditionally been considered as modern art is its special mode of simplification. As I will argue later, this simplification began not just with the simplification of form (or flatness) but in fact by some artists first with the manipulation of colour. The importance of the new approach in art was in the interest in colour itself – what a single colour would suggest or indicate. As this study will examine, this group of very different artists detached their art from the strong tradition of mimetic representation, in favour of more simplified form, focusing

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218 Contrary to what colour historians generally state, there are many other colour practices besides the pure, colourist palette of the Modernists, but this aspect has not received attention and would need a study of its own.


220 Septem (Latin ‘seven’) was born out of the desire of artists with an enthusiasm for colour to form their own separate group and create for Finland an exhibition culture based on the international model. The name is a reference to the Belgian group Les Vingts (The Twenty) and its active member A. W. Finch, who was to become a leading advocate of neo-Impressionist use of colour in Finland and a regular member of Septem. The artists in favour of a pure palette needed each other's support. The first impetus for setting up the group came when a planned exhibition in St Petersburg was suddenly cancelled. The artists concerned – Enckell, Finch, Ellen Thesleff, Juho Rissanen and the younger-generation artists Verner Thomé, Mikko Oinonen and Yrjö Ollila – who later adopted the name Septem, exhibited for the first time in spring 1912 at the Ateneum Art Museum. Septem was the first modern artists' group in Finland, though elsewhere in Europe it was already common for artists espousing similar ideological or artistic principles to exhibit together. As well as a sense of affinity, practical and financial reasons weighed in the balance when the group decided to exhibit independently and not in the annual Finnish Artists exhibition. The links between the members of Septem were not very firm, and the composition changed straight after the first exhibition, when Thesleff dropped out. The group’s importance in creating something new was clearest in the exhibitions between 1912 and 1915. von Bonsdorff 2002, 256-259.
themselves on colour and meaning. These new methods of using colour are studied in the following parts of the study.

4. FINNISH ART IN THE 1890S

The turn of the twentieth century is probably one of the most intriguing and multifaceted periods in Finnish art, due to the vast blooming of the arts generally. From the point of view of Finnish art history it has also been a widely researched area due to National Romanticism and the rise of Finnish art in international circles. Finnish artists shaped European stimuli to conform to their own cultural and personal ideas of art and in some cases to the national art being constructed. In this fruitful period artists such as Albert Edelfelt,221 and later the generation of Helene Schjerfbeck, Axel Gallén and others mentioned in this study, contributed greatly to making Finland better known in the international art world.

From the 1870s to the 1880s Realism and Naturalism led to a new era in Finnish art. In general a decisive turning point was reached in Nordic art around 1880. Naturalism made its breakthrough in all the Nordic countries including Finland, and brought about a regeneration of artistic activity, clearly inspired by French art. When Nordic painters turned toward Paris in the 1870s, it was not the work of the Impressionists that attracted their attention but the naturalistic painting of the day, where Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884) was the leading figure. The decade – the time of plein-airism – became an important one for Finnish artists. During this time almost all artists were trained in Paris. Common characteristics of painting in the 1880s were first-hand experience and authenticity. Artists found their motives in familiar milieus, depicting them at close range with reportage-like objectivity and from a viewpoint that invariably gave the beholder a feeling that he or she might have been present.222

The last two decades of the nineteenth century were a turbulent time for art throughout the Nordic countries. Artists rebelled against ingrown traditions in the art world. The first Finnish Artists’ Exhibition opened in Helsinki in October 1891. Breaking with precedent, the participating artists arranged the showing without the support of the Finnish Art Society, thus giving it the nature of an opposition exhibition. They wanted to exhibit everything that was young and vital in Finnish art. Behind this desire was a decade-long struggle between the classically-dominated academic idealism of the old generation and the new conception of art of younger

221 Edelfelt had already made his artistic breakthrough in Paris in 1877 with the history painting Queen Blanka. By 1882 he had received the Medal Second Class and exhibited annually at the Salon. Gutman 2004, 314-316.
222 Monrad 1995, 16.
artists. The Finnish Art Society was headed by the traditionalists and the younger generation that had adopted the new ideas of the 1880s sought almost unanimously to escape the Art Society’s control. For the critic Kasimir Leino the exhibition was proof of the final victory of Naturalism in Finnish art. But, as Monrad (1995) sees it, even before the 1880s had ended the initial reactions against its objectivity set in. Around the middle of the decade, the first steps were taken towards the trends that were to dominate the 1890s: national romantic and symbolist art. For Finnish art this study, however, will use a period concept “Early Modernism” since artists such as Helene Schjerbeck belonged neither to the national romantic nor symbolist art movements.

The painter of country life par excellence was Jules Bastien-Lepage, made known in Finland by Edelfelt and also an acknowledged model for Gallén and Pekka Halonen. Riitta Konttinen (1992) mentions Bastien-Lepage as an influence also on Schjerbeck, who, in the 1880s, was the prominent naturalist artist in Finland and severely criticised for her too “foreign” art. Schjerbeck’s Boy Feeding his Little Sister (1881) and Convalescent (Prêmière verdure) (1888) which was painted in St. Ives, won the bronze medal at the 1889 Paris World Fair. The promising younger generation artists, Gallén and Eero Järnefelt, had studied in Paris since 1884, and like other Nordic artists, had become ardent followers of Naturalism. As Soili Sinisalo (1996) has pointed out, naturalist art was known and supported by Edelfelt as the right mode for younger Finnish artists. The art movement was strong and Gallén was only nineteen years old and had not yet visited Paris when he painted Boy with Crow (1884). The painting is done very much in the manner of Jules Bastien-Lepage but went even further by excluding the horizon. The diagonal view from above and especially the rough brushwork in the foreground are reminiscent of Bastien-Lepage to such an extent that there has been discussion as to whether Gallén could have seen reproductions in Adolf von Becker’s private painting academy. It is important to note that Finns also kept in touch with developments in Parisian art through newspaper articles written by Edelfelt, Helena Westermarck, Johan Jakob Tikkanen and others. Edelfelt was the most influential Finnish proponent of Naturalism and he too followed the example of Bastien-Lepage.

224 Monrad 1995, 18.
225 Convalescent (1888) was later purchased by the Finnish Art Society. Konttinen 1992, 48, 51-52.
228 Johan Jakob Tikkanen (1857–1930) belonged to the generation of scholars that ultimately made art history an independent academic discipline. Since he had to work among a small circle of experts in his own country, it is understandable that he found his scholarly community abroad, particularly in the German-speaking countries. Tikkanen’s interest in colour and form was enhanced by his early training to become an artist. This may also be the reason why artists like Pekka Halonen, for example, wrote to him of their experiences and analysed the art they saw. Vakkari 2007, 117.
As a student in Paris Gallén saw Bastien-Lepage’s 1885 memorial retrospective several times:

*I find he has more in common with the old masters: the same fierce passion for nature, the same fine skills of characterisation, the same immaculate brushwork. His originality is the natural outcome of an aspiration to paint nature exactly as he perceived it. Art such as this will never be modern, nor will it ever grow old. - - I saw the Delacroix exhibition. Quite frankly, I fail to see why on earth the fellow is hailed a genius. I have also seen the Bastien-Lepage exhibition a few times. Now here is a true and genuine artist! - -.*

As Erja Pusa (1985) points out, Edelfelt tutored Axel Gallén in 1883–84, which must have left a mark on Gallén’s development. In the following year, when Gallén painted the controversial, naturalist work *Old Woman with a Cat*, originally named *Autumn* (1885, Turku Art Museum), he followed Bastien-Lepage whose retrospective exhibition he had just seen in Paris. The similarities in palette, style and composition with Bastien-Lepage’s *Nothing Doing (Pas Mèche)* (1882, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh) are striking. But as an artist of the younger generation Gallén’s emphasis on the rugged figure, called ‘ugliness’ by Edelfelt, was more forceful than in Bastien-Lepage’s characters. In Paris Gallén later struck up a friendship with the writer August Strindberg and found his faith in the doctrine of life expounded by the Swedish author under the guiding influence of Émile Zola. His radical circle of friends in Paris included the Norwegians Carl Adam Dörnberger and Hans Jaeger. As David Jackson (2006) points out, Gallén adopted Bastien-Lepage’s flat, modern compositional devices and broad brushwork, allied to realist subjects, in many of his works, the most audaciously in *Lost*, 1886 (Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki) where he adapted the composition of Bastien-Lepage’s *Haymaking* to the theme of a rural infanticide.

When Pekka Halonen began his studies at the Art Society’s Drawing School in 1886, reforms were reshaping art education in Finland. Finnish artists had gained a foothold in the international art world, receiving, like Edelfelt, significant prizes at the annual Salon de Paris. When Halonen made his debut in 1891 his conception of rural life did not include the drama, torn shirts and smoke-stained faces of, for instance, Järnefelt’s *Under the Yoke (Burning the Brushwood)* (1893, Ateneum Art

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230 Pusa 1985, 246.
231 For Gallén’s *Old Woman with a Cat*, see Reitala 1974, 18; Ringbom 1989, 118-120; for Gallén’s circle in Paris see Sinisalo 1996, 33-34.
Museum); rather, Halonen wanted to paint what was close and real to himself. Halonen’s heroes were Millet, Corot and later Bastien-Lepage. We do not know whether Halonen saw Bastien-Lepage’s Tired (1881, National Gallery, Oslo) in Paris or merely a reproduction, but one can find distinct similarities in Halonen’s first breakthrough work Reapers (1891) in that both the composition and the subjects are much the same. Both share a respectful attitude to what is depicted. The only real difference is in the mood and colour scheme, which in Halonen’s reaper (his brother posed as a model) basks in sunshine, while Bastien-Lepage paints an overcast day. In any event, during his first trip to Paris Halonen found models to support his own view of life and art from the mainstream of international art. What is common to Millet, Bastien-Lepage and Halonen is primarily that they were all farmers’ sons and all put an emphasis on the rural area from which they came. Interestingly, Bastien-Lepage even signed ‘Damvilliers’ in his paintings. Also in their works man and Nature are shown as existing in mutual harmony. Halonen was never to abandon this theme, which runs like a thread throughout his oeuvre.

What the leading academies in Finland wanted was skilful academic painting but it was towards Naturalism that the younger generation was first drawn. Artists began to concentrate on Finnish landscape and figure painting, using peasant folk as models. On the other hand, the fact that many of them lived and studied in Brittany and in Paris, the centre of world art at the time, was to be of great significance for art at home in Finland. This period around the end of the 19th century also witnessed tremendous efforts by Finnish artists to make Finland better known in international art circles. In general, Nordic artists did not travel to Paris in the late nineteenth-century solely for the highest standard of art teaching available at the time. They also sought contact with the latest currents in art. In the 1890s, however, the monopoly of Paris in art began to wane and was matched by Florence and also Berlin, to which Finnish artists began to travel in the late 1890s. Paris nevertheless retained its leading position in so far as renewal of style was concerned as well as in terms of opportunities for exhibitions and sales for foreign artists. A good example is the rapid professional success in Paris of Edelfelt and sculptor Ville Vallgren. The influence of Bastien-Lepage, the effect of naturalistic expression and plein air painting were the three main factors contributing to national identity in art that emerged around the turn of the 19th century. This was a pan-European phenomenon which has been studied in recent decades.

So many aspects which were to affect the historical context of the artists in question were also the consequences of the rapidly changing modern Europe,

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233 Eero Järnefelt, Under the Yoke (Burning the Brushwood) (1893), Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.
235 Rapetti 1999, 49.
such as possibilities to travel, bursaries and the exchange of artists, international World Exhibitions, the vast spread of the reproduction of artworks and new periodicals, which were also widely read in Finland, as well as the new system of group exhibitions. However, for Finnish artists, political aspirations towards independence of the oppressed Grand Duchy of Finland and the significant role of these artists as creators of the nation being built were also a central concern for them.\textsuperscript{236} At that time the identity of an artist in the art world was changing from that of ambassador of Finland, as the government wanted, to a more individual and independent role. These matters will be discussed in part II.

\textit{National and International – the concept of the total work of art}

From the 1860s to the 1880s all the country’s foremost artists were advised by the academics to execute big historical scenes from Finnish history. Finland’s political and cultural situation called for its artists to create a grand art comparable to that of other European countries. Many major monumental projects of state buildings in Finland were underway. One of the most important decoration programmes in Finland was for the murals of the University of Helsinki’s ceremonial hall, a project which was ultimately divided between the most prominent Finnish artists Gallén, Edelfelt and Järnefelt (1863–1937). Of the planned murals Edelfelt’s triptych \textit{Pietari Brahe} (1904) and Järnefelt’s \textit{Aurora Society} (1916) and \textit{Flora Feast} (1920) were those executed.\textsuperscript{237}

Political and governmental institutions in Finland initiated artistic projects depicting history and nationalistic epic dramas to decorate new buildings. However, it is important to note that the greatest interest in independent decorative and monumental mural art came from the artists themselves.\textsuperscript{238} The reason for this new enthusiasm in the decorative lay in their close contacts with French art and the growing admiration for the mural artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes who retained strong links with the history of art while creating a new modern pictorial language.\textsuperscript{239}

\textsuperscript{236} This is also mentioned by Ville Lukkarinen in his book on Halonen, see Lukkarinen 2007, 111-112.

\textsuperscript{237} Gallén renounced the task in 1891. The paintings which had been completed were destroyed in the Helsinki bombing of 1944. Sarajas-Korte 1989, 280.

\textsuperscript{238} Mural art is the general name for a monumental and decorative kind of art which is not fresco but imitates its character. Murals can also be framed paintings, e.g. Puvis de Chavannes’ works are on canvas glued to the wall. Because of the cold, damp climate, it was not possible in either France or Finland to produce ‘real’ frescos painted on plaster.

\textsuperscript{239} When Pierre Puvis de Chavannes died in 1898, Julien Leclercq’s article “Puvis de Chavannes” was published in the \textit{Ateneum IV} periodical, which was mainly executed by artists. Leclercq, Julien, “Puvis de Chavannes”, \textit{Ateneum IV}, 24. December 1898, 429-432. These periodicals were often works of art in themselves, as the illustrations, ornamentation and their design, and to some extent the articles, were by artists. See Kuusela 2004.
It is interesting that later in 1898 Edelfelt, a friend of the French artist, stated that at the end of the nineteenth century Puvis de Chavannes was the most influential artist for Finnish artists.\textsuperscript{240} In the 1890s it was his monumental and decorative art that had the greatest influence on them. The third reason lay in the ideals of French Symbolism and its interest in the ancient and archaic art of Assyria and Egypt as well as in the Early Renaissance.

What is important to note is that in Europe the end of the nineteenth century was a time of great world fairs. Artists in many countries made it their main endeavour to display the special features of their national cultures at these fairs. In the Nordic countries especially, what was shown at these displays of the culture of exotic lands led artists to ponder more deeply than before the roots of their own national cultures. Influences came, for instance, from folk poetry and indigenous architecture, especially if these were seen to underline features felt to be distinctly original in their own cultures. Works were produced based on major events in national history and, under the influence of folk poetry, on mythological themes.\textsuperscript{241} For politically-aware artists, emphasising the distinct identity and culture of their own country came to be something of a mission. It was particularly important for countries that had not yet achieved independence, such as Finland and Norway, to show the world their own national art: exhibiting specifically at world fairs under the country’s own name was something completely unique.

Another issue equally as important as these national aspirations – but not as frequently referred to – was the growing diversity in the European view of what constituted art. The numerous names given to new art movements in the late-19th century include Symbolism and Art Nouveau in France, Jugend in Germany and Aesthetism in Britain. This broader view meant that artists everywhere became interested in the new directions being taken by art and, in the wake of Symbolism’s example, strove for mutual interaction between them. Composers, poets and artists wished to be involved in joint, mutually supportive projects. It is particularly interesting to see how admiration for the craftsmanship of the Middle Ages and its individualism was converted into Modernism. This reaction against industrialisation and mass production was led by the British Art and Crafts Movement,\textsuperscript{242} which,

\textsuperscript{240} Edelfelt 1905, 6, 132.
\textsuperscript{241} Countries like Poland, Hungary and Czech. Fahr-Becker 1997, 283-284. This also applied elsewhere in Europe, e.g. in Ireland and Scotland, where the Celtic Revival movement likewise took political forms. Opposition to predominantly English culture through the arts made it possible to highlight some specific national characteristics. Sheehy, Jeanne. The Rediscovery of Ireland’s Past. The Celtic Revival 1830–1930. Thames & Hudson, London 1980.
\textsuperscript{242} Arts and Crafts movement = a reform movement that arose in England after the 1851 World Fair which aimed to revive handicrafts in the medieval tradition and thus raise the quality of design. The declared aim was to turn artists into craftsmen and craftsmen into artists (Walter Crane). The movement took its name from the exhibition organization the Arts and Crafts Society founded in 1882. Its best-known member was William Morris (1834-1896).
as it reached the Continent, took on unique features along with the French trend towards Symbolism. In Finnish art particularly, an important function in this fruitful period was the great contribution made by artists to making Finland better known in the international art world. The more liberal view of the new appreciation of its strong handicraft tradition also changed the role of the artist; he became a creator of more diversified art forms.

This process can be seen as a reaction to the maelstrom of modern life which was fed from many sources: great discoveries in the physical sciences, which changed our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialisation of production, which transformed scientific knowledge into technology, created new human environments and destroyed old ones, speeding up the whole tempo of life, generating new forms of corporate power and class struggle; mass social movements of people, and peoples, challenging their political and economic leaders, striving to gain some control over their lives; finally, bearing and driving all these people and institutions along, an ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market. Thus the hectic modern life had its counterpart in the growing search for spirituality and in the ideals of the arts and crafts movement.

As Sharon Hirsh (2004) points out, while proposing this definition of art that must occur in the public as well as private sphere, Picard concluded that “Socialized art will [make] cities and fabulous societies rise up, it will make of our sad towns the dwelling of the gods, at the same time as it renders private life and the home charming, peaceful, and constantly vibrant.” Thus, like Morris and Picard, artists struggled with two realities, one of which (the external) was rapidly changing, causing the other, most cherished (the internal) life to be dangerously threatened: the strength of the inner life had to be established and enhanced, if any good were to be accomplished in the external world. Just as Moréas first declared his goal “to clothe the invisible with the visible,” symbolist artists sought to reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable realities and tried to follow the advice of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, to “stretch your practiced powers until they reach between two contradictions.” It was this new and at times tortuous adaptation that was the basis of the study of the fledgling discipline of urban sociology. During the period 1880–1918, a time now identified as the “classic era” of urban sociology, there was a surge of inquiry into the interactive social conditions of new city life. Artists were suitable examples of the class slippage that seemed at the root of metropolitan

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244 Berman 1997, 16.
245 Picard, 110; Hirsh 2004, 16.
society; they gradually crafted lives and lifestyles that essentially isolated them from the ordinary middle class. As they led lives and built careers that straddled at least two classes, however, they were unable to make the kinds of classless adaptations—uniform public behaviour that supposedly mirrored private conventionality—which were learned on the new city streets. It might be said that while the average city-dweller thus ceded to a breakdown of formerly class social codes by morphing into a generic “mass class” with its own new and impersonal codes, artists established their outsider role by intermingling social codes of all classes, resolutely refusing such conformity. Neither esoteric nor common, neither completely elite nor earthbound, they were as artists neither academicians nor bohemians, but some strange mixture of all, embodying the true elision of class that bothered many at the fin de siècle.\footnote{As already noted, in the 1890s Simmel began to make his own observations; and with other scholars like Emile Durkheim in France and Max Weber, also in Germany, he was among the first to recognise the sociological impact of the new cities and the challenge they posed for traditional social relationships. Hirsh 2004, 18.}

This was also the case with most Finnish artists, many of them perfect cases of the changing social environment. Eero Järnefelt, an aristocrat, lived seemingly modestly. His brother Arvid, an ardent follower of Tolstoy, who changed from being a lawyer to becoming a shoemaker and later a farmer, was an inspiration to Halonen, the prime example of class slippage. Halonen was the first Finnish-speaking person from a poor but cultured background to become a famous professional artist and carve out for himself a long and prosperous career.\footnote{von Bonsdorff 2008, 9-10, 164-165.} On the other hand, Halonen felt he was not welcome anywhere else than in artist circles – an in-between-person no longer welcome from where he came, and yet not welcome in bourgeois society either.

But what were the social conditions of Finnish artists in Finland and abroad? It is clear that these artists also came to see and understand the good and bad sides of modern urban life. The physical and social transformations that drove the poor out of sight now brought them back directly into everyone’s line of vision. In tearing down the old medieval slums, Haussmann inadvertently broke down the self-enclosed and hermetically sealed world of traditional urban poverty. The manifestation of class divisions in modern city opened up new divisions within the modern self. As Berman points out, at this point modern love loses its innocence. The presence of the poor casts an inexorable shadow over the city’s luminosity. In the midst of the great spaces, under the bright lights, there is no way to look away.\footnote{Berman 1997, 153-154.} It also meant that Finnish artists from the very small and mostly rural Finland lived in the midst of all this change. Staying in Paris they preferred either
the established ‘Nordic artists colonies’ like Schjerfbeck,254 or, like Blomstedt and Halonen, the new area of Montparnasse.

For a broader point of view, it should be noted that between 1800 and 1910 the urban population of Europe expanded six-fold, but this statistic is more instructive when fixed on particular cities: while the total population doubled, the percentage that could be classified as urban tripled. As Hirsh (2004) reminds us, thus spatial as well as population growth in cities soared at the precise moment that the artists were at their most active. The acceleration took off in the 1850s, when many of these artists were born, and continued until around 1910, when they were in their fifties and sixties, had either stopped working or changed their art significantly. Furthermore, despite the common linking of industrialisation with its growth, it was not the factory town, with actual industries built in or adjacent to the urban centre, that experienced the strongest growth at this time. It was rather the “capital cities” – where banking and other service professions mushroomed and art centres blossomed – that saw the most profound development. The changes in these cities were, therefore, not the smoke and slums that had stirred calls for reform earlier in the century but the experience of huge new centre–city boulevards accompanied by suburban sprawl, all giving way to a completely new sense of “the crowd” on the streets.252

It is crucial to note that between these two different worlds the artists wished to build a new concept of living. The symbolist concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art, spurred Finns, too, to surmount all boundaries and create something new and unique. One concrete example was the artist’s studio home, where the ideal was for every detail to be designed and/or created by the artist himself. A complete framework was shaped to offset paintings and sculptures: house, furnishings, ceramics and handicrafts. Everything was inspired by nature and traditional or folk culture. Another example was international. Artists were united in the idea of making Finnish art better known in international arenas. This succeeded beyond all expectation at the Paris World Fair (Exposition Universelle) of 1900.253 Finland was well represented in the Fair’s international art exhibition and won several medals.254 There the art of the Russian Grand Duchy was presented under the name of Finland and the unusual Finnish pavilion created in the Gesamtkunstwerk

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251 Women artists had neither the means nor the possibility to explore new areas in Paris. Many wanted to have the support of other Scandinavians and fellow women artists.


253 Finland also raised its profile through music. The Helsinki Philharmonic Society orchestra gave two concerts in Paris during the World Fair, conducted by Robert Kajanus with Sibelius as his deputy. The musicians included Pekka Halonen’s brother, violinist Heikki Halonen. The programme included Sibelius’ Finlandia (1899), though with the title changed to La Patrie so as not to annoy the Russians. See e.g. Smeds 1996, 324.

254 Pekka Halonen received a silver medal. Halonen also exhibited Winter Sunset (1899), which was considered for purchase for the French state collection although this did not take place.
spirit attracted considerable attention and admiration. The pavilion was a *total work of art*, designed by the architect trio Gesellius-Lindgren-Saarinen, and its Iris room had décor by Gallén. Muralworks by leading Finnish artists decorated its walls. In particular, the attention paid to Gallén’s *rämät* rugs was the argument clinching the change in artists’ attitudes to the applied arts. As a result, artists began to expand their repertoires into areas such as tapestries, ceramics, stained glass, furniture, frames and enamelpwork. As Gallén enthusiastically encouraged artists to broaden their techniques and stop “wasting their time and talent on oil-painting”, he proclaimed an important shift in art making.

*My very modest dream is to be able to gather round me a number of workshops in different artistic fields, to produce tapestries and stained glass, carve furniture, print wallpaper, make ceramics, do metal embossing and so on. I would be the absolute ruler and take on as many of my artist friends as possible. It’s painful to see so many of them wasting their time and talent on everlasting oil-painting.*

*(Axel Gallén to Ida Aspelin, 27.10.1896)*

A particular reaction to this urbanisation was the interesting end-of-the-century phenomenon of the artist communities set up in many European countries. Finland witnessed the construction of several artist’s homes based on *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Tolstoyan ideals. Prime examples of complete works of art included a number of studio-homes built on the guiding principle that every detail should be designed by the artist or be the product of his own labour. As Ritva Wäre’s 1991 doctoral thesis *Rakennettu Suomalaisuus* (Finnish character in architecture) has shown, the designs reflect influences from several quarters. In Paris artists had seen houses for rent with studios two-storeys high. In Finland they had studied pictures of English country houses with similar features and great open fireplaces in the British magazine *The Studio*. The studio homes were sited outside Helsinki, far from the busy – and to an artist perhaps oppressive – life of the city. Artists preferred to live close to unspoiled nature and real Finnish people.

The first to erect a house based on these principles was the sculptor Emil Wikström (1864–1942), who in 1893 erected a lakeside log-built studio home called

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255 See e.g. Karvon-Kannas 1996, 104-111.
Visavuori in Sääksmäki. He was soon followed by Gallén, whose Kalela was built in 1895 at Ruovesi, also on a lake.259 Halonen in turn built his log house Halosenniemi as a complete work of art on Lake Tuusula from where it was much easier to get to Helsinki. The painter Järnefelt and the composer Jean Sibelius also built houses in Tuusula, close to the Halonens.260 In spring 1898 Pekka Halonen wrote to his friend Emil Wikström: “In my evening prayers I still ask the Creator not to punish good folk to suffer a foretaste of hell by forcing them here on earth to live in Helsinki, the hotbed of everything prosaic and ugly...There’s nothing here to help the artist. On the contrary, everything we see and hear is poison to art. We are not gods, able to create art out of nothing.”261 The same year Halonen moved some 30 km north of Helsinki, to Tuusula where in a few years he built a magnificent wilderness studio there that he called Halosenniemi, or Halonen headland. Halonen’s own memories of the building process were that “as folk in art circles were in a frenzy of house building just then – Wikström in Visavuori, Gallén in Ruovesi – I started heaving rocks around too. But it was slow going, because it all had to be done on bank loans. Still, in the end it was finished (...)”262

It is important to note that in reality these were modern communal projects where wives and family members also made an important contribution to the buildings, furnishings and handicrafts. The huge Halosenniemi log house outside Helsinki, for instance, is a complete work of art produced by many members of the extensive, craft-oriented Halonen family.263 Gallén’s wife, in turn, used many of her husband’s designs to weave and embroider cushions and wall-hangings. Riitta Konttinen (2001) believes that it was the handicrafts produced by Blomstedt’s wife, Gertrud that first attracted her husband to the industrial arts.264 Art handicrafts became the couple’s shared interest and Gertrud implemented many of the picture weaves designed by her husband.265 Louis Sparre, who was Studio magazine’s correspondent in Finland and founder of the arts and crafts Iris factory, introduced Blomstedt to

259 Emil Wikström’s ‘Visavuori’ is in Sääksmäki (the original 1893 building burned down, a new main building was completed 1902 and separate studio, 1903). Axel Gallén, who in 1907 changed his name to the Finnish form Akseli Gallen-Kallela, had his ‘Kalela’ built in Ruovesi in 1895. Pekka Halonen’s ‘Halosenniemi’ was completed in winter 1902-03. See Rinta-aho 2008, 125-130.

260 Eero Järnefelt had the architect Unso Nyström design him a studio home that he called ‘Suviranta’ and which was completed in 1901. Järnefelt and his family lived there all year round until 1917 when they moved to Helsinki, thereafter using the house only in summer and on special occasions. ‘Ainola’ was the home of Jean Sibelius and his wife Aino. The building close to Lake Tuusula designed by the architect Lars Sonck was completed in 1903. Sibelius died at Ainola in 1957 and is buried in the garden.

261 Pekka Halonen to Emil Wikström 15.3.1898 Helsinki. Helsinki University Library.

262 Interview with Pekka Halonen 23.9.1925 Helsingin Sanomat.

263 Pekka Halonen’s brother Antti was trained as a carpenter and acted as the general construction supervisor for Halosenniemi. Their sculptor cousin Arttu crafted the doors for ovens and fireplaces. Rinta-aho 2008, 123-131.


265 Tirranen 1945, 42.
the ideas of the British arts and crafts movement and recommended him to the 
Friends of Finnish Handicraft as artistic adviser. This was an important shift in 
Finnish art since an established artist was officially hired to oversee production. 
After that many other artists also designed patterns for arts and crafts. The artists’ 
main idea was to create fitting frameworks for their paintings and sculptures in 
which house, furnishings, ceramics and handicrafts all blended to form a unique 
aesthetic setting. The teachings of the English magazine *The Studio* and the arts 
and crafts movement in general won wide support among Finnish artists. It is also 
interesting to note how little the educational ideas behind their rural creations 
differed from those of John Ruskin and William Morris in respect of the uplifting 
and instructive influence of an aesthetic environment.

There were also other major changes in the artists’ social and professional scene. 
The convergence of art and literature in forging a new model of aesthetics seemed 
clear to critics as the first theoretical formulations of the symbolist system began to 
emerge. Rodolphe Rapetti (2005) notes that two conjunctural developments became 
crucial at this point; first the liberalisation of exhibition systems and second the 
rapid increase in symbolist publications. Parallel to official, government-sponsored 
exhibitions, a series of private exhibition initiatives arose, designed to circumvent the 
academy. The spread of artistic groupings and societies in the 1890s progressively 
rendered obsolete the traditional system of education and exhibition. A reaction 
to this in Finland were the Artists’ Society exhibitions administrated by artists 
which began in autumn 1891 while the illustrated publications *Nuori Suomi* (Young 
Finland) and *Ateneum* were both designed by artists and included many translated 
articles on European art.

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267 Ruskin preached a ‘gospel of beauty’ and argued for a new economic ethic and the creative value of handicrafts. 
Morris in turn was the guiding light of the Arts and Crafts movement, whose socialist views on educating 
the nation through art also appealed to many Finnish artists, although the latters’ thinking did not extend 
to socialism, as in Sweden, but rather to popular education and national awakening.

268 Rapetti 2005, 15-17. For example, the Belgian *Les XX*, which was founded already in 1883 and later in the 
Germanic lands, the secessionist phenomenon. In Munich a hundred artists united in 1892 to form the first 
Sezession.

269 A group of Finnish patriotically-minded artists, writers, poets and academics called Young Finland founded 
a circle which in 1886 launched a newspaper *Päivälehti*, a predecessor of *Helsingin Sanomat*. The paper’s 
founders, Juhani Aho, Eero Erkko and Arvid Järnefelt, were young radicals of the day who wanted to foster 
democratic and liberal developments in Finnish society. *Päivälehti* was suppressed in the summer of 1904. 
From the outset, censorship exercised by the Russian authorities had made editorial work difficult and the 
paper had suffered an increasing number of sanctions. Among other things, its Editor-in-Chief, Eero Erkko, 
was dismissed from his position and exiled from Finland. [www.payvalehdemuseo.fi/permanent-exhibition. 
html](http://www.paivalehdemuseo.fi/permanent-exhibition.html)
The Kalevala’s nostalgic voyage

During the 1890s, the Finnish Epic Kalevala was unquestionably a prime source of artistic inspiration. The material was collected by philologist Elias Lönnrot and it was a work of folk poetry, of oral culture.²⁷⁰ The age-old pagan tradition of runesinging was to inspire artists in all fields. Ever since the competition to illustrate the first Kalevala in 1885 scholars and artists had pondered the importance of stylistic approach in depicting the ‘Kalevala world’.²⁷¹ After all, this meant illustrating epic and mythological events and heroes and characters with supernatural, virtually divine, powers. The debate focussed on stylistic issues and the problem of anchoring the historical in the ethnographical. For artists in particular, the key issue became how to depict the Kalevala world and the people in it. The rules agreed on for the competition urged them to aim at naturalism, “...in order to attain complete authenticity in buildings, clothing and other elements, competitors should take account of what can be found in well-known works and general collections”. This clearly means that the works also had to illustrate Finnish history, or at least to construct a historical, mythical past based on objects and information in ethnographical collections.²⁷² Expeditions made to Karelia by artists and ethnographers and the pioneering search made in the 1880s by the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts for the roots of the ‘Finnish style’ in ancient Karelia had also revealed ornamentation influenced by Byzantium.²⁷³ Artists, composers and architects all strove to find in the spirit of the ancient Kalevala something of the mystical past and ‘golden age’ that they believed had once existed and which was now to be given new life in their works. It was an epic work comparable to Homer’s Iliad and Scotland’s Ossian Legend while its great hero Väinämöinen could be compared to Apollo and Orpheus.²⁷⁴

The Kalevala’s nostalgic voyage of discovery into Finland’s primeval folk culture left its mark on the visual arts in many ways and also led Finnish artists into new pastures. Decorative art and the total work of art were fresh concepts pondered by all Finland’s turn-of-the-century artists, not merely those who actually depicted scenes from the Kalevala. In the 1890s the boundaries between what had been strictly separate art forms were broken down and, thanks to internationally active artists and composers, Finnish art enjoyed a period described as “golden age”. This was also a time marked by a widening of the whole ‘art’ concept and a new respect for traditional Finnish handicrafts. A fresh awareness of nationality and

²⁷⁰ Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) was a Finnish philologist and collector of traditional Finnish oral poetry. He is best known for composing the Kalevala, the national epic compiled from national folklore (first published in 1835).
²⁷¹ Van der Hoeven 2009, 48-50.
²⁷³ The Friends of Finnish Handicraft organization was founded in 1879 on the initiative of Jac. Ahrenberg and most of all artist Fanny Churberg.
better understanding of its true nature also changed the role played by Finnish artists; they became a more diversified creative element that took a stand on social affairs and brought Finnish art to international consciousness by both creating works of art and introducing beauty into the everyday environment. But without the international exchange through travel, periodicals, press and literature of the modern world this period would not have been so fruitful. The diversity of modern art and the socio-historical developments in Europe coincided with a situation in Finnish art where all talented artists were given an education and the possibility to travel and study in international art centres such as Paris, Brittany, Rome, Florence, Munich and Berlin. Without this and the political ambience the advance of Finnish arts would never have taken place.

On a more abstract level collaboration between artists in different fields, Baudelaire’s ideas of Correspondance, led Finnish artists to cross thresholds and create something new and unique. One impulse came from music and the Wagnerian compositions produced in the early 1880s by Robert Kajanus (1856–1933) on key themes found in Finnish mythology. 275 After that, it was the young Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) who seized upon folk poetry themes and also inherited Kajanus’ position as national composer. In his symphonic poems, the folk poetry tales of Kullervo (1892) and Lemminkäinen (1896) took on a completely new kind of ‘Finnish tone’. The highly sensuous musical world of Sibelius expressed the powerful essence and unity of ancient Finnish culture and nature. Such melodies also correspond to the paintings of the composer’s good friend, Axel Gallén. 276 Indeed, the latter’s Lemminkäinen’s Mother (1987, fig. 10) was originally called Lemminkäinen in Tuonela, after the second movement of Sibelius’ Lemminkäinen Suite. Gallén, Kajanus and Sibelius were thus leading members of a group of Finnish-minded artists amongst whom poetry, music and art overlapped in accordance with the symbolist ideal. The prime example of collaboration was the Finnish pavilion, the first performance of Sibelius’ Finlandia and the works shown in the major art exhibition that told Finland’s story exceptionally comprehensively. 277

As in other countries seeking independence, artists founded their work on what was ‘native’ to them. The life of ordinary, rural people, mythological themes and the scenery of the homeland were typically subjects they wanted to show, for instance at France’s annual Salon, then the focal point of the European art world. However, the more mythical works were not always so enthusiastically received. Narratives from the Kalevala depicted in a naturalist manner were not easy for foreign audiences to understand or appreciate. Some French critics even failed to understand that

275 These orchestral works were also performed abroad with Kajanus himself conducting (The Death of Kullervo in Leipzig in 1881 and Aino in Berlin in 1890).


277 See e.g. Smeds 1996, 324.
the subject was mythological, it was seen as a historical scene, or still worse, it was thought to depict Finnish life, its “backwoodness” clashing with the ‘modern’ they actually wanted to show. It became clear that the mimetic approach of naturalism was not the right ‘language’, the right mode for depicting mythological narrative. Halonen complains in a letter of the cool reception given to Gallén’s version of *The Aino Myth* (1891): “The Salon is over. There was a lot of bad stuff, and not much good. - - Of course Gallén stands out, though naturally the French can’t understand him. It’s a waste of time for Scandinavians to send works here, because they’re too good.”

While the work received poor reviews in the Spring Salon of 1892, the critique sparked off an important discourse on the possibilities and problems of depicting Kalevala’s mythological narratives. On the other hand, Halonen’s letter makes clear the importance he attached to Scandinavian art as a counterbalance to the highly-finished, old-fashioned academic art in the Salon.

But it was not only the French who failed to understand these mythical scenes. Later, a similar problem arose in Scandinavia when Gallén’s *The Forging of the Sampo* (1893) was shown in Stockholm in 1897. The audience thought it depicted a fire in the forest. This embarrassing fact was written about in the Finnish press. It was clear that they needed to seek a new approach to their ‘holy art’. But what was this ‘right language’ or the ‘right vocabulary’? Or the new approach to mythological art depicted in a contemporary, modern manner? It was not the classicising, academic or naturalistic mode. The answer lay in Baudelairean ideology which praised ancient and primitive art as the primary source of modern art.

At the same time, in 1890–91, Finnish artists came to know Parisian Symbolism and the new admiration for decorative art. Artists had come into contact with the new movement in art that rejected the criteria of imitation of nature and objective observation of reality. Symbolism brought a new conception of the power of decorative art to the consciousness of Finnish artists. The pursuit of a decorative art, or more superficially, of an ornamental stylisation, was linked with a desire to create an art that affected viewers more profoundly than had been possible with the copying of objects from nature. The more liberal view of what made art and the new appreciation of Finland’s strong handicraft tradition also altered the artists’ role; they became creators of more diversified art forms that brought beauty into people’s everyday lives. It was understood that Finland’s political and cultural situation needed its artists to create a grand art comparable to that of any other European country. Only after this did they become interested in the new possibilities that Early Renaissance and archaic art were to offer – particularly the synthetist

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278 *The Aino Myth* II (final version) 1891.
279 Pekka Halonen’s letter to Eero Järnefelt, Paris, rue Racine, 12.5.1892, CAA.
280 Konttinen 2001, 164.
approach to painting. This was not the situation in Finland alone but constituted a much larger phenomenon in Europe. Towards the end of the nineteenth century European artists began to express a new, profound interest in their unique local pasts and cultural heritages. This growing sense of national identity prompted a major flowering of nationalist debate on the fast-disappearing regional cultures of Europe. This debate was largely shaped by the desire of a number of countries for cultural, artistic, and ultimately social and economic independence.

It is clear that at the end of the nineteenth century national mythological literature and national epics, such as the *Kalevala* in Finland or the *Cuchulainn* legend in Ireland and Ossian legends in Scotland, became major vehicles of cultural expression and created some of the most important art of the age. Several of the most important artists of the period were also key figures in this movement. They worked across all artistic media from small-scale traditional domestic crafts and large-scale design to major schemes of architecture. Rather than produce easel-painting, these artists frequently undertook monumental programmes of mural decoration or stained glass because of the social implications this public art held. For those countries that had not yet achieved their dream of sovereignty it became imperative to promote their unique distinctive cultural present as unbroken with the past. This was particularly important for those small nations on the northern, eastern and western fringes of Europe and especially for those that had been conquered and divided by powerful neighbours.

Although it is well-known that countries on the fringes of Europe’s borders such as Finland, Norway, Scotland, Ireland, Poland and Hungary had unique and far-reaching cultural renaissances in the form of a ‘national revival’, it is less known that although each country was distinctive they all had much in common. Although direct connections existed between Finnish and Hungarian or Irish and Scottish artists, several other factors contributed to a largely undocumented system of interaction and exchange from the educational and exhibiting opportunities in St-Petersburg, Paris, London, Berlin and Vienna; the foundation of national collections of museums and research into vernacular and folk cultures and the rise of mythology and legendary history in literature and music to the multitude of localised ‘national’ exhibitions of contemporary art and new forms of integrated art and architecture in various local manifestations of the Gesamtkunstwerk and the major role played by national displays at the International Exhibitions and World Fairs of the period. It

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281 Sheehy 1980, 37, 184-185.
282 Relations between Finland and Hungary grew stronger during the Paris World Fair in 1900, and, for instance, Axel Gallén had close contacts with people in the Hungarian art world. Finnish artists also had their own section at an international exhibition in Budapest in 1907, and works were bought for the Hungarian National Museum, for instance. Gallén won a gold medal for his *Defence of the Sampo* (1896). See Karvonen-Kannas 2004, 100-110.
is within this Europe-wide ‘revival’ movement that the idea of a renewal of art and art as a cornerstone of modern society was forged. The influence of unique, local, artistic traditions found their fullest expression in indigenous folk art forms and, although the globalising industrial revolution threatened many such folk traditions with extinction, at the heart of the revivals movement was a desire to refine art and society for the modern age.

As Michelle Facos (2003) points out, in Sweden, the former native land of Finland, the systematic use of the word fosterlandskärlek [literally “love of native land”] instead of patriotism in works seeking to encourage a distinct concept of Swedishness is significant since it indicated the benign character of Swedish national identity. In Swedish, as in other languages, the word “patriotism” contained a hint of xenophobia and even militarism, whereas fosterlandskärlek embodied a sense of nostalgia and geographical rootedness. It is to this benign variant that the word “patriotism” will refer in the following discussion. By the 1890s, the first patriotically-educated generation of the Nordic countries had reached maturity and it was no coincidence that it was at this time that the national romantic movement in music, art, and literature emerged. Tradition, ritual, history, and landscape became central themes for Nordic artists, who recognised in them vehicles for promoting a generic national identity grounded in the collective past and rooted in the landscape and in social practice.

This broader view of art meant a particular interest in and admiration of the craftsmanship of the Middle Ages and its individualism was converted into Modernism. As a group, nationally-inclined artists in Finland, Norway and Sweden were convinced of the affectivity of artworks. Profoundly influenced by the theories of William Morris and Leo Tolstoy, they believed that an individual’s surroundings directly affected his values, personality, and ideas. Furthermore, they felt that artists (in the broadest sense) had a responsibility to shape the future of their society and to guide it towards a future characterised by freedom, equality, and solidarity. Indeed the words liberté, égalité, fraternité, which embodied French revolutionary republican ideals, were inscribed on a wall in the home of the Swedish artist Carl Larsson.

In Finland however, the political situation was very different. The

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283 From 1100 to 1809 Finland was under Swedish rule. In the 18th century, wars between Sweden and Russia led twice to the occupation of Finland by Russian forces, wars known to the Finns as the Greater Wrath (1714–1721) and the Lesser Wrath (1742–1743). On 29 March 1809, having been taken over by the armies of Alexander I of Russia in the Finnish War, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire until the end of 1917.

284 Facos 2003, 229-230.

285 In Sweden Hugo Alén composed symphonic works based on indigenous folk melodies, Karl Nordström and Richard Bergh painted, and Verner von Heidenstam and August Strindberg wrote works evoking the historic and prehistoric past in a manner that combined scholarly veracity with deep nostalgia. Facos 2003, 230.

286 They were, in addition, the motto of Sweden’s Social Democratic Party (SDP), the platform of which was actively supported by most national romantic painters. Evidence for this is found in the fact that the organisation
comradeship and mutual understanding among artists were strengthened in the political upheaval of the 1890s as Russian nationalists strove to abolish Finnish autonomy. As the decade neared its end, the political climate in the autonomous Grand Duchy grew increasingly oppressive. Various areas of life fell prey to rapid modernisation while, at the same time, antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Kalevala were nostalgically admired.

“Art is at the crossroads now” 287

At the time of Symbolism, many Finnish artists were also adopting new, modern ideas of colour, philosophies and practice in their art as well. Finnish art historians have usually been keen to categorise these artists as either National Romantics or Symbolists. However, what I consider interesting is that, when looked at from the point of view of colour, all this changes and gives new perspectives on the context and influences even though the artists and and their iconic works are well-known. In my opinion, the big difference from European national romantic art is that Finnish artists decided to choose the modern, synthetist form for their mythological and symbolist art. For instance, the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha and many others made a stylistic turn from the curvy and decadent Art Nouveau towards a naturalistic approach because it was considered more appropriate for the national and cultural cause. But, for Finnish artists like Gallén and Halonen, the naturalistic approach did not suit their concept of the new art. They consciously chose a more modern mode for their Kalevala-inspired art which took its form from the monumental art of the primitive periods such as Egyptian and especially Early Renaissance art which they studied in the Louvre and later in Italy. Adopting “archaic” techniques like tempera and colours resembling fresco painting, the artists aspired to something eternal and permanent.288

What the critic Édouard Rod from the Gazette des Beaux-Arts described as the champions of the new generation of artists in the Champs-de-Mars exhibition of 1891 is revealing. He first mentions Puvis de Chavannes as the most influential artist and notices the overall harmony of his mystical works. – “Everywhere in the exhibition one can see that there is something from Puvis de Chavannes and something from Whistler.”289 In Finland after the strong tradition of Naturalism

established by national romantic artists in 1886, the Artists’ Association, adopted a red flag, similar to that of the SDP, as their own and that they regularly marched in the SDP’s May Day parade for working-class solidarity. Facos 2003, 230.

287 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter 9.11.1891. CAA.
and its mimetic representation to the ascetic or synthetic colours constituted an entirely new approach to art. I will argue that the process towards ‘non-naturalistic colour’ and its symbolic impact on a painting marked a decisive break from the long tradition, not only in Finnish but in all Western art.

*Art is at the crossroads now, the new representatives of the new art are Puvis de Chavannes, and Manet. It looks so terrible, all the figures are so simplified, like Assyrian art, and painted with black contours and painted with one colour.* - - *A couple of days ago I was in the Luxembourg where they have modern masters. - - There was this painting by Manet [Olympia] it was the same new style like [Puvis de] Chavannes’s but I couldn’t understand it at all. - - If this is art I should become a baker. No one but Enckell admires it. It is this that is called art for the future, it makes me cry.* - - 290

These were the shocked words of the young Blomstedt writing, in his confusion, a letter home in November 1891. The letter clearly shows the two new artists who were to influence many artists in Finland. It did not take long for Blomstedt to reverse his opinion completely and he soon became an ardent admirer of the ‘new art’.

This artistic environment was already established when Magnus Enckell enrolled at the Académie Julian in spring 1890.291 After only a couple of months he wrote home, stunned by the new exciting, mystical art form which had consumed the whole of Paris at that time. “One cannot escape the new philosophy, a completely new art form has been born. It is everywhere; in the cafés, on the streets in every conversation...”.292 Enckell came to realise that Symbolism was more than just a new idiom in painting: it was a new philosophy of life that was reflected in the various fields of art which required a thorough change in habit and thinking.

In Paris, Enckell, like many other Finnish artists, first ended up in the Scandinavian circles of Paris and at the “Hôtel des Scandinaves” where Halonen was also living. Working at the Académie Julian was demanding and consisted mainly of painting from live models, something which held a particular appeal for Enckell. His first six months in Paris were highly significant for his development as an artist: the flood of new influences was considerable but before the onset of summer the young artist was suffering from depression and a lack of confidence. It was around this time that he painted the small, brown-toned *Self-portrait* (1891).

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290 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter 9.11.1891. CAA
292 Puokka 1949, 57.
which became the first example of his new symbolist art,\textsuperscript{293} and his first colour ascetic work.

So what was the environment in 1894 in Montparnasse where Blomstedt and Halonen lived and worked? The building, which expanded to the courtyard in which Halonen lived and worked, was full of atelier-apartments. Later the address became even better-known when it was occupied by Picasso and his friends.\textsuperscript{294} The boulevards were only one part of a comprehensive system of urban planning that included central markets, bridges, sewers, water supply, the Opéra and other cultural palaces, as well as a great network of parks. The new construction wrecked hundreds of buildings, displaced uncounted thousands of people and destroyed entire neighbourhoods that had lasted for centuries. But, for the first time in its history, it opened up the entire city to all its inhabitants. It was now possible to move not only within neighbourhoods, but through them. After centuries of life as a cluster of isolated cells Paris was finally becoming a unified physical and human space.\textsuperscript{295} And in the 1890s the city had profoundly changed and Finnish artists lived and experienced urban life to the fullest.

From 1890 to 1906 Finnish art was linked more closely than before to international art. Artists like Blomstedt, Gallén, Halonen, Enckell, Thesleff and Schjerfbeck all studied in Paris and became familiar with the new ideas on colour. In 1894 Blomstedt and Halonen were devoted pupils of Paul Gauguin. Enckell occupied himself with Parisian Symbolism while Thesleff was more fascinated by the monumental, tonal art of Puvis de Chavannes and the soft monochrome art of Carrière. From 1894 onwards Schjerbeck’s delicate, ascetic colours link her to the same group, before her so called “modernist period”. During 1890s Schjerbeck’s palette changes to delicate, ascetic tones and the subjects of her paintings are wrapped in greyish shimmer. In my opinion, this links her to the group of artists who based their art on changes of colour. In each of these cases reduced colours, synthetist or ascetic, were advancing the process towards the simplification of the surface. This will be studied in part II of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{293} Saraja-Korte 1966, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{294} Halonen lived at 9 rue Campagne-Première throughout his stay in Paris in 1894. Some hundred studios had been built at this address by the architect Taberlet with building materials from the World Exhibition of 1889. Gutman-Hanhivaara 2008, 99, 101.

\textsuperscript{295} Berman 1997, 150-151.
2. SOURCES OF COLOUR

This great symphony of today, which is an eternal variation of the symphony of yesterday, this succession of melodies whose variety ever issues from the infinite, this complex hymn is called colour.

(Baudelaire on Delacroix, Salon of 1846)\(^{296}\)

From the 1860s onwards the writings on the arts of Charles Baudelaire powerfully influenced the aesthetic theories of many artists and critics in much the same way as his poetics and poetry were at the root of Symbolism in literature. Baudelaire drew his principal theories from mainstream romantic aesthetics. Newspaper clippings of his Salon reviews circulated among the Symbolists;\(^{297}\) the poet Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) reportedly carried one in his coat pocket and quoted from Baudelaire’s 1859 Salon review, praising the older poet’s imaginative play of associations: “(The imagination) is the analysis, it is the synthesis... It has created... the analogy and the metaphor... it produces the sensation of the new.”\(^{298}\) Following Baudelaire’s death in 1867 his aesthetics became even more widely known with the publication of much of his literary and artistic criticism as well as much of his poetry.\(^{299}\)

Symbolism represented a necessary response to the single-track approach of Naturalism which replicated the material world and depicted human existence from a rationalist point of view. Symbolists believed that the artist’s unconscious provided access to ‘the world of ideas’, and at the same time to a clearer vision than was granted to other beings.\(^{300}\) Baudelaire placed Plato’s doctrine of ideas and Emmanuel Swedenborg’s correspondences on an aesthetic plane and opened

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\(^{296}\) Baudelaire’s self-contained essay on colour forms section III of his *Salon de 1846*, where it is preceded by a discussion of the nature of Romanticism and followed by a tribute to the work of Delacroix. The *Salon de 1864* was originally published as a separate pamphlet under the name Baudelaire Dufays, Paris 1864. Baudelaire 1964, 48-52.

\(^{297}\) The Salons were vast juried exhibitions of works by living French and foreign artists held annually or biennially in Paris. Although the juries were shielded from governmental pressure by a series of reforms, they reflected official taste through most of the nineteenth century. Dorra 1994, 1, 315.


\(^{300}\) Together with Plato’s *Ideas* and Plotinus’s ecstasy theory, Swedenborg’s thinking on correspondence came to be the third pillar on which symbolist theory was founded. The eighteenth-century Swede Emanuel Swedenborg had great influence on ideas of mysticism at the end of the century and, via Baudelaire, also on the formulation of symbolist theory. The Swedenborg renaissance was made possible by the various new translations of his original Latin works published at the end of the nineteenth century. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 31–34, 60.
up to the next generation the possibilities for poetic expression they created. It was Baudelaire who was responsible for the most lucid perceptions of the symbolist concept of art and his influence cannot be underrated.\(^{301}\) As Rapetti (2005) points out, there were two overriding new ideas which were to form the cornerstones of Symbolism. First were Baudelaire’s theories of Correspondence and synaesthesia. Second was the Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), created by Richard Wagner (1813–1883), which inspired artists to break the boundaries of the arts. As Émile Hennequin wrote in 1885: “Wagner’s aesthetic is a doctrine of condensation. It makes a principle out of the need to encourage all arts to collaborate in generating a supreme genre, musical drama.”\(^{302}\) A year later, in 1886, the poet Jean Moréas (1856–1910) published “The Manifesto of Symbolism” in Le Figaro. Symbolism was an idealist, literary and artistic movement. The references, in various cultural spheres, were Swedenborg, Wagner, Edgar Allan Poe, the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris. Certain poems by the most important symbolist poets, such as Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé (1841–1898) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), came in a cascade of metaphors. To show detachment from the “slice of life” of Naturalism and from the water and sunlight reflections of Impressionism, Mallarmé sets the allusion against the description; more generally speaking, the symbol is set up against the exact reproduction of the outer world. The symbol, according to Maeterlinck, could “be unconscious, be brought forth unbeknown to the poet and often in spite of him, and nearly always reach far beyond his thoughts”. In this it differs from allegory, which addresses itself to reason.\(^{303}\) As this study will later show the new ideas on non-mimetic colour reflected the aesthetics of Symbolism.

Thus the profile of symbolist art as a flight of fancy arising out of the creative imagination of artists’ disassociation with everyday life is misleading, since the escapism embraced by artists was in fact precipitated by the analysis and experience of current, real life. Symbolists had to work with actual images identifiably and believably delineated, but also had to avoid the hyper-descriptive art or literature that had become the accepted fare of the Naturalists who had gone before them. They also needed to adjust and, to a certain degree, condense and synthesise their language, but as Hirsh (2004) notes, in this way the Symbolists clearly missed the avant-garde breakthrough in formal non-objective language that would soon, in part due to their own influence, succeed them. In an interview in 1891, Mallarmé expressed this in a much more poetic way, resorting to dual sources without fully following either the style or the image:

\(^{301}\) Sarajas-Korte 1966, 33.
\(^{303}\) Pierre 1994, 151.
To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which derives from the pleasure of step-by-step discovery; to suggest, that is the dream. It is the perfect use of this mystery that constitutes the symbol: to evoke an object little by little, so as to bring to light a state of the soul or, inversely, to choose an object and bring out of it a state of the soul through a series of unravellings.304

Thus, as deliberately abstruse as it usually is, the true symbolist work inevitably includes references to its own times; as esoteric as they seemed to be, artists inevitably responded to the immense pressures of the changing society of which they were a part.305

Although the symbolist manifesto of Moréas was confusing and remained unclear and ambiguous to the general public, Symbolism’s most important message was that, in art, the meaning of concrete phenomena was merely the expression of their esoteric links to the world of ideas. Already prior to the formulation of the theory of symbolist art, poets had, in several contexts, presented their own definitions of the basic principles of symbolist poetry. It is important to note that their essays, critics and poetry frequently spread their ideas of Symbolism more widely than the Moréas manifesto.306

Moreover, the multi-structural and diverse significances which point to references in the texts opened readers’ minds to ambiguous art. Baudelaire’s concept of art provided artists with a direct sign as to what made a painting symbolist; not the subject but the symbol, the hidden sign behind it.

After Baudelaire, around the end of the nineteenth century, the art critic G.-Albert Aurier (1865–1892) became a prominent influence on artists and on the new concept of art. Patricia Townley Mathews’s study of Aurier’s Symbolist Art Criticism and Theory (1986) shows well how his theory developed systematically and how he was the first to recognise and define the wide ranging aesthetic of the (symbolist) artists such as Gauguin, van Gogh and Carrière.307 Although Aurier died young in 1892, his writings and theories were widely read long after his death.308 As Sarajas-Korte (1966) demonstrates in her dissertation on the sources of Symbolism, a work of art could not leave confusion as to the value of the objects, i.e. the signs, depicted, and the spectator had to be brought to a state of mind in which he or she did not doubt the symbolic power of what they depicted. The objects in themselves had no value.

306 Sarajas-Korte 1966, 34.
308 Within a year of Aurier’s death, a collection of his critical and literary writings appeared, Oeuvres posthumes, edited by his friend Remy de Gourmont and published in Mercure de France, Paris 1893.
but were mere words, with no other meaning. For this reason, in Aurier’s view, the unconditional task of the artist was to choose between the multiplicity of Nature; to simplify, to utilise only general and significant lines, forms and colour. The artist had the right to exaggerate, to muffle and deform, not only in accordance with his or her own viewpoint but also in order to clarify the idea the artist sought. As this study acclaims, to simplify, exaggerate and deform was the basic idea when artists started to manipulate their palettes to either ascetic or synthetist. Moreover, it was important that Aurier’s theory gave the artist the possibility to make his or her own choice, in fact demanded this. His theory is a guide only to that which should not be painted. Choice of subject was free but painting should have sufficient symbolic power to allow the spectator to participate in the world of ideas. Aurier’s theory emphasises the independent, abstract existence of a work of art. It was born of the spirit, was part of true existence and formed a new synthesis made up of the spirit of the artist and the spirit of Nature. It is important to note how Aurier’s emphasis on purity and reduction led to the idea of “pure painting”. This concept, current in art criticism after the turn of the century and well into the 1960s, has its roots in the symbolist notion of purity through formal means. But it should be stressed that for Aurier and artists at the time, formal means should bear universal content rather than just depict human situations. This was of profound interest and it needed a new visual language.

Although Aurier’s vision was shared mainly in symbolist circles, it is interesting to note how Joseph Sloane (1973) uses it to find new means of expressing that difficult concept, “art for art’s sake”, which in nineteenth-century critical literature around the time of Manet and Whistler, seems to “have referred to an emphasis on technique”. Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski (1978) defines it as the transfer of “objective certainty” from “external reality” to the medium. Whistler and Manet may not be considered as Symbolists but it is clear that with the Symbolists they shared a deep and profound interest in emphasis on technique and transfer to the medium – more precisely to colour, which manifests in the paintings, writings and criticisms of this period from the 1860s to the early 1900s.

It should be noted that not all symbolist or modern art was innovative and ‘modern’ in technique or in use of colour. Modern subject matter was adopted by many artists whose paintings were by no means ‘modern’. This is also true in

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313 Callen 2000, 1.
symbolist art. The leader of the Rosicrucians, Joséphin Péladan (1859–1918), had declared that decorative and symbolist works were welcome at his Rose + Croix salon; in conformity with his conditions, he rejected works in which “the proportions of the human body, the laws of perspective and technical rulings were unscrupulously violated.” In his rules, Péladan makes it possible to create “colour harmony” in the style of Leonardo, which must be seen as referring primarily to a mimetic, more ‘natural colour’ palette: his criteria for acceptable art were extremely old-fashioned and restrictive.314 Greater differences between Aurier’s theory and Péladan’s view were the choices of subject at a basic level. Whereas Baudelaire considered each daily image to have symbolic value Péladan’s intention was to guide artists back to Renaissance-style tasks, to catholic, mystic legends, myths, allegories and grand poetic subjects. Everything else – for example history painting, military subjects, contemporary subjects and portraits – was considered forbidden.315 Artists were to direct their gaze solely to the source of mimetic, standardised beauty. One example of Symbolism’s very different modes is Péladan’s “Rosicrucian aesthetic” favouring the smooth chiaroscuro, polished catholic ideal and mysticism which can be seen from the point of view of colour, as opposed to non-mimetic ascetic or synthetist colour. It seems that these new colour concepts and techniques used in symbolist and modern art may thus be considered a colour tradition developed specifically in the spirit of Aurier and Baudelaire.

Although a turn in the concepts of art took place away from the realistic and analytical logic of continuity towards a symbolist logic in which associations, parallelisms and synthetist combinations provide a dreamlike or ‘musical’ structure, turn-of-the-century Symbolism was not formulated merely as a refutation of Naturalism. While Naturalism’s interest in social reality did, in fact, fade, its psychological orientation – the study of the secret depths of the human mind – continued in turn-of-the-century Symbolism.316 It is crucial to note that the bipolarisation of this Symbolism could already be seen in the early 1890s and that around the same catchwords – idea, symbol, mystery, synthesis – two opposing paths grew up, which different artists distorted and changed. Within the symbolist movement an independent desire for a bold renewal of art emerged alongside the affected pursuit of old stylistic ideals. Considered from this standpoint we can see that in the 1890s colour ascetism fell primarily within the former innovative circle of Symbolism. It is also important to note that Synthetism and synthetist colour as such are not the equivalent of Symbolism. This study considers Synthetism rather

314 Published i.a. in Péladan Salon de la Rose+Croix, regles et monitoires. Paris 1801; Péladan, Joséphin, Manifesto and Rules of the Salon de la Rose+Croix, Harrison & Wood & Gaiger 1998, 1054-1060.
315 Sarajas-Korte 1966, 45.
316 Lyytikäinen 1998, 11.
as an artistic mode, which can be seen as one of the innovative veins within the symbolist movement.

This study embraces the notion that the afore-mentioned admiration of Ancient and Primitive periods, styles and especially colours is related to Baudelaire’s and later Symbolism’s new pursuit of non-realistic art. This was also connected to a pursuit of musicality and spiritualism; a religious tone or neo-platonic awareness spurred artists to work on the basis of true art. In the following chapters I will show where artists could have found the sources of their colour ascetic or synthetist art. As I hope to establish in this part of the study, the great admiration of archaic art, referring to past, was a new mode for historicity of the modern period. These concepts, as we will see, were adopted during the nineteenth century by many artists – and not only by those referred to as Symbolists.

2.1 THE PURSUIT OF ARCHAIC AND TIMELESS ART

In investigating colour ascetism and synthetist colour in Finnish and European art it has become clear that three issues were relevant to the artists in question. First was the Baudelairean admiration of decorative, archaic art, which here mostly means the ancient art of Mesopotamia and Egypt that could be seen in the Louvre or in the museums in Europe. The second source of inspiration was mainly the paintings and frescoes of Early Renaissance, in particular the art of Sandro Botticelli and Fra Angelico. Finnish artists saw their art first in the Louvre, the most admired works there were the Tornabuoni frescoes of Sandro Botticelli. The other was Fra Angelico’s, Le Calvaire, which was acquired by the museum in 1880. Later

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317 In Finland certain art historians, such as Wennervirta, have not connected this admiration to Symbolism at all but, have explained the admiration for Assyrian and Egyptian art as relating to “a longing for man’s eternal realist art tradition.” See e.g. Wennervirta 1950, 11-18.


319 It seems that the admiration of Gauguin and the Nabi Group was concentrated only on the archaic and frescoes, but not on the Old Masters as such.

320 Archaic Art, Archaistic = art which imitates Grecian art of c. 620–500 B.C, or which is art which appears old-fashioned vis à vis its own time, Lucie-Smith 1984, 19. Archaism = the imitation of the style of ancient, generally prehistoric art or in the tradition of the remnants of this which have been preserved. Taiteen pikkujäättäimien 1991, 37.

321 Gauguin, on the other hand, found the ancient Peruvian mummy from the northern Andes (1100-1400) an inspiration to ceramics Oviri 1894-95 and many paintings. Thomson 1997, 86, 186.

322 Botticelli, Venus and the Three Graces Presenting Gifts and Venus and the Liberal Arts with a Young man (possibly Lorenzo Tornabuoni) c.1483-85, were rediscovered in 1873 and brought to the Louvre. See image: Musée du Louvre, Atlas Database of Exhibits <http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=crt_frm_rs&langue=en&initCritere=true> (11.10.2010)

323 Fra Angelico, Le Calvaire, fresco, see image: http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=1183&langue=en
in the 1890s artists also went to Italy to find more of the genuine art their admired. For example, in Florence in the monastery of San Marco and Botticelli in the Uffizi Gallery in the 1890s. Also for some Finnish artists, like Pekka Halonen, the ancient Roman frescoes in Pompeii were held in highest esteem.

The third aspect was admiration of the Old Masters. Here the modern concept of historicity becomes topical. It is interesting that most of the artists who used a colour ascetic palette admired Velázquez particularly for his supreme technique with reduced colours and Zurbarán whose mystical art is totally based on a strict ascetic palette. These Spanish artists were much admired by Édouard Manet, Eugène Carrière and James McNeill Whistler as well as by many other artists. In a Finnish example, Magnus Enckell’s enthusiasm led him to travel to Spain in 1900 and to relate his experiences in the Ateneum review in 1901. From the point of view of colour ascetism, the Dutch painters Frans Hals (c.1580—1666), famous for his use of black colour, and Rembrandt in his later years, were likewise admired and studied closely for their genius but especially for their personified palettes in their portraits. Whistler, Manet and the Finnish artist Helene Schjerfbeck in particular are known to have studied their art and palettes. It is important to note that this admiration was not just a question of copying the style or manner of the Old Masters but also of referring to them by colour as Whistler did from his first Self-Portrait in 1858 to his last Gold and Brown (1896–98). In these self-portraits, by both posing as Rembrandt in Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of the Painter 1872 and by using the palette of Rembrandt he underlined his admiration. Moreover, in referring to Rembrandt’s palette by naming the work Gold and Brown Whistler took referring to a different level, which may be seen as a very modern approach. Another way of referring to Old Masters was to underline timelessness as Carrière and Schjerfbeck (fig. 28) did by ‘blurring time’, or more precisely by linking two time levels in their ascetic paintings through the inclusion, in an otherwise modern painting, of objects, such as armour or a collar, which refer to the 17th century.

It is significant that only in the late eighteenth century did the work and interest of antiquarians and connoisseurs invoke a new idea of the “past as a different

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325 e.g. Några teckningar af Svensk arkitektur and Brev från Spanien, (Some sketches of Spanish architecture, and Letter from Spain) Ateneum, review 1901. National Library of Finland, Helsinki.

326 Whistler: Gold and Brown 1866-98, oil on canvas, 62.4 x 46.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Broun and Gold 1895-1900, oil on canvas, 95.8 x 51.5 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow. Dormont 1994, 284-285.

327 Eugène Carrière: Portrait d’un jeune garcon (Marcel Lacarrièr) 1886, oil on canvas, 172 x 120 cm, Art Institute, Chicago, cat. 207; L'Enfant au plateau (Elise Carrière) 1885, oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, cat. 155; Helene Schjerfbeck Boy Dressed in Armour 1894, oil on canvas, 57 x 41 cm, Art Foundation Merita collection, Helsinki (fig. 28)
realm,” with its own history, separated from the living present. In mid-nineteenth-century works such as Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (1843), the use of the past not only as a comparative guide for but also as a validation of the present was typified. By the latter part of the century, however, a romantic nationalism that celebrated older folk traditions as a key to present strength encouraged new efforts at conservation and reconstruction and an approach to the past that was more emotional than educational. As David Lowenthal points out, even Sigmund Freud used “archaeological metaphors for excavating the psychological past.” This new definition and appreciation led to a new role for “the past” that would offer artists an additional, and even very meaningful, alternative to their troubled, modern present. The notion of “the past as a foreign country” had its origins here. Evidence of this could be found also in the World Fairs, where ‘villages’ of the present displayed current lifestyles of foreign (to Western Europe) places, but where ‘historical villages’ were designed to show established Western nation’s foreign times, e.g., the Old Manchester and Salford Village at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition of 1887 in England, or the Old Paris section at the Paris 1900 exposition. Interestingly, the Finnish Pavilion at the Paris World Fair was the creation of Finnish artists and architects. Although realised in modern Art Nouveau style, it leaned strongly towards ancient Finnish folk culture and to an imagined past of the ancient Finns. By the last quarter of the century, a new tourist industry boomed, not only in big modern cities but also in small historic towns (such as Bruges, a favourite haunt of the Symbolists). And as Sharon Hirsh (2004) points out, when added to the late-century ‘disease of nostalgia’ this new identification of the past as a destination rather than as remembered history was inescapably appealing, especially to the Symbolists, but, as I hope to establish, also to many nineteenth-century European and Finnish artists.

It is rather interesting that the most modern artists of the nineteenth century, such as Manet and Whistler, went searching for new inspiration from the Old Masters, especially for technique and palette. This was not the usual copying and learning but a completely new way of adapting and referring, as equals, to the long tradition of art. But there were certain Masters who were placed on a pedestal. Interestingly one feature common to all the admired artists was, in fact, the colour ascetic palette they used. In the pursuit of timeless art of nineteenth-century artists a number

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328 Lowenthal, xvi.
330 This phrase is borrowed by Lowenthal from L. P. Hartley’s *The Go Between*. Hirsh 2004, 10.
331 Fowle 2012, 115-118.
332 Hirsh 2004, 10.
333 Of course, they admired also for example, Titian, Murillo and other Old Masters, but what is important is that they did not adopt their colours or palettes. Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) may refer to Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* but he did not adopt Titian’s palette, quite the opposite.
of sources cite as the greatest objects of their admiration Francisco de Zurbáran (c.1598–1664) and Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660),\footnote{Also Goya, as we know, was admired by Manet but not by the other artists in question. Helene Schjerfbeck, on the other hand, admired El Greco. I mention only the Old Masters who were commonly admired by these artists.} as different from one another as these two Spanish artists are. A not-so-well-known Spanish artist, Zurbáran, was, even during his own times, very different from his fellow artists such as Velázquez. Zurbáran painted religious subjects in an abstract space, with a strong contrasted palette of white and brown. He had developed a special lightning technique with which he created the mysterious thrill of almost medieval religiosity which attracted French Romantics, Manet, Symbolists and later artists like Braque and Picasso.\footnote{Gállego 1987, 10, 21, 65–67.} His timeless and minimal art emphasised the ethereal spirituality which affected those who appreciated ascetic purity and meditative quality in painting. The fame of \textit{Saint Francis in Meditation} (1635–1640) was spread through prints such as the splendid etching by Alphonse Masson, published in Charles Blanc’s \textit{Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles. École espagnole} (1869).\footnote{Francisco de Zurbáran, cat. No.85, “Saint Francis in Meditation (1635–1640)”, oil on canvas, 152 x 99 cm, The National Gallery, London. See Pérez 2003, 462.} Manet, on the other hand, was clearly inspired by Zurbáran when he executed his \textit{Monk at Prayer} (ca. 1864–1865).\footnote{Édouard Manet, \textit{Monk at Prayer} (ca. 1864–1865), oil on canvas, 146.4 x 115 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. See Wilson-Bareau 2003, 493.} Zurbáran’s highly spiritual ascetic art was also a great inspiration for Finnish artists. Magnus Enckell, for example, was enchanted by Zurbáran’s enigmatic \textit{Saint Francis in Meditation} and \textit{Saint Francis} which he had seen in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. Enckell studied more Zurbáran’s art when he travelled to Spain in 1900.\footnote{Enckell, Magnus, ”Nägra teckningar af Spansk arkitektur”, Ateneum, 1901. National Library of Finland, Helsinky.} Eero Järnefelt too admired the Spanish masters and, in his monograph on Järnefelt, the art historian Ludvig Wennervirta (1959) particularly stresses Zurbáran’s importance for the Finnish artist.\footnote{Wennervirta 1950, 13–16.}

Where Velázquez is concerned the admiration is easily understandable since the technical level of his art is widely recognised by the art world. His portraits in particular are unparalleled. Their soulful expression and simple but effective composition make the pale face stand out from the dark, virtually undefined, abstract background. The psychological power of Velázquez’s portraits,\footnote{N. B. I am not referring to ceremonial court portraits but generally to the artist’s first versions of these and to simple, often anonymous portrait paintings. E.g. \textit{Portrait of a man}, see Brown 1986, 186.} combined with his bold and incomparable technique, explain why so many later artists wished to copy and learn from his work. At the start of his career in 1857 Whistler travelled from Paris to Manchester to see a large exhibition of old art which included works by
Velázquez, Hals and Vermeer. These artists made a great impact on Whistler even if, as he is known to have told his pupils, he failed to find “the absolute truth”.341 As Richard Dormant points out, in his Harmony in Green and Rose: The Music Room (1860–61) Whistler borrowed directly from Velázquez: in the complex composition he shows the figure of a woman reflected in the mirror: precisely in the same way as Velázquez in his painting Las Meninas (1656).342 Also Vincent Van Gogh remarks on how characteristic of Velázquez is his palette of black, white, grey and pink.343

The frankness of tone and the bravura brush of the Spanish Guitar Player and the Boy with a Sword recalled the masters of seventeenth-century Spain. Since then M. Manet has strayed from these healthy practices (...) he has taken an unusual fancy to black tones, and his ideal consists of opposing them to chalky whites so as to present on the canvas a series of more contrasting blobs. This manner, new to France, was formerly used in Spain (...) how blacks and whites set each other off (...) moreover, that colour is a language, and they sought hazy, strident, or dramatic effects in order to translate an emotion.

(Paul Mantz 1868)344

There is also another artist who referred to Las Meninas in his painting, travelled to Spain in 1865 and has mainly been connected with Spanish art; he was, of course, Édouard Manet.345 The revealing exhibition Manet/Velázquez (2002–03) explored the close relationship between Manet and Spanish art.346 As Manet himself said, Velázquez was “the painter of painters; he didn’t surprise me, he enchanted me”.347 Françoise Cachin (1995) also mentions Manet’s Self-Portrait with Palette (1879)348 as imitating his dear Velázquez in Las Meninas but here Manet keeps his elegant black hat on.349 As in many of Manet’s ‘Spanish paintings’ the colours are somewhat sparse; with its plain dark-brown background, the whole painting relies on black,

342 Dormant 1994, 14.
345 This aspect has been studied thoroughly in art history, and in 2002–2003 an inauguration of a big exhibition Manet/Velázquez, The French Taste for Spanish Painting showed the French artists’s influence of Spanish art. Also Whistler was presented in the exhibition and in the catalogue. Weinberg 2003, 259-307.
348 Édouard Manet, Self-Portrait with Palette (1879), oil on canvas, 83 x 67 cm, Private collection.
brown and white, even the palette which is only partly shown, has no other colours. It should be noted, however, that not all of them were painted with an ascetic palette. Thus *maniere espagnole* is not dependent of a certain palette but was highly dependent on its context. As Marie-Sophie Lundström (2008) rightfully notes, throughout the nineteenth century, Velázquez was reborn; painters in different times looked differently at his art and exploring his style and palette in accordance with the current manner of painting. 350 Manet’s friend and colleague Edgar Degas (1834–1917) is known to have attempted to imitate Velázquez’s use of paint – “Velázquez’s soft muddiness” 351 – via Manet’s example. An important note by Bridget Riley (1999) is that the actual secret of Velázquez’s celebrated greys and blacks is not to be found in any tonal concept such as chiaroscuro, but in his treatment of them as true hues in themselves. For this recognition he was later much loved by the French painters of the nineteenth century and by Manet in particular. 352

Actually, with the exception of *Olympia* (1863), all the artworks by Manet mentioned in this study can be seen as belonging to his ‘Spanish inspired works’. For me the most striking is the Musée d’Orsay’s *Woman at Her Window*, also called, *Angéline* (1865) 353 which depicts a very curious-looking Spanish woman. Is she the dwarf of *Las Meninas*? 354 The painting depicts a young woman in Spanish dress with a fan, looking from a window. Manet had travelled to Spain in 1865, and in his letter to Fantin-Latour he admires the dwarfs of *Las Meninas*. But his ascetic palette goes far back to earlier *The Absinthe Drinker (A Philosopher)* (1858–59) which refers to both Baudelaire’s poem “Rappickers’ wine” and to Velázquez’s philosopher portraits of Aesop (ca. 1638) and Menippus (ca. 1638). As in many of Manet’s ‘Spanish influenced’ works the bold strokes of paint are reduced to ascetic black, brown and white.

*Look at it – just look – look at the beautiful colour – the flesh – look at the white – that black – look how those ribbons are put in. O what a swell he was – -.*

* (James McNeill Whistler on Hals 1902) 355

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352 Riley 1999, 43.
Among Finnish artists Helene Schjerbeck, in particular, has stressed the importance of Frans Hals and she claimed to have learnt the use of the colour black specifically from the Dutch artist.\footnote{Sarajas-Korte 1992, 25.} Finns were not the only artists to be inspired by Hals. One can find similarities with the art of Velázquez and Hals particularly in Whistler’s art. Hals, too, like Velázquez, used a highly minimal colour range especially in portraits where an abstract background was used to emphasise the faces and expressions of his models.\footnote{e.g. in the work Regentesses of the Old Men’s Almshouse (1664)} Hals’s restricted palette is particularly noticeable in his flesh tints, which from year to year became increasingly grey, until finally the shadows were painted almost absolute black, as in his many portraits of 1640s to 1660s. On the basis of conservators’ pigment studies it may be noted that, in addition to black and white, Hals used only ochre colours and brown (umbra), occasionally red but generally no other colours.\footnote{Groen-Hendriks 1989 124-125.} Manet was also an ardent admirer of Hals and copied his work. Manet’s work resembles in the use of black and muted earth colours.\footnote{Jowell 1989, 71.}

Also Helene Schjerbeck copied Hals’s Portrait of Dutch tradesman Willem van Heythuijsen (1634).\footnote{Frans Hals: Portrait of Dutch tradesman Willem van Heythuijsen (1634), oil on wood, 18,5 x 14,5 inches, sold in July 2008 by Sotheby’s.}

It is interesting that from his first Self-Portrait of 1858 to his late self-portrait Brown and Gold (1895–1900)\footnote{Whistler, Brown and Gold (1895–1900), oil on canvas, 95,8 x 51,5 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Birnie Philip Bequest. Dorment 1994, 285.} Whistler wished to paint himself as vanishing into the golden-brown mist reminiscent of Rembrandt. This shows his desire to pay homage to Rembrandt but also how he, as a modern artist, developed his own way of adopting Rembrandt’s palette. Also the warm-coloured, soft ambience wraps the full-length standing artist in a golden-brown dark ‘otherness’, as if there is already a veil separating the old artist from the viewer. Unlike the earlier self-portrait Gold and Brown (1896–98) where the artist’s face is shown well, here in Brown and Gold Whistler has blurred the vision to prevent seeing him properly. Only the left hand, which is on the waist, is better seen since it is the lightest part of the whole painting. Whistler’s face is subdued in the darkness and the eyes are not clearly seen. Richard Dorment (1994), on the other hand, states that the pose is that of Velázquez’s The Jester Pablo de Valladolid (ca. 1632–35),\footnote{Velázquez: The Jester Pablo de Valladolid (ca. 1632–35), oil on canvas, 213,5 x 125 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.} which, from a colour point of view, is also very ascetic looking. I would argue that, in his last years of loneliness and anxiety after losing his wife, Whistler is showing a last testament or statement of himself as belonging to the rare chosen ones, the Masters. This
impression is perhaps created by the pose referring to Velázquez, but the most striking – and the most modern – aspect of this artwork is the ascetic golden brownish palette with which the whole painting is executed.

Throughout his career Eugène Carrière (1849–1906) was connected to the group of artists who were seen to pay homage to Velázquez and Rembrandt. In 1903 the critic Henry Cochin in Gazette des Beaux-Arts placed Carrière on the same plane as the Masters, not far removed from Rembrandt. The soft, enveloping mist, the monochromatic brown, intimist painting for which he was famous won many followers in the 1890s. Carrière’s ascetic art, which is based on a dialogue of only two colours, usually ivory and brown, can be seen as following the path of the Old Masters, who, like him, were fascinated by the technique of having figures emerge from the darkness by an only partially pervading light. In an article written in 1906 after Carrière’s death, Gabriel Mourey connects his art to Rembrandt’s, “who does not allow himself to be dazzled by the seductive glitter of the visible world, but sets himself only to paint his soul.” Claude Roger-Marx (1970) calls the peintre des maternités “a modern Rembrandt, equally detached from his own time, equally solitary and in practising an unusual technique one who at every moment finds the supernatural where others see only what is material and commonplace.”

James Bantens (1983), on the other hand, sees this as a several-century-old tradition of tenebrism, which looks back to Caravaggio as its major proponent and founder in European art. I would argue that Carrière’s method of painting and colours was very different. He did not use sharp light and shadow but very soft sweeps of colour. Moreover, his subjects depict subjects like maternité, the inner harmony and gentleness of human life, quite the opposite of Caravaggio. The Old Masters were known to Carrière from the Louvre, and from his travels in England, Spain, Belgium, Holland (especially to see Rembrandts) Italy and Switzerland. In my opinion, Carrière refers directly to Velázquez with his Marcel, portrait (1886), where the boy’s pose and clothes, especially the ‘Spanish’ collar, refer to the seventeenth century. The whole painting echoes the simplified art of Velázquez. The difference is more in the technique of semi-obscurité which Carrière used from 1885 onwards.

366 Mourey 1906, 115.
368 Bantens 1983, 36.
I consider this technique more reminiscent of Rembrandt’s later painting. It is, however, particularly important to note that, like that of Whistler and the others, Carrière’s admiration for the Old Masters stemmed mainly from the adaptation of their simplified palettes; it was not merely the pose or subject, that fascinated him but also the limited palette and ascetic colours they used.370

Another way of looking to the past for inspiration and guidance was admiration of the Primitives. This had been noted earlier by the English critic John Ruskin (1819–1900) who had become fully attuned to the aesthetics of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance in 1844. Ruskin had been influenced by the earliest works of Christian art which reflected Nazarene attitudes,371 as well as by the fourteenth-century frescoes of the Campo Santo in Pisa and by much of the medieval art he had seen in Florence. In the wake of Ruskin’s teachings and writings Botticelli’s art was newly found in Europe and greatly admired by the Pre-Raphaelites. Ruskin’s lead appeared to justify the religious tone of both early and later Pre-Raphaelite work and the Neo-platonic awareness that became increasingly pronounced in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s work which was also to affect the work of other Pre-Raphaelites, that the soul alone is real.372

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was established in 1848, but as early as 1855, only seven years after the mysterious initials PRB had first appeared, their art was seen outside Britain.373 What is still more interesting, Pre-Raphaelite paintings were included in the Paris World Exhibition of 1855 and impressed Delacroix, who found the works of William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais worth mentioning in his journal.374 Another British artist discovered by the French Symbolists later at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 and who then enjoyed a wave of public interest was Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898).375 Although the name of Burne-Jones is synonymous with the history of and achievements of the Pre-Raphaelites, he was a relative latecomer to the movement and in many respects transcended its

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370 It should be noted that, for example, Carrière, who decided to be an artist when he was “struck by a thunderbolt” when he saw Rubens’s works in the Louvre, did not adapt Rubens’s glowing, multi-coloured palette. Carrière’s letter to Gustave Geoffroy in 1899. Oulmont 1970, 11-12.

371 According to William Holman Hunt, Rossetti at one point proposed Early Christians as a name for the brethren, one that would have been appropriate given their dedication to ideals like those of the Nazarenes, young German artists who had studied together at the Vienna Art Academy and had moved to Rome in 1810. Dorra 1994, 17.


373 In its first stage the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s three most influential members were William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Of the remaining four members William Michael Rossetti and F.G. Stephens became influential critics, Thomas Woolner the sculptor, a successful Academician, and James Collison, who was a Roman Catholic, resigned in 1850 on religious grounds and went on to study for the priesthood.


375 Edward Burne-Jones, The Wheel of Fortune (La Roue de la Fortune, 1875/1883), oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumid=783
aspirations, becoming regarded as the leader of the Aesthetic movement, a precursor of Symbolism.\textsuperscript{376} Also, it should be noted that his palette is very different from that of other Pre-Raphaelites who preferred the shine of almost jewellery-like bright colours. Burne-Jones’s sombre palette was mainly created with soft tones of grey and brown and other subdued colours.\textsuperscript{377} Burne-Jones’ enigmatic and allegorical paintings greatly interested artists in Europe and his art was widely known through prints and illustrations, artworks which circulated widely as reproductions.\textsuperscript{378} It is therefore not surprising that Burne-Jones’s art was particularly admired by the French Symbolists in the 1890s.

It should be noted that Burne-Jones’s art met with genuine international success and became a reference point for younger artists, who saw it as an art stylistically rooted in the past while raising intriguing issues of the relationship between literature and the fine arts. For example, Rapetti (2005) points out that Rossetti, the teacher of Burne-Jones, had forged his style progressively imbuing the quattrocento Pre-Raphaelitism with a Renaissance spirit. It was that Renaissance feel that would seep into the Symbolism of the 1890s via Burne-Jones. In addition Rapetti sees that Fernand Khnopff’s (1858–1921) paintings that first earned him fame display a strong Burne-Jones’ influence.\textsuperscript{379} I would like to argue that this can also be seen in Khnopff’s ascetic palette of soft browns and greys which create a static, dreamlike ‘unreal’ atmosphere.

More importantly, inherited from Burne-Jones were his large compositions with extremely rich decorative vocabulary and a limited palette that, together, tended to homogenise a painting by drawing the attention away from the figures. The cohesiveness of a composition went hand-in-hand with a uniformly smooth pictorial surface. And what is interesting, the highly sober technique thus brought the painting closer to the realm of the spiritual by becoming less tactile, consequently distancing itself from the allegedly less noble realm of the senses. The symbolist credo would thereby be summoned to adopt, in the name of the dematerialisation of painting, one of the founding precepts of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.\textsuperscript{380} What is more important, this ‘dematerialisation’, I would argue, was accomplished especially with the non-mimetic palettes, either by reduction of colour to asceticism or enhancing it to a synthetist surnaturelle level.

\textsuperscript{376} Ash 1993, 1, 9.

\textsuperscript{377} With this Burne-Jones’s brown-grey palette I mean artworks like Perseus Cycle: the Doom Fulfilled (ca 1884–85), gouache on canvas, 154 x 139 cm, Southampton Art Gallery. He also used a brighter palette in his earlier works, which reflect more his teachers, Rossetti’s palette.

\textsuperscript{378} In spring 1894, on her way to Florence, Helene Schjerfbeck stopped in Vienna, where she studied black and white reproductions of Burne-Jones. Appelgren 1949, 97-98.

\textsuperscript{379} Rapetti 2005, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{380} Rapetti 2005, 32.
With much the same end and results, the Symbolists manipulated and often
even distorted their subject matter, turning traditional stories, whether mythological,
religious, or fictional, into sagas of ideas rather than action. Plots were suspended as
one image from a story which is frozen in time, while presentation of a protagonist
was altered to offer new interpretations of character or meaning. However, for the
Symbolists, caught up in the social shifts of the metropolis, as for the Pre-Raphaelites
before them, medievalism as well as Nature itself had become unachievable ideals.
This became particularly important since artists found it increasingly difficult to
turn to traditional nature settings: life in the city seemed to have changed lives
so completely that one could no longer “go back” – in space or time – to a better
world. And thus, as Hirsh (2004) states, an underlying theme of much symbolist
art is nostalgia. Even as they dreamed of past times and places in which life was
more liveable, they also hoped to revive an art that was more meaningful. Medically
recognised in the eighteenth century and often considered fatal, nostalgia was
originally linked to homesickness; by the nineteenth century, however, it was a
complex structure of psychological, social, and physical symptoms. Medical treatises
on the disease, still considered contagious as well as a cause of mental illness,
continued to appear into the era of Symbolism. All this, however, emphasises how
artists of the period seem to have developed a more twentieth-century approach
to nostalgia as an acceptable, even enviable state of mind endemic to modernity.

For example, the longing for the past of some nineteenth-century artists, such
as the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists, used elaborate medieval and Gothic tracing
to cover their images with a veneer referencing what they considered a simpler,
communal, and more spiritual era. These artworks ‘evoking medieval times’ lead
us to question what the literary theorist Susan Stewart has called ‘authorial time
versus readers’ time.’ It is interesting how Hirsh (2004) contrasts impressionist
paintings, or more precisely their practice, which, with their short irregular and

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381 Hirsh 2004, 8-9.
382 The most noted and first diagnosed victims of nostalgia were Switzerland’s mercenary soldiers, making
the proper treatment of “nostalgia” an important issue in military procedures. How to prevent nostalgia
(by removing reminders of the homeland from the soldiers) and how to treat the disease (by incarcerating
or allowing the afflicted soldier to return home on sick leave) were hotly debated as armies strove to keep
383 For example, the treatise of 1873 by August Aspel, as cited in Starobinski, 99-100.
384 This continued in works by Jan Toorop and Johan Thorn-Prikker in particular. In some works, such as Thorn-
Prikker’s Epic Monk, the images themselves, appearing to evolve out of an overall linear veil, are taken from
and refer to medieval (and here also to monastic) life. This drawing was one of four that Thorn-Prikker designed
to illustrate the Belgian writer Emile Verhaeren’s anthology of poetry titled The Monks. Just as Verhaeren’s
poetry conjured heroic people in honest times, so also Thorn-Prikker sought through image, style, and even
media (his drawing is on vellum) to evoke a time that, at least in its nineteenth-century reconstruction, was
centered on the spiritual individual as opposed to the mass public lifestyle of late nineteenth-century cities.
Hirsh 2004, 7-8.
obvious brushstrokes, offer at least the illusion that they have been quickly, even hurriedly, executed, with the ‘medievalists’ process which gives the impression of a slow, almost meditative procedure on the part of the artist and demands from the viewer a similar deliberation and length of time (slow enough to be off the scale of modern urban time). This illusion of timelessness or ‘the reduction of time’ and its slow ‘spiritual’ practice was actually the goal of many artists in the nineteenth century, not just the Pre-Raphaelites, though their example was certainly an inspiration to many French and European artists. This aspect of a ‘spiritual and ancient practice’ became an important ideal for Finnish artists. This will be discussed later in part II.

There are two influential writers who steered artists to admire ancient frescoes. The first was Baudelaire, who, in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), comments strongly on archaic art as a powerful style which should be admired. Baudelaire, moreover, accepted – indeed, recommended – that drawing depart from the perspectival approach to Nature developed since the Early Renaissance by naturalistically-inclined artists so as to accentuate its element of musicality. He specifically advocated a return to the expressive power and harmonious effects achieved by archaic artists through abridgment and deformation:

*I want to talk of an inevitable, synthetic, childlike barbarity, which often remains visible in a perfect art (Mexican, Egyptian, or Ninevite) and which derives from the need to see things on a grand scale and to consider them primarily in their overall effect. It is not out of place to observe that many people have accused of barbarity all the painters whose vision is synthetic and abbreviated.*

According to Baudelaire, the deliberate abridgments and distortions of form in the art of archaic cultures – form in this instance encompassing line and colour – were essential to the successful expression of abstract thought. Although Baudelaire never quite said so, a corollary also holds: that the simplifications and abridgments of archaic traditions for the purpose of expression or harmony are, in fact, examples of musicality. Used in this connection, the term *synthetic* was nothing short of prophetic, for it embodied all that hieratic, even barbaric stylisation would contribute to the search for musicality, to the evocation of complex ideas and emotions by members of what was to be known as the cloisonist or synthetist school. Although

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386 Hirsh 2004, 7-8.
387 This important aspect has been stated by Elizabeth Prettejohn in *The Art of Pre-Raphaelites*. Prettejohn 2008, 128-131.
389 Dorra 1994, 3-4.
14. Pekka Halonen *Sunday in a Crofter’s Cottage* (1894). Oil on canvas, 105 x 97 cm, Halosenniemi Museum, Tuusula. Photo: Tuusula Museum
the artists of archaic periods, Primitives and Old Masters, were viewed as guiding spirits by the nineteenth-century artists who harked back earlier art, they interpreted tradition through a revival of decorative, mural painting. The other, synthetist approach was directed by Paul Gauguin and, in my opinion, took its references of colour from both archaic and Pre-Raphaelite art from the basis of impressionist palette. What is also important to note is that it was the simplicity of this ‘archaic’ and primitive art, its decorative and spiritual power and clarity of form that had become the ideal in the synthetist art.

The other writer to advocate the power of frescoes was the art critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier who in 1891 wrote his famous article: Le symbolisme en peinture – Paul Gauguin, demanding “Walls, walls, give him walls”. In this important article Aurier also laid down the criteria for the new art of Ideas, the symbolist art which, he claimed, was essentially Ideist, Symbolist, Synthetic, Subjective

and (as a consequence) Decorative – inasmuch as decorative painting, as the Egyptians and very probably the Greeks and the primitives understood it, is only a manifestation of an art that is at once subjective, synthetic, symbolist, and ideist.\[391\

And decorative painting is, properly speaking, true painting. Painting can have been created only to decorate the bare walls of human edifices with thoughts, dreams, and ideas. Easel painting is an illogical refinement invented to satisfy the fantasy or the commercial spirit of decadent civilisations. In primitive societies the first attempts at picture-making could only have been decorative.”\[392\

This is art that I have tried to legitimise and characterise, this art that may appear complicated and that some chronicles would gladly call deliquescent, can therefore, in the last analysis, be reduced to the formula of simple, spontaneous, and primordial art.\[393\] Such is the criterion of appropriateness in the aesthetic reasoning I present here. Ideist art, which had to be justified by abstract and complex arguments because it seems so paradoxical to our civilisation, which happens to be both decadent and forgetful of any revelation, is therefore, irrefutably, the true and absolute art. Not only is it legitimate from the standpoint of theory, but it is also, in the last analysis, identical to primitive art, to art as it was intuited by the instinctive geniuses of the dawn of humanity.\[394\]

(G.-A. Aurier, Le Mercure de France 2, March 1891)

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393 Here Aurier takes the reader back to Baudelaire’s statement. Dorra 1994, 201, 352.
394 Dorra 1994, 200-201.
It is important to stress how strongly Aurier considered symbolist art to be linked to the decorative aspect. Admiration for ancient and primitive frescoes was an essential link. The mysterious archaic and Early Renaissance art was the ideal model for the complexity of symbolist art. The possibilities of pictorial narrative, combining word, image and history, or imagined history, found its true means of expression in the decorative mural art of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries which allowed artists to depict complicated narratives and symbolistic elements in one and the same work. The idea of decorative art which is made for and available to the public was embraced by the Pre-Raphaelites, Puvis de Chavannes, Gauguin, the Symbolists – and by Finnish artists.

An artist who had an important impact on many artists who were influenced by admiring frescoes was Gauguin. He held Egyptian art in the highest esteem, calling it l’art célebral pur.396 The reproductions on the walls of his Paris studio in 1894 reflect other objects of his admiration: alongside Utamaro’s woodcuts were a copy of Manet’s Olympia,397 Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus, Fra Angelico’s Annunciation, as well as works by Puvis de Chavannes.

It is important to note that Gauguin, too, strove to make his surface a veil, attempting to imitate frescoes with ironed and washed canvases that would be both degreased in colour and matte in finish.398 Such heavy manipulation, moving away from the glossy thin and detailed application of oil paints favoured by the academic painters of the day, characterises the work of the nineteenth-century artists who were drawn to express the decorative aspect. Hirsh states that this might even be a definition of what she has termed their ‘secret style’,399 a form of non-compliance with traditional rules of representational art. By introducing the extreme manipulation of colour, form and technique these artists announced to the viewer that their art was not an illusion of reality but rather a jumping-off image into the realm of ideas.

It is clear that, from the ascetic murals of Puvis de Chavannes to Gauguin’s synthetic canvases and murals, the greatest inspiration for their art was admiration of archaic and Early Renaissance frescoes. Their aim was also to recreate the mystical and spiritual practice of ancient or fifteenth-century artists who painted the true art; the decorative flat, two-dimensional surface, with contoured simplified forms. One

395 The term ‘primitive’ was associated in its time with early Greek vases, with quattrocento painting and with tribal art. This cultural phenomenon has been investigated earlier. Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity, is a collection of Greek and Latin texts in the original and in translation by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas. Also in Italian: Lionello Venturi’s Il gusto dei primitivi and Giovanni Previtali’s La fortuna dei primitivi dal Vasari ai neoclassici. Gombrich 2002, 9.
397 Gauguin painted a copy for himself after Manet’s Olympia in 1891.
399 Hirsh 2004, 3.
artist who wished to reach the realm of the spiritual practice of decorative painting was Maurice Denis. A member of Les Nabis, Denis was the one who later, in 1912, wrote down the art theories of the group. Here he claims his affection for the past: Art is the sanctification of nature, that mundane nature which is content merely to be alive. What is great art – the art we call decorative – the art of the Indians, the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Greeks, the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the decidedly superior works of Modern Art, but the disguising of vulgar feelings – of natural objects – as sacred, hermetic and impressive icons?

What lies behind the hieratic simplicity of figures of the Buddha? Mere monks, transformed by the aesthetic sense of a pious people. Again, compare the natural lion with the lions of Khorsabad: which forces us to kneel? The Doryphorus, the Diadumenus, the Achilles, the Venus de Milo, the Winged Victory, these are, in truth a redemption of the human form. Should we mention the saints of the Middle Ages, both men and women? Should we add Michelangelo’s prophets and Leonardo da Vinci’s women?

I have seen the work by the Italian artist, Pignatelli, which inspired Rodin’s John the Baptist, and instead of some banal model, I saw a venerable bronze, the embodiment of the Word in motion. And what kind of man was it that Puvis de Chavannes selected to be his Poor Fisherman, expressing eternal sorrow?

Everywhere those with aesthetic imagination triumph over those who attempt crude imitation, the emotions of Beauty triumph over the lies of Naturalism.

(Maurice Denis, Théories, XXIV) 400

It is interesting how these two colour practices – colour ascetic and synthetist colour – both shared two contending approaches to pictorial practice with a paradoxical shared goal: to achieve spiritual ends through the plastic means of pigment, canvas, and in some cases primer. Their quest for sacrality and spirituality immerses them in developing stylistic practices to dematerialise the physical surface of the canvas as much as possible and, as I see it, it by colour ascetism or by synthetist colour and by emulating the matte permeation of the fresco, which they saw as the true painting, they sought to efface the distance between a deficient material world and

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the ineffable world of dream and the divine. In my opinion, this change – when the material became part of the content – was also the main signifier of Modernism in Finnish and, also in some cases discussed here, in European art. As I hope this study will establish, colour was being developed to express a new kind of aesthetic language in art.

Ernst Gombrich has in *The Preference for the Primitive. Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art* (2002) called the choice of modes into question. He asks whether it could be argued that the softness and innocence of Raphael’s earlier manner should be regarded not as a sign of imperfection but as an alternative mode, much as David’s rebellious students had regarded the primitive style of Greek vases as the most appropriate of modes. Here as elsewhere the notion of style as the manifestation of skill gave way to the conception of a variety of legitimate modes – the idea, in other words, that the creator has the choice and ability to adopt a particular style for a particular context. And I would argue that, at this point, there was an entirely new approach, the choice of modes, which gave artists a much wider scope to develop a new language and even to choose from the ideals. The centuries’ old reign of ‘mimetic skill’ as the only true virtue of art was starting to disintegrate. It is interesting to note that this was also the period that led to the diversity of the arts. The consciousness of historicity together with the consciousness of mode was to be a powerful asset to artists included in this study.

This situation brought to the fore another aspect of the mural revival. In Europe at the end of the nineteenth-century artists began to express a new interest in monumental decorative schemes covering vast surfaces and in easel paintings of all sizes. This tendency was more or less linked to the nationalistic ideals that grew up around the same time in many European countries. The end of the 19th century was also a time of great world fairs. As Rapetti (2005) states, this generation was fronted by the phenomenon of universal expositions, employed to assert military and economic might from a standpoint that combined technological progress with the appropriation of traditional culture, which was perceived as the specific expression of a given nation. Myth and legend would therefore play an important role in the development of national identities. The fusion of mythology, archaeology, and folklore that steadily took shape, for example, in Finnish art and

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401 Silverman points out this aspect with Gauguin but I see it as relevant to all the artists in question. Silverman 2000, 6. I have presented this aspect in my master’s thesis. von Bonsdorff 2000, 46-51, 112.
402 Gombrich 2002, 90.
403 Gombrich states that it would be interesting to trace the rise of this phenomenon in the various arts in the preceding years. Even in the early eighteenth century, J.S. Bach could write a concerto ‘in the Italian gusto’, and compose ‘English’ and ‘French’ suites. Mozart adapted a Lutheran chorale for the hymn of the two men in armour accompanying the ordeal of the lovers in *The Magic Flute*, and Beethoven was to compose his thanksgiving hymn in the quartet op. 132 ‘in the Lydian mode’. Gombrich 2002, 93.
404 Regional countries like Hungary, Czech and Poland as well as Scotland and Ireland had their national revivals.
in the art of Axel Gallén was emblematic of this modern conflation of mythology with history, or should we say more precisely of imagined history. The convergence of mythology and archaeological objectivity de-poeticised legend by presenting it as a construction of the human mind based on foundations of historical truth. The progress of objective knowledge therefore led to a utilitarian conception of mythology harnessed to political goals, similar to the technological implementation of scientific discoveries. This certainly provided history painting with one of its final opportunities for reinvigoration. On an aesthetical level, however, many artists rejected the validity of any depiction of historical deeds and imbued myth with an entirely different dimension. ⁴⁰⁵

Artists in many countries made it their main endeavour to display the special features of their national cultures. In the Nordic countries especially, what was shown at these world exhibitions of the culture of exotic lands led artists to ponder more deeply than before the roots of their own cultures. Pronounced patriotic tendencies, which are found specifically in politically suppressed regions, encourage people to reflect upon their origins. Hence favourite themes tend to be the life of the people, myths, legends and the native landscape. ⁴⁰⁶ As Guy Cogeval (1995) demonstrates, ancient myths made a triumphant reappearance at the turn of the century, when various schools of thought rejected the modern world, with its poverty, division and conflicts which had been the material of naturalist painting, and harked back to an idealised Golden Age or an idyllic Middle Ages. Symbolism, on the other hand, was concerned with looking afresh at myths and systematically rereading them in an objective manner. ⁴⁰⁷ This new wave of interest towards mural art coincided with many decoration programmes of state buildings in both France and Finland. ⁴⁰⁸ From the 1860s to the 1890s artists were needed for many major monumental projects were underway. For Finnish artists the reason for this new interest in the decorative lay in their close contacts with French art and the growing admiration for the mural artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, a personal friend of Edelfelt, who maintained strong links with the history of art while creating a new visual language for the modern world. His tonal, ascetic palette with which he created his monumental and decorative works had the greatest influence on Finnish artists in the 1890s. The second impulse for an ascetic or synthetist colour scheme lay in the ideals of Symbolism and its interest in the ancient and archaic art of Assyria and Egypt as well as in the Early Renaissance which became the credo for artists like Enckell, Halonen and Thesleff. This will be discussed in more detail in part II.

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⁴⁰⁵ Rapetti 2005, 10.
⁴⁰⁶ Fahr-Becker, 283-284.
⁴⁰⁸ For France, see Brown Price 1994, 13.
To this group of European artists who explored the new ways to express their art through the ‘past’, which this study aims to establish, belonged the Pre-Raphaelites, Gauguin and the Nabi group who used the bright, synthetist palette and a second group comprising Puvis de Chavannes, Manet, Whistler, Burne-Jones and Carrière, all of whom manipulated colour to the extreme to express the ‘realm of ideas’ and the ‘consciousness of modern historicity’ as past as a different realm. These complex ideas were depicted first with subjects that refer to the past and second in simplified form, but what has not been established widely, and what I would specifically argue, is that what is described as ‘emotional and harmonious effects’ in art were created by the new palette practices, by manipulation of either ascetic or synthetist colour.

2.2 COLOUR ASCETISM

2.2.1 NEW AESTHETICS FOR MURAL ART – PIERRE PUVIS DE CHAUVANES

*I have condensed, assembled, packed*

(Puvis de Chavannes 1868)409

Only a few years after Dante Gabriel Rossetti had found inspiration in his daydreams of Arezzo and Florence and Edward Burne-Jones in his visions of medieval chivalry, a Frenchman, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), conceived vast works based on complex allegorical thought vaguely evoking a distant, somewhat nebulous Golden Age that could be associated alternatively with Greco-Roman and Gallo-Roman antiquity, and even with the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance. A keen student of earlier historical styles, he had adopted simple linear compositions and harmonious arrangements of muted colours that brought to mind the Early Renaissance, even though the static poses and whiteness of his figures often suggested antique statuary. Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) was the first French critic to sense the innovative character of Puvis de Chavannes’s works, both in the inventive handling of its allegorical undercurrents and in the unifying palette. Gautier, moreover, notices a new concern for musicality in the artist’s handling of line and colour. He even uses the word synthetic in discussing the artist’s compositions, implying a deliberate elimination of details of time and place and the expression of abstract thought. Gautier was responding to the slow, controlled grace characteristic

409 Of course there are other European artists who could belong to either group. I have chosen these as examples because these artists mostly influenced the Finnish artists.

of Puvis de Chavannes’s figures and to the dreamlike atmosphere in which they existed.\footnote{411}

For most of his career, Puvis de Chavannes was driven by his ambition to create great mural paintings. Aimée Brown Price (1994) states that it was this that set him on a search for appropriate styles and led him to select the classicising imagery with which he is most often identified. That is also what caused him to formulate an aesthetic proper to murals. These aspects of his work, the classicising imagery and the mural aesthetic – which themselves changed over time – were central to the development of his peculiar, idiosyncratic manner that changed the pictorial idiom of his time.\footnote{412} His legacy for the new generation included also a highly manipulated colour range where all colours used were toned by ‘mother tones’ of light-grey or almost white which gave the impression of a ‘real’ fresco.

A successful poet, novelist, playwright, and creator of ballets, Gautier became an ardent romantic and was Baudelaire’s supporter and friend, and it was to him that the younger poet dedicated Flowers of Evil in 1857. It is also significant that in Gautier’s review of the 1855 Paris Universal Exhibition he had written at length about the German Nazarenes and the British Pre-Raphaelites. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was sensitive to the originality of Bellum (War) and Concordia (Peace), Puvis de Chavannes’s first major works. He understood that they constituted an intelligent departure from works whose style and iconography were rooted in naturalism.\footnote{413}

One may say that the real debut (of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes) dates from this year. In one stroke he has come out of the shadow. - - Puvis de Chavannes does not belong to the fastidious school. His mind dwells in the highest sphere of art, and his ambition surpasses even his talent. The very aspect of his two large compositions, Bellum and Concordia, challenges the onlooker: Are they cartoons, tapestries, or rather frescoes mysteriously removed from an unknown Fontainebleau, these immense canvases surrounded by frames bearing flowers and emblems reminding one of those of the Farnesina? What medium was used? Tempera? Wax? Oil?

One can hardly tell, so strange is the gamut of hues, so far outside the usual range; these are neutral or skilfully muted tones of mural painting of the kind that covers buildings without introducing elements of gross vulgarity and, rather than represent objects, he gives birth to the idea of them.

\footnote{411} Dorra 1994, 35-38.  
\footnote{412} Brown Price 1994, 11.  
\footnote{413} Dorra 1994, 36-37.
In a period of prose and realism, this young artist is naturally heroic, epic, and monumental, as if through the startling rebirth of the genius of earlier ages. It would seem that he has seen nothing of contemporary painting and has just come out of the workshops of Primaticcio or Rosso.

The subject of War is conceived in the synthetic sense, outside the contingencies of time, place, or any particularity. It is the idea itself, rendered perceptible to the senses with a singular poetic power. - - Peace transports us to - - a vale shaded by large trees, irrigated by running water. - - One could imagine oneself in the Golden Age. - - Even its colour is less abstract and more human. - - Flowers and fruit of an excellent colour surround this Arcadian idyll and complete it; the ornamental and decorative sense of Puvis de Chavannes emerges even in his details.414

(Théophile Gautier, Abécédaire du Salon de 1861)

In his references to frescoes and tapestry Gautier connects Puvis de Chavannes's work to the line, colour and richness of design of earlier periods and his mention of the sixteenth-century palace of Fontainebleau links the artist to the elegant line and artificiality of colour characteristic of the Italian painters who decorated it.415 Gautier's insistence on decorative surface effects evidences a new concern for musicality in the artist's handling of line and colour. Furthermore, that “forms,” as the critic puts it, “give birth to ideas” implies their suggestive power in giving rise to a play of associations. In other words, Gautier discovered in Puvis de Chavannes's works what Baudelaire found lacking in the historical-philosophical paintings of Chenavard and others;416 he uses the word synthetic in discussing the artist's compositions, implying a deliberate elimination of details of time and place. In Bellum and Concordia the artist gave play to the expression of abstract thought. Not only did Gautier stress the irreality of the scenes, asking whether they were 'cartoons, tapestries, or rather frescoes' of a distant era, but he also pointed out the impassiveness of the victors in Bellum, just as he stressed the quality of an Arcadian idyll in Concordia. On both occasions he was responding to the slow, controlled grace characteristic of Puvis de Chavannes's figures, whatever action they might


415 The decorations of the royal palace of Fontainebleau by the leading Italian mannerist Giovanni Battista de' Rossi, called Rosso Fiorentino, and Francesco Primaticcio and their following had been somewhat insensitively restored in the 1830s. In other words no one can say what the colours originally looked like, and what is more important, what they looked like after the restoration. Dorra 1994, 37.

416 Gautier stressed the mannerism rather than the archaising elements of the pictures; the linear forms and the relative flatness of composition, however, have roots in the Early Renaissance tradition, and the works are therefore somewhat archaising in relation to naturalist trends. Dorra 1994, 37-38.
be engaged in, and to the dreamlike atmosphere in which they existed - traits akin to the somnambulism referred to earlier.  

Moreover, Gautier also points out the significant use of colour as well as how colour itself was used as a symbol in the painting. The idea that the Concordia's 'less abstract' brighter colours were chosen to symbolise its 'more human' effect is intriguing. In this way the Bellum's more ascetic colours would emphasise the paintings' less human and more abstract nature. Puvis de Chavannes's first major works were the first in which he introduces his particular kind of ascetic palette, created especially for monumental and decorative painting – the famous matte, pale, greyish palette – that gave the illusion of fresco painting, the couleur crayeuse as Maurice Denis called it in his critic of the Salon 1892. Since decorative elements had become one of the aims of symbolist art, the Symbolists had taken as their model the unique monumental art of the older generation artist, Puvis de Chavannes, which, together with archaic frescos, they greatly admired.

By the 1860s Puvis de Chavannes had developed a specific painting technique to create the illusion of a ‘true’ fresco with his unique thick, dry, matte paint with greyish tonality in works painted on canvas which was then attached to the wall. His mural colours were keyed in chords to those of the surrounding architecture as Gautier said mural colours should be. As an example, in the 1890s, preparing his Boston Public Library murals, he would acquire a sample of the grey-veined yellow marble used for the walls of the building and take scrupulous care to imitate it. His ‘mother tones’, kept meticulously (in crucibles immersed in water basin), were used throughout a mural’s execution. It is interesting to note how Puvis de Chavannes creates the complete work of art in his paintings with his overall tonal colours and how the artist is aware of the surrounding conditions of the place he is decorating. It must have been essential for the works to be seen; this may be one of the reasons for his very pale palette. In the Pantheon, for instance, there is little light, but one can see the works well.

After 1883, his public exhibitions were limited to large decorative canvases that would soon be installed in the buildings for which they were commissioned, thus confirming the dominance of monumental works over easel paintings in his oeuvre. Thus Puvis de Chavannes’s works could be seen fairly regularly in the Salon. His career and, to a large extent, his life were bound up in the history of the vast decorative

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418 M. Denis’s article on the Champs de Mars salon of 1892. Denis berates the vulgar use of colour of the young Impressionists and Luminist school and urges artists to take as their model Whistler or Puvis de Chavannes. "Qu'elle s'adresse à M. Whistler pour apprendre à manier les gris; ou bien qu'elle revienne à la mode déjà surannée de la couleur crayeuse et qu'elle imite M. Puvis de Chavannes". Denis 1912, 14. Transl. Valerie Vainonen.
420 von Bonsdorff 2000, 75.
schemes he executed, from the stairway of the Amiens museum in 1864–65 to
the Panthéon in Paris, which remained unfinished at his death in 1898. The most
important murals for Finnish artists were in the Panthéon, the Sorbonne and the

Puvis de Chavannes’s art, expressed in monumental decorative schemes covering
huge surfaces that were integrated into the architecture, and in easel paintings of all
sizes, some of large format, has two main components: a subject and a form. The
latter consists of simplified pictorial elements, that can go as far as schematisation,
a concise draftmanship, an economy of muted shades, a decided flatness at the
expense of illusionistic depth. As for his technique, it is unaffected and occasionally
 crude, even in small formats. The content is based on allegory, and shows a preference
for simple themes that are displayed without narration or psychology, but which
evoke a poetry, that may be elegiac, gloomy or even tragic.\footnote{Lemoine 2002, 17-18.}

Although Puvis de Chavannes was best known for his mural works, it is evident
that the mature easel paintings are among his most compelling and original
contributions. With the direct approach to their subject, their silence and their
utterly timeless appearance, the paintings \textit{Hope} (1872), \textit{Young Women by the Sea}
(1879),\footnote{In \textit{Young Women by the Sea} (1879), Puvis de Chavannes uses a pastel palette, which means that he toned
the palette with white and pale grey colour which give it delicate shades of pale pinks and blues. \textit{Young
Women by the Sea} (Jeunes filles au bord de la mer) (1879), oil on canvas, 205,4 x 156 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See
image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&numid=443} and \textit{Dream} (1883), are true pictorial poems that are achieved through their
rarefied composition, the inter-locking of forms and the accurate appropriateness
of their colours, while the two versions of \textit{The Prodigal Son} (1879), and still more so \textit{The Poor Fisherman} (1881),\footnote{\textit{The Poor Fisherman} (Le Pauvre pêcheur, 1881), oil on canvas, 154,7 x 192,5 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See image:
http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&numid=1069} with its utter bareness, express dereliction and
poverty, bereft of literary or picturesque effects.\footnote{Lemoine 2002, 18.} In contrast to his reassuringly
official Arcadias, they include melancholic images of great subtlety, reserve and
expressive force. As private expressions of isolation and displacement they are an
important legacy to Modernism and twentieth-century art. The imagery of these
more personal works and their radical simplifications are as much a product of
the special aesthetics Puvis de Chavannes developed for his murals as are the
monumental wall paintings themselves.

The unique greyish palette of \textit{The Poor Fisherman} (1881) was, perhaps, even
more influential for artists in the 1890s than the contrasted palette of \textit{Olympia}
(1863). As Brown Price (1994) points out, the response to the *The Poor Fisherman* was immediate and lasting. The painting was out of the ordinary and, as with any innovative cultural artefact, it was baffling. *The Poor Fisherman* was striking for its simplifications, its flat areas of muddy colour, its geometry. The chalky grey sky and putty sea, the neutral and sombre diagonal spits of land, developed from the bleak colours of the north coast already evident in painted sketches. Its salient features are sharply defined abbreviated forms, rigidly sustained geometric shapes; the arch of the net, the diagonal beam — and stiff figures. The systematic decorative aesthetic and its elimination of the narrative were disturbing for the audience.426 *The Poor Fisherman* ostensibly deals with everyday life, but its decorative and colour ascetic aesthetic mode suggests symbolic meaning. Like *The Prodigal Son* (1879), *The Poor Fisherman* contains a meditative figure, his hands crossed in a gesture of passivity and constraint. Both compositions underscore the essential isolation of the figure; the former does so in a religious context with a specific moral component generated by a biblical parable, while the fisherman underscores a societal and existential condition. *The Poor Fisherman* is not explained by a single narrative but is rather more elusive. Faith and acceptance are not posed as religious questions within the teachings of the Church, for example, but more vaguely, as both a more universal and personal matter. *The Poor Fisherman* is an amalgam of vestigial religious references and secular themes of metaphysical isolation and melancholy that represent the emerging modern mentality.427 Moreover, in its ambiguity, it also captures a dreamy nostalgia of a pastoral innocence, and on the other hand, its radical simplicity, austere colour scheme and melancholia underline its modern and spiritual level outside of an institutional religion. Enigmatic in many ways, it was also a key work inspiring artists to a new language in art.

It is interesting and very revealing that in 1888, writing of Puvis de Chavannes, whose works at that time were the subject of a retrospective exhibition, Léonce Bénédicte, the young director of the Luxembourg Museum, notes that in “chaste and earnest visions” this “great visionary”..."immerses us in both the sources of consolation from which humanity constantly draws strength: the Dream, which allows our hopes to come true, and Memory, which extends our suspended animation into the past.” These two aspects were actually the essence of Puvis de Chavannes’s enigmatic art. This is even more evident in his easel paintings such as *The Poor Fisherman* and may explain why his consoling and dreamful art became so important and so admired by artists at the end of the nineteenth century and onwards. Moreover, it is not surprising that the first painting by Puvis de Chavannes to be purchased by the Luxembourg Museum was *The Poor Fisherman*. In 1888 the

artist was 63 years old and had previously received only monumental assignments from the State. What the museum purchased was the “official” approved art of the time. The acknowledgement was important because this very museum was dedicated to living artists, for whom it was the ultimate cachet of French appreciation. But for Puvis de Chavannes and others of like persuasion, the journey there was a long one.428 But once the painting got there, it became one of the most important paintings for the new generation.

Why, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and around 1900, does one run into so many painters throughout the world who have nothing in common with Impressionism or Naturalism and who no longer belong to the category of academic and eclectic art? All these artists display a great unity of style and content in their production that causes them to be grouped today under the denomination of Symbolism. As Serge Lemoine (2002) points out, it is now feasible to challenge the univocal history that has become tradition and that appears to be so unsatisfactory with respect to the wealth and complexity of its manifestations. One must leave aside ready-made formulas and go back to history itself to concentrate on the facts and their manifestations, and then examine what has taken place since the beginning of modern art, rather than the reverse; that is, start with what is known and accepted today and go back in time. Such a reappraisal enables us to understand that as early as 1861 there was a painter, Puvis de Chavannes, who was neither part of the fashionable trends of tradition, nor an Impressionist, Realist, or academic, but one who contributed a new language and powerful, simple concepts as well as an artistic ideal. These concepts were so thoroughly appreciated by his contemporaries, subsequent generations and the public less than twenty years later that they exerted a profound influence worldwide which lasted late into the following century.429

As a model for the Symbolists and the Nabi Group, the art of Puvis de Chavannes was not perceived solely as reinvigorated mural painting based on strictly formal criteria. The themes of his famous works alluded to a golden age and his style was always perceived as solidly linked to the idea of Apollonian calm. And as Rodolphe Rapetti (2005) states, the serene vision of a timeless equilibrium between mankind and nature was conveyed by the artist in a way that would nourish an entire wing of Symbolism. He produced the image of a timeless world, nostalgia for which would spawn the fin-de-siècle pessimism that considered the emergence of the industrial society to be an unpardonable rupture with primordial harmony.430 This aspiration towards primordial harmony was shared by many Finnish artists, in particular by Axel Gallén, Pekka Halonen (fig. 19) and Ellen Thesleff (fig. 31). But

428 Lacambre 1994a, 153.
overall Puvís de Chavannes’ most influential concepts, at least for Finnish artists, were his famous couleur crayeuse, the dry, plaster-like, pale grey, ascetic and tonal palette which imitated fresco, and his unique, timeless, even static and melancholy vocabulary. These were the principal qualities that were admired and adopted by many Finnish artists.431

### 2.2.2 TONALITY – JAMES MCNEILL WHISTLER

*He, first of occidentals, has explored the infinite ranges of tones that lie wrapped about the central core of greys. His greys themselves pulsate with imprisoned colors. Years ago I had said of the Chinese school of coloring, that it conceived of color as a flower growing out of a soil of greys. But in European art I have seen this thought exemplified only in the work of Whistler.*

When the critic Édouard Rod from the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* described the champions of the new generation of artists in the Champs-de-Mars exhibition of 1891 he first mentioned Pierre Puvís de Chavannes as the most influential artist. He recognised the overall harmony of his mystical works. – “Everywhere in the exhibition one can see that there is something from Puvís de Chavannes and something from Whistler.”433 It is interesting to note how Rod connects these older generation artists and also how their tonal, ascetic art had become an inspiration to the artists of the 1890s. These artists could not have been more different in the choice of worlds they depicted. Puvís de Chavannes had his timeless allegorical arcadias and the mystical and melancholic depictions of his easel paintings. James Abbot McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), on the other hand, painted contemporary scenes and modern ingenious portraits, but both painters shared a mutual ambition to control the palette through the harmonious tonalism they created. This musical and harmonious art was of particular interest to European and Finnish artists during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Whistler was an international artist in the most profound meaning of the term; a true cosmopolite he lived and worked in the United States, Russia, France and

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431 Pekka Halonen was also influenced by Puvís de Chavannes’s iconography which can be seen in such paintings as *Pioneers in Karelia* (1900) and *The Fisherman* (1904), see images, von Bonsdorff 2008, Pekka Halonen, cat. 122, 165.


434 He spent his childhood in Russia. His father was employed by Nicholas 1 to build the railway between St. Petersburg and Moscow (1843-48). He began to study art at the St. Petersburg Academy of Art where he was best in his class. Walker 1987, 9-12; He had learned French as a child in Russia. Lacambre 1994b, 39-41.
30. Helene Schjerfbeck Seamstress (1903/1905). Oil on canvas, 95.5 x 84.5 cm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. Photo Hannu Aaltonen/Finnish National Gallery, CAA
England.\textsuperscript{435} Painter, printmaker, designer, teacher, critic and polemicist, Whistler was one of the most influential figures in the visual arts of the nineteenth century. During a period of so many artistic movements – Realism, Neo-Classicism, Pre-Raphaelitism, and Impressionism – his work also fascinated many poets and writers, from Baudelaire to Mallarmé and Proust and from Swinburne to Oscar Wilde.\textsuperscript{436} He was also a major mediator of French ideas to British colleagues.\textsuperscript{437} Whistler’s charismatic and disputed personality – the modernist \textit{par excellence},\textsuperscript{438} as Charles Morice called him – and his diverse contribution to the arts was a fine example of how an artist could affect many at the turn of the twentieth century.

When Whistler arrived in Paris in 1855 to perfect his artistic skills he soon developed friendships with Édouard Manet and Henri Fantin-Latour. Whistler’s 1860s were spent travelling between two cities, London and Paris. His circle of friends included Fantin-Latour, Manet and Courbet as well as Millais, Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites.\textsuperscript{439} In 1862 he settled in London, however, sojourning frequently thereafter on the Continent.\textsuperscript{440} During his early years in London he became a neighbour and close friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the poet Swinburne. But it was in Paris that Whistler became famous. Ironically, it was the rejection of his submission to the 1863 Salon that brought him overnight fame.\textsuperscript{441} Whistler, who, with the Impressionists,\textsuperscript{442} showed in the Salon des Refusés in 1863 was as independent of them as he was of the Royal Academicians. His art was unique and his intense individualism caused him to be misunderstood. His career was marked by the hostility of contemporary critics and the public but, in the long term, his modern simplified works of “symphonies”, “harmonies” and “arrangements” won him fame although at first he won praise only from his colleagues. With these musical works Whistler attacked the anecdotage in painting, ubiquitous in Victorian and Edwardian art as well as in the polished academic art in France.\textsuperscript{443}

In 1863 when \textit{The White Girl}, with its shocking and symbolising white on white colour, was shown, it was considered by Victorian standards as a painting without a subject. This important shift is interesting since it also ties these artists to the concept of Modernism. In France the \textit{Dame Blanche}, later called \textit{Symphony in

\textsuperscript{435} Dormont 1994, 7.
\textsuperscript{436} Dormont 1994, 7.
\textsuperscript{437} Walker 1987, 8.
\textsuperscript{438} Charles Morice, “Deux morts: Whistler, Pissarro”, \textit{Mercure de France}, vol.50, 1904, 84.
\textsuperscript{439} Dormont 1994, 15.
\textsuperscript{440} For this reason this study considers Whistler as a European artist even though he was born in America.
\textsuperscript{441} Lacambre 1994b, 39-41.
\textsuperscript{442} Whistler was rejected with Manet, Fantin-Latour, Legros, Pissarro, Cézanne and others. Walker 1987, 37; Lacambre 1994b, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{443} Walker 1987, 8-9, 21-24.
White No I: The White Girl (1862), received mostly praise from the critics and ridicule from the public. It should be noted that even though Manet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe (1863) was exhibited in the same exhibition, Whistler’s Dame Blanche attracted attention. The painting was actually given its name by the critic Paul Mantz in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts. Mantz considered it the most important picture in the exhibition and described it as Symphonie en Blanc, enthusing over this “strange white apparition... with her dishevelled hair, her great eyes swimming in ecstasy, her languid pose and that petal-less flower in the fingers of her trailing hand”. Fernand Desnoyer thought Dame Blanche the most original painting in the Salon des Refusés, “at once simple and fantastic...though of a beauty so peculiar the public did not know whether to think it beautiful or ugly”. He continues, “the portrait of a spirit, a medium” and to Théophile Thoré it was “a vision”. The distinguished critic Théodore Duret said, “she is painted like a vision, which appears, not to everyone, but to a poet.”

These were the positive critics but the painting also aroused another kind of reaction. What were the reasons for the uproar? John Walker (1987) says that in England it was because it showed a painting of white on white which was a novel tonal arrangement that enraged the conventional jury. Of course, many saw the ‘virginal white’ in contradiction to the model, a known red-haired mistress and model of Whistler. The painting fell too easily into mid-Victorian conventions for depicting a fallen woman, a ‘Mary Magdalene’. Castagnary, a theorist of Naturalism, devoted an entire page to the picture in his review of the 1863 Salon. As Geneviève Lacambre (1994) mentions, he had no hesitation in seeing in it ‘the bride on the morning after’. These references to the dubious reputation of the subject and the white colour come through many sources. The ridicule of some critics and the public who, as Zola put it, “roared with laughter”, led to many cartoons circulating in the press. As Denys Riout (1998) demonstrates, the ridicule was not solely related to the scandalous subject and he interestingly puts forward that the reason why Symphony in White was so different and so difficult to understand

444 Symphony in White, No I: The White Girl (1862), oil on canvas, 214.6 x 108 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Harris Whittemore collection. See image: http://www.nga.gov/cfgi-bin/tinfo_?object=12203
446 Walker 1987, 37.
447 The idea of The White Girl as the portrait of a medium with ‘eyes swimming in ecstasy’ may be considered to come from the keen interest in fashionable spiritualist sessions which were common in Whistler and Rossetti circles at the time. Dorman & MacDonald 1994, 77-78.
448 Walker 1987, 37.
449 Walker 1987, 32, 34.
450 Dorman & MacDonald 1994, 77.
was its simplified colour scheme of whites, and that it took a long while for this to be appreciated. Reviews remained lukewarm until 1883 when Whistler sent his Portrait of the Painter’s Mother to the Salon, earning the timid recognition of his peers with a third-class medal. It is important to note that here, as in the case of Manet’s Olympia (1863) two years later, the question lies also in the formal innovations that shocked viewers and particularly in the new use of colour. Is it also a coincidence that these paintings were created almost at the same time in 1862 and 1863 and by artists who knew one another?

Despite the many written analyses of this painting, I consider Symphony in White No I: The White Girl Whistler’s key work, which initiated him to transfer to the medium – to colour and meaning. It is clear that after this he concentrated more on developing the palette and, of course, on adopting musical titles. It should also be noted that, it was only later that Whistler’s japonisme period began; in other words the simplification of and concentration on colour had interested him earlier. Richard Dorment (1994) points out that the roots of the simplification which is characteristic of Whistler’s may lie in his early training as a meticulous etcher; works could contain nothing superfluous. But is this the answer? Etchings require a very different technique and Whistler’s paintings, unlike his etchings, did not dwell on line and detail. Whistler had begun to simplify his paintings at a very early stage, witness his experiments with both composition and a simplified palette in At the Piano (1858–59). This work already features the domination of dark and light colour combined with a shadowless space. It is from this time, I would argue, that his interest in using a controlled palette derives. It should be noted that Dorment (1994) states that, influenced by such writers as Baudelaire, Whistler became increasingly interested in the art of Delacroix, Velázquez and Hals. These masters reminded him that the power of a painting lay not in its subject but in its “surface” – the colours, tones, brushwork and composition. He embodied this l’art pour l’art concept in his work even though, at the same time, he painted purely naturalistic landscapes Whistler combined different elements in his works...

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453 Which can be compared with the second-class medal awarded to Manet in 1881. Lacambre 1994b, 46.
455 An interesting similarity; Carrière had also originally studied as an etcher.
456 Dorment 1994, 18.
457 At the Piano (1858–59) was the first of Whistler’s works to attract attention. Shown in Paris at the Bonvin studio in 1867 after being refused by the Salon (1859), it was considered too simplified: a new simplified style, clear contrasts of dark and light, no shadows. Manet admired the painting and wanted to purchase it. Walker 1987, 22-24; Dorment 1994, 14.
458 One can also find literary sources in Whistler’s art, e.g., Symphony in White, n:o 2: The Little White Girl (1864) was shown together with a poem by Algernon Swinburne fixed to the frame, This manner of combining literature and modern art received further impetus after Whistler discovered Manet in 1861. Dorment 1994, 15-16.
without a second thought. His enthusiasm for this had come from Baudelaire’s correspondence concept which had already inspired him to choose musical names for his works.\textsuperscript{459} However, later Whistler created his musical analogies also with tonal colour harmonies.

It is interesting that when in the late 1860s Whistler turned his back on \textit{plein air} painting and started with a completely different technique; Whistler became aware of the painting techniques of Thomas Gainsborough and the English school of painters of watercolours. He taught himself a distinctly English way of glazing and staining the canvas with thinned pigment.\textsuperscript{460} Whistler learned to work more quickly, covering the whole canvas in one session to achieve the exquisite unity of effect at which he aimed. He also started to work mostly from memory. The \textit{mnemonic system} freed him from the mimetic strictness of Courbet’s \textit{plein air} realism and drew him ever closer to an understanding of an artwork which is first and foremost, an \textit{objet d’art}. By 1871 Whistler had arrived at a successful synthesis of realist subjects combined with highly manipulated ascetic palette and simplified form. This new kind of art he called “impressionism” but, as Dormont notes, it became known as Aestheticism.\textsuperscript{461}

At this time Whistler began by simplifying his compositions, and limiting his portraits to the single figure. Interestingly Dormont sees that in \textit{Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother} (1871)\textsuperscript{462} the rigid compositional structure and domestic subject revert back to a picture he had painted before he had met Courbet, \textit{At the Piano} (1858–59). Moreover, Dormont analyses that the use of a limited range of colours, ‘low tone’, and severe composition reflect the continuing influence of Hals and his contemporaries, but the picture is painted in a technique utterly different from that of the Dutch old masters. Pigment was directly applied onto a water-based grey ground spread over raw, absorbent canvas. As a result, the medium has seeped into the fabric of the canvas like a stain.\textsuperscript{463} Despite the influences and the references to old art, I would argue that it is evident that what makes this enigmatic painting one of the modern icons is its unique fusion of all kinds of elements embedded with the contradictory aspect of the intimate subject versus the extreme composition. And most importantly, as has already been mentioned, with its bold and mastered use of a very strict, almost achromatic range of ascetic colours: black, grey and white with a hint of pale red blush in the

\textsuperscript{459} Dormont 1994, 17.
\textsuperscript{461} Dormont 1994, 18.
\textsuperscript{463} Dormont 1994, 18.
cheeks and lips. Here the subject’s (mother) religious austerity is reflected by the rigid pose and palette to match it. Moreover, this ascetic palette is named in the title of the painting and is the element which underlines the modern meditative quality of the work.

The innovative approach led Whistler to experiment with other subjects. In the ‘Nocturnes’ he employed a broadly similar technique over a variety of grounds. Again, a musical term for his tonal paintings. Now the misty, vaporous modern landscapes were no longer views of a real world, but a very Baudelairean artificial arrangement of shapes and colours, a formal “problem to be solved”. Simplicity and economy of expression are the essence of Whistler’s art. This is evident in the wide range of mediums and techniques he used; from pastels and drawings to his paintings. One of his students, Otto Bacher, describes that “delicacy seemed to him the keynote of everything, carrying more fully than anything else his use of the suggestion of tenderness, neatness, and nicety”. One should also note that, alongside these ascetic works, Whistler also produced highly colourful pastels and paintings. Interestingly, many of these more colouristic works show also a different brush technique which is much freer and stronger, in other words, texture and technique adapted to the use of colour and thus to the mood created.

As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour...The great musicians knew this...Beethoven and the rest wrote music – simply music: On F or G they constructed celestial harmonies.”

(Whistler in 1878)

This musical and harmonious art was of particular interest to European and Finnish artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is evident in the 1860s in the works of Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes. As some art historians have stated, this musical tendency in art presented itself in the elaborate titles and artworks of Whistler. But Whistler was not alone with his musical analogies. As this study will claim, many artists were interested in chromatic and tonal compositions. In music, as Riley (1995) states, the daring orchestral colour experiments of Wagner,

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464 For an example of these landscapes: Whistler’s famous court case against Ruskin in 1878 where the Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket (1875) was the cause. Walker 1887, 79-85. Dorment 1994, 18.
466 “Celebrities at home. No. XCII: Mr. James Whistler at Cheyne – Walk”, The World, 22 May 1878, 4-5; Whistler, Gentle Art, 126-128.
Berlioz, and Scriabin exploded in the late-nineteenth century but it was not until three decades later and the work of Arnold Schoenberg that they found any kind of echo. With musicality grew the idea of synaesthesia, which continued to flourish in the abstract art of the early-twentieth century. I would, however, argue that the idea of simplification, colour harmony and abstraction in painting goes back far earlier than, for example, Kandinsky.

It was through Édouard Manet that Théodore Duret made Whistler’s acquaintance at the end of 1880. In April 1881, to encourage Whistler to return to the Paris scene, Duret informed readers of the Gazette des Beaux-Arts of the painter’s most recent activities in London and of his libel action against Ruskin, which, from then on, took its place alongside the Dame Blanche in the imagination of the French. But the links with his artist friends had already been re-established. From the 1882 Salon onwards, Whistler’s painting was to shatter all preconceived ideas of art. From white he had turned to black. The Portrait of Valerie Meux (1881) surprised many people. After the debate about white colour, it now turned to black. In the serious Revue des Deux Mondes of 15 June 1882, Henry Houssaye pondered: “Why, instead of an Englishwoman, did M. Whistler not use some negroess from the Congo as a model to make a thorough job of his ‘symphony in black’?” In L’Art, Paul Leroi observed that it was a deserved failure, since the “very eminent etcher Whistler” indulges “exclusively in the cult of the approximate and the pure smudge”, thus reducing the painting to a “dirty-looking, blackish smudge”. It is clear that his choice of ascetic art, which was based on tonal whites and blacks, was too abstract, too rigid and too much to handle in the 1880s.

Whistler returned to France at the turn of the 1890s. 1891 was a significant year for him: his portrait of Carlyle, the Arrangement in Grey and Black, No.2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle (1872–73), was purchased by the Glasgow Museum of Art. Portrait of the Painter’s Mother was shown at the Musée de Luxembourg and the artist was awarded the Légion d’Honneur medal. Whistler returned to his friends and spent much of his time with the symbolist circle at Mallarmé’s salon. His close friends included Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin and Monet but he felt most at home in the company of writers. They appreciated his work and considered them comparable to their poems; Whistler’s refined taste and the shadowy light and mysticism of his work fascinated them. The dreamlike figures of his paintings

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468 Riley 1995, 2.
469 Whistler: Arrangement in Black No.5: Lady Meux (1881), oil on canvas, 194.2 x 130.2, Honolulu Academy of Art.
471 Whistler: Arrangement in Grey and Black, No.2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle (1872–73), oil on canvas, 171.2 x 143.5 cm, Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery.
emerged from the dark and the modern landscape of nocturnes corresponded to the landscape of their poems; misty blue-grey views of a nocturnal secret city. As an example of his most highly ascetic works, the Nocturne in Grey and Gold, Chelsea (1876) is reminiscent of the soft vaporousness of Eugène Carrière’s works this urban ‘street-nocturne’ pins down the ideas of the modern ascetic art.

Whistler comments on the importance of colour in 1878: My picture of a “Harmony in Grey and Gold” is an illustration of my meaning – a snow scene with a single black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture.

Towards the end of his life Whistler was lionised by symbolist and decadent artists and poets. In 1889, Joris Karl Huysmans, author of the decadent novel A rebours, wrote that “His nuances tend to go beyond the frontiers of painting: he enters into a realm of letters, moving towards melancholic dreams in which M. Verlaine’s flowers grow.” It is thus interesting that Dormant (1994) continues that “at first it might seem odd that a painter who was essentially a Realist and who went to great lengths to repudiate any literary dimension in his art, should be taken up by those whose work explored a world of fantasies, dreams and emotion.” From the point of view of colour, and what this study aims to show, Whistler was not a realist as Dormant states and if he was not a symbolist artist but an artist admired and understood by the Symbolists, it can be said that, if nothing else, Whistler was a modern artist par excellence who embraced fully the possibilities of referring to the past and who worked and developed the concept of transfer to medium as much as Gauguin. Hopefully, this study will show that in considering the new concept of colour ascetism, Whistler was one of the most important artists, who experimented with medium and base, influenced and inspired many long after his death in 1903.

A Finnish artist who, in her lifetime, was compared to Whistler was Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946). She spent most of the 1880s and 1890s studying and travelling in Paris, Brittany and St Ives. In the 1890s Schjerfbeck’s art underwent a major change. From being an ardent painter in the naturalist mode, she turned to a softer, misty treatment, and reduced her colours to black, earth tones and white.

472 Walker 1987, 115-122.
475 Dormant 1994, 264.
At the beginning of the 1900s her art simplified to near abstraction. As Lena Holger (1992) states, one cannot avoid comparing these works from the early 20th century to Whistler’s puritanically ascetic portraits of his mother and Thomas Carlyle. The paintings convey the same quietness; the same peaceful, measured colour surfaces link the two artists. In Schjerbeck’s Seamstress (1905, fig. 30) there is the same kind of interior, of composition and static colour ascetic expression as in the two Whistler works. Also it is important to note that, with Whistler, Schjerbeck shared a great admiration for the Spanish Old Masters, Rembrandt and Hals, whose works she copied to finance her stays in Europe. And like Whistler, she continued to refer to the Old Masters throughout her life.

Charles Riley (1995) stresses how different Whistler’s methods were from those of his contemporaries. Unlike Cézanne, whose work Whistler hated, or Kandinsky, Whistler was less interested in the dynamic interplay of colours in dialogue than he was in the echo of a single voice. Whereas Kandinsky and Cézanne used the border between two colours to enliven both, Whistler’s works are almost devoid of discernible edges. Where they are observed, as in Rothko, they are blurred and softened by brushwork and gradual modulation. The conceptual coherence that governs the work is essential to understanding Whistler. Both his paintings and his decorative schemes hinge on one idea: the promotion of a signature colour, the tonic, to a position of utter priority, at which its multi-dimensional strengths and variety may be appreciated. Many contend that Whistler made a name for himself by inventing the modern notion of harmony, but by earlier and later standards there is little in his harmonic combinations that is really new. He relied too heavily upon two mainstays of tradition, the use of complementaries (especially blue and yellow) and the gradations of a single tone. Whistler was not a Schoenberg in paint – if anything, his age-old devices are more reminiscent of Mahler. What is important to note is that, despite Riley’s negative remark, Whistler’s “old methods” are not at all in contradiction with the invention of a ‘modern mode’. I would argue that, in fact, all the artists examined in this study developed their modern art from strong links to the past. As we have seen, the difference lay in the attitude to the past with which they adopted, referred, moulded and shaped a new language while remaining conscious of the past. I would even claim that, with these artists, the notion of historicity was the modern in modern art. It is evident that modern art

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476 Holger refers also to Hammershøi’s ascetic works. Schjerbeck is known to have seen pictures of Whistler’s paintings in the English magazine The Studio and the French publication L’art et les artistes but she herself denies that she had been influenced by them. Holger 1992, 57.


478 Many artists have recently been linked with Old Masters, e.g Picasso etc. Paris exhibition Picasso and the Masters 2009.
grew not from a void but that it had many different roots and connections to the past. Whistler is a fine example of the diversity of this concept.

This process of finding a new language and aesthetics for modern art was a long one and it became clear when Whistler taught or talked about painting, which was often. He would dwell on the importance of selecting or abstracting from Nature one particular tone. He told George Lucas, a young engraver and art dealer, that in his monochromes he had developed a “science of colour and picture pattern”. As Inez Bates recalled in her memoir of the Académie Carmen in Paris, Whistler would counsel his students, “To find the true note is the difficulty”. As Riley (1995) notes, the use of the singular is important. All of the memorable Whistlers, including the portraits of Carlyle and his mother, “arrangements” in grey, black, and white, and the powerful, full-length portraits in black of the middle years, are in some way monochromes. An examination of the self-portraits reveals that, from the beginning and even later in life, he favoured a Rembrandtesque brown for his own image. For Whistler colour became an autonomous element in his art, which could be manipulated and moulded – or more precisely be played like an instrument.

What was Whistler’s legacy to European art? Riley (1995) sees that, like Degas, Whistler was a master of control. Next to Monet and Gauguin, Whistler’s palette seems low-keyed and even drab. Yet Whistler was as much a pioneer of modern chromaticism as they were, particularly in his anticipation of the monochromatic abstract works of a few decades later and of the grey masterpieces of Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Brice Marden, Nancy Haynes and others. When the critic Robert Pincus-Witten (1984) compiled his astute history of monochromatic painting, his starting point was Whistler and his use of the “image imbued with the controlling emotion of a single colour”. Whistler’s influence as a painter is matched by his work as an early experimenter in the atmospherics of colour applied to the surroundings in which his work was displayed and created. The influence of his exhibition techniques is often overlooked in considerations of his legacy. His openings, for example, were elaborate chromatic arrangements of his own devising, down to the decorative yellow butterflies he gave to women visitors and the uniforms worn by the doormen. In this sense, Whistler’s creation of a total work of art also included ‘a total work of colour’.

The key to Whistlerian colour is what he called the “management of the palette”. Comparing Cézanne with Whistler, Gage notes that they both adhered to the principle

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481 Riley 1995, 88.
482 Pincus-Witten 1984, 43-44.
483 Riley 1995, 85-86.
of modulation rather than modelling in colour, based on a scale established by the palette: “Like Whistler and the painters of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Cézanne set out his scale of mixtures on the palette before he started working and did not mix as he went along; this must, of itself, have imposed some conceptual coherence on his rendering of his perceptions from the outset.”

But what was the connection between Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes, the two artists who worked with a tonalist method? They were not friends but they undoubtedly knew one another’s work from the Salons. Each developed his own particular tonalism, Whistler used his “key note” and his “sauce” to create symphonic works and Puvis de Chavannes had his greyish palette of “mother tones” which were keyed in chords to those of the surrounding architecture. And they both strove to create complete works of art through the control of colour. They both became so involved with their personal palette that everything else, even the subject, became secondary. Whistler’s working method of the fluid ‘sauce’ and the ‘key tone’ was the basis of his works, as we have seen from Symphony in White: The White Girl (1862) to the last work Self-Portrait (1895–1900). These artists dedicated much to emphasis on technique and few other artists concentrated in their oeuvre on transfer to the medium as thoroughly as Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes. This, I would acclaim, was their legacy to future generations.

2.2.3 CONTRASTS – ÉDOUARD MANET

A couple of days ago I was in the Luxembourg where they have the modern masters. - - There was this painting by Manet [Olympia] it was the same new style as [Puvis de] Chavannes’s but I couldn’t understand it at all. - - If this is art I should become a baker. No one but Enckell admires it. It is this that is called art for the future, it makes me cry. - -

(Väinö Blomstedt November 1891)

Looking at Olympia (1863) now, it may seem unlikely that this painting could have proved difficult or impenetrable to the contemporary public. It was, however, the considerable evidence of failure to find meaning in Olympia, witnessed by
contemporary critical reviews, that provided the art historian T.J. Clark with the starting point for his analysis of the painting.\textsuperscript{487} To focus on it would be seen by some art historians as falling into the trap of rehearsing an argument over a painting that has been recognised as one of the first major icons of Modernism. One reason for choosing to look at this much-discussed work is precisely that it has been argued over. For Greenberg, as we remember, Manet was the first artist to show with ‘frankness’ the flatness of the picture surface characteristic of modernist painting. Although the majority of contemporary critics saw Olympia as a failed painting, it came to be regarded as a canonical work — this is seen particularly vividly in the way in which views on art, and on what art is change over time. As Briony Fer asks: What is *Olympia* a painting of? What does it represent?\textsuperscript{488}

One way to examine the contested nature of the modern would be to examine these different views. But at least for young Finnish artists like Väinö Blomstedt and Ellen Thesleff, the reason *Olympia* was so striking and different was its innovative form. Blomstedt wrote home in November 1891, shocked by the boldness of the painting, not bothering about the nude model and its moral aspects, (they couldn’t know who the model was or what she represented) but of the boldness of the simplified surface which was clearly new and disturbing for the young artists. Thesleff, on the other hand, stressed Manet’s importance as a model for all young artists at the end of the nineteenth century. In Thesleff’s opinion Manet had created an amazingly clear synthetist form along with a reduced palette to enhance the overall simplification.\textsuperscript{489} Schjerfbeck too writes later in 1911 that Manet’s art led to “a synthetist view”.\textsuperscript{490} In general, Manet was seen as the leading model and guide of the Finnish Symbolists and Modernists.

Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) was first brought to public attention in 1865, when it was exhibited at the Salon. On the face of it, the painting complied with the requirements of a Salon painting of its type, and it came with the usual trappings: it was a painting of a female nude with a classicising title and like Whistler’s *Symphony in White: The White Girl* (1862), a few lines of verse accompanying it in the Salon handbook.\textsuperscript{491} The verse, by Manet’s friend, the poet Zacharie Astruc, uses the fictitious name ‘Olympia’ whereas contemporary spectators might have expected to find Venus. For it is Venus, the goddess of love, associated with allegorical representations of


\textsuperscript{488} Fer 1993, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{489} Sarajas-Korte 1998, 26-28.

\textsuperscript{490} Schjerfbeck’s letter to Maria Wiik, 16.7.1911. Appelgren 1949, 139.

\textsuperscript{491} “When, weary of dreaming, Olympia awakes, Spring enters in the arms of a gentle black messenger; It is the slave who, like the amorous night, comes in and makes the day delicious to see with flowers: The august young woman in whom the flame (of passion) burns constantly. Zacharie Astruc in English Fer 1993, 22; Clark 1999, 83.
Spring, and conventionally ‘awakening’ and ushering in the spring with flowers, who
was a common device in Venetian art. What Manet did was recast the motif and
its traditional associations in contemporary form, in the bouquet held by the maid-
 servant and in the floral pattern sketchily worked on the silk shawl at Olympia’s
feet. Manet also used the classical pose of the recumbent Venus, which he drew
from Titian’s famous Venus of Urbino (1538) in the Uffizi Gallery.492

What the critics in France saw, on the other hand, was not how far Olympia
complied with artistic tradition, but how far it departed from conventional ways of
representing the nude, and that departure proved difficult to make sense of. The
critics failed to find what I have called significant interest in the painting because
it did not fit, at least in some crucial ways, with what they expected of art. Olympia
had the pose of Venus, but also of some contemporary travesty called Olympia.493
This ‘travesty’ is a reworking of an existing model which disguises the original by
clothing it in a ridiculous form: “female gorilla, a grotesque in India-rubber outlined
in Black.”494 What is most interesting is that this discomfort with the supposed
vulgarity of the woman depicted became embroiled in these reviews with the
supposed inadequacy of Manet’s artistic technique – his “absolute impotence of
execution”.495 The critic Theophile Gautier wrote: “the colour of the flesh is dirty, the
modelling non-existent. The shadows are indicated by more or less large smears of
blackening”, “the least handsome of women has bones, muscles, skin, and some
kind of colour.”496 Fer (1993) points out that it is notable that the language of dirt,
of smearing, refers at one moment to the colour of the paint on the canvas, but is
then associated with the supposed moral character of the woman depicted.497 This
attitude of the critics was not new, the same association of disturbing colour (white
and black) and the character of the model was clear when Whistler’s ‘virginal’ Dame
Blanche was shown in the Salon des Refusés two years earlier in 1863.

In Manet’s painting, the expanse of Olympia’s body was edged in a chalky grey
outline, which was awkward and abrupt when compared with the softer gradation
of tones in the conventional use of smooth chiaroscuro. This lack of modelling
signalled a lack of compliance, compliance with a tradition of painting the nude, in
which the nude female body was offered for contemplation in idealised form. The
seamless, smooth finish of contemporary paintings of the nude is interrupted not
only by such details as the black choker, which has the effect of cutting the body
at the neck, but also by the evident brushwork and the sudden shifts in the tonal

492 Fer 1993, 22.
493 Fer 1993, 23.
494 Amédée Cantaloube in Le Grand Journal, Clark 1999, 94.
495 E. Chesneau, in Clark 1985, 290.
497 Fer 1993, 24.
range of the painting from dark to light. As one critic, Félix Derière, said of the picture, it seemed to disintegrate before him: “White, black, red, and yellow make a frightful confusion on the canvas; the woman, the Negress, the bouquet, the cat; all this hubbub of disparate colours and impossible forms seizes one’s attention and leaves one stupefied.”498 For this critic the painting is inarticulate because it is cut adrift from the normal conventions of picture-making; we could compare its effect to a sentence in which some words are intelligible but the grammar is all wrong.499

The two figures depicted in the painting are the unclothed figure of Olympia (Victorine Meurent) and the black servant offering flowers. To compare, where Berthe Morisot with a Fan (Musée d’Orsay) lacks detail, this painting is more specific in its connotations of sex, class and what were the signs, as contemporary critics observed, of a contemporary prostitute. One critic went so far as to suggest the kind of prostitute she was, commenting on ‘the vicious strangeness of the little faubourgienne (girl from the suburbs), a woman of the night out of Paul Niquet...’ (a low-class prostitute from a bar which serviced the market area of Les Halles). The body of Olympia, seen as ‘used’ and ‘skinny’, was distinguished from the body of a courtesan, the accepted subject of many contemporary paintings (and in the nineteenth century Titian’s Venus of Urbino was widely accepted as a painting of a courtesan). Perhaps the travesty was made even more emphatic by the contradictory presence of the attendant maid-servant who seemed more in keeping with a courtesan’s boudoir. So, was it this juxtaposition of sex and class that disturbed the critics? Did the unsettling ‘frankness’ lie not so much in the manner of execution, as Greenberg would have it, as in the frank portrayal of sex in the market-place, with the imaginary male spectator as a third protagonist – not just a spectator of art but a potential client?500 I would argue that here the form cannot be detached from the narrative. To be more specific, the extraordinary drama of the blacks and whites and the simplified, contrasted form detached the painting from the polished smoothness of Titian’s Venus. The dialogue was surely considered by Manet and not made in vain. The reference to Titian was made in a different way from that in which Manet referred to Old Masters, where it was in the same vein as in the more simplified art of the modern mode in which ascetic colour played a crucial part.

As Fer (1993) states, here the answer may be that it is neither one nor the other – neither the technique nor the subject – but rather a combination of a problematic subject with a disconcerting way of painting. To see the difficulty of Olympia as residing only in its subject-matter – the fact that it is a picture of a prostitute – is to

498 Critic Félix Derière quoted in Clark 1999, 97-98.
499 Fer 1993, 24.
500 Fer 1993, 25.
fail to account for the kind of illegibility that we have been discussing, the ‘impossible forms’ of the painting. To understand what the painting represents entails more than identifying the subject depicted. To ask why Manet should have chosen to paint his model, cast as a prostitute and as an emblematic figure of modernity, and to paint his subject in the way that he did, is to ask about the painting as representation. Fer points out that the iconography of a painting, what is depicted, however complex, cannot be separated from the way in which it is represented on the canvas.501

It is interesting that Manet’s use of ‘impossible’ forms and formal effects and the sort of ‘incoherence’ to which the critics objected can tell us something about the way the modern was constructed in Manet’s work – as a matter of technique as well as subject matter. To ask “What does Olympia represent?” is to ask about its meaning: although the figure of a prostitute is the subject depicted in the painting, what the painting represents is the obliteration of the original ‘story’ by Manet’s manipulation of the surface of the painting, which defies a literal reading.502 But how did Manet manipulate the surface? I would argue that, in fact, the bold use of black contours and white on white was the most intriguing feature of this painting, also for some of Manet’s contemporaries, particularly artists.

Given what we already know of Zola’s view of painting, it is not surprising that when he came to write about Olympia in 1867, he saw its interest as residing in the way it was painted. Addressing the artist, he wrote: “You needed a nude woman and you chose Olympia, the first-comer. You needed some clear and luminous patches of colour, so you added a bouquet of flowers; you found it necessary to have some dark patches so you placed in a corner a Negress and a cat.”503 He establishes the ‘character’ of Olympia – she is depicted as a modern type – on the other, he identifies the features of Manet’s ‘language’. Olympia is painted ‘as a large pale mass against a pale background’. He removes the painting’s interest away from the literary aspects of the subject towards the way the subject is painted; interestingly, for Zola this was how it achieved its identity as a modern painting.504

Here we come to what Clement Greenberg means by ‘experience’, the practical aspect of making art, and the artist’s attention to the medium of painting.505 In Greenberg’s view what all successful modern painting had in common was an acknowledgement of the surface of a painting – that is, the flatness of its support. In contrast to the illusion of depth pursued by the ‘Old Masters’, this flatness

502 This idea of obliteration in Manet’s work is raised by the writer Georges Bataille in his book on Manet, Bataille, Georges, Manet: Etude biographique et critique. Geneva 1955.
504 Fer 1993, 27-29.
505 For Greenberg the medium is used as meaning the material and technique in which the artist works, not a binding liquid as it really is. See Jirat-Wasiutyenski & Travers Newton Jr. 2000, “Glossary”, 259.
revealed rather than concealed the medium of painting. In Greenberg’s view ‘Manet’s paintings became the first modernist works by virtue “of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted.”’

\[506\] This refers to the way in which Manet painted his subject with sketchy brushstrokes and very little depth – the way the nude figure of Olympia, for example, is painted as an expanse of white flesh edged with abrupt grey outlines which draw attention to the flatness of the picture surface. Greenberg’s judgement was thus made on formal grounds – which is not to say that he was blind to the subject depicted, but that he thought the quality of modern works of art depended on the acknowledgement of the medium, on the way in which a work was painted. Priority is given to the autonomous properties of painting because it is these which give painting its particular character and which distinguish it from any other art. For Greenberg, ‘flatness’ is the most important feature of painting, because it is this two-dimensional characteristic which is peculiar to it and which makes it like no other art.\[507\] As Fer (1993) demonstrates, underlying Zola’s discussion of Olympia is the idea that modernity is qualitative and that modern paintings require modern spectators. To read a painting in an appropriate way, the viewer should focus on the way it was painted rather than try to weave a story around it. For this was the condition imposed on the viewer by a modern work of art. Zola’s interpretation has subsequently been seen by some as the ‘right’ way to read Manet’s work, and it has been used to validate the view that Manet’s interests lay primarily in the medium of painting. But, as we have seen, in the 1860s Zola’s was, to say the least, a minority view: the majority of spectators read paintings according to their narrative, moralising content, and there was no pre-existing or single type of ‘modern’ spectator.\[508\]

From the point of colour ascetism Olympia (1863) was just one of Manet’s more colour ascetic works, and not even so radical in the use of colour. The more striking examples are the Musée d’Orsay’s Woman at Her Window, Angélina (1865) and Berthe Morisot with a Bunch of Violets (1872). As in many of Manet’s works the bold strokes of paint are reduced to black, brown and white. I would, however, argue that flatness is just one property of Manet’s paintings. If we look at the comments of contemporaries like Zola, and other artists, such as the Finn Blomstedt, it was also the boldness of the contrasted palette, the white on white and the black – the black contours, and the black in general. Magnus Enckell, on the other hand, paid homage to Manet in both composition as well as in an ascetic palette of strong black and white contrasts. In his Boy Resting (1802, fig. 4) and in his keyword Awakening (1894, fig. 5) Manet’s art, Olympia in particular, was looked upon as a ‘guide’ to “a

\[506\] Greenberg 1982, 6.
\[507\] Fer 1993, 14.
\[508\] Fer 1993, 29.
synthetist view” which could be summarised as non-mimetic, strong contours, contrasts and a reduced, ascetic palette. In the 1890s it was mainly this bold use of colour, not the subject, that artists admired or were horrified by.

2.2.4 MONOCHROMATIC – EUGÈNE CARIÈRE

Only those without patience could fail to penetrate the secret of Carière’s genius and appreciate the pleasures his paintings offer in the fascinating realm of the soul and that reality within us of which Carrière gives his kindly revelation.

(Rodin on Carrière)

Of all the artists who developed and used a colour ascetic palette it was only Eugène Carrière who used the extreme form of monochromacy, which means ‘painting with one colour’. This, on the other hand, was a painting technique which he himself had long developed, but it is also an extreme way of simplifying painting which, as we know, interested such twentieth century artists from Malevich to the Minimalists. In Claude Roger-Marx’s (1970) words Carrière was a master whose care for plastic values matched his intellectual preoccupations, and who, thanks to his clair-obscur, the magic world, the hyphen of which inseparably links the known and unknown, was always intent on the visible world he observed. For Roger-Marx Carrière’s work was dedicated to woman, to man, to child, to the hearth, which is another word evoking so well the radiant warmth of an environment at once physical and of the mind, to which affection or blood ties give the illusion of being unified for ever. Due to his extensive social contacts with so many of the important poets, playwrights, artists, collectors, and officials of the time, Carrière painted many portraits of his fellow artists, for example Portrait of Paul Gauguin (1891) and Portrait of Paul Verlaine (1890). The critic Édouard Rod saw in Carrière’s art the ultimate protest to “yesterday’s Realism”. We can thank him for incorporating

509 As Helene Schjerfbeck later said, Schjerfbeck’s letter to Maria Wiik, 16.7.1911. Appelgren 1949a, 139.
511 ‘Monochromatic’ is loosely used to mean a painting done with few colours. This is, however, incorrect since there really are monochromatic works made with one colour.
512 Carrière developed this technique also in prints. See, for example, Carrière catalogue 1996, 212-213.
514 Bantens 1983, 129.
515 Carrière, Portrait de Jean coq (1891), oil on canvas, 54.6 x 65.4, Yale University Art Gallery.
516 Portrait of Paul Verlaine (ca. 1890), oil on canvas, 61.2 x 50.5 cm, Musee d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumid=117
the hereafter in artistic form, for showing us the human soul. It is clear that for Rod, Carrière’s portraits in particular represented the mystical soul for which Carrière became famous.

Carrière has been linked with the symbolist movement and his art has been shown in exhibitions alongside that of the Symbolists. On the other hand, Rodolphe Rapetti and others have rightfully underlined Carrière’s individuality. In 1904 Camille Mauclair referred to him as un halluciné, un voyant, un incassable. Carrière’s dualistic and mystical art and especially his ‘immaterial’ colours are related to the pursuit by Baudelaire and the later Symbolists of a non-realistic art of the ideas. Thus the aspiration of spiritualism, the dematerialisation of the real became the ideal. Neo-platonist awareness furthered artists to work on the basis of true art. These aspirations towards a mysterious and immaterial art of a voyeur, a seer, derive from Baudelaire’s theories showing the poet as a genius and not merely from his ability to create, but also from his ability to perceive. Art critic G.-A. Aurier likewise considers the foundation of all knowledge to be subjectively, mystically, and intuitively revealed. But mystical initiation and intuition alone are not enough. Implicit in Aurier’s cognitive theory is Plato’s concept of recollection as the source of our knowledge of Absolute Ideas, and contemplation as its instrument. In his article on Carrière of 1891 Aurier refers to ‘memory as the source of forgotten Ideas’. He connects the melancholy power of dreams and their enveloping atmosphere with the ability to remember forgotten things. Recollection, he says, represents the immutable reality, that is, Ideas. In Aurier’s opinion Carrière was the artist who had understood this law of existence and he praises him because his soul is visible in his paintings, because he paints the souls of others, and because he takes the viewer away from “dull and brutal reality” by bathing it in mystery. He transforms reality into the “magic of dreams”, while remaining true to the real. He evokes for us a world of softly luminous mist, of “things vanished”; he captures “melancholy visions glimpsed in the mists of an uncertain memory”. He is the poet of recollections. These comments by his contemporary tell us something of the effect Carrière’s mystical art had and of the way in which his art was linked to the thinking of Baudelaire and the Neo-Platonists.

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521 Gaultier 2002, 90, 102.
Carrière’s trademark is a broad, erased, thin, partly transparent surface, which envelopes the subject in a hazy, ascetic space. Thinly charged with paint, Carrière’s brush brings from out of the shadows the essential of a being – that is to say the features that stand for thought. Roger-Marx poetically states that “as on a mountain, mist suddenly parts, allowing a fragment of landscape to appear in clear relief, so from the cloudiness of ash-blonde, dull gold, amber, velvety-black emerge visages singly or together, the effect heightened slightly by a touch of carmine or tender pink; wondering, anxious or meditative, turned towards the past or the future, seemingly caught up in a dream more living than reality”.524 His fantômes synthétiques,525 as Charles Morice called these figures, emerge from the darkness. Carrière’s many paintings consist of portraits, landscapes and his famous ‘Maternité’ paintings. As in Manet’s works, Carrière’s misty art was created by contrasts, but with a technique very different from Manet’s strong contrasts. Carrière’s soft, sweeping technique usually used only two colours – a polychrome pair based on brown and ivory or black and white. This technique developed slowly over a number of years from 1885 onwards.526 It is interesting that, even though he is considered a symbolist artist, Carrière’s subjects are not symbolist as such but mainly the intimate and every day life of his family. The enchantment of his art is based on presenting ‘a human soul condensed’ in a painting. In other words, what is actually ‘symbolist’ in his art is his technique which produces almost abstract visions in ascetic colour.

_A mad man, a voyeur, a man impossible to categorise_

(Camille Mauclair 1904)527

As Rapetti (2012) states, in Carrière’s work, the asceticism of his palette, often also criticised by his contemporaries, his willingness to capture primordial shapes and their movement through gesture, the presence in his paintings of places with no recognisable feature that would allow them to be identified, immediately assign landscape a symbolic role. In 1901, Carrière gave a talk at the Natural History Museum in Paris, which was published in his Écrits et lettres choisis in 1907.528 The text bears witness to a malleable conception of nature, based on an equivalence between the mineral, animal and plant realms and bringing together science (biology, botanics, geology) and aesthetic intuition. Like an obsessive Symbolist, Carrière was searching for a single word that encapsulates the entirety of the cosmos. For him, there was no difference between painting a figure or a landscape; he represented

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526 Rapetti 2008, 37, 39.
528 Carrière 1907, 27.
both with similar arabesques of dark colour. Suggestive mistiness, spatial unreality (his landscapes do not always have a foreground), sinuous lines leading the eye outside the frame: Carrière’s paintings evoke not so much what they represent as a kind of mnemonic presence. This instability of representation was described by Paul-Jean Toulet when he formulated the following observations in one of his notebooks in 1908:

_The greatest thing about Carrière, which recalls Rembrandt, is that he expresses or suggests the undercurrents of life – it’s the fact that what he shows is only the visible knot where forces and obscure actions which began outside the canvas get bound together. Or rather, did not begin. For life is not something one can contain within a border, or within five acts, something with a beginning, a middle and an end; it is infinitely contiguous to itself, without voids or frontiers. - To sum up, in Carrière’s work, the visible is only a grazing of the surface of the invisible. Like rocks that are slowly uncovered by the ebbing tide._ 529

Even though Carrière’s art has for the most part been forgotten, his unique, soft, enveloping mist, his _monochromes arabesques_ of brown, 530 the intimist painting for which he was famous won many followers in the 1890s. By that time Carrière was ranked among the most respected artists of his time. In 1890 Léopold Mabilleau advised others of the danger of following the narrow path of Carrière’s monochromatic brown, intimist painting. 531 However, little had been done to interpret or analyse his work. 532 As the painter of home life, maternité and landscapes his subject matter was not symbolist, but his treatment of the subject was, with colour and form. Among his totally monochromatic works one can find both landscapes and human figures, where the painting is created using one colour and the base canvas. 533 It is important to note that many Finnish artists were considered to have been influenced by Carrière’s ascetic art. From the outset, Ellen Thesleff’s paintings (figs. 32, 33) from the 1890s have been compared with the French artist’s hazy paintings. 534 In real monochromacy, Carrière went furthest of all, painting canvases using only one dark colour, the light base being the light colour which glows through where

529 Toulet 1986; Rapetti 2012, 30.
533 It should be noted that, technically speaking, because of the absence of a conservator’s examination, it is not possible to say just from looking at these paintings, which colours Carrière used. I would say that in most of his monochromatic works he used sienna brown and umbra brown. It should also be noted that these paintings are not studies but finished works.
needed. This monochromatic painting, the most extreme colour technique, was adopted by one Finnish artist, Magnus Enckell (fig. 4), who, instead of oils, used black watercolour and a light coloured paper as the ‘other colour’.\textsuperscript{535} On the other hand, in his review of the 1914 Autumn exhibition, the Finnish art critic Sigurd Frosterus links works of Helene Schjerbeck painted in the 1890s and early 1900s to the ascetic art of Carrière and Whistler, especially in her use of a similar kind of “intensified mood”.\textsuperscript{536}

As Rober James Bantens (1983) concludes, Carrière’s influence and the acclaim for his work were obviously due to its being representative of an aspect of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century taste. To ignore Carrière would be to have an incomplete view of the aesthetic climate of that era. Despite this, his reputation has declined for a number of reasons. In Bantens’ view, in the light of the artistic currents which emerged during the last century, the absence of colour in Carrière’s dark palette may make his work seem less related to what followed.\textsuperscript{537} I would, however, argue that Carrière’s colour ascetic and monochromatic art somehow continued in the art of the Cubists (Picasso and Braque), the Suprematists (Malevich) and later in that of the Minimalists. Picasso and Malevich at least could certainly not have avoided knowing Carrière’s unique art in the early-twentieth century. Even though, at the time of Carrière’s death in 1906, the aesthetics mostly preferred the bright, strong colours of the Fauves and the Expressionists, is it mere coincidence that, for example, Picasso’s ‘Blue Period’ is said to have begun around 1906?\textsuperscript{538} And soon afterwards, could it be that Manet’s and Carrière’s contribution to simplifying the palette to extremes would continue in the sparse, ascetic palette of Analytical Cubism, in the black, grey and white used? Or even more so in Malevich’s monochromatic paintings?

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\textsuperscript{536} Frosterus 1917, 248.

\textsuperscript{537} Bantens uses “monochromatic palette”. Bantens 1983, 129.

\textsuperscript{538} Also Bantens mentions Carrière as an inspiration for Picasso’s ‘blue period’. Bantens 1983, 132.
2.3 SYNTHESTIST COLOUR

2.3.1 SURNATURELLE COLOUR – PAUL GAUGUIN

Above all, don’t perspire over a picture. A strong emotion can be translated immediately: dream on it and seek its simplest form.

(Paul Gauguin in 1885)

The guiding principle of Impressionism – painting the moment, capturing the light, painting in pure colours – was, in the long term, too rational for artists seeking a connection between emotion and form and attracted by the imaginary. The well-known experiments of Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard in Pont-Aven with the non-realistic palette and flattened surface triggered a whole new method of using colour. In 1888 Gauguin left Paris for Pont-Aven, Brittany. Inspired by the hills of the coastal landscape, he began concentrating on lines and reducing volumes. Round him he gathered a small group of artists. The advent of the young Bernard was a turning point. Influenced by Japanese woodcuts and medieval stained glass, Bernard employed bold sections, frontal elevations, contoured forms and smooth expanses of unifying colour *Breton women in the meadow* (*Bretonnes dans la Prairie*, 1888) was the daring painting he created in this circle of inspiration. It revealed everything that Gauguin had spent nearly three years searching for and he eagerly adopted the young artist’s idea. Belinda Thomson (1997) concludes that under the influence of folk art and Japanese prints, Gauguin evolved towards Cloisonism, a style given its name by the critic Éduard Dujardin in response to Bernard’s cloisonné enamelling technique. Gauguin was highly appreciative of Bernard’s art and of his daring in the employment of a style which suited Gauguin in his quest to express the essence of objects in his art. But as this study has suggested, from the point of view of colour, Gauguin took his art away from cloisonist black contour style to an adoption of his own and developed his colour-conscious art further towards synthetist colour which had many followers.

It should be noted that Gauguin’s quest for a new language in art was a process which began in Pont-Aven and continued from there. One should also ask what was the reason for such a search? Debora Silverman (2000) has shown how seminal it was for Gauguin to discover a new and modern form of sacred art to fill the void

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left by the religious system that artists were struggling to abandon but which had nonetheless left indelible imprints on their consciousness, shaping their theories of life, attitudes toward reality, choice of subject and repertoire of artistic techniques. Moreover, although Silverman examines the work of van Gogh and Gauguin, this new approach to sacred and poetic art should be extended to all artists in this study who adopted the synthetist palette.

Yes, you are right to want a painting with colouring suggestive of poetic ideas, and in that sense I agree with you, with one difference. I don't know any poetic ideas; it is probably a sense which I lack. I find EVERYTHING poetic and it is in the corners of my heart, which are sometimes mysterious, that I glimpse poetry.

(Gauguin to van Gogh in 1888)

Later the same year Gauguin worked with Vincent van Gogh in Arles where he painted, for example, Women from Arles in the Public Garden, Mistral (Arlésiennes au Jardin Public, Mistral) (1888) where he continued with a simplified surface and strong diagonal composition but a more or less imaginary palette. After that famous period he returned to Brittany, to Pont-Aven where his experiments with colour flourished. For example, The Yellow Christ (1889), with its symbolising colour, is more interesting from a colour standpoint. If in Vision of the Sermon the red colour, pure vermillion, raises the artwork to a surnaturelle sphere, or as Rapetti points out, the warm colour symbolises the energy of the struggle and indicates the unreality of the vision, then here in The Yellow Christ, with the different shades of chrome yellow on which the whole painting is built, the symbolising idea of martyrdom comes through, an idea which greatly puzzled Gauguin. More precisely, in both paintings the sacred and religious connotations are created by the subject and certain colours which emphasise the connotations and bring an emotional level to the artworks.

This study aims to show that this new attitude towards emphasis on technique and a transfer to the medium was established through individual artists such as Gauguin, who, during his lifetime, enjoyed a strong following. Artists like Edgar Degas, Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier, not forgetting a whole range of lesser-known

542 Silverman 2000, 3.
544 Women from Arles in the Public Garden, The Mistral (Arlésiennes au Jardin public, mistral) (1888), oil on canvas, 92 x 72, Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.
545 Gauguin leaves for Brittany in February and stays again in Pont-Aven. Joined by Charles Laval and Emile Bernard in Pont Aven. Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel) (1888), oil on canvas, 73 x 92, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; The Yellow Christ (1889), oil on canvas, 92 x 73, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York, General Purchase Funds 1946.
disciples, including the Pont-Aven school and the two Finnish artists Blomstedt and Halonen who wholeheartedly admired Gauguin’s work, hailing him as the initiator of a formal and decorative revolution. One of the reasons for this was undoubtedly Gauguin’s individual art which, from 1886 onwards, he termed ‘Synthetism’.546 Other terms relating to Gauguin’s art were ‘decorative’ and ‘primitive’, which later became a term of praise to signal vanguard art as opposed to the academic aesthetic of the 1890s.547 This liberation of form and colour through obedience to nature has been judged from modernist critics onwards to be Gauguin’s most important legacy to the twentieth century and especially to the avant-garde grouped round Matisse.548 The quotation from Gauguin’s letter to van Gogh also shows us Gauguin’s ideas on art and especially colour. I would argue that his legacy of a formal revolution was also a revolution in using synthetist colour.

Interest in Gauguin’s synthetist art has not ceased. Particularly in recent years new research has been published around its technical and contextual interests. Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski and Debora Silverman (2000) have both examined Gauguin’s contribution to the decorative revolution, connecting these formal developments to the social and historical context, each from a different angle: Jirat-Wasiutynski’s study in strong collaboration with the fine arts conservator H. Travers Newton Jr. and Silverman with an interest in Gauguin’s religious past and his attraction to the sacred.549 In this study it is my aim to establish this important transfer to the medium — especially from the point of view of synthetist colour — and to establish its important part in the transfer to the medium which manifests itself in paintings, writings and criticisms of the period from the 1880s to the early 1900s and beyond.

As mentioned earlier, Gauguin’s ideas on art and colour derived from Baudelaire’s correspondence theory, which was adopted by the artist early on. In his sonnet “Correspondences,” first published in Les Fleurs du mal in 1857, Baudelaire postulates a universal harmony that accounts for the relationship between the tangible and the intangible; he implies that the gifted poet perceives this relationship through the bare hints provided by nature, stressing the evocative and expressive

546 Synthetism is a term used by such post-impressionist artists as Paul Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Louis Anquetin to distinguish their work from Impressionism. Earlier, Synthetism has been linked with the term Cloisonism and later with Symbolism. The term is derived from the French verb synthétiser (to synthesize or to combine so as to form a new, complex product). Dempsey 2002, 53-55.


549 The results presented in Silverman’s book, and after additional years of research and close comparative scrutiny of letters and pictures, suggest that religious legacies provide a new point of entry from which to consider the tensions in the collaboration between van Gogh and Gauguin, to offer new readings of some of their major paintings, and to assess the wider resonances of their debates on technique, matter, and memory as they tested the limits of painting as a figurative language. Silverman 2000, 5.
power on the senses of such stimulants as perfumes, colours, and sounds. Well might Gauguin write of colour’s inner power, its mystery, its enigma so that we ‘cannot logically employ it except enigmatically’, to call up immediate sensations, as music does. Väinö Blomstedt, Gauguin’s Finnish pupil, reports from Paris in January 1894 “All he ever talks of are [cor]respondences, harmonies which we had never been used to hearing about.” It is evident that his colour-system operated on this intuitive level, using memory to work on the paintings. Baudelaire’s concept provides artists with a direct sign as to what makes a painting symbolist; not the subject but the symbol, the hidden sign behind it. And in many cases it is interesting that these hidden signs were represented by colour. For example, violent struggle by energetic vermilion and martyrdom by yellow.

In the philosophical environment of Gauguin, Rapetti (2005), on the other hand, stresses the neo-platonic underpinnings to symbolist idealism. Julien Leclerq reported that Aurier was “well informed in philosophy and science”. It is interesting to see how philosophical thinking and technical innovations in painting were seen to intertwine. Charles Chassé noted that by November 1890 Gauguin and Sérusier had already been “anointed as the Symbolists of visual art”, pointing out that “long before he met the Symbolists, Sérusier was an old hand at philosophical discussion”, having taught Maurice Denis “the philosophy of Plotinus and then revealing the technique and aesthetics of synthetist painting as received from Gauguin”. A letter from Gauguin to Schuffenecker shows, moreover, that by the late-1880s these issues were being debated by artists.

*Explaining in painting is not the same thing as describing. That’s why I prefer a colour suggestive of forms, and parable in composition rather than a painted novel.... In painting, a hand holding a handkerchief can express the feeling that gives it life, an entire past life as well as a future life. Since everything is conventional, and happiness and unhappiness are words in French that express a state of things; and black, mourning; why shouldn’t we manage to create various harmonies that correspond to the state of our innermost selves?*  

*(Gauguin December 1888)*

Here Gauguin is explaining his complex preference for a colour symbolism.

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550 Dorra 1994, 1.
551 Gage 2006, 81.
552 Väinö Blomstedt to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1894, EJA.
554 Chassé 1947, 70.
The idealist core around which Symbolism developed was based on the principle of the unreality of the objective world. In the tradition of neo-platonic philosophy, tangible appearances were seen as the pale reflection of the divine ideal, the only true reality. Any reproduction of those appearances (by which Aurier meant Naturalism and Impressionism) or their stylised translation (academicism and idealised beauty) merely constituted a degraded form of all the glorious things art had produced in the past, from antiquity down to the quattrocento. The sudden doubt cast on tangible reality, whose solidity and physical framework were challenged, also concerned the materiality of painting: since painting was merely a sign; the more its very texture signifies its relationship to the idea, the more it loses some of its pictorial substance and rejoins the pure sphere of intentionality. “Symbolist painting” was launched through a play of visual and aural equivalences between the vision of the faithful and the voice of the priest. This synaesthetic notion was presented by Aurier when he described what Gauguin’s painting intended to show: a vivid, striking description, a true “vision” evoked in listeners’ minds. Gauguin produced a “hypotyposis” through a staging that juxtaposed spectacle and spectators. Painting was an evocative idiom; therefore it must be an abstraction. For Plotinus, when the divine assumed material substance it became a “hypostasis” – the very theological term Aurier used to incite artists to focus solely on the way the tangible world testified to an immaterial otherworld.556

Art is an abstraction, draw it from nature by dreaming in front of her and rather think of the creation that will result from it, it is the only way of ascending toward God, by doing as our Divine Master, creating.

(Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14th August 1888)557

In addition, as Silverman (2000) states, Gauguin’s search for sacrality immerses him in developing stylistic practices to dematerialise the physical surface of the canvas as much as possible, emulating the matte permeation of the fresco, for example, as he sought to efface the distance between a deficient material world and the ineffable world of dreams and the divine, or devising unusual technical forms of chafing and parching to represent what he considered the lamentational condition of modern misery. The pictorial practice had a paradoxical shared goal: to achieve spiritual ends through the plastic means of pigment, canvas and primer. Gauguin

556 Rapetti 2005, 113-114.
thus pursued this peculiar but, for him, absolutely essential project of painting as a mediator of divinity.\textsuperscript{558}

In the summer of 1888, when van Gogh and Gauguin were in close contact through correspondence and deliberating the arrangements for their impending collaboration in Arles, each embarked on a distinctive programme of pictorial experiments. Both painters construed the experiments as particularly challenging, emphatically modern, and singularly “symbolist,” a term that for the first time both attached to specific works produced between July and November. In September 1888 Gauguin charted out what he called “the path of Symbolism” in a “religious painting”, \textit{Vision of the Sermon}. Gauguin’s vision captured Breton peasant women frozen in silent prayer and meditation. The women are rendered in the synthetist manner; the crude, angular modelling of their faces and coifs, however, recalls the primitive Breton sculptural tradition going back to the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{559} There, through the peasant women’s mesmerised concentration, Gauguin dramatised the biblical scene when Jacob challenged God and won his own name. Heads bowed, eyes closed, and hands locked together, they projected the contours of their inner vision onto a dream landscape, rendered, Gauguin explained, as an unmistakably “non-natural” colour field of “pure vermilion”\textsuperscript{560}; also the Prussian blue garment and golden wings of the angel, on the other hand, embody the message of the painting and announce the superiority of the mind’s eye over the eyes of the body.\textsuperscript{561} The broad mass of bright red enveloping the static figures signified the fluid externalisation of their inner vision, providing a formal medium for Gauguin’s goal – to depict the passage across the divine of material reality into the realm of the supernatural.\textsuperscript{562}

As for the painting’s fighting figures, it was the practice for young Breton villagers to participate in wrestling matches after Sunday mass but Gauguin transformed the scene into an archaising vision of Japanese wrestlers in Western medieval garb, one of whom, in keeping with the just-heard sermon, has sprouted wings, so that the two represent the biblical struggle of Jacob and the Angel.\textsuperscript{563} The biblical theme itself, moreover, brings to mind Delacroix’s \textit{Struggle of Jacob and the Angel}, completed in 1861 for Saint Sulpice in Paris, and yet another set of associations. Indeed, well-informed admirers of Delacroix – and Gauguin was definitely one of these – would have recognised Delacroix’s figures as “an emblem of the ordeals to

\textsuperscript{558} Silverman 2000, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{559} Dorra 1994, 193.
\textsuperscript{561} Gamboni 2010, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{562} Silverman 2000, 49.
\textsuperscript{563} See Mathew Herban III, “The Origin of Paul Gauguin’s Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel,” \textit{Art Bulletin} 59, no. 3, Sept. 1977, 415-20. Herban determined that a sermon on the subject had just been delivered at the parish church of Pont-Aven.

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which God sometimes subjects the chosen ones” and, as such, of the struggle of the creative artist with his ideal. Not surprisingly, the painting has a highly subjective approach; the priest on the right has Gauguin’s characteristic angular nose, as if to stand for the artist conjuring up the vision of his ideal before the congregation and introducing to it the new artistic tradition.

But it is not just the spiritual aspect which is interesting in this enigmatic painting. The red colour itself draws the viewer into a strange world that is part real and part apparition and gives an interesting hint. The fact that Gauguin set this work in Brittany, where a traditional local wrestling match merges into a subjective vision of the biblical struggle between Jacob and the angel, was a conscious and deliberate choice aiming to expand the boundaries of expression. Interestingly, the significance of place and region is great, in fact, the vermillon red background recalls the glow of Breton buckwheat and the headdresses refers to locality. But whereas Gauguin underlines the abstract dimension of the work using synthetist form and colours, the effect is to increase its fantastic and dreamlike quality and still Gauguin’s ‘vision’ is set in a specifically-chosen ‘landscape’ which lends a folkloric connotation to the work. This kind of dualistic approach is also evident with Finnish artists.

It is clear that colour played an important part in the renewal of Gauguin’s art as he amplified in a letter to Emile Schuffenecker in 1888:

I have done the self-portrait which Vincent asked for. I believe it is one of my best things: absolutely incomprehensible (for example) it is so abstract. Head of a bandit in the foreground, a Jean Valjean (Les Misérables) personifying also a disreputable impressionist painter, shackled always to this world. The design is absolutely special, a complete abstraction...The colour is far from nature; imagine a vague suggestion of pottery contorted by a great fire! All the reds, violets, striped by flashes of fire like a furnace radiating from the eyes, seat of the struggles of the painter’s thought...The Impressionist is pure, still unsullied by the putrid kiss of the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

It is interesting that Gauguin’s ‘artist’ was a victim of both social oppression, evoked by the prisoner Jean Valjean dragging his chain, and the corruptive contact with artistic convention – the “putrid kiss” of the Beaux-Arts and the debased shackles of this world. The artist’s salvation lay in defiance and release from such sullying

564 Quotation from Delacroix’s invitations to the opening of the Chapel of the Angels at Saint Sulpice whose walls are decorated with his paintings. Sérrullaz 1963, 391.
565 In Gauguin’s Ceramics, Merete Bodelsen tentatively proposed that Gauguin was indeed the priest. The evidence appears convincing. Bodelsen 1964, 182.
566 Dorra 1994, 192.
567 From the English translation, see Chipp 1996, 67; French letter in Merlhès 1984, 248-249, #168.
contact, breaking the chains that bound him to what he called the “vile existence that burdens me.”568 The process towards a new, abstract language in art was slowly developing. One other aspect was the quest for a new sacred art which astonished Gauguin’s friend, van Gogh.

In November 1889 after he had returned to Brittany, Gauguin wrote from Le Pouldu a long letter to van Gogh that included descriptions and sketches of two works, one of which was Christ in the Garden of Olives.569 When writing to his brother Théo, van Gogh attacked the religious subject matter and linked his distaste of the new Christs in the garden to a discussion of the rejection of biblical models while searching for their modern equivalents. He reminded Theo of his admiration for the way Rembrandt, Delacroix and the Pre-Raphaelites had handled religious subjects, but he did not want to continue this discussion.570 It is interesting that van Gogh mentions the Pre-Raphaelites and it shows that their art was discussed in artist circles of the time. The ‘Christs’ of which van Gogh did not approve were a series of interesting paintings in which choice of colour became an important part of the meaning.

For example, in his The Yellow Christ (Le Christ jaune) (1889), Gauguin, as Belinda Thomson (1997) states, consciously embarked on a more imaginative and ambitious series of works, once again inspired by Breton piety.571 Gauguin transformed the Trémalo sculpture in a number of significant ways, all directed to renewing his quest for modern sacrality through anti-naturalist painting.572 Enlarging the Trémalo figure and moving it from the chapel interior outdoors, Gauguin planted the coloured Christ in a landscape that deliberately exploited the “ambiguity of the real and the imaginary”, the natural and the supernatural.573 It is interesting to see how the ambiguity of Baudelaire’s notion of “the here-and-now and the eternal” manifests itself in Gauguin’s thoughts and art.574 The hilly town of Pont-Aven is recognisable rising in the distance and women in Breton costume sit at the base of the cross, joining, without meditation, a contemporary order and a transcendent one.575

568 The French is "sale existence qui...me pèse": in a letter from Gauguin to van Gogh, September 1888, Merlhès 1984, 233, #165. Silverman 2000, 32.
572 For the large canvas The Yellow Christ (1889) Gauguin drew directly on an artifact of Breton religious art. A seventeenth-century polychromed wood sculpture of Christ on the cross that hung in the small Trémalo Church near Pont-Aven. See images in Silverman 2000, 278-279.
574 Welch-Ovcharov 1981, 208.
There is no denying that we are the martyrs of painting.
(Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, May 1885)\textsuperscript{576}

Interest in the movement from one level of reality to another within a single visual field had been the keystone of Gauguin’s Vision of the Sermon, and some writers have noted similarities between this work The Yellow Christ (1889) and Christ in the Garden of Olives (1889).\textsuperscript{577} In Vision of the Sermon the spatial scrambling is evident, with intense compression of near and far, as well as acutely heightened and arbitrary colour choices to emphasise departures from visual observation. Gauguin explained that he used glaring ‘vermilion’ in Vision of the Sermon in order to evoke a supernatural realm. In comparison the high-keyed sulphur yellow and fiery orange appear in The Yellow Christ as the means of conveying a release from worldly anchorage. Also reminiscent of Vision of the Sermon are the positions and costumes of the three sitting Breton women, cut off at the front and left of The Yellow Christ in the same way that some of the seated women were in the Vision, in which Gauguin used tactics of “abstraction” to activate the intrusion of vision into the visual, depicting an exalted moment of contact with the sacred order. Again, he aims to create a hypostasis.

As Silverman (2000) notes, in The Yellow Christ, on the other hand, the praying women, again motionless and rapt, are seated at the foot of the cross, engaged in the tragedy of sacrifice and loss. The evocation of an eternal order beyond appearances belongs to the New Testament, women grieving for the Son, who has assured collective salvation through his own suffering and physical annihilation.\textsuperscript{578} Gauguin clearly pursued his own evolving techniques of flattening, simplification, and reduction; the striking yellow as the key, symbol of the suffering Christ, and, as Belinda Thomson (1997) has suggested, depicting his own trials. This new aspect of using the image of the Calvary or of Christ’s agony in an autobiographical way, was also introduced by symbolist poets like Octave Mirbeau and Aurier.\textsuperscript{579} But for the Christ series, with The Yellow Christ, The Green Christ (the Breton Calvary) (1889), Christ in the Garden of Olives (1889) and Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ (1891) it is evident that synthetist colour and the transfer to the medium had become very important to Gauguin.\textsuperscript{580} The flat, unmodelled and unvariegated yellow of The Yellow

\textsuperscript{576} Guérin, Daniel, The Writings of a Savage, Paul Gauguin, New York, Paragon 1990.

\textsuperscript{577} Gauguin, Christ in the Garden of Olives (1889) oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm, Collection of the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida. See image, Silverman 2000, 296.

\textsuperscript{578} Silverman 2000, 281.

\textsuperscript{579} Thomson 1997, 114, 116.

\textsuperscript{580} Gauguin leaves for Brittany in February and again stays in Pont Aven, joined by Charles Laval and Emile Bernard. Yellow Christ (1889), oil on canvas, 92 x 73. Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York, General Purchase Funds 1946; Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ (Portrait de l’artiste au Christ jaune, 1890–91), oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm, Musée d’Orsay. See image:
Christ, Gauguin later explained, was intended to express the feelings he had about the desolate isolation and medieval quality of Breton life. Although, as Thomson suggests, in all probability it was the yellowish stain of the wooden crucifix itself that first suggested the use of the colour. What is also interesting is that Gauguin evidently used the technique of blotting the surface, perhaps to dull the glossiness of the oil pigment and give an aged appearance to the strident yellow. Reinhold Heller (1985) too has stressed Gauguin’s need to ‘disguise’ the medium of oil painting. With these actions also Gauguin was reaching for a timeless, ethereal art.

As we have learned from Philip Ball (2001) Gauguin used most of the modern colours, cobalt blue, emerald green, viridian, cadmium yellow, chrome yellow, cobalt violet, and a mixture of cobalt blue and barium sulfate called Charron blue, more precisely. Prussian blue and ultramarine were the only colours Gauguin commonly used unmixed as a substitute for black. In The Yellow Christ, as in many of his paintings, Gauguin outlined the Christ figure with dark Prussian blue, enhancing the yellow which dominates the painting. Warm orange and yellow are contrasted by the cold bluish tones of the horizon and sky and in the dresses of the Breton women in the foreground. The new language in art and the new mode that Gauguin was aiming for were transferred to the paintings of the mysterious Brittany. As in the South Seas, the rural and primitive atmosphere there detached Gauguin from the heavy burden of the “putrid kiss of the Beaux-Arts and the debased shackles of this world”. But I would argue that it was certainly synthetist colour that worked as the ‘medium’ between form and emotion and attracted the imaginary and divine sensation. The concept of the primitive, of sacred and primordial life was presented by synthetist colour.

The reason for the quest for primitive places and imagined realms lay also in the distress found in the fast changing modern world. It is interesting that in the late-1880s and throughout the 1890s, the traditional sense of space and time disintegrated in the new metropolis to the point of seeming confused and ever-explaining: artists lived in destructured cities. Roland Barthes has described late-19th century literature as a field in which “cataclysmic changes” occurred, so that “classical writing therefore disintegrated.” Sharon Hirsh (2004) demonstrates how the same might be claimed for the “classical” city: whole new idioms, new languages, and new readings were required of the fin-de-siècle urbanite. Just as new maps were redrawn in the literal sense, so also new mapping was needed to navigate the metropolis mentally. Thanks to technological advances that could overcome even the most physical and obstinate of earlier boundaries to urban spaces, the Symbolists could no

581 Heller 1985, 148-149.
582 Ball 2001, 192-193.
583 Barthes, 9; Hirsh 2004, 11.
longer plan to escape to a purely natural space but could only dream of such an ideal. Thus, in the most obvious case of Gauguin, a lifelong search for the truly “primitive” – that is, anti-materialistic, non-urban culture – led from Brittany to the South Seas and a career as a professional tourist. But Gauguin’s heroisation of alternative cultures and religions is an implicit rather than explicit criticism. While he adopted what he considered a native lifestyle and appropriated numerous “primitive” visual forms, Gauguin’s artistic statements regarding the Western European life against which he was rebelling were deliberately restricted to universal, philosophical works with such titles as the well-known Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going? (1897).\(^{584}\) This monumental painting, considered as the painter’s “last will and testament”, typically placed its author’s questions, personal though they may have been at their origin, in a mysteriously evocative composition, filled with images and symbols that, in Gauguin’s explanations and in most viewer’s opinions, were only partially decipherable.\(^{585}\)

Gauguin’s large oil painting can also be seen as a ‘theosophilical mural painting’ stating what Gauguin held important.\(^{586}\) He created his own synthetic art in vivacious tertiary colours which changed through times from more brighter to darker tones.\(^{587}\) Gauguin’s legacy was a profound change in aesthetics; a new language in art of vivid synthetist colours which embodied an emotional effect. He also gave a new model to what an artist can create from the life around him. The many intense collaborations with different artists Gauguin met and knew and whom he taught left an everlasting impression on European and Finnish art.

### 2.3.2 The Nabi Group – Maurice Denis, Paul Séraphier and Jan Verkade

*For the future, I dream of an utterly pure brotherhood comprised uniquely of committed artists in love with the Good and the Beautiful who will instil in their works and their demeanour that indefinable quality I call ‘Nabi’.*

*(Paul Séraphier to Maurice Denis)*\(^{588}\)

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584 Gauguin, *Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897), oil on canvas, 139.1 x 374.6 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

585 Hirsh 2004, 10-12.

586 It is interesting that A.P. Sinett’s book *De invigdes lärna (Esoteric Buddhism)* Stockholm 1887, which dealt with esoteric Theosophy, contains Gauguin’s thoughts on “where we come from, who we are and where we are going” which can be found in the preface of the book.

587 The reproductions on the walls of Gauguin’s Parisian studio in 1894 tell us of his admiration. Moreover, from the point of view of colour, one could note that only Egyptian frescoes, painted sculptures and Japanese woodcuts were strong, based mainly on primary colours. This is interesting since all the other examples here belong to a more ascetic range of colours.

588 Gaultier 2002, 90.
2. Väinö Blomstedt *Episode from the Kalevala, Kullervo Cutting into the Oak* (1897). Tempera on canvas, 93.5 x 114 cm, private collection. Photo: Hannu Aaltonen/Finnish National Gallery, CAA
Paul Séraphile (1864–1927), whose students called themselves the Nabi after the Hebrew brotherhood of prophets, (or Nebiim), gathered around Séraphile after the summer of 1888. The name was coined by the poet Henri Cazalis who drew a parallel between the way these painters aimed to revitalise painting as *prophets of modern art*. In autumn Séraphile had displayed his *Talisman* at the Académie Julian, where he was the ‘massier’. Everyone was moved by his boldness and a semi-secret fraternity was formed, comprising Pierre Bonnard, Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Paul-Elie Ranson and Maurice Denis. They were later joined by Ker-Xavier Roussel and Edouard Vuillard. The Swiss Félix Vallotton, the Dane Mogens Ballin, the Hungarian József Rippl-Ronai and the Dutchman Jan Verkade who joined the Nabi Group in 1891.

Meeting at the Académie Julian and later at the apartment of Paul Ranson, they preached that a work of art is the end product and visual expression of the artist’s synthesis of nature in personal aesthetic metaphors and symbols. They paved the way for the early-20th century development of abstract and non-representational art. The goal of integrating art and daily life was one they had in common with most progressive artists of the time. In 1890, of the Finnish artists who studied at the Académie Julian neither Enckell, Blomstedt nor Halonen could have missed hearing about of Séraphile’s *Talisman* and the synthetist art of the Nabi group.

The legendary meeting between Gauguin and the young Séraphile is well documented by many sources. Séraphile, a product of the strict Parisian Académie Julian, fell under the spell of Gauguin and became his apostle. A summer with Gauguin at Pont-Aven in 1888 changed his work completely and he produced a painting which is little known today but which was of seminal importance when it was exhibited in Paris in October 1888.

Maurice Denis recollected the dramatic lesson in *L’Occident* after Gauguin’s death in 1903.

*It was following the summer vacation of 1888 that Séraphile, lately back from Pont-Aven, revealed to us the name of Gauguin. Rather mysteriously, he unveiled the lid of a cigar-box on which one could just make out a landscape that had been treated so synthetically that it had lost all form – in violet, vermilion, veronese green, and other pure pigments, just as they come straight from the tube, without adding white.*

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589 It is possible that the nickname arose because “most of them wore beards, some were Jews and all were desperately earnest”. Gaultier 2002, 9-10.

590 He moved to Paris, where he met Paul Gauguin, Meijer de Haan and Paul Séraphile, and frequented the circle of Les Nabis. After Gauguin’s departure for the South Seas, Verkade travelled to Brittany, accompanied by Mogens Ballin. Dempsey 2003, 50-51.

“How do you see this tree?” asked Gauguin, standing before a corner of the Bois d’Amour, “is it quite green? Put in some green then, the most beautiful green in your palette. And is that shadow rather blue? Don’t be afraid of painting it as blue as possible”. In this way for the first time were we confronted, in a paradoxical yet unforgettable form, with the fruitful concept of the “plane surface to which colours assembled in a certain order are applied”. Thus we learned that every work of art is a transposition, a caricature, the impassioned translation of some feeling sensation.592

Sérusier’s The Talisman (Landscape of the Bois d’Amour)593 is an astonishing painting even by today’s standards – and in its time was a revelation despite its tiny size. A landscape in vibrant golds, greens, red and four different blues, purple and vermilion, it is closer to abstraction than any of Kandinsky’s Murnau landscapes. Sérusier gave it to Denis and its spirit imbues the eloquent writings in which Denis defined the movement. For Denis and his studio-mates, Vuillard, Roussel, Bonnard, Valotton, and Lungné-Poe, it was the signal of profound change. Their manifesto, The Definition of Neo-Traditionalism, was formulated by Denis in 1890 and was supplemented in 1912 by Sérusier’s now-forgotten ABC of Painting. The latter captures the colour theory exemplified by the School of Beuron which he taught at the Academie Ranson.594 They chose “Nabi” – Hebrew for “Prophet” – because they understood that they would be creating new forms of expression. By the end of the decade the group would split up but would influence the later work of both Bonnard and Vuillard, as well as non-Nabi painters like Henri Matisse. Denis especially went on to focus on religious subjects and murals. Later, in 1922, he published his collected historical and theoretical work under the title Nouvelles théories sur l’art moderne, sur l’art sacré (New Theories of Modern and Sacred Art).

Mark Cheetham (1991) is pointing out the etymological link between Sérusier’s Talisman (1888) and the ancient Greek pharmakon and sees Sérusier’s painting as the key that freed Denis and the others from mimesis and opened up the path to an “essentialist” art in the Neo-platonic sense that created abstractions from memory. Cheetham’s study is inclined towards the mysticism of Plotinus but it does show us the way in which Sérusier’s colourful pharmakon-talisman acted as an antidote to the reigning academic pallor and as a recipe for a new abstract art. Sérusier reported that the painting introduced all of them to the concept of the work of art as “a plane surface covered with colours in a certain order.” The real anomaly is that the Talisman was not painted from memory. But, since it represented Sérusier’s

593 Sérusier, Landscape of the Bois d’Amour (The Talisman) (1888), oil on panel, 27 x 22 cm, Musée d’Orsay.
594 Riley 1995, 74.
13. Pekka Halonen *Three Holy Men in the Forest* (1894). Indian ink and watercolour on paper, 27.5 x 21 cm, Halosenniemi Museum, Tuusula. Photo: Tuusula Museum
initiation (we might say his “rite de paysage”), and embodied the purification of Nature’s forms urged by Gauguin, the painting became a powerful mnemonic device, a memory not only of Sérusier’s seminal lesson, but also of this lesson’s prescription to paint the essential.595 Cheetham’s conclusion is interesting since Les Nabis regarded themselves as initiates and used a private vocabulary. They called a studio ergasterium, and ended their letters with the initials E.T.P.M.V. et M.P., meaning “En ta paume, mon verbe et ma pensée” (In the palm of your hand, my word and my thoughts).

In lieu of the Cloister I found the Studio, The Studio with all its frivolity and debauchery; and while I’m looking to reconcile the teachings of heaven, my broadening knowledge is opened up to a greater variety of ideas.

(Denis’s Journal, March 18, 1888)596

It is crucial to note that with the Nabi group, and especially with Denis, Sérusier and Verkade, the question of religion and spirituality becomes topical. From early on Maurice Denis had a surprisingly broad religious streak for such an avant-garde figure, writing in his notebook at the age of fifteen, “Yes, it’s necessary that I am a Christian painter, that I celebrate all the miracles of Christianity, I feel it necessary.”597 Their art and life was shaped by the quest for a mystical art. For the more spiritually-inclined artists of the Nabi Group their task was not to conjure up symbols or allegories but to find “plastic equivalents” with the potential “to translate and arouse emotional states”.598 By carefully selecting and manipulating their media, by creating subtle suggestions of colour and line to establish a strikingly ambivalent sense of place, the Symbolists were able to make art that was a tangible image of an idea. When all these means were applied together, viewers were supposed to be transported to a new reality, an ideal, without ever conceiving the mistaken idea that they were simply observing an image of life. When added to the symbolist subject – deliberately selected images and objects that in turn were intended to lead the viewer further into the realm of ideas – a release from the contemporary world was made possible.599

595 Cheetham 1991, 30-31; Riley 1995, 74-75.
597 The Denis family was affluent and the young Maurice attended both the École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied with the French figure painter and theorist Jules Joseph Lefebvre, and from 1888 the Académie Julian, where he made the acquaintance of Paul Sérusier, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, and Henri-Gabriel Ibels, with whom he later founded the Nabi Group. Gaétan 2006, 15-16.
598 Gaultier 2002, 102.
599 Hirsh 2004, 6.
It is important to note that social historians of art and other writers have underlined the nineteenth-century myth of the defiant avant-garde, exposing how deeply class, gender, and political strategies were inscribed in an ethic of social and spiritual deracination and how the practice of self-invention exhibited a strikingly close fit with the marketing tactics of an emerging capitalist economy of spectacle. Yet these “ideologies of vision,” as T.J. Clark defined them, have not included religion as part of the social ground shaping artists’ lives and works. Michael Baxandall’s analysis of painters’ “cognitive styles” and “visual skills,” and Lucien Febvre’s emphasis on the “mental equipment” or “mental tools” of a given period, can also be adapted to the Nabis. They wanted to incorporate in their art the practice and spiritual life of the Primitives. But it was not only the Nabis who were the reason for so many artists wanting to identify themselves with the primitive artists of the fifteenth century such as Fra Angelico and Botticelli? Why did they admire the ethereal quality and matte surface of the frescoes so much?

The principal model followed by the Nabi Group was, of course, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, whose decorative ensembles, even those destined for Paris interiors, were first exhibited publicly in the annual Salon. It is important to note that his work circulated widely through photographic reproductions. Denis and Paul Sérisier, in particular, were influenced by Puvis de Chavannes’s organisation of space, based on the repetition and variation of simple visual patterns, such as the partitioning of the pictorial surface by clearly defined vertical axes. This decorative approach was to spread across Europe. It is important to note, however, that the generation that immediately followed Puvis de Chavannes differed in its theoretical aspirations and mystical tendencies. These artists imbued decorative art with metaphysical considerations of an idealist kind and some of them even attempted to discover mathematical laws that governed the formal and symbolic content of a painting. This speculative quest and its putative codification meant that ultimately the very artists who sought to establish a new tradition based on Gauguin and Puvis de Chavannes went beyond these two mentors. Whereas the “neo-traditionalism” that led Denis toward his “new classical order” was largely based on a return to Italian sources (both Renaissance and Early Renaissance), it was theosophy that inspired the science of numbers and mystical tension apparent in Sérisier’s output right from the days of Symbolism and the start of the Nabis in 1888. The Dutch artist Jan Verkade joined the Nabis in 1891, the year he arrived in Paris. His discussions with Denis and Sérisier pointed him towards a spiritual vision of art.


601 In 1890 Puvis de Chavannes quit the Société des Artistes Français and began showing at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, of which he was a founding member. Rapetti 2005, 182-183, 309.

It is crucial to note that for the Nabi artists the question of *sacred art* was seminal, both in theory and practice. In 1892 Jan Verkade, who had converted to Catholicism after travelling through Italy, visited a Benedictine abbey in Beuron on the upper Danube. There Father Desiderius Lenz had installed a monastic workshop designed to produce decorative art for Benedictine establishments. Lenz, who had trained as an artist in Munich, sought to establish the “canons” of a religious art in which architecture, frescoes, and liturgical furnishings were conceived in terms of an overall programme as a religious *Gesamtkunstwerk*. His sources included archaic Greek art and Egyptian art, as well as Byzantine art and basilicas from the early days of Christianity. He employed mathematical relationships to construct systems of proportions that reflected numerical symbolism as a manifestation of divine harmony. Lenz’s research was first published in German in 1898 and translated into French by Sérusier in 1905. Verkade, on the other hand, worked alongside Lenz on several projects, notably participating in the decorations of a chapel of the abbey of Saint Gabriel, Prague in 1895. Giovanni Papini remembered Verkade as a young man who wanted “to revive the true sacred painting of the Christian era” while executing his first frescoes for the Franciscans in Fiesole in the summer of 1893. After entering the monastery, Verkade remained in touch with the Nabis, notably exchanging letters full of aesthetic considerations with Denis and Sérusier. Verkade later wrote his memoirs *Yesterdays of an Artist-Monk* (1930).

In broadening the historical field to include religion as part of a social analysis of modern art, we begin to encounter phenomena missed by the secular model of the avant-garde, such as the way Protestant and Catholic traditions may in distinctive national contexts have shaped different kinds of artists’ receptivity or resistance to idealism and abstraction in the 1880s. Silverman (2000) has been intrigued by a correlation between mid-nineteenth-century Catholic formation and the definition of abstraction; it is interesting that the first language and practice of abstraction emerges between 1886 and 1890 within Parisian artist circles which shared a French seminary education in which supernaturalist Catholicism, idealist Neo-Platonism, and avant-garde Symbolism came together in a dynamic cultural mix. The links are neither static nor monolithic but their interrelation has not been called into question, nor has the religious training of particular artists been incorporated into analyses of their radical breaks from naturalism. The painter Edouard Vuillard, for example, attended a Marist seminary, where he submitted to a regimen of hourly prayer to the Virgin; the writer Octave Mirbeau was schooled by the Jesuits; Auguste Rodin spent time in a Paris monastery. These internal strains and variations within French

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603 Papini 1948, 193; Rapetti 2005, 186-187.
Catholicism, as well as their shared habits of inwardness and other-worldliness, must be specified; they can be treated with the nuances and historical complexity that scholars have shown in reconstructing class ambivalences, shifting markers of social perception, and gendered assumptions of avant-garde painters and their visual forms.606

In his Définition du Néo-traditionisme Maurice Denis stated his well-known definition of what a painting is:

> It is well to remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.607

Denis especially was from the outset interested in the various fields of art. When, in 1889, Denis read Paul Verlaine’s Sagesse, inspired by the poems, he soon decided to illustrate the book.608 These woodcuts already show a decisive, simplified form with a highly spiritual “embroidery of arabesques” in black.609 In comparison with other Nabi artists, Denis has a very distinctive style and palette of close-tone synthetist colours of browns and greens which he used in his early paintings. In Landscape with Green Trees (1893)610 Denis uses the same kind of procession of veiled figures that he did in the woodcut of Sagesse. It is quite clear that the stylised pictorial techniques used owe much to Japanese art, highly simplified shapes, bold areas of colour, and a tree trunk cut off by the edge of the painting with darker contours. These trees, with barely suggested foliage, become simple trunks soaring ever upwards. The considerable economy of means and the choice of Veronese green against white clouds and blue sky confer a certain mystery and a remarkable modernity on this work, which was not understood and provoked many hostile reactions during the first exhibitions.611 When Denis depicts a procession of young girls, all veiled in pink (a virginal colour also in Gauguin’s Miserables), in a forest of beech trees he sets the stage for a mystical gathering. One of the figures has moved away from the group to join another, wings spread, placed beyond a low dark blue wall which

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607 Denis 1912, 1.

608 Gaëtan 2006, 16.


610 Denis, Landscape with Green Trees (La procession sous les arbres, Les arbres verts 1893), oil on canvas, 46.3 x 42.8 cm, Musée d’Orsay. See image: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumid=110580

611 Gaëtan 2006, 158.
marks, as is often the case with Denis, the separation between two worlds – the secular and the sacred, earthly and celestial. It is interesting that many artists’ visions and dreams are placed deep inside a ‘sacred grove’, in a closed and intimate landscape where a secret ceremony or meditative contact with the spirit world is taking place. Through the references to their wildness, these artists depicted the forest and nature as the opposite of the cultivated land tamed by modern men. The forest was also seen as a tranquil and spiritual place. From Denis’s *Landscape with Green Trees*, to George Henry and Edward Atkinson Hornels’s *The Druids Bringing in the Mistletoe*, 1890 (Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow), and to Gauguin’s *Vision of the Sermon* (1888) artists’ oneiric, enigmatic visions are often placed within the magical realm of a fertile forest.

These rhythmical, dominating composition of the tree trunks are also seen in other Denis’s works such as *The Orchard of the Wise Virgins* (1893) and *The Muses* (1893). In fact all of the scenes are placed in a mysterious forest or in an orchard of golden apples. In these two last-mentioned paintings, Denis depicts his future wife Marthe as a centre figure. In the *Orchard* the theme of the expectation of the husband and the consecration of marriage is narrated by many symbols. Meditative and contemplative, Marthe appears majestically in the foreground of the decorative and monumental square painting. She abandons her book at the approach of the husband she cannot see but senses. He is the rider, who, reduced and practically hidden by the trees in the right hand corner, crosses the background of a landscape filled with the familiar places of Saint-Germain-en-Laye where they lived. The episode of the wise and the foolish virgins (Matt., 25:1-13) is superimposed on the reference to chivalry. The foolish virgins are the shameless bathers in the background, while the wise virgins (Marthe in multiple forms), they who know how to prepare, “to sanctify themselves”, for the marriage, a parable of the second coming of the Christ – prepare themselves in a Marian *hortus conclusus* as pure and protective as it is fertile.

These mystical surroundings are also in *The Muses* (1893), which today is probably Denis’ best-known work and emblematic of his work during the Nabi years. As Jean-Paul Bouillon (2006) suggests, this painting refers to Puvis de Chavannes’s *The Sacred Forest, Beloved by the Arts and the Muses* (1884) in both subject and title. Art and nature, the material and the spiritual – the theme is wholly personal and the language universal. With its monumental strength, quite rare for him at that

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612 This aspect is evident in many Nordic artists’ works in particular.
613 von Bonndorf 2012, 90-103.
615 Patry 2006, 154.

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time, the work epitomises Denis’ aesthetics of the period.\textsuperscript{616} The monumentality is created by interplay with straight lines of the tree trunks contrasted with the curvy arabesque of the women and the branches with decorative leaves. Also the colour scheme is an interplay with different synthetist tones of warm browns, orange, yellows contrasted by cold range of pale mauve, Prussian blue and turquoise. The musical overall harmony is created with intervals of thought and an innovative synthetist palette.

The Nabi artists who had contact with Finnish and Swedish artists outside Paris were Sérusier, Verkade and Ballin. In 1893 Verkade travelled across France with the Danish Mogens Ballin (1871–1914). What is interesting, and not known outside Finland, is that Sérusier and Verkade met the Finnish writer Juhani Aho and his artist wife Venny Soldan-Brofeldt in Florence and on their initiative were later invited to take part as guest artists in an exhibition in Helsinki in 1893. Both Sérusier and Verkade continued their discussions later in correspondence with the Finnish artist-couple. From the letters it is evident that both of them were convinced of the new spiritual and decorative art which they wanted to convey to Soldan-Brofeldt and asked whether she had changed her style, saying that she should abandon copying nature. In autumn 1893 Sérusier’s and Verkade’s synthetist works were shown at the sixth Finnish Artists’ exhibition.\textsuperscript{617} They each exhibited three works and the paintings were received as curious, naïve and incomprehensible. One critic, however, saw that “these works have more to do with ancient art than Symbolism - - these artists base their art on simplest methods, with simple colouring and form; the complementarity of the colours is allowed to take the place of everything else.”\textsuperscript{618} After the exhibition Verkade’s works were sent to Copenhagen to Ballin who helped Verkade hold a private exhibition which, contrary to the Helsinki exhibition, was a success.\textsuperscript{619} The exhibition was reviewed in the Danish symbolist periodical \textit{Taarnet} with illustrations and the article also explained Verkade’s ideas on art. \textit{Taarnet} was widely read among Finnish artists, and Axel Gallén for one is known to have commented on this article. The case also shows how the new ideas spread in Finland and how diverse the sources of synthetist art were; from artworks shown in Helsinki to articles, personal contacts and correspondence. It is important to note that artistic exchanges took place also outside the Parisian art scene and that ideas on synthetist decorative art did not come solely from Gauguin but also from his international disciples.

\textsuperscript{616} Bouillon 2006, 156.
\textsuperscript{617} Juhani Aho and Venny Soldan-Brofeldt had met them on their travels in Italy and invited them to come to Finland. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 128-132.
\textsuperscript{618} “Suomen taiteilijan näyttely VT”. \textit{Päivälehti}, 16.11.1893, (Laicus).
\textsuperscript{619} Sarajas-Korte 1966, 131-132.
The Nabi artists worked in a variety of media, using oils on both canvas and cardboard, distemper on canvas and wall decoration and they also produced posters, prints, book illustrations, textiles and furniture. Considered during their early period to be on the cutting edge of modern art, their subject matter was representational (though often symbolist in inspiration) but was design-oriented along the lines of the Japanese prints they so admired and art nouveau. Sharing the flatness, page layout and negative space of art nouveau and other decorative modes, much Nabis art has a painterly, non-realistic look with synthetist colour palettes. After the turn of the century, as modern art moved towards abstraction, Expressionism, Cubism, etc, the Nabis were viewed as conservatives, and indeed were among the last group of artists to stick to the roots and artistic ambitions of the Symbolists, pursuing these ends almost into the middle of the 20th century.

The dualistic world of the secular and the sacred, earthly and celestial is well represented in Denis’s art but it can be also seen in the approach of many other artists. The closeness of Nature and the connotations of the pagan sacred grove or the celestial paradise is a subject matter found in many of Sérusier’s paintings but it is also well presented in many Finnish artists works. The synthetist palette particularly, which enhanced the non-mimetic, spiritual aspect of Nature, was adopted by Väinö Blomstedt, Axel Gallén and Eero Järnefelt. This aspect will be examined in Part II.
3. COLOUR AND EARLY MODERNISM IN FINLAND

An artist can be a cosmopolite – and still always be national. My roots are here in the North. Of that notion I am not afraid. From all the influences, I am still the one who creates the artworks.

(Helene Schjerfbeck ca. 1918)

As stated earlier, due to the flourishing of the arts and active international artistic exchange this period in Finnish art has traditionally been named “The Golden Age” whenever art historians have wanted to establish the canon of Finnish art and have thus focussed on what they have considered ‘national art’. The problem is that this excludes, for example, symbolist art and the work of women artists. Later, to avoid these connotations and restrictions, art historians have used the term ‘early modernism’, which covers a more heterogeneous field of visual art from 1880s to the 1910s. For some reason, and particularly in earlier art historical literature, interaction with the international art world has been seen as a threat to ‘national art’, or more precisely as excluding this. In recent decades this aspect has been challenged. In this study I hope to establish that in Finnish art international exchange does not exclude the national aspect, rather the opposite, enhancing the possibilities for artists to participate in the discourse of their time. It is evident in letters and other material that the artists themselves saw no contradiction in being both internationally inspired and nationally aware. Even though Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946) was not what can be described as a patriotic artist, her awareness of being individual and a Finnish artist comes across well in her letter around the year of the Finnish civil war. Moreover, all the artists mentioned developed their art and their colour concepts in close connection with the international art

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621 The term “Golden Age of Finnish art” has mainly been used from 1930 onwards when the canon was established by art historians such as Okkonen, Wennervirta and Lindström.

622 For almost all contemporary critics, “international influence” was more or less a negative term and was seen as a highly undesirable aspect in Finnish art. This is evident in critics of Schjerbeck’s works in the 1880s and later also in the work of art historians who wanted to establish a Finnish canon.

currents. Contacts with other artists and artworks, for example, from Pierre Puvis de Chavannes to Paul Gauguin and the Nabi Group, were of the utmost importance for the development of Finnish early modern art. Thus the new concepts of *colour ascetism* and *synthetist colour* are surely one example of this fruitful exchange.

In this part of the study I shall also examine the concept of ‘modern art’ in Finland. Rather than providing a survey of great artists or paintings I will address a particular set of ideas on colour and meaning in relation to works in their context, the art produced during a specific historical period. To examine the issue of colour in Finnish art I have adapted the notion of painting as “a deposit of a social relationship” as proposed by Baxandall (1988). As previously stated, I will extend this framework to a period in Finland - 1890–1906 - to suggest painting as a *deposit of a specific colour-conscious culture* in a particular turn-of-the-twentieth-century European context and will concentrate on this highly significant period from a political, cultural, and particularly an art standpoint. Also this part of the study will demonstrate for what kind of art artists chose either ascetic or synthetic colours.

But what were the reasons for this flourishing of the arts? On the one hand this period witnessed international influences while, on the other, it focused on inventing the nation’s cultural identity and tradition. Regarding my approach in discussing identity and tradition, it is within discourse on the modern. Thus this study considers ‘tradition’ and ‘myths’ as modern constructions which makes them modern products. The consciousness of being historical and creating an “own” culture grew among Finnish artists. I wish to emphasise, however, that this consciousness was developed during the years these artists were travelling and living in Europe when internationality was reflected in their longing for their own country. The situation was, moreover, helped by the socio-cultural climate and the infrastructure. In the face of modern industrialisation too Finland was a fast-developing country under Russian rule and the Finnish establishment supported the arts and education abroad.

There was also a more practical reason why artists flocked abroad. Since there was still no instruction in oil painting at the Finnish Art Society Drawing School at the beginning of 1890s, the acquisition of technical skills required all young artists to travel abroad for a professional education. It became common for Finnish artists to study and work in Paris during the winter and return to Finland for the

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625 This study aligns with the so-called Hobsbawmian perspective. See Hobsbawn, Eric & Ranger, Terence (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1983.
626 The Finnish Art Society Drawing School did not teach oil painting and for Halonen, who could not afford private teaching in Helsinki, his first instruction was in Paris at the Académie Julian in 1890–91 and again in 1891–92. See e.g. von Bonndorf 2005, 13, 15-18.
summer.\textsuperscript{627} Women artists tended to associate more with one another and artists like Schjerfbeck and Ellen Theleff (1869–1954), whose mother tongue was Swedish, spent most of their time in Paris in Scandinavian circles.\textsuperscript{628} In the 1890s also Magnus Enckell (1870–1925), the most socially active of them all, mingled with symbolist circles in the international and intellectual atmosphere of the Latin Quarter.\textsuperscript{629} The international art académies – Julian and Colarossi – were the most popular places at which Finnish artists studied during the 1890s.\textsuperscript{630} A few, like Albert Edelfelt, sculptors Walter Runeberg and Ville Vallgren, had established themselves in Paris but artists tended mainly to visit Paris frequently. Later, from 1894 onwards, Italy became the new capital of artistic inspiration. This was made possible because of the support the Finnish government gave to promising artists, who received state bursaries which enabled them to spend years abroad before returning permanently to Finland. It is important to note that from the 1890s to 1917 Finnish artists were living in a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, but, on the other hand, were also studying in the international circles of Paris, Brittany, Cornwall, Berlin and in Italy.

It may be said that the international artistic exchange became the cornerstone for Finnish artists, who could now be educated in the best possible environments where new ideas of the renewal of the arts flourished. This created a situation where many of the internationally aware and educated artists wanted also to reflect their identity in a more patriotic sense and aspired to create a distinctive Finnish cultural identity different from Swedish and the Russian culture. Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937), for example, was an intellectual and patriotic artist who closely followed the discussion of the period. Coming from an aristocratic, Finnish-speaking home and having a Russian-speaking mother from the Baltic aristocracy, the whole family contributed to Finnish cultural life. What is an interesting, but not traditional aspect of Finnish “national art”, is the theosophical ideology studied by artists like Väinö Blomstedt (1871–1947), Axel Gallén (1865–1931)\textsuperscript{631} and Peikka Halonen (1865–1933). Blomstedt in particular envisaged a world order in which periods of decadence and rebirth alternated: around the turn of the century it was the Scandinavian countries’ turn to lead the way. In Blomstedt’s view, Finland’s political situation in the grip of mother Russia and hopes for a spiritual revival

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\textsuperscript{627} Some Finnish artists like Helene Schjerfbeck spent the summers of 1881–1890 in Meudon, Concarneau, Pont-Aven and in St. Ives, Cornwall.

\textsuperscript{628} Women artists could not live as freely as men because of the status of women at the time. During the 1890s they could not, for instance, go to a café by themselves in the evening. Hälikkä 2008, 224.

\textsuperscript{629} Enckell’s friends in the 1890s were the Swedish artists Olof Sager-Nelson and Ivan Aguéli, and Drawing School friends - Theleff, Blomstedt and Halonen, with whom he shared an apartment in 1892. Enckell also enjoyed close relations with Albert Edelfelt, his former teacher.

\textsuperscript{630} Women artists like Ellen Theleff studied at the Académie Colarossi, because the Académie Julian, for example, charged women double for tuition but gave them less instruction than male students. Kontinen, Riitta, in \textit{Helsingin Sanomat}, 15.3.1996.

\textsuperscript{631} From the year 1907 officially changed his name to a more Finnish form: Akseli Gallen-Kallela.
were linked with the ideas of cyclical alternation. Artists’ letters were fired with their belief in “an imminent Scandinavian renaissance” and they saw themselves as the leaders of such a revival. This spiritual aspect was expressed with colour and form and will be studied more closely in the following chapters.

This period saw Finnish artists who were shaped by European stimuli conform to their own cultural and personal ideas of art and, in some cases, to the national art being constructed. It is important to note that this coincided with a reaction to the discovery of a new language in art in the rapidly-changing modern world. I will argue that the new mode for the early-modern period in Finland was found, not only by introducing new subject or simplified form, but also through colour and meaning. It is clear that, before the end of the nineteenth century, artists did not see colour as important as disegno, composition, subject or perspective. The idea that colore now had a specific meaning for certain kinds of painting, such as symbolist, monumental and decorative, or referring to the past, were new concepts in Finnish art. This turn towards a personified palette and non-mimetic colour marked, as I hope to establish, a profound change in Finnish art.

Furthermore, to obtain an overall view on context and draw a comparison between Finnish and international art, I will introduce artists who had an influence on Finnish artists and who were pioneers of both colour extremes. With reference to colour ascetism I will introduce artists who, from the outset were connected to Finnish artists, such as Eugène Carrière, Édouard Manet, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and James McNeill Whistler and who were discussed, for example, in the artists’ letters. What Finnish artists specifically admired in Puvis de Chavannes was the timeless decorative vocabulary with which he presented allegorical arcadias and mystical and melancholic depictions in his easel paintings. Whistler, on the other hand, who painted contemporary scenes and modern ingenious portraits, made Finnish artists ambitious to control the palette by ascetic tonalism. This tonal, musical and harmonious art of Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler was of particular interest to Finnish artists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Carrière’s extreme monochromatic art was adopted only by Enckell, but Carrière was mentioned by many critics as the inspiration for both Thesleff and Schjerbeck.

In introducing Finnish artists to synthetist art and especially to synthetist colour, the connections and influences came particularly from the Nabi Group: Maurice Denis, Paul Serusier, Jan Verkade and, of course, Paul Gauguin, who also became

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632 E.g. Väinö Blomstedt to his cousin Yrjö Blomstedt 6.3.1894. Yrjö Blomstedt’s letters, Jyväskylä provincial archive.
633 Blomstedt and Halonen read Édouard Shuré’s book Les Grands Initiés and the journal Le Coeur, La Plume and The Studio, something very typical for the period. New ideas spread rapidly around Europe via various artists’ periodicals. These were often works of art in themselves, as their illustrations, ornamentation and design, and to some extent their articles, were by artists. See Kuusela, Tuija. Taiteilijat kirjoja tekemässä. Finnish Literature Society 2004.
Blomstedt’s and Halonen’s teacher in Paris in winter 1894. Also, as we will see, the bright synthetist palette was explored by Gallén and Järnefelt. The next chapters will explore the usage of *synthetist colour*; from where and how artists, like Blomstedt, Gallén and Järnefelt came to know synthetist art and how they adopted the synthetist palette to enhance spiritual and sacral qualities in, for example, works depicting the Kalevala and ‘primordial’ nature. Finnish early modern art also adopted the other colour extreme and *ascetic colour* was practiced especially by Enckell, Halonen, Järnefelt, Schjerfbeck and Thesleff. Ascetic colour was used particularly in intimate portraits and mystical landscapes.

In explaining decorative and mural art in Finland I will begin by outlining the historical situation and how and from where Finnish artists’ received their inspiration to experiment with different medium, bases and colour and how the *transference to medium* became important. I will go on to question how Finnish art differs from European national romantic art since Finnish art has traditionally been seen as belonging to either the national romantic or symbolist movement but it is interesting to note that, if one considers the context of the artists in question, these movements are far too restrictive. The new interest in mural art and its ‘ancient’ methods was more or less linked to the vast phenomenon of the European revival in decorative, mural painting, which went from Puvis de Chavannes to Gauguin.634 I will argue that it is important to recognise that, although Finland belonged to the regional countries in Europe which emphasised their mythical past, Finnish artists opted for a modern mode in their mythological, symbolist and decorative art, in which central perspective was replaced by a two-dimensional, decorative surface with an overall *ascetic* or *synthetist* palette. In this sense, however, Finnish mural and decorative art differs from some of its regional European counterparts. For instance, the Pole Jacek Malczewski (1854–1929)635 and the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), as well as many others dedicated to their ‘patriotic cause’, made a stylistic and conceptual turn-around from the curvy and supposedly ‘decadent’ decorative Art Nouveau towards a realistically inclined style considered more appropriate for the national and cultural cause. For Finnish artists like Gallén and Halonen, however, the naturalistic approach did not ‘work’ in their concept of the ‘new art’. Here the modern notion of *historicity* and the *choice of mode* become topical. Furthermore, this study wishes to emphasise that alongside national aspirations Finnish artists were in fact influenced by the symbolist movement and the growing diversity in

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635 Jacek Malczewski was part of the Young Poland Movement. He was renowned for the patriotic-martyrologic content in his work, which combined a unique symbolist imagery with striking realism. Dudkiewicz 2009, 34. For the “Young Poland” movement, see Kopszak, Piotr & Szczerski, Andrzej, “The Young Poland Movement: Art, Nation, Modernity”, *Symbolist Art in Poland*. Ed. Smith, Alison, exhibition catalogue 14.3–21.6.2009, Tate Britain, London 2009.
the European view of what constituted art in general. It is important to note that these two movements do not exclude one another and in Finnish art were not opposite in their aims.\(^{636}\) Artists consciously chose an approach for their decorative art which took its form from the monumental art of the primitive periods such as Egyptian and Early Renaissance, which they studied first in the Louvre and later in Italy.\(^{637}\) And more importantly, Finnish artists chose the modern consciousness of history along with the Baudelairian duality of presenting the eternal and the fleeting. These new ideas were specifically depicted by choosing either the ascetic or synthetist palette.

The third important aspect in studying colour and early modern art in Finland and the source of their new inspiration for the ascetic palette was admiration of the Old Masters. As in adopting archaic and primitive features in painting, the dualistic modern concept of historicity was also established by referring to Old Masters. More precisely, most of the artists who used a colour ascetic palette admired Spanish artists; the cult for Velázquez, for his supreme technique with reduced colours, had spread also among Finnish artists. Some of them were impressed by Zurbarán’s mystical art which he created with a strict, ascetic palette. Zurbarán made a lasting impression at least on Enckell and Järnefelt, both of whom held his art in high esteem. As we know, these two Spanish artists were much admired by artists such as Manet and Whistler,\(^{638}\) who were themselves well-known to the Finnish artists in question. Along with decorative art, the Old Masters were admired firstly for their psychological and mystical approach to depict human life, secondly for their diverse technical methods and most importantly for their skilful use of a limited palette. In 1900 Enckell’s enthusiasm for Spanish art led him to travel to Spain and to relate his experiences in the Ateneum review in 1901.\(^{639}\) Schjerfbeck, on the other hand, studied and gladly copied Velázquez’s works on her trips to St Petersburg in 1892, where she also chose to copy Hals’s works, and to Vienna in 1894.\(^{640}\)

From the point of view of colour ascetism, the Dutch painters Hals, famous for his use of black colour, and Rembrandt in his later years, were admired and

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\(^{636}\) There is an old tradition in Finnish art history establishing National Romanticism and Symbolism as opposite movements with very different aims and ideology. This is evident mostly in older art history but is still the view of, for example, Janne Gallen-Kallela-Sirén. See Okkonen 1961 and Gallen-Kallela-Sirén 2001, 202-204, 235-237.

\(^{637}\) In Finland certain art historians such as Wennervirta have not connected this admiration for archaic art with Symbolism but have explained admiration for Assyrian and Egyptian art as relating to “a longing for man’s eternal realist art tradition.” See e.g. Wennervirta 1950, 11-18.

\(^{638}\) See 2.1 The Pursuit for Archaic and Timeless art

\(^{639}\) e.g. Nägra teckningar av Spansk arkitektur and Brev från Spanien, (Some sketches of Spanish architecture, and Letter from Spain) Ateneum, review 1901. National Library of Finland, Helsinki.

\(^{640}\) Since there were no Old Masters collections in Finland, the Government had decided to create a collection of high-standard copies. Schjerfbeck, among others, was appointed to do the copies. Konttinen 2004, 161-165.
studied closely for their genius but especially for the personified palettes used in their portraits. It is important to note that this admiration did not manifest itself merely in copying the style or manner of the Old Masters as the tradition had been before but in learning a new means of expression removed from the naturalist mode. Moreover, artists also referred to them by adapting their palettes as Whistler did in his later portraits of Gold and Brown. Another form of reference was to underline timelessness as Carrière had done and Schjerfbeck in her Boy Dressed in Armour (1894, fig. 28) by blurring time, or more precisely by fusing two time levels, the present and the past, in their simplified ascetic coloured paintings and by including objects, such as armour or a collar referring to the 17th century.

_The time has come again to search for something new, which is likely to become the art of the future – the appearance of subjectivity for the most part. Mock Fantasy no longer. It will once more be eulogised_ (Väinö Blomstedt to Eero Järnefelt in 1894)

It is clear that the 1890s brought new ideals to the fore and Finnish artists into a phase of individualism, which, it should be noted, was more groundbreaking than any change of style or school. As always, these changes were reflected in the cultural and social-historical conditions in Finland. What I wish to establish in this study of colour is that the symbolist movement, in particular, or the general awareness of it, opened up artists’ perspectives in general, allowing them to utilise greater imagination and individualism than had been possible under the strict objectives of Naturalism. In my view, the fact that artists familiarised themselves with the possibilities afforded by new movements such as Symbolism and the Pre-Raphaelites and with archaic and Early Renaissance art as well as with the new painting techniques and colour theory is significant even though most of the artists were not ‘Symbolists’. Traditionally in Finnish art history these artists have been classed in different groups. For example, it is interesting that Schjerfbeck, who is usually studied in the context of women artists and who has been mentioned as an exceptional artist “an early pioneer of Finnish Modernism”, shared, as I aim to establish, these new concepts of art

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641 Whistler: Gold and Brown 1896–98, oil on canvas, 62.4 x 46.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Bown and Gold 1895–1900, oil on canvas, 95.8 x 51.5 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow. Dormont 1994, 284–285.

642 Carrière, Portrait of Leon (ca. 1886); Child with a Plate (L’enfant au plateau, Élise Carrière) (1885), oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm, and L’enfant malade (1885), oil on canvas, 200 x 246 cm, Musée d’Orsay.


644 It should, nevertheless, be noted that, for the majority of Finnish artists, Symbolism and Mysticism tended to mean a general spiritual attitude rather than a programmed rejection of the strong traditions of Naturalism.

and colour and should therefore be studied in this context. Blomstedt, Enckell and Thesleff, for example, have been considered “symbolist artists”. On the other hand, artists such as Gallén, Halonen and Järnefelt, who have from early on been stamped as “heroes of national art”, being the leaders of National Romanticism, this study will hopefully broaden the view of their contexts and more particularly of the sources of their art in 1890–1906.

So how should we address this significant change in Finnish art when style or movement concepts do not explain this? What could be the mutual ideology or aim which changed their ideas on art? Or are there many different ones? As this study aims to establish by concentrating on studying this phenomena from the point of view of colour, this change led many artists, not only the ones studied here, to new aspirations in art such as decorative art, musicality, spirituality, the complete work of art and historicity. This led to the expansion of what ‘art’ actually embraced; artists became interested in new forms of art and aimed at interaction between the arts in line with the symbolist ideal: composers, poets and artists wanted to share in common, mutually supportive projects. All these new ideas contributed to the profound change in Finnish art which was raised to an entirely new level. As I hope to establish in the following chapters, Finnish artists had found a new language and new methods with which to depict emotions, moods and ideals in decorative murals containing images of sacred nature, melancholic poetic landscapes, intimate portraits and soulful depictions of human life. And, as I will show in the following chapters, these aspirations were expressed by the new ideas of colour, with ascetic and synthetist colour.

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646 Sarajas-Korte has from the outset considered Axel Gallén as a symbolist artist. Sarajas-Korte 1966, XX; Sarajas-Korte 1994, 154-156.

647 For example, Hugo Simberg, Beda Stjernschantz and Maria Wiik could be studied in this context but since there are so many, and to keep this study in proportion, I have decided to concentrate on these chosen examples whose art most clearly shows the change in the palette to ascetic or synthetist colour.
28. Helene Schjerfbeck *Boy Dressed in Armour* (1894). Oil on canvas, 57 x 41 cm, Art Foundation Merita's collection, Helsinki. Photo: Matti Huuhka, Ilari Järvinen, Museokuva Matti Huuhka & Co
3.1. THE PAST AS A DESTINATION

*Here, studying the art of old Pompeii in the Naples museum, one’s soul rejoices – – You can’t really call it ‘old art’ because great art is always eternally new.*

*(Pekka Halonen to Axel Gallén 1897)*

As we shall discover, Finnish artists too were introduced to the modern ideology of dualistic admiration for ancient fresco art. As stated earlier, this ideology was launched by the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin and was promoted by Charles Baudelaire who had described archaic and primitive art as a powerful style to be admired. Baudelaire had proposed that drawing move away from the perspective approach to nature developed since the Early Renaissance by naturalistically inclined artists in order to accentuate its element of musicality. In its place he advocated a return to the expressive power and harmonious effects achieved by archaic artists through abridgment and deformation. This he saw as essential for the successful expression of abstract thought, musicality, evocation of complex ideas and emotions. All these new aspirations were imbued in the new art of the turn of the twentieth century. This meant that Baudelaire’s two aspects of Modernism – the transitory or the fleeting on the one hand and the eternal on the other – were two sides of a duality which, as we will see, was expressed in Finnish early modern art. Other sources were G.-Albert Aurier’s theories and writings on art which were known throughout Europe. In his famous article in 1891: *Le symbolisme en peinture* – *Paul Gauguin*, Aurier demanded “Walls, walls, give him walls”. Here Aurier also laid down the criteria for the new art of Ideas, the symbolist art which, he claimed, was, as a consequence, essentially decorative – *inasmuch as decorative painting, as the Egyptians and very probably the Greeks and the Primitives understood it, is only a manifestation of an art that is at once subjective, synthetic, symbolist, and ideist.*

For the change in the aesthetics of decorative and mural art, either *colour ascetic* or *syntheticist* in colour, three significant issues became relevant for the Finnish artists in question. First was the Baudelarean admiration of decorative ancient art, which here mainly means the art of Mesopotamia and Egypt that could be seen

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648 Pekka Halonen’s letter to Axel Gallén, Sorrento, Naples 22.2.1897, CAA.
650 Baudelaire 1964, 13; Fer 1993, 9.
652 It seems that the admiration of Gauguin and the Nabi Group was only for the archaic and frescoes, but not for the Old Masters as such.
in the Louvre or in other museums in Europe.\textsuperscript{653} Other sources of inspiration were the paintings and frescoes of the Early Renaissance and the art of Botticelli and Fra Angelico in particular. In 1894 Pekka Halonen, on the other hand, went also to the Musée de Cluny to experience the “eras of spirituality and greatness” and a “pagan era”. Halonen had just stopped working at Gauguin’s Académie Viti and,\textsuperscript{654} as we see from this letter, had been fully initiated into the concept of timeless decorative art of ancient times.\textsuperscript{655}

\begin{quote}
I’m off to visit a place called the muse de Cluni [sic] - - I’ve taken the week off from the treadmill for a bit of change and relaxation, to visit some museums and find out about things. – And believe me, there’s plenty to see here. By that I don’t mean Paris, because I’m not actually in Paris. I mean somewhere ages, centuries, thousands of years ago. Those eras of spirituality and greatness when people weren’t so tied down to material things as in our own decadent times. The period that Europeans now call the ‘pagan era’. What I shall tell our children is, don’t believe what your teacher says because they are the living dead and spiritually blind. Go out and learn for yourselves –find out what was done in the world at every period.”

(Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen in 1894)\textsuperscript{656}
\end{quote}

In addition to studying contemporary art in Paris, Halonen also devoted a lot of time to prehistoric and mediaeval art. The letter to his fiancée Maija in 1894 quoted above tells us how eagerly he studied and read about those “times of spirituality and greatness”, the ancient periods that he got to know through Theosophical writings and probably from the ideology of Gauguin.

This study adopts the notion that the idea of the afore-mentioned admiration for Ancient and Primitive periods, styles and especially colours is related to the new pursuit of non-realistic art by Baudelaire and later by the Symbolists.\textsuperscript{657} This was also connected to a pursuit of spiritualism; a religious tone to work on the basis of \textit{true art} influenced by neo-platonist, catholic and theosophical thinking which was also in the core of the Nabi ideology of their spiritual art. From Plotinus came the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[653] On their way to Paris Finnish artists stopped usually in Copenhagen or Stockholm, Munich and Berlin and visited the museums there. They also visited St Petersburg and the Hermitage. In Italy they travelled mainly to Rome, Sienna, Florence, Venice and Naples.
\item[655] Halonen’s graduation certificate letter to the Imperial Senate of Finland, was signed by Gauguin on 10. March 1894. National Archives of Finland, Helsinki. Supinen 1990, 270-271.
\item[656] Pekka Halonen’s letter to Maija (Maria) Mäkinen, April 1894, CAA.
\item[657] In Finland certain art historians have not linked this admiration to Symbolism, but, like Wennervirta, have attributed admiration for Assyrian and Egyptian art to “a longing for man’s eternal realist art tradition.” See e.g. Wennervirta 1950, 11-18.
\end{footnotes}
idea that when the divine assumed material substance it became a “hypostasis” the very theological term G.-A. Aurier used to incite artists to focus solely on the way the tangible world testified to an immaterial otherworld. Gauguin and especially the Nabis embraced the notion of recreating the mystical and spiritual practice of ancient or fifteenth-century artists who painted the true art; the decorative flat, two-dimensional surface with contoured simplified forms. Artists who wanted to reach the spiritual realm of decorative painting were Maurice Denis and Paul Séruisier, the more mystically inclined of the Nabis, and Jan Verkade, who even became a monk.

It is important to note that it was the simplicity of this ‘archaic’ and primitive art, its decorative and spiritual power that became the ideal. For synthetist colour it was Gauguin, who, took his colour references both from archaic art and from the intense coloured art of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists. It would appear, however, that the admiration of Gauguin and the Nabi Group was only for the archaic and frescoes and not so much for the Old Masters presented in this study.

Later in the 1890s many artists travelled to Italy to find more of the genuine art they admired. It is understandable that they wished to experience and study the Early Renaissance frescoes in situ. For example, the frescoes in the monastery of San Marco in Florence and the works of Botticelli in the Uffizi Gallery were seen and studied by all who went there. Also the ‘pagan’ Roman frescoes in Pompeii were held in the highest esteem by Finnish artists such as Halonen. In Italy some artists studied the fresco technique in practice. Where colour was concerned, imitating the fresco, as we shall see, led artists more to the colour concept of colour ascetism and tonalism. Thus the great interest shown by Finnish artists in tempera and fresco painting did not merely stem from a desire to learn new techniques. The process itself was considered as uplifting. Artists inspired by frescoes, such as Blomstedt, Edelfelt, Gallén, Halonen, Schjerfbeck and Theleff, wanted to imitate their beautiful characteristics in their own work. Since it was virtually impossible to produce actual frescoes in Finnish conditions, they started to use oil paints thinned down in various ways. Many experimented with gouache and tempera which they thought best reproduced the thin, matte surface of real fresco. Halonen continued to experiment with tempera in Italy and developed his own method of mixing tempera with oil paint. Gallén wanted to learn the proper technique and in 1898 set off for Italy to study genuine fresco painting.

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659 Gaultier 2002, 90, 102.
660 Albert Edelfelt, Magnus Enckell, Ellen Theleff and Helene Schjerfbeck also admired and studied frescoes at the Louvre and in Italy. von Bonsdorff 2007, 50-52.
661 E.g. the frescoes in the Sigrid Jusélius Mausoleum were ruined because of the inferior plaster and dampness. See e.g. Pusa 1991, 38-39; Gallén’s son Jorma recreated the frescoes after their disintegration in the 1930s. Gallen-Kaleda-Sirén 2002, 286-308.
It is interesting to note that enthusiasm for fresco art was also enhanced by the few scholars in Finland. These influential men, especially the two Finnish academics, Eliel Aspelin-Haapylä and Johan Jakob Tikkanen, both of whom knew of medieval and Renaissance art, enjoyed close relations with Finnish artists and urged them to go and see art in the main museums of Europe and to travel to Italy.

*I soon intend to leave here for Paris. Once again, I’ve had enough of Italy for the time being. I simply can’t absorb any more in one visit; there’s no modern creative and thought-provoking life here at all. Though otherwise there’s certainly quite enough for me to see and learn from. I’ve seen much of it with quite different eyes from before, maybe because I’ve tried to paint frescoes myself. There is very little technically pure fresco painting here. Masaccio and Giotto remain in my mind as the best and purest. You don’t just delight in them for a moment; they have a lasting impact. – –All this has made me very homesick and filled me with a desire to get down to some serious work, because you have to create art on your own ground.*

This letter from Halonen to J.J. Tikkanen shows the close relationship Tikkanen had with such leading Finnish artists as Halonen, Gallén and others. In 1904 Tikkanen was a well-known scholar and professor of art history who had travelled, published and lectured on medieval and renaissance art. Tikkanen’s contacts with the artists encouraged them to seek new inspiration from genuine Italian sources. It is interesting that at the turn of the twentieth century Finnish artists admired Early Renaissance frescoes especially in their aspirations to create a modern and decorative art for Finland. They perhaps identified themselves with the Early Renaissance masters who in their own time struggled amid the political upheavals of the nation where Giotto, in particular, was seen as a model of a national artist.

It is also evident from Halonen’s letter that he was travelling in Italy with a very ‘modern’ attitude as if in a living museum, only wanting to see what interested him, such as Early Renaissance and Roman frescoes from Pompei, just as when he walked in the Louvre, he selected what to see and closed his eyes to the contemporary. In this sense he followed the Symbolists’ notion of the past as a different realm. Also as Gombrich (2002) pointed out, the difference from earlier times was that this period called the choice of modes into question. Here as elsewhere the notion

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664 Johan Jakob Tikkanen belonged to the generation of scholars that ultimately made art history an independent academic discipline. Since he had to work among a small circle of experts in his own country, it is understandable that he found his scholarly community abroad, particularly in the German-speaking countries. Vakkari 2007, 117. Tikkanen’s interest in colour and form was enhanced by his early training as an artist. This may also be the reason why artists like Halonen wrote to him of their experiences and analysed the art they had seen.

of style as the manifestation of skill gave way to the conception of a variety of legitimate modes – the idea that the creator has the choice and ability to adopt a particular style for a particular context. I would argue that at this point there was an entirely new approach, the choice of modes, which gave artists much greater scope to develop a new language and even to choose from the ideals. The centuries-old reign of ‘mimetic skill’ as the only true virtue of art was starting to crumble. It is interesting to note that this was also the period that led to the diversity of the arts. The consciousness of history together with the consciousness of mode was to be a powerful asset also for Finnish artists.

Decorative murals were ideally suited to the depiction of mythological events and complicated stories. The large size and simplified form of the works and their flat, two-dimensional perspective were properties of the new decorative art that Gallén, for instance, chose for his works on Kalevala themes. Aesthetic ideals from ancient times were sought in influences found in Baudelaire’s writings and in Symbolism under the common name of “archaism” which, for Finnish artists, meant in practice studying Assyrian and Egyptian art in the Louvre. Although artists of archaic periods and the Primitives were viewed as guiding spirits by the nineteenth-century artists who harked back to earlier art, for many Finnish artists the distinctive, asetically coloured murals of the Pierre Puvis de Chavannes were highly significant. His vast works were based on complex allegorical thought vaguely evoking a distant Golden Age that could be associated alternatively with Greco-Roman and Gallo-Roman antiquity, and even with the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance. Puvis de Chavannes cleverly adopted simple linear compositions and harmonious arrangements of muted colours that brought to mind the Early Renaissance even though the static poses and whiteness of his figures often suggested antique statuery. For European art, Puvis de Chavannes’s timeless pastorals created a mysterious new pictorial language with many meanings. Artists were inspired by his tranquil, ethereal and timeless arcadias, reflecting as they did his idea of an ideal French society. For Finnish artists this aspect was certainly inspiring.

In this part of the study I hope to establish that, in general, admiration for archaic art and allusions to the Early Renaissance through the imitation of frescoes, or

666 Gombrich 2002, 93.
667 Archaic Art, Archaistic = art which imitates Grecian art of c. 620 – 500 B.C. or which is art which appears old-fashioned vis à vis its own time, Lucie-Smith 1984, 19. Archaism = the imitation of the style of ancient, generally prehistoric art or in the tradition of the remnants of this which have been preserved. Taiteen pikkujättäiläinen 1991, 37
668 Mural art = the general name for a monumental and decorative kind of art which is not fresco but imitates its character. Murals can also be framed paintings, e.g. Puvis de Chavannes’ works are on canvas glued to the wall. Because of the cold, damp climate, neither in France nor Finland was it possible to produce 'real' frescos painted on plaster.
through references to the Old Masters in the adoption of their palette, constituted a new mode for historicity in Finland’s early modern art. Furthermore, Finnish artists expanded their understanding and knowledge of new mediums and the concept of transfer to medium becomes topical. These new concepts, as we will see, were adopted by many Finnish artists during the nineteenth century, not only by those named as Symbolists such as Blomstedt, Enckell and Thesleff, but also artists like Gallén, Halonen and Järnefelt who are seen as patriotic artists, as well as the ‘pioneer of modernism’ Schjerfbeck. This is also the reason why this study adopts the term ‘Early Modernism’ which is not a concept of a particular style as it is a period and consequently better suited to the examination of these two colour practices in Finnish art in 1890s to early 1900s.

3.1.1 THE CRADLE OF INNOVATION – THE LOUVRE

As far as painting goes, there is something completely new in the air here. Assyrian and Egyptian art is now the ideal. In my opinion Assyrian and Egyptian art is the most interesting art at the Louvre. There is an overwhelming power of expression in its lines and the decorative quality is simply magnificent.

(Väinö Blomstedt’s letter home, November 1891)⁶⁷⁰

In 1891 Väinö Blomstedt, then living in Paris, wrote home about a new movement, which extolled the stylised simplicity of archaic art periods. It is revealing that he is amused that archaic art has “an overwhelming power of expression” just as Baudelaire had described archaic art as a powerful style to be admired. Blomstedt has also adopted the most popular term of his day and writes in his letter home that “the decorative quality” of archaic art “is simply magnificent”. Again, this echoes Baudelaire, who had urged a return to the expressive power and harmonious effects achieved by archaic artists through abridgment and deformation which he considered essential for the evocation of complex ideas and emotions and for the successful expression of abstract thought.⁶⁷¹ Also in his essay “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, Baudelaire used the term ‘modernité’, which does not mean merely of the present but rather a particular attitude to the present. As Frederic Jameson (2002) states, such a self-conscious experience of modernity developed only in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷² It is revealing that, besides the archaic Egyptian and

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⁶⁷⁰ Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to his mother, Paris 1.11.1891, CAA.
Mesopotamian art and the frescoes of the modern masters in the Louvre, it was *The Poor Fisherman* (1881) of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) that were the keynote works seen by Finnish artists when they arrived in Paris. Paradoxically the Louvre became the cradle of innovation. This duality of ancient and modern is well represented also in Finnish art from the 1890s onwards.

In the nineteenth century Finnish artists acquired their first impressions and knowledge of archaic and Renaissance art from the Louvre where they studied frescoes by the Early Renaissance masters Sandro Botticelli (c.1445–1510) and Fra Angelico (c.1400–1455). Later most of them deepened their knowledge in Italy and in the various museums of Europe. However, it involved much more than merely copying paintings: it became the place in which to learn about the decorative art and was also the inspiration for many artists who considered ‘the eternal beauty of real frescoes’ painted by the Primitives. The most admired works there were the *Tornabuoni* frescoes of Botticelli,⁶⁷³ *Venus and the Three Graces Presenting Gifts* and *Venus and the Liberal Arts with a Young man (possibly Lorenzo Tornabuoni)* (c.1483–85), both of which had been acquired in 1882.

Interestingly, it was not the young symbolist generation who started to copy these works, but, in spring 1888 Helene Schjerfbeck, who had returned from St. Ives, Cornwall and was desperate for new inspiration. She began to copy details and they are probably the same frescoes which Edelfelt later admits to having admired.⁶⁷⁴ For Schjerfbeck the inspiration of the Louvre came at a time when she was clearly looking for a new direction in her art. Riitta Konttinen (2004) points out that prior to leaving the artists’ colony in Cornwall St. Ives,⁶⁷⁵ Schjerfbeck had gone through a dramatic turning point in her life.⁶⁷⁶ Moreover, her *Convalescent* (1888), today her most famous painting, was shown in the Paris Salon under the name *Première verdure*, which has been interpreted as a private statement of her recovery.⁶⁷⁷ Konttinen (2004) also says that although this work is painted in a naturalist manner, emphasis is placed on content and it should be seen as marking the end of her naturalist period and a new starting point in her career towards a more psychological and introverted approach.⁶⁷⁸ It is, however, interesting that Schjerfbeck later in 1902 recalls how, when she visited the Louvre, “the shades of the fresco and its seriousness tempted me and all that was something new for

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⁶⁷³ Botticelli’s frescoes in Villa Lemmi were rediscovered in 1873 and brought to the Louvre.

⁶⁷⁴ Konttinen 2004, 142.

⁶⁷⁵ Schjerbeck’s closest friends there were Marianne and Adrian Stokes. For Schjerbeck’s time in Cornwall, see Konttinen 2004, 127-140; for an English biography see Görgen et al. 2007, 170-201.

⁶⁷⁶ Helene Schjerfbeck had broken off her engagement to an unknown British artist she met in Pont-Aven, Brittany in winter 1883-1884. Konttinen 2004, 106-108.


Her focus is on the “shades of fresco” and the more “serious” mood, which here could mean a universal and spiritual content. It is also rather interesting that, when Schjerfbeck presented the Copy after Sandro Botticelli (1888), the detail portrait of a young man, at the annual Art Society’s exhibition in Finland, the critic and artist Fanny Churberg (1845–1892) strongly criticised the use of oils since one could not “copy the pallidity of the chalk-like colour”. It is true that the painting does not have a greyish, chalk-like tone and appears somewhat dark. However, Churberg admired the noble, idealistic qualities of the painting which reminded her of early art and “transported the viewer away from the poverty of modern life to the golden halls of Fantasy”. It is interesting to note that in Churberg’s mind the choice of medium should better imitate the colours of fresco.

On the other hand, Magnus Enckell, who was deeply interested in symbolist ideology and who was impressed by Josephin Péladan’s ideas, was interested in both Early and High Renaissance. When he studied at the Académie Julian in 1890–91 he too turned to the Louvre as a source of learning. There he was able to study the elegant art of the Renaissance masters, the mystery of Leonardo da Vinci’s paintings – the androgynous beauty of John the Baptist – and the Early Renaissance and neo-platonistic allegories of Botticelli. Enckell, who preferred to study also High Renaissance art in the vein of Sár Péladan and the Rosicrucians, was fully aware of the new currents of Symbolism.

The sketchbooks of the younger generation, such as Enckell and Ellen Thesleff, tell of their enthusiasm for ancient art. In Salme Sarajas-Korte’s (1998) view, and as so many other art historians have reiterated, “for (symbolist) artists form was the most important, lasting and eternal factor in art; colour, on the other hand, was a sensual element, momentary and fleeting” thus it should not be emphasised. I will, however, argue that the studying and copying of archaic art point rather to a holistic admiration for a simplified decorative art, which also includes the reduction of colour to form ascetic or synthetist two-dimensional flat taches of contoured or blurred, misty images. The reduction of light and shadow for the two dimensional and matte surface was enhanced by a greyish (colour) imitating the fresco and by depicting the subject by means of spiritual ‘archaic methods’ was a common pursuit for artists.

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679 Helene Schjerfbeck’s letter to Ada Thilén, 18.12.1902, CAA.
681 It should be noted that, unlike other artworks presented in this study, Scherbeck’s Detail of a Fresco by Sandro Botticelli (1888), Portrait of a Young Man, (private collection), probably Lorenzo Tornabuoni, has been available only in a photograph.
683 Vihanta 1995, 266.
What we know of Enckell’s admiration can be found in his letters to Finland, his memoirs and also in his sketchbook. As he said later, he mainly admired the art of Puvis de Chavannes and Manet, but he can also be said to have been strongly influenced by what he found in the Louvre. Enckell’s sketchbook for 1891–92 contains drawings of works found particularly in the Assyrian art section.685 His sketchbook is filled with details and pictures of Assyrian art, such as the throne of Darios I and details of Persian capitals. It is evident from what Blomstedt writes in a letter that this admiration for archaic art spread among Finnish artists. However, one should also remember that they all studied at the Académie Julian in 1890–91.686 where they probably got to know Sérusier and the Nabis Group and to hear about decorative art and possibly about Gauguin’s synthetism.687 Thesleff, on the other hand, particularly favoured Egyptian art.688 She studied at Colarossi but was a close friend of Enckell and they were in contact with one another in Paris. Thesleff’s sketchbook has several drawings of Egyptian art, such as the sarcophagus of Ramses III and details of the tomb relief of the warlord Imeneminet, the dancer of Hathor.689 None of Halonen’s sketchbooks from this time have survived but his letters and paintings reflect his particular interest in old and prehistoric art. It is clear that in addition to the formal teaching of the academy, they educated themselves by studying archaic, Egyptian and Medieval art which was not to be found in Finnish museums.

In the previously quoted letter which Blomstedt wrote home about the new movement in November 1891 he clearly expressed his enthusiasm for the stylised simplicity of archaic art periods: “In my opinion Assyrian and Egyptian art are the most interesting in the Louvre.”690 It is interesting to note that the same letter reveals that he was appalled by Manet’s Olympia (1863) and Puvis de Chavannes’s Poor Fisherman (1881) which he had seen in the Luxembourg museum “the same new style like [Puvis de] Chavannes’s but I couldn’t understand it at all.... If this is art I should become a baker. No one but Enckell admires it.”691 It is clear that Blomstedt does not see “the new style” of Puvis de Chavannes as being part of the same decorative ideal. An ardent follower of Naturalism, he was not convinced by Symbolism either but all this would change in 1894 when he became Gauguin’s pupil and completely reversed his opinions. Both artists shared the same admiration

687 Sarajas-Korte 1966, 67-68.
690 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to his mother, Paris, Sunday 1.11.1891, CAA.
691 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to his mother, Paris, Sunday 1.11.1891, CAA.
since Gauguin too held Egyptian art in the highest esteem.\textsuperscript{692} The reproductions on the walls of his Paris studio in 1894 were Botticelli’s \textit{The Birth of Venus}, Fra Angelico’s \textit{Annunciation} and Puvis de Chavannes’s \textit{L’Espérance (Hope)} (c.1872). Blomstedt continues “there is an overwhelming power of expression in its lines and the decorative quality is simply magnificent - - I have begun painting in quite a different way from before - - contours are so important.”\textsuperscript{693} This is extraordinary since the paintings from this year and the following year show no contoured forms nor anything else that would reveal an admiration for the “overwhelming power of expression in lines and decorative quality” that Blomstedt is praising.

Later in 1895 Albert Edelfelt, an older generation artist and the leading Finnish artist in Paris at the time as well as a personal friend of Puvis de Chavannes, writes in his diary that “Yesterday I spent hours in the Louvre. I am absolutely crazy about Botticelli’s frescoes - - No oil painting comes close to a fresco”.\textsuperscript{694} It is evident in Finnish art that admiration of frescoes and archaic art went much further than with the group who were called Symbolists. It is interesting that the ideals of the decorative art and the delicate surface of the fresco was widely admired by many end of the nineteenth century artists. Even Enckell states that “All the young artists in Paris are Symbolists, and even those who don’t want to be Symbolists have dedicated themselves to Mysticism”.\textsuperscript{695}

One of the most intriguing amalgamation of archaic, primitive and contemporary art can be seen in Enckell’s \textit{Seine Net Weaver} (1894).\textsuperscript{696} This exceptional painting in gouache was presented as a Finnish fisherman weaving a net, but Enckell’s model was actually a painted statue of an Egyptian \textit{Seated Scribe} from the Louvre.\textsuperscript{697} The whole ascetic palette is based on dark shades of brown, with contoured outlines in black and one can just recognise this “fisherman” seated in a room.\textsuperscript{698} Enckell has dressed him in a brown shirt and trousers and given him dark hair. The skin is quite brown like that of the \textit{Scribe} and the similar features of the face with its high cheekbones reveal the “source" for the painting. Here \textit{the past as a destination} is enhanced by the \textit{choice of mode}: the clear black contours and ascetic dark palette of browns emphasise the ‘archaic’ timeless and static appearance. Needless to say, the painting was not well-received. The art critic Jac. Ahrenberg thought the painting

\textsuperscript{692} Morice 1920, 26-27; Sarajas-Korte 1966, 38.
\textsuperscript{693} Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to his mother, Paris, Sunday 1.11.1891, CAA.
\textsuperscript{694} Albert Edelfelt 12.3.1895, Edelfelt 1928, 187.
\textsuperscript{695} Sarajas-Korte 1994, 154.
\textsuperscript{696} Enckell, \textit{Seine Net Weaver} (1894), gouache, Ostrobothnian Museum, Vaasa.
\textsuperscript{697} Enckell’s sketchbook no. 3636, Ateneum Art Museum. Puokka 1949, 83-84; Sarajas-Korte 1966, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{698} It should be noted that in the 1890s the statues and frescoes were not cleaned by conservators and probably the lighting too was dark, so the Egyptian works and frescoes probably did not look the same as they do today.
ugly and scary, and interestingly mentions it to be ‘artificial archaism’. The art historian and critic J.J Tikkanen thought that Enckell’s works were “above the audience’s healthy grasp of understanding and feeling”. Nevertheless Enckell’s example shows clearly how an artist could fearlessly take an ancient statue and make it a contemporary model for a modern artwork; Enckell is utilising the concept of ‘Primitive’ in a new way. The return to the expressive power and harmony of primitive art as advocated by Baudelaire, which artists would achieve through simplification and stylisation is surely demonstrated here.

_Ideist art, which had to be justified by abstract and complex arguments because it seems so paradoxical to our civilisation, which happens to be both decadent and forgetful of any revelation, is therefore, irrefutably, the true and absolute art._

(G.-A. Aurier in 1891)

It is evident that the refined and elegant fresco art of the Early Renaissance and archaic art in general provided the foundation for a more profound understanding of the significance of ageless art. The frescoes discovered and carefully analysed in the Louvre acted as important pointers for new efforts on the part of many Finnish artists. At the end of the 19th century the innovative sources of the Louvre were an inspiration to Finnish artists, from the details of the Botticelli fresco copied by Schjerfbeck in 1888 to the religious subject and blue background of Fra Angelico’s, _Le Calvaire avec Saint Dominique_ (1440–45), which inspired Halonen, as can be seen in his altar works. In 1896, before leaving for Florence, Halonen painted his study for the Mikkel altarpiece in the spirit of the Christ figure in Fra Angelico’s _Crucifixion_ with which the completed work shows many similarities in composition, colour scheme and in the simplified fresco-like approach which he tried to achieve through the use of transparent watercolour. Also the finished work from 1899 resembles Fra Angelico’s fresco. This change in aesthetics effected also the use of medium. Many turned to tempera and gouache to create a similarity with a fifteenth-century fresco. Tempera in its deep and matte colour was considered to be a step towards fresco. It is revealing that, when writing to his friend Mario Krohn in 1902, Edelfelt explains that “tempera deceivingly resembles fresco, but you can

699 Jac. Ahrenberg, Finska Konstnärernas utställning I. "Våra symbolister". Nya Pressen 14.10.1894, CAA.
700 These harsh criticisms wounded Enckell severely and the most criticised work was the _Head_ (1894). J.J. Tikkanen, "Finska artisternas utställning". _Finsk Tidskrift_ 1894 II, 363.
702 Halonen painted "Christ on a cross" in 1897, just before leaving for Italy and with watercolours so the Louvre version was in his mind. von Bonsdorff 2007, 51-52; Luukkanen 2007, 144-145.
703 Also the finished work from 1899, the altarpiece resembles Fra Angelico’s fresco. Pekka Halonen’s letter to Maija Halonen, Wednesday evening 1896, CAA. von Bonsdorff 2008, 30.
make corrections”. Both Edelfelt and Järnefelt chose to combine oil and tempera for the murals of the University of Helsinki’s ceremonial hall. It is clear that the time of traditional oil painting was over and many experimented with tempera, which they felt best replicated the thin, matte surface of fresco. Halonen continued experimenting in Italy and developing his own way of mixing tempera and oil paints. Many artists incorporated the principles of decorative painting into their work; large size, simplified form and a flat, two-dimensional perspective were other properties of the new decorative approach. For instance, it is clear that during the years 1894–1900 this method was used by many artists in Finland. Blomstedt used unprimed canvas with a synthetist palette in his symbolist and Kalevala works. Also Gallén chose tempera for his large paintings on Kalevala themes. Halonen in turn developed a thinned oil paint with a translucent palette toned with grey that contemporaries already considered reminiscent of Puvís de Chavannes’s murals in imitation of fresco.

The mysterious archaic and Early Renaissance art was the ideal model for the complexity of the end-of-nineteenth-century art. The possibilities of pictorial narrative, combining word, image and history, or imagined history, truly found its way of expression in the modern decorative and monumental art of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It meant that artists could depict complicated narratives and symbolist elements in one and the same work of art. Decorative elements were as much a part of the painting as much as the subject. As this study will present, this dualistic quality and timelessness was emphasised by Finnish artists with simplified colour and form. Also the idea of decorative art, which is made for and is available to the public, was embraced by the Pre-Raphaelites, Puvís de Chavannes and the Symbolists. In the nineteenth century Finnish artists had acquired their first impressions and knowledge of archaic and Renaissance art from the Louvre. Later most of them deepened their knowledge in Italy and in the various museums of Europe, but it is important to note that it was a selected amount of frescoes in the Louvre that was their first source of medieval art, the Old Masters and especially of true fresco art.

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706 Pekka Halonen to Eliel Aspelin-Haapylä, 7.4.1897. Finnish Literature Society.
II. Axel Gallén *Kullervo Sets Off for Battle* (1901), preliminary work for fresco. Tempera on canvas, 89 x 128 cm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. Photo: Jouko Könönen/Finnish National Gallery, CAA
3.1.2 CONSCIOUSNESS OF TIME, FORM AND COLOUR

Medieval artists had the kind of inner strength and inward eye that I wish I had myself.

(Axel Gallén to Kaarlo Slöör 1896)\textsuperscript{707}

Another matter equally as important as these national aspirations was the growing diversity in the European view of what constituted art. Artists became interested in new forms of art and aimed at interaction between the arts in line with the symbolist ideal: composers, poets and artists wanted to share in joint, mutually supportive projects. It is interesting to see how, all over Europe, admiration for craft-centred medieval art and its individuality was subsumed into a contemporary approach.\textsuperscript{708} This trend, emerging as a reaction to industrialisation and mass production, was led by the British Arts and Crafts movement, and later, as it reached the Continent, it adopted new features from French Symbolism.\textsuperscript{709} In Finnish art one of the most important things to coincide with the renewal of the arts was Finland's national epic. During the 1890s the Kalevala was unquestionably one of the prime sources of artistic inspiration. It was of enormous importance in helping to build this new integration of the arts and inspired much of the new Finnish visual culture. But why was the epic of collected ancient folklore such an inspiration to nineteenth-century artists?

As early as the competition held to illustrate the first Kalevala in 1885 scholars and artists had pondered the importance of the stylistic approach in depicting the Kalevala world.\textsuperscript{710} After all, this meant illustrating epic and mythological events and heroes and characters with supernatural, almost divine powers. One of the key debates engaged in at the time was, in fact, how, and specifically in what style, the Kalevala world should be depicted, i.e. how the mythological and the epic could and should be integrated with ethnographic and historical material. The process was furthered by the fact that great interest already existed in Finland’s archaeological finds and the nation’s ancient history.\textsuperscript{711} It was believed that anchoring Finland’s ancient legends to actual past events would provide evidence of and a proper historical basis for an “ancient golden age”. This debate took on added impetus when the first competition for the illustration of the Kalevala was announced in


\textsuperscript{708} This also applied elsewhere in Europe, e.g. in Ireland and Scotland, where the Celtic Revival movement likewise took political forms. Opposition to predominantly English culture through the arts made it possible to highlight some specific national characteristics. Sheehy, Jeanne. The Rediscovery of Ireland’s Past. The Celtic Revival 1890–1930. Thames & Hudson, London 1980.

\textsuperscript{709} Rapetti 2005, 15-17.

\textsuperscript{710} Van der Hoeven 2009, 48-50.

\textsuperscript{711} A similar upsurge of interest was also seen elsewhere in Europe, e.g. in the 'Celtic Revival’. See note 100.
1885. As mentioned earlier, Finland was not alone in these aspirations. As a consequence, in the late-eighteenth century the work and interest of European antiquarians and connoisseurs had invoked a new idea of the “past as a different realm,” with its own history, separated from the living present. This is connected to the vast interest in new ideas about the past and its modern dimensions. Works such as Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, in which the use of the *past* not only as a comparative guide to but also as a validation of the present was typified. As David Lowenthal describes it, artists used “archaeological metaphors for excavating the psychological past.” It is crucial to note that also Finnish artists in the end of the nineteenth century were conscious of being historical in the modern sense. This notion of *historicity* and the *past as a destination* was expressed in many ways. One of the interests was clearly the quest for a mysterious past revived by the collected oral culture of *Kalevala* which belongs to this current of European ‘revivalism’.

*The benefit I gain in starting to work in many areas of art is minimal, but in a small, newly-shaped country personal initiative and stimuli are very important. In future, artists with talents greater and above all more coherent than mine will find stimuli and develop as experts in different fields. In any case, I need the new ideas I get from interesting and exciting experiments. And ultimately, it’s not just art that all this serves. For art is life, religion — everything.*

(*Axel Gallén, sketchbook XI-101*)

This ideology grew from the idea that Finnish history indicated the existence of a primeval, pure and uncorrupted “golden age”, that is, a time before either Swedish or Russian domination. It is, nevertheless, important to note that there were problems merely with this starting point: it was, in fact, impossible to reconcile the realities of history with the mythical heritage. This dilemma resulted in a conscious search for the right mode to depict the mythological past and led artists to prefer the synthetist and decorative mode which grew into what was later called the “Kalevala style”. It is also interesting that this decorative mode was a concept that was believed to possess the vocabulary Finnish artists strove towards. It was also the language that transposed the more obscure mythological themes found in Finnish folklore into a form that could be understood – also internationally.

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712 It was Matti Äyräpää, a member of the Savo-Karelia student organization, who proposed holding the competition after hearing Lönrot remark that it was surely time for the Kalevala to be illustrated. Van der Hoeven 2001, 31-32.

713 Lowenthal, xvi-xviii; Hirsh 2004, 9-10.

714 For the national discourse on Kalevala, see Anttonen 2005, 151-154.

In March 1890, the *Päivälehti* newspaper wrote that a trend had been chosen in art which "places extreme value on national themes". In Paris, attention had been paid to "a work of art that introduces new regions, new people and a new atmosphere that have not yet been seen." This meant that Finland, small and unknown though it was, could attract interest with its special exoticism. "In a recent discussion with a Finnish painter, the French artist Meissonier had explicitly admitted that the reform of art would come from the Nordic countries, from Scandinavia, including Finland. And why? Because we have the raw soil “without which all cultivation will remain artificial and plants wither”.

Sharon Hirsh (2004) has stated an important fact that was shared by many European artists who, at the end of the nineteenth century, were caught up in the social shifts of the metropolis where ‘medievalism’ as well as ‘nature’ itself had become unachievable ideals. This attitude became especially important as artists found it increasingly difficult to turn to traditional nature settings. Life in the urbanised cities seemed to have changed so completely that one could no longer “go back” – in space or time – to a better world. The same applied to Finnish artists, some of whom, like Halonen, were tired of and appalled by the “ugly and prosaic” city life, which he saw as “punishment and foretaste of hell” to live in Helsinki.

Although Finland was not as urbanised as other European countries such as France, artists longed to escape to pure surroundings where it was possible to create art.

In Finland the need for an ‘other world’ was reflected in the many expeditions made to Karelia by artists, composers, architects and ethnographers who all strove to discover in ‘the spirit of the ancient Kalevala’ something of the mystical past and ‘golden age’ which they believed had once existed and which was now to be given new life in their works. The letters of Väinö Blomstedt, Gallén and Halonen speak repeatedly of a “new renaissance of the north”. Behind this upsurge of national feeling lay the mighty weight of the *Kalevala*, an epic work comparable to Homer’s Iliad and Scotland’s *Ossian* Legend while its great hero Väinämöinen could be compared to Apollo and Orpheus. These kinds of theosophical ideas about chosen peoples merged in their minds with what they saw as Finland’s spiritual and cultural development.

*There were such a number of unforgettably fine things to see in Naples and Pompeii. Certainly I learned such a lot about art that I’ll never re-*

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717 Hirsh 2004, 8.
720 It should be noted that Finnish artists were not alone with their inspiration on Theosophy. During this period many artists were interested in theosophical ideology. For Russian artists, see Tillberg 2003, 174-176.
gret making the journey. It’s helped me to understand much better the greatness of ancient Greek and Roman art. There was so much new to see in the wall paintings in Pompeii, for instance. A couple of thousand years ago they were producing just as fine work as we do today.

(Pekka Halonen to Eliel Aspelin-Haapylä 1897)\(^{221}\)

Although Gallén is the artist best known for his Kalevala art, Blomstedt and Halonen also depicted scenes from the Kalevala and mythical subjects using symbolist elements and decorative techniques. These works are an interesting combination of patriotism, Baudelairean *modernité* and the timeless mythological Kalevala world. The artists saw decorative art as a universal mystical language that could be understood by ordinary people and by those seers who ‘understood’ the universality of this ‘new art’. It should be noted that Kalevala was read also in Paris, and for some esoteric Parisians it was one of ‘mankind’s holy books’. A poet of the Quartier Latin circle, Charles Grolleau, a friend of Blomstedt, wrote that he had found a beautiful version of the Kalevala in Paris and bought it.\(^{222}\) Like ancient Egyptian wall paintings or Early Renaissance frescoes in the Louvre, these decorative, monumental Kalevala works are carefully considered yet completely clear. This attitude becomes apparent in Gallén’s description of the reception of his *Defence of the Sampo* (1896, fig. 9) in his letter to K.A. Tavaststjerna in 1897; “when the eyes of the crofter Heikki shone with unreserved admiration after he had seen the wild tussle of my Sampo men, my heart was filled with triumph – don’t let the critics or the one-in-a-thousand who count themselves among the intelligentsia hear this”.\(^{223}\) These decorative ‘fresco imitations’ underline the transcendental power of art, its timeless quality and its ability to survive the ravages of time, lifting it above what any ‘bourgeois art’ could achieve. And, like modern art around the turn of the century, they strove to depict simultaneously both something from the mythological past in the art of the future. As a consequence, contemporary ideas on art had formulated a new sense of how the present constantly reflects the past.

Blomstedt’s two decorative paintings commissioned for Salomo Wuorio’s dining room,\(^{224}\) on the other hand, reiterate the idea of a tapestry rather than fresco but also reveal Early Renaissance influences. In 1896 Blomstedt wrote to Louis Sparre asking if he could get him “a large, clear photograph” of Botticelli’s famous *Primavera*.\(^{225}\) Here Kalevala and Renaissance art blend in Blomstedt’s *Forging of the Sampo*, in

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\(^{221}\) Pekka Halonen to Eliel Aspelin-Haapylä 7.4.1897, Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki.


\(^{223}\) Axel Gallén’s letter to K.A. Tavaststjerna 10.4.1897, Helsinki University Library. For the critics’ reception of this painting see Ilva 1996, 68, 73-80.

\(^{224}\) The first painting *The Theft of the Sampo* (1897) was more or less ready when Blomstedt left for Italy in the autumn 1896. Raivio 1992, 299; von Bonsdorff 2009b, 78-79, 94-95.

\(^{225}\) Letter from Viinö Blomstedt to Louis Sparre 25.8.1896, CAA.
which he borrows Botticelli’s god of the west wind, Zephyr, to blow on the anvil where the Sampo is being wrought. This unusually clear evidence of a ‘model’ also shows us how Finnish artists used reproductions of artworks to give them ideas. For it was the idea of a blowing god he adopted and without the letter the reference to Botticelli would not be recognisable. Blomstedt’s decorative work is painted with tempera on a special cloth Wuorio had purchased from Stockholm which had a rough patterned weave to enhance the ‘gobelin’ effect. Blomstedt’s tempera colours follows his synthetist palette of dark turquoise, mauve, brown, orange and yellow, but are partly absorbed by the cloth so that the effect is somewhat darkened. His palette resembles, not his teacher Gauguin’s, but the soft tertiary colours of the Nabi Maurice Denis. The problem with colours absorbed by a cloth is also seen in Halonen’s Väinämöinen Playing (1897) and Lemminkäinen Arrives at the Isle (1900) although he used a far more neutral palette than Blomstedt. Whereas Blomstedt underlines the narrative fairytale effect and Botticellian subject with his palette, Halonen’s Väinämöinen Playing shows a pastoral paradise in which tranquil people are mesmerised by Väinämöinen’s magical playing of the kantele. It is also interesting that they both worked on these ‘Finnish’ Kalevala paintings during their stay in Italy, since it was also the place where the concept of ‘complete work of art’ was all around, in San Marco to every church and Renaissance villa they explored.

The idea of a complete work of art fascinated Finnish artists and it became the aim of these artists to create something similar in Finland. Gallén expressed his opinion in the Ateneum art-periodical in 1901 after he had begun sketches for the frescoes for the Sigrid Jušélius mausoleum in Pori.

It’s an old phrase that Italy is rich in art treasures. What it really means as far as paintings are concerned is the Vatican and Palazzo Pitti; however, many small towns are complete works of art, from the layout and buildings right down to the simplest decorations; this is what we rarely think about. Amongst all this splendour the paintings never push to the front, but are associated through serving with the whole, like a final touch of the brush. – – What a splendour of colour and yet a whole, what serious depth and what strong love of life is in both their thought and in their realisation.

(Axel Gallén in Ateneum 1901)

726 Salomo Wuorio’s letter to Axel Gallén 10.10.1896, GKM.
727 See images, von Bonsdorff 2008, Pekka Halonen, Väinämöinen Playing (1897) cat. 84, Lemminkäinen Arrives at the Isle (1900) cat. 126.
728 The Jušélius Mausoleum in Pori was built at the beginning of the century by the Pori businessman F.A. Jušélius in memory of his daughter Sigrid, who died at the age of 11. The idea for an imposing cemetery chapel was unique in Finland at the time. The co-operation between the architect Josef Stenhåck and Axel Gallén, who painted the frescoes, was also unique. Pusa 1991, 5. Pekka Halonen painted the hallway frescoes.
729 “Konst. Några hâgkomster af Axel Gallén”. Ateneum 1901, HUL.
Axel Gallén’s memories of his trip to Italy in 1897–98 are like the enchanted description of someone who has had a revelation following a new experience. However, the fresco idea was not entirely unknown to the artist prior to his trip to Italy: plans for murals can already be found in his sketchbooks from the 1880s.\footnote{Pusa 1991, 20.}

During his stay in Italy he wanted to learn the techniques of fresco painting. His teacher and “reveler of secrets” was the Danish artist Oscar Matthiesen, a kindred spirit, who taught Gallén the methods used in the wall paintings of Pompeii. On his return to Finland, Gallén immediately started on some practical experiments at Kalela, his studio-home in the wilds. It is evident that Gallén shared the decorative aspirations of the time when contemporary art favoured the fusing of architecture and painting. As Erja Pusa (1991) mentions, the theories of Symbolism, which led him particularly to admire frescoes, had a far-reaching impact on Gallén’s career and for him to paint something permanent,\footnote{Otto Donner Jr. had donated funds for the fresco. Pusa 1991, 22-23, 36-37.} public and spiritual was never merely a feature of a specific period but an enthusiasm that lasted throughout his life.

Gallén’s one dream of creating a real fresco for a public space in Finland came true when he received a commission to create a fresco in the music hall of the Old Students’ Union building in Helsinki.\footnote{The last frescoes he executed were the cupola frescoes in the National Museum in Helsinki in the 1920s. Pusa 1991, 20-21.} An interesting discourse prompted by Gallén’s heroic *Kullervo Sets Off for Battle* (1901, fig. 11), which is one of the few surviving frescoes,\footnote{Kullervo Sets Off for Battle (1901, here as image the preliminary work, Ateneum Art Museum) is also one of the few surviving frescoes Gallén produced. The frescoes in the Finnish pavilion and the Sigrid Jusélius Mausoleum no longer exist. In addition, Blomstedt’s fresco *The Swan of Tuonela* in the Suur-Merijoki manor house was destroyed in during the war. See Amberg 1998, 113-124.} also reveals the controversy in fusing Finnish ‘patriotic art’ with clear references to Early Renaissance fresco art. From the outset *Kullervo Sets Off for Battle*, completed in 1901,\footnote{A version of Kullervo Sets Off for Battle (1901), in the Ateneum Art Museum collection was made with tempera on canvas, 89 x 127. The final fresco (355 x 687 cm) in the music hall of the Old Students’ House is in poor condition after the fire in 1978.} received a rather muted reception, despite its “brilliant thought”. The critics called for greater pathos and drew attention to the contradiction between the work and the architectural space which was too small for the “huge” fresco. But more interestingly the real question seemed to be that the model for the fresco was too close to a detail of Simone Martin’s well-known fresco from the Palazzo Pubblico in Sienna. These comments upset the artist who later (1924), in his memoir book, disputed the supposed plagiarism as false, calling it “an attack by domestic wet hats.”\footnote{Gallen-Kallela 1924, 199-200.} Although Gallén had made sketches prior to his trip to Italy in 1898, when he actually saw the fresco which shows Guidoriccio da Fogliano riding against the Florentines, the similarities between the two frescoes...
in both composition and subject are striking. I would, however, argue that this is true of many other “knight or Mars riding to war” images. Gallén’s fierce Kullervo rides in a snowy landscape, blowing a horn and followed by a wolf-like hound or Karelian dog against an intense blue night sky lit by Northern Lights and a constellation of stars. The white horse is saddled like a knight’s steed but with a blanket whose weave resembles a Finnish handicraft pattern. In the first tempera version the matte colours are already saturated, as a whole limited mainly in blue, white, red and yellow. The surrounding landscape is based on blues and whites; the accented colours are the red of the blanket, the hood and the cape and they focus the eye on the centre of the static composition.

It is important to note that Gallén moulded the character to suit his own needs; Gallén’s Kullervo knight or Mars is a timeless archetype image which could be found in so many sources, from the Early Renaissance and still earlier Roman images and from books to churches, that this discourse as to from where Gallén’s inspiration actually came is quite unnecessary. This monumental, ‘true’ fresco of Kullervo depicts a different character from that described in the Kalevala. Here Kullervo is presented as a noble Renaissance knight, setting off to fight against evil. Still more interesting is the bold amalgamation of a timeless heroic image and Kullervo, who in the Kalevala was not a ‘hero’ but a very tragic figure who failed to find his place in society. The sensitivity of the subject seems to lie more in the excessively close association between the national subject and the international model.736 I would, however, argue that the fresco is the synthesis of admiration for fresco painting: the painting’s meaning lies more in the national cause and in underlining the Theosophist expression of ‘the new renaissance of the north’ and less in illustrating the Kalevala. It is, moreover, interesting to see how Gallén has blended the two Baudelairean elements, eternal and modern. Interestingly the fresco also contains a second dualistic pair: it is national in content but international in form, two elements in perfect harmony.737

It was self-evident that the frescoes of Botticelli hacked from an Italian villa were no longer sufficient inspiration for Finnish artists. The ‘real effect’ of the authentic surroundings was believed to lift artists from contemporary times to a different realm. Studying and working in ‘timeless’ monasteries and churches brought the past as a destination close to them. As the letters show, it was not the contemporary Italy they sought but another ancient one. They wandered in Italy as in a museum, picking and choosing. Halonen’s later comment in 1904 is revealing: “there is no

736 There have even been recent attempts to ‘explain’ Gallén’s motifs in this painting especially by his descendants. Aivi Gallen-Kallela has produced a research paper on Gallén’s many studies of the constellations of the night sky and her son, Janne Gallen-Kallela-Sirén, has stressed Kullervo’s “universal meaning” as well as the gesture of blowing the horn and the sound’s significance on Gallén’s oeuvre. Gallen-Kallela 1981, 522.

737 von Bonsdorff 2009b, 83, 86.
modern creative and thought-provoking life here at all. Though otherwise there’s certainly quite enough for me to see and learn from. I’ve seen much of it with quite different eyes from before, maybe because I’ve tried to paint frescoes myself.” He goes on “All this has made me very homesick and filled me with a desire to get down to some serious work, because you have to create art on your own ground.”738

As Hirsh (2004) points out, an underlying theme of much symbolist art in the 1890s was nostalgia. Even as they dreamed of past times and places in which life was more liveable, they also hoped to revive an art that was more meaningful. Medically recognised in the eighteenth century and considered often fatal, nostalgia was originally connected to homesickness; by the nineteenth century, however, it was a complex construction of psychological, social, and physical symptoms. Medical treatises on the disease, still considered contagious and also as a cause of mental illness, continued to appear well into the era of Symbolism. Artists, however, seem to have developed a more twentieth-century approach to nostalgia as an acceptable, even enviable state of mind endemic to modernity.739

It is difficult to say for what reason the very things that move our senses most to pleasures and appeal to them most speedily at first are the ones from which we are most quickly estranged by a kind of disgust and surfeit. How much more brilliant, as a rule, in beauty and variety of colouring are new pictures compared to the old ones. But though they captivate us at first sight the pleasure does not last, while the very roughness and crudity of old paintings maintains their hold on us.

(Cicero, De Oratore III.xxv.98)740

The importance of what Gombrich came to call ‘Cicero’s Law’ should not be hard to explain: traditionally the history of art has been conceived and told in terms of technical progress towards the imitation of nature. Pliny in ancient times and Vasari in the Renaissance had built their narratives on this conception, as did Gombrich when he wrote The Story of Art, published in 1950. But later, in 1956 he developed the theme of Primitivism in more psychological terms.741 The break from mimetic representation occurs at end of the nineteenth century in many ways. As previously stated, one is in the important admiration for ancient and primitive fresco art. This also marks a very important shift from the traditional idea of how art should affect the senses.

738 Pekka Halonen’s letter to J.J. Tikkanen, 26.4.1904, University of Helsinki Library Archives.
739 For example, the treatise of 1873 by August Aspel, as cited in Starobinski, 95-97, 99-100; Hirsh 2004, 8-9.
741 Cicero, De Oratore III.xxv.98; Gombrich 2002, 9.
This ideology of going back into ‘another realm’ was expressed also through synaesthetic remembering; a correspondence of the senses or induced nostalgia was, as Hirsh suggests, enacted by hearing music, smelling or meditating with an image of the past, all of which were considered in the vein of Baudelaire’s method of correspondences. This notion of an induced nostalgia held immediate appeal for symbolist artists and was made more visual by them. Hirsh (2004) interestingly demonstrates how, in its image of a woman completely caught up in the reverie of music, an early work by Fernand Khnopff, Listening to Schumann (1883), puts compositional emphasis not on the performer of the music but rather on the listener, who seems able to transport herself beyond the confines of her Victorian interior. Later Khnopff works are much more explicit in summoning nostalgia and in forming organic links with the past as a place to which one might actually connect: With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Weeps for Other Times (1889), the title of which is taken from a Le Roy poem about nostalgia, shows a woman attempting to create an attachment with a veiled or mirrored image of a past city (probably Bruges) with her kiss. In Across the Ages, a Khnopff lithograph of 1894, a woman of the present seeks conversation with a statue of another woman of the past, perhaps her former self. In these latter images, the invoker of nostalgia is no longer a victim needing treatment, but an active enactor of her own therapy, seeking spiritual if not physical health through association to the past. A Finnish version of the synaesthetic remembering is visualised in Blomstedt’s Francesca (1897, fig. 1) where the notion of an induced nostalgia is referred by symbolist subject matter; a young girl, dressed in renaissance clothes, smelling a poppy, ‘dream flower’.

Furthermore, primitive art, which Baudelaire and later Aurier praised, was believed to have a certain deep and lasting effect on the viewer. As Halonen said “Masaccio and Giotto remain in my mind as the best and purest. You don’t just delight in them for a moment; they have a lasting impact.” But what has tended to be ignored by art historians, and what the artists believed, is that making primitive and decorative mural art also had a certain effect on the artist who aspired to become more spiritual by, for example, painting frescoes. As Silverman points out, Gauguin’s goal to depict the passage across the divine of material reality into the realm of the supernatural was by colour and form. Gauguin pressed his new synthesis of form and content into the service of a sacred, eternal and invisible world beyond the self and the senses, attempting, paradoxically, to achieve spiritual ends through

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742 Khnopff, Listening to Schumann (1883), oil on canvas, 101.5 x 116.5 cm. Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

743 Khnopff, With Grégoire Le Roy. My Heart Weeps for Other Times (1889), pastel and white chalk, 248 x 142 mm. The Hearn Family Trust.


745 Pekka Halonen’s letter to J.J. Tikkanen, 26.4.1904, University of Helsinki Library Archives.
plastic means of pigment, canvas and primer. It is interesting how artists linked their art and their identities to a larger, transcendent order, and they assigned to painting a new role, that of mediator of divinity and the ideology to create a total work of art held a higher purpose. For example, the idea of fusing architecture and frescoes fascinated Gallén throughout his life. This interesting aspect recurs in the artist’s many letters and statements. In important surroundings, such as in holy and/or public places, it was the process itself that artists of the end of the nineteenth century strove to achieve. Also in Finland modern decorative and mural art sought to be a mirror of simultaneity, linking time and reflecting the past in the future and vice versa.

It should be noted that these aspirations towards decorative mural art were shared by many artists in Europe, particularly by artists who were politically active. Apart from patriotic elements, Gauguin too strove to make his surface a veil, attempting to imitate frescoes with ironed and washed canvases that would be both degreased in colour and matte in finish. Such heavy manipulation, moving away from the glossy thin and detailed application of oil paints favoured by the academic painters of the day, characterises all symbolist work and may even be a definition of what Hirsh has termed their “secret style”. By introducing extreme manipulation of form, colour, and technique, artists announced to the viewer that their art was not an illusion of reality but rather a jumping-off image into the realm of ideas. This form of art became an important vehicle also for Finnish artists, especially in the possibilities it afforded for depicting pictorial narrative, combining word, image and history, or imagined history, which found its true means of expression in the Finnish decorative and mural art of the nineteenth and early-twentieh centuries, allowing artists to create complicated narratives of the ancient Kalevala world and symbolic “abstract” elements in one and the same work. As Riitta Ojanperä shows in The Kalevala in Images (2009), the aim was both to generate an authentic Finnish art culture and to teach the whole nation about the Kalevala in an accessible manner. It was an art that was for the ‘people’; not just for the upper classes who had earlier bought art for their private homes, but for the bourgeoisie and working classes who were populating the growing cities of modern Europe. What is significant is that the idea of decorative art which is made for and

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746 This is identified as the central paradox of the symbolist generation by Jean Bouillon, “Le Moment Symboliste”, Revue de l’Art, no. 96 (1992), special issue, 5-11; Silverman 2000, 49-50.

747 The idea of fusing architecture and painting fascinated Gallén throughout his life. His sketchbooks from the 1880s right up to his death in 1931 contain countless designs for wall and ceiling frescoes. Pusa 1991, 5.

748 See Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe. (Eds.), Facos, Michelle & Hirsh, Sharon L., Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom 2003.


750 Hirsh, From Imagination to Evocation, 3-12; Hirsh 2004, 3.

751 Ojanperä 2009, 16, 18.
available to the public was embraced by the Pre-Raphaelites, Puvis de Chavannes, the Symbolists – and by Finnish artists.

The idea of a public, uplifting and spiritual decorative art was of profound interest to artists such as Gallén and Halonen. The high-spirited comment of Halonen to the sculptor Emil Wikström shows a mutual mission. “Literature and art based on the Finnish national spirit; that is our strength and a power not easy to overcome. We are God’s chosen people, with a role to play in mankind!” They were also united by the idea of making Finnish art better known in international arenas. This succeeded beyond all expectation at the Paris World Fair (Exposition Universelle) of 1900. Finland was also well represented at the Fair’s international art exhibition where it won several medals. The significance of this endeavour was that the art of the Russian Grand Duchy was then, for the first time, presented separately under the name of Finland. Mural works by leading Finnish artists decorated its walls, including two by Halonen, Washing on the Ice (fig. 19) and The Lynx Hunter (fig. 20), which depicted rural life and hunting traditions.

The murals Washing on the Ice and The Lynx Hunter (1900) are fine examples of the imitation of Early Renaissance fresco art and of the adaptation of Puvis de Chavannes’s art and his tonal palette. These paintings, created for the Finnish Pavilion, must be seen as a single entity forming an allegorical pair. As in Puvis de Chavannes’s monumental art one allegorical figure represents one concept as, for example, in L’ Espérance (Hope) (c.1872, Louvre). Halonen’s allegorical figures, however, represent Finnish forms of livelihood and culture. The hunter is shown in profile, carrying his gun in the wilderness, tracking the lynx, a beast of prey. The masculine figure dominates the snowy wilderness landscape. The young woman, on the other hand, is shown frontally and, as a feminine figure, symbolises a cultural landscape. She represents agriculture and peasant farming culture. She is rinsing clothes with her bare hands in a hole in the ice and the motionless atmosphere and noble harmony of the painting are at odds with the subject as such. Whereas Puvis de Chavannes chose timeless arcadian landscapes as the subject for his paintings, Halonen has placed his subject on the ice of Lake Tuusula in a snowy wilderness landscape. Typical of the Finnish painter is the calm mood conveyed by the painting and its sensitive brush with thinned oils on a transparent, matte surface which resembles almost unmistakably that of a fresco. The artist has clearly sought to

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752 Pekka Halonen to Emil Wikström, 5.3.1899. Helsinki University Library

753 For example, Pekka Halonen received a silver medal. Halonen exhibited Winter Sunset (1899), which was considered for purchase for the French state collection, though this did not take place. von Bonndorf 2008, 10-13.

754 Others were Albert Edelfelt, Venny Solda-Brofeldt, Väinö Blomstedt, Juho Rissanen, Pekka Halonen. The programme was commissioned by Albert Edelfelt.

755 Lemoine 2002, 42-43, 47. Puvis de Chavannes’ Hope (c.1872) also hung on Gauguin’s wall and the painting appears in two of Gauguin’s paintings e.g. Still Life with “Hope” 1901.
stress poetic monumentality also through stylistic means. More importantly, the overall harmony created by the greyish tonal palette of the work has succeeded in giving a static, ceremonial impression. Halonen’s great interest in tempera and fresco painting was thus more than just an introduction to a new painting technique; it referred both to quattrocento Florence and to modern art guided by Puvis de Chavannes. This was almost certainly the art Halonen aimed to create as his contribution to the “new Renaissance” for Finland.

Halonen produced most of his monumental and decorative paintings after moving to Tuusula in 1898. The murals at the Paris World Fair of 1900 – *Washing on the Ice* and *The Lynx Hunter* - and the imposing *Pioneers in Karelia* (1900) – form a distinct group and crystallise the aims of the artist’s decorative art at the turn of the 20th century. After the World Fair, he wrote from Paris to Gallén: “Just what our function is and what we have to say are becoming increasingly clear to me.” Halonen wanted his monumental works to reflect the solidarity and patriotic feeling of which he had so often talked with Gallén and with the cultural-politist group called *Young Finns*. Something of a theosophist, Halonen considered it essential to ensure the advance of a national art and culture. This idealistic view of the lofty intellectual standing of their homeland encouraged artists to find points of contact for their ideals specifically in theosophist thinking. It is seems that ideas of chosen peoples blended in their minds with an upsurge of Finnish feeling and culture. “We must all work together to give Finland its own art, something great and true.”

These aims are particularly obvious in *Pioneers in Karelia* which Halonen offered to the state-owned Antell Collection. He did not initially get the answer he expected and was greatly upset by the negative criticism the work received.

In the view of Councillor of State C. G. Estlander, “The work lacks energy, as can be seen in the poses of the figures and various ancillary elements, particularly the clothes. They are not credible and one does not really know just how they are dressed. I have heard tell that the artist intended to use a symbolist approach. But if, in fact, this was because the artist’s powers faltered in the course of the work, it is greatly to be deplored. Blows like these do not fell trees and such methods do not dig up boulders. –It is my clear impression that Mr Halonen is a gifted

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757 Pekka Halonen’s letter to Axel Gallén, 5.6.1900, GKM.
758 E.g. Väinö Blomstedt to his cousin Yrjö Blomstedt, 6.3.1894. Yrjö Blomstedt’s letters, Jyväskylä Provincial Archives. Halonen and Blomstedt read Sinnet’s *De invições lāra* 1887 (Esoteric Buddhism) and other theosophic-symbolist literature. Later, Halonen’s library also contained theosophic books including works by Blavatsky and Ervasti.
and important painter who has been temporarily led astray by the disastrous theorising going on among our artists.”

The insulted Halonen replied to Estlander, “I have myself felled trees and dug up boulders – and continue to do so while working on the foundations of my planned studio! – What I wanted to depict in this painting was the calm, tranquil and endless character of Finnish work. – The painting also has a decorative purpose, best achieved in my view by giving it a tranquil and harmonious overall impression. – In that respect the work is certainly stylised and carefully composed, in terms of both the poses of the figures, and their clothing and arrangement and of the whole treatment of the theme. But I should not have thought that such a method denied the freedoms granted under the laws of folk art.”

Estlander’s criticism and Halonen’s response show us that the artist’s vision and the various interpretations of symbolist works rarely coincided. On the other hand, Halonen’s explanation of his own ideas tells us clearly what his decorative art was aiming at. And as the French critic Georges Michel stated in “L’Aurore” in 1908: “Mr Pekka Halonen sees his subject like a Synthetist; each pose has its specific line, each movement is in the main tempo, and each figure’s pose is in relation to the overall subject; in works handled in this way, a beautiful overall impression is achieved.”

The structure of the painting was, to a large degree, inspired by both Gauguin’s synthetist style of painting and the allegorical art of Puvis de Chavannes. Aune Lindström (1957) states that Halonen’s work was inspired by Puvis de Chavannes’s painting Winter (L’hiver) (1892), which features a similar group of working men. It is crucial to note that both artists depict ordinary people working deliberately and unhurriedly. Halonen has skilfully adopted the dreamlike peaceful beauty for which the works of Puvis de Chavannes are renowned. As is clear from Estlander’s criticism, because of its static quality and powerful Synthetism the painting received a highly contradictory reception. The problem for the critics was that the subject was not treated realistically enough and they failed to see the decorative achievements, the harmony between line and colour which was the true beauty of the painting. With this painting Halonen certainly tried to reach something monumental and allegorical. In this monumental painting Halonen used a tonal, harmonising palette of grey tones. There is also a desire to imitate the delicate, thin paint of frescoes as in Washing on the Ice and The Lynx Hunter. Even though these are painted with oils, the paint is made so thin that it leaves the surface completely smooth and

761 Pekka Halonen to C. G. Estlander, December 12, 1900. Swedish Literature Society. The monumental painting was finally purchased for the Antell Collection because Eliel Aspelin and Albert Edelfelt were in favour.
762 La revue des B(atignolles?) 2.10.1908, copied article from the Finnish Press Archives, CAA. Also Lindström 1957, 203.
matte. His technique resembles also the tonality of Whistler and his thin ‘sauce’ which was partly absorbed by the canvas. Halonen’s illusion of fresco is striking and underlines the timeless quality. Halonen always intended these monumental mural paintings to be seen by the public. From the outset he hoped that Pioneers of Karelia would be bought for the Antell collection which could be compared with the Luxembourg museum’s collection.

In my opinion Halonen’s three monumental, decorative works can also be seen as prime examples of Baudelaire’s ideology on the heroism of modern life. At the very end of his review of the Salon of 1845 Baudelaire complains that the painters of the day are too inattentive to the present.

And yet the heroism of modern life surrounds and presses in on us – – There is no lack of subjects, or of colours, to make epics. The true painter we are looking for will be one who can snatch from the life of today its epic quality and make us feel how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots. Let us hope that next year the true seekers may grant us the extraordinary delight of celebrating the advent of the new!764

Even though Halonen’s ‘heroes’ are not clad in “cravats and patent-leather boots”, and can be seen as anti-modern, what Baudelaire was saying was that the real heroes of contemporary epics can be found in the humblest working man. A notion of timelessness and past as a destination is relevant also in these monumental paintings.

It is important, however, to recognise that these patriotic ideas were not embraced by all Finnish artists. And not all artists adopted decorative art as their goal in creating national mural art for Finland.765 Magnus Enckell, for example, experimented with different mediums, such as watercolour and gouache, to achieve a transparent ‘fresco-like’ matte surface as in his Seine Net Weaver (1894), which was inspired by the Egyptian Scribe while Ellen Thesleff created a rough-textured, ‘mural-like’ surface with oils. Siina Hälikkä (2007) has pointed out that during her stay in Florence in 1894 Thesleff pondered the dimensions a canvas could afford. While she spent time in the San Marco monastery making studies of Fra Angelico’s frescoes she wrote that “there is also a monk and artist Beata Angelico who has painted and decorated the walls with wonderful frescoes...it is unworthy to follow his brushstrokes – a canvas also has its dimensions.” This is especially evident in her

764 Baudelaire, Art in Paris, 31-32; Berman 1997, 142-143.
765 A small number of Finnish artists including Enckell and Thesleff became immediately interested in French Symbolism when they settled in Paris. For them, despite Finland’s political situation, it was the existential problems of the individual that were considered of primary importance, not the political situation of Finland. Vihanta 1995, 266.
‘archaising’ *Lydia* (1897), where a young girl with her mouth open has turned away from the viewer holding one hand gently over her chest. This enigmatic painting is created by interesting contrasts in form and content: a portrait but with the face almost turned away, open-mouthed but a silent mood, youth versus ‘ancient’ surface, a fleeting moment versus static timelessness and crude rough contours on a delicate young figure.\(^{766}\) The contrasts continue in the colour scheme, black charcoal contours versus soft, ascetic palette toned with grey. The painting is done with a limited palette but with many shades of brown, white, reddish-violet.

Thesleff’s former interest in the Louvre continued in Italy. She painted at least one copy which was shown at the yearly Art Society’s exhibition. It is rather interesting that Thesleff’s mother criticises the painting as being “too antique for our taste, and if she had been smarter, she would have painted Raphael or other masters who are more familiar for our time and understanding.”\(^{767}\) It is clear that Fra Angelico was not a known artist even in those days, and Thesleff’s choice shows her preference for Angelico’s more ‘ancient’ Primitive aesthetics, something that was new in the 1890s. Thesleff’s letters reveal other sources of admiration and enthusiasm. One is Masaccio, whom she saw, for example, in St. Carmine and who was the “master who taught Leonardo and the other masters a lot - - He died young, but what he did was great”.\(^{768}\) Botticelli is also mentioned by Thesleff, who saw the *Birth of Venus* and *Prima vera* in the Uffizi Gallery. Especially the *Prima vera* was important to her since she writes to her sister Gerda that she kept the print on her wall and had sent a photograph of it to Gerda: “I saw the original today – but it was so huge – what wonderful things you can find in the museums here.”\(^{769}\)

What is interesting is that Thesleff and Helene Schjerbeck spent time working together in San Marco and later working with a Danish colleague, Anna Petersen. Thesleff writes home telling how “we were all in our own cells working intensively”\(^{770}\). I would propose that even though Schjerbeck was an older and more accomplished artist, her art from that trip onwards changes towards a non-mimetic approach with an ascetic palette and new subjects. It was, I would argue, perhaps not merely due to the Fra Angelico frescoes but also to her relationship with a younger fellow artist who from 1892 had already converted to an ascetic palette of greyish tonalism,

\(^{766}\) Thesleff, *Lydia* (1897), oil on canvas, 50 x 38 cm, Maire Gullichsen collection, Pori Art Museum. Ellen Thesleff’s letter to her mother, Florence 6.4.1894, SLS. These contrasts have also been noticed by Hälikkä, Hälikkä 2007, 42-43.

\(^{767}\) "Få nu se om din madonna skull bliëva såld. Jag fruktar dock den är för antik för vår goût och att du gjort klokare uti att hålla dig till Rafael och de der andra italienska storheterna, som mera närmare sig vår tid och uppfattning." Thesleff’s mother’s letter to Ellen Thesleff 10.5.1894. Hälikkä 2007, 43.

\(^{768}\) Ellen Thesleff’s letter to her mother, Florence 28.2.1894, SLS. Hälikkä 2007, 41.

\(^{769}\) Ellen Thesleff’s letter to Gerda Thesleff, Florence 12.1.1894, SLS. Hälikkä 2007, 40.

\(^{770}\) Ellen Thesleff’s letter to her mother, Florence 6.4.1894, SLS. Hälikkä 2007, 42-43.
which can be seen in her *Self-Portrait* (1895) and its greyish tone and shimmering background.

Like the young Enckell and Thesleff, Schjerfbeck did not take part in the ‘national cause’. Her art was similarly inspired by frescoes towards what she later described as “the path to synthetic”.\(^{771}\) Alongside others Schjerfbeck too began to experiment with different mediums and especially from 1894 onwards worked with gouache, watercolour and charcoal. What is particularly interesting is that Schjerfbeck later experimented with a strange imitation of an ancient flaked plaster surface in her delicate *The Fragment* (1904–05),\(^ {772}\) depicting an angelic young girl with her eyes shut. The surface is scraped and swiped, showing different layers of paint as imitating a deteriorating old fresco with worn-out colours. This was a new technique for Schjerfbeck who clearly wanted to create an ancient fresco mood with oils. Likewise the name of the small painting refers to a ‘fragment’ of a perhaps Early Renaissance fresco? Or is it a symbolist painting à la Odilon Redon? Or an amalgamation of both? Finding iconographical sources for this image might be interesting, but I would argue that it is more important to note how Schjerfbeck experimented with surfaces in an innovative manner and, by emulating timelessness with these layers of colour, show that modern *historicity* was established in many different ways.

Interestingly, the idea of historicity comes out in other Schjerfbeck paintings also. One method of manipulating time in Schjerfbeck’s works, as in *Boy Dressed in Armour* (fig. 28), and *Cypresses, Fiesole* (fig. 27), both painted in Italy in 1894, shows this phenomenon by blurring time, by referring to the past by subject as in *Boy Dressed in Armour* or by reducing the landscape from all that would indicate place and time. As Hirsh (2004) demonstrates, symbolist artists aimed to visualise the obscure but evocative colour sense often found in symbolist poetry. Tonal colouring, using one or two colours at most, also avoids all suggestion of line and creates the illusion of form by arrangements of one soft mass against another.\(^\text{773}\) Both paintings were done with ascetic colours of browns, grey and black toned down to enhance the simplified, misty form. Schjerfbeck’s journeys to Italy in 1889 and in 1894 were an important factor in this change. Riitta Konttinen (2004) sees *Boy Dressed in Armour* as echoing Schjerfbeck’s interest in Burne-Jones.\(^\text{774}\) It is true that in spring 1894 Schjerfbeck had stopped off in Vienna on her way to Florence and had seen big black and white reproductions of Burne-Jones’s works.\(^\text{775}\) The Finnish artist became interested in “the harmony and tones of lines, the mystique hidden in the

\(^{771}\) Helene Schjerfbeck’s letter to Ada Thilén 6.7.1911, Åbo Academy Library Archives, Turku.

\(^{772}\) Schjerfbeck, *The Fragment* (1904–05), oil on canvas, 31.5 x 34 cm, Gyllenberg Foundation Museum, Helsinki.

\(^{773}\) Hirsh 2004, 5-6.


\(^{775}\) Schjerfbeck may not have seen Burne-Jones’s paintings since she was wondering about the colours in the letter.
painting.”  

Even if at that point she had not seen Burne-Jones’s paintings, still the Boy Dressed in Armour owes something to Burne-Jones’s monotonous and simplified colours which emphasise the dreamlike melancholy of his allegorical and mystic paintings such as The Wheel of Fortune (1883) and what Elizabeth Prettejohn (2009) describes as the colours of metallic grey and gold.  

The painting also resembles Carrière’s method to refer to the past. Despite Schjerfbeck’s many influences, it is evident that the artist had already begun to show an interest in the more mystical side of art. Earlier Schjerfbeck had shown no particular interest in Parisian Symbolism; evidently Burne-Jones and English Aestheticism was more to her taste.  

Nevertheless, the shift to greyish tonality which shows in her paintings after this was new in the technique and content in her paintings.

It is interesting that later in 1918 Schjerfbeck emphasised her Italian year of 1894. In a letter to Einar Reuter she spoke of her “Italian period” when she tried to simplify according to her models.  

It is also interesting that Florence’s art treasures and unique, spiritual atmosphere along with the frescoes of the San Marco monastery were a place of pilgrimage for almost all the artists mentioned, from Pre-Raphaelites to Symbolists, as well as for Finnish artists, such as Enckell, Schjerfbeck, Thesleff and Halonen.

Blurring time and referring to the past was not only done with an ascetic palette. It is interesting that Väinö Blomstedt also used this method but with a synthetist palette. Besides his tapestry-like Wuorio-paintings mentioned earlier, there is also one painting for which he is best-known. The dreamlike Francesca (1897, fig. 1), which has almost an iconic status in Finnish symbolist art. When Blomstedt put his paintings on display after his Italian trip, one critic noticed his new colour scheme where a deep blue-green played a part. ”Since his trip to Italy Blomstedt has found a particular deep transparent and gleaming turquoise-blue colour which can be found in, for example in the painting In Arcadia, and giving his work a delicate, decorative mood.”

The same signifier colour can be found in Blomstedt’s Sunset, from 1898 (fig. 3), but here in Francesca the palette resembles more the mythological theme of Episode from the Kalevala, Kullervo Cutting into the Oak (1897, fig. 2). Both of them are tempera paintings which have a very Gauginesque spirit, but with a deep synthetist palette with tertiary colours more reminiscent of Maurice Denis’s

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776 Appelgren 1949, 97-98.
778 Schjerfbeck had pondered on Oscar Wilde’s Picture of Dorian Gray and was otherwise interested in the writer’s theories. E.g. Sarajas-Korte 1992, 30.
779 Helene Schjerfbeck’s letter to Einar Reuter 30.11.1918, ÅAB.
more muted colour scheme. Here Blomstedt has interestingly experimented with an absorbent, brown, unprimed canvas which creates a matte surface and a soft unifying colour scheme. The odd ’renaissance’ landscape with dark cypresses reflecting in the still turquoise-blue water behind a young girl dressed in Renaissance dress is clearly Italian. The young, beautiful Francesca is posing in profile, in 15th century mode, and holds a poppy in her hand, breathing the scent. Riikka Stewen (2002) notes that Francesca refers to Dante’s Hell and the fifth poem with Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta.

It is seems that Italy had inspired Blomstedt, however, to take a more troubadouresque approach in this painting, the scene is full of beauty but with a sombre symbolist melancholy akin to Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. In Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s (1828–1882), who translated Dante Alighieri’s poetry, has in his famous work, Beata Beatrix (1864–’70, Tate Britain) depicted a bird which is dropping a poppy flower in Beatrix’s lap. Eyes shut she reflects divine light. Blomstedt’s work Francesca, however, focuses on the synaesthetic remembering, smelling the same kind of poppy flower. Drooping eyes underline the dreamlike, otherworldly static atmosphere of the painting. Francesca’s enigmatic Italian arcadia and timeless paradise embraces a melancholic feeling as a paradis artificiel stimulated by synaesthetic remembering or by intoxication. It also captures the same kind of timelessness as Schjerbeck’s Boy Dressed in Armour (1894, fig. 28), both depicting young persons on the verge of puberty, still innocent and surrounded in the timeless realm of the dreamy landscape referring to past times. It seems that both Blomstedt and Schjerfbeck were influenced also by Pre-Raphaelite art.

Also Magnus Enckell travelled to Italy in 1894. Sarajas-Korte (1966) points out how Enckell and his friend Thesleff were advised by the sculptor Sigrid af Forselles, an older artist colleague staying in Paris. For Enckell this trip differed from others; he was interested in the enigmatic works of Leonardo and Ravenna’s ancient mosaics. But even Enckell did not avoid the lure of the frescoes. During his second trip to Italy, he copied Masaccio’s Expulsion of Adam and Eve (1898, Ateneum Art Museum) to a large canvas in pale, translucent tempera colours, imitating the delicate colours of fresco.

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781 This kind of technique was practised by Whistler, but it is not known if Blomstedt was familiar with it.
783 Rossetti identified his and Siddal’s story to Dante and his love Beatrix. Rossetti completed Beata Beatrix a year after his wife Elizabeth Siddal’s death. She died of an overdose of laudanum. If Blomstedt knew the story of the painting is not known. For Rossetti and Siddal, Dante and Beatrix, see Prettejohn 2008, 197-201.
784 The same kind of poppy flower is in Fernand Khnopff’s Dream Flowers ca. 1895, Paris, Audouy collection. See image Clair 1995, 174.
785 At this period Sarajas-Korte emphasises the impact of Arnold Böcklin on Enckell. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 132-133.
786 Enckell copied also Leonardo’s Annunciation (Ateneum Art Museum) in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
It is not merely the Spanish school, but one may, in fact, say that the whole of Spain is condensed into this passionate painting, which is devout and sombre, mystic and brutal at the same time.

(Magnus Enckell in 1901)\textsuperscript{787}

In so far as the ‘cult’ of Dutch and Spanish masters was concerned, the approach of Finnish artists was different. As this study has pointed out Carrière, Manet and Whistler all shared a keen interest in and admiration for seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish art. This was also true of some Finnish artists,\textsuperscript{788} such as Enckell, Järnefelt and Schjerfbeck who also shared an interest in ascetic colour. Some of them copied the works of Velázquez, for example, but more importantly they ‘borrowed’ elements, props and objects or more importantly – just as Carrière, Manet, Whistler did – referred to Rembrandt or Velázquez by adopting their simplified techniques and ascetic palettes. It is also important to note that this approach is different from the imitation of frescoes or ancient art where the whole practice was considered to bring the artists close to a spiritualist state and where the whole artwork was constructed usually by the mode of decorative art.

\textit{He imitates nobody except himself and Velázquez}

\textit{(Albert Edelfelt on Whistler in 1884)}\textsuperscript{789}

Outside Finland, Whistler is known to have admired the art of Rembrandt, Velázquez and Hals. And the minimalised figures of Carrière in particular have also been linked to the tradition created by Velázquez.\textsuperscript{790} It is revealing that the similarities between these artists were also noted by the architect and critic Sigurd Frosterus who, in his art historical study of 1920, linked “in their colourlessness” or “single base colour harmonies” the black-clad portraits of Titian and Velázquez (\textit{Pope Innocentius X}) with Whistler’s portraits of his mother and Carlyle.\textsuperscript{791} As previously demonstrated, Whistler was known to use the methods and techniques of Old Masters, such as coloured canvas primers like umbra-brown. He developed the method further and also used a grey basis for his “keynote” works of grey. But a Finnish example of this method is Pekka Halonen who surprisingly used an umbra base for his winter

\textsuperscript{787} Icke blott den spanska skolan, utan man kan säga hela spanien var sammanfattad i denna lidelsefulla måling, hängifven och dyster, mystisk och brutal på en gång.” Enckell in his article “Bref från Spanien”, Ateneum -magazine n:o 3, 1901, 14.
\textsuperscript{788} For Edelfelt, see Lundström 2008, 257-260.
\textsuperscript{789} Edelfelt 1905, 93.
\textsuperscript{790} Dorment 1994, 13; Walker 1987, 61, 66; Bantens 1983 36, 44.
\textsuperscript{791} Frosterus 1920, 9-10.
landscape, *Winter Light at Lake Tuusula* (1905, fig. 23).\(^{792}\) The brown base really creates a dark, mystical mood throughout the whole painting. The decorative trees, thick with snow, with the young slim birch trees in the foreground are in focus, and in contrast with the vast silent landscape in the background with the dark blue-grey, heavy clouds on the horizon. The controlled, somewhat ascetic palette charges the whole decorative landscape with an ominous mood. Moreover, the umbra ‘glows’ through the transparent white paint and creates the unique ‘base tone’ of the painting. Even though the subject is a Finnish winter landscape, this technique echoes the technique of Whistler and/or the Old Masters. Maybe Halonen was inspired by the second trip he took to Italy in 1904 and his passion for studying old art.

It is interesting and revealing that when Edelfelt commented on Whistler’s art influenced by Velázquez in *Finsk Tidsrift* in 1884, he emphasises colour:

> He has painted splendid things, always keeping to these deliberate harmonies of colour. He subdues the light and places his models far back in space, and because of the painting’s dusky tone it obtains an ancient look. Therefore in this respect he does not resemble the great Spaniard who never hesitated to place his figures in full light, but [Whistler’s] brush has this subtlety and light, sweeping moment, his grey tones acquiring this tinge of pearly lustre, which we admire in Velázquez’s *Infantas*. Accomplishing such consistency and depth in thin paint is certainly astonishing.\(^{793}\)

A number of sources cite the simplified art of Francisco de Zurbarán and Diego de Velázquez as objects of Finnish artists’ admiration, different from one another as these artists are. What we know is that Eero Järnefelt also admired the Spanish masters and in his biography (1950) Ludvig Wennervirta in particular stresses Zurbarán’s importance for Järnefelt.\(^{794}\) Schjerbeck, on the other hand, admitted to being an ardent admirer of Velázquez and Hals.\(^{795}\) This certainly affected her choice in copying many Old Masters works for the Finnish Art Society National Gallery’s collections.\(^{796}\) For example, early on Schjerbeck copied Hals’ *Portrait of Willem*

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793 *Finsk Tidsrift* 1884, Edelfelt 1905, 93.
794 Wennervirta 1950, 13 -16.
796 This project was started because the Art Society had none of this class of works in its collection. A young country needed to build its own collections. Later this collection became part of the National Gallery collection. Æksi 1984, 35-46, TY; Hällikä 2007, 41-42.
van Heythuysen in 1877–78 and later in 1892 Velázquez’s Pope Innocentius X and and Hals’s Man wearing a wide-brimmed hat in the Hermitage.797

This colour ascetic approach was practiced, as noted in chapter 2.1, by referring to Old Masters and especially to Spanish art. Enckell, like many others, had also first admired Old Masters in the Louvre but, as the century neared its end, he began to distance himself from the strict colour ascetism, or even the monochromacy he had used in 1892–96. It is, however, interesting that his trip to Spain in 1900 led him to return to a different colour ascetic palette of soft browns which echoes the Spanish school. It is interesting that when Enckell’s enthusiasm led him to travel to Spain in 1900 he relates his experiences of his trip in the Ateneum artists review in 1901 where he confessed his great admiration for Zurbarán’s painting of a “praying monk” i.e. Saint Francis (c. 1630) in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and says that he had always been interested in Spanish culture.798 As an example of this he states his high regard for Moorish architecture and the “robust honesty and conscious strength” of such Spanish artists as Morales, Zurbarán and Velázquez.799

Of all [Zurbáran’s] his paintings, the one to affect me most is that of a praying monk, currently in the National Gallery, London. I cannot help but describe here the impression this painting made on me the first time I saw it in Paris. ... It was not – the amazing brush of Velazquez – that affected the Parisian public, but its sensitivity and at the same time its symmetry – says Charles Blanc – It was certainly Zurbarán’s Praying Monk, one of those paintings that is impossible to forget even though one has seen it only once.

(Enckell in Ateneum review 1901)800

It is also revealing that Enckell is familiar with Charles Blanc’s praise of Zurbarán which could also mean that Enckell had read Blanc’s book on colour theory. We know that Enckell did not paint a great deal during his trip to Spain but the impact of the trip can be clearly seen in, for example, the dark-toned painting Woman Weeping (1903, Private collection). Here the ascetic colour is central to the emotional

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23. Pekka Halonen *Winter Light at Lake Tuusula* (1905). Oil on canvas, 90.5 x 72 cm, Harri Silander’s collection. Photo: Harri Silander
impact; the painting’s simple, subtle, dark brown colouring envelops the weeping woman like a mourning cloak.

It is crucial to note that the concepts of historicity and past as a destination were closely connected to the relationship between subject and technique, or means of representation. This breakthrough towards the modern concept of choosing the mode of representation was a constant concern for the Finnish artists mentioned in this study. They detached their art from the strong tradition of mimetic representation in favour of a more simplified form, concentrating on colour and meaning. Each of them shared a particular interest in developing in his or her own work a personal, ascetic or synthetist palette. For Finnish artists, such as Blomstedt, Gallén and Halonen, it was significant that the new art was to be the art of the future, the ‘Nordic Renaissance’ about which they were enthusiastically writing in their letters, while imitating frescoes and underlining the decorative element in their paintings. The emphasis on timelessness was also visible in the work of Enckell, Thesleff and Schjerfbeck, who explored the limits of painting by referring to ancient times in technique, medium and colour. As a consequence, by adopting “archaic” techniques like tempera and colours resembling fresco painting, the artists aspired to create something eternal and permanent, a reference to a glorious past.

As stated by Gombrich (2002), this consciousness of historicity was not an entirely new idea and echoes what Friedrich Schiller states in his essay “On Naive and Sentimental Poetry” published in 1795, that this kind of approach is a mode of creation that springs from reflection, in other words, from the awareness of choice. What emerges is an attempt to justify art which is not ‘naïve’, but admiration for an earlier state of mind. This is a form of nostalgia, a longing for a lost paradise of innocence.801 This approach, as demonstrated in this chapter, brought about a profound change in Finnish art in the 1890s. New content along with formalistic changes occurred to depict the epic Kalevala world and found its language in the decorative works of synthetist colour and symbolist ornamental details. On the other hand, the reduction of colour to colour ascetism, referring to the Old Masters, transported Finnish painting into a new era, enabling artists to create an original language with which to express their deep feeling for nature and people, for their history and for ancient mythology. This Baudelairean attitude, which manifested itself in the monumental and decorative works of Finnish artists, is related to a particular experience of modernity, characteristic of the modern period as distinct from other periods. The consciousness of being historical was established through new subjects which emphasise timelessness which was achieved by using the colours of fantasy or colours of reflection. As I have argued here, not all modern paintings depict contemporary subjects but the relationship between subject, technique and

801 Gombrich 2002, 93.
medium, or means of representation was a constant concern for European and Finnish artists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. As we have seen here, Finnish early modern art, strove to be a mirror of simultaneity, linking time and reflecting the past in the future and the future in the past.

3.2 SYNTHETIST COLOUR

I enjoy resting my eyes on deep, saturated, warm colours, for as I see it, they embody life and passion, the best defences of the will to live. Rest and peace are negative concepts for me. Does fire have peace while it lives, while it burns! No, not until it has been extinguished, not until it has ceased to exist.

(Axel Gallén to Johannes Öhquist 1896)

The pioneers of bright, saturated colours emphasising the emotional effect in painting in the nineteenth century were the Pre-Raphaelites. As has become clear this new sensibility received its impulses from the heavy industrialised environment, and more importantly, it was the radical change brought about in responses to colour that was the most far-reaching. This was important not only because it was so sudden but because it immediately extended beyond the field of painting into the decorative arts. This aspect of Arts and Crafts was adopted also in Finland at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the marks of the finest Pre-Raphaelite work was the exciting and disturbing power of its strident colour, which was certainly the least naturalistic aspect of the painting. The painters of the Brotherhood went beyond the frank record of the green of trees and grasses, the bright pure hues of flowers, and reintroduced into painting ranges and relations of colour unused in European art since the Middle Ages – an alarming array of blues, greens, violets, purples chosen for their powerful emotional effect. This concept of colour was embraced by Paul Gauguin who influenced a great number of artists from many countries. It is worth noting that in Finland it was not just Gauguin’s pupils – Väinö Blomstedt and in some degree Pekka Halonen – who, from the year 1894 onwards, used accentuated, bright non-mimetic colours in their art. In some works by Axel Gallén particularly and even more surprisingly by Eero Järnefelt, we can see the synthetist palette adopted by the Finnish artists to enhance the emotional, decorative connotations of the sacred and primitive in their paintings.

802 Axel Gallén’s letter to Johannes Öhquist 18.11.1896. Öhquist 1933, 277.
803 Watkinson 1990, 6-7.
16. Pekka Halonen *Rowan Tree* (1894). Oil on canvas, 92 x 46 cm, private collection. Photo: Tuusula Museum
It is important to emphasise that it was not, of course, simply the colours, but also their combination that compelled attention and provoked these emotional effects. And more precisely it was a decisive move towards early modern painting in Finnish art, where we expect art to disturb, remake and extend experience, rather than to recapitulate the perfected system of form. Interestingly, from the outset, all this concerns Pre-Raphaelitism as such, the painting of pictures; but once the new wave of responses was released in the middle of the nineteenth century the old values collapsed and the way was open for further extensions of sensibility. As Watkinson (1990) states, it very powerfully affected and broadened the possibilities of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which was at the heart of the Aesthetic Movement, and paved the way for new concepts in art which were expressed in French Art Nouveau, Symbolism and Synthetism.

In October 1888, when Gauguin was painting his Self-Portrait (Les Misérables), he was also completing a large canvas that can be regarded as the pictorial manifesto of the symbolist aesthetics he elaborated at Pont-Aven: the Vision of the Sermon. As mentioned before, this was also the manifesto of non-mimetic synthetist colour. As Dorra (1994) correctly emphasises, the archaising linear style and the application of colour in more or less uniform outlined areas make the picture a synthetist work; the expressiveness and harmony of lines and colour, the aura of mystery, the bold play of association, the somnambulistic demeanour of the figures – the image suggests a visionary or trancelike attitude or an intense daydream on the artist’s part – and Gauguin’s own role, figuratively (and literally) as both observer and participant, all make this a truly symbolist work.

*This year I have sacrificed everything – execution, colour, style – in my endeavour to achieve something other than what I know how to do. I believe it is a transformation that has not yet borne fruit but will do so (...). The design is absolutely special, a complete abstraction... The colour is rather distant from that of nature; a vague memory of pottery twisted in high fire – All the reds, violets, with fiery streaks radiating from the eyes where the thought of the painter’s struggles... the whole thing [Self-Portrait (Les Misérables)] against a background of pure chrome yellow strewn with child-like posies – the room of a pure maiden.*

*(Paul Gauguin in 1888)*

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804 Watkinson 1990, 7.
805 See 2.3.
806 Dorra 1994, 192.
807 French letter in Merlhès 1984, 248-249, #168; From the English translation, Dorra 1994, 190-191.
It is interesting how, from his earliest synthetist paintings, Gauguin uses colour to symbolise abstract elements such as red for “painter’s struggles” and yellow for “artist as pure being”. Furthermore, to paraphrase Gauguin himself, the red background is as imaginary as it is real, for it recalls the reddish hue of varech, the seaweed villagers spread on the fields to dry before they stored it as fodder, it also recalls the red lacquer background of Japanese decorative objects. The intensity of the red ground and the blue clothes of the wrestlers, with their Byzantine or Romanesque folds, and the subtle striations in each, along with the delimiting outlines, suggest medieval stained glass and give the whole scene a particularly non-naturalistic, indeed a visionary, character. More importantly, this painting introduced a new approach to colour where subject and form amalgamates to a whole – where the synthetist palette works as part of the content. This method Gauguin developed further in his next works.

All this has been very carefully thought out by Gauguin and the painting’s colour scheme echoes Charles Henry’s ideas on colour. This comes through in a letter to Schuffenecker in which Gauguin explains that:

_The colours are even more revealing, though less susceptible of multiple effects than lines, because of their power over the eye. There are hues that are noble, others common; tranquil and consoling harmonies, others stimulate through their boldness. In sum, you find in graphology the features of men who are frank and those of others who are liars. Why should not lines and colours reveal to the art lover the more or less grandiose character of the artist?_  

For Finnish artists the emphasised subjectivity and the emotional direct effect of colours was mainly established by Gauguin and the Nabi Group whom they got to know during their stay in Paris in the 1890s. It can be imagined that the close relationships that artists such as Blomstedt, Gallén, Halonen and Järnefelt shared also meant sharing ideas on art and all the new concepts were discussed at least amongst this group. It is thus revealing that the year 1894 when Blomstedt and Halonen spent a memorable time in Gauguin’s atelier is the same year that both Gallén and Järnefelt painted their synthetist works; Gallén his _Self-Portrait in Fresco (Quand même!), En Saga (Jean Sibelius and Fantasy Landscape, fig. 8)_ and _Conceptio Artis_ (Ateneum Art Museum), all in 1894 and experimenting with different mediums such as gouache and watercolour. Subsequently it was also the year in which Gallén’s most famous symbolist works, including _Symposion_ and

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Ad Astra, were executed. More surprisingly, Järnefelt too, an ardent painter in the naturalist mode, created a series of landscapes (see fig. 25) in blazing synthetist colours. It is quite evident that Finnish artists, who were very much aware of the new possibilities of colour, chose a new form and medium for their colour-conscious art. This colour phenomenon and its sources in Finnish art will be examined in the following chapters.

3.2.1 PAUL GAUGuin’S ACADEMIE VITI 1894 – VÄINÖ BLOMSTEDT AND PEKKA HALONEN

We definitely have a good teacher here. The best in Paris. He understands so much but then he has travelled all over the world. China, Japan, Asia, Sweden, Norway. He knows what conditions are like everywhere. And he’s not biased, as the French usually are.

(Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen 1894)

On their third trip to Paris Väinö Blomstedt and Pekka Halonen had reached a dramatic turning point in their life. Contrary to previous visits, they now decided to establish themselves in Montparnasse. Blomstedt and Halonen had no idea that they would be part of some of the most interesting moments of Parisian art life in the 1890s. They arrived in Paris in November 1893 and began by enrolling at the Académie Colarossi. But everything changed when they met Paul Gauguin, recently returned from Tahiti, in Madame Charlotte’s crèmerie, which was located on the opposite side of the same street as Académie Colarossi. Gauguin lived on the same street at 8, rue de la Grande-Chaumière and took all his meals at Madame Charlotte’s, a custom he would continue even after he moved at the beginning of 1894. It was at the crèmerie that the two Finnish artists made his acquaintance, through a Polish painter studying with them at Colarossi; it was there too that Blomstedt said he had seen him take all his meals over a six-month period – which

811 Pekka Halonen’s letter to Maija Mäkinen 27.1.1894, CAA.
813 This meeting took place in a specifically urban context. The Académie Colarossi was located at 10, rue de la Grande-Chaumière, and opposite, at number 13, was an inexpensive little restaurant, frequented by artists, and called crèmerie to give it a more respectable air. The owner, Charlotte Caron née Furtterer, came originally from Alsace but had settled in Paris after Alsace was annexed by Prussia. A number of stories and legends grew up around the crèmerie, making it appear the epicentre of a proliferating artistic epoch. Laura Gutman-Hanhivaa has written a detailed article on Madame Chalotte’s crèmerie and the artists visiting it. Gutman-Hanhivaa 2008, 88, 91. See also Crombie, John, Chez Charlotte and Fin-de-siècle Montparnasse. Kickshaws, Paris 2003; Deryng, Xavier, "Mehoffer à la crèmerie de Madame Charlotte. Un artiste polonais à Paris 1891-1896", Jozef Mehoffer (1869-1946). Un peintre symboliste polonais. Exhibition catalogue, Musée d’Orsay, Paris 2004.
814 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.12.1894, EJA.
indicates their frequent patronage of the crèmerie throughout their own stay in Paris.\(^{815}\) It is important to note that in those days the eccentric and controversially acclaimed Gauguin was not perhaps the most obvious choice of teacher for young art students coming from Finland. Perhaps, they had heard of him during their previous studies at the Académie Julian, where Paul Séruiser was the massier. Despite the disapproval of their fellow students at the Académie Colarossi the young Finns hired Gauguin, who intended to set up a teaching group in Raphaël Collin’s studio in Montparnasse, as their teacher.\(^{816}\) Even though their time in Gauguin’s studio was a short one, it nevertheless made a great impact on their lives, and on their art.\(^{817}\)

In a revealing and important letter to his friend and fellow artist Eero Järnefelt in January 1894 Blomstedt wrote explaining how Gauguin had made an impression “on us as an apostle of freedom in art.”\(^{818}\) Blomstedt recalls in the 1913 Konst magazine the effect Gauguin’s work had had on him: “Standing for the first time before his paintings, which breathed colour, I was bursting with admiration”. This revelation happened when Blomstedt and Halonen had an opportunity to visit his new studio-home at the time when Anna the Javanese shared the artist’s life.\(^{819}\) Gauguin had moved to 6, rue Vercingétorix, into a building built from materials which came from the demolition of buildings at the World Exhibition of 1889 and originally intended as a coffee warehouse.\(^{820}\) Gauguin’s son, Pola, who later wrote a biography of his father, describes it in detail:

One entered by a porte-cochère in a large wall on the street, then crossed a spacious courtyard in which a large tree grew in front of a low building comprising two studios on the ground floor and three on the first floor. One reached this by an outside staircase and balcony. From there one first entered a small antechamber with an alcove on one side; a glass door led into the studio which Gauguin had immediately decorated with a painting in maori style: Te Faruru. Here one loves. One side of the studio was bathed in thick shadow in marked contrast to the light that came through a high window on the opposite side. Gauguin had painted these windows chrome yellow. The furniture consisted solely of divans covered by Oriental rugs; the walls were covered with Polynesian arms, bought in Paris, and Gauguin’s

\(^{815}\) In 1913 Blomstedt wrote an article “Gauguin”, in a Swedish periodical Konst, where he recalls the time studying under Gauguin. Almost the same article was published in Finnish in the Finnish Artists’ Society’s Christmas album in 1923 as “Paul Gauguin. Pariisialaismuistelmia”, Blomstedt 1923, 19-20.

\(^{816}\) Gauguin taught them in Raphaël Collin’s studio. Tirranen 1945, 30.

\(^{817}\) This is also evident with Gauguin and the Nabi Group and others. Even though the collaboration was short-lived Gauguin always made a life-lasting impression on his fellow artists, such as van Gogh, and on his students.

\(^{818}\) Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1894. EJA

\(^{819}\) Blomstedt. Konst 1913; Blomstedt 1923, 19.

\(^{820}\) Malingue 1987, 197.
paintings. A piano and a large camera were the sole objects to remind one of Paris or Europe. There were two pets, a monkey and a parrot. And as servant and friend, a pretty Javanese girl, Annah, a model well-known in the studios of Montparnasse.821

It is clear that the bright-coloured synthetist Tahiti paintings in their yellow frames and Gauguin’s yellow and green studio home were something that Halonen and Blomstedt had never seen before.822 As on all the visitors who visited Gauguin’s studio, they made an indelible impression on the Finnish artists. Blomstedt retained a vivid impression specifically of the yellow that covered the walls: “Everything that I have seen of Gauguin has made a deep impression on me. Indeed, he has such paintings in his burning yellow atelier that nothing before has ever touched me so.”823

It is clear that Gauguin’s ideas had been immediately and unhesitatingly adopted by the impulsive Blomstedt. Halonen, on the other hand, had reservations at first but, at the end of January, he wrote to his fiancée Maija enthusiastically about “the best teacher in Paris” who had travelled the world. It is interesting how they saw Gauguin different from the French:

Here in the studio, though, the people are good and respectable. And if someone starts getting too rowdy we immediately shut him up. You see Vääinö and I are more or less in charge here. Firstly because we are doing the best work and secondly because we are the most hard-working and the most serious.

(Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen in January 1894)824

This recollection of Blomstedt proves that Gauguin had just begun using chrome yellow both to cover the walls of his studio and as frames for his paintings, after realising, at the time of his personal exhibition at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in November 1893, that white failed to offset his Tahitian works properly.825 Blomstedt noted the presence of yellow frames and the particular impact they produced with these works: “Everything is painted in truly pure colours: all have burning yellow

821  Gauguin 1938, 198-199.
822  Blomstedt wrote of the yellow frames of Gauguin’s works in a letter. Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1984. The painting seen in Gauguin’s Autoportrait avec chapeau (1893, Musée d’Orsay, Paris) also has a yellow frame. Earlier I.a. Richard Brettel has said that the frames were white, as the neo-impressionists used. Brettel 1989, 300-301.
823  Blomstedt 1913.
824  Pekka Halonen’s letter to Maija Mäkinen 27.1.1894. CAA. There were only four students on Gauguin’s side, in addition to the above an unknown Polish student and Johan Albert Lindfors, an unknown Finnish artist. Oral communication: Marja Supinen 14.5.2002. See also Supinen 1990, 270; Roald Nasgaard has indicated that Swedish Helmer Osslund studied in Académie Colarossi with Willumsen and Gauguin. Nasgaard 1984, 85, 249.
825  Compare to Brettel 1989, 300-301.
frames, so that unaccustomed eyes are dazzled."826 "He has also sculpted in wood, depicting the most fantastic ideas."827 It shows that the strangeness of the wooden sculptures that Gauguin had also exhibited at Durand-Ruel among the works brought back from Tahiti also astounded the young Finn.828

He has travelled all over the world - - I imagine that it is just this that has enabled him to free himself from the concept of European art - - His teaching is such as I have never heard from anyone before. He opens our eyes so that each and everyone of us learns to know himself and he helps us find within ourselves the best we have to give. - - All he ever talks of are [cor]respondences, harmonies which we had never been used to hearing about.

(Väinö Blomstedt to Eero Järnefelt 1894)829

Alongside these works, often described as “barbaric”, and the ethnographic collection inherited from his Uncle Isidore, completed by objects bought at the flea market, the presence of paintings and prints by old and modern masters seemed amazing. They bore witness to the frame of reference and likings of the autodidactic artist, who loved discussing them with the young artists who flocked around him. The importance of Gauguin’s collection, which he strove to hold onto despite all his financial difficulties, can be seen in an article in which Gauguin himself presented the works from his collection in his studio, specifically the works of his friend, Vincent van Gogh.830

In my yellow room, the sunflowers, with their purple eyes, stand out against a yellow background; they bathe their feet in a yellow vase, on a yellow table. – In a corner of the painting, the artist’s signature: Vincent. And the yellow sun that shines through the yellow curtains of my room floods with gold this flowering, and in the morning, in my bed, when I wake up, I imagine how good it all smells. (Gauguin “Natures mortes” in 1893)831

The mention of Edgar Degas in a letter written by Blomstedt to Järnefelt on the 16th January 1894 also reveals the enthusiastic discovery of the artists shown as examples by Gauguin:

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826 Blomstedt 1913.
827 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1894, EJA.
828 Gutman-Hanhiavaara 2008, 94.
829 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1894, EJA.
830 Gutman-Hanhiavaara 2008, 94.
Here in Paris is a figure, Degazes [sic] by name, the greatest and most
genial painter in France, as Gauguin says. He doesn’t exhibit and
never lets journalists visit him. I have only seen a couple of etchings at
Gauguin’s and they were superb.

(Blomstedt to Järnefelt in 1894)832

As Laura Gutman-Hanhivaara (2008) points out, if Gauguin’s peculiar collection
allowed Blomstedt and Halonen to get to know the artistic avant-garde, it cannot be
denied that a visit to the studio came within the scope of the artist’s true strategy,
in search of markets within as well as outside France. In fact, eager for contacts
and publicity, Gauguin invited an incredible number of people to visit him in his
studio and introduced a regular visiting day which took on the air of a permanent
carnival. Did Halonen and Blomstedt have an opportunity to take part in Gauguin’s
soirées? In the absence of written sources, there is nothing to confirm this. However,
the same people as frequented Madame Charlotte’s crèmerie can be found at 6
rue Vercingétorix, alongside poets, musicians and writers and an entire colony of
Scandinavian artists, introduced by Gauguin’s neighbour, the Swedish sculpsress
Ida Ericson.833

More interestingly, what we know from Hertta Tirranen’s study (1945) on
Blomstedt,834 Gauguin insisted that it was first necessary to master academic skills
and then to forget everything and be influenced by what had been only as though
it were an inherent talent.835 This instinctive temperament of an artist was crucial
to finding the ‘inner vision’ with which a true artist could convey to the canvas. It
is interesting that Gauguin wrote Halonen the letter of recommendation for his
studies at the Imperial Senate of Finland:836

832 Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Eero Järnefelt 16.1.1894, EJA.
833 Among numerous descriptions of these soirées, see e.g. Charles Morice, 114-115: “Rue Vercingétorix. What
memories this name evokes for us! Gauguin’s soirées, so simple and congenial, where in a youthful childhood
atmosphere, some of the finest poets and artists of our day would meet ... I will not try to list them for fear
of forgetting someone. And yet there are names which rush to mind: the musician Molard, the sculptors
Francisco Durrio, Aristide Maillol, the poets Paul Roinard, Julien Leclercq, the painters Armand Seguin,
O’Connor, Zuloaga, Daniel de Montfreid, Chamaillard, Maufra and Strindberg, who observed Gauguin with
astonishment, part hostile, part friendly... At Gauguin’s one doesn’t theorise, one chats lightheartedly on
everyday subjects, one laughs freely : oh ! how young we were ! Sometimes we even played charades. The
Master from Tahiti did not disdain to play a part and with divine clumsiness” Morice 1920, 114-115. Gutman-
Hanhivaara also emphasises the presence of Maillo, whose studio was at the same address as the studio at
which Halonen and Blomstedt attended Gauguin’s course. Gutman-Hanhivaara 2008, 95, 102.
834 Tirranen’s master’s thesis was made by interviewing Väinö Blomstedt. This comes well through in the text,
even though it is not mentioned or noted, which was usual in some 1940s art historical studies.
835 Tirranen 1945, 30
836 This letter of recommendation was found by Marja Supinen in the National Archives in Finland and a copy
of it is included in her article in Burlington Magazine. See Supinen 1990, 270-271.
Paris le 10 Mars 1894

Au Sénat Impérial de Finlanede

I have followed attentively the conscientious work of Mr. Pekka Halonen. From every point of view he deserves to continue his artistic education and I am convinced that, with his temperament, he can become an artist.

I would be delighted if the Imperial Finnish Senate which is highly solicitous of its artists would facilitate the studies of Mr. Pekka Halonen by granting him a travel scholarship.

Paul Gauguin, Painter, teacher at the Académie Viti

(Paul Gauguin, Artiste Peintre. Professeur à l’Académie Viti)\textsuperscript{837}

For Halonen winter in Paris was a period of new spiritual introspection. From his earlier works one can already see that he was seeking a new approach for his art.\textsuperscript{838} Artists’ letters describe how, in 1894, the climate in Paris was thick with different ideological streams: mysticism, theosophy and occultism became mixed into the most exotic forms and cults. Strong emphasis was placed on the spiritual aspects of art. Gauguin’s inflammatory speeches and Halonen’s intensive study of esoteric thinking brought about a radical change in the latter’s attitude to life. Together Halonen and Blomstedt read A.P. Sinett’s work Esoteric Buddhism, and considered its teachings “the greatest and purest truth”. For them “it is so profound and strange that we cannot read more than a couple of pages in an evening and then we always discuss them; otherwise it would be impossible to digest them.” \textsuperscript{839} These quotes all clearly illustrate that being a student or a follower of Gauguin meant being initiated to esoteric and symbolist sources as well as getting teaching in art.

It is interesting that Sinett’s book Esoteric Buddhism, which dealt with esoteric theosophy, also contains Halonen’s and Gauguin’s thoughts on “where we come from, who we are and where we are going” which can be found in the preface to the book. Bringing patriotic art and culture to the fore had, from the outset, been


\textsuperscript{838} See The Kantele player (1892) and Seated on a shore (1893). Von Bonsdorff 2008, 19-20; Lobstein 2008, 74-76.

\textsuperscript{839} Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen 1893. CAA. A. P. Sinnet De invigdes liära. Original name: Esoteric Buddhism. 1887.
close to Blomstedt’s and Halonen’s hearts and now the idealistic view of the high
spiritual condition of their country led the patriotic artists to find something in
common between their ideals and theosophical thought. The writings on the chosen
peoples merged in their minds with the spiritual and cultural revolution taking place
in their own country.840 One can also deduce from Halonen’s letters that he was
going through an ideological and religious crisis that made him seek a more spiritual
content in his art. The unfinished Self-portrait (1893, fig. 12) clearly shows the young
artist’s new attitude towards his work. Although the subject, especially the face, is
treated realistically, Halonen has painted himself against the background of an
unreal landscape with a rugged, stylised mountain above, to the side of which he has
painted the odd tree. He has painted himself using precise, thin brushstrokes, which
were typical of his early works. On the other hand, the contours of the mountain
are painted in typically Gauguinesque darkish Prussian blue. The colours of the
new-style work aspire to a homogeneous, bluish harmony. It is interesting that
Halonen has also chosen a new medium – tempera. The artist’s sensitive face is the
most finished part of the portrait although the eyes are mere brownish shadows in
the eye-sockets. Why did Halonen leave the painting unfinished? Was it perhaps
the first work painted in Gauguin’s studio referred to by Blomstedt? He recalls in
1945 that when Halonen painted his first work there in the spirit of Naturalism,
his teacher added thick blue-green contours. “The devil ruined it” was Halonen’s
terse comment according to Blomstedt.841

Another painting which he worked on in the “Academie Viti” was Nude Female
Model (1894, Helsinki Art Museum)842 which is signed “Paris – 1894” and shows
an adolescent girl looking straight at the viewer with an bold attitude. The painting
itself is quite minimalistic focusing on the pale skin of the skinny girl with greyish
background. An old photograph from the Tuusula Museum archives shows that
this painting has been larger, showing the girls sitting. When this painting was cut
smaller is not known. But someone, probably Halonen’s wife Maija, has written
on the paper where the photograph is attached that “This painting was done in
Gauguin’s studio on rue Vercingétorix and it influenced Gauguin to give good marks
on his studies”.843 Also this painting is done with a grey-bluish scale as the Self-
Portrait (1893).

There was a clear link between the starting points of the synthetist art of
Gauguin and the Nabis and Japanese art. Thus it is not surprising that, after his

840 E.g. Väinö Blomstedt to his cousin Yrjö Blomstedt 6.3.1894. Yrjö Blomstedt’s letter archives, Jyväskylä province
archives.
841 Tirrannen 1945, 30.
842 Halonen, Nude Female Model (1894), oil on canvas, 40 x 34.5, Helsinki Art Museum. For the later cut version
see von Bonsdorff 2008, Pekka Halonen, cat. 43.
843 Tuusula Museum archives, Tuusula.
trip to Paris, Halonen began to collect woodcut copies. Influenced by Gauguin, Halonen adopted japonist elements in his paintings. The special characteristics absorbed from Japanese art are reflected in Halonen's work in many ways: the vertical and narrow kakemono form, the high horizon, shadowless and flat surfaces, ornamentality, diagonal perspectives and near-views of nature raise the paintings to a level above that of a random view. Winter motifs in particular are a dimension of Japonistic art. Halonen had earlier attempted to paint snow motifs but it was only after 1894 that he found his own unique way of painting winter landscapes. As Anna Tuovinen (1995) points out, besides japonistic similarities in Halonen's style, there was also a similarity in subject. The crooked pine, for instance, which frequently appears in his work; was also a popular motif in Japanese art.

An interesting similarity between Halonen and Gauguin can be found in the winter of 1894. Three of Gauguin's rare winter landscapes date from this year, the first of which, Paris in the Snow (Paris sous la neige) (1894, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) he painted in Paris. The painting shows a view of the rue Vercingétorix from the window of the artist's studio during the same winter that Gauguin had Finnish pupils. The winter view of the snow-covered roofs is rather realistic subject-wise. After Paris Gauguin painted two more winter themes in Brittany, Village breton sous la neige (1894) and Nuit de Noël (1894-96, private collection). The latter in particular was painted in synthetist style, complete with Egyptian oxen. Yann le Pichon compares Gauguin's winter paintings with Hiroshige's Snow-covered Kambara at night. But Gauguin's 1894 winter themes may well have been influenced by his contact with the Finnish painters of "winter exoticism". Pekka Halonen and Paul Gauguin had also other things in common. They both considered themselves outsiders and were deeply interested in discovering the 'primitive' through their art. Gauguin sought this in Tahiti and the islands of the south Pacific. Halonen, on the other hand, sought to revive the 'paradise lost'  

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845 Japonism was the collection of design objects and an art movement, which was a "must" for every artist seeking new impulses. Tuovinen 1995, 14-15.

846 Tuovinen uses the term "japonism". The crooked pine is a symbol of Finnish endurance. It is also a symbol of long life and a picturesque element in Japanese art. Tuovinen 1995, 25. Among the finest examples of Halonen's "japonistic" paintings are of his late career the Pine Tree in the Snow (1928) and The First Snow (1931). Japonisme reached new heights once more in Halonen's later minimalistic and meditative paintings.

847 Gauguin, Village Breton sous la neige (1894) oil painting, 65 x 90, Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Jeu de Paume).

848 The landscape of Gauguin's Village breton sous la neige can be clearly seen in the background of La nuit de Noël (1894-96). von Bonsdorff 2005, 161-162.


850 Gauguin sought "the Inca past of his forefathers" in Tahiti and wanted to live like the natives. He wanted to find a primitive paradise and build his art on this basis. Thomson 1997, 168-172.
of his people in the virgin forests and concept of sacred wilderness which is also described in the Kalevala.851

The works of the following summer clearly reflect Gauguin’s influence on Halonen. He later felt that Gauguin had given him the freedom to find lyricism and individualism. According to the French artist’s teaching, all greatness, all beauty was simple and clear.852 It should be noted that what Halonen inherited from Gauguin was not his bright synthetist palette but rather synthetist clear contour and unbroken colour surfaces, and decorative “abstract” elements which he instinctively adopted to his paintings. This issue will be discussed more closely in the next chapter.

3.2.2 PARADISE LOST AND SACRED NATURE – VÄINÖ BLOMSTEDT, AXEL GALLÉN, PEKKA HALONEN AND EERO JÄRNEFELT

The great black woodpecker has always been a friend of mine. Whenever I hear his fresh, ringing voice, it gives me a feeling as though I were so far from all human habitation that I am completely out of touch—even when this happens right by the corner of my own home. ... I simply had to include him in my painting to emphasise that feeling of solitude in the wilderness. This red dot is the call of one individual life in the silence of the deep wilds.

(Axel Gallén)853

In order to investigate Finnish landscape painting of the 1890s it is important also to examine the artists’ idea of the wilderness they depicted. Their enthusiasm for a pure, virginal, primordial place was quite unique even in the Nordic context. As this study has noted earlier, it is also significant that landscapes held a strong position in Finnish art and it is clear that this genre in particular reflects the ideologies of many different artists. In these works the ideas and ideals of a “higher” world were all expressed through images of the earthly world. Traditionally, however, almost all Finnish art historians have tended to see these paintings as depictions of a patriotic ideology. However, as I hope to show, especially artists who were fascinated by sacred nature and what they considered as ‘untouched’ landscapes took a stand against modern industrialisation. For example, this led artists such as Axel Gallén and Pekka Halonen spoke out on more concrete matters such as the extensive clear-felling by forestry companies and expressed their concern for what they saw as the

852 Halonen’s notes. Tuusula Museum archives, Tuusula.
853 Gallen-Kallela 1924, 176, 178.
destruction of the true wilderness.\textsuperscript{854} It is also evident that this was an expression of the ideology of modern escapism towards more spiritual surroundings.

If the consideration of artworks as ‘a deposit of social relationships’ matters, this genre in particular clearly shows the different ideals through the beauty of nature. It is a subject matter that well reflects the Finnish approach to what Silverman calls the “value of the image” and “mental frameworks”\textsuperscript{855} related to a specific religious tradition in a specifically national context and is effectively expressed by Finnish artists who used the landscape to express their “habits of the mind” or even as their “mental equipment”. As a special subject in Finnish art, the wilderness, which embraced the concept of the sacred and the primitive, was used by artists who shared an interest in finding new ways to depict spirituality. In this chapter I propose to analyse the close relationship between colour, landscape painting and ‘spirituality’ and the manner in which it was presented by Finnish artists in the 1890s.

Moreover, depictions of the wilderness were also used to express private and subjective emotions in what artists saw as the emergence of its true nature. This ideology culminates in the anthropomorphic method, which supposedly came from the Kalevala where this ideology is common and was expressed in the depiction of self in the image of an animal. In some works this ideology, which I have chosen to call the ‘shamanistic approach’, was expressed in different ways. On the one hand, artists used an animal as a self-portrait. On the other, they depicted their emotions through a landscape. Likewise, in a more concrete example, the urge to be close to nature and to be able to create art in pure and sacred surroundings was also behind the ideology which led artists to build houses in the woods and beside lakes. This completed their dream of a “life devoted to matters of a transcendental nature” as Gallén expressed it in 1894.\textsuperscript{856} Thus, as I aim to demonstrate, it is evident that the ‘Wilderness’ concept is a far more complex issue than has been previously noted and, as a special imagery depicted in many paintings (as well as in the names of the paintings), well reflects the diversity with which artists embraced this subject. In this chapter this study will explore the new ways in which the ‘wilderness concept’ was expressed with the \textit{transfer to medium} – to colour and new mediums. As I hope to establish, this transference to colour was a significant element in bringing the connotations of sacred and primitive to Finnish landscape art.

One of the first attempts to express this unique anthropomorphic way of combining a subjective and emotional ‘self-portrait’ of the artist expressed in an animal was by Gallén in 1892. This new approach in capturing the essence of what artists saw as wilderness can be seen in Gallén’s \textit{The Great Black Woodpecker}

\textsuperscript{854} This aspect is examined by Lukkarinen 2005, 142-148.  
\textsuperscript{855} Silverman 2000, 13.  
\textsuperscript{856} Axel Gallén’s letter to Robert Kajanus April 1894. In English see Ilvas 1996, 120-121.
(1893, fig. 7). Interestingly, for this intriguing work Gallén chose a new medium, gouache. It is also a synthesis of all the new elements of 1890s’ Symbolism and especially the decorative effect in subject, form, medium and composition. The painting has been said to be the artist’s hidden self-portrait, Gallén as the lone, majestic woodpecker in the vast wilderness. As in Halonen’s Wilderness (1899, Turku Art Museum) here too the kakemono form emphasises the tall, ceremonial and monumental effect as does the composition of the straight pine which cuts dramatically towards the sky. In both paintings one finds two dimensionality: in the foreground is the diagonal curved kelo-tree with the black woodpecker and two pines. Far into the background spreads the vast primordial landscape. The brownish base and overall bluish tone of the translucent gouache creates a strong tapestry-like effect. All these elements give the work a synthetist flare; the painted decorative band with its symbolistic animals, the pine-cone motifs around it and the transparent colouring and synthetistic form combine to make it a fine example of the decorative art of the sacred wilderness. The emotional impact is emphasised still more by the artist’s personal depiction of self as the woodpecker, raising the painting to another level. A few years later, Halonen uses the same ‘shamanic approach’ in Winter Day (1895).

It is significant to note that the large size and simplified form of the works, with their flat, two-dimensional perspective, were properties of the new decorative art that Gallén, for instance, later chose for his works on Kalevala themes. In fact, the first example of the new Symbolist art is the tapestry-like Great Black Woodpecker which he painted in gouache out in the wilds in 1892, interestingly soon after being criticised for his Aino triptych. “The cry of an individual living thing in the silence of the wilds”, as Gallén himself described it, shows how important a role the magical dimensions of nature played in the Kalevala world. The anthropomorphic transformation of a human being into an animal figure features in many stories in the epic. The identification of Finnish artists through this approach can be seen as typically Finnish. The painting’s new subjective character – with the woodpecker embodying the artist himself – and its celebration of the virginal, primeval wilds link it with the new mystical art. Also the ornamental painted frame which resembles what Puvis de Chavannes used for most of his works was adopted in Finnish art. In 1893 a Finnish version can be found in Gallén’s The Great Black Woodpecker. Interestingly enough, this was also the first synthetist work Gallén painted and

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857 Using an animal as a symbol of the artist themselves is common to Finnish artists. Järnefelt had his great crested grebe and his frog. Gallén painted the woodpecker in many of his works. Sibelius identified himself with a swan.

858 von Bonsdorff 2008, Pekka Halonen, cat. 93.

859 Galen-Kallela 1924, 176, 178.
he also chose a new medium, gouache, for this decorative work.\textsuperscript{860} However, the painting’s bluish colouring and its schematising form refer to Synthetism and not to Puvis de Chavannes’s ascetic palette. Gallén was the only Finnish artist to use this kind of decorative and ornamental band around a painting.

Going back to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s interesting notion of ‘modernism’, where he emphasises the concurrent conflict between two opposite responses to the hectic fin de siècle existence is also reflected in Finnish art. Von Hofmannsthal states: “Today, two things seem to be modern: the analysis of life and the flight from life (...). Reflection or fantasy, mirror image or dream image.”\textsuperscript{861} As Hirsh (2004) states, Symbolism was precisely such a bifurcated art: intending to “make visible the invisible,” Symbolists sought an art that could imagine and reflect the ideas and ideals of a “higher” world, all expressed through images of the earthly world. Addressing the inner being, it nonetheless used external, real scenes and objects as expressers. It is thus in their blending of von Hofmannsthal’s two impulses that Finnish artists are most modern. While working and living in cities that seemed to be robbing them of their innermost being, they sought an art that could not only speak to their souls but also help to save them. While undergoing the most traumatic transitions of new technological, spatial, and social changes in their own real life, they found solace — but not total escape — in fantasy and dreams.\textsuperscript{862} Moreover, Berman (1997) points out that people who find themselves in the midst of this maelstrom are apt to feel that they are the first, and perhaps the only ones, to be going through it; this feeling has engendered numerous nostalgic myths of a pre-modern ‘Paradise Lost’. In fact, however, great and ever-increasing numbers of people have been going through this for close on five hundred years.\textsuperscript{863}

For Finnish artists and scholars alike paradise lost was found in Karelia. One of the greatest sources of inspiration was the national epic Kalevala. During summertime trips to Eastern Finland and Russian Karelia were common among artists in the 1890s. The patriotic artists embarked on a quest to discover the ‘original people’ and ‘lost ancient culture’ of Finland. Longing for their own heritage and culture they travelled to Karelia where the oral tradition of the Kalevala was still alive. The epic was widely read and greatly admired by a large group of artists, writers and journalists involved in the Young Finland patriotic group. But, since many of these artists were interested in theosophy, Kalevala was also seen as a holy book, containing secret knowledge. This and the magnificent nature of Karelia made primordial times seem present and artistically interesting, in much the same way

\textsuperscript{860} Axel Gallén uses a decorated, painted frame also in his \textit{Mäntykoski} (1892–94) -painting.


\textsuperscript{862} Hirsh 2004, 1.

\textsuperscript{863} Berman 1997, 16.
as Gauguin was fascinated first by the original culture of Brittany and then of the islands of Polynesia. In reality, the quest for natural and ethnic authenticity was highly romanticised. The “seriousness of life” sought by artists actually meant the hardship and poverty of people subsisting on bread mixed with bark but, for the ‘Karelians’, this was authentic, primal Finnish peasant life in the East Finland wilderness. During their many high-minded, patriotic evenings in Paris they all decided on the mutual dream of an artist-house in Finland’s untainted wilderness with an atelier within the concept of a total work of art as their ultimate dream and way of life.864

It is important to note that Karelia was not the only place to which artists went in search of the original, primordial place and people. In 1895 Thesleff’s friends, Anna Bremer and Beda Stjernschantz, went searching for new, exotic and primitive surroundings. They chose the Island of Worms off Estonia where the original inhabitants still spoke Swedish and wore old-styled ethnic dresses.865 Stjernschantz’s *Everywhere a Voice Invites Us* (1895) is like a Nordic version of Gauguin’s Tahiti themes. Her interpretation is dreamy and deliberately stylised in its own silent way.866 Here the Baudelairean approach to musicality and a pastoral innocence is created by the interplay of the kantele instrument, the signing of the girl and the silent rhythmical windmills in the horizon. Compared to Gauguin, the greatest difference is in Stjernschantz’s transparent and delicate touch and ascetic, grey-brownish palette. Only the children’s clothes have brighter colours such as yellow and red, otherwise the landscape is wrapped in a mystical grey-brown mist. The painting’s matte and transparent lucidity with contoured simplified shapes may also be seen as reflecting a mural art converted to an oil painting.

At the end of the nineteenth century many artists wanting to weave a spiritual context into their art without obvious, straightforward allegorical symbols began using new ways and techniques. As Debora Silverman (2000) points out, this difficult goal of using tangible form to reference intangible ideas was accomplished through careful manipulation of both style and subject. The distinction drawn by Silverman in her study of the opposite styles and techniques used by van Gogh and Gauguin to accomplish this symbolist goal is instructive here: she makes a convincing claim that Gauguin sought to “dematerialis[e] nature in a flight to metaphysical mystery”.867

864  Konttinen 1995, 95. On their return from Paris in the early summer of 1892, most of these artists intended to travel to Karelia to paint. Louis Sparre and Emil Wikström planned to go to Russia or Dvina Karelia, the Galléns to Paanajärvi in Kuusamo, Eero Järnefelt to the Koli Fell region and Halonen to the Lake Ladoga region in Karelia. Elin Danielson decided to travel with Halonen “to the unknown East, where the race is pure and many others are going now”. Lindström 1957, 59.


866  Sinisalo 1995, 40.

In highlighting religion Silverman suggests an attentiveness to the role 
of religiosity in generating the form, structure, and content of various types of 
modernist expressive art. Here she is less interested in charting the symbols and 
iconography of religious aspiration than in exploring the underlying resources and 
tensions generated by varying religious traditions in specific national contexts as 
well as their varying conceptions of the status of the self, the value of the image, 
and the meaning of the visible world. This approach privileges religious legacies, 
not as a matter of conventional religious practice nor as the inclusion of overt, 
surface symbols, but as formative structures, or mental frameworks and filters that 
are mediated through the institutions of educational formation. Considered in this 
way, as habits of mind or “mental equipment,” religious legacies may be analysed 
historically as providing painters with particular resources and constraints, shaping 
in part the ways artists approach reality, how they consider the status of the sensual 
in their craft, the density of the artist’s touch, the relation between perception and 
conception, and the vocation of the artist as a purveyor of meaning and value.\textsuperscript{868}

Landscape painting has always held a strong position in Finnish art. It was also 
the genre that clearly depicted the turning point in favour of modern aspirations. 
I will argue that Finnish art from the end of the nineteenth century marked the 
beginning of a new way of using the palette to signify the artist’s ‘inner vision’. These 
innovations in art were also expressed in landscape painting. Side by side with his 
figure compositions, Halonen was also producing interesting landscapes showing 
new ideas on art on many levels. \textit{Late Summer} (1892, Tampere Art Museum)\textsuperscript{869} 
is his first work to be inspired by japonisme. The tall, narrow \textit{kakemono} shape and the unusual composition of the fir trees in the foreground, together with the 
dominant role played by flowing water, show that Halonen understood the potential 
of the nature motifs in eastern art as ‘great subjects’ for art. In terms of style, on the 
other hand, the meticulous brushwork and detail reveal that this work is still firmly 
rooted in Naturalism. Halonen must have understood the allegorical significance 
of the nature theme and the ways it could reflect the universal. The young man’s 
relationship with and profound respect for nature meant that he found points of 
contact with the Japanese and Chinese view of art specifically in how this depicted 
nature. Halonen’s Japonism is seen in the multiple layering, composition and shape 
of the painting, rather than in mere stylistic borrowings, which were the usual way 
for artists to produce ‘japonistic’ works.\textsuperscript{870}

Halonen was open to new ideologies in both his art and life. During his long 
career he studied both contemporary and older art at museums in the cities he

\textsuperscript{868} Silverman 2000, 13.
\textsuperscript{869} von Bonsdorff 2008, Pekka Halonen, cat. 28.
\textsuperscript{870} Geneviève Lacambre divides the history of Japonism in art into four stages. Tuovinen 1994, 12-14.
visited. His studies in Paris in 1890–94 and visits to Italy in 1896–97 and 1904 provided him with tools for interpreting his own environment in a uniquely direct manner. It is clear that Halonen’s ideas on art developed amidst the upsurge of international avant-garde but his respect for ancient European art and what he had learned about the art of the east gave them greater depth and the ability to interpret Finnish people and nature in an innovative variety of ways. Halonen’s art depicts his ideologies as deposits of his ideals. What he read of Tolstoyism and, in particular, theosophy shaped his Christian idea of life and art into something more independent and liberal. His guiding philosophy of life came to be a deep respect for nature and the environment but this did not take place overnight. It took many years, during which Halonen travelled in Finnish Karelia, France, Germany, Italy and Russia. Most Finnish artists felt a curiosity and interest in discovering what was truly ‘primitive’, but Halonen did this literally. His works are full of the intense personal impact with which he painted both his innumerable views of nature and his decorative works of rural life.

When discussing Halonen’s work, however, it is not enough merely to underline its national significance: we must also allow for what may seem the surprising influence of Gauguin, specifically on the unique character of the winter landscapes in Halonen’s output. There was a close link between the synthetist work of Gauguin and the Nabi Group and Japanese art. It seems clear that Halonen saw Japanese woodcuts hanging on the chrome-yellow walls of Gauguin’s studio side by side with paintings by Puvis de Chavannes, Degas and van Gogh. What is also interesting is that even Gauguin was inspired to paint his Paris in the Snow (1894) from his studio window. Had that inspiration come, perhaps, from his two Finnish students and from the time he spent in Copenhagen, his wife’s home town? Many art historians have been puzzled by Gauguin’s brief flirtation with a winter theme. In any event, Halonen developed a keen interest in Japanese art, and started to collect copies of woodprints after his third trip to Paris. It should, of course, be noted that he could not have avoided seeing Japanese and Chinese paintings, graphics and objets d’art in Paris since they were everywhere, from department stores to galleries, but it was probably specifically under Gauguin’s influence that he continued to develop ‘Japonist’ elements in his own paintings.

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871 Halonen remained interested in Theosophy all his life. The library at Haloseniemi contains several theosophical works by Pekka Ervasti, the latest from the 1920s.

872 In Brittany, Gauguin in 1894 painted his oils Village in the Snow (65 x 90, Paris, Musée d’Orsay) and Christmas Night (1894) (72 x 83, Lausanne, private collection). Le Pichon 1986, pp. 192–193.


874 Japonism was both a fashion among collectors and a movement in art that no artist seeking new ideas could fail to experiment with. Tuovinen 1995, pp. 14–15.
17. Pekka Halonen *Winter Day* (1895). Oil on canvas, 55 x 38 cm, private collection. Photo: Tuusula Museum
The question of synthetism in Halonen’s oeuvre comes to the fore in his depictions of nature. It is important to note that, although at the beginning of his career Halonen placed human figures at centre stage in his works, after his period as Gauguin’s pupil in 1894 he began to produce more and more paintings solely with a nature motif. It is crucial to note that he did not really become a painter of decorative winter landscapes until 1895, when his first major works of this type were produced in Sortavala, on the northern tip of Lake Ladoga in Karelia, and in Komora where Halonen and his wife Maija spent the winter after their marriage in January 1895. It was there that he was seized by a passion for painting winter scenery outdoors in sub-zero temperatures. I would argue that Halonen’s interest in depicting winter landscapes grew out of his new appreciation of ‘primitive nature’ and in order to establish himself as an individual artist he found his calling as a painter of winter from Gauguin’s ideology. After 1895 he became the painter of snow. It is for this that he is still famous in Finnish art.

Right from the start Halonen, an ardent painter en plein air, continued to work outdoors until the end of his life. He despised those who “painted through the window”. It is clear from his interviews and letters that he needed to ‘feel the nature’ which surrounded him; hands-on experience was part of the practice. Senses were sharpened to a maximum and this can be felt from his very first winter landscapes; in Winter Landscape (1895, fig. 18) one can almost feel the crisp frosty air, as Halonen concentrated on capturing the various tones of the brilliant blue sky and the snow casting cold blue shadows on great white drifts. These sensations were enhanced by the strong blue contrasted with shining white and yellow which creates almost a reflection of light from inside. With its exact precision in form the painting has a naturalist feel but the bright palette and the odd, strongly upward-leading perspective towards the steep snowy slope and the tree trunks and rocks shows more an individualist approach. Artists usually preferred to depict panoramic winter landscapes with views from high places. Even though Winter Landscape is done in a naturalist manner the painting’s upward composition and vertical trees reflect a certain Japonist flare.

That same winter Halonen painted his enigmatic Winter Day (1895, fig. 17). The artist has chosen an unusual subject for his painting; from the bottom left corner a hare comes loping up across the snow-covered slope with strong blue shadows. More interestingly, the viewer is placed behind and on the same level as the hare. The unusual strong diagonal of the composition gives the feeling that the artist is actually viewing the scene from just behind the animal, or merging himself into it

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876 Though it was a cold winter, Halonen was often outside working for up to four hours at a time, even at minus 20 degrees centigrade. Lindström 1957, 93-94.
like a shaman as if it were his alter ego. This exceptional painting is an anomaly in Halonen’s oeuvre but a very interesting one. Its colours are also enhanced and give a synesthetist effect with the glittering white snow contrasted with the bright blue sky above. Its enigmatic subject can be derived from the shamanistic lore of the Kalevala where a skilful rune-singer shaman could take the form of an animal and possess its qualities. But is it, in fact, a portrait of the artist? Or does it show Halonen’s profound respect for mystical nature?

Wintern landscapes were already popular themes among patriotically inclined artists in Finland in the 1890s. And bearing in mind the international art scene and market, the snow-covered scenes differed from all other Salon subjects and were seen to be the “exotism of the North”. Thus from the 1890s onwards winter landscapes became common subjects for large-scale paintings. The ideology to live in the ‘pure’ wilderness was also a concept that some Finnish artists shared. As previously demonstrated, this ideology was behind Gauguin’s famous travels and continued to be carried on by many of his followers such as the Nabi Group. Another kind of escapism also existed. As Sharon Hirsch (2004) points out, symbolist artists living in cities which had been destroyed and rebuilt were also inclined to escape to other ages and preferred old timeless places such as Bruges. It is, moreover, interesting to note that another example of the symbolist manipulation of traditional images can be supplied by means of nature portrayals. These are often landscapes that are either devoid of people or serve as a magnificent natural domain for a solitary individual. As we shall see, Symbolism followed most directly the nature imagery of the Romantics, but at the end of the century rather than at the beginning of it, and with a desperation born of a wholly new sense of loss. For the Romantics, nature as well as monasticism was an escape, but an escape to an actual – still reachable – destination where they might find themselves enlightened and refreshed.

It is clear that either Symbolists or Finnish artists, especially Axel Gallén and Halonen, shared a distaste for the “poisonous” bourgeois life within the cities. Escaping “the hotbed of everything prosaic and ugly” as Halonen called Helsinki and the “biggest whorehouse” Paris, Finnish artists, inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and William Morris, built their houses away from city life in more remote locations surrounded by beautiful nature. The sculptor Emil Wikström was the first artist actually to produce a log-built studio-home on these principles, Visavuori (1893) situated on a lake in Sääksmäki in the wilds of Ruovesi. He was soon followed by Gallén, who built his Kalela in 1895, also on a beautiful lake in Ruovesi where

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878 Hirsch 2004, 8.  
879 Pelka Halonen’s letter to Emil Wikström, Helsinki 15.3.1898, HUL.
he could live devoting himself “to matters of a transcendental nature”.\textsuperscript{880} Halonen chose a more practical place for his log-built studio-home Halosenniemi, a site on Lake Tuusula, within easy reach of Helsinki, and was soon followed there by Eero Järnefelt with his own Suviranta and his brother-in-law Jean Sibelius, whose house Ainola is also close to Lake Tuusula.\textsuperscript{881} It is worth mentioning that these artists’ homes also set a new ideal for desirable living in Finland. But more interestingly, all highly individual crafted houses, they blended in with their surroundings and were situated close to a lake or even almost surrounded by water as in the case of Kalela and Halosenniemi, both of which stand at the very end of a headland. Inspiration for the design was found in organic natural shapes and in tradition and folk culture. Naturally enough, the pervasive power of nature was also present on every side through the innumerable windows and look-out spots of these houses. Kalela, for instance, has an altarpiece-like window that brings the nearby forest into the house as a ready work of art,\textsuperscript{882} and Halonen’s lasting source of inspiration – trees, rocks and views of water – is visible from Halosenniemi’s many windows. Just outside his home was a world which he called “the treasures of Louvre”.\textsuperscript{883} For the artists who lived in them, these houses and their surroundings acted as microcosms within which they created their art, considered to be “a sacred mission”.\textsuperscript{884}

\textit{After all, we mortals are destined to suck at the many breasts of Mother Nature for as long as we remain on this earth (and perhaps even thereafter?)}

\textit{(Axel Gallén to Louis Sparre 1897)\textsuperscript{885}}

These thoughts on \textit{sacred nature} were, from the outset, connected to the Kalevala and in the 1890s, when theosophy was studied among artists, these two views found common ground. For an earlier generation of artists like R.W. Ekman, the Kalevala had expressed the beliefs of ancient Finnish nature worship but by the end of the 1880s artists no longer saw it as a religion in keeping with the teaching of

\textsuperscript{880} Axel Gallén’s letter to Robert Kajan April 1894. In English see Ilvas 1996, 120-121.

\textsuperscript{881} The first couple to move to Tuusula were the writer Juhani Aho and his artist-wife Venny Soldan-Brofeldt, who rented a villa on Lake Tuusula. They encouraged others to join them. Usko Nyström designed Eero Järnefelt’s artist’s home Suviranta (completed 1901). Järnefelt and his family lived at Suviranta all year round up to 1917, when they moved to Helsinki. Thereafter, they only spent time there in summer and on special occasions. Ainola was the home of composer Jean Sibelius and his wife Aino and lies close to Lake Tuusula. Designed by architect Lars Sonck, it was completed in 1903. Sibelius died at Ainola in 1957 and is buried in the garden.


\textsuperscript{883} Pekka Halonen’s interview, \textit{Svenska Pressen} 5.4.1932, CAA.

\textsuperscript{884} Axel Gallén’s letter to Pekka Halonen 3.11.1894. In English see Ilvas 1996, 127.

\textsuperscript{885} Axel Gallén’s letter to Louis Sparre 15.2.1897. In English see Ilvas 1996, 141-142.
the Enlightenment but rather as an esoteric tradition hidden from outsiders in line with theosophical thinking. As Riikka Stewen (2008) points out, the main figure Väinämöinen continued to be a kind of Orpheus for artists, but this Orpheus was merely one link, albeit an important one, in a great ‘chain of initiates’. Theosophy, like the other esoteric philosophies of the age, believed that all religions, and indeed all knowledge, derived from the same source. Religions were simply variations of one and the same knowledge or learning existing across time, an immemorial chain of individual links. And for Gallén’s generation, Väinämöinen was one among many initiates inducted into the secret knowledge. The Kalevala had become a holy book whose contents were open only to the select few.886

Every reader of the Kalevala has its images embedded in his soul and does not want to replace them. The Kalevala does not need our pictorial help or written interpretations. – – I believe that its fruitful effect should take place through inner learning and digestion, especially as far as art is concerned.

(Pekka Halonen 1910)887

There were also artists, like Pekka Halonen, who felt that the Kalevala was such a holy book that its subjects should not be depicted in a direct manner. The only paintings on actual Kalevala themes in Halonen’s oeuvre are the works commissioned for the Salomo Wuorio room, which include the tapestry-like Väinämöinen Playing (1897) and Lemminkäinen Arriving at the Isle (1900). For Halonen the Kalevala was an inspiration that operated more through his inner vision and the constant emphasis in his work on the concept of sacred nature and in subjects like the holy tree of Finnish folklore – the rowan tree.

Väinö Blomstedt’s works also combine subjects from the Kalevala, the decorative style of contemporary Symbolism and the imaginative synthetist palette. Imaginary and mythological themes are typical of Blomstedt’s work. From an early age, the development of Finnish art and culture had been close to his heart and his idealistic views on the noble spiritual calling of his homeland led this patriotic artist to discover points of contact in theosophical thinking. One of Blomstedt’s main motivators was

886  Stewen 2008, 77.
887  Halonen was replying to a group enquiry from the magazine Aika in 1910. Hämäläinen 1947, 19. On the other hand, Halonen’s Maidens of the Headland (1895), which was inspired by Sibelius’ Venematka (Boat Ride), and Awaiting the Enemy (1896) show Kalevala influence. Both these large-scale works are also marked by a precise, naturalistic approach that is very different from his simplified fresco-like works such as Pioneers in Karelia (1900). In my opinion the carefully depicted elements may have been influenced in 1895-96 by Halonen’s close friend Eliel Aspelin-Haaplay, who had strongly-felt beliefs and tried to influence the works and taste of his favourite artists accordingly. Aspelin-Haaplay felt that national romantic works should be naturalistic and carefully painted. Selkukari 2008, 102-103.
his teacher Gauguin, who in September 1893 had just returned from Tahiti where he had been in search of his own primitive paradise. "The apostle of freedom in art", as Blomstedt describes Gauguin in a letter, made an ineradicable impression on Finnish artists. It is important to note that the ideas of sacred nature and the search for the lost paradise had already been explored by Finnish artists in the beginning of 1890s. The quest to find an unspoiled nature and people grew from the need to find the world of Kalevala and its people. The anthropomorphic or shamanistic approach they used to mirror their self or their personal feelings was expressed through the imagery of a sacred nature. They all thought that spiritual and cultural development reflected a new approach and imagery should be of sacred nature. In particular Blomstedt and Halonen saw this period as a time of spiritual revival and cyclical alternation.

It is evident that in the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s the traditional sense of space and time had disintegrated. Just as new maps were redrawn in the literal sense, so also new mapping was necessitated to navigate the metropolis mentally. Thanks to technological advances that could overcome even the most physical and obstinate of former boundaries to urban spaces, artists could no longer plan to escape to a purely natural space but could only dream of such an ideal. Thus, in the most obvious case, Gauguin, a lifelong search for the truly “primitive” – that is, an anti-materialistic, non-urban culture – led from Brittany to the South Seas and to a career as a professional tourist. But Gauguin’s heroisation of alternative cultures and religions is an implicit rather than explicit criticism. While he adopted what he considered a native lifestyle and appropriated numerous “primitive” visual forms, Gauguin’s artistic statements regarding the western European life against which he was rebelling were restricted to deliberately universal, philosophical works. This idealism of an anti-materialistic, non-urban culture was shared by Finnish artists who expressed it through their art and their ideas of living in the wilderness in houses they themselves had designed and where they could create ‘pure art’.

It is interesting how Blomstedt’s art is thus founded on a longing for a primeval paradise aroused by Gauguin. The national and mythological theme of his synthetist tempera painting Episode from the Kalevala, Kullervo Cutting into the Oak (1897, fig. 2) is depicted in a Gauguinesque spirit, with deep synthetist palette with tertiary colours complementing one another. The dark Prussian blue outlines dominate the decorative surface. As in Gauguin’s Vision of the Sermon (1888), the work’s dynamic composition, with its cows, is based on a rhythmical crisscross of powerful diagonals on a flat surface. The synthetist palette is darkish and intense: due to the un-primed brown canvas the colours are partly absorbed which creates the tapestry-like surface

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889 E.g. Väinö Blomstedt to his cousin Yrjö Blomstedt 6.3.1894. Yrjö Blomstedt’s letters, Jyväskylä provincial archive.
that Blomstedt aimed for and which is achieved using complementary colours – mainly orange, rust red, and the brown of the canvas contrasted with blue, dark green and turquoise. Except for Gauguin’s brighter colour scheme, Blomstedt’s palette is much more reminiscent of Maurice Denis’s *Muses* (1893), with its close-tones of earthy colours, but also has the intense turquoise colour particularly typical of the Finnish artist. The scene deriving from Kalevala shows a young, naked Kullervo digging furiously with his knife at an oak tree’s trunk. The boy’s strong, tense body is leaning forward against the tree. The dramatic mood and the noose hanging from a branch (later removed) point to the golden-haired boy’s future tragedy: in an act of furious revenge Kullervo, who has unknowingly seduced his own sister, kills his host family and finally himself. However, the artist wanted to tell the Kalevala tale in its original primitive form.\(^{80}\) Since his trip to Italy Blomstedt has used in his paintings an original, deep, glowing blue-green colour that gave a decorative flare to his paintings.\(^{81}\)

Although Finnish artists were aware of their art on the one hand as a *deposit* public and national (their social statement) on the other it depicted private statements of their ideology and ideals. Like his *The Great Black Woodpecker* (1892, fig. 7), Gallén’s iconic *Lemminkäinen’s Mother* (1897, fig. 10) is both a highly personal statement of his beliefs and an example of his decorative Symbolism in which the powerful archaic, synthetist form and intense tempera colours underlie the strong emotional charge. The fresco-like work’s emphasis on ‘antiquity’ together with its mediaeval references make for an interesting combination of pagan Kalevala and Christian tradition, evidencing Gallén’s consciousness of *historicity*. More specifically, as if following theosophical principles, Gallén uses timeless and eternal mother love to express a universal message. In the Kalevala legend, Lemminkäinen is a war hero and womaniser who dies when he tries to shoot the mystical swan of Tuonela (the river of death), a bird above both life and death. *Lemminkäinen’s mother* succeeds in restoring her son to life by appealing to higher powers. The golden bee carries the life force back on golden rays from the land of the living. The painting is striking in its modern primitive and ancient simplicity. The dark, muted colours enhance the stillness of the underworld and the intensive blood red moss on the stones and the dead, pale whiteness of the flowers and Lemminkäinen’s skin are contrasted with the ethereal delicate Botticellian gold colour of the bee and the beams from heaven. The mystical swan swims silently in the darkness of the underworld and witnesses from the mist the rebirth of Lemminkäinen. To achieve the greatest possible intensity when he was painting the work, Gallén used

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80 von Bonsdorff 2009b, 94.

his own mother as the model. It is through this highly personal input that he has so effectively expressed the instinctive confrontation between life and death, the ultimate universal theme which is underlined with a timeless, synthetist form. Thus the painting is also dualistic in its highly personal level and its effective emotional impact but, on the other hand, is also clearly created as an epic work for the public and more specifically as a painting depicting Finland’s epic past.

The presence and power of nature play an important part in the Kalevala experience. Artists underlined the idea of sacred nature and its primeval pagan force by using certain subjects that were felt to have a Kalevala character. In Gallén’s Lemminkäinen’s mother the main characters are the ominous Swan of Tuonela, Lemminkäinen, his mother and most important of all the small golden bee which carries the force of life. The interplay with nature and humans is in focus. There are also other subjects, the symbolistic plants, the poisonous crowberry flower and the bunch of flax. Plants are also in focus in many paintings. For instance, Finland’s holy tree, the rowan appears in the work of almost every artist inspired by the Kalevala. It occurs repeatedly in the epic itself, providing protection from evil spirits and foretelling war. It is depicted in Gallén’s and Blomstedt’s Killervo subjects, but also by itself in many of Halonen’s paintings, the most important of which is his 1894 Rowan Tree. Halonen, who had just returned from Paris after studying under Gauguin, was aiming to produce an altarpiece-like hymn to primitive nature. The kakemono shape underlines the sacral character of the work. Rowan trees also feature in many landscape paintings, and have found their way into Kalevala-style decorative art and picture weaves.

With the arrival of Symbolism, Finnish artists discovered new dimensions in landscape painting where themes were taken from international sources. Blomstedt’s Sunset (1898, fig. 3) depicts an island, a popular symbolist subject. In turn-of-the-century art, mystic islands were usually depicted either as pastoral utopias, as Gauguin’s views of Tahiti, or serene resting places of the dead, as Arnold Böcklin’s famous The Isle of the Dead (1880). In Finnish pre-Christian traditions, islands were also linked with the dead. However, Sunset has a silent and meditative stillness with the last rays of evening sun. A mystical island in dark outline is reflected at the centre of a calm lake view. The island and the clouds, gilded by sunset, are mirrored in the bright turquoise water, the colour typical of Blomstedt’s synthetist palette of the 1890s. The view is framed by the shoreline rocks and pines in the foreground and by a delicate rowan tree, considered sacred in Finland, laden with berries.

For Halonen the works of the following summer clearly reflect Gauguin’s influence. Halonen later felt that Gauguin had given him the freedom to find lyricism and individualism. According to the French artist’s teaching, all greatness, all beauty

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892 Re. Halonen’s Rowan Tree see von Bonsdorff 2008, 48-55.
was simple and clear. What Halonen inherited from Gauguin was not his bright synthetist palette as in Nave nave moe (1894, Hermitage, St. Petersburg) which he was painting at the time but rather the clear contours and colour surfaces as well as the decorative effect which he instinctively adopted. This is evident in his Rowan tree (1894, fig. 16), which for Halonen was Finland’s sacred tree. The rowan is depicted in the grip of the rocks, sprouting and bending low under the weight of its red berries. The sacred and eternal essence of nature fascinated Halonen throughout his career. The painting shows how he emphasises the decorative effect with curvy contours and colours brighter than before. The work aroused considerable interest among Halonen’s artist colleagues also and it is interesting to see how Axel Gallén in 1894 describes the painting in his letter:

*Rowan tree is a highly decorative endeavour and, surprisingly, conveys a peaceful impression - that long moment of expectation when Nature holds its breath. I have never before seen the mood illustrated.*

*(Axel Gallén to Pekka Halonen 1894)*

Using the allegory of a tree to describe mood and thoughts was not a new form of expression. The tree of life of the ancient Assyrians is perhaps one of the world’s oldest symbols. The great oak of the Kalevala myths is also a source symbol. Runes contain sensitive images of nature where it is personified to echo the emotions and moods of the singer. Symbolic characteristics have always been associated with trees of the forest, traces of which can still be seen in our collective consciousness. The solitude of the wilderness sighs through the pines, melancholy through the spruces. The birch is by nature closer to the idyll of home and reflects a lighter, brighter mood. The rowan tree also had a special significance for Halonen: it was the holy tree to be planted first on the spot on which one intended to live. The rowan tree was also one of the subjects that Halonen painted throughout his life.

Halonen’s attempt to depict the rowan tree as Finland’s sacred tree shows how he adopted the symbolist ideas in his art. The mystic ceremonial aspect of nature was close to him. The combination of the universality of a patriotic subject and the beauty of nature was a message also understood by visitors to the exhibition. Later, at the time of the February Manifesto of 1899, Halonen again used the same form of approach; *Wilderness* (1899, Turku Art Museum) a decorative and synthetist painting radiating Finnish nature and self-esteem, clearly reflects his emotions

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893 "-- Pihla on hyvä dekoratiivinen yritys ja antaa, kumma yllä, rauhallisen vaikutuksen, semmoisen pitkään vartovaan hetken jolloin huono pidättäisi henkeänä. En ole vielä ikinä nähnyt sitä mielialaa kuivattuna. - "

Axel Gallén’s letter to Pekka Halonen 3.9.1894. GKM

894 Kallio 1995, 5.

celebrating holy nature as an altarpiece. The Japonistic, tall kakemono form of the painting is the same as that used for *Rouvan Tree* but the treatment of the theme is more dramatic and more synthetist in its simplified, flat colour fields and strong contours. Halonen has again composed his painting with strong, rhythmically vertical tree trunks contrasted by a diagonal fallen kelo-tree with curving branches, giving the painting still more decorative power. The sacral form of the work emphasises the holy primitive mood. It is precisely this that underlines the fact that the painting is something more than just a random landscape.

As Ville Lukkarinen (2005) has stated, the area in which Halonen painted the work was not a true wilderness but an old farming area. Thus Halonen’s choice in celebrating primeval, untouched nature in such a manner and in the name given to the work underlines nature’s timeless quality and sacred being as values in themselves rather than as depictions of a patriotic statement although these two explanations do not cancel one another out. As in many paintings, Finnish artists strove to achieve complex connotations through depictions of nature. The decorative work is one of Halonen’s best-known works and during his lifetime was given a patriotic underpinning while at the same time it was one of his most synthetist paintings. I would argue, however, that for Halonen, whose deep respect for nature reached the devotion of a religion, the grandeur of Nature, its sacred, eternal, timeless essence, was for him the most important of all themes. To emphasise this, Halonen chose a more timeless form.

It is also interesting that Eero Järnefelt, who has not traditionally been linked to the symbolist art movement, has a series of what could be described as landscapes painted with intense, non-mimetic synthetist colours. In these synthetist landscapes Järnefelt introduced a very bright synthetist palette and simplified, contoured form along with different mediums on canvas and paper. This was also the year 1894 when Blomstedt and Halonen were studying under Gauguin which could hardly be a coincidence. As we know from letters the artists were in close contact and Blomstedt’s letter, which so eloquently describes Gauguin’s art, ideology and methods, was written to Järnefelt. This was also the year Gallén explored the limits of symbolist

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896 Halonen uses kakemono first time in 1892.
897 Halonen is known to have dragged the dead tree to the spot where he was painting and as Ville Lukkarinen has noted the actual painting site was anything but true wilderness. Lukkarinen 2005, 145-151.
899 What he read about Tolstoyism, and in particular theosophy, shaped his Christian idea of life and art into something more independent and liberal. His guiding philosophy of life came to be a deep respect for nature and the environment. Halonen remained interested in theosophy all his life. The library at Halosenniemi contains several theosophical works by Pekka Ervasti, the latest from the 1920s.
24. Eero Järnefelt Self-Portrait, Storm from the East (1890s). Oil on canvas, 80 x 132 cm, private collection. Photo: Hagelstam
images and new methods to depict the ‘inner world’ of his circle in the Symposion series and in Ad Astra.

The first of Järnefelt’s landscapes is also the most innovative in its strong Gauguinesque synthistent form of blazing, saturated colours such as blue, brown, green, violet and orange contrasting with one another. In this extraordinary painting Järnefelt has used gouache and or tempura colours on paper. Also here the transference to medium is evident. The last beams of golden flickering sunlight on water are painted with gold colour, which gives the painting a somewhat sacer and decorative feeling. The bold orange which dominates the evening sky and the contrasting blue in the shadows of the islands continue in other landscapes and also in his unique Self-Portrait, which is also called Storm from the East (1890s, fig. 25). What is interesting, all these works are more akin to Gauguin than his students’ works of the same summer. This is quite surprising since Järnefelt is known to have been moderately cautious in his art and in adopting “foreign” influences. This rhetoric comes across well in many studies made on Järnefelt, from the first, Wennervirta’s in 1947, to the latest by Leena Lindqvist (2002), who depicts him as an “ardent realist and rationalist, who tended to avoid all symbolist influence of the period”.

It is therefore somewhat surprising that we find one of the most synthetically coloured works to be by Järnefelt. What is known is that the series contains four landscapes and, in my opinion, Self-Portrait, Storm from the East since its colours are from the same palette as the first Symbolist Lanscape in gouache on paper. This well-known landscape, as Annika Waenerberg (2002) has demonstrated, is not a “real landscape” but a constructed or a synthesis of a kind of an ideal landscape of Koli. This area has a legendary status as the national landscape of Finland. Almost all Finnish artists at the time, writers, poets and composers such as Sibelius visited the vast spreading landscape of continuing islands on the lake Pielinen. Järnefelt visited the site first in 1892 with writer Juhani Aho and went back many times in the 1920s. Waenerberg’s study shows that Järnefelt composed his landscapes from different parts of the scene and moved trees and islands to his liking in his many landscapes of Koli. Waenerberg also studies what she calls “the symbolist

900 Lindqvist 2002, 103.
901 A small landscape, the gouache one, the oil and the watercolour which he made later as a gift to Eliel Aspelin in 1898. See Selkokari 2008, 119.
902 One of the best-known and most frequently painted of Finnish landscapes was the view from Koli towards the lake Pielisjärv. Koli represents a nationally significant landscape that was painted by artists, depicted in poems and celebrated in music during Finnish art of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. These breathtaking views of Finland’s lake district led painters such as Eero Järnefelt to capture them on several occasions in different seasons. On seeing the view that opened up from the Koli heights Jean Sibelius was inspired to write his Fourth Symphony. Eero Järnefelt is known to have painted more than twenty landscapes from Koli during his career. See e.g. Waenerberg 2004, 186-191.
character of the Koli landscape” which shows well the shift to non-mimetic art. What is also interesting, from the first Koli paintings Järnefelt censured all marks of habitation in the area, thus he emphasised the concept of a silent, untouched wilderness. This depiction of a sacred nature was underlined in the synthetist series with golden beams glittering on a lake surface in an imagined ethereal landscape.

This new palette of bold synthetist complementary colours and the new non-mimetic approach cannot be considered only as an experiment or a passing phase since what this study is suggesting, is that during these years Järnefelt’s concept of art and his practising of it changed profoundly and may thus be seen as Early Modern in its aspirations towards spiritual and non-mimetic art. As this study has shown, synthetist or symbolist art does not just include artworks that have a clear literal or symbolist subject-matter. It also includes a broader repertoire of artworks such as landscapes and figure paintings, which reflect the inner world, sacred nature, images of the mind or connotations of subjective emotions achieved with a highly manipulated palette of synthetist or ascetic colours as will be introduced in the following chapters. I would argue that within this framework Järnefelt’s artworks are as such perfect examples of the break from the “rational”, mimetic, naturalist tradition that was the starting point for Järnefelt and other Finnish artists presented in this study.

The year 1894 was significant also for Axel Gallén, who had already painted subjects from the Kalevala back in the 1880s but for whom the true power of the epic crystallises in the synthetist works produced from 1894 onwards. It should be noted that Gallén did not actually use a synthetist palette in such symbolist works as *The Journey to Tuonela* (1888–94), *Ad Astra* (1894) and *Symposion (Problem)* (1894) which were painted in oils with a more traditional palette. In 1894 Gallén produced an interesting series of paintings done with various mediums, the synaesthetic *En Saga* or *Jean Sibelius and Fantasy Landscape* (1894, fig. 8), the enigmatic *Self-Portrait in Fresco (Quand Même!)* (1894) both in watercolour, and the intriguing *Conceptio Artis* (1894, Ateneum Art Museum) in gouache. This was also the year Gallén studied symbolist periodicals such as the French *Revue Encyclopédique* which, for example, had an article on Gauguin and his art and the Danish *Taarnet* as he tells us in his letters to Louis Sparre. It should be noticed that Gallén is interested in the portrait of Jan Verkade “that Symbolist brought to Finland by Juhani Aho drawn by Herr Mogens Ballin.” drawing a caricature version of it is his letter.

From a colour point of view two paintings, *En Saga* and *Self-Portrait in Fresco (Quand Même!)* are the most interesting. Both are done with watercolour, both

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are some kind of portrait but have a more complex, enigmatic content. Gallén’s odd *Self-Portrait in Fresco* shows the artist’s face on an illusionistic “crumbling fresco surface”. And, where parts have crumbled, a kind of Kalevala theme in pale bluish colours can just be seen. The background Gallén chose is in a Pompeian red colour, as I would argue, to emphasise the idea of an ancient fresco. The painting was done before Gallén actually went to Italy but shows his own personal adoption of the aspirations of ancient art and depicts himself as a master of ancient times – and as a timeless master. Especially here Gallén reflects his consciousness of time, form and colour.

The other unique portrait is *En Saga (Jean Sibelius and Fantasy Landscape)* which can also be seen as a synthesis of the two colour concepts of synthetist and ascetic colour and a music composition. Like many other artists, Gallén had become interested in new forms of art and, in keeping with the ideals of Symbolism, sought interactions – correspondences – between the different expressions of art in which composers, poets and painters could join. However, musicality in painting was something that nineteenth-century artists specifically aimed for and, since music was considered *immaterial*, artists influenced by Symbolism and neo-platonic philosophy considered music the highest form of art. As has previously been noted, these ideas on harmonious, musical art and synesthesia became widely known through Baudelaire’s writings during the 1860s and culminated in the 1890s. This uncompleted triptych was Gallén’s input to contemporary ideals in which he combines a Gauguinesque synthetist landscape and the ascetic portrait of a severe-looking Jean Sibelius with a space in which he hoped the composer would write notes.

Inspired by the music of his friend, Gallén created this special portrait of the composer with the idea of *correspondance*. The painting was meant to show the composer of *En Saga* through portraiture, a progression of notes and a highly synthetist ‘inner’ landscape. Like many composers, Sibelius was particularly sensitive to colours. We know, for example, that he possessed synaesthetic ability. He heard the colour green in F major and yellow in D major. Gallén’s painting was intended as a collaboration with the composer but when Sibelius saw it he did not want the notes inserted. For the fantasy landscape Gallén had chosen *surnaturelle* vermilion red as in the background of the *Vision of the Sermon* (1888), a Japonist crooked tree bearing golden apples holds a salamander, which again recalls Gauguin’s work. The odd landscape, in the foreground of which small black rats are galloping and where white decorative snowflakes are falling, is unique. The almost black and

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906 Sibelius heard the colour green in F major and yellow in D major. Lindqvist 1998, 44.
907 Although Sibelius did not collaborate he kept the painting in his home and it is still on the wall of Sibelius’s Ainola home museum.
white ascetic portrait shows Sibelius in severe pose, looking into the distance, as if concentrating and hearing music. The contrast between the landscape and Sibelius is created by extreme pairs of palettes and by the handling of the subject; the first a total bright fantasy, the other a static, severe portrait emphasised by the ascetic colours. The work is like an illustration of Baudelaire’s Correspondance on the similarity between melodies, scents and opposite colour harmonies – the portrait of an ascetic and an ‘inner’ landscape in bright synthetist colours.

The earliest work inspired by Kalevala which introduced Gallén’s dazzling synthetist palette, is the big tempera painting The Defence of the Sampo (1896, fig. 9). For this unique painting the artist used a variety of techniques in his search for a new style. Interestingly this was also the most radical painting because of its extremely decorative and synthetist form. Gallen had studied the potential of symbolist art and its theoretical foundations in 1893–95 in Berlin where he had produced a tempera sketch that is one of the earliest versions of the final painting.\footnote{In Berlin Gallén’s circle included the artist Edvard Munch, art historian Julius Meier-Graefe, philosopher and occultist Stanislaw Przybyszewski and poet Paul Scheerbart. Gallén contributed two drawings to the first issue of the magazine Pan and arranged a joint exhibition with Munch. See Sarajas-Korte 1996, 48, 52-56. However, Gallén’s trip to Berlin ended tragically when his only child died of diphtheria in Ruovesi where his wife was overseeing the building of Kalela.}

The first version of the subject was a wood relief intended as the lid of a box. The third version was actually a woodcut and it was only later that Gallén painted the same theme on canvas. The many versions of the subject in different techniques concretely display the fruitful effects of working in several mediums. The dynamic composition of the final Defence of the Sampo and its extreme stylisation were present right from the start but it is the glowing synthetist tempera colours that raise the work to a new level. The startling final “tapestry painting” may not have appealed to his client, Salomo Wuorio, for whose dining room it was commissioned, but it attracted huge crowds when exhibited. Architect and art critic Jac. Ahrenberg considered it “a dazzling ornament, a magnificent wall covering, the most original thing one could see anywhere”.\footnote{J.A., “Finska konsträrernas utställning” Finsk Tidskrift 1896, II, 381-386. CAA.} Although the painting’s highly decorative quality divided opinion Gallén himself was very pleased with his achievement.\footnote{Ilvas 1996, 68, 73-79.}

He felt he had found the right way, the right language, for depicting the mythical world of the Kalevala. This he had achieved with a choix of mode, and with strong, synthetist palette.

The period of the synthetist palette in Finnish art in the 1890s was short and intensive. It is clear that, inspired by the European movement, Finnish artists too explored the extreme bright and close-tones of synthetist colours in their art. The synthetist palette was used in Kalevala-inspired works, in depictions of ‘sacred nature’, in landscapes and even in self-portraits. Even though it did not last long
as a colour method the synthetist palette changed artists’ perception of colour in painting and their manipulating of colour to more enhanced and surnaturelle levels likewise changed their concept of art. Synthetist colour became a vehicle for the spiritual and abstract depictions of non-mimetic early modern art in Finland.

3.3 COLOUR ASCETISM

What is called the art of the future reduces one to tears. It is a pity that Enckell has resorted to this; his drawings are excellent but his paintings strange. He has painted an old Breton woman using only two or three colours; he says nowadays that there are no colours in Nature!

(Väinö Blomstedt 1891)

Symbolism, the art philosophy of the 1890s, emphasised spirituality and one of the aims was to bring that into painting. But instead of focusing solely on symbolic subject matter, one possibility was to change the palette from realistic to unrealistic – from mimetic to non-mimetic. As I stated earlier, two different tendencies to manipulate colour existed. First, the Pont-Aven school and the Nabis who followed in the steps of Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard. The other, which this chapter will focus on, is colour ascetism, which can be seen in Finnish art as the opposite of the bright, shocking colours of the synthetist palette. Whereas synthetist colour emphasised fantasy and preferred the dynamic contrast of tertiary colours, the almost acromatic ascetic palette was based on a few, simplified pairs of colour. One method was tonalism, to tone every colour with grey or use black and white (or brown and white) as a contrasting pair of dark and light to create stillness, inwardness and silence as a Platonist ‘mirror image’ of the world. I would argue that to simplify the palette to the extreme minimum, monochromacy, or to tone all colours with one mother tone could be the equivalent of what cubism later did to form – here colour was manipulated to compliment artistic vision. This process was furthered by such artists as Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Édouard Manet, James McNeill Whistler and Eugène Carrière. In Finland colour ascetism was used and developed mainly by Magnus Enckell, Pekka Halonen, Eero Järnefelt, Helene Schjerfbeck and Ellen Theslef.


912 It should be noted that also Väinö Blomstedt and Axel Gallén have a few works in which they have used an ascetic palette, although they mainly preferred a synthetist palette.
5. Magnus Enckell *Awakening* (1894). Oil on canvas, 113 x 85,5 cm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. Photo: Jukka Romu/Finnish National Gallery, CAA
This colour-conscious turn was an essential part of the new movement when the Symbolists began first, as all their theories affirmed, with the idea or ideal and then sought to find in nature some correspondance or “equivalence” that might be used in such a way as to announce that this art object was not a replication of that object in nature but rather a vehicle for the recognition and contemplation of a higher reality. Thus the symbolist credo would be called upon to adopt, in the name of the dematerialisation of painting, one of the founding precepts of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.913 This dematerialisation, I would argue, was achieved specifically with the non-mimetic palette, the reduction of colour – colour ascetism. This method of painting recreated with the artists’ vision reproduced, for example, something from nature such as a landscape. This led to certain objects needing to be presented in an iconic way to realise this transformation from object to art, from ‘thing’ to ‘evocation’. A typical method of colour ascetism was the imagery of the estompe, or atmospheric conditions such as mist or permeating rain, used especially in landscapes, which blurred lines and enveloped objects in a haze that made them less material, more evocative. The pursuit of this method was attente, or arrested time, shown by means of frozen poses, stilled water and air, or uninhabited spaces, which could also reinforce the iconic nature of the scene in visual as well as literary terms. By these means, it was possible for the artist, as it was for the writer, to turn not only to traditional romantic images of nature but also to contemporary cities; any object, whether country or urban, which held the potential for evocation.914 As Hirsh (2004) points out, indistinctness – the most obvious effect created by a blurred or vague line – is also common in European symbolist art. It is also employed in the “landscape” that provides an almost abstracted background for Khnopff’s colour ascetic Memories (1889), allowing the viewer to realise the unreality of the game of lawn-tennis that, at first glance, the women seem to be preparing to play.915

The use of few colours, usually restricted to black, brown and white, or more exactly, concentration on the contrast of dark and light colour, bearing in mind the idea of von Hoffmannsthal – brought painting into the realm of the ‘analysis of life, Platonist mirror image and reflection’. It is clear that dark, muted colours refer to melancholy, which was one of the main themes in Symbolism. The manipulated and reduced palette which some artists used created a meditative stillness and contemplative mood while other pursuits, for example, referred to a different worldliness and spirituality. Another underlying theme of much colour ascetic art was nostalgia. Even as artists dreamed of past times and places in which life was

913 Rapetti 2005, 32.
914 See Donald Friedman, “Belgian Symbolism and a Poetics of Place,” in Goddard, 127-129. Again, Friedman writes here about literary devices, which Hirsh is comparing to visual manipulations. Hirsh 2004, 3.
915 Hirsh 2004, 4.
more liveable, they also hoped to revive an art that was more meaningful.916 In this respect, asceticism seems to be one method of creating a notion of the past as a different realm in painting. A reduced, ascetic palette can be seen to convey a notion of timelessness or frozen, arrested time.

An artwork created with only a few ‘non-colours’ was a bold move: imagine a landscape painted with only black, brown and white. To produce a painting ‘without colour’ must have been as shocking as Gauguin’s use of deep purple and chrome yellow. The pioneers of the colour ascetic palette of tonalism were Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler who, in their lifetime, inspired many Finnish artists to explore greyish tonality in works imitating fresco, landscapes appearing from the mist and innovative portraits. Manet and Carrière, on the other hand, pushed artists to explore the limits of using two colour contrasts. Both artists were admired and followed by the Symbolists, also by the Finns. Their methods of using colour have, for example, what Sarajas-Korte calls the “black synthetism of Manet” and the “black colourism and monochromatic of Carrière.”917

Another method of colour ascetism was the use of the tonal palette. Puvis de Chavannes used his ‘mother tones’ to create an imitation of a greyish, dry, matte fresco surface. Whistler was another artist who made skilful use of this tonalist technique. On the other hand, the “symphonic” colour art he developed was more versatile than the somewhat monotonous total harmony of Puvis de Chavannes. Whistler shaded the tonal harmony of his works using a single colour – or as he himself put it – “a single tone”.918 Linking the colours of the painting together with one principal colour created a general impression of harmony. Maurice Denis, among others, used the term “manier les gris”919 to describe Whistler’s style.

Colour ascetism – or as Sharon Hirsh (2004) calls it, symbolist colour – also adopted the deliberate distortion of the natural as a means of evoking non-nature. As with line, this could be described as an imprecise reference to hues existing in nature, reflecting a heightened sense of colour and its evocative powers in the late-nineteenth century. Like their neo-impressionist contemporaries, symbolist artists were well aware of recent colour theories such as those of Charles Henry, who in the late 1880s proposed that each colour carried with it a psychological effect. With the knowledge of the inherent psychological impact of colours, the Symbolists experimented with anti-naturalistic colour.920 In this sense it can be seen that Hirsh’s

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916 Sharon Hirsh connects this as a symbolist theme, but it was part of many other artists’ works as has been suggested in part I of this study. Hirsh 2004, 8.

917 Sarajas-Korte 1966, 77.

918 N.B. Whistler used other colours in his single tone technique, including blue, turquoise, green and red, but these were not colour ascetic works and for this reason are not discussed here. For example Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso (1866).


920 Hirsh 2004, 5-6.
notion of which palette most Symbolists used was more an ascetic one. It should be noted, however, as my master’s thesis suggested, that within Symbolism there are as many methods of using colour and thus as many different palettes as there were artists. This, I would argue, is due to the symbolist notion of individualism. It is therefore important to note that ascetism as such is not solely a symbolist method but a much wider phenomenon in European and Finnish art.

As stated earlier, an admiration for primitive art and artists such as Botticelli and Fra Angelico was evident in the art of the Pre-Raphaelites. Also, the British Arts and Crafts movement was well-known in the Nordic countries through a Swedish company *Sub Rosa*, which sold and distributed reproductions of pre-Raphaelite images in the Nordic countries. It is interesting to note that not all Pre-Raphaelite art was brightly coloured and there are artists such as Edward Burne-Jones whose individual monumental and decorative art with its highly subdued palette of soft-browns and greys differed considerably from the strident, jewel-like colours of the other Pre-Raphaelites. His monotonous and simplified colours which emphasise the dreamlike melancholy of his allegorical and mystic paintings such as *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883) inspired French and Finnish artists including Helene Schjerfbeck. Elizabeth Prettejohn (2009) describes the colours of Burne-Jones’ painting as metallic grey (silver) and gold. Burne-Jones was a strong influence in Europe and it is therefore important to note that his art could have been seen by many other Finnish artists too. It is likewise important to note that in order to get an overview of the possible contacts for and sources of colour ascetism we should move away from the Francocentric tradition when studying Finnish art from the end of the nineteenth century as well.

As Hirsh puts it, by limiting colour contrasts to a narrow range of almost monochromatic arrangement or by introducing tertiary, or even “off” colours in opposition to the “pure colours” beloved by the Impressionists, Symbolists could visualise the obscure but evocative colour sense often found in symbolist poetry. Tonal colouring, using one or two colours at most, also avoids all suggestion of line and creates the illusion of form by arrangements of one soft mass against another. Through these unusual colouristic manipulations, images managed to suggest natural colour while at the same time created symbolic evocations. Another way

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921 Ahlund 2009, 140-141.
922 Edward Burne-Jones *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883), oil on canvas, 200 x 110 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
923 Prettejohn 2009, 60, 63. See also 3.1.2
924 In *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (2007) Elizabeth Prettejohn has pointed out that most historians of modern art post a Francocentric tradition that originates with Manet in the mid-nineteenth century, and proceeds self-consciously to develop from that point. This is anachronistic since in the days of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood Manet had not yet begun to paint and there was no special reason for the PRB to look for what might constitute a ‘modern’ art. Prettejohn 2007, 130.
925 Hirsh 2004, 5-6.
of immediately announcing this “non-real” aspect of their art was the Symbolists’ embracing of non-traditional genre. 926 Through drawings, often using limited colour and blurred or tangled lines with matte or textured finish, the Symbolists could establish the imprecise vision of an object as a symbol that was their goal. 927 It is important to notice that this ‘soft mass’ or blurred vision was used mostly by artists who created their paintings using a colour ascetic palette.

As Charles Riley (1995) notes, at the turn of the century grey was considered a true opposite of colour, a “non-colour”. 928 The colour grey, which is in fact white containing black to a greater or lesser degree, 929 was perhaps the most frequently used prime colour in the innovative tonalism of both Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler. John Gage’s definition “the notorious greying, the suppression of colour, was the most sincere of the tributes paid by nineteenth-century painters to the work of Chevreul” 930 ably describes the sources associated with this colour harmony. Despite the negative attitude towards grey, it is important to note that a grey-toned palette was a central colour ascetic technique used by the afore-mentioned artists and via them by Finnish artists. This form of grey colour ascetism is used in, for example, Halonen’s monumental Washing on the Ice (1900, fig. 19) and Thesleff’s poetic Spring Night (1894, Ateneum Art Museum). 931 As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, the first Finnish artist to adopt an ascetic palette was Magnus Enckell, a keen student of symbolist ideals. Blomstedt describes Enckell’s ‘new art’: “He [Enckell] has painted an old Breton woman using only two or three colours; he says nowadays that there are no colours in Nature.” 932 The same year Enckell had also painted a Self-Portrait (1891) based on a restricted brownish-grey palette and crealy contoured areas emphasising the inwardness of the artist. Enckell showed his paintings in the autumn exhibition in Finland and

926 A groundbreaking article on symbolist surfaces was that by Reinhold Heller, “Concerning Symbolism,” 146-153. Specific conservation work and media information have also been provided by Jirat-Wasiutynski et al., Vincent Van Gogh’s Self-Portrait. Most recently, Silverman, Van Gogh and Gauguin, has offered intriguing new interpretations of the work of these two artists based in part on an understanding of their media and surface differences. Hirsh 2004, 3.

927 Hirsh 2004, 4.

928 Generally speaking e.g. the Impressionists never used black. Grey, transparent grey is, however, found in their work. Grey has been considered the “very antithesis of colour”. Riley 1995, 72-73.

929 Gage uses these terms in discussing Seurat’s art and in respect of Puvis de Chavannes. Gage 1999, 200.


they affected many Finnish artists. Some were shocked by the simplified palette but others, like Halonen, soon followed.

What is important to note is that there were also other Finnish artists such as Helene Schjerbeck who was not part of the young group of artists of the 1890s but who used an ascetic palette in her works from 1894 onwards. The influence Schjerbeck received from studying the frescoes of Fra Angelico in the San Marco monastery has been mentioned earlier. Florence made a strong impact on her and she turned away from naturalist expression towards a more subdued palette and a new introspective art which led her to “the path to synthetic”.933 To the question of her new ascetic palette in 1894 I find it interesting that in 1889, just before her trip to Italy, Schjerbeck worked in Bouvet’s atelier. Puvis de Chavannes had visited the atelier to correct the students’ paintings. Salme Sarajas-Korte (1992) finds no influence from Puvis de Chavannes’ contact,934 but I do not believe that Schjerbeck’s enthusiasm for the Botticelli frescoes in the Louvre in 1888 and this contact can be ignored even though, after her first trip to Italy, her palette does not change that much. It nevertheless shows a change from a strict naturalist mode to a more softer surface and subjective approach. Also, Konttinen has pointed out that Schjerbeck herself mentioned that one of her teachers in Paris was in fact Puvis de Chavannes.935 It is thus interesting to compare her Self-Portrait (1895) or more precisely the background of the Self-Portrait which clearly reflects Puvis de Chavannes’s palette. It is evident that from 1894 onwards a completely new process is taking place towards an ascetic and atmospheric haziness and vaporousness of the Fiesole landscape. The even more ascetic Going to Church (1895–1900, fig. 29) shows the same kind of restricted palette even though the subjects are very different. I would argue that Schjerbeck, although a member of the older generation, was part of the colour-conscious group of Finnish artists who explored the possibilities of manipulating the palette as the means of early modern art.

As has been shown, of all the artists to develop colour ascetism only Eugène Carrière used an extreme form of total monochromacy which was also a painting technique that he himself had developed.936 In Carrière’s monochromatic work one can find both landscapes and human figures, where the painting is created using one colour and the base canvas. It should be noted that these paintings are not studies but finished works. Carrière’s mystic art, fantômes synthétiques,937 was created also by contrasts, but with a very different soft, sweeping technique usually with two

933 Helene Schjerbeck’s letter to Ada Thilén 16.7.1911, ÅAB.
935 Konttinen 2004, 146-147.
936 Carrière developed this technique also in prints. See, for example, Carrière catalogue 1996, 212-213.
colours – brown and ivory or black and white. Carrière went furthest of all and painted canvases with only one dark colour, the light base being the light colour which glows through where needed. This monochromatic painting, which was the most extreme colour technique, was adopted by Enckell, who used instead of oils, black watercolour and a light coloured paper as the ‘other colour’. In my opinion, the turn towards colour – when ‘material’ became a part of the content – was also the main signifier of Modernism in Finnish and in European art. It is interesting to note how these two colour practices – colour ascetic and synthetist colour – shared two contending approaches to pictorial practice with a paradoxical shared goal: to achieve spiritual ends through the plastic means of pigment, canvas, and in some cases primer. Their quest for sacrality and spirituality immerses them in developing stylistic practices to dematerialise the physical surface of the canvas as much as possible, aiming for ‘hypostasis’, by ascetic or synthetist colour and by emulating the matte permeation of the fresco which they saw as the true painting. They sought to efface the distance between a deficient material world and the ineffable world of dream and the divine. It is evident that ascetic colour was developed to express a new kind of aesthetic language in art. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters this ‘dissolution from the real world’ towards an immaterial spirituality was created in painting especially by ascetic colour.

3.3.1 SUBJECITY AND INTIMACY – MAGNUS ENCKELL, EERO JÄRNEFELT, HELENE SCHJERFBECK AND ELLEN THESEFF

Do I like grey – this is what I have painted most, white, grey, black, recently now I have tried to add colour

(Helene Schjerfbeck 1916)

During his studies in Paris at the beginning of the 1890s Magnus Enckell landed in the midst of the symbolist art world. When Enckell travelled to Paris for the first time in spring 1890, he enrolled at the Académie Julian at a time when the Nabis tradition and Paul Sérusier’s Synthetism were major topics of discussions. Riikka Stewen (2000) has pointed out that Enckell later kept in touch with some Nabi

938 von Bonsdorff 2000, 70-76, 84-90.
939 Silverman points to this aspect with Gauguin but I see it as relevant to all the artists in question. Silverman 2000, 6. I have brought this aspect to the fore in my master’s thesis.
33. Ellen Thesleff *Portrait of the Artist’s Mother* (1896). Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 44.5 cm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. Photo: Kari Soinio, Finnish National Gallery, CAA
artists such as Maurice Denis, Edouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard,\textsuperscript{42} and probably heard about the Nabis in the Académie Julian and while socialising in artist circles. After being in Paris for only a couple of months he wrote home stunned by the new exciting, mystical art form which had consumed the entire city at that time. He writes that “one cannot escape the new philosophy, a completely new art form has been born. It is everywhere; in the cafés, on the streets in every conversation.”\textsuperscript{43} It is clear that Enckell came to realise that Symbolism was more than just a new idiom in painting: it was a new philosophy of life that was reflected in the various fields of art which required a thorough change in the ideals of art.

As we will see, before the end of the year the young artist’s ideas on the essential nature of art had undergone a complete change. In Paris Magnus Enckell was influenced by many sources: literature,\textsuperscript{44} music,\textsuperscript{45} of course, as well as by the amazingly diverse cornucopia of art open to him there. By the following autumn he had produced the first of what Sarajas-Korte calls his “new style” paintings.\textsuperscript{46} Enckell’s first six months in Paris were highly significant for his development as an artist: the flood of new influences was considerable and before the onset of summer the young artist was suffering from depression and a lack of confidence in his own ability. It was around this time that he painted the small, grey-brown-toned \textit{Self-portrait} (1891, City of Tampere) which became the first example of his new symbolist art and also, as I have argued, his first colour ascetic painting.\textsuperscript{47} It should be noted that Sarajas-Korte (1966) suggests that the artist’s depression was attributable to ascetic expression.\textsuperscript{48} The portrait shows a young, serious, perhaps shy artist looking into the distance. The composition leans on a diagonal line and the light is just on the left side on the face. The palette is very sparse, only white, brown and black are used. The warm tone of the brown, which caught Edelfelt’s notice, is gleaming from behind but not so much as in \textit{Breton Woman} (1891, Private collection). The brushstrokes are still vaguely visible but the contours emphasise the simplicity of the painting. It is like a statement of the new beginning of an ascetic art which continued in Enckell’s oeuvre more or less until the turn of the

\textsuperscript{42} Enckell’s Swedish friend Ivan Agüéli fraternised with Gauguin, as did Blomstedt and Halonen who were Gauguin’s pupils in 1894, but we do not know if Enckell ever met Gauguin. Stwen 2000, 115; For the artist circles of Gauguin see Gutman-Hanhivaara 2008, 88-101.

\textsuperscript{43} Puokka 1949, 57.

\textsuperscript{44} Enckell is known to have read i.a. Dante, Goethe, Musset, Hugo, Poe and Baudelaire. Sigurd Frosterus’s unpublished study on Enckell. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 63. From his childhood he had also written poetry. Puokka 1949, 28-31.

\textsuperscript{45} Enckell is known to have admired Beethoven and Wagner in particular. Sigurd Frosterus’s unpublished study on Enckell. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 63. As a child he displayed a talent for music. His skills as a pianist developed to such an extent that he considered a career as a musician. Puokka 1949, 28-31.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Self-portrait} (1891); \textit{Breton Woman} (1891), Sarajas-Korte 1966,63.

\textsuperscript{47} Sarajas-Korte 1966, 64-65; von Bonsdorff 2000, 84-87.

\textsuperscript{48} Sarajas-Korte 1966, 64-65.
century when from 1904 he gave himself completely to the bright palette of the neo-Impressionist movement.949

The first of Enckell’s colour ascetic art was painted during summer 1891 in Quimper, Brittany.950 It was a natural choice since Brittany had been a place to visit for many Nordic artists since the 1870’s and it now acquired an almost magical reputation as the birthplace of synthetist and symbolist art. The Pont-Aven school had begun there and virtually everyone at the Académie Julien had heard of Sérusier and Nabis art. The Nabis still continued to congregate in Brittany each summer, staying very near to where Enckell was living in the summer of 1891. Brittany had a major impact on the young artist who was fascinated by the religious and mystical atmosphere of the region. As he wrote in a letter to his mother, his attention was drawn to ancient stone crosses, churches, old construction styles and the ancient religious customs of the inhabitants. In style his summer painting, Breton Woman (1891), is a logical successor to Self-portrait. The minimalist painting differs totally from the earlier works he had painted in Finland. Sarajas-Korte considers these two ascetic paintings as deliberate but unoriginal and unsure interim period works.951 Stewen states that “Enckell’s painting followed a certain academic conventionality” and he was not tempted by Impressionism or Naturalism.952

In my view, however, and what is important to note, these paintings mark the start of an entirely new colour concept in Enckell’s work. One can find in them all the influences of the new symbolist art: flat two-dimensionalism, holistic minimalisation, integrated treatment of surfaces, emphasis of outline and explicitly the use of ascetic colours. It should be noted that when Albert Edelfelt saw the painting he commented interestingly on the new use of colours:

I think that your new works display good draughtsmanship but they are slightly too monochrome. Self-portrait held the most appeal for me. As I said, you should be careful of being too monochromatic. In particular, you need to forget your reddish-violet general tone.953

Evidently Edelfelt did not like the pale reddish-blue shade à la Puvis de Chavannes which gleamed through the black, white, grey and brown colours. Edelfelt’s criticism was understandable as the painting differed from naturalist painting tradition

949 It should be noted that in 1904 Enckell was involved in organising the Belgian and French Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist art exhibition in Helsinki with the Belgian A.W. Finch. von Bonsdorff 2002, 256-257, 260.
950 Brsec, Quimper. Magnus Enckell’s letter, 2.10.1891. No.22, HUL.
951 Puokka 1949, 59; Saraja-Korte 1966, 175.
952 Stewen 2000, 115.
953 Edelfelt’s letter to Enckell, 15.12.1891, HUL.

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precisely in this new reduced and ascetic colour use. As Sarajas-Korte points out, what Edelfelt considered strange and inadequate was, in fact, the basis of Enckell’s new art.\textsuperscript{954} I would, however, argue that colour was no longer an element imitating nature but a non-mimetic and autonomous element and the creator of overall harmony and atmosphere of the painting. Also Enckell’s young artist colleagues living in Finland found his work strange. The most interesting comment is from Blomstedt who astutely observed in a letter written in November 1891 what other artists were lacking in understanding: “—– his drawings are excellent but his paintings strange. He has painted an old Breton woman using only two or three colours; he says nowadays that there are no colours in Nature!”\textsuperscript{955} It is interesting that for Blomstedt too the colour ascetic palette was the most difficult element to accept.

Even though it seems that Enckell was at first alone in adopting the colour ascetist palette, the works of Enckell’s close friend Theleff from 1892 show a similar enthusiasm for an ascetic colour scheme. It took a couple of years for Halonen to use an ascetic palette. It is somewhat surprising that under the influence of Gauguin, the works of summer 1894 also show a clear turn towards colour-conscious art but only in \textit{Rowan Tree} (1894, fig. 16) does Halonen use stronger colours reminiscent of Gauguin’s palette. Other works from that summer point to a more subdued palette as in \textit{Sunday in a Crofter’s Cottage} (1894, fig. 14), which is constructed using a hazy brown-grey tonalism. The notion of frozen time - the \textit{attente} - is also evident in this painting. It is interesting that Gauguin’s influence is more general than the imitation of his formal achievements. Halonen’s \textit{Sunday in a Crofter’s Cottage} (1894) may be considered the first of his monumental and decorative paintings. Especially the clear contours and homogeneity of soft brown-greyish colours harmonise the everyday subject and the synthetic figures, forming a whole. The shift from the naturalistic monumental size paintings of earlier years is clear. Halonen’s breakthrough painting \textit{Reapers} (1891), on the other hand, is executed in a precise, reportage-like manner with strong light and shadow effect and expressive brushwork showing influence from Jules Bastien-Lepage.\textsuperscript{956} Thus even though Halonen uses the same motif – peasant life – for \textit{Sunday in a Crofter’s Cottage}, his treatment of subject and form is entirely different in its total stillness and symbolist \textit{attente}, reminiscent of Khnopff’s arrested and enigmatic figures. Here Halonen has created the mood by

\textsuperscript{954} Sarajas-Korte 1966,176
\textsuperscript{955} Enckell’s letter home written on 9.11.1891. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 67.
\textsuperscript{956} Halonen’s \textit{Reapers} (1891) shows the strong influence of Jules Bastien-Lepage’s (1848–1884) way of monumentalising peasant folk and a working theme. Since Naturalism was new in Finland, this was also the perfect moment for an artist like Halonen, with his strong farming background, to rise to the fore. Even so, it was not easy for a poor young man from Savo to battle his way into the select ranks of the country’s professional artists. von Bonsdorff 2008, 14-17.
the static poses of the figures who gaze into eternity, emphasised by the overall colour harmony of soft brown and grey.

Interestingly, Halonen can also be seen as exploring the modern Baudelairean theme in his *Sunday in a crofter's cottage*. Highly aware of his background as the painter of the people he has chosen special subject matter for his first monumental work. The painting depicts what Baudelaire called 'modern heroism', which Berman (1997) explains emerges in conflict, in a situation of conflict that pervades everyday life in the modern world. Baudelaire gives examples from bourgeois life as well as from fashionable high and low life. Berman (1997) notes in this context that Balzac, the one artist in Baudelaire's gallery of modern heroes, does not strive to distance himself from ordinary people, but rather to plunge deeper into their life than any previous artist in order to come up with a vision of that life's hidden heroism. This 'modern heroism' is found in many Finnish paintings from naturalistic to monumental artworks where peasants worked with grace and dignity. Particularly in Halonen's decorative works these dignified, static and sublimated peasants were presented almost as 'holy people'.

In autumn 1891 Enckell had returned from Brittany to Paris. On his return to Finland he began working on a new series of paintings of boys and portraits; this was the start of a period which both Puokka and Sarajas-Korte call Enckell's "master era". As Stewen (2000) points out, quite a lot has been written in Finnish art history about Enckell's works from 1892–94. The last of them, painted in January 1894 and titled *The Awakening* or *Le Réveil*, has often been singled out. But what are the actual features in Enckell's art that makes these works so interesting and debated? Is it their subject or mode that stands out? The uneasiness of young boys depicted in symbolist mode or their innovative use of new mediums of watercolour and pencil or charcoal? I would argue that there is no one answer but the intriguing aspect in these works is their modern mode: a symbolist ambiguous subject and their innovative form.

There are ten works which formed a complete period in Enckell's art, its common factors being simplified form and ascetic colour range which, from the greyish tones of his earlier works, gave way increasingly clearly to contrasting black and white, light and dark, as in the painting *Boy Resting (Reclining Boy, 1892, fig. 4)* and *The Awakening* (1894, fig. 5). If *Breton Woman* (1891) had been influenced by

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958 Berman 1997, 144.
959 This aspect of holiness in Halonen's subjects is also mentioned by Waenerberg. See Waenerberg 2001, 222-225.
961 Stewen 2000, 115.
962 Puokka gives the year as 1893. Puokka 1949, 67, 71.
Puvis de Chavannes’ tonal palette, the paintings of adolescent boys and the portraits were inspired more by the distinct outlines and strong contrasts of Manet’s black and white palette. Enckell’s bold and ascetic *Awakening* was the last as well as the most impressive of the series of these paintings. A young boy, who has just reached the age of puberty, has woken up and is seated naked on the bed with its white sheets, looking down with a grave expression, lost in thought. The bent position of his body conveys more than the impression of the daily habit of getting out of bed; this motif, frequently used by symbolist artists, is more complex; for as Stewen notes, puberty and sexual awakening/loss of innocence are subjects treated by many artists. Enckell’s painting may also be seen as a personal outburst of emotion. The painting has also a relationship with Edvard Munch’s *Puberty* (1894/95) which depicts a young girl sitting on the bed-side looking as confused as the young boy in Enckell’s canvas. Munch’s painting on the other hand is done using a different technique and colours. The anxiety in *Puberty* is emphasised by vivid brushstrokes and multiple colours, while Enckell’s *Awakening* states the ambiguity of static stillness and mystery. Also *Puberty’s* girl is staring at the viewer while Enckell’s adolescent boy is avoiding eye contact and is wrapped in his own world of thought. In my opinion, the “black and white” colour world creates a powerful melancholic and charged atmosphere as the youth wakes up to an oppressive world.

The impact of Manet’s Olympia can be clearly seen in the treatment of the motif as well as in the ascetic palette and emphasis of flatness and form. As in Olympia, there are now distinct light or shadow effects or smooth chiaroscuro in the treatment of the skin. The painting is built on stark contrasts on black and white, dark and light colour; the emphasis on the pale skin surrounded by the white sheets and the minimal white background illustrate Enckell’s skilful colour technique. The form emphasised by the distinct dark outlines and the subtle shades stand out from the pale surface. The management of few colours are striking. The clear diagonal composition of the painting is emphasised by the lower section’s horizontal black and the vertical reddish-brown area (column) on the right.

The importance of the new mediums and the innovative use of colour for these works must be stressed. By carefully selecting and manipulating their media and by creating subtle suggestions of colour and line to establish a strikingly ambivalent sense of place, artists were able to make art that was a tangible image of an idea. As

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964 Like other Finns he had become tired of the decadent atmosphere in Paris in winter 1893-94. “Nothing, nothing but the lowest eroticism, and nothing more”. Sarajas-Korte 1998, 32. Another reason may have been his contemplation of his own homosexuality. See also Stewen 2000, 46, 48; Kalha 2000, 104-110.

965 Different interpretations have been proposed by Reitala and Sarajas-Korte who see the young boy waking to a bright future and spirituality (white background). Sarajas-Korte 1966, 190-192; Reitala 1977, 124.

Hirsh (2004) points out, when all these means were applied together viewers were supposed to be transported to a new reality, that of an ideal, without ever falling into the mistaken idea that they were simply observing an image of life. When added to the symbolist subject — deliberately selected images and objects that in turn were intended to lead the viewer further into the realm of ideas — a release from the contemporary world (as we shall see, the city world) was made possible.967

It is important to notice, that from a colour ascetic standpoint, the almost monochromatic Boy Resting (1892, fig. 4)968 and Death’s Walking (1896, fig. 6) are key works in Enckell’s turn-of-the-century production. In their achromatic black-and-whiteness they represent the culmination of a colour ascetism of strong contrasts. It should be mentioned that these water-colours are, nevertheless, paintings; in both works other colours, including blue, brown and yellow, are used sparingly. In both, the brush-strokes are visible, as is a distinct painterly touch. Enckell was the only turn-of-the-century colour ascetist in whose work pure monochromy may be found; Portrait of Toini von Rehausen (1893, Turku Art Museum) is basically painted in only one colour. Enckell has ingeniously used transparent black water-colour and soft charcoal to create minimalist subtle shades of black, with the light brown cardboard base acting as the “second colour”.969 Although this portrait is his only truly monochromatic work, Enckell has also made partial use of the same “base-colour technique” in Seine Net Weaver (1894), in which the palid skin of the model’s face is, in fact, the colour of the base paper. The artist has, however, painted the background a warm brown, which frames and emphasises the model’s ascetically fine features and soulful face. In this work too Enckell has combined drawing and painterly elements, using water-colour, gouache and charcoal and softening the outlines with a freer, transparent brushstroke.

A continuity of Enckell’s intense colour ascetism can be seen in Portrait of Madeleine Jouvray (1893–94)970 and Seine Net Weaver (1894), both of which were painted in Paris and show a persistence in his exploration of the restricted palette.971 After his trip to Italy in 1894 the subject matter changes and Enckell also starts to use a brighter palette, especially in his mythological themes, such as The Fantasy

967 Hirsh 2004, 6.
968 In Enckell’s Boy Resting (1892) one should note that there is a hint of ice-blue in the boy’s eyes.
969 Only in the eyes and brooch has he used a touch of white paint, which I believe are corrections. von Bonsdorff 2000, 89-90.
971 In Sarajas-Korte’s opinion Enckell’s (Symbolist) art had already reached an impasse. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 205-206. I find this somewhat ‘evolutionary’ in the sense that Enckell, in my opinion, used his symbolist themes in his later years.
Although, under the influence of Italy, Enckell’s art began to display a new lightness and sentimentality, colour asceticism was still strongly apparent in his work, for example, in the almost monochromatic Death’s Walking (1896). Dark immensity, profundity and angst have given way to a more subtle, painterly touch. As the century neared its end Enckell began to distance himself from asceticism but it is interesting that his trip to Spain in 1900 led him to a brief return to a colour ascetic palette, particularly in his Woman Weeping, Sorrow (1903) and Portrait of Mother (1904, Ateneum Art Museum). Sarajas-Korte (1966), on the other hand, believes that Enckell’s symbolist phase was over at the end of the 1890s. Although the artist’s palette became brighter as early as 1894–95 this did not mark a complete break with colour asceticism and dark-toned paintings can be found in his work during the early years of the 20th century. From the outset Enckell was the most programmed of all Finnish artists in his symbolist efforts but for him, too, it is interesting that Symbolism did not signify the same as colour asceticism. Alongside his colour-ascetic paintings one can constantly find works painted in bright, rich colours. It is crucial to note that Enckell chose an ascetic palette for works which as such were already highly abstract in motif. In his art the transfer to medium becomes topical. Thoughts and emotions are depicted in severe minimalist style and the works reflect a profound contemplation which is underlined using colour ascetic means. In its black and whiteness Enckell’s colour asceticism was first and foremost symbolist art, achieved with strong minimalist outlines, based both technically and content-wise on a new form of painting.

Enckell’s fellow students included Thesleff, whose relationship with Parisian Symbolism was, from the outset, more independent than Enckell’s. Like Enckell’s art Thesleff’s also underwent a fundamental change in Paris. She rejected the outdoor painting value theories adopted by Gunnar Berndtson and in her earliest paintings began using ascetic colours. On her arrival in Paris in 1891 she discovered her own path and her own artistic style in symbolist sources. The art critic Kasimir Leino considers the symbolist style of painting characteristic of her “poetic expression”. Symbolist philosophy complemented man’s role in the cosmic harmony and the artist’s intuitive attempt to reach this harmony. Thesleff does not seem to have considered fantasy motifs or literary content. For her the most typical motifs were ascetic, grey and dark-coloured landscapes and human figures. The melancholy of these dream-like paintings was both personal and symbolist in nature. In common with many other Finnish artists, nature was one of Thesleff’s main sources of

972 Enckell, Fantasy (1895), gouache on paper, 63.5 x 41.5, Mikkeli Art Museum, Airio collection.
974 Suomen Taidellijain syysnäyttely II. Päivälehti, 24th November 1894.
inspiration. Her sensitive lyrical landscapes were created at her home in Murole, whose poetic, misty landscapes she painted repeatedly.\(^{976}\)

From the outset, Thesleff’s paintings from the 1890s have been compared to the hazy paintings of Carrière. The artist herself rejected the comparison, stressing the importance of Manet as a model for young artists at the end of the 19th century. Manet was considered to have created an amazing overall plan for clear synthetist form and painting with a simplified palette.\(^{977}\) Despite the artist’s own comments, Carrière’s soft misty forms and motifs have considerably more in common with Thesleff’s works than Manet’s art of ‘bold contrasts’. On the other hand, Manet was the leading model and guide of the Finnish “Modernists”. What Thesleff and Carrière shared was a feeling for the intangible, born of the misty, dark and light shades of strong contrasts. If, for instance, one compares Thesleff’s *Portrait of the Artist’s Mother* (1896, fig. 33) with Carrière’s *Portrait of Paul Verlaine* (1890)\(^{978}\) one cannot help but notice similarities in the use of colour, motif and atmosphere. The only difference is in brush-stroke technique: Thesleff’s work features a characteristically strong, sometimes thick texture drawn with a thin pencil line, whereas Carrière’s trademark is a broad, erased, thin, partly transparent surface.

In Thesleff’s work from the 1890s two distinct colour techniques can be seen; one is a palette based mainly on brown, black and white, the other the “harmonisation” of a tonal palette of white and grey. The first technique points to Carrière, the second to Puvis de Chavannes. I consider the term, “black colourism”, used i.a. by Sarajas-Korte for the first technique misleading.\(^{979}\) The dark colour used by Thesleff is always a “softened” colour, not pure black but generally a warm brown. Only for outlines does she occasionally use black.\(^{980}\) Carrière too uses mainly a warm, soft earth brown. In Thesleff’s work, painted using the second technique, an ascetic tonal palette is softened by one colour (white or grey),\(^{981}\) which is derived from the mural art technique developed by Puvis de Chavannes.

The first example of Thesleff’s tonalism is *Thyra Elisabeth* (1892, Helsinki Art Museum), painted in symbolist and pre-raphaelite mode, in which one begins to see the overall harmony of the colour palette, where all the colours “are shaded” to harmonise with one another. Whistler referred to this as “keynote” technique.\(^{982}\)
The dreamlike atmosphere of the painting, built on shades of reddish brown and yellow, is captivating; like a medieval Madonna, the young woman is dreaming, holding a flower in her hand, her eyes closed, distant and inspiring. Everything points to the emphasis of the intangible: the curve of the line, the transparency of the surface, the model’s spiritual expression. In particular, the delicate grey colour of the model’s dress and the soft reddish-brown of her face and hair envelop the work in a hazy atmosphere. It is unlikely that, without this premeditated colour palette, the painting would convey such a spiritual intensity which is further emphasised by the frame, the curved, altar-like upper part and gilt of which are suited to the colouring. In the same year Thesleff painted the subtly coloured *Thyra Elisabeth* which is already a strongly colour ascetic work. *Old Woman Wearing a Headscarf* (1892, Private collection) painted in strong dark and light contrasts show that, although Thesleff has only just painted her “first symbolist” work, colour ascetism was already powerfully present in her work. *Old Woman Wearing a Headscarf*, painted in ascetic, pure colours, is a bold execution by the young artist. The only pale details in the otherwise dark-coloured painting are the light falling on the old woman’s face, partly turned-away from the viewer, and arm. This is also typical of Carrière who often focuses “the light” on the arm.

Thesleff’s next trip abroad at the beginning of 1894 was to Italy, the home of Early Renaissance art and a country much admired by the Finnish artist. In Florence Thesleff found Botticelli, the love of her time in Paris and whose work she had admired in the Louvre. She strove increasingly towards great, poetic and sublime art. The spiritual art of Fra Angelico also inspired her to copy the frescoes in the San Marco monastery. It is interesting that *Portrait of Ingeborg von Alfthan* (1894, Ateneum Art Museum) brought fresh nuances to Thesleff’s colour ascetism of subtle, soft contrasts. In the opinion of Ahtola-Moorhouse (1995) it is precisely the atmosphere of Florence that brings a new rose colour to the artist’s palette, which differs from the colour ascetic series of blue-grey and rigid black-brownish paintings. Not surprisingly, one can find a small portrait of a young boy, where she has experimented with tempera and here the colours are even more softer with tones of pale pink and grey. On the other hand, this “reddishness”,
of which Edelfelt spoke in his letter to Enckell in 1891, was explicitly linked to the influences of Puvis de Chavannes’ art. A second significant factor is its specific “faces in shadow” composition. Like Carrière, Thesleff had, in earlier paintings, tended to emphasise a pale face against a dark background. In this painting, however, she chose a lightish-grey background, leaving the face in the shadow of the slightly bent figure.\footnote{Ahtola-Moorhouse 1995, 224.} The unusual choice has succeeded and emphasises the withdrawn and intense atmosphere; the subject is unwilling to reveal her feelings to the viewer, keeping these to herself.

Whether or not the reason was Italy or the spiritual atmosphere of the monastery frescoes, Thesleff’s new colour ascetism reached its peak in subsequent years. The totally dark-toned \textit{Self-portrait} (1894) painted in Florence, the utterly tonal light grey opaline \textit{Thyra Thesleff} (1895) or \textit{Violinist} (1896, fig. 32) and \textit{Portrait of the Artist’s Mother} (1896, fig. 33) are all examples of this art, dominated by a sensually sensitive and elegant colour palette; the ascetic palette is clearly vital to the fundamental nature of the painting. Thesleff has used \textit{subtle contrasts} of dark and light shades in these colour ascetic works. The pale face, turned to one side, stands out clearly against the dark brown background framed by the model’s blackish-brown hair and dress. Thesleff has not omitted the light falling on the otherwise subtly painted work as she has in the more finished portrait \textit{Ingeborg von Alfthan}, in which she concentrates on depicting her model solely by means of ascetic colour shades.

Thesleff was the only Finnish artist to develop tonality as a technique. Although we can see that Halonen used a tonal technique in some of his paintings such as \textit{Sunday in the Crofter’s Cottage} (1894, fig. 14), however, Thesleff went much further with the technique and created a textured, toned surface in her paintings. It is somewhat reminiscent of Claude Monet’s \textit{envelope} and his London series or the Notre Dame Cathedral series. The harmony achieved with gentle shades softened with white or light grey was unusual and successful. In \textit{Aspens} (1893, fig. 31) and \textit{Thyra Thesleff} (1895) the artist has, with a light tonal palette, created the colour scale of the entire work. In the opaline grey painting \textit{Thyra Thesleff} in particular she has concentrated solely on different shades of white and pale grey for the shimmering of many undertone colours from which form is completely absent. This painting, which is built on tones, is purely musical, immaterial, colour ascetic art in which form, light and shade have vanished, surrendering totally to colour and texture. In Finnish art Thesleff’s colour ascetic work is individualist and in its immaterialness unique. Already then, in her 1890s ascetic works colour was the main force in her paintings and content was an analytical element.
15. Pekka Halonen *After the Music Lesson* (1894). Oil on canvas, 75 x 52 cm, Signe and Ane Gyllenberg Foundation, Helsinki. Photo: Tuusula Museum
Halonen likewise used the ‘musical aspect’ in his art. The old Karelian man in _The Kantele Player_ (1892) also had a personal connection with Halonen. The shamanistic engrossment of the unknown rune-singer with the music of the kantele reflects some emotional bond between the musician and the painter, who himself greatly loved, and played, the instrument. 990

“As he plucks his battered kantele with his work-worn fingers, everything in the room seems to be in harmony. - - - And when the old fellow starts up a favourite tune, a strange expression comes over his whole face and his brightened eyes seem to be gazing back through the decades to the times and dreams of his youth, and all the adventures that life had to offer. It is such a moving thing to see that you always have to turn away to hide the tears in your own eyes.” 991

In this painting Halonen has brilliantly captured the musician’s expression, as if gazing into another world, and the mystical essence of the music. This work diverges greatly from the numerous other national romantic depictions of rune-singers being produced at the time by, for instance, Edelfelt and Järnefelt. 992 _The Kantele Player_ (1892, Ateneum Art Museum)993 is one of Halonen’s most intensive figure paintings. The artist concentrates on the old man playing, and the shadowy dark interior of the room emphasises the intimate mood. With its personal touch, this painting differs from typical ethnographic depictions. It is an interesting mix of the mystical mood preferred by Symbolism and a realistic portrayal of the people. Halonen’s marked identification with the old man in his trance-like state is an expression of sympathy. He was moved by the old man, who relived his memories as he played. 994 Both Thesleff’s and Halonen’s paintings are expressions of musicality to which they referred in subject and form but most of all in tonal colour harmony which, as Baudelaire spelled out in his critique of the Salon of 1846, has been called musicality:

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990 Halonen was taught to play by his mother Wilhelmiina Halonen, who was a skillful kantele player. Halonen even built himself a kantele in Paris.

991 Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen 1892, CAA. Lindström 1957, 63-64.


The artist’s creation of harmonious as well as expressive effects by line and colour, comparable to what the composer creates with rhythm and notes and the poet with prosody.

(Baudelaire in 1846)

As Richard Thomson (2012) states, some of the most important innovations in European painting between the 1870s and the First World War were stimulated in the growing momentum towards non-representational work which developed during the 1890s and came to a climax in the years just before 1914. There were various reasons for this. Many artists wanted to seek a treatment of motif and a choice of chromatics which, by contrast, evoked parallels with other, less materialistic, forms of expression such as the musical and the spiritual. The most obvious example of this ideology was Whistler. By drawing analogies between his paintings, music and poetry, and by using titles such as Nocturne with its evocation of Chopin’s piano music or Harmony with its cross-disciplinary resonance, Whistler distanced his work from descriptive naturalism.

Musical references were quite common in art of the 1890s. However, it is surprising how many of the artists who practiced art with a spiritual attitude and especially with the synaesthetic idea of musicality, were also skilful players of musical instruments. Halonen played the Finnish national instrument, the kantele, and it is known that he asked his wife Maija to play the piano for inspiration when painting. Blomstedt was an excellent violinist and considered it as a career. Enckell played the piano and he too in his youth considered becoming a professional pianist and made references to music. As we can witness from her paintings, Thesleff also played the piano and her family held musical evenings with violin and piano. These artists all surrounded themselves with music and this cannot be a coincidence. They had learned through the ideas of Symbolism and theosophy that music was the highest form of art and the vibration of colour claimed the same aspirations at a higher level.

It can be said that the symbolist approach took in both the present moment and an experience of the divine. For Halonen, this mystical moment is the subject of many works. It is visible for instance in After the Music Lesson (fig. 15) and Sunday in a Crofter’s Cottage (fig. 14), both painted in 1894. The subtlety and musicality are underlined by the restrained palette, with its opal glow: the soft brownish tones and dark shades of the outlines are in complete harmony and exude the static, non-material mood of the works. In the former painting, the young woman’s eyes

996 Whistler only began to add the topographical coda – such as ‘Chelsea’ – to his titles for a retrospective held at the Goupil Gallery, London in 1892. Thomson 2012, 151-154.
997 Sarajas-Korte 1966,189-190; For a general overview on colour and music see Gage 2005, 227-236.
are unfocused, looking inward to eternity and memory; for a moment, the mood is melancholic. The simplified form of the work and the contrasted ascetic colours of dark contours and pale matte surfaces at the same time enforce its intense silence which, in my opinion, conveys the spiritual feeling. It is interesting that Halonen did not adopt Gauguin’s strong, intense synthetic colours for these paintings, but instead used subtle soft shades similar to those in Puvis de Chavannes’ works to present attente. The Symbolist approach aimed to submerge both the present moment and an experience of the divine. In this sense After the Music Lesson (1894) and the theosophic “altarpiece” Three Holy Men in the Forest (1894, fig 13) reveal more of Halonen’s awareness of French Symbolism of the 1890s and the Nabis, such as the work of Maurice Denis.

Do you know what the Wise Men from the East still around today say about our idea of the Bible? One day we read here in a French magazine what some Wise Man from the East thinks about us — for instance how ignorant and childish we are now, and will remain, about the Old Testament as long as we consider religion and science two different things. And as ‘Esoteric Buddhism’ also tells us, religion and science are the same, and can’t be separated in any way. That God is omnipresent in the universe.

(Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen 1894)998

Halonen’s intensive study of esoteric theosophy brought about a radical change in his views on life. He and Blomstedt together studied A. P. Sinnett’s book Esoteric Buddhism, whose teachings they considered “the purest, greatest possible truth. – It is so profound and strange that we can only read a couple of pages a night, then discuss them, or we wouldn’t be able to digest it all.”999

One Finnish artist who developed her art mostly on the muted and ascetic colour scheme and who in her lifetime was compared to Whistler was Helene Schjerfbeck. She spent most of the 1880s and 1890s studying and travelling in Paris, Brittany and St Ives.1000 In the 1890s Schjerfbeck’s art underwent a major change. From being an ardent painter in the naturalist mode, she turned to a softer, almost misty treatment, and reduced her colours to black, earth tones and white in order to create spiritual or mystic connotations. At the beginning of the 1900s her art simplified to near abstraction. With Whistler Schjerfbeck shared a great admiration for the Spanish

998 Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen, May 1894, CAA.
999 Pekka Halonen to Maija Mäkinen 1894, CAA; A. P. Sinnet De invigdes lära, Stockholm 1887.
1000 On a personal note, Schjerfbeck was also engaged for a couple of years to an unknown English artist, but unfortunately destroyed all the letters in which his name was mentioned so that it still remains a mystery. During Schjerfbeck’s life-time her art was considered too modern and she had to struggle to survive, but today she is Finland’s most celebrated artist.
Old Masters, Rembrandt and Hals, whose works she copied to finance her stays in Europe. And like Whistler, she continued to refer to the Old Masters throughout her life.\footnote{Late works such as \textit{El Greco’s Self-portrait} (1944) and \textit{My Earthly Madonna} (1944) show both admiration of El Greco and an ascetic palette. See Schjerbeck catalogue 1992, 290.} Interestingly, it shows that Schjerbeck’s inspiration for exploring colour ascetism derives from a wide spectrum of sources.

It is claimed by many Schjerbeck scholars from Einar Reuter onwards that after isolating herself in the small town of Hyvinkää from June 1902 she found her special “modernist style”, although her contacts abroad ceased. Both Leena Ahtola-Moorhouse (2007) and Aud-Kristin Kongsbro Haldorsen (2002) call Schjerbeck ambivalent and the period (1890–1902), which has often been sidelined in the studies of Schjerbeck, the “most uneven and fragmentary of her career”.\footnote{Kongsbro Haldorsen 2002; Ahtola-Moorhouse 2007, 25-26.} I would argue, however, as I have said earlier in this study, that the profound change developing her individual mode actually starts when from 1890 onwards Schjerbeck begins to explore with colour and manipulate her palette using different mediums, such as tempera which she considers as ‘ideal’.\footnote{This is also noticed by Konttinen 2004, 238.} Interestingly, her distinctive style and content evolve from Naturalism through studying frescoes, Old Masters and exploring non-mimetic colour and the simplicity of artists such as Whistler and Manet. It is important to note that also Schjerbeck uses this as the basis of her art.\footnote{I studied this important aspect in my master’s thesis. von Bonsdorff 2000, 104-108, 112-114.} In my opinion some works such as \textit{Girl from St.Ives} (1890) recall Carrière’s portraits. As Konttinen (2004) states, although Schjerbeck did not travel so much, it is clear that she increasingly followed international periodicals, mainly French, reading widely about what was going on in international art and corresponding with her colleagues.\footnote{Konttinen 2004, 266-274.}

As Lena Holger (1992) points out, one cannot avoid comparing these works from the early-twentieth century with Whistler’s puritanically ascetic portraits of his mother and Thomas Carlyle. The paintings convey the same quietness; the same peaceful, measured colour surfaces link the two artists.\footnote{Holger refers also to the works of Vilhelm Hammershøi, who likewise used a very sparse palette. Schjerbeck is known to have seen pictures of Whistler’s paintings in the English magazine \textit{The Studio} and the French publication \textit{L’art et les artistes} but she herself denies being influenced by them. Holger 1992, 57.} In Schjerbeck’s \textit{Seamstress (The Working Woman)} (1903/1905, fig. 30)\footnote{The year in the painting is 1903 but Schjerbeck later says it was painted in 1905, see Konttinen 2004, 237.} there is the same type of interior, composition and colour ascetic expression as in the two Whistler works. In fact, I consider that the \textit{Seamstress} bears a closer resemblance to the portrait of Thomas Carlyle which in composition appears to be a more simplified version of this. We do not know if Schjerbeck saw Whistler’s exhibitions in London or his works
in Paris but she herself mentions Whistler several times. Also when we look at her many works, for example Seamstress (fig. 30) or the Schoolgirl (1908, Ateneum Art Museum) it is evident that she was very familiar with Whistler’s Arrangements of Grey and Black, Mother (1871) and the Portrait of Carlyle. Comparing Whistler’s Mother and the Seamstress one can see also the different mood and approach to the model. These Schjerbeck’s paintings are a product of the twentieth century and her anonymous models pose for artistic reasons, whereas Whistler’s models were personified with attributes. Schjerbeck’s art assumed an increasingly simplified form with sweeping taches of oil paint, Whistler’s even stronger sfumato, more liquid paint with his figures stepping out from a completely blackish fog. In some cases Schjerbeck’s technique reminds more of Carrière’s than Whistler’s.

It should be noted that Schjerbeck scholars consider the artist’s move to Hyvinkää and her subsequent solitude as the turning point in her modernist art.1008 In the early years of the twentieth century she produced a series of paintings built on a harmony of black and grey tones with flat, decisive form. These colour ascetic works, for example the Seamstress and a later work Schoolgirl (1908) are among the artist’s finest and best-known paintings. “The path to synthetic”,1009 had led her, via simplification and static calmness, to an increasingly intense and more concrete reduction, which showed the main character of her art – the discovery of the essential. However, it is clear that Schjerbeck’s explorations from the 1880s with fresco art culminating in the 1890s with spirituality, timelessness, transfer to medium and the emphasis on content had become possible through the simplification of form and colour. Colour ascetism, which had already been apparent in the hazy and transparent works of the 1890s, had now, at the beginning of the twentieth century, found its true form. Furthermore, one has to notice, that from here onwards, Schjerbeck’s distinctive style changes little and in the 1920s she went back to the use of a more muted colours,1010 even though after 1908 her colours got significantly brighter. Likewise her repertoire did not change but grew even further with a life-long series of self-portraits. Later she repeated many of her earlier works, for example the Seamstress (1927) and made many works based on Old Masters such as El Greco in the 1920s and 1940s.1011

Whistler was less known to Finnish artists of the turn of the 19th century than for example the French painters, Puvis de Chavannes and Manet, but when studying colour ascetic works it is impossible to overlook his influence. Finns were evidently familiar with his work through the Musée du Luxembourg, Salons and the press.

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1009 Helene Schjerbeck’s letter to Ada Thilén 6.7.1911, Åbo Academy Library Archives, Turku.
1010 Schjerbeck’s later palette shows many colours and is not so ascetic although she uses mixed colours with a subdued and muted palette.
Paintings by Schjerfbeck and Eero Järnefelt have been compared by different art scholars to those of Whistler.\footnote{In respect of Schjerfbeck i.a. Johansson, Sarajas-Korte, Holger. In respect of Järnefelt Wennervirta.} to such a degree that Schjerfbeck was asked about her connection with the American artist. She denied “even liking him” but it is difficult to avoid comparing her paintings, particularly those of the early-20th century, with Whistler since they contain so many similarities from the point of view of motif, composition and specifically colour.\footnote{It seems strange that Schjerfbeck denied any connection with Whistler since both in England and in Paris she had undoubtedly come in contact with the artist’s work, well-known and talked about as they were. She is, moreover, known to have seen Whistler’s work in the English magazine The Studio and the French publication L’Art et les Artistes. E.g. The Artist’s Mother Reading (1902) and At Home, The Artist’s Mother Sewing (1903). Holger 1992, 57.} On the other hand, Konttinen (2004) points out that when Schjerfbeck wrote to Einar Reuter in 1924 she said that “Whistler had brought back the real principals of painting in art”.\footnote{Helene Schjerfbeck’s letter to Einar Reuter 3.5.1924. Reuter Coll. Åbo Akademi Library, Turku. Konttinen 2004, 152-153.}

In Järnefelt’s case his personal relationship with Whistler remains unclear although Wennervirta (1950) indicates that the artist “had been unable to reject the values of his work” and had “unwittingly” changed his technique, moving away in the 1890s from Naturalism towards Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler.\footnote{Wennervirta 1950, 184-185, 234.} Järnefelt’s Portrait of Mathilda Wrede (1896) done in gouache on paper is one of his most innovative portrait works. The ascetic colour range and the subtle translucent surface are reflecting the subject’s delicate and almost sublime pose. She was a known benefactor and a helper of prisoner people. Järnefelt, along with other fellow artists, has successfully combined the content and form.\footnote{von Bonndorf 2000, 101-102.} In the works of both Finnish artists we can find not only in motif but also in the interesting painting technique and specifically in the use of colour. Since Whistler was considerably “ahead of his time”, wielding influence (in the visual arts) long before Symbolism his significance, in so far as the renewal of art and more specifically in the birth of colour ascetism are concerned, should be looked at as a separate occurrence rather than as something related to French Symbolism. Thus it seems that ascetic palette practice was not dependent of a style or movement but was used during a longer period than synthetist colour from the 1860s up to early 1900s.

Every efflorescence [in art] is spontaneous, individual. (...) The artist stems only from himself(...). He stands security only for himself. He dies childless. He has been his own king, his own priest, his own God.

Finally, as these paintings by Finnish artists remind us, it is this need for an inner life and the ability to interpret the contemporary external world as a mere system of signs that could lead to the contemplation of a higher existence that makes the Symbolists so modern. Artists intending to “make visible the invisible,” they sought an art that could imagine and reflect the ideas and ideals of a “higher” world, all expressed through images of the earthly world. Like the Romantics who exerted such a strong influence on them, the modern artists prized the personal, the interior, and the individual. Unlike the Romantics, however, the Symbolists were living in city conditions with unprecedented physical changes accompanying an urban population explosion, so that the system of signs that they were reading was quite new. For the most astute critics of this late-nineteenth-century situation, a crisis was clear: how to maintain individuality, a unique personality, and, most important, an inner life under such conditions was seen as the dilemma of the day.\footnote{Hirsh 2004, 14.}

**3.3.2 THE SPIRITUAL AND MELANCHOLIC LANDSCAPE – MAGNUS ENCKELL, PEKKA HALONEN, EERO JÄRNEFELT, HELENE SCHJERFBECK AND ELLEN THESLEFF**

You can capture so many human thoughts and emotions in a landscape: seriousness, joy, despair, anger. Therein lies the task of the colourist, to delicately trace the form and thought. How clear is not only the sense of wistfulness just before the sunset but also how clear sometimes is the endless despair in a grey forest.

\textit{(Eero Järnefelt in his diary 1895)}\footnote{Eero Järnefelt’s diary, EJA.}

This comment from Eero Järnefelt is close to Charles Blanc in his \textit{Grammaire des arts du dessin} – first published as a series of articles in the \textit{Gazette des Beaux-Arts} from 1860 – where he stressed the necessity for the artist to recompose nature according to his subjectivity, thereby coming somewhat close to Philip Otto Runge’s view:

\textit{What is missing from the spectacle of nature is the essential quality of art, unity: not only does it [nature] change throughout the day, but, within its infinite complexity, its immense confusion, its sublime disorder, it contains and reveals to us aspects that respond to the most conflicting of feelings. While it is able to provoke emotions in man, it is powerless to express them. Only man himself can make them clear,}
palpable and visible, by choosing those features that are scattered around, lost within reality, and by discarding those elements which are alien to his way of thinking and would contradict it.1020

Landscape painting has always held a strong position in Finnish art. As I hope to establish, it was also the genre, along with portraits, that clearly marked the turning point in favour of early modern aspirations. It is interesting that the first paintings executed using an ascetic palette were not allegories or fantasies but rather traditional subjects. The new palette, therefore, did not necessarily bring new subjects to Finnish painting. In this chapter this study will show how the significant break from the long tradition of mimetic representation which had continued until the end of the nineteenth century presented itself in a completely new way with an ascetic colour scheme. As Hirsh (2004) points out this break came into being with the start of a new way of using the palette to signify the artist’s ‘inner vision’. Addressing the inner being, it nonetheless used external, real scenes and objects as expressors. It is thus in their blending of Hofmannsthay’s two impulses that the Symbolists are most modern. While working and living in cities that seemed to be robbing them of their innermost being, they sought an art that could not only speak to their souls, but also help to save them. While undergoing the most traumatic transitions of the new technological, spatial, and social changes of their own real life, they found solace – but not total escape – in fantasy and dream.1021 These patterns emphasised, as we shall see, a fundamental resistance to materiality concordant with symbolist strains of neo-platonism. In Finnish art this immateriality was expressed especially in landscapes.

As in other art this colour-conscious turn was an essential part of the new movement when the Symbolists began, as all their theories affirmed, with the idea or ideal first, and then sought to find in nature some correspondance or “equivalence” that might be used in such a way as to announce that this art object was not a replication of that object in nature but rather a vehicle for recognition and contemplation of a higher reality. The more correspondance artists inspired by Baudelaire tried to achieve, the more some artists aspired to a synaesthetic level to experience the landscape as an affective subject. It is interesting to note that the ‘landscape’ which artists in the 1890s began to explore as a genre turned out to be a much more complex subject for both European and Finnish artists. As to the surroundings of the artists, only by understanding the impressive – and for many oppressive – conditions of the artists’ lives can we begin to understand the full implications of symbolist art which took a new interest in depicting landscape

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1020 As early as 1802, the German artist Philipp Otto Runge argued that landscape as a genre would come to replace history painting. Rapetti 2012, 19; Blanc 2000, 566.
1021 Hirsh 2004, 1.

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– a nature scene or an artist’s vision. As Sharon Hirsh (2004) demonstrates, one important clue to these subtext meanings is their basis in the late-nineteenth-century reassessment of the seemingly oppositional relationship between ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’, of ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’, or even of ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’ in what has been termed the “epoch of apparitions”. These spiritual aspects of the seen and unseen levels were depicted by artists who specifically used the ascetic palette in their landscapes.

It is clear that the emphasis on recreating the artist’s vision rather than reproducing something from nature continued to a new understanding of what could be considered a landscape. It is interesting to note that in landscape painting certain objects needed to be presented in an iconic way to accomplish this transformation from object to art, from thing to evocation. A typical method was the imagery of the estompe, or ‘vaporous’ baudelairean atmospheric conditions such as mist or permeating rain, for example, which could blur lines and envelop the objects in haze that made them less material, more evocative. By these means, it was possible for the artist, to turn not only to traditional romantic images of nature but also to contemporary cities; any object, whether country or urban, held the potential for evocation. Indistinctness or unreality – the most obvious effect created by a blurred or vague line – is especially common in European symbolist art. The spiritual aspect of a landscape was to emphasise the transcendental, mystical and recuperative powers of nature.

But how was this spiritualism in Finnish art demonstrated in landscape painting? As Sixten Ringbom said in his groundbreaking research Sounding Cosmos 1970; “The term ‘spiritualism’ should be taken here in its general philosophical sense and should not be confused with ‘spiritism’ or the belief in communication with departed spirits through media.” Ringbom’s dissertation, which deals with Wassily Kandinsky’s spiritualism in the 1910s and investigates the sources of the theory of non-representational art, also presents a firm historical background on the theosophical movement within the European art world. Although this study concentrates on an earlier period, from the 1860s up to 1900s, it shares the same historical background and context as those from which Kandinsky developed his theories. In this chapter, which focuses on the idea of spiritualism in art from the viewpoint of colour ascetism the key words are musicality, harmony, intimacy, immaterial and mirror image.

Although I have chosen to concentrate on the specific way of using colour in landscape painting, with artists such as Magnus Enckell, Pekka Halonen, Eero Järnefelt, Helene Schjerfbeck and Ellen Thesleff as my examples, this phenomenon

1022 Hirsh 2004, 2.
1023 Hirsh 2004, 3-4.
1024 Ringbom 1970, 16.
of using a non-mimetic ascetic palette was, of course, a widespread phenomenon in European art. These Finnish artists began to use tonal or contrasted ascetic colours especially in landscape painting. Thesleff’s delicate and poetic landscapes represent a unique colour asceticism. She had developed this tonal colour technique and adapted it brilliantly to the pale colours of late winter/early spring. She particularly changed her palette and the small, poetic landscapes like *Aspens* (1893, fig. 31) and *Winter* (1893) are good examples of how these artists transferred to smaller paintings tonality, the reduction of light and shadow to a decorative surface and the silent, meditative mood. Thesleff’s brush technique is also fine and thin. The small *Aspens* painting is a small kakemono, tall and narrow in shape, whose colour world glows in different shades of pale grey, with blue, violet and white tones. The winter landscape is like an intangible image of tree trunks, water and snow in vertical and horizontal form in different shades of white. The ascetic tonal palette was recognised by Edelfelt when *Aspens* was exhibited in autumn 1893. He wrote to Enckell that it was “elated and fine à la Puvis de Chavannes”\(^{1025}\) presumably precisely because of the tonality which resembles Puvis de Chavannes’s pale palette. Thesleff herself did not appreciate this comment even though her technique is based on the tonal mixing of mother tones of the French artist’s “couleur crayeuse”\(^{1026}\) and she is known to have admired Puvis de Chavannes’s Sorbonne murals.

Thesleff’s delicate, poetic landscapes were appreciated also abroad; *Spring night* (1894, Ateneum Art Museum) won the bronze medal at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1894.\(^{1027}\) The extreme restraint in her paintings created an almost matterless, music-like experience. The dissolution of form or ‘modern’ vaporousness is evident in her landscapes which seem to live in a world of their own. Contrary to those of other artists, Thesleff’s paintings were full of gentleness and harmony, which many critics saw to be ‘feminine’ art. As Soili Sinisalo (1995) has pointed out, her delicate works lacked the melancholy heaviness and images of death that were otherwise typical of Symbolism.\(^{1028}\) From the outset, Thesleff’s concept of Symbolism was an original one. I would argue that even though she was influenced by the movement and used themes which can be related as being symbolist, Thesleff adopted elements such as musicality, spirituality and introspection in her portraits quite freely and never even mentions “Symbolism” in her letters.\(^{1029}\) Also, it is crucial to note Baudelaire’s use of terms like ‘floating existences’ and gaseousness which “envelops and soaks us like an atmosphere” as symbols for the distinctive quality of modern life. This

\(^{1025}\) Albert Edelfelt in a letter to Magnus Enckell 24.10.1893. HUL.

\(^{1026}\) The term is used in Maurice Denis’s criticism of the Champ de Mars Salon of 1892. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 178.

\(^{1027}\) Sarajas-Korte 1998, 41-42.

\(^{1028}\) Sinisalo 1995, 40.

\(^{1029}\) This has been pointed out by Siina Hälikkä in her master’s thesis. Hälikkä 2007, 8-11.
continues in Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* which states, “all that is solid melts into air.”\textsuperscript{1030} I would argue that this vaporousness of modern life which manifests itself especially in the works of Monet’s late works, Whistler and Carrière is also part of Finnish early modern art as, for instance, in Thesleff’s ascetic works.

In Thesleff’s work from the 1890s two distinct colour techniques can be seen; one is a palette based mainly on brown, black and white, the other the “harmonisation” of a tonal palette of white and grey. The first technique points to Carrière, the second to Puvis de Chavannes. In Thesleff’s work painted using the second technique, an ascetic tonal palette is softened by one colour (white or grey),\textsuperscript{1031} derived from the mural art technique developed by Puvis de Chavannes. Thesleff was the only Finnish artist to use pastel-like white tonality. The harmony achieved with gentle shades softened with white or light grey was unusual and personal. In *Aspens* (1893, fig. 31) and *Murole* (1895) the artist has, with a light tonal palette, created the colour scale of the entire work. Particularly in the opaline grey painting *Murole* she has concentrated solely on different shades of grey to create the mystical atmosphere of the shimmering evening dusk. Here her method resembles Whistler’s technique but she has used a thicker impasto than Whistler who painted with a lucid, transparent paint. This painting, *Murole*, which is built on tones, is purely musical, immaterial, colour ascetic art in which form, light and shade have almost vanished, surrendering totally to colour and texture. In Finnish art Thesleff’s colour ascetic work is individualist and in its immaterialness unique. Even at that time, colour formed the frame for her painting.

Helene Schjerfbeck is better known for her figure painting but there is an interesting series of paintings from Italy from 1894. Interestingly, in Schjerfbeck’s paintings where a method of manipulating the palette in such works as *Boy Dressed in Armour* (1894, fig. 28), and especially in the landscape *Cypresses, Fiesole* (1894, fig. 27), shows this phenomenon through blurred outline, a hazy vaporousness wraps the Fiesole landscape in a mystic mist which, by reducing the landscape from all that would indicate place and time, indicates *estompe* and abstraction. These paintings suggest a landscape, but do not depict a landscape. In *Cypresses, Fiesole* the landscape is painted with a sparse ascetic palette of dark brown in the cypresses which are hovering in a silvery mist, with some golden shades of ochre blending into the greyish shades of green of the bushes. The harmonising is done with grey tonalism and thus point to Whistler’s use of colour. Although this painting carries some different shades of colour, the misty vaporousness which dominates the painting refers also to Carrière. *Cypresses* is a unique painting in Schjerfbeck’s

\textsuperscript{1030} Berman 1997, 144-145.

\textsuperscript{1031} The so-called pastel or muddy colour. Pastel colour = a heavily white content colour from which black is completely absent. Muddy colour = a highly harmonious or shaded white-content colour. Rihlma 1985, 28-29.
oeuvre but it may also be seen as the culmination of her search for a new expression, the softness and haze pointing to a symbolist notion of the imagery of the estompe, emphasising the ‘immaterial’ quality of the mystical landscape.

Nature is the skeleton of my paintings, but the mood is the content, the main body. Whether this mood comes from outside or from within myself I do not really know.

(Pekka Halonen in Svenska Pressen 1932).

A kindred spirit on a subjective and delicate treatment of a winter landscape was, of course, Pekka Halonen who considered nature as a meditative, spiritual place which had a value of its own. Halonen’s great urge to depict the forest and trees lasted throughout his working life. Although he painted mainly outdoors in the naturalist spirit, regardless of the weather, his unique way of approaching his subject differs from that of other artists of the period and tells us a lot about his highly personal attitude to nature. Childhood memories of the trees cared for by his mother and her respect for nature’s beauty tell us how this began. Later, after he became familiar with Tolstoyism and theosophy, his respect for nature took on almost religious proportions. Halonen’s unusually animistic attitude to nature was unique among Finnish artists of the day. His many tales of his childhood illustrate well how important a role natural beauty played in his aesthetic education and how important to him was a deep respect for nature that was extremely unusual at the time.

The upbringing that Halonen’s mother gave her children was rare in contemporary rural life, where nature was normally something to be seized upon, shaped and farmed. An aesthetic attitude to nature was primarily the privilege of city folk and the upper class. For Halonen, though, a profound feeling for nature meant not merely remote admiration for a beautiful landscape but something more all-embracing. This is how he recalled his synaesthetic memory of his childhood:

I will never forget it. I was very small, lying in the bows of a boat with blue sky and bird-cherry branches with huge clusters of white blossom curving above me. I remember their intoxicating scent, and only have to close my eyes to sense it all yet. Here I am again, lying in the bows of the boat. 1034

1032 Hämäläinen 1947, 8-9, 11.
1033 Halonen’s father Olli and brothers Antti and Heikki also supported Theosophy. Lindström 1957, 17.
1034 Hämäläinen 1947, 9.
In his letters, this keen interpreter of the Finnish landscape often mentions how important it was for him to change his surroundings if he was to find inspiration: natural beauty and tranquillity amid nature were the vital prerequisite for his art. His ideas about ‘sacred nature’ merely intensified paradoxically during his years in Paris. Amid the winding back-streets of a great capital the difference between French culture and nature finally convinced the young art student of the uniqueness and vitality of his own country. Halonen’s roots were in Lapinlahti in northern Savo, and his mother Wilhelmiina ran counter to the general attitude of the time in constantly pointing out to her son that nature should be respected and protected. The special standing of the rowan tree in Halonen’s art also derived from his mother. Another endless source of inspiration for the artist was the Kalevala, which refers to the rowan as a holy tree to be found close by every home. This is something Halonen felt intensely and he returned to the subject at intervals all his life, his latest version dating from the last year in which he painted, 1932.

It is interesting that for Halonen eastern traditions were close to his ideas on art and one key grouping in Japanese and Chinese art was on winter themes. Halonen had already experimented earlier with snowy landscapes but it is interesting that it was only after 1895 that he found his own approach to depicting winter landscapes. The passion for decorative form on snow, so typical of Halonen, reached its peak in the period from 1899. Snow-covered Pine Saplings and Frost are good examples of close-ups of decorative snowy trees painted in ascetic colours.1035 As Anna Tuovinen (1995) points out, Halonen adopted the themes as well as the stylistic features of Japonisme – for instance the twisted pine tree that he uses so often was an extremely popular subject in Japanese art.1036 The symbolic twisted pine, which also represents Finnish toughness, can be found in numerous works by Halonen.

Although at the start of his career Halonen put human figures at centre stage in his works, he also began to produce more and more paintings solely of nature. It is interesting that he did not really become a painter of decorative winter landscapes until 1895, when his first major works of this type were produced in Sortavala, at the northern tip of Karelia’s Lake Ladoga, amid the snowy landscapes of Komora. On April 18, 1895 he wrote to his artist friend Louis Sparre: “At the moment I spend the best part of my days skiing. Because the forest is magically beautiful just now... Everything is so grey and monochrome. Even so, it’s such fun to ski out among all that endless ornamentation.”1037 The words demonstrate Halonen’s desire to

1036 The gnarled and twisted pine tree symbolises Finnish endurance. It is also a symbol of longevity and a picturesque feature used in Japanese art. Tuovinen 1995, 25.
1037 Lindström 1957, 93-94. Italics added by author.
21. Pekka Halonen *Juniper Trees* (1901). Oil on canvas, 48.5 x 52 cm, Private collection. Photo: Harri Silander
convey the experience of the aesthetic effect to canvas and see the way in which he saw the snowy forest as an endless ornamentation of monochrome decorativeness.

From Japonism Halonen adopted nature themes with multiple significance, the diagonals and particularly asymmetrical composition, which he used repeatedly over the years. Narrow vertical *kakemono* or long, low *makimono* formats, a high horizon and forest close-ups can be found throughout his work right up until his final years. Like many other artists around the turn of the century, such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), van Gogh or Gauguin, Halonen, too, adapted Japonist influences to create his own individual vision. As Lindström (1957) also states, Halonen openly admired Japanese art and, if he felt he had succeeded with some painting, expressed satisfaction that it embodied the ‘Japanese view’.\(^{1038}\) This could be said to be particularly true of *The First Snow* (1902, Private collection),\(^{1039}\) which epitomises all the special features that he had absorbed from Japanese and Chinese art: the tall vertical *kakemono* shape, diagonal perspective, and asymmetrical and unusual composition, the flat shadowless surfaces, the ornamental character of the water and trees, and the restricted colour ascetic palette, based on the contrast between pale snow and dark brown outlines. The abstract essence of these paintings is like a fascinating *haiku*, at once minimalist and multi-layered. Halonen’s winter scenes have a unique quality that expresses on the one hand his private statement of the eternal beauty of nature and on the other the ‘exoticism of the North’.\(^{1040}\)

Landscapes account for an unusual proportion of Halonen’s art. One could argue that they were his best-selling product and it is for these that he continues to be best known. It is interesting, however, that Halonen’s landscapes differ from the typical scenic views of his day, depicted from above. Most of his landscapes are painted deep in the forest, close up, with the forest trees embracing the viewer in their silent world and the decorative detail and forms of his snow-covered trees rising up like sculptures. On the other hand, Halonen’s way of shaping his trees and bushes at the turn of the century, in a thin, translucent softness, endows them with a living and even quivering kind of movement. Also his palette is the most minimalist in the early 1900s. The cypress-like shapes of his junipers are like dark flames in the wintry whiteness. In *Juniper Trees* (1901, fig. 21) Halonen has painted the trees in the foreground as dim, transparent surfaces and abstracted his subject by reducing his palette to ascetic black, green, brown and white. In the background one can make out a wintry Lake Tuusula landscape, but the tremulous movement

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\(^{1038}\) Lindström 1957, 312.


\(^{1040}\) Up on the rocks of the Halosenniemi headland grew a tree that the family called the ‘million pine’, which was particularly dear to Halonen and which he cared for in droughts and high winds. *The First Snow* (1931), for instance, is a fine example of a Japonist interpretation of the million pine. It is interesting to see that Japonism rises to the fore once again after the works of his youth in the simplified and meditative works of his old age. von Bonsdorff 2008, 23-24.
of the flame-like junipers fill the foreground. The same approach can be found in the monumental *Washing on the Ice* (1900), where Halonen uses a painterly technique to underline the difference between nature and person. The buildings, the washtub and the human figure are all painted with clear outlines and matte surfaces. The ‘natural elements’, the trees and bushes and the various shades of the snow are brought out in delicate, transparent colours. In an otherwise static and solemn work, the trees and bushes are ‘alive’ in the background scenery. Another good example is *Mild Winter Day* (1902, fig. 22), which depicts a moist and mild winter day. One can almost feel the misty air of the silent, shadowless landscape depicting a snowy slope and a dark forest behind. The bare trees are treated very softly in different shades of dark brown and only white birch trunks are showing as delicate verticals in the misty forest. Also in this painting Halonen has abandoned the strong contours and the technique is more reminiscent of Carrière’s soft asceticism. Halonen’s ascetic series of decorative winter landscapes continues mainly to year 1905.

Discussing Symbolism, the Danish symbolist journal *Taarnet*, which was read eagerly by Finnish artists, wrote “a landscape is a state of the soul”. Mainly under the influence of Symbolism, Halonen’s work constantly features the natural elements most sacred to him – the rowan and the sacred grove. It is important to note that in many works by Gauguin and the Nabi artists, such as Sérisier and Denis, the forest was a place for rites and holy practices. Gauguin, too, considered nature the stage for paradise and sacrality. Both Halonen and Gauguin hankered for a pure, innocent primitive culture; Gauguin found his in the South Seas and Tahiti, Halonen in the wilds of Finland’s Savo and Karelia as he saw them in his mind’s eye. Both were united by the idea that nature was something supreme to mankind. It was the source of great inspiration, the foundation of everything, and had to be respected.

*The Symbolist viewpoint asks us to consider the work of art as an equivalent of sensation received; thus nature can be, for the artist, only a state of his own subjectivity.*

*(Maurice Denis 1909)*

Actually, the only artist who used natural elements and forms as creatively and convincingly as Halonen was his contemporary Edvard Munch, whose work is given a psychological charge by intense, powerful line and symbolic colours. As with Halonen, the exact form and colours endow the work with many layers of meaning.

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1041 This is already visible in the sketches, which lack the female figure rinsing the washing. E.g. *Winter Landscape in Tuusula*, 1900.
Both artists produced landscapes that act partly as stages or micro-universes in which to ponder the deeper issues of humanity. Whereas Munch in the 1890s was expressing his complex attitudes to, say, the relationship between men and women and creating psychologically-tinged images of modern depression, Halonen was pondering issues at a more general level – the human condition, religion, politics and existence. Halonen and Munch experienced the new potential of turn-of-the-century art in different ways but their works reveal a surprising number of similarities. Munch, who is viewed as a radical modern innovator and a forerunner of Expressionism, reiterated his personal themes with great passion and ambition, also experimenting with numerous technical methods.\textsuperscript{1044} He, too, finds room for winter landscapes, and the importance he attached to experiencing nature lies behind many of his works.\textsuperscript{1045} Experimentation with new techniques and materials, such as thinned-down, transparent oil paint, and simplification of form took place with both Halonen and Munch around the same time. The two artists clung persistently to their own themes and reiterated them throughout their working lives. The symbolist and anthropomorphically treated organic form and nature themes is similar with both and distinguishes them from other artists of their time. Halonen and Munch are also linked by a distinctive spiritualistic attitude towards their subjects, and by the desire to depict northern nature as landscapes of the mind open to many interpretations.\textsuperscript{1046}

Halonen’s colleague Eero Järnefelt, on the other hand, was, from the start, very unwilling to submit himself to any ‘artificial theories’, which he saw symbolist ideals to be.\textsuperscript{1047} But it is clear that after a while not even he remained untouched by Symbolism. The new, decorative direction of Järnefelt’s art was already evident at the beginning of the 1890s. For example Pondweed (1892) shows how he chose to paint a very modest motif, something delicate and decorative in nature itself, without staged surroundings. He succeeded in capturing the delicate and mystical in nature’s modest details. The simplified form is enhanced by the ascetic sparse colours he has used in this painting. The brownish silent surface of the water raises the modest pondweed into focus. Järnefelt succeeds in capturing the delicate and mystical in nature’s small and decorative details. It was his aim to bring out such decorative motifs which became increasingly common in his work and were the opposite of the monumental and panoramic landscapes and stately portraits for which he is better known.

\textsuperscript{1044} See e.g. Buchhart 2007, 73, 88.
\textsuperscript{1045} Tojner 2003, 35-39-41.
\textsuperscript{1046} von Bonsdorff 2008, 48-52.
\textsuperscript{1047} Wennervirta 1950, 237-247.
Halonen’s connection with Puvis de Chavannes and Gauguin has been mentioned many times but Järnefelt’s involvement with Symbolism is much more difficult to analyse. For example Autumn Landscape of Lake Pielisjärvi (1899, Ateneum Art Museum)\textsuperscript{1048} is a wide panorama that represents the epitome of Finnish landscape as melancholic and monumental. The famous painting has earlier been seen as a national romantic painting but I think it has many other qualities as well. A renowned landscape in Finland, the wide view of lakes seen from the top of the fell at Koli became, thanks to artists, one of the ‘national landscapes’ of Finland. This landscape made such an indelible impression on Järnefelt when he saw it in 1892 that for years he kept returning there, painting the region over and over again. Järnefelt began painting the landscape in 1892 and continued to do so until his last years. Of all the versions,\textsuperscript{1049} Autumn Landscape of Lake Pielisjärvi is the darkest, and in my opinion, the most ‘symphonic’. The sublime effect is striking and the makimono or panoramic shape gives the painting a modern decorative feel. Järnefelt is known to have done a gouache and pastel sketch in situ,\textsuperscript{1050} and supposedly painted the landscape afterwards from memory in his atelier. He also altered the entire landscape, making it much larger, and thus clearly painted it mainly from memory. Järnefelt took a deep interest in colour theory and in how to portray autumn colour, creating his ‘ideal landscape’ on the basis of many different sketches. With its silent, stylised mood it is also very ‘un-naturalistic’. The colours are dark and mysterious, highlighted by the barren autumn trees. Autumn itself depicts the death of nature and the heavy, grey clouds underline the melancholic mood of the landscape. As I see it, Järnefelt conciously chose to use the symbolist ‘method’ when he wished to create a certain mood in a painting.\textsuperscript{1051} Although, the palette is not very ascetic or simplified due to the yellow and orange trees, the autumnal lake landscape is a celebration of the untouched wilderness and has a solemn and highly charged atmosphere.

Järnefelt’s private inner vision is reflected in the landscape Lake Shore with Reeds (1905, fig. 26), which is altogether different from the previous ‘national landscape’. The artist emphasised the silence of the shore near his home and the melancholy of the autumn evening by a muted, brownish palette. Also including an empty, vacated chair Järnefelt is underlining the attente, the silent and soft moment when nature

\textsuperscript{1048} Järnefelt, Autumn Landscape of Lake Pielisjärvi (1899), oil on canvas, 61 x 198 cm, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. See image: \url{http://kokoelmat.fmg.fi/wandora/w?lang=en&kaktion=genksi=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.munsu.net%2FTeos%2FF5BCoF5B-5B73-4302-8D5C-89D86E38DC3F&imagesize=0}

\textsuperscript{1049} More than twenty landscapes from Koli are known.

\textsuperscript{1050} The sketch (private collection) is done in a very synthetistic style and is the centre part of the Autumn Landscape of Lake Pielisjärvi (1899).

\textsuperscript{1051} He also used the same method in the ‘psychological’ portraits, for which he is famous. In these he used a strongly ascetic palette to bring out the subject’s character and also to concentrate on their face and soulful eyes.
is still and holding its breath before winter. The whole landscape is painted with a soft haziness and muted colours of different earth shades of brown and grey. Only the greyish purple horizon in the background and the odd green leaves add some colour to an otherwise monochrome palette. As with Halonen, Järnefelt’s ascetic painting recalls Carrière’s soft semi-obscure landscape paintings and Knopff’s more ascetic and silent landscapes. The viewer can almost synaesthetically smell the landscape’s damp, musty autumn scent. As the excerpt from his diary states: “how clear is not only the sense of wistfulness just before the sunset but also how clear is sometimes the endless despair in a grey forest.” Järnefelt, in particular, felt that landscape painting was a rich form of expression. The moods and thoughts are depicted in his landscapes which are like an extended visual diary in which he explores the complexities of life. Here the colours are the interpreters of the emotions.

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a particularly strong output in landscape painting, with Finnish artists emerging as powerful and versatile interpreters of nature. Two reasons for this can be seen. The first is the issue of reconstructing nationality; in Finland, as in other countries, such as Norway, that were engaged in their struggle for independence, some Finnish artists, like Blomstedt, Gallén and Halonen aimed to make their own unique ‘authenticity’ a focus of their art. Thus landscapes were among the most popular subjects that Finnish artists wished to exhibit internationally, for instance, at the annual Salons in Paris and at the World Exhibitions. — the finest exoticism that the North could offer. The second reason that I hope to establish is that of a deeper, more mystic and intimate relationship between the artist, nature, and landscape. Artists such as Schjerbeck and Thesleff explored the possibilities of manipulating the palette. However, as I hope to show, these two questions were in many cases intertwined.

It is important to note how the relationship between subject and medium, or means of representation, was a constant concern for Finnish artists. Each of the artists shared a particular interest in developing in his or her own work a personal, ascetic palette. I should like to propose that the creation of symphonic works of art with a harmonious palette was the over-riding idea of all these artists who sought a spiritual and deeper meaning in their art. One unifying element can be found in all the artists mentioned. Their common interest in using a non-mimetic palette, either colour ascetic or synthetist, reflected a modern attitude of being conscious of the effect of the colour that they used. And I will argue that this marked the significant break from the long tradition of mimetic representation which had reigned from the Renaissance until the end of the nineteenth century when a new way of using

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1052 Moreover, roughly half of the paintings that adorned the Finnish Pavilion at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 were winter landscapes.
the palette to signify the artist’s ‘inner vision’ began. My aim is to show that the change in using colour in a certain way was a key element for artists wanting to incorporate in their landscapes new concepts and depths such as ‘spiritualism’ and ‘musicality’. By focusing on van Gogh and Gauguin, Silverman (2000) has raised a larger issue for interpreting modernism: it is needed to re-emphasise the critical role of religion in the development of modernism, to bring religion back into the story of artists’ mentalities and formations.\footnote{As Silverman states, basic questions and research on religion and modernism are radically underdeveloped, especially for the decisive transitional period of the 1880s. We tend to secularise the avant-garde, and our approaches are too dependent on a model of modernism generated by the national context that gave the avant-garde its name and institutional practice in the nineteenth century: France. Silverman 2000, 13.}

Artists opting for colour ascetism adopted the deliberate distortion of the natural as a means to evoke non-nature. As with line, this could be described as an imprecise reference to hues existing in nature, reflecting a heightened sense of colour and its evocative powers in late-nineteenth-century Finnish art.

To conclude, these new ideas on harmonious and spiritual art became widespread through Baudelaire’s writings in the 1860s, culminated in French Symbolism in the 1890s and continued into the 1910s and in abstract art. But what I must emphasise is that the common factor for every artist here was the importance of colour itself. The Baudelairean belief that harmony is the basis of colour theory manifests itself in the works of Whistler and Puvis de Chavannes as well as in those of the Finnish artists Blomstedt, Enckell, Gallén, Halonen, Järnefelt, Schjerfbeck and Thesleff. This group of very different artists detached their art from the strong tradition of Naturalism, in favour of more simplified form, focusing themselves on colour and meaning. Their simplified form and reduced, ascetic or synthetistic use of colour emphasised the abstract elements in painting, such as silence, inwardness, musicality and spirituality which were depicted in many ways in both content and form. Whether the subject was a view from Florence or simply a Finnish winter landscape, it was undoubtedly the new palette that detached it from the mimetic landscape towards a different realm of spiritual timeless.
4. CONCLUSION

For visual art the turn of the twentieth century is probably one of the most intriguing and multifaceted periods during which many colour theories began to be developed by both scientists and artists. However, this interesting episode in the history of art and colour has mostly dwelled on chromatic ‘colourful’ colour: the shift from mimetic representation and especially the shift from the mimetic palette (both academic and realist or naturalist) has not been properly studied in Finnish art and the use of the other side of the colour scale has mostly been ignored. As this this study proposes, many artists of the period experimented with a more acromatic range of subdued, restricted ascetic palette. It is important to establish that non-mimetic colour practices such as ascetic and synthetist colour schemes were one of the most innovative methods that began to separate art from its earlier traditions of Realism and Naturalism in favour of painting that mirrored the “inner world”. Furthermore, this turn towards a new means of representation should not be considered solely as a style issue, but also, as I will propose, as a profound change in creating art. As I understand it my main concepts in this study – colour ascetism and synthetist colour – played a crucial part in the move towards colour and meaning which opened up new horizons for artists of this period and onwards. This had an impact not merely on Finnish art but, in fact, made a lasting impression on European art generally and later on what we now know as abstract art.

The purpose of this thesis has been to establish that colour ascetism and synthetist colour as such give a painting meanings and as such may be studied in the same way as, for example, form, subject or composition. Colour ascetism or synthetist colour were ingrained with certain common connotations and were a key element for artists wanting to incorporate in their art modern concepts and depths such as historicity, spirituality, melancholy, musicality, harmony, synaesthesia or immateriality. The aim of this study is to show that the change in using colour in a certain way was not just a change in technique but an innate change in the concept of art.

Colour has always represented a difficult subject in art and art history. Many studies have shown that, from the Renaissance onwards, colour was, with few exceptions, a subordinate value in art. In addition to the technical problems inherent in producing vivid pigments, artists (or art historians) did not seem to consider colour as important as composition, subject, line, or perspective. Traditionally, the focus on and meaning of colours craved attention specifically in allegorical religious art. As we know, in the nineteenth century attention shifted towards colours, as impressionist and later symbolist artists concentrated on modern colour theories, optics and science.
This study of colour ascetism and synthetist colour in Early Modern Finnish and European art has had two main objectives. First, to present a new approach to understanding the history of colour in painting during the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by studying colour ascetic and synthetist colour and an approach that differs from that which has become conventional; that is to say, as a series of avant-garde movements from Post-Impressionism to Post-Modernism. Second, to present a survey of the history of art in the light of this new approach to colour, one that may be of interest in seeking a new aspect of twentieth-century art while also paying due regard to painting as a cultural activity deeply embedded in other social, religious and intellectual activities but subject to pressures from the fields of economics, politics and ideology. Emphasis is placed upon artists’ individual achievements inside the societal nexus within which achievements take place. This is merely one attempt to present a different view of the art of these centuries.

In order to establish why nineteenth-century artists adopted a new interest in colour and why they developed their non-mimetic palettes I have deployed a variety of methodological tools. This study is in the vein John Gage opened up by studying colour as a contingent, historical phenomenon whose meaning lies in the particular historical context in which it is experienced and practised. However, whereas Gage’s work comprises broad surveys, this study has concentrated on a specific period and on two specific colour methods and concepts. Combined, these can best be defined as a hybrid of the history of colour in this art and context. To confront the difficult issue of colour as a concept and practice, this study has adapted the notion of painting as a “deposit” proposed by Michael Baxandall. I have extended this framework to the modern period in Europe and in Finland (ca. 1890–1908) to suggest painting as a deposit of a specific colour-conscious culture in a specific turn-of-the-twentieth-century context. This period was also a highly significant period in Finland from a political, cultural, and particularly an art standpoint.

Colour ascetism and synthetist colour have proved to be a very complex and broad issue in art. Even though this study is limited mainly to the years 1890–1906 in Finnish art, the turn towards colour in painting is an important shift or should be seen as a prelude to what was to come in the 1910s. As this study has explored, the sources of colour ascetism and synthetist colour vary from the aesthetic discourse and art theories of the period to the aspirations of the artists themselves.

This is why the study concentrates on finding as many comments on colour as possible from the artists themselves but also on keeping a close relationship with the historical context of the artists in question. After many years of research on the paintings and a close comparative scrutiny of artists’ letters and archive research, the

1054 This study aligns with recent studies on colour such as Krüger’s (2007) and Tillberg’s (2003).
results presented in this study show that colour played a pivotal role in Finnish early modern art. The legacies of such practices as colour in painting provide a new point of entry from which to consider the new technical innovations in painting. But what are the painterly effects and qualities that artists explored at the end of nineteenth century? As I have argued, surely they can mean sketchy brushstrokes and flatness of the surface as has conventionally been explained as the signs of modernity, but what of colour? I would argue that if we address the question of materiality and medium, the use of colour should be at the heart of that question. The transfer to medium meant new palette practices and a new understanding of colour.

It is important to note that the concepts of historicity and past as a destination were closely connected to the relationship between subject and technique, or means of representation. This breakthrough towards the modern concept of choosing the mode of representation was a constant concern for the Finnish artists mentioned in this study. As this study claims, the shift towards non-mimetic colour is found to have various sources, from Old Masters to Early Renaissance to archaic art. It is interesting that there are paintings which include references to all these aspects.

The study of this phenomenon has required a focus on the conditions prevailing in the places where artists lived, travelled and worked as much as on the aesthetic and theoretical climate of the period.\textsuperscript{1056} Also it is important to note that this colour-conscious art was necessary in presenting the new content of the artists mentioned in this study. By concentrating on colour this study also offers new readings on art in the nineteenth-century as well as on some of the major paintings of the period such as Whistler’s iconic Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of the Painter’s Mother (1871) and Schjerbeck’s Seamstress (1905, fig. 30). Also the art of Gauguin and the Nabi Group must now be studied from the point of establishing synthetist colour, the use of tertiary close-tones which differs from the use of more pure colours used by Impressionists. Assessing the wider resonances of artists’ debates on technique, matter and medium as they tested the limits of painting as a new ‘language of colour’. It should also be noted that, contrary to the synthetist palette, the ascetic palette was more widely used colour practice and it was used within many styles and movements.

The idea that colour and its practice had specific meaning for certain kinds of painting such as symbolist or monumental and decorative was new in Finnish art in the 1890s. The use of an ascetic, restricted palette or of a range of synthetic, vivid colours was a specific way to simplify the surface and it was now possible to introduce the ideas of the abstract into painting. Thus, the achievement of connotations to musicality, immateriality and synaesthesia, the new concepts of turn-of-the-

\textsuperscript{1056} Although this study is aware that there cannot be a complete reconstruction of the art or the ideas of the artist it has tried to study the chosen material with a broad attitude.
twentieth-century art, was intended, as this study has shown, to be through both colour ascetism and synthetist colour. As in many cases examined here, colour was actually the first element to be deformed, manipulated and simplified and not merely line and form as has traditionally been cited in art history.

Moreover, Baudelaire’s term ‘modernité’ articulated a sense of difference from the past and described a peculiarly modern identity. Modernité in this context does not mean merely of the present but rather a particular attitude to the present. Such a self-conscious experience of modernity developed only during the mid-nineteenth century. These two aspects – the transient or the fleeting, on the one hand, and the eternal on the other – were two sides of a duality. Or the Pre-Raphaelites who emphasised the ‘past as a destination’. This duality is also well represented with colour as, for example, by Whistler in his self-portrait, referring to Rembrandt through the artist’s late use of the brownish palette or Puvis de Chavannes, modulating the allegorical painting to modern vision and imitating ancient fresco with a matte, greyish surface. Even though the subject was of the present, the medium and/or colour choice referred to the past. The consciousness of historicity was a common aim of many artists of the period. This modern dualism, which has been examined in this study, was also expressed in Finnish art.

The second part of this thesis focuses on Finnish Early Modern art and the simplification of the palette from the 1890s to the early 1900s. The first chapter examines how artists became familiar with the new ideas on mural art and decorative painting which was used as a new mode of presenting concepts such as historicity and the ancient past inspired by the national epic, Kalevala. The quest to imitate the fresco had many implications for artworks which were to emphasise the ethereal aspect of decorative art. Here the ‘total work of art’ concept is also discussed. Clearly not all modern paintings depict modern or contemporary subjects but the relationship between subjects and technique and medium, or means of representation, was a persistent concern for artists in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Modern art sought to be a mirror of simultaneity, linking time and reflecting the past in the future and vice versa.

Finnish art was also concerned with depictions of paradise lost and sacred nature. These ideas were established mainly by artists who used dynamic synthetist colour. The bright synthesised colours brought landscape painting to a new dimension of ‘surnaturelle’ and dream image. On the other hand, colour ascetism was used to create colour harmonies and contrasts to emphasise such aspects as silence, melancholy and intimacy in painting. This perhaps shows the most important change in this colour-conscious art: individual choices, experiments and manipulation of the palette grew from this innovative art. Gauguin, as we know from Blomstedt’s

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comments, urged his pupils to find the ‘original’ in themselves and not to imitate his art. This shows perhaps the most important shift in turn-of-the-twentieth-century colour-conscious art: either ascetic or synthetist use of colour, it culminated in individual choices and experiments that grew from this new, innovative view of art.

I will further postulate that these abstract ideas or elements such as musicality and spirituality, so highly valued in the modern period, were not first introduced through form, composition or subject, but through the idea of colour. I would argue that the idea of simplification, colour harmony and abstraction in painting goes back considerably further than, for example, Kandinsky, Mondrian or Malevich. The conviction that, with the methods of colour ascetism or synthetist colour, a painting worked as a mediator of divinity and spiritualism was a mutual goal of these artists. As I have argued here, this was the first sign of removing painting in general from the long mimetic tradition which had reigned from the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century. When something changes so profoundly, as here with the concept of colour in painting, can it be merely a change in style or is it rather an overwhelming change in creating art? This study claims that in painting first by ascetic and later by synthetist colour the effects, moods and connotations of the modern period were made possible. These colour concepts can be seen in Finnish art as opposite colour practices of the non-mimetic colour scale: while ascetic art simplified itself to acromatic monochromacy, synthetist colour expanded the limits of the colour sensation of chromaticism. As I have put forward in this study, a new idiom in art was spreading across the western world and meaning was now being established also through colour. The time of traditional oil painting was changing and colour-conscious artists turned towards new mediums and colour practices. The process of creating art would never be the same again and the success of colore, the concept of the autonomy of colour was established at the end of the nineteenth century by a wide range of artists who used, among others, ascetic and synthetist colour.

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1038 e.g. Väinö Blomstedt’s letter to Yrjö Blomstedt 6.3.1894. Jyväskylä Provincial Archives.
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ABBREVIATIONS

CAA = Central Art Archives, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki
EJA = Eero Järnefelt Archives, Riihimäki
GKM = Gallen-Kallela Museum, Tarvaspää, Espoo
HUL = Helsinki University Library
KB = Kungliga biblioteket, Copenhagen
SKS = Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura
SLS = Svenska Litteratur Sällskapet
ÄAB = Åbo Akademi Bibliotek, Turku/Åbo

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