

The 14th Triennial NORDIK
Conference of Art History in the
Nordic Countries

**“Why So Nordic?
The ‘Nordic’ as
Fact and Fiction
in Art History”**

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Book of Abstracts





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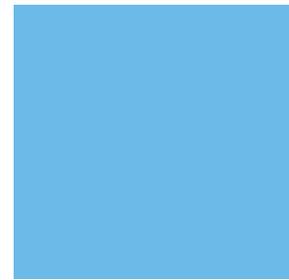
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Introduction

The Nordic Association for Art Historians NORDIK came into being as an organizer of international conferences that since 1984 have brought together individual scholars and organizations with an interest in Nordic and Scandinavian art history.

The conferences, which occur every three years, forge connections between research environments in the five Nordic countries and have sustained the idea of a specific art history related to Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. Today, the very notion of a network of Nordic art historians raises questions. Who do we include in this community today? How do we look at the Nordic in art and its history? What does it mean to “do Nordic art history”?

A long period defined by wars, exploitation, and intermittent exchange was transformed with the birth of new Nordic and Scandinavian identities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the divergent paths of the Nordic countries suggested new transformations and divisions. In the new millennium, climate crises and war in Europe make the future seem wholly uncertain. Thus, a common history is undeniable, but its implications and meanings are contested.

The Nordic seems a powerful concept, equal parts liberating and oppressive. It has been a concept of exclusion—of colonized subjects, of the have-nots, of women—but it has also been a concept of radical alternatives to hegemony, whether in politics or art. Nordicness is defined as much from outside of the region. Romantic and racist frames of reference intermingle in fantasies of the North. Even the most powerful concepts and slogans erode with time, and the political and social structure of the Nordic welfare state with its strong cultural ambitions seems replaced by superficial branding. How has art, design, and architecture contributed to the various concepts of Nordicness expressed through history? And how do we deal with the multiplicity of identities and interpretations connected to this term, today?

For the XIV NORDIK Conference of Art History in the Nordic Countries organized in collaboration with the University of Helsinki, we invited scholars and all interested parties to reflect and discuss “Nordic” as fact and fiction. Catalyzed by keynotes from Mathias Danbolt, Merike Kurisoo, and Anna Ripatti, the conference will dwell on the topic in 28 sessions. This publication contains all presentations as abstracts. We want to thank everybody for their contributions. Welcome to join the discussion!

Keynote I: Anna Ripatti

Logs, Crafts, and Ornament

Imagining Nordicism through art and architecture

Anna Ripatti

University Lecturer in Art History
University of Helsinki
Finland

Date Monday, October 20th
Time 9.15–10.45
Location Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor

Did Scandinavia have its specific way of building fit for its climate and characteristics? This question was posed in 1820 by Hans Linstow, an architect born in Denmark and based in Christiania, Norway. Defining *Norden* in racial terms as a territory where “the great Gothic tribe has spread unmixed, from the Danube to the northernmost confines of Europe”, Linstow suggested that, indeed, there existed an age-old Scandinavian building tradition in remote, rural Norway. He was convinced that this seed of national architecture could be revived and developed into modern, Nordic architecture.

As this example shows, *Norden*, Nordic and Scandinavia were nebulous concepts deeply embedded in racial thinking. In the nineteenth century, and even today, they were saturated with allusions to origins, kinship, and race. Nonetheless, art historians have rarely examined how art and architecture

have contributed to the ways in which Scandinavia and Nordic have been understood in different times, or how the concepts of Scandinavian or Nordic art and architecture have been entangled with the notorious history of human classification.

This presentation explores how nineteenth-century scholars, artists, and architects used vernacular architecture—mainly loft storehouses—as well as ornamentation in traditional crafts, especially needlework, for imagining and delineating the inhabitants of *Norden*, or the so-called Nordic countries. By examining the crossroads of art history, linguistics, and ethnography, and by focusing on Sweden and Finland, I seek to show how folk art and architecture were tied to racial genealogies and diverse political ambitions.

First, I shall examine the ways in which Swedish nineteenth-century scholars, such as Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius and Nils Månsson Mandelgren, pushed forward their ideas about Scandinavians and their racial characteristics through vernacular building traditions. Their studies emphasized fundamental differences between the originally Germanic Scandinavians and other peoples of the region, the Sámi and the Finns. Many nineteenth-century scholars presented Finnish chimneyless cabins as evidence of their builders' inferiority, and loft storehouses as evidence for defining the Scandinavians as Aryans.

Hyltén-Cavallius and Mandelgren were both proponents of the Scandinavists movement. With other active members of the Artists' Society in Stockholm, they promoted Scandinavian unity—culturally, historically, racially, and to some extent even politically—and highlighted Sweden as its leading power. Celebrating Nordicness, they defined national art as Scandinavian and Nordic art, based on the common characteristics and the inner spirit of the originally Germanic Scandinavian people. As we shall see, built heritage played an important role in their Scandinavist aspirations.

Second, my presentation discusses how and why traditional textile ornamentation was interpreted as racial expression in late nineteenth-century Finland. While numerous scholars labelled the Finns as a non-white race, and deemed them inferior to the mighty Scandinavians, Finnish scholars, artists, and architects of course protested. Studies on folk art, especially ornamentation, as well as nascent art history writing on what was considered as Finnish art, served to rank the Finns as artistically gifted people with substantial potential to contribute to the world histories of art and architecture. I shall show how Akseli Gallen-Kallela participated in racial discussions of his time through his artworks.

Imagining the Nordic countries and their inhabitants through art and architecture was an international, pan-European phenomenon. Theorists such as Gottfried Semper and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc played a major role in defining and distributing the image of Scandinavians, their art, architecture, and characteristics. For many nineteenth-century scholars, log buildings and folk ornamentation served to underline not only the racial origins and characteristics of Nordic peoples, but also their global importance and future potential.

The aim of my presentation is to ask how we imagine Scandinavia and the Nordic countries as communities today, and how these concepts could

and should be defined in the future. How is art history contributing to the ways in which these concepts are understood? By studying how the Scandinavians and the Nordics were defined through art and architecture in the past, and how art history has been used to fulfil various ideological and political aims and ambitions, to include and to exclude, my presentation seeks to encourage art historians to problematize these concepts, and to pay careful attention to their enduring legacies in our time.



Anna Ripatti is University Lecturer in Art History at the University of Helsinki. Her research has focused on nineteenth-century European art and architecture, and she is particularly interested in the social, political, and ideological meanings of art and architecture. She has published widely on a variety of topics, including architectural restoration, art historiography, monuments, history paintings, architectural reforms and publications as well as decorations.

Her ongoing research projects examine 1) architectural standardization and the formation of a gendered working class through architecture in nineteenth-century France, and 2) the interconnected histories of ethnography, art, and architecture in the Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Finland.

She is Principal Investigator of the research project *The Political Agency of Architecture in Revolutionary Europe, 1830–1930*, funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation. She is also the Chair of the Finnish Society for Art History and serves as the chief editor of the book series *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia—Studies in Art History*.

Keynote II: Merike Kurisoo

Nordic, Baltic, or Hanseatic?

Reframing perspectives on medieval and early modern art in the Baltic Sea region from the viewpoint of Estonian art history

Merike Kurisoo

Museum Director
Niguliste Museum, Adamson-Eric Museum
Estonia

Date Tuesday, October 21st
Time 13.15–14.45
Location Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor

What does it mean to study medieval and early modern art from the vantage point of Estonia, situated on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea? Should its heritage be interpreted within Nordic, Baltic, Baltic German, or Hanseatic frameworks—or do such categories risk concealing more than they reveal? Terms carry assumptions about belonging, identity, and aspiration, reflecting the shifting political and cultural landscapes of their time. This keynote explores how Estonian art history has been shaped by these frameworks, offering perspectives rooted in artistic mobility, material exchange, and the shared cultural geographies of the Baltic Sea, with a focus on artists and workshops active in late medieval and early modern Tallinn, who themselves or whose works traveled from the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland to other centers of the Nordic and Baltic Sea region.

Three case studies exemplify this approach. Tallinn-born late medieval painter Michel Sittow illustrates the interplay between global mobility and local engagement. His career spanned the Habsburg courts and the Iberian Peninsula, as well as Nordic and Hanseatic networks. Despite his renown, Sittow returned to Tallinn, where he worked locally and fulfilled commissions for Finland and Sweden, demonstrating how local and global networks shaped his practice.

Arent Passer, a master of stone sculpture at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, worked across Estonia, Finland, and Sweden within the Swedish Kingdom. He established a workshop in Tallinn, and his monumental tombs reveal patrons ranging from Baltic German families to Finnish and Swedish nobility, highlighting the transregional reach of his workshop.

Tobias Heintze began his career as a woodcarver at the Courland court, arriving in Tallinn as a war refugee, where he established a workshop in the 1620s. He produced pulpits and altarpieces for Estonian, Latvian, and Finnish Lutheran churches, while participating in courtly, urban, and noble patronage networks.

Collectively, these artists demonstrate that art in the region was shaped by local, Nordic, Hanseatic, and international connections. As was typical of the era, artists were mobile and moved from center to center. These three examples represent only a fraction of the period; numerous lesser-known masters from Germany, the Netherlands, and other cities arrived in Tallinn and Riga and operated within similar networks. Materials such as Baltic oak and Estonian limestone illustrate how the availability of natural resources shaped artistic creation in the Baltic Sea region: Baltic oak was one of the principal materials for artists in Western Europe, while high-quality Estonian limestone was used both as a building stone across the Baltic Sea region and for the creation of refined sculptures.

Comparing late medieval church art and architecture across Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and northern Germany highlights shared practices alongside local distinctions. Large workshops—such as those of Lübeck masters—along with shared iconographies and traveling masters produced a recognizable trans-Baltic Sea visual language, while variations in the cult of saints, iconography, and material adaptations distinguished regions. The sixteenth-century Reformation reshaped patronage, liturgical spaces, and power centers. Stockholm and Turku rose in prominence, while Tallinn and Riga retained significant roles; notably, Riga remained the largest city of the Swedish Kingdom until the mid-seventeenth century.

Historiography mediates our understanding of these dynamics. German and Baltic German art history writing has mostly focused on Bernt Notke's and Hermen Rode's works, reflecting long-standing scholarly emphases. Swedish art historian Johnny Roosval advanced the "Baltic-Nordic art domain" in the 1920s, framing the Baltic Sea as a shared cultural space rather than one divided by national traditions. This perspective influenced Estonia, supporting art-historical identity beyond German models.

Estonian art history as an academic discipline emerged at the University of Tartu in the 1920s, where Swedish professors Helge Kjellin and Sten Karling shaped generations of scholars. Karling's student Armin Tuulse later

became a professor in Stockholm, cementing lasting intellectual exchanges between Estonian and Swedish art history. Estonia and Latvia share a common cultural space through centuries of historical, political, and cultural developments, yet linguistic differences persisted. For much of these periods, the Baltic German elite acted as “a roof”, directing and connecting networks, patronage, and artistic traditions.

In dialogue with the NORDIK 2025 theme, “Why so Nordic?”, this keynote reflects how the notion of “Nordic” has been applied in art historical scholarship and considers its relevance for Estonia. It asks: Who defines the boundaries of this category, who is included, and who is excluded? Estonia occupies a strategic position at the intersection of Nordic, Baltic, and Hanseatic networks. The keynote argues that these frameworks are not neutral categories but reflect shifting identities and power relations. Estonia’s position—Finno-Ugric in language yet historically shaped by German and Swedish rule—raises questions about how regional art history boundaries are drawn and whose perspectives shape their definition.



■ **Merike Kurisoo**, an Estonian art historian, is the Director of both the Niguliste Museum and the Adamson-Eric Museum, branches of the Art Museum of Estonia. Her research focuses on medieval and early modern ecclesiastical art, particularly the transition from Catholicism to Lutheranism in Estonia. Kurisoo has authored several books and numerous scholarly articles, emphasizing art relations in the Baltic Sea region and Nordic countries. She has curated several exhibitions in collaboration with museums from Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and Sweden.

Her interests also include the mobility of artists and art within the Baltic Sea region in medieval and early modern period. She leads the international research project *Michel Sittow in the North*, highlighting Tallinn’s role as an art mediator. This project featured exhibitions in Estonia and Sweden in 2023, along with a seminar in 2022 that focused on artistic connections between Estonia and Finland during the long Middle Ages.

Kurisoo is the Chair of the Estonian Society of Art Historians and Curators, as well as the Research Board of the Art Museum of Estonia. She also serves on the board of the Nordic Iconography Society and is part of the editorial board for the journal *ICO: Nordic Review of Iconography*.

Keynote III: Mathias Danbolt

Nordic Habits and Hiccups

Thinking with *Nordting* about the “Nordicness” of Nordic art history

Mathias Danbolt

Professor of Art History
University of Copenhagen
Denmark

With contributions from Vár Eydudóttir, Nivi Christensen, and Nordting

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| Date | Wednesday, October 22nd |
| Time | 9.00–10.30 |
| Location | Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor |

The theme of the 2025 NORDIK conference, “Why so Nordic? The ‘Nordic’ as fact and fiction in art history”, invites critical reflection on the role of “Nordicness” in shaping art-historical narratives. Even as the conference calls for questioning what the “Nordic” excludes, its framing habitually refers to research environments in “the five Nordic countries”—a shorthand that naturalizes the Nordic as a constellation of sovereign nation-states while leaving aside the autonomous territories of Føroyar (Faroe Islands), Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), and Åland, as well as the stateless nation of Sápmi. Such habits are endemic in art-historical practice about the North—from museums that present collections of “Nordic modernism” without reflecting on the geographies included, to exhibitions and publications

Nordic exceptionalism—habitual histories—infrastructures—

colonial entanglements—postnational art histories

that feature Nordic “landscapes” or “light” but center histories on artistic production canonized in capitals such as Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Reykjavík.

In this lecture, I turn to the performance-based political art project *Nordting* for help in breaking with the habits and hiccups of organizing art history around ideas of the “Nordic”. *Nordting* describes itself as a “nomadic people’s parliament of the North”. Since its initiation at the Arctic Arts Festival in Harstad in June 2014, it has convened multiple assemblies across the “Pan-Arctica”—from Vardø to Yukon, Nordkapp to Nuuk, Rovaniemi to Reykjavik, Tórshavn to Murmansk—to debate issues of “power and money, art and identity, separatism and populism, center and periphery”. Combining striking political symbolism with aesthetic playfulness, *Nordting* stages its assemblies as performative experiments in direct democracy, inviting participants to vote on decisions that affect their lives—a collective rehearsal of political futures in which peripherized subjects reject subordination to southern centers. In doing so, *Nordting* exposes how infrastructures of economy, representation, accessibility, visibility, and resource management reproduce inequalities and hierarchies that sustain (neo)colonial logics and dynamics.

In this talk, I propose to think both *about* and *with Nordting* to interrogate how “the Nordic” operates not only as “fact or fiction” but as an art-historical infrastructure of habitual histories—patterns of scholarly and cultural practice that shape funding streams, institutional orientations, and narratives of past and future. Inspired by *Nordting’s* efforts to replace the “Nordic” with more situated frameworks for living, making, and historicizing the North, I ask what this would imply for art history—a discipline long entangled with the nation-building and identity-shaping projects that the “Nordic” brand sustains.

Examining habits of Nordicness seems especially urgent in the current climate of war and military armament, which has replaced the “post-Nordic” sentiments of the early 2000s with a revamped spirit of Nordic unity. So far, however, this geopolitical return to Nordic exceptionalism has not translated into renewed investment in the regional art infrastructures that once fostered collaboration among the Nordic majority nation-states in the 1980s and 1990s, as discussed by Jonas Ekeberg in *Post-Nordic—The Rise and Fall of a Nordic Art Scene 1986–2006* (2022). Concurrently, however, the itinerary of a project such as *Nordting* points to the rise of alternative infrastructures of collaboration and solidarity across the North—frameworks that operate alongside, or sometimes against, national and Nordic institutions to offer different forms of artistic, cultural, and political exchange that center Indigenous and other marginalized perspectives.

What might art history gain by following *Nordting’s* attempt to wrest the North free from the branded framework of Nordic? If the Nordic has at times offered alternatives to national isolationism—and has been mobilized critically to confront colonial specificities, as in exhibition projects such as *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* (Kuratorisk Aktion, 2006)—it has not yet moved beyond the organizing principles of sovereign nation-states. As Ian McLean and Charles Green ask in the introduction to *Postnational Art Histories* (2023): “The nation-state has been the lifeblood of art history.

Can the discipline in its present form have any credibility as a postnational narrative?" Their provocation reminds us that art history remains deeply invested in national frames of belonging, even when refracted through regional rubrics such as "Nordic".

In this light, the "Nordic" functions as a regional proxy for the nation: a frame that promises solidarity and collectivity yet stabilizes exclusionary habits. What place do Sápmi, Kalaallit Nunaat, the Faroe Islands, or Åland occupy within this frame? Too often, "Nordic" exhibitions and institutions privilege a narrow imaginary of light, landscape, or social democracy that centers the Scandinavian core while marginalizing colonial entanglements and alternative histories.

Inspired by Nordting's tradition of inviting expert voices to broaden the debate, my keynote will include digital interventions from scholars who articulate the hiccups of Nordic art history from positions often deemed peripheral, including museum director Nivi Christensen on how Nordic infrastructures distort the framing of Kalaallit art history, and cultural critic Vár Eydnuðóttir on "colonial disconnectedness" in Faroese art histories. Their perspectives extend my call for a collective interrogation of how the habits and hiccups of Nordicness risk reproducing exclusions and foreclosing other practices and futures.



Mathias Danbolt is a professor of art history at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Over the past decade, his research has focused on the intersections between art history and colonial history in a Nordic context, with particular emphasis on memory politics, monuments, and art in public spaces. Danbolt has led several collaborative research projects examining the contemporary effects of colonial history and politics, including *Okta: Art and Communities in Friction in Sápmi* (2019–2022), *The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories* (2019–2024), and *Moving Monuments: The Material Life of Sculpture from the Danish Colonial Era* (2022–2025). His latest publication is the anthology *Searvedoaibma: Art and Social Communities in Sápmi* (2024), co-edited with Britt Kramvig and Christina Hætta.



Ambiguous Antiquity

Classicism and its reception in the
Nordic countries during the 18th
and early 19th century



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|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Tonje Haugland Sørensen, Researcher, University of Copenhagen, Denmark Amalie Skovmøller, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 16.00–17.30 |
| Location | Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor |

In the royal gardens of Fredensborg in Denmark stands a large monument of roughly hewn granite stones combined with classical marble heads. Known as *Forblommet Antik*, or covert or ambiguous antiquity it was made by the Danish sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt in the 1750s and is indicative of how he sought to merge his studies of ancient antiquities with Nordic materials and landscapes. By seeing *Forblommet Antik* as emblematic for a willed entanglement of classical forms (the heads) and Nordic materials (the rough granite) we seek to explore how, during this period, the hegemony of the classical was becoming tempered—and even challenged—by the fascination for and the growing belief in the existence of a particular Nordic aesthetic. Informed by the region's own history, climate, and geography, antiquarians, such as O. Worm, had established a tradition of collecting Nordic antiquities during the 17th century uniting *naturalia* with *artificiosa*, and thus reaching beyond the studies of ancient texts to include local landscapes. In this session, we examine the role of classicism in the Nordic countries, and how it became entangled in the idea that there existed a Nordic aesthetic that somehow differed from the classical tradition. The session thus centers on the 18th century at the cross-section between 19th century reception of ancient antiquities and 17th century antiquarian practices, highlighting Nordic pre-historic landscapes and archaeological remains.

Eternal Love! Sphinx!

Whoever Antinous clings to, is never abandoned by him

Marcel Engdahl

This paper explores the impact of Antinous, the highly portraited favorite of Emperor Hadrian, as a personification of ambiguous antiquity in the Swedish classical reception of late 19th century. It argues that the author Viktor Rydberg (1828–1895), in the sense of a minor “initiator of discursive practices”, at the core of his classical aesthetics placed his encounters with the sculptures of Antinous in Rome 1874, when in search of a runic manuscript for his studies in old Norse and mythology.

Rydberg became fixated on the representations and tragic fate of Antinous. This paper approaches the ambiguous relationship with the equally ambiguous Antinous and the reception of him as emblematic of Greek beauty in Rome’s morally debased culture, where art, according to Rydberg, had long been incapable of renewal. Antinous, however, embodied an enigmatic coexistence of Hellenic and Roman art, the formation of his face being Hellenic, but “diverges from the Hellenic type”. His aesthetic beauty is eternal, “always the same, at the first glance recognizable, in changing forms, as hero or as god”.

As the first professor of art history in Sweden (1889–1895), Viktor Rydberg aimed at giving the dawning discipline weight and academic distinction with his deep erudition, literary style, and personally colored examples from Western cultural history, as is shown in the manuscripts of his lectures. Rydberg’s iconographic (and homoerotic) interpretations of Antinous “Hellenic” beauty and Roman melancholy also made an impression outside of Sweden. For example, his *Roman Days* was simultaneously published in Swedish and Danish 1877 and reaching an English-speaking public when published 1879 in the UK and the USA.

■ Marcel Engdahl is a first-year PhD student in the Department of Art History at Uppsala University. He completed his master’s degree in art history at Stockholm University in 2022 and held a curatorial position at the Åmells Gallery and Fine Art Dealers in Stockholm from 2021 to 2024. Engdahl’s thesis project, *Viktor Rydberg as Art Historian*, seeks to address a gap in the historiography of Viktor Rydberg’s contributions to art history and to assess his influence on the development of the discipline in Sweden.

Antinous
Viktor Rydberg
classical aesthetics
reception

ambiguous antiquity
Hellenic beauty
Roman melancholy

A Small-Scale Empire in Porcelain

Helene Engnes Birkeli

Among the historical holdings of the Meissen porcelain manufactory (est. 1710) is a striking allegorical centerpiece labeled “Dänemark und Norwegen” (MPS 003345–003359, model no. 1692). Dominated by a tall obelisk, the tableau features crowned female figures with cornucopias and a spindle, putti engaged in arts and sciences. A winged man pulls a woman from the obelisk, while a helmeted figure gestures toward a cartouche. These mythological characters include Fame, Athena, Saturn, and the Parcae (The Three Fates). Palm trees frame the scene—not evoking a Nordic landscape, but rather a tropical or Mediterranean one. This paper explores how, through its form and implementation of Classical idioms, the sculpture enacts a vision of Danish-Norwegian imperial worldmaking.

Drawing on Meissen catalogues, the group likely commemorates the 1767 diplomatic agreement transferring Schleswig and Holstein to Denmark-Norway, securing its alliance with Russia and the Oldenburg duchy for Catherine II’s heir. Sculpted by Meissen’s master sculptor Johann Joachim Kändler, the piece reflects the prestige of its commission. Notably absent is the elephant symbolizing the Danish Order of the Elephant (nonetheless visible in the black-and-white photograph reproduced in the 1930 *Sammlung Dr. Witte-Rostock*-catalogue).

As a *Tafelaufsatz*, this porcelain centerpiece would have adorned a banquet table, materializing diplomatic ties through a medium that played with visual genres—combining Greco-Roman iconography, print culture and cartographic motifs, and the legacy of edible sugar sculpture. Monumental yet intimate, the centerpiece invites reflection on scale, immersion, and imperial imagination. In glazed porcelain, the paper whiteness of the “terra nullius” in cartographic worldmaking is transformed to resemble Classical marble statuary. Rather than evoking timelessness, however, these overlaid associations point to the peculiar materiality of whiteness in the late eighteenth-century.

■ Helene Engnes Birkeli is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the project TiO2: *How Norway Made the World Whiter* at the University of Bergen, funded by The Research Council of Norway. She completed her PhD at University College London in 2022 with her thesis titled *Tracing Territory: The Visual Culture of Danish(-Norwegian) Colonialism in the Caribbean*, which she is turning into a monograph. Her current project investigates the aesthetics of Norwegian cobalt production and extractive landscapes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

porcelain
classicism
imperial worldmaking

Marblescapes

How foreign stones shaped Danish landscapes

Amalie Skovmøller

White marble is a material that has been closely associated with Antiquity through centuries. Since the 18th century, marble became a sought-after material for sculptural and architectural decorations in Denmark. Today, white marble stones can be found in public spaces, civic buildings and cultural institutions throughout the country, and has become a material closely associated with the historic and cultural spaces of Danish society. Yet, marble—as a natural, metamorphic stone—cannot be sourced within the borders of what we know as Denmark today. This raises the questions: where did the stones come from; how were they extracted—and by whom; how has the circulation of stones from far away regions, crossing land and sea to reach Denmark, been organized; and how has the consumption of foreign stones mattered to the formation of Danish landscapes as well as cultural and civic spaces?

Discussing these questions, this paper centers on the white marble, which came to Denmark during the late 18th century to shape the artistic landscapes of Danish sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt (1731–1802). Wiedewelt had travelled to Rome during the 1750s, and when he returned to Copenhagen, he brought with him ideas about sculpture, aesthetics and materials—above all, white marble. Tracing his marble connections, this paper explores how stones were brought to Danish contexts from quarries in Italy and Norway to shape new *marblescapes*; meaning sites of display for sculpture, where marble accumulated to serve as medium for Danish national, political, and ideological ideas.

Amalie Skovmøller is Associate Professor in Art History, University of Copenhagen. Trained in classical archaeology, her research extends from painted polychromy of ancient Roman portraiture, to eighteenth and nineteenth century reception of antiquity, emphasizing white marble sculptures. She has published on the colors and materialities of ancient sculptures, and the surface treatments and marble-connections of Danish sculptors Johannes Wiedewelt (1731–1802) and Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844). She's currently co-directing the research project *Moving Monuments: The Material Lives of Sculpture from the Danish Colonial Era* with professor in art history Mathias Danbolt, uncovering the infrastructure of public monuments from the 17th century till today.

material circulation

marble

classicism

extraction

The Classical Idiom and the Problem of Odin's Horse

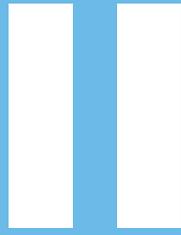
Tonje Haugland Sørensen

What does a Norse god look like? And does Odin require a specific, Nordic aesthetic? In the late 18th century, Scandinavian writers and artists became increasingly fascinated by the stories and characters from Norse mythology. Poems, plays and visual artworks with a Norse theme started to be produced, yet the fascination was also followed by a discourse that highlighted the problems with Norse-inspired art. In this debate, the entanglement and tension with the classical tradition were a central feature, and a recurring problem was whether it was possible to make statues of the Norse gods. First was the worry, uttered by the Danish sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt as early as 1764, that most depictions of Norse deities too closely resembled the iconography of Classical antiquity. Wiedewelt, informed by the works of J.J. Winckelmann, stressed the need to explore an artwork's cultural context and questioned the wisdom of making Norse gods resemble those of Greece and Rome. For Wiedewelt, this resulted only in a practice where Norse gods had "German names, but Greek garbs". However, a break with the classical tradition also presented a problem as figures like the one-eyed Odin with his eight-legged horse ran counter to the classical idiom and its aesthetic ideals of beauty and harmony. Influential people like Erik Gustaf Geijer, in the 1818 essay "Betraktelser i avseende på de nordiska myternas användande i skön konst" ("Considerations concerning the use of Norse myths in Fine Art"), therefore advised artists not to make statues of the Norse gods at all since doing so would only lead to making bad art. According to Geijer, artists wanting to explore Norse material should opt out of sculpture altogether and focus instead on landscape painting similar to those of C.J. Fahlcrantz!

Tracing this discourse through text and art works (for instance by J. Wiedewelt, B.E. Fogleberg and H.E. Freund) this presentation will explore the intertwined history of the classical idiom, aesthetic theory and Norse mythology in the late 18th and early 19th century Scandinavia and reflect on why the hegemony of the classical idiom made sculpting Odin's eight-legged horse so incredibly difficult.

■ Tonje Haugland Sørensen is Assistant Professor in Art History, University of Copenhagen. With a background in both art history and film studies her research deals with the wider visual culture of Scandinavia and northern Europe in the 18th to early 20th century. She has worked on medievalism in Scandinavia and her monograph on that subject—*A Discovery of Dragons—Norse Revival art, architecture and design in Scandinavia* is forthcoming with Manchester University Press. In recent years she has worked increasingly on eco-critical perspectives in art history and particularly on the role of extraction and aesthetics. From 2025 to 2029 she is PI on project *Norwegian Wood: Extractive landscapes, art and visual culture in Denmark and Norway 1730–1860* funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation.

Norse mythology
sculpture
aesthetic theory
classicism



Architecture in Sápmi



Session chairs

Carlos Mínguez Carrasco,
Chief Curator, ArkDes, Stockholm, Sweden

Petteri Kummala,
Head of Research,
Architecture and Design Museum,
Helsinki, Finland

Bente Aass Solbakken,
Senior Curator, The National Museum of Art,
Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway

Date Tuesday, October 21st

Time 9.00–10.30 & 10.45–12.15

Location Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor

A growing interest in Indigenous architecture is emerging internationally. This interest encompasses architecture designed by, with, or for Indigenous communities, as well as the impact of non-Indigenous and colonial architecture. In the Nordic countries, a new interest in Sámi architecture has developed over the past decade, though studies on the subject remain limited and fragmented. Studies on architecture in the Nordic countries have rarely aimed to transcend national frameworks, thus Sámi architecture has also been obscured as a transnational phenomenon.

As part of an initiative by the Architecture and Design Museum Helsinki, the National Museum of Norway, and ArkDes, we are collaborating on a project to explore both Sámi architecture specifically, and architecture in Sápmi from a broader perspective.

The papers of this session discuss how architecture and architectural culture in Sápmi have developed and evolved through interactions with, in spite of, and as a result of various nation-state geopolitical strategies from the 17th century to the present.

On Sámi Displacement and Solidarity in post-World War II Sápmi

Elisa Dainese

This presentation investigates the history of Sámi resistance to displacement in the 1960s–1980s. The focus is on the attempted erasure of Indigenous land-care practices and landscape imageries that followed the collectivization, industrialization, and urbanization of Sápmi in Russia. Among others, the work analyzes examples of Sámi testimonies which include the writings by Askold Bazhanov and Oktiabrina Voronova on the hybridity of Sámi culture in the Kola Peninsula and the traumatic history of Indigenous displacement, assimilation, and language loss in the Soviet Union. The examination of the history of Sámi artistic production on displacement uncovers the complex role played by Indigenous writers in the development of a post-World War II transnational solidarity. Hidden accounts tell the story of a complex framework of cross-border contacts in which Indigenous voices followed networks that had been present among Arctic groups well before the consolidation of state borders. In the 1960s–1980s, Indigenous transnational activism articulated a unique approach to resisting, protecting, and restoring knowledge. By drawing from Sámi worldviews and ideas of communal property, Nordic Sámi diplomacy asked for the creation of alternative Arctic sovereignties, a focus on land and resource rights, control over Indigenous knowledge, and the preservation of local cosmologies, more than the creation of independent statehoods. Indigenous writers in Kola Sápmi fought to inform local narratives on displacement. Together and across borders they influenced the emergence of transnational organizations, including the Saami Council and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON).

Elisa Dainese is an Assistant Professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology (USA). She is a historian and theorist of architecture and urbanism who specializes in architectural knowledge, its production, and transnational circulation. Her work investigates ideas of cross-cultural exchange and the recovery of historically underrepresented voices, including ones in the Arctic. She has published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, the *Journal of Architecture*, *Thresholds*, *Bauhaus*, *OASE*, and *Planning Perspectives*, and is the co-editor of *War Diaries* (University of Virginia Press, 2022). She has received awards from the Mellon Foundation, the Bruno Zevi Foundation, and the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians. Her research has been supported by the European Union, the Canadian Center for Architecture, and the Graham Foundation. She has served in research and professional boards, among them that of the Directors of the Society of Architectural Historians and was co-chair of the SAH 78th Annual International Conference.

Sámi solidarity
post-war architecture
land separation
transnational history

Cross-Pollination or Coercion?

Critical notes on “hybridity” in ecclesiastical modern architecture in Sápmi

Sofia Nivarti

Since the new millennium, the role of the Nordic national Churches in the cultural and political subjugation of Sámi communities has been interrogated with increasing vigor by academics and the Churches themselves. This paper introduces a new research project which seeks to contribute an architectural voice to the enquiry.

The construction of Lutheran churches throughout Sápmi from the 17th century to the present day has been employed by Finland, Norway, and Sweden as an instrument of subjugationist and assimilationist politics. The increased recognition of the legal and cultural rights of the Sámi since the mid-20th century has complicated the prior premise of ecclesiastical architecture as a tool of conversion and control with more ambiguous—if still fraught—dynamics of ostensible dialogue and reconciliation. This paper addresses the extent to which, and means through which, the evolving relations between Sámi and Nordic actors are reflected in sacral modern architecture in Sápmi.

Focusing on Lutheran churches erected in Sápmi in the 20th and 21st centuries, the paper asks: What does it mean, architecturally, to “translate” a Christian paradigm to an Indigenous context—and more specifically, a Nordic national religious paradigm to Sápmi? Is the dynamic one of translation in the first place—or coercion, cross-pollination, creolization, or something else? Are modern churches in Sápmi architectural “hybrids”, or is the very conception of hybridity misleading? Which theoretical frameworks might a study of these buildings rely on, and benefit from?

Examples of the buildings studied include the Sámi Church of Aanaar/Inari (Inkeri Visanti with Antero Pernaja, 1952); the Arctic Cathedral of Romsa/Tromsø (Jan Inge Hovig, 1964); the Church of Kárášjohka/Karasjok (Odd Østbye, 1974); the Chapel of St. Paul, Suoločielgi/Saariselkä (Erkki Jokiniemi, 1996); the Northern Lights Church of Áltá/Alta (Schmidt Hammer Lassen with Kolbjørn Jenssen, 2013); and the New Chapel of Gáregasnjárga/Karigasniemi (Jorma Paloranta, 2016).

■ Sofia Nivarti is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at the University of Cambridge, UK. Her research interests lie in the architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries in Sápmi and the Nordic countries, and her specialist area of expertise is the study of Finnish modernists Alvar, Aino, and Elissa Aalto.

architecture in Sápmi
ecclesiastical architecture
Christianization
colonialism
hybridity

Inside the Circle—Outside the Frame

Sámi dwellings reimagined

Maria Nordvall

Sámi dwellings are found throughout the entire Sápmi region, encompassing a diverse array of materials, structural forms, and architectural adaptations. These dwellings, shaped by environmental conditions, available resources, and local cultural traditions, showcase the ingenuity and resilience of Sámi people, demonstrating both material and immaterial cultural heritage.

The paper explores Sámi dwellings primarily in Sweden with a thematic temporal scope spanning from the late 19th century through to the contemporary. By looking at primarily *lávvus* and *goahtis*, two types of Sámi dwellings, the paper explores the relationship between the dwelling and the ideas of the circle and circularity. The study considers an inside-outside perspective that accounts for the physical spatiality, engagement through different artistic media, and their cosmological meaning. What arises when we position ourselves inside the circle but reimagine beyond the frame? By assessing the dwellings' physical and material dimensions and their conceptualization in and through visual culture, like installations, sketches, and paintings, the approach serves as a way to indigenize the narrative. Not only does the paper contribute to the broader discourse on indigenous architecture, visual culture, and spatial practices, it also emphasizes the dwellings as crucial epistemologies for indigenous methodologies in academia, closely interwoven with decolonial strategies. By demonstrating the enduring significance of the dwellings in both historical and contemporary contexts, the research restores the agency of the dwellings, allowing them to be defined from within rather than from perhaps a more limiting, external perspective.

The paper is an excerpt from my ongoing dissertation, situated at the intersection of art history and social anthropology, employing an interdisciplinary approach to examine the visual, spatial, and epistemological significance of Sámi dwellings in both historical and contemporary contexts.

■ Maria Nordvall is a forest Sámi scholar, art critic, and illustrator originated from Jiellevárre (Gällivare) located north of the Arctic Circle in Sweden. She is a second year PhD researcher at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland) in the department of Social Anthropology. Her previous work stretches from her master's degree in art history to academic contributions within collaborative Sámi research projects such as *Viesso duobbdága* and *Säi'mm—Skolt Saami Network*. Nordvall is a research assistant within the international initiative *Arctic Heritage: Commodification, Identity, and Revitalisation in the Anthropocene*.

Sámi dwellings
visual culture
indigenous architecture
material and immaterial heritage
Sápmi
multisensory engagement

Making Amends?

Negotiations and implications of the Akkats hydropower station art project

Felicia Söderqvist

The majority of Sweden's hydroelectricity is produced in the Swedish "North", largely a product of the booming economies and industrial growth following WWII. These hydropower facilities meant drastic changes to the riverine landscapes, including traditional livelihoods and cultural expressions. For example, hydropower has often been criticized for its role in the negative impacts on Sámi peoples and Sámi cultural practices. In the Swedish Arctic and Swedish Sápmi, hydropower can therefore be highly ethnopolitical.

As a part of my PhD, and the project *Cultural Heritage and the Legacies of Hydropower in the Swedish Arctic*, I investigated the narratives of consequences of the Akkats hydropower station outside of Jokkmokk, finished in 1973. By the end of the 1900s, indigenous rights were gaining momentum in international politics. This focus reverberated within the Swedish context, providing incentive for the Akkats art project in 1999—Sámi artworks covering the Akkats hydropower facilities.

Through interviews, observations, maps, news article analysis, and reshooting of photos, the results demonstrated that the artworks served to render the onsite relationships between local communities, place, and industry more visible, as well as henceforth providing a marketing and history use opportunity. Due to the history of negative impacts on Sámi culture and land use, the artworks became controversial, and opinions diverged whether this was a case of recognition or sacrilege. The hydropower station has also become used as a testament to the history and correlation of hydropower projects and the growth of communities within the region, the colorful exterior frequently utilized by actors working to put the region, and themselves, on the map.

■ Felicia Söderqvist is a PhD candidate in history at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, finishing her thesis in Autumn 2025. She is a board member of the Swedish branches of the *Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS Sweden)* and the *International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH Sweden)*. She has a background in social and cultural analyses and environmental history. She specializes in the history of energy systems, currently focusing on hydropower.

Akkats
hydropower
Sweden
Sápmi
art

Architectural Conservation as a Decolonial Tool

Magnus Antaris Tuolja

One of the core definitions of being an indigenous people, according to the Martinez Cobo (1987) study, is the determination to “[...] preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns [...]”. In short, cultural heritage conservation is a key element of being an indigenous people. Although it can take different forms, this should also be applied to architectural conservation.

Heritage conservation has in a Sámi perspective received a more important role through the judicial processes surrounding Sámi rights on the Swedish side of Sápmi. The Sámi rights on the Swedish side are mainly based on *urminnes hävd* (adverse possession). Where the right of usage has been cultivated continuously over time. *Urminnes hävd* is today defunct, and new rights cannot be accrued.

The Swedish Supreme Court made it clear that it’s up to the Sámi people to claim these rights and provide proof of historical Sámi usage and that this usage hasn’t been discontinued. The need has increased for us to conserve our heritage, both material and immaterial, to claim and keep our rights to Sámi land. As an indigenous people, we are not only forced to prove that we are still here, but that we have also been here historically.

This paper attempts to explore the roles of Sámi architectural conservation and the strategies that have been used in the field historically. It describes these strategies, from Sámi perspective, regarding its usage in the decolonial process of claiming indigenous rights to indigenous lands.

These strategies must also be analyzed through their ability to preserve árbbediehto (traditional Sámi knowledge) and not only our material heritage. So that our architectural heritage can be continued into our contemporary Sámi movement of architecture.

■ Magnus Antaris Tuolja is a Sámi handiworker, working primarily with restoring and conserving traditional Sámi buildings and the immaterial heritage of the craft behind them. His background is in traditional duodji, educated in the subject at Sámiij áhpadusguovdásj 2012–2014. His journey continued into architecture at Umeå School of Architecture between 2014–2016 before he decided to move into architectural conservation. He studied the Building Craft’s programme between 2021–2024 at the Department of Conservation, University of Gothenburg. His bachelor paper on the historical craft of bending Ádnárisá (curved ribs in a Sámi goahti construction) received a Várdduo’s student prize scholarship of 2024.

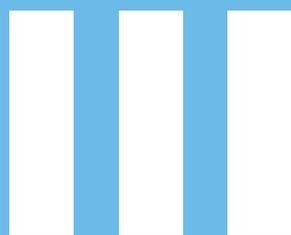
decolonial architecture

indigenous architectural conservation

traditional Sámi architecture

Sámi Rights

indigenous land



Art and Creative Practices in Healthcare Institutions

A Nordic context

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Session chair | Hedvig Mårdh, PhD Art History, Senior Lecturer Cultural Studies, Art History and Visual Studies, Karlstad University, Sweden |
| Date | Wednesday, October 22nd |
| Time | 13.45–15.15 |
| Location | F3006, 3rd Floor |

This panel explores art and creative practices, including patients' art and public art, in health care institutions in a Nordic context.

Art is experienced, used, and practiced in numerous settings and situations, also when we are at our most vulnerable and challenging stages of life. Art can be found in most hospitals, as public art, art therapy, in collections, exhibitions, and in hospital archives. Research about art and creative practices in healthcare institutions can contribute to a better understanding of the important role art can play in relation to people's mental and physical health. The history of art in institutions of care also reveal the changing perceptions over time of the relation between art, creativity, and health.

Research in this field is often interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from for example art history, museum studies, healthcare science, and medical history. The topic is also closely related to current artistic and curatorial practices where it often is examined in relation to power and norms regarding creativity and health. The session provides a platform for papers that explore individual artists, exhibitions, specific sites, and institutions, art works, collaborative projects, or collections. In line with the conference's aim this session should be seen as an invitation to explore and expand our knowledge about the Nordic context and aims to encourage further research collaborations.

Magical Healing

A case study on the (un)predictability of using art in the healthcare sector

Peter Bengtsen

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to use art within healthcare to improve health and well-being, and new structures for researching and evaluating the effects of artistic interventions have been established within the healthcare sector. A consequence of this is that new professions, from neurologists to nurses and work therapists, increasingly produce knowledge about art as a part of their professional work. The emergence within healthcare of this structured interest in art has mostly happened independently of art history—the discipline which traditionally has managed academic knowledge about art—and has given rise to a new field: Arts & Health.

In clinical practice as well as in policy and scholarly publications (e.g., *Arts & Health* (2009–present) and *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health* (2019–present)) within the field of Arts & Health there is a tendency to focus on *evidence* and *predictability*—i.e. the need to be able to measure and reliably predict the effects of art on health. This focus seems in part to be connected to the well-known first principle of the Hippocratic Oath: “first, do no harm”. This principle, which is central to medical ethics, entails a responsibility to ensure that medical and therapeutic practices do not cause harm to patients.

The Arts & Health field’s focus on evidence and predictability stands in contrast to the expectations related to art usually found within art history and art practice. Here is often emphasized precisely art’s unpredictability and its ability to surprise and create new and unexpected perspectives and ideas.

With a point of departure in the American artist Brad Downey’s work *Magical Healing* at Södertälje Sjukhus, this paper explores the artist’s perspectives on working in a field that tends to expect and require evidence and predictability. Understanding the artist’s perspectives and experiences is important for the long-term development of the Arts & Health field and for finding ways to align expectations and further integrate the use of art in improving health and well-being.

■ Peter Bengtsen is an art historian and sociologist and is Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at Lund University. He has published extensively on art in public spaces and is currently working in the projects *Art Worlds Apart: Art as a Boundary Object between Healthcare and Art History*, funded by the Swedish Research Council 2022–2025, and *Burden of Proof: on creating and using art in the healthcare sector*, funded by The Gyllenstierna Krapperrup Foundation 2024–2025.

Arts & Health
evidence claims
Brad Downey
Södertälje Sjukhus
Magical Healing

The Salutogenesis of Response within Tina Enghoff's Photography Workshops

Erika Larsson

Danish artist Tina Enghoff has worked for nearly three decades on both individual and collaborative artistic projects, with photography often playing a central role. Her project “Siunissaq” (meaning “the future” in Greenlandic), carried out between 2015 and 2021 in collaboration with psychologist Peter Berliner, focuses on engaging young people in artistic workshops related to mental health in various Greenlandic communities.

Conventional mental health research often follows clinical methodologies with predefined, measurable outcomes. However, Enghoff's work takes a different approach. From a salutogenic perspective, this paper explores how the artistic workshops she leads serve not only as forms of creative expression but also as catalysts for insight, community-building, and transformation. Rather than aiming for specific results, the emphasis lies on the creative process itself—an open-ended exploration where curiosity and creativity hold intrinsic value.

This paper highlights specific works from the *Siunissaq* project, looking at how responses from participants, facilitators, and the broader community shape the workshops' impact. In these workshops, young people create images and texts that give form to emotions that can be difficult to express, creating space for reflection and connection. The paper suggests that the open-ended nature of the workshops allows for deeper engagement, where the process itself—not just the final outcome—becomes meaningful. Instead of focusing on correcting something or achieving a predefined goal, the workshops encourage curiosity and exploration, making space for new ways of seeing and understanding personal and collective experiences.

By stepping away from a fixed, outcome-driven approach to mental health, Enghoff's work opens up alternative ways of thinking about healing and well-being. Rather than being bound by a strict definition of mental health, the workshops allow creativity to take on a life of its own—shared, evolving, and shaped by the people involved. In this way, the project shows how artistic expression can go beyond the individual, creating a sense of connection and transformation that isn't tied to a specific result but to the journey itself.

■ Erika Larsson is an Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Culture at Lund University, specializing in affective, embodied, and non-representational perspectives on photography. She previously held a postdoctoral position at HDK-Valand Academy, Gothenburg University, in collaboration with the Hasselblad Foundation, where she researched contemporary artists' engagements with the interwar period. Her current research explores the connections between artistic processes and salutogenesis and is conducted in partnership with the Museum of Artistic Process and Public Art in Lund.

*collaborative art
creativity
mental health*

*photography
salutogenesis*



Art as a Boundary Object in-between Healthcare and Art History

Max Liljefors

In the Nordic countries, the arts are increasingly integrated into the healthcare sector to promote health and wellbeing. A scoping evidence report from WHO (2019) presents results from around 4 000 studies showing positive health effects from engagement in artistic and aesthetic activities, e.g., decreased need for medication and doctor's visits, reduction of pain and stress, faster recovery from physical and psychic illness, and increased quality of life, across the lifespan.

This paper discusses how the integration of art in healthcare contexts requires an interdisciplinary approach, where insights from the aesthetic disciplines, e.g., art history, are combined with discoveries from the medical and healthcare sciences. This, in turn, necessitates a meta-epistemological dialogue about the differing criteria for legitimate knowledge in the respective fields.

The paper proposes that the concept of *existential health* can function as a conceptual bridge for dialogue and collaboration across disciplines. This term gained increased attention in 2024, when the Swedish government gave a new directive to the Public Health Agency: to work with existential health as part of the public health policy. As a result, the potential of the arts to foster health and wellbeing has been highlighted. In a recent report, the Public Health Agency points to art history as a crucial discipline for realizing this prospect in society. The paper discusses potential benefits and risks with this initiative.

The paper also elaborates on how existential health relates to the transformative potential of art, as elaborated by several aesthetic philosophers. Specifically, the tension between aesthetic transformation and a utilitarian approach is highlighted. A new model comprising four layers of "aesthetic engagement" is presented as a methodological tool for implementing art in healthcare contexts without succumbing to an instrumentalist view. The model combines recent findings in neuroscience with insights from aesthetic philosophy and artistic research.

The paper is based on the research project *Art Worlds Apart: Art as a Boundary Object between Healthcare and Art History*, funded by the Swedish Research Council 2022–2025.

■ Max Liljefors is Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at Lund University. He is the PI of the project *Art Worlds Apart* and has extensive experience from interdisciplinary collaboration with the medical and health sciences. He has developed courses on arts and health for personnel in the healthcare and cultural sectors, and within EUGLOH (European University Alliance for Global Health). He coordinates the Existential Resilience Collaboration Initiative, with 20 researchers from five faculties at Lund University and a dozen societal partners in Sweden and Denmark. Liljefors is a fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, and the Academy's Health Committee.

art and health

art and transformation

existential health

boundary object

instrumentalization

Herlev Hospital

The largest work of art in Denmark by a single artist... or a result of the Nordic welfare state?

Philip Pihl

After ten years of construction, Herlev Hospital outside Copenhagen opened in 1976. It has 26 floors and done in a brutalist and futuristic style. Inside the building is extremely colorful. The lobby is marked by large colorful paintings and throughout the building walls, doors, lamps, curtains etc., are given bright colors.

The color scheme of the interior is credited to Danish artist Poul Gernes (1925–1996), who worked with the architects of the building in ten years to realize the bright colored result. In the process Gernes managed to expand the project from only including the lobby to the entire hospital. The work is often called the biggest piece of art in Denmark.

In my paper I will focus on discrepancies in the general narration about the decoration. On one hand the work is often understood as the work of a single artist, who fought the system and through will power forced his vision through. On the other hand, large scale works from this time are also understood as a result of the Danish Arts Council, formed in the mid-sixties. This again is understood as a result of a specific Nordic welfare model flourishing in the sixties. So, is Herlev Hospital the result of a single artist or of a democratic system believing in the power of free art?

I wish to investigate how both narrations seem to coexist and possibly also feed off each other. As a second point I find it interesting to see if a new narration of the work as being a collective work, can allow new interpretations, that might free the work from being understood as a predominant historic work to an open work, with a purpose inside a hospital today as well as then.

■ Philip Pihl started his PhD at Aarhus University in September 2024, which is centered on the collective work of the Danish artist couple Aase and Poul Gernes. Although Poul Gernes is often cited as the sole artist of his big public commissions, it is widely known that these were created in collaboration with Aase Gernes as well as others. He is interested in how new interpretations are possible, when the work is understood as a collective work. He has previously worked on other Danish artists such as Willy Ørskov (1920–1990) and Anna Thommesen (1908–2004).

public art in hospitals

welfare state

1970s

Danish Arts Council

Poul Gernes

IV

The Artist's Role and “Nordic” Identity



| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Session chairs | Andrea Kollnitz, Professor in Art History, Stockholm University, Sweden Øystein Sjøstad, Professor in Art History, University of Oslo, Norway |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 11.00–12.30 & 14.00–15.30 |
| Location | Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor |

This session explores the artist's role as it relates to, becomes entangled with, or disrupts ideas of a "Nordic" identity. Since the rise of the artist as a professionally distinct and exceptional creative agent during the early Renaissance, artists have been interpreted—and have often interpreted themselves—as *pars pro toto* of their geographical area, region, nation, culture, etc., thereby taking on representative roles in terms of style, motifs, and expressions. Artworks are supposed to communicate not only the qualities of their individual makers, but also the places with which they identify. Then, as now, both art objects and their creators tend to be appropriated and politicized as symbolic—or even deviant—phenomena, either reinforcing or unsettling notions of collective national or "Nordic" identity.

In this session, we aim to problematize the expected connection and interaction between such composite identities within the role of the artist by highlighting cases of supposedly "Nordic" artists who promote, negotiate, or question their national or Nordic identity, particularly in relation to their self-fashioning as representatives for or against such notions. Self-fashioning may imply strategies of self-promotion and validation through visual self-display in different media or embodied life-performances. It may involve strategic art production either in support of, or opposition to national or regional labels, evolving through textual discourses that reinforce or transcend images of national or Nordic identity. In this session we discuss diverse aspects of identity formation in the artist's role and its relation to Nordic identity, whether by investigating individual artists or theorizing general themes and questions in historical or contemporary contexts.

Tyko Sallinen's non-Nordic Art

Racialization and Finnish art in the Scandinavian context

Timo Huusko

In my paper I will focus on how Tyko Sallinen's (1879–1955) art and especially his painting *The Fanatics* (1918, Finnish National Gallery) affected the notions of Finnishness in Scandinavia. I will concentrate on the reception of Sallinen's art at an exhibition of Finnish art held in Copenhagen in 1919 and at an exhibition of Nordic art held in Gothenburg in 1923. Sallinen's primitivism supported the prevailing prejudices related to racialization at the time, in which the Finnish-speaking population was considered non-Western and even Asiatic. These ideas had been popular ever since the Swedish Gustaf Retzius published his study *Finska kranier* ("Finnish Skulls") in 1878, which became well-known at the Paris World Fair that same year.

My presentation sheds light on how the Finnish Civil War in 1918 reinforced the perception of primitive Finns in relation to civilized Scandinavians and the civilized Swedish-speaking population of Finland, and how Sallinen's artistic imagery and its formal characteristics supported this preconception. During the civil war, Finland was positioned between East and West in a geopolitical sense, as Germany supported the victors, the "Whites", while Soviet Russia supported the defeated, the "Reds". The Finnish-speaking populace, which joined the revolutionary Reds, was seen as having lost its self-control and become contaminated by the "Bolshevik" spirit. Sallinen's depiction of commoners was also seen as proof of this. Primitivism and Finnishness became almost synonymous, as Swedish art historian Ragnar Josephson noted as late as 1943 in his essay on Sallinen.

I will also ponder how consciously Sallinen and his art dealer Gösta Stenman constructed this perception of primitiveness, because it seemed to be something that Scandinavians expected to see in Finnish art after the bloody civil war. My paper is based on my doctoral dissertation, which I defended in April this year.

■ Timo Huusko (PhD) is Chief Curator of Collections at the Ateneum Art Museum / Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki. He has written art historical articles in exhibition catalogues and scientific publications and curated and co-curated art exhibitions. He is member of CIMAM and EAM.

primitiveness
othering
racialization
Finnish art
Tyko Sallinen

“Nordic Archetypes”?

On the role of a “Nordic Neo-Avant-Garde artist” in the Harvesters’ exhibitions between Finland, Iceland, and Sweden

Diana Kaur Vonna-Michell

The Finnish artist group the Harvesters’ most ambitious exhibition took place at Amos Andersson Art Museum in Helsinki (1976), at the Nordic House in Reykjavik (1977), and at Moderna Museet in Stockholm (1977). In the exhibition, titled *Adhesive Archetypes*, the Harvesters were claiming kinship with the historical avant-gardes as well as ideas of a “Finnish folk soul”. Significantly, according to the artist J.O. Mallander, a founding member of the group, they were not merely quoting avant-garde attitudes, strategies, and goals, but presenting them in a Finnish context for the first time. Thus, they claimed continuity with historic sensibilities while applying them to a distinctly Finnish and Nordic contemporary condition. Most Finnish art critics rejected this premise, considering it a rehash of outdated ideas, thus invalidating the exhibition’s principal aims. The reception in Sweden, on the other hand, was more positive. Despite the stereotyping of the “wild and crazy Finns”, the Harvesters’ mix of folk culture, shamanism, Zen Buddhism, and environmental concerns prevalent in the mid-1970s was met with cautious enthusiasm.

This paper explores the diverse and collaborative art practices of the Harvesters within the framework of the *Adhesive Archetypes* exhibitions. By positioning themselves both within, across, and outside national, cultural, linguistic, and relational boundaries, the group constructed a collective artists’ identity that was intensely local and, at the same time, “pan-Nordic”. This paper examines this polyphonic and ambiguous discourse, reading it not only as an attempt to articulate a “Nordic Neo-Avant-Garde” from a Finnish viewpoint, but also as part of a wider resistance against the constructive, edifying and nationally loyal role expected of the artist.

■ Diana Kaur Vonna-Michell (PhD) is an art historian and curator. She is a researcher at Uppsala University. Her doctoral dissertation, *The Making of Ways of Being an Artist: The Ethopoetics of J.O. Mallander’s Conceptual Art*, was published in December 2024. Since 2010, she has co-run the curatorial publishing agency and analogue studio Mount Analogue in Stockholm.

artist’s role
Nordic identity
self-fashioning
self-promotion
art critique
the Harvesters

J.O. Mallander
Neo-Avant-Garde
conceptual art
Finnish art
Cold War
nationalism

“Osessione Nordica”

Italian conceptions of Nordic art and the Nordic artist in the early twentieth century

Liliana Leopardi

Nordic Obsession: Böcklin, Klimt, Munch e la Pittura Italiana was the title of a 2014 exhibition at Palazzo Roverella in Rovigo. The title cleverly revived a phrase coined more than a century earlier by art critic Vittorio Pica—*l’Osessione Nordica*—in his review of the fourth Venice Biennale in 1901. At that time, Pica observed that Italy’s most modern and avant-garde painters were either influenced by, or ought to take inspiration from, the leading lights of Nordic art. Notably, both in 1901 and in 2014, the term “Nordic” was applied to a remarkably broad and heterogeneous group of artists—Swiss, German, Scottish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish—without significant critical differentiation. While the 2014 exhibition adopted the label with a knowing acknowledgment of its idiosyncratic scope, its earlier use was more earnest and prescriptive.

This paper explores how the concept of “Nordic art” was constructed and received in early twentieth-century Italy. It argues that, at a moment when the Italian state was less than half a century old and national identity was still in the making—echoing Cavour’s famous phrase “L’Italia è fatta, ora bisogna fare gli italiani”—the 1901 Biennale sought to contribute to this cultural project. By framing Nordic art as a cohesive and visionary model, the Biennale promoted a vision of modernity defined in contrast to Italy’s own self-perceived exhaustion: a “tired Latin” culture mired in retrospective classicism. However paradoxical given the internal diversity of the so-called Nordic countries, the label functioned rhetorically as a unified, forward-looking alternative. Nordic art, in the Italian imagination, became a beacon of clarity, innovation, and national cohesion—a mirror in which Italians might glimpse a future unburdened by the weight of antiquity.

■ Liliana Leopardi holds an MA and PhD in Italian Renaissance art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. She is Associate Professor and Chair of the Art and Architecture Department at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY. Her earlier research on gems and magical practices in the early modern period led to several articles and a book—*Speculum Lapidum: A Renaissance Treatise on the Healing Properties of Gemstones* (Penn State University Press, 2023). Her current work investigates the Baroque silver simulacrum of Santa Lucia in Siracusa and explores the material expressions of lived religion in early modern Sicily.

Italy
nationalism
Nordic art
realism
Venice Biennial

The Battle of North and South

Climate theory in the formation and reception of Thomas Fearnley as a Nordic artist

Trine Nordkvelle

This paper will explore the north-south dichotomy in the reception of Thomas Fearnley (1802–1842) and his art, using *The Grindelwald Glacier* (1838) as a point of departure. By asking the question “Why so Nordic?”, I will investigate the notion of a “masculine Nordicness” in opposition to a “sentimental South” in the research history of the painting as well as in the contemporaneous reception of Fearnley’s art, exposing climate theory as the underlying thought structure.

The idea that geography and climatic conditions affect society and its inhabitants became particularly widespread during the mid-18th century through the writings of, amongst others, Charles Montesquieu. Referred to as environmental determinism, climate theory led to the belief that some climates and traits were more preferable than others and was pervasive in German-Nordic exchange well into the early 19th century. In this context the “rough” and “proud” Nordic nature with its harsh weather is exalted as the suitable subject for a Nordic artist.

By looking at contemporaneous sources, I seek to identify how climate theory is essential to the understanding of Thomas Fearnley’s identity as a Nordic artist and the expectations of him as such. Moreover, I will discuss how these expectations conflict with Fearnley’s own experience of weather, making him prefer a milder climate. In his own words, in a letter to J.C. Dahl from T. Fearnley, Paris 24.3.1836: “[...] tænker jeg mig boende i Italien [...] beskjæftigende min Pfantasie med Nordens stolte og alvorlige Caracteertræk; malende vore barske og stormende Høstdage uden at i mindste Maade blive generet ved dem.” By investigating Fearnley’s dependency on weather in relation to his agency as landscape painter, this paper will critically explore if and how some aspects of climate theory might be worth revisiting.

■ Trine Nordkvelle (b. 1985) is a Doctoral Research Fellow at the National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design and University of Oslo with the PhD project “Thomas Fearnley and the Frozen Giant. *The Grindelwald Glacier* (1838) between Science, Imagination and Experience”. As a collection’s advisor at the National Museum, Trine has been working with Fearnley and early nineteenth century art for many years, with a specific focus on drawings and prints. She has a particular interest in how historical art is relevant for today’s discourse on environment and anthropogenic climate change.

Nordic identity
climate theory
ecocriticism
landscape painting
nineteenth century

Composite Notions of “Nordicness” in Ernst Barlach’s Oeuvre and His Reception

Charlotte Plückhahn

Ernst Barlach can be regarded as a prototype of a 20th century artist, whose reception was shaped by attributions such as “Nordic” and “German”. The artist himself relentlessly declared his close attachment to a northern landscape, infused not only by nationalist notions but also primitivist ideas of simplicity, authenticity, and an altogether unclassical realm. My paper investigates Barlach’s specific and complex notion of “Nordicness” and seeks to disrupt the idea, that a Nordic identity of a 20th century artist simply refers to a nationalist stance. Moreover, I intend to discuss the intricate relation of the artist’s reception until the 1930s and Barlach’s role, who partly embraced and partly refused being labeled as “German” and/or “Nordic”.

In a first step, the paper dwells on contemporary textual discourses and circumstances which took part in Barlach’s formation of a “Nordic” identity. It focuses on the artist’s residency as a fellow of the *Villa Romana* in Florence in 1909, where he developed a concept of the “North”, defined by the idea of an un-classical, un-cultural, and mythological realm. Moreover, it will shed light on Barlach’s reception of Wilhelm Worringer’s seminal book *Formprobleme der Gotik*, in which gothic art was declared as a “Nordic” phenomenon. In a second step, I intend to analyze visual strategies such as Barlach’s unpainted, raw woodworks and chosen subject matters as a probable means of self-promotion and validation as a “Nordic” artist. Finally, I will raise the question how Barlach’s self-fashioning relates to the reception of his artworks in public political debates. It will show the consequence of Barlach’s reception and the artist’s role in it as a highly ambivalent and politicized case, which could suddenly change to the contrary when the National Socialists came into power and declared Barlach’s art as being “Slavonic” and “un-German”.

■ Charlotte Plückhahn (b. 1989) studied art history at the University of Leipzig and attended a graduate program (Arnold-Heidsieck-Stipendium, ZEIT-Stiftung) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2014. She graduated at the University of Hamburg in 2018. In addition to her studies in Hamburg she worked as a Research Assistant at the *Center for the Study of Manuscript Cultures*. From 2019–2023 she has been a teaching assistant for art history at Justus-Liebig-University, Gießen. She is currently writing her dissertation about medieval allusions in the work and reception of Ernst Barlach at Goethe University, Frankfurt, and holds a scholarship by Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Düsseldorf.

Nordicness
primitivism
Ernst Barlach
reception
visual strategies

Myth, Music, and Manifestation

Richard Wagner's artistic identity and the Nordic imagination

Dagmar Thielen

The work and theories of German composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883) were profoundly shaped through his reinterpretative use of Nordic mythology. Through a newly conceptualized mythopoesis, Wagner employed ancient Nordic mythological narratives such as the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* as a means to craft a unique operatic language able to affectually express the broader ideological framework he himself had newly constructed for it. This paper examines how Wagner's use and transformation of characters and narratives from Nordic mythology not merely drifted on the intellectual currents of 19th-century Romanticism and nationalism, but rather how for Wagner, who neither Nordic by birth nor directly affiliated with Scandinavian cultural movements, it served as a means of artistic and ideological self-positioning. Central to this paper is Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* tetralogy (1876), which draws heavily from Old Norse sagas. Through a reconstruction of ancient Nordic narratives and their universally recognizable typologies Wagner aimed to create a narrative that, through the inherent recognizable affect of the myth, pushed his own artistic theory and its and utopian aspirations. The affective resonance of the Nordic myth strengthens and narratively reflects the other elements of the all-encompassing affectual aesthetic framework of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as well as providing an idealized historical narrative for that aimed to fill the void in the search for a national German identity and would simultaneously connect the artist Richard Wagner to both of these affectual constructs. This paper ultimately seeks to analyze how, through the use of Nordic mythology and its affect, Wagner aimed to fashion his artistic identity as not merely as a composer, but as a mythmaker, cultural architect, and artistic axiom. In doing so, it sheds light on the ways in which artists navigate, promote, and challenge the cultural identities with which they become entangled, raising broader questions about the intersections of art, mythology, and identity in the 19th century and beyond.

■ Dagmar Thielen (b. 1995) is an art historian with a focus on 19th century studies, iconology, architectural affect, and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In 2021, Dagmar graduated magna cum laude from her studies at KU Leuven (art history), whilst publishing on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in contemporary art (2019; 2024: WBOOKS, Zwolle; Kerber Verlag, Berlin). Between 2019 and 2022, she curated contemporary art at the Limburgs Museum and Museum van Bommel van Dam (Venlo, 2019; 2022). Dagmar is currently working on a PhD on Wagnerism (KU Leuven, Coventry University), exploring the movement's fin de siècle artist networks, interiority and visual motifs concerning gender, identity, art, and spaces of performance beyond Wagnerism's French nexus. In January of 2025, Dagmar was awarded first place in *The Ludwig Prize: the Wagnerian Research Award* for her academic work.

Wagnerism

Richard Wagner

Nordic myth

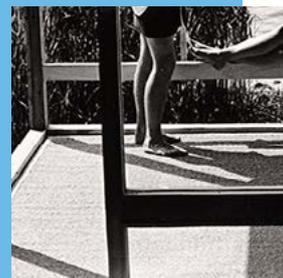
drama

19th century studies

art history

total work of art

V



Biennials in the Nordic Countries

Histories, places, practices,
and politics

Session chairs

Hanne Hammer Stien,

Professor, Academy of Arts,
UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø,
Norway

Elin Haugdal,

Professor, Department of Culture and Language,
UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø,
Norway

Stephanie von Spreter,

PhD, Norway

Haugdal and Stien are co-heading the research
group Worlding Northern Art | UiT where
von Spreter is a member.

Date

Monday, October 20th

Time

14.00–15.30 & 16.00–17.30

Location

F3017, 3rd Floor

Today the term biennial is used to refer to landmark survey exhibitions of international contemporary art, including not just biennials but also triennials, and even the quinquennial exhibition, documenta. Examples of biennials from a Nordic context are the Helsinki Biennial, Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art (GIBCA), Lofoten International Art Festival (LIAF), Bergen Assembly, and the ARoS Triennial.

In the introduction to *The Biennial Reader* (2014) Filipovic, van Hal, and Øvstebø call for what they term biennialology—“the study of something in a systematic, rigorous way in order to generate a body of knowledge”. The editors convincingly argue that biennials try to make sense of contemporary culture and that there is a need to examine them not only to understand what is at stake in the art (field), but also to comprehend today’s world. Even if there has been a growth in research on biennials since *The Biennial Reader* was published ten years ago, surprisingly little is written about biennials in the Nordic countries. How did they come about? Which artistic and curatorial practices do they generate? What topics do they address? How do the biennials in the Nordic countries attune and adapt to the local sites, and which place-making activities do they produce? How do they respond to and reflect the politics of the Nordic nation states and the geopolitical situation? Do they have impact on the practices of a broader field of contemporary art, and are they comparable to biennials outside of the Nordic countries? Is there a potential for continued relevance and future of the biennials, and do they foster resilient communities—in the long term? These are some of the questions we ask.

The Great Nordic Art Exhibition

Continuities and discontinuities in Nordic biennials from the 1860s until today

Jonas Ekeberg

In this paper, I would like to give an outline of a history of major Nordic art biennials from 1849 to the present. The term *a major Nordic art biennial* is used here to mean a recurring art exhibition that is arranged with the ambition to give a more or less coherent picture of Nordic art of the current time. Only once, in 1949, were one of these exhibitions named “The Great Nordic Art Exhibition”.

This history shall be divided into various periods: 1) the early period, before the opening of the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm in 1866, 2) the period of art and industrial exhibitions, from that opening and until the Stockholm exposition of 1930, overlapping with 3) the period of artist’s assemblies and exhibitions, starting in Gothenburg in 1869. After the Second World War we enter 4) the period of official Nordic biennials, with the exhibitions of the Nordic Art Association (from 1946 to 1976), then Nordic Youth Biennials (from 1966 to 1970) and the biennials Boralis and Aurora by the Nordic Art Centre (from 1983 to 1996) and, finally 5) the period of the contemporary biennials.

I would like to study these exhibitions, with a focus on the Post War era. I will put varying emphasis on a) social and political context, b) organization and financial structure, c) selection criteria and artistic direction, d) the actual exhibitions, including curatorial narrative and selected artists and artworks, and e) reception/criticism. The purpose of this broad approach is to try to discover continuities and discontinuities in Nordic exhibition history, and, in this way, uncover relations between cultural policies, institutional structures and artistic production in the Nordic countries.

■ Jonas Ekeberg (b. 1967) is a curator and critic based in Oslo. He is currently visual arts lead at Arts and Culture Norway. Ekeberg was the chief curator of Momentum—Nordic Biennial for Contemporary Art in 2000, founding director of Oslo Kunsthall the same year, and a curator and Head of Information at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway from 2002–2004. From 2004 to 2009 Ekeberg served as the director of Preus Museum, Norway’s national museum for photography. Ekeberg was chief editor of *Kunstkritikk—Nordic Art Review* from 2009 to 2019. His book *Postnordisk—Den nordiske kunstscenens vekst og fall 1976–2016* was published by Torpedo Press (Oslo) in 2019 (English version, 2013).

**Nordic art
biennials
exhibition history**

Challenging the Notion of the Nordic

The Sámi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

Monica Grini

“Biennials” are often used as shorthand for recurring art events, usually displaying contemporary artworks in large-scale exhibitions, accompanied by public discussions and interactions between various actors. The format goes back to the industrial world fairs of the 19th century and the promotion of modern nation-states within imperial power structures; this history is still identifiable in the pavilion layout of the Venice biennale. Although biennials are tied to hegemonic configurations and global economics, many also see them as places for counter-narratives and sites for critical experimentation. In my paper I will inquire into this duality. I will explore the notion of the Nordic, and its nation states, inscribed in the design for the Nordic pavilion and the discourse surrounding it. Touching upon topics like Nordic exceptionalism, intra-Nordic power relations, and Indigenous, transnational, national, and global networks, my primary case will be the transformation of the Nordic Pavilion into The Sámi Pavilion during the 59th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale in 2022.

■ Monica Grini is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Bergen. Her research focuses on historiography, museology, and the compound agency of objects. She has written extensively about representations of Sámi art, transnational networks, and national predicaments in the discipline of art history. Her most recent book is *Samisk kunst og norsk kunsthistorie: delvise forbindelser* (2021).

***Venice Biennale
the Sámi Pavilion
Nordic exceptionalism
indigenous
counter-narratives***

From Nordic to Arctic

Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival / Suialaa Arts Festival as platform for self-determination and new regional solidarities

Lorenzo Imola

The versatile formats of art festivals and biennials have been mobilized worldwide to create spaces for marginalized voices, facilitate dialogues, and build alliances across locales, regions, and continents—in so doing, they serve to advance cultural self-determination and reshape geo-political landscapes. Over the past decades, several initiatives have emerged in the Arctic region, too, connecting actors and communities across the national borders that shape the Circumpolar North. Suialaa Arts Festival is the largest recurring cultural event in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), established in 2015 as Nuuk Nordisk Kulturfestival (NNK). NNK aimed to celebrate the diversity of cultural and artistic expressions from Kalaallit Nunaat and the Nordic region, strengthening both Kalaallit representation within Norden and relationships between all countries involved. A certain skepticism has accompanied the Nordic framework of this major event in Nuuk, since Kalaallit Nunaat's affiliation to Norden originated in its colonization by Denmark and furthermore continues to be marked by substantial inequality. Over the years, NNK has not least provided a platform for debate and self-scrutiny, with local institutions organizing projects that addressed problematic aspects of the relationship between Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark (or Norden), seeking out alternative networks within Norden, and connecting with Indigenous groups throughout a broader North that encompasses the entire Arctic. In 2024, the festival changed its name into Suialaa Arts Festival and adopted a new strategy that explicitly prioritizes a focus on the Arctic region and Indigenous voices. Looking at curatorial and funding structures, as well as historical parallels around the world, my contribution will consider how programming and critical discussions within the festival have gradually led to questioning the primacy of the Nordic in Kalaallit Nunaat, towards exploring other possibilities for regional belonging, such as an Arctic North and kinship with other Indigenous peoples who share struggles, experiences, and cultural affinities with Kalaallit Inuit.

■ Lorenzo Imola holds a BA in Art Theory and Philosophy from the University of Iceland and is currently completing a MA in Curating Art and Cultures at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. During 2024, Imola was curator-in-training at the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands. He previously worked at Nuuk Art Museum as intern and curator, where he took part in the realization of the exhibition *Puilanerit // Grafisk Værksted 1972–1980*.

art festivals

biennials

Kalaallit Nunaat

self-determination

Pan-Arcticism

Latitudinal Solidarities

Biennials in the South and the North

Kaija Kaitavuori

The Havana biennial in 1989 (third edition) was built on the concept of South-South connections (introduced into the art field by Gerardo Mosquera), focusing on art from the Global South and—more importantly—aiming at circumventing the Western art world as a compulsory reference point. The first international biennial in the Nordic countries, the Momentum in 1998 (Moss, Norway), also played on the concept of its Cardinal direction, profiling itself as the “Nordic festival of contemporary art”.

The first biennials established in the Nordic countries were part of the global expansion of biennials in the 1990s—so-called Post-89 biennials. Lofoten International Art Festival LIAF in 1999 (1991) built its reputation as a festival “beyond the arctic circle”; Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art (since 2001) has profiled itself as a platform of international contemporary art in Scandinavia.

Can these biennials be compared with the South-South solidarity as a North-North collaboration? And further, what does the emphasis of “Nordicness” mean in this context?

Rather than a study of individual biennials and their editions per se, this paper attempts to be a reflective exercise on the ways in which these geopolitical and artistic “continents” are implied and played out in the rhetoric and programming of the early Nordic biennials.

■ Kaija Kaitavuori works as lecturer at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts and as a visiting lecturer and docent at the University of Helsinki. She received her PhD in 2015 from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Her thesis investigated participation in contemporary art. The scope of her current research spans contemporary art, cultural policy, and sociology. She has previously held senior roles at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki and the Finnish National Gallery, working in museum education and institutional development.

Nordic biennials
Nordicness
South-South
contemporary art

Not Exotic Enough to be “Found”—Not Centre Enough to be the Attraction

Cases of Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2021 and Borås Art Biennial 2021

Mansi Kashatria

Contemporary art has always tied the different regions of the world in a hierarchical relationship, whether they have been rooted historically in their colonial/imperial relationships or through the globalized market systems in the present times. What makes the global of this contemporary—the universal, the homogeneous, the lack of history, and the nomadic nature—has been addressed by biennials and other international contemporary art festivals with their insistence of site-specificity and with a significant allegiance to the historiographic turn.

The cases of GIBCA 2021 and the Borås Art Biennial 2021 marked a moment where the format of a biennale was effectively used to explore the politics of location and to recover a historical consciousness. GIBCA 2021’s curatorial traces the creation of “truths” in historical narration of Sweden’s colonial past and Borås 2021’s curatorial calls for a “deep listening” to uncover those relations that form our everyday practices.

The condition of the Nordic, as developed in periphery to the European imperial adventures but very much a part of Euro-modernity, is where I believe the gap in engagement with understanding its own post-coloniality is situated. To this end, my paper investigates the curatorial approaches that are tied to the format of a biennale as Nordic post-coloniality gesturing towards a decoloniality. When read together, both these instances give a framework to build a critical regionalism that unsettles the self-assumed peripheral marginality.

My study proposes that regionalism further holds the potential to create new forms of collectivity across the Nordic region, a political insurgency deemed necessary because of the acceleration in institutional management of art.

■ Mansi Kashatria is currently working on her dissertation *Radical Nuisance? Contemporary Art Practices and Re-imagined Globality*, that is due for publication in 2026. Mansi grew up and finished most of her education under the “colonial hangover” of socio-cultural interactions in India. She describes her relationship with contemporaneity and global art as having been rather disjointed and therefore critical. Through various research projects with small-scale art and culture organizations in India, Germany, and Sweden, Ms. Kashatria has been searching for more accessible, inclusive, social, or even radical forms of art.

peripheral marginality
critical regionalism
Nordic post-coloniality
Nordic collectivity
politics of location

The Sápmi Triennial and the Råneå Biennial

Background, realization, and future prospects

Maria Lind

The Sápmi Triennial and the Råneå Biennial belong to the youngest biennials in “the North”, established in 2024 and 2018. They are examples of biennials which are based on notions of self-determination and different degrees of bottom-up activities, revitalizing both professional and non-professional communities. This brief contribution looks at their background, realization, and future prospects in the midst of intensified focus on “the North” where some of the most urgent questions of our time are played out.

■ Maria Lind is a curator, writer, and educator from Stockholm. She is currently the director of the Kin Museum of Contemporary Art, Kiruna. From 2020 to 2023 she was serving as the counsellor of culture at the embassy of Sweden, Moscow. She was the director of Stockholm’s Tensta konsthall 2011–2018, the artistic director of the 11th Gwangju Biennale, the director of the graduate program, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (2008–2010), and director of Iaspis in Stockholm (2005–2007). From 2002–2004 she was the director of Kunstverein München and in 1998, co-curator of Europe’s itinerant biennial, Manifesta 2 in Luxembourg. In 2015 she curated Future Light for the first Vienna Biennial, and in 2019 she co-curated the Art Encounters Biennial in Timisoara. She has taught widely since the early 1990s. Currently she is a lecturer at Konstfack’s CuratorLab.

Sápmi Triennial
Råneå Biennial
self-determination
bottom-up
revitalization

To Redraw the Map

How can an art biennale be a decolonizing force on the grounds where it takes place?

Maria Svonni

In the lead-up to the Luleå Biennial's 20th edition, the landscapes of Norrbotten County have undergone artistic, physical, and value-based transformations. Interest in the north and the way of life here is increasing, and while people speak about us, we are rarely included in the conversation. The Luleå Biennial is a platform to formulate and take charge of our own stories. While the world's gaze is turned towards us, the biennial is looking inwards and downwards on the lands we are privileged to walk upon.

The Luleå Biennial is the oldest art biennial in Scandinavia, initiated in 1991 with the aim to introduce international art to a region which lacked exhibition spaces for contemporary art. The biennial played a crucial role for the local art scene and audiences, connecting them to global contexts and introducing artistic expressions from around the world. This longing for connection remains to this day, while the needs for a sustainable local future have changed.

The biennial takes place upon the traditional homeland of the Sámi people in Julevu Luleå, named after its placement in the eastern parts of the reindeer herding grounds. Due to the last 100 years of mining, there has been a shift in regard to how the landscapes are described. Nowadays Julevu is commonly placed in the south, in relation to the ore fields in the north. Knowledge about Sámi traditions, which are still present here, is increasingly rare among those outside the indigenous population.

The in-depth work with the biennial is aimed towards long-term cultural sustainability, which exceeds the scope of any single biennial edition, with the potential to counter the growing polarization in the region. Defying the boundaries of given circumstances has always been an integral part of the Luleå Biennial and continues to be so going forward.

■ Maria Svonni, based in Giron, Sápmi, is the artistic director of the Luleå Biennial, the oldest art biennial in Scandinavia, and founder of Verdde, a nomadic art institution working for the inclusion of Sámi perspectives in everyday life. Svonni is active as a freelance curator and writer and is currently involved in formulating the artistic program for the European Capital of Culture year in Kiruna 2029. She led the establishment of KiN art museum in Norrbotten County and is currently involved in creating the first dedicated exhibition space for Sámi contemporary art in the Swedish parts of Sápmi.

Luleå Biennial
Sápmi
contemporary Sámi art
indigenous land
agency
decolonizing
sustainability

Momentum 13: Between/Worlds

Resonant ecologies—a sonic inquiry into Nordic biennials

Morten Søndergaard

Momentum 13: *Between/Worlds: Resonant Ecologies* (2025) foregrounds sound art as both medium and methodology, interrogating the resonances between human and non-human ecologies in the Nordic cultural and environmental landscape. As one of the region's longest-standing biennials, Momentum presents an ideal case for critically re-examining the term "biennialology" and its relevance to Nordic biennial practices. Drawing from Germano Celant's concept of the biennial as a dynamic and evolving structure, this paper situates Momentum 13 within a critical framework that emphasizes practice, as articulated in Mark Fell's *Structure and Synthesis* (2022), to argue for a practice-based approach to understanding Nordic biennials.

With its focus on sound art, Momentum 13 departs from visual-dominant frameworks often associated with biennials. By embedding sonic practices in site-specific contexts such as Moss, Alby Forest, and the Oslo Fjord, it challenges the normative structures of biennials as "landmark survey exhibitions". Instead, it proposes a sonic rethinking of how biennials might resonate with local ecologies and global discourses. This approach aligns with Fell's emphasis on the relational and systemic properties of artistic practice, highlighting how sound art reveals the interconnectedness of spatial, temporal, and ecological dynamics.

Through Momentum 13, this paper questions the applicability of "biennialology" as a critical term, proposing instead that Nordic biennials be understood as experimental practices that navigate the tensions between local specificity and transnational networks. Drawing on examples from the Nordic biennial ecosystem this analysis demonstrates how these events foster site-responsive practices that transcend the commodified spectacle often associated with biennials. In this context, Momentum 13 redefines the biennial format as a resonant, process-oriented platform rooted in sonic inquiry.

This paper also critiques the romanticized and hegemonic notions of Nordicness, which often obscure the multiplicity of identities and histories embedded in the region's biennial practices. By engaging with Fell's structural methodologies and Celant's vision of the biennial as a "container of possibilities", it argues that sound art provides a critical framework for understanding Nordic biennials as dynamic systems that resist static definitions.

■ Morten Søndergaard is an internationally acclaimed curator and Associate Professor of Media Art at Aalborg University, Denmark. He is the AAU academic director of the Erasmus Master of Excellence in Media Arts Cultures. He is presently engaged with sound curation at the Momentum Festival in Norway and the founder of the conference series POM—Politics of the Machines (with Laura Beloff) (since 2017) and ISACS—International Sound Art Curating Symposia (with Peter Weibel) (2010–2017). Søndergaard has published and curated several sound and media art exhibitions internationally, including at Kiasma, ZKM, Rupertinum, Ars Electronica, Eyebeam NY, Utzon Center Aalborg, Kunsthall Aarhus, and Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde.

Momentum

Helsinki Biennial

LIAF

Bergen Assembly

sonic inquiry

Nordicness

marginalized ecologies

“The Spaceship has Landed”

Local and international agendas at Bergen Assembly

Synnøve Marie Vik

The triennial Bergen Assembly was born out of a joint ambition from Bergen Kunsthall and the municipality of Bergen, who in their cultural policy stated that Bergen should be “the most exciting and innovative city for culture in the Nordic countries” (Bergen kommune, 2007). This policy was largely created in collaboration with local artists and art institutions. To ground the initiative within both the local and international art scene, Bergen Kunsthall hosted the Biennial Conference *To biennial or not to biennial?* at Bergen Kunsthall in 2009. The conference initiated new—and brought to the table ongoing—discussions on the relevance of the biennial format globally, discussions that were further developed and theorized in the anthology *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen Kunsthall and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010).

The various stakeholders in the triennial have had diverging aims in supporting the project. This paper explores the interplay between these ambitions and the artistic and theoretical trends that have influenced the five different iterations of the Bergen Assembly since 2013. My investigation will especially highlight the ambitions of the municipality, the professional and international art scene, and the local art scene. The analysis will seek to join perspectives from the study of cultural policy, cultural sociology, and art history to discuss contemporary art’s multiple potentials. The concluding discussion will examine to what extent the ambition that all stakeholders shared, namely that Bergen should be a “city for art” (*kunstby*), has been met.

■ Synnøve Marie Vik is Senior Curator of contemporary art at Kode Bergen Art Museum. She has held positions as an academic director, museum director, curator, and art critic, as well as a special adviser for art and cultural politics in Bergen municipality. Vik holds a PhD in visual culture with the dissertation *Nature as Violent and Violated: five essays on the visual culture of the Anthropocene* (2021) and has written extensively on art and visual culture, with a particular focus on the relationship between nature and technology.

Bergen Assembly
cultural policy
local art scenes
place-making

VI

Crafting the Nordic, Mapping, Archiving, and Disseminating



Session chairs

Johanna Rosenqvist,

Professor, Department of Music and Art,
Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden

Anneli Palmsköld,

Professor, Department of Conservation,
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Karin Gustavsson,

Researcher, Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences,
Lund University, Sweden

Date

Wednesday, October 22nd

Time

13.45–15.15

Location

F3005, 3rd Floor

Crafts have been in focus of interest for institutions, practitioners, and researchers for a long time as means to differentiate or unify the Nordic and/or Scandinavian region. Stakeholders such as museums, handicraft associations, or individuals, have used different methods to map craft—its techniques, materials, and objects—aiming for understanding, interpreting, and communicating craft and its contexts. In different collections or inventories the Nordicism of craft may mean different things. It can be Nordic by nature—focusing materials from the region. Or Nordic by regional definition—where the aesthetic categorizations can be used to rule out or include craft traditions from other countries in for example the Baltic region.

Common methods are to make inventories, to document, to collect, and to archive craft, by processes of selecting and deselecting. The results of these efforts may be photographs, sketches, films, interviews, descriptions, manuscripts, handbooks for crafters, books on craft, collections of different kinds, or discussions on social media, etc. The mapping activities are not limited only to the Nordic region but reverberate in collections around the world. In this session we focus on mapping, archiving, and disseminating craft in historical, as well as contemporary practices.

Artek as a “Cultural Archive”

Indian textiles in Finland 1966–1976

Daniele Burlando

The proposed contribution analyses extra-European handcrafted products presented by the Finnish design company Artek as commodities within its modern interiors. This practice, developed through research travels and exhibitions, is proposed as the construction of a “cultural archive”, with reference to Foucault’s theorization of “archives” as systems of statements composing discourses. The discourse developed by Western modernity to describe extra-European cultures is problematized with reference to handicrafts. Artek’s focus on extra-European products was established by director Aino Marsio-Aalto, and embodied by the company’s first exhibition in 1936, of Amazigh rugs from Morocco. During the 1950s–1970s several exhibitions ensued after travels performed by Artek’s staff, particularly by textile designer Sinikka Killinen.

As a case study, the lecture presents three displays of Indian textiles produced by Comtrust Ltd. (Kozhikode, Kerala), organized by Artek in its Helsinki shop between 1966–1976. Comtrust was occasionally visited by Western textile designers, who created through designing on the handloom. In 1966 American artist Sheila Hicks developed at Comtrust a textile collection for Artek. The analysis of its display in Helsinki highlights connections to modern textile culture, with reference to Anni Albers’s legacy. The 1970 display *India-Nepal-Thailand* resulted from a travel during which Sinikka Killinen also designed a collection at Comtrust. This experience supports the insight on Artek’s research-travel practice in connection to the agency of the textile designer. The 1976 exhibition featured an invited weaver from Comtrust, performing his craft at Artek. Its analysis highlights connections to colonial history and India-West relations.

Artek is identified as a leading international stage, broadening the scope of references entering the discourse on modern interiors. Its practice of research and selection is identified as enriching the “cultural archive” describing modern homes to Western consumers but also revealing Modernism’s relation to the Western consumption of extra-European handicrafts.

■ Daniele Burlando is an art historian and doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki, Finland. He focuses on design history, textile history, the history of Artek, and Italy-Finland cultural exchange. His research is supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Alfred Kordelin Foundation, Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation. He is experienced in textile techniques. He obtained his MA in art history in 2016 from the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy, with a dissertation about Artek textiles. He has contributed to the recent publication on Artek’s former artistic director: *Ben af Schultén—muotoilija / formgivare* (Parus Verus 2023).

Artek
Indian textiles
cultural archive
modern interiors
research travels

Unfolding Kven Craft

A collective journey through archives

Åsne Kummeneje Mellem, Tarja Salmela, & Gyrid Øyen

Our presentation is a continual of a collective experiment that focused on feminist knowledge production through wool and the writing of letters. Whilst we were previously curious about the process of “weaving knowledge” by attuning to the materiality of wool and the embodied knowledge that travels in the process of letter writing, today we want to go deeper into project investigating the intersections between craft, archives, and ways to do research. We are a group of three women who continue to learn about each other through experimentation: an artist, a researcher, and a museum professional.

To start to understand the aforementioned intersections, we have decided to stay close instead of traveling far. We ground ourselves into the artistic practice of one of us. We set to become curious to Åsne’s work as a Kven artist, and her current project of assembling her own Kven archive.

Kvens are a national minority group in Norway that faced long-standing and enforced assimilation policies known as Norwegianization, which deeply impacted Kven culture, language, identity, and ways of life. The marginalization of Kven knowledge-practices, such as craft, renders the act of reconnecting with the past a complex and challenging task. Kven matters are often curated out when the Nordic is crafted.

In the absence of arenas where Kven craft is represented, Mellem assembles her own archive, searching for traditional techniques, material knowledge, and places to harvest. Her archive is embodied in her practical, material, and corporeal work as an artist. Through her method of engaging in conversations with knowledge-holders, institutions, landscapes, and more-than-human inhabitants of the north, Mellem creates opportunities to craft contexts for Kven *käsityö* (handicraft) and for herself, and for those in need of learning.

Kven craft
käsityö
embodied archive
collective knowledge processes
feminist practice



Drawing on theories from feminist posthumanism, critical heritage studies, and research-art collaborations, we aim to broaden the perspective on archives related to Kven craft and continue a journey to experiment with collective and collaborative ways of knowing.

■ Åsne Kummeneje Mellem (b. 1995) is a Kven artist based in Tromsø with a MFA from Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Arts. In her practice she investigates the intangible cultural heritage of the Kven culture where she mainly focuses on told or forgotten knowledge about techniques and materials related to Kven crafts, käsityö. Kummeneje Mellem is one of the founders of Kväänitaitheilijät—Association of Kven Artists and she actively contributes to the revitalization and common understanding of the Kven contexts of today.

■ Tarja Salmela is a researcher and writer, currently working as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Arctic University of Norway, School of Business and Economics. Her feminist research focuses on storytelling and collective processes of knowledge production with(in) more-than-human, mobile worlds. In recent years, she has been developing decolonizing storytelling practices with(in) landscapes that have been overshadowed by tourism and, especially, touring narratives. Salmela's work is inspired by feminist new materialisms, feminist posthumanism, queer ecologies, and research-art collaborations. She has published in cross-disciplinary journals, including *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Culture and Organization*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, and *Tourism Geographies*.

■ Gyrid Øyen is a researcher, currently working in Varanger museum, Norway. In her work she is interested in questions that centers around museum practices, culture politics, representation of minority cultures and archives, and knowledge production. Her PhD takes a closer look at how the production of culture and heritage processes, in connection with the national minority Kven/Norwegian-Finnish, plays out in a Norwegian museum.

Visualizing Contested Geographies

The popular silk road in contemporary art practices

Elena Mazzi

China has recently confirmed the future development of the so-called “New Silk Road by Land and Sea”, a global infrastructure strategy adopted by the Chinese Government in 2013. According to its promoters, the project should improve connectivity and cooperation between multiple countries spread across Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is supposed to be 6,300 km long and it should connect about 78 countries. The project is also formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR). Initially announced with the purpose of restoring the ancient Silk Route that connected Asia and Europe, the scope of the project has expanded over the years to include new territories and development initiatives. The New Silk Road involves the construction of a large network of roadways, railways, maritime ports, power grids, oil and gas pipelines, and associated infrastructure projects.

As the Arctic seas become increasingly navigable due to global warming and the consequent melting of the ice sheet, the access to new resources is drastically enhanced, as promoters now get to lay their hands on no less than 20% of the world’s oil, gas, uranium, gold, platinum, and zinc reserves. One of the aims of my PhD dissertation is to develop research-based speculative encounters between geopolitics and visual culture in relation to the Polar Silk Road commercial project. This abstract is the first step towards a more articulated research where I aim to bring the territorial and cultural landscapes crossed by the Polar Silk Road to the forefront of contemporary art practices. The research revolves around the following questions: How do we visualize contested landscapes today? How can artistic practices and theoretical research contribute to delineate new experimental tools that may grasp the complexity of our times? Would it be possible to define new forms of knowledge starting from alliances and interactions between humans and non-humans living in contested landscapes? If so, what methodology should be followed to define this process in the frame of Arctic regions?

■ Elena Mazzi (b. 1984) is a visual artist, working with specific geographical and socio-political contexts. Her poetics deals with the relationship between human beings and the environment in which he/she lives and with which he/she must reckon on a daily basis. This analysis, which often follows an anthropological approach, investigates and documents an identity which is at the same time personal and collective, and gives rise to forms of exchange and transformation. She studied History of Art (Siena), Visual Arts (IUAV, Venice), and Fine Arts (Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm). She is currently a PhD candidate at Villa Arson and Université Côte d’Azur, Nice. Her works have been displayed in many solo and collective exhibitions all over the world. She attended several residency programs, and she is the winner of various art prizes. In 2015 she started to lead workshops for young artists, teachers and the general public in collaboration with Institutions, Schools, Academies.

earthed imagination
custodianship
mobility

mapping
decentering

Mapping Swedish Folk Textile Art in a Nordic Context

Johanna Rosenqvist, Anneli Palmsköld, & Karin Gustavsson

Lilli Zickerman (1858–1949) was the prime organizer of handicraft in Sweden in the beginning of the 20th century. In an ongoing research project about her work, we study how cultural heritage is progressing alongside the fluctuating aesthetics and needs of the surrounding society. Zickerman's endeavor Sveriges folkliga textilkonst (Swedish Folk Textile Art) was a comprehensive inventory project that was conducted during the period 1910–1932 and supported by Föreningen för svensk hemslöjd (National Association of Swedish Handicraft Societies) and the Nordic Museum. It was an important work in stating what, at that point in time, had been made by hand within the regions of Sweden, and what effectively constituted Swedish homecraft. Everything foreign, everything too mechanized, was ruled out.

Conducting her study, Zickerman travelled in Sweden documenting textiles by describing them and photographing them, leaving an archive of 24,000 photographs and catalogue cards (now at the Nordic Museum). She created an archive for future textile artists to be inspired by and to give them opportunities to learn more from their forerunners. The material was structured according to ideas on craft as typical local, organized primarily in a geographical order and thereafter according to textile techniques. Zickerman's conception of craft became an important point of departure for the governmental inquiry about craft, where she became the main author (Hemslöjdskommittén 1918). In the inquiry, she developed her ideas on the typical local sloyd further, mapping different craft techniques within a national frame. The Zickerman inventory is now accessible through a digital archive (www.digitalmuseum.se). Zickerman in her time medialized heritage through modern techniques that today again have been disseminated by using modern techniques of our time.

In the presentation we discuss the boundaries she establishes towards the Nordic and Scandinavian Crafts.

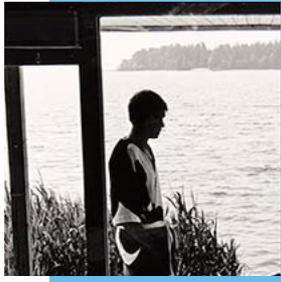
*home craft
handicraft
inventories*



■ Johanna Rosenqvist is Professor in Art history and Visual Studies at Linnaeus University. She defended her thesis in 2007, *An Aesthetics of Sexual Difference?*, examining the role of the artist in the Swedish handicraft movement. She has since researched visual representations of craft practices at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Lund University, and been teaching at Konstfack, Stockholm. Rosenqvist is member of the editorial board of *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History* since 2014 and she has been a board member of NORDIK, the Nordic Committee for Art History, 2012–2018.

■ Anneli Palmsköld is full Professor in Conservation, specialized in Craft Science at the Department of Conservation, University of Gothenburg. Palmsköld holds a PhD in Ethnology at Lund University (2007). She has since continued her research into material culture and crafting, as well as historical and contemporary perspectives on textiles and handicrafts. She has also explored crafts and home crafts as ideas and phenomena, and crafts and handicrafts as cultural heritage. The aim of her research is to develop the Critical Craft Science, inspired by intersectional perspectives.

■ Karin Gustavsson holds a PhD in ethnology and teaches ethnology and museology at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Lund University. Gustavsson defended her dissertation in 2014, entitled *Expeditions into the Past: Ethnological Fieldwork and the Disappearance of Folk Culture in the Early 20th Century*. She conducts research in the field of cultural history, with a particular interest in methodological issues and the potential of various sources in cultural history research. Through her previous position as head of the Folk Life Archives in Lund and several editorial assignments, she has a broad network among cultural history researchers in the Nordic countries.



VIII

Cross-Border Contacts in Nordic Art

Public interfaces of artistic
circulation 1900–2000

Session chairs **Marta Edling,**
Professor of the History and Theory of Art,
Södertörn University, Sweden

Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe,
Professor of Art History,
Department of Culture and Aesthetics,
Stockholm University, Sweden

Date Wednesday, October 22nd

Time 10.45–12.15

Location F3005, 3rd Floor

We invite scholars to join a session exploring the vital cooperation between artistic networks, galleries, and museums across the Nordic region throughout the 20th century. Recent research reveals that from 1945 to 1990, Nordic exhibitions constituted half of all foreign exhibitions in Sweden's major art institutions, with the 1980s and 1990s being the most vibrant periods of cross-border interaction. Despite this, the motivations, resources, and contexts that drove these connections remain largely unexplored.

Traditionally, art history has focused on the interactions between Nordic artists and the major international art centers. However, the "horizontal" relationships within the Nordic region—between institutions, artists, and cultural actors—deserve greater attention. We currently lack a comprehensive understanding of connections within the Nordic art world, including the art market, collectors, patrons, art schools, museums, and state agencies.

This session examines the public platforms of artistic exchange in the Nordic region, such as exhibitions, art or trade fairs, feminist manifestations, political festivals for peace or against nuclear power, public art, art journals, and conferences, etc., during the 20th century. We aim to investigate the conditions and outcomes of these collaborations, the networks of professionals, key funders, and the institutions that facilitated them. Additionally, we are eager to explore the various media and public spaces where these collaborations unfolded, and the visions they communicated to a Nordic audience.

We welcome scholars interested in deepening the conversation around the important interactions that have shaped the Nordic art community and in uncovering the untold stories of artistic cooperation in the region.

Foreningen Fransk Kunst

A Scandinavian laboratory for art historical and museological practice (1919–1928)

Dina Eikeland

This paper argues for the central role of the *Foreningen Fransk Kunst* as a transnational arena for dialogue and cooperation among Scandinavian countries during the interwar years.

In October 1919, members from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—each with their own *Foreningen Fransk Kunst*—met in Copenhagen to coordinate strategies for exhibiting French art across Scandinavia. Led by Danish collector Wilhelm Hansen, other key figures such as the museum directors Jens Thiis (Norway), Axel Gauffin (Sweden), and Karl Madsen (Denmark), and the art collectors Jørgen B. Stang (Norway) and Thorsten Laurin (Sweden) envisioned a series of touring exhibitions featuring French art from the late 19th century. Their shared belief in Scandinavia’s cultural affinity with France provided the ideological foundation for the association’s activities. Members also promoted greater collaboration between private collectors and public museum professionals across borders.

Thanks to agreed principles established in 1919, the association organized eight French painting exhibitions between 1919 and 1928, shown in all three Scandinavian capitals. Logistical responsibilities—including transport, insurance, and catalogue production—rotated among the countries.

While recent scholarship has often treated the reception of French art in Scandinavia through national or biographical lenses, the association’s role in professionalizing the museum sector has been largely overlooked. Using the 1919 meeting as a starting point, this paper reconsiders retrospective narratives by asking: what does this collaborative model reveal about how the Scandinavian art elite understood their region as a shared geographical, linguistic, and cultural framework for professional development and institution-building?

■ Dina Eikeland has been a PhD fellow at the *Institut national d’histoire de l’art* in Paris since October 2022. Her PhD, supervised by Dominique Poulot at the Université de Paris I, investigates Scandinavian Francophilia through the study of exhibitions of French 19th and 20th century art between 1914 and 1928. Adopting a transnational perspective, her study aims to shed light on the role played by Scandinavian networks of art historians, museum curators, art dealers, and collectors in the organization of these exhibitions.

networks

exhibition history

French art in Scandinavia

Foreningen Fransk Kunst

art collecting

Networking of the Northern Artists in the Barents Region in the late 1980s and early 1990s

Anniina Koivurova

The early 1990s depression in Finland was a deep economic crisis. During the time, the artists in the North Calotte area were active in connecting with each other. In spring 1987, the Artists' Association of Lapland arranged a cultural trip to Murmansk by bus. The participants included writers, theatre people, and musicians: writers Rosa Liksom and Kirsti Paltto, singer Kaija Kärkinen, sculptors Markku Malmivaara and Teuvo Tuomivaara, and painters Pekka Hermanni Kyrö, Kalervo Palsa, and Richard Kautto. The visit received an enthusiastic reception in Murmansk and sparked more cooperation between the Barents region and Lapland's cultural life.

In 1992, the Arts Council of the Province of Lapland and the Norrbotten County Government of Sweden had started the Art Crossing Borders visual arts project, which involved six artists, three from each region. Tuomivaara, Merja Aletta Ranttila, and Kari Tuisku participated from Lapland. Kari Laine, Secretary General of the Lapland County Arts Commission, said that because "it's a recession and the capital region doesn't help us, let's combine forces on a horizontal level". Whereas the visual arts life in Finland struggled to break away from Helsinki-centricity, Stockholm-centric thinking slowly broke down in Sweden. The artists toured the North Calotte and held mini-seminars and workshops, spending several weeks together during the year. They got to know each other's work and work environment, welding together as a group.

This presentation opens up northern artists' life from the viewpoint of a Lappish sculptor Teuvo Tuomivaara and his active role in networking with artists in Barents region. I bring forth discussion and its tones on northern peripheries and their artists, during the era.

■ Anniina Koivurova (D.A., Art and Design) is a Professor of Art History at the University of Lapland. Previous teaching and research positions: art history, contemporary art, art and culture, and visual arts education at the University of Lapland (1997–2020); regional curator of the Rovaniemi Art Museum (2020–2023). Koivurova has studied children's drawings from the reconstruction period in Lapland and the artist, aid-worker Naomi Jackson (Groves); the activities and art of the Finnish *October group*; contemporary northern artists; and pedagogical activities in the Rovaniemi Art Museum. She leads an Erasmus KA2-project on museum education and makes art.

Barents region

North Calotte

Lapland

periphery

contemporary art

Transnational Threads

The Nordic textile triennial and the politics of textiles

Sigrun Åsebø

The Nordic textile triennial (1976–1995) was established to explore and advocate for the specificities and diversities of a Nordic textile art tradition. The 1960s and 1970s brought fundamental changes in the art of tapestries and textile art. Fiber, soft materials, and everyday objects became important in art's expanded field, and feminism highlighted the gendered structure embedded in the separation between "pure" art and craft-based practices. The Nordic textile triennial was partly conceived as a supplement to other biennials, but also in protest against the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial, which had a reputation as a space for textile experimentation. Nordic artists saw it as elitist with criteria for admission that disfavored women and Nordic traditions. The Nordic triennial was artists run, based in trans-Nordic democracy that ensured equal representation, and in jury work, which would produce openness to young and established artists alike, and counter any national power structures or narratives. The Nordic triennial insisted on an open concept of textile art, with most materials and expressions allowed. Its only criterium was that the artwork should be "freely conceived". In this paper I want to approach the Nordic textile triennial as a space of collective activism and exploration. How did the triennial conceive and negotiate its "Nordicness"? Were there differences across the Nordic countries? The triennial was never feminist, nor did it explicitly highlight textile politics. However, women dominated the organization and the quest for a heightened status and more space for textile art on the art scene and the insistence on the importance of experimentation from within textile art, indirectly highlighted new artistic genealogies and opened doors for women artists. Could the insistence on textile as a fine art be read as part of a politics of gender equality and liberation?

■ Sigrun Åsebø is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Bergen. Her research focuses on feminist exhibitions and museology, feminist art history and historiography, gender and sexuality in art, and women artists in the 20th and 21st century. Publications include chapters *Modern Women Artists in the Nordic Countries, 1900–1960*, edited by Kerry Greaves (2021) and *Ruth Asawa: Citizen of the Universe*, edited by Vibece Salthe and Emma Ridgway (2022). This paper is part of the project *The Feminist Legacy in Art Museums (FLAME)*, funded by the Research Council of Norway.

textile art

Nordic collaboration

feminism

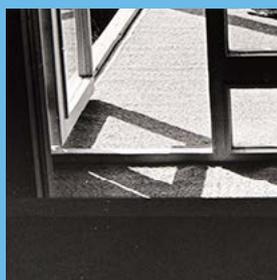
artist activism

transnational art history

VIII

Dreams of the South

Nordic architecture and the Mediterranean



| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Session chair | Panagiotis Farantatos, Architect, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Communication and Culture, Art History, Aarhus University, Denmark |
| Date | Wednesday, October 22nd |
| Time | 10.45–12.15 & 13.45–15.15 |
| Location | F3010, 3rd Floor |

This session examines the architectural interactions between the Nordic countries and the Mediterranean, considering the North's ever-evolving relation to the South as a cultural and geographical entity, as well as a place of the imaginary. We focus on 20th-century Nordic architects and architectural theorists who engaged with the Mediterranean and its adjacent regions, exploring how their travels, exchanges, and experiences—as well as their use of drawings, photographs, and source books—shaped their work and writings.

The session highlights the interwar and postwar periods, when Nordic architects began to develop direct, lived relations with the Mediterranean and its architecture, in addition to established mediated sources, such as illustrated publications. During postwar modernization, the rise of summer tourism and the relative economic prosperity of the Nordic countries drew broader audiences to the Mediterranean, permeating popular culture (as expressed, for example, in the travel books of Göran Schildt or Thorbjørn Egner's *Folk og røvere i Kardemomme by*). Across these periods, the still-rural Mediterranean offered Nordic architects the opportunity to reflect on modernism, history, landscape, and vernacular traditions and reconsider their own practices.

What role did these Mediterranean encounters play in the dialogue between modernity and tradition that shaped Nordic architecture in the 20th century? In what ways did the Mediterranean serve as a “mirror” for Nordic identities? To what extent did these “Dreams of the South” inform Nordic architectural practices, from the study of classical antiquity to the discovery of broader regional and vernacular approaches?

The session seeks to transcend entrenched concepts of European “center and periphery” and to challenge the primitivizing and sometimes orientalist views that have often colored northern-European perceptions of the South, as well as the equally persistent romantic image of the Mediterranean as the “cradle of classicism”. By also considering cross-disciplinary perspectives such as archaeology and ethnographic observation, the session highlights how mediated and lived experiences alike shaped architectural imaginaries. *Dreams of the South* ultimately invites scholars to reflect on, re-examine, and question Nordic architecture and cultural identity in relation to the Mediterranean, and to re-evaluate these exchanges in the context of today's hyper-connected world.

What Visual Sources?

Travel to the South versus books in the practice of Sigurd Lewerentz

Anna Bortolozzi

In an article entitled “How do you imitate a building that you have never seen?” (2001), Mario Carpo illustrates the shift in the Renaissance from the medieval non-visual modality of imitation to the transmission and dissemination of classical prototypes through drawings and printed images. This shift from words to images meant that Renaissance architects could imitate models they had seen, without having to travel long distances. The relationship of early twentieth-century Swedish architects to classical Mediterranean architecture was not very different from that of their Renaissance predecessors. Although their educational travels took them to Rome, Pompeii, and Sicily, none of the leading figures of 1920s Classicism—Sigurd Lewerentz, Gunnar Asplund, and Ivar Tengbom—reached Greece or Egypt.

In the spring of 1922, Lewerentz travelled to Italy, most likely to gather ideas for the Chapel of the Resurrection in the Woodland Cemetery. He brought back a small sketchbook and a series of photographs showing architectural elements and ancient floor mosaics, which he used to decorate of the chapel. Notably no whole buildings appear in these records. What other visual sources did Lewerentz draw on for his classically inspired project? One clue comes from the architect’s library. By 1930, he had amassed an extensive collection of 18th to early 20th century plate books by renowned authors such as Stuart and Revett, Durand, Canina, d’Espouy, and von Mauch. These works accurately depict scaled plans, elevations, and sections of major Greek, Roman, and Egyptian monuments, including large details of architectural elements. Focusing on the Chapel of the Resurrection as a case study, this paper aims to highlight the importance of books and, conversely, to re-evaluate the significance of travel to the Mediterranean as a source of inspiration for Sigurd Lewerentz and other early twentieth-century Swedish architects.

■ Anna Bortolozzi is Professor of Art History in the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University, where she has worked since 2015. Her research focuses on early modern architecture and the relationship between architecture and cultural identity, the reception of classical and Christian traditions; architectural practice; and the materiality of architectural drawings. While working as a research fellow at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Bortolozzi conducted extensive research on the museum’s collection of architectural drawings. She is currently researching Sigurd Lewerentz’s library, exploring the relationship between books and the classically inspired architecture designed and built by the architect.

travels

libraries

plate books

classical architecture

Lewerentz

With Foreign Eyes

Sverre Fehn between Morocco and Norden

Giovanni Comi

“Taking distance to Scandinavia in a desert under a burning sun, I discovered our circumstances in a new way, obtained a better understanding of the Nordic atmosphere: trees, grass, rain, winter, snow, they all acquired a new meaning.” With these words taken from *An Architectural Autobiography*, Sverre Fehn describes the trip he took to Morocco in 1952—at the suggestion of Jørn Utzon—to study primitive architecture. Like other architects of the Third Generation, for Fehn too the journey is an opportunity to recognize the basic elements of the architectural phenomenon as archetypal forms that reside outside of time; not to refer to models, but to go back to principles that concern the relationship between presence and architectural expression. Having set out to discover new forms, in Morocco Fehn recognized the compositional principles of the Modern Movement, the destruction of Wright’s box, Mies’ infinite walls, the terraces as open-air interiors of Le Corbusier’s poetics. He therefore does not find abstract forms but constructed realities; in the clear line of the shadows, in the materiality of the forms, Fehn recognizes the genius loci of the site, the essence of things, confirming the fact that one chooses to travel to the land by which one wants to be influenced.

Starting from these premises, the text intends to direct our gaze towards various projects and works, including those created by Fehn in the early years of his career—starting from the project for terraced houses in Arnebråten near Oslo developed on the occasion of the CIAM 1953 with Geir Grung and Jørn Utzon—with the aim of understanding the compositional logic and formal choices of an architect whose work, however profoundly Nordic, never appears isolated, but part of a Universal Harmony; a poetics that is perhaps only possible to understand through a comparison with those references to the Mediterranean horizon.

■ Giovanni Comi is an architect, PhD in Architectural Composition at the IUAV University of Venice with research on the poetics of Sverre Fehn and the Hamar Museum, and Assistant Professor at the DPIA of the University of Udine. Among his research topics are the stratified city and the complex relationship between architectural design and archaeology, forms of living, urban and landscape regeneration in fragile and marginal contexts. He has written articles and books on the work of Sverre Fehn, in particular *Sverre Fehn. La costruzione dell'orizzonte* (2024) and *Architettura memoria luogo. Sverre Fehn e il Museo arcivescovile di Hamar* (2019).

Sverre Fehn
Morocco
Mediterranean
primitive architecture

Making Sketches in the Mediterranean and Middle East

Ideas of archaeology and community in the work of archaeologist/architects Anne Tinne Kielland Friis and Mogens Lønborg Friis

Tom Davies & Gabrielle Kielland Friis

This presentation explores the North-South connection, through ideas of 1960s community-focused design, archaeology, and conservation, replete with crime-writers and prehistoric-heads, by examining the work of archaeologist/architects, Anne Tinne (Cathrine) Kielland Friis (1927–1995) and Mogens Lønborg Friis (1919–2006). The Friis' made a significant contribution to Norwegian architecture from 1960 to the late 1980s. Combining a dynamic approach to design and new ideas with influences from their travels as archaeologists from 1952–1957, working on excavations and vernacular building restorations across Greece, Iraq, and Egypt and undertaking studies of recently completed Modernist buildings. In the Mediterranean and south they gained a wide skillset in archaeology, archaeological illustration, and conservation which they later drew heavily on this in their architecture.

The presentation comprises readings of excerpts from their diaries and correspondence together and reflections on material from their archives about the Friis's architecture and archaeological experience. Key themes include how they reinterpreted the knowledge they gained on site and the central roles played by archaeology and community design. How perceptions or images of the Mediterranean/South manifest in their architecture will be explored by drawing lines between key example architectural projects and the excavations and conservation work between 1952–1957 painting a fuller picture of the dynamics between these fields of expertise. A key factor of which was the unique parity of their working partnership in which they complimented each other's individual strengths and abilities. Exploring the path, they took as practitioners across these different fields with its shared experience will help reveal what marked them out as something unique amongst the architects of their time.

■ Tom Davies and Gabrielle Kielland Friis have been working together on the archives of Gabbi's parents the architects and archaeologists Anne Tinne (Cathrine) Kielland Friis and Mogens Lønborg Friis for the past year and half. Tom recently completed his doctorate *The Architecture of the Ordinary: Redefining protection and the role of communities in the future of Brutalist heritage on the community and heritage of Post-war housing* (AHO). In 2019 Tom's studies brought him into contact with the Kielland Friis' work and after Gabbi and he got talking about her parents' archives and work as archaeologists, they hit it off and have been enthusiastically engaged on the project ever since. They have researched and written together and presented widely with a view to finding homes for all the amazing material and writing a book about Anne Tinne and Mogens hitherto unrecognized contributions to architecture and archaeology. Tom works full-time as a senior advisor for Nordland County Council helping manage the Vega Archipelago World Heritage Site and the protected fishing town of Henningsvær in Lofoten.

architecture
archaeology
community
conservation
travel

Towards a Vernacular Modernism

The “Knutsen school’s” travels in Greece

Panagiotis Farantatos

The importance of the environment, the submission of the building to its landscape and existing materials, and the organic development of plan and volume lie at the core of Norwegian architect Knut Knutsen’s postwar teachings. His engagement with informality and the landscape was passed on to a younger generation of architects who studied under him shortly after WWII. This paper investigates how members of Knutsen’s circle—his students Trond Eliassen, Per and Molle Cappelen, Erik Anker, and his son Bengt-Espen Knutsen—interpreted and expanded on his ideas about landscape and the vernacular in their own explorations of the Mediterranean, particularly postwar Greece. In these encounters, the established academic perception of the Mediterranean as the locus of classical antiquity is challenged and reversed: the Mediterranean vernacular becomes a primary reference point and source of inspiration. During the postwar modernization period, fueled by the growth of summer tourism, the rural, austere, and modest Mediterranean landscape resonated with Knutsen’s teachings, offering Norwegian architects an opportunity to reflect on their own traditions in a new light. Drawing on interviews with surviving architects, archival research, and a close reading of writings in *Byggekunst*, Norway’s leading architectural magazine, the paper traces these trajectories and personal encounters with the vernacular in postwar Greece. It explores how volumetric, spatial, and material impressions—as well as anthropological and cultural observations—gained during these journeys were incorporated in particular into the architecture of Trond Eliassen and Bengt-Espen Knutsen, transforming Mediterranean experiences into systematic design strategies.

■ Panagiotis Farantatos is Associate Professor in Art History at Aarhus University, Denmark. Trained as an architect (NTU Athens, 2007), he holds a specialization MA (NTUA, 2010), and a PhD in architectural history (University of Oslo, 2019). He edited the Greek translations of Le Corbusier’s *Modulor* and *Modulor 2* (2015), and recently published “Embodied memories, retroactive traces: Le Corbusier’s travel sketches in *Le Modulor*” (*Architectural Histories*, 2025). He organized the symposium *The Architecture of Copies / Copies of Architecture* (Aarhus, 2022) and is General Chair of the 9th Biennial EAHN Conference (Aarhus, 2026).

Greece

Norway

postwar

Trond Eliassen

Bengt-Espen Knutsen

Tuscany in Central Finland

Alvar Aalto and the landscape qualities of the vernacular

Christin Nezik

At first glance, Tuscany and Central Finland may seem to have little in common. Geographically and culturally, one belongs to the south, the other to the north. However, Alvar Aalto would have disagreed with such a simplistic division. He preferred a more nuanced view, based on the similarities between the regions. In his 1925 article “Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland”, he wrote that the topographical features of the Central Finnish landscape are often reminiscent of Tuscany and its hilltop villages. Consequently, Tuscan architecture could provide a conceptual reference point for a landscape-based building practice in Central Finland. What Aalto recognized as prototypical in this article was not the “high” architecture already canonized by art history, but rather the Italian vernacular, or *architettura minore*.

The paper discusses the imagined qualities of Italian and Finnish vernacular architecture through Aalto’s writings and travel sketches, with a particular focus on its assumed space- and place-making capabilities. Concepts of peripheral, anonymous architecture have been part of the international discourse on architecture for the modern age since the late nineteenth century. Some architects focused more on the native, while others—like Aalto—were equally interested in foreign vernacular architecture, especially the Italian. Attributes such as timelessness, tradition, and functionality were projected onto the vernacular, resulting in diverse interpretations. For example, the assumed correlation between vernacular architecture, topography, climate, and local materials served as a conceptual framework to promote the idea of both a proto-national or proto-regional building practice and a site-specific approach.

Aalto’s interest in vernacular architecture was primarily conceptual, with the origin of the buildings playing a secondary role. As a result, his designs often combine anonymous concepts from various art-geographical backgrounds, creating configurations of building, landscape, and life. His Muuratsalo House and Säynätsalo Town Hall, both located in Central Finland, serve as examples of how Aalto merged the qualities of *architettura minore* with those of Finnish farmsteads.

■ Dr. Christin Nezik is a German art historian. She received her PhD from Ruhr University Bochum with the thesis *The Search for a Contemporary Architecture 1890–1950: Adaptations of the Vernacular in the Work of Herman Gesellius, Armas Lindgren, Eliel Saarinen, and Alvar Aalto*. Her dissertation identifies different “mental figures” of vernacular architecture in the modern architectural discourse and analyzes their translation into the building practices of the selected architects. While researching the Seurasaari Open-Air Museum, Nezik contributed to the DFG-funded collaborative monograph *Outdoor Architectural Museums 1880–1930: Contact zones of regional and national architecture in transnational exchange*.

Alvar Aalto
architettura minore
Finnish vernacular architecture

IX

From Taxonomy to Fluxus

Nordic art at the borders
between Medieval and
Early Modern



Session chairs

Kristin Kausland,

Senior Researcher and Paintings Conservator, PhD,
Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU),
Oslo, Norway

Julia Trinkert,

Assistant Professor of Medieval Art History,
Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf,
Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Düsseldorf, Germany

Date

Monday, October 20th

Time

11.00–12.30

Location

F3005, 3rd Floor

This session aims to critically examine the art historical hierarchy that traditionally positions certain figures or centers as the primary sources of artistic influence in the Nordic countries. Since the 1970s, and particularly throughout the 1980s, a shift in perspective emerged with social and technical studies revisiting established ideas about borders, centers, and peripheries in Medieval northern art. However, some forces have resisted this shift, and there remains a tendency to revert to national perspectives.

Today, there is a timely opportunity for a comprehensive, renewed view of Medieval Nordic art, prompted by the emergence of global art history, advancements in technical art history, and an increasing distance from earlier art historical paradigms.

The papers of this session offer fresh perspectives on Medieval Nordic art. The papers discuss:

- **Art Historiography:** Topics illuminating the contributions of the early generation of scholars as well as the contemporary currents that resist or challenge a radical reassessment of art historical traditions.
- **Defining “Nordic” in Medieval Art:** Studies exploring the concept of “Nordic” within the discipline, notions of being localized “inside” or “outside” the region and the implications of horizontal art history.
- **Cross-Disciplinary Case Studies:** Investigations merging art history with conservation science, where material studies either challenge or reinforce traditional assumptions about the boundaries of Nordic art.
- **Network Studies:** Research on artistic networks, clusters, and interactions between agents and “actors” within the Nordic region’s art production and trade.

Dürer's Design and Birgitta's Beast

The Last Judgement in Late Medieval carved altarpieces in the North

Ragnhild M. Bø

In the predella of the Antwerp altarpiece in Ringsaker parish church (1530s), there is a carved scene showing the Last Judgement. Christ as Judge is seated on a rainbow and the Virgin and St. John the Baptist kneel in prayer at either side each accompanied by six apostles. In the central section of the front, men and women rise from their graves. To the right, St. Peter receives those destined for Paradise at the Gates of Heaven; to the left, a devilish satyr (a human body with a dog's head) guides the less fortunate to the Mouth of Hell.

The iconography of this Last Judgement largely follows a design known from Netherlandish panel paintings and illuminations from the fifteenth century onwards. Yet, even if this scene is traditional in design, the representation is unique in so far as Ringsaker is the only preserved Antwerp—even Netherlandish—altarpiece with a carved representation of the Last Judgement.

In this paper I will look more closely at the Last Judgement, its design, and the fact that it is a carved scene. Rather than merely focusing on the scene's exceptionality in the context of Netherlandish altarpieces, I will relate it to a few other extant carved versions in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century altarpieces of Northern German and Scandinavian origin, arguing that its inclusion may be a visual reflection of the sermon production and preaching tradition in late medieval Scandinavia. I also make the case the scene may have been influenced by Albrecht Dürer's artistic endeavors regarding the production of printed editions of St. Birgitta's Revelations around 1500.

■ Ragnhild M. Bø is Associate Professor in Medieval Church History and Christian Material Culture at the University of Oslo. Her research interests center on the making and meaning-making of artefacts ca. 1200–1600. Recent publications include "Shining Pearls: Materialising Devotional Teardrops in late Medieval Northern Art" and "Gender and Ornamental Practices, c. 1000–1350. Re-assessing the Interpretative History". She is PI of the research project *Dressing the Saints. Gendering and Othering in Netherlandish Art at the Dawn of a Globalized World* (NRC FRIPRO 2025–2029).

altarpieces
iconography
cross-regional artistic encounters

Word, Image, and Materiality

Cross-disciplinary perspectives on 15th- and 16th-century urban dwellings in Estonia

Anu Mänd

Compared to churches and monasteries, medieval urban dwellings and their decoration have received comparatively little attention from art historians. The aim of my presentation is to examine the self-representation of Tallinn's and Tartu's burghers, which was expressed in the exterior and interior decoration of houses. From the second half of the 15th century, many images and inscriptions were used to adorn facades and interiors. Where were they located, what motifs were used, and what was the content of the inscriptions? Was the homeowner's social status, marital status, profession, and piety reflected through images and words? How were the material and the decor related? In order to answer these questions, cross-disciplinary research is needed, integrating art history with linguistics and material studies.

Anu Mänd is Professor of Art History at the University of Tartu. Her main field of research is cultural history of late medieval and early modern Baltic Sea region. She is the author of *Urban Carnival: Festive Culture in the Hanseatic Cities of the Eastern Baltic, 1350–1550* (2005), *Keskaegsed altarid ja retaablid* [Medieval altars and altarpieces] (2019), and other books. Co-edited volumes include, e.g., *Images and Objects in Ritual Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Northern and Central Europe* (2013), *Symbolic Identity and the Cultural Memory of Saints* (2018), and *Baltic Human-Animal Histories: Relations, Trading, and Representations* (2024).

medieval art history
materiality in art
burgher houses
carved stones
inscriptions

Hermen Rode's Textile Worlds

Local and global?

Kerttu Palginõmm

The works of Lübeck master Hermen Rode represent a shared heritage among Estonia, Germany, and Sweden. Key institutions that house his works include the Niguliste Museum in Estonia, the Historiska Museet in Stockholm, and the St. Annen-Museum in Lübeck. In 2023, the research scholarship titled "Studies in Material Culture in the Oeuvre of Bernt Notke and Hermen Rode" focused on Rode's contributions. Funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, the works by Rode were examined in Tallinn, Lübeck, Güstrow, Stockholm, Sorunda, and Vansö, with a particular emphasis on the textiles and accessories on display.

Research on material culture related to textiles, clothing, and accessories in Hermen Rode's work has been limited. The main monograph on Rode dedicates little attention to these aspects. Most research has focused on circumstances, locations, donors, iconography, and techniques, though there are exceptions. The project "Rode Altarpiece in Close-Up" made significant strides in this area, particularly examining the pigments used and their associated costs.

Textiles serve as a primary means of connecting local and global trends, alongside the materials used. In Rode's works, international goods and global materials interweave. Notably, the Mediterranean cities were pivotal production centers for luxurious textiles. Rode's textile patterns, techniques, and materials link the altarpieces to the global networks of luxury goods. This presentation provides an overview of these connections and explores the inherent global aspects of Hermen Rode's material world.

■ Kerttu Palginõmm (PhD) is a Specialist at Tartu University, working for the EU Horizon project *Colour4CRAFTS*. The project combines a multidisciplinary team of experts from research institutes and R&D companies and focuses on textile colorants. The main research areas of Palginõmm include the art and material culture of Burgundian and Habsburg Netherlands, with particular interest in luxury goods in Netherlandish painting. She acquired her PhD at the University of Tartu and TU Dortmund University in 2020. She has curated the exhibition *The Power of Things* (Niguliste Museum 2018–2019) and has published articles, edited and co-authored catalogues.

material culture studies

textile history

luxury goods

hanseatic networks

medieval altarpieces

Borderlands to Borderless

Using historical networks to reconsider the history of Medieval Nordic art

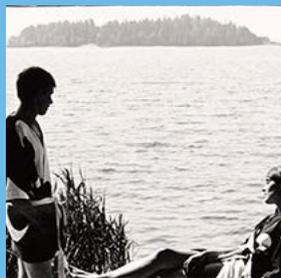
Benjamin Zweig

The study of medieval Nordic art has long been afflicted by enduring yet suspect assumptions regarding its broader place in the history of medieval art. The first is that medieval Nordic art was often the last stop in a vector of stylistic “influence” that, like spokes in a wheel, radiated outwards from mainland European centers to the receptacle of the northern periphery. Second, and attendant to this, is that geographic orientation determined stylistic relationships; for example, Norway exhibits English styles, Denmark and Sweden exhibit those from Germany and Italy. While there is undoubtedly truth to these relationships, both artistically and culturally, the foregrounding of these relationships has had the unintended consequence of making medieval Nordic art something of a passive recipient in its own history.

As a corrective to these long-standing assumptions, this paper explores the question of what exactly makes medieval Nordic art “Nordic” and its greater role in medieval art not from the perspective of geographical determinism or under the nebulous autonomous principles of influence, but from the perspective of networks. That is, this paper re-centers the stylistic development of Scandinavian and more broadly Nordic medieval art from a different projection that places Scandinavia at the center, and continental Europe at the periphery. Specifically, this paper examines personal and collective networks as agents, such as those of the Hvide family in Denmark and the foundation and architectural history of Sorø Abbey, that consciously adopted transnational styles for both local and international relevance. The end goal of this paper is thus to posit a different methodological framework for understanding medieval Nordic art within the broader medieval world, one that eschews abstract external influence in favor of localized agency and international connections.

■ Benjamin Zweig (PhD) works at the Columbia University Libraries and Pratt School of Information, United States.

mapping
networks
geography
architecture
medieval



X

Mediation of Nature in Nordic Design Cultures

Session chairs

Niels Peter Skou,

Associate Professor, Design Studies,
Department of Design,
Media and Educational Science, SDU Kolding,
University of Southern Denmark

Anders V. Munch,

Professor, Design History,
Department of Design,
Media and Educational Science, SDU Kolding,
University of Southern Denmark

Date

Monday, October 20th

Time

14.00–15.30 & 16.00–17.30

Location

F3005, 3rd Floor

The idea of a special closeness with nature has been and still is one of the strongest narratives about Scandinavian Design. While its roots can be traced back to the occupation with and construction of national art, lifestyles, and material cultures in the National Romantic period, it was also very much prominent in the formation and branding of the concept of “Scandinavian Modern” in the 1950s, where images of Scandinavian landscapes featured prominently supporting claims of the special character of Scandinavian Design stemming from traditional craft cultures that had preserved an intimate understanding of local natural materials, or that the organic forms of Scandinavian “organic modernism” were being derived directly from features in the national landscapes. This strong narrative was, however, shaped in a period where the forces of industrialization and urbanization were rapidly changing both design cultures and actual landscapes, and it can even be argued that the success of this dream image of Scandinavian culture may be viewed as a reaction to these changes. The present climate crisis has only enforced the narrative even further since it can be used to position Scandinavian Design as particularly sustainable, but on a background where the modern relationship with nature has been thrown into question.

The starting point for this session is the notion that design mediates nature in a double way. It does so by physically shaping and regulating landscapes and making natural phenomena tangible, but also by providing images and narratives of regional landscapes and relationships with nature. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between the way design has shaped Nordic landscapes and relationships with nature and the way it has produced images of Nordic nature as part of the construction of Nordic identity.

Natural Fibers and Nordic Tradition in Modern Swedish Textile Design

Anna Bergfeldt

Grazing sheep and waving fields—this pastoral view is reminiscent of a Nordic rural landscape, that in the 20th century rapidly gave way for a society centered around cities and industries. From the sheep and the fields, the people of pre-industrial society got the raw material for their textiles: wool and flax. Owing to modernization, these too were losing ground, first to imported cotton, then to artificial fibers derived from wood, plastic and glass. In the textile design of mid-20th century Sweden, however, they still had a crucial part to play—as symbols of a cherished national heritage.

The aim of this presentation is to analyze how the domestic natural fibers wool and flax functioned as mediators of Nordic traditions in the design of modern interior textiles in Sweden 1930–1960. It does so through a case study of two prominent figures in the field: designers and workshop leaders Elsa Gullberg (1886–1984) and Astrid Sampe (1909–2002). Gullberg's and Sampe's progressive work is jointly characterized by welcoming attitudes towards new materials and production methods, but also by advocacy for textile traditions. In their shared ambition to synthesize modernity and tradition, wool and flax functioned as powerful tools. They were used to frame the qualities of artificial fibers and industrial production, which appear as symbols of a promising—but also threatening—modernity. In fabric design, wool was used to damp the strong brilliance of artificial silk. In visual marketing, domestic natural fibers evoked memories of the rural landscapes where the modern production claimed to have its roots. Hence, this paper argues that wool and flax, by virtue of their origin in the Nordic rural landscape, helped reduce the shock effects caused by modernity. In so doing, they also supported the master narrative of modern Swedish design as a harmonious synthesis of nature-tradition and urbanity-modernity.

Originally from Sweden, Anna Bergfeldt is currently a PhD researcher in Art History at Åbo Akademi University. Her thesis focuses on the textile design and textile culture of the modern Swedish home of the inter- and afterwar era, with the two textile designers Elsa Gullberg and Astrid Sampe and their workshops as case studies. A main research interest is the inclusion of textiles and tradition in the design of the modern domestic interior and its historiography.

textile design
natural fibers
wool

flax
tradition
modernity

The Aesthetics of Infrastructure from Car Parks to Nature

On the careful design of post-war Finland

Eeva Berglund & Tiina Männistö-Funk

Whilst the role of nature in the construction of modern Nordic identity is well researched, the extent to which this significant relationship is underpinned by quite recently produced but unsustainable infrastructures are less well known and sometimes deliberately downplayed. We illustrate this by studying two places central to the modern Finnish lifestyle: car parks in the city and summer cottages in the country. With a focus on the 1960s and 1970s when both holiday-home ownership and private motorization accelerated alongside rapid urbanization, we study contemporary printed media to show how both types of places, with their contrasting mediations of nature, were designed into new lifestyles. A powerful ideal of closeness to nature was promoted at the cottage for times of leisure, whilst a technology-intensive design culture dominated politics and penetrated everyday life.

We approach these entangled developments through the idea of an aesthetics of infrastructure, which captures both the poetics and the politics of constructing shared environments. We argue that particular meanings and politics were intentionally designed into the physical and discernible elements of the Finnish landscape, making it and its citizens fit for a consumer society. Elements that were already known to be problematic when introduced, particularly the system of automobility, were carefully hidden whilst virtues such as closeness to nature, stewardship of the land and local tradition, were explicitly celebrated and made visible.

This process was not free of contestation. Visual imagery and popular texts of the time show clashes and negotiations over aesthetics at all points from the “non-place” of automobility to the symbolically charged “our-places” of holiday homes. A historical approach to aesthetics can thus displace flat and stereotypical renditions of past ideals, revealing their complexity and yielding richer understandings of post-war Finnish design culture.

■ Eeva Berglund works at the intersections of design culture, environmental policy, and lived experience. Her research, supported by a doctorate in social anthropology and an MSc in urban planning both from the UK, has revolved around environmentalism, spatial planning, modern notions of knowledge and expertise, and, more recently, leisure and tourism.

■ Tiina Männistö-Funk is a historian of technology and mobilities. She works at the Department of Finnish History at the University of Turku as an Academy Research Fellow funded by the Research Council of Finland. Her current research deals with the change of Finnish living environments from the point of view of non-motorized modes of transport during the second half of the 20th century.

Finland
cottage culture
car parks
aesthetics of infrastructure

Modern Architecture as Compensation for Lost Nature

Controversial heritage of hydropower architecture in Oulujoki

Satu Kähkönen

The hydroelectric development of the Oulujoki River, initiated by the Oulujoki Power Company in 1941, significantly altered the landscape and local communities over two decades. Designed by architect Aarne Ervi (1910–1977), the power plants and residential areas became icons of Finland's post-war reconstruction and modernist architecture. These sites have since been designated as nationally significant cultural environments.

This paper investigates the relationship between landscape transformation and architectural expression, with particular attention to the narratives that have shaped public perception. It contrasts the treatment of nature in industrial and residential design, revealing divergent ideological and aesthetic priorities. Official heritage accounts emphasize architectural merit, economic progress, and technological achievement, while recent participatory heritage initiatives have uncovered personal testimonies that offer more complex and sometimes critical perspectives.

In the context of current environmental discourse—biodiversity loss, ecological restoration, and energy sustainability—this legacy invites renewed examination. Rather than viewing the hydropower infrastructure solely as a symbol of progress, it is approached as a multifaceted heritage reflecting both innovation and ecological disruption. By integrating institutional and community narratives, the study proposes a framework for heritage interpretation that fosters critical reflection and informs more equitable and ecologically attuned futures.

■ Satu Kähkönen holds a PhD in Art History and works as a Senior Adviser at the Finnish Heritage Agency. She coordinates collaboration between the Agency and the museums with regional responsibility to preserve cultural environments, encompassing landscapes, built heritage, and archaeological sites. Prior to her current role, she worked as a researcher and lecturer at the University of Jyväskylä, where she specialized in design and architectural history and Finnish heritage and environmental administration. Her teaching experience includes general art history, design history, and architectural history of the 19th and 20th centuries.

hydropower
landscape
modern architecture
cultural heritage
participatory heritage

Naturalization of Danish Design

Anders V. Munch & Niels Peter Skou

Highlighting different aspects of geographical and climatic conditions along with natural resources as explanation for the style and character of the country's design is a common feature in national design histories as well as in the marketing of regional design brands like "Danish Design" or "Scandinavian Design". Many of these explanations are repeated and expanded so much to cover ideas of national identities that they end up as myths. The designs of each of the Nordic countries, e.g., are often understood as very close to another and promoted with photos of Nordic, rocky wilderness, even though Denmark is rather flat and highly cultivated. Roland Barthes noted in 1957, how the myths of media promotion he studied usually made a short cut to explain themselves in some natural order to avoid further questioning. This "naturalization", however, often hid more complex and problematic backgrounds in historical changes.

This presentation will discuss the "naturalization of nature" in the promotion of Danish Design through historical examples from the 1950s to the present promotion of the Danish design company Bolia under the headline "New Scandinavian Design". Focusing on furniture and home design we will explore the tension between a tradition of describing Denmark as a remote and isolated place, secure for any foreign influences and the development of the geographical and historical conditions, which have framed and influenced Danish design and production culture. Bolia is thus an example of a fully globalized and digitalized design company that operates through global networks of designers, production facilities, and consumers. A Bolia product may e.g. be designed in Italy, produced in China, and consumed in the USA without ever crossing a Scandinavian border but is still conceptualized as "Scandinavian Design" through the use of images of Scandinavian nature. In this case it will be shown how the inherent tensions surrounding the naturalization of nature may be argued to have reached a level where the image- or sign-character of Scandinavian nature has become self-reflective.

■ Anders V. Munch is Professor of Design Culture at the University of Southern Denmark. Recent books are *The Gesamtkunstwerk in Design and Architecture* (Aarhus University Press, 2021); *Design Culture. Objects and Approaches* (Bloomsbury, 2019) co-edited with Guy Julier, Mads Nygaard Folkmann, Hans-Christian Jensen, and Niels Peter Skou; and *Nordic Design Cultures in Transformation, 1960–1980: Revolt and Resilience* (Routledge, 2023) co-edited with Kjetil Fallan and Christina Zetterlund. Munch is Danish representative in Nordic Forum for Design History.

■ Niels Peter Skou (b. 1974) takes part in the research program in Design Culture at SDU Kolding and is co-editor of *Design Culture. Objects and Approaches* (Bloomsbury 2016). His research explores historical and analytical approaches to Scandinavian Design Culture with a special focus on conceptions of democracy and nature. At present he is co-heading the project *Landscape Imaginaries* on energy landscapes and Danish conceptions of nature and landscape.

Danish design history
design historiography
use of history
cultural myths
nature understandings

Threads of Resistance

Elsa Montell-Saanio and Lapin Raanu in post-war Lapland

Sini Rinne-Kanto

The dominant epistemologies in design history research have traditionally focused on urban centers and makers. This paper proposes a more nuanced understanding of how ideas move across the global design field: how they influence, and are influenced by, debates rooted in local communities and conditions. The paper examines the work of Finnish textile artist Elsa Montell-Saanio (1925–2019) and the weaving studio Lapin Raanu, which she established in 1955 in the village of Oikarainen, Lapland.

Post-war Finland was characterized by rapid industrialization, followed by demands to respond to the manufacturing needs of widespread urbanization. As large-scale migration to cities accelerated, counter-movements emerged in rural areas, advocating for alternative relationships with nature and craftsmanship. Lapin Raanu exemplifies this neo-folk design thinking, representing a rare case of female entrepreneurship in the war-torn northern countryside. The small enterprise provided vital employment, particularly for local women, at a time of historically high post-war unemployment.

Montell-Saanio's practice was grounded in traditional techniques that she continuously sought to renew and reinterpret. Drawing inspiration from the local landscape, her work often addressed the pressing concerns of surrounding communities. Her tapestry *Lokan susi* ("The Lokka Pool") protested against the destruction of nature and local culture caused by the construction of the Lokka reservoir in the 1960s, which submerged entire villages. Another work, *Fierua*, integrates a grassy surface made from old fishing nets, literally weaving together notions of resistance, ecology, and tradition. Her oeuvre embodies a profound commitment to design responsibility, female entrepreneurship, and ecological resistance within the modernist and Nordic design canon.

In line with the conference theme, the proposal interrogates the concept of Scandinavian design and the mediation of nature by foregrounding overlooked geographical foci within the design historical establishment and reintroducing the "global-local" perspective to the making of design histories.

■ Sini Rinne-Kanto is a Paris-based curator and researcher currently pursuing a PhD at Paris 8 University. Her ongoing thesis project, *Cold and Soft, War and Power: Discourses, Practices and Forms in Finnish Design in the 1960s and 1970s*, focuses on post-war Finnish design history in the context of the Cold War. Her research interests include domesticity, collective memories, and the socio-cultural histories of the material world. She has curated several exhibitions in France and internationally that test the boundaries of design and contemporary art, most recently *Surprise Guest* at the Fiskars Village Art & Design Biennale (2024) and *Nordic Noir* at the SIC gallery (Helsinki, 2025).

regional identities

craft

female entrepreneurship

ecology

cottage industry

Museal Mediation of Nature at the Biological Museum of Stockholm

Molly Sjögren

Framing and mediating nature is an important part of Nordic art and design history and a popular motif during the 19th century, when plein-air painting became popularized. In this paper I will argue that the motif of nature was also used to transfer its “natural” aspirations onto other associated phenomena.

The study focuses on the Biological Museum in Stockholm, displaying a collection of taxidermy animals in a panorama setting, with monumental background paintings by renowned artist Bruno Liljefors. The panorama displays are housed in a building designed by Agi Lindgren, meant to look like a medieval Norwegian stave church. The museum was created in 1893 and was one of the main attractions of the *General Art and Industrial Exposition of Stockholm* in 1897. By analyzing the museum and their displays, the study discusses the role of the museum’s mediation of nature in relation to the contemporary political project of creating a Nordic identity as well as the museum’s connections to the dissemination of nationalistic narratives.

The building’s church-like design works to both sanctify its content, but more importantly becomes a way for Swedish nationalists to symbolically claim possession of a Norwegian cultural heritage. The union between the two nations was in a political turmoil at the time, becoming clear during the 1897 exposition.

The practice of creating an immersive experience of a nature setting is an effective way of mediating the displayed content as *true—i.e. natural*. In this instance it produces the image of a unified Nordic Nature and cohesive wildlife, effectively mediating the notion of a unified territory that includes all its varied landscape types.

The museum and its displays are still almost intact, but the museum has been closed for renovations since 2017.

■ Molly Sjögren is a Stockholm based curator, researcher and architect working in the field of public art and designed living environments. She specializes in artistic practices during early building stages and in large scale urban development projects, as well as the bureaucratic and organizational practice involved in producing those projects. Sjögren is currently a PhD student in art history at Södertörn University in Stockholm.

mediation of nature
Nordic identity
Biological Museum
World Fairs
Nordic architecture

XI

Myth, Mythology, and Mythmaking in the North

Session chairs

Oscar Ortiz-Nieminen,
Post-Doctoral Researcher

Terhi Utriainen,
Professor

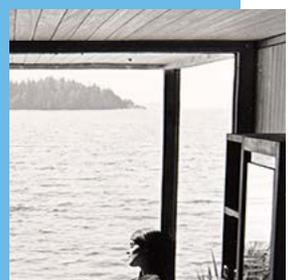
Alexandra Bergholm,
Senior Researcher

All are members of the *Whose Angels?*
Art, Research, and Enchantment project,
University of Helsinki, Finland.

Date Tuesday, October 21st

Time 10.45–12.15

Location F3004, 3rd Floor



Our session delves into the concepts of “myth”, “mythology”, and “mythmaking” in the context of art, architecture, design, and visual culture in the Nordic countries. Although “myth” is often used to denote falsehood, from a Cultural Studies perspective, the term is used to refer in general terms to a story that narrates supernatural involvement in the physical world or bespeaks core cultural values.

Our approach to the session topic is twofold. On one hand, we are interested in ways myths and mythologies have been visualized, circulated, and contested in the Nordics. How do art and design pieces and practices communicate, transform, or subvert nationalized narratives and religious or other belief systems?

On the other hand, we are interested in the material and/or discursive mechanics of myths, mythologies, and mythmaking. In this aim, we ask how some Nordic artworks or artists have become considered as iconic or legendary—and some have not. In what ways can myths within and about the visual arts be critiqued or challenged?

Edvard Munch as Totem and Taboo

Homage, compulsion, and “The Great Patricide” in the visual art of 21st century Norway

Zuzanna Borowska

As one of the fathers of Expressionism, Edvard Munch firmly holds his due space within the canon of art history. In his native country, however, his constantly growing domestic and international fame continues to influence the shape of Norwegian art to an unprecedented degree. Described as Norway’s “leading trademark” and “largest artistic export product”, Munch is also a major art historical ghost—a Nietzschean totem and taboo looming over contemporary Norwegian artists.

In this paper, I will center on the posthumous functioning of Munch in Norway. By focusing on his reception by four acclaimed contemporary visual artists—Anne Katrine Dolven, Markus Brendmoe, Unni Askeland, and Bjarne Melgaard—I will examine three primary modes of Munch’s appropriation: paraphrase, deconstruction, and rejection. I will also attempt to highlight the interrelationship between Munch’s complex position and the attitude of these artists, who relate to him differently. I will explore how an artist’s intention, stemming from their personal views on Munch and his status, shapes the social and critical reception of their work. Finally, I will consider the opportunities and dangers accompanying young artists just entering the art market, in the context of the probable overload from the figure and legend of Edvard Munch.

This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on how art history has constructed myths, which are currently being redefined through new methodologies. Although still understudied, Munch’s perception as a solitary genius—and the long-standing critical and institutional focus on his early Symbolist paintings—have been progressively acknowledged and described as myth-making agents, contributing to such notions as commercialization, mythologization, iconization, and totemization. This paper builds upon my master’s thesis, defended at the University of Warsaw in 2023.

■ Zuzanna Borowska is a Polish scholar holding a master’s degree in the History of Art and a bachelor’s degree in Norwegian Philology. Combining her two biggest passions, she is most interested in researching modern and contemporary Norwegian art, and their relationships to the past.

Edvard Munch
status
appropriation
contemporary art

Gendering Norwegian Fin de Siècle Nature Mythologies

Flowers, ocean, sky, and the supernatural in Frida Hansen's weavings

Adine Lexow

A pioneering figure of the 1890s Norwegian weaving renaissance, and one of Scandinavia's most prominent Art Nouveau artists, Frida Hansen (1855–1931) embraced the metamorphic nature mysticism of the European fin de siècle. Her project was a deeply national one; in addition to her work being central in the revitalization of traditional weaving techniques and plant dye methods, her motifs were often inspired by south-west Norwegian nature, 16th- and 17th-century Norwegian tapestries, and national folklore. At the same time, she was born into one of Stavanger's wealthiest shipping families and was more travelled and internationally connected than most. She became heavily inspired by the new European decorative language of the day, and as Anniken Thue argued in the 1970s, this led to her work being viewed as too international by the gatekeepers of the Norwegian art scene. This was often done through comparisons with the art of Gerhard Munthe, which by the turn of the 20th century had become an emblem of Norwegianness.

Hansen got tired of the excessive comparison with Munthe and claimed that the two were as different as fire and water; Munthe was influenced by the forests in east Norway, with their gnomes and trolls, while her own art was inspired by her grandmother's rose garden and the beaches and moors at Jæren. Considering the prevalent fairytale nature mysticism of Norwegian fin de siècle art and its connections to questions of Norwegianness, this paper asks what stories Frida Hansen's tapestries, full of vivid depictions of flowers, ocean, sky, and supernatural creatures, tell about Norwegian nature. How did her nature imagery differ from what was considered more "Norwegian" nature depictions of her day? And how does this relate to questions of gender and class, as well as east-west and urban-rural dichotomies?

■ Adine Lexow is a PhD fellow in Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Oslo, employed by the Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design in a position financed by the Fredriksen Family Art Foundation. Her project *Floral Entanglements: Frida Hansen's Weaving and Gardening Practices* investigates the work by Norwegian weaver and art nouveau artist Frida Hansen (1855–1931) and aims to unravel the environmental aspects of her artistic practice. Lexow completed her master's degree in art history and curating at the University of Oslo in spring 2022.

Frida Hansen
Nordic nature myths
nature mysticism
neo-romanticism
art nouveau
weaving

How Hugo Simberg's Untitled Painting Became "The Picture of Our Nation"

Drafting a reception history of *The Wounded Angel* (1903)

Oscar Ortiz-Nieminen

In 2006, Ateneum, the Finnish national gallery, organized a public vote titled "The Picture of Our Nation" (Maamme taulu). The goal was to determine the most beloved work in the collection. *The Wounded Angel* (1903) won the contest with 1,360 votes. This large-format oil painting was created by artist Hugo Simberg (1873–1917). Due to its popularity, the work holds special status in the museum, as it is almost always on display and rarely loaned. The painting has been lengthily discussed in Finnish art historiography, particularly in the context of the artist's oeuvre and biography. However, its broader reception history has received little scholarly attention.

In this paper, I explore the factors that explain and support the fame of *The Wounded Angel*, seeking answers primarily outside the artwork itself. By analyzing relevant documentation, bibliography, and other sources, I aim to identify key events that have contributed to the painting's public recognition and acclaim. Additionally, I explore the main discursive trends and cultural practices surrounding *The Wounded Angel*—examining how the image has been presented, circulated, and written about over roughly a hundred years. My study draws on the research tradition of Visual Culture Studies and Bildwissenschaft, both of which engage with questions regarding the use, agency, and social significance of images.

■ Oscar Ortiz-Nieminen holds a PhD in Art History and a MTh in the Study of Religion. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. Ortiz-Nieminen is a member of the *Whose Angels?* interdisciplinary project, which combines artistic and scholarly approaches and focuses on the popular reception of contemporary angel images. His research interests lie in the intersections of religion with visual culture and with the built environment.

The Wounded Angel
reception history
art historiography
social significance of images

Famously Neglected

John Bauer as artist and myth

Martin Sundberg

Swedish artist John Bauer (1882–1918) is best known for his fairy tale illustrations, merging Nordic myths and landscapes. His trolls and forest scenes remain immensely popular. Yet, despite Bauer being part of the Swedish cultural canon, art historians have neglected him. Why has there been no thorough discussion of Bauer as artist so far? In this paper, I want to pursue the notions of myth and mythmaking from a canon perspective. Bauer's famous illustrations will serve as point of departure to discuss their roots comparatively, e.g., to discuss the role of nature—at the core of Nordic mythmaking—then and now. Art historical hierarchies can be scrutinized using canon and myth as tools to understand the mechanics behind. In Bauer's later years, he struggled with the recognition he received as illustrator—a struggle he lost since the illustrations are what he continuously remains known for. But how come that the images have retained their popularity? And is there a flipside to popular fame, it standing in the way of academic consideration?

In the case of Bauer, other angles regarding mythmaking emerge as well. His tragic fate, drowning with wife and son in a winter storm on lake Vättern, seems to be another factor to consider in this context. I will discuss Bauer as myth in himself, a popular construction. Through a more profound comprehension of the impact of his fate on our understanding, as I want to argue, a re-evaluation of his art can be pursued. Hopefully, this example will show the close relationship between myth as image, mythmaking regarding fate and fame, and how this is related to the notion of a cultural canon. Bauer's art and life seem to provide a perfect starting point for understanding what myth stands for in multiple ways in Nordic art.

■ Martin Sundberg is an art historian with a PhD from Lund University (2005). Since then, he has worked as curator and researcher in many museums in Sweden, e.g. in Jönköping with the most extensive John Bauer collection and archive in Sweden. His research has dealt with questions of canonization, museum history, and feminist art history. He held a post doc position at eikones NCCR Iconic Criticism at Basel University in 2010–2013, focusing on the carpet paradigm and Modernist art. Since August 2025, he is Artistic Director at Helsingborg Museum.

John Bauer

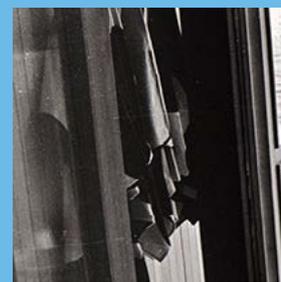
cultural canonization

art history

omission

forest in art

XIII



Nation-Building and the Collaboration Between Antiquarians and Restorers in (Re) Creating Church Interiors in the Nordic Region

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Session chairs | Project Group <i>Memento Restauratum!</i> <i>Historical Restorations of Church Interiors in Norway</i> (MEMRES), represented by: Elisabeth Andersen and Susanne Kaun , Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), Oslo, Norway |
| Date | Tuesday, October 21st |
| Time | 9.00–10.30 & 10.45–12.15 |
| Location | F3017, 3rd Floor |

The session aims to explore the impact major alterations in Nordic church interiors during the 1800s and the subsequent restorations of the 1900s have had on our current perception of church interiors. During the 20th century, a revived interest in historic church art led to the “restoration” of church interiors, often aimed at recreating an idealized medieval or baroque aesthetic. This restoration process, intended to evoke a pan-Scandinavian artistic heritage, frequently came at the expense of the 19th century designs. Wall paintings were uncovered, fragments of original furnishings were restored and reintegrated, and entire interiors were reimagined according to these ideals.

This session invites discussion on the extent and authenticity of these restorations, as well as the motivations and historical assumptions that underpinned them. For instance, early antiquarians and restorers in Norway sought inspiration in Denmark for ways to “revive” medieval styles. This prompts questions about who influenced Danish restoration practices and how restoration approaches in Sweden and Finland evolved concurrently.

Topics discussed include:

- **Expressions of Medieval Nordic Identity:** By whom, how, and why was the concept of “Medieval Nordicism” expressed in church restorations?
- **Collaborations Between Antiquarians and Restorers:** How did the early generations of antiquarians and restorers work together in these projects?
- **Justifications for Restoration Choices:** What rationales led to the removal of 17th and 18th century features in favor of older layers?
- **Preservation and Reimagining of Medieval Art:** How was medieval art preserved or reinterpreted in different Nordic countries? What ideas fueled a shared notion of a “Scandinavian color instinct”?
- **Historiography of Nordic Identity in Art and Restoration:** What are the historiographical roots of “Nordicism” and Scandinavianism in art history and restoration studies?

Karin Månsdotter Re-Constructed

Saila Leskinen

Karin Månsdotter (1550–1612) was the queen consort of King Erik XIV of Sweden, albeit for only 87 days. She was of non-noble Finnish ancestry but nevertheless became a royal mistress and eventually queen. After being dethroned, imprisoned, and eventually widowed, she was, however, treated with respect. She lived the rest of her life—35 years—in the Liuksiala manor in Kangasala, Finland, where she died at the age of 61. She was laid to rest in Turku Cathedral in 1613, and a stone monument was erected on her tomb.

The legend of the beautiful and wise “peasant-queen” lived on for centuries, inspiring many pieces of art. However, there are very few contemporary memorials of Karin Månsdotter. Her earthly remains were transferred to a new marble sarcophagus in 1867 during the post-fire restoration of Turku Cathedral. The interior of the burial chapel, including a fragment of the original tomb monument, was recreated. Her name carried such a legendary aura that it became associated with places to which she had no actual connection. In Siuntio, a local lord of the Suitia manor conducted a vast restoration of his estate in the early 1900s, including the restoration of a 17th-century pulpit from Siuntio church, erroneously known as Karin Månsdotter’s pulpit. He was accused at both the local and state levels of vandalism and desecrating Karin’s name.

In my paper, I discuss these two cases through the Latourian concept of iconoclasm. Both cases revolve around larger restoration projects during a period of heightened national romanticism in Finland. I explore how these restoration cases express iconoclasm, i.e. changes in the appearance and meaning. How was Karin Månsdotter perceived as a national figure several hundred years after her death, and how do these re-constructed objects actually present her memory?

■ Saila Leskinen is an art historian specializing in Early Modern church art and objects, with a background in the restoration and conservation of furniture and wooden objects. Her current doctoral research focuses on Early Modern funerary and memorial objects in Finnish churches.

church interiors
memorial objects
restoration
early antiquarians
iconoclasm

Theory and Practice of “Color Restoration” (*Farverestauring*) in Early Church Restorations in Norway (1912–1940)

Anne Milnes

In the years surrounding Norway’s declaration of independence in 1905, significant efforts were made to define what was perceived as a distinctly Norwegian identity. The establishment of the National Trust of Norway in 1844 had already initiated the preservation of stave churches and sparked a renewed interest in folk art, inspiring ideas about a uniquely Norwegian “sense of color” (*farvefølelse*). This cultural revival directly influenced how church interiors were restored in the early decades of the 20th century.

The Directorate for Cultural Heritage (*Riksantikvaren*) was founded in 1912, with art historian Harry Fett serving as its head from 1912 to 1946. Together with his fellow antiquarians, Fett shaped the ideological foundation for church restoration during this period. The concept of “color restoration” (*farverestauring*) emerged with the aim of reviving the vivid and colorful interiors believed to reflect a lost Norwegian past.

To realize these ambitions, the antiquarians sought a skilled craftsman or artist capable of working directly with church interiors and their wall paintings. They found such expertise in the decorative painter Domenico Erdmann, who was loosely affiliated with their circle.

This paper presents several case studies of church interior restorations resulting from the collaboration between antiquarian Harry Fett and painter-restorer Domenico Erdmann. By examining in detail, the working methods of the painter-restorer, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved. Furthermore, it explores how the restoration theories promoted by the antiquarians aligned—or conflicted—with the practices carried out by the painter-restorer.

■ Anne Milnes has since 2008 operated her own private conservation practice in Oslo, Norway. Prior to that, she worked at the Museum of Cultural History and the Munch Museum. Originally trained as an art historian in 1996, she went on to earn a diploma in art conservation in 2001. While she specializes in the conservation of easel paintings, a significant part of her practice also focuses on the preservation of church art and interiors. Additionally, she has devoted extensive time to the examination and analysis of architectural surfaces.

conservation history
color restoration (farverestauring)
church interiors
painter-restorer
cultural revival

Revealing Color in Church Interiors, Medieval, and Beyond

Anneli Randla & Hilikka Hiiop

Recent studies of churches of medieval origin in Estonia have shown that these edifices have long histories of polychrome decoration both before and after the Reformation. In this presentation, some aspects of these color schemes will be discussed. Firstly, the question of the decoration and redecoration of interiors during the Middle Ages is addressed, secondly the authorship and technique of the vernacular-looking murals is discussed, and thirdly the discovery and conservation of wall paintings is analyzed. In addition, post-medieval murals are also examined. This paper is based on fieldwork in around 25 Estonian medieval churches conducted over a period of twenty years by the staff and students of the Department of Conservation and Cultural Heritage at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

As elsewhere in medieval (Northern) Europe, medieval church interiors included at least some kind of painted decoration. The first (and in many cases the only) color scheme was provided by the builders and applied at the time of plastering, when the mortar had not yet set and the scaffolding was still available. Historical records, surviving artworks and investigated interiors demonstrate that after the Reformation the Lutherans were less radical in transforming churches than were other Protestants: several Catholic altarpieces and statues were preserved, side altars were not removed, etc. The churches were usually decorated with new, more modern murals and whitewashed only several centuries later. Gradually, church interiors became more monochrome, although not necessarily white. However, the late 19th century brought a revival of color to at least some churches. These colorful, mainly Gothic revival interiors survived for only a short time and disappeared again when they were painted over everywhere. The principles behind and practice of uncovering and presentation of the murals throughout the 20th century (with special focus on Helge Kjellin's activities) will also be discussed.

■ Anneli Randla (PhD) (b. 1970) is the Head of the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Senior Research Fellow, and Associate Professor. Her research interests span medieval art and architecture, technical art history, and conservation history.

■ Hilikka Hiiop (PhD) (b. 1974) is a Professor in the Department of Conservation at the Estonian Academy of Arts and from April 2025 the rector of the Estonian Academy of Arts. She has studied and worked as a conservator in Berlin, Amsterdam, and Rome, supervised a number of conservation and technical investigation projects in Estonia, curated exhibitions, and conducted scientific research on conservation and technical art history.

medieval wall paintings
church interiors
post-Reformation church decoration
conservation of murals

Rootless Paintings

Kalkmalerier and the search for Nordic aesthetic particularity in nineteenth-century Denmark

Ronah Sadan

Medieval wall paintings (*kalkmalerier*), which deck the walls of about a thousand Danish churches, are today one of Denmark's most cherished cultural treasures. Their rediscovery in the nineteenth century under often-thick layers of limewash was a concerted national endeavor aimed at reintegrating elements of the medieval past within the fabric of modern church spaces, with the hopes of rooting the country's national identity within a culturally particular (*ejendommelig*) artistic tradition. As previous research has shown, the non-negligible public resources invested in these paintings' restoration and the interest with which they were received by many church communities indicate that these medieval images were understood as a valued element in the establishment of a historically informed Danish identity in the nineteenth century.

My paper, however, examines a heretofore de-emphasized aspect of the reception of medieval wall paintings in Denmark: their lack of Nordicism. As authors such as the Scandinavist historian Carl Rosenberg and the art historian Julius Lange observed towards the nineteenth century's close, even the most important *kalkmalerier* were, in the organicist parlance of the time, foreign transplants. That is, they did not appear stylistically rooted in what was defined at the time as Nordic aesthetic traditions. My paper will analyze the implications of this foreignness not only on the paintings' historiographic reception, but also on their restoration. It highlights the rhetorical strategies that restorers employed in order to connect *kalkmalerier* to a particularly Nordic confessional history. It argues that due to the perception of the paintings' foreignness, their full embrace as an essential part of the canon of Danish art was delayed until the mid-twentieth century, when Modernism situated the paintings within a newly defined primitivist Nordicism.

■ Ronah Sadan has recently defended her dissertation at the Department of Art History at Aarhus University. Her thesis, *Revelation, Restoration, Erasure: The Reception of Medieval Wall Paintings in Nineteenth-Century Denmark and Europe*, studies the modern reception and remediation of Danish medieval wall paintings and examines how both national and trans-national ideologies and aesthetic trends have shaped of remains of medieval architectural polychromy in Northern Europe. She received her MA in the History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University (2012), where her studies were focused on Albrecht Dürer, Northern Renaissance print culture, and epistemic images.

wall paintings
cultural particularism
restoration history
organicism
rootlessness

Bringing Back the Medieval Images to Lutheran Church

The restoration case of Kalanti in 1884

Leena Elina Valkeapää

In Finland, the antiquarian research of medieval churches began in the 1870s, and the first restoration works were carried out in the 1880s. The most important institutions involved were the Finnish Antiquarian Society, founded in 1870, and the Commission for Antiquities (predecessor of the current Finnish Heritage Agency), which began its work in 1883–1885.

In this paper, I focus on the research and restoration work of the Kalanti Church in 1884, which was the first restoration to receive public support in Finland. The Kalanti parish began the process as a maintenance and renovation work as usual. However, during the work, medieval wall paintings were discovered, and the vicar reported the discovery to the Society. I will study how the practical needs of the parishioners met the stylistic views of the planning architect C. J. von Heideken and the conservation efforts of the Society members in the Kalanti process.

Kalanti was the first case in Finland where Catholic images were uncovered and returned to a church that was now Lutheran. The actual painting work was done by decorative painter Karl K. Hellstén, but the key figure in the restoration project was Emil Nervander, a journalist, writer, and expert in Finnish medieval art history. I will ask how did he justify the restoration of the wall paintings, what were the goals of the work, and how was it carried out?

Nervander's work and methods have been much criticized later, and almost every one of his restorations have been destroyed. However, from my point of view it is more fruitful to try to understand him and his contemporaries work and decisions than to simply dismiss them as historical curiosities.

■ Leena Valkeapää is an independent researcher specializing in late 19th century art and cultural history. Her dissertation (2000) dealt with the initial stages of the protection of medieval stone churches in Finland. Since then, she studied the early stages of cultural heritage protection and art history research, for example the life of Emil Nervander and the art historical expeditions organized by the Finnish Antiquarian Society. Recently, she has been researching early applied arts exhibitions as well as the cultural history of the national costumes in Finland.

medieval church
early antiquarians
nation building
restoration
art historiography

Johnny Roosval and the “Wrong” Medieval Sculptures at the Turku Cathedral Museum’s First Exhibition in 1929

Katri Vuola

This article explores the history and museological framing of the medieval polychrome wood sculptures in the collection of the Turku Cathedral Museum. The devastating fire that struck Turku Cathedral in 1827 destroyed most of its medieval artworks, leaving only seven sculptures—or fragments thereof—intact. In 1893, these surviving works were deposited in the Historical Museum of Turku and displayed at Turku Castle, alongside sculptures from various parishes in the region. This mixing of collections led to significant uncertainty regarding the original provenance of many works.

When the Turku Cathedral Museum opened its first exhibition in 1929, it included several sculptures that were not originally from the Cathedral, while some of the Cathedral’s own sculptures remained at the Castle. Among those moved to the museum were two monumental apostle figures, which are now known to have originated from the church in Sund, on the Åland Islands. During his visit to Turku in 1929, the Swedish art historian Johnny Roosval (1879–1965) attributed the apostles to the German master Bertram von Minden (c. 1345–1415).

This paper argues that Roosval’s authority and attributions were instrumental in shaping the perceived artistic value of these sculptures, and that they influenced the selection of works for the museum’s inaugural exhibition. Furthermore, it considers how early attributions—whether accurate or not—played a formative role in defining the museum’s collection and the historical identities of the works within it.

■ Dr. Katri Vuola is a postdoctoral researcher at Aalto University in Espoo, Finland. She holds a PhD in Art History and specializes in medieval polychrome wood sculpture in Finland and the Baltic Sea region. Her recent research has focused on affective devotion and the iconography of color in medieval crucifixes. Currently, she is involved in the *La cathédrale engloutie* project—funded by the Research Council of Finland—which investigates the medieval architecture, construction phases, and artworks of Turku Cathedral through the application of new methodologies.

Turku Cathedral Museum
polychrome sculpture
Johnny Roosval
Bertram von Minden
Sund church (Åland)

Nordic art—artist collectives—experimental pedagogy—collaborative and socially engaged art and its theoretical contexts—protest art—modern and contemporary art

XIII

Negotiating Spaces

Nordic artists working within or in resistance to institutional spaces

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|-----------------------|--|
| Session chairs | Wylie Schwartz, Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Art History, State University of New York at Cortland, United States Katherine Jackson, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History, Utah Valley University, United States |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 11.00–12.30 |
| Location | F3004, 3rd Floor |

*history and critical theory—systems of power—art as resistance strategy—
art barricades—activist art—institutional critique*



During the 1972 Documenta 5 exhibition in Kassel, the Scandinavian Bauhaus Situationist, an artists' group also known as Drakabygget, intervened by staging their own unauthorized "Alternat-Documenta", a collectively made barricade of "junk" consisting of a pile of wood scraps and trash, situated outside the exhibition hall. Accompanying the work was a series of leaflets stating the group's demands, including a call to the international art community to "Follow Courbet" by constructing art barricades designed to resist the monopolization of cultural life by an elite art-system of nationalism. In a similar gesture to the French painter's *Pavillon du Réalisme*—which challenged the authoritarian art-system by exhibiting work that had been rejected from the Salon of 1855 in a highly visible yet marginal public location—Drakabygget launched their critique without becoming complicit in the system they opposed. This Nordic example is one of many postwar conceptual artworks that address artists' engagement with institutions as systems of power and the established modes of practice they represent.

From the corporation to the art school, the papers of this session investigate Nordic and Northern European artists and artist collectives from the 1960s to the present in their operation within or in their attempt to change institutional bodies such as the government, the corporation, and the art school. We hope to gain a more intricate understanding of the art historic context that influence many artists today working within residencies and institutional frameworks. This panel ultimately asks proposals to consider: Can an artist operate critically within systemic structures without dismantling the institution itself?

The Cave Art Museum

Asger Jorn and Jørn Utzon's underground anti-museum

Niels Henriksen

In 1963, while at work on the Sydney Operahouse, Danish architect Jørn Utzon drew up a proposal for a modern art museum in Silkeborg, Denmark. The commissioner for the project was the Danish artist Asger Jorn. Jorn had a history of thinking critically about the art historical and museological framing of art. His brief for Utzon was generous in ambition and rich with ideas. Shaped like a cluster of three-story tall, double-curved concrete shells dug deep into the terrain, Utzon's proposal was as bold and unusual as it was impossible to build.

What drew Utzon to the idea of a modern art museum shaped like an underground cave? Why was Jorn so excited about it? Taking Utzon's unrealized 1963 proposal for the Silkeborg Art Museum as a case study, this paper digs into the history and theory of the cave as a type in museum architecture.

Jorn first talked to Utzon about the museum shortly after he had been dissociated from the Situationist International movement that he helped found in 1957. In the paper I consider Utzon's proposal in the context of other caves in his works and Jorn's as well as in relation to the history of Situationist interventions with urban and architectural space. Substituting curved walls for square boxes, free-flowing open spaces for clearly divided closed ones, underground for overground, invisibility for monumentality, Utzon's Silkeborg Art Museum was an anti-museum. And yet, it was a proposal for an actual building, housing actual works of art and hosting actual visitors. As Utzon's proposal defied the norms of traditional museum architecture, what did it offer instead? What was Jørn Utzon and Asger Jorn's positive definition of the cave art museum?

■ Niels Henriksen wrote his PhD at Princeton University about a series of illustrated books on prehistoric and medieval art created by the Danish painter, sculptor, and theorist Asger Jorn between 1947 and 1973. His main interests include twentieth-century critical histories and theories of art, modern painting, cave art, prehistory, and archaeology, psychoanalytic theory, and the history and theory of modern architecture. A NNF postdoctoral fellow at SMK and Museum Jorn, he is currently working on a book about the art and archaeology of Asger Jorn and an essay on the woodcuts of Sidsel Meineche Hansen.

Asger Jorn

Jørn Utzon

cave art

museology

Situationist International



Alternative Voices in the Museum

Institutional critique in three cases of Nordic contemporary art collectives

Pilvi Kalhama

As democratic values are being reconstructed and challenged even within the Western world, a debate is taking place regarding the role and ability of the museum institution to foster open interaction within civil society. This paper explores the potential of artistic collectives to reconstruct the museum institution through three case studies. It investigates whether creative interventions can introduce polyphony into the museum context and what role they may play in transforming the museum into a less univocal platform. Despite the Nordic ideal of freedom of expression, the critical potential of contemporary art has received little attention. However, if the museum is conceptualized as an open, democratic space, study of this field becomes crucial.

The analysis is grounded in the theoretical landscape of institutional criticism and art studies acknowledging the post-global condition of the reflective power of contemporary art. To examine whose voice speaks at the museum, the analysis draws upon the concept of *metamuseality*, which I introduced in a peer-reviewed article (2023), and which builds on cultural theorist Mieke Bal's analyses of museum narratives.

The artistic interventions examined in this study are *mesh/mej/* (2015) by nabbteeri (Janne Nabb and Maria Teeri, FI); *2020* (2020–21) by Elmgreen & Dragset (Michael Elmgreen, DK, and Ingar Dragset, NO), and *The White Exhibition* (2021) by Hesselholdt & Mejlvang (Sofie Hesselholdt and Vibeke Mejlvang, DK).

Each distinct intervention took place at EMMA—Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland, and intentionally dismantled the museum's established and authoritative practices. The analysis focuses on the thematic, material, and discursive intersections of these projects. It examines how the interventions exposed the museum's meta-level (power) structures and contributed to the construction of an intrinsic polyphony within the institution. Consequently, the paper further discusses how these case studies functioned as temporary agents within the museum, acting as catalysts for social interaction and institutional transformation.

■ Pilvi Kalhama (MA, Ph.Lic.) is an art historian and doctoral researcher in the Juno Doctoral Programme in History, Culture, and Art Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. Her research examines the impact of institutionally critical contemporary art on the museum institution through six case studies, which introduce multiple voices and underrepresented perspectives to challenge the museum's meta-level structures. The research is funded by the Wihuri Foundation. Kalhama served as Director of EMMA—Espoo Museum of Modern Art from 2012, and in 2025, she assumed the role of Director of the Museum of Architecture and Design, Helsinki.

institutional critique

metamuseality

museum critique

multivocality

art interventions

Power Struggle over Art Education in Iceland

Margrét Elísabet Ólafsdóttir

This paper examines the transformation of the Iceland School of Arts and Crafts in the mid-1970s with the foundation of an “Department in Formation” in 1975 later named “New Art Department”. The pedagogical approach adopted by this department was significantly influenced by artistic movement such as Fluxus, conceptual art, and intermedia practices that emerged in the 1960s. Its foundation marked a pivotal shift in Icelandic art education and instigated considerable institutional conflicts concerning curricular direction and authority.

Following the departure of the director who had initiated the department a newly appointed director sought to dismantle it, contending that it was inappropriate to base an academic department on an art movement. He further declared his intention to resign should he fail in doing so. Despite these efforts, the department persisted, while the director ultimately stepped down. The department went on to establish a pedagogical framework that would later serve as the foundation for the Fine Art Department of the Iceland University of the Arts, which succeeded the School of Arts and Crafts in 2000.

This paper argues that these developments reflect broader international trends in the reformation of art education, drawing on the educational philosophy of Richard Newell. At the same time, it acknowledges the particular socio-cultural and institutional dynamics unique to the Icelandic context that shaped this process.

■ Margrét Elísabet Ólafsdóttir, is a Professor at Iceland University of the Arts, and Associate Professor at the University of Akureyri. Her research focuses on Modern and Contemporary Art with a particular emphasis on Icelandic context.

contemporary art
art education
art schools

Poul Gernes and Art School Collectives

A double-sided story

Philip Pihl

Danish artists Poul Gernes (1925–1996) was one of the founders of “Eks-Skolen”, an experimental art school in Copenhagen in 1961. This should become an important institution in the history of Danish art. It was an egalitarian project where Gernes wanted to overcome any hierarchy between teachers and students, all were to equally learn/unlearn. At Eks-Skolen collaboration was at the forefront and the school was in clear opposition to the established art academy as well as the art market.

Decades later in 1985 Gernes became a professor at the Danish Royal Academy of Art, a position he held until 1991. Again, he found it necessary to shake up the role of the teacher/professor, but now in a very different manner. As a professor at the academy Gernes wanted his students to “collaborate” with him on his decoration jobs. At this time Gernes only found it interesting to work on projects in situ to avoid producing discrete art objects and had developed his own color scheme and quasi-theory. His best-known work, the decoration of Palads Theater in Copenhagen, was created with/by students from the academy in 1989. Gernes wanted to redefine the artist’s role from within the system as well as what art is supposed to be—ideally leaving behind the commodified art object entirely.

Due to poor interest from students in Gernes’ school at the academy, his professorate was not renewed in 1991. In my presentation I wish to examine differences in the idea of collectivity between Eks-Skolen and Gernes’ time at the academy as a professor to see if these created different kinds of institutional oppositions.

■ Philip Pihl started his PhD at Aarhus University in September 2024, which is centered on the collective work of the Danish artist couple Aase and Poul Gernes. Although Poul Gernes is often cited as the sole artist of his big public commissions, it is widely known that these were created in collaboration with Aase Gernes as well as others. He is interested in how new interpretations are possible, when the work is understood as a collective work. He has previously worked on other Danish artists such as Willy Ørskov (1920–1990) and Anna Thommesen (1908–2004).

collectivity

art education

1960s

institutional critique

student and teacher relationship

Violent Games

Nordic artistic representations of institutional dependency and terms for liberation during the 1960s

Ellen Suneson

Debates concerning the necessity to employ violence as means for liberation from institutional dependency grew increasingly tense in postcolonial movements and amongst the New Left during the 1960s. Certain positions, often formulated as a response to the devastating effects of colonialism, modern technological warfare, and concentration and extermination camps, promoted the significance of nonviolence. Others, who had grown increasingly frustrated with what they perceived as the ineffectiveness of nonviolent actions, advocated violent resistance as the only means by which political liberation from oppressive systems of power such as imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism could be achieved.

In this paper, I take up scholar Michael Azar's (2019) notion of the "double-bind" of liberation to consider ambivalent representations of militarism and violence as liberatory practices in four cultural works produced in Denmark and Sweden during the long 1960s: Mai Zetterling's drama film *Night Games* (1966), Walter Henry Williams' woodcut *Caged Bird* (1964), Susan Sontag's drama film *Duet for Cannibals* (1969), and the experimental film/recorded performance *Tre Piger og En Gris* (1972) by Lene Adler Petersen, Per Kirkeby, Ursula Reuter Christiansen, and Elisabeth Therkelsen. Placing these cultural works in relation to 1960s debates regarding violence in Nordic contexts and drawing from present-day queer feminist and decolonial theories of violence and destruction, this paper argues for the historical significance of these works as part of a genealogy of Nordic art that tackles the terms upon which liberation is offered.

■ Ellen Suneson holds a postdoc position in the project *To show but not tell: on themes of passivity, submission, and internalization in 1970s Nordic feminist art*, at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at Lund University and Copenhagen University (founded by the Swedish Research Council). She completed a PhD in Art History and Visual Studies at Lund University in 2022 with the dissertation *Portraying Unease: The Art and Politics of Uncomfortable Attachments* (Gothenburg: Makadam). Suneson's research focuses on modern and contemporary art and scholarly methodologies, with a particular focus on feminist and queer feminist perspectives.

Nordic art
violence
nonviolence
1960s
liberation

XIV



The Network of Images in the 19th Century Nordic Countries

Session chair Ringa Takanen,
Postdoc, Art History,
University of Turku, Finland

Date Tuesday, October 21st

Time 10.45–12.15

Location F3006, 3rd Floor

How the styles, themes, and images spread in-between the Nordic countries in the 19th century art and visual culture? And how “Nordic” were they indeed? This session broadly explores themes such as the migration and survival of images, (inter)cultural artistic and visual influence, the networks of artists including artists’ colonies, exchanging letters and postcards, even postage stamps. The network and spread of images have greatly to do with the rise of mass production in the 19th century. For the first time in history, the rapid advances in mass printing techniques, most of all lithography, made it more effortless to distribute visual imagery, such as pictures of artworks, across Europe, and even the world. Moreover, in the latter part of the 19th century a new medium, photography, emerged. Postcards with pictures also became popular and a wider set of people got familiar with a wider range of visual imagery than ever before. At the same period, it became more common for the artists to study abroad, travel to artists’ communities and thus exchange ideas, interact, and paint together.

For example, the popular international religious imagery had a great effect on the themes and visual composition of the Finnish altar paintings in the late 19th century. The publication of Christian images as prints was a successful business. Reproductions of religious art by famous artists, such as Carl Bloch, Heinrich Hofmann, and Ary Scheffer were sold in large numbers and several formats from pictured Bibles to postcards. This undoubtedly had an effect in the popularity of certain motifs and even unifying the visual preferences.

The art and cultural historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929) talked about the survival of “archetypal” images, *Pathosformel*, their vital force and power. What were the qualities and themes of the pictures that spread most effectively? Were there differences between Nordic countries or between artist’s preferences?

Robert Wilhelm Ekman's History Paintings in a Transnational and Interartistic Network of Images

Petra Lehtoruusu

Mainly known for his romantic genre scenes, religious art, and Kalevala imagery, the court painter Robert Wilhelm Ekman (1808–1873) was commissioned to paint the first monumental frescoes in 19th century Finland: the choir of Turku Cathedral. Among the paintings are the history paintings *Bishop Henrik baptizes Finns at Kupittaa spring* and *Mikael Agricola hands the first Finnish Bible translation to Gustav Vasa* (both 1850–1854). Later commissions for history paintings from Ekman include *Regina von Emmeritz* (1855) for Zacharias Topelius and *Opening the Diet of Porvoo in 1809* (1855–1858) for the Imperial Senate in Finland.

Just as Ekman's religious art is indebted to earlier depictions of the same subject matter, often known to him as reproductions, his historical frescoes were influenced by the paintings of his teacher Johan Gustav Sandberg (1782–1854) in Uppsala Cathedral. Both projects were inspired by German Nazarene frescoes admired by the Nordic commissioners. As reinterpretations of Emanuel Thelning's earlier painting and of Topelius' drama, Ekman's *Regina von Emmeritz* and *Opening the Diet of Porvoo in 1809* were similarly connected to earlier imagery. On closer examination Ekman's and Sandberg's frescoes also resemble French paintings labeled as *troubadour* that Ekman saw in Paris, but Sandberg never viewed in the original. Meanwhile, Ekman's later history paintings show his knowledge of Swedish and French art, the extent of his interpersonal network and his frenzy for theater.

My presentation addresses the genesis and dissemination of Ekman's history paintings in a transnational and interartistic network consisting of artists and professionals, artefacts, places, original and reproduced paintings, illustrations, texts, and staged spectacles. This allows to embed Ekman's paintings on subjects from Finnish history in a European context of romantic historicism in which French *troubadour* and German Nazarene art as well as Ekman's Swedish education all convene.

■ Petra Lehtoruusu (MA) is a curator of collections at Ateneum Art Museum and a doctoral researcher at University of Helsinki. Her thesis *The Spectacle of History—interartistic practice, emotion, and the reformation era in Finnish history painting 1850–1905* discusses representations of 16th and 17th century Finnish history by 19th century Finnish history painters in the contexts of European historicism and emerging visual popular culture. Besides history painting and 19th century Finnish art, Lehtoruusu's research interests include the history of photography, cultural memory studies, and visual culture studies.

history painting

historicism

artists' networks

circulation of images

Robert Wilhelm Ekman (1808–1854)

The Art of Copying

Drawing manual *Cours de dessin* in 19th century Finnish art education

Laura Nissinen

In art history, copies are often dismissed as mere reproductions, yet their role warrants reconsideration. As Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann notes in *Creative Copies: Interpretative Drawings from Michelangelo to Picasso* (1988), copies in their various forms have long played a crucial role in transmitting artistic knowledge, ideas, and skills. The pedagogy of disciplined copying, widely associated with the French Academy, was a cornerstone of 19th century European art education. Before drawing the living human body, students practiced by copying from drawing manuals or plaster casts of antique statues.

One of the most frequently used manuals in the Finnish art schools was *Cours de dessin*, first published in Paris in 1868 by Goupil & Cie. The manual comprises 197 lithographic plates, divided into three sections: drawings after casts, master drawings, and male models. The casts for the first part include many well-known artworks or parts of them, such as the foot and leg of the *Medici Venus*, the full-length figure of *Ares Borghese*, and the *Belvedere Torso*. The second part of the manual features Raphael's *Self Portrait* and *Kneeling Woman*, a three-quarter view of Gérôme's *Head of a Fella*, and figure details from Michelangelo's fresco *The Last Judgment*.

Today, complete copies of the *Cours de dessin* manual are rare, and its historical significance has often been overlooked. In my ongoing research on 19th-century Finnish artists' education, I have identified manuals from four different art schools, along with numerous copied drawings. Among the artists who produced these are Helene Schjerfbeck, Axel Gallén, Pekka Halonen, and Torsten Wasastjerna. Despite its profound impact, the topic remains largely unexplored, even though *Cours de dessin* was a fundamental tool for nearly every student in Finnish art schools in the late 19th century. This under-explored history offers new insights into the pedagogical practices that shaped the development of Finnish art during this period.

■ Laura Nissinen is a Helsinki-based artist and art historian with master's degrees in photography (University of Art and Design, Helsinki) and art history (University of Helsinki). Her ongoing research focuses on artists' education and 19th century, intersections between art and science, history of photography and contemporary art. She earned her Doctor of Arts from Aalto University's Department of Media in 2021. Her doctoral dissertation, which included an artistic component, examined the history of Finnish abstract art photography and was published by Aalto Arts Books in 2021. In 2017, she curated *Abstract! 100 Years of Abstract Photography, 1917-2017* at the Museum of Finnish Photography.

drawing manual
Cours de dessin
art education
lithography
art copying

The Migration and Changes of the Funeral Boat Motif in the 19th Century Nordic Art

Ringa Takanen

The motif of a funeral boat, depicting people with a casket rowing towards graveyard or funeral proceedings, was much used in the latter half of the 19th century Northern Europe. The paper discusses the differences and continuities in the use of the motif in Nordic artist's oeuvre through selected cases.

Many Nordic artists travelled to study in Düsseldorf in the 19th century. There they were influenced by different sources: exhibitions they saw on their travels, German artists, mass-produced lithographic model drawings, their fellow Nordic artist colleagues. Some of their funeral boat paintings were painted in Düsseldorf too.

Finnish artist Alexandra Frosterus-Såltin painted one of her early main works *Rowing to the Graveyard* (1861) in Düsseldorf. There the artist could have been inspired by earlier works such as German Ludwig Richter's painting *Crossing at the Schreckenstein* (1837) and Norwegian Düsseldorf based artists Gude and Tidemand's painting *Burial at Sognefjord* (1852). Her former teacher, Finnish history painter Robert Wilhelm Ekman also produced boat motif in the 1850s.

In Frosterus-Såltin's case it is noteworthy that the Art Association of Finland bought her painting *Rowing to the Graveyard* to their collection as model work for their Drawing school. Thus, painting most likely influenced younger artists.

Later in the century, highly esteemed Finnish artist Albert Edelfelt produced a painting with a funeral motif *Conveying the Child's Coffin (A Child's Funeral)* (1879) as well. He was a well-known Paris traveler who painted the work for the Paris Salon in Haikko, Finland.

The migration and survival of the motif in the oeuvre of the 19th century Nordic artists is a fascinating subject that investigates the themes of artistic and visual influence and the networks of artists. What made the motif to rise and spread in popularity? Were there differences in the use of the motif, composition, or meaning between countries or artists?

■ Dr. Ringa Takanen (PhD) is postdoctoral researcher at the University of Turku and curator of collections at the WAM Turku City Art Museum. Her ongoing research project explores the 19th century narrative painting in Finland. It studies the ways in which artworks reconstruct the events of myth, historical past or their present time, and the role of art in the formation of cultural historical memory. Furthermore, the project explores the affects in narrative paintings. Takanen's doctoral thesis focused on the Finnish altarpieces by women artists in the 1870–1920.

artistic networks
migration of images
narratives
history painting
genre painting

XV

“The Nordic Art”

The knowledge circulation by women artists from the Nordic countries at the turn of the 20th century



| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Kerstin Lind, PhD TemaQ, Linköping University, Sweden Karin Ström Lehander, Researcher, PhD Student, Åbo Akademi University, Finland |
| Date | Tuesday, October 21st |
| Time | 9.00–10.30 |
| Location | F3006, 3rd Floor |

Artists have always travelled and therefore contributed to the circulation and development of Art. The circulation movement may be understood as an educational process with the intention of contributing to the enlightenment of the public as well as of the individual. For some of the artists it has been a question of exploring the new continents, finding inspiration or education, while others have been driven from their homes due to wars, famine, or lack of work. Whatever the reasons might have been, artists have always been circulating around the World. While women artists have had a more disguised position compared to their male colleagues, they have yet developed, contributed to, and been a part of, “the Nordic Art”. In the session we define “Nordic Art” as art made by artists from the Nordic countries, but the art itself does not necessarily have to be created there.

This session highlights the questions regarding the artistry of women artists, to discuss how their artistry contributed to the circulations and development of “the Nordic Art” at the turn of the 20th century. At the same time, those decisions on the artistry could become a step further in the progress of the artist’s own development and social mobility. Which individual or collective forces, such as institutions or patrons, had an impact on Art’s circulation and development towards the concept of “a Nordic Art”? Was the artist given certain options to a personal development and mobility through working for and promoting “a Nordic Art” within or outside the geographic Nordic? Did the geographical borders around the countries even have an impact, or not, on how the art and artists circulated?

Vera Nilsson in a Nordic context

Annika Gunnarsson & Matilda Olof-Ors

This paper discusses how the Swedish artist Vera Nilsson (1888–1979), as an active participant in the national, Nordic, and international art scenes, contributed to the circulation of knowledge and advocacy related to global peace initiatives and nuclear disarmament. Throughout her career she was continuously dealing with questions of democracy and education, addressing them both from a political and from a public point of view. After completing her education in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Vera Nilsson held her first exhibition 1917 in Copenhagen, alongside her colleague and friend Molly Faustman. In Copenhagen, where Nilsson lived during the winters between 1916 and 1919, she also befriended with the Danish artist Astrid Holm. Vera Nilsson's impact on contemporary Nordic artists throughout her career can be discerned through the reception of her work in newspapers and in Swedish art history writing during the last century.

The ongoing research project *Vera Nilsson's drawings in the collection of Moderna Museet* focuses upon the artist's method of using her drawings and sketchpads to collect, preserve, and produce knowledge, which she explores further in her more monumental works. Through her developed skill to observe societal changes in the world Nilsson not only depicts but also engages in critical discussions on global issues through her art. One of the strongest examples of this being the monumental painting *Penning contra liv*, created as a protest against the Spanish civil war, at the end of the 1930s. This paper departs from the following two questions: What institutional and individual forces drew Vera Nilsson to present the Spanish civil war to a Nordic art scene, and how did these forces influence her personal artistic development within the geographic Nordic?

■ Annika Gunnarsson, PhD (2012) is Curator of Prints and Drawings at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Previously, she has worked at National Museum, and as a lecturer in Art History at Stockholm University. At Moderna Museet she has been part of the project *Pontus Hultén and Moderna Museet—Research and Learning Based on an Art Collection, an Archive, and a Library* (publications in 2017 and 2023) and she is currently researching Vera Nilsson's drawings in the Collection of Moderna Museet and has just curated the exhibition *Yet Another Morning: Drawings in the Collection of Moderna Museet* (2025).

■ Matilda Olof-Ors, B.A. in Art History from Stockholm University, is Curator of Swedish and Nordic Art at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. She is currently working on a large-scale Vera Nilsson exhibition to be shown at Moderna Museet in 2027, and on a solo presentation of *Britta Marakatt-Labba: Where Each Stich Breathes* (2025). She has among other exhibitions also curated *Pink Sails: Swedish Modernism in the Moderna Museet Collection* (2023), *Björn Lövin: The Surrounding Reality* (2022), *Atsuko Tanaka* (2019 with Jo Widoff), *Concrete Matters* (2018), *Thomas Schütte: United Enemies* (2016), and *Olafur Eliasson: Reality machines* (2015).

resistance

democracy

global peace

knowledge production and circulation

Emma Toll and Brita Nordencreutz, Two Swedish Artists' Fascination of Spain

Anna-Lena Jönsson

In my presentation I will describe my ongoing research of two artists Emma Toll and Brita Nordencreutz, and their fascination for the Spanish art, as representatives of two successive generations at the turn of the 20th century.

The Swedish artist Emma Toll (1847–1917) started her art studies at the Swedish School of Crafts (Slöjdskolan) in 1860. She attended the Academy of Fine Arts (Konstakademien) 1864–1871 and continued in Paris, 1878–1883. After her stay in Paris, she returned to Sweden for her artistic work. She taught art at Anna Sandström's school in Stockholm, 1883–1897. Emma Toll was fascinated by the Spanish masters that she copied *in situ*. Archive studies of Swedish press confirm the fact that Emma Toll spent time in Spain copying art works at Spanish museums. Today two portraits by Emma Toll dated in the 1890s are situated at Museu d'Art Jaume Morera, near Barcelona.

Brita Nordencreutz (1899–1982) was a Swedish artist and writer who took art classes for Carl Wilhelmson in Stockholm and studied art in Paris for André Lhote. Her work includes sceneries from Spain, Turkey, and North Africa. During 1950s Brita Nordencreutz travelled in Spain where she painted the Spanish landscape and exotic folk-art. Brita Nordencreutz also wrote a book in Spanish about the Swedish artist Egron Lundgren's stay in Spain. Archive studies of Swedish press and auction pictures together with correspondence from Brita Nordencreutz' personal archive at Västerås City archive in Sweden, indicates the artist's interest in Spanish culture.

■ Anna-Lena Jönsson (MA in Art History, Uppsala University) works as a Librarian at the Eskilstuna Library, Sweden.

Spanish masters
female copyists
Swedish modernists

The Swedish Artist Tyra Kleen

A constant seeker

Karin Ström Lehander

The Swedish artist and writer Tyra Kleen (1874–1951) was an adventurous woman and a constant traveler. She lived in Europe for many years and was part of a large network of artists. Kleen was one of the artists circulating around the World at the fin de siècle. As a symbolist and influenced by the esoteric tendencies of the time, she was a religious, spiritual and theosophical seeker. As a member of the *Theosophical Society*, Kleen attended seances and exhibited her art in theosophical circles. A great inspiration to Kleen were the literary works and poems by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and books by Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849). Kleen is known for her symbolist lithographies and for portraits of temple dancers in Java and Bali.

Kleen contributed to the circulation and development of the Nordic Art through her travel writing in articles, books, paintings, and drawings. Via the theory of seekership, this paper will discuss how her two year long stay in Indonesia in Java and Bali, 1919–1921, enlightened the European public of Indonesian culture.

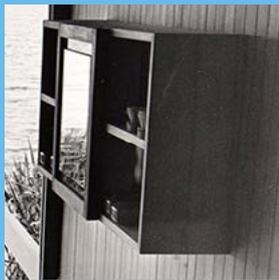
■ Karin Ström Lehander, PhD candidate in Art History at Åbo Academy, Finland. Lecturer in Art History at Linköping university. Co-curator of the exhibition *Tyra Kleen—Ständigt sökande*.

theosophist
symbolist
seekership
Indonesia
artist

XVI

The “Nordic Miracle”

Exhibition histories from
the 1990s to the present



| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Katharina Alsen, Research Associate, Hamburg University of Music and Theatre, Germany Maike Teubner, PhD, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 11.00–12.30 |
| Location | F3017, 3rd Floor |

This session explores the 1990s as a period of heightened international interest in contemporary art from the Nordic countries. Since this time, a vibrant young art scene has emerged on the global stage, with several cities in the North being designated as European Capitals of Culture. Art critics enthusiastically described this phenomenon as a “Nordic miracle” and referred to it as a “Scandinavian wave”. However, alongside increasing global interconnectedness, regional labels began to face issues of legitimacy. Many artists responded by critically engaging with regional attributions and the legacy of National Romanticism in their work.

This raises several questions: How have Nordic artists presented and continue to present their work during this period of growing international attention? How do their practices engage with the construction of “Nordicness”? What concepts and ideas have been employed to present and contextualize contemporary Nordic art in exhibitions? What strategies did curators use to position Nordic art within the global art scene? Moreover, the “Nordic” has become a potent label in place branding and the promotion of cultural production in various forms, including film (Nordic noir) and food (Nordic cuisine). How do these branding strategies differ from the contexts of the visual arts?

In this session, we discuss, for example:

- Exhibitions and artistic works from the 1990s and beyond that reflect on the notion of the “Nordic”
- Critiques of hierarchical relationships between center and periphery
- Cultural policy funding programmes and institutions supporting Nordic art (e.g., NIFCA)
- Place branding strategies in/and the art world
- Comparative perspectives in Nordic and non-Nordic contexts

Reconstructing and Deconstructing the Nordic Miracle

Jonas Ekeberg

The “Nordic Miracle” is one of the central concepts describing Nordic art of the 1990s. In this paper, I would like to attempt at reconstructing the phenomenon, starting with art historical fragments. In the process, I will look for possibilities to deconstruct it, e.g., look at the historical data and see if there are contradictions and inconsistencies that allows us to see behind the rhetoric of a “miracle” in order to observe the width and depth of artistic realities in the Nordic countries of the nineties, as well as its potential as a societal force, behind the short-lived marketing of a cultural scene.

I will start by presenting a historical outline: 1) A prehistory of the new Nordic art scenes of the nineties, 2) A historical and social context of the “new” Europe and changing Nordic cultural policies, 3) The actual introduction of the term in the beginning of 1998, and how it was developed and discussed throughout that year, and 4) How the term came to be debated and finally dismissed. The investigation will show that the term “Miracle” was rather misleading, but that it nevertheless described an actual situation: a strong, new generation of Nordic artists and a new liveliness on the Nordic art scenes. However, as a specific group of artists took center stage, it was also clear that it concealed or suppressed other positions. These positions would be strongly articulated in the years after 1998. The study of the Nordic Miracle is the study of hegemonic formations in art and culture, a field of research that necessarily also must include studying less visible or even excluded positions.

■ Jonas Ekeberg (b. 1967) is a curator and critic based in Oslo. He is currently visual arts lead at Arts and Culture Norway. Ekeberg was the chief curator of *Momentum—Nordic Biennial for Contemporary Art* in 2000, founding director of Oslo Kunsthall the same year and a curator and Head of Information at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway from 2002 to 2004. From 2004 to 2009 Ekeberg served as the director of Preus Museum, Norway’s national museum for photography. Ekeberg was chief editor of *Kunstkritikk—Nordic Art Review* from 2009 to 2019. His book *Postnordisk—Den nordiske kunstscenens vekst og fall 1976–2016* was published by Torpedo Press (Oslo) in 2019 (English version 2013).

Nordic art
contemporary art
1990s art
artistic hegemony

Decentring Nordic Homogeneity

The politics of exhibitions in the early 2000s

Line Ellegaard

The Nordic region as a brand is often associated with culturally homogeneous nation-state populations, sharing a set of norms, values, and practices tied to strong moral codes of freedom, tolerance, and equality. Implicit in this narrative is the notion that greater cultural diversity presents a threat—or at least a problem to be addressed. In the wake of the so-called “Nordic Miracle” and against the backdrop of globalization, the rise of neoliberal politics, and the often-heated debates on multiculturalism, this paper examines exhibitions from the first part of the 2000s that sought to counter rising xenophobia and engage questions of cultural diversity and belonging in the Nordic region.

Focusing mainly on Danish and Swedish examples, the discussion highlights key initiatives such as *Nordic Objects* (Nordens Hus, 2001); *In 2052 Malmö Will No Longer Be “Swedish”* (Rooseum, 2002–2005); *Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark* (Århus, 2004); *Swedish Hearts* (Moderna Museet, 2004); *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* by Kuratorisk Aktion (NIFCA, 2006); and *A Fiesta of Tough Choices* (Iaspis, 2006). Emphasizing their discursive frameworks, this mapping—while not exhaustive—explores how these exhibitions engaged with or deconstructed narratives of homogeneity in Nordic society by addressing its blind spots: the presence of migrants, racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples, and the region’s colonial context. Acknowledging the continuing need to challenge narratives that conflate homogeneity with whiteness, this paper interrogates both the significance and the limitations of these initiatives in confronting the tokenistic, othering, and exclusionary practices shaping Nordic art and politics in the early twenty-first century.

■ Line Ellegaard is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, whose work focuses on exhibition histories, archival encounters and institutional reimagining past and present. Her PhD thesis *Organising, Exhibiting and Curating (in) Solidarity: “Kvindeudstillingen”, 1975, “Art contre/against Apartheid” 1983–1984, and “Rethinking Nordic Colonialism” 2006* (2023) examined historical intersections of artistic organization, exhibition production and political solidarity practices. She has previously worked as a curator and organizer and was formerly associate editor on the *Exhibition Histories* program of research, events, and publication at Afterall Research Centre, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London.

decentring
curating
homogeneity
cultural diversity
exhibition histories

Interplay Between Art, Institutions, and Socio-Economic Change

The case of the exhibition *Monument* in Riga (1995)

Andra Silapētere

The 1990s in the Baltics were marked by significant transformations in political systems, ideologies, economies, and social norms. Central in contemporary art process during this period was the establishment of the Soros Contemporary Art Centre (SCCA) network across Eastern Europe, Central Europe, and Central Asia. The Riga branch (SCCA-Riga), founded in 1993, played a crucial role in promoting contemporary art in newly independent Latvia and fostering international circulation.

This paper examines the third annual exhibition of the SCCA-Riga, titled *Monument*, held in Riga from August 21 to September 21, 1995. Curated by Helēna Demokova, the exhibition explored the symbolic, social, historical, and cultural significance of monuments in public spaces. It featured large-scale contemporary art installations that questioned the impact of history on Riga's urban landscape and the lives of its inhabitants, while also addressing aesthetic criteria in the urban environment.

The theme of the exhibition was particularly poignant and thought-provoking in light of Latvia's recent historical narrative and its newly reinstated independence. This era of significant social transformation incited vigorous discussions regarding the nature of public spaces, the deconstruction and reconstruction of monuments, and their function as vessels of ideological discourse. *Monument* aspired to engage with and reflect upon broader international developments while simultaneously contemplating local advancements within a comparative global framework. The exhibition endeavored to encapsulate an understanding of the artistic processes unfolding across Europe, particularly within the post-1989

contemporary art

curation

institution

local vs. global

post-1989

Baltic states

context. It critically reassessed collective memory through a diverse artistic lexicon and compelling social metaphors. This conceptual framework was deeply intertwined with Latvia's post-independence zeitgeist, characterized by a desire for integration with Western cultural processes. It mirrored the global phenomenon of an increasingly interconnected cultural economy and the proliferation of biennial exhibitions.

This paper will highlight the interplay between art, institutions, and socio-economic change, emphasizing the role of contemporary art in navigating the complexities of post-socialist transitions. The exhibition histories from the 1990s to the present reveal the dynamic evolution of artistic discourse in the Baltics and its integration into the broader international art scene.

■ Andra Silapētere is a curator and researcher at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Silapētere's field of research and interests include topics of exile, migration, identity, and belonging. Her contributions to the art world extend to publications and conferences, where she has explored themes related to Latvian art in exile and contemporary art trends. Silapētere's exhibitions and programs have been presented at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga, Praha Kunsthalle in Prague, District in Berlin, James Gallery, CUNY in New York, Den Frie in Copenhagen, PUBLICS in Helsinki, Riga Art Space. In 2022, she cocurated the Latvian Pavilion at the Venice biennale with the artist *Skuja Braden*. At the moment she is preparing a book *Portable Landscapes: Latvian Exile Art Histories* (K. Verlag).



XVII

Nordic Prefabricated Housing in an International Perspective

Session chairs

Mia Åkerfelt,

PhD, University Lecturer in Art History,
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Tzafir Fainholtz,

PhD, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Martti Veldi,

PhD, Estonian University of Life Sciences,
Landscape Architecture, Estonia

Date

Monday, October 20th

Time

16.00–17.30

Location

F3010, 3rd Floor

Since the 19th century, the Nordic countries have had large-scale manufacturing of prefabricated housing, aimed at a global market. Significant quantities of wooden houses were exchanged in between the Nordic countries as well as exported to destinations globally. From the beginning, the buildings were shipped as humanitarian aid after natural disasters and used within contexts of colonization. This mobility continues into the present day, when questions regarding sustainable crisis shelters and affordable housing are as pressing as ever.

This session explores wider connections between producers and receivers of Nordic prefabricated housing through questions on history, ideologies, production, reception, and planning. Due to their temporary nature as well as destinations abroad, the houses have generally not been given much place in national canons on art history, and research in the prefabricated Nordic houses has mainly been discussed within national contexts.

This session includes papers discussing:

- The history of prefabricated housing production in the Nordic countries and the history of trade and export of housing, both within the Nordic countries and globally.
- Methodological questions related to research and data collection concerning Nordic housing prefabrication and export, as handling and accessibility of material in archives, fragmentary documentation, questions on cultural heritage and cultural diplomacy. How can the houses be understood as shared Nordic histories and heritages?
- The impact of the Nordic prefabricated houses in urban planning and landscapes.
- Learning from the past—what can the history of prefabricated Nordic housing bring into the contemporary discourse of affordable housing or crisis reconstruction?

Building the Arctic Fur Trade

Architecture, prefabrication, and the Hudson's Bay Company in Inuit Nunangat

Samuel Dubois

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), Canada's oldest corporation, played a foundational role in the North American fur trade following its establishment in 1670. Yet it was only in the early twentieth century that the HBC expanded its commercial activities into Inuit Nunangat—the Arctic homelands of the Inuit peoples. Unlike earlier whalers, who either remained shipbound or wintered temporarily in the region, fur traders were the first to establish permanent, commerce-driven settlements that enabled non-Inuit to reside in the Arctic year-round.

Beginning in the 1910s, HBC workers—including members of local Inuit communities—constructed a vast network of wooden trading posts using prefabricated components and manufactured materials imported from Southern Canada, Europe, and the United States. These structures, functionally and aesthetically foreign to Inuit architectural traditions, played a key role in transforming the region's built environment. The physical presence of the HBC thus ushered in new forms of modernity that remain largely overlooked in architectural history.

This paper draws on HBC's extensive archives, Inuit oral histories, and historical photographs to examine how prefabrication functioned as a vehicle for transcultural architectural adaptation in Inuit Nunangat. It situates HBC fur-trading outposts within broader global networks of material flow and exchange, revealing how these dynamics reshaped construction practices at the local level. Ultimately, the paper argues that the architectural infrastructure established by the HBC in the Arctic constituted an apparatus of settler colonialism—one that not only enabled year-round occupation by outsiders for the first time but also profoundly transformed Inuit housing and settlement patterns.

■ Samuel Dubois is an architect, trained geographer, and historian of the built environment. He holds a BA in Geography from McGill University, a BSc in Architecture from the Université de Montréal, and a Master of Architecture from Carleton University. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies in the History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture program at MIT. His research broadly interrogates the relationship between architecture, environmental adaptation, and cultural identities, with a focus on historically marginalized communities in Canada during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Notably, Samuel is the co-editor of *Thresholds 52: Disappearance* (2024), MIT's peer-reviewed journal of architecture and art.

***Hudson's Bay Company
Inuit Nunangat
Arctic adaptation
prefabricated architecture
fur trade***

Prefabricated Cultural Diplomacy

Nordic housing in postwar Australia, 1948–1955

Mark Ian Jones

This paper examines the import, reception and legacy of Nordic prefabricated houses in postwar Australia, a little-studied yet significant chapter in the global history of prefabricated housing. Between 1948 and 1958, over 10,000 prefabricated houses from Finland, Norway, and Sweden were shipped to Australia in response to the nation's acute postwar housing crisis. While primarily functional, these prefabricated homes also served as conduits for architectural and cultural exchange, contributing to Australia's adoption, adaptation, and hybridization of Nordic design cultures after World War II. Their arrival coincided with broader international currents of Scandinavian modernism, influencing construction techniques, housing policy, and domestic aesthetics.

Focusing on Swedish prefabricated houses erected in eastern Australia between 1948 and 1955, the paper investigates how these homes were procured, distributed, and integrated into national housing programs. It explores their roles in Commonwealth and State Housing Commission initiatives, postwar migration schemes, and their commercial circulation via department stores and architectural services. The paper also considers British prefabricated houses imported to Australia during the same period and unpacks their relationship to Swedish models, alongside discussion of the important 1948 Finnish "Experimental House". It traces a longer trajectory of Nordic prefabricated housing in Australia, beginning with Swedish export models as early as the 1830s. Imported as a pragmatic response to a housing crisis, these prefabricated homes shaped Australian architectural and domestic life. Yet, despite their significance, they remain largely absent from historical narratives, while their traces exist hidden in plain sight across Australian urban and regional areas.

By situating Australia within the broader history of Nordic prefabricated housing exports, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the transnational nature of postwar housing trade. It explores the economic, political, and cultural forces shaping Nordic prefabricated housing exports in the postwar period while contributing to contemporary discourses on housing shortages in national and transnational contexts.

■ Dr. Mark Ian Jones is an Australian academic and design historian at UNSW Sydney. His research focuses on transnational design history and cultural diplomacy, particularly Nordic and Italian influences on postwar Australian design cultures through the department store. He is author of the book *Vicke Lindstrand: On the Periphery: Mid-twentieth century Swedish design and the reception of Vicke Lindstrand* (Uppsala University Press, 2016). He is a former Powerhouse Museum Research Scholar, Guest Researcher at Uppsala University Department of Art History, Sweden, and a practicing architect.

***Nordic prefabrication
Australian postwar housing
cultural diplomacy***

***housing trade
design cultures***

NORHOUSE

Exporting Norwegian know-how to the developing world

Maryia Rusak

In the early days of January 1973, many Norwegian newspapers featured an exciting announcement: a new Norwegian Housing Development Company, NORHOUSE A/S, was formed, bringing together the efforts of five Norwegian construction companies. Of these, Block Watne and Moelven Brug specialized in timber prefabrication, while Edelbetong, Norcem and Norwegian Contractors were material producers of concrete and its synthetic composites, also engaged with large housing and construction projects. The new enterprise was to capitalize on the knowledge and experience amassed by the post-war Norwegian building industry in the fields of cheap housing and municipal construction. Now, this Norwegian “know-how” and building technology could be exported to developing countries to address pressing social issues. NORHOUSE corporation was then to transpose the heavy bureaucratic structures at home and provide a “full-package” deal, delivering not only cheap housing schemes but furnishing both materials and expertise and even turn-key financing solutions for international state clients to pay for such developments. Among the first projects was a 6,000-unit housing development in the Ivory Coast, complete with a new Siporex-concrete factory built in Abidjan. Moelven was contracted for 2,000-unit prefabricated housing projects based on local timber resources in Kenya and Zambia, while Block Watne investigated potential housing designs for Indonesia and Malaysia. Equipped with original archival sources of the NORHOUSE corporation, this contribution is particularly interested in how prefabricated housing technology was mobilized in the 1970s as a tool of Norwegian foreign aid and a potentially profitable business franchise. Through case studies of specific housing projects by NORHOUSE, the paper scrutinizes what happens when architecture is set at the overlap between the universalist aspiration of technological and business export and the local specificity of housing problems. By doing so, it suggests a more critical reading of Norwegian prefabricated housing export, providing a global perspective on the shared Nordic heritage.

■ Maryia Rusak is an architect and architectural historian who works with transnational histories and is currently a Junior Research Fellow at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. Her doctoral dissertation, completed at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (2022), examined the prolific building output of a large post-war Norwegian timber prefabrication company, Moelven Brug. Maryia’s current research project investigates the Nordic architecture of foreign aid in postcolonial Africa, focusing on the pragmatic and economic rationale behind its production. Maryia’s writings appeared in the *Architectural Theory Review* (2022), *The Journal of Architecture* (2024, 2025), *OASE* (2024), and *Footprint* (2025).

prefabrication

Norway

NORHOUSE

export

foreign aid

The Prefabricated Gift

300 Swedish houses in Bornholm

Erik Tønning Jensen, Anna Wahlöö, & Erik Sigge

From June to November 1945, over 70 shipments of flat-packed architectural elements arrived at the harbors of Nexø and Rønne on the Danish island Bornholm. The shipments consisted of prefabricated interior fixtures and ready-to-be mounted walls. The Danish municipality prepared infrastructure, named new roads, and within a year, 300 wooden houses were assembled on site. The buildings, *Svenskehusen* (the Swedish houses) or *Gavehusen* (the gift houses), were donated by Sweden to Denmark following the devastating bombings of Bornholm in May 1945 when about 750 Danish families lost their homes. The bombs were dropped by the Soviet Union after the official end of WWII, to force the German commander, who did not acknowledge the Nazi surrender, to leave Bornholm. In 1949 the houses were listed and protected as historical and cultural heritage.

By following the making, reception, and management of the houses, this project uses the notion of the gift as a conceptual framework to investigate histories of *Svenskehusen*. From the Swedish manufacturer to their construction, and through their 80 years of use, alterations and maintenance, to their present state and legacy. We are particularly interested in the houses as prefabricated buildings, as mass-produced parts for worldwide distribution that have become specifically noteworthy in a specific place. How does prefabrication affect the architectural, cultural, and historical understanding and significance of the houses, both today and in the future?

Our project involves both teaching and research and includes explorations of *Svenskehusen* and their heritage designations. As part of the master course *Cultural Heritage Buildings*, students have proposed design alterations and additions. These design responses are considered as one of many inputs in a broader understanding of the “prefabricated gifts” from Sweden to war-damaged countries after WWII, which also include buildings to Norway and France.

prefabricated housing
cultural heritage buildings
architectural history
architectural transformation
building expo

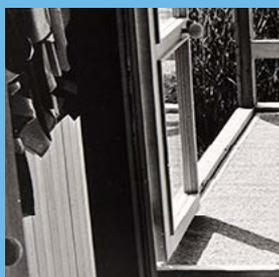
■ Erik Tønning Jensen is an architect, artist, and Lecturer at Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, Lund University, Sweden. The last ten years he has combined teaching in architecture with an artistic practice exploring rituals, material cultures, and site sensitivity in spaces between art and architecture. His work has been exhibited as installations, sculptures, and time-based interventions in museums and public spaces nationally and internationally, both solo and in collaborations. He holds a Master in Architecture from The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (2013), and a Bachelor in Fine Art from Bergen Academy of Art and Design (2015).

■ Anna Wahlöö is a full-time Lecturer and researcher at the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, Lund University, Sweden, with a specialized focus on cultural heritage, interior design, and furniture. Wahlöö is an art historian by training and holds a PhD in Construction and Architecture (2017). In her previous research projects, she has explored the processes of change in both contemporary and listed historic buildings in Sweden, Denmark, and other European countries, with an emphasis on interiors and furniture, where new design choices related to long-term perspectives were analyzed. Wahlöö has been actively involved in teaching master's level courses that explore cultural heritage and environments at risk, spanning from modernism to medieval times.

■ Erik Sigge is an architectural historian and preservationist, and Head of Unit and Lecturer at the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, Lund University, Sweden. During 2020–2021 he was a postdoc fellow at MIT, Cambridge, MA, USA. Erik gained his PhD in architectural history from KTH, Stockholm, Sweden. Prior to KTH, Erik was Director of Educational and Cultural Programs at Scandinavia House in New York City. He holds a master's degree in Historic Preservation from Columbia University, New York, USA, and a bachelor's degree in Integrated Conservation of the Built Environment from University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

XVIII

Nordic Rural Modernity



| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Session chairs | Kesia E. Halvorsrud (PhD), Researcher, KODE Art Museums, Bergen, Norway Tove Haugsbø (PhD), Senior Curator, Astrupsenteret, KODE Art Museums, Bergen, Norway |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 14.00–15.30 |
| Location | F3004, 3rd Floor |

This session meets the overarching heading “Why so Nordic?” with a critical reflection on the rural geographies typical for large parts of the Nordic countries. One of the myths in art history is that modernity is an urban phenomenon and that the rural exist outside of modernity. Even though the twentieth-century city was important to modernist artists, many also lived and worked in the modern countryside, either temporary or long term, for retreat and relief, solitary or in artist colonies or as part of other kinds of collective creative communities. The tendency to characterize or represent the rural as empty and untouched, reflects an idea of the rural as a site to observe and visit, not as a place to live. To idealize the countryside as a timeless and harmonious pastoral scene can lead to ideas of rural purity, which is a traditional component in nationalism. In recent interdisciplinary research, the rural is considered more as an active and complex site of modernity. Rural modernity is however not simply about the visualization of the impact of industry in the countryside, even though infrastructure, communication, and transport services, were crucial for artists residing in non-urban areas with long distances. It is also about people and their modern way of life; networks, collaboration, and knowledge about the particular everyday life and culture of a place.

From Boundary to Symbol

The visual evolution of rural fences in Finnish art, 1890s–1950s

Carlos Idrobo

This paper examines the evolution in visual representation of rural Finland apropos the material infrastructure of its boundaries, particularly the traditional round-pole fence (*riukuaita*). Following the Great Enclosure reform of 1757, bordering practices in Finland became central to a modern system of village administration that included regular fence inspections, communal maintenance schedules, and formalized governance through the Alderman institution. As a consequence, the Finnish countryside emerged as a site where modern administrative systems and traditional community practices combined to create distinctive forms of rural modern life. Thus, throughout the long nineteenth century, the widespread construction of round-pole fences was instrumental in shaping modern ways of life through regulated daily movement patterns and standardized practices, as well as in creating new sites and forms of social relations and interactions. Visually and phenomenologically, the *riukuaita* transformed the Finnish countryside into borderscapes—a fragmented landscape where physical boundaries fundamentally shaped how the countryside was perceived and experienced. Consequently, it shaped artistic representations of rural Finland. Numerous lithographs, illustrations, paintings, and photographs by different generations of artists before, during and after the so-called Golden Age of Finnish Art (1890–1910)—some of them lived in more rural areas like Tuusula—, not only reflect such transformation but also challenge visual narratives about the countryside as a boundless place outside modernity. Drawing and expanding from two previously published articles on the theme, I trace how the *riukuaita* evolved from a practical agricultural boundary into a powerful symbol of personal and national identity, even romance, by examining its representation and transition across media. In particular, I will focus on landscape and portrait photography between 1890s and 1950s, taken by amateur and professional photographers alike.

■ Dr. Carlos Idrobo (a.k.a. Luca) is a multidisciplinary scholar and artist based in Tuusula, Finland. His work moves between psychology, philosophy, and art history from the 19th century to the present, with a distinctive focus on walking as a theme in art, science, and culture. Parallel to his academic path, he has nurtured a decades-long artistic practice that began with classical guitar, singing, and literature, and later expanded into photography, drawing, and walking art, contributing to independent and collaborative projects across Colombia, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, and Finland. He is currently co-curating *Jalan / On foot*, a walking-themed exhibition scheduled for autumn 2026 at the Serlachius Museums.

Finnish rural modernity
borderscape
riukuaita
visual culture
rural infrastructure

Local, National, or Nordic Landscapes?

Lakes and seas between modernity and identity in the late 19th-century visual imagination

Emiliana Konopka

The late 19th century saw a flourishing of Nordic landscape painting, particularly depictions of sea- and lakescapes that became enduring visual symbols shaping national, Nordic, and local identities. While often associated with Romantic ideals, these images also played a crucial role in engaging with rural modernity, challenging the notion that modernity was solely an urban phenomenon. Colonies in Skagen, Varberg, Tuusula, or Arvika, created mostly in coastal and lakeside environments, demonstrate how non-urban settings, and locations away from conservative art centers, could foster artistic innovation.

The case of the Skagen painters illustrates how Nordic artists engaged with rural modernism following their experiences abroad and how their depictions of peasants, particularly fishermen, aligned with (neo)romantic rediscoveries of their respective nations. Michael Ancher and Christian Krohg chose maritime motifs to portray fishermen as “modern Vikings”, reinforcing a powerful symbol of Nordic national identity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Finland, however, the struggle against natural forces was also interpreted as a visual representation of *sisu*, a concept reflected in winter landscapes painted around Lake Tuusula.

Although these movements align with Peter Nørgaard Larsen’s concept of “Nordic Counter-Images to Modernity” (2012), these artists did not view rural settings as mere retreats. Instead, they actively engaged with them as laboratories for artistic progress, adapting their work to the social, technological, and infrastructural transformations occurring in the countryside. Through an analysis of paintings produced in key artist colonies, I will analyze how landscape painting functioned not only as a means of forging national and regional identity but also as a response to the broader complexities of rural modernism. Exploring inspirations by Post-Impressionism, Japanese woodcuts, as well as Romantic imagery, and local landscapes, I will present how the artistic treatment of Nordic rural landscapes navigated the tension between continuity and transformation.

■ Emiliana Konopka (PhD, University of Gdańsk) is an art historian and Scandinavian scholar. Within her PhD dissertation, she researched Nordic art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in terms of national and Nordic identity. Co-editor of the volume *Antologia naukowa. Islandia: Język. Naród. Natura* (University of Warsaw, 2017). Author of popular-scientific project *Utulę Thule*. Culture and science specialist in Embassy of Iceland in Poland.

national identity
landscape painting
rural modernism
artistic colonies

Power Up and Change

The hydro powered Norwegian industrial town of Rjukan as a rural artistic force field 1910–1940

Unni Tandberg

This paper explores the relationship between the development of the new industrial town of Rjukan in the mountainous Telemark region in Norway 1910–1940, and the artists and architects that were part of this place and period. Rjukan was the first place where a waterfall was regulated for the purpose of hydroelectric power. Since 2015 it has been a World Heritage Site under the name Rjukan–Notodden Industrial Heritage Site.

Families and individuals came to Rjukan to live and work in the first decades of the 20th century. Architects and artists were engaged in planning and building houses and welfare infrastructure in the valley where the sun is absent for many weeks during winter.

The narratives about Rjukan as a heritage site have mainly concentrated on histories of technology, relationships between workers and owners, and the dramatic sabotage actions taking place there during World War II. This paper will highlight aspects that show the creative forces behind the new community. A rich source material is the starting point for the paper, and ranges from watercolor sketches and drawings to photographs and newspaper articles from the period. One example of a source material is sketchbooks made by the Norwegian artist and designer Sophie Poulsson (1904–1994) in the 1920s–1930s. Her life and work are quite unknown today. Her father worked as an engineer at the Vemork plant in Rjukan, built 1907–1911, and went on to become leader for the development of the town. Sophie started documenting her wardrobe and the alterations she made to her outfits in exquisite watercolor sketches in a lookbook. The outfits mirror an active lifestyle with outdoor activities but also gowns and current trends. The paper will ask in what ways the new town can be perceived as an active and complex example of Nordic rural modernity?

■ Unni Tandberg (b. 1972) is a museologist and art historian from the University of Oslo. She has worked as a cultural history curator and photo archivist at Norwegian museums, with tasks such as research, collection management and dissemination. She also has a professional career as a film creator and production designer and has been teaching in the same field.

rural modernism

visual culture

design history

architectural history

Rjukan

XIX

Nordic Women, Art, and Esotericism



| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Marja Lahelma, Docent, University of Helsinki, Chief Curator at Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland Nina Kokkinen, Research Doctor, The Donner Institute, Finland |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 14.00–15.30 |
| Location | F3006, 3rd Floor |

This session is connected to an ongoing research and exhibition project at the Ateneum Art Museum. The project's aim is to shed light on northern women's interest in esoteric movements such as magic, theosophy, spiritualism, and anthroposophy, and their significant role in the heterogenic fields of occulture and modern art. The project adopts approaches from art history, study of religion, and gender studies. The topic is examined, for instance, from the perspective of various esoteric movements, communities, and networks, as well as by shedding light on mythical conceptions of the North. The purpose of this project is also to explore how notions of "northernness", Nordic identity, and nationalism are interconnected with esotericism and occulture. Previously, this issue has typically been associated with a masculine ideal and has primarily been explored in relation to art created by men. Introducing women's art into this discussion will, therefore, provide a fresh outlook. We discuss the role of esotericism in the work of both well-known and previously unknown Nordic women artists and explore previously neglected networks of women artists in the Nordic countries and internationally.

From The Darkness In Dance

Frauke's *Shining Light* Trilogy

Emily Kivistö

In post-World War II Japan, the art scene witnessed the emergence of an avant-garde dance, *butoh* (or *butō*), meaning “dance-step”. It was developed through the collaboration of Kazuo Ohno (1906–2010) and Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986), and was initially known as *ankoku butoh*, the “dance of utter darkness”. Its origins can be traced to early 20th-century German Expressionist dance, as well as traditional Japanese performance genres such as *Noh* and *Kabuki*, although diverging from established theatrical forms within the performing arts.

A central theme in *butoh* is death as a poeticized aesthetic—a force that gives rise to new visual languages and the concept of the living within death. Kazuo Ohno believed that the veil between the living and the dead is thin, encouraging states of consciousness to dance within this liminal space. It is within this space that the *butoh-ka* (*butoh* dancer) begins to excavate the most unsettling human emotions.

This study aims to discern how *butoh* initiates movement through a process of welling up the unconscious, pivoting on *butoh*'s use of cathartic philosophy aligned with shamanism. Following Sondra Fraleigh's rendition, in *Butoh—Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy* (2010):

In butoh, as in alchemy, the darkness of material needs to be undergone before transformation and integration can occur.

In the *Noh* and *butoh* performance trilogy *Shining Light* (2021–2024) by Frauke, a Kyoto-based Swedish *Noh* and *butoh* practitioner, conveys a shamanistic sense of revival. She explores the unwavering energies that nature attracts and encapsulates in the performances *Amber*, *Pearl*, and *Coral*, each tied to the elemental, the hidden organic realms through metamorphoses.

On these grounds, this present research positions Fraleigh's phenomenological interpretation of *butoh* in dialogue with Frauke's esoteric performances in *Shining Light*, offering insight into embodied metamorphosis and opening a nexus to the spiritual dimensions of contemporary dance.

■ Emily Kivistö holds a master's degree in art history from the University of Copenhagen and is a researcher at the *Imaginary Lab* (University of Copenhagen). Her research focuses on the anachronistic intersection that occurs when elements from ancient cosmogonies, myths, and esotericism are incorporated into contemporary performing and performance art, as well as visual arts. She approaches this from the perspective of how art comes alive through lived spirituality and, similarly, how art can be inspired by it.

Shamanism in butoh and Noh
esoteric dance
phenomenology
embodied metamorphosis

Secret Women

Female artists in Estonia at the beginning of the 20th century and esotericism as an opportunity in search for creativity, alternative truths, and social innovation

Liis Pählapuu

The studies of Estonian symbolist art have not yet set the focus on its connection with the esoteric movements, alternative spiritual teachings and practices, that spread throughout European cultural circles at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. Even less is known so far about the role of women as receivers, distributors, and implementers of secret teachings in various creative media—literature, music, dance, art.

The aim of the presentation is to highlight Estonian female artists associated with esoteric trends and the reflection of alternative spiritual theories in their work. The connection of spiritualist, theosophical etc. circles as platforms for social and cultural experimentation and innovation with women's movement in Estonia is also examined.

The presentation is eager to initiate the study of the work of Estonian female creators related to esoteric ideas, focusing on the activities of five women, Lydia Vademan-Jans (1882–1975), Helmi Reise (1898–1971), Ella Ilbak (1895–1997), Marta Lepp-Utuste (1883–1940), and Hilda Kamdron (1900–1972). Lydia Vademan-Jans studied at the art school of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in St. Peterburg under the devoted theosophist Nikolai Roerich. Vademan-Jans's strongly composed, oriental contemplative landscape paintings express spiritualistic aspirations, as well as connections with the local pantheistic circle. Helmi Reise, who studied at the Pallas Art School, also in Dresden and Paris, was a restless seeker of Truth and participated in all kinds of secret organizations of her time. Reise conducted spiritualist sessions and wrote a comprehensive book introducing the development of spiritualism in Estonia. Ella Ilbak, who made an international career as a free dance enthusiast in the 1920s, took part in spiritist sessions in Tartu during World War I. Marta Lepp-Utuste was an active socialist, writer, a women's rights activist, and the main ideologue of the pantheistic Taara religion movement. Two watercolors by Hilda Kamdron, an artist referred to as a magical realist and Estonia's first conceptualist, show her possible interest in esoteric iconography.

■ Liis Pählapuu graduated from the Art History Department of the University of Tartu in 2005 (MA in Art History). 2012–2018 she worked as a curator at the Estonian Art Museum, Kumu. She has curated or coordinated the following Kumu Art Museum's exhibitions and has compiled accompanying publications, e.g.: 2012 *Geometrical Man. The Group of Estonian Artists and Art Innovation in the 1920s and 1930s*; 2015 *Hilma af Klint. A Pioneer of Abstraction*; 2018–2019 *Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Art of the Baltic States* (Musée d'Orsay, Kumu). Since 2018, she has worked as a freelance curator and art historian.

early 20th century
female artists in Estonia
esotericism

theosophy
spiritistic practices
women's movement

Island Fluidity and Botany in Hilma af Klint's Watercolors

Jadranka Ryle

This paper explores gender politics, esotericism, and island geography in Hilma af Klint's abstract watercolor paintings. For the last two decades of her life, af Klint painted almost exclusively in watercolor. In 1922, she completed a series called *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees*, and two years later, *Studies of Colors of the Island of Munsö*, both made using wet-on-wet watercolor technique. In this method, wet paint is applied on wet medium, which results in the colors spilling and disarranging the image surface, giving the finished images the impression of perpetual movement. Despite the fact that this comprises a major body of work, this period of af Klint's creativity has not yet received sustained attention. This paper addresses this gap by showing how af Klint ties her understanding of gender to the natural world, intuiting an emergent ecofeminist perspective from the situation of island geography. Central to her understanding of these questions is the relation of gender politics to the ideas of botany and island geography. The island is a place of fluidity and potential for feminist ecologies—a place that interacts and is transformed by the surrounding sea ecology. An important component is the role of esotericism. Af Klint channeled her ideas of island geography and fluidity via the theosophical and anthroposophical thought of Helena Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner, as well as contemporary advances in natural science. Esoteric ideas of the time challenged established values and theorized utopian political rearrangements of social life. This paper explores how for af Klint the concept of island fluidity, conceived via esotericism, served as a model both for her own subversive gender politics, and her fluid gender aesthetics that she expressed through a vision of the concealed spiritual reality of botany and island geography.

■ Jadranka Ryle holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Manchester. Her research interests are modern and abstract art, women artists, and island studies. She is Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Stari Grad Museum on the Island of Hvar, Croatia.

fluidity

water

esoteric movements

island

botany

watercolors

XXX

Nordik/Not Nordik

Scandinavian artists abroad
(1850–1950)



| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Session chair | Mary Peterson Zundo, Lecturer, History of Art and Visual Culture, University of California, Santa Cruz, United States |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 16.00–17.30 |
| Location | F3006, 3rd Floor |

This session addresses the work of Nordic-born artists who embedded themselves outside Scandinavia at significant moments in their artistic careers as new, modernist modes of expression emerged across the world. Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, for example, took residence in France and Germany, absorbing novel ideas about light, color, and expression from his foreign counterparts, yet remained famously “Norwegian”. Decades later, Swedish painter Carl Oscar Borg immersed himself among California impressionists and was eventually adopted into a Native American tribe before returning home to Sweden, where he continued his adherence to Swedenborgian philosophy.

A transcultural theoretical approach, first defined by Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz (1940), offers a means to advance an understanding of the complex—and often ambiguous—intercultural exchanges taking place among artists in an increasingly mobile world, exchanges made visible through the art objects themselves as artifacts of those processes. In what ways did Scandinavian artists incorporate non-Nordic artistic practices while still retaining a decidedly Nordic sensibility? To what extent did they, in turn, exert influence on artists in the host countries they frequented? What evidence might be found in the objects they produced?

This panel, *Nordik/Not Nordik*, features papers that explore the work of Scandinavian artists who have grappled with the complex questions of Nordic artistic identity while immersed in modernist aesthetic spheres outside their homelands.

Interwar Political Journals and Transcultural Artistic Exchange in Scandinavia and Beyond

Oliver Wiant Rømer Holme

During the 1920s and 1930s the Scandinavian countries witnessed a proliferation of numerous radical left-wing political journals. Among them were the local iterations of the French *Clarté* that were established in both Sweden, Norway, and Denmark during the 1920s. These journals modelled themselves on the French journal and the international Clarté-movement originally established by the communist and pacifist novelist Henri Barbusse in the aftermath of the First World War. In Norway, the journal *Mot Dag* became influential in left-intellectual circles, and in Denmark, *Monde* became similarly important, seeking to align intellectuals with the political goals of the proletariat.

With these developments in mind, this talk takes the Danish context as its point of departure to illuminate how cultural and political journals facilitated transcultural exchanges and transfers of political art and ideas during the interwar years. This is especially true for the pamphlet series *Social Kunst* (1930–1932), through which the so-called Monde-group promoted a distinct political art, challenging the dominant modes of formal experimentation in Danish modern art. The series included monographic booklets on the Danish artists Aksel Jørgensen, Anton Hansen, and Robert Storm Petersen, while also introducing its readership to German artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, as well as Soviet art, and the artists associated with the American journal *New Masses*. From its inception, the Danish notion of “social art” was thus conceptualized as an international impulse within the Danish context. By centering transcultural collaboration, as well as the travels of Danish artists and their contributions in international forums, I argue that the artistic impulse of social art was part of a wider framework of transcultural socialist cultures, and that journals played an important role in facilitating cultural, political, and artistic exchange.

■ Oliver Holme is a Novo Nordisk Foundation Mads Øvlisen PhD fellow in Art History at the University of Copenhagen. His PhD project *Between Solidarity and Powerlessness: Social Art of the Interwar Period in Denmark* reconsiders the art historical perception of the so-called social art current of the interwar period in Denmark. By conceptualizing social art as a revolutionary impulse in a larger network of transcultural socialist cultures, the project challenges established art historical narratives of modernism in Denmark, which has historically foregrounded formal experimentation and the turn towards abstraction.

transculturalism
communism
graphic art
journals

Maison Watteau and the Negotiation of Transregional Scandinavian Artistic Identity in Paris

Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe

In Nordic art history, the emergence of modernism is closely associated with cultural transfer between the Nordic region and artistic centers in continental Europe, where Scandinavian artist coterie formed transregional networks that were more or less long-lasting. During the interwar period, Maison Watteau in Paris became a focal point for Nordic artists who resided and worked in the French capital. Maison Watteau was a cultural institution in Montparnasse, founded in 1919 and managed by the Swedish sculptor Lena Börjeson (1879–1976). Börjeson served as the director of L'Association des Artistes Scandinaves, which from 1922 was the principal organization overseeing its activities.

The purpose of Maison Watteau was not only to function as a social and cultural meeting place for Nordic artists in Paris but also to serve as a point of contact between Scandinavian artists and the French public and art market. Its activities included exhibitions, masquerades, balls, and other social events, as well as, from 1926 onwards, the art school Académie Scandinave. In the early 1920s, under Börjeson's leadership, Maison Watteau hosted both Nordic group exhibitions and joint exhibitions where Scandinavian artists were presented alongside their French peers.

Focusing mainly on the exhibitions and activities of Maison Watteau, this paper explores how Nordic artists collectively negotiated and constructed a transregional Scandinavian artistic identity beyond their native countries and within the cosmopolitan art scene of Paris. It discusses the construction of transregional group identity as an epistemological attitude, shaped by the Nordic artists' "semiperipheral" position within the European art world, and defined by their shared engagement with the perceived cultural and artistic center.

■ Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe is Professor of Art History at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics in Stockholm University. Her research interests include modern art, art and transnationalism, and feminist historiography. She is Coordinator of Research in Art History at Stockholm University, editor-in-chief of *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, chairperson of the Swedish Society of Art Historians, titular member of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA), member of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art (AICA), and the 2025–2026 chair (together with Andrea Kollnitz).

transregional artistic identity
transcultural exchange
Scandinavian modernism
art exhibitions in Paris

In Search of the Modern

The mobility of Scandinavian sculptors and the materiality of sculpture, c. 1880–1905

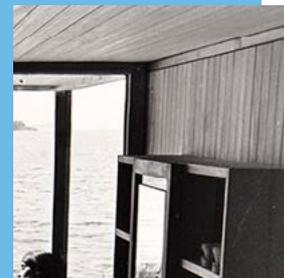
Mari Tossavainen

This paper adopts a material-focused perspective to the study of Finnish sculptors, the search for modern sculpture, and the transnational exchange of materials and know-how related to bronze casting, with the focus on materiality leading to a consideration of these international transfers and exchanges. By the 1880s the question of how sculpture was made became more relevant in Finland and Scandinavia, and especially sculptors working abroad or who maintained international contacts and became interested in the modernity of lost-wax casting, as there was a global revival of lost-wax casting in the late 19th century. These sculptors were eager to travel to Italy to explore the subject, so that they could see themselves how to cast in bronze. At the end of the 19th century, Paris had become the center of sculpture and bronze casting in Europe. The Scandinavian artists' colony there was one of many foreign communities in Paris. Based upon the study of archival material, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on sculpture materials, methods, and cultural transfers. The work of Emil Wikström (1864–1942), one of the pioneers of Finnish bronze casting, exemplifies the dynamics of the national-global overlap in sculptural production at the time.

■ Mari Tossavainen, PhD, is an art historian who has written about Finnish art and sculpture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries with special attention to the artists Emil Wikström and Helene Schjerfbeck. She is a grant-funded researcher at the University of Helsinki

19th century
Finland
sculptors
materiality
transcultural

XXI



Pre-Modern Art Histories of Migration and Exchange

Moving images, objects, and artistic expressions from, to, and between the Nordic countries

Session Chairs

Ylva Haidenthaller,

Postdoctoral Researcher, Division of Art History and Visual Studies, Lund University, Sweden

Charlotta Krispinsson,

Researcher, The School of Culture and Education, Södertörn University, Sweden

Clara Strömberg,

PhD Candidate, Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, Sweden

Date

Wednesday, October 22nd

Time

10.45-12.15 & 13.45-15.15

Location

F3017, 3rd Floor

pre-modern periods—destabilizing hierarchies between center and periphery—

questioning national art history writing—migration—exchange

The tradition of writing national art histories is a contested legacy that continues to shape as well as limit our knowledge of pre-modern periods. While ideas of hierarchies of center and periphery still dominate Nordic art historical surveys, we now know that cultural heterogeneity and the migration of images, people, objects, and ideas are constant features of our visual and material culture.

To give just a few examples, the training of pre-modern artists and craftsmen was based on geographical mobility and global influences. The courts of Stockholm and Copenhagen were centers of artistic production that celebrated expressions from all over Europe. Artists and craftsmen from other backgrounds were particularly valued. At the same time, Denmark and Sweden were also part of the European colonial project, both in their ambitions to conquer and rule geographical areas within and outside Europe to be turned into provinces and colonies, as well as in the plundering of, for example, Sámi objects to be collected in cabinets of curiosities. Furthermore, the printing revolution and global trade allowed popular European images to be distributed, circulated, adapted, and translated worldwide. Nevertheless, many histories of migration and exchange remain to be researched.

For this session, divided into two parts, we gather papers with transnational, regional, and non-hierarchical perspectives on the production, uses, and meanings of art, visual and material culture. The first slot deals with moving objects and images in the period from the Bronze Age to late medieval times. The second slot discusses cultural exchanges and connections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Garden in Schering Rosenhane's *Hortus Regius*

Swedish and Dutch artistic exchange in the
1600s

Elin Bergman

In 1645, Münster in present day Germany was together with city of Osnabrück the epicentre of the Thirty Years War peace negotiations, as well as a melting pot of cultural exchange in proximity to the political parleys. The Swedish diplomat Schering Rosenhane (1609–1663) stayed four years in Münster where he negotiated for the Swedish crown and took the opportunity to expand his personal and professional network in addition to his official duties. Among his encounters was the Dutch artist and engraver Pieter Holsteyn the Younger (1614–1673)—renowned for his representations of the natural world—who Rosenhane commissioned the work of an emblematic manuscript in honor of queen Christina (1626–1689) dated to the mid 1640s. The manuscript, titled *Hortus Regius*, resulted in eighteen emblematic images and texts whose political and religious implications have been thoroughly investigated in previous research. However, one element in the manuscript has not undergone extensive analysis, namely the title's reference to a particular space in early modern court culture: the royal garden, *hortus regius*. In the manuscript, two visual representations of garden features are included, and these are the point of departure of this paper: a walled garden and a labyrinth. The purpose of this presentation is to examine and contextualize the *hortus regius*—with focus on physical sites in general and the representations in Rosenhane's manuscript in particular—and thereby illuminate a specific spatial construct and the customs it encompassed and enabled. Besides giving insights on representations of gardens and contributing to the history of horticulture, this paper furthermore illuminates the artistic and scientific networks of exchange in early modern Europe, exemplified by Rosenhane's and Holsteyn's collaboration.

■ Elin Bergman is a post-doctoral researcher and defended her thesis with the short title *Trädgårdens textur* at Stockholm University in 2024 and has since the defense worked as a lecturer and taught art and architectural history from pre-history to today on all academic levels at different Swedish universities. As of 2025, Bergman has been awarded a two-year full time post-doctoral stipend from the Ellen Ahlström och Anna Terserus stiftelse for the project *Ephemeral green spaces: Garden ideals, parks and horticultural exhibitions in general art and industrial expositions 1866–1930*.

emblematic imagery

royal gardens

artistic exchange

Pieter Holsteyn the younger

Schering Rosenhane

Nordic Bronze Age, the Forgotten Origin of Early Celtic Art?

Virginie Defente

From the end of the 19th century, the marked graphic break between rectilinear forms of the First Iron Age and curvilinear forms of the Second Iron Age drew the attention of researchers, who assimilated this graphic rupture to new cultural movements originating in Etruria and Greece. In the early 1930s, when Paul Jacobsthal analyzed the origins of Early Celtic art on the continent (5th–1st centuries BC), three cultural zones were then taken into consideration: Greek art, Scythian art, and Hallstatt art. But in 1996, the discovery of a human-sized stone statue at the site of Glauberg (Hesse, Germany), which can be dated to the second half of the 5th century BC, revived research on the art of the European Iron Age. While the representation of this human head shows an exact parallel with the human heads of a quadrangular pillar previously discovered in Pfalzfeld (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany), a new analysis of these stone sculptures now reveals graphic parallels with the representations of human figures engraved on the rocks of Bohuslän. Moreover, bronze objects from the tomb of Waldalgesheim (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany) reinforce this graphic proximity. It follows that, in the valley of the Middle Rhine, works in stone and bronze datable to the end of the 5th century BC, present graphic similarities with the great men engraved on the rocks of Bohuslän and with the abstract engravings of bronze basins from Sweden and Denmark (Nordic Bronze Age, periods IV and V). The stylistic analysis of the statue of Glauberg, the pillar of Pfalzfeld and the metal pieces from the tomb of Waldalgesheim now highlights stylistic influences stemming from the art of the Nordic Bronze Age, which enrich the complex genesis of the Early Celtic art.

■ Virginie Defente is a Senior Lecturer at Rennes 2 University, France. She is currently head of the archaeological bachelor's degree program and coordinator for international relations for the history of art and archaeology department. Her main research topics concern materials—glass, bronze, iron—and techniques, such as enamel work, as well as their historical context and natural environment. More recently, she has developed her skills in university teaching by joining a working group involving UQAM, Canada and Rennes 2 University. Former member of the French School in Rome (1995–1998), PhD—Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University (1995), Research Diploma from the École du Louvre (1990).

Early Celtic art
Nordic Bronze Age
Glauberg
Waldalgesheim
Bohuslän

Portraits in Motion

Printed celebrity culture and the European portrait market from a Stockholm perspective

Ylva Haidenthaller

The eighteenth century witnessed a significant surge in the production and circulation of printed images, particularly portraits of so-called famous individuals. These depictions—of intellectuals, writers, military leaders, royalty, actresses, and singers—were widely sold as single-sheet prints across Europe, signaling the emergence of a nascent celebrity culture. While cities such as London, Paris, and Leipzig already boasted well-established print markets, Stockholm's engagement with printed portraiture was initially more hesitant. Nevertheless, the trend soon reached Scandinavia, and contemporary advertisements reveal a swift increase in the availability of printed faces. Printers began commissioning engravers and selling portraits either by subscription or as loose sheets. However, not all of the portraits sold in Stockholm were produced locally. Many arrived through transnational channels—imported via auctions, purchased abroad, or brought back by travelers as souvenirs. This influx demonstrates how even peripheral markets were tightly connected to wider European visual and consumer networks.

This paper takes Stockholm as a point of departure to examine the distribution and circulation of printed portraits in late eighteenth-century Europe. It explores how such images functioned as active components in the machinery of rising celebrity culture. By analyzing European and Swedish portrait collections alongside archival sources related to engravers and collectors, the study sheds light on the mechanisms by which portraits “went viral”, ultimately revealing a far more interconnected Europe than is often assumed. This paper forms part of a larger postdoctoral research project investigating the production, circulation, and cultural significance of printed portraits of women and the visual construction of female celebrity in the eighteenth century.

■ Ylva Haidenthaller is a postdoctoral researcher at Lund University and an art historian specializing in visual and material culture with a focus on early modern Europe. Trained in Uppsala and Vienna, she combines approaches from art anthropology and historical analysis to explore the various uses of art. Her doctoral thesis examined medals in early modern Sweden. Her current project shifts to printed portraits, investigating their role in the visual construction of fame and female celebrity in eighteenth-century European culture.

printed portraits
eighteenth century
celebrity culture
transnational circulation

The Measure of a Saint

Size, movement, and meaning in St. Olaf pilgrim badges

Cecily Hughes

Concealed in church cupboards, cast onto bells, and buried beneath layers of peat moss or grave dirt, minute traces of the cult of St. Olaf (b. 995–d. 1030) are scattered across the Nordic landscape. Medieval pilgrim badges of St. Olaf found in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark reveal networks of trans-Scandinavian travel, stories of devotion, and a market for salvation. But these miniature emblems of the Christianizing king should also be interpreted in light of the movement of pilgrims through Scandinavia's formidable geography. To acquire an Olaf badge from the saint's shrine in Nidaros (modern-day Trondheim), pilgrims traversed difficult terrain—routes populated by mountains, fjords, and forests—that, according to pagan legend, was formed from the body of the ancient giant Ymír. Exploring localized experiences of a particular kind of mobile, medieval object, this paper considers the small stature of St. Olaf pilgrim badges in the face of Scandinavia's spectacular landscape, arguing that these objects activated a sense of scale in their medieval bearers that reverberated with Christian doctrine amidst echoes of a pagan past.

■ Cecily Hughes is a doctoral candidate at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, where she studies medieval Scandinavian art history. Cecily is also a curatorial research assistant at the Cleveland Museum of Art. With an avid interest in understanding how objects made meaning for their viewers, Cecily's work often considers environment, mythology, and medieval approaches to humor. This year, she was awarded the Haugen Memorial Scholarship for graduate research from the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. Recently, Cecily has presented papers at the College Art Association conference in New York City and the centennial meeting of the Medieval Academy of America at Harvard University.

landscape
environment
mobility
pilgrimage
art history

Nordic Unicorn

Unicorn hunting motif and its migration to the pictorial programs of late medieval churches in Finland and the Swedish Upland region

Millamari Kalliola

In medieval bestiaries, animal figures like the unicorn were imbued with allegorical and moral meanings derived from the Bible and other sources. These works offered a narrative in which hunters could only capture a unicorn with the help of a virgin, who tamed the animal. Allegorically, the unicorn is compared to Christ, the virgin to the Virgin Mary, and the taming to the Incarnation.

Initially, in the West, the unicorn appeared in miniatures of manuscripts, psalters, and bestiaries. From the 13th to the 16th centuries, unicorn motifs gained popularity in Christian iconography and began appearing in textile art, panel paintings, and church murals. These depictions often featured the unicorn on the lap of the Virgin Mary in a hortus conclusus, with the angel Gabriel portrayed as a hunter driving the unicorn towards the Virgin, drawing a connection between the unicorn hunt and the Annunciation. This paper examines the migration of Central European ecclesiastical and secular unicorn motifs to the churches of the Kingdom of Sweden during the Middle Ages, focusing on church chalk paintings. This paper analyzes the types of changes, new emphases, or new adaptations that took place in this migration process.

The emphasis is on the motif of the unicorn hunt, which was especially popular in the Kingdom of Sweden, particularly in the Upland region. Finnish and Swedish church murals typically depict the unicorn similarly to German and Swiss textile art and panel paintings, with Gabriel as the hunter. However, a unique pictorial type emerges in this region, where hunters are ordinary men who kill the unicorn. This type aligns with secular image types from the Middle Ages depicting the unicorn hunt but does not appear in any other European church. The paper suggests that the motif adopted new forms and uses in Finland and the Upland region.

■ Millamari Kalliola (MA) is a doctoral researcher at the University of Jyväskylä. Her dissertation examines the unicorn hunting motif in Finnish and Swedish Late Medieval Church Wall Paintings (1400–1560).

*Middle Ages
medieval
migration
church art
wall painting
unicorn
unicorn hunt*

Embodied Encounter

Artistic form and colonial power in seventeenth-century ethnographic portraits

Zoe Robakiewicz

This paper examines a unique work of ethnographic portraiture from the collection of the National Museum of Denmark: the *Inuit Portrait* (1654), the earliest known European depiction of Inuit individuals from Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland). Created decades before formal colonization of Kalaallit Nunaat began, it offers a rare visual record of the Dano-Norwegian crown's early, pre-colonial interest in the region. The portrait presents four Inuit individuals—three women (Gunneling/Kuneling, Kabelou, and Siogo) and one man (Ihiob), as named by Europeans—who were abducted during a reconnaissance voyage led by Danish Captain David Danel between March and September 1654.

Painted by an unknown artist in Bergen and reportedly acquired on the return to Denmark, the work blends Dutch Renaissance conventions of group portraiture with the descriptive visual strategies of early modern colonial science. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that includes formal art historical analysis, historical materialist methodology, and museological critique, this paper investigates how the *Inuit Portrait* has historically operated, and continues to operate, within the tension between representing individual subjectivities and reinforcing colonial typologies.

It highlights the portrait's shifting role within the Royal Kunstkammer collection, where it functioned both as an object of royal curiosity and as a tool of emerging colonial knowledge production—embedded within broader power structures that privileged direct observation and life-based visual documentation (*ad vivum*). Finally, the paper explores the lasting legacy of such representational practices in contemporary ethnographic museums, where attempts to critically engage with colonial pasts remain deeply entangled in their institutional foundations. By situating the *Inuit Portrait* (1654) within early modern intersections of art, science, and colonialism, this analysis contributes to broader discussions on how visual art functioned not only as a product of empire but also as an active participant in its formation.

■ Zoe Robakiewicz is a recent graduate in Art History from the University of Copenhagen and holds a BA in Art History from Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland. Her research focuses on the early modern period, colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, economic and labor history, and cultural diplomacy. Her previous work examined the role of state-sponsored visual art in shaping national identity in interwar Poland. More recently, her research has shifted toward Nordic colonialism in Kalaallit Nunaat, with a particular focus on the economic and cultural transformations within Inuit society from the seventeenth century through the early nineteenth century.

***Early Modern colonialism
Dano-Norwegian colonialism
ethnographic portraiture
art and ethnography***

XXIII

Public Art Policies in the Post-Welfare Phase



Session chairs

Håkan Nilsson,
Professor of Art History,
Södertörn University, Sweden

Oscar Svanelid,
Postdoc Researcher in Art History,
Swedish Research Council International
Postdoc Grant,
Södertörn University/Oslo University

Date Tuesday, October 21st

Time 9.00–10.30

Location F3004, 3rd Floor

This session explores public art policies and their relationship to contemporary forms of governance in the Nordic countries and their outcomes. The papers of this session address public art in relation to changing political ideals, using both historical and contemporary examples.

The session will examine how public art policies have changed since the beginning of the 21st century, in light of the “post-welfare” phase: i.e., deregulation and a governance approach aligned with the private market. It will address how policy decisions affect the artistic outcome and how public art is treated in relation to its physical context. Is it merely placed into an environment, or has it already played a role in the decision-making process?

In Sweden there is a political will to increase collaboration between artists, architects, real estate companies, and urban planners under the umbrella of “designed lived environment”. While integration of art in society responds to historical demands, there are concerns about the instrumentalization of art under an “environmental mode of governance”, prioritizing management of spaces and behaviors with economic and political interests.

Historically, public art in the Nordic countries has been seen as a manifestation of the welfare state’s commitment to ensuring equal access to culture and encouraging citizen participation in the development of democratic culture. Today, both governance and cultural policy have changed, as have the ways art is conceived. How has this affected public art? Do we find the same pattern in all Nordic countries? Have the previous similarities in public art policy changed since the decline of the Nordic cultural model?

Institutions and the Governing of Public Space

The changing policies of architecture museums in Finland, Norway, and Sweden

Christina Pech

The question of public art and its changing policies is closely linked to that of public space. This paper examines recent transformations of three Nordic institutions that, to varying extents, hold national responsibilities in relation to public space.

2024 saw the founding of the AD Museum in Helsinki, the result of a merger between two existing museums dedicated to architecture and design. While celebrated as a new beginning, it also marked the end of the last architecture-specific museum in the Nordic countries, a pioneering institution founded in 1956 with close ties to post-war welfare initiatives. Sibling institutions with comparable histories in neighboring countries have recently also experienced transformations driven by cultural policies. In 2012, the Swedish Museum of Architecture (est. 1962) underwent a name and mission update to include design, followed by a whole new national directive in 2018 aimed at enhancing the impact of the Designed Living Environment politics. It is currently being revised again and is likely to lose its position as an independent state authority. In Norway, the Norsk Arkitekturmuseum (est. 1975) was incorporated into the monumental Nasjonalmuseet alongside four other institutions in 2003.

From a governance perspective, these institutional processes share several features, such as, tentatively, disciplinary obscuration, ever-expanding responsibilities, and a growing focus on the intangible aspects of operations. Overall, the continuous transformations suggest a vulnerable and somewhat contested position within the national institutional landscape. In light of these museums and their recent changes, this paper will speculate on the consequences for, and the status of, public space in the political sphere. Where does public space belong institutionally? Where is it governed, documented, safeguarded, and disseminated? How does the institutional integration of the arts influence decision-making, expertise, safeguarding, and dissemination? What impact does it have on the ability to assess methods and goals pertaining to public art and its spaces?

■ Christina Pech is an architectural historian based in Oslo and Stockholm. Her research centers on the historiography and discourses of modern architecture, particularly through exhibitions and museums. Pech earned her PhD (2011) from the School of Architecture, KTH, Stockholm, and has held a position as Research Coordinator at ArkDes. Since 2020, she has been co-editor of *Site Zones*. Recent publications include “The great betrayal. A Swedish critique of welfare state architecture” in *Architecture and Welfare—Scandinavian Perspectives* (Eds. T. Arrhenius et al., Birkhäuser 2025) and “History curated: architecture museums—custodians of the past, critics of the present?” in *Valences of Historiography* (Ed. G. Hartoonian, Routledge 2024).

public space

public art

architecture museums

cultural policy

Creating Frameworks for the Ephemeral

The governance of temporary art in public spaces in Denmark

Sarah Pihl Petersen & Jens Christian Nielsen

In recent decades, art institutions across the Nordic countries have increasingly engaged in off-site curating and temporary public art initiatives. These practices diversify the artistic landscape by operating outside the more rigid regulatory frameworks that govern permanent public artworks. However, the governance structures shaping such ephemeral initiatives remain underexplored.

This paper examines the policy frameworks regulating temporary public art in Denmark, drawing on contemporary case studies including Kunsthall Charlottenborg's Biennale presented on advertising columns, *Performance Bulletin* by Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art and Husets Teater, and Horsens Art Museum's *Performance i det fri*. Through these case studies, we address the following questions: What cultural policy objectives drive art institutions' growing engagement with temporary public art? How do policy frameworks for temporary and permanent public artworks differ? As traditional models of art funding and governance evolve, what role do private foundations play in shaping public art? Who are the key decision-makers in temporary public art, and who remains excluded from these processes?

By exploring these questions, the paper highlights how policy shifts and economic restructuring influence artistic outcomes in public space. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the role of temporary and permanent public art in the Nordic countries in what is often described as the post-welfare phase, where changing governance structures raise pressing questions about accessibility, artistic freedom, and new forms of collaboration.

■ Sarah Pihl Petersen, MA in Art History, works as Analyst at the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis in Roskilde, Denmark. She has previously been a curatorial assistant at the National Gallery of Denmark and ARKEN Museum of Contemporary Art and has a special interest in cultural democracy and art in public spaces.

■ Jens Christian Nielsen, PhD, is the Head of Analysis and Research at the Danish Institute for Cultural Policy Analysis in Roskilde, Denmark. His work includes cultural policy analysis, with a particular focus on the impact of art initiatives in public space and questions of citizen participation and engagement in cultural life. Among other topics, his research explores how different groups of citizens and users interact with cultural offerings, and how policy frameworks shape access, inclusion, and artistic expression.

ephemeral public art
cultural policy frameworks
art funding
accessibility
collaboration

Challenging the Parameters of Time and Place

Recent experimental public art projects in Swedish municipalities

Molly Sjögren

This paper delves into two recent municipal public art projects in Sweden. The projects have respectively been designed to test the boundaries of the structural and material settings of the commissioning organization and their role. The projects share many properties, even though they were initiated from different sides of the democratic spectrum—the public and the elected politicians. Common denominators include that both these projects are process based with prolonged time periods for artistic and curatorial processes and research, have non-determined geographical starting points and end results as well as including a large amount of interaction with the public.

Using interviews, political documents, and other public material, the projects will be outlined both from the commissioner's and the artist's point of view. Comparing these projects provides a deeper understanding of the motivations, advantages, and obstacles of challenging established municipal commissioning methods.

One of the projects studied is *Överraska, Variera, Förändra* ("Surprise, Differentiate, Change")—including three separate artistic commissions, initiated in 2022 by Jönköping municipality. Funds were allocated by politicians for additional public art, resulting in geographically unbound, investigative projects, intended to question the bureaucratic practices of the municipality. The project resulted in several temporary events and permanent traces of the artistic interventions.

The second project—*Hela staden är ett monument* ("The whole city is a monument")—started as a citizen initiative by what would develop into an NGO, called *anti-racist Monument*. The project resulted in several socially engaged art processes and a commission for a permanent artwork, as well as a series of public talks. The project also informed the development of the organizational structure of the commissioning agency Malmö konst.

■ Molly Sjögren is a Stockholm based curator and architect working in the field of public art and designed living environments. She specializes in curating artistic practices during early building stages and in large scale urban development projects, as well as the bureaucratic and organizational practices involved in producing those projects. Sjögren is currently a PhD student in Art History at Södertörn University in Stockholm.

public art
process-based art
municipal regulations
bureaucracy
policy making



XXIII

Representing the Nordic and Nordicness in Cultural Diplomacy before and after 1989

Art and design exhibitions as cultural
diplomacy in, from, and to the
Nordic countries

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Kristian Handberg, Assistant Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark Maija Koskinen, Academy Research Fellow, University of Helsinki, Finland Camilla Larsson, Senior Lecturer, Södertörn University, Sweden |
| Date | Wednesday, October 22nd |
| Time | 10.45–12.15 & 13.45–15.15 |
| Location | Small Hall, F4050, 4th Floor |

Exhibitions are an important medium of international cultural exchange and diplomacy. When exhibitions are sent abroad or received as representatives of nations or related to geopolitics, they are often associated with definitions such as “the Nordic” which can be both a fact and fiction. This was significant towards the end of the Cold War when cultural diplomacy had become an established element of the conflict, as the Nordic-Baltic region held strategic importance. After 1989, the situation underwent radical changes with the establishment of new nations, alliances, and practices. Across the Nordic countries, the former socialist states, and the new Baltic republics, many kinds of exhibitions and related activities (artist meetings, festivals, cultural programs, etc.) were undertaken; some still active, some forgotten today—in a time of new threats in the region.

The panel include presentations of new research on cultural diplomacy in the field of the arts, addressing topics related to foreign art and design exhibitions in the Nordic countries, Nordic exhibitions in other countries as well as international events and networks. The focus is on the later phase of the Cold War, the transition phase of “1989” and the post-cold-war era of the 1990s. Presentations are dealing with cultural diplomacy and the Nordic in today’s context are also included. Geographically, the panel aims at both the Nordic countries and activities to and from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland, and Germany. The presentations will focus on the role of exhibitions, funding bodies, economic structures, political organizations, NGOs, art institutions, and artists as diplomatic actors.

The End of the Century

Iceland-USSR cultural relations and the definition of contemporary art towards the end of the Cold War

Heiða Björk Árnadóttir

In 1990 the National Gallery of Iceland organized an exchange of exhibitions of Icelandic and Soviet contemporary art, in collaboration with the USSR Ministry of Culture and the E.V. Vuchetich All-Union Artistic Production Association in Moscow. Titled *The End of the Century*, the exhibitions opened in the All-Russian Decorative and Folk Art Museum in Moscow in June 1990 and at the National Gallery of Iceland in November of the same year. Each was jointly curated by Bera Nordal, director of the National Gallery of Iceland, and Olga Sviblova, a Moscow art critic and filmmaker.

Examining the politics of display involved in *The End of the Century*, this paper interrogates the use of two key terms in relation to the presentations in Moscow and Reykjavík. The characterization of the Icelandic artists as “Nordic” brought with it a host of ideological associations, including ideas of social liberty or freedom and a distinctive closeness to nature. Meanwhile, the use of the term “contemporary art” in relation to the work of the Soviet artists, and the National Gallery’s introduction of its display as the “first exhibition in Iceland of Soviet contemporary art”, prompted public objections from the chairman of the Soviet-Icelandic Friendship Society (MÍR, est. 1950), who asked: “Who are the artists of the contemporary? Is it those that practice their art in our times, without consideration of how their works are categorized? Or is contemporary art only bound to certain movements, styles and isms?” Exploring this complaint in the context of the work of MÍR and changing Iceland-USSR cultural relations in the decades prior, this paper highlights the ongoing impact of the Cold War on the discourse and presentation of visual art in Iceland towards the dissolution of the Soviet Union and examines the place of the “Nordic” in this context.

■ Heiða Björk Árnadóttir is Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Iceland. She holds a PhD in Art History and Theory from the University of British Columbia and a MA in Museum Studies from the University of Iceland. Her main areas of research are Icelandic modern and contemporary art and the history and politics of museums. Her interests include global modernism, Cold War cultural politics, environmental art, and the role and status of the proximal senses in visual art. Her writing has been published in the internationally renowned art magazine *October* and in various other international and Icelandic publications.

Iceland
USSR
contemporary art
cultural diplomacy
exhibition history

“Scandinavia Today” and US Cultural Diplomacy 1982–1983

Marta Edling

In autumn 1982 and early 1983, Nordic art received unparalleled exposure in the United States through the “Scandinavia Today” cultural programme. The programme showcased Nordic literature and film, as well as the visual and performing arts, and seven major art exhibitions were presented in Washington, Minneapolis, and New York: *Northern Light*, *The Frozen Image*, *Scandinavian Modern*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Art Now*, *Poetry and Ecology*, and *The Scandinavian Touch*. The total budget for “Scandinavia Today” was \$4.5 million (SEK 28 million at the time).

Previous research has identified the programme as a Nordic initiative and/or a project run by the American Scandinavian Foundation. However, this paper will present its origins in US cultural diplomacy. Between 1978 and 1983, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and the U.S. Information Agency collaborated to create exhibitions and cultural programmes showcasing international art and culture. This resulted in the Today programmes, which introduced American audiences to cultural expressions from Egypt, Mexico, Belgium, Japan, and Scandinavia.

The Today programmes emerged as part of a new US strategy to promote cultural diplomacy by increasing American citizens’ knowledge of other nations. This paper argues that acknowledging these origins calls into question certain aspects of the prevailing narrative surrounding the increased interest in Nordic art during the 1980s and 1990s. Although contacts between Nordic and American museum curators and administrators had been established long before, the intensified attention should be seen in the light of a proclamation issued by President Ronald Reagan in August 1982, in which he inaugurated a Nordic-American Week as part of the “Scandinavia Today” programme and praised Scandinavians for their role in shaping America’s history, stating that they had “extended our frontier, tamed the prairie, and helped make America the great nation it is today”.

■ Marta Edling is Professor of the History and Theory of Art at Södertörn University in Stockholm since 2012. Her recent research focuses on artistic positions and collaborations in the Nordic region 1945–1989. She has a particular interest in the role of national and regional artistic networks, as well as cross-border contacts within and outside the Nordic region. In 2022, she was guest editor of *Art/@s Bulletin*, Volume II, Issue 2: *Nordic-Baltic Cross-Border Connectivity*, in which she presented her article “Art for All! Nordic Art and Cultural Democracy, 1945–1959”. Her forthcoming article, “An Ambivalent Narrative: Nordic modern art in Swedish art history, 1923–2023”, is due to be published in the *Journal of Art History* (no. 1, 2026). She has also recently written an article on the early years of the Nordiska Konstförbundet (NKF) entitled “Nordiska yrkesbröder. Nätverk och vänskap 1945–1963”. This article is due to be published in the Finnish section of the NKF’s forthcoming anniversary publication in autumn 2025.

Nordic art
“Scandinavia Today”
US cultural diplomacy
US Information Agency

Uzbekistani Art and the Soviet Cultural Days in Malmö 1975

Cultural exchange or propaganda?

Joel Odebrant

This paper examines the exhibition *Folkkonst och grafik från Uzbekistan* from the perspective of cultural diplomacy. The exhibition was held at Malmö Konstmuseum in 1975 as part of the Soviet Cultural Days, a recurring event organized in several Swedish cities during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. These events showcased Soviet culture, including dance, music, visual arts, and crafts, to Swedish audiences. They were organized by *Förbundet Sverige-Sovjetunionen* in collaboration with local politicians, Soviet political representatives, business communities, and art organizations. *Förbundet Sverige-Sovjetunionen*, founded in 1935, aimed to foster cultural and business contacts between Sweden and the Soviet Union. It periodically received financial support from Moscow (Wenell 2015).

The paper explores the key actors behind the exhibition, its sources of funding, and the selection of artworks and objects displayed. Particular attention is given to the political and aesthetic ideas conveyed through the exhibition, its accompanying materials, and overall organization. This analysis is further related to Sweden's political positioning during the period, which has been described as an ideological "middle way" between capitalism and communism. Was the exhibition primarily a Soviet propaganda initiative, or were there additional motivations behind its organization? What role did Malmö Konstmuseum play in this context, and how were the exhibition and the Cultural Days received?

The paper also presents examples of art exhibitions at Malmö Konstmuseum from the former Soviet Union after 1989, highlighting shifts in framing over time.

■ Joel Odebrant (PhD, Södertörn University) is a postdoc in Art History at the University of Copenhagen. His doctoral thesis dealt with informal painting in the 1950s and 1960s from Sweden, Poland, and former Czechoslovakia. He is currently part of Kristian Handberg's (University of Copenhagen) project *1989: Changing Europe? Contemporary History as Cultural Heritage task for the Art Museums* where he is conducting research on exhibitions featuring art from Eastern and Central Europe during the Cold War and the long 1989 at Malmö Konstmuseum.

exhibition studies
Cold War
Soviet Union
cultural diplomacy

Nordic-Baltic Architecture Triennials as an Agent of Professional Exchange and Cultural Diplomacy

Ingrid Ruudi

The presentation focuses on the Nordic-Baltic Architecture Triennials that took place in Tallinn in 1990–2005, a platform for the professional dialogue of Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Faroese, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian architects. Initiated in 1988, it was an attempt at a dialogue of equal partners even before the collapse of the Soviet Union was actually formalized. The first event in 1990, consisting of a two-day symposium, an exhibition and an international student workshop, was a great success, featuring Aldo van Eyck, Peter Wilson, Sverre Fehn, Henning Larsen, Juhani Pallasmaa, and others in addition to the most celebrated architects from the Baltics. The theme—*Metropolism and Provincialism*—was in tune with postmodern regionalism yet not without some self-irony and critical stance. The following triennials continued to feature representative lineup but did not perhaps fully live up neither to the Nordic architects' expectations of a seedbed for a regional theory nor to the Baltic architects' hope for profitable international commissions. Regardless, it was a remarkable milestone of the transition era both professionally and politically, satisfying both sides' hunger for knowledge about the other as well as contributing to theoretical discussions in each participating country.

The presentation analyzes the professional, social, economical, and political conditions of organization of the triennials and the changes taking place over the 1990s. What was at stake for the participants from the Nordic and the Baltic sides, and the impact of the event in the respective regional contexts? What kinds of shifts of meanings and (mis)translations happened in communicating the beliefs and values of practitioners of the both sides? The presentation is based on archival material, contemporary reviews in Estonian and international media, and interviews with the organizers and the participants from the Nordic and Baltic countries.

■ Ingrid Ruudi is a senior researcher at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Institute of Art History and Visual Culture, currently focusing on Late and Post-Soviet spatial practices from the perspective of ethics of care. She has curated research exhibitions at the Estonian Museum of Architecture (*Unbuilt: Visions for a New Society 1986–1994*, 2015, and *A Room of One's Own. Feminist's Questions to Architecture*, 2019), as well as Estonian exhibition *Gas Pipe* at the 11th Venice Architecture Biennale (2008). She is also editor-in-chief of Estonian art history journal *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies on Art and Architecture*.

architecture
Nordic-Baltic relations
post-socialist transition
exhibitions

Curating the “Nordic” after 1989

The North as part of the global art world in exhibitions in Europe

Maike Teubner

In 1992, the biennial *Norrskjen 92 (Northern Lights 92)* presented fifteen emerging artists from the Nordic countries at Gothenburg’s Konstmuseum. The curators’ thesis, which suggests a connection between contemporary art and the National Romantic tradition of the late 19th century, thus asserts its authenticity as “Nordic”, is based on a shifting geopolitical situation following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union: with the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union was founded in 1992 to foster international cooperation. Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995. This resulted in a closer political relationship between the Nordic region and continental Europe, which made it easier for artists to study and work abroad. Concurrently, several cities in the North were honored as European Capitals of Culture. Following an increased interest in art from Eastern Europe and Great Britain, Scandinavian art moved into the international spotlight. However, in an increasingly globally networked art scene, regional categories are being challenged. In this context, the paper will discuss exhibitions which aim to present a survey of contemporary art from the Nordic countries in Europe after 1989, such as *Come closer—90’s Art from Scandinavia and Its Predecessors* (Vaduz 1998). The aim is to explore how curators argue to detach art from the regional label “Nordic” and its associated clichés. Examining the curatorial concepts, this paper presents strategies to deconstruct traditional narratives about “Nordic art” and to reposition the North as a dynamic and active contributor to the global art scene.

■ Maike Teubner is a postdoctoral researcher in art history, based in Düsseldorf, Germany. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary art, exhibition histories, and ecocriticism. Her PhD thesis *Licht—Natur—Melancholie. Konstruktionen des ‘Nordischen’ bei Olafur Eliasson, Ragnar Kjartansson und A. Karlsson Rixon* (Reimer: Berlin 2024) deals with (de)constructions of the “Nordic” in contemporary art. As a visiting PhD student at Stockholm University, she conducted interviews with artists and curators. She has been a lecturer at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg and worked at museums, e.g. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, and Neues Museum—State Museum for Art and Design Nuremberg.

exhibition histories
contemporary art
Nordic
regional identity
curatorial practice

Subversive Politics?

Nordic Contemporary Art in the Baltic States in the early 1990s

Annika Öhrner

The emergence of a distinctively Nordic interpretation of the “contemporary turn” in art around 1990 has been noted recently, drawing parallels with the breakthrough of Nordic art in the US in the late 1980s. Meanwhile, the art scene in the Baltic countries underwent significant transformation following political and economic upheaval during and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. “Contemporary art” projects emerged in Baltic countries in venues such as independent and public galleries, Soros Centres for Contemporary Art, but also and less well-known, Nordic Information Offices (NIO).

This was a formative and structurally open period, during which the power structures of various fields were weakening or collapsing. Nordic-Baltic relational art projects saw day light. As just one example of many, one such project titled “Līdz-Svars / Like-Vekt / Equi-Librium”, was presented at the National Exhibition Hall Latvija in Riga in 1993. The curatorial statement, written by Helena Demakova, proposed juxtaposing the Nordic and Baltic to highlight their differences and contrasts.

Why and how were contemporary art exhibitions in the Baltics so heavily sponsored by Nordic national and pan-Nordic public authorities, national embassies of the Nordic countries, and NIOs? I suggest that this would qualify as an equally relational study. The political landscape around the Baltic Sea required the navigation of a delicate foreign policy situation, that seem to have had impact on the cultural agenda of the Nordic countries in a way that needs to be explored. This paper discusses the possible manifestation of Nordic “subversive politics” through contemporary art projects, thus using “benevolent assistance and cognitive colonisation”, with the terms by Kasimierz Murial (2015), and the intention to balance national, supranational, and individual power relations during the severe geopolitical crisis that arose from the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

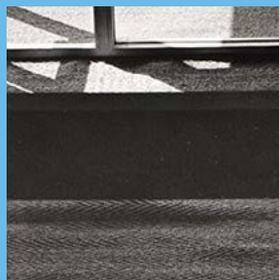
■ Annika Öhrner is an Associate Professor in Art History at Södertörn University and a curator. Her research is profiled towards critical historiography and translocal cultural transfer. She edited the anthology *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop. Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, Södertörn Studies in Art History and Aesthetic in 2017, and co-edited with Marta Edling, the issue “Nordic-Baltic Cross-Border Connectivity”, of *Artl@s Bulletin*, II (2), Purdue University Press, in 2022. The study “Warhol in Translation, Stockholm 1968 : “Many Works and Few Motifs”, was published in Wolf R. (Ed.), *Translating Warhol* (pp. 103–124), Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

***Nordic politics in the Baltic
Nordic-Baltic space
contemporary art
post-1989 period
Nordic Information Offices***

XXIV

Sensing the Nordic

Multisensory art and exhibitions in a Nordic perspective



| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Session chair | Viveka Kjellmer, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Sweden |
| Date | Monday, October 20th |
| Time | 11.00–12.30 & 14.00–15.30 |
| Location | F3010, 3rd Floor |

What constitutes “the Nordic”, and how does it engage our senses within the realms of art and art history? This session explores the implications of a multisensory approach for understanding Nordic art, here defined as art that is inspired by, or problematizes, themes of nature, cultural history, or contemporary life and culture in the Nordic region. Can a sensory perspective enable us to encounter the Nordic in art and exhibitions in novel ways?

The emphasis on visual culture has significantly broadened the field of art history, fostering a less hierarchical and more empirical outlook on what constitutes compelling objects of study. However, in this process, the sensory dimensions of experiencing art may have been overlooked. Art history transcends the visual: our encounters with artworks engage all the senses. As W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) notes: “There are no visual media”, indicating that all visual experiences simultaneously evoke other sensory reactions and memories. Over the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in the multisensory aspects of art. Investigations into olfactory, auditory, gustatory, and tactile dimensions reveal that sensory communication holds significant potential for enriching our understanding of both historical and contemporary art.

This session examines how non-visual aspects are employed in artworks and exhibitions within a Nordic context, with papers addressing olfactory, gustatory, auditory, tactile, or multisensory artworks and exhibition designs. Case studies range from early twentieth-century explorations of the “modern sensorium” to contemporary ecological art, multisensory scenography, and haptic engagements with Nordic landscapes. “The Nordic” is approached variously as a geographical location, a cultural and artistic heritage, an environmental condition, and a broader source of inspiration.

An Inner and Outer Space

A 1970s multisensory Norwegian installation

Frida Forsgren

In Norwegian art history the exhibition *Miljø 70* (1970) in Trondheim is recognized as the first collective exhibition of installation art. The exhibition was organized by the art-collective GRAS and consisted of different multisensory ambiances. The thematic focus was physical and mental pollution, dehumanization, indoctrination, violence, and the Vietnam war. The main part of the installations were figurative and fact-based “tableaus”. They thus depended mainly on the visual. However, one of the installations stood out. Liv Elin Trygstad’s *An Inner and Outer Space* consisted of two separate rooms with two completely different “feelings”. The first room provided the feeling of a cold threatening surveillance society evoked by cold, metallic reflective mirrors, whereas the second explored the vulnerable inner space inside us. In the latter space she made use of soft materials as the sun-dried hay, sawdust, burlap, cushions, velvet, and the rough hemp rope. The materials contributed to create an immersive atmosphere, both poetical and frightening. To add to all these diverse visual stimuli, the room additionally had a muted sound recording with John Coltrane. In Trygstad’s installation, the rich variety of textures, materials, and sounds gave the audience haptic, tactile, and audible stimuli. To her, it was important not simply to reproduce something she had seen, but to communicate what she felt about it. “I constantly try to give more of what I feel than of what I see or have seen”, she stated in an interview from 1967.

My paper argues that Trygstad’s installation was highly radical for its time. And that her radical contribution has been overlooked in studies on Norwegian 1970s art because scholars have overlooked the sensory dimensions of experiencing art. I suggest that recent art historical scholarship stressing the emotive character of art allows us to readdress the sensory qualities inherent in a work as *An Inner and Outer Space*.

■ Frida Forsgren is Associate Professor in Art History at the University of Agder, Norway. She has a PhD in renaissance studies but currently works with American and Nordic Modernism. Her publications include *San Francisco Beat Art in Norway* (2008), *Beat Lives* (2013), *Out of the Shadows* (2015), and *Beatgenerasjonen og kjønnsroller* (2017). Recent publications: “Jack Kerouac’s paintings: color, texture, movement”, *Rethinking Kerouac: Afterlives, Continuities, Reappraisals*, edited by Tomasz Sawczuk and Erik Mortenson, Bloomsbury Academic 2024. “Den levende kroppen. Else Hagen og modernistisk dans”, *Else Hagen—Mellom mennesker*, Orkana Forlag 2024.

installation

GRAS group

Miljø 70

Liv Elin Trygstad

feminism

Experiencing Icelandic Snowscapes across the Haptic Sense

Ivan Juarez

*How can we engage with snowscapes through our tactile perception?
How does tactile experience contribute to understanding Nordic snowscapes?*

Shaping and modeling snow, tracing and imprinting on snowy surfaces. Walking, touching, sensing, feeling. Dialogue between time, physical matter, and winter landscapes, as an experience that reveals diverse haptic landscapes. Low temperature, wind, sunlight; natural dynamics that provide a sensitive approach to snowscapes.

A key approach to becoming aware of our Nordic landscapes focuses on the senses, particularly tactile perception, as a tool for understanding and enhancing our connection with the natural environment. This aesthetic and experiential approach is significant for engaging in a dialogue between the human body's experience and its surrounding environment.

The Icelandic landscape features a unique ecosystem that ranges from volcanic lava fields to glaciers. A territory distinguished by a variety of underground and surface water features present in different states: liquid, gaseous, and solid. With regard to solid water landscapes, snowscapes are distinguished by their constant transformation, closely linked to seasonal cycles. This characteristic identifies it as a fragile and dynamic environment that generates unique transitory atmospheres, where snow manifests itself in different forms and physical states, describing its temperature, density, texture, hardness, humidity, moldability, and, above all, its ephemeral nature. As a result, this territory acts as a dynamic laboratory that can be explored and understood through sensory experiences.

In this context, and with the intention of examining aesthetic, perceptual, and environmental aspects, the present experiential research addresses the haptic sense as a source of cognition of the snowscapes through a series of explorations and interventions in situ. The aim is to examine the poetry of tactile landscapes in relation to the Icelandic winterscape, interconnecting bodily experience, time-based and landscape awareness through sensitive cognition and environmental mindset.

***Icelandic snowscapes
tactile experience
embodied landscape cognition
hapticscapes***



During the process, a series of on-site actions intertwine various snow-covered locations across haptic explorations. In this manner, Icelandic winterscapes are interpreted as a source for understanding the territory, connecting tangible and intangible landscapes in experiences.

■ Ivan Juarez is a landscape architect, environmental artist, and educator working at the intersection of practice, research, and teaching across media, geographies, and scales. Founder of Icelandic Nordcape Lab and researcher and lecturer in Landscape Architecture at The Agricultural University of Iceland, he holds a Doctor of Arts with honors from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Wrocław, Poland; a Master's in Landscape Architecture with distinction from the Budapest Faculty of Landscape Architecture; and a Postgraduate Specialization in Landscape Architecture from ETSAB Barcelona. His work investigates the interrelationship between human and natural environments through artistic processes, including site-specific interventions, public art, and bio-cohabitation spaces.

Nordic Scent and Multisensory Exhibition Design

Understanding and describing olfaction in art

Viveka Kjellmer

How does scent contribute to the experience of Nordic art and exhibition design? This paper investigates the role of olfaction in museums, considering its function as an artistic medium, a scenographic tool, and a means of deepening engagement with Nordic cultural narratives. In a region where nature, seasonal changes, and environmental consciousness shape artistic and curatorial practices, scent offers a compelling yet underexplored dimension of multisensory exhibition design.

A significant curatorial challenge, as noted by Drobnick (2014), is the absence of a shared vocabulary for describing olfactory experiences, limiting visitors' ability to engage with scented exhibitions. In a Nordic context, where artistic expression is often rooted in landscapes, heritage, and material culture, scent has the potential to evoke strong sensory connections to both historical and contemporary narratives. Yet, its presence in art historical discourse remains marginal.

This paper examines how scents contribute to the cultural narratives embedded in art and how contemporary artists use olfaction to problematize themes of environment, climate, or cultural heritage. To address these questions, it introduces olfactory ekphrasis, a method of scent interpretation inspired by ekphrasis in art history, which seeks to translate visual experience into verbal description. Aligning with Gombrich's (1982) notion of *the beholder's share*, this approach acknowledges that scent perception is subjective, shaped by cultural and personal memory. Olfactory ekphrasis offers a tool for understanding both the aesthetic and emotional impact of scent in Nordic exhibitions.

The study examines scenting strategies in Nordic exhibitions, including multisensory scenography and contemporary art installations incorporating olfaction. Through a theoretical lens combining critical scenography, sensory exhibition design, and Nordic cultural discourse, it explores how scent serves as a sensory bridge between nature, history, and contemporary artistic practice, offering new perspectives on Nordic identity in art and museums.

The presentation includes olfactory elements and smelling samples.

■ Viveka Kjellmer is an Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Kjellmer has published studies about the visual language of advertising focusing on the image of scent. Her current research concerns exhibition design, costume, body and multisensory analysis, as well as scented scenography and olfactory art. Kjellmer is a member of *The Sensorial Network in Sweden*, an organization for sensory research and evaluation. She is also a guest researcher at CCHS (Centre for Critical Heritage Studies) at the University of Gothenburg, where she conducts research on scent and multisensory communication.

scented scenographics

olfactory ekphrasis

olfactory art

multisensory museum

Scenography of Sustainability

Embodied encounters and agency in the exhibition spaces of Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art

Olga Nikolaeva

The paper presents an embodied exploration of the multisensory exhibition *Living Structures* held in the Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art (Denmark) during Autumn 2024–Spring 2025. Informed by the framework of scenographic materialism with its focus on human and non-human agents and meaning-making as well as an affective embodied exploration, and, what I term an embodied curiosity, the paper explores advantages and failures of the exhibition's focus on sustainability. The paper accepts the conference call "why so Nordic?" as a provocation to critically explore how experiences, meanings, and places are constructed and seen in stereotyped Nordic contexts. In this context, Louisiana Museum is accepted as an ideally Nordic space for engagement with sustainability as the only right way for future, with its clean, open, and accessible spaces. The exploration of the exhibition addresses the crucial for sustainability interplay of different agencies and stories and questions "how" and "if" the multisensorial space of the exhibition allows such interplay among visitors' bodies, objects, images, sounds, and smells. Furthermore, the exploration is informed by my simultaneous position as a museum's visitor, scenography scholar, and lecturer in design and sustainability. The interplay of personalities and agencies paves a way for the interdisciplinary methodology of the analysis presented in the paper and allows to critically explore potentials and lacks of exhibition spaces in relation to sustainability.

■ Dr. Olga Nikolaeva is an independent researcher and specialist in feminist and political scenography. She is also a substitute lecturer in Design/Visual Communication and Sustainability at Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her research interests lie in the sphere of holistic scenography with focus on materiality, agency, affect, and meaning-making. She is also working on application of scenography to interventional protests. Her recent publications focus scenography of trauma in works of women theatre makers in the contemporary Russian theatre and scenographic reading of interventional protests.

scenography
sustainability
new materialism
agency
Louisiana Museum

The Modern Sensorium of Per Krohg and Isaac Grünewald

MaryClaire Pappas

In the 1910s, the Norwegian Per Krohg and his close friend and colleague, the Swedish painter Isaac Grünewald, sought to capture in their paintings the dynamic sensory experience of the modern city. Paintings such as Krohg's *Duer* (1914) or Grünewald's *The Violinist* (1915) incorporate visual elements like musical notes and clanging colors to stimulate an auditory response, inviting the viewers to imagine the sounds of modern urban life. This paper analyzes Krohg's and Grünewald's multisensorial paintings to demonstrate how these artists encouraged the viewer to transcend a visual experience and engage their entire sensorium. Grünewald articulated his position on the modern sensorium in his 1918 publication *Den nya renässansen inom konsten*, where he criticized the passive, complaisant looking embraced by modern Swedes, which he argued, left Swedes ill-equipped to handle the rapid technological and environmental changes of the early twentieth century. Simply put, Swedes held a distaste for modernity because they felt overwhelmed by the somatic experience created in modern industrial life. This paper argues that Krohg and Grünewald used painting as a pedagogical tool teaching the viewer to use their senses to look, hear, and feel with the subjective senses of the artist. Through paintings depicting a multisensory experience the viewer could learn to enjoy and understand the multivalent experience of modernity. Once learned, the viewer would serve as the ideal citizen, much like how the artist's imagined themselves, and serve social democracy and civic identity.

■ MaryClaire Pappas is a Professor of Art History at Savannah College of Art and Design. She specializes in Norwegian and Swedish modern art of the early 1900s with an interest in color theory, national identity, and affect in modern painting. Before beginning at SCAD, Pappas held positions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Indiana University, and Munch Museum in Oslo. Her research has been funded by the Einar and Eva Lund Haugen Memorial Scholarship, the Swedish Fulbright Commission, the Lois Roth Endowment, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, among others.

modern art
Expressionism
somatic
modernity
urban studies

Olfactory Orientations and Disorientations of the Nordic in Contemporary Art

Karin Silverin

In this paper I explore how smells used within the context of the artwork can work to orient and disorient the body in relation to notions of “the Nordic” and specifically Nordic nature. Following Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology, orientation is here used to indicate a feeling of familiarity dependent on histories of inhabitation. Disorientation, in turn, is the feeling of being out of place, the loss of perspective where other, unexpected orientations can emerge. By engaging phenomenologically with two multisensory artworks which both centers on notions of place and nature—Peter de Cupere’s *Smoke Cloud* (2021) and Goldin+Senneby’s *Pheromone Traps* (2025)—I explore how the affective, mnemonic, and bodily connections engendered through smell work as orienting and disorienting factors.

Goldin+Senneby’s *Pheromone Traps* revolves around issues of disease and ecology and consists of a forest-like installation of commercially available bark beetle traps that fill the gallery space and emanates artificial, species-specific pheromones that in turn mimic the smell of pine resin. De Cupere’s *Smoke Cloud* consists of an A-frame ladder, above which a cloud of cotton hangs. The visitors can climb the ladder and stick their head in the cloud, where the smell of air pollution, adapted to mirror the local, Danish conditions, emanates.

Departing from the two artworks I argue that smell constitutes a specific agency that emerges *in-between* the artwork and the feeling, sensing and remembering subject, and that meaning is dependent on this encounter. I further suggest that olfactory sensibilities brought forward in these works relate to wider notions and discourses of “Nordicness” and Nordic nature. In conclusion, I consider how the agency of smell within art has the potential for fostering embodied connections, highlighting emotional orientations as well as critically challenge these orientations and preconceived notions and imaginations of Nordic nature.

■ Karin Silverin is a third year PhD candidate at the University of Gothenburg. Her research interests are contemporary olfactory and multisensory art. Her thesis focuses on questions of epistemology and interpretation of aesthetic smelling experiences—working to broaden ocular-centric notions of art. Her theoretical focus includes affect, phenomenology and the concept of aesthetic atmospheres. She also has an interest in art pedagogy, both within the university and museum.

olfactory art
affect
phenomenology
nature

How to Dance with a Tree

Nordic ecological art in the times of climate change

Mårten Snickare

Climate change gives rise to multisensory experiences: the smell, sound, and scorching smoke of a forest fire; the sight and ominous sound of ice blocks coming off a glacier and plunging into the sea. In a similar way, today's ecological art often appeals to our senses in plural: Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* consisted of twelve blocks of ice, harvested from the sea outside Nuuk and placed in a circle like a clock. When staged in connection with COP21 in Paris 2015, visitors engaged in the artwork, not only by looking, but also touching, caressing, even kissing the slowly melting ice. *Forest Calling*, an artwork by Malin Arnell and Åsa Elzén, consists of 3,7 hectares of forest in Central Sweden taken out of production. The artists invite visitors to try out other ways of relating to the forest than to profit from it: to walk in silence; to stand still and carefully observe the manifoldness of organic life; to lay down and enjoy the scent of humus and fungi; to dance with a tree.

This paper argues that artworks like these are not primarily to be regarded as mimetic gestures, or as representations of certain aspects of Nordic landscapes exposed to climate change. Rather, they are relational: they invite the viewer to become participant, and to connect with the artworks with multiple senses. By extension, these artworks may open up for a re-envisioning of the subject/object relations between humans and their lived environment, suggesting less hierarchical and more sustainable ways of relating to the ecosystems that we form part of. And they do so by means of stimulating and engaging, not only our gaze and mind but also our other senses and bodily motions.

■ Mårten Snickare is Professor of Art History at Stockholm University and Director of Accelerator, the university's space for art and meeting place for art and research. Formerly the curator of drawings at Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Snickare has a continuing interest in museums, display, and the materiality of art. His research on the interlinked histories of museums and colonialism resulted in the monograph *Colonial Objects in Early Modern Sweden and Beyond. From the Kunstkammer to the Current Museum Crisis* (2022). In his current research Snickare explores the ways in which contemporary art approaches the environmental crisis. He recently contributed with a chapter to the anthology *Ekologisk konstvetenskap* (2024).

ecological art
climate change
relational aesthetics
Nordic landscapes

Scenographic Snow

Art historical approaches to Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*

Astrid von Rosen

The art form and practice of scenography, or related phenomena, has been theorized and studied by art historians since the inception of the academic discipline. Traditionally, scenography in the theatre or more broadly, has been understood as an image or background in the theatre.

In recent years scenography has to an increasing extent been theorized as a multisensory event, actively embracing and instructing actors as well as audience members rather than leaving them with a distant and passive visual representation. It is worth noting that scholars from the Nordic region have contributed substantially to this domain.

In this paper I will mobilize ideas from new scenography theory to explore how the very Nordic phenomenon of snow can function as a particularly powerful agent of performance. Selected accounts of memories and visual representations from productions of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's play *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) will form the bases for the analysis. It is worth noting that the play premiered in Helsinki 1897 at two theatres: Svenska Teatern and Suomalainen Teatteri (the Finnish theatre).

Norwegian artist Edward Munch, who is said to have identified with the troubled main character in *John Gabriel Borkman*, described the drama as "the most powerful winter landscape in Scandinavian art". In line with Munch's wintery understanding of the drama, I will focus on examples from the 4th act, where snow is particularly present as a scenographic feature.

■ Astrid von Rosen is Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, and director of the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies at the University of Gothenburg. In her research she combines critical historiographical and digital approaches to art and performing arts heritage. Among her recent publications can be mentioned "Scenography: From marginalized study object to vital theoretical concept" in *Swedish art historiography: Institutionalization, identity, and practice* (2022).

scenography

multisensory event

snow

Ibsen

John Gabriel Borkman

XXV



Søsterskap

On contemporary Nordic
photography

Session chairs

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir,

PhD, Professor, University of Iceland,
Reykjavik, Iceland

Anna Tellgren,

PhD, Curator of Photography
and Head of Research, Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, Sweden

Date

Tuesday, October 21st

Time

10.45–12.15

Location

F3010, 3rd Floor

The Nordic countries are often celebrated for their high levels of gender equality and are recognized globally as leaders in this area. The *Søsterskap* session aims to critically examine the concept of the welfare state while spotlighting the significant contributions of contemporary Nordic women photographers. This session will explore how these artists interrogate and subvert normative constructs of gender through an intersectional lens. Additionally, the session will amplify marginalized voices that have historically been overlooked in both art and societal discussions. We will specifically focus on the exhibition *Søsterskap—Contemporary Nordic Photography*, which took place in 2023 at Les Rencontres de la photographie in Arles, France.

In this context, the artists will be recognized as key agents of social change, navigating and articulating critical issues related to gender roles, labor dynamics, migration, and social structures. Through this lens, we can thoroughly investigate the diverse experiences of women photographers, illuminating their vital role in creating culturally and politically charged dialogues within the Nordic welfare state. Situating their work within broader theoretical frameworks will allow the session to engage in transversal conversations drawing on insights from scholars such as Judith Butler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, alongside more recent Indigenous voices like Rauna Kuokkanen. Participants will be invited to delve into the complexities of representation within the welfare state and to reflect on how these dynamics challenge existing power hierarchies.

Facets of Care in Contemporary Photography

Marthe T. Fjellestad

In a time of recurring crisis, what role might photographs and photography have in individual and collective practices and politics of care? This was a key question as four members of the UiT research group Worlding Northern Art (WONA)—Elin Haugdal, Hanne Hammer Stien, Stephanie von Spreter, and myself—probed the intersections of photography and care, first in a conference (2022), followed by the recent themed issue of the journal *Photographies* (2025). In investigating care, we recognized it as a conflicted term. It denotes on the one hand carefulness, comfort, providing for others' welfare through empathy, and on the other hand anxiety, the act of carrying burdens, and going through—and staying with—trouble.

In this paper, I will expand upon our co-authored "Introduction" (2025) in a discussion of current photographic practices where notions of care can be described as a driving force, and perhaps also a core outcome. I will consider developments in the practices of Hilde Honerud, who has worked with refugees in Norway and Greece in the extended series *Reality Slipped Into a Symbol* (2018–2022), and Alice Cazenave, photographic artist and a leader of the British organization Sustainable Darkroom.

Honerud's use of visual and formal abstraction and distortion, resulting at times in grotesquely altered human shapes, simultaneously belies the artist's inherent care for her subjects and underscores the entangled nature of global migration. Cazenave, using multiple means including plant-based chemistry, critically examines the dirty and violent history of photography and engages with communities and environments affected by colonialism and the current ecological crises. Both artists' practices can be seen as "actions [aimed to] instigate change".

■ Marthe Tolnes Fjellestad is trained as an art photographer and holds an MA in Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice from Chelsea College of Art, London, and an MA in Photographic History and Theory from De Montfort University, Leicester. With Solveig Greve, she published *Starman—Sophus Tromholt Photographs 1882–1883* (Forlaget Press, 2018), and with Shannon Egan, she co-curated *Across the West Toward the North: Norwegian and American Landscape Photography*, touring 2020–2024, and co-edited the accompanying book (University of Utah Press, 2022). Fjellestad is the curator at Perspektivet Museum in Tromsø.

contemporary photography
photographic practices
care-taking/care-giving
Photographies
eco-conscious photography

Advantages and Challenges of Sisterhood

Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger

In summer 2023, the exhibition titled *Søsterskap* (Sisterhood) featured 17 Nordic artists from three different generations at Les Rencontres de la photographie festival in Arles, France. The exhibition was collectively curated by seven curators from five countries and the aim of it was to focus on two concepts and their intersections: the Nordic welfare state and intersectional feminism.

The curatorial statement for the exhibition starts with optimistic tone: "Often referred to as 'the Nordic model', it is characterised by a public sector that provides all citizens with social security and welfare services including day-care and education and has brought significant improvement to living and working conditions. Basic values underlying the model are openness, tolerance and the conviction that all people are equal." Later the tone in the concept text turns less optimistic and continued: "Family life, gender roles, labour, ethnicity and colonialism are some of the topics discussed in *Søsterskap*, which also considers the darker sides of this model, based on exclusion and continuous economic growth that is accelerating the global ecological crisis."

Two years after the exhibition, Rastenberger, who was one of the seven curators of the exhibition, analyzes the *Søsterskap* exhibition as part of a trend in which exhibitions are caught in the crossfire of expectations as part of the global crises of our time, including the crisis of the welfare state. She also talks about the collective curatorial process with its advantages and challenges. Rastenberger discusses the exhibition's media reception in the international media and reflects on the potential of exhibitions and the curatorial process associated with them to bring about change.

■ Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger (PhD) works as the museum director at The Finnish Museum of Photography. From 2016 to 2022 she worked as the Professor of Exhibition Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, being also responsible for the MA-program for curatorial and exhibition studies, Praxis. She is co-founder and artistic director of The Festival of Political Photography. Rastenberger has extensive experience in exhibition projects and writing on photography. She has co-edited the books *Why Exhibit—Positions on Exhibiting Photographies* (2018) and *Why Exhibit vol. 2—On Photography Curation* (2024). Rastenberger is interested in exhibition as critical practice, feminist curation, and long-distance running.

sisterhood
intersectionality
Nordic model
curating
contemporary photography

Embodied Narratives

Exploring *Søsterskap* through an intersectional lens

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir

This paper engages with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of the notion of "universal sisterhood", which presumes a shared gender experience across racial and national boundaries—often privileging Western women while marginalizing non-Western voices. Building on Mohanty's emphasis on narrative complexity in political thought, I examine how intersectional, gendered immigration stories challenge hegemonic discourses. Focusing on the work of Dýrfinna Benita Basalan, an Icelandic artist of mixed Filipino descent, I analyze how her drawings and installations—many based on childhood memories and personal photographs—serve as counter-narratives that disrupt dominant representations of migrant identities. Employing an intersectional and visual analysis methodology, this study explores how Basalan's art interrogates issues of race, religion, and identity within a secular Nordic context. It demonstrates how her artistic practice transforms personal histories into powerful sites of resistance, fostering visibility for marginalized communities and enriching debates on gender, and domestic violence.

■ Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (PhD) is Professor of Art History, Art Theory, and Curatorial Studies at the University of Iceland. Her research interests encompass historiography, contemporary art practices, the history and theory of photography, visual culture, and curatorial studies. She collaborates regularly with the National Gallery of Iceland and Reykjavík Art Museum, contributing to historical research initiatives and curatorial projects. Her international engagements include curatorial work with Bozar Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels and the European Capital of Culture initiative. Most recent publications include "From Exploration to Representation: The Cultural Construction of Icelandicity in Gaimard's Atlases" in *Inter-Nord: International Journal of Arctic Studies* (2024).

contemporary art
feminism
immigration
intersectionality
gender
sisterhood

Feminist Strategies in the Works of the Photographer Tuija Lindström

Anna Tellgren

One of the starting points for the exhibition *Søsterskap* in Arles 2023 was the strong presence of several generations of women photographers in the Nordic countries. From the 1970s, a group of women photographers emerged and became active in shifting the documentary, classic black-and-white photography, towards the more poetic and private. Among them you can find Bente Geving, Raakel Kuukka, and Tuija Lindström. These women have been key role models, and forerunners to younger generations of Nordic photographers from the 1990s and onwards.

Tuija Lindström (1950–2017) began working with photography after her move from Helsinki to Stockholm in the mid-1970s. She finished her studies at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in 1984, where she started working with large-format cameras and advanced darkroom techniques. Nudes were a theme she had been exploring for years and developed into the conceptual series *Kvinnorna vid Tjursjön* (The Girls at Bull's Pond) from 1991. Lindström was the first woman to be appointed professor, in 1992, at the School of Photography, University of Gothenburg. Under her leadership for ten years the curriculum took a noticeably more theoretical and artistic direction. Throughout her career, she continued to experiment and renew her work on portraits, landscapes, and still-lives.

This paper will discuss the role of the feminist strategies in the works of Tuija Lindström. Although she never defined herself as a feminist artist or was part of the Swedish feminist movement it is interesting to analyze her approach in this context. If we look beyond the photographic scene and instead compare her to artists such as VALIE EXPORT (Austria), Katalin Ladik (Serbia), and Ana Mendieta (Cuba), her work appears in a broader and different light within film, video, and performance, and as part of a feminist avant-garde.

■ Anna Tellgren (PhD) is Curator of Photography and Head of Research at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. She has curated numerous exhibitions including *Lars Tunbjörk. Winter/Home* (2007), *Annika Elisabeth von Hausswolff Alternative Secrecy* (2021), and *Francesca Woodman. On Being an Angel* (2015) that was touring internationally for several years. Among her most recent publications are contributions in *A World History of Women Photographers* (2022) and *Fotografihistorier. Fotografi och bildbruk i Sverige* (2022) a new history of Swedish photography. Previously, she has worked as researcher and lecturer at the Department of Art History at Stockholm University and she is in the Board of *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*.

Tuija Lindström
feminist avant-garde
sisterhood
Nordic photography
contemporary photography



XXVI

Under the Protection of the Nordic Democracy and Welfare

Artist collectives, collectivism, and
activist future-making of the 1970s
and beyond

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Session chairs | Riikka Haapalainen, Senior University Lecturer in the Department of Art and Media, Aalto University, Finland |
| | Hanna Johansson, Professor, Contemporary Art Research, Academy of Fine Arts, Finland |
| | Riikka Niemelä, Researcher, University of Turku, Finland |
| Date | Wednesday, October 22nd |
| Time | 10.45–12.15 |
| Location | F3006, 3rd Floor |

The session focuses on artist collectives and collective artmaking in the Nordic countries, especially in the 1970s. The decade is often associated with a polarized atmosphere, radical political positions versus reactionary attitudes. The collectivity that set in, was a counterforce that tested the unity of Modernism, and sought to actively reform art and society.

The 1970s served as a divider, after which society and the economy emphasized human-centered, individualistic ideals of growth, consumption, conformity, and neoliberal market economy. By looking at the activities of the artist collectives of the 1970s and the artistic and social aspirations that motivated them, it is possible to build an understanding of alternative futures.

The currents of student radicalism, experimentalism, and interdisciplinary artistic collaboration of the early avant-garde were carried on in the communal efforts of the 1970s. We can assume that the ideas of collectivity continue in the 2020s, for example in the actions of Extinction Rebellion, activism, and DIY activism.

The session asks whether there is something particularly Nordic in the Nordic artists collectives' activities that Nordic democracy and welfare state model made possible.

Art and Life

An investigation of Irma Salo Jæger's socially engaged art in the late 1960s and early 1970s

Hanne Cecilie Gulstad

Irma Salo Jæger (b. 1928, Finland) came to Norway in 1954 to study at the art academy and has since left a strong mark in the Norwegian art scene. She is known for her abstract non-figurative paintings, and her tireless work teaching a younger generation about form and color principles. Despite having a central role in Norwegian artistic life, her strong social commitment has been little highlighted in Norwegian art history. In this presentation I will see how, in her work with the *Bøler investigation* in 1969 and her work in the female artist group *Park 62*, she worked to unite art and life as described in Peter Bürger's theory of the historical avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century.

Bøler is one of the satellite cities that flourished outside Norway's capital Oslo in the post-war era. The satellite cities provided more and better housing for common people and helped even out social differences. With these Oslo took one step into modernity and into the welfare society. With the *Bøler investigation* Irma Salo Jæger together with several others questioned how the satellite city welcomed its inhabitants. The reason for the investigation was to examine social needs such as well-being, identity, and living environment. It was an interdisciplinary investigation involving many different professionals, from architects, landscape architects, to artists living in the artists' residences Trolltun in Bøler, including Irma Salo Jæger.

After the work in Bøler, Jæger formed the artist group *Park 62* together with Inger Sitter and Berit Soot Kløvig. Here she continued to improve "the gray and boring satellite cities". Together the group performed several exhibitions, participated in lectures and seminars, and became almost like an employment agency for visualization in the public space. The aim of this presentation is to place Jæger's commitment in a social and theoretical context. I will highlight how her art can connect to Peter Bürger's theory of linking art and life together and highlight how she worked in the legacy of the art historical avant-garde.

■ Hanne Cecilie Gulstad (b. 1986) works as a curator at Kunstsilo in Kristiansand, Norway. Here she works with the museum's collection focusing on contemporary art and crafts, and with The Tangen Collection, focusing on Nordic Modernism. Among her curated exhibitions are *Pioneers of Modernism* examining female pioneers and *Concrete* examining non-figurative painting as a new movement in Finland in the postwar era. She holds a MA in Modern Culture from the University of Copenhagen and a BA in Art History from NTNU in Trondheim.

art in public space
avant-garde strategies
interdisciplinary collaboration
the welfare society
satellite cities

Collective Art Making and Environmental Change in the Nordic Context in the 1970s and 1980s

Hanna Johansson

In recent years the art world has shown renewed interest in collectives and collective art making, although its practices have remained largely premised on individualistic notions. However, artists have established collectives also before and often they have had a significant role in communities, and they have even enabled societal or ecological change.

This paper studies the role of collective art making in two cases, which both have had significant transformative potential not only in the art-world but more broadly in the society. Both cases are also deeply rooted in the Nordic welfare state and perhaps enabled by the welfare society. Ararat was an exhibition in Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1976 organized by the Kapsylen work co-operative. The exhibition became a real thought awakener on environmental issues, focusing on recycling, small-scale production, transparent democratic processes, alternative energy and construction, organic farming, public transport in line with the 1960s experiments with art and technology. The second case to be discussed are the activities made by Talas Collective. The collective was formed in the late 1980s around researchers and artists involved in the protection of old Talaskangas forests. The collective can be regarded as one of the pioneers of so called activism that combines art and activism in Finland. Through activities focused on the collective's environmental themes, I will ask, on the one hand how art contributes to social debate, and, on the other hand, how collective artistic activities can contribute to environmental protection. And finally, do these Nordic art collectives differ from the early artistic collectives in the U.S. like for example Drop City founded in 1966.

■ Hanna Johansson works as a Professor in Contemporary Art Research at the Academy of Fine Arts and is an adjunct professor at the University of Helsinki. Contemporary art and its ecological dimensions as well as art's potential to convey thinking are her core area of interest. She has published widely on contemporary art and artists in Finland and beyond. Johansson has had several positions of trust in art organizations. She holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Helsinki.

artists' collectives
activism
alternative society
Nordic welfare state
ecological change

Pink, Feminism, and Community

Women's building forum at the exhibition *Boplats 80*

Frida Rosenberg

Pink was the color of a full-scale installation of an apartment exhibited at Kungsträdgården, Stockholm in 1980. The apartment was a radical action promoting more color, more community, and more females in the housing sector. It was radical in its approach against the background of the Million Housing Program (1965–1974), which was all too similar in its essence. But even more so as the women behind the installation had not been invited to participate in the exhibition.

The installation was set forward by the recently formed Women's Building forum (Kvinnors Byggforum). The media highlighted them as one of the key moments of the exhibition, providing women with an unusually large stage to showcase their often-underutilized knowledge as architects and users. However small they were as a group in Sweden, their quest represents a Nordic phenomenon. In the late 1970s, groups of female architects from the Nordic countries began collaborating, leading to the first conference in a series of six, *Building and Living on Women's Terms* held in Kungälv, Sweden, in 1979. This was followed by five more conferences. These Nordic seminars provided a platform for discussing and developing architecture and living environments from a women's perspective.

This paper will use the pink apartment as a point of departure to discuss the Women's Building forum in a Nordic context and how this gave shape to an alternative future in housing design, regulation, and opportunities for women in architecture.

■ Frida Rosenberg is an architect and curator of 20th Century architecture at ArkDes where she was vital in the installation of the permanent Collections Exhibition. Previously she was a lecturer at KTH Architecture School where her research and teaching focused on mass housing from a historical and contemporary practice perspective. Recent publications include "Catherine Bauer, International Exchanges, and Swedish Housing Policy" in *Architecture and Welfare Nordic Perspectives*, ed. Thordis Arrhenius et al., 2025.

women in architecture
community
feminism
activism
Nordic cooperation

XXVII

Was There a Nordic Renaissance?



Session chairs **Johan Eriksson,**
Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor,
Department of Art History,
Uppsala University, Sweden

Henrik Widmark,
Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor,
Department of Art History,
Uppsala University, Sweden

Date Tuesday, October 21st

Time 9.00-10.30 & 10.45-12.15

Location F3005, 3rd Floor

The ideas and artistic influences of the Renaissance movement reached the Nordic countries gradually from the late 15th century and onwards. An influx of artists, architects, and scholars brought work and knowledge to the North, and patrons who sought new ways to communicate drew inspiration from their continental forerunners. The art and architecture of, what have been called the Nordic Renaissance, have in many ways been regarded as a regional or national phenomena, but the ideals and role models were always found abroad.

Research on Renaissance Scandinavia has recently increased, and the purpose of this session is to share new results regarding art and architecture with focus on space, cultural transfer, material culture, re-use, anachronic aspects, and shifted meanings. From the late 15th century until the mid-17th century the continental Renaissance inspired and influenced the art and architecture of the Church, the princely courts and the nobility in the Nordic countries. The Reformation gave rise to new interiors in both churches and private environments, from small chapels to cathedrals and in private domestic spaces, representative palaces, and ship cabins. In what way do the Nordic Renaissance differ from the continental role models and can we actually talk about a Nordic Renaissance?

Locating the Renaissance in the Early 16th Century Church Wall Paintings of Finland

Case of the Rymättylä Church

Janika Aho

The renaissance in Finland has traditionally been associated with the renovations of Turku castle and the court of John the Duke of Finland and his wife Catherine Jagello in the 1562–1563. The renaissance paintings of Finland consist of a few secular motifs painted on the walls of room nr. 40 in the Turku Castle (c. 1540). In addition, the wall paintings of Isokyrö Church (1560) in Ostrobothnia, the only surviving mid-16th century paintings in Finland, have been considered as the only renaissance church wall paintings in Finland. All in all, the wall paintings from 1530 onwards until the early 17th century are very few and the period seems to represent a “silent age” in the production of monumental paintings in Finland.

The earlier, pre-reformation church wall paintings (c. 1500–1530) belong to the catholic medieval tradition and the taxonomy of medieval has been the setting of their research since the early days of art history in Finland. However, some of the late medieval church wall paintings dated to the pre-reformation era contain features such as clothes and armor of the characters, use of central perspective and classical architectural elements which tell of “renaissance influence”. Especially the case of Rymättylä Church paintings (1514), attributed to Lars Snickare, poses an interesting example of the question: What is a medieval painting, and what is a renaissance painting?

In my paper, I explore the Rymättylä Church paintings which are in many ways unique among the early 16th century wall paintings in Finland. Their presumed painter is known by name, their motifs display a simple narrative centered on the passion history of Christ, and the composition and details of the motifs such as Deposition and Uprising of Christ make the art historian question if there was a renaissance at the end of the medieval.

■ Janika Aho is a PhD researcher from University of Helsinki and shall complete her dissertation considering the late medieval wall paintings in Finland 1500–1530 this year (2025). Her article-based dissertation has mainly focused on the morality and memento mori motifs of the late medieval wall paintings and on the role of the wall paintings as an encyclopedic explanation of the world to the medieval viewer. The Rymättylä Church paintings have been her latest focus on her last article of the thesis, and they have opened new horizons for her future research—namely the interest in Nordic renaissance and its existence.

church wall paintings
catholic images
late medieval
Western Finland

Garden Imagery 1475–1525

The case of the prints and altarpieces from Flanders

Anna Andréasson Sjögren

Can garden images contribute to our knowledge of Renaissance art in Sweden 1475–1525? In my recently published thesis in archaeology, I use art created and/or used within the area that today is Sweden to study views on and use of gardens. Inspired by archaeology and assemblage-thinking, I focus on physical art pieces as materializations of motifs, within unique contexts, continuously situated within space and time throughout their histories.

About 330 of the collected images are dated 1475–1525. They give some interesting clues to the contact networks of the time, and the exchange of ideas and art. Here, I would like to focus on woodcuts and altar pieces from Flanders. Using specific examples, I aim to highlight some physical evidence of imported woodcuts, their influence on church murals within the Swedish area at the time, and the changing import directions of altarpieces during the same period.

■ Anna Andréasson Sjögren is a Swedish historical archaeologist, who utilizes her knowledge in archaeology, art history, textual history, garden history, and botany to study gardens of all ages. Earlier this year she defended her thesis *Från Kål till Paradis: Medeltidens trädgårdar inom dagens Sverige* (From Kale to Paradise: Medieval Gardens in Sweden) at the Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies, Stockholm University. In the thesis archaeological sources, written sources, and art historical sources are used to create a new and deeper understanding of Medieval gardens in the Nordic area.

material culture
assemblage thinking
cultural transfer
Nordic Renaissance
interdisciplinary studies
international Birgittine influences
Gardens of Mary
Hunt of the Unicorn

Collecting Plants and Prints

Botanical *Herbaria* and literature among women in the Vasa dynasty circa 1550–1650

Elin Bergman

The Vasa dynasty's attempts to manifest and legitimate their power through representative building, art collections, and other dynastic efforts are established facts within the research of early modern Swedish art history. As has been noted in previous research, these aspirations included efforts to introduce continental garden design through invitations renowned gardeners and architects. The kings Gustav I, Eric XIV, John III, and Karl IX are known to have cultivated gardens surrounding the palaces in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gripsholm, and Nyköpingshus, and invited gardeners from Germany and France to expand the horticultural knowledge in Sweden. However, gardening and interest in botany was not a solely male activity in the early modern period, nor in the Vasa family and the royal collections bear witness of this interest among the women around the throne. For example, Elisabet Vasa (1549–1597, daughter of Gustav I and Margareta Leijonhufvud) had a printed copy of Adam Lonitzer's *Kreuterbuch* first printed in Frankfurt am Main in 1557 in her private library and her niece Anna Vasa (1568–1625, daughter of Johan III and Catherine Jagiellon) held a medicinal interest in botany and financed the print of Simon Syrenius' influential *Herbarium* (1613) in Poland. Later, queen Christina (1626–1689) incorporated volumes of Leonhard Rauwolf's renowned *herbaria* with dried specimens, part of the war booty from Prague, into the royal collection. This paper therefore seeks to illuminate the botanical and horticultural interest—and in some cases their direct contributions to the field—by women in the royal family circa 1550–1650 through sources in their libraries and collections and thereby put emphasis on cultural exchange relating to botany and garden culture between Sweden and the continent during the early modern period.

■ Elin Bergman is a post-doctoral researcher and defended her thesis with the short title *Trädgårdens textur* at Stockholm University in 2024 and has since the defense worked as a lecturer and taught art and architectural history from pre-history to today on all academic levels at different Swedish universities. As of 2025, Bergman has been awarded a two-year full time post-doctoral stipend from the Ellen Ahlström och Anna Terserus stiftelse for the project *Ephemeral green spaces: Garden ideals, parks and horticultural exhibitions in general art and industrial expositions 1866–1930*.

royal collections
collection practices
the Vasa dynasty
herbaria
botanical literature

Portraiture in 16th Century Sweden and Finland

Anna Franck

The research—still in its early stages—focuses on 16th century portrait painting in Sweden, Finland included. Portraits begin to appear in Sweden during this period following the development in Europe. King Gustav Vasa started commissioning portraits early on his reign, and gradually the habit spread also among aristocracy. My main objective is to study portraits commissioned by aristocracy as an object group that forms a part of period's material and visual culture.

To examine the meaning portraits had and how widely they were commissioned, it is important to keep in mind that many portraits have been lost or destroyed, and some have been moved or evacuated and lost the connection to their original context. I use object biography as a method to examine the portraits still surviving in public and private collections to understand their lifepaths.

Few painted portraits from this time survive in Finnish collections and art history has traditionally largely overlooked profane paintings in Finland before 17th century. However, the political situation of the 16th century gave many Finnish nobles exceptional chances to reach important positions as well as gather wealth. Recent studies have used archival sources to enrich our understanding of their material culture. This research aims to extend this to portraiture. My first article focuses on the portrait of Klas Kristersson (Horn af Åminne, c. 1518–1566), three versions of which survive in the collection of Swedish Nationalmuseum and one 19th-century copy in the collection of Turku City. Klas Kristersson's portrait suggests that tastes and consumption practices of Finnish nobles and noble families reflected the ones in more central areas of the kingdom and should be studied side by side.

■ Anna Franck holds MA degrees in European and World History from University of Turku and Art History and Curating from University of Birmingham. She works as a curator in Turku City Art Museum. At the moment she is on leave to advance her research as well as studies in Archival Science at the University of Turku.

portrait painting
object biography
material history
visual culture
lost objects

Representations of Children on Grave Monuments during the Early Modern Period (1500–1700) in Sweden

Urszula Frick

On 18th of January 1566 Princess Isabella Vasa died at only two years old leaving her parents, Princess Catherine Jagiellon and her husband John III Vasa devastated. Almost 20 years later, in 1580 a small grave monument in alabaster was erected in Strängnäs cathedral to commemorate their child. It was beautifully designed and carved by a Flemish painter and sculptor, Willem Boy. Isabella, lies on a catafalque, resting her head on a soft brocade cushion, wearing a gown decorated with gemstones and chains and a headpiece covering her short strands of hair. Only her joined hands are a subtle reminder that she is forever asleep. Today, Isabella's grave is a prime example of children's depiction in funerary art in Sweden during the early modern period. However, her tombstone is not the only example of the depiction of a child on grave monuments in Sweden from that time and in my research, I focus on identifying and analyzing more examples that are still hidden in the Swedish churches.

Internationally, the depictions of children on grave monuments were not uncommon in the early modern Europe, despite the high mortality of children during that time. The examples from Lower countries, Germany, England, and Poland suggests that this phenomenon in the funeral sculpture peaked between the years 1500–1700. Moreover, the similarities in those depictions suggest that they were shaped by artistical and cultural trends streaming through Europe back then.

I would like to discuss Swedish examples of representations of children on grave monuments from years 1500–1700, and their correspondence with known international counterparts. I want to lift both artistical similarities and a local influence.

■ Urszula Frick is a PhD candidate at the Department of Art History at the Uppsala University. She studied art history in several European universities such as University of Warsaw in Poland and University of Münster in Germany. She is interested in researching cultural transfer between Sweden and other countries of early modern Europe, especially between Sweden, Poland, and Italy. Her PhD research project focuses on representations of children on early modern grave monuments in Sweden and the national and international context of this phenomenon.

children funerary art
funeral sculpture in Sweden
cultural transfer
European renaissance
European funeral sculpture

What an Early Portrait of Queen Christina Might Tell Us about the Renaissance in the Nordic Countries

Charlotta Krispinsson

The aim of this paper is to discuss if, and how, a Nordic Renaissance was preconditioned by the invention of the printing press. The main example will be a stylistic comparison between Flemish prints and a portrait of the Swedish Queen Christina, (probably) painted by the Stockholm painter Jacob Heinrich Elbfas in 1637, when Christina was 11 years old. Of the several surviving versions of this portrait, the one with Stockholm seen through a window in the background in the Nationalmuseum's Swedish Portrait Collection is the best known today. The linear character of these portraits, as well as their similarity to other portraits of this period in terms of settings and poses, indicate a dependence on prints as models. This demonstrates how imported prints were used as models by painters in the Nordic countries to repeat and imitate Renaissance iconography and aesthetics.

The topic of this paper is approached theoretically through Christopher S. Wood's conceptual rethinking of the Renaissance north of the Alps, as developed in his *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (2008). According to Wood, the Gutenberg revolution should be seen as a more important catalyst for artistic and cultural change in Northern Europe than the need to reconnect with antiquity that motivated the Italian Renaissance. Whereas the Italians of the fifteenth century saw their own age as a "new beginning" and a rebirth of classical antiquity after its interruption by the Middle Ages, the Germans saw themselves as the last in a long, unbroken lineage that connected them to their ancient past. According to the same logic, the Renaissance ruler Erik XIV of Sweden considered himself as the last in a long lineage of Swedish kings named Erik, going back to Goths and Wends. Since the Nordic countries were closely connected to German culture and politics, I will discuss how Wood's theory and the paradigm of print culture can help us to better understand the Renaissance in the Nordic countries.

■ Charlotta Krispinsson is Senior Lecturer in Art History at Södertörn University in Sweden. She completed her PhD at Stockholm University in 2016. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Art and Visual History at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2019–2022, and a research fellow at the Rubenianum in Antwerp in spring 2023. Her current research project, funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, focuses on the widespread use of prints as models for painting in seventeenth-century Sweden. Her research interests also include art historiography and the history and theory of portraiture.

***Queen Christina of Sweden
the Northern Renaissance
Jacob Heinrich Elbfas
portraiture***

XXVIII

Why a Nordic History about Early Women Photographers?



Session chairs

Mette Sandbye,

Professor of Photography Studies,
Department of Arts and Cultural Studies,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Sigrid Lien,

Professor of Art History and Photography Studies,
Department of Linguistic,
Literary and Aesthetic Studies,
University of Bergen, Norway

Date

Tuesday, October 21st

Time

9.00–10.30

Location

F3010, 3rd Floor

All the Nordic countries have their own art and photography histories based on methodological nationalism. These stories have contributed to establishing largely male dominated canons and media hierarchies. This panel aims at challenging established canons by forefronting a specific, trans-Nordic photographic culture via four papers that all shed light on the exceptional early photographic studio culture in the Nordic countries (1860–1920) in which women took an active part. This was a period in which the medium was new, and canons not yet established. Around 1880 around one third of all registered photographers in the Nordic countries were women. Many of them owned their own studios, some hired only women assistants, some lived in lifelong relationships with female partners. We argue that photography as a profession became a specific Nordic female culture of independence and freedom. Some were not only engaged in aesthetic production, but also in political struggles, and in social work directed to improve women's living conditions in general. All speakers contribute to the edited volume *Striving for Independence. Nordic Women Studio Photographers, 1860–1920* (De Gryuter, 2026).

What kind of photographs did early professional women photographers produce? Are there any connections between politics and aesthetics in their photographic productions? How do we detect and address possible queer connections in their work? How can we “do Nordic art history” by putting the medium of photography and women in the forefront? And which new insights can be gained from replacing a national with a trans-Nordic perspective?

Magdalene Norman

Spinster queerness—a photo-autobiography of life and love

Sigrid Lien

On a summer's day in 2022 I visited an old, white-painted wooden house in the small coastal village, Korsnes, in Northern Norway. Surrounded by a garden with lilacs and roses, and overlooking white beaches, blue fjords, and distant snowclad mountain-tops, it appeared as a haven of beauty and tranquility. The house, now partly a museum, was once the home and sanctuary of photographer Magdalene Norman (1877–1979).

What Norman shared with many other early women photographers is first that she was unmarried, and second, that she lived her life in close professional and personal relations with her female partner. She belonged to what Tone Hellesund has termed the “spinster culture” that unfolded in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Norway. Hellesund (2008) points to how these middle-class spinsters represented a queer challenge to the heteronormativity of the period. This challenge not only had to do with gender and sexual ambiguity, but to the way the spinsters created “concrete, ideological and other types of rooms of their own”. Thus, they managed to establish a distinctive self-awareness and manner of living. As Norman was a photographer, it is pertinent to ask how she used photography to visually create such a room of her own, and what strategies she employed in manifesting her spinster self-awareness.

Inspired by the French author Annie Ernaux's experiments in photo-textual assemblages as life-writing, I will argue that her personal photographs constitute fragments of what may be termed photo-autobiographies. With Norman's photo-autobiographical production as a point of departure, I will raise the following questions: How did Norman use the camera as a tool to visualize her own space and social arena? How did she visually enact her personal and professional relationships with other women? And how do such photo-autobiographical enactments speak about her dreams, ideals, life, and love?

■ Sigrid Lien is Professor of Art History and Photography Studies at Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies, University of Bergen. Lien has published extensively on nineteenth century as well as modern and contemporary photography and headed several large research projects. Recent publications include: *Contact Zones: Photography, Migration and America*, 2021 (co-edited with Justin Carville); and *Adjusting the Lens, Indigenous Activism, Colonial Legacies, and Photographic Heritage*, 2021 (co-edited with Hilde Wallem Nielssen). Latest work: the edited volume *Striving for Independence. Nordic Women Studio Photographers, 1860–1920* (co-edited with Mette Sandbye) to be published early spring 2026 (De Gryuter).

women photographers
spinster-culture
queerness
photo-autobiographical enactments

Hildur Larsson

Crossing borders and pushing boundaries

Mervi Löfgren Autti

Photographer Hildur Larsson (1882–1952) was Swedish by origin. In Haparanda she was an assistant for photographer Mia Green (1870–1949), who must have been a kind of a model and guide for her. Many of her assistants, all women, later opened their own studios, as did Larsson. In 1905 she set up her own studio in Rovaniemi, at the Arctic Circle, in the Grand Duchy of Finland. She was the first photographer in the village. Larsson's photographs show especially Rovaniemi, its residents, and its significant events. At the time, Rovaniemi was a transport hub and an administrative and commercial center with a popular market. Larsson mainly photographed *cartes de visite*. Moreover, she did portraits, some of which were quite experimental. Larsson also ventured into photojournalism and gained national importance when she became a correspondent for the Helsinki pictorial magazine *Helsingin Kaiku*. For example, Larsson's photographs of the forest logging sites in winter, as a trusted photographer for the largest forestry company in Lapland, are truly unique. She also published an album of her printed photographs. Hildur Larsson did all this while she was single. When she married her career was over. However, she continued to take photographs that celebrate her home and her everyday life. Hildur Larsson is also of interest locally today. In September 1925, the Regional Museum of Lapland in Rovaniemi will have the opening of a year-long exhibition on her and her work.

In my presentation, I will discuss the agency of Hildur Larsson in the context of multiculturalism and as a young single woman in the male-dominated profession. The content of her work, especially her experimental portraits are worth presenting. So is the impact of the geopolitical situation on her work.

■ Doctor of Arts (DA) Mervi Löfgren Autti (real name Löfgren) has worked at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi in Cultural History, and Unit for Gender Studies and as a photographer. Her doctoral thesis is *Etsimessä neitikulttuuri—1900-luvun alun valokuvaajanaisia Rovaniemellä* [Women on Their Own—Single Female Photographers of Rovaniemi at the beginning of the 1900s] (2010). She has published articles in English in the following books: *Reconstructing minds and landscapes: silent post-war memory in the margins of history*. Eds. Tuominen M. et al, Routledge (2021), *Northern insights: feminist inquiries into politics of place, knowledge, and agency*. Eds. Kesitalo-Foley S. et al, LUP (2013), *They do things differently there: essays on cultural history*. Eds. Johnson, B. & Kiiskinen, H. k&h. (2011), *Progress or Perish: Northern Perspectives on Social Change*. Eds. Linjakumpu A. & Wallenius-Korkalo, S., Ashgate (2010).

***border-crossing
multiculturalism
photography
gender
single woman***

Julie Laurberg

Court photographer and women's liberation activist

Mette Sandbye

Very few women are visible in the Danish history of—particularly early—photography, and very few are mentioned in the one-volume *History of Danish Photography* (2004), that I was the editor of. Nevertheless, around 1900, approximately 40 % working in the professional photography business were women. Several of these photographers were involved in the women's movement leading up to 1915, where Danish women gained the right to vote. In my talk I will present one of them: Julie Laurberg (1856–1925), known for having produced one of the first reportage films in Denmark, documenting the women's parade in 1915, where they—dressed in white—walked to the Royal Palace and the Parliament to thank the king and the parliament for gaining the right to vote.

As a young photographer Laurberg studied in Paris and in Italy. In 1900 she gained a Silver Medal of Photography at the World Exhibition in Paris, and throughout her career she also wrote about photography and in 1921 she co-edited an educational book on photography. In 1895, she opened a studio in central Copenhagen, at the top of the brand new Magasin du Nord, with her first photography apprentice Franziska Gad (1873–1921), who later became her business partner, and they also lived together. They had almost exclusively female employees. In 1910 the studio was appointed Royal Court Photographer. Julie Laurberg was engaged in various forms of politics. She was a well-known public figure in her own time, recognized for her technical as well as artistic skills and for being a prominent entrepreneur and businesswoman.

■ Mette Sandbye is Professor of Photography Studies at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. She has published numerous books and articles on contemporary art photography and photography as part of visual culture. Most recent research interests are: women photographers around 1900, the history of the family photo album in the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary photography in Greenland, and the challenges of contemporary war photography. Editor of the first Danish history of photography (*Dansk Fotografihistorie*, 2004). Editor (with Sigrid Lien) of *Striving for Independence. Nordic Women Studio Photographers, 1860–1920*, in print, De Gruyter 2026.

studio photography
women's liberation
modern breakthrough
women photographers

Anna Schiöth and Engel Jensen

Two different pathfinders in Icelandic photography

Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir

In my presentation I will focus on two women photographers in Iceland, Anna Schiöth (1846–1921) and Engel Jensen (1877–1963). I will shed light on their work and their life course in the context of both photographic history and the professional history of middle-class women.

Schiöth and Jensen were from different generations. Unlike most women photographers in Iceland, Schiöth was married and had five children. She was a very important role model for young women in Iceland who wanted to educate themselves and have a career without rejecting family life. Although women made up just over 17% of working photographers in Iceland in the second half of the 19th century, photography was one of the few professions where women could gain ground and enjoy recognition. Both Schiöth and Jensen studied photography in Copenhagen, and both were of Danish origin. Their lives also show us how complex and connected the relationship between Iceland and Denmark was in the second half of the 19th century when Iceland's battle for independence was just starting.

Schiöth and Jensen's lives were interconnected in many ways and Schiöth was a great role model for Jensen when she was growing up, even though Jensen ended up following a more untraditional path in life. She both worked as a photographer and masseuse in Iceland, Denmark, and Scotland, and never married. Both Schiöth and Jensen were living proof that women from the middle class could take other paths in life than devoting themselves to their homes, husbands, and children. They also had the possibility to pursue their own careers, develop in their profession and earn an income. In this way, Schiöth and Jensen paved the way for other women within photography and made their mark in the history of Icelandic photography.

■ Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir is a PhD student, writer, and curator. She was Assistant and Associate Professor at the Iceland University of the Arts from 2011–2021 and Dean of the Department for Design and Architecture for a period of four years. She is now working on a PhD project at the University of Iceland on poetic storytelling and earthbound relations in Danish Art and Literature. Sigurðardóttir has published numerous books and articles in Icelandic and English on contemporary art and on memory, trauma, historiography, and photography, as well as fiction.

history of photography

women's history

gender

Iceland

19th century

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