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The Art Museum as Author of Art History – The Formation of a National Art Collection in Finland and the Case of Copies

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 The Ateneum, which opened to the public in 1888, was the first official building in Finland dedicated to the arts. Photograph by Daniel Nyblin, 1890 / Finnish National Gallery.

People have always been keen to hear, tell and build complete stories. The reasons have to do with the encyclopaedic need to understand the world and its mechanisms and to govern the universe by relevant explanations. The more one knows the more power one has, as demonstrated in the early cabinets of curiosities of the Renaissance period.¹ The driving force behind every collection is a dream of completeness, and creating something that remains even after the collector's death.² Collecting is also a statement of what's considered valuable and worth seeing. In this sense a collector is a creator, a storyteller.

Public museums are not that different. They are committed to the formation of art history by collecting, displaying and interpreting works of art at an institutional level. Museums have become the official narrators of art history – but not without the individual decision-makers and gatekeepers who have used the institutional power. The formation of collections has depended on their personal value judgement, understanding and taste. It's also vital to understand the role of the museums as non-neutral, political tools. They have been used to build and to illustrate a nation, as authors such as Benedict Anderson³ have suggested. Museums create an institutional aura for the master narratives, and help nations to visualise the past and the present by displaying collections according to the greater consensus.⁴ This is particularly interesting in the case of 19th-century representations since that was typically an era of 'one' story, art history forming a good example of this.

This article looks into one of the early Finnish cases, the formation of the art collection of the Finnish Art Society⁵, and describes the high expectations and controversies that emerged in late 19th-century Finland when the collection was permanently displayed at the Ateneum building, opened to the public in the autumn of 1888 in Helsinki city centre. The event was of extraordinary importance since it represented the first official building that was dedicated to the arts. Due to the geopolitical situation, Finland, as the Grand Duchy of Russia, did not have any public art collections similar to those possessed by neighbouring countries Sweden and Russia. Finland had fallen between the royal courts and was thus left without treasures, without collections of masterworks.

The emergence and development of the Finnish art field was in the hands of a group of intellectuals and cultural activists. The main character of this article is one of the most central gatekeepers, Professor Carl Gustaf Estlander (1834–1910), Chairman of the Finnish Art Society, who educated the emerging generations of art historians at the university, wrote extensively about the arts in numerous publications and daily newspapers and was in charge of developing the first semi-public art collection in Finland.

I will discuss Estlander's way of using the collection, his attempts to contextualise it, and his collection strategies in relation to the use of copies that, for a long time, had formed a backbone of the collection of European art. It can be argued that copies offered Estlander a great tool to represent the 'right' story of art, to get a proper start for a national art collection that was to link Finland as a nation to the European tradition. Moreover, his relation to copies can be interpreted as an ongoing struggle mirroring the controversial value judgement concerning the right ingredients for an ideal collection. Was it the originality of the work that counted most, or the educational aims of the collections? Was it about a single object, or the whole story?

The collection as an educational tool

When Estlander became one of the key players of the art field in the early 1860s, the Finnish art scene was under development, and taking its first tentative steps. The only institutional player was the Finnish Art Society, which

¹ See Mauries, Patrick, *Cabinets of Curiosities*. Thames and Hudson, 2002.

² About the psychology of collecting see Muensterberger, Werner, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion. Psychological Perspectives*. San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book, 1994.

³ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

⁴ This can be demonstrated by looking into the history of displays where different trends apply: the 19th-century collection display emphasised the traditional story of art told with the help of different Schools and this remained the dominating way to address the issue until the last decades of 20th century when museums started to present multiple stories at the same time, mixing and blending the major narrative with minor narratives, representing the local and global together and travelling in time, thus demonstrating the links from the contemporary to the past. For influential examples see the documentation of the 1998 collection display at Moderna Museet, Stockholm and the 2000 collection display at Tate Modern, London.

⁵ For an extensive study of the formation of the collection of the Finnish Art Society see Pettersson, Susanna, *Suomen Taideyhdistyksestä Ateneumiin. Fredrik Cygnaeus, Carl Gustaf Estlander ja taidekokoelman roolit*. Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura: Helsinki, 2008.

had been founded in 1846 following the German model of *Kunstvereins*⁶. The Society was to take responsibility for art education and for supporting artists, arranging exhibitions, and educating and informing the public about art. Later it also undertook to build an art collection.⁷

Estlander had started as a board member in 1863 and had become the Society's Secretary in 1869. In 1878 he was elected as its Chairman. One of his biggest initiatives included reforming art education as well as the tradition of presenting the fine arts and arts and crafts.⁸ He wished to establish an institution that could combine teaching and displaying the arts under the same roof. The project became known as Ateneum, and in October 1888 Estlander saw how his efforts finally materialised when the Ateneum building was opened to the public. Two art schools, two art collections, a library, a reading room and a lecture hall formed a unique and, at the time, very modern institution.⁹

The Ateneum building offered a platform for the arts. Visitors could learn and be enlightened by looking, listening or reading. The most important educational tool was the collection, which presented the idea of the history of the arts as well as its current state. It's worth noting that unlike many other European art collections, the national part of the art collection was mostly contemporary in nature.

The early collection of the Finnish Art Society had been acquired as a model collection for the students of the Drawing School and contained works of non-Finnish art: copies of old masters, works by lesser known European painters as well as contemporary art of the time. It was housed and displayed in six different addresses in Helsinki, all of them apartments of various sizes. Only after the late-1850s did the Society start to acquire Finnish art, and by the end of the 19th century the focus had clearly shifted from foreign to national art. This change went hand in hand with the growth of the national art market. This development was also quite typical for the time: for instance, the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm began to purchase works of living Swedish artists as late as the 1840s.¹⁰

One has to note that establishing a national art collection had not originally been the main task of the Society. The focus had been on educating the artists and the collection was a tool to reach this goal. The collection carried symbolic value; it showed that the nation did not lack cultural capital, and that Finland as a nation belonged to the civilised West despite the political marriage with Russia to which Finland had belonged since 1809. Simultaneously, the collection was a typical showcase presenting the taste of the academic, Western white male who believed in Winckelmann, Vischer and Hegel. The ideal art collection was a complete, preferably Hegelian narrative, that didn't allow any gaps.

The first collection inventory from 1854 shows that during its first years of activity the Society had acquired 60 works for the model collection.¹¹ The acquired works of art were mostly landscapes that had links to the Finnish art field. Since the Society could not afford old masters – due to restricted funds it never tried to purchase any masterworks from the auction houses in Stockholm, Paris, Berlin or London – it commissioned copies of the key pieces from young Finnish painters travelling abroad. By 1868, the Society had acquired nearly 40 copies, mostly religious paintings and genre pictures originally by Velázquez, Delacroix, Murillo, Rembrandt, Correggio, Jusepe de Ribera, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Rubens.¹² One noteworthy feature is that many of the painters were emerging female artists, including Ida Silfverberg (1834–1899), Augusta Soldan (1826–1886) and Victorine Nordenswan (1838–1872).

⁶ About *Kunstvereins* see Zeitler, Rudolf, 'Konstföreningar under 1800-talet', *Skandinavien och Tyskland 1800–1914. Möten och vänskapsband*. Ed. Bernd Henningsen, Janine Klein, Helmut Müssener & Solfrid Söderlind. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Nationalmuseum & Norsk Folkemuseum, 282–283.

⁷ Pettersson 2008, 67–89.

⁸ Estlander, Carl Gustaf, *Den finska konstens och industrins utveckling hittills och hädanefter*. Helsingfors: K. E. Holms förlag, 1871; Estlander, Carl Gustaf, *Vid konstflitens härdar i Tyskland, Österrike, Schweiz och Belgien. Resanteckningar*. Helsingfors: G. W. Edlunds förlag; Pettersson 2008, 206–217.

⁹ Viljo, Eevamajja 1984, 'Planerna för ett "konstens hem" i Finland under 1870- och 1880-talen', *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia* 7. Ed. Anne Valkonen. Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura, 75–115; Viljo, Eevamajja 1991, 'Ateneumin kuvaohjelma. Taiteiden ykseys ja sopusointu Suomen taiteen nousukauden tunnuksena', *Ateneum*. Ed. Marjatta Levanto. Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, 8–57; Pettersson 2008, 259–260.

¹⁰ Pettersson 2008, 105–130; Bjurström, Per, *Nationalmuseum 1792–1992*. Nationalmuseum/Wiken 1992, 110.

¹¹ Tikkanen, Johan Jakob 1896, *Finska Konstföreningen 1846–1896*. Helsingfors, 67; Lindström, Aune 1963, *Ateneumin taidemuseo 1863–1963*. Helsinki, 8.

¹² Pettersson 2008, 112–113 and 304–309.



Albert Edelfelt, *Portrait of Professor Carl Gustaf Estlander*, 1896, Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Karjalainen.

Establishing a collection of copies represented a strong need to create a permanent collection for study purposes and one of its primary functions was to help Finnish students connect with the tradition of the central European art academies. The small study collection of European art provided a Hegelian frame for the narrative depicting the development of Western art, including different epochs, master artists and schools. Finns were taught to see themselves as part of the tradition, but were also required to produce Nordic uniqueness.

Copies served as a living and psychologically important link to the European museum scene that represented the ideas of enlightenment. The Finnish Art Society and its collection was part of the trend: a growing number of museums and galleries were opened for the public to use and art was regarded as a means to educate the nation. The collections that served as models for the Finnish Art Society were in cities such as Munich, Berlin, Dresden and London, frequently visited by the Finnish academics and art connoisseurs.¹³

Displaying art

Exhibiting the art collection at the brand-new art building, Ateneum, was a challenge for Estlander. As mentioned before, the Society had displayed its collection in various apartments in Helsinki. The works had been arranged in small rooms according to the European models and the best possible adaptation of the continuous narrative of the history of the fine arts. In principle, the Society had shown everything it had acquired.¹⁴

The Ateneum and its new galleries offered – even required – a different approach. Activities run by the Society were expected to reach a new scale and professional level. The art collection was displayed in generous third-floor premises and along the large staircase of the building. It was only at this point that the public pressure for a national art gallery was clearly articulated in the press.¹⁵ What the public expected to see was a ‘museum’.

Through careful selection and elimination of the works, chairman Estlander and the keeper of the collection, painter Thorsten Waenerberg (1846–1917), organised the exhibition according to schools of art based on geographical division, a principle that had been applied in the national art museums in Berlin and Stockholm. The aim of this organisation was to ensure the best possible facilities for the members of the general public, who were expected to acquire knowledge of art and develop their taste. Now, for the first time, it was possible to exhibit and evaluate the ‘story of Finnish art’.

A whole set of new rules came into being. Works that possessed, according to Estlander, historical value were degraded. This category included artists’ portraits, portraits of significant persons, art that originated before the foundation of the Finnish Art Society¹⁶ and sketches. These works were included in the inventory but stored in the board meeting room. Weak copies, poor quality works by unknown artists and works that had been acquired only to support the artist were excluded from the collection. Estlander also suggested that the process should continue in the future, highlighting artistic quality rather than quantity. This was a significant change because at first the Society had concentrated on quantity rather than quality when purchasing European art. This had created endless needs to fill the gaps within the collection, supporting the idea of a single story rather than a set of multiple stories that cannot be covered within one collection.

European and Finnish art were to be separated, and older and contemporary art was to be displayed in different spaces. At this point copies were to be separated from originals – a new rule that highlighted a strong need to stress the authenticity and originality of the works. Sculptures were to be displayed together with paintings unlike before. National art was to be given pride of place and Estlander wanted to display its ‘evolution’. At this point, the signature works of the collection started to stand out. Genre paintings by Alexander Lauréus, landscapes by Werner Holmberg and single works such as Ferdinand von Wright’s painting *View from Haminalahti* (1853) built the backbone of the national collection. The European art collection relied, on the one hand, on a rare number of old masters like Lucas Cranach the Elder, and on the other, on Nordic contemporary art. A majority of the works represented small-size, mediocre works by lesser-known or even unknown European artists. This meant

¹³ Pettersson 2008, 57–66.

¹⁴ Pettersson 2008, 250–258.

¹⁵ Pettersson 2008, 265.

¹⁶ It can be suggested that this particular feature signalled the need to create the story of Finnish art that had to be ‘autonomous’ also in political terms. Finland had been separated from its former mother country Sweden in 1809 and was an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia.

that the original vision, the Hegelian narrative representing the historical development of the fine arts, was never realised on a full scale. For the collection visionaries like Estlander this was clearly a challenge.¹⁷

Originals and copies

In Estlander's view, acquiring art for a proper collection was the task of many generations. He valued the professional expertise possessed by those who acquired art for the collections but noted that even in the very best collections only half of the works represented *real collection value*.¹⁸ The biggest challenge for a collection expert was to differentiate the authentic works from the copies.¹⁹ He pointed out that collecting art required special skills, and those skills needed to be developed. This was one of his great concerns. These thoughts were put into words in his book *De bildande konsternas historia* (1867) where he poses a direct question: how can anyone develop into a connoisseur up north where the arts are not being included in the basic schooling of the children? According to him, developing one's taste in Finland was challenging, if not even impossible, compared to countries like France, Germany or England.²⁰

Estlander's thoughts concerning real collection value and authenticity of the works reflect his ambitions as one of the masterminds of the national art collection. Despite all the challenges, Estlander was clearly willing to take the role of a connoisseur. His statements about art were clear in character and, in order to be able to work with the collection material, he created categories according to style and quality of works. First he divided the works into two categories: significant works and lesser works. He stated that, strictly speaking, one should acquire only works of significant value. Only two exceptions to the rule were allowed: 1) works acquired to support the artist and 2) works to enlighten the public.²¹

Estlander's original idea was to present the whole story of art from the beginning of time up to his present day with authentic works. Two years after the Ateneum had been opened Estlander publicly gave up his dream, and confessed that Finland could not possibly compete with the bigger European museums. The best items already held pride of place in different museums and if any appeared on the market, they were auctioned at outrageously high prices. He also saw the fact that collection formation was linked to historical preconditions. The royal collections, for instance in Sweden, had benefited extensively from the wars.²²

Estlander clearly fought with himself when trying to find a solution: on the one hand, he was quite strict on the issue concerning authenticity, quality and value of the works. On the other hand, he didn't want to give up: the Waagenian and Hegelian dream of the big narrative, the Story of Art with capital letters, was still there. Finally he came up with a solution that had been tried before: copies. He suggested that the European masterworks should be copied and then included in the collection. Here one should note that, as explained earlier, only a couple of years before, he had separated copies from the originals.

The idea of using copies was not new to Estlander, who had used the collection of plaster casts when lecturing about art at Helsinki University. These copies provided a three-dimensional experience of antique sculpture, probably the first true encounter with world art objects for many students of art history and therefore unique in importance. The first items for the collection of plaster casts had been purchased in the 1840s, including key pieces of antique sculpture, such as the *Laocoön Group*, *Apollo* and *Artemis*. But it was only after Estlander took charge in 1869 that systematic collecting began. He ordered the first copies from Paris in 1871 and in 1876 he also published a catalogue of the plaster casts.²³

¹⁷ Pettersson 2008, 259–270.

¹⁸ *Finsk Tidskrift* II 1877, 220–221.

¹⁹ *Finsk Tidskrift* I 1878, 314.

²⁰ Estlander, Carl Gustaf, *De bildande konsternas historia från slutet af adertonde århundradet till våra dagar*. Stockholm: L. J. Hiertas förlag, 1867, ix–x.

²¹ *Finsk Tidskrift* II 1879, 164.

²² *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel* 1890, 4–5.

²³ Estlander, Carl Gustaf, *Universitetets skulptursamling: Företeckning öfver antika verk i gipsafgjutningar uppställda i Universitetets Laboratoriibyggnad*. Helsingfors 1876; Nikula, Riitta, 'Helsingin yliopiston veistokuvakokoelman historiaa ja taustaa', *Helsingin yliopiston taidehistorian laitoksen julkaisuja* I. Ed. Lars Pettersson et al. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston taidehistorian laitos 1974, 65–114.



Ida Silfverberg, *Copy of a work Brädspelare attributed to Caravaggio*, early 1860s, Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Henri Tuomi.

The plaster casts were commonly used all over Europe in museums, art academies and universities. They were highly appreciated tools for teaching and were used as the building blocks of esteemed collections, both private and public. Copies, mirroring the original works, linked the pieces in the collection together, thus forming a complete narrative of the world's best treasures. For Estlander, the most influential early examples were the collection at South Kensington Museum, London, founded by Sir Henry Cole (1808–1882), whose achievements were familiar to Estlander, and the collection of architectural fragments by Sir John Soane, also visited by Estlander in London.²⁴ Other noteworthy copy collections were located in cities like Paris.

Therefore, it's understandable, that despite all the high expectations and ambitions, Estlander finally tried to turn the loss into an innovative victory. If the Finnish Art Society could not acquire original masterworks, it would be better to mediate the story of art with the aid of copies than not at all.

For Estlander this idea was a compromise but demonstrated clearly how he valued the collection primarily for its educational purposes. For him, it was far more important to be able to deliver the whole story to the public than to cling to a fragmented presentation.²⁵ Accepting copies indicated that Estlander evaluated the basic skills of the public as relatively low; they were not expected to 'read' works of art with the same capacity as professionals and fill the imaginary gaps. He also noted that in order to be able to enjoy the art the public would need the basic knowledge. As Pierre Bourdieu has emphasised, the viewer who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of colours and lines²⁶, and exclusion from the circle of the happy few, the connoisseurs, is evident.

The collection of copies

The idea of a collection of copies was discussed within the board of directors of the Finnish Art Society and it was to be realised with special public funds provided by the Senate. The initial plan was to collect the copies with the annual budget of 5,000 marks for two years, starting from 1891, and involve the art students and artists' community in the process. As the negotiations had started already in 1890 the Senate expected to get a detailed plan of the initiative.²⁷ Based on this request, the board laid out a plan emphasising the educational importance of the copy collection: it was to create a backbone for art studies and provide opportunities to learn about European art.²⁸ In this sense the idea was a clear continuation of the already existing collection of copies that the Society had acquired to meet the needs of the Drawing School.

Secondly, the artists and art students who were commissioned to paint the copies would learn from the process. Artists were expected to deliver suggestions concerning the subject of the copy, schedule and costs related to the enterprise. The outcomes would be judged by the purchasing committee, which would also set a price for the purchase of the copy.²⁹

The Society published 'a list of master painters and their works', *Förteckning på Mästare inom Målarekonsten* (1891), including all the relevant paintings the Society had agreed upon. The amount of artworks was impressive: it consisted of more than 1,200 items.³⁰ A closer look at the list reveals how the fine arts were being approached and which individual works were valued the most. In a way, it also represents an ideal collection of European classics of its own time and forms, therefore, a unique document.

The list had been compiled based on the experiences that individual connoisseurs like Estlander had encountered in the European collections. Traditional collection catalogues, print folders containing lavish pictures of the signature works of the museum collections, and publications providing thumbnail pictures of the 'best' works of European art, provided material for the selection process. The references of the list of master painters and their work reveal that the Society had investigated collection catalogues from 26 collections in 21 European

²⁴ Pettersson 2008, 193.

²⁵ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1890*, 5–6.

²⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. New York and London: Routledge, 2007 [1979], 2–3.

²⁷ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1891*. Helsingfors 1892, 13.

²⁸ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1891*. Helsingfors 1892, 13.

²⁹ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1891*. Helsingfors 1892, 14; *Förteckning på Mästare inom Målarekonsten 1891*, 3.

³⁰ *Förteckning på Mästare inom Målarekonsten, hvilka äro afsedda att representeras i den blifvande kopiesamlingen i Helsingfors*. Helsingfors 1891.

cities, the main focus being in Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Denmark and England. Also Spain was mentioned.³¹

As noted in the preface of the publication, the idea was not to acquire every single item for the collection, rather it was to provide guidance for artists who wished to participate in the creation of the copy collection. The artists were also encouraged to suggest their own favourites, provided that the works were relevant representatives of the master's production.³² This is an interesting feature since it entitled the artists to make a decision concerning the work to be copied, having in mind that the final blessing was to come from the purchasing committee.

On the other hand attention must be paid to the fact that the aim of the copy collection was to 'display the history and development of painting as widely as possible and through those masters who represent the highlights of this development, those who have been pioneering men and pictured the uniqueness of their own time and nation'.³³ This reflects, yet again, the original need to tell the whole story of art, and stresses the importance of the national character of the fine arts.

The copy collection was divided according to schools: the Italian, the Spanish, the French, the German, the Dutch and the Flemish. The Italian School covered almost 12 pages of the publication, starting from Giotto and finishing with Caravaggio³⁴; the Spanish School four pages focusing on Ribera, Velázquez and Murillo; the French School one-and-a-half with François Clouet, Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Eustache Le Sueur, Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Creuze, Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Jacques Louis David and Pierre Prud'hon; the German School had one page with Hans Holbein the Younger, Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach; and the Dutch and the Flemish Schools 13 pages from Jan van Eyck to Jan van der Heyden³⁵.

It's worth noting that most of the artist names belong even today to the core of art-historical narratives, whereas some less so. The works have been displayed, printed in collection catalogues, researched, analysed and copied over and over again, thus enforcing their position and relevance as key pieces in art history. General histories of art were being written all over Europe, one of the most important being Wilhelm Lübke's book *Grundriss der Kunstgeschichte* (1860).³⁶

Building the collection of copies started immediately. Painters Thorsten Waenerberg, Venny Soldan-Brofeldt (1863–1945) and Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946) were commissioned to copy the first paintings. Waenerberg and Soldan-Brofeldt were expected to paint two copies, whereas Schjerfbeck had three entries on her list.³⁷ Among the first copies to be included with the collection in 1892 were Frans Hals's painting *Man in a Slouch Hat* (A I 505), Gerard ter Borch's *The Glass of Lemonade* (A I 506), a Velázquez portrait of the Pope Innocentius X (A I 507) – all painted by Helene Schjerfbeck. Also, Rembrandt's *Holy Family* was copied by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt (A I 504).³⁸ The average price paid for the copies was 400 marks. These figures indicate that the annual budget of 5,000 marks allowed the Society to purchase an average amount of 10 to 15 copies for the collection per year.

³¹ Förteckning på Mästare inom Målareskonsten 1891, 37.

³² Förteckning på Mästare inom Målareskonsten 1891, 3.

³³ Förteckning på Mästare inom Målareskonsten 1891, 3. ...'man torde kunna hoppas att målareskonstens utveckling blir framstäld, så vidt möjligt är, genom de mästare, som beteckna denna utvecklings höjdpunkter, som varit dess framstegsmän och i sin konst afspeglat sitt folks och sin tidsålders egendomlighet'.

³⁴ Artists representing the Italian School who were listed were (as written in the original) Giotto, Fra Angelico, Masaccio, Domenico Ghirlandajo, Melozzo da Forlì, Luca Signorelli, Pietro Perugino, Andrea Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini, Antonello da Messina, Lionardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Sebastiano del Piombo, Fra Bartolommeo, Andrea del Sarto, Raffaello Sanzio, Soddoma, Correggio, Bernardino Luini, Giorgione, Palma vecchio, Tiziano Vecellio, Moretto da Brescia, Paolo Veronese and Caravaggio.

³⁵ Artists representing the Dutch and Flemish Schools who were listed were (as written in the original): *the Old Dutch School*: Jan van Eyck, Roger van der Weyden, Hans Memling; *the Flemish School*: Jan Brueghel, P.P. Rubens, Frans Snyders, Jacob Jordaens, Antonius van Dyck, Adriaen Brouwer, Jan Fyt, David Teniers; the Dutch School: Frans Hals, Jan Wynants, Aalbert Cuyp, Rembrandt Hermensz van Rijn, Jan Both, Adriaan van Ostade, Ferdinand Bol, Gerard Dou, Gerard ter Borch, Barth. Van der Helst, Aart van der Neer, Philips Wouwerman, Nicolaas Berchem, Allart van Everdingen, Jan. Babt. Weenix, Jakob van Ruisdael, Paulus Potter, Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Nicolaas Maes, Jan Vermeer van Delft, Willem van de Velde, Frans van Mieris the Elder, Adriaan van de Velde, Melchior d'Hondecoeter, Meindert Hobbema, Gerrit Berck-Heyde, Jan Weenix, Jan van der Heyden and Jan van Huysum.

³⁶ See Karlholm, Dan, *Handböckernas konsthistoria. Om skapandet av 'allmän konsthistoria' i Tyskland under 1800-talet*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag, 1996.

³⁷ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1892*. Helsingfors 1893, 13.

³⁸ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1893*. Helsingfors 1894, 2–3.

Despite high expectations, during the following years the growth of the collection of copies was moderate: in 1893 it increased by one copy³⁹, in 1894 by two copies⁴⁰, in 1895 by one copy⁴¹, in 1896 by two copies⁴², in 1897 one copy⁴³ and so on⁴⁴. The latest addition to the collection was made in 1912⁴⁵, by which time the total amount of copies had grown to 20. This demonstrates how the idea of an extensive collection of copies diminished to a random selection of pieces.

Whereas the original idea had been to collect a complete story of art and send the artists out to the museums to complete this task, it seems that the concept was turned into a complementary grant programme for artists to fund their study trips abroad. Copies followed merely as a bonus.

For the benefit of the public

During the process of displaying the collection in the new premises, the status of the collection started to be transformed from a semi-public educational tool to something bigger and more significant. The purchases grew in size to fulfil the museum scale of the brand-new building. Estlander even spoke of 'the museum-quality works'.⁴⁶ The story was no longer told to the art students and members of the Society but to the whole nation. The collection was soon regarded as *the* national art collection.

The need for a national museum institution had been a topic of intellectual discussion since the 1860s, but the focus had been on cultural history and archaeology. The role of the Society's collection had been discussed, too, but only in the context of planning an art academy. The educational role of the collection dominated the discussion. Every now and then 'museum', 'national museum', 'national art museum' or 'gallery' was mentioned, but not in the contemporary meaning of the words. These phrasings referred to something more organised and professional than the Society's collection, which was run by academic volunteers. They also pointed out the political potential that the museum as an institution could have for the growing nation.

Carl Gustaf Estlander was among the first Finns to realise the importance of the collections as educational, economic and political tools. He also saw, as a practising academic art historian, the influence the choices had on the collection once they were made. Collecting art for a public art collection meant creating and writing three-dimensional art history: choosing, highlighting and editing the story of art to be displayed in the galleries. It was also a huge responsibility since the choices were to remain in the nation's collective memory and become part of the visual narrative of the country.

Estlander balanced two roles, the academic scholar believing in the authenticity of the works, and the educator wishing to provide the people with the story of art. The Ateneum was his instrument for displaying the story. For him, the educational function of the collection was, after all, the most important factor, even at the cost of originality. In this sense he gave up his early Winckelmannian ideals concerning the originality of the works.

³⁹ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1894*. Helsingfors 1895, 8. Hanna Rönneberg, copy of Rembrandt's portrait of Lieven Willemzoon van Copernol (A I 568).

⁴⁰ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1895*. Helsingfors 1896, 8. Helene Schjerfbeck, copies of Velázquez' painting *Infantina Maria Teresia* (A I 571) and Hans Holbein, the Younger's, portrait of *John Chambers* (A I 572).

⁴¹ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1896*. Helsingfors 1897, 27. Magnus Enckell, copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* (A I 596).

⁴² *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1897*. Helsingfors 1898, 11–12. Magnus Enckell, copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna Litta* (A I 612) and Beda Stjernschantz, copy of Raphael's *Maria Magdalena* (A I 613).

⁴³ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1898*. Helsingfors 1899, 11. Albert Gebhard, copy of Pietro Perugino's *Maria Magdalena* (A I 621).

⁴⁴ *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1900*. Helsingfors 1901, 11: Widolfa von Engeström-Ahrenberg, copy of Rembrandt's *Young Girl* (A I 645); *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1901*. Helsingfors 1902, 12: Werner von Hausen, copy of a fresco i Assisi (Simone Memmi's *Madonna*) (A I 663); *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1906*. Helsingfors 1907, 9: Werner von Hausen, copy of a mural painting in Naples (A II 1001); *Finska Konstföreningens Matrikel för 1912*. Helsingfors 1913, 14: Helene Schjerfbeck, copy of Hans Holbein's painting *Sir Richard Southwell* (A II 939). For additional information see also <http://kokoelmat.fng.fi>: Magnus Enckell, copy of Masaccio's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (A I 646) was added to the collection in 1898; Signe Tandefelt, copy of Lucas van Leyden's portrait of Spanish Prince Ferdinand (A II 778) and Väinö Hämmäläinen, copy of Filippo Lippi's *Self Portrait* (A II 779) were added to the collection in 1904; Werner von Hausen, copy of Fragonard's *Reclining Nymph* (A II 862) and Tyra Malmström, copy of Botticelli's *Madonna, Jesus and St. John the Baptist* (A II 861) were added to the collection in 1908.

⁴⁵ <http://kokoelmat.fng.fi>: Helene Schjerfbeck, a copy of Hans Holbein's *Sir Richard Southwell* (A II 939).

⁴⁶ Pettersson 2008, 281.

Even if the idea of representing art to the nation through copies was generous and educationally solid, the real use of the copies remained questionable. The true beneficiaries were the artists who had the opportunity to study the originals carefully, copy and paint every brush stroke. Whereas the unreachable dream of a fabulous collection of European masterworks had failed and the collection of copies funded by the Senate never grew to more than 20 works that completed the older collection of copies, the copies themselves remained a topic of constant re-evaluation. Issues related to originality and authenticity grew in importance and gradually the Finnish Art Society stopped acquiring copies for the collection. The last acquisition to the Senate-funded collection was made in 1912.

The tentative and vulnerable status of copies is reflected in the early collection policy of the Finnish Art Society that allowed deaccessioning. As mentioned before, Estlander and Waenerberg streamlined the contents of the collection after the opening of the Ateneum and this process affected also the oldest part of the collection of copies. In spring 1889 at least six copies were given to the annual lottery.⁴⁷ After the First World War, works were also deposited in schools and other venues. The rest were silently removed from the gallery premises and put into storage. The status of copies has been redefined from valuable to worthless and vice versa. As part of the permanent collection of the Finnish Art Society and later the Finnish National Gallery,⁴⁸ the copies deepen our understanding of collection history, showcasing the dreams and wishes, likes and dislikes of the 19th century, whether they are used in the collection displays or not. Copies are also excellent examples of the changing value of a museum object, value that has to be negotiated over and over again, in the given time and context. A perfect example of this is that the Finnish National Gallery acquired in 2009 a copy of a work once attributed to Caravaggio. The painting called *Brädspelare*, carefully copied by Ida Silfverberg, was the same work that was given to the lottery exactly 120 years earlier.

⁴⁷ Pettersson 2008, 308–309 and 312–329: Adolf von Becker, copy of Murillo's *Mater Dolorosa* (A I 113), Ida Silfverberg, copies of work attributed to Caravaggio, *Brädspelare* (A I 127) and *Falskspelare* (A I 126), Franc Solimena's *Mater Dolorosa* (A I 129), Gabriel Metsu's painting of a woman buying a hare (A I 131), Raphael's *Madonna* (A I 124).

⁴⁸ The Finnish Art Society's collection forms a core collection of the Finnish National Gallery, founded in 1990. The collection was managed by the Art Society until the Finnish Fine Arts Academy Foundation was founded in 1939 and took over the responsibility of taking care and developing the collection. The Foundation gave, in its turn, the collections to the state in 1990 after a long process.