From a Young Genius to a Monument

Riitta Ojanperä
PhD, Director, Collections Management, Finnish National Gallery


We all know what the composer Jean Sibelius looks like. He is elderly, with penetrating eyes, his mouth closed in a stern line. He is bald and – if we can see more than his face – he sits in an armchair and smokes a cigar. The image is very much a cliché. It is also quite possible that this is no longer the figure many Finns see in their minds – the prevalence of such images is very much bound to culture and generation. It is nevertheless quite likely that such an image of Sibelius is shared by those of us who were born before the 1970s, who received a school education founded on early 20th-century unified culture – our minds imprinted not only with the image of the stern national composer, but also with the Finlandia Hymn and the Song of the Athenians – and who in primary school groped for the notes of Andante Festivo in the ranks of the school orchestra.

The assumption of a widely held visual image requires at least that we know who Sibelius is. The composer has been on the list of the most famous Finns for decades, although the basis of his recognition is undoubtedly different in Finland than elsewhere. In Finland, Sibelius’s peers have comprised both the most prominent statesmen and the most prestigious representatives of art and culture. The Finnish adage ‘Sibelius, sauna and sisu’ carries the name of Sibelius everywhere that the deepest perceived values and everyday experiences of Finnishness are discussed.¹

The popular recognition of Sibelius shows no sign of declining. In 2013, the Finnish Cultural Foundation conducted an extensive Gallup poll on the kind of art Finns find appealing.² The result shows that the appreciation of Sibelius is virtually unrivalled, insofar as age, education and domicile in Finland made hardly any difference in the overall positive result.³

---

¹ ‘Sibelius, sauna and sisu’ is used as an idiomatc compound. Its reference is to the cultural determination of Finnish identity, sometimes used ironically. Examples: in popular culture, the chart hit of the Kvikkasvot ensemble entitled Made in Finland (Tankeros love) 1975; in an academic context, the title of a seminar ‘Sibelius, sauna ja sisu! Suomen maakuvan historiaa’ (‘Sibelius, sauna and sisu! History of the Finnish national image’), University of Helsinki 16 April 2009, or the title of a thesis Sauna, sisu ja Sibelius. Jean Sibeliuksen konstruoidun säveltäjäkuvan muodostuminen musiikkikirjallisuudessa (‘Sauna, sisu and Sibelius. The formation of the constructed image of Jean Sibelius in music literature’), Lantto 2013.

² Study commissioned by the Finnish Cultural Foundation Suomalaisten näkemykset kulttuurista. Vaikuttuneisuus taiteilijoina ja tautilaisuutta (‘Finnish Views on and Engagement in Culture and the Arts’). The survey questions related to 32 pre-selected artists.

³ Suomalaisten näkemykset kulttuurista. Vaikuttuneisuus taiteilijoina ja tyylisuunnista, 35.
The survey suggests that while traditional cultural heavyweights remain strong, the top four – Jean Sibelius, Tove Jansson, Väinö Linna and Juice Leskinen – encompass a wide spectrum of artforms and artist’s ages.⁴

Portraits on the Nation’s Mantelpiece

Shared notions regarding the physical appearance of those people who belong to the cultural canon are founded on the dissemination of popular images, primarily in the media and in textbooks. On the other hand, visual art in general and public art in particular – memorials

⁴ Press release of the Finnish Cultural Foundation 2013: ‘Tutkimus: Tunnetuimmat taiteilijamme ovat Jean Sibelius, Tove Jansson, Väinö Linna ja Juice Leskinen’ (‘Study shows our most famous artists are Jean Sibelius, Tove Jansson, Väinö Linna and Juice Leskinen’).
of great men and women – imprint the collective memory with images of people of note by the authority of high art.\(^5\) Owing to the pictorial representations thus produced, many Finns ‘know’ what the national writer Aleksis Kivi looked like, although not a single photograph or live drawing of the author exists from his lifetime. We also know what Väinämöinen looked like, although the mythical hero of Kalevala never existed in reality.

The popular idea of the physical appearance of author Aleksis Kivi was established by the memorial created by the sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen, erected in the centre of Helsinki in the 1930s.\(^6\) In its day, the project triggered a debate about the writer’s appearance, matched only by the public outcry and surge of public opinion triggered by the Sibelius Monument in the early 1960s. As regards Väinämöinen, the paintings of him and other Kalevala figures created by Akseli Gallen-Kallela remain for many the only correct likenesses of the mythic characters of the epic.\(^7\)

In the course of the 20th century, the interest of artists in creating portraits through public or private commission or because of their own interest has fluctuated. Portraiture has produced a great many works that stand the test of time, although the grand narrative of the 20th century has emphasised the primacy of abstract art, of art liberated from the mimetic subject. Examining portraits of Sibelius, one should bear in mind that the first decades of Finnish independence were a golden age of portraits, sculptural portraits in particular. Finnish national identity was not constructed solely through public art, but also through the production of a significant number of portraits of cultural as well as business celebrities. It was quite common for wealthy individuals to commission portraits of their family, often of children as well. Portraits conveyed a sense of propriety and togetherness, the very best aspects of the Finnish national character. Appraisals of head portraits in art publications often referred to idealistic aspirations and cultural values. For Finnish sculptors, of course, the popularity of head portraits meant much-needed work opportunities.\(^8\) Produced in great numbers, miniature likenesses of notables – Aleksis Kivis, Mannerheims, Sibeliuses – also found their way into less affluent homes as emblems of cultural will.\(^9\)

During his long life, numerous photographs were taken of Sibelius that are easily accessible today in many picture archives. Many sources on Sibelius comment in passing on the composer’s critical attitude towards posing for pictures and the pictures themselves. This applied to photographs as well as portraits, of which there were, and still are, many in Ainola, some placed in prominent spots, others less noticeable. Stories have it that the composer froze or became ill at ease in front of a camera, nor was he particularly fond of sitting for portraits.

One anecdote about the ageing Sibelius’s interest in the construction of his public images is told by composer Einari Marvia in a reminiscence of his visit to Ainola in 1955, published in the music magazine Pieni Musiikkilehti in 1965. Marvia was preparing an article on the composer for the Uusi Musiikkilehti magazine’s jubilee issue on Sibelius, when he was called to Ainola to discuss the content of his piece. It appeared that Sibelius was particularly interested in the photographs intended for the article. He made a thorough examination of the selection of photographs brought by the writer and assessed them, but made no changes to the illustrations for the upcoming article.\(^10\)

Considering that Sibelius led a long and colourful life, the number of photographs of him in the archives seems rather small.\(^11\) It is also striking that the pictures of the composer offer little to provide some context regarding the sitter and his life, such as other people,
The master of the Ainola household in his favourite corner in the Library photographed by Santeri Levas, the private secretary of Jean Sibelius. The photograph was published in a cropped and retouched version in Levas’s book on Sibelius in 1945.

Photo: Santeri Levas. Finnish Museum of Photography

interior or exterior spaces, spontaneous or staged situations. The one exception is Ainola, the interiors and surrounding woods of which became an indistinguishable part of Sibelius’s official image from the 1930s onwards. A natural explanation is that this was when ‘the silence of Ainola’ began – a time when the composer’s active artistic work declined and he withdrew into the domestic sphere. He rarely ventured outside Ainola, whereas numerous guests came to visit him.
The picture of Sibelius in the setting of Ainola grew stronger after the end of the Second World War. In 1945, the film company Aho & Soldan completed a documentary, Jean Sibelius at Home, using footage shot by Heikki Aho and Björn Soldan in Ainola that went as far back as 1927. No earlier moving pictures of Sibelius are known. The year 1945 also saw the publication of Jean Sibelius ja hänen Ainolansa (Jean Sibelius and His Ainola) by Santeri Levas, who had been Sibelius’s private secretary (1937–57). Levas was a prolific amateur photographer, and he took dozens of photographs of Sibelius, his family and Ainola for the book.

The Ideal Head of a Living Legend

The book by Santeri Levas is full of keen visual observations. In the beginning, he dedicates several pages to descriptions of Sibelius’s appearance: his hair, the shape of the bald head, his furrowed brow, his gaze, the particularly mesmerising ‘Sibelius eyes’, the large ears. He discusses external features which in his estimation best describe the composer, with the observation that the noble shape of the head is the most essential part of the correct image of Sibelius. ‘For the writer of these lines, as supposedly for the younger generation in general, it is the magnificent top of the head, as if carved in marble, that truly establishes the true image of Sibelius. All portraits from his younger years seem very strange and unreal,’ he wrote.

Using pictures and words and a familiar tone, Levas explores Sibelius in his domestic environment. The angles of Levas’s photographs are those we are most familiar with: Sibelius in the cigar corner in the library, Sibelius on the forest path in Ainola and sitting in the tree root chair at the edge of the forest, Sibelius in his wide-brimmed hat against the wide open skies. Aino Sibelius also played an important part in the book. The ‘true’, essential Sibelius described by Levas in writing nevertheless seems like an animated, nobly featured sculptural head, a picture on the nation’s mantelpiece, amplified by art. One of the illustrations in Levas’s book appears to be of a plaster cast of Wäinö Aaltonen’s famous sculptural portrait of Sibelius from 1935. Aaltonen was neither the only nor the first sculptor whose image of Sibelius is based on a sublime rendering of the characteristic hairless head. Among the artworks in Ainola there is also a plaster cast of Mauno Oittinen’s head of Sibelius from 1929. The head, carved in black granite, was exhibited at the 1939 New York World Fair to promote the public image of Finland.

One of the most famous photographs of the ageing Sibelius is the picture taken in 1949 by the Armenian-Canadian portraitist Yousuf Karsh. In his Sibelius biography, Santeri Levas writes about the photographer’s visit to Ainola. According to Levas, the reason Sibelius has closed his eyes in the picture is the bright studio lights that the photographer brought with him, and because of which the composer kept his eyes closed almost throughout the session. The picture of the artist with his eyes closed takes to an extreme the impression of inwardness and timelessness, properties that were emphasised in pictures of the mature Sibelius. From the perspective of the history of motifs, the closed eyes link Karsh’s portrait to the ideals of spirituality prevalent at the turn of the century. Closed eyes was one of the ways in which artists sought to express the interiority of the sitter, their creative imagination and ecstasy, the artist’s ability to see beyond the material world.

12 Jean Sibelius at home. Yle elävä arkisto. See also Brofeldt 2010.
13 Levas’s book was not the first one to present Sibelius in Ainola. See, e.g., Sandberg 1940.
14 Levas 1945, 8–12.
15 Levas 1945, 9.
16 Levas 1945. Aaltonen’s Sibelius portrait is no longer in Ainola. Other pictures chosen to illustrate Levas’s book that are in Ainola are Gallen-Kallela’s En Saga and Edelfelt’s portrait from 1904.
17 Levas 1986, 411–12.
18 See, e.g., Stewen 1996.
Mauno Oittinen, Bust of Jean Sibelius, 1929
plaster, ht. 38cm
Ainola Foundation
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
In a cartoon published in *Helsingin Sanomat* on 13 June 1954, Kari Suomalainen, one of the most famous Finnish caricaturists of the post-war period, confirmed through an exaggerated cliché what the public image of Sibelius had grown to become: bald, forever old and always smoking a cigar. After the war, this was obvious even to schoolchildren, if we are to believe an article from spring 1949 in the art magazine *Kuva*: ‘What Second-Graders Know About Sibelius’. The essence of such knowledge possessed by the student quoted in the magazine was: ‘He never smokes any other tobacco than a cigar. He has no hair at all these days.’

**Sibelius and the Myth of Greatness**

Research on the press coverage of Sibelius confirms that during the composer’s lifetime and as late as 1957, soon after his death, writing was typically extremely respectful. As early as 1915, but particularly in 1957, the stories tell about the inaccessibility of the great man.

The formation of Sibelius’s incontestable status as a great man in the early years of the 20th century came under scrutiny in the early 1980s as part of new approaches in cultural research. In a musicology seminar at the University of Jyväskylä in 1982, Philip Donner and Juhani Similä analysed the cultural ideas associated with Sibelius from the perspective of idol research. Their aim was to augment the musical and biographical aspects of the composer with studies of Sibelius as a cultural phenomenon. According to Donner and Similä, the image of Sibelius was subject to the same kind of projection of cultural values and dreams as the idols of popular culture. The Sibelius of popular imagination had become a national myth whose manner of being was not unlike that of the characters in *Kalevala*. ‘Sibelius is perceived as a seer, a wise man, a spiritual giant, a mythical demigod arising from Finnish soil,’ the researchers wrote.

Their viewpoint would attract criticism in the early 1980s, when the boundaries and hierarchy between high and popular culture were still much sharper than today.

The principal material in the seminar paper comprised photographs and artworks depicting Sibelius. The following year, 1983, Philip Donner revisited the subject in the journal of the Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology, particularly from the perspective of photographs. Among the points highlighted in his text were the editing practices of publications and the activities of the gatekeepers of the art world, a theme that attracted the interest of other researchers as well at the time. In the field of Sibelius research, these papers represented an opening towards cultural research strategies that questioned strongly such issues as the construction of national cultural canons, for example. It is clear that identical arguments were used in the 20th century to strengthen the public image of Sibelius as well as other artists and writers in the national vanguard. They all centred on a story whereby distinctly Finnish art is created by the efforts of an artist of exceptional vision who is able to draw directly on the primal power of Finnish nature, without the dead weight of surrounding temporal culture.

The perspective of myth and cult surrounding Sibelius re-emerged in a collection of essays published in 2006, *Kirjoituksia neroudesta* (*Writings on Genius*), in which the public image of exceptional artists is examined from the perspective of the thriving Western myth of the genius. In their respective contexts, the writer Jukka Sarjala, a musicology researcher who has written extensively on Sibelius, and the editor Taava Koskinen both observe that one of the ways often used to create the image of an artist-genius is through silence, through an emphasis on the quiet surrounding the creative artist.

---

19 Luukkonen 1949, 22.
20 Heino 1999, University of Tampere, 114, 144. The study examines writings about Sibelius in selected newspapers from 1892, 1915, 1957 and 1995.
21 Donner & Similä 1982, 34.
22 Sarjala 2006, 297.
23 Donner 1983.
24 Koskinen 2006, 33; Sarjala 2006, esp. 303.
Panel from *En Saga (Jean Sibelius and Fantasy Landscape)*, 1894, by Akseli Gallen-Kallela showing a portrait of Sibelius.
Ainola Foundation
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
Young Sibelius Through the Eyes of Artists

From the 1880s onwards, young Akseli Gallen-Kallela was the great promise of Finnish art, just as Sibelius was in the field of music. The earliest known drawing of Sibelius by Gallen-Kallela is from 1890.25 One of Gallen-Kallela’s most famous works is Symposion, of which he painted two versions in 1894. The painting shows four luminaries of Finnish culture at a late-night get-together in a restaurant: Jean Sibelius, the conductor Robert Kajanus, Gallen-Kallela himself, and a fourth reveller whose identity remains uncertain.26

The earlier version of Symposion, one that was previously considered a sketch and is also known as Kajustaflan, is painted with vigorous, even caricaturistic brush strokes.27 In both versions, the figures are depicted sharply characterised, not unlike portraits, although the ambiguous content of the pictures extends in many directions far beyond mere portraiture. The fundamental content in both pictures is based on intense get-togethers of a circle of artists envisioning the future of Finnish culture in the restaurant at Hotel Kämp in Helsinki in 1893.28

The year 1893 also provided the inspiration for Gallen-Kallela’s watercolour En Saga, with its right-hand panel showing Jean Sibelius as the composer of the tone poem En Saga.29 Comparison between the two Symposions and En Saga shows that the figure of Sibelius that is presented in each of them is a different version of the same portrait. In all three pictures, Sibelius’s face is shown in three-quarters profile so that his intense attention focuses somewhere to the front left – beyond the frame. When Symposion was shown in October 1894 in the annual exhibition of the Artists’ Association of Finland in Helsinki, the art critic Kasimir Leino wrote in the Päivälehti newspaper: ‘As to the portraits themselves, I think Mr Gallén has best succeeded in the depiction of the facial features, and character, of the young talented composer sitting at the right. He sits there in a strange posture, limp and pensive, but the eyes staring into the vastness of infinity tell that in his spirit he feels himself to be in a world all of his own, outside the shelter where they happen to find themselves.’30 En Saga too was exhibited in Helsinki for the first time in 1894, but Gallen-Kallela never exhibited Kajustaflan publicly in his lifetime.31

In the Symposion paintings, Sibelius is shown as belonging to a generation of cultural personalities who envisioned a great future for Finnish culture and who also produced artworks on which the national cultural identity was subsequently built. It was not their private project, but the common goal of actors in the cultural field in the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland.32 Through strong public support, Sibelius and other talents of his generation had an opportunity to attain the status and identity of national hero-artists at a relatively young age. On the other hand, in the bourgeois atmosphere of the small capital it was not difficult to arouse indignation with unconventional behaviour. In Symposion, Gallen-Kallela transposed a boisterous spree among the cultural elite into the rarefied atmosphere of high art, thereby causing an art scandal that is remembered to this day. The scandal is referenced in a pastiche of Gallen-Kallela’s Kajustaflan painted in 1970s by the bohemian artist Kalervo Palsa, who also shook the norms of his generation. By introducing a female figure into the composition who scolds the drunken artists, Palsa reminds us of the conflict that easily arises between an all-consuming artistic activity and the demands of family life – that was, after all, reality also for Sibelius. He was not the only artist whose wife and children expected their share of attention.

25 Okkonen 1949, 190.
26 Gallen-Kallela-Sirén 2001, 192–97. Gallen-Kallela-Sirén refutes the earlier assumption that these would be a sketch and a final painting. According to him, Kajustaflan with its fiercer brushwork, and Symposion, are both independent works.
30 Leino Päivälehti 19.10.1894.
As to the small and not so small scandals in the annals of art, we should remember that shocking the middle class – épater la bourgeoisie – was seen as part of the role of the creative, pioneering artist since the late 19th century. This was something Sibelius, Gallen-Kallela and many others learned early on in their careers or at the latest while visiting European cultural capitals. The narrative of constantly evolving 20th-century art virtually required the disapproval of contemporaries or gestures denouncing bourgeois society by actors elevated into the canon of modern art.

Art and Domestic Togetherness

The earliest painting of Sibelius is Jean Sibelius Plays the Violin by Eero Järnefelt from 1890. It was painted in the autumn of the same year that Järnefelt’s sister Aino was engaged to Sibelius. Sibelius had become acquainted with the Järnefelts as a student in the 1880s, and the marriage and shared artistic aspirations consolidated the connection. Just as Sibelius, the Järnefelt children and their mother, Elisabeth Järnefelt, were among the key players in turn of the century Finnish cultural life.
It is well known that Sibelius had his sights on a career as a violinist during his first student years in Helsinki in the mid-1880s, yet there are few pictures of Sibelius with a violin. By the time Järnefelt painted the picture, the future composer’s dreams of becoming a virtuoso violinist had already been abandoned. Sibelius’s early compositions had begun to garner more praise than his achievements as a violin player. By spring 1889, at the latest, the future hopes of creative Finnish music had come to rest on the shoulders of Sibelius the composer.33

During his advanced composition studies in Berlin (1889–90) and Vienna (1890–91), Sibelius still took the violin with him. He particularly liked to play chamber music with friends. The violin also played a part in the first meeting and falling in love of Aino Järnefelt and Jean Sibelius at the Järnefelts in 1889, when Aino’s brother Armas accompanied Sibelius on the piano.34 In 1885, when he moved to Helsinki to study, Sibelius had been given a violin that was in the family’s possession. It had been bought in St Petersburg in 1860 by his oldest uncle, the sea captain Johan Sibelius. Although Sibelius had abandoned his career as violinist, up to 1896 he occasionally played as an extra with the Helsinki Orchestra Society’s symphony orchestra at the request of its conductor Robert Kajanus. In his work as composer, Sibelius would sometimes use the violin in addition to the piano – the instrument remained part of the domestic sphere in Ainola.35

Eero Järnefelt painted his second portrait of young Sibelius in 1892. Aino Järnefelt and Sibelius were married the same year, and were given the picture as a present. In it, the young composer is shown sitting, with a cigar in his hand. Although he is depicted frontally, it is done so that the viewer cannot catch his eye. The charged artistic fervour in Gallen-Kallela’s pictures of Sibelius is absent from Järnefelt’s rather reticent portraits.

Aino Sibelius was happy to welcome the 1892 portrait by Järnefelt as well as Gallen-Kallela’s En Saga into the couple’s home. ‘I look at your portrait very often. (…) It is so pretty. (…) We’ll hang it up first thing on the wall in our new home,’ Aino wrote about her brother’s painting on the eve of her marriage.36 En Saga came into the Sibeliuses’ possession the same year that the second version of En Saga was composed, in autumn 1902, at a time when Sibelius was in Berlin. Aino Sibelius wrote to her husband on 14 November 1902: ‘How I yearn to be with you. The painting by Gallen has arrived, and every so often I admire your pretty likeness. I would fain kiss you through it.’37 A couple of days later the composer replied: ‘I am just on my way to a concert. I have kissed your picture. O you dearest!!!’38

Portraits and photographs seem to have played an important part in the spouses’ correspondence during Sibelius’s long stays abroad. One passage suggests that the portraits of Sibelius by Järnefelt and Gallen-Kallela helped Aino Sibelius to incorporate the absent father into the everyday life of the family in Ainola, where they had moved in autumn 1904. In January 1905, she wrote to Sibelius in Berlin, telling him about herself and their daughter Katarina, around two years old at the time: ‘…but I do miss you so, I close my eyes and in my mind I describe your face, your dear face. Little Kai is very fond of your portrait on the wall, she speaks to the picture painted by Erik and looks at it so sweetly, and once I asked her to touch it, and she was so surprised at its smoothness, she will not touch it again for anything, only to marvel from a distance, and then she runs under Gallén’s picture and shouts, “another Papa”.’39

33 Tawaststjerna 1965, 150. The writer refers to Flodin’s concert review in Nya Pressen on 30 May 1889.
34 For information on the beginning of the acquaintance between Aino Järnefelt and Jean Sibelius, see Tawaststjerna 1965, 128.
35 Jean Sibelius as a violinist. Jean Sibelius website.
37 Talas 2003, 300.
38 Talas 2003, 301–02. Sibelius was on his way to conduct En Saga in Berlin.
39 Talas 2007, 11.
Eero Järnefelt immortalised his brother-in-law in pictures later as well. A lithograph portrait he created in 1908 has circulated in countless prints, some of them hand signed by the artist.\textsuperscript{40} From 1935, we know of a rather official looking portrait commissioned from Järnefelt by the Ylioppilaskunnan Laulajat choir.\textsuperscript{41} In it, the composer is shown at the age of 70 surrounded by instruments and sheets of music.\textsuperscript{42} The prominence of Sibelius in the Finnish media is also suggested by the discovery in 2013 of a previously unknown print of the composer made by Eero Järnefelt. The discovery was widely publicised, being reported by, among others, the national public broadcasting company and the leading national daily.\textsuperscript{43}

**From Wild Youth to Serene Middle Age**

Among the portraits of Sibelius in which he is depicted along with emblems of ideology or status, the pastels by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa\textsuperscript{44} deserve particular mention. In 1892, he painted Sibelius in the company of the tragic figure of Kullervo from the *Kalevala*.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Eero Järnefelt, *Jean Sibelius*, undated\newline\textit{pencil on paper, 30.5 x 39.5cm}\newline\textit{Finnish National Gallery / Aleneum Art Museum}\newline\textit{Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{40} The signature ‘E.J-It’ is part of the printed picture.
\textsuperscript{41} E. R-r HS 9.12.1935. Richter writes: ‘The attention is mainly drawn to the magnificent head and its animated yet supernaturally inspired eyes’. The portrait stood until 2013 in the rehearsal room of the choir, the Music Hall at the Old Student House.
\textsuperscript{42} There is also another, undated version, painted in a somewhat softer manner, which is probably in a private collection.
\textsuperscript{43} The news was reported by *Helsingin Sanomat* and YLE news on 28 September 2013. Researchers assumed that only one print of the found work exists. It was donated to the Järvenpää Art Museum.
\textsuperscript{44} For more on Wettenhovi-Aspa, see Lahelma 2014.
\textsuperscript{45} For more on the painting, see von Bonsdorff 2014, 91.
version of Sibelius by Wettenhovi-Aspa is in many ways related to the Sibelius in Gallen-Kallela’s pictures, down to the sitter’s dress. Wettenhovi-Aspa and Sibelius remained friends throughout their lives, and Wettenhovi-Aspa made several pictures of the composer that differ from the usual official portraits, such as Sibelius against a background of pyramids as symbols of ancient cultural heritage and Sibelius in the robes of an honorary doctor of Yale University.

Cultural trends of Sibelius’s generation were spurred on by the press. Many illustrated comic papers, in Swedish as well as in Finnish, began appearing from the late 19th century onwards. On the pages of such magazines as Fyren, Tuulispää and Velikulta, politicians as well as cultural luminaries, Sibelius among them, were often the butt of cartoonists’ benevolent satire. The tousled hair of the young bohemian Sibelius was often used as a defining feature for the composer. Where the bald head of the ageing composer expressed genius, the unruly hair of the young Sibelius was an emblem of creativity. In a caricature by C. Meurlin from 1901, Sibelius’s shock of hair is reminiscent of Shockheaded Peter.46 A book entitled Imagines

46 Hoffman 2001. Hoffman’s didactic picture book on the dire consequences of disobedience had a wide circulation. It was published in Germany in 1845 and was first translated into Finnish in 1869.
Nostratium locosae I appeared in 1904 under the editorship of Heino Aspelin, containing a wide range of caricatures of contemporaries created by Aspelin in colour lithographs. At the turn of 2014, researchers in the archives of the Finnish National Gallery had reason to suspect they had found drawings of none other than Sibelius in sketches left behind by the artist Marcus Collin. Identification was based on Sibelius’s distinctive browline and the often repeated typical furrows on his forehead. Collin also worked in the early years of the 1900s as a cartoonist, and we may assume he too must have had a go at describing the composer’s features.

In December 1915, Fyren published a Sibelius-themed issue to celebrate the composer’s 50th birthday; the issue included a collection of caricatures of Sibelius published over the years. On the cover, Sibelius is depicted as Väinämöinen, with a kantele in his lap. The artist has based the picture on two famous works that represent Finnish national imagery at its most typical. Apart from the head, the figure of Väinämöinen is borrowed almost directly from a sculpture made by Johannes Takanen for the Monrepos Park in Viipuri in 1873. The landscape is a pastiche of the page in the edition of The Tales of Ensign Stål illustrated by Albert Edelfelt on which the lyrics of the national anthem are printed on a landscape viewed from on high.

The collection of portraits in Ainola grew over the decades. Two works that retained their pride of place in the home were a pen-and-wash drawing by Albert Edelfelt from 1904 and a bronze sculpture by John Munsterhjelm from 1909. Edelfelt used Sibelius’s face in a mural for the Great Hall of the University of Helsinki, completed in early 1905. Edelfelt’s sketch for the mural was one of Aino Sibelius’s favourites. She commented on it in a letter to her husband in January 1905: ‘You are simply enchanting in the university painting. I am head over heels in love with it and falling in love with you too again. The entire painting is exceedingly beautiful in my mind. You are simply wonderful. The sketch or rather the study for it is also delightful, it carries the inscription “till Jean Sibelius af Albert Edelfelt”. That means we will have it. I am so happy.’

Sculptor John Munsterhjelm’s bronze from 1909 was made when Sibelius was in Berlin. The composer commented on the piece with satisfaction, saying he liked it more than an earlier portrait head by Viktor Malmberg. He ordered a cast of the piece that was delivered to Ainola in late 1909. The sculpture generated a great deal of publicity, not least because the prestigious professor of aesthetics and the art critic Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä reported on it from Berlin to Finnish cultural circles in the magazine Aika in June 1909, prior to it being cast in bronze.

In the article, Aspelin-Haapkylä emphasised the role of Sibelius, who was around 45 at the time, as an established, world-famous composer in a prolific period ‘at the pinnacle of his art’. He compared the image conveyed by the new Sibelius sculpture with the young Sibelius in Gallen-Kallela’s En Saga. ‘It [Gallen-Kallela’s painting] shows him young, when his head was topped by unruly curls, and his eyes and every feature of his face glowed with happy genius brimming with the joy of life. That picture is dear to many, as it so perfectly captures the composer’s days of storm and passion,…’ Aspelin-Haapkylä wrote.

Now, however, it was time to see the composer in a new light and in a new form, also in art: ‘The new portrait, published here for the first time (…) shows us another Sibelius, a master steeped and matured in his art, whose blazing fire of genius has calmed down and in a manner of speaking gathered all his strength within the closed furnace.
John Munsterhjelm, Portrait of Jean Sibelius, 1909 (detail)
bronze, ht. 54cm
Antell Collections, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
Another cast of the work was made, belonging to the Ainola Foundation.
of his brain.’ In the ‘noble curving forehead’, the deep furrows between the eyes and the thinning hair of maturity in Munsterhjelm’s work, Aspelin-Haapylä reads signs of the greatness of Sibelius’s ceaseless creative power. ‘And the same oblivion to the external world is indicated perhaps also by that lonely tuft of hair fallen across the brow, which, by reminding us of the bountiful head of hair of his youth, is a veritable Napoleonic lock of hair that makes us think of the energy with which the master steers his troops of notes,’ he wrote. There is no doubt that the writer wanted to contribute to the construction of a new, dignified and more disciplined public image for the middle-aged national cultural icon.

The same spring, in 1909, when Sibelius was on a long trip to London, Paris and Berlin and sat for Munsterhjelm, the latest photographs travelled by post back home to Ainola. ‘Remember to send me immediately the new photograph of you,’ Aino Sibelius wrote to him in London in March.55 The reply and the photographs soon arrived: ‘I got your letter in which you asked for my photo. I sent you three right away. Here they particularly like the one in which I rest my chin in my hand. They are certainly free of sentimentality and retouching!!’56 Aino Sibelius commented on the pictures in her letter. The couple seem not to have been in agreement about how the pictures should be retouched, as was customary then, nor about in which pictures the composer looked his best. ‘Thank you for your letter and the photographs. I do think they are too realistic, although I also like best the one with your hand under your chin. The expression on your face is best in that one. The other pictures have that uncertain look which often comes into your eyes in photographs. Let’s talk more about this when you return home,’ Aino Sibelius wrote.57

All Sorts of Portraits

The artist Antti Favén belonged to Sibelius’s circle of friends and painted him several times. He spent long periods of time in Paris, and was known there as well as back in Finland as a cheerful and sociable person, whose company Sibelius also enjoyed. Favén was already much acclaimed in the 1910s, and, in the 1920s he became the leading portrait painter of the newly independent Finland.58

In spring 1909, the same time Munsterhjelm sculpted Sibelius in Berlin, Favén began planning a portrait of Sibelius that was not to be completed until 1913. In March 1909, Sibelius made a decision to leave London for Paris, ‘if I might benefit thereby. Antti Favén is quite désolé if he is unable to paint me’.59 Aino Sibelius did not think it worthwhile to travel only to sit for a portrait. ‘I think it is rather pointless for you to go to Paris, if the main reason is Favén’s need to paint. But do go ahead, if you wish. As I said, I can just as well be by myself here.”60 Sibelius did travel to Paris, but his letters and diary entries make no mention of Favén’s portrait for a few years, nor do we know of any Sibelius portraits by Favén prior to 1913.

The sitting sessions did not begin until June 1912 in Ainola.61 Although Sibelius thought that the painting would be finished a couple of weeks after it was begun, the sitting continued into the autumn and over the following spring. The composer’s short diary entries on the matter are increasingly impatient as time goes by. The portrait took up a lot of his time, while he was under pressure to do his own work and the need to earn money also grew.62 If paintings of the composer by Gallen-Kallelä, Järnefelt and Edelfelt had

55 Aino Sibelius to Jean Sibelius, 22 March 1909. Talas 2007, 125.
56 Jean Sibelius to Aino Sibelius, 28 March 1909. Talas 2007, 128.
57 Aino Sibelius to Jean Sibelius, 1 April 1909. Talas 2007, 132.
58 Vihanta 1999.
59 Jean Sibelius to Aino Sibelius, 19 March 1909. Talas 2007, 125.
60 Aino Sibelius to Jean Sibelius, 26 March 1909. Talas 2007, 128.
61 Diary entry on 6 June 1902. Sibelius 2005, 141.
nourished warm feelings in Aino Sibelius, in early autumn it began to seem Favén’s ongoing portrait had the opposite effect. In the beginning of September, Sibelius wrote dramatically in his diary that the painting expressed the tragedy of his life. Favén’s portrait drew from him aspects that seemed to destroy the love of his beloved wife. The painting led to a ‘heart-rending scene’ between the couple.63 The last entry about the portrait is from the end of April 1913, when in a generally gloomy passage Sibelius remarked that Favén had depicted him as a butcher.64

In the painting, Sibelius is shown sitting in an empire-style chair, dressed in black and looking intensely into the space in front of himself. His right hand rests on a table. The position of his left arm, resting on the back of the chair, is almost identical with that in John Munsterhjelm’s sculpture portrait. Stylistically Favén’s work represents the colouristic vibrancy of neo-impressionism, a style he had adopted at the beginning of the 1910s. This shift towards an increasingly liberated style is known as the first breakthrough of modernism in Finnish art history.65 Favén’s style developed very much on the pulse of the times, and this is apparent also in his picture of Sibelius. It was typical of the new painting of the period to approach composition and palette so as to create a unity. In portraits, the sitter was intentionally allowed to blend in with the background, enabling a lively play of form and colour free of the constraints of likeness. In Sibelius’s portrait, the composer’s figure in its dark costume is clearly set off from the surroundings, but the tones of the interior are echoed in the colours of the loosely rendered face and hands.

How well this modern style was thought to express the greatness of the national icon – an aspect that Aspelin-Haapylä for one had emphasised in his assessment of Munsterhjelm’s portrait – is a different matter. Reviews of Favén’s Sibelius reveal a sense of doubt. Writing in the Uusi Aura journal in May 1913, Onni Okkonen, future professor of art history and a key authority on art, remarked that the expression on the sitter’s face, intended to be lively, seemed primitive and empty.66 A few years later, the author Toivo Tarvas wrote in the literary magazine Otava. Kuvallinen kuukausilehti that the ‘tiredness and vacant gaze’ on Sibelius’s face did not impart the correct idea of a strong national composer.67

As Sibelius’s 60th birthday drew nearer, the State decided to commission a new portrait from Favén. In 1925, the composer’s son-in-law Jussi Snellman, recalled life in Ainola, where the work of composing The Tempest and the painting of the portrait became intertwined. The great hall in Ainola once more became Favén’s studio.68 In this new portrait, Sibelius is seen against an almost monochromatic background. His arm rests on a table on which vaguely rendered sheets of music lie. This time the painting is dominated by the composer’s figure without a recognisable setting.

In Favén’s 1925 picture, the figure of Sibelius is active despite being seemingly static. He does not rest in the chair, one has the impression he might get up at any second. The expression in his blue eyes is particularly intense – perhaps these were the ‘Sibelius eyes’ whose peculiarity Santeri Levas remarked on later in his book Sibelius ja hänen Ainolansa, and which Jussi Snellman also mentioned when he described the composer during the time the picture was painted: ‘His eyes are marvellous. They are

---

63 Diary entry on 7 September 1912. Sibelius 2005, 151: ‘Life is really a tragedy, for me. Favén paints my portrait and pulls out traits that kill my wife’s – my darling wife’s, love. A heart-rending scene between us. – Why should this woman – this fine being – be tormented? – Dear God! My childhood God – I see no dawning.’
64 Diary entry on 28 April 1913. Sibelius 2005, 170: ‘Favén’s portrait of me! I’m like a butcher!’
65 See Modernismin läpimurto 1898. Since then, the modernism of the 1910s has been examined in Finland, e.g., in the exhibition Surface and Depth 2001.
It is interesting to examine Eemu Myntti’s portrait of the composer alongside Favén’s pictures of Sibelius. Myntti painted his portrait in Järvenpää in spring 1930.\textsuperscript{70} He too was a skilful portraitist, albeit not a maker of official portraits. He painted perceptive portraits of writers and artists – and always following his own, expressive style. Myntti’s picture of Sibelius is characteristic for the artist, but compared with other portraits of the composer its decorative painterliness sets it apart.

\begin{flushleft}
\textbf{Antti Favén, Portrait of Jean Sibelius, 1913, oil on canvas, 90.5 x 103cm}
\textit{August and Lydia Keirkner Fine Arts Collection, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum}
\textit{Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen}
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{69} Sirén 2000, 450.
\textsuperscript{70} Salin 1991, 51.
Myntti’s approach to the task of portrait painting recalls Favén’s 1913 picture: in Myntti’s work too the keenly observed figure of the sitter and the background are elements of a painterly whole. The style and the stylisation are part of the content of the work. In the appraisal of 20th-century modern art, it is precisely the expression of the artist’s own, distinctive personal style that was seen as a measure of positive value from the perspective of artistic innovation. In portraits of notables, however, it was customary to emphasise likeness and fidelity to an external reality perceived to be ‘correct’. A portrait may have got a mixed reception when the artist sought to express not only the ‘likeness’ of the subject, but also his or her own inner vision. It is therefore not surprising that Myntti’s Sibelius aroused disapproval in the press due to its idiosyncratic style.

Myntti was nevertheless intrigued by the figure of Sibelius, and in his Kalevala-themed works from the 1930s he sketched Väinämöinen also as a bald figure who bore a resemblance to Sibelius.

A Living Monument

The solemn image of the national composer with allusions to eternal values is more firmly associated with Wäinö Aaltonen’s marble head of Sibelius than with any other work of art. Aaltonen’s own status in the history of Finnish art has undoubtedly strengthened the normativity of his image of Sibelius. Although Aaltonen’s career is appreciated across generations, a myth of genius was constructed also around his own public image that begs critical appraisal. By the mid-1930s, Aaltonen had already given form to the fundamental values of the newly independent country: work, family and cultural aspirations. He put a seal on his own heroism as an artist by making – in a manner of speaking – the impossible possible through his art by giving a face and an imagined bodily presence to the author Aleksis Kivi.

The story of Wäinö Aaltonen’s sculpture portrait of Sibelius began in spring 1935, when the Aleksis Kivi memorial was finished, and the Council of State commissioned a portrait of Sibelius in honour of the composer’s 70th birthday. The initiative, however, had come from Aaltonen himself. He approached the Council of State in March, explaining his financial difficulties and the harsh realities of the sculptural profession, such as the high cost of materials and labour. He asked the State for support in the form of a commission for a sculpted portrait of Sibelius, remarking that ‘as the nation would thus express its gratitude to the master of the creative spirit, it would also support me in my own creative work’. Aaltonen’s plea was processed as urgent in the State Art Commission, which in its positive decision expressed the hope that Sibelius would agree to sit for Aaltonen. The terms of the commission stated that the piece should be in marble and slightly larger than life.

The material for the future sculpture was already in Aaltonen’s possession. He had acquired a two-metre piece of Carrara marble from Italy in 1923. It was originally meant for a work called Suuri kahlaaja depicting a wading woman, and had been rough hewn for the purpose in Italy. Having stood for years in the yard of Aaltonen’s Kulosaari studio in Helsinki, the stone finally became Sibelius’s head. In summer 1935, Sibelius sat for Aaltonen several times in his studio. There are no known sketches for the piece. The pastel drawing of Sibelius by Aaltonen on the cover of the 1945 Yearbook of Finnish Art was created later...
Wäinö Aaltonen. Jean Sibelius, 1935
marble, ht. 70cm
Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
specifically for the book.76 The pastel is reminiscent of Wäinö Aaltonen’s paintings with their intense colours and stylised forms.77 Aaltonen planned from the start to make other versions of Sibelius’s portrait, too. We know of several heads in marble, and, as early as 1935, Aaltonen made a bronze cast of the piece.78 The idea of a large version sculpted in black granite was never realised,79 but in 1963 he completed a massive head in diorite.80

No site for the sculpture had been chosen when the work was commissioned, but in 1935 it was decided to deposit the finished piece in the Ateneum Art Museum.81 The work was acceded to the national art collection as soon as it was completed,82 thus making the piece, funded as it was by the State and deposited in a museum, a kind of official portrait of Sibelius in its time.

Aaltonen’s finely sculpted head rises from a large, rectangular monolith. The rough-hewn mass is strikingly large compared with the nearly life-size head. The design creates an impression of organic growth: the sophisticated human head, symbolising culture and creative spirit, seems to emerge from the rough, unrefined raw material of the earth.

Aaltonen had used marble, the classic material of sculpture, since his early work in the 1910s. In the case of the Sibelius piece, the transformation of a slab of marble into the portrait of a creative artist alludes to works by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin.83 The juxtaposition of rough and polished stone is a recurring motif in Rodin’s work, and particularly close parallels with the Sibelius piece are Rodin’s portrait of Victor Hugo (1883) and Gustaf Mahler as Mozart (1911).84 This sculptural device was particularly suited to express the vigorous creative power of an artist-genius, whose work could almost be compared with divine creation.85

If Aaltonen’s portrait were of granite, the characteristic stone of Finnish bedrock, the growth metaphor of the work would be easy to interpret specifically as symbolising the birth of national art from the immemorial ground of Finland.86 In the early years of the 20th century, it was common practice to construct the history of Finnish art by downplaying even the most obvious links to international movements in works and artists. Important works of art were interpreted as products of Finnish nature or national character, and the heaviness and inwardness typical of the Finnish national identity were perceived as positive traits.87 The same also happened with ideas around the music and artistry of Sibelius. But as Aaltonen’s portrait shows, features perceived as national and international are not mutually exclusive in art.

Aaltonen’s sculpture was finished in time for Sibelius’s 70th birthday, when the composer was the object of unprecedented attention. He was at the height of his popularity, but the gala dinner also remained his last prominent public appearance.88 Afterwards, countless visitors came to pay their respects to Sibelius in Ainola. Undoubtedly many of them brought to their visit expectations created by Sibelius’s music as well as photographs.
and artworks of the famous composer. One of them was Veikko Hintikka, who wrote about his meeting in the Yhteishyvä magazine on 9 December 1950. On his visit, the art-based idea of the composer came face to face with the living reality: ‘I look at the maestro sitting opposite me and listen to him talk. If one looks back on the Sibelius so masterfully captured in marble by Wäinö Aaltonen, its features exuding both inner and outer strength, the Sibelius who in a few weeks will turn 85 bears little outward resemblance to that picture etched on one’s mind. But although the peaked face carries signs of great age, the eyes still show the vitality of the creative spirit.’

Sibelius and the Modern Memorial

*The Sibelius Monument* in Helsinki’s Sibelius Park is one of the most famous public artworks in Finland. It is also one of the most popular tourist sights in the capital. The memorial was unveiled in the presence of dignitaries on 7 September 1967, when the Sibelius Society donated the work to the City of Helsinki.90

The Sibelius Society had been founded ten years earlier, soon after Jean Sibelius’s death, and it took on the task of launching a monument project.91 In early 1959, the society invited all Finnish sculptors to participate in a competition for the monument. The competition brief required entries to express both the music and the person of Sibelius, but otherwise its terms were loose enough to allow for either abstract or figurative solutions.92

By the end of the submission period on 25 May 1961, a total of 50 entries had been received. After evaluating them anonymously, the jury divided the entries into three categories.93 Eight submissions were accepted into the highest category, the three top proposals being by Toivo Jaatinen, Harry Kivijärvi and Martti Peitso. Entries by Kauko Räsänen and Ben Renvall were purchased, in addition to which the jury unanimously recommended the purchase of Eila Hiltunen’s submission entitled *Credo* as an extra entry. Hiltunen was not the only artist to submit an abstract proposal, but the spatial concept of her work differed from the rest. Consisting of pipes, the main volume of the work rested on the ground on four legs without a pedestal so that the public could also stand underneath the work.

The assessment of the competition entries took a long time, and the decision was not an easy one. One of the contentious issues was whether the monument should be a likeness of Sibelius. One such work, the equestrian statue of Marshal Mannerheim, had been unveiled in the centre of Helsinki only a few years earlier, in 1960, after a project that had dragged on for ten years.94 The debate on the Sibelius Monument branched out in many directions, and at one point it was suggested that the monument be commissioned from Wäinö Aaltonen, who had recently completed portraits of two former presidents installed in front of the Parliament building.95

The Sibelius Society finally decided at the end of 1961 to invite the top six sculptors from the first competition to participate in a new round. They could either develop their earlier submissions or make completely new ones. Eila Hiltunen’s *Passio Musicae* was a refined version of her original entry. The art experts on the jury took a favourable view of her proposal, and according to the jury’s statement the entry was the most original of them all. ‘Although the work is not directly linked to Sibelius as a person – it could also be a generic monument to music – it is an apt expression of Sibelius’s music,’ reads the statement. It also noted that using steel pipes as a medium was linked to contemporary trends. By contrast, the idea of a portrait plaque under the pipe construction was not considered a good idea.96

---

90 One of the invited guests was Urho Kekkonen, President of the Republic.
91 The Sibelius Society was founded on 7 December 1957. A memorial statue of Sibelius was planned in Helsinki as early as 1946. At the time, the city observed that the Sibelius Park would be a suitable site for the statue. Lindgren 1996, 65–66.
93 The entries were marked with pseudonyms, with the names of the artists in closed envelopes. Only the envelopes of the top eight entries were opened.
94 See, e.g., Konttinen 1989.
95 Younger generation art critics of the 1960s debated the construction of likenesses. This offered a fine opportunity to delineate differences regarding changing ideas about art. See Valkonen 1962.
Even after the second competition round in autumn 1962 the jury was still not unanimous. Its internal disagreements were analysed in the press, which fanned the flames of the monument debate as a topic of public discussion. The idea of a third round of competition was mooted, following which the architect Aulis Blomstedt, a relative of Sibelius and proponent of Hiltunen’s proposal, resigned from the jury.97 Eila Hiltunen received defamatory mail.98 One of the staunchest advocates of Passio Musicae in the debate was Erik Kruskopf, art critic of the Hufvudstadsbladet newspaper, who was well versed in trends in modern art. Among other things, he analysed the gap that had emerged between expert views and popular opinion. The debate about the monument was not merely about the superiority of a representational or abstract solution, it was also about who has the right to decide – whose taste would tip the scales. According to Kruskopf, there was not a single artist in early 1960s Finland who would have been able to create a work to parallel the likeness of Aleksi Kivi, for instance.99

97 Wessman 1998, 36.
98 Pietinen 2012, 168.
99 Kruskopf Hbl 17.10.1962.
The decisive meeting of the jury in November 1962 was held with both radio and television in attendance. The majority of the members were in favour of allowing Hiltunen to continue developing her design.  

However, they stipulated that the final design must also include a sculpture portrait of Sibelius. In a letter to Eila Hiltunen on 1 December 1962, the Sibelius Society gave instructions regarding the portrait: ‘As to your inquiry, which age the portrait should present, the desired answer is: the creative Sibelius of the 1910s–1920s.’ Hiltunen was advised to request photographs from the composer’s daughter. 

In June 1963, the Sibelius Society finally accepted Hiltunen’s design in its entirety. The artist had built a new partial sketch of the pipe construction in actual size and a scale model of Sibelius’s face cast in steel. 

The contract for the commission was signed in July. 

Built in accordance with the third sketch, *Passio Musicae* is a construction of metal pipes standing on three legs. A facial sculpture of Sibelius, surrounded by a free-form composition, is placed on top of a rocky outcrop. While developing the second draft, Hiltunen had worked in Milan and had often visited the late-medieval cathedral of the city. It has been suggested that the cathedral-like character of the *Sibelius Monument* was influenced by the architecture of the church reaching for the heights. 

It took many years to build the monument, and the original idea of completing it for the 100th anniversary of Sibelius’s birth could not be carried through. The planning and realisation of the monument required cooperation between different professionals. The architect Juhani Kivikoski assisted Hiltunen in creating the landscaping plan for both competition entries. 

The final site of the monument in the park was not decided upon until during the second competition. Kivikoski drew up an extensive plan for the work in the rocky park. 

The strength calculations of the monument required engineering skills, and the closest collaborator of the artist in the realisation phase was a professional welder called Emil Kukkonen. Hiltunen herself had learned to weld in the late 1950s. The stainless-steel for the pipes of the monument was supplied from France in plates cut to size. The method for turning the plates into individually decorated pipes was developed after experimentation, and most of the work was done by the artist herself. Altogether 14 components were built in the studio, which were then assembled on-site. 

The technical realisation of the monument is an important part of its history. The project produced a legendary image of a young female artist engaged in physically strenuous welding work. The artist’s husband, the photographer Otso Pietinen, documented the project in hundreds of photographs. 

In August 1964, Hiltunen wrote in her work diary about working on the material. The personal, hands-on experience of the material was important to her, leaving her handprint on the work. ‘I am getting to be more and more virtuosic at welding (...). In modern art, the personal event resides in the form, all the life that happens in it is so important that you cannot let someone else make your art,’ she wrote. 

In the end, Hiltunen found it difficult to let her assistant do the welding. The scholar of Finnish sculpture, Liisa Lindgren, has emphasised the position of the *Sibelius Monument* on the dividing line between traditional and modern monumental art. The starting point of the work, one also underlined by Hiltunen herself, is the ideal of modernist art, the artist’s personal expression. Public art was in a period of rapid change in Finland, when a principle used to define an artist’s independent work was now transposed into the realm of public art.
Kain Tapper, Sibelius, c. 1964
plaster, ht. 17.5cm
Ainola Foundation
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
One interesting aspect of the project was the public fundraising campaign at the end of 1961 and the start of 1962. Campaign plans included the idea of extensive educational work to strengthen familiarity with Sibelius and his music throughout the country. The Sibelius Society presented a proposal to the Union of Finnish Primary School Teachers for a popular education project to be conducted in conjunction with the fundraising campaign, to include ‘in the union’s 1961 programme for patriotic education work for the popularisation of Sibelius’s music and its national importance and that events to this end would be organised in schools’. With the help of the teachers’ union, it would be possible to extend the programme ‘into every village community’. The measures suggested included the incorporation of certain songs and tunes by Sibelius into the school curriculum. The National Board of Education accepted the Sibelius Society’s proposal in a meeting on 31 December 1960, but details on its implementation were not laid down at the time. The fundraising campaign took place as a collaboration between schools and students of different educational institutions, which had been one of the proposals of the Sibelius Society.

Other public artworks depicting Sibelius have attracted much less attention than the monument by Eila Hiltunen. Plans for erecting a statue in Hämeenlinna, Sibelius’s birthplace, were put forward as early as 1936. The project never took off, however, as the composer did not support it. Sibelius’s death in 1957 reawakened this project as well. The town of Hämeenlinna announced a nationwide competition in 1961. Under the competition brief, the work should depict a young Sibelius at the height of his creative powers. The next year, the first prize was shared by two young sculptors, Heikki Nieminen and Kain Tapper. Following the recommendation of the statue committee, the work was commissioned from Tapper, and was unveiled on Sibelius’s birthday on 8 December 1964.

Kain Tapper is one of the artists who redefined Finnish sculpture in the early 1960s. Around the time the project for the Hämeenlinna Sibelius memorial was current, he was also actively involved in public debates to define the boundaries between modern and traditional styles and different artist generations. Tapper’s unconventional modern altarpiece in a church at Orivesi and particularly his 1962 work *Funeral March* composed of pieces of wood resembling found objects, fired up the opposition led by Wäinö Aaltonen: it was inappropriate to bring ‘stones and stumps’ to an art exhibition as works expressing the artist’s personality.

The full-length portrait of Sibelius in Hämeenlinna rising to a height of three metres, is basically a traditional likeness. However, its execution alludes to the stylistic devices of the modernist sculpture of the 1950s and 1960s. The rough surface texture underlines the materiality of the work, and even in the case of this statue it reminds one of the artist’s role as an author working on material. Tapper also made a bronze bust of the statue’s head. The casting process is intentionally made visible by leaving the seams of the cast plainly in sight. The casting technique has also produced a pale uneven patina on the surface, a device that was used from the 1950s onwards to emphasise the materiality of the work.

In keeping with the competition brief, Tapper’s figure of Sibelius alludes to the young composer. Here too photographs of the composer were used as an aid by the artist.

---

109 Copy of Sibelius Society’s memorandum, 2 January 1961. Documents on the Sibelius Monument, Eila Hiltunen Archive. Archive Collections, FNG. The author has not researched how Sibelius was taken into account in the final curricula of Finnish primary schools in the early 1960s.

110 Wessman 1998, 28; Copy of Sibelius Society’s memorandum 2 January 1961. Documents on the Sibelius Monument, Eila Hiltunen Archive. Archive Collections, FNG.

111 See the City of Hämeenlinna website. The same year, a bronze statue of Sibelius by Erkki Eronen was erected in the town of Järvenpää. Eronen participated in the competition for the Sibelius Monument in the early 1960s, but his entry was unsuccessful.

112 Picture of Heikki Nieminen’s entry: Heikki Nieminen Archive. Archive Collections, FNG.

113 Lindgren 2007.

114 Casts of Tapper’s head of Sibelius can be found at least in the collection of the Hämeenlinna Historical Museum (Birthplace of Jean Sibelius Museum) and the Kirpilä Art Collection in Helsinki.

115 The phenomenon is particularly associated with the influence of modern Italian sculpture in Finland in the 1950s and 1960s, see Lindgren 1996, 113–16, 125–28.

However, the figure is rendered in a way that refuses to offer an unequivocal interpretation as to the historical period in which the person should be placed. Neither is the figure’s age obvious – at least not to a viewer unfamiliar with the transformation in Sibelius’s appearance from youth to old age. The simple nondescript suit that the young composer wears is timeless, and the roughly sketched features of the face also allow multiple interpretations of its age.

The Person in the Limelight

A study of the press coverage of Sibelius from 1999 reveals that the reservedly respectful attitude towards the composer that was still prevalent in 1957 had changed by 1995. The writing had acquired new features that made Sibelius’s public image more down to earth. Although attitudes towards the national past and to public persons have also changed in the past 15 years, we may still agree with the researcher’s observation: ‘It is symptomatic of the sanctity and untouchability of Sibelius’s heroic figure that more than 40 years after [the composer’s death] things having to do with Sibelius’s everyday life are still new to the public, so much so that they can be turned into big headlines in the papers’.  

The 2000s have seen a rise in the presentation in films, for example, of national figures representing both high and popular culture. The Sibelius movie by Timo Koivusalo from 2003 follows the composer’s life, underlining in a rather romantic register the long love story between Aino and Jean Sibelius. The emergence of new interpretations is facilitated by the improving accessibility of biographical source material and documents in both printed and digital forms, and this does not apply exclusively to Sibelius. A different thing altogether is the quantitatively enormous amount of research on the music of Sibelius that has been produced in the past decades, a veritable Sibelius cult.

While the image of Sibelius has become more informal, the figure of the aged composer has been replaced by pictures of the young Sibelius on the covers of many books about the composer, for instance. As early as 1986, when Sibelius was selected as the motif on the 100-mark paper note in the new series of Finnish currency, the selection fell on a picture of the composer around 1900, an image expressive of youthful creativity with copious hair. The image of a distant and severe Sibelius had already become a problem of sorts in the composer’s lifetime. In many texts, people who knew Sibelius, such as the painter Antti Favén in 1945, emphasised that the great man living in ‘the silence of Ainola’ was in fact a jovial and friendly person. In 1952, a picture book on Sibelius’s life, entitled Jean Sibelius and edited by his daughter, Margareta Jalas, was published on the initiative of the Otava Publishing Company Ltd. Mostly consisting of captions, the text is in Finnish, Swedish and English. According to the blurb on the back cover, the purpose of the book is to use rare and previously unpublished material to create ‘an intimate picture story’. Sibelius had inspected and approved the book, but hoped it would not be published until after his death. The book was released in the hope that by bringing ‘our great man as a person near to us all’ it would make the general public even more familiar with Sibelius’s music. In the foreword, Veikko Helasvuo emphasised the engaging social character of the ‘lonely genius’. Among the pictures, there were also a few rare shots of

117 Heino 1999, University of Tampere, 149.
118 The publication of diaries and letters after the turn of the millennium is important for the study of the image, cultural impact and networks of Sibelius, see, e.g., Sibelius 2005 (diary); Talas 2003 and 2007. For more information on the history of letters in Sibelius’s private papers, see Sirén 2000, 8.
119 Sibelius’s manuscripts have been available to musicologists from the 1980s onwards. For example, the Jean Sibelius Works project by the National Library of Finland aims at publishing a critical edition of all of Sibelius’s works.
120 This seems to be the case particularly in the case of books on Sibelius published outside Finland. See, e.g., Vignal 2004; Goss 2009; Barnett 2010.
121 Dahlström 2005, 8–9.
122 Jalas 1952. According to the National Bibliography of Finland, the work recorded for 1952 was not published until 1957. The text on the back cover mentions Sibelius’s wish to have the book published only after his death. A second edition was published in 1958.
the Sibelius family on a summer picnic. The artworks in the book included Järnefelt’s portrait from 1892, Gallen-Kallela’s Symposion and the portrait panel of En Saga, Edelfelt’s drawing of Sibelius in Ainola, and the ‘famous marble sculpture’ by Aaltonen.

In his book *Sibelius, me ja muut (Sibelius, We, and Others)*, published in 2007, Tomi Mäkelä discusses the problem of the image of an excessively severe Sibelius. According to him, the image that conveys military dignity in keeping with the ideals of its age is not only erroneous, but downright damaging. The extremely masculine image of Sibelius had been developed in the years between the World Wars, as represented by Wäinö Aaltonen’s 1935 portrait. In the new world situation after the Second World War, such an image might, according to Mäkelä, also produce unwanted associations, even ones alluding to nationalist extremism.123

Interest in the image of Sibelius, its humanising and new contextualisation continues, and previously unseen versions will undoubtedly emerge. Even Eila Hiltunen’s monument changed soon after its completion from being regarded as a radical and scandalous work to a widely accepted collective symbol of modern Finland and its cultural heritage. The history of Finnish art also offers less familiar and less ‘correct’ interpretations. The image of Sibelius presented in art today is more diverse than the one created by such great names as Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Eero Järnefelt during turn of the century Golden Age of Finnish art, or in the 1930s and 1960s by the likes of Wäinö Aaltonen and Eila Hiltunen, iconic creators of images of Sibelius.

**Sources and Bibliography**

**Unprinted sources**
- Finnish National Gallery (FNG), Archive Collections, Helsinki
- Eila Hiltunen Archive
- Eva and Marcus Collin Sketchbook Collection
- Heikki Nieminen Archive
- University of Tampere, School of Communication

**Printed sources**

123 Mäkelä 2007, 243–45.
Literature

Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopiston kuvanveistö.


---

FNG Research Issue No. 1/2017. Publisher: Finnish National Gallery, Kaivokatu 2, FI-00100 Helsinki, FINLAND. © All rights reserved by the author and the publisher. Originally published in https://research.fng.fi