Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Illustration for the novel, Seven Brothers, by Aleksis Kivi, 1907, watercolour and pencil, 23.5cm x 31.5cm. Ahlström Collection, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.
European Revivals
From Dreams of a Nation to Places of Transnational Exchange
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Foreword

European Revivals: From Dreams of a Nation to Places of Transnational Exchange

Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff and Riitta Ojanperä

When the Finnish National Gallery established a research project titled ‘European Revivals’ in 2009, the idea was to stimulate debate and reflect upon the phenomena surrounding European national revivals, by bringing together and analysing the connections and correspondences that have helped to shape the identities of modern European nations. The question of national revivalist discourses in art and art-historical research was most current at the project’s outset at the Finnish National Gallery, which had just opened a comprehensive exhibition of Finnish art past and present, based on motifs from Finland’s national epic poem, *The Kalevala*.

It was clear that an art-historical scholarship on the subject of European Revivals had been broadly established, but the Finnish National Gallery’s initiative aimed at examining parallel phenomena from a more wide-scale international perspective. It seemed obvious that one of the defining traits of cultural revivalist rhetoric in art and art history had been an exclusiveness linked to local current cultural or social objectives. Our key interest, however, was to look at the similarities of these narratives, instead of their differences.

The project’s intention was to foster and provide international scholarly networking between museum professionals and academia and to bring together art-historical scholarship on the subject. In our view, this was needed in order to nourish museum projects, exhibitions and university research with an emphasis on national art and its collections on a wider scale. This was to be realised through organising or supporting affiliated international conferences, all of which would explore different aspects of the European Revivals phenomena. Moreover, it was important that the European Revivals project was not distinctly connected with any exhibition programme, but that from the outset its field was open to connecting optional initiatives, including international exhibitions and publications. From the start, the project aimed to culminate in a scientific peer-reviewed publication, which would cover the most interesting topics to have emerged during the period 2009–18.
At the heart of the European Revivals project has been a series of international conferences organised in several countries since the inaugural conference held in Helsinki in 2009. Each ‘European Revivals’ conference has had its specific theme, title and organising team. The topics have arisen out of the different aspects of the ideas of a cultural revivalist phenomena, linking with other key questions being asked within art history and cultural history.

Conferences:
2009 ‘Myths, Legends and Dreams of a Nation’, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, Finland
2012 ‘Modern Identities’, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, Finland
2015 ‘Artists’ Colonies and Nature in Art, Architecture and Design around 1900’, Zakopane and Krakow, Poland
2017 ‘Cultural Mythologies around 1900’, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

The transnational way of looking for the unique and authentic around the turn of the 20th century

Towards the end of the 19th century, European artists began to express a new and profound interest in their unique local pasts and cultural inheritances. This growing sense of national identity prompted a major flowering of nationalist debate concerning the rapidly disappearing regional cultures throughout Europe. This was a debate that was largely shaped by the desire within several countries for cultural and artistic, and ultimately social and economic, independence.

As the new century dawned, national mythological literature and national epics, such as The Kalevala in Finland or the Cuchulainn legend in Ireland and Scotland, became major vehicles for cultural expression and inspired some of the most important art of the age. Several of the most significant artists of the period were also key figures in this movement. They worked across all artistic media, from small-scale traditional domestic crafts and large-scale design, to major schemes of architecture. Often, rather than producing easel-paintings, artists undertook monumental programmes of mural decoration or
stained-glass projects, because of the social implications of such public art. For those countries that had not yet achieved their dream of self-sovereignty, it became imperative to promote their unique distinctive cultural present as unbroken with the past. This became particularly important for those small nations on the northern, eastern and western fringes of Europe and especially those that had been conquered and divided by powerful neighbours.

Many of the important topics concerning national revivals in European art around 1900 also examined issues around the search for authenticity, and the ‘rewriting’, reinterpretation and assimilation of

Joseph Alanen, *Lemminkäinen and the Cowherd*, 1919–20, tempera on canvas, 50cm x 64cm. Collection Maine Wartiovaara née Alanen, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Jenni Nurminen
national styles, symbols and cultural narratives in late 19th-century European art and literature. Interestingly, it has become clear that these aspects were considered on a wider geographical scale: from Finland, Norway, Estonia and Germany to Poland, France, Spain, Ireland and Scotland. Many revival movements were forging powerful cultural interests which focused on Spiritualism and Theosophy, which themselves were often based on folk traditions and the new scholarship that was being created at that time.

Although it has been well known that the countries on Europe’s outer borders have had unique and far-reaching cultural renaissances in the form of ‘national revivals’, what seems to have been less well understood is that while each was distinctive, they also had much in common. And although direct connections existed, for example between Finnish and Hungarian artists or between Irish and Scottish artists, several other factors have contributed to a largely undocumented system of interaction and exchange. These ranged from educational and exhibiting opportunities in Paris, London, Berlin and Vienna, to the foundation of national collections of museums and research into vernacular and folk cultures; from the rise of mythology and legendary history in literature and music, to the multitude of localised ‘national’ exhibitions of contemporary art and new forms of integrated art and architecture in various local manifestations of the Gesamtkunstwerk. There was also the major role played by national displays at the International Exhibitions and World Fairs of the period.

It is within this Europe-wide ‘national revival’ movement that ideas of a renewal of art, and art as a cornerstone of modern society, were forged. The influence of unique local artistic traditions found fullest expression in forms of indigenous folk art and, although the globalising Industrial Revolution threatened many such folk traditions with extinction, nevertheless at the heart of the ‘national revivals’ movement was a desire to refine art and society for the modern age.

Towards nature and spiritual regeneration

One of the key themes that has been investigated in many of the European Revivals conferences is the link between the spiritual and nature which inspired artists to create powerful works and even transformed people’s ways of living. This important development was especially explored in the conference in Krakow, where the leading theme was the return to nature, which manifested itself in visual arts, architecture and design, literature and music, philosophy and lifestyles around 1900. Rooted in the ideas
of 19th-century thinkers and writers such as John Ruskin, it informed the Arts and Crafts and Back-to-the-Land movements, as well as parallel ideas understood as national revivals in central and northern Europe, all of which tapped into Romantic philosophy and imagination.

The return to nature took place both in art and in life, triggering the rise of the colonies of artists who believed that the rural life was the only happy, healthy and human one. In their search for the simple life and physical and spiritual regeneration, painters, writers and composers settled down in the areas of natural beauty, such as the countryside around Lake Tuusula in Finland, the seaside village of Skagen in Denmark or the village of Zakopane in the Polish Tatras. This development manifested in the realisation of numerous individual artists’ houses in different parts of Europe. The rise of these artists’ communities and colonies in the countryside was part of the search for alternative ways of living; and this created new examples of *Gesamtkunstwerk* combining the arts, architecture and interior design of the time. There the struggle to forge new modern identities in the material world was realised in a yearning for a holistic aesthetic ‘order’.

In the arts, this turn towards nature translated into the representations of the world and order, not infrequently endowed with symbolic and metaphysical qualities. Nature was carefully studied by artists and the representations of life, growth, germination and cycles of seasons made their way into painting and sculpture. In design and applied arts nature was stylised and increasingly abstracted into decorative forms and patterns. Some plants and trees, such as the rowan tree or chestnut, gained widespread significance and the motif of the Tree of Life stood out as a powerful symbol. This, again, underlines the manifold potential and variation of traditional myths and stories. The revivalist cultural approaches to these traditions have been utilised both in forming national identities through exclusion, but also in the search for universalist conceptions of meaning in art, life and nature.

**Looking forward**

The themes drawn from the key ideas supporting the European Revivals project are still powerfully resonant in the early 21st century. People’s lifestyles, indigenous material culture, national myths, forming personal or collective identities and the meaning of native landscape or nature in general still have an enduring significance today. The 10-year cycle of European Revivals conferences, professional exchange and accumulated research have shown that the issue of cultural revivals, whether national,
universal or local, is far more wide-reaching, multidimensional and complex than we could possibly have imagined at the beginning of this journey.

The discourses connected to cultural revivals do not seem to subside. On the contrary, interest in these topics across the fields of art-historical research, the arts and cultural history remains very much alive. It seems evident that analytical and critical historiographic surveys of national historical narratives are more important than ever. Therefore we hope that the input of the European Revivals research project will extend over a widening range of scholars and research communities. We hope we are right in believing that interaction between individuals and institutions, both in museums and in academia, has grown deeper and more wide-ranging than was the case ten years ago.

The authors of this foreword, as well as the Finnish National Gallery, wish to extend the warmest thanks to all those individuals and organisations who have participated in and are committed to making the project plan of European Revivals come true. The collaboration with all of you, on both an intellectual and practical level, has been most rewarding and inspiring.
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Both James Macpherson’s *Ossian* and Elias Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* are cultural-political texts born out of times of stress. To understand the significance of Macpherson’s work and its relation to *Kalevala*, one can begin with the insight of Joep Leerssen of the University of Amsterdam.¹ Leerssen writes that we may encounter the impact of Macpherson’s *Ossian* in situations ‘where the conditions of 1750s Scotland apply: a rich oral culture, a sense of historical disruption and a sense of ill-borne political subordination’.² Leerssen thus identifies *Ossian* as a text that exists at the interface of political stress and traditional culture. He continues: ‘In such circumstances, oral literature may be collected, not just into anthologies or into short textual Fragments (...) rather, attempts will be made to reconstitute these “fragments” into what is felt to be an original epic whole. The best example, apart from *Fingal* and *Temora* (the two volumes which constitute Macpherson’s *Poems of Ossian*) is probably Lönnrot’s *Kalevala.*³ Like *Ossian*, *Kalevala* is one of the great constructed epics of northern Europe. But how can the two be compared? To begin with one should note that they are not contemporary with one another. Macpherson (1736–96) published his first Ossianic work, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, in 1760. Lönnrot (1802–84) published his first version of *Kalevala* in 1835. That is a difference of 75 years. Another difference is that Lönnrot gathered Finnish material and published it in Finnish, while Macpherson took inspiration from his own native Gaelic-speaking culture but published his work in the language of the oppressor culture, namely English. Yet that publication in due course helped to drive Gaelic-language scholarship, just as *Kalevala* helped to drive Finnish-language scholarship.

To understand the stress on Macpherson’s native culture at the time he created *Ossian* one has only to revisit the events

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² Leerssen, ‘Ossian,’ 122.
³ Leerssen, ‘Ossian,’ 122.
of his childhood. A defining moment was the defeat of the Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden, which took place on 16 April 1746. In the days after the battle, the main remnant of the Jacobite army disbanded at Ruthven barracks near Kingussie, in the heart of the Scottish Highlands. It was on a farm close to that barracks that James Macpherson had been born, in October 1736. The nine-year-old Macpherson may have been looking on as the last of the Jacobite army, some of whom would have been his kinsmen, set fire to the barracks as they dispersed. He would certainly have been aware of what had happened. But more important to understanding the situation of stress that gave birth to Ossian is not the immediate military disruption of that war, but its aftermath. That aftermath was oppressive for all Highlanders, regardless of where their political allegiance lay, for what began as a campaign of anti-Jacobite
action became a campaign of destruction of Gaelic culture. Central to that was the banning of tartan in civilian dress. From the 1 August 1747 it was illegal for men to wear that characteristic Highland fabric unless they were part of the British army. Tartan is now such a common fabric across the world that the notion of it being illegal seems farfetched. But that law remained in force for over three decades; it was not repealed until 1782. That is to say, by the time Macpherson’s Ossian was fully published in 1763, it had been illegal for a man to wear tartan in a civilian context for over 15 years. The message of the tartan ban was very clear: regardless of political allegiance, Highlanders had no right to express their own culture, except as military servants of the British Empire. In short a central element of James Macpherson’s everyday culture had been destroyed.

That legal injunction against tartan was part of a wider campaign of violent suppression in the period immediately following Culloden. For his advocacy of that policy the leader of the Hanoverian forces, the Duke of Cumberland, third and youngest son of King George II, earned the nickname ‘butcher’. The point here is that the intention of the British Government after Culloden was not only to suppress Jacobitism but to use it as a pretext for destroying Highland culture. That attempt to extirpate an indigenous culture in the interests of economic advantage was not unusual in the British Empire. Indeed a number of military officers active in Scotland in the aftermath of Culloden went on to commit atrocities against indigenous populations elsewhere. A well-known example is Edward Cornwallis, who ordered the brutal suppression of the Native American population of Nova Scotia, a mere two years after he had been similarly engaged in Scotland.

So by the time James Macpherson had reached his eleventh birthday in October 1747 it was illegal for him to wear the distinctive clothing of his own culture. That enables one to understand Ossian as the remarkable act of cultural retrieval and reconstruction that it is. With a single work Macpherson managed to transform public perception of the Scottish Highlander from that of a barbarous threat that must be suppressed, into a repository of noble virtue worthy of cultural admiration; indeed in virtue equal to or exceeding that of the ancient Greek. (The current stereotype of the Highlander falls somewhere between the two).
The immediate impact of Macpherson’s work was not just in the British region but elsewhere in Europe, indeed Denis Diderot made a French translation of parts of the Fragments only a year after it had been first published in Edinburgh, in 1760. Fingal – or to give its full title, Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books: Together with several other Poems, composed by Ossian the Son of Fingal – was published in London in 1762. It quickly attracted the interest of the Italian writer Melchior Cesarotti, then working in Venice. His own version of much of the material in that volume was published in his native Padua, in 1763, under the title Poesie di Ossian. Soon Goethe would follow suit in Germany with translations of two of the Ossianic poems in the Fingal volumes – The Songs of Selma and Berrathon, both of which he used to great effect in his pioneering novel, The Sorrows of Young Werther, published in 1774.

Ossian and Finland

Ossian became known in Finland first through its Swedish and French translations, during the time when Finland was a province of the Swedish kingdom. As Peter Graves has pointed out, there was considerable Swedish activity with respect to Ossian as early as 1765.⁴ That rapidly transferred to Finland via the then capital Turku, also known by its Swedish name of Åbo. Of particular importance was Swedish-born Johan Henrik Kellgren (1751–95), who became a student at the Åbo Academy at the age of 17. In 1773, he was elected a member of the literary society Aurora and under its auspices he published his first Ossian translations, in 1775.⁵ In the same paper, Graves notes that ‘later generations of scholars and students at the Academy there – particularly the Åbo Romantics of the 1810s – retained Ossianic interests, along with an increasing enthusiasm for the Finnish language and culture which was to lead, among other things, to Elias Lönnrot’s collection of ancient Finnish songs out of which he composed Kalevala’.⁶ Graves also notes that ‘the literary society founded by the Åbo Romantics in 1815 initially took the name of The Selma Society, before changing it a year or so later to The Aurora Society’.⁷ The Songs of Selma constituted one of the most popular parts of The Poems of Ossian – indeed it was a translation of that section of Ossian that Kellgren had published in 1775. Kellgren’s source was not the English of Macpherson (or, indeed,

⁷ Graves, ‘Ossian’, 207.
the German of Goethe) but the French of Suard. That French source for a Swedish translation made in Finland underlines the early international impact of Macpherson’s text. With respect to Kalevala, Graves goes on to make the point that a key Finnish-Swedish writer of the first half of the 19th century, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, author of King Fjalar (which makes strong reference to an Ossianic Scotland) matriculated at Åbo Academy in 1822, in the same year as Elias Lönnrot.

These two historically interwoven constructed epics, Ossian and Kalevala, have each given birth to a significant body of visual art. It was the art that related to Ossian that led to my participation in the first conference of the European Revivals project to which this publication is devoted. That conference, ‘Myths, Legends and Dreams of a Nation’, took place at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, in 2009. In my paper I underlined the continuity between

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8 Graves, ‘Ossian,’ 201. Passages of what became Songs of Selma had been published in 1760 in Macpherson’s first Ossianic work Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland. Suard had also translated that version, see James Macpherson, Fragments de poésie ancienne – traduction de Diderot, Turgot, Suard (Paris: José Corti, 2008). My thanks to Jean-Noel Bret for making me aware of that volume.

the art responding to James Macpherson in the late 18th and early 19th century and the considerable activity around 1900, the period usually referred to as the Celtic Revival. In an earlier work I had noted that Macpherson managed to convey ‘a response to his own ideological fragmentation at a time when Europe was itself beginning to fragment ideologically’.10 His significance for Scottish art was that – through the artists who were inspired by him – he began a process of making Celtic material visible. That found developed expression over a century later in the Glasgow of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Edinburgh of John Duncan and Patrick Geddes. That analysis was at the heart of my presentation in Helsinki.11

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Fig. 3. Charles Cordiner, Cascade near Carril, 1780

The 2009 conference was an education in the aesthetic echoes between Finland and other European cultures. Complementing it was a thought-provoking exhibition of Kalevala artwork, which filled the Ateneum Art Museum. It was a reminder that there had been no exhibition of Ossian and art since the great exhibitions in Paris and Hamburg, in 1974. The conference concluded with a visit to artists’ houses, both close to Lake Tuusula, north of Helsinki and in Tarvaspää, Espoo. It included the studios of two painters who had responded in depth to the words and locations of Kalevala, namely Pekka Halonen (1865–1933) and Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931). They were close contemporaries of the Scottish Celtic Revival artist John Duncan (1866–1945). In his developed figurative style responding to Kalevala, Gallen-Kallela has much in common with Duncan, who portrayed numerous figures from Celtic legend, including from Macpherson’s Ossian. Duncan would have been aware of Gallen-Kallela’s work for the Finnish Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition of 1900. Indeed Duncan’s patron and close associate, Patrick Geddes, had transferred his educational activities from Edinburgh to Paris for that year. Recognising the power of an internationalism that respected national and local cultures – an international unity in diversity – Geddes proposed a scheme to make permanent the key element of that exhibition, La Rue des Nations, which had been built on the banks of the Seine. Had he succeeded, Gallen-Kallela’s murals in the Finnish Pavilion would have been preserved.

An important link between John Duncan and the Finnish painters was Theosophy. Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff has noted that after Halonen ‘became familiar with Tolstoyism and Theosophy, his respect for nature took on almost religious proportions’. Gallen-Kallela was close to the movement through his friendship with St Petersburg-born Nicolas Roerich (1874–1947), one of the most Theosophically-committed of all artists of the time. Neither Halonen nor Gallen-Kallela became a Theosophist in formal terms, but John Duncan joined the organisation in 1909 and, from an art-historical perspective, it is interesting to note that Piet Mondrian joined the same year. In 1912, Duncan married a fellow Theosophist, Christine Allen, who was part of an intriguing group of Theosophically-inclined Celtic revivalists centred on the English market town and spiritual...
A shared focus was the figure of Bride, both in her role as a Christian saint, and in her earlier form as a pagan Celtic goddess, and around the time of his marriage John Duncan produced a number of works devoted to Bride in both her guises. Like Bride, from the perspective of the Gaelic oral tradition, Ossian can be considered as a figure on the pagan-Christian cusp. Indeed, both Macpherson’s *Ossian* and Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* can be seen as negotiating a place for pre-Christian and non-Christian material in a Christian world. It is noteworthy that Macpherson stood aside from any overt Christian reference in his work, perhaps because of the brutally sectarian aspects of Highland oppression after – and indeed before – the Battle of Culloden. In that aspect Macpherson’s work differs from the Gaelic oral tradition of Ossianic lore in which dialogues between Ossian and Saint Patrick are a significant element.

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18. A notable pre-Culloden military atrocity that had a sectarian pretext was the massacre of Glencoe in 1692.

19. Macpherson replaces St Patrick with the figure of ‘son of Alpin’.
That period also saw John Duncan making a notable print, *The Head of Ossian*\(^{20}\) (Fig. 1), and a finished drawing of another Ossianic subject, *Cuchulainn* (Fig. 2).\(^{21}\) The latter became the frontispiece for a post-*Ossian* retrieval of folk material, namely the second volume of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s *Songs of the Hebrides*, published in 1917. Kennedy-Fraser’s work was a translation and transformation of Gaelic material into classical art song, with piano accompaniment. She had a strong sense of the international context of her work, not least with respect to Finland. In a footnote to her introduction she refers to a visit from the Finnish musicologist Otto Andersson, making comparison between the performance of Hebridean work-songs and *Kalevala*. She concludes, presumably quoting Andersson, that ‘(t)he Finns are the only other race in modern Europe that has preserved to the present day an heroic epos reaching back into the far distant past’.\(^{22}\) One can note that Scotland had helped to pioneer the notion of folk-inspired classical art song through George Thomson’s work with Robert Burns a century earlier. In the context of Macpherson’s *Ossian* one of those songs, *The Lovely Lass of Inverness*, is of particular interest because it relates to the Battle of Culloden. The setting is by Beethoven and the Ossianic link is underlined by the name of the melody, *Fingal’s Lament*.

Duncan’s Ossianic frontispiece for *Songs of the Hebrides*, in 1917, echoes the frontispiece for Sir John Sinclair’s *Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian*, published over a century earlier, in 1806.\(^{23}\) That was an imagined portrait of Ossian attributed to the Scottish artist Alexander Runciman (1736–85), who was a close contemporary of James Macpherson. His mural scheme for Penicuik House near Edinburgh, dating from about 1772, was the first major visual

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20 Colour woodblock print, c. 1912, Collection of the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 21cm x 29.2cm.

21 Note that ‘Cuchullin’ (the spelling varies) is the very first word of Macpherson’s *Fingal*: ‘Cuchullin sat by Tura’s wall; by the tree of the rustling leaf. – His spear leaned against the mossy rock. His shield lay by him on the grass.’ Duncan’s *Cuchulainn* dates from 1912 at the latest, for it was first published in Patrick Geddes’s magazine *The Blue Blanket* in that year. In the same edition (October) was a piece by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser.

22 Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *Songs of the Hebrides*, Volume Two (London: Boosey and Co., 1917), xii, footnote 3: ‘Mr Otto Anderson [sic], a musician from Finland, who paid me a hasty visit in my music room in Edinburgh, told me that the Finns still chant their *Kalevala* epic to a bodily movement that resembles that of Hebridean waulking [a working technique accompanied by song used, normally by women, for fulling cloth].’

23 Duncan’s drawing is in the tradition of a number of works devoted to *Ossian* that in their size echo the printed book. One can note here the work of the French artist Girodet (1767–1824), who in the 1790s produced a notable set of finished drawings on Ossianic themes. See Sylvan Bellenger and Jean-Michel Pianelli (eds.), *La Légende d’Ossian illustrée par Girodet* (Montargis: Musée Girodet, 1989); and ‘Desins Ossianiques’ in Sylvan Bellenger (ed.), *Girodet* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 248–55. In the early years of the 19th century there were projects for illustrated editions by both Goethe’s friend Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810) and the Tyrolean artist Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839). Neither came to fruition. By contrast, in Italy 48 images were published in Venice in 1817 in a landscape format bound into a folio book with explanatory text based on Cesaretti’s translation. They were drawn by Luigi Zandomeneghi (1778–1850) and engraved by Felice Zuliani (?–1834), under the title *I Canti di Ossian pensieri d’un Anonimo, disegnati, et incise a Contorno*, (Venezia: Guiseppe Battaglia, 1817). For further consideration see Fernando Mazzocca, ‘La Fortuna Figurativa di Ossian in Italia Negli Anni Della Restaurazione’, in Gennaro Barbarisi and Guilio Carnazzi (eds.), *Aspetti dell’Opera e della Fortuna di Melchiorre Cesari* (Milano: Cisalpino, 2002), 835–55; also Murdo Macdonald, ‘Ossian and Visual Art – Mislaid and Rediscovered’, *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol 39, no 2, June 2016, 235–48, in particular 240–43, (section III, ‘The Italian Dimension: Luigi Zandomeneghi’). I owe a particular debt to Guido Baldassarri for inviting me to work with the Cesari Project in Padua in 2013, and to Valentina Gallo for drawing my attention to Zandomeneghi’s work. Zandomeneghi was a distinguished student of Canova; his best-known work is the tomb of Titian in the Frari in Venice.
response to Macpherson’s work. The portrait of Ossian attributed to Runciman is known through its published version engraved by John Beugo (1759–1841) (Fig. 8), and the image has a particular importance in the iconography of Ossian. It first appeared in 1806 in two related volumes: Sir John Sinclair’s *A Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian* and John McArthur’s English translation of Melchior Cesarotti’s *Historical and Critical Dissertation Respecting the Controversy on the Authenticity of Ossian’s Poems*. It appeared in various versions, re-engraved, in France and Italy, until at least 1828.

Although that early 19th-century Ossian portrait predates Lönnrot’s writing of *Kalevala* by several decades, the sculptor Erik Cainberg made a plaster relief of Väinämöinen playing the kantele (the traditional stringed instrument of Finland) for the main auditorium of Turku (Åbo) Academy as early as 1814. That was eight years before Lönnrot had even matriculated at the Academy and over 20 years before the first version of *Kalevala* was published. That is a reminder that some of the material Lönnrot was to use in *Kalevala* was being to have a substantial cultural presence during his student days, but in the context of this paper one can speculate that – to some small degree – visual art may have been a context for Lönnrot’s work, as well as a result of it. What one can be certain of is that Cainberg’s work was made during the height of the continental European response to Ossian. Like that of Cainberg, such Ossianic work is firmly rooted in a classical approach to the figure. In the case of France that was notably, from the 1790s onwards, the work of three students of Jacques-Louis David – Girodet, Gerard and Ingres. A good example is *Le Songe d’Ossian*, by Ingres, a composition he repeated in various media over a period of years, including an oil painting made in 1813 for the


This matter, and the influence of Ossianic imagery on Finnish Kalevala art more generally, has been addressed in Finnish research, and while quite clear visual affinities have been found at the same time as the early literary reception of Ossian has been noted, no explicit written references concerning the interlinkage of this iconography have been detected in the original sources. For example, Jukka Ervamaa writes about this in his published doctoral thesis from 1981 (R.W. Ekman ja C.E. Sjöstrandin Kalevala-aiheinen taide, Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys), that sections of Ossian appeared in the newspapers of the Aurora Society in 1775–91 and that the French translations were known to have been well liked by Napoleon. Ervamaa (p. 138) and others have also underlined that Cainberg’s commission of the Väinämöinen piece was accompanied by a clear iconographic guideline authored by professors of the Turku University. (Already Torsten Stjernschantz in 1909 thought that the advice was based on the volume Mythologia Fennica, by Chrístfrid Ganander, 1789.) Other researchers who have mentioned Ossian in the context of 19th-century Kalevala art, include Rikka Stewen (in an article ‘Unohdetut kuvitelmat Kalevalasta kuvataiteessa’, published in Finnish in 2008, in Ulla Piela, Seppo Knuttilla & Pekka Laaksonen (eds.), Kalevalan kulttuurihistoria (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), 66–81, and most recently, Henrik Knif in his Swedish-language biographic monograph on Cainberg, entitled Bränna vingarna – Erik Cainberg och hans värld (2015, Helsingfors: Svenska Folkskolans vänner, 155, with Ingres also mentioned). In the Finnish research, Cainberg’s Väinämöinen has been seen as a mixture of Ossian, Homer and Orpheus, in various degrees of emphasis. I owe the foregoing detailed information to a reviewer of my paper, to whom my thanks are due.

Graves, ‘Ossian,’ 207.

Now in Russia. The statue was destroyed already in 1871.

My thanks to an anonymous reviewer of my paper for this information.

Oil on canvas, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 42cm x 35.5cm. With respect to the Danish connection note also the attention paid by Sir John Sinclair to the views of the Rev. Mr Rosing of the Danish Church in London. See A Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian (London: William Bulmer, 1806), especially section 7: ‘That the existence of Swaran, and other Personages mentioned in the Poems of Ossian, is authenticated by Danish historians.’ Sinclair clearly knew Rosing, for he sent an inscribed copy of his dissertation to him (author’s collection).

One can also note what seem to be deliberately Ossianic references in art responding to Kalevala: a drawing of Väinämöinen from 1852 by Anders Ekman.
(1833–55) in the collection of the Ateneum Art Museum and a painting from 1885 by Rudolf Åkerblom (1849–1925), Väinämöinen Playing.\footnote{Oil, Kalevala Society, 47cm x 37cm.} In those works Väinämöinen is shown playing a Celtic harp rather than a kantele. But that is the exception rather than the rule: by the time of Åkerblom’s work, the iconography of Väinämöinen with his kantele had become firmly established, in particular through the painting of R.W. Ekman (1808–73) and the sculpture of C.E. Sjöstrand (1828–1906).\footnote{See ‘R.W. Ekman,’ and ‘C.E. Sjöstrand,’ in Riitta Ojanperä (ed.), \textit{The Kalevala in Images}, (Helsinki: Ateneum, 2009), 22–35 and 36–47.} Although he is often compared to Orpheus, as far as I know there are no paintings of Väinämöinen playing Orpheus’s instrument, the lyre. By contrast, Ossian is sometimes shown playing a lyre rather than a harp, as is the lover of his son Oscar, the bard Malvina, implying the relationship of both bards to Orpheus’s divine musical inspiration.
Cordiner’s image was published as plate 13 in his Antiquities and Scenery Of The North Of Scotland, 1780.

The beginnings of Ossianic landscape can be seen in Alexander Runciman’s etching Fingal finding Conban-Carglas, c. 1772–74 (Fig. 10).

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Oil, 64.1cm x 98.8cm. In that work the figures are almost absorbed into the landscape. It is thus interesting to note Ossian as a driver of the English school of landscape painting of which Turner became the leading figure. Turner’s 1802 Ossian work was thought lost but it was located in 2013, and can now take its place alongside Ossian-themed landscapes of the same period by Thomas Girtin and John Sell Cotman in particular. See Murdo Macdonald and Eric Shanes ‘Turner and Ossian’s The Traveller’, Turner Society News, Autumn 2013, 4–7. See also Murdo Macdonald, ‘Ossian and Visual Art – Misplaced and Rediscovered’, Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies, Vol 39, no 2, June 2016, 235–48, in particular 237–40, (section II, ‘J.M.W. Turner’s interest in Ossian’).

Joseph Anton Koch, c. 1800, Southern Mountainous Landscape with City, Waterfall and Figures, pen and ink, 56cm x 82.3cm. National Gallery of Canada. See Mitchell B. Frank, Central European Drawings From the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2007), 98–99.

It is interesting that during the 1830s, when Turner was working on illustrations for a new edition of Scott, one finds his work taking a specifically Ossianic turn. The most obvious example of that is his well-known oil painting Staffa: Fingal’s Cave, which dates from 1832 and would not have been painted had he not been engaged in the project of illustrating Scott. It is not generally appreciated how closely Staffa: Fingal’s Cave is linked in its Ossianic ethos to a small watercolour of Glencoe made to illustrate one of Scott’s historical works (watercolour, 9.4cm x 14.3cm, Rhode Island School of Design).

I have noted elsewhere that despite their difference in size, those two images share a great deal, not least in terms of composition [and] also contain an Ossian-related cave. The Staffa oil painting has Fingal’s Cave, the Glencoe watercolour has Ossian’s Cave. These caves are ‘pointed out’ by Turner by – in both cases – streams of vapour and streams of smoke’. ‘On Finding Turner’s Ossian / A propos de la découverte d’une oeuvre ossianique de Turner’, for La légende d’Ossian et l’art préromantique en Europe, Colloque international d’histoire de l’art et d’esthétique, Bibliothèque départementale des Bouches-du-Rhône, Marseille vendredi 9 et samedi 10 juin 2017. In press.

A particularly significant image of such a lyre-playing Ossian is to be found in Cascade near Carril (Fig. 3), by Charles Cordiner (1746–94).36 Cordiner was a trained artist, but by career he was an Episcopalian minister in Banff, not far from Culloden. At the time that he made that image, the wearing of tartan was still illegal, so the tartan stockings that Ossian is wearing have a cultural-political significance. It is of note that Cordiner’s image was engraved by the London firm, Basire. At the time of publication, William Blake (1757–1827) had just completed his apprenticeship with Basire and he would most probably have been aware of Cordiner’s work. Some years later, Blake’s regard for Ossian became clear in his writings, in particular Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793). One can see that work as a homage to Macpherson’s Oithona, a poem that appeared in the Fingal volume in 1762.

Landscape and revival

In due course J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) would also produce drawings of antiquities to be engraved by the Basire firm, so it is likely that he too would have known Cordiner’s work. That is significant, because Cordiner pioneered the notion of Ossianic landscape art, showing the bard as a relatively small figure anchoring the foreground of an image that was for the most part devoted to trees, rocks, waterfalls, clouds, and the moon.37 Turner would later explore such an approach to figures in an Ossianic setting in his 1802 oil painting, Ben Lomond Mountains, Scotland: The Traveller — Vide Ossian’s War of Caros (Fig. 4).38 The Tyrolese artist Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839) also took up this notion of Ossianic landscape. One can note that, like Cordiner, Koch shows Ossian with a lyre rather than a harp.39

The Highland landscape of which Macpherson wrote became the basis of a developing aesthetic of national landscape in Scotland. By the time Kalevala was published in Finland in 1835, that Ossianic landscape was becoming enhanced by both Scottish and English artists, like Turner, in response to the works of Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott (Fig. 5).40 It is an irony that the development of landscape art in Scotland had been driven to a significant
degree by military topographical draughtsmen, such as Paul Sandby (1731–1809), who worked in Scotland in the period of cultural suppression after the Battle of Culloden. However, Macpherson’s Ossian offered the possibility of landscape as an act of imagination, not of record, and in the process opened the way for landscape painting that was doing more than serving the needs of landowners and the military. Ruskin’s concept of ‘Turnerian topography’ begins to grasp that notion of a landscape art attentive to optical reality, but not constrained by it.
At the heart of Turner’s conception of landscape was poetry and his 1802 *Ossian* work is one of the earliest explicit examples of that poetical commitment in his work. An interesting analogy with *Kalevala* art can be drawn, for a landscape art driven by poetry was precisely what Pekka Halonen was creating a century after Turner’s first *Ossian* experiment. By comparison with the more clearly symbolist approach to landscape of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the power of Halonen’s landscape work lies in the fact that its legendary reference is implicit, taken for granted but in the deepest and most positive way, through the image of place itself. Visiting Halonen’s studio house, north of Helsinki, as part of the 2009 European Revivals conference, it was easy to understand his landscapes as cultural-nationalist statements. On a table was his kantele, and on the piano was the music of his *Kalevala*-inspired neighbour, Sibelius. Every window presented a different framing of the Finnish landscape. In Halonen’s work one can see analogies with John Duncan’s late landscapes, but a closer Scottish equivalent can be found in the work of David Young Cameron (1865–1945). D.Y. Cameron’s Scottish mountain landscapes, for example *Hill of the Winds* (c. 1913, Fig. 6)\(^1\), have what has been called by Lindsay Errington an ‘austere Celticism’.\(^2\)

Cameron’s Celticism was recognised in his own time, since his images were used for several frontispieces of the collected works of the Celtic Revival writer Fiona Macleod.\(^3\) ‘Fiona Macleod’ was the pseudonym of the influential writer, critic and editor William Sharp, and at the time D.Y. Cameron and Pekka Halonen were maturing as painters, Sharp was editing a new edition of *Ossian*. It was published by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues in 1896 to mark the centenary of James Macpherson’s death and it contained a fine Celtic Revival / Art Nouveau title page decoration by Helen Hay, one of John Duncan’s most talented students. Hay also contributed remarkable endpapers based on intricate Celtic knotwork from illuminated manuscripts and stone carvings of the eighth century. In terms of the comparative chronology of responses to *Kalevala* and *Ossian*, one can note that Sibelius’s *Kullervo* was first performed four years earlier, in 1892.

Also of note from that period is the highly influential first edition of the collection of Gaelic oral material edited and translated by Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica / Ortha nan Gaidheal*. It was published in 1900, the same year that

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41 Oil, National Galleries of Scotland, 116.80cm x 132.70cm.
43 For example, D.Y. Cameron’s painting of *The Isle of Arran* is used as the frontispiece of *The Winged Destiny and Studies in the Spiritual History of the Gael* (London: Heinemann, 1910). The cover decoration is the work of John Duncan or Helen Hay.
Akseli Gallen-Kallela made *Kalevala*-inspired murals for the Finnish Pavilion at the Paris Universal Exhibition. Macpherson’s *Ossian* had helped to facilitate the opening-up of ethnological research into Celtic cultures, and *Carmina Gadelica* was one of the key Gaelic texts that was enabled by that process. Alexander Carmichael bears interesting comparison with Elias Lönnrot, for both authors ‘improved’ the oral material they transcribed, and both have been criticised for doing so. But both produced remarkable and enduring work. In Carmichael’s case, as well as his Gaelic text, his English translations are also of note, indeed he can be seen as one of the great translators into English of the turn of the 19th century, along with Rabindranath Tagore, from his own Bengali, and Arthur Waley, from the Chinese. *Carmina Gadelica* was published in a beautifully produced and embellished edition, the Gaelic and English given in parallel text (Fig. 7). The designs were made by Carmichael’s wife, Mary Frances MacBean (1837–1928), who based her work on Celtic designs deriving from the eighth to the 16th centuries. Her most notable designs are in the form of initial letters, an area of interest to both John Duncan and Akseli Gallen-Kallela.

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As he developed as an artist, John Duncan became part of Alexander Carmichael’s milieu in Edinburgh. That link is clearest of all in his friendship with Carmichael’s daughter Ella, whom he used as the model for the central figure of his image *Anima Celtica* (1895, Fig. 8), a figure surrounded by scenes from Celtic legend, including *Ossian*.45 In that image there are also direct references to the Jacobite period, that period of historical disruption and ill-borne political subordination (to draw on Joep Leerssen’s words again) that gave rise to Macpherson’s text. A key part of the image shows Ossian with Malvina against a backdrop of prehistoric standing stones that links the bard symbolically to a much earlier time. It should be stressed that Malvina was herself a bard, indeed the bard to whom Ossian transmitted his songs.46 The fact that in Macpherson’s writing Malvina predeceases Ossian, can be taken as indicative of his understandable pessimism for the survival of his own culture. In *Anima Celtica* John Duncan depicts Ossian with his *clarsach* (harp), the instrument of the Celtic bard. Again one can note a close iconographical analogy with the approach of artists to *Kalevala*, in which Väinämöinen is shown with his kantele. And as with *Ossian*, so with *Kalevala*, for both bards – Ossian and Väinämöinen – sing the lore of their respective lands into being.

In Duncan’s *Head of Ossian* both *clarsach* and prehistoric standing stones again figure, but the focus is on the features of Ossian, and there Duncan takes as his model the 1806 image attributed to Alexander Runciman to which I have already referred (Fig. 9). That Runciman portrait became a significant part of Scottish art again, almost a century after Duncan’s use of it, when in 2002 Calum Colvin used it as the basis of his exhibition ‘Ossian: Fragments of Ancient Poetry / Oisein: Bloighean de Sheann Bhàrdachd’, at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.47 The significance of that exhibition in the reassessment of Macpherson’s work has been recognised through its citation in the introduction and research timeline of Howard Gaskill’s *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*.48 That book underpins my work here, because it contains both Peter Graves’s comments on *Ossian* in the context of Sweden and Finland to which I have referred, and the comparison made between *Ossian* and *Kalevala* by Joep Leerssen with which I began. Colvin’s immediate source for Runciman’s image was a reproduction in a 1997 paper by

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45 Macdonald, ‘Visual Dimension,’ 142. The image was published in Patrick Geddes’s magazine, *The Evergreen*, in 1895. Ella Carmichael took over her father’s research on his death in 1912. She was the editor of the influential *Celtic Review*.


Hugh Cheape, then of the National Museums of Scotland, and since 2006 professor at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College in the Isle of Skye. One can note that in 2017 Hugh Cheape gave the introductory lecture at the conference ‘Cultural Mythologies around 1900’, held at the National Gallery of Scotland as part of the Finnish National Gallery’s *European Revivals* project. It is significant that contemporary artists are still exploring *Ossian* and also interesting to find an analogy with Colvin’s transformation of Runciman’s work in a *Kalevala* work by Sirpa Alalääkkölä (b. 1964), from 1988. In her *Aino Triptych*, she takes a famous work of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *The Aino Myth* and transforms it formally, sharpening its message. Both Colvin’s work and that of Alalääkkölä have been exhibited by their respective national galleries, indeed Alalääkkölä’s work was part of the exhibition at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki that accompanied the first conference of the *European Revivals* project in 2009.

By way of conclusion, I note that the edition of *The Poems of Ossian* published in Edinburgh by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues in 1896 – the period during which so much

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**Fig. 8. John Duncan, Anima Celtica, published in 1895 in Patrick Geddes’s journal The Evergreen**

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50 1 December 2017. Professor Cheape’s title was ‘The enhancement of cultural mythologies and the role of material culture’.

51 Acrylic, 346cm x 400cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Kiasma.

52 Oil, 200cm x 413cm, Ateneum, Helsinki.

Fig. 9. Alexander Runciman (attrib.), Ossian. Engraving by John Beugo, 1806

Scottish point of view but with the full international historical reach and representation shown by the Paris and Hamburg exhibitions in 1974. In addition to its historical depth, one of the strengths of the display of Kalevala art at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki in 2009 was the inclusion of visual responses from the present day. That exhibition has set an example for an Ossian exhibition to follow.

Murdo Macdonald is Emeritus Professor of History of Scottish Art at the University of Dundee in Scotland. He is author of Scottish Art in Thames & Hudson’s World of Art series. He is a former editor of Edinburgh Review. His book Patrick Geddes’s Intellectual Origins will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2020. Current projects include a chapter on Robert Burns and visual art for the Oxford Companion to Robert Burns. He was appointed an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Academy in 2009, and an honorary fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 2016.
Nationality and Community in Norwegian Art Criticism around 1900

Tore Kirkholt

Back in 1857, the Norwegian writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) considered the establishment of a theatre institution in Christiania (Oslo) as a vital necessity for the nation. One of his main arguments for having such an institution in Norway was what he saw as a lack of certainty, of self-confidence, in the people of Norway. This lack of confidence was easy to spot when a Norwegian stepped ashore on a foreign steamer-quay. He would be groping for his sense of ease, and end up conducting himself in a ‘rough, short, almost violent manner’, which gave an uncomfortable impression.¹ In Bjørnson’s narrative, this feeling of uncertainty relates to the theme of modernity. Bjørnson described his home country as a small America – where factories and mining were expanding – dominated by the sheer material life. The solidity of tradition had gone; it was a time of flux, decoupled from the past.

Modernity’s splitting of traditions was a common theme in most European countries, so why was the rough, short and violent behaviour so characteristic of Norwegians? According to Bjørnson, it was because Norway did not have an artistic culture that could negotiate the feeling of fragmentation and uncertainty. Arts such as theatre, music, painting and statuary could express what was common in what seemed like fragments. The arts could unite. However, cultural institutions that could support the arts suffered from a lack of funding, a vital deficiency of Norwegian society. Through art’s ability to unite, the nation could be united; through art, Bjørnson wrote, one could come to an understanding of one’s national identity. Through art, the (chaotic) power of the people could find ‘form and freedom’.² Art was to function as a counterweight to the corruption of a coarse material life.

¹ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, ‘En Stor-thingsindstilling’, Morgenbladet, 21 June 1857. ‘Man kan f. Ex. paa en udenlandsk Damskibsbrugge meget godt se, det er en Normand, som stiger i land; men man kan ogsaa se, at han ikke længer er ganske vis paa sig selv, famler efter sin Form og søger at dække det gennem en brusk, kort, næsten voldelig Fremtræden.’
² Bjørnson, ‘En Stor-thingsindstilling’.

Bjørnson’s claim for the importance of artistic culture in establishing national identity was to be a central theme in art and literature for many years. In this paper, I will investigate how this theme came to be expressed in art criticism related to painting in Norway during the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the twentieth. It was during this period that some of the institutions Bjørnson sought were actually set up. In 1884, Statens kunstutstilling (‘The Autumn-exhibition’) was formally established, having been arranged as a private initiative by a young generation of artists since 1882. This was also the decade when Norwegian artists began to settle and work in their homeland, after years of effective exile. Norwegian painters used to live and work in Germany, where they had received their education and where they could find a market for their paintings. Although artists still had their formal education abroad – that would not change until the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1909 – the establishment of art shops and new exhibition venues made it easier for artists to live and work in Norway.

The interest in art as an expression of national identity can have political roots, as when national themes in art became a symbol of opposition in Finland during the era of Russification. Even though Norwegians gained their independence only when the union with Sweden was dissolved in 1905, the focus on national identity in Norwegian art did not have the same strong political meaning as it carried in Finland. Norway had always enjoyed a high degree of political autonomy, and there was no strong cultural influence from Sweden. The interest in national identity in art in Norway seems to be a reaction to the process of modernisation, with the growth of cities and the sense of alienation that aroused. I will follow this theme in this essay, and investigate how critics in Norway thought about ‘the national’ in art in the decades around 1900.

I will investigate different critical positions, from the interest in Naturalism in the 1880s, to the fascination for decorative painting and colourism during the 1890s and first decades of the 20th century. The different artistic trends were all imported from abroad, mostly from France, where the young generation of Norwegian artists found their artistic inspiration, after decades of German influence. How a national art could spring forth from

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foreign impulses came to be a fundamental critical question in artistic debate in Norway.

City life and the need for belonging: art criticism in the 1880s

Richard Terdiman has stressed the feeling of atomisation and alienation that modernity brought about, and he views it as a memory crisis. Terdiman, building on the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, insists on the significance of past memory for our feeling of belonging and of identity. What precedes us is the basis of our self-understanding. With modernity, the uninterrupted flow of time and our natural place in it had become problematic. Modernity, with its city-life and uprooting from the countryside, created a sense of uncertainty and unrest, a feeling of nervousness, as intellectuals often expressed it at the end of the 19th century. Both artists and critics in the second half of the 19th century recorded a crisis regarding the relationship with the past. This was also the case in Norway where, by the 1880s, Kristiania (Oslo) had reached a population of more than 100,000, which made it a big city, even by European standards.

Urbanisation and the sense of nervousness went hand in hand. In traditional village societies, intentions and forms of behaviour were usually easy to understand. The opposite was true for cities. Here, one was engaged in an endless process of interpretation. Artists and critics interested in the communal function of art, its expression of unity and community, often turned towards the still existing traditional societies to re-establish a lost sense of community.

During the 1880s, critics who promoted Naturalist painting understood the re-establishment of this national community as connected to the artist’s choice of subject matter: the depiction of the (rural) land and its people, the peasants. In contrast to the anxious atmosphere of the cities, critics often lauded an art rooted in the soil of the rural home territory for its ‘naturalness’ and its depiction of an ‘immediate reality’. Naturalist critics usually understood French plein-air painting as a model to emulate. In 1884, the Norwegian art critic Andreas Aubert (1851–1913) published a pamphlet on the recent developments in French painting, where he professed his interest in the paintings of Jules Bastien-Lepage and Jules Breton. Bastien-Lepage took his subject

matter from Damvillers, his home village in the north-eastern part of France (Fig. 1). This gave his paintings a certain authenticity:

*From there, from the earth of his home ground, his art derives its healthiness, its naturalness, its saturation, which is like a breath of country life for a culture, ridden by ennui, nervous sensibility and sweet sentimentality.*

It was this breath of fresh air and country life that Aubert also wanted to see in Norwegian painting, and he established Bastien-Lepage as an example for Norwegian artists to emulate. He regarded French Naturalism as a healthy challenge to the art in Munich, where most Norwegian artists were trained in the 1870s. In 1881, Aubert described the art and artistic education in Munich as a turning towards the past. Artists, however, should give

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*Fig. 1. Jules Bastien Lepage, *October*, 1877, oil on canvas, 180.7cm x 196cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1928*

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5 Andreas Aubert, ‘Fra det franske nutidsmaleri’, *Nordisk Tidsskrift* 7 (1884), 383. ‘Der henter hans kunst, af hjemmets jordbund, den sundhed, den naturlighed, den renhed, der virker som et friskt pust af landliv ind i en kultur, på så mange måder market af livstræthed, nervøs sanse- lighed, selv såmegen blödsöden sentimentalitet.’

voice to contemporary life, and French artists had led the way. French art was important for Aubert, because French painters had introduced the objective, Naturalist style.

Conservative critics, such as the art historian Lorentz Dietrichson (1834–1917) and the philosopher Marcus Jacob Monrad (1816–1897), often referred to naturalist art as raw, as being without sympathy for their subjects. Dietrichson stated that naturalism was a positivist art, inclined towards determinism and denial of the freedom of spirit. Commenting on literary Naturalism in France, he stated that it was not created for the sake of the unhappy and suffering poor – the subjects of Naturalist art – but for the ‘over-refined society, for the weary rich, for the dulled nerves, that need to be stimulated, for the blunted tastebuds, that need cayenne pepper to taste’.7

Fig. 2. Christian Krohg, Albertine to See the Police Surgeon, 1885–87, oil on canvas, 211cm x 326cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo
Photo: Nasjonalmuseet / Jacques Lathion CC-BY-NC

7 Lorentz Dietrichson, Betegner den moderne naturalisme i poesien et fremskridt eller et forfald? Foredrag holdt i Studentersamfundet lørden den 11te november 1882 (Kristiania: Chr. Schibsted, 1882), 30. ‘Men disse romancer, der tale saa stærke Ord om det lidende Folk, om det fordaervede Folk ere ikke skrevne verken for det lidende eller for det fordaervede Folk, men for det overforfinede Selskab, for de trætte Rige, for de sløvede Nerver, der behøves at pirres, for de enerverede Ganer, der behøve Cayennepeber for at smage.’
Dietrichson claimed that the falseness of the Second French Empire gave birth to this art, which also bloomed naturally in Bismarck’s Germany. Marcus Monrad criticised naturalist painting for adopting a scientific point of view; that is, he saw naturalist art as fragmented, characterised by what he called a ‘realistic-episodic’ depiction. When naturalism did involve a search for a comprehensive depiction, its artists typically chose a deterministic rendering, where individual life was shaped by imprints of their social milieu. A painting such as Christian Krohg’s (1852–1925) *Albertine to See the Police Surgeon* (1887, Fig. 2), with its depiction of prostitutes in Kristiania, was typical of naturalist painting of this kind. Even Aubert, champion of naturalist art, raised his critical voice when Krohg exhibited the painting in March 1887.8

Instead of paintings depicting the darker sides of society, Aubert wanted naturalist art to nationalise painting in Scandinavia. When in 1885, Erik Werenskiold (1855–1938) showed *Peasant Burial* (Fig. 3) at the Autumn Exhibition in Kristiania, Aubert referred to it as a ‘major work of our younger national art’. In his review, Aubert focused on Werenskiold’s ‘energetic love towards his people and the nature of his home country’.9 The religiosity of the Norwegian people was manifest in this simple picture. Werenskiold had painted his pictures in close connection with the material reality of the (rural) home territory; and for Aubert, this was the best way to re-establish a feeling of community. Consequently, he urged all Nordic painters to settle down in their home countries. Aubert confirmed this view in his dissertation in 1896, when he insisted that French painters needed nourishment from their home soil too:

*Present day France, which in Paris concentrates and combusts its life, needs strengthening from these sources, to be affected by the soil and the sky of their home ground. In the old, traditional culture there is ‘an originality and energy’ that one must become aware of and make fertile for the whole of France.*10

Aubert’s statement is an echo of the French art critic Louis Brès, who in his reception speech addressed to the Academy of Marseilles in 1883, stated: ‘The capital, tired and disgusted with

9 Andreas Aubert, ‘Kunstnernes fjerdde høstutstilling’, *Nyt Tidsskrift* 4 (1885), 592. ‘En sand og livfuld objectivitet er denne opfatnings styrke. Ikke en kold og sympathiløs, men en, der har sit udspring fra en kraftig personligheds energiske kjærlighed til sit folk og til sit fædrelands natur.’
its artificial life, finds nothing better than to immerse its art in the heart of the provinces.'\(^\text{11}\)

The sympathetic attitude that Werenskiold showed towards traditional peasant life was important for Aubert. Nils Messel has drawn attention to Aubert’s religious view of life and his interest in the writings of the Danish pastor and poet N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). Grundtvig’s interest in the national tradition and his understanding of nature as a manifestation of spirituality, was important for Aubert’s understanding of Naturalism.\(^\text{12}\) For Aubert, Naturalist art was not a positivist depiction of the material world and its dreary social condition, but a spiritual view of life. With Lotta Nylund, we can label it ‘protestant Naturalism’.\(^\text{13}\)
In 1894, Aubert published his doctoral thesis, *Den nordiske naturfølelse og Dahl: hans kunst og dens stilling i aarhundrets utvikling*, in which he identified a unique feeling for the nature in the Nordic countries, a feeling for the more sublime aspects of nature. According to Aubert, contemporary artists in Norway felt a resonance with J.C. Dahl (1788–1857) for his expression of a national sentiment. However, already the year before Aubert delivered his thesis, Gerhard Munthe (1849–1929) had depicted this national sentiment in an anti-naturalist style, in decorative painting.

‘The decorative’ and the communal hope

Munthe, who during the 1880s had been an uncompromising naturalist, showed his new decorative art in Kristiania at the graphic art exhibition ‘Black and White’ (*Sort og hvitt*), early in 1893. Norwegian folk tales inspired the coloured drawings of Munthe, and his style was revivalist, inspired by Norwegian folk art (Fig. 4). In his review, Aubert insisted that Munthe had found a genuine expression of the ‘childlike ingenuous, unpretentious, audacious’ that characterises what is Norwegian. He saw in Munthe’s coloured drawings a search for a new style with a typical Norwegian spirit, and he found in them a specific ‘Norwegian sense of colouring’. Nevertheless, he was not ready to proclaim Munthe’s new anti-naturalist art an artistic expression that would replace Naturalism. Naturalism had played too important a role in marrying Norwegian painting to its home country for it to be replaced. Even so, Munthe’s decorative painting was a vital complement.

The young art critic Jens Thiis (1870–1942) was more inclined to understand Munthe’s new art as an overcoming of Naturalism. Thiis was a student of Lorentz Dietrichson, and he was an influential critic and art historian, and held important positions as a museum director. He proclaimed the new art of Munthe as the answer to those who had tired of the positivism of Naturalism. ‘In secrecy,’ he wrote in his review, ‘we longed for a new ideal art, for daring imagination, that could lead us somewhere we had never been before.’ Thiis longed for an art that could re-establish a bold and simple colour palette, one that was rhythmic and could exert a mystical power over the soul, related to music. In short, he longed for style in art. Thiis was a fervent critic of

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14 Andreas Aubert, ‘Ny Kunst: Gerhard Munthes billedvævmønstre’, *Nyt Tidsskrift* (Ny række) 1 (1892–93), 617.
15 In 1895, Thiis was appointed conservator of Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimusem (Nordenfjeldske Museum of Arts and Craft) in Trondheim. In 1908, he became the first director of Nationalgalleriet (The National Museum) in Oslo.
naturalist art, and he would become an ardent supporter of both Munthe’s decorative style in painting, as well as Edvard Munch’s (1863–1944) Symbolist paintings of the 1890s.

The British art historian T.J. Clark has shown how the use of seminal critical terms such as ‘decoration’, ‘synthesis’ and ‘style’ vary profoundly from text to text in European art criticism during the last part of the 19th century. The reason for this is that these critics had the difficult task of welding together the aesthetic and the social. On the one hand, ‘decorative’ signalled an art that could re-establish continuity with the past and create a community in the face of the fragmentation that characterised modern times and its art (Naturalism). On the other hand, decoration also signalled a shallow art: ‘Decorative means merely

\[Fig. 4. Gerhard Munthe, The Horse of Hell, 1892, watercolour, gouache and crayon on cardboard, 79.1cm x 112.9cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo\]

Photo: Nasjonalmuseet CC-BY-NC

17 T.J. Clark, 
decorative – meaning overt in its simplification, ostentatious in its repeated patterning, and unashamed of its offer of visual delight.’\textsuperscript{18} These two meanings alternate in the critical discussions of modern art in this period; they are central in the critics’ endeavour to come to an understanding of the new, modern art that presented itself in various exhibitions.

The interest in \emph{style} was typical for the critical climate of the 1890s, which saw a turning away from Naturalism. In 1889, the Danish art historian Julius Lange (1838–96) published his essay \textit{Studiet i marken. Skilderiet. Erindringens kunst} (Field study. Picture. Art of Memory)\textsuperscript{19}, in which he criticised artists who were contented with painting field studies. Instead, he insisted that the purpose of art was to bring people together, to create a feeling of community. This could be achieved through a personal art, created not in front of nature, but in the atelier, where the outward-directed eye of the painter could rest, and images from the inward-directed eye could come forth. ‘Even though a society is dissolved into atoms’, Lange wrote, ‘it may once more be knitted together through personal expressions.’\textsuperscript{20}

Aubert was impressed by Lange’s concept of an art of memory that would bring about a more communal art, although he was not convinced that a personal/subjective art was the answer. In 1896, reflecting on decorative colouring, Aubert identified artistic style as an expression of a people, of their world view. This meant that Aubert came to distrust an art that was too idiosyncratic or too personal. He saw Munthe’s art as a reaction against a modern cult of personality and individualism, a cult that had contributed to the disintegration of traditional values and national community. Instead, he hoped for a style that would grow organically from ‘the natural conditions and the natural instincts’ of a people. He wished for an art that could express what he thought of as the ‘higher personality’, the individuality of a whole people.\textsuperscript{21} This view was shared by Munthe, who, reflecting on monumental art, claimed that ‘the whole of art history and all logic, points towards the national’.\textsuperscript{22}

When Aubert surveyed the history of Norwegian art in 1900, he had apparently come to distrust the

\textsuperscript{18} Clark, \textit{Farewell to an Idea}, 131.
\textsuperscript{20} Lange, ‘Studiet i marken ...’, 166. ‘Selv om et Samfund er nok saa opløst i Atomer, knyttes det Masker paany gennem indbyrdes personlig Meddelelse.’
\textsuperscript{21} Andreas Aubert, ‘Den dekorative farve, et norsk farveinstinkt’, \textit{Nordisk Tidskrift} 19 (1896), 545.
\textsuperscript{22} Gerhardt Munthe, ‘Kunstværdier’ [1898], in \textit{Minder og meninger: fra 1850-aarene til nu} (Kristiania: Cammermeyer, 1919), 72.
Fig. 5. Frits Thaulow, River, Northern France, 1898, oil on canvas, 46cm x 55cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo
Photo: Nasjonalmuseet CC-BY-NC
communal importance of Naturalism. Aubert now turned his back on Naturalism and identified decorative principles as the leading artistic principles. He criticised Naturalism for its individualisation and its analytic observation of nature (related to the fragmentation of scientific observation), and advocated decorative art as a synthesis created by memory and fantasy. Artists were searching for a decorative style in cooperation with architecture. Aubert regarded the decorative principles as simplifying and liberating. The decorative style could establish a feeling of community, a national community that could bridge both the split and the fragmentation caused by scientific culture and the split between present and past.

Aubert’s reflection on the communal function of decorative painting is related to the French critic Georg Albert Aurier and his theorisation of Symbolism. In 1891, Aurier described Paul Gauguin’s art as ‘ideist’ (an expression of ideas), ‘symbolic’, ‘synthetic’ and ‘subjective’, characteristics also summed up in the notion of ‘decorative painting’. This decorative painting had the communal function that customary easel paintings lacked. Easel painting was nothing more than ‘an illogical refinement invented to satisfy the fantasy of the commercial spirit in decadent civilisations’. Modernity and commercialism went hand in hand; the world and the arts had become decadent. For Aurier, true art meant decorative art, and by bringing it to life again, he hoped that art could recover its communal function.

Nils Messel and Magne Malmanger have investigated the meaning of ‘the decorative’ in the Norwegian artistic debate around 1900. They both emphasise how the first of Clark’s two positions came to be important for the community of painters and intellectuals centred around Erik Werenskiold and his home in Lysaker, south of Oslo, where he had moved in 1896. Both Munthe and Aubert were a part of Lysakerkretsen (the Lysaker circle), and their interest in medieval Norwegian art was also an interest in the moral character of this art. Messel states that while (formless) naturalist painting was seen as international and cosmopolitan, decorative painting was regarded as our national artistic expression. The interest that Lysakerkretsen and Aubert showed in the decorative principles of art is related to the English Arts and Craft movement. The concept of ‘the decorative’ signalled an art that was not an autonomous easel

23 Andreas Aubert, *Det nye Norges malerkunst. 1814–1900. Kunsthistorie i grundlinjer*. 2nd edition (Kristiania: Alb. Cammermeyers forlag, 1908), 98–101. Aubert’s interest in the decorative simplification of painting was inspired by Emmanuel Löwy, who had claimed that art originally was not imitative, but conventional, shaped by the synthetic activity of memory and the imagination. The art of Munthe was a return to these fundamental principles, according to Aubert.

24 Aubert, *Det nye Norges malerkunst. 1814–1900*, 100. ‘(...) den decorative kunst kræver en frigjørelse og en forenkling for at slippe løs av naturalismens overlæsselse og knugen-de tyngde.’


painting, but an art of style that was deeply embedded in the fabric of society. Malmanger points out that ‘the decorative’ came to signal the religious, ethical and social meaning of an artwork integrated in its physical surroundings. At the same time, the concept of ‘the decorative’ proved important in the artistic debate in Norway, since it could establish a connection between traditional Norwegian folk art and modern European art, preoccupied with the means of art and the artistic qualities of painting.

Malmanger’s statement confirms T.J. Clark’s view about the ambiguous use and meaning attributed to a concept like ‘the decorative’. Clark’s assertion that this concept also could signal a shallow art is proved by the critical reorientation of Aubert. In 1901, he stated that the interest in the decorative was about the urge to embellish. The problem with decorative paintings was their shallowness. In contrast, pictorial representation (‘billedfremstilling’) comes from a deeper human need, a need for expressing the world of thought. Eschewing the shallowness of decorative painting, he now supported what he designated as ‘spiritual Naturalism’.

In 1907, Thiis declared his opposition to Lysakerkretsen, writing: ‘Out there in Lysaker they cultivated “the national” and their famous explorer of the North Pole. With rising reputation, they created bourgeois paintings.’ Nevertheless, Thiis shared their interest in ‘the decorative’, and reflected upon how decorative principles were used in modern art. In an essay from 1907, he discussed how modern painters used decorative principles very differently in their art. Commenting on the paintings of James McNeill Whistler and Vincent van Gogh, he found that both artists’ works were characterised by their decorative abilities. Whistler’s art tended towards the liberated decorative, towards the taché and the use of line as pure visual delight. It was an art for the eye. Aristocratic and disinterested, it kept the audience at a distance. The paintings of van Gogh, on the other hand, showed an interest in style and expression.

Thiis came to understand the paintings of van Gogh and Paul Cézanne as the most vital and important art of the modern period. Reflecting on French painting exhibited in the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne in 1912, Thiis criticised Naturalism and Impressionism for their tendency to render the

29 Andreas Aubert, ‘ Dekorativ kunst. Og billedfremstillingens kunst’, Samtiden 12 (1901), 259–69.
30 Jens Thiis, Norske malere og billedhuggere, (Bergen: John Grieg, 1904–07), 2, 375. ‘Ude i Lysaker dyrked man “det nationale” og sin berømte Nordpolfarer, malte borgerlig med stigende anseelse.’
world in fragmented, objective and (especially for Impressionism) instantaneous impressions. This left little room for personal expression, so that the subjective connection between man and nature/world was absent. In opposition to this artistic pendant to positivism and a scientific world view, the paintings of van Gogh and Cézanne demonstrated a decorative simplicity and expression. Thiis characterised van Gogh as ‘the opposite of a virtuoso and a self-admirer’,\(^{32}\) and commented on his simple and religious soul, how his art was an expression of his feelings towards people and nature. Likewise, Cézanne’s artistic ambition was to surmount ‘the contingency of matter, through an artistic unity, that transcends all of nature, all illusion and all technical experiments’.\(^{33}\) Thiis saw it as an art that was on the verge of mystery, the mark of all great art.

Thiis’s interest in the foundation and seriousness of art, his preference for an artistic unity that disclosed a subjective view of the world, had implications for his attitude towards the concept of the national. Although he could make ironic remarks about Lysakerkretsen’s cultivation of national artistic values, he recognised the subjective and expressive values of a nationally oriented art. In 1907, he identified the decorative as ‘the urge’ of the time, happily noting that the Norwegian painters had found national forms for this.\(^{34}\) It was a typical anthropophagic understanding.

**Anthropophagic versus anthropoemic strategies**

When France celebrated the centenary of the French Revolution with the World Fair in Paris in 1889, the painter Kitty Kielland (1843–1914) was part of the committee that organised the Norwegian section of the art exhibition. Afterwards, she was challenged in the periodical *Samtiden* to state what exactly was the ambition of the Norwegian painters, and what status words such as ‘national’ and ‘fatherland’ occupied in contemporary art. Kielland stated that the ambition of the best Norwegian painters was to see with a fresh eye, to see their nature and life with a ‘Norwegian eye’. While she admitted her initial fear that Norwegian art might have been too caught up in the French art that inspired it, this fear had proved groundless: ‘What they had been taught abroad was properly digested; it had entered


\(^{33}\) Thiis, ‘Betragtninger og karakteristiker av moderne fransk maleri’, 39. ‘Og tingenes bund var for denne gamle katolik og reaktionære revolutionære den aandige forflyttelse av tingenes tilfældighet i en kunstnerisk enhet, som ligger over al natur, al illusion og alle tekniske eksperimenter.’

\(^{34}\) Thiis, ‘Betragtninger og karakteristiker av moderne fransk maleri’, 380.
the Norwegian blood, and had strengthened the national [orientation], not weakened it.'\(^{35}\)

Kielland’s comment on the Norwegian painters’ relationship with French art that inspired them can be put into a theoretical context through Claude Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between *anthropophagic* and *anthropoemic* societies. They are two different strategies for dealing with otherness. The *anthropophagic* strategy is cannibalistic; the foreign body is swallowed and digested, making it a part of the body swallowing it. The anthropoemic strategy is bulimic; the foreign body is vomited or spat out. Protecting oneself from foreign influence is an anthropoemic strategy. Kielland identified an anthropophagic reality in Norwegian art; while the painters were inspired by foreign (French) art, they used it to express something personal or homely. Dietrichson understood the creation of a national painting as more of an anthropoemic strategy. Around 1890, he insisted that one had to free oneself from both French and German influence to create a true national painting. Like Kielland, he claimed that painters had to learn to see Norwegian nature and everyday life through ‘Norwegian eyes’. But this had to await a new generation; present day painters still saw with German or French eyes.\(^{36}\)

Aubert and Kielland’s opinion was that Norwegian painters had already freed themselves from the French influence and were able to use their native eyes when they studied nature. In 1890, reflecting on the Nordic paintings he had seen at the World Fair in Paris the preceding year, Aubert stated that Norwegian art was more national than Swedish art, a view he would find confirmed by leading French critics. They had referred to the Norwegian paintings as *rustic*, a characterisation Aubert gladly embraced. Swedish artists, on the other hand, had not been able to digest foreign impulses properly. Swedish painters had become Parisian painters; they had taken up the Parisian ‘refinement’. The result was a ‘homeless’ art. Aubert characterised the colours of the Swedish painters as ‘softened by the present neurasthenic taste’, a taste that he identified with city life.\(^{37}\) This meant that rural parts of Europe, like the Nordic countries, were of interest as a healthy alternative. To avoid the decadence, Nordic artists simply had to anchor their art in their home country.

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\(^{35}\) Kitty Kielland, ‘Lidt om kunst’, *Samtiden* vol. 1 (1890), 224. ‘Men nei, det i udlandet lærte var godt fordølet, var gaaet ind i det norske blod og havde blot givet styrke til det nationale, ikke svækket det.’


\(^{37}\) Andreas Aubert, ‘Svensk Malerkunst paa Verdensudstillingen, sammen-stillet med den norske’, *Dagbladet*, 30 November 1890. The Finnish painter Edelfelt was also an elegant Parisian, in Aubert’s view, even though he regarded him as the most truthful of the Nordic painters in Paris.
The concern that modern man had developed a neurasthenic sensibility, reflects a general concern about Western civilisation in crisis, heading towards self-destruction. The sociologist Max Nordau identified in this era a degeneration of modern man, caused by ‘an exhausted nervous system’. The nervous system was overloaded by a frenzied city life. Jean Clair sees Symbolism as a ‘desperate attempt to restore the natural and ancient links that man, as a thinking being, had established with the world’. For Aubert, much of what was produced under the banner of Symbolism was rather an expression of the sense of alienation brought about by city life. He identified Edvard Munch as a typical representative of a neurasthenic art in Norway, a decadent, a ‘child of a refined, over-civilised time’. Munthe’s decorative Symbolism, on the other hand, was a healthy alternative, with its roots in the national past.

Decoration was important as a contrast to this refinement and over-civilisation, rooted as it was in traditional culture. Aubert admitted that the interest in decorative art and national expression was imported from outside, from English Arts and Craft. In 1898, Munthe reflected upon how to respond to this kind of influence:

*One kind of Civilisation is the study of how to acquire taste for what is imported, even when there is lack of consideration as to our own state of life, or our concepts. However, we get there only by losing our sense of the meaning of art.*

Foreign art should not be imported directly into the Norwegian artistic milieu; it should be assimilated into national ideas and understanding – a typical anthropophagic strategy.

In Norwegian art criticism and art history, Jens Thiis has a reputation for being a critic who was more interested in the pure artistic qualities of painting than its moral aspects. In a debate with Aubert regarding the paintings of Edvard Munch, Thiis defended Munch’s art against Aubert’s allegations of amorality. The only judgement he could accept regarding the value of art was a judgement about artistic value, he contended. Even so, Thiis came to differentiate between what he regarded as a healthy and a decadent taste in art. In 1907, reflecting on art history and criticism in Denmark, Thiis described the Danish critic

40 Andreas Aubert, ‘Høstutstillingen. Aarsarbejdet IV. Edvard Munch’, *Dagbladet*, 5 November 1890.
41 Aubert, ‘Ny Kunst: Gerhard Munthes billedvævmønstre’, *Nyt Tidsskrift (Ny række)* 1 (1892–93), 616.
42 Munthe, ‘Kunstværdier’ [1898], 76. ‘En Art Civilisation er Læren om at finde sig i og faa Smag for det importerede, selv naar det ingen Hensyn tager hverken til vores Livsforholde eller vores Begreber, men det er ved at miste Sansen for Kunstens Mening, at vi naar dit.’
43 Thiis’ contributions were printed in *Morgenbladet*, 14 and 25 May 1902; Aubert’s contributions, 17 and 30 May.
Emil Hannover (1864–1923) as a ‘decadent, with an unfortunate inclination towards that kind of refinement, that also is a deterioration’.44

For Thiis, the history of French art was the history of modern art. The challenge for Nordic artists was how to cope with this influence. It was all about being able to create a genuine expression from the impressions you acquired. This had also proven a challenge for an artist like Paul Gauguin. In contrast to the serious and almost religious art of Cézanne and van Gogh, Thiis would describe Gauguin as more of an eclectic, tempted by ‘colouristic gourmandise’.45 His criticism of Gauguin discloses a concern that artists may be too caught up in an international style, free-floating and eclectic, without a firm foundation in the observation of nature or in subjectivity. This criticism Thiis also directed towards Frits Thaulow (1847–1906), an artist who was regarded during the 1880s as a standard-bearer of Naturalism. In his survey of Norwegian art, Thiis claimed that Thaulow had become a ‘colouristic sweet tooth’, and criticised his recent art for being seductive and false, flowing too easily from his hands (Fig. 5). As a celebrated international painter, his art had yielded to economic interests and lost the best of his artistic qualities from the 1880s, when Thaulow had painted his plein-air pictures in Norway. For Thiis that had been an art founded in the observation of nature, like Munthe’s paintings from the 1880s. But while Munthe had established during the 1890s a new foundation in the domestic artistic tradition, Thaulow’s paintings had lost their foundation and seriousness.46

The criticism of Thaulow’s later paintings was also directed against his eclectic use of a Rococo tradition that was especially French. In 1906, the critic Carl Wille Schnitler (1879–1926) stated that Thaulow’s paintings were marked by the French Rococo, and shared both its virtues and vices. The vices were related to Thaulow’s claim that art should be viewed as aesthetic gourmandise, which had stamped his paintings as perfumed and sugared.47

**Colourist modernism**

Both Messel and Malmanger have emphasised ‘the decorative’ as a concept that gave the formal qualities of the artwork priority. This meant that ‘the decorative’ did more than establish

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44 Jens Thiis, ‘Dansk kunsthistorie og kritik. Av en anmeldelse om tre kunsthistoriske verker’ [1908], in Samlede avhandlinger om nordisk kunst (Kristiania og København: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1920), 165. When Erik Mortensen published his history of Danish art criticism, he gave the second volume the subheading ‘Forfinelsens pris’ (The price of refinement), a reference to Thiis’ objection towards Hannover. Mortensen implied that Danish art critics around 1900 were mainly interested in pure artistic qualities, and too little concerned about the social and communal functions of art. Erik Mortensen, Kunstkritikkens og kunsttopfattelsens historie i Danmark, 2nd band, Forfinelsens pris (København: Rhodos, 1990), 36, 112.


a connection back to traditional visual culture; it also became a concept that could establish a connection with international modernism. By its focus on the picture surface, Malmanger contends, ‘the decorative’ came to be an important concept for the critical interest in the pure visual qualities of the work of art.48

We can find this interest in the critical writings of Rolf Thommessen (1879–1939) around 1900. Thommessen had close connections with Aubert and the Lysaker milieu. In 1900, reviewing the ‘National Art Exhibition’, he called for the establishment of a national artistic style, using decorative, architectonic and artistic principles.49 In 1901, he identified a group of young artists who were mostly interested in colourism and the pure artistic merits of painting. He described this as an art for the eye; its purpose was to embellish, just what Aubert had criticised earlier the same year. The new art was characterised by a ‘decorative strength in its form’ and a ‘shifting beauty in the colouring’.50 This was an art of little human concern, an autonomous art with its own value, cultivating pure artistic qualities.

Jens Thiis often expressed his belief that this artistic value was the only value by which a work of art should be judged. According to Nils Messel, Jens Thiis’s interest in French art as the foundation of modern Norwegian painting meant that he did not care much about Aubert’s interest in the national visual culture.51 However, this simplistic view of a polarisation between Aubert and Thiis needs to be revised. Although Thiis made ironic remarks over the cultivation of the national at Lysaker, he nevertheless came to identify different national artistic traditions, traditions that were also vital for modern painting. In fact, Thiis was probably the critic who best succeeded in integrating the two aspects of decoration: on the one hand the interest in a serious art that was anchored in the past, on the other, an art that was ‘unashamed of its offer of visual delight’, as T.J. Clark expressed it. For as much as Thiis insisted on the interest in colours and colourism as a specific modern trait in contemporary painting, he also established a specific tie to the national tradition through colourism.

In 1914, reflecting on the paintings exhibited in the centennial exhibition in the Frogner district of Oslo, Thiis identified a colouristic interest in contemporary Norwegian painting. This new colourism had French connections, since many of the

young Norwegian colourists had studied French painting. This was true of Thorvald Erichsen (1868–1939) and Oluf Wold-Torne (1867–1919), as well as Edvard Munch and the young Norwegian students of Matisse. Erichsen and Wold-Torne had studied under the Danish painter Kristian Zahrtmann in the 1890s. And even though they had acquired what Thiis regarded as a very welcome Danish culture and feeling for form, Danish painting had done no good for their colour sensibility. They both brightened their colours when they returned to Norway around 1900 (Fig. 6). Thiis regarded this colourism as a vital national thread in painting, going all the way back to J.C. Dahl.52 Dahl’s colourism had its roots

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in the Norwegian landscape, where the crisp air gave the colours of the landscape a sparkling quality.

For Thiis, there was a natural connection between the characteristics of the art of a nation and its landscape. Writing about his impressions of the Danish art in the journal *Politiken* in 1908, Thiis found it natural that Danish art was characterised by its linear quality, and that its greatest artist was the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. His work reflected the linear qualities of the Danish landscape, with its broad undulating lines of the countryside, silhouetted against a towering sky. Norway, however, brought forth a different image, of rough form and flickering colours. This explained the different characters of their art. While Danish artists excelled in drawing and form, their colouring had too little brightness and energy. Norwegian art, on the contrary, was characterised by a less developed formal culture, but showed its strength in its sparkling colours.

In 1923, Gothenburg celebrated its 300th anniversary with a great exhibition. The art exhibition pavilion showed contemporary Nordic art. Jens Thiis, who had participated in the planning of the exhibition of Nordic art, wrote a long review, which he published under the title *Nordisk kunst idag* that same year. Thiis made positive remarks about the Swedish art, but he was critical of the Danish art for its lack of colourism, and harshly rejected most of the Finnish paintings. The Finnish section displayed ten paintings by Helene Schjerfbeck, which Thiis could enjoy, and a few paintings from the Septem Group, which also gave him a pleasant impression. However, most of the Finnish section did not appeal to him:

*One felt surrounded by a foreign race in these painting halls. (...) Mongolian and tartarian types grimacing from the walls. A confined environment of lowbrow peasants, lay-reader and liquor emanates from dozens of these tales of everyday life. Besides, the bleak grey and dirty colouring that characterised the exhibited paintings (...) gave a general impression of levelled down democracy, a feeling of dispiritedness.*

53 Jens Thiis, *Nordisk kunst idag*, (Kristiania: Gyldendal, 1923), 56–57. ‘Man følte sig omgitt av en helt fremmed rase i disse malerisaler. (...) Mongolske og tatariske typer griner en i møte fra væggene. Et innestengt miljø av lavloftet bonde-dom, av lægpredikant og brænnevin oser ut frae n række av disse folkelivsskildringer. Og den trøstesløst graa og skidne koloritt som satte preg paa utstillingen, (…), gav et totalintrykk av nednivellert demokrati, som gjorde motløs.’
Fig. 7. Axel Revold, Farming, 1922, sketch for Bergen Børs (Bergen Stock Exchange building), oil on wood, 145cm x 137.5cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo
Photo: Nasjonalmuseet CC-BY-NC, © Revold, Axel / Kuvasto
Fig. 8. Edvard Munch, *The Girls on the Bridge*, c. 1901, oil on canvas, 136cm x 125cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo
Photo: Nasjonalmuseet / Børre Høstland CC-BY-NC
of Finland in dark tones. Their paintings showed a social spirit, a style and colouring that was very different from ‘our own’, he stated. As Timo Huusko has pointed out, it was a common racist prejudice in this period to believe that the Finnish peasants were of (inferior) Mongolian descent. Thiis’s criticism of the Novemberists’ depiction of them echoed previous reviews by other Scandinavian critics. Prominent among the November Group were the paintings by Tyko Sallinen (1879–1955). Thiis found the people occupying his paintings hideous. At first sight, the colouring appeared grey and without mellow contrasting colours. On looking again, however, Sallinen’s paintings showed a surprising beauty, a beauty that was to be found exactly in the colouring. At a distance Thiis found a ‘marvellous and mystical vibrating splendour’ in his paintings. Sallinen’s grey was a living grey, and Thiis proclaimed him the greatest Finnish painter of the young generation.

Entering the Norwegian section of the exhibition from the Finnish one was, according to Thiis, like coming from a dark attic into a flowering garden. Here he took a special interest in the paintings of Thorvald Erichsen, Ludvig Karsten (1876–1926), the young Alf Rolfsen (1895–1979), and the former pupils of Henri Matisse: Axel Revold (1887–1962), Henrik Sørensen (1882–1962), Per Krohg (1889–1965), and Jean Heiberg (1884–1976). Thiis was especially interested in the sketches Revold had made for the fresco decoration at the Bergen Stock Exchange building (Bergen Børs), sketches that had secured Revold the commission (Fig. 7). In contrast to the Finnish art, Thiis was happy to see that the Norwegian art rose above the depressing social reality of the time:

*Something light and airy, colourful and robust characterises the whole. Nowhere can one sense that this art comes from a land of prohibition and bitter pietism. Whatever the situation in literature and politics, pessimism has not got hold of the art of painting.*

Thiis saw these light, airy and colourful paintings as characteristic of a Norwegian tradition stretching back to Dahl. Criticising what he saw as dark and muddy colours in the paintings of Alf Rolfsen, he advised him to adjust his colours to ‘the
Norwegian line’, which he described as ‘true to nature, wakeful and vigorous’ (‘livsnær, våken og frodig’). It was a vision of an exuberant colourism.

When Thiis surveyed the history of painting in Norway in 1927, he stated that ‘if anything should be called our national line in painting, it is the colouristic’. This time he traced a colourist tradition that went beyond Dahl, going all the way back to medieval church interiors and their tapestries. This medieval colouristic tradition lived on in the folk art of the Norwegian inland, until J.C. Dahl revived it in his landscape paintings, inspired by the Norwegian nature, full of contrasts, fresh and sparkling colours.

Even Edvard Munch could be associated with this Norwegian colouristic tradition. When Thiis reflected on Munch’s paintings in 1914, he drew attention to the shift in Munch’s paintings around 1900. At this time, Munch turned his back on the Symbolism of the former decade, opened his eyes to a saturated vibrating nature, and started to paint landscapes in Warnemünde and later in Kragerø, a little coastal town south of Oslo. In 1933, when Thiis reflected upon Munch’s use of colour in The Girls on the Bridge (1901, Fig. 8), he insisted that ‘in truth, this is Nordic classic’. The triad of the white, red and green dresses was typical of Norwegian colouring. ‘No Frenchman, no Dane, no Swede would have dared this’, he wrote, underlining Munch’s qualities as a colour composer.

Conclusion

The critical practice in Norway around 1900 is clearly related to the weathering of tradition and the fragmentation caused by the growth of cities and of the techno-scientific culture that had developed during the 19th century. As a contrast to the feeling of nervousness or uncertainty (as Bjørnson called it) caused by this profound change in sociocultural life, critics expressed their hope in art to restore the experience of unity and man’s connection with nature. The concept of ‘the national’ was important in the critical discourse around 1900 as an entity that signalled a unity that had been lost, and that could be retrieved by art. Naturalist critics, like Andreas Aubert in the 1880s, came to support an art that took its subjects from the rural part of the country, where he saw old traditions still existing. This art promised a healing

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57 Thiis, Nordisk kunst idag, 111. In contrast to Thiis’ understanding, Frosterus openly criticised what he called ‘the noisy epigones of colour-gaiety’ (‘färgglädjans larmande eftersejare’), which was his ironic phrase for the Scandinavian pupils of Matisse. Frosterus, Solljus og slagskugga, 291.
59 Thiis, ‘Betragtninger over norsk malerkunst i aaret 1914’, 379.
60 Jens Thiis, Edvard Munch og hans samtid: Slektet, livet og kunsten, geniet (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1933), 278.
for a fragmented and rootless city culture, in Norway typically associated with Kristiania (Oslo). An authentic art depended on artists working independent of a cosmopolitan city culture. Therefore, Aubert was inclined to value art according to the distance it kept from the ‘decadent’ or ‘refined’ city culture.

The 1890s brought about an interest in the style of painting. This interest in style and decorative painting was a reaction against Naturalism, which was now regarded as analytical and commercial, related to scientific culture and capitalist markets. In contrast, style in painting signalled a specific attitude to life, a more spiritual art, and decorative painting was marked by this stylization, which bore witness to a people’s world view. Relating decorative painting to a tradition of monumental art, it was almost by definition a communal art, and critics could embrace the art of Gerhard Munthe as an embodiment of Norwegian sentiments. Critics viewed Munthe’s decorative-inspired art as a colouristic rustic painting, the opposite of painterly ‘refinement’, in which the national tradition was invoked by the colouring and the decorative form.

Norwegian art criticism around 1900 is usually seen as polarised, with the nationally oriented Lysakerkretsen on one side, and the more internationally oriented critics – with Jens Thiis as the leading figure – on the other. And even though critics like Aubert and Thiis often had their disagreements, not least regarding Munch’s art, in hindsight their consensus is just as striking. They were both advocates of an anthropophagic strategy and understood French artists as the most important models to emulate. Around 1900, they expressed their highest expectations for the same Norwegian artists, painters like Munthe, Erichsen and Wold-Torne, whom they praised for developing decorative paintings with a distinct national character. For Thiis, this national character was to be found in the colours; the paintings could be decorative, like Revold’s frescoes from Bergen Børs, or more expressive, like the paintings of Edvard Munch and Henrik Sørensen. What gave them their Norwegian quality was their common grounding in the fresh and sparkling colours of the Norwegian landscape.

The fact that even an internationally oriented critic like Jens Thiis would embrace the concept of ‘the national’ is a testimony to the strong impact of the concept. It signalled that art, faced
with the fragmentation and alienation caused by the modern city and techno-scientific culture, could restore man’s relationship with his world, and create a feeling of (national) community and a continuity with the (national) past.

**Tore Kirkholt** gained his PhD in art history from the NTNU (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) in Trondheim in 2010, with a thesis on art criticism in Norway during the 19th century. He has written several articles on the criticism and reception of art, both during the 19th and 20th centuries. Kirkholt is also associate professor in art history at NTNU, and has earlier worked as a curator at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø.
Celticism, Internationalism and Scottish Identity
Three Key Images in Focus

Frances Fowle

The Scottish Celtic Revival emerged from long-standing debates around language and the concept of a Celtic race, a notion fostered above all by the poet and critic Matthew Arnold. It took the form of a pan-Celtic, rather than a purely Scottish revival, whereby Scotland participated in a shared national mythology that spilled into and overlapped with Irish, Welsh, Manx, Breton and Cornish legend. Some historians portrayed the Celts – the original Scottish settlers – as pagan and feckless; others regarded them as creative and honorable, an antidote to the Industrial Revolution. ‘In a prosaic and utilitarian age,’ wrote one commentator, ‘the idealism of the Celt is an ennobling and uplifting influence both on literature and life.’

The revival was championed in Edinburgh by the biologist, sociologist and utopian visionary Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), who, in 1895, produced the first edition of his avant-garde journal *The Evergreen: a Northern Seasonal*, edited by William Sharp (1855–1905) and published in four ‘seasonal’ volumes, in 1895–86. The journal included translations of Breton and Irish legends and the poetry and writings of Fiona Macleod, Sharp’s Celtic alter ego. The cover was designed by Charles Hodge Mackie (1862–1920) and it was emblazoned with a Celtic Tree of Life. Among the many contributors were Sharp himself and the artist John Duncan (1866–1945), who produced some of the key images of the Scottish Celtic Revival.

However, it was in Galloway, a Celtic region in south-west Scotland, that the first visual expression of the Scottish revival was produced by the painters Edward Atkinson Hornel (1864–1933) and George Henry (1858–1943). Their mysterious joint project, *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe*, of 1890 (Fig. 1, Glasgow

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1 On Arnold see, for example, Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 64–69

2 Anon, ‘Pan-Celtic Congress’, *The Advertiser*, 9 November 1907, 8 (reporting on the Edinburgh Pan-Celtic Congress).

Fig. 1. Edward Atkinson Hornel and George Henry, *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe*, 1890, oil on canvas, 152.4cm x 152.4cm. Glasgow Museums Resource Centre
Photo: ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collections
Museums), astonished critics when it was displayed in London and Munich in 1890. The German art critic Fritz von Ostini commented on the Glasgow artists’ ‘real, glowing passion for colour’ and their ‘great intensity of feeling’. The painting, surrounded by a spectacular gold frame of interlaced snakes, depicts a procession of Druids in colourful ceremonial robes descending a hill in winter. Some are dark-haired and dark-skinned, representing the powerful Picts, whose Iberian/Scythian origins distinguished them from other Celtic tribes. Others are red-haired and fair skinned, representing the Kingdom of Dalriada, colonised in the third and fourth centuries by the Scots, a warlike Celtic race with red hair and green eyes. A third ‘type’ in the painting possibly represents the Britons (or Bretons) of Strathclyde, another Celtic race, who controlled the area from the River Clyde to the Solway Firth (including Galloway), and beyond into northern England. They were stocky, fair-skinned and dark-haired, rather like Hornel himself.

As this essay will argue, Hornel and Henry’s painting not only reflects key debates around the origins and identity of the Celts, it represents the plurality and complexity of Celtic identity and the sheer eclecticism of the revival in Scotland. Drawing on contemporary journals and antiquarian publications, as well as John Duncan’s Notebooks in the National Library of Scotland, the painting will be analysed in conjunction with two major paintings by Duncan, *Anima Celtica* (National Trust for Scotland), from 1895, and *St Bride* (National Galleries of Scotland), from 1913. Together, these three key images illustrate the different ways in which Scottish identity at this period was expressed: not only through its Celtic past, but also through an awareness of the latest developments in European art and culture, including Symbolism and more esoteric concerns such as Theosophy. As we shall see, Scottish artists in the late 19th century were inspired by avant-garde movements such as Art Nouveau, as much as by archaeological finds and antiquarianism. However, they were also seeking specifically Scottish sources for their *fin-de-siècle* paintings – in the knots and interlace of Celtic metalwork, or the mysterious signs found on Pictish stones. They were considerably aided by the proliferation of antiquarian literature, including new translations and reinterpretations of Celtic myths, and publications containing reproductions of recent ‘finds’, such as the *Horae Ferales* (1863),

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5 ‘Immeasurable is what can be learned from them, from their boldness in colour, their great intensity of feeling …’ in ‘Scottish Pictures: What the Germans Think of Them, No. 2’, The Weekly News, 27 September 1890 (translation of an article by Fritz von Ostini in Münchener Neueste Nachrichten), Smith 1997, 62.

Part of the Celtic migrations that reached the British Isles during the first millennium BCE, the Picts were said to be Scythian in origin. The Scythians were ancient Iranian nomads, also Ukranian. They are also said to have settled for a period in Northern Spain.
as well as pattern books, such as Owen Jones’s *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856).  

**Hornel, Henry and the Galloway landscape**

*The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe* was similarly eclectic in its approach and represented an entirely new direction for Henry and Hornel. Their earlier paintings were typical of the avant-garde group known as the ‘Glasgow Boys’ who, inspired by French Realism and the work of Salon Naturalists such as Jules Bastien-Lepage, were dedicated to painting rural subjects out of doors. Towards the end of the 1880s, however, their work began to move in the direction of decorative Symbolism, beginning with Henry’s masterpiece, *A Galloway Landscape*, of 1889 (Glasgow Museums). With its flattened perspective and synthesis of forms – including a stream inspired by the Japanese arabesque – this canvas has been compared to Paul Gauguin’s Breton landscapes from the same period. Although Henry’s approach was less radical and groundbreaking than that of his French contemporary, he shared an interest in capturing the essence of an area steeped in legend and superstition.

It was Hornel who almost certainly ignited Henry’s interest in the landscape of Galloway. In the medieval period the area was inhabited by a population of mixed Scandinavian and Gaelic ethnicity, hence the name Galloway or ‘Gall Gaidhell’, meaning, literally ‘Foreigner-Gael’. Based in Kirkcudbright, Hornel was well versed in Celtic mythology and was fascinated by the recent discoveries of prehistoric marks hewn into a group of rocks in the surrounding landscape. He immersed himself in local history and folklore, devouring, among other publications, John Nicholson’s *Historical and Traditional Tales ... connected with the South of Scotland* (1843). This included the gruesome cannibalistic tale of Sawney Bean and a poem entitled *The Brownie of Blednoch*, by William Nicholson. The poem tells the story of a fairy called Aiken Drum who, like all traditional Scottish brownies, lives by water and guards the sheep, but takes offence easily and has a hideous, frightening appearance. In the same year that Henry produced *A Galloway Landscape*, Hornel painted the *Brownie of Blednoch* (Glasgow Museums), bringing to life the brownie in Nicholson’s poem. Lit by a silvery moon, the malevolent creature crouches on a hillside beside a babbling brook, very similar to...
the stream in Henry’s painting. Like the fairy in the poem, he has glaring eyes, ‘matted head (…) a lang blue beard’ and ‘knotted knees’.\(^{10}\) The flowing arabesques of the rushing water and the brownie’s beard suggest the rhythmic forms of Celtic art, while the concentric rings of the moon are inspired by the Galloway cup-and-ring marks.

**The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe**

The archaeologist J. Romilly Allen would have approved of Hornel’s ancient indigenous sources. Writing on ‘Early Scandinavian Wood Carvings’ in the *Studio* in 1897, he recommended that:

> in seeking for models (…) it is far better to seek inspiration from the works of art produced either by our own ancestors, or by those people in Europe who are nearest akin to ourselves (…) than to endeavor to make wholly alien styles, like those of India or Japan, take root in a soil quite unsuited to their favourable growth.\(^{11}\)

The Celtic Revival was, at least in part, an attempt to regain contact with Scotland’s national cultural roots, but for Henry and Hornel this did not mean (as Allen recommended) to the exclusion of other more exotic sources. Both Henry and Hornel were inspired, not only by the ancient markings recently discovered in the Galloway landscape, but also by Japanese prints by Hokusai and others which, from 1889 onwards, they were able to see at the gallery of their friend and supporter, the art dealer Alexander Reid.\(^{12}\) Indeed, their joint project, *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe*, presented a fusion of Celtic ornament, Japanese design and other continental sources.

*The Druids* was one of several works by the Glasgow Boys exhibited in 1890 at the Grosvenor Gallery in London, where it caused a sensation. The art critic R.A.M. Stevenson described the druidical figures as ‘grim, tawdry, and savage (…) glowing with crude colour’.\(^{13}\) The artists constructed a myth around the painting: the solemn procession of Celtic priests emerging from a grove of oaks was said to have been inspired by the vision of a local shaman.\(^{14}\) In reality, however, the source of the myth is to be found in the writings of Pliny, who described the gathering of the mistletoe in his *Natural History*:

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10 Nicholson, *Historical and Traditional Tales in prose and verse*, 81.
12 On Reid, Hornel and Henry, see Frances Fowle, *Van Gogh’s Twin: The Scottish Art Dealer Alexander Reid* (Edinburgh, 2010).
The Druids – for that is the name they give to their magicians – held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it, supposing always that tree to be the common oak (quercus robur). Of itself the oak is selected by them to form whole groves, and they perform none of their religious rites without employing branches of it; so much so, that it is very probable that the priests themselves may have received their name from the Greek name for that tree [drus]. In fact, it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by God himself as an object of his especial favour.

The mistletoe, however, is but rarely found upon the oak; and when found, is gathered with rites replete with religious awe. This is done more particularly on the fifth day of the moon, the day which is the beginning of their months and years, as also of their ages, which, with them, are but thirty years. This day they select because the moon, though not yet in the middle of her course, has already considerable power and influence; and they call her by a name which signifies, in their language, the all-healing. Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, the horns of which are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that God will render this gift (...) to those to whom he has so granted it. It is the belief with them that the mistletoe, taken in drink, will impart fecundity to all animals that are barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons.¹⁵

Sir James Frazer included Pliny’s account of the gathering of the mistletoe in *The Golden Bough*, his groundbreaking comparative anthropological study, published in 1890, the same year that Henry and Hornel completed *The Druids*. He surmised that the reason why the oak tree was venerated was the presence of the mistletoe in the deciduous oak during the winter months: ‘In winter,’ he wrote, ‘the sight of its fresh foliage among the bare

branches must have been hailed by the worshippers of the tree as a sign that the divine life that had ceased to animate the branches, yet survived in the mistletoe. The mistletoe was poisonous and yet had healing powers; it was a symbol of life, as well as a being a harbinger of death. In Norse mythology it caused the death of Balder and in classical legend it allowed Aeneas access to the Underworld. Light and darkness, death and resurrection are recurring themes in Celtic mythology and are also the underlying themes of this painting.

Indeed, the painting should be considered in the context of the artists’ only other joint project, The Star in the East (Glasgow Museums), which shows the angel announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds. Exhibited in 1891, this painting, with its profoundly Christian message, was designed as a pendant, as well as a foil, to the pagan ritual of The Druids. Despite the obvious differences between the two pictures, there are parallel themes. Both depict events that took place around the same time of year; both depict a group of people – the shepherds and Druids – who lived their lives according to the rhythms of nature, guided by the moon and the stars. The ceremonial gathering of the mistletoe took place at the Winter Solstice, which marks the shortest and darkest day of the year, around 22 December, when nature is at its most barren. But it also marked a turning point, signalling the moment when the winter days began to lengthen, promising light and fertility in the months that were to come. The birth of Christ, similarly, occurred just after the Winter Solstice. Christ was the Light of the World, bringing with him hopes of salvation and resurrection.

Returning to The Druids, the basic details of Pliny’s account are carefully observed in Henry and Hornel’s painting: the two white bulls in the foreground, the priest clad in white, the oak trees, the snow-covered winter landscape, the half-moon on the horizon and the golden sickle. The artists maintained that the bulls were modelled on an ancient breed of cattle and the physiognomy of the priests was based on close examination of Druid skulls, in order to lend the figures an air of authenticity.

They almost certainly based their version of the druidical ceremony on the account given in William Mackenzie’s History of Galloway, a copy of which remains in the library at Hornel’s home,

Broughton House in Kirkcudbright. Mackenzie even noted that female, as well as male, Druids participated in these sacred rituals, perhaps explaining the presence of the androgenous figure in the centre of the composition. He also observed that ‘... (i)n its original purity, Druidism inculcated the worship of a Supreme Being; the immortality of the soul, or at least, its perpetual transmigration; the exertion of courage; and abstinence from evil’.19

In terms of visual inspiration, the white-haired, bearded Arch-Druid on the left of the composition was inspired, not by druidical remains, but by an illustration in an 1815 book of costume that was widely reproduced,20 while the features of the central priest were probably based on photographs of Native Americans that were widely distributed around the time of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. This spectacle had attracted thousands and ran for five months (from May 1887) in London, before touring to Birmingham, Manchester and Paris, coinciding with the Exposition Universelle of 1889.21 For many this event was their first opportunity to view diverse cultures on a global scale, albeit through the prism of French colonialism. And, although the Native Americans may have seemed like exotic and intriguing ‘savages’ to a European audience, there was still the sense that they represented an ancient, noble and dying race. Moreover, like the Druids, they were shamans, in possession of magical powers.

The writer Neil Munro recorded that, as they worked on the picture, Henry and Hornel bellowed out a druidical chant called The Black Whale Inn of Askelon.22 In reality The Black Whale Inn was a student drinking song or commercium, composed in the mid-19th century by Josef Viktor von Scheffel.23 However, Hornel retained an interest in Druidism that stemmed from his membership of the Kirkcudbright Antiquarian Society. He was later elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh and was able to attend their meetings, as well as read, and contribute to, their proceedings.24

The composition of The Druids is pervaded with circular forms: the mistletoe branches, the designs and decorations on the priest’s robes, the golden sickle, the moon on the horizon and the winter landscape itself. Various commentators have observed that these circular forms, once again, allude to the cup-and-ring markings that fascinated Hornel – so much so that he made a number of sketches which were published, in 1887, in

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23 In Josef Viktor von Scheffel, Gaudamus, Lieder aus dem Engeren und Weiteren (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1868).
24 John Morrison, Painting the Nation (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 199.
He also took photographs of the markings, some of which were then engraved and reproduced in a later supplement about the High Banks carvings.26

To be archaeologically accurate, the cup-and-ring markings are Neolithic, rather than Celtic, but the proceedings may also have provided the source for the picture’s frame, which is decorated with Celtic interlace.27 John Morrison has attempted to identify specific sources for the decorative elements in the painting, including Pictish symbol stones and high-profile Celtic ‘finds’, such as the Aylesford Bucket (found in Kent in 1886), and the Battersea Shield.28 Hornel was certainly looking to Celtic art in order to find a specifically Scottish ‘brand’ of decorative Symbolism. However, I would argue that many of the so-called Celtic references in the picture were intentionally universal. The snake, found on Pictish symbol stones, was sacred to the Druids and a symbol of wisdom, but is also present in several ancient cultures, including Norse (Jörmundgandr or the Midgard Serpent), Hindu and Egyptian mythology, and venerated by Native American tribes such as the Hopi. It signified strength and regeneration, due to the fact that the snake renewed itself through the shedding of its skin.29 The scallop shell, visible on the shoulder of one of the priest’s robes, was said to represent the setting sun and symbolised death and resurrection. Scallop shell scoops were used as early as 4300 BCE in the Inner Hebrides and there is a possibility that Hornel or Henry might have seen an example in the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.30 On the other hand, scallop shells also have Christian symbolism and, more prosaically, are a feature of Georgian interior design.

Celtic sources do not explain the bright palette, which is the most prominent feature of The Druids. Its colour scheme of vermillion, emerald and gold was described by the critic Walter Armstrong as the picture’s ‘aesthetic raison d’être’.31 If it recalls the dominant (if now faded) colours of insular manuscripts,32 it is because Henry and Hornel almost certainly consulted pattern books such as Owen Jones’s The Grammar of Ornament (1856), in which original Celtic designs were reproduced using the new technique of chromolithography. Another source for the artists’ brilliant colourism and thick impasto, was the work of the French artist Adolphe Monticelli, whose work had a major

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29 On symbolism in pagan art, see Hilda Roderick and Ellis Davidson, Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions (Manchester University Press, 1988).

30 See, for example, the scallop shell from Cnoc Coig, on Oronsay (4500–4300 BCE), National Museums of Scotland.

31 The Magazine of Art 1890, 326.

impact on both artists from about 1888 onwards. They were also inspired by Japanese prints, as discussed above, and by stained glass, which was enjoying a huge revival in Scotland during this period.

**John Duncan, The Evergreen and Anima Celtica, 1895**

Such eclecticism is also a key feature of the work of John Duncan, who was to become a major figure of the Scottish Celtic Revival. While Henry and Hornel were based in Galloway, Duncan hailed from Dundee in the East of Scotland and worked mainly in Edinburgh. He and Geddes established the University Hall School of Art, subsequently the Old Edinburgh School of Art, of which Duncan was first artistic director. In 1895, Geddes invited him to contribute to *The Evergreen* and also commissioned him to create a series of murals at Ramsay Lodge, Edinburgh, which were reproduced in the *Studio* in 1897 (incidentally, in the same year as a work by Akseli Gallen-Kallela). Duncan chose three Celtic heroes for his mural scheme: Fingal from Macpherson’s *Ossian* saga, Cucchulain from the Ulster cycle, and the young king Arthur. He included ‘authentic’ Celtic items and decorated the surrounding frames with Celtic knotwork. His choice of images was pan-Celtic, but also nationalistic: Cucchulain defended his native Ulster from the rest of Ireland; Fingal is shown in combat with Swaran, son of Starno, King of Lochlin (Norway); King Arthur is challenged by his Welsh half-sister, the evil Morgan Le Fay, who represents spiritual darkness as a threat to the historical and cultural continuity of the Britons.

We know from Duncan’s Notebooks, deposited in the National Library of Scotland, that he steeped himself in Celtic history and folklore, much of which he read in French. Like Geddes, he adopted a global view of Celticism, which included Irish epic literature, popular Breton tales, Welsh bardic poetry and Manx legends – texts written by French, Welsh, Irish and English authors, such as Marie Henri d’Arbois de Jubainville, Vicomte Hersant de la Villemarqué, Sir John Rhys, Daniel O’Sullivan, A.H. Leahy and Charles Squire. Like Henry and Hornel, Duncan aimed to breathe new life into Scottish painting through a fusion of Celtic myth, French Symbolist theory and an appropriately modern style of painting. His ideas were in tune with those of the French avant-

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34 On stained glass in Scotland, see Michael Donnelly, *Scotland’s Stained Glass: Making the Colours Sing* (Mercat Press, 1997).

35 Geddes had been appointed to the Chair of Botany at University College, Dundee, in 1888. On Geddes and Duncan in Dundee, see Matthew Jarron (ed), *The Artist and the Thinker: John Duncan and Patrick Geddes in Dundee* (Dundee: University of Dundee Museum Services, 2004).


garde and during the 1890s he immersed himself in the esoteric theories of the notorious Sâr Péladan and the Salon of the Rose + Croix. Péladan was steeped in esotericism and the occult and, whereas Duncan sought a purer path, he, too, was fascinated by mysticism and the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky. Although he did not join the Edinburgh Theosophical movement until 1907, he was interested from the outset in the interconnectedness of things, especially different spiritual beliefs.38

Like many revivalists, including Sharp, Duncan believed ardently that the Celts were a creative, instinctive and deeply spiritual race. After a trip to the island of Eriskay (in the Outer Hebrides) in 1905, he vowed ‘to devote myself to the realisation of a spiritual art. To garner the crops of my imagination that they do not rot in the fields.’39 He also connected Celtic art – because of its simplicity and synthetism – with the ‘Idea’, a neo-Platonic concept appropriated by the Symbolists, who believed that the underlying idea conveyed by a work of art was more important than its faithful representation. In his notes Duncan wrote that art ‘should not be judged by its resemblance to nature but by its expressive force’.40

As I have discussed elsewhere, the illustrations that he produced for The Evergreen show the influence not only of Celtic art (including head and tail pieces inspired by the Book of Kells) and mythology, but of French Symbolism and of more esoteric sources, such as Egyptian art.41 Even though Sharp shared Duncan’s interest in Theosophy and mysticism, these more mysterious sources were downplayed by the promoters of the journal, who preferred to embrace Geddes’s notion of a Celtic ‘renascence’.42

Sharp’s original vision for The Evergreen was a thoroughly representative Anglo-Celtic quarterly that also included a detailed prospectus for a journal entitled ‘The Celtic World’ or Anima Celtica.43 The first item would be a prologue entitled ‘The Celtic Renaissance’, followed by essays on ‘The World Anglo-Celtic’ and ‘Anglo-Celtic Magazines’. Contributors would include the Scottish Celtic revivalist Alexander Carmichael; the Welsh writer and editor Ernest Rhys; George Meredith, Celticist and future author of Celt and Saxon (1910); and W.B. Yeats, a major figure in the Irish Celtic Revival. The second edition would comprise items by ‘Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx, Cornish, & Breton writers’. In the end, Geddes’s French connections would prevail and the journal’s
Fig. 2. John Duncan, *Anima Celtica*, 1895. National Trust for Scotland
Photo: National Trust for Scotland / Antonia Reeve
Celtic contributions from Edith Wingate Rinder and others were somewhat overshadowed by articles by French anarchists, geographers and sociologists, such as Elisée Reclus and Abbé Félix Klein. In terms of Scottish identity, therefore, the first edition of *The Evergreen* (subtitled ‘A Northern Seasonal’) had a decidedly international outlook.\(^{44}\)

Nevertheless, one of the most representatively Celtic images in the journal is Duncan’s *Anima Celtica* (1895), a deeply symbolic image, almost certainly based on an earlier painting (Fig. 2, National Trust for Scotland). In both works the Celtic soul or imagination is visualised as a female sorceress or perhaps psychic medium, conjuring up images of heroes from Celtic mythology. The images in the top half of the picture exist in the woman’s imagination, or have been summoned up through her psychic powers. The legends emerge from a curious incense burner and the smoke from it divides the various elements and ends in a swirl of Celtic interlace. The woman’s psychic ‘episode’ has apparently been prompted by the smell and intoxication of the incense. The painting further reflects the inward-looking Symbolism of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes through its simplification, flattened perspective and muted tones, which are especially evident in the figure of Deirdre.

In the printed version, the images are taken largely from James Macpherson’s *Poems of Ossian*, along themes of renaissance and regeneration: the Birth of Ossian, the Awakening of Cucchulain, and the swine of the Irish Tuath[a] de Danaan, who continually renew themselves. The painting is more obviously pan-Celtic: it depicts Deirdre of the Sorrows, who was betrothed to the King of Ulster, but who fell in love with a man from Erin (Ireland), then fled with him to Scotland; Mannan, the God of the Sea, who gives his name to the Isle of Man; and the Children of Lir, who were transformed into swans during the pagan era and regained their human form 300 years later, once Christianity had been brought to Ireland.\(^{45}\)

**John Duncan’s *St Bride*, 1913**

A similar conflation of the pagan and Christian occurs in Duncan’s *St Bride*, of 1913 (Fig. 3, National Galleries of Scotland). This colourful work in tempera shows the pagan Brigid, who became Saint Bride, the midwife who assisted at Christ’s birth. Duncan
depicts her being flown by angels across the sea towards Bethlehem. The angel’s costumes are decorated with Celtic spirals and scenes from the New Testament.

In Celtic mythology Bride or Brigid was the giver of light and life, a symbol of the coming of Spring. Brigid’s day was celebrated on 1 February, about halfway between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, a festival known as Imbolc in Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man. It is one of four Celtic Festivals (the others are Beltane, Lughnasa and Samain) but is also the equivalent of the Christian festival of Candlemas. Thematically, therefore, the painting has close links with Henry and Hornel’s *The Druids* and *The Star in the East*. As the original catalogue entry for this painting explained: ‘On the night of the first Christmas, Bride, the daughter of Dubhach the Druid, was carried by Angels from Iona to Bethlehem to help Mary in her weakness to care for the new-born babe.’

According to the critic for the *Glasgow Herald*, Duncan’s source for *St Bride* was Fiona Macleod’s short story *Muisme Chriosd*. We know from William Sharp’s memoirs, collated by his wife, that Fiona Macleod was inspired to write this legend after a visit to Iona in 1894 and it was in fact first published as ‘Mary of the Gael’ in the second edition of *The Evergreen* (Autumn 1895). The following year it appeared in *The Washer of the Ford and other Legendary Mortalities*, published by Patrick Geddes and colleagues and, much later, as *Bride of the Isles*, in Macleod’s ‘Iona’ series, published in 1914. Sharp later claimed that the inspiration for the tale came to him through a psychic transference: ‘When I wrote certain of my writings (eg “Muisme Chriosd” and the “Three Marvels of Iona”) I felt, rightly or wrongly, as though I had in some measure become interpretative of the spirit of “Colum the White”:’ In other words, by taking on the female persona of Fiona Macleod he was able to act as a medium through which the spirit of Saint Columba was able to communicate.

Errington suggests that the prologue of Macleod’s book *The Sin-Eater and other Tales* (first published in 1895), was a source for some of the descriptive detail in Duncan’s painting, including the seal and the gull. Entitled ‘From Iona’, it describes springtime on the Sound of Iona, with seals ‘putting their breasts against the running tide’, ‘a congregation of sea-fowl – gannets and guillemots, skuas and herring gulls’, and the waters of the sound, which ‘dance their blue bodies and...
swirl their flashing white hair o’ foam’. Duncan denied such a specific source, writing in his 1912 Notebook: ‘It is better to paint from memory; then your work will be your own property.’ Like many Symbolists, his intention was to suggest ideas; to evoke universal truths, rather than describe reality. Bride is depicted as child-like and youthful and, as the critic for the Herald explains, both her physical appearance and the voyage across water are intentionally symbolic, for ‘(t)he artist shows us a type of pure maidenhood being borne as though by her own intuitive longing to aid in the regeneration of the world’, and continues, ‘Mr Duncan does not try to make humanly credible the angels in “St Bride”. Emphatically he does, however, remove us to a realm of thought and
feeling in which, without much effort of mystical contemplation, verities of inner experience are imaged.’

Conclusions

In conclusion, therefore, we are not intended to view Duncan’s canvases as illustrations or as reflections of reality, but as ‘envisionings’. All three artists discussed in this essay used Celtic art and myth as a stimulus, as a route towards the spiritual and the subconscious, or towards a more suggestive evocation of reality. In all three works – *The Druids*, *Anima Celtica* and *St Bride* – there is a sense of the visionary and of the artist as ‘medium’, drawing on the past to evoke a more universal idea, and linking them very specifically with European Symbolism.

From this brief survey, therefore, three clear themes emerge, contributing towards a more general definition of Scottish Celtic Revival painting. First, the pictures evoke a complex, pan-Celtic identity, whether in terms of Scotland’s origins (*the Druids*) or in relation to shared mythologies (*Anima Celtica*). Secondly, the fusion of the pagan and the Christian is a constant, linking our cultural past to the present day. Lastly, these artists looked beyond Scotland for inspiration, drawing on Symbolism, Japanese art and even Theosophy in order to express their national identity through the universal language of the avant-garde. Together, these three works – even if they represent only one aspect of Scottish art at the end of the 19th century – give a sense of the richness and complexity of Celtic identity, as well as the diversity and internationalism of Scotland’s cultural Revival.

**Frances Fowle** is Professor of Nineteenth-Century Art at the University of Edinburgh and Senior Curator at the National Galleries of Scotland. She is also senior Trustee of the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Board member of the International Art Market Studies Association (TIAMSA) and Chair of the Association for Art History (AAH). She is the author of *Van Gogh’s Twin: the Scottish Art Dealer Alexander Reid 1854–1928* (2010) and Editor of *Nordic Artists Colonies 1870–1914* (2 vols, 2017). She has curated and contributed to numerous international exhibitions, notably ‘Impressionism and Scotland’ (2008); ‘Van Gogh to Kandinsky: Symbolist Landscape in Europe 1880–1910’ (2012) and ‘Celts: Art and Identity’ (2015–16).
Joan of Arc has been celebrated across the centuries for many reasons. The legend began in the 15th century with a peasant girl in Domrémy. Upon hearing the voices of saints, she was inspired to intervene on behalf of the French cause in the 100 Years War with England. Famously, the warrior-maid of Orléans was captured, tried and burned at the stake. Her legend has often been misunderstood, mistaking the reason for her execution as a result of a prosecution for witchcraft or for hearing the voice of the devil but historically she was sentenced to death due to the heresy of cross-dressing.\(^1\) As with many myths and legends, such tales inspire appropriations and revisions of the values embodied by the characters in the story. Since the 19th century Joan represented a national champion, particularly during and after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). She has also symbolised steadfast loyalty to a religious or spiritual cause, or a feminist icon as a female heroine in a world of men.\(^2\)

For the Celtic Revival in Scotland at the fin-de-siècle, Joan of Arc represented the Auld Alliance with France. This was a celebration of the historic political and cultural ties between France and Scotland. Meanwhile, for the international movement of Spiritualism, Joan represented the witch as a misunderstood spirit-medium in history. These two seemingly disparate interests are united in the painting *Jehanne d’Arc et sa Garde Écossaise*, by the Scottish and Celtic Revival artist John Duncan (1866–1945), in 1895–96 (Fig. 1). This painting is usually considered in terms of its engagement with the Celtic Revival’s interests in national and cultural identities. Yet it is the intention of this article to reconsider Duncan’s painting in the context of 19th-century Spiritualism in order to demonstrate how the appropriations of both the Celtic Revival and the Spiritualist movement coalesce in the image of Joan.

\(^1\) For more see Daniel Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

The painting shows the French protagonist on horseback and escorted by a Scottish guard on the way to Rheims. This episode depicts the day before the crowning of Charles VII as King of France, for whom Joan fought under the direction of spiritual guidance. Her winged guides maintain a visible presence close by. Also nearby are the Scottish guard who fought as allies alongside the French in the 100 Years War, when Scotland and England were separate kingdoms. From 1418 the Garde Écossaise acted as the personal bodyguard to the French monarchy and the Scots came to the aid of Joan during the 1429 siege of the English-held town of Orléans. The painting is symbolic of the close connection
between the two countries and epitomises the Auld Alliance. In addition to its painted version, Duncan made a similar line drawing of Joan in *The Way to Rheims* for the Celtic Revival project, *The Evergreen*, a four-volume journal that celebrated the ties between countries with a Celtic culture.³

**The Celtic Revival**

The Celtic Revival was interested in a pan-European identity between countries with a shared Celtic heritage or past.⁴ These included Brittany in France, Cornwall in England, the Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland, one of the main centres for the Celtic Revival was at Ramsay Lodge on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh's old town. Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) was an influential figure around whom many artistic and intellectual individuals gathered from both Scotland and further afield. One of the shared visions amongst this group was the belief that art could provide the genesis for cultural and social rejuvenation.⁵ Duncan's oeuvre contains a number of paintings that seem to represent the ties between different Celtic nations. His painting *Tristan and Isolde* (1912) is perhaps the most famous example of this. Tristan, a knight from Cornwall, and Isolde, an Irish Princess, stand upon a boat holding a love potion between them to express their eternal bond. The scene provided the opportunity to present the union of two Celts in front of a seascape, devoid of any indications to a specific national landscape, thus representing a universal message about the bond between Celtic nations of the North-Western Atlantic archipelago of Europe. In a similar vein, the image of Joan of Arc with her Scottish guard marching to victory was adopted by the Celtic Revival as a manifestation of the close bond between French and Scottish Celts.

The Celtic Revival appropriated Celtic archaeology and antiquaries for its own purposes, usually to find stylistic inspiration from artefacts and thematic motifs from folkloric stories that were broadly understood to be ‘Celtic’ in the 19th century. Such appropriations are found in *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe* (1890), by the Glasgow artists George Henry (1858–1943) and Edward Atkinson Hornel (1864–1933), in which the costumes of the Druids draw on a range of appropriated imagery, such as the lunula-shaped sickle derived from an early Bronze Age neck ornament, and a snake design from the Pictish Aberlemno stone.⁶

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John Morrison noted that Duncan took a similar approach in his painting *The Riders of the Sidhe* (1911), by applying symbols from various archaeological discoveries found across Britain and further afield. For example, the rider’s shield is modelled on the Battersea Shield in the British Museum (originally retrieved from the River Thames, London) and one of the helmets may be based on the carnyces represented on the Gundestrup cauldron from Jutland. This appropriation of an eclectic range of ‘Celtic’ prototypes was not necessarily problematic. In Duncan’s case it was typical of the pictorial synthetic approach of Symbolist art to which many of his paintings belonged. Such synthetic approaches in his work also apply to the spiritual syncretism and mystical quality of his paintings, which borrow from Christianity, Spiritualism, Theosophy, folkloric superstitions and mythological tales of the supernatural. His work is often imbued with an air of mystery, a deeply imaginative quality that revels in suggestions of otherworldliness.

This is not surprising, as many other Celtic Revivalists were interested in different forms of esotericism, mysticism and the occult. William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), an Irish Celtic Revival poet, who was famously a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, took an interest in Rosicrucianism and Theosophy, and was inspired by Maude Gone (1866–1953), who herself was deeply interested in occultism. Duncan was also interested in Theosophy and joined the Theosophical lodge in Edinburgh in 1909. Yet he was simultaneously drawn to the predecessor of the Theosophical movement: Spiritualism. These two movements were eclectic in their beliefs, the lack of strict dogma permitted each adherent the ability to subscribe to a range of alternative spiritualities, picking and choosing which aspects best suited their own individual approach to Theosophical and Spiritualist teaching. Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, began her mystical career as a spirit-medium. It was not uncommon for adherents to take an interest in both movements throughout the late decades of the 19th century.

**Spiritualism**

Spiritualism originated as a movement in 1848, in Hydesville, New York. Phenomenal events in the household of the Fox
family resulted in three sisters, Katherine, Margaret and Leah, identifying a series of coded knockings, or rappings, in the walls and on furniture, as communications from a spirit. This spirit was believed to have left the afterlife and crossed through the Veil, the threshold between worlds, into the mortal realm. The events gained considerable attention from both locals and a wider audience due to reports in the American Press. As the story spread, the Fox sisters gained followers who believed in the alleged phenomenon.12

Central to Spiritualism was the belief that human personality survives bodily death and continues to take an active interest in the mortal realm. Communion with spirits was widely believed to be possible and attempts to contact the spirits usually took place at social gatherings known as séances. These séances were often led by an individual who was deemed to be peculiarly sensitive to the presence of spirits. Such individuals were known as mediums. Mediumistic abilities ranged considerably but the most common powers were clairvoyance (clear-seeing), clairaudience (clear-hearing) and clairsentience (clear-feeling).

Séance transcripts reported that the spirits delivered many messages in the séance parlour. These messages were not only to comfort the recently bereaved but, much more importantly, were also supposed to be lessons and guidance from the Other side. Spirits were viewed by Spiritualists as enlightened teachers who knew the secrets of the afterlife. Spirit messages were intended to better humankind and lift those who listen to their lessons to a higher spiritual state. For this reason Spiritualists felt duty-bound to listen to the spirits, to share their messages and to act on their guidance. This was the driving force which saw Spiritualism spread across the globe to become an international movement.13 It was in this context that attention was given to acting upon the advice of spirits received via clairvoyant and clairaudient means, which became particularly poignant for the subject of Joan of Arc. She was a historic figure who was seen to parallel modern Spiritualist practices.

**Witches as mediums**

From the moment of the movement’s conception, its followers took a keen interest in exploring the possibility of earlier examples of Spiritualist beliefs throughout history. During their
search Spiritualists retrospectively perceived the witch as a spirit-medium. As an international leader of Spiritualism, Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–99) stated in 1871:

*In the trials in the Middle Ages which disgraced humanity, those who were accused of witchcraft possessed the gifts, which in ancient times were called witchcraft, and now called Spiritualism.*

It is not surprising that Spiritualists were interested in witches as historic mediums. In 1848, the Fox sisters were accused of witchcraft by some contemporary commentators. Nineteenth- and 20th-century mediums were regularly prosecuted in Britain under the Witchcraft Act of 1735, which remained in law until it was repealed and replaced by the Fraudulent Medium Act in 1951. Most infamously Helen Duncan (1897–1956), a Scottish medium, was amongst the last people to be convicted and imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act in 1944. Spiritualists ran several campaigns against this law, viewing it as a discriminating and problematic deterrent to the progress of the movement and the development of mediumship across Britain.

Sceptics warned that people attending séances were duped on the grounds of sentimental reasons whereby the medium, as a charlatan, took advantage of people who were emotionally vulnerable, usually following a bereavement, and therefore not rational or of sound mind. Spiritualists claimed this was not the case and that they were helping those in mourning to find comfort in the belief that their loved ones were still available to them. Nonetheless, for every Spiritualist there was also a sceptic and many Spiritualists felt that they were under threat from discrimination, supported by the law in the case of the Witchcraft Act.
Joan the clairaudient

The discrimination faced by 19th-century mediums was likened by Spiritualists to the prosecutions faced by historic mediums as witches. The most famous example of these historic figures to be identified by Spiritualists was Joan of Arc. According to Spiritualist theories, Joan was a clairaudient, a medium who could hear the spirit voices bringing messages from beyond the Veil. By listening to the spirits Joan achieved victory, but sceptics disbelieving her mediumistic abilities were thought to be the cause behind her prosecution. As the foremost Spiritualist newspaper in Victorian Britain, *The Medium and Daybreak*, stated:

[Joan of Arc] saw supernatural lights and heard supernatural voices. These voices urged her to undertake deeds of daring on behalf of the Dauphin of France, and kindled in her martial enthusiasm which bore her on to victory on an irresistible tide. During her life she had known nothing of the causes of these supernatural voices, but she had learned them in the spirit-world. She had been a physical medium, and spirits were able to address her in the spirit-voice. (...) The gift of mediumship had been to her misfortune, and she paid the penalty with her life, for she perished at the stake. How different was it now! Yet her case illustrated the continuity of Nature’s laws, and in dark times she had been an early ray from the sun of modern Spiritualism.²⁰

Such was the popularity of Joan amongst Spiritualists that by 1901 she was regularly cited by those who wished to suggest that Spiritualism had a long history.

Now it is seldom one goes to a place where spiritual meetings are kept up that there are not in the course of the year one or more lectures delivered on Joan of Arc. This is as it should be; the time has come when preachers of Spiritualism should instruct their hearers more in history. The spiritual movement should every day grow more educational. Nothing strengthens the facts and phenomena of today as the proof that they are not something ‘new under the sun’. When the

²⁰ ‘Solution of the Historical Mystery of Joan of Arc’, *The Medium and Daybreak*, 4:144 (1873), 8.
world learns that history backs us in all the phenomenal parts of Spiritualism, then it sees that opposition to it weakens.\(^{21}\)

By referencing well-established examples of historic figures who could be claimed to be mediums, Spiritualists hoped to use history as a means of countering sceptical claims. Although deeply subjective, they thought history could in some way authenticate their beliefs.

Celtic Revivalists were also interested in revisiting history. Scholars on the Celtic Revival have already established that Joan of Arc was appropriated for the cultural revival in order to demonstrate a pan-Celtic connection between countries with a shared Celtic heritage or past, in this case France and Scotland. This correlated with the Auld Alliance, which was nurtured and rekindled in the late 19th century by the Franco-Scottish Society, founded in 1895 to celebrate the cultural ties between the two countries.\(^{22}\) It is within this context that the painting by Duncan from around 1895 has so far been understood. Murdo Macdonald and Frances Fowle have previously noted that this painting was commissioned or prompted by Geddes at the suggestion of the Scottish novelist, poet and literary critic Andrew Lang (1844–1912).\(^{23}\) Geddes wrote to Duncan in November 1895 to ask, ‘What do you say to a picture suggested by Andrew Lang of the Franco-Scottish Society, of Joan of Arc with her bodyguard of Scots archers?’\(^{24}\) Yet this detail about its conception is more important than has previously been realised.

In addition to being a member of the Franco-Scottish Society, Lang was also a member — and eventually President — of the Society of Psychical Research, which sat in on Spiritualist séances to investigate the authenticity of mediums. In the Society’s *Proceedings* from 1895, Lang wrote a lengthy article on Joan of Arc and the spiritual nature of her voices.\(^{25}\) He suggested that it was possible she was admitted to the sanctuary of the universe by spiritual means but he was reluctant to say she was specifically led by spirit-guides, although he ruled out most of the other possibilities in his article.\(^{26}\) He quietly suggested it but avoided explicitly writing it. This is perhaps appropriate for an article for the discerning Society of Psychical Research.\(^{27}\) In Lang’s hesitancy to avoid making a final conviction, he quickly concluded his article with a joke. Quoting a Frenchman, two decades after

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24 Letter from Patrick Geddes to John Duncan, 18 November 1895, National Library of Scotland, Patrick Geddes Archive, MS 10508A, f.135.
26 Lang clearly states that Joan of Arc was not mad or hysterical, presumably taking into consideration and rejecting the theories of French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot. Eighteen years later Lang would write Joan’s biography: Andrew Lang, *The Maid of France: Being the Story of the Life and Death of Jeanne D’Arc* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1913).
the Franco-Prussian War, he said: ‘If there are so many Joan of Arcs today, i.e. mediums, why is it that we have not taken back Lorrain?’

Lang’s burgeoning interest in Joan of Arc in 1895 was not only limited to her symbolic relevance for the Franco-Scottish Society but also her increasing recognition as a potential medium in Spiritualist perceptions of history. Moreover, Lang’s interest in Joan’s mediumistic abilities was reinforced when, in the same year, the Celtic Revivalists in Edinburgh were visited by the Spiritualist William Thomas Stead (1849–1912). Stead tends to be remembered for his journalism, particularly with regard to his investigation into child prostitution in Victorian Britain, and as a tragic victim of the Titanic disaster in 1912. However, Stead was also the founder and editor of a popular Spiritualist magazine called Borderland, published between 1893 and 1897. When Stead visited Geddes and colleagues, this may have included a meeting with Duncan. In July 1895, that same year, Stead published a short article on Joan of Arc in Borderland:

> The chief importance of the prominence which is now given Jeanne both in France and in England is the witness which she bears to the possibility of clairaudient communication between mortals and invisibles.

Through the network of Celtic Revivalists centred around Geddes and his acquaintances with Lang and Stead, Duncan had the opportunity to gain an insight into Spiritualist ideas about Joan of Arc when he first approached the design of his work. Lang foregrounded the treatment of Joan as a subject in Spiritualist discourse with his evaluation of the theories pertaining to her phenomenal legend, meanwhile Stead reinforced these interests in the same year that he visited Edinburgh.

**Artistic inspiration**

While Spiritualist ideas about Joan contributed to the conception of his painting, Duncan could choose from numerous examples of other artworks for pictorial inspiration. This may have included examples such as Jan Matejko’s The Maid of Orléans, Entrance of Joan of Arc into Reims in 1429 (1886), or Jean-Jacques Scherrer’s Entrée de Jeanne d’Arc à Orléans (1887) – both of which have

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29 William Thomas Stead wrote about his visit in *Borderland*, 2:9 (1895), 234.
a similar processional quality to the composition. Meanwhile, Jules Eugène Lenepveu’s famous cycle of paintings depicting key episodes from Joan’s legend for the Panthéon in Paris, from 1886 to 1890, had recently gained considerable attention. Alternatively in 1890, the actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) had achieved success when she played the character of Joan in a play by Jules Barbier (1825–1901). A depiction of Bernhardt as Joan of Arc at Her Majesty’s Theatre was circulated via The Illustrated London News (28 June 1890). The show was a success and widely acclaimed by critics, so it was likely to have been known by Duncan.

Yet Duncan decided to base his painting on an illustration from William Forbes-Leith’s two-volume text The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guard in France (1882). Duncan regularly researched his subjects as part of his creative process. In this case he found Forbes-Leith’s text to be the most pertinent as a starting point for
his image of Joan and the Scottish guard. It provided Duncan with a foundation for understanding the history of the Auld Alliance, as the opening 46 pages of the first volume discussed the origins of the Garde Écossaise and their relationship with Joan of Arc. Additionally, the illustration on page 12 shows The Entrance of Charles VII into the City of Rheims (Fig. 2). The illustration is a reproduction of a 17th-century engraving by Jean Poinssart held in the Cabinet des estampes in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. This image provided an obvious template for Duncan’s version of Joan entering the city. The guards wear strikingly similar outfits, with crosses on their chests, hemmed by borders with more crosses, and plumed helmets. The guards who are carrying bows in Duncan’s painting match the royal guard in the illustration who also carry bows as they follow the French King on foot. The two guards who are facing each other to the front-right of the composition in the engraving are copied, but shaven and reversed in Duncan’s painting. The dog from the engraving has been transformed into a motif on a flag, symbolic of Scottish fidelity to the French cause, the King and, in the case of Duncan’s painting, specifically to the French heroine. The city and cathedral of Rheims featured in the background of the engraving are copied in Duncan’s design for The Evergreen, although the buildings are not present in the painted version. Significantly, Joan of Arc is also featured in the illustration and described as La Pucelle in the annotation. Her armour is similar in Duncan’s rendition, although the breastplate is less decorative and he removed her helmet in favour of long, flowing black hair. She rides on horseback, her mount wearing the same fleur-de-lis caparison. This was undoubtedly the template on which Duncan based his painting.

However, in Duncan’s painting there is an emphasis on the spiritual communication significant to Joan’s story, which is not necessary in the illustration of Charles VII entering Rheims. Although two putti hold up the caption atop the engraving and may provide the basis for the angels swooping towards Joan in Duncan’s work, there is more attention given to this spiritual agency than is initially derived from the illustration in Forbes-Leith’s volume.

In terms of the quiet spiritual quality associated with the contact between spirits and mediums, Henri-Michel-Antoine Chapu’s celebrated sculpture Jeanne d’Arc (1870) provides a useful

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32 Forbes-Leith concluded his chapter on Joan and the Scots Guard by suggesting that after Joan’s execution and ‘From that day the nationality of France was revived’ (Forbes-Leith, The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guards in France, 46). Perhaps Lang, Geddes and Duncan saw Joan as an instigator for the cultural revival of Scotland’s shared Celtic identity with France in the context of the formation of the Franco-Scottish Society.
case study to heighten the viewer’s awareness of clairaudient powers. Although Chapu (1833–91) is not known to have been a Spiritualist, his sculpture reflects a sophisticated interest in the generic spiritual connection between Joan and the voices. The sculpture focuses on Joan as a peasant when she first hears the voices at Domrémy. The artistic medium is apt for forcing the viewer to become aware of what the sculptor has not included in the figural composition. With the subtle tilt of her head, Joan indicates that she is clearly engaged in the act of listening. Yet the absence of a physical depiction of the saints, or spirits, draws attention to the presence of invisible entities, who are necessary to complete the narrative and provide meaning to the sculpture.

Fig. 3. Jules Bastien-Lepage, Jeanne d’Arc Écoutant les Voix, 1879, oil on canvas, 25.4cm x 27.9cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
In this way, the viewer becomes aware of her mediumistic potential, if only the sculpture could speak to relay the message of the voices, which cannot be heard by anyone else. Therefore Joan becomes an effective example of a motif that encourages the contemplation of clairaudience as a mediumistic ability. The sculptor charges the empty, three-dimensional space around the sculpture with meaning, but painters are not necessarily able to engage the viewer in the same way and with such ease. Unlike the real space around a sculpture, a vacant space on the canvas risks being misunderstood. As such the painter often has to deal with the challenge of making the invisible visible. Duncan chose to do this by providing the spiritual voices with the forms of winged heads who can be seen actively speaking to his protagonist.

Jules Bastien-Lepage’s (1848–84) painting from 1879 may have been a source of inspiration for Duncan when he made a visible depiction of the spiritual contact that is central to the narrative of Joan’s story. In Bastien-Lepage’s painting, *Jeanne d’Arc Écoutant les Voix* (Fig. 3), Joan is treated as a mystical figure who is beseeched by the voices of higher powers who inspire her to take up the French cause when she is still a peasant at Domrémy. The treatment of the subject is interesting from a Spiritualist perspective, as she is disengaged from the mortal world around her while she is beseeched, showing she is instead engaged with the otherworldly agents. The manner of her distant gaze is similar to a mediumistic trance but she does not look at the figures appealing to her, instead she listens to them clairaudiently.

Spiritualist viewers would understand that the clairaudient experience might provide a clairvoyant response, as Joan is able to see prophetically the events she is called to enact. Bastien-Lepage reportedly achieved this dreamy expression on his model ‘only by the aid of hypnotism’. During the 19th century hypnotism was closely associated with Spiritualism; the theory was that by being hypnotised into a passive state it helped the spirits to work actively through the person hypnotised, similar to a mediumistic trance. As a Chicago Spiritualist newspaper stated:

*One of the remarkable features of hypnotism, particularly as related to the afterlife, is the development of the gift of prophecy, with which gift is blended ever conscious and...*
unconscious trance, clairvoyant sight and psychometric sensitiveness. History furnishes remarkable examples in this particular line, notably in the cases of Socrates, Joan of Arc, Lilly, Zadkiel, Cazotte, and others; and in our own time we have sensitives, known as mediums, who possess these gifts.35

These ideas were also explored in texts such as Ernest Hart’s Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft (1893). In Bastien-Lepage’s painting Joan’s intense absorption presents a hypnotic quality that would be readily associated with the Spiritualist movement by contemporary viewers.

The way in which the saints – Michael, Margaret and Catherine – are depicted is interesting too because of their ethereal nature. They do not have wings, although they do have halos. Compared with earlier paintings by Bastien-Lepage, in which he actually depicts wings, for example, The Annunciation to the Shepherds (1875), the saintly figures in the visitation at Domrémy are treated more like ghosts from the beyond than angelic beings. While this is indicative of his stylistic shift towards a more naturalistic approach, it also coincides with Spiritualist dialogues about spirits being a natural part of the universe, as alluded to in The Medium and Daybreak quote above. Bastien-Lepage apparently derived the idea for his painting from his mother when she claimed to have had a fleeting vision after she returned to her home in Damvillers, fatigued from a long day working in the fields.36 If it is true that his mother made such a claim, it would seem his family’s rustic mysticism provided a bridge to the earthy naturalism of his style. Yet not everyone appreciated the blend of the natural and supernatural. Émile Zola criticised the disruption of the naturalism in his work with their ethereal intrusion.37 It is as if these figures have materialised into the mortal realm, partly concealed by the texture of the paint, as though the surface of the canvas is behaving like the Veil between both worlds. It would not have been difficult for those inclined to Spiritualism, such as Duncan, to read this painting in a way that addressed Spiritualist ideas.

Generally, many Scots were familiar with Bastien-Lepage’s work by the time Duncan painted his image of Joan in 1895.38 It is possible that Duncan saw one of the many engraved copies of the painting, perhaps in Julia Cartwright’s book Jules Bastien-Lepage,

35 'At The Threshold of the Great Beyond', The Progressive Thinker, 1:16 (1890), 1.
37 Marnin Young, Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time (Yale University Press, 2015), 99. His friend and biographer André Theuriet also disagreed in Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art: A Memoir (T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 54.
published in 1894, which featured an engraving of the work on its frontispiece, or even when it was printed in *The London Illustrated News*.\(^{39}\) Furthermore, Duncan had the opportunity to see the painting himself when he visited Paris in 1890.

A comparison between the two paintings is interesting because, arguably, Duncan attempted to create a similar effect to that in Bastien-Lepage’s painting. There is a suggestion that the spirits are appearing from beyond the Veil but in a more naïve manner than in the French painting. The flags become symbolic metaphors for the Veil, through which the spirits have passed to address Joan. The spirit to the right of Joan parts its lips, as if speaking, and in turn Joan must be listening clairaudiently. Added to which, Spiritualists argued simply that the word ‘angel’ traditionally meant messenger, and therefore angels were spirits bringing messages to mortals from the spirit-world.\(^{40}\) This is what can be interpreted as being represented here in a Spiritualist reading of the image: Joan the clairaudient medium has listened to the spirit lessons from beyond the Veil and her reward is victory – the Scottish guard escort her to the forthcoming coronation of the French King.

**Conclusions**

As a case example, John Duncan’s painting *Jehanne d’Arc et sa Garde Écossaise* demonstrates a connection between the Celtic Revival and Spiritualism. It shows that cultural revivals operated on multiple levels and the interpretation of their artworks require closer examination to take into account the wider esoteric and occult trends of the 19th century. This is especially the case with subjects that appear on one level to be concerned primarily with national and cultural identities but on another level allude to the beliefs of a spiritual movement. In the case of Joan of Arc, the notion was that spirit-mediumship is deeply entrenched in history and that listening to the spirits is essential for positive outcomes. In Duncan’s painting this was represented by a strong bond between France and Scotland and the triumph of divine providence, both of which are rendered in the scene of the Scots escorting Joan to the coronation of her king.

This article has identified the previously unrecognised template for Duncan’s painting of Joan of Arc and her Scottish guard as the 17th-century engraving by Jean Poinssart, which was

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40 The role of angels as spirit-messengers was discussed in-depth in a prominent Christian-Spiritualist text by Stainton Moses, *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism* (E.W. Allen & Co., 1880).
known to Duncan as an illustration in William-Forbes Leith’s 1882 publication. However, Duncan also had the opportunity to draw on a rich oeuvre of images depicting Joan of Arc, which would be readily understood as depictions of clairaudient and clairvoyant engagement within the context of 19th-century Spiritualism. Duncan not only drew on this rich oeuvre but also on Spiritualist beliefs and ideas to inform his painting at a time when witches were being actively and retrospectively revised as spirit-mediums. Duncan most likely encountered these ideas via widespread Spiritualist publications but also through Andrew Lang, whose involvement in the 1890s with both the Franco-Scottish Society and the Society of Psychical Research prompted his own interest in Joan of Arc and his subsequent request for the painting.

Joan of Arc represented historical clairaudience perceived as witchcraft and she embodied the Auld Alliance between two countries with a shared Celtic heritage. The authenticity of these subjective 19th-century perceptions of history is questionable, but for a Symbolist artist such as Duncan it was these ideas that provided a depth of meaning to his image. In this case, the appropriations of the Celtic Revival extended to the re-appropriations of the Spiritualist movement to produce a complex image that was steeped in cultural resonances and occult currents at the fin-de-siècle.

Dr Michelle Foot is the Teaching Fellow of Nineteenth-Century Art at the University of Edinburgh. She received her PhD from the University of Aberdeen in 2016, after successfully completing her doctoral thesis Modern Spiritualism and Scottish Art between 1860 and 1940. Her research interests include Scottish Art, the Celtic Revival and Modern Spiritualism.
ARTISTS’ PLACES, LOCATION AND MEANING
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A photograph of the Polish painter Stanisław Witkiewicz, taken outside in wintertime around 1899, shows him with six unknown men wearing picturesque peasant costumes (Fig. 1). On the snow is a large wooden model of the Dom pod jedłami (House under the Firs), made for the Galician Pavilion as part of the presentation of Austro-Hungarian Empire at the Paris World Fair in 1900.¹ The model for a villa in the form of a peasant log cabin was designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz for Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, an economist and publicist from Lemberg (Lviv). In the photograph Witkiewicz, wearing a winter coat and a top hat, stands behind the model as if he wants to withdraw himself. But his gaze is focused directly at the camera. In the front, you can see the local carpenters who have built the house as well as the model. Despite their prominent position and their handsome fur vests and felt hats, they seem unnaturally rigid. Positioned near the photographer in forced poses and forming a tight diagonal line, they are looking out beyond the picture. Their function is similar to that of the model – they too are exhibits. The photo appears staged, like a play, which is being controlled by the puppet master from behind the scenes. This inner tension in the photograph, which reveals itself only at second glance, uncovers a fundamental dilemma behind the Zakopane project, namely a discrepancy between the ‘real’ and the ‘invented’ peasant culture.

A painter and writer, Stanislaw Witkiewicz was also a keen promoter of the picturesque landscape in the Carpathian mountains, as well as the culture of the original inhabitants – the Highlander górale⁴. Witkiewicz liked to have himself photographed in the górale costume.

He and his compatriots, the Polish nationalist bohème, settled in Zakopane, supposedly in simple living conditions,
but which turned out to be more sophisticated. Despite their enthusiasm for the peasant culture and attempts to reconstruct it and save it from the damaging influence of urban civilisation, these incomers created a stylised and well-groomed peasant art that was a far cry from the life and nature of the local population. The local people were elements of the decoration, as can be seen in the photo.

Since the introduction of the term ‘invention of tradition’ by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in the 1980s, there has been increased attention to the interrelation between national ideas and the formation of traditions. It turned out that most of the ‘traditional’ customs worldwide (festivals, folk costumes and other symbolic actions and artefacts) go back to the end of the 19th century, the period of increasing nationalism. They were mostly constructed, hybrid or ‘invented’ traditions, adjusted to or glorified by the period’s eye.
‘Invented’ tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historical past.²

Hobsbawm and Ranger also accentuated the fact that ‘invented traditions’ ‘used the history as a legitimation of action and cement of group cohesion’.³

This article is devoted to the phenomenon of the ‘invention’ of the folk arts and crafts in the artists’ villages in Eastern Europe and explores the following questions: What role did artists’ colonies play in rediscovering folk culture? How characteristic was the discrepancy between ‘real’ and ‘forged’ for a transnational phenomenon of revival of popular culture around the turn of the century? How did the revival relate to national ideas and political conditions of an empire? To what extent was the return to traditional culture a phenomenon of modernity?

As case studies, three artist colonies in the Habsburg Dual Empire and the Russian Romanov Monarchy are considered. Besides the above-mentioned Zakopane in Polish-Austrian Galicia (c. 1880s–1930s), there is the Hungarian artists’ village Gödöllő, near Budapest (1901–20) and the Russian private estate of Abramtsevo, near Moscow (1880s–1905). All three were artists’ colonies that shared many principles in common: they aimed to unify art and life. All three cherished an ambition to create a modern national art that should flourish on the basis of the doomed folk tradition. And, as I’ll be trying to show, they became quite successful in their idealistic aspirations.

Artists’ colonies as a global phenomenon

From the late 19th century until the outbreak of the First World War, artists’ colonies were booming. In rural areas of Europe and the US, in the middle of unspoilt countryside, artists’ settlements emerged which strove to unite the ideals of the Life Reform Movement with their attempts at artistic innovation.⁴

They rejected what was generally perceived as the damaging results of increasing industrialisation inflicted on urban life. In this reawakened ‘need for escapism’ and the return ‘to the soothing respite of rural seclusion’, the Viennese art historian

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⁴ For the social impact and transnational dimensions of the movement, see Marc Cluet and Catherine Repussard (eds.), ‘Lebensreform’: *Die soziale Dynamik der politischen Ohnmacht* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2013); Thorsten Carstensen and Marcel Schmid (eds.), *Die Literatur der Lebensreform. Kulturkritik und Aufbruchstimmung um 1900* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016).
Alois Riegl detected not only ‘purely selfish interest’ but ‘a very serious and highly ethical sentiment (...). This is how humankind creates an ideal faculty which elevates it, ennobles and glorifies it amid the battle for earthly material possessions.’\(^5\) The rural idyll and the invigorating nature of communal life were central to this way of life – whether it was a permanent artists’ colony, such as Gödöllő near Budapest, known as one of Empress Elizabeth’s favourite retreats, or one designed for the summer months, such as the artists’ village on the Abramtsevo estate in Russia. As the researcher of artists’ colonies Michael Jacobs has demonstrated, the pursuit of the ‘good and simple life’ was an integral part of the nature of artists’ settlements.\(^6\)

Hermann Bahr, who introduced the term ‘artists’ colony’ at the turn of the 20th century, saw it as a modern type of collective which was not based on family structures but on elective affinities.\(^7\) Most colonies were initiated by artists searching for new motifs, a cheap way of life, and a summer retreat, and they were often established as permanent settlements. Others, however, were dependent on the support from their upper-class or aristocratic patrons. The artists’ colony founded at the request of the Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse-Darmstadt in his residential city had the exemplary character of a permanent exhibition.\(^8\) Thanks to the media coverage and the presence of eminent artists, the Darmstadt artists’ colony gained considerable international acclaim.

The artists’ village in Abramtsevo in Russia was a modest dacha settlement on the summer estate of the wealthy new-bourgeois Mamontov family. Nonetheless Abramtsevo made a crucial contribution to the turning point in the Russian art world. Zakopane was first and foremost a health resort, which gradually attracted artists and developed into an artists’ village. Despite their differences, Abramtsevo, Zakopane and Gödöllő all had at least one thing in common: they combined artistic work with social impetus.

**Instrumentalisation of folk art: the Austro-Hungarian monarchy**

Towards the end of the 19th century, both in the Romanov Empire and the Dual Monarchy of the Habsburgs, the tendency towards the vernacular\(^9\) was an important aspect of imperial representation.

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5 Alois Riegl, ‘Das Volksmäßige und die Gegenwart (The Popular and the Present)’, Austrian Anthropology Magazine, 1, Year of issue 1895 (Vienna and Prag, 1896), 4.


8 For Darmstadt in a wider social context, see ‘Eine Stadt müssen wir erbauen, eine ganze Stadt!’ (We Need to Build a City, an Entire City!). Die Künstlerkolonie Darmstadt auf der Mathildenhöhe (Wiesbaden: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 2017). The essay at hand is a modified and extended version of the article Marina Dmitrieva, ‘Zwischen Idylle und Kommerz – Die Wiederbelebung der Hausindustrie in den Künstlerkolonien Gödöllő und Abramtsevo’.

9 To the contextualization of vernacular revival in connection with the nationalism in k.-k. Galicia, see David Crowley, National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style (Manchester, 1992); Jacek Prchla (ed.), Vernacular Art in Central Europe. International conference 1–5 October 1997 (Cracow: Wydawn. Antikwa, 2001).
During the last third of the 19th century, folk art in Austria-Hungary became an object of fashion and scientific interest. The Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (now The Museum of Applied Art) – established in Vienna in 1863 and modelled on the Museum of South Kensington in London that had opened only ten years previously – became the focal point for collections of folk art from all corners of the empire. In addition to the School of Applied Arts in Vienna, the museum also coordinated state-run industrial schools in other cities, such as Salzburg, Graz, Prague, Pilsen, Brünn (Brno), Czernowitz (Chernivtsi) and Krakow. With the aim of preserving the arts and crafts, as well as maintaining the rural youth, technical colleges for national cottage industries emerged in remote provincial towns. These included the woodcarving and lace-making schools in Zakopane in Galicia, the traditional craft schools in Bleiberg in Styria as well as those in Proveis in Tyrol. They operated according to standardised syllabi under the guidance of professional teachers.10

Ever since the World Exhibition in Budapest in 1873, folk art products had become an indispensable part of the exhibition programme of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. National villages that reflected regional architectural traditions – complete with local people dressed in colourful ethnic costumes – could be seen at the Regional Exhibition in Prague in 1890, as well as in Lemberg (Lviv) in 1894 and the Millennium Exhibition in Budapest in 1896. For the Regional Exhibition in Lemberg, the architect Julian Zachariiewicz built a Ruthenian village in order to showcase the regional traditions of Galicia and Bukovina. In contrast, the Millennium Exhibition in Budapest in 1896 displayed the diverse national traditions of the Empire, thus representing the ‘multi-national Austrian mosaic’ based on the imperial idea of ‘unity in diversity’. This was particularly evident in the publication The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures (Kronprinzenwerk, 1885–1902), which was published by Crown Prince Rudolf and comprised several volumes.11 This was a comprehensive richly-illustrated ethnographic documentation of the many national facets of the Habsburg Empire.

As demonstrated by Rebecca Houze, the enthusiasm for folk art found its way into the professional fashions and everyday décor of the upper classes, as well as among the artistic bohème. Hence Empress Elizabeth designed the dairy, her private

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‘farm’ in Schönbrunn, as a Hungarian farmhouse parlour. Gustav Klimt’s partner, Emilia Flöge, wore outfits inspired by traditional costumes.\textsuperscript{12}

The Paris World Fair of 1900 presented three outstanding displays from Hungary, Finland and Russia as a reinterpretation of folk style. Accordingly, the Finnish Pavilion was constructed in the style of a village church (architects Eliel Saarinen, Armas Lindgren, and Herman Gesellius; interior design by artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Fig. 2.)\textsuperscript{13} The Hungarian Pavilion attracted the attention of visitors with its arts and crafts products. A certain similarity

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig2.jpg}
\caption{The Finnish Pavilion at the World Fair in Paris, 1900 (architects Eliel Saarinen, Armas Lindgren, Herman Gesellius), in Dekorative Kunst. Illustrierte Zeitschrift für angewandte Kunst, Bd. 6 (1900), 459}
\end{figure}


was noticed between the appearance of the Hungarians, Finns, and Russians. Critics even wrote about a ‘Hungarian-Slavic union’ (comprising the Hungarians and the Finns as one ethnos). This rural trend was determined by the collective spirit of the artists, who were either already living in painters’ collectives or were to do so a few years later.

Thanks to recent research, the impact of the British Arts and Crafts movement on Eastern Europe has become clear, not only in aesthetic terms but also in the social and Utopian aspects. English art magazines such as The Studio and The Artist played an important role in this, as did direct contacts between artists and journalists. In particular, Amelia Sarah Levetus (1853–1938) should be mentioned here. An emancipated woman, who was born into a Jewish family in Manchester and lived in Vienna from the 1890s onwards, Levetus played an important role in the Austrian women’s movement, amongst others. Thanks to her articles about the arts and crafts, and architecture in Austria and Hungary, as well as those on British art in British and Austrian magazines, she became an intermediary between these cultures. She was one of the founders of a John Ruskin Club in Vienna, where various events on English culture took place. Thanks to her friendship with the Hungarian art critic Ludwig Hevesi, she was particularly interested in the evolution of Hungarian art. The most important English-language source of information on the subject of peasant art in the k.k. Monarchy was the richly illustrated Special Edition of The Studio from 1911, Peasant Art in Austria and Hungary, which included chapters by Levetus, with illustrations.

When the British artist Walter Crane (1845–1915) visited the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Budapest in 1900, which had opened in 1896 in a magnificent building by Ödön Lechner, he was able to admire a beautiful collection of folk art. Invited by the Director of the Museum, Jenő Radisics, in preparation for his exhibition, Crane received an overwhelming reception. He emphasised the meaningful role of the collected objects as the basis of the, as he called it, particularly distinct Hungarian patriotism. He quoted the novelist Maurice Jokai (Mór Jókai), who pointed out in his opening address:

*We must learn how the Hungarian peasant cloaks, flower-decorated trunks, dishes, cups must be transformed into*
ornaments fit to embellish drawing-rooms, palaces, altars. We must learn how to transform into a creating power the aesthetical sense and artistic inclination of our people.\(^\text{17}\)

It was precisely this attempt by the state to instrumentalise the folk tradition, which Crane, who shared William Morris’ socialist views, found problematic. Travelling through Transylvania (now in Romania), he admired the diversity of national traditions in this rural Carpathian area. On the other hand, he noticed that genuine old embroideries had become almost impossible to find because ‘rich people’ had bought them all up, a sign of how widely fashionable the time-honoured folk tradition had become.

*Schools of embroidery were being established in the towns to teach the work which the peasantry had taught themselves, and of course, at every remove, the pattern became tamer. It does not seem possible to transform unconscious spontaneous art into conscious learned art, any more than it is possible for wild flowers to flourish in a formal garden.*\(^\text{18}\)

This discrepancy between ‘real’ folk art and the commercial products of the Imperial national education policy was also recognised by other critics. A selling exhibition in the London department store Norman & Stacey’s Tottenham Court Road Emporium, organised in 1902 by the Society in Support of Hungarian Industry under the patronage of the British and Hungarian aristocracy, was heavily criticised in *The Artist*.\(^\text{19}\)

Did these Habsburg art policies produce ‘genuine or forged art’? This was also a question asked by the journalist Berta Zuckerkandl in regards to the cottage industry and national education in Austria.\(^\text{20}\) Contrary to the model of Austrian ‘Gesamtpatriotismus’ (patriotism embracing the whole monarchy) which she too represented, part of the revival of folk art in Hungary was the rhetoric of growing nationalism. The renowned Austrian art critic Ludwig Hevesi, who himself had Hungarian origins, also took a critical view of folk art as a fashion: ‘The countryside may become urban, but the new prescriptions issued by technical schools only create templates instead of promoting creativity.’\(^\text{21}\)

Gödöllő: the spirit of folk art

Enthusiasm for Hungarian folk art was of great significance for the concept of the artists’ colony Gödöllő. The artists Sándor Nagy (1869–1931) and Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (1863–1920), who had settled there with their families from 1904 onwards, shared aesthetic and social ideas. Nagy had previously lived in Diód, a Tolstoyesque rural commune, where he had met the socialist, anarchist and Tolstoy devotee Jenő Henrik Schmitt (1851–1916), whose philosophy influenced the circle.22 The painter Aladár Kriesch and the architect István Medgyaszay supplied sketches with examples of ornamentation, wooden furniture, peasant architecture, and textiles for The Art of the Hungarian People, by Deszső Malonyay, a publication comprised of several volumes, thus confirming their interest in ethnographic studies.23 Székelyland (Székely) near Kalotaszeg (today Tara Călatei in Romania) in Transylvania was chosen as an unspoilt region with ‘genuine’, surviving folk traditions. The architect Eduard Wigand studied the farmhouses of this region and designed villas based on their shapes for his clients, artists, and art lovers. Like Aladár Kriesch, who later went by the name Körösfői-Kriesch, Wigand adopted the additional name ‘Thoroczkai’, derived from a place in Transylvania, as an expression of a special affinity with the area.

Following projects by István Medgyaszay, artists’ houses emerged in Gödöllő, amongst others for Leo Belmonte and Sándor Nagy. Their design resembled those of British houses, which were popular at the time. A central element of these utterly modern villas, which were concrete structures, was their workspaces. Thanks to their high ceilings and large windows, the artists’ studios were particularly spacious and bright. And yet the seemingly functionalist buildings were decorated with folk ornamentation.

Despite all the differences between separate projects, both architects aspired to a distinct modernisation of architecture and its liberation from the ornateness of historicism. Hence the functionalistic, as well as organic approach to construction, as Katalin Keserü has demonstrated, was enhanced and effectively even made possible by drawing on local tradition.24 At the forefront of the weaving mill that opened in Gödöllő in 1905 (based on the project by the architect Eduard Wigand) was Leo Abraham Abendama Belmonte (1875–1956), an artist

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with international experience. He came from a wealthy Jewish family in Sweden and had studied painting and tapestry in Paris. The tapestries, which were produced there by local women, were based on sketches by painters such as Sándor Nagy or Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch. In the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement and similar to that of architecture, they combined ornamental patterns and compositions of folk art with a modern approach. Organic materials and colours rather than the authenticity of origin and style, were prerequisites for the production. In addition to the traditional kilims that were prevalent in Transylvania, they produced Swedish scherreben rugs, as well as gobelin tapestries, using Caucasian weaving techniques. The Gödöllő textiles won awards at international exhibitions – in Paris in 1900, Turin in 1902, St Louis in 1904 and Milan in 1906. This production, which was based on a ‘Morrissonian model’, as Katalin Keserü called it, was subsidised by the state.\textsuperscript{25}

It is important to emphasise the vital part that women played in this artists’ community and in the commercial enterprise. The textile artist Valéria Kiss, who had studied the art of gobelin tapestry in various countries, taught the girls. Mariska Undi (1877–1959) and Laura Kriesch-Nagy (1879–1966), Aladár Kriesch’s sister and wife of Sándor Nagy, collected peasant textiles and used them as patterns for weaving. Undi and her sisters, Carla and Jolán, wore costumes from Kalotaszeg.\textsuperscript{26}

In the leading art magazine \textit{Magyar Iparműveszet} Elek Petrovics (1873–1945), who would later become the Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, emphasised the important role the artists of Gödöllő played in the ‘salvation’ of the arts and crafts, which were threatened by industrialisation (Fig. 3). He pointed out that the philosophical background was the union of art and life as sought by Ruskin and Morris. Hence art should not be solely accessible to the upper classes but also allowed to find its way into every apartment. There should be no contradiction between fine arts and applied arts. Not only art, but the entire way of life, would be formative. The artists of Gödöllő did not try to modernise life but returned to ‘primitive conditions’, thus following Tolstoy.\textsuperscript{27}

Gödöllő was a new settlement that was created in the spirit of life reform. As the photographs taken there show, this meant promoting a healthy lifestyle, such as nude bathing and winter sports, liberating women from their corsets and peasant


\textsuperscript{26} Houze, \textit{Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary Before the First World War}, 8.

The Hungarian artists were in contact with their Finnish colleagues, especially the Finnish national painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931), who visited them there and who was in many respects a kindred spirit.

In Hungary, as well as in Finland, the search for artistic reinvention by means of discovering regional traditions was part of the national liberation movement on the peripheries of the great empires – the Habsburg Monarchy and the Great Russian Empire of the Romanovs. This trend intended to subvert the diktat of the titular nations. The Finnish artists chose the region of Karelia as a place of longing and inspiration – an unspoilt area,
Fig. 4. Peasant houses at Körösfő and Toroczkó in Transylvania, from the drawings by Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, in The Studio (1911)
home of the Finnish national epic *The Kalevala*. The equivalent for the Hungarian painters and architects was the region surrounding Kalotaszeg in Transylvania.

However, part of this ‘invented tradition’ was a clear attempt to emphasise the Hungarian and ‘dumb down’ everything else. In his essay for *The Studio*, Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch described Transylvania as a unique reservation for national Hungarian culture, which in its purity remained ‘practically intact’.

*Transylvania is the fairyland where one can imagine oneself back in the sturdy days of the Middle Ages with their exuberance of joy and energy. How long will its primeval forests, where the bear and the fox are still at home, retain their virgin splendour? How long will the maidens of Kalotaszeg, with their red-bordered, looped-up skirts and their red embroidered blouses, continue to disport themselves in its emerald pastures like butterflies – or go gleaning the golden corn in its fields?*

The essay is accompanied by scenic sketches (Fig. 4). In contrast, an outsider, the British visitor Walter Crane, saw a unique diversity of ethnic cultures in this region, which in turn generated different forms of folk art:

*There were peasants who had migrated from Saxony centuries ago who still had the characteristic fair hair and blond complexion. There were the ‘Gipsies’ who claim descent from an original Roman colony (...) and there were, of course, the Magyars in their semi-oriental white dress, with gay embroidered jackets and riding boots, sometimes wearing the heavy white overcoat, cloak-wise, with the sleeves hanging.*

In terms of lifestyle, clothes, and simplicity of life, the artists’ colony in Gödöllő imitated ‘primitive’ peasant culture. And yet the artists’ villas, which were decorated with elements of folk art, provided maximum comfort. The textiles produced there transposed peasant ornamentation using sketches by professional artists. The artists successfully used folk art as an inspiration for their artisanal products, as well as paintings and graphics. And yet, just as in the case of William Morris, the egalitarian model
was doomed to fail: too expensive and exquisite, their trendy and elegant products did not reach the broad swathes of society but only the wealthy élite. The ‘Home for an Art Lover’ was a popular and successful project presented by Hungarian designers at international exhibitions and competitions.32

**Zakopane: a cure for the disease of civilisation and a national project**

An interest in ethnography and philanthropic efforts was also at the basis of another artists’ colony. Zakopane33 is in the region of Podhale, at the foot of the High Tatra massif.

This region was discovered by the Warsaw doctor and art lover Tytus Chałubiński (1820–89). While tackling a cholera epidemic in the area, he discovered that this place was perfect for curing what was then a disease of civilisation – tuberculosis. As an amateur ethnographer, he was involved in collecting and publishing artefacts of the mountain people’s cultures – the górale. However, it was only after the relocation of Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851–1915), who suffered from lung disease, that a popular colony and an independent Zakopane Style emerged. The then partially intact tradition and landscape were sources of inspiration for Witkiewicz’s artistic and literary works. He also tried to imitate them in his architectural projects. This resulted in spacious and comfortable villas with the outward appearance of a farmhouse. They were inhabited by the bourgeois intellectual and artistic elite, who at the turn of the century formed the artists’ settlement in Zakopane. It was, as David Crowley pointed out, ‘a hybrid style – both peasant and disguised historical’,34 borrowing from the wooden architecture and crafts of the local population. As mentioned earlier, as part of the Austrian policy of reviving cottage industries there was a Wood Carving and a Lace-Making School in Zakopane (which was in the Austrian territory of Poland), but it tried to professionalise folk art from the top.35 Whilst executed by local craftsman, the Zakopane villas were based on a design by Witkiewicz himself and under the guidance of professional architects, and provided ample comfort. This did not just apply to the size of the villas, but also to their spacious interiors and wide windows, which were adapted to the new type of house popular with art lovers (Fig. 5). They were stylishly

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33 About Zakopane artists’ community see also Edyta Barucka’s article in this publication.
furnished with handmade fittings and textiles from the area. As an outcome of collecting activities and ethnographic studies, furniture, textiles and crockery were made, that gave these luxury villas a ‘real’ peasant look. It is safe to assume that the idea was influenced by the Russian élitist folk style surrounding the Abramsevo circle.36

In Zakopane too there was a romantic glorification of the peasantry taking place. The culture of the górale – similar to that of the Székely – is declared as the authentic and genuinely Polish one. Its symbolic effect applied to all three Polish territories – Russian, Austrian (of which Zakopane was a part), and Prussian. The Zakopane Style is not only found in wooden architecture; it also highlights a national emphasis in the urban space of trisected Poland – from Lemberg to Warsaw. Textiles and furniture with folk patterns became fashionable accessories where the furnishings of Polish families were concerned.

36 Witkiewicz attended for two years the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg and lived in Warsaw from 1875 until moving to Zakopane, to the Russian partition part of Poland. It can be assumed that he was informed about the trend of the neo-Russian style.
Around the turn of the century, artists started to settle in Zakopane, while a fashionable *dacha* colony and sanatoriums were also established. Accordingly, the modern Dłuski Sanatorium was modelled on Davos in Switzerland. The furnishings and design, however, used elements of regional folk art. This was the world of the imaginary ‘Polishness’ beyond the boundaries of the territories. Zakopane drew visitors from both Warsaw and Krakow, as well as other Polish regions. The School of Wood Crafts continued well into the Polish Republic between the two World Wars, contributing considerably to the fact that the Zakopane Style was established as a fashion trend: the Polish Pavilion at the ‘Exposition Internationale des Arts Décors et Industriels Modernes’ in Paris in 1925, for instance, was designed in the Zakopane Style, with a touch of Art Deco (architect Architekt Jósef Czajkowski).37

**The revival of folk art in Russia**

Similar processes aimed at reviving the arts and crafts took place in Russia. The rapid industrialisation following the abolition of serfdom in 1861, and the consequent administrative reforms implemented by Tsar Alexander II, led to many peasants migrating to cities. At the same time, an orientation towards the old Russian traditions was not only scientifically motivated but also the result of national policies. The state ideology claimed by Tsar Nicholas I, of a union of ‘orthodoxy, monarchy and the common touch’ still remained influential. Contrary to the Habsburg doctrine, it created a Russian-national self-perception instead of a multi-national mosaic, and thereby unity rather than diversity.

At international exhibitions, the neo-Russian style took on greater significance as the representative style of the Russian Empire. However, the study of folk ornamentation not only led to discovery, but also to a dry, archaeological, and eclectic reconstruction. Hence the Russian ‘Pavilion of the Russian Provinces’ at the World Fair in Paris combined objects from the Moscow and the Kazan Kremlin, with made-up ‘Russian-style’ details in order to portray a general view of the Empire.38

In the context of public administration reforms (*zemtsvo*) there was increasing support for the *Kustar* industry, the Russian equivalent of the cottage industry.39 Opened in 1885, a *Kustarnyi muzej* (museum of arts and crafts), was supposed to collect

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37 About the Zakopane style as a promotion of Polish national identity, see Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera, ‘Artists’ colonies as a response to the experience of modernity. The case of Zakopane’, *Dailės istorijos studijos* 8 (Lietuvos kultūros tyrimu institutas), 14–39, here 25–26.

38 Juri A. Nikitin, *Vystavochnaya arhitektura Rossii XIX – nachala XX vekov* (Exhibition architecture of Russia in 19th and beginning of 20th centuries) (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’skii dom “Kolo” 2014), Chapter II: Architektura vystavochnykh pavilionov Rossii na vsemirnykh i mezhdunarodnykh vystavakh (Architecture of the exhibition pavilions of Russia at the world and international exhibitions), 269–322.

artefacts and support production, similar to those in Vienna and Budapest. The opinions of economists were divided. Some saw it as an outdated form of production, which would inevitably be superseded by rapidly growing industry. Others saw it as an expression of Russia’s national idiosyncracy.

Similar to Hungary, an important invigorating impulse for the revaluation of the arts and crafts originated in an artists’ colony. It was, as it is called in Russian, the artists’ circle (Russian: kružok) Abramtsevo.

**Abramtsevo: the Russian Barbizon**

The Abramtsevo estate, with its modest timber manor house and large park, is situated approximately 60km north-east of Moscow, on the pilgrim route to the centre of Orthodox life, Sergiev Posad. The beautiful location on the banks of the Vorja creek, and especially their adoration of the previous owner, the legendary Slavophile and author Sergei Aksakov, prompted the Mamontovs, a merchant family, to purchase the estate in 1873. Savva Mamontov (1841–1918), who inherited his father’s sizeable railway business, was part of the new Russian élite of energetic entrepreneurs and patrons of the arts. He and his wife, Elizaveta Grigorievna Mamontova (née Sapozhnikova, 1847–1908), initially attempted to restore the atmosphere of a stately home. It was only after a trip to Italy, where they met artists in Rome (‘the Russian Romans’), that the idea of an aesthetic refuge was born. It soon became customary for artists, musicians, and writers, at the invitation of the host, himself an amateur sculptor and singer, to come to Abramtsevo to spend the summer together. ‘The best dacha in the world’ (Ilya Repin), the ‘Russian Barbizon’ (Kuz’ma Petrov-Vodkin), Abramtsevo offered good working conditions, pleasant company, and a particularly creative atmosphere.40 The brothers Viktor and Apollinarij Vasnetsov, Ilya Repin, Valentin Serov, Konstantin Korovin, Vasili Polenov, Mikhail Vrubel, and Matvei Antokol’ski were well-known names in the Russian art world even in those days.

Gradually an ‘artists’ village’ came into existence, located near the manor house and charmingly spread around the park. The first building was designed as a sculptor’s workshop in 1873 (Fig. 6), by the architect Viktor Gartman (1834–73). This spacious studio, with its large windows to the rear, was, as a friend of

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the family commented sarcastically, built in a style ‘which this brave architect took to be Russian’. Gartman was known for his exhibition architecture in the neo-Russian style. From 1877–78 the guesthouse called Teremok following, which was designed to be the guest accommodation. Elaborately decorated with wooden ornamentation, and executed by local craftsmen, this building by the well-known architect Ivan Ropet (anagram of Petrov, 1845–1908) was based on the local architectural tradition (Fig. 7). Following a similar pattern of the national revival in Britain or the Baltic area, these wooden structures in the reinvented national style combined the results of ethnographic and archaeological studies with imaginative fusions.

This also applies to the church project (1881–82) in Abramtsevo. The small stone St Saviour’s Church was a collaborative project carried out by the members of the colony. The artists Viktor Vasnetsov (1848–1926) and Vasili Polenov (1844–1927) supplied the first draft, which was modelled on the architecture of Novgorod and then executed by a professional architect (Fig. 8). Everyone, including women and children, collected motifs of the native flora, which they consequently incorporated in the decor, thus creating a building of exceptional

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41 Nikolai Prachov, Staroje Abramtsevo (The Old Abramtsevo) (Abramtsevo: own publisher, 2013), 11.
42 In Russian a small house, a word mostly used in Russian fairy tales.
Fig. 7. The Teremok guesthouse in Abramtsevo, architect Ivan Ropet, 1877–78
Photo: Marina Dmitrieva

Fig. 8. St Saviour’s Church, Abramtsevo
@A.Savin, WikiCommons
spirituality and grace. The church of Abramtsevo internalised the ancient Russian tradition and modified it in the modern spirit of a Gesamtkunstwerk (‘Total Work of Art’). From then on it served as a perfect example of the new style of the turn of the century, which is called ‘the modern style’ (stil’ modern) in Russian.

Although as patron Savva Marmontov was the driving force of the circle, his wife Elizaveta Mamontova played not only the role of a friendly hostess, but also that of a dedicated reformer and successful businesswoman. At the outbreak of a cholera epidemic she founded a hospital and a school for the residents of the surrounding villages. In 1876, a woodcarving workshop for the village youth was set up with the aim of preventing a mass exodus to the cities and the concomitant moral decline through for example the consumption of alcohol. In the context of the construction of the church and the collective studies of literature on art history and archaeology, she started, together with her artist friends, to collect objects of folk art in the surrounding villages. The area around Abramtsevo was known for its woodcarving tradition. Gradually, the main house turned into a museum of woodcarving and embroidery. In the photographs the children of the family can be seen in peasant clothes. They were also used in the colourful extravaganzas at home, from which Mamontov’s private opera was developed.43

However, it was only after the sister of the artist Vasili Polenov, Elena Dmitrievna Polenova (1850–93), took over the leadership of the workshop, that the pastime could be turned into an established cottage industry. Attempts to let the students work independently, however, were unsuccessful. It was only when she herself and other artists provided sketches and ideas that prototypes for the production emerged. Encouraged by Viktor Vasnetsov, a great expert on Russian antiquities, Elena Polenova designed more than 100 models for furniture and smaller objects. Natalia Vasilievna Polenova (née Jakunchikova), Polenova’s sister-in-law and a keen observer and reporter on Abramtsevo, has described the process of finding shapes and motifs. Hence a simple kitchen shelf was turned into a beautiful small wall cupboard, and painted with floral ornaments, such as those first used by Viktor M. Vasnetsov for the mosaic of the church floor, or motifs from an album by the French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.44 Others, such as the famous wall cupboard with column, were inspired by

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43 About the history and visual culture of Abramtsevo artists’ colony, see Eleonora Paston, Abramtsevo. Iskusstvo i žizn’ (Abramtsevo. Art and Life) (Moskva: ID Iskusstvo, 2003).
findings in surrounding villages, as well as in Moscow and along the Volga (Fig. 9). The distinctive Abramtsevo Style, with its flat woodcarving relief and colourful painting, was also similar to that of Gödöllő, a hybrid, invented style.

It is particularly important to highlight the role played by women in turning this business into a success. When Elena Polenova retired in 1893 to focus on illustrating children’s books, a relative of Mamontov, Maria Fedorovna Yakunchikova (1863–1952), took over the management of the workshops, steadily increasing their production, to meet the growing demand. The workshops continued
to exist in the Soviet era but gradually lost their original creative freshness. Based on the model of Abramtsevo, other production centres emerged – usually organised by female landowners – in the Russian provinces around the turn of the century, such as the embroidery workshop, which Maria F. Yakunchikova founded on her estate in Solominka (administrative district of Tambov)\(^45\), and Princess Maria Klavdievna Tenisheva’s (1858–1928) embroidery and woodcarving workshop in the artists’ village of Talashkino, near Smolensk.\(^46\) They were all successfully represented at the Paris World Fair in 1900, where they were exhibited in the *Kustarnyi Pavilion* (Village Russe) designed by the architect Ivan Ye. Bondarenko (Fig. 10). They drew a very positive response in the international Press.\(^47\)

Like Amelia Sarah Levetus, who acted as an intermediary in Austria-Hungary, another Englishwoman, Netta Peacock, was a link between Russia and the European art scene. She published articles about the ‘new direction’ of art in international magazines and was well-informed about its philosophies and objectives. For instance, she wrote about how Russian artists, especially Elena Polenova, were talented at adopting the naive and the poetic of folk aesthetic in their work and ‘exalting’ it artistically without losing the original essence of peasant culture.

*So thoroughly have they impregnated themselves with the spirit of legend and fairy tale as still told by the poet-peasant, so genuinely do they feel the absorbing charm of that atmosphere of old-world simplicity, with all it contains of dreamlike and weird reality – its mingled fancy and belief – that their designs are distinctly national both in feeling and colour. This new movement is, in fact, an exaltation of the popular genius; and the designs of the artists are so perfectly executed because they answer to the inborn aesthetic sense of the village artisan.*\(^48\)

Peacock also reported on Polenova’s wish to travel to England to explore the local art scene. The artist’s premature death, however, put a stop to this.\(^49\)

Abramtsevo products became increasingly popular, even gaining cult status in élite circles and at the Tsar’s court. In particular, the Exhibition of Art and Industry in Nizhni Novgorod, in
Fig. 10. The Russian village, in Netta Peacock, ‘Das Russische Dorf auf der Pariser Weltausstellung’, in Dekorative Kunst. Illustrierte Zeitschrift für angewandte Kunst, Bd. 6 (1900), 480
1896, and the Paris World Fair, as well as the All-Russian Exhibition of the Kustar Industry in St Petersburg in 1902, all contributed to the renown of the Russian cottage industry of Abramtsevo both in Russia and internationally.50

The matryoshka (diminutive from the name Matryona), now known as the epitome of Russian folk art, was created in the 1890s at Abramtsevo as an example of cooperation between a professional artist and a folk craftsman. The author of the proto-matryoshka was the painter and architect Sergei Malyutin. He designed the stacking wooden dolls called matryoshka, which was intended as a toy for the village children, together with the carpenter from the nearby timber workshop in Sergiev Posad. The first nested matryoshka consisted of eight dolls, representing a mother and seven children. According to the legend, its model was a Japanese figure of a Buddhist god, which a guest of the estate had brought from Japan. Once the doll was shown at the Paris World Fair of 1900, it began a global career as a typical Russian artefact.51

**Outlook**

All three settlements – Gödöllő, Zakopane and Abramtsevo – were artists’ colonies which held life-reforming aspirations. Their aim was to cure the diseases of civilisation by retreating to a rural idyll, whether it was only for the summer months or longer. The enchanted pastoral gaze (Ernst Bloch)52 on the peasant community did not just see in it poverty and misery but the yearned-for harmony between art and life, a harmony that had got lost in modern society. Just how illusory these attempts were at living out such ideals is demonstrated by the short life of most of these artists’ colonies. Photographs show male and female artists wearing peasant clothes, posing for the photographer, more often than not with villagers looking mostly reserved and tense, and taking a clear distance from these extravagant performances. Nonetheless, these attempts at reviving the cottage industry and appropriating folk art and lifestyle were successful both in artistic and even commercial terms.

Developing a ‘place-myth’ is a constructive part of an artists’ colony. It often served to articulate ideas of national identity and of universally valued quality. Eastern, Central and Northern Europe, with its unspoilt nature, offered places with

50 Salmont, ‘Reviving Folk Art In Russia’, 81–98.
such a potential. Examples include the Karelian topos in the Finnish culture\(^5^3\) or the górale myth in the Polish cultural self-consciousness, or the role of the Kalotaszeg region in Transylvania in the Hungarian search for the spirit of the nation. Looking for a mythical topos or living in such a place encouraged ethnographic studies and interdisciplinary exchange in the artists’ colonies. This can be linked to a rural location and connected with a real or imagined national tradition.

As I have demonstrated, since the late 19th century, the interest in folk art and folklore has been closely linked with recent developments in the fine arts and modern architecture. The traditional farmhouse, and wood as a material, inspired architects to create innovative solutions in terms of planning, construction or texture of the buildings and artefacts. Not by chance did many of them belong to the circle of artists’ colonies.

Especially important was the role played by the exhibitions, such as the Paris World Fair of 1900, in presenting and popularising the results – nationally and internationally – and in fostering artistic exchange. Above all, the role of the Arts and Crafts movement should be emphasised.

The invention of national styles (Zakopane, Abramtsevo, Gödöllő), associated with the names of artists’ colonies that were influential outside of them, is related to imperial discourses. As I have shown, both in the Habsburg Dual Monarchy and in the Romanov Empire there have been attempts to reanimate, re-use and institutionalise the folk art tradition, though under different premises. While earlier research has accented national aspirations as a driver for small nations to free themselves from the hegemony of the empires, recent studies focused on the institutional frameworks that the Empires created for national cultures, have emphasised hybridity, diversity and multiple subjectivities of the Empires seen from the margins and not from the centre.\(^5^4\)

There is also the relationship between the revival of folk art and the development of ethnography. In all three artists’ settlements the artist/architect acted as ethnographer and collector. The partially alienated folk tradition was studied in much the same way as the cultures of exotic peoples were in the imperial colonies. It was no coincidence that the social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski’s interest in ethnography

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was enhanced by the ‘ethnographic’ ambience of Witkiewicz’s family house in Zakopane.\footnote{Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1884–1942) father was a linguist Lucjan Malinowski (1839–98) who was studying the Carpathian folklore. After his premature death his son grew up at Stanislaw Witkiewicz’s family in Zakopane.}


The artists’ villages were in many ways utopian communities. This is seen in the aspirations of the artists and their patrons to find a new art movement that would combine a revival of folk art with a view of the modern age, to create such kind of art, in which there would be no more distinction between the artifact and the object of utility. The attempts of downshifting and integrating into the existing village community can also be seen as utopian, even a gender egalitarianism. And the social claim to ‘rescue’ and reanimate folk art, condemned under the advance of industrialisation to the lower slope, was doomed to failure in the situation of global capitalism. Nevertheless, these ideas, which were targeted in artist colonies, have later been taken up in some avant-garde art schools, such as the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau in Germany or VKhUTEMAS (Vysshiy Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye / Higher Art and Technical Studios) in the early Soviet Union.\footnote{VKhUTEMAS was founded in 1920. In 1926, the school was reorganised under a new rector and its name was changed from ‘Studios’ to ‘Institute’ VKhUTEIN (Vysshiy Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiy Institut). It was dissolved in 1930.}

\textbf{Marina Dmitrieva} is senior researcher in Art History at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig, Germany. Currently she is involved in a research project on the utopian imagination in Central and Eastern Europe. Her book publications have largely focused on the visual culture in this area: \textit{Community and Utopia: Artists’ Colonies in Eastern Europe from the Fin-de-Siècle to Socialist Period}, co-ed. Laima Lauckaite (Vilnius 2017); \textit{Italija v Sarmatii. Puti Renessansa v Vostočnoj Evrope} [Italy in Sarmatia. The Ways of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe] (Moscow 2015); \textit{Zwischen Stadt und Steppe. Künstlerische Texte der ukrainischen Moderne aus den 1910er bis 1930er Jahren} (Berlin 2012).
At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, a remote village of Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains rose to unprecedented prominence among the Polish elites as the informal cultural capital of the country. Though Poland did not exist at that time on the European map, the efforts of Poles to sustain their national identity and ultimately to regain the country’s lost independence continued throughout the long 19th century.¹ In 1831 and 1863 there were abortive military uprisings, both followed by severe persecutions, which included deportations and exile, confiscations of property, imprisonment and death penalties. Times were harshest under the Russian and Prussian authorities after 1863. With the failure of the uprisings, home industries, culture and education began to play an increasingly important role and the idea of military action gave way to the ethos of carving out national autonomy through economic and social measures. Painting, literature, decorative arts and architecture became vehicles for national memories, dreams and aspirations.² In the last decades of the 19th century, for reasons that will be discussed later in this paper, there emerged in Zakopane a community of artists, doctors, intelligentsia and landed gentry, some of them from insurrectionist backgrounds, dedicated to upholding Polish identity and values. Those men and women became involved in initiatives and work at the grassroots level, fostering education among Highlanders, cultivating local craftsmanship and vernacular building traditions, documenting the Tatra mountains plant species and local wildlife.

¹ At the end of the 18th century the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania disappeared from the map of Europe as a result of three partitions (in 1772, 1793 and 1795). Its territories were occupied and incorporated into the Russian Empire, Prussia and Austria (since 1867 Austria-Hungary) of the Habsburgs. The independent state was restored as the Republic of Poland in 1918, after over a century of military, economic, political and cultural struggle.

and preserving the ethnographic heritage of the Podhale region. The vernacular revival in the Tatras that these people initiated had political overtones and was part of a broader sweep of the national Romantic movements across Northern Europe, with their appreciation of folk traditions, indigenous architecture, handicrafts and Nature.

This article sets out to discuss that revival and, in particular, to highlight the work of two artists, Stanisław Witkiewicz and Karol Kłosowski, who both made lasting contributions to the decorative arts and architecture in Podhale. It also aims to situate the vernacular revival in Podhale in a broader context of artistic and ethnographic interests in the Tatras in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The history of artists’ presence in Zakopane has been thoroughly researched and discussed by Teresa Jabłońska, most recently in her major book on the subject, *Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains* (2015), which offers an in-depth survey of the discovery of the Tatras in the 1830s, and the subsequent growth of interest in Highlanders and their culture. That interest was sustained by the advent of mountain photography in the 1850s, and invigorated by the foundation of the crafts schools in Zakopane in the 1870s and 1880s. The rise of ethnographic studies and the interest in collecting in Europe – which highlighted the vernacular and folk traditions – played its role, too. In Zakopane Countess Róża Krasiańska and Maria and Bronisław Dembowscy were among the earliest private collectors of Podhale handicrafts. A suite of furniture decorated with folk motifs, commissioned by Krasiańska in 1885, is considered to be the first example of neo-vernacular ornamentation in the region.

A breakthrough in the history of the vernacular revival in the Tatras was the construction of Koliba. Designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851–1915) – who sketched out the building, completed in 1893 – it stands out as the first and prime example of the so-called Zakopane Style (Fig. 1). Witkiewicz was a larger-than-life figure: a painter, writer, and art critic, prolific designer of furniture and interior decorator. His houses, writings and ideas constituted a major contribution to the artistic developments in Zakopane around 1900. He moved to the village in 1891 to be treated for tuberculosis, joining his friends Maria and Bronisław Dembowscy. Their collection of everyday objects, made and used by Highlanders, opened his eyes to the decorative potential

3 Teresa Jabłońska is a former Director of The Tatra Museum in Zakopane and author of several major publications on art and artists in the Tatras. She discusses the artistic colony in Zakopane in a guidebook to The Tatra Museum, *Artyści i Sztuka w Zakopanem* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzanskie, 2012), and most recently in the *Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains* (Zakopane: The Tatra Museum in Zakopane, Tatra National Park, 2015). I wish to extend my thanks to her for generously sharing with me her vast knowledge and expertise on the subject over the course of more than 15 years.

4 The earliest such collection was of female folk costume from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. It belonged to Count Stanisław Drohojowski, who donated it to the Tatra Museum in 1889, thus starting the Museum’s ethnographic section. In 1896 the Krasiański collection was donated to the Museum. The years between 1880 and 1920 were the peak period for ethnographic studies and private collecting in Podhale. Hanna Błaszczyk-Ziórowska, *Kultura Ludowa Podhala* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie, 2003), 5–7.

of local craftsmanship. The Zakopane Style was Witkiewicz’s endeavour to revive the building and ornamental traditions of the Tatra Highlanders and use them as a springboard for more elaborate and sophisticated architectural and interior design.6 Koliba was designed to showcase his ideas.

While the work of Stanisław Witkiewicz has been well documented in scholarly publications, and his own writings have been published, the artist whose contribution to the Zakopane Style has not yet received proper recognition nor properly been researched is Karol Kłosowski (1882–1971). Unlike Witkiewicz, Kłosowski never became a central figure in the artistic community in Zakopane, nor did he aspire to hold such a position. In Polish art history he is first and foremost recognised as one of the founding members of the Podhale Arts Society (Towarzystwo Sztuka Podhalańska) and a designer of lacework, for which he was awarded the gold medal in the ‘Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes’ in Paris in 1925.7 Yet, it is his intricately handcrafted house in Kościeliska Street in Zakopane that deserves a special place not only in the history of the vernacular revival in the Tatras but also in that of the artists’ wooden houses and studios in Northern Europe (Fig. 2). Kłosowski named his home Willa Cicha (Silent Villa) and during his long and

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6 For a discussion of Witkiewicz’s idea of the Zakopane Style see Teresa Jabłońska, The Zakopane Style of Stanisław Witkiewicz (Olszanica: Bosz, 2008).

7 Edyta Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness...’, 98.
creative life he transformed a modest vernacular dwelling that had originally belonged to his Highlander wife into an artistic house of remarkable unity – his personal and poetic statement on art and life.

When Kłosowski first came to Zakopane in 1896 to learn woodcarving, the village had already been a hub of educational activities. The School of Wood Industry that he joined had been in operation for 20 years and the School of Lacework had recently opened. Both were founded with a view to educating young people in useful skills and with the ultimate goal of providing economic relief in a region where there was notorious poverty. There was also the School of Household Management, founded in Kórnik by Countess Jadwiga Zamoyska and which moved to Zakopane in 1889.8 Interestingly, those responsible for the foundation of the schools – doctor Tytus Chałubiński, actress Helena Modrzejewska (later known as Modjeska) and Countess

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8 I discuss the role of Kórnik and the Zamoyski family in Zakopane at greater length in ‘Redefining Polishness....’, 78–80.
Zamoyska – arrived in the Tatras from three different corners of the former Commonwealth: Chałubiński, came from Warsaw, then occupied by the Russians, Modrzejewska from Krakow, then in Austria-Hungary, and Zamoyska, together with her son, Władysław, from Greater Poland, then under the Prussian rule. In 1889, Władysław Zamoyski purchased a large portion of the lands of Zakopane which, thanks to the relative autonomy of the whole region under the Habsburgs and Zamoyski’s ownership, became an enclave of freedom for Poles from the three partitioning zones. In 1907 Kłosowski returned to the village and in that same year he married a Highlander poetess, Katarzyna Gąsienica-Sobczak. He moved into his wife’s house in Kościeliska Street and would spend the rest of his life there.

As Kłosowski’s entire output is still awaiting a monographic study, this article aims partly to fill that gap by shedding light on the Silent Villa on the basis of available sources, including family archives and memories. The significance of Willa Cicha is highlighted in particular against the backdrop of the cultural and educational developments in Zakopane around 1900 and Stanisław Witkiewicz’s idea of the Zakopane Style. The contribution of Witkiewicz and Kłosowski to the artistic revival in Zakopane cannot be discussed without a reference to a score of outstanding personalities such as Chałubiński and Modrzejewska, who offered their support, patronage and friendship, generously shared their knowledge and financial resources, and became involved in a host of initiatives pro publico bono. It was thanks to the contribution of such personalities, coupled with the work of the artists themselves, that around 1900 Zakopane came to be perceived as the cultural and spiritual centre of Polish life, alongside Krakow. Therefore, this paper also sets out to offer a picture of this community, which comprised painters, sculptors, writers, and musicians, as well as doctors, lawyers, and landowners, and last but not least, the Highlanders themselves. The two major dates defining the period under discussion are those of 1873 and 1909, which mark the foundation of the Tatra Society and the Podhale Arts Society respectively. The Tatra Society was the first body launched to coordinate scientific and ethnographic studies on the Podhale region; the Podhale Arts Society was an umbrella association for regional artists.
‘The secret speech of the landscape’: painters and writers in the Tatras around the mid-19th century

The early writers and painters who travelled to the Tatras were driven by the call of the wilderness and the quest for the sublime, also noted elsewhere in Europe, in the wake of Romantic sentiments.\(^9\) The first painter of the Tatras and a pioneering figure of the Polish school of landscape painting, Jan Nepomucen Głowacki (1802–47), set up a studio in an old inn in the 1830s in one of the valleys in the Tatras, from which he would embark on outdoor trips to make studies from nature for his oil paintings.\(^10\) At the same time the Romantic writer and poet, Seweryn Goszczyński (1803–76), in his *Podróż do Tatrów* (Journey to the Tatras, 1832) praised the Highlanders and their ways of life, thus becoming one of the first writers to introduce the Tatra motifs into Polish literature.\(^11\) For Goszczyński, who had taken part in the November Uprising of 1831, the region provided a refuge from political persecution, a role it would resume later in the century after the Uprising of 1863. Both such literary and pictorial representations of the mountainous landscapes were also charged with coded emotions, becoming manifestations of patriotism at a time of partitions and political oppression. Using the expression coined by the poet Wincenty Pol, the ‘secret speech of the landscape’ evoked the motherland as much as the nature.\(^12\)

The second wave of artist-visitors started to paint in the Tatras in the 1860s. They were bohemians and disciples of Wojciech Gerson (1831–1901), whose Warsaw studio was home to the Gerson School and who is considered one of the best realist painters of mountain views. The works of his disciple, Leon Wyczółkowski (1852–1936), stand out as the most expressive renderings of the power and glory of mountain peaks, crags, lakes and tarns.\(^13\) Towards the end of the 1850s, painters were followed by photographers such as Walery Eljasz-Radzikowski (1840–1905), who visited the Tatras regularly and made Zakopane his second home.\(^14\) Eljasz-Radzikowski was not only one of the most gifted early photographers of the Tatras, but also a painter and writer, author of the first guide to the Tatras and a co-founder of the Tatra Society.
Education and arts patronage in Zakopane towards the end of the 19th century: the role of Tytus Chałubiński and Helena Modrzejewska

The establishment of the Tatra Society in 1873, as well as Zakopane’s newly acquired status, from 1885 onwards, as a mountain resort for the climatic treatment of pulmonary diseases, were the two milestones in the development of the village. Both were largely masterminded by Tytus Chałubiński (1820–1889), a renowned Warsaw doctor who, together with Walery Eljasz and parish priest Józef Stolarczyk, was among the founders of the Society. The Tatra Society provided a platform for concerted efforts to protect native plants and wildlife, encourage ethnographic research and promote tourism. In 1888 it played an instrumental role in the foundation of the Tatra Museum in Zakopane. That year Chałubiński, who had been involved in the project and whose wide-ranging interests included botanical and mineralogical studies, donated his substantial collection of the Tatra bryophytes to the Museum.15 It was also on the initiative of Chałubiński and the Tatra Society that in 1876 the School of Wood Industry was founded to provide vocational training in building, ornamentation, sculpture and crafts.16 Similarly, the School of Lacework opened in 1883 thanks to the actress, Helena Modrzejewska (1840–1909). In a letter of 12 October 1881 Modrzejewska was writing about her desire to do ‘something good’ for Highlander children17 and a year later she raised funds for the School at the premiere of Ibsen’s Doll’s House in the Great Theatre in Warsaw.18 The School initially produced work based on foreign models, but over the years, it developed its own designs, with motifs of Tatra plants and animals; a pivotal role in this development was played by Kłosowski19 (Fig. 3). In 1925 several pieces of lacework designed by Kłosowski and executed by students of the School, were displayed in the Polish Pavilion in Paris.

Modrzejewska was a regular visitor to Zakopane, where she had a villa called Modrzejów built for herself and her family. The villa was one of the artistic salons of Zakopane, frequented by artists who were resident in the village or visiting for shorter breaks. It was at Modrzejów that the career of Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) was launched. Paderewski was a virtuoso pianist

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15 For more on the role of Chałubiński in scientific research of the Tatra Museum, see Włodzimierz Cichocki and Grażyna Cisło, Przyrodnicy i ich zbiory w Muzeum Tatrzanka (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzanske, 1999), 9–12.
16 Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness…’, 80–81.
17 Helena Modrzejewska, Wspomnieńia i wrażenia (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1957), 459.
18 Józef Szczublewski, Modrzejeswska. Życie w odsłonach (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2009), 325.
19 The novelty of Kłosowski’s design for bobbin laces in relationship to the art of the Podhale region is discussed by Karolina Sarkowicz in a B.A. dissertation under the same title. Karolina Sarkowicz, Nowatorskie wzornictwo koronek klockowych Karola Kłosowskiego na tle sztuki podhalańskiej, unpublished B.A. dissertation written at the Department of History and Cultural Heritage of Papeska Akademia Teologiczna in Krakow, 2009.
and composer, who went on to become the Prime Minister of the independent Republic of Poland in 1919. He was introduced to Modrzejewska in 1884 by Tytus Chałubiński and he would come to play the piano in her house until the small hours of the morning. Impressed by his demeanor and performance, Modrzejewska noted: ‘By the piano, Paderewski’s head encircled in a halo of thick, golden hair and his delicate, almost feminine facial features reminiscent of an angel from Botticelli or Fra Angelico’s paintings. Whilst playing, he was so absorbed in the music that its power over him had an almost hypnotic effect’.20 She decided that as a young, gifted pianist the 24-year-old Paderewski should continue his education abroad. That year, she also arranged for Paderewski to give a concert in Krakow, combined with her own recitations, to raise funds for his studies in Vienna.21 Nearly twenty years later, in 1901, Paderewski’s opera *Manru*, with its plot set in the Tatra Mountains, was first performed at Königliches Opernhaus in Dresden, and was subsequently staged in several European cities,

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20 Szczublewski, *Modrzejewska. Życie w odsłonach*, 387. The impression accounted for by Modrzejewska has its counterpart in Paderewski’s portrait by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, painted in 1891 and now in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

as well as New York’s Metropolitan Opera.\textsuperscript{22} The costume designs were sketched out in Zakopane and some of the costumes were sent to Dresden directly from there; presumably the School of Lacework was also involved in making them.\textsuperscript{23}

Helena Modrzejewska was a good friend of Stanisław Witkiewicz, with whom she maintained regular correspondence throughout her intensive European and American tours. She also acted as godmother to Stanisław Witkiewicz’s son, Stanisław Ignacy, who later made his name as a portrait painter and playwright.\textsuperscript{24} The boy was christened in 1891 in the old wooden parish church of Our Lady of Częstochowa in Kościeliska Street. Jan Gąsienica Krzeptowski, also known as Sabała – an inspirational Highlander who was a bard, musician and guide – acted as

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_4.jpg}
\caption{Leon Wyczółkowski, Stanisław Witkiewicz with Wojciech Roj, 1902, oil on canvas. National Museum in Krakow \hspace{1cm} Photo: Paweł Czernicki}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{22} Szczyblewski, Modrzewsk. Życie w odsłonach, 569.
\textsuperscript{24} The friendship between Modrzejewska and both Witkiewicz senior and his son, Stanisław Ignacy has been discussed by Janusz Degler, ‘Modrzewsko i Witkiewiczowie’, in Helena Modrzejewska 1840–1909. Pamiętnik Tetralny, Zeszyt 3–4, (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2009), 261–81.
\end{footnotesize}
a godfather. Witkiewicz’s choice of these two highly original and talented figures from two different backgrounds to act as godparents to his son was an example of the socially inclusive sensibilities of the Zakopane artistic community at that time. Modrzejewska represented artists who were coming to the Tatras to become part of the local community. Sabala stood for the local górale people, epitomising their spirit of independence, creativity, strong connection with the land, and the continuity of culture and traditions. This coming together of two worlds is well reflected in Witkiewicz’s double portrait with Wojciech Roj, a mountain guide and builder, painted by Leon Wyczółkowski (Fig. 4), as well as in Tytus Chałubiński’s statue with Sabala, by Jan Nalborczyk, erected in Zakopane in 1903.

**Stanisław Witkiewicz and the development of the Zakopane Style**

Zakopane’s mountain climate attracted people who suffered from TB, such as Witkiewicz, Kłosowski, Dembowski and Dr. Władysław Matlakowski (1850–1895), all of whom were to make a significant contribution to the artistic heritage of Podhale. The year 1891 marked the beginning of the Zakopane period in Witkiewicz’s life, which continued for 17 years until he left the Tatras for Lovrano (now in Croatia), never to return. Known as an art critic and theoretician, he came to Zakopane from Warsaw at the age of 40. Witkiewicz spent his youth in Siberia, where his family was exiled as punishment for their participation in the January Uprising, and he was later educated in St Petersburg and Munich. He had visited Zakopane several times before, at the invitation of Maria Dembowska and her husband Bronisław. During one such early visit of 1886, the Dembowskis introduced Witkiewicz to their collection of Highlander household objects and costumes (Fig. 5). This first encounter with the culture of Podhale was to inspire him with the idea for the Zakopane Style. Having settled in the village, Witkiewicz became part of the circle of writers and painters who regularly met at the Dembowskis’ home. The group included such luminaries of Polish literature as Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916), the author of uplifting historical novels that were to win him the Nobel Prize, and Stefan Żeromski (1864–1925), a writer with a strong social conscience and considerable political interests. Among the painters was Adam Chmielowski (1845–

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26 The Warsaw years were an important period in Witkiewicz’s life, not only because they marked the beginning of his professional life as an art critic and theoretician, but also because it was in that period that he made several friendships that weighed upon his later stay in Zakopane, such as those with Bronisław Dembowski, Helena Modrzejewska, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Władysław Matlakowski. Moźdżer, ‘Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851–1915). Szkic biograficzny’, 15–25.

27 Jabłońska, Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains, 128.
1916), later Brother Albert, who gave up art to serve the poor and homeless. The Highlanders, Wojciech Roj and Jan Gąsienica Krzeptowski, aka. Sabała, were also part of that circle.

Witkiewicz’s move to Zakopane in 1891 coincided with the publication of his book *Na przełęczy* (On a Mountain Pass), subtitled ‘Impressions and Pictures from the Tatra Mountains’. A highly emotional praise of the górale and their culture, it received such great critical acclaim that Witkiewicz himself was hailed as ‘the Evangelist of the Tatras’. Richly illustrated with Witkiewicz’s own woodcuts, the book comprises a collection of literary vignettes from the Highlanders’ life, his own ponderings on local nature, customs and traditions, as well as transcriptions of conversations with the górale. Last, but not least, it features passages on vernacular building and decorative traditions, highlighting the artistic potential of Podhale. The opening lines of

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28 Chmielowski joined the Third Order of St Francis. As Brother Albert, he founded the Albertine Brothers and Albertina Sisters; his austere hermitage was designed by Witkiewicz on the outskirts of Zakopane. Zbigniew Moździerz, *Dom „Pod Jedlami” Pawlikowskich* (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie im. dra Tytusa Chałubińskiego, 2003), 252.

29 Jabłońska, *Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains*, 124.
Witkiewicz’s description of the Highlander chata (hut) shows us what he saw with the painter’s eye and what he so successfully persuaded others to see. He wrote:

The chata góralska (Highlander hut) on the very first sight appears to be full of character – this element of personality that makes special people and extraordinary things stand out from the crowd. Its main structure is that of a box for man to hide within, that serves practical purposes and is equally simple and unsophisticated in all other such huts. Four walls, two gable ends, two surfaces of a pitched roof, slightly asymmetrically leaning onto one side to shelter additional chambers – that is the whole of it. Yet, all the parts of this chata bear a stamp of a certain style, a certain linear motif.\(^{30}\)

The following year, Witkiewicz set out to explore further this potential in a house, which would take the simple ‘box’ into a previously unknown level of complexity and sophistication. The outcome was Koliba, completed in 1893, and it marks the beginning of the vernacular revival in the Tatras.

Within a decade, other houses in the Zakopane Style followed: Pepita, Oksza, Zofiówka, and the most spectacular of them, House under the Firs (originally referred to as a Villa under the Firs), which up until now was privately owned by the same family, and designed and furnished by Witkiewicz and his collaborators. Those who commissioned drawings and designs for their houses from Witkiewicz were not artists themselves, but they appreciated his mission and ideas. Koliba was built after his sketches between 1892–93 for Zygmunt Gnatowski, a landowner and amateur collector of Highlander dress, furniture and household objects. Originally, Gnatowski intended to have a dwelling modelled on a Highlander chata specifically to house his collection, but Witkiewicz persuaded him to make Koliba a flagship for the Zakopane Style.\(^{31}\) Not only was the house conceived and constructed in keeping with the vernacular building traditions of the Podhale region, but it was also furnished and decorated with items and ornaments that drew upon local craft traditions (Fig. 6). The Highlander motifs, reinterpreted and refined, when applied to furniture, textiles, embroidery, woodcarving and ironwork, provided the aesthetic coherence of the house. This dedication


\(^{31}\) Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness...’, 82–84. The major study on Koliba was published by The Tatra Museum and offers articles on the idea of the Zakopane Style and history of the house by Teresa Jabłońska and Zbigniew Moździerz, Koliba. Pierwszy dom w stylu zakopiańskim (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzarskie im. dra Tytusa Chałupińskiego, 1994).
to craftsmanship and vernacular ways of building, the celebration of beauty in everyday life and the Gesamtkunstwerk quality, make Koliba a fine example of the values and attitudes of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Some years later, Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, the owner of the House under the Firs, remarked that it was the ‘house’ and the ‘book’ (Koliba and Na przełęczy) that defined the direction of the artistic development of the Zakopane Style.

Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski’s House under the Firs is the grandest artistic house that was built and furnished to Witkiewicz’s design. Pawlikowski was a man of diverse talents, with interests ranging from economics and politics, to the history of literature and nature conservation. He was also a keen mountaineer, the
first to climb several of the Tatra’s most challenging peaks.35 Completed in 1897, the house was subsequently inherited by his artistic family, who included Pawlikowski’s sons, Jan Henryk Gwalbert, a writer and poet, and Michał, a writer and publisher, and their wives: the poet Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and the painter Aniela (Lela) Pawlikowska. Like Koliba, the House under the Firs was built by local Highlander builders, budarze, who had the necessary skills and experience. The interior was richly furnished with handwoven and embroidered textiles made into covers, cushions, throws and curtains, as well as individually designed items of furniture made of wood and finished with decorative carvings. As such it brings to mind the artists’ houses from the turn of the centuries, such as Anders Zorn’s studio in Dalarna36 or Saarinen, Gesellius and Lindgren’s Hvitträsk. They all share characteristic combinations of wood and textiles, strong colours and decorative features inspired by folk traditions. In the House under the Firs, this influence can be seen, for example, in

Fig. 7. Stanisław Wilkiewicz. House under the Firs, built 1896–97. Period photograph from the archive of the Tatra Museum in Zakopane

35 Mośdzierz, Dom ‘Pod Jedlami’ Pawlikowskich, 102–103.
36 Shadows of creation: Preserving the artist’s studio, the title of a lecture given by Giles Waterfield at ‘The Artist’s Studio as Museum’ seminar at the Swedish Institute in Rome in 2015 captures the essence of the experience of artists’ houses that have become museum spaces. Though it is not addressed in this article, it seems worth referring to, especially as the two houses discussed, the Silent Villa and the house Under the Firs, continue to be in the hands of their families. It is a valid question to ask how to instill life (and what life) back into spaces that can no longer be maintained by families.
the white woollen curtains in the drawing room, embroidered with a motif of *parzenica* (a heart-shaped ornament), which was traditionally used to decorate Highlander trousers. To complete the artistic and local feel of the room, Witkiewicz’s painting *Sheep in the Mist*, hung on one of the walls. The interior arrangement of space is complex and sophisticated, with views carefully framed, window seats thoughtfully positioned, and dormers judiciously placed to provide enough light. Seen from the outside the house is situated in an elevated position, enhanced by stone foundations, ranging up to four metres, with a commanding view of the surroundings, originally undisturbed by other buildings (Fig. 7)\(^{37}\). Not far from the house there is a well, topped with a wooden canopied structure designed by Witkiewicz, which perhaps echoes the well as a symbolic *fons vitae* in the courtyard of William Morris’s Red House in Bexleyheath near London.\(^{38}\)

Witkiewicz’s rich repertory of forms and decorative motifs drawn from folk art in the Tatras and Podhale region, and reinterpreted in his houses in the Zakopane Style, was grounded in the research of Władysław Matlakowski (1850–95). Like Witkiewicz, Matlakowski suffered from TB. He came to Zakopane from Warsaw, where he had established his reputation as a distinguished surgeon. Matlakowski had an excellent educational background in classical studies and sciences and, having settled in Zakopane, he devoted the last years of his life to documenting the artistic and architectural traditions of the *górale*. His studies and collaboration with Witkiewicz resulted in two monumental volumes, *Budownictwo ludowe na Podhalu* (Vernacular building in Podhale, 1892) and *Zdobienie i sprzęt ludu polskiego na Podhalu* (Decorations and household objects of Polish folk in Podhale, 1901).\(^{39}\) Not unlike Gnatowski, Pawlikowski, Chałubiński, the Dembowski and others, Matlakowski became one of the key figures of the community in Zakopane, who despite not being artists themselves, nevertheless made a lasting contribution to the vernacular revival in the Tatras.

**Karol Kłosowski and Zakopane before the Great War**

In 1896, when the work on the House under the Firs had begun, Witkiewicz was at the peak of his creative powers. He was in his mid-40s and was becoming a celebrated originator and champion
of the idea of the Zakopane Style. That same year the young Klósowski, aged just fourteen, came to Zakopane from his native village of Pilatkowice in Podolia (now western Ukraine) to learn about wood carving at the School of Wood Industry. His drawing skills had been recognised quite early in his childhood and, as his later career proved, he was keen to hone them further to become a professional artist. After five years in Zakopane, where he learned ornamentation and figurative sculpture, Klósowski continued his education at the School of Decorative Arts in Krakow (Szkola Przemyslu Artystycznego, modelled on the Viennese Kunstgewerbeschule) and graduated in 1902. Thanks to a private scholarship he then went to Vienna to study sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts (Academie der Bildenden Kunste). Returning to Krakow, between 1904–07 he was studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts under such renowned teachers as Stanisław Wyspiański, Leon Wyczółkowski and Jan Stanisławski. These were the golden years of the Krakow Academy, which attracted some of the foremost artists as teachers after a major reform at the end of the 19th century. Working under distinguished personalities such as Wyspiański – a versatile artist, playwright, draughtsman and designer of stage sets, furniture, stained glass and textiles – must have had a considerable bearing on young Klósowski, whose drawings and paintings show stylistic references to Art Nouveau and Wyspiański’s manner of portraiture. Likewise, Klósowski’s dedication to craftsmanship may have been not unrelated to that of Wyspiański.

In 1907, having completed his education, Klósowski returned to Zakopane. During the ten years between 1896 and 1907, when Klósowski first came to Zakopane and then returned to live there for the rest of his life, the village and its artistic community thrived. In the words of Teresa Jabłońska: ‘Around 1900, Zakopane “seethed” with art. The village had become, next to Krakow and in artistic relationship with it, the cultural centre of the Young Poland movement. (...) It was then that the younger generation of artists, who lived or stayed for longer periods of time in Zakopane, attracted attention.’ In 1899, the village railway station opened, thus making it much more accessible to guests and tourists flocking to the Tatras for a holiday. Zakopane also became a well-established health resort after the Sanatorium of Dr. Dłuski opened in the neighbouring village.

40 Within the course of a few years designs in the Zakopane Style proved popular enough to reach beyond the regional borders, and what originated as an attempt to protect the indigenous character and identity of local architecture came to be recognised as the national style. More of the response to Witkiewicz’s ideas and his own understanding of the national style can be gleaned from his letters around 1900, collected and edited by Michał Jagiełło. Jagiełło (ed.), Listy o stylu zakopiańskim 1892–1912 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979), passim.

41 Włodzimierz Wnuk, Ku Tatru, (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1978), 176. This is an informative personal account of the meetings with artists and writers in Zakopane. Wnuk knew Klósowski and one the chapters is his book is devoted to ‘Cicha’, 173–90.

42 For Wyspiański and the Polish Arts and Crafts Movement, see Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness...’, 90–96. In 1902, Wyspiański himself was on holiday in Zakopane, where he met Maria Dembowska and saw her ethnographic collection. Anna Rudzińska, ‘Kalendarium Życia i Twórczości’, Stanisław Wyspiański (centenary exhibition catalogue), (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe, 2007), 33.

43 Jabłońska, Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains, 209.
of Kościelisko, in 1902. It was built on the initiative of Kazimierz Dłuski and his wife, Bronisława, sister of Maria Curie, who like her husband, received her medical education in Paris. The Dłuskis were both politically active and in Paris had already hosted future politicians of the independent Poland. The sanatorium was designed for the treatment of tuberculosis and respiratory diseases. In terms of medical facilities and standards, it was modelled on the state-of-the-art developments in Switzerland. The interiors were designed by artists of the Polish Applied Art Society (Towarzystwo Polska Sztuka Stosowana, founded in 1901 in Krakow), stylishly combining the spirit of Vienna Secession with elements of local culture and traditions. Having already collaborated with Witkiewicz on the furnishings for his houses, Wojciech Brzega – the first Highlander sculptor to receive formal arts training in the art academies in Krakow, Munich and Paris – designed several pieces of furniture. It was at this time that Witkiewicz's campaign for the use of indigenous motifs in furniture design bore fruit. In 1901 the School of Wood Industry abandoned decorative motifs taken from Swiss chalets in favour of the vernacular ones, thanks to the appointment of Stanisław Barabasz as its first Polish director. Finally, around 1900, Witkiewicz's two major ecclesiastical projects were completed: the chapel of St. John the Baptist (1894–1900) in the parish church of the Holy Family in the village of Zakopane itself, and the free-standing chapel of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (1904–07) in Jaszczurówka. Both were designed and furnished in the Zakopane Style, including the stained glass to Witkiewicz's design in Jaszczurówka. The chapel of St. John the Baptist was decorated with some personal bravado: the painting of the patron saint in a dramatic pose in the retable, shown against the background of the Black Tarn in the High Tatras, was modelled after Witkiewicz himself.

Kłosowski’s decision to come back to Zakopane in 1907 may have been dictated by his ill health and the onset of tuberculosis during his studies. Equally, it may have been due to his early experience of five years spent in Zakopane beforehand. What is known is that, in the year of his return, he married his Highlander wife, Katarzyna Gąsienica-Sobczak, 26 years his senior and moved into her family home, a traditional Highlander hut (chata), then known as Sobczakówka, in Kościeliska Street (Fig. 8). At that time, Sobczakówka was a modest Highlander chata, run as a

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46 Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness…’, 81. Witkiewicz’s campaign against the ornamentation adopted from Swiss chalets, taught by non-Polish directors of the School, has been discussed by David Crowley in National Style and Nation-state: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 22.
47 This kind of theatricality in painting seems to have been initiated by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It was not uncommon in paintings around the turn of the century, as can be seen, e.g. in the altarpiece painting by Michael Ancher in Frederikshavn parish church, in which the figure of Jesus meeting the disciples by the Lake of Tiberius was modelled on the painter himself.
48 Wnuk, Ku Tatro, 181.
guesthouse and popular among eminent visitors, such as Stefan Żeromski, Henryk Sienkiewicz, and the sisters Maria and Bronisława Skłodowskie (later Maria Curie and Bronisława Dłuska). Klóowski himself had rented a room in Sobczakówka when he was a student at the School of Wood Industry. After marrying, he renamed the house Willa Cicha, the Silent Villa, thus marking the beginning of its history as an intimate haven of arts and craftsmanship. Klóowski soon became an active figure in the artistic community in Zakopane: in 1909 he was one of the founding members of the Podhale Arts Society, which included among others Witkiewicz’s collaborators Stanisław Barabasz and Wojciech Brzega. In 1910 Klóowski became a member of the Kilim Society, instituted to promote woven textiles. Members of the Podhale Arts Society held annual exhibitions of their works initially in private houses, and since 1911 in the rooms of the so-called Polish Bazaar in Krupówki.

Fig. 8. Karol and Katarzyna Klóowski in front of their house the Silent Villa (Willa Cicha). Period photo from around 1910 from the Family Archive

49 Barucka, ‘Redefining Polishness...’, 87. For more on Polish applied art see Irena Huml, Polska sztuka stosowana XX wieku (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1988).
Street, built by Władysław Zamoyski as a local department store and exhibition venue.\textsuperscript{50} In 1912 Kłosowski was offered teaching posts at the School of Wood Industry and the School of Lacework, remaining in post at the latter until 1932. This period in his life was marked by personal bereavement when Katarzyna died in 1915. Five years later Kłosowski married a fellow-teacher of lacemaking, Jadwiga Marusińska, with whom he continued to live at Silent Villa (Willa Cicha) and the couple had two children. Their descendants have become today’s custodians of the house.

**The Silent Villa (Willa Cicha): Karol Kłosowski’s artistic home**

The Silent Villa sits comfortably in Kościeliska Street, the oldest street in Zakopane, lined with vernacular wooden buildings. An old wooden church, which was the hub of community life for Witkiewicz and Chałubiński’s generation, and the free-standing chapel, founded by Katarzyna’s ancestors around 1800 at the entrance to the adjacent graveyard, are a stone’s throw away,\textsuperscript{51} as is Witkiewicz’s house Koliba. The original wooden house Kłosowski moved into in 1907 has thus been described in the conservator’s report from 2013: ‘It is an exceptional, unique wooden house in the Zakopane Style with ornamental features from Podolia region. The present-day house was developed through enlargements and extensions, from a traditional Highlander chałupa (another name for a Highlander’s house) belonging to the Gąsienica-Sobczak family, dating back to c. mid-19th century (or perhaps even earlier, as there is a shelf in the vestibule bearing the date 1819) into a commodious family seat of the artistic Kłosowskis.’\textsuperscript{52} As has been mentioned, the house evolved piecemeal over a period of 20 years. In its early stages it was extended horizontally and the attic was converted into the artist’s studio. To provide light, a dormer was added in the street façade, facing south, possibly in keeping with the solution successfully employed previously by Witkiewicz in Koliba and his other houses in Zakopane. Another, larger dormer window, facing north, was built into the attic at the opposite end of the study. With the resulting extra space above the ground floor Kłosowski tucked into the house an intimate ‘sitting nook’, a sunny spot a few steps below the level of the studio, used for reading and contemplating nature. The two stoves were also added, both decorated by Kłosowski.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Jabłońska, *Fine Arts at the Foot of the Polish Tatra Mountains*, 10.


\textsuperscript{52} The first well-informed survey on the architecture of Willa Cicha and its subsequent alterations and extensions is in the unpublished Conservation Management Plan by Agata Nowakowska-Wolak, which has been kindly made available to me by Urszula Bukowska, Karol Kłosowski’s granddaughter. Agata Nowakowska-Wolak, ‘Remont willi “Cicha” przy ulicy Kościeliskiej w Zakopanem wpisanej do rejestru zabytków pod nr: A.266 29.05 1957r. St. Rejestr nr A – 137, PROGRAM KONSERWATORSKI’, Zakopane, September 2013.

\textsuperscript{53} Conservation Management Plan by Nowakowska-Wolak ‘Remont willi “Cicha” …’, 3.
Unlike Witkiewicz’s houses, the Silent Villa was not built from scratch, and was therefore not unrestricted in its layout and spatial arrangement. Even so, in the course of time and through a series of sympathetic extensions and alterations, Kłosowski was able to depart from the longitudinal, two-chamber chalupa, successfully transforming it into a two-storey house of considerable spatial and functional complexity. The last stage of the development took place in the 1920s, when a new wing was built crosswise to the south wall, and a spacious and decorated open porch was added at the street entrance to the house. The porch, like a ‘garden room’ – to use the term of a British Arts & Crafts architect M.H. Baillie Scott – extended into the front garden, integrating the outside with the interior, as a transitional and protective space.

Kłosowski’s creative energy in the domestic sphere was not directed solely on the architectural extensions and alterations to the house. It extended to the whole building, its interior and surroundings, including the outbuildings, such as a shed for livestock, all elaborately covered with delicate carvings. For Kłosowski, as for other artists at this time, nature provided an important source of inspiration and reference – not only in the Art Nouveau manner of stylised ornamentation but also as a proper subject of study and source of daily joy and pleasure. In his decorations he explored vegetal and entomological motifs alike; his landscape paintings are often focused on some wild plant growing in a meadow. Like his teacher, Wyspiański, Kłosowski made studies of plants in his sketchbook.

Kłosowski was a keen horticulturalist and an experienced gardener, and he is credited with the introduction and acclimatisation of a host of non-native flowers and shrubs into Zakopane. He planted them in his front garden, which has survived to today, being uniquely cottagey in its sensibility and thus unusual in the otherwise severe climate of the Tatra Mountains. The flowers grown in the front garden represented a remarkable profusion of species given the relatively small size of the plot, and included roses, hollyhocks, nasturtium, delphinium, dahlias, peonies, phlox and Michaelmas daisy, carnations, lilies, poppies, snapdragons, tulips, narcissus and lily-of-the-valley, forget-me-nots and oxeye daisy. There were also ferns, meadowsweets, jasmine and quinces, with clematis

54 Such a pattern of rebuilding was also adopted in Koliba.
56 M.H. Baillie Scott envisaged a ‘garden room’ as adjoining the house and facing south; ‘it may be formed by an extension of the roof supported by posts’, and used for outdoor dining or relaxing. The deep porch at the entrance to Cicha, though not a garden room proper, gives a strong sense of the interconnectedness between the house and the garden and with a built-in-bench it offers an outdoor seat for recreation. Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott, Houses and Gardens, Arts and Crafts Interiors (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1995, 1st published in 1906), 68–69.
and Virginia creeper climbing the walls and posts. On the other side of the house, where the ground is sloping down towards a stream, there was a meadow of wild flowers and knee-high grass. Fruit and berry plants and trees were cultivated too, with raspberries, currants, gooseberries, apple trees and cherries, among others. Maples and sycamore trees, as well as aspens and poplars, completed the arrangement.\textsuperscript{57}

The motifs employed to decorate the house and its interior, profusely drawn from the world of nature, share the subtle fretwork quality of Kłosowski’s lacework and paper cuttings. He started to practise lacework as a small boy in his native Podolia and when he

\textsuperscript{57} I owe this information to Urszula Bukowska, who lives in Willa Cicha, and who was recollecting plants in her grandfather’s garden.
was given a teaching position at the School of Lacework in 1912, this childhood experience must have served as a useful blueprint for designing patterns in parallel media. Unsurprisingly, there are motifs that he employed in both crafts. Kłosowski’s dedication to paper cuttings coincided with the growing appreciation of the technique among art lovers and critics, especially in the first two decades of the 20th century. His continuous use of the technique, however, stemmed from genuine childhood experience and the apparent passion for ornamentation. The decorations inside the house are replete with private and personal symbolism, which can also be seen in some designs for lacework and paper cuttings.

One of the recurring motifs is the spiderweb, carved on a door in the studio, together with a Latin inscription *Aurora Musis Amica* (Dawn is a Friend of the Muses) (Fig. 9). The spider spinning its thread is set within a decorative framing of intertwined twigs of rowanberry. The motif is repeated in the decoration of a photo album and in lacework, apparently as a viable metaphor for the literal spinning of the thread with lacemaking bobbins. The visual similarity between the two actions and their results lends itself easily to such associations. Kłosowski’s lacework and his paper cuttings often explore motifs of the indigenous plants of Podhale, such as pine cones, the flower of carlina or ornamental dragon lily, some of which were also used previously by Witkiewicz. Animals appear too, such as the Tatra chamois or squirrels. There are cocks and peacocks, and a motif of the so-called *gadziki* (little reptilians), which look like coiled snake heads, popular in Highlander decorations. Kłosowski used *gadziki* on many occasions, in carvings and lace designs, and most extravagantly and theatrically as a decorative finish to a fascinator he designed for his wife as part of a fancy dress ball costume. Unique to Kłosowski’s motifs seems to be the cricket, found painted on the stove and repeated on one of the doors, perhaps in evocation of Charles Dickens’s Christmas book *The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845) 58 (Fig. 10). It might also have been Kłosowski’s private reference to music, which played such an important role in his life. The photograph from his student days at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow shows him with a violin, and throughout his life he was an avid dulcimer player.

One thing about Kłosowski’s house that poses a challenge to scholarly interpretation is the chronology of its evolution. The

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58 *Dickens’s The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home* was published in Polish translation by Antoni Mazanowski in 1914.
Silent Villa, much representative of the attitudes and aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement, was being developed when the movement was no longer fashionable. In the interwar period, when Kłosowski continued his work on Willa Cicha, modernity was making its way to Zakopane and artists alert to new ideas, no longer subscribed to the fin-de-siècle ideals of their fathers. Stanisław Witkiewicz’s son, known as Witkacy, for example, started a notorious enterprise, The S.I. Witkiewicz Portrait Painting Company, which specialised in portraits reportedly produced under the influence of drugs and other stimulants. Other artists were experimenting with synthetic and geometric...
forms, and leaving behind organic and nature-inspired sources and approaches. Kłosowski, however, consistently continued to weave his own beauty. Cicha was his labour of love, and when fashions were changing, and other artists came to Zakopane and then left, he adhered with remarkable integrity and unswerving commitment to the ideals that he had embraced early in his youth and had deliberately chosen to cultivate. As an artist and teacher he sustained a tradition of good quality craftsmanship and in the long run he provided a link between the early artistic colony in Zakopane and the generations to come.60

**Conclusion**

When Poland regained its independence in 1918, it inevitably affected the community in Zakopane, which between the wars had morphed into the Polish Davos, becoming a capital of snow sports.61 As generations and historical circumstances changed, the early idealism and patriotic fervour gave way to the growing enthusiasm for modernity. An era when writers and painters defined their ideas and ideals in the face of nature and in relation to indigenous traditions, legends, myths and symbols, was coming to the end. Yet the mountain village, which in 1933 acquired city rights, continued to attract artists. Some, who had visited it since the turn of the century, made Zakopane their home in the interwar period. Among them, two notable figures deserve a mention in these concluding paragraphs: Jan Kasprowicz (1860–1926), a Young Poland poet, and Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937), a major Polish composer, both inspired by the Tatras and the Highlander culture. Kasprowicz’s house in Zakopane, the Harenda Villa, which he bought in 1923 from an English artist Winifred Cooper, has been preserved to this day as the writer’s house. Thanks to a broad range of Kasprowicz’s artistic contacts and interests, it offers an insight into the continuity of artistic tradition in the Tatras.62 Szymanowski had been a frequent visitor to Zakopane since 1904, staying in several guesthouses, where he enjoyed the social life and studied Highlander music and folklore, but it was the Atma Villa, where he lived between 1930 and 1935, that became his home.63 His major work influenced by Podhale and its musical traditions is a ballet-pantomime *Harnasie*, written 1923–31 and set in the Tatras.64
For artists such as Kasprowicz and Szymanowski, who lived in Zakopane between the wars, it was still an inspiring place to practise poetry and music, but the educational and social mission of the early community had been lost. Though Witkiewicz’s development of the Zakopane Style transformed building methods in the area, the young avant-garde artists who were attracted to the Tatras did not relate directly to the legacy of the previous generation. The Schools of Wood Industry and Lacework, however, continued to prosper and they were both successfully featured in Paris in 1925. Two of the houses designed by Witkiewicz – Koliba and Oksza – are now home to the Tatra Museum, and the House under the Firs has been preserved virtually intact by the family owners. Karol Kłosowski’s Willa Cicha has fortunately escaped the fate of many wooden houses in Zakopane and is also owned by the artist’s descendants. There are still, however, different threads in Kłosowski’s various activities – as a painter, sculptor, designer and teacher – that need to be woven together to give a more complete and adequate picture of his contribution to sustain the tradition of artists’ engagement with the nature and culture of Podhale.

The history of the vernacular revival and the artistic community in the Tatras highlighted in this paper is valuable as part of a broader movement of the European Revivals. It is also valuable in its own right as a model example of friendship and cooperation, which resulted not only in the vernacular revival in Zakopane around 1900, but also gave impetus to more systematic scientific studies on the Tatras. The legacy of Witkiewicz and Kłosowski bears witness to their appreciation of the natural beauty of the world that surrounded them and their respect for the Highlander culture. As much as their work is indebted to the vernacular traditions of Podhale and rooted in their individual lives and Polish political history, it is also representative of the early modern turn towards the primeval, the genuine and the unspoilt by civilisation, which produced artists’ colonies and communities elsewhere in Europe.

Edyta Barucka, PhD, is an art historian and independent scholar with a background in English literature and art history. In 1993–2014 she was assistant professor at the Institutes of English Studies and Applied Linguistics of Warsaw University. Her PhD research on the British Arts and Crafts Movement, published in 2004, led...
her to reassess the developments in Polish decorative arts and architecture around 1900 in terms of the Arts and Crafts ideas. Her areas of special interest are North European, and especially Polish and British, painting and handicrafts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She is the author of the book on the European Garden City Movement (2014). In 2015 she organised with the Tatra Museum the ‘Return to Nature’ conference, which was part of the European Revivals project. She is currently working on a book of essays on British art and gardens.
The first impression of the southern beach at Skagen in Denmark was enchanting: a simple landscape of sea and sand in the summer breeze with two friends walking on the beach in their white dresses. It was not so much about the grandeur, the multidimensional landscape but a rather simple one that some would even call a meaningless landscape – seemingly nothing special in its simplicity. But this landscape was in fact a special one; those who went there remembered the lazy, hazy days of the past – the time before industrialisation. This scenery attracted artists who had studied at arts centres and travelled across Europe. Suddenly, for them, the cafés, restaurants and the city
life were no longer appealing. It did not offer the same kind of excitement. Instead, the cities felt large, dirty and the life there rather impersonal and expensive. Artists wanted a change of environment, they wanted to enjoy the simple way of life, they searched for the authentic. On the eve of industrialisation artists felt it their duty to paint the beautiful landscapes that would soon disappear. They wanted to immortalise these immersive landscapes (Fig. 1).

In this article I ask what could be the additional benefits of focusing on social networks and using the social network analysis (later the SNA) to research artist colonies. What kind of new insights would this provide? What kind of social network theory or a combination of several theories would be the most suitable and how could a social network analysis be carried out in this context? I will discuss the possibility that the SNA could provide a new kind of analytical approach for studying the phenomenon of artists’ colonies, as the examples in this article will show. The potential of the SNA suggests the possibility of a new insight into the geography of the artists’ colonies, their framework, the social leadership within them and maybe even the impact of popular motifs for paintings. I will use two Nordic artists’ colonies, Skagen in Denmark and Önningeby in Åland, as examples, and an open-source social network analysis tool, Gephi.org¹, for studying them. As the basis of this article I use my doctoral thesis.²

Landscape was the focus when the artists’ colonies started to emerge around the 1820s. First, there were the French landscape painters who discovered the forest of Fontainebleau near the village of Barbizon. The unspoilt nature with its lush trees, dark woods, and rock faces, as well as the simple life of the local peasantry appealed to these artists. In some villages, the local people still wore the traditional costumes, which added to the general atmosphere of authenticity. Another decisive factor was the shift away from the arts centres of Paris, Antwerp and Düsseldorf and young artists’ revolt against the historical and mythological painting of academic art education. Instead of working indoors under artificial light, the young artists wanted to paint naturalistic subjects in the open air in order to capture real life, in real light. Added to this was the more practical consideration that living and painting in the rural settings was far cheaper than in the big cities.

The artists’ colonies were often established in small, rural villages. They were most often based on the initiative of one artist who was not a permanent resident of the village. The colonies consisted of a group of artists (the majority of whom were visual artists) who lived and worked at the same place or in the same village for a certain period, usually during the summertime. The colonies usually functioned for at least three consecutive months per year, every year. Most of the artists joining them were young, 20–30 years of age, and they represented different nationalities. The colony could be composed of different groups, a key group consisting of the most loyal artists, whose paintings and actions influenced the colony or even helped to create the colony’s own significant style further. An implicit social hierarchy can be found in some of these colonies.3

The phenomenon spread from France to Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, and to the Nordic countries (Fig. 2).4 Michael Jacobs’ book, The Good and Simple Life: Artist Colonies in Europe and America (1985), was a pioneering publication about the formation of 11 different artists’ colonies in Europe, Russia and America. A decade after Jacobs’ publication, The National Museum of Germany (Germanisches Nationalmuseum) launched a large international research project on this theme. The result was an exhibition ‘Künstlerkolonien in Europa. Im Zeichen der Ebene und des Himmels’ that was held at the Nationalmuseum of Germany in Nuremberg in 2001–02. An extensive exhibition catalogue was published in connection with the exhibition.5

Nina Lübbren states in her book Rural artists’ colonies in Europe 1870–1910, that more than 3,000 artists worked in artists’ colonies at some point of their careers.6 However, the heyday of these communities was over by the time of the First World War, with a corresponding shift from nostalgic rural idylls to utopian urban ideals.7 Nina Lübbren’s study was the first to undertake more analytical research into this phenomenon. Her new approach focused on the creative sociability among the artists, the relationship between the local people and the artists, the artists and nature, landscapes and tourism.8

Some research has been published during the past ten years, such as Alice Gudera et al., Und sie malten doch! Geschichte der Malerinnen – Worpswede, Fischerhude, Bremen (2007), Jennifer

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4 Wiljänan, ‘Nej, i sanning...’, 10.
7 Lübbren, Rural artists’ colonies..., 162.
8 Lübbren, Rural artists’ colonies..., ivii.
L. Aldrich’s *Artist Colonies in Europe, the United States and Florida* (2008) and Thomas Andratschke’s *Mythos Heimat: Worpswede und die europäischen Künstlerkolonien* (2014). However, art-historical research has not paid attention to social networks in this context until the doctoral thesis produced by Alexandra Herlitz, *Grez-sur-Loing. The International artists’ colony in a different light* (2013), as well as my doctoral dissertation ‘No truly, a better place could the young painter not have ended up.’ *The Önningeby artists’ colony and the interaction of the multifaceted social networks* (2014). There have also been articles focusing on the networks, such as Stefanie Porras’s ‘Keeping Our Eyes Open: Visualizing Networks and Art History’ (2017).

**Social networks as a research toolbox**

Social networks are referred to in practically all sectors of today’s society. We are looking at the world through ‘network glasses’ in order better to understand the connections between states, people, politics and economics. We are not merely concentrating on the networks themselves, but also on their structures and how connections between institutions and people are created and what connections there are to those fields where the same kinds of structures emerge.

However, research and the concept of the network is not a new phenomenon. In English-speaking countries it can be traced back to the 16th century, although the more scientific definition was developed in the 19th century. According to Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), sociology was about studying the psychological interactions between people. The focus was on a small-scale interaction and imitation rather than on social facts. George Simmel (1858–1918) argued that everything is interacting with everything. Different matters are developed in a network that consists of ever-changing relations. According to Simmel, nothing that relates to society or culture can be understood apart from the relations from which they have been shaped.

A network can be defined as a technique that describes the relations between different actors, for example between organisations or people, as a regular structure that can change. It can also be interpreted as a metaphor that can be extended to the entire society. This has shaped the perception about the
networked social reality. Many philosophers, among them Gilles Deleuze (1925–95), Michel Foucault (1926–84) and Michel Serres (1930–2019), have referred to networks as open, productive and multidisciplinary structures that shape the changing conditions of social existence. A network is considered complicated because it has been defined in numerous ways. It can be seen as a methodology, as a heuristic model or as an ontology, or it can be viewed as a language, a technique or an organisation or something else.15

For analysing social networks the most suitable way seems to be, after carefully examining the options, Linton Freeman’s (1927–2018) network analysis that covers the entire development cycle. According to Freeman, the network analysis consists of 1) a structural way of thinking, 2) the systematic gathering of material, 3) visualisation and 4) mathematical and computer-assisted modelling.16 Visualisation can be carried out by using sociometrical research initially launched in the 1930s by Jacob L. Moreno (1889–1974). He created a map of social relations where an individual’s position in the group, as well as the group itself, could be analysed. Moreno focused especially on the distinction between social positions and emotions between individuals. One result of his research is that there tends to be one central figure within a network who all the other members want to be in contact with. Moreno developed the sociometrical test that shows how a person has gained their position in a group.17

Using the SNA means mapping and measuring relationships and flows between people, groups, organisations and other connected information/knowledge entities. The nodes in the network are the people and groups, whereas the links show relationships or flows between the nodes. The SNA provides both a visual and a mathematical analysis of human relationships. The location and grouping of the actors in the network are evaluated in order to understand the networks and their participants. These measures give insights into the various roles and groupings in a network – who are the connectors, leaders, bridges, isolates, who is in the core of the network, and who is on the periphery.18

How can the social network analysis be used as a tool in the research context? Some researchers, such as Alexandra Herlitz, have found Bruno Latour’s (b. 1947) idea of the black box useful. Latour defines blackboxing as ‘the way scientific and technical

work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become. Latour refers to science as an action where a hypothesis is first presented. In time, it is accepted and turned into an approved result, which according to Latour translates as a black box. Over time, the hypothesis will no longer be questioned but will eventually be accepted by the scientific community. In order to convince the community of the usefulness of the SNA, the best combination of it must be tested.

An artists’ colony consisted of a group of artists, with a common denominator that could be a destiny, a certain

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20 Latour, *Pandora’s hope*, XXX.
social structure or a certain status. A group can also consist of individuals who meet on a regular basis, like families or work colleagues. According to Rupert Brown, a group is formed when two or more persons think that they belong to a group and its existence is recognised by at least one person outside the group.\textsuperscript{21} Judy Gahagan, on the other hand, does not share Brown’s idea. According to her, a collection of people can only be called a group if they share interactive relations that refer to a common goal.\textsuperscript{22}

**Undiscovered routes of the artists**

How can the SNA be used in studying what made the artists travel to artists’ colonies, to the small villages that often were not easily reached? Let’s get back to the primary functions of a network that can be divided into exchange, exclusion and inclusion. The most important function is often an exchange that mutually benefits actors within the network.\textsuperscript{23} Exchange in a social network can be equated with a gift exchange.\textsuperscript{24}

Before the artists’ colonies were established, information about the beautiful rural villages and the suitable locations for painting were exchanged between artists. The forms these exchanges took included correspondence, dinner discussions, meetings and mutual travels. For example, the Finnish artist Maria Wiik (1853–1928) wrote to her fellow Finnish artist Alma Engblom (1856–1926):

> There will be a real artists’ colony in the Åland Islands in the summer. Male and female artists from both Sweden and Finland, a real restoration à la Brittany. Maybe you go there too.\textsuperscript{25}

Not only does Wiik mention news about the upcoming artists’ colony in Åland but she also refers to another colony in Brittany. The networks between the women artists in Finland were extensive, so news about an upcoming artists’ colony, as well as Brittany, spread relatively quickly. News about the artists’ colony in Skagen circulated in a local newspaper *Dagsavisen*. The front page read:

> There is a small Scandinavian artists’ colony in Skagen this summer. In addition to Michael Ancher and his wife, who

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have been staying there, there are also the Danes Kröyer and Locher, the Swede Oscar Björck, a relatively young artist, whose painting portrait of the artist’s father has attracted attention, and also the young and very talented artist Krouthén. Norway is best represented with four artists: Christian Krogh, Wilhelm Peters, Eilif Peterssen and a quite young artist named Lund.26

The SNA can be used when establishing the ways in which information about the colonies spread. An artist’s network should be established in order to find out how the information was disseminated. Fig. 3 shows the links between the French artist Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–84) and the Finnish painter Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905).

According to Rob Shields, people attribute certain characteristics to certain places. He argues that, by a process involving over-simplification, stereotyping, labelling and activating prejudices, these conceptions are divided into symbolic formations that are called place-images. A group of place-images forms a place-
Social network mapping provides more information about the selection of colony sites, about the artists’ routes to the colonies, whether their arrival was intentional or not and whether they were attracted merely by the myth of the place. An analysis of the cultural positioning of the venues of these artists’ colonies and how their position was constructed within a broader

Linton Freeman’s four-phase-theory combined with the sociograms developed by Jacob L. Moreno, have proved to be the most useful, as the following examples show. Fig. 4 describes the relations between the artists at the outset of the Önningeby artists’ colony. The artist who initiated it was Victor Westerholm (1860–1919). According to artist Hanna Rönnberg’s (1860–1946) memoirs, Westerholm was considered the new talent in landscape painting and already had large networks. How can these networks and their impact be measured? By using the Gephi Graph Visualisation and Manipulation software for the social network analysis in which different variables are given to different aspects – such as whether the artists who became key members of the colony knew each other before joining, whether they were friends or had worked together or were married to another artist in the same colony. Gephi then calculates the values for different nodes. The analysis confirms that Westerholm was already part of a large number of networks before the colony, and this helped him expand the number of its members even further.

What we know about these artists’ relationships to each other from archive documents verifies this. Both Westerholm and Fredrik Ahlstedt (1839–1901) had naturally strong links to their wives Hilma Westerholm and Nina Ahlstedt (1853–1907) but Westerholm also probably knew Edvard Westman (1865–1917), since they both had studied in Düsseldorf. Ahlstedt also had strong links to his students Elin Danielson (1861–1919) and Hanna Rönnberg, who had become acquainted with Eva Topelius (1855–1929). The Swedish artist J.A.G. Acke (1859–1924) almost falls out of the sociogram because he probably did not know any of the members before joining. Based on the sociogram, the initiator could also have been Fredrik Ahlstedt because of his large networks but he was older than Westerholm and perhaps not willing to live on the Åland Islands every summer.

Degree centrality means measuring the network activity for a node by using the concept of degrees – the number of direct connections a node has. A node with the most direct connections in the network is a connector. Fig. 5 shows that both Westerholm and Ahlstedt – both with equally many links – were connectors, even though Westerholm became the initiator of the artists’
colony. He was considered as the leader both by contemporaries and in the later research.

However, the situation changed when J.A.G. Acke joined the colony. Acke was very outgoing and liked his fellow artists, especially two women artists who he fell in love with. When he arrived, the power positions in the colony changed, as can be seen in Fig. 5 when compared with Fig. 4.

Fig. 5 shows that Westerholm still had the most links but other nodes, such as Elin Danielson, Hilma Westerholm, Hanna Rönnberg and J.A.G. Acke, were already getting stronger. When combining the SNA with the archive material, it becomes clear that the leadership changed quite soon after the establishment of the colony. Later, Acke’s position was strengthened even further, so that he eventually became the strongest node. An individual’s network centralities provide insight into their location in the network. The relationship between the centralities of all the nodes of the network can reveal information about the network’s structure, the network centralisation. If a network is more or less dominated by one or a few very central nodes, we are talking about a very centralised network. If a network is centralised around one node, a connector with large networks, it can be disabled if this node is removed.29

This is precisely what happened in Önningeby. Acke was not considered as a central node when he joined the colony. However, he became the connector since the number of his direct relations grew the most. The situation changed dramatically when Acke was preparing a monumental painting, *Snöljus* (1892), which was to be sent to the Salon de Paris. Suddenly, he no longer had any time to take care of his relations. He focused only on his artwork and the links around him became weaker. The painting was sent to Paris, where it was refused in the Spring of 1892.30 Acke and his wife associated this misfortune with their time in Önningeby, and they left the colony, never to return. This departure of a dominating node signalled an end to the heyday of the Önningeby artists’ colony. Even Elin Danielson, who was another powerful node in the network, decided to leave. Some artists, like Rönnberg, Westman and another dominating node, Westerholm, went back to Önningeby after 1892 but it was not the same. Finally, Westerholm, the initiator of the colony, was left alone there in 1914.31

29 Wiljanen, ‘Nej, i sanning…’, 129.
30 Wiljanen, ‘Nej, i sanning…’, 121.
31 Wiljanen, ‘Nej, i sanning…’, 122.
The situation was quite similar in Skagen. Four dominating nodes in the colony – Michael Ancher (1849–1927), Anna Ancher (1859–1935), Peder Severin Krøyer (1851–1909) and Laurits Tuxen (1851–1923) – stayed and worked in Skagen well into the 1890s. The poet and artist Holger Drachmann (1846–1908) also belonged to this group of powerful nodes. Direct links between these artists had already been forged before the colony’s establishment. Michael Ancher married Anna in 1880 and Tuxen had studied at the same time as Krøyer at the Royal Danish Academy of Arts. The five nodes strengthened their links to fellow artists and local people even further when they eventually bought houses in the village. Despite the strong direct links to other nodes, the network of Skagen artists turned out to be vulnerable. A less centralised or decentralised network, like Skagen’s artists’ colony, had more connected nodes, so the failure of one node had less and less impact but it increased the resilience of the network. It is more resilient against many intentional or random failures – many nodes or links can fail while allowing the remaining nodes still to reach each other over other network paths. However, this was not the case in Skagen. When two powerful nodes in the network died – Drachmann in 1908 and Krøyer in 1909 – it meant the end of the colony’s heyday too.

Can this research follow in the footsteps of the artists with the help of the SNA? Some local hotels or inns near these artists’ colonies kept guestbooks, where each guest wrote their name, occupation, address, name of the last visited location, arrival date and departure date, as well as their next destination. These variables can be put into a social network analysis tool Gephi.org that calculates different centrality values. The results of the analysis explain for example, the gender mix in the colony, especially the proportion of working women artists and those women artists who did not paint during their stay, but who instead took care of the families and their artist husbands. The SNA could also analyse the nature of the links between the women artists. The share of women in the five European artists’ colonies of Barbizon, Pont-Aven, Grez-sur-Loing, Skagen and Önningeby was approximately 17 per cent. The smallest share was in Barbizon and the largest in Önningeby, where the local newspaper wrote about the women artists and their paintings regularly, whereas in Skagen the local newspaper did not even mention Anna Ancher by

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name but referred to her merely as the wife of Michael Ancher. Another interesting area where the SNA could be used, was to find out why local artists seldom mixed with the artists’ colonies (with the exception of Michael and Anna Ancher, who lived in Skagen permanently). The share of artists who initially came from the same village where the colony was located was only 1 per cent.33

33 Wiljanen, ‘Nej, i sanning...’, 48.
The choice of motifs for painting

The SNA can also be used when mapping the motifs used in the artworks. Analysing the paintings produced in the artists’ colonies, we can see that motifs, compositions and even colours in different artists’ paintings can reflect one another. One reason for this was that some artists went to the same places to paint. However, in some cases, the reasons behind the choice of motifs might have been more complex. For example Peder Severin Krøyer was fond of painting groups of people in everyday, informal situations in different light conditions, and he experimented with different kinds of compositions. He often painted artists at breakfast or lunch, fishermen by the seashore or a group of friends by the bonfire or walking on the beach. I assume, that the reason for choosing these motifs could be traced from the social networks. Krøyer worked in the French artists’ colony of Cernay-la-Ville, in 1879. During his stay, he finished The Artists’ Luncheon in Cernay-la-Ville (1879). He later painted the same motif in Skagen, as seen in Artists’ Luncheon at Brøndums Hotel (1883, Fig. 6). He developed this motif further in Artists at breakfast, Grèz, in 1884. One more version of the same motif was A Luncheon. The Artist, his Wife and the Writer Otto Benzon (1893, Fig. 7).

Krøyer travelled around Europe and met many artists. An SNA could be undertaken by analysing, for example, the following variables: artists using certain motifs, compositions, colours, the direction of the light, and the number of models in the painting. Then the ‘betweenness’ and ‘closeness’ centrality would be calculated, after which the final analysis could be made. However, the main reason for these choices of motifs can be traced back to the quest for authenticity. On the eve of industrialisation, people linked modernisation with instability and artificiality. They searched for an authenticity that could be found in a simple lifestyle in the countryside where ‘real people’ lived. This sense of authenticity was comforting in a situation where the rapid change in society could cause insecurity. Historic sightseeing spots gave a sense of continuity and security.34 This also affected the artists’ choice of motif. The descriptions of the artists’ life were a way in which to communicate about their colonies and to recruit new members. These kinds of motifs also depicted the history of the colonies.

Conclusion

This article has pointed out some examples of the possibilities of social network analysis in the research into artists’ colonies. The results show that defining the networks of the artists helps us to understand the mechanism with which artists were ‘recruited’ to the colonies. They could be part of the network of an art academy or a private art school in one country or in another. They could be asked to join one artists’ colony and from there again via social networks to join another, maybe in another country. They could travel to Paris, where they would be part of an even bigger network, such as that of the Scandinavian artists. The mobility of
the artists, the end of the colonies, the leadership of the colonies and even the motifs in the paintings can be explained with the help of the SNA.

When researching artists’ lives and work, the role of the SNA is to take a new and complementary analytical approach to knowledge based on archival material and other historical documentation. Hence, it might be challenging to implement social network analysis in this context because the prerequisite is that there is enough basic information about the nodes, so that they can be included in the sociometrical test. The more complete the research on the artist, based on letters, photographs and journals, the better, as can be seen in Fig. 3. If there is not enough information, then the node cannot be included in the analysis.

Once the social network is built, it should be visualised. Visualisation is a means of organising and translating sometimes disorganised archive material. Another advantage with SNA tools like Gephi.org, is that they can handle large amounts of fragmented data. The more data is at hand, the more manipulation is needed to make the resulting visualisation legible. Building networks of the artists is time-consuming, as can be seen in Figs. 4 and 5, but digital data sets created and shared by cultural heritage organisations, for example by The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, are of vital importance. Social networks and the SNA, together with archival documentation, should be put into the black box of artists’ colony research in order to conduct new, analytical research methods. In this way the SNA will most certainly shed new light on the history of artists’ colonies.

PhD, M.Sc. Anna-Maria Wiljanen has worked as the Director of the Finnish Institute in Japan since January 2018. She defended her doctoral dissertation in art history at the University of Helsinki in 2014. Wiljanen also holds a Master’s degree in Political Science with Economics as her major. Wiljanen has previously worked as the Executive Director of the UPM Kymmene Cultural Foundation in Helsinki, Finland and in various positions over 10 years at the Finnish National Gallery. Wiljanen’s research interests are European artists’ colonies during the 19th century, social networks, women artists and the mobility between the artists.

Porras, ‘Keeping Our Eyes Open...’, 45.
Casting its gaze broadly across the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, this essay investigates the construction of a pre-history of German visual art and architecture rooted in the ancient practice of the Germanen. After the Congress of Vienna created the framework in 1815 for the modern European nation states, art and architecture assumed a new role in defining and giving form to the national character, with museums and public institutions designed to serve the public domain. Accordingly, art history was structured according to national schools, which were seen to exemplify national character. In Germany this process of mythologisation through the reinvention of ancient art practice was nurtured as a powerful emotional antidote to the modernisation, internationalisation, and secularisation of German society. As Claude Lévi-Strauss once noted, myths are ‘machines for the suppression of time’.¹ It was also a highly promiscuous activity, ranging in its search for possible sources across all the visual and decorative arts, architecture, archaeology, ethnology, linguistics, literary history, and material culture. This short essay explores the diversity of this compulsion to invent and construct mythologies of nation, memory, and tradition, and its recurring iterations over the 19th and 20th centuries.

Definitions and adoptions

The Germanen are defined not by geographical location but by language and ethnology, with tribal groupings coalescing around three main groupings: the North Germanic, essentially the modern Scandinavian nations; the East Germanic based around the Oder and the Vistula; and the West Germanic group, made up of Elbe Germanen (Lombards, Bavarians and Alemanni), North Sea Germanen (Angles, Frisians, Saxons), and

Weser-Rhein Germanen (Saxons and Franks). Add to this already complicated picture the impact of large-scale ethnic migration and the definition of what exactly Germanen culture represents becomes a contentious question. Indeed, as Sybille Ehringhaus has noted: ‘The word Germanen solely reflects the perception of whoever is using it. (…) In the age of humanism, in late 19th-century Romanticism, and in the period of National Socialism, the Germanen were invoked to construct national roots and thus to reinforce a sense of nationhood.’2 Mythologisation does not necessarily imply falsification and misrepresentation, however, and the construction of narratives of community is patently a work of imagination and creativity, which envisions or gives tangible form to a sentiment that is real and known to exist, but cannot be seen. In this sense, the term Germanen carried social-utopian resonances for Montesquieu in his Esprit des Lois of 1748. But it is also a term whose lack of definition makes it vulnerable to exploitation and abuse: for 19th-century race theorists like Joseph Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain it served as justification for bigotry, and intolerance.3 The insistence on the primacy of the primeval and the primordial over the shifting and often alien conventions of the contemporary moment brings with it an exaggerated sense of authenticity and thus purity, which can be exploited as a basis for social engineering. Nationhood, by definition, can be both inclusive and exclusive.

From the days of Sturm und Drang in the 1770s, an engagement with the northern fringes of Europe had been used as a means of redefining a German national culture. Johann Gottfried Herder, for example, had written about Ossian in Von deutscher Art und Kunst, published in 1773. The occupation of large parts of Germany by Napoleonic France between 1806 and 1813 also prompted serious questioning into what it meant to be German. Jacob Grimm led the way with a series of volumes that included Über den altdeutschen Meistergesang (Göttingen, 1811); Alteutsche Wälder (Kassel, Frankfurt, 1813–16, 3 vols.); and Die Lieder der alten Edda (Berlin, 1815, with Wilhelm Grimm). The revelation of northern alternatives to the romance cultures of Italy and France gathered pace over the 19th century, with Nordic and Germanic themes favoured. The very name of the Walhalla, built near Regensburg in the early 1840s and dedicated to eminent contemporary and historical figures ‘of the German

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2 Sybille Ehringhaus, Germanenmythos und deutsche Identität (Weimar: VDG, 1996), 14, 15.
tongue’ ties it explicitly to the Norse sagas, while the debt to Germanic precedent is featured in the northern pediment frieze depicting the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9CE, when Hermann, chieftain of the Germanen Cherusci tribe, was victorious over three Roman legions. The widely held view at the time, that the Germanen tribes and the ancient Greeks had shared ethnic routes in Central Asia, made it entirely possible to frame a Germanic hero in a classical pediment.4

The core text in demarcating the Germanen came not from inside the linguistic grouping but from the Roman historian Tacitus, who wrote his account of Germania around 98CE, describing the inhabitants as follows: ‘(...) in the peoples of Germany there has been given to the world a race unmixed by intermarriage with other races, a peculiar people and pure, like no-one but themselves, whence it comes that their physique, so far as can be said with their vast numbers, is identical: fierce blue eyes, red hair, tall frames, powerful.’5 The rediscovery of this text in the 15th century aroused great interest among German humanists and prompted the identification of Germania with Germany. As Heinrich Beck has noted: ‘Renaissance humanism led to a conscious nationalism in which the Germani rose to become a unique source of popular Germanic thought and culminated in the formula: Germanic equals German. The continued existence of this equation in subsequent centuries, down to the present (...).’6

Predictably, the interest in the culture and art of the Germanen during the 19th and 20th centuries was stimulated by domestic upheaval and uncertainty.

**Mythologising**

In his dedication to Georg Gottfried Gervinus in the first volume of his history of the German language, published in the revolutionary year of 1848, Jacob Grimm made an appeal for national unity based on shared language and the cultural heritage derived from specifically Scandinavian sources such as the Norse sagas, the Eddic songs and the Skaldic poems.7 The appeal of such a coherent world view can be sensed in the introduction to a book on nature cults in Germanen antiquity, published in Berlin in 1877 by Wilhelm Mannhardt, a scholar of mythology. Looking back to his youthful discovery of Grimm’s Deutsche Mythologie, Mannhardt recalls: ‘It was the summer holiday; the August apple tree in the

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4 See also Rudolf Petersdorff, Germanen und Griechen: Übereinstimmung in ihrer ältesten Kultur im Anschluss an die Germania des Tacitus und Homer (Wiesbaden: C.G. Kunzes Nachfolger, 1902).


middle of our garden threw its rosy-cheeked fruit into my lap. At that point a Secundaner [in the penultimate year of secondary school], I read this masterpiece, which had been achieved with enormous effort, from beginning to end – and the direction my life would take was decided. The conditions under which I grew up, revealed to me at an early age, and in contrast to my rigid Prussian surroundings, a distinctly national way of thinking and a lively interest in the various form of religious life.\(^8\) Born in 1831, Mannhardt would have been a Secundaner in 1847 or 1848. His memoir moves on to fulsome praise of Grimm’s genius: ‘Only rarely has a book generated such a magnificent outcome as this one. It became a national accomplishment, bringing together and making use of customs, legends, myths, superstitions, songs – in short oral folklore of every sort – as documents of the nation’s prehistory.’\(^9\) Grimm’s Edda collection of songs was particularly important in advancing popular engagement with the ancient Nordic Gods and religions, a rich narrative seam that Richard Wagner mined in the Ring cycle, on which he began work in 1848 and completed in 1874. Odin became Wagner’s Wotan, Frigg became Frikka, Andwari became Alberich. The Wagner operas also gave the Nordic myths visual symbols, which were further developed by artists such as Friedrich Gunkel (1819–76), who produced a celebrated painting of the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9CE, with Hermann, mounted on a white horse, crushing the Roman legions of Quinctilius Varus, prompting the final withdrawal of the Romans from Magna Germania (Fig. 1).\(^10\)

Gunkel’s painting was completed in 1864, the year of the Second Schleswig War, after which the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein were placed under Prussian and Austrian administration, respectively. Two years later, the Prussian army was victorious over Austria at the Battle of Königgrätz, and in 1870 defeated the French in the Franco-Prussian War. The climax of the Prussian advance towards military and political domination in Central Europe came on 18 January 1871 with the foundation of the German Empire, ruled by Kaiser Wilhelm I, when Wilhelm King of Prussia was declared Emperor of the German Reich. Exactly at this time, and not coincidentally, the painter Peter Janssen produced his own version of Hermann’s great victory, Der siegreich vordringende Hermann (Hermann advancing victoriously), 1870–73, now in the Lippisches Landesmuseum in Detmold. With the


\(^9\) Mannhardt, Antike Wald- und Feldkulte aus Nordeuropäischer Überlieferung, IX. ‘Nur selten hat ein Buch eine so großartige Nachfolge geweckt, wie dieses. Es wurz zu einer nationalen Tat, Sitte, Sage, Märchen, Aberglauben, Lieder, kurz mündliche Überlieferungen jeder Art als Documente der vaterländischen Urzeit zusammenzubringen und zu verwerten.’

\(^10\) Gunkel’s painting of the Hermannsschlacht was bought by the Bavarian King Maximilian II in 1857 but destroyed during the Second World War. It now exists only in photographs and reproductions.
founding of the new German state, the nationalist tendencies that had gained momentum over the preceding century took on heightened intensity and ambition. Across the spectrum of scholarship and the arts, history was ransacked for narratives that could support the message of German unity and national identity. The *Germanen* offered a particularly rewarding subject in this search.

### Monumentalising

Architecture played a central role in giving tangible form to the desire for national unity, community, and shared history. Some 300 monuments were constructed between 1871 and the outbreak of the First World War. They were dedicated primarily to Kaiser Wilhelm I, who died on 1 March 1889, to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, and to various military triumphs, both recent and historical. A typical example is the *Kaiser Wilhelm Monument* located at Porta Westfalica on the River Weser, built in 1892–96 to

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the design of the Berlin architect Bruno Schmitz. In common with virtually all of the monuments of this period, Schmitz’s tower sets a monumental, heroic statue within a massive stone vault. The vault, with its insistent buttresses and domed cap, is not unlike the conical Spangenhelm adopted by the Germanen around the 6th century, where the reinforcing framework of the helmet is formed by metal strips; Spangen in German. To make even more explicit the debt of the nation to the Kaiser and his Chancellor, a monument to Bismarck was built in 1902 on the neighbouring Jakobsberg in Porta Westfalica, directly facing the Kaiser Wilhelm Monument. It was to be one of a network of similar towers spread across the entire country, each topped by a fire bowl, which would be lit each year on Bismarck’s birthday on 1 April and on Midsummer’s day as a visible symbol of national community and connectivity modelled on the fire festivals of the Germanen such as Walpurgis Night (30 April / 1 May).

In the drive to characterise Germany as a strong and unified nation, the battle of Teutoburg Forest played a key role, and work on the Hermannsdenkmal (Hermann’s monument) near Detmold began in 1838 and was completed in 1875. A figure of Hermann, 26 meters high and made of riveted copper plates, stands on a circular sandstone drum of roughly the same height, composed of ten hexagonal columns that taper together to form a ring of very simplified, almost crude gothicky arches, which in turn support the shallow dome on which Hermann stands, waving his sword at the enemy. The long period of construction is evidence of a failing interest in the project in mid-century, which was only revived after the defeat of the French and the unification of 1871. Inscribed into the sword is the patriotic exhortation: ‘Deutsche Einigkeit meine Stärke, Meine Stärke Deutschlands Macht’ (German unity is my strength, my strength is Germany’s might). The designer of the monument was the architect and sculptor Ernst von Bandel, who had worked in the 1820s as an assistant to Leo von Klenze, the architect of the Walhalla in Regensburg. As Simon Schama concludes: ‘Von Bandel may not have been the most flamboyantly inspired of monumental sculptors but he evidently knew his public. He provided it with exactly the image of a Wagnerian hero it expected: whiskery, wing-helmeted, flourishing the invincibly tempered Nothung in the skies, a repatriated version of Tacitus’s Armenius as “the liberator of Germany”.’12 Besides commemorating Hermann’s

12 Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory (London: Harper, 2004), 112. See the chapter ‘Arminius Redivivus’ in this book (100–120) for an overview of the revival of interest in the Germanen from the 18th to the early 20th centuries.
victory over the Romans, the monument carries inscriptions that celebrate victory over Napoleon in 1813, the Battle of Waterloo, the fall of Paris in 1815 after the Battle of Issy, and, of course, the defeat of the French in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Further political messages were implicit, not least the battle of the new German imperial government against the power of the Roman Catholic Church in the Kulturkampf which raged from 1871 until 1887.13

Jacob Grimm’s Deutsche Mythologie reached a fourth edition in 1875/78 and the nationalist frenzy of the founding decades of the German Empire saw a flurry of scholarly publications on the Germanen.14 This agenda was further promoted at the start of the new century by the discussion around the Urheimat, the original and authentic homeland of the Germanen. Heinrich Beck explains: ‘While in the 19th century the view prevailed that the homeland of the original Indo-European peoples was in Asia (or the southern parts of Eastern Europe), now the hypothesis of the North German home of the Indo-Europeans became increasingly prominent.’15 This argument, which located the Urheimat of the Germanen in Northern Germany and on the Baltic shores, gained great traction around 1905, and a key figure in the debate was Johannes Hoops, who was the first editor of the four-volume edition of the Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, published between 1911 and 1919. The article on the Germanen in the Reallexikon was written by Rudolf Much, Professor of Germanische Altertumskunde und Sprachgeschichte at the University of Vienna, who also contributed some 260 other articles to the Reallexikon. Although a deservedly distinguished scholar, Much was also an advocate of pan-Germanism and a member of the Catholic German-Nationalist Deutsche Gemeinschaft.16

Ideological readings

The charm of the new scholarship, which identified the folklore and history of the Germanen with modern-day Germany, had great appeal to popular nationalism. Symptomatically, 30,000 visitors travelled to Detmold and to the Hermannsdenkmal for the extended celebrations staged in August 1909 to mark the 1,900th anniversary of the victory over the Romans, with the urgings on national unity and might that are inscribed on Hermann’s sword repeated on postcards and souvenirs (Fig. 2).17 Predictably, the Germanen

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14 A list would include E.H Meyer, Germanische Mythologie (Berlin, 1891); W. Golthar, Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie (Leipzig, 1895); E. Mogk, Germanische Mythologie, 2nd edition (Strasbourg, 1898); W. Mannhardt, Wald und Feldkulte, 2nd edition (Berlin, 1905); W. Golthar, Religion und Mythos der Germanen (Leipzig, 1909); W. Pastor, Altegermanische Monumentalkunst (Leipzig, 1910); H. Popp, Germanenkunst (Weimar, c. 1910).
17 For a full account of these celebrations, see the publication of the organizing committee (Festausschuß), Festbuch zur Neunzehnhundertjahrfeier der Schlacht im Teutoburger Walde (Detmold: Meyersche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1909).
antecedence attracted an ideologically-driven fringe. This can be represented by a book by Willibald Hentschel, published in 1904 and entitled *Mittgart: Ein Weg zur Erneuerung der Germanischen Rasse* (Leipzig, 1904). This was a völkisch appeal for renewal of the German race, involving a colony of 1,000 women and 100 men, hand-picked for their racial purity, who would produce children in idyllic, rural surroundings. Marriage would only last until the woman became pregnant, at which point the father would start a new relationship aimed at the further procreation of the pure Germanic
race, which would settle across the land in protected, village-like communities. The existing cities, in contrast, would be left to the enfeebled and to the stipulated enemies of völkisch purity, the Jewish population. The goal was ‘to progress from the theoretical veneration of the Germanen species to its systematic nurturing’. In 1903, Hentschel was a joint founder with the publicist Theodor Fritsch of the extreme anti-Semitic journal Der Hammer, and the two men were behind a shortlived attempt to establish a ‘deutsch-völkische’ garden city named Heimland (homeland), near Ost-Priegnitz in the Mark Brandenburg.

**Werdandi-Bund**

A more moderate variation on the theme of a revival of Germanentum was offered by the Werdandi-Bund, which alluded in its name both to the Norn Verdhandi and to the German adjective werdend, meaning nascent, emerging, or about to happen. The title thus sought to link the distant past of Norse mythology with the future of the new German state. The group was established on May 1907 by Friedrich Seeßelberg, Professor of Architecture at the Technische Hochschule Charlottenburg in Berlin. Seeßelberg was an acknowledged expert on the art and architecture of the Germanen, and in 1897 published *Die Frueh-Mittelalterliche Kunst der Germanischen Voelker* under the subtitle of the book noted that it referred in particular to Scandinavian architecture and that its arguments were grounded on ethnological and anthropological evidence. The tone is strongly nationalist – an explicit goal is to promote ‘(...) the battle against world-citizenship and Jacobinism’ – and the opening chapter insists that the spread of Christianity and of the concomitant Romanesque art encountered the strongest resistance in Scandinavia in general and Norway in particular. Here the art and architecture adhered to structural and decorative models derived from the Germanen: ‘For in Scandinavia the heathen-Germanic art, based on its ancient stock of forms, both local and oriental, was able to continue to regenerate itself over several centuries, at a point when the Romanesque had at least in part already begun to force the national art in Germany out of its old course.’


Illustrated by some 500 drawings, Seebelberg’s book became a standard work of reference and was drawn on extensively in popularising surveys of German art. Easy public access to inexpensive illustrated books, photographs, maps, postcards of monuments and relics played an important role in the mythologising process. This affirms Benedict Anderson’s thesis that print-capitalism, as a broad societal practice rather than as an elite project, made it possible to understand distant antecedents as metaphorical kinsfolk, as part of an imagined community of the nation.22 Two examples of popular histories of German art, both heavily influenced by Seebelberg’s work, were Hermann Knackfuss’s two-volume Deutsche Kunstgeschichte (1888) and Wilhelm Lübke’s Geschichte der deutschen Kunst: Von den frühesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart (1890). The nationalist passion that drove these publications becomes clear in the language used, and as paraphrased by Ehringhaus, these authors find ‘Germanic character’ in flat, linear ornamentation, which – in spite of its recourse to a unified language of form – also admits diversity and freedom. Similarly, wooden structures were seen to be Germanic thanks to their proximity to nature and to the forests. According to Lübke, ‘every German is by nature a carpenter’.23 In a similar vein, Knackfuss portrays the origin of the German race as an image, in Ehringhaus’s words, of sacral peace and calm, located ‘in the shadow of the mysteriously soughing, leafy canopy of the woods, under ancient trees (…)’.24 The destiny of the Germanen, however, was not simply to enjoy peace and calm under the Nordic forest canopy, and as Knackfuss explains: ‘It was not the destiny of this race to pursue its hunting and martial existence secluded in its woods. It overflowed its boundaries, destroyed the Roman Empire (…)’.25

Seebelberg’s magisterial volume also informed specific studies of the art and architecture of the Germanen, such as Germanenkunst, by Hermann Popp (1910) and Albrecht Haupt’s Die älteste Kunst insbesondere die Baukunst der Germanen: Von der Völkerwanderung bis zu Karl dem Großen (1909). In the absence of surviving Germanen structures, however, nothing was certain, and Haupt admits that: ‘It should be once again stressed here that, while we cannot say that the oldest wooden churches of the Germanen looked like the Norwegian ones from the 12th to 14th centuries, they must at least have been similar,

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23 See Ehringhaus, Germanenmythos, 46.
24 Hermann Knackfuss, Deutsche Kunstgeschichte (Bielefeld/Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1888), vol. 1, 1.
25 Knackfuss, Deutsche Kunstgeschichte, 5.
in that they were built entirely of wood – beams, planks, and boards, cut and decorated in a similar configuration, created in exactly the same way by the hand of the Germanic carpenter.\textsuperscript{26}

Seeßelberg’s engagement with the art and architecture of the \textit{Germanen}, however, was not merely archaeological, but intended as a catalyst that would launch a new and specifically nationalist aesthetic impulse among the broader population of the nation.

This was the message of the book he published in 1907 with the programmatic title \textit{Volk und Kunst}. The hero and guiding light of the manifesto-like text was Richard Wagner, and the cover illustration depicts a sword thrust into a tree: a clear reference to the first act of \textit{Die Walküre}, where Siegmund finds the magical sword left for him in the tree by his father, Wotan. Seeßelberg’s aim was to extend Wagner’s understanding of art as religion into the realms of politics and governance. In contrast to the 19th century, which Seeßelberg dubs the ‘century of reason’, the new century is ready for a patriotism grounded in the arts and culture. By this he meant ‘(...) the holy German art. Not an art for Teutonic obsessives; not something conditioned by irretrievable ideas derived from of a faded era of the past, but an art that is appropriate to the age and borne by a serious German spirit.’\textsuperscript{27}

Art was to replace religion and the new German art was to be the new religion. This he saw as a specifically German destiny: ‘It can be said in general, that only very few nations of the earth knew how to produce such an identity that joins the universe of nature and their spiritual essence as do the Germans – namely in the Mythischen.’\textsuperscript{28}

He regarded Wagner’s theatre at Bayreuth as the epicentre of the dramatic and musical arts, but argued for a ‘temple’ in which the religious power of the arts would become manifest. ‘This also needs a locational centre – a sanctuary that awakes and sustains interest in the artistic consciousness – a sacred site. I am thinking of a temple; and by this I mean not only a notional structure but a very tangible, old-Germanic temple, in which from time to time the appointed German artists would meet to offer profound wisdom, exhibit their recent work, and seek in every way to serve the cause of art. It should become a great festival, at which our nation would once again embrace its art – and the visual arts would unite with the skaldic, musical, and poetic arts.’\textsuperscript{29}
Exactly what an ‘old-Germanic’ temple would have looked like is, of course, a matter of some speculation, as no authentic structures had survived over the centuries. The extant relics were limited to pieces of jewellery, armour, metalwork, and stone carvings, but no building. According to Seeßelberg, the oldest Scandinavian churches were rectangular in plan, relatively long and narrow, with a small sanctuary at the eastern end, accessible via a narrow opening in the wall that divided the two sections. This was the model that he used in his reconstructive design of a Nordgermanisches Thinghaus, which he made in 1907. Between roughly the fifth and ninth centuries CE, Germanic law prevailed in Northern Germany and Scandinavia. A meeting of the legal court under this law, which was also an assembly of the people, was called a Thing, and the German terms for the site of the meeting were Thingplatz or Thingstätte. Seeßelberg’s Thinghaus is a large hall, with simple stone piers at floor level supporting lateral balconies, and also the massive wooden posts that carry a high pitched roof in which the principal trusses are triangulated: a very practical solution (Fig. 3). At one end, the sanctuary is structurally defined by giant stone pillars, and contains a massive, well over life-size figure of a warrior god (Fig. 4). Externally, the undressed stone walls are topped by a massive thatched roof and modest Nordic detailing – notably a dragon’s head on the gable end.

Idealism in the face of mechanistic realism and positivism was the goal of the Werdandi-Bund, which was seen as an antidote to the accelerating industrialisation of Germany. Its starting point was clearly stated in the group’s first yearbook, published in 1908, which was primarily to fight ‘the materialistic world view (…), which strives to reduce our life into a battle of everyone against everyone else for superficial advantages and pleasures, and recognises increasingly only those values that our shallow, times-table brains can convert into Marks and Pfennigs’. The appeal of this call to the intelligentsia was extraordinary, and dozens of distinguished figures from the world of literature and the arts joined the Werdandi-Bund, drawn from a broad spectrum of the German intelligentsia. From the extreme, anti-Semitic right came the historian Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, the Wagnerian devotee and race theorist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and ideologues like Friedrich Lienhard and Adolf Bartels. But more moderate voices were also attracted to the group: the writers Wilhelm

30 Werdandi, no. 1 (1908). The Werdandi-bund opposed ‘in erster Linie die materialistischen Weltauffassung (...), die unser Leben in einen Kampf aller gegen alle um äußere Vorteile und Genüsse aufzulösen strebt und immer mehr nur solche Werte kennt, die unsere seichten Einmaleinsgehirne in Mark und Pfennige umrechnen können’.
Fig. 3. Friedrich Seeßelberg, Reconstructive design for a Thinghaus, 1907, interior. Architekturmuseum, TU Berlin

Fig. 4. Friedrich Seeßelberg, Reconstructive design for a Thinghaus, 1907, section. Architekturmuseum, TU Berlin
Busch, Wilhelm Raabe, Detlev von Liliencron, Carl Hauptmann, Julius Hart, Richard Voß, and the Wagner biographer Hans von Wolzogen. The membership included composers like Engelbert Humperdinck, Hans Pfitzner, Hugo Wolf; the painters Hans Thoma, Max Klinger, and several members of the Worpswede group. In alignment with Seeßelberg’s own profession, architecture was also well represented by Richard Riemerschmid, Bruno Schmitz, Bruno Möhring, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, Emanuel von Seidl, and Friedrich von Thiersch.31

As stated in its manifesto, the aim of the organisation was straightforward: ‘to conserve and reinforce the particular qualities and spiritual strength of the German people through the means of art.’ Seeßelberg, as already noted, however, was both a devotee of the semi-mythological Germanen and also a modernist, who taught architectural design at a progressive school of architecture. As Rolf Parr has noted, the Werdandi-Bund squared this circle by pressing the artists to be simultaneously grounded in Germanen culture, while fearlessly pushing forward into the uncharted world of the future: ‘From the outset, the solution of this contradiction was a strategy that attempted to pair the “preserving old” (German) elements and the “innovative modern” (individual artistic) ones.’ In this way, the Werdandi-Bund located itself between the ultra-conservative forces of the anti-modernist and chauvinist Bund Heimatschutz and the progressive optimism of the Deutscher Werkbund, which was founded in 1907 to promote German design and industry. Indeed, many members of the Werdandi-Bund were also in the Bund Heimatschutz, while others – more progressive in spirit – were also in the Werkbund. All three initiatives, however, were united in their fundamental belief in a social-Darwinian struggle between nations for cultural and economic supremacy. Given the European political landscape at this time, and the consolidation of the Triple Entente (France, Russia, and Great Britain) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy), this was not entirely surprising.

Modernism and primitivism

It should also be noted that the emerging avant-garde impulses in the arts in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War invariably sought to justify and authenticate their radical
positions with reference to primitive and primeval antecedents. Thus in the German context the painters of the group *Die Brücke*, established in Dresden in 1905, looked to anthropological evidence and sculpture from the German colonies in Africa and Oceania in their search for models that were ‘genuine’ and ‘direct’. Similarly Franz Marc, in *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac*, published in 1912, dubbed the painters of the Blaue Reiter as ‘the savages’ (*Wilden*) of Germany, as primitives whose radical position in the arts was grounded in the primeval: ‘Mysticism awakes in the souls and with it primeval elements of art.’\(^{34}\) August Macke’s essay ‘Die Maske’ in the same volume, is illustrated with photographs of sculpture and reliefs from Easter Island, Cameroon, Mexico, and New Caledonia. The attempts of the Werdandi-Bund to reconcile and somehow unite a passionate interest in the ancient cultures of the *Germanen* with the desire to produce an avowedly modern art should be seen in this broader context.

Seelöbelberg’s own efforts as an architect to square this circle resulted in two exhibition pavilions for the Werdandi-Bund. The first, installed at the 1913 Leipzig Baufachausstellung (Building Industry Exhibition) was designed in collaboration with Max Taut, one of his assistants in the architecture faculty at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin. The pavilion was highly innovative, both structurally and architecturally, and made a radical statement about modern building technology. The tall columns that form the building frame and support the roof truss were formed from reinforced concrete. Their slenderness is particularly striking, and marks a very bold and confident use of a relatively new and untried building material (Fig. 5). The four external elevations were very plain, with the exposed structural frame as the only decoration. The frames also serve to articulate and decorate the space in the interior. In this basic formula of exposed structural frame and simple elevations, the Leipzig Pavilion can be seen as a distant relation, but nevertheless a relation, of Seelöbelberg’s ‘*Thinghaus*’. Both are strongly-articulated enclosures that propose aesthetic and polemical positions, and the two designs employ equivalent technologies, one in timber and the other in reinforced concrete. The lingering memory of victories of the *Germanen* against foreign foes and intruders would also have been stirred by the very siting of the Baufachausstellung, which was set on an axis that extended to the gigantic *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (Monument to the Battle of the Nations) in Leipzig.

\(^{34}\) Franz Marc ‘*Die “Wilden” Deutschland*’, *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* (Munich: Piper, 1912), 5, 7. ‘Wir sind diese “Wilden” in Deutschland. (...) Die Mystik erwachte in den Seelen und mit ihr uralte Elemente der Kunst.’
to the Battle of the Nations), built to the design of Bruno Schmitz and inaugurated on 13 October 1913 to commemorate the defeat of the Napoleonic army in 1813.

This retrospective and nationalistic reading, although supportable, only represents one side of the story, however, as Seeßelberg and the Werdandi-Bund also had their eyes firmly fixed on the future. As the official account of the Leipzig exhibition noted: ‘The Werdandi-Bund (...) adheres to the principle that every building idea must, above all, be derived from the demands of
construction and function, so that while avoiding any unnecessary expense, the fulfillment of these demands automatically satisfies the aesthetic requirements.\(^3\) This was to become the recurring mantra of architectural modernism as it gained traction in the 1920s. Under the Werdandi-Bund flag, Seeßelberg published a book that appeared in five editions between 1900 and 1914, in which he argued in favour of the flat roof, thus contradicting the conservative, *Heimatkunst* position, which insisted that the pitched roof was the only truly ‘German’ option.\(^3\) This openness to technologically-progressive design also found an expression in the interior of the Werdandi-Bund Pavilion in Leipzig, where the main concrete structural frames also served to form the partitions between the display booths, which featured modern, synthetic building materials, such as face bricks, cast cement stone, bitumen roofing felt, and corrugated sheet iron. These, it was argued, would be aesthetically acceptable in the traditional landscape. The interior display also featured what the official report described as ‘a rich collection of pictures of extremely worthwhile new building – particularly built in brick – in the spirit of the 20th century’.\(^3\) Seeßelberg and Max Taut went on to design a similarly striking exhibition pavilion for Werdandi-Bund, which was installed at the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö, Sweden, in 1914. Taut became one of the leading modernist architects in Germany in the 1920s and up until his death in 1967.

**Radical conservative architecture in the Weimar Republic**

While the Werdandi-Bund foundered with the outbreak of the First World War, the Bund Heimatschutz prospered. Rebranded in 1914 as the Deutscher Bund Heimatschutz, by 1916 it functioned as an umbrella organisation to some 250 affiliated groups. In the years of the Weimar Republic the architectural debate in Germany became a battleground between the conservatives in the Heimatschutz lobby and the modernists who coalesced around the Ring group in Berlin. The symbolic epicentre of this struggle was the roof: pitched and Germanic for the former, flat for the latter. The flat roof, which Seeßelberg had advocated in 1912, became identified by right-wing conservatives such as Paul Schultze-Naumburg – a one-time member of the Werdandi-Bund and founder member of the Bund Heimatschutz – as the despised...
symbol of a flawed modernism, which was also identified with *Kulturbolschewismus* (cultural Bolshevism). Writing in 1922, he despair ed at ‘(...) the deplorable disappearance of love for the native land, the unpardonable spread of an international democraticism, that no longer bonds with the soil’. The debate over the flat versus pitched roof climaxed in 1927, when the modernist wing built the Weissenhof Estate at Stuttgart, and Schultze-Naumburg hit back with his polemic *Flaches oder geneigtes Dach* (Flat or pitched roof), in which he argued that the form of the house was linked to racial origin: ‘Thus every people, in as far as it is in some way racially homogeneous or derives its physiognomy from a particularly creative race, knows that its houses have a particular physiognomy.’ Clearly, the Nordic *Germanen* were the ‘particularly creative race’ in question.

More substantially, the conservative lobby built a rival estate at the Kochenhof in Stuttgart in 1933. It was subsidised by the timber industry and the design guidelines, drawn up by the architect Paul Schmitthenner, specified that all the buildings be constructed from wood, with pitched roofs throughout, including outhouses. In this context, the flat roof was a metaphor for race and specifically for non-Germanness, and the proposition that the pitched roof was linked to blood and race sits easily with Schultze-Naumburg’s other publications on race and art, such as *Rassengebundene Kunst* (Art determined by race), *Kunst aus Blut und Boden* (Art from blood and soil), both published in 1934, and *Nordische Schönheit: Ihr Wunschbild im Leben und in der Kunst* (Nordic beauty: Its ideal in life and art, 1937). Under the National Socialists, art was intended to serve ideology, as Schultze-Naumburg wrote in *Rassengebundene Kunst*: ‘No other concept is so influential for the entire world view of the new state as earth and soil. Only art can make visible to us the racial target.’

**National Socialism and the Germanen**

An essay on cultural mythologies around 1900 is not the occasion for a detailed study of the impact on National Socialist politics of the cultural conservatism that flourished at the start of the century, nor for an exegesis on the revival of occultism, ‘Wotanism’, and the like. Similarly, it is not a vehicle for the investigation of the unhealthily close relationship between the National Socialist party and many professional German archaeologists,
who laboured to produce proof of the racial superiority of the Germanic races and offered pseudo-racial justifications for the aggressive expansionism of the Third Reich. The thesis that the Urheimat (original home) of the Indo-Europeans was not, in fact, Asia or the southern parts of eastern Europe, but was actually in the northern Europe of the Germanen was readily adopted by the ideologues of National Socialism. It reappears, for example, in the first chapter of Alfred Rosenberg’s Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts, entitled ‘Rasse und Rassenseele’, which describes how the ‘world’ was ‘colonised’ by the Germanic tribes that had migrated eastwards to Persia and India.

An excursus on the architectural impact of neo-Germanism, however, can be justified as evidence of the lasting power of this impulse. A very direct example of the recycling and reinvigoration of the 19th-century Germanen cult can be seen in a postcard from the National Socialist period, showing two members of the Hitler Youth saluting the Hermannsdenkmal (Fig. 6). The text on the card reads: ‘Where the leader of the Germanen once freed the German land from the enemy, Hitler’s victory flag now waves mightily in the new era.’ The Thinghaus was also revived both as a subject...

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43 See, for example, the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Focke-Museum, Bremen, in 2013: Sandra Geringer, Frauke von der Haarm, Utta Halle, and others, Graben für Germanien: Archäologie unterm Hakenkreuz (Stuttgart: Theiss Verlag, 2013).


45 ‘Wo einst der Führer der Germanen/Deutsches Land vom Feind befreit/Wehen Hitlers Siegesfahnen in die neue Zeit.’
Fig. 7. Reconstruction drawing of a Germaniche Kulthalle, in Hermann Wille, *Germanische Gotteshäuser zwischen Weser und Ems*, 1933

Fig. 8. Hans Mallon Monument, Rügen, in *Kriegsgräberfürsorge: Mitteilungen und Berichte aus dem Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, February 1939
of pseudo-scholarly interest and as a design model. In 1933, the architect Hermann Wille published *Germanische Gotteshäuser zwischen Weser und Ems* (Leipzig), with a high-pitched *Thinghaus* on the cover and reconstruction drawings of Germanic building types (Fig. 7).46 The opening sentence reads: ‘The aim of this book is to awaken and encourage love of the native land [*Heimat*] and pride in Nordic ethnicity. (...) We must look back to the journey that our fathers have made from primordial times to the present. We must attempt to immerse ourselves in the innermost essence, in the soul of our race, in the Germanness to which we are born.’47 Wille was also involved in the design of the *Hans-Mallon-Ehrenmal* (Hans Mallon Monument) on the island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea (Fig. 8). Hans Mallon was a member of the Hitler Youth, who died in September 1931 as the result of a fight with left-wing sympathisers. The monument was intentionally designed ‘with reference to primeval German constructional methods’.48 The temple itself was a timber-frame structure with a high-pitched thatched roof. On the inside, Hans Mallon’s gravestone was set under a massive stone altar, in front of which was set a vault containing earth from the battlefields of the First World War. The historian Saul Friedlander has tellingly written about the confluence in National Socialist aesthetics of kitsch and death: ‘Kitsch is a debased form of myth, but nevertheless draws from the mythic substance – a part of its emotional impact – the death of a hero; the eternal march, the twilight of the gods; myth is a footprint, an echo of lost worlds, haunting an imagination invaded by excessive rationality and thus becoming the crystallisation point for the thrusts of the archaic and the irrational.’49 The *Hans Mallon Monument* is a perfect example of Friedlander’s thesis.

**Thingstätte**

The initial plans for the monument on Rügen by the architect Robert Tischler, a leading figure in the German War Graves Commission, also included a *Thingstätte*. This was an open-air amphitheatre designed to host gatherings of the party faithful, that referred back in its nomenclature to the ancient Germanic judicial and social gathering, the *Thing*. Twelve hundred *Thingplätze* were planned by the National Socialists, and specifically by Joseph Goebbels’ Propaganda Ministry, ranging in scale from the modest enterprise on Rügen to a gigantic but unbuilt structure in the coal-mining

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48 See Christian Fuhrmeister, ‘Völkische Memorialarchitektur im Nationalsozialismus: Herman Wille’s *Germanische Gotteshäuser* (1933) und das Han-Mallon-Ehrenmal auf Rügen (1937)’, in Ulf F. Ickerodt and Fred Mahler (eds.), *Archäologie und völkisches Gedankengut: Zum Umgang mit dem eigenen Erbe* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 115–25, this quote 119. ‘(...) in Anlehnung an uralte deutsche Bauweise’. I am very grateful to Christian Fuhrmeister for generously sharing with me his material on this topic.
town of Gelsenkirchen, intended for an audience of 200,000. Only 45 were built, however, before the party’s interest in the project faded after 1937, and vanished with the outbreak of war in 1939.50 The most famous was the *Dietrich-Eckart-Bühne* (Dietrich Eckart stage), which was constructed in 1936 for the Olympic Games in Berlin. Dietrich Eckart was a poet and journalist, and also the spiritual father of the party. He was Hitler’s mentor and model in the early 1920s, and the first editor of the party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*.51 Werner March, the architect of the *Dietrich-Eckart-Bühne* and the neighbouring Olympic stadium, described the theatre as a site for ‘sacred musical drama and nationalistic celebrations’.52 In July 1936, 1,200 working men took part in a performance there of Eberhard Wolfgang Möller’s *Frankenburger Würfelspiel*, commissioned by Josef Goebbels and

performed as part of the artistic programme of the Olympics. It was a retelling of a tale dating back to 1626 and the outbreak of the Peasant’s War in Upper Austria.

Another completed, but more historically burdened Thingstätte was built beside a monument to the Freikorps on the Annaberg Mountain (now Góra Świętej Anny, Poland). The Freikorps was made up of those elements of the defeated army who took up arms in 1918 and 1919 against the socialist uprising in Germany. The circular stone monument was set on a hill above a limestone rock face, with the Thingstätte below (Fig. 9). The architectural precedent was the Tannenberg Memorial, completed in 1927 to honour the German soldiers who had fallen at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914 and also at a previous battle on the same site in 1410. The leader of the design team was Robert Tischler and, as at the Hans Mallon Monument on Rügen, the graves of the heroes

Fig. 10. Freikorps Monument on the Annaberg, interior, in Die Kunst im Dritten Reich, March 1939
were composed of massive, altar-like stone blocks, set in arched niches around the perimeter of the domed space (Fig. 10). At the centre of the circle, a sculpture of a warrior stirring from his sleep symbolised the awakening of the German nation under National Socialism. The ashlar masonry was simple in the extreme, echoing the primevality of the Kulthaus of the Germanen in spirit, if not in form. As described in the official art journal Die Kunst im Dritten Reich: ‘After the collapse of 1918, Upper Silesia was the site of heavy fighting. The Freikorps and self-defence units defended the borderlands against the enemy advancing from the east and the traitors in our own land. In the memorial on the Annaberg, 51 Freikorps fighters who fell in storming this hill in 1921, have found their final peace.’

**Conclusion**

It would be reassuring to think that myth-making histories of the Germanen had expired with National Socialism, but this is clearly not the case. While radical voices like that of the painter Anselm Kiefer return repeatedly and obsessively to the 19th-century portrayals of Germanen cultural identity in order to critique the horrors of National Socialism, the neo-Fascists in Germany and Scandinavia revisit them with approval. Danger still lurks in the dark northern forests.

**Iain Boyd Whyte** is Professor of Architectural History at the University of Edinburgh. He has written extensively on architectural modernism in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, and on post-1945 urbanism. Among his more recent books are *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, co-edited with Roald Hoffmann, Nobel Prize laureate for Chemistry in 1981); and *Metropolis Berlin: 1880–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Beyond architecture, he has written on Anglo-German literary relations, aesthetics, and 20th-century art history. He has served as a Trustee of the National Galleries of Scotland, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a former chair of RIHA, the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art. In 2015–16 he was Samuel H. Kress Professor at the Centre for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

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From Nostalgia to Where…?
National Romanticism, Esotericism, and the ‘Golden Age of Finnish Art’

Marja Lahelma

In Finnish art history, the period encompassing the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century up until the outbreak of the First World War has come to be known as the ‘Golden Age of Finnish art’. This article looks into the background of this notion, connecting it with a sense of nostalgic longing. Once the fantastical nature of this concept has been identified, it is possible to recognise the building blocks on which it has been founded. We can then also become more aware of the various cultural dimensions and ideological currents that have been ‘abjected’ in the process of constructing the narrative of ‘National Romantic’ art. I will explore these issues first on a more general level and then through two case studies, the first of which focuses on the myth of Akseli Gallen-Kallela (Axel Gallén, 1865–1931) as a national hero and patriotic-minded artist, while the second one explores a national monument, the Lönnrot Memorial (1902) by Emil Wikström (1864–1942). In Finnish art historiography both artists have been placed within the category of National Romanticism, which has encouraged interpretations that emphasise nationalistic content. However, my analysis will focus on esotericism, which constitutes a marginalised cultural dimension in the art of the ‘Golden Age’. In Finnish art history, the nationalistic theme has typically been separated from a more internationally oriented Symbolist current, and esotericism has been connected with the latter.1 The aim of this article is to demonstrate that nationalism and esotericism were, in fact, deeply intertwined in the artistic discourses of the period. Both contain an element of nostalgia that manifests itself as a feeling

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1 See, for instance, Markku Valkonen, ‘Hedelmät kypsyvät’, in Eija Kämäräinen and Sirpa Westerholm (eds.), Suomen ja maailman taide 3: Kultakausi (Porvoo: WSOY, 1984), 6–35. A similar tendency continues to be reflected in the Pinx-series, which otherwise sought an outlook that was more inclusive and multidimensional than those that emerge in previous general accounts of Finnish art history. The editor in chief, Helena Sederholm, writes in the introduction to part one that the five parts of the series will take the reader from the ‘grand narratives’ connected to the building of a national identity to an individualist and pluralist contemporary art. Helena Sederholm, ‘Esipuhe’, in Helena Sederholm (ed.), Pinx: maalaustaidesa Suomessa (Espoo: Weilin + Göös, 2004), 5.
of discontent with modernity and a longing for a more authentic existence that may be bound up with the past but also with a utopian future.

The approach that I am following is based on the understanding that, in order to create a more multidimensional view of the past that makes room for the complexity of historical works of art, it is necessary to assess even those aspects of history that make us uncomfortable and to take seriously the kind of cultural phenomena that from our intellectual point of view might seem irrational, eccentric, or even immoral. In the quest to broaden the ideological framework of Finnish art history, I am following Michael Ann Holly’s insight and calling for a sense of awe and astonishment, and of curiosity as a driving force behind historical approaches to works of art.\(^2\) It seems that the mythologised notions embedded within the established art-historical narratives have also made us partly blind to the incredible richness of meaning contained in works of art.

The reason that I have chosen esotericism as the main focus for exploration is that it constitutes one of the most obviously rejected fields in Western culture in general, and within the nostalgically motivated National Romantic historiography of Finnish art in particular. It must be pointed out that nationalism, which is a complex and multifaceted conception with entire fields of study centred on it, is here approached within the framework of National Romanticism. This definition emphasises its function as a cultural rather than a political concept. The notion of National Romanticism (or the partly synonymous Romantic Nationalism) is defined a little differently in various contexts. As a broader European literary and cultural phenomenon it usually refers to an earlier stage, beginning at the end of the 18th century, but as an artistic current in Finland, National Romanticism (kansallisromantiikka) is most typically employed in the context of the late 19th and early 20th century, referring to both fine art and architecture.\(^3\) It is, as I will argue, one of the most central ideological edifices that has supported a unified vision of social harmony and progress. It is a notion that, on the one hand, has had the effect of accentuating political dimensions of art. Yet, at the same time, it has served to neutralise the potentially dangerous elements inherent in the combination of nostalgia and politics.

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Of course, Finnish art history has never spoken with just one voice. Ever since its beginnings as an academic field it has been motivated by different ideologies and has held a variety of critical perspectives. When it comes to the subject of the present article, the pioneering scholarship on the Symbolist current in Finnish art by Salme Sarajas-Korte holds a central place. Sarajas-Korte approached Finnish Symbolism as part of the international phenomenon and paid attention to the interconnectedness of national and international aspirations. Nina Kokkinen’s recently published doctoral dissertation, which places Gallen-Kallela, Pekka Halonen and Hugo Simberg’s art within an esoteric context, has provided a highly significant new opening for the kind of research that I am also promoting here. Even though Kokkinen’s focus is elsewhere and she refers to nationalism only in passing, her research clearly demonstrates that nationalism and esotericism are deeply intertwined and that it can be very fruitful to focus on the esoteric dimension of works previously categorised as National Romantic. Other critical voices that have gnawed at the foundations of the monolithic construction of Finnish art have been heard over the years, but one incredibly persistent story in the popular consciousness has been that of ‘little Finland’, which fought its way to independence with the help of patriotic-minded artists. This has both directed our attention towards phenomena that best fit within the nationalist framework, and also encouraged us to look for interpretations that conform to these preconceptions.

**Nostalgia for a lost Golden Age**

Nostalgic longing for an idealised and mythologised past was a characteristic feature of late 19th-century art and culture. Nostalgia is intertwined with both the modern idea of progress and the anti-modern notion of a revival of national pasts and vernacular
traditions, and it accompanied the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation. Although literally referring to homesickness, nostalgia is here understood as a longing for a lost time rather than a place. As Svetlana Boym has noted, nostalgia in a broader sense denotes a rejection of the modern idea of time as history and progress. It is about turning history into private or collective mythology.\(^8\)

In the Finnish context, the dream of a mythical past was embodied in \textit{The Kalevala}, the so-called ‘national epic’ published as a literary work composed by Elias Lönnrot (1802–84) in the first half of the 19th century but based on oral traditions believed to be of very ancient origin. Towards the end of the century, artists dissatisfied with the modern world became fascinated with the myths and legends that reflected an earlier, more authentic existence. They embarked on travels to the Karelian forests and villages where the main corpus of the poems for \textit{The Kalevala} had been collected and where the last remnants of Kalevalan culture were believed still to survive. The allegory of a lost paradise that could be revisited held the promise of both personal and national artistic redemption.\(^9\) However, the motivation behind this article has been the realisation that the attitude of nostalgia is not only a historical phenomenon, but also constitutes an ideological structure embedded within the narratives of art history. It appears that many of the scholars who have contributed to the established view of the ‘Golden Age of Finnish art’ have also been infected with nostalgia.

Hence, I am using the notion of nostalgia here as a conceptual tool with which to unravel some of the mythical constructions that have guided both scholarly approaches and popular views on the genesis of modern art in Finland from the late 19th century onwards. The acknowledgment of this element of nostalgia within the historical narrative creates an opening that makes room for alternative interpretations. Boym describes nostalgia as ‘a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed’.\(^10\) Nostalgic longing has a utopian dimension that connects it with both the past and the future; it projects a fantasy of a past that never was into a future that might still be. It is ‘a sentiment of loss and displacement’, but at the same time it also reflects ‘a romance with one’s own fantasy’.\(^11\) Nostalgia, which originated as a medical diagnosis, is closely connected to the psychological

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\(^{9}\) Sawchuk, ‘Introduction to Part Three: Modernity, Nostalgia, and the Standardization of Time’.

\(^{10}\) Boym, \textit{The Future of Nostalgia}, xii.

\(^{11}\) Boym, \textit{The Future of Nostalgia}; See also Wilson, \textit{Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning}, 27. Wilson points out that while there is no antonym for nostalgia as such, we might consider ‘dystopia’ as a term to use, even when referring to the past as ‘a hypothetical, imaginary place or state of total misery’.
Boym notes that the main difference between melancholia and nostalgia is that the former is mainly confined to individual consciousness while the latter is about the relationship between personal and collective memory. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 13.


Okkonen, ‘Kansallisten piirteiden ilmeneminen kuvaamataitees­samme’, 265.


state of melancholia – and as Holly has so persuasively shown, the task of the art historian is inherently melancholic. The objects of our interest, the material remnants of the past, stand before us, but their contexts, the ‘noisy and busy’ worlds from which they come, have long since disappeared. In the persistent effort to construct an ever-growing corpus of visual and cultural knowledge, the scholar of art history strives for detached objectivity. Yet something more is at work. The narratives of art history, like any written histories, are ‘narratives of desire, full of latent and manifest needs that exceed the professional mandate to find out what happened and when’.14

The notion of the ‘Golden Age of Finnish art’ quite perfectly captures a sense of nostalgia and melancholic longing, and it is a notion that has come to be so well-established that its origins have rarely been pondered and its full implications have never been addressed. One of the very first (if not the first) instances of the usage of this term in connection to Finnish art around 1900 originates from the highly influential art historian Onni Okkonen (1886–1962), who in 1927 wrote that, despite all the political disputes at the end of the 19th century, artists had a shared patriotic mission that had a beneficial effect on all artistic production. He therefore suggested that this period should be labelled as the first ‘Golden Age’ of Finnish national art. Okkonen’s treatment of the term was unmistakably nostalgic and had a strong patriotic motivation. He was trying to encourage contemporary artists to create a new Golden Age. Since Okkonen introduced this idea, similar constructions have been repeated over and over again by Okkonen himself, as well as by many other scholars of Finnish art history. Markku Valkonen, for instance, has defined the ‘Golden Age’ as a poetic rather than as a strictly art-historical notion. Like Okkonen, he describes the late 19th century as an era characterised by an active and conscious effort to establish a nationally significant artistic culture. He also separates nationalistically motivated art from the Symbolist direction, which was defined as marginal, individual, and esoteric.

In addition to these art-historical debates, recent approaches in social and cultural history have emphasised that the processes that created the ‘identities’ of modern nation states were much more complex than the national myth-builders...
have been willing to admit. The 19th-century idea of ‘Volk’, the people, for instance, embraced a general reaction to modernity, and it had spiritual connotations that linked it with notions of individuality and creativity, rather than with the idea of a nation as a political entity – although, of course, the notion of Volk later became a foundation for more political aspirations. Both Völkisch ideologies and esoteric notions about the spiritual development of mankind were fuelled by racial theorisations of human evolution that found support in Darwin’s publications.

Late 19th-century culture in Finland and elsewhere in Northern Europe, was fuelled by an idealised notion of the North that carried associations of purity, authenticity, and vitality. It was reflected in (pseudo-)scientific theorisations of the ‘Nordic race’, as well as in the popular esoteric notion of different world periods, which identified the Nordic region as a site of spiritual renewal. The artist Väinö Blomstedt, who belonged to both Gallen-Kallela and Wikström’s circles of friends, reflected on this issue in a very illustrative manner in a letter sent home from Paris in 1894. Blomstedt wrote about a new era that was about to begin that would succeed the current period of decadence. This, according to him, follows from the cyclical law that is present in everything. Decadence is equated with materialism and with Naturalism as an artistic direction, and the Nordic region is identified as the site of spiritual renewal, indicating that humanity will once again achieve knowledge of the mysteries of nature. Blomstedt is echoing ideas that were widespread in late 19th-century European culture. The prevalent notion that civilisation had come to an end, that it had reached a point of decadence and degeneration, gave birth to the idea that a Northern influence had the potential to invigorate and revitalise the cultural ambience of Europe.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the idea of national unification embedded within the National Romantic paradigm never extended to certain marginalised groups, such as the Sámi or Roma people. The treatment of these groups presents the most blatant cases of historical abuse in the Nordic context, but there were also more subtle mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, such as those separating different religious or linguistic groups, which could be articulated in terms of ‘racial’ as well as cultural difference. In addition, the scholarship presented
by Joep Leerssen and Anne-Marie Thiesse, among others, has emphasised the transnationality of the phenomena of national cultural revivals and the historical construction of national identities. Yet, despite these kinds of new openings, which have both problematised the historical phenomena related to modernism and tied Finland more closely with the international scene and with the colonial histories of Europe, there has been a reluctance in the art-historical field to let go of the mythical constructions that have maintained the illusion of social harmony and unity.

**Unravelling a national icon: Akseli Gallen-Kallela**

After this introductory section analysing the element of nostalgia within art-historical narratives, it is now time to move on to the first case study that assesses the myth of Akseli Gallen-Kallela as a national hero and a patriotic-minded artist. Focusing on some of the building blocks of this myth, the aim is to show how a critical attitude can reveal hidden ideologies and contribute towards interpretations that diverge from the established narrative, making room for the complexity of Gallen-Kallela’s artistic production. I will, moreover, look briefly into the possibilities of reading his *Kalevala*-themed art from a more esoterically informed perspective.

In 1891, the first issue of the *Nuori Suomi* (Young Finland) album appeared as a supplement to the Finnish language newspaper *Päivälehti*. The critic Kasimir Leino (Kasimir Agathon Lönnbohm), one of the most central figures among the group of artists, writers, and intellectuals who gathered around the publication, wrote about an artistic awakening that indicated the creation of a truly Finnish art, rooted in the unspoilt soil of the homeland. As a central representative of this new artistic current he mentioned Gallen-Kallela, who in that same year had his first big breakthrough with the painting *Aino Myth* (1891) that depicted a legend from *The Kalevala*. The Young Finland group with its patriotic mission has gained an iconic status in Finnish cultural history, and it has often been perceived as a unanimous and cohesive brotherhood. However, in more critical scholarship this group emerges as a rather discordant conglomeration of individuals who generally believed in the same cause but were...
not necessarily in agreement about the finer details. Moreover, only a relatively small number of artists (mostly men) can be counted as members of the Young Finland group. Gallen-Kallela, in fact, was never among its most central adherents.27

Nevertheless, the early reception of Gallen-Kallela’s art set the tone for later interpretations and, already during his lifetime, writers of Finnish art history began pigeonholing him into the role of a national hero. In the beginning of the 20th century, in 1904, the writer and publisher Wentzel Hagelstam, a personal acquaintance of the artist, published a short study of Gallen-Kallela’s art in which he described him as ‘a pioneer of Finnish art, who captured the innately national undercurrents of Finnish culture with greater originality and intensity than any other Finnish artist’.28 A few years later came Johannes Öhquist’s comprehensive overview of the history of Finnish art (1912), which contained a separate chapter on Gallen-Kallela. Notably, apart from the national hero Gallen-Kallela and the most internationally acclaimed artist of the period, Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905), all other late 19th- and early 20th-century artists were grouped together under a chapter on contemporary art. Gallen-Kallela and Edelfelt were thus lifted above the rest of the art world and presented as heroic artists.

Öhquist is a controversial and very much under-researched figure in Finnish cultural history. His case deserves to be examined a little further because it is connected to the central themes of this article in a fascinating and somewhat alarming manner. Öhquist’s importance for establishing Gallen-Kallela’s reputation cannot be denied, but the specific content of his approach has been surpassed by later myth-builders – most importantly by Okkonen, whose substantial biography of the artist was published after the Second World War in 1949. Okkonen’s work solidified the image of Gallen-Kallela as a patriotic artist who actively and consciously contributed towards the creation of a Finnish national identity.29

Öhquist was a prolific and influential art critic in the 1890s and the early 20th century, as well as a personal friend of many Finnish artists, including Gallen-Kallela. He was a cosmopolitan personality, born in Ingria, the area around the city of Saint Petersburg in Russia, formerly a province of Sweden, where a large group of people from present-day Finland had emigrated in the 17th century. His mother came from a German background, and German was hence his native language, but he also spoke...
perfect Swedish and Russian, as well as some Finnish. In addition to his role as an art historian and critic, Öhquist was also a lecturer in German, a public officer, and an aspiring poet. Due to his knowledge of German, he had a significant role in promoting Finnish art in Germany. In the 1890s, he introduced the Symbolist current to Finnish audiences in a series of unusually well-informed articles. Later, however, he became infamous for his role as a propagandist of National Socialism. His book on the Third Reich, published in 1938, was an instant and international success. Öhquist’s radicalisation did not, however, take place until around the mid-1930s. In 1933, when Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany, Öhquist was still very much opposed to National Socialism, describing it as an ‘ominous phenomenon’, but a couple of years later he had completely changed his mind. He had come to believe that National Socialism contained a unique and unprecedented potential for determining the fate of a nation, and that its effects should not be confined to the German people alone. More research would be needed to grasp fully how the democratic and liberal thoughts that Öhquist apparently shared with many of his artistic acquaintances around the turn of the century transformed into uncritical Nazi support in the 1930s and 1940s. However, he was by no means the only important figure in the Finnish art world around the turn of the 20th century who later came to develop sympathies towards the far Right.

Öhquist’s description of Gallen-Kallela in 1912 is quite interesting and it gives some insight into his broader intellectual and ideological pursuits around that time. Indeed, there is nothing there that suggests any kind of politically radicalised nationalism. Like many of his contemporaries, he was affected by fashionable theories of racial origins, but it should be emphasised that racial theories were at the time considered to be perfectly acceptable from a scientific perspective and represented mainstream ideologies of the period. There was a well-established belief that the Finnish-speaking population living within the borders of present-day Finland belonged to an Oriental race, while the Swedish-speaking inhabitants of coastal areas were Germanic. According to Öhquist, Edelfelt was a pure German whose art can be described as national in the outward, patriotic sense. Gallen-Kallela, on the other hand, belonged to the other racial category;
the one that ‘leans towards Asia, which in the procession of humanity is still several positions closer to the origin than Europeans, who are over-saturated with historical traditions’. Öhquist described Gallen-Kallela and Edelfelt as opposites in almost every way: Edelfelt was ‘cold and objective’, while Gallen-Kallela was a ‘Romantic’, always searching for the ‘inner essence’ of things.

Öhquist’s view of Gallen-Kallela as an artist who was in some racially determined manner connected to the Finnish soul is certainly mystified, but unlike Okkonen, Öhquist did not see Gallen-Kallela as a patriotic or political artist. Rather, he was someone who was in touch with both the ancient roots of humanity and the most recent scientific discoveries. He compared Gallen-Kallela to August Strindberg, an author and artist known to have both scientific and esoteric interests, in that, for Gallen-Kallela, astrology and alchemy meant more than humbug not because he did not understand modern astronomy or chemistry, but because he had the capacity to use his instinct and intuition to see beyond the visible world. In the light of more recent approaches to Gallen-Kallela’s art that have emphasised the international attitude of the artist and the multiple layers of meaning contained in his finest artistic achievements, Öhquist’s views appear in some ways quite insightful. They also correspond to the artist’s own claims that he was not at all political in nature, but rather ‘a hermit of the backwoods’.

Gallen-Kallela was among the young artists in the beginning of the 1890s, who set out on an expedition into the wildernesses of Eastern Finland and onwards to Russian Karelia, but there is no need to assume an overtly patriotic motivation behind his enthusiasm for the ancient myths of The Kalevala. Rather, it can be seen as part of a universal quest for origins that was common among his contemporaries all over Europe. The world of Finnish folklore represented the complete opposite of the modern Parisian decadence that he had encountered during his student years. Undoubtedly, in the beginning he was fuelled by a nationally motivated ethnographic interest. He assembled an extensive collection of material that he used as a source of inspiration and as ethnographic props for creating an effect of ‘authenticity’ in his Kalevala-themed works. But tellingly, he never returned to Russian Karelia after his first trip.

34 Johannes Öhquist, Suomen taiteen historia (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Kirja, 1912), 406–407.
35 Öhquist, Suomen taiteen historia, 372–73.
36 Öhquist, Suomen taiteen historia, 404–05.
37 See, in particular, the articles in Fill Your Soul! Paths of Research into the Art of Akseli Gallen-Kallela (Espoo: Gallen-Kallela Museum, 2011).
and over the years his fictive Kalevalian world drifted further away from reality, as he gradually refined his vision to match his ideals.39

Gallen-Kallela’s relationship with Karelian culture can be described in Boym’s terms as ‘a romance with one’s own fantasy’.40 From a Finnish perspective, the so-called ‘Karelianist’ movement tends to be viewed as an inherently national effort, but the background to the phenomenon is more complex – as is also evidenced by the fact that Gallen-Kallela’s thirst for exoticism and cultural authenticity later drove him to the remotest outposts of British East Africa (present-day Kenya) and New Mexico.41 He explained that in Africa he felt truly connected with the great wilderness, which was an experience he no longer believed to be possible in the commercially exploited forests of his homeland. Deep in the heartlands of Africa he hoped to encounter the origin of all mankind, the true ‘Kalevalian people’ who had become extinct in the Finnish wilderness.42

Based on inspiration drawn from his Karelian travels, Gallen-Kallela gradually developed a visual rendition of The Kalevala that has become so deeply etched in the popular imagination as to be deemed the ‘true’ image of authentic Kalevalian reality. This idea has become firmly entrenched in Finnish culture, even though Gallen-Kallela soon abandoned the Naturalism of his early Kalevalian motifs in favour of a growing degree of stylisation influenced by international Symbolism, which accentuated not the national, but the universal aspects of Kalevalian mythology.43 Already in the 1960s, Sarajas-Korte suggested that Gallen-Kallela’s Kalevala-themed paintings should not be regarded as a separate thematic field within his production, which in the 1890s had become intensely engaged with Symbolism and the religious and esoteric ideas connected with this artistic current.44 It has become quite clear within the context of recent research that with his esoteric interests Gallen-Kallela was not an exception, but rather a typical representative of his generation of artists. His work should not be interpreted in the context of any particular belief system – he was interested in Theosophy, for instance, but he was not a devoted Theosophist. Kokkinen describes him as a ‘seeker’ who moved freely between different ideologies without ever committing to any of them but always searching for his

40 Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, xii.
43 Lahelma, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, 27–34.
own truth. Towards the end of his life he summarised this searching attitude in the following way:

_Curiosity has often driven me, like many others, to seek an answer, or a personal conviction, as to what lies on the other side, after death. As a young man I read as many Swedish translations of Swedenborg as I could lay my hands on, and I even waded through the murky marshes of Theosophy, but Madame Blavatsky was revealed to me early on. I am also well-versed in the teachings of our own church, but no road has taken me far enough to build a lasting personal conviction as regards the ultimate truth._

Gallen-Kallela understood his creative role in a manner that was very similar to Öhquist’s description of him as a subjective and intuitive artist. For him, the true artist was a visionary who could see beyond the everyday plane of reality. He believed that he could develop his senses like an ancient sage by achieving a deep mystical connection with Finnish nature. This was also in line with the Theosophical teachings of Helena Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, whom Gallen-Kallela mentioned in the quote cited above. Gallen-Kallela’s words are a little ambiguous in regard to how he feels about Blavatsky, but it seems clear enough that in the 1890s he had a strong interest in Theosophy. There are many parallels in his writings from the period and those of Blavatsky and other Theosophists. Blavatsky, for instance, encouraged the study of the mysteries of nature, which, according to her, corresponded to the latent spiritual powers of man.

Moreover, like the Theosophists, Gallen-Kallela believed that the mythical tradition of _The Kalevala_ contained ancient sacred wisdom, and it was a notion that was probably fuelled by esoteric interpretations. The poet and Theosophist William Butler Yeats, for instance, thought the poems of _The Kalevala_ to reflect a tradition that was even more ancient and less occupied with the material world than Scandinavian or Celtic mythology. Blavatsky, likewise, appreciated the ancient origin of Kalevalian mythology, stating that it must be at least 3,000 years old. She described the Finns, whom she believed to be of Asian origin, as ‘a wonderfully simple nation, still untouched by civilisation’s varnish’
living ‘close to Nature, in perfect touch and harmony with all her living powers and forces’. These kinds of ideas evidently would have appealed to Gallen-Kallela’s sensibilities, and it is more than likely that he was familiar with them. Gallen-Kallela’s personal library contains a range of material connected to esotericism, such as Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy* and *The Secret Doctrine*, in Swedish translations published in the 1890s, *Spiritistiska fenomen och spiritualistiska vyer* (1900), by the Swedish-born spiritualist medium and author Mary Karadja, as well as Camille Flammarion’s peculiar science fiction novel *Lumen* (1872), which combines astronomical theorisations with speculations about the immortality of the soul, vibrations of the ether, and the limitations of the earthly senses.

For Gallen-Kallela, the world of myth contained ancient wisdom and provided a release from decadent modernity. He was aware of the universal dimensions contained in myth, and the imagery that he drew from *The Kalevala* allowed him to give a timeless and symbolic expression to psychological and philosophical issues that even in modern times continued to rule over human existence. He created a pictorial language that was both primitive and modern in a manner that forward-looking artists all over Europe aspired to create. The over-emphasis on content in general, and nationalistic content in particular, has left this very rich dimension of Gallen-Kallela’s art under its shadow. Moreover, it has left very little room for examination of the innovative visual strategies employed by Gallen-Kallela. Sixten Ringbom, the pioneering Finnish scholar of modern art and occultism, is among the very few writers who have paid attention to this aspect of Gallen-Kallela’s production. He has drawn attention to the manner in which Gallen-Kallela used highly abstracted visual effects to emphasise the psychological and emotional content of his paintings, noting the synthesis of form and meaning in his artistic approach.51

For instance, in the *Kalevala*-themed work *Joukahainen’s Vengeance* (1897, Fig. 1), the grim fogginess of the landscape reflects the protagonists’ psychological state, while various compositional effects emphasise the emotional tension in the image: the large boulder in front of Joukahainen gives the viewer a sense of the painfully difficult task that awaits the hero, while the line of the horizon that is exactly on the level of his eye shows

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Fig. 1. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Joukahainen’s Vengeance, 1897, tempera on canvas, 130cm × 125cm. Turku Art Museum
Photo: Turku Art Museum
the direction of his gaze; his mother is desperately grasping the hero’s arm, trying to hold him back, while her fingers point to the opposite direction on the horizon line. These effects operate in a subtle way that appeal to the unconscious mind of the viewer, introducing a more profound level of meaning to the images and transporting them from narrative content towards the field of abstraction.

The issue of externalising thoughts and inner sentiments was a central element of late 19th-century esoteric thought. For Kandinsky, an artist who at the beginning of his career greatly admired Gallen-Kallela’s work, Theosophical imagery representing invisible thought forms became an important element in his quest for an artistic language that could give a visual form to spiritual reality. Kandinsky has given a written account of this idea and method in Über das Geistige in der Kunst, published in 1911 – there is a copy of the book in Gallen-Kallela’s personal library. Gallen-Kallela’s interest in esotericism and the kind of visual experimentation that it fuelled was not a passing phase in his career but a fundamental artistic strategy that he developed as he transitioned from Naturalism towards a more fantastical and abstract expression that reflects a tension between inner and outer realities. For instance, in the illustration project for the so-called Suur-Kalevala (The Complete Kalevala), which was never brought to completion, he once again returned to the idea of universally and directly expressive form. The dream-like illustrations and surrounding ornamentation were to represent a philosophical and artistic synthesis of all the creative ingredients collected by the artist on his life’s travels.

Ringbom compares these visual strategies employed by Gallen-Kallela to those of Edvard Munch, who was a master of creating visual links between inner and outer realities. Munch, indeed, presents an interesting comparison to Gallen-Kallela on various levels. The two artists were almost the same age (Munch was born in 1863), their artistic careers had many parallels and their paths crossed a couple of times – most significantly in 1895, when they exhibited together in Berlin. For a brief moment in the mid-1890s these two artists were considered by many European critics to be members of an ultra-modernist avant-garde. But whereas Munch is one of the few Nordic artists whose work has been included in the international canon of modernism,
Gallen-Kallela is nowadays little-known outside his native country. Munch has achieved the kind of universal status whereby he has been lifted beyond his cultural, geographical, and temporal context, while Gallen-Kallela’s role as a national hero has meant he has been over-determined by his context. This is clearly an effect of the nostalgically motivated approach that has dominated Finnish art history. But as we have seen, Gallen-Kallela’s own highly fantastical and esoterically informed views about the ancient history of Finland also contained elements of nostalgia. Gallen-Kallela’s own approach may be characterised in Boym’s terms as ‘reflective nostalgia’ – that is, the kind of nostalgic attitude that ‘dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity’. The writers of Finnish art history, however, have tended to translate this wistful, ironic and utopian attitude into ‘restorative nostalgia’ that attempts to reconstruct the lost home and protects the absolute truth about past events.

Emil Wikström’s Lönnrot Memorial: unravelling a national monument

The second case study focuses on a specific work of art, the Lönnrot Memorial, by Emil Wikström, which, as I shall demonstrate, represents a fascinating example of esoteric content ‘hiding in plain sight’. It is a public monument located in a park in the very centre of Helsinki. The monument was erected in 1902 to mark the centenary of the birth of Elias Lönnrot, the physician, philologist and collector of traditional Finnish oral poetry, best known as the composer of the The Kalevala. By the time Wikström won the competition for Lönnrot’s memorial in 1899, he had already established himself a reputation as a sculptor of national monuments. In 1893 he had received his first public commission when he had been chosen to execute a grand sculptural frieze for the pediment of the newly-erected House of the Estates in Helsinki. The completion of the frieze describing the development of the Finnish nation until the era of autonomy was delayed, however, due to a fire that completely destroyed Wikström’s studio home. It was still incomplete in 1899, and in order to carry out both commissions, Wikström decided to rent a large studio in Paris where he stayed permanently from 1899 to 1902 (Fig. 2).
Considering Wikström’s role as a national celebrity during his lifetime, literature on his artistic production is surprisingly scarce. A biography by Mari Tossavainen published in 2016 has brought out a range of previously unknown material and insight, but there are still many questions that remain unanswered. Certainly, this is to some extent due to the fact that in the National Romantic project sculpture was never elevated to the same status as painting. Another possible reason why Wikström has perhaps been deemed somewhat uninteresting from an art-historical point

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56 On Wikström’s reputation and role as a national sculptor, see Mari Tossavainen, Kuvanveistotyö: Emil Wikström ja kuvanveiston rakenne 1890–1920 (Helsinki: Suomen Tiede seura, 2012), 203.

of view stems from his resistance of the modernist idiom. From a purely formalist perspective, his work seems quite traditional and unproblematic. Hence, intellectually reflective and contextually grounded interpretations of his artistic production are virtually non-existent. Also, quite little is known of his aesthetic, literary, or philosophical pursuits, although Tossavainen does shed some light on this aspect, and I shall reflect on this in more detail below. Moreover, Wikström himself has reminisced about spiritualist séances held with Gallen-Kallela, suggesting that these two artists had a shared interest in esoteric phenomena and that they would frequently discuss these issues together.58

Wikström, like Gallen-Kallela, developed an early interest in *The Kalevala* and he also embarked on expeditions into the Karelian forests in the early 1890s. However, by the time he received the commission for Lönnrot’s memorial, the initial ethnographic interest had probably developed into a more profound fascination with mythology and the origins of all humanity – as had also been the case with Gallen-Kallela. Yet, even more so than with Gallen-Kallela, there appears to be an art-historical blind spot regarding potential dimensions of meaning in Wikström’s artistic production. The dominant interpretations have connected the *Lönnrot Memorial* very closely to nationalism and the political situation in Finland during the period of Russification. The whole meaning of this sculptural work has been to a large extent determined by the fact that due to increased control and censorship, no official ceremony could be arranged to celebrate its inauguration.59 My aim here is not so much to question the nationalistic interpretations as such, but to create space for a more multidimensional view of this extremely intriguing sculptural work. It is clear that a monument like the *Lönnrot Memorial* will also have a nationalistic motivation. However, as I have shown in the discussion above, nationalism does not in fact offer a simple, all-encompassing framework for interpreting works of art. In the interpretations of the *Lönnrot Memorial* in Finnish art historiography we may see another example of restorative nostalgia at work. After Finnish Independence, and particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, it became important to place all kinds of artworks by the artists of the Golden Age within the context of the national project. The purpose of my analysis is to bring forth some alternative or parallel dimensions of meaning

58 Emil Wikström, ‘Muutamia muistelmiä’, *A. Gallen-Kallelan muisto, Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja* 12 (Porvoo: WSOY, 1932), 72–74; see also Kokkinen, *Totuudenetsijät*, 120.
in order to demonstrate the limitations of a purely nationalistic interpretation – or perhaps rather, an interpretation that is based on an overly simplified view of nationalism. As we saw above in the previous case study, the kind of fin-de-siècle nationalism that was promoted by Öhquist, for instance, and that probably corresponded to Gallen-Kallela’s own views, has a very different tone to the patriotic and politically motivated nationalism reflected in Okkonen’s conceptualisation of Gallen-Kallela as a national hero. A similar kind of dynamic between restorative and reflective nostalgia can also be identified in this second case.

Wikström had won the competition for Lönnrot’s memorial with a proposal that was quite different from the monument that now stands in the small leafy square tucked away just behind the busiest thoroughfares of central Helsinki. The first version was a rather conventional monumental sculpture in which the great man is placed on a decorative granite pedestal. The mythical figures were situated on both sides of the pedestal: on the right-hand side was the Kalevalian Maiden and on the left stood Väinämöinen gesturing theatrically towards Lönnrot.60 The original plan was quite harshly criticised in the Press and also by fellow artists, and a lengthy thought process followed before Wikström was happy with the idea and ready to begin the actual work.61 In the final sculpture the figures of Lönnrot and Väinämöinen appear to inhabit the same reality, sitting side by side on top of the sculptural composition, both appearing equally realistic and tangible, so that there seems to be no distinction between the worlds of myth and reality. The figure of Väinämöinen with his long hair and beard brings to mind Gallen-Kallela’s depictions of this mythical bard, but in Wikström’s execution the appearance of the old man is more contemplative and poetic and less active and demonic.

The composition of the monument is quite interesting: the bronze sculpture of Väinämöinen and Lönnrot together with the four-sided granite base build into a triangular form resembling the shape of a pyramid. This is the first clue that might open the way towards an esoteric reading, because Egypt held a central symbolic place in many esoteric traditions. For the Theosophists, for instance, Egypt was the home of the ancient mystery schools that preserved and passed on to the initiates secret traditions believed to be as old as humanity itself.62 Gallen-Kallela’s interest

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60 Lindgren, Monumentum: Muistomerkkien aatteita ja aikaa, 36.
61 Wikström’s own account of the process was published in a booklet given out in the autumn of 1902 in order to raise money for the final stages of the project. E. F. ‘Patsaan syntyhistoria: myöskin kappale’, Eliaksen muisto (Helsinki, 1902), 42–44; see also Tossavainen, Emil Wikström: kuvien veistäjä, 103.
in esoteric ideas has been known and at least to a certain extent accepted since Sarajas-Korte’s first publications in the 1960s, but Wikström’s possible esoteric activities have received very little scholarly attention. As was noted above, Wikström was residing in Paris during the time that he executed the Lonnrot Memorial, which took about three years in total. Tossavainen shares a few significant details about his social life and interests during these years. Apparently, in the mid-1890s, Wikström had already had some contact with the Swedish branch of the Theosophical Society, and in Paris he seems to have socialised with a number of local Theosophists and spiritualists, including the Swedish medium Mary Karadja, who was in the habit of spending winters in either Paris or London.63

The granite base of the Lonnrot Memorial bears an inscription ‘Sain sanat salasta ilmi!’, which roughly translates as ‘I retrieved the words from secrecy!’ (Fig. 3). It is a direct quote from The Kalevala, and in the context of the sculpture it can easily be connected to Lönnrot’s project of collecting oral material and representing it to the Finnish people. But I would argue that in the light of what has been discussed above, it may also be interpreted as reference to an esoteric tradition of secret knowledge contained within the Kalevalian myths. It seems, therefore, that there is substantial evidence to support an esoteric reading of Wikström’s sculpture. Let us therefore ponder a little further on the pyramidal composition and its connection to Ancient Egypt. In esoteric symbolism the square base of the pyramid is typically seen to represent matter, while the triangular shape is a symbol of theory and ideas, so that as a whole the pyramid is an emblem of the spirit’s triumph over matter. This notion is also found in Blavatsky’s writings, which contain numerous references to Ancient Egyptian cosmologies and religious rituals. She also speculates on the geometrical proportions of pyramids and their links with numerological and astrological symbolism.64

The triangle, of course, is a well-established symbol of deity in Christianity and many other religions. Blavatsky also connects the three sides in a metaphysical sense to ‘the descent of Spirit into matter, of the Logos falling as a ray into the Spirit, then into the Soul, and finally into the human physical form of man, in which it becomes Life’.65


of the heavenly bodies, and at the close of the cycle of initiation man will have regained the original state of ‘divine purity and knowledge from which he set out on his cycle of terrestrial incarnation’.66 The pyramid is hence a very potent symbol relating to the development of the cosmos and the spiritual initiation of man.

The true revelation arrives when one walks around the sculpture. The left-hand side of the monument constitutes a hidden image of a face carved upside-down. It is an image of Antero Vipunen, an ancient giant sage in Kalevalian mythology who lies buried under ground. Vipunen is the only character presented as more powerful than Väinämöinen, and it is to him that Väinämöinen goes to uncover words that he has lost. He ends up in Vipunen’s stomach where he manages to capture the lost

words and is then eventually regurgitated by the irritated giant. In Wikström’s sculpture Väinämöinen appears to emerge from Vipunen’s mouth (Fig. 4). Wikström has explained that this detail carries the most important ideological message of the work and that the biggest flaw in the first sketch that he had submitted to the competition was that it did not make it clear enough that Väinämöinen emerges from the ground and at the same time from Vipunen’s mouth.\footnote{E. F., ‘Patsaan syntyhistoriaa: myös-kin kappale’, 42–43.}

Hence, in the composition of the sculpture, the figures of Vipunen, Väinämöinen, and Lönnrot can be seen to form a chain of initiation where Väinämöinen gets the secret words from Vipunen and passes them on to Lönnrot, who then in the form of The Kalevala, gives the words to the entire Finnish nation. This kind of succession of initiates who pass on the secret knowledge from generation to generation is a central feature of the esoteric tradition. In the \textit{fin-de-siècle} context it was most famously expressed by Edouard Schuré in his book \textit{Les Grands Initiés} (1889), which was very popular among Finnish artists of the period.\footnote{See Kokkinen. \textit{Totuudenetsijät}, 121–22.} This interpretation also finds support in Pekka Ervast’s esoteric reading of The Kalevala. Ervast presents Vipunen as a symbol of the mysteries of life and death that are passed on to the sage Väinämöinen.\footnote{Pekka Ervast, \textit{Kalevalan avain} (Hämeenlinna: Karisto, 1985). The book was first published in 1916.}

The most perplexing detail of the sculpture is, however, the pentagram placed within a circle on Vipunen’s forehead (Fig. 4). It is a strikingly powerful symbol that immediately brings to mind associations of Freemasonry and even Satanism. In the context of Wikström’s sculpture it can have a range of potential meanings. One possible hint towards its interpretation can perhaps be found in Gallen-Kallela’s writing – bearing in mind that these two artists were close friends. In 1919 Gallen-Kallela was commissioned to design an emblematic brooch for the Kalevala Society. He used a design with a pentagon enclosed within a triangle, explaining the geometrical and numerical symbolism behind these shapes in the context of mythical syncretism. The pentagon, according to him, can be seen as a reference to the five founding members of the Kalevala Society but at the same time it also symbolises the ancient magical power of the pentagram. The triangle, on the other hand, is an emblem of organised activity, and in it can be seen the outline of a traditional hut or tent (\textit{kota}), as well as that of a pyramid. Gallen-Kallela notes that the triangle should
not be seen as a specific reference to Freemasonry even though it appears often in masonic imagery. He emphasises that the triangle is one of the most ancient and universal pictorial and ideological symbols.70

Interestingly enough, in previous literature on Wikström and the Lönrot Memorial, this little detail is barely even mentioned. The public sculpture database maintained by the Helsinki Art Museum (HAM) does, however, tell us that the pentagram probably has some kind of cosmic or mystical meanings connected to The Kalevala and its description of the origin of the world.71

Fig. 4. Emil Wikström, detail of Lönrot Memorial, 1902, showing the head of Antero Vipunen and the pentagram
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen
Yet, without an esoteric contextualisation based on the notion of a shared origin of all myths and religions, this explanation makes very little sense. The pentagram as such has no place in Kalevalian symbolism. It is, however, quite possible to connect it with Finnish folk tradition in which it often appeared as a protective sign. In a publication from 1895 describing the nature, culture, and customs of the Karelian borderlands, written by the historian and Kalevala-enthusiast Oskar Hainari (Oskar Adolf Forsström) it is mentioned that the pentagram was still commonly used as a magical sign, often seen inscribed on doorposts, household objects, and on the traditional Kalevalian instrument, the kantele. A magical interpretation of the pentagram also appears in the popular novel Panu (1897), by Finnish writer Juhani Aho, which describes the battle between paganism and emerging Christianity in Finland. Notably, its author was also a member of Wikström’s social circles. Panu, the main character of the novel and a personification of old pagan beliefs, uses the image of the pentagram in one of his magical rituals. However, while these links all seem relevant, the fact that the pentagram is placed on the forehead of the upside-down figure of Vipunen also awakens different kinds of associations related specifically to 19th-century esoteric imagery.

The pentagram was widely used in late 19th-century visual culture of esotericism, for instance in the emblem of the Ordre kabbalistique de la Rose-Croix, the occult society founded in 1888 by Joséphin Péladan and Stanislas de Guaita. Péladan soon left the Order and established his own Ordre de la Rose-Croix catholique du Temple et du Graal, which held annual art salons in Paris in the 1890s and promoted a highly esoteric form of Symbolism. It is very likely that Wikström visited some of these salons or at least was aware of them. Allusions to Egypt and other ancient cultures were also very common in the artworks and other visual material connected to the Rosicrucian salons. The influential French occultist and magician Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant), whose writings had a huge impact on fin-de-siècle esotericism, wrote extensively on the symbolism of the pentagram in his Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie (1855). In a widely disseminated image drawn by Lévi himself and published as an illustration to the book, a pentagram appears on the forehead of the Sabbatic Goat, Baphomet. Versions of this image have been reproduced endlessly in the context of new religious movements.
and subcultures, most notably within the various heavy metal and gothic scenes. The most famous visual continuation of this image can be seen in the figure of the Devil in tarot cards. Hence, in popular imagination Baphomet is often perceived as an image of Satan and a symbol of evil.

Yet, for Lévi the meaning of this symbol was neither Satanic nor anti-Christian. Baphomet was a symbol that represented balance between binary opposites.\textsuperscript{76} Lévi, however, introduced the notion of the inverted pentagram (two points directed upwards) as the symbol of Satan. He also mentions that a human figure, head downwards, represents a demon. According to him, depending on the direction of its points, the pentagram can represent order or confusion, initiation or profanation, day or night, victory or death, Satan or the Saviour. The pentagram symbolises human intelligence, the domination of the mind over the elements, and by means of the pentagram, spirits can be made to appear in vision.\textsuperscript{77} The pentagram on the base of the Lönnrot Memorial is pointing upwards, but if we consider it from the perspective of the upside-down head, then two points are in the ascendant. There hence appears to be a reference to demonic forces of the past and order emerging from chaos. This kind of interpretation corresponds to esoteric views of the more profound meaning of The Kalevala as a battle between light and darkness, good and evil.\textsuperscript{78} Blavatsky mentions the section of The Kalevala that is depicted in the Lönnrot Memorial, the ‘Finding of the Lost-word’, stating that like many other parts of the epic, it is ‘full of occultism’.\textsuperscript{79}

Within the Finnish context, The Kalevala and Egypt were brought together in the theories of the artist, poet, linguist, inventor, and social activist Sigurd Asp, who later adopted the name Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa.\textsuperscript{80} He presents an example of someone who has been almost entirely written out of history, presumably because his ambivalent figure does not fit the nostalgic view of history embedded in the National Romantic narrative. Wettenhovi-Aspa was undoubtedly an influential personality in his lifetime, and someone who was closely acquainted with the most famous artists and cultural figures of his day – including Gallen-Kallela, Wikström, and Öhquist, as well as the great composer Jean Sibelius.\textsuperscript{81} In his publications, Wettenhovi-Aspa set out to establish linguistic and cultural connections from the Kalevalian


\textsuperscript{78} Blavatsky, ‘The Kalevala, the Epic Poem of Finland’, 146.

\textsuperscript{79} Blavatsky, ‘The Kalevala, the Epic Poem of Finland’, 148.

\textsuperscript{80} Ervast also speculates on ancient connections between Finnish and Egyptian culture, suggesting even that the mythical and mysterious object called ‘Sampo’ in The Kalevala could actually be a reference to the pyramid where secret wisdom was being taught. Ervast, Kalevalan avain, 279, n1.

\textsuperscript{81} Very little serious scholarly work has been devoted to Wettenhovi-Aspa. The best and most reliable source of information is Pekka Pitkälä’s master’s thesis Pyramidit, pyhät raamit: Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan (1870–1946) näkemykset suomen kielestä ja suomalaisen historiasta, University of Turku, 2010. Pitkälä is currently carrying out doctoral research on the same subject. Another important work, but one that unfortunately contains quite few references and does not always mention its sources, is Harry Halén and Tauno Tukkinen, Elämän ja kuoleman kello: Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan elämä ja teot (Helsinki: Otava, 1984).
myths to Egypt and other ancient civilisations in a manner that reflects Theosophical interpretations of *The Kalevala* as a ‘holy book’ that contained ancient wisdom.

Wettenhovi-Aspa had resided in Paris in the early 1890s, exhibiting at the Salon de la Rose+Croix and socialising with Strindberg, who was going through his ‘Inferno’ period during which he was intensely occupied with occultist experimentation. It was within this context that Wettenhovi-Aspa first developed an interest for both Egypt and linguistics. However, when in 1915 he finally published his first longer study on the ancient roots of the Finnish language and people, *Finland’s Gyllene Bok I = Suomen kultainen kirja I* (‘The Golden Book of Finland’), he was also commenting on current and ongoing linguistic and racial debates. His book appeared as a reaction against a publication that had defended the privilege of the Swedish-speaking minority, arguing for their racial superiority in a Pan-Germanic spirit. Wettenhovi-Aspa defended the eastern and very ancient origin of the Finns, arguing that *The Kalevala* was the product of a culture that was more advanced and civilised than that of the Germanic people. He rejected the notion of ‘race’ in favour of a belief in the shared ancestry of all existing groups of people. Wettenhovi-Aspa developed his theories even further in part two of ‘The Golden Book of Finland’ that appeared in 1935 and was titled *Kalevala ja Egypti* (‘The Kalevala and Egypt’).

To add another level of intrigue to the story, it should be mentioned that at least according to Wettenhovi-Aspa’s own account, the initiative to erect a public memorial for Lönnrot had actually originated from none other than himself. He mentions this in a caption placed under a photograph of his sculpture of Lönnrot printed on one of the opening pages of *Kalevala ja Egypti*. On the page next to it is a drawing of a sculpture of Väinämöinen, said to reside in a private collection in Copenhagen, in which the mythical bard has a notably Oriental appearance. In all likelihood these were the two sculptures that were exhibited together in Helsinki in 1895 as a proposal for Lönnrot’s monument. One critic mentioned that the figure of Väinämöinen looked like ‘a Chinese Mandarin’, which probably should not be seen as an artistic faux pas but rather as a conscious reference to the ancient Eastern origin of the Finns. He also notes that that the pedestal was shaped like a pyramid – a detail that is not really visible in the drawing,

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83 The collection of essays titled *Svenskt i Finland: Ställning och strä­vanden* (1915) had been given out by the University of Helsinki’s Swedish-speaking students’ party delegation.
but perhaps the two sculptures originally constituted a whole and therefore may have appeared different.\textsuperscript{86} It is not possible to go deeper into this issue here, but certainly the potential connection between Wettenhovi-Aspa’s theories and Wikström’s \textit{Lönnrot Memorial} would present an interesting case for further research.

As some kind of a conclusion to this brief esoteric analysis of the \textit{Lönnrot Memorial}, it is interesting to note that while the esoteric content of this national monument has been completely ignored in official narratives of Finnish art history, it has not escaped the attention of conspiracy theorists on the internet. The conclusions that they have drawn, perceiving it as a symbol of the power of the Illuminati or some other secret elite, are certainly extreme and very much incorrect, but it bears to emphasise that the conspiracy theorists have paid attention to something that official art history has decided to leave outside of its narratives.

\textbf{Conclusion: onwards from nostalgia}

The practice of art history, as Holly has pointed out, has an element of mystery and the unknown: ‘Something has gotten lost, someone has gone missing, a visual clue remains unseen.’\textsuperscript{87} But the story never arrives at a full conclusion, no matter how vigilantly you observe and how eloquently you turn your observations to literary descriptions. There is always something that remains unresolved in the compelling visuality of a work of art.\textsuperscript{88} In the case-studies presented above, I have endeavoured to see things that others have ignored and to follow even those clues that at first sight may have appeared incomprehensible. My aim has been to show how the National Romantic approach to Finnish art history has left potential meanings and important ideological tensions under its shadow. Perhaps even more significantly, it has offered an overly convenient, yet clearly quite limiting, template for interpreting all kinds of artworks. But nationalism, of course, was one among many intellectual currents that affected the Finnish art world during the politically restless and culturally vibrant decades around the year 1900. Hence, there was unquestionably a range of artistic phenomena that in no way engaged with nationalistic ideologies. In addition to this, the examples presented here demonstrate that even works of art that on one level manifest links with nationalistic or patriotic belief systems, may at the same time reflect other kinds of aesthetic,
religious, philosophical, ideological, or political phenomena that intersected the cultural world of the period.

Gallen-Kallela’s paintings inspired by the Kalevalian myths and Wikström’s *Lönnrot Memorial* both present cases that traditionally have been interpreted more or less as expressions of patriotic sentiment and as examples of the National Romantic direction in Finnish art. Yet, in the light of more recent critical scholarship, their links with international artistic phenomena like Symbolism and the popular interest in esoteric currents have become apparent, which has significantly expanded their aesthetic and intellectual potential. These *Kalevala*-inspired works find a place within the broad European cultural current of reflective nostalgia that turned towards mythical pasts to find a release from a modern world that was believed to be in a state of decadence and degeneration. The world of myth and fairy-tale became a symbol for personal artistic freedom as much as it was to be understood as a site of national redemption.

I chose esotericism as the focus of my analysis, as it appears to be the most obvious ‘abjected’ dimension in relation to the case studies. Certainly, there are many other issues that have been rejected in the process of constructing a convincing narrative of national art. For instance, I have briefly referred to the notion of decadence without giving a full account or even a definition of this cultural concept. Decadence presents another problematic issue that has been very much marginalised in the context of Finnish art. Yet, it is also related to nationalism via the notion of nostalgia and through a process of abjection. As Matei Călinescu has famously demonstrated, fascination with decadence and the apparently contradictory fascination with origins and primitivism are actually two sides of the same phenomenon. Both attach themselves to the modern notion of progress; they construct a critical perspective towards this notion and offer alternative solutions to the problem.\(^{89}\) A juxtaposition of the notions of nationalism and decadence hence creates an intriguing ideological construction, where each appears to block the other one out of view.

Another highly significant aspect that I have not even touched upon here is gender. The National Romantic paradigm has an inherent masculinity embedded within its ideological structure. At least in the Finnish context, the heroes of national

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art have without exception been men, although the decades around the turn of the 20th century were also a period during which an unprecedentedly large number of women embarked on a professional artistic career. One of the most internationally acclaimed Finnish artists, Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946), has typically been viewed as an isolated loner rather than as an active member of the art world. Being both a woman and a member of the Swedish-speaking population, she has been marginalised on many levels, but this marginalisation has also indicated that it has been possible to evaluate her work outside of the tightly-framed nationalistic paradigm. Yet, as the case of Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa so poignantly demonstrates, there are many complex mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Wettenhovi-Aspa certainly had nationalistic motivation but it seems that he has been considered too eccentric to fit the role of a national hero or, indeed, to even deserve a place in Finnish art history. I have merely mentioned these examples here in passing in order to point out some possible directions forward, and to demonstrate how the kind of critical analysis that has been initiated here can generate entirely new perspectives into an art-historical field we think we know so well.

In the light of recent scholarship, the phenomena that previously appeared reactionary and irrational have started to emerge as central currents in Western modernism. It has, moreover, become apparent that nationalism and esotericism are not unrelated. Both are connected to nostalgia and to a sense of discontent with the contemporary world. For those suffering from perpetual discontent with modernity, nationalism and esotericism, either separately or in various combinations, could offer a way out that was appealingly founded on tradition but also presented itself as a modern solution. Therefore, the most central issue that I have attempted to bring forward in this article, and that has motivated the case studies presented here, is the fact that the story of the ‘Golden Age of Finnish art’ has been built on a foundation of nostalgic fantasy, and such fantastical constructions are always haunted by what has been ‘abjected’ – ignored, overlooked, forgotten, disregarded, concealed, rejected – in the process.90 The main aspect that I have focused on here is the centrality of popular esoteric currents, such as spiritualism and Theosophy. In addition, among these rejected phenomena

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are issues relating to ethnicity, racial theories, and degeneration – all of which attach themselves to the notion of nationalism in a highly complex manner. After the Second World War, both racial theories and esotericism have come to be associated with the kind of irrationalism that gave birth to National Socialism in Germany and related phenomena elsewhere.\footnote{See, for example, Goodrick-Clarke, \textit{The Occult Roots of Nazism}; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, \textit{Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Peter Staudenmaier, \textit{Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era} (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Treitel, \textit{A Science for the Soul}. Treitel's approach is particularly fruitful for my purposes, because while clearly acknowledging the links between occultism and Nazism, she also treats the esoteric dimension as a broader ingredient in the genesis of modernism.} Hence, there has been a strong desire to push these cultural features into the margins. However, within the past decade or so, research into the cultural history of esotericism has increased both internationally and within Finland. At the same time, art-historical scholarship has become more aware of the impact of esoteric and occult ideas on the development of modern art.\footnote{As Kokkinen has pointed out, there has been an uncritical tendency to separate the secular from the spiritual and to define the spiritual side as irrational and therefore potentially dangerous. Kokkinen, \textit{Totuudenetsijät}, 36; for my examination of this subject, see Marja Lahelma, ‘The Symbolist Aesthetic and the Impact of Occult and Esoteric Ideologies on Modern Art’, \textit{Approaching Religion} 8, no. 1 (2018): 32–47.}

Dr \textbf{Marja Lahelma} is an art historian with a special interest in Nordic art and in the intersections of art, science, and esotericism. She is currently a member of the multidisciplinary research project Seekers of the New, which explores the cultural history of Finnish esotericism from the 1880s to the 1940s. The project is based in the University of Turku and is funded by the Kone Foundation.
The Artist’s House
Symbolism and Utopia

Laura Gutman

At the turn of the 19th century, a number of painters around Europe built houses for their own use, extending their experience as artists into the field of architecture. There had been previous examples of prominent figures – particularly writers – who, despite their absence of architectural knowledge, had their own houses built. Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill, near London, is generally considered to be the first of its kind to have been built in the Gothic style during the second part of the 18th century, and it provided a suitable backdrop for his novel *The Castle of Otranto*.

This phenomenon gained unprecedented importance during the Symbolist era, when Richard Wagner’s concept of the Total Work of Art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, combined with William Morris’s revival of the medieval guilds, guided the creation of multi-talented artists. In my research, I consider the artist’s house as a Symbolist artwork *per se*, whereby the architecture and interior design, the celebrations that took place at them, and at times even the cuisine served and the clothing worn in them, were in perfect correspondence to the artist’s oeuvre. The house was a recurrent motif in Symbolist literature and painting, portraying or revealing the inner visions of the artist. I propose that, with essential differences between themselves and contemporary Art Nouveau, the Symbolist artist’s house supports the definition of a Symbolist architecture.¹

To reach this conclusion, I have analysed artist’s houses that were built at the turn of the 19th century, and selected experimental examples executed by Symbolist artists who did not necessarily know each other. The purpose was to underline certain similarities, which may not have otherwise surfaced. In this paper, I also wish to address the significance of the political context, which has been considered problematic in connection to Symbolism. How would politics and a rejection of the real world, which was seen as a prerequisite for Symbolism, be expressed.

¹ This essay is based on my post-graduate research thesis: *Les maisons d’artistes en Europe à la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe siècle: Symbolisme et Utopie*. František Bílek, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Sándor Nagy, Santiago Rusiñol, defended at Ecole du Louvre in 1998 under the direction of Mr Guy Cogeval. Later publications have been taken into account.
in these artists’ houses? I have therefore selected four artists belonging to the European Symbolist art movement, in countries that were striving for their independence: František Bílek (1872–1931) in Bohemia, Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931) in Finland, Sándor Nagy (1868–1950) in Hungary and Santiago Rusiñol (1861–1931) in Catalonia.

When studying the artist’s house, I have taken the viewpoint of the artist and have replaced the analytical tools used to describe architecture with those used in art history and iconography. Similar themes, motifs, and intentions that are evident in these artists’ paintings, sculptures and writings can also be identified in their houses. Architecture appears not as a goal, but as another means to express their artistic and intellectual vision of the world. It has become evident that these houses encompassed a political viewpoint – they were manifestos for a new way of life on a private, national and spiritual level. In this respect, I have analysed artists’ houses as utopias, expressions of ideas and ideals that challenged the existing society and aimed at its revival, or reinvention.

Forerunners

From a biographical perspective, certain houses are considered as marking a turning point in an artist’s career. William Morris², Henry Van de Velde³ and Peter Behrens⁴ were all painters when they decided to build a house of their own. But I have realised that designing and furnishing their house warranted far more than just a brief mention in their biography; it was the very start of their understanding on how to shape their ideas. They addressed architecture as painters, and construction as composition. Seen from a painter’s viewpoint, everything had to match: lines, colours, textures; the relationship between the interior and the exterior of the house. The importance of this experience reflected in their careers, as they continued with architecture and design, and interestingly enough with book design, which I see as another space for their art.⁵

The notoriety of these iconic houses has extended beyond their original countries. In Finland, it was two foreign artists who introduced these modern developments to the local scene. The Swedish painter Louis Sparre (1863–1964) was the correspondent in Finland for the English magazine The Studio, whose publisher

² William Morris and Philip Webb (arch.), Red House, 1859, Bexleyheath, Great Britain. William Morris asked his architect friend Philip Webb to build his Red House in 1859. Delivered in 1860, the house was already sold in 1865 and was forgotten until the director of The Studio, Geoffrey Holme owned it between 1889 and 1903. Hermann Muthesius publicised Red House among German-speaking countries with his book Das englische Haus in 1904–05.

³ Henry Van de Velde, Bloemenwerf, 1895, Uccle, Belgium.

⁴ Peter Behrens, Behrens House, 1901, Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt, Germany.

Charles Holme at that time owned William Morris’s Red House in Bexleyheath near London. Sparre tutored the trio of young Finnish architects Eliel Saarinen, Herman Gesellius and Armas Lindgren to design their projects in watercolour\(^6\) in the same fashion as the renowned British architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott. Sparre also created an opportunity for his friend Akseli Gallen-Kallela to visit Red House during his trip to England in 1895. The Finnish painter was then completing the construction of his first house, Kalela\(^7\), which involved a similar artistic discourse. Gallen-Kallela clarified in later days the difference he saw between the emotional and conceptual approaches that painters and architects have towards architecture:


\(^7\) Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *Kalela*, 1894–95, Ruovesi, and Tarvaspää, 1911–13, Espoo, Finland.
And now that we are in 1928, I return to this wonderful cabin as a discovery of ancient times. It is then so tender and so fragile that I put myself at work with trembling hands... For an architect, it is usually only a matter of finding a subject... For me, it is quite another thing. For me, there are deeper feelings; I see the essence of my people at the beginning of time. Often an old house like this can be a synthetic image, a symbol.8

When he was invited to Finland by Louis Sparre, the Belgian painter Alfred William Finch (1854–1930) introduced the young architect Sigurd Frosterus (1876–1956) to his friend Henry Van de Velde.9 The Bloemenwerf, built in 1895–96 for his family in the suburb of Brussels, had been the catalyst for a career change, and Van de Velde had become a renowned architect and interior designer in Germany. At Van de Velde’s studio in Weimar in 1903–04, Frosterus grasped the importance of painting and colour. Besides his architectural practice, Frosterus became an important art critic, art collector and theoretician of colour in Finland.10

These personal contacts facilitated the discovery of Red House before it was publicised in the German-speaking countries by Hermann Muthesius in his book Das englische Haus11 in 1904–05. They added to the far-reaching circulation of ideas in Europe at the turn of the 19th century by the elitist distribution of avant-garde publications. At a time when artists were broadening their field of competence and erasing the traditional boundaries between the different arts, the artist’s house was offering a new experimental model and opportunity. Drawing this conclusion, I realised that the house designed by artists was built on utopian ideas.

The closed space

A common feature among those artists involved in the design of their house was their disdain for their own time, in favour of a glorified vision of the past and the future. They rejected the Industrial Revolution and its inherent disenchantment and instead initiated a revival of the traditional ways and means. In countries ruled by foreign governments, the revival of ancient times echoed with a ‘young’ yearning for independence. Indeed this ‘modern critic of modernity’12 has been noted as a progressive, as much as a regressive, movement. Within its walls, the house was meant...
to offer a refuge against the outside modern world. It became a protective shell, allowing for the free development of an interior space. At Charles Baudelaire’s injunction to leave ‘Anywhere out of the world’\textsuperscript{13}, Symbolist artists found no escape unless privileging their interior world, answering together with the Pre-Raphaelite poet Christina Rossetti ‘I locked the door upon myself’\textsuperscript{14}.

Symbolist literature developed the motif of the closed space as a protective shell for poetry and dream. The Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck, for instance, designated the glasshouse\textsuperscript{15} as a distinctive refuge, the modern iron and glass structure offering a fragile and marginal protection to the self. The street was perceived as antagonistic, polluted and trivial, while the interior a safe and silent shelter. The French novel \textit{A Rebours}, published in 1884 by Joris-Karl Huysmans, typified the house as an aesthetic retreat from the modern world,\textsuperscript{16} and became a guidebook for Symbolist artists. In the novel, Gustave Moreau personified the solitary artist withdrawn in the secrecy of his studio, remote yet located in the heart of Paris.

The monastic model prevailed all through the 19th century as a secluded place where artists would answer the call to implement their artistic vision. The abandoned monastery of Sant’Isidoro in Rome, occupied by the German Nazarene painters in 1810, had paved the way forward. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood effected a similar religious tone in England, interestingly combined with a socialist ideology. William Morris considered his Red House, situated on the pilgrimage road to Canterbury, as a first stop away from London, a monastery where his friends from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood could gather.\textsuperscript{17}

Soon enough, artists retreated into the outskirts of capital cities, or further away into the nature.

**Into the wilds**

I realised during my visits to these distant locations, that leaving the urban artistic scene, with its cafés and patrons, was not necessarily a logical choice for young artists who were trying to make a name for themselves. Ignoring the city and returning to the wilds was nevertheless considered a prerequisite for a genuine start. A few kilometres outside Barcelona, in the little fishing village of Sitges, Santiago Rusiñol set his Cau Ferrat (Iron Tanner, Fig. 2)\textsuperscript{18} originally to protect his collection of antique


\textsuperscript{14} Ferdinand Khnopff titled in 1891 a painting \textit{I lock the door upon myself} (Neue Pinakothek, Munich) after a verse from a poem by Christina Rossetti ‘Who shall deliver me?’, \textit{The Argosy} (London: Strahan & Co., 1866).

\textsuperscript{15} Maurice Maeterlinck, \textit{Serres chaudes} (Brussels: Léon Vanier, 1889).

\textsuperscript{16} Joris-Karl Huysmans, \textit{A Rebours} (Paris: G. Charpentier & Cie, 1884).

\textsuperscript{17} J. W. Mackail, \textit{The Life of William Morris} (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898).

\textsuperscript{18} Santiago Rusiñol and Francesc Rogent (arch.), Cau Ferrat, 1893–94, Sitges, Catalonia.
ironware from his grandfather’s disapproval. His opposition to his grandfather, the head of an important textile firm, typified the artistic fight against the bourgeoisie. In Sitges, Rusiñol had no interest in painting seascapes, contrary to the former generation of Naturalist painters in the village. He enjoyed the sea views from his windows, taking a rejuvenating ‘bath of poetry’ to wash away the ‘prosaic disease’.19

The desire to be at one with nature led a number of Symbolist artists to experiment with naturism, encouraged by the hygienic recommendations of the time. Nudity was considered part of the refusal of the city and a token of sincerity.20 The Hungarian painter Sándor Nagy practised naturism in his garden with his friends and family21 at the Gödöllő artist colony (Fig. 1).22 In a cycle of four drawings titled The Human Pilgrimage23, he portrayed himself leaving the city with his wife Laura, walking across a splendid garden, and continuing his spiritual path for finally reaching nature where, naked in a paradise regained, the couple start a new life.

In several descriptions of artists’ houses, the intuitive affinity with nature has been noted as a precondition for selecting the site for the house. Trying to preserve the existing nature in its original condition and not cutting down any trees are recurrent themes. For the house designed by the Czech sculptor František Bílek in his childhood village of Chynov24, special attention was paid to preserving the garden.25 During my visits to various artists’ houses, I realised that the longing to be close to nature was, however, often softened by a garden surrounding the house, creating a new barrier between the house and the outside world. Solitude required seclusion, rather than disintegration into the wilderness.

Vernacular

Protected from human civilisation, being in nature reconnected the artists with a feeling of permanence. In a national revival context, the natural heritage was also seen as evidence of national rights against later invaders. For example, the Hungarian word, ‘haz’ designates both the home and the homeland,26 stressing the identity value of houses built in the country.

The search for authenticity and primitivity led Symbolist artists to take an active part in the local Folklorist movements,
collecting and documenting traditional objects and motifs; the founding of artist colonies in remote villages and their fascination for vernacular architecture suggests an interest in nature-based production. In Zakopane (Poland), Worpswede (Germany), Tuusula (Finland) or Gödöllő (Hungary), the merging of the vernacular into Art Nouveau motifs constituted the basis for a style of architecture and interior design in their houses, as well as for their art.27 As a frame for their paintings28, the artist’s house offered a proper environment for the free reign of their imagination.

The high value placed on nature flavoured the appreciation of everything that was natural, or produced using natural elements. Wood in particular, but also bare brick were praised as building materials. According to Hermann Muthesius in his study on the English house, brick was regarded as a
humble and inexpensive material and chosen for the Red House for its simplicity and authenticity, rather than the stucco villas and neo-gothic castles constructed in artificial stone. Both of the houses that František Bílek built in Chynov and Prague respectively use brick, as do those built by Sándor Nagy and Leo Belmonte in Gödöllő.

In Finland, where industrial brick was an expensive imported material, the log architecture helped to fill a conceptual gap, as the identification of historical models proved complex; artists paved the way before architects followed suit. Vernacular farms from Karelia, in eastern Finland, offered a ‘natural’ architectural model that was perfectly suited to the climatic conditions, integrated into the natural surroundings, and also used local knowledge. Furthermore, Karelia was the land where the Kalevala mythology had been collected and rooted in the Finnish identity, which in turn promoted the national revival. Following in the ethnographers’ footsteps, artists drew their inspiration from its local peasant culture, which was considered as being preserved from modern civilisation. The log houses built by the Finnish painters Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Pekka Halonen, the sculptor Emil Wikström, and the conductor Robert Kajanus, were meant to recreate these enchanted surroundings that were necessary for their art. Built in dark wood, in regions where log architecture was not customary, these Symbolist houses reinforced the natural and supernatural presence of the surrounding forest. When Akseli Gallen-Kallela invited Jean Sibelius and Robert Kajanus to Kalela to celebrate the christening of his children, he asked his distinguished guests to cut down a pine tree. This revived pagan ritual was performed to wipe out all signs of present times and to initiate a fresh start, reinforced by the placement on the altar of Gallen-Kallela’s painting Ad Astra, a work that was imbued with Theosophical meaning.

**Artist colonies**

Isolation and solitude, although necessary as a first step in dissociating from contemporary society, soon proved unsustainable. Escaping the grey city and returning to the wilderness, opposing industrial production and reviving traditional handicrafts, was a political act addressing society. In

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29 Muthesius, Das englische Haus, 17.
34 Pekka Halonen, Halosenniemi, 1898–1902, Tuusula, Finland.
35 Emil Wikström, Visavuori, 1893–94, Sääksmäki, Finland. The house was destroyed by a fire and rebuilt with a separate studio, to spare the house in case of fire.
36 Robert Kajanus, composer’s house, 1898, Obbnäs, Finland.
their protected shelters, artists pretended not only to ignore the illegitimate rulers of their nation, but to invent a new world. Being eager to replace the existing society with another one supposed that they would prepare an alternative model.

Nothing from the execrated modern world was to remain, which meant that artists had to involve themselves in all fields of art and techniques to express their own vision of the world. Although they were opposed in political terms, the ideologies upheld by Richard Wagner, William Morris and Leo Tolstoy emphasising the importance of working collectively, were still revered by Symbolist artists. Wagner insisted:

*The Art-work of the Future is an associate work and only an associate demand can call it forth. This demand, which we have hitherto merely treated theoretically, as a necessary essential of the being of each separate branch of art, is practically conceivable only in the fellowship of every artist; and the union of every artist, according to the exigencies of time and place, and for one definite aim, is that which forms this fellowship.*

Communities that had been located in the country during the plein-air era had gone out of fashion and the circles artists had joined during their studies abroad had dispersed once they returned home, not without a certain nostalgia. The Symbolist artist’s house produced an alternative model that was centred on a new lifestyle. Art for art’s sake had been proscribed, whereas art was resumed in everyday life in the form of the applied arts. Together with William Morris, artists living in houses of their own design admitted that ‘the true secret of happiness lies in taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life, in elevating them by art’.

Appreciated for their functional and aesthetic integration in the house, the applied arts were opposed to decorations designed to mask a certain modern vacuity. The production of handicrafts under the supervision of Symbolist artists led to their move to the outskirts of the industrial towns. Tapestry was the ferment of the Gödöllő colony in Hungary; František Bílek tried to bring Czech artists to Chynov to produce ceramics, recalling the Hauteclaire ateliers created by the painter Armand Point that Bílek had visited.
in Marlotte, on the outskirts of Paris. Akseli Gallen-Kallela had also considered bringing together an artists’ colony based on arts and crafts:

My modest dream is to gather around me several different arts workshops, which would make gobelins and stained glass, carve furniture, print wallpaper, produce ceramics, embossed work, and so forth. There I would rule absolute, employing as many of my fellow artists as possible. It really pains me to see how many of them wander about, wasting their time and talent on endless oil picture paintings.44

Many of Gallen-Kallela’s artist friends were installed on the shore of Lake Tuusuula, where they built individual artist’s houses. Schooled in the ideas of Morris and Tolstoy, they involved their families and friends in progressive child raising but did not commit to a joint artistic programme.45 The tentative Iris workshop, run in Porvoo by the artist couple Louis and Eva Sparre in 1897–1902, intended to invite friend artists to collaborate. Ceramics and furniture were produced in a factory and sold together with imported textiles in a gallery based in Helsinki.46 Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement Iris, however, related more closely to the Art Nouveau project to reform interior design, rather than to an artist colony project.

Utopia

Being distant from the cities, and in natural and vernacular surroundings, the artist’s house was intended to play an active part in the recreation of a new world. Conceived as an isolated and complete microcosm, the house became a laboratory for the future society, reviving supposedly genuine and non-corrupted values.

Utopia – the isolated island far from all civilisations where new forms of human societies were tried out, resulting in a permanent golden age – had defined a literary genre at the intersection between philosophy and politics since Thomas More in the 16th century. When Robert Owen left Great Britain with 800 people to build New Harmony in Indiana (1825–27), the Utopian ideal took a new step towards actual experimentation. The American New World was chosen for its promise of a new

beginning, just as the French Etienne Cabet started an Icarian Colony in Illinois (1840–98) or the Italian Giovanni Rossi a Colônia Cecilia in Brazil (1890–94).47

The goal of establishing a utopian society based on free love was intensely debated among the Kristiania Bohemians in Norway, and the topographer Nils Johan Schjander was sent to Patagonia to prepare for the artists and writers’ coming. In 1905, a deal was eventually discussed with an Indian tribe concerning the cession of some land. The Norwegian writer Hans Jaeger was a driving force behind the project, trying to raise funds in Paris to start the colony.48 The prominent position within the Nordic colony in Paris he had held since 1886, as mentioned by the

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48 Christine Amadou and Marc Décimo, ‘Une colonie scandinavo-indienne en Patagonie’, Monitoires du Cymbalum Pataphysicum, n° 14, 73–76.
Finnish Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Eero Järnefelt with a smile⁴⁹, leaves little doubt as to the knowledge Nordic artists had of the utopian project.

Based on libertarian or socialist ideologies, utopian theoreticians granted a decisive role to artists, whose creativity was recognised as a powerful asset.⁵⁰ Art was trusted with a sacred mission that was meant to serve societal change. The tight limitations of such doctrines failed to attract artists, however, but instead drew them to produce their own utopias.

The revolutionary discourse among the European nations that were striving for their independence, incorporated utopian accents. At the end of the 19th century, comments on the decline and fall of civilisation often ran parallel to those hoping for a new dawn. Entrusted with the mission to foresee and shape the future of their independent country, artists assumed the role of prophet, often deriving some exalting inspiration from the concept of the Nietzschean superman.⁵¹

The Symbolist artist’s house and its development within artists’ colonies became the centre of the utopian experiment. Searching for harmony, painters realised that architecture and the decorative arts could support their new lifestyle and vision. William Morris, describing his utopia in News from Nowhere (1890), wrote of a golden age in line with the goal stated with and at the Red House with his friends. Rather than submitting painting to an educative and illustrative role, as required from Academic painters, Symbolist artists found better prospects in involving themselves in the arts and crafts. As the Hungarian artists involved in the Gödöllő colony declared:

*We know, and cultivate and seek a greater treasure, the greatest treasures of all: the joy of life. – This is the flame we fan with all of our strength, in ourselves and in each other. Our only aid in this is the love we bear for ourselves and for others. – We show love for ourselves by living a pure life, by listening to the heavenly voice within us. – We show love for others by regarding ourselves as small shoots, leaves, flowers of the great universal Tree of Life, all of us sharing the nourishment of the same single root. Our lives are minuscule in the nourishing warm lap of eternity. – What we produce with our two hands in the wake of this*

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joy of life as the result of our daily labours – this is our art! We accept no other artistic programme.\(^5^2\)

Conceived as an experimental model, I conclude that the artist’s house had turned into a Total Work of Art: the saturation of the space with an art production meeting their requirements intended to conceal unpleasant reality, and to offer an alternative. The exclusion of all exogenous elements likely to endanger the overall harmony, points out the risks of confinement as well as the perverse effects underlying these utopian and nationalistic dogmas.

The Temple of the Arts

Calling for the destruction of the existing world, artists prepared individually or collectively for the world to come. Symbolist artists took upon themselves what they considered their mission with some eschatological undertones; they took on a messianic role, becoming self-proclaimed prophets and priests, and transforming the artistic creation into a rite and their house as its temple. Paul-Elie Ranson’s Nabi Temple\(^5^3\), Fernand Khnopff’s Temple of the Self\(^5^4\), Emil Wikström’s Temple of Work and many others serve the metaphor. Distancing from traditional churches and adopting a Nietzschean perspective, Symbolist artists diverted the Christian signs of faith\(^5^5\) towards their utopian beliefs.

In this respect, the comparison between the artist’s house and the church occurs as a recurrent theme in the literature dedicated to Santiago Rusiñol’s house in Sitges (Fig. 2).

The Cau [Ferrat] resembles nothing else, but looks most like a church, wrote the art critic Angel Ganivet, one of these churches there will be when religion will be commonplace and fathers will be priests, having altars next to the kitchen and the bedroom.\(^5^6\)

I saw the Cau! exulted the writer Manuel de Montoliu. I kneel, prayer to the lips and faith in the heart, in the temple you have built for Holy Poetry. And from this cosy nest of your dreams, hung between sky and sea, you have given a tremendous impulse to my soul who has just spread its wings

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54 Fernand Khnopff and Edouard Pels-neer (arch.), *The Temple of the Self*, 1902, Brussels, Belgium.


to rise to the heights, seeking with delectation the infinity that attracts me with an irresistible force.\textsuperscript{57}

The strong spiritual permeation and the dissemination of Theosophy among Symbolist artists at the end of the 19th century were noticeable in the use of a religious vocabulary. For the French Catholic writer Léon Bloy, it was self-evident that František Bílek’s art was heretical, closer to Symbolism than to Christianity\textsuperscript{58}, while for the Czech poet and painter Zdenka Braunerová, sincerity and purity prevailed in Bílek’s art and lifestyle\textsuperscript{59}.

The Czech sculptor František Bílek was born in Hussites land in South-Bohemia, near the city of Tabor. The Christian pre-Reformation movement from the 15th century had left a strong mark in the region, and its tragic rebellion against the Holy Roman Empire had nourished the national revival movement at the end of the 19th century. Inspired by Decadent Symbolism, Bílek chose not to illustrate the historically rebellious counter-power, but a contemporary Bohemia exhausted and abandoned by God, having lost all hope and humbly praying for its resurrection.\textsuperscript{60} The fall of the Habsburg Empire was considered inevitable, and the resurrection of an independent Bohemian Kingdom was hoped for.

Both houses built by the sculptor were grounded on his religious beliefs and his own Symbolist interpretations. Ornamental reliefs and quotations, some taken from the Gospel of John, were applied to walls and furniture, creating a unique ‘talking architecture’. The house was conveying a message, and in doing so was charged with meaning. ‘We are covered’ was the inscription next to the relief on the façade of František Bílek’s first house in Chynov. The relief depicted a mother covering the naked body of her child, echoing the protective role played by the house for the vulnerable artist. ‘Earth speaks to us’ was illustrated by a woman in profile whispering to a young man’s silhouette.

There are certain men in certain times to which the Earth speaks. They are pure, holy and poor in spirit. What does she tell them? She tells them about the terrifying rumours that were in the world; they are the elect of God, looking at the clear sky, but never smiling on the ground. – It is the cause of the painful and sad expression of the head, the painful half-


\textsuperscript{58} Letter from Léon Bloy to Josef Florian, 24 April 1901, in \textit{Léon Bloy, Josef Florian. Correspondance 1900–1914} (Lausanne: L’Age de l’homme, 1990), 40.


open mouth and the look full of regret that she sends to the man who tenderly presses against her.61

The second house Bílek built for himself, on the outskirts of Prague, developed further the temple metaphor, leaving behind the vernacular references seen in Chynov (Fig. 3). Publicised in the magazine *Styl*, after its completion in 1912, the architecture of the villa was said to have expressed the artist’s spiritual concerns. At the same time it was the first building with a flat roof ever to be constructed in Prague, and this design revealed an unexpected approach to modernity. The liturgical motif of the daily bread pervaded the entire house, referring to the mystical communion that was central to the Moravian Church. The semi-circular house was designed to represent a wheat field cut by a scythe, and the columns evoked the wheat stalks. The wheat motif repeated in the dining-room was emphasised by scriptures: ‘The movement of the Earth when she gives bread, There was a field full of wheat offering the brothers’ daily bread.’ This stressed the religious dimension of the Christian meal. Both the interior and exterior of the house featured carved doors and door handles with the countryside theme of ears of wheat and wild birds.62

A statue of Moses63 provided the axis of the construction. The Old Testament prophet, who would have borne the artists’ own features64, was interpreted after Edouard Schuré’s influential book *Les Grands Initiés*65, as an Egyptian initiate preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. The papyrus columns standing for the wheat stalks on the façade of the villa developed the Egyptian reference further. The repetition of the semi-circular shape of the architecture in the desk Bílek designed for his own use66 also carried a symbolic meaning. In correspondence with the house, the axial position of the artist at his desk suggested that he had become the new Moses and prophet of the time to come.67

The mystical aesthetic culminated in the artist’s studio, which was ornamented with decorative stones. The studio, which also functioned as a gallery presenting his sculptures, looked like a chapel devoted to his art, and it elevated its creator, imbuing him with divine powers. The wedding celebration of Bilek’s daughter that took place among his sculptures, confirms the liturgical intention of the studio68, and reminds us of the christening of Gallen-Kallela’s children in his house69.

61 This quote from Zdenka Braunerová is in the large essay she devoted to the sculptor after her visit to Chynov, see Braunerová, ‘František Bílek’.
63 František Bílek, Moses, 1905, bronze, melted during Second World War. A new cast of the statue is now placed next to the Old New Synagogue in Prague.
66 František Bílek, Desk, 1900–12, oak, 100cm x 120cm x 70cm, Prague City Gallery – Villa Bílek.
67 I would like to note that the motif of the couple sitting on a throne under a starry sky resembles a similar motif, although inverted, published by Akseli Gallen-Kallela in the German magazine *Pan* in 1895. The original source for the motif was Félicien Rops *La Lyre*, which illustrated a rather discreet publication of Stéphane Mallarmé’s poems in 1891. Gallen-Kallela’s illustration was further disseminated in German-speaking countries, and the Hungarian ceramic factory Zsolnay also produced a coloured tile with it.
68 Vybíral, ‘L’innovation architecturale dans l’œuvre de František Bílek’, 120.
69 See note 37.
Other celebrations of the cult of art confirm the sacralisation of the Symbolist house. A remarkable example took place in Sitges, where Santiago Rusiñol had his house, Cau Ferrat. He organised a spectacular procession of two paintings by El Greco, which belonged to his collection, leading to his house, where they were hung on the wall. The description given by Josep Pla was powerful enough to create a myth around the event. The journalist recalled how the morning train brought celebrities from Barcelona to the village; two artist friends parading on horses were following the two paintings of St Peter and St Magdalena that were carried on tabernacles by other artist friends. The villagers believed that the procession was heading for the church, but as Josep Pla reported in the papers on the following day, this was a civic ceremony, which ended with a banquet on the nearby terrace.70

All five of the Modernist celebrations that took place at Cau Ferrat consecrated the religion of art. With the exception of the first exhibition, in which the landscape paintings of the Luminist school of Sitges71 were displayed, the importance of painting diminished in the subsequent celebrations. Contemporary literature and music took priority; for example, Maurice Maeterlinck’s play, L’Intruse, was performed in Catalan translation72 and a Serpentine Dance73 inspired by Loïe Fuller, introduced the Symbolist aesthetic in Catalonia.

During these celebrations art was present in all forms, yet it was nevertheless played down, and instead a feeling of taking part in a collective moment was foregrounded. The Total Work of Art was accomplished, and the individual expectation merged with that of their generation, striving towards a common goal. With artists celebrating art, the Symbolist utopia reached its peak but at the same time it had exhausted its concept. Once the golden age was reached, only the repetition of the same was possible.

An interior space

Designed by artists, the artist’s house eluded the prevailing architectural paradigms and replaced them with concepts that were present elsewhere in their art. In an Ex Libris bookplate from 1904 (Fig. 4), Akseli Gallen-Kallela represented himself alone, smoking a pipe and seated by a log house. The house is on the top of a hill above a deep forest, an eagle flying high in the sky.

70 Josep Pla, Santiago Rusiñol i el seu temps, 1942 (reprinted by Edicions Destino, Barcelona, 1981).
71 Isabel Coll, Antoni Sella, and Roland Sierra, L’Escola Luminista de Sitges (Sitges: Diputació de Barcelona, Ajuntament de Sitges, Consorci del Patrimoni de Sitges, 2002).
73 During the night of 29 August 1895, the dancer Pilar Arcas performed a Serpentine Dance on a boat at sea, lit from the Cau Ferrat windows. Originally created by the American dancer Loie Fuller, this veil dance inspired by paintings on Greek vases and by Botticelli’s Venus resumed a Mediterranean identity. Planes, El Modernisme a Sitges, 101.
Fig. 4. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *Ex libris Axel Gallén*, 1904, linocut. Gallen-Kallela Museum, Espoo
Photo: Gallen-Kallela Museum / Jukka Paavola
The meditative figure, the majestic eagle and the house can all be considered aspects of a self-portrait, all insisting on escape and transcendental elevation.

Solitary and surrounded by nature, the house in this bookplate conveys the parallel iconography of the heights, or of the island that was also thematised by Akseli Gallen-Kallela74. For Santiago Rusiñol it was expressed in the painting of a walled garden. This protective envelope surrounding the house drew particular attention to the interior of the house. Entering the house symbolised penetrating the most intimate and fragile part of the artist’s psyche.

The escape out of the world prompted Symbolist artists to investigate their inner world. Behind walls, in the privacy of their studio, artists felt secure enough to delve into the self. Indeed, the heart of the artist’s house was the studio, with the living spaces distributed around it. And in the studio was the artist, communing with his visions. Progressing inside Fernand Khnopff’s house, one journalist wrote that he reached the acme when entering the studio, where the Belgian painter had drawn a circle around his easel to designate the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary of creation.75 The magic circle reinforced the walls in resisting the disintegration process endured by the artist.76

Turning inward, Symbolist artists even referred to their own bodies as mere envelopes protecting their inner selves. The Symbolist house was therefore materialising an extension of the artist’s body. The anthropomorphic house was apprehended as a living body, encompassing the most frightening nightmares, as well as the most ecstatic visions. Charles Baudelaire, after Edgar Allen Poe, had popularised the idea of the house endowed with life, which impressed Belgian Symbolists,77 such as Xavier Mellery78, who surreptitiously depicted The Soul of Things, or Léon Spilliaert, whose distorted self-portraits were reflected in a mirror.

Considering the artist’s house as an extension of the body tended to project the house from the inside out; the house seemed built from the interior, continuing out towards nature. When I first visited Halosenniemi, the log house that the Finnish painter Pekka Halonen built for himself and his family in Tuusula, I realised how exceptionally well the house functioned in that respect. The numerous windows, all with different shapes, framed

76 Marja Lahelma, Ideal and Disintegration – Dynamics of the Self and Art at the Fin-de-siècle, Doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2014.
77 Patrick Laude, Rodenbach. Les décors de silence (Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1990), 41.
the landscape in the same way as a painting. Embracing the view from a dominant position, the house seemed to look out through its windows.79

The open layout of the interior space, with minimal interior divisions, was not only guided by an intention to merge functions, or by the meeting between artistic practice and everyday life; it was also intended to free the artist’s psyche, and to allow the expression of the wildest ideas. This fluidity of space was a feature that was inspired as much by the vernacular farmhouse as it was by Art Nouveau architecture magazines. The farmhouse served the purposes of the artist’s house surprisingly well, gathering the extended family and all activities in a central open volume. The Finnish log houses, the house built by Bílek in Chynov, and the traditional Hungarian farmhouse, were all based on such models:

What I mean by the heart of the house is this space, which could work like the human heart. The whole life of the house could be there, there would be enough space for the family to work in common, for the creative activity in common, for the social life in common, for the dinners in common. That’s where we would paint, where we would eat, it would be the children’s room, where we would read, where we would gather around the stove in winter, refresh in the summer. All this in one space, thanks to the artistic and ingenious interpretations of the interior, in the heart of the house.80

The Symbolist utopia developed in the artist’s house intended to reverse the imposed powers and to create a new world in perfect correspondence with the artist’s ideals. Stripped of the perversions related to modern civilisation, the artist demiurge believed that he could outline a new genesis with collective pure intentions. Transgressing the categories of architecture, the artist’s house was a home, a studio, a gallery and a temple in which to celebrate the new world to come. It was built with materials found in the nature or produced following an ancestral tradition, considering everything original and genuine as good, and everything industrial as corrupted. The Symbolist artist’s house embodied spiritual ideas, with the intention to make the inner world accessible and the artist’s soul visible. This concept belongs to a certain moment in the history of ideas, when at the

turn of the 19th century the possibility to progress backwards was imagined, and the capacity to build a better world was considered a matter of goodwill. In the seclusion of their house, artists hoped to witness a new dawn.

Laura Gutman is a French historian of art and culture, who specialises in cultural transfers between France and the Nordic countries at the turn of the 19th century. She has curated a number of exhibitions in Finland and in France, and has taken part in international publications and seminars. She is a founding member of the association The Birch and the Star – Finnish Perspectives on the Long 19th Century, devoted to cross-disciplinary research. Her thesis on artists’ houses defended at Ecole du Louvre prompted her move to Finland in 2001.
In 1916 the Norwegian artist and designer Gerhard Munthe (1849–1929) finally completed his decoration of the reconstructed medieval hall Håkonshall in Bergen, Norway. The project had taken several years, and during this time it had greatly expanded from Munthe’s original plan of woven tapestries. A contemporary visitor to the hall would have been met by frescos of varying sizes depicting scenes from the Norse sagas. There were benches decorated with woodcarvings, decorated doorframes and even a large music pavilion, and all of these features echoed the ornaments found in the frescos. There was a series of stained-glass windows, ornamental ironwork in the form of chandeliers, door latches and candlesticks, and through it all a selection of textiles in striking colours. While some of the work, such as the woodcarving, had been undertaken by other artisans, the design was all conceived by Munthe. For him the hall was best considered as a whole – a form of Gesamtkunstwerk – and he considered it among his major works, and indeed in some ways it was (Fig. 1).

For the interior design of the Håkonshall Munthe drew upon several decades of work and experiments in creating an art that echoed Norse and medieval art, yet without being bound by it. Ever since the late 1880s, he had experimented with art whose forms drew inspiration from Norse and medieval history. In this capacity he had also been a central artist and cultural activist in several projects that were intimately connected to the sentiments of Romantic nationalism in late 19th-century Norway. Munthe was thus one of several Norwegian artists, writers and scholars who at this time were concerned with and inspired by Norse history and myth.
Although Munthe and his contemporaries knew what they wanted – a historicist art inspired specifically by Norwegian and Norse history and objects – they were less certain as to how to go about creating it. While they were well informed by the developments for instance, in England and Germany with regards to different revival styles and ideas, such as the teachings of John Ruskin or the Symbolist mysticism of Arnold Böcklin, they – and in particular, Munthe – did not wish directly to copy these styles and ideas. Rather, they wished to create their own distinct take, and again especially for Munthe, the goal became twofold: to explore what entailed a form of Norse revival steeped in history and Romantic national sentiment, all while preserving what Munthe called ‘one’s whole identity as a free artist’. Studying Munthe’s work will therefore allow a glimpse into how the ideas of revival
and medievalism were adapted and transformed in *fin-de-siècle* Norway. I will particularly focus on Munthe as he felt he had found the answer to the conundrum of juggling the independence of the artist and the perceived collective need for a distinct Norwegian art with a sense of historical sensibility. I propose that he outlined what he called a sense of history through his concept of rhythm and rhythmical art. By considering two examples of his art in connection with his theoretical reflections, these ideas of rhythm and revival will be explored. The first work is the aforementioned Håkonshall, though with the unfortunate caveat that Munthe’s interior was destroyed by an explosion from a nearby ship in 1943. The analysis must therefore be based on the copious sketches and photographs that remain of the hall, as well as the large digital reconstruction of the interior executed by the Nationalmuseum in Oslo in 2018. A work which has survived is the sumptuous publication of the medieval poem *Draumkvedet* (The Dream Poem) from 1904, which forms the second main case study.

**The decorative future of Norwegian art?**

In 1901, a group of highly influential cultural personages published a massive two-volume work called *Norge i det Nittende Aarhundrede* (Norway in the 19th Century). Lavishly illustrated and featuring essays from a selection of who’s who in contemporary Norwegian cultural, political and scientific life the work’s goal was no less than a catalogue of what made Norway unique.4 Among the essays published in this collection was the first art-historical summary of Norwegian art, penned by art historian and critic Andreas Aubert (1851–1913). Aubert started the saga of Norwegian art with J.C. Dahl (1788–1857) and his sojourn in Dresden and involvement in German Romanticism, and he ended it proclaiming Gerhard Munthe as the culmination and future of Norwegian art.5 The reason for Aubert’s elevation of Munthe was given as the latter’s ability to develop an art firmly anchored in Norwegian culture, nature and history. The art Aubert specifically referred to was historically-inspired art, which Munthe himself sometimes called his rhythmic art, but which others, including Aubert, called his decorative art.

The latter term described a stylised, geometric art in bright, often complementary colours reminiscent of, yet distinct from, Norwegian folk art and medieval woodcarving and church

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5 Andreas Aubert, ‘Norges Malerkunst,’ in Nordahl Rolfsen & Erik Werenskiold (eds.), *Norge i det nittende Aarhundrede* (Kristiania: Cammermeyer, 1900), 365–401.
Fig. 2. Gerhard Munthe, Chandelier and wall painting on the North Wall of the Håkonshall, 1918, 34.8cm x 21.8cm. KODE Art Museums of Bergen
Photo: KODE / Dag Fosse
The idea and execution of this decorative art is reminiscent of the wider European tendency for ‘vernacular styles’, where the shapes and colours of folk art were heralded by some artists as a more genuine and authentic form of art. However, a fascinating aspect of Munthe’s oeuvre was that he worked in this decorative style at the same time as he was producing oil on canvas paintings in a Naturalist style, often executed *plein-air*. These Naturalist paintings can be traced back to his education in Düsseldorf, as well as his subsequent inspiration from the Barbizon school. In general Munthe’s paintings comprised idyllic, almost impressionistic summer landscapes which in style, colour and motif are surprisingly distinct from his decorative, medievalist art. It has been customary to treat Munthe’s Naturalist paintings and his decorative works as distinct spheres. The first major studies of Munthe carried out by Hilmar Bakken are typical of this division, with one volume dedicated to a biographical study, which included considerations of his Naturalist art, and another volume dedicated to Munthe’s decorative art. While the scope of this article does not allow for a deeper consideration of Munthe’s Naturalist work, I will state that the decorative and Naturalist should be seen in tandem rather than apart.

That such a consideration is necessary becomes evident when considering Munthe’s belief that the choice of artistic style was largely dictated by the motifs and themes to be depicted. For Munthe Naturalist art was eminently suited to depicting landscapes and interiors, as is evident in his many watercolour studies of his home in Leveld, or in his landscape studies from rural areas in Norway, such as Vågå. However, when it came to depicting historical and mythical motifs he found Naturalist art highly unsuitable, and even derided attempts at Naturalist depictions of mythical places such as Valhalla. In creating historical and mythical images, the style of art had to communicate the same historical aura as the tales that informed the motif. Subsequently his choice of a decorative style when depicting historical motifs was due to how he saw the decorative aesthetic being in tune with the history it was depicting.

When Aubert wrote his essay Munthe was just starting work on *Draumkvedet*, and it would be some years before he would receive his commission for the Håkonshall. However, Munthe was already an established name, partly due to his artistic and

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editorial work for an illustrated edition of the Norse sagas from 1896, as well as several other interior and design commissions. The works in question in this article were thereby started by Munthe after he had worked on decorative art for some years, and they can be read as a culmination of years of experimentation and execution. They also came after Aubert, who was one of the most influential art historians and critics of the day, had proclaimed Munthe the embodiment of contemporary Norwegian art. This is significant as it indicates that Munthe’s take on historicist art was both established and accepted. Munthe was not a radical outsider or questing loner, but rather very much an accepted part of the establishment – a part, which segued well with his conservative, even self-proclaimed reactionary, stance. It is therefore possible to see Munthe as part of a wider Nordic movement of national and patriotic ideas of art channelled through a reinterpretation of vernacular folk art and historical objects. The latter Munthe found in the many newly established museums and collections, and his notes and sketchbooks reveal that he made frequent trips to them to sketch historical art objects. This too was in line with larger European-wide trends described by Michelle Facos, Patricia Berman and others.

While Aubert, as well as Munthe himself, tended to stress the artist’s specific Norwegian take on art, it is therefore possible to see Munthe as very much part of a wider European art world. This is also evident in the inspiration he drew from Symbolist art, his connection to various German Secessionist movements (he was featured in Julius Meier-Graaf’s avant-garde art journal Pan, in 1895), as well as British Arts and Crafts and French Art Nouveau. As such Munthe was similar to other Nordic artists, such as Akseli Gallen Kallela (1865–1931), who made illustrations for Pan, and it is possible to see Munthe as part of a wider Nordic trend in which artists were concerned with questions of the national, but placed these concerns within a highly international context.

The difficulty in connecting Munthe to one specific movement comes in part from the great reluctance of Munthe himself to do so, the reasons for which I will explore further along in the text, as well as from the translational character of Norwegian art at this time. Implicitly in Aubert’s stress on the need for a specific Norwegian form of art could also be found the story of Norwegian art so far. Starting with Aubert’s designated point of

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11 Kokkin, Gerhard Munthe, 275
12 Gerhard Munthe, Ms. Fol 1071. Tilhører maler Gerhard Munthe, 1890–1900 (Bergen: Bergen University Museum).
13 Facos & Hirsh, Art, Culture, and National identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe, 9. See also particularly Patricia G. Berman’s contribution to that volume with ‘Making family values: Narratives of kinship and peasant life in Norwegian Nationalism’, 207–228.
origin – Johan Christian Dahl – Norwegian artists had consistently had to go abroad for their education. Being on the periphery of Europe, Norway had no great artistic centres, nor indeed any higher education for its artists in the 19th century. From the 1810s onwards, therefore, talented Norwegians who wished to become artists had to move abroad, usually to Copenhagen or to different German destinations, such as Dresden, Berlin, Düsseldorf and Munich. From the 1890s onwards, they also started venturing to Paris. Munthe himself had gone first to Düsseldorf, where his great-uncle Ludvig Munthe (1841–96) was a professor and reasonably successful landscape painter in the academy style. However, after an early period in Düsseldorf, Munthe went to Munich and Paris, and was undoubtedly influenced by both places. There is, for instance, a certain similarity between Jules Bastien-Lepage and Munthe concerning motifs and depictions of landscape and the interplay between light and greenery when considering Bastien-Lepage’s *October* (1878) and Munthe’s *Idyll* (1886). Jan Kokkin has suggested that he also drew inspiration from artists such as Eugen Grasset, and it is clear that, rather than being the product of one specific artistic centre, Munthe – like many artists from the so-called peripheral countries – was in a position to select and combine ideas and styles from several places, in order to create his own.

With the growing stress placed on the idea of a patriotic artistic expression, combined with the specific contemporary Norwegian political struggle for independence from Sweden in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, the need for a national Norwegian art began to develop. The necessity of long educational trips abroad, combined with the fact that several artists subsequently chose to live outside Norway altogether, became problematic in a context where land and culture were increasingly seen as symbiotically linked. Nor did it help that Norwegian art at the time (and some would argue it is still the case) had something of an inferiority complex as a peripheral little brother to the large, important art centres of the continent. Subsequently it was in both Aubert’s and Munthe’s interest to stress the specific Norwegian-ness of Munthe’s art, as it helped argue that Norwegian art too had great artistic value and was something more than ‘simply copies’ of continental works. Indeed Munthe especially, tended to downplay any foreign inspiration for his work. Instead, he talked


15 The inferiority complex takes different forms, but is perhaps best captured by how older Norwegian art-historical surveys talk of Norwegian art as being ‘retarded’ in comparison to continental art. By this is meant that for instance the Rococo style came late to Norway, in other ways that it was retarded in comparison to the development on the continent. It is an understanding of art-historical development which is explicitly teleological and even modernist in its framework, and while the word ‘retarded’ is no longer in use in contemporary Norwegian art history its influence can still be felt. See for instance Leif Østby, *Norges Kunsthistorie* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1962).
about finding inspiration for his colour schemes in the clothes and art of Norwegian farmers, or even flora considered particularly prevalent in Norway, such as rowan berries. While Aubert was slightly more lenient in comparing Munthe to foreign artistic traditions – presenting him as the Norwegian artist most suited to emulate the ideas of John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–96) – Munthe himself tended to brush aside such possible connections.

While this brief survey of Norwegian art history and Munthe’s proposed role in it reveal both the national and more international concerns inherent in Munthe’s art, it is time to consider more in-depth the role played by history – and specifically the idea of a revival of historical art – in his work. I now turn to consider more closely the works in question here, starting with the interior of the Håkonshall, before considering Draumkvedet.

A kingly hall – Munthe’s decoration of the Håkonshall

The so-called Håkonshallen (lit. The Hall of Håkon) was a large, rectangular building, which was part of the Bergenshus fortress complex in the inner harbour of Bergen. The building had been the focus of a long reconstruction and preservation campaign, starting with J.C. Dahl in the 1830s. Since then the hall had been significantly reconstructed under the auspices of Foreningen for Norske fortidsminnersmerkers bevaring (the Society for Preservation of National Monuments). They had opted to emphasise the building’s medieval history, and argued for its ties to the architectural style of England and Normandy, as well as the stone churches around Trondheim in Norway. Upon completion of the extensive restoration, it was agreed that the main hall should be decorated in line with the building’s elevation into a form of historical monument. The monumental and commemorative aspects of the hall were heightened when Norway gained Independence in June 1905, which ended a struggle that had been waged to a smaller or larger degree since the proclamation of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. The independence came with the ascension to the throne of a new Norwegian king, who took the name Haakon VII (1872–1957), the same name as the historical King Håkon V Håkonsen (1207–63) after which the hall had been named in the 1830s. The
general feeling was therefore that the newly reconstructed hall should serve as a public hall fit for the new king and should be representative of the newly independent Norway.

The idea to redecorate the interior of the reconstructed hall had already been aired by J.C. Dahl, who had brought in the German architect Friedrich Wilhelm Schiertz to sketch a possible interior. While Schiertz’s designs were never put to use, the idea of interior decoration remained, and in the first years of the 20th century the decoration of the hall was put out to commission.\textsuperscript{22} Munthe received the brief, in part due to his previous experiences with designing interiors and historically-inspired art, as well as a result of his personal acquaintances.\textsuperscript{23} As mentioned in the introduction, the original commission was much smaller in scale than the eventual outcome, which was completed in 1916. In fact the original idea was limited to woven tapestries, the design of which was seen as one of Munthe’s particular strengths. He had worked with textile and tapestry design since the late 1880s, and his reputation was such that when the art historian and museum director Jens Thiis (1870–1942) wanted to establish a weaving academy for women in connection with Nordenfjeldske kunstindustrimuseum (The Museum of Applied Arts) in Trondheim, he invited Munthe to be principal designer. The weaving academy was inspired in part by the British Arts and Crafts movement, but while Thiis had no issues with declaring his foreign inspiration – even proclaiming in 1903 that ‘Morris is our Master’ – Munthe was much more reluctant about being compared to what he simply referred to as ‘the British’.\textsuperscript{24} Be that as it may, Munthe’s involvement with the weaving school and the praise he received from Thiis – who alongside Andreas Aubert was one of the most influential art historians in Norway at the time – are good indications of how valued Munthe and his tapestry designs were in Norway at the time.

However, Munthe’s ideas for the Håkonshall soon expanded beyond woven tapestries and it became clear that his vision called for a more radical, all-encompassing and permanent form of interior decoration. Woven tapestries, after all, could be removed. The same was not so easy with frescos, stained-glass windows or even doors. When it came to interiors, Munthe had a history of designing every piece of the decoration in connection with the whole. In one of his first commissions for interior

\textsuperscript{22} Kokkin, \textit{Gerhard Munthe}, 228–29.
\textsuperscript{23} Kokkin, \textit{Gerhard Munthe}, 229.
\textsuperscript{24} Sørensen, ‘Designing a Nation’.
decoration, the so-called Eventyrrommet (lit. The Fairytale room) located in the Holmenkollen Touristhotel outside Oslo, this had manifested in Munthe designing everything from wall decorations to furniture. This has led to Eventyrrommet being called the first example of a Gesamtkunstwerk in Norway, with all the pieces working in synthesis with each other to produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The term is German and its theoretical origin is to be found in German Romanticism. Munthe had spent considerable time studying and working both in Düsseldorf and Munich, and he spoke and wrote German. Given the term’s frequent use within German art it is not unreasonable to think that Munthe knew of it, as well as the ideas behind it, even though he did not specifically use the term himself. Furthermore, the ideas of the Gesamtkunstwerk are also to be seen in the decoration of Håkonshallen, where Munthe expanded upon his previous tendency to design a complete interior.

The result was that Munthe’s ideas were to be found in the design of everything from benches, to carpets and candleholders. With such an abundance it was difficult to state that one object was more distinct than the others, though the monumental wall frescos are perhaps the best candidates. On the north wall there were two frescos depicting the coronation of Norse kings, among them Håkon IV Håkonson of medieval fame, as well as his son Magnus ‘The Lawgiver’ Håkonson (1238–80). Along the east wall ran a series of frescos telling the story of Princess Kristina (1234–62), the daughter of Håkon IV Håkonson, who sailed to Spain to marry the Spanish prince Don Felipe, brother of King Alfonso X (1221–84) of Castille. The selection of these historical figures was not only dictated by the hall’s location – Kristina had been born in Bergen – but also due to the 19th-century elevation of this period as a former Golden Age of independent Norwegian history, with the added bonus of depicting Norway as a worthwhile player on the international scene. Both the series of frescos and the supporting ornaments were created in a medievalist style that was deemed particularly suited to the historical motifs at hand. This is vital as it indicates that a guiding principle for Munthe in designing the interior was the historical era of 13th-century Norway. Subsequently, while Munthe could be said to be part of the wider European tendency to adopt a vernacular art, it is

27 Magnus ‘The Lawgiver’ Håkonsson was given his moniker due to instigating a large-scale revision of the Landslov, aka Law of the Land. The result was the written and publicly presented Landslov and Bysloven from 1274–76. As written law they thereby preceded the various Danish and Swedish laws that marked the period on which Norway was the junior part in various Scandinavian unions. For the newly independent Norway the laws of the Lawgiver were potent symbols for the right of Norwegian independence.
necessary to stress that his decorative art was equally anchored in a certain vision of history.

The term ‘vision’ is especially apt here for its multifarious connotations. It can imply both a certain version of history, while also indicating a visual depiction of the same history. Such a double optic is well suited to Munthe’s ideas about his decorative art which he saw as simultaneously drawing upon historical styles for inspiration, while also making the same history present through his art. A closer look at one of the images in the Kristina cycle can serve as a more detailed example (Fig. 3). This scene depicts Kristina and her lavish bridal party riding through France. What is immediately striking is the degree of stylisation it shows. Neither the landscape nor any of the people depicted appear to have any individual features. The landscape is barely lineated, visualised mostly through a selection of trees in flower. There is little or no use of perspective or shading. Instead the figures are drawn with a strong, clearly visible black line which accentuates their almost geometric shapes. A closer look at the trees and flowers reveal Munthe’s use of strong, contrasting colours with little or no attempt at shading. The green trees and white, star-like flowers seem instead to emphasise the flat and ornamental. The figures are equally stylised, appearing mainly in profile or three-quarters profile and without any overt distinguishing features. The geometric and flat impression is highlighted by the distinct use of repetition. Selected parts of the images – be they trees, horses or soldiers – are repeated with minimal or no individual alteration, and in part take on the role of repeating ornaments.

Fig. 3. Gerhard Munthe, Kristina 2, Brudefølge på vei gjennom Frankrike, 1905. Sketch for the Kristina cycle, watercolour, 20cm x 83.5cm.
KODE Art Museums of Bergen
Photo: KODE / Dag Fosse

Visions of History: Gerhard Munthe’s Rhythm and Revival in fin-de-siècle Norway
While Munthe often based his decorative art on specific stories or people, he almost never gave his characters any distinguishing, personalised features. This is also evident with Kristina. While she is the main character in the cycle, and can be identified due to her placement in the composition and a certain form of individual clothing and colouration, she is never depicted as an individual. Her face and features are almost identical to the others in the work, and like them she displays little to no emotion. Rather, she is drawn with the same straight, near geometric lines, and with the same distinct use of profile, as all of the characters. This treatment of historical figures is a subtle, yet important indication of where the focus of Munthe’s historical art lies. The personalities and emotions of the historical figures he depicts, such as Kristina as an individual, do not concern him. Instead she is better read as a cipher that allows him to play with historically inspired art and ornamentation. What this implies will be explored later, but for now we can say that what is on display in Munthe’s decorative art is history as the historical. Consequently, what he is interested in depicting is not Kristina’s personal journey or individual character, but rather – through an amalgamation and reinterpretation of historical art – making the contemporary spectator aware of this sense of history.

However, the Kristina cycle was part of a larger decorative scheme, which in turn echoed the clear lines, geometric shapes, primary colours and frequent use of ornamental repetition. A digital reconstruction of the hall from 2018 gives an indication of the overwhelming sensory experience this must have been.28 Opposite the Kristina cycle was the wall with glass windows. These in turn were fitted with stained-glass designs depicting medieval Norwegian kings. The light filtered through these windows would thereby flicker across the various scenes in the Kristina cycle, providing coloured, vibrant light to dance across the geometric, ornamental pictures. Details and ornaments would also have been picked up and expanded in the various woodcarvings found throughout the hall. At the shorter, south end of the hall, the large wooden music pavilion had been designed by Munthe, but carved by his frequent collaborator, the artisan woodcarver Johan Borgersen (1863–1930). Here Munthe’s designs could be found in the natural brown colour of the wood, though with certain

selected parts such as fanciful heraldic shields highlighted in bright colours.

This sense of all-encompassing decoration also included the tactile experience of the hall. When visitors grasped a door handle, walked on the carpet or sat on a bench, they would be using and inhabiting the artwork. Consequently, visitors would be encapsulated in this vision of historical imagery. Or more precisely, Munthe’s vision of history. For while he was open about drawing inspiration from historical art, he was equally insistent on the artistic interpretation of the historical examples. In fact it was the opportunity to combine the two, which he saw as particularly enticing:

*Bergen has ordered a work of Art, and what interested me was first and foremost the combined nature of the subject – to create a whole with so many considerations, so many types of material, that each to its own gives Colour and Form different values and denominations. To tune this interior in such a way together, that each single visitor in our time can speak about the memories of the place while also finding joy at its artistic details.*

Consequently, Munthe was not advocating a mimetic interpretation of historical art, but rather an interpretation or even a continuation of the same. This view caused him to clash publicly with leading figures in the Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, who had been central in the hall’s reconstruction. Their idea of an interior decoration had leaned much more in the direction of a historically founded reconstruction, and for them Munthe’s design was too fanciful and even too modern to be suitable for the hall. Nicolay Nicolaysen (1817–1911), archaeologist and former leader of the Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, was a powerful figure within the preservation movement, and he went so far as to state publicly that Munthe’s work ‘had diminished our best memorial’.

Not everyone agreed with Nicolaysen’s assessment, and Munthe himself was the most forceful voice among them. In making his views known through a public debate in a national newspaper, he refuted Nicolaysen’s criticism and continued by criticising the reconstruction work carried out on the hall in the

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29 Munthe, *Minder og Meninger*, 120. Author’s translation. The original Norwegian reads: ‘Bergen har bestilt et Kunstværk, og hva der interesser mig først og fremst er emnets kombinerte natur, at danne et hele af saa mange Hensyn, saa mange Slags Materiale, som hver især giver Farve og Form forskjellige Værdier og Valeur. At stemme dette Interiør slig sammen, at det til vor Tid kan tale om Stedets Minder og samtidig glæde ved kunstneriske Detaljer – hver enkelt Besøgende.’

first place – work for which Nicolaysen was partly responsible.\textsuperscript{31}
What became clear through Munthe’s argument was that he felt he had adhered strictly to a vision of history and that his interpretation was just as valid, if not more so, than the one presented by the Society. What was not clear from this public debate was what exactly constituted Munthe’s vision of history. Which principles had he so adamantly followed? A central tenet seemed to be a synthesis of the ideas of older artworks and the contemporary role of the artist. It is a complicated balance that goes to the core of what Munthe aimed to do, and which made up the framework of why his decorative – or rhythmic – style had the geometrical, stylistic and colorful expression it did. However, to find further answers as to Munthe’s ideas of art-historical styles, it is necessary to turn to the other work under scrutiny here: the book he designed for the medieval poem \textit{Draumkvedet}, which he had worked on prior to the majority of the Håkonshall project.

\textbf{The visions of Olaf – \textit{Draumkvedet} and the role of medieval ballads in \textit{fin-de-siècle} Norway}

In 1904, the newly established Norwegian Society of Fine Books (Foreningen for Norsk Bokkunst) published a lavish and illustrated folio version of \textit{Draumkvedet}. The poem was said to have medieval roots, telling of the eschatological visions of a man called Olaf Åsteson. In the period from Christmas Eve and through the thirteen days of Christmas, Olaf experiences a supernatural sleep and receives religious visions that culminate in Judgement day. On waking, Olaf rides to church and on the threshold he recounts his visions for the people attending mass. The poem or song is therefore eschatological in nature, and its narrative takes place in visionary and historical space.\textsuperscript{32} This makes it hard to ascribe any specific date or location to the poem, while also giving the narrative a supernatural aspect. The sense of timelessness in the poem is further strengthened by the presence of supernatural and/or mythical figures, some of whom might be influenced by Norse mythology. These include a rider called Grutte Gråskjegg (Grutte the Grey Beard), who is reminiscent of the Norse god Odin, as well as a metaphysical bridge between realms that the poem calls Gjallarbrui. In the poem, the bridge is the site for crossing from the land of the living to the land of the dead, though its name and part of its function bear close resemblance to the Norse bridge of

\textsuperscript{31} Gerhard Munthe, \textit{Aftenposten}, 8–11 July 1906. Central parts of the reconstruction of the hall had been done by architect Christian Christie, who was Nicolaysen’s brother-in-law and fellow member of the Society for the Preservation on Monuments. 19th-century Norway was a place with a limited cultural elite, and family connections and nepotism were prevalent. For an overview of the reconstruction of the hall and Nicolaysen and Christie’s roles see Sørensen, ‘At vårt land var et selvstendig rike’. For an overview of the debate between Nicolaysen and Munthe regarding the Håkonshall see also Kokkin, \textit{Gerhard Munthe}, 226–52.

\textsuperscript{32} The origin of \textit{Draumkvedet} is uncertain. It is possible that it dates from the medieval period, whereas other dates set its origin as the 16th century. See Gudleiv Bø & Magne Myhren, \textit{Draumkvedet} (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 10–11.
the same name, which bridged the human realm of Midgard with the land of the dead, called Hel.

The poem was a part of an oral culture in the region of Telemark in south-eastern Norway, and was ‘discovered’ and written down in several versions in the 1840s. Inspired by the work of among others the German brothers Grimm, as well as the work by Elias Lönnrot in collecting oral Finnish poetry of which the best known is *The Kalevala*, this period in Norwegian history saw an increasing number of learned men starting to collect and write down oral folk culture. *Draumkvedet* was among the many songs and fairytales that were collected and published in this period, and so its dissemination to a larger audience was part of a wider corpus. However, the themes of *Draumkvedet* were uncommon in a Norwegian context. While there were several folk songs and medieval ballads about trolls, maidens and fierce knights, *Draumkvedet* was alone in being a distinctly religious and visionary work. Despite, or perhaps because of, its unique character, the poem became popular in the late 19th century, and was heralded as part of the golden medieval age of Norway. It thereby became an integral part of the country’s cultural heritage, and so its selection for a special publication was not surprising.

That Gerhard Munthe should be connected to such a publication was also not surprising. His previous work with the Norse sagas, as well as his interest in folk songs were well known. In his design for the interior of the Fairytale room in the 1890s, he had drawn inspiration from folk songs, and even included verses from one of them – the ballad of *Liti Kjersti*, a girl who is abducted by trolls – into the decoration scheme. Within the cultural circle in which Munthe moved there was also a prevalent interest in folksongs, and in singers such as Thorvald Lammers (1841–1922), who at the time was one of the most successful singers (baritone) in Norway and whose repertoire included renditions of folk songs. This cultural circle also included the folklorist Prof. Molkte Moe (1859–1913), son of the priest and fairytale collector Jørgen Moe (1813–82), and the original plan for the publication of *Draumkvedet* was that Munthe would collaborate with Molkte Moe. Munthe was tasked with the artistic side of the project, while Moe would write a scholarly essay.

Despite being given several extensions to his deadlines, Moe failed to deliver the promised essay, and the publication as
planned had to be altered. However, Moe’s presence in the project was not completely removed. There were several textual versions of *Draumkvedet* available, and the 1904 publication would follow the version that Moe had put together.\(^{37}\) While Moe’s textual rendition of the poem remained, the publication as a whole came to be dominated by Munthe. He was the artistic designer in all aspects of the production. His contribution included illustrations to the text, the different marginalia ornamentation, as well as the front cover, the dust cover and the end sheets. Significantly, he also created the font for the text. The latter was in part inspired by the *Codex Frisianus* from the early 14th century, which was one of the primary sources for the *Old Edda*, where the oldest version of the sagas could be found.

The publication was in a folio format, printed on high quality paper with a selection of illustrations and titles emphasised by golden embellishment. Some pages were dedicated to larger illustrations whose style appeared like a blend of illuminated manuscripts and Jugend-style aesthetics. This segued well with the poem’s proposed medieval origin, though it also marked out the publication as in tune with larger Nordic and European trends. The care Munthe took with every detail of the publication indicates that he considered it as a whole, rather than something to which he simply contributed illustrations. Rather I would argue that, much like his work with interior decoration such as the Håkonshall, this focus on the overall perspective was very much a core concern for him. A closer look at the interaction between text, illustrations and overall design in *Draumkvedet* can elucidate this further. Moreover, it can help clarify Munthe’s idea of rhythm in art which, I will argue, can be seen as a foundation for his revival art.

**Text and imagery in Munthe’s *Draumkvedet*\(^{37}\)**

The cover of Munthe’s *Draumkvedet* is in thick, supple leather with ornamental letters and decorations embossed in blue and gold leaf. Parts of the ornamentation have been further embellished by the use of slightly raised, blue glass beads placed to highlight selected parts of geometric interlacing and patterns that form the decoration on the left of the cover. The texture of the leather, the embossed text and the glass beads all serve to give the cover a three-dimensional feel, and bring to mind the elaborate covers
of medieval books set with enamels, jewels and gold filigree. There is also a specific tactile sensation in handling this book, as if one’s fingers are brushing against something rare and valuable. It is clear from the outset that this book is not a mass-produced volume designed for easy reading, but is rather geared towards aesthetic contemplation, and through that an appreciation of the poem’s historical dimension. The historical connection is emphasised by how the cover so clearly brings to mind Viking and early medieval art. The dust cover and end sheets are decorated with patterns similar to both the cover and the inside of the book. The text itself is surrounded by and partly integrated with the
various illustrations. Several of the larger illustrations also pick up strands of the text and include it as part of the image (Fig. 4).

The historical focus is emphasised by the cover text. The title Draumkvæde has been given the prominent place, but so too has the designation Et digt fra Middelalderen (A poem from The Middle Ages). The words Draumkvæde and Middelalderen appear to grow out of the ornamentation on the left-hand side. This is emblematic for what follows, as Munthe repeatedly integrates the text of the poem into the larger illustrations, and the line between the poem’s text and Munthe’s artistic interpretation of it is consistently blurred. While he did not execute the calligraphy himself, leaving that up to a Mr. A. Sørensen, Munthe oversaw the calligraphic process, which included adding parts of the text to the illustrations. It is tempting to see Munthe’s focus on the integration of the text by adapting a suitable font as something related to the previous work he did on the Norse sagas, and particularly in the development of how he sought an integration between text and image.

The sagas published in 1896 featured chapter headlines and different decorations created by Munthe, and the publication could also boast illustrations made by most of the established Norwegian artists at that time. However, the text itself was printed in a traditional gothic font common to books of the period. This made it suitable for commercial mass printing, but did not allow for the same integration of text and images as was the case with Draumkvedet’s specially designed fonts. A page from the saga of St Olav can demonstrate the difference. Both the border at the top of the page, as well as the central illustration, are by Munthe. The latter depicts St Olav looking down from the heavens, with the faithful gathering around his altar (Fig. 5). St Olav and the altar form a sort of pillar which divides the page in two, and the text would be printed on both sides of the pillar. The text in question would have been verses about St Olav, but while the content of the text matches the content of the illustration there was no pictorial interaction between the two. In fact, the illustration of St Olav could easily be juxtaposed with any manner of texts, with the reader being none the wiser.

In contrast, the various illustrations in Draumkvedet frequently incorporate the text as part of the image, binding text and image much more tightly together as an aesthetic whole than

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38 A note on the spelling of Draumkvedet and the language used. The cover of the publication gives the title as Draumkvæde. This is a spelling more in line with the Danish influence on Norwegian, which was and remains significant. Due to this the subject of language and orthography has been (and remains!) a highly contested and political subject within Norwegian culture. The role of the text in Draumkvedet should also be seen within this context, particularly since the text of the poem itself is not in the Danish-Norwegian style, but rather in a specific dialect, and the chosen orthography is marked by Molkte Moe’s ideas about what was a more authentic Norwegian language. The contemporary spelling of the title is Draumkvedet, and that is the one, which is used here. For further details about the poem and language, see Bø & Myhren, Draumkvedet.

had been the case with the Norse sagas. The illustration connected to verse 5 is a good example (Fig. 6). It describes how Olaf has woken from his sleep and is riding to church. The priest is holding mass standing in front of the altar. Olaf has not entered the church proper, but sits at the threshold. It is this liminal space, which Munthe has chosen as the first major illustration of the text itself, and he depicts it as a diptych. Olaf is seated to the left, while the priest stands to the right. Above them, in arches that serve both as a frame for the image and as indicative of the church interior,
Fig. 6. *Draumkvedet*, University of Bergen Library
there are quotes from the text. Much like medieval altar frontals, where angels would hold banners inscribed with relevant biblical quotes, the illustration includes a guiding and informative piece of text.

While the text of the poem creates the parameters for the scene Munthe’s interpretation is noticeable. First, while the text gives no indication as to which church Olaf rides towards, and no indication of its history or architectural style, Munthe depicts the interior in ways which bring to mind medieval stave churches. These wooden churches, with their elaborate woodcarving, were central to the Norwegian medievalism of the fin-de-siècle, and Munthe had on several occasions voiced his admiration for these buildings. In this illustration Olaf is shown seated in front of wood panelling and a wooden door with its ornaments of cast iron, and above the priest’s head can be seen two beams in the shape of a St Andrew’s cross. All of these elements were typical of stave church construction. The pillars and capitals separating the images are also reminiscent of the type of zoomorphic woodcarving found on pillars and doors in stave churches. Thus Munthe has created a very specific historical location for Draumkvedet, and one which is in line with the contemporary fascination with the stave churches and medieval woodcarving.

Moreover, the illustration is in tune with a specific reading of the text. Verse 5 starts with describing the priest (Presten stand fyr altari / The priest stands before the altar), and then proceeds to recount how Olaf sits himself down on the threshold (Olav let seg i kyrkjadynni / Olaf sat down at the church threshold). However, Munthe’s illustration shows Olaf to the left, and the priest to the right. Following the western tradition of reading from left to right, such a depiction gives precedence to Olaf in a way that the text does not. In the text, the priest comes first, and in Munthe’s illustration it is Olaf. Moreover, the text only describes the priest as holding mass and nothing about which way he was turned. Through Munthe’s interpretation, the priest appears to be turned away from the people, whereas Olaf is surrounded by them.

A further distinction is made by how Olaf and the priest are dressed in similar colours, though Olaf’s clothes are simple and without the priest’s ornamented chasuble. Lastly, Olaf has a halo, and a parishioner is even kneeling in front of him. Olaf has placed a hand on the kneeling man’s head. Nothing in the text gives any
indication about Olaf being a saint or that he blessed the people listening. While the priest and Olaf are visually juxtaposed they are also made distinct, with Olaf being the figure who interacts with the people. In contrast, the priest is shown focused on reading the Bible while turned away from his parishioners. A scene, which the text of *Draumkvedet* recounts with a certain objectivity, is in Munthe’s depiction given a certain tension. A reader of the text and the image combined is likely to gain a more positive image of Olaf, as he is the one interacting with the congregation and is depicted with a saint’s halo. Subsequently, it is possible to read the illustrations as lauding Olaf and his visions, possibly to the exclusion of the priest and his Bible.

Taken as a whole, Munthe’s work with *Draumkvedet* reveals an intentional interaction with text and imagery, in which he interprets and in some sense expands upon the meaning of the text by intertwining it with the illustrations. However, this interaction of text and art can be read as containing an even deeper connection, and one which formed the basis of Munthe’s ideas about historically themed art. To unpack these ideas we must turn to Munthe’s concept of rhythmic art and engage in the theoretical and artistic framework Munthe ascribed to this aspect of his art.

**Depicting rhythm – the intertwined role of language, style and art in Munthe’s works**

Munthe was an avid writer of essays on art and aesthetics. The value he attached to these essays can be appreciated by how he gathered them for publication under the title *Minder og Meninger* (Memories and Opinions) in 1919. While some of the essays concern memories, the majority belong more to the category of ‘Opinions’ and can be read as Munthe’s own theoretical musings on his art and creative process. The concept of Rhythmic art is most thoroughly introduced in an essay from 1909. Here, Munthe seeks to place the concept into a larger narrative about the development of art styles, and he posits a fairly traditional chronological framework for these arts by placing their origin in the states of the ancient world. He goes back to Sumerian and Assyrian art, before linking up with the art of Ancient Greece and Rome, and then Western European art through to his own day. This is a fairly standard linear narrative, though Munthe adds a personal touch by ascribing...
different descriptions to the different eras of art. He sees the first and oldest art as founded on the principle of what he calls the rhythmic. Later, primarily through the influence of classical Greek and Roman art, pictorial art in particular took a turn for the naturalistic and emphasised the idea of the beautiful as a common motif. Yet a central tenet in Munthe’s theory of art is that there is no universal form of art, and subsequently no universal development of art. The turn to the naturalistic might have been hegemonic, but he never regards it as all-encompassing, and certainly not as a teleological certainty.

Furthermore, the naturalistic turn occurred at different intervals across Europe, reaching the Northern areas later than the countries around the Mediterranean. Therefore, older art from the periphery, such as Nordic medieval art or Celtic art, preserved their rhythmic tradition for a longer period of time than, say, the art of Italy. In addition, Munthe states that the turn towards a naturalistic hegemony happened at a slower pace in the case of poetry and prose, and so the rhythmic style existed for longer in written form than it did in pictorial form. Following Munthe’s argument, it is therefore possible to claim that Nordic medieval poetry and language are examples of art where the rhythmic style had the greatest longevity. This is a central point in understanding the emphasis he places on text and language in his art works.

While Munthe does not give any specific examples of what he considered this rhythmic style, I would argue that it is possible to gain an insight by considering his thoughts concerning the sagas and medieval texts such as Draumkvedet. In one of his essays he states that he first grasped the nordic rhythm through his work with the Norse sagas:

*When I in 1896 took part in illustrating the Norse sagas, I was as soon as I started confronted by the mythology – how I saw Odin, Thor and into the legends and prehistorical – from the Saga of the Ynglings down to Haakon Jarl. No place is a rhythmic preparation more fitting, for also in the North lived its Ancient period in the rhythmic view on art, and the way it is natural to view the Norse gods in the old styles which created them in their image (if not as directly as naturalism created the Greek [Gods]), so a shadowy rhythmic poetry carries our*
Fig. 7. Ferden over Gjalalbrui, 1904. University of Bergen Library
old legends into daylight. The Edda’s as well as Snorre’s [The Saga of the Norse kings] secure style lies across this rolling stream, which we look down into here and there and which we notice underneath us the whole time.\(^{45}\)

It is clear that Munthe saw the idea of rhythmic style as embedded in the language of the sagas, and given the emphasis he placed on the role of the text of *Draumkvedet* it is not implausible to think he saw a similar rhythm there. Such a reading can be strengthened by considering another illustration of the poem, which shows the crossing of the Gjallar Bridge – *Ferden over Gjallarbrui* (1904, Fig. 7).\(^{46}\)

The third line of the verse – *no hev eg gjengi Gjaddarbrui* (Now I have walked the Gjaddar-bridge [sic]) – is included in Munthe’s illustration. Again in a manner reminiscent of a medieval altar table, the arches in the image are inscribed with this text. What makes the use of text on these arches so interesting is that the curves accentuate the specific rhythm of the verse. The *Draumkvedet*, like several other medieval Norse texts that fascinated Munthe, were composed according to a specific idea of rhythm, that of alliteration and/or assonance. Alliteration can be defined as the resemblance in sound between the consonants in the beginning or end of a word. Assonance is the resemblance between the vowels.\(^{47}\) It is a form of rhythm which is particularly prominent in the Norse medieval sagas and poetry, and a poem from the saga of Håkon Håkonsson – the very saga which formed the basis for the decoration in the Håkonshall – illustrates both forms of rhythm:

Folket fræg ved gode åring  
Frugda seg, når same sommar  
To gonger frukt gav tre og fuglar  
Herleg tyktest kongens heider.\(^{48}\)

The same way of creating rhythm is at work in *Draumkvedet*, with the verse *no hev eg gjengi Gjaddarbrui* being a particularly good example. Reading the sentence in Norwegian, it becomes apparent that the arches Munthe has included in the image accentuate the line’s original rhythm, with the downturn of each arch corresponding to the natural stops
and emphasis on the letter and sound of ‘g’ which can be found in the verse. Subsequently, Munthe has not only quoted from the original text, but has visually interpreted and emphasised the rhythmic properties of the poem itself. Such a reading is in line with his idea that the language of the sagas and medieval poetry did not simply convey a narrative; they were the essence of these works of art. If this essence were to be be properly channelled into a new medium, then the medium had to be in line with this language and its rhythm:

*It is never possible to take the motif out of the notion in which it lays, and put it in another, which one might find more in tune with the current time: the Norse mythology is particularly unsuited.*

Consequently, the repetition and symmetry Munthe found in the medieval texts had to be visually reflected in his art inspired by these texts, so as to carry over the essence of this art. Thereby the frequent use of ornament and repetition on the walls of the Håkonshall and which mingled with the text in *Draumkvedet* can also be read as a visual interpretation of the particular rhythm Munthe believed was in the same texts. The rows of soldiers and flowers in the Kristina cycle, and the arches filled with text in *Draumkvedet* are thus visualisations of the underlying, all-important rhythm.

For Munthe, such an approach would not be historically anachronistic. First because he did not believe in a universal development of art, and so there was no normative development of art to be anachronistic towards. Secondly, because he felt that a style of art never truly died, but would instead slumber every now and then, before being developed through artists with a fine-tuned understanding of the essence of the style in question. That Munthe saw himself as such a fine-tuned artist is evident, and he argued:

*If I want to speak about the 13th century, about the time of Håkon Håkonsson, then it becomes natural for me to learn about the Gothic – not only the surviving forms, but the meaning and attitude of Gothic. And then to create novelty within that line of thought.*

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49 Munthe ([1909] 1988), 86. Author’s translation. The original quote reads: ‘Det nytter aldri å ta motivet ut av den forestillingen det ligger i, og legge det inn i en annen, som man kanskje finner mer tidsmessig; men den nordiske mytologi tåler det spesielt ikke.’

With this in mind, it is possible to consider Munthe’s work on *Draumkvedet* and Håkonshallen as joined not only by a certain artistic style and historical period, but also as part of a coherent aesthetical philosophy.

**Munthe’s rhythm as a revival?**

I have argued that in his exploration of what he called a rhythmic art Munthe reflected on how an artist can channel and in a sense revive a historical style, all without copying it. Through such a process he felt he could create works of art that were a synthesis of the old and the new, and both *Draumkvedet* and the Håkonshall can be said to be informed by this philosophy of art. Their revival was to be found in the centrality Munthe placed on historical text, its rhythms and visual interpretation exemplified by his extensive use of decoration and stylisation. What Munthe proposed was not a break with historical traditions, but neither was it a return to a specific historical style. Instead he posits the artist as a possible intermediary figure, whose fine-tuned sense of aesthetics can interpret and expand upon the historical legacy. Rather the artist – such as Munthe – must take into consideration the wider historical and cultural context of the artwork he is undertaking. He must consider its historical horison and seek to find its very essence, not to replicate it, but to expand upon it. In so doing Munthe also implicitly argued for the acceptance of a plurality of styles, and to turn away from the idea that there is one universal style. He thereby also argued for the possibility of a distinct Norwegian art – or even a Norse revival – that was equal rather than inferior to the one produced on the continent.

This possible Norse revival did not necessarily visually resemble the medievalist revival styles found for instance in Britain or Germany, but then again that was the point. Munthe had sought to develop an art that was distinctly Norwegian, and according to Aubert and other contemporaries, he had done just that. For a brief while it also looked as if Munthe’s art and ideas would form the basis of a school of art. Several of his pupils, such as Oluf Wold-Torne (1867–1919), continued to explore this form of decorative or rhythmic art. However, with the coming of modernism and abstraction within Norwegian art, this attempt was sidelined.⁵¹

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When Munthe’s illustrations of medieval folksongs were posthumously published by the National Socialist Government in 1943 at the height of the Second World War, it did nothing to help his legacy in post-war Norway. It is only the recent decade, which has started to reassess Munthe and his contemporaries, and as such ensured him a revival of his own.

**Tonje Haugland Sørensen** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Bergen. She is an art historian and film scholar, dealing mainly with the reception of history and with a particular emphasis on questions of cultural memory, historicism and revival in film, photography, art and architecture in the 19th and 20th century.
Craft, Ornament and its Meaning in Finnish Architecture around 1900

Charlotte Ashby

The emotive associations between traditional craft and nationhood are well established in the literature of the craft revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. What is apparent, voiced and unvoiced, in collected studies across the international Art and Crafts movement is the degree to which the revival of local crafts was shaped by internationally circulating ideas regarding their value and potential for meaning.

In this article I will consider the manifestation of craft in Finnish architecture around 1900. I will look at the interaction between the international or universal and the local and national in relation to thinking on the craft revival. A consideration of the application of craft revival thinking in architectural practice will allow me to explore the meanings expressed through architectural ornament, as parts of façades or interiors, that sought to embed the idea of craftmanship in modern building. These meanings can be understood to extend beyond those of national identity, though around 1900 this was often part of what ornament was expected to do. The presence of crafted ornament and the forms it took also addressed wider concerns – triggered by the transformation of modern architecture and the urban environment – through the articulation of humanistic values associated with hand-crafts and hand-making. I aim to nuance emphasis on the reconnection to the local/national heritage by means of a wider discussion of what meanings were served by the insertion of craft into architecture.

The craft revival can be broadly defined as the pan-European movement to research and preserve traditional crafts, as means of reviving and restoring value in contemporary art and design. In the arena of architecture, this took the form of research into vernacular architectural traditions and in the use of other crafts.
techniques, materials, forms or ornament derived from these traditions within contemporary architectural ornament. This later dimension is recognisable in projects that might be labelled as Arts and Crafts or National Romantic, but it also fostered a broader engagement with the meaning and value of materials and techniques that permeated work labelled Art Nouveau and later Modernism. The search for what was sometimes called a new style and sometimes called a new language of ornament overlapped with these efforts because ornament was often the most conspicuous and replicable element of the craft traditions that formed the basis of the new approaches to architecture.

The importance of craft traditions in the development of new architectural approaches around 1900 has been explored by many scholars of Art Nouveau and National Romanticism, both inside and outside Finland. My work is indebted to the work of Finnish scholars, such as Ritva Wäre and Pekka Korvenmaa, whose work in the 1990s charted the importance of such craft revivals, but also pointed out the limits of their impact and their interweaving with other international sources and influences.¹ Their work connects to efforts to explore Finnish architectural history of the late-19th century, as a period during which the Finnish architectural profession emerged and much of its culture was forged.² Outside of Finland, a number of scholars, such as Jeremy Howards and Nicola Gordon Bowe, explored the transnational dimensions of these movements in studies of European Art Nouveau, National Romanticism and Arts and Crafts.³ My work is also in debt to a number of works focused on Central European architecture that addressed the efforts of architects of this period to articulate new identities through architectural ornament.⁴

The current article builds on these earlier works to home in, not just on comparative examples of craft revivals across Europe, but on the means by which these revivals operated transnationally and mechanisms of translation from one region to another and then from one medium to another in design practice. As well as drawing on pan-European material, the article focuses on a set of Finnish case studies. Scholarship on late-19th and early-20th century Finnish architecture has been particularly rich compared to many other European countries, in part because of the importance of the period within Finnish art historiography as a ‘golden age’ and a reflection of the role that Finland’s worldwide


success as a design nation plays in contemporary national consciousness. The result has been a nuanced scholarly field and understanding of the development of educational culture, architectural discourse and professional organisations and the important role of the past and disciplines such as history and archaeology in architectural debates and practice in this period.\(^5\)

The work presented here has its origins in my PhD project, undertaken in the early 2000s, which started out as a transnational study of Baltic urban architecture and was whittled down over time to an individual architect, Vilho Penttilä (1868–1918), and the architecture of Finnish financial institutions.\(^6\) This choice was not an arbitrary one. The forms taken by urban architecture were rapidly evolving, as were the identities they were required to represent. Financial institutions were in a small group of clients with the means to commission large-scale urban buildings, to occupy conspicuous downtown plots and make their choices freely among the architects and styles available. The buildings executed under their auspices were frequently the most lavish and high-status buildings in town, with the exception of churches and town halls. They gave architects a comparably free hand in executing their visions of what urban architecture should look like, unfettered by financial constraints. They were public-facing buildings that sought to address a wide audience of the institutions’ potential customers.

Penttilä was the architect of choice for the Kansallis Osake Pankki (National Share Bank) from the mid-1890s until the hiatus of the First World War and his death in Finland’s Civil War. He was, simultaneously, the Editor of Suomen Teollisuuslehti (The Finnish Industry Gazette) and its various design supplements, and a prominent voice in the first decades of Finnish-language architectural discourse. This allowed me to create a bridge between my interest in architectural practice and architectural discourse. In this manner I am again in debt to Ritva Wäre’s groundbreaking work. The case studies within this chapter, the Helsinki head office of the National Share Bank (1889–91), the Lundqvist Commercial Building, the Pohjola Building and the Viipuri National Share Bank (all 1901), were all buildings I encountered over the course of my doctoral research. An additional advantage of studying prominent urban buildings has been that I have later been able to extend my interest in architectural discourse beyond the specialist architectural Press to consider opinions in the general

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Press. Though the authors were often the same architect-critics who wrote for the architectural Press, their building reviews in the general Press reveal a broader engagement with architectural discourse and argue in favour of a more widely informed audience addressed by these buildings.

This article, therefore, reflects on the presence of this audience. It explores the ramifications of an architectural culture addressing a wider culture shaped by the increased availability of the printed word and the printed image. The audience addressed by Finnish architects was literate and also visually literate. The language of ornament was a construction of European scholarship, but it was also real and manifest in the expanding realm of visual material available. The role of ornament in architecture went beyond aesthetic efforts to make a building look pleasing. Ornament was understood to reflect underlying cultural meanings and allegiances. Ornament had acquired that meaning and an audience who recognised it had been created over the 19th century by means of the circulating discourse of printed texts and images.7

An additional and important dimension of ornament within architecture was one that went beyond the iconography of signs and symbols. It also expressed the investment of care and effort in a building through allusions to the labour and skill manifest in handcrafted elements and this was important in addressing anxieties about meaning and value in modern architecture by reinserting a human dimension.8 The English critic John Ruskin was prominent in this discourse. His ideas were influential across Europe in the latter decades of the 19th century and were widely translated and discussed. Ruskin’s theories were discussed in European arts journals and selections from the works of Ruskin were published in translation in German in 1896, Swedish in 1897 and Russian in 1900.9

The period around 1900 was marked by extensive urban building and the rapid uptake of new architectural technologies that radically changed the nature of the architectural fabric. Finnish towns and cities were transformed, over the matter of a few decades, from a built infrastructure of one- and two-storey wooden buildings, to four- and five-storey brick and render buildings. Bertel Jung, writing in Teknikern (The Technician) in 1901 about the recent architectural development of central Helsinki, stated that new buildings had ‘even made Helsinki a “modern

These new buildings were a source of pride, as were the central heating systems, fire-safety technologies, iron structural elements, gas lighting and, latterly, the electricity and elevators that began to appear. Finnish architectural reviews of the period, in both the professional and general Press, invariably made note of these technological advances. The circulation of international architectural journalism and the increased prevalence of photographic reproductions of architecture revealed the extent to which Finnish architecture was increasingly similar to architecture elsewhere.

This development was not unique to Finland. The building boom of the late 19th century saw cities expand at an unprecedented rate across the world. In Europe and America, architectural culture was increasingly international, as reviews and images of new buildings could circulate internationally in the design Press within months of completion. Incidentally, the international building boom, with its demand for timber scaffolding, directly contributed to Finnish prosperity as a major exporter of timber. The rapidity of this development and the transformation of the built environment necessarily had a destabilising effect. New architectural technologies could not be ignored. Awareness of international developments was a point of pride across the emerging profession of architect, as it was across many professions. The nation’s architecture should aspire to be as functional, sound, technologically advanced and aesthetically pleasing as that of any other nation. At the same time, this threw up a problem of distinction. If it was all these things, was it still Finnish? Architecture, as both a technology and an art, was meant to meet universal modern needs that, barring climatic conditions, did not vary substantially from country to country. At the same time, it was understood to reflect national culture. Architectural ornament, applied to exterior and interior surfaces, were the means by which architects mediated these competing objectives.

**The transnational nature of craft revival discourse**

The apparently paradoxical relationship between the universal and the nationally specific in architecture is initially illustrated by a comparison of Abbe Laugier’s frontispiece depicting the primitive hut from his *Essai sur l’Architecture*, of 1755 (Fig. 1).
Fig. 1. Charles Eisen, Frontispiece for Marc-Antoine Laugier’s book *Essai sur l’Architecture*, Paris, 1755
and a plate from a survey of the buildings of the Finnish peoples (1887, Fig. 2), by the ethnographer Axel Olai Heikel (1851–1924). The primitive hut image serves to suggest the universal origins of all architecture: man’s need for shelter. The form of the hut is presented as a response to the nature of the materials used: wood. The pillars are formed by the upright, still-living trunks of trees. The pitched roof, erected to bridge the two rows of trees, is presented as that first simple step, to augment the natural shelter they provide. In this way, the image reflects the treatise that architecture is, at its roots, a response to needs and to means. At the same time, Laugier’s hut is also presented as the precursor to the column and lintel system of Greek architecture. The female figure, who rests upon a heap of ruined stone capitals and lintels,
directs the putti (the reader) to understand the relationship between the hut and the ruins. This secondary allusion suggests the classical as the universally appropriate aesthetic language with which to clothe rational architecture.

Heikel’s study, in contrast, is focused very much on the specific. It was based on an extensive survey expedition, collecting evidence of the buildings and material culture of the peoples of the Finnic language group, dispersed across the Grand Duchy, the Karelian Isthmus and the Volga region. The connection between language, people and architecture can be aligned with the spread of theories of nationhood into the architectural domain through the late 18th and into the 19th century. Such thinking had come to predominate by the end of the 19th century. The notion that the form people gave to the buildings and objects they made was an expression of their national character had become an orthodoxy.

Heikel’s expedition and much of the intellectual culture of the movement pursuing the advancement of Finnish-speaking Finns and Finnic culture, known as Fennomania, was heavily influenced by definitions of Finnish identity bound up in philological research into the Finnish language. Philological researchers earlier in the 19th century had used comparative linguistics to trace relationships between Finnish dialects, as spoken across the Grand Duchy and the languages of various peoples, most notably the Estonians and Karelians, to the East. Heikel’s study into building types was a conceptual extrapolation from language-kinship to cultural-kinship and mirrored a similar approach in archaeology.

The histories of craft and craft revival discourse written in the 19th century were invariably discussed in terms of national specificity, yet the scholarly discourse on the craft was international. Heikel’s work was frequently published in German and occasionally in French in order to reach non-Finnish audiences. The transnational character of this discourse can be illustrated by way of the following case study, which traces resonances between different writers over time and across language barriers. Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857) was a Norwegian landscape painter of the early 19th century. He was also an antiquarian and passionate about the preservation of Norway’s art and archaeological heritage. In 1837, he published an illustrated book on Norway’s early wooden architecture: Monuments of Highly

14 Timo Niiranen, Axel Olai Heikel: suomalais-ugrilaisen kansatieteen ja arkeologian tutkija (Kuopio: Kustanuskila, 1987).
Developed Wooden Architecture from the Earliest Centuries in Norwegian Rural Areas. The book was published in German by a publisher in Dresden, the city where Dahl spent most of his life. Dahl’s lithographs illustrating Norwegian churches were also captioned in German and French (Fig. 3). This again revealed the assumption of addressing an international scholarly community, beyond Norway, with this study of Norwegian craft.

The same image of Borgund Church was reproduced 45 years later in a textbook on architectural history by the German architect and professor at the Munich Technical University, Rudolf Gottgetreu (1821–90). It appeared in the section on wooden architecture, ‘The Work of the Carpenter’, in which Gottgetreu outlined the origins of wooden architecture in the meanest and most ancient form of shelter. The chapter took readers through a narrative of the development of wooden architecture derived...
from biblical and classical sources, such as the Temple of Solomon and Caesar’s bridge over the Rhine – legendary architecture with pan-European relevance. His study concluded with a representation on notable contemporary wooden, vernacular architecture focused on national crafts, catalogued by their most distinct features and attributes.

In ‘The Work of the Carpenter’, Gottgetreu cited what he considered the most significant texts in this field: Johan Christian Dahl’s aforementioned 1837 book; E.G. von Gladbach, Die Holz-Architektur der Schweiz, Zurich 1867; Viollet-le-Duc, L’art Russe: Ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée son avenir, Paris, 1877 and Georg von Moller, Denkmäler der deutschen Baukunst, Darmstadt, 1845. This offers just a small taste of the wider field of scholarly publishing on wooden architecture, as a subsection of the emerging disciplines of art history and craft studies.

Gottgetreu’s book was, in turn, the primary source for a long article in the Suomen Teollisuuslehti (Finnish Industry Gazette) on the ‘History of Building in Wood’ by the Editor and most consistent proponent of the need for a Finnish style, the architect Vilho Penttilä. Though it was not accompanied by illustrations, the content of the article substantially reproduced the structure and gist of Gottgetreu’s section on wooden construction. This exemplifies the process by which thinking on craft architecture and its subsequent relationship to craft revival design was spread across Europe. In this case, Gottgetreu reading Dahl and Penttilä reading Gottgetreu.

Penttilä echoes Gottgetreu’s taxonomical emphasis on nationally distinct forms and features. The traditional vernacular architecture of each nation was praised for the sophistication of its construction methods and richness of its ornament. What was particularly highlighted were the things that made each regional tradition particular. In the case of Norway, Penttilä echoes Gottgetreu in emphasising the covered veranda around the outer walls of the stave church, as a locally developed form evolved to provide the congregation with shelter before and after services: a local solution to a local problem and the essence of the creativity of a nation. The multi-part article concludes with a plea that such a distinctive national tradition of wooden architecture be found in Finland.

The translation of Finnish craft discourse into contemporary design

It was in hope of this that Finnish craft material became the focus of interest for architects in the 1890s. Ritva Wäre’s research has shown that a craft revival, in the sense of a search for a Finnish Style, was relatively limited in its scope and coherence. At the same time, amongst a small set of dedicated Fennomane designers, such as Penttilä, it flowered in a few projects, as well as in the pages of the Finnish Industry Gazette. Its clearest manifestation is in the series of competitions for furniture in a Finnish Style held during the 1890s. The first competition, organised in 1894...
by the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts, illustrates this (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{22} It is interesting to note that two of the seven jury members were ethnologists – Theodor Schvindt (1851–1917) and Heikel – both of whom were members of the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts. Both of them also prefaced their ethnographic publications with expressions of hope that the material they presented would be of use to contemporary makers.\textsuperscript{23}

The geometric patterns in Sucksdorff’s (1866–1952) first-prize-winning entry can be read as an interpretation of the patterns of Finnish textiles collected by the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts and those studied and published by Schvindt.\textsuperscript{24} They can simultaneously be seen to make reference to the forms and ornament of Finnic material culture, as studied by Heikel, and as directly studied by Sucksdorff during his own expedition to Karelia.\textsuperscript{25} The competition jury clearly thought so, commenting that ‘both the main points of the design and the decoration feel authentic and in accordance with a Finnish style’.\textsuperscript{26}

What is indicated in this example is that a clear relationship had already been established between ethnographic material and ornament in contemporary design. At some point prior to the 1890s certain forms, techniques and materials came to be regarded as a repository of ideas of national identity and sufficiently familiar to the public to be able to communicate these ideas. For the idea of a Finnish Style to work at all, i.e. for certain patterns, forms, materials, colours and so on to be associated with the idea of Finnishness in the minds of the public, there had to have been an ongoing, publicly available discourse to build up such associations. Experiments with the revival of vernacular crafts in the 1890s rested on such established connotations, so that it was possible for designers, jurors and the public to identify or recognise certain design features as ‘Finnish’ in some way. This discourse was based around a particular body of source material: Finnish craft and archaeological artefacts, which had been collected and made available in public or semi-public collections and disseminated through a range of print media.\textsuperscript{27} These forms were echoed and reproduced in various forms through the 1880s and 1890s, resulting in a process of accumulated meaning, so that the craft-derived geometric patterns came to stand metonymically for Finnish culture.

\textsuperscript{22} Wäre, Rakennettu suomalaisuus, 43.
\textsuperscript{24} Schwindt, Suomalaisia koristeita, 3.
\textsuperscript{25} Yrjö Blomstedt and Victor Sucksdorff, Karelische Gebäude Und Ornamentale Formen Aus Zentral-Russisch-Karelien (Helsinki: Tilgmann, 1900).
\textsuperscript{26} A selection of the competition jury’s minutes was published under the title ‘Suomen käsityön ystävälle!’, Suomen Teollisuuslehti 4 (1894), 111.
One source for this material were the illustrated publications of the various societies that concerned themselves with Finnish material culture. The Finnish Literature Society, The Finno-Ugrian Society, the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts and the Society for Finnish Antiquities all produced illustrated books on Finnish archaeology, ethnography and vernacular crafts, architecture and textiles. Additionally, this material was disseminated by means of shorter articles in newspapers, journals and magazines, aimed at the wider, literate Finnish-speaking population.

An early example of the transposition of meaning from vernacular sources to contemporary design can be seen in the design of bonds for the National Share Bank in 1889 (Fig. 5). The bond, designed by Sigfrid August Keinänen (1841–1914), was issued for the launch of the new bank, which had been founded to provide financial services in Finnish to combat Swedish-language economic hegemony. The bond was framed with an ornamental border of geometric forms suggestive of carved posts and reminiscent of Karelian carved grave posts or barge boards. The roots of the imagery in ethnographic and archaeological
scholarship reflect the role that visions of the past had in constituting both present and future identity in this period.

The directors of the National Share Bank sought to communicate their vision for the future of the institution and the nation and this vision incorporated both tradition and modernity. The bond itself, as a document, was a manifestation of a thoroughly modern nation-building, economic enterprise. This point is significant in reminding us that the use of newly-emerging national imagery based on ethnographic sources was not intrinsically anti-modern. A sense of the past was a vital component in the construction and articulation of hopes and plans for the future, making the past a central element in the construction of modernity. To conceive of cultural artefacts and practices as traditional, as rooted in some timeless, pre-modern space, implicitly acknowledges an awareness of being part of another time/space, a modern present that reflects back on the past. As Pertti Anttonen has said: ‘While modernity, according to the classic tenet, destroys tradition, it – epistemologically speaking – creates tradition and makes tradition a modern project.’

A further instance of the National Share Bank’s use of patterns recognised as Finnish can be found in the 1889–91 headquarters building in Helsinki by the architect Onni Tarjanne. The four-storey commercial building was executed in a Neo-Renaissance style, largely without clear national signifiers. However, the review in Päivälehti, the only Press review of the new building, tantalizingly notes: ‘The cornice mouldings of the ceiling are of original Finnish patterns, so that it is indicated to the visitor that he has arrived at a national institution...’ Sadly, no visual records of this interior exist that show this design feature with sufficient clarity to be analysed, but the review points to the existence again of patterns widely recognised as being Finnish in character.

We can ask what function these elements of ornament served. They made allusions to vernacular craft traditions, hand-carved wood or woven or embroidered ornament, translated into modern media: print or plaster moulding. This translation process did not disrupt the role they performed in articulating a visual link back from the space of the contemporary to the space of the largely timeless, national past, as constituted in nation-building, ethnographic discourse.

32 ‘Reunusmaa­lau­kset katossa ovat enimmäkseen alkuperäisiin suomalaisiin kuoseihin laaditut, niin että tulija kohta huomaa saapuneensa kansalliseen laitokseen...’, Päivä­lehti, 1 June 1892, 2. I am indebted to my colleagues at the 2011 TAHITI conference at the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, for pointing out to me that ‘reunus­maalaukset’ could refer in this context to moulding and not just mural painting.
Despite the hopes of Heikel and Schvindt and the various
c ompetitions promoting a ‘Finnish Style’, the direct translation of
vernacular forms and ornament into contemporary architecture
was swiftly overtaken by alternative forms of expression. This was
certainly not a reflection of a decline in Finnish national feeling.
The unification policy of the Russian Tsar through the 1890s,
which sought to dismantle the semi-autonomous status of the
Grand Duchy of Finland, triggered widespread patriotic resistance
among Finns. It is possible that Karelian forms, with their eastern
associations, no longer aligned so well with the image of the
Finnish nation that patriots wished to preserve and promote.

Certainly, the competition for the Finnish Pavilion,
announced in 1898, for the Paris World’s Fair in 1900, stated
that the pavilion should be given the appearance of stone. The
announcement of the competition in Hufvudstadsbladet, the
leading national, Swedish-language daily, commenting on the
choice of stone over wood, observed that the Finnish style was
the product of the imagination of certain architects and that,
more importantly, it would be taken as Russian by the uninitiated,
i.e. the rest of the world, due to similarities between the two.33
This would, of course, run directly counter to the aims behind the
pavilion project, which sought to use it as a vehicle for making the
plight of the Finnish national known to the world.

The extensive work of ethnographers and architects
interested in exploring vernacular material did not evaporate
entirely. Rather, the impetus behind the engagement with Finnish
craft was absorbed into a broader trend concerned with the role
of craft, ornament and materials in modern architecture.

Craft revivals and new meanings in architecture

Across Europe, the scope of the craft revival phenomenon
suggests that it offered more than just the opportunity to imbue
designs with a national stamp. Alongside its role as part of a
national language of design, it functioned as a universal language,
expressive of other values. The fin-de-siècle was a period
searching for a way to reconcile the material and spiritual. There
was a widespread desire to transcend the divide between the
materialistic, progress-oriented, rationalism on the one hand and
more ephemeral, spiritual values on the other. Through the 19th
century there had been growing disquiet at the marginalisation

33 ‘Den finska paviljongen vid världsut-
ställningen’, Hufvudstadsbladet 168
(26 June 1898), 3.
of the latter portion of the human experience. Craft revivals offered a model for the reconciliation of function and the creative spirit. It also served as a means of reinserting the human and the authentic into a world of increasingly mechanised and mass production through its associations with individual, hand-making.

Already in the 19th century, research into crafts had placed significant emphasis on its intrinsic engagement with the functional, as well as the pursuit of beauty in everyday life. Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, in his *Art of Russia* (1877), noted the similarities in appearance between the architecture of different regions. He explained it on the basis of the supposed rational use of timber as the common structural material:

> ...it manifested in traditional timber constructions, the principles of which we also find on the slopes of the Himalayas, in Scandinavia, the Tyrol and Switzerland. The correspondence of these constructions, which for centuries have stood in parts of the globe separated from each other by vast spaces without direct communication between them, is certainly one of the most interesting to study in the history of art. The inhabitant of the Canton of Bern is hardly more familiar with the methods adopted by the Great Russians, than they have knowledge of high buildings in the mountain of the Himalayas and yet, if a fairy were to transport a Swiss chalet to the highlands of the Indus and a wooden house of the Kashmiri to Great Russia, the people there, so remote from each other, would scarcely notice the exchange.

It is not my intention to confirm Le-Duc’s assertion of equivalence. What this quote illustrates is the widely held notion that craft forms from different times and places could be read as based on common principles of the rational use of available materials and responsiveness to local climatic and topographical conditions. This connects us back to Laugier’s primitive hut and the principle that the origins of architectural beauty lie in the synthesis of desired function and available materials.

Laugier’s primitive hut illustration performed another important function with resonances for our period of study: it seeks to make architecture legible. It is an image with a didactic function: to illustrate the relationship between the need for


35 ‘...elle se manifestait dans les constructions de bois traditionnelles dont nous retrouvons les principes sur les rampes de l'Himalaya, aussi bien qu'en Scandinavie, dans le Tyrol, la Suisse. L'identité de ces constructions qui, depuis des siècles, s'élevent sur des parties du globe séparées les unes des autres par des espaces immenses et sans communications directes entre elles, est certainement un des faits les plus intéressants à étudier dans l'histoire de l'art. L'habitant du canton de Berne n'a guère plus la notion des usages adoptés par les Grands-Russiens, que ces derniers n'ont la connaissance des constructions élevées par les montagnards de l'Himalaya; et cependant, si une fée transportait d'un coup de baguette un chalet suisse sur les hauts plateaux de l'Indus et une maison de bois des Kachmiriens dans la Grande-Russie, ces populations si éloignées les unes des autres s'apercevraient à peine de l'échange.’ Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc, *L’Art Russe: Ses Origines, Ses Éléments Constitutifs, Son Apogée, Son Avenir* (Paris: Ve. A. Morel et Cie, 1877), 136–38.
shelter and the structure that provides it. It also communicates the theory of the (fantasy) origins of the columns and pediments of Greek architecture in the trunks of trees and branches thrown across to provide shelter, and this serves to explain the relationship between the more developed forms of classical architecture and its primary structural and functional principles. By looking back to these origins, Laugier evoked the ongoing presence of these principles that might have become obscured by later centuries of augmentation and elaboration but were, he argued, still there at the heart of classical architecture.36

The legibility of modern architecture had become a source of anxiety through the course of the 19th century, as it would continue to be up to the modern day. The development of modern architectural construction, the split between engineered core and the architectural façade, disrupted the relationship between visual expression and underlying structure. The suitability of one historical style over another was endlessly debated across Europe. The effective relationship of architectural construction, materials and ornament were increasingly considered essential to successful architecture.37 Though the principle was widely shared it was, in practice, hard to achieve. The new building technologies listed above did not come with a pre-established visual culture. As buildings became increasingly complex and innovative, expressing construction, function, ethos and identity became more challenging.

In wrestling with this modern problem, architectural theorists sought to reassert the fundamental principles at the root of modern architecture. Laugier’s visual analogue between nature and architecture can be seen to persist through the 19th century. In the writings of François-René de Chateaubriand in the 1800s, architecture is compared to the structural forms of trees:

*The forests were the first temples of divinity and thus men acquired the first ideas of architecture. This art must, therefore, have varied according the climates. The Greeks turned the elegant Corinthian column, with its capital of foliage, after the model of a palm tree. (...) The forests of Gaul were, in their turn, introduced into the temples of our ancestors (...) everything in a Gothic church reminds you of the labyrinths of a wood.*38

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37 Ringbom, *Stone, Style and Truth*.
The relationship between structure (trunks and boughs) and ornament (leaves and flowers) is one that is echoed in the writings of Violette-le-Duc and his student and successor, Victor-Marie-Charles Ruprich-Robert. It also familiar from the writings of John Ruskin and other British Arts and Crafts writers.

Craft, ornament and Finnish architecture around 1900

Efforts along these lines can also be traced in Finnish-language architectural discourse. Penttilä attempted to distil received wisdom on the principles of architecture for Finnish-speaking readers in a long, two-part article, ‘On Beauty in Building’ in 1893. In this article, architecture is presented as an art, but at the same time an art bound to the logic of rational construction. He too uses the analogue of the plant:

*Just as a plant germinates from the seed, grows, spreads its branches and flowers, so must an artistic building do also. The seed of an idea is sown in the imagination; it germinates and soaks up the elixir of life. It is planted as a seedling, to grow and flower at the end in the façade of the building. The building plan is the fixed core, the contents of which are to be made comprehensible to the senses by the clear forms of the external shape.*

The quote reveals the way Penttilä’s writing enthusiastically segues between different ideas: the flowering plant as an analogue for creative thought and for the relationship of ornament to structure in architecture. The visual expression of load-bearing construction was one of the cardinal laws of architectural beauty, he stressed:

*The upper part of the building, which also comprises the roof as a supported-element, exists in relationship to the form of the walls, which support it. The eye should not see them as carrying more weight than can be supported or vice versa. In the Greek column system such relationships attain their highest flowering.*
In these two passages, we can see the long persistence of the twin ideals traced in Laugier’s primitive hut. The rapid development of architectural education and the architectural profession in Finland from the 1870s to the 1890s, lent itself to the simultaneous manifestation of old and new architectural thinking. Late 19th-century Finnish architectural culture was characterised by the persistence of anachronistic ideas, as shown in the work of Ville Lukkarinen. Alongside this, architects engaged with and adopted new ideas encountered on study trips abroad and through architectural print-discourse in Swedish, German, Russian and English. Different architects navigated their way through this new abundance of competing authorities in different ways. The absence of a firmly entrenched tradition facilitated a period of rapid innovation as different solutions were swiftly adopted and just as swiftly discarded.

Ornament, in the sense of the surface articulation of façades and interiors, played an integral part in architecture at the turn of the century, as the frequent allusions to the integral relationship of the flower to function of the plant as a whole attest. The very partial departure from the dominant classical idiom of the National Share Bank headquarters in Helsinki, represented by the small inclusion of elements of Finnish ornament, was swiftly overtaken around 1900 by a profusion of new forms. If we compare three further commercial buildings, all completed in 1901, we can consider what this diversification might mean. The Lundqvist Commercial Building, by the architect Selim Lindqvist, stood on the principal commercial street of Aleksanterinkatu, Helsinki. Opposite it, the Pohjola Building, for the Pohjola Fire Insurance company, was designed by the firm Gesellius–Lindgren–Saarinen. Another branch of the National Share Bank opened the same year in the important commercial city of Viipuri, designed by the firm Usko Nyström–Petrelius–Penttilä.

The three buildings shared common characteristics related to their urban locations and commercial functions. They were, internally, based on supporting structures of iron, with the Lundqvist House going the furthest in departing from the need for internal supporting walls to allow for complete flexibility in the arrangement of the interior. The buildings combined large windows for shop premises on the ground floor, with more conventional fenestration above. In order to meet the demands, voiced above, of

43 Lukkarinen, Classicism and history.
making visible the structural integrity of the building, the different architects all elected a similar solution by placing broad granite piers between the large windows to offset visually the transparency and weightlessness of glass. This was noted in a number of the reviews, indicating that Penttilä’s concern was widely shared. In a review headed with the Latin quote, *Architecturae sola domina est necessitas* (Architecture’s sole mistress is necessity), the architect Jac Ahrenberg commented on the Pohjola Building:

> These vaults and rocky volumes seem symbolically to indicate the raw, unprocessed mass from which grows the more even surfaces of the floors, finer shapes and rich plant and animal ornamentation.⁴⁴

Though the idiom is far removed from the classical, the main portal to the building was ornamented with soapstone colonettes that, in place of capitals, metamorphose into the trunks of pine trees with twisted branches and pine needles.

Materials played a key role across all three buildings, as an articulation of the principles of beauty. All three of them used local stone, in a departure from plaster façades, which was greatly welcomed by the architectural profession and the culmination of a long discourse.⁴⁵ Lindqvist used granite only to a limited extent, to clad the piers between the ground-floor windows, before shifting register to vibrant, red brick. G–L–S used soapstone and Usko Nyström and Penttilä, the co-authors of the Viipuri project,⁴⁶ used a combination of granite on the ground floor and soapstone on upper floors. The use of stone cladding, though it had no actual load-bearing function, was felt to express greater architectural integrity than plaster shaped to mimic stone.⁴⁷ Local stone was also another way of signalling a building’s national specificity, offsetting its similarity to modern buildings elsewhere. Alongside the façade materials, all three buildings made extensive and varied use of ornament. This ornament was important not merely for the iconography, but for the meanings invested in the materials and techniques used to craft it.

**The Lundqvist Commercial Building**

The Lundqvist Building was enriched by a combination of materials and techniques that were utilised across the façade (Fig. 6).

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⁴⁶ The architectural drawings are signed by both architects, implying they both contributed to the project. The minutes of the Viipuri Branch of KOP, however, refer only to dealings with the architect Penttilä, so it is likely that he was substantially responsible for the design and building work. It is possible that for such a prestigious commission Usko Nyström, as the most senior architect of the trio, signed the drawings to indicate his approval.

⁴⁷ Ringbom, *Stone, Style and Truth*. 
Granite piers were carved in a combination of smooth and rough dressing. The red brick upper façade was, in itself, rich in colour and additionally ornamented with various decorative mouldings and filleted demi-columns. The red brick was contrasted with areas of pale render. The fenestration varied on each floor, down to different patterns in the glazing bars. The upper portion of the street façades was further enriched by means of full-colour majolica mosaic panels across the façade and gable ends. The roofline featured an array of small spires and decorative metalwork finials and ridge crests. Grey slate roofs and a green copper cupola over the tower added further contrasts of colour and materials.
The main entrance on Aleksanterinkatu was ornamented by two bronze allegorical figures of *Hunting* and *Spinning*, by the artist Robert Stigell (1852–1907). Between these, a carved portal led into a magnificent vestibule clad in contrasting colours of Belgian marble and majolica panels depicting daisies. This itemisation of the ornamental details of the building is far from exhaustive. It serves to indicate the extent of the investment, both financial and conceptual, in visually enriching this commercial building. The sheer variety of materials and techniques draws attention to the craftsmanship that went into the building – with each transition from stone to brick to tile, and from brick to wood and metalwork, different skills are performed. It is no coincidence that this investment in art and craftsmanship in architectural ornament coincided with the importation of modern industrial construction techniques into high-status architecture.

**The Pohjola Building**

The ornament of the Pohjola Building was not so materially various, but was no less dramatic in its scope (Fig. 7). The soapstone façade was enlivened with vividly carved forest animals and sprites, pine branches and contrasting smooth- and rough-dressed surfaces, by the sculptor Hilda Flodin (1877–1958) and a team of Norwegian stonemasons. The interior continued the ornamental idiom of the mythic northern forest, but in wood. This culminated in a wood-panelled transactions hall, which contemporaries compared to an old cabin, farmhouse kitchen or the home of Louhi, the Mistress of Pohjola in the *Kalevala* legends. The hall was dominated by red pine cladding over walls, ceiling and furnishings, creating a rustic impression (Fig. 8). The centrepiece of the composition was a massive, wood-clad pillar that ostentatiously supported the roof beams. The real structural support was provided by a relatively slender iron column concealed within its core. The column does not echo any real feature from Finnish vernacular culture. Rather, it suggests the imagined past of great, wooden feasting halls and an ancient, pagan culture. In this way it is comparable to Victor Vasnetsov’s stage designs for the performance of *The Snow Maiden* at Abramtsevo in 1881: the Romantic revival of an imagined pagan past, which leaps from surviving vernacular crafts towards far richer fantasy.

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49 This imaginative dramatisation of the national past was an international phenomenon. See for example Rosalind P. Blakesley, ‘“The Venerable Artist’s Fiery Speeches Ringing in my Soul”: The Artistic Impact of William Morris and his Circle in Nineteenth Century Russia’, in Grace Brockington (ed.), *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 79–105 and Barbara Miller Lane, *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
Fig. 7. Gesellius–Lindgren–Saarinen, Pohjola Building, Helsinki, 1899–01. In Rakentaja 11 (1901), 87

Fig. 8. Gesellius–Lindgren–Saarinen, Pohjola Building, interior. In Rakentaja 11 (1901), supplement XIV
The column is carved with bears, echoing these features on the façade. Heavily riveted, ornamental metal strapwork also enhances the sense of rustic heritage and conspicuous craftsmanship. The addition of prominent metalwork, strap hinges etc., was a feature common to English Arts and Crafts furniture, much admired across Europe. Entwined forms in the metal work also suggest the influence of the Norwegian Viking Revival, which was one of the most internationally recognisable and admired national revival styles of the 1890s. The elaborate central pendant lamp similarly departs from the elegant chandelier-inspired forms common to high-status interiors. The lamp takes the form of four mottled-glass lanterns with metal hoods, bracketed together by means of a geometric metal frame.

The message inscribed in the ornament of the Pohjola Building is clearly that of an institution proclaiming its Finnish identity. The direct use of references to the vernacular material so carefully gathered during the 1880s and 1890s are, however, absent. What has been retained is the principle of craftsmanship and the hand-wrought. The choice of a varied palette of materials, particularly the use of red pine rather than marble or mahogany, upheld the Arts and Crafts principle that valued skilled and artistic workmanship, over the raw value of the materials used. The rough-hewn carving and hand-beaten and riveted metal details made visible the invisible hands of the craftsmen who had executed the interior and sought to impress visitors with this labour and skill rather than with sheer opulence and expensive materials.

The Viipuri National Share Bank

Nyström and Penttilä’s Viipuri National Share Bank building continues this trend, albeit without the extreme theatricality of the Pohjola Building (Fig. 9). The treatment of the façade demonstrated a similar *horror vacui* to the previously discussed buildings. Stonework was dressed in varied courses of ashlar, rubble- and diamond-pointed and interspersed with carved ornaments of thistles, clover leaves and flowers. The mezzanine floor was particularly picked out with a motif of caducei of Mercury (the God of Commerce) topped by cogs, indicating industry and technology. Over the main entrance, there were a pair of decorative panels carved with integrated symbols signalling arable farming and forestry (sources of wealth) and

a steam train and ship (trade). In addition, the corner tower carried the carved coats of arms of Finland, Karelia and Viipuri. The combination of ornament derived from nature, the coat of arms and the modernity signalled by the steam train recalls the share certificate designed by Keinänen. All that is missing is the Karelian-inspired notch-work.

The banking hall is more coherent in its iconography and focuses on an ornamental scheme of thistles and floral ornament taken from the façade (Fig. 10). The iron columns and fire-proof concrete flooring were concealed behind oak and pine panelling and massive granite columns. Though less conspicuously rustic than the Pohjola Building’s interior, the National Share Bank interior can nevertheless be contrasted with the banking halls of nearby competitors in Viipuri, such as Waldemar Aspelin’s Pohjoismaiden Osakepankki (1900) and Gustav Nyström’s Suomen Yhdyspankki (1899). These banks were furnished with banking halls in a far more classical vein, with tall marble
columns topped with ornate capitals of gilded plaster and plaster friezes. The natural wood of the National Share Bank struck a deliberately more domestic note. This is suggestive in the context of the overtly Fennomane character of the National Share Bank, compared with its Swedish-speaking competitors. Alongside this preference for native wood and conspicuous craftsmanship over marble and gilt, the long counter and furniture designed for the interior also signalled an awareness of international design trends, Arts and Crafts and Jugendstil. Solid wooden forms were offset with smooth, tapering legs, delicate struts and jewel-like inserts of carved oak leaves.

Fig. 10. Vilho Penttilä and Usko Nyström, Viipuri National Share Bank, Viipuri, 1900–1901. Courtesy of Nordea
Conclusion

The international craft revival, in all of its elements, from the pan-European scholarly tradition of ethnographic and architectural research to the mutual admiration of craft revival design from country to country, was an integral part of the value of national crafts. Contemporary rhetoric, with its repeated condemnation of the foreign, can be misleading if taken at face value. It is important to remember that for every statement decrying the adoption of ‘bad’ foreign fashions at the expense of national traditions, another statement can be found expressing admiration for ‘good’ architectural solutions imported from abroad.

Reviews of the Lundqvist and Pohjola buildings both commented on international influences. The brick façade of the Lundqvist Building is described as follows:

*Its style is the modern brick gothic, which, in Germany in particular, has gained a significant spread.*

The review in *Dagligt Allehanda* also described the extensive use of modern building technologies in the Lundqvist Building, such as elevators and efficient doors and windows, as offering:

*...everything America, and fantasies in that vein, have found to be achievable, solid and refined.*

In the same review, the Pohjola Building was described as ornamented with Finnish animals and plant motifs ‘reminiscent of the role models of the sculptural decorations found in the newest English, American and Austrian journals’. Ahrenberg’s review in *Teknikern*, already cited, similarly identified the conceptual origins of the building in England and America.

The reviews of the National Share Bank were less extensive, as was common for buildings outside Helsinki. They emphasise the innovation of the soapstone façade. Additionally, the technical innovations of the extra-secure banking vaults and the English-made cash registers and safe were admired. What might we make of this seeming inconsistency between the expression of national identity or local traditions and importation of new ideas and technologies?
Penttilä ended his 1894 article on the history of wooden architecture with a long quote taken directly from Gottgetreu on the Swiss craft:

*These are works in wood that manifest complete design accuracy, as well as artistic forms of the highest calibre. Nowhere else can be found such original and at the same time functional joints as the ones used by the Swiss joiner and carpenter for supporting his beams and uprights, which are arranged so thoughtfully and employed so practically. One can trace the joy of creativity and the striving towards beauty in these works. In numerous towns the opinion is widely held that all constructive parts should be suitable and sure and decorative forms should respond to materials, so that mere handicraft has risen through its own strengths to great heights and created works of art, which merit enduring comparison to that of other nations.*

Unique forms in Swiss wooden architecture, the small as well as the large, appear beautiful through their sublime, harmonious relationships and fine taste. To this is added striking colour effects, decoration by living flowers and plants around the windows and porches – all of these reveal the striking idea that they are all born of nature, national life grown to health as an expression of true, fresh nationality. It is work expressive of intelligence and joy and the independent spirit of a free national people.55

The architectural values expressed here are universal, transcending any specific Swiss-ness. What is described is an architecture in which sound construction and functionality are in harmony with the requirements of beauty. Furthermore, the balance achieved allows for the expression of personal creativity on the part of the builder and community through the expression of harmony with nature, local conditions and national spirit. This underlying ethos behind the craft revival was celebrated internationally. It was also understood across Europe as a reformist model for contemporary design whose core principles transcended national boundaries, even as it offered a path towards an internationally respected need for local specificity. The

55 ‘Nämä ovat puutöitä, jotka niinhyvin kokoonsimmittelunsa sääntelyyn kuin taiteellisen muovailunsa suhteen saavuttavat korkeimman asteen. Emme missään muualla tapaa noin ominaisuuksia ja samalla läpitsensä tarkoituksistaan vastaavia puulaitoksia kuin.name ne Schweitsiläinen puusappä ja kirvesmies on kannattajan, tukipylväiden y.m. järjestelyissä ajatellut ja käyttäntöön panut; näissä kaikissa tōissä ilmenee itsenäisen luomiskyvyn iloisuus ja kauneuteen pyrkimys. Lukuun ottamatta kaupungeissa laajalle levinnyttä oppisuuntaa, saivat kaikki konstruktion- osat hapailemmaan sattuvan, aineesta vastaavan kaunomuodon; tuo tavallinen, pelkkä käsityö kohosi omin voimin korkeuteensa ja loi taideteoksia, jotka ansioikain kyllä hyvin kestävat vertailun muiden kanssa. Erikoismuodot, niinhyvin pienet kuin suuretkin, Schweitsiläissä puurakennuksessa ovat yleisiä, sopuontuisia osoittaa suhteitten somuutta ja hienoa maakua. Tähän tulee vielä lisäksi monet sattuvat värivaikutukset, koristelu elävillä kukilla ja kasveilla ikkunoissa ja kuisteissa – kaikkia näitä nähdessä hämmästyy ajateholla että, tuo kaikki on luonnosta syntynyt, kansan elämästä kasvanut terveen, tosiuoreen kansallisuuksen ilmaksena; se on älykäs, iloa ilmaseva työ, jonka on suorittanut itsetietoinen, vapaa kansallisheimo.’ Penttilä, ‘Silmäys puurakennusten historiaan’, 53. The quote was taken from Gottgetreu, *II: Die Arbeiten des Zimmermannes*, 23–24.
revaluation of craft in Finland cannot be considered separate from the widespread revaluation of craft in European design discourse. This trend did not have a single point of origin, but arose out of a range of concerns regarding commodity culture and the erosion of local traditions in the face of global capitalism.

In architecture, the reliance on historical forms (classical and gothic) raised questions as to the suitability of such forms for meeting modern needs, both in terms of symbolism and practicalities. Established architectural theory lent credence to the principle that ornament should be a ‘natural’ outgrowth of structure and function. By 1900, the structural character of urban architecture was unrecognisable from the architectures of the past, increasingly dependent on iron and steel supporting structures and concrete. Hand in hand with this, functions had also evolved and diversified. While no definitive language of ornament emerged to express these shifts, investment in ornament in the form of crafted interventions in façades and interiors served to provide a counter-weight of recognisable value to offset the invisible, new technologies within. The ‘honesty’ of stone and brick, in place of plaster-dressed façades was one dimension of this. The profusion of hand-wrought elements, carved stone and wood, mosaic, metalwork details reconnected architecture with narratives of craftsmanship just at the moment when it began to shift conclusively from artisanal labour to industrial construction technologies.

The Finnish case studies above reveal that, even within the confines of a single architectural milieu, this period was one of significant experiment and divergent strategies for resolving the challenge of a new style for a new world. The well-known story of the Helsinki Railway Station competition and the pamphlet published by Gustaf Strengell and Sigurd Frosterus presents a compelling narrative of the rejection of National Romanticism and the craft revival in favour of rationalism in the early 20th century. However, the foundational thinking regarding the meaning and value of craft and craftsmanship persisted. One need only look at the attention to materials and their handling in the work of Alvar Aalto, a pupil of Armas Lindgren, whose genius for ornament contributed to the early success of the G–L–S firm. Through the Nordic Classicism of the 1910s sculpted ornament in stone and the highly-crafted finish of wood, metalwork, tile and

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marble in the interior continued to mediate the technological domain of new constructions by means of the human domain of craft.57 Through the first decades of Modernism illustrative ornament receded, but the careful handling of materials and their conjunctions continued to fulfil that function as Finnish architecture achieved international esteem.

The craft revival was propelled by a sense of imminent loss and the fear that the tides of modernisation would sweep away the identity and memory embodied in traditional ways of life. Craft as a concept evokes first and foremost the presence of the skilled hands that hewed, moulded, wove and spun, a measurable human scale and recognisable investment of time. New technologies disrupted this, but the carefully jointed brickwork and majolica of the Lundqvist Building, the gnomes of Pohjola and the carved oak leaves of the Viipuri bank were a way of reasserting a connection to values that were worth maintaining, just as the new elevators and fire safety were worth celebrating.

Charlotte Ashby is a lecturer on art and design history at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research focuses on the intersection of nationalism and transnationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Recent publications include Modernism in Scandinavia: Art, Architecture and Design (Bloomsbury, 2017), Imagined Cosmopolis: Internationalism and Cultural Exchange 1870–1920, Peter Lang, co-edited with Grace Brockington, Sarah Turner and Daniel Laqua, (Peter Lang, 2019), and ‘The North, National Romanticism, and the Gothic’ in Marja Lahelma and Frances Fowles (eds), The Idea of North: Myth-Making and Identities (Birch and the Star, 2019)
Encounters between Art and Folk Art around 1900 in Norway

Gerhard Munthe, Theodor Kittelsen and Frida Hansen

Vibeke Waallann Hansen

Throughout the 19th century, various forms of folk culture – literary, musical and visual – were highly valued in Norwegian society. It was the cultural history of the peasantry that the country’s intellectuals worked hardest to preserve and perpetuate. By the end of the century, folk art had assumed a central place in the Norwegian art discourse and artists had begun drawing their inspiration directly from the folk art and vernacular literature that had been collected over the previous 100 years, and which had then become widely accessible through museum displays and publications.

Common to three of the most prominent Norwegian artists around the turn of the century was their use of this folk material and the extent to which they were influenced by the debate about art and folk art. The decorative works of Gerhard Munthe, the enchanted scenes based on fairy tales, legends and myths depicted by Theodor Kittelsen, and Frida Hansen’s tapestries, all have their roots in folk traditions. The innovative art they developed was the outcome of their interest in and thorough knowledge of Norwegian folk art. In this paper, I will consider the sources to which these three artists had access and discuss their reasons for using this material in their creative work. I will argue that it was their knowledge of folk art and their determination to engage it in a dialogue with contemporary trends in European art, such as Symbolism, the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau, which made them key players in spreading modern art to Norway.
The widespread interest in the idioms of folk art in Norway during this period is often associated with the parallel struggle for national independence that dominated the political climate of the time. Leading critics, theorists and museum directors advocated the cultivation of a Norwegian art tradition along similar lines. What mattered for them was to identify what was specifically Norwegian and to encourage artists to pursue a national style. But was the notion of the national a decisive consideration for Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen in the work they produced?

Folk art, the same as peasant art?
The concept of folk art is relative, and what the term refers to depends on when and where it is used and on the historical context. The ambiguity of the label is confirmed by the diversity of objects that are now displayed under the label of folk art in museum collections around the world. The term ‘folk art’ was first used by the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl in an 1894 article entitled ‘Volkskunst. Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie’ (Folk Art. Household Production and Household Manufacturing).1 Folk music and folk literature were by that time already familiar concepts in Europe, and it was an obvious step to extend the exploration of national and regional cultures further into the field of visual expression. Riegl’s definition of folk art was based on historical factors. He believed that the period of folk art was a phase that had been superseded, in that it was inextricably linked to a less developed way of life and was in part a consequence of household production. He was critical of museum colleagues who facilitated and stimulated the continued production of folk art for the market. By encouraging rural populations to continue to use primitive forms of production, one was effectively ‘condemning’ them to live in the past and excluding them from modernity, a position that Riegl considered was unethical.2

In Norway, one of the first to respond to Riegl’s article was the art historian Andreas Aubert (1851–1913), who began to use the term folk art in 1897.3 A central figure in the Norwegian cultural sphere around the turn of the century, Aubert promoted a view of folk art as something fundamental to the Norwegian art tradition. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau, he advocated a closer connection

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1 Diana Reynolds Cordileone, Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875–1905: an institutional biography (Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 109–43. Riegl’s text ‘Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie’ is available only in German, and his definition of the phenomenon and the current discussion are based on Cordileone’s reading.

2 Cordileone, Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875–1905, 130.

3 Peter Anker, Norsk folkekunst: Kunsthåndverk og byggeskikk i det gamle bondesamfunnet (Oslo: Cappelen forlag, 2004), 15. For a more detailed discussion of the use of the term ‘folk art’ in the Norwegian context, see Anker, Norsk folkekunst, 9–22.
between crafts, architecture, fine and applied arts, articulating a range of thoughts on the subject.\textsuperscript{4} In his writings, and more generally in Norwegian art history, the term folk art was used almost synonymously with peasant art. In an article published in 1907 to coincide with an exhibition of Norwegian Folk Art in Copenhagen’s Museum of Decorative Arts, Aubert declared: ‘The exhibition of Norwegian folk art encompasses more than a thousand items of very different kinds (…). But all of the objects on display can be grouped around one central characteristic, the Norwegian peasant (…). The Norwegian peasant’s home, Norwegian peasant art in its highest manifestation (…).’\textsuperscript{5} In Aubert’s view, the unique and distinctive aspects of the nation’s culture were to be found in the traditions of the Norwegian peasantry. For him, peasant culture was ‘the essential repository of national artistic heritage in our country’.\textsuperscript{6} This view was widely held in the debate about ‘the distinctively Norwegian’ and what kind of traditions the nascent art of the young nation ought to build on in years to come.

Two other major figures who, like Aubert, promoted folk art as a rich source of inspiration for modern art and design, were the art historian Lorentz Dietrichson (1834–1917) and the lawyer Henrik Grosch (1848–1929). Both were instrumental in setting up the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1876. Grosch had no formal education in the field, but was self-taught and passionate about the museum, and in 1886, he became its first director. Both Dietrichson and Grosch shared Aubert’s passionate interest in peasant art. They argued that the Museum should collect and spread knowledge about these kinds of objects, and saw it as an important means to ‘preserve and develop the remains of Norway’s own Folk industries, which were inherited from our forefathers and carry the distinctive imprint of our nationality and are still preserved in our valleys’.\textsuperscript{7} The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design defined its purpose of collecting folk art primarily in terms of making it accessible as a model and a source of inspiration for contemporary crafts and industry: ‘Our own interest relates to the artistic and technical aspects of these works. What we wanted was (...) on the one hand, to strive for a revival of old handcrafts and, on the other, to render this rich material of benefit to the craftspeople and industries of today.’\textsuperscript{8} The emphasis was on collecting older examples and looking for


\textsuperscript{5} Andreas Aubert, ‘Om norsk bondekunst’, Tidsskrift for kunstindustri (Copenhagen: Industriforeningen i København, 1907), 138.

\textsuperscript{6} Andreas Aubert, ‘Om norsk bondekunst’, 146.

\textsuperscript{7} Lorentz Dietrichson, Aftenposten, 1886. Quoted here from Randi Gaustad, ‘Kristiania Kunstindustrimuseum og folkekunsten’, in Om kunstindustri (Trondheim: Kunstindustrimuseene i Norge, 1991), 49.

\textsuperscript{8} From a speech by conservator H.A. Grosch to mark the museum’s 10th anniversary, in 1886. Here quoted from Gaustad, ‘Kristiania Kunstindustrimuseum og folkekunsten’, 50.
‘the masterpieces’ of Norwegian Folk Art. In other words, as was the case with Riegl, folk art was conceived of here as a more or less historical form of cultural expression. The possibility of reviving old domestic crafts was discussed, but for the art historians the crucial aim was to preserve traditions through renewal and by assimilating them into contemporary crafts and methods of production.

As the above citations show, terms such as ‘folk art’, ‘peasant art’, ‘household production’ and ‘domestic industry’ were often used interchangeably. In the ensuing discussion, the term folk art in a narrow sense is taken to denote primarily the examples of woodcarving, rose painting, tapestry and rug weaving that were collected by the Norwegian museums of decorative art and which were considered objects of art-historical value at the time. However, Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen drew inspiration not only from these objects but, as I will show, also from folk tales and myths, folk music lyrics, traditional styles of dress and architecture. In general, they were fascinated by folklore and clearly saw the aesthetic value in the cultural traditions of the people. I use the term folk art therefore in a wider sense, referring more in general to folklore.

Folk art, fine art and the idea of the nation in the 1890s

Large-scale projects to collect and preserve folk culture were initiated in many parts of Europe throughout the 19th century. Folk literature in the form of legends, myths, songs and fairy tales was transcribed, categorised and published. Similar efforts were underway in the field of material culture, documenting and assessing craft traditions, regional costumes and vernacular building styles. Two pioneering figures in Norway were Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, now celebrated for their collection of Norwegian folk tales, the first volume of which was published in December 1841. Further, artists and historians were investing considerable energy in amassing information about historical craft traditions, practices and aesthetic preferences. Among the efforts of Norwegian artists in this regard, the best known are J.C. Dahl’s devotion to Norwegian stave churches and their preservation, and Adolph Tidemand’s documentation

9 Peasant art would soon also be collected by the two other Museums of Decorative Arts in Norway; Vestlandske kunstindustrimuseum, Bergen (founded 1887) and Nordenfjeldske kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim (founded 1894).

10 For a thorough historical presentation and discussion of the role of domestic handicraft for the development of the decorative arts in Norway in the 19th century, see Ingeborg Glambek, Kunsten, nytten og moralen: Kunstindustri og husflid i Norge 1800–1900 (Oslo: Solum forlag, 1988).

11 According to its statutes of 1876, the task of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Kristiania was then to collect and preserve three categories of objects, one of which was ‘industrial objects of Norwegian origin, characteristic of our people’s culture (The Collection of Norwegian Folk Industry)’. Although theoretically very broad, in practice this category was given a narrow interpretation. By and large three types of objects were collected: silver jewellery, woodcarvings and textile works, which consisted of woven tapestries and white-border embroidery. The collection that developed provides an interesting picture of what the term ‘Norwegian folk industry’ entailed. See Gaustad, ‘Kristiania Kunstindustrimuseum og folkekunsten’, 47.

12 Norske Folkeeventyr samlede ved Per Chr. Asbjørnsen og Jørgen Moe (Kristiania: Johan Dahls forlag, 1841–43).
of diverse folk costumes. As this collecting work progressed, and the quantities of preserved material grew, the need for some form of systematisation and academic analysis became increasingly pressing. Towards the end of the century, work began on organising the material to make it accessible to academic study. When it came to presentation, the museums of decorative art played an essential role. In addition, the year 1894 saw the founding of the Norwegian Folk Museum and the University Collection of National Antiquities. As even more material was classified and made accessible through museum displays, photographic documentation, drawings and a multitude of publications, artists and writers began to draw inspiration directly from this material. They were not the first to do so, but compared to the trends of the 1890s and 1900s, the primary concern of earlier generations had been documentation.

The integration of folk art into fine art that took place around 1900 has often been interpreted in conjunction with the ambition to develop a national style and as a manifestation of a national Romantic ideal: ‘Rejecting historical revival styles (...) Romantic nationalists drew from “national vernacular or (…) folk motifs”, and turned these folk motifs into national design idioms.’ This interpretation is particularly true of the work of artists who were active on Europe’s periphery, such as the Nordic countries, during this period. The ideal of creating fine and applied arts of a distinctively national character found clear articulation in the Norwegian art debate at the turn of the century, and, as we have seen, folk art was lifted out of its regional context and elevated to a heritage of national value. But there is good reason here to distinguish between what was presented as a theoretical artistic ideal and the pursuits and objectives of individual artists. In addition to the ideal of establishing a national art for Norway, there were other reasons for seeking inspiration in folk art. These included a broader interest in the people as a nation, the creation of an art for all social classes, the preservation of traditions, and an emphasis on the regional rather than the international. The turn towards popular traditions and folk culture that we find in the work of Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen was part of a Europe-wide movement that reflected intellectual currents that had to do with much more than just the concerns of nation building. Since

13 Johan Christian Dahl was the force behind the founding of the Foreningen for norske Fortidsminnesmerkeres Bevaring (Society for the Preservation of Ancient Norwegian Monuments) and one of the first to highlight the importance of preserving the nation’s stave churches. Tidemand’s studies of Norwegian folk costumes are of great historical value. Made over a period of some 30 years (1843–74), this material runs to almost 150 drawings, now in the keeping of the National Museum. For more on this, see Aagot Noss, ‘Adolph Tidemand: tilhøvet folkedraktstudier og folkelivsbillete’, in Tidemand og Gude, exhibition catalogue (Oslo: National Museum, 2003), 61–69.


the 18th century, a Romantic tendency to idealise the ‘unspoilt peasantry’ had been spreading across Europe. It was claimed that the peasantry constituted a repository of traditions dating back to prehistoric times. Essentially, the movement was about a form of cultural rediscovery; it was for the most part unpolitical and unaccompanied by external agendas. The rediscovery of folk traditions closely associated with the historically neglected peasantry and their transformation into ‘national traditions’ is attributable primarily to the efforts of the intellectual elite. The perspectives that mattered for the latter included the preservation of traditions, concord between social classes, and the local and regional versus the international. There is no compelling justification to equate the cultural awakening movement with the nationalist movements that steadily gained in strength towards the end of the century.17

In other parts of Europe, the interest that artists showed in folk art was not necessarily linked to the ideal of creating a national style. For a number of intellectuals, such as Riegl, it was to be viewed as yet another contribution to the ongoing search for new styles that typified the 19th-century art world. Riegl was critical of the restlessness of the era and believed that the art world was too preoccupied with the vagaries of international fashions. In his view, the ‘discovery’ of folk art was yet another attempt to find an artistic cure-all that could serve as the basis for a modern style.18

For Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen, it was not just the national art debate that shaped their work; they were also influenced by international trends. In terms of both its formal aesthetics and its content, folk art had certain qualities that harmonised well with modern ideals of art. It was a period in which the term ‘primitive’ had become a badge of honour, with the consequence that ‘primitive’ folk art was now accorded a similar value to the ‘primitive’ art of the European Middle Ages or the stylised art of Japan, both of which were further sources of inspiration for these three artists.19 With this context and understanding of modern art in mind, the question to ask is: What use could these three artists make of folk art in their work?

17 Hobbsawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Hobbsawm writes about the various phases of nationalism and the development of nation states. The early 19th-century cultural awakening that he describes, in other words the interest among the bourgeoisie and social elites in wanting to preserve folk culture and all the work it involved, was first placed in a political context by later generations. Hobbsawm maintains, for example, that the Folklore Society, founded in England in 1878 with the aim of reviving and popularising folk song, was no more nationalist than the Gypsy Lore Society (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 137).


Gerhard Munthe – fine art or folk art?

When I later read about Alcinous’ garden in the Odyssey, for me it was the gardens at Kroken.

Gerhard Munthe, ‘En reise til Kroken i Sogn’ (A Trip to Kroken in Sogn), 1856

There are two sides to the artistic output of Gerhard Munthe (1849–1929). Here we will set aside his considerable production of oil paintings in order to concentrate on his decorative works. Munthe was a radical creator of style and a design pioneer. In this respect, he was shaped in large part by his belief in the qualities of Norwegian folk art. Munthe is associated with nation-building, and he strongly favoured the ongoing quest in his day to find national characteristics, whereas he viewed art as rooted primarily in the subjective and the individual’s imagination and creativity. What was unusual about Munthe’s ideas was that he viewed nationality and personality almost like two sides of the same coin. For him, nationality was all about an individual’s local roots, and as such it was in no way incompatible with artistic demands for uniqueness and originality in style. In the above quote, Munthe associates the garden of Alcinous in Homer’s Odyssey with the garden at Kroken, the Munthe family’s farm located deep in Sogn og Fjordane. This comparison neatly sums up his views about how personal experience forms the basis for both the creation and the appreciation of art.

As a young student, Munthe visited many Norwegian valleys, studying local customs, traditions and crafts, such as woodcarving and weaving. One of his sketchbooks from 1870 contains detailed drawings of life as he found it in the Norwegian villages (Fig. 1). The sketchbook is divided into sections: ‘Everyday Life’, ‘Parts of Buildings’, ‘Nature’ and ‘Fairy-Tale Life’. Munthe’s role models at the time were scientists, collectors and other artists who had travelled the country, collecting information about Norwegian peasant culture. However, it would be another 20 years before he began to use those insights in his own artistic work.

For an exhibition in Kristiania in 1893, Munthe presented 11 large watercolours of scenes based on Norwegian fairy tales and legends. These were perceived as ground-breaking in both

21 Art historian Jan Kokkin uses these terms in discussing Munthe’s decorative works in his two books about the artist: Jan Kokkin, Gerhard Munthe. En radikal stilskaper (Lillehammer Art Museum, 2011) and Gerhard Munthe: Norwegian pioneer of modernism (Stuttgart: Arnoldshe Art Publishing, 2018).
22 I have previously written about this topic in The Magic North: Finnish and Norwegian Art around 1900, exhibition catalogue (Oslo and Helsinki, 2015). See also Margaretha Rossholm, Sagan i Nordisk sekelskifteskonst: En motivhistorisk och ideologisk undersökning (Stockholm, 1974), 294.
23 Hilmar Bakken, Gerhard Munthes dekorative kunst (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1946), 8.
their content and style. Illustrating fairy tales had long been a popular preoccupation for many Norwegian artists, but Munthe wanted something else. His own works were more than just illustrations or attempts to visualise a text. They encapsulated the artist's personal encounters with Norwegian legends, songs and folk tales. His ambition was to make imaginative art based on themes he found in folk poetry. Certain aspects of these pictures
can be traced back to Magnus B. Landstad’s *Norske Folkeviser* (Norwegian Folk Tales), from 1853, a publication Munthe knew well and which he referenced later in works such as Åsmund Frægdegjevar (Åsmund the Worthy), *Lindarormen* (The Big Serpent) and *Draumkvæde* (The Dream Ballad). In folk literature, he found themes of universal human relevance that were at the same time also local. The colours, forms and ornaments of the watercolours on display in 1893 were heavily inspired from Norwegian peasant art. In addition to the content being carved out of a Nordic storytelling tradition, Munthe developed a colour
palette based on observations he had made in old tapestries, rose paintings, stave church interiors and folk costumes. In *Friere* (The Suitors), also known as *Nordlysdøtre* (Daughters of Aurora Borealis), from 1892 (Fig. 2), the florid designs on the sides of a bed have been transformed into independent decorative devices. By repeating elements such as three polar bears, three princesses, three stars and three birds, he has used the number symbolism of the folk tale to create a visual composition. Many folk tales contain the number three, for instance three brothers,
three princesses, three wishes or an action that is repeated three times. Other common numbers are seven and nine. Ornaments from folk art can also be traced, like the stylised animals in *Three Princesses* (Fig. 3).

Many critics and colleagues thought the watercolours were sketches for tapestries. But the spatial effects in Munthe’s watercolours are more three-dimensional than was characteristic for traditional tapestries, a formal element that partly counteracts some of the abstraction in the scenes. At the same time, the use of bold decorative borders disrupts the illusion of space and draws the pictures more towards the decorative. His palette consisted of colours that he referred to as ‘deep red’, ‘reddish violet’, ‘pot blue’, ‘bluish green’, and ‘bold yellow’, in addition to grey, black, and white. It was vital for Munthe that the colours drew on those from Norwegian folk art. However, there is also a correspondence between the colours he used and those used by some of the leading artists of the day, such as Paul Gauguin, Émile Bernard, and Maurice Denis.²⁴

In his 1946 biography of Munthe, Hilmar Bakken wrote that Munthe did not directly imitate anything in folk art.²⁵ In fact, it is hard to find direct copies of folk-art elements in Munthe’s works, even though there can be no doubt that they were a crucial source of inspiration. There are good reasons to assume that Munthe was steeped in the fairy-tale and folk music traditions from his native region of Elverum and Solør. Folklore research has shown that folk ballads, such as *Den onde stemor* (The Evil Stepmother), *Ridder Valivan* (Knight Valivan), *Agate og havmannen* (Agate and the Seafarer) and others were sung in Solør, and were still part of a living tradition when Munthe was a child.²⁶ Thus he could have drawn not only on a literature of national importance but also on his personal memories.

Munthe’s fairy-tale watercolours placed him on the European art map. They were exhibited in a number of countries in the mid-1890s, and soon became widely known in Scandinavian art circles. The contemporary Swedish art critic, Edvard Alkman, described his work as follows:

> Although one has never heard the story, one understands it even so. One is overcome by the spirit of the tale (...) and with that the artist has achieved what he wanted. His pictures are

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²⁵ Bakken, *Gerhard Munthes dekorative kunst*, 32.
not intended to be mere illustrations of a story’s events, but rather freely imagined visualisations (...) a highly individual artistic perspective that makes Munthe’s work entirely different from, for example, Werenskiold’s famous Asbjørnsen drawings... 27

For Aubert, as well as several other art theorists and critics, it was Munthe who really succeeded in using national material and in combining decorative and national elements in his work. In Aubert’s words, Munthe had laid ‘...his decorative art over Norwegian tradition, in accordance with folk art’s distinctive sense of colour’. 28 Munthe was a writer as well as an artist, reflecting on his own work and the view of art on which it was based. 29 Concerning the background to the fairy-tale watercolours, he wrote: ‘...many different things(,) from ancient memorials in the Louvre to the youngest Symbolist works, have informed the gaze that was for me an absolutely necessity. As much of a necessity perhaps as knowing our own ancient crafts and literature.’ 30 He made it clear that his platform was art history in general and Symbolism in particular. Munthe was well versed in contemporary art theory, and the French symbolist-synthetic mindset, as formulated e.g. in Albert Aurier’s article ‘Le symbolism en peinture: Paul Gauguin’, from 1891, and Maurice Denis’s ‘Définition du neo-traditionnisme’ (1890) 31, provided him with a conceptual framework that accorded with his own ideas of combining pictorial art with the decorative principle. According to Aurier, the decorative was essential to symbolic art. In Denis’s essay, the preservation of tradition played a central role. For Munthe, it made sense to view Norwegian peasant art as a tradition that needed to be preserved and developed via contemporary art. Munthe himself made no direct reference to Aurier or Denis, but the number of similarities between their views is striking, especially between those of Denis and Munthe. Viewed from this theoretical angle, the stylistic potential of Norwegian folk art is strikingly evident.

In addition to the preservation of tradition, and that of stylistic and national characteristics, there was another aspect to Munthe’s conception of art that probably strengthened his interest in folk traditions. He was sympathetic towards the contemporary ideal of breaking down artistic hierarchies. It

29 These texts are collected in Minder og meninger: Fra 1850-årene til nu.
31 Aurier’s article was published in Mercure de France, March 1891, 155–65. Denis’ article was published in Art et critique 5, 23 and 30 August 1890, 540–42.
was from this vantage point that he saw the potential of both the literary and the craft aspects of Norwegian folk art. For him, no single style of any epoch or culture could be ranked higher than any other. In this respect, he advocated a central principle of European modernism, one that allowed him to adopt a different perspective on folk art, among other things. Feeling the dominance of the Renaissance in Western art to be restrictive, Munthe called for greater imaginative freedom of the kind he found, for example, in Viking art: ‘We are always so quick to conclude that what was lacking was the capacity for naturalistic reproduction; (...) in my view what was lacking was determination and the urge.’ Describing himself and his fellow artists as ‘students of classicism’, he was opposed to the Naturalism that dominated in his own day. For him, this was just one of many possible directions one could take in art: ‘The one thing that is always demanded of art in our day is objective likeness, “photographic” likeness, (...). This stems from interests that are now in fashion, but it has nothing to do with art (...). The concrete view, Naturalism, was now cultivated territory, yet it too is built on abstraction, which is the true hallmark of art...’

Unlike Naturalism, folk art does not pursue objective likeness as an ideal. By bringing elements from this tradition into the sphere of fine art, Munthe’s fairy-tale watercolours took a step that was in its time transgressive. Contemporary critics and audiences were uncertain about what kind of artefacts they were being confronted with. This is evident in the way in which the works were discussed in their day. Ten years after first seeing Munthe’s watercolours, Jens Thiis wrote: ‘One stood there, somewhat bemused by this new art. What was this anachronism, which denied all realism, seeking to achieve? Was it a cartoon for a tapestry? What kind of art was it?’ By assimilating folk art into fine art, Munthe was challenging the Classical art tradition.

34 Jens Thiis, Gerhard Munthe: En studie (Trondheim, 1903).
35 The fact that Munthe’s watercolours were purchased by the National Gallery, rather than the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, shows that they were regarded as fine art, rather than as cartoons for weaving.
Theodor Kittelsen: visualising folklore

Imagine you undertake to depict a hare laughing...
If that's your aim, you certainly can’t let yourself be bound by your model.

Christian Krohg on Kittelsen, Kunstbladet, 1888

In the first half of the 1890s, the interest in legends, myths and fairy tales grew steadily among both artists and writers. The creatures of folk belief were reimagined in a variety of contexts. The Danish publication Trolde (Trolls), from 1890, which includes texts by Holger Drachmann and illustrations by Joachim Skovgaard, Thorvald Bindesbøll and August Jerndorff, is one of several examples — as was Trolde (Trolls), from 1891, by the Norwegian author Jonas Lie, Munthe’s fairy-tale watercolours (1893) and Theodor Kittelsen’s Trolde (Troll Folk) (1892). An earlier example is Ernst Bojesen’s inter-Nordic Christmas magazine Juleroser, the 1887 edition of which focused on a selection of figures from Nordic legends. This work included texts by Lie and Drachmann, while Carl Larsson, C. Bloch and August Jerndorff were among those who supplied illustrations. Writing about the Nordic mythic creature, the draug, Jonas Lie describes the challenge for the artist: ‘I shall be intrigued to see what the artist makes of the draug (...). What will he look like? – I imagine a painter would not be too happy to depict him – as painters these days seem required to do – sitting on an upturned boat in a naturalistic style, looking him straight in the face. The face, indeed! He doesn’t have a head, but just a clump of seaweed; even so, one could still stare him in the face.’ Lie is suggesting in a humorous way that the Naturalistic approach does not extend this far. Kittelsen was not among the contributors to this publication. Even so, during the 1890s he would become one of the most dedicated exponents of this genre, and — as the above citation from Krohg indicates — one who was not always ‘bound by his model’.

Kittelsen was primarily a book artist and illustrator. The illustrations that Asbjørnsen and Moe commissioned from him for several of their collections of folk tales were in a class of their own. The first publication that Kittelsen illustrated was entitled Eventyrbog for Børn. Norske Folkeeventyr (Fairy Tales for Children. Norwegian Folk Tales) and consisted of three volumes published

36 Rossholm, Sagan i Nordisk Sekelskifteskonst, 72.
in the years 1883–87. Kittelsen returned repeatedly to fairy-tale illustrations over a 30-year period. From 1887 to 1889 he lived in northern Norway, and it was there that he began work on one of his defining projects, *Troldskab*, a presentation in text and pictures of a selection of creatures from folk belief. Each drawing was accompanied by a text about the respective creature – Nøkken (the Water Sprite or Nix), Huldra (the Wood Nymph), Draugen (the Sea Ghost), Trollet (the Troll), etc. A mixture of literary fairy tale and legend, the texts give the impression of being drawn from oral transmission but were in fact written by Kittelsen himself. Like Munthe’s fairy-tale watercolours, *Troldskab* presents us with the artist’s personal interpretations of popular tales handed down by word of mouth. Stylistically, the drawings

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38 It was around this time that Kittelsen began to work on these drawings. Jonas Lie was supposed to write the texts, but due to his failure to deliver on time, Kittelsen eventually wrote them himself. As a result of the delay, the book wasn’t published until 1892.

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Fig. 4. Theodor Kittelsen, *Nøkken / The Nix*, 1887, pen, pencil and wash on paper, 33.1cm x 46.6cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo

Photo: Nasjonalmuseet / Jacques Lathion CC-BY-NC
in *Troldskab* are varied, reflecting various sources of inspiration. Some of them resemble the fairy-tale illustrations he had made on earlier occasions. The most important literary inspiration was Andreas Faye’s *Norske Folke-Sagn* (Norwegian Folk Tales), from 1833. Faye was the first Norwegian to collect folklore in a systematic way. Several of the pictures and texts in *Troldskab* are fairly direct interpretations of Faye’s narrative, and it is tempting to view the book as an extension of the latter’s collected folk tales. Throughout the work, Kittelsen was in contact with his friend, the folklorist Moltke Moe (1859–1913).\(^{39}\)

In addition to publishing the oral material he had collected, Faye hoped to establish the place of Norwegian folklore in its broader and more general European context. In the introduction to *Norske Folke-Sagn* he wrote: ‘When we compare the popular beliefs of neighbouring and closely related nations, we notice the same ideas and superstitions in slightly different forms.’\(^{40}\) He drew parallels to Norway’s neighbours, including examples from Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Germany, Scotland and the Orkney Isles. Kittelsen’s text and picture for *Nøkken* (Fig. 4) show parallels to Faye’s account. Interestingly, Kittelsen did not confine himself exclusively to Norwegian legends. Faye wrote that it had been said of the *nøkk* that ‘(h)e can transform himself into all kinds of things, sometimes into a half-boat on the water, sometimes into a half-horse on the shore, sometimes into gold and other precious things. If you touch these things, the *nøkk* will immediately gain power over you. He is, however, only dangerous after sunset.’\(^{41}\) He added that in Iceland, the *nøkk* revealed himself as ‘a beautiful grey horse who entices people to mount him, whereupon he carries the rider straight into the water.’\(^{41}\) The *nøkk* also appears as a horse in Shetland, albeit as ‘a small beautiful pony that lures people’\(^{42}\). In *Troldskab*, Kittelsen wrote: ‘The *nøkk* can transform himself into all kinds of shapes. Often he lies on the shoreline like a beautiful glistening jewel. If you touch it, he has you in his power (...). He turns himself into an old barge, half up on land (...). Once in a while, the *nøkk* turns himself into a grey horse that starts grazing right beside the tarn. His aim is to trick someone into climbing onto his back, at which point he will head straight for the water.’\(^{43}\) The drawing of the *nøkk* was close to Faye’s description of the Scottish water sprite: ‘In Scotland, the *nøkk* appears sometimes as Shellycoat, covered in seaweed and

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41 Ibid., 50.
42 Ibid., 53.
Fig. 5. Theodor Kittelsen, *Boy on White Horse*, 1890–1909. Th. Kittelsen Museum / Blaafarveværket

Photo: Th. Kittelsen Museum / Blaafarveværket

Fig. 6. Theodor Kittelsen, *Nøkken / The Nix*, 1909. KODE Art Museums of Bergen

Photo: KODE, Bergen
mussels, sometimes as Kelpie...’ But it was Faye’s description of the popular Danish idea of the nøkk that had the closest parallels to Kittelsen’s drawing in *Troldskab*: ‘...a monster with a human head, who lives both in the sea and in lakes.’\(^{44}\) Several years later, Kittelsen made a number of other pictures of the nøkk, this time in the guise of a horse. *Gutt på hvit hest* (Boy on White Horse, Fig. 5) and *Nøkken* (Fig. 6) were probably responses to Faye’s description of the Shetland water sprite. The nøkk’s tendency to assume the form of a horse was also an element of Norwegian folklore, but it was the seductive and alluring nøkk that Kittelsen chose to depict in these two works. Conceptions of supernatural figures from continental Europe, in addition to the Norwegian tradition, also played a part for Kittelsen. He was familiar with the illustrations of the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales, but in regard to international influences, it was probably Arnold Böcklin who offered the greatest inspiration. Kittelsen borrowed ideas from Böcklin for both his sea serpent and his mermaid.\(^{45}\) These elements show that Kittelsen channelled more than just folklore into his *Troldskab* series. Indeed he had a wide interest in mythology. He was not only focusing on what was typical for the Norwegian tradition.

For the folklorist Moltke Moe, folk literature was an expression of the ‘mythical mindset’, something that possessed value as symbolic narrative of universal significance. The fact that folk beliefs can be seen as expressions of fundamental universal ideas was an important aspect of their reception in general and of research into this material. They were not merely the products of ignorance and superstition, and the study of folk literature represented not just ‘the collecting of curiosities and bric-a-brac, but (...) a route back to the broad universal foundation from which ultimately all human culture has emerged’.\(^{46}\) Faye’s *Norske Folke-Sagn* was a contribution to the comparative mythology that became a popular discipline in the 19th century. Asbjørnsen and Moe’s work in collecting Norwegian folk tales was also a contribution to this field of research, which straddles the boundaries between ethnology, psychology and anthropology.\(^{47}\) Kittelsen’s works show an awareness of the importance of legends and supernatural beings, and the stories and creatures he chose to represent in *Troldskab* are those he regarded as holding a deeper meaning. The mythical aspect of folk culture harmonised

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\(^{44}\) Theodor Kittelsen, *Troldskab*.


\(^{46}\) Reidar T. Christiansen, ‘Norske folkeminne. En veiledning for samlere og interesserte’, *Norsk folke­minnelags skrifter*, nr. 12, Oslo 1925, 7.

\(^{47}\) In the introduction to *Norske Folke-Sagn*, Faye explains the scientific approach of his studies and throughout the book he compares mythological themes and figures from different European countries.
well with contemporary Symbolism and Neo-Romanticism, one of the goals of which was to represent human intuition and emotions and the life of the soul. In Symbolist art, allegories, myths and biblical themes were reformulated using a new iconography, and Kittelsen used the historical-mythical material of folklore to evoke a world of universal experience. Norway’s natural environment and folk beliefs provided the inspiration, but the framework was Symbolism.

Mythological and biblical themes were a focus of renewed interest among painters in the 1890s, and Kittelsen’s private library reveals that he was no exception in this regard. On his bookshelves one finds works such as Illustrert mytologi (Illustrated Mythology), from 1875, which covers Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Nordic and Germanic mythology, and Mythologisk haandbog (Mythological Handbook), from 1872. Kittelsen’s first major artistic achievement was his set of drawings for an edition of the Batrachomyomachia (Homer’s Battle of Frogs and Mice), which actually had nothing to do with Norwegian history or folk traditions. In his younger years, Kittelsen lived and studied in Munich, where, as mentioned above, Böcklin’s pictures were a source of inspiration for many, Kittelsen included. Böcklin’s integration of existential themes with a world of visual fantasy was widely admired. The personification of Nature was one of the driving forces behind folk tales and other popular legends and myths. Symbolist art is also inclined to ascribe human traits to animals and natural phenomena and to use fairy-tale figures as symbols for human experiences and feelings. This is something that especially characterises Nordic Symbolism. Figures such as trolls, nøkks and personifications of pestilence serve as reflections of human fears, in that they symbolise phenomena we find too frightening to confront or are unable to explain.

As with Munthe’s fairytale watercolours, some contemporary critics contrasted Kittelsen’s artworks with the fairytale illustrations of Erik Werenskiold (1855–1938). This juxtaposition was made to highlight Munthe and Kittelsen’s imaginative results. For instance, Jens Thiis drew such a parallel, emphasising Kittelsen’s imagination:

> Despite my profound respect for (...) Werenskiold's fairytale drawings, it ought to be asked whether Kittelsen’s
best drawings are not more successful in capturing the burlesque tone of fairy tales. His drawings are bolder, wilder, and possess more of the spirit of fairy tales than the wise, meticulous works of Werenskiold, which are often more like naturalistic depictions of peasant life than fantastical fairy-tale illustrations. Kittelsen has shown us once and for all what a Norwegian troll looks like, whether it be the mountain variety, the forest troll, the tarn troll or any of the many other enchanted and supernatural creatures of this country.52

Werenskiold was dedicated to Naturalism and his drawings very often render what he in fact had observed on his many travels in different Norwegian valleys. It was in regard to these more realistic folklore renderings that Kittelsen represented a contrast. It was this depiction of peasant life – which kind of continued the older generation of artists’ national Romantic motives – that Kittelsen freed himself from. To a greater extent he found inspiration in the texts.

**Frida Hansen: how to make the most out of a Norwegian peasant woman’s weaving tradition**

*I am glad that in 1889 my path took me to Sognefjord, rather than to the Gobelin factory in Paris.*

Frida Hansen

Frida Hansen’s career began with an åkle – a traditional Norwegian rug (Fig. 7). In the 1880s, she ran an embroidery shop in her hometown of Stavanger. Anna Rogstad’s book, *Kjente menn og kvinner. Fra deres liv og virke* (Famous Men and Women. From their lives and works), published in 1926, quoted Hansen as saying about this period:

...one day a woman came in with a beautiful old rug that she had bought in Telemark. It was threadbare and had a few holes, and she asked me to repair it ... Suddenly, I recalled the words of my brother-in-law Carl – ‘You should be weaving such rugs.’ It shot through me like fire. Yes, that’s what I would now do! I would take up the old Norwegian craft of weaving,

so as to renew it and make it available, both as decoration and as a field of activity for many. And thus began my life’s work, which has occupied my thoughts, my creative drive and my life.\textsuperscript{53}

Hansen was familiar with old woven textiles of this kind from the collection of her brother-in-law, the painter Carl Sundt-Hansen. She herself had no experience of the technique, but soon became aware that it was on the verge of dying out in the local villages. Fortunately, there were others who were also eager to preserve Norway’s textile traditions, and at the

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Åkle, 19th century, tapestry, 152cm x 126cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo. Photo: Nasjonalmuseet / Frode Larsen CC-BY-NC}
\end{figure}

invitation of a friend, the women’s rights campaigner Randi Blehr, she took a trip to Sogn in order to gain her first experience. Blehr encouraged women to pursue home crafts during a period when the interest in Norwegian folk culture was widespread. One of her discoveries was Kjersti Hauglum, a young woman who wove tapestries using a technique that had survived in Norway since the Middle Ages. In 1889, Blehr organised a course in Lærdal on tapestry weaving using warp-weighted looms, with the aim of reviving the tradition. Hansen took part and quickly decided to focus on this technique in depth. However, she was not satisfied with the colours of the woollen yarns that were available. So she set off to visit the farms in Ryfylke to collect recipes for plant-based dyes from the older women of the region. In due course she established Norway’s first plant-dyeing workshop in Stavanger, and the following year, in 1890, she founded the ‘Atelier for haandvævde norske Tæpper’ (Studio for Hand-woven Norwegian Rugs).

In 1892, Hansen decided to move to the capital in order to share her knowledge with others and to show that Norway ‘had something that was bound to inspire respect and admiration – in other words,’ she said, ‘I wanted to build a new branch of Norwegian applied art’. Five years later, together with Blehr, Hansen set up the Norsk Aaklæde og Billedtæppe-Væveri (Norwegian Rug and Tapestry Workshop). In the autumn of 1897, the workshop exhibited its first product, a floor rug. On that occasion, the Director of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Kristiania, Henrik Grosch, was rather sceptical about the project. Despite being an advocate for the preservation of Norwegian textile traditions, a theme he frequently promoted in his public speeches, Grosch thought the pattern of the floor rug was ‘second-rate’, the execution irregular, and the dyeing of the yarn a failure. A few days later, Hansen published her response in ‘Innovation in the Field of Art-Textiles’, explaining that, for this floor rug, she had developed a new technique that combined modern tapestry weaving with the very oldest methods, and that the irregularities that Grosch had highlighted were the very point of the work. For her, the effect created by this technique ‘introduced something ancient and fresh into the over-refined home. This yearning for the authentic and the simple is what is in the air today’. Evidently, Hansen could justify the use of this old
technique in terms of the current taste for a decorative art that prioritised simplicity and stylisation.

Hansen became closely involved in the efforts to spread knowledge about textiles and tapestry weaving, while at the same time building her own career as an artist. The number of women who were professional weavers in these years became quite substantial, yet few were as ambitious as Hansen. Ancient textile traditions from Norwegian rural communities formed the basis for her considerable output, and throughout her career she justified her choice with artistic arguments and by remaining true to her heritage. Over the years, she wrote a number of newspaper articles and took part in debates about textile art and the development of Norwegian applied arts. Historically, the aesthetic standard in the field of tapestry had been the French Gobelin. This was a type of tapestry characterised by technical refinement that allowed the realistic treatment of themes. On several occasions, Hansen discussed the status of the French Gobelin, claiming that it was an error to judge the quality of all textile art on such a basis. In 1913, she wrote in *Aftenposten* about the Norwegian ‘weaving renaissance’ to which she herself had contributed over the previous 20 years:

*On the other hand, if we have turned our backs on the Gobelin, it is certainly not for any lack of ability, but because, in my view, we are best served by preserving our own tapestry weaving (...). If we have turned our backs on this kind of work, it is because we did not want to weave paintings. We wanted textile art (...). I am glad that in 1889 my path took me to Sognefjord, rather than to the Gobelin factory in Paris.*

But renewal was also needed. Hansen recognised the importance of new designs and refined the technique accordingly. Paradoxically, she based her first tapestry on a well-known Norwegian painting. In her memoir in Rogstad’s book, she said: ‘...but what should I weave? (...) I chose a Norwegian theme, a woodcut of Bergslien’s painting *The Birkebeiner Carrying the Royal Child over the Mountains*. I didn’t want to misappropriate or copy old tapestries, since I realised that – beautiful and decorative as they may be – they could never serve as models for a modern line of work due to the primitiveness of their figure drawing.’

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60 Rogstad, *Kjente menn og kvinner*, 32.
solution was to elicit a dialogue between folk art and fine art. So what would she weave? In November 1891 an article by Hansen appeared in Morgenbladet, in which she reflected on where modern Norwegian tapestry weaving should look for designs. Under the heading ‘Our National Tapestry Weaving’, she pointed out that Norwegian traditions offered ‘a rich field to work from: themes from our legends and fairy tales, amazing animal and flower forms, ornamental and ground patterns, etc. (...) Our old tapestries, with their patterns and colour combinations, should be the basis on which we develop further work.’61 Hansen wrote this two years before Munthe exhibited his fairy-tale watercolours and a year before Kittelsen published his book Troldskab. Hansen saw Munthe’s watercolours when they were exhibited in Kristiania in 1893, and in response she wrote to Blehr: ‘Fairy-tale themes (...), that’s what we should be weaving, in my opinion (...). Just think! What fantasy there is in our ancient fairy tales, legends and yarns…’62

Initially, Hansen’s subjects concentrated on Norwegian tales and, like Munthe, she found inspiration in Landstad’s Norske Folkeviser. A significant work from these early years was Olaf Liljekrans, from 1894 (Fig. 8), which consists of two large tapestries and four sets of portières, made as a commission for the Skøyen estate. In other words, like Munthe, she chose the most Norwegian of Norwegian themes.

As we have seen, from the outset Hansen’s aim was the preservation of traditional Norwegian crafts, but in order to create a living tradition she was convinced that preservation had to be combined with renewal.63 A few years after her comments in Aftenposten about seeking inspiration in ‘Our Ancient Tapestries’, her thoughts were once again in print, this time concerning the need for new, original designs to ensure the development and continued viability of tapestry weaving as an industry.64 She had started out pursuing the ideal of Norwegianness, probably influenced by the ongoing debate at the time about a national style, but after a few years this had been toned down. In the spring of 1895, Hansen travelled abroad, first to Cologne, then Paris. She went to Cologne to copy late-medieval German art and to study drawing at the city’s art school.65 What she sought in medieval art were ways in which to simplify figurative elements. As in tapestries, medieval painting emphasised the two-dimensional

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61 Thue, Frida Hansen: En europeer i norsk tekstilkunst omkring 1900, 23.
62 Thue, Frida Hansen: En europeer i norsk tekstilkunst omkring 1900, 42.
63 One of Hansen’s innovations was the so-called transparent technique, for which she took out a patent in 1897 – ‘Procedure for creation of open work on a warp-weighted loom’. In her text for the patent she writes that although open ornamentation is nothing new, it has not hitherto been produced on warp-weighted looms.
65 Thue, Frida Hansen: En europeer i norsk tekstilkunst omkring 1900, 43.
Fig. 8. Frida Hansen, Olaf Liljekrans II, 1894, tapestry in gobelin technique, 358cm x 175cm, Nasjonal Museum, Oslo
Photo: Nasjonal Museum / Frode Larsen CC-BY-NC
surface, making medieval designs highly suitable for transfer to the particular Norwegian weaving technique she worked with. After a few months she moved to Paris, where she took life classes. None of the surviving sources mentions where in Paris Hansen studied, but probably it was with Puvis de Chavannes. A number of young Norwegian women studied with him and, according to a newspaper report from 1892, a door curtain that Hansen had woven using the åkle technique was sent to him as a gift from ‘some of his Norwegian female students in Paris’.66 It is also probable that Hansen attended his classes as a guest during a stay in Paris in 1895. But whether or not she studied with Puvis, we know that she was acquainted with his art, and her stylistic and thematic development after 1895 certainly suggests that his work was of major importance to her. Before travelling to Paris, she had focused on Norwegian themes, but her encounters with Symbolism, Art Nouveau and Japonism took her in a new direction. It was in Paris that she made the first sketches for one of her best-known works, Melkeveien (The Milky Way), from 1898 (Fig. 10).

After Paris, Hansen began working with more international themes. She always kept herself well informed about the latest developments in art, even if her opportunities to travel were limited. Among other things, she subscribed to The Studio.67 She was fairly free in her treatment of themes and did not worry unduly about whether or not they were Norwegian. The same was true of her colour schemes. But where she did remain consistent was in her use of the warp-weighted loom, the technique she had ‘discovered’, and she continued to dismiss the French Gobelin as a medium that essentially amounted to rendering paintings in textiles: ‘There is absolutely no reason why our technique should be an obstacle to the making of tapestries similar to the French Gobelins. If we wanted to do that, we could. But of course, we don’t want to. For weaving, the road ahead is not to copy paintings. In that direction, the French have already taken things as far as they can possibly go.’68 Ironically, her tapestries were compared to paintings on several occasions. When she exhibited a number of works in 1894, the critic for the Dagposten in Trondheim wrote: ‘This is genuine art – painting in yarn!’69

At the Bergen Exhibition in 1898, Hansen and Munthe’s tapestries appeared for the first time in the same exhibition. In
Bergens Aftenblad, Munthe’s *C’est ainsi* (Fig. 9) was compared with Hansen’s *Melkeveien* (The Milky Way). For the reviewer, Hansen’s was the more original and powerful work. But the exhibition also triggered a debate about the direction Norwegian textile art should take, with some remarking that Hansen’s tapestries were not sufficiently Norwegian. Jens Thiis, who by that time had become Director of the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim, was himself advocating a new national textile...
art, and for him Munthe stood out as a central role model. Despite gaining highly positive reviews, Melkeveien was not purchased by any of the Norwegian museums of decorative arts, whereas Munthe’s C’est Ainsi was bought by the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Kristiania. The refrain was that Norwegian textile art should be based on what was nationally distinctive. The following year, Melkeveien was shown in Berlin, where it was purchased for the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg. The professor of art history, Julius Lessing, was impressed by what he saw: ‘The great tapestry (...) by Frida Hansen is an artwork of the highest rank. Compared with a French tapestry, its simple expanses of colour may seem primitive, yet this simplicity does not equate with a

For details on this debate see Thue, Frida Hansen: En europeer i norsk tekstilkunst omkring 1900, 63–65 and 74–80.
lack of strength; on the contrary, it must be a sign of strength, when a composition of such exalted simplicity and greatness can grow from it.\textsuperscript{72} For Norwegian critics, Hansen lacked what was distinctively Norwegian. Their German colleague found the idiom of her tapestries primitive compared to French examples. However, primitiveness was a quality that carried a positive value in the European art debate around the turn of the past century, and for Lessing, Hansen’s work was art of the highest rank, regardless of its national associations.

Hansen let a traditional, almost extinct technique play the leading role in her artistic work. This was her basic idea. At the same time, she chose to put this Norwegian tradition into dialogue with motifs, colours and patterns that were fashionable in the international art environment of the time, and because of this she succeeded with her ambition in preserving and renewing the tapestry tradition. As we have witnessed in the debate about Hansen’s artworks, she was not considered a contributor to the development of a ‘national style’ by her contemporaries. Nor has she later been seen in such a context and today she is more widely regarded as a representative of the European historical revival style, than a pioneer of a national revival style.\textsuperscript{73} But just as fully, her work of art was fundamentally based on a Norwegian weaving tradition stemming from peasant women. Hansen saw the potential in this technique and the beautiful tapestries that were the result. That this was a tradition associated with women’s culture also played an important role for Hansen. In addition to making her own art, it was essential for her to create jobs for women in her own time. Her activities helped women enter into professional life and at the same time they were continuing a significant craft tradition that had been carried out by women for centuries.

The preservation of folk traditions through artistic work

For Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen alike, their interest in folk art was of decisive importance for their artistic activities. Although each had different motivations, they grappled with various aspects of folk traditions, and by transferring elements from folk art into fine art, they created new styles of expression that broke with older aesthetic ideals and thus brought them into line with the ideals
of modern art. Whereas the ideology of the nation mattered to them in varying
degrees, what they did share was a general desire to communicate the traditions
of Norway to their contemporaries. Of the three, it was Munthe who placed the
greatest emphasis on developing a particular Norwegian style, and in the art-
historical literature he is also the only one to have been cited with any consistency
in discussions about the importance of folk art in relation to the development of a
national art. Kittelsen’s visualisations of the creatures of folk belief brought trolls,
nøkker and hulders into the shared Norwegian culture, although in choosing his
themes it would appear that Kittelsen was motivated more by a general interest
in popular culture than by any particular issue of national identity. He wanted
to honour the popular imagination and was interested in these stories for their
potential to reflect something universally human.

Against the background of the Symbolist interest that was current in the fields
of visual art and literature at the time, these artists recognised the opportunity to
build bridges between folk art and fine art. Munthe, Kittelsen and Hansen all chose
mythical themes. Some of these they found in Norwegian tradition, but others
were derived from a broader European heritage. The Symbolist inclination towards
favouring literary references in visual art meant that fairy tales and myths were
perceived as particularly relevant material. Supernatural and fantastical subject
matter were well suited to the desire to reach beyond the mundane and the rational.

In Norway, it was a fairly obvious step to link the cultural awakening that
folk art represented with the ambitions towards nationhood that became so
dominant in the 1890s. Many people saw these as traditions that carried little
trace of ‘foreign influence’. This was an argument made by prominent critics, such
as Aubert, and supported by a number of artists. For most artists, however, there
was no explicit wish to create a national art that required them to seek inspiration
in popular traditions. We have seen that Kittelsen, Munthe and Hansen all adopted
a considered approach to folk art, finding both formal and thematic ways to
engage with it, not primarily because as a material it was thoroughly Norwegian
or because they wanted to create a specifically Norwegian art, but rather because
folk art possessed qualities that corresponded well to the current preoccupations
of art in Europe. What mattered for them was not so much the creation of a
national art as making this national material more universally interesting and
relevant for a new era.

Vibeke Waallann Hansen, MA, is Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at the
National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, Norway. She is a
specialist of modern Norwegian art (1880–1950). Her other interests are European
art from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, early modernism and Nordic art
in general.