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Sources for Ilya Repin Researchers in the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery

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Transl. from Finnish to Estonian by Meelis Lainvoo and from Estonian to English by Juta Ristsoo

Documentary materials related to the painter Ilya Repin (1844–1930), starting from 1910, are stored in the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery.¹ Along with specialised art-historical archives and documents, these collections include photos and other pictorial material, audiovisual recordings, literature and newspaper articles related to and associated with the fine arts.²

The oldest material in the Archive Collections is based on the collections of the Finnish National Gallery's earliest predecessor – the Finnish Art Society, which was the administrative arm of the fine arts scene in Finland between 1846 and 1939. These collections became the responsibility of the Fine Arts Academy of Finland Foundation, inaugurated in 1940. The Foundation became a state-owned museum, the Finnish National Gallery in 1990 and, at that time, the Central Art Archives was established along with the other museum departments. In 2014, the National Gallery was reconstituted as a foundation and the functions of the Central Art Archives were included in the new Department of Collections Management.

Ilya Repin's ties with Finland became stronger when, at the beginning of the 1900s, he started coming from St Petersburg to visit the holiday destination of Kuokkala at Kivvenapa, in Vyborg County on the Karelian Isthmus. As a result the Finnish press started to pay more attention to Repin, who was a famous professor at Russia's Imperial Academy of Arts. In 1897 the Finnish Art Society started to document the fine arts scene and began a press cuttings collection. At first, it was limited to a few Swedish-language newspapers in Finland, but gradually spread to publications throughout the country. The information on Ilya Repin in the press cuttings collection in today's Finnish National Gallery dates back to 1906, when Repin's

1 The original text for this article was produced by the Central Art Archives, a department of the Finnish National Gallery from 1990–2013. The writer has now updated the contents to correspond to the current situation in the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.
2 By 2021, approximately 215 separate archives, most of them acquired as donations, have been assembled in the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery.

В.А. 116 (прот. с. IX. 19. § 6).

Отисъ

Художественнаго произведенія.

I. Босмертинъ даръ Наталіи Борисовны Кордманъ.

Портретъ Нат. Бор. Кордманъ къ Лилланъ (къ Швейцаріи) масло, И. Э. Репина, около 1890. Высота х 70 см.

Портретъ съ книгой, масло, И. Э. Репина, 70 х 60 см.

Раніишего портета. Девушка маслом, И. Э. Репина, ок. 40 х 40 см.

Портретъ М. Б. Кордманъ, скульптурно-графический листъ, рол. И. Э. Репина, двѣ карандашныя величина.

Даръ Нови Ефимовича Репина.

1) Работы И. Э. Репина:

Портретъ Е. Н. Званцовой, масло, ок. 80 х 70 см.

Портретъ П. Левуцкаго, масло, черни, ок. 70 х 70 см.

Портретъ Л. Кордманъ, масло, около 1890. Высота х 70 см.

Портретъ Л. Н. Толстого, скульптурно-графический листъ, рол. И. Э. Репина.

studio was completed as an annex to Penates, his summer house in Kuokkala.³

The Finnish press paid special attention to Repin's art exhibitions which were organised in the 1920s, and this publicity attracted an increasingly large group of admirers. Repin's important works, which were in Russian art museums, were well-known⁴ through newspaper photographs, and the Russian postcards that began to circulate in the early 20th century. In April 1895, art researchers were also able to listen to the St Petersburg art critic Julius Hasselblatt give a lecture in German on Repin's art in the great hall of the Finnish Art Society at the Ateneum building, in Helsinki.⁵

The documents in the Archives of the Finnish Art Society include the minutes related to the gift of art that Ilya Repin made to the Society. In the summer of 1919, Repin asked Nikolai Dmitriyevich Yermakov⁶ to write a letter for him from Kuokkala to Helsinki about his plan to donate Russian art to a national gallery in Finland. In the Russian-language letter, which a representative of the Art Society's board translated into Swedish, Yermakov provided an overview of the planned two-part donation. The first part comprised the artworks that had belonged to Ilya Repin's deceased life partner Natalia Borisovna Nordmann (1863–1914); the second part consisted of Repin's own paintings and the works of other contemporary Russian artists in his collection.⁷

Since the Director of the Finnish Art Society Collections was on a trip at that time, the vice-chairman of the Art Society, painter Väinö Blomstedt (1871–1947), rushed to thank the already elderly Ilya Repin on behalf of the Society for his potential donation. In his letter to Nikolai Yermakov, he explained why the answer to Yermakov's letter of July had been delayed. The addressee had been the 'National Museum' and therefore the letter had first been sent to the History Museum before arriving

The list of artworks that Ilya Repin proposed to donate to the Finnish Art Society, as outlined in Colonel Nikolai Yermakov's letter to the Society, 20 July 1919. Minutes 1917–20. The Archives of the Finnish Art Society. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Jenni Nurminen

- 3 'Den berömda ryska målaren', *Nya Pressen*, 7 July 1906. Scrapbook V. Press cuttings collection. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki (AC, FNG).
- 4 E. R-r. [Edvard Richter]. 'Repin, Ilja Jefimovitš (s. 1844).' in *Tietosanakirja*. Helsinki: Otava, 1915, col. 1715–1716.
- 5 Julius Hasselblatt (1849–1907) wrote art critiques for the *St. Petersburg Zeitung* newspaper under the pseudonym J. Norden. 'Hr Julius Hasselblatt', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 28 April 1895.
- 6 Colonel Nikolai Yermakov acted as the executor of Natalia Nordmann's will in Kuokkala in 1914. See Nikolai Yermakov's letter to the Finnish Art Society, 20 July 1919 and the separately filed list of donated works of art. Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 5 September 1919, attachment 11. Archives of the Finnish Art Society 1846–1939 (AFAS). AC, FNG. Yermakov had a collection of Ilya Repin's works in Petrograd, which was transferred to the Russian Museum in 1918. Maria Karpenko, Jelena Kirillina, Galina Pribulskaja and Natalia Vapenina. 'Teosluettelo', in *Ilja Repin, maalauksia, grafiikkaa*. Leningrad: Aurora/Tammi (Finnish), 1984, 247–60.
- 7 Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 5 September 1919, § 6. AFAS. AC, FNG.

Б.Л. 1 (прот. № 9. IX. 19, § 2)
 Товарищу Вузе-
 Председателю Фин-
 ланского Художес-
 твенного Общества
 Herr Väinö Blomstedt.

Министром Государств

я очень обрадован известием, что Финлянд-
 ская Художественная Общество принимает
 в Гельсингфорскій Музей коллекцию, состоящую
 из рисунков и картин моих, а именно порт-
 ретов и картинных, а также рисунков и
 рисунков русских художников, работавших.

Теперь, с Вашим разрешением, будет
 улаживаться в ящики, описанные Вам
 коллегой Н. Д. Ермаковым, собрание художествен-
 ных произведений, для отправки в Гельсинг-
 форс. Было бы желательно прислать сюда
 Ваше уведомление. — Этим, под моим кри-
 стом, все будет сделано надежным
 способом и отправлено по Вашему указанию.
 Относительно справочных вещей предостере-
 жено Вашему благоусмотрению.

Если возможность дойдет и отправка
 работ будут присланы Вам для отправки.

С совершенным уважением и
 благодарною преданностью

Илья Репин

Ilya Repin's first letter
 to the Finnish Art
 Society, undated,
 1919. Minutes 1917-
 20. The Archives
 of the Finnish Art
 Society. Archive
 Collections, Finnish
 National Gallery
 Photo: Finnish National
 Gallery / Ainur
 Nasretdin

at the Finnish Art Society Gallery, which according to Blomstedt represented the national art gallery.⁸

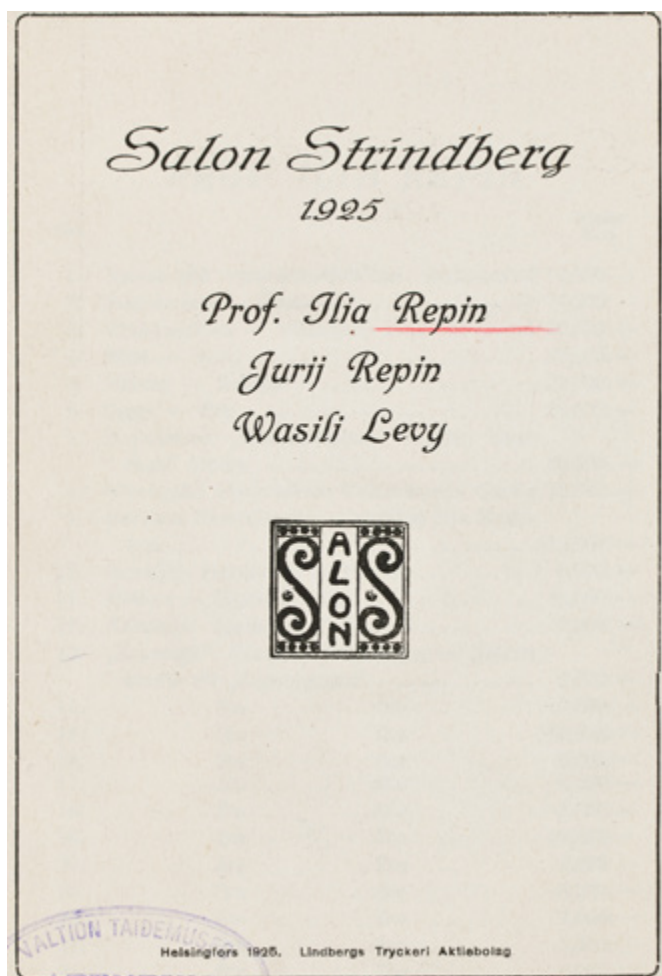
In her will, Natalia Nordmann specified that the Repin works that belonged to her – three paintings and a portrait bust – would remain in Repin's possession until the end of his life. However, she wished them to become part of a public collection thereafter. Repin wanted to fulfil her wish and also donate a representative selection of Russian art, which included his own works, to a Finnish museum. Repin had lived in the Grand Duchy of Finland, which became the Republic of Finland in 1917, for 20 years. Nordmann, on the other hand, was a Finnish citizen by birth.⁹ Both facts are mentioned in Yermakov's letter as reasons for the donation.¹⁰ The titles of the works that reached the Ateneum building in 1920 were registered under Ilya Repin's name in the collections of the Finnish Art Society by Johan Jakob Tikkanen (1857–1930), the secretary of the Society.¹¹ The contents of the donation that arrived, however, did not correspond exactly to the works mentioned in Yermakov's letter.¹²

In 1920, Kaarlo Juho Ståhlberg, the President of the Republic of Finland, presented Repin with the Order of the White Rose, which had been established the previous year.¹³ Attachments to the Art Society minutes from 1920 include two Russian-language letters sent by Repin the same year, in which he expressed his thanks for the tributes and also donated to the Society the portrait he had painted of the artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931).¹⁴

Finnish artists and art experts also visited Penates from time to time. Antti Favén (1882–1948), who had gained recognition as a portraitist, expressed a wish to paint a portrait of Ilya Repin and asked Torsten Stjerschantz (1882–1953), the Director of the Collections of the Finnish Art Society, to write to Repin about his idea. Stjerschantz wrote in German a letter of recommendation, the draft of which is dated as December 1920.¹⁵ Favén's double portrait of Ilya Repin and his daughter Vera Repina was probably completed in 1921.¹⁶

At that time, Ilya Repin visited the sculptors Ville Vallgren (1855–1940) and his wife Viivi Paarmio-Vallgren (1867–1952), who lived in Espoo, near Helsinki.¹⁷ Of the letters Repin wrote in French to Viivi Vallgren between 1920 and 1925 five are known to exist. These surviving letters were donated, most probably by Viivi Vallgren herself, to the Finnish Art Society and its successor, the Fine Arts Academy of Finland Foundation. Currently, they are

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- 8 Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 5 September 1919, attachments 11, 12a, 12b and 13. C30. AFAS. AC, FNG. Furthermore, the Collection of Artists' Letters includes four of Yermakov's letters to Väinö Blomstedt in 1919 connected with the Repin donation. Tkk/Je 93–6. Collection of Artists' Letters. AC, FNG.
 - 9 The writer Natalia Nordmann was born in Helsinki as the third child of Admiral Boris Bernhard Nordmann and died in Locarno, Switzerland. Tor Carpelan. *Åttartavlor för de på Finlands Riddarhus inskrivna efter 1809 adlade, naturaliserade eller adopterade ätterna*. Helsingfors: Frenckellska tryckeri, 1942, 215.
 - 10 Nikolai Yermakov's letter, 20 July 1919, translated into Swedish. Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 5 September 1919, attachment 12a. AFAS. AC, FNG.
 - 11 J.J. Tikkanen's notes about the collections of the Finnish Art Society in the 1920s. The document records the donations and purchases made with the resources of various funds supplementing the collections. Various documents related to the Finnish Art Society 1846–1939. H 24. AFAS. AC, FNG.
 - 12 Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 5 March 1920, attachment 2. AFAS. AC, FNG.
 - 13 Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 8 October 1920, § 7. AFAS. AC, FNG.
 - 14 Ilya Repin's letters to the board of the Finnish Art Society, Kuokkala 8 and 20 September 1920. Minutes of the Finnish Art Society Board, 8 October 1920, attachments 3 and 4. AFAS. AC, FNG.
 - 15 Torsten Stjerschantz's letter to Ilya Repin, 21 December 1920. Tkk/St 542. Collection of Artists' Letters. AC, FNG. In the same collection, there are also two of Repin's letters in Russian to Torsten Stjerschantz, Kuokkala 8 October and 30 December 1920. Tkk/Re41 and Tkk/Re42. AC, FNG.
 - 16 The portrait was in a private collection in Sweden in 1950. The magazine *Vecko-Journalen* no. 24/1950, picture on the art page. NS 109. Nikolai Shuvalov Archive. AC, FNG.
 - 17 Ilya Repin and Ville Vallgren had met in Paris around 1900. The Vallgren couple participated in the joint exhibition of Russian and Finnish artists in Petrograd in 1917 and in the art celebrations that were organised. See Viivi Vallgren. *Sydämeni kirja. Elämän muistelmia*. 2nd edition. Helsinki: WSOY, 1950, 202–05.



Cover of the catalogue from the Repin exhibition at the Strindberg Art Salon, Helsinki, in 1925. Finnish National Gallery Library

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Jenni Nurminen

part of the Collection of Artists' Letters in the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery.¹⁸

The largest and most utilised material related to Repin in the Archive Collections is Grigori Brenev's Ilya Repin archive, which includes Repin's letters from 1920 to 1930.¹⁹ Grigori Brenev (Breneff) (1888–1969), a St Petersburg scientist and book publisher, bought a farm in the village of Ollila in 1909, and thereby ended up in a neighbourhood closely associated with Repin. Brenev's Polish wife, the painter Anastasia Breneva, had studied at the St Petersburg State Art and Industry Academy, which later became known as the Vera Mukhina Higher School of Art and Design. The family's son, the painter Nikolai Brenev (Breneff, 1909–94), who was born in Kivennapa, became Ilya and Yury Repin's student. After the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1939–40, the Brenev family moved to Jokela in Uusimaa County, where Nikolai Brenev also worked as a photographer.²⁰

The most recent donation of Repin's work to the Finnish National Gallery Archive Collections, made in 2020, is the Lauri Haataja Repin Collection.²¹ Originally it seems to have been gathered by Nikolai Brenev, who possibly wanted to write a book about the Repin family. There are six notebooks that contain records from different literary sources in Russian and a large number of photographs of the Repin and Brenev families in Kuokkala.

During his last decade in Kuokkala, Ilya Repin struggled with financial difficulties. However, he was able to manage by selling his tranche of older drawings and sketches, as well as paintings. Repin organised sales exhibitions at the Strindberg Art Salon in 1921, 1925, 1927 and 1928. After his death, a memorial exhibition was held

there in 1930 and his heirs organised sales exhibitions in 1931, 1935–39 and 1944.²²

The Archives of the Strindberg Art Salon were acquired by the then Central Art Archives in 2005, after a portion of it had already been lost.²³ The received letters in the Archives are organised by year. From the copies of the letters that were sent out, we see that

- 18 The Collection of Artists' Letters contains approximately 5,000 letters and other documents dating from 1799 to 1962.
- 19 The Central Art Archives bought the documents in 1998 from Tatjana Vyrycheva, the widow of Grigori Brenev's (Breneff) son, the painter Nikolai Brenev. The collection includes 22 letters and 9 postcards from Ilya Repin to Grigori Brenev. It also includes 29 pages of letters from Yury Repin, and 4 letters and 2 postcards from Vera Repina to Grigori Brenev.
- 20 Pirkko Ropponen. 'Nikolai Breneff, valokuvaaja – taidemaalari', *Tuusula-seuran aikakirja XV*. Vuosijulkaisu 2003. Kerava: Tuusula-seura, 91–92.
- 21 Lauri Haataja (1947–2012) was a historian and non-fiction writer who had an interest in Finnish Karelia and its war history at the beginning of the 20th century.
- 22 The Archives of the Strindberg Art Salon contain the lists of works at these exhibitions, with scant information in Finnish and Swedish, and documents related to the sales of works. The Archives of the Strindberg Art Salon. AC, FNG. The Finnish National Gallery Library also has lists of works from other art exhibitions in which Repin participated, such as the Spring Salon in Paris 1875 and 1876, and the International Art Exhibition in Stockholm in 1897.
- 23 A treasure of materials related to Ilya Repin was lost, and possibly sold, from the Archives of the Strindberg Art Salon before 1987. See Elina Heikka. 'Sotien jälkeinen kausi. Intendentti Lydecken jatkaa toimitusjohtajana', in Erkki Anttonen (ed.), *Salon Strindberg. Helsingkiläisen taidegallerian vaiheita*. Kuvataiteen keskusarkisto 10. Helsinki: Valtion Taidemuseo/Kuvataiteen keskusarkisto, 2004, 119–20.

Arvid Lydecken (1884–1960), who was Director of the Art Salon, wrote several letters to Ilya Repin between 1920 and 1929, but Repin’s replies have been lost. From the sent letters, it turns out that in 1926 and 1927, for instance, Repin’s works were also sold to Oslo.²⁴

In 2015, the Finnish National Gallery received a new Strindberg donation, the Paavo Aalto Strindberg Archive. Among the other Strindberg documents, it contains some letters and three photographs once sent to the Strindberg Art Salon by Ilya Repin and his children Vera and Yury.²⁵

Art dealers and collectors also approached Ilya Repin directly about purchasing his works. One of the most distinguished art collectors and dealers was Nikolai Alexandrovich Shuvalov (Schuvalov) (1906–68), the son of the owner of a St Petersburg confectionery factory. Shuvalov’s archive and large picture collection were received as a donation by the Central Art Archives from his daughter Elena Majjala in 2002. Along with art sales, Shuvalov also collected detailed information about Repin’s abundant body of work. Most of the archival documents are in Russian, but there are also some in Finnish, English and French.

The only documents written by Ilya Repin in the Nikolai Shuvalov Archive are a letter from 1920 and a postcard from the following year sent to Dmitri Mikhailovich Palatko (1868–1954), who came to live in Kuokkala in 1916. The Shuvalov family moved to Helsinki the same year. In addition to works by Ilya Repin, Shuvalov also acquired paintings by other Russian emigrant artists. He sold parts of his art collection in 1967 and 1972 to the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.²⁶

The Nikolai Shuvalov Archive and those of the Strindberg Art Salon contain many letters from Ilya Repin’s children. The Russian-language letters of the painter Yury Repin (1877–1954) and the letters from the actress Vera Repina (1872–1948), often written in German, describe the sale of Ilya Repin’s works, as well as their own lives after their father’s death. These letters have not yet generated much interest among researchers.

Finnish scholars have mostly been interested in the collection of Finnish translations of the details related to Finland found in Ilya Repin’s letters. The material, which is known as Rudolf Sykiäinen’s copies of Ilya Repin’s letters, was donated by Sykiäinen to the Central Art Archives around 1994. He had collected the material for a play about Repin.²⁷ The usefulness of the citations is marred by the lack of any information about the sources, archives or publications, as only the recipient of the letter and the reason for it being sent are indicated. The letters have not been translated into Finnish in their entirety, and therefore their context is unclear.

Professor Olli Valkonen (1924–2016) used Rudolf Sykiäinen’s material in his research on Ilya Repin’s years in Kuokkala.²⁸ Valkonen donated his own archive to the Central Art Archives and thereby made the material he had collected on Repin available to researchers.²⁹ Other Finnish art historians have also answered enquiries about Repin’s drawings and paintings. The archive of the art historian Bertel Hintze (1901–69), who was a long-time Director of the Kunsthalle Helsinki, contains some written queries related to Repin’s works.³⁰

24 Arvid Lydecken’s letter to Vasily Levi at Terijoki, Helsinki 26 May 1926 and to Dr Cato Aall in Oslo, Helsinki 26 May 1926. Copy book of the sent letters 1926. The Archives of the Strindberg Art Salon. AC, FNG.

25 Paavo Aalto (1898–1970) worked as an office manager in the Strindberg Art Salon in 1920–69. In 1941, he also became a member of its board.

26 Mitro Kaurinkoski. ‘The archive inventory of the Nikolai Shuvalov Archive, 2002’, 13. AC, FNG.

27 Regarding the editor Rudolf Sykiäinen’s (1924–2005) visits to the Central Art Archives, see the email correspondence and phone conversations on 29 and 30 August 2012 between the author and researcher Liisa Murtti, who worked at the Central Art Archives until 2010. AC, FNG.

28 Olli Valkonen. ‘Repin ja Suomi’, in *Ilya Repin 1844–1930. Juhlakirja Taiteilijan syntymän 150-vuotisnäyttely*. Taidekeskus Retretti 24 May – 27 August 1995. Punkaharju: Taidekeskus Retretti, 1995. The exhibition catalogue was simultaneously published in Russian.

29 Repin, Ilya: tutkimusaineistoa [research material]. File 7. Olli Valkonen Archive. AC, FNG.

30 E.g. three of O. Raudsepp’s letters from Stockholm between 1946–48 deal with Repin’s works. Received letters. Bertel Hintze Archive. AC, FNG.

Finally, one should also mention the material related to the family of Ilya Repin's life partner Natalia Nordmann. The Collection of Artists' Letters includes the letters of the painter Maria von Nordmann (1835–1915) and the translator Mathilda von Nordmann (1842–94) to Berndt Otto Schauman (1821–95), who was the Director of the Finnish Art Society Collections from 1869 to 1887. These daughters of Natalia Nordmann's uncle Alexander von Nordmann (1803–66) were born in Odessa but were educated in Helsinki.³¹ Unlike Natalia Nordmann, who was listed in the Register of the Finnish House of Nobility, her cousins Maria and Mathilda were included among the Russian nobility because of their father, who had been elevated to aristocratic status in Russia. Mathilda von Nordmann's letters in Swedish, German and Italian from 1877 to 1892 include information about the Nordmann family.³²

Keywords: Ilya Repin, Natalia Nordmann, archives, Finnish Art Society, museum donations, Nikolai Shuvalov, Grigori Brenev, artists' letters

31 Helena Hätönen. 'Pieniä lisäyksiä taidemaalari Ida Silfverbergin vaiheisiin', in Hanna-Leena Paloposki (ed.), *Muisto: taiteilijakirjeitä, arkistoja ja kokoelmia*. Kuvataiteen keskusarkisto 19. Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo / Kuvataiteen keskusarkisto, 2010, 33–39.

32 Veli-Matti Autio. 'Nordman (1700–) sukuja', in *Suomen kansallisbiografia 7. Negri-Pöysti*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006, 158–60.