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Barely two years after Nationalmuseum’s reopening, Sweden and the world were hit by the Covid pandemic. This continued to affect our activities in 2021, with the museum being closed until the spring, when limited opening hours were introduced for the Zorn – A Swedish Superstar exhibition. This was a great success, but was ringfenced by strict access restrictions, which also applied to the rest of the museum. For this reason, ticket bookings and slot times were used to better control visitor flows and to guarantee entry to the exhibition. Another consequence of the pandemic was that there were no programme activities in 2021, as limitations applied to the number of people who could participate in seated events. For exhibitions, the situation remained the same during the autumn, when the next exhibition, Scandinavian Design & USA – People, Encounters and Ideas, 1890–1980, opened and remained on display until 7 January 2022. After this, all restrictions were lifted.

For the Nationalmuseum, as for other cultural institutions, the pandemic presented a huge challenge. At the same time, work continued on making experiences for visitors to the collections as rich as possible. This entails a responsibility for showing the elements that make the Museum unique, those that are known and those that are unknown. Another focus is the areas of the collections that need further strengthening, so we have actively worked on acquisitions over the past ten years. Due to the absence of state funding for acquisitions, this is only possible thanks to generous donors and returns from the Museum’s investment funds.

The Nationalmuseum has one of the world’s finest collections of 18th-century French art, although this emphasises the Rococo Period due to Count Carl Gustaf Tessin’s many purchases in Paris in the early 1740s and, for the same reason, there has long been a lack of important works from after the middle of the century. One example is Noël Hallé’s The Schoolmaster, 1751 (NM 7591), which was a public favourite at that year’s Salon. Teaching as an artistic subject of moral import had long been a popular motif and gained new relevance in the Enlightenment, see article on p. 13.

The collection of Swedish 18th-century art was expanded over the year through the purchase of Louis Masreliez’ Allegory of War (NM 7613) from Christie’s in New York. The painting was intended to be one of two overdoors in Gustav III’s bedchamber at the Royal Palace. It is an important piece, not least because it is an excellent representation of the turning point in the artist’s career, from magnificent history paintings to more decorative work, see article on p. 23.

A not insignificant component of these acquisitions is characterised by art from the first half of the 19th century, with important pieces from France, Germany and Denmark. Many artists from these European nations gathered in Italy, especially in Rome; Roman streets and their characters became a popular genre. Old Italian Woman with Distaff (NM 7603) by Jean-Victor Schnetz is an unusual and exciting example. The elderly woman who modelled for this was also engaged by his artist colleagues such as Léon Cogniet, François-Joseph Navez and Léopold Robert, see article on p. 31.

Another popular subject with the international artists in Rome was landscapes. The encounter with the intensive light and the monumental views spellbound them all. One excellent example of the highest quality is Denmark’s Anders Christian Lunde’s Ponte Clementino and Monte Soratte, Civita Castellana (NM 7610). The artist was one of several generations who were fascinated by the landscapes in this area north of Rome. Lunde has superbly captured how the sunlight filters down through the ravine. This acquisition was made possible thanks to a large donation from Lars Vogel in the autumn of 2021, primarily intended for 19th-century landscape painting.

Landscapes otherwise comprise a category that is well represented among the year’s acquisitions, not least of several important views, with a particular emphasis on the artists who worked in Fontainebleau and the surrounding areas. The leading name among the Barbizon painters is Théodore Rousseau. He previously had little representation in the museum, but the purchase of his A Pond in the Forest. La Mare aux Evées (NM 7609), from the 1840s, has added an excellent example of his very personal style of painting. It was characterised by dramatic light contrasts, clean lines and bitumen colouring, which gave his atmospheric images a dark, dim atmosphere. Rousseau regarded the wetlands that he depicted
here as pristine nature, and hurried to document them before the area was affected by ditching in the mid-1840s.

Lars Vogel's donation has also enabled several purchases of Nordic landscapes, including examples from Finland by Magnus von Wright and Emma Gyldén, which combine an objective perspective with romantic and atmospheric painting. For some undecipherable reason, landscapes, like other art from our eastern neighbour, have been underrepresented in the Nationalmuseum's collections, see article on p. 41.

During the year, the Nationalmuseum was also able to acquire a key work by Julia Beck, her painting Autumn Day from 1883, which is both a landscape and portrait (NM 7614). The woman in the painting is her artist friend, Gerda Rydberg Tiren, and the location is a cabbage garden in Gréz-sur-Loing. Julia Beck was almost forgotten for a long time, but has recently made a comeback and is now one of the late-19th-century’s most popular artists. The painting, a gift from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, shows the breadth and the depth of Julia Beck's artistry, see article on p. 53.

Julia Beck's painting is one example of the special effort the Museum has invested over the past decade in acquiring works by female artists. The most spectacular case is the acquisition of the American-French artist Mary Cassatt. Along with Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalès, she was one of the three significant female Impressionists, les trois grandes dames, in the otherwise male-dominated group. It is a portrait of the artist’s sister, Lydia, a freestanding study for The Cup of Tea, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (NM 7618). This is the first direct purchase of an Impressionist painting that the Museum has made in a century, see article on p. 47.

During the preparations for the “What joy to be a sculptor!” exhibition, shown in the spring of 2022, some important acquisitions were made due to this significant collection of Swedish female sculptors from the late 19th century and early 20th century. One example is Ida Matton's Supplice de Loke (NMSk 2409) from 1897, which was a gift from the artist’s descendants, see article on p. 59.

The Nationalmuseum has important collections of older applied arts and occasionally objects that had been lacking turn up. In terms of silver, we have been delighted to receive gifts of older Swedish silver over several consecutive years. Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist, who have long been passionate about art and the applied arts, not least silver, have shown great generosity to the Museum a number of times as regards older Swedish silver, see article on p. 9.

One particularly prioritised area of applied arts and design is 1920s Sweden, often called Swedish Grace. One key work comprises the pewter furnishings – a table and tall folding screen – drawn by architect Uno Åhrén in 1928. These custom-made, exclusive pieces simultaneously represent both tradition and the future. They are the biggest and most spectacular items to have been produced by Svenskt Tenn. They were all made on a mahogany frame, clad in matt pewter with patterned inlays in shiny brass. They were commissioned by Isabelle Mann Clow from Lake Forest, outside Chicago, Illinois. This acquisition was possible thanks to a significant grant from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum and the Axel Hirsch Fund, see article on p. 65.

The Nationalmuseum has a defined mission to represent and develop knowledge of the arts, preferably in association with the collections being kept and displayed. Research activities play an important and integrated role in the collections’ presentation, and one element of this is exchanges with foreign researchers. In this issue, we are able to publish the recent Tessin Lecture, held by Professor Penny Sparke, Kingston University, London. She talked about the shifting significance of plants in interior design, from the Victorian Era to Modernism and subsequently.

This issue of Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum Stockholm will only be published as a digital edition. The consistent increases in the number of downloads demonstrate how this opens up for greater and simpler dissemination of knowledge about the museum, even internationally. The Nationalmuseum also aims to reinforce its digital publication of collections and research results.

During the final stages of publication, we were reached by the sad news of the passing of Barbro Norbelie (1942–2023). Norbelie was a specialist in the work and life of the sculptor Ida Matton and contributed an essay on the artist to the Nationalmuseum publication Nordic Women Sculptors at the Turn of the 20th Century (2022). She had the opportunity to oversee the typesetting and proof-read the article about Matton’s sculpture Supplice de Loke published in this issue of Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum Stockholm.
In 2021, the Nationalmuseum was delighted to receive another important donation of silver items from Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist, given through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. The value of such generous and insightful donations cannot be overstated, and they are of huge significance for the Museum's work on advancing the collection through new acquisitions. Their generous gift in 2020 comprised two magnificent beakers with filigree ornamentation; they date from 1698, are by Rudolf Wittkopf, and were presented in the *Art Bulletin*. These were followed in 2021 by another gift that included three unique silver items from the 18th century. Two of these are from Sweden’s Great Power Era, the third from the 1760s.

One of the oldest is a pot produced in the Stockholm workshop run by Petter Henning’s widow, in 1715 (fig. 1). Petter Henning (1658–1713) was the son of one of the 17th century’s leading silversmiths outside of Stockholm – Henning Petri (d. 1702), who worked in Nyköping from 1657. Petter Henning was made a master goldsmith in Stockholm in 1688. His workshop’s production was extensive and he was appointed court goldsmith by the kings Karl XI and Karl XII, as well as the dower queen Hedvig Eleonora. Following his death, his widow, Anna Maria Richter (1675–1755), continued to run the workshop until 1735, when their son, also called Henning Petri, was made a master and took over.

Donation of 18th-Century Swedish Silver Items

*Micael Ernstell*

*Curator, Applied Art and Design*

![Petter Henning’s (1658–1713) workshop, Chocolate Pot, 1715. Silver, 22.5 × 17 × 7 cm (h × l × w), 720 g. Gift 2021 of Märta Christina and Magnus Vahlquist through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum 2021. Nationalmuseum, NMK 53/2021.](image-url)
One example of an early Swedish chocolate pot in silver was produced by Olof Fernlöf in Gothenburg, in 1728, which was sold a few years ago at auction in Stockholm. It is pear-shaped, with a round base, a sliding lid filial for the molinet and a wooden handle. Height 27.5 cm. There are later examples of chocolate pots made in Sweden using silver and ceramics.

Chocolate spread from Mexico to Spain in the early 16th century. The drink was popular in southern Europe for many years, but did not spread rapidly to other areas of Europe. In France, the arrival of chocolate is associated with the 1615 wedding of Anne of Austria and Louis XIII, and it did not arrive in England until the 1650s. Field marshal and count, Carl Gustav Wrangel (1613–1676) is the first known importer of chocolate to Sweden. In the autumn of 1670, he bought chocolate from Hamburg through a banker, Manoel Teixeira. In a letter, the banker apologises for his inability to obtain perfumed chocolate, but states that adding ambergris or musk when preparing it is equally effective.4 At the time, drinking chocolate was considered to possess medicinal effects – it was good for the appetite and the soul, and was an excellent aphrodisiac. The type of serving container he used is unknown.

When the pot was produced, drinking chocolate was not as we would recognise it today; it was a viscous concoction that could include chocolate, eggs, milk, sugar, vanilla and other spices. Not only this, but lumps of fat formed in the chocolate, as no one knew how to separate the cocoa butter from the solids. This was not done successfully until the 19th century and, naturally, this influenced the design of the chocolate pots.

In Stockholm in 1755, Cajsa Warg (1703–1769) published a recipe for “Chocolade-Miölk” in her cookery book, Hjelpreda I Hushållningen för Unga Fruentimmer (A Household Aid for Young Women): “Bring sweet milk to the boil and add enough grated chocolate to it that it becomes dark. Leave it to boil with a cinnamon stick and sugar to taste. Then thicken with 4 or 5 eggs,
depending on the amount of milk, so it is thick enough. Then serve with fried sliced bread in the dish.”

Carl von Linné (1707–1778) provided instructions for the preparation of what he called “the food of the gods” – Théobroma Cacao: “Dissolve 1 oz. chocolate in 6 oz. water or warm milk and heat, until the solution is slowly simmering, stir over hot embers for fifteen minutes, whip until frothy and then pour the froth into a cup. The frothing should be uninterrupted; what is left in the vessel can be whisked again so that it froths.”

The viscous mixture thus required considerable stirring before it was served, while also being kept hot. Chocolate pots were therefore designed with a small hole in the lid, so a stirrer or molinet could be used to stir the drink without it cooling too much, while also achieving the desired froth. This pot has a removable top finial with a bayonet mount that covers the smaller hole. To keep the heat in, the spout also has a hinged lid. The little sieve that sits on the inside of the spout is somewhat special, preventing unwanted ingredients ending up in the cup. This thick drink was imbibed with a spoon or straight from the cup; chocolate cups were also preferably lidded.

The other item also comes from Petter Henning’s workshop. It is a toiletry box, also from the Swedish Great Power Era, stamped 1715 (fig. 8). It was probably part of a larger toiletry set with more items. Toiletry sets were important to the upper classes in society, as they were kept in areas to which guests had access, so were preferably made from expensive materials. The design of Henning’s box is monumental, despite its insignificant height, just 6.5 cm. The architectural forms of the late Baroque, with angled corners and cornices, as well as ornamentation with gadroon borders and chiselled patterns is typical of the time. The design influences come from France. Petter Henning was one of the first goldsmiths in Sweden to adopt the ideals of French style, as early as the 1680s. Casting, punching and engraving were introduced; chased ornamentation did not belong to this style. Nicodemus Tessin the Younger was very familiar with the arts and cultural life of France, and brought the new French...
influences to Stockholm. He was the royal architect and court intendant, and used the latest fashions to create a stately setting for King Karl XI. Original drawings, craftsmen and a French goldsmith named Jean Francois Cousinet renewed Swedish design, resulting in a dinner service, for example, for King Karl XII, which was produced in 1703–11 as a cooperation between Cousinet and Petter Henning. It was probably designed by Tessin.8

The third silver item in the donation is a confectionary bowl from 1769, which embodies the design ideals of European Rococo. A shell-shaped bowl is borne on three claw-and-ball feet (fig. 9). Silversmith Lars Petter Hackzell (1739–1771) was a master silversmith in Örebro for a brief period, 1768–71. He came from a family with many silversmiths in small Swedish towns, such as Mariefred and Strängnäs. His confectionary bowl is another example of something that is often highlighted in the history of Swedish silver, namely that smiths outside Stockholm had the same quality and same influences as their colleagues, who were closer to the royal court and the capital city’s leading circles. Hackzell’s life story also reflects the need for access to a functioning workshop. In 1768, he married Ulrica Blom, a widow who had inherited a workshop from her husband, silversmith Olof Norling. After Hackzell’s death, Ulrica Blom married silversmith Stephan Halling in 1772, who became a master silversmith the same year.9
The Schoolmaster – Noël Hallé’s Tender Look at Education in the Mid-18th Century

François Bouquet
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National Archives of France

Fig. 1 Noël Hallé (1711–1781), The Schoolmaster, 1751. Oil on canvas, 63 × 79 cm. Purchase: Axel and Nora Lundgren Fund 2020 (accession 2021). Nationalmuseum, NM 7591.
Some of the highlights of the French Enlightenment of the 18th century were the ideas regarding education and its possible evolution, ideas which remain influential to this day. Noël Hallé’s (1711–1781) painting *The Schoolmaster*, recently acquired by the Nationalmuseum, reflects this and is a touching depiction of childhood, to which the artist’s sharp eye brings depth and a sense of intimacy.

Noël Hallé belonged to one of the dynasties of French painters that flourished during the 18th century thanks to them closely following the evolution of taste and style. Grandson of Daniel Hallé (1614–1675) and son of Claude-Guy Hallé (1652–1736), both painters, he received his training in the workshop of his brother-in-law, Jean Restout (1666–1702), and won the Academy’s first prize in 1736. After a lengthy stay in Rome as a boarder at the French Academy, he first participated in the Salon in 1747. He was to exhibit a selection of his works every year until his death. Once he became a member of the Academy in 1748, he achieved the status of an established artist and his reputation was assured. Indeed, in 1759, when Carl-Gustaf Tessin (1695–1770), in correspondence with Per Gustaf Floding (1731–1791), requested a painting by an acclaimed Salon artist, the latter responded that he would not commission Restout, who was too old, that [Jean Baptiste] Deshays (1729–1765) asked 800 pounds and [Joseph-Marie] Vien (1716–1809) 1,200, after which he adds that “Mr. Hallé also asks for 1200 pounds. His drawing is much less correct, his colouring more attractive though less true than that of M. Vien”.2

Hallé benefited from a royal patronage that gave him many commissions, including for one of his masterpieces, *The Race of Hippomenes and Atalanta*, which was a cartoon for a Gobelins tapestry and a huge success at the Salon in 1765. However, his work was forgotten during the 19th century, before finally being rediscovered – particularly due to the aforementioned painting, which was a revelation to both

Fig. 2 Noël Hallé (1711–1781), *Christ and the Children*, 1751. Oil on canvas, 310 × 190 cm. Église Saint-Sulpice, Paris, COA-SUL 28/211.
critics and the public at The Loves of the Gods exhibition at the Louvre in 1991.3

Noël Hallé and the Salon of 1751

The Schoolmaster is part of Noël Hallé’s early work (fig. 1), as he exhibited this painting at his fourth Salon in 1751.4 An old schoolmaster, dressed in a large, worn-out frock with a turned-down collar, sits in an austere interior with only a bare wall to be seen. He hands a book, or rather a bundle of papers, to two children, the oldest of whom is a little girl who is clasping her hands together and looking at the old man, while a little boy cries behind her. The scene is painted with great realism, in the manner of a genre study, and underlines Hallé’s observational skills and his ability to convey the psychological attitude of the characters, with the master’s calm, the little girl’s sustained attention and the seemingly simulated sorrow of the little boy. It is, moreover, these attitudes that were half-heartedly highlighted by a critic who saw the work at the Salon and pointed out a lack of progress in drawing and colouring by the artist, but “[could] only praise his two little schoolchildren, the expression is striking; but the schoolmaster is cold, and his head has no relief”.5

That same year at the Salon, Noël Hallé presented a second work depicting Christ and the Children (fig. 2).6 Although best known as a history painter, he was interested in all types of subjects – religious and decorative paintings, mythological, realistic, genre or humorous scenes, as well as family portraits – and was commissioned this important work for the Church of Saint-Sulpice, to which Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre (1714–1789), Jean Charles Frontier (1701–1763) and Carle van Loo (1705–1765) also contributed works.7 In the composition, the attitude of the two girls kneeling in profile at the foot of the Christ is the same as that of the young student with folded hands in The Schoolmaster. The destination for this canvas, intended to decorate the chapel of the Infancy of Jesus, suggests that a parallel can be drawn between reverent students and the blessed

Fig. 3 Noël Hallé (1711–1781), St. Anne Revealing to the Virgin the Prophecy of Isaiah, c. 1749. Oil on canvas, 62.6 × 41.3 cm. The Ciechanowiecki Collection, Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2000.179.16.
children, as well as between the old schoolmaster – whose head strongly resembles that of the apostle – and Christ, in some ways portrayed in a teaching position. The name of this chapel and its decoration suggests that this was where young children gathered for catechism, which became part of religious instruction in the 18th century, with an hour-long oral lesson every Sunday. It appears that Hallé was particularly fond of this work, since he used the composition again twenty-four years later, modifying it slightly, detaching himself from Restout's influence, for a commission from the Collège des Grassins. Although he did not preserve the kneeling girls, the educational aspect of the scene is still central in this work for the school, which took in poor pupils from the diocese of Sens.

**Education in Hallé's work**

The painter's interest in teaching and children, which is evident in *The Schoolmaster*, runs through all his work and is based on a real knowledge of educational issues. Two years prior to *The Schoolmaster*, Hallé executed a decorative painting depicting Saint Anne teaching young Virgin Mary to read (fig. 3) for the Brotherhood of Saint-Anne of the Master Carpenters of the City and Suburbs of Paris. More than rigorous tutoring, here the reading lesson is given the intimate tone of a moment shared between a mother and her daughter. Hallé thus shows a great interest in education and demonstrates a knowledge of personal learning processes, even in earlier works such as this. While school education was strengthened in the 18th century, learning to read remained a central issue and was sometimes a substantial investment for parents. Although pupils were often divided in classes, the teacher nevertheless commonly taught them individually, especially in underprivileged environments, to compensate for differences in pupil attendance and the differences in ability. Regardless of their social background, all pupils who learned to recognise words the same way, using the method of breaking them into characters and then syllables, could decipher text the schoolmaster pointed to with his finger or a stylus (fig. 4).

In the 18th century, this type of education was extended to young girls, because the Reformation movements were concerned with providing them with an education that would make them not only proper housewives but also good Christian mothers. However, it was uncommon for boys and girls to be educated together, as represented in *The Schoolmaster*, because religious authorities, which regarded this as a possible opportunity for sin, often governed the organisation of schools or at least intervened in the choice of teachers. Therefore, this intriguing painting probably portrays the education of a young girl and her little brother by a private master, a practice that was widespread among the modest bourgeoisie in the second half of the century, as the "monastic" education criticised by some thinkers gave way to a more useful education.

**More than just a reading lesson?**

Noël Hallé thus takes a tender look at a schoolmaster and his two pupils, capturing a moment in the reality of mid-18th-century education, but is this really the sole subject of his work? The austere setting, the teacher’s worn frock coat and his dirty nails bring a critical eye to the scene, turning it into social commentary. The obvious destitutuion of the old man questions an education system organised through unequal means,
one that is largely dependent on the local context. Later in his career, at the 1765 Salon where he also presented *The Race of Hippomenes and Atalanta*, Hallé exhibited two sketches depicting *The Education of the Rich* and *The Education of the Poor* (figs. 5–6), which sharply contrasted the mores of a well-to-do, austere family with those of a warm household of craftsmen: these are a clear manifesto in favour of the benefits of family education, necessary for the development of children, and which some of the Salon’s critics noted.13 But a final element adds another layer to *The Schoolmaster*: the little boy, particularly appreciated by the critics, a frontal figure with a face pierced with light, crying and strangely grimacing. This undisciplined young pupil, who seems to force his tears to escape the lesson, disturbs its serenity and the devout attention of the girl. This troublemaker, who could be reminiscent of the painter’s work as an illustrator, adds a certain comic character to the scene: indeed, Hallé did not hesitate to combine the profane and the sacred, the grandiose and the humorous, in his works.

Many of Noël Hallé’s paintings and drawings show a great sensitivity to childhood. A few months earlier, in 1751, the same year he executed *The Schoolmaster*, Hallé had married Françoise-Geneviève Lorry and fatherhood was probably already on his mind. Later work by the painter suggests that he was very attached to his family, which he enjoyed drawing and painting, beginning in 1754 with the birth of his son Jean-Noël, and continuing with that of his daughter Catherine-Charlotte-Geneviève the following year.14

**Appreciation of The Schoolmaster**

As a renowned and affluent artist, Noël Hallé achieved great freedom in the choice of paintings he executed: he became financially independent, didn’t have to work for the Bâtiments du roi and was able to rely on private commissions. Despite its unenthusiastic reception by the critics, *The Schoolmaster* appears to have been not only very
popular at the Salon, so that the painter made several copies, but also appreciated by the artist and his family. When Noël Hallé died in 1781, one of these paintings – probably the copy exhibited at the Salon – was sold, indicating he kept it in his studio until his death; furthermore, forty years later, another Schoolmaster is mentioned in his son Jean-Noël’s after-death inventory. Hallé also made an etching after the painting as soon as executed in 1751. He had become interested in etching during his stay at the Academy in Rome, but he did not practice much and engraved only four of his paintings, two of which were done during his stay in Rome. The engraving after this painting is particularly rare and, unlike the last one, has not been commercialised.

The Schoolmaster is a surprising painting in many respects, and was certainly inspired by other commissions and personal reflections of the artist at this time, so should probably be considered in the light of its contemporary reception. Of the copies Hallé executed to meet demand after its exhibition, Hallé’s The Schoolmaster represents a testimony, to some extent even an exposé, of education in his time, but it is also an intimate social commentary in which he humorously inserted a small satirical nod.

Notes:
7. The irregularly shaped pentagonal chapel was adorned with an elaborate pulpit and five roccaille panels depicting The Flight into Egypt (lost) and The Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the temple (still in place) by Pierre, *Jesus among the Doctors* (lost) by Frontier, *The Nativity* (Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts) by van Loo, and *Jesus and the Children*; the ceiling, also painted by Hallé, depicted Stella mututinal (still in place). The chapel was remodeled into the present Assumption Chapel, but the former layout of the chapel is known from an engraving. See: Willk-Brocard 1995, pp. 120–121.
15. Willk-Brocard 1995, pp. 380–381, nos. 43 a-d. See: “historique” for the copies sold at the death of the painter and the one mentioned in his son’s inventory after his passing.
17. Willk-Brocard 1995, pp. 201–202, no. 740, p. 551. Only the Adoration of the Shepherds, engraved after his 1770 painting, seems to have been intended for sale.
19. One of the copies was attributed to Nicolas Bernard Lépicié when sold in 1939. See: *Dessein et tableaux anciens,...* Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 20 June 1939, lot no. 89. Another one bears the inscription “Fragonard 1801” in red gouache in the lower right corner. See: Willk-Brocard 1995, p. 381, no. 43b.
Pierre Jacques Volaire’s View of Solfatara

Daniel Prytz
Curator, 18th-Century Painting, Drawings and Prints

Fig. 1 Pierre Jacques Volaire (1729–1799), Attributed to, View of Solfatara, 1770s. Oil on canvas, 77.5 × 111 cm. Transferred from the Swedish National Arts Council 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7581.
The French painter Pierre Jacques Volaire, also known as Le Chevalier Volaire (1729–1799), is perhaps most famous for his dramatic views of the erupting Vesuvius, so popular amongst Grand Tour travellers to Italy in the latter half of the 18th century. However, the present work – which could be firmly attributed to Volaire after it was recently transferred to the Nationalmuseum from the Swedish National Arts Council – shows a more serene view, albeit still with sublime and deadly volcanic activity at its centre, the Solfatara crater (fig. 1).

Solfatara and Volaire’s views
The Solfatara crater at Pozzuoli, near Naples, is part of the volcanic Campi Flegrei, the Phlegrean Fields. Solfatara is considered dormant rather than extinct, emitting the toxic sulphurous fumes that give it its name. Solfatara has been a popular tourist attraction for centuries and, long before Volaire painted pictures of it, an etching by Georg Hoefnagel (1542–1600) that depicts visitors marvelling at the crater was included in Georg Braun’s and Franz Hogenberg’s travelogue Beschreibung und Contractur der vornemst Stät der Welt (1582).1 In the late 1760s, Volaire settled in Naples and painted colourful, dramatic landscapes in the grand and somewhat idiosyncratic tradition of Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), catering to the tastes of the Grand Tourists visiting there. His many scenes of Vesuvius became very popular; his works that feature this subject are not only amongst the most numerous produced by any artist of the period, but are rightly considered some of the best of the genre. His works from Solfatara are much rarer, although at least three works by the artist with this subject have been previously identified, or at least documented in different sources. There is one version in the Museo di Capodimonte, signed and dated 1774 (fig. 2), a second (probably executed between 1778 and 1782) was part of the collection of the Marquis of Hertford, Ragley Hall, and a third (1778) was sold at Sotheby’s in 1950.2

Two works, or the same work referenced twice, are mentioned in two old, separate sources: one by Antonio Canova (1757–1822) after his visit in 1780 to Volaire’s studio in Naples, and the other was part of the 1882 sale of the collection belonging to Domenico Barbaja (1778–1841), the director of the San Carlo theatre in Naples. In addition, an etching was executed by Pierre Duflos (1742–1816), probably after the painting at Ragley Hall. This was used in the second volume of the Abbot of Saint-Non’s (1727–1791) Voyage Pittoresque, published in 1782, testament to the appreciation for Volaire’s works with this subject.3 Here, the depiction is accompanied by a geological description of the site, highlighting the scientific and industrial importance of the extraction of alum, or aluminium sulphate, from the volcanic soil.4

These pictures, as well as the present painting, show the crater from the same vantage point and are all quite similar, but not straight copies. In the centre background, a group of visitors have ventured close to fissures where a rising cloud of steam and sulphurous fumes are clearly visible. Further to the left, another group of tourists seems to be cautiously approaching or moving away from the fissures. There was, and is, a real danger here, not only because of the poisonous fumes and scalding steam, but also because of the site’s characteristic bradyseism, which means the ground is slowly moving, rising or sinking, making it unstable. In the foreground, at a safe distance from the fissure, members of a larger group are resting or engaging in different kinds of seemingly leisurely activities. Some noticeable characteristics are unique to the Nationalmuseum’s painting. For example, there are a few children in the foreground, like the boy playing with two dogs. Also, to the right, locals are hanging laundry out to dry on the roof of an edifice where the processing of volcanic clay probably took place, a supposition supported by the two basins also seen in the picture. In addition, the work seems to show the scene earlier in the season, as there are leaves on the tree in the right foreground, which are missing in the other paintings. In all the known works, the scenes apparently take place in the middle of the day and the artist manages to convey a sense of pastoral serenity and bliss. The view in the Nationalmuseum’s work is more centred, or cropped depending how one interprets it, and with the somewhat warmer colours and the specific details, such as the children, the work has more of an intimate warmth.

The Nationalmuseum’s View of Solfatara in relation to old sources
The painting belonging to Domenico Beraja was described in unusual detail in his collection’s catalogue, on the occasion of its sale in 1882. Here, Volaire’s use of the figures, as well as detailed trees and shrubbery, to enliven the work, is particularly highlighted: “ornata da bei gruppi di figurine di vario carattere, quivi accorse per vedere quello spettacolo della natura. La composizione è arricchita di fabbriche, ed alberi e boscaglie, ed altri molti accessori, per rendere pieno e vario un soggetto che per se stesso è secco monoton”.5 Considering the specifics of its description it is very tempting to identify this work as the Nationalmuseum’s painting. In her definitive catalogue raisonné on Volaire published in 2010, Émilie Beck Saiello mentions that this description could be said to match the work in the Museo di Capodimonte, as well as the two works in England, but neither of these are populated by lively figures or pronounced trees and shrubberies or, for that matter, “many other accessories” to the extent that the Nationalmuseum painting is and, of course, this work was not known to Saiello at the time of publication of the catalogue raisonné.6 As the way in which the painting from the Beraja Collection entered the art market is well documented, there is a possibility that, through successive acquisitions and donations, it eventually became part of the collections of the Swedish National Arts Council and thus now the Nationalmuseum.

Saiello also mentions the possibility that the work belonging to Beraja, and which
entered his collection no later than 1819, is the same that Canova saw in Volaire’s studio on the 18 May 1780. Canova did not describe the work in any detail, but his account of the visit and the types of works he saw, taken together with the description of Volaire’s work in the catalogue of the Beraja collection, nevertheless has a revealing relevance to the overall character of the artist’s output. Canova mentions three works: an erupting Vesuvius, a coastal scene, and the View of Solfatara. The former two types are also mentioned in the 1882 catalogue, where Vesuvius paintings are described as virtually synonymous with Volaire’s oeuvre as a whole, and therefore this makes the View from Solfatara unique.

The View of Solfatara, the character of Volaire’s work and its representation in the Nationalmuseum

The Nationalmuseum previously owned seven paintings by the artist. Surprisingly, none of these works show Vesuvius, however they are all examples of the other type usually associated with the artist, dramatic coastal scenes in a manner similar to Claude Joseph Vernet (1714–1789) (fig. 3). Volaire came from an artistic dynasty in the coastal town and great naval centre of Toulon. Artists in the family had naturally specialised in marine subjects and in 1755–1763, Volaire was engaged by Vernet to assist and collaborate with him on the prestigious and extensive series of works depicting the ports of France. After this, his close association with Vernet and his work had a lingering and often beneficial impact on Volaire’s career. This lasted well into the latter’s artistic maturation, which he achieved in Italy, where he first settled in Rome in 1763.

Six of the Nationalmuseum’s paintings have a definite provenance, as they were part of the Martelli Collection, acquired en masse by the Swedish Crown in 1797 from the Roman art collector and dealer Nicola Martelli (1733–1829). In the catalogue of this collection, drawn up in 1798, the works are, tellingly, described as by Vernet. The subjects of four of these works may represent the hours of the day. They share format and technique, oil on panel, and were probably executed together for a specific interior during Volaire’s stay in Rome. All six paintings are examples of quite contemporary works in the wide-ranging Martelli Collection. They show the span of Volaire’s work in Italy at the time, as well as the eclectic and up to date taste of Martelli, his clientele and his friends, who included the Prince Sigismondo Chigi (1736–1793) and in whose palace in Rome Martelli rented rooms for exhibiting his collection.

There are now at least four different known versions of the View of Solfatara, including the Nationalmuseum’s painting. This, and the special mention made by Canova and others of works belonging to this group, is testament to their popularity. They form an important part of the artist’s output, which, compared to other works from his period in Naples, are also much
ACQUISITIONS/PIERRE JACQUES VOLAIRE’S VIEW OF SOLFATARA

Fig. 3 Pierre Jacques Volaire (1729–1799), Shipwreck. Oil on wood, 66 × 96 cm. Transferred from Kongl. Museum 1866 (1804 Martelli). Nationalmuseum, NM 893.

scarcer. Far from tired depictions of an endlessly and monotonously puttering volcano, the artist, in a perhaps intentionally ambivalent way, seems to juxtapose his paintings of Solfatara with the way he paints Vesuvius and the coastal landscapes, where the magnificent forces of nature are often shown in dramatic moonlight, or at least twilight. The View of Solfatara, shown bathing in an almost palpable, strong daylight, comes across as their opposite, and is above all characterised by tranquillity. But, nevertheless, it contains a touch of drama of a different kind, with the cloud of steam and fumes representing an obviously fascinating but more perilous danger, fitting the paradox of a deadly volcano turning into a tourist attraction and by extension, a picturesque landscape by the artist. As such, the View of Solfatara captures the sublime nature of the subject in both a similar and different manner to that typically found in the artist’s other works and, to some extent at least, it can like these, be viewed as Pre-Romantic.16 Intrinsically, the work is also a fine complement to the collection of works by the artist already in the Nationalmuseum, and hopefully its identification and publication can further add to knowledge about Volaire’s paintings of the View of Solfatara.

Notes:
6. Ibid.
ACQUISITIONS/LOUIS MASRELIEZ’ ALLEGORY OF WAR

Louis Masreliez’ *Allegory of War* – Between History Painting and Interior Art in a Sequence of Interrelated Propaganda

Daniel Prytz
Curator, 18th-Century Painting, Drawings and Prints

Fig. 1 Louis Masreliez (1748–1810), *Allegory of War*, c. 1790. Oil on canvas, 92.5 × 132 cm. Purchase: The Friends of the Nationalmuseum 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7613.
False pretexts for the declaration of war, the aim of maintaining political power at home through the show of military force abroad, and the importance placed on propaganda to achieve, justify and document this – these were as topical in the time of Gustav III (1746–1792) and the Russo-Swedish War 1788–90 as they are today. The present painting, recently acquired by the Nationalmuseum through the generous support of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, is a prime example of this, specifically of the type of propagandistic allegory that Louis Masreliez’ (1748–1810) perfected in different, but often closely interconnected, artistic media and which served to reinforce the position and policies of the king (fig. 1).

Louis Masreliez showed a penchant for history painting early in his career and devoted thirteen years, 1770–1783, of study in Italy primarily to this field. After his return to Sweden he rarely had the chance to realise this in practice, but he applied compositional skills and his knowledge of didactic allegory and iconography, in part learned through his studies of history painting, in a variety of different ways. In 1785, Masreliez assumed artistic responsibility for the interior design of the Royal palaces; seldom have these types of decorations been filled with so much allegorical allusion as under his supervision. The first commission of this kind Masreliez received was for the mezzanine apartment of Gustav III at the Royal Palace in Stockholm. Here, he created interiors that closely reflected what he and the king had been inspired by while in Italy. Gustav III had completed his Grand Tour just the year before and was obviously greatly motivated to modernise his apartments upon his return. The resulting décor represents the pinnacle of the latest neo-classical fashion, based as much on Renaissance and Greek influences as on Roman ones. A gesamtkunstwerk was created through the close affinity between Masreliez’ decorations and the furniture designed for the rooms, made by the foremost Swedish cabinetmaker of the time, Georg Haupt (1741–1784).

The painting was specifically made as an overdoor for Gustav III’s bedchamber. The closely thought-out interdisciplinary connectivity of the artist’s 1785 designs for the palace are perhaps why Masreliez scholar Carl David Moselius (1890–1968) dated it to the same year. The Nationalmuseum collections already have three works relating to the present painting: a preparatory drawing, a preparatory drawing and an oil study for its overdoor counterpart, works of which Moselius was also aware. The preparatory drawing has an inscription by Masreliez, explaining that it represents Charles XII’s (1682–1718) victory at Narva, Russia, in 1700 (fig. 2). The full inscription,
written in two notes, in French and Swedish respectively, reads: “Dessin du porte pour le chambre à coucher du Roy Gustav III; Narva slag 1700; Bellona med en åskvigge i handen ledsagad av Boreas som blåser snöglopp. Allusion uppå snödrifvan som betäckte svenska angreppet”. This depiction would be in line with some of Masreliez’ wall decoration designs for the divan room in the king’s apartment, which also alludes to Charles XII and is revealingly dated to 1788, according to the palace inventory. It is therefore possible that the present painting was also commissioned a few years later than Moselius’ assumption, in an attempt to update and amplify the allegorical content of the apartments’ décor, giving them a stronger political content as a direct result of the Russo-Swedish War. The war began on the initiative of Gustav III, and on false claims of a Russian attack in 1788, mainly in an effort to strengthen his position at home. The allusion to Narva could thus have been chosen specifically to put the king’s own battles against the Russians in the same light as this perhaps greatest historical Swedish triumph against its eastern neighbour and traditional foe.

The compositions of drawing and painting are very close; the warrior goddess Bellona is dynamically entering the fray in her chariot from the right, bolt of lightning held high, while Boreas and the zephyrs pour down snow from above. Her horses, seen from behind and moving inwards into the picture plane, lends depth to the composition. Their vigorous rendering is obviously inspired by Masreliez’ study of Italian Renaissance painting, which he fused with inspiration drawn directly from Antiquity in a somewhat novel way. Interestingly, on the same sheet underneath the drawing for the full composition, he seems to be trying out the positions of the zephyrs in a separate drawing, to achieve a higher degree of plasticity and movement. In a closely related preparatory pencil drawing which accompanied the acquisition of the painting, Bellona’s helmet is pulled down while her head and back is completely turned from the viewer, her stance even more accentuating motion and depth (fig. 3).

The design of the corresponding overdoor has naturally been interpreted as an allegory of peace, but a description of the allegorical content by Masreliez’ himself is lacking and the reading can therefore not be as completely confident and straightforward (figs. 4–5). Moselius interpreted the figures as Bellona and the Genius of Peace holding a pendant lodestone, representing equilibrium, in front of an altar in
a courtyard, flanked by the curved arcades of a rotunda-shaped temple. In the background of the courtyard there seems to be an olive tree. If the two standing figures are war and peace, the kneeling figure is Sweden.10

However, if this interpretation is also to be viewed as a representation of the peace reached by Sweden and Russia in Värälä in 1790, it is quite different from other depictions of this subject. As a direct representation of this specific peace, the two standing figures could also be interpreted as Bellona and Sweden, while the then eastern half of the Swedish nation, Finland, could be represented by the kneeling woman. A few other attributes, which are clearer in the preparatory drawing than in the oil study, also suggest this interpretation, such as the shield adorned with the three crowns of the Swedish coat-of-arms at the feet of the standing woman to the right, as well as the royal mantle which drapes, and almost billows over, both her and the kneeling woman.

For the most part, the war was fought in Finland, including the most important battles, such as the naval battles at Hogland in 1788 and Svensksund in 1789 and 1790, the last of which Sweden won decisively. This interpretation would not only put the peace in a more specific context, but also in a more favourable, active, light for Sweden, and consequently for the king, showing him as the protector rather than the protected.

Often, in other artistic representations of the Värälä peace, Sweden, and in particular the king, is even more overtly to be understood as a strong, even victorious, protector, while an equilibrium between the warring nations – which comes closes to the actual outcome of the war – is also acknowledged.

Here, in straightforward depictions of the peace, Gustav III could be portrayed as Mars, in the same guise as he might be represented in allegories of the war and its battles. This was true of one of Masreliez’ designs for the king’s medals to commemorate the peace (fig. 6).11

From 1788, Masreliez also took overall responsibility for the artistic content of
exemplified by Masreliez’ study for an unrealised monument dedicated to Karl XII, which is particularly close to the Allegory of War overdoor (fig. 7). Regardless of whether they were supposed to directly relate to Gustav III’s own war against Russia, or more generally to the Swedish might symbolised by his forebear Karl XII’s greatest triumph, the two painted allegories of war and peace could have been central to and – as overdoors and integral parts of interior decorations – literally have fit perfectly into this sequence, bridging Masreliez’ work using different media.

While it served to reinforce the intended interrelation between the media involved,
this sequential synergy could be both to an aesthetic advantage as well as disadvantage. In select paintings from the period, it is as if Masreliez directly repurposes the sculptural, heavy figures typical of the motifs of neo-classical medallion art, which, even if this was intentional, can make them seem perhaps unnecessarily static. However, in other cases, as exemplified by the *Allegory of War*, Masreliez is also able to show his often-unrealised sense of movement and colour and infuse the work with the dynamism of 15th-century Italian Renaissance painting, exemplified by the murals of Polidoro Caldara de Caravaggio (1492/95–1543) and Luca Signorelli (1445–1523), amongst others, both of whom he was particularly fond. Likewise, in his medals, the typical stateliness of the allegorical figures can sometimes be replaced by a striking vitality he learned from the study of those same Renaissance artists.17

Perhaps the king’s death in 1792 led to Masreliez’ two designs for overdoors never being used, instead remaining in the possession of the artist.18 The recent acquisition of the *Allegory of War* repatriates the only finished overdoor from this commission to the same collection as the directly relating drawings and the oil study for its counterpart. Altogether, they can perhaps allow us to obtain an even clearer view of what Masreliez and the king intended to accomplish with the decorations, further suggesting an interrelation between the different media used in the artistic propaganda. The painting also allows us a further taste of the type of works Masreliez, when he was afforded time and opportunity, could execute within the, for him thoroughly explored, but largely unrealised, field of history painting.

**Notes:**

5. Moselius 1923, pp. 70–72. However, it is not wholly clear whether the work was intended for the state or private bedchamber.
7. Nationalmuseum inventory no. NMH 267/1891.
12. Prytz 2009. It was actually in this field that Masreliez got to apply his knowledge of history painting to its greatest extent. The creation of Gustav III’s “History in Medals” was the responsibility of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities and its secretary Gudmund Jöran Adlerbeth (1751–1818). Tellingly, Adlerbeth referred to the obverse designs of the medals as “historie-tafflor” (history paintings). See: Prytz 2009, p. 31, note 128.
17. Prytz 2009, pp. 52–60. However, it is not wholly clear whether the work was intended for the state or private bedchamber.
The Nationalmuseum has acquired a flower piece by Antoine Berjon, one of the foremost artists in the genre in his time. In the artist's relatively limited output, this painting is among the largest, format-wise, and the most ambitiously executed. Although the artist was exceptionally technically gifted, his career was not smooth and was fraught with financial difficulties. Berjon was born in Lyon, in 1754, where he was also educated; he later worked at the local academy and was associated with the silk industry. When this industry was severely affected by the French Revolution, he tried his luck in Paris in 1791, by exhibiting three floral and fruit still lifes at the Salon. Two years later, after an uprising in his native Lyon was brutally suppressed in June 1793 by the revolutionary terror, Berjon moved to Paris.

At the time, he was around 40 years old and very experienced. Berjon specialised in still lifes, but had also mastered pastels and miniature painting. His landlord in Paris happened to be a leading miniaturist, Jean-Baptiste Jacques Augustin. For Berjon, portraiture was an important way of making a living, especially miniatures, and he was able to learn artistically from this technique for his work on still lifes. He regularly exhibited his flower and fruit paintings at

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Fig. 1 Antoine Berjon (1754–1843), Still Life with Flower Arrangement and Fruit Basket, c. 1800. Oil on canvas, 99 × 76 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7582.
the Salon and had several decades of success, but the big breakthrough never came. Financially, his income was meagre, which may have been because artists could not charge as much for flower still lifes as for other subjects; another factor was probably the fact that Berjon’s technique was time-consuming, due to its wealth of detail and the sophisticated relationship between the different layers of paint, which had to be dried and planned in relation to each other. A third explanation may be found in the artist’s personality, which made him barely socially adept.

This may nevertheless be surprising, because floral painting experienced a renaissance in Paris in the latter half of the 18th century. Anne Vallayer-Coster was the leading name, followed by a number of Dutch artists who successfully established themselves there at the end of l’ancien régime. The leading representatives were Gerard van Spaendonck (1746–1822) and Jan Frans van Dael (1764–1840). The former was a professor of flower painting at the Jardin des Plantes, the Paris botanical gardens. Like Berjon, Spaendonck also worked as a miniaturist, which contributed effectively to the renewal of floral painting. However, compared to 17th-century Dutch still lifes, they are painted with thinly applied paint, giving them a lighter, brighter and more decorative appearance, Moreover, the often intricate symbolism of the 17th century has given way to a more pronounced striving for beautiful illusionism, and a touch of geometric abstraction.5

The Nationalmuseum’s newly acquired painting is one of Berjon’s largest, in terms of format, in his relatively small production. The painting shows roses, peonies, lilies, tulips and other plants in various stages of bloom. A fruit basket on the table overflows with peaches, pears and grapes and there is a bumblebee on one of the roses, which could be interpreted as a reference to 17th-century still lifes. However, while insects such as beetles and flies often represent decomposition, the bumblebee symbolises the plants’ reproduction. Everything, including

Notes:
5. Joseph J. Rishel characterises Berjon’s painting as follows: “This was the context in which Berjon emerged. Although his depictions were as botanically correct as those of his Parisian contemporaries, his tradition as a Lyonnais set him clearly apart. His designs were not intended for illustration and porcelain decoration (be it a vase or a plaque), but for the continuous flow of decorative rhythms required by the weavers. In turn, there is often a boldness in his lighting and composition – a strength of relief and robustness of forms – which suggests his formation in a center some distance from the almost feminine refinement and delicacy of the court style practiced by his contemporaries in Paris. He is, in fact, closer in spirit to the baroque amplitude and fullness of scale of the seventeenth-century Flemish and Dutch masters who stand behind them all.” Quote after Joseph J. Rishel, “A Lyonnais Flower Piece by Antoine Berjon (1754–1843)”, in Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin, autumn 1982, vol. 78, no. 336, p. 20.
dylic genre scenes from Roman popu-
lar life were a favourite subject
among the European artists who
flocked to the eternal city from the
end of the Napoleonic Wars and onward.
These paintings were often skilfully com-
posed using comprehensive model studies.
The characters they depicted were hardly
taken straight from the streets, but were
instead professional models who offered
their services on the Spanish Steps in Rome,
so the same model can feature in works by
different artists in the same period. Danish
Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg’s diary has
several examples of this. He mentions his
work on La Ciociara from 1816, where the
interesting element of this piece is that
Eckersberg decided to make one of these
folk characters a subject in her own right.
The painting has a monumentality that is
reminiscent of Rafael. The artist’s diary
from the time also reveals the careful pre-
paration that went into this staged presen-
tation of a Roman woman, as he hired clothes
and jewellery for fourteen days, specifically
for the purpose. The name of the painting
refers to the sitter’s accessories, which came
from an area called Ciociaria to the south-
west of Rome. The value that Eckersberg
placed on this work can be seen in his choice
to keep it and later use it as a study object
for his pupils.

Eckersberg left Rome the year that he
painted La Ciociara. This was the same time
that another David disciple, Frenchman
Jean-Victor Schnetz (1787–1870) arrived
in the eternal city. He would eventually

Fig. 1 Jean-Victor Schnetz (1787–1870), Old Italian Woman with Distaff, 1820s. Oil on canvas, 55 × 48.5 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N.D. Qvist Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7603.
specialise in depictions of popular life and individual character pictures of the type Eckersberg produced of the Roman woman. A few years later, Schnetz fell for the beautiful Maria Grazia Boni from Sonnino. This beauty and her mother would soon feature in paintings by the artist and his Academy colleagues. According to rumour, Maria Grazia’s mother was married to a brigand, a *brigante*, people who had long made the outskirts of Rome a lawless area. Many came from the town of Sonnino in Lazio and were captured during a major raid in the summer of 1818, on the order of the Papal State’s strongman, the authoritarian Cardinal Ercole Consalvi. The bandits were then gaoled in Castel Sant’Angelo and the Termini prison (*Terme di Diocleziano*) in 1818. The following year, the cardinal decided that Sonnino should be razed to the ground as a warning example – a reminder that brigandry had reached the end of the road in this region. It must thus have been an unpleasant surprise for Cardinal Consalvi when the same bandits and their families soon became popular subjects for Rome’s many artists, also working as individual models. It is among these artists that we find Jean-Victor Schnetz.

The Nationalmuseum’s recently acquired painting by Schnetz, *Old Italian Woman with Distaff* (fig. 1), shows an old woman, worn down by life, taking a break from her work of spinning wool with a distaff. She has already placed her tool inside her braided corset, part of the model’s genuine folk costume, as was the distinctive headpiece. The old woman has clasped her hands together, as if deep in prayer, an impression accentuated by the pious, god-fearing gaze. This virtuous attitude appears entirely removed from the tough reality that may previously have characterised her life.

Schnetz continued this theme, characterised by religiosity, in a painting called *La Prière des pèlerins italiens*, 1823 (Private collection, Paris). This was one of several compositions in which the artist used Maria Grazia Boni’s mother as a model. According to rumour, Maria Grazia’s mother was married to a brigand, a *brigante*, people who had long made the outskirts of Rome a lawless area. Many came from the town of Sonnino in Lazio and were captured during a major raid in the summer of 1818, on the order of the Papal State’s strongman, the authoritarian Cardinal Ercole Consalvi. The bandits were then gaoled in Castel Sant’Angelo and the Termini prison (*Terme di Diocleziano*) in 1818. The following year, the cardinal decided that Sonnino should be razed to the ground as a warning example – a reminder that brigandry had reached the end of the road in this region. It must thus have been an unpleasant surprise for Cardinal Consalvi when the same bandits and their families soon became popular subjects for Rome’s many artists, also working as individual models. It is among these artists that we find Jean-Victor Schnetz.

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Schnetz continued this theme, characterised by religiosity, in a painting called *La Prière des pèlerins italiens*, 1823 (Private collection, Paris). This was one of several compositions in which the artist used Maria Grazia Boni’s mother as a model. In another case, he had her play the role of a fortune teller. This painting belongs to the Musée d’Art Roger Quilliot, Clermont-Ferrand, and is called *La Diseuse de bonne aventure*, (The Fortune Teller, fig. 2). This was
painted c. 1820–1824, which is also true of the Museum’s newly acquired painting *Old Italian Woman with Distaff*.

However, Schnetz was not alone in regularly using this particular older woman as a model. Many of his artist friends, such as Léon Cogniet (fig. 3), François-Joseph Navez, Léopold Robert and possibly Théodore Géricault did the same. This phenomenon is familiar in art history, as it is not unique to early-19th-century Rome. For example, we know that Rembrandt and Lievens used the same models. However, in the case of the fortune teller, this has led to a schism among French art historians, with one side insisting that Géricault cannot be the artist responsible for a renowned painting in Musée Malraux, Le Havre, on long-term loan from the Louvre (fig. 4). The expressive work is painted in a fairly rough manner, which is the reason why Géricault has been persistently credited as the artist, and Schnetz has not. The issue has thus divided French specialists in this period into two camps: those who assert that it is the work of Géricault (on stylistic grounds); and those who counter this with the argument that Géricault was not in Rome at the time, 1820. The aim of this article is not to take a side in this almost two-decade-long debate about the famous painting in Musée Malraux. However, the acquisition by the Nationalmuseum does place another piece in the puzzle regarding the works that feature Maria Grazia Boni’s mother, *la Vieille Italienne*, as a model. It also demonstrates Jean-Victor Schnetz’ position between, on one side, the pure Classicists like Navez (fig. 5) and, on the other, the radical Romantic genius of Géricault. This was a quality appreciated by his contemporaries and was, not least, praised by Stendhal in association with the 1824 Salon, renowned as the first major artistic showdown between the two groups.

**Notes:**
3. Wilhelm Bendz was one of the people to copy *La Ciociara*. It is found in the famous interior from Amaliegade, 1826 (Hirschsprung’s collection). Eckersberg’s original was sold when his estate was auctioned on 17 April 1854 (no. 26), eventually ending up in Claudius’ collection, Malmö. It was sold in 1997 at Museumsbygningen in Copenhagen (4 September 1997, no. 158) and acquired by an American collector. Acquired by the Nationalmuseum at Christie’s, New York, 19th Century European Art, 25 April 2016, no. 67.
5. The model Maria Grazia appears to have ended up in the Termini prison, which was part of the *Terme di Diocleziano* that had been converted to
Fig. 5 François-Joseph Navez (1787–1869), Scene of Brigands with the Fortune Teller, 1821. Oil on Canvas, 104 × 148 cm. Private Collection.


In June 2021, a large allegorical oil painting was put up for auction at Ketterer Kunst München. It was Ditlev Blunck’s (1798–1854) Allegorie des Sonntags (figs. 1 and 4), which was purchased by the Nationalmusem. A contextual explanation of this work of art will be needed.

On the occasion of his coronation on 28 June 1840, King Christian VIII of Denmark (1786–1848) was given an album to which a number of Danish Golden Age artists had contributed an image. Among these contributions was the watercolour Søndagen – en allegori (fig. 2), donated by Ditlev Blunck.

Two months later, in August, Blunck left the kingdom of Denmark, expelled with a concilium abeundi. For a while he took up residence at his birthplace Münsterdorff in the Duchy of Holstein. From there he embarked on further travels, to Berlin and Munich. From 1841 to 1848 he settled in Vienna, except for a period in 1845/46, when he again resided in Berlin, living in the house of his close friend, the architect Albert Theodor Karchow (1800–1870). Blunck and Karchow had met in the 1830s in Rome, where Blunck had lived as a fellow from 1828 after graduating from the Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, in 1827. When the kingdom of Denmark

Fig. 1 Ditlev Blunck (1798–1854), Allegory of Sunday, 1841. Oil on canvas, 121 x 100 cm. Purchase: Sophia Giesecke Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7620.
ACQUISITIONS/ ALLEGORY OF SUNDAY – A PAINTING BY DITLEV CONRAD BLUNCK

Fig. 2 Ditlev Blunck (1798–1854), Sunday – An Allegory, 1840. Watercolour, pencil, brown ink on paper, 34.1 × 26.2 cm. H. M. the Queen’s Reference Library, the Royal Collection, Copenhagen.
was at war with the duchies Schleswig-Holstein from 1848 to 1850, Blunck participated with a troop of men, the so-called *Freischar Blunck-Magnussen*, on the side of the duchies against Denmark. After the war, Blunck ran an art school in Kiel for a short time with his friend, the painter Theodor Rehbenitz (1791–1861), and from 1851 he lived in Hamburg until his death on 7 January 1854.

Why did Blunck paint a monochrome allegorical watercolour for the king, when his artist friends all donated works with a perfectly idyllic Danish landscape in light and brilliant colours? He did so because he was a trained history painter who never wanted to paint romantic genre-like scenes as expected. The donation for the king’s coronation was the closest he ever got to painting a grand Danish landscape with a typical Danish church. Despite this, the picture remained allegorical.

Already as a student Blunck was dedicated to history painting. The subjects of the genre were taken from the Bible, classical history and mythology or they were allegorical representations. History painting was the only genre you could compete in to achieve the climax of the academic painter’s education, the Great Gold Medal, which Blunck received in 1827. He had come to the academy in Copenhagen in 1814 and progressed through the classes. After winning the Little Silver Medal in 1817 he attended the art academy in Munich from 1818 to 1822. On his return to Copenhagen, he chose Johann Ludwig Lund (1777–1867) as his professor. After the turn of the century and until his professorship in 1818, Lund had stayed in Rome, where he had become friends with the German artists’ group *Lukasbund*, known as the Nazarenes, and its leader Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869). The group painted religious motifs inspired by Renaissance Italian painters such as Fra Angelico (1395–1455) and Raphael (1483–1520) and the German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). The figures were like Raphael painted them, with sweetish features, the landscape was archaic with subtropical vegetation, and elements from medieval architecture were included, the colours dense and the brushstrokes straight and smooth and demarcated. Through Lund, Blunck was introduced to the ideology and way of painting of this group of artists whose style was Germanic and not the bright Nordic expression, which C. W. Eckersberg (1783–1853) represented at the academy. This influence of German style and colour, and his dedication to the motifs of history painting, meant that Blunck was not a painter of Romantic nationalism and thus, even before he distanced himself politically from the kingdom of Denmark, he was at risk of becoming an outcast. Before finishing his education, he painted an altarpiece in the Nazarene style for a church in Denmark and several followed in years to come. Although he as a student had painted...
some genre motifs, he was an idealistic and intellectual artist who later in life refused to paint genre motifs he could live on and stated outright that he would rather starve than fall into painting these lower genres, stating that “if art was nothing to me but a milk-giving cow, I certainly would not continue to be a History painter”.

On the small allegorical watercolour Sunday – An Allegory, you see an archangel with crossed arms gliding across the firmament over a Danish landscape. A church and beech trees are visible in the foreground. Nature with a lake and hills that almost resemble mountains is the middle ground that forms the transition to the sea in the far distant. Around the archangel hover little angels with praise attributes, sheaf, spade, sword, harp, flower wreath, cross and the Bible as symbols of grandeur, fertility, growth, victory, strength, heavenly delight, holiness and belief. The corners of the watercolour have ornamentation adorned with rosettes, that is metaphors for the Sun as symbol of birth, death and eternity. The watercolour was the last Blunck painted in Denmark and the only work where he came close to painting the landscape in the manner of Danish Romantic Nationalism. It was meant as a tribute to the king.

Blunck was a history painter at heart, but throughout his career he had taken commissions, painting portraits of both the king and officials, and in the last years of his life he almost exclusively painted portraits of prominent families. This was the compromise he had to make to earn a living and as portrait painting was an accepted genre, of which Jens Juel (1745–1802) at that time was the most famous and esteemed master in Denmark, he did. In the field of portrait painting, Blunck also became the first of the Golden Age painters in Denmark who introduced the artist himself as a motif by depicting himself at work in his own studio with the divine light falling on his brow. These paintings are not to be compared with paintings of working artists in the study halls of the academy. Blunck wanted to show that the artist felt a calling, was special, and a chosen one. During his stay at the academy in Munich, that feeling came to him as something of a revelation.

In the 1830s, Ditlev Blunck lived in Rome, where he met the Berlin architect Albert Theodor Karchow (fig. 3). They became close friends and the friendship lasted a lifetime. The oil painting at the Nationalmuseum, Allegory of Sunday, was a gift to his friend Karchow (fig. 4). Possibly Karchow already received it in 1841, when it was painted and Blunck was staying in Berlin. More likely is that he first got it in 1845/46 when Blunck again lived at the Karchows in Berlin. After his expulsion from Denmark, Blunck was in despair, but it was necessary for him to paint and sell works. Allegory of Sunday was possibly painted in the hope that this religious motif could be acquired by a church or perhaps as a devotional painting for a prince’s chapel. As Karchow was a well-known architect and builder in Berlin, Blunck may have had the hope that he would be able to arrange such a sale of the painting, and therefore he initially deposited it with his friend. However, it was not uncommon that Blunck gave a painting or a portrait to a friend.

Allegory of Sunday seems identical to the watercolour donated to Christian VIII. The immediate difference is that this is a large polychrome oil painting in an imposing gold frame with decoration. But if you look closely, there are other modifications and additions needed to be addressed to another kind of owner.

The motif is an allegory on Sunday, the seventh day, and Christianity. It is painted in the German style both in terms of the colours and the landscape depicted, and there is a further diversity of symbols. You see lake, fjord and sea. A church with dual spires on the top of a mountain in the distance. It is a German church, possibly the Broager Church, which is located in the Duchy of Schleswig Holstein and could reference Blunck’s birthplace Holstein. The first light of day colours the horizon in pastels and the sky in luminous blue. The morning light catches the finest play of colours in the Archangel’s beautifully ornamented chasuble, which is worn over the white robe. The chasuble is a symbol of piety and is worn on Sundays. Its red colour is a symbol of love and the gold a symbol of eternity as the highest spiritual recognition. Blunck has also inserted the holy cross in the ornamentation. The two angels of Sunday carry religious attributes, a Bible, a crucifix, and the third angel, a little cherub itself, is a religious symbol. Hoe, shovel and spade are symbols of everyday life, which on this holy Sunday, rest in a fine net of delicate sprigs. The whole scene exudes peace and calls for contemplation. Blunck follows the Nazarene concept, the union of the allegorical and the reflective, and the basic philosophy of Romanticism that life on earth is a wandering towards eternity, the final highest realisation, the symbiosis with the spiritual.

This beautiful Sunday scene is framed in an ingeniously done gold-plated frame with foliage decorations. In the frame, the other six days of the week are inserted in grisaille as narratives of the days. Each day is depicted as a child holding the attributes belonging to the god of this individual day and must be read as metaphors of life and eternity. The names of the days are written in Latin, identical to the names of Roman gods. Roman gods have their alter egos in the gods in Nordic mythology which also gave the days of the week their names. Blunck thus unites in these symbols and names North and South. Monday and Saturday stand out from this order.

Dies lunae (Monday), Moon day. The child looks at the moon, the symbol of fate and the universe. Dies martis (Tuesday), Mars and Taurus day. The child who has a sword and dagger looks at a dead frog, meaning that it is practicing the struggle of life. Dies mercuri (Wednesday), Mercury and Odin’s day. The child has a Mercury staff with a snake and a Pan flute. Symbols of strength, power and might. Dies iovis (Thursday), Jupiter’s and Thor’s day. The child is seen with Jupiter’s eagle on the rock with stones of fire. Symbols of beauty
Fig. 4 Ditlev Blunck (1798–1854), *Allegory of Sunday*, 1841. Oil on canvas, 121 × 100 cm. Purchase: Sophia Giesecke Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7620.
and force of nature. \textit{Dies veneris} (Friday), Venus and Freja’s day. The child holds two pigeons still in chains. Symbols of life beginning at baptism, later the bonds are loosened as love and spirit grow. \textit{Dies sabbati} (Saturday), no god is referred to and it is not a child who carries the symbols, it is not about Roman, Greek or Nordic mythology but about the Jewish religion. Moses is seen at the burning bush carrying the tablets with the Ten Commandments.

The six days of the week show an idealised union between North and South and diverse religious faiths.

Ditlev Blunck gave \textit{Allegory of Sunday} to his friend Albert Theodor Karchow in the 1840s and it was in the possession of the Karchow family until it was put up for sale by a descendant in June 2021 and purchased by the Nationalmuseum.

Notes:

1. Ditlev Blunck, \textit{Allegory of Sunday}, 1841, oil on canvas, 121 × 100 cm, signed monogram and date on the back of the Bible, in original art frame with days of the week in \textit{grisaille}. Provenance: Albert Theodor Karchow (1800–1870), Berlin; by inheritance to descendants for generations sold by a descendant via Ketterer Kunst München on 18 June 2021 to the Nationalmuseum.


3. Ditlev Blunck was the first history painter to be awarded the prize since C. W. Eckersberg (1783–1853) in 1809. The motif was \textit{The Prophet Elijah and the Widow in Zarepta} (1 Kings, ch. 17 v. 23). 1827, oil on canvas, 122.8 × 99.2 cm, Akademirådet, Det Kongelige Akademi for de Skønne Kunster Copenhagen, inv. KASK KS 17.

4. Guido di Pietro (Fra Angelico).

5. Raffaelo Santi (Raphael).

6. Ditlev Blunck, \textit{Entombing of the Lord}, 1825, oil on canvas, 188.5 × 251.5 cm, deposited from Den Kongelige Malerisamling, Copenhagen to Thorshavn Kirke, Thorshavn, Faroe Islands, 1829, KMS 9; Ditlev Blunck, \textit{Jesus Washes his Disciples’ Feet}, 1834, oil on canvas, 115 × 180 cm, Vicelinkirche, Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein; Ditlev Blunck, \textit{Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane}, 1839, oil on canvas, 134.2 × 102.5 cm, Ude Sundby (Frederikssund) Kirke, Denmark. After 1840, Blunck painted several drafts of church decorations in Austria and in 1847 he painted an altarpiece for a Count Karoly in Hungary.


8. The representation of the gliding angel references Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844). See: \textit{Night}, 1815, marble, 80 cm in diameter and \textit{Day}, 1815, marble, 80 cm in diameter, Thorvaldsen’s Museum, Copenhagen, A 901, A902.

9. See examples: Ditlev Blunck, \textit{A Battle-Painter in his Study}, 1823, oil on canvas, 121.5 × 101 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, KMS 57; Ditlev Blunck, \textit{The Copper Engraver C. E. Sonne at his Study}, 1826, oil on canvas, 69.5 × 56 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, KMS 51.

10. Blunck’s masterpiece is four large allegorical paintings \textit{The Four Ages of Man}, 1840–1945, oil on canvas, 170 × 142 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, KMS 508a, KMS 508b, KMS 508c, KMS 508d. In Copenhagen he met the Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1770–1851) together with his professor J. L. Lund at the home of the salon hostess Friederike Brun (1765–1835), Sophienholm by Lake Bagsværd. Oehlenschläger was the literary father of Romanticism in Denmark. And in 1828 he visited Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) in Dresden and saw his allegorical series \textit{The Stages of Life}, 1803 and 1826. “He showed us, in addition to several other paintings, an attempt in successive landscape scenes to recount the human life, I must confess, nothing has ever seized me like this”, (Letter, 26 Nov 1828, The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, KB NBD II, 1; Karin Bechmann Søndergaard, 2017 op. cit. p. 73). From then on Blunck was a faithful believer in the philosophy of Romanticism as it was interpreted by these artists and as Romanticism was born in Denmark by the Danish-German philosopher Heinrich Steffens (1773–1846) as a reckoning with the rationalism of the Enlightenment.
19th-Century Finnish Landscape Painting
From Romantic Views to Colour Experiments

Susanna Pettersson
Director General

Fig. 1 Magnus von Wright (1805–1868), Landscape in Lielax, 1861. Oil on canvas, 37.5 × 53.5 cm. Purchase: Sara and Johan Emil Graumann Fund 2020 (accession 2021). Nationalmuseum, NM 7602.
Finnish landscape paintings are known mostly for their bright and sharp Nordic light, images of snow and dense woodlands. Dramatic views in the best Düsseldorf tradition or examples of symbolistic landscapes have been discussed frequently, but less attention has been paid to romantic landscapes and some of the first free colour experiments. This article looks at the latter category using the recently acquired paintings by Magnus von Wright, Emma Gyldén and Maria Wiik as examples.

How to portray a nation? How can it be illustrated? These were the questions that Finnish professors, politicians, authors, and artists pondered after Sweden had lost Finland to Russia in 1809. In this geopolitical situation, landscapes became a symbolic way of picturing the Finnish nation, and the first Finnish landscape painters were tasked with painting the country from the south to the north.

The most ambitious undertaking was a publication named *Finland framställdt i teckningar* (1845–52), written by Zacharias Topelius and illustrated by artists such as Johan Knutson, P. A. Kruskopf and Magnus von Wright, who contributed 17 works. The publication had a clear mission: it was expected to create a picture of a country with both pristine and built-up landscapes: lake views, rapids, and forests, as well as lighthouses, churches, and cities. It can be claimed that this created a framework for Finnish landscape painting for years to come.

**Romantic ideals**

Magnus von Wright (1805–1868), painter, board member of the Finnish Art Society and skilful conservator of birds, was the oldest of three artist brothers, with the two younger ones being Wilhelm (1810–1887) and Ferdinand (1822–1906). He specialised in painting landscapes and birds and kept a comprehensive journal of his works.

When looking more closely at the Nationalmuseum’s acquisition *Landscape in Lielax* (1861), we can see a carefully painted image of a manor house, beautifully located in a

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*Fig. 2 Magnus von Wright (1805–1868), *Erkylä Manor House*, 1861. Pencil, 32 × 49 cm. Purchase 1875. Ateneum Art Museum/Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, A I 33:38.

*Fig. 3 Magnus von Wright (1805–1868), *Haminalahti Manor House*, 1855. 56 × 63.5 cm. Purchase 1875. Ateneum Art Museum/Finnish National Gallery, A I 36:24.*
romantic landscape (fig. 1). The building is seen from a hill, bathed in sunlight, whereas the forests are in shadow. The lake reflects the clouds passing by. Von Wright’s detailed diaries reveal that he visited Lielax, which is situated close to Tampere in Finland, several times in 1861. At the time, the building was owned by Major General Clas Alfred Stjernvall (1893–1869). It was customary for the Finnish upper class to commission portraits of their possessions, manor houses included. This painting was, however, sold for 50 rubles to Referendary-Secretary Oscar Norrmén, who had married Sjernvall’s daughter Selma Emelie in 1855.

According to art historian Aune Lindström, who conducted the first academic research on the von Wright brothers in 1932, Magnus von Wright’s landscape portraits were slightly mechanical, and she argued that commissions like these limited his artistic creativity. On the other hand, when looking at von Wright’s production, he always chose subjects that were true to nature and he seemed to enjoy painting landscapes, with or without buildings. Manor houses were typically painted as a delicate centrepiece in a landscape (figs. 2 and 3).

His landscapes were not only popular but also well-received by his contemporaries and many of them were quickly purchased for the collection of the Finnish Art Society. His greatest admirer, professor and poet Fredrik Cygnaeus, praised the paintings in Morgonbladet, saying that Magnus and his brother Ferdinand use colours like the national poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg uses words. That was perhaps the highest compliment one could possibly receive.

**Peasant life**

Emma Gyldén-von Schantz (1835–1874) began her studies under the supervision of Berndt Abraham Godenhjelm in the Finnish Art Society, continued them in Stockholm in 1863–64 with Johan Edvard Bergh and later with Hans Gude in Düsseldorf and Karlsruhe. She made her debut in 1854, and her work was included in the collection of the Finnish Art Society in 1867 (fig. 4).
Gyldén took part in the annual exhibitions in Helsinki and was frequently mentioned in the exhibition reviews. One, published in July 1868, commented that she had “listened to nature with a warm heart” and suggested that some years in France would help her to the next level—but there was no doubt of her talent. However, her career ended all too soon when she died just 38 years old. Newspaper Sanomia Turusta (News from Turku) reported her death, praising her poetically spirited paintings that were pleasing to the spectator’s eye.

_Landscape near Björneborg_ (fig. 6) is a typically idealistic landscape painting that features a little boy with a fishing rod, a girl peeking into a barrel and a woman carrying two oars on her right shoulder. The landscape was painted close to the city of Pori (Björneborg) on western coast of Finland, the birthplace of her husband Fabian Wilhelm von Schantz.

Gyldén painted another version of the same subject in 1865 (fig. 5). This painting was acquired by Fredrik Cygnaeus, who had the ambitious idea of purchasing at least one painting from all living Finnish artists. Some details differ in this version, such as the costume of the woman. She is bareheaded and carries only one oar in her hand. Also, the wooden fence behind her is more rustic in style.

**Experimental approach**

Maria Wiik (1853–1928) was known as a skilled portrait painter, but she devoted time to some landscapes too, either in oils or watercolours, especially during her trips in France, Italy, and Norway. Her portraits were realistic, capturing the personality of the sitter, whereas her landscapes are freer.
and more experimental in character, mirroring the plain air painting. *Landscape by a Lake* was painted wet on wet on a thin cloth that was then glued to a cardboard (fig. 7). The brushwork was swift, and Wiik has elegantly captured the reflections of the sky on the surface of the water. Conservator Fernando Caceres, at the Nationalmuseum, has shown how the work was pinned on a wall before it was later framed.

In 1879, Wiik painted a work similar in style, *Landscape in St. Cloud*, when she spent the summer months in Normandie (fig. 8).14 This painting suggests that Wiik experimented with a new painting technique and palette, whereas her portraits are more detailed and have a darker colour scale. It is worth noting that there are some similarities with a painting by Wiik’s artist friend and colleague Julia Stigzelius-de Cock, who painted *Summer Day in Normandy* (1879) the same summer (fig. 9).

**Space for change**

These three acquisitions feature the different ways of approaching the landscape in 19th-century Finnish painting. Von Wright’s paintings closely follow the tradition he created in *Finland framställdt i teckningar*. Buildings sit in the landscape, they catch the eye but do not dominate the painting. Also, Emma Gyldén’s landscape, showing peasants in their daily environment, on their way to the fishing trip perhaps, focuses more on the scenery than people in it. Both paintings are typical of their time and present buildings and people in harmony with nature. Maria Wiik, on the other hand, is interested in colour and new painting techniques, leaving behind the 19th-century tradition represented by the former generations.

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**Fig. 7 Maria Wiik (1853–1928), Landscape by a Lake.** Oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 32 × 18 cm. Purchase: Lars Vogel Fund 2021 (accession 2022). Nationalmuseum, NM 7631.
All the above-mentioned artists studied outside the Finnish borders and had the opportunity to travel. Von Wright, who stayed closest to Finland, chose to work mostly with Finnish landscapes. Gyldén’s gentle interpretations of nature were given names rooted to the Finnish soil. In contrast to this, Maria Wiik did not paint landscapes as depictions of a nation, rather focused on a landscape as such.

Notes:
9. See for example Hufvudstadbladet, 13 May 1867; Wiborgs Tidning, 13 April 1870; Helsingfors Dagblad, 11 May 1870; Finlands Allmänna Tidning, 2 July 1870; Helsingfors Dagblad, 3 May 1873; Vikingen, 11 July 1874.
Mary Cassatt’s Portrait of her Sister Lydia
A Free Study for *The Cup of Tea*

Magnus Olausson
Director of Collections

Fig. 1 Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), *Portrait of the Artist’s Sister Lydia. Study for The Cup of Tea*, c. 1879 –80. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 39.5 × 60 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N.D. Qvist Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7618.
Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) was the daughter of a rich banker from Pittsburgh. The family can be traced back to the Cossarts, French Huguenots who arrived in New York in the 17th century. Cassatt was precocious and adopted a feminist stance at an early age. She first studied painting in Pennsylvania, starting in 1860, before continuing her studies in Paris under teachers who included Jean-Léon Gérôme. Cassatt returned to the US in 1870, due to the Franco-Prussian War, and then just four years later definitively settled in France. She first encountered Impressionist painting in 1875. Cassatt herself described how astounded she was on seeing a pastel work by Edgar Degas exhibited in a Paris display window. By then, Degas was already familiar with her piece shown at the 1874 Salon, Portrait de Madame Cortier, and expressed himself in a very positive fashion about his colleague’s painting: “Voilà quelqu’un qui sent comme moi.” Exactly when they first met is not known, but it soon developed into a close friendship. This may appear surprising, as Degas was known for his somewhat misogynist attitude, but one explanation could be that both Cassatt and Degas were fundamentally intellectual artists, thoroughly testing their ideas and compositions, as well as different angles and positions, relationships between surfaces and depth, and so on. Degas thus held a lifelong respect for Cassatt. He was the one who invited her to participate in the Impressionists’ independent exhibition of 1879, which resulted in Cassatt becoming one of three significant female Impressionists, known as les trois grandes dames, in a group otherwise dominated by men.

Once they had laid the foundation of their friendship, both Cassatt and Degas started experimenting with graphic techniques. The results of their joint activities are distinguished by a noticeably generous artistic freedom and innovation. Cassatt’s work, in particular, is characterised by unusually rough representation for its time, and for liberal experimentation that tends

Fig. 2 Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Mary Cassatt at the Louvre, 1879–80. Aquatint, line engraving, stipple engraving and drypoint on paper, 30.5 × 12.7 cm. Nationalmuseum, NMG 420/1950.
but without her becoming an epigone. She created her very own form of expression, often in the psychological interaction between the models. The artist's independent approach is also visible in her experimentation with pastel painting, where she worked with various blending techniques which, in turn, affected her oil painting. The influences of pastel techniques can be seen particularly clearly in this painting, recently acquired by the Nationalmuseum. It is a figure study from c. 1879–80, depicting Cassatt's sister Lydia, a sibling to whom she was very close (fig. 1). The model is shown apparently unaware that she is being observed, drinking tea. Cassatt's sister appears as a model in various compositions from this time, either in a salon or a garden (fig. 3). The works feature the most everyday activities, such as needlework, reading the newspaper or socialising over a cup of tea. All these paintings have a clearly sensual and lyrical touch. Compared to Manet and Degas, the colours are blander, with contrasting complementary colours. Cassatt also worked using a more virtuoso sketch-like technique, without the rapid brushwork becoming superficial and solely for effect. Despite the
ACQUISITIONS/MARY CASSAT’S PORTRAIT OF HER SISTER LYDIA

Fig. 4 Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), The Cup of Tea, c. 1880–81. Oil on canvas, 92.4 × 65.4 cm. From the Collection of James Stillman, Gift of Dr. Ernest G. Stillman, 1922. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 22.16.17.
The sketch-like character of the Museum’s painting and the impression of it being unfinished, it still possesses balance, as the composition is fundamentally clearly considered and produced. Just a few highlights were enough to provide the coordinates for the picture’s construction. The artist’s preparatory drawings are especially revealing, in which she tested compositional elements, light and shade. Unfortunately, she destroyed most of this material.

The extension of Cassatt’s sketched study of her sister Lydia can be seen in her composition *The Cup of Tea* (now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (fig. 4), which was painted in 1880 and exhibited the following year. This was the period, up until the mid-1880s, in which Cassatt was artistically close to Degas. However, inspired by Japanese woodcuts, she soon moved on from purely Impressionistic painting and developed a more synthesised method, using bold colours and finishes. Unlike many Impressionists, she barely produced landscapes, but instead examined middle-class homes, where the emotional reflection of her models plays a huge role. Cassatt worked in oils, pastels and, not least, produced sheets of graphics featuring these subjects. Another of the museum’s new acquisitions is a drypoint from this period, c. 1903, depicting one of her nieces, *Margot Resting Arms on Back of Armchair* (fig. 5). We could speculate as to whether this choice of subjects was a contributing factor in Cassatt long being overlooked, despite her many qualities as an artist.

The Impressionists’ leading art dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, soon became Cassatt’s emissary, particularly in the US, establishing a branch in New York. Despite the artist possessing excellent contacts of her own in her home country, especially among the few American art collectors, she never really felt that Durand-Ruel respected her or kept his promises. Cassatt soon realised that exporting her work to North America would be detrimental to her chances of making a name for herself in her new homeland of France, where she lived and worked.

Finally, around 1900, she gave up and began to engage Durand-Ruel’s competitor, Ambroise Vollard, who has given a free hand to select works, particularly from her older production. This was why, at the start of the last century, Vollard began to acquire Cassatt’s earlier paintings, like the Little Girl in a Blue Armchair and the Nationalmuseum’s recently acquired oil painting. The latter was long in the ownership of textile magnate Raoul Bouchara (1901–1955), before being inherited by his son Jacques Bouchara (1927–2005), whose heirs sold it at auction in 2021. This is also why this painting remained unknown for such a long period and is not entered in the artist’s catalogue raisonné.12

Despite Vollard mainly operating on a European market, most of the paintings he bought ended up in American collections. This, combined with Paul Durand-Ruel’s deliberate policy of milking the cash-rich North American market, contributed to Cassatt long remaining outside the most valued Impressionists in France and almost unheard of in the Nordic region. After her death in 1926, there was a long wait for the first monographic exhibition of her paintings. Cassatt is now also represented in the Nationalmuseum’s collections, accompanied by her colleague in les trois grandes dames, Berthe Morisot, whose painting In the Bois de Boulogne was produced at around the same time as The Cup of Tea.

Notes:
3. According to Achille Ségard, on this occasion Degas said: It’s true. This is someone who feels exactly the same way as I do.” Quote from Achille Ségard, (Mary Cassatt. Un Peintre des enfants et des mères, Paris 1913, p. 40), in Burns and Saunier 2014, p. 270.
4. This should have occurred no later than 1877, if Philippe Saunier is to be believed (Ibid., p. 272).
5. In 2014, the Degas Cassatt exhibition, organised by curator Kimberly Jones at the National Gallery in Washington, thoroughly explored the relationship between the two artists.
11. Ibid., pp. 162ff.
Julia Beck’s Painting *Autumn Day* and 19th-Century Transnational Naturalism

Carina Rech
Curator

Fig. 1 Julia Beck (1853–1935), *Autumn Day*, signed 1883. Oil on canvas, 77 × 107.5 cm. Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum 2021. Nationalmuseum, NM 7614.
In the autumn of 1883, the Swedish artist Julia Beck painted the genre scene *Autumn Day*, depicting a woman in profil perdu and a dark overcoat standing in a garden landscape (fig. 1). The model's fashionable hat and matching gloves indicate that she belongs to the urban middle classes, which makes her form a marked contrast to her rural environment. She is positioned in a cabbage patch in front of a plastered stone wall, separating the kitchen garden from the surrounding village and a group of trees, some of which have already lost their leaves. The simplicity of the subject corresponds to the painting's muted palette, dominated by earthy and green tones in the depiction of the garden and the almost monochrome grey in the rendering of the cloudy sky. The picture is devoid of any narrative content and appears peculiarly still. The almost statuary motionlessness of the depicted woman, who seems lost in thought, contributes to the tranquil and melancholic atmosphere of the autumnal scene. However, two compositional elements—the off-centre position of the staffage figure as well as the diagonal of the slightly sloping garden wall—disrupt the overall harmonious impression of the genre scene, creating a subtle sense of tension. The artist has chosen to paint this rather humble subject on a large and demanding scale, which indicates that, from the beginning, the painting had been conceptualised as an exhibition piece.¹

**Reconsidering Grez-sur-Loing from a transnational perspective**

Julia Beck painted *Autumn Day* in the garden of Hôtel Chevillon, a guesthouse in Grez-sur-Loing, located on the outskirts of the Fontainebleau Forest near Barbizon. In the early 1880s, the picturesque village that could conveniently be reached by train from Paris was a popular gathering place for international artists, in particular Nordic and anglophone painters, who escaped the metropolis, preferably during the summer months, to work outdoors. In Swedish art historiography, the artists' colony in Grez-sur-Loing has often been described as a creative laboratory, in which a progressive generation of young artists shook off their academic training and immersed themselves in plein air painting. Here, Swedish artists such as Carl Larsson, Bruno Liljefors and Karl Nordström adopted themes of rural life popularized by the painters of French naturalism and the juste milieu, experimenting with a freer stylistic facture informed by French impressionism as well as asymmetrical compositions and dramatic foreshortenings inspired by Japanese prints.

Following the publication of the doctoral dissertation *Grez-sur-Loing Revisited* by art historian Alexandra Herlitz in 2013, the international character of the artists' colony and the cross-cultural exchanges between Nordic and anglophone artists have been

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¹ Reconsidering Grez-sur-Loing from a transnational perspective

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Fig. 2 Lowell Birge Harrison (1854–1929), *November*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 132 × 248 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, D 884.1.1.
more strongly emphasised, both in research and exhibitions, replacing previous notions of one-sided influence from the centre to the periphery with a more nuanced understanding of transnational flows, circulations of ideas and creative cross-fertilization. As a consequence, we have become more aware of the creative exchange among foreign artists in France, their networks and their impact on the local art scene. Rather than studying exclusively what foreign artists took with them when returning to their countries of origin, we also need to acknowledge what they left behind and how they shaped the Parisian art scene in return. Herlitz has studied how foreign artists developed the Grez style in dialogue with French masters, most notably Jules Bastien-Lepage, creating sentimental scenes and melancholic landscapes characterized by a harmonious and mild tonality, an often-prominent greyish-silvery sky and solitary figures implying introversion and contemplation. Julia Beck's painting Autumn Day can be considered a prime example of the Grez style, as it exhibits all the above mentioned thematic and stylistic traits associated with the movement. In Autumn Day, but also in her wider production from Grez-sur-Loing, most notably her river landscapes, Beck has transferred into paint what compatriot artist and publicist Georg Pauli later defined as the Grez school's defining pictorial theme – the “still life” in a broader sense:

A nature without traces of violent effects, silver grey and beaming in all its monotony. [...] One should never come across a canvas or study of this school with any dramatic situation, never an atmosphere with striking effects. Everything flows smoothly like the Loing River [...], everything is decent sober, nice, often enough with a certain elegiac emphasis.

If viewed in the wider context of the international artists’ colony, Julia Beck’s Autumn Day shows some striking resemblance to Lovell Birge Harrison’s November in terms of composition, placement of the figure, prominence of the meticulously rendered
Julia Beck is a striking example of a previously marginalised artist, ignored by art historians for almost a century until being “rediscovered” and elevated to the canonical status of leading landscape painter of her generation. The gratifying reconsideration of Beck’s pivotal contributions to the creation of the Grez style has, however, caused the unintended side effect that other women artists active in the colony have once again been overshadowed, this time by a female peer.

In the 1880s, Grez-sur-Loing became a magnet for aspiring women professionals from Sweden, including the painters Karin Bergöö Larsson, Eva Bonnier, Emma Löwstädt-Chadwick and Gerda Rydberg Tirén, the sculptor Carolina Benedicks-Bruce and the actress Siri von Essen. Several of the artists had been friends since their student days at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. Julia Beck and Gerda Rydberg, for instance, had previously joined forces as

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**Fig. 4** Unknown photographer, *A Group of Artists in Grez-sur-Loing*, September 1883. From left: Unidentified artist, Gerda Rydberg Tirén, Richard Bergh, Julia Beck, Carolina Benedicks-Bruce (at the easel), Nils Kreuger. Brucebo Foundation archive, Visby.

**Fig. 5** Unknown photographer, Gerda Rydberg Tirén.

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soil and overall atmosphere (fig. 2). Harrison exhibited his monumental genre painting to great acclaim in the Salon of 1882 and it became one of the first works by an American artist to be purchased by the French state. Interestingly, Harrison noted in his textbook *Landscape Painting* in 1909 that he had benefitted from the advice of an unnamed male Scandinavian painter when completing *November*, proving that he interacted with artists from other nationalities in Grez. As Beck was one of the Swedish artists to live in Grez for the longest, even during the winter months, she is likely to have met Harrison and known about his work. If she had not seen the painting in the making in the forest surrounding the village, she would at least have encountered it in the exhibition. Consequently, *Autumn Day* is a striking example of the transnational naturalism that emerged in the French countryside during the second half of the 19th century, built upon local examples and developed further by foreign artists in creative exchange.

Inspired by the success of Harrison’s *November*, Beck developed further the popular motif of the landscape with staffage figure in *Autumn Day*, exchanging the peasant girl for a fashionably dressed woman. The model’s crossed arms seem to emphasise that she has not come to the kitchen garden to engage in any agricultural labour. Instead, the Parisian appears remote from the environment she inhabits. In *Autumn Day*, Beck conflates rural and urban themes in an innovative manner, rendering visible the flow of people and the interrelatedness of the village and the capital of Paris. In contrast to artists such as Carl Larsson, who preferred to employ the local population or models in historic costumes in his garden landscapes (fig. 3), Beck embedded the rural scene in her own reality, shaped by constant movement between the city and the countryside. In her work, she thus counteracted the otherwise prevalent romantic detachment of the artists’ colonies from the modern world.

**A colony of women**

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Interestingly, the painter Anna Cramér later recalled that Rydberg was a favourite model among her artist friends: “[…] she was a true beauty and possessed a personality full of freshness and character. It is natural that her image often haunted the latest art. If something truly beautiful was to be depicted, they said: ‘Yes, I did it using a photograph of Miss Rydberg.’” Cramér further emphasised Rydberg’s great artistic talent, stating that she executed “excellent studies”, which in the words of her founding members of the academy club and as co-initiators of the student newspaper Palett-Skrap, alongside its first chief editor Carl Larsson. The informal gatherings and creative exchange among female and male students outside of the gender-separated classrooms were revived in the French countryside (fig. 4), where they found their most playful expression in the artists’ carnivals of Grez-sur-Loing. In a photograph taken at the carnival of September 1883, Beck and Rydberg appear in the second row, dressed in matching black costumes and devil horns (fig. 6).

It has been suggested that Rydberg modelled for Beck’s Autumn Day, as the woman in the painting bears some resemblance to the painter, even though she has turned her face away from the beholder (fig. 5). The identification seems plausible, because painter and model were close friends, and both are known to have stayed at Hôtel Chevillon in the autumn of 1883.

Fig. 6 Unknown photographer, The Artists’ Carnival in Grez-sur-Loing, September 1883. Nationalmuseum image archive.
In recent years, the Nationalmuseum has complemented its collection with several works by Gerda Rydberg Tirén, who previously had been poorly represented, thereby contributing to the revaluation of another important woman artist, whose production is closely linked to the artists’ colony in Grez-sur-Loing.14

Notes:
1. According to a label on the back of the stretcher frame, the painting was exhibited in the ninth exhibition at Blanchs konstsalong in Stockholm.
3. Herlitz 2013, pp. 79–145.
6. Herlitz has argued that relations with artists from other nationalities in Grez became closer during the cold season, when not many compatriots were around, and she noted that Beck’s works “show a decisive affiliation with the international colony that was her base.” However, it seems that Herlitz was not aware of *Autumn Day*, as it is not discussed in her book. Herlitz 2013, p. 219.
10. Kåa Wennberg, who has published extensively on the artists’ colony in Grez-sur-Loing, has orally suggested this identification.
11. Cramér 1925, p. 82.
12. Cramér 1925, p. 82.
13. The painting was most probably executed around the same time as the corresponding work *Garden, Grez* from 1883 in the collection of Brucebo Foundation, Visby.
14. Apart from *Mallows by a Wall*, the museum purchased the paintings *A Mother* (NM 7501) in 2019 and *Portrait of a Woman* (NM 7569) in 2020.

Fig. 7 Gerda Tirén (1858–1928), *Mallows by a Wall*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 57.5 × 41.5 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N.D. Qvist Fund 2022. Nationalmuseum, NM 7675.

Fig. 7 Gerda Tirén (1858–1928), *Mallows by a Wall*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 57.5 × 41.5 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N.D. Qvist Fund 2022. Nationalmuseum, NM 7675.
Supplice de Loke – A Sculpture by Ida Matton

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Fig. 1 Ida Matton (1863–1940), Supplice de Loke (The Penalty of Loki), 1897. Plaster, 113 × 130 × 85 cm. Gift of Åke and Marie Matton 2021. Nationalmuseum, NMSk 2409.
When the art collector and chairman of the Swedish Society in Paris, Edward Björckman, was planning to donate his entire art collection to Stockholm’s Nationalmuseum in June 1925, the sculptor Ida Matton wrote the following: “Mr Björckman knows that I have told him that as long as I live I will not allow anyone to donate any of my works to Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, since a few years ago the men in charge treated me and one of my greatest works poorly, to say the least.” Matton had donated Björckman’s portrait bust to the club “in memory of and as thanks for what you [...] have done for us in the Swedish colony.”

What had happened to make Ida Matton so vehement about Nationalmuseum not acquiring any of her work? In February 1917 Matton had offered to sell a marble sculptural group, *Supplice de Loke* (The Penalty of Loki), to Nationalmuseum at the price of 33,000 kronor. The museum had declined the offer. Two years later, Matton offered to donate the artwork to the museum but her offer was again refused with the statement: “When this sculpture was made available for purchase at the board meeting on 28 February 1917, the committee felt that the sculpture should not be purchased because it was lacking in quality. For the same reason the committee has decided, with their gratitude, to decline the offered donation.”

The sculpture group *Supplice de Loke* is in many ways unique in Ida Matton’s body of work. It is one of only a few public artworks by her hand. She primarily produced portraits and tomb sculptures for family and friends, for which she often received good reviews when they were exhibited. In addition, Loki’s twisted and crouching body is a far cry from the contraposto of classical sculptures, and the only example of a naked male figure in her entire oeuvre. It is also the only time she borrowed a motif from Nordic mythology. Loki’s punishment for tricking Hodr into killing Baldur, the favourite of the gods, with a mistletoe arrow, was to be bound to a rock and to be tormented by a venomous snake.

The following text does not only highlight the different issues related to the production, reception and eventual fate of *Supplice de Loke*, but also says something about the prevailing view of female sculptors and their work. Like many of her female counterparts, Ida Matton’s work was relatively well-received in France. *Supplice de Loke* drew attention mainly because of its unusual style, subject matter and composition. In Sweden the sculptor and her work had a tough time gaining recognition, though.

**The production of the work**

So far, it has been impossible to determine what inspired Matton to produce the work. She often visited the grounds of Fontainebleau; perhaps she was inspired by the strange stone dubbed *L’Éléphant*, photos of which are in her archive (fig. 2). She was probably influenced by the currents introduced to Paris at the end of the 19th century, mainly by her teacher Emmanuel Frémiet (1824–1910), known for his realistic animal sculptures. He, in turn, was influenced by Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) in his choice of subject matter, including confrontations between humans and animals. The Norwegian sculptor Stephan Sinding’s (1846–1922) *The Slave* (1878) is rendered in a style resembling Ida Matton’s *Loke*. Matton has portrayed Loki as a man with physical strength and mental determination. According to her address book, the model was a certain Mr Joseph Vitti “who posed ‘a session’ for my sketch of Loke.”

Relatively early on in her career, Matton considered the figure’s possible shape. At Académie Julian in Paris, where she was enrolled from 1889 to 1892, women had the possibility to sketch both men and women in nude figure drawing classes. In December 1896 she asked her brother Waldemar to find out what the writer and poet Viktor Rydberg had written about Loki. The same year she received an answer to her question directed at the future national antiquarian if he could send some photos of the bound Loki from the Isle of Man where he had seen “some of the runestones carved during the Viking era with images, some of which depicted the bound Loki.” Matton modelled the work in the course of 1897 and her...
ACQUISITIONS/SUPPlice DE LOKE – A SCULPTURE BY IDA MATTON

earlier teacher and good friend Denys Puech (1854–1942) maintains in a letter of recommendation that Supplice de Loke is a “very powerful creation and very acclaimed among French artists.”

The plaster piece was first shown in 1897 at the traditional Société des artistes français (SAF) salon and a second time at the Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs (UFPS) salon in 1898 (fig. 1). Ida Matton had hoped to be able to exhibit the plaster model at the 1900 Paris Exposition and had sent a photograph of the sculpture to Anders Zorn, but it was not accepted. Ida Matton expressed her dissatisfaction to Zorn and to Christian Eriksson, but to no avail. Zorn answered: “I have received both of your letters and I wish to state that I no longer have anything to do with the jury’s work since a deputy has been selected in my stead.”

Supplice de Loke was carved in marble and exhibited at the SAF salon in 1909 and one year later at the UFPS salon (fig. 3). Matton’s brother Emil asked what she was planning to do with Loke. Does she intend to offer it to the Swedish state? Shouldn’t she try to have it exhibited in Stockholm at Nationalmuseum? He writes: “I really think that the male sculptors who are unwilling to acknowledge a female colleague are behaving badly. They reveal their small-mindedness and lack of nobility of character. So much is certain, that it won’t be easy for any male sculptor to get anything from me after this.” In Sweden the group was exhibited at the Baltic exhibition in 1914 and at the exhibition organised by the Association for Swedish Women Artists (Föreningen svenska konstnärinnor) at Liljevalchs in 1917. In connection with the latter, Matton hoped that her friend Nathan Söderblom, pastor in the Swedish congregation in Paris and future archbishop, would put in a good word for her at Nationalmuseum: “I write in connection with my marble statue Supplice de Loke, which, as you know, I am currently exhibiting at the gallery and which I have always dreamt of being acquired by the state for Nationalmuseum. In Stockholm, whence I just came, I spoke to Richard Bergh, the curator Axel Gauffin, Chr Eriksson amongst others. I tried in vain to get in touch with Zorn. Someone asked if I knew Prince Eugen or the Crown Prince, but I don’t.”

In the end Emil Matton offered the marble carving of Supplice de Loke to the City of Stockholm to be placed in the newly built city hall, which was noted by daily newspapers such as Dagens Nyheter and Aftonbladet. The sculpture was accepted by the City Council in October 1922 and, in a telegram to her brother Emil, Matton writes: “Accepted. Hurray Emil […] I am delighted!” Emil confirms that Loke has been purchased for 30,000 kronor. The group was placed in Palmstedt’s grotto and Svenska Dagbladets critic “une” thought that “the blindingly white marble comes into its own against the grey-green violet background.” Ida Matton herself was, however, dissatisfied with the placement of the work and the fact that it was already covered up in early autumn and too close to the water.

At the end of March 1925, Matton worked on a Loke meant to be cast in bronze and left a sketch with the bronze caster E. Rudier in Paris. The sculpture was exhibited at both SAF’s and UFPS’s salons in 1937. There it garnered moderate attention in the French press for its realistic anatomy and for the depiction of a tortured body, but it was ignored by the Swedish press. The following year, the work was donated to Gävle Museum, once again by her brother Emil Matton, which was mentioned in the local papers. Today it is placed outside the entrance to the County Museum of Gävleborg.

Contemporary Reception

Contemporary reviews of Supplice de Loke were mixed, but it is worth noting that the work was noticed in French newspapers and magazines before it was even mentioned in the Swedish press. Some French critics had visited UFPS’s salon at Georges Petit in 1898 and remarked on Ida Matton’s work in particular. The pseudonym Paul Maryllis wrote that women no longer need the support of men to triumph. “They are emancipated in art. From now on they can fly on their own wings, secure of their own merits and social abilities”; Matton is named as one of them. Matton’s Loke is also described as “a virile figure by Mlle Ida Matton, symbolising a chapter of Scandinavian mythology with energy.” Another positive opinion was voiced by the pseudonym Edouard Hubert, who after mentioning a number of uninteresting works comes to Loke, “a proper sculpture […] that will assuredly hold its own at the next salon, among the work by the male artists.”

In 1902 Matton exhibited the original plaster version of Supplice de Loke in Sweden for the first time, at the Swedish Artists’ Association at Valand in Gothenburg. Svenska Dagbladet made space for two reviews, both disparaging. John Hertz wrote: “Ida Matton proves that she possesses the purely superficial skill of using a modelling tool in her large-scale ‘Loke’, a boundlessly heavy bombastic figure, anatomically weak and lacking in muscle tension.” Tor Hedberg is even more negative in his evaluation: “Ida Matton’s ‘Loke’ who does not want to get bitten in the back […] belongs to the kind of sculpture that should ideally not exist at all.” He also dismisses Alice Nordin and Sigrid Blomberg while Carl Milles finds favour in his eyes. The pseudonym E.A. in Dagens Nyheter does not mince his words either: “Ida Matton’s Loke is a masterpiece of primordial awfulness.”

In Göteborgs Aftonblad, on the other hand, the pseudonym Gert praises the sculpture: “An almost masculine power distinguishes Ida Matton. Just look at her Loke! Who could believe that it was not modelled by a man?”

Supplice de Loke in marble was met with more positive reviews. Svenska Dagbladet’s critic wrote: “At this year’s salon (SAF 1909) Miss Ida Matton is exhibiting a larger work in marble, Supplice de Loke, which has been favourably mentioned by critics and been considered for the third medal. According to reliable sources, only the fact that no foreign woman has ever been awarded this honour before, prevented the jury from..."
When it comes to the exhibition by The Association for Swedish Women Artists at Liljevalchs konsthall a few years later (1917) the Swedish critics are divided. One points out that the work has “attracted great and well-deserved interest” while Aftonbladet’s critic, the pseudonym Marcelle (Martha Rydell-Lindström), writes that “the only large composition Supplice de Loke should give it to Miss Matton.” The following year the newspaper’s critic once again praises the group: It has been given “pride of place in the middle of the sculpture section in front of the large stairs, a place that is usually reserved for the creations of the president of the society, the Duchess d’Uzès.”

Matton’s marble group was also mentioned in French newspapers. Le Figaro notes that there are not many sculptures at the UPS salon (1910), but there are “a few pieces of merit: Supplice de Loke by Mme Ida Matton” and Le Journal des arts notes the work as “a beautiful, piece inspired by Scandinavian mythology.” La Revue Générale is astonished by the fact that “the creator of this masterpiece is a young woman, since it has been executed with such power and such energy. This artwork deserves a place in one of the state museums, where it can serve as an example of what a woman’s hand can produce.”

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not have been made at all. Why use so much marble without any innovative value?"

It is in this context that Ida Matton approached Nationalmuseum with her offer of *Supplice de Loke*.

**Ida Matton – a rediscovered sculptor of her time**

Ida Matton returned to her hometown Gävle in 1937 where she died in 1940, thus disappearing from the art scene. She is mentioned in a few lines in *Svenskt porträttgalleri* (1901) and Philibert Humbla, the first director of the County Museum of Gävleborg, wrote in 1952 that “Ida Matton’s contribution to Swedish art history is an episode. In a way she stands alone, not joining in the Swedish tradition and not contributing to the nationalist strivings so typical of her time. She did not have any Swedish pupils either and Ida Matton’s artistic production meant nothing for the development of art in this country.”

It was only in connection with a commemorative exhibition at the County Museum of Gävleborg (1963) that she was, to some extent, rediscovered. *Arbetarbladet’s* art critic admits that he was surprised by the fine qualities in her work. He argues that “it is the refined, elegant salon pieces and the intimate small sculptures that are her proper genre”, not the monumental works like *Supplice de Loke*.

Ida Matton’s oeuvre was largely ignored in art historical research until her archive became accessible and was catalogued in 2009. A couple of articles were published on the occasion of the memorial exhibition in 1963 but it wasn’t until 2012 that Matton and a number of other female sculptors from the same time came to the fore in connection with the publication of Irja Bergström’s *Skulptriserna*. This was also the year I presented my master’s dissertation in art history, which aimed at highlighting Matton who, despite finding a place for herself on the Parisian art scene, has only marginally featured in Swedish art history. A biographical article about Ida Matton has also been published in *Svenskt kvinnobiografiskt lexikon*.

Times change and today women artists are rediscovered and integrated into museums and art history. In 2016 Nationalmuseum acquired a piece by Ida Matton, an early terracotta bust of a young woman (1891). Furthermore, Nationalmuseum highlighted twelve Swedish women sculptors from the turn of the last century in the spring/summer 2022 exhibition “What Joy to be a Sculptor!” *Swedish Women Artists 1880–1920*. Several works by Matton were included, not least the original plaster of *Supplice de Loke*, which has also been donated to the museum. Thus, although Matton never managed to sell or donate *Supplice de Loke* in marble to the museum, the plaster has now been incorporated into the collection, a work that Matton’s friend and teacher Denys Puech deemed “a work for a museum or a public space.”

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*Fig. 4 Ida Matton in her studio at 233 rue Fabourg Saint-Honoré, Paris, with her marble statue *Supplice de Loke*, c. 1910. Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.*
Notes:
2. Nationalmuseum, copy of the minutes of a City Council meeting, 28 February 1917, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
3. Nationalmuseum, copy of the minutes of a City Council meeting, 30 April 1919, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
5. Stephan Sinding, Norwegian sculptor, lived in Paris sporadically (1874 and 1891) before he settles there for good in 1910 until his death in 1922.
6. Address book, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library. The Italian family Vitti opened an art school in Paris in 1889 that supported women artists in particular.
12. Letter from Christian Eriksson, 23 January 1900 in which he expresses his regrets that when sculptures have been refused by the jury, no change of their decision may take place, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
16. Letter to Nathan Söderblom 17 February 1917, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
17. “Nytt från Stadshuset”, in Dagens Nyheter 14 October 1922, Aftonbladet 14 October 1922.
18. Telegram 17 October 1922, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
22. The foundry Rudier was owned by Alexis Rudier (died 1897) and his son Eugène (1875–1952). The foundry worked with some of the best-known sculptors of the 19th- and 20th centuries, including Rodin, Bourdelle, Miklos, Maillol and Daumier.
28. La République française 22 March 1898.
32. “Utställningen å Valandas”, in Göteborgs Aftonblad, 8 March 1902.
36. La Revue Générale, partially quoted in Dagens Nyheter, 16 June 1911.
37. Trelleborgs tidingen, 31 January 1917; Aftonbladet, 18 February 1917.
44. Diary, 16 November 1922, Ida Matton’s archive, Uppsala University Library.
Isabelle Mann Clow from Lake Forest, Illinois, visited Europe in 1928 to buy furniture for her and her husband William E. Clow Jr.’s new and exclusive, hyper-modern home, which was designed in a classicising style by society architect David Adler (1882–1949).¹ The Clow’s fortune came from the foundry giant James B. Clow & Sons, which made products that were crucial to expanding modern cities, such as prefabricated elements, water pipes and fire hydrants. Her shopping list included a glass dining table from Lalique in Paris.² However, she changed her plans after visiting Svenskt Tenn’s showroom in Stockholm, and commissioned architect Uno Åhrén (1897–1977) to design a spectacular suite of pewter and brass clad furniture. This included a three-part table that seated 16 people and a tall four-leaf folding screen (figs. 1–3).

There could be several reasons why Mann Clow chose to visit Sweden on her European shopping trip. She had probably seen examples of Swedish applied arts and design in the US. Her hometown of Chicago had large Scandinavian immigrant community, including people who ran import companies. There were Swedish designers and makers who had recently immigrated to

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Fig. 1 Uno Åhrén (1897–1977), Table and folding screen, 1928. Produced by Svenskt Tenn. Gabon, oak, pewter, brass, 75.5 × 242 × 122 cm (h × l × w) [table], 330 × 202 × 7.5 cm (h × w × d) [screen]. Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum and Hirsch Fund 2021. Nationalmuseum, NMK 48–49A–B/2021.
and highlighted many objects that were included in the Swedish exhibition in Paris, some of which were also shown at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1927. There is also a possibility that both Adler and Mann Clow, like many other Americans who were interested in modern art and design and could afford the transatlantic crossing, visited the 1925 Paris Exhibition themselves. Another source of new ideas was likely to have been David Adler’s sister, the noted interior designer Frances Elkins. It has also been suggested that Adler and Mann Clow collaborated with the American designer Eyre de Lanux, who lived and worked in Paris in the 1920s, making a brief stop in Chicago in 1927.3

the US and joined American design firms.3 Swedish design was shown at exhibitions and several leading American art museums purchased and exhibited modern Swedish design in the 1920s.4

She had definitely read about Swedish architecture and design, and discussed the subject with her architect. During work on the new residence she gave Adler a book by the Swedish architect Hakon Ahlberg, Swedish Architecture of the Twentieth Century (1925), a gesture that naturally indicates her wishes.5 Ahlberg’s book was richly illustrated with photogravures, elevations and plans. It described buildings by both older, well-established professionals and a younger generation of architects who were the same age as Adler. For example, it presented innovative work by Gunnar Asplund, Carl Bergsten, Cyrillus Johansson, Sigurd Lewerentz and Ivar Tengbom that combined classical ideals with a modern, streamlined and rational approach.

Adler also owned a copy of The Modern Decorative Arts of Sweden (1926), written by Erik Wettergren, then head of the Nationalmuseum’s Decorative Arts Department.6 This was published in French in 1925, for the international art industry exhibition in Paris, L’Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne.7 The book had a historical point of departure, depicting the evolution of Swedish design up to the 1920s. It was richly illustrated

Fig. 2 Isabelle Patchin Mann Clow (1887–1939) photographed in front of the pewter screen in the dining room.

Fig. 3 Raymond W. Trowbridge (1886–1936), photographer, Interior view of Clow residence, Lake Forest, Illinois, September 1929. Chicago History Museum, Chicago. On the table by Uno Åhrén stands a couple of silver centerpiece by Josef Hoffmann.
Mann Clow was a passionate collector and acquired works from various countries, but more research is needed to help answer specific questions about how Mann Clow took an interest in modern Swedish design. From a general perspective, however, light can be shed on why the interest in Swedish decorative arts grew in the US in the 1920s, eventually steering Mann Clow towards the Svenskt Tenn showroom in Stockholm.

**The US and the 1925 Paris Exhibition**
This is often described as a breakthrough for Swedish design in the US, but was the result of multiple layers of important connections linked to aesthetics and design reform, as well as to trade and politics. The attention that Swedish glass garnered at the 1925 Paris Exhibition paved the way, but the way that American and Swedish agendas aligned on a number of other issues was also important. Lessons learned by the US delegates at the exhibition in Paris can be used to illustrate the American agenda. The travelling exhibition featuring Swedish contemporary decorative arts, which started in New York in 1927, speaks of common Swedish-American aims, but also of a tour that was, from the Swedish perspective, a matter of public diplomacy.

The exhibitors participating in the 1925 Paris Exhibition were requested to only show work produced in a modern spirit, so objects in more historical styles were not welcome. In addition, the producers were also asked to name and highlight the artists and designers. The largest exhibition area was allocated to France, but generous space was also reserved for Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, and the US, who had been France’s foremost allies in the First World War. The US declined the invitation, however, since an internal assessment concluded that the American applied arts did not have enough attractive modern design. Instead, the US Secretary of Commerce sent a commission to visit the Paris Exhibition and, with the help of 180 American specialists and delegates from different national trade associations, they were to report back on any
impressions that could benefit the development of the industry back home. The commission’s report concluded that the US should have participated after all, to show goodwill and to reciprocate for France’s participation in the 1914 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, despite the fact that the German army was advancing on Paris at the time. It also concluded that, in order to stand up to international competition, the US had to develop products adapted to modern life and the needs of the broader market. The American decorative arts industry had the capacity to mass produce and mass distribute but, according to the commission, there was resistance to new ideas. The industry continued in its old, conservative rut, hoping this was the way to guaranteed profitability. Unlike Europe, US industry lacked artistic directors and designers with artistic training who pushed for progress. There was also a dearth of higher design education with practicing lecturers who were leaders in their field. Furthermore, there was a need for lobby organisations and exhibition practices that conveyed knowledge and provided inspiration.

In order to spread this message and highlight good examples, the American Association of Museums organised a travelling exhibition with 398 hand-picked objects that had been shown in Paris. The exhibition opened in Boston in 1926 and was subsequently shown in New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis and Minneapolis. All the objects in the exhibition were for sale.

French objects dominated the exhibition, but there was also some Swedish design. The collection included nine engraved Orrefors glass objects, designed by Simon Gate and Edward Hald, as well as weaves and carpets by Märta Määs-Fjetterström, Annie Frykholm for Thyra Grafighter’s textile shop, Carin Wästberg for Handarbetets vänner (the Friends of Handicraft Association) and Eva Nilsson for the Malmöus Hemsöjdsforeningen (Malmöus Handicraft Association).

**Swedish Design on show in the US**

The conclusions of the American commission came as no surprise. There had been ongoing debate in the US for quite some time, discussing how to reform the applied arts. Newark Museum had already exhibited industrial arts in the 1910s, and in 1917 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York started producing annual exhibitions meant to inspire renewal. Historical styles dominated, but from 1922 onwards the influential curator of the Decorative Arts Department, Joseph Breck, who was also the assistant director of the museum, started acquiring and showing more modern design from France and Denmark, amongst others. The touring exhibition in 1926 shook things up and in 1927 the annual American exhibition of decorative arts was replaced with the *Swedish Contemporary Decorative Arts Exhibition*. This collection of objects had also been shown in Paris in 1925 and, just as in Paris, the chairman of the Swedish arts and crafts society, Gregor Paulsson, acted as curator with Carl Bergsten as exhibition architect. This was the first exhibition in the US to be dedicated solely to the decorative arts of a single country. The Swedish examples provided some perspective on the American industry and had an impact on public opinion, if only in a limited circle. The presentation conveyed progressive ideas about the important role designers could play in the industry, propagating for social aims such as “beauty for all” and “better things for everyday life”. Breck also stated that the design was rooted in a vigorous folk art tradition and French 18th-century aesthetics, here transformed into classic simplicity marked by a “discipline of self-restraint”, elegance and refinement – an assessment of Swedish design that is still stressed in different ways.

The Swedish arts and crafts society and its members naturally wanted to spread these reform ideas, for both commercial and ideological reasons. It was an honour to be invited to exhibit at one of the world's leading art museums and from an official Swedish perspective the exhibition was an important opportunity for public diplomacy, through which knowledge of Sweden could be improved and bonds of friendship formed.

The Sweden-America Foundation was formed in 1919 to strengthen the cultural and scientific relationship between Sweden and the US. The Swedish politics of neutrality during the First World War had damaged Sweden's reputation in the US. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Sweden-America Foundation together established the American-Swedish News Exchange in New York, with the goal of spreading knowledge and understanding of Sweden. A Swedish exhibition was completely aligned with these ambitions. The story goes that the idea was hatched during the Paris Exhibition and presented to Sweden’s crown prince, Gustaf Adolf – who was very interested in arts and crafts, as well as being an amateur archaeologist and collector of Chinese ceramics – when he visited the Metropolitan Museum in 1926. The project was also actively supported by the Swedish envoy Wollmar Boström and the consul general in New York, Olof H. Lamm. Prince Eugen was also included in the royal exhibition committee, as were Herman Lagercrantz, the former Swedish envoy to the US, and Josef Sachs, the director of the luxury department store Nordiska Kompaniet (fig. 4). Joseph Breck stated in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* that the exhibition provided knowledge of Swedish art and culture and fostered better understanding between the countries. It enjoyed royal patronage, but despite his evident scepticism about the antiquated monarchical order, Breck welcomed the exhibition to the democratic US. He even stressed that the exhibition was, in fact, rooted in democracy since among the many beautiful pieces you could find both high-quality objects and objects that did not cost so much and thus appealed to “the taste and needs of the middle class”.

The exhibition moved on to Chicago and ended its tour in Detroit. As mentioned above, the objects were all for sale, with one...
of the buyers being the influential George Booth, who founded the Cranbrook Academy of Art that same year. Booth bought an urn by Wilhelm Kåge from the Gustavsberg porcelain factory, a vase by the ceramics manufacturer Bobergs fajansfabrik, a stool by Carl Hörvik, a chest with inlaid decor by Carl Malmsten, a Diana urn by Ivar Jonsson from the foundry Nåfveqvars bruk, as well as a light fitting in engraved glass from Orrefors.19

Isabelle Mann Clow’s dining room furnishings

The international attention and positive reception of modern Swedish architecture and design attracted particularly interested people to travel to Sweden. Mann Clow arrived in Stockholm in the summer of 1928 and checked in at Grand Hotel, a stone’s throw from both the Nationalmuseum and Svenskt Tenn’s showroom.20

Svenskt Tenn was a natural place to visit. The company had been founded in 1924 by Estrid Ericson, whose idea was to design and produce modern and artistic objects in pewter at reasonable prices. Success came quickly, and the company’s products were shown in Paris in 1925 and in the travelling exhibition in the US.

When Mann Clow visited the showroom, she decided to order a table and four-leaf folding screen from Svenskt Tenn rather than a glass table from Lalique. Ericson commissioned some of the most radical designers of the time, and this job went to Uno Åhrén. The encounter with Le Corbusier’s work at the Paris Exhibition had had a fundamental effect on Åhrén, making him re-evaluate his role as an architect and designer, leading to the publication of a series of polemical articles. In these, rather than personal expression, he emphasised the importance of societal involvement and working for the good of the collective.21 This probably did not correspond ideologically to Mann Clow’s ambitions, but his style matched her vision. However, it was urgent, as she was to travel onward the following day. Åhrén quickly produced drawings in accordance with her instructions and the price of SEK 7,000 was approved (figs. 5–6). The result was unique dining room furnishings in oak and gabon, clad in matt pewter with shiny geometric brass inlays. The table is in three parts, almost five meters in length and 122 cm wide. The screen was 330 cm tall and two meters wide. The pieces were made with a craft-based approach, but the simple, smooth shapes and brass pattern, created with machine precision, look to the future. This shows how the Swedish design of the 1920s teamed tradition with innovation; classicism meets a modern material and machine aesthetic.

When the commission was ready, the new head of the Nationalmuseum’s Decorative Arts Department, Åke Stavenow, saw the furnishings in the showroom. They roused his interest to such a degree that he wanted to exhibit them to the Nationalmuseum’s visitors before they were exported to the US. Estrid Ericson, who was a skilled and intelligent designer and businesswoman, seized this opportunity and the project grew
into an exhibition featuring products from Svenskt Tenn designed not only by Uno Åhrén, but also by Ericson herself, Nils Fougstedt, Björn Trädgårdh, Evdin Ollers, Robert Hult and Torvald Alef. The press were divided, but mostly positive. The table and screen were described as skilfully made. One critic stated that the furnishings had fine proportions and exquisite brass inlays, whose mild glaze was well displayed against the matt tin, despite them being in a purely functionalist style, whose devotees usually delight in the complete absence of anything that does not have a purpose (fig. 7). 22 Others were more negative. The screen was likened to a robust safe door and the “Babylonian voluminous pewter pieces” had art critic Gustaf Näsström feel as if he was imprisoned in a Venetian lead chamber. 23

However, Ericson’s staging was highly praised. The pewter furnishings stood against a matt green wall. The table was dressed with green damask place mats, silver cutlery with ivory handles, glass and porcelain that were attractive of the grey tabletop, flowers and a mirrored tray ornamented with engraved goldfish. Chairs upholstered in natural calfskin stood around the table. The exhibition was open for a little more than two weeks and, in the middle of April, the furniture was packed for shipping to the US.

The house in Lake Forest still stands, but has changed over the years. However, photographs from the early 1930s provide good insight into its original milieu. The architecture of the symmetrical, white-rendered villa has been described as Greek Revival and strict neoclassicism (fig. 8). Adler’s role models, Mies van der Rohe and Josef Hoffmann have been highlighted, particularly Hoffmann’s Villa Primavesi from 1913. 24 However, there is also great recognition when seen through Swedish eyes, with the thoughts going straight to the Swedish classicism of the 1920s. As well as Åhrén’s pewter furnishings, the photographs show that Clow also invested in other Swedish and Danish items. The garden wall, which was decorated with an
In the 1980s they were placed in the Member’s Lounge and the Women’s Board Room. One of the smaller tables is still part of their collection, but the large table and screen were de-accessed in 1999 and sold at auction.\textsuperscript{29} In 2021, the Nationalmuseum was able to acquire these unique pieces thanks to a generous gift by the Friends of the Nationalmuseum (Otto Andersson Fund, Max Dinkelspiel Fund, Brita and Nils Fredrik Tisell Fund, H.M. Konung Gustav VI Adolf Fund, Marit and Herbert Bexelius Fund, Barbro and Henry Montgomery Fund) and Hirsch Fund. Since their acquisition, the pewter furnishings have been shown in the Nationalmuseum’s exhibitions Scandanavian Design & USA. People, encounters and ideas, 1890–1980 (2021) and Swedish Grace. Art and design in 1920s Sweden (2022). The screen is now on show in the 20th century section of the Museum’s collection presentation The Timeline. From the 16th Century to the Present Day.

The pewter furnishings were acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1959.\textsuperscript{28} In the 1980s they were placed in the Member’s Lounge and the Women’s Board Room. One of the two smaller tables is still part of their collection, but the large table and screen were de-accessed in 1999 and sold at auction.\textsuperscript{29} In 2021, the Nationalmuseum was able to acquire these unique pieces thanks to a generous gift by the Friends of the Nationalmuseum (Otto Andersson Fund, Max Dinkelspiel Fund, Brita and Nils Fredrik Tisell Fund, H.M. Konung Gustav VI Adolf Fund, Marit and Herbert Bexelius Fund, Barbro and Henry Montgomery Fund) and Hirsch Fund. Since their acquisition, the pewter furnishings have been shown in the Nationalmuseum’s exhibitions Scandanavian Design & USA. People, encounters and ideas, 1890–1980 (2021) and Swedish Grace. Art and design in 1920s Sweden (2022). The screen is now on show in the 20th century section of the Museum’s collection presentation The Timeline. From the 16th Century to the Present Day.
Notes:
7. The profit on the book's sales in France was spent on the acquisition of French applied arts for the collections of Malmö museum. Erik Wettergren, L'art décoratif moderne en Suède, Malmö museum, Malmö 1925, back cover.
18. Exhibition of Swedish Contemporary Art (exh. cat.), Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago 1927.
19. Cranbrook Archives, Box 23, Folder 14, Art Collection, Purchase Records, Swedish Association of Arts and Crafts, 1927. Ceiling fittings from Orrefors were later also used in the large dining hall at Cranbrook Academy of Art.
20. Monica Eriksson, Svenskt tenn från Svenskt Tenn, Stockholm 1985, p. 68.
26. Some of the pieces shown in the ladies’ parlor are now part of the Nationalmuseum collection: the cupboard (NMK 1/2018. Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum), and the Art Institute of Chicago, accession no 1959.484b. Gift of Mrs. Cedric Hagenbuckle in memory of her mother, Mrs. Isabella Mann Clow.
28. The Art Institute of Chicago, accession no 1959.484b. Gift of Mrs. Cedric Hagenbuckle in memory of her mother, Mrs. Isabella Mann Clow.
29. Correspondence with the AIC’s EDA department, June 2021.
The discipline of design history, which emerged in the UK in the 1970s, combines the study of visual and material culture with social history and, unlike art history, focuses on banal objects. Since the 1990s that has been supplemented by the study of interiors which, usually, contain assemblages of artefacts situated within designed spaces. By expanding that focus to the engagement of designed objects and interior spaces with nature, this essay pushes design historical scholarship yet one step further.

The subject of plants and flowers being brought indoors has, to date, been absent from interiors scholarship. However, in the contemporary context, it has increasingly come to the fore both as a fashionable pursuit for millennials in their homes (which grew exponentially during the Covid lockdowns) and as a large-scale phenomenon in many commercial buildings (fig. 1). Popular accounts of these phenomena have focused on the role played by bringing plants and flowers inside in maintaining mental health and in healing the rift between human beings and the natural world that has been caused by the former’s over-exploitation of the latter. That lack of respect for nature, the authors of the accounts have explained, is the cause of many of our environmental problems, especially climate change.

Fig. 1 The indoor roof garden at Crossrail Place, Canary Wharf, London, designed by Foster and Partners, 2015.
Driven by the expanding availability of exotic plants – Kentia palms from Norfolk Island in the South Pacific, and the cheaper indigenous ferns among them – and the sense of loss that was incurred by people leaving their lives in the countryside – “nature inside” became a hugely popular aspect of the interior décor of the Victorian home. It softened architectural frames, lightened heavy furniture, provided elegance and refinement, acted as screens, and added colour, texture, and scent. (fig. 5) It also helped to introduce children to the laws of science and post-Enlightenment rational thought, as well as playing a part in the self-improvement of adults.

Perhaps the most important symbolic meaning of domesticated plants and flowers at that time, however, derived from the
widespread Christian belief that nature was made by God himself and was therefore inherently ‘good’. Very importantly also, domesticated nature was seen as therapeutic, both in the sense that many people needed to negotiate new relationships with both the pre-industrial past and the modern industrial present and future, and because living nature could act as a companion to those who needed it. The apprehension and fear of raw nature’s power was, in the domestic context, replaced by a belief that nature had a calming effect on the soul. The advice book author, Shirley Hibberd, believed that nature inside was a source “of rest, and solace, and refreshment”.\(^3\) In addition, anticipating ideas that were to become widespread in the early 21st century, the author of a 1898 book explained that indoor plants, ‘preserve the purity of the air by removing the poisonous gas evolved by animals and the combustion of hydrocarbons and maintain the equilibrium of nature’.\(^4\)

Given the gendered (as feminine) nature of the Victorian middle-class home nature inside took on that gendered meaning and
inside had largely lost its religious symbolism and its educational role. These were replaced by a new, primarily aesthetic, function which was to underpin architects’ and designers’ spatial strategies, especially in creating the porosity between inside and outside that was so central to the modernists’ vision for their buildings. The softness of plants also provided a strong visual contrast to the otherwise cold appearance of steel and concrete.

A vestigial domesticity remained in place in some of those interiors, however. Nowhere was that more apparent than in Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Villa Tugendhat, built in Brno in 1929–30. Not only do archive pictures show many plants and flowers in the spaces of that dwelling, a large conservatory filled with plants also flanked the entire eastern side of the building (fig. 9).

To date, despite its size and its visual prominence in many of the images taken of the open plan first floor of the building, the conservatory has received practically no mention in existing accounts of the villa, most of which stress its technological inventiveness instead.
As one entered the villa, at the top of the staircase leading to the floor below, a complex set of planes, surfaces, forms, materials, and spaces converged with each other. To add to that complexity, one of the internal, chromed steel-covered columns passed through the midst of that convergence. The meeting point of the horizontal floor, which stopped sharply at a right angle as the stairwell fell away beneath it, and the vertical column, was made even more complex by its proximity to the end point of the glazed drum and the presence of a rail, made of two horizontal rows of steel bars, which acted as a protection from the otherwise open stairwell. An early photograph depicted a potted maple strategically placed on the floor at the point at which all those elements met, softening the hard geometry and materials it neighboured (fig. 10). Also, arguably, it provided a visual resolution, or perhaps a distraction, to the spatial complexity of the combination of verticals, horizontals, curves, straight lines, masses and voids, and the multiple materials that came together at that point.

Did the photographer of the maple feel it was a photogenic requirement? Or did a member of the Tugendhat family feel that it provided a picturesque punctuation mark that was needed in that specific location? On one level, given that interiors are always the result of the work of multiple agents, those questions are irrelevant. What is important, rather, is to recognise its primarily formal function in that architectural and interior setting. Not only did the maple reinforce the spatial strategies at play, it also added texture, colour and decoration to the interior. It also brought a level of conventional domesticity into that otherwise technologically progressive space.

In post-war USA – especially as demonstrated by the mid-century modern houses that were built on the West coast in the years after 1945 – architectural and design modernism and the natural world became increasingly closely aligned. The warm temperate climate of that location permitted the inside/outside obsession of modernist
architects to become a reality rather than a dream. Plants and flowers were used to realise it. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Case-Study houses, especially Case-study house 8, designed by Charles and Ray Eames. (fig. 11) Plants were added around the perimeter of the house to blur the boundary between inside and outside, while, inside, they performed a similar role by taking the eye from the inside outwards. The photographer, Julius Shulman, emphasised this strategy in the images he created of the interior of the house in which plants both framed them and took the eye into the distance. Other case-study houses either planted nature directly into internal beds dug directly into the earth (fig. 12) or placed them strategically to emphasise distinct areas in otherwise open spaces.

While nature played a key role in many west coast modernist domestic spaces, it also defined a new kind of public interior that accompanied the expansion of corporate capitalism in America at that time.
This took the form of dramatic planting schemes in hospitality interiors, shopping malls, and office and hotel atria, among other large-scale spaces. Its presence in these commercial spaces echoed the way they were used in 19th-century exhibition halls and palm courts, that is, consumers were made to feel relaxed and willing to part with their money. Examples include the Four Seasons Restaurant in NY; the NorthPark shopping Center in Dallas (fig. 13); and the indoor garden at the Ford Foundation Building in NY (fig. 14). The scale of these constructions required the combined skills of architects, landscape architects and horticulturists. However, a new multi-skilled professional specialist also joined the team, known as an interior landscaper, a plantscaper or an interior-scaper. One of the pioneers in this field, Everett Conklin, worked on both the Four Seasons and the Ford Foundation building garden.

The Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta opened in 1967. Although the hotel was heavily criticised at the time for being inward-looking, the way in which nature inside was incorporated as part of the overall design marks it out as extremely innovative. Its architect, John Portman, cleverly created an interior atrium space that was simultaneously a living room and a city. While the former was reinforced by pots of yellow chrysanthemums, seating positioned for conversations, and low lighting, the latter was defined by the inclusion of fully grown Australian umbrella trees; quarry tiles on the floor; and the addition of lifts which looked as if they were outside rather than inside.

When the hotel opened 110 philodendrons cascaded down from each floor. That number grew significantly over time. The idea of using them was envisaged from the moment of the conception of the building and modular concrete structures used for the balconies outside the guest rooms were specially designed to accommodate them. As well as adding colour the philodendrons also provided texture and a strong sense of movement that contrasted with the static concrete structure of the atrium’s frame.

In the early 21st century, the rate of the expansion in interiorscaping accelerated once again. It became a global rather than just a US/European phenomenon at that time and, thanks to a vast body of scientific research that was undertaken by environmental psychologists and others, the benefits to human beings of plants and flowers in inside space were widely articulated. It was increasingly used in commercial spaces to enhance productivity and consumption. Also, at that time, interiorscaping became a huge international industry and its popular symbolism became linked to the widespread interest in environmentalism.

Nature inside’s therapeutic capacity to calm people by restoring their links with the rural past, and of improving interior
recognising the importance of the agency of the natural world and the need for human beings to re-establish a balanced relationship with it.\(^\text{10}\) Along with Stephen Kellert, Wilson was one of the editors of *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, a book of essays, published in 1993. The hypothesis was now formulated as “a human dependence on nature that extends far beyond the simple issues of material and physical sustenance to encompass, as well, the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and emotional satisfaction.”\(^\text{7}\)

Everett Conklin had published an influential article in 1972, in which he outlined the idea that man was genetically programmed to be near green, growing plants.\(^\text{8}\)

In 1984 Edward O. Wilson published a book, *Biophilia*, in which, like Conklin before him, the author articulated an evolutionary approach, defining biophilia as “the innate tendency to focus on life and life-like processes.”\(^\text{9}\) He realised that, “we only think we have control” of nature, thereby environments physically, both of which had been first recognised in the 19th century were acknowledged once again in the early 21st century. Arguably, the religious function that it had performed in that earlier century was replaced by many people architects and designers among them signing up to the concept of “biophilia”. The psychologist, Erich Fromm, had first used the term in his 1964 book, *The Heart of Man*, where he defined biophilia as a “psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital”.\(^\text{7}\) Everrett Conklin had published an influential article in 1972, in which he outlined the idea that man was genetically programmed to be near green, growing plants.\(^\text{8}\)

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and their associated microorganisms”, he wrote, “it should be obvious that when he attempts to isolate himself in tightly sealed buildings away from this ecological system, problems will arise.”

Bringing nature inside is undoubtedly here to stay for the foreseeable future and architects and interiors designers will be working with plantscapers and horticulturists to facilitate many of the future’s green interiors for some time to come. A design historical exploration of some of the different ways in which it has worked in the past hopefully assists an understanding of the ways in which, to date, human beings have biophilia, it was suggested, was rooted in learning that had taken place in the past and still existed in people who had lived in urban environments for several generations. The satisfaction of their craving for nature, it was implied, led to a state of psychological well-being, a reduction in stress levels, and the promotion of physical health.

In the early 2000s, the concept of biophilia is embraced very widely. Not only is it invoked by architects, designers and plantscapers, it is also used by the developers of offices and large commercial spaces (figs. 15, 16 and 17). It is paralleled, however, by others who invoke the physical benefits of nature inside, a fact that was already understood by the Victorians. The subject came to a head in the wake of the 1989 publication of a report for NASA by Bill Wolverton who, back in 1973 had found that Sky Lab 3 had been contaminated with more than three hundred volatile organic chemicals.” Wolverine discovered that certain species of plants – peace lilies, areca palms, lady palms, fig trees and the golden pothos among them – were effective air purifiers. “Since man’s existence on Earth depends upon a life support system involving an intricate relationship with plants and their associated microorganisms”, he wrote, “it should be obvious that when he attempts to isolate himself in tightly sealed buildings away from this ecological system, problems will arise.”

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continually exploited nature to their own ends, whether to improve the quality of their lives, or, more cynically, for economic profit. Knowledge of that exploitation will hopefully help future perpetrators of the act of bringing plants and flowers into interior spaces to do as sensitively and with as much respect for nature as possible.

Notes:
1. Design history emerged in the UK in the 1970s. The need for it arose from design students wanting to be taught the history of their discipline, and it was pioneered by scholars in the fields of art history, architectural history and social history who sought to stretch the edges of their disciplines.
5. Domesticity, and the accompanying idea of the “domestic interior”, first emerged in 17th-century Netherlands but reached new heights in 19th-century Britain where it represented a refuge from the world of work.
6. Examples of modernist houses that contained plants included Hans Sharoun’s Villa Schminke of 1933; Walter Gropius’s Zuckerhandl house of 1929; Group 7’s Electric House of 1930; and Marcel Breuer’s Erwin Piscator apartment of 1928.
9. Ibid., p. 10.
13. Ibid., p. 18.

Fig. 17 Green wall created by Biotecture in the Anthropologie fashion store, Regent Street, London, 2009.