

Cross-border connectivity in Nordic–Baltic Art in the late 19th and 20th centuries

This symposium explores a new and critical Nordic–Baltic research front on cross-border relations and the artistic connectivity of the Nordic–Baltic realm and relations to European neighbours, in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

This symposium presents a new and critical Nordic–Baltic research front on cross-border relations and circulations in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sápmi (the land of the Sami) and Sweden, including interconnections with European neighbours. The invited scholars explore ideas that moves beyond “centre–periphery” models and ideas of aesthetic diffusion of innovation and the symposium will give an overview of state-of-the-art approaches to the artistic connectivity of the Nordic–Baltic realm in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

It is arranged by the Department of Art History, School of Culture and Education, Södertörn University and the Swedish Institute, Paris, in cooperation with the Research group Artl@sorbonne.fr at the École Normale Supérieure and Université de Genève, and scholars at Nordic and Baltic universities and museums. Concluding remarks will be given by Agata Jakubowska, dr habil., Associate Professor, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

The symposium will be open to public as a webinar. For registration and more information about the program contact Oscar Svanelid, crossborder@sh.se. For other enquiries on the symposium contact Marta Edling, marta.edling@sh.se or Annika Öhrner annika.ohrner@sh.se.

Contributions

* Monica GRINI

Sámi Art Beyond the Nation

In 1940, the Norwegian art historian Harry Fett described what he called “the art of the Sámi” and related it to “that of a larger group, namely the art of the peoples living in Siberia, North America and Greenland’s great plains up towards the Arctic Ocean, a part of a circumpolar culture, if you like” (1940: 232–233; my translation).

Objects and practices categorised as Norwegian art have rarely been placed in such transnational Arctic relations; instead, they have been related to a larger history of European or Western art. Sámi art has been thought to have global connections in a special way: “In different places around the globe”, writes Fett (1940: 235; my translation), “we have a living Palaeolithic art, practised today like it was done ten thousand years ago”.

More recently, the predisposition to describe Sámi art as global has been observed by the Sámi writer John Gustavsen: “There is today a tendency that Sámi art necessarily has to be global. That is, a world art which shows that one is not inferior to the others, those ‘out there’” (2011; my translation).

Yet another – similar but also different – global horizon was at work in the exhibition *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* in 2013 in Ottawa, in which several Sámi artists participated. A reviewer observed: “Curators from the National Gallery of Canada began scouring the globe a few years ago to find, in the words of one of them, ‘great’ contemporary art.

The only other ingredient beyond ‘greatness’ [...] was that the artists had to be ‘indigenous’” (Gessell 2013). Together these three examples show that various stories about Sámi art as particular kinds of transnational or global art are circulating. In this paper, I explore how Sámi objects, practices and actors in different moments and places have been inscribed in, and compared through, different narratives of regionality and globality.

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* Tominga HOPE O'DONNELL

Pivotal or peripheral? Our World of Things exhibition at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (1970) in Harald Szeemann’s curatorial career.

In the nascent historicisation of curatorial practitioners’ careers, Swiss curator Harald Szeemann (1933–2005) is by far the most renowned. He left an extensive body of work in the form of an archive of catalogues, installation shots and documentation of exhibition-related events and happenings and other paraphernalia, much of which is housed in the Getty Research Institute. In 2013, Szeemann’s most famous exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), was restaged in full at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, and a great tome produced to accompany the exhibition. What is less well-known is that between opening *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern and curating one of the most acclaimed exhibitions of contemporary art, *documenta*, in Kassel in 1972, Szeemann curated an exhibition entitled *Our World of Things – Objects* in 1970, together with Ole Henrik Moe, the director of Henie Onstad Kunstsenter outside Oslo. This presentation examines the role of this seemingly minor exhibition in the development of Szeemann’s curatorial career and what impact Ole Henrik Moe’s international network had on the relatively peripheral status Norway had within the contemporary art landscape at the time. The exhibition was staged in 1970 at both the Kunsthalle Nürnberg and Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, and it is telling to see how *Our World of Things* was differently received in Germany and Norway. Moe’s negotiations with his international collaborators and how Szeemann ended up taking or receiving greater credit for the development of the curatorial concept may speak to the relative power of this small museum outside Oslo and its director.

Tominga Hope O’Donnell is a Senior Curator at MUNCH, Oslo.

* Giedrė JANKEVICIUTE

This presentation is based on the comments showing the reactions of Baltic art critics to the transnational exhibition *Âmes Sauvages: Le symbolisme dans les pays baltes* (curator Rodolphe Rapetti), inaugurated at the Musée Orsay in 2018 and later shown in the three national art museums of the three Baltic states, namely in Tallinn, Vilnius and Riga.

In this presentation, I will address some of the preconceptions about the historiography of culture and art from the Nordic–Baltic realm when viewed from the outside. The genesis of this attitude is from the 1930s onwards, including the disappearance of these three countries from the European political map during the Nazi and Soviet occupations, a brief overview of which will be given.

A short historical deviation helps to better understand the roots and nature of the brief overview of which will be given. A short historical deviation helps to better understand the roots and nature of the stereotypes which mark the relations that emerged between the Baltic states and “the centre” in connection with the exhibition and the rhetoric of its advertising. Some of the difficulties in accepting and interpreting the 20th-century artistic heritage of the three Baltic states are discussed in this context.

[Giedre Jankevičiūtė](#) is Prof. Dr. at the Lithuanian Institute for Cultural Research, Vilnius.

* Anna JOHANNSDOTTIR

Landscaping modernism: Negotiating modern painting within a classical genre in early 20th-century Iceland

The emergence of a landscape tradition in art and photography in late 19th-century Iceland, inspired by classical European models, was closely bound to the nation’s identity formation and a slow process of modernisation. Once this process began to accelerate, during the second quarter of the 20th century, especially due to World War II, the development of a painterly representation of landscape was itself a manifestation of these changes, involving considerable tension between traditional values and new progressive views.

The importance of modern landscape painting in the national narrative was not only reflected in the genre’s popularity well into the 20th century but also through its enthusiastic, if often critical, reception in public discourse. Many artists who had experimented with new art trends during their studies abroad turned to landscape painting at home. In this genre, the artists were presented with a particularly rich field in which to test the tension mentioned above.

Although their experiments were contested in the public sphere right from the start and seen by some as “foreign”, the new trends in art slowly made their way into landscape painting. There they contributed to certain shifts in the representation and contextualisation of national identity – the identity of a small nation living in vast expanses of land – while paving the way for an increasing abstraction in Icelandic art. Through the analysis of key works and the public, aesthetic and critical discourses on art, this paper presents an inquiry into landscape painting in Iceland as a space where modernism was negotiated.

Anna Johannsdóttir is an artist and an art historian, sessional lecturer at the University of Iceland and Iceland University of the Arts.

* Krista KODRES

In search of cultural belonging: The concept of the Baltic–Nordic artedominium and Baltic art historiography in the 1920s and 1930s

In 1932, Alfred Vaga writes in the “History of Estonian Art” that “in all the countries of the Baltic–Nordic region, art had more or less the same character from the 12th to the early 16th century, and developed in close unity, in the same direction and with mutual influence [...]. In the Baltic–Nordic artedominium (BNA), art progressed more or less independently, and the inevitable impact of foreign influences was shaped by the region’s creative spirit and according to its own manner”.

In the 1930s, the chair of art history at the University of Tartu was the Swede Sten Karling, who adopted the concept of BNA to apply to later art historical periods too, thus offering new Estonian nation builders a cultural space to identify with and to distance the space from German colonial roots. The concept of BNA was actually established in 1927 by a Swede as well, namely the art history professor at Stockholm University College Johnny Roosval, whom Karling, of course, knew.

My presentation asks what ideas formed the core of BNA, what was the context in which these ideas grew, how can their agency in art historiography be evaluated and, finally, what were the narratives, produced by the BNA concept, about the past of Estonian art.

Krista Kodres is a Professor and Head of the PhD Curriculum in Art History and Visual Culture, Estonia Academy of Art.

* Stefan NYGÅRD

Scandinavia as a cultural semi-periphery

Drawing on the concept of semi-periphery in world-systems theory, this paper examines how artists, writers and intellectuals from the Scandinavian region positioned themselves in European and global cultural space at the turn of the 20th century. My starting point is the late 19th-century movement launched in Copenhagen by Georg Brandes (1842–1927) for a “modern breakthrough” in Scandinavian intellectual life. Against the backdrop of the demise of political Scandinavianism in the wake of the Dano-German war of 1864, culture became increasingly important for situating Scandinavia in the world. Within the region, modernisers often sought to combine local content with international form. But Brandes and other small-state intellectuals at the time also claimed that their comparative outlook had a broader significance for the functioning of the system as a whole (corresponding to Immanuel Wallerstein’s conception of the semi-periphery’s role in stabilising the world-system). They did so by contrasting their understanding of universalisation as refinement through reconciliation of competing traditions, against universalism as power and domination. In his outline for a “sociology of thirdness”, which is particularly useful for analysing how Scandinavian actors inserted themselves between the more dominant cultures, Georg Simmel acknowledges not only the beneficial effects of the mediator or arbiter in

alleviating tensions between antagonistic elements, but also the power bestowed on the third party who benefits from having a privileged relationship with mutually ignorant conflicting parties. The purpose of my contribution is to assess the value of the concept of semi-periphery and Simmel's reflections on "the sociological logic of the situation of three" for understanding the place of Scandinavia in the geopolitics of European cultural and intellectual life.

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* Karen WESTPHAL ERIKSEN

Concepts of modernism: Re-evaluating figuration and abstraction in Danish post-war art

In the 1950s, Danish sculptor Robert Jacobsen developed two different modes of sculptural expression. He created geometrical abstract iron sculptures with a calligraphic appearance and an extensive use of negative space. At the same time, he made a series of "dolls", sculptures made from scrap metal. They were narrative and anecdotal in appearance. In art history, the two forms of expression have been seen as having nothing in common, and the dolls, although owned by many museums, are rarely, if ever, on show.

Robert Jacobsen was the in-house artist at the Gallery Denise René, opened in Paris in 1944. The dolls caused a dispute between him and his French agent, Denise René, who refused to exhibit them. Her marginalisation of the dolls in favour of Jacobsen's abstract sculptures has shaped later art historical writings on Jacobsen. The dolls were, however, at the time of their making well received by critics, buyers and museums and connected to a wide network of cultural and artistic influences in the European context.

In my paper, I discuss why and how we should change the art historical narrative on Robert Jacobsen and what insights we can gain from changing our approach and what difficulties we encounter when we historicise old narrative frameworks of abstraction/figuration and centre/periphery.

[Karen Westphal Eriksen](#) is a researcher at National Gallery of Denmark.

* Christina WISTMAN

Building legitimacy and gaining approval via Paris: Prince Eugen and the first museum of Swedish modern art

When the Swedish art museum Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde opened in Stockholm in 1948, it was the first Swedish museum dedicated to Swedish modern art. This presentation will highlight some of the founding conditions for the collecting process and the social sphere of activity of Prince Eugen (1865-1947) as an art collector, and the vital function of Paris in building his relations to Swedish artists and the Swedish art field.

Having a fortune and ranking high in social prestige did not give prince Eugen any advantages, and in order to acquire a position in the Swedish art field he needed legitimacy. And he did what many other aspiring Swedish artists did; he travelled to Paris in order to study at the free academies and live as an artist. As young and unexperienced he was, Eugen

recognized that as important for an actor on the art field, and it also gave him social access to the leading Swedish artists and the Scandinavian colony of artists in the city.

It was here he made his first acquisition of Swedish art in 1887 and it may be seen as a way for him to convert his economic and social capital into field-specific symbolic capital. It was a strategy in order to make himself noteworthy, but also to prove his loyalty to the group he aimed to be a part of; Swedish modern artists and especially the non-academic group of artists.

Christina Wistman is a Deputy Director and curator at Museum Swedena Jamtli, Östersund.



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