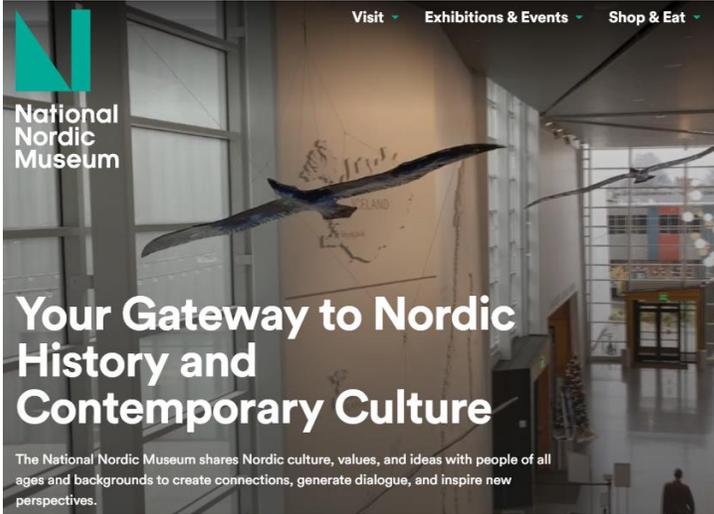


Nordic Museum, Ballard, Seattle, June 17 2022



From Dawn to Dusk: Nordic Art from Sweden's Nationalmuseum

Nationalmuseum is Sweden's museum of art and design. The collection comprises paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints from 1500–1900, as well as applied arts, design, and portraits from early Middle Ages up until present day. The collections include masterpieces by European artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Peter Paul Rubens, François Boucher, Francisco Goya, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Édouard Manet and Berthe Morisot, as well as important works by Swedish artists such as Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn. The collection of old master drawings is regarded as one of the most important in the world and includes master drawings by artists such as Raphael and Albrecht Dürer.

France was the land of opportunity for aspiring artists. In Paris, it was possible to study at private academies with greater freedom than at home. This applied not least to women artists. The aim was to have a work accepted by the jury for the annual Salon and reach its broad audience. Nordic artists travelled there in the 1870s and were exposed to Impressionism. However, it was the artists referred to as “Naturalists” that impressed the Scandinavians – in other words, the artists who painted subjects from contemporary everyday surroundings with photographic clarity in bright light.

Photos by Jimmy Granström

Taken at the Nordic Museum on June 17 2022

Harriet Backer (Norwegian, 1845–1932)

A Country Cobbler, 1887

Oil on canvas





Hildegard Thorell (Swedish, 1850–1930)
Lady in Mourning, 1896



Anders Zorn (Swedish, 1860–1920)
Dalecarlian Girl Knitting, Kål-Margit, 1901
Oil on canvas

The Century of the Child

During the 19th century, attitudes toward children and their place in the family and in society changed after the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed a new lens through which to see children. For example, he emphasized that children's open-mindedness could set an example for adults. In 1900, Ellen Key published *The Century of the Child* (*Barnetsarhundrade*), in which she argued for a view of children as individuals and the importance of development based on these terms. This had an impact on art created in this period. Children played a more prominent role in art and were depicted as freer than ever before.



Hanna Hirsch-Pauli (Swedish, 1864–1940)

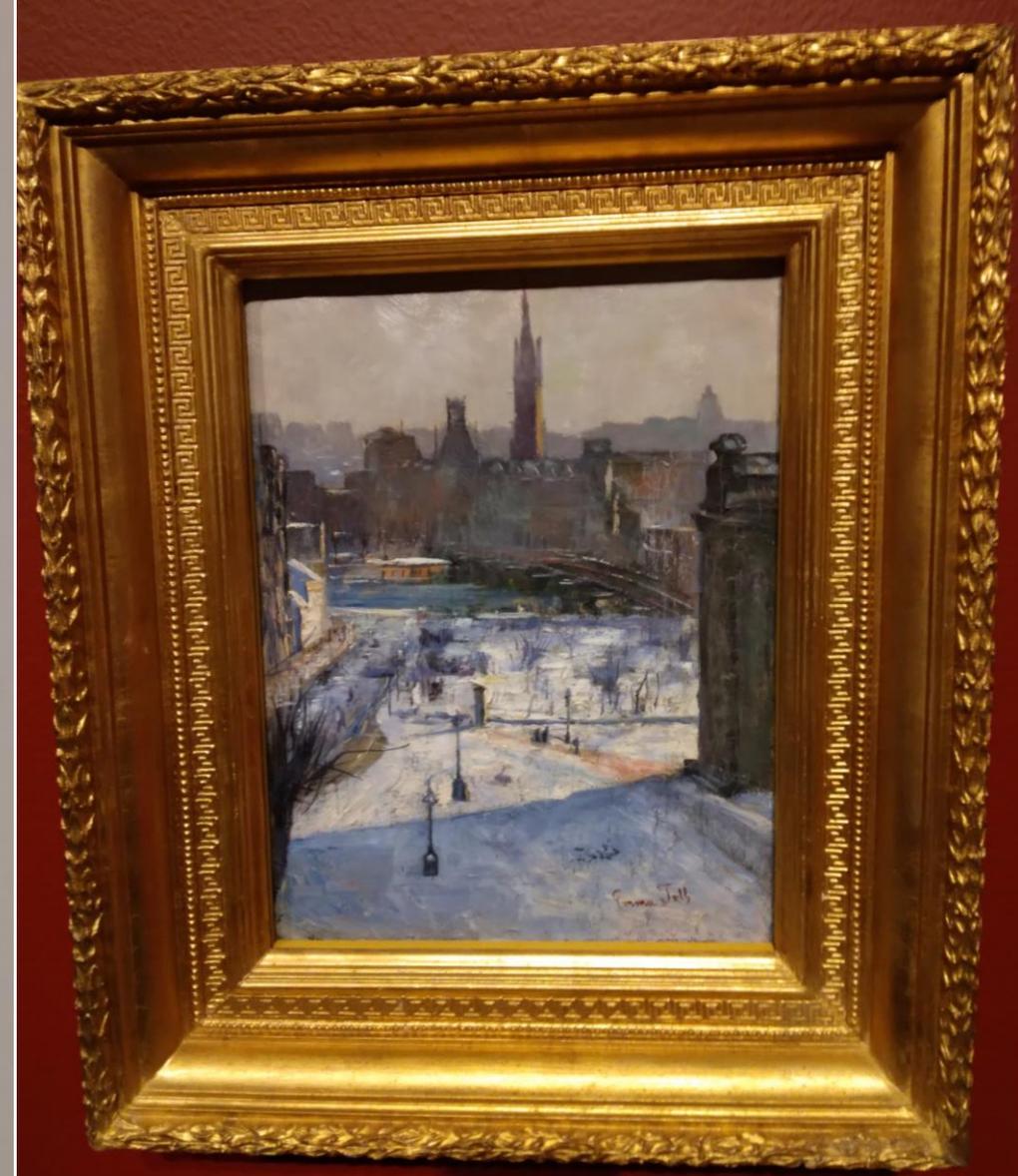
At the Grand Piano, 1892

Karl Nordström (Swedish, 1855–1923)

View of Stockholm from Skansen, 1889



Back in Scandinavia, there had been slight change in landscape painting over the years, and its status was lower than history painting at art academies. Plein-air (“open air”) painting had a long tradition in France and its Nordic origins may be traced to the teachings of Danish Golden Age artist and academy professor C. W. Eckersberg (1783 – 1853), yet it had not made a significant impact on Nordic art. It was practiced before the middle of the century, and the Barbizon painters in France had later inspired the Impressionists and the Naturalists. In the works painted by Nordic artists in France, the emphasis was on rendering the atmosphere and the effects of light. Greyish and misty days became popular, as they suited intentions like these.



Emma Toll (Swedish, 1847–1917)
View of Riddarholmen, undated



Alfred Bergström (Swedish, 1869–1930)

Winter Scene from the Stockholm Waterfront, 1899

Oil on canvas

Gift of Ms. Birgit Rosin, 2004 (NM 7023)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum

Bergström had been to France. However, like many Swedish artists of his day, he was not particularly influenced by Impressionism. This painting is an exception. The artist renders the fleeting impact of sunlight and shadow on the entire snow-covered landscape. Blue, grey, mauve and other colors fill his palette. Yet, the viewer has no difficulty in perceiving the snow as white.



Olof Arborelius (Swedish, 1842–1915)

Lake View at Engelsberg, Västmanland, 1893

Oil on canvas

Purchase, 1894 (NM 1472)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum

Olof Arborelius was a member of the older generation of artists, and he specialized in scenes from everyday life. He was also an accomplished landscape painter. This motif from Engelsberg in Västmanland County shows that he was no reactionary. He was influenced later in his career by plein air (“open air”) painting. On one occasion, this painting was voted as being the “most Swedish” picture of the Swedish countryside and was called “the Sweden painting.”

Nordic Symbolism

In the 1890s, art took on new directions in France. Nordic artists began to take an interest in what was called Symbolism. This still involved depicting the world around them, but not in the same accurate and straightforward way. Instead, they based works on people's feelings and attempted to render moods and atmospheres that affected the viewers at an emotional rather than an intellectual level. Everything, from portraits to landscapes, could be painted from this aspect.



Otto Hesselbom (Swedish, 1848–1913)
Summer Night. Study, undated

Monumental Twilight

The most striking paintings from this period monumentalize twilight motifs. Their size was used to emphasize the mood in the landscape and cityscape. The large format also captures the nuances of twilight and the light at night in the north. In most cases, these motifs are devoid of figures, enhancing the experience of the silent, melancholic remoteness that was viewed as typically Nordic.

August Strindberg (Swedish, 1849–1912)

The Town, 1903

Oil on canvas

Purchase, 1949 (NM 4516)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum



The Varberg School

In the years between 1893 and 1896, Swedish artists Richard Bergh, Nils Kreuger, and Karl Nordström went to Varberg on Sweden's west coast to paint. They had returned from France to take part in the creation of a new national art and realized that they needed to leave Stockholm to achieve their aims. In Varberg and its environs, they found motifs that aligned with their vision of the Swedish countryside. Unfolding and evocative, Varberg also bore the mark of generations of farming. Moreover, there were prehistoric sites that testified to the country's long and rich history.



Nils Kreuger (Swedish, 1858–1930)

The Håsten Hill at Varberg II, 1896

Oil on canvas

Gauguin as a Source of Inspiration

Paul Gauguin began as an Impressionist, but then shifted to painting landscape and genre paintings in a simplified style with bold colors. This was a way of coming to terms with Naturalism and Impressionism, which he considered too superficial. To achieve his aim he appropriated and assimilated non-Western pictorial conventions. He wanted to paint the world around him as if he was seeing it for the first time and give the viewer the same experience. Artists across Europe followed his lead, including Scandinavian painters who viewed their own countries with the same eyes.

Interestingly, Gauguin had connections to the Nordic countries. He lived in Copenhagen with his Danish wife Mette Gad during Winter 1884 – 1885, until he set off for France and later, French Polynesia, where his best-known works were painted. Important exhibitions including his work were organized, such as *Nordiske og franske Impressionister* in Copenhagen in 1889.



John Sten (Swedish, 1879–1922)

Autumn Landscape, 1906

Oil on canvas

Purchase, Hedda and N.D. Qvist Fund, 2015 (NM 7302)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum

John Sten painted this groundbreaking work without having traveled abroad. He attended the Artists' Association's school, and his teacher was Richard Bergh. Bergh owned a painting (see below) by French artist Gauguin that inspired several Swedish painters. Here, Sten goes so far in his selection of the landscape's colors that the painting becomes almost luminous. By choosing to paint the fence blue, Sten enhances the effect of the orange autumnal leaves, as these are complementary colors.



Paul Gauguin (French, 1848 – 1903), *Landscape from Brittany*, 1889, oil on canvas, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Ester Almqvist (Swedish, 1869 – 1934)

The Weeping Birch, 1900





Laurits Andersen Ring (Danish, 1854–1933)

The Lineman, 1884–1906

Oil on canvas

Purchase, 1951 (NM 4882)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum

Laurits Andersen Ring frequently depicted life in the Danish countryside. When he painted *The Lineman*, he had not yet been to France, which did not prevent him from using the silvery, misty atmosphere often connected with the Scandinavian artists who had travelled there. The artist also derived indirect inspiration from contemporary French art for his realistic subject matter, such as in this painting.

Laurits Andersen Ring (Danish, 1854–1933)

An Evening Gathering, 1886



Twilight Interiors

Around the end of the 19th century, interiors became increasingly popular motifs. The effect of twilight on the countryside had an indoor equivalent in scenes of everyday life and portraits. The dim light made rooms more intimate and, at the same time, enhanced the feeling of the darkness outside. It became common for artists to select motifs in which they depicted their companions in candlelight.



Hans Fredrik Gude (Norwegian, 1825–1903)
The Sandvik Fjord, 1879

Bruno Liljefors (Swedish, 1860–1939)
A Fox Family, 1886



Visual Art, Music, and Literature

The arts are inextricably linked. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, shared artistic interests included twilight, enigmatic landscapes, and melancholy. Painters, sculptors, composers, and writers met frequently and operated within an artistic milieu. It was not uncommon for them to belong to the same artistic fraternities. Several paintings on display evidence their camaraderie.

Carl Larsson (Swedish, 1853–1919)
The Author August Strindberg, 1899



AUG·STRINDBERG
FVRVSVD · JVLII · 1899 · RITADT AF HANS
GAMLE VAN · C.L.

• B 308. LARSSON, CARL · PORTRATT AF AUGUST STRINDBERG
Köpt af Statens Museum för Historiska Byggnadsminnen



Anders Zorn (Swedish, 1860–1920)

Coquelin Cadet, Actor, 1889

Oil on canvas

Scandinavia in a New Light

During the 1880s, countless artists travelled back and forth between France and Scandinavia. While in their native countries, they painted Nordic motifs in the style they had cultivated in the south. In 1885, 85 Swedish artists signed what was known as the Opposition Manifesto, and one aim was to reform the Academy of Art and the way it arranged exhibitions. This protest included the organization of the independent exhibitions *On the Banks of the Seine* and *The Opposition's Exhibition (Opponenternas utställning)*, which displayed the latest works by artists who had been to France. In 1886, the Artists' Association was established as an alternative to the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts.



Ivar Nyberg (Swedish, 1855–1925)

Elegant Walkers, Kungsklyftan, Fjällbacka, 1889



Sofie Werenskiold (Norwegian, 1849–1926)

Fjord Landscape, 1882

Oil on wooden panel

Gift of Oscar II, King of Sweden, 1905
(NM 6944)

Collection of the Nationalmuseum

Sofie Werenskiold first studied in Munich but travelled to France to study plein-air (“open air”) painting. She painted this fjord landscape in the summer of 1882, just after returning home from Villiers-le-Bel, north of Paris. The rendering of the calm, damp grey atmosphere shows Werenskiold’s sharp eye and great technical virtuosity. She gave up her profession when she married the artist Erik Werenskiold, a common fate for women artists who were expected to conform to ossified and outmoded gender norms.