



— 1. Valde Rosenberg, *Seated Lady*, 1913; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery

Transnationality and stylistic ideology in semi-cubist Finnish art between 1914 and 1923

Timo Huusko

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

My article focuses on the changes in Finnish modern art and artistic discourse during the World War I and the declaration of Finnish independence in 1917–1918. It can be said that the Great War changed artistic networks radically, because travel to France was no longer possible. Finland's Independence, for its part, changed the Finnish art world, bringing with it ideas of national modernism. These changes centred partly around the role of cubism, which in Finland was seen as a logical continuation of Paul Cézanne's art. Cubism was also gradually compared with classical art because of its structural clarity. This kind of clarity was needed in order to link emotionally loaded expressionist art with illusionism, and by doing so, to keep up associations with nature and with national characteristics. The change is best exemplified in the art of Tyko Sallinen (1879–1955) and Marcus Collin (1882–1966).

I am also interested to show that in this process there were transnational connections¹, not only between Finland, Scandinavia and France, but also between Finland, Russia and Germany and even between Finland and other new states, which were born after the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian empires collapsed. These connections or networks can be found in the formal elements and iconography of a kind of cubo-expressionism. Cubo-expressionism seemed to serve as a platform and an ideological tool for those who had thoughts of national modernism in countries such as Poland, Latvia, Estonia as well as in Finland. It is obvious that artists in Finland were not conscious of what happened in the Baltics or Poland, because there are no direct contacts between the artists. However, there are many parallels that emerged out of general views of the role



¹ I use the term “transnationality” in the same way that it is used in: **H. van den Berg, L. Głuchowska**, *The Inter-, Trans- and Postnationality of the Historical Avant-Garde: Introduction*, [in:] *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, Ed. **iidem**, Leuven 2013, pp. ix–xvii. Transnationality consists thus mainly of networks between people from different countries and nationalities.



² Of reception of cubism in Finland see S. Sarajas-Korte, *Kubismi-radikalismiavai klassismia. Kubismin käsityksiä Suomessa 1910-luvulla*, "Ateneumin Taidemuseo. Museojulkaisu" Vol. 14 (1969), pp. 7–8; T. Huusko, *The Reception of Cubism in Finland*, "Ars" 2014, No. 2, pp. 113–120.

³ See e.g. *Modernismens genombrott. Nordiskt måleri 1910–1920* [exhibition cat.], 12 August – 8 December 1989, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Ed. C. T. Edam, N. G. Hökby, B. Schreiber, Stockholm 1989; *Electromagnetic: Modern Art in Northern Europe 1918–1931* [exhibition cat.], Ed. G. C. Fabre, G. Mørland, T. Hansen, 26 September – 15 December 2013, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo 2013.

⁴ Alanco went there together with Swede John Sten.

⁵ See O. Valkonen, *Cubism in Finland*, [in:] *Picasso ja kubismi Suomessa* [exhibition cat.], Ed. K. Salmela-Hasán, I. Karttunen, K. Väkiparta, 25 May – 28 August 1994, Retretti, Helsinki 1994, p. 136.

⁶ See O. Valkonen, *Maalaustaiteen murros Suomessa 1908–1914. Uudet suuntaukset maalaustaiteessa, taidearvostelussa ja taidekirjoittelussa*, Jyväskylä 1973, p. 79.

⁷ See D. Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories*, Manchester – New York 2004, pp. 16–17.

⁸ See O. Valkonen, *Maalaustaiteen...*, pp. 125–128.

⁹ J. Thiis, *Betragtninger og karakteristiker av modern fransk maleri*, "Kunst og Kultur" Vol. 3 (1912/1913), p. 40.

¹⁰ See S. Sarajas-Korte, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

of new art, and it may be possible to draw common threads, when one tries to map the topography of Finnish semi-cubism in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

Roots of cubism in Finland

Cubism and its reception in Finland² can be traced back to the developments and history of cubism in France. Finnish artists were not, however, as closely connected to French cubism as were artists in Scandinavia³. A Finn Uno Alanco (1878–1964) studied in Paris under Henri Le Fauconnier at the free art academy La Palette⁴, and even had works at the Salon des Independants exhibition in Paris in the spring of 1913⁵. Other Finns who lived in Paris and drew on cubism were Kalle Kuutola, Alvar Cawén, and Collin.

The term "cubism" was first mentioned in Finnish art criticism in the autumn of 1911⁶. Alanco sent the book *Du cubisme* (1912), by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, to Finnish artist Magnus Enckell (1870–1925) at the end of 1912. Both Enckell and Alanco saw the importance of a certain dependence on nature while creating an art work – as Gleizes and Metzinger also emphasised – and like Metzinger and Gleizes, Alanco admired Paul Cézanne. In terms of Finnish publicity *Du cubisme* first presented by the art critic Onni Okkonen in February 1913. It can be said that cubism was presented in Finland in the form of so-called salon cubism or "academic" cubism and not in the form of the so-called gallery cubism, which centred around Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and had Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque as its leading figures⁷.

Jens Thiis and the influence of Cézanne

In Finland, cubism was understood to continue the heritage of Cézanne. This idea had already been expressed in *Du cubisme*, but in Finland it became a prevailing opinion, thanks to Jens Thiis, who was the newly appointed Director of the Nasjonalgalleriet, National Gallery in Oslo. Thiis gave lectures on modern art in Helsinki in October 1913. The third of these lectures, called *From impressionism to cubism – object and art*, was highly influential. Thiis's notions were based especially on the impressions he had gained from the huge international exhibition of modern art which was held in Cologne and organised by Köln Sonderbund in the summer of 1912. The only Finn who is known to have visited this exhibition was Alanco⁸. This is considered Picasso to have gone furthest towards abstraction, but emphasised that cubism was built on "Cézanne's cultivation of reality"⁹. Finnish art critics took up this point and it became a widely expressed opinion that cubism and especially Picasso's cubism was the logical end in a path towards abstraction, but also a dead end, which could not lead anywhere¹⁰.

“Cubisations” in Finnish modernism

In Finland cubism was overshadowed by the popularity of expressionist art and art theories¹¹. Critics and art audiences were able to identify with the emotional power of distortion in art works, but they were not able to identify or reflect their emotions with geometric abstraction¹². In addition to Thiis’s writings and that of the Swede August Brunius, it was Wilhelm Worringer’s book, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* from 1908, which paved the way to the acceptance of expressionism¹³. Later on, the Finnish art critic Ludvig Wennervirta brought the ideas of Paul Fechter’s book, *Der Expressionismus* (1914), to the Finnish public in April 1915 and presented in this connection Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Les Peintres cubistes* (1913) seen through Fechter’s negative eye and emphasizing even more than Fechter formalism in cubism¹⁴.

If one looks at the formal aspects of the Finnish art works of that period, it is easy to see that there was no clear dichotomy between expressionism and cubism. It was a characteristic of Finnish modernism that there was a structural modulation in order to support expressivity in paintings. More influential than cubism for this kind of development in new art was the example of Cézanne. Admiration for Cézanne started in 1911, when his painting, *The Road Bridge at L’Estaque* (1879–1882) was acquired for the Ateneum Art Museum collections, and with the museum’s exhibition of Norwegian art the same year, where Edvard Munch’s new Cézanne-related expressionism¹⁵ made a huge impact on young Finnish artists. The impact of cubism started to emerge in 1914, and it is most visible in the changing nature of Sallinen’s art.

Tyko Sallinen as a key figure

In Sallinen’s case it is not so easy to map the transnational dimensions of his art from 1914 onwards. One of the reasons has been that from the mid-1910s onwards there was a strong need to emphasise that he is an artist who implies national values and whose art grows from national soil. His art has actually not been put in a European context. Another problem in discussing his art has been that he hardly spoke or wrote about it in public himself, neither did he leave any correspondence. According to Sallinen’s daughter, her father deliberately destroyed his letters¹⁶.

Sallinen went to Paris in the spring of 1914, before the outbreak of the World War I. He had been there earlier in 1909, when he was keen on the fauvists and especially Kees van Dongen, but now his interest turned to cubism and Cézanne. Sallinen’s art dealer, Gösta Stenman, had advised him to study e.g. cubists and Henri Rousseau while in Paris¹⁷. Stenman himself was also in Paris at the time and bought French art from Wilhelm Uhde and Kahnweiler’s galleries for his forthcoming exhibition of cubist and expressionist art, held in



¹¹ On term “expressionism” and how it was connected to German and French art see **T. O. Benson**, *Two Phases of European “Internationalism”*, [in:] *Transnationality...*, pp. 10–13. The word as a term was first used in Finland by Swede art critic Carl David Moselius in 1911.

¹² See **T. Huusko**, *Maalauksellisuus ja tunne. Modernistiset tulkinnat kuvataidekriitikissä 1908–1924*, Helsinki 2007, pp. 64–73.

¹³ August Brunius visited Helsinki in 1912 and his book *Färg och form* (1913) was well-known in Finland.

¹⁴ See **Y. Levanto**, *Kirjoitetut kuvat. Ludvig Wennervirtan taidekäsitys*, Helsinki 1991, pp. 162–163. On expressionism and its German connections in Finland, see **T. Huusko, T. Palin**, *Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the Discourses on Expressionism in Finland: From the November Group to Ina Behrsen-Colliander*, [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a Transnational Context*, Ed. **I. Wünsche**, New York 2018.

¹⁵ See e.g. **A. Eggum**, *Munch og Warnemünde*, [in:] *Munch og Warnemünde: 1907–1908* [exhibition cat.], Ed. **S. Bjørnstad**, 17 March – 24 May 1999, Munch-Museet, Oslo 1999, p. 39.

¹⁶ This information comes from the Hyvinkää art museum, where the archive and library of Tyko Sallinen is located. The only source which I have found and where Sallinen himself tells about his life is interestingly from France in 1914 when the Great War broke out: Sallinen tells how he acquainted with Estonian and Russian artists there. See *Sodan jaloissa. Taiteilija Tyko Sallinen kertoo näkemiään Ranskassa*, “Uusi Suometar” 1914, No. of 22 October.

¹⁷ See **L. Bäcksbacka**, *T. K. Sallinen. Hans studieår och koloristiska genombrott 1905–1914*, Helsingfors 1960, p. 47.

2. Tyko Sallinen, *Girl from Riekkala*, 1914; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery



¹⁸ See C. Hjelm, *Modernismens förespråkare. Gösta Stenman och hans konstsalong*, Helsingfors 2009, p. 43. Juan Gris' still-life *Bouteille et verre* and Maria Laurecin's *Le Bal elegant* were displayed in this exhibition also. Gris and Picasso were bought from Kahnweiler and Laurecin from Uhde.

¹⁹ See L. Bäcksbäck, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

Helsinki in January 1915¹⁸. It was the first time that a work of Picasso was shown in Finland (*LEsprit, la Tête d'un Homme*, gouache, 1912, now in Tikanoja Art Museum, Vaasa). In Paris Sallinen is known to have visited Uhde's gallery collection, most likely thanks to Stenman's contacts.

It is clear that besides cubists, Sallinen had also studied Cézanne. On his way to Paris in 1914 Sallinen had been in Malmö, where he participated in a huge exhibition of Baltic Art and saw Der Blaue Reiter's works from Germany and Russia. On this trip he also visited a big exhibition of French art, including work by Cézanne, in Copenhagen¹⁹.

Traces of Cézanne and primitivism are obvious in Sallinen's *Dwarf* from 1915 (Osthrobothnian Museum, Vaasa), which raised a polemic because it was claimed to depict ugliness. Sallinen kept on with this kind of constructive method for many years, both in portraits and landscapes, and so did many of his friends and compatriots who formed a group of artists called the November Group, in Novem-

ber 1917. It can be said that the landscape paintings of the November Group, with their characteristic iconography, constructed an artistic topos of humble Finland, with its countryside and suburban views, until the mid 1920s.

In this connection it is worth pointing out that “cubisation” or “semi-cubism” as a constructive element helped to add the acceptance of Sallinen’s and other Finnish novembrist’s art. One could even say that semi-cubism was a kind of an ideological tool or pictorial manifestation in promoting a new notion of Finnishness²⁰. This idea became more easily legible in landscapes than in portraits. At the beginning of 1920s the future architect Alvar Aalto and poet-scientist Aaro Hellaakoski were able to see national values even in Sallinen’s “monumental forms” and in his lines which “revealed the essence of typical Finnish landscape”²¹. In other words, there was an ideological content hidden in the formal elements of the paintings.

Russian avant-garde and Finnish modernism?

In Sallinen’s case there are also other interesting transnational connections. If one thinks of the primitivism that was an integral element of modern art at the time, it is to be found throughout Sallinen’s career from 1909 to 1924. However, in 1914 and especially 1915–1916, primitivism begins to show new features both in Sallinen’s choice of colours and in the structure of his paintings. There seem to be connections to the Russian avant-garde. In addition to primitivism, another element that links Sallinen to Russian art is the comparison of blue and red tones. This comparison presumably has connections to Paris, where French cubists had contact with Maria Vasiljeva’s Académie Russe, Académie Vassilieff from 1909, and to Russian avant-gardists living in Germany and belonging to the circle of Der Blaue Reiter. Vasiljeva herself was interested in combining Matisse, Cézanne and cubism, and Jean Metzinger and André Lhote visited Vasiljeva’s academy. Le Fauconnier and other cubists, such as Lyonel Feininger were later connected to Der Blaue Reiter.

The Finnish artist Valle Rosenberg (1891–1919) spent a few months in Vasiljeva’s circle at the beginning of 1914, when he had an affair with Swedish painter Siri Derkert, and Rosenberg’s *Seated Lady* was actually painted and purchased to the collections of Ate-neum in Helsinki before he went to Paris in December 1913. Rosenberg’s bold deformation and primitivism also influenced other Finnish artists²² [Fig. 1].

Sallinen had displayed a few paintings which demonstrated a new kind of sensitivity to the Finnish character in the autumn of 1914. In *Girl from Riekkala* (1914, Ateneum Art Museum) the combination of blue skirt and rose-violet blouse connects with the primitive style of the face [Fig. 2] Sallinen had already painted this work in the spring in Riekkala, an island in Lake Ladoga near Sortavala in



²⁰ See T. Huusko, *Maalauksellisuus...*, pp. 97–176.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

²² See T. Sandqvist, *Han finns, förstår du. Siri Derkert och Valle Rosenberg, Åhus 1986*, pp. 47, 77–79.



²³ See M.-L. Linder, *Ihmisen kuva Tyko Sallisen muotokuvissa 1905–1919*, Tampere 2005, pp. 179–180.

²⁴ See O. Valkonen, *Cubism...*, p. 143.

²⁵ See S. Sinisalo, *In Search of New Means of Expression*, [in:] *Nordic Dawn: Modernism's Awakening in Finland 1890–1920* [exhibition cat.], Ed. S. Koja, 15 June – 2 October 2005, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, Munich 2005, p. 88.

²⁶ See L. Savolainen, *Ilmari Aallon taiteen alkuvaiheita*, "Ateneumin Taidemuseo. Museojulkaisu" 1967, No. 3/4, p. 18.

²⁷ See L. Wennervirta, *Marcus Collin. En blick på det finländska måleriet under åren 1900–1920*, Helsingfors 1925, 47.

Karelia, the border zone between Finland and Russia. The old doors of the Orthodox church in Riekkala island have possibly been some kind of inspiration for Sallinen²³.

Der Blaue Reiter and cubo-expressionism

Der Blaue Reiter's art was displayed in Helsinki in February 1914, at the Strindberg Art Gallery, when Herwarth Walden's "Der Sturm" exhibition travelled there from Kristiania (Oslo). The exhibition had also been in Germany and Budapest and after Helsinki it went to Trondheim and Gothenburg. Alongside works by Munich-based Russian avant-gardists, visitors had the opportunity to see for example August Macke's painting *Der Sturm* and Franz Marc's *Yellow Cow*. A connection to *Yellow Cow* can be seen in Sallinen's *Race* from 1917 (Ateneum Art Museum).

It is also obvious that Marc's works had an impact on Cawén's paintings in 1914, even though prior to that he had been interested in French cubism. Connections to Marc can be seen in his *Nude (sketch)* (ca. 1915–1917, Helsinki Art Museum), which resembles Marc's *Tiger* from 1912, and in the angular and curvilinear elements in *Girl Reading* (1914, private collection) [Fig. 3] Cawén was otherwise keen to create colour harmonies and he used dark constructive lines to articulate forms and space into a structure of facets. His interest in using shades of purple, violet, green and yellow unites him to the works of Le Fauconnier, whom he aimed to study alongside Picasso as late as in 1919²⁴, but his sombre tones have also been interpreted as nationally characteristic in the discourse of November Group's art in Finland.

It has been said that cubism and expressionism in Finland was most often fused into what is called cubo-futurism in Russian art²⁵. This is, however, exaggerated, unless one excludes some works of Tyko Sallinen and Marcus Collin, but one can see, that besides Gleize's cubism, there are obvious elements from cubo-futurism or "cubo-futo-expressionism" in Ilmari Aalto's well-known *Bells* from 1914, which was shown in Stenman's exhibition of cubist and expressionist art in 1915 [Fig. 4]. His *Cubist still-lives* from 1915 and 1916 (Ateneum Art Museum; Helsinki Art Museum) are more in accord with French cubism as represented by Picasso. Aalto is known not to have been abroad before his trip to Paris in 1920, but he studied cubism from art books²⁶.

The only Finnish artist who is known to have visited Moscow in order to study modern art there is Collin, who went in the autumn of 1916²⁷. Collin fused elements of Cézanne, expressionism and cubism in his art from 1914 onwards. He obviously went to see the Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov collections in Moscow in 1916, and there is indeed a connection between Picasso's *Woman Farmer (La Fermière)* from 1908 (Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) and Col-



3. Alvar Cawén, *Girl Reading*, 1914; private collection. Photo: Finnish National Gallery



4. Ilmari Aalto, *The Bells*, 1914; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery



5. Marcus Collin, *Harvest*, 1915; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery

lin's *Grieving Jeremiah* (private collection) from 1916. In addition, some of his works, such as *Harvest* (1915, Ateneum Art Museum), have similarities to Russian neoprimitivism, both in modulation and colouring [Fig. 5].

Sallinen, Russia and Germany

What can be said of Sallinen's direct connections to Russia? Not so much, but it is known that his dealer Stenman visited St. Petersburg often. Sallinen himself participated in the exhibition of the Free Artists Association in Burtsev's exhibition hall in St. Petersburg at the end of 1914. Sallinen and his friends Ilmari Aalto, Ragnar Ekelund and Juho Mäkelä were invited to join the association²⁸. There is no information about Sallinen's visits to St. Petersburg after 1914 before the beginning of 1917, but it is known that Stenman spent occasional months in St. Petersburg purchasing art, and it is also claimed that he planned to open an art gallery there before Revolution²⁹.

There was in fact nothing strange about being a Finn in St. Petersburg at the time. Finland belonged to Russia and tens of thousands of Finns lived in St. Petersburg. The Finnish Art Society had also had its own agent there for decades. Pupils from the Finnish Art Society's art school visited art exhibitions in St. Petersburg, even though the frequency of these trips is not documented. There was an organised trip to centennial exhibition of French art in St. Petersburg in 1912³⁰.



²⁸ See S. Sinisalo, *Om finnar, ryssar, avant-garde*, [in:] *Avantgarde 1900–1930. Tjudnovskijs samling från St. Petersburg* [exhibition cat.], Ed. H. Sariola, L. Jaakkola, 14 October 1993 – 9 January 1994, Ateneum, Helsinki 1994, p. 66, footnote 13.

²⁹ See C. Hjelm, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–55.

³⁰ See L. Bäcksbacka, *Ragnar Ekelund. En studie över stilutveckling i hans måleri 1913–1920*, Helsingfors 1961, p. 8. Exhibition reached chronologically to Derain and Vlaminck.



6. Greta Hällfors-Sipilä, *Chess*, ca. 1918–1920; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery

When it comes to Sallinen, the most interesting comparison with the Russian avant-garde is the art of the *Bubnovyj valet*, or Knave of Diamonds group³¹. From the beginning there was also the art of Der Blaue Reiter group included, and French cubists showed work in the Knave of Diamonds' exhibitions. The only exhibition of the group in St. Petersburg was held in April 1913, though, but Natalia Goncharova, who belonged to the group until 1911, had a big retrospective in St. Petersburg at the beginning of 1914 in Nadezhda Dobychina's Art Bureau.

Some artists from the Knave of Diamonds group, such as Andrei Konchalovsky, Ilya Mashkov and Goncharova, combined elements of Cézanne and the cubists with primitivism, which was national, or to be more precise, originated from Russian folk art. What is interesting to note is that, this kind of combination also began to show in Sallinen's art, from 1916 onwards. The first example of primitive folk art in Sallinen's work was actually inspired by Marc Chagall's work. Sallinen painted a portrait of his mother in a strict primitive, almost totem-like manner (1916, Tampere Art Museum). Its connection to Chagall's *Praying Jew (Rabbi of Vitebsk)*, from 1914 has been noted³², but it has not been connected to the fact that the painting of Chagall was displayed in Helsinki in May 1916 at the exhibition of Russian art at Strindberg's art Salon. The exhibition was produced by Madame Dobychina³³.

It is still not known how Dobychina³⁴ (nee Fishman) came into contacts with Finnish artists and with Sven Strindberg, who ran the Strindberg gallery. Sven was August Strindberg's cousin and moved to Stockholm to run Liljevalchs Kunsthalle at the end of 1916³⁵. After the exhibition of Russian art in Helsinki, Dobychina had a holiday there in the summer of 1916 and saw Vassily Kandinsky's exhibition in September in Strindberg's Salon. That exhibition came from Kristiania and was organised by Walden. It had been in Gummeson art gallery in Stockholm earlier that year. After Helsinki, works by Kandinsky went to Dobychina's Art Bureau³⁶.

Obvious traces and influences from exhibitions of Russian art and of Kandinsky's art in Salon Strindberg in 1916 can be seen in Sulho Sipilä's (1895–1949) and Greta Hällfors-Sipilä's (1899–1979) art. Many of their works feature the colours of Russian avant-garde and skilful adaptations of Kandinsky or Chagall. Hällfors-Sipilä, whose mother was Russian, also made some paintings that have an almost purist geometrical construction, like *Chess* (1918–1920, Ateneum Art Museum [Fig. 6]). Hällfors-Sipilä and Sipilä did not study abroad and their works from that period did not generate discussion in the Finnish art media before the 1970s. Hällfors-Sipilä's connections to Russian constructivism and the works of Aleksandra Ekster and Lyubov Popova would deserve closer study³⁷.

On her trip to Helsinki in the summer of 1916, Dobychina and the Director of Ateneum Art Museum, Gustaf Strengell, agreed to



³¹ See *Ruutusotamies. Taiteen etujoukko ja Venäjän kansa* [exhibition cat.], 13 October 2006 – 7 January 2007, EMMA, Ed. E. A. Petrova, I. Karttunen, Espoo 2006, p. 93–100.

³² M. Linder, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–100. Chagall's painting is now in Museo d'Arte Moderna in Venice.

³³ Of the exhibition, see T. Huusko, *The Reception...*, pp. 118–119.

³⁴ Madame Dobychina (1884–1950) was the first professional art dealer in Russia. Her agency was opened in 1911 or 1912 and in 1919 it was closed down.

³⁵ On Sven Strindberg's avant-garde exhibitions in Finland, see J. Siukonen, *Humpuukia ja hulluutta. Uuden taiteen vastaanotto 1910-luvun Suomessa*, Helsinki 2023.

³⁶ See E. G. Soini, *Finljändija v literaturnom i hudožestvennom nasledii russkogo avangarda*, Moskva 2009, pp. 34–39; S. Sarajas-Korte, *Kandinsky ja Suomi II (1916). Venäläinen näyttely ja Kandinskyn yksityisnäyttely 1916*, "Ateneumin Taide-museo. Museojulkaisu" 1971, No. 1/2.

³⁷ Works by Ekster were displayed in the exhibition of Russian art in Helsinki in 1916. Constructivism is obvious in Hällfors-Sipilä's paintings *Bangs* (ca. 1920, Ateneum Art Museum) and *At the Coffee-table* (ca. 1919, private collection).



³⁸ See **B. Hellman**, “*Mnogo! Mnogoo! Mnogoo!*”. *Suomalainen taidenäyttely Petrogradissa 1917*, “*Idäntutkimus*” 2002, No. 4, pp. 27–28.

³⁹ An exhibition catalogue with the list of works in French and Russian can be found in Finnish National Gallery’s Document Archive. Sallinen had 14 paintings exhibited.

⁴⁰ **B. Hellman**, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28. Wennervirta’s comment is found in newspaper “*Turun Sanomat*” 1917, No. of 4 April.

⁴² Of connections between Goncharova and Sallinen, see **T. Huusko**, *Suomalaisen tarinan saksalaisvenäläinen säie: Tyko Sallisen kansankuva ja primitivismi*, “*Ta-hiti*” 2018, No. 3.

⁴³ One painting by Goncharova, *Still-life*, was seen in Helsinki, in *Der Sturm* exhibition, in 1914.

⁴⁴ **S. Tandefelt**, *Vasily Kandinskys utställning*, “*Dagens Press*” 1916, No. of 19 September.

mount an exhibition of Finnish art in Dobychina’s Art Bureau³⁸. This exhibition opened in April 1917. The curators were Juho Rissanen and Sallinen himself. Unfortunately, nothing exact is known of Sallinen’s involvement in the exhibition organisation or contacts he had there, except that he gave a speech in the opening ceremony festivities, probably in French³⁹. Prominent Russian avant-gardists participated in the exhibition opening, among them David Burliuk, Vladimir Mayakovski and Osip Brik⁴⁰. Finnish art was celebrated at the opening ceremony, but Finland’s bid for independence from Russia was happening at the same time and it dampened Russia’s interest in Finnish art. It is characteristic of the time of early enthusiasm, that among others, the art critic Ludvig Wennervirta was looking forward to the exhibition and declared that, instead of orienting themselves towards Sweden, Finns needed to look to Russian art world from now on⁴¹.

Sallinen and Goncharova

Sallinen’s interest in the Russian avant-garde shows clearly in his painting *Tradesman’s Daughters* [Fig. 7] which was made in Hyvinkää in the spring of 1917. Asiatic features in the daughters’ faces were so evident that in Finland the painting was called *Daughters of the Chinese Tradesman*. What actually links the painting with Russian avant-garde is the composition and the rhythm, which is reminiscent of Goncharova’s art⁴². Goncharova’s method is also seen in work by another Finnish painter Eemu Myntti, *Girl Smoking* (1916, Museum of Ostrobothnia, Vaasa)⁴³.

In some of his paintings of male figures Sallinen has references to works by Pjotr Konchalovsky, and in his *Babysitter* (1917, Museum of Ostrobothnia, Vaasa) there are connections to both Picasso’s *Bathing* (1908, former Shchukin Collection; now Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) and to Vladimir Tatlin’s *Fishmonger* (1911, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).

In addition to experimenting with formal elements and primitivist iconography, Sallinen also explored unusual colour combinations, which bore a resemblance to what was considered Russian colour sensitivity. In connection with Salon Strindberg’s exhibition of Russian art in 1916, the art critic Signe Tandefelt wrote of Kandinsky’s strange and “Russian” colours, referring to the combination of blues, reds and greens, which “Russians love, but which forcibly with almost physical pain hit the Western eye”⁴⁴. A combination of red and green is dominant in Sallinen’s *Devil’s Dance* from 1917–1918 (Museum of Ostrobothnia, Vaasa), which he painted when the October Revolution had started in Russia and the bloody civil war in Finland broke out.

There are no other examples of such a bold use of colour in Sallinen’s art but he kept on with the comparison of red, blue and violet in his later works, even though they can not be said to be typical ex-



7. Tyko Sallinen, *Tradesman's Daughters*, 1917; Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Photo: Finnish National Gallery



— 8. Tyko Sallinen, *Saturday Evening*, 1920; The Tikanoja Art Museum, Vaasa. Photo: The Tikanoja Art Museum

amples of his oeuvre. In 1919 he painted a few landscapes in Kajaani in northern Finland with cubist-like facets and red and blue (*Factory*, Ateneum Art Museum) Another painting with the same kind of colour combination, which also has exceptional dynamism and almost cubo-futurist spirit, is the *Study for Fight III* (1920, Ateneum Art Museum). The painting *Fight* itself had a curious fate. Gösta Stenman donated it to Hamburger Kunsthalle in 1925 and it was confiscated and destroyed as “Entartete Kunst” (degenerate art) at the end of 1930s⁴⁵. As far as I know it is the only Finnish art work which had this kind of destiny.

One of the most extraordinary works of Sallinen’s output and one that comes close to the Russian avant-garde and Der Blaue Reiter, is his *Saturday Evening*, from 1920 (Tikanoja Art Museum, Vaasa) [Fig. 8]. Sallinen had actually been visiting Germany and stayed there for a few months with his daughter before he painted *Fight* and *Saturday Evening*. However, *Saturday Evening* is very Goncharova-like with its rhythm and composition. Sallinen’s stay in Germany is totally neglected in his biographies, but his daughter Taju gives a fictitious description of their stay in her novel *Father and Me*⁴⁶.

Primitivism as stylistic ideology

It remains somewhat unclear as to why Sallinen wanted to add primitivist features and a kind of clumsy rhythm in his paintings. He kept on with the primitivism even after the Russian Revolution scuppered his art dealer’s dreams of having a commercial art gallery in St. Petersburg. In search of exoticism, Sallinen even planned a trip to North Africa in autumn 1920⁴⁷, although he ended up in southern France, where he produced Derain-inspired landscapes in Cagnes.

The main reason for his interest in primitivism is, however, to be found in the development in Finland. Sallinen was keen to depict Finnish-speaking workers and the so called proletariat and their surroundings, and even though he sympathised with them – he was himself socialist⁴⁸ – he also wanted to convey the menacing side of human behaviour, the ecstasy and instincts of the uneducated masses, which was also considered to be the main cause of the Finnish civil war. Interest in social change might also explain his decision to spend time in the German Weimar republic after the Great War in 1920.

Another artist who went to Germany after the German Empire collapsed was Edwin Lydén (1879–1956), who travelled to Munich in 1919 and made contact with Sturm gallery and the activities of Walden’s in Berlin in 1920. Lydén is actually the only artist in Finland who based his artistic world view on Kandinsky’s writings and *Sturm* periodical articles. After the war he was inspired by Franz Marc, Robert Delaunay and Lyonel Feininger. His spiritual cubism was not praised in Helsinki, but he was the leader of artistic circles in his hometown of Turku after he returned from Berlin in 1920⁴⁹.



⁴⁵ The information was sent to me by mail from Dr. Ute Haug, Head of Provenance Research and Archive in Hamburger Kunsthalle, on 13 January 2015.

⁴⁶ See I. Salla, *Isä ja minä. Muistelma Tyko Sallisesta*, Porvoo 1957, pp. 221–234. German avant-garde art was shown in Helsinki at the Strindberg Art Gallery in December 1919 and at Ateneum in October 1922.

⁴⁷ See N.-G. Hahl, *Samling Gösta Stenman. Finländsk konst*, Helsingfors 1932, p. 499.

⁴⁸ See E. Koponen, *Suomen Taiteilijeseuran vaiheita 1864–1964*, [in:] *Taide enemmän kuin elämä. Muistikuvia taiteemme taipaleelta*, Ed. *idem*, J. Tissari, R. Ahtokari, Helsinki 1986, p. 12 (published originally in “Svenska Dagbladet” 1943, No. of 1 December).

⁴⁹ See R. Aarras, *Edwin Lydén*, Helsinki 1980, pp. 63–96. Lydén subscribed “Der Sturm” for many years since 1920. See also A. Waenerberg, *National Features in Modern Art: Edwin Lydén (1879–1956) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)*, [in:] *Local Strategies, International Ambitions: Modern Art in Central Europe 1918–1968*, Ed. V. Lahoda, Praha 2006, pp. 55–58.



⁵⁰ R. Josephson, *Sallinen*, [in:] *Tyko Sallinen 1879–1955* [exhibition cat.], 31 October – 30 November 1980, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 1980, p. 14.

⁵¹ See A. Gabriels, *Den finländska konsten i Köpenhamn*, “Stenmans Konstrevy” Vol. 3/4 (1919), pp. 37–46.

⁵² S. Frosterus, *Företal till Göteborgskatalogen*, [in:] *Göteborgstaflorna / Göteporintaulut* [exhibition cat.], 7–22 November 1923, Stenmanin Taidepalatsi, Helsinki 1923. At least half of the art followers in Helsinki at the time had Swedish as their mother tongue.

⁵³ See U. Vihanta, *Kivettyneitä ihanteita. Klassismi Suomen sotienvälisessä kuvataiteessa*, [in:] *Kivettyneet ihanteet? Klassismin nousu maailmansotien välisessä Euroopassa*, Ed. M. Härämä, T. Vihavainen, Jyväskylä 2000, pp. 344–349.

⁵⁴ J. Thiis, *Kunsten paa Gøteborg-utstillingen. IV. Finsk malerkunst. Av museumsdirektør Jens Thiis*, “Dagbladet” 1923, No. 7 July.

⁵⁵ T. Tamminen, *Kansankodin pimeämpi puoli*, Jyväskylä 2015, pp. 115–120.

Sallinen seen from postcolonial perspective

After Finland had gained independence in 1917–1918 Sallinen became famous in Scandinavia with the help of Stenman. Sallinen’s art was seen to reflect the short history and soul of modern Finland and its Finnish-speaking inhabitants. Whether or not it was intentional, a primitive image of Sallinen’s Finns came into focus in the Scandinavian reception of Finnish art. Or as Ragnar Josephson put it in “Svenska Dagbladet” as late as 1943, in Sallinen’s case “national and primitive had become one”⁵⁰.

This notion of the primitive Finn was supported by race theory and ideology, where representatives of Sallinen and also the nature of working class Finns were classified as belonging to the eastern race. The Finnish race was mentioned as an entity already in the Danish reception of Finnish art in Copenhagen in 1919⁵¹, and in a preface to an exhibition catalogue of Finnish art in the Nordic art exhibition in Gothenburg in 1923, Finnish art critic and architect Sigurd Frosterus made a distinction and distanced himself (and the Swedish-speaking educated class in Finland) from Sallinen’s Finns by calling them “clumsy Mongolian and Russian-Karelian types”⁵².

It was important for the new Finland to emphasise that it belonged to Western culture⁵³. Connections with the Russian avant-garde or Walden’s *Sturm* circles were soon forgotten. The Finnish Civil War and the formation of Soviet-Russia made it impossible to admit that there would be connections with Russia in Finland, let alone mention connections with a female avant-gardist such as Goncharova. The avant-garde was rejected as artistic Bolshevism or, in German terms, *Kulturbolschewismus*.

For Scandinavians, Finland belonged to another sphere, though. The Norwegian Jens Thiis wrote about Finnish art in the Gothenburg exhibition in 1923, declaring that a totally unfamiliar race meets the visitor in the Finnish section, where Mongolian and Tatarian types are grinning at the spectators and giving a total impression of democracy at its lowest level⁵⁴. Sallinen’s *Tradesman’s Daughters* was titled *Tatar’s Daughters* (*Tattarin tyttäret*), in this exhibition. It has not been noticed that the term “Tatar” did not refer to Tatar Muslims living in the Helsinki region, but as Tapio Tamminen has pointed out in his book of the history of Swedish race ideology, the word “Tatar” referred to an unspecific Eastern vagabond tribe, which was to be avoided because it threatened the racial purity of Scandinavia⁵⁵.

Finland and other “New States”

In this way Finnish art, and the uneducated Finnish-speaking working-class, that Sallinen depicted, had been labelled as something “other”, belonging to a new border-state zone, which had emerged between east and west after the Great War. From the Scandinavian perspective Finland was classified as a “close other” in the same way

that Piotr Piotrowski claims Western Europe to have classified countries behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. It would be interesting to compare how this newly found identification of values in art of the so-called new states in Europe (including Finland, the Baltic States and Central Eastern Europe) affected and generated discourses of modern national art, and how much in common the art of these countries had, both in iconography and in formal language.

This kind of comprehension, however, as art historian Steven Mansbach has noted, would require, the observer to understand that the “perception of stylistic affinity should not lead one to an assumption of parallel meaning or analogous reception”⁵⁶. If one concentrates on the discourses of modern national art in the new states of Europe, there seem to be similarities to Finland in Polish and Latvian art. I mean the art and meaning that was given to formists in Poland, the art of Jēkabs Kazaks (1895–1920) in Latvia and that of the November Group in Finland.

In Poland formists were considered to express a new national identity. They used the iconography of folk art and religious themes, which was characteristic of German expressionism and not of cubism, and it was important for them to use formal elements in folk art in order to create an independent Polish style as one art critic put it⁵⁷. This comes close to the concepts of the art of the November Group, where Sallinen, for example, used religious iconography and his art was seen to reference the colours of old Finnish rugs⁵⁸. Connections to Kazaks’ art are related to his expressionist conceptions⁵⁹, but it is also noteworthy to draw attention to his interest in Derain’s works, which he saw in Moscow in the Shchukin collection in 1917. Like the novembrists in Finland he emphasised the content, adding that the idea “must not be separated from the means of expression [...]”⁶⁰. In addition, Kazaks talked of a national shade in art, which for him was not ethnography or the depiction of history, but a “national spirit”⁶¹.

It would be tempting to draw similarities between Finnish Semi-cubism and the Estonian syncretic style, which developed from ca. 1918 onwards and fused elements of cubism, expressionism, futurism and constructivism⁶², but as has been noted above, this would have required an appreciation of cubism’s metaphysical or spiritual content in Finland, which was not the case, if one excludes Lydén⁶³, Sipilä, Hällfors-Sipilä and possibly Cawén. Although Sallinen’s interest in cubism is documented, he stated in 1919 that cubism can serve as a technical necessity, but not as a new world of beauty in itself⁶⁴, which is an opposite view from, for example, that of the Estonian Jaan Vahtra (1882–1947), whose art has otherwise formal similarities to those of the November Group⁶⁵. The same can be said of Märt Laarman’s (1896–1979) works. Peet Aren’s (1889–1970) Estonian cubo-expressionist townscapes are probably coming closest to the November Group’s ambitions. The future Estonian Artist Group’s members had



⁵⁶ S. A. Mansbach, *Methodology and Meaning in the Modern Art of Eastern Europe*, [in:] *Central European avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* [exhibition cat.], Ed. T. O. Benson, 3 March – 2 June 2002, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Cambridge (Massachusetts) – Los Angeles 2002, p. 303.

⁵⁷ See P. Piotrowski, *Modernity and Nationalism: Avant-Garde Art and Polish Independence, 1912–1922*, [in:] *Central European...*, pp. 322–323. See also L. Guchowska, *The “New World” of the Avant-Garde and the “New States” in Central Europe: Perspectives of a Postnational and Postcolonial New Art History, Postface*, [in:] *Transnationality...*, pp. 189–191.

⁵⁸ See A. Hellaakoski, *T. K. Sallinen, Hämeenlinna 1921*, pp. 50–59.

⁵⁹ See S. Peļše, *History of Latvian Art Theory: Definitions of Art in the Context of the Prevailing Ideas of the Time (1900–1940)*, Riga 2007, pp. 76–78.

⁶⁰ D. Lamberg, *The First World War and the Birth of Latvian Classical Modernism*, “Muzeja Raksti” Vol. 6 (2015) *Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs*, p. 48. In Finland Derain became highly esteemed after Independence, and his works were first shown in 1918.

⁶¹ E. Klaviņš, *The Ambivalence of Ethnography in the Context of Latvian Modernism*, [in:] *Local Strategies...*, p. 61.

⁶² See V. Lahoda, *Avardunud modernism*, [in:] *Geomeetiline inimene. Eesti kunstnikkude rühm ja 1920.–1930. aastate kunstiuuendus* [exhibition cat.], 31 August 2012 – 6 January 2013, Ed. L. Pählapuu, Eesti kunstimuseum, Tallinn 2012.

⁶³ Lydén and Estonian E. A. Blumenfeldt share similarities in their stylistic ethos, but Blumenfeldt’s career is not well documented.

⁶⁴ See e.g. A. Hellaakoski, *op. cit.*, p. 64. In the literary remains of Sallinen there are books from “Junge Kunst” series (G. Biermann, *Max Pechstein*, 2nd ed., Leipzig 1920; D. Henry, *André Derain*, Leipzig 1920; H. von Wedderkop, *Paul Cézanne*, Leipzig 1922; L. Meidner, *Eine Autobiographische Plauderei*, 2nd rev. ed., Leipzig 1923; E. Wiese, *Paul Gauguin. Zwei Jahrzehnte nach seinem Tode*, Leipzig 1923), as well as the one on expressionism (G. Marzynski, *Die Methode des Expressionismus. Studien zur seiner Psychologie*, Leipzig 1921), but nothing of cubism.

⁶⁵ See L. Pählapuu, *Eesti kunstnikkude Rühm. Eksperiment 1920.–1930. aastate Eesti kultuuris*, [in:] *Geomeetiline inimene...*, pp. 27–28.



⁶⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Dr. Heie Treier cited this in her presentation of Estonian art in workshop *Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Avant-Garde and Modernism: The Impact of WWI* in Charles University in Prague 27 November 2014.

in general an interest in expressionism before the 1920s⁶⁶, but they started to highlight constructivism, and as Eduard Ole (1898–1995) has stated, “we are supposed to construct the new state of Estonia, that’s why constructivist art is more adequate than expressionism [...]”⁶⁷. It was actually only the generation following that of the November Group artists in Finland who could appreciate the Estonian Artist Group’s accomplishments when they participated in an exhibition of Estonian art in Helsinki Kunsthalle in 1929.

Słowa kluczowe

idiomy kubizmu, kubizm, ekspresjonizm, kuboekspresjonizm, sztuka fińska, Tyko Sallinen, narodowa sztuka nowoczesna, prymitywizm, państwa graniczne

Keywords

idioms of cubism, cubism, expressionism, cubo-expressionism, Finnish art, Tyko Sallinen, national modern art, primitivism, border states

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Timo Huusko, PhL, timo.p.huusko@utu.fi, ORCID: 0000-0002-9627-9805

He is senior curator in Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery. He wrote his licentiate thesis on modernist discourses in Finnish art criticism in 1908–1924. He has been working in Ateneum Art Museum since 1997 and written essays and articles in exhibition catalogues. He has also been involved in museum exhibitions and collection displays as curator, co-curator and catalogue editor. He is now PhD student at the Turku University.

Summary

TIMO HUUSKO (Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery) / Transnationality and stylistic ideology in semi-cubist Finnish art between 1914 and 1923

The article focuses on the changes in Finnish modern art and artistic discourse caused by World War I and Finnish Independence in 1917–1918. World War I changed artistic networks radically, because travel to France was no more possible, and Independence of Finland changed the art world with the ideas of national modernism. These changes centred in Finland around the role of cubism – seen as a logical continuation of Paul Cézanne’s art – and were expressed in both formal language and artistic discourse. Questions of “primitive” in art and its connection to cubism and to what is national in art were also essential in defining Finnish modernism and avant-garde in around 1917–1920. There was small exhibition of French cubism in Helsinki in 1915, but otherwise knowledge of cubism came via second-hand sources, such as lectures, art magazines and Der Sturm Gallery’s exhibitions. Norwegian art historian Jens Thiis had a strong impact on notions of cubism in Finland.

It is in my interest to show that there were transnational connections between Scandinavia, Russia and Finland, and also more or less between Finland and other “new states”, which were born after Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian empires collapsed. These connections can be seen in formal elements and iconography of kind of cubo-expressionism, which was a kind of fusion of cubist structuralism and expressionist emotion. This “semi-cubism” seemed to serve as stylistic ideology or ideological tool for those who had thoughts of national modernism in countries like Poland (formists), Latvia (artists like Jēkabs Kazaks), Estonia (artists like Jaan Vahtra and Märt Laarman) and Finland (art of the so called November Group). It is obvious that artists in Finland were not conscious of what happened on the southern side of the Baltic Sea, but there are so many parallels which were born by shared general views of the role of new art, that it is possible to see not only France, Norway or Russia, but also Poland, Latvia and Estonia as artistically close to Finland, when one tries to map the topography of Finnish semi-cubism in late 1910s and early 1920s.