HELSINKI, FINLAND

Ateneum Art Museum: Masterpieces

Twenty works from Helsinki's Ateneum: Finnish painting at the centre, with pictures by Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin and Munch.



The Ateneum, part of the Finnish National Gallery, occupies a nineteenth-century building in Helsinki. Its collection matters above all for Finnish painting, and this selection follows that emphasis. Gallen-Kallela appears with scenes from the Kalevala, the Finnish epic poem, and Simberg with The Wounded Angel. Helene Schjerfbeck can be followed from a child's recovery to a self-portrait pared down to a few marks. The collection also holds pictures that rarely appear in international surveys, so there is room here for quieter subjects: a forest road in Häme, an empty summer room, snow at Kinahmi. From further afield come Van Gogh, Cézanne and Munch, and Gauguin, whose landscapes take the eye as far as Tahiti and Hiva Oa. The selection ends with less expected things: an invented landscape by Tove Jansson, Gallen-Kallela's study for the frescoes of the Jusélius Mausoleum and a stage design by Nicholas Roerich.

The selection is independent of the museum and drawn from its documented holdings. Dates and attributions follow the linked records, keeping any date ranges or qualifications they give.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/ateneum

The selection · 20

1. The Wounded Angel
   Hugo Simberg · 1903
2. Lemminkäinen's Mother
   Akseli Gallen-Kallela · 1897
3. Aino Myth, Triptych
   Akseli Gallen-Kallela · 1891
4. The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris
   Albert Edelfelt · 1887
5. The Convalescent
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6. Self-Portrait, 1912
   Helene Schjerfbeck · 1912
7. Self-Portrait, en face I
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   Vincent van Gogh · 1890
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10. Girl Reading
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11. The Violinist
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    Werner Holmberg · 1860
14. Interior, Summer
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15. Landscape in Tahiti: Mahana Maà
    Paul Gauguin · 1892
16. Landscape with a Pig and a Horse, Hiva Oa
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17. Bathing Men
    Edvard Munch · 1907–1908
18. Mysterious Landscape
    Tove Jansson · c. 1930–1939
19. Spring, Study for the Jusélius Mausoleum Frescoes
    Akseli Gallen-Kallela · 1903
20. Set Design for Princess Maleine
    Nicholas Roerich · 1913

01 / 20

The Wounded Angel

Hugo Simberg

1903 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Hugo Simberg. The Wounded Angel. Hugo Simberg; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Hannu Aaltonen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

Two boys carry an injured angel on a stretcher through a bleak landscape. Her wing is damaged and her eyes are bandaged, so she cannot see where she is being taken. Simberg tells us no more than she knows: neither how she was hurt nor where the boys are going. The picture's peculiar force comes from how matter-of-fact it is. In their plain clothes, the boys make the task look almost ordinary, just a load to be got from one place to another. Is that ordinariness a comfort, or the strangest thing in the painting?

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 1703

02 / 20

Lemminkäinen’s Mother

Akseli Gallen-Kallela

1897 · Canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Lemminkäinen's Mother. Akseli Gallen-Kallela; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Hannu Pakarinen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

Lemminkäinen's mother stays upright beside her son's pale body, which lies stretched out and cannot respond to her. Nothing in the setting eases her vigil: dark water, bones, red stones. The episode comes from the Kalevala, but you need no knowledge of the poem to understand a mother keeping watch over a son who cannot answer her.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A I 640

03 / 20

Aino Myth, Triptych

Akseli Gallen-Kallela

1891 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Aino Myth, triptych. Akseli Gallen-Kallela; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Aleks Talve. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

Aino refuses the proposal of the old sage Väinämöinen. In the central panel he catches her in the form of a fish, and she escapes him again. Gallen-Kallela keeps the three scenes apart, and the landscape does not run on from one panel to the next. What joins them is his carved frame, inscribed with text from the Kalevala. The poem's words do the linking that the scenery leaves undone.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A I 518

04 / 20

The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris

Albert Edelfelt

1887 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Albert Edelfelt. The Luxembourg Gardens, Paris. Albert Edelfelt; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Hannu Pakarinen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

A hoop, chairs, groups of people beneath the trees: Edelfelt's Paris garden has several things going on at once and no single focus. Across the wide path, playing, watching and resting remain distinct. The real subject is the public garden itself, ground shared by people who are each busy with something different.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 835

05 / 20

The Convalescent

Helene Schjerfbeck

1888 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Helene Schjerfbeck. The Convalescent. Helene Schjerfbeck; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Jenni Nurminen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

The child looks small in the large wicker chair, attention fixed on a branch held near the table. Schjerfbeck does not reconstruct the illness. Instead, recovery shows itself as renewed interest in an ordinary thing.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A I 223

06 / 20

Self-Portrait, 1912

Helene Schjerfbeck

1912 · Canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Helene Schjerfbeck. Self-Portrait. Helene Schjerfbeck; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Yehia Eweis. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

The face rises above a dark collar, set apart from broad areas of grey and yellow behind. Schjerfbeck does not give everything equal attention. Some passages are defined more fully than others, and she leaves the surface unevenly finished. Her frontal self-portrait, later in this selection, strips away still more descriptive detail.

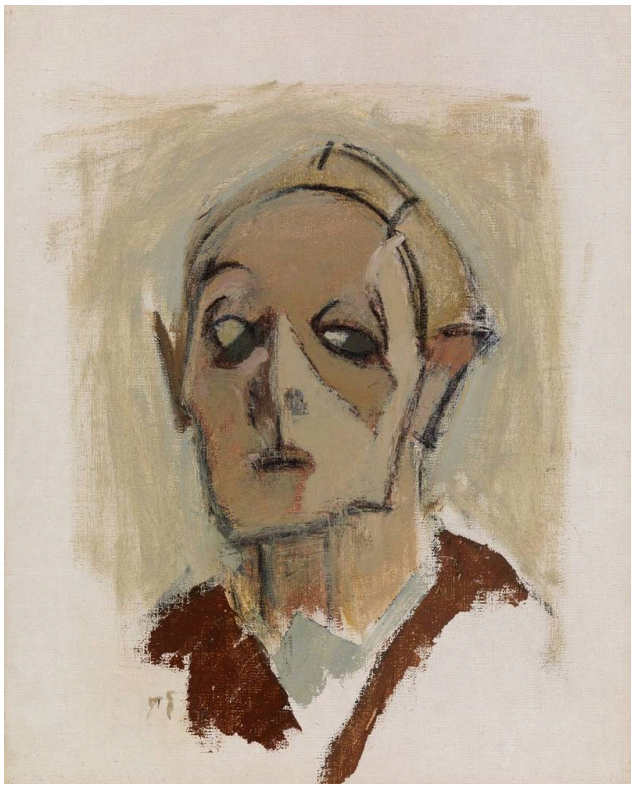
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A-2016-51

07 / 20

Self-Portrait, en face I

Helene Schjerfbeck

1945 · Ateneum Art Museum



Helene Schjerfbeck. Self-Portrait, en face I. Helene Schjerfbeck; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Hannu Pakarinen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

A handful of marks separate eyes, nose and mouth, just enough for them to read as a face. The head is seen straight on, with no turn or profile to help, so everything depends on where those few marks fall.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A-2005-131

08 / 20

Street in Auvers-sur-Oise

Vincent van Gogh

1890 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Street in Auvers-sur-Oise. Image credit: Finnish National Gallery / Yehia Eweis. CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0 1.0

The paint is busy across the whole canvas, yet the road can still be followed between the houses. Roofs, vegetation and sky each have their own rhythm of brushmarks, and that is what keeps the scene legible: however much is going on, buildings, plants and air never run into one another.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A I 755

09 / 20

The Road Bridge at L’Estaque

Paul Cézanne

1879–1882 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Paul Cézanne. The Road Bridge at L'Estaque. Image credit: Finnish National Gallery / Jenni Nurminen. CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0 1.0

Van Gogh, in the street at Auvers, sorts his marks according to what they describe. Cézanne's short patches of colour join into planes without entirely losing their separateness. The bridge gives the trees and sloping ground a firm structure to be arranged around. The double character of the patches runs through the whole picture, so that the landscape reads both as space going back into the distance and as adjoining areas of paint that build that distance.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 906

10 / 20

Girl Reading

Helene Schjerfbeck

1904 · Ateneum Art Museum



Helene Schjerfbeck. Girl Reading. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Seen in profile, head bent over the page, the girl gives little of her face away. What Schjerfbeck shows is her absorption, while the expression stays largely hidden. It is the opposite of the frontal self-portrait, where the face is all there is. The bars of her chair cut across her figure. You might expect them to get in the way, but their repeated divisions make the small turn of her body easier to see, and they hold her within a tightly organised space.

Object source · Open artwork

11 / 20

The Violinist

Pekka Halonen

1900 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Pekka Halonen. The Violinist. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The violin is not set beside the sitter as an attribute. It is in use, held between chin, hand and shoulder, which makes this a picture of playing as much as of a player. With the upper body exposed, the contact and positioning that playing depends on are plain to see.

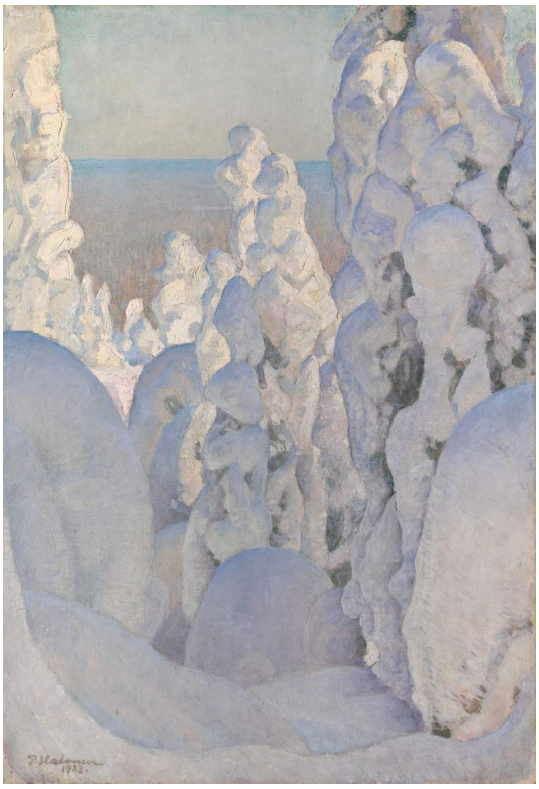
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A III 2071

12 / 20

Winter Landscape at Kinahmi

Pekka Halonen

1923 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Pekka Halonen. Winter Landscape, Kinahmi, 1923. Inventory A II 1546. Pekka Halonen; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Jenni Nurminen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). https://kokoelma.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/400442. Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

Halonen's other picture in this selection leaves the player behind for trees under snow. Snow covers much of their branching and turns them into rounded, pale masses. A subject like this could easily become one unbroken white field, but blue in the distance and shadows within the masses prevent it. The trees remain recognisable, even though the snow has hidden much of what usually identifies them.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 1546

13 / 20

Road in Häme: A Hot Summer Day

Werner Holmberg

1860 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Werner Holmberg. Road in Häme (A Hot Summer Day), 1860. Inventory A II 1002. Werner Holmberg; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Yehia Eweis. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). https://kokoelma.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/608901. Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

A small cart on the road marks the way through the forest without taking it over. Between tall trunks, patches of sun alternate with enclosed shade, so the route is followed in stages. Depth comes from these changes of light and openness, and there is no single clear view of where the road leads. If the hot summer day of the title can be felt anywhere, it is in that alternation of sun and shelter.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 1002

14 / 20

Interior, Summer

Elin Danielson-Gambogi

1900–1919 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Elin Danielson-Gambogi. Interior, Summer, 1900–1919. Inventory A-2026-55. Elin Danielson-Gambogi; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Jenni Nurminen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). https://kokoelma.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/6127043. Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. The current museum record dates this work 1903–1913; the existing catalogue range 1900–1919 is retained for editorial review. · CC0 1.0

With nobody in the room, the bright window and its plants become the main event. Light falls across pale chairs and a covered table. Danielson-Gambogi has the same difficulty indoors that Halonen has in the snow, and warmer touches in the furnishings keep the pale surfaces from merging into one white mass. The room shows signs of use without saying whose. The date of 1900–1919 is a broad catalogue range. The museum's current record gives a narrower one.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A-2026-55

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Landscape in Tahiti: Mahana Maà

Paul Gauguin

1892 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Paul Gauguin. Landscape in Tahiti (Mahana Maà). Image credit: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen. CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0 1.0

A small seated figure is surrounded by palms, buildings and strong areas of orange and green. Colour does as much as description to hold the view together. This is a constructed image of a place, built from what Gauguin chose to emphasise, and it is better looked at that way than as an account of Tahitian life.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 986

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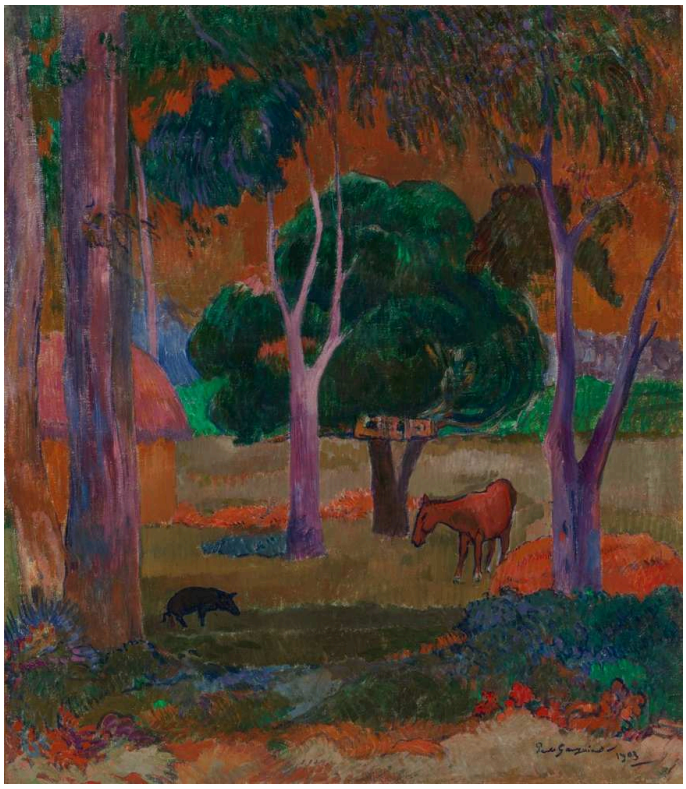
Landscape with a Pig and a Horse, Hiva Oa

Paul Gauguin

1903 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Paul Gauguin. Landscape with a Pig and a Horse (Hiva Oa). Image credit: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen. CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0 1.0

A pig and a horse give scale to a clearing ringed by richly coloured trunks and foliage. Purple, red and green run through the landscape, with no attempt to match the usual colours of outdoor light. In the Tahiti landscape colour holds the view together. Here it goes further, and while the animals stay recognisable, much of the space around them turns into pattern.

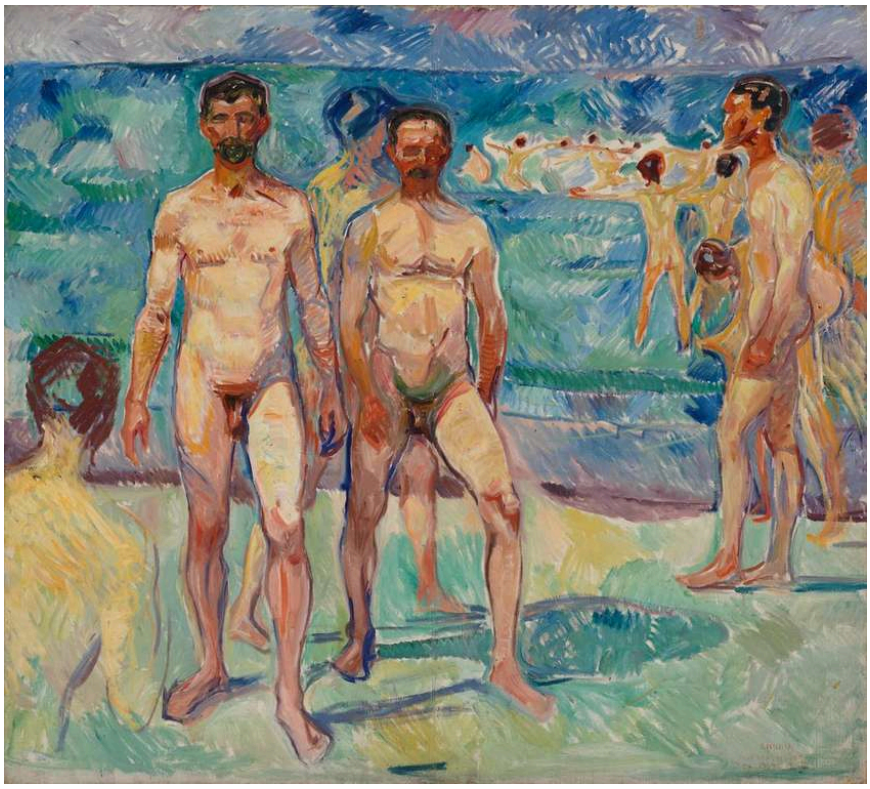
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 854

17 / 20

Bathing Men

Edvard Munch

1907–1908 · Oil on canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Edvard Munch. Bathing Men ; Middle Age. Image credit: Finnish National Gallery / Aleks Talve. CC0 1.0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0 1.0

There is no incident here. Munch's bathers are the whole subject. Some face us and others are turned at an angle, and those differences of position give the group its variety. Broad strokes run across bodies and shore alike, binding the men into the open setting.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 908

18 / 20

Mysterious Landscape

Tove Jansson

c. 1930–1939 · Oil on plywood · Ateneum Art Museum



Tove Jansson. Mysterious Landscape. WikiArt source label: Tove Jansson Fair Use. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/tove-jansson/mysterious-landscape-1930 · Tove Jansson Fair Use (WikiArt source label)

Jansson's invented terrain, painted on plywood, is closed in. Dark mountains and pale, drooping trees surround a small opening in the distance. Paths offer ways through without showing where they go. The title calls the landscape mysterious, yet there is nothing confused about how it is built. What stays unsettled is the story.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A-2006-155

19 / 20

Spring, Study for the Jusélius Mausoleum Frescoes

Akseli Gallen-Kallela

1903 · Canvas · Ateneum Art Museum



Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Spring, study for the Jusélius Mausoleum Frescoes, 1903. Inventory A IV 2962. Akseli Gallen-Kallela; Finnish National Gallery; photograph: Jenni Nurminen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). https://kokoelma.kansallisgalleria.fi/en/object/388496. Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression. · CC0 1.0

Spring may seem an unexpected subject for a mausoleum, but the study is full of upward movement. Raised arms beneath the branches echo the growth above them, and beyond the gathering, water opens out into a broad setting. Because this is a study for frescoes, it also works on a practical problem: how figures and gestures might organise a decorative wall and stay legible across a large space. That is a different task from the Kalevala paintings and their episodes from the poem.

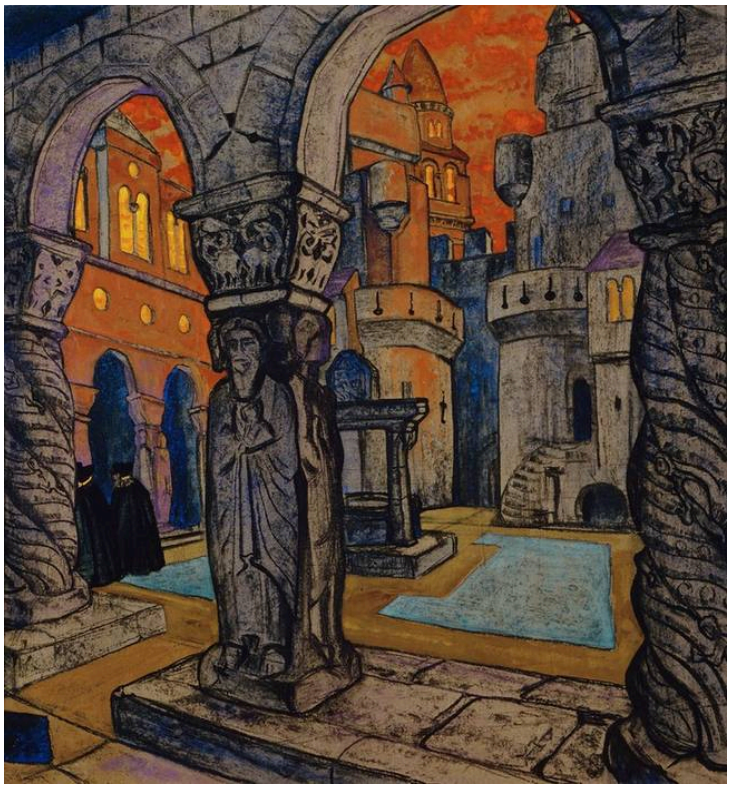
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A IV 2962

20 / 20

Set Design for Princess Maleine

Nicholas Roerich

1913 · Gouache, charcoal and pastel on paper · Ateneum Art Museum



Nicholas Roerich. Draft Set Design for Maurice Maeterlinck´s Play Princess Maleine. Image credit: Hannu Aaltonen; Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen. CC0 (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · CC0

This is architecture devised for the stage. Arches and columns form a series of openings, orange light marks out the space beyond, and the depth suggests where performers might appear or pass through. It proposes a setting rather than recording real buildings, and it does not illustrate any particular moment of the action.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: A II 1267

Sources and what pictures make of them

Several of these pictures answer to something outside their frames. Gallen-Kallela's Kalevala paintings draw on a poem that can be read beside them, though the poem does not dictate how he arranged them. The Jusélius study and Roerich's design were made for other settings, the walls of a mausoleum and a theatre stage, and here they are seen apart from the places they were meant to serve. Simberg and Jansson offer nothing beyond their titles, and their pictures are, if anything, stranger for having nothing else to lean on.

Further reading

The Kalevala: The Epic Poem of Finland

Elias Lönnrot; English translation by John Martin Crawford (1888) · Free English text and ebook at Project Gutenberg.

The epic itself, in John Martin Crawford's nineteenth-century English translation. It contains the episodes behind Gallen-Kallela's Aino triptych and Lemminkäinen's Mother, so you can find there the parts of the story the pictures leave out. Crawford's language belongs to its period and reads quite differently from a modern translation.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
