

Symbolist Art and the Baltic Sea Region, 1880–1930

Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia

31 January – 2 February 2019

Organised by Art Museum of Estonia – Kumu Art Museum
and Estonian Society of Art Historians and Curators

Symbolist art, with its mystical landscapes of the soul, otherworldly visions of the afterlife and pathological degenerations of the self, has witnessed a meteoric rise in scholarly interest and exhibition programming in the past decade. In critique of the field's franco-centric origins, touring shows have become ever more international in their representation, yet, with rare exceptions, artists from the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have remained conspicuously absent from these narratives. The pioneering 2018 exhibition "Wild Souls: Symbolism in the Baltic States" curated by Rodolphe Rapetti at the Musée d'Orsay was a pivotal step in addressing this omission, introducing the sensuous musings of turn-of-the-century Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian modernists to an international public eager to learn more about this cadre of fascinating artists. Despite this well-deserved and overdue international acclaim, the works of even the most iconic and beloved artists—Janis Rozentāls, Konrad Mägi, and even Mikalojus Čiurlionis—remain largely unknown among neighboring countries across the Baltic Sea. This enduring unfamiliarity is especially puzzling given the fact that their creative endeavors, including their most distinctive National Romantic artworks, mediated the multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional reality of the Baltic Sea Region and its colonial history. What role has historiography and the writing of art history played in making these artists simultaneously so visible at home, yet practically invisible abroad? How might we transcend national narratives to create more holistic accounts of the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century? What are the new approaches to Baltic art of the period? In which ways can new research paradigms open up a dialogue between Baltic materials and global discussions on art and art history?

In collaboration with the exhibition "Symbolism in the Art of the Baltic Countries" arriving in Tallinn (12 October 2018 – 3 February 2019), the Kumu Art Museum and the Estonian Society of Art Historians and Curators seek to address this lacuna with an international conference highlighting the transcultural networks of Symbolist art across the Baltic Sea Region between 1880 and 1930. As we strive to overcome the enduring national boundaries of art history, we envision the conference as a seminal opportunity specifically to bring Baltic Symbolism to an unprecedented level of international scholarly inquiry as well as an inimitable opportunity to foster a transnational, yet distinctly regional network of Symbolist scholars, curators, and specialists.

We invite papers which address relevant currents of Symbolist aesthetics in the visual and material culture of the Baltic Sea Region, broadly construed. Preference will be given to papers which are transcultural in subject matter and move beyond methodological nationalism. Themes may include, but are not limited to:

- The Past, Present, and Future of Local Histories of Art between 1880 and 1920
- Landscape and Environment
- Invented, Reimagined, Entangled Histories
- Cultural Memory and National Identity
- Symbolism as National Romanticism
- Colonial History and Legacies
- Gender and Sexuality
- Race and Ethnicity
- Esotericism, Spiritualism, Science
- Multiethnic Conflict and Collaboration
- Travelling Artists, Artists' Colonies
- Regional Exhibitions
- The Symbolist Self
- Symbolism and Materiality

Special opening lecture:

Rodolphe Rapetti, Musée d'Orsay

Keynote speakers:

Dr. Joep Leerssen, University of Amsterdam

Dr. Michelle Facos, Indiana University

Dr. Kristiāna Ābele, Institute of Art History, Latvian Academy of Arts

The board of the conference:

Kadi Polli, Director of Kumu Art Museum

Dr. Tiina-Mall Kreem, Head of Estonian Society of Art Historians and Curators; Curator, Kadriorg Art Museum

Dr. Krista Kodres, Professor, Estonian Academy of Arts

Dr. Kristiāna Ābele, Institute of Art History, Latvian Academy of Art

Dr. Linda Kaljundi, Associated Professor, Tallinn University

Bart Pushaw, PhD Candidate, University of Maryland

Liis Pählapuu, Curator, Kumu Art Museum

Deadline of the abstracts: August 6, 2018

Please send a 250-word abstract to Liis Pählapuu, liis.pahlapuu@ekm.ee

Contacts

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