

UNTO PUSA - Cubism and National Imagery

Pori Art Museum, Project Room. 15 February – 25 May 2008

Unto Pusa painted his first cubist work entitled *Katunäkymä* (Street View) in 1949. The painting is also known as *Cubist Chevreuse*. Pusa had worked in the small town near Paris for a decade and a half, painting canvases in the style of Cézanne, as miniature worlds free of any illusion. For Pusa, Cézanne's art was not just about the stylistic simplification of form. At its core was an effort to understand the thinking that went into the composition of a painting. In the late 1940s, Pusa visited Fernand Léger's retrospective in Paris. It made an enduring impression on him. He came to understand that all forms within a composition are equal such that the choice of subject matter no longer occupies a dominant position.

Cubism was never adopted fully into Finnish art. It was regarded as nothing more than a stylistic element, and the theoretical foundation of the movement awakened little interest. Monumental painting was nevertheless considered an area to which cubism was appropriate. In the mid-1950s Pusa became interested in *Robert Delaunay's orphism*. Taking his cue from the neo-impressionists and fauvists, Delaunay had developed a form of painting where visible reality is rendered through a combination of rhythms and colour contrasts on the canvas. Pusa put these ideas into practice in North Karelia, where in 1955 he painted on the banks of the Pamilonkoski rapids, producing works such as *Elämäniloa* (Joie de vivre); the painting is also known as *Ylistys Delaunaylle* (Homage to Delaunay). Two years later he painted a work, now in the collection of the Maire Gullichsen Art Foundation, entitled *Ympyrä neliössä. Hommage à Delaunay I* (Circle inside a square. H à D).

Pusa's desire to create a style of his own made him apply his cubist ambitions to topics that half a century before would have been alien to the masters of the movement. In addition to rapids, Pusa painted dead trees and tree stumps, and even developed an interest in Finnish traditional log notches, leading to paintings such as *Aitta kubistiseen tapaan* (Granary in the cubist style) and *Aitta orfiseen tapaan* (Granary in the orphic style) and *Vesimylly Kuusamosta* (Water-mill in Kuusamo). The next paintings in the *Aitta* series were included in the second exhibition of the *PRISMA* group, established in 1956. The critic in the *Uusi Suomi* newspaper wrote of them: "Pusa displays the diligence of a scientist in his efforts to unveil the laws of painting. An entire wall in the exhibition attests to the research he does to master just one topic, white-water rapids." Comprising painters representing colour-field painting and abstract art, the other members of the Prisma group were *Yngve Bäck*, *Ragnar Ekelund*, *Torger Enckell*, *Gösta Diehl*, *Sigrid Schauman* and *Sam Vanni*. With the exception of Ekelund, all have works in the Maire Gullichsen Art Foundation collection.

From the late 1950s Pusa focused systematically on monumental painting. This was reflected in the subsequent decade in the large-format compositions of figures, such as *Neljän sepän sunnuntai* (Sunday of four smiths), painted in the spirit of Léger in 1963. Paintings featuring modern society and its achievements, such as canvases depicting the construction of canals, were gradually accompanied by paintings of natural landscapes or urban views executed with great stylistic control. The painting inspired by the song "Sellainen ol' Viipuri" is a grand composition celebrating Viipuri, the Finnish town ceded to Russia, with the most famous buildings of the town depicted on a single canvas together with playing children, workers, townspeople and peasants in their carts. In the last years of his life, Pusa's work acquired a new dimension: colour charged with an emotional meaning. According to Pusa artists should not copy nature. They must create something that is as beautiful as nature.

In conjunction with the jubilee exhibition to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Maire Gullichsen's birth, it was decided that one of the exhibition spaces in the Pori Art Museum would in the future be reserved for the presentation of the collections of the Maire Gullichsen Art Foundation. The Maire Gullichsen and Modernism series was launched in September 2007 with the *Ellen Thesleff and Contemporaries* exhibition.

In addition to works from the collections of the Maire Gullichsen Art Foundation, the UNTO PUSA. Cubism and National Imagery exhibition also includes paintings from the collections of the *Aine Art Museum*, the *South Karelia Art Museum* and the *Helsinki City Art Museum* as well as the *Finnish National Gallery* and *Imatran taideyhdistys*.

More information about the exhibition:

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