THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
SPECIAL EXHIBITION PAINTINGS
BY AXEL GALLEN-KALLELA
DECEMBER 18 TO JANUARY 20
NINETEEN HUNDRED TWENTY-FOUR
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THE THIEVES OF SAMPO
AXEL GALLEN-KALLELA

Axel Gallen-Kallela was ten years old before he saw a railroad or a steamboat. As a child growing up on his ancestral estate in Finland, he knew little of the adornments of metropolitan civilization, but in him was early implanted a deep and abiding understanding of his own country. When a youth with such a background is thrust into the art life of Paris and brought into sudden contact with all that is most modern and sophisticated, one of two things is likely to happen: either he will be bewildered and his course deflected by the engaging novelty of his new environment, or the experience will serve to clarify and intensify the reality of his early life, enabling him to bring greater appreciation and understanding to it. The latter was the case with Gallen-Kallela. He learned much in Paris, but he did not substitute this knowledge for the values he had learned in his youth.

We in this part of the world know little enough of the art of Finland, and the history of the arts in that small, isolated country is, to be sure, a brief one; but we are familiar—through the music of Sibelius, if through no other source—with the high seriousness of that art, its intensely national character, its sober realism and spirituality. A country which is young in artistic expression but old and rich in tradition, offers a fertile field for the artist. The very qualities that are to be found in Sibelius' music are characteristic of the work of Gallen-Kallela, of whom it has been said that he is "like a window turned toward the outer world through which we are permitted to look upon the soul of the Finnish people."

The career of Axel Gallen-Kallela can be divided into three distinct periods, but in all his work there is to be
found the same note—a seeking of the spirit for the inner
significance in all things—indicating that the development
of the artist has been a consistent and inevitable unfolding.

There is the Paris period when the young man, fresh
from Finland, first began to realize the new possibilities
that the art capital opened up for him, and painted por-
traits, landscapes, and illustrative canvases with equal
fervor. Of that period his Portrait; Mother and Infant
and Lady Among the Rocks are typical. Here is the
approved technique of the Paris schools of the late eighties,
the utmost fidelity to detail, careful, photographic repro-
duction, so that every leaf of moss behind the Lady, every
object on the wall above the Mother and Infant is pre-
sented with the closest approximation to reality. But
even here, and more especially in Symposium, there is a
penetration that goes beyond mere photographic exactness.
The latter canvas, painted in the same manner as the
others, has a definite decorative pattern, but more than
that, it is an interpretation of the four persons around the
table, with a dramatic suggestion of the mystic.

It was a little later, when Gallen decided to return to
Finland and go more deeply into the character of the
Finnish peasantry, that he began to show a greater free-
dom and individuality in his work, to discard some of the
meticulous realism in favor of a broader style, in which
the whole was made more vital by subordination of some
of the parts and color made to play a more important role.
This was done without any trace of sensationalism.
Gallen's roots were too firmly fixed in his native soil to
permit him to soar into thin atmosphere. In Finland he
built himself a studio in the wilderness of Ruovesi and
there lived the life of a hermit. During that period he
experimented widely, etching, working in tempera, oils,
stained glass, and wood. He left Ruovesi in 1900, having
made the cartoons for the cupola of the Finnish pavilion
at the Paris exposition. At Tammensfors, he made the
cartoons for the tomb of Juutilius, which were completed
in fresco at Bjørneborg. He lived for some years at
Helsinki, making his illustrations for the Kalevala, the
national epic of Finland. All through this period the
versatility of his nature expressed itself in various ways,
the decorative quality of his work becoming more pro-
nounced, his portraits making a striking group, including
the earnest studies of Gustave Mahler, Madame G. A. S.,
and Alpo Saito.

While there has always been noteworthy restraint in
the work of Gallen-Kallela, it is evident that the dramatic
aspects of life appeal to the man, as to the artist. The
stirring illustrations of the Kalevala, the sharp contrasts
in the cold Finnish landscapes, the intense romanticism of
the powerful canvas, The Thieves of Sampo, the sinister
symbolism of The Deluge, all indicate an instinctive
response to whatever is emotionally stirring, and help to
explain the third and latent phase of his work, which
includes his African studies. His trip to Africa revealed
to his curious and enthusiastic eye a new and different
world, a land that presented the greatest possible contrast
to his own Finland, a land of exotic brilliance, where he
found, ready-made, the rich color he had learned to
delight in. There is a difference indeed between the
careful paintings of his Paris period and these more recent
swift, impressionistic African canvases, many of them
scarcely more than sketches, as though the artist were
simply storing up ideas for future use. The skill and the
fidelity to nature are still there, but the hand has learned
to transcribe to canvas, bodily, without hesitation, what the
quick eye and mind comprehend. The parched, sun-baked country, the heavy vegetation, the patterns formed by the skeletons of animals in the desert, all the dramatic elements of the hunt, made their appeal to Gallen, presenting a wealth of material eminently suited to his simplicity and directness of color, line, and composition. Since taking up his residence at Bargo and continuing his illustrations for the Kalevala, he has carried still farther his search for the essential. There is variety but no inconsistency in the work of Gallen-Kallela, who has been moved throughout his career by the same earnest spirit, half-realistic, half-mystic, manifesting itself in different ways.

Some of the honors and distinctions which have been conferred upon Mr. Gallen-Kallela are as follows: Lieutenant of reserves and past adjutant to the Regiment of Finland; honorary professor and doctor of philosophy, University of Helsingfors; vice chairman of the Kalevala Society; past chairman, Artists' Guild of Finland; member of the Royal Academy, Stockholm; member of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin; corresponding member, Vereinig Buchgewerbe, Leipzig; honorary member of various societies and student corps; associé, Salon d'automne; chevalier, Legion of Honor, France; commander of the White Rose of Finland; gold medal, Paris, 1900; large gold medal, Budapest, 1908; medal of honor, Panama-Pacific Exposition, San Francisco, 1915.
CATALOGUE

PAINTINGS

1. ON GUARD
2. TROPICAL FRUITS: STILL LIFE
3. A WILD SAVANNAH
4. MY FIRST HYENA
5. SYMPOSIUM
6. KENOUSSA
7. MY FIRST BUFFALO
8. IN AUTUMN SUNLIGHT
9. PORTRAIT: WAINO-SALMINEN
10. PORTRAIT: MADAME E. E.
11. YOUNG KIKOYOU WARRIOR
12. BANANA LEAF
13. THE DELUGE
14. THE LYNX HUNTER
15. RHINOCEROS AND EUPHORBIA
16. SUNSET AT UKAMBA (Central Africa)

Nos. 1 to 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 16 were painted in Central Africa.
17 PORTRAIT: ROBERT KAJANUS
18 BUFFALO HUNT
19 PORTRAIT: MR. GUSTAVE MAHLER, COMPOSER
20 MY FIRST RHINOCEROS
21 THE TRIBE OF NAUDI
22 KULLervo ON WARPATH (Kalevitsa)
23 SUMMER NIGHT
24 THE CATARACT OF MASIOJA (Central Africa)
25 SPRINGTIME
26 PORTRAIT: MOTHER AND INFANT
27 BARCAROLE (Kalevitsa)
28 SAVAGE IN THE SHADOW
29 THE HRASIANI MOUNTAINS
30 ANTELOPE
31 CROCODILE
32 CARCASS
33 MEADOW
34 BIVOUAC
35 HIDE

Note: 16, 20 and 21, 24 and 35 were painted in Central Africa.
36 ZEBRAS AND GAZELLES
37 DEAD FIR TREE; WINTER
38 BURNED FIR TREE
39 AFTER THE HUNT
40 PORTRAIT: MADAME G. A. S. (Tempera)
41 SLAIN RHINOCEROS
42 YOUNG KIKUYOU
43 BROKEN FIR TREE
44 THE WATERFALL
45 KIKUYOU WOMAN
46 MASSAI WARRIORS
47 HOMO VICTOR (Victorian Man)
48 PORTRAIT: MR. ALPO SAILO
49 ANTELOPE
50 THE BURNED STEPPE (Water Color)
51 WILD DATE PALM
52 PORTRAIT: MADAME M. G. K.
53 BATHERS
54 RUSTIC PAINTER

Notes: 36, 39, 41, 43, 44, 46, 50, and 52 to 54 were painted in Central Africa.
55 SPRING ASPEN
56 SKI RUNNERS
57 PORTRAIT OF A LADY AMONG THE ROCKS
58 MODEL OF A CUPOLA FOR THE CAPITOL BUILDING AT HELSINGFORS
59 THE THIEVES OF SAMPO
60 PLAIN
61 DONYA SABOUK
   Lent by Miss Harriet Bain, Kansas, Wis.
62 FROZEN SEAS
63 SUMMER NIGHT; RUOVESI
64 FIRST SNOW
65 SHARKS; INDIAN OCEAN
66 AD ASTRA
67 SPRING ICE
68 COSMOS (Cartoon for fires)
69 COAST OF WRECKS (Cartoon for fires)
70 EDEN (Cartoon for fires)
71 BEARWORT
72 FADED WREATH

Two, 54 and 61, were painted in Central Africa.
73 BREAKING ICE
74 SKETCH FOR DECORATIVE PAINTING (University of Helsinki)
75 SKETCH FOR DECORATIVE PAINTING: WINTER (Tempera)
76 PORTRAIT: MR. S. W. A.
77 HOME IN MOONLIGHT
78 PORTRAIT: MR. E. EHRSTROM
79 SKETCH FOR DECORATIVE PAINTING: WINTER (Tempera)
80 SPHINX BY MOONLIGHT (Tempera)
81 SKERRIES
82 BREAKING WAVES
83 KULLERVO HERDING HIS WILD FLOCKS (Kalevala)
84 RAINBOW
85 THE PROPHET
86 HIPPOPOTAMUS
87 WAINAMOINEN'S FAREWELL (Cartoon for Kalevala)
88 LUMBERJACK
89 SKETCH FOR SELF-PORTRAIT IN UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE
90 STUDY FOR BREAKING ICE
91 STUDY FOR RAINBOW