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# NORDIC PAINTING

 PRESTEL











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# N O R D I C P A I N T I N G

T H E R I S E O F M O D E R N I T Y

PRESTEL

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SKV

I.

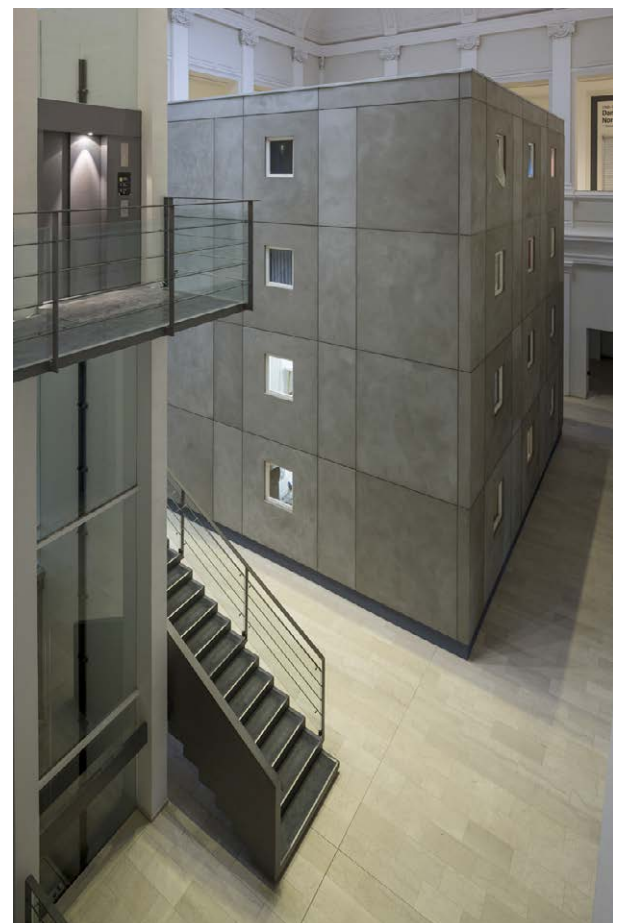
**ART - GEOGRAPHICAL NORTH**

## P. S. KRØYER IN A PREFABRICATED CONCRETE-SLAB BUILDING: NEW CONTEXTS

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An unprepossessing, square window offers a view into a living space, which at first glance is stylized as an archetype of artless interior design—but on closer inspection displays a multilayered arrangement: → **fig.2** beside a rather old-fashioned sofa set can be found symmetrically hung porcelain plates and a tapestry as decoration on the walls. A tube television from previous decades, whose flickering screen cannot be viewed from the window, gives the room the effect of being technologically from another time. The uninhabited room displays clear traces of previous presence, and subcultural associations grow stronger: on a rustic, tiled table are a number of disorderly objects, among them a used ashtray, as well as open cans of beer and empty beer bottles. Beneath one beer can is a large-format book with a figuratively printed cover and bright colors. The reading direction of the cover is turned away from the viewer, the book title largely covered by the alcoholic drink.

A trained eye will recognize the title illustration as a work by the painter P. S. Krøyer (1851–1909), whose *plein air* painting from the Danish artists' colony of Skagen has an iconic character in the history of Scandinavian art. The impressionist-informed monumental painting *Summer Day at the South Beach of Skagen* → **fig.3** shows an idyllic coastal landscape on the northern point of Jutland, where, with the Skagerrak and the Kattegat, the North Sea and the Baltic flow together. This work is Krøyer's first treatment of the motif—popular at the turn of the century—of children swimming, who express their joie de vivre in a vitalistic style. The natural scene awakens the impression of being untouched by the industrialized modern world. As is typical of Krøyer's works, the sea is as smooth as glass and seems domesticated, the maritime backdrop thus formally harmonized. Isolated grains of sand in the paint layers of the original work similarly appear to attest to the practice of *plein air* painting.<sup>1</sup> The painting is dominated by the complex lighting of the reflecting surface of the water; the light, muted coloration; and an empty, monochromatic foreground. In brief, the idealizing, romanticizing title image of the illustrated book on the tiled table stands in sharp visual contrast to the rest of the interior with its careless decoration.





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◁ 1 E L M G R E E N & D R A G S E T

*The One & The Many*, 2010/14

Installation

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner

↑ 2 E L M G R E E N & D R A G S E T

*The One & The Many* (detail), 2010/14

Installation

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Courtesy of Galleri Nicolai Wallner




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13 P. S. KRØYER  
*Summer Day at the South Beach of Skagen*  
 (Sommerdag ved Skagen strand), 1884  
 Oil on canvas, 154.5 × 212.5 cm  
 Den Hirschsprungske Samling, Copenhagen

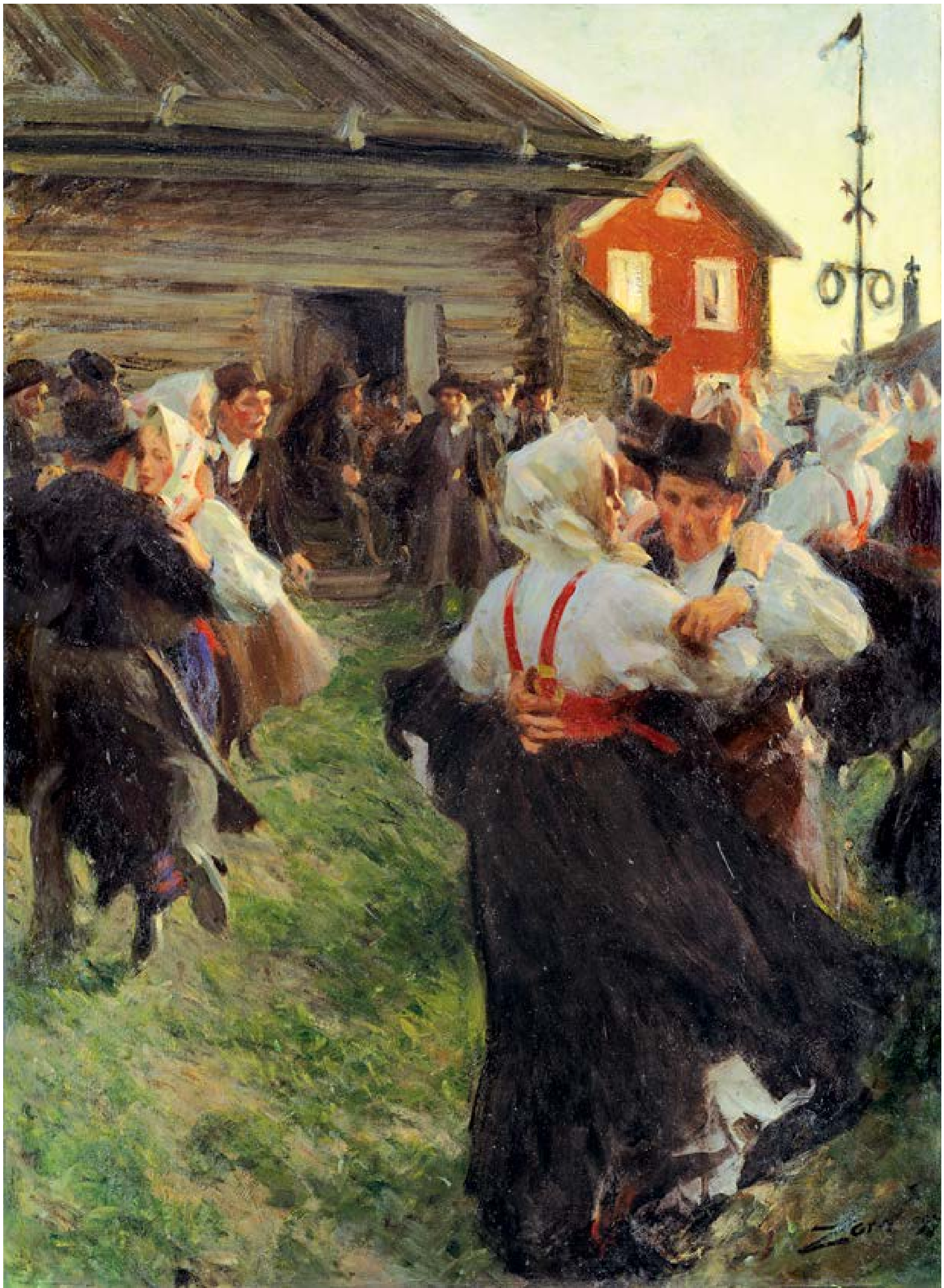
The scene described was a part of the retrospective *Biography* by the Danish-Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset in 2014 at the Statens Museum of Art in Copenhagen. For the installation *The One & The Many*, a multistory prefabricated gray building of concrete slabs was fitted into the large entrance hall of the museum, its massive architecture almost original size. → **fig.1** This “house within a house” could not be entered but there were numerous windows that allowed views into pseudo-private rooms of various kinds. The exhibition visitor found himself in an anticipated staging of his own voyeurism. Putatively naturalistic replicas of everyday objects and realistic scenes, defamiliarized by means of logical fractures and by being transferred into the gallery space, are recurrent components of the artistic works of Elmgreen & Dragset. By means of the defamiliarizing effects, the superficially familiar becomes permeable to paradoxes, which seem to ferment beneath the “smooth” surface of the known. The latent absurdity of everyday banalities is shifted to the focus of attention and gets reflected onto the self-evident quality of the art world. The installations by Elmgreen & Dragset, who have been working together since 1995, are thus always also self-referential works, which critically question their own status as “artworks.”<sup>2</sup>

The art book disconcertingly transferred into the prefabricated building is an edition of the survey *Malerne på Skagen* by the Danish art historian Lise Svanholm. In the English translation of the book, entitled *Northern Light. The Skagen Painters*,<sup>3</sup> the atmospheric prefix “Northern Light” has joined the title. This attribute follows a common interpretative schema of Nordic painting that has dominated (at least) international art history writing until the present day: climatic and geographic characteristics of the Nordic countries—such as the light spectacle of the midnight sun—are combined with stereotyped ideas of naturalness, authenticity, and purity and are mythically or even magically charged. Idealizing topoi of longing serve a

kind of branding specific to the region (“region branding”).<sup>4</sup> They are functionalized as self-images or public images to create a region-spanning identity of the North. The point of departure for the art-historical fashion of identifying Nordic painting with proximity to nature and atmospheric descriptions of light was the exhibition *Northern Light. Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting* in 1982 at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.<sup>5</sup> The curatorial approach of this “Nordic-poetic” show lastingly shaped the discourse and functioned in a conceptually formative way.

The installation by Elmgreen & Dragset, in contrast, makes no firmly established interpretative overture and opposes a homogenizing narrative. Instead, references to Nordic art are inscribed into the context of the interior in ways that are fragmented and enigmatic. If the illustrated book with its beach motif was an almost marginal detail in a complexly designed space, one that might also escape the fleeting gaze of the viewer, then the opened beer cans and empty beer bottles distributed across the tiled table seem all the more dominant. But in the beer bottles as well, presumably indicative of subculture, there can also be found a hidden reference to “high art”: Jacob Christian Jacobsen (1811–1887), who in the nineteenth century founded what is today the largest brewery in Denmark, was also an important art collector and patron. After his death his private art collection was transformed into a public museum and remains known to this day as the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in downtown Copenhagen. The monumental museum building houses antique and modern sculpture of international provenance, as well as an extensive collection of Danish and French painting.<sup>6</sup> The superficial opposition between high culture and precariat presented in the installation *The One & The Many* thus does not merge completely into a binarily coded reading. In the work of Elmgreen & Dragset, Nordic art reveals itself as permeated by ambivalences, in which the Romantic-nationalist painting of an artist like P. S. Krøyer finds its place just as much as do the symbols of a local drinking culture.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the best-known historical images of the motif of the midnight sun were created by Anders Zorn (1860–1920), who, as a successor to the Impressionists, was also referred to as the “painter of light.”<sup>8</sup> His “white nights” occurred against the rural backdrop of the central Swedish region of Dalarna, which at the time was stylized as the ideal-typical national landscape and as the “heart of Sweden.”<sup>9</sup> But in Zorn’s work, too, numerous ambivalences and thematic “abysses” can be found, suggesting that the idyll of the painting is merely a superficial staging. Zorn himself came from the town of Mora, in Dalarna, so he was familiar with the local culture and had not traveled from the city into the provinces as an “artist-tourist” in order to record supposedly “original” customs. His image *Midsummer Dance* → fig. 4 attests to the iridescent dark-light of the Nordic summer evening, in which the sky seems to oscillate between the dusk of evening and daybreak.<sup>10</sup> The scene, which shows a village festival gathering, seems as if suffused by a muted yellow veil of light. In the foreground several couples clad in traditional clothing are dancing, while in the background a loose group of darkly clad men stand to the side of the grassy dance floor. It was the Swedish Prince Eugen (1865–1947) who first had to convince Zorn to treat this pictorial subject—his best-known—before he began working on the painting. At the time, Prince Eugen was not only an art collector, but also worked as a painter himself. On closer inspection, Zorn’s reluctance to devote himself to the motif of the celebrations around the summer solstice is also visible in the composition: the faces seem mute and typecast like masks, with the elaboration of individualized








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← 4 ANDERS ZORN

*Midsummer Dance (Midsommardans)*, 1897

Oil on canvas, 140 × 98 cm

Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

↗ 5 ANDERS ZORN

*The Mora Fair (Mora marknad)*, 1892

Oil on canvas, 133 × 167.5 cm

Mora kommun

physiognomies largely avoided. The dance is not exuberant and the celebration seems dominated by a melancholic, even uncanny basic mood. With its empty, steeply sloping center, the composition, too, works against any illusionistic access to the painting. Numerous details reveal that the actually romantic-idealizing motif of the midnight sun is here vehemently closed off to idealization and is tantamount to an inscrutable “psychogram of society.”<sup>11</sup> An explicit rejection of romanticizing descriptions of rural ways of life can also be seen in Zorn’s painting *The Mora Fair*: → fig. 5 the semiannual market was a popular pictorial theme of nineteenth-century Swedish genre painting.<sup>12</sup> But in Zorn’s work the bustling market activities appear only as an absence. In the background, horse carriages and pedestrians can be seen in transit. The focus of the painting is a young girl with an exhausted-looking body posture and facial expression. In front of her is an apparently unconscious man lying face down on the ground, his body cut off by the edge of the image and partially obscured by the branches of a bush. It stands to reason that the man is drunk. That this tragically banalized figural group is found at the foot of a hill may be an indication of social decline and fundamental resignation. The ideal of Dalarna as a scenic and cultural idyll, generated discursively and constructed visually by Zorn’s contemporaries, is becoming brittle and is displayed precisely in its brittleness.

## THE PERIPHERAL GAZE: ON THE MARGINS OF REPRESENTATION

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The cultural diversity of the North is reflected in the art production, which participated in various ways in the avant-garde currents of modernism.<sup>13</sup> The pictorial themes of modern Nordic painting were by no means limited to the—empathetic or decaying—representation of sublime nature and of idyllic scenes far from the urban centers, even if the international exhibitions in curatorial succession to the 1982 show *Northern Light* in New York can easily awaken this impression. Nor was it dominated by a paradigm of naturalistic representation. The avant-garde currents of the time were also formally adopted, shaped, and further developed. In the writing of art history, the European North is often designated as periphery per se—from a perspective in which the central European metropolises such as Paris, Berlin, and London function as the center. But these kinds of binary oppositional pairings of center and periphery are not consistent with the varied, innovative forms of Nordic art production.

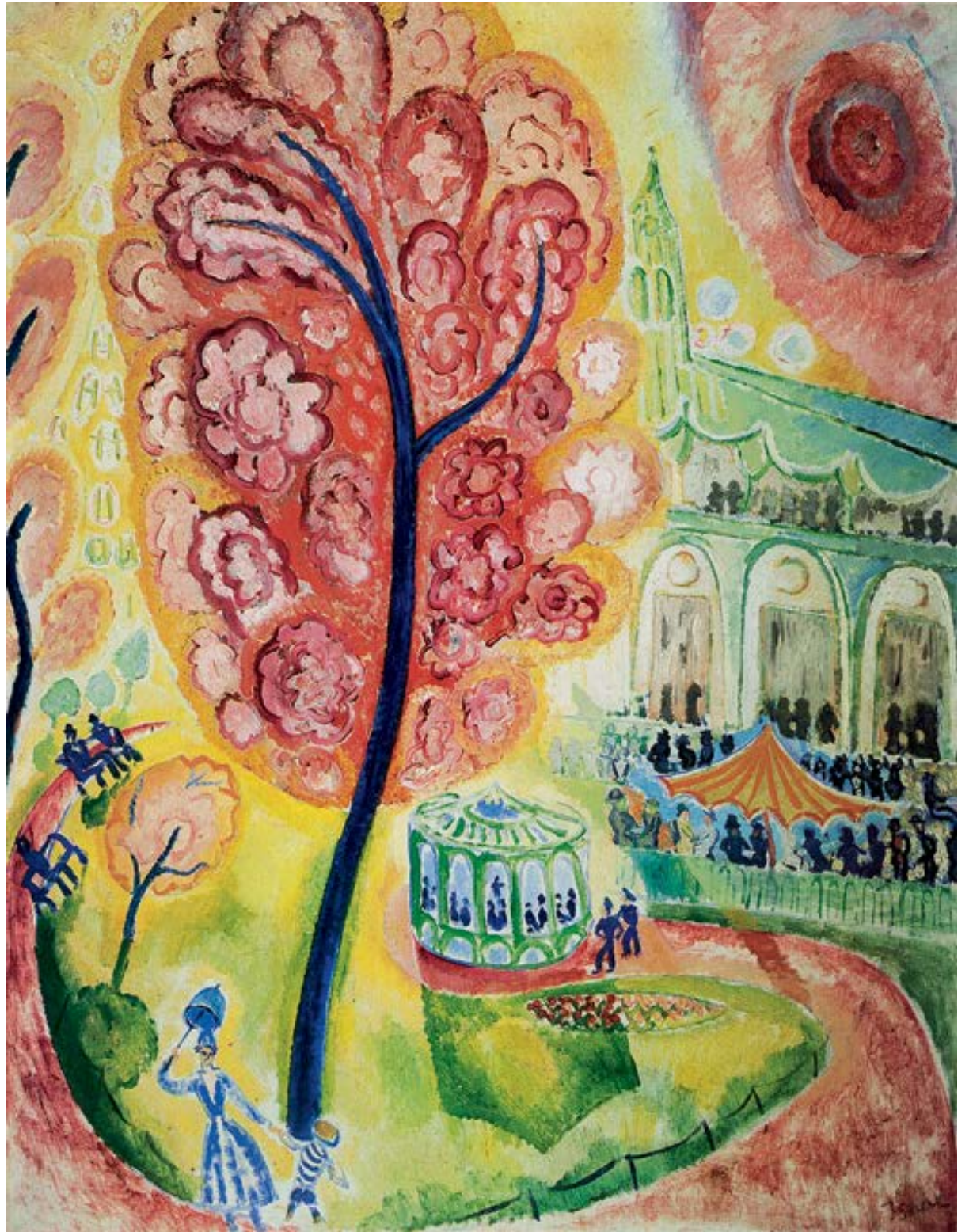
In the art-historical research, similar bipolar patterns found themselves transferred onto the North itself, its regions subdivided into centers and peripheries. Artists from the core Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway—which, together with Finland and Iceland, form the Nordic countries—were frequently stylized as representative agents of Nordic art. This has prevented a view of the nonnational regions of the North, which have significantly contributed to the cultural diversity of northern Europe and continue to do so. The Faroes and Greenland as present-day autonomous regions of the Danish kingdom, the German-Danish border region in Schleswig-Holstein, and Sápmi, the area of settlement of the transnational minority group the Sámi, form more than merely “marginal” regions within the North.<sup>14</sup> In more recent research, approaches can increasingly be found that make the position on the cultural and geographical margins conceptually useful and translate it into a positive appellation: the concept of the “North Atlantic Rim” is an example of this kind of “challenge to the concept” of the North.<sup>15</sup> But the historical educational situation in the Nordic countries also allows for inferences as to why specific built-up urban areas proved to be especially productive artistically: for a long time, only Copenhagen and Stockholm had art academies. Prospective artists from other regions in the



➤ 6 SIGRID HJERTÉN  
*Flag Parade (Flaggparaden)*, 1914  
 Oil on canvas, 46.5 × 38.5 cm  
 Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm

North thus had to leave their home areas to visit these state educational centers. Another popular alternative in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was enrollment in art schools in other parts of Europe.

Like many Nordic artists drawn at the time to France, the Swedish painter Sigrid Hjertén (1885–1948) was a student at the Académie Matisse in Paris. With *Flag Parade* → fig. 6 she created a brightly colorful painting in stylistic succession to Fauvism; her teacher Henri Matisse (1869–1954) was considered its main proponent. The coloration liberates itself from the goal of illusionistic representation and captivates by means of its schematized contrast of luminous warm and cool colors. Through the expressive coloration and the “wild” tectonics of the image, dominated by diagonals, the appellation of the Fauves is also explained, which can be translated from the French as “wild animals” and which served Hjertén as a stylistic model from which she was able to develop her own independent visual language. In a decorative jumble, *Flag Parade* describes a Stockholm harbor scene with steaming ships, in which the Swedish flag is an especially dominant detail. In modern Nordic painting, flags were integrated into images as a representational medium only to a limited extent. Generally, it was other motifs and codes that stood for national ties or a Nordic positioning. Historically, the Danish flag, the *Dannebrog*, was the first flag with the Scandinavian cross, which provided the orientation for all the Nordic countries and regions, with the exception of the flags of Greenland (1985) and Sápmi (1986). During her period of artistic production, Hjertén was described as the “most Nordic” of all the French-inspired Swedish Expressionists.<sup>16</sup> This attribution—that Hjertén was the “most



Nordic” of a group of internationally oriented artists—shows that in the art criticism of the time the “North” already served as a relational concept and (self-)reflective interpretative category.

The motif of mass-cultural amusement, familiar especially from French modernism, was symbolically depicted in the images of Hjertén’s husband, the Swedish painter and stage-set designer Isaac Grünewald (1889–1946). In *The Singing Tree* → fig.7 the world of street cafés, dance, circus, and variété theater is assembled and at the same time quasi-mythologically romanticized: the motif of a tree of life can also be found in other paintings by the artist.<sup>17</sup> The variant of the singing tree in the city park—that is, an anthropomorphizing of the urban vegetation—may be a cipher for the domestication of nature in the wake of urbanization. These typified signs of modernity are



← 7 ISAAC GRÜNEWALD  
*The Singing Tree (Det sjungande trädet)*, 1915  
 Oil on canvas, 116 × 90 cm  
 Norrköpings Konstmuseum

➤ 8 JAIS NIELSEN  
*Departure! (Afgang!)*, 1918  
 Oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm  
 Tilhører Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, Toreby Lolland

not, however, placed within a critical context but are almost emphatically described as new forms and possibilities of amusement. The entire urban image seems patterned on a living organism. Only the design of the people, who—with the exception of a dancing mother-child duo in the foreground—are anonymized as uniform silhouettes, provides grounds for suspecting a critical commentary on modern mass culture and the paradigm of modernity.<sup>18</sup>

Another side of the industrialized modern world can be seen in the painting *Departure!* → fig. 8 by the Danish artist Jais Nielsen (1885–1961). Acceleration, mobility, and technological progress are shifted into the foreground of the dynamic train-station scene and are allied to the avant-garde formal language of Cubism and Futurism. The picture surface is divided into geometrized forms and appears as a fragmentary, anti-illusionistic, simultaneous view of various individual elements. The motif of the clock dominates and seems to determine the hectic pace of both the human movement and the departure times of the trains. The clock is shown not only as a stylized sun above the heads of the people, but also, in miniature version, in the form of the pocket watch, suggesting an omnipresence of the measuring and pressure of time. In Nielsen's work, modern busyness finds itself converted into a narrative painting.<sup>19</sup>



## CONSTRUCTIONS: THE NORTH, SCANDINAVIA, AND THE ARCTIC

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The exhibition *Arktis* in the Danish Louisiana Museum for Modern Art welcomed the visitor in 2013 with a wall projection, whose virtual and ephemeral materiality, just like its motif, could stand as a symbol for the cultural-geographic construct of the “North.” The work was a projected version of Caspar David Friedrich’s (1774–1840) painting *The Sea of Ice*, → **fig. 9** the original of which is found in the Hamburger Kunsthalle and does not travel.<sup>20</sup> Friedrich was born in Greifswald, on the Baltic Sea, which at the time was part of Swedish Pomerania, and studied at the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen.<sup>21</sup> Not only because of his biographic positioning, his paintings were already seen by contemporaries as typically “Nordic.”<sup>22</sup> The painter’s model for his later motif of the sea of ice was not—as the title leads one to expect—the Arctic Ocean with fragmented polar ice and icebergs in the background, but only the ice-covered Elbe. At the time, there were no photographs of polar expeditions in circulation, only reports and illustrations. Friedrich had made various color and form studies of ice floes on remnants of canvas, which he subsequently transferred into the painting. But the stage-like presentation and dramatization of the landscape surpasses the criteria of mimetic faithfulness to reality. In *The Sea of Ice*, Friedrich created an imaginary view of the Arctic, the complex constructedness of which cannot be discerned in the pictorial logic, but is constitutive of the composition.<sup>23</sup>

In the research, the idea of the “North” is identified from various sides as a cultural-geographic construct, which has been in transformation for centuries and has stood, or stands, in dynamic relation to other collective concepts of identity, such as “Scandinavia,” the “Arctic,” or the historical “Hanseatic League” in the Baltic Sea region. But the constructed character of a unified North is not always recognizable in the discourses and appears all too often as a naturalized, universally valid concept that masks the cultural, political, and geographical diversity of northern Europe.<sup>24</sup>

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◀ 9 CASPAR DAVID  
FRIEDRICH

*The Sea of Ice (Das Eismeer)*, ca. 1823/24  
Oil on canvas, 96.7 × 126.9 cm  
Hamburger Kunsthalle

Seen historically, completely different semanticizing strategies of the “Nordic” can be discerned: antique climatic theory already contained the idea that geographic conditions had an effect on a person’s character and mentality. This led to the formation of a pole between North and South, in which—according to this reading—the North was imagined as a “natural unity.”<sup>25</sup> Later, the Latin term for northerliness, *borealis*, served to form additional oppositions. Under the catchword of “borealism,” present-day research deals with the formation of various stereotypes that characterize the North as “other” in distinction to the central European mainland.<sup>26</sup> Borealisms thus stand in the tradition of an “Arctic Orientalism” or “Nordic Orientalism.”<sup>27</sup>

Generally, it is the religious homogeneity of Protestantism and the “Nordic linguistic community” that are stressed as central factors of the cultural connectedness of the Nordic countries.<sup>28</sup> But these identity-forming criteria—the confessionally linked religiosity as well as the mutual comprehensibility of the Nordic languages—are based on generalizations, which are not tenable in their exclusivity.<sup>29</sup> For example, the Finnish, Sámi, and Greenlandic languages display a linguistic difference that, in the history of the Nordic countries, has repeatedly led to hierarchizations and exclusions.<sup>30</sup> On the basis of these and other ambivalences, the multilayered concept of the “North,” in which cultural, political, and geographic perspectives are comingled, has also been designated by the Swedish historian Peter Aronsson a “productive myth.”<sup>31</sup>

The Treaty of Kiel in 1814 brought about political changes for all the Nordic countries and regions. A fundamental territorial restructuring of the North took place, which continued to exist and exert an effect into the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century the concept of the North was meant to emphasize the equally important positions of Sweden, Denmark, and the nations of Norway, Finland, and Iceland, which had only recently become independent or autonomous. It aimed at strengthening the political relations between the Nordic countries, which increasingly presented themselves as a unity during this period.<sup>33</sup> The Scandinavism movement that had been active in the nineteenth century thus passed over—even if no longer formulated as a distinct political movement—into a Nordism, which had a larger radius of spatial and identity construction as its goal.<sup>34</sup> The paradigm of the national state seemed to be compatible with the transnational collective of the North.<sup>35</sup> As a demonstration of historical and cultural connectedness, the metaphor of a “Nordic family” was increasingly circulated.<sup>36</sup> In various exhibition concepts at the time, alternative patterns of the formation of a collective were also tested: the 1914 *Baltiska*







↖ 10 Nordic Biennial (*Nordiska biennalen*),  
1943, Gothenburg  
Photograph

↑ 11 P. S. KRØYER  
*Midsummer's Eve Bonfire on Skagen's Beach*  
(*St. Hansblus på Skagens strand*), 1906  
Oil on canvas, 149.5 × 257 cm  
Skagens Museum

*utställningen* (Baltic Exhibition) mounted in Malmö received a great deal of attention and brought together works by artists from various regions of the Baltic Sea area. In addition to Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, participating countries also included Germany and Russia. A progressive feature of the Baltic Exhibition was connecting arts and crafts and the applied arts with “high” art genres such as painting, and thus breaking apart conventional hierarchies.<sup>37</sup> From 1939 to 1943 the *Nordiska biennalen* (*Nordic Biennial*) → fig. 10 was held three times in Gothenburg. Mounted in a newly constructed exhibition hall, the show was intended to offer a representative overview of contemporary modernist art practice in the Nordic countries.<sup>38</sup> At the time of the Biennial, the structures of political identity that had been in uproar in the early twentieth century had already consolidated themselves once again. Works were exhibited by artists from the five countries commonly classified to this day as “Nordic,” thus further shaping the cultural and political idea of a unified “North.”



II.

**SPACES, BORDERS, IDENTITIES**

## TRANSGRESSIONS: THE GERMAN-DANISH BORDER REGION

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Monotonous scenery that seems to stretch out into infinity is one of the central features of Emil Nolde's (1867–1956) landscape images. → **fig. 12** The geographic conformity is broken up by intensely colored cloud formations that throw the sky into turmoil and lend their mood to the entire scene. The expressive natural spectacle above the marshy landscape of the German-Danish border area stands in the tradition of the North Frisian painter Hans Peter Feddersen (1848–1941), in whose work the forces of nature of his native region were a recurring motif. Feddersen devoted himself principally to the austere charm of the island of Sylt and the Halligen islands, shaped by storm tides, in North Frisia.<sup>1</sup> → **fig. 13** The dynamism inherent in Nolde's works and the intensive coloration stand in contrast to the terrain's purported uniformity, a charge Nolde felt to be unfair. In his autobiography Nolde wrote: "Our landscape is unassuming, remote from anything intoxicating or lush, we know this, but in return for the intimate observer's love of it, it gives him an infinite amount of still, inward beauty, of austere grandeur, and also of stormily wild life."<sup>2</sup> A whole set of moralistic value judgments are connected to the painter's comments, already implied in the wording "intimate observer." These are accompanied by a characterization of the people living in the North, who—to follow the traditional topos of art theory—were the opposite of the inhabitants of more southerly climes. Alfred Lichtwark (1852–1914) and Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) were among the exponents of this line of thinking, in which the artist and his native region were viewed as a natural unity. Furthermore, it was also believed that climatic conditions were reflected in artistic creation, for example in the regional atmosphere and coloration.<sup>3</sup> Nature was thus made into a space of identification as well as a central factor that was thought to contribute to the formation of the subject. This ideological approach is of significance in that it defied the drawing of national boundaries and suggested unities that opposed the political resolutions adopted at the time. Nolde's biography exemplifies the artificiality of the politically motivated shifting of borders, which necessitated that the painter change his citizenship in 1920. As the result of a referendum, Northern Schleswig became Danish, which is why the artist relinquished his German citizenship. He himself refrained from voting and voiced his support for a clear separation



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† 12 E M I L N O L D E  
*Evening Landscape in North Frisia*  
(*Abendlandschaft Nordfriesland*), undated  
Watercolor, 33.3 × 47.1 cm  
Nolde Stiftung Seebüll



between statehood and artistry: “Are not politics and art two different things? Should not artistic persons be relieved of all things political and be allowed to stand apart from the conflict of national boundaries?”<sup>4</sup> But his regional affiliation to the “narrow land between the two seas” continued to be expressed in his family name. Born Hans Emil Hansen, this crosser of borders married Ada Vilstrup (1879–1946), a Danish resident of Copenhagen, in 1902. That same year he changed his name to reflect his birthplace of Nolde, near Tønder, in Southern Jutland. The change of name also had a programmatic meaning for the painter in terms of his art: after the “first, preparatory half of life” it was to herald the start of the “second, artistic part.”<sup>5</sup>

The problem of drawing boundaries in the region of Southern Jutland and the alternating usurpation of the former Duchy of Schleswig up to the early twentieth century was subsumed under the catchword of the “Schleswig-Holstein Question” over the course of the first and second Schleswig Wars.<sup>6</sup> With the regional languages of North Frisian, Lower German, Low German, and South Jutlandic (*Sønderjysk*), the German-Danish border region exhibited a great cultural plurality. Nolde was thus shaped from his childhood by his experience of an existence outside of clear national affiliation: just three years before his birth Denmark lost his hometown to neighboring Prussia and in 1867 it became part of the newly founded North German Confederation. In his parental home the Danish dialect of South Jutlandic was the everyday language commonly used by his father, Niels Hansen, of Frisian descent, and his mother, Christine, with her Schleswig origins; multilinguality was necessary for social coexistence.

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† 13 HANS PETER FEDDERSEN  
*Halligen Terp on Wasteland*  
*(Halligwarft auf Ödland)*, 1900  
 Oil on canvas, 51.5 × 71.5 cm  
 Kunsthalle zu Kiel

→ 14 AGNES SLOTT-MØLLER  
*Ox Island in Flensborg Fjord*  
*(Okseøerne i Flensborg Fjord)*, ca. 1909  
 Oil on canvas, 42 × 54 cm  
 Museumsberg Flensburg

Other artists in addition to Nolde also had their homes in the rural German-Danish border region, which manifested a melting pot of regional identities.<sup>7</sup> One important example to mention is the internationally oriented, but long artistically isolated, pioneer of abstraction, Franciska Clausen (1899–1986). Prominent examples from earlier generations include the writer Herman Bang (1857–1912) and the painter Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783–1853), both of whom centered their lives in the Danish cultural sphere. The latter came from Sundewitt, not far from the later artists' colony of Ekensund. After training as a painter in Flensburg he studied at the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen, subsequently working as a professor at the studios there. His Romantic-classicizing painting is considered formative for the Danish Golden Age in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Southern Jutland also became the hub of the politically motivated artistic work of the Copenhagen painter Agnes Slott-Møller (1862–1937). As a consequence of the territorial losses in 1864, more and more movements formed in Denmark with the goal of national regeneration and cultural recollection. Slott-Møller, a student of P. S. Krøyer, thematically addressed Danish folk sagas and medieval regional history. Her decorative painting style was formally oriented towards the early Italian Renaissance and the English Pre-Raphaelites; her enigmatic visual language exhibited a Symbolist throughout her life. Around the turn of the century, together with her husband and fellow artist, Harald Slott-Møller (1864–1937), Agnes joined the Sønderjylland movement (*Den danske bevægelse i Sønderjylland*), which advocated politically for the concerns of the Danish-speaking population in the border region. From 1909 the couple traveled through Schleswig-Holstein, which had formerly been under the Danish flag. The destination enduringly impressed Slott-Møller and allowed her to devise a memorable reversal of periphery and center: “We felt respect and gratitude for the way our countrymen venerated their Danishness, openly revealed their love of Denmark. [...] One feels as if only *there* is one in the real Denmark, as if *these* are the true Danish people.”<sup>8</sup> Even before the artist couple began their attempt to start up a colony in Southern Jutland on the model of Skagen, Slott-Møller created a programmatic image of the Ox Islands, in the Flensborg Fjord. → **fig. 14** At first glance the painting, unusually naturalistic for Slott-Møller, has no political import. The composition is dominated by a few horizontal lines, with the coloration limited to alternating colored areas in green and blue shades. The influence of P. S. Krøyer's style of atmospheric painting is unmistakable. It is a historic tradition that sheds light on the image's ideological relevance: the Ox Islands, according to the saga, is the burial site of the Danish queen Margaret I, who founded the Kalmar Union in 1397, establishing the Scandinavian national federation of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, which until 1523 extended from Iceland through Schleswig-Holstein to southwestern Finland. According to the legend, Margaret I died of plague in Flensburg Harbor. The painting of the Ox Islands thus stands metonymically for a Danish-dominated union of Scandinavia. In the work of Agnes Slott-Møller the instrumental character of landscape painting in the decades of changing border demarcations is vividly manifested.

