

Albert Edelfelt (1854-1905)

Lights of Finland

10 Mars - 10 July 2022



Petit Palais
Musée des Beaux-Arts
de la Ville de Paris

Informations
petitpalais.paris.fr

After retrospectives dedicated to the Swedes Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn, and The Golden Age of Danish Painting, the Petit Palais pursues its exploration of Nordic artists. This new exhibition, organised with the Ateneum Art Museum of Helsinki, is dedicated to Albert Edelfelt, one of the stars of Finnish painting. Some 100 works retrace his career and illustrate how the artist greatly contributed to the recognition of a Finnish art in the late 19th century.



Albert Edelfelt, *Boys playing at the Shore*, 1884,
Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum.
Photo Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

Born in Porvoo in 1854, on the southern coast of Finland, Albert Edelfelt was the son of an architect of Swedish origin. Having initially received artistic training in Helsinki, he then benefited from a state subsidy that allowed him to pursue his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Wishing to become a history painter, Edelfelt, like many artists of the time, left for Paris to launch his career and ended up settling in the French capital.

He enrolled in Paris' prestigious School of Fine Arts and entered the studio of Jean-Léon Gérôme in 1874. His style, at first historicist, very quickly evolved, drawing inspiration from new trends in Parisian life. In 1875, Edelfelt met Jules Bastien-Lepage, a prominent representative of naturalism.

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Edelfelt's painting offered a new vision, henceforth a mix of impressionism and realism. Critics and the public at large praised him and hailed his talent for portrait painting. In 1886, the painter chose to immortalise Louis Pasteur, a giant of his times, who had just discovered the vaccine against rabies. The portrait, a veritable allegory of cutting-edge Science, was roundly acclaimed at the Salon and earned Edelfelt great renown.

Edelfelt continued to return to Finland every summer, where his love of Finnish landscapes gave rise to large, sensitive compositions. He drew inspiration from rural life and the traditions of his homeland to create large paintings which he then showed at the Salon. His mastery of twilight scenes and tangible tenderness toward his subjects make Edelfelt one of the most eloquent spokespersons for his country.

Deeply patriotic, Edelfelt used his notoriety in the struggle for Finnish independence from the influence of an all-powerful Russia. Through his political and aesthetic commitment and international status, he became a model for a young generation of Finnish artists including Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Helene Schjerfbeck and Magnus Enckell.

This first Parisian retrospective marks the return to grace in France of a master and pioneer of Finnish art who remains very popular in all Nordic countries.

“Finland is a poor, secluded country whose entire history played out in the shadows, amidst the torment of political turmoil, misery and deprivations of all kinds. [...] We march on. If our step is yet uncertain, one explanation is the total lack of any plastic tradition and extreme youth of our art. It is not yet half a century old, and its first master is Edelfelt.”

Magnus Enckell, *Preface. Autumn Salon. Illustrated catalogue of the exhibition of Finnish art*, 1908, Paris.

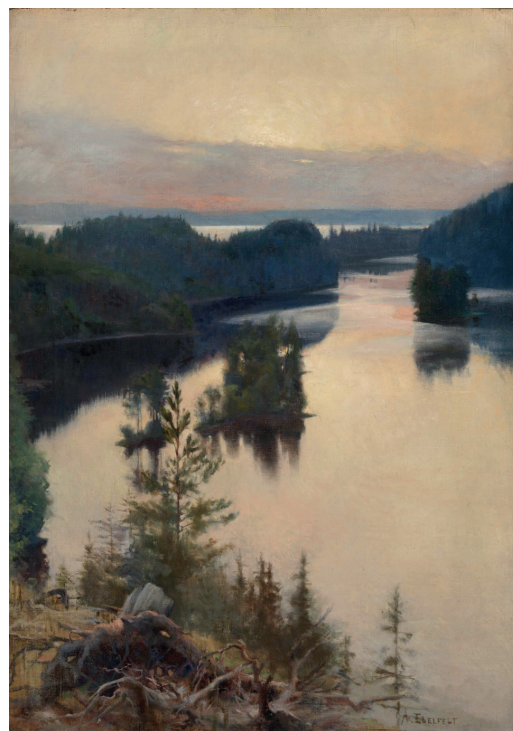
The exhibition was organised with the Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

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Curation :

Anne-Charlotte Cathelineau, curator at the Petit Palais.
Dr. Anne-Maria Pennonen and Dr. Hanne Selkokari, curators at the Ateneum Art Museum of Helsinki.



Albert Edelfelt, *Sunset on the Hills of Kaukola*, 1889-1890, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum Photo Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.



Albert Edelfelt, *Portrait of Louis Pasteur*, 1886, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay)
Martine Beck-Coppola