

Malmö Art Museum

THE ART COLLECTION OF HERMAN GOTTHARDT

The joy of being able to create an art collection may be sufficient in and of itself, but in the end the collection has to belong to the public. (Maurice Girardin)

The donation of Herman Gotthardt (1873-1949) – one of the largest gifts of art in our country – consists of 700 works of Nordic contemporary art, collected between 1914 and 1943. It includes around 300 oil paintings and some 60 sculptures, in addition to drawings, pastels, water colors, gouaches and graphic art.

The Herman Gotthardt art collection constitutes the foundation of Malmö Art Museum's collections of early Nordic twentieth century art, and pieces from the collection are in frequent use in the everyday operation and also on loan both within and outside the country.



Christian Berg, Portrait of Herman Gotthardt, 1943

The Businessman

Herman Gotthardt was born in 1873 on the island of Falster in Denmark. Gotthardt arrived in Malmö in 1905 to manage a Norwegian shipping company. The same year – at the age of 32 – he married his childhood sweetheart, Hanne Margrethe née Pedersen (1867 – 1964). The couple had two daughters, Asta (Hansen) and Elsa (Clase). In 1909 Gotthardt took over the company, which was registered in his name. AB Herman Gotthardt was incorporated in 1916, and he remained its executive director until 1943.

The Art Collector

In his own inimitable way, Professor Ragnar Josephsson describes how it was that Gotthardt got started collecting art. He – Gotthardt – found himself under great stress and consulted a nerve specialist. He was advised to find some outside interest as therapy – why not try some art? Gotthardt took his advice, inviting an artist every now and then and buying the occasional canvas. With each purchase he felt stronger. Whenever his nerves acted up again he increased the dosage. At an Einar Jolin exhibition he “swallowed” 18 canvases in one fell swoop. He was finally forced to build a sizable gallery next to his home in Limhamn to house his “medicine”.



Einar Jolin, Girl with dogs, 1917

Gotthardt started to collect art in earnest in 1914. And he took the advice of the nerve specialist to heart. His original intent was to create a collection of French 19th century art, including works by Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Courbet, Pissarro, Sisely, Renoir, Matisse, Picasso, etc.

Unfortunately, Gotthardt was soon forced to part with his treasures. The firm suffered an acute liquidity crisis during the First World War, and Gotthardt traveled to the United States, where he sold his artworks, thereby assuring himself of a ready supply of cash. However, Gotthardt had not only been collecting French art, but also Nordic contemporary art, and it was this latter that eventually came to predominate. He befriended a number of artists and often invited them to his home. He also provided financial support as benefactor.

The Art Collection

Herman Gotthardt's appetite for everything 20th century art had to offer was enormous. His collection varied as to contents over the years. He sold off that which did not measure up, traded up, and bought new things. Although it had never been his intention to assemble a complete inventory of Nordic contemporary art, virtually all schools and directions within Scandinavian 20th century art found themselves represented in the Villa Bost collection during the 1930s and early 1940s.

In the end, the collection came to focus on Swedish art, and of the Swedish artists, those from Skåne (Scania - region in south Sweden) came to predominate. Herman Gotthardt preferred expressionist figurative art – whether rooted in French or in German expressionism. In terms of technique, he favored painting. The motifs spanned a large area.

Swedish Art

Much of the Swedish art that Gotthardt acquired, and to which he was partial, originated with the “Men of 1909” who were heavily influenced by Matisse and the Fauvists. Painting should be a “feast for the eye”, as Isaac Grünewald put it. The collection includes pieces by Tor Bjurström, Nils Dardel, Isaac Grünewald, Sigrid Hjertén, Einar Jolin, Per Leander Engström, and Gösta Sandels.

Naivism is a completely Swedish phenomenon - an art rooted in folk culture, free, and imaginative. The collection contains works by Hilding Linnquist, Eric Hallström, Gideon Börje, and Axel Nilsson. In Sweden, the classicist wave that swept European art during the twenties was described as “the new matter-of-factness”. Its foremost proponent in Sweden was Otte Sköld. He had earlier experimented with cubism.



Gösta Adrian-Nilsson, The sailors dream of war, 1914

Vitalism or primitivism was a school that questioned classicism during the thirties, as did expressionist painting of the same period with a cruder, more brutal expression, often accompanied by a social or political message. Sven X-et Erixson, Vera Nilsson, and Albin Amelin are among the artists represented in the collection. Nils Nilsson occupies a special position with more than 50 works. He belonged to the Gothenburg colorists.

Among the Scanian artists Gösta Adrian Nilsson (GAN) is the best known. He developed an idiom that was a mixture of cubist, futuristic, and expressionistic tendencies. The Scanian modernists included Svante Bergh, Johan Johansson, Tora Vega-Holmström, Martin Edmond, Jules Schyl, and Per Siegård.

Finnish Art

The Finnish collection is more limited in scope. It contains works by the uncontested breakthrough artist within Finnish modern art: Tykko Sallinen. Others represented are J. Roukokoski and Marcus Collin.

Danish Art

Danish painting was more traditional than Swedish. One of the early modernists was J.F. Willumsen. Other important artists represented in the collection include Harald Giersing, Oluf Höst, Edward Weie and Olaf Rude, and, from the Bornholm School, Axel P. Jensen, Jens Søndergaard, Sager Hjort-Nielsen, and Vilhelm Lundström. In addition to the Danish modernists, a number of older Danish artists are also represented in the donation, e.g. Vilhelm Marstrand, Per Christian Skovgaard, Vilhelm Hammershøi, Julius Poulsen, Niels Hansen, Viggo Hadsen and Aksel Jørgensen.



Per Krogh, Sunday Afternoon, 1915

Norwegian Art

Christian Krogh and Edvard Munch prepared the way for Norwegian modernism. Torvald Erichsen was another pioneer. All are represented in the collection. In addition, there are works by Ludvig Karsten, Henrik Sørensen, Ulf Wold-Torne and Per Krogh, the son of Oda and Christian Krogh.