



## New Donation of Helene Schjerfbeck Letters to the Finnish National Gallery

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The Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery received an interesting addition to its collection of artists' letters recently, when a private individual donated eight letters written by painter Helene (Elli) Schjerfbeck (1862–1946) that had been in the possession of the donor's family. The letters relate to the last years of Schjerfbeck's life, when she was in Sweden, from the summer of 1944 to the summer of 1945. Schjerfbeck was staying in Saltsjöbaden's spa hotel where she still painted whenever her health permitted.

The recipient of the donated letters was her second cousin, artist Martha Neiglick-Platonoff (1889–1964). Schjerfbeck's mother and Neiglick's maternal grandmother were sisters. The War Censors had opened and examined half of the letters. The recipient's Russian

surname probably affected the matter. The censorship practice was obviously known to the author as well. The contents of the letters are summarised and restrained, and many things are alluded to rather than made explicit.

Martha Neiglick had studied, like Helene Schjerfbeck, at the Finnish Art Society's Drawing School and later abroad. She had remained a widow following the death of her spouse, the Russian naval captain, Lieutenant Igor Platonoff (1887–1921). To Helene Schjerfbeck, Martha Platonoff was both a relative and an artist colleague.

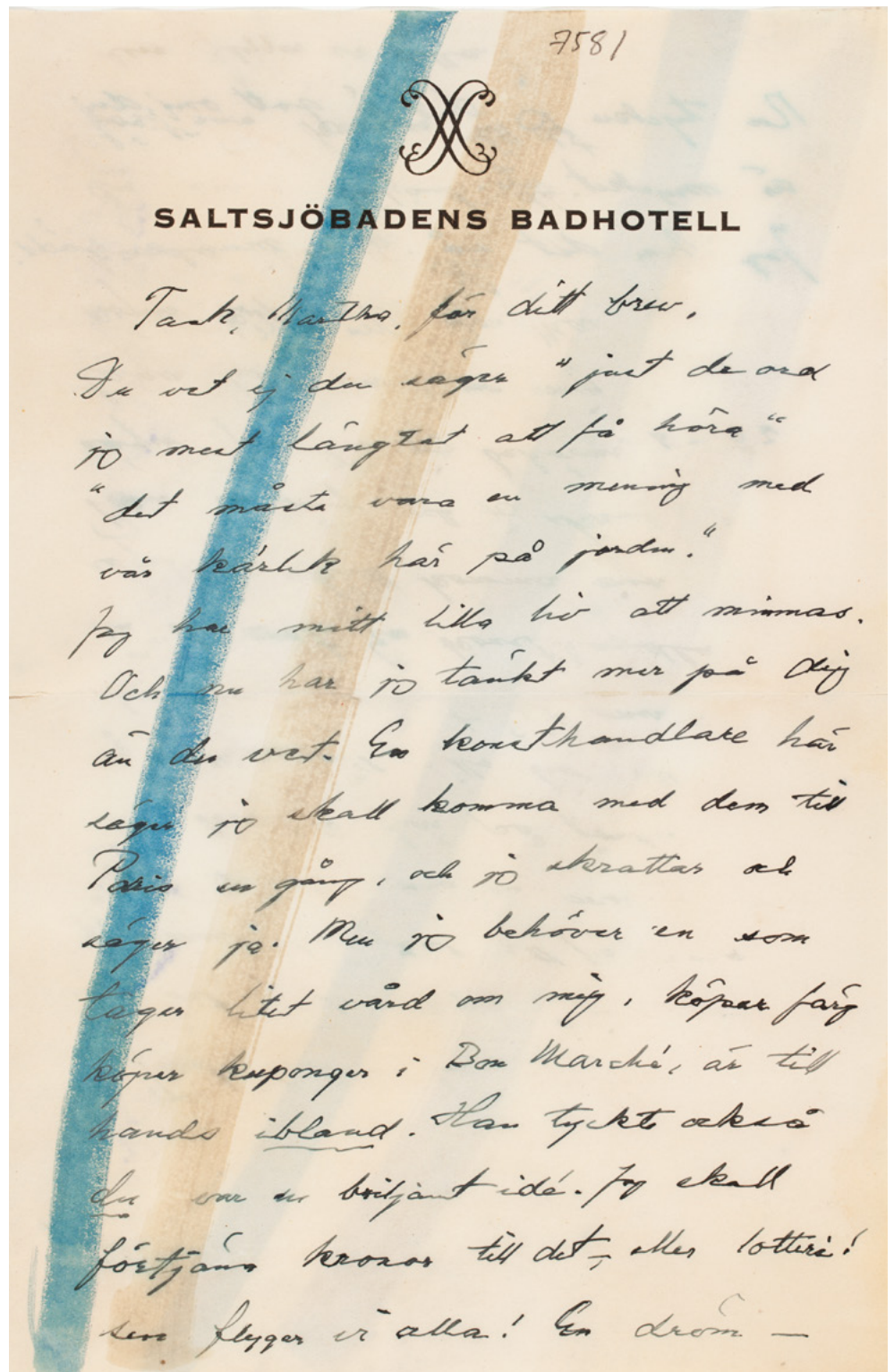
The donated letters date from the time of the Continuation War's intensification in the summer 1944, and it is because of this that Schjerfbeck had moved to a more secure residence in Sweden. Martha Platonoff was staying in the Finnish countryside to escape the Russian bombardments. Her only offspring, Lieutenant Stephan Platonoff (1917–44) – who was also a Master of Arts

– had crashed at the Finnish front line in the Battle of Ihantala on the Karelian Isthmus at the end of June that year. The event is never mentioned in the letters, but it is made apparent through the themes of fear, mourning and loss contained in them.

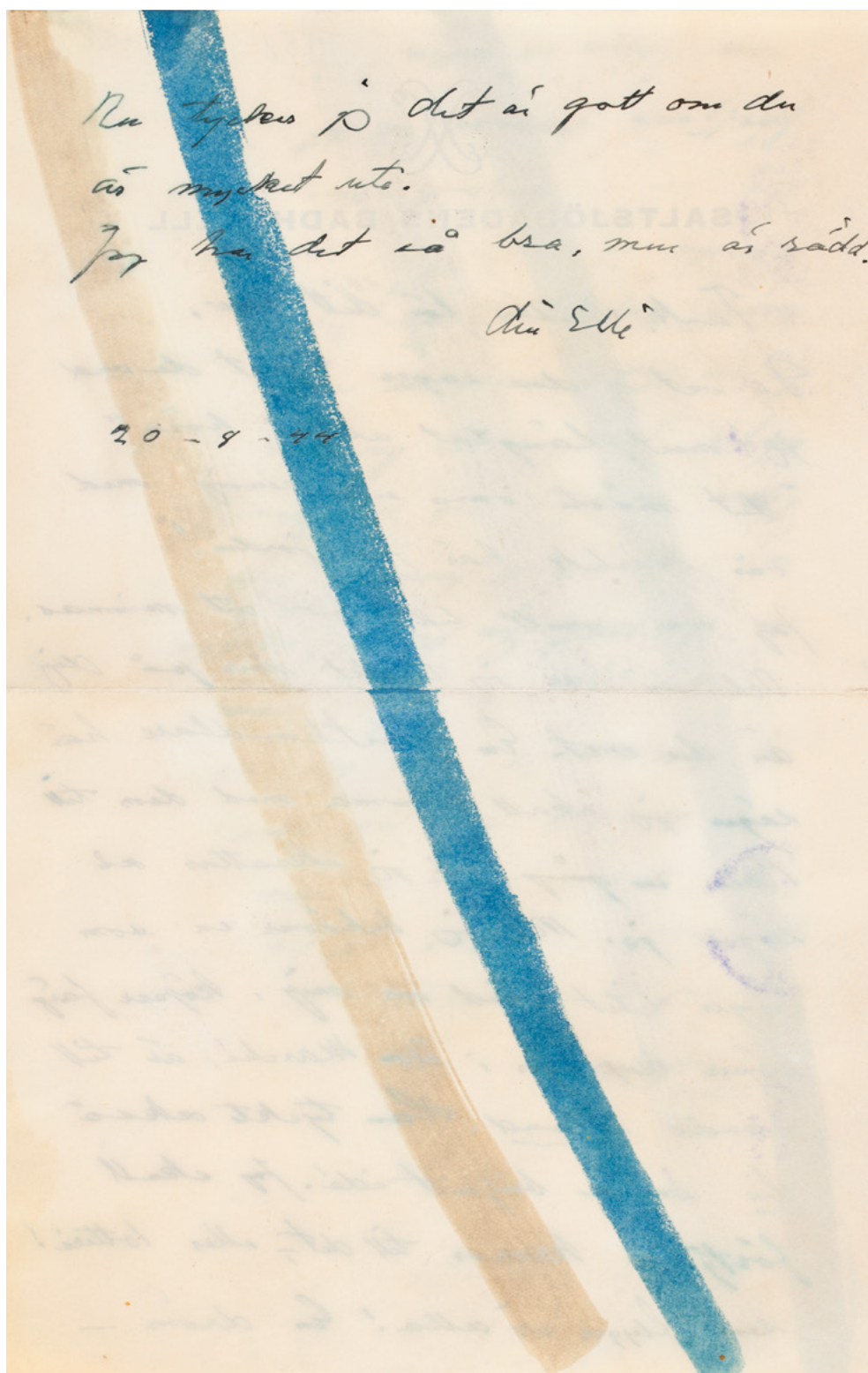
The letters will be made available to researchers after they have received due conservation. One of the letters, written on 20 August 1944, is now published in digital format in *FNG Research* on the following pages.



Martha Neiglick-Platonoff.  
Photographer unknown.  
Archive of the Artists'  
Association of Finland.  
Archive Collections,  
Finnish National Gallery



Helene Schjerfbeck, letter to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff, Saltsjöbaden, Sweden,  
 20 August 1944, 1/2. Helene Schjerfbeck's letters to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff.  
 Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery  
 Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin



Helene Schjerfbeck, letter to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff, Saltsjöbaden, Sweden,  
20 August 1944, 2/2. Helene Schjerfbeck's letters to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff.  
Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery  
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin



Helene Schjerfbeck, letter to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff, Saltsjöbaden, Sweden, 20 August 1944, envelope. Helene Schjerfbeck's letters to Martha Neiglick-Platonoff. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin