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Ferdinand von Wright, Letter-writer

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Also published in Erkki Anttonen & Anne-Maria Pennonen (eds.),

The von Wright Brothers – Art, Science and Life. Ateneum Publications Vol. 99.

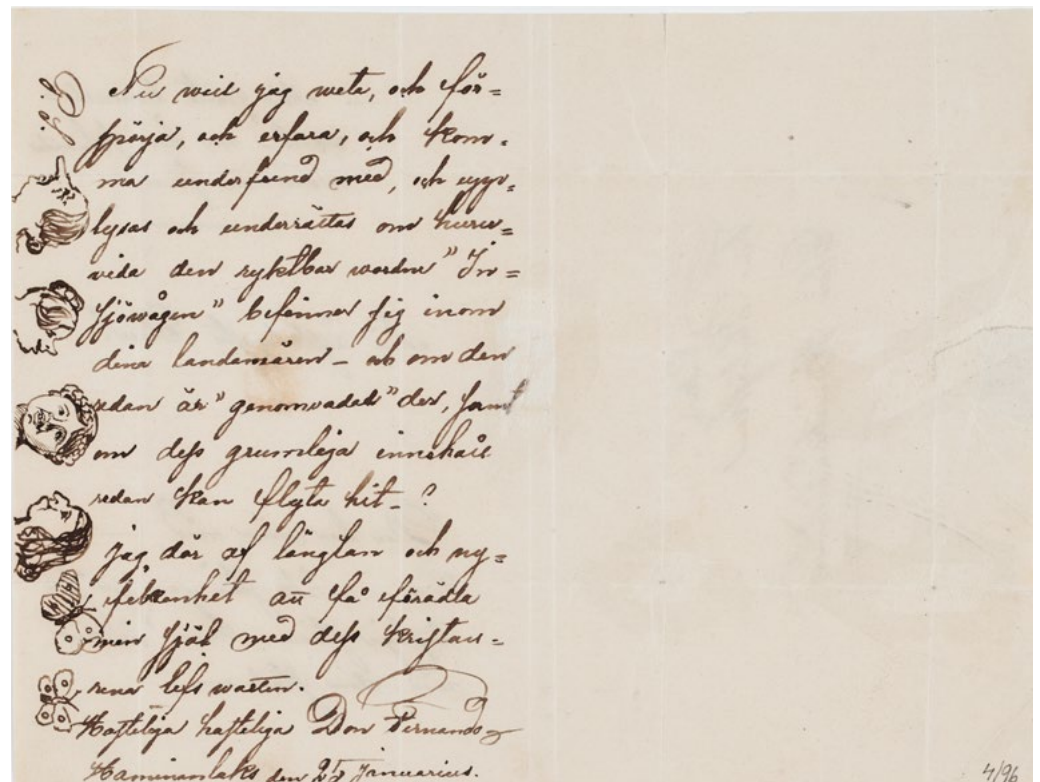
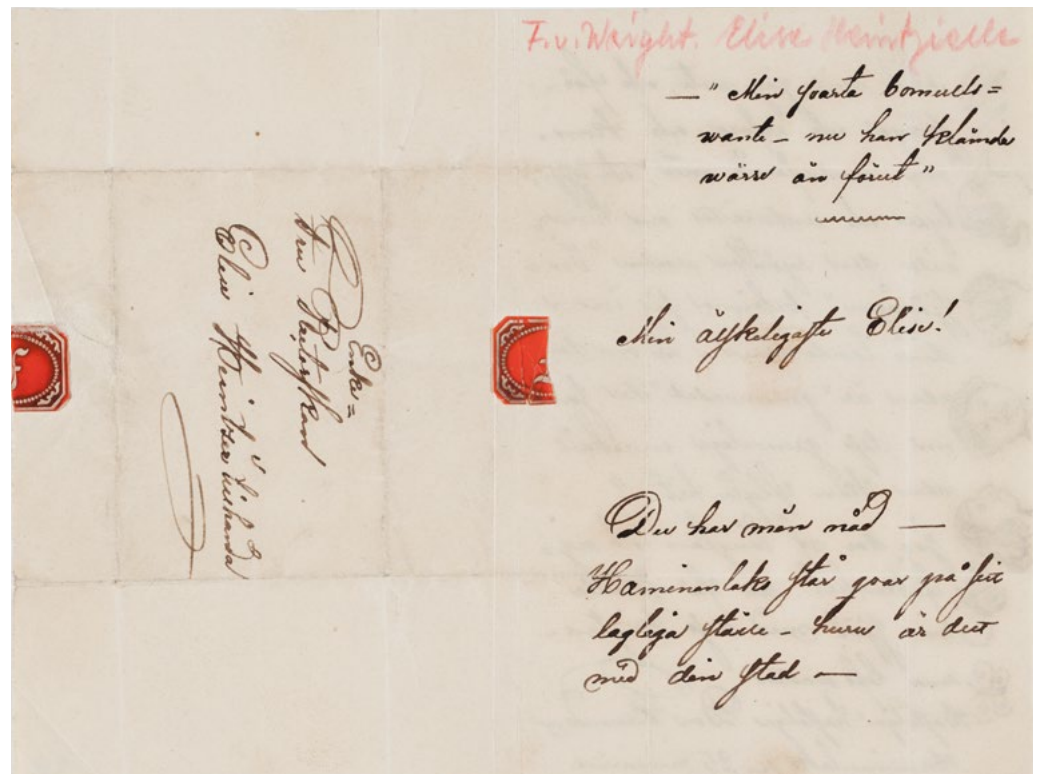
Helsinki: Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum 2017, 159–65. Transl. Wif Stenger

The Finnish National Gallery's archive collections include correspondence and other documents from artists Magnus, Wilhelm and Ferdinand von Wright. They are part of the collection of artists' letters that is made up of artists' documents both bought for and donated to the Finnish Art Society. The first batch of the brothers' letters was acquired for the collections in 1890–91.

In this article I focus on letters written by the youngest of the brothers, Ferdinand (1822–1906), of which there are 104 in the collection. They provide a background to his art and help contemporary readers to approach him as both an artist and as a person. For von Wright, who lived far from the Finnish capital, letter-writing was the most important method of maintaining contacts. Letters have always been important source materials for historians. The chronological distance from the writing of the texts imposes an interpretational challenge, but, on the other hand, letters are generally written in order to overcome and withstand chronological and geographical gaps.¹ Source material is almost always a random selection, as not all documents are generally preserved.²

1 Hyttinen, Elsi & Kivilaakso, Katri, 2010. Johdanto. *Lukemattomat sivut. Kirjallisuuden arkistot käytössä*. Eds. Elsa Hyttinen ja Katri Kivilaakso. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 930. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 9.

2 Researchers choose details of correspondence that are relevant to their own fields, leaving behind information that is irrelevant to their research and which no-one may ever make use of, or which may remain uninterpreted because of inadequate information. An example of this kind of irrelevant detail is that Ferdinand von Wright did not care for women wearing hairstyles with fringes, considering them a form of vanity. This was revealed when B. O. Schauman sent him photographs of well-known women, including an image of the internationally-successful Finnish opera singer Alma Fohrström (fan photos of the day). See Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 19 May 1887 and 14 June 1887. Collection of artists' letters. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery (= CAL, FNG). Why did Schauman send these pictures? Was it two elderly bachelors sharing their distant admiration for women?



A letter from Ferdinand von Wright to Elise Heintzie, Haminalahti, dated 25 January, year not given. Collection of Artists' Letters. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin

On letters and writing

Magnus von Wright has been a more popular subject of research than his younger brother, partly due to the wealth of the source material concerning him: the Finnish National Gallery's artists' letters collection includes 128 of his letters to his fiancée and then wife, as well as to others. He also kept a journal for more than 40 years.³ Ferdinand von Wright was not the same kind of writer as his brother. He only kept a journal in certain years,⁴ and his entries are quite brief and usually followed a daily formula: weather data, records of his works in progress, if any, and visitors. The content of his letters is quite similar to the journal entries. According to former Ateneum Art Museum curator and director Aune Lindström,⁵ who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the artist brothers, the differences between the journal-writing styles of Magnus and Ferdinand were attributable to the younger brother's 'more carefree nature'.⁶

Ferdinand's letters often refer to his poor health and his complaints about it. It is unclear what illnesses he had. In addition to previous problems, he suffered a stroke in 1884. As a result, he was at least partly bedridden and obliged to work while lying on his side.⁷ His illness may have been associated with psychosomatic symptoms, loneliness and even some degree of depression.⁸ He longed for sympathy and appreciation for the fact that he worked so much in spite of everything. According to his relatives, though, Ferdinand sometimes climbed with agility to the dovecote if he thought that no-one was watching.⁹

Correspondents

The recipients of Ferdinand von Wright's letters in the artists' letters collection include three leading figures in the Finnish Art Society: Fredrik Cygnaeus, B. O. Schauman and Thorsten Waenerberg. Many Finnish artists wrote to the leaders of the association that supported

3 Magnus von Wright's journals from the years 1824–68 are in the collections of the National Library of Finland. His work as a zoological illustrator and his active role in Helsinki networks may also be why research has focused on him.

4 Ferdinand von Wright's journals or journal-like entries have been preserved from the years 1850, 1858–59, 1866–74, 1885 and 1889. According to family lore, he burned his other journals, see Lindström, Aune, 1932. *Taiteilijaveljekset von Wright*. Helsinki: Otava, 125. The Finnish National Gallery archive collections include his travel journal from his time in Dresden in 1858, two pages of entries from 1859, as well as notes on his own houseplants from 1867–74.

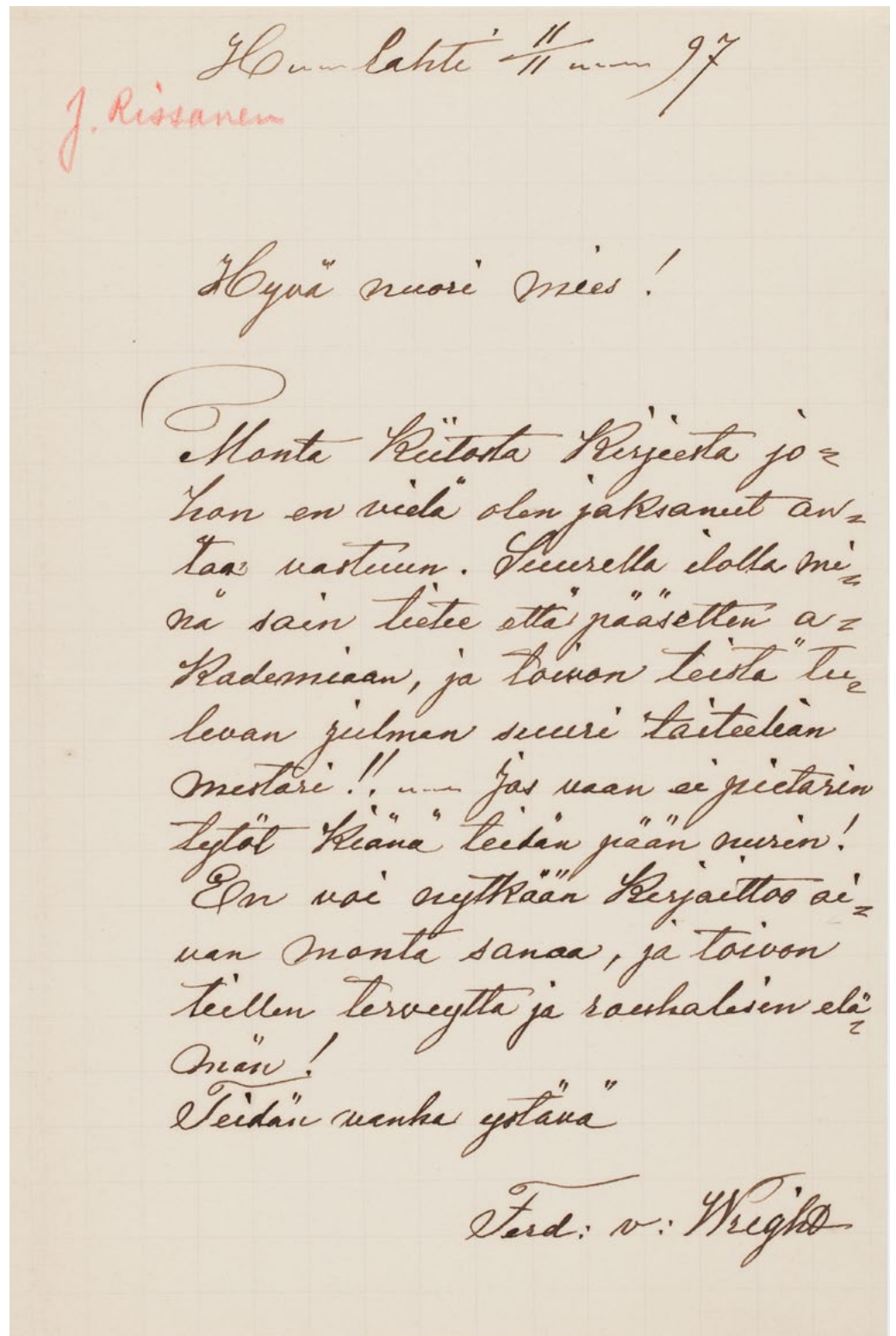
5 Aune Lindström (1901–1984) became a curator at the Ateneum Art Museum in 1928 and served as museum director from 1953–69. She completed her doctoral dissertation in 1932. While working as a curator, she organised the museum's collection of artists' letters. The Finnish National Gallery's archive collection also includes Lindström's own archive, but it contains surprisingly little material on the von Wright brothers. A few of the brothers' drawings came with the archive and were added to the Ateneum Art Museum collection, as was the earlier-obtained Lindström collection, which included e.g. zoological illustrations by the von Wright brothers. Thus museum staff members' research interests have played a role in the gathering of material.

6 Lindström 1932, 46.

7 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 14 June 1887 and 7 April 1893; Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 4 February 1889. CAL, FNG. See also Lindström 1932, 156; Stjernberg, Torsten, 2008. *Bildtexterna*. In Wright, Wilhelm & Ferdinand von 2008. *Dagböcker*. Eds. Anto Leikola, Juhani Lokki, Torsten Stjernberg & Johan Ulfvens. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, nr 600:6. Konstnärsbröderna von Wrights dagböcker 6. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 536.

8 Brusewitz, Gunnar, 1985. *Bröderna von Wright – hemma och i Sverige. Konstnärsbröderna von Wright*. Nationalmuseums utställningskatalog Nr 485. Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 29.

9 Leikola, Anto, 2008. Års- och periodsintroduktionerna. In Wright, Wilhelm & Ferdinand von 2008. *Dagböcker*. Eds. Anto Leikola, Juhani Lokki, Torsten Stjernberg & Johan Ulfvens. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, nr 600:6. Konstnärsbröderna von Wrights dagböcker 6. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 541; Lindström 1932, 157.



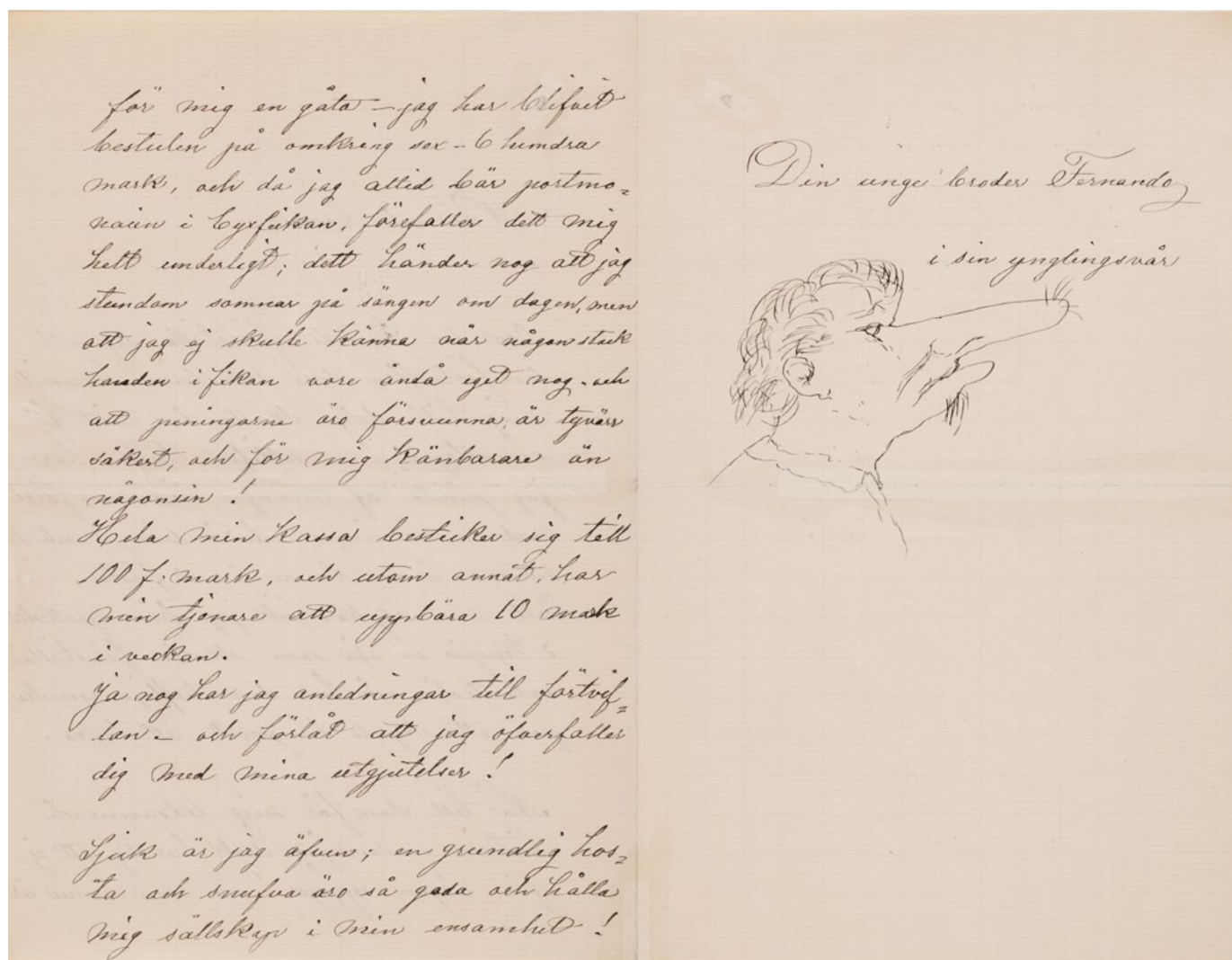
A letter from Ferdinand von Wright to the artist Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti, dated 11 November 1897.
 Collection of Artists' Letters. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery
 Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin

them, particularly to its president, Cygnaeus,¹⁰ and to the first keeper of its art collections, Schauman¹¹. Such letters were often sent by artists who were on study and work trips abroad. Ferdinand von Wright's letters, on the other hand, are messages from an artist who had remained in one place in the peace of the countryside, far from the capital and centres of European art, and who had become something of a hermit. In a way, they can be seen as anti-travel letters.

The artist Thorsten Waenerberg became keeper of the Art Society's collections in 1888,¹² and it was during his time there that the association began to gather artists' letters to support research into works of art.¹³ Ferdinand von Wright was not an archivist by nature. When asked by Waenerberg to submit letters about art written by Magnus and Wilhelm, he was only able to send in one letter by Wilhelm. Of the others, Ferdinand wrote that he had 'sacrificed them to the flames at various stages', in other words, burned them.¹⁴

Although Cygnaeus and Schauman were long-time friends of von Wright's, their leadership roles at the Society and in the country's art field inevitably affected the content of the letters. Ferdinand von Wright assured Cygnaeus of his friendship by writing that it was unlikely that there would be anyone of the male gender whose heart beat so fondly for Cygnaeus as his.¹⁵ Schauman's published reviews of the artist's work drove a wedge into their relationship.¹⁶ Schauman collected biographical information about Finnish artists, and von Wright, too, provided his information in a letter, dated April 1880.¹⁷ Waenerberg had been a student of von Wright's in 1864 in Haminalahti, where their friendship began.¹⁸ In his letters to Waenerberg, von Wright often referred to the recipient being an artist, too, and the mutual understanding that it brought.¹⁹

- 10 Cygnaeus served as vice president of the Finnish Art Society beginning in 1855 and as its president in 1863–78. His letters from Finnish artists, including those from Ferdinand von Wright, were bought from Emil Nervander for the Art Society's collection in 1890 and 1891. See the proceedings of the Finnish Art Society board from March 1890, 16 September 1890, 7 February 1891. Archive of the Finnish Art Society 1846–1939. Archive Collections, FNG; Hätönen, Helena, 2004. *Kuvataiteen keskusarkiston taiteilijakirjekokoelma tutkimuksen näkökulmasta*. Painamaton arkistonhoitotutkinnon kirjoitelma, toukokuu 2004. National Archives of Finland, Helsinki (copy: Archive Collections, FNG), 4. Ferdinand von Wright's 12 letters to Cygnaeus are from the years 1863–74.
- 11 Berndt Otto Schauman (1821–1895) served as the first keeper of the Finnish Art Society collection in 1869–87 and as keeper of the Cygnaeus Gallery in 1885–95. Ferdinand von Wright's letters to Schauman are part of a more extensive group of artists' letters that Schauman's estate donated to the association in 1895. See the proceedings of the Finnish Art Society from 3 May 1895. Archive of the Finnish Art Society 1846–1939. Archive Collections, FNG; Hätönen 2004, 4. Ferdinand von Wright's 32 letters to Schauman are from the years 1874–94.
- 12 Waenerberg (1846–1917) served as keeper of the collections until 1913. At the time when he took over as keeper, the Society moved into the newly-completed Ateneum building.
- 13 Hätönen 2004, 3. Waenerberg may have himself added 26 letters to the collection that he had received from von Wright. They were written over a period of 16 years, 1888–1903.
- 14 Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891 and 4 May 1891. CAL, FNG. Ferdinand von Wright only had a few of his brothers' letters, which he did not regard as appropriate to hand over to the Society. In her dissertation, Aune Lindström has interpreted Ferdinand von Wright as meaning that letters had been destroyed in several fires, see Lindström 1932, 125. He, however, wrote of himself in an active role as a burner of letters.
- 15 Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 2 February 1866. CAL, FNG.
- 16 Schauman's 1874 review of Ferdinand's paintings was still a sore point in their relationship two years later. See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Lugnet 22 September 1874, 12 March 1876. CAL, FNG.
- 17 Autobiographical information. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, April 1880. CAL, FNG.
- 18 Lindström 1932, 125. Another pupil was Berndt Lindholm. In both cases, though, the teacher-pupil relationship was so short that no direct impact on their art has been discerned.
- 19 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 4 June 1891 and 5 February 1892. CAL, FNG.



Ferdinand von Wright's caricature of himself in his letter to Thorsten Waenerberg, keeper of the Finnish Art Society's collections, undated. Collection of Artists' Letters. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin

The artists' letters collection also includes letters from von Wright to two other artists, Lennart Forstén and Juho Rissanen. Forstén, Ferdinand's second cousin and childhood friend, was a painter and poet, but also an engineer and lieutenant colonel.²⁰ Forstén helped Ferdinand with practical matters such as acquiring art supplies.²¹ Ferdinand's letters to Forstén

20 Forstén (1817–1886) took part in an exhibition for the first time in 1847, but did not study at the Finnish Art Society's Drawing School until 1875–76. Forstén's works are held by the Ateneum and Tampere art museums, as well as the Cygnaeus Gallery. He contributed to the illustrations for Zacharias Topelius's book *Finland framställt i teckningar*. Forstén mostly painted commissions and was a skilled copier. He was a chief engineer at the National Road and Waterway Transport Administration and lived in Kuopio during part of his working career. For more about Forstén, see Ilkka Jylhä, *Lennart Forstén*. <http://www.kaukosorjosensaatio.fi/lennart-forsten/> (Accessed 15 October 2016).

21 Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 20 March 1874. CAL, FNG. Ferdinand von Wright's letters to Forstén were donated to the artists' letters collection by Forstén's relatives in the 1970s.

are friendly, yet von Wright sometimes wrote of him in a curt tone to others. For instance, he wrote that Forstén was completely incapable of copying a painting properly, even though he had been painting copies for decades.²²

Ferdinand von Wright's letters to the young Juho Rissanen also include a reference for a grant application to study at the St Petersburg Academy of Arts. According to von Wright, the indigent Rissanen's technical skill was quite good, but as a painter he was still completely inexperienced.²³ Rissanen sent one of his paintings to von Wright for evaluation. Von Wright made a brief response, blaming its brevity on his poor Finnish language skills. He did, however, admit that he did not understand the new painting style, which he saw as not being natural.²⁴ Otherwise von Wright was supportive of the budding artist and also lent him money.²⁵ He expressed the wish that Rissanen would become 'a terribly great artistic master!!'²⁶ According to Aune Lindström, von Wright was very pleased by the attention paid to him by young artists.²⁷ To some of them, he was a respected master,²⁸ and he himself particularly admired Hjalmar Munsterhjelm, whom he considered a true artist.²⁹

Paintings of birds to order

Ferdinand von Wright was popular among the art-loving public right up to the end of his life, even though the stature of all of the von Wright brothers' work declined in artistic circles as artistic orientations changed.³⁰ Of the three brothers, it is Ferdinand who is primarily described as an artist,³¹ and he was also one of the first Finnish visual artists to make a living by creating art on the open art market that had developed in the 19th century.³² He said that he was financially dependent on commissions. In the famine year of 1868, he received none, and wrote to Cygnaeus that soon his prospects would begin to be financially dire.³³

Usually, though, there were so many orders that von Wright wondered whether he could get them all done, and sometimes clients had to wait for more than a year for a painting.³⁴ His shaky health made work difficult and elongated completion times. Furthermore, von Wright said that he could not work in the spring or summer, as nature and the great outdoors then attracted him. During the winter, the shortness of daylight imposed

22 Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Kuopio 2 January 1883. CAL, FNG.

23 Juho Rissanen (1873–1950) donated the letters he had received from Ferdinand von Wright to the collection in the 1920s. These include the recommendation written by von Wright, as well as seven of von Wright's letters to him. They date from the years 1897–99. Ferdinand von Wright's reference for Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 4 September 1898. CAL, FNG.

24 Ferdinand von Wright to Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 28 January 1899. CAL, FNG.

25 Ferdinand von Wright to Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 1897–1899. CAL, FNG. For more on lending money: see Ferdinand von Wright to Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 19 November 1897. CAL, FNG.

26 Ferdinand von Wright to Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 11 November 1897. CAL, FNG.

27 Lindström 1932, 157.

28 These included Hjalmar Munsterhjelm, Arvid Liljelund, Eero Järnefelt and naturally Thorsten Waenerberg. Ervamaa, Jukka, 2000. Von Wrightin veljesten taide. Historia, maisema, nykypäivä. *Taitelijaveljekset / Konstnärbröderna von Wright*. Taidekeskus / Konstcentret Retretti, Punkaharju 31.5.–27.8.2000. Punkaharju (Helsinki): Retretti Oy Ltd, 16.

29 Ferdinand von Wright even wrote that if he had been in Helsinki, he would have taken lessons from Munsterhjelm. Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 6 January 1877. CAL, FNG. The letters to Schauman also include a rewritten version of von Wright's 1892 statement about his pupil, Matti Karppanen, who was renowned for his paintings of birds. See Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 16 June 1892. CAL, FNG.

30 Ervamaa 2000, 16.

31 Ervamaa 2000, 12.

32 Ervamaa, Jukka, 2007. Wright, Ferdinand von (1822–1906). *Kansallisbiografia -verkkokjulkaisu*. (Finnish Biographies), www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/4172/ (Accessed 15 October 2016).

33 Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 31 March 1868. CAL, FNG.

34 Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Kuopio 27 December 1873. CAL, FNG.

limitations.³⁵ On several occasions, the artist suspected that he would no longer be able to work at all,³⁶ and as he grew older he also began to wonder whether he would die before finishing all his commissions.³⁷ However, he was able to keep painting for a long time, and prolifically. His last references to orders in the artists' letters collection are from 1903, three years before his death.³⁸

Cygnaeus, Schauman and Waenerberg played important roles in conveying commissions, and they also ordered works for themselves and their immediate circle. Von Wright made clear to them, as well as to Lennart Forstén, the number of commissions he received, who had ordered them, and either their completion or his inability to paint them.³⁹ As an example of the number of simultaneous commissions he received, a letter to Waenerberg in April 1891 includes a list of 13 works that he had yet to start on.⁴⁰ He generally worked on several commissions at a time.

Ferdinand von Wright's relatives also conveyed orders,⁴¹ which are discussed in most of the material in the rest of the letter collection.⁴² He painted commissioned works for people in various parts of the country, but mostly in Helsinki and Vyborg.⁴³ Orders also came from abroad, at least from St Petersburg⁴⁴ and Gothenburg.⁴⁵ Delivering the completed works was

- 35 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 19 February 1870, 23 March 1872; Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 22 February 1874. CAL, FNG. For instance, in late October, 1893, von Wright began work on a painting commissioned by Nils Grotenfelt, but did not complete it until the last day of February, due to illness and the darkness of December and January. See Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 23 March 1894. CAL, FNG.
- 36 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 4 December 1889. CAL, FNG.
- 37 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 14 March 1891; Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891. CAL, FNG.
- 38 Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 15 October 1903. CAL, FNG.
- 39 Commissions were plentiful in 1870, 1872 and 1874, for instance. See Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 19 February 1870, 23 March 1872 and 3 April 1874. CAL, FNG. In April 1877 von Wright sent to Lennart Forstén a list of completed commissions and those in progress, a total of 11. Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 8 April 1877. CAL, FNG.
- 40 Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891. CAL, FNG. There were 13 works to be painted for 10 clients. Almanac entries from the year 1885 also provide details of Ferdinand's commissions, see Wright, Wilhelm & Ferdinand von 2008. *Dagböcker*. Eds. Anto Leikola, Juhani Lokki, Torsten Stjernberg & Johan Ulfvens. Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, nr 600:6. Konstnårsbröderna von Wrights dagböcker 6. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 537–39.
- 41 For instance Adolf von Wright passed on an order in November 1886: an engineer named Hallberg wanted a painting of a bullfinch. See Adolf von Wright to Ferdinand von Wright, Helsinki 20 November 1886. CAL, FNG.
- 42 For instance, in 1866 bookseller G. W. Edlund placed an order for paintings for five different clients at a price of 120 marks each. Ferdinand von Wright to G. W. Edlund, Lugnet 15 October 1866, 18 November 1866. CAL, FNG. Also e.g. von Wright's letters to Anna Castrén in 1892–93 were exclusively about orders, at least some of which Castrén had made on behalf of a Miss Friman. See Ferdinand von Wright to Anna Castrén, Haminalahti 18 November 1892, 5 April 1893, 27 April 1893 and 8 November 1893. CAL, FNG.
- 43 In his letters von Wright mentions sales to clients in Helsinki, Vyborg and Joensuu (to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891), Kuopio (to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 6 January 1877; to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891), Kristinestad (to Lennart Forstén, Kuopio 27 December 1873), Pori (to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 18 April 1891) and Tampere (to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 15 October 1903). CAL, FNG.
- 44 Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 23 March 1872; Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 5 February 1892. CAL, FNG.
- 45 Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 24 January 1885. CAL, FNG. The Gothenburg order came via Finnish painter Berndt Lindholm, who served as keeper of the collections of the art museum there, and who had briefly been von Wright's pupil. Ferdinand von Wright thought that his work had completely come to an end, and that he could therefore not fulfil the wishes of those in Gothenburg.



I. K. Inha, *Ferdinand von Wright painting on his bed*, c. 1896, albumen print on cardboard base, 17.5cm x 23.3cm. Archive prints. Archive Collections, Finnish National Gallery

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Kirsi Halkola

not without its problems,⁴⁶ and there were sometimes difficulties and delays in collecting payments.⁴⁷ Living far away from potential clients was difficult.

Von Wright's customers generally wanted paintings of birds. Sometimes he received clear requests for the species of birds to be painted. Von Wright tried to fulfil these requests if possible. However he did not want to paint birds without models, and these were not always available. In those cases he changed the subject matter. Cygnaeus had commissioned a painting of a swan because of the meaning of his own family name, the Latin name for swan being *Cygnus*. But von Wright did not have a swan available. Besides a freshly-shot or stuffed bird, he sometimes used earlier paintings based on actual models. For instance, he could have painted a swan based on one of his own older swan pictures, if he had had one to hand.⁴⁸ The artist had to cancel an eagle painting promised to the bookseller G. W. Edlund as his previous eagle painting had been destroyed by moths, and he could not use a sketch done for that one as it was too rough and lacking in detail.⁴⁹

The downside of working on commission was that von Wright was left with very little time or energy for his own free painting, especially considering his diminished strength and poor health. When von Wright did not have orders waiting to be completed, he focused on his

46 In April 1874, for instance, he wrote that he could not send his completed commissions to Helsinki as the deliverymen had announced that they would no longer make any more trips there that spring. Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 3 April 1872. CAL, FNG. In June 1873, his paintings bound for Helsinki had been waiting for delivery for months at Mr Engström's in Kuopio. See Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 13 June 1873. CAL, FNG.

47 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 22 February 1867; Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Kuopio 27 December 1873. CAL, FNG.

48 Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Haminalahti 22 August 1863. CAL, FNG.

49 Ferdinand von Wright to G. W. Edlund, Lugnet 28 September 1866, 15 October 1866. CAL, FNG.

dream of landscape painting. This however was associated with a continuous sense of failure, as he felt that his skills and training were insufficient for this genre.⁵⁰ He had also received negative reactions to the background landscapes in some of his paintings, and since he was highly sensitive, he could not forget such criticism. He wrote to Schauman, saying that he would prefer to leave landscapes out of his bird paintings – as they complicated composition and created headaches – but birds without landscapes were not likely to satisfy clients.⁵¹

According to Ferdinand von Wright, the Finnish art public had a higher regard for a painting based on how ‘refined’ and polished it was, and that this was particularly true of the von Wright brothers’ birds. If he abandoned this manner of painting, customers would be disappointed and see his new style as carelessness and an attempt to earn money with less effort.⁵² This is how he responded to critiques of his painstaking depictions of birds. He was often preoccupied with the reception of his works, and with a festering uncertainty over whether or not a client liked a painting.⁵³ If not, von Wright was ready to take it back or to pass it on to someone else.⁵⁴ His letters simultaneously reveal his uncertainty over his own art and its reception,⁵⁵ but also his desire to remain true to his own path and love of art.⁵⁶

In a way, his commissions also included works purchased for the Finnish Art Society’s lottery⁵⁷, as requested by Cygnaeus in his letters to von Wright. He was actually one of the artists whose paintings were most frequently bought as lottery prizes during the Society’s early decades.⁵⁸ Whereas artists generally offered their works to the association for this purpose, by around 1866 von Wright had adopted an attitude that the organisation had to ask him to provide works.⁵⁹

Through these lotteries, awareness of von Wright’s art spread further around Finland, which led to more commissions. Participation in the Art Society exhibitions had the same effect. The organisation played a central role in the emergence of the Finnish art public. It was the country’s only visual arts body, and a circle of art enthusiasts gradually formed around it, including people living in various parts of the country.⁶⁰ In any case, the art-buying community was still small at the time, and in relation to this the number of commissions received by Ferdinand von Wright can be seen as exceptionally high.

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- 50 Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Lugnet 22 July 1879, 20 January 1880. CAL, FNG. For the artist’s own view on his insufficient art education and on the significance of art studies, see Ferdinand von Wright to Lennart Forstén, Lugnet 26 March 1875, 6 January 1877; Ferdinand von Wright to Juho Rissanen, Haminalahti 7 October 1897, 11 November 1897. CAL, FNG.
- 51 Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 14 March 1891. CAL, FNG.
- 52 Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Lugnet 22 September 1874. CAL, FNG.
- 53 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 5 February 1892. CAL, FNG.
- 54 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Haminalahti 24 February 1891; to Thorsten Waenerberg, Haminalahti 4 February 1889, 4 May 1891, 5 February 1892 and 11 February 1892. CAL, FNG.
- 55 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 23 March 1872. CAL, FNG.
- 56 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to B. O. Schauman, Lugnet 22 February 1874. CAL, FNG.
- 57 For the artwork lotteries during the early decades of the Finnish Art Society, which was established in 1846, see Paloposki, Hanna-Leena, 1992. *Suomen Taideyhdistyksen arpajaiset yhdistyksen perustamisesta vuonna 1846 1870-luvun alkupuolelle asti*. Taidehistoria, sivuaineen tutkielma. Art History Studies. Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki, and Paloposki, Hanna-Leena, 1993. *Suomen Taideyhdistyksen kokoelman alkuvaiheet – kilpailua arpajaisien kanssa*. *Ateneum. Valtion taidemuseon museojulkaisu 1993*. Ed. Susanna Laitala [Pettersson]. Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo.
- 58 Paloposki 1992, 69–70.
- 59 See e.g. Ferdinand von Wright to Fredrik Cygnaeus, Lugnet 2 February 1866, 19 February 1870. CAL, FNG.
- 60 For more on the 19th-century art public in Finland, see Pettersson, Susanna, 2008. *Suomen Taideyhdistyksestä Ateneumiin. Fredrik Cygnaeus, Carl Gustaf Estlander ja taidekokoelman roolit*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 240 / Dimensio 6. Valtion taidemuseon tieteellinen sarja. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura & Valtion taidemuseo, 67–79; Rassi, Johanna, 2010. *“Ei kansa elä vain leivästä”*. *Suomen Taideyhdistys ja taiteen kannattajakunnan muotoutuminen Helsingissä 1846–1865*. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Finnish and Nordic History Studies. Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki.