‘I could give up everything to live only for painting’¹ – Eva Cederström’s Career and Artist Identity 1927–39

Sandra Lindblom, MA student, University of Helsinki

This article is published as a result of a three-month research internship at the Finnish National Gallery

Introduction

And now, comes praise for the female painters! I’ll be damned if we men also in this regard are beaten by the fairer sex! [...] Eva Cederström’s paintings in the southern hall sing out high. No. 39, June Morning in the Atelier, is a piece of true painting. She is no nervous man, Eva. She is not weighed down by complexes, she paints straight from the heart. The result is fresh, powerful and beautiful paintings.²

It was in this manner that the art critic Hjalmar Hagelstam (1899–1941) praised the work that Eva Cederström (1909–95) had brought to the ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ in Helsinki Kunsthalle in the spring of 1939. Instead of simply giving recognition to Cederström’s work, he constantly refers to her gender and the competition between the sexes in the art field. In general, the 1930s texts on art have a tendency to emphasise the gender of female artists.³ Gender affected the expectations placed on artists, and there were certain prejudices among

---


³ There is an ongoing discussion on the use of terminology concerning female artists in the field of art history. Researchers such as Griselda Pollock advocate the use of the term ‘artist woman’ as the term ‘female artist’ also holds historical, negative connotations. Using the term ‘female artist’ also unfairly puts a focus on the gender of female artists, whereas gender is seldom emphasised in the case of male artists. The term ‘female artists’ also implicitly states that women are not included in the term ‘artist’. In my study I will use the term ‘female artist’ as an operative term, as my study also investigates the ways of perceiving what it means to be a female artist in the 1930s and 1940s.
My original interest in Eva Cederström’s early career was caught by a desire to understand how it was to start a career as a female artist in a time like this. As I familiarised myself with earlier research and previously unstudied archive material, it became increasingly clear that it was hard to answer this question since the details on Cederström’s early career were so vague. Unlike the art critics, Cederström herself seemed to perceive gender as a minor part of her identity as an artist. Examining Cederström’s career development only from a gendered perspective seemed problematic, as it was affected by several factors. Conducting further biographical research therefore became the principal focus of this article. Then, based on this research, I also draw conclusions as to how gender played its part.

In this article I study the archive documents, paintings and drawings related to the beginning of Cederström’s artistic career from 1927–39. What were the factors that shaped her career progression? How did she perceive her art and herself as an artist during this time?


5 The percentages of female art students in 1923–35 was approximately 40.5 per cent. The Finnish Art Society’s annual reports 1923–35. Helsinki: Suomen Taideyhdistys 1924–36.

6 There were some women holding influential positions in the art field, such as museum curator Aune Lindström and art critic Sigrid Schauerman and Signe Tandefelt. Kristina Linnavara, Makt, konst, elit – konstfältets positioner, relationer och resurser i 1940- och 1950-talens Helsingfors (Helsingfors: Statens konstmuseum, 2008), 120–24.

7 During the time period 1927–39, Eva Cederström either studied art or aimed for art education, hence this became the period considered in the present article.
The most important study on Eva Cederström is a biography written in 1989 by Riitta Konttinen marking Cederström’s 80th birthday.8 It is based mainly on interviews with Cederström, who, it seems, wished to create a certain kind of narrative about her early career.9 Konttinen later described Cederström as a challenging interviewee, who would ‘rather not have said anything at all’ and even censored many parts.10 This study reassesses and gives new information about the narrative on Cederström’s early career, using previously unstudied archive material, drawings and paintings. My main sources are the artist’s diary entries from 1937–3911 and unpublished autobiographical notes12 that are part of the Eva Cederström Archive at the Archive Collections of the Finnish National Gallery. Also, her collection of sketchbooks and drawings recently donated to the Finnish National Gallery, reveal something of her development as an artist. Documents at the Archives of both the Academy of Fine Arts and the Vyborg Friends of Art at the National Archives of Finland have shed light on Cederström’s studies. Additionally, her daughter Kanerva Cederström kindly agreed to an interview.13

A difficult start

When talking about her initial interest in painting and art studies, Eva Cederström emphasised that originally she had a broad interest in different forms of arts and culture: painting, music, literature and languages.14 However, drawing and music seem to have been the most important; she described them as vital. Choosing one art form to concentrate on was something that her family and the world around her seem to have encouraged. In one anecdote, Cederström wrote that she was furious as a teenager when her mother sold her

8 Riitta Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1989). The earliest texts on Eva Cederström are short articles and Konttinen has taken these into account when writing her biography, e.g. Sinikka Kallio-Visapää, ‘Eva Cederström’, in E. J. Vehmas & Y. A. Jäntti (eds.), Suomen taiteen vuosikirjo 1946, (Porvoo: WSOY, 1947). The short texts written on Eva Cederström after Konttinen’s biography, partly written by Konttinen herself, are mainly based on Konttinen’s biography.
9 The image of Cederström’s early career, which is created through the archive material, and the image created through Cederström’s interviews, are to some extent contradictory, e.g. regarding Eva Cederström’s early studies in the Finnish Art Society Drawing School in the Ateneum. Also Kanerva Cederström notes that her mother was conscious of her artist persona and responded to the expectations of her interviewers.
10 Riitta Konttinen, email to Sandra Lindblom, 20 November 2018. I want to thank Inari Krohn for giving me a tip about the fact that Eva Cederström edited the biography quite considerably.
11 The Eva Cederström Archive contains three diaries. The oldest dates from 23 December 1937 to 25 October 1942. The wartime years have been partly censored, but the period prior to the war seems quite untouched. The two other diaries are from the 1960s and 1970s. It is unclear whether Eva Cederström also kept diaries at other times. ECA, file 13. Archive Collections, FNG.
12 It is unclear to what purpose the notes have been made, but they seem more confessional than any published material on Eva Cederström. They are partly written on the paper of the ABC Drawing School where Cederström was teaching in the 1950s, partly on the paper of the Finnish Painters’ Union, partly on the paper from the Apollonia Hotel in Stockholm and partly on a piece of paper that seems to be from a hotel in Leipzig. However, an autobiographical timeline, probably written at the same time as the texts, is written on a list of works from an exhibition in 1969, which would imply that the notes are from the end of the 1960s or the beginning of the 1970s. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
13 However, I used many additional archive sources, such as the Sven Grönwall Archive in the Archive Collections in the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Helsinki City Archive and the Kalevala Society Archive. I also want to thank the Kalevala Society for giving me access to the Eva Cederström paintings in their collections. I am especially grateful to the Finnish National Gallery for this research internship possibility and the help I have received, especially from my tutors Riitta Ojanperä and Timo Huusko, but also from all the others.
14 Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 17.
violin, claiming that one cannot serve two masters.\textsuperscript{15} Whether this was due to lack of money or a distrust in Eva’s musical talent, or both, remains unclear but Cederström referred to this moment later in several instances.\textsuperscript{16} This idea of concentrating on one aspect in life was often put forward when discussing female artists – mostly in the form that one could not be both an artist and a wife.\textsuperscript{17} The idea that art needed one’s full attention, seems to have been a central part of Cederström’s view of what it was to be an artist.\textsuperscript{18} When the chance to practise music was withdrawn from her, drawing and painting must have gained even more importance.

The strong drive to work in the arts may have been affected by Cederström’s family background. Her father, Emil Cederström (1863–1912), was part of the Finnish elite, a man with a doctoral degree in meteorology and with good connections.\textsuperscript{19} His premature death in 1912, following surgery, changed the economic situation of the family completely,\textsuperscript{20} but the values of a cultural home remained. The earliest material where one can see a sign of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Eva Cederström, ‘Kannaksen ja Viipurin aikoja’ in Erkki Koponen, Jorma Tissari & Reijo Ahtokari (eds.), \textit{Taide enemmän kuin elämä – Muistikuvia taiteemme taipaleelta} (Helsinki Suomen Taiteilijaseura – Konstnärsföreningen i Finland ry, 1986), 64.
  \item Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG; Konttinen, \textit{Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva}, 74–75.
  \item The idea was quite widespread, for example gallerist Ivar Hörhammer (1884–1953) said that he did not believe in the possibilities of combining the life of a wife with that of an artist, while explaining that he only admired the female artists of the older generation, such as Helene Schjerfbeck. Riitta Konttinen, \textit{Täältä tullaan – Naistaiteilijat modernin murroksessa} (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Siltala, 2017), 133–34, 281.
  \item Cederström said in an interview that Tove Jansson ‘discovered she was more of a drawer than a painter’. Cederström seems to have had a view that even combining the identities of a drawer and a painter was problematic. Konttinen, \textit{Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva}, 40, 44.
  \item Influential Finnish cultural figures such as architect Armas Lindgren (1874–1929) and artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931) belonged to the social circles of Emil Cederström. Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
  \item Eva Cederström seems to have had an urge to tone this down in the 1989 biography, as she avoided Riitta Konttinen’s questions on the matter by saying: ‘Niin millä hän elätti? Olisiko hän tehnyt käsityötä?’ Konttinen, \textit{Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva}, 12.
\end{itemize}
Cederström’s urge to find an artist identity is from the spring of 1927. A sketch of a gate, dated 3 May 1927, is signed with the initials E C. The letter E has been written inside the larger C in the style of an artist’s monogram.21 The same monogram can be seen in an idealised drawing of a young man called Erkki and a drawing of ‘an idyll at the beach’ with ‘happy polytechnic students admiring the beach of golden sand’.22

In the early autumn of 1927,23 Cederström left her home in Terijoki, eastern Finland, after an argument with her mother and moved to the villa city of Kulosaari, which was next to Helsinki.24 As a result, she was closer than ever to the most important art school in Finland—the Finnish Art Society Drawing School, commonly known as the Ateneum, after the building in which it was located. Cederström managed to find work in Helsinki in the office of a stone manufacturer called Suomen Kiviteollisuus Oy.25 In January 1928, she started art studies as a trial class student at the Ateneum.26

She studied art only in the evenings, as she was still working in the office during the daytime. She clearly acquired an art student identity despite her time-consuming office work; when she moved to an apartment in the Helsinki city centre on 15 March 1928, she stated that her occupation was an art student.27 The trial class studies lasted six months,28 after which all the students were assessed by the teachers and school board, who decided whether a student would be accepted to the school. Unfortunately, Eva Cederström was not accepted.29

21 The same kind of signature, or versions of it, for example the name ‘Eva’ written in capital letters inside a large C, can be seen throughout Cederström’s 1927–28 sketchbook. A–2018–535. FNG / Ateneum Art Museum.
23 Cederström arrived in Kulosaari on 7 September 1927, as she has written this date as the day when she received a new address. Eva Cederström’s sketchbook, A–2018–535. FNG / Ateneum Art Museum.
24 Apparently, Eva Cederström moved to Kulosaari, where a daughter of the Hallenberg family, who were family friends, lived and she provided a place for Cederström to stay. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 18. Kulosaari has been a part of Helsinki since 1946.
25 In the biography from 1989, Cederström claims she was working as a babysitter in Kulosaari, but there is no mention of this in her autobiographical notes, which implies that she either worked for a babysitter for a very short time or did not work as a babysitter at all. Apparently, Cederström seems to have perceived office work as somehow shameful. Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG; Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 18.
26 The different archive sources and earlier research contradict each other on the question of Cederström’s early art studies. The biography from 1989 claims that Eva Cederström studied in the Ateneum in the autumn of 1927. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 18. The school matriculate entry from the 1930s claims Cederström was an aspiring student both in the autumn of 1928 or the spring of 1928. Finnish Art Society Drawing School matriculate. Microfilms. Archive Collections. FNG. The most reliable source in this case is the book with the list of art students written in the 1920s. It is a record kept by the principal Uuno Alanko, where he states how much money the students have paid for their studies. There it is clearly stated that Eva Cederström started her studies in January 1928 and that they lasted six months. Book of the list of students 1913–54. Academy of Fine Arts Archive (AFAA), file 5. The National Archives in Finland (NAF), Helsinki, Finland.
27 Police address records of Helsinki. City of Helsinki Archive.
28 According to the Master’s thesis of Satu Karvetti, who has studied the art of Aino von Boehm, Eva Cederström ended her studies before the end of the school term in the spring of 1928. Satu Karvetti, Rajaankindit tuomarinroutan ja taidemaailman identiteettien välillä: tutkielma Aino von Boehmin taiteilijaudesta, (University of Helsinki, 2013), 40. The annual report of the Finnish Art Society Drawing School from 1927–28 mentions two students who ended their studies before the end of the trial period. The annual report of the Finnish Art Society Drawing School 1927–28. Karvetti seems to have deduced that one of them would have been Eva Cederström. However, based on the material in the Academy of Fine Arts Archive, the two students who ended their studies earlier were Elsa Alexandra Snellmann and Harald Emil Herttel. Book of the list of students 1913–54. AFAA, 5. NAF.
29 Book of the list of students 1913–54. AFAA, 5. NAF.
Her failed plans to become an art student in the spring of 1928 seem to have created a difficult and awkward situation for Cederström. In her own writings or interviews she never mentions it and so it is omitted from most descriptions of her early career. In the biography from 1989, Cederström seems even to have misled the art public: she explained her art studies were cut short as she ‘felt she would eventually not endure’ staying in Helsinki, which was a hard place for a lonely, young girl.30 Actually, Cederström came to this conclusion only later, in the summer of 1928, when she already knew she had failed to enter the Ateneum.31 This silence and concealment of her failure make them interesting. The rejection was a statement that one of Finland’s most influential art institutions believed Cederström was not destined to become an artist.32 This was probably very hard for the young Eva Cederström, who had a strong urge to become one. Also, it would be interesting to find more information on the school’s selection procedure, but unfortunately there is no material relating to this area in its archive. According to Cederström’s niece, Inari Krohn, the rejection was caused by the school staff’s distrust in the artistic talent of young women.33 The gender of the students seems to have been important for the school, as the amount of female and male students was stated in each annual report. The principal Uuno Alanko also addressed this question in an interview.34 However, gender seems not have been a problem in itself in the application process in 1928 as all the other female art student applicants, except Cederström, were accepted to the school.35

A new start in Vyborg

When returning to her family, who had meanwhile moved to Vyborg, Eva Cederström still had a strong urge to become an artist. There was no possibility to continue her studies in the Ateneum, as the rejection was binding. However, there was an art school in Vyborg with a focus on applied arts, which trained artists for local needs.36 Like the Ateneum, the Drawing

31 Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
32 Between the years 1923–35 an average of 53 per cent of the trial class students were accepted into the school. Some students were given new trial periods in 1925, 1930, 1934 and 1935. In 1928, four students were accepted conditionally. The Finnish Art Society annual reports 1923–24 to 1934–35. The rules of the Finnish Art Society Drawing School state that they did not accept students to the school who they found not to be apt to be artists: ‘Lukukauden lopulla toimeenpanaan Valmistavalla luokalla sinä aikana suoritettujen töiden pohjalta tarkka arvostelu, jonka Koululautakunta ja koulun kaikki taiteellisten aineiden opettajat toimittavat. Jos silloin epämättömästi havaitaan oppilaata puuttuvan taipumusta, ei häntä katsota kouluun otetuksi.’ The Finnish Art Society Drawing School rules, 12 October 1922. AFAA, 14. NAF.
33 Inari Krohn, Muusa kirjahyllyssä (Jyväskylä: Gummerus kustannus Oy, 2004), 48. In Inari Krohn’s autobiography there is a claim that the school staff said to Eva Cederström, ‘Yes, you are good but we will not take you to the school as you are a woman.’ Riitta Konttinen has interpreted this as a direct quote from the school staff, but I would rather read it as merely a way of expressing that gender affected Cederström’s chances to enter the Ateneum. Konttinen, Täältä tullaan – Naistaiteilijat modernin murrroksessa, 260. Inari Krohn kindly answered my question regarding this, but at that point she could not remember any details regarding words spoken by the Ateneum staff, but she still emphasised that gender had affected Cederström’s chance to enter art studies.
35 Book of the list of students 1913–54. AFAA, 5. NAF.
School of the Vyborg Friends of Art was based on a classical art education system. The first phase was a preparatory class, after which students proceeded to the Antiquity class, where they drew plaster casts, mainly from Antiquity. They then proceeded to concentrate either on painting or sculpture.

Already in the autumn term of 1928 – contrary to the information in the 1989 biography – Cederström had started in the preliminary class at the Drawing School of the Vyborg Friends of Art. It seems she was also working in the office of Oy Mekano Ab.37 The Vyborg school matriculate mentions her studies in the Ateneum, but of course nothing about the fact that she failed to enter the school.38 After the autumn of 1928, Cederström was absent from the Vyborg School for more than a year. It seems that the office work and independent studies for a matriculation exam, which she never completed, occupied her time.39 She returned in the autumn term of 1930 and proceeded straight to the Antiquity class.

Meanwhile, the school had moved to fine new premises designed by the architect Uno Ullberg and changed its name from the Drawing School of the Vyborg Friends of Art to the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art, possibly as a way of trying to boost the school’s status.40 ‘The principal was Rurik Lindqvist, an old, fine, friendly gentleman’,41 as Cederström explained later. When describing her teachers, she often concentrated on their character, which puts an emphasis on the social structures in the art schools. Lindqvist had taught art in Vyborg since 1900 and he had a traditional, realist approach to art.42

37 Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
38 The Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art Matriculate, 1891–1939. Vyborg Friends of Art Archive (VFAA), file 2. NAF.
39 Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taitelijan henkilökunta, 18–20; Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
40 Olli Valkonen, Viipurin Taiteenystävänskä 1890–1940 (Helsinki: Viipurin taiteenystävänskä, 1992), 89.
41 ‘Piirustuskoulun rehtori oli Rurik Lindqvist, vanha, hieno, ystävällinen herra.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
In this new environment, Cederström was suddenly quite ahead of many others. She had taken classes at the Ateneum, whereas many of the other students had not even visited Helsinki or seen the art collections there. These changes also seem to have been reflected in a new nickname, ‘Beebi’. According to a humorous student poem: ‘Beebi sings nasally / and talks in English / draws very diligently / and mimics Rembrandt.’ Cederström’s interest in English can also be seen in her early sketchbooks; for instance, the sketchbook from 1927–28 has a small photograph glued to its inner cover accompanied by the words: ‘Portrait of herself at summer 1926 in Terijoki’ and a drawing of her mother is titled ‘Mother’ in English. Her broad interest in languages was apparent throughout Cederström's career.

In the autumn of 1931, Cederström was transferred to the live model class, where her teacher was Nils Wikberg (1907–71). Wikberg was a young local painter, who worked mainly in watercolour. He had been a student of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, a key figure in Finnish national romanticism. According to Cederström, one could ‘clearly see the influences of the teacher in [Wikberg’s] paintings, also the topics he depicted were often pine trees, cloudy skies and water that he had painted in the same way as the master.’ Despite the quite unmodern themes in his own art, Wikberg taught a modernist, formalist approach to painting:

However, we thought N.W. was skilful and even inspiring. When, for example, we told him that we don’t know what to paint he put an ink bottle on the window sill and said that there you have a model, it is irrelevant what you paint but how you paint is a different question.

The school advocated a strong work ethic and constant practice as the way to become an artist. These ideas were widespread in the art field at the time. ‘Work, work and once again work, is what is needed’, wrote the art critic Signe Tandefelt in 1921. However, artistic work was no ordinary work, but rather equivalent to a holy service which could only be conducted by outstanding individuals. Given that Cederström received a prize for ‘diligent work and development’, she seems to have developed a strong work ethic right from the start of her studies.

Locally, Eva Cederström was noticed early on. In 1932, the local newspaper Karjala wrote about her as a promising artist. The critic claimed he had already taken an interest

---

43 The principal of the school writes about a student trip to Savonlinna in 1932, and says that it would have been more useful to travel to Helsinki, as many of the students have not been there or seen the Helsinki art collections. The Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art Matriculate, 1891–1939. VFAA, 2. NAF.
44 ‘Beebi’ laulaa hononottaa / ja puhuu englantia / piirtää kovin ahkreaan / ja matkii Rembrandt’ia.’ A student song about the teachers and students of the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art written for the school’s Christmas party in 1931. ECA, 14. Archive Collections, FNG.
45 Valkonen, Viipurin Taiteenystävät 1890–1940, 90. The Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art Matriculate, 1891–1939. VFAA, 2. NAF.
46 ‘Akseli G-Kn viimeinen oppilas, jonka maalauksissa näki selvästi opettajan vaikutusta, aiheetkin olivat usein mäntyjä, pilvinen taivas ja vesi oli käsitetty oppimestarit tavoin.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
47 ‘N.W. oli kuitenkin taitava ja innostavakin. Kun esim. sanoimme hänenelle ettemme tiedä mitä maalaisimme asetti hän ikkunalaudalle mustepullon ja sanoi että siinä on teille malli, sama mitä maalaa mutta miten se on sitten eri asia.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
50 In each annual report the principal Rurik Lindqvist mentions whether the students have worked diligently. This implies he saw it as an important issue. The Seth Solberg grant, which Eva Cederström received, was awarded for diligent work. The Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art Matriculate, 1891–1939. VFAA, 2. NAF.
in her work the year before, in 1931. In 1933 the local art critic Jalmari Lahdensuo wrote in *Karjala* that Cederström’s works were the most accomplished in the art students’ spring exhibition.

A photograph in Eva Cederström’s archive shows her work on display in the 1933 spring exhibition. Cederström’s display, and probably the whole exhibition, consisted mainly of sketches, which explains why the local paper claimed there were more than a thousand works in the exhibition ‘despite the stern qualification’. The choice of works is surprising as Cederström had also painted more finished work at the time, such as an interesting self-portrait from 1932.

---


52 ‘But the overall high standard of the works are proof of diligent work. Especially we have to mention students Eva Cederström, V. Hämäläinen, Veikko Repponen and Venda Mäkeläinen, who are reaching already the standard of an artist. Especially with Eva Cederström, one can notice how fruitfully several years of studies have affected her work.’ Jalmari Lahdensuo, ‘Taidekoulun näyttely.’ *Karjala* 17 May 1933. Newspaper clipping collection, XXXIII 44. Archive Collections, FNG.

53 ‘Oppilasnäyttely.’ *Karjala* 14 May 1933; Eva Cederström’s clipping book no. 1. ECA, 18. Archive Collections, FNG.
Further art studies were common among the most promising art students of the school. However, family poverty seems to have threatened her continuing further art education:

*When studying in the drawing school [of Vyborg Friends of Art] I often thought whether I would be granted the chance to continue my studies in Helsinki [...]. Meri V[artiolla]vaara had already gone there in 1932 and my big dream was the same and one day when I was helping my relatives with the harvest in Kymi, my mother called and asked me to come home and get ready to go to Helsinki. I was surprised as I knew how hard we had it economically, but my mother had received a loan from the Hallenberg family. I was so happy I could not sleep in the night, I had ended my studies in the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art and I even received a small grant.*

This ‘small grant’, of 1,500 Finnish marks, was awarded to Cederström by the Vyborg Friends of Art association, and it can be seen as a sign of strong trust in the artist. However, what actually enabled her studies was her mother’s ability to negotiate a loan from family acquaintances, who they knew via Eva’s late father. The above quote also emphasises that Eva Cederström’s greatest wish was to continue her studies in the Ateneum. The connection to the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art continued while Cederström was studying in Helsinki: she travelled to Vyborg for most Christmas and summer breaks and used the possibility to draw for free in the Vyborg school premises that was granted to former students.

**Evchen starts at the Ateneum**

In the autumn of 1933, Eva Cederström’s dream was realised when she applied again to the Ateneum. ‘Evchen alias Eva Cederström’ she wrote as her name in a sketchbook — the nickname Evchen was regularly used by her and her classmates in the Ateneum.

When starting her studies Eva Cederström was initially listed as one of the trial class students despite her previous studies in Vyborg. However, she seems to have become one of...
the regular students quite soon. One could say that the Ateneum did not initially recognise her previous education. On the other hand, the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art seems to have been very proud of their student, as they mentioned Cederström’s further studies at the Finnish Art Society Drawing School in their annual report in 1934. This would imply that there was a hierarchy operating within the art education institutions in Finland, which has not been addressed in previous studies.

It seems, Eva Cederström was systematically supported with grants during her studies in the Ateneum in the 1930s. After her first year, she received a 1,500 Fmk travel grant and an additional travel grant of 300 Fmk, which helped her to participate in a school trip. Additionally, she received a 1,500 Fmk Seth Solberg grant in both 1934 and 1935, from the Vyborg Friends of Art. In 1936 the Finnish Art Society gave Cederström the Hoving grant worth 600 Fmk. She also became a so-called ‘free student’ after the spring of 1934 and hence paid only a tenth of the actual tuition fee for her studies. Even though these grants represent a trust in her work, they were still proportionally quite small amounts of money. It seems that

59 A line was drawn over Cederström’s name in the list of trial class students and the text ‘check the regular students’ was added. Finnish Art Society Drawings School list of regular students, autumn term 1933. Book of the list of students 1913–54. AFAA, 5. NAF.
60 The Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art Matriculate, 1891–1939. VFAA, 2. NAF.
63 The 1989 biography and an exhibition catalogue from the same year claim Cederström received a Finnish Art Society grant in 1937. There is however no evidence of this in the Finnish Art Society records, which implies Cederström misremembered. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 141.
64 The Finnish Art Society Drawing School matriculate. Microfilms. Archive Collections. FNG.
an art student’s poverty could be a contributory factor in the awarding of grants.65 ‘Sometimes I also had problems with money, and I could not ask for money from my mother in Vyborg as I knew it was not easy for her to send me extra’, Cederström wrote of her economic situation during her studies in her autobiographical notes.66 In the summer and Christmas breaks Cederström worked in an office in Vyborg to save money.67

‘The spirit in our school was good and our teachers were exciting’,68 Cederström wrote of her overall experience as a student at the Ateneum. According to its annual report from 1933–34, her teacher for the preparatory class was Werner Åström, whom Cederström describes positively: ‘It was exciting to draw the nude with Werner Åström, he was a real gentleman in the finest meaning of the word, charming, friendly, short in words, we understood from a few words what he meant and it was easy to continue working.’69

The preparatory class curriculum consisted of several subjects, but drawing was the central focus. The subjects drawn were mostly plaster casts of busts and body parts, but the students also drew from a live model.70 According to Cederström’s autobiographical notes she, Tove Jansson and Jyrki Sailo, ‘were not obliged to draw plaster casts for two terms’71 – the choice of words implies this was a relief.

Only one drawing of a plaster cast has survived in Eva Cederström’s sketchbooks. It is a drawing of the sculpture of Pietro Mellini by Benedetto da Majano, and Cederström wrote under it: ‘Is a heroic man always heroic?’72 The profile of the sculpture has been drawn in a way that rather gives an impression he is an actual physical person in flesh and blood and not a plaster cast.73 Her comment, which could either refer to the heroic representation of men in art or more general questions of heroic male figures in art history, is very hard to interpret without knowing its original context. According to Cederström herself, discussion on art, teachers and life in general was heated, as they were young.74

65 At least the travel grant in 1934 was given to students who would otherwise not be able to travel. The board that decided on the travel grants saw that Roger Relander and Niilo Suihko were so wealthy that they could pay for the trip themselves. ‘The board has decided…’ Study trips. AFAA. NAF.

66 ‘Oli välillä rahavaikeuksiakin enkä voinut pyytää rahaa äidiltäni Viipurista kun tiesin ettei hänellä ollut helppoa lähettää minulle ylimääräistä.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

67 Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

68 ‘Henki jkoulussamme [!] oli hyvä, opettajamme innostavia.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

69 ‘Oli jännittävää piirtää alastonta Werner Åströmin johdolla, hän oli tosi herrasmies sanan hienoimmassa merkityksessä, charmikas ystävällinen, lyhytsanainen, ymmärsimme muutamasta sanasta mitä hän tarkoitti ja oli helppo jatkaa työtä.’ The contrast to the other teachers was quite large: Uuno Alanko, the principal, Cederström described as ‘dry, stern and demanding’ and William Lönnberg, the painting teacher, as ‘stern and sometimes we were even afraid of him, for example I was’. Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

70 ‘Valmistavalla luokalla opetetaan: a) piirustusta rintakuvain, vartalokuvain ja kuvapatsaiden ja elävän mallien mukaan; ehdollisesti opetetaan maalaustakin siihen sopivain esineiden mukaan; b) plastillista anatomiaa c) taidehistoriaa d) perspektiivioppia, joka myös käsittää konstruktioita.’ The Finnish Art Society Drawing School rules 1922. AFAA. NAF.

71 ‘[E]ikä meidän tarvinnut piirtää kipeijä kahta lukukautta.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

72 Cederström probably threw away most of her drawings of plaster casts. Also this drawing is part of a book of her selection of drawings, which implies that she has had a reason to save especially this one.

73 When Eva Cederström was working as a teacher herself she taught the students that they should draw the plasters in a way such as they would have been actual persons, and this is the impression one gets when looking at Cederström’s drawing. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 80.

74 ‘[!]Suurimmillaan Mokka-MökissäAleksilla vaihtaa ajatuksia taiteesta, opettajamme, elämästä yleensä, kannanottomme olivat usein varsin kiikkeitä, olimmekin nuoria.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
Practice and a work ethic remained central to Cederström’s views on art: she saw these as the means for expressing feelings. ‘If the artist does not have a passion for work, then he has few possibilities to express his deepest feelings – the technique must be mastered and then also forgotten and it is still always there in the unconscious.’

Cederström’s remark about learning and forgetting the technique, reminds one much of the way in which classical music relates to its technique.

Eva Cederström’s views on what was good art seems to have been broad, but quite conventional. When some of the young men in the school rebelled against the school authority in 1933 and formed the so called October group with the expressionist artist Tyko Sallinen as their source of inspiration, Cederström wrote: ‘A lot of us other students didn’t really understand fully the art taste of the boys [e.g. Ernst Krohn, Sven Grönvall], we were admiring [Akseli Gallen-]Kallela and [Albert] Edelfelt, whose works we went to see between the lessons in the Ateneum Art Museum.’ However, when describing a visit to the Ateneum in her diary, she implies that the art of Tyko Sallinen was also important for her. The art books she owned reflected even broader interests: from Sandro Botticelli to Pablo Picasso and the Impressionists.

The only time when Cederström had the chance to see the work of international artists from the canon of art history, was in 1934 when she travelled together with the school’s painting class to Berlin and Dresden. As she was still in the preparatory class, it was surprising that she was chosen to take part in the trip. Visits to the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum (later known as Bodemuseum) and the Dresdener Gemäldegalerie were included in the itinerary. In her autobiographical notes she writes, that she was especially overwhelmed by Botticelli’s portrait of Giuliano de’ Medici. She perceived the painting almost as a sacred relic.
with magical powers: ‘Often later in my life I have experienced the same [sacred feeling] when seeing this fine portrait and also when thinking of it from afar.’

Eva Cederström saw the classics of art history as examples of eternal, overwhelming, unspeakable, objective beauty. This sometimes created a lack of trust in her own art: ‘I felt that I could never create anything as beautiful and permanent; despite this, one also believes in oneself and that one can in the future express what one sees and feels in a personal and

82 ‘We went to museums, that was the purpose of our trip after all. The Egyptian sculptures made an impression on me, Nefertite especially. The painting that was imprinted in my mind permanently was Botticelli’s Giorgio [Giuliano] dei Medici, a noble young emperor in deep red garments, a sculptural head, a proud, but pondering expression in his downward gaze. Often later in my life I have experienced the same when seeing this fine portrait and also when only thinking of it from afar.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
The idea about emphasising the eternal values in art, is much like those of her painting teacher Uuno Alanko, whose approach was to view contemporary art through art history: ‘Above all art should not be momentary. And in the momentary also the superficial idea, that the word ‘modern’ stands for, is included, as it is limited only to our time.’

The Finnish Art Society Drawing School influenced the themes their students depicted by giving them composition exercises and competitions with pre-set themes. The idea was that it would be easier to compare the work of students, when everyone depicted the same scene. Often the composition exercises involved painting everyday scenes typical of modern art, such as ‘an interior with two persons’ or ‘a person reading a newspaper’. At the same time, depicting scenes from the Finnish national epic The Kalevala, was a recurrent theme. ‘Alanko, the principal of the school, [...] loved Kalevala, giving us – according to us – too often scenes to depict from it’, Cederström wrote in her autobiographical notes. Tove Jansson also mentioned Alanko, saying, ‘he always gave us the themes from Kalevala, which he saw as the Bible of the painters, nothing else was needed, he said’.

83 ‘Ennen muuta taideetekstot jotkut jäivät lähtemättömästi mieleen, mutta niitä ajatellessa tuntui ettei itse koskaan kykene saamaan aikaan mitään niin kaunista ja pyysyää, siitä huolimatta kuitenkin uskoa itsensäkin ja että tulevaisuudessa pystyy ilmamaan näkemäänsä ja tunteamaansa omintakeisesti ja maalauksellisin keinoin.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15.

84 ‘Ennen kaikkea taiteen ei pitäisi olla hetkellistä. Ja hetkelliseen sisältyy myöskin se pintapuolinen käsitys, minkä muodostaa sana ”modäri”, se kun rajoittuu ainoastaan meidän aikaamme.’ Uuno Alanko, The annual report of the Finnish Art Society Drawing School 1934–35.

Hence, Eva Cederström made some *Kalevala*-themed paintings and drawings during her studies. She seems to have met the school’s wishes with her works, as she received prizes in the composition exercises in 1936 and 1937. Her earliest known *Kalevala*-themed painting is a tempera work from 1934, depicting Lemminkäinen and his mother at the river of death in Tuonela. The monumental mother-figure, the oddly positioned Lemminkäinen hovering, a faintly visible swan in the background and the dominance of blue, create a mystical feeling. According to Cederström’s autobiographical notes, it was created for the major *Kalevala* 100th anniversary exhibition in 1935, where it was on display.

All of the known *Kalevala*-themed paintings by Cederström depict scenes linked to one particular story in *Kalevala* – the death and resurrection of Lemminkäinen. In the mid-1930s students were free to paint a scene of their choice, which implies Cederström had a certain

---

86 The Finnish Art Society Drawing School matriculate. Microfilms. Archive Collections. FNG.
87 ‘I still have a few oil paintings depicting Lemminkäinen’s mother and one of them was displayed, together with a work by Christian Sibelius, at the Kalevala 100 anniversary exhibition in the exhibition centre, which we both saw as a great honour.’ ‘Itseelläni on vieläkin muutama Lemminkäinen-äitiä esittävää öljymaalaus, joista yksi Christian Sibeliusen työn ohella oli Kalevan 100-vuotisväärtetysys [sic] Messuhallissa mikä meistä kummastakin oli suuri kunnia.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
88 There are three known paintings, which are from 1934, 1936 and 1937. They are now part of the Kalevala Society Art Collection. Kalevala Society board meeting records. Kalevala Society Archive, Helsinki.
89 ‘The composition exercises since 1932.’ AFAA. NAF.
interest in this story. Also, all her unrealised plans, which can be followed in her sketches, are linked to this story.

The Kalevala paintings are a category of their own in Cederström’s early artistic production. They are quite different from her portraits, self-portraits and landscapes from the 1930s. It seems Cederström wanted to use an archaic style, which she saw as especially suited to the Kalevala. However, the mystical dominance of blue, apparent in her Kalevala paintings, later became her trademark. The Kalevala paintings represent some of the earliest examples of this feature in her art.90

Eva Cederström’s use of the colour blue has puzzled interviewers and critics throughout her career. I searched in vain for a passage in her diary and autobiographical notes, referring to the colour. How she decided to use it seemed very intuitive, and it seemed to become a symbol of herself and the things that were dear to her. She also saw its mystical qualities: ‘When arriving we were sitting on the veranda while it was getting dark – it was beautiful to observe the world becoming bluer and more enchanted moment by moment.’91

The painting student at the Ateneum

In the autumn of 1934, Cederström was allowed to start the painting class.92 The core studies of the class were drawing and painting based on visual observation, mainly using a clothed or nude model, as well as a knowledge of working materials and techniques.93 Additionally, composition exercises, plastic anatomy, art history and perspective drawing were included. The painting teacher in 1934–35 was Uuno Alanko.94 In a letter to her friend, Cederström describes the content of Alanko’s teaching: '[W]e have been working hard here in our old school, listening faithfully to Uuno's advice on cold and warm colours, spiritual and soulful art and we have been a bit confused – at least I have been – because everything is so new to me, at least for now.'95

Eva Cederström started her painting class at a time when the curriculum was in a process of change.96 A short course in landscape painting with William Lönnberg was introduced in the spring of 1935. Printmaking and knowledge of materials were included in the painting curriculum the following school year.97 Both landscape painting and knowledge of

90 Also, there is a watercolour landscape in blue from 1933. Under the landscape Eva Cederström has written in pencil, ‘sininen hetki’ which means ‘blue moment’. This sketch shows an early interest in the shades of blue in Eva Cederström’s surroundings. Eva Cederström’s sketchbook, A–2018–538. FNG / Ateneum Art Museum.


92 Finnish Art Society Drawing School matriculate. Microfilms. Archive Collections. FNG.

93 Knowledge of materials was only introduced as a separate subject with a teacher of its own in the autumn of 1935, but similar content seems to have been part of the teaching plan at least since 1922, when the school regulations that were valid until 1935 were accepted. Finnish Art Society Drawing School rules. AFAA. NAF.

94 The painting class teacher is not mentioned in the annual report of 1934–35, but Cederström’s letter to Sven Grönvall makes it clear that Uuno Alanko was her painting teacher in the autumn of 1934. Eva Cederström’s letter to Sven Grönvall, 8 December 1934. Sven Grönvall Archive (SGA), SLSA 903 file 1. SLS.

95 ‘Hm – ja me olemme ahertaneet vimmatusti täällä vanhassa koulussa – ollut kaunista nähä maailman muttuvan yhä sinisemmäksi ja satumaisemmaksi hetkki hetkeltä.’ Eva Cederström’s letter to Sven Grönvall, 8 December 1934. SGA, SLSA 903, file 1. SLS.

96 Developing Finnish art education became crucial as the 1930s recession made it much more difficult to continue studies abroad. Anttonen, Kansallista vai modernia – Taidegraafikka osana 1930-luvun taidejärjestelmiä, 34.

97 Finnish Art Society Drawing School annual reports 1934–36.
I could give up everything to live only for painting’ – Eva Cederström’s Career and Artist Identity 1927–39 // Sandra Lindblom

FNG Research Issue No. 1/2019. Publisher: Finnish National Gallery, Kaivokatu 2, FI-00100 Helsinki, FINLAND.
© All rights reserved by the author and the publisher. Originally published in https://research.fng.fi

The teachers of these subjects, Lönnberg and Johannes Gebhard, both had an impact on her career. William Lönnberg became the Ateneum painting teacher in the autumn of 1935. He can be seen as the most influential art teacher of the 1930s in Finland. The paintings of his students were seen to represent ‘Lönnbergism’, as they received a recognisable visual style from his teachings. Maire Gullichsen recalled later that this was a shift in the scale of colours towards blue-red. Lönnberg was famous for his outspoken opinions, explosive temper and impolite behaviour and he created mixed feelings amongst his students. Six painting class students – including Cederström – decided to move their studio away from the Ateneum.

Eva Cederström’s meticulous notebooks from the Knowledge of Materials lectures speak of an interest in the subject and she describes Johannes Gebhard as a person who was ‘friendly, as always’. 30 April 1939. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG. The material knowledge studies most certainly encouraged her to see all the preparations of colours as materials, later as a central part of the whole artistic process, which she claimed to be important for her. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 94.


materials seem to have been important for Eva Cederström. The teachers of these subjects, Lönnberg and Johannes Gebhard, both had an impact on her career.

Eva Cederström, Sketches of Johannes Gebhard (top row), 1935, graphite on paper
Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum
Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Ainur Nasretdin
after their first term with Lönnberg. Cederström was a little afraid of Lönnberg, but she also developed successful strategies on how to handle him. At the same time she felt gratitude towards him: ‘He opened our eyes to painting, to the wonderful world of colours, shades and lines.’ Lönnberg advocated constant, hard work as the way to achieve great art, a view which Cederström to some extent shared. Still, Cederström is reserved when writing about his positive influence on her art. ‘And it is maybe thanks to Lömpä that I got them in!’, she wrote after her paintings were accepted for an exhibition. It seems Cederström was irritated by Lönnberg’s behaviour, especially at the start of her studies, but became more understanding towards the end. Respect towards older people was part of her world view, even though she also had an understanding for her more rebellious friends. The art students seemed to talk a lot about Lönnberg’s teachings and behaviour. On one occasion Cederström described having her fingers frozen when she could not leave an interesting discussion on this ‘same old topic’ with her friend Mauno Manninen.

William Lönnberg saw art as a ‘cold’ and ‘logical’ process where the colours and lines had to be carefully considered choices. This approach and his fierce nature made him an opponent of expressionist art in 1930s Finland, which was seen to express national values. Cederström mentions this discussion only once in her diary, even then with a certain indifference: ‘Joh. Gebhard has written in the Ajan Suunta newspaper, defended Lömpä and “Lönnbergism” against [Ludvig] Wennervirta, who sees in Lömpä the destroyer of our (national) art of painting. Gebhard has among others mentioned Tove [Jansson] and myself as examples (in his opinion) of free and praised artists in the spring exhibition. That doesn’t mean anything to us, but it is good that someone publicly defends Lömpä.’

Eva Cederström’s diary includes some rare descriptions of conflicts in the painting class, and moments when the students were questioning Lönnberg’s authority. Cederström positioned

---

101 Kruskopf, Kuvataiteilijia Tove Jansson, 86.
102 For example, when Lönnberg blamed her for not working on her painting, as the paint was clearly dry, she made up an explanation on the spot and said she had been thinking hard about the painting. Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.
103 Eva Cederström, for example, remembers Lönnberg claiming there was no concept of waiting for inspiration, as inspiration was something that would be found when working. Konttinen, Eva Cederström – Taiteilijan henkilökuva, 96.
104 ‘Ja ehkä kiitos Lömpän, että sain ne sisälle!’ 29 April 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.
106 ‘[S]eisoimme ja keskustelimme meidän oven ulkopuolella koleassa yössä niin kauan, että kädet melkein kohmettuivat. m.m. tietysti vanha puheenaihe: Lömpää.’ 9–10 November 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.
107 Tiriran, Suomen Taiteilijoita, 109. Contrary to Uuno Alanko, Lönnberg despised ‘soulful art’, especially the emotional or spiritual art made by women. On the other hand, they both seem to have defended a modernist, formalist approach against conservative figures like art critic Ludvig Wennervirta. Anttonen, Modernia vai kansallista – Taidegrafikka asaana 1930-luvun taidejärjestelmänä, 36. There is a need for additional research as it is somewhat unclear how Alanko and Lönnberg’s views on art related to each other.
herself as one of the more conciliatory students, who were unhappy about the constant disputes in class:

Today I thought about the Ateneum between 11am and 1.30pm and that I should go there – however, I only went after 1pm – and realised something was in the air – Aino [von Boehm], Gunvor [Grönvik], Brita [von Zweygberg] and Ilmari Nylund were again standing dramatically close to the closet – I thought – Jean-Christophe (?) must be behind this – and he was! He had been fighting Lömppä and in his impetuosity said some thoughtless things. The class had received back their competition works: Abraham sacrifices Isaac and in the critic situation he exploded. [Mauno] Markkula received the first prize and his work gained support – a war started.109

The composition exercises and competitions served as a fruitful starting point for disputes in the class, as some of the students opposed Lönnberg’s views on the definition of good art. The 300 Finnish marks,110 which Mauno Markkula received, seems to have added to the provocation. Eva Cederström also described some of the discussion in the classroom:

As a response to something Jean-Christophe (?) had said, among other things: Järnefelt was of a different opinion about this – to which Lömppä had answered that Järnefelt was no authority – ‘Is artist L. an authority?’ asked M[auno Manninen] – ‘Yes, I am in this classroom.’ ‘In that case a real discussion is out of the question’, said M[auno Manninen] and showed with his hand that he was leaving – but he did not – Aino [von Boehm] was also angry because of M.’s behaviour.111

Eva Cederström’s friends Mauno Manninen and Jean-Christophe seem to have been irritated by somewhat different aspects of William Lönnberg’s character. Manninen was provoked mainly by Lönnberg’s authoritarian role, whereas Jean-Christophe seemed to oppose Lönnberg’s art view. Similarly, the tense atmosphere in the class was apparent, when Cederström described how Lönnberg tried to come to the level of the students. The contrast to Lönnberg’s previous actions seemed enormous, as Cederström described the evening as ‘historical’ in a somewhat sceptical tone:

Last Friday was the historical evening when Lömppä and Mauno [Manninen] were discussing Ingres and Delacroix – the bad and good influences artists have on other artists – Lömppä said he wanted to know what we were thinking about art when we for example painted a model – and that he wants to be a friend to us and no Sebastian with a twig in his hand. Ah, it was interesting to hear. He promised to come to the student

---


110 Mauno Markkula’s prize is mentioned in the Finnish Art Society Drawing School’s matriculate. Microfilms. Archive Collections. FNG.

association meeting to listen (as a friend) with us, in other words he or mainly Mauno will be talking.\footnote{112}

The ‘historical evening’ Cederström described in her diary was also recorded in her sketchbook. Lönnberg reacts to Mauno Manninen’s comment by saying: ‘It is a completely different thing to who they are as people, it has nothing to do with art.’ One part of the drawing had been cut out, which would imply that Cederström had later censored some part of the scene.

Eva Cederström saw that her studies in the Ateneum had a huge impact on her artistic development, which was probably a factor in her studying there for an exceptionally long time.\footnote{113} Being away from the Ateneum was a risk for her development as artist: ‘I will start

\footnote{112} ‘Viime perjantaina oli se historiallinen iltta kun Lömppä ja Mauno väittelivät Ingresistä ja Delacroix’sta – taiteilijoiden hyvää ja huonosta vaikutuksesta toisiin taiteilijoihin – Lömppä sanoi että hän tahtoo tietää mitä me ajattelemme taiteesta kun esim maalaamme maailma – ja että hän tahtoo olla meille toveri eikä mikään Sebastian vitsa [?] kädessä – Ah, Se oli intressantti kuulla. Hän lupasi tulla ensi toverikuntaan kuuntelemaan (toverina) kanssamme t.s. hän tai etupäässä Mauno puhuu.’ 15 November 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.

\footnote{113} Cederström’s more critical friends studied in the Ateneum for considerably shorter periods. For example Mauno Manninen studied there only from 1937–39, after which he started taking lessons from Tyko Sallinen. Hellevi Arjava, \textit{Mauno Mannisen monet kasvat \textemdash\ Ihminen julkisuuskuvanssa takana} (Helsinki: Books on demand, 2016), 45, 53. Tove Jansson, who was also critical of the school, ended discussing her dissatisfaction at home and she wrote in her diary a comment she got from sculptor Felix Nylund, a friend of her father: ‘Damn, you shouldn’t go to study in a school if you have talents!’ Consequently, Jansson started as a private student of Sam Vanni. Boel Westin, \textit{Tove Jansson: sanat, kuvat, elämä} (Helsinki: Schildts, 2008), 79–80.
drawing in the Ateneum in the evenings, otherwise I will not have any skills left soon."114 Hence, it is not surprising that Cederström was one of the students who continued taking classes there after graduating. However, graduating was also important, as she saw it as a crucial step in becoming an independent artist: ‘Today we had an art history exam, the day after tomorrow we have the ending party, then the exhibition and everything ends. It is kind of sad, but it is a good – and the only – way to go, if one wants to say something of one’s own about painting.’115

First exhibitions and aiming abroad – starting an artist’s career

Eva Cederström’s first exhibition outside school was the 8th exhibition of the Vyborg Artist Association in 1937. She participated with one painting, ‘a theme from Suomenlinna’.116 In 1938 she took part in the ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ in the Kunsthalle Helsinki, while still studying in the Ateneum. In the following year she had graduated and participated once again in the ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ and in a ‘Nordic Art Exhibition’ in Gothenburg.117

After 1938, Cederström was obliged to work at the office of G.W. Berg in order to support herself and to make some financial contribution to help her family. There was an acute need for income, but she did not have any trust in her ability to sell paintings, so she saw office work as a necessity.118 Her diary is filled with passages were she states how exhausted and frustrated she is.119 ‘I could even die, I feel I have nothing to do in this world even though my room is filled with frames and canvases – but where is the time! Why is there no time? – Oh God, does it always have to be like this – I can’t take this anymore.’120

For the workwoman Cederström had become, holidays were a time for painting121 and using even three hours on artistic work could be exceptional.122 Having time did not however

---


116 This exhibition is not mentioned in earlier biographies. Exhibition catalogue Taidehistorian toiminnan vuosikertomus 1937. Vaahtera, Mässhallen juli 1939. Unfortunately Cederström does not write anything about the exhibition in her diary.

117 Eva Cederström’s first international exhibition, the Gothenburg ‘Nordic Art Exhibition’ of 1939, has been left out from the 1989 biography. Cederström seems to have displayed paintings with the titles ‘Kväll i staden’ and ‘Självporträtt’. Exhibition catalogue 1939 Katalog över nordisk konstutställning, Göteborg, Mässhallen juli 1939. Unfortunately Cederström does not write anything about the exhibition in her diary.


119 ‘Oh damn, that I have to be in this bread-and-butter job, I can’t stand this anymore – I am too tired to paint – in the beginning I managed, now came the warm spring and above this I have been in the Ateneum each evening – I am too tired to do anything.’ ‘Voii että täytyy olla tässä! I am too tired to do anything – en jakaa maalata – alussa vielä meni, nyt kun tuli lämmintä kevää on ollut lounaissa aikoina – ei tahdo jakaa mieltään.’ 29 March 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.


121 ‘I have to paint at least one decent work in the holiday.’ ‘Minun täytyy maalata lomalla ainakin yksi kelvollinen työ’ 29–30 July 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.

122 ‘I feel good as I could paint Inkeri Kytö yesterday – even though it was only three hours, I had not painted for a long time, it was maybe three months ago when I painted last time – and nothing good during the whole year.’ ‘On hyvä olla kunnossa, alun olis maalasta Inkeri Kytö – vaikka vain kolme tuntia, maalaisin pitkästi aika, ehkä n. kolme kuukautta sitten viimeksi – ei koko vuonna mitään kunnollista.’ 21 November 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.
automatically meant that it was always spent on painting: ‘From where will I find time – here in the countryside one can find it, but the silence has taken over me in a way that prohibits me from working – I can do nothing else but read – and marvel at this.’

Even the most wonderful visual views in nature cannot always make her paint: ‘I am not in the right painting mood – and everything is still so green in nature even though a cut rye field can be seen here or there, the wheat glows as gold, but I cannot paint.’

The second exhibition Eva Cederström participated in was the 1938 ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’. It seems that the encouragement she received was of great importance: ‘It is thanks to Johannes Gebhard that I took my work to be evaluated by the jury’, she wrote in her diary. ‘I would otherwise not have thought about it – he encouraged me several times when bumping into me on the street etc.’ Press reviews of the exhibition indicate it was mostly an arena for younger Helsinki-based artists. Eva Cederström showed ‘Autumn Morning in the Woods’, ‘Self-portrait’ and ‘Spring in Suomenlinna’. The self-portrait was not for sale, which implies that it would have been especially important for Cederström. However, at the time Cederström was feeling blue, which affected her own assessment of the exhibition.

And it doesn’t feel like anything that I got three of my paintings into the Finnish Artists’ Association’s spring exhibition. There was my large self-portrait, which I painted in the autumn when visiting home before my work at G.W. Berg, before I said goodbye to my home and – painting! Maybe I have managed to say what I wanted – as almost everyone has liked it.

Skåpe said: ‘I would like to own it’, and asked whether I would sell it. Also, Mauno Manninen said he liked it very much, and also Christian [Sibelius] – Benvenuto128, Kullervo [?], Veikko Rauhala, [?] Odenberg, Lyyli, Ahkola […] [Ben Renvall] also especially liked my self-portrait and at the opening Samuel Besprosvanni came and said ‘I like it, it has attitude’.129

Eva Cederström’s way of writing implies that she especially appreciated the comments from her circle of friends. This acceptance affirmed the value of her paintings, making the self-


125 ‘Kiitos Johannes Gebhardille että tulin vieneeksi töitän juryn arvosteltavaksi – en olisi muuten ajatellut – hän kehotti monta kertaa tavaissaan kadulla t.m.’ 29 April 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.


128 The identity of Benvenuto is unknown, but a drawing of him from the spring of 1934 can be found in Eva Cederström’s sketchbook which includes drawings of her friends.

portrait especially good. She interpreted the comments as a sign that she had grasped in her painting what she intended to express – her uncertainty over her work turned into trust. The strong feeling of belonging to the art world and the circle of young artists is apparent in many of her diary entries. At one point, she describes the office workers and states how their views differ from those prevalent in her artist circles: ‘The people at [the] Berg [office] are nice people, but they are not from my world. Think, they laugh at Gauguin – call his paintings ugly, horrible! But they don’t know what they are doing!’

The ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ was also one of the first times that Cederström sold a painting, which also meant parting with a work that was dear to her. In her diary she wrote:

It is not clear to which self-portrait Cederström is referring. There are at least two self-portraits from 1937, which could have been on display. One is in the Lappeenranta Art Museum collections and one remained part of Eva Cederström’s own collection of paintings until her death. The fact that Signe Tandefelt writes in an article about the opening of the exhibition ‘framför ett klarblått ansikte Eva C:s självporträtt vars blåa ögon tydligen har något att säga professorn’ implies that the painting would be the bluer work, which is in Lappeenranta. However, Cederström was much more attached to the painting that remained part of her collection until her death. She displayed it in exhibitions where she mostly had some later paintings on display. This could perhaps imply that she exhibited that painting in Helsinki Kunsthalle in 1938.

‘Bergiläiset ovat kaikki hauskoja ihmisïä, mutta eivät minun maailmastani. Ajatella, he nauravat Gauguinille – hänen maalauksiaan sanovat rumiksi kauheiks! – Mutta he eivät tiedä, mitä tekevät!’

23 January 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.
'I could give up everything to live only for painting’ – Eva Cederström’s Career and Artist Identity 1927–39 // Sandra Lindblom

FNG Research Issue No. 1/2019. Publisher: Finnish National Gallery, Kaivokatu 2, FI-00100 Helsinki, FINLAND.
© All rights reserved by the author and the publisher. Originally published in https://research.fng.fi

‘One painting was sold – of course the painting of a stream from Raivola – a thousand times more I would have wanted to part from the Suomenlinna love pond.’132

At the same time Cederström wrote about how she related to the comments art critics made about her participation in the 1938 ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’. Not a great deal was written about her in the exhibition. Edvard Richter – her art history teacher – noted her in one of his two long articles on the exhibition.133 In her diary Eva Cederström distances herself from the critics. She quotes their texts – but her choice of words implies that she is quite indifferent towards them:

[Edvard] Richter wrote about me too – as did [Signe] Tandefelt in Hufvudstadsbladet in an article about the opening: ‘In the following room we find Prof. Ruin pondering in front of a clear blue face, Eva C’s self-portrait, its blue eyes have apparently something to say to the professor.’134

Meanwhile, Eva Cederström started to write about her wish to continue her studies abroad. She clearly saw this as a necessary next step in her career. Cederström was interested in Paris, southern France and Italy as destinations: ‘I am thinking about faraway lands, as a pilgrim I will once walk to the city of the Boulevards and the sunny parts of southern France
– to Italy, the wonderful country of Michel-Angelo and Leonardo.135 While writing about her longing to travel, she also mentions how her friends are abroad, yet without any bitterness: ‘It was almost spring already – I walked by the harbour and the ships sailed far over the sea and in my mind, I was with them – in the big world. The sky was so blue, the sun so radiant and it gave me a hint of the summer. My heart was free and filled with joy and my wonderful friend the wind told me about wonders in foreign lands. Gunvor left for Italy and Uhra for Paris – they travelled in the spring and summer there in the south.’136 Cederström noted that study trips abroad had a very concrete effect on the work of her friends and colleagues. When Tove Jansson returned from a study trip to Paris Cederström wrote in her diary about the progress she saw in Jansson’s paintings: ‘[T]here is a clear development between the first paintings and the most recent ones. Paris – when will my turn come?’137

The second exhibition Eva Cederström mentioned in her diary was the ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ in 1939. ‘The weeks have past – at last on last Thursday – no it was on Friday, I got rid of my burden when I left my paintings at the Kunsthalle where the men of the jury yesterday and today have decided their fate – I also made the frames myself – I painted frames made by Eki [?] I was away from the office on Thursday and Friday – sick – I was that also – a weird tiredness – even fever!’138 The works that were accepted were The Evening of the City, June Morning in the Atelier and My Mother.139 One of the jury members was her painting teacher William Lönnberg.

This time Eva Cederström’s work received more attention from the critics. The male art critics put her in a category of promising female artists, not simply of artists, but Cederström ignored this when she wrote:140

The exhibition passed. [Edvard] Richter mentioned me in Helsingin Sanomat: ‘Gunvor Grönvik and Eva C-n both attracted attention with their landscapes.’ [Onni] Okkonen also mentioned me. Hageli [Hjalmar Hagelstam] wrote a lot in [Svenska] Pressen: as grand as G.G.-vik’s [Gunvor Grönvik’s] canvases appeared in the middle hall, as high Eva Cederström’s paintings sing out in the southern hall – she is no nervous man, Eva. She is not weighed down by complexes – she paints on – straight from the heart. The result is

‘I could give up everything to live only for painting’ – Eva Cederström’s Career and Artist Identity 1927–39 // Sandra Lindblom

---

FNG Research Issue No. 1/2019. Publisher: Finnish National Gallery, Kaivokatu 2, FI-00100 Helsinki, FINLAND.
© All rights reserved by the author and the publisher. Originally published in https://research.fng.fi

‘fresh powerful and beautiful paintings!’ Thank you Hageli – these words are kind of a big service to me – Olle Berg bought a painting, I presume merely because of this critique.141

Such outright praise from a critic was something new for Cederström. Still, she was not awestruck, as she quite coolly described the critique as a kind of favour. As an artist struggling with her income, she put an emphasis on the way in which the critic affected her sales – Olle Berg was a member of the Berg family who owned the company she worked for. Another painting was bought from the exhibition by the Finnish Art Society, and Cederström clearly notes the significance of this sale. The work they bought for their yearly art lottery was June Morning in the Atelier which Hagelstam had praised.142 Apparently, the exhibition organisers took half of the selling price for themselves, as Cederström wrote: ‘The Art Society also bought a work – 2,500 – summer morning in the atelier! That I did not want to sell in the beginning but now I received a good amount of money for my Italy travel budget – even though I will only get half of that amount!’143 The need to travel was so strong that Cederström agreed to part with the painting that seemed to be one of her most successful to date.

Probably partly followed by the success in the ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ in 1939, Cederström received the Ducat Prize that same year, awarded by the Finnish Art Society to an aspiring artist.144 There were no female laureates from 1904–36, so it was still unusual to award a female artist in this category.145 The decision about the Ducat Prize was made by a Prize and Grant Committee that included Bertel Hintze and artists Wilho Sjöström, Viktor Jansson, Felix Nylund, Eero Snellman and Verner Thomé.146 Generally, there is very little archive material on the decision-making procedure147 but a table with names of artists and the grants they applied for has survived from 1939. It seems that the committee first nominated a number of aspiring artists and then made a choice between them.148 As Cederström was simultaneously working full-time and struggling with her income and to have enough time to paint, it is not surprising that she did not refer to the symbolic value of the prize. ‘For the trip to Italy I received 3,000 from Vyborg – and here in Helsinki the 1st Ducat Prize 3,000 – the

---


142 The Finnish Art Society annual report 1939.


144 The Ducat Prize was founded in 1857 as a form of support for young artists. The name comes from ducat, the gold coins that were used widely in Europe in the 19th century. Jukka Ervamaa, ‘Ruususvaa, kultadukaatteja ja taidepolitiikkaa’ in Rakel Kallio (ed.), Dukaatti: Suomen Taideyhdistys 1848–2006 (Helsinki: WSOY, Suomen Taideyhdistys, 2006), 57–58.


146 The Finnish Art Society annual report 1939.


148 The Finnish Art Society minutes and their attachments, 1939. The Archive of the Finnish Art Society. Archive Collections, FNG.
money starts to grow a bit more, I still need to have at least half that again to be able to be there at least half a year.”

In 1939 her plans to travel abroad were already concrete. In her archive there is a certificate of her studies of Italian, signed 8 September 1939 – language studies seem to have been a standard part of travel preparations. Thinking about the lessons and her expectations, Cederström wrote: ‘Let’s see what happens to my dream of the trip to Italy next autumn – I think I will be able to go! The big, beautiful world waits for me – the old beautiful sunny Italy with its Giottos, Leonardos and other wonderful names. Life has become too busy – the thoughts are jumping around restlessly – there’s no moment of rest – the whole day first in the feverish bustle at [G.W.] Berg – and after that my own hobbies – the lessons in Italian – painting – that receives a smaller amount of my time even though it should be the other way around.’

However, the war halted Cederström’s plans to travel. One can follow in her diary how she gradually understands that her dream will not be realised. In the spring of 1939 she wrote: ‘Aino also maybe leaves in the autumn – and for sure if the war doesn’t come before that. But it will not!’ In August, Cederström was already expecting the upcoming war, as she wrote in her diary: ‘If the war comes, I cannot go to Italy – then what will I do! Nothing but waiting – waiting…’

Eva Cederström’s views on painting

Eva Cederström occasionally reflected upon her views on art in her diary at the end of the 1930s. She defined art as her life-goal and painting as the meaning of her life. Cederström saw the artist community as ‘her world’ and at moments of mistrust painting was still something that usually remained meaningful. The darkest moments for Cederström were those when even painting lost its meaning. Once she wrote: ‘My heart did not feel anything – it was frozen by the cold – alone – and ready to die – even though I thought about my work – painting – it was also worthless.’

Beauty was also linked to the meaning of life in Eva Cederström’s view: ‘Nevertheless – Beauty is always around us if we have it in our soul – how great it is to live when we have understood Beauty.’

---


154 ‘Muuta en tiedä kuin että taide ja kaikki siihen liittyvä on minun maaliman.’ 26 December 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.


Based on her diary, I would suggest that Eva Cederström saw her art and the development of her personal character as one process. This would also explain the notable amount of self-portraits she created. It became evident that in her view, a self-portrait was a representation of an artist's character. A constant urge to develop was part of her view on life: ‘I cannot be sad and stand still, I have to go further towards life and the future.’ When she wrote about the art studies abroad that she dreamt of, she also mentioned how she thought it would affect her character: ‘The time will come and then I will feel and live – I will be what I have to be – the free, honest version of myself, I want to be like [the Egyptian pharaoh] Akhenaton – he will be my role model – a great and humble person.’

When comparing her self-portrait from the 1938 ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’ with a self-portrait by Samuel Besprosvanni (later known as Sam Vanni), she wrote about Besprosvanni’s character: ‘[The painting] was good – it was an image of a human – of a free, great human being.’

---


159 ‘Se aika tulee sen tunnen ja silloin elän – olen se mikä minun on oltava – vapaa, oma itseni tahdon olla kuin Akhanaton – hän olkoon esikuvani – suuri nöyrä ihminen.’ 15 November 1938. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG. Eva had seen a play about the pharaoh the previous day and the reference comes from there.

Cederström’s personal and artistic aims were about finding inner peace and discovering her true, honest character.\(^{161}\)

In her writings, Eva Cederström seldom pondered upon gender as a part of her artist identity,\(^{162}\) even though art critics wrote about her as a female artist.\(^{163}\) It seems evident that she saw herself mainly as an artist rather than a female artist. However, gendered structures


\(^{162}\) In the 1930s diary entries Cederström never reflected upon gender as part of her life as an artist or the expectations put upon female artists. However, in the beginning of the 1940s she once reflected upon the theme after having discussed with an older married woman, who studied painting in Paris in her youth. Cederström was thinking that the role of a high society wife and artist were impossible to combine. 4 April 1942. Eva Cederström’s diary. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.

\(^{163}\) Art critics and to some extent the art teachers were prejudiced against female artists. E.g. the biography written by Hertta Tirranen claims that painting teacher William Lönnberg saw women as incapable of the process of making real art. The biography is based on interviews with the artist’s friends. Tirranen, \textit{Suomen Taidetilaijat}, 109. Also Tove Jansson’s interviews have highlighted this side of Lönnberg’s attitude towards women. Kruskopf, \textit{Kuvataiteilija Tove Jansson}, 76.
could have affected her approach to her own art: like the art critics, Cederström mainly compared herself to Tove Jansson, a female artist of her own age. When looking back at the 1930s in her autobiographical notes, Cederström sometimes referred to gendered structures as confusing. For example, when she explained how Uuno Alanko kept ‘long lectures after the classes separately for the girls and boys’, she defined this as something the students ‘couldn’t understand’.164 The question of gender was, however, especially present in one of her paintings, a self-portrait from 1937. In this work, Cederström presented herself as a young Renaissance man in the style of Hans Holbein. This painting hung later in her studio and it was the only painting from the 1930s that was part of her 1980s retrospective exhibitions, which implies that it was important for her. Discovering what kind of meanings she saw in this specific self-portrait and to what extent they were linked to gender, requires further research.165

It became evident through her diary that Cederström perceived painting as an ongoing process and ‘seeing’ as a central part of it. ‘I feel I am right now beginning to understand and see’,166 she wrote at a time when it was hard for her to paint. ‘Seeing’ for Cederström was something between visual perception and understanding the nature of things. ‘My paintings are few – I haven’t painted much – but the time will come when I can paint what I have seen – now I only walk around and see everything clearly – but I cannot paint – maybe what I see remains in my mind, on the canvas of my soul and I can draw on canvas when the time comes.’167 Visual observations and the right kind of stimuli are clearly part of the artistic process: ‘Now I would like to paint – paint all day – I see colours – I feel the vibrations of the air – I see the light everywhere.’168

In her diary Cederström wrote about painting as a process of feeling, and the strongest and most dominant feeling for her – love. ‘I want to love the light of spring – I have to love something because there is no person I would love; therefore I have to take everything from around me, from nature, and I have to paint what I feel.’169 In her private writings art and her constant search for love are merged into one. When falling in love in the end of the 1930s she wrote: ‘I do not want to forget painting – it is number one in my life – and then comes He. But no, they are one!’170 For female artists in the 1930s, having a love-life was seen as something that risked the ability to concentrate on art. In Cederström’s diary notes it became evident that she rather saw love as a source of inspiration: ‘What he is to me – my thoughts, my life. ’

164 ‘Alanko, koulun rehtori, oli kuivahko, tiukka, vaativa ja rakasti Kalevalaa antaen meille mielestämme liiankin usein sitä käsitteleviä sommitellehtäviä ja pitäen pitkiä esittelmiä tuntien jälkeen, erikseen työissä ja pojille mitä emme voineet ymmärtää.’ Eva Cederström’s autobiographical notes. ECA, 15. Archive Collections, FNG.

165 ‘Eva Cederström was fascinated by Renaissance art and the painting could also have been for her purely a reference to the style she admired. On the other hand, it would be somewhat surprising if she hadn’t thought about the fact that no female artists were part of the canon of art history in the 1930s, when creating this piece. If this painting was on display in the 1938 ‘Finnish Artists’ Exhibition’, it would be surprising that there was no reference to what it clearly represented.’

166 ‘Tunnen, että nyt juuri alan ymmärtää ja nähän, vois siitä antaa kaikki saadaksesi yksin maalauselle elää.’ Eva Cederström’s diary 1937. ECA, 13. Archive Collections, FNG.


muse.”

Love and the colour blue – which in Cederström’s writings becomes a symbol for her and everything that is dear to her – were linked when she wrote: ‘the blue dusk of the evening I give to you’. Having a voice of her own and being an independent artist was an artistic aim for Eva Cederström. ‘This is all a beginning – but despite all, it is forward – upwards. I myself have something to say in painting’, she wrote in her diary. Her way of writing implied that her paintings were mainly statements about paintings as a form of art. Cederström worked in the tradition of modern painting, creating portraits, interiors and small landscapes. As painting in these genres was common throughout the 20th century, they were seen as neutral and ‘empty’, mainly as references to the tradition of modernist painting.

In her texts, Eva Cederström emphasised the importance of the experiences in nature as a source of inspiration for painting. The places and moments of painting are especially emphasised in the landscape paintings. When she writes about a landscape painting from 1938, she ponders her experience in the midst of nature: ‘the autumn in Raivola was a wonderful time – the bright yellow mornings in the old woods and the sound of the stream at the stony parts. I want to paint there once again.’ However, she often linked her experiences to representations of nature in art: ‘One can see a lot of [Akseli Gallen-]Kallela-like landscapes here, especially in the early mornings and evening.’ Cederström’s writings are filled with descriptions of the weather conditions and landscape experiences: ‘The frost has come, the snow crunches when walking – the snow glitters wonderfully, all this whiteness fills one’s heart, the whole human being is taken over by it. Now I understand how Pekka Halonen felt in the wintry forest.’ Cederström even wrote of her dream to escape into the wilderness, an idea that was quite widespread among Finnish landscape painters such as Gallen-Kallela and Halonen at the turn of the century: ‘Now I would not want to return to Helsinki – I would like to go deep into the Finnish forests – to a place where my thoughts can rest. There I would know what I really want – I could examine my Helsinki-person from afar and maybe find something that should be changed.’ One aspect of nature that was especially dear to her was the sea, and her fascination for it is evident in many pages in her diary. In later interviews she also explained that the sea was one of the reasons why she painted in blue. Her way of perceiving the sea as a mystical symbol of the eternal is evident in her diary: ‘To these dear seashores I have arrived again – I am happy to


be here. Far, far is Helsinki – its bustle and all the people there are strangers. Only this huge, wonderful sea and the high blue sky exist.”

Conclusions

From my archive research it is clear that Eva Cederström’s early career included failures, successes, institutional support and economic problems. Her career started with a failed attempt to enter the Ateneum in the spring of 1928. The studies in the Art School of the Vyborg Friends of Art developed her work ethic and introduced her to a formalist approach to painting. Cederström was perceived as a promising young artist after the spring of 1932, which
led to her receiving a number of grants. As Cederström continued her studies in the Ateneum her views on the importance of spiritual and soulful side of art seem to have been affected by Uuno Alanko’s teaching. William Lönnberg’s difficult personality created some challenges, but she saw his influences as important for her artistic development. The fact that art studies in the Ateneum had been her unreachable dream in the 1920s and early 1930s, certainly affected the fact that she appreciated the studies more than her peers. This sheds light on why she stayed in the school for an exceptionally long time. Encouragement from the school was crucial to Cederström: she offered some of her works to an exhibition due to Johannes Gebhard’s encouragement. Cederström worked determinedly towards being able to make a study trip abroad, seeing also the prizes she received merely as part of the travel budget. Additionally, this study gives new information on the conditions of art education in Finland in the 1930s, and its key figures, such as William Lönnberg and Uuno Alanko.

I conclude that Cederström’s career development was especially hindered by the lack of economic resources – it restricted her from continuing her studies in Finland and abroad and obliged her to take a day job that clearly was an encumbrance for her career. The impact of the socio-economic background on the career development of female artists has not been highlighted enough – this case study implies that lack of economic resources hindered career development, e.g. art studies abroad, even though institutions would have given their support to a female artist, e.g. in the form of grants. Therefore, it is relevant to underline the deficiency of the grant system, which did not in itself provide enough resources for art studies in the 1930s. Cederström’s ability to work determinedly towards her goals seems to have advanced her career.

Previous writings on Eva Cederström have not revealed much about how she perceived her art, as she avoided analysing her work, which was the common approach among artists during the modernist period. This study shows that Cederström saw art as an intrinsic part of her life – a reason to live. She perceived art and personal development as ongoing processes that were linked. Based on this, the numerous self-portraits she created throughout her career seem to be representations of different phases in a project of personal development. Seeing and understanding the nature of things around her was central in the painting process, and her sources of inspiration were light and colour, which were commonly seen as constituents of modern painting. Cederström saw these often in nature or in weather conditions. In a turn-of-the-20th-century manner she wished to escape from modern urban life into the wilderness. This study proves that feelings and especially the strongest of them – love – were central for Cederström’s painting process and the men she admired were sources of inspiration.

The time period considered in this article ends in the early autumn of 1939, but questions regarding Cederström’s further career development can also be answered through material in Eva Cederström’s archive. The conditions of wartime, under which Eva Cederström established herself as an artist, created an exceptional situation within the art field with a mentally challenging environment, booming art sales and increased possibilities for female artists.

181 Wartime inflation decreased the value of the Finnish mark, which led to a situation where people spent rather than saved their money. Thus, the art market bloomed, but this seems to have mostly had an impact on the sales of the works of well-known artists. Oskari Mantere, ‘Kuvataiteet ja nykyaika’ in Suomen taiteen vuosikirja (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 1942), 2. When artist Mauno Manninen was taking part in the war effort Eva Cederström used his studio and this development of female artists using the studios of male artists could have been a larger phenomenon. Group exhibitions also seem to have displayed the works of female artists more often during the war, e.g. Aune Lindström wrote in a catalogue to a female art exhibition: ‘female artists have lately been quite well-represented in our exhibitions for obvious reasons.’ I will continue studying Eva Cederström and the development of her career in the 1940s and early 1950s in my Master’s thesis.