

Devoted to Kalevala: Perspectives on Akseli Gallen-Kallela's Kalevala Art

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Abstract

In addition to his many-sided activities in the field of pictorial art, Akseli Gallen-Kallela has been very commonly defined as the *Kalevala* illustrator. A need to depict Finland's national epos followed him throughout his life. In my article, I wish to open up questions and problematics concerning this task. I also shed light on the developing or changing ways of interpreting the mythology into art. Gallen-Kallela started his last but unfinished *Kalevala* project, the so-called *Great Kalevala* while staying in the United States in 1923-1926. It was supposed to become the final synthesis of what the artist himself had learned up until then about the Finnish people, nature and traditions.

Akseli Gallen-Kallela said of his work thus:

I derive little personal benefit from dividing my time between so many different fields of the arts, but in a young, fledgling nation, such as ours, we need a spirit of enterprise and inspiration. Others will follow in my footsteps, and more committed artists than I will absorb influences and develop each field independently, as specialized experts. Besides, I need the stimulation that these exciting experiments have given me. And, in the end, it's not only for art's sake that I am doing this. For me, art is life, religion – everything. (Gallen-Kallela's sketchbook 1897; as cited in Karvonen-Kannas, 1996, p. 110).

The artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1856-1931) is a unique phenomenon in Finnish art history. His versatile and massive production consists of paintings, drawings, graphics, illustrations, design, textiles, uniforms, flags, photography and even buildings. He carved, hammered, printed, engineered and built. An educated artist merged into a skilful craftsman and this combination built the cornerstone of Gallen-Kallela's artistic identity. By crossing over the boundaries of the bourgeoisie and rural life by transmitting folk art into the field of fine arts, Gallen-Kallela was able to create images, which met the needs of his time to promote Finnish art both on international and domestic levels. He filtered layers of influences, secular and religious pictorial traditions, sense of different materials and techniques into his art. From this simplified diversity comes the strength of his image, which has not faded. It is also remarkably manifested in his *Kalevala* related art. These strongly contoured and emotional works have been etched into the minds of Finns and they still keep on living in our culture – in popular as well as in subcultures, for instance in the forms of tattooing.

The need to have Gallen-Kallela on one's skin brings into focus an interesting manner of returning the "official" images from the museum walls back to people on a deeply personal level. It also gives fascinating ideas to interpret the profound question of the purpose and the use of the mythological symbols. It would be a subject for another study, but in this context, it provides yet another good example of the quality of Gallen-Kallela's *Kalevala* art: like myths themselves, his art is constantly open for new interpretations and purposes and its elements and narratives bend smoothly to ironic, serious, respectful or critical variations.

In Gallen-Kallela's case it is especially interesting how the desire to illustrate the *Kalevala* haunted him all of his life. This separates him clearly from his contemporaries and underlines his unique role. It even reveals his fearless attitude to take risks – artistic and economic – while many of his colleagues thought the task to illustrate the epos would be nearly impossible.¹ In my article, I wish to open the problematic to Gallen-Kallela's lifelong task of depicting mythology and to show how he approached it. A special focus is given to the artist's last but unfinished project, *The Great Kalevala*, which he started during his 1923-1926 stay in the United States.

Kalevala as a Guiding Star - Developing the Image of the Myth

Early *Kalevala* themes appear in Gallen-Kallela's sketches at the age of 16, soon after he had started his fulltime art studies at the Drawing School of the Art Association of Finland in 1881. Adventurous incidents connected to the Sampo myth and the tragic hero Kullervo were among the first themes that appeared (Okkonen, 1935, pp. 15-17). The interest towards *Kalevala* reflected both the

¹ Pekka Halonen's opinion was published in magazine *Aika* 1910. (Bonsdorff, 2009, p. 75).

artist's personal interest as well as the common and growing public and institutional demands for new illustrations (Okkonen, 1961, p. 199; Wahlroos, 2004, p. 52).

A request for *Kalevala* art had aroused in Finland already in the beginning of the 19th century soon after the first and the second versions of the *Kalevala* were published in 1835 and 1849. Robert Wilhelm Ekman (1803-1873) was the most significant painter in this field in 1850s and 1860s (Ervamaa, 1981, p. 9). His efforts to create a wide series of illustrated scenes from the *Kalevala* have remained as original drawings and as two self-published booklets with few of his approximately 100 drawings published. He also painted some large canvases (Stewen, 2008, p. 73).

Ekman made his images at the time when the idea of Finnish art and style did not yet exist and when Finnish artistic culture, in its infancy, still had not developed its institutions. It was obvious he painted according to European models and following his teacher, famous history painter Frenchman Paul Delaroche. Ekman's *Kalevala* works are partly detailed and ethnographically-inspired studies of imagined ancient Finns and partly reflections of sensual Parisian salon paintings. The inability of Finnish critics of that time to evaluate both the demands and the results of this new task might have been the reason for the quite indifferent attitude Ekman received (Ervamaa, 1981, p. 10; Stewen, 2008, pp. 72-74). However, his works have an important place in the history of the *Kalevala* illustrations and they clearly had an influence on young Gallen-Kallela when it comes to the handling of the themes and the compositions.

When Gallen-Kallela started his *Kalevala* career, he faced the same problem as Ekman: how to find the balance between national themes and international form. At the beginning, the realistic approach served as a solution, and Gallen-Kallela's early *Kalevala* paintings were based on recognizable Finnishness with original details from nature, costumes and utensils painted in a French realistic outdoor manner. Compared to Ekman, Gallen-Kallela had time on his side. In late 19th century Finland, the whole concept of Finnishness was under a new formulation since our national position as a Grand Duchy of Russia was changing. There was a national need to define Finnish identity and Gallen-Kallela gave his answer through his art. His depictions of Finnish nature, people and the *Kalevala* were recognised to be important because they showed the potential of our own heritage and culture.

According to the scientist of religion Mircea Eliade, the right historical moment is needed to reveal a specific, national and also

sacred substance from the every day. It relies on an individual's capability to understand the essential characteristics (Anttonen, 1996, p. 62). Gallen-Kallela's sacred and national substance grew from his close experiences of rural life and nature. They made the world of the *Kalevala* alive in his imagination.

In regard to their themes, the old tales of the *Kalevala* evoke in me the warmest feeling of familiarity, as if I had lived and experienced it all myself. But when I use these themes, it is not in order to "illustrate" them, but because their reality corresponds to my own imagination and they arouse in me a yearning to put them on canvas. Nor do I proceed from the theme, but rather from my own state of mind and conception of painting, the images that appeared in mind, having already lived in my soul since my early childhood (Gallen-Kallela, 1903, as cited in Okkonen, 1961, p. 417).

Throughout his life, Gallen-Kallela faced the challenge of how to bring into pictures the mythological imagination, which was at the same time very concrete and multifaceted, real and supernormal. Gallen-Kallela's mental images of the *Kalevala* found their first realization in the spirit of realism. However, he soon came across the problems of realistic depiction. The metaphors of the old poems were illustrative, concrete visions, while their content referred to the supernatural world of spirits, seer-shamans and incantations. Coexisting in the poems were the everyday and the sacred, the real and the otherworld.

In his *Kalevala* images of the late 1890s, Gallen-Kallela sought a form of expression that would combine the multiple meanings of the theme with simplicity and lightness of expression – the coexistence of naiveté and seriousness familiar from the Early Renaissance. The new impulses adopted by Gallén in the early 1890s – stylization, archaism, primitivism, the study of ethnography and the achievements of ancient cultures – all began to influence the core solutions of the paintings, which he was creating. A further element towards a more dense and reduced composition was provided by graphics, which appeared in Gallen-Kallela's oeuvre after 1895.

The period when Gallen-Kallela lived isolated in his distant countryside home Kalela, also included work in applied arts, and the use of decorative elements and colour opened up in a new way through experiments with materials. Adding to this ensemble of various impressions personal impulses – a quiet life in natural

surroundings, grieving for his daughter² – we obtain a picture of the starting points for the best-known of Gallen-Kallela's works, his monumental *Kalevala* paintings from 1896-1899. As Gallen-Kallela himself put it: "Many a beautiful story could perhaps come about in my

Alongside individual works of art, there were plans, which expanded all the way to a hand-painted deluxe edition on parchment. The artist began to realize his dreams in the early 20th century, but the project foundered on economic issues. When the publisher Werner Söderström



Figure 1. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: *Lemminkäinen's Mother* 1897.

Tempera on canvas 85,5 x 108,5 cm. Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum

mind when the fire rages in the fireplace – but from now on my stories are only heavy, gloomy and lacking all joy" (Axel Gallén personal communication to Louis Sparre, September 26, 1895; as cited in Wennervirta, 1932, p. 52). The atmosphere in these paintings is solid, gloomy, pathetic yet also decorative and luscious in colours. Nature and its individual elements play an important part echoing the inseparable relation between nature and man in Finnish folklore (Ilvas, 2000, p. 43).

The Kalevala Decorated 1922

The dream of an illustrated version of the *Kalevala* epic had run through Gallen-Kallela's oeuvre ever since the early 1880s.

began to plan a series of illustrated versions of the *Kalevala* in the early 1920s, an agreement was drawn up with Gallen-Kallela for the first "popular edition" known as *The Kalevala Decorated*, with vignettes at the beginning and end of the runes, which appeared in 1922 (Kuusela, 2001, p. 101).

Although *The Kalevala Decorated* was a reduced version of the artist's original plans, it nonetheless permitted him to see how the visual themes functioned together with the runes and introduced him to the practical aspects of printing methods. The decoration of the whole *Kalevala* also meant the adoption of completely new visual motifs alongside the use of the artist's earlier *Kalevala* imagery. The presence of ethnographic material is emphasized throughout the book.

With illustration limited to initial and closing vignettes, it shaped the themes towards

² Gallen-Kallela lost his daughter Marjatta at the age of four in 1895.

decorative stylization of an ornamental kind. In addition, the limited space and available technique reduced and simplified both themes and form. The overall appearance of the book was archaically angular, and examples from the Middle Ages were also suggested by the leather-bound cover, the gilt ornament of the back, the raised binding threads and the thick paper. As a whole, *The Kalevala Decorated* was a milestone achievement in Finnish book art, expressing the requirements of a national style in graphic art (Kuusela, 2004, pp. 69-70). For Gallen-Kallela, the book was an overall process entailing several phases, the lessons of which were to be used in the next stage of the *Kalevala* illustrations.

From Diversity to Unity

“The runes of *Kalevala* are truly so sacred to me that, for instance, while singing them feels like leaning one’s tired head to some solid, unbreakable support.”
(From Gallen-Kallela’s diary, March 1899; as cited in Wennervirta, 1932, p. 59).

Viewed as a whole, Gallen-Kallela’s *Kalevala* art evolved from realism to reduced and simplified symbolism and from the latter to the stylized ornament of *The Kalevala Decorated* with *The Great Kalevala* sketches (1923-1926) as a culmination: a fantasy-filled synthesis of realism, symbolism, ornament and colourism (Möttönen, 2000, p. 40).

The stylistic switch from the artist’s earlier *Kalevala* works (*Aino-triptych*, 1891 and *The Forging of the Sampo*, 1893) painted in a highly realistic manner into symbolist and synthetic works (*The Defence of the Sampo*, 1896; *Joukahainen’s Revenge*, 1897; *Lemminkäinen’s Mother*, 1897 See Figure 1); *Kullervo Cursing*, 1899; *Väinämöinen’s Departure*, 1896-1906) marked a way to Gallen-Kallela’s later *Kalevala* projects. He became more involved with folkloristic and ethnographic studies of the day, which nourished his own visions and even theories of myth based art (Gallen-Kallela personal correspondences to E. N. Setälä and Väinö Salminen, 1914-1920). A wish to create a sense of community through the pictures of *Kalevala* became an important intention as *Kalevala* itself was a collection of anonymous poets, an anonymous voice of the community that borne communally shared knowledge on life through myths and taboos.³

³ Under Elias Lönnrot’s edition the names of the singers of the *Kalevala* runes were not mentioned. This has created a sense of anonymousness to the *Kalevala*.

In Gallen-Kallela’s advanced thinking, the *Kalevala* pictures, like folk poetry in it, should be available to all and their symbolic power should be shared by all. The educated class had taken and formulated old poems into written epos, transformed them into music, plays and pictures and now Gallen-Kallela was quite explicitly dreaming of returning the *Kalevala* back to the people (Gallen-Kallela, 1909, p. 218). He wanted to hand to the people a unique art book, which would take through the world of *Kalevala* with the help of visual elements. The combination of text and picture became a starting point and the goal was to produce a prototype of the mythic Finnish pictorial thinking.

The question of how to illustrate myth was still in the air, partly unsolved despite the success of Gallen-Kallela’s earlier works. From large canvases, the interest turned into the dreams of minute detailed illustrations where *Kalevala* appeared like another holy book, the Bible, illustrated by medieval monks:

I would like to enter a monastery and be given the task of decorating and illustrating a big book or “Bible.” –But the book would continue to approach completion and when the last page with its last “Finis” would be finished, decorated in beautiful colours and gold, I would go and rest for a few hundred years. No one would know the name of the monk who sat there in a grey habit, lettering and struggling in his cell (Gallen-Kallela, sketchbook notes, 1896; as cited in Kuusela, 2001, p. 101).

The Great Kalevala

Gallen-Kallela pronounced his programme of *The Great Kalevala*, a wholly illustrated epos in the magazine *Valvoja* in 1909: “The illustrated *Kalevala* is to become the Book of the Nation, not only portraying the main events of the *Kalevala* epic with pictures but also forming an artistic entity presenting the folklife and nature of Finland” (Gallen-Kallela, 1909, p. 218).

The Great Kalevala was meant to crystallize all that Gallen-Kallela knew and had learned up until then about the Finnish people and nature in Finland. Now all the details and studies he had drawn, painted, carved and photographed throughout his career could be taken into use.⁴

⁴ In his long letter to Jalmari Jäntti, dated March 3, 1925 and written in New Mexico, Gallen-Kallela tells how he has prepared for this task for all of his life. The content of this letter was also addressed to the people of Finland and especially

The examples for this “manual of Finnish mythic thought” were medieval handpainted and illuminated manuscripts, codices and prayer books. Like these works, *The Great Kalevala* was to be decorated with an easily interpreted and illustrative allegory running alongside the text and clearly related to it, and with ornamental typography. Of the 700 pages comprising the whole book, 150 were planned to be illustrated with images of whole and half-page format, 450 pages of text were to be coloured ornamentally, and fifty pages for the beginnings of poems were to be decorated to a richer and greater degree. The unique, one-off, work was to be placed in a special Kalevala Room of the National Museum of Finland (Gallen-Kallela, 1909, p. 218).

Gallen-Kallela estimated that this immense undertaking would take twenty years to complete. As the first actual drafts for the pages were completed only as late as 1924, the artist, now in his sixties, felt that despite his enthusiasm, he would have neither the time nor energy for the task.

New influences in the New World – Gallen-Kallela in America 1923-1926

In this connection, it is highly interesting that Gallen-Kallela did the major part of *The Great Kalevala* sketches in the U.S.A. There, away from home, he found a peace in which to work and a right mood. New visions started to blossom in the cold winter of Taos, New Mexico and in Chicago’s summer heat.

The background for going to America can be traced back to the year 1915, when the international Panama-Pacific exhibition was held in San Francisco. Gallen-Kallela sent 170 works directly to the exhibition from the International Biennial of Venice. His department at the San Francisco exhibition was awarded an honorary mention. Owing to the First World War, the return of the works to Finland was delayed however. The collection was seized and ten works were sold without the artist’s permission. Years passed and there seemed to be no solution to the fate of the collection. It was only in 1923 that the Art Institute of Chicago approached Gallen-Kallela requesting permission to stage an exhibition of the works that had remained in America. Both perplexed and annoyed by this turn of events, Gallen-Kallela decided to travel personally to sort out the situation. In November 1923, Gallen-Kallela travelled via Stockholm, Gothenburg and London to Southampton, from where he continued to New York and finally stayed in Chicago.

to the friends of the *Kalevala*. (Raivio, 2006, p. 204).

In the evenings one is impressed by the bustle of life on the streets and the tall skyscrapers covered by flashing multi-coloured electric lights. A true advertisement hell in all its magnificence, but lacking the light gaiety that one can see, for instance, in Paris. --- People eat a great deal, but everything is very expensive! On the whole, the most horrible caricature of human culture. (Akseli Gallen-Kallela personal correspondence to Mary Gallen-Kallela, December 17, 1923. As cited in Gallen-Kallela, 1964/1992, p. 579)

The exhibition opened in Chicago in December 1923. Also in Chicago was an old friend, the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950), who had moved to America in February of the same year. In 1922, Saarinen had participated in the architectural competition for the Chicago Tribune Tower, receiving second place even though he had never visited the city. Excited by the prize, Saarinen moved to America and was now working on a new traffic plan for Chicago. This meeting of fellow artists in a setting that was new for both of them, was a significant event, which begun to lead to joint plans. In addition, the Art Institute asked Gallen-Kallela to participate in its teaching.

In February 1924 Gallen-Kallela was invited to hold an exhibition at Suomi College [now Finlandia University] in Hancock, Michigan. For this event the artist painted 20 “small typical Finnish landscapes” (Gallen-Kallela personal correspondence to Mary Gallen-Kallela, January, 24, 1924; as cited in Raivio, 2006, pp. 82-89) and in addition he also exhibited some portraits and *Kalevala* works.⁵ At first Gallen-Kallela felt aloof towards the planned ceremonial occasions to be held in Hancock, but once he arrived there he was touched by the presence of Finnish culture and people and also by the positive and enthusiastic receipt of his exhibition. Even though the artist sold only three paintings, he evaluated his visit with a very warm tone of voice afterwards (Raivio, 2006, pp. 79-90).⁶ He donated to Suomi

⁵ Gallen-Kallela was able to add to the Hancock exhibition artworks from his big touring collection, which were already in Chicago and temporarily restored to Frank A. Hecht’s house. This addition was especially desired by the exhibition organizers in Hancock (Raivio, 2006, p. 84).

⁶ Gallen-Kallela’s granddaughter Kaari Raivio has written very careful and detailed memories of Gallen-Kallela’s stay in the United States which were published in Finland in 2006.

College the colour sketch for the first page of *The Great Kalevala*.⁷ As the Finnish American doctor Henry Holm put it, Gallen-Kallela was like a god for Finnish Americans and his paintings were heavenly too (Raivio, 2006, p. 90).

The lift manufacturer Frank A. Hecht also became interested in Gallen-Kallela's skills and commissioned a portrait of his wife and daughter and an etching of himself. Hecht also asked Gallen-Kallela to design the logo of his company. Hecht was satisfied with the results and paid Gallen-Kallela a handsome sum, which permitted him to invite his wife and daughter to America. The family was reunited at Belen, New Mexico. Gallen-Kallela had gone to see a Pueblo Indian reservation and to stay at the Taos colony popular among American and European artists.

The Gallen-Kallelas rented a house at some distance from the rest of the village. The site was on a high mountain with snow and frost in the winter. Built of large yellowish mud bricks, it was a house in a traditional Indian style. There was no electricity, the clay roof leaked when it rained, and snow came in from the cracks of the doors and windows. However, the large porch provided a magnificent view of the snow-topped Taos Mountains and their lower slopes where the Indians' horses grazed. (See Figure 2.)

The new setting inspired the artist to paint some thirty works of the surrounding mountains and the vicinity of the house. The Indians, with their plaited hair and clothed in blankets liked to sit for the artist. They became friends with Gallen-Kallela and worked for him. They were accustomed to various kinds of trade with the artists who came to the village. The Gallen-Kallela's home collection also came to include a variety of small pots, ornaments and amulets. Their rich, original and simple decorative motifs appealed to Gallen-Kallela (Lampinen, 2004, pp. 186-187). In addition, he also visited the ancient cave paintings of the Anasazi tribe. There the artist came across with

an ancient swastika symbol, which had fascinated him already earlier and had also appeared in some of his artworks.⁸

When the old *Kalevala* themes and their compilation in a new illustrated version of the epic began to live in the artist's mind, the motifs



Figure 2. Akseli and Mary Gallen-Kallela in front of their home in Taos, New Mexico 1925. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum.

of the Indians also found a place in his works.⁹ According to the artist's own words, living isolated and without books started to bring images into his mind. Gallen-Kallela started to sing and write a story of the imaginary *God of Perm* following the primeval style of *Kalevala* runes; meanwhile the first concrete ideas for *The Great Kalevala* were born.¹⁰ The austere winter and astonishing night skies with thousands of brightly sparkling stars, high mountains on the background, provoked existential thoughts and turned into cosmic visions in the very first sketches (Mary Gallen-Kallela personal correspondence to Aina Slöör, November 30, 1924; as cited in Raivio, 2006, p. 177).

⁷ The Finlandia University / Finnish American Historical Archive in Hancock has some documents related to Gallen-Kallela's visit to Hancock. For the writer of this article it is unknown if Gallen-Kallela's sketch also belongs to the archive.

⁸ Gallen-Kallela used swastika for instance in the frame decoration of the *Aino*-triptych (1889) and in the frescoes of the Jusélius mausoleum (1901-1903). (Raivio, 2006, p. 201).

⁹ More profound studies of the influence of Native American art to Gallen-Kallela's *Great Kalevala* have not been carried out so far.

¹⁰ At that time Gallen-Kallela even started to do Finnish translations to Omar Khayyam's famous poem collection *Rubayat*. (Raivio, 2006, pp. 201-203).



Figure 3. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: Sketch for the 1st rune of the Kalevala, *The Maiden of the Air*. Water color 21 x 10 cm. The Gallen-Kallela Museum. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum.

The Gallen-Kallelas spent seven months in New Mexico. In the spring of 1925, the artist returned to Chicago, now with his wife and daughter. His work on the illustrations to the *Kalevala* gained new pace, and the interest of Finnish Americans in his work inspired continuous achievement. Gallen-Kallela was instrumental in founding the Kalevala Federation of North America, which held numerous *Kalevala* festivals around the country and fostered new community spirit among Finnish-Americans. Saarinen, who was now working with George Booth in Detroit on the planning and design of the new Cranbrook Academy of Art, invited Gallen-Kallela to present his new sketches for the illustrated *Kalevala*. Booth planned to invite all first-rate artists to Cranbrook, which was to be a complete city of the arts and science. The patron of the project would have wanted to commission Gallen-Kallela to paint the frescoes of this major undertaking. Homesickness prevailed, however, and in May 1926, the Gallen-Kallelas decided to return to Finland (Lampinen, 2004, p. 188).

Unfortunately, the inspiration did not flourish back in Finland just as Gallen-Kallela had feared (Raivio, 2006, p. 237). *The Great Kalevala* was never completed, but luckily, the sketches for the first five runes have remained, offering important material for the study of Gallen-Kallela's idea for the illustrated *Kalevala*.

At the Sources of the Birth of the World

The *Kalevala* begins with the myth of the birth of the world and it was this thematic which Gallen-Kallela also addressed first when he started the more systematic work of illustration while staying in Taos. Gallen-Kallela created several beautiful variations of Ilmarinen, the spirit of the air (See Figures 3 & 4), floating on the waves and the world being hatched from the egg of a pochard. The freshness of the subject and the enthusiasm of beginning new work are markedly present. The universal thematic of the



Figure 4. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: Sketch for the 1st rune of the Kalevala, *The Maiden of the Air*. Water color 41,5 x 66 cm. The Gallen-Kallela Museum. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum.

story of creation is evident in the blending of ethnographic and Biblical visual motifs. The figure of the hero Väinämöinen varies from divine to folkish. There are also cosmic elements, visions of space, alluding to the heavenly visions of Gallen-Kallela's symbolism of the turn of the century.

In the illustration in the beginning of the second rune of the epic, the Great Oak is of outright apocalyptic appearance with its branches covering all living things. (See Figure 5.) Later, the artist made several and light versions of the felled oak that bring to mind lightning or the

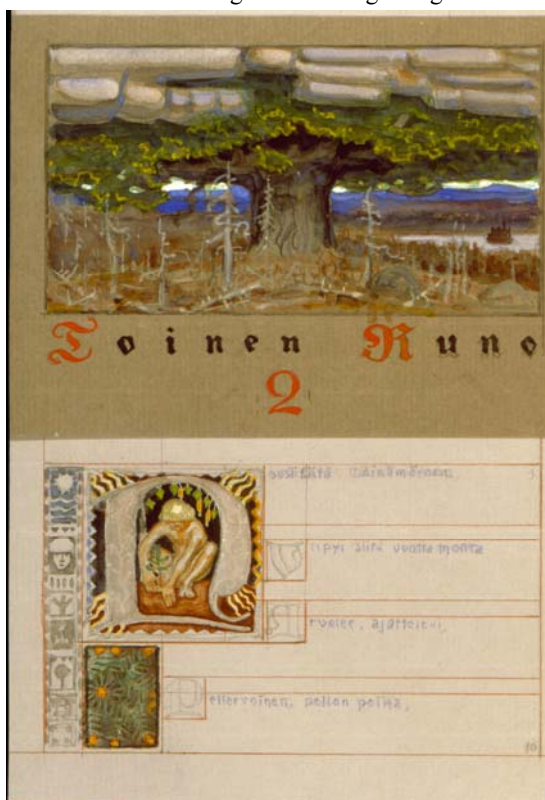


Figure 5. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: Sketch for the 2nd rune of the *Kalevala*, *The Great Oak*. Water color 52,5 x 66 cm. The Gallen-Kallela Museum. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum.

residual image produced on the retina by bright effects of light. The felling of the oak marked the beginning of farming. The hero Väinämöinen is portrayed as passing on this new skill, which started a new era for the members of the hunter-gatherer culture (Knuuttila, 1978, p. 71). Gallen-Kallela portrayed the miracle of growth, described in the terms of the *Kalevala*, taking as his motifs thunderbolts, germinated seeds, rain, the face of the supreme god Ukko who sent rain, delicate sprouts, and Old Woman Mannu living underground, who is given the form of Artemis of Ephesus, the multi-breasted goddess of fertility.

Väinämöinen and Joukahainen: A War of Generations

Väinämöinen becomes a great and renowned seer, singer of deep matters, already in the beginning of the *Kalevala*. His skills are tested in the third rune, where he is challenged by

the young Joukahainen. Contests of singing or recital are generally speaking an integral part of the tradition of the oral performance of the *Kalevala* runes, telling about the situations in which they were presented, with performers competing in the skills of singing and knowledge. The competition between Joukahainen and Väinämöinen is also marked by the encounter of youth and old age, of different generations (Knuuttila, 1999, p. 13). Väinämöinen proves to be unbeatable in his singing skills and defeats Joukahainen with his attempt at “patricide,” although Joukahainen’s singing tells in a fascinating way about the traditional knowledge of nature and animals in Finnish culture and is a reminder of the complexity and detailed nature of information embedded in the *Kalevala*.

In his depictions of Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, Gallen-Kallela made a thorough study of the collision of their sledges (See Figure 6), their horses running in opposite directions, and the confrontational poses of the old seer and his young challenger. The heads of horses looking in different directions are an old symbol in Finno-Ugrian cultures, used to depict opposing forces, which divide the world. In these broader terms, the story of Väinämöinen and Joukahainen can be interpreted as a myth associated with the organization of the world (Knuuttila, 1999, p. 14; Möttönen, 2000, p. 45). Opposition is the bearing theme in the illustrations of the third rune, either in more realistic or more stylized execution. The contrast of the figures is underscored by framing Väinämöinen with pine branches and Joukahainen with birch branches. Gallen-Kallela employed a similar symbolism of trees in works such as the *Aino-triptych* (1891), in which Väinämöinen was identified with a stand of pines and the maiden Aino with young birches.

The Story of Aino

Gallen-Kallela made his impressive debut in *Kalevala* subjects and themes with his *Aino-triptych*, of which there are two finished versions from 1889 and 1891 along with several sketches and preliminary works. Three decades later, the treatment of the story of Aino had changed from a bright vision to more sensitive fragments of atmosphere interweaving details and moods of nature. Details of beauty are a birch-leaf sauna bath whisk, a water lily and the trunks of the birches. The work of illustrating *The Great Kalevala* ended in the beginning of the fifth rune, which would have continued the story of Aino.

All that I Have Learned of the People and Nature of Finland

According to Gallen-Kallela's own agenda, the illustrations of *The Great Kalevala* were to express scenes from the runes, associated themes and motifs, Finnish flora, fauna and ethnographic motifs following from the content of the runes (Gallen-Kallela, 1909, p. 218). The first four runes give an indication of the overall appearance of the epic, its style and treatment of motifs, as well as the demanding nature of the work. *The Great Kalevala* was to be the artist's grande finale, the summation of his long career, and an attempt to crystallize, with the *Kalevala* as its lead, a Finnish style, or the starting points of such a style. The sketches and studies of *The Great Kalevala* fascinate the viewer with their varied expressions, distinguishing this work from the controlled and comprehensively striking style of *The Kalevala Decorated*. *The Great Kalevala* is softer, more wistful and less restricted, while also more problematic, as shown by some of the sketches with regard to the changing of styles. Alongside realistic, romantic and cosmic manners of depiction, the studies contain more conceptual motifs, a reminder that the artist's relationship with illustrating the *Kalevala* was

Gallen-Kallela felt it was almost impossible to paint *Kalevala* outside Finland.¹¹ Gradually the artist's attitude moved interestingly towards more universal interpretation of myths, and in addition to the international tendencies his art was expressing, he no longer saw the pictorial elements or subject matters from the national basis only. Gallen-Kallela's daughter has recollected how the Americans who saw the sketches paid attention to the artist's overall knowledge of the cosmos and his ability to express abstractions with images (Gallen-Kallela, 1932, p. 185).

With *The Great Kalevala*, the artist wished to create the same kind of implicit power seen in the folk art in the forms of magical marks, symbols and ornaments. Moreover, like folk art, *The Great Kalevala* would bear originality, which fountain from people, from their old traditions and beliefs, reflecting their worldview. It would not be art for art's sake, but art for the community, for its purposes.

The time Gallen-Kallela stayed in America meant a lot to his new *Kalevala* view and in its way it continued artist's search for "Kalevala people" abroad, which he declared already while living in British East Africa in

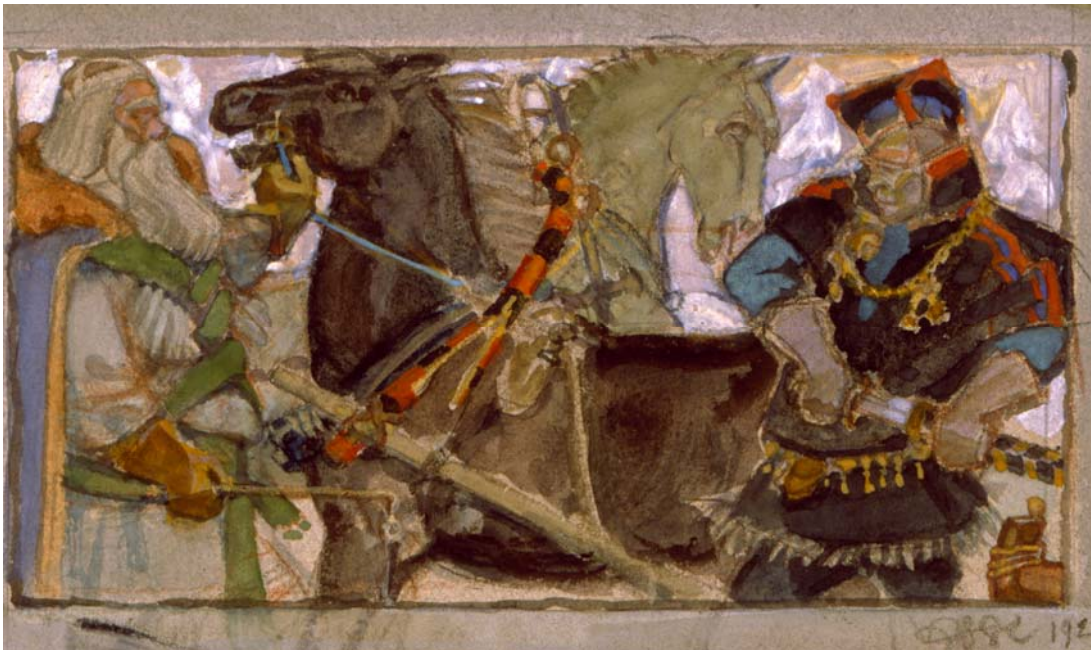


Figure 6. Akseli Gallen-Kallela: Sketch for the 3rd rune of the Kalevala, Joukahainen Meets Väinämöinen, 1925. Water color 12 x 33 cm. The Gallen-Kallela Museum. Photo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum.

more complex than is readily assumed. Compared with Gallen-Kallela's early dramatic *Kalevala* paintings, the mood of *The Great Kalevala* is lighter and more lyrical, thus reflecting a more serene and broader imagination (Okkonen, 1961, p. 880). As a young artist

¹¹ For instance, while completing his first large *Kalevala* painting, *Aino*, in Paris 1888-1889, Gallen-Kallela found it very difficult to work with Parisian models. (Gallen-Kallela, 1964/1992, p. 242).

1909-1910. In Africa, the artist dreamed of going back in time to the moment when the birth-words of the world were born, and similarly the birth images, the very first symbols (Okkonen, 1961, p. 715). As a whole, the impact of indigenous cultures together with Christian and theosophical influences he came across during his stay in the United States¹² moved *The Great Kalevala* toward the understanding of myths' universal unifying power between different cultures. The impressive nature in different parts of the continents also played an important role in inspiring the artist.

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¹² In Chicago, the Gallen-Kallelas became friends with a Finnish family having contacts in the theosophical movement. Gallen-Kallela's daughter has also mentioned the artist's deep conversations with a local priest in Taos and rites of penitents Gallen-Kallela witnessed while there. (Raivio, 2006, p. 195; pp. 236-237).