

## Introduction

The 19th century was an era of nation-building, both politically and metaphorically. In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, 'home' represented a central concept within each of these nation's transformed identities—it was one's domestic residence, the physical land itself, and the communities built through a collective commitment to social democracy. The arts played a crucial role in reinforcing a sense of belonging, as each Nordic country strove to distinguish and celebrate specific local and national identities.

Rejecting the formulaic teaching of state-sponsored academies, Nordic artists joined a Europe-wide trend toward individual expression and local subject matter. Landscapes featured luminous Northern skies and snow-blanketed hills; trolls, fairies, and dragons adorned silver, furniture, tapestries, and more. The homes of

artists, craftspeople, art patrons, and middle-class collectors of antiques showcased this new national aspiration.

The Scandinavian Home is the first exhibition in North America to explore the core themes of art and identity in Nordic art across all media. The works are drawn from the remarkable collection of David and Susan Werner and from those public collections to which they have already made gifts. The wide-ranging artworks on view trace the evolution of Nordic visual culture in the decades around 1900.

# Swedish, Skåne Province

Unknown artist



## ***Carriage cushion cover, c. 1850***

Cotton and linen

This sleigh or carriage cushion cover was woven in a Flemish (flatweave) technique in the southernmost Swedish province, Skåne. The padded cushion made travel over bumpy roads more comfortable. Cushions were often embroidered or woven with Biblical subjects and signed with the maker's initials and date. This one features a pair of red lions with floral embellishments.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

# Gerhard Munthe

Norwegian, 1849–1929

## *The Suitors*, 1906

Wool and linen tapestry



While inspired by folk and fairy tales, Munthe's story of *The Suitors* emerged primarily from his imagination: three young men, transformed into polar bears, enter the chambers of the daughters of the Northern Lights to court them. Munthe first created a series of independent watercolors in 1893 with no plans to reproduce them in textiles. He later adapted them as models for production by students at the newly established Art Weaving School, housed in the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim, Norway. Such museum collections and weaving schools were crucial for the revival of regional woven textiles. Munthe's designs combine notable elements from rural Norwegian crafts and Japanese designs, characterized by bold lines, flattened forms, and bright colors. The tapestries garnered international attention after their display at the 1900 Paris World's

Fair. The initials at the bottom left likely belong to weaver Margit Kielland.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

# Gustaf Fjaestad

Swedish, 1868–1948

## *Landscape in Moonlight, 1905*

Wool



Fjaestad married textile artist Maja Hallén in 1898. Inspired by the artistic possibility of tapestry, he began applying his painterly instincts to textile designs. Subtle variations of brown, blue, and green yarn combine to depict a snow-covered landscape and flowing stream under a bright, full moon. Fjaestad worked closely with the wool dyers to achieve the nuances of tone and color he desired, the same way he would have mixed paint on a palette. Gustaf's sisters, Amelie and Anna, joined Maja as weavers, and the family started their own weaving studio in 1905, the same year woven in the bottom right corner of this tapestry.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

# Gerhard Munthe

Norwegian, 1849–1929



## ***The Red Rooster, 1890***

Wool and linen tapestry

*The Red Rooster* tapestry shares similarities with *The Suitors*, Munthe's tapestry on view in the introductory gallery. It represents the same transformation myth of the three bears and the maidens with the spiky hair. Munthe's wife, Sigrun, wove the design for the first time in 1894. It became the most frequently woven motif at *Den Norske Husflidsforening*, also known as DNH (Norwegian Handcraft Association). As a member of the DNH board, Munthe played a significant role in promoting the production of affordable handicrafts for a broader public.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

# Gerhard Munthe

Norwegian, 1849–1929



## ***The Wise Bird, 1898-1899***

Wool and linen tapestry

An elderly king wanders through a stylized chestnut forest and confronts a large bird while a courtier, bearing a sword, feeds golden birds in flight. Perhaps a parable of the wisdom of age versus youthful frivolity, the motif was not drawn from a single folk or fairy tale, but rather an artistic convention. Munthe's study of rural crafts led to his conviction that there was, in his words, a Norwegian "instinct for color"—high red or crayfish red, reddish violet, pot blue, bluish green, and strong yellow or brass yellow. The members of the Art Weaving School in Trondheim dyed their wool according to this palette to achieve the nuances found in Munthe's designs.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

# Thorolf Holmboe

Norwegian, 1866–1939

## ***Three Princesses*, 1910**

Wool and linen tapestry



Thorolf Holmboe was a Norwegian painter, illustrator, and designer who worked in a variety of media. *Den Norske Husflidsforening* (Norwegian Association for Handicrafts, founded in 1891) commissioned several designs from Holmboe, including this one. The scene is possibly a reference to one of several Norwegian fairy tales featuring three princesses, or perhaps it refers to the three primary Norse goddesses known as the Norns—Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld—who weave the threads of fate and represent the past, present, and future.

Collection of David and Susan Werner

## **Ilma Hirn, designer**

Finnish, 1870–1966

## **Wetterhof, maker**

Finland (Hämeenlinna), est. 1885



## ***Jugend* rug, 1986 (designed 1903)**

Wool

*Ryas* (hand-knotted, long-pile rugs) were used in the Nordic countries for personal warmth and comfort. They originated from the Medieval Viking trade with the Byzantine Empire. This form evolved as a domestic decoration throughout the 19th century, gaining international popularity when Akseli Gallen-Kallela exhibited his *Flame Rug* in the Finnish Pavilion at the 1900 Paris World's Fair. Hirn's symmetrical floral designs exemplify the aesthetic and handwork of the Friends of Finnish Handcraft. Such rugs, whether designed by men or women, were typically handwoven by women.

Collection of David and Susan Werner