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SIX PICTURES OF ARTIST CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER'S HOME IN KARJA STREET, TALLINN

The aim of this article is to introduce to an audience bourgeois home interiors in Tallinn of the first quarter of the 19th century through six drawings depicting the painter Carl Siegmund Walther's home. The sketches illustrate gatherings of literati, recorded in handwritten protocols bound in notebooks.¹ Historian Epp Siimo introduced these materials in the journal *Keel ja Kirjandus* in 1972, although her focus was primarily on the substantive activities of the society.²

The author of these drawings, Carl Siegmund Walther, born in Dresden in 1783, arrived in Estonia in 1809 at the invitation of the dramatist August von Kotzebue to become the art teacher for his children at Vardi Manor. However, by 1812, Walther was already living in Tallinn.³

He married Juliane Elisabeth von Dehn, the daughter of a merchant and alderman, in Tallinn.⁴ Marrying into a family belonging to the city's elite meant for the artist both connections and a wealthy

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1 Estonian History Museum [Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, AM], AM.130.1.1–AM.130.1.6, *Commentariorium actorum venerabilis Fraternalitatis*.

2 Epp Siimo, 'Literaatide vestlusing Tallinnas', *Keel ja kirjandus*, 10 (1972), 616–621.

3 See Walther's biography in the article Reet Pius, 'Altariipiltide maalija Carl Siegmund Waltheri pärand. "Temma kättetõ ja kunsti peale on ni mitme tuhhande Eestirahwa silmad jubba waatnud ja waatwad veel"', *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi / Studies on art and architecture*, 32 (1–2) (2023), 35–67.

4 Juliane Elisabeth von Dehn (1791–1832), Henning v. Wistinghausen, *Freimaurer und Aufklärung im Russischen Reich: die Revaler Logen 1773–1820: mit einem biographischen Lexikon* (Köln: Böhlau, 2016), 329.

clientele among the urban upper class and nobility. As a newlywed, he began working as a private art tutor, giving art lessons in his home on Pikk Street.⁵ In 1815, he became a drawing teacher at the Cathedral School, from where he retired in 1850. After that, he mainly focused on painting altarpieces. He died in 1866.

In Tallinn, he actively participated in the local social life, joining the Isis Freemason's lodge in 1814. In 1820, when Freemasonry was banned in the Russian Empire, the group formed into a smaller circle of friends who continued the enlightening activities established in the Masonic lodges. The ten-member circle of friends formed during the Tallinn Cathedral School years, but as a club with its own intellectual goals, they started gathering only after the ban on Freemasonry.

The name of the group, the John the Baptist Brotherhood, is a direct reference to continuity with Freemasons, whose patron saint was John the Baptist. Other names used include the Brotherhood of Reval and the Friday Club (*Freitags Convivio*), although the name Brotherhood Wreath (*Bruderkranz*) is more common. It was the host's duty to record the meetings, and when they gathered at Brother Carl Siegmund Walther's place, the artist also included a picture of the event.

At that time, Walther lived with his family on Karja Street, which is referred to as *Kuhreihenstraße*, Cowbell Lane, in the records, although he cannot be found among the owners of houses on Karja or Niguliste Streets.⁶

He may have rented an apartment in the goldsmith's Dehio House, from where the view is depicted in one of the drawings from 1820, which already shows several buildings in the neoclassical style.⁷ However, he could also have lived in von Glehn House (Kuninga Street 1) across the street. The evidence of their close relationship might be one picture depicting Peter von Glehn's Jälgimäe Manor, where the artist was a guest.⁸

Walther's home is in the neo-classical style, with large windows and plastered ceilings, adorned with intricate (stucco) ornaments and chandelier rosettes.

5 *Revalsche Wöchentliche Nachrichten*, 1/12/1813.

6 Kuhreihen is a Swiss cattle dance. Officially, the street was then named Michaelis-Strasse (*Mihajlovskaja ulica*). See Aleksander Kivi, *Tallinna tänavad* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1972), 47–48. Tallinn City Archives [Tallinna Linnaarhiiv], TLA.R-242.1.124.

7 Carl Siegmund Walther, *Vaade H. Dehio majast Niguliste tänavale = View from H. Dehio's House onto Niguliste Street* (1820). Tallinn City Museum [Tallinna Linnamuuseum, TLM], https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/1196426 [accessed 03/01/2024].

8 Carl Siegmund Walther, *Jälgimäe mõisahoone = Jälgimäe Manor* (1838). AM, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/3738094 [accessed 17/03/2024].



FIG. 1. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *WALTHER'S STUDIO* (1823, DEPICTING EVENT ON 18/10/1817). ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.2, 8.

First, I will be examining the studio views. In the artist's studio, there were two tall windows, with a crucifix hanging between them on the wall. God played an important role in Walther's life, with depictions of God in his work showing his devotion.

In the first picture, which depicts a gathering of young men on October 18, 1817, the central focus is on a large painting titled 'The Descent from the Cross'.⁹ This work is also sketched in the next drawing, indicating the passage of time reflected in the new arrangement of adjacent pictures.

In 1818, Walther created an altarpiece for Noarootsi Church, which was his first altarpiece.¹⁰ In 1920, the congregation of Noarootsi donated a painting (173 × 101 cm) with the same theme to the Estonian Museum in Tallinn.¹¹ Sculptor Herman Halliste, who collected antiques in Noarootsi parish on behalf of the North Estonian Art Protection Committee, posed with the collected art treasures, which

9 AM.130.1.3, 8p.

10 'Carl Siegesmund Walther †', *Revalsche Zeitung*, 26/11/1866.

11 AM.274.1.10, 3.



FIG. 2. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *WALTHER'S STUDIO* (8/10/1823). ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.2, 11.

are now displayed in Niguliste Museum next to the seated sculpture of Saint Anne or Saint Bridget.¹² Among these treasures is 'The Descent from the Cross', which is evidently the same work seen on the wall of Walther's studio. While altar paintings were typically modelled after Rubens' 'The Descent from the Cross', this work seems to be inspired by Rembrandt's version.

The Hermitage acquired Rembrandt's 'The Descent from the Cross' in 1814.¹³ The presumed commissioner of the artwork, Johann Karl Emanuel von Ungern-Sternberg, a landlord of Pürksi Manor and a trustee of the Noarootsi Church, who was also an artist himself, belonged to the Alexander zum gekrönten Pelikan Masonic Lodge in St Petersburg; in Tallinn he was Walther's Isis lodge brother.

12 Art Museum of Estonia [Eesti Kunstimuseum, EKM], https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/2888145 [accessed 30/12/2023]. The painting has been destroyed: *Püha Anna või Brigitta = Saint Anne or Saint Bridget*, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/1445462 [accessed 17/03/2024].

13 Ermitaaž ГЭ-753, Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Descent from the Cross* (1634), <https://hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/43510> [accessed 17/03/2024]. The Hermitage acquired Rembrandt's *The Descent from the Cross* in 1814–1815. Tiina Abel, 'Kujundite grand tour. Maalikoopiad ja klassikaline traditsioon', *Meistriteoste lummus. Koopia Eestis 19. sajandil* (Tallinn: Kadrioru Kunstimuseum, 2005), 25.



FIG. 3. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *WALTHER'S STUDIO WITH EMPEROR ALEXANDER I PARADE PORTRAIT* (29/03/1824) ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.3, 21 (40).

However, they may have met each other at the Dresden Art Academy, where he also studied art from 1806 to 1807. They both attended lessons by Franz Gerhard von Kugelgen and Professor Johann David Schubert. Ungern-Sternberg had connections and interests that suggest they could have visited a Rembrandt painting exhibition together in St Petersburg. Walther's interest in Rembrandt's style is evident in one of his later sketches for the altarpiece of Simuna Church, titled 'Christ in the Temple'.¹⁴

A significant part of Walther's oeuvre consists of portraits of emperors.¹⁵ In the third studio picture, dated March 1824, there is a canvas of a man in parade uniform titled 'Portrait of Alexander I', which currently belongs to the collection of the Tallinn City Museum.¹⁶ The model for this painting was a portrait painted by François Pascal Simon Gérard in 1815, which is located in the Pavlovsk

14 EKM, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/1447254 [accessed 17/03/2024].

15 Mai Levin, 'Carl Sigismund Walthe', *Eesti Kunsti Ajalugu*, 3 (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2017), 430.

16 Carl Siegmund Walther, *Aleksander I portree = Portrait of Alexander I* (1824), TLM, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/1473622 [accessed 17/03/2024].

Palace Museum.¹⁷ The emperor's portrait sparked discussions and mischievous thoughts; one young man offered himself as a model, stood on a stool and crowned himself with a candlestick.

There are also some portraits on the studio wall, although it is difficult to identify them from among Walther's quite extensive portrait work. There are few remaining paintings in Estonian museums.

In the first studio view, above the secretary there is a portrait of a man wearing round glasses. He might be Alexander Heinrich Neus (1795–1876), a recent theology graduate from the University of Tartu, a folklorist and an Estophile who was one of the earliest researchers of Estonian folklore. At the time he was involved in translating Tacitus' *Germania* into German, which was published in 1826. Neus is known to have had myopia, and the man in the painting has noticeable glasses.¹⁸

Equally challenging is attributing two portraits of pastors. In the drawing from 1824, one could be Kadrina pastor Arnold Friedrich Johann Knüpffer (1777–1843), who, alongside his pastoral duties and position as an assessor of the Consistory of Estonia, was a folklorist and linguist. He collected and transcribed 500 old Estonian folk songs, many of which served as source material for the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*.¹⁹ It was probably intentional that the Estophile pastor and Alexander I, who emancipated the Estonian peasants from serfdom, appear in the same picture. The act of emancipation from serfdom was a victory for humanist enlightenment, and the more progressive Baltic German circles bowed to the emperor for this. Knüpffer and Neus's activities in the intellectual field made them prominent figures, which is why they were later portrayed, immortalised by August Georg Wilhelm Pezold, who himself was a guest of the literary circle during his time in Tallinn.²⁰

Above the sideboard in the dining room hangs a small detail copy of Raphael's 'Sistine Madonna', a symbol representing Walther's

17 Mai Levin, 'Carl Sigismund Walther', 430.

18 August Pezold, *Alexander Heinrich Neus* (1843), AM, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/2236412 [accessed 17/03/2024].

19 Estonian Literary Museum [Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, EKM ERA], ÕES, EK, 62.2: 'Olli üks noori naene. Läksi karja satemaie. Leidis kannu wainiult. Viis see kannu kojeje. Kannast kasvis innimenne. Sulla Salme neitsikene. Siis sel tullid kolmed kosjad. Üks oli kuu, teine päeva, kolmas tähte poisikene...'

20 August Pezold, *A. F. J. Knüpfferi portree = Portrait of A. F. J. Knüpffer*, EKM, https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/1338914 [accessed 17/03/2024].



FIG. 4. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *YEAR'S CELEBRATION AND POETRY. SUPPLEMENT TO JANUARY 7, 1824* (7/01/1824). ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.3, 9.

hometown and education. On the opposite wall, there is a portrait of Jesus suggested by the depicted man's long-haired hairstyle and shirt collar. The strong religious symbols in Walther's small drawings primarily express his deep religious faith.

In one picture, men have gathered to play music. In the room, there is a square piano, considered a luxury. On the wall behind the piano are nine artworks with among them three landscapes and three portraits visible. In the centre, there is a portrait of a woman with a deep neckline, distinguished from the adjacent pictures by its massive frame. The woman's attire and gentle demeanour could indicate a depiction of a saint, but it could just as well be a portrait of Walther's wife, as we see a woman with a similar hairstyle and attire serving snacks to the group in the dining room. Among the landscapes, there is an arcade-like Italian landscape with a bridge and a stone house. The remaining mountainous landscapes are more difficult to identify. The portraits of men depict older gentlemen.

One should also dwell on a drawing depicting a New Year's gathering.²¹ Amidst greetings and general hustle, two peculiar figures

21 *Year's celebration and poetry. Supplement to January 7, 1824.*



FIG. 5. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *DINING HALL* (22/03/1824). ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.3, 19.



FIG. 6. CARL SIEGMUND WALTHER, *MUSIC HALL (ALSO HERCULES GROUP)* (MARCH 1824). ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, AM.130.1.3, 21.

resembling hussars with tall, furry busbies are standing against the wall. These theatrical characters probably depict characters from Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's tale *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* ('The Nutcracker and the Mouse King'), which was published in German

in 1816 and immediately became very popular. Since then, they have been part of New Year's celebrations.

The six pictures provide an authentic overview of the rooms open to guests in the artist's home located in Tallinn city centre. His home was adorned with plenty of artworks. In the drawings, we also see the custom of placing paintings above some lower pieces of furniture, which made them easily visible but also protected them. In the picture wall consisting of nine paintings, works of different genres were arranged in two intersecting diagonals, five portraits with landscapes in between, creating a lively pattern.

Between the windows of the hall are two tall, triangular-shaped pier glasses.²² The tall mirrors reflected the light from the chandeliers, making the room brighter.

The sofas with soft upholstery are present both in the studio and the hall; they are classically elegant, lacking in Biedermeier comfort. The same applies to the sideboards, tables, and chairs. The artist's style was realistic; even details like the crossed arrows on a chair's backrest²³ or a long-stemmed pipe can be found in museum collections as corresponding examples. Such attention to detail makes these works valuable as documentary drawings capturing the everyday life of the time.

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KEYWORDS: NEOCLASSICISM; INTERIOR; LIFESTYLE; PAINTINGS; BOURGEOIS; ENLIGHTENMENT; ESTOPHILE

²² Virumaa Museums [Virumaa museum, RM], https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/2090090 [accessed 03/01/2024].

²³ Estonian National Museum, [Eesti Rahva Muuseum, ERM], https://www.muis.ee/en_GB/museaalview/647684 [accessed 17/03/2024].

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