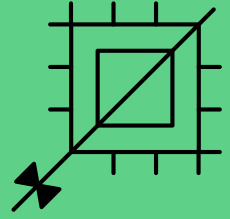
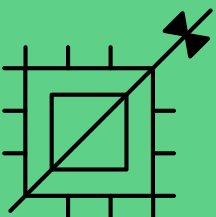


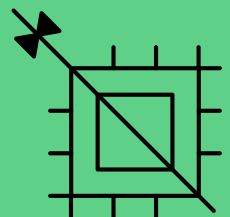
16 August—19 October, 2025



The Sun Picture
Matts Leiderstam,
Prince Eugen's Altar
Piece, and the Move
of Kiruna Church



Kin Museum
of Contemporary Art



The Sun Picture—Matts Leiderstam, Prince Eugen’s Altar Piece, and the Move of Kiruna Church

When the Kiruna church completes its relocation from the low mountain area to its new home in August 2025, its famous altarpiece, painted by Prince Eugen, will have also moved along with it. In this exhibition, the artist Matts Leiderstam has delved into the history of the painting’s creation, with a particular interest in the prince’s sketches and ideas. Through his own painting—and based on a long-standing fascination with the human gaze on the landscape—he studies how light, especially sunlight, shapes the altarpiece.

The exhibition weaves together Leiderstam’s own research with previous research on the altarpiece, and is presented in text, painting, and installation, as well as how objects are placed in the exhibition’s display cases. *The Sun Picture* consists of five parts, each reflecting different aspects of the altarpiece, but also the many ways in which Leiderstam approaches it. One part consists of works from the Kiruna municipality’s collection, in particular those by artists who were close to the prince and were occupied with depicting the early years of the city of Giron (Kiruna). The exhibition is organized in collaboration with the museum Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde in Stockholm, where it will be later shown during the winter of 2025–2026.

In a public vote during the Swedish Year of Architecture 2001, Kiruna Church was voted “Best building of all time, built before 1950.” The church was designed by Gustaf Wickman, who is said to have been inspired by both Norwegian stave churches and Sami huts. It was completed in 1912, at which time Prince Eugen’s altarpiece was also in place. Now, just over a hundred years later, the church must be moved due to cracks in the ground caused by

LKAB’s mining operations, making large parts of the old city center uninhabitable.

The unusual altarpiece, without a cross or biblical figures, is included in the move because it is glued in place and impossible to remove from the church. At the center of the painting is a brightly lit grove of trees in a field. It is a quiet, southern landscape far from the mountain world of Giron (Kiruna). Here it is nature that is animated and carries the spiritual. Perhaps this is also a glimpse of the Giron (Kiruna) landscape of the future that the prince has unintentionally managed to depict, a landscape that is not only being reshaped from below by mining, but which may have a completely different flora because of climate change.

Maria Lind, director of Kin Museum of Contemporary Art

Public programme

Saturday 16 August

14:00 Opening of the exhibition, floor 2

- Opening ceremony *Markerna*, work by Carola Grahn and Nils-Johan Labba
- Introduction by Kin's director Maria Lind
- Artist Matts Leiderstam introduces the exhibition

Monday 18 August—Wednesday 20 August

Guided tours of the exhibition during the church move

Monday 18 August

12:00 (Swe), 15:00 (Eng), 18:00 (Swe)

Tuesday 19 August

13:00 (Swe), 18:00 (Eng)

Wednesday 20 August

10:00 (Eng), 12:00 (Swe)

Meeting point at Kin's green reception.
The tour takes about 30 minutes.

Wednesday 20 August

15:00–18:00 Watch the final stage of the church move from the best viewpoint in Kiruna, floor 5

Kin will open the doors on the 5th floor of the town hall, where visitors can watch the church being put down in its new location. The visit is free. There will be coffee and tea, drop in.

20 August—19 October 2025

Free guided tours: Prince Eugen's famous altarpiece

Although Prince Eugen's famous altarpiece from 1912 will remain inside the church when it is moved on 19-20 August, it can be seen at Kin Museum of Contemporary Art. A sketch of the sunlit forest grove made by the artist in the same size as the altarpiece will be displayed alongside other works by the prince. The unique painting is devoid of religious symbols and figures—nature is left to represent the spiritual. New paintings inspired by the altarpiece by contemporary artist Matts Leiderstam are also on display.

From 20 August to 19 October, 12:00 on Wednesday and Friday.

Meeting point at Kin's green reception.
The tour takes about 50 minutes.

Saturday 4 October

13:00 About Kiruna Church, its importance for Kiruna and the friendship between Hjalmar Lundbohm and Prince Eugen: Lecture by Curt Persson, floor 2

Curt Persson is a writer, educator and PhD in History. He works as a Senior Lecturer at Luleå University of Technology, and was previously director of Norrbotten County Museum. Curt Persson has done historical studies for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset.

13:45 The landscape painter Prince Eugen and the altarpiece in Kiruna: lecture by Karin Sidén, director of Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde

Prince Eugen, born Hereditary Prince of Sweden and Norway on 1 August 1865, was active as an artist in the field of landscape painting and worked as such both nationally and internationally. Eugen was influenced by the artistic movements of the time, including French plein air painting, Symbolism and eventually early Modernism, and in many of his works he endeavoured to convey different feelings and moods in and towards nature. In his monumental works in public buildings, including Stockholm City Hall, the Royal Opera, the Royal Dramatic Theatre, schools such as Norra Latin and Östra Real, and Kiruna Church, he came to relate to the spatial and to strive for concentration and stylisation. Prince Eugen's ability to draw inspiration from the building elements and materials of the interiors, colours and light in the creation of his monumental works has been noted in art history writing, including by Ragnar Josephson in his influential book *The Birth of the Work of Art* from 1940. This lecture analyses Prince Eugen as a landscape painter in relation to his own statements, the art movements of the

time and the reception of his works. Special attention is devoted to his landscape depictions in monumental painting, including the unique altarpiece in Giron (Kiruna) Church, where an animated nature is entirely in focus.

Karin Sidén, PhD, is an associate professor of art history and works as chief curator and museum director at Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde in Stockholm. She was previously Head of Research and Chief Curator at the Nationalmuseum and has been a working member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts since 2016. Sidén has published extensively both in book form and with articles in anthologies and exhibition catalogues. Her research has focused on early modern art as well as late 19th and early 20th century art movements, artists and art life. She has been responsible for a large number of exhibitions on artist colonies, art movements, artists such as Prince Eugen, Carl Fredrik Hill and Ernst Josephson and contemporary artists such as Lena Cronqvist and Cecilia Edefalk.

14:30 Presentation by Matts Leiderstam

Matts Leiderstam talks about his project based on the altarpiece

15:00 Conversation between Curt Persson, Karin Sidén and Matts Leiderstam. Moderator Maria Lind, director at Kin

The Sun Picture

The exhibition is based on Prince Eugen's altarpiece in Giron (Kiruna) Church and takes its title from Hjalmar Lundbohm, the LKAB's first manager in Giron (Kiruna) as well as the church's builder and one of the prince's closest friends. Lundbohm is said to have called the painting *The Sun Picture*, while the church's first vicar named the painting *The Sacred Grove*. The prince himself chose a more descriptive name—*Decorative Altarpiece for Kiruna Church*—when it was shown at an exhibition in Stockholm in the summer of 1912.

In his work on the exhibition, the artist Matts Leiderstam has drawn on existing research as well as having conducted his own investigations into the history of the altar piece. The accumulated knowledge permeates the entire exhibition: his textual work, painting and spatial designs, as well as how objects are placed in the exhibition's vitrines.

The exhibition consists of five parts, each of which relates to different aspects of the altarpiece, but which also reflect the different ways in which Matts Leiderstam relates to Prince Eugen's work and process. The works have been gathered under the collective title *The Sun Picture* with each of them having no individual titles assigned. Objects, sketches, and paintings by other artists, however, are presented with their own titles in the exhibition. The fifth and final part of the exhibition consists of works of art from the early 20th century by artists who were close to both Prince Eugen and Hjalmar Lundbohm, on loan from Kiruna Municipality.

The City Hall

1. In 1911–1912, Prince Eugen made a sketch on a scale of 1:1, which he then tested in the church at the end of January and towards the beginning of February 1912. It is an oil painting on canvas measuring 2 × 5 meters and has been rolled up for many years at Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde. It was probably never intended to be shown in public. However, what remains of the sketch does not show the entire intended composition: the upper part, which was supposed to show the sky, clouds and sun rays, has not been found. However, it is unclear whether the artist even made the upper part.

For the exhibition, Waldemarsudde has restored the sketch, which is now on display at Kin together with a component above it made by Matts Leiderstam, which is intended to complement the painting. Prince Eugen's sketch, made with oil on canvas, and Leiderstam's painting, executed on panel and set into sections, have been mounted on a specially built wooden structure in the lobby of the City Hall, which forms a grid of pinewood ribs.

Since the Renaissance, artists have used the grid as an important tool, especially in landscape paintings that incorporate architectural elements. In the City Hall, the paintings of Prince Eugen and Leiderstam converge, with the latter offering an abstract response based on two grids: the overall structure of the wooden scaffolding and a set of squares derived from one of Prince Eugen's early altarpiece sketches, which was drawn on graph paper. In Leiderstam's interpretation, the sun has set. Here, the polar night meets the altarpiece's summer landscape, whose motif is taken from southern latitudes. An important starting point for Leiderstam's work is also the renewed importance of the grid in contemporary visual worlds. What was once a tool for artists to compose their images continues to live on and propagate, not least in the grids that structure mobile screens and digital interfaces.

The Exhibition Rooms on Floor 2

2. Prince Eugen's sketches and Matts Leiderstam's own work meet in a number of display cases. Here a timeline is formed in text and image that follows the friendship between Prince Eugen and Hjalmar Lundbohm, the birth of the altarpiece and its historical and contemporary context, and what it means for the altarpiece to be moved to a new location together with the church.

Several themes that interested Leiderstam are evident in the timeline: the presence of the sun in both the painting and the church space, and the ways in which the landscape is affected by climate change. Prince Eugen's sketches, photographs, personal statements, and other events relating to the altarpiece are also included. Visual encounters arise between Prince Eugen's images and elements added by Leiderstam. The timeline is printed on drawing paper in Leiderstam's studio in Stockholm and is supplemented with his own drawings, photographs, and paintings. Some of the photographs were taken by him; others come from the archives at Waldemarsudde, while still others were sourced from more peripheral digital collections.

3. The third part of the exhibition addresses the church's relocation in a more tangible way. At the center of the exhibition is the wooden model created when the church was built, on loan from the Kiruna parish. Around the model is a series of paintings by Leiderstam, inspired by the shape of the altarpiece and the way the sun and the shadows from the church windows move across the painting during the summer months. In fact, the sun and its effect on the painting will be the most noticeable difference when the church is moved and the building is turned 180 degrees in the new Giron (Kiruna)—the light conditions will be the opposite. A silent film on a flatscreen shows the church's move and new location from Kin's perspective. The camera is placed in one of the

museum's windows. During the first few days of the exhibition, the flatscreen shows a live image; as soon as the move is complete, a loop is played showing the last part of the church's journey to its new location.

4. The most expansive and playful part of the exhibition is a new series of paintings by Leiderstam. There are nearly thirty abstract landscape paintings, done in acrylic and oil on poplar panels, which loosely corresponds to the altarpiece's grid and that meet its shape, composition, and colors. The grid is a method of working with and transmitting images used by artists in the Western world since the Renaissance. The sun and its impact on the landscape is also a central theme and clearly present in the form of several round paintings of different sizes that are distributed across the walls.

5. A selection of works from Kiruna municipality's art collection, by artists affiliated with Prince Eugen and Hjalmar Lundbohm, are all presented here. Many of the works depict the beginnings of the town of Giron (Kiruna) dating back to the early 1900s.

Artist's presentations

Matts Leiderstam

Matts Leiderstam's artistic practice encompasses painting, drawing, photography, text and exhibition architecture—always with a focus on exhibiting the work in ways that both enhance and obscure the act of seeing. Leiderstam's art often grows out of a simple question: What does a picture do? Triggered by individual paintings and photographs, he searches for and creates narratives in dialogue with their history of creation and circulation—investigations that tend to lead him into museum collections and archives.

One example is the project *Grand Tour* (1997–2016), in which he used art historical traces from the educational journeys of aristocratic men to southern Europe in the 18th century, so-called grand tours, where the ideal landscape of 17th century painting was an important source of inspiration. By painting copies and searching for images in books, he both examined art history and fantasised about it on the basis of hidden and forgotten homoerotic motifs. The material was presented in archive-like installations with customised presentation furniture and optical instruments such as magnifying glasses and binoculars. The same applies to the *Neanderthal Landscape* project (2010–2011), which centres on the national landscapes, such as the “German landscape” and the “Norwegian landscape”, taught at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts in the first half of the 19th century, but all rooted in the rocky and cavernous Neander Valley created by the Düssel River outside the city.

While most of Leiderstam’s earlier works are related to the queer gaze, classical painting and the museum, his latest works focus on the concept of the grid in painting, which has been used by artists since the Renaissance to create and transfer motifs from one surface to another. In his exhibitions, he takes on the visual structure of the grid and expands it in space, while reflecting on its significance in our time. This applies both to the recent renewed interest in abstract painting, which has historically been associated with the grid, and to the grid’s constant presence linked to the screens of the digital revolution and their inbuilt grids. The experience of this was spatialised in the exhibition *What does the grid do?* at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm in 2022 and in print in the award-winning book *Seen Through the Grid* the following year.

Matts Leiderstam was born in 1956 in Gothenburg, where he studied painting at the Valand Academy between 1984 and 1989. In 2006 he was awarded a doctorate in Fine Art at the Malmö

Art Academy. Today he lives and works in Stockholm. He has had solo exhibitions at Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm (2023); Konstakademien, Stockholm (2022); Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam (2017); Collectors Space, Istanbul (2016); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and Grazer Kunstverein, Graz (2010); Salon MoCAB—Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (2008); Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (2007); Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz (2006); Göteborgs Konsthall (2005) and Magasin III Museum of Contemporary Art, Stockholm (2005).

He has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including *Sleepless Nights*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2023–24); *In-Visible*, Malmö Konstmuseum (2021); *Art Encounters Biennial 2019*, Timisoara (2019); *The 11th Shanghai Biennale*, Shanghai, (2016); *Generosity: The Art of Giving*, The National Gallery, Prague (2016); *Recto Verso*, Fondazione Prada, Milan (2015); *In Search of Matisse*, Heine Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo (2015); *8th Berlin Biennale*, Berlin (2014); *Ciclorama*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2013); *The End of Money*, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam (2011); *Pandemonium—Art in the Time of Creativity Fever*; Göteborg International Biennale for Contemporary Art, Göteborg (2011) and The Third Guangzhou Triennial—*Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, Guangzhou (2008).

Prince Eugen, 1865–1947

Prince Eugen revitalized landscape painting in northern Europe and was one of the foremost representatives of National Romanticism in Sweden. His art is characterized by evocative landscapes in which forms are simplified and light treatment and color choices are used to create emotional tones. It has been described as “mood painting”, where unpopulated places in nature play the main role and assume existential and even spiritual dimensions; in the Romantic spirit,

nature expresses human emotions. The most famous works by the so-called Prince of Painting include *The Old Palace* (1894), *The Cloud* (1895) and the monumental frescoes in Stockholm City Hall, *The City by the Water* (1922). The latter show the influence of the lessons he received in the 1910s from the moderate cubist André Lhote in Paris. The unusual altarpiece in Kiruna Church (1912), which lacks Christian symbolism, is also one of his most well-known paintings.

It was far from obvious that the fourth and youngest son of King Oscar II and Queen Sophia would become an artist. However, he was allowed to train at private painting schools in Paris in the late 1880s, where he became acquainted with many of the leading artists of the time from the Nordic countries. Artistically, he was related to the so-called Opponents in Sweden, who opposed the Academy's conservative view of art and were influenced by the realists, impressionists, and symbolists of the continent. The Opponents formed the Swedish Artists' Association with representatives such as Karl Nordström, Carl Larsson, and Rickard Bergh, who all became close friends of Eugen's. Up until the 1890s, he held significant military duties as a prince but was later relieved of them by his father, Oscar II the reigning King of Sweden and Norway. Nevertheless, he continued to perform his other royal duties throughout his life.

Prince Eugen had a genuine interest in society and was progressive by the standards of the time, both in terms of art policy and politics. For example, he supported the dissolution of the union with Norway, universal suffrage and became an ardent anti-Nazi who helped several refugees, including the German-Jewish writer Nelly Sachs and her mother, who were rescued to Sweden at the last minute. Dancer Josephine Baker was one of his friends and he did not hesitate to appear with her in public, especially when she had been subjected to racist attacks. He began buying art at

an early age and over the years built up a significant collection of art, mainly from Sweden but also from the other Nordic countries. He also acted as a patron, actively supporting in particular younger artists, for example Isaac Grünewald (1889–1946). In addition to being deeply involved in Sweden's artistic life, he was committed to public education issues; he was honorary chairman of the Swedish Association for Public Education and active in the Association for the Decoration of Works of Art in Schools, founded by the art historian Carl G Laurin in 1897.

The Prince shared an interest in art and a commitment to public education with the geologist Hjalmar Lundbohm (1855–1926), LKAB's first manager. Their friendship went back to the 1890s and mutual artist friends, including Per Hasselberg (1850–1894). One expression of their friendship is the invitation to an intimate dinner for friends that the prince organized in 1897 to celebrate the purchase of the land at Waldemarsudde on Djurgården in Stockholm. They holidayed together and Eugen's first trip to Giron (Kiruna) took place in the winter of 1905 when he drew and painted on site. When Lundbohm invited him to paint the altarpiece for the new church, designed by Gustaf Wickman (1858–1916), the answer was, not unexpectedly, yes. In 1920–1921, he accompanied the prince on a long trip to Europe with Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf (1883–1973), following the sudden death of his wife, Crown Princess Margareta (1882–1920), in the same year.

Prince Eugen bequeathed his home at Waldemarsudde and the extensive art collection to the Swedish state. In 1948, the museum Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde opened and is now run as a foundation.

On Prince Eugen's Altarpiece in Kiruna Church

Karin Sidén

In a series of letters from the autumn of 1911 and the winter of the following year, Prince Eugen shares with his close friend, museum curator Carl Anton Ossbahr, his reflections on the early stages of what would become the unique and impressive altarpiece in Kiruna Church. He writes:

I am presently at work on the painting for Kiruna Church. For a time, I quite despaired of it, and in truth felt unwell at the mere thought of it. I came to understand what those must feel who are bound to fulfill commissions. But now, thanks to studies from Dalarna, I have struck upon a colour scheme upon which I might build further. Perhaps, then, there shall be some tangible outcome from my stay in Västergötland after all. Yes, at the very least, it shall yield a collection of drawings from there.¹

This initial hesitation can be understood as part of the creative process, with its periods of considerations. Just a few months later, the tone in his correspondence with Ossbahr is more optimistic:

Once more I find myself in Lapland, in the company of my friend Lundbohm, to resume work upon the altarpiece for the church. In truth, it is merely a cartoon I wish to put through its paces. It is not beautiful, admittedly, yet the conception and tone appear sound and promising—and that is, after all,

¹ Letter from Prince Eugen, Waldemarsudde, Dec. 1911, to C.A. Ossbahr. The quote is taken from Prins Eugen, *Breven berättar*, Stockholm 1942, 361–362.

the essential matter; a preparatory study need not possess beauty. The church, in its broad outlines, is a success, though the interior still stands in need of considerable loving care. Wickman and I shall see to it together.²

These remarks reveal Eugen's involvement in the broader vision for the church's interior, collaborating closely with architect Gustaf Wickman to achieve a unified aesthetic for the altar piece. This approach was not new to Prince Eugen, who had previously partnered with architect Ferdinand Boberg on the Palace and Gallery at Waldemarsudde. Throughout his career, Eugen remained attentive to how his large-scale works resonated with surrounding architecture, materials, and light—considerations that for instance guided his fresco *Staden vid vattnet* [City by the Water] (1916–23) in Stockholm City Hall, with Ragnar Östberg as its architect. In Kiruna Church, too, Prince Eugen engaged thoughtfully with both natural and artificial lighting, spatial composition, and the textures and colors of the materials.

Between 1898 and 1939, he completed twelve monumental works for public buildings, including the Royal Opera House, the Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm City Hall, Stockholm University, various schools such as Norra Latin, Östra Real, and Kalmar Läroverk, as well as the Gothenburg Concert Hall, Karolinska Hospital, and Kiruna Church.³ The commission for the Kiruna altarpiece was offered by Hjalmar Lundbohm, a friend of the prince, in 1910.⁴

² Letter from Prince Eugen, Kiruna, Feb. 2, 1912 to C.A. Ossbahr. The quote is taken from Prins Eugen, *Breven berättar*, Stockholm 1942, 362–363.

³ Karin Sidén, "Svävande stämningar och känslig färgmusik. Om konstnären och landskapsmålaren prins Eugen," included in *Prins Eugen 150 år. Fasetter ur ett liv*, exhibition catalog, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 2015, 40–49.

⁴ Hans Henrik Brummer, *Minnet av ett landskap*, exhibition catalog, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 1998, 342–343.

Lundbohm, who was the director at LKAB, art collector, and widely recognized as the founder of Kiruna—had also enlisted Wickman as the church’s architect and Christian Eriksson as sculptor.⁵ The imposing wooden church, noted for its spacious interior and visible structural logic, was roofed in 1911.

Prince Eugen began working on the altarpiece on-site in the spring of 1912; the painting was installed later that year on the brick wall behind the altar and completed with the help of his assistant, Carl Gustaf Wetterstrand. The work was preceded by numerous sketches, studies, and more extensive preparatory pieces. The larger preparatory cartoon for the composition was executed by Prince Eugen in his spacious studio at Waldemarsudde Palace. The preliminary studies were executed in a variety of techniques and materials, including pencil on paper (at times on graph paper or tracing paper), ink and pastel on paper, as well as oil on canvas or paper, chalk on canvas, tempera and gold on canvas, and tempera on masonite.⁶ Some studies focus on the composition as a whole, others explore the central grove of trees or the dramatic clouds and rays of sunlight in the upper portion. In some of these studies, the hidden sun’s rays pierce through dramatic, baroque-like cloud formations – an effect reminiscent of ceiling paintings Eugen studied in Italy. In the final composition, however, the emphasis shifted to a more restrained treatment of the clouds, allowing the radiance of the sun’s rays to take visual precedence.

The iconography of the painting draws on several sources of inspiration, including Eugen’s impressions of the Florentine landscape in 1897 and, more significantly, his repeated visits to Stora

5 On Kiruna Church, see e.g. *Kiruna. Staden som konstverk*, exhibition catalog, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde and Radiotjänst i Kiruna AB, Örebro 1993, 75–84.

6 *Prins Eugen. Målningar och skisser. En beståndskatalog*, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 2010, 539–542.

Dala in Västergötland where tranquil horizontal forms rest across the landscape. Prince Eugen spent a number of summers at Stora Dala, where he painted—captivated by the flat fields, the distinct lines of the farmland across the landscape, and the low horizon, all of which offered rich opportunities for observing meteorological phenomena, cloudscapes, and shifting skies. In a letter to his mother, Queen Sophia, written in August 1910, Eugen writes: “I wished to gain new impressions, to behold wide expanses, shifting lights—to learn, in one word...”⁷

Notably, the altarpiece bears some affinity with a fresco Eugen completed in 1910 for the Östra Realläroverket in Stockholm, again under the commission of Ragnar Östberg. The fresco is located in the main entrance, between the doors leading to the school’s auditorium, and depicts a vantage point in the southern hills opposite Waldemarsudde. In the fresco, it presents as an idealized landscape, stylized sunbeams spreading across an Arcadian nature scene. Both *Solen strålar över staden* and the altarpiece in the Kiruna Church share a luminous color palette, the later painting, however, is distinguished to an even greater extent by a cohesive and concentrated composition, by clear linear outlines around trees, clouds, and landscape forms, by stylized rays of sunlight, and by a light, luminous palette, primarily in various shades of green, blue, violet, and yellow.

From an art historical standpoint, Prince Eugen’s altarpiece is strikingly unconventional. It dispenses with traditional Christian iconography—absent are biblical figures, the dove of the Holy Spirit, symbols of the Trinity or the Good Shepherd. Instead, it presents an atmosphere of sanctity rooted in nature and a light that spreads

7 Letter from Prince Eugen to his mother, Queen Sophia, from Dala, 31 August, 1910. The quote is taken from Prins Eugen, *Breven berättar*, Stockholm 1942, 358.

purposefully across a landscape rendered in a simplified, schematic, and visionary way. Here are the stylized clouds of the sky and rays of white light, a cohesive grove of trees, and a flat landscape with a few scattered trees—resting horizontals across open terrain, and a layered background with bands of blue. This is no specific place but an imagined, pantheistic landscape—a visionary terrain suggestive of spiritual ideals and inward reflection.

Prince Eugen often spoke of nature as animated, expressing the emotional and atmospheric qualities he sought to evoke both in himself and the viewer. His turn inward, toward subjective perception rather than objective documentation, aligned him with the Symbolist movement, in which he emerged as one of Sweden's foremost lyrical landscape painters from the 1890s to the beginning of the 1900s.⁸ From the 1910s onward, Eugen was to some extent also influenced by Cézanne's painting and by the moderate cubism of André Lhote, with whom he studied briefly in 1913. These influences can be seen in Prince Eugen's works from this period onward, which are increasingly marked by simplified compositions, a certain stylization, and a lighter, more contrasting color palette than in his earlier landscape paintings.

Of his depopulated landscapes, Eugen once remarked that he wished to be the omnipotent figure within them—a reflection of his desire to channel personal mood and spiritual sensibility into nature itself. In this light, the Kiruna altarpiece becomes a profound expression of Prince Eugen's vision of the spiritual and the sacred in nature. The radiant beams of light in the work signal a spiritual presence, drawing on both traditional religious iconography and, for instance, theosophy as an esoteric doctrine—an esoteric current that resonated

8 Karin Sidén, "Fursten bland våra symbolister. Om prins Eugens förhållande till den symbolistiska 'trosläran,'" *Symbolism och dekadens*, exhibition catalog, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 2015, 81–99.

widely at the time of the work was created. While no firm evidence suggests Prince Eugen adhered to formal religious belief, his letters and writings reflect a deep conviction of a higher order and a mystery inherent in nature. It was the moods and sensations stirred by nature that he strove to capture in his landscapes—a pursuit that extends to the altarpiece in Kiruna Church.

Years later, he returned to the motif of radiating sunbeams in his small altarpiece *Den signande solen* [The Blessing Sun], that he made for Djurgård Church in Stockholm in 1943.⁹ Like the altar piece in Kiruna, it features six beams of light, though the setting is now completely different, depicting a tranquil lake bordered by leafy trees. The composition remains tightly focused and rendered in a soft, luminous palette. However, the altarpiece, donated by Eugen to Djurgårdskyrkan in May 1943, is set within a bright, rectangular church interior, characterized by white-painted wooden walls and large windows—an environment that renders it less visually striking than the altarpiece in Kiruna, which appears luminous in the dark wooden architecture.

In Ragnar Josephson's seminal work *Konstverkets födelse* [The Genesis of the Artwork] from 1940, which centers on the artistic process the author reflects on Eugen as a monumental painter.¹⁰ Describing the initial layout for the fresco *Staden vid vattnet*, Josephson sees a formal structure that is subsequently imbued with life. In his own writing, Eugen himself often referred to the 'architecture' of his paintings—a structural element clearly evident in *Solen strålar över staden* at Östra Realläroverket and even more so in the composition of the Kiruna altarpiece. Josephson writes:

9 Inga Zachau, *Prins Eugen. Det öppna landskapets skildrare*, Stockholm 1991, 176–178.

10 Ragnar Josephson, *Konstverkets födelse*, Lund 1940.

*The floating light of the past has here been made manifest in a majestic architecture of rays. The landscape is rendered in grand, deliberate simplification (...). The artist has taken the bold step to the full; nature itself, absent of human or allegorical figures, preaches in the altarpiece of a church.*¹¹

Indeed, the monumental presence of the altar piece—the radiant brightness of its colors and the concentrated depiction of nature—profoundly shape the experience of both the church interior and the work.

The dark-stained wooden architecture, defined by its clear construction, offers a muted setting in which the painting becomes a luminous focal presence, responding to both the play of daylight from the windows, and the glow of artificial light. The painting draws the visitor into the space, toward the chancel and altar rail, serving as a climax and culmination in the experience of the church interior.

But how did Prince Eugen himself view his finished work? In a letter to his mother, Queen Sophia, dated October 4, 1912, he wrote:

*The church turned out truly beautiful; full of atmosphere in all its simplicity, with the painting as the sole adornment of vivid color. People of all sorts seemed pleased, and that, of course, was gratifying—for it is, after all, something of a bold venture on my part to undertake the painting of an altarpiece.*¹²

¹¹ The quotation from Ragnar Josephson is taken from *Minnet av ett landskap*, exhibition catalog, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 1998, 330.

¹² Letter from Prince Eugen to his mother, Queen Sophia, from Waldemarsudde, 4 October, 1912. The quote is taken from Prins Eugen, *Breven berättar*, Stockholm 1942, 365 f.

The church and the altarpiece both attracted significant attention in the press around the time of the consecration and in the period that followed, with several publications expressing admiration—for example, *Norrbottnenskuriren* in December 1912:

*... There is in this work a warm sincerity and profound emotion, which Prince Eugen has here so delicately expressed through the subtle gradations of color in the landscape motif and the majestic rays of light that surge forth in every line, reflecting the artist's tender, yet resplendent, outlook on life. Gone are the traditional allegories; in their place, the painting stands as a testament to the reverence felt by an open soul when it contemplates the mysterious depths of nature ...*¹³

Today, the altarpiece—often referred to as *Soltavlan* [The Sun Picture]—is a highly cherished work and an integral part of the beautiful church in Kiruna. As the church faces relocation, it will be fascinating to observe how this luminous and visionary work is perceived in its new setting.

¹³ “Den nya kyrkan i Kiruna,” *Norrbottnenskuriren* 1912-12-06.

Matts Leiderstam in conversation with Maria Lind

Maria: We are sitting in your studio that's located at Bjurholmsplan in Stockholm, surrounded by paintings that are both rectangular and round in shape. Given your interest in the landscape, the image of landscapes in art history and the way they are viewed—especially through a queer gaze—you have been invited by Kin Museum of Contemporary Art to create a new work in relation to Prince Eugen's altarpiece in Kiruna Church. The church and the painting will be relocated to new Giron (Kiruna) in August 2025 and in connection with that we want to make a contemporary art project. Could you describe to us what you have in your studio right now?

Matts: It is a selection of paintings loosely connected to Prince Eugen's altarpiece.

Maria: The altarpiece dates from 1912, when Gustaf Wickman's Kiruna Church was inaugurated. It is an unusual altarpiece, highly stylized and lacking both Christian symbols and human figures. What is it about the piece that interests you?

Matts: It's a colorful, symbolic landscape that, to me, evokes a kind of sublime state that you could interpret as religious, though not necessarily Christian. It depicts a southern Swedish plain landscape: A grove of trees stands in the center of the lower part of the painting, and beyond it, mountains or hills fade into blue, just as I remember from a time when I lived in Västergötland. The clouds wander across a clear blue sky and in the middle, near the top of the painting, the sun is hidden behind them—six broad rays of light break through and reach down to the earth. Everything in the image is rendered with clarity and intention.

Maria: It's a painting with a very distinctive light. The whole color range is almost electric or fluorescent.

Matts: The trick, as I understand it, lies in his use of a limited range of bright colors—yellow, blue, purple, and green—applied on a white background. They stand in stark contrast to the dark, brown-stained wooden interior of the church. The frame was designed in collaboration with Wickman, and the colors were fine-tuned to maximize the contrast with the surrounding interior. The altar painting is placed where Wickman had originally planned a window. In the dark room, the painting also functions as a giant luminous opening in the wall, onto a landscape.

Maria: There is something about it that feels reminiscent of the screens we use today. As if the light emanates from the image itself, rather than falling on it. There is also something cinematic about the whole effect.

Matts: It looks projected. I think Prince Eugen was genuinely interested in the technological innovations of his time, and this painting was created at the same time as cinema was starting to take off. A funny coincidence is that in March 1912, while he was working on this painting in his studio, a film about him premiered at Brunkebergsteatern titled *Hos Prins Eugen på Waldemarsudde*, and it was likely filmed the previous autumn. The film shows, among other things, how he paints landscapes outdoors in the park, and amusingly, we see him driven there in a car even though he is clearly painting only a few hundred meters from the main building!

Maria: He was one of the celebrities of his time. Born in 1865, he was the youngest of King Oskar II (1829–1907) and Queen Sophia's (1872–1907) four sons. At the time, his uncle Charles XV (1826–1872) was king. Eventually his father took over the throne, and so he grew

up in the Stockholm Palace. To the surprise of many, he became an artist and went to train in Paris where he became friends with many of the famous Swedish and Nordic artists of his generation.

Matts: He was not only their friend but also became their patron and an important collector of their work. While developing his own artistic practice, he remained a prince with a capital P—diligently fulfilling the royal duties of representation expected of him.

Maria: He wove these three threads together and, as a member of the royal family, he was unusually progressive for the times. He actively supported public education and worked to make art more accessible to a wider audience, for example through the Art in Schools Association. He also sided with August Strindberg (1849-1912) in the major battle at the turn of the century over voting rights. In other words, he was a complex and fascinating figure.

As a contemporary artist, what does it mean to you to engage with this altarpiece, and to step into his position and artistic concerns?

Matts: I first came to Giron (Kiruna) in December 2023 to see the altarpiece. What interests me the most is Prince Eugen's way of relating to landscapes—a relationship that comes across in the altarpiece as a distinct “way of seeing.” You sense it when you stand before it in the church, but also through all his preparatory work preserved at Waldemarsudde. Together, they reveal a way of seeing that is rooted in his time, but which also speaks to how we in our time perceive and physically relate to landscape and landscape painting. It was all these layers of seeing that drew me in. Then there is the strangeness of encountering a southern landscape in a church surrounded by mountain nature.

Maria: Can you expand on that line of thinking?

Matts: There is a duality at play here because on the one hand, the eye that embraces the landscape as an emotional space, on the other, the altarpiece as part of the actual conquest of this mountain region, which is reindeer grazing land, driven by the expansion of mining. It brings to mind the imperialist gaze behind landscape painting in the United States in the second half of the 19th century, where the so-called wilderness of the American West was depicted, erasing indigenous people and other signs of human culture. In the altarpiece, too, there is a gaze linked to the national project. It is there in the very gesture of Prince Eugen taking the southern Swedish landscape and placing it in the mountains, in a mountain nature transformed by mining. The altarpiece was a gift to all these new people who came to work in the mine, a community, as I understand it, that was originally predominantly Laestadian.

Maria: It was also around this time that hydropower expanded, for instance the power plant in Porjus, located about 130 km away, was built between 1910 and 1915. Major interventions in the land were already underway through LKAB's mine in Giron (Kiruna). The company was founded in 1890 and 1900 is considered the founding year of the town of Giron (Kiruna). There were various colonial views shaping how the area around the new city was perceived. The Laevas and Gabna Sami communities of today were already there but with different names, and they still have their reindeer herding around the mine and in the town.

What are your thoughts about Prince Eugen's view of the landscape, because he was also a romantic as you said, and an idealist? There are clear connections to artists like for instance Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), for whom the landscape is an expression of human emotions.

Matts: That's true, but the great role model for the young Eugen is probably another painter, the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901). For a long time, the prince had a print of his famous *Island of Death* above his bed. But he did not stand still and was constantly influenced by the currents of the time—including modernism.

His sketches reveal a process that begins with plein air painting, drawing on real landscapes in Italy, Östergötland, and Västergötland; and culminates in a composition whose simplifications seem formally influenced by Vitalism, Cubism, and Symbolism. After receiving the commission for the altarpiece, he returns to a small oil sketch made in 1897 outside Florence, in which he had captured a sun hidden behind clouds, its rays stretching down toward the earth, and with a grove of trees on the slope below. Despite being painted in winter, the painting has a distinctly Tuscan palette—the ground painted with green earth, terra di Sienna and the trees in pine green. The painting is small, only 17.5 cm high, and 13.5 cm wide, painted from a hill outside the city.

This moment of seeing clearly stayed with him, it became a motif that he then developed through several stages to the monumental altarpiece that is 5 meters wide and 3.6 meters high. The small painting was later donated by the artist to the parish in 1915 and has since hung in the church. So, the church holds both the beginning and the culmination of the work—and they are placed in quite close proximity to each other.

Maria: What you are highlighting now is a process, his artistic process. Here in your studio, we can also sense a process—there are a lot of paintings everywhere. Can you describe what is going on?

Matts: I have started working with forms that are directly related to the altarpiece, to its outer shape and the way its composition

is structured, for example the placement of the horizon. In addition, I have read a lot about the colors he used, and I have studied his color calculations from the period.

Maria: What colors are they?

Matts: Purchases of lead white, cobalt blue, royal blue, cadmium green, and cadmium yellow are noted here, for example. He orders his material on account from Beckers. I have also read everything that has been written about Eugen's practice and specifically about the development of the altarpiece. In addition, I have spoken with the curators at Waldemarsudde and with a couple of other art historians, including the museum's former director Hans Erik Brummer. Prince Eugen's preparatory works also hold important information, details that only become visible through close observation. All this knowledge has, in an almost intuitive way, guided my decisions in the studio, influencing my choices of color, form, scale, and composition.

Another interesting aspect is the physical presence of the painting in the church. It is a fact that both paintings in the church room, the sketch and the altarpiece, will remain in place even during the relocation of the church. That is because they are fixed to the building. The large altarpiece is glued onto the wall using a mixture of lead white and linseed oil. Today, it is not possible to detach it from its surface.

Maria: That sounds strange!

Matts: The small painting, still in its frame, will also remain in place during the move. It was apparently screwed to the wall in 1915, in such a way that the conservators have not been able to remove it. Both paintings are being protected and will be covered during the relocation of the church.

Maria: That sounds equally just as strange!

Matts: All of this, plus the motif's journey through time and geography, between Florence and Kiruna, made me think of the altarpiece as a moving object. It can't and won't be stationary even though it is irremediably fixed. The paintings you see here in the studio are triggered by the altarpiece and evolve into something between grid abstractions and landscapes. They echo one another, shifting in scale and color, and they spread across the walls in a way that emphasizes movement and the changing light between them.

Maria: As you pointed out, the sun is not visible. You have brought out something that is implied in the picture, and yet it has a very tangible effect. The rays of the sun are a kind of protagonist in the painting, rather than the sun itself.

Matts: I think it is precisely where the sense of the religious in the painting comes from. In fact, Prince Eugen's close friend, Hjalmar Lundbohm, who was the first director of LKAB, is said to have called it *Soltavlan* (The Sun Picture) while within the parish it is known as *Den heliga lunden* (The Sacred Grove). The rays of the sun, fanning out evenly from the top, combined with the perfectly centered grove of trees, look completely unnatural. The trees in the grove also look as if they have been planted! It reminds me of Sigurd Lewerentz's (1885–1975) famous memorial grove at Skogskyrkogården here in Stockholm—it has a similar shape.

Maria: The tree grove is landscaping rather than nature.

Matts: At the time when the altarpiece was created, there was a discussion among Swedish artists about plein air painting versus decorative painting. When the altarpiece was shown at the Swedish Artists' Association's exhibition in the summer of 1912,

in connection with the opening of the Olympic Games in Stockholm, the title was "Decorative altarpiece for Kiruna church." In a book about Prince Eugen from the 1920s, the artist Georg Pauli (1855–1935) argues that decorative painting should draw its motifs from the observed reality and then be translated and simplified into fully composed images that are tailored to the architecture and context of the space they're meant for—Prince Eugen has indeed done so.

Maria: Looking around here in your studio, I notice colors that I don't recognize from the altarpiece. How did you choose your palette?

Matts: In some of the paintings I have used the colors of the altarpiece as a starting point, in others I have not. The landscape in the altarpiece, seems to show the sun at its zenith on a beautiful summer day. But as I mentioned earlier, I think of the sun as mobile, imagining how that same landscape might appear at different times of day and in other seasons.

The paradox is that Prince Eugen never visited Giron (Kiruna) in the spring or summer before or while working on the painting—so he missed the midnight sun. He does not seem to have noted when the sun in fact enters the church. His first visit was in January 1905, and all his work on the painting took place during the winter months, when daylight was scarce. This means that the painting was likely adapted to the electric light in the church—illuminated by the large chandeliers. That too was a modern technology of the time.

People who live there and others who visit the church during the summer months, know that the sun does reach the altarpiece. In the late afternoon, the sun casts beautiful reflections and shifting shadows that trace the movement of the church windows' grid patterns, across the landscape. A series of photographs I received

from one of the conservators who worked on the altarpiece, confirms that this also occurred during the church's last mass in its original location, on June 2, 2024. The sun made its last journey across the painting. When the church reopens, the building will have been rotated 180 degrees, meaning that the sunlight reaches the painting at different times of the day.

Maria: The new site, 5 km away in new Giron (Kiruna), is located at the old cemetery. There, the church is rotated so that the doors face the new center of the town. This change breaks with the traditional orientation of churches, where the altar should always face east.

You are working with a grid pattern, something that has appeared in your previous projects as well. Can you tell us about it?

Matts: I've been interested in the grid for a long time—as a tool that artists have used since the Renaissance, both to analyze paintings and to structure the image. For several years now, I have been working on a research project where the grid plays a central role. The artist Birgit Ståhl-Nyberg (1928-1982), who was my teacher in the late 1970s, introduced me to this way of thinking. Since then, I've explored it in many different forms. Today, the grid is everywhere—in our cameras, smart phones and in the image editing software—I would claim that we see the world through grid patterns today.

When I started working on this project, one of the first things I did was to overlay this grid onto a reproduction of Prince Eugen's altarpiece, to see how much he had used it in his compositions. It appears that he didn't rely much on "my grid" when he made the painting. But through my research, I discovered that he had worked on some compositional sketches on graph paper that is gridded in squares.

Maria: Do you think he used graph paper or similar grid-based methods in his process for other works too, besides the altarpiece?

Matts: I think he, like most artists, followed a working method that he had learned and that he developed while working on his public works. Just before the altarpiece, he did a fresco for Östra Real in Östermalm: *Solen strålar över staden* (The Sun Shines Over the City), which shares a similar visual language—simplified, stylized, and centered around a radiant sun—but here the sun shines over a view of Stockholm. In one of the first sketches for the Kiruna church, he in fact had a similar rounded shape of the painting's top, as in the Östra real fresco. But later he adapted it more to the church space. I believe the final shape of the painting likely emerged in dialogue with the architect Wickman.

Maria: Your paintings are made on panel. Is there a particular significance to that choice?

Matts: It has no direct relevance to this project, although Prince Eugen's small preparatory work from Florence is also painted on panel. For several years now, I have been working on poplar wood panels that a carpenter makes for me. It is now part of my practice to paint on panels. Compared to working with canvas, the surface is smoother and more rigid. I also find that panels have a stronger physical presence in the space—they feel more like objects than images. I have often presented them on shelves, in boxes, and on tables, rather than hanging them on the wall.

Maria: You have made a number of round paintings—and here we have not just one sun but seven!

Matts: Maybe there will be more by the time of the exhibition! I have ordered a large panel that I think will be installed high up in the exhibition space.

Maria: It's worth noting that there are several circles within the different 'suns' but they are not completely centered.

Matts: I started by placing the 'suns' near my rectangular paintings where the clear structure of the grids dominated. At first the 'suns' felt too solid and too centered—they weren't interesting enough until I allowed them to become uncentered.

Maria: Were you seeking a certain dynamic?

Matts: Yes, exactly! Perhaps it's worth mentioning that in this project, I have been working on several different parts that together form the exhibition, first at Kin and then later at Waldemarsudde. Here in the studio, we have mainly been talking about the part that you see before you—the 'liberated' paintings that spread across the walls. I'm also working on a large installation or structure based on a painting that has been hidden away in the collection at Waldemarsudde since 1912.

The story is that we came across a so-called "cardboard"—a rather distressed test painting that Prince Eugen brought with him when on his trip to Kiruna at the end of January and beginning of February 1912. He used it to test whether his hypothesis was correct before he finally carried out the actual painting of the altar. This painting, oil on canvas, has been rolled up for many years and has now been restored for conservation to be displayed for the first time since it was created. It's intriguing that only the lower part of the landscape remains, the upper part of the sky with the sun missing.

I am now making a painting to replace the missing upper section. It will then be put together with Prince Eugen's cardboard, building a large installation, which will be displayed in the lobby of the town hall.

The third part I'm working on is a kind of timeline which will be presented in several display vitrines. In these, I'm assembling preparatory work, photographs, objects, letters, and tools taken from Waldemarsudde's collection and archives. The presentation also contains texts, some factual and others composed of small narrative fragments linked to the altarpiece and Prince Eugen. The idea is to allow viewers to follow the development from the first viewing experience in Florence to the final product displayed in the church.

You mentioned Caspar David Friedrich and his famous use of the *Rückenfigur*—a lone, or a group of figures, seen from behind, acting as a stand-in viewer placed in the landscape, which would invite the viewer to take their place. In my presentation, I would like to emphasize the fact that Prince Eugen, in front of his first vision in Florence, was standing as a plein air painter on a height, looking down at the grove and the rays of the sun. But throughout the process this initial vision is developed—as the sketches show—Eugen climbs down from the height and places an imaginary viewer at the level of the landscape, right in front of the grove. In my view, it is the priest standing at the altar, facing away from the congregation directly in front of the painting, who takes on the role of a Caspar David-like *Rückenfigur*, with whose back the congregation can identify.

Maria: There is one more part in the exhibition.

Matts: At the moment, we don't know much about it, except that we know the church will be moved. The plan is for the relocation to begin shortly after the exhibition opens at Kin. I want to place a camera at the top of the town hall, inside the museum, facing the site of the new church. The camera will stream an image to a screen in the exhibition space, and a short film will also be recorded during the final part of the church move—capturing the moment when the building rolls up the last hill, the old location, to its new one.

Maria: Let's return to the the hypothesis that we talked about, and this sense of something almost timeless in the altarpiece, as in other works by Prince Eugen too. What is this landscape really? You mention the Västergötland plain, and others have speculated about northern Italy or even Skåne. But perhaps it is the future landscape of Giron (Kiruna) we see before us?

Matts: Yes, today we know that winters are milder and that creates major problems for reindeer herding and the land of the bare mountains is being transformed into moorland. I recall Prince Eugen's first visit to Giron (Kiruna) in January 1905—it was reported in the press that there was "severe cold and magnificent northern lights." It was his friend Hjalmar Lundbohm who invited him on an official visit. Children's choirs and a sleigh ride through a decorated Giron (Kiruna) awaited the prince. It was also Lundbohm who who commissioned the church and invited Eugen to paint the altar. When the final bill for the church and its decorations arrived, it turned out that the painting was donated by Eugen.

Maria: As a royal, he could not accept compensation for his work.

Matts: The same was true in the case of Östra Real, where he also paid for the work of fellow artists involved in the decoration of the building. This dual role, being both a royal and an artist, was clearly not without its complications.

Returning to the friendship between Prince Eugen and Hjalmar Lundbohm, I am particularly interested in an excursion that Eugen and Lundbohm made together with the adjutant Rolf Cederström (1853–1933) and the curator Carl Anton Ossbahr (1859–1925) in 1899, to the area that is now Tyresta Nature Reserve south of Stockholm. There are some photographs in the archive at Waldemarsudde, from a rowing trip that show Prince Eugen's camera being passed between the men

in the boat. They take turns photographing one another in a relaxed and intimate setting, as good friends in a circle of like-minded people.

Maria: It is a circle of men.

Matts: You could almost call it a "bromance"! It is the end of May, unusually cold, and there are no leaves on the trees. Now, also in May, we are sitting here talking and spring has been in full bloom for weeks already. We live in a time when climate change is changing the whole country, especially the Arctic landscape. In a few hundred years, Kiruna church might be surrounded by a landscape similar to the one in the altarpiece.

Maria: That's ahead of us, like the exhibition itself. After it has been in Giron (Kiruna), the exhibition will travel to Waldemarsudde. What does it mean to present this particular project in these two different locations?

Matts: The relocation of the church takes place very close to the inhabitants of Kiruna. I imagine that for many Giron (Kiruna) residents, there are experiences and memories associated with the altarpiece and the church. The history, the mining, the mountain landscape, and the special light of the sun on the site, are tangible and leave an imprint on the project—even if I, as someone from Stockholm, cannot fully grasp it.

At Waldemarsudde, the altarpiece returns to the space where it was conceived—Prince Eugen's studio. There the project is also brought into the prince's own museum, in dialogue with his other works and with the collection. And there, my exhibition also meets the presentation of paintings depicting the "northern space," which you and Karin Sidén are putting together for the exhibition spaces, which are adjacent to the studio.

Maria: It's a radical shift that takes place, with the church getting a new location. Since 1912, it has been one of the most important buildings in Giron (Kiruna), a landmark that you can see from nearly every corner of the city. Now it disappears from its original location as part of the larger transformation of the town. Many buildings are being demolished and a few, like the church, are being moved to the new Giron (Kiruna). It is very dramatic, and for many people also very sad.

Matts: I can understand that. In a way, it is also a new situation for Prince Eugen's two paintings, the sketch from Florence and the altarpiece, because the light changes. There is also something striking about the fact that the mine itself is forcing Hjalmar Lundbohm, the first director of the mine and the commissioner of the church, who is buried next to it on its original site, to move. What is especially poignant is that this is not the first time he has been moved. Originally buried in 1926 in the cemetery not far from the new church site, he was moved three years later to his memorial next to the church—and now he must move back again. At least he gets to bring his monumental headstone when they move him back.

Maria: The original location of the church is a well-known resting place for the Sámi people, established long before the city was built, for those who have walked in this area for thousands of years. Now it will become part of a park, the so-called Gruvstadsparken.

Matts: Given the history of the Sámi in the area, the landscape of the altar painting may seem strikingly out of place. And yet, for generations of Giron (Kiruna) residents, whether indigenous or those who've migrated, it has created a close relationship with the landscape, serving as a backdrop for funerals, baptisms, and weddings. *Soltavlán* is now part of their reality—and many people love this painting!

List of works

Waldermarsudde

1. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Preliminary work, 1912
Oil on canvas
2. Viggo Johansen
Studies in Moonlight. From the series *Les Délices de Tyresö*, ca. 1907
Watercolour on grey paper
3. Prince Eugen
Sketch of the Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Ca 1910-1911
Pencil and ink on stationery
4. Prince Eugen
Sketchbook from Winsor & Newton. 1910s
5. Prins Eugen
Landscape. Preliminary work for the altarpiece in Kiruna Church, ca 1910-1911
Crayon on canvas
6. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Unfinished sketch, 1911
Chalk and ink on blue paper
7. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna. Sketch, 1911
Oil on canvas

8. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Preliminary Work, 1911
Pencil on lined paper

9. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Unfinished sketch, 1911
Oil on paper mounted on thin canvas

10. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Preliminary work, 1911
Pencil on graph paper

11. Prins Eugen
Copes of Trees. Preliminary work for the altarpiece
in Kiruna church, ca 1911
Oil on canvas mounted on masonite

12. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Preliminary work, 1911
Pencil on tracing paper

13. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Study A, 1911
Tempera on masonite

14. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna. Study B, 1911
Tempera on masonite

15. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. 1911
Tempera and gold on canvas

16. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Sketch, 1912
Pastel on grey paper

17. Prince Eugen
The Altarpiece in Kiruna Church. Sketch, 1912
Ink and pencil on tracing paper

18. Prince Eugen
Sketchbook from Frans Svanström & Co. 1910s

19. Christian Eriksson
Kiruna Church and Prince Eugen's Altarpiece in Kiruna,
Plaque with motifs on both sides, 1912

Kiruna Kommun

Albert Engström, 1869–1940

Hjalmar Lundbohm
Etching, 1925

Albert Engström was one of Hjalmar Lundbohm's closest artist friends. He regularly visited the CEO of the LKAB mine in Giron (Kiruna) and travelled around the area during the years 1903–1927. This portrait was first made as a drawing and then only later became an etching. Lundbohm is depicted in profile with his head tilted slightly back, his characteristic goatee pointing forwards, and his heavy eyelids almost completely closed. The wrinkles on his forehead are clearly depicted. The painters Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939) and Carl Larsson (1853–1919), who were among Lundbohm's good friends, strongly influenced the young Engström. However, he mainly chose the path of drawing, illustration, and cartooning. He published regularly in the humor magazine *Söndags-Nisse* before deciding to found his own magazine, *Strix*, where the character Kolingen plays an important role. From today's perspective, both his cartoons and jokes often appear to be both sexist and racist.

Leander Engström, 1886–1927

Sámi boy
Oil on canvas, 1910

With his roots in Hälsingland, Leander Engström travelled and painted extensively in northern Sweden. Abisko became a favorite place of his—so much so he even built a house and studio there. His interaction with the Sámi people in the area provided him

with a circle of motifs that he often returned to, as in the painting *Sámi Boy*, whose name the artist notably did not include in the title. After studying at the School of the Swedish Artists' Association in Stockholm, Engström travelled to Paris, where he was a student of the Fauvist Henri Matisse (1869–1954) from 1909 to 1910. The Fauvist's bold choice of colors are reflected in this painting, which is dominated by shades of blue. The artist, along with Isaac Grünewald (1889–1946) and Birger Simonsson (1883–1938), among others, belonged to the artist group *De unga*, which was active from 1907 to 1911 and only allowed male members. They are considered to represent the breakthrough of modernist art in Sweden. Prince Eugen bought several works by Engström for his collection.

Christian Eriksson, 1858–1935

Kirunavaara
Watercolour and ink on paper, ca 1900

Christian Eriksson received vocational training as a cabinetmaker and then trained as both a furniture designer and an artist, the latter of which brought him to studying at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. He is best known as a craftsman and sculptor in the realist school. For Kiruna Church he made the twelve gilded bronze figures representing human states of mind that stand at the eaves on all four sides, and the carved relief above the church door. This long, narrow drawing depicts the mountain Gironvárri, Kiirunavaara, in the early days of the mining company, when the natural shape of the mountain is still visible. Gironvárri is the North Sámi name, meaning the grouse mountain, reminding us that this was the very first known language spoken in the area.

Prince Eugen, 1865–1947

Seine with the Eiffel Tower,
Oil on panel, 1889

This intimate painting, with surprisingly vigorous brushwork, depicts the bright blue waters of the Seine and a light grey sky. Trees, buildings and walls are visible on the left bank, and on the far right, as if in a haze, the newly built Eiffel Tower. The painting was a gift from the prince to his friend Hjalmar Lundbohm and was probably painted during his time studying in Paris in 1887–1889, when he produced several small views of Paris. As “Monsieur Oscarson,” he attended classes at four different private painting schools and was able to familiarize himself with the artistic trends of the time and at the same time get to know the many Swedish artists who were active in the French capital. There he anonymously showed three pastels at the 1889 Paris Exposition.

Carl Larsson, 1853–1919

Carl G Laurin
Etching, ca 1905

Carl Larsson is considered to be one of Sweden’s most beloved artists, largely thanks to his idyllic watercolor depictions of family life with his wife Karin and their many children in their house in Sundborn, Dalarna. He was also an esteemed painter of monumental pictures, with for example frescoes adorning the stairwell of the National Museum, and he maintained a significant body of graphic work. This etching shows the editor, teacher, art writer, and theatre critic Carl G Laurin (1868–1940) in profile with his face and fixed gaze turned to the left in the picture. Details of an interior can be seen in the background.

Laurin wrote several books on art history and campaigned for art to be given a permanent place in the country’s school buildings. In connection with the very first art exhibition in Giron (Kiruna), organized by Hjalmar Lundbohm in 1904 in the library of Bolagsskolan, Laurin came to the town to lecture on art during the exhibition period. It was Konstnärnsförbundet, the Swedish Artists’ Association’s, anniversary exhibition, which featured works by Carl Larsson, Anders Zorn, Christian Eriksson, Carl Wilhelmsson, Karl Nordström, Prince Eugen, and Eugène Jansson (1862–1915), among others, the latter of whom acted as exhibition commissioner. Laurin gave lectures under headings such as “Development in Art” and “Carl Larsson, Anders Zorn and Bruno Liljefors (1860–1939).” The exhibition was very well attended and received favorable reviews in *Norrbottens-Kuriren* and was mentioned in the Stockholm newspaper *Social-Demokraten*.

Sixten Lundbohm, 1895–1982

Kirunavaara
Oil on canvas, ca 1960

This painting of the mountain Gironvárri (Kirunavaara), where LKAB’s mine has been located since 1899, is in landscape format. This is traditional Sámi land, where reindeer herding has taken place for many hundreds of years. With his typical architectural clarity of composition, Sixten Lundbohm has concentrated here on shades of brown with hints of green and plenty of white in both the ground and the sky. He spent the summer of 1914 with his uncle Hjalmar Lundbohm, the CEO of LKAB, and got to know the painter Carl Wilhelmsson, who was also visiting. Sixten Lundbohm developed his ‘cubist realism’ after studying at Wilhelmsson’s painting school in Stockholm and later with the cautious cubist André Lhote in

Paris. *Kirunavaara*, however, was painted much later, around 1960 when he was invited to make a large painting with the same motif for the municipal board meeting room in Kiruna city hall. The latter is today in the municipal board meeting room in Kristallen, Giron (Kiruna's) new town hall.

Luossavaara,
Oil on panel, ca 1960

The slightly smaller painting of *Luossavárri* (Luossavaara), like *Gironvárri* (Kirunavaara), shows the impact of mining on the mountains, as is evident to their forms, in an area where the Sámi people have lived for centuries. Both paintings attest to Sixten Lundbohm's balanced pictorial construction, characterized by compositional weight and a sense of necessity in the use of color. The artist's uncle, Hjalmar Lundbohm, came to have a great influence on him, not least by accompanying him on a long trip to Italy in 1920 together with Prince Eugen and Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf. Some of his works are included in the collection at Prince Eugen's Waldemarsudde.

Karl Nordström, 1855–1923

Midnight Sun
Charcoal on paper, 1913

In this charcoal drawing entitled *Midnight Sun*, Karl Nordström depicts the mountains around Giron (Kiruna) in the light of the midnight sun. The sun's rays point outwards like a fan meeting the horizontal lines of the dark ground. The drawing was probably made north of Luossavárri (Luossavaara), looking westwards so that Lake Luossa and *Gironvárri* (Kirunavaara), are also visible in the

picture. To this day the land seen in the picture is travelled by Sámi reindeer herders whenever they migrate between the forested areas in the southeast in the winter and the mountains in the northwest in the summer.

Nordström focused mostly on landscapes in his painting, from the time of the artists' colony at Grèz-sur-Loing outside Paris in the 1880s and the so-called Varberg School in the 1890s to the dense atmospheric landscapes where the paintings give a single unified expression in the early 1900s. During his lifetime he had a great influence on art in Sweden, not least as the long-standing chairman of the Swedish Artists' Association, which stood in opposition to the conservative Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and as a teacher at its school. He was one of Eugen's friends and the prince bought a number of his paintings for his collection.

Helmer Osslund, 1866–1938

Scene from Abisko
Oil on canvas, 1910

Helmer Osslund painted a number of scenes from the area around Giron (Kiruna), which is part of the Swedish side of Sápmi, where he visited primarily during the autumns of the early 1900s. In this painting, Čuonjávággi (Lapporten) is visible on the horizon, the ice lies on Duortnosjávri (Torneträsk) and patches of snow alternate with cloud shadows on the ground. Yellow, blue, and white dominate, and it is noticeable that the clouds have been painted naturalistically woolly, while the ground is depicted in a more abstracted form. The landscape paintings are characterized by expressiveness, with uniform color fields, rhythmic lines and bright colors. Here one can trace the influence of the symbolist paintings

of his teacher Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), with their strong surface effect. Osslund hiked in the mountains and selected greaseproof paper as the basis for his paintings—as it was both light and cheap, something he learnt from Gauguin. Osslund also studied under the artist Rickard Bergh (1858–1919), a close friend of Prince Eugen, who bought several of Osslund’s works for his collection at Waldemarsudde.

Carl Wilhelmsson, 1866–1928

Kiruna

Oil on canvas, 1914

The painter Carl Wilhelmsson spent the summer of 1914 in Giron (Kiruna) at the invitation of Hjalmar Lundbohm. This painting is one of two works in the municipality’s collection created during that visit, depicting the town from the mountain Gironvárri (Kirunavaara). The town is located along an ancient path for the Sámi and their reindeer, moving between the forested areas in the southeast in the winter and the mountains in the northwest in the summer. To the right in the picture is the then two-year-old, red-painted church, designed by Gustaf Wickman and with an altarpiece by Prince Eugen. However, he had already spent the summer of 1906 in Giron (Kiruna), invited by the manager for an assignment for Grängesbergsbolaget, the mine’s parent company, which resulted in a large canvas entitled *The Miner*.

Wilhelmsson’s paintings are suffused with light, often composed of facet-like elements and recurring motifs drawn from his home region around Fiskebäckskil on the west coast. He was an esteemed teacher, both at Valand’s painting school in Gothenburg and at his own private painting school in Stockholm, where Ivan Aguéli (1869–

1917) and Sixten Lundbohm (1895–1982), Hjalmar Lundbohm’s nephew, attended. It is worth noting that women were welcome at his school and places were subject to quotas. Among the female pupils were Vera Nilsson (1888–1979), Tora Vega Holmström (1880–1967), and Maj Bring (1880–1971). Wilhelmsson portrayed both Lundbohm and Prince Eugen, in whose collection he is represented.

Hjalmar Lundbohm

Etching, 1922

Wilhelmsson’s portrait of Lundbohm was painted the year after he was forced to leave LKAB. After the intensive years of building up both mining operations and the local society, a period began when the need for expertise in the industry became increasingly important and Lundbohm’s leadership style was no longer as suitable. However, his benevolent patriarchal attitude had earned him a position that has been described as “the king of Kiruna,” although there were a lot of chafes and irritations along the way. It is an old and tired man we see in the portrait, with a moustache covering his mouth and his slightly absent-minded gaze directed out of the picture to the right.

Anders Zorn, 1860–1920

Albert Engström

Etching, 1905

Anders Zorn’s portrait of his close artist-friend Albert Engström exudes concentration and seriousness with the model placed frontally in half-length. The strong lines depicting hairstyle, facial features, and clothing were made with the pointed bottom of a sheet of felt, in contrast to the background, which was left blank.

Engström's gaze is fixed on the viewer. The origins of the etching are described in Engström's 1928 biography of Zorn: during a visit to Zorn's home in Mora, the host proposed that they etch each other's portraits as a kind of friendly competition. They sat down on either side of the table in the main room and began.

At the time, Zorn was one of Sweden's most celebrated artists, who was also known internationally. In addition to his realistic paintings of valley hills and bathing women and children, he made a name for himself as a graphic artist and portraitist. The paintings of his single mother Mona, the brewery worker, deserve special mention. At Prince Eugen's Waldemarsudde, his portrait of the prince's mother, Queen Sophia, occupies a place of honor in the salon. Zorn was a close friend of both the prince and Lundbohm, and he visited Giron (Kiruna) on several occasions.

Colophon

Adress

Kin Museum of Contemporary Art, Kristallen City Hall
Stadshustorget 1, 98130 Kiruna

Staff

Tova Ejeklint, coordinator
Carola Kalla, assistant
Alice Lampa, mediation
Maria Lind, director
Inur Mustafin, technician
Christina Pestova-Ejiksson, collections
Bettina Pehrsson, deputy director
Emma Pettersson Juntti, producer, coordinator, and mediator
Paulina Sokolow, communication
Museum hosts: Alla Belova and Lena Rydström
Graphics: Marina Sergeeva

The Sun Picture—Matts Leiderstam, Prince Eugen's Altar Piece, and the Move of Kiruna Church 16 August—19 October, 2025

The exhibition is organised in collaboration with Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, where it will be on display from 15 November, 2025 to 15 March, 2026.

Many thanks to Karin Sidén, Anna Meister, Catrin Lundeberg, Cecilia Dalborg, Lars Edholm and Fredrik Helander at Prince Eugen's Waldemarsudde. Thanks also to Karin Calissendorff and Tove Nyhlén from Tyréns Sverige AB, Lisa Swedberg from Stiftelsen Föremålsvård, Joel Almqvist and Kristina Benson from LKAB, Lena Tjärnberg, Göran Stålnacke and Stefan Wylinder from Kiruna parish, and Fredric Bedoire, Lennart Lantto and Patrik Steorn.

Text on p 42-50 by Maria Lind.

Kin's visual dialect has been developed by the artists Inga-Wiktoria Påve and Fredrik Prost in collaboration with the designers Johanna Lewengard and Benedetta Crippa.

Kin Museum of Contemporary Art is the regional art museum of Norrbotten, founded in 2018 by the region and the Municipality of Kiruna.

Kin Museum för samtidskonst/dáládáidaga dávvirvuorká/
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