



Path to Hidden Knowledge

Villa Gyllenberg

Helsinki, 2020



Path to Hidden Knowledge

Villa Gyllenberg, Helsinki, 3 June – 11 October 2020

Curated by Nina Kokkinen

*esotericism and occultism • initiatory journey
• spiritual seeking • Finnish art 1890–1950 •
research-based exhibition*

Exhibition *Path to Hidden Knowledge* explored the significance of esotericism and occultism in Finnish art between 1890 and 1950. Designed as an immersive experience, the exhibition guided visitors towards fundamental questions of existence, along paths guarded by shadows and illuminated by hope and spiritual insight.

The exhibition's architecture and narrative framework were conceived as an initiatory journey, drawing inspiration from nineteenth-century literary works by the French Theosophical writer Édouard Schuré and the British novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, both of whom inspired many artists of the period.



The exhibition and its curatorial concept were grounded in extensive academic research on esotericism and occultism. During the curatorial process, a comprehensive survey was undertaken of Finnish artists engaged with esotericism and spiritual seeking. Alongside celebrated masterpieces by artists such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Helene Schjerfbeck, the exhibition featured rarely exhibited, and in some cases previously unexhibited, works by lesser-known artists including Meri Genetz, Eva Törnwall-Collin, Torsten Wasastjerna, Ilona Harima and Werner von Hausen.

Many of the artists represented in the exhibition were affiliated with Anthroposophy, Freemasonry or Theosophy. Others pursued answers to the mysteries of human existence as more independent seekers, without committing themselves to any esoteric movement.



“This immersive exhibition invites reflection on the premises and aims of artistic creation while bringing to light works that have rarely, if ever, been seen by the public.”

– Art critic and curator Timo Valjakka, in *Helsingin Sanomat*



Path to Hidden Knowledge was presented at the Villa Gyllenberg, Helsinki, from 3 June to 11 October 2020. Despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition attracted a substantial audience and received an enthusiastic response. It was accompanied by the scholarly publication *Spiritual Treasures: Esotericism in the Finnish Art World 1890–1950* (eds. Nina Kokkinen & Lotta Nylund), which presented new research on Finnish artists' multifaceted connections to esotericism. The volume received an honorary mention in Finland's national Best Art Book of the Year competition.

The exhibition also gave rise to the scholarly symposium *Clear-sighted Art – Open Mind? Encounters between Art and Esotericism*, which brought together researchers, contemporary artists, authors and museum professionals engaged with related themes. The symposium subsequently led to the publication of the peer-reviewed special issue *Seekers of Spiritual Art and Higher Wisdom: Encounters between Art and Esotericism* (eds. Nina Kokkinen & Ruth Illman), further advancing interdisciplinary scholarship on art and esotericism.

