

HANKO * HANGÖ

Artists' Hanko

'Thalatta, Thalatta – the sea, the sea,' shouted Greek soldiers when they saw the Black Sea on their way back from a trying military expedition to Asia Minor in 401–400 BC. Professor Rolf Lagerborg and his family had the same feeling of freedom when they arrived in Hanko in 1910, and inspired by the sea, they named their villa 'Thalatta'.

The sea has also enchanted many artists searching for inspiration in Hanko. At the beginning of the 20th century, Hanko was a sophisticated spa town. Artists, however, were more impressed by the natural beauty of the cape and the sea, which both brought forth their creativity and forced them to face themselves.

'The same fascination that countless times has made me find a good spot on the floor to see an artist performing, once brought me to a vantage point by the Baltic Sea, on the Hankoniemi cape. Day after day I watched the sea and its various faces. I saw it breathe in long, calm waves, deceptively tranquil and cunning, as if hiding a secret; I saw it roll in angry surges, pitch black under a heavy snowfall; and I saw it sleepy and grey, poor and tired, dying on the beach as monotonic waves in the endless autumn drizzle... I wasn't going to settle for fantasies but got to know it and found it to have a soul that I felt sympathy for. It was deceitful, callous, violent, and awe-inspiring. But I kept the upper hand, because I wouldn't give myself up to it entirely, because I feared it and respected and admired it. All people have a touch of the sea in them – at least all interesting people.'

This is how writer Karl August Tavaststjerna described his relationship with the sea. He stayed in Hanko in the early 1890s and worked as the chief editor of the local paper for a year. Later Tavaststjerna moved to Pori, but his longing for Hanko never ceased. In Hanko, his base was the home of Arthur Borgström, an educated businessman. Tavaststjerna fell in love with Borgström's wife Aline, for whom the realist writer relentlessly wrote his 'Sonnets to Diana'.

Artist Venny Soldan Brofeldt and writer Juhani Aho, with their families, also spent summers on the Hankoniemi cape. Aho was charmed by the 'calm, softly swelling sea that does not crush, threaten, or frighten but



loves its own, rocks and lulls its children – all torn and quarrelsome people, all of you who hate and harass each other, all burdened by twisted thoughts and trifling tasks and toil, why not come here?’

Aho was a passionate fisherman. He charted the local fishing waters and taught the residents of the village how to use a spinning rod. The family lived in Tvärminne, naked most of the time, which at the time was popular in artistic circles. To mark Sunday, however, master singer Helge Lindberg in Täktom, on the island of Sandskär, decided to wear a belt.

The villagers must have been mystified by the artists’ lifestyle, but, being artists, they were allowed to be bohemian. Besides the sun-bathed landscapes of Hankoniemi and her sons, Venny Soldan Brofeldt painted the villagers and their everyday life. So did artist Helena Westermarck, who was of the opinion that the people living on the coast were the most sophisticated members of the Finnish population.

Composer Jean Sibelius spent a few days at the spa, celebrating once so riotously that the help of the spa doctor was needed to get him back on his feet. Sibelius escaped his wife’s pregnancy by visiting Tvärminne in summer 1902, bringing with him his grand piano, hauled with great effort along the sandy road to the house of pilot Österlund. In the evenings, the pilot would sit behind the composer’s door, listening to him playing.

Sibelius also played the piano for summer guests who danced on the nearby cliff. The pilot’s family took care of the composer and was truly worried when, one day, he did not show up for dinner in due course.

Sibelius had gone for a walk on the seashore, swum to his heart’s content, and fallen asleep under a pine tree on the sandy beach – where he was later found. The experiences of that summer inspired the song ‘Untako vain’ (Only Dreams).

The Hanko-born artist Carl-Gustaf Lilius and his wife, writer Irmelin Sandman-Lilius, have also found inspiration in Hanko. Carl-Gustaf Lilius’s bronze statues Lintu (The Bird) and Lenore can be found in the parks of Hanko, and Irmelin Sandman-Lilius’s Tulavall series and the adventures of the little boy called Rasse Rask are set in Hanko. The Lilius villa, next door to Villa Thalatta, boasts a magnificent view of the sea and the broad horizon. In the nearby Raatihuoneenpuisto park, the bronze statue Marielle lies on her granite bed. Dutch sculptor Sten Fogelberg donated the statue to the inhabitants of Hanko, hoping that peace and calm would always prevail around her.

Marketta Wall
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Sources:

Birgitta Ekström, Hangon muinaismuistoja, muistomerkkejä ja veistoksia
(The monuments and sculptures of Hanko)

Birgitta Ekström Söderlund, Hangossa kuin ulkomailla konsanaan I (In
Hanko – almost like abroad I)

Birgitta Ekström Söderlund and Marketta Wall, Hangossa kuin ulkomailla
konsanaan II (In Hanko – almost like abroad II)