



Large  
Print

# Helene Schjerfbeck

The Gabrielle  
Jungels-Winkler  
Galleries

Gallery 1

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Multimedia tour

## Gallery 1



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Gallery 1 - Introduction



The Door, 1884



The Convalescent, 1888



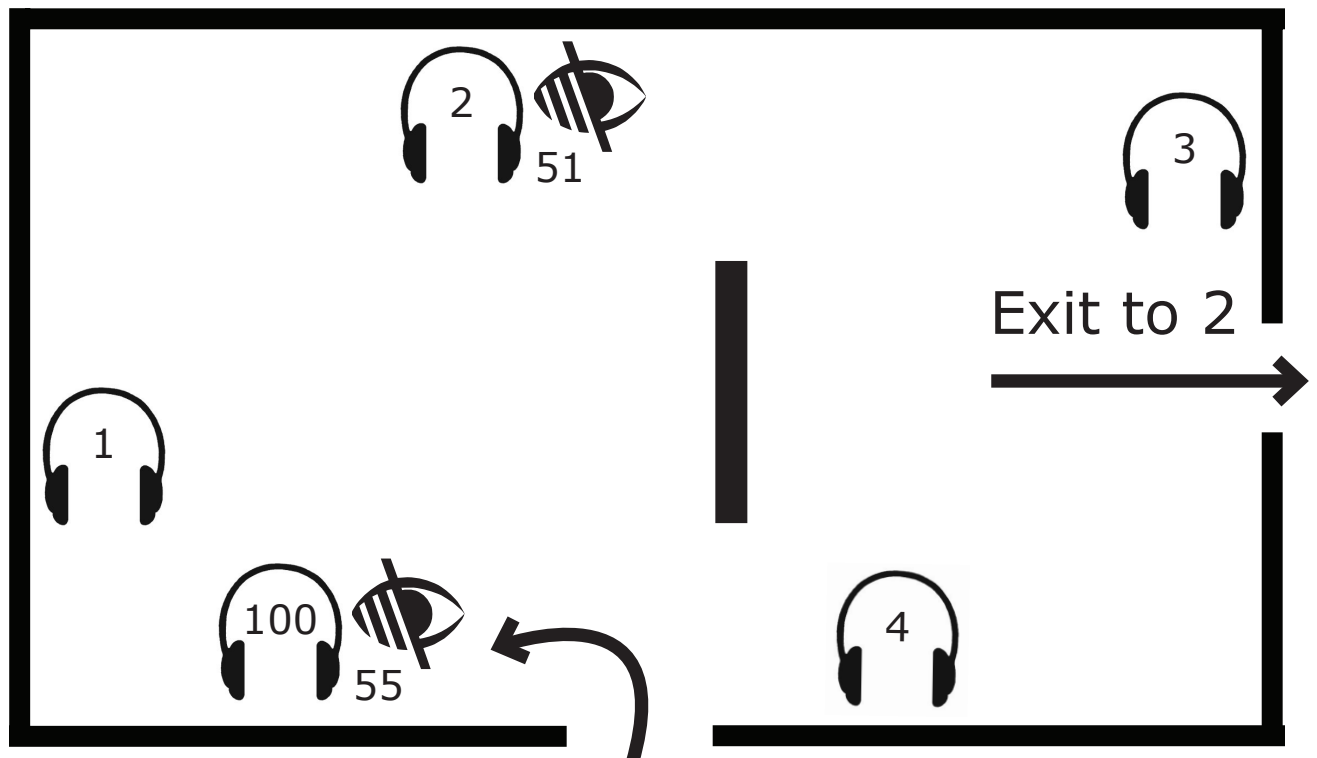
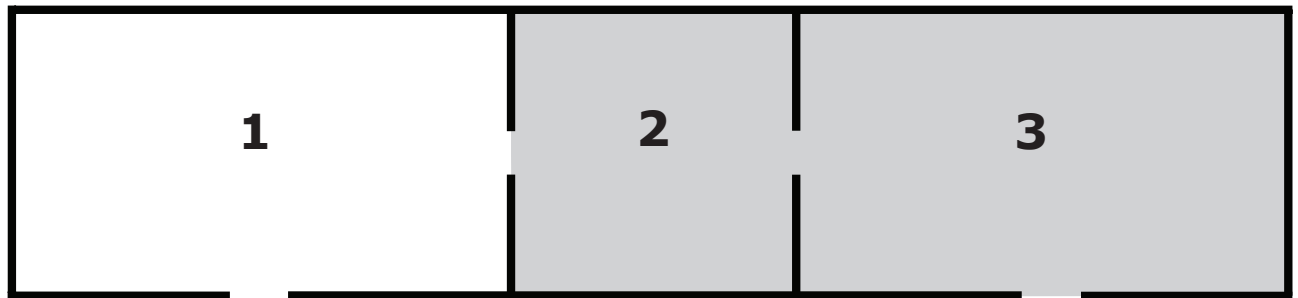
My Mother, 1902



Maria, 1909

Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

You are in Gallery 1



Exhibition entrance

# Helene Schjerfbeck

Royal Academy of Arts

The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

20 July — 27 October 2019

## Contents

**Page 5** Introduction

**Page 6** I Paris, Pont-Aven and St Ives

**Page 18** II Moments of Silence

Supported by



Supported by



# Introduction

Helene Schjerfbeck was born in Finland in 1862 and died in Sweden in 1946. Today she is celebrated widely across the Nordic countries and mainland Europe, yet remains unfamiliar here. This is the first solo exhibition of her work in the UK, almost 130 years after Schjerfbeck herself exhibited in London in 1890.

Schjerfbeck's long career spanned seismic shifts in modern art, from Impressionism and Cubism to the emergence of pure abstraction. Aware of these movements, she forged an independent path and constantly tested her own stylistic and technical boundaries.

Over seven decades, she produced more than a thousand works, many of which appear startlingly contemporary today. This exhibition aims to chart Schjerfbeck's remarkable artistic journey through 65 paintings.

# I Paris, Pont-Aven and St Ives



Schjerfbeck's talent was recognised aged eleven, when she entered the Finnish Art Society's drawing school as its youngest ever student. After four years diligently following the traditional teaching programme, she moved to a private academy for a further two years, where Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting was a key influence.

In 1880 she received a state travel grant and moved to Paris. She studied at the Académie Colarossi where she made lifelong friendships with the Austrian painter Marianne Preindlsberger, who appears in the foreground of 'Two Profiles' (1881); the Norwegian painter Annie Anker; and Maria Wiik, a fellow Finn.

Schjerfbeck was influenced by the naturalistic style, typified by Jules Bastien-Lepage.

On seeing a couple of her works he once commented, “these paintings have fine things and fierce things”, perhaps recognising something of Schjerfbeck’s independence.

Alongside accomplished scenes of everyday life that balance lively brushwork with convincing description, she explored the materiality of paint in less conventional pictures.

The unpopulated landscapes she made in the artist’s colony of Pont-Aven, Brittany, such as ‘Shadow on the Wall’ (1883) and ‘The Door’ (1884), place emphasis on formal qualities of light, colour and shape rather than narrative.

Schjerfbeck made two visits to Cornwall in 1887/8 and 1889/90 at the invitation of Preindlsberger, who had married the English painter Adrian Scott Stokes (a former student at the RA Schools, he would be elected an Academician in 1919).

Among the works she made in St Ives is 'The Bakery' (1887) in which she explored new ideas for imagined spatial arrangements and textures. In other pictures, she conformed to conservative Victorian tastes, producing sentimental scenes of children.

It is believed she sold some works in Britain that are yet to be traced. Her major work of this period, 'The Convalescent' (1888), was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1888 and awarded a bronze medal at the Paris World's Fair of 1889.



**I Paris, Pont-Aven and St Ives -  
list of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Two Profiles 1881**

Oil on wood

Gerda and Salomo Wuorio Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

During her years travelling and studying in France and England, Schjerfbeck formed close friendships with several other female artists, with whom she maintained lifelong correspondences.

Here she portrays two of these friends; on the left is Marianne Preindlsberger (later Stokes, following her marriage to Adrian Scott Stokes RA), and on the right, possibly the Danish artist Annie Anker.

# **Portrait of Helena Westermarck 1884**

Oil on canvas

Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation, Mänttä

# **Portrait of a Woman 1884**

Oil on board

The Karl Hedman Collection, Ostrobothnian Museum,  
Vaasa

# **Portrait of a Girl (St Ives) c. 1889**

Oil on canvas mounted on wood

Nils Dahlström Collection, Turku Art Museum

# **Clothes Drying 1883**

Oil on canvas

Private collection. On long-term loan to Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# The Door

## 1884



Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

As well as large Salon pieces such as 'The Convalescent' (hanging nearby), Schjerfbeck worked on smaller, experimental paintings, which she kept largely private.

This modest subject – the light spilling under a door – is infused with atmospheric qualities, hinting at the unique turn that Schjerfbeck's work would later take.

The scene was observed inside the Tremalo Chapel, Pont-Aven, which also contains the polychrome sculpture of the crucifixion that was to inspire Gauguin.

# **Chickens among Corn Stooks c. 1887**

Oil on panel

Penlee House Gallery & Museum, Penzance

Purchased in 2007 with funding from The Art Fund,  
V&A/MLA Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of  
Penlee House

# **View of St Ives 1887**

Oil on wood

Private collection

# **The Bakery**

## **1887**

Oil on canvas

The Karl Hedman Collection, Ostrobothnian Museum,  
Vaasa

During her time in St Ives, Schjerfbeck paid a small fee to set up an easel in the local bakery. The resulting painting is not a naturalistic depiction of the working kitchen.

By removing all figures from the scene, Schjerfbeck captures the atmosphere through colour, light and composition. The glowing fire draws the eye deep into the dark space, a warm heart to the still room.

# Woman with a Child 1887

Oil on canvas

Private collection. On long-term loan to Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# The Convalescent 1888



Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Head of a Girl Crocheting 1904–5**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Fragment 1904**

Oil on canvas

Villa Gyllenberg, Helsinki. Signe and Ane Gyllenberg Foundation

Fragment is one of the first works Schjerfbeck made following her move from Helsinki in 1902, which brought about a radical change in style.



Inspired by the early Renaissance frescos she had seen in Italy a decade previously, Schjerfbeck imagined this painting to be a fragment of a larger scene.

To replicate the effect of fresco in oil, she scraped and reworked the surface many times, revealing different layers of paint in imitation of a deteriorating fresco with faded colours.

## **Shadow on the Wall (Breton Landscape) 1883**

Oil on canvas mounted on wood

Niemistö Collection

# II Moments of Silence

During the 1890s, Schjerfbeck was based in Helsinki and worked as painting tutor for the Finnish Art Society. Her employer also sponsored Schjerfbeck to make trips to St Petersburg, Vienna and Florence in order to copy works by Frans Hals, Velázquez, Holbein and Fra Angelico; these replicas were brought back to Finland, as the national collections lacked Old Master paintings.

Through making these detailed studies, Schjerfbeck learnt about painterly techniques and composition using areas of light and dark.

Her experiences of seeing art in the world's great museums left enduring impressions that were to sustain her artistic imagination, and sometimes emerge in

direct quotations – for example, the gold lettering of 'Maria' (1909) recalls Holbein's naming of his sitters on bold blue-green backgrounds.

On giving up her teaching post in 1902, Schjerfbeck moved with her mother to Hyvinkää, a town some 30 miles north of Helsinki.

Nonetheless, Schjerfbeck kept in contact with the international art scene through regular correspondence with friends and by reading contemporary art magazines.

No longer interested in sending submissions to the Paris Salon, nor willing to cater to the taste for nationalistic pictures in Finland, she began to experiment.

Now able to dedicate herself fully to painting, Schjerfbeck embarked on larger canvases. Pared down compositions reject detailed description in favour of flat areas of contrasting tones.

Dry, rubbed paint creates hazy contours, and a restricted palette focuses attention on subtle colours and luminosity. These works exude a sense of quiet and introspection.

## **II Moments of Silence - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Tapestry 1914–17**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Seemingly caught in a moment of private contemplation, two luminous, fashionable figures stand in front of a mysterious landscape.

Only the furniture reveals the background to be a large hanging tapestry rather than a natural location.

This ambiguous setting gives the scene a dream-like quality, as if the viewer were joining the figures in a flight of fantasy or perhaps watching actors on set.

## **The Schoolgirl II (Girl in Black) 1908**

Oil on canvas

Herman and Elisabeth Hallonblad Collection,  
Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

# **The Seamstress (The Working Woman) 1905**

Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

# **Silence 1907**

Oil and tempera on canvas

The Art Foundation Merita

# **My Mother 1902**

Oil on canvas

Moderna Museet, Stockholm



# **At Home (Mother Sewing) 1903**

Oil on canvas

Turku Art Museum

# **My Mother 1909**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# Maria 1909



Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki





Large  
Print

# Helene Schjerfbeck

The Gabrielle  
Jungels-Winkler  
Galleries

Gallery 2

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Multimedia tour

## Gallery 2



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Gallery 2 - Introduction



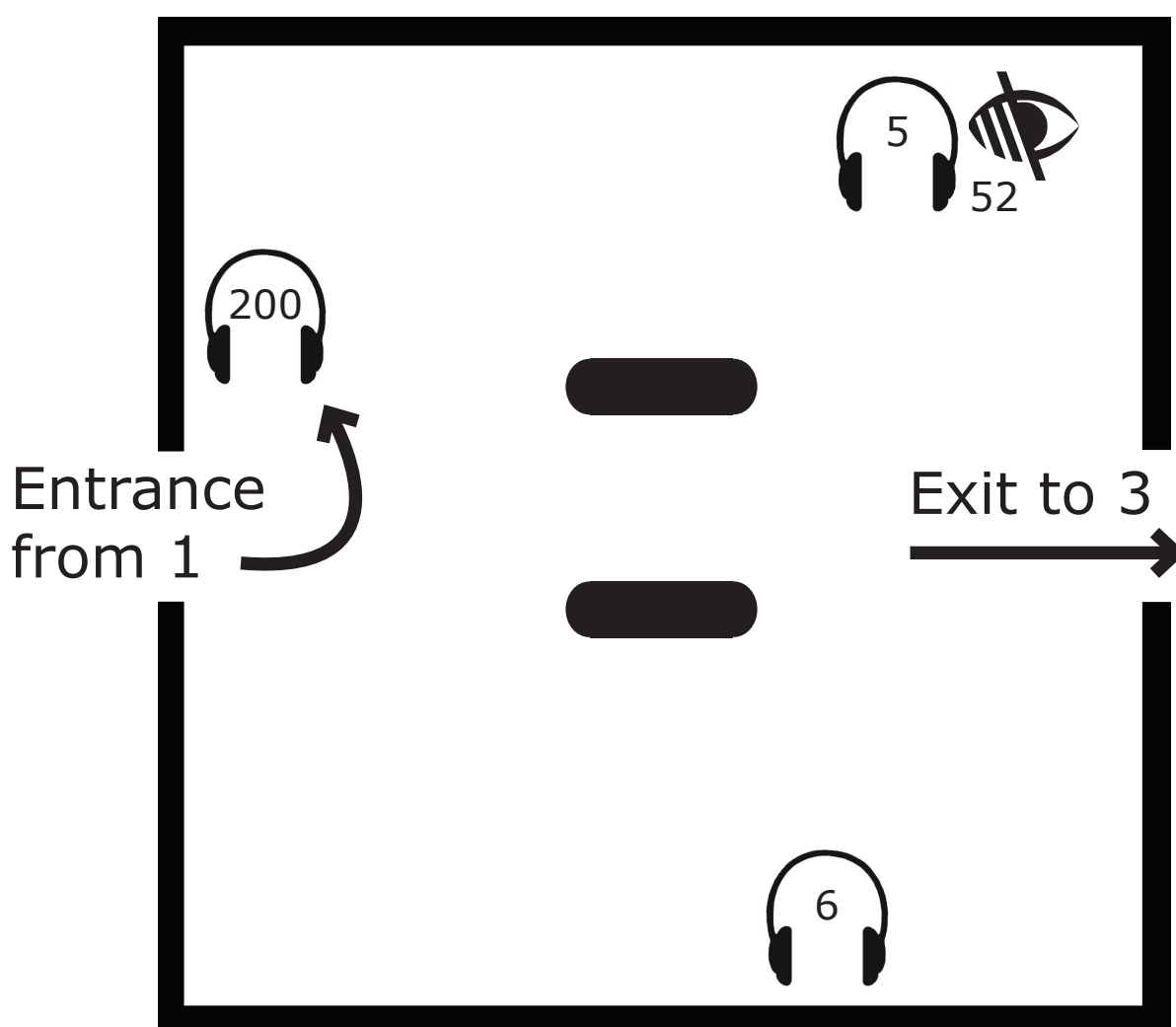
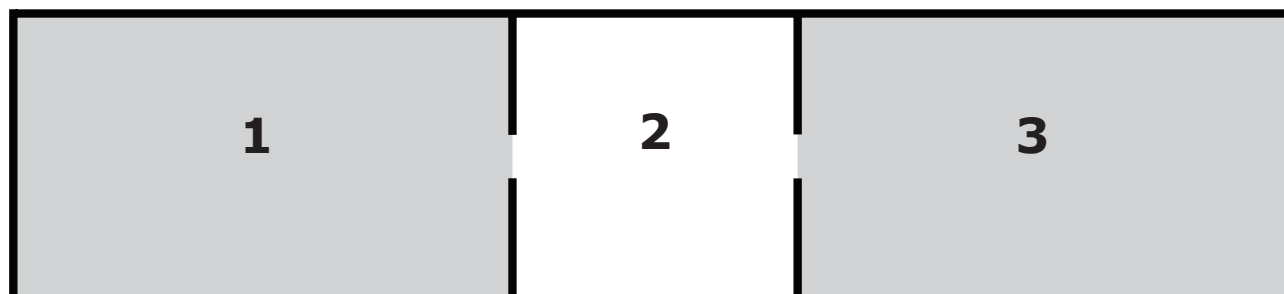
Self Portrait with Black  
Background, 1915



Self Portrait with Red Spot, 1944

# Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

## You are in Gallery 2



 = seating

# Helene Schjerfbeck

Royal Academy of Arts

The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

20 July — 27 October 2019

## Contents

**Page 5** III Self-portraits

Supported by



Supported by



# III Self-portraits



Schjerfbeck painted her first self-portrait at age 22 and her last at 83. By grouping the self-portraits, it is possible to chart her ageing process as well as the extraordinary evolution of her style.

The pale palette and open brushwork of 'Self-portrait' (1895) reflect the influence of Impressionism. After the turn of the century, a shift towards a more expressive use of colour and gesture can be seen, as in 'Self-portrait, Black Background' (1915), which retains a spontaneous, convincing presence despite its bold stylisation.

During the 1930s Schjerfbeck experimented with largely monochrome treatments, breaking the face into angular shapes, giving it a mask-like appearance, often punctured by a confrontational gaze.

(continued over)

Schjerfbeck's technique involved applying paint and then scraping it off or rubbing it back. She repeatedly reworked surfaces with a brush, palette knife or cloth and even sandpaper.

The layering and erasure emulate the effects of time in paint. In some cases, parts of the canvas are deliberately left bare, using this texture as part of the picture.

In her final years, which coincided with the end of the Second World War, Schjerfbeck executed around twenty abstracted self-portraits. These haunting images, such as 'Self-portrait in Black and Pink' (1945), reveal Schjerfbeck's fascination with the physical and psychological effects of ageing.

### **III Self-portraits - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

## **Self-portrait 1880–4**

Pencil on paper

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

## **Self-portrait 1884–5**

Oil on canvas

Friends of Ateneum Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Self-portrait**

## **1895**

Oil on canvas

The Provincial Museum of Western Nyland, Raseborg

# **Self-portrait**

## **1912**

Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

# **Self-portrait, a Study**

## **1915**

Pencil, watercolour, charcoal and silver leaf on paper

Turku Art Museum



# **Self-portrait, Black Background 1915**



Oil on canvas

Herman and Elisabeth Hallonblad Collection,  
Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

# **Unfinished Self-portrait 1921**

Oil on canvas

Tatjana and Pentti Wähäjärvi Collection, Riihimäki  
Art Museum

# **Self-portrait in Black Dress 1934**

Oil on canvas

Reitz Foundation

# **Self-portrait 1935**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Self-portrait with Palette 1937**

Oil on canvas

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

# **Self-portrait with Black Mouth 1939**

Oil on canvas

Didrichsen Art Museum, Helsinki

# **Self-portrait with Red Spot 1944**



Oil on canvas

Gösta and Bertha Stenman Donation, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Self-portrait en face I 1945**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Self-portrait, Light and Shadow**

## **1945**

Oil on canvas

Villa Gyllenberg, Helsinki. Signe and Ane Gyllenberg Foundation

# **Self-portrait in Black and Pink**

## **1945**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **An Old Painter**

## **1945**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Last Self-portrait**

## **c. 1945**

Charcoal on paper

Villa Gyllenberg, Helsinki. Signe and Ane Gyllenberg  
Foundation



Large  
Print

# Helene Schjerfbeck

The Gabrielle  
Jungels-Winkler  
Galleries

Gallery 3

**Do not remove from gallery**

# Multimedia tour

## Gallery 3



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Gallery 3 - Introduction



The Sailor (Einar Reuter), 1918



Girl from Eydtkuhne II, 1927



Madonna of Charity (after El Greco),  
1941. Girl in Brown and Blue (Inez),  
1944

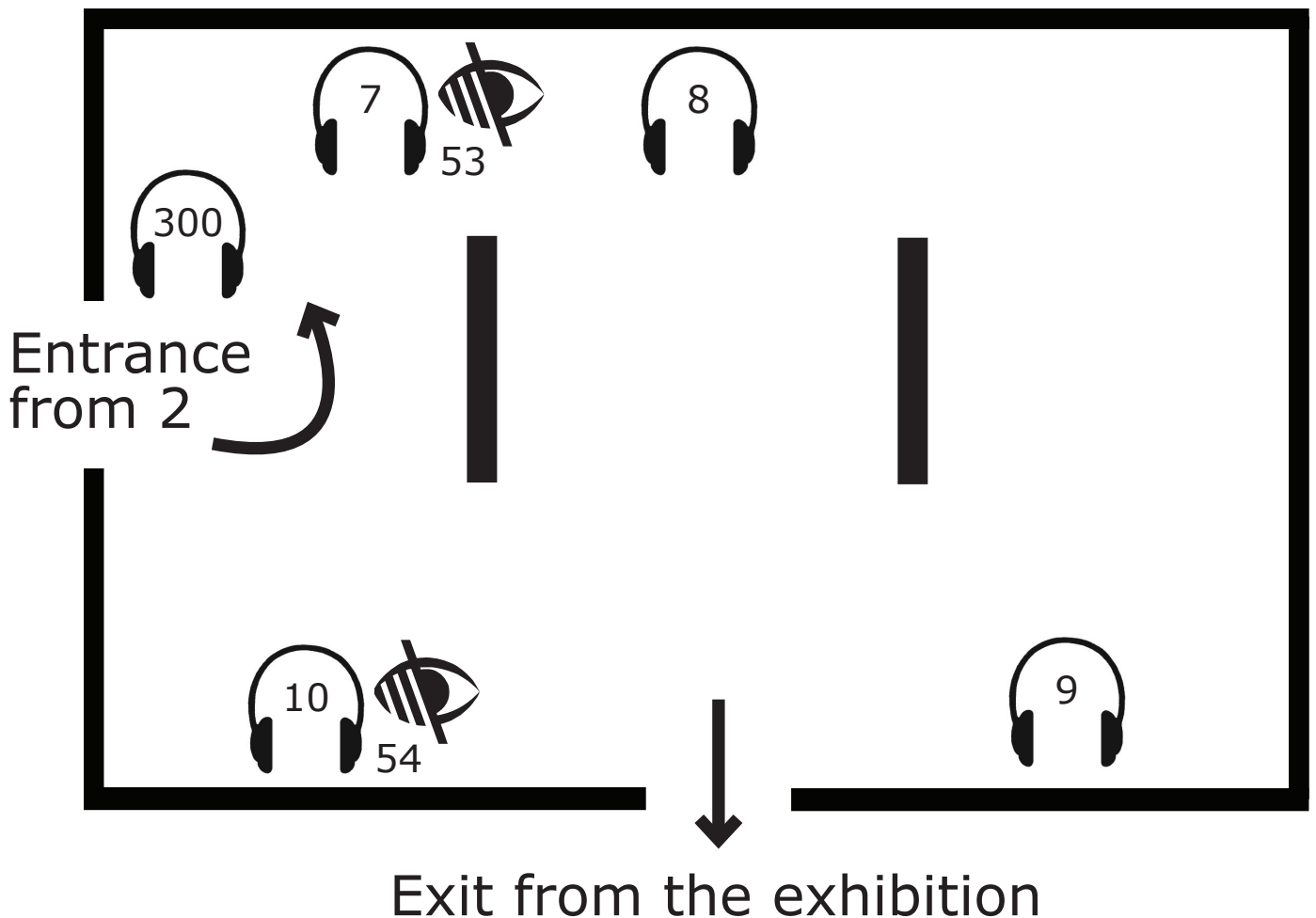
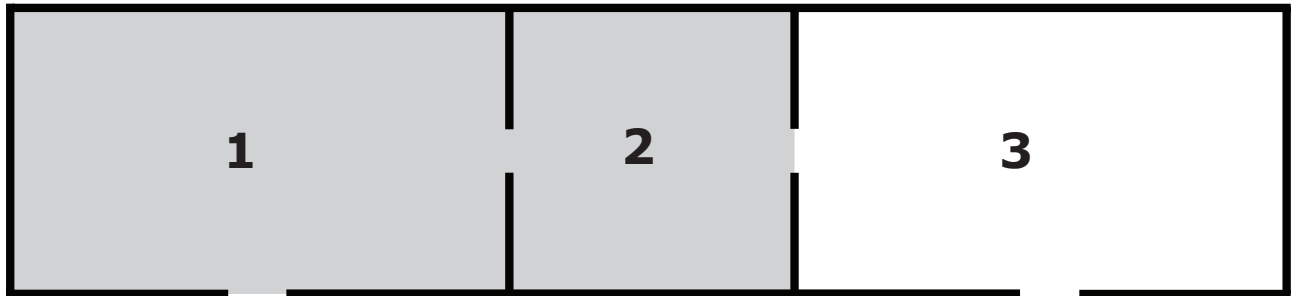


Still Life with Blackening Apples,  
1944



Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

# You are in Gallery 3



# Helene Schjerfbeck

Royal Academy of Arts

The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries

20 July — 27 October 2019

## Contents

**Page 5** IV The Modern Look

**Page 20** V Still-life

Supported by



Supported by





# IV The Modern Look

This gallery concentrates on Schjerfbeck's unique approach to portraiture from 1909 onwards. Her sitters were family, friends and models from the local community.

Although her practice was to begin by painting from life, a realistic depiction was not the goal; as she once stated, she did not want her pictures to be "people hanging on the wall".

In some ways, her sitters were a vehicle for experiments in colour, tone and composition, which capture an atmosphere or mood, rather than a simple likeness.

What is so unusual about Schjerfbeck's portraits, especially for the time they were made, is her fusion of visual information: as well as observing the sitter, she looked at diverse source images and drew on her memory and imagination.

Schjerfbeck subscribed to fashion magazines such as 'Marie Claire', and her paintings register particular trends, such as the gender-neutral look of 1920s flappers and the straight-line clothing made fashionable by Coco Chanel.

She continued to borrow from art history, sometimes basing compositions on particular works as in 'Profile of Madonna, after El Greco' (1943). As with her self-portraits, faces often take on a mask-like appearance, and the notion of costume and masquerade is prevalent.

For example, 'The Skier (English Girl)' (1909) refers to the tradition of the Pierrot and registers Schjerfbeck's interest in eighteenth-century painting and the Rococo revival.

Schjerfbeck's approach is reflected in her titles, which often refer to types.

Sometimes these reflect the working roles of women, such as nurses and teachers.

(Finland was the third country in the world to grant women's suffrage, in 1906.)

At other times, they are semi-fictional:

'Måns Schjerfbeck (The Motorist)' (1933) depicts Helene's nephew, who owned neither car nor driving license, while the startling 'Circus Girl' (1916) is more than likely a local factory worker.

## **IV The Modern Look - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)**

# **The Skier (English Girl) 1909**

Oil on canvas

Sven-Harrys konstmuseum, Stockholm

It is not known whether Mabel Ellis, the English model for this unusual portrait, was a skier, although her caked make-up may have acted as sun protection, as required when skiing.

Her unusual appearance, with exaggeratedly red cheeks on flat white skin, also points to Schjerfbeck's interest in a contemporary revival of eighteenth-century Rococo style.

The Rococo fashion for masquerade and masking relates to Schjerfbeck's approach

to semi-fictional portraiture, in which identities become layered or confused.

## **Circus Girl** **1916**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

## **The Sailor** **(Einar Reuter)** **1918**

Oil on canvas

Private collection



# **Costume Picture II 1909**

Oil on canvas

Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery,  
Helsinki

# **Einar Reuter III 1919–20**

Oil on canvas

Friends of Ateneum Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki



# **Girl from California I 1919**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Girl from Eydtkuhne II 1927**



Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Girl from the Islands**

## **1929**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

With her cloche hat and unfussy clothing, this girl typifies the androgynous 'garçon' look of the interwar period. This is likely to be of Schjerfbeck's imagining. Schjerfbeck often used local women and children as her models, projecting onto them the styles she found in fashion magazines.

Perhaps because she transformed them so completely, she disliked showing models their completed portraits. The girl's striking, simplified facial features also point to Schjerfbeck's interest in so-called 'primitive' sculpture and Japanese woodblock prints.

# **Profile of a Woman from Memory 1932**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **The Teacher 1933**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **The Landlord II**

## **1928**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Måns Schjerfbeck**

## **1930**

Oil on canvas

Private collection. On long-term loan to Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Måns Schjerfbeck**

## **(The Motorist)**

### **1933**

Oil on canvas

Sven-Harrys konstmuseum, Stockholm

The model for this portrait was Schjerfbeck's beloved nephew, Måns. Although in her seventies when she made this work, Schjerfbeck kept up to date with contemporary fashions and ideas, and often portrayed her sitters in imagined modern roles.

Here Måns, a school teacher, is cast as a dashing motorist – whereas in reality he did not own a car or even have a driving licence.

# **Girl with Beret**

## **1935**

Oil on canvas

Didrichsen Art Museum, Helsinki

# **Hjördis**

## **1934**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Stubborn Girl**

## **1938–9**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Madonna de la Charité, after El Greco 1941**



Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Portrait of a Girl in Blue and Brown (Inez) 1944**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# Nurse I (Kaija Lahtinen)

## 1943

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

As she grew older, Schjerfbeck spent increasing periods of time in hospital and nursing homes. Her desire to paint was strong, however, and she used the nurses who cared for her as models.

In this portrait, the nurse's calm expression and downward gaze show the influence of Schjerfbeck's other preoccupation at the time, creating reworkings of El Greco paintings based on black-and-white reproductions, as in 'Madonna de la Charité, after El Greco' (displayed nearby).



# **Profile of Madonna, after El Greco 1943**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art  
Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Alarm 1935**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **The Family Heirloom 1915–16**

Oil on canvas

August and Lydia Keirkner Fine Arts Collection, Ateneum  
Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# V Still-life

For Schjerfbeck, who greatly admired Cézanne, still-life was a way to focus intently on the spatial, tonal and colour relationships between objects. In this genre, she produced some of her most abstract works, such as 'Market Apple' (1927).

She often had several canvases on the go at any one time, switching between portraiture and still-life. The final painting she made, 'Three Pears on a Plate' (1945), echoes the sense of mortality and decay that pervades the self-portraits.

Having travelled and exhibited internationally during her youth, in later life Schjerfbeck began to garner attention. The art dealer Gösta Stenman, who operated in Helsinki and Stockholm, and her biographer Einar Reuter (seen in two works in this room) both promoted her work.

Schjerfbeck had her first retrospective at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki in 1917 and went on to contribute to exhibitions in Sweden, Germany and France.

A plan for an exhibition in the United States in 1939 was cancelled owing to the outbreak of the Second World War. After her death, Schjerfbeck was chosen to represent Finland at the Venice Biennale in 1956.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Schjerfbeck's work has been somewhat overlooked in recent years is that it is not easy to categorise; this testifies to its originality.

Her independence of mind and continual technical innovation make Schjerfbeck a pioneer among painters. She once commented: "Dreaming does not suit me. To work, to live through work, that is my path."

**V Still-life - list of works**  
**(clockwise in order of hang)**

# **Three Pears on a Plate**

## **1945**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

# **Still-life with**

# **Blackening**

# **Apples**

## **1944**

Oil on canvas

Didrichsen Art Museum, Helsinki



# **Pumpkins**

## **1935**

Oil on canvas

The Collection of Maire Gullichsen Art Foundation,  
Pori Art Museum

# **Still-life in Green**

## **c. 1930**

Oil on canvas

Antell Collections, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish  
National Gallery, Helsinki

# **Market Apple**

## **1927**

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Schjerfbeck's distinctive technique of repeatedly scraping and repainting the canvas is taken to an extreme in this still-life. The resulting flatness renders the painting almost completely abstract.

By focusing completely on a lone apple within a single colour-field, Schjerfbeck was pushing the boundaries of what a still-life could be.

# **Red Apples**

## **1915**

Oil on canvas

Yrjö and Nanny Kaunisto Collection, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki

# Your feedback, please

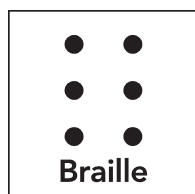
As we are committed to access for all, we would like your feedback on our large-print provision. Feedback forms are available from both Information Desks on the ground floor.

We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits in with your schedule.

For more information please contact the Access team at [access@royalacademy.org.uk](mailto:access@royalacademy.org.uk)

Thank you.



**InTouch**  **at the RA**

Typography & layout: Portugal Prints; Brent, Wandsworth and Westminster Mind [www.bwwmind.org.uk](http://www.bwwmind.org.uk)

© Copyright Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2019