

# Early Sámi visual artists - Western fine art meets Sámi culture

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## **ABSTRACT**

Johan Turi (1854–1936), Nils Nilsson Skum (1872–1951) and John Savio (1902–1938) were among the first Sámi visual artists. The production of their art work occurred between the 1910s and the early 1950s. Sámi aesthetics had its basis in folklore, i.e., handicraft or *duodji*, which did not follow the principle of art for art's sake but combined beauty and practicality. Art was part of community life. Not until the 1970s was the word *daidda*, which is Finnish in origin and which means “art”, adopted into the Sámi language. Turi and Skum became famous through their books. They drew and wrote in order to pass the traditional knowledge of their people on to succeeding generations. They also wanted to introduce Sámi life and culture to non-Sámi people. One typical feature of their work is that they depicted Sáminess in a realistic way and sought to strengthen and preserve the Sámi identity through their art. In Turi and Skum's work, both the documentation of community life and their own personal expression were strongly present and equally important; for this reason their pictures and texts have both practical and aesthetic dimensions. They did not attend school and were self-taught artists. The third pioneer of Sámi visual arts was John Savio, who, unlike the other two, attended secondary school and studied visual arts both independently and under the guidance of a mentor. He expressively combined Western ways of depiction with Sámi subjects.

My article examines what made these early Sámi artists change over from Sámi handicraft, *duodji*, to Western visual arts, how they used Western pictorial conventions in dealing with their Sámi subjects, and the significance of their art for Sámi identity and culture. They lived and worked under cross pressure: the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by racial theories that denigrated Sámi people, and the period following World War II was marked by demands for modernization and

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assimilation. Therefore, I also discuss how the conflicts of the time influenced the art of these three early Sámi artists.

## INTRODUCTION

Johan Turi (1854–1936), Nils Nilsson Skum (1872–1951) and John Savio (1902–1938) were among the first Sámi visual artists. The production of their art work occurred between the 1910s and the early 1950s. Sámi aesthetics had its basis in folklore, i.e., handicraft or *duodji*, which did not follow the principle of art for art's sake but combined beauty and practicality. Art was part of community life. Not until the 1970s was the word *daiida*, which is Finnish in origin and which means “art”, adopted into the Sámi language (Bergmann 2009, 61–62).

Turi and Skum became famous through their books. They drew and wrote in order to pass the traditional knowledge of their people on to succeeding generations. They also wanted to introduce Sámi life and culture to non-Sámi people. One typical feature of their work is that they depicted Sáminess in a realistic way and sought to strengthen and preserve the Sámi identity through their art. In Turi and Skum's work, both the documentation of community life and their own personal expression were strongly present and equally important; for this reason their pictures and texts have both practical and aesthetic dimensions. They did not attend school and were self-taught artists. The third pioneer of Sámi visual arts was John Savio, who, unlike the other two, attended secondary school and studied visual arts both independently and under the guidance of a mentor. He expressively combined Western ways of depiction with Sámi subjects. In some art history texts, Oddmund Kristiansen (1920–1997) and Iver Jåks (1932–2007) are also regarded as pioneers (Bergmann 2006, 63). However, in my opinion, the careers of these two artists are part of a different art world which started to become more global following World War II; their most significant artistic activity took place from the 1960s through the end of the 1990s.

My approach in this article is based on the history of art and culture, drawing on the tradition of Erwin Panofsky's iconology. I rely on the third level of his iconological method – iconographical synthesis – according to which content is seen as reflecting the prevailing ideological or historical, philosophical and/or basic attitude of an area (Panofsky 1972, 5–17). Turi, Skum and Savio are well-known in Norway and Sweden but not, for instance, in Finland. Therefore, I will present the main points of their biographies. The sources used in my article vary: Hans Nerhus's book based on his

memories of John Savio and Ernst Manker's text on Nils Nilsson Skum's art. In order to take a more critical approach to my sources, I have combined various texts. My article examines what made these early Sámi artists change over from Sámi handicraft, *duodji*, to Western visual arts, how they used Western pictorial conventions in dealing with their Sámi subjects, and the significance of their art for Sámi identity and culture. They lived and worked under cross pressure: the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by racial theories that denigrated Sámi people, and the period following World War II was marked by demands for modernization and assimilation. Therefore, I also discuss how the conflicts of the time influenced the art of these three early Sámi artists.

### JOHAN TURI – A SÁMI AUTHOR

Johan Olafsson Turi was born on 12 March 1854 in Kautokeino, Finnmark, in northern Norway. The original Sámi name was spelt Thuuri, and later Thuri in Swedish. The Norwegian version of his name is Johannes Olsen Thuri. He was the first Sámi artist in the modern sense, signing his drawings (Salokorpi 2004; Bergmann 2009, 63). According to Harald Gaski, a researcher of Sámi literature, Turi is the most important tradition bearer and the most widely read communicator of Sámi values and the wisdom of the elders (Gaski 2003, 145).

The closing of the border between Norway and Russia in 1852 forced many Sámi families to move to the Swedish side, as the winter pastures of the reindeer became too small (Hansegård 1988, 9; Aikio 1979, 6–7). Around the year 1860, the Turi family started to move south, arriving in the Sámi village of Talma in Jukkasjärvi Parish in Swedish Lapland by the year 1870. The members of the Turi family were reindeer herders, but Johan was more interested in hunting and fishing than reindeer husbandry, and he became a skilful hunter and fisherman. He helped his brothers Aslak and Olof with reindeer herding occasionally; they and their families lived the nomadic life of the Reindeer Sámi (Tveterås et al. 2002, 103; Aikio 1979, 6–7; Svonni 2011, 483). Johan Turi, who never married, lived on a small income and led a simple, modest life. He was a dreamer and lyricist, a kind of wilderness philosopher, who observed life in nature and among people, but he was also a writer and conscious observer of the environment (Manker 1971, 122; Dubois 2012, 108).

*Figure 1: Johan Turi: Once the Sámi have reached their winter grounds, about 1910, ink drawing.*



### **CULTURAL CO-OPERATION WITH EMILIE DEMANT**

In 1904, Johan Turi took a train trip to Torneträsk along the so-called Iron Ore Line (Kiruna–Narvik), which had opened the previous year. Travelling in the same coach was Emilie Demant (1873–1958), an ethnographer and artist who was accompanied by her sister. They had come to Lapland from Jutland, Denmark. Suddenly Emilie Demant's childhood dream seemed to be coming true: she had always wanted to visit Lapland, and now there was a real Sámi person sitting opposite her. Despite the lack of a common language, Turi and Demant struck up a conversation. A Finn who was on board the same train provided interpretation (Salokorpi 2004; Svonni 2011, 483–484). Like many Sámi people from Jukkasjärvi, Turi could speak Finnish (Hansegård 1988, 14; Dubois 2012, 96).

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The 50-year-old Turi told Demant that he wanted to write about Sámi people, but he did not know how to proceed. The young Dane had hoped that sometime she could experience a nomadic life. Turi promised he would help her do so. Demant returned to Denmark and began to study the Sámi language at the University of Copenhagen; she also continued the drawing and painting studies she had started in 1898. In June 1907, she returned to Swedish Lapland and accompanied Aslak Turi's family for a year, participating in all activities related to herding and migration (Kuutma 2011, 500). Without her knowledge of the Sámi language and her familiarity with the life of reindeer herders, Demant could not have assisted Turi in his project (Svonni 2011, 484).

In August of the same year, 34-year-old Emilie and 53-year-old Johan lived in a small fell cabin on the shore of Torneträsk. Turi drew pictures, dictated and made notes, and Demant wrote out the texts. *Muittalus samid birra* was published in Denmark in 1910 as a Sámi-Danish edition called *En bok om lappernes liv (Johan Turi's Book of Lapland; new English translation: An Account of the Sámi)* (Salokorpi 2004; Bergmann 2009, 63). Hjalmar Lundbohm (1855–1926), the Kiruna mine director, was a curious combination of hard-boiled industrialist and sensitive intellectual interested in art and culture. He considered the book to be such an important source of information concerning the life of Sámi people that he funded it. He also wrote the foreword to the first edition of the book (Kuutma 2011, 503; Seurujärvi-Kari 2011, 303).

Turi wanted his book to correct mistaken ideas about the Sámi. The book received a great deal of publicity outside the Sámi area. Demant and Turi became famous, and the book was translated into many languages: German (1912), English (1931), Swedish (1917), and French (1974). In 1979 it was published in Finnish, in Hungarian (1983) and in Italy (1991). The book was widely disseminated in Europe (Bergmann 2009, 63). Turi's book is unique in terms of both its language and its content; it is the first nonreligious book written in the Sámi language by a Sámi person. It is an example of reminiscence literature, which is a vital genre of Sámi literature based on the centuries-old Sámi narrative tradition (Hirvonen 1994, 104; Salokorpi 2004; Seurujärvi-Kari 2011, 303; Svonni 2011, 487).

The text of *Muittalus samid birra* is complemented by a set of pictures drawn by Turi; he wanted to show all the essential things concerning Sámi people's living conditions: life in the forest with reindeer, reindeer enclosures, summer and winter migration, life in camps, church attendance, traditions, hunting for beasts of prey, and Sámi cosmology

(Kjellström 1981a, 104). Turi's drawings have been considered to contain features of traditional Sámi engraving and rock art. Unlike typical Western art, they do not have a central perspective (Seurujärvi-Kari 2011, 314). Turi's aim was to depict the true nature of things in his pictures by combining different areas of life in a single picture. Even though he portrays people and animals as stylized signs, he manages to create a plausible, authentic atmosphere containing events and life in his drawings (Lehtola 1997, 116; Hirvonen 1994, 115). He depicts events simply but precisely and as simultaneously as possible in a manner that is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian reliefs and early northern rock art.

### JOHAN TURI'S LATER YEARS

*Muittalus samid birra* made Turi famous but did not bring him financial success. Tourists visiting Abisko were interested in his art and wanted to buy his drawings. They wanted to have more colourful pictures, so Turi started to use watercolours. His main subjects were reindeer, elk and bears, but fells were also common; Turi rendered them with some degree of depth. To make drawing easier, Turi developed templates, which he cut out of thin pieces of bone. The shapes and sizes of the reindeer bodies varied to some extent. Thanks to the templates, the work of drawing could be done more quickly: the bodies did not take long to make, and only the legs and antlers had to be added freehand (Manker 1977, 128–129; Bergmann 2009, 64). When visiting Hjalmar Lundbohm's office, Turi noticed some stamps on the office desk. To make his own stamps, Turi first used birch wood, and later spruce and pine as well. He made stamps for important and often repeated figures like female and male reindeer, reindeer calves, dogs and people (Tveterås et al. 2002, 104; Kihlberg 2007, 90). Occasionally, he still used templates. Turi combined different methods: he stamped, drew and painted. He tried to rationalise his work and aimed at being an artist (Kjellström 2003, 248; Gaski 2011, 593).

During the years 1918–1919, together with his nephew, the reindeer herder Per Turi, Johan Turi wrote some texts which Emilie Demant-Hatt worked up into a book called *Sámi deavsttat*. Her husband Gudmund Hatt translated the texts into English, and the book was published in an edition called *Lappish Texts*. At the age of 76, Turi produced material for his third book *Duoddaris*, which was published in both Sámi and Swedish in 1931; the Swedish edition was called *Från fjäll* (*From the Fells*). The artist Edith von Knaffl-Granström (1884–1956) and Anna Thuresdotter Bielke (1864–1955), a Swedish noblewoman, helped him produce this final book, which tells about Turi's hunting trips





Figure 2: Johan Turi: Lattilahti,  
Torneträsk, 1933, watercolour.

on the fells, his two journeys in the North Calotte region, and various ways of herding reindeer in the northern Sámi area (Hansegård 1988, 9–10; Manker 1971, 131–132).

In 1913-1914, Turi had assisted and guided Frank Hedge Butler (1855–1928), an English globetrotter, and Borg Mesch (1869–1956), a Swedish photographer, during two journeys which took them through the Sámi areas of northern Sweden, Norway, Finland and present-day Russia as far as the Kola Peninsula (Lehtola 2012, 105; Dubois 2012, 95). The wealthy Butler wanted to experience the Land of the Sámi by travelling in an ancient way on skis and in a reindeer sledge. He published his travelogue *Through Lapland with Skis and Reindeer* in 1917. The trip offered Turi a chance to observe Sámi

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people's life and culture in a vast geographical area. He was, in effect, working as a researcher and, according to Professor Thomas A. Dubois, performed a kind of synthetic, comparative analysis (Kuutma 2011, 499; Dubois 2012, 95, 105).

Johan Turi received official recognition and was granted the Royal Gold Medal and a State Artist Pension (Kjellström 1981a, 104–105). In 1915, he moved to Lattilahti into a cabin donated by Hjalmar Lundbohm, where he lived until his death (Hansegård 1988, 14). He died on 30 November 1936 at the age of 82, and is buried outside the Jukkasjärvi church. His gravestone bears the inscription: “Johan Turi – Samernas Författare” (“Johan Turi – A Sámi Author”; Svonni 2011, 489).

### **NILS NILSSON SKUM – AN ARTISTIC REINDEER HERDER**

Like Johan Turi, Nils Nilsson Skum was an artist and writer who recalled past events but had no formal education (Lehtola 1997, 117). He also belonged to a family that moved from Norway to Swedish Lapland because of the closing of the border in 1852. Skum's parents left Kautokeino, Finnmark for Sweden in 1863. During the spring migration, they stopped at Tjiurutuottar, where Nils was born on 13 April 1872 (Thomasson 2012; Manker 1959, 7). In 1875, the Skum family, together with their reindeer, settled in the Sámi village of Norrkaitum in Gällivare municipality and found a pasture area around Kebnekaise. The summer place was 300 kilometres as the crow flies from the winter place (Tveterås et al. 2002, 105; Burman 2009, 273).

Nils Nilsson Skum had a lonely childhood, so drawing was an important hobby for him (Thomasson 2012). When he first began to draw, he is said to have used a charred straw on white, split birch wood logs. In winter, he drew pictures in the snow. Both of these techniques were ephemeral art forms: the log was burnt and the snow melted. Like other Sámi boys, Skum also carved pictures of reindeer on bone and wood with a knife (Manker 1959, 10–11). Nils Anderson Wasara, his maternal grandfather, brought him a pencil as a present from the Gällivare Christmas market. Now Nils began to draw on pieces of paper and paperboard. By hearing his uncle, Anders Nilsson Wasara, read the Bible out loud, Skum learned letters and thus acquired the key to learning to read. Later he also learnt to write (Manker 1965, 31–32; Manker 1971, 143; Burman 2009, 273).

When Skum was 12 years old, two Englishmen came to visit the Sámi village where he lived. One of them was an artist who drew pictures of reindeer. Skum's father, Nils, saw him drawing and told the man that his son could do it better. The Englishman



was not insulted but wanted to see the boy's drawings. He thought they were good and suggested that the boy could go to England with them and attend art school there. However, Nils had planned for his son to be a reindeer herder, so the boy stayed at home. The Englishmen did not forget the boy who was talented in drawing: the following Christmas he received a packet from England containing pencils, coloured pencils, watercolours and paintbrushes (Manker 1965, 32; Manker 1971, 144).

In 1895, Skum married Helena (Elli) Kuhmunen (1872–1950), the daughter of a wealthy and powerful reindeer herder, and the couple had many children. The number of reindeer increased, and Skum became a man of great power whose physical appearance was also grand. At his heaviest, he weighed about 130–140 kg (Thomasson 2012; Tveterås et al. 2002, 106). Even though he was the owner of a reindeer farm with no time for drawing, Skum did not give up his old hobby entirely. In 1908, Hjalmar Lundbohm, the Kiruna mine director, published some of Skum's drawings in a series of books called *Lapparne och deras land* (*The Lapps and Their Land*). Skum also contributed illustrations to various Sámi publications (Kjellström 1981b, 107; Tveterås et al. 2002, 106; Manker 1965, 57). Two of these publications were Professor K. B. Wiklund's reader *Nomadskolans läsbok* (*Nomad School Reader*, 1929) and the yearbook of a tourist association (1930). At that time, only a few people knew about Skum's artistic talent (Manker 1959, 14; Manker 1971, 146).

### CONTACT WITH ERNST MANKER

As Nils Nilsson Skum got older, reindeer herding became too strenuous for him. In 1934, at the age of 62, he gave up his reindeer and moved with his family into a turf hut near Sjisjkavare, close to the railway line along the national border (Kjellström 1981b, 107; Manker 1965, 58). He now had time to draw. He recalled reindeer husbandry during the years of his youth and adulthood and recorded his experiences and knowledge of reindeer and reindeer herding, wanting to preserve and pass this knowledge on to younger people. In April 1934, Skum sent a letter that was received by Ernst Manker (1893–1972), a Lappologist in the Nordic Museum in Stockholm. Manker knew of Skum and asked him for some drawings; this was the beginning of a collaboration between the two men began (Manker 1965, 7–8).

Skum made 98 drawings depicting reindeer herding during the different seasons. He also added texts in Sámi, which Israel Ruong translated into Swedish. The book *Same sita – Lappbyn* (*Lapp Village*) was published in 1938 in the Nordic Museum's ACTA

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LAPPONICA 2 Series. The book received a great deal of attention, but it was also criticized. The Sámi orthography was considered to be too difficult and Manker's role unnecessarily large (Kjellström 1981b, 109; Lehtola 1997, 117; Burman 2009, 276–277). The Nordic Museum in Stockholm bought all the works used to illustrate the book for its collections (Nils Nilsson Skum 2007).

Skum's goal was to document his Sámi forefathers' life and work through his book and his illustrations. The drawings drew attention, and there was an interest in presenting them in exhibitions both in Sweden and abroad. Depictions of reindeer and nature were his specialty: he had the ability to create strong overall pictures of wintry wildernesses and the movements of reindeer herds in different formations. As an artist Skum was characterised by spontaneity and freshness. As the years passed, his artistic strength and confidence grew, and the pictures flowed more and more profusely over oil-colour panels and sheets of drawing paper (Lehtola 1997, 117; Kihlberg 2007, 90 & 92).

### NILS NILSSON SKUM'S CAREER AS A PAINTER

Skum's art works were included in the *Folklore de Suède (Swedish Folklore)* exhibition displaying Swedish folk art in the cultural anthropology museum *Musée de l'Homme* in 1937; the exhibition was organized by the Nordic Museum, and from Paris it moved on to Brussels. Skum's works were on display for the first time in Sweden in a large exhibition in the *Färg och Form* Gallery in Stockholm in 1940 together with works by Carl Fredrik Hill and Ernst Josephson. Thus, Skum became famous both in his native country and abroad (Burman 2009, 275; Manker 1965, 97). During the years 1940–1958, Skum's works were exhibited almost every year in Stockholm and elsewhere in Sweden: in Luleå, Nyköping, Jönköping, Kalmar, Ystad, and other cities. As for foreign countries, they were not exhibited only in Paris and Brussels, but also in New York in 1946 (Manker 1965, 97).

Nils Nilsson Skum became well known for his drawings and his talent in portraying reindeer herding. When making his art works, he usually used a pencil, crayons, watercolours and gouaches. He also liked to paint with oil colours. He also mastered *duodji*. He was a skilful maker of traditional Sámi knives and also made a few wooden sculptures (Burman 2009, 275; Svedsen 1992, 10). Skum was granted a state pension. Pleased with the recognition he received, he continued to draw and was extraordinarily productive (Kjellström 1981b, 109). He also did well financially, building an atelier and having a house built for himself and his wife Elli and another for his daughter.

The buildings were equipped with electric lights by means of a wind-powered plant (Manker 1971, 162–164).

Skum wanted to create work of lasting value and leave depictions of different ways of reindeer herding with which he had become familiar as a legacy to the Sámi people. He started to draw with concentration and purposefulness. He managed to finish 46 pictures for his new book. To avoid the difficulties caused by orthography, he wrote

*Figure 3: Nils Nilsson Skum:  
Herd of Reindeer Running, 1934, pencil.*



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the text in Finnish and Gunnar Pellijeff translated it into Swedish (Burman 2009, 277; Manker 1955, 8). Skum did not live to see the finished book, dying on 27 December 1951 at the age of 79 (Thomasson 2012). His book *Valla renar (Reindeer Herding)* was published posthumously in the Nordic Museum's ACTA LAPPONICA X Series in 1955 (Burman 2009, 277).

### JOHN SAVIO – AN EDUCATED SÁMI VISUAL ARTIST

John Andreas Savio was born on 28 January 1902 in Bugöyford on the shore of Varangerfjord in Finnmark, but spent his early years in Kirkenes, where his parents established a shop (Rasmussen 2006, 28; Rasmussen 2005, 89; Bang 2002, 7). He was descended from Kven and Sámi people. His father Per John Johansen Savio's (1877–1905) Sámi-Finnish family came from Peltovuoma, Enontekiö in Finnish Lapland and was partly also descended from the large Kyrö family. His mother Else Strimp's (1875–1905) father was a member of the Nomadic Sámi, and he was the first one in his family to settle permanently. The Strimp family had sheep, cows, horses and reindeer as well as fishing vessels, a bakery and a shop. The wealthy family belonged to the Sámi upper class (Gjelsvik 2012, 12–13; Nerhus 1982, 14; Bang 2002, 5; Rasmussen 2006, 29).

At the age of 21, John Savio's father Per took part in an expedition to Antarctica (1898–1900) organized by Carsten Borchgrevink (1864–1936), who was born in Norway but lived in Australia. During the trip, Per Savio learnt to speak and write English (Gjelsvik 2012, 14–16; Nerhus 1982, 16). After returning home, he married Else Strimp in 1901 and their first child, John, was born in 1902. Two daughters were born in 1903 and 1905, but died at the age of a few months. John's childhood turned to tragedy: his mother died of tuberculosis in 1905, when the boy was three years old, and two days later his father drowned while fetching a coffin from Vadsø (Lorck 2012, Bang 2002, 5–7; Gjelsvik 2012, 20).

Savio's maternal grandparents took it upon themselves to raise their grandchild, and John moved to the village of Bugöyford on the shore of Varangerfjord. The village was the centre of Finnish-Russian trade, and the Laestadian movement was strong and influential there (Rasmussen 2006, 30). John liked to wander in nature, and he drew pictures of the things he saw; drawing was a good and important hobby. The grandparents encouraged the boy in his art work, even if they hoped he would eventually become a priest. Thanks to his grandparents' wealth, Savio was able to begin school (Gjelsvik 2012, 21–22; Nerhus 1982, 32–34). His native language was Sámi. In Bugöyford, the

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people spoke Sámi and Finnish, as well as a mixture of Russian and Norwegian developed due to the Russian Pomor trade; John probably understood these languages as well. In order to attend school, he had to learn Norwegian (Gjelsvik 2012, 22–24); at the age of ten, he had a sufficient command of the language and was sent to primary school in Vardø.

In 1916, John Savio began secondary school in Vardø, where Isak Saba (1875–1921), a Sámi activist and politician, worked as a teacher. He was Savio's first drawing teacher. Saba was a family friend of the Strimps and knew the plans for John's future as a priest. After becoming aware of the boy's gifts, Saba encouraged him to try visual arts (Bang 2002: 8; Gjelsvik 2012, 24–25). John Savio's perception and skill in drawing can be seen in the small pencil drawing *Omakuva peilissä* (*Self-Portrait in a Mirror*, 1917). The picture shows how the 15-year-old artist managed to draw his own features as reflected on the surface of a mirror. After Savio had attended secondary school in Vardø for two years, his health declined, and he moved farther south to Kvaefjord to finish secondary school. He finished lower secondary school in 1919 and during the following autumn started the humanities and natural sciences programme at the upper secondary school in Bodø (Nerhus 1982, 40, 51; Gjelsvik 2012, 26, 29).

### MOVING TO CHRISTIANIA

John Savio did not make progress in his upper secondary school studies in Bodø. He drew, painted and dreamt of moving to Christiania, the capital. In the autumn of 1920, he moved to Christiania to complete the upper secondary school syllabus in the English programme at Ragna Nielsen's private school (Nerhus 1982, 51; Gjelsvik 2012, 36; Bang 2002, 9). At the same time, Savio made drawings in day and evening classes in the State College of Crafts and Design; his goal was to become a construction-engineering assistant. He was not interested in copying ornaments, which was part of the instruction in the art classroom, but he considered drawing nudes to be meaningful and useful for his development (Nerhus 1982, 52; Gjelsvik 2012, 42–43).

The explorer Carsten Borchgrevink had moved to Christiania. Savio visited him and got to know his family. Ridley Yngvar Borchgrevink (1898–1981), one of the sons of the family, studied graphic art and painting in Paris from 1920 to 1923. During the voyage to Antarctica, Per Savio, John's father, had saved the lives of Carsten Borchgrevink and the whole expedition, and the grateful family wanted to pay for John Savio's art studies in Norway and later abroad. However, Savio did not want to accept their offer; perhaps

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he was too proud and had decided to manage on his own (Gjelsvik 2012, 39–40; Bang 2002, 9).

Savio's health weakened, and in January 1921, a fever and bad cough sent him to hospital, where it was discovered that he had tuberculosis. One of his lungs had to be operated on, and both his physical and mental state of health were poor. In December 1921, Savio was sent for rehabilitation, after which he returned to his home region in Finnmark to spend the spring and summer of 1922 in order to gather his strength so he could continue his studies (Nerhus 1982, 54).

In the late autumn of 1920, Savio's grandfather, Josef Strimp, had died, and Savio and his uncle inherited the remaining property (Gjelsvik 2012, 47). Thanks to the inheritance, he was able to return to Christiania in the autumn of 1922 (Nerhus 1982, 60). According to some sources, Axel Revold (1887–1962) may have taught Savio, and it is possible that Savio attended Revold's private painting school (Bang 2002, 10; Rasmussen 2005, 89; Hanssen-Serck 2002, 268). For the most part Savio worked independently, studying art history and the human body in anatomy pictures in the library and in the National Gallery, where he studied art by the Old Masters and copied their works. He was also interested in newer European visual arts, especially works made after the 1850s. After wood engraving became an important technique, Savio started to study graphic art by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), a German Renaissance artist. He was interested in both older and newer graphic art, as well as Japanese wood engraving. He became familiar with woodcuts and other graphic art by the Norwegian Edvard Munch (1863–1944) in exhibitions held in Christiania in 1919 and 1921 (Nerhus 1982, 53; Lorck 2002, 19–21). He must have become acquainted with woodcut on his own, because at that time the technique was not taught in art schools. Sámi people's traditional skills in processing wood and bone made it easier for Savio to learn the woodcut technique (Lorck 2012; Lorck 2002, 21).

Savio left Oslo (which was called Christiania earlier) and lived in Karasjok, Tana, and other places in Finnmark during the years 1926–1928. He probably spent the summer of 1927 in Ifjordfjellet and became familiar with traditional Sámi reindeer herding. Many of his best-known works featuring Sámi subjects are connected with the Ifjordfjellet region. During the following summer, he spent a few weeks in Pasvikdalen, immortalizing its sceneries in both woodcuts and paintings (Rasmussen 2005, 89–90). Savio had decided to make a living from his art and tried to sell some of his paintings. They did not sell well, but his woodcuts, on the other hand, were more successful. The making



of art was regarded as a trade in Oslo, but elsewhere in Norway practical trades were held in higher esteem. Art work was associated with spare time and was considered to be a good hobby. People in Finnmark were not used to buying art, and Laestadianism, which had a strong influence in the area, rejected vanity and luxury (Bang 2002, 12; Gjelsvik 2012, 60–61). In Sámi culture, beauty was connected with utility articles, and art was not part of either Sámi or Norwegian folk culture.

In the autumn of 1928 at the latest, Savio was back in Oslo, where he met Hans Nerhus, a student of theology, who bought a large number of Savio's works. The artist was not good at household management, and, being gullible, he lent money and trusted people's promises to pay him back (Gjelsvik 2012, 75–76). He was no fickle bohemian artist and did not drink alcohol (Nerhus 1982, 66).

### JOHN SAVIO'S WANDERING YEARS

After the busy year in Oslo, Savio wanted to travel. The years 1929–1933 were the real wandering years. He visited various parts of Norway, going from Bergen via Romsdalen to Svolvär in Lofoten (Gjelsvik 2012, 84). The Svolvär region inspired Savio, and he depicted a large number of landscapes there. After the productive period in Lofoten, the artist settled in Tromsø for a longer period and visited the Bodø region in 1932. He probably travelled extensively, trying to sell his art work. At the end of 1930, Savio had a joint exhibition with Elliot Kvalstad (1905–1938) in the rooms of the Tromsø Art Association, which bought five woodcuts by Savio to give as prizes in a Christmas lottery. The paintings that have Tromsø-related subjects were signed in 1931, and in the autumn of 1932, Savio held a solo exhibition in the town. The exhibition was well received, and Savio's woodcuts, in particular, were considered to be good. *Tromsø* newspaper wrote: "His art work is already so well known that it needs no further recommendation. Among the new woodcuts, there are many good ones" (Cit. Nerhus 1982, 76). On their way to Nordkapp, tourists bought woodcuts from the exhibition, but Savio still had to borrow money and pawn his works in order to get by (Bang 2002, 12; Gjelsvik 2012, 95).

At the beginning of the 1930s, Savio took a trip to the neighbouring countries, visiting Copenhagen, Stockholm and Finland (Rasmussen 2005, 90), probably including Helsinki and/or Turku. He also travelled in Central Europe, where his primary destination was Paris. During his European trip, he spent some time in Munich and Cologne, and on his way back to Norway he visited England. In 1933–1934, he probably studied



Figure 4: John Savio:  
*Alone (Okto)*, woodcut.

in one of the free art academies in Paris and held a solo exhibition in the summer of 1936 (Rasmussen 2005, 90; Bang 2002, 14; Gjelsvik 2012, 130).

An article about Savio's exhibition appeared in *L'illustration* newspaper (11 July 1936). The article was entitled *Un dessinateur lapon (A Lappish Artist)*, and it included a photograph of the woodcut *Lassokaster (Lassoing)*. The text introduces the northern Norwegian John Savio, the Sámi artist of the exhibition, as an example of how it is possible to develop one's own skills without a professional teacher by studying the works of a higher civilization. At the end of the article there are recollections of how Per Savio, the artist's father, had been the right man on the voyage to Antarctica because he had risked his own life in order to save the lives of Borchgrevink and the whole expedition, according to Borchgrevink's book *Le Plus près du pôle sud 1900* (English edition: *First on the Antarctic Continent*, 1901). The article ends with a sentence reflecting the

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racial thinking of the 1920s and 1930s: “He [Per Savio] drowned a few years after [the polar expedition], but gave his son John an artistic temperament which distinguishes him from the other representatives of his race” (Nerhus 1982, 81, copy of the original article.).

Savio’s exhibitions did not produce any breakthroughs, but the theology student Hans Nerhus was not Savio’s only supporter in Oslo in the 1930s. Torgeir Sigveland, the head of the Norwegian Immigration Service, organized a small exhibition of Savio’s works in his office and showed his works to diplomats. Anthony Joseph Drexel Biddle, an American diplomat, was in Oslo during the years 1935–1937. He and his wife became interested in Savio’s work, buying hundreds of his woodcuts and creating a Savio collection for themselves, as well as sending them as presents to their friends all over the world (Nerhus 1982, 81, 85; Gjelsvik 2012, 124).

It is not precisely known how often Savio visited his home region after the year 1930. In 1937, he lived in Kirkenes, but returned to Oslo in the autumn, living in an attic room of a hospice there. In the spring of 1938, the tuberculosis of his early years recurred and he was taken to Ullevål Hospital, where he died at the age of 36 on 13 April 1938 after one week of hospitalization (Lorck 2012; Gjelsvik 2012, 144).

## **ASSIMILATION POLICY AND THE RISE OF SÁMI DAIDDA**

The work of the early Sámi artists occurred during a time of strained minority policies. In 1809, Finland became the Grand Duchy of Finland as part of Russia, and a border was drawn between Swedish and Finnish Lapland. In 1826, the Näätamö common area between Norway and Russia ceased to exist. These arrangements made border crossing more difficult for nomads and even prohibited it, but did not yet hinder reindeer husbandry or fishing in practice. The closing of the border between Russia and Norway in 1852 – because of which the Turi and Skum families had to move to Sweden with their reindeer – and between Russia and Sweden in 1889 cut off the long traditional migration routes, leading to mass migrations by the Sámi. The people had to choose in which country they would live henceforth. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Sámi had lost their special rights, and the rights of the Lapp villages became unclear (Lehtola 1997, 36; Lehtola 2005, 309–311).

Social Darwinism, which sees natural selection and the struggle for existence as natural and desirable from the viewpoint of human evolution, emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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According to this theory, a lower race gradually submits to the culture and way of life of a stronger race. This fate was widely predicted for the Sámi in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Isaksson and Jokisalo 2005, 203–206). Scandinavian race researchers took an active part in the development of physical anthropology and race research, as well as in the debate on the racial position of the Sámi at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For some researchers, the Sámi were the relics of an aboriginal race which had been pushed aside during human evolution; its living representatives were considered to be losers in the struggle for existence. Intermarriages between the northern race, to which the Norwegians, Swedes and Danes belonged, and the Sámi were thought to be detrimental to the races; mixed-race people were considered to be weaker than the rest of the population (Isaksson 2001, 145, 162, 169).

In Sweden, the exploitation of natural resources in the northern parts of the country was connected with racial views and the preservation of the Sámi. It was thought that reindeer could be herded in areas where there were no natural resources or arable land (Isaksson 2001, 170). The Swedish interpretation of social Darwinism led to “*Lapp skull vara lapp*” (“*Lapps should be Lapps*”), a policy of discrimination. According to this policy, the Reindeer Sámi, who had adapted to nature on the fells, were considered to be survivors. Those who became settlers were destroyed in the struggle, so the Reindeer Sámi were separated from society and there was an attempt to protect them from outside social influences. The Sámi had schools of their own (Lehtola 1997, 45; Isaksson and Jokisalo 2005, 207). In Sweden, assimilation was directed not towards the Sámi but towards the Finns, who were thought to be a menace to national security because Finland was under Russian rule (Solbakk 2006, 72). Turi and Skum had both given up reindeer nomadism; perhaps their decision to concentrate on visual art and writing can be seen as attempts to survive as Sámi people among the Swedes and to prove that the patronized ancient people possessed a living culture of their own which was worth developing.

Starting at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a strong, systematic policy of assimilation was pursued under cover of national security in Norway; its aim was to assimilate minorities into the majority population (Isaksson and Jokisalo 2005, 206–207). This Norwegianization policy was put into practice by means of policies on settlement, industry, language and education, and it was applied legally as well. The first two policies supported the establishment of Norwegian and Norwegianized settlers’ farms and fishing companies; the other two aimed at rooting out minority languages – i.e., Sámi and Finnish – in schools. In 1851, all schools received orders to use Norwegian as the

language of instruction; only Bible-based religious education could be given in Sámi and Finnish. The School Act of 1898 prohibited people from using the Sámi language in the Sámi area; the act was later repealed in 1959. Teachers were paid extra money if they made their pupils learn Norwegian. The right to purchase land was dependent on skill in the Norwegian language. The Government defended Norwegianization by appealing to the security of the country; there was a desire to have only loyal, reliable citizens living in northern Norway (Lehtola 1997, 44–45; Solbakk 2006, 69–71).

### THE MISSION OF THE PIONEERS OF SÁMI DAIDDA

Johan Turi and Nils Nilsson Skum were members of the Reindeer Sámi people. John Savio spent his childhood in a village that was the meeting point for all the northern cultures, and later he wanted to know how reindeer herders lived. All three of these artists knew *duodji*, which played an important role in the everyday life of the Sámi before World War II. They were used to a holistic perception of nature. Both Turi and Skum earned their living from nature, and Savio loved to wander and hike in the wilderness. Skum and Savio were interested in drawing even in their childhood.

In the early lives of all three Sámi artists, there were events that influenced their decisions to become artists. Johan Turi gradually lost his reindeer and changed to a bohemian lifestyle (Lehtola 1997, 116), and Nils Nilsson Skum, who was a tall, jolly partygoer, became a reindeer farmer through marriage, but could no longer work as a reindeer herder (Manker 1971, 146). John Savio lost his parents and siblings in early childhood, suffered from poor health, and attended upper secondary school with his grandparents' help; after they died, he was able to work as an artist for a few years by means of his inheritance. All three early Sámi artists travelled both in their native country and abroad, which also influenced their decision to become artists.

Turi and Skum had no formal schooling, aside from acquiring the elementary reading skills that were necessary to read the Bible. In the Karesuando-Jukkasjärvi area, almost all adult Sámi mastered Finnish. The more active members of the community could speak two or three languages (Kuutma 2011, 498). Savio spoke many languages: Sámi, Finnish, Norwegian, English and German, and he also knew some French (Rasmussen 2005, 90; Bang 2002, 14; Gjelsvik 2012, 130). Turi's and Skum's unique personalities, in combination with their excellent observational skills, agreeable presence, thorough traditional knowledge, and distinctive narrative talents, engendered the collaborative projects that established them as Sámi artists (Kuutma 2011, 499).

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John Savio received instruction in drawing as early as his school days, and he attended art school, where he drew and made woodcuts of nudes and became familiar with theories of perspective and colour. He familiarized himself with art history and earlier graphic art on his own initiative. He also went to art exhibitions in Oslo and took trips abroad. He depicted his subjects with the kind of self-confidence education and training give. His conscious aim was to become a professional artist, but he never applied for any grants. According to Hans Nerhus, who was Savio's friend and who bought a large number of his works, the artist felt that Sámi people had been passed over and did not regard themselves as anything special (Nerhus 1982, 71).

During the lifetime of the three pioneers of Sámi *daidda*, Sámi culture underwent a transition, and the old, traditional way of life based on natural economy changed. There were also more and more conflicts between the economies of the majority and minority populations. Turi hoped that better knowledge about the situation of the Sámi would lead to better prospects for the immediate and long-term survival of the Sámi way of life (Svonni 2011, 486). Skum recalled and recreated the past in his drawings. Both Turi and Skum wanted to pass their knowledge on to succeeding generations and to introduce Sámi life and culture to non-Sámi people. In their book illustrations, the content was the essential thing; the desire to create clear and understandable pictures influenced their way of composing. Savio wanted to become a professional artist and move among the artistic circles in Oslo, but he felt like an outsider. He sometimes emphasized his father's family, referring to himself as a Kven, but in Oslo, his mother's family and the Sámi background took precedence, due to his concern about the situation of the Sámi. Savio felt that it was his mission to promote Sámi life in his art (Lorck 2002, 26).

All three of the early Sámi artists worked with outside helpers who were of great importance for their decisions to become visual artists. Johan Turi met the Danish ethnographer and artist Emilie Demant, and Nils Nilsson Skum met the Lappologist Ernst Manker. Turi and Skum helped these ethnographers understand Sámi culture through their skills and knowledge. Turi and Demant had an ongoing dialogue while their book was being prepared. He was able to express himself to her, and she was able to transcribe that understanding in a way that brought his voice to all of Europe (Dana 2003, 211). Turi might have never written his book without Demant's help. She was an outsider, an inexperienced foreigner in the Sámi community, a single, middle-class woman who was an amateur in the eyes of professional Lappologists. Without Turi's collaboration, support and friendship, Demant might have never evolved into an an-



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thropologist. Furthermore, she could never have earned the trust of the Sámi if it had not been for Turi (Kuutma, 2011, 491, 513).

Ernst Manker became famous as a Sámi researcher in Sweden, publishing many articles and books about Sámi culture and mythology. Skum was a very good informant for Manker. John Savio's drawing teacher was Isak Saba, the first Sámi Member of Parliament. He was a versatile person of culture who was acquainted with music, visual arts, cultural history and archaeology. Saba was also a representative of the Finnmark Labour Party in the Norwegian Storting from 1907 to 1912. In 1906, he wrote a poem called *Sámi soga lávlla* (*Song of the Sámi Family*), which became the national anthem of the Sámi (Nerhus 1982, 38–39, 43; Lehtola 1997, 49). Savio admired his teacher, who encouraged his pupil to familiarize himself with art and culture (Gjelsvik 2012, 25). It is possible that Saba, who was an advocate for the Sámi, hoped Savio would become a successful Sámi artist whose production would prove that even a minority population has a culture of its own and the right to exist. The first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the most oppressive period of Norwegianization for the Sámi people in Norway; at that time Sámi people living on the coast were the ones who were the most strongly discriminated against (Jernsletten and Jåks 1981, 115).

The traditional Sámi way of life had begun to change. It was no longer easy to make a living from a natural economy; the work was hard and provided little income. Turi and Skum were aging men, and Savio had problems with his health. All three of these early Sámi artists tried to earn money through their art.

There were new customers in the North Calotte region. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hurtigruten ships began to sail from Bergen to Kirkenes in Norway. The first section of the railway, from Gällivare to Luleå in Sweden, opened in 1888. By 1899, the line had extended to Kiruna, and from 1903 it ran all the way to Narvik. It was easy for tourists to travel along the Western coast of Norway as far as Finnmarken. The tourists on the ships bought Savio's prints. He used both oil and watercolours, but began to concentrate increasingly on woodcuts, the material for which was cheaper (Gjelsvik 2012, 56). Prints made from woodcuts could be sold more cheaply than paintings, because one block could be used to make 50–100 prints. It was also easy to travel to the northernmost parts of Sweden. In the 1920s and 1930s, hiking and skiing tourists discovered the area. Travellers were enchanted with the impressive landscapes and the exotic Sámi culture with reindeer and people wearing colourful clothing, and they naturally wanted to obtain real, authentic souvenirs. *Duodji* productions were quite expensive and pencil

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drawings and watercolours were cheaper than handmade articles, which took a long time to make. In his later years, Turi developed his art technology and produced pictures in a way that was almost industrial by stamping. Skum achieved popularity as an artist thanks to his many exhibitions and the efforts of Greta Wenneberg of Kiruna, who introduced him to the open art market (Lehtola 1997, 50; Kihlberg 2007, 90–92).

### **THEMES, CONTENT AND STYLE OF THE PIONEERS OF SÁMI DAIDDA**

According to the art historian Ernst Gombrich, there is no pure perception or innocent eye: everything we have learnt and all routines of perception influence both the artist's and the viewer's perceptions. Gombrich wrote: "The world can never quite look like a picture, but the picture can look like the world. It is not the 'innocent eye', however, that can achieve this match but only the inquiring mind that knows how to probe the ambiguities of vision" (Gombrich 1977, 331). Memory, emotions and experiences construct a subjective relationship with a landscape. In addition to the conception or experience of a landscape, the means of expression chosen by the artist also has an essential influence: one who uses a paintbrush depicts landscapes as masses, whereas one who is working with a pencil renders them with lines. The style chosen by the artist always makes him or her study a landscape from a certain point of view (Gombrich 1977, 56, 73–75).

The pioneers of Sámi *daidda* knew *duodji*, the old, traditional Sámi handicraft, which was – and still is – an important part of Sámi culture. *Duodji* items like knives, cases, wooden cups and so forth were made and meant to be used in the everyday work environment. Beauty of form, sometimes including detailed but harmonious and rhythmic decorations, are a fundamental part of the aesthetics of *duodji*. Turi, Skum and Savio experienced arctic nature in their everyday life. Elements of Sámi culture, animals, mountains and nature are an essential part of their art. Turi's drawings are full of rhythm and detail; sometimes the compositions are similar to those found on shaman's drums or the ornaments on knives. The empty spaces around figures bring to mind the snowy, endless mountain plains. Skum seems to climb up on top of the mountain, depicting landscapes from a bird's eye view. Savio's woodcuts are reminiscent of carved wooden cups and ornaments made from reindeer bone. Of course, all three artists went to church and were familiar with religious pictures in their childhood. Turi was a religious person, and he saw Orthodox icons when he visited the Kola Peninsula (Forsberg and Risberg 1968, 12). Savio's grandmother was a Laestadian.

Later, because of their drawing hobby, the early Sámi artists started to pay more attention to various images. As a boy, Skum met the two English artists and saw European collections of pictures when he was in Berlin in 1909 with a so-called Lapp caravan (Manker 1965, 57). Thus, Turi and Skum were not folk artists, but aimed to develop themselves as visual artists, and they developed their methods of expression to meet buyers' expectations as well. According to the conventional racial ideology of the early 1900s, the Sámi were considered intellectually inferior and incapable of rigorous abstract analysis (Kuutma 2011, 514).

Johan Turi and Nils Nilsson Skum are considered to be ethnographic illustrators or storytellers, and their style is generally defined as naïve or primitive. Turi's images have a strong narrative component, reflecting the same approach to knowledge and storytelling that is evident in his texts. His method of writing is based on stream of consciousness (Gaski 2011, 592). Turi was a good observer who took careful note of details, a fact that makes his narratives interesting as sources of information (Svonni 2011, 486). His first drawings were intended to illustrate texts, but in his later paintings he aimed at artistry and expressiveness. Emilie Demant was an artist, and through her Turi came into contact with Western art. Demant took Turi to see the collections of the National Gallery of Denmark when he visited Copenhagen on the occasion of the publication of *Muittalus samid birra* in 1911. Turi and Skum also visited Hjalmar Lundbohm in Kiruna (Gaski 2011, 539). Lundbohm supported Swedish modernist painters of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – such as Karl Nordström, Prince Eugen, Christian Eriksson, Bruno Liljefors and Carl Wilhelmson – by buying their works. In addition, they stayed with him during their painting trips in the north. Lundbohm had a notable collection of their art (Andrén 1990, 14–15). The artist Edith von Knaffl-Granström helped Turi with his watercolour technique (Manker 1971, 131). According to Gaski, Turi's paintings are not ethnographic or naïvistic depictions but expressive; they can be stylistically placed somewhere between realism and expressionism (Gaski 2011, 593).

Turi's ink drawing *Sita vid vinterboplats* (Figure 1: *Siida on winter grounds, p. 14*) – one of the illustrations for *Muittalus samid birra* – has a very open composition with an empty white background. The perspective is simultaneous: some of the details, like the reindeer and the village, are depicted from a bird's eye view, whereas the people and the huts are shown at normal eye level. Using this simultaneous perspective, allows Turi to depict the life of the winter village as a unified whole in a way that is plain and clear. Turi's purpose in the ink drawing was to show what happens when the Sámi reach their winter grounds. As an art work, the picture is an example of the way Turi cre-

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ates a compositional balance between rhythmic details and fine details. The lines and shapes are uniform and solid as in *duodji* decorations. The watercolour depicting the fell landscape of Lattilahti in Tornedäsk (Figure 2; Turi lived in Lattilahti from 1915 on, p. 17) was painted in 1933. Its composition was made following the rules of the Western panoramic landscape tradition: the point of view is from above. The entity forms a broad overall view depicted from a high point but not as high as a bird's eye view; the horizon is high, and the picture plane is divided into fore-, middle- and backgrounds. The foreground is painted in yellow and green and contains stamped human figures, reindeer and trees. The three mountains in the middle are painted in shades of blue and green, and the sky in the background is full of pale yellow, white and cold green clouds. Turi uses colour perspective to create an illusion of depth and three-dimensional space.

Nils Nilsson Skum's pictures are natural and unpretentious. A sense of perspective, a clear impression of depth and three-dimensionality are typical of his paintings (Hirvonen 1994, 115). Although Skum often drew from memory, his drawing is lively and expressive (Figure 3: *Herd of Reindeer Running*, 1934, p. 21). He aptly shows the essential nature of animals, especially reindeer, which he depicts in various landscapes (Kjellström 1981b, 109). His paintings are strictly representational, giving his perspectival – and often even panorama-like – landscapes a personal, somewhat tensional and even dramatic appearance (Svedsen 1992, 10). A representational and impressionistically momentary landscape also has a living dimension, a mental existence, which is the result of Skum's firm relation to the scenery he is depicting (Aamold 2013). All of Skum's drawings depicting reindeer herding were inspired by his spontaneous and unreflecting visual memories drawn from a long life as a reindeer herder. With acute attention to detail, he produces suggestive, naturalistic recollections from life in the reindeer forest (Kihlberg 2007, 92). In his great oil paintings he endows the mountain landscape with a monumental aura and harmonious colour schemes. In one picture he depicts a valley – as usual for him – from a bird's eye view. Manker wrote about the painting, which was done in 1936 and provided the cover illustration for *Same sita – Lappbyn*, as follows: "In his memories Skum stood at the foot of Singitsjåkkes and looked over Tjåktjavagge and along Näskevagge towards Unna Ruoska, which is in the background" (1965, 107). The monumental mountains and the large valley are located in Abisko National Park, not far from the mountain Kebnekaise.

An artist may have a relationship with the landscape he or she depicts either as an insider like a local inhabitant or an outsider like a tourist (Relph 1987, 49–50). Skum and Turi depict landscapes from the inside and portray Sáminess through collective groups

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of people, but Savio depicts landscapes from an outsider's perspective and portrays Sáminess from an individual viewpoint, focussing on individual people. He portrays these people in a variety of situations: reindeer herding (e.g., catching a reindeer or driving away wolves that are harassing the reindeer), and playing cards or drinking coffee beside an open fire in their spare time. Savio's pictures of working reindeer herders are contemporary with Axel Revold's paintings depicting people at work. It seems that Savio wanted to show work as an equally important part of life among Sámi people and Norwegian workers. The Sámi people he portrays are strong and skilful at their work. In addition to their work, Savio shows the unique culture and human value of the Sámi (Rasmussen 2006, 36–39).

Unfortunately, Savio's artistic and social aims were overshadowed by subjects that were considered to be exotic. His woodcuts depicting Sámi people and scenery, as well as northern villages and seaports, have a clear composition, and as they are rendered in black and white, their atmosphere is effective (Lorck 2002, 25). As an expressionist painter, Savio depicts not only what people see but what they feel. His own loneliness can easily be seen in his woodcut *Okto (Alone)*, Figure 4, p. 26). The sky behind the reindeer is flaming, like the sky in Edward Munch's famous painting *Scream*.

Savio's non-Sámi subjects – for example, his views of the town of Tromsø – correspond completely to the typical style of expression and portrayal of Norwegian art in the 1920s and 1930s. His many trips in Norway and abroad inspired Savio, offering impulses for both style and content. He developed a woodcut technique characterized by a strong composition and controlled lines (Svedsen 1992, 10; Jernsletten and Jåks 1981, 113). His means of expression contains features of impressionistic momentariness and expressionistic emotions; sometimes a landscape quivers, as in paintings by Vincent van Gogh.

In the Norway of the 1920s, woodcut was not a very popular technique. In addition to Munch, only Nikolai Astrup (1880–1928) and Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943) made woodcuts. The productions by these latter two Norwegian artists provided the most important models for Savio (Nerhus 1982, 53; Lorck 2002, 19–21). Savio developed his woodcut technique and bought the book *The Woodcut of To-Day at Home and Abroad* published in London in 1927. In addition to the text, the book contains many illustrations giving examples of woodcuts. Through this book, Savio became familiar with xylography, a woodcut technique in which a block is cut across the grain of the wood, making very thin strokes possible. An abundance of details – as in copper engraving

– is typical of xylography. Savio's woodcut technique was clearly influenced by xylography (Moe 2002, 16).

Savio produced many pictures depicting villages and scenery on the Finnmark coast, the milieu of his childhood and youth. However, he did not portray the life of Sea Sámi people. His mother's family were originally reindeer nomads, and Savio lived in Karasjok and Tana to get better acquainted with the way of life of the Reindeer Sámi. Among people who are interested in culture – artists and those who have studied at universities – there has always been sympathy for reindeer nomads and the free nature of the fell regions. Tourists were also more interested in Sámi people who herded reindeer, considering them more exotic than the Sea Sámi or Kven people. Savio depended on his art for his income, which partly explains his choice of subjects. He depicted the picturesque and fascinating aspects of Reindeer Sámi culture (Jernsletten and Jåks 1981, 115–116). His woodcuts showing traditional Sámi life have been – and still are – used to illustrate books about the Sámi (Lehtola 1997, 117). Nevertheless, there is variety in Savio's pictures of the Sámi. They depict reindeer herders at work, fishermen, children sucking icicles, and people drinking, fighting and playing cards, as well as emotions like love, harmony with nature and jealousy. Portraying the life of Reindeer Sámi people could very well be a sign of Savio's search for his own identity or his desire to make the Sámi visible, since the artist was worried about their situation (Lorck 2002, 26).

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EARLY SÁMI VISUAL ARTISTS**

The tightening of the grip of the majority population and the narrowing of the possibilities to pursue their own traditional livelihoods made Sámi people understand the importance of cooperation. The organization of Sámi associations started at the local level to settle disputes concerning reindeer herding and farming. The first association was South Sámi Fatmomakke in Sweden, which was organized in 1904; similar local associations were organized in southern Norway in 1906–1908, and the first associations in Finnmark were organized in the 1910s. On 6 February 1917, there was a general Sámi meeting in Trondheim, Norway with participants from Norway and Sweden. A year later, a collective meeting was held in Östersund, Sweden that lasted for four days, drawing more than 200 participants. At the same time, the Sámi press began operating (Lehtola 1997, 46–49; Solbakk 2006, 76–77).

The early Sámi artists' works and the publicity they received were contemporary with the Nordic governments' active assimilation or isolation policy, but also with the Sámi



people's awakening and becoming active. The artistic work and the political activity supported each other: if Sámi issues had not been discussed, art would not have been discussed, either, and it was important for the Sámi for their art to become more prominent and widely known. Art increased Sámi people's feelings of solidarity, creating and strengthening their identity. It was also made clear that the Sámi were not a primitive relic but a people capable of producing culture and art who had the right to existence and a language of their own. Turi was a sensitive observer who tried to analyse and understand the situation of the Sámi, the reasons for conflicts with expanding settlers, and the territorial, social and cultural restrictions imposed on the Sámi – their historical predicaments in the tightening grip of the inevitable modernization in the border regions of Sweden, Norway, and Finland (Kuutma 2011, 516). Johan Turi and Nils Nilsson Skum depicted their own ways of life, but also showed differences in reindeer herding in different parts of the Sámi area. They documented their own culture. John Savio depicted what he saw and experienced from an individual viewpoint. He also bore witness to the modernization of Sáminess. At the core of the work of all three artists was Sámi culture, the representations of its essential nature and discussions concerning its significance.

Johan Turi attempted to bridge the gap between the two discursive spheres. Writing and the printed book belonged to the sphere of the colonisers. Up until the point when Turi took up the pen, writing and books had been used to objectify the Sámi. Turi's goal was to inject Sámi content into the colonial form to make the Sámi subjects (Storfjell 2011, 575). He was the first to portray Sámi people as actors, not only as anthropologically interesting objects. Nils Nilsson Skum proved that one could become a noteworthy artist even at a mature age and that a representative of a cultural minority could have significant influence on the cultural front. Despite the fact that John Savio died poor and suffered a bohemian destiny, he showed that a Sámi could become a professional artist and find respect for his art, and that his works could even become part of museum collections: in 1994, the Saviomuseet (Savio Museum) was established in Kirkenes.

The roots of early Sámi visual arts are in old Sámi culture as well as in modern Western visual arts. The tension and harmony between the two different traditions gave a characteristic and versatile nature to Turi's, Skum's and Savio's art. Traditions – the traditional way of life and stories – were the sources of inspiration for all three of these early Sámi artists (Solbakk 2006, 144). Their work provided an important model, especially for the Sámi visual artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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