Speaking with Wood: Eva Ryynänen Negotiates the Meaning of Wood in Finnish Church Art.

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Of all the various media employed by the sculptor—e.g., stone, metal, plaster, clay, glass—wood stands nearly alone in the fact that it was once alive. The piece of wood that the sculptor shapes was once a tree, and before that a sapling, and before that, a seed. The marks of its species and its life history are recorded in its very substance: one can see whether it grew rapidly or slowly, whether it enjoyed gentle winters or dry summers, whether it sat on the ground for some time before being harvested, or was cut green from a living tree. Even after its harvest and transformation through the subtractive practice which constitutes the carver's art, the wood's living qualities remain: its grain aids or resists the carver's vision, its surface oxidizes, its resins dry out and harden, its striations crack or pull apart. It is the most enduring of the ephemeral media, i.e., when compared to ice or sand, yet in the course of time it will inevitably molder and age and decline. Wood is subject to all the mutability of other life forms, which means that, like the sculptor, it will last for only a time before slipping into decay.

To work in wood, then, is to enter into a partnership with the remains of another form of life, another creation of the Godhead. The carver makes art out of the body of another living thing and does so with the cognizance that the form created will ultimately

supercede the wood's previous existence as a tree. Wood is thus a uniquely resonant and potent medium, one which offers much significance to the creator of religious sculpture.

In this paper, I explore the ways in which the Finnish artist Eva Rynnänen (1915-2001) used and described her relations with wood as a medium. A noted practitioner of religious sculpture, she produced more than five hundred pieces during her career, many of which decorate the interiors of Finnish Lutheran churches and others of which found their ways abroad: to Sweden, Norway, Germany, Russia, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Canada, Cuba, Egypt, the United States and Japan. In the context of a study of Nordic nature cultures, I hope to explore what it meant for this artist that she worked with wood in particular, and how she described the creative process which led her to transform pieces of wood into images of religious significance within contemporary Nordic Christianity. Part of her experience was colored, I will argue, by the prominent role of wood in Finnish and broader Nordic architecture and design, lending it a specifically *national* quality that Rynnänen invoked and engaged with in differing ways within her work. Part, however, is also linked to Rynnänen's personal convictions regarding the inherent sacrality of wood as a creation and as a partner in the expression of religious art. Overall I hope to suggest a relationship with wood or trees—or with nature in general—which Ryynänen regarded as integral to her professional as well as religious identity.

Wood in a National Context

In the following, I discuss the place of forests in both Finland and Sweden. In terms of cultural history as well as ecology, this choice makes sense, as the two countries

share a common reliance on the forest as a lucrative renewable resource and as a potent cultural symbol. Certain elements of the history of Finnish approach to the forest cannot be fully understood without reference to the country's earlier experience as part of the Swedish realm, or through reference to and intellectual movements that emerged first in Sweden. At the same time, including Sweden in the discussion below will allow us to recognize certain distinctive features of the Finnish case in particular, elements of importance to an understanding of the works of Eva Ryynänen.

Simply put, forests, trees, and wood matter a great deal in eastern Scandinavia, geographically, economically, and culturally. This fact is particularly the case in Finland, where forests cover some 86 percent of the country's overall terrain, earning it the title of Europe's most forested country. Forestry represents the country's second-largest industry, generating roughly twenty percent of its export revenues and more than five percent of its gross domestic product (Forest.fi). The corresponding figures for Sweden are somewhat less dramatic but highly significant nonetheless. According to the Swedish Forestry Agency (Skogsstyrelsen), sixty percent of Sweden is covered by forest, and forestry annually contributes nearly twelve percent of the country's export revenues and more than four percent of its gross national product. Understandably then, forests have become important in the cultural representations of these countries, both domestically and abroad.

It should be noted that this geographic and economic significance of forests masks to a certain degree the fact that the majority of Swedes and Finns live today in thoroughly urbanized environments, primarily in the southern tracts of their countries. According to United Nations Common Database population estimates reported in the Globalis website,

83.4 percent of Swedes live today in urban areas, while roughly 61 percent of Finns reside in them. The Swedish figure in particular corresponds closely to those cited for the USA (81 percent) and the UK (89 percent). The lower Finnish rate reflects a populace with a greater tendency to rural residence, but such is not to imply that the average Finn lives in forested wilderness tracts, despite the popular view, cited in a recent *New York Times* travel account, that Finland is "one huge forest with five million people hiding in it" (*New York Times).* Arvo Peltonen points out that although the Finnish population distribution is sparse at seventeen persons per square kilometer, the vast majority of the populace lives in areas where the population density hovers between thirty persons per square kilometer (the average for the entire southern coast region) to more than two hundred per square kilometer (the Greater Helsinki area). These statistics reflect the realities of life in both of these highly affluent, highly centralized Nordic nations, where an individual's actual concourse with the forest may be limited to summer holidays, weekend mushroom or berry picking, and skiing vacations.

Given the tendency of formal religion to address disparities between actual and ideal situations, forests and trees in particular can become very important in Nordic religious representations. Where urban life clearly represents the actual experience of many citizens, life in close association with the forest can be seen as an idyllic alternative existence, a respite from ordinary life. Heikki Ylikangas (1996) underscores this notion in his discussion of modern Finnish experiences of the forest: "Hän kokee sammumatonta kaipuuta sinne, missä ei ongelmia eli muita ihmisiä liiemmin ole, siis metsän yksinäisyyteen. Sinne hän pakenee..." [The Finn experiences an unquenchable longing for a place where there are not too many problems, or in other words, people: i.e., the

solitude of the forest. There he flees…] (41) Veikko Anttonen (1994) describes the "Lutheranization" of the landscape, by which the shadows and isolation of the forest environment become a privileged site of personal reflection and transformation. The view of the forest as a refuge from the pressures and conflicts of ordinary social life, and as a privileged site of contemplation and meaning-making lends the forest—and by extension trees and wood—powerful resonance for modern Nordic viewers, a resonance that underlies part of the effect and agenda of the artworks discussed below.

The personal significance of the forest suggested above exists in Finland and Sweden alongside a specifically *national* significance as well. The forest as a national symbol in each country has its roots in the nineteenth century and the intellectual milieu of political and cultural nationalism (Germundsson 2008, Mead 2008, Lehtinen 2008). As emerging Western nation-states searched for distinctive features of national history, culture, or economy to highlight in their self-portrayals to the wider world, Sweden and Finland came to attach great significance to their natural landscapes. The fact that outsiders regarded the countries largely as wilderness areas contributed to this choice: the Italian traveler Giuseppe Acerbi, for instance, writes in the preface to his influential memoires of his travels through Finland-Sweden in 1798-99, of the "novelty, the sublimity, and the rude magnificence of the northern climates" (Acerbi 1802: vi), elements that warranted a visit from someone even from the very center of European art and civilization, like himself. Johan Ludvig Runeberg's poem *Vårt Land,* published as the preface to his *Fänrik Ståhls Sägner* of 1848, and eventually the text of Finland's national anthem, makes warm and copious reference to the country's natural terrain, as does Richard Dybek's *Sång till Norden* of 1844, Sweden's *ipso facto* national anthem.

Significantly, however, in their enumeration of the beauty of the natural landscape, neither text makes explicit mention of forests in any way. As Leea Virtanen (1994) has shown, nineteenth-century Finns, like their neighbors to the west, tended to view the forest as unsightly and unavoidable, finding aesthetic value in the *absence* rather than the presence of trees. The notion of even sporadic plantings of trees near Finnish housing arose only in the latter half of the century, diffusing into the country as part of an aristocratic landscape aesthetic of forested parklands that had developed elsewhere on the continent (135).

By the end of the century, however, forestry had become a major industry in both countries, and images of forests and forest activities became increasingly more common and more positive in the arts and literature of Sweden and Finland (DuBois 2005). Rural folk and lumberjacks became heroes of Finnish novels and plays, as in Aleksis Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* (1870), Teuvo Pakkala's *Tukkijoella* (1899), and Johannes Linnankoski's *Laulu tulipunaisesta kukasta*(1905). Zacharias Topelius's *Boken om Vårt Land/Maamme-kirja* (1875) enshrined the forest as part of the Finnish character and presented it as such to generations of Finnish schoolchildren. In Sweden, the forest became a prime site of children's literary fantasy, as in the works of Elsa Beskow (Hammar 2002) and illustrator John Bauer (Lundberg and Villa 2002). The image of the Nordic lumberjack became widely known in Scandinavian America as well, where the popularity of the image correlated with the historical reliance of immigrant Swedes and Finns on logging as a means of employment (Leary 2001). Images of Ole and Lena, Paul Bunyan and Husqvarna chain saws helped develop and sustain this trope of Nordic identity internationally, with significant popular, literary and economic ramifications.

Significantly, at the outset of the twentieth century, the forest and its most noticeable product wood also began to emerge as important elements in Swedish and Finnish approaches to architecture. It is also in the medium of architecture that this modern embrace of wood as a symbol first becomes explicitly associated with religion. Where earlier architecture as well as statuary had tended to disguise wood through painting and other treatments intended to convey the solidity and majesty of stone, new techniques of nitrocellulose lacquer application permitted the display of wood with all its grain and irregularities as an aethestic statement. As we shall see, this new technology helped transform wood from its former status as a cheap alternative to prestige materials into a valued architectural feature in itself.

In 1915, architects Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940) and Sigurd Lewerentz (1885-1975) proposed a new urban cemetery for Stockholm's southern section, a space that came to be known as Skogskyrkogården (Constant 1994). Drawing on the concept of the woodland cemetery as introduced by Hans Grässeloch in his Munich Waldfriedhof of 1907, Asplund and Lewerentz designed a cemetery of some one hundred hectares that would combine forest landscape with the simple, utilitarian lines of the then-ermerging functionalist architecture. Grave monuments were subordinated to trees, which enjoyed the central attention of the planned space. Upon its completion in 1920, the cemetery was greeted nearly universally as stunning and innovative, and Skogskyrkogården remains a major tourist attraction in Stockholm today, a century after its design. In 1994, it was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO), the website for which describes it as follows:

> This Stockholm cemetery was created between 1917 and 1920 by two young architects, Asplund and Lewerentz, on the site of former gravel pits overgrown with pine trees. The design blends vegetation and architectural elements, taking advantage of irregularities in the site to create a landscape that is finely adapted to its function. It has had a profound influence in many countries of the world. (UNESCO).

Significantly, Skogskyrkogården offers the deceased urban dweller a forested afterlife: a shaded and naturalistic context in which one's body can decompose and in which the deceased's surviving friends and family can contemplate their loss. The forest offers a bucolic welcome and peace to modern Swedes who most probably have lived out their lives in dwellings of concrete and glass.

In 1937, Alvar Aalto contributed to the rise of wood in functionalist architecture through the house he designed for Harry and Maire Gullichsen (Gaynor 1984: 37-43). Aalto sought to echo nature in the forms and materials of his resulting Villa Mairea, incorporating wooden columns into his design that were meant to suggest the trunks of trees, and even wrapping steel columns in wood so as to make them appear more natural. The roof of the house's sauna was covered in turf, and the interior spaces of the house made ample use of polished blond wood, cut in simple, smooth lines and covered with a clear finish. Local stone and brick were also employed in the interior, lending the home a rustic feel that contrasted with the villa's refined lines and owners. The furnishings of the house were especially designed by Aalto's wife Aino. Her lamps, stools, chairs and tables would eventually become the trademark items of Artek, an interior decorating firm founded by the Aaltos and Gullichsens together with Nils-Gustav Hahl. As Gaynor

writes: “In Villa Mairea, Aalto achieved not only the bridge he sought between man and nature, but a harmony between man and manmade that was to have lasting impact on architecture in Finland and throughout the world” (41).

Through Artek, Aino’s innovative designs literally became household items, eventually finding imitation in the works of many other Nordic designers (Artek). Aalto’s furniture made frequent use of birch and pine, finished in clear lacquer, so that its color and grain would remain prominent. Sometimes such pieces were bent into smooth or undulating shapes through a special process that involved natural drying, followed by steam heating, shaping, and kiln drying. Chair legs produced in this process became characteristic of the new Aalto look, one that was both unambiguously manmade and yet formed of natural wood. The symbolic resonance and appeal of such treatments of wood remain evident in much of Nordic design more than half a century later. They came to stand for the core of what Frykman and Löfgren (1987) identify as the ideal of Nordic postwar Modernity: a seamless unity between the technology and efficiency of the modern world on the one hand and the simplicity and humanity of the agrarian past on the other. As Frykman and Löfgren note, nature enjoyed a key place in Nordic postwar décors, but only as a clean, smooth, and lovely reworking of the rough surfaces and smells of the past.

In 1969, Helsinki’s church architecture came to partake of this new natural aesthetic through Temppeliaukiokirkko, an underground church designed to occupy an open space in downtown Helsinki that had long been dominated by a single granite slab (Mehtälä 2003). Architects Timo (1928 -) and Tuomo (1931-1988) Suomalainen called for a pit to be blasted in the rock and for the resulting crater to be covered and fitted out

as a church. Temppeliaukiokirkko's walls are formed of the natural granite of the once unassailable rock, capped with a ceiling of copper and glass. Wooden furnishings inside the space lend it a warmth and intimacy that its creation would seem to make unlikely, and the resulting church has become one of the favorite tourist sites in Helsinki. On any given day, one can observe busloads of visitors from Europe, North America and Asia, all admiring the "rock church" for its technological innovativeness, beauty, and seeming acknowledgement of the essential sacrality of nature. The church's unfinished pink and gray granite walls, as well as its furnishings of stone and wood, convey the idea that natural forms and objects are holy in and of themselves, even with minimal human alteration.

Figure 3526. Temppeliaukiokirkko interior on a typical tourist day.

The legacy of this Nordic embrace of wood and other natural materials is evident in even a cursory perusal of the catalogue of the Swedish furniture retailer IKEA (founded in 1943 by the Swedish entrepreneur Ingvar Kamprad) or in the bold architectural lines of the Finnish Embassy in Washington, D.C., designed in 1994 by Mikko Heikkinen, Markku Komonen, and Sarlotta Narjus. IKEA designers make frequent use of plastics and laminates in their highly affordable and cheerful household furnishings, but their offerings also always include items crafted in Nordic birch or pine, often with the rounded contours and prominent knots and grain reminiscent of classic Nordic functionalist works. Such wooden objects become essential elements of the retailer's marketed image, a reminder of the company's Nordic roots and persistent populist ideals.

The Finnish Embassy creates a similar echo in Washington D. C. According to William Morgan's description in *The Architectural Review* (Morgan 1994), excerpted for display on the Embassy's official website (Morgan 2009), the Finnish Embassy combines industrial metal, glass and concrete with blond wood, natural plantings and a wooded location on Massachusetts Avenue to convey the image of a quiet and cultured forest retreat amid the high-power politics of the American capital. Morgan writes: "Modest, reserved and quiet, the building is a lot like the people it represents: underneath its polite exterior is a sophisticated and passionate soul. The embassy is a refreshing exercise in understatement with a combination of boldness, self-confidence and simplicity." For an

American viewer, the building, like IKEA, conveys the Nordic ideal of an easy union between modern existence and the natural environment.

Such treatments of wood in twentieth-century Nordic design and architecture became suggestive of the famed Nordic "Middle Way," a humanized, privatized, aestheticized approach to socialism that embraced the common person and yet sought to propel this imagined citizen into the sleek and efficient Modernity of postwar society. It is important to recall the origins of this construct within the context of twentieth-century Social Democratic idealism and social planning lest its full significance as a utopian vision become obscured by the imagery and practices of consumerism that dominates postmodern societies. Smooth light wood furnishings were part of the serene and dignified internationalist materialism that the elite of Sweden and Finland sought to extend to their citizenry in the aftermath of Europe's most devastating war, a cataclysmic military event that largely destroyed the appeal and viability of earlier tropes of nationalism on the continent. As utopian symbols, they became easily allied to the ideals of modern Nordic Christiantity, as we shall see below.

The Artist and Her Work

In her artwork itself as well as her commentaries on her pieces, Eva Ryynänen (1915-2001) embraced wood as both an essential element of her personal religiosity and as a part of her national and cultural identity. The two books written about Ryynänen to date, the first written with her cooperation and approval before her death (Laininen 1992), the latter completed with a strong sense of respect for the artist's own self

portrayal (Simola, Simola, and Repo 2004), underscore repeatedly the deep, spiritual relation that Ryynänen felt between herself, her people, and wood. Much in keeping with the symbolism of Temppeliaukiokirkko, Ryynänen developed a sculptural style that highlighted the natural qualities of her favorite medium and explicitly linked these with concepts of God and the cosmos.

Eva Ryynänen was born Eva Åsenbrygg in the Savo village of Vierimä, near Iisalmi in 1915. Throughout her life she recalled the evenings she spent as a child, whittling small birds and animals while her father repaired farm equipment during long winter's nights (Laininen 1992: 5). A *Suomen kuvalehti* article from 1934 recounts the young artist's new discovery by the Suomen Taideyhdistys art institute of Helsinki (Heikinheimo 1934). In the photo included in the article, she is a lean and resolute nineteen year old, seated beside a carving of a moose, her long pig tails chest length, her fists clenched. Great things were expected of this young woman with a grade school education and childhood experience as a cowherd. She had come to the attention of the academy through her remarkable carving of a scene from Aleksis Kivi's classic novel *Seitsemän veljestä.* In the sculpture, never sold, and now a part of the permanent collection at Paateri, the artist's farm-turned-studio-turned-museum, the seven brothers of Kivi's comedic masterpiece are depicted stranded atop the massive rock Hiidenkivi, mournfully calling for help, encircled by angry bulls. The sculptor portrays the young men as lean bumpkins, slouching, their mouths agape, their expressions humorous and yet not stereotyped. The figures are executed with rough scalloping over most of the body but their faces are finished glassy smooth. In the style of folk carving, their heads and hands are slightly enlarged, although without the grotesque exaggeration typical of

caricature works. The bulls are carved in relief in front of the rock, prancing in a stylized, decorative fashion. The piece is finished in a bright clear lacquer that sets of the golden tone of the wood while lending the surface a glassy shine.

According to the article, Eva hit upon the theme and form of the piece by contemplating the dry, half-rotted alder stump from which she carved it. After removing the rotted parts of the stump, the figures' heads began to emerge, and gradually the entire sculpture and its program materialized in the carving. This notion of *discovering* the form hidden within a piece of wood became a characteristic of Ryynänen's work for the entirety of her career. As she stated: "Kun on nähnyt kuvia puun sisässä, niitä sieltä aina etsii" [Once you have seen pictures within the wood, you always look for them there](7). Of course, such a method precluded the use of models or plans: all her works came from her own internal understandings of the objects she depicted, detected and then unveiled in the wood she carved. In this way, carving was for her a process of negotiation, in which the wood itself played an active role, nearly equal to that of the sculptor.

This deep-seated respect and affection for the wood she carved became manifested in various ways in which Eva described and practiced her art. In terms of materials, Eva favored pine in particular, noting that its light color reflected the Nordic complexion, and comparing her choice to the affection of African carvers for ebony (7). The wood becomes not simply a medium in which to execute a work, in other words—as was the case with medieval religious woodcarvers, who covered their works in *gesso* and paint, disguising their material's identity—but is instead transformed into surrogate flesh, a mimicking of the human, angelic, or animal bodies that it depicts. Further, Eva generally used only a single piece of wood for a given work, resisting the temptation to

join pieces together in order to accomplish difficult angles or extensions, a common practice among earlier religious woodcarvers as well as modern woodcarving hobbyists. By resisting the expediency of supplementation, Eva highlights the identity of the tree or branch from which a given work is produced, permitting it to retain its autonomy as a site of meaning in its own right, while uncovering within it the image which Eva perceived. Her approach thus accords the wood a share of responsibility—and credit—for the work which emerges from within.

Although Eva's entry into the national spotlight portrayed her as having gained an inside track toward fame and success in the Finnish art world, Eva never truly embraced the enterprise that so courted her initially. She enrolled in the art academy as invited, traveling to Helsinki to do so, and spent five years there, dutifully taking courses while cleaning house for a diplomat to make ends meet (Laininen 6). It was at a Helsinki hospital where she was working after the war that she first met Paavo Ryynänen, the man she would eventually marry in 1944 (Simola, Simola and Repo 2004: 17-18). At the end of her studies, however, she returned to her home village, gratefully leaving the pretensions and agendas of the art world behind. In fact, on her first day back in her home village, Eva entered a milking contest and won. (Laininen 6). She and Paavo soon moved to land in North Karelia that Paavo had acquired from his father. There the young couple built a sauna in which they lived for the first seven years of their marriage while they constructed the barn and other buildings of their new farm. They lived out their lives as farmers, with Eva sculpting on the side, until one day when Paavo sold the cows and insisted Eva devote her energies fulltime to her art (Laininen 5). It was thus Paavo's insistence that compelled her to accept the artist's mantle. And it was not until 1974, at

the age of 59, that Ryynänen had her true breakthrough as an artist, with a one-person exhibition of her works at the Amos Andersson Art Museum in Helsinki. Her exhibition ran concurrently with the Ateneum's Ars 74, a multi-artist display of the latest products of the art world that Eva had renounced. According to Laininen, visitors to the two exhibits told Eva: "Siellä tuli sairaaksi, täällä taitaa parantua" [There you grow ill, here you can heal] (7).

While more mainstream artists of Eva's generation sought out and received commissions for pieces to be displayed in largely secular contexts, such as galleries, museums or public buildings, religious art became a staple of Eva's career. Her angels, flowers, and animals found appreciative response from church authorities as well as congregations, who pronounced them both delightful and inspiring. Eva's first commission for a work to be displayed in a church came already in 1953, and many more followed over the next five decades (6-7). Eva noted that she enjoyed making angels and Madonnas more than crucifixes: "Kristusta tehdessä minä kärsin ihmisen pahuuden tähden—minun mielessäni välkkyy tuollainen lempeä aurinkokulttuuri, missä rakkaus on hallitsevana, ei sota." (8) [I suffer for mankind's evil when I make Christ—in my heart shines a gentle culture of the sun, where love prevails, not war."] Eva also maintained faithfully the view of an essential unity between man and nature, stating: "Maa on minun lähtökohtani. Ihminen on yhtä luonnon kanssa." (7) ["The land is my source. Man is one with nature."] As such statements imply, Eva's religious views were broad and panentheistic, finding cultural expression in the Lutheranism of her society, but also always gesturing toward a view that recognized the inherent sacrality of tree or animal within the grand totality of the cosmos. This element of her work often allows it to

transcend strictly Christian readings, an important feature in a society whose members frequently feel estranged from many of the tenets of formal religion. Where a believing Christian can admire one of Eva's many depictions of an angel as an image of its stated referent, in other words, a more agnostic viewer can enjoy the work as a rendering of the spirit of the tree or an acknowledgement of the transcendent beauty of nature and form.

These elements and ideals of Eva's art became most powerfully enunciated in her greatest masterpiece, the chapel she created on her own farm (figure 1747).

Figure 1747. Eva Ryynänen’s Paateri Church.

With its towering roof, natural wood, evocative sculptures and carefully chosen landscaping, the church at Paateri, Eva's "Taiteilijan temppeli" [Artist's temple], seeks to unite seemingly opposing concepts such as nature and religion, inside and outside, animate and inanimate in spiritually uplifting and revelatory ways.

Eva began work on this ambitious project in 1989. The idea for a church at Paateri came from a visitor who admired the large number of pine trunks that Eva had drying on the property as the material for future sculptures, noting that there were enough logs stockpiled to build an entire church (Simola, Simola and Repo 2004: 66). The idea stuck in Eva's mind, and she soon began to discuss it seriously with the municipal authorities of the nearby town of Lieksa. She and Paavo donated the land for the building, its wooden building materials, copper roof, and gilded cross. The town of Lieksa paid for the remaining materials and labor, and local builders worked alongside Eva and Paavo during the construction. One of the men involved in the project, Raimo Kärkkäinen, reminisced about the difficulties of the work: artist that she was, Eva had not thought about the practicalities of incorporating electrical wiring into the building at all. Raimo devised a means of electrifying the structure that did not detract from its overall artistic unity of Eva's design and a grateful Eva carved Raimo's name in the wall alongside her own as a co-producer of the work (figure 1767; Kärkkäinen 2005).

Figure 1767. Ryynänen's tribute to the church's lighting engineer.

The church is built primarily of logs, joined in a traditional long cabin fashion, with chinking of fiber material (figure 1762).

Figure 1762. Church wall showing logs and fiber chinking.

Most of the beams and logs used in the structure were imported from the Russian Federation, particularly the Komi Republic. The trunks had been deemed too large for conventional uses but proved highly effective for achieving the verticality and power of Eva's planned structure. Horizontal logs are anchored and offset by logs set upright, some of which show the parallel striations formed in the process of resin sapping, conducted at the trees' site of origin when they were newly cut (figure 1748).

Figure 1748. Front door framed by upright beams, the latter showing sapping striations from the period when they were newly cut.

Eva oriented these logs carefully so as to incorporate their striations into her design, where they appear as part of the walls' ornamentation. In this way, the personal history of the logs are made evident to the viewer, who may take the markings as part of Eva's own carving.

For the doors of the church, Eva and Paavo traveled to the Canadian west coast to select a massive Western red cedar trunk to import (figure 1748). It furnished not only the building's two large doors but also the material for the church's hourglass baptismal font, and several other pieces elsewhere on the property (Simola, Simola and Repo 2004:

69). The door handles for both the interior and exterior of the doors are gouged from the wood in a manner that reflects Eva's career-long commitment to avoiding supplementation or joining in her sculptures. Likewise, each of the church's fourteen pews is carved whole from its own red pine trunk, sanded to a glossy texture and then ornamented with decorative floral patterns (figure 1751).

Figure 1751. Church benches carved from whole logs, decorated with floral patterns.

The floor is made from crosscut sections of pine trunk combined with droplet-shaped pieces of pine, surrounded by a mastic of sawdust, woodchips, and glue (1753), a

refinement of a very pragmatic flooring Eva first developed for use in her studio, now raised to the level of high art.

Figure 1753. Flooring, showing pine trunks, tear-shaped pieces, and surrounding mastik.

As in the other elements of the building, this choice in flooring, with tree rings prominently displayed for the viewer to count or admire, underscores the identity and individuality of the trees that form it, reminding the viewer of the cooperation of all these beings in the creation of the church as it stands.

The church's main altarpiece consists of the imposing roots of a gigantic tree known as Karjalan Kuusi ["the Spruce of Karelia"] which had grown in the village of

Ruokolahti, South Karelia, before being struck by lightning and dying in the 1970s (figure 1755; Simola, Simola and Repo 2004: 72).

Figure 1755. Church altarpiece, formed of spruce roots.

Eva turned the trunk on its side and removed the trunk itself, leaving only a ring of gnarled and undulating roots which she smoothed slightly and finished. Glass windows behind and above the altar allow the viewer to take in the towering living trees that overshadow the church on all sides, reminding the viewer of the building's woodland setting and figuratively incorporating the forest into the congregation's circle of prayer. In order to minimize obstruction of this view, Eva made the altar proper out of a thick

sheet of glass, inserted unobtrusively into the spruce roots. Four overtly Christian iconographic pieces accompany the altar: an hourglass-shaped baptismal font (designed to remind the viewer of the passage of time through one's life, a pulpit, a crucifix, and a silhouette sculpture of Mary and the baby Jesus, Eva's evocation of the Christmas season (figure 1754; Simola, Simola and Repo 2004: 72).

Figure 1754. Silhouette sculpture showing Mary and baby Jesus.

Eva had carved the crucifix and pulpit during the 1950s for the chapel of the Vuonislahti parsonage; their return to Paateri as part of the new church held important symbolism for her. Given the prominence of the silhouette sculpture at the very top of the altar, Eva felt uncomfortable leaving the pulpit as she had originally carved it, i.e., as a depiction of

Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms (see earlier photo Laininen 1992: 85). So, she altered the carving so that the woman would be holding a lamb instead, describing the resulting work as a depiction of the Good Shepherd (figure 1756).

Figure 1756. Pulpit, showing Good Shepherd.

In this way, her work appropriates the masculine image of the biblical shepherd and reenvisions it as an image of feminine nurturing and care.

Eva's church was consecrated on Midsummer 1991 and remains an active place of worship for the Lieksa parish today. It is used for holiday services as well as life cycle rituals such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Like Temppeliaukiokirkko, however, its greatest impact appears to be as a site for secular tourism, as thousands of visitors

come each year to admire the craftsmanship, ingenuity, and aesthetic sense of an artist whose deep spirituality they glimpse in every aspect of her former home.

In their evocative work *The Seeing Eye: Hermeneutical Phenomenology in the Study of Religion* (1982: 93), Brenneman, Yarian and Olson describe three patterns of emotional or intellectual involvement characteristic of artists who produce works with religious purpose or content. First, such artists may regard their task as imitating an established and meaningful archetype, reenacting that form in acknowledgement of the transcendent reality behind it. Alternatively, they may identify deeply with the process of creating the piece, focusing their conscious minds solely and satisfyingly on the simple act of producing the work at hand. Finally, they may experience the work of producing the art as revelatory, sensing in it the participation of a force or forces outside the self and encapsulated in the term *inspiration.* On a variety of levels, it seems that Eva Ryynänen exemplified all three of these patterns. Her sculptures as well as her church itself reproduced well established iconographic figures, albeit often in innovative or unexpected ways. She described her work as infused with sacrality, both in the sense that it brought her a sense of peace, fulfillment and joy, and in the sense that she could sense the guiding assistance of partners in creation: the wood itself as well as God. She was once quoted as putting it this way: "Me olemme jonkun tahdosta tällä pallolla. Meitä kuunnellaan. Ei pelota yhtään, kun sen muistaa" [We are on this globe at someone's behest. We are heard. Nothing is frightening if you remember that fact] (Simola, Simola, and Repo 2004: 76). In a late twentieth-century Finland, in a country simultaneously both heavily urbanized and heavily forested, in a society that attached

great national and personal significance to forests, trees, and wood but that felt often distanced from the theology and viewpoints of the Lutheran state church, Eva Ryynänen represented a typical and exemplary religious artist. Her works evoke a relationship with nature, with her fellow human beings, and with the divine which is both open-ended and yet warmly reassuring. In her art, Finns can find signs of a society that contemplates, remembers, and ultimately maintains its place in a greater cosmos.

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