

The Purest White Marble, Just Like the Swedish:  
Cultural Mythmaking and the Works of Bengt Erland Fogelberg



History 402: Capstone

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*For my mother,  
who instilled in me excellence before I even knew what it was.  
You gave me more than I will ever be able to say.*

## *Introduction*

Entering a Swedish museum is often a very memorable and specific experience, as visitors to any of the nationally funded museums in Stockholm can attest to. Visitors to the Vasamuseet (Vasa Museum) are greeted with the reconstructed visage of a giant 18th-century Swedish warship, while visitors to the Nordiskamuseet (Nordic Museum) are greeted by an oversized wooden sculpture of the first king of what is generally agreed to be modern Sweden, Gustav I Vasa. But a visit to the Nationalmuseum, the National Museum, is staged differently. Visitors enter into an indoor courtyard of sculptures placed right next to the entrance, staged with creeping ivy, marble pedestals, and antique figures that give the air of high culture, and high class. Within this space, visitors are confronted with three imposingly sized statues of Odin, Thor, and Balder, three of the major gods of the ancient Norse pantheon, done in the purest white Carrara marble. The statues are noticeably taller than many other pieces in the exhibit, and their inscriptions bear the name of a relatively internationally unknown, but incredibly locally important, Swedish sculptor by the name of Bengt Erland Fogelberg. Curiously, right next to the sculpture garden is the museum gift shop, where visitors can shop for mini Odins, postcards of Balder, and notebooks with Thor's visage printed upon them, if patrons find themselves enamored with these pieces.

These three statues are not only marketing material to be used by the Nationalmuseum. They and their artist are deeply interwoven within 19th-century Swedish state-building and national culture and represent a shift in Swedish identity from continental inclinations toward a purely Nordic and Scandinavian proto-history. But this shift in self-identification is not a passive project, and the ways in which these statues, and the historical impulses they embody, have been passed through Swedish history show a project of statecraft that is designed to be imperial, all-encompassing, and hegemonically exclusive. It is the goal of this paper to recenter this cultural

history within a greater historical context and understand why these statues should be noted as a turning point in Swedish national identification, both for those included within the Swedish ideal, and those excluded from it. This paper will establish new methodologies for understanding these pieces and move through the many different historical forces at play to set the scene for the life and work of the artist who created them. It will then provide an analysis of these pieces and their peculiarities, asserting that they do not in any sense divest themselves from continental and classical influences, and in fact perpetuate and buy into ideals of virtue and superiority through art. It will then provide some examples of how modern artists and culturists are again recontextualizing and remaking the Swedish space and fighting back against the hegemony and exclusion in modern Swedish culture that persists today.

No element of Swedish culture is entirely “Swedish,” just as no culture is wholly isolated on its own. This paper shows through these statues how previous histories and mythologies perpetuate themselves in subversive ways if historians are not keen to pay attention. This project aims to bring greater awareness to the ways that Swedish culture has built itself up a wall, so that it may piece by piece be taken down by those that now inherit and work in a modern Swedish history.

### *Spaces as Methodology*

To understand the subject pieces of this study as multidimensional and interdisciplinary objects, some theoretical frameworks should be established at the outset. Firstly, the statues in question in this study operate in many different conceptions of space/spaces, whether that be the physical space in which the object exists *in situ*, or the historical space that it takes up, or their placement relative to other cultural works, etc. One framework that this analysis works under, as developed by Berg and Lundgren in “We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political

Space Through Unsanctioned Art,” is the idea that “space is always ideological... and that it needs to be thought of as something ongoing, a ‘heterogeneity of processes’ that together form, and reform, notions of what space can be/come.”<sup>1</sup> The statues of Fogelberg are then objects that also inform their spaces, that create history as much as they are a part of history, and are not objects to be examined solely as objects of only cultural or only historical significance. The process that these statues engage in interjects and works in concert with other various historical forces at the same time, and they thus should be looked at as artifacts with multifaceted and continuing significance.

Secondly, it is important to complicate how the term and concept of “representation” could be applied historically to these statues under discussion. Representation means to re-present, or to “make something present again” as understood by F.R. Ankersmit in “‘Presence’ and Myth.” But he adds the qualification that in order to re-present something, it requires that it not *currently* be on display, showing how “it follows from this that the notions of ‘representation’ and ‘presence’ are closely and indissolubly linked: the notion of ‘presence’ is part of the meaning of the word “representation.”<sup>2</sup> All this goes to say that the act of presenting these statues is necessarily a creation of a new historical item that did not exist before, but not devoid of a prior context. Key to this analysis, “the historical text [or artifact] is then not merely a textual *substitute* for the absent past – nay, the past then travels into the present as a kind of ‘stowaway[.]’”<sup>3</sup> Conceiving of these statues as objects that allow (a form of) the past to leak into

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Berg and Anna Sofia Lundgren, “We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art,” in *Pluralistic Struggles in Gender, Sexuality and Coloniality: Challenging Swedish Exceptionalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Springer International, 2021), 50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47432-4>. See also Cresswell and Massey quoted in this text for further reading on these ideas beyond what developed by Berg and Lundgren.

<sup>2</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, “‘Presence’ and Myth,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 3 (2006): 328. See Runia cited in this work for a further elaboration on the metaphor of the “stowaway.”

<sup>3</sup> Ankersmit, 329.

the present is important to understanding how they transmit idealized forms of culture and identity, in both positive and negative ways.

By incorporating both these theoretical perspectives into an analysis of these historical objects, a much more nuanced idea of how the past is transmitted and what effect it has on the present can be developed. When thinking of how the “Classical world” (which in itself is a monolith created by Romantic scholars of that historical milieu) and its mythologies work their way into a Swedish context, Ankersmit adds that “myth always brings us up to the limits of what can be historicized: for myth informs us how history, the ever-changing historical reality in which we are living now, arose out of what did *not* change[.]”<sup>4</sup> Thus, thinking about the Classical world itself is a construction becomes extremely important in dealing with the ancient and mythologized Swedish past.<sup>5</sup> The Swedish national history is both a theoretical and ongoing project, one that is continually interacting with artists such as Fogelberg.

### *An Exceptional History?*

The Swedish historio-cultural space is not without its many issues and problems. Swedish historians often have trouble recognizing and speaking out against the more embedded problematics of their national history and how it is represented; this is not entirely due to willful ignorance, or an unwillingness to look critically at moments of tension. As Kajsa Norman calls it in her book *Sweden's Dark Soul: The Unravelling of a Utopia*, the “culture wars” waged throughout Swedish history have created historiographical blind spots, shrinking the historical space, which becomes particularly pervasive in a country containing an intense homogeneity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ankersmit, 333.

<sup>5</sup> For further nuance on this discussion of myth/history, please see the Analysis section of this paper beginning on page 15.

<sup>6</sup> Kajsa Norman, *Sweden's Dark Soul: The Unravelling of a Utopia* (London: Hurst, 2019), 225.

And while it could be said that all national histories attempt to create and define what comprises the national culture, in Sweden, it became an opportunity to “gain cultural dominance – and, ultimately, control over what constituted common sense.”<sup>7</sup> In a perfect storm of cultural and historically ethnic homogeneity, mixed with a national mood of moral superiority, this control becomes extremely pervasive.

This hegemony is present throughout Sweden’s historiography, but it begins to be most visible in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of the Social Democratic party and the phenomenon that Norman calls the “unimind.”<sup>8</sup> As the state of Sweden began to have a larger and stronger role in maintaining the exceptionality of the Swedish national consciousness, with it came a stronger sense of Swedish group identity and groupthink. This “unimind” contained “all the unspoken rules and values of Swedish culture, it enabled Swedes to know instinctively what was expected of them. What was right; what was wrong... Swedes relied on this collective intuition as their moral compass; using it both to judge and to predict the judgments, thoughts or actions of others.”<sup>9</sup> Not only is it socially difficult to speak out against issues in Swedish culture or history, but it also becomes intellectually difficult to even detect inconsistencies, as the pervasiveness of Swedish conformity “had mutated, and by now, it came from within as much as from without.”<sup>10</sup>

It is important here to note that this conformity is also extremely racialized. Norman’s concept of the unimind embodies Swedish anxieties about “immigrants” coming to Sweden that don’t mesh well with the traditional culture, which often is a dog whistle for discrimination against people of African, Arab, or otherwise nonwhite descent, all populations that have

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<sup>7</sup> Norman, 225.

<sup>8</sup> Norman, 113.

<sup>9</sup> Norman, 113–14.

<sup>10</sup> Norman, 114.

exploded in Sweden in recent years.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, it is often due to Swedish governmental policies of redlining, segregation, and a failure to support large immigrant populations that these social anxieties often are caused in the first place.<sup>12</sup> Swedish hegemony is a self-fulfilling aspiration of an insular community of whiteness; a place where “we have always been a people” becomes a way to say “we have always been a *white* people.”<sup>13</sup> This establishment of a “sacred territory [and] national identity” as an exclusive cultural space, as Patrick Geary puts it in *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, is “the very antithesis of history.”<sup>14</sup> As this establishment is explored in this paper, it is important to note this hegemony as a tool to maintain Swedish whiteness.

These impulses and controls over the narrative of Swedish history are so embedded in the national consciousness, that they at times expose themselves in moments of extreme discomfort, such as when a Swedish mining executive mistakenly dismisses the presence of an indigenous community on the land in which her company is developing, or when a prime minister remarks that he will, “in every context, forcefully *brand* those who speak ill of Sweden abroad” during a governmental debate.<sup>15</sup> But how did this hegemony become so pervasive, and where does the obsession with what/who is and isn’t “Swedish” begin to become a concept? These questions certainly do not have simple answers, but one place to begin to look is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a small group of intellectuals starting to build a grander idea of what it means to be Swedish, and who gets to fit in. They named this concept *Gothicism*, after the apocryphal proto-Nordic peoples who inhabited what is now known as Scandinavia.

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<sup>11</sup> Norman, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Norman, 248–49.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Second Printing edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 37, second quotation includes my own emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Geary, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Berg and Lundgren, “We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art,” 64; Norman, *Sweden’s Dark Soul*, xiv, my emphasis.



## *The Gothic Society and Swedish “Antiquity”*

The main factor for the propulsion of Gothicism into Sweden at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a group of scholars, academics, and politicians called the *Götiska Förbundet*, usually translated as the Geatish or Gothic League. Shaken by movements on all sides of the dying Swedish empire by Denmark and Russia, and recently subject to the loss of thousands of Swedish soldiers and the territory of Finland in 1809, Swedish aristocrats began to worry about the placement of Sweden in a greater continental consciousness, one that increasingly became more differentiated by the day.<sup>16</sup> The interrelatedness of the Swedish empire and her subjects became less of a sure thing, and as Norman puts it, the Swedish “resonated deeply with the zeitgeist of the early nineteenth century: the individual was alone.”<sup>17</sup> In art and cultural contexts, the classical themes that had dominated all forms of cultural consciousness for hundreds of years began to leave a sour taste in the mouth of the more upstanding Swedish citizens, and motivated a change in motive, partially put together by one Erik Gustaf Geijer.

Geijer was 28 years old when he began with some fellow academics in 1811 to publish a periodical called “Idunn,” after the ancient Nordic goddess of youth, with the subheading “a paper for all lovers of the ancient Nordic past,” designed to promote what he saw as the virtue of the ancient peoples of Scandinavia.<sup>18</sup> An academically-educated poet, Geijer set out to “wake the slumbering Nordic spirit” in the people of Sweden whom he thought had fallen from their original Northern grace.<sup>19</sup> In the poem *Odalbonden*, Geijer “romanticized the Viking and the land-owning Swedish farmer, who, with his ties to the land, was more Swedish than any nobility

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<sup>16</sup> Maja Hagerman, *Det rena landet: Om konsten att uppfinna sina förfäder* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2006), 137; Norman, *Sweden’s Dark Soul*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Norman, *Sweden’s Dark Soul*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Hagerman, *Det rena landet*, 139, my translation.

<sup>19</sup> Hagerman, 139, my translation.

could ever be.”<sup>20</sup> Geijer created a fictional ancient Nordic land called “Manhem,” free from all “alien external influences and the vanity of the southern parallels[,]” referring to his distaste for the myriad of continental influences present in Scandinavia.<sup>21</sup> In this space, he saw a way for Sweden to persist by claiming a heritage that was lost to time, and to repossess their ancient “male virtue, bravery, endurance, and independence.”<sup>22</sup> Geary calls this phenomenon a “renewable [resource],” where utilizing the name and mythology of the Goths holds “the potential to convince people of continuity, even if radical discontinuity was the lived reality... [The Goths] could be reclaimed, applied to new circumstances, and used as rallying cries for new powers.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, Gothicism and the Goths could become whatever Geijer needed them to be.

The feelings and memories that Geijer crafted for the Swedish people took off across Scandinavia and the rest of Europe. In Denmark, the other Nordic superpower of the time, these ideas spread throughout the Danish court, making Copenhagen into the “authoritative workshop of Nordic mythmaking” for all interested continental parties also looking to discover their hidden ancient past.<sup>24</sup> The German Romantic nationalists, at the time also constructing a connection to the ancient Nordic peoples as a unifying German trait, were directly in contact and contest with Copenhagen over laying claim to the originality of the peoples called “the Germans,” so much so that an intellectual linkage was forged between the Danish and German academic milieus, and exchange of pasts was begun.<sup>25</sup> Via scholars such as Paul Henri Mallet, Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, and others, Germany and Sweden engaged in very

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<sup>20</sup> Norman, *Sweden's Dark Soul*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Hagerman, *Det rena landet*, 139, my translation.

<sup>22</sup> Norman, *Sweden's Dark Soul*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 118–19.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*, 1st edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 171.

<sup>25</sup> Krebs, 172, 175.

similar projects of national mythmaking.<sup>26</sup> Geijer himself was also directly involved with the mythmaking of the court of Weimar through Amalia von Helvig, a member of the Weimar and Jena intellectual circles and de facto translator for Geijer's work in German academia, acting almost as a kind of "PR-agent" for Swedish Romantics in Germany.<sup>27</sup> As Christopher Krebs writes in *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*, "an anticlassical poetics was the order of the day[.]" and the Gothic Society was right at the forefront of its new replacement.<sup>28</sup>

A turning point came in May of 1818 when the Gothic Society held its first exhibition of artifacts and art concerning the Nordic past.<sup>29</sup> This exhibition, planned according to Geijer's designs, contained several "artifacts" of the Nordic past centered around a drinking horn that Geijer supposedly acquired from a scholarly society in the university city of Uppsala, a very important ancient site for Viking-era archaeology.<sup>30</sup> This horn, and many other decorative pieces included in the exhibition, were created by a young and upcoming sculptor by the name of Bengt Erland Fogelberg, a protégé of Geijer's and many other members of the Society. Also in attendance was the newly minted King Karl Johan XIV, who had recently arrived from France as a foreign import, tasked with rehabilitating the Swedish imperial project with knowledge gleaned in Napoleonic circles.<sup>31</sup> Desperately looking for ways to integrate himself and his family line, the Bernadottes, into the Swedish cultural consciousness, Geijer's nationalistic ideas and Fogelberg's embrace of Gothic themes would prove instrumental towards the end of accomplishing that goal.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Krebs, 175.

<sup>27</sup> Hagerman, *Det rena landet*, 150.

<sup>28</sup> Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book*, 173.

<sup>29</sup> Hagerman, *Det rena landet*, 151.

<sup>30</sup> Hagerman, 151.

<sup>31</sup> Hagerman, 151.

<sup>32</sup> Hagerman, 151–52.

The Swedish academy and elite would eventually embrace the Gothic Society so entirely that they would become inseparable, ushering in a new age of Gothicism and Swedish national thought that would be instrumental in years to come, ultimately culminating in the construction of the Historiskamuseet, or the Swedish National History Museum, which serves as a monument to Geijer's ideal Swedish Nordic past.<sup>33</sup> But Geijer alone was not enough to enact this ideological shift and required collaboration with culturists in multiple different spaces in order to entrench his re-creation of Gothicism. One such profoundly influential culturist, who would go on to bring the Society to its zenith, is the Swedish sculptor Bengt Erland Fogelberg.

### *Bengt Erland Fogelberg*

Fogelberg, born in 1786, was a native of the west coast city of Gothenburg, raised by a copper-smithing father who supported his artistic passion by enabling him to move to the more international city of Stockholm in 1803, to pursue an education.<sup>34</sup> An already talented student, winning awards throughout his time at the Swedish Academy of Art, he came under the instruction and influence of prominent Swedish artists such as Johan Tobias Sergel, and his professor Carl Fredrik von Breda, turning him in the direction of Classical art instruction. Concurrently, the Gothic Society was being established in 1811 while Fogelberg was advancing in his instruction in Stockholm, with many of his mentors also serving as prominent members of the Society.<sup>35</sup> This movement influenced Fogelberg's early artistic development especially under von Breda, whose followers began to be referred to as "Breda's salon" for their philosophical

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<sup>33</sup> Hagerman, 156.

<sup>34</sup> Karin Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg," Biographical Archive, Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/14284>.

<sup>35</sup> Melin.

engagements against the prevailing Swedish Academy.<sup>36</sup> Fogelberg's friend and fellow artist Axel Nyström even remarked that "it was under these years that Fogelberg really became an artist."<sup>37</sup>

But still, during this early time in his career, Fogelberg was immersed in the Classical influences of his surroundings, producing pieces such as *Bacchus* (1808), *Faun* (1811), and *Sårad Akilles* (*Wounded Achilles*, ca. 1820, Figure 1), drawing on an entirely Graeco-Roman set of motifs. His training under his instructors in Stockholm at the time was entirely in this artistic milieu. Even though the Gothic revival movements were beginning to gain traction, they had not reached the level of prominence that they would occupy in the coming years. It was at this moment, between the dates of 1818 and 1820, that Fogelberg received a pension from the government to begin an artistic European tour, where he would advance his knowledge of Classical themes by studying in the major continental artistic centers, beginning with Paris.<sup>38</sup> He studied there for about a year under the tutelage of prominent French artists such as Pierre Guérin and François Joseph Bosio, developing his technical sculpting skills in a more advanced environment than was available to him in Stockholm.<sup>39</sup> Fogelberg would then continue his tour into the city where he would come to spend the greater portion of the rest of his life, and the city in which he would create his distinct style, Rome.

Fogelberg's early years and works completed in his new city were marked by an attention to his strict Classical surroundings, working alongside sculptors such as Antonio Canova and

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<sup>36</sup> Lennart Pettersson, "Johan Niklas Byström och Bengt Erland Fogelberg - Samtidiga svenska skulptörer i Rom," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 67, no. 2 (January 1, 1998): 97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609808604454>.

<sup>37</sup> Pettersson, 97, my translation.

<sup>38</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg"; Hugh Chisholm, ed., "Fogelberg, Benedict Erland," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 590. The exact date of Fogelberg's departure from Stockholm is slightly unclear, as the sources consulted for this project disagree. I have cited the Encyclopedia Britannica in this instance to provide a second narrative, and because there are so few sources that reference this event specifically.

<sup>39</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg."

Bertel Thorvaldsen who provided him with a wealth of subject material in the Greco-Roman tradition. This period of his development is marked by works such as *Psyche* (in terracotta, 1822) and *Paris* (c. 1824, Figure 2), showing the development of his technical skill in sculpting as well as his unique approach to classical motif.<sup>40</sup> He embraced the continental influences of his contemporaries, producing works that fit in well with the other Classical Revival artists in Rome at the time. But in 1828, Fogelberg received the commission that would change the course of his art and the course of Swedish high art culture in general.

Under the influences of the Gothic Society and the new burgeoning Romantic movement, Karl XIV Johan, King of Sweden from 1780-1844, had commissioned Fogelberg to create a full-size statue in Carrara marble of the Norse god Odin.<sup>41</sup> At the same time as Fogelberg was solidifying his style in Rome, the king had commissioned several statues of all the previous Swedish kings under the name of Karl: Karl X, Karl XI, Karl XII, Karl XIII, which had been done in standard Classical style.<sup>42</sup> But in terms of his own portrayal, he desired a different and more engaging subject matter that aligned with the growing Romantic movement taking shape in Stockholm. Thus, the king chose to be depicted as Odin himself.

Fogelberg had contributed a small sketch statue of Odin to a Gothic Society exhibition in 1817 (Figure 3), previous to his departure from Sweden as a test run of his incorporation of Nordic themes into his sculptural practice, but he had not yet completed a full-size statue of Odin or any other Nordic mythological figure until this point.<sup>43</sup> Through Fogelberg's series of connections in the Gothic Society and their now closeness to the royal court, the king became

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<sup>40</sup> Melin.

<sup>41</sup> Pettersson, "Johan Niklas Byström och Bengt Erland Fogelberg," 100; Susanne W Lamm, "Kung i Gudomlig Skepnad," October 31, 2018, <http://www.epochtimes.se/Kung-i-gudomlig-skepnad>.

<sup>42</sup> Lamm, "Kung i Gudomlig Skepnad."

<sup>43</sup> Pettersson, "Johan Niklas Byström och Bengt Erland Fogelberg," 105.

aware of Fogelberg's skill and adoption of the new Romantic inclination. However, the king requested that Fogelberg depict Odin not as he had before, seated upon the throne statically, but rather "as a god of war, looking out from the top of some mountain, over ancient Scandinavia."<sup>44</sup> With these instructions, it would seem only natural that Fogelberg should produce his new *Oden* modeled after his surrounding inspirations, the most salient being the statue of Mars Ultor held in the Capitoline Museum, creating a striking likeness between the two (Figure 4). Under this context, Fogelberg finished his breakthrough piece in 1830, which would be received in Stockholm with much praise and celebration.<sup>45</sup> With this statue, Fogelberg cemented the new Romantic period in artistic and popular consciousness and lifted the Nordic mythological theme above the Classical, marking a new and different period in Swedish national conception (Figure 5).

Fogelberg continued to create pieces following Classical motifs (*Venus* and *Apollo*, both 1839), but nothing would come close to the popularity he achieved by creating *Oden*. Luckily for him, when *Oden* was delivered to Stockholm, the king quite quickly commissioned two other pieces by Fogelberg; he was to depict two other polemic Norse gods, Thor and Frey, but Frey was swapped out with another god, Balder, for his associations with grace and mild dignity, in contrast to the domineering and violent associations of Thor.<sup>46</sup> Balder as a subject also allowed Fogelberg to draw on a much different set of references, such as those of his mentor Bertel Thorvaldsen, which allowed for a contrast of aesthetics against the other two statues that the subject of Frey would not have.<sup>47</sup> Thus, both statues were completed in 1844 after being delayed

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<sup>44</sup> Lamm, "Kung i Gudomlig Skepnad," my translation.

<sup>45</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg."

<sup>46</sup> Melin.

<sup>47</sup> It is possible that there were also religious motivations for avoiding a physical portrayal of Frey, a god associated with fertility and procreation, alongside the crafted personas of Odin and Thor, but existing sources do not particularly address this possibility. See further in this paper for more analysis on the religiosity of these pieces, specifically Balder, and the accompanying sources for further discussion.

by work on many other smaller pieces, but once they were finished, Fogelberg returned home to Sweden for the first time since leaving the country during his initial travels in 1820, and he was received in Stockholm with honors (Figures 6 and 7).<sup>48</sup>

His style and impact on Swedish artistic consciousness now cemented, he returned to Rome the following year with several new project commissions under his belt, all in the new Romantic, Gothic style that he pioneered with his *Aesir Trio*, as his three sculptures are referred to collectively. In the following years, Fogelberg would move towards more historical figures and motifs, completing statues of several other Swedish kings, such as Karl XII and Gustavus Adolphus, and an outdoor sculpture of Birger Jarl, the founder of Stockholm, completed around 1850 (Figure 8).<sup>49</sup> As a result of his popularity, he became admitted to and a member of several academies and societies, such as the Royal Order of the Polar Star, a Swedish order of chivalry to which he was the first artist to ever be admitted.<sup>50</sup> Thus in 1854, he resolved to travel back to Stockholm, with several other projects in tow, to receive the honor in person and to be recognized by the royal family. But on his journey back, he suffered a stroke in Trieste, Italy, where he died on the 22nd of December.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, his body was moved from Trieste to Gothenburg, where he now lies within his family's traditional grave.

### *An Analysis of Fogelberg's Trio*

Fogelberg created a new politicized aesthetic through his sculpture through his adoption of Gothic motifs, and his history as a protégé of the Gothic Society attests to this. It is important to see his active participation in history through the medium of art for what it is, in just the same

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<sup>48</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg"; Pettersson, "Johan Niklas Byström och Bengt Erland Fogelberg," 108.

<sup>49</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg."

<sup>50</sup> Melin.

<sup>51</sup> Melin.



way as Geijer's creation of a proto-Swedish consciousness was. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes in *Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History*, "deeds and words are not as distinguishable as we often presume. History does not belong only to its narrators, professional or amateur."<sup>52</sup> By breaking down how Fogelberg's statues act upon history through their construction, it becomes easier to see how the life of these pieces extends beyond the artist's unique historical situation.

Fogelberg's statues occupy a niche in-between what could be called "the Classical" and what could be called "the Gothic," but they are not necessarily the only pieces to do so. Cultural differentiation within sculpture is a key element of national construction in this era of European history, as Daniel Koep attests to in a book chapter concerning a German sculptor of the post-WWII era, "Modernity and tradition: public sculpture by Gerhard Marcks, 1949-67." He postulates that "this constructed cultural identity could be composed of elements from archaic Greece [e.g., Rome] as the archetypal human culture; it could incorporate medieval German piety and spirituality and last, but not least, the living tradition of modernist German figuration... Marcks formulated a West German identity in which he salvaged its wholeness physically and metaphorically in terms of a national culture."<sup>53</sup> And while the context for Fogelberg is obviously different, he similarly constructs a chimera culture through his sculpture of a salvaged Gothic identity, pieced together with the glue provided by the stability of Classical references. In both contexts, an identity is intentionally being constructed as a separation *from* a past. In this case, Fogelberg's sculptures propose a new "unbroken [Romantic] tradition[,]"<sup>54</sup> one that is

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<sup>52</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2nd Revised edition (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015), 153.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Koep, "Modernity and Tradition: Public Sculpture by Gerhard Marcks, 1949-67," in *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968*, ed. Charlotte Benton, 1st edition, Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture (London: Routledge, 2004), 103.

<sup>54</sup> Koep, 103.

attested to be uniquely Swedish in character. However, a tradition that is uniquely “Swedish” without outside influence simply does not exist, and Fogelberg’s artworks themselves expose this.

The best example for analysis of this is the magnum opus of Fogelberg’s pieces, *Oden*. On surface-level observation, this piece looks like a dramatized representation of Odin in classical Nordic myth, albeit with a bit of Greco-Roman dress and posing mixed in. But with a deeper lens, this statue is missing several important attributes of Odin’s traditional depiction. For example, common myth relates that Odin sacrificed one of his eyes to the god of the well of wisdom, Mimir, to gain never-ending knowledge of the arcane in his quest for understanding, but Fogelberg portrays him as a whole and completed being, without the distasteful evidence of his pagan sacrifice for dark knowledge visibly obvious on his face; for a post-Christianized Sweden, that would be unacceptable.<sup>55</sup> Odin’s familiars, the crows Hugin and Munin, that traditionally sit on his shoulders and whisper arcane knowledge to him, are reduced to elements that crown his helmet as decoration, more in line with a depiction of the elements of a Roman god than a Nordic one.<sup>56</sup> In actuality, Odin in this statue becomes a Latinized version of himself, one that the new king of Sweden could identify with and disseminate as his adoption of the Gothic aesthetic, reinventing himself as the ancient war god he desired to be shown as.<sup>57</sup> It just was not a *Swedish* war god he ended up identifying with. Fogelberg’s resource of the Capitoline Museum comes out more in this statue than any other he created, and the popularity with which it was received attests to that. The Nordic themes are there, but still safely wrapped up in a very Roman-looking toga.

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<sup>55</sup> Elin Eriksson, “Bland gudar och krigare: asatro, ideologi och mansidealet i nationalromantikens konst” (Dissertation, University of Gävle, 2009), 19, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hig:diva-4701>.

<sup>56</sup> Eriksson, 19.

<sup>57</sup> Lamm, “Kung i Gudomlig Skepnad”; Hagerman, *Det rena landet*, 152.

*Tor* is a different story. Due to this piece's completion coming much later in Fogelberg's career, there is much more of a developed sense of identity and attention to specificity than is present in *Oden*, one that Fogelberg only developed with time and with more attention from the Swedish academy. He is clothed in a more appropriate set of pelts with a more Nordic style of dress, but still maintains a reference to Classical forms through his posing and slight reference to statues of Hercules that Fogelberg also had access to.<sup>58</sup> *Tor* personifies the virtuous farmer ideal dreamed up by Geijer, of a strong, hardworking Swedish peasant, complete with hammer and iron-working gloves that would be common to blue-collar workers in the northern cities of Sweden.<sup>59</sup> He becomes a masculine ideal of what the Nordic prototype should be, taking the place of *Oden* as the war god of the set of statues. While not as kingly in depiction as Odin, Thor here is the statue that the Swedish people could identify with and see as their countryman, fitting in the perfect proto-Swedish society of the Gothic Society. The kings have their *Oden*, but the people have their *Tor*.

*Balder* sits somewhere in-between but also outside these two cultural motifs. To address the obvious, this statue is a heavy reference to statues of Jesus created by Thorvaldsen whom Fogelberg did encounter early on during his time in Rome, and who also was likely a present figure during the construction of all three of the trio of sculptures.<sup>60</sup> However, deeper than visual reference, the figure of Balder also serves a martyr-type role in Nordic folklore, offering up his purity and innocence to be destroyed as the result of a prophecy that must be fulfilled. Much like the figure of Jesus, Balder becomes the victim of an inevitability, drawing connections across the minds of Christian Sweden to apply to this ancient Nordic figure in ways that go much deeper

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<sup>58</sup> Eriksson, "Bland gudar och krigare," 20.

<sup>59</sup> Eriksson, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Eriksson, 20; Lamm, "Kung i Gudomlig Skepnad."

than physical reference.<sup>61</sup> It's unclear whether or not Fogelberg intended this dual reference to be present in this work, but his open and outstretched hands and lightly draped garment create a very strong connection. If the artist intended to portray a figure with a similar function to one that the people of 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden would be able to relate to, choosing Balder over the far more obvious choice for trio portrayal, Frey, begs for his decision to be read as intentional.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout these three sculptures, the Gothic Society's idea of an unbroken culturally Swedish motif becomes wrapped in reference to other Classical visual elements, figures, etc., which may initially create a sense of artificiality or invalidity. With the intensity of Geijer's and the Gothic Society's nationalist sentiment as strong as it is, one wonders how references to continental motifs could pass under scrutiny and not be rejected by the close lens of the Gothic Revival. But as Philip Ayres elaborates in *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England*, the sense of virtue and refined thought that accompanies classical culture is still very much alive throughout the gothic movement, especially in someone as obsessed with continental references as Fogelberg. He incorporates "a familiarity with the ancient authors and the inculcation of grace, propriety and moderation learned there, [with] a classical *gravitas* which would then be softened by an easy elegance charm and gentility best learned on the Continent[.]"<sup>63</sup> The formula for proper virtue signaling within learned art still persists despite the Gothic Society's efforts to shed all forms of continental reference. Fogelberg, a thoroughly Classical sculptor living in Italy, is still the one making the sculptures of the Nordic gods.

It is also not out of the question to consider that the Swedish elite is attempting through these sculptures to have their classical cake and to eat it too, by referencing specific sculptural

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<sup>61</sup> Eriksson, "Bland gudar och krigare," 20.

<sup>62</sup> Melin, "Bengt E Fogelberg."

<sup>63</sup> Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England*, Annotated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53.

elements that would have cultural weight at this time, beyond just a general reference to antiquity that could be read into these pieces. For example, Ayres asserts that “Roman military garb, and civil garb too for that matter, is not a ‘masquerade costume[;]’ It expresses the idea that the subject maintains the values of the classical past in the English [e.g. Swedish] present.

Frequently a deliberate juxtaposing of the past and present emphasizes just this point.”<sup>64</sup>

Considering the portrayal of Odin in this case, with his Roman toga and helm, this metaphor could even be drawn to assert a juxtaposition of the past with another past, maintaining what remains of the value of the virtuous classical Roman past, with the national idea of the Swedish Gothic heritage. Returning to Ankersmit’s idea of the ‘stowaway’ cited above, the Roman past sneaks in through its repackaging as an authentic Swedish culture under the eyes of those who would divest themselves from it most. The past of this ‘representation’ is in fact, anything but original, and as Ayres shows, “the best values of the past are alive in the present, which may be like, but can never be, the past.”<sup>65</sup>

### *Recontextualizing Swedish Modernity*

Fogelberg’s sculptures are key elements of this project of manufactured cultural exclusivity, in that they visually and representatively depict who is allowed to sit at the Swedish table. The past as it is seen by Fogelberg and his contemporaries is a closed loop, one that must be maintained and solidified through the means of culture. As it is shown above, this process requires intentional production that is not merely a culture developing itself passively, but rather an active redefinition of who is allowed to take part in the project. Thus, when confronting these

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<sup>64</sup> Ayres, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Ayres, 69.

sculptures in a modern historical context, an inclusive approach is needed to resist and work against the hegemony they create.

An important way that these structures are talked back to is through a process termed “cultural jamming,” whereby a group acts in spaces that are publicly visible or owned by others, creating resistance to hegemony or dominant cultural ideologies through art and other cultural elements, such as music.<sup>66</sup> Usually used in the contexts of anti-capitalist or political activism, culture jamming is a way that artworks can be informed not only by the intent of the artist through the piece but by their social and spatial contexts, working closely with the concept of space as a methodology introduced earlier.<sup>67</sup> For example, if Fogelberg’s works are taken to be a form of “culture building,” in that they rearrange elements to serve the purpose of building a homogenous and standardized culture, then culture jamming is the inverse relationship, rearranging and reframing elements to expose that very homogeneity that may be non-obvious to all participants. With the rise of the internet and a more overtly racialized Swedish context, culture jamming becomes an important and accessible way to resist such constructions.

Culture jamming is most closely associated in Sweden with the works of indigenous Sámi activists, and their resistance to various threats including the “ongoing mining boom in Northern Scandinavia, questions of cultural appropriation and assimilation, and the challenges the Sámi are facing on the level of national and municipal politics and jurisdiction.”<sup>68</sup>

Historically, the Sámi have been hidden and placed outside of traditional Swedish narratives, relegated to an insignificant community in the north that is not, but should become, as Swedish

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<sup>66</sup> Laura Junka-Aikio, “Indigenous Culture Jamming: Suohpanterror and the Articulation of Sami Political Community,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10, no. 4 (September 3, 2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2017.1379849>; Berg and Lundgren, “We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art,” 52.

<sup>67</sup> Junka-Aikio, “Indigenous Culture Jamming,” 4.

<sup>68</sup> Junka-Aikio, 5.

as possible through reeducation and forced boarding school residency.<sup>69</sup> A good example of this is that nowhere are the Sámi included in any part of the idea of Swedish ‘antiquity,’ like Geijer’s *manhem* introduced above, although the Sámi and their culture have been present in Scandinavia since time immemorial.<sup>70</sup> They are emphatically and intentionally missing from the narrative, as they are not the hardworking virtuous peasants of ideal ancient Sweden, nor are they even the right color. They are not the Swedish archetype preached by the Gothic Society.

With the advent of the internet and the increasing democratization of cultural space, the Sámi gain the space to jam the culture that has jammed them for millennia. One actor making use of this framework is the organization Suohpanterror, an art-activist collective comprised of semi-anonymous members who promote Sámi interests and political goals through digital and physical media campaigns. Their posters often take the form of parodies of popular cultural references, including media from brands or well-known social media memes (Figure 9). They act both overtly and subtly in their critique of Scandinavian states and culture, sometimes referring to global issues such as the ratification of international indigenous sovereignty law, and sometimes referencing local issues, like the problems of land and water disputes taking place in northern Sweden.<sup>71</sup> Suohpanterror’s online work emphatically brings attention to “the importance of ‘sharing’ and ‘liking’ as means of producing collective political subjectivities and solidarities[,]” as pointed out by Laura Junka-Aikio in “Indigenous Culture Jamming: Suohpanterror and the articulation of Sami political community.”<sup>72</sup> While Fogelberg’s statues constructed a new ideal of Swedishness to be aspired to culturally, and redefined the conversation around issues of

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<sup>69</sup> Berg and Lundgren, “We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art,” 60–61.

<sup>70</sup> Junka-Aikio, “Indigenous Culture Jamming,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Junka-Aikio, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Junka-Aikio, 6.

Swedish identity and nationhood, Suohpanterror complicates that construction and threatens the structure that it relies upon.

Similarly, the works of Sámi artist Anders Sunna enact an analogous disruption and jamming. Sunna, a well-known street and urban artist throughout Sweden, often uses his art to combat the issues of colonialism and discrimination prominent in his life as a Sámi person.<sup>73</sup> Berg and Lundgren analyze Sunna's work in the form of a music video, where pieces of Sunna's graffiti-inspired outdoor works are accompanied by the singing of Sofia Jannok, an extremely popular Sámi musician. Sunna's accompanying pieces consist of slogans such as "YOU HAVE NOT BEEN IN THE AREA!," referencing comments made by Swedish politicians regarding Sámi land sovereignty, and "WE ARE STILL HERE!," asserting presence and historicity in the face of encroachment on Sámi homelands by Swedish mining corporations.<sup>74</sup> These slogans are accompanied by the portraits of both historical and contemporary Sámi activists creating a "united consensus that stretches across both time and space[,]” and a depiction of a reindeer skeleton wearing traditional Sámi clothing, holding a lasso against a depiction of a cat-like predator wearing a suit, with its arms crossed, wearing a golden crown on its head (Figure 10). The images of this piece, set against the backdrop of the northern Swedish forest and its grazing reindeer, create a juxtaposition of history and place that jams mainstream cultural and political assumptions about the space that the Sámi inhabit, noting that it is both familiar to the Sámi, and is filled with people who draw cultural importance from the area. The dissonance is abruptly jarring, especially when highlighted by a clip at the beginning of the video of a speech given by the Swedish state attorney asserting that "The Sámi have not been subjected to discrimination by

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<sup>73</sup> Berg and Lundgren, "We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art," 62.

<sup>74</sup> Berg and Lundgren, 60–61.



the state.”<sup>75</sup> Sunna’s work jams the perfection of the Swedish *manhem* and those it protects, showing an alternative historical perspective of those not included in the vision of the Gothic Society. As he writes the racial slur “LAPP” across one of his canvases, Sunna leaves the viewer no choice but to confront the stigmatizing power of Swedish cultural antiquity.<sup>76</sup>

Through these two examples, indigenous culture jamming becomes the antithesis to the cultural construction of Fogelberg and the Gothic Society and retakes the methods of art and sculpture as resistance to their exclusivity. By recognizing Fogelberg’s sculpture as a political aesthetic, a counter aesthetic can be created, which allows for a breaking down of barriers between culturists across imposed boundaries. Thus, the solidarity of the Gothic Society is no longer the only solidarity available.

### *Concluding Remarks*

By showing the life and work of the artist Bengt Erland Fogelberg, his historical contemporaries, and modern art resistance movements in Sweden, this project demonstrates how art and culture both are defining and talking back to history. There is no culture without history, as is shown by the ways that Fogelberg’s statues continue to rely on classical forms and practices when portraying the Gothic archetype, and there is no history without culture, as the works of the Gothic Society, Suohpanterror, and Anders Sunna all attest to. Swedish history has an inescapable classical past, no matter how many times it is asserted that it has been rooted out, and that past still informs the ways that Swedish society is exclusive and detrimental to peoples and cultures that do not fit the mold today. If Swedish culturists and historians continue to repress and avoid this issue, there is a grave danger that it will become the symbol of separation

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<sup>75</sup> Berg and Lundgren, 60.

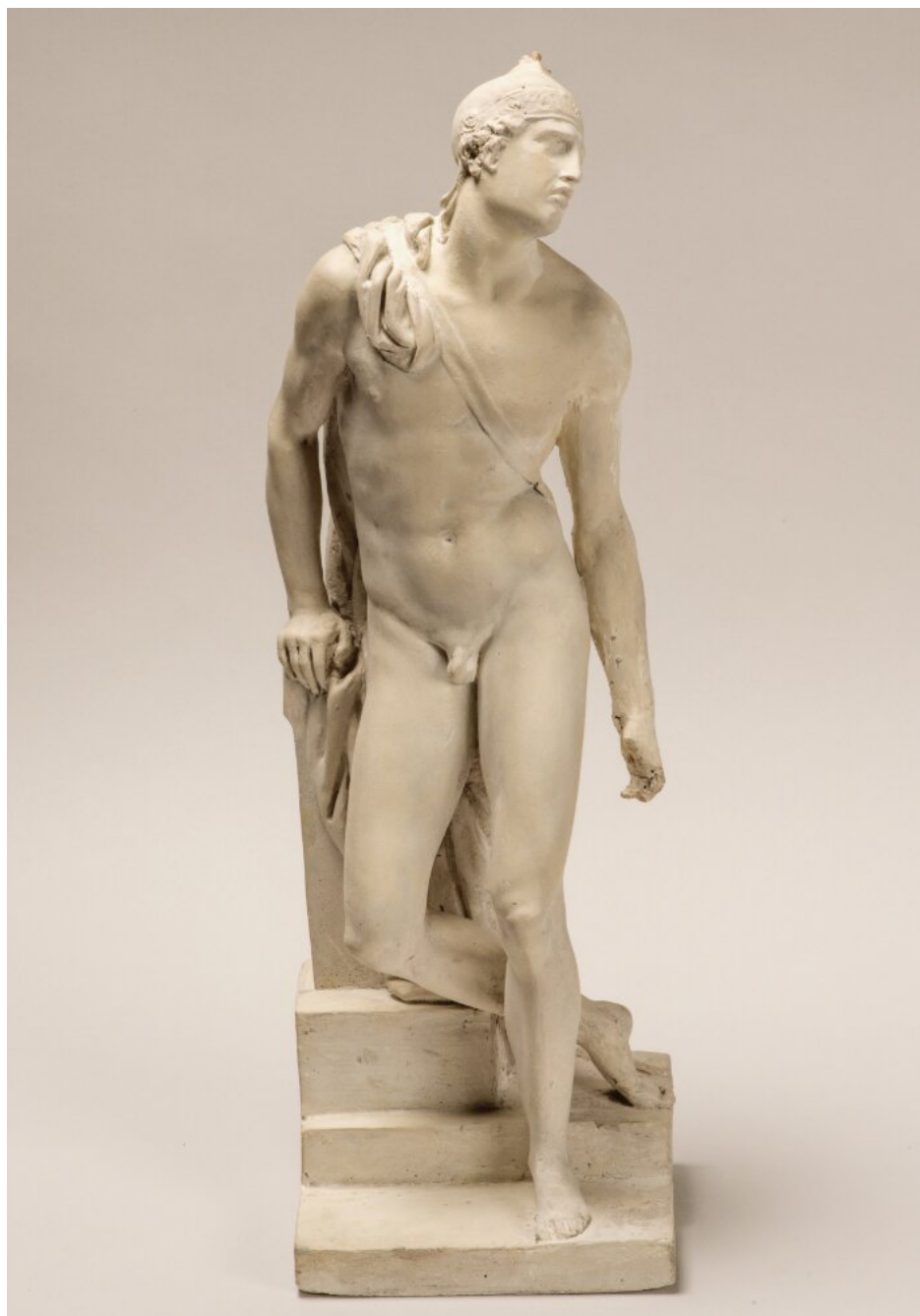
<sup>76</sup> Berg and Lundgren, 61.

and exclusivity, more so than it already has, with the movements of white supremacy and neo-Nazism claiming the antique Swedish past as the background for hatred and violence. Regardless of if that past is constructed or not, the effects of its enforcement are and will continue to be felt around the world if a critical examination is not done. There is a grave need for a perspective shift, if only Sweden will allow it to happen.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot ends his text, *Silencing the Past*, with an epilogue detailing the removal of a statue of Columbus from a public square in Haiti, after a demonstration by the townspeople of Port-au-Prince who threw the statue into the sea as an artifact of the people that oppressed and violated them throughout history.<sup>77</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the statues of Fogelberg arriving at a similar fate, as a result of cultural and historical oppression taking place in Sweden in our time. However, there is grand learning to be done by studying these statues, and great insight to be gained on how colonialism and imperialism work in concert with culture, as this project has hopefully been able to successfully prove. I do not want the statues to be thrown into the Baltic Sea, but rather, I desire that they become symbols of the growth and examination of Swedish culture as it truly is, a chimera of influences that reflect its multifaceted and rich history. Swedish culture is not Mars Ultor, nor is it Odin. It is an ever-changing and undefinable historical force, and the works of Fogelberg are a testament to that. My only hope is that those who act within and upon it are willing to embrace that fact and continue it for generations to come. Then, in this space, we may be able to understand new and exciting things about the trio of statues that currently stand in the Nationalmuseum without wincing from the pain that they've inflicted.

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<sup>77</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 156.

*Images*

*Figure 1, Sårad Akilles. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 552.*



*Figure 2, Paris. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 911.*



*Figure 3, Oden, sittande. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. NMSk 707.*



*Figure 4, comparison between Mars Ultor on the Capitoline (left) Fogelberg's Oden (right). Lamm, "Kung i gudomlig skepnad."*



*Figure 5, Oden. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 392.*



*Figure 6, Tor. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 393.*





*Figure 7, Balder. The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 394.*



*Figure 8, Birger Jarl (sketch). The Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMSk 562.*



Figure 9, Target. Suohpanterror Facebook page, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/suohpanterror/photos/604704082885864>.



Figure 10, Girjas, still here. Anders Sunna website, 2015-2016, andersunna.com.

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