

'Wedged between history and hipster,' Ballard's new Nordic Museum is ready ... almost



Amy Radil

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 **1 OF 11** SLIDESHOW: Artworks by Martin Whatson of Norway, center, and Kim Simonsson of Finland, right, are on display inside the Northern Exposure exhibit on Wednesday, May 2, 2018, at the new Nordic Museum in Seattle.

Credit: KUOW Photo/Megan Farmer

3 MINS

When you see wood smoke and naked people in Ballard, you'll know the new Nordic Museum is finally complete.

The museum's grand opening takes place this weekend, but there's one piece of history that's not quite ready for visitors yet: A century-old Finnish sauna, built by lumberjacks,

which now sits on the museum's lawn.

“This is one of my favorite things,” museum CEO Eric Nelson said. “We’ve got a group of Finnish folks who helped us move it over here, and their dream is to get it operational again as a functional sauna. So we’ll see how that goes.”

Unless you're holding out for an old-fashioned steam, the Nordic Museum is ready. It took 20 years and \$50 million dollars, but the museum now joins a city — and neighborhood — transformed from the heyday of Scandinavian immigration a century ago.

The museum aims to embrace both past and present — in fact, the museum’s very construction [was yet another change in Ballard’s identity](#). The design aims to honor the immigrant journeys that were at the heart of the previous Nordic Heritage Museum.

Curator Nancy Engstrom Zinn showed us how the new building includes a physical bridge over the entryway below, connecting the exhibits on the Old World and North America.

“We’re about to step off — we’re about to cross this 34-foot tall Fjord Hall,” she said.

The sides of the bridge are transparent, making the drop feel even more dramatic.

“It’s meant to be a little bit thoughtful,” she said. “It’s meant to make you stop and take a deep breath before you do it.”

And the objects on display tell compelling stories, whether or not you grew up eating *lutefisk* at Christmas. They include authentic Viking swords and armbands worn by the Nazi resistance in Denmark.

“If we can tell the story of that object and make it a personal experience for somebody else, you can actually kind of project yourself into that experience,” Zinn said.

The old museum opened in 1980 in a former school building. It hosted cultural events and recreated turn-of-the-20th-century storefronts. The new Nordic Museum is custom-built to host exhibits about everything from contemporary Scandinavian art to Viking artifacts.

There’s also a space where visitors can bask in a recreated birch forest, looking at the Northern Lights and other scenery.

“The imagery and the sounds put you in touch with the natural environment in the region,” Nelson said.

Nelson said the planning process included focus groups that weighed in on which aspects of Scandinavian culture people find relevant today.

“There is a great deal of fascination in the ancient Norse mythology, Viking era, huge interest still in immigration and cultural identity, and then people were also fascinated by contemporary Nordic culture,” he said.

As part of the opening, the auditorium is already scheduled to host Nordic opera, films and performances by “post-punk” rock bands.

The Nordic Museum is located on Northwest Market Street, not far from the Ballard Locks. Nelson said it’s right where “old” and “new” Ballard collide. You can see tugboats on the waterfront from the back parking lot.

“We have the maritime industry, this kind of Nordic heritage to the south of us,” Nelson said. “And a very kind of hip, trendy thing going on to the north of us, so we’re kind of wedged between history and hipster. It’s a fantastic place to be.”

AMOS
Rex

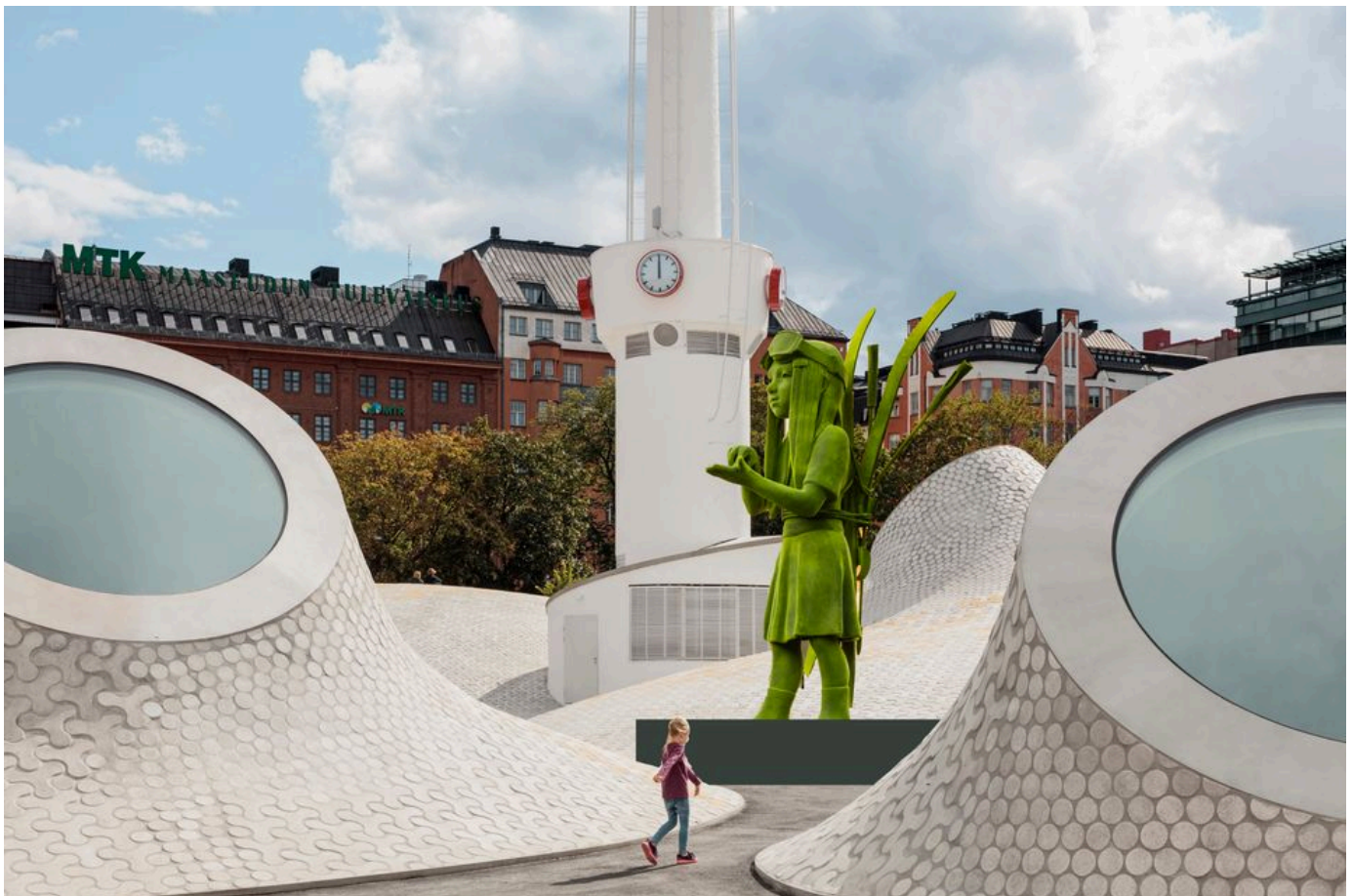
Mysterious moss giants take over Lasipalatsi Square – Amos Rex’s exhibition invites us to ask questions and dream fearlessly like children

14.3.2024 10:40:08 EET | [Amos Rex](#) | Press release

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A green moss giant with skis and poles has arrived at Amos Rex’s domes, ready to explore unfamiliar terrain. *Wanderer* sees the world as being best explored by travelling, but also with the sense of touch – especially the touch of the hand. That may be why the giant is moving two fingers across the palm of his other hand, forming the sign that means to *walk* or to *wander*.



Composite image. Kim Simonsson: Wanderer, 2022. Image: Kim Simonsson

Wanderer is one of four bright-green, giant-like figures who have temporarily set up camp in the courtyard at Lasipalatsi Square and on the terrace of Bio Rex. **Kim Simonsson's** (b. 1974) are about four metres high and communicate with each other through Finnish sign language. They have been acquired for Konstsamfundet, which has one of Finland's most extensive private art collections.

Kim Simonsson is available for on-site interviews in Helsinki on 22–26 April.

The moss giants' long journey home passes through the centre of Helsinki

The giants – *Wanderer*, *Collector*, *Friendship* and *Bringer of Light* – are on their way home to the forest. During the summer, they will take a break at Lasipalatsi Square, after which they will gradually continue to their final destination: a leafy forest glade at **Amos Anderson's** summer residence, Söderlångvik manor on Kimito Island. There they will stay permanently, gradually becoming part of the forest ecosystem.

"I had a vision of a large moss figure in the forest, so people would accidentally meet a friendly giant in the woods. That dream will now become a reality, with the four giants moving to a forest glade at Söderlångvik," Simonsson says.

The moss giants will be discoverable in the forest at Söderlångvik from spring 2025 onwards.

Simonsson describes his giants as utopian moss children. He has given each individual in the group their own specific task, with each task being equally important. One carries tools, while another has skis on his back. It is also worth paying attention to the moss giants' hands, which play an important role: they communicate with each other, and with the outside world in sign language.

Sculptor Kim Simonsson lives and works in the artists' village of Fiskars in Western Uusimaa. He has been working with ceramic moss figures for almost a decade – the moss giants are his most large-scale works so far.

The Moss Giants will be at Lasipalatsi Square 29 April–20 October 2024. The exhibition is curated by **Kai Kartio**.

Sign language is for everyone

Sign language is a visual language used by deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people. It consists of various signs, combining facial expressions, hand body and mouth movements. Two different sign languages are used in Finland: Finland-Swedish and Finnish Sign Language, which is also used by Kim Simonsson's *Moss Giants*.

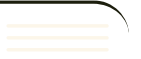
Spring exhibitions

Amos Rex's Spring exhibitions offer experiences for our emotions and all of our senses – the first-ever collections exhibition *I feel, for now* and **Josefina Nelimarkka's** studio exhibition *The Cloud of Un/knowning*. The exhibitions are open 27 March – 8 Sept 2024.

COLOSSAL



Menu



“Mossgirl with Feathers” (2016), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, feathers, and rope. All images © Kim Simonsson, shared with permission. Photos by Jefunne Gimpel

Mossy Figures Wander Through Woodlands and City Streets in
Kim Simonsson’s Flocked Ceramic Sculptures

Some of the most exciting artistic discoveries are the results of accidents or the surprising outcomes of experiments, and artist [Kim Simonsson](#)'s series *Moss People* is the result of one such unexpected twist. Coated with soft [flocking](#)—a process of applying very fine fiber to the surface of an object—the large-scale ceramic sculptures were initially layered only with velvety black until a few years ago, when one day, the Finnish sculptor decided to flock one of those pieces with yellow, too. Once the crushed nylon fiber was applied over the black, it turned green, and the verdant figures have since grown into a cornerstone of his practice.

Simonsson draws inspiration from pop culture and Nordic fairytales and folklore, creating expressive, youthful characters who tote rucksacks, wear feathers in their hair, or carry important items like books, radios, or plush toys. For the 2022 [Utopia Festival](#) in Lille, France, he created monumental versions from fiberglass that lined a thoroughfare and appeared to wander amongst the passersby, emphasizing tender facial expressions, theatrical scale, and the sense that each individual is on a mission. The artist taps into a playful tension between the spritely energy of youth and the fact that moss naturally grows on hard, unmoving surfaces.

Atmospheric images taken outdoors capture the self-assured figures as they wander through woodland, equipped for an expedition. The most recent characters feature edible greenery and cabbage that grows from their limbs, torsos, and feet, providing both protection and sustenance. By producing and carrying their own food, they are completely autonomous, self-sustaining beings.

Simonsson's solo exhibition *Moss Cabbage People* is on view at [Galerie NeC](#) in Paris through December 24. Find more of the artist's work on his [website](#), and follow updates on [Instagram](#).



"Moss People in Pine Forest"



"Cabbage Mossgirl Resting" (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, and artificial plant



Left: "Mossgirl With Broken Stereo" (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, cassette stereo, rope, and artificial flowers. Right: "Cabbage Mossboy Reading" (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, and epoxy resin



“Hiding Place” (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, and epoxy resin



“Mossboy” (2016), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, feathers, and rope



Left: “Bearded Mossman with Feathers” (2019), ceramics, epoxy resin, nylon fiber, feathers, and rope. Right: “Mossboy With Idol” (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, and soft toy



“Mossboy With Rock” (2017), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, and textile



“Moss Princess” (2019), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, and chain



“Remember,” “Friendship,” “Giant Gatherer,” and “Light,” (2022), fiberglass, polyester resin, and nylon fiber. Installed in Lille, France, for Utopia Festival

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Moss People by Kim Simonsson Wander Around Woodlands

Pulling inspiration from mainstream culture as well as Nordic fairytales and folklore, this Finnish artist's work is a must-see.

By: THURSD. | 26-01-2023 | 3 min read

FLORAL ART



Kim Simonsson's Flocked Ceramic Sculptures feature mossy figures wandering through woodlands and city streets giving eerie but curious greenish human-like figures. Made of diverse materials, Simonsson expresses his art through a creative process and passion behind greens and ceramics.

Kim Simonsson's Mossy Experimentation

Some of the most fascinating artistic discoveries are the consequences of accidents or unexpected outcomes of research, and artist Kim Simonsson's 'Moss People' series is one such unexpected twist. The large-scale ceramic sculptures were first coated with velvety black flocking—a process of adding very fine fiber to the surface of an object—until a few years ago when the Finnish sculptor chose to flock one of those works with yellow as well.



Moss People in Pine Forest

What gives his work the genius, daunting, and creative perspective is the crushed nylon fiber and the verdant forms that have since become a staple of his work.



Hiding Place (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, and epoxy resin.

Moss People Based on Nordic Fairytales

Simonsson draws inspiration from pop culture as well as Nordic fairytales and mythology to create expressive, youthful characters that carry rucksacks, feathers in their hair, or crucial goods like books, radios, or soft toys. He constructed massive fiberglass versions that lined a thoroughfare and looked to wander amongst the visitors for the 2022 Utopia Festival in Lille, France, stressing delicate facial expressions, theatrical grandeur, and the idea that each figure is on a mission.



Left: "Mossgirl With Broken Stereo (2022)", ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, cassette stereo, rope, and artificial flowers.

Right: Cabbage Mossboy Reading (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, and epoxy resin.

Kim Simonsson's Moss People series exploits a humorous conflict between the vivacious energy of youth and the reality that moss grows naturally on hard, immovable surfaces.

Mossy People Wandering Around Woodlands

Outdoor atmospheric photographs capture the confident figures as they walk through the woods, fully dressed for an adventure. The most current figures have edible plants and cabbage growing from their limbs, torsos, and feet, offering protection as well as sustenance. They are entirely autonomous, self-sustaining beings since they produce and transport their own food.



Mossboy (2016), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, feathers, and rope.

For Kim Simonsson His Sculpting Abilities Started as a Kid

Kim Simonsson discovered his ability to sculpt many years ago. He was simply a little boy playing in his backyard with the snow. Kim carved a Donald Duck while the other boys his age rolled snowmen. He has had a three-dimensional vision from a young age. Kim's interests outside of snow sculpting include soccer and history.

The neighborhood soccer field was converted into an art studio, yet his sculpting is alive with stories and history. Kim Simonsson's hands mold the ancient material into life-size sculptures of animals and children. He blends innocence with an unusual agenda. Although his method is classic, the manner he imbues the material with spirit is unique.



Cabbage Mossgirl Resting (2022), ceramics, nylon fiber, epoxy resin, and artificial plant