

## Chapter 58 : Prince Eugene (II) (1905-1948) – “Prince of Culture”.

In the summer Eugene travelled or rented a house. In the winter he lived first at the castle, then with his brother Carl in the heir prince palace at Gustaf Adolf's Square. In 1899 he bought the property Waldemarsudde on Djurgården where he had a large villa built, which was ready for occupation in 1905. The money came from an advance on the patrimony. The villa had three floors and contained some 40 rooms. The ground level contained a library that doubled as work place and meeting room, “telephone booth”, salon, dining room & kitchen. The second floor included Eugene's bedroom, a small office, several guest rooms and a residence for his court employees. The upper floor contained a large studio. The staff's quarters were in a separate building. In 1913 he had a gallery built which in 1946 was connected to the villa by an underground passageway. The villa was more intended to be admired than to live in. Eugene had a bathtub in his bedroom. In practical terms, it was used for meetings, representation and displaying Eugene's art collection. There were no public exhibitions, but the guests were shown around. Eugene put a lot of work into the garden that was filled with flowers & sculptures and was much talked about. There is a 1910 portrait by Anders Zorn of Eugene in tails and the Seraphim Order's blue ribbon surrounded by flowers. He sports a beard & a crew cut and looks generally tired and hungover - probably because of the representation, 3-5 dinners a week it seems. It was not a very flattering portrait but probably more accurate than the photographs from his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary where he looks like everybody's favourite grandfather.

Eugene this time also began to receive official positions of trust:

- 1899-1948 he was chairman of the Swedish Association of handicraft and also performed some himself. Most famous are his flower pots in white stoneware from 1915<sup>1</sup> but he also designed silverware, jewellery & furniture. After Eugene's death, the pots were remanufactured and became a significant income. As president of the handicraft association, he worked for liberating the handicraft from its 19<sup>th</sup>-century traditions.
- 1902-1920, he served on the Stockholm University Committee for Summer Courses with a special focus on painting and art. The courses were primarily aimed at public school teachers and Eugene delivered the inaugural speech in which he emphasized that “if culture is to be democratized, democracy must at the same time become part of culture”. The meaning of this is not entirely clear. One interpretation is that Eugene rejected democracy as politics, organization and power play but saw it more as a way of personal growth.
- 1904-1939, he was honorary chairman of Folkbildningsförbundet, a central hub for public & ambulating libraries and popular science lectures, which he also supported financially. The engagement was not very time-consuming. He was there when the agenda interested him. Later he made an introductory speech at the annual meetings. During World War II, he dwelt on art as a “civilizing force.” His most concrete effort was to sign an appeal against pulp fiction trash that resulted in cheap editions of quality books.
- 1909 he became chairman of Eva Bonnier's public art donation committee. The latter had at its disposal the returns on a capital of 390 thousand.

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<sup>1</sup> Andréasson 2001.

- 1911 he became chairman of the committee for the construction of Liljevalchs art gallery. 1915-1945 he was chairman of the board. Liljevalch's art gallery was unique in that it was Stockholm's first municipal art gallery and Eugene used the same legal construction for Waldemarsudde when he later bequeathed it to the city.
- 1911 until his death (?) he was vice-chairman (?) of the association Nationalmusei Friends. The association contributed to the museum's purchase of an older version of the Nixie, painted in 1882/83. A revenge long in the making.
- 1917 he became honorary chairman of the committee for the construction of the Stockholm Concert Hall.
- 1918, he became president of the Association of French Art with sections in Sweden, Denmark and Norway.
- 1920 until his death, he was chairman of the Bridget Foundation with the task of caring for Vadstena monastery.
- 1924, the state bought the Thiel art gallery, which was transformed into a foundation with Eugene as chairman.
- 1934 (?) he became chairman of the Committee for the History of the Artists' Association and he also supported the project financially. Wistman is critical of the result: "The two volumes on the history of the Artists' Association are tendentious, they speak almost one-sidedly from the perspective of the Association about its supposedly unique contribution to Swedish art, but the volumes are also tendentious in relation to Prince Eugene. They tend to consecrate the prince."<sup>2</sup> [Consecrate = To praise a famous person in order to bask in his fame.]
- 1937 until his death, he was chairman of the Friends of the Artists' Association, which supported artists who, because of illness or age, were no longer fully fit for work.

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Eugene has written a great deal about the Swedish-Norwegian Union, which he believed had survived itself, and he was relieved that it was dissolved without violence. Like the rest of the family, he got bogged down into details of various parties' actions and the Norwegians' lack of consideration. However, the basic approach was clear:

In my view - and you have heard it many times - it was a mistake of Sweden not to understand its mission as midwife to a sovereign Norway; not to bind it ever closer, but to step by step set it free. The Norway of 1814 was incapable of self government or anything else. The modern Norway is its own master. It would have been better for Sweden if it had realized that such an evolution was unavoidable and taken the lead.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wistman 2008: s. 285.

<sup>3</sup> prins Eugen 1942: s. 324, brev till C.A. Ossbahr 1905-03-28.

1895, in a letter to fellow artist Richard Bergh, Eugene expressed it as: "Politics in general, great theories and principles, huge currents and such things, may have its interest, but realpolitik, with its narrow legal outlook and compromises, is disgusting and demoralizing."<sup>4</sup>

Eugene also agreed with François Carnot's criticisms of empires - to which Eugene apparently also counted Sweden-Norway. They were too large to be rationally administered.<sup>5</sup>

With this attitude, he was not allowed near Norwegian politics, but to assist his father with clerical tasks such as deciphering letters. When Gustav (V) ascended the throne, he lost all influence. His presence at Borggården during the peasants march in 1914 seems exclusively pro-forma. In the Swedish biographical dictionary, Eugene's political conviction is summarized as a benevolent paternalistic authority - not necessarily a royal such - arranging everything for the best:

Prince E. was liberal in the old-fashioned sense. To T. Fogelqvist (Feb. 29, 1932; Br., 2, s. 307 f.) he wrote, that the task of liberalism, the middle way, was, "to clarify what is dated and must be sacrificed and what is viable, and has a future; what has value or at least should have value, and must be preserved for the good of it ... Progress must be both reckless and considerate." Prince E. was thus a democrat, but only in the most general sense.<sup>6</sup>

Eugene's view of World War I was so indifferent that it raises questions. There is no comment on the communist seizure of power or the execution of the Romanov family, but with his attitude to historical inevitability the Romanovs were probably outdated. During the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 he supported the Japanese.<sup>7</sup> He seems to have seen World War I, not as a tragedy, but as a social Darwinian process - only the most suitable regimes survived - and buried himself in the arts awaiting the outcome. "No, I can't keep up with politics! I lie alone in the country and only think of painting."<sup>8</sup> Afterwards, the destructiveness of it all scared him. He was most involved in Prince Max's late attempts to save the German monarchy by having Emperor William II abdicate in favour of his son. However, he did not show any remorse for the German outcome either. "I suppose many wonder over my lack of sympathies with Germany, which was at least my mother's [Queen Sophie's] fatherland. But whatever way she influenced me, it was not to admire Prussia's brutal recklessness and thirst for power, which she had experienced herself."<sup>9</sup>

Eugene hated Hitler from day one but not as a fascist but as another representative of the Prussian tradition. "Most of what I blamed the Germans for during the last war, brutality, servility, total lack of psychology and a habit of threats and intimidation, has returned in spades under the new régime."<sup>10</sup> 1934 he supported a call for asylum to anti-Nazis. The systematic killing of Jews, he however reduced to "Jewish harassment". He mostly wrote about Hitler's cultural policy. That Hitler in 1937, after the journalist Carl von Ossietzky was

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<sup>4</sup> Gram 1998: s. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Fett 1948: ss. 91-92.

<sup>6</sup> Hildebrand 1953.

<sup>7</sup> prins Eugen 1942: s. 302, brev till sin mor 1904-02-29.

<sup>8</sup> prins Eugen 1945: s. 127, brev till Viggo Johansens 1915-08-10.

<sup>9</sup> prins Eugen 1945: s. 155, brev till Verner von Heidenstam 1919-01-23.

<sup>10</sup> prins Eugen 1945: s. 313, brev till Henrik Sörensen 1933-07-09.

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, forbade him to accept it.<sup>11</sup> He also the same year visited a picture gallery in Munich with a selection of works in Hitler's 19<sup>th</sup>-century academic taste. "I can still see how the prince turned nauseous at the sight of these various 'works of art'."<sup>12</sup> 1938, in connection with the Munich Agreement, Eugene started exchanging letters with the newspaper man Torgny Segerstedt and during the war there were often discussions on Waldemarsudde. It seems to have been mostly about Norway & Finland. During the Winter War of 1940/41 Eugene was chairman of the Central Organization for Rusthåll (=what was left of the allotment system), which raised funds for salaries to Swedish volunteers. There is an anonymous submission about Sweden's Finland policy which is supposedly written by him and a letter to Torgny Segerstedt in July 1941 where he defends the transit of German troops through Sweden to Finland:

[1940:] The article is a strong criticism of Sweden's stance towards Finland in the war against Russia. Since Sweden refused to allow the transport of rescue troops from the Western powers over its territory, Swedish troops should have been sent instead. The reason for not doing so, according to the author, is pressure from Germany. " ... we are still waiting to know the compelling reasons why we must leave Finland without the help it so badly needed", concludes the article.<sup>13</sup>

[1941:] I cannot help writing to you about your position regarding the consent to the German transit. I am sorry I cannot share your opinion. I think you underestimate, yes completely ignore, the consideration of Finland in this decision. You emphasize that the sole reason for accommodating Germany was fear of the consequences if we did not. You suggest that consideration of Finland was only a pretext for cowardice. I can say that when I, at a very early stage, heard about the German claims, before the government position was ready, it was clear that they had to be granted subject to the conditions laid down, etc. under strict control of the transport, which was what happened! For me, it was crucial that we did not oppose Finland's interests. Our relationship with that country can't stand any more conflicts [...]<sup>14</sup>

As for Norway, he forwarded letters, money & food packages and complained with some effect to the Germans about the treatment of his friends and acquaintances. During talks with Norwegian activist Amelie Posse, it could sound like this:

Sometimes, when we talked by phone, he took the opportunity to express the most unreserved judgments about things and people who had incurred his disapproval. When I tried to stop him and suggested that it might not be so well-advised, my phone might be monitored - he let me know that he didn't care. Anyone was happy to hear what he thought about the Germans, the Quislings and the Swedish turn-coats. In such cases, he repeated his slogan that he "had never felt neutral, never intended to be neutral, and never understood how any private person could be so". When the conversation was face to face, he would add: "I can only understand and excuse those who, in a difficult moment, have to bear responsibility. But even in their case I accept it only as an outward attitude, dictated by prudence and political necessity, not by emotion."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> prins Eugen 1945: s. 346-350, brev till Sven Hedin 1933-02-03.

<sup>12</sup> Brunner 1998a: s. 231.

<sup>13</sup> prins Eugen 1940.

<sup>14</sup> prins Eugen 1941.

<sup>15</sup> Posse 1949: s. 255.

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At Eugene's death, his art collection consisted of 2,078 works by 478 artists, most of them easel paintings, drawings, and graphics. Ninety-five percent were of male artists, 75 percent were of Swedish mainly younger artists. Most of the foreign art was from Denmark, Norway & France. 16 percent of the works came from the Swedish Artists' Association. His patronage was limited to the purchase of individual works. He did not issue assignments or award scholarships. The purchases were often made through intermediaries, possibly to not push up the price but also because the artist would not then feel forced to sell.<sup>16</sup> Eugene's motives for buying individual works are not known. It was probably done “on a hunch”. The fact that the purchase of female artists began only in 1913 has been interpreted as an effect of Eugene's gradual radicalization on women's issues.<sup>17</sup> The year 1913 is suggestive. Maybe he was influenced by his mother.

Eugene sold his own art but to a lesser extent. The part that is privately owned has been “paid for” by purchasing from some needy artist and then receiving a work from Eugene as a gift or by purchasing a “Prince Eugene”, meaning that Eugene chose the painting they received for their money. Wistman argues that Eugene's position would have been undermined if he made himself dependent on the art market. This seems far fetched. According to Wistman, Eugene would have been considered a hobby, amateur, or prince painter if he had acted commercially. That is an incorrect description. Other of his relatives such as Prince Wilhelm, Prince Lennart, Prince Sigvard & Prince Carl-Philip have alternately been praised for daring to expose themselves to the vicissitudes of the market, sometimes despised for their huckster attitude not worthy of a prince, sometimes criticized for taking advantage of their social position so that their work was overvalued. Something similar probably applies to Eugene. The fact that the sale of his paintings was surrounded by such secrecy is probably due to the fact that over time there were many paintings sold and it was a question of keeping the market price up. Eugene was always careful in economic matters. His fortune in 1947 was about eight million kronor (160 million in today's money value) – not very large – and he supported a number of initiatives. Ideally, however, the aid was “in kind” so that he did not have to use his capital. It also worked the other way around. For example, he did not charge for his public art. Maybe it was not considered cosher when he received a public appanage.

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As a royal, Eugene automatically received a variety of Orders, medals and other honours. Two of them differ: In 1907 he became an honorary doctor at Uppsala University and in 1945 Gustaf V created a medal for special artistic merit named after him – the Prince Eugene medal - which is given to painters, architects, sculptors & craftsmen of special merit. After his death, Eugene became a national monument. However, the interest in Waldemarsudde as his personal creation waned considerably during the 1960s and now it is the exhibition activities and floral splendour that attracts. By 2005, Waldemarsudde had received 7 million visitors, 24 million if one includes the garden, and has organized 269 exhibitions.

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<sup>16</sup> Wistman 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Wistman 2002.