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Serlachius Museums' Art Sauna nominated for Finlandia Prize for Architecture

Serlachius Museums' Art Sauna has been nominated for the 2022 Finlandia Prize for Architecture. The Finlandia winner will be selected by Finnish film director Klaus Härö. The winner will be announced on 3 October.

The Art Sauna, built next to Serlachius Museum Gösta, integrates Finnish sauna culture into an experience of art, nature and architecture. The Art Sauna has been designed by the internationally renowned award-winning trio of architects **Héctor Mendoza, Mara Partida** and **Boris Bežan**, who also designed the Serlachius Museums' timber-frame extension, the Pavilion, which opened in 2014.

According to the Finlandia Prize for Architecture presentation, the concrete-structure sauna does not defy Finnish sauna architecture. Instead, the Art Sauna transports visitors, accustomed to the archaic, rugged Finnish log sauna culture, to a completely unexpected sauna world.

"The end result is an experiential sauna path, drawing on the cultural backgrounds of its creators, along which a substantial amount of art has been placed. The path ends in the steam room via an outdoor space. The Art Sauna is unmistakably related to a new sauna culture, where instead of traditional relaxation and washing, people seek experiences and a sense of social togetherness," the presentation states.

In addition to the Art Sauna, the renovation of the University of Jyväskylä Library and the Jätkäsaari School in Helsinki are competing for the Finlandia Prize. The Finlandia Prize for Architecture shortlist is selected by a pre-selection jury appointed each year by the Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA). The pre-selection jury is chaired by Professor Lehtovuori, according to whom the factors uniting the buildings are education and culture as well as high-quality design and realisation.

“The three selected architectural, landscape and urban sites remind us, on the one hand, of the importance of top-quality science, education and learning environments and, on the other hand, highlight how architecture creates warm places for good living in an abstracted world.”

This year, SAFA is awarding the Finlandia Prize for Architecture for the ninth time. The final selection is traditionally made by one person, representing a field other than architecture.



A journey into architecture, art and nature

The starting point for the architecture of the unique Art Sauna is a horizontal line defined for the whole Museum complex, with stone below and wood above. The sauna is concealed behind the museum on a slope descending to the shore of the lake, and it blends into the landscape, rising unassumingly above the terrain. A green roof further merges the building into its setting.

The interior spaces of the sauna are characterised by a dialogue of art, landscape and architecture. Stone and wood surfaces alternate rhythmically, and the curved lines of the lobby's ceiling soften the straight lines of the stone finish. The entrance to the sauna and the layout of the rooms lead the sauna visitor on a journey into the embrace of light, nature and art. At the journey's end awaits a round steam room, which can be reached via a cooling yard.

Héctor Mendoza, Mara Partida and Boris Bežan say that to have an opportunity to design a Finnish sauna has been a challenge and a big responsibility. Their way of working seeks an adequate balance between experimentation and common sense.

“Sauna tradition is bound with Finnish culture and its way of living, and we needed to understand it so our architecture could respond to that. With that in mind and the admiration we feel towards Finland, we feel quite fortunate to take on that challenge”, they say.

The architects consider the Serlachius Museums to be more than just a museum. There, the art experience extends beyond the walls of the museum.

“Actually, the Gösta extension, the building itself, is part of an emotional journey that starts and continues with different elements of the context. The new Art Sauna is presented as part of that journey, and it will become ‘more than a sauna room’, integrating nature and art in a more intimate and proximate scale”, they conclude.



A challenge for designers and builders

Pekka Pakkanen, who acted as the chief designer and Finnish architect partner in the project, says that it has been possible for the Mexican and Slovenian architects to examine the sauna process without the burden of tradition or convention. The ambience of the building is defined by purposeful openings into the landscape and high-quality, timeless building materials as well as exceptionally meticulous finishing of details.

“The building complex, precisely embedded in the landscape park, rises from the slope as grooved concrete walls and opens out towards the lake as light infills built with oak. Concealing the building technology, the eaves and joint structures required by our challenging climate, and the extensions of the materials has challenged the skills of both the design team and the builders to the extreme”, he says.

Finnish contemporary art and international design

In addition to Finnish contemporary art, the sauna also features utility items. **Satu Rautiainen's** large-scale commissioned work *Birdbath* (2022) decorates the wall of the lobby. The theme of the work is also repeated in sauna textiles designed by Rautiainen. **Tuula Lehtinen's** mosaic work *Embrace* (2022) decorates a semi-circular outdoor shower, which is in use all year round. Other artists include **Jussi Goman, Anne Koskinen, Laura Könönen, Anni Rapinoja** and **Noora Schroderus**.

The interior of the sauna features furniture from top international designers such as **Óscar Tusquets, Patricia Urquiola, Jasper Morrison** and **Faye Toogood**. **Alvar Aalto, Eero Aarnio, Lisa Johansson-Pape** and **Antrei Hartikainen** are among the Finnish designers represented in the sauna.

Sauna complements Serlachius' range of services

The Art Sauna provides a unique addition both to Serlachius' own service offering and to Finnish sauna culture as a whole, which has become an internationally important tourism product in recent years. The sauna can be hired by groups for recreational, meeting and festive use. Its steam heat can also be enjoyed by individual sauna lovers on pre-arranged public days.

Architects

Héctor Mendoza, Mara Partida and Boris Bežan (Mendoza-Partida Architectural Studio and BAX Studio)

Execution planning

Pekka Pakkanen and Anna Kontuniemi (Planetary Architecture)

Landscape design

Gretel Hemgård

Art curator

Laura Kuurne

Interior design

Rafael Maynegre

Overall concept

Päivi Viherkoski

Press releases and photographs: <https://serlachius.fi/en/for-media/>

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The Serlachius Museums are open:

in the winter season, 1 September–31 May, from Tuesday to Sunday, 11 am–6 pm.

in the summer season, 1 June–31 August, every day 10 am–6 pm

Visiting addresses:

Serlachius Museum Gösta, Joenniementie 47, Mänttä

Serlachius Museum Gustaf, R. Erik Serlachiuksen katu 2, Mänttä

Serlachius Museums in the social media:

<https://facebook.com/serlachius>

<https://twitter.com/serlachius>

<https://instagram.com/serlachiusmuseums>

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