

IN ENGLISH

PARLIAMENT'S
BUILDINGS
and
ART



*Johan Sigfrid Sirén, the architect
of the Parliament Building,
in the Hall of State*

«The Parliament Building
is a song of praise to
monumentality»

Hilding Ekelund in *Arkkittehti* magazine, 1931



The Parliament Building

The Parliament Building, whose façade overlooking Mannerheimintie is dominated by a row of fourteen columns, is a landmark in the centre of Helsinki. The cube-shaped granite edifice that rose on Arcadia Hill in the 1920s, with its massive steps, still reaches higher than the buildings around it. *J.S. Sirén* had imagined a different urban landscape, but the monumental square that he envisioned in front of the building remained on the drawing board.

Finland's parliamentary reform resulted in the need for a new building where Parliament could meet, but this had to wait until Finland achieved independence. The question of where it should be located was not yet decided when the architectural competition was ended in 1924. The winner was the architectural firm of Borg-Sirén-Åberg with a proposal that was mainly prepared by Johan Sigfrid Sirén (1889-1961). The young architect, who had a reputation for being meticulous and even a bit stern, supervised every part of the project until it was completed.

The Parliament Building was inaugurated in 1931 and was viewed as the pinnacle of Finnish construction at the time. Finely grained, reddish Kalvola granite was an impressive and original choice for the exterior of the building. The elevations are enlivened by rows of windows as well as variations between smoother and rougher granite surfaces. The entire building has been sculpted to form a carefully considered whole. Finnish expertise in masonry reached its peak in the skilful stonework.

In Sirén's modern classicism simplicity of form is inventively combined with abundant colours and materials. The rectangular building is laid out symmetrically around the Plenary Hall, which is circular. The marble staircases at the south and north ends of the foyer lead to the main floor and the Hall of State, which is bathed in green hues. This floor also contains the domed Plenary Hall, which has largely retained its original look, as well as a cafeteria in the functionalist style.



*Henrik Tikkanen (1924–1984):
House of the Estates, 1957*



*Henrik Tikkanen (1924–1984): Assembly
Chamber in the Voluntary Fire Brigade
Building, 1957*

Before the Parliament Building

Following the Porvoo Diet in 1809, when the second Diet was held in 1863 all the estates met in the House of Nobility in Helsinki. This building, designed by G. T. P. Chiewitz (1815–1862) for the noble estate, was completed in 1862. The House of the Estates, which was designed by Gustaf Nyström (1856–1917) for the other estates, was completed in 1891.

The shift from the old Diet to a unicameral Parliament in 1907 led to plans for a new Parliament Building. The winning entry that was prepared in 1908 by

Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) called for a monumental building on Observatory Hill, but the Emperor did not give his approval. Projects to expand the House of the Estates also got nowhere. In the early years the new Parliament worked in rented premises, first in the Voluntary Fire Brigade Building designed by Theodor Höijer (1843–1910) and then in the Heimola Building designed by Onni Tarjanne (1864–1946) from 1911 on. Both of these buildings located in the centre of Helsinki were torn down in the 1960s.

The Plenary Hall has a domed ceiling and receives daylight from a lantern.



Key meeting rooms and offices for senior staff line the Speaker's Corridor and the Government's Corridor. Committee rooms are located on the third and fourth floors. The most impressive of these is the old Grand Committee Room. The offices on the fifth and sixth floors were originally reserved for MPs' offices but are now used by parliamentary groups.

One cross-cutting principle in the internal design of the Parliament Building is a hierarchy that reflects rooms' purpose in style and materials, all the way down to light fixtures and decorative motifs. Rooms whose décor is governed by classical rules in terms of furniture and details are interspersed with rooms that have been decorated more freely, in which Sirén was influenced by contemporary currents.

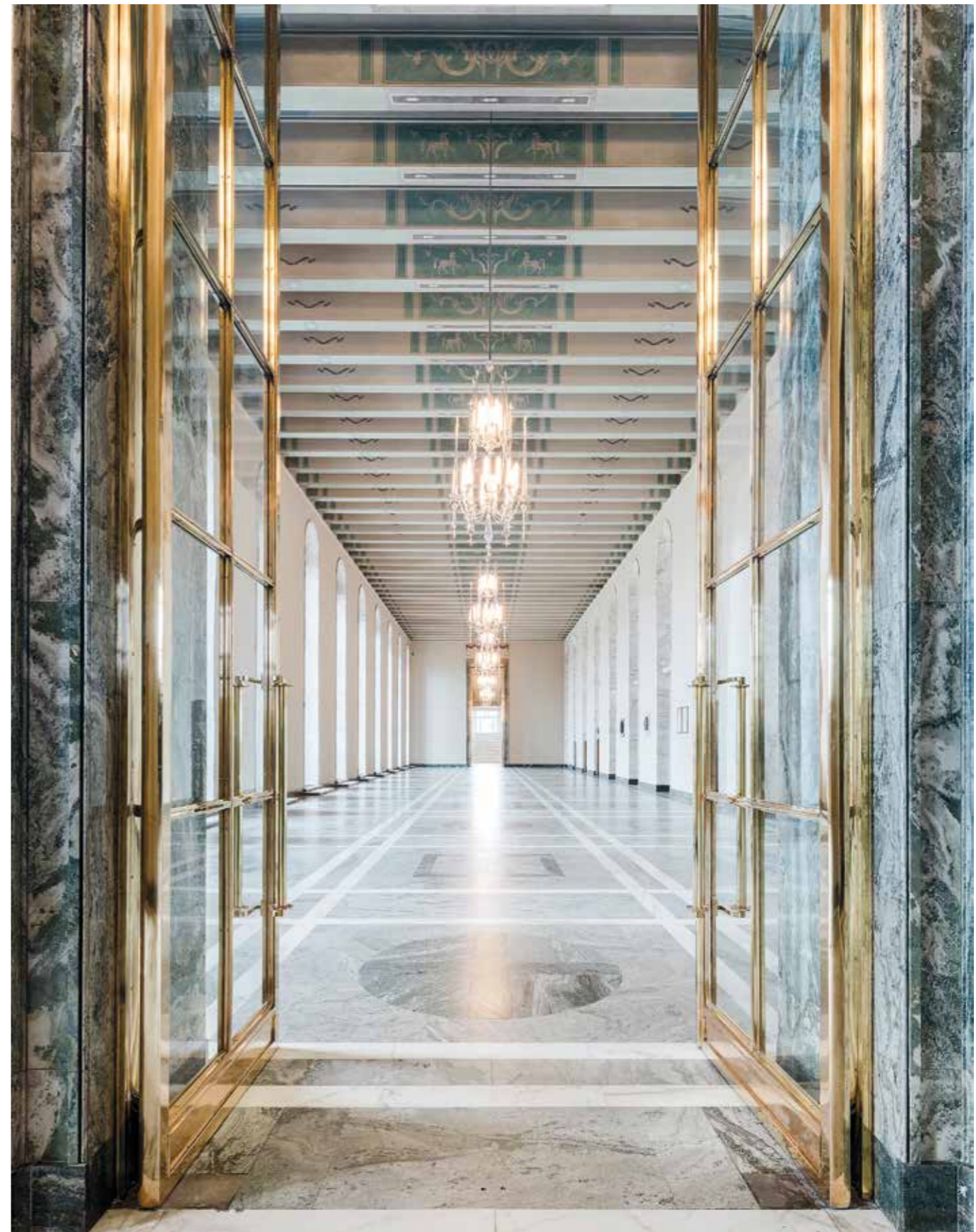
Hall of State

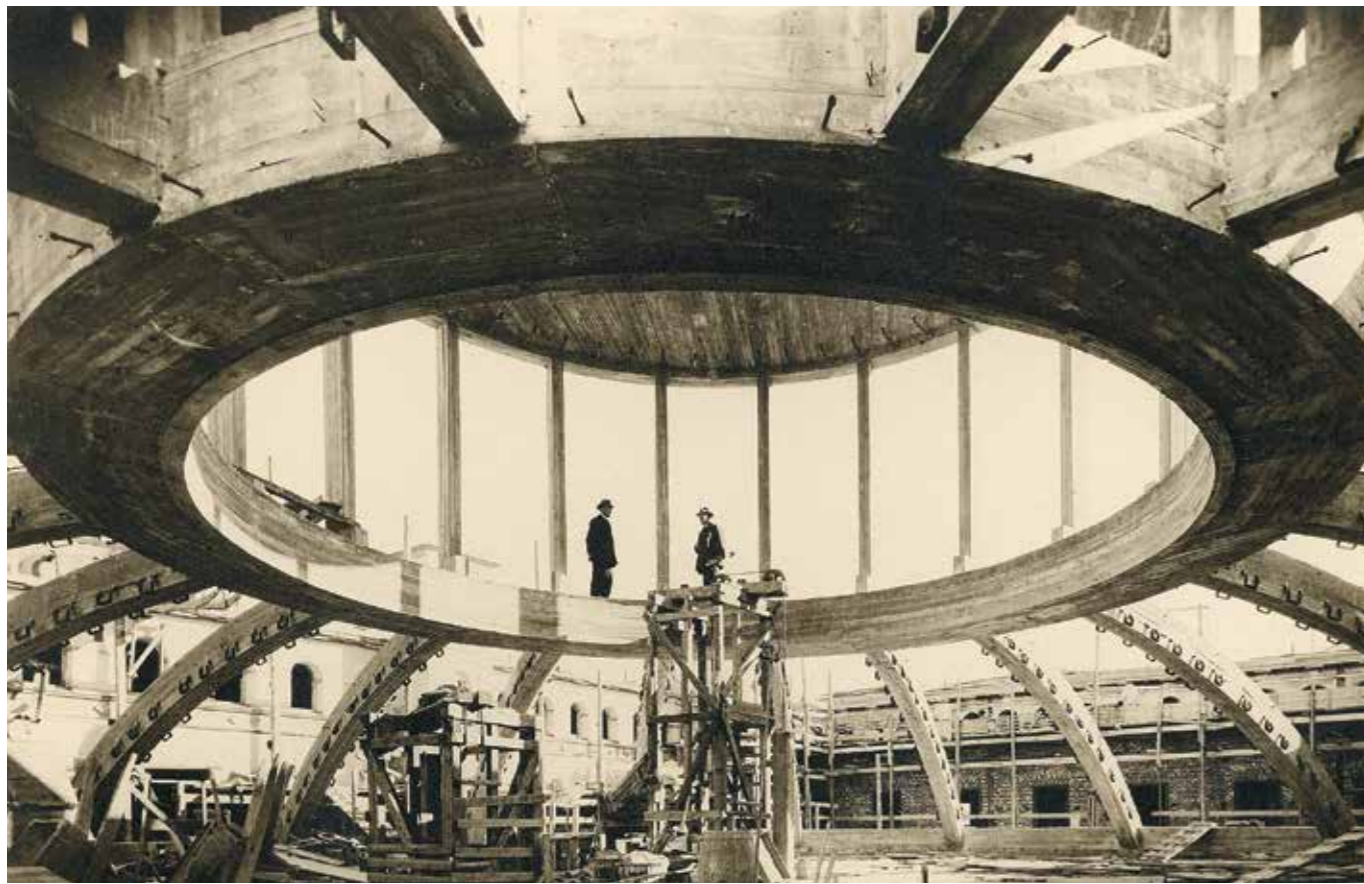


A National Historic Monument

The Parliament Building was given protected status in 1980 and any renovations must be supervised by the National Board of Antiquities. Alternations have been made over the years, but the goal has been to preserve key parts of the building in their original form as far as possible. A major renovation was conducted in the early 1980s under the direction of the architectural firm of Laiho-Pulkkinen-Raunio.

Building protection criteria were revised in 2008. Preserving cultural values and modernizing building technology place challenges on the renovation project that was launched in 2006. The renovation project, which includes the buildings and underground facilities built in the 1950s and the 1970s as well as the main building, was completed in 2017.





The dome of the Plenary Hall during the construction stage

A complete work of art

The new Parliament Building was regarded as a symbol of the young nation's freedom and independence. Besides its significance in strengthening national pride the building was also a showcase for Finnish interior design and crafts, which helped form the young nation's public image. The stern exterior conceals a diverse series of rooms and décors in which light, colours and even playfully modern details are intertwined. Art that is closely connected to the architecture plays a significant role in the Parliament Building. Sculptors *Gunnar Finne*, *Johannes Haapasalo*, *Carl Wilhelms* and *Hannes Autere* and painter *Bruno Tuukkanen* were all distinguished artists.

Cooperation among leading designers made the Parliament Building a complete work of art in which every detail is essentially linked to the whole. J.S. Sirén himself took charge of designing the light fixtures and the furniture in key rooms. To furnish the other rooms he chose gifted designers from his own generation: *Arttu Brummer*, *Werner West*, *Elsa Arokallio*, *Birger Hahl*, *Rafael Blomstedt*, *Arvo Muroma*, *Hugo Borgström* and *Elna Kiljander*.

With high-quality materials and workmanship, decorating styles vary according to the purpose for which rooms are used. The furniture in more dignified rooms such as the Hall of State is a variation on



The flamy birch furniture in the Diplomats' Room was designed by Birger Hahl (1901–1975). The luxurious upholstery fabrics were ordered from Oy Pirtti Ab and are original. The original carpet designed by Greta Skogster (1900–1994) has been replaced by a modern wall-to-wall carpet.



The flamy birch furniture in the Government's Meeting Room shows Empire influences and was designed by Arttu Brummer (1891–1951). The light fixtures were designed by J.S. Sirén. The ceiling designed by Gunnar Finne and Bruno Tuukkanen and the blue Wilton carpet designed by Eva Brummer (1901–2007) round out the dignified decor.

the Empire style, which is at the top of the hierarchy. The furniture in the Speaker's Rooms is Biedermeier, which has a bourgeois feel, and the urban stylishness of the cafeteria is expressed through functionalist steel-tube furniture. In MPs' offices practical mass-produced furniture was given preference.

Modernists favoured an austere approach to decorating, without frills, and shied away from luxuriousness. The hand-made textiles that were designed for the Parliament Building, in keeping with international fashion, were a key factor in forming a modern whole, however. The Parliament Building is eclectic in its architecture and decoration, with modernist elements of functionalism applied in a classical framework. Features of art deco, which was influenced by cubism and oriental exoticism, stand out clearly in decorations and textiles.

Decorating textiles were designed by *Maija Kansanen*, Finland's best-known textile artist in the inter-war period, as well as *Greta Skogster*, *Eva Brummer*, *Eva Anttila* and *Marianne Strengell*. Textiles such as carpets, curtains and upholstery fabrics were produced in artists' own ateliers. In addition textiles were ordered from various firms, whose designers' names have not been preserved.



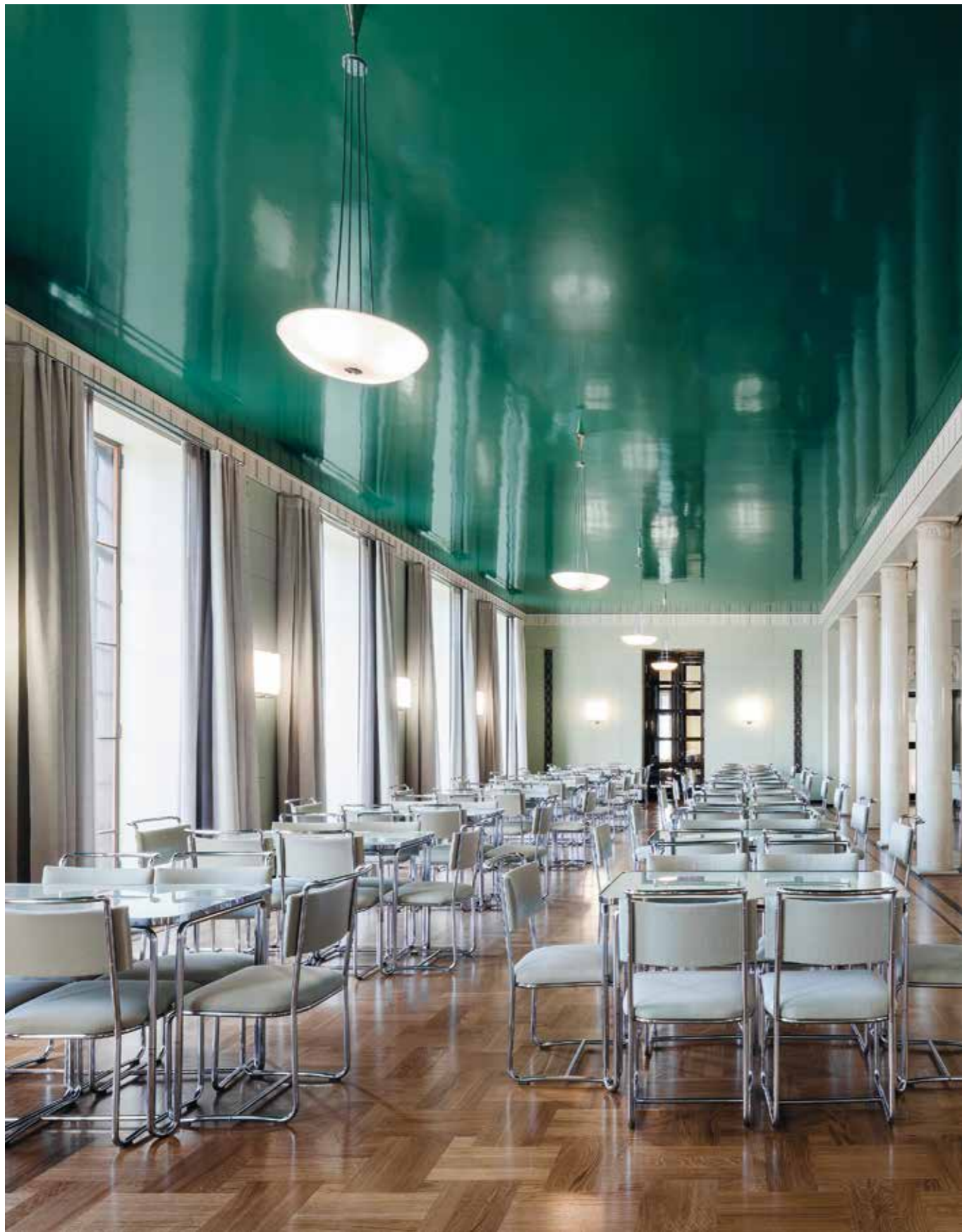
Sculptor Gunnar Finne (1886–1952) created most of the abundant art deco-influenced architectural sculpture in the Parliament Building, which ranges from building decorations to capitals on columns and reliefs. Finne was accustomed to working with architects. A sculpture of the «Lion of Finland Without Its Crown» is located on the wall of the cafeteria.



In the Parliament House dining room are five murals depicting farming, animal husbandry, harvesting as well as hunting and fishing. The murals were painted by Bruno Tuukkanen.



J.S. Sirén designed the lighting fixtures for the Parliament Building, which were produced by Oy Taito Ab. A silver-plated lighting fixture that resembles a miniature fountain is a decorative detail in the classical decor of a meeting room.



The functionalist metal-tube furniture in the cafeteria was designed by Werner West (1890–1959). The cafeteria's modern decor is emphasized by a mirror-like green ceiling.



The Yellow Room was originally one of three lounges reserved for female MPs. Elsa Arokallio (1892–1982) designed the furniture. The upholstery fabrics were designed by Irma Kukkasjärvi to reflect the original textiles by Marja Kansanen (1889–1957). The room is adorned by art competition entries for the Grand Committee meeting room mural by Yrjö Ollila (1887–1932) and Lennart Segerstråle (1892–1975). On the back wall there is a study by architect J. S. Sirén for Parliament House (1927).



Gunnar Finne's wall reliefs in the dining room portray characteristics of the Finnish people. This one is called «Timid».

Expansions

In need of more space, Parliament set out on an expansion project in the 1960s. As a result of changes in parliamentary work it had become clear that each MP should have a separate office instead of sharing offices among four MPs as in the past. Personnel was also growing and appropriate facilities were needed for new committees, parliamentary groups, the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the media and the Library of Parliament, for example.

In autumn 1970 a proposal submitted by architects *Pekka Pitkänen*, *Ola Laiho* and *Ilpo Raunio* was unanimously selected as the winner of an architectural competition. Respecting the area's planning history the proposal took into consideration Sirén's original vision. The large wings easily fit in the urban landscape in spite of considerable differences in height, since part of facilities are located underground. The expansion, which was completed in 1978, was planned comprehensively, like the Parliament Building, and the architect's hand is visible down to small details such as signs.

MPs received offices in the wings next to the Parliament Building, which also contains an auditorium and a reception room. The Library of Parliament and administrative offices are in a separate semicircular building that is clad in brass sheets. The semicircular space behind the Parliament Building had been included in the plans that J.S. Sirén drew up in the 1920s. Architect *Hilding Ekelund* (1893–1984) had also envisaged such a space when he planned the Association of Finnish Cities Building, which was completed in 1952 and was acquired by Parliament in the 1980s.

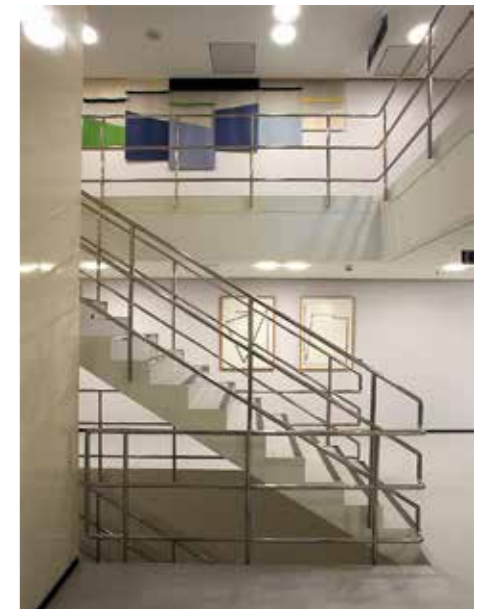


After winning the architectural competition for the expansion of Parliament in 1970, Pekka Pitkänen, Ola Laiho and Ilpo Raunio established a partnership. Laiho and Raunio were mainly in charge of planning, assisted by architect Anja Karlsson and interior architect Martti Tiilikka. The architectural firm of Pitkänen-Laiho-Raunio was responsible for planning renovation work for Parliament up to the year 2000. In 2006 this responsibility was transferred to Pekka Helin & Co Architects.



The architectural firm of Pitkänen-Laiho-Raunio selected Irma Kukkasjärvi (1941–2011), a distinguished young textile artist, to design carpets and curtains for the expansion. Each part of the expansion has its own blue, greenish or reddish colour scheme based on textiles. In connection with the renovation of the Parliament Building in 1980, Kukkasjärvi was asked to design textiles based on the original fabrics from the beginning of the 1930s. She considered this demanding job one of the peaks of her career. New textiles to Kukkasjärvi's designed were produced in the 2014–2017 renovation project.

Irma Kukkasjärvi designed the three-part «Rug Relief» (1982) for the reception room in the expansion. (picture above)



Little Parliament



The Little Parliament annex was inaugurated in September 2004. It was designed by the internationally recognized architect *Pekka Helin* and his team, who won an international architectural competition that was arranged in 1998-2000.

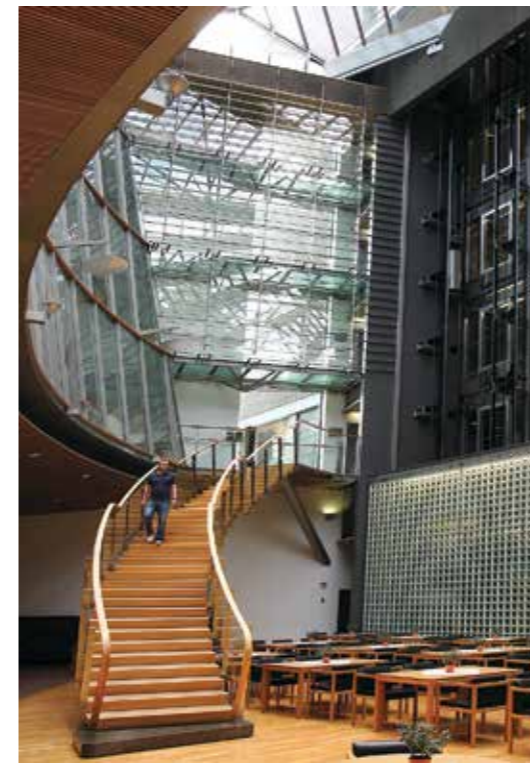
The Little Parliament has been designed to fit in with the surrounding urban landscape in terms of shape, dimensions and materials. The end of the curved section is clad in the same reddish Kalvola granite as the Parliament Building. Different types of Finnish stone and wood have been used on the walls and floors inside the building. As in Parliament's older buildings the aim has been to showcase Finnish expertise and quality in planning and building the annex.

Located on the first floor of the building is the Visitors' Centre. The upper floors contain offices for MPs and their assistants, meeting rooms, the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman and the International Department. The building's central space is an atrium that serves as a cafeteria and banqueting hall. Next to the atrium are meeting rooms for the Grand Committee as well as a joint meeting room for the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defense Committee.

Architecture gives visible form to the objectives and ideals of the times. The Parliament Building with its granite walls defended the young republic and made Finland part of the tradition of European democracies. The Little Parliament was meant by its designers to express the ideals of Nordic democracy: closeness to people, openness and understanding of the surrounding reality.



The City of Helsinki built a small park with a fountain in front of the new annex. In connection with Parliament's centennial a sculpture by Eila Hiltunen (1922-2003) entitled «Past Knights» was unveiled in the park as a monument for equal and universal suffrage.





Wäinö Aaltonen (1894–1966) original sculptures “Work and the Future” from 1932 in gault plaster in the Plenary Hall

Parliament's art collection

Parliament has a sizable collection of Finnish art from the late 19th century to the present day. The largest number of works are in offices. These are mostly graphic and photographic works on paper. Larger paintings and sculptures are located in lobbies, meeting rooms and corridors. The art collection includes portraits of 34 Speakers of the Diet and the unicameral Parliament. Portraits owned by the non-noble Estates were passed on to the unicameral Parliament, while portraits of Lord Marshals have remained in the House of Nobility. Portraits have been painted by distinguished artists from *Albert Edelfelt* and *Eero Järnefelt* to *Kimmo Kaivanto* and *Jaakko Sievänen*. Portraits have been placed in rooms used by the Speaker's Council and the Speaker as well as offices along the Speaker's Corridor.

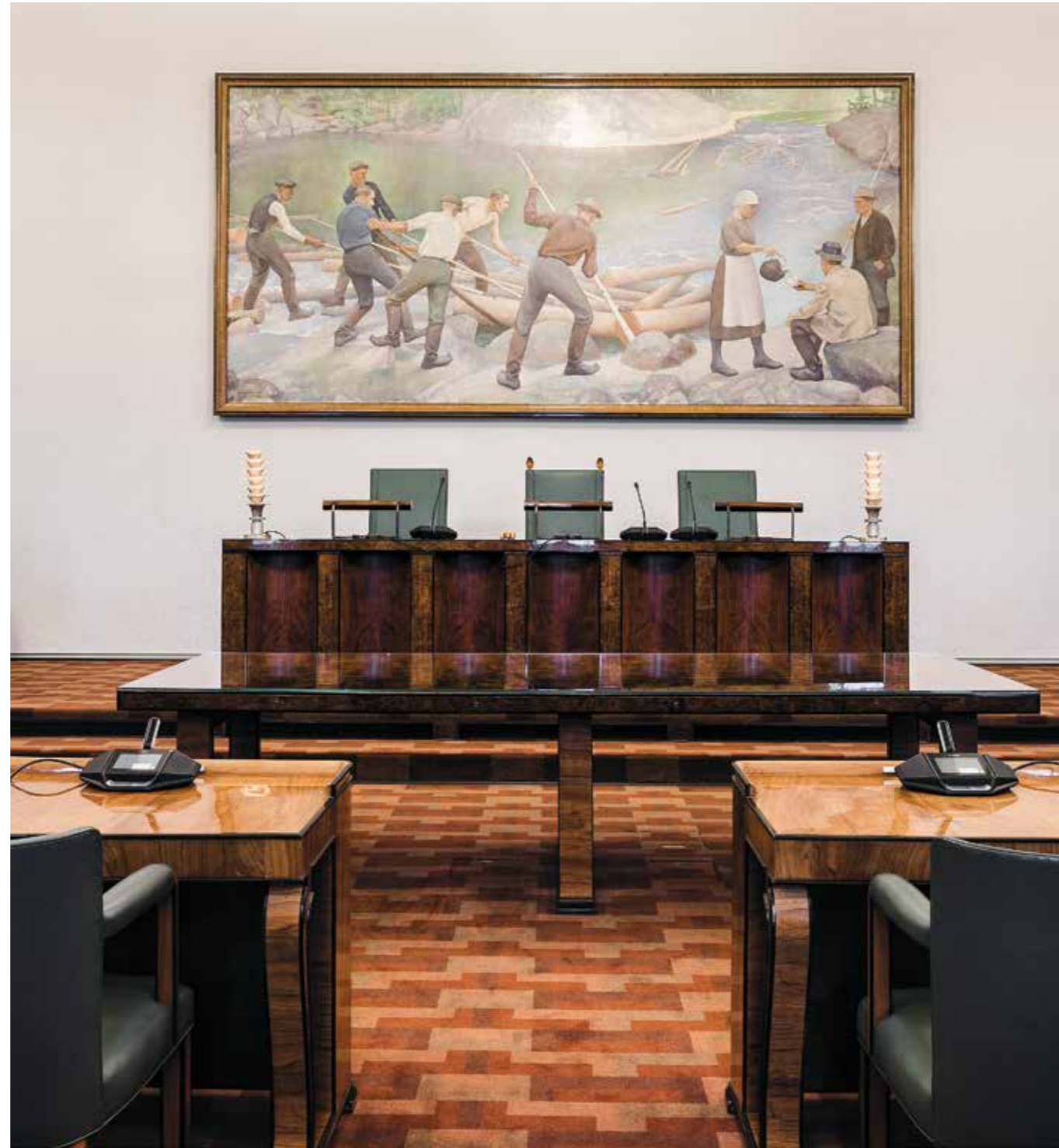
The most significant works of art have traditionally been selected through competitions. Parliament's best-known series of sculptures is visible in news pho-

tos almost daily. These were not procured directly from *Wäinö Aaltonen* (1894–1966), a leading artist of the times, as *J.S. Sirén* had wished. Nevertheless *Aaltonen's Work and the Future* was selected as the winner in an open art competition that was announced in January 1930, as expected. The series of gilded plaster sculptures that *Aaltonen* completed in 1932 were cast in bronze after his death. The original statues in gault plaster were returned to the plenary hall in 2017. The bronzes are exhibited in Parliament House as well. *Settler, Intellectual Work, Faith* and *Harvester* represent men's work in society. The female figure standing with her back to the hall carries the future in her lap, a small boy. Although Finnish women had received full political rights over 25 years earlier, the affirmation of the basic values of a patriarchal agrarian society was not questioned. The nude female figure raised eyebrows, however.

A competition for a wall painting in the Grand Committee Room that was held in 1929–1930 attracted a number of prize-winning entries that were purchased. These were by the distinguished artists *Lennart Segerstråle*, *Yrjö Ollila*, *Uuno Alanko* and *Henry Ericsson*. A new competition that was arranged in 1961–1962 did not have a clear winner either. Drafts by *Erkki Hervo*, *Anitra Lucander*, *Unto Pusa*, *Anna Räsänen* and *Heimo Riihimäki* were praised and are on view in the Parliament Building. The issue was decided in 1980 when Parliament accepted a painting by *Pekka Halonen* entitled *Log Floating*. In 1926 the Finnish Government had donated the work to the International Labour Organization in Geneva. The gift was returned to Finland in the mid-1970s when the ILO constructed a new office building, to which Halonen's work was not moved.

Sculptures for the four courtyards outside the wings containing MPs' offices were procured in a competition that was arranged in 1978–1979. All four prize-winning entries, *Veikko Hirvimäki's In Time*, *Markku Kitula's Coexistence*, *Taru Mäntynen's The Approaching* and *Arvo Siikamäki's Discussion about the Future*, were carried out. After their completion in 1981 each courtyard had its own symbol.

Noteworthy works have also been ordered directly from the artist, such as *Maija Lavonen's Textile on Three Levels* (1982) in the Speaker's Reception Room and *Irma Kukkasjärvi's Rug Relief* (1982) in the reception hall in the expansion. *Kain Tapper's* large wood sculpture *Wind* was placed in the foyer for the Library of Parliament in 1986. It was moved to the Little Parliament annex in 2012.



Pekka Halonen's (1865–1933) «*Log Floating*» (1925) remained the artist's last monumental work. Halonen carefully observed loggers on inland waterways and produced several sketches for this painting

Although originally the Grand Committee meeting room, it today serves as meeting room for the Finance Committee.



The bronze copies of *Wäinö Aaltonen's* sculptures graced the Plenary Hall between 1969 and 2015. After the completed renovation of Parliament House the original sculptures in guilt plaster were returned to the Plenary Hall in 2017. The bronze *Future* is now in a niche close to the Northern marble staircase.

Jukka Lehtinen's «Where Strawberries Grow» (2007) photographed from the terrace on the roof of the Little Parliament. Wild strawberries grow beneath the sculpture



Aimo Katajamäki's «Wood People» in the foyer of the Little Parliament



Six key works of art were selected for the Little Parliament in 2004-2005 in the biggest art competition arranged in Finland to date. Jukka Lehtinen's steel sculpture made up of giant strawberries and entitled *Where Strawberries Grow* (2007) stands outside the main entrance. The foyer is decorated with a series of sculpted wooden heads by Aimo Katajamäki entitled *Wood People* (2006). Pertti Kekkarainen's four-part photo installation *Tila* (2006) on the atrium wall is in a dialogue with the architecture. Sculptor Pekka Jylhä's *Window to the Sky* (2006) with its hundreds of crystal prisms brings light to the room where the Grand Committee presently meets. Tuula Närhinen's *Xylo-tèque* (2007) forms a «wooden library» on the walls of the Foreign Affairs Committee Room and the small meeting rooms beside the atrium. Markku Arantila's *Wanderers* (2007) presents a bright and colourful surrealistic landscape in the corridor that connects the Little Parliament to the Parliament Building.

MPS' offices have windows facing the inner courtyard, which is graced by Veikko Hirvimäki's three-part granite sculpture «In Time» (1981).



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