

Images of Sami religion

Ossian Elgström (1883-1950), artist and writer, had a great interest in Arctic peoples and their religions. He made several trips to Norrbotten. In the painting *Björnfesten* from 1930, he gives us his image of the bear ceremony. The painting is a watercolor ink drawing, 150x150 cm, and consists of a number of episodes, which describe the rites surrounding the hunt, the feast and the necessary purification afterwards.

The hero, i.e. the bear killer, distinguished by a yellow halo around the head.

The scenes are rendered with clarity, drama and a very large portion of imagination, but basically it shows the rites that we can read about in the written sources. The scenes, which zigzag from the upper left corner to the lower right corner, are numbered at the beginning, perhaps to be linked to a written commentary, but this is not carried out.

The painting has been part of the Norrbotten Museum's collections since 1954.

As the priest's records of Sami religion began to be published at the end of the 17th century, the first images of the Sami religion were also spread. The priests perceived the religion as the work of evil himself, which is clearly reflected in the images.

When pleasure is depicted in a trance, his spirit has also taken on the form of the devil.

But there are pictures where the artist has tried to reproduce, among other things, drums as faithfully as possible. We find a romanticized picture of Sami religious practice in Linné's work *Flora Lapponica* from 1737.

Although it is mainly other people's images of Sami religion that have spread, there has always been Sami art that not only describes the religion, but is also a part of it. The oldest are religious motifs on petroglyphs in Sápmi. Even the painted figures on drums, preserved from the 17th and 18th centuries, are examples of this.

Today, the Sami religion is a source of inspiration for many artists, both Sami and others. In the artist Lars J:son Nutti's painting *Reindeer Girl's Dream*, the reindeer

herder's reality is contained, both in everyday life and in dreams, where myths and stories take shape.