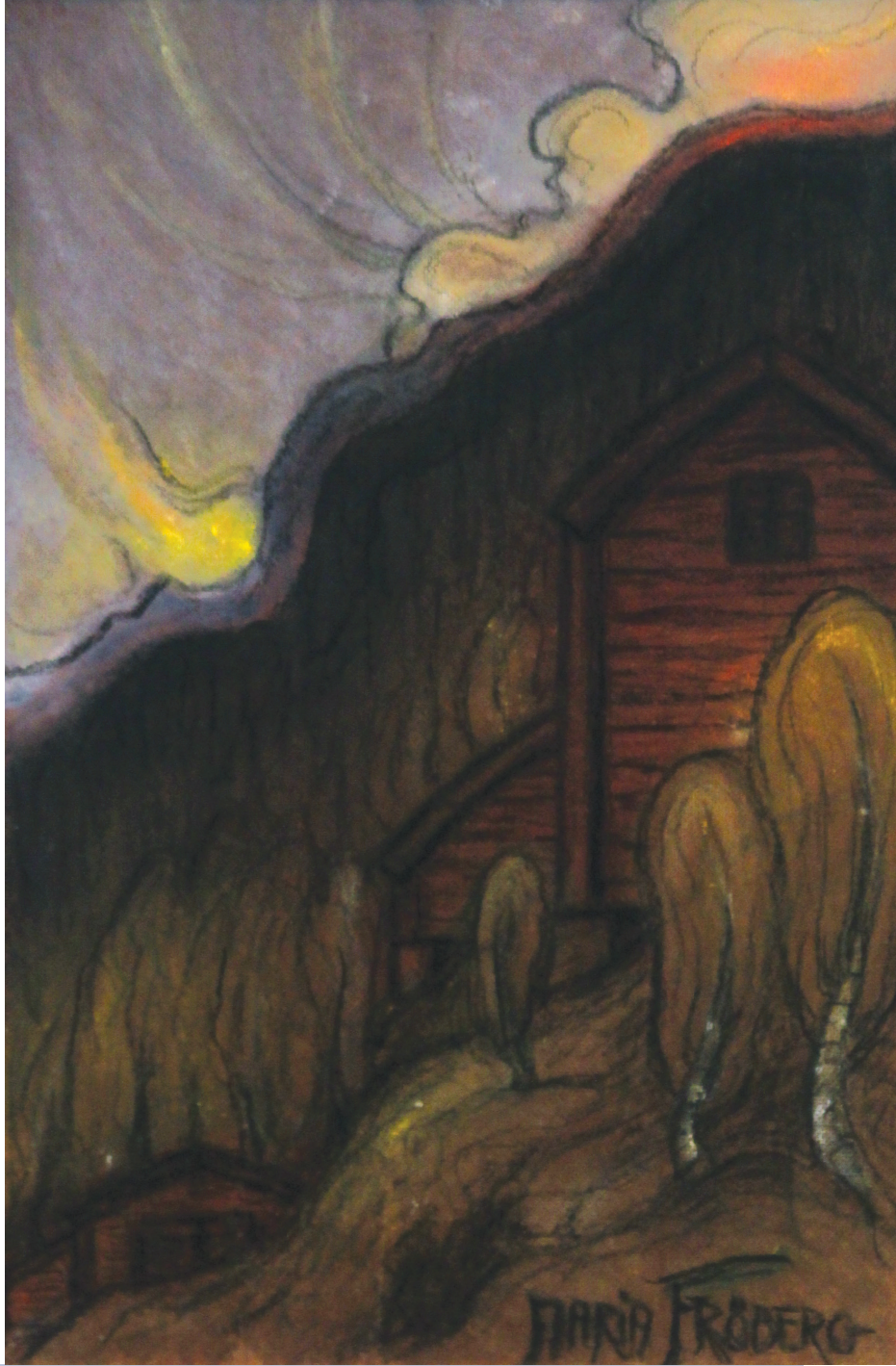


A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING

Works from the Sam and Ann Charters Collection
of Swedish Art



Augustana College

“It is a well-known cliché that the study of another language provides us with valuable insights into our own language, and it is our belief that in the same way we can develop a broader understanding of art through experiencing other art. A society’s way of *seeing* is as unique as its language, and just as in the study of their language, the study of its arts will aid us in the study of the art of our own society.”

– Sam Charters



AUGUSTANA
TEACHING
MUSEUM OF ART

THE EVOLUTION OF SWEDISH MODERNISM

By Dr. Claire L. Kovacs
Director, Augustana Teaching Museum of Art

The earliest works in the Sam and Ann Charters Collection of Swedish Art date to the 1880s, when Swedish artists looked outside of their borders for inspiration beyond the Academy. Like elsewhere, the 19th century in Sweden saw a shift in patronage from the royal courts to an emerging bourgeoisie, which provided fertile ground for experimentation in a variety of subject matter. At the time, the *Kungliga Akademi för de Fria Konsterna* (Royal Swedish Academy of Arts) in Stockholm was a very conservative body focusing on training artists in the Neoclassical tradition.



Nils Kreuger, *Porträtt (Portrait of an Officer)*, 1877, Oil on canvas. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.13.

The Academic method took after its corollaries in France and Italy, allowing the artists to slowly ingest tradition through copying works after established masters before moving on to their own compositions in a Neoclassical style, as embodied by Nils Kreuger's *Porträtt (Portrait of an Officer)*, completed in 1877, just before Kreuger's artistic trajectory was interrupted when an attack of malaria forced him to stop his studies at the Academy. While there, he became friends with Richard Bergh and Karl Nordström, two young artists who, along with Kreuger, would be very influential in their generation's break with Academic tradition. Kreuger did not return to the Academy after his convalescence, instead spending a year at Edvard Perseus' free art school in Stockholm. Kreuger then moved to Paris with Bergh and other Perseus students in 1881.

Already before the 1880s, a number of Swedish artists, starting to feel constrained by the Academic traditions, found their way to the *Kunstakademie* in Düsseldorf, taking up the dominant practice of Realism, painting genre scenes and landscapes. Another group of artists, later known as the *Pariserpoikarna* (Paris Lads), felt isolated in Sweden and moved to Paris in 1872. They established a colony in the City of Light and exhibited regularly in the Salon. In Sweden, there was unrest in the Academy, which suspended its regular exhibitions in 1878, not resuming again for another eight years.



Georg Pauli, *Landskap med figur* (*Landscape with Figure*), 1891, Oil on canvas. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.19.

The early forays outside of Sweden, to Dusseldorf and Paris, paved the way for the next generation of artists. Swedish artists, looking for inspiration beyond the Academy, continued to study in France, and became interested in *plein air* painting, or painting outdoors. They were particularly taken with the tonality and fidelity to place in the work of Jules Bastien-LePage. Georg Pauli's *Landskap med figur* (*Landscape with Figure*, 1891) exemplifies the continued engagement with the naturalist perspective, even after the artists returned to Sweden. The work is a reconsideration of a work painted by Pauli in 1884 of a similar figure set in a French pastoral landscape. In the later version, Pauli pays attention to qualities of light and place that were underscored by *plein air* painters. Instead of the soft tonality of France (seen in the 1884 version), the work displays the rich, cool tones of the “blue hour”—the long

twilight of summer evenings in Sweden, caused by atmospheric conditions and its geographical position in high latitudes. The importance of Bastien-LePage to this generation of Swedish artists is summed up by Pauli in his autobiography:

As long as I can remember, there has never been a time when the interest of the young artists of France, no—Europe, no, I may even say—the world, has been so concentrated around one focal point, one name, as it was in the first five years of the 1880s, around Bastien-LePage. He was the genius who was going to solve the riddles of art. Not its beauty, but its meaning.”¹

If it had not been for Bastien-LePage and the *plein air* movement in France, Swedish artists might have continued creating studio works, instead of the open-air landscapes, painted directly in nature, taking full advantage of the strong qualities of light and landscape in Sweden, depicting it with accuracy and power. Bastien-LePage's work helped the artists reject the Italianate landscape tradition derived from 17th-century artists such as Claude Lorraine. This time in France allowed these artists, upon their return to Sweden, to focus their attention on accurate and powerful depictions of their own landscape, qualities of light, people and culture. Their return in the 1890s coincided with the development of Swedish nationalism and a greater awareness of conceptions of national identity. Like elsewhere in Europe, the artists utilized the training

¹ Georg Pauli, *Opponenterna*, Stockholm, 1927.

undertaken in France to create an artistic practice that was uniquely Swedish in its consideration of the landscape and qualities of light.

Catalyzed by their time in France, a number of artists, including Bergh, Kreuger and Pauli, calling themselves *Opponenterna* (the Opponents), decided to formalize their opposition to the Academy's authority and tradition.

Reflecting back on his critiques of the academic tradition, Pauli was still quite scathing in his criticism of the Academy in the early 20th century. Noting too much tradition placed on the past, he stated, "The main point of teaching is lost; the young generation, which should be spurred on to do their best, and be assured of their faith in the future, are stuffed full of retrospective enthusiasm only."²

In 1886, 84 artists signed a list of reforms of the Academy, including right to appoint their own instructors, greater freedom in the courses of study available, abolition of medals and titles of honor, a scholarship jury made up with equal representation from the Academy and the Opponents, establishment of a school for sculpture, and a regular schedule of mounted art exhibitions. The Academy was given two months to respond, but did not. Thus, following the lead of artists in France and Germany, the artists formally broke away from the Academy, establishing the *Konstnärsförbundet* (League of Artists), which survived, though with diminishing importance, until the end of WWI.

By 1890, several successful exhibitions were held by the League, and the artists became known as the leading representatives of modern Swedish art, both in Sweden and abroad. At the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, Sweden was represented exclusively by League artists, receiving much critical acclaim and formal honors. However, by 1887 there was already faction and schism, as the more radical wing in Paris came into conflict with a mood of moderation in Sweden that was attempting to broker a peace with the Academy. The less radical artists broke away from the League of Artists in 1889 to found *Svenska Konstnärernas Förening* (Swedish Artists' Union).

By the 1890s, Swedish artists were returning home, building on the lessons learned in France. They moved away from detached, ethnographic considerations of landscape, favoring instead to immerse themselves in their subject matter. This practice presented landscapes in such a way that the viewer gained an immediate access to them. These works are characterized by a sense of emotional power and lack of sentimentality not often found in works by their continental counterparts.

² Georg Pauli. *The Socialization of Art*. Carl Eric Lindin, trans. Woodstock, NY: The Maverick Press, 1916.

These changes also were linked to pressures of political change, both within Swedish artists' circles and society at large. The politics of the 1880s, committed to socialist political positions, gave way to an emphasis on returning to the homeland. The cosmopolitan experiences of Paris had a paradoxical effect on these artists: while it provided a model from which to break away from the Academy, it also provided an increased sense of Swedish identity and awareness of a Nordic spirit and culture, stronger even than that felt by those in Sweden itself. The expatriate artists' communities were spaces where return-to-the-fold ideas fomented. They became places of the interaction of seeming opposites: metropolis and wilderness, progressive internationalism and resolute parochialism.

The most powerful themes in Swedish art at the turn of the century were those that fused Symbolist currents of inward-turning subjectivity with the local motifs of nation-affirming Nordic identity. Foremost among these themes was the Nordic summer night, with its traditional overtones of the erotic, the primal and the cosmic. Turning towards symbolism, works from this period, such as Maria Fröberg's *Norrländsk landskap* (*Norrland Landscape*, c. 1920), are distinguished by the highly personal subjectivity, unnatural color and formal patterning.



Georg Pauli, *Scen* (*Scene*), early 1920s, Watercolor on paper. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.20.

In comparison with continental Europe, Scandinavia's move towards Modernism was much slower and more tentative. In Sweden, it arrived in 1907–1911 with the appearance of *De Unga* (the Young Ones), the artists who had studied at the League's school and then later in Paris with Matisse. Pauli also returned to Paris during this time to study under “young men of the new school,” in particular the Cubist André L'Hote, whose work Pauli saw in a Paris exhibition in 1910. For the next two years, Pauli studied under

L'Hote, and his works changed dramatically as a result, as exemplified in *Scen* (*Scene*, early 1920s).

The Young Ones dissolved in 1911, but five of its most radical members joined three newcomers, including Gösta Sandels, in forming *Die Atta* (the Eight).



Gösta Sandels, *Vandraren (The Wanderer)*, 1915, lithograph. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.54.

While interested in pushing Swedish art forward, Sandels was less interested in Matisse (curmudgeonly calling Matisse's Swedish followers "optimistic extroverts") and instead looked to the Futurists as inspiration for his work, as well as the solitary grandeur of the landscape around Göteborg, where he settled. His work *Vandraren* (*The Wanderer*, c. 1915) embodies this introverted, solitary artist.

Another artistic movement that emerged was *Naivisterna* (the Naivists), which emerged in reaction to the international modernists. The group went further than their predecessors in rejecting the Academy, by having little if any artistic foundations, unburdened by academic teaching or travel abroad. They were a group of young,

intentionally unskilled and ignorant artists, proudly trusting their own feelings and sensitivity to painting. Gideon Börje (*Landskap [Landscape]*) and Eric Hallström (*Brobyggare [Bridge Builders]*, 1931) met while both were briefly attending a drawing school in 1917. At the time, Börje was working as a surveyor, and when he showed his weekly earnings to Hallström, the two decided to immediately rent a studio, purchase paints and canvases, and begin painting, having little-to-no experience. They also rented a gallery space and hosted a show a year later, with paintings filling the walls. Such a story, while perhaps somewhat apocryphal, allows the reader a sense of how the group regarded technical routine a handicap, and school a location where talent went to die.

These intentions were carried on by the second generation of Naivists, whose work embodies a more romantic and optimistic response to environments and people, exemplified in Sven "X-ET" Erixson's *Fiskebåten (The Fishing Boat)*, c. 1931). The



Gideon Börje, *Landskap (Landscape)*, n.d., Watercolor on paper. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.34.



Eric Hallström, *Brobyggare (Bridge Builders)*, 1931, Oil on panel. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.44.



Sven "X-ET" Erixson, *Fiskebåten (The Fishing Boat)*, 1931, Mixed media on paper. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.38.



Staffan Hallström, *T-bana miljö (In the Subway)*, 1971, Lithograph. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.46.

second-generation artists such as Erixson also did not completely reject training or travel; discussing Van Gogh, Soutine and Kokoschka with his classmates, Erixson had a particular fondness for spontaneous and eruptive painting,

Artists such as Staffan Hallström (*T-bana miljö* [*In the Subway*], 1931) strove to unite the Naivists' legacy of spontaneous color with a Modernist stability of form. His works have a sense of corporeality and rootedness to the earth that the Naivists lack, while maintaining a commitment to emotive, symbolic character.



Lena Cronqvist, *Tre flickor (Three Girls)*, c. 1990s, Etching. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.59.

In many ways, the introverted, expressionistic form of figurative art by contemporary artists such as Lena Cronqvist (*Tre flickor* [*Three Girls*], c. 1990), which found expression in the 1960s, functions as a successor to the works of artists such as Hallström. Cronqvist's work rejects the continental fascination with Pop Art or Photorealism, instead tending towards social and existential empathy, social commitment and political agitation. In many ways, her work embodies not only a contemporary Swedish political agenda, but also folds itself

in nicely with the politics of Sam and Ann Charters, whose collecting is discussed in Ann's essay.

“THE SWEDISH VISION”—STATEMENT ON COLLECTING SWEDISH ART

By Dr. Ann Charters
26 June 2016

Sam and I began collecting Swedish art in Stockholm in 1977, after we bought a large, old wooden villa in the suburb of Storängen, built in 1905 by the artist Richard Bergh (1858-1919). Bergh and his family had lived in the house for more than 70 years when his grandchildren sold it to us. He had been an important painter and director of the National Museum in Stockholm, and he had built a large studio on the second floor of the house where he painted portraits, often of famous contemporary Swedish artists and writers, including the playwright August Strindberg.



A. Blomberg, *Richard Bergh's Studio*, c. 1906. Source: *IDUN: Illustrerad Tidning för Kvinnan och Hemmet*, v. 14, no. 1005. Stockholm: Frithiof Hellberg. 5 April 1906. p. 168.

Before we bought the Bergh villa, Sam and I hadn't known much about Swedish art—we were more interested in Swedish literature and music. Once the old painter's house became our new home, I began to look for his paintings in antique stores and galleries in Stockholm. One evening in the early winter of 1978 I saw a large oil portrait of a beautiful woman in a blue dress in the window of an art gallery in the Old Town, and Sam told me it was painted by Richard Bergh. Apparently Sam had seen it on a wall

in the house before Bergh's collection was auctioned off. The next afternoon, without telling Sam, I returned by myself to the gallery and asked the price of the painting. It was too much for me to pay all at once, but I arranged to pay it in installments, and I was able to take the portrait home as a surprise for Sam on August 1, 1978, his 49th birthday. I didn't realize it at the time, but I had started our collection of Swedish art.

What drew us to Swedish art in the first place was buying Richard Bergh's beautiful villa. What made us collectors was that we responded to Swedish painting with all our heart. We knew nothing about Swedish art before we moved to Stockholm, but we were excited by what we saw there in the museums and galleries. Before leaving New York City to live in Sweden at the end of 1970 as a protest against the American war against Vietnam—neither

Sam nor I had a Swedish ancestry—we'd collected American photographs. We'd never been able to afford to pay the prices of any works painted by the American artists we loved—John Marin watercolors, for example, or early Richard Diebenkorn drawings. In contrast, the work of the Swedish artists was relatively inexpensive and (after I began teaching at the University of Connecticut and Sam had his job as a record producer with a Swedish company) affordable.



Ann and Sam Charters, August 2014, in Årsta, Stockholm, Sweden. Photograph by Martin Colyer. Courtesy of the artist.

Our collecting habits changed over time and broadened as we learned more about Swedish art. We were self-taught, attending art auctions, reading books about Swedish art history and Swedish artists, talking to our Swedish friends about art, and traveling throughout Sweden to look at the collections in various museums. Several years later I gradually began to collect 20th-century Swedish art glass, and Sam began to buy pieces of Swedish ceramics, both old and new. As my glass collection grew and I spent money for more expensive pieces, I bought fewer paintings.

While I returned to Connecticut during the academic year, Sam lived and worked in Stockholm for most of the year, so he could attend all of the important auctions. He began to know more about Swedish painting than I did, because he had seen much more of it. If he bought an expensive painting at auction or in a gallery, he would ask me to share the cost, and I always did. As his knowledge of the Swedish language grew, he could also read extensively about art.

Living in Stockholm, Sam also became deeply involved in translating Swedish poetry to English, especially after the poet Tomas Tranströmer and his wife Monica became our close friends. Tranströmer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013. Collecting Swedish art and translating Swedish poetry helped Sam feel that he had vital connections to Swedish culture. While he kept his U.S. citizenship, one of Sam's happiest moments was when he was made a Swedish citizen in 2009.

I can't say exactly when Sam first began to feel (consciously or unconsciously) that he wanted our Swedish art collection to express his sense of gratitude to Sweden for making him feel welcome in a country dedicated to the Democratic Socialist ideals he so passionately avowed. That might have been when he discovered that he had an intentionality to his collecting—he wanted to gather

a large group of paintings by important Swedish artists (both women and men) to show Americans the “Swedish vision,” the country’s cultural heritage as represented by the achievement of a number of its painters.

The parameters of our collection were historical—we were mainly interested in the range and direction of Swedish art from the period of National Romanticism at the end of the 19th century to the postmodern period of the present time. As we could afford to buy only relatively modest pieces by representative artists, we made no attempt to purchase expensive paintings by the most famous Swedish artists such as Anders Zorn and Carl Larsson. We bought their etchings instead. We realized that our ultimate goal was to assemble a representative collection we could donate to an American museum, rather than to impress our friends with one or two extravagant investment pieces.

That said, after we bought the paintings, it was a joy to see them on the walls of the places we lived. We decided that we would hang the earliest 20th-century paintings, often quite large, in the house we built in Storrs, Connecticut, after we sold the Bergh villa. That’s where I now can look at Richard Bergh’s painting of the woman in the blue dress, for example, that means a great deal to me. We also own a small apartment in Brooklyn Heights, where we hung the most modern paintings, those from the post-1950 era. In Sweden Sam filled the walls of the apartment that we bought in the Stockholm suburb of Årsta with art from between the two World Wars.

Our dream was to see all the paintings hung together. Perhaps this can happen at the teaching museum at Augustana College sometime in the future. I’m only sorry that Sam, who died of leukemia on March 18, 2015, at our apartment in Årsta, won’t be able to see this dream come true in the United States, with me and our two daughters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition project is presented in collaboration with Augustana College with selections from the Sam and Ann Charters Collection proudly presented by Julie Hohman.



This publication was created with the support of the Swedish Council of America.

Dr. Kovacs would also like to wholeheartedly thank the staff of the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College for their support in preparing her essay.

THE AUGUSTANA TEACHING MUSEUM OF ART

The Augustana Teaching Museum of Art holds a collection of more than 4,200 objects, and hosts four exhibitions per academic year. It provides our communities with meaningful opportunities to utilize art as a window into critical thinking, a mode of posing questions, a way of materializing ideas and a mechanism to catalyze conversations between and across disciplines. By bringing the visual arts to the heart of the Augustana experience and seeking to better understand the world through the medium of visual art, the collections, study spaces, exhibitions and programming are used to provoke curiosity, inquiry and collaborative learning, as well as provide a mechanism for insight and contemplation.

AUGUSTANA COLLEGE

Founded in 1860, Augustana College is a selective four-year residential college of the liberal arts and sciences. Augustana is recognized for the innovative program Augie Choice, which provides each student up to \$2,000 to pursue a high-impact learning experience such as study abroad, an internship or research with a professor. Current students and alumni include 163 Academic All-Americans, two Nobel laureates, 13 college presidents and other distinguished leaders. The college enrolls 2,500 students and is located in Rock Island, Illinois, along one of the world's most important waterways, the Mississippi River, in a community that reflects the diversity of the United States.

This publication is intended as an educational resource only, and no monetary gain will be generated from it. The works in this publication are reproduced based on the college's assessment of fair use of copyrighted works, as outlined by the College Art Association's Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts. If you are the copyright holder for a work illustrated in this publication, and have questions about its use, please email us at augieartmuseum@augustana.edu.

Augustana College

AUGUSTANA TEACHING MUSEUM OF ART

Centennial Hall, 3703 7th Ave., Rock Island, Illinois

Public Hours: Noon–4 p.m., Friday–Saturday when classes are in session

For more information, call 309-794-7400. or visit

www.augustana.edu/artmuseum.

Image on front cover:

Maria Froberg, *Norrländsk landskap (Norrland Landscape)*, n.d., Oil on panel. Augustana Teaching Museum of Art, Sam and Ann Charters Collection, 2013.18.6.