

. AGNEWS .

EST. 1817

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Gustaf Fjæstad

Stockholm 1868-1948 Arvika

The Ice Lake

Signed, inscribed and dated (lower left): 'G A

Fjæstad/ Vermland 1902'

Oil on canvas

59 ¼ x 69 ¾ in. (150.5 x 177 cm.)



Provenance

With Eduard Schulte Kunsthandel, Berlin, Cologne and Düsseldorf (on consignment from the artist during spring and summer 1902);

By whom sold in Berlin;

With C.E. Fritze Ltd., Stockholm, by 1916;

Anonymous sale, Stockholm, Bukowski's, 18-19 May 1933, lot 22 (as *Svenske vinterdag*);

Private collection, Stockholm;

By whom sold, London, Sotheby's, 18 June 1980, lot 134;

Where acquired for a private collection;

Anonymous sale ('Visions of Collecting: Royal and Aristocratic, An Important Private Collection'), London, Christie's, 19 September 2019, lot 304, where acquired by the previous owner.

Literature

G. Nordensvan, 'Från årets konstlif', in *Svea Folk-kalender för 1903*, Stockholm 1902, pp. 126 and 127, reproduced;

G. Nordensvan, *Sveriges konst från 1700-talets slut till 1900-talets början*, Stockholm 1904, p. 98, reproduced fig. 65;

T. Westrin (ed.), *Nordisk familjebok*, Stockholm 1908, p. 475;

A.L. Romdahl and J. Roosval, *Svenske Konsthistoria*, Stockholm 1913, p. 530, reproduced fig. 361;

C. Brinton, *The Swedish Exhibition*, exh. cat., New York 1916, p. 32;

G. Nordensvan, *Svenske konst och svenska a konstnärer i nittonde århundradet, II.*, Stockholm 1928, p. 419, reproduced;

A. Fjæstad-Nordmark, *Fjæstads konst*, Karlstad 1999, p. 243 (as *Glansis med Drifsnö*).

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Exhibited

Stockholm, Ateljébyggnaden, *Konstnärsförbundets 14:de utställning*, March - April 1902, no. 34 (as *Is med driftsnö. Oljemålning*);

New York, Brooklyn Museum; Boston, The Copley Society of Art; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Pittsburgh, The Carnegie Institute; Detroit, Detroit Museum of Art; Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago; Minneapolis, Minneapolis Institute of Art; St. Louis, City Art Museum; Indianapolis, The John Herron Art Institute; Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art, *The Swedish Art Exhibition*, January - December 1916, no. 77 (as *Winter Afternoon*, lent by C.E. Fritze Ltd.).

Remnants of the sun's rays are seen beyond the snow covered hills as darkness and silence settle on this vast winter landscape. The last vestiges of light illuminate the white snowdrifts on the frozen lake. A man pushing his sleigh in solitude is swallowed by his expansive surrounds. The evocative scene is full of subtle colour and weaving patterns, from the teals, ultramarine and sweep of turquoise in the foreground to the soft pinks of the pine trees, there is a sense of tranquility and timelessness. *The Ice Lake*, projects a romantic longing for nature – a driving force for many second generation nationalistic painters in Sweden working at the turn of the twentieth century. The rejection of realism for a more subjective emotional response to the landscape, in a deeply unique personal visual language, makes Gustaf Fjæstad's works increasingly sought after.

Fjæstad is best known for his winter scenes depicted at Värmland, in west central Sweden, where the present work was painted. In 1897, he and Maja moved to Taserud near Arvika and eventually built a house and studio at Kampudden by Lake Racken. Fjæstad and Maja formed the Rackstad colony with friends living nearby, including artist Bjorn Ahlgrensson (1872-1918) and Fritz Lindström (1874-1962). The group were united in their longing for nature and an unwavering aim to reconnect with their Swedish nationhood. It was not unusual for other Nordic artists to search for wilderness as a way to connect with their homeland; Anders Zorn settled in Mora, Carl Larsson in Sundborn and Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela had a studio overlooking Lake Ruovesi in Finland. Fjæstad started this work in late December 1901 and his wife Maja, who was also an artist, wrote a letter to her siblings stating, 'Gustaf is painting a terribly beautiful picture now, *Glansis med Driftsnö* – the view from the balcony with the mountains beyond.'¹

¹ Fjæstad-Nordmark 1999, p. 243.

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Despite never travelling abroad, *The Ice Lake* and other paintings by Fjæstad, are clearly influenced by Japanese art. Fjæstad studied and painted with Carl Larsson, most notably collaborating on murals now at the Stockholm National Museum and he assisted Burno Liljefors during his decorative work for the Biological Museum. Both Larsson and Liljefors were admirers of Japanese art and undoubtedly inspired Fjæstad to look to their artmaking, technique and ideology. In particular, the influence of *Japonisme* in the present work is seen in the emphasis on surface, asymmetry, and the absence of illusory depth of the classical Western perspective. Like calligraphy, the beauty and wonder of nature are conveyed by simple lines and contours, and different surfaces are given character through texture, shape and colour. Japan opened its borders in 1854 and just over a decade later, a trade agreement was signed between Japan and Sweden that intensified the flow of ideas and techniques. Fjæstad and his wife were introduced to Japanese woodcuts in Stockholm at the Art and Industry exhibition in 1897 and later in his life Fjæstad dedicated himself almost exclusively to woodwork.

Fjæstad's first solo exhibition was in 1908 and he exhibited in Stockholm, Berlin and London. In 1932 a larger exhibition dedicated to his later works was shown at the Värmland Museum. *The Ice Lake* was included in a touring exhibition in 1916 – with the help of Anshelm-Schultzberg, the Art Commissioner from Sweden to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition – to promote Swedish art in America. Artists represented were Anders Zorn, John Bauer, Carl Larsson and Bruno Liljefors amongst others, and it travelled to ten different museums. In the accompanying catalogue, Christian Brinton describes, 'At once naturalistic and stylistic, he [Fjæstad] extracts the essential beauty from a given subject no matter how simple the elements may be. And not only is he a painter, but also a handicraftsman of uncommon capacity, his carved furniture, tapestries, wood-cuts and the like contributing their quota to an always individual and accomplished ensemble.'² Today, Fjæstad's work is included in the collection of the National Museum of Sweden, the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Fjæstad's fascination with the decorative effects of nature, helped him create a new dimension to the allure of the Swedish landscape, especially the remoteness of the wilderness area around Arvika. His paintings have resonated with collectors both based in Sweden and internationally since.

² Brinton 1916, p. 15.