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**Nils Santesson** (Stockholm 1873-1960)

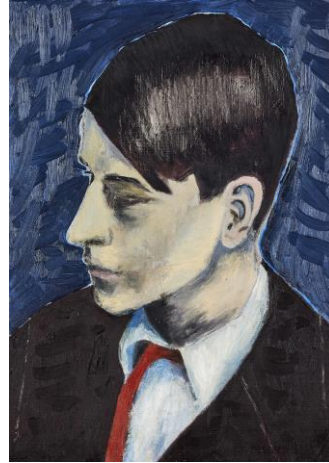
*Portrait of Ivan Lönnberg*

Inscribed on reverse (on frame): 'Nils E Santesson'

Oil on canvas laid down on board

18 ½ x 13 ¾ in. (47 x 34 cm.)

Painted in 1914



## Provenance

Private collection, Sweden, until 2022.

## Literature

Nils Santesson's diary and notes (MS. Royal Library of Sweden).

F.U. Wrangel, *Minnen från konstnärskretsarna och författarvärlden*, Stockholm 1925, pp. 312-314.

Ex. Cat., Stockholm, Konstsalong Rålambshof [Thérèse Fant], *Ivan Lönnberg. Commemorative exhibition*, 13 September -18 October 1941, foreword by R. Hoppe.

O. G. Carlund, *Ivan Lönnberg Commemorative exhibition*, in *Konstvärlden*, Year. 1, no. 15, in Oct. 1941, pp. 314-15.

Nils E. Santesson, *Ivan lönnberg Några minnesord*, in *Konstvärlden*, Year. 1, no. 15, in Oct. 1941, pp. 469-472.

Ext. Cat., *Riksförbundet för bildande konst, Åtta unga målare Minnesutställning, Liv Derkert, Lars Engström, Birger Höög, Ove Lagström, Sture Lundberg, Ivan Lönnberg, Tage Trolle, Carl H. Wettervik*, Vandringsutställning 128, 1954.

L. Börjeson, *Mitt livs lapptäcke: Minnen från ett konstnärsliv*, Stockholm 1957.

E. Björkman-Goldschmidt, *Jag minns det som i går*, Stockholm 1962.

L. Börjeson, *Mitt livs lapptäcke. Ett liv bland konstnärer i sekelskiftets Stockholm*, Paris and Fjällgatan, 1974, pp. 63-69.

G. Söderström, *I Sympatiens hemlighetsfulla makt, i Stockholms homosexuella 1860-1960*, 2009, pp. 298-305.

N. Fabiansson, *Historien om västfronten: I spåren av första världskriget*, 2014.

S. Björklund., *Ivan Lönnberg. Konstnären som stupade i första världskriget*, 2015.

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This portrait was executed during Ivan Lönnberg's stay in Paris January-August 1914, probably in Santesson's studio at 7 rue Belloni and is his only known painting. Santesson was a sculptor, but during his stay in Paris took lessons in drawing and painting. His painting technique appears to be astonishingly modern and shows greater similarity to artists such as Francis Bacon (1927-1992) and James Francis Gill (b. 1934), than Santesson's contemporaries (figs. 1-2).

During his early teenage years in Stockholm, Ivan Lönnberg came into contact with the 18-year-old sculptor Nils Santesson. The documents left by Santesson at the Royal Library include a number of photographs of Ivan posing naked in his younger teens. In 1907, Santesson became notorious for being involved in a public court case related to his homosexuality. After a short prison sentence, he moved to Paris in 1912, where two years later he would reconnect with Ivan Lönnberg, who was now a painter and one of the first of his generation to join the Parisian art world. In a painting done in Paris in 1914, Lönnberg has portrayed Santesson as a visual artist standing in his Paris studio with brushes in his hands in front of a canvas on an easel (fig. 3). On the surrounding walls, Lönnberg has incorporated several self-portraits, which bear witness to his and Santesson's close relationship. That Lönnberg chose to portray Santesson as a visual artist and not a sculptor, his main occupation as an artist, indicates that at this time Santesson took painting very seriously. In addition to Lönnberg's portrait of Santesson, two other portraits depicting Santesson executed in Paris are known; one by Arvid Fougstedt (1888-1949) from 1913 (Modern Museum) (fig. 4) and one by Valle Rosenberg (1891-1919) from 1916 (Atheneum Art Museum, Helsinki) (fig. 5).

Ivan Lönnberg was considered one of the most promising Swedish artists of his generation, but his life was too short and there are not many works preserved by - barely 50 paintings are known today, most of which studio studies but also a great number of striking self-portraits. On April 26, 1918, Ivan Lönnberg was killed by a German bullet whilst fighting in the area of Hangard en Santerre in the Somme department about 15 miles north of Paris. Ivan Lönnberg was one of the most famous Swedes who participated as a volunteer in World War I on the side of the Allies. When he fell at the age of 26, he had been in the war for three years and eight months serving as a corporal assigned to the 1st Regiment de la Légion Etrangère, 1st Compagnie de Mitrailleuses, Secteur postal 109. Although Lönnberg was known in Swedish artistic circles as well as in Paris, he had also made himself known among the general public; he was one of the country's best long-distance runners and in 1912 had participated in the marathon in the Olympic Games in Stockholm. Swedish newspapers wrote articles about the death and published obituaries.

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Lönnerberg was the son of the artist Per Ekström and Signe Lönnerberg, who came from a bourgeois family from Östgöta. In 1912, Lönnerberg had his only exhibition in Stockholm. After studying at Carl Wilhelmson's painting school, he travelled in January 1914 to Paris. In Paris, Lönnerberg moved in the circles of the international world of artists, writers and art connoisseurs who lived a rather openly promiscuous heterosexual as well as homosexual life. Even before the First World War, Ivan, like his close artist friend Nils Dardel, befriended two of the dominant players in modern art, the art dealers Wilhelm Uhde and Alfred Flechtheim. Through their care, the two young Swedish painters came into contact with the leading artists of the time and were also able to pass on the knowledge to their Nordic colleagues in Paris. Lönnerberg has painted a very interesting portrait of Uhde in his home surrounded by paintings by Picasso and his group of artists (Private ownership).

In 1941, a memorial exhibition on Lönnerberg was held in Stockholm with a foreword by Ragnar Hoppe. The exhibition included 48 paintings, from 1909 to 1914 largely covering Lönnerberg's known oeuvre. The exhibition attracted great attention and was reviewed by a. by Otto G. Carlsund in the magazine 'Konstvärlden'. The general opinion among reviewers was that with Ivan Lönnerberg's untimely death, Sweden had lost an artistic talent significant to Swedish modernism. Ivan Lönnerberg is today considered one of the pioneers in the development of modernism in Sweden. The works he executed in 1914 in Paris are considered to be the high point of his short career as an artist.

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Fig. 1: Francis Bacon, *Study for a head*, from Bacon's "screaming popes" series, oil on canvas, private collection.



Fig. 2: James Francis Gill (b. 1934), *Portrait of a man*, oil on canvas.

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Fig. 3: Ivan Lönnberg, *Santesson as a visual artist standing in his Paris studio with brushes in his hands in front of a canvas on an easel*, 1914, oil on canvas, private collection.



Fig. 4: Arvid Fougstedt (1888-1949), *Nils Santesson*, 1913, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

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Fig. 5: Valle Rosenberg (1891-1919), *Portrait of Nils Santesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, Atheneum Art Museum, Helsinki



Nils Santesson in his studio