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EST. 1817

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Ellen Trotzig

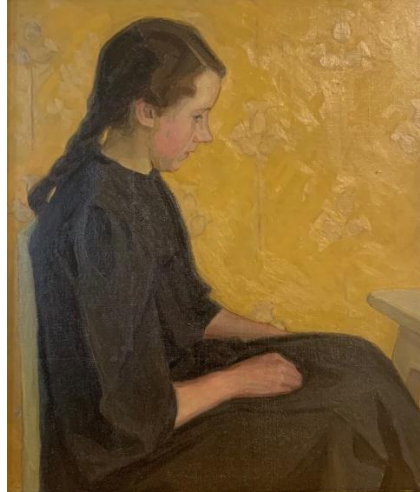
(Malmö 1878-1949 Simrishamn)

Portrait of a seated girl in profile

Oil on canvas

29 1/2 x 25 1/2 in. (75 x 65 cm.)

Painted in 1910



Authenticated by Ernst Fischer,¹ on the reverse "Sittande flicka, målad av Ellen Trotzig 1910 utställd på minnesutställningen i Simrishamn 1950 intygar d. 20 april 1950 Ernst Fischer Malmö musei styresman", stamped "Malmö Museum", in red

Provenance

Private Collection south of Sweden until 2023.

Comparative Literature

B. Rausing, *Ellen Trotzig. Österlens första målarinna*, 2003.

Exhibited

Simrishamn, *Ellen Trotzig. Minnesutställning*, 1950.

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For an international viewer, the present work brings to mind Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous book *The Yellow Wall-paper. A Story*, regarded as an important early work of American feminist literature for its illustration of the attitudes towards mental and physical health of women in the 19th century, first published in January 1892 in *The New England Magazine* and printed as a book in 1899.² A Finnish translation appeared between the 1892 magazine publication and the publication of the book in 1899. The story was first published in Swedish in 1973. It is unlikely that Trotzig could have read the work, but she could have known of its existence.

Ellen Trotzig is often called 'Österlens första målarinna' (the first female painter of Österlen). She was one of the earliest artists who took her inspiration from the nature of Österlen, in Scania, and its much noted light. Ellen Trotzig was born in Malmö in 1878. Her family left Malmö when she was five years old to settle in Simrishamn where her father, Johann Wilhelm Trotzig, had been appointed postmaster. Following her father's death Ellen Trotzig and her mother Christina Cecilia Trotzig, and her four younger siblings, all moved back to Malmö. At this point she was 18 years old. Her paternal uncle, Fredrik Trotzig, who was a successful businessman, ensured that she was able to undertake art studies and became her patron.

Ellen Trotzig spent two years, from 1896–1898, at the Tegne- og Kunstindustriskolen for Kvinder in Copenhagen. She subsequently earned her living for a few years working as a cartographer at the Malmö municipal engineering offices. She then made her way to Gothenburg for further training at the Valand school of art. There she studied under Carl Wilhelmsson from 1903–1905. She undertook her first overseas trip to Paris in 1907, remaining there throughout the spring. She attended the Académie Colarossi, working under the guidance of Christian Krogh. During this time many of her fellow Scandinavian artists were in Paris and she got to know Tora Vega Holmström who was also active in Scania. They maintained their friendship after leaving Paris. Ellen Trotzig only made one other overseas trip during the rest of her life which was to Italy, via Germany, in 1927.

Ellen Trotzig wrote in her diaries that she often found it difficult to be amongst others and that she was at her happiest in nature, where she always felt at peace. "My love for nature is one of the first feelings I remember having and is also the one which remains constant ..." she wrote. Her favourite landscape was that of Österlen and she returned to it after her stint in Paris. She was looking for her roots, for comfort, and for an easy source of inspiration for her painting. Whenever she made shorter visits to Stockholm or

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Gothenburg she always expressed her longing to be back in the Österlen landscape. Österlen was a peripheral place for an artist to be based during the first half of the twentieth century. Ellen Trotzig nevertheless opted to settle there. She remained loyal to both the landscape and her artistry until her death.

Ellen Trotzig's main artistic themes were portraits, landscapes, and still-lives. She had a skill for capturing facial features and produced many interesting portraits of people. She tended to surround herself with female company and after she had finished her studies it seems she largely painted female subjects. Her portraits often depicted serious facial expressions, or women in deep reveries, and Ellen Trotzig had a proclivity for painting profiles. She usually found her models in rural Österlen villages, often servant girls who needed to earn extra money. She also produced several self-portraits as well as portraits of her colleagues and personal friends. One of her 1914, portraits of a friend was of Martha Lytzell, the physical education instructor in Simrishamn, who was one of her close friends. Following a few years of close friendship they moved in together in Simrishamn in 1914. Ellen Trotzig's love for the landscape and for botany is frequently displayed in her portraits and from 1916 onwards she almost completely stopped producing portraits in order to focus on landscapes and still-lives.

Ellen Trotzig primarily spent time on the coast north of Simrishamn. She sometimes lived in the villages of Rörum and Vik. The hills of Rörum and areas around Vik and Stenshuvud make up her most frequent motifs. Towards the end of the 1920s Ellen Trotzig also began to spend time further south in Kåseberga. Ellen Trotzig never allowed herself to be taken in by the idyllic. She once said in an interview that it was precisely the harshness and serious nature of the landscape which captivated her in the first place. Dark greens, with brown and blue tinges, were her dominant colour schemes and she used clear brushstrokes to depict the restful landscape as it meets and is influenced by the dramatic light coming from the sky.

Her paintings tend to be quite dark and heavy, albeit with glimpses of light appearing through the heavy cloud-cover. She saw the light as an "organic element of the dark", as the art expert Birgit Rausing expressed it. Ellen Trotzig became known for her botanical knowledge and interest. In 1916 she was elected onto the Simrishamn Planterings direktion (plant organisation). She also painted flowers, sometimes those which grew in the garden, or those she would arrange in a bouquet specifically chosen for the colours and then leave to settle in a vase so the flowers found a natural resting pose. Over the years she became bolder with

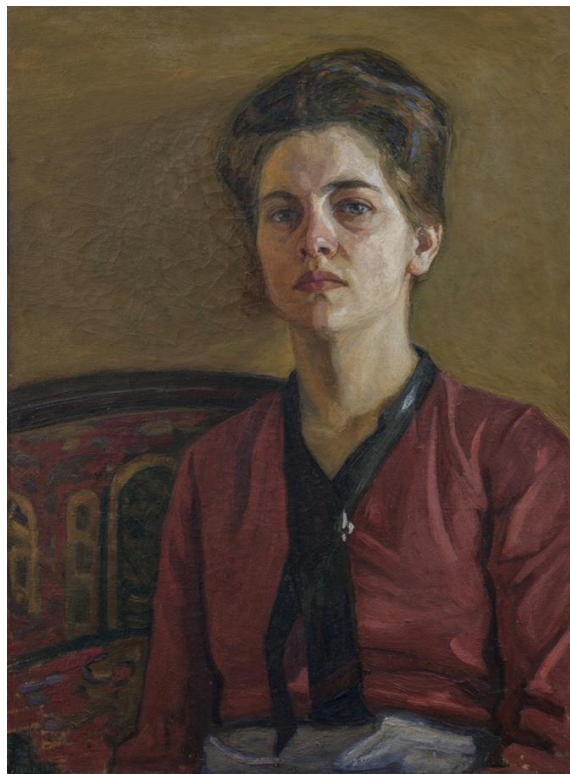
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her choice of colours. It is primarily in her still-lives of flowers that her experimentation with colours is apparent.

Ellen Trotzig made her exhibition debut at the Skånska konstnärslaget (Scanian artists' association) exhibition in 1905 and then went on to display her work at several group exhibitions in Scania, Gothenburg, and in Stockholm. In 1908 Gothenburg museum of art acquired a *Self-portrait* which she had painted in 1906. She took this as public recognition of her position as an artist. She was one of very few women who exhibited their work with Skånska konstnärslaget, the Konstnärgruppen 1913, and Skånes Konstförening (Scanian art society). She also displayed her work at the 1914 Baltic exhibition in Malmö and she was involved in a collective exhibition at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. She held a solo exhibition in 1928 at Landstingssalen in Malmö town hall and at the Ystad art museum in 1942, as well as in Malmö again. Following her death retrospective exhibitions have been held and her work was included in several group displays. In 2010 Ystad art museum held a comprehensive solo exhibition of her work.



Självporträtt, 1906, oil on canvas, Göteborgs Konstmuseum

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Ellen Trotzig left a sizable artistic production behind on her death. According to her wishes it was partly sold and partly served to fund the Ellen Trotzig stipend fund. This stipend is awarded annually to young promising artists who are connected to Scania. In this way she still is of great importance to modern art life in Scania. Ellen Trotzig died at her home in Simrishamn in 1949. Works by Ellen Trotzig is currently being shown at Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm, *Kvinnliga pionjärer - visionära landskap* [Female pioneers - Visionary landscape], 4 March-20 August.



The opening of the exhibition in Simrishamn in 1950 showing the present work on the right hand side

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1. Ernst Fischer (1890-1980) became amanuens at the royal art collections in 1912 and at the Röhsska konstslöjdmuseet in 1914. He was also employed by the historical committee of the anniversary exhibition in Gothenburg in 1916. For the Skara museum, he organized the collection and designed the museum's exhibition interior in 1917–1918. Between 1923-55 he was curator at the Malmö Museum's art and cultural history collection and board member.
2. The story is written as a collection of journal entries narrated in the first person. The journal was written by a woman whose physician husband has rented an old mansion for the summer. After the birth of their baby., she suffers from depression. As a form of treatment, the husband forbids the journal writer from working or writing, and encourages her to eat well and get plenty of air so that she can recuperate from what he calls a "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency", a common diagnosis in women at the time. The story makes striking use of an unreliable narrator in order to gradually reveal the degree to which her husband has "imprisoned" her due to her physical and mental condition: she describes torn wallpaper, barred windows, metal rings in the walls, a floor "scratched and gouged and splintered," a bed bolted to the floor, and a gate at the top of the stairs, but blames all these on children who must have resided there. The narrator devotes many journal entries to describing the wallpaper in the room – its "sickly" color, its "yellow" smell, its bizarre and disturbing pattern like "an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions," its missing patches, and the way it leaves yellow smears on the skin and clothing of anyone who touches it. She describes how the longer one stays in the bedroom, the more the wallpaper appears to mutate, especially in the moonlight. With no stimulus other than the wallpaper, the pattern and designs become increasingly intriguing to the narrator. She soon begins to see a figure in the design. Eventually, she comes to believe that a woman is creeping on all fours behind the pattern. Believing she must free the woman in the wallpaper, she begins to strip the remaining paper off the wall. When her husband arrives home, the narrator refuses to unlock her door. When he returns with the key, he finds her creeping around the room, rubbing against the wallpaper, and exclaiming, "I've got out at last... in spite of you." He faints, but she continues to circle the room, creeping over his inert body each time she passes it, believing herself to have become the woman trapped behind the yellow wallpaper.