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Per Tellander
Lake, forest, and tree, c. 1915

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PER TELLANDER

(Fagerberg, Sweden 1876 – 1951, Kärbackstrand, Sweden)

LAKE, FOREST, AND TREE, c. 1915

Monogrammed lower left: 'P.T.'

Oil on panel

44 x 33 cm; 17 5/16 x 13 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Sweden.

Literature

Konttinen, Ritta, *Sammontakojat. Nuoren Suomen taiteilijat ja suomalaisuuden kuvat*, Keuruu 2001.

Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

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The Swedish artist Per Larsson Tellander occupies a distinct position within the artistic history of the Värmland region. Though never achieving the broad fame of his teacher Gustaf Fjæstad or the wider Rackstad artists' colony, Tellander developed a deeply personal meditative style, rooted in the forests, rivers and lakes of his homeland. His landscapes often reflect both an intimate knowledge of nature and a mystical solemnity that connects him to the broader currents of national romanticism. Tellander studied at the Artists' Association school in Stockholm between 1907-1908, during this time he joined *De Unga*, or 'The Young Ones' group of pioneering modernist painters, who were opposed to what they saw as the conservative tendencies to art in Sweden.

The painting presented here, depicting a solitary red pine rising before a twilight sky, stands as a striking example of Tellander's mature work, dating to the first decades of the 20th century. Executed in oil, it presents a vertical composition, the pine's trunk and branches rendered in glowing red tones that contrast dramatically with the cool indigos and greens of the forest and sky. The tree stands at the edge of calm waters that mirror the colours above in a softened reflection. Across the lake, a horizon of dark trees is reduced to a rhythmic silhouette, in the fading sky. The result is a scene of stillness, solitude, and contemplation – a distilled vision of the northern landscape.



Harry Nyström, *Photograph of Per Tellander*, circa 1908, Karlstad,

Tellander frequently returned to such pared-down motifs from his favoured landscape of remote Northern Värmland. Having settled in Kärrbackstrand in 1914, he joined the Värmlands Artists' Association but lived much of his later life in near seclusion, dividing his time between farming and painting, the isolation giving his work its own idiosyncratic style.

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The idea of the North as an untouched wilderness, both primitive and pure, became central to how Scandinavian artists represented themselves at international exhibitions and World Fairs during the end of the 19th and early 20th century. The Finnish newspaper *Päivälehti* captured this sentiment in 1890, recounting a conversation between a Finnish painter and the French artist Ernest Meissonier, who claimed: “*The reform of art would come from the Nordic countries — from Scandinavia, including Finland. And why? Because we have the raw soil without which all cultivation will remain artificial and vegetation withers.*”¹

Such statements reveal how artists from Finland, Sweden and Norway actively constructed the North as a moral and spiritual frontier, separate from the industrialised and “corrupt” West. Painters such as Pekka Halonen, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and Per Tellander sought to capture this wilderness as a site of authenticity, purity, and renewal. In this way the single pine can be seen as an emblem, standing steadfast against the encroaching dusk, like the artist himself within the changing tides of modernity.

By 1900, the artistic language of French-inspired plein-air naturalism had given way to symbolism and synthetism. Nordic artists were particularly influenced by Gauguin and Japanese art, using these modern constructs and applying them to their own landscape. The narrative of primitivism became an asset, with Nordic artists positioning themselves as outsiders to mainstream European art, their remoteness and rugged environment lending an aura of authenticity and mysticism that found eager audiences both at home and abroad. Within this context, the solitary pine emerged as one of the central symbols of Nordic painting. Artists across Scandinavia adopted similar compositional strategies derived from Japanese woodcuts, particularly the kakemono format, a tall, vertical composition featuring a central motif that soars dramatically against the sky. The high horizon line and strong foreground focal point flatten the pictorial space while emphasising rhythm and

¹ Ritta Konttinen, Sammontakojat. Nuoren Suomen taiteilijat ja suomalaisuuden kuvat, Keuruu, 2001, p.145

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monumentality. Both Tellander and Gallen-Kallela employed this device to elevate the pine into a spiritual and symbolic subject.

The style, defined by Kirk Varnedoe as a “crisp linear treatment and use of unmodulated colour”,² mirrors the synthetic aesthetic that pervaded Nordic art around 1900, with simplified form, luminous colour, and a meditative stillness that invites contemplation rather than narrative. Tellander’s *Solitary Pine* resonates in this way, much like Fjæstad’s frozen lakes or Harald Sohlberg’s luminous landscapes, it embodies a mood of spiritual isolation and quiet transcendence. His bold treatment of colour, the glowing red trunk against the encroaching indigo night, gives the work a distinctive emotional charge. Although Tellander’s reputation remained largely regional due to his reclusive nature, he exhibited regularly in Karlstad and Stockholm, and his works are now represented in the Värmlands Museum and Rackstadmuseet.

² Kirk Varnedoe, *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p.90

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI
London

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM
+44 (0)20 7491 7408
contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Madrid

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT
spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
New York

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM
+1 (917) 388-3825
newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Brussels

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM
BY APPOINTMENT ONLY
brussels@colnaghi.com