

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Carl Johan FORSBERG (Stockholm 1867 - Sønderho 1938)**

## **Lake Garda and Monte Baldo**

Watercolour.

Dated MCMIII in green ink at the lower centre and signed CARL. JOHAN. FORSBERG in green ink at the lower right.

Inscribed LAGO DI GARDA- in green ink at the lower left.

Further inscribed Lago di Garda in Monte Baldo and Forsbergs akvarell on the verso.

156 x 238 mm. (6 1/8 x 9 3/8 in.)

This small watercolour, which is dated 1903, depicts a view of Lake Garda, in northern Italy, with the mountain range of Monte Baldo in the background. Forsberg is known to have stayed in the town of Sirmione, on a promontory at the southern end of Lake Garda, at least twice; in 1901 and again in 1907, and seems to have found the surrounding landscape very appealing. A painting of Lake Garda, executed in 1907, is illustrated in Forsberg's Opera, wherein the artist also describes the beauty of the area in lyrical terms: 'I embrace you, Garda, pressing you hard to my panting breast; Beautiful are your shores, which defy the force of the seething waves, Sweet are your lily-pads, which undulate beneath the flowery, verdant veil. Snow-white is your image, where Monte Baldo, in winter, is reflected in blue-green waters... Lago di Garda! A flap of the purple mantle of the soul remains on your beautiful shores, where I spent so many happy and joyful moments during the carefree days of Italian study tours. Like a string of glistening sapphires and emeralds, the lakes of Italy adorn the white neck of the Alps.'

### **Artist description:**

The Swedish landscape watercolourist Carl Johan Forsberg was born into a wealthy family and studied architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm between 1889 and 1893. He continued his training at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, where he also took courses in etching. He first exhibited his highly stylized landscapes in watercolour and gouache in 1904 at the Konstnärshuset, the gallery of the Swedish Artist's Association in Stockholm, although without much critical or commercial success. Of independent means, however, Forsberg did not need to make a living from his work. He travelled widely around Europe, and after marrying a Danish girl in 1900 settled in Nice. He continued to

travel throughout southern Europe, Greece and Morocco and, between 1910 and 1913, around Denmark and Norway.

In 1913 Forsberg once again exhibited several works at the Konsthäuset in Stockholm, including some earlier Symbolist landscapes such as Pax, alongside more recent views produced in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. A review of the exhibition commented on this watercolour in particular, noting that 'C. J. Forsberg was originally an architect...[he] is just as much a landscape artist. That he has a high degree of architecturally active imagination, that he mainly feels like an architect before the landscape, however, quite clearly shows in his landscape images. Lines and structure become essential, no matter how brightly coloured many pictures appear. And almost everywhere in his production is the decorative and stylized, which is the objective. He seeks the astonishing impression and has achieved great effects of this kind in both mountain and sea views. It is quite natural that a watercolourist of Forsberg's temperament should have sought out the Swiss Alps and the mountains of Norway, that he should play with snow formations and blocks of ice, and dream of the majesty and dominion of the eternal ice, which, for all living things, must set an unrelenting frontier...such as in the colourful composition Pax...What the artist is aiming for in general, we are probably already clear about. That which crystallizes in lines and shapes, what can be captured in ornamental and architectural forms, apparently attracts him the most.'

In 1913 Forsberg financed the publication of the book *Opera*, illustrated with reproductions of his work, which seems to have served as something of an artistic manifesto. The following year he and his family settled in the small village of Sønderho on the southern tip of the Danish island of Fanø, where the artist lived and worked until his death. Although these were intensely productive years for Forsberg, he seems to have not wanted to part with much of his work, for which he asked exceptionally high prices. He continued to exhibit his watercolours occasionally in Sweden and Denmark, usually to, at best, middling reviews. An exhibition at the Valand Academy in Gothenburg in 1920, however, elicited a review entitled 'En lyriker i akvarel' ('A Poet with Watercolours'), which remarked that 'Any artist who wants and dares to be himself merits our interest and respect. How much greater is not our confidence in the seriousness and devotion of an artist who listens only to the music of his own soul, creating on the basis of his own inner imperatives without concerning himself with matters such as the art professor's most recent hobby or the random vagaries of the art market.' A third and final exhibition at the Konsthäuset in Stockholm was held in 1925, and included views in Italy as well as some female nudes and floral still life subjects.

The work of Carl Johan Forsberg remained almost completely unknown for most of the 20th century. Apart from his own book *Opera*, there have been no monographs or articles published on the artist, and only a handful of contemporary reviews of his exhibitions. It was not until the 1980s, when interest in Scandinavian painting of the period was stimulated by the groundbreaking exhibition *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*, shown at three American museums between 1982 and 1983, that Forsberg's work began to come to wider notice.

More recently, the contemporary Danish artist Eva Louise Buus (b.1979) has taken inspiration from Forsberg's oeuvre to create paintings and prints which have twice been exhibited alongside the original watercolours in Denmark; at the Fanø Kunstmuseum in 2015 and the Rønnebæksholm in Næstved in 2016. A large group of watercolours by Forsberg is today in the collection of the Fanø Kunstmuseum, while others are in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm.