

COLNAGHI

PEKKA HALONEN
(Lapinlahti, Finland 1865 – 1933, Tuusula, Finland)

Winter landscape, 1913-15

Signed and dated lower left

Oil on canvas
79 x 59 cm
31 1/8 x 23 1/4 in.

Provenance
Private collection, Finland.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI

In an interview in relation to what would become Pekka Halonen's last solo exhibition in 1932, the artist's gave a remark which succinctly encapsulates his attitude towards art and nature:

"Art should not prod your nerves as if scrubbed by a coarse brush—it should grant peace. For as long as I can remember, I have not been able to see art in any other way. I have lived in the same house at the edge of the forest for over thirty years. I often feel as if I am the owner of the Louvre or that I possess the world's greatest artworks right on my doorstep."

Pekka Halonen came from a peasant family who had tilled the soil for hundreds of years where the serene southern Finnish landscapes meet the wild beauty of the sub-Arctic hills. Besides fulfilling his duties as a farmer, Halonen's multi-faceted father was an avid decorative painter and draughtsman, which introduced Pekka to art as a natural past-time existing in conjunction with nature. Halonen's father was clear that he painted for his own pleasure, an approach which Halonen rigorously adopted as his own. Halonen's mother was similarly artistic showing talent as a *kantele* player. The naturalness and self-assuredness with which Halonen was able to interpret nature onto the canvas owed a lot to his creative parents as well as the sublime nature that shaped him.

Born in Lapinlahti, Halonen grew up at a time when Finnish artists were defining the visual language of a budding nation. He became one of the central figures of the Golden Age of Finnish Art, alongside his contemporary Akseli Gallen-Kallela, with whom he shared both a Parisian training and a lifelong dialogue on the moral and spiritual meaning of nature. While Gallen-Kallela's imagery often drew from the heroic mythology of the Kalevala, Halonen turned to the lived experience of the landscape itself —its forests, lakes, and the transformative power of light and snow.

For Halonen, art was an act of communion rather than description. His belief that painting should "grant peace" expressed an ethical as much as an aesthetic ideal — a faith in the restorative power of the natural world. The artist's home and studio (now a museum of the artist's work), Halosenniemi, embodied this philosophy. Constructed from pine logs and surrounded by thick southern forest, it became both family home and creative sanctuary. Here Halonen lived and worked for over thirty years, painting directly from nature, often in the most inhospitable conditions. He rejected the comforts of studio work, famously declaring that he was no "painter of windows," but an artist who sought truth in the open air.

The present work, *Winter landscape* demonstrates Halonen's mastery of the winter scene — a subject that became his hallmark. Rolling mounds of snow dominate the composition, concealing a rocky terrain beneath soft sculptural drifts rendered in dense, tactile brushstrokes. Auburn branches and evergreen pine and spruce needles punctuate the white expanse, imbuing the painting with a subtle struggle between vitality and the sublime force of winter. Halonen heightened the luminosity of snow through delicate modulations of violet and blue, intensifying the cold while giving the painting a complex depth. The influence of Japonic art, which Halonen would have been introduced to as a pupil of Gauguin in Paris is clear in the painting:

COLNAGHI

the sparse use of shadows and general diagonal asymmetry skilfully leaves room for the colours to vie for attention and the snow on the ground is reminiscent of a frozen Hokusai. Though Halonen's influences were always integrated idiosyncratically they remained subservient to his greatest muse, nature.

Despite the scene's tranquillity, a sense of kinetic tension runs through it: the branches bowing under the weight of a heavy mid-winter snow, seem on the verge of release, suggesting that momentary disruption that restores and strengthens the ensuing stillness. The result is a painting that balances monumentality with intimacy — the immensity of the Finnish landscape condensed into a single, resonant moment. That Halonen would have painted the present picture *en plein-air* facing the crisp weather is palpable in the depiction.

At times, Halonen had to pay a price for his unyielding commitment to painting outdoors. Around the time of the present painting's execution, while working in minus thirty degrees Celsius, fully engrossed by his work, the painter had not noticed the cold seeping into his joints. When ready with the day's effort he stood up, stiff as an icicle, slipped and broke his tibia. Yet even during the long months of convalescence he spoke to journalists with longing of his beloved winter motifs, declaring his wish to export to the world "the silence of the woods and the shimmer of the snow." His thickly applied yet surreptitious pigments — often blues, greens, and purples mixed directly on the canvas — evoke the tactile reality of frost and bark. This palette, simultaneously austere and radiant, became the chromatic signature of his early 20th century style.

Halonen's art stands at the crossroads of Naturalism and Symbolism, united by a deep spiritual sensibility. While his training in Paris exposed him to the lessons of Realism and the *plein-air* discipline of the Barbizon painters, his mature works transcend observation to achieve a meditative purity. His compositions are pared down, built from simplified forms and broad tonal harmonies that verge on abstraction. The thick impasto and rhythmic contouring of tree branches reveal an affinity with the decorative language of art nouveau and, more distantly, with the compositional discipline of Japanese woodcuts, whose vertical formats and flattened planes had a lasting influence on Nordic painters of the fin de siècle.

Whereas the other Finnish greats like Akseli Gallen-Kallela often sought national drama in myth and legend, and Hugo Simberg dove deep into the mystic aspects of symbolism, Halonen sought the sacred in the ordinary. His winter scenes, humble in motif yet monumental in feeling, transform ubiquitous topography into a meditation on endurance, silence, and renewal. As one critic observed, "Halonen's landscapes contain no pathos, only peace." The serenity he captured was not sentimental but existential — a harmony born of the belief that man and nature were inseparable parts of a divine order.

Pekka Halonen's oeuvre remains one of the cornerstones of Finnish national art. His depictions of snow-laden forests and frozen lakes became visual metaphors for the country's stoic beauty and inner strength — an explicit motive for Halonen during

COLNAGHI

the fraught state of Finland's claim to independence in the first quarter of the 21st century.

Halonen's influence extended beyond his canvases to his role within the Tuusula artists' community, a circle that included Gallen-Kallela, Jean Sibelius, and Eero Järnefelt — figures who collectively defined the cultural identity of early twentieth-century Finland. His home, Halosenniemi, continues to embody the synthesis of art, craft, and environment that he championed.

In 2026, the Petit Palais, Paris, will present a major retrospective devoted to Pekka Halonen. Bringing together key works from Finnish and international collections, the exhibition will trace his lifelong dialogue between art and nature, situating his vision within the broader currents of European Symbolism and Nordic Romanticism. In conversation with contemporaries such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Helene Schjerfbeck, and Eero Järnefelt, Halonen's paintings will reveal anew the luminous serenity that made that made him, in the words of his peers, *"the purest interpreter of Finnish nature."*

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