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Gerda Roosval-Kallstenius  
*View from Borsö, c. 1895*

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GERDA ROOSVAL-KALLSTENIUS

Kalmar, Sweden, 1864 – 1939, Västervik, Sweden

*View from Borsö*, 1895

Oil on canvas laid on panel

18 x 50 cm

7 x 19 7/10 in.

Certified by the artist's estate verso

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**Provenance**

Sold from the Artist's estate, 2020;

Private collection, UK

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By the summer of 1895, when this view was painted, Gerda Roosval-Kallstenius (Née Roosval), was already an established and cultured artist. She had studied in Paris, lived in the bohemian artist's colony of Grez-sur-Loing, and travelled extensively in Italy.

Born in Kalmar, Southeastern Sweden, in 1864, the same year that the first female artists were admitted to the Swedish Royal Academy. Gerda was sent by her father to Montreux, on the shores of Lake Geneva, to finish her schooling, where she became fluent in French, in addition to English and German which she had been taught at a young age. It was here that she developed her interest in art.<sup>1</sup> After returning to Sweden in 1881, she enrolled at the studio school of Christine Sundberg (1837-1892) in Kalmar, who like Kersten Cardon, had been one of the "chosen" 19 women to study at the Swedish Royal Academy in their inaugural year of accepting women. Following Sundberg's studies she had travelled, visiting Dusseldorf and Paris. She would settle permanently in France, even becoming an expert restorer for the Louvre from 1872 onwards, returning to Sweden intermittently.

In 1884 Roosval moved to Stockholm, where she studied at the Technical school, now called the Konstfack (University of Arts, Crafts and Design), for a year. During this period, she received private tuition from Ferdinand Stoopendaal (1849-1930), the Swedish portrait painter, prior to his emigration to New York. Tuition under these different artists finally paid off, when she was admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts in the autumn of 1886, at the age of 21. It was here at the Academy that Gerda would meet her husband and fellow painter, Gottfried Kallstenius (1861- 1943) however she would also form strong bonds with a new generation of female art students.

In a photo from the late 1880s, discovered during archival research and recently published by Carina Rech, one can see this strong friendship and sisterhood on display (Fig.1).<sup>2</sup> Gerda Roosval is shown on the far left, with a grinning smile and her hand nonchalantly in Maria Asplund Wrangel's pocket (1861-1923), embracing Maria tightly is Ida Gisiko (1859-1940), with Lotten Rönquist (1864-1912) resting her head on Ida's shoulder. Gerda and Gottfried would marry in 1891; however she would remain close to a number of her fellow female students, particularly Lotten Rönquist, who would go on to study with her in France.

Gottfried received a travel scholarship shortly after their wedding and the young couple immediately travelled to Paris. Here Gerda continued her training in Raphaël Collin's studio,

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Collin was a prominent figure in the promotion of Japanese art in Paris, even teaching Japanese artists western techniques in his studio in the late 1880s, including Kuroda Seiki, Kume Keiichiro and later Okada Saburosuke. The influence of Japanese art on Gerda's style is perhaps not initially obvious, however there is little doubt having studied with Collin that she would have been au courant with the latest exports from Tokyo and may have even met Japanese artists or art dealers within Collin's circle in Paris. The closely cropped view from the shores of Borsö, shown here (Fig.3), illustrates an awareness of Japanese woodcuts and the innovative compositions they revealed to western artists.

Gerda and Gottfried settled in Grez-sur-Loing in 1892, where an artist's community had been firmly established by Nordic, American and British artists. It was here that Gerda developed her en plein air technique, spending time painting outdoors, along the river and the surrounding areas. As can be seen in *Byväg. Grez (Village Road, Grez)* (Fig.2), painted on the outskirts of Grez in 1892, where the vibrant palette shows a particular attention to the study of light, as well as continuing to experiment compositionally.

Having returned from their time abroad in 1894, Gerda and her husband stayed on the island of Borsö in the Trosa archipelago with their two young children in the summers of 1895 and 1896, where they rented a small fisherman's cottage called "Borsö-Lina". During these summer days, Gerda worked on a series of landscape paintings known as "*Borsö sviten*" (*The Borsö suite*), which would be exhibited at the World Fair in Stockholm in 1897.<sup>3</sup>

Our *View from Borsö*, was produced separate to this series, and exudes the plein air style that she had seen and developed during her stay in France. It is one of a handful of her works that survive from her family's stay on Borsö, with her time for work there seemingly limited, Klingberg, her biographer, suggests this was due to the demands on her as a young mother.<sup>4</sup> A reminder that despite the relative freedom enjoyed by female Swedish artists at this time, there was still unavoidable societal and family pressures that hindered their careers.

Of the handful of her works that are known from this time, the majority are seascapes or small paintings of fisherman's cottages. However, *View from Borsö* displays a much more free and painterly tendency, painted with tempo on the shoreline of Borsö. The thin horizontal composition is contrasted with an expansive depth of perspective that opens a window onto the islands of the archipelago beyond. The free fast brushstrokes, with close attention to the

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play of light reflecting on the sea, bring to mind impressionist works that Gerda admired in Paris, as well as en plein air paintings by fellow Nordic artists in Grez.

One clear influence on Gerda's style is the work of Julia Beck. Although Beck had already moved to Vaucresson by the time Gerda arrived in Grez, her paintings were regularly exhibited in Paris and Stockholm and would have been known to the young artist. Beck's *Last Ray of Sunshine* (Fig.8), painted in 1888, preceding Monet's first water lily series of 1889, shows the last glint of sunlight on the Seine in an almost abstract celebration of pure colour in a closely cropped horizontal format. This approach can be seen in *View of Borsö*, where Gerda reduces the composition to the essential brushstrokes forming the horizon and island in the foreground. Unlike Beck, who famously said that she preferred the light of France<sup>5</sup>, Gerda would return to Sweden to apply what she had learned to her native landscape, expressing within *View of Borsö* the unique light of the North through a carefully selected palette of tonal blues.

There is no doubt that the landscape depicted here was of very personal importance to the artist, representing a summer sanctuary for her young family, however *View from Borsö* also stands as a clear example of the international spirit and attitude that Gerda maintained throughout her life. She would become renowned in her later career for society portraits of friends and fellow artists, however these early landscapes on her return exude a rumination of the ideas she had absorbed on her travels, now applied to her own landscape.

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Fig.1 Gerda Roosval-Kallstenius, Maria Asplund Wrangel, Ida Gisiko and Lotten Rönquist in the Higher Painting Class at the Women's Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, 1887–88.

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Fig.2 Gerda Roosval-Kallstenius, *Byväg. Grez*, oil on canvas, private collection.

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Fig.3 Julia Beck, *Last Ray of Sunshine*, 1888, Stockholm, National Museum

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Klingberg, *En blå hyacint i Paris (A blue hyacinth in Paris): Gerda Roosval-Kallsetnius, hennes värld och verk*, (Stockholm: Rönnells Antikvariat, 2009), p.18

<sup>2</sup> Carina Rech, *Becoming Artists: Self-portraits, Friendship Images and Studio Scenes by Nordic Women Painters in the 1880s*, diss. Stockholm 2021, (Makadam, Sweden, 2021),

<sup>3</sup> Klingberg, *En blå hyacint i Paris*, p. 54

<sup>4</sup> Klingberg, pp.50-57

<sup>5</sup> “in Sweden I could never learn to paint the sun – it is so hard to see, the air is clear, oui, but in Normandy the atmosphere is misty and there I could see the sun glittering in the haze and on the sea” (famous quote, translated into English in “The aqueous scenes of Julia Beck”, article by Michael Prodger, 19 May 2012, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2021/05/julia-beck-swedish-painter>)

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