



Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910

Kirk Varnedoe

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From Foreword: "The field of late nineteenth-century painting has been so extensively surveyed in recent years that it is unusual to be able to present a whole area of completely fresh, unfamiliar work of high quality from that period. Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910 gives us such an opportunity. The somewhat special approach that was taken in organizing the exhibition should be made clear. Any survey of thirty active years of painting in five different countries will necessarily be limited. But while Northern Light, with ninety-four paintings representing the work of thirty-six artists, is selective in the obvious sense, our focus is more sharply defined. It was evident from the earliest consultation with our colleagues that an exhibition composed of selections made by curators in each of the five countries, broadly surveying the five national schools with a goal of arithmetic evenhandedness, while inviting for its dictionary-like qualities, would in the end do a great disservice to the art. Thus, while Kirk Varnedoe and his co-curator, Sarah Faunce, benefited from the guidance and generous cooperation of our colleagues in Scandinavia, the selection was approached without the obligation to be all-inclusive....The exhibition often contradicts national notions regarding paintings, artists, and relative importance. Certain artists of recognized merit...do not appear. In some cases, as in the regrettable absence of Jens Ferdinand Willumsen of Denmark, insurmountable conservation problems made it impossible for an artist's key pieces to travel. In general, however, the final selection reflects Professor Varnedoe's approach - to isolate works of particular styles and themes so that they might, as a group, offer a broad sampling of the artists of the period even as they illuminate the patterns of development he sees as central to Northern painting of the period...."

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