

ANDERS ÖSTERLIND

Lépaud, 1887 – 1960, Paris

*Seascape*

1906

Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 37.5 cm,  
signed and dated lower right,  
'Anders Österlind /1906'

## Anders Österlind | *Seascape*

The recent discovery of a *Seascape* by Anders Österlind, dated 1906, offers a rare glimpse into the genesis of a truly independent landscape painter whose expressionist work, until recent scholarship, has been sadly overlooked. However, thanks to recent research by Bénédicte du Chaffaut, Christophe Rameix and others, his legacy has been revised, illustrating his unique perspective as a French born Swede, with work spanning the end of impressionism right through to post war modernism.

Completed when Österlind was only nineteen years old, this *Seascape*, previously misdated, but whose cleaning has revealed the year 1906, now stands as one of the earliest known paintings by Österlind and provides powerful evidence of an innate expressive instinct. The painting's turbulent sea, its chromatic force, and its vigorous palette-knife handling reveal an artistic temperament that aligns uncannily with the bold mature style for which Österlind would later become known. Intriguingly, the stretcher bears the inscription "*Osterlind Le Jeune*", the name he used only briefly, recorded as such in the Salon catalogue of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts of 1906, to distinguish himself from his father. This raises the possibility that this canvas may even have been submitted to the 1906 or 1907 Salon, but due to its abstract nature, was rejected by its jury. If so, this work may represent Österlind's earliest attempt to introduce his true artistic vision to the French public.

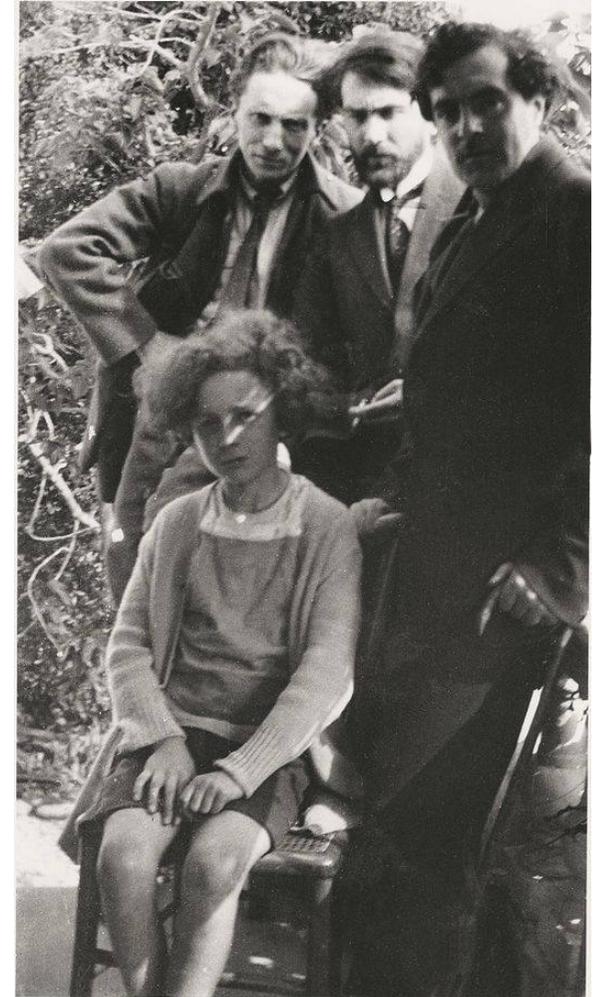


Fig.1 Photograph of Amedeo Modigliani, Léopold Zborowski, Anders Österlind (back left) and his son Nanic, Haut des Cagnes, 1919



Fig.2 Ernst Josephson, *Portrait of Allan Österlind*, 1880, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum

Österlind's precocity is inseparable from the rich artistic world into which he was born. His father, the Swedish painter Allan Österlind (fig.2), had settled in France in 1877, at the age of twenty-two. His mother was Joséphine Eugénie Carré Österlind, a French watercolourist and artist in her own right, who married Allan in 1889, the year he received a silver medal at the Exposition Universelle. Both belonged to a vibrant circle of Scandinavian and French artists active between Paris (Montparnasse), Creuse in central France, and Brittany, which included Renoir, Rodin and Maxime Maufra, but also influential Swedish artists such as Prins Eugen, Per Ekström, August Strindberg and Ernst Josephson, who was present at Anders's birth. Anders grew up learning from his father the 'classical rules and naturalist painting,' yet in Montparnasse he absorbed 'the bold inventions of the successors of Gauguin and Cezanne'.<sup>1</sup>

It was around the moment of our painting that Österlind's work started to evolve, influenced by Montparnasse's artistic milieu. It was in 1906 that Amedeo Modigliani would move to Paris, the two artists would quickly become close friends and Österlind would go on to form a circle that included: Michel Kikoïne, Amedeo Modigliani, Georges Braque, André Derain, Chaïm Soutine, Moïse Kisling, Pinchus Krémègne, André Salmon, Max Jacob, to name but a few. In 1950, during a speech in Tunis, he would recall those early happy moments:



*‘How beautiful springtime was when we filled ourselves with ideas, hopes, springs in which we were perhaps penniless but full of ideas and fervour! Older men who surrounded us accepted us among them. Those were the true Fauves, the true artists ... It was the good era—it was above all our youth!’<sup>2</sup>*

Rameix states that it was the combination of discipline and daring that would form the backbone of Österlind’s paintings produced during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the process of emancipation from his father’s influence, Anders sought ‘to build his paintings with powerful strokes of the palette knife, make tubes of colour spit flames... thrown onto the canvas with the violence of the world’.<sup>3</sup> Remarkably, the newly discovered *Seascape*, one of his earliest known works, painted a year before leaving the family home, already displays the seeds of this ferocity.



The year 1905 marked the young Österlind's debut at the Salon de ka Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, where he exhibited a pastel titled *L'Aurore* along with three engravings, exhibiting alongside his father. The following year he had his first painting accepted by the jury, exhibiting under the name of 'Osterlind Le Jeune',<sup>4</sup> a painting entitled *Neige*, now lost, a pivotal early breakthrough for the then eighteen-year-old artist.

The name, 'Osterlind Le Jeune', designated in the catalogue of that year, also appears in calligraphic ink on the stretcher of our newly discovered work by the artist. We know that it was only in this year that Österlind exhibited under this moniker, still in the shadow of his more famous father. By 1907 he returned to the same name as his father, 'Osterlind (A)', but at different addresses – Osterlind by this point had moved out of the family home and would marry the following year.<sup>5</sup> Unlike his successes in 1905 and 1906, the Salon de ka Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts catalogue of 1907 lists no paintings by the young Österlind, only drawings and pastels, still an impressive feat for such a young artist.



Reverse of *Seascope*, showing the inscription 'Österlind Le Jeune', as well as the wax seals



Given this chronology, the verso ink inscription provides a compelling argument that our *Seascape* may have been submitted for the 1906 or 1907 Salon, entered under the name ‘*Osterlind Le Jeune*’, and therefore likely rejected by the jury. The wax stamps also present on the reverse, which are now sadly illegible, would suggest either the entry of the work to an important collection or perhaps stamped as part of the Salon rejection process. For a young painter keen to characterise their public identity, separate of their father, this would have been a formative moment. In this way *Seascape* can be seen as an attempt for the young Österlind to announce himself to the Paris art world and define his own artistic voice. The plausible rejection, due to its provocative technique, may explain why the work has remained for so long unknown to scholarship on the artist until today.

The inspiration for the *Seascape* almost certainly originates from the Brittany coast, a region that profoundly shaped Österlind’s imagination from childhood onward. The family alternated between Paris (Montparnasse), Creuse, and Brittany, with Anders returning to Brittany throughout his life, drawn repeatedly to its rugged cliffs and turbulent waters. It is here that he spent time with Maxime Maufra and August Strindberg, friends of his father, and like them he remained throughout his life ‘deeply in love with Brittany’.<sup>6</sup> The sea would become, for him, not merely a motif but a psychological force, entwined and laden with cultural references. As Rameix puts it, ‘the sea, the sea always anew! — with its drownings as Rimbaud saw them, with the call of the open sea as Baudelaire felt it’, Österlind was enthralled.<sup>7</sup>



André Lhote  
1928

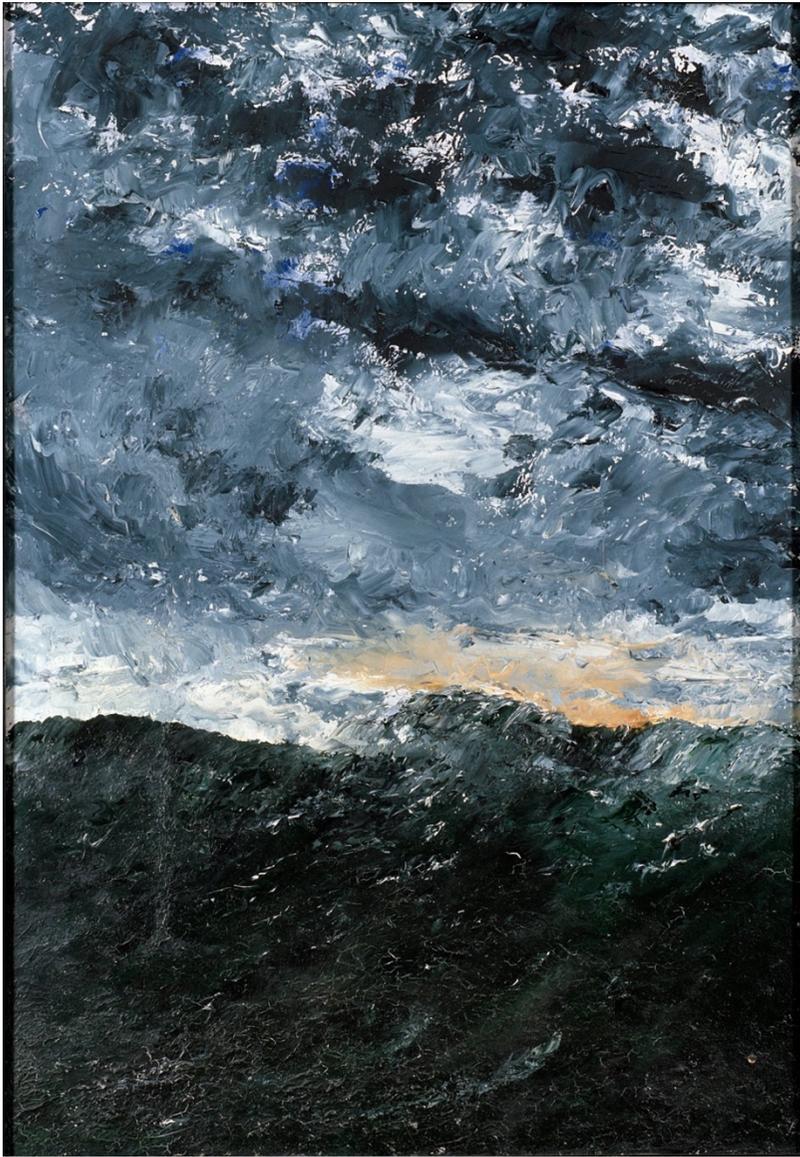


Fig.3 August Strindberg, *Vågen VIII (Wave VIII)*, 1901-1902, Stockholm, Nordic museum

Our 1906 *Seascape* captures precisely that sense of elemental drama. Here, the wave does not simply crest; it heaves upward with the tension of an emotion barely contained. As Rameix observes Österlind's works seize 'the psychology of the landscape as one captures human psychology'.<sup>8</sup> *Seascape's* affinity with the radical palette-knife dreamscapes of August Strindberg, who had produced abstract, frenetically charged paintings as early as the mid-1890s, is compelling, particularly Strindberg's *Vågen* (Wave) series, the first works of which were produced in Dalarö Sweden in the early 1890s and subsequently in France between 1900-1902, such as *Vågen VIII (Wave VIII)*, now in the Nordic Museum (fig.3). Writing on his artistic process in November 1894 in his influential essay 'Des arts nouveaux! Ou le hazard dans la production artistique' (The New Arts! Or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation), Strindberg describes a practice grounded in speed and intuition:

*'I select a medium-sized canvas, or preferably a board, so that I can complete the painting in two or three hours, while my inspiration lasts. [...] I distribute the colours around the board, and mix them there so as to achieve a rough sketch'*<sup>9</sup>

Central to Strindberg's thinking was the notion that uncontrolled natural forces generate forms that in turn stimulate the artist's imagination. This belief in a dialogue between randomness and artistic intuition finds a compelling visual echo in Österlind's *Seascape*, where the paint appears driven as much by impulse as by intention.

As mentioned, it was during the Osterlind family's time in Brittany, that Anders would meet and spend time with Strindberg.<sup>10</sup> Whether the young artist witnessed these abstract works being painted personally is unclear, we know that he did take impromptu lessons from his father's circle, including Renoir and Per Ekström. If he did not, he certainly would have been aware of Strindberg's dynamic and pioneering views on the future of painting from his 1894 essay. Osterlind strives with the same fervour as Strindberg for a rejection of academic constructions and the search for elemental truth. A powerful statement by a nineteen-year-old artist soon to be exposed to the Fauves and already imbued with knowledge of Van Gogh and Cezanne.

Though often mischaracterised as an impressionist, Österlind's art diverged sharply from this tradition. Due to his father's work and circle, critics mistakenly assumed he practiced 'Monet's or Guillaumin's naturalism, but with the expressionists' technique'.<sup>11</sup> *Seascape* therefore stands as an integral addition and one of the earliest works in his oeuvre, an important exemplar that the young Österlind's focus lay beyond that of his father's circle even at this early stage, seeking dynamism from the outset. This is counter to the traditional thinking on his early works, that 'the vigorous surge that would lead Österlind toward Expressionism' came between 1908 and 1910.<sup>12</sup> *Seascape*, created two years prior, shows that his expressive tendencies were apparent much earlier. More than a youthful exercise, this *Seascape* is evidence of a fully emerging expressionist sensibility. In its daring execution and emotive power, the painting heralds the bold distinctive landscapes that would define Österlind's career and situates this early canvas at the genesis of the unique artistic vision he would spend a lifetime refining.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Christophe Rameix in the preface of *Anders Osterlind 1887-1960 La force du paysage*, p.6

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.18

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>4</sup> See the Societe Nationale Des Baux-Arts, *Catalogue illustré du Salon 1906*, Paris 1906, (Peinture XXIV)

<sup>5</sup> See the Societe Nationale Des Baux-Arts, *Catalogue illustré du Salon 1907*, Paris 1907, (XXXIV)

<sup>6</sup> Christophe Rameix, p.10

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.7

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> August Strindberg, *Des arts nouveaux! Ou le hasard dans la production artistique*, 1894.

<sup>10</sup> Christophe Rameix, p.10

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.13