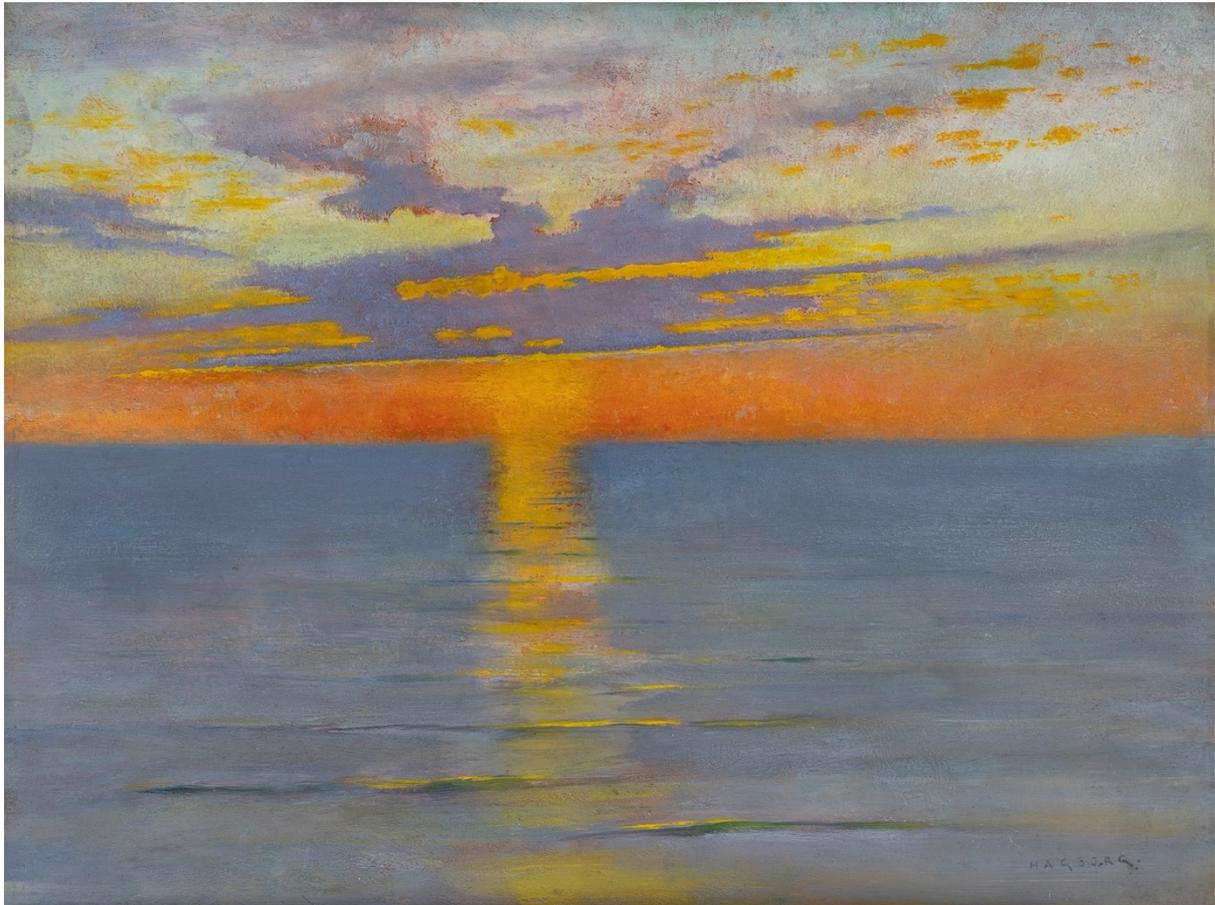


AUGUST HAGBORG

Gothenburg, Sweden, 1852 – 1921, Paris, France

Setting Sun



Early 1880s

Oil on panel, 32 x 41 cm

Signed 'HAGBORG' (lower right)

Provenance:

Private collection, Sweden

August Hagborg | *Setting Sun*

After attending the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm between 1872 and 1874 as a pupil of neo-Rococo painter Vicente Palmaroli (1834-1896), August Hagborg moved to Paris in 1875, where he joined the ranks of Swedish painters residing between Montmartre and Montparnasse. He would remain there for almost four decades, marrying fellow Swede Gerda Christina Göthberg (1863–1934) in 1885.

Hagborg's first address in the Ville Lumière was 35 boulevard Marguerite-de-Rochechouart, at the foot of Montmartre. From there, in 1876 he exhibited for the first time at the Salon, submitting a representation of a street child titled *Un Gavroche*. Alternating professional life in Paris with spring and summer periods in Sweden, in 1877 Hagborg submitted a

second painting to the Salon, titled *The Wait: souvenir of Sweden* (Fig.1), the portrayal of a young woman with a child in her arms, looking out to sea from a dock. It embodied the development in subject-matter and style that marked Hagborg's paintings in the decades that followed, centring around the life of fishing coastal communities in both his native Sweden and France, and inspired by the Naturalism popularised in Paris by artists such as Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884). Against the backdrop of vividly painted ochre shores, cloudy skies and steel-coloured *the Channel* (Musée de Saint-Maur, La Varenne Saint-Hilaire, on loan from Musée d'Orsay), shown at the Salon of 1879, the painting that brought him prominently to the attention of collectors and the public.



Fig.1 August Hagborg, *The Wait: souvenir of Sweden*, 1877, private collection



Fig.2 August Hagborg, *Sea at Sunset*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Praised by critics, in demand among art dealers, and working from a fashionable studio in Paris, by the mid-1880s Hagborg formed part of the group of Swedish painters – which originally called themselves the Opponents and later the Swedish Artists' Union – that rebelled against what they perceived as the Stockholm Royal Academy's archaic teaching methodologies.¹ Informed by the example of phenomena such as Impressionism, without necessarily adhering to their pictorial principles (after all, they were keen to exhibit at the Paris Salon), Hagborg and eighty-five fellow Swedes signed a petition to the Academy, presented in March 1885, that requested several changes to its statutes. All their demands were rejected, which only helped strengthen the group's sense of purpose, as they began to stage exhibitions in Stockholm and abroad, starting with a show titled *From the Banks of the Seine* at Blanch's Art Gallery in April 1885.



Fig.3 August Hagborg, *Sea and clouds*, Gothenburg Museum of Art, Gothenburg

In Hagborg's case, naturalism had prompted him to observe closely the life of rural communities, and to broaden his brushwork to depict vibrant landscapes, yet he had retained a meticulous approach to the representation of figures in line with academic painting. Although Hagborg did not return to live in Sweden until 1909, he did return frequently during the summer months. It was during these sojourns in his native landscape that he started to experiment with complete artistic freedom, leaving aside temporarily his academic style that was so sought after in Paris. Forsaking the human figure, Hagborg focused instead on representing the broad horizons of Western Sweden's coast, immortalising its sunsets and seascapes in a style tending towards abstraction, such as the highly comparable *Sea at Sunset*, now at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (Fig.2).² This resulted in these abstract seascapes, of which very few survive and even fewer are dated. The only known dated painting being the *Sea and clouds* (Fig.3), now in the Gothenburg Museum of Art, dated to 1881. The present composition is an evocative example of this fascinating phase in Hagborg's career, around the early 1880s, doubtless his most modern and ground-breaking. Adopting a palette worthy of a Fauvist and a bird's eye view over the sea, the artist fuses the sun's last rays with scattered clouds in the sky, tracing their path over the waves.

¹ A. Herlitz, "From 'The Paris Boys' to the Artists' Union: A Swedish secession in the late 19th century and its art history", in L. Qvarnström ed., *Swedish Art History: A Selection of Introductory Texts*, Lund Studies in Arts and Cultural Sciences, vol. 18, Stockholm, 2018, p.229