

# · AGNEWS ·

EST. 1817

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**Hjalmar Eilif Emanuel Peterssen**  
(Kristiania 1852-1928 Lysaker)

*Laksefiskere på Nesøya (Salmon Fishers at Nesøya), 1891*

Signed (lower centre) 'Eilif Peterssen';  
(lower left) 'Nesoen'; and dated (lower right) '1891'

Oil on canvas

55.1 x 74 in. (140 x 188 cm.)

There are some marks on the stretcher  
and also a written name: Direktör  
Solberg which refers to the first owner



## Provenance

Private Collection, Oslo.  
Peter Solberg, Drammen.  
Adolf Solberg, Oslo, and by descent.

## Exhibited

Fall Exhibition, Oslo, 1891, cat. 133.  
Gothenburg Art Society, Gothenburg, 1892.  
Munchener Internationale Kunstausstellung, 1892, cat. 1354.  
Oslo Art Society (OK), 1925, cat. 31.  
Art Academy, Stockholm, 1925.  
Kistefos Museet, 2002, cat. 44.

## Literature

Jan Kokkin, *Eilif Peterssen. Mellom stemninger og impresjoner*, Oslo, 2009, p. ?

Hjalmar Eilif Emanuel Peterssen (1852–1928) was a major Norwegian artist who painted across various genres, however, is most celebrated as one of the pioneers in the development of Nordic landscape painting and Impressionism. His work as part of the Skagen group, the 19th century Scandinavian artist's colony, is recognised as some of the best and is comparable to that of the French Impressionists. His influence was

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substantial and extended to most contemporary Norwegian painters, including Harriet Backer, Kitty Kielland, Frits Thaulow, and most importantly Edvard Munch.

Born in what is now Oslo, he started his studies there under Johan Eckersberg, before continuing his training first in Copenhagen, then in Karlsruhe under Hans Gude. In 1873 he became a pupil of Wilhelm von Diez in Munich, where he got to know Arnold Böcklin and others. In Munich's galleries he studied and copied the Old Masters and Peterssen's debt to 16th-century Venetian colourism is evident in his later works. From 1878 he travelled extensively in Europe, and a new phase in Peterssen's work started in 1879 when he moved to Italy, where he lived until 1883. He painted a number of scenes of Italian daily life, with a realism suggesting a plein-air execution but idealised by a lyrical response to the soft southern light.

In 1883 Peterssen joined other Scandinavian artists in a colony that developed in the fishing community in the village of Skagen, Jutland, Denmark. His experiences here would come to inform his distinctive style of *plein-air* subject matter and his work in Skagen, alongside Peder Severin Krøyer, was central in the formation of the Danish Impressionists. Indeed, Peterssen's influence on his fellow painters at the time was substantial. In the summer of 1884 Peterssen stayed at Sandø, a small island in the Oslofjord, where he painted several versions of *Summer Evening, Sandø* (Fig.1). These paintings, depicting a contemplative woman sitting in the foreground of an extensive landscape, would influence the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch in his famous 'Melancholy' series (Fig. 2); variant versions of a similarly contemplative scene painted in 1891–1893, the same period as the present painting.

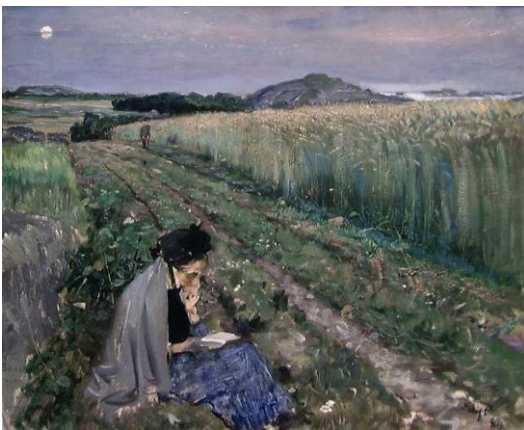


Fig.1: Peterssen, *Summer evening at Sandø*, 1884, Private collection. Fig. 2: Edvard Munch, *Melancholy*, 1891, Private collection.

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After his return to Norway, in the summer of 1886, Peterssen spent time on a farm at Fleskum, just outside his native Oslo, where he and his fellow Norwegian painters Christian Skredsvig, Gerhard Munthe, Kitty Kielland, Harriet Backer, and Erik Werenskiold celebrated nature through their work, as seen in Christian Skredsvig's *The Boy with the Willow* (1889) (Fig. 3).



Fig 3: Christian Skredsvig,  
*The Boy with the Willow Flute*,  
1889

A focus on landscape is evident from this point onwards and indeed mark a turning-point in Norwegian landscape painting. Some of his most notable works were painted during this period and reveal a predilection for dreamlike elegiac moods, as seen in his painted view of the local lake, Dæhlivannet, which became one of his greatest landscape works, *Summer Night* (1886) (Fig.4).



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Fig 4: Hjalmar Eilif Emanuel Peterssen, *Summer Night*, 1886, The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway

*Summer Night* can be read as part of a trend in Norwegian painting of the time, which used the motif of the strong tree silhouetted against the landscape as a symbol of national pride.

Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857), known as ‘the father of Norwegian painting’, moved to Dresden in 1818 where he worked with the great Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1744–1840). While Friedrich continued to take the local landscape as his subject and transform it through his spiritual vision, Dahl painted visions of Norway, translating the peaks of the Sognefjord, the thundering Labro torrent and other recognisable Norwegian beauty spots into a new, impressive and turbulent vision of a northern Arcadia. Dahl’s studio in Dresden became a place of pilgrimage for Norwegian painters who wanted to build on the German Romantic tradition. The clear line from Friedrich can be seen in *Old Birch Tree at the Sognefjord* (1839) by Thomas Fearnley (1802–42), a clever progression from Friedrich’s famous *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818) (Fig. 5 & Fig. 6). In the latter the individual human hero stands strong and straight against a tempestuous background, but Fearnley replaces the human figure with an ancient birch tree, symbolising Norway. Composition, theme, spirituality and yearning are similar in both paintings but Fearnley moves the message away from Romantic individualism and towards nationalist symbolism.

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Fig.5: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, Kunsthalle Hamburg.



Fig. 6: Thomas Fearnley, *Old Birch Tree at the Sognefjord* (1839), National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo

Fearnley's lone birch tree as symbol of Norway was further developed by Peterssen in *Summer Night*, which, although seemingly an informal composition of a birch fallen across a sheet of water, references a progression of nationalism. Rather than Friedrich's carefully composed, idealised scene, Peterssen portrays a slice of reality to which every citizen could relate; any countryman might glimpse something very like the casual beauty depicted in Peterssen's *Summer Night* on an evening walk.



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It is this sense of national pride in the beauty and moving power of even the most everyday landscape that makes Peterssen's works so engaging, as seen in the present painting, *Laksefiskere på Nesøya* (*Salmon Fishers at Nesøya*), 1891. Here the artist depicts the island of Nesøya, a wooded island located in the fjord between Meisingset and Stangvik, about 30 km. from Sunndalsøra and not far from Oslo. It shows a typically Nordic landscape on a warm summer's day, with a verdant sun-drenched landscape, unlike the pure, almost Symbolist landscapes which Peterssen, Kielland and the others had painted at Fleskum.

This painting shows Peterssen at his most Impressionist, using broad strokes with thick impasto in the rocks, water, trees and clothing of the fishermen, which are all executed in a dynamic virtuoso, almost abstract, dazzle of strokes.

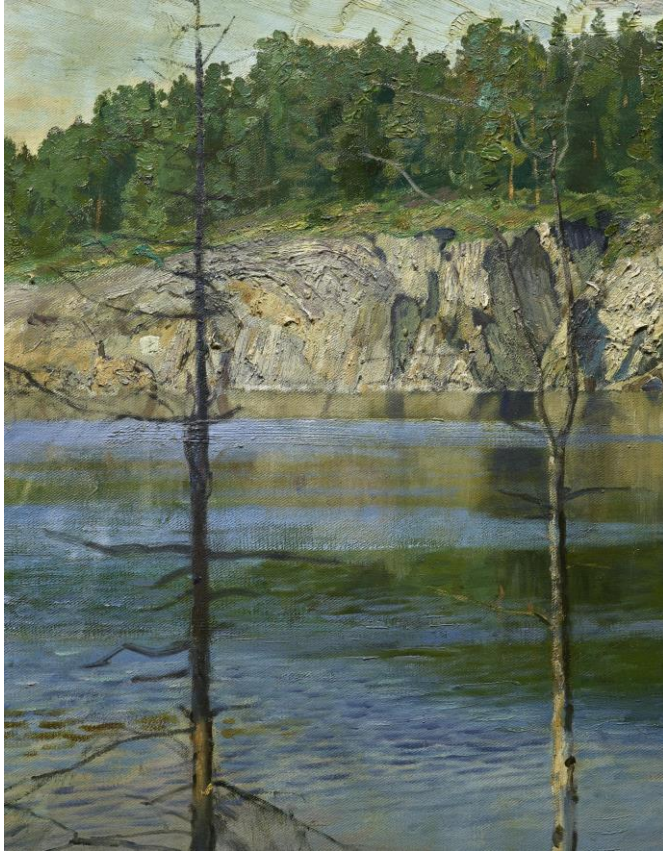


Peterssen, *Laksefiskere på Nesøya* (*Salmon Fishers at Nesøya*), 1891, detail.

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Impressionism was seen as a rejuvenating force, not only for those Norwegians, like Werenskiold, who had seen it first-hand in Paris in the early 1880s, but for Norwegian painting as a whole. As Andreas Aubert wrote in *Dagbladet* in 1895, looking forward to Monet's visit to the country, "Claude Monet, the bold conqueror, one of the creators of a new kind of painting, for which our young art owes him a large debt of gratitude. Claude Monet's youth has turned into a new youth for our painting to new blood in our veins".

*Salmon Fishers at Nesøya* is a testimony to Petersen's position at the forefront of the development of Nordic landscape painting. The translucent light imbues the composition with an optimistic warmth and sense of well-being that combines the spontaneity and bright colours of Impressionism with a provincial motif that celebrates the innocent rustic charm of summers spent in the Norwegian fjords. Layered with national pride, the painting is a poignant expression of simple values and a healthy lifestyle in a rural idyll.