

THE WILDLIFE PAINTINGS OF BRUNO LILJEFORS (1860 - 1939)

A VISIONARY

While the term *wildlife art* might bring to mind the works of twentieth-century American artists like Bob Kuhn or Ken Carlson, the genre found its roots in this country with the German immigrant Carl Rungius. Yet by the time Rungius hit his stride at the beginning of the twentieth century after moving here in 1897, the Swedish artist Bruno Liljefors had already been producing grand, sweeping, and innovative scenes of the dance of predator and prey since the 1880s. Liljefors had a vision that was ahead of his time, foreshadowing a movement that would reach its heyday a half-century later. The title of art historian Martha Hill's book *Bruno Liljefors: The Peerless Eye* captures the essence of his work; many would follow, but Liljefors was altogether without peer.

INFLUENCES

Liljefors formally studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm in the late 1870s but left after only a few years. He rejected the artistic hierarchy of classical training, which relegated animals to a lower order only to be portrayed as allegory or myth, favoring instead the tenets of a burgeoning naturalism. In 1882, he travelled first to Düsseldorf, where he met and studied with German animal painter C.F. Deiker, and then to Freilassing to paint *en plein air*, followed by a short stay in Italy. Finally he visited Paris where he viewed the art capital's spring Salon exhibition. Liljefors then returned to Sweden, but his year-long sojourn had a profound impact on his painting. Much like Carl Rungius, he was an avid sportsman, outdoorsman, and keen observer of wildlife. Naturalism suited him, but unlike his contemporaries, he began to express its sentiment influenced by the French *plein-air* Impressionists and the Japanese color woodcuts that were popular in the late nineteenth century. He also did not shy away from the realities of the predator-prey relationship but expressed its natural harmony. "Life is imbued with conflict. It is the basis of beauty," he said. This combination led him to produce thoroughly fresh compositions that celebrated the natural behaviors of animals, whether a capercaillie issuing a mating call, an eagle dramatically descending on its prey, or a vixen feeding her young. His unique and expressive style gained him national and international recognition.

ALSO ON VIEW



Still Water

by the British Contemporary artist
Nic Fiddian Green

Fiddian Green is internationally recognized for his monumental equine sculptures, including a 30-foot version of *Still Water* installed at London's Marble Arch.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

Scraps: Drawings from the Paul Mellon Collection
April 6 - June 30, 2012

Bob Kuhn: Drawing on Instinct
October 1, 2012 - February 28, 2013

THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

The NSLM's permanent art collection consists of paintings, sculpture, prints, weathervanes, and objets d'art dating from the late 17th century to the present. Important American, British, and Continental artists such as Henri DeLatre, Lionel Edwards, John Emms, Herbert Haseltine, J.F. Herring, Sr. and J.F. Herring, Jr., Ben Marshall, Sir A.J. Munnings, John Skeaping, Edward Troye, Franklin Voss, and George Wright, as well as lesser known works by Richard B. Adam, Carroll Bassett, Jean Bowman, Paul Brown, Alvan Fisher, Michael Lyne, Louis Maurer, Gustave Muss-Arnolt, and Richard Stone Reeves are represented.

The art collection, first formed with important donations and bequests from the George L. Ohrstrom family, has expanded over the years through gifts from other NSLM benefactors, including Norman R. Bobins, Elizabeth D. Clark, John H. Daniels, Timothy J. Greenan, Jacqueline B. Mars, Paul Mellon, Jacqueline L. Ohrstrom, Harry T. Peters, Jr., and Felicia Warburg Rogan.

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Sun., noon - 4 pm
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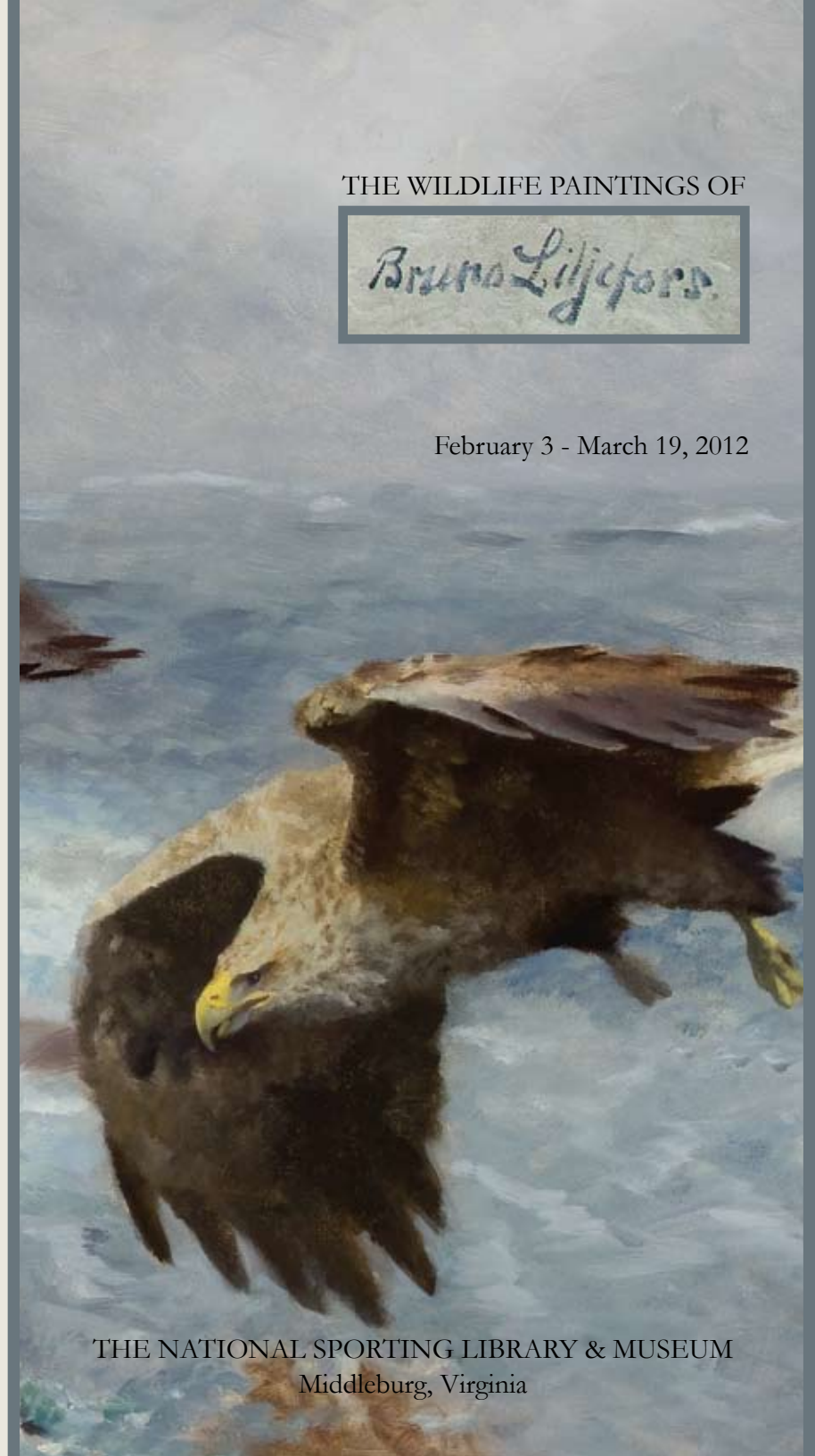


PO Box 1335
102 The Plains Rd.
Middleburg, VA 20118
(540) 687-6542 • www.nsl.org

THE WILDLIFE PAINTINGS OF



February 3 - March 19, 2012



THE NATIONAL SPORTING LIBRARY & MUSEUM
Middleburg, Virginia



Foxes, 1892
Oil on canvas
57 ½ x 79 inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors
and dated -92



Forsommarlandskap (Early Summer Landscape), 1895
Oil on canvas
28 ½ x 20 ½ inches
Signed B. Liljefors
and dated -95.



Vinterlandskap (Winter Landscape), 1909
Oil on canvas
47 ½ x 72 ½ inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors. and dated 1909.



Skogs Landskap (Forest Landscape), 1910
Oil on canvas
26 ¾ x 39 inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors.
and dated 1910.

THE SWEDISH 'HOMER'

In 1887 Liljefors first exhibited in America with his painting *Fox and Dogs* at the Second Industrial Exhibition in Minneapolis for a primarily Swedish-American audience as part of the artist group “The Opponents”, an *avant-garde* association defying the Royal Academy of Stockholm.² Liljefors was then introduced to a wider audience at the World’s Columbia Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, representing Swedish artists with his *Bear Hunting, Fox Shooting, Game Shooting, Hawk’s Nest, Foxes, Wild Geese, Night, and Grouse Shooting*. Among the American representatives at the international exhibition was Winslow Homer, whose works included *The Two Guides, Hound and Hunter, Coast in the Winter, Herring Fishing, and Return from the Hunt*.³ New York art critic and editor of *Review of Reviews* Ernest Knaufft noted the parallels between the two artists:

*Liljefors seems to be the Winslow Homer of Sweden. His “Bird Hunting” and “Foxes” and other studies of animals remind us of that American master.*⁴

Three of Liljefors’ paintings - *Wild Geese, Foxes* (dated 1892, in the current exhibition), and *Night* - were purchased by American collectors.⁵ While he never visited the U.S., his canvases would continue to be recognized in the States with the *Contemporary Swedish Artists* exhibition that traveled to St. Louis, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, Boston, and Brooklyn from 1895 to 1896; the *Louisiana Purchase Exposition* in 1904, where he won a gold medal; and the *Scandinavian Art Exhibition* shown in New York, Toledo, Chicago and Boston from 1912 to 1913.⁶ Art historian John C. Van Dyke would write in 1907, “Perhaps the ablest painter of birds and wild animals at the present day is the Swedish artist, Bruno Liljefors.”⁷

A WILDLIFE PAINTER

The Wildlife Paintings of Bruno Liljefors represents a sampling of the many works he painted between the time of his success at the Chicago Exposition (*Foxes, 1892*) through his late efforts (*Eiders in Flight, 1938* completed in the year before his death). Liljefors was a prolific artist, executing an estimated 2,000 canvases in his lifetime and consistently painting until 1939, when he died at the age of seventy-nine. While most of his work remained in Sweden, his compositions again came to the fore in America with the growth of the twentieth-century wildlife movement.

Much like Carl Rungius and other American wildlife artists, Liljefors had a great respect for the natural order and believed in the need for wildlife conservation. He had an innate understanding of nature’s balance and the talent to communicate this understanding through art. “I paint animal portraits,” he said, modestly, in 1902.⁸ With the success of the American wildlife movement, it followed naturally that Liljefors would be recognized as a pioneer of the genre, which continues to celebrate animals and advocate conservation to this day.

¹ Björn Fredlund (ed.), *In the Realm of the Wild: The Art of Bruno Liljefors of Sweden*. (Gothenburg, Sweden, 1988), 10.

² *Catalog of Paintings, Minneapolis Industrial Exposition, 1887* (Minneapolis, 1887), 2.

³ Halsey C. Ives, *World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 20 and 188.

⁴ Ernest Knaufft, “Art at the Columbian Exposition.” *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 7, 562.

⁵ Martha Hill, *The Peerless Eye* (Kingston on Hull, England, 1987), 32.

⁶ Fredlund, *In the Realm of the Wild: The Art of Bruno Liljefors of Sweden*, 18 - 20.

⁷ John Charles Van Dyke, *Studies in Pictures: An Introduction to the Famous Galleries* (New York, 1907), 122.

⁸ Hill, *The Peerless Eye*, 15.

Varlandskap (Spring Landscape), 1912
Oil on canvas
25 ¾ x 46 inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors. and dated 1912.



Sommarlandskap (Summer Landscape), 1912
Oil on canvas
27 x 39 ¼ inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors. and dated 1912.



Marine, 1927
Oil on canvas
41 x 62 ½ inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors. and dated 1927.



Eiders in Flight, 1938
Oil on canvas
25 ½ x 43 inches
Signed Bruno Liljefors. and dated 1938.

