

The Zorns in St Ives

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Bjarne supervised my undergraduate dissertation in 2012–13 on the Swedish artist Anders Zorn with kindness and firmness that recognised my enthusiasm for Zorn's work. I first met Bjarne when I came to the Scandinavian Department in Buccleuch Place as a non-graduating student in 1987. His calm and patient teaching opened up the world of Scandinavian literature especially of H.C. Andersen and C.L. Almqvist and in my final year as a graduating student 2013 a love of Ingmar Bergman's films.

Anders Zorn and his wife Emma were both only twenty-seven when they decided to spend some time in St Ives. Zorn was already a renowned watercolour painter and a great traveller. He and Emma had returned from France, Spain, and Algiers and had already had a trip back to Sweden in the summer. Zorn had been based in London since 1883 and had married Emma in October 1885. They were on their way to Spain via Plymouth when they visited St Ives and decided to linger there for a while. After the time in St Ives, they settled in Paris for eight years but continued to travel. It was during these few months at St Ives that Zorn started to paint in oils. This essay aims to investigate further the Zorns' sojourn in St Ives by considering the place, the people, and the point in time in Zorn's career. Three of Zorn's works painted in St Ives

will be discussed in detail; *Emma läsande, Fiskare i St Ives* and *Fiskmarknad i St Ives*.

In 1887, St Ives was a small fishing town which had been discovered by a few artists. As Hermione Lee says in her biography of Virginia Woolf, 'from the early 1880s – long before the town had been made famous by its associations with Alfred Wallis, Bernard Leach, Barbara Hepworth or Patrick Heron – painters were arriving, drawn by the soft Mediterranean light and the seascapes and the picturesque fishing community'.¹ At that time there were artists' colonies in north-west France, particularly in Brittany. It has been suggested that some artists moved to Cornwall to escape an epidemic in Brittany.

St Ives is on the north coast of Cornwall. The main industry was fishing, especially for pilchards. The number of shoals of pilchards coming to St Ives declined drastically in the late 1880s. The coming of the railways made St Ives more accessible to visitors. St Ives station opened in 1877, as a branch line from St Erith on the main GWR line, a year later than Penzance station.

Artists came to both Newlyn from 1882 on the south coast of Cornwall, just beside Penzance, and then St Ives in 1885 to paint and establish new artists' colonies.² It has been said the St Ives was more international. The artists in both Newlyn and St Ives painted scenes of the sea and the fishing community. Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) had visited Cornwall and Devon as early as 1811. There are four sketches of St Ives in the British Museum.³ It may be that Zorn saw these when he was in London as he is known to have visited the British Museum. He had an entry ticket to the print collection there.⁴

1. Lee 1997: 27.

2. Brown 1985: 1.

3. Ibid.

4. 'Anders Zorn Konstnären & samlaren'. http://www.alsing.com/zorn_sv/zorn.html. Accessed 25 August 2021.

Whistler was also a visitor to St Ives, though it is not certain that his visit coincided with the Zorns' stay. They did meet later in 1895, as Zorn noted in his autobiographical notes.⁵

Anders and Emma Zorn travelled to St Ives with Alice Miller, an English artist, at the beginning of December 1887.⁶ Zorn described St Ives as a little international artists' colony.⁷ They decided to stay and spend Christmas in St Ives. Emma and Alice, who shared lodgings, decorated them so that it was as much like a Swedish Christmas as possible. They had a pine tree and a Christmas tree and exchanged Christmas presents. It was the Zorns' third Christmas as a married couple and the third one spent away from Sweden.⁸ There are a number of artists that we know were in St Ives at the same time as the Zorns thanks to autobiographical notes by Anders Zorn himself and by Henry Harewood Robinson in his article 'St Ives as an Art Centre'.⁹ There are also several accounts of the early days of the St Ives artists' colony.¹⁰

Those most often mentioned are the Finnish artist Helene Schjerfbeck (1862–1946); the English artist Adrian Stokes (1854–1935) and his Austrian wife Marianne née Preindlesberger (1855–1927), who had previously been in Skagen artists' colony; Emma Löwstädt Chadwick and Frank Chadwick; Edward Simmons, an American artist; and the Norwegian artist Bernt Grönwold and his wife. W.H.Y. Titcomb, an English artist, was also resident in St Ives in 1887. Marianne Stokes was at Pont-Aven, in Brittany, with Helene Schjerfbeck.

The two years after their marriage had been very busy for

5. Brummer 1994: 298.

6. Anders Zorn *Konstnären & samlaren*. http://www.alsing.com/zorn_sv/zorn.html. Accessed 25 August 2021.

7. Zorn 1982: 57.

8. Sandström 2010: 60.

9. Robinson in Whybrow 1994: 21.

10. Whybrow 1994: 21.

Zorn and Emma. They had travelled extensively although based in England. Their honeymoon in Istanbul had been complicated by Zorn becoming seriously ill with typhoid fever. He took three months to recover.¹¹ They then spent summer in Sweden, both in Dalarö in the Stockholm archipelago and in Mora in Dalarna. The winter and spring of 1887 were spent in north Africa and Spain. In autumn they returned to England, and in December came to St Ives. This was a time for relaxation according to Zorn.

The combination of place, people, and a period of 'free time' may have led to Anders Zorn experimenting with oil paint and changing the trajectory of his career. Up to 1887, Zorn had made his reputation as a renowned watercolourist who painted portraits and landscapes and genre paintings. He had of course had experience of painting with oils when a student at the Konstakademien in Stockholm and had produced the occasional oil painting such as *The artist's studio, Brook Street* in 1882. He worked equally happily with watercolours and oil painting according to the author of Mollbrinks booklet.¹²

It has been pointed out that Zorn was already good at oils, though Zorn himself thought that the move to oils was a breakthrough. Emma regarded it with more practical criticism, complaining about the smell and the difficulty of cleaning the brushes. Brigitta Sandström says that St Ives was where Zorn painted his first more important oil paintings.¹³

Emma läsande (Emma reading) was painted in 1887. It is Zorn's first serious oil painting. It measures 40.2 cm by 60 cm and shows Emma reading a newspaper in a domestic setting. Emma is in the foreground and is wearing a high-necked grey blouse or dress. Only her head and shoulders are seen. She has a

11. Den svenska mästaren Anders Zorn', <https://www.barnebys.se/blogg/den-svenska-mastaren-anders-zorn>. Accessed 25 August 2021.

12. Mollbrinks: 1.

13. Sandström 2005: 71.

brooch at her neck which Zorn has made sparkle. Her face is in three-quarter view, and her left hand is in the foreground. This shows her rings and may underline the fact that the Zorns are relatively recently married. She is engrossed in what she is reading and appears to be short-sighted. The newspaper itself has no writing on it. The columns of print are implied by the different tones of white. This may be an artistic device or an attempt 'to rub out the extremely stormy times he lived through' (author's translation) as the journalist and poet, Göran Greider says.¹⁴

Emma's face is well lit from the left of the picture and is its focal point, even though the newspaper takes up more space. The background shows a corner of a room with a mantel shelf behind her, wallpapered walls, and a picture on the back wall. The mantelpiece has a shiny metal bowl on it with flowers and a mirror behind it. There is a cloth hanging from the mantelpiece which is patterned and looks modern, like part of an Elizabeth Blackadder painting. There is some writing in Latin along the top left – 'AETATIS SUAE 27' (her age 27). This is a device more often used in Renaissance paintings as Brigitta Sandström pointed out.¹⁵

The style of the painting is impressionistic, and the colours in the palette are muted. The American artist Edward Simmons helped Zorn to choose the range of colours of his oil paints. According to Sandström's research, the colours which dominated were cinnabar (red) and light ochre. Both zinc white and lead white, ivory black, cadmium yellow, emerald green, and cobalt blue are also used.¹⁶ The brushstrokes are visible, particularly in the bottom left. Zorn has signed the painting and dated it 1887. Beneath that he has written St Yves.¹⁷

14. Greider 2010.

15. Sandström 2010: 60.

16. Ibid. 2005: 34.

17. *Emma läsande* is now in the Zorn Museum art gallery in Mora. The

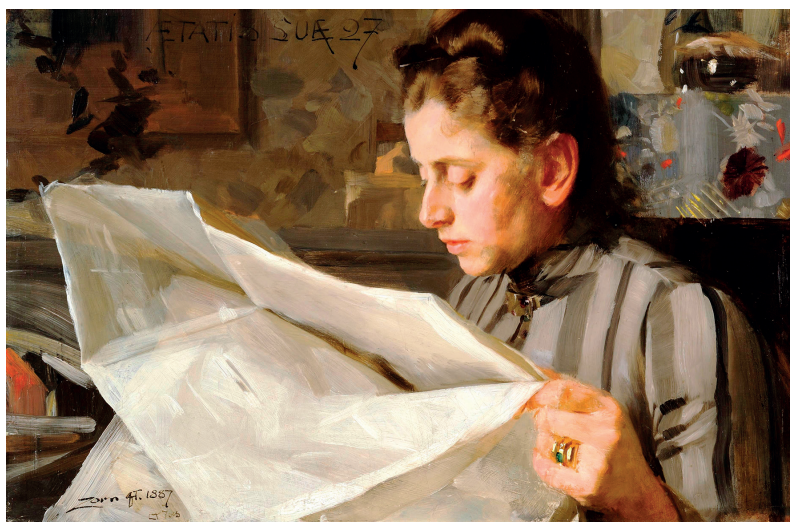


Figure 1: *Emma läsande* (Zorn Museum).

The next oil painting Zorn produced was *Fiskare i St Ives* (*Fisherman in St Ives*). This is considered to be a more technically accomplished work. It is dated 1888 and is now in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Pau in south-west France. It was shown in the Paris Salon in spring of 1888 and bought by the French State for 1,000 Francs. This was a great honour for Zorn.¹⁸ It was then on view in the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris. Zorn made an etching of *Fiskare i St Ives* in 1891 and this is in Mora, Sweden, in Zornmuseet. This is the image more often shown in books on Zorn. The etching measures 27.8 cm by 20 cm.

The oil painting shows two figures, a man and a woman, leaning over a wall. They are looking out over the harbour. The two figures are in the middle ground of the painting with their backs turned towards the viewer. The woman is standing next to a lamp post which is at the right side of the painting.

author and editor gratefully acknowledge the museum and the Zorn Collections' extensive work in preserving the works of Zorn, and thank them for their permission to reproduce the picture here.

18. Sandström 2010: 60.

The lamp post is remarkable because it makes the picture look asymmetrical and was itself a fairly recent invention. There is a road between the viewer and the figures. The woman is wearing a pink dress with an apron. In the background is the harbour and part of the town of St Ives. The colours, as seen in reproductions, are muted. Both figures are in workaday clothes and are presumed to represent local fishing people.



Figure 2: *Fiskare i St Ives*.

Whilst he was in St Ives, Zorn painted a large watercolour of a woman selling fish on the beach, *Fiskmarknad i St Ives* (*Fish Market in St Ives*). This is a large painting, which is a very jolly picture and measures 100 cm by 76.5 cm. The main figure is in the middle ground to the right of centre and is looking over her shoulder at a group of fishermen who are standing near the edge of the sea to the left of the picture. There are several boats

near the shore on the top left. One of the fishermen is looking directly at the fishwife. She is a strongly built woman who is holding a large fish in her left hand and wearing a straw hat which covers her eyes. She is said to be a woman Zorn saw in St Ives and wanted to paint.



Figure 3: *Fiskmarknad i St Ives*.

In the foreground there is part of a boat which appears to be full of seaweed. The three fish in the foreground on the left appear to be looking at the viewer. They may be gurnards. In the absence of the shoals of pilchards St Ives was originally famous for, the fishermen caught other fish, including gurnards, and which were sold on the beach and then transported to London. The coming of the railways would have made this easier.

The water is portrayed with Zorn's usual mastery. The reflections of the boats make the sea look dark and make a contrast with the figures of the fishermen. This picture was on show at Börjeson art collection at the Green Hotel in Tällberg, Sweden, but was sold at auction in 2018. Its present whereabouts are unknown. There is a good reproduction online.¹⁹

The Newlyn painter, Stanhope Forbes (1857–1947) painted *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach* in oils in 1884–85 which was shown at the Royal Academy in London. It is possible that Zorn may have seen it when he was in London and been influenced by it. It is a much busier picture than *Fiskmarknad i St Ives*, but the arrangement of the fish in the foreground and the people between the viewer and the sea is familiar. Perhaps Zorn's decision to come to Cornwall was influenced in part by Forbes' painting and those like it.

Zorn also painted a portrait of Alice Miller, *Målarinnan Alice (The Painter Alice)* in oils at St Ives in 1887. It shows a serious woman looking out of the picture at the viewer. She may be sitting at a table as there is a dining chair to her left. There is a pot plant and a wall with two pictures behind her. The portrait lacks the feeling of tenderness and affection engendered in *Emma läsandet*. This painting may have been an

19. 'Den svenska mästaren Anders Zorn', <https://www.barnebys.se/blogg/den-svenska-mastaren-anders-zorn>. Accessed 25 August 2021.

‘exercise’ for Zorn, as Alice was one of the main people in St Ives who helped and encouraged him in his oil painting.

The Zorn couple’s three months in St Ives is remembered mostly as the springboard for Zorn’s career as a successful oil painter. Most of the portraits Zorn painted after his time in St Ives were in oil. This part of his career flourished in the following eight years that Anders and Emma spent based in Paris (1888–96). They did not stop travelling in those years. The partnership between Anders and Emma Zorn continued for the whole of Anders’ life. Emma was often his model and his muse. The newly regained mastery of oil paint was added to Zorn’s mastery of watercolour painting, etching, and sculpture. There is no denying Zorn’s technical skill, which Göran Greider said ‘*känns som trolleri*’ (‘feels like enchantment’).²⁰

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20. Greider 2010.

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