

THE FAIRYTALE

BY ALEXANDER LERVIK & ARITCO

The Scandinavian fairytales are full of mystery, trolls & princesses, but foremost it features the forest. A forest full of pine trees, moss, fern and ivy.

By the small dark lake, you will find the princess mirroring herself combing her hair. The trolls are her guardians against evil visitors. Mr John Bauer was a painter in the end of 1900-century, born in the area where deep woods and small lakes define the landscape, which he used to create the paintings in the books for children. Picturing the nature and the fairytale like a dream.

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ARITCO™



JOHN BAUER

Why only tales for middle- and upper-class children, was the question in Sweden at the turn of the century. Bringing forth fairy tales from a distant middle age, from far away countries, Old Norse myths, as well as newly written stories was part of the Romantic nationalism in vogue. John Bauer, with his pipe always at hand blowing troll smoke, explored the same myths creating enchanting worlds out of the past: his illustrations were so captivating that the trolls seemed to be outright alive. He evoked deep forests where high ferns, hawthorns, fly amanita and lily-of-the-valley abound. Beholding a fairy revels, you hear the night raven screech, and you glimpse hobgoblins hiding under windthrows. Giant trolls seem to be transformed out of large boulders, and if not the most clever, they are joking loudly clad with treasures of gold and sparkling jewelry. This is a territory beyond mankind where only fierce adventurous children dare venture. If nature is wild and wily, it is also pagan fertility in heat as opposed to religious puritanism.

In John Bauer's pre-modernist time as well as our own seemingly enlightened digital age, trolls and fairies might just seem superstition. John Bauer nevertheless could draw them into existence in order to us have a glance into their parallel reality. As an art student he rejected

the usual stay in Paris where artists at the beginning of the 20th century were supposed to get inspired and develop their artistry. Instead, he ventured to Lapland and the Sami people, and deep down to renaissance Tuscany and to Germany. His illustrations and paintings managed to evoke a mysterious yet not forgotten past in a time when Sweden was in the midst of industrialization. Already at 16 years of age he wanted to leave the family in the countryside to study at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts in Stockholm. His sketches and drawings were appreciated, but he was deemed to young and had reluctantly to contend with a minor school until he eventually was accepted. Already from the beginning in his career he illustrated children's books, and today his name, more than the authors themselves, are tied to stories that form part of Swedish childhood.

His illustrations of *Among Gnomes and Trolls* are his most famous, and although capturing Nordic nature it is not hard to see the influences from Florentine renaissance, Flemish tapestries as well Roman sculptures. John Bauer life was cut short when he, at only 36 of age, drowned along with his young family on the Lake Vättern in southern Sweden when an overloaded ferry perished in a storm.



John Bauer

