

CARL LUDVIG THILSON LOCHER

FLENSBURG 1851 – SKAGEN 1915

Carl Locher was born in the maritime city of Flensburg, where his father, J.T. Locher (1825–1869) enjoyed some success as a sea painter. In the mid-1850's, the family moved to Copenhagen. Carl's interest in ships thus derives from his childhood home, where he also received his first artistic instruction. He was only seventeen when his father died, but his training was so advanced that he continued to run the sea painting business for some years. In 1870–1871, he became familiar with the sea in earnest when he embarked on his first long voyage to the West Indies, travelling home via London.

The desire for further training of a more artistic nature led him to become a pupil of the marine artist Carl Baagøe (1829–1902) and then of Holger Drachmann (1846–1908), who was also one of the most famous poets of the day. After this, Carl applied to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, where he was a pupil until 1874. He aimed for an academic career, and from 1870 he exhibited at Charlottenborg, the Academy's official annual exhibition, and several times competed for the Neuhausen Prize, though never winning it. Now he alternated further instruction with voyages on board ship and brief visits abroad.

Like other young Scandinavian painters, Locher settled for a time in France in order to acquaint himself with new artistic forms of expression. During the years 1876–1878 he was a pupil of Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) in Paris, for a time studying together with Laurits Tuxen and P.S. Krøyer. He also learned a great deal by copying earlier sea paintings. While in Paris he painted Redningsbåden går ud, forrygende storm, 1877 (The Lifeboat Goes Out, Raging Storm, replica at Handels- og Søfartsmuseet, Kronborg), on the basis of studies made in Skagen, a work which he exhibited at home in 1878. That same year he painted Ageposten (The Post Wagon), portraying the horse-drawn wagon carrying the mail on its way to Skagen along the South Beach. This painting was bought by the landowner O. Rosenørn-Lehn, who was both foreign minister and director of the National Gallery (now Statens Museum for Kunst) and was also building up a considerable private collection.

With his background in marine painting, Locher found it relatively easy to free himself from the traditional academic manner of painting of the time. Sketches from Normandy from 1876 in the Michael and Anna Ancher's House Museum at Skagen and in Skagens Museum show that by this time Locher had acquired the sketch-like style of plein air painting, which was the way of the future. In 1879 he stayed at Skagen, where the artists' colony was taking shape with the participation of such figures as Drachmann, Karl Madsen (1855–1938), the Norwegians F. Thaulow (1847–1906) and Christian Krohg (1852–1925), Michael Ancher and his future wife, Anna. That summer, during a visit to the Faroe Islands and Iceland, Locher painted some magnificent sketches of the mountainous islands in the North Atlantic.

Locher was something of a loner, and the free life of a traveller was a prerequisite for his painting. Although he married early and had children, he was often away from home. However, from 1880

to 1889 he lived at Hornbæk on the north coast of Zealand in a house almost right on the very shore. From a glass-covered veranda that protected him from wind and rough weather, he could paint the coast, the sea and the weather at all seasons of the year. The family then moved to Copenhagen, where they lived until 1910. During this period, Locher's interest in graphic art increased, and he received instruction from Hans Meyer (1846–1919) at the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts with a view to starting a school of graphics in Copenhagen. His own works using the vernis-mou¹ technique were greatly admired in their day and were awarded a bronze medal in the World Fair in Paris in 1900. The last five years before his death in 1915 were spent entirely in Skagen. He built a house with a large studio that still stands, whence there was a view across the famous South Beach, so often portrayed by Locher and countless other painters. A younger painter and critic, Walter Schwartz (1889–1958), who grew up at Skagen, described him as impulsive and stubborn, but with a vivacious painter's temperament.

Locher exhibited regularly and, as was then the custom, also put his paintings up for sale in auctions. He took part in the major general Scandinavian exhibitions that were held particularly frequently in the 1880's, while his work was often used to represent Denmark abroad.

Danish marine painting was founded by C.W. Eckersberg, but the genre was not among those taught at the Academy of Fine Arts. So it went its own way, influenced by trends outside Denmark. The quality of sentiment and drama that gave greater freedom to its exponents was viewed as alien at the time of Locher's youth. So, as in the case of his exemplars, C.F. Sørensen and Drachmann, even from Locher's early years there exist numerous inspired sketches which he alternated with large-scale carefully accomplished compositions on historical subjects. Thus in 1889 he painted Kong Frederik VII's ligfærd, 1863 (The Funeral of King Frederik VII 1863) and Slaget på Kolberger Heide 1644 (The Battle of Kolberg Roads 1644) for the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle. After the Modern Breakthrough in the 1880's, most of Locher's work consisted of inspired studies of colour and atmosphere, usually with the sea and the coast as motifs.

E. F.

LITERATURE: Karl Madsen, *Skagens Malere og Skagens Museum*, Copenhagen 1929; Walter Schwartz in: *Politiken* 4.9.1942; Hanne Poulsen, *Danske skibsportrætmalere*, Handels-og Søfartsmuseet på Kronborg, 1985; Claus Olsen, in: *Weilbach*, Vol. 5, Copenhagen 1996.

¹“Soft-ground etching.” Instead of covering the surface with the usual resin, the artist spreads a composition of warmed resin and tallow, using a brush roller, creating a softer ground. He then places a thin sheet of paper on the plate and draws on it with a sharp pencil. The technique dates back to the 18th century.