

JOHAN ERIK CHRISTIAN PETERSEN

COPENHAGEN 1839 – BOSTON 1874

The master shoemaker Peter Erik Petersen's son Johan had a short but apparently intense life. From the scant information available on this unusual young man, we can derive the following: He graduated from the Borgerdyd School in Christianshavn in Copenhagen in 1857, two years later taking the preliminary degree of cand. phil. However, instead of continuing an academic career, he decided to fulfil a long cherished desire to become a painter. (In 1855, Johan Petersen, then only a sixteen-year-old school pupil, surprisingly had had a painting accepted for Charlottenborg entitled En dansk fregat under sejl (A Danish Frigate under Sail), a work purchased by the King Frederik VII.)

So in 1860 Johan Petersen was admitted to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, at the same time becoming a pupil of the marine artist Carl Dahl (1812–1865). Dahl had been a teacher of drawing in the Naval College and a teacher of perspective in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. As a young man Dahl had been tutored in marine painting by C.W. Eckersberg, and during the professor's old age his pupil, with younger eyes had skilfully helped his teacher draw rigging and tackle on his paintings of ships.

Not until 1861, six years after his first Charlottenborg success, did Petersen exhibit his next work, also in Charlottenborg. This was Et fuldrigget amerikansk skib, der har kastet bak i stille vejr (A Full-Rigged American Ship Reversed in Calm Weather) which might possibly be the painting in the Loeb collection. (Petersen showed altogether seven works at Charlottenborg between 1855 and 1865.)

In 1864 Petersen participated in the second Schleswig war against Prussia and Austria as a cadet and was that year appointed a second lieutenant in the reserve. The following year he emigrated to America and settled in Boston as an artist where his paintings were given a positive reception, resulting in several major commissions. Den atlantiske kapsejlds's afgang fra Sandy Hook (The Start of the Atlantic Race from Sandy Hook) from 1865 and Sørøverens erobring; Den flyvende Hollænder (The Pirate's Conquest; The Flying Dutchman) from 1869 are the titles of two of Petersen's American works.

Johan Petersen is known to have spent 1867–1868 in the West Indies, but died in a Boston hospital six years later in 1874, at only thirty-five years of age.

S.L.

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