

JOHAN THOMAS LUNDBYE

KALUNDBORG 1818 – BEDSTED 1848

Alongside Købke with his classical training, J. Th. Lundbye, a Romantic, stands as the artist who perhaps most clearly and wholeheartedly represents the younger generation of the Danish Golden Age.

The son of an army officer, Johan Thomas chose at an early age to follow an artistic career. Despite his father's disapproval, he took private lessons from the animal painter Christian Holm (1803–1846) and was then admitted to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1832 to work under J. L. Lund (1777–1867). Lundbye was registered in the Academy for ten years, though he never won any of the medals.

The museologist and archaeologist Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788–1856) gave Lundbye support and advice during his early years. Thomsen had also been a source of help to this young Romantic landscape artist's exemplar, Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857),¹ when he was studying at the Academy in Copenhagen twenty years earlier.

Lundbye first showed a painting in Charlottenborg in 1835, exhibiting there regularly until the year prior to his death. A landscape from the Sabine Mountains in Italy was also exhibited there posthumously in 1850.

*Lundbye's great and only visit abroad, lasting from June 1845 to July 1846, took him through Germany, Switzerland, and the south of France to Rome, where he stayed for seven months. He then went on through Pæstum and Naples and proceeded to northern Italy, where he spent some time in Florence. There he started writing his autobiographical work *Trolddom og Huletanker* (Magic and Cave Thoughts). The journey home was through Belgium and Holland, where the collections in the museum in The Hague filled him with intense enthusiasm.*

*J. T. Lundbye was a landscape artist, and like his friend and colleague P. C. Skovgaard he was closely associated with the art historian N. L. Høyen (1798–1870), by whose national Romantic ideas he was deeply inspired—as he was also enthralled with the religious ideas of the poet and Lutheran pastor N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). (Grundtvig's ideas are briefly explained in a footnote in the article about Skovgaard's *Forest with a Herd of Fallow Deer and Two Girls in the Loeb collection*.)*

*Lundbye produced pictures of the Danish countryside that were pure eulogies to his native land. With his gigantic principal work, *En dansk kyst 1842–43* (A Danish Coastline, Statens Museum for Kunst), which cost him much effort, Lundbye wanted to prove to the world outside that the Danish countryside was in grandeur and beauty in no way inferior to foreign landscapes.*

The artist gradually moved away from spontaneous observations of nature, intending now to bring out typical Romantic and Danish features. His paintings often contained reminders of the glories of former times in the form of burial mounds, churches and medieval castles—and were frequently pieced together from fragments of landscape taken from various localities.

J. Th. Lundbye was perhaps the most widely read and most eager-to-write artist of the Golden Age. His numerous diary entries, letters, and descriptions of works not only throw light on his personal struggles and his artistic self-understanding but they also contain important comments on cultural and political currents of the day.

In 1848 he volunteered for military service and was killed by a stray shot at Bedsted in southern Jutland at the age of only twenty-nine.

S.L.

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¹Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857), Norwegian landscape artist, was born in Norway while it still belonged to Denmark. He was trained in Copenhagen and lived most of his life in Dresden, Germany, where, like his friend, the famous German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), he was a professor in the city's Academy of Fine Arts. Dahl's sense of the Romantic manner of painting and his dramatic, passionate art, which was inspired partly by 17th-century Dutch landscape artists, became an example for the Danish national Romantic painters of the 1830s and 1840s.