

MARTINUS CHRISTIAN WEDSELTOFT RØRBYE

DRAMMEN 1803 – COPENHAGEN 1848

Rørbye grew up as a member of a Danish civil servant family in Drammen in Norway. The family moved to Denmark after Norway was ceded to Sweden in 1814.

By 1820 Martinus Rørbye was a student in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, where in time he was awarded both the minor and major silver medals and then, after several attempts, the minor gold medal. However he was unsuccessful in his various submissions for the competition for the major gold medal. Rørbye was originally one of C.A. Lorentzen's (1746–1828) students, but from 1825 he became a private pupil of Eckersberg, with whom he established a close relationship, so close in fact, that in 1832 Eckersberg introduced his pupil to the Order of Freemasons, of which he himself was a member.

*Rørbye exhibited works at Charlottenborg almost every year from 1824 to 1848. Twelve works, mainly with Italian motifs, were shown posthumously by his widow in 1849. Throughout his life Rørbye was extremely fond of travelling, and he ventured farther afield than any other Danish Golden Age artist. He explored Norway in 1830 and 1832. In 1834, financed by a grant from the *Fonden ad Usus Publicos*, he went first to Paris where he admired especially the work of Horace Vernet (1789–1863), but was also taken by Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) *The Raft of the Medusa*—while emphatically expressing disapproval of the works of Delacroix (1798–1863) and viewing Ingres (1780–1867) with great scepticism.¹ After Paris, he went to Rome where he joined the architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll (1800–1856) and travelled on to Athens and Constantinople. He was back in Copenhagen at the end of 1837. The following years offered more opportunities for travel, which in 1839–1840 included another journey to Italy, this time including Sicily. He also took many journeys within Denmark itself, and he was presumably the first Danish artist to work at Skagen, which he visited as early as 1833.*

Rørbye was appointed Professor in the Royal Danish Academy Life School in 1844. Christen Dalsgaard was one of those for whom he played a significant role during his short career as a teacher. Throughout his life Rørbye's preferred motifs were genre paintings and pictures of everyday life in addition to architectural pieces all in the manner of Eckersberg. His paintings were factual, almost in the nature of reportage, but his portrayals of people revealed tenderness and sensitivity. He also executed a few portraits and a number of landscapes, these latter frequently inspired by J.C. Dahl (1788–1857) and to a certain extent Casper David Friedrich (1774–1840).

S.L.

LITERATURE: Georg Nygaard, *Martinus Rørbyes Rejsedagbog 1830*, Copenhagen 1930; Dyveke Helsted, Eva Henschen, Bjarne Jørnæs and Torben Melander (eds.), *Martinus Rørbye 1803–1848*, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen 1981; Jens Peter Munk in: *Weilbach*, Vol. 7, Copenhagen 1998.

¹Kasper Monrad (ed.), *Danish Painting, The Golden Age*, National Gallery, London 1984, p. 179.