

NICOLAI WILHELM MARSTRAND

COPENHAGEN 1810 – COPENHAGEN 1873

Wilhelm Marstrand started at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1825 and already the following year was accepted as a pupil in C.W. Eckersberg's private studio together with others including Martinus Rørbye. (Eckersberg had known Wilhelm Marstrand since he was a boy and was aware of his excellent abilities. Wilhelm's father, N.J. Marstrand, was an instrument-maker and later a Commercial Counselor—an honorary title given by the king to people connected with commerce; he and Professor Eckersberg were close friends and often made music together.)

*In the course of his approximately ten years in the Academy, Marstrand won the silver medals but twice competed in vain for the gold medal. He showed his first painting at Charlottenborg in 1829 and then exhibited there almost every year until 1873. Two grants from the *Fonden ad Usus Publicos* enabled Marstrand to travel abroad. He was in Norway in 1835, the following year going to Rome via Berlin, Dresden and Munich. He stayed in Rome for almost four years, returning to Denmark via Paris. In the mid-1840's and early 1850's he was again in Italy. He also visited Amsterdam, southern Italy, Sweden, Vienna and in 1862 was in London together with N.L. Høyen (1798–1870) and P.C. Skovgaard. During the spring and summer of 1869 he visited Rome for the last time—on this occasion with the lithographer Adolf Kittendorff (1820–1902) and P.C. Skovgaard. Before going abroad, the young Wilhelm Marstrand painted several Copenhagen genre scenes sometimes verging on caricature and making some subtle point. In Italy he continued painting scenes of everyday life and often—not least in his drawings—in an ambiguous, humorous idiom. But he also threw himself into large-scale compositions containing numerous figures and vivid, colourful pictures of Italians dancing and making merry. Even before his visits, he had familiarised himself with everyday life in Rome through the etchings of the Italian artist Bartolomeo Pinelli (1781–1835). Once home in Copenhagen, Marstrand continued with his narrative and illustrative works. The social comedies of Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), which since their appearance in the 1720's had enjoyed widespread popularity in Denmark, provided a series of choice motifs for Marstrand, and a few years later, episodes from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (published 1605–1615) also found their way into his repertoire.*

Marstrand could not identify with the burgeoning nationalism of the 1840's. In a letter home, he wrote: "What have all these politics, nationality and corn taxes to do with artistic effect and the beauty of line? What is meant by saying that art should be national?"¹ In his later years he developed an interest in history painting, whereby he helped restore this genre to favour. Wilhelm Marstrand became a professor in the Academy in 1848; he was the director from 1853 to 1857 and again from 1863 to 1873.

S.L.

LITERATURE: Karl Madsen, *Wilhelm Marstrand 1810–1873*, Copenhagen 1905; *Nivaagaard viser Marstrand*, Nivaagaard 1992 (containing articles by Gitte Valentiner, Elizabeth Cederstrøm, Kirsten Nørregaard Pedersen, Bent Holm, Claus M. Smidt and Erik Fischer); Gitte Valentiner, *Wilhelm Marstrand Scenebilleder*, Copenhagen 1992; Stig Miss, in: *Weilbach*, Vol. 5, 1996; Otto Marstrand, *Maleren Wilhelm Marstrand*, Copenhagen 2003.

¹Gitte Valentiner, 1992, p. 72 and note 38.