

PEDER SEVERIN KRØYER

STAVANGER 1851 – SKAGEN 1909

P. S. Krøyer was the most successful painter of his generation. As a child he demonstrated such a convincing talent that when he was fourteen he started at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and took the final examination there five years later. For some years he successfully painted portraits and pictures of everyday life in Arild, Sweden, and Hornbæk at the north coast of Zealand; he then decided to undertake training abroad.

Among the young artists of the day there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction. The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts still taught along the lines laid down many years before by C. W. Eckersberg, who refused to allow young artists contact with modern German or French art. While nationalism was at its height, the crucial aim was to protect Danish art against foreign influences, which were considered harmful. But the desire for fresh approaches persuaded the young artists to make for France. Krøyer became a pupil of Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) and learned to work in a completely new way with regard to the total concept of motif; he absorbed the modern French art of the day, both the academic Salon art and the naturalism soberly portraying the countryside, the city, or the working population.

Awarded the bronze medal from the Paris Salon in 1881, Krøyer experienced his international breakthrough with Italienske landsbyhattemagere (Italian Village Hatters). In Copenhagen, the painting created a storm of indignation on account of its uninhibited realism. Krøyer was regarded as revolutionary, and he confirmed that reputation while teaching in De frie Studieskoler. But neither his skill nor his charm could be denied, and it was not long before the artists of the Breakthrough triumphed over the outdated Academy of Fine Arts. On the basis of a number of large and splendidly executed commissions, Krøyer went from success to success, given demanding commissions that brought great honor to him. In 1888, together with Laurits Tuxen, he arranged an exhibition of French art in Copenhagen for the brewer Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914) of the Carlsberg Breweries.

Krøyer discovered Skagen in 1882, after which he devoted his summers to motifs that Michael Ancher had hitherto had to himself. In contrast to Ancher, Krøyer was an extrovert, a painter who sought company and who liked painting in the company of others. Many other Scandinavian plein air painters flocked to Skagen, which changed the character of the area completely, now being characterized by parties and discussions at Brøndum's Hotel. For Krøyer, the important feature was the painterly aspect, and so there were no social attitudes behind his choice of motifs. During the 1880's, he discovered a field that was to occupy him constantly, the portrayal of the light on Nordic summer evenings and nights, done in shades of blue. He painted Fiskere på Skagens Strand, 1883 (Fishermen on Skagen Beach, Statens Museum for Kunst) and Fiskere går ud på nattefiskeri, 1884 (Fishing by Night, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). In the 1890s, he produced a series of atmospheric romantic paintings in which his wife Marie was his central motif; these are his most charming and today

his most popular group of motifs. They include *Sommeraften ved Skagens Sønderstrand, 1893* (Summer Evening on Skagen Sønderstrand, *Skagens Museum*) portraying Marie and Anna Ancher walking along the shore. These paintings can be seen as a typical manifestation of the decade of symbolism but were probably especially due to inspiration from James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903).

Krøyer reached the pinnacle of happiness in 1889 when he married Marie Triepcke, a much-feted beauty sixteen years his junior, who was herself training to be a painter. In 1891 they set up their first summer residence in Skagen Vesterby, well away from the artists' colony. The rose garden, which Krøyer painted, and their second house, which they themselves arranged and decorated under the influence of the English arts and crafts movement and the periodical *The Studio*, are known from the beautiful photographs Krøyer took with a large-format French camera he had bought in 1885. Krøyer was receptive to everything new and, like many of the artists of the day, made use of the photograph as an alternative to the sketchbook. Meanwhile, his photographs show that he was also able to use photography as an independent creative medium.

While Krøyer continued to enjoy success with large commissions in Copenhagen, Marie never managed an artistic career and preferred to live in isolation in Skagen. Within a few years of their marriage, her difficult nature made for complications in Krøyer's life. Also, he began to suffer attacks of illness, the source and nature of which have still not been fully explained but which are traditionally attributed to some venereal disease. In 1905, Marie left him and their daughter.

In 1906 he completed *Skt. Hansblus på Skagens Strand* (Midsummer Bonfire on the Beach at Skagen, *Skagens Museum*) showing the group of artists gathered around watching. Ill and broken, Krøyer died in Skagen in 1909 at the age of only fifty-eight, surrounded by loyal friends, including Michael and Anna Ancher. The romantic and tragic story of Krøyer's marriage has in recent years led to biographies, films, and a stage play.

E. F.

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