

P. C. SKOVGAARD

1817–1875

108. *Forest with a Herd of Fallow Deer and Two Girls*, 1854

(*Skov med rudel dådyr og to piger*)

Oil on canvas, 48 x 72³/₄ in. (122 x 185 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: P. C. Skovgaard 1854

PROVENANCE: Biskop D. G. Monrad (1855); Vinhandler J. B. Sandberg (1864); Godsejer C. Scavenius til Klintholm (1871); Kammerherre C. C. Scavenius. Klintholm;¹ Fabrikant Bøie Dorph, Tåstrup (1967); Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 454, 1983, lot 497 (described as *Hjorte i en lysning i en skov, sensommer*).

EXHIBITED: Possibly Charlottenborg, 1855, no. 149 (described as *Sildig Sommeraften*); Skovgaard Museum, Viborg, *P. C. Skovgaard Udstilling i 150 året for kunstnerens fødsel*, 1967, no. 85; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 25.

LITERATURE: Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994, p. 7.

For the national Romantic painters the object was not to achieve the highest degree of naturalism; their aims were more concerned with the ideal. Writing about this, the art critic K. F. Wiborg² argued that the aim of art was not to copy nature but that the artistic content of a picture was solely determined by the extent to which “the ideal was reproduced.”³ The background to this far-reaching change in painting style was of a political nature. Intellectual trends at the time, deriving from literary Romanticism, found a religious outlet especially in the Grundtvigian movement⁴ as well as a political statement in national liberalism.⁵

Skovgaard was in close contact with both these environments, and over the years their ideas found a common expression in his pictures. This was seen—especially in his carefully worked-out compositions—in the balance he gradually achieved between an ideal grandeur and an elementary delight in nature.

This applies also to this solemn late summer portrayal of a Danish beech forest seen in the light of a setting sun, a painting intended to fill the viewer with reverence. The height and majesty of the beech trees are emphasized partly through the positioning of the staffage figures and the many animals below the horizon, aided by a backlight in the style of Claude Lorrain, which makes the treetops stand out like gigantic, darkgreen silhouettes against the pink and golden cloud formations in the sky.

The artist’s delight in nature is seen in the meticulous reproduction of foliage and grass and not least in the rendering of the radiant forest flowers in the foreground, perhaps placed there in special acknowledgement of the artist’s father-in-law, the famous botanist J. F. Schouw. The inspiration for all this splendor presumably came primarily from Deer Park, Dyrehaven (north of Copenhagen), where Skovgaard found so many of his motifs, but it is probably based on a number of observations from various other places as well, cobbled together to form an idealized whole.

S.L.



¹It is not yet documented that this painting, *Skov med rudel dådyr og to piger*, is identical to *Sildig Sommeraften* exhibited at Charlottenborg 1855, nr. 149, which was inherited by Bishop Monrad, and later became part of the Sandberg collection and finally the Scavenius collection. If, as is believed, the two titles are indeed the same painting, the provenance attributed to the hereby cited owners is accurate as well as the Charlottenborg exhibition listed.

²The two leading art critics in Golden Age Copenhagen were the art historian Niels Lauritz Høyen (1799–1870), who was by far the more important, and the somewhat younger Karsten Wiborg (1813–1885). In 1838, 1841, 1843, and 1844, Wiborg published a series of papers on art criticism relating to the Charlottenborg exhibitions.

³Henrik Bramsen, *Malerier af P. C. Skovgaard*, Copenhagen 1938, pp. 8–9.

⁴Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872), poet and cleric, was one of the great cultural personalities of the Golden Age who by lecturing and writing brought about a truly national and religious revival. From 1839 until his death, he was the pastor at Vartov Church in Copenhagen. Grundtvigianism was a church movement based on Grundtvig's conviction that the crucial element in the understanding of Christianity was not the interpretation of the Scriptures but of the living Word proclaimed through baptism, the Eucharist, and the Creed. Most of the national Romantic landscape artists, including Skovgaard and Lundbye, were deeply inspired by his ideas.

⁵National liberalism consisted of liberal but profoundly nationalistic parties in the Europe of the 19th century. In Denmark, the 1840s saw the formation of the party *De Nationalliberale*, demanding a free constitution applying as far south as the River Ejder, which marks the border between the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein in present-day Germany. It was a party with a profound sense of Scandinavian unity. Niels Lauritz Høyen was a national liberal, as were Grundtvig, Skovgaard's father-in-law, the politician and botanist J. F. Schouw, and the politician Orla Lehmann (1810–1870). Lehmann commissioned paintings by both Vilhelm Kyhn and P. C. Skovgaard and supported them throughout their lives.