

CARL BLOCH

1834–1890

17. *The Artist's Parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Bloch in Their Sitting Room, 1855*

(*Kunstnerens forældre i dagligstuen*)

Oil on canvas, 21½ x 18¾ in. (55 x 48 cm)

Signed lower left: Carl Bloch 1855

Inscribed on back: *J.P. Bloch 1795–1874, Henriette Bloch 1805–1891*

PROVENANCE: Dr.med. O. Bloch; Kunsthallens Auction A/S, 8–9/10 1936, lot 9, ill. p.4; Manufacturer L. Thobo-Carlsen, Odense (1944–45), (described as: *Kunstnerens forældre*); Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 107, 1959, lot 62, ill. p. 11; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 623, 1996, lot 145, ill. p. 67; Bruun Rasmussen, Vejle, Auction 55, 1997, lot 1415, ill. (described as: *Kunstnerens Forældre, Grosserer I. P. Bloch og Hustru i Dagligstuen*).

EXHIBITED: Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, *Arbejder af maleren Carl Bloch*, 1921, no. 9; Fyens Stiftsmuseum, (after 1978 Fyns Kunstmuseum), Odense, u.å.; Kunstakademiets Jubilæumsudstilling 1954, (no number).

LITERATURE: Rikard Magnussen, *Carl Bloch*, Copenhagen 1931, no. 29, ill. p.15; Herman Madsen, *Kunst i Privat Eje, I-III*, Copenhagen 1944–45, Vol. III, p. 277, ill.; Herman Madsen, *200 Danske Malere og deres Værker*, Copenhagen 1946, Vol. I, p. 247, ill.

Carl Bloch was only twenty-one when he painted his parents in the splendid sitting room in their home, where the mother is sitting in the window niche with her knitting, while the father, the elegant silk and clothing merchant—with a long pipe in his left hand and his right hand hidden beneath his waistcoat—is leaning nonchalantly against the mahogany arm of the Biedermeyer sofa.

In interpreting the pictorial relationship between the parents, writer Herman Madsen suggests that the wife has just interrupted her knitting to give her husband a quizzical look. Perhaps he has just dropped some sarcastic comment that has caused her to contradict him. The merchant and his wife were not happy that their son wanted to be an artist, but surely this work, painted several years before Carl Bloch's first prolonged journey abroad, convinced them of his unquestionable talent. Even at this early stage of his career, the artist makes effortless use of a number of diagonal perspective constructions that were subsequently characteristic of his work. They create depth in the picture, as also do various other subtle details, such as the impression of expanded space deriving from the mirror image and the meandering patterns in the carpet.

We note Thorvaldsen's Christ¹ on the console of the mirror; we can dream of a sail on the lake in the mountain landscape on the wall. With this inventiveness and delight in narrating, combined with the many light and shadow effects, Carl Bloch amplifies the dialogue between his parents and adds to the picture something of the genre character required by the age. The tradition of the Eckersberg school and of the young artist's teacher, Wilhelm Marstrand, can clearly be seen here.

S.L.

¹The sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) decorated Vor Frue Kirke, the Cathedral Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen with works including marble statues of Christ and the twelve Apostles. The 1821 figure of Christ was erected in the cathedral in 1839.