

P. S. KRØYER

1851–1909

72. *Portrait of the Artist's Wife Marie (presumably 1889)*

(*Kunstnerens hustru Marie*)

Oil on canvas, 16 x 13 in. (41 x 33 cm)

PROVENANCE: Auction, the artist's estate, Charlottenborg 1910, lot 116 (described as: 1890, *Dameportræt, Brystbillede en face*), purchased by Henriksen, Brolæggerstræde 8, Copenhagen (700 kroner); purchased by Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inventoried 16.9.1910 [possibly erroneously for 1911] (900 kr) inventory no. 1768; loaned 1930 to Skagens Museum, returned to Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 13.5.1943; Sold at Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 301, 1943, lot 113, ill. p. 45; Hjalmar Bruhn, shipbroker; According to E. Brünniche owned by Finn Brodersen, presumably after 1952; Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 71, 1956, lot 129, ill. p. 82; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 679, 2000, lot 262, ill. p. 123; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 688, 2000, lot 1474, ill. p. 145.

EXHIBITIONS: Den Frie Udstilling 1891, no. 27 (described as: *Portræt*); Charlottenborg, *P.S. Krøyer*, 1910, no. 187 (the artist's estate, described as: 1890. *Fru Maria Krøyer, Brystbillede en face*); Charlottenborg, *P.S. Krøyer*, 1951, no. 152 (described as: *Portræt af kunstnerens hustru, brystbillede en face, leende*), owner Hjalmar Bruhn; Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, *P.S. Krøyer*, 1980, no. 40, ill. on cover; Modum Blaafarveværk, Norway, *P.S. Krøyer*, 1992, no. 55, ill. p. 59; Aarhus Kunstmuseum, *Tradition, modernitet, P.S. Krøyer*, 1992–93, no. 60, ill. p. 85; Gammel Holtegaard and Skagens Museum, *Portrætter fra et ægteskab, Marie og P.S. Krøyer*, 1997, no. 37, ill. p. 45.

LITERATURE: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, *Katalog moderne Samling* 1916, no. 837; 1927, no. 807; 1936, no. 807; H. Chr. Christensen, *Fortegnelse over P.S. Krøyers Oliebilleder*, Copenhagen 1923, no. 428 (described as: 1890, *Kunstnerens Hustru, Fru Maria Krøyer. Brystbillede en face. D.f.U. 1891. A 116 for 700 Kr. til Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*); Kirstine og Hjalmar Bruhn, *Malerier, Tegninger, Kunstindustri*, I–III, Copenhagen 1934–54; Elisabeth Fabritius, *P.S. Krøyer's Photographs* in: M. Saabye (ed.), *P.S. Krøyer's Photographs*, Den Hirschsprungske Samling 1990, pp. 92, 165; Jytte Nielsen, *Maleren P.S. Krøyer i Stenbjerg, Aar bog for Thy og Hanherred*, 1994, pp. 7–8; Knud Voss, *Skagensmalerne*, Tølløse 1994, pp. 181–82; Charlotte Christensen, *Träumerei* in: Jacob Thage (ed.), *Portrætter fra et ægteskab, Marie og P.S. Krøyer*, Gammel Holtegaard and Skagens Museum 1997, p. 27; Tonni Arnold, *Balladen om Marie*, Copenhagen 1999, ill. p. 112; Peter Michael Hornung, *Peder Severin Krøyer*, Copenhagen 2002, ill. p. 232.

The portrait of Marie (as of July 1889, the artist's wife), was apparently painted while the couple were on their honeymoon by the North Sea. An inspired situation-painting of a trusting, tenderly smiling young woman who, in the artist's sensuous interpretation seems to be in love, loved and desired, which all in all makes it a very private portrait. It is thereby inevitable that it should be brought into the interpretation of the artist couple's tragic love story, which today has achieved almost mythical status.

Marie is sitting in a room with windows on two sides. A mild, warm light comes from the left, while a stronger light coming in from behind catches the hair at the back of her head and the loose locks. Around the outline of her chignon we can distinguish a deep bluish purple shade, which, as a complementary colour to the sunlight entering from the window, creates a colouristic tension that reveals Krøyer's interest in Impressionism at this time. Marie is wearing a blue dress with white collar, decorated with a brooch. The face and coiffure have been painted in stages, partly with a palette knife, and this section has been beautifully finished with fine clear light in her eyes and on her teeth. In contrast to this, the dress at the front of the picture appears to be more sketch-like, due to the fact that Krøyer has scraped the first layer of paint away leaving only a slight remainder, though the neck has been re-painted. The background is painted *alla prima* with broad assured strokes in shades of greenish grey; the window is a radiant gold; all this exemplifies the artist's consummate ability to re-create space and atmosphere. Krøyer must have picked the picture up while the paint was still wet, for there are thumb prints on either side.

Interest in the purely private aspects of the two artists' lives burgeoned after the publication in 1990 of Krøyer's photographic oeuvre, which had been unknown until then. This showed him not only as a great artist in this field, too, but by virtue of their documentary quality, the photographs gave the public an insight into the way the couple liked to present themselves and how Krøyer idealized his motifs in the paintings and drawings.

When Krøyer married at the age of thirty-eight, he was an advocate of "free love" with no societal responsibilities. His experience of women was quite considerable, although the widespread discretion in Protestant northern Europe of the day means that we do not know the names of very many of his liaisons. As one of the radical artists of the time, he pursued the ideas that had been launched by the pioneering Danish critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927), whose principles were free thinking, godlessness and respect for a woman's right to an erotic life.

Marie Triepcke was only twenty-one years old and well advanced in a training as a painter when she met Krøyer among the Scandinavian artists flocking to Paris in the winter of 1888–1889 for the World Fair. Although she had sat for him and he had been her teacher, he had not really noticed her before. In 1889 she was a much-fêted beauty who easily charmed both younger and older men and, according to the strict judgement of her contemporaries, also knew how to exploit this ability. The feminist Norwegian painter Kitty Kielland (1843–1914), who formed part of her circle in Paris, wrote of Marie in a private letter that she was "very beautiful, too beautiful, and so fully convinced of her beauty that she is always referring to it."¹ But at the same time, according to the author Sophus Schandorph, she was "splendidly free from prejudice."

The Krøyer engagement was announced in Paris in May 1889, and Copenhagen thereafter rang with inquisitive commentaries on the match between the famous and successful artist who, according to contemporary witnesses, wanted to have a beautiful wife, and the young art student's conquest of the much older and influential man, the leader of the artists' opposition in society. Several suitors, including the promising young painter J.F. Willumsen (1863–1958), had difficulty in hiding their disappointment. In the case of Robert Hirschsprung (1865–1889), the son of Krøyer's patron Heinrich Hirschsprung (1836–1908), the news is said to have exacerbated the tuberculosis from which he died within a few months thereafter, an event that provided Krøyer with certain problems.

After the wedding on 23 July 1889 at the home of the bride's parents in Augsburg in southern Germany, Mr. and Mrs. Krøyer went to Stenbjerg close-to-the-sea in Thy in northwestern Denmark. They stayed at Stenbjerg Kro, where they surrounded themselves with Japanese textiles and objects they had bought in Paris, where Japonism had taken serious hold. Here Krøyer painted *Interiør (Interior)*, portraying Marie at her evening toilet (Den Hirschsprungske Samling). In addition there was a portrait of her standing, a gift

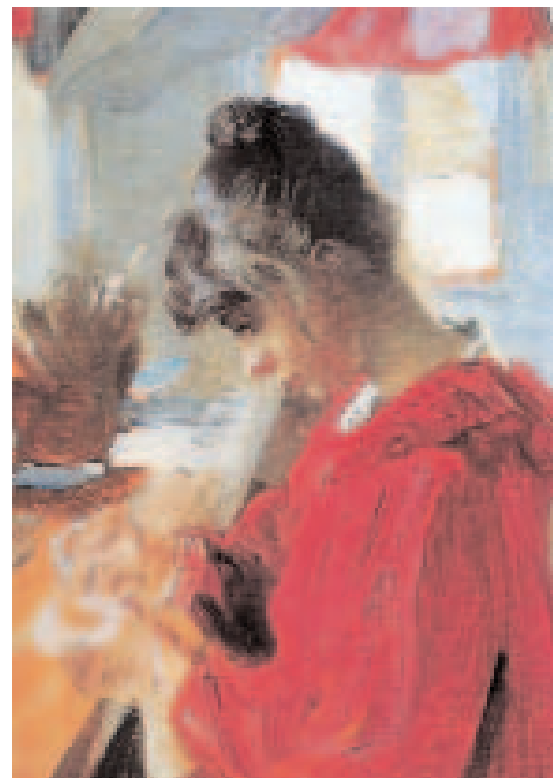


FIG. A: *Marie Krøyer at Her Handwork*, 1889
Oil on wood, 13³/₄ x 9¹/₂ in. (35 x 25 cm)
Private collection

to her parents (Skagen Museum). In this and in other accurately dated paintings, drawings and photographs from 1889, Marie's face is still very youthful, her hair cut short at the side and forehead, long in back, with a highly placed chignon. In portraits from Italy the following winter, where she fell seriously ill, she wears a more classical coiffure.

In a letter quoted by Knud Voss, Krøyer says that he repeatedly painted Marie in Stenbjerg, and there is reason to believe that the picture in the Loeb collection is one of those paintings. If we compare it with another sketched portrait in which Marie is sitting in a red cloak, bent over a piece of handwork, it is obvious that they were painted in the same room. The coiffure is again that from 1889 and presumably it is even the same dress of which we see the white collar. Here, the window can be seen more plainly and is exactly the type seen in older photographs of Stenbjerg Kro. Despite the traditional date of 1890, which first appeared in 1910 in the catalogues of the private exhibition in September and sale of the artist's estate in November, the portrait of the smiling Marie must therefore be considered as having been painted in Stenbjerg in the late summer of 1889.

E. F.

¹Kitty Kielland 6.2.1889 to Eilif Peterssen, Nasjonalbiblioteket, Oslo.

²Here I am referring to Christensen's catalogue on the painted oeuvre by Krøyer, the full title of which is cited in LITERATURE. Like the painting in the Loeb collection this additional portrait is also dated 1890 by Christensen, whereas I believe they are both from 1889.