

CARL CHRISTIAN THOMSEN

COPENHAGEN 1847 – COPENHAGEN 1912

Carl Thomsen originally started studying at the University, but broke off to go to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, where he was admitted in 1866 and qualified in 1871. Here he had Frederik Vermehren (1823–1910) and Wilhelm Marstrand as his professors and was thereby among the last Academy pupils to be taught the techniques of the Eckersberg school and fashioned by the ideals of the Golden Age. The Academy was strongly conservative during this period, but especially Wilhelm Marstrand managed to bring about a renewal of figure painting on which the younger artists could build further. As was the custom, Thomsen went to Italy to complete his training through a direct encounter with painting in practice. Then, although he was in Paris in 1878 and 1881, important years during the period when others were falling under the influence of the new currents of the day, Thomsen found inspiration in the acknowledged traditional manner of painting, especially the historical genre pictures that were so popular in the Salon, a range of motifs that Marstrand, too, in his later years had cultivated intensively.

Thomsen exhibited for the first time at Charlottenborg in 1869 and continued showing there. With his well composed and always carefully finished works, he was at the same time a participant in all major official Danish exhibitions abroad until his death. He very often took his motifs from the history and literature of the 18th and early 19th centuries and was fond of depicting episodes from the lives of authors. Among his most important works mention can be made of Digteren Johannes Ewalds møde med Arendse (The Poet Johannes Ewald's Meeting with Arendse), 1876, private collection; Middag efter en bispevisitats (Dinner after a Visitation by the Bishop), 1888, Statens Museum for Kunst, which won many prizes in exhibitions abroad; Knud Lyne Rahbek ved sin hustrus dødsleje (Knud Lyne Rahbek at the Deathbed of His Wife), 1895, Statens Museum for Kunst; and Grundtvig i Udby Kirke (Grundtvig in Udby Church), from 1901.

Other challenges taken up by Carl Thomsen were altarpieces and other kinds of religious art. In keeping with the spirit of the age that was predominant in his youth, he remained loyal to what he had learned and found a lasting example in Marstrand's lively figure compositions. Meanwhile, he achieved his greatest popularity as an illustrator. His works for books and cultural periodicals are numerous, and a whole series of graphic reproductions were produced and published in folders that were well known and loved in his day. His masterful technique comes into its own in this medium, and his independent contribution is seen to its full extent.

E.F.

LITERATURE: Sigurd Müller, *Nyere dansk Malerkunst*, Copenhagen 1884; Peter Christiansen, *Carl Thomsen som Illustrator*, Copenhagen 1939; Peter Michael Hornung in *Ny dansk kunsthistorie*, vol. 4, Copenhagen 1993; Kirsten Nannestad in *Weilbach*, vol. 8, Copenhagen 1998.