

# CHRISTIAN ALBRECHT JENSEN

BREDSTED NEAR HUSUM 1792 – COPENHAGEN 1870

*The artist C. A. Jensen was born in the small town of Bredsted north of Husum in Southern Schleswig, the son of a glover. He trained in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen 1811–1816 where he was taught by Professor C. A. Lorentzen (1777–1867) along with (among others) the German painter Ferdinand Flachner. Jensen left the Academy in 1816 after having won only the minor silver medal, the lowest-ranking of the official tokens of ability awarded. He spent 1817–1818 in Dresden, Germany, where he registered at the city’s Academy of Fine Arts. From there he proceeded to Italy and Rome with financial support from the Fonden ad Usus Publicos.*

*During his three years in Rome, C. A. Jensen studied the latest developments in portraiture, which tended to be intimate portrayals of the facial features executed in a small format. Having joined the circle around Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) in Rome, he painted a number of small portraits of his Danish acquaintances there, including the poet B.S. Ingemann (1789–1862), the historian Hector F. Janson Estrup (1794–1846), whom he had met in Dresden, and the sculptor H. E. Freund (1786–1840). During the same period, he copied a number of the works of older masters.*

*Once back home, Jensen acquired a reputation as a portraitist for the affluent Copenhagen bourgeoisie. He produced one sparkling portrait after another, straightforward in manner and with little in the way of staging. For a time he even outdid Eckersberg, whose cool neo-classical style lacked the sensitive psychological insight characteristic of Jensen’s works. The years 1825–1830 saw the execution of many of C. A. Jensen’s best paintings, including portraits of a colonial civil servant, Johannes Søbøtker Hohlenberg, 1826, now in Statens Museum for Kunst, the artist’s own wife c. 1826, now in Den Hirschsprungske Samling, and one of his friends in Rome at the time, Professor, dr. theol. Henrik Nicolai Clausen, 1827, now in the Museum at Frederiksborg Castle.*

*However, his success did not continue, for he had difficulty in gaining official appreciation of his work. Though he was recognised by the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1823 and made a member the following year, five years later he was passed over when a new chair was to be filled after the death of C. A. Lorentzen. Throughout his life C. A. Jensen had to suffer from the art critics’ rancorous opposition to his free use of the paint brush and his occasional broad strokes. It was the influential Professor Høyen (1798–1870) who was at the forefront of the disparagement and at times ridicule of the portraitist and his “blotchy” style of painting, which was described as “messy” and “unacademic.” In time, Høyen managed to denigrate Jensen to such an extent that many of his earlier clients began to look down on him and reduced the number of their commissions.*

*Jensen ran into financial difficulties after 1830. A growing family increased the need for rapid productivity, and his works began to vary in quality. Nevertheless, Prince Christian Frederik, later King Christian VIII, who had been an admirer of the artist ever since his time at the Academy, supported him when he applied for a post as a replica artist for the collection of portraits at Frederiksborg Cas-*

tle, then being organized as a museum of portraits and national history. For a number of years Jensen was thus occupied with painting replicas of historical portraits and duplicates of his own portraits of important and famous persons.

N. L. Høyen, who at this time was engaged in what was a highly necessary reorganisation of the art collections in Frederiksborg Castle, was very much against this arrangement. Naturally enough, he preferred original, contemporary works of art as the basis for the collection. C. A. Jensen's time as a replica artist was thus not a happy one, and his financial situation did not improve sufficiently even though, thanks to the support of the Crown Prince, he continued to produce portraits for Frederiksborg Castle for a period lasting until 1847, and despite the fact that in 1835 he was made a titular professor and given an official residence at Charlottenborg.

Then he had the idea of going abroad to seek commissions. From 1837 he traveled abroad regularly, especially to Britain, but also working in France, Germany, Holland and even Russia, where, between 1839 and 1843, he painted eleven portraits of famous astronomers for the observatory at Pulkovo near St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, at the death of Christian VIII in 1848, C. A. Jensen's financial situation deteriorated to such an extent that he was no longer able to support his wife and their eight children. He was also meeting political opposition because during the war between Denmark and Prussia he was unable to refrain from expressing his sympathy for the cause of the Schleswig-Holsteiners.

At the suggestion of a friend from his youth, H. N. Clausen, the artist was given an appointment with a fixed annual salary as an assistant in the Royal Collection of Prints and Drawings. C. A. Jensen remained in this inferior position for the rest of his life. In the middle of the 1850's he was also given permission to restore paintings for Frederiksborg Castle Chapel. But apart from a few replicas of Raphael and Perugino and a few portraits, he ceased painting entirely. His last effort was to accommodate a request to paint Dr. theol. Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach, 1858, now in Statens Museum for Kunst. With this undertaking, Jensen surpassed himself and created a portrait which, in its characterisation of a personality and in its painting technique, at the same time harked back to the great Dutch portraitist Frans Hals. It proclaimed a new and different artistic vision.

C. A. Jensen exhibited at Charlottenborg between 1813 and 1857 and in other venues such as the Royal Academy in London and the world fairs in Paris and London. His oeuvre consists of more than 400 portraits of which the best stand comparison with the work of international artists. Nevertheless, he was totally forgotten by art critics until more than thirty years after his death, people learned to appreciate the scintillating style of Impressionism.

S.L.

LITERATURE: Sigurd Schultz, *C.A. Jensen*, I-II, with a list of the portraits, Copenhagen 1932; Thomas la Brie Sloane, *Neoclassical and Romantic Painting in Denmark 1754-1848*, Evanston, Illinois, 1972; Claus M. Smidt, *Portrætmaleren C.A. Jensen*, Copenhagen 1986; Hannemarie Ragn Jensen in Weilbach, vol. 4, Copenhagen 1996.