

HEINRICH HANSEN

HADERSLEV 1821 – FREDERIKSBERG 1890

Hansen first trained as a painter's assistant in Flensburg in what was then Danish Southern Jutland. In 1842 he entered the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen as a decorative artist, and during his studies he worked alongside many other young students who were decorating Thorvaldsens Museum. Here he became good friends with Ferdinand Meldahl (1827–1908), who subsequently qualified as an architect and later became the energetic director of the academy. Not only did Hansen win the major silver medal for decorative art but in 1846 he was also awarded the silver medal in the academy's life class, where he spent his final student years.

Architectural and decorative shapes of the past had been the accepted basis for contemporary decorative art, but more and more in the 1840s, decorative artists drew inspiration not only from classical antiquity and the Renaissance but from later eras. The drawings Hansen brought home from his first study trip to Germany in 1847 containing examples of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque work were so good that he was appointed to the academy to teach perspective and ornamentation in 1848. In 1850, he was awarded a bursary by the academy in recognition of his painting Frederiksborg Castle in the Time of King Frederik III (i.e., from the period of that king's reign, 1648–1670). In early May of that year, he and Meldahl left on a major study trip. Between then and 1852 he visited Spain, France, Scotland, England, and the Netherlands, completing such thorough studies of historical monuments that he had material for paintings to last him the rest of his life.

Hansen was the first in Denmark to do what is known as “architectural paintings.” As distinct from a view or a vedute reproducing reality, an architectural painting is typically a reconstruction of the outside of a building and its surroundings, or an interior. The reproduction is a piece of art and thus essentially different from the architect's surveys or perspective reproductions. The architectural painter brings a vanished age to life, reproducing the chosen motif as though it were reality, often including figures wearing historical dress. Hansen won great popularity for his technical and perspective skills, his sure sense of the special quality of the styles of architecture and of decoration styles, and his ability to reproduce the details in a clear and pleasing form.

In the Denmark of the 1840s, when nationalist sentiments were running high, there was an intense focus on the Danish cultural heritage. This was true for instance in France, when a start was made on “restoring” older buildings, which in those days meant they were reconstructed in what was believed to be their original form. This was done with great medieval cathedrals and several buildings from the reign of Christian IV, 1588–1648, including Frederiksborg Castle. This popular king was particularly active in commissioning fine buildings, and people once believed that he was an architect himself. The style was named after the king, but in fact it is Dutch Renaissance and is the work of Dutch architects brought in by the king. The “Christian IV style” was Heinrich Hansen's favorite. His many detailed drawings of Frederiksborg turned out to be invaluable when the castle was recon-

structured after the great fire of 1859. As Meldahl's closest associate he produced new drawings for decorations, including a set for the ceiling in the great hall.

Hansen's talents went beyond decoration and architectural paintings. He became one of historicism's finest and most productive designers of furniture and ornaments. From 1868 to his death he was artistic director of the Bing & Grøndahl porcelain factory; he held several honorary offices, was decorated, and enjoyed great general recognition. Both as a painter and a designer, Heinrich Hansen belonged to the school of historicism, which was the dominant style in the second half of the 19th century. Throughout most of the 20th century, this style was seriously undervalued, and only in recent years have people again begun to appreciate its qualities.

E.F.

LITERATURE: H. Stemmann, *Meldahl og hans venner*, vol. 1-6, Copenhagen 1926-1932; Birgit Jenvold, *Heinrich Hansen, kunstner i tid og rum*, Haderslev 1992.