

JOHANNES MARTIN FASTING WILHJELM

BARTOFTEGAARD 1868 – COPENHAGEN 1938

Johannes Wilhelm was deeply affected by the scenic impressions he received as a child in Lolland, an island off southern Denmark, where he grew up in rural surroundings. After studying for a short time at the Polyteknisk Lærestalt (College of Advanced Technology), he registered in 1888 as a pupil in Harald Foss's (1843–1922) school of drawing and then attended the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts for two years. From 1892 to 1894 he was a pupil at Kunsternes Studeskole, where he had P. S. Krøyer as his teacher. In addition, he came into contact with Kristian Zahrtmann (1843–1917), whose teaching was of crucial significance to a large number of leading younger painters. Wilhelm felt attracted by Zahrtmann's work but did not at that time dare to become his pupil, something that only took place in 1903–1904, when he was more confident of his own means of expression.

It appears that Wilhelm had a good instinct for what would benefit his development. In 1893 Den Frie Udstilling in Copenhagen held, quite exceptionally, a large-scale exhibition of paintings by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903)—who was married to a Dane—and his friend Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), both of them painters then considered to be outsiders. Wilhelm was among the few people who were fascinated by this new art and bought two of Gauguin's paintings, which he had before him every day afterward. That same year he benefited greatly from a visit to Zahrtmann in Civita d'Antino in northern Italy, where a fertile artist's colony had emerged around him.

*In 1894, Wilhelm married the Norwegian-born Johanne Marie Klöcker, with whom he quickly had four daughters and later a son. Until 1897 the family lived in Italy, partly in Florence, where Wilhelm studied the Tuscan countryside and coloring on his own and its art under the guidance of the Danish art historian Julius Lange (1838–1896). He became extremely knowledgeable about early Renaissance painting, which came to play a crucial role in his own sense of form. His main works from this period are *Bøn om regn*, 1895 (Prayer for Rain, Statens Museum for Kunst) and *Vinhøst i Abruzzerne*, 1896 (Wine Harvest in the Abruzzi), in a private collection. At this time it may well be that Wilhelm's technique and treatment of color were already indebted to Zahrtmann, but in respect to composition he is more in keeping with contemporary artists such as the symbolists Ejnar Nielsen (1872–1956) and Harald Slott-Møller.*

After returning home, Wilhelm abandoned the composed figure pictures and turned to landscapes, which on occasion, and more informally, are populated with figures. He painted a good deal in Norway, but at the beginning of the 20th century he discovered the area around Svinkløv in Vendsyssel, which he portrayed over several summers in a series of striking, somewhat somber pictures in a particular dark color, betraying his interest in Hans Smidth. He also related to the work of Jens Vige (1864–1912), with whom he was acquainted.

Around 1910, Wilhelm began painting at Skagen, where the light fascinated him, and about 1912 he bought a house close to the Brøndum Hotel, where he then spent the summers with his family. With

artists like Einar Hein (1875–1931) and William Stuhr (1882–1958), Wilhelm was one of the “younger” Skagen painters, who in the manner of and in understanding with the already well-known artists explored the light and coloring of the area. A portrait of Wilhelm is thus to be found in the frieze in the Brøndum Hotel dining room, and his work is represented in Skagens Museum. With his constant and lively interest in the development of art, Wilhelm was an inspiring figure around whom the younger artists could rally. His painting became lighter and simpler in later years, when he lived in Provence during the winter and established links with Norwegian colorists and J. F. Willumsen (1863–1958).

E. F.

LITERATURE: Kai Flor, *Johannes Wilhelm*, Copenhagen 1937; Jan Zibrandtsen, *Johannes Wilhelm 1868–1938*, Charlottenborg 1968 (exhibition catalogue); Hanne Honnens de Lichtenberg, *Zahrtmanns Skole*, Copenhagen 1979; Hanne Honnens de Lichtenberg in *Weilbach*, vol. 9, 2000.