

LAURITS ANDERSEN RING

RING 1854 – SANKT JØRGENSEBJERG, ROSKILDE 1933

While still a young man, L. A. Ring took his name after the place of his birth, the village of Ring in Zealand between Næstved and Præstø. His father was a smallholder¹ who earned a living both as a carpenter and a wheelwright, and the family lived in very modest circumstances.

Ring was apprenticed as an artisan painter in Præstø. He then became a pupil in the Technical School in Copenhagen and in 1874 was admitted to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. He sought instruction there (although interspersed with considerable gaps) from professors F. Vermehren (1823–1910), N. Simonsen (1807–1885), and J. Exner until 1885. In 1886 he was taught by P. S. Krøyer in Kunstnernes Studieskoler. However, none of these teachers had any profound influence on Ring's artistic development, which came rather from colleagues he met while studying, such as the painter and art historian Karl Madsen (1855–1938), the much older Vilhelm Kyhn, whose landscapes he admired, and the young H. A. Brendekilde. The sense of affinity with Brendekilde diminished later as the two artists developed in different directions. During these years, Ring earned his living by working as a journeyman painter while studying.

In 1889, he embarked with Karl Madsen on his first important visit abroad, traveling via Holland and Belgium to Paris. He spent most of the period 1893–1895 in Italy, where one of his associates was the painter Vilhelm Hammershøi. He visited Italy again in 1899–1900, went there once more eleven years later, and traveled to Berlin in 1930. Various grants and distinctions from the Academy enabled the impecunious young painter to undertake these visits abroad.

L. A. Ring exhibited at Charlottenborg from 1882 to 1928. There were interruptions, some brief and some longer, partly occasioned by a short period during which he was a member of Den frie Udstilling (1902–1904). As the years passed he participated in several world fairs and many similar prominent events in Copenhagen and other European capitals. In time he won several gold medals and other marks of distinction both in Denmark and abroad. Ring gradually became a highly respected artist, with good contacts in the international intellectual movements, but he never forgot that he came from a rural area.

At first, critics often mentioned him in connection with Hans Smidth, painted Jutlandic moorland farmers, while Ring showed solidarity with the poor Zealand rural community. Both artists have sometimes been seen as the heirs to Christen Dalsgaard, who was probably the most important artist to portray the lives of the ordinary people on the basis of Høyen's national Romantic principles.

However, neither Smidth's nor Ring's works had any national objective; they were never, as was the case with Dalsgaard, governed by an overarching narrative element. It is important to emphasize this difference between the style of the more old-fashioned Dalsgaard, with his somewhat idyllic and predictable anecdotes of the life of ordinary people, and Smidth and Ring, who were both on their way to modernism, where the language of art is simple and without additional embellished narrative

elements. Ring's personal views were revolutionary and atheistic, influenced in part by the most important cultural figure of the day, critic and writer Georg Brandes (1842–1927), and authors such as Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–85) and Henrik Pontoppidan (1857–1943).

Ring's first important painting, *Tiggerbørn uden for en bondegård i landsbyen Ring* (Children Begging Outside a Farm in the Village of Ring), from 1883 reflects his sense of solidarity with the impoverished environment from which he came and shows the special form of illusion-free realism that characterized many of his future works. The grays in the picture underline its melancholy mood, and the children's awkward and ungainly figures and their pale appearance tell plainly of hard work and undernourishment.

Works like this made critics of the time see Ring's style as naïve and clumsy and to talk of his "curiously rough brush, a brush lacking in color" and his apparently deficient drawing ability. It was also felt that the figures in his paintings seem to have been superimposed, an impression no doubt fueled by Ring's technique of painting the surroundings first and then adding the figures. The Loeb collection's *Bondedrengen på vej mod hjemmet, Landsbyen* (Road with a Boy) might have been executed this way.

The social commitment in L. A. Ring's work coincided with international trends. The painting *I høst* (Harvest) and later pastels with the same motif are closely related to works by the French realist Jean-François Millet (1814–1875). Millet's works also came to inspire Ring later, for instance in *Den gamle kone og døden* (The Old Woman and Death), painted two years later than Loeb's *Harvest*.

The motif of death appears quite frequently in works by Ring and many of his contemporaries. An expressive and dreamlike, sometimes sinister element was part and parcel of the ingredients of the symbolist art that came to dominate in the 1880s and 1890s, and it marks large areas of Ring's work.

In 1896, a happy turn of events occurred in L. A. Ring's life. At forty-six, the painter married young Sigrid Kähler, the daughter of a faïencé manufacturer and ceramist, Herman A. Kähler (1846–1917), whose home and workshop in Næstved in southern Zealand had been the painter's constant abode. The newly married couple settled in the fishing village of Karrebæksminde south of Næstved, and it is from here we have Ring's striking, sensitively colored, and symbolist-inspired 1897 portrait *Kunstnerens hustru* (The Artist's Wife), showing his wife standing in the doorway opening on the garden of their home. The artist often used his wife and growing family as models, not least in a number of paintings executed on the beach outside Karrebæksminde, where in time he erected a caravan.

In 1902, the Ring family moved to the anonymous little central Zealand village of Baldersbrønde, from which many of the artist's best works stem. These pictures, from an area that could not boast of a beautiful landscape in a traditional sense, can be seen in relation to the period's great interest in depictions of reality and plein air painting. Ring's numerous, usually grayish, paintings from Baldersbrønde and nearby, equally modest villages and their surroundings can quite reasonably be interpreted as veritable *sindbillede* (pictures of the mind). The motifs from this painter assuredly come from his own incorruptible and honest mind and soul.

In January 1914, Ring and his family installed themselves in their own house, *Bjerget*, at Sankt

Jørgensbjerg near Roskilde, designed by their friend, the architect A. L. Clemmensen (1852–1928). Ring remained there until his death nineteen years later.

S.L.

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¹Chiefly British. A small holding is a piece of land detached from a cottage, hired or owned by a laboring man and cultivated to supplement his main income.

²A man whose occupation is to repair wheels and wheeled vehicles.

³Earthenware decorated with opaque glazes.

⁴A covered wagon with living quarters where Ring could live as well as paint.