

LAURITS REGNER TUXEN

COPENHAGEN 1853 – COPENHAGEN 1927

Laurits Tuxen became the portraitist for the royal families of Europe and in his day was famous far beyond the borders of Denmark. His great group portraits are found hanging in Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen, the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace in London, and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. As a young man in the 1870s, he was one of the rebels taking their training in France and striving for a new artistic mode of expression. In 1879, in opposition to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, he was given state funding to provide a free alternative training for young Danish artists according to the French model. From 1882, the Kunsternes Studieskole in Copenhagen was a reality, with Tuxen, P. S. Krøyer, and Frans Schwartz (1850–1917) as teachers, and the school became an important factor in the 1880s transformation of Danish art known as the Modern Breakthrough. The results achieved by the school led to the formation in 1891 of Den Frie udstilling, which betokens a breach of the monopoly of the official Charlottenborg exhibitions.

Tuxen's international career began early in the 1880s, when he was living in Paris with his Belgian wife and traveling a great deal. He had an impressive capacity for work, and his paintings were shown in the major exhibitions of the time, both at home and abroad. The status he achieved, thanks especially to the royal commissions, led to his occupying many positions of trust; for instance, with Krøyer, he was a commissioner for the large-scale exhibition of French art in Copenhagen in 1888 organized by the brewer Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914) of Carlsberg Breweries, and he was adviser to the Danish exhibition in the Guildhall in London in 1907. During his second marriage, he again settled in Copenhagen, where he resumed his teaching, this time as professor in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, which to a large extent had adapted to the demands of the new age. In close collaboration with Viggo Johansen (1851–1935), Valdemar Irminger (1850–1938), and Julius Paulsen (1860–1940) he was until 1920 a highly regarded teacher during the difficult period when yet another modernism deriving from France brought about a radical change in the techniques and aesthetics of painting.

Tuxen's talent for painting was revealed at an early age, and he did not lack encouragement, although he also had excellent academic abilities. He originally wanted to be a marine artist, for his childhood in the Christianshavn district of Copenhagen, where his father was a naval officer and director of the naval dockyard, was spent in close proximity to large numbers of ships. Among the family's friends were several of the cultural personalities of the time, among whom was the marine artist and poet Holger Drachmann (1846–1908), who became one of his first advisers. At the age of fifteen he left Vilhelm Kyhn's school for the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, where he took the classical academic training with the Golden Age painters Wilhelm Marstrand and Jørgen Roed (1808–1888) as his professors in the life class. They convinced him that he ought to aim at a future as a figure painter.

Meanwhile in 1875, the first painting he exhibited, Redningsbåden går ud (The Lifeboat is

Launched), was on a maritime subject. The money he earned from it was used for a trip abroad that took him to London and St. Malo in Brittany. From there he went to Paris, where with financial support from his parents he followed classes in Léon Bonnat's (1833–1922) famous school during the winters of 1875–1876 and 1877–1878. Here Tuxen became acquainted with new ideals and techniques, especially what was known as value painting, and became a figure painter in earnest.

In 1879, Tuxen's *Susanne i badet* (Susanne in the Bath), painted in the international academic style, caused a stir in Copenhagen. Four allegorical ceiling paintings for the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle, which he was then commissioned to execute, are just as strongly influenced by French Salon art. In autumn 1882 he was given the task of painting a group portrait of Christian IX, "the father-in-law of Europe," and his queen, Louise, surrounded by their entire large family in the garden salon at Fredensborg Palace (now hanging in Christiansborg Palace, Copenhagen). This task, demanding and indicative of great honor as it was, was brilliantly carried out, and Tuxen's reputation was thereby established. While he was working on it, he was commissioned by Queen Victoria to paint a corresponding portrait of herself and her family at Windsor on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee. This enormous and successful canvas was finished by 1887. For the next many years Tuxen was constantly on the move, busy with sketches and paintings portraying weddings and coronations, especially in the English royal family and that of the Russian czar.

After his second marriage in 1901, Tuxen moved to Denmark and bought a house in which to spend his summers in Skagen, which he had visited as a young man, close to the houses owned by his friends Drachmann and Krøyer. The local countryside inspired him, and he became one of the Skagen Painters. In 1908, together with his fellow artists, he founded Skagens Museum, and it was very largely due to his organizational talent, his negotiating skills, and his connections that it was possible for the museum to open twenty years later, equipped with a large collection in a new building erected for the purpose.

During his final years, Tuxen was three times in the United States. In 1918, accompanied by his wife and daughter Nina, he aimed to paint President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), but he was refused. From the East Coast they traveled to California, where he painted a number of successful studies of the exotic landscapes and of oil wells. The couple spent 1923–1924 in California, and on their third visit in 1925 they sailed home via the Panama Canal and the Caribbean.

Tuxen made his first appearance at Charlottenborg in 1875 and in the Salon in Paris in 1878, and he represented Denmark in a large number of official exhibitions.

E. F.

LITERATURE: Laurits Tuxen: *En Malers Arbejde gennem tredsindstyve Aar fortalt af ham selv: Malerungdommen tilegnet*, Copenhagen 1928; Karl Madsen: *Skagens Malere og Skagens Museum*, Copenhagen 1929; Lise Svanholm: *Laurits Tuxen, Europas sidste fyrstemaler*, Copenhagen 1990; Lise Svanholm in Weilbach, vol. 8, Copenhagen 1998; Mette Bøgh Jensen and Tine Nielsen Fabienke (eds.), *Tuxen, Color, Countryside and Crown*, Skagens Museum and Fuglsang Kunstmuseum 2014.