

OTTO DIDRIK OTTESEN

BROAGER 1816 – FREDERIKSBERG 1892

O. D. Ottesen came from a poor country home just outside Broager in Southern Jutland, an area that formed part of what were known as the Duchies. Until he was eighteen years old he worked on the land, and it is said that even as a shepherd boy he would be found drawing and painting with sticks, feathers, and the juice of berries. He trained as a painter's assistant and at the same time became a pupil at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He copied the Dutch flower and fruit painters in the Royal Collection of Paintings (Statens Museum for Kunst). In his late twenties he specialized in flower painting, self-taught in this regard.

He exhibited for the first time in 1842 in the annual Charlottenborg exhibition, and the following year he sold a fruit piece for King Christian VIII's private collection. He early enjoyed royal favour, being granted dispensation from the military service to which his peasant birth made him liable. He had painted a small fruit piece of the winter's poorest fruits, but he had placed all his energy and skill in it. Later he sold paintings both to Thorvaldsen's Museum and the Royal Collection of Paintings, and he had many private purchasers. Between 1844 and 1876 he sold sixteen paintings to the Copenhagen Art Society (Kunstforeningen). Like J. L. Jensen, he had many pupils, a number of them were women.

When one of the flower pieces by Jan van Huysum (1682–1749) was purchased for the Royal Collection of Paintings in 1843, the event had great significance for Ottesen, who painted an expression of homage to this picture in 1869. Ottesen's first journey abroad was in 1855, taking him to Holland and Paris. He became a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1866 and was made a professor in 1874. In his letters he expresses a great interest in and knowledge of flowers, which he studied in gardens and parks just as intensely as he studied the paintings of them in the museums.

After J. L. Jensen, Ottesen became the leading Danish flower painter. His works are executed with great accuracy and precise detail; they are painted with meticulous care and often in clear local colors. "He is an interesting flower painter because he feels a personality in the plants he depicts and isolates every single flower so that the surface of his picture is sometimes refracted," wrote Hanne Westergaard.

*In addition to the major flower compositions, Ottesen also painted smaller pictures of plants on the forest floor, a bird's nest, a rose against a wall, and a tiny symbolic picture from his own garden of a laurel-wreathed beehive, a rose, fruit trees, hops, and grapes. Another meticulous picture of a dog rose in red, painted for his two daughters, bears the title *The Andante* to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. The title was painted as an inscription on a stone beneath a bird.*

M. T.

LITERATURE: Hanne Westergaard, *Blomstermaleren O.D. Ottesen, Arbejdsbog og Optegnelser*, Copenhagen 1979; Hanne Westergaard, *H.C. Andersens Blomster*, Copenhagen 1985; Jørgen Slettebo, *O.D. Ottesen og andre danske blomstermalere på H.C. Andersens tid*, Museet på Sønderborg Slot 1986; Laura Bjerrum in *Weilbach*, vol. 6, Copenhagen 1997.