

PAUL (POUL GUSTAV) FISCHER

COPENHAGEN 1860 – GENTOFTE 1934

Paul Fischer was one of a group of painters who, from the 1880s, started to portray modern life as seen in both town and country. Among the Nordic painters his work especially resembles are P. S. Krøyer, the Finnish Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905), and the Swedish Hugo Birger (1854–1887), in addition to the Henningsen brothers. He learned the painter's craft from his father, who was both an artist and craftsman painter, and he trained for a brief period in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. In 1882 he experienced success with some illustrations for one of the cultural periodicals of the time, and in 1884 he made his first appearance at Charlottenborg. Among his early major works are Østergade, juletravlhed på Strøget (Østergade, Christmas Shopping in Strøget), 1886, I Det Kongelige Teater (In the Royal Theatre), showing familiar Copenhagen figures in the auditorium, and Mågerne fodres på Dronning Louises Bro (Feeding Gulls from the Queen Louise Bridge).

Paul Fischer became famous as the result of a number of scenes of Copenhagen, which formed the basis of his public success. Although he was admired and used as an illustrator, revealing an original creative talent as a poster artist, he was not in his day reckoned among the true naturalist artists of the Modern Breakthrough. His paintings were not bought by the art museums, which preferred the very similar portrayals of Copenhagen by Erik (1855–1930) and Frants Henningsen (1850–1908). Nevertheless, Fischer's work achieved high prices in his day. Interest declined after his death, but in the mid-1980's, the public again became aware of his work, not only in Denmark but abroad.

Paul Fischer took most of his motifs from the heart of Copenhagen. His pictures of the city are usually populated with a large number of figures, including people buying from the tradespeople in the street, the ladies often being portraits done to order. After 1900, Fischer painted a fair number of pictures of bathers on the north coast of Zealand, which seen in the moral light of the time must be said to be rather daring. Fischer learned photography and left some 5,000 photos (Copenhagen City Museum), which to a considerable extent provided the direct foundation for the street scenes and figures in his pictures. Using photographs in this way was a method that in Denmark was considered too easy a shortcut to achieving a result, so artists did not discuss the matter in public.

Most of Paul Fischer's extensive oeuvre is in private collections. Of his work in public collections, mention should be made of I Glyptoteket på Ny Carlsberg, 1887 (In The Glyptotek at Ny Carlsberg), painted at about the same time as P. S. Krøyer's interior from the same place (now in the Carlsberg Museum, Copenhagen). In addition, Fischer's painting from 1906 of Christian IX Announcing to the Deputation from the Norwegian Storting His Agreement to Prince Carl Assuming the Norwegian Throne, is not much inferior to Laurits Tuxen's work in its solution to a large and complicated undertaking. It is now in the Royal Palace in Oslo. A smaller replica was commissioned for the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle in Hillerød. Copenhagen City Museum has acquired a number of works by Paul Fischer over recent years.

E.F.