

P. C. SKOVGAARD

1817–1875

109. *A Street in Italy*, 1854

(*En italiensk gade*)

Oil on canvas, 12 x 11½ in. (30.5 x 29 cm)

Inscribed lower right: Corvara 29 Aug. 1854

PROVENANCE: The auction of the artist's estate, 1876, no. 54; Editor Svend Kragh-Jacobsen; Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 465, 1984, lot 4, ill.

EXHIBITED: Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, *P. C. Skovgaard*, 1917, no. 201; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 26; Artemis Fine Arts, Inc., New York, *Danish Paintings of The Golden Age*, 1999, no. 27, ill.

LITERATURE: Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1994, ill. and discussed p. 7.

Professor Niels Lauritz Høyen's ideas of a national art reflecting the original character of the Danish people made a powerful impression on P. C. Skovgaard, not least because he himself came from genuine Danish peasant stock. He became one of Høyen's most loyal adherents. But Høyen's national romantic program demanded that the painters should remain at home and work in Denmark, and it was only when they were out of the danger of being seduced by the landscapes and life of foreign nations that they could be trusted to go abroad. Thus, when P. C. Skovgaard was thirty-seven years old and in Høyen's opinion could not be "corrupted," the painter and his wife, together with Høyen and his wife, spent the end of summer 1854 and well into the winter of 1855 in Italy. Halfway through they were joined by Wilhelm Marstrand. (The object of Skovgaard's first journey abroad was to study the old masters, including both the Venetians and Rubens and, not least, Claude Lorrain.)

Skovgaard did not fall under the spell of Italy but on the contrary became even more Danish as a consequence of the journey. On his return he produced what is perhaps his best-known work, *Bøgeskov i maj*, 1857 (*Beech Forest in May*, Statens Museum for Kunst).

*A Street in Italy* does not immediately attract attention. However, on closer examination it is impossible to avoid taking delight in the subtle play of light and shade and the many exquisite painterly details, such as the dense volume of foliage, the little group of figures in the background characterized by their motley dress, and the washing laid out to dry. A straight gable end blocks the space on the left and sends its greetings to Skovgaard's upright Danish beech trees, such as are seen in the Loeb collection's *Forest with a Herd of Fallow Deer and Two Girls*, painted shortly before his departure for Italy.

S.L.