

HANS SMIDTH

1839–1917

112. *The Stagecoach*, 1884

(*Diligencen*)

Oil on canvas, 19½ x 24½ in. (50 x 62 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: H. S. 84

On the stretcher, a contemporary label with the artist's signature, the title of the painting, and the price of 250 kroner.

PROVENANCE: Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 67, 1929, lot 170 (described as *Postvognen*); Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 688, 2000, lot 1506, ill. p. 175.

In 1883, Hans Smidth painted a large picture from the Hillerød area entitled *The Coach Drives Through the Village* (Fig. A). A barefoot young cowherd tending a pair of mottled cows is being hailed by the coachman and the passengers crowded together in the coach as it passes him. The Loeb collection's *The Stagecoach*, with a similar motif and painted the following year, is very reminiscent of the earlier work, but it is smaller and livelier. From 1893 there is a third picture of a heavily laden, horse-drawn carriage swaying along an uneven road, closely pursued by shouting children and a barking dog tearing off at great speed in front of the frightened horses.¹

These last two paintings are very similar to each other. The measurements are almost the same; the children and the dog appear to be the same, and both scenes are played out against a background of a radiant evening sky colored by the glow of the sunset. All three works have various elements in common and are composed on similar lines. The coach is driving toward the observer along a road running diagonally from the background down to the right-hand corner of the picture. In each of the works, a distant mill with spreading sails is placed at the vanishing point of the road, and in all the paintings the road divides in the middle distance with a narrower fork going off to the left. It appears that none of these pictures was exe-



FIG. A Hans Smidth
The Coach Drives Through the Village,
1883 (*Dagvognen kører gennem
landsbyen*)

Oil on canvas, 27½ x 37¾ in.
(69 x 95.5 cm), Nordjyllands
Kunstmuseum, Aalborg

cuted on the spot. They were presumably painted in the artist's studio on the basis of visual experience and perhaps some hastily drawn sketches—one version of the coach based on the other.

There are many vehicles in Hans Smidth's oeuvre, encompassing every conceivable type, from roomy wagonettes laden with the artist's merrymaking nephews and nieces to ordinary carts filled with serious moorland peasants. Drawn by snorting horses or staid bullocks, the vehicles rock along in the paintings' universe, creaking and jolting on dusty roads or sandy, heather-covered tracks.

Here in the reddish-violet dusk after the heat of a summer's day, three children are capering wildly after the coach, the arrival of which is the recurrent high spot of the day. A boy has hung on to the rear of the vehicle, and his trouser leg and dancing feet are all we see of him; a little girl is rushing behind, half-blinded by the cloud of dust thrown up in the wake of the coach; a smaller, fair-haired child is stumbling and almost falling over in his eagerness to keep up. At the roadside, a fourth, rather bigger boy is shading his eyes and looking up toward the coachman and a woman sitting on the box. The little black and white dog is yapping shrilly and preparing to rush in between the horses' legs and bite their hocks. The coachman is leaning forward, hitting out at the animal with his long whip.

We are confronted with an episode, seen *en passant* as though from the window of a train; a brief vision that will soon have vanished like the sinking sun. There is no anecdote but merely a glimpse of reality caught and retained in the suggestive form of a sketch and intensified by means of strong green and reddish-brown colors forming a contrast with each other and enclosed in a profusion of violet and golden light reflections.

A new age in painting was on the way.

S.L.

¹Oil on canvas, 19⁷/₁₀ x 24⁴/₅ in. (50 x 63 cm), present owner unknown.