

F. SØDRING

1809–1862

114. *Rønneby¹ Waterfall at Blekinge, Sweden, 1836*

(*Rønneby vandfald i Blekinge, Sverige*)

Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. (30.5 x 40.5 cm)

Signed and dated at bottom: Kjöbenhavn 1836 F. Sødring

PROVENANCE: The Auction of the Estate of Emil Wulff 30.3.1926, lot 6; Bruun Rasmussen, Vejle, Auction 7, 1991, lot 715 (described as *Prospekt af norsk fos med vandfald, figurer og bygninger*).

EXHIBITED: Den Hirschsprungske Samling, Copenhagen, *Sødring, Borgruiner og vilde vandfald*, 2000–2001, no. 16.

LITERATURE: Lilian Vestergaard, Landskabsmaleren Frederik Sødring in *Kunstmuseets Årsskrift*, 1977–1980, pp. 48–82, p. 64, no. 73 (described as *En vandmølle ved en norsk fos*); Jens Peter Munk, *Kunstnerkammerater* on Christen Købke's portrait in *Landskabsmaleren Frederik Sødring*, folder accompanying the above exhibition in Den Hirschsprungske Samling, Copenhagen 2000; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, ill. p. 102.

There is a fascinating history to this work by Frederik Sødring, and no final conclusion has yet been reached about it.

The work is a replica made in Copenhagen by the artist himself after a painting he executed in southern Sweden in 1831 and exhibited the following spring at Charlottenborg under the title of *View of Rønneby Waterfall in Blecking, Painted on the Spot from Nature, in the Light of Midday (Prospekt af Rønneby Vandfald i Blecking, malet paa Stedet efter Naturen, Middagsbelysning)* (Lilian Vestergaard no. 31).

Rønneby, in the Swedish province of Blekinge, is close to the Baltic, halfway between the towns of Karlshamn and Karlskrona. Kunstforeningen (The Copenhagen Art Society) immediately purchased Sødring's southern Swedish landscape, after which, in the annual lottery, it went to a Lieutenant Nehus from Altona. According to all accounts there is in existence a rather smaller preparatory work for this painting, a simple study of the actual waterfall in Ronneby, painted in oil on cardboard (Lilian Vestergaard no. 32).

The present whereabouts is not known of either of these two works. Two other works with the same motif by Frederik Sødring exist in public collections. The first is an india ink drawing made for the Copenhagen Art Society archives after the painting disposed of by lottery and now belonging to the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (Lilian Vestergaard Drawings No. 7, Fig. A). The second is a lithograph of the same motif in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Department of Maps, Prints and Photos (Lilian Vestergaard, Graphic Works No. 1, Fig. B).

This does not, however, complete the documentation relating to the Loeb collection portrayal of the Swedish waterfall.

One of the best known and best loved works in the history of Danish art, Christen Købke's portrait *The Landscape Artist Frederik Sødring* (Fig. C) contains information that is extremely interesting in the present connection but has hitherto been overlooked: behind Sødring, there is a mirror in an oval frame. In accordance with European art tradition, the mirror reflects details from the room facing it, details that are outside the actual motif. The picture space is thus expanded before the viewer, and various more or less definable descriptive details are added to the narrative implicit in the painting. It has recently been realized

that the painting seen in the mirror, partly hidden by a couple of letters pushed in between the frame and the glass, are these very Rønneby reminiscences by Sødning. A closer examination shows the cascading waterfall and the silhouette of the mill wheel in a laterally reversed version—fragmentary but unmistakable.

At the beginning of the 1830s, the two young artists shared a studio in Toldbodvejen, present-day Esplanaden, in Copenhagen. The portrait of Frederik Sødning was a birthday present to him from his friend Christen Købke. The iconography in Købke's famous portrait has been meticulously studied and described by Jens Peter Munk of the Hirschsprung collection. Likewise, it is he we can thank for determining the correct identity of the Loeb collection work by Sødning—and for the discovery of the mirror image in the first version of Sødning's beautiful painting.



FIG. A F. Sødning
Rønneby Waterfall, Bleking, Sweden, 1831
Pen, brown ink, and wash on white paper, $7\frac{1}{5}$
 $\times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (183 x 243 mm), Nationalmuseum,
Stockholm



FIG. B F. Sødning
Prospect of Rønneby Waterfall, Bleking, Sweden, (1832)
Lithography, $8\frac{4}{5}$ x $13\frac{2}{3}$ in. (225 x 345 mm),
Royal Library, Copenhagen

There is a little further embellishment to the story of *Rønneby Waterfall in Blekinge*: Frederik Sødring's Swedish work has been in the possession of a certain *Konferensraad*² Martin Lehmann. We know this because about 1856 it was hanging in Lehmann's sitting room in Gothersgade in Copenhagen, together with a number of other unidentified gold-framed paintings. Here again we find the Blekinge motif, this time placed above a door in the background in Edvard Lehmann's painting *Musikaften i det Lehmann'ske hjem* (*Musical Evening in the Lehmann Family Home*) (Fig. D). Here too the picture concerned is Sødring's earliest version from 1831, though whether we are talking here about the replica from the Loeb collection cannot be determined with any certainty. The painting from the sitting room in Gothersgade is assumed (after Martin Lehmann's death) to have been inherited by his son, the famous Danish politician Orla Lehmann, in the auction of whose effects it appears in 1871.



FIG. C Christen Købke (1810–1848)
The Landscape Painter Frederick Sødring, 1832
(Landskabsmaleren F. Sødring)
 Oil on canvas, 22 x 15 in. (42.2 x 37.9 cm), Den Hirschsprungske
 Samling, Copenhagen



FIG. D Edvard Lehmann (1815–1892)
Musical Evening in the Lehmann Family Home, c. 1856
(Musikaften i det Lehmann'ske hjem)
 Oil on canvas, 17 x 20½ in. (43 x 52 cm),
 Musikhistorisk Museum, Copenhagen

If we compare the drawing, the lithograph, and the painting in the Loeb collection, we can note some minor differences in the execution of the three works. The drawing is the most exact reproduction of the now-vanished *Prospekt af Rønneby Vandfald i Blecking* from 1831, as it was made that same year at the request of the Copenhagen Art Society. In conformity with this, Lilian Vestergaard suggests that the lithograph must also have been made after the painting from 1831. The possibility cannot, however, be excluded that Sødning used the drawing as the model for it. As we do not know the earliest painting, we must be content to note a few differences between the drawing and the lithograph, such as the number and height of the trees, the distribution of various details in the appearance of the houses, and small differences in the water's course and the amount of the vegetation.

What is interesting in the context of the Loeb collection is that according to the evidence in both the drawing and the lithograph, Frederik Sødning has made certain more radical changes in his latest Rønneby work, of which the most striking is a somewhat different arrangement of the entire group of trees at the top left and the addition of some extra billowing smoke from the chimney in the middle of the building complex.

If we look at the Loeb collection version in clear daylight, we can take pleasure in various subtle qualities in the painterly treatment, such as complementary colors in green and brick red, numerous finely varied shades of brown and gray and pink verging on purple, as well as the blue of the sky, with the many shades of white in the clouds and cascading water.

Thanks to the exquisite little work in the Loeb collection, the first version of Rønneby waterfall Sødning painted on the spot might possibly again come to light—perhaps even in the ownership of the Hirschsprung collection, where it belongs side by side with Christen Købke's portrait of the landscape artist Frederik Sødning.

S.L.

¹Rønneby is the Danish spelling of the word; Rønneby is the Swedish spelling.

²An ancient honorary title that cannot be translated.