

FERDINAND RICHARDT

1819–1895

129. *Frederiksborg Castle by Moonlight, 1861*

(*Frederiksborg Slot i måneskin*)

Oil, 13²/₅ x 20¹/₂ in. (34 x 52 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 743, 2005, lot 1075, ill. (described as *Frederiksborg Slot i måneskin*).

LITERATURE: Melinda Young Stuart and Niels Peter Stilling, *Danske herregårde og Amerika. Rejser i guldalderens Danmark og pionertidens Amerika med maleren Ferdinand Richardt*, Søllerød Museum 2003 (partly in English).

The old royal castle of Frederiksborg in the town of Hillerød to the north of Copenhagen has, over the years, earned a special place in the history of Denmark due to its ambitious architecture and its dramatic fate.

Frederiksborg has the character of both a fortress and a country seat. It stands idyllically at the center of a lake and consists of several large buildings, walls, towers, and courtyards linked by bridges. Its location in this beautiful area of northern Zealand, close to large forests and an attractive hunting ground, appealed to King Frederik II. He acquired the property in an exchange of real estate with the nobleman Herluf Trolle in 1560, christened the old mansion with his own name, and maintained the building as it existed at that time.

The castle was given its current appearance when Frederik's son and heir, Christian IV, became king. He razed most of it to replace it with a much larger building. At the beginning of the 17th century he had the castle itself constructed of red brick, with three wings on four floors above a cellar. It was decorated with sandstone ornamentations and boasted numerous garrets and turrets in the copper-covered roof. The interior was also richly and splendidly decorated. The design was by Netherland architects working in close collaboration with the king, who was well versed in architecture. From the inner courtyard, a bridge leads to the outer courtyard, where a fountain containing many figures by Adrian de Vries (1560–1626) has been replaced with a copy. The original was removed by the Swedish conquerors as the spoils of war in 1660 and is now located at Drottningholm Castle near Stockholm. Farther to the south, an S-shaped bridge flanked by circular towers leads to a street lined with houses. Like the towers, they were replicated from the building's older period. Another bridge links the complex to the mainland.

The castle was occupied by the Swedish army in 1658 during the Swedish wars and was the setting for the Danish royal banquet marking the 1660 peace treaty, a major humiliation for Denmark. Succeeding monarchs preferred to use castles other than Frederiksborg, which in the eyes of the royal family became a "castle of sad memories." In 1812, King Frederik VI decided to turn it into a pantheon and moved a great many portraits from the royal collections to the castle. It was then opened to the public, and thus a museum of national history became a reality.

However, the castle and museum we see today is another reconstruction. One night in December 1859, the main building burned down, except for the west wing containing the chapel, the Great Hall above the chapel, and the Audience House. Denmark suffered a painful loss when the north and east wings, containing the portrait collection, fell to the flames.



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Fortunately, a large number of pictures of both the interior and exterior of the castle had been painted before the fire. When Danish artists started to paint views of the country around 1800, Frederiksborg Castle was included in their work, and it is probably the Danish castle of which the largest number of paintings exist. In 1815, the Norwegian painter J. C. Dahl (1788–1857) exhibited a view of the castle complex as seen from the market square in Hillerød, and in 1817 he painted the famous picture of the castle by moonlight, a work that is brought to mind by this small picture in the Loeb collection. Of the painters of the Golden Age it was especially Christen Købke who was interested in portraying the castle, particularly the north side in the dramatic light of various evenings. In 1850, Heinrich Hansen exhibited a painting of the castle as it had been at the time of Frederik III (1648–1670). That painting belonged to King Frederik VII (reigning 1848–1863).

Frederiksborg was naturally one of the many castles that Ferdinand Richardt drew during his youth. In 1847 he also exhibited a very large painting of the castle as seen from the northeast, 69 x 100 in. (175 x 255 cm). This was owned by the crown prince, later King Frederik VII.

In 1850, Richardt exhibited several drawings of the castle as seen from other angles, so the artist had plenty of material from which to make paintings of the castle even after the fire.

The destruction by fire of Frederiksborg Castle in 1859 was a devastating loss in the age of nationalism, sadly followed in 1864 by Denmark's being obliged to surrender the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein to Germany after the Second Schleswig War. Then in 1877 the founder of the Carlsberg Breweries, I. C. Jacobsen, offered to finance the rebuilding of the castle and to reestablish the museum with the ambitious intention of illustrating the course of national history for the people. The enormous project was realized in the reconstructed castle, where the history of Denmark was told in original paintings along with new ones, all presented in chronological order.

In 1861, two years after the fire, Ferdinand Richardt painted the castle as it once was, partly from memory and partly based on his earlier sketches. With the castle veiled by moonlight, the picture is a beautiful vision and at the same time an expression of sadness at the loss.

E.F.