

C. A. JENSEN  
1792–1870

145. *Portrait of the Flower Painter J. L. Jensen's Wife*, 1827

(*Portræt af blomstermaler J. L. Jensens hustru*)

Oil on canvas, 25 x 19½ in. (63,5 x 50 cm)

Signed and dated top right: C.A. Jensen 1828

PROVENANCE: Kgl. kammersangerinde Emilie Ulrich, Copenhagen; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 846, 2014, lot 32, ill.

EXHIBITED: Holmegaards Glasgalleri, *Udstilling af danske blomstermalere på H.C. Andersens tid*, 1983.

LITERATURE: Sigurd Schultz, *C.A. Jensen*, I–II, Copenhagen, 1932, no. 153, vol. I, pp. 230, 232, ill. p. 219.

Flower painter J. L. Jensen's handsome wife Signe Marie Vilhelmine, (née Visby), is barely twenty-three years old in this portrait. She married her artist husband on May 27, 1825 in the village of Gentofte, north of Copenhagen. The wedding took place only a few months after the groom's appointment as Painter-in-chief at the Royal Porcelain Factory of Copenhagen, an honorable and steady position that made it possible for him to marry, as well as two years later letting his wife, and later himself, be painted by the city's most prominent portrait painter.

It is not unlikely that the flower painter carefully decided how his young wife should present herself in her portrait. Signe's beautiful gown appears to be made of mauve tulip leaves, making one think of the magnificent flower arrangements that would be the motif throughout the life of J. L. Jensen. Here we see that the fabric of his wife's iridescent attire is made of expensive silk taffeta, appropriate for her regal mien. Her neck and shoulders are bare, while her arms are hidden by plump puffed sleeves, so long they fall below her wrist. The voluptuous bosom of Signe Marie appears both proper and daring, concealed and contained beneath the heart-shaped dress seams that point towards her small waist. The bottom of her broad waistband leads to the skirt of her gown, which continues on to the bottom of the picture. Imagination suggests that her skirt ends in an extravagant width.

The cheeks of this lovely young woman are as brightly pink as a freshly opening rose. Her simple jewelry pieces are minimal: only a small multi-strand bead necklace with a gold clasp, and slender gold earrings. A handsome comb, strudded with turtle shells, stands back of her tightly-curled coiffure. Signe Marie Jensen has been painted by a masterful artist who captured not only the pride and dignity but the joy and glow of a happily married young woman.

In the late 1820s, the portrait painter C. A. Jensen was at the height of his career. His insightful, but flattering, representations of his clients made him in much demand among the bourgeoisie of Copenhagen. With their warm humanity and buoyant character portrayals, they even outshone the much admired and popular marble-like and flawless portraits by his colleague, Professor C. W. Eckersberg. Later on, the works of C. A. Jensen were to be criticized and even ridiculed by the most influential art historian of his day, N. L. Høyen, to the degree that the portrait painter became ignored, and ultimately forgotten.

In his mention of Signe's portrait, the biographer of C. A. Jensen, Sigurd Schultz, praises the exact aspects of the painter's impressionistic painting technique that are valued highly today, but that Høyen regarded with the deepest disdain: *Jensen painted away, straight forward without hesitation and without mistakes.*



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*Where the brush stroke is allowed to stand, specifically in attire and hair, it is both forceful and rhythmic, of an equality that gives a splendid beauty of craftsmanship (...). It is scholastic to see how a painter in that time could fall in love with the effects of the materials of contemporary fashion, here in the case of Jensen, when he painted the iridescence of the dress between red violet and olive and thoroughly basked in it, and it is always a pleasure to observe how beautifully he could characterize the fall of the hair in women's hairstyles. Obviously, it gave him a special pleasure to take on with the wet, heavily oily color mass he here used and with amusing details such as the small shadows on the forehead from the curls in the hair, or the incursion of light in the edges of the curls in the hair.*

Signe Marie was the daughter of Hans Jensen Visby, a teacher in Agerup by Frederiksborg in the north of Zeeland. Visby was a colleague and a friend from youth of Jensen's father. The young couple had a residence in Copenhagen, and in the summer, a little house with a flower garden in Gentofte. In 1833, six years after this portrait in the Loeb collection was painted, Signe fell ill. Because the doctors thought that a southern climate would help her recover, J. L. Jensen and his wife left Denmark and went out on an extended journey to France and Italy. They were away for two years and Signe came home well. Her painter husband enriched by many impressions of beauty. Their marriage was to be childless, but they took in a little niece, Sara Henriette, born around 1845. Johan Laurentz Jensen had an exceedingly industrious, but short life that to the sorrow of his wife and his many friends, ended in 1856.<sup>1</sup> Signe Marie Vilhelmine Jensen died in 1885.

S.L.

<sup>1</sup>*Mindeblade om Professor, Blomstermaler Johan Laurentz Jensen. Medlem af det kongelige Academi for de skjønne Kunster i Kjøbenhavn, Ridder af Dannebrog. Manuscript for Venner, Copenhagen 1856.*