

OTTO BACHE

1839–1927

15. *Flag Day in Copenhagen on a Summer Day, in Vimmelskiftet,* after 1892

(*Der flages, sommerdag i Vimmelskiftet*)

Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 22 in. (45 x 56 cm)

Signed lower left: Otto Bache

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 465, 1984, lot 53.

EXHIBITED: Bruce Museum of Art and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, and The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, New York, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2005, no. 21, ill. p. 73 and cover back; Scandinavia House, New York, *Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough, Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2013, no. 7.

LITERATURE: Patricia G. Berman, “Lines of Solitude, Circles of Alliance, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century” in *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, Bruce Museum 2005, p. 24; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2007, p. 239, ill. p. 236.

The luminescent, almost impressionistic style of this work might be due to his recollection of the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878, when Otto Bache was among the Danish participants. It is possible that on that occasion Bache saw Monet’s *La rue Montorgueil, Fête au 30. juin 1878*, a lively, scintillating picture of festive crowds in a Parisian street decorated with flags.¹

Bache is considered the first Danish painter to be attracted by the new French art, to which he had his eyes opened in Paris as early as 1866. According to the landscapist Godfred Christensen (1845–1928), Otto Bache was the first artist to create “a stir among the young” in Copenhagen by talking about the radical ways of painting in France. But he was not able to enrich his own art by means of this painting technique, which allowed the brush to work freely and gently without creating sharp outlines and which prioritized brilliant light and a vibrant fullness of color in preference to veracity and wealth of detail. He was too tied to the still-pertinent national program of N.L. Høyen and too inhibited by the general fear of “being splashed with alien varnish.”²

The title of Bache’s painting is misleading, as the motif is not one of Vimmelskiftet itself but of Amagertorv looking down past the tall trees in front of one of the oldest churches in Copenhagen, Helligåndskirken—the Church of the Holy Spirit—to Vimmelskiftet in the distance. Both Amagertorv and Vimmelskiftet are part of the medieval “*Strøget*,” a nickname for the long, narrow sequence of streets linking the two most important squares, Kongens Nytorv and Rådhuspladsen, in the center of Copenhagen.

Copenhagen City Museum (*Københavns Bymuseum*) claims that the flags were flying to mark the golden wedding anniversary of King Christian IX and Queen Louise, on May 26, 1892. A photograph presumably taken that morning is of an identical motif, except that it was taken at street level and the scene is devoid of people. The approximate dating is derived from this.³ Christian IX, the first Danish king belonging to the house of Glücksborg, was born in 1818 and reigned from 1863 to 1906. He was blamed for the 1864 defeat in the war with Prussia and Austria, although he had in fact tried to prevent it. Despite a great deal of political turbulence at home, he became much loved by the people in the course of his long reign.

Christian IX is perhaps best remembered today for his nickname, “Europe’s father-in-law,” which he was given because his many children married into various royal and princely houses. For instance, one of his sons, Prince Vilhelm, became king of the Hellenes under the name of George I. The second oldest daughter, Princess Dagmar, became Empress of Russia, and another daughter, Princess Alexandra, became Queen of England.

It is probable that Otto Bache himself saw Copenhagen decorated with flags and festoons on that beautiful day in May 1892 when the capital celebrated the aging king and queen. But it is not possible to determine for certain whether he painted his picture during the actual event or several years later, using the photograph as his model and adding to it a vivacious, sunlit street scene deriving from memory and his imagination.

S.L.

¹Claude Monet (1840–1926), *La rue Montorgueil, Fête au 30. juin, 1878*, Musée d’Orsay.

²Finn T. Frederiksen in *Mødested i Paris – 1880’ernes avant garde*. Randers Kunstmuseum, 1983, p. 7. On N. L. Høyen, see note 6 on Christen Dalsgaard’s *En pige, der skriver (Young Girl Writing)* in the Loeb collection.

³Copenhagen City Museum. Photograph with motif from Amagertorv taken May 26, 1892, 6½ x 9½ in. (16.4 x 23.3 cm). I am grateful to archivist Mette Bruun Beyer for this information.