

CARL FIEBIG

1812–1874

28. *Portrait of a Little Girl with Her Dog*, 1856

(*Portræt af pige i blå kjole*)

Oil on canvas, 29½ x 22 in. (74 x 56 cm)

Signed and dated bottom left: *Fiebig 1856*

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen Vejle, Auction 85, 2003, lot 12, ill.

We have here a three-quarter figure seen from the front of a little girl with brown eyes and light brown hair with golden highlights. She is smiling innocently and confidently at the beholder, embracing her dog, which is standing on a chair to the right and looking devotedly at her. She wears earrings and is dressed in a very elegant blue dress with a flounced skirt, blue-, white-, and red-striped trim, puff sleeves adorned with open-work white material and the blue, white, and red trim. At the neck, the dress is cut to reveal to the child's shoulders. There is fine lace around the edge, the same as that decorating the sleeves. The dog is a kind of spitz and wears a broad, decorated collar.

The portrait must have been a commissioned work, but the artist has nevertheless succeeded in giving it a universal character. As a result of the philosopher J. J. Rousseau's epoch-making ideas concerning the special nature of children, the portrayal of children had been a popular subject for painters since the end of the 18th century, as is typically seen in the work of Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) in England. In Denmark, Jens Juel was the first to portray children's games and their spontaneity. The understanding of children continued to develop throughout the 19th century. Fiebig's portrait of this child was painted at the same time that Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) was writing fairy tales for children. Also at the same time, the painter and draftsman Lorenz Frølich (1820–1908)—a close friend of J. Thomas Lundbye and P. C. Skovgaard—was enjoying great success in Paris with his illustrated books for children.

We do not know the identity of the little girl in the portrait, but her appearance and dress make it clear that she belongs to the more affluent strata of society, the bourgeoisie or the nobility.

E.F.