

AUGUST JERNDORFF  
1846–1906

66. *Portrait of Theodora Jacobsen,  
Seated in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1885*

(*Portræt af Theodora Jacobsen, siddende i Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*)

Oil on canvas, 22 x 16½ in. (56 x 42 cm)

Signed and dated lower left with monogram: Juli 1885

PROVENANCE: Commissioned by the brewer, director, dr. phil. Carl Jacobsen; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 679, 2000, lot 286, ill. p. 141.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg 1886, no. 202; Paris World Exhibition 1889, no. 77; 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. 15, ill.

LITERATURE: H. Chr. Christensen, *August Jerndorff 1846–1906, Fortegnelse over hans Arbejder*, Copenhagen 1906, no. 180.

On 5 November 1882, Carl Jacobsen (1842–1914), brewer, art collector, patron of the arts, and from 1899 the holder of the honorary degree of dr. phil., opened his first public art collection, and the following year he published a catalogue compiled himself of *Glyptoteket paa Ny Carlsberg* (The Glyptotek<sup>1</sup> at Ny Carlsberg).

This predecessor of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Dantes Plads in Copenhagen (opened fifteen years later) was housed in an extension to Bakkegården, Carl and Ottilia Jacobsen's home at that time; this was the roughly 200-year-old principal building of the Valby farm on the land where the Ny Carlsberg brewery had been built. Following the example of his father, the founder of the Carlsberg breweries, J. C. Jacobsen (1811–1887), Carl Jacobsen had extended the house by building a winter garden with the intention of creating a decorative interplay between plants and sculptures. However, before this conservatory was completed, art had triumphed over nature, for Carl Jacobsen acquired a number of original plaster models by sculptors including H. W. Bissen (1798–1868), who after the death of Bertel Thorvaldsen in 1844 was considered to be the leading Danish sculptor. As time passed, more works of art were added, among these antique sculptures, and room after room had to be built to create space for the collection.

Theodora, Carl and Ottilia Jacobsen's eldest child, was eight years of age when she was placed on a stool in the middle of her father's first glyptotek in front of the jewel in the collection, the Casali sarcophagus.

The little girl with the black-stockinged legs that fail to reach the floor is dressed in a demure dark velvet dress trimmed with white lace, enhanced by a modest amethyst brooch and a gold heart hanging around her neck. Her clasped hands correspond to a serious, somewhat dispirited face framed by shoulder-length straight hair carefully brushed behind her ears and kept in place by a yellow ribbon.

The contrast between Carl Jacobsen's daughter and his valuable collection of art is striking and strangely captivating. The main figure in the painting is a living child, but it is as though the lonely little figure has withdrawn into herself, oblivious to the works of art surrounding her. Placing the girl in the foreground of the painting interrupts most of the view of the late Antonine masterpiece in front of which she is sitting, but it does not reduce the viewer's awareness of the sumptuous decoration of the sarcophagus

which is very far removed from the world of Theodora's childhood. Voluptuous episodes from the wedding feast of the god of fertility Dionysus and the beautiful Ariadne decorate the heathen obsequies from a distant past.

The massive marble sarcophagus, created in the last quarter of the second century A.D., had been acquired two years previously by Carl Jacobsen from the Villa Casali in Rome. On the front we see Dionysus and Ariadne, seated on a rocky promontory flanked by naked satyrs and maenads in order to watch a wrestling match between Pan and a cupid. This many-figured scene has a host of symbol-laden cult accessories, including various musical instruments, several goats, and a dog. There are vines growing in the depths of this lifelike, action-packed scene, decoratively twining in and out among the figures.

Behind Theodora on the left side of the sarcophagus can be seen part of a bearded Dionysus holding a staff and a timpano, his hair entwined with ivy and bunches of grapes and a goatskin thrown over his long, flowing robe; the head of a satyr is seen to the left of the little girl's shoulder. Behind her we can glimpse the god Hermes' *kerykeion* (herald's staff) alongside a bunch of ripe grapes in addition to part of the bridegroom's half visible leg.

On the relief on the lid of the sarcophagus above the actual coffin, Dionysus can be seen standing on a chariot drawn by two panthers. On one side of the animals rides a lyre-playing cupid. The little group is moving toward the two main figures and constitutes part of the wedding festivities taking place in a rocky landscape dotted with trees. The painter has cut his picture at the top in such a way that the heads of the figures cannot be seen.

In a compositional sense, the heavy sarcophagus acts as a set piece added from the right in the middle distance of the painting, but the mammoth, relief-decorated marble creation does not quite reach the opposite edge. An ingenious perspective line allows us to see a little more of the winter garden with the displaced green plants, a smaller section of yet another antique fragment, and, at the very back and raised high up on an invisible plinth, we see H. W. Bissen's graceful plaster figure *Bathing Girl* against the background of an ochre wall.

At the age of twenty-three, Theodora Jacobsen (1877–1956) married the brewer Edgar Frederik Madsen, who later became a director of the Wibroe Breweries in Elsinore.

S.L.

<sup>1</sup>*Glyptotek*: a collection of sculpture.