

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



(original size)

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JOHAN CHRISTIAN DAHL

1788 Bergen - Dresden 1857

Rocks in Rabenauer Grund

Oil on paper mounted on cardboard.

Signed with the initials and dated lower centre *JD Juni 1825*. Annotated on the verso *No. 218 13 h - 15[...]* / *Joh. Chr. Cl. Dahl / geb. zu Bergen in Norweg. d. 24 Feb. 1788 / † zu Dresden d. 14 Octbr. 1857 / Naturstück, Felßengrotte ... / oder Rabenauer Grund bei Dresden / bez. D. Juni . 1825 / ... gezogenes Papier / Mit Mastix gefirnisst.*
13.4 x 15.5 cm

EXHIBITED: *Katalog over Professor Dahl udstilligen*, Christiania Kunstforening, 1907, no. 89 (see label on verso) – *J. C. Dahl 1788-1857 Mindeutstilling*, Oslo, Blomqvist Kunstutstilling, 1926, no. 143.

LITERATURE: Marie Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857). Life and Works*, Catalogue Raisonné, Oslo 1987, II, no. 483, III, pl. 194. – Johan Langaard, *J. C. Dahl's verk*, Oslo 1937, no. 276.

On Dahl's return from Italy in the summer of 1821, the city of Dresden and its surroundings provided his preferred motifs. Like his fellow-artists in Dresden, he favoured popular tracts of countryside such as the Plauenscher Grund, the Liebenthaler Grund and the Rabenauer Grund. His diary entry for 13 June 1825 describes a trip to Lohmen at Tharante, not far from the Rabenauer Grund: *Came back from Lohmen where I was four days painting with landscape painters Müller and von Hauch.*¹

The Rabenauer Grund is a deep, narrow valley south-west of Dresden in Saxony. An area of outstanding natural beauty, it was largely undiscovered before the early 1830s when it became better known as a picturesque area for lovers of the countryside and artists attracted by the romantic appeal of its bizarre rock formations, ravines, crags and streams. The present sketch is one of a group of nature studies initialled and dated *JD Juni 1825* (Bang 480-484). The dating of the sheets clearly shows that they were executed on the trip to Lohmen and the Rabenauer Grund described in the diary entry. The Rabenauer Grund is also the subject of a later painting (1836).²

*I prefer to depict nature in its free and wild state, with regions of mighty scenery with mountains as well as forest. Therefore I do not like it much here [Dresden] – although the scenery is lovely in its way, I find it somewhat trivial, with too many traces of human hands and artifice, whereby it often appears artificial.*³ (Dahl in a letter to Crown Prince Christian Frederik dated 26 November 1818). The freshness and immediacy of this small-format oil sketch demonstrates Dahl's mastery in the depiction of unconventional landscape subjects despite his dissatisfaction with Dresden and its countryside as landscape motifs.

¹ *Kam zurück von Lohmen, wo ich 4 Tage beim Malen zusammen mit den Landschaftsmalern Müller und von Hauch verbrachte:* Bang, op. cit., no. 480.

² Bang, op.cit., II, no. 807.

³ *Am liebsten stelle ich die Natur in ihrem freien und wilden Zustand dar, in Gegenden mächtiger Fels- und Waldpartien; deshalb bin ich auch hier [Dresden] nicht so vollkommen zufrieden; trotzdem die Natur in gewisser Hinsicht sehr schön ist, erscheint sie mir doch etwas kleinlich, man findet zu viele Spuren von Menschenhänden:* Bang, op.cit., I, p. 236.