

MARTINUS RØRBYE

1803 Drammen - Copenhagen 1848

Portrait of Professor C. A. Lorentzen in his Studio

Oil on canvas. Dated lower left: 1827.

70.4 x 57.1 cm

PROVENANCE: Danish private collection – Private collection, Hamburg

LITERATURE: Dirk Luckow and Dörte Zbikowski, *Die Kopenhagener Schule – Meisterwerke Dänischer und Deutscher Malerei von 1770 bis 1850*, exhib. cat., Kiel 2005, p. 81 – Peter Michael Hornung and Kasper Monrad, *C. W. Eckersberg – dansk malerkunsts fader*, Copenhagen 2005, p. 223

EXHIBITION: *Die Kopenhagener Schule – Meisterwerke Dänischer und Deutscher Malerei von 1770 bis 1850*, Dirk Luckow and Dörte Zbikowski, Kiel 2005, p. 81

Martinus Rørbye ranks as a leading representative of the Danish Golden Age, an era which marked the apex of Danish painting and flourished at the same time as German Romanticism. Significant cross-fertilization of ideas occurred between the Copenhagen Academy and the two key centres of Romantic thought in Germany, namely the Hamburg and Dresden Academies. Rørbye entered the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1819, studying under Christian August Lorentzen. In 1825 he joined the class of Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg and became his private pupil. He was known as an inveterate traveller, exploring Norway, touring extensively in Germany, France and Italy and travelling as far east as Greece and Turkey. He finally returned to Copenhagen in 1841.¹ Christian August Lorentzen (1746 Sønderborg - Copenhagen 1828) was appointed professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1803, succeeding Jens Juel. In 1827, only a year before Lorentzen's death, Rørbye painted a portrait of the aged art professor. This recently discovered portrait is now in the Nivaagaards Malerisamling in Nivå.²

Lorentzen's private quarters were located on the ground floor of Charlottenborg Palace on the corner of Kongens Nytorv and Nyhavn. After his death in May 1828 they were taken over by Just Mathias Thiele who was later secretary at the Academy.³ Lorentzen painted only few self-portraits and one of them is counted among the most remarkable of all his works. It was executed around 1824 and shows him leading the life-class at the Academy. His intention perhaps was to use painting as the vehicle to substantiate his vocation as a teacher [Fig. 1].⁴

¹ On Martinus Rørbye, see Kasper Monrad, *Danish Painting, The Golden Age*, exhib. cat., The National Gallery, London 1984, p.179 - *Im Lichte Caspar David Friedrichs. Frühe Freilichtmalerei in Dänemark und Norddeutschland*, exhib. cat., Hamburger Kunsthalle 2000, p. 49 - Dirk Luckow and Dörte Zbikowski, exhib. cat., op. cit., Kiel 2005, pp. 266-7.

² *Portrait of Professor Lorentzen in his Studio*, oil on canvas, 95 x 77 cm, dated 1827. Acquired at auction in 2016 (see anonymous sale, Bruun Rasmussen, *Fine Art + Antiques, International Auction 869*, Copenhagen 2016, lot 27, repr. p. 41).

³ C. A. Lorentzen. *Udstilling i 225-året for malerens fødsel*, exhib. cat., Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen 1971, pp. 32-3.

⁴ Oil on canvas, 87 x 61 cm. Frederiksborgmuseet, Hillerød.

Rørbye's portrait of Lorentzen was executed in 1827. It is a compelling tribute to his teacher and at the same time one of the most striking artist's portraits in the history of Danish painting.⁵ It displays a high degree of psychological sensitivity in its portrayal of the eighty-year old professor as a representative of a different era.⁶ The work shows many thematic breaks with convention. A dignified figure, Lorentzen is seated in a worn, high-backed armchair at his easel. His pose is borrowed from neoclassical portraiture, but genre elements such as the informal dressing gown, the red sheepskin slippers and the unconventional blue-and-white checked chair cover and cushions conjure up a picture of him that is scarcely identifiable as the embodiment of neoclassical artistic ideals. He may be surrounded by casts after antique sculptures – among them an Atlas figure and a Medici Venus – but the sleeping dog in the right corner provides a curiously profane antithesis to the idealised bust of a youth in the left foreground. A painting on the easel depicting a scene from Ludvig Holberg's comedy *Mascarade*⁷ references Lorentzen's achievements as a painter of theatre subjects and testifies to his interest in non-canonical and everyday themes – themes which were gradually being supplanted by history painting in his own lifetime. Rørbye's portrait encompasses the full breadth of Lorentzen's *oeuvre*; it includes allusions to his contribution to academic teaching and to his openness towards pictorial motifs outside the bounds of neoclassical convention.⁸

The present painting was traditionally given to Adam Müller (1811 Copenhagen 1844) as a copy after Rørbye. Müller studied under Eckersberg at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. But on stylistic grounds and based on evidence drawn from Rørbye's known *oeuvre* the work is clearly identifiable as a second, smaller-format autograph version of the recently discovered 1827 portrait.⁹ A number of examples can be found in Rørbye's *oeuvre* documenting the existence of more than one version of a single painting. The most prominent example is the painting titled *A Catholic Novice Reading*. As many as four versions of the painting are known. They were executed in 1836, 1838 and 1842.¹⁰ During his tenure as academy professor Lorentzen was highly respected and it therefore seems plausible that Rørbye was commissioned to execute a second version of the portrait in smaller format.

⁵ The painting was exhibited at Charlottenborg in 1828 and received much praise from one of the period's arbiters of taste, the art historian N. L. Høyen, who could otherwise be very scathing in his criticism. Høyen wrote of the portrait: *The old, friendly man sits, quite content, in front of his easel, surrounded by artworks. It appears as if something has suddenly distracted him from his work and as if he is not so much looking at a particular object as absorbed in reflections on things he has seen; and in so doing he has found rest from his labour, and this calm which has fallen over his entire body, while an inner life glistens in his eye, is captured magnificently. You do not get tired of looking at this piece.* See N. L. Høyen, *Nogle Bemærkninger over de paa Charlottenborg udstillede Konstsager*, in *Niels Laurits Høyens Skrifter*, I, Copenhagen 1871, p. 68.

⁶ C. A. Lorentzen. *Udstilling i 225-året for malerenz fødsel*, exhib. cat., op. cit., Copenhagen 1971, pp. 32-3.

⁷ Ludvig Baron Holberg (1684 Bergen - Copenhagen 1754) was a Danish-Norwegian playwright and historian. *Mascarade*, Holberg's tenth stage comedy, was first performed in 1724. It enjoyed extraordinary success and was the most frequently produced of all his comedies. It was staged thirty-seven times over a period of twenty years. The part of the plot involving the lovers recalls numerous conceits used in the *Théâtre Italien*. The scene between the two old men in the third act draws on Molière's *Dépit amoureux*, one of the many foreign models Holberg liked to use.

⁸ Petra Gördüren, in exhib. cat., op. cit., Kiel 2005, pp. 266-7.

⁹ As documented in the two publications cited above: Kiel 2005 and Copenhagen 2005.

¹⁰ – Private collection. See *Martinus Rørbye 1803 – 1848*, exhib. cat., Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen 1981, p. 215, no. M. 139.

– Anonymous sale, Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen, 28 November 2011, lot 17.

– Anonymous sale, Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen, 2 December 2002, lot 1153.

– Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (inv. I.N. 937). See Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen, *Danish Painting of the Golden Age*, exhib. cat., Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen 1995, pp. 280-1, no. 107.

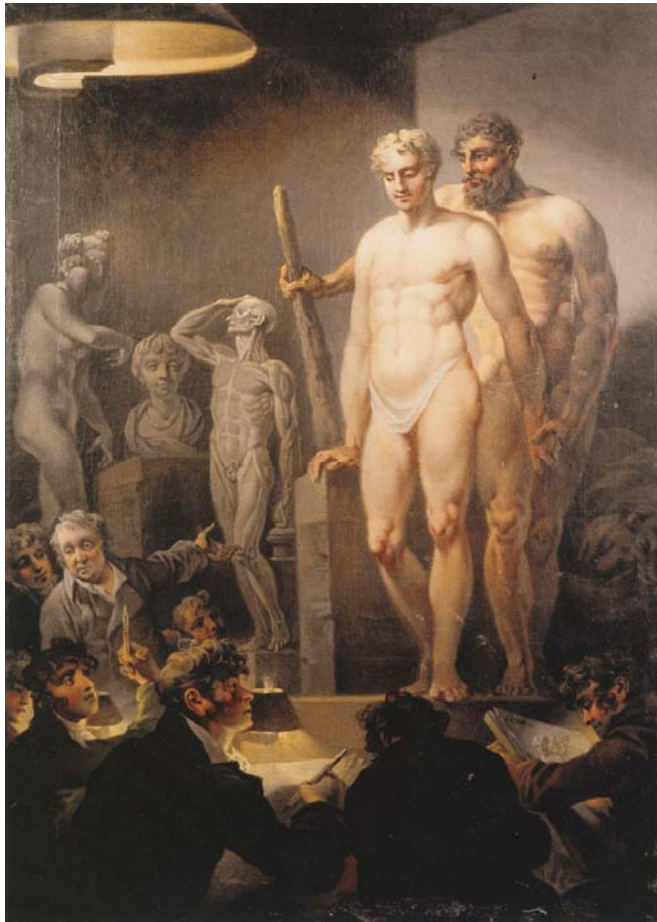


Fig. 1: Christian August Lorentzen (1746 Sønderborg - Copenhagen 1828),
Life-Class at the Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen; including a Self-Portrait, oil on canvas,
87 x 61 cm. Frederiksborgmuseet, Hillerød