

JOACHIM FERDINAND RICHARDT

BREDE, NORTH OF COPENHAGEN, 1819 – OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 1895

Ferdinand Richardt trained as a carpenter before enrolling at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts at the age of sixteen. He was admitted to the life class in 1837 and in 1839 began to make topographical paintings of his native area north of Copenhagen. That same year he exhibited for the first time in Charlottenborg. In 1842 he made his first sale to the art-loving King Christian VIII. Richardt was awarded the Academy's major silver medal in 1840 and continued in the life class under J. L. Lund until 1846. He was also given guidance by the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, whose studio in Charlottenborg Richardt portrayed in a painting (Thorvaldsens Museum). Throughout all his artistic studies, he was well trained in perspective.

In 1843, Richardt found a subject that was to become a major preoccupation for him: views of country mansions and churches. Drawing and painting while traveling all over Denmark, he produced work that appeared in printed booklets he published from 1844 to 1868 under the title of "Prospecter af danske Herregaarde (Views of Danish Country Mansions)." These 20 volumes of 12 views each became very popular. In 1845, Christian VIII commissioned him to paint a series of views of selected castles, and then in 1847 he gave Richardt the title of Painter to the Royal Court along with a travel bursary. Between 1852 and 1863 Richardt published another series of lithographs, this time of country mansions from the southwestern part of Scania, which had been Danish territory until 1660.

In 1855, Richardt traveled to the United States, a trip said to be taken at the suggestion of the Vanderbilt family. He landed in New York City, where he set up and maintained a studio from 1856 to 1859. He later visited Niagara Falls, which he had long wanted to see. In the summers of 1855 and 1856 he painted a large number of pictures of the magnificent waterfall and enjoyed a warm reception when he exhibited thirty-two of them in the Stuyvesant Institute in New York the following year. After a prolonged tour of the eastern and midwestern states and Quebec, Canada, he increased his popularity in the United States with a solo exhibition in the National Academy of Design in New York. Several of the exhibited paintings are owned by American public institutions. For instance, one painting of the Niagara Falls hangs in the Department of State in Washington, DC, and there are two views of the Mississippi River painted around 1857 at the White House, which also owns an 1858 view of Philadelphia's Independence House. Richardt planned to publish a book in New York containing 60 American views but it never appeared, though three prints made in 1859 are known to exist.

That summer of 1859, Richardt sailed back to Denmark, where he held an exhibition of his American views in 1860. At the same time he returned to his Danish motifs. However, his days of traveling were not past. In 1862 he married Arnadine Linnemann and went with her to Italy and England, where he also exhibited.

After holding several auctions in Copenhagen, Richardt emigrated with his wife and daughter to the United States, where they first lived in New York City and Niagara Falls. In 1875 the family moved to San Francisco, where he taught in the Arts Association School of Design, finally settling in Oakland, California, where he had his own workshop and teaching facilities. Richardt was among the first to have a painterly eye for the idiosyncratic nature of Yosemite Park, where he painted numerous pictures. Dying in 1895, he was buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland. His works are to be found in many Danish and American museums and in private collections. In 2002, the artist's descendant Justine Hemmert Van Keller, of New Orleans, Louisiana, presented a large collection of Richardt's drawings and watercolors to the National Museum in Copenhagen.

E.F.

LITERATURE: Aase Bak in *Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon*, vol. 7, 1988; Melinda Stuart and Niels Peter Stilling, *Danske herregårde og Amerika*, Søllerød Museum, 2003 (partly in English).