

His childhood in Dragør

Christian Mølsted was born and grew up in the little coastal town Dragør. When Mølsted was a boy the town was the third largest sea port in Denmark. The greater part of its inhabitants was in some way or another connected to the harbor and the sea. Playing with the other boys often took place down by the harbor.

The boy also paid frequent visits to the sea pilot Strømberg who told stories about old ships and who knew more about the technical skills of navigating sailing ships than most people. In his spare time Strømberg painted pictures of sailing ships. He was not actually a marine painter, but painted amateur pictures of sailing ships which depicted the ships with perfect accuracy and realism down to the last detail.

Mølsted's mother was a skipper's daughter and his father was a fisherman. His plan was that one day his son should take over his father's fishing boat. Christian, however, would rather be a painter. The outcome was that, in spite of his father's initial resistance, the boy was allowed to go to Technical School in Copenhagen.

His years of apprenticeship in Copenhagen

At Technical School young Christian Mølsted learned the basics of drawing necessary to gain admittance to the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen. Teaching took place in the winter and during summer the students might go home and practice what they had learned.

During the first years of his education Mølsted lodged in the winter with his uncle Vilhelm Jørgensen, who had a cigar shop at Østergade in Copenhagen. He helped his uncle in the shop and thereby came into contact with a group of future clients. Among them were a captain Næser, a well-

to-do citizen of Copenhagen who became his prime benefactor. Næser hired him to paint 4 large seascapes for the dining room in his house in a fashionable square in Copenhagen. Mølsted was also allowed to live in a small room on the stair case of the property. Later on a studio was established for him in the back building. Rent was paid in pictures.

During the summer of 1880 - just before he started at the Royal Academy of Arts - Mølsted (thanks to another of Vilhelm Jørgensen's customers) were given a chance to sail on the 'Jylland', a frigate belonging to the Danish navy on an expedition to England, Madeira and Russia during the summer months. On this cruise he found motives for many later works.

From autumn 1880 onwards Christian Mølsted spent 4 years studying at the Royal Academy of Arts. His teachers exerted a crucial influence on the painting style of their student. Professors Frederik Vermehren, Julius Exner and Carl Bloch followed the principles laid out by C. W. Eckersberg at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From the 1870s onwards, however, this conservative classical style had many critics even among the teachers of the Academy. The final outcome of the debate was that a group of teachers formed De Frie Kunstskoler (The Independent Art Schools) as an alternative to the Academy. Christian Mølsted had the option to attend a school influenced by the new winds blowing. He chose the classical line of the Academy, though.

His style of painting and his customers

In the 1880's when Mølsted attended the Royal Academy of Arts the education started with the School of Drawing. Then you advanced to the School of Casts (drawing from casts) followed by the School of Models (drawing and painting after life model) and finally the School of Painting.

The classical way of painting and painting style which Christian Mølsted had impressed on him at the Academy, he stuck to throughout all of his life as a painter.

From his early years Mølsted's clients belonged to the upper class. The Ministry of Naval Affairs ordered seascapes for hanging in offices. Captains and other naval officers also wanted well-known motives for their dining-rooms. Members of the royal family and the Civil Service were also among his clients.

There is no indication that Mølsted ever felt like trying a more modern style of painting. The Impressionism or any of the other 'modern' styles never appealed to him. In letters some of his clients wrote to him that they preferred his art to others exactly because of his old fashioned, classical style. He himself admires the painters one might call 'Salon' painters. Among those are his teachers at the Academy Julius Exner, Frederik Vermehren and - first of all - Carl Bloch whom he describes as Denmark's greatest painter.



Detail from 'Onboard the frigate Niels Juel during the battle at Helgoland 1864', painted 1897.

The Marine Painter

In several series of paintings Christian Mølsted dealt with the historical painting, but he combined it with the marine painting. The great naval battles Denmark had been involved in were of great interest to him. In his notebooks there are handwritten accounts of the victorious battles of Tordenskjold in 1719 and other historic battles. They were among his favorite motives all through his career. Mølsted paid tribute to Peter Willemoes, the naval hero of the Napoleonic wars. And to admiral Niels Juel, the hero of the battle in Køge Bug: His achievements also became a series of paintings. The last naval battle of Denmark in 1864 was dealt with in the large painting which exists in several versions, 'Ombord på fregattens Niels Juel under slaget ved Helgoland' (Onboard the frigate Niels Juel during the Battle at Helgoland).

Already in his Academy days he received letters addressed to The Marine Painter Christian Mølsted. It was the kind of painting he identified himself with early on. All through his life he lived mostly near the sea-shores of Dragør, Lønstrup or Copenhagen where he found motives from the harbour or the sea. Even at the Louvre, which he visited several times during his three-month stay in Paris in 1882, it was the sea scapes that caught most of his attention.

With Dragør as his base

After a five year long engagement to Inge Dorothea Svendsen (Thea) from Lønstrup Christian Mølsted married her in 1891. The couple settled down in Mølsted's childhood home in Dragør where three daughters were born in 1892, 1894 and 1896. Apart from summer stays in Lønstrup the couple spent most of the year there.

In 1916 Mølsted acquired the neighbouring plot of land and built the studio which today is known as Mølsted Museum. By that time he was sufficiently well-established as a painter to be able to ask his customers to come to him in Dragør. He continued to do that until his death in 1930.



Fishing boats at Sdr. Mole in Dragør, 1881

Mølsted Museum

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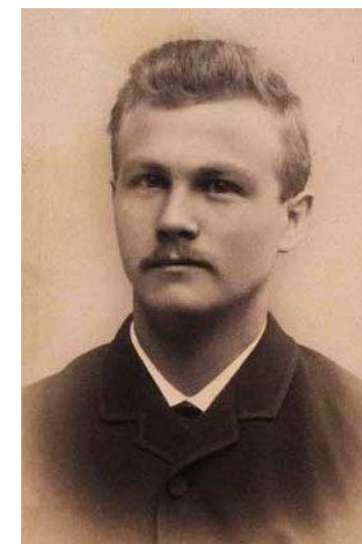
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Mølsted Museum



The Marine Painter

Christian Mølsted

1862-1930

His life and work

A short biography.