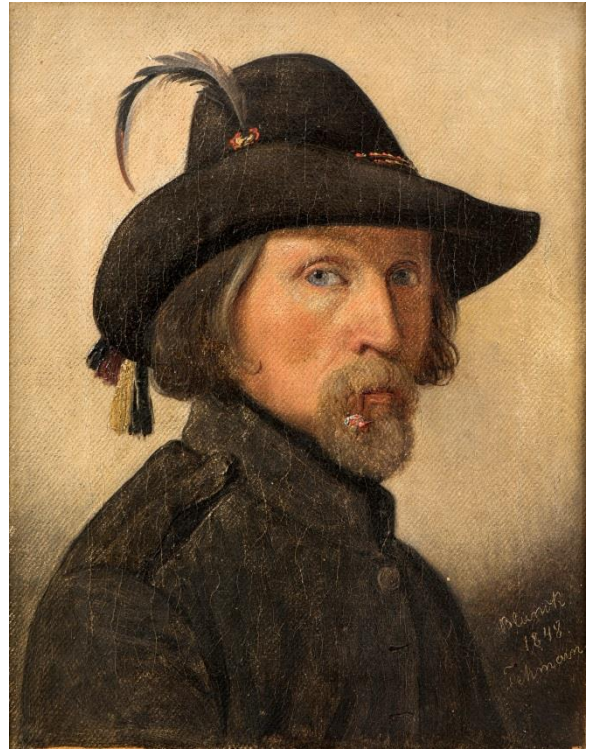


Ditlev Blunck

A different kind of golden age painter

March 26 – August 27, 2017



Ditlev Blunck, *Self Portrait as Legionnaire*, 1948.
Nivaagaard Painting Collection

The Nivaagaard Collection presented the first ever major exhibition of Ditlev Blunck's (1798-1854) work. Blunck was in many ways a different kind of painter; he was a Holsteiner, he had a unique style compared with his Danish Golden Age contemporaries, and he was homosexual.

While Blunck was, in his day, an acclaimed painter, in 1840 he fell out of favour in the Danish art world after he was expelled from the country because of a sexual offense. For a long period Blunck has been forgotten in Denmark, while he is still revered in Germany. In spite of this, Blunck is still reckoned among the Danish Golden Age painters.

He was educated in Copenhagen and in Munich, and it is perhaps the German influence on his art which came to mean that his idiom stood out from his contemporaries in Copenhagen, who were all famous pupils of the Eckersberg School. Blunck, by contrast, had as his inspiration the group of artists known as the Nazarenes, who painted in a more idealised and at times romantic style.

When the First Schleswig War broke out in 1848 Blunck chose to fight on the side of Schleswig-Holstein, which was perhaps not so surprising given that, eight years earlier, he had been declared persona non grata in Denmark. All the same, Blunck no doubt felt an emotional rift between his native land and Denmark, the land he had called his home.

The exhibition therefore also puts the idea of Danishness – an idea which came into being in the Golden Age – under the microscope. When is one Danish? What does it actually mean to be Danish, and how does art contribute to generating Danish national sentiment, creating images of Danishness, and shaping the national character? Blunck still has relevance, just as the question of national identity does

Blunck's oeuvre is interesting, and we are exhibiting the full spectrum of his wide-ranging work, which includes history painting featuring mythological, allegorical and religious motifs, portraits, battle painting, genre painting and sketches. The works that will be featured in the exhibition have been loaned from various Danish and German galleries as well as private owners.

In connection with the exhibition, the museum has published the first major biography of the artist, written by Blunck researcher Karin Bechmann Søndergaard.

We are happy to have giving Ditlev Blunck the place in Danish art history which he so richly deserves.

New work added to the Ditlev Blunck exhibition

A productive bit of cleaning

A private owner of a beautiful image of the Madonna got a pleasant surprise when the work was recently cleaned, only to reveal Ditlev Blunck's signature. The Danish Golden Age painter Ditlev Blunck, who in his day was expelled from Denmark by the Danish royal family, presumably as a result of having committed a homosexual act thereby sidelined in Danish art history, is currently the subject of a major exhibition at The Nivaagaard Collection.

A stroke of luck

The large painting is entitled *Madonna with Child* and is dated 'Rome, 1833'. The painting is mentioned in H.C. Andersen's diary in an entry from 1834, but following an auction in 1879 it disappeared without trace. So there was great jubilation at the Nivaagaard Collection of Paintings when the owner approached the museum's new director Andrea Rygg Karberg on her second day in the job. "It is such a stroke of luck," says Andrea Rygg Karberg – and the work will be added to the exhibition this coming Monday, and will be on display to the museum's many guests from Tuesday 13th June.



Ditlev Blunck, *Madonna with child*, Rome 1833. Private collection

Came to the attention of an art history expert and H.C. Andersen

Senior researcher Karin Bechmann Søndergaard, who has authored a comprehensive biography of Blunck, has long considered the work to be lost. Blunck certainly produced the painting in Rome, and it was painted for Ottilie von Goethe, who was the daughter-in-law of the famous German poet, philosopher and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. On the 14th of January 1834 H.C. Andersen mentions the work in his diary after having visited Blunck, describing it as follows:

“The passion flower grows in through the window, and [from] the cradle a butterfly rises into the air as the child looks on; the child and the Madonna seem to me not noble enough”.

H.C. Andersen was apparently not keen on Blunck’s free-and-easy treatment of the religious subject matter – yet the work is characteristic of the artist’s unique, sentimental style. The Virgin Mary looks tenderly and yet sorrowfully down on her young son, who is destined to die before his time. The baby Jesus himself is occupied solely by the butterfly. Noble or not, the butterfly, as it rises up into the sky, is a symbol of innocence, vulnerability and the transient nature of existence.



