

A scent of eternity

The flower painter J.L. Jensen

January 21 – August 12, 2018



J.L. Jensen, *Opstilling med blomster og frugt*, 1836
Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Oldenburg

Blossom-Jensen comes to Nivaa

The Nivaagaard Collection opened its doors to a grand exhibition featuring the works of J.L. Jensen (1800-1856), often referred to as 'Blossom-Jensen'. Jensen was the leading flower painter of the Danish Golden Age. He devoted his entire life and career to depicting lavish bouquets in glowing colours as well as vivid displays of fruits, even though flower painting was traditionally a genre that was looked down on and generally something that female amateur painters occupied themselves with. The exhibition was the first in recent times to feature Blossom-Jensen and the biggest one ever dedicated to the artist.

Jensen worked within the international still life (nature morte in French; stilleben in German) tradition, which focuses on paintings of static subjects such as an arrangement of inanimate materials, typically flowers, fruits, food and dead animals. The Danish artist painted all of these, but he is most renowned for his beautiful paintings of flowers in Greek vases, baskets and wreaths lying on a sill or growing on the forest floor. In addition to these are his works of pieces of fruit and his rare kitchen and hunting works, as well as the hitherto unknown porcelain that he – as the head painter at the Royal Porcelain Factory – decorated for King Frederick VI of Denmark's two daughters.



What particularly characterises Jensen's works is his painstakingly detailed depiction of each flower, piece of fruit or animal and his well-balanced and harmonic compositions, where light flows into the bouquets so that each flower, leaf, bud or stalk is clearly and logically rendered.

The dream of eternal life

Jensen occupied himself with both nature and art, and it is in the space between these two poles that his work unfolds. He drew inspiration from the Dutch baroque art of the 1600s, while reinvigorating the genre by mixing Danish flora with exotic flowers. Jensen's works represent the dream of imperishable beauty and eternal life.

It is a message that remains just as relevant today, just like flowers both then and now are a big part of people's lives, also on a symbolic level. Flowers can say more than words. We congratulate, court and convey our condolences to one another with flowers. Bouquets connote luxury, extravagance and joie de vivre, expressing a fleeting beauty that wanes too soon. After all, flowers are vulnerable, just like people.

During the exhibition, guests at the Nivaagaard Collection could go for walks through the museum's famous rhododendron park or pick edible plants in the scenic beach meadow, attend workshops about flowers in salads, floral arrangement courses on the museum terrace and much more.

Golden Age poetry complemented by modern art

Jensen's flowers was accompanied by poetry from the Danish Golden Age and two contemporary artists. The popular young British installation artist Rebecca Louise Law is known for her poetic works, which, like Jensen revolve around natural beauty and impermanence. In the week commencing 19 February, 2018, she was setting up her breathtaking flower installation at the J.L. Jensen exhibition as a complement to the Danish artist's works.

Inspired by the Nivaagaard Collection's newly acquired work by J.L. Jensen, *Pomegranate and green and blue grapes on a marbled window sill*, the Danish artist Katja Bjørn has created an outdoor video work that was shown on a screen placed at ground level on the lawn. The film featured fruits, flowers and bodies that start out bursting with life, but slowly descend into rot and decay until they finally disappear altogether. The work was placed at ground-level, which symbolised a place of incipient growth and nourishment, but also a place of darkness, death and burial.

In Jensen's time, women were denied access to the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts and an education. While Jensen taught a number of female private students in flower painting, their names have since been forgotten. Rebecca Louise Law's flower installation and Katja Bjørn's video work represented the museum's way of paying tribute to the lost female artists of the past and celebrating the many strong female artists of today.

The book about Blossom-Jensen

The exhibition coincided with the publishing of a long and beautiful book (published by Strandberg Publishing A/S in both a Danish and English version) on the artistic development of Jensen, his great decorations currently found in places such as Amalienborg Castle in Frederick VIII's Palace as well as his porcelain, accompanied by an abundance of beautiful pictures. The author of the main article and the article on Jensen as a porcelain painter is the art historian Marie-Louise Berner, who has researched Jensen over the past 14 years. The art historian Mette Thelle has written about Jensen's room decorations. The book is the first in-depth description of Jensen's collected works, a compilation of new knowledge of a high research standard which has long been in demand internationally. At the same time, the book is a pleasure to read thanks to its treasure trove of beautiful photos of Jensen's artistry.



