Self-Portraits and Artists’ Portraits as Portraits of Friends – A Selection of Paintings and Drawings

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Over the last two years, the Nationalmuseum has acquired a number of self-portraits and portraits of artist friends or other close colleagues, a wide selection of which are presented here. They vary in character and execution, exhibiting a wide range of striking features, several of which they, nevertheless, clearly have in common. Intimate self-knowledge, mutual familiarity and friendly caricature are among the characteristics they share.

A Drawn Self-Portrait by Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée

The oldest work is a self-portrait drawing in profile by the French artist Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée (1725–1805, Fig. 1). Over the course of his career, Lagrenée specialised above all in mythological subjects marked by a fairly austere classicism, but he also produced a smaller number of lively portraits, including a much-praised painting of himself, now in the collections of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum in Helsinki (Fig. 2). In it, the artist appears with great self-assurance and confidence, like a bon vivant whose eyes radiate an engaging perspicacity. The work is signed “L. de Lagrenée arrivé à Rome le 13 nov. 175[0] peint pour lui-même”. That same year Lagrenée had won a scholarship to study in the city. Although an old inscription on the verso states that it was done in 1778, the Nationalmuseum’s self-portrait drawing in profile seems very close to this painting, as if the artist had

Fig. 1 Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée (1725–1805), Self-Portrait, probably executed in 1778. Black and red chalk on paper, 235 x 175 mm. Purchase: the Hedda and N. D. Qvist Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 217/2017.
merely changed pose during the same “sitting”. In the drawing, though, Lagrenée depicts himself in a somewhat more subdued and sober way, seemingly taking a step back from his persona; his grand role as an artist. This impression is reinforced perhaps by the technique: the outlines of the profile are admittedly firmly drawn, but the work as a whole nevertheless exhibits a certain lightness of line. The artist returned to Paris in 1754 and although the drawn self-portrait was presumably done much later, it still demonstrates the skilled draughtsmanship he developed during his years in Italy. Lagrenée strikes us here as urbane, but perhaps also a little past his prime. Portrait drawings are rare in his work, but an interesting comparable example with virtually identical dimensions, albeit showing the sitter three-quarter-face, is his rendering of Alexander Roslin’s (1718–1793) daughter, Alexandrine Élisabeth, to be found in the Nationalmuseum’s Institut Tessin collection (Fig. 3).

A Presumed Self-Portrait by Johan Södermark

Olof Johan Södermark (1790–1848) was one of a successful group of painters and architects who started off as military officers and who were to play an important part in Swedish artistic life in the first half of the 19th century. They had been taught drawing at the Military Academy and in the Fortifications Corps, a forerunner of the Corps of Engineers, thereby receiving the beginnings of an artistic training into the bargain. Another of these artists with a military background, Hjalmar Mörner (1794–1837), urged Södermark to travel to Rome. From 1826 to 1829, Södermark stayed with the sculptor Johan Niclas Byström (1783–1848), whose Villa Malta was a hub for Scandinavian artists in the city. A few portraits by Södermark, among them images of his friends Mörner and Byström, but no self-portraits, were
previously known from this, his first visit to Rome. The portrait considered here (Fig. 4) is signed “O. Södermark pinx Roma 1827”, and given that the sitter’s features recall both a later self-portrait in private ownership and Johan Gustaf Sandberg’s (1782–1854) portrait of a some years older, somewhat greying Södermark (painted in 1831), it may be assumed to be a self-portrait (Fig. 5).

The fact that this work was not among the portraits from Rome which Södermark exhibited at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm in 1831, a couple of years after his return home, may perhaps have to do with the constant doubts he felt about his own artistic ability. These were possibly coupled with misgivings about the obviously egocentric nature of self-portraiture, and hence about how such art should be presented in a public context.

Another key challenge, perhaps, was that of allying the self-analytical nature of the self-portrait with the successful combination of portrait-like realism and idealisation which Södermark had mastered in his other portraits. Quite clearly, the concentrated – scrutinising – gaze so typical of the self-portrait is present here, reflecting, it seems, the character of a single-minded and ambitious artist.

The painting is an important, and previously unknown, example of the portraits produced by this artist in Rome in the late 1820s.

**Johan Thomas Lundbyes Presumed Portrait of the Painter Lorenz Frølich**

Johan Thomas Lundbye (1818–1848) and Peter Christian Skovgaard (1817–1875) are regarded as two of the leading artists of the Danish Golden Age of the 19th century. They were close friends, and according to a later inscription the present drawing by Lundbye (Fig. 6) is a portrait of Skovgaard. A number of portraits of that artist by
Lundbye were already known, showing the subject from different angles, in various emotional states and at different ages. In several of his drawings of his friend, Lundbye uses touches of watercolour to emphasise his reddish and often dishevelled hair and beard, a technique that also highlights the sitter’s high cheekbones. The fact that these features are not conspicuous in the Nationalmuseum drawing may invite questions about the sitter’s identity. There is no doubt, though, that the portraitist here is Lundbye. And probably the image does indeed originate from the context of his friendship with a fellow artist, but if we accept it as a portrait of a friend, then it is in fact more reminiscent of Lundbye’s earlier portraits of Lorenz Frølich (1820–1908). Either way, it would seem to be intended primarily to capture an emotional state of friendly intimacy and pensiveness on the part of the subject.11

Portrait of a Man by Ludvig August Smith
A less widely noted artist of Denmark’s Golden Age was Ludvig August Smith (1820–1906). His motives for devoting himself to portraiture were perhaps chiefly financial, but this was in fact a form of art he was very well suited to. With his accomplished rendering of light and shadow, he built shapes and volumes in the manner of earlier masters of chiaroscuro; a technique he had probably learnt in C. W. Eckersberg’s (1783–1853) life class in Copenhagen and which he employed to great effect in his portraits, including the one considered here (Fig. 7). The intense gaze suggests that this is a self-portrait and if that is so, it is the only one known by this artist.12

Greeting with Portrait from Carl Ferdinand Stelzner to Emil Bærentzen
Several of Smith’s portraits were originals for lithographs, drawn for Em. Bærentzen & Co, the leading lithographic workshop in Denmark at that time.13 Emil Bærentzen (1799–1868), the portraitist who managed the business, and his friend, the German miniaturist, lithographer and pioneering photographer Carl Ferdinand Stelzner...
and understanding which only love and family ties can bring. In this sense, the work recalls one of Ancher’s best-known portraits of his wife, *Anna Ancher Teaching her Daughter Helga to Draw, with a Christmas Gnome as a Model* (1888), in which Anna Ancher is also in the process of creating, in this case while instructing her daughter in the art of drawing. What is ingenious about the Nationalmuseum painting is that Michael Ancher’s portrait of his wife is at the same time a profile portrait of the woman she is painting. The image conveys, above all, a sense of absolute concentration; a concentration that grips Anna Ancher, her sitter, and Michael Ancher’s Portrait of Anna Ancher Painting a Model
The glimmer from the Danish Golden Age also formed the basis, through precursors like the artist Martinus Rørbye (1803–1848), for the light of the Skagen painting of the turn of the century. Among those active at Skagen at that time was one of Scandinavia’s most prominent artist couples, Michael and Anna Ancher (1849–1927 and 1859–1935). Michael Ancher’s image of his wife painting a portrait in her studio (Fig. 9) reflects not only the professional common ground between artist and artist-sitter, and the intimate trust between artist friends, but also the recognition

(1805–1894), are also among the artists linked to the Danish Golden Age who figure in the present selection of portraits. Like Bærentzen, Stelzner presumably studied in Eckersberg’s life class in Copenhagen. They were later close associates during their time in Paris, as the greeting accompanying this drawing (Fig. 8) makes clear. It is probably a portrait of Bærentzen, drawn by Stelzner. In this sensitively executed rendering of his friend at the drawing board, he emphasises the things the two artists had in common: their delight in the meticulous detail of portraiture, in both prints and miniatures.


Fig. 8 Carl Ferdinand Stelzner (1805–1894), *Greeting with Portrait from Carl Ferdinand Stelzner to Emil Bærentzen*, signed 28 June 1832. Pencil on paper, 243 x 198 mm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 2/2017.
Fritz von Dardel’s Portraits of Friends and Colleagues at the Nationalmuseum

As a young adjutant to the then Crown Prince Karl, later Karl XV (1826–1872), the draughtsman and military officer Fritz von Dardel (1817–1901) gained experience early on of a variety of high-society settings in the second half of the 19th century. Later in life, von Dardel was an influential figure on the Swedish cultural scene; he chaired the Nationalmuseum board from 1867 to 1893, for example, and was a member of several committees responsible for the Museum’s collections. As in other areas of his life, von Dardel made drawings recording his work at the Museum. From time to time he produced caricature-like portraits of members of the staff, as we see in the present drawings from meetings of the board (Figs. 10–11). Among the individuals he portrayed were Nils Fredrik Sander (1828–1900, NMH 203–204/2017), head of the Department of Paintings and Sculpture from 1869 to 1875; Hampus Huldt (1833–1894, NMH 206/2017), assistant curator from 1874 to 1890; Albert Theodor Gellerstedt (1836–1914, NMH 199/2017 and NMH 202/2017), artist and professor of architecture at Stockholm’s Nationalmuseum.

Fig. 10 Fritz von Dardel (1817–1901), Portrait of Hampus Huldt and Albert Theodor Gellerstedt at a Board Meeting at Nationalmuseum, 1880s. Ink on paper, 254 x 153 mm. Purchase: the Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 202/2017.

Fig. 11 Fritz von Dardel (1817–1901), Portrait of Nils Fredrik Sander at a Board Meeting at Nationalmuseum, 1892. Ink and pencil on paper, 164 x 137 mm. Purchase: the Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 204/2017.

undoubtedly, outside the picture, the artist behind the painting, her husband.
True to von Dardel's habit, these portraits are anecdotal in character, with a sense of being spur-of-the-moment creations, tending towards caricature. At the same time, they seem to have been drawn with due regard both for the subjects’ self-image and for their public position.

**An Early Self-Portrait by Richard Bergh**

Another artist who came into contact with the power centres of art and art policy was Richard Bergh (1858–1919), including during the final years of his life, from 1915, when he served as director general of the Nationalmuseum. There is an intense immediacy to Bergh’s portraits, an insightful feeling for the inner lives of his subjects, reflected, not least, in his portraits of women. Earlier-known self-portraits by him include an unfinished monochrome work produced in 1889, at the age of 31. That painting seems to vibrate with a sense of presence and spirit, an effect underscored by the broad, rapid brushwork.

In terms of its dimensions and expression, the self-portrait recently acquired by the Nationalmuseum (Fig. 12) can be regarded as something of a forerunner of the 1889 work. Probably painted in the late 1870s, when Bergh was around 20, it demonstrates an extraordinary artistic maturity and self-awareness. Despite obvious age-related differences, such as the fact that Bergh still has an impressive shock of hair in the earlier of the portraits, we are struck more by the similarities between the two. Although the technique differs, there is a similar vigour in the brushwork. And while the sharp gaze of the earlier portrait radiates self-confidence and expectancy, there is also a touch there – perhaps a presentiment – of the melancholy that so strongly pervades the portrait from 1889.
A Drawn Portrait of Ida von Schultzenheim by Mina Carlson-Bredberg

Wilhelmina (Mina) Carlson-Bredberg (1857–1943) was a contemporary of Richard Bergh’s and should be counted, like him, among the leading Swedish portraitists of the period. Her portraits are often of women and children, and not uncommonly there is something of an impressionist feel about them.24 The portrait drawing considered here shows her friend and fellow artist Ida von Schultzenheim (1859–1940, Fig. 13). Later, in 1910, von Schultzenheim became one of the founders of the Association of Swedish Women Artists, and she was its first president.25 In Carlson-Bredberg’s cautious, sensitively drawn lines – very different from the vigorous brushstrokes of her oil paintings – we can sense the trust and intimacy between portraitist and sitter. Von Schultzenheim’s gaze reflects a sharp intellect, coupled with both resolve and a certain sadness.26 Traits that can be said to be mirrored in her now almost famous words about why an organisation specifically for women artists had to be created: [We were] forced and compelled to do so.27

A Comic Self-Portrait by Bror Hjorth

Finally, we turn to Bror Hjorth’s (1894–1968) watercoloured self-portrait, dated 1915, the year after he had embarked on his artistic studies (Fig. 14).28 It is as if he had originally set out to produce a rather solemn frontal portrait like Richard Bergh’s, but eventually decided to give it a very different twist. We now see a young man in quite bohemian garb with his characteristic spectacles and bangs, striding forth, admittedly sure of his calling as an artist, but at the same time searching and hesitant. The typical distortion of caricature not only turns the proportions on their head, but also takes the edge off the whole thing: the seriousness, the artist’s calling, self-portraiture itself.

ACQUISITIONS/SELF-PORTRAITS AND ARTISTS’ PORTRAITS AS PORTRAITS OF FRIENDS

Notes:
2. Several early biographical notes on Lagrenée stress the particular importance of his stay in Rome in the development of his drawing; see for example Sandoz 1984, pp. 58–63.
4. In Södermark’s case, with the Field Survey Brigade of the Corps of Engineers. In the army, Södermark became a lieutenant colonel, serving among other things as an instructor in topography at the Military Academy at Karlberg. See Bo Lundström, Officiern som arkitekt och konstnär i det svenska 1800-talet, diss., Uppsala University, 1999, pp. 206–214, 298, 210, fig. 110; Margareta Rosvall, Olof Johan Södermark, licentiate dissertation, Stockholm University, 1993; Margareta Rosvall, Porträttmålaren Olof Johan Södermark: En förstudie, undergraduate dissertation, Stockholm University, 1975; Ludvig Looström, Olof Johan Södermark: hans liv och verk: lefnadsteckning, Stockholm 1879.
5. Looström 1879, pp. 13–16.
7. Lundström 1999, fig. 110.
8. Looström 1879, p. 21; Lundström 1999, pp. 213–214. These were doubts that assailed him despite his contemporaries’ praise for his portraits and the prestigious commissions he received. See for example Solfrid Söderlind, Porträttbruk i Sverige: 1840–1865, en funktions- och interaktionsstudie, diss., Linköping University, Stockholm 1993, pp. 289, 306–308, 472, n. 106. As regards the style of dress, for example, Södermark’s self-portrait closely matches his portrait of his friend Mörner, shown at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1831, and in fact it has no less “official” a feel than that work.
9. The special complexity which self-portraits have long engendered between artist and viewer may possibly have been a factor, in other words: “the artist is engaged in self-analysis, but the actual painting will nevertheless represent the person concerned in the usual way in the public consciousness”; see Tomas Björk, “Att skildra själens djup – Richard Bergh som porträttmålare”, in Richard Bergh: Ett konstnärsfall (exh. cat.), Hans Henrik Brummer (ed.), Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 2002, pp. 77–100, specifically pp. 81–84 on the subject of self-portraits. This scrutinising, “watching”, gaze goes back to the earliest preserved “independent” self-portraits, dating from the

Fig. 14 Bror Hjorth (1894–1968), Comic Self-Portrait, signed 1915. Chalk and watercolour on paper, 160 x 100 mm. Purchase; the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 17/2017.
ACQUISITIONS/SELF-PORTRAITS AND ARTISTS’ PORTRAITS AS PORTRAITS OF FRIENDS


11. Ibid.
14. Weilbach 1896 ("Stelzner, Carl Ferdinand"); Thieme and Becker 1937, p. 585 ("Stelzner, Carl Ferdinand").
15. The inscription reads: "Paris den 28ten Juni 1832 / Erinnerne Sie sich hierbei lieber Bæren[ ]zen, die vergnügen Stunden die wir in Paris zusammenverlebt haben, und gedenken Sie auch ohne dieser Ihres freundes / C. Stelzner" ("Paris, 28 June 1832 / Recall by this, dear Bæren[ ]zen, the enjoyable times we spent together in Paris, and remember, even without them, your friend / C. Stelzner").
18. Ibid.
22. This was roughly at the time he was a student at Edvard Perséus’s school of painting in Stockholm. Brummer 2002, p. 164.
23. Bergh’s first wife Helena died of an incurable illness in the summer of the same year, and in the autumn he himself went down with influenza and severe pneumonia. Brummer 2002, p. 166.
27. Ibid.