Three German Artists on their Travels

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ACQUISITIONS/THREE GERMAN ARTISTS ON THEIR TRAVELS

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Fig. 1 Ernst Fries (1801–1833), *The Waterfalls at Tivoli with the Ponte Lupo, Temple of Vesta and Temple of Sibyl*, 1826. Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 73.5 cm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7472.
The Nationalmuseum has acquired three landscapes painted by German artists on their travels around Europe: Ernst Fries’s The Waterfalls at Tivoli with the Ponte Lupo, Temple of Vesta and Temple of Sibyl, Christian Morgenstern’s View towards Amalfi from the Grotta dei Cappuccini, and Georg Eduard Otto Saal’s The Verma Waterfalls: Study. Works of this kind by German artists were not previously to be found in the collections. The three recent acquisitions enable the Museum to show more clearly just how international artistic practice tended to be in the 19th century. Artists of different nationalities travelled to the same destinations and painted the same subjects. The Nationalmuseum’s collections include paintings from the same places by French, Danish, Swedish and other artists.

One feature which the three works have in common is their distance from their subject, in each case a famous location which the artist has chosen to paint from far off. These views invite us to explore roads, spaces and buildings with our eyes, in a way that illustrates how the
ACQUISITIONS/THREE GERMAN ARTISTS ON THEIR TRAVELS

When Ernst Fries died at the age of just 31, he was not quite established as an artist in Karlsruhe, where he had settled after a four-year stay in Italy. He consequently left behind a fairly meagre body of work, and the view of Tivoli (Fig. 1) now acquired by the Nationalmuseum is therefore a rarity. Judging from the freshness of the painting and the sharp treatment of light, it was done at least partly in front of the motif, on the artist’s visit to Tivoli in October 1826. Fries is said to have had a particular fascination with waterfalls and caves, and it seems natural to regard this picture as a vividly rendered experience of one of the most famous and dramatic

idea of distance became central to German Romantic art. The poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801) put it like this: “Everything at a distance turns into poetry: distant mountains, distant people, distant events; all become romantic.”¹ In The Sorrows of the Young Werther, Goethe’s protagonist prefers to view the landscape from afar, so as to be able to experience it through his powers of imagination. On one side of a valley, he can allow his gaze to roam up and down the steep precipices on the other side, but once he has physically reached those slopes, the magic is lost and he lifts his gaze to take in the next distant view.²

This approach to nature and landscape seems to be built into the three newly acquired paintings. Their creation can be thought of as a counterpart to the kind of experience at a distance which Werther preferred to physically exploring a place.

When Ernst Fries died at the age of just 31, he was not quite established as an artist in Karlsruhe, where he had settled after a four-year stay in Italy. He consequently left behind a fairly meagre body of work, and the view of Tivoli (Fig. 1) now acquired by the Nationalmuseum is therefore a rarity. Judging from the freshness of the painting and the sharp treatment of light, it was done at least partly in front of the motif, on the artist’s visit to Tivoli in October 1826. Fries is said to have had a particular fascination with waterfalls and caves, and it seems natural to regard this picture as a vividly rendered experience of one of the most famous and dramatic

Fig. 3 Georg Eduard Otto Saal (1818–1870), The Verma Waterfalls: Study. Oil on canvas, 47 x 67.7 cm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7433.
of such scenes. In Italy, Fries got to know Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, and the two painted together on at least two occasions.

Carl Morgenstern went to Italy in 1834, staying there for three years. He produced numerous paintings along the Amalfi coast and on Capri, two of the destinations that artists were most anxious to visit. His study from the opening of the Grotta dei Cappuccini, looking towards the city of Amalfi (Fig. 2), demonstrates one of his specialities, a subtle atmospheric perspective in a pale bluish-violet tone. Of particular interest here is the way he painted the scene from an opening in the rock, presumably to make use of the shadow falling across the foreground and some way into the picture, and to be able to record the sun-drenched view without being dazzled by the light.

German artists not only travelled south. Later in the century, Scandinavia also attracted interest as a destination – especially Norway, which with its waterfalls, mountains and fjords offered the most striking scenery. Georg Eduard Otto Saal’s study of the Verma Waterfalls (Vermafossen, Fig. 3) was painted entirely before the motif. With its lifelike trees and rushing falls, it is a superb example of how artists developed a technique to achieve a high degree of illusion with the simplest and swiftest possible brushwork.

Notes: