

Dr. Knut Ljøgodt Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway

The motif in this painting by Peder Balke is obviously inspired by his journey to Northern Norway and can probably be dated as mid 1840s.

The Norwegian painter Peder Balke (1804–1887) started his career as the apprentice of a local painter for decorative interiors, before attending the Royal Drawing School in Christiania (present-day Oslo). He continued his education in Stockholm under the tutelage of Carl Johan Fahlcrantz, professor at the Royal Academy and Sweden's leading landscape painter of the day. It was during his studies in Stockholm that Balke in 1832 decided to travel to the Northernmost parts of his native country and to depict the Arctic scenery there. Later, Balke studied with his famous compatriot, Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857), who had settled in Dresden as a professor at the Art Academy. At first Balke only stayed in Dresden for a few months in 1835–36, but then returned for an entire year in 1844–45. Here, the visionary landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich and the German Romanticists also made a great impression on the artist. A sojourn in Paris in the late 1840s led to a large commission from Louis-Philippe, King of the French.

The wild and desolate landscape of the Arctic came to preoccupy the artist for the rest of his life. Balke continuously experimented with ways of depicting these motifs, creating his own, highly unique manner of painting. Again and again he returned to Northern motifs, as can be seen in the present painting, "Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway". The dramatic composition and romantic-naturalistic style points to the relatively early production of the artist, and was probably painted in the mid 1840s, just after his second stay with Dahl in Dresden. Later, Balke's landscapes became more contemplative in mood and almost monochromatic in style.

The stretcher of "Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway" is of a so-called Dresden type, known from the works of Dahl and other painters of his circle. It seems to be made of untreated pine, a common material among Scandinavian artists. "Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway" can be compared to another painting by Balke, "North Cape", which is signed and dated 1845 (Collection Savings Bank Foundation DNB, Norway; on long-term-loan to Northern Norway Art Museum, Tromsø). Many of the elements – such as the white cliffs as the centre motif, the waves, and a flock of seabirds across the sky – are similar in the two paintings. We can also notice the distinct red-orange stream of light glowing on

the horizon in both paintings, a characteristic feature we also know from works of the 1850s, "Vardøhus Fortress" (KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes, Bergen) and "Lighthouse on the Norwegian Coast" (variations in the National Museum, Oslo, and Trondheim Art Museum). The rock in the foreground of the present work seems to have been scraped down with a palette knife rather than painted. This is an element also found in "North Cape" and other works by Balke, and are reminiscent of his early days as a decoration painter. Some of the rocks in "Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway" seem rather fantastic, but similar formations can also be identified in later works, such as "Seascape with Cliffs" (1870s, The Gundersen Collection, No 38).

Ref.: Leif Einar Plahter and Unn Plahter: 'J.C. Dahls malerier – en teknisk undersøkelse', in Marit I. Lange (ed.): Johan Christian Dahl 1788–1857: Jubileumsutstilling, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery, Oslo and Bergen Art Museum, 1988; Marit I. Lange, Knut Ljøgodt and Christopher Riopelle: Paintings by Peder Balke, exhibition catalogue, The National Gallery, London 2014; Knut Ljøgodt: Peder Balke: Sublime North: Works from The Gundersen Collection, Skira, Milan 2020; Dr Wolfgang Gabler: condition report, Berlin, October 16, 2020.



Peder Balke, North Cape, 1845, Öl auf Lwd., Collection Savings Bank Foundation DNB, Museum Tromsø



159 Peder Balke

Helgøya 1804 – 1887 Kristiana (Oslo)

„Cliffs by the Coast of Northern Norway“.

Mitte der 1840er-Jahre

Öl auf Leinwand. 34,3 cm × 50,3 cm

(13 ½ in. × 19 ¾ in.). Das Gemälde wird aufgenommen

in das Verzeichnis der Werke Peder Balkes, hrsg. von

Dr. Knut Ljøgodt, Nordic Institute of Art, Oslo, in

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