

Knut Ljøgodt The forces of nature

The subject as well as the painterly treatment of this beautiful seascape points to the Norwegian landscape painter, Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857), or his immediate circle.

After studies at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen, Dahl settled in Dresden in 1818, where he eventually became a professor, a key figure in the city's milieu of landscape painters, as well as a close friend of Caspar David Friedrich. Dahl went back to his native Norway on study trips to explore the country's nature, making sketches and studies that later would be turned into large-scale landscapes in the studio. The close observation of nature – „nature's way", as Dahl expressed it himself – was always at the core of his ideals. Dahl's Dresden studio was frequented by Scandinavian and German artists alike. Through his many pupils and followers, he became a leading light for the more naturalist approach in Northern European landscape painting, as opposed to e.g. the more transcendental romanticism of Friedrich. Among Dahl's Norwegian students, we find Thomas Fearnley, Peder Balke and Knud Baade; among the Germans, Carl Blechen and Franz Schiertz.

The sea is a recurring subject in Dahl's oeuvre; sometimes in stormy weather or including a shipwreck, emphasizing the forces of nature. The landscape of the present painting is probably taken from the dramatic West Coast of Norway; a topography Dahl knew well as a son of Bergen. This can be found in e.g. his Shipwreck on the Coast of Norway (1832, National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Bang 688) and other versions of the subject. It should be noted, however, that Dahl on several occasions also depicted the rocky landscape of the peninsula Kullen on the South-Western coast of Sweden.

The canvas is mounted on a so-called Dresden stretcher, which was often used by Dahl as well as other artists of his milieu. According to paintings conservator Felizitas zur Lippe, the stretcher dates from the 19th century and is very likely the original. The painting is unsigned, which is unusual for Dahl for a work of this size. We do know that artists of the day often borrowed from the works of their colleagues. On some occasions, Dahl himself based his works on other artists' sketches; and, vice versa, his friends and students would borrow elements from Dahl's paintings or be inspired by them.

The composition is quite close to that of Dahl's Study of Breakers on a Rocky Coast (undated, private collection, Bang 1294), on which the present painting might be based. The painterly technique and the fresh treatment of the different elements of Rocks by the Coast of Norway also

points to Dahl's naturalist ideals. In particular the sky with the grey-white clouds, as well as the air perspective, can be compared to a series of cloud studies in the collection of KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes in Bergen. Also the depiction of the cliffs as well as that of the water seem quite close to similar elements in several of his works. See e.g. Shipwreck on a Rocky Coast (1819, Neue Pinakothek, Munich, Bang 159) and Shipwreck on the Coast between Larvik and Fredriksvern (1846, KODE, Bergen, Bang 1039).

126 Johan Christian Clausen Dahl (?)

Bergen 1788 – 1857 Dresden

Stürmisches Meer an einer Felsenküste.

Öl auf Leinwand. 44,8 × 56,3 cm (17 5/8 × 22 1/8 in.).

Werkverzeichnis: Nicht bei Bang (vgl. Bang 1294).

Kleine Retuschen. [3115]

Provenienz

Privatsammlung, Schweden

EUR 35.000–45.000

USD 40,700–52,300



J. Ch. Dahl, Breakers on a Rocky Coast (undated, private collection), Bang 1294