



ANNA ANCHER
The Pastels

Elisabeth Fabritius

FORLAGET VANDKUNSTEN
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Assistance Relating to Conservation Techniques

The technical comments on the individual pastels have been written on the basis of observations made by the painting conservator, Lone Bøgh, and me in 2003–04. This does not, however, apply to the pastel in the Icelandic Art Museum (p. 33), which was examined in 2004 by the then head conservator, Viktor Smári Sæmundsson, during a visit I made there. During the winter of 2005–06, three canvases in Den Hirschsprungske Samling (pastels p. 37, 52, 63) were macrophotographed by the conservator, Mikkel Scharff, the head of the art department in the Royal Danish Academy of Art School of Conservation. They were subsequently analysed by the conservation, technician Kathrine Segel,

now cand.scient.cons. She also analysed samples of the canvas from the pastels on pp. 24, 26, 31, 33, 37, 42, 47, 61, and the ground of pastels on pp. 26, 31, 37, 47 and 63. Finally, Kathrine Segel and I have evaluated the technical comments. The chapter on Anna Ancher’s paint and technique was written on the basis of discussions between myself and Lone Bøgh and my studies of technical literature in research libraries in various places, including Paris. The chapter was subsequently evaluated and formulated in collaboration with Kathrine Segel, who has contributed her valuable observations of Anna Ancher’s canvases and her use of ground.

Foreword

ANNA ANCHER (1859–1935) is considered to be one of the finest of the Scandinavian artists who excelled as pastel painters in the 1880s. In the paucity of literature on pastels, she is regarded to be on a level with the best known pastel artists of the day: Danes such as *Th. Philipsen* and *P.S. Krøyer*, Swedes such as *Bruno Liljefors* and *Anders Zorn* and Norwegians like *Fritz Thaulow* and *Asta Nørregaard*. Many more Scandinavian artists went in for pastel painting, which reached its peak at the end of the 19th century, and Anna Ancher was one of the first.

Anna Ancher’s pastels represent a limited, but very striking part of her art and have not previously been the subject of study or specific publication. Danish pastel painting is virtually unexplored in general, and nor does the subject receive more than scant consideration in other countries. Work on this book has surprisingly shown that Anna Ancher’s special character and artistic intentions are more clearly to be seen in the pastels than in her oil paintings.

Pastel is as fine as the dust on a butterfly’s wing, so delicate that it is scarcely ever possible to assemble a major exhibition in which it is possible to study the special character and splendid range of colour in pastel paintings and to draw comparisons between techniques and painters. Concern for conservation is virtually insurmountable. Hence this book on Anna Ancher’s pastels.

Although pastels enjoy a fair amount of popularity, especially in Britain and North

America, there is a curious tendency to overlook them. They are small in number in comparison with oil paintings and differ from them aesthetically in ways that make a stylistic comparison difficult. And they are rarely exhibited together. On account of their fragility, pastels are usually enclosed behind glass and sealed frames, which complicates a closer examination, and only a small number of conservators have any real experience with them. In museums, pastels on paper are typically kept together with drawings and graphics, separate from pastels on canvas, which are usually kept in storerooms along with paintings.

Twenty-five of Anna Ancher’s pastels are presented here, all of which can be counted as independent works of art. Pastels made as preparatory studies for oil paintings are not included. The existence of a further 25 is known from exhibition and auction catalogues and unpublished sources. Eleven of these have been traced, while the fates of the others are uncertain. There are presumably even more in unknown private collections. A complete list will be published in my forthcoming monograph on the artist.

Most of the pastels are owned by Michael and Anna Ancher’s House in Skagen, Skagens Museum and Den Hirschsprungske Samling, others by Statens Museum for Kunst and the art museums in Odense and Sorø. I would like to thank my museum colleagues for their ready help and their interest in the project, especially the art historian, Inge Mejer Anton-

sen, a member of the board of the Helga Ancher Foundation, and the art historian Suzanne Ludvigsen. Finally, I have encountered great kindness on the part of the owners of private collections, who have permitted me to examine their pastels and made them available for this book. I have also received practical help and great interest from the Museumsbygningens Kunstauktioner (now Lauritz.com) and Bruun Rasmussen in Copenhagen. I am deeply grateful to them all.

Without an expert evaluation of the technical aspects of Anna Ancher's pastels, the book would not have the same value. So I am profoundly grateful to Lone Bøgh, the conservator of paintings, for making her technical competence and experience available to me in 2003. Together, we examined more pastels than those here published and we subsequently discussed the results of our observations in relation to technical treatises from the artist's own time and more recent professional literature. Unfortunately, we had not concluded our discussions before Lone Bøgh's sudden death in spring 2005. I owe her a profound debt of gratitude for valuable and inspiring collaboration.

Lone Bøgh's desire to analyse selected canvases and grounds, however, was brought to fruition in the autumn of 2005 when I contacted the conservator, Mikkel Scharff, the head of the department of painting in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Conservation. It is thanks to him and Kathrine Segel that concrete information on tech-

nical aspects can now be published, something for which I am very grateful indeed to both of them. In the course of our work I was also given information by Marjorie Shelley, the chief conservator in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, by Lesley Carlisle of the Tate Gallery, London, and by Professor Anthea Callen. So this book is the result of a happy collaboration between the humanities and technology.

The project was started in 2003, and in 2004–05, the Ministry for Science, Technology and Development supported the compilation of the manuscript with a major grant. The project was completed in the Royal Library in 2005–06, where I am provided with facilities as a researcher. My sincere thanks go to both the Ministry and the Royal Library for enabling me to complete this project.

Without publication, the results of the project would remain unknown. So I would like to express my thanks to the Beckett Foundation, the Augustinus Foundation and Mr. Bent Fredberg, owner of Brøndums Hotel for support to the Danish edition and The American-Scandinavian Foundation for generous support for the English version, made possible by a grant from ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr., New York.

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Elisabeth Fabritius

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Pioneer in Danish Pastel Painting

Anna Ancher, famous as one of the Skagen artists and married to the painter Michael Ancher, was from her early youth recognised as an independent and talented painter. When the Skagen artists' colony was at its peak in the first half of the 1880s and painters from Scandinavia, Germany and England went there to pursue plein air painting in the strong light on the point between the two seas, Anna Ancher was already a central figure. She preferred to paint human figures, studies of women at work, children and old people, but she herself said that colour was the most important thing to her and her real inspiration.

Anna Ancher was one of the first artists in Denmark to work in pastels when this French-inspired technique gained new popularity at the end of the 19th century. The first known pastel by her was signed with her maiden name, Anna Brøndum and dated 1880, when it was presented as one of her debut paintings in Charlottenborg. After that, she regularly worked with pastels, particularly intensively in the 1880s and 1890s.

It is typical of Anna Ancher that her interest should be caught in the pastel as an artistic medium. Most of her pastels must be considered finished works. There is only a small number of examples of her using the pastel as a preparatory study for large figure paintings. It is also typical that she often chose to paint the same motif in pastel and in oil without it therefore being possible to define the pastels as preparatory works for the oil paintings; on the contrary, they must be considered independent works of art – alternative versions of

the chosen motif. This clearly reflects Anna Ancher's manner of working. There are many examples of her painting a motif over and over again. As for the story of the genesis of these works and their order in relation to each other, it is only possible to guess, for she rarely signed or dated them, and she left no other concrete information of any kind.

Her method and approach to her craft were very different indeed from those practised by her husband, Michael Ancher, a man ten years older than she. He had been taught in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in the 1870s and learned how by means of a series of sketched and painted preparatory works it was possible to arrive at a finished result that could be presented to the public. She closely followed this process in his work. She herself had no such systematic teaching, since as a woman she was not allowed to attend classes in the Academy, and it was only the exception that she later worked in this way.

She received her first guidance in Skagen from Michael Ancher and other visiting painters. She was given more professional teaching in Vilhelm Kyhn's private school of drawing and painting for ladies in Copenhagen, which she attended as a young woman. This limitation, however, was to Anna Ancher's advantage. In contrast to her husband, she had no prejudices to confront and could freely choose her methods and her sources of inspiration. And it was to the Barbizon School and the French plein air painters that, as one of the painters of *the Modern Breakthrough*, her enthusiasm was directed.

In 1879, Anna Ancher saw modern French art for the first time. She was eighteen years old and had three years training behind her. It was in the spring exhibition in Charlottenborg, the official annual exhibition of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, where Carl Jacobsen, the owner of the Carlsberg Brewery, was showing his newly acquired collection of French art. In time, this collection was to take up an entire museum, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. Jacobsen had not been buying Impressionists in Paris, but works by modern academic painters of the time such as A.-W. Bouguereau, Charles Chaplin and Raimondo Madrazo. However, there was also a painting by J.-F. Millet, *Death and the Woodcutter*, with a motif from a fable by La Fontaine, that made a powerful impression on Anna Ancher and all the younger artists.

For reasons of national politics and their influence on art, Danish artists had at that time been more or less cut off from European art movements, whose influence was viewed as harmful. In the 1878 Paris World's Fair, Denmark was represented with such old-fashioned painting that it attracted embarrassing attention and gave rise to a negative reception by the French critics. At the same time, a revolt was gathering among the young artists of the day, several of whom had defied the Academy since 1875 by going to France for further training. It was an epoch-making event that painters like P.S. Krøyer, Laurits Tuxen, Frans Schwartz, Carl Locher, Theodor Philipsen, Vilhelm Groth and Karl Madsen went to Paris in the second half of the 1870s and encountered new ideals and new techniques and not least plein air painting. Impressionism, which was relatively unknown at the time but later to be a dominant influence, was something they had not yet really discovered and certainly not understood.

The Scandinavian artists' colony at Skagen began to form in the summer of 1879. It was centred on the Brøndum Hostelry at Skagen, where Anna had grown up. Three well-trained Nordic painters, all of whom were strongly committed to plein air painting, Realism and Naturalism, chanced to be there at the same time. There were the Norwegian Fritz Thaulow, who had lived in France for several years and just then was Paul Gauguin's brother-in-law, and his friend Christian Krohg, who had shared a studio with Max Klinger in Berlin. There was also the friend of Anna and Michael Ancher's youth, Karl Madsen, the later critic and museum director, who had just completed his three years of studies in Paris. Holger Drachmann, already famous as a marine artist, a man who had travelled in England, France and Germany, was there as well, as were the Swede Wilhelm von Gegerfelt with his French pupil Émile Barau and the German artist Julius Runge. Anna was enthralled to listen to their ideas, which were expressed in a free and lively exchange of views. Mixing with so many painters familiar with European thinking and themselves modern in their ideas led in 1879–80 to Anna's intuitively embarking on an independent artistic career starting out in French art. This quickly earned her respect and interest and established her as a fully-fledged member of the artists' colony on the same footing as the male painters.

Models

Earlier models were few and far between when Anna Ancher made her first appearance as a pastel painter in 1880. So she must be considered one of the pioneers of this technique in Denmark. We do not know for certain how she learned to work with pastel. The technique does not appear to have

formed part of the teaching in Kyhn's school, which she had attended the previous years.

Among Danish artists, it was Theodor Philipsen who became famous for his pastels. The first ones known by him are from 1869 and 1874, that is to say before his first visit to Paris.¹ In his memoirs, Karl Madsen mentions a pastel cartoon that Philipsen had left behind in his studio in Paris when the painter, Carl Locher took it over, presumably in 1876.² While Anna was in Copenhagen during the winters of 1875–78 or rather later, she could well have met Philipsen, although he only spent brief periods in Denmark during these years when he was training in France. Anna's fiancé, Michael Ancher had known Philipsen since 1865. But that a pastel was still a rarity in a Danish context around 1880 emerges from a letter from Frans Schwartz to Laurits Tuxen: *Philipsen has set himself up in my studio here in Sværtegade; he is painting coloured sketches of his pictures in coloured chalk and is full of praise for it, and it actually looks quite practical.*³ Philipsen developed his skill as a pastel artist after discovering Impressionism in the 1880s. In about 1892 he acquired a pastel by Anna Ancher entitled *Maren Laughing*, which he liked very much. Unfortunately, this pastel is not known today.

1879 was the first year in which it was possible in recent times to see a work in pastel in Charlottenborg, a portrait of a lady painted by H.C. Grønvold. The following year, he exhibited another pastel, *A Girl with Apples*, which, judging by a surviving photograph, was technically superb. Grønvold is not otherwise much known as a painter. He was an excellent and inspiring teacher in the Technical School, where he was of importance to Danish artists such as Vilhelm Hammershøi and the "Funen Painters" in the 1880s. But the artists undoubtedly noticed the works that Grønvold himself exhibited, for he was known and

highly respected by everyone. He had trained in Paris in 1874–75 under the German-born Henri Lehmann, who was considered to be one of the famous J.-A.-D. Ingres' best pupils. It is possible that Grønvold learned the pastel technique in Paris.

Another early Danish pastel painter was the now forgotten Albert Hartvig. He actually specialised in pastels and made his first appearance at the same time as Anna Ancher in Charlottenborg in 1880 with works using this technique. Anna Ancher saw them, and in all probability she also met Hartvig when he visited Michael Ancher in Skagen in 1878. But it is not known whether he was already engaged in pastels at that time. None of his works are known today, neither pastels nor anything else. Hartvig later made a living as an illustrator on the periodical *Illustreret Tidende*. Outside Charlottenborg, pastels could be seen in the Copenhagen art dealers of the day, for instance in Dansk Kunsthandel.



1. In *Med solen i øjnene, en Theodor Philipsen-studie*, Randers Kunstmuseum 1992, Finn Terman Frederiksen published a small number of pastels from 1869 and 1874, nos. 855–857 in the oeuvre catalogue. I am grateful to him for supplementary information
2. *Som kunstner bliver jeg så fransk, så det er en gru. Erindringer og breve af Karl Madsen fra Frankrig 1876–79* will be published by the Royal Library, introduced by the present writer
3. Copenhagen, 9.1.1880 (The Royal Library). Pastel is often wrongly termed coloured chalk