

Torben Holck Colding: À la Carvelle

Towards the end of the 18th century, and in accordance with the democratic trends of the age, the “fast” portrait – the silhouette and profile portrait engraving – came into fashion.

The French draughtsman Jean Baptiste Carvelle travelled around Germany in 1780 and made portraits in a poor version of the miniature portraits of the 18th century, often in profile too and in silver-point, usually with a light tint. In 1783, Anton Graff learned the procedure from Carvelle and within a short period, made more than three hundred such portraits. In 1783 and 1784, Graff thus made some of the very best portraits in this technique, for Johan Ludvig Reventlow and his family, to be found in the Reventlows' Altenhof.

In around 1785, Darbes and Chodowiecki learned the technique from Graff. And Cornelius Høyer learned the technique when he met Graff in Berlin and Dresden in 1788.

G. L. Lahde, who in 1790 and the following years made a number

of portrait drawings *à la Carvelle*, must have learned the technique from Høyer when the latter returned home from his travels abroad. There is quite obviously a difference when it comes to talent in the portrait drawings by the two artists, but there is also a difference in technique. Lahde is more restrained in his use of the silver pencil, while he makes considerable use of lead, especially in shadows and background.

Some fifty portrait drawings executed in a technique akin to Carvelle's were made by Thorvaldsen. Thorvaldsen too was restrained in his use of the silver pencil. The earliest known work is a self-portrait from 1794. The others can be dated to 1795 and 1795-96. There can be no doubt that Thorvaldsen learned the technique from Lahde, a friend of his youth. Thorvaldsen's drawings can be divided into two groups: drawings of friends, largely portraits of the West family, and drawings of his fellow passengers on the frigate *Thetis* on his voyage to Italy in 1796.

In 1796, after a long stay in Italy, Christian Horneman came to Berlin, where he learned to draw *à la Carvelle*, probably from Chodowiecki. From Vienna, where he executed numerous excellent portraits in this style, Horneman seems to have travelled via Schleswig to Copenhagen in 1803, since Altenhof has four drawings by Horneman done in silverpoint, a continuation of the series of portraits Graff had made in 1783.