

Emma Salling: The Melancholy Hero

This article concerns a painting by Andreas Ludvig Koop in the collection belonging to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. It represents Thor after his victory over the frost giants in Utgard, listening to the *Volva's* omen concerning Ragnarok (Twilight of the Gods) and the coming of a new world. The motif is taken from the Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger's poem "The Volva's Prophecy" in his collection *The Gods of the North*, published in 1819. The painting, which was completed in Rome in 1823 and exhibited in Copenhagen in 1824, is based on Koop's painted sketch (known solely by way of an engraving by S. H. Petersen), which won 2nd Prize in 1822 in a draft competition for art works with themes taken from Norse mythology. The competition was made public on 19 May, 1821, shortly before Koop's departure from Copenhagen, at a time when a heated debate was going on about the use of Norse mythology in pictorial art. The composition in the Academy's painting is largely the same as that of the prize entry from 1822, but the great Roman painting shows Thor as a naked Herculesfigure as opposed to the theatrical, fully-clothed figure of the sketch. It is possible that Oehlenschläger's description of the listening, melancholy hero following the combat also forms the basis of H. E. Freund's reception piece for the Academy: the sitting Thor from 1829. It is also pointed out that works by Bengt Fogelberg, who joined the Scandinavian artist colony in Rome in 1821, may have had an influence on Koop and Freund, whose reception pieces characterize Thor by way of twelve stars in his hairband, just as in Fogelberg's sketch from 1818 Thor is crowned with a wreath bearing twelve stars in accordance with the iconography of P. H. Ling's Norse mythology.