

Hans Nikolaj Hansen, Firenze (Allegory of the City of Florence), 1897, drypoint etching on tinted paper, 275 x 226 mm (image = plate), 525 x 396 mm (sheet), inscribed below „UD AFDIN LILJES BAGER SOMSMYKKER DIN MUREDE KRONE / HELE DENS MONNINGS SKAT FLORENTS, GAVMILDT DU / HER HAR, UDI GESTALT AF EN GHIRLANDAJOS MATRONE / ÆDELBAAREN OG STOLT, TIL TAK JEG TEGNET DIG AF.“ as well as the artist's mark (coat of arms) and the year „97“ and handwritten in pencil on the back „Hans Nicolaj Hansen (1853-1923) / ,Firenze““. Condition: very good, with only a few creases along the edges of the page, which are hidden by the passepartout.

The print was provided – in museum quality – with a new passe-partout (60 x 45 cm) of the company HALBE. A fitting frame – in museum quality – with museum glass (anti-reflective, very high UV protection, anti-static, abrasion resistant) of the company HALBE can be provided on request.

Hans Nikolaj Hansen (Copenhagen 1853 – 1923 Frederiksberg) was a prominent Danish painter and draftsman, initially working in the Realist style and later primarily in Symbolism; he was particularly noted for his highly imaginative compositions.

Born the son of a wine merchant, he studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from 1872 to 1876 and subsequently trained under Léon Bonnat in Paris from 1877 to 1879. Records indicate that he spent an extended period in Rome in the early 1880s. He subsequently served as an assistant engraver to the renowned Danish painter Carl Bloch (1834–1890) in 1885–86. During his time in Paris with the French painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898) in 1890–91, he came into contact with Symbolism, which had a formative influence on the style of his later work. Italy, particularly Florence, also had the greatest influence on his artistic expression around the turn of the century; he traveled there in 1895 on the Ancker Scholarship and returned several times thereafter. There he also encountered Rembrandt's etchings, which would have a lasting effect on his art.

From 1883 to 1900, Hansen was married to Ida Rasmussen, and subsequently to Ella Ruben, a daughter of State Councilor Bernhard Ruben. The couple moved to the Christinelund estate in Præstø. Hansen became a member of the Academy's plenary assembly in 1910—the same year he received the Eckersberg Medal for his etchings—and joined the Academy Council in 1915; he was elected chairman of the Society of Graphic Artists in 1909. In 1916, he was knighted in the Order of the Dannebrog. He is buried in the Asminderød Cemetery. His works can be found, for example, in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

This exceptional print from Hansen's Florentine period depicts a portrait-like allegory of the city of Florence and was titled "Firenze" both in the obituary and in various auctions of additional prints, such as in the Danish magazine *Samlere* (1.1924). Inspired by profile portraits of the Italian Renaissance, the city of Florence appears as a female personification of striking beauty—a tradition of representation dating back to the Trecento. Crowned with a city wall as a diadem and a laurel wreath—symbols of defensibility, but also of its outstanding status as a city of the arts—and dressed in a precious robe with floral patterns, she radiates calm and kindness. She is further distinguished by a halo of light that partially overlays the other design elements and is otherwise typically reserved for saints.

The fact that this can only be an allegory of the city of Florence is further made clear by the other motifs in the image. To the left and right of the personification stands the Marzocco on a pedestal. In heraldry, this is a lion that holds the coat of arms of Florence as a shield-bearer with its right paw in front of its body. The coat of arms depicts the Florentine lily. The depiction is based on a famous sculpture created around 1416 by Donatello (1386–1466). In the center, between the two figures, the Palazzo Vecchio in Piazza della Signoria can be seen, and to the left, the Florence Cathedral with its bell tower stands before the Tuscan hills in the background. The inscription below the depiction roughly translates to: “Let your lilies bloom, which adorn your stone crown / All the abundance of Florence, you generous giver / Here, in the form of a matron with garlands / Noble and proud, I have drawn you in gratitude.”

The drypoint etching appears to be connected to a painting by Hansen in a Berlin exhibition in 1898/99, about which Georg Malkowsky wrote in the journal *Deutsche Kunst*: “Hans Nicolai Hansen—Copenhagen has exhibited a peculiar fantasy titled ‘Florence.’ To the painter, working by lamplight, the beautiful city appears as a visionary, iridescent Renaissance female figure, shimmering like a serpentine dancer illuminated through colored glass; lily stems bloom around her; in her hand she holds the lily of the Medici. Surrounding the oil painting is a collection of Hansen’s etchings, in which the widest range of tonal values—from the coldest, brightest light to the warmest depths—are expressed with masterful technique.”

In general, Hans Nicolaj Hansen was more highly regarded as an engraver and draftsman than as a painter. For example, the magazine *International Studio* (46.1912) wrote the following about his famous portrait of his mother: “Hans Nikolaj Hansen’s portrait of his mother is done with much love and sincerity and with all the authority of this highly gifted artist, whose other work, both with the needle and the pen, has been previously reproduced in these pages. The plastic contingencies are ably rendered, and there is both depth and atmosphere in the room.” Hansen is one of the most outstanding practitioners of this technique within the Symbolist art movement. The rare print offered here is an impressive example of this.