

Hans Nikolaj Hansen, *Florentine Singer*, 1898, drypoint etching on tinted paper, mounted on paper, 256 x 210 mm (image), 278 x 228 mm (plate), 557 x 358 mm (sheet), inscribed in the image „HNH“ as well as the artist's mark (coat of arms) and the year „98“. Inscribed in ink on the bottom sheet of paper „Hans Nicolaj Hansen 15/5 1853.“ and „‘Florentinsk Sanger 1898.’“ as well as diverse auctions numbers. Condition: very good, with only a few small spots 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.

The exceptional print offered here, created during Hansen's stay in Florence in the winter of 1896, is extremely rare. In the 1931 book *Hans Nikolaj Hansen og Hans Raderinger*, the etchings from this period are counted among the finest Hansen ever produced and are praised for their composition and grace. The print *Florentine Singer* is listed in the book as Opus 36 and is reproduced on p. 71. The motif of the work is interesting, as it is not one of the usual depictions of Florence. Dominating the foreground of the image is a singer dressed in a magnificent Renaissance robe, sitting on a gargoyle with a lute in his hands. However, he has not opened his mouth to sing; instead, he fixes the viewer with an intense gaze. As in a dreamlike vision, the grotesque figure of the gargoyle appears, its mouth open in a scream. In the background, beneath a starry night sky, a city wall with towers is visible, within which cypress trees and a multitude of family towers can be seen.

The fact that this is not San Gimignano—as is sometimes mistakenly stated in descriptions—is made clear simply by the large river separating the singer from the depiction of the city; San Gimignano is situated on a hill, with no large river flowing around it. Rather, this depicts an image of Florence that remained valid well into the Renaissance, for at that time there were a multitude of family towers in the city (approx. 200), which were demolished or integrated into palaces over the course of the following centuries. The district beyond the Arno, known as Oltrarno—which is likely visible here—had a whole series of them. One can only speculate about the meaning of these assembled motifs. Is the screaming gargoyle, for example, an ironic commentary on the singer's musical art? What is certain, however, is that this is an outstanding print of extraordinary imagination in the technique of drypoint etching.

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.