

# ELISABETH MARIA ANNA (LISINSKA) JERICHAU BAUMANN

JOLIBORD (NEAR WARSAW) POLAND, 1819 – COPENHAGEN 1881

*Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann was a talented, enterprising, and determined woman whose life was unusual for her time. At the age of nineteen she began her training at Düsseldorf, which at that time was one of the most important art centers in Europe, especially in the study of genre and history painting. She also began exhibiting there and in 1844 experienced her artistic breakthrough. She was thus well advanced in her career when, during a visit to Rome the following year, she met the Danish sculptor Jens Adolf Jerichau (1816–1883). He was one of the outstanding talents of the period and for a short time had worked with the world-famous Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) before Thorvaldsen left Rome in 1838. The couple married and moved to Copenhagen in 1849, where Jens Adolf became a professor in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.*

*To her amazement, Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann discovered that she was not given a positive reception by her fellow artists there. These were the most intense years of national patriotism during the first Schleswig war, and she encountered a powerful and concerted opposition in the art world, whose purpose was to protect the ideals of the Danish Golden Age and the heritage from C. W. Eckersberg. Even as late as about 1880, the most important subject of discussion in Danish artistic life was the relationship to other countries, i.e., the fear of influence, especially from Germany and France. However, Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann refused to be intimidated and tried to find subjects that she believed would speak to the Danish public. The allegorical *Danmark, 1851* (Denmark), *Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, did not bring her the recognition she deserved, although the painting quickly became known and reproduced. She had greater success with portraits of important personalities of the time. Here her portrayals of the politician *Orla Lehmann, 1848* (*The Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle*) and *Hans Christian Andersen* must be given special mention. She also repeatedly painted portraits of *Christian IX's Queen Louise (1817–1898)*, herself a painter, and her daughters (*The Amalienborg Museum*). It is interesting to note that these ladies corresponded with her.*

*Because of the “European” quality of her work, Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann remained a controversial figure in Danish art. Not until 1865 was one of her paintings, *En såret dansk kriger* (A Wounded Danish Warrior), purchased by *Statens Museum for Kunst*. It remained the only one. Her painting continued to be seen as alien and her personal behavior did not conform to the strict norms of bourgeois society as to what was fitting for a woman. She was not reserved, patient, or humble but keen to continue her career—although she gave birth to nine children! Several developed into talented painters, while others turned out to be mentally unstable. She has several descendants alive today who are artists. A grandson, *J. A. Jerichau (1891–1916)*, was among the most talented of Danish modernist painters.*

Even while Jens Adolf was director of the Royal Danish Academy from 1857–1863, she chose to pursue her own career and retained her connections with artists and intellectuals abroad, where she continued to exhibit and have success in selling her pictures. Baumann was captivated by an interest in Asia that had originated at the beginning of the 19th century and was especially pursued by French artists. Accompanied by her sons, she traveled abroad, the first time in the 1860s. As a woman, she could gain access to harems and the private lives of the Asian women she visited and could therefore exhibit authentic portrayals of this exotic world; she also brought costumes and other paraphernalia home. These motifs often betray a sensualism that may well have been one of the 19th century's taboo subjects but which can also be seen in her husband's sculpture, which frequently has an erotic subject. The leading circles in Danish artistic life tried to keep her out of sight, and indeed her paintings have until recently been kept in museum storerooms.

She has herself given an account of her difficulties and experiences in the books *Ungdoms-erindringer* (Youthful Memories) and *Brogede rejsebilleder, Copenhagen 1881* (Motley Travel Pictures).

E. F.

LITERATURE: Sigurd Müller, *Nyere dansk Malerkunst*, Copenhagen 1884; N. Bøgh, *E. Jerichau Baumann*, Copenhagen 1886; Peter Nørgaard Larsen, *Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann*, Øregaard Museum 1996; Peter Nørgaard Larsen in *Weilbach*, vol. 4, Copenhagen 1996.