

JOEL JOHN BALLIN

VEJLE 1822 – COPENHAGEN 1885

A good deal of information is available about the painter and engraver Joel John Ballin. He was born in the Jutland town of Vejle in 1822, the son of a Jewish candle maker, and died in Copenhagen in 1885. At the age of eleven he went to Copenhagen, apprenticed as an artisan painter. At the same time he attended classes in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts until 1844, the last two years in the life school with J. L. Lund and later C. W. Eckersberg as his teachers.

At the age of nineteen, Joel Ballin exhibited for the first time at Charlottenborg with his painting The Procession in the Synagogue at the Feast of Tabernacles (Processionen i Synagogen ved Løvsalsfesten), which today belongs to the Jewish community of Denmark. Very few other paintings are known by this artist, who nevertheless left a large graphic oeuvre of high quality.

It cannot have been long after the summer course with Eckersberg that Ballin decided to give up figure painting and instead seek a career as a chemotypist. In 1846 he went to Leipzig for further training as a graphic artist and to take part in developing the chemotype method along with its inventor, Danish photographer C. Piil.

Two years later, Joel Ballin went to Paris, where he was to spend the next twenty-two years. By means of various scholarships and grants from home, he was able to train himself further in the French capital as an engraver and copperplate artist while attending classes in painting in the École des Beaux-Arts from 1849 to 1851.

He gradually gained a considerable reputation, first as a copperplate artist working mainly on French paintings and portrait photographs and then with other graphic techniques. From 1858 he began to work with a “manière noire,” which led him on to a “manière mixte,” a mixture of etching, burin, and knurling which best re-created the textural effect of a painting. This was a method he also used for various reproductions of the works of Danish artists that were published by Kunstforeningen in Copenhagen.

In September 1870, Joel Ballin moved to London with his family on account of the troubles resulting from the Franco-Prussian War. Thirteen years later he returned to Copenhagen, where he remained until his death two years later.

From 1841 until 1882, though interspersed with a few breaks of a several years, he showed works in the Charlottenborg exhibitions. Ballin was awarded a gold medal in the Paris Salon in 1861; the following year he was appointed a Knight of the Order of Dannebrog. In March 1877 he was made a member of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He participated in the Paris World Fair in 1878.

S.L.

LITERATURE: Lise Svanholm in Weilbach, vol. I, Copenhagen 1994.