



Inv. no. B 323

PETER HANSEN (1868–1928)
MANURE GATHERERS, 1904
OIL ON CANVAS

100 X 141.3 CM

In early 1903, Peter Hansen received the Stoltenberg Grant, which enabled him to embark on his second trip to Italy. He departed in August of that year. The sojourn, which lasted for a couple of years, saw the creation of works that would be of great significance for the artist himself and for the Danish art scene as such.

Peter Hansen's time in Italy included stays in Naples and in the Italian mountain village of Civita d'Antino, where he visited his friend and former teacher at the Artists' Independent Study Schools in Copenhagen, the painter Kristian Zahrtmann. Peter Hansen also stopped in Pompeii, where he began working on the painting *Manure Gatherers* in April 1904.¹ The work went against the grain of the established Danish Golden Age tradition with its romantic notions about a sun-kissed Italy where life was cheerful and the people carefree.

Like the other Funen Painters, Peter Hansen strove to find artistic subject matter taken directly from everyday life around him. These subjects were to be depicted with expressive realism while exploring the painterly possibilities offered by the image, both in terms of composition, space, light and colour. All this came together in *Manure Gatherers*, where Peter Hansen – employing a light palette and rapid brushstrokes to depict his chosen subject of horse-drawn carriages in a road and boys collecting manure in baskets – established a realistic

narrative about life in sunny Pompeii in the year 1904.

What Peter Hansen had not foreseen was that he and his *Manure Gatherers* would, a few years later, become central focal points in a fierce discussion on art theory and art politics conducted in the pages of the Danish newspaper Politiken in 1907 – the so-called ‘Peasant Painter Feud’. It started with a letter to the editor written by the painter Gudmund Hentze, who disparagingly called the Funen Painters ‘peasant painters’ due to their down-to-earth, everyday realism and naturalistic values. According to Hentze, subjects such as Peter Hansen’s manure-gathering boys were not suitable in the realm of art. The Funen Painters’ defence was conveyed by the painter and art critic Karl Madsen and the author Johannes V. Jensen, both of whom had strong ties to the group. The ‘feud’ lasted for a few months and ended with a strengthened position for the Funen Painters on the Danish art scene.²

¹ On 4 January 1904, Peter Hansen wrote to Theodor Philipsen: ‘... for my part, I am about to embark on a scene from the main road to Scafatti with manure-gathering boys and carriages. I have painted five studies, but they all ended up looking like Amager, so I’ll have to do yet another.’ See Grete Zahle: *Peter Hansen. Hans liv og arbejde*, Faaborg Museum, Faaborg 1992, p. 60.

² Susanne Thestrup Truelsen, Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, Lise Harbeck (eds.): *Kampen om kunsten. Fynboerne. Ordrupgaard and Faaborg Museum, Charlottenlund 2011*, pp. 73–77.

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V. Winkel & Magnussen (ed.): *Kunst i privat eje*, vol. 1, København 1944, fig. 83, pp. 105, 107;

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