



Inv. no. B 454

J.F. WILLUMSEN (1863-1958)
THE POTTER VASE, 1900
EARTHENWARE, P. IPSENS ENKE TERRACOTTAFABRIK

H: 72; DIAM (TOP) 54 CM

J.F. Willumsen created *The Potter Vase* for P. Ipsens Enke Terracottafabrik with a view to exhibiting it at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris that same year. Although it did not win the gold medal and had little impact on the company, Willumsen, or the overall development of Danish ceramics at the time, it is now considered a ceramic masterpiece within the realm of Danish art.

The most distinctive feature of *The Potter Vase* is first and foremost the technique, which was developed by Willumsen and Bertel Ipsen in 1899 in connection with plans to restore Jørgen Sonne's frieze at Thorvaldsens Museum.¹ The vase is made of unglazed earthenware decorated with different coloured slips in five bands. Willumsen did not turn the vase himself but drew a design to which the chief thrower at P. Ipsens Enke, Hans Lund, referred while working.²

The vase was named after the eye-catching frieze that adorns its upper

part. Here, a number of different scenes are played out, all bearing witness to the working processes typical of a pottery company like P. Ipsens Enke in the year 1900: A lump of clay is brought to a potter, who uses it to turn a vase, which is then decorated by an artist. Next, we see a range of ceramic objects being carried to the kiln, which is overseen by the kiln master. Finally, a vase of classical outline is presented to a customer.

Close inspection reveals that there are not just great similarities between *The Potter Vase* and the vase being turned and decorated in the frieze depiction. A similar kinship can be found between the potter depicted and Hans Lund, as well as between the artist decorating the vase and Willumsen himself. In addition, the vase being presented to the customer in the frieze is of a type reminiscent of the antique style used in some of P. Ipsens Enke's creations.

However, prior to the Exposition Universelle the task of making *The Potter Vase* had proven more difficult than expected. There were problems with the yellow colour, which was prone to crazing when fired.³ As a result, two versions of *The Potter Vase* were created, identical except for the colour of the upper and middle band. The first version of the vase was yellow, had cracks and was not exhibited. The second version was blue, intact and was sent to Paris. It is the former version, the one corresponding to Willumsen's original design, that is now seen in The David Collection.

¹ *The test results proved unsatisfactory, which meant that the restoration was not undertaken until 1952–1959 by Axel Salto. See Kathrine Jørgensen and Bente Holst: Et keramisk Eventyr. P. Ipsens Enke Kgl. Hof Terracottafabrik 1843-1955, Copenhagen 2001, pp. 79-81.*

² *J.F. Willumsen, Design for the Potter Vase, Designmuseum Danmark, inv.no. KIM no. 27.*

³ *Charles Been: 'Pottmagervasen' in Tidsskrift for Industri, Copenhagen 1900, pp. 131–132.*

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