



Inv. no. B 457

JENS FERDINAND WILLUMSEN (1863–1958)
A MOUNTAIN CLIMBER, 1902
WATERCOLOR ON PAPER

48 X 40 CM

In the spring of 1902, J.F. Willumsen went on a hike in the Pyrenees in the company of his new, great love and later wife, the sculptor Edith Wessel (1875–1963). They travelled together to the Swiss Alps during the summer, where Willumsen did a series of watercolours of his fiancée sitting, walking and standing, with or without a walking stick, in various alpine landscapes. The watercolours served as sketches for his large oil painting, *A Mountain Climber* (1904), a masterpiece in Danish art.¹

Several of these watercolours differ however greatly from the scene and expression found in the final painting, including this example in The David Collection. Willumsen has depicted Edith Wessel seated, resting in the grass on a hillside. The upward movement of nature is further enhanced by the mountains seen in the background. A striking feature of the scene is Edith Wessel's feminine appearance, emphasised by the mermaid-like pose, the limp wrist and the hair

arranged underneath the hat. Willumsen has not painted her face and left hand, accentuating that this is a step on the road towards determining the final subject.²

Overall, *A Mountain Climber* portrays a harmonious relationship between woman and nature, a motif which may be seen in light of the cultivation of the body and freedom prevalent in the vitalistic movement in Danish art from 1890 to 1940. Furthermore, it was also important for Willumsen to portray the woman who so enraptured him at the time. In 1903, Willumsen married Edith Wessel, who became a central focal point in his life and art until their relationship came to an end in 1928.

¹ *In the final oil painting, the mountaineer strikes a completely different pose. Her clothes and hairstyle are also different compared to this sketch.*

² *J.F. Willumsen created the oil painting *A Mountain Climber* for Hagemanns Kollegium in Copenhagen 1904. A later version, painted in 1912, belongs to The National Gallery of Denmark, inv.no. KMS3413.*

Published in:

Erik Zahle: "Malerisamlingens vækst" in *C.L. Davids Samling, Tredje del*, København 1958, pp. 127, 160-161;

C.L. David: *C.L. Davids Samling*, København 1960, p. 23;

Roald Nasgaard: *Willumsen and symbolist art 1888-1910*, Diss. New York University 1973, printed 1996, fig. 149, p. 78;

Leila Krogh in Kjeld von Folsach and Nana Lund (eds.): *Dansk kunst i Davids Samling – fra Philipsen til Saxbo*, København 1995, cat. 20, pp. 80-81;

Henrik Wivel: *Jeg er en anden: en biografi om J.F. Willumsen*, København 2024, Vol. 1, 1863-1914, fig. 157, p. 215;