



Inv. no. B 358

CHRISTEN KØBKE  
'DAY' (AFTER BERTEL THORVALDSEN'S RELIEF), 1834–1835  
OIL ON CANVAS

DIAMETER: 76.5 CM

In the mid-1830s, Christen Købke executed the circular painting *Day* after one of the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen's (1770-1844) most popular reliefs of the same name.<sup>1</sup> The scene has the floating Hemera, a personification of day in Greek mythology, as its main figure. While scattering flowers, she looks back over her shoulder and directs her gaze at a small, winged and torch-carrying boy sitting on her back. He symbolises light and the sun.

In mythology, *Day* (Hemera) is often referred to as the opposite of *Night* (Nyx). Thorvaldsen had this in mind, too as he concurrently with the *Day* relief created its counterpart, the relief *Night*.<sup>2</sup> Being opposites, they symbolise the two halves of the day. Together they represent the whole. They can also be seen as opposites in terms of light versus dark, awakening versus sleep, life versus death. Thorvaldsen was by no means the first artist to address the two goddesses and the symbolism associated with them, but in his version

the motifs appear distinctly well-thought-out and well-executed, infused with the harmony and balance that was his particular hallmark.<sup>3</sup>

Købke's two paintings were originally part of the decoration of his parents' dining room in their home in Blegdammen in Copenhagen, where the artist also lived with his family. On the opposite end wall of the dining room were two large landscape paintings based on Købke's small paintings 20/1969 and 31/2014.

Købke's painting *Night*, the counterpart to *Day*, is also part of The David Collection (B 359).

<sup>1</sup> Kasper Monrad: *Hverdagsbilleder. Dansk Guldalder – kunstnerne og deres vilkår*, Copenhagen 1989, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Bertel Thorvaldsen, *Night, 1815*, Thorvaldsens Museum, cat. no. A901.

<sup>3</sup> Bertel Thorvaldsen, *Day, 1815*, Thorvaldsens Museum, cat. no. A902.

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