

(1818 - 1885)

Wilhelm Camphausen

Whether contemporary scenes or those from the Thirty Years' War – Wilhelm Camphausen's works had a determining influence on the faithfully narrating style of history painting.

Camphausen is one of the leading representatives of nineteenth-century battle painting. His contemporaries were fascinated by the realistic details of his compelling compositions, which have not lost any of their power and intensity today.

Born in 1818 in Düsseldorf, Camphausen was first introduced to the art of drawing and painting by Alfred Rethel and Carl Friedrich Lessing. As of 1834 he attended the Düsseldorf Academy, being a student of Wilhelm von Schadow's master class from 1843-1849.

During his studies he made several trips to the major German centres of art, to the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern Italy.

Initially applying himself to literary subjects from works by Wilhelm Hauff, Ludwig Uhland and his friend Carl Immermann, Camphausen soon discovered his aptitude for history painting; seventeenth-century English and German history supplying his first motifs. Owing to the four years he spent as war reporter in military service during his studies, Camphausen was permanently drawn to military and battle scenes. As his actual experiences led to the realistic details in his paintings, he

also developed a particular knack for dramatically composed riding scenes. By 1849 the fame of this way of painting had spread and he sold a work all the way to America.

He decisively influenced a way of portrait painting that depicts princes (or other members of the aristocracy) as a heroic figure to the fore while scenes of riders or battles take up the background. The monumental portrait of Frederick the Great on horseback (1871) is regarded as pinnacle of this style of painting.

Apart from history painting, Camphausen also had a gift for caricature and illustration. During his years of study he contributed etchings and illustrations to various magazines as well as to the chronicle of the Malkasten – an artists association a member of which he was in the years 1850-1853 and 1859-1885, even chairing it from 1861 to 1885.

Although Camphausen was never a professor at the Düsseldorf Academy, he still trained students at his private studio, Emil Hüntgen and Charles Meer Webb amongst them. *KS*