



**Johan Christian Dahl (1788–1857)** is widely considered to be the father of Norwegian painting. Dahl came from a humble background. His father, Claus Trulsen, was a modest seaman and fisherman, and he also transported people by rowboat around Bergen harbour and to waiting ships. Dahl took his own name from the family farm in Opdal in Eivindvik, on the outer shores of the Sognefjord.

His parents thought that he should become a priest, but he showed artistic ability at a very early age. Already when he was eleven years old he started receiving artistic training. Soon he apprenticed as a painter. One of Dahl's first teachers was the well-known artist J.F.L. Dreier.

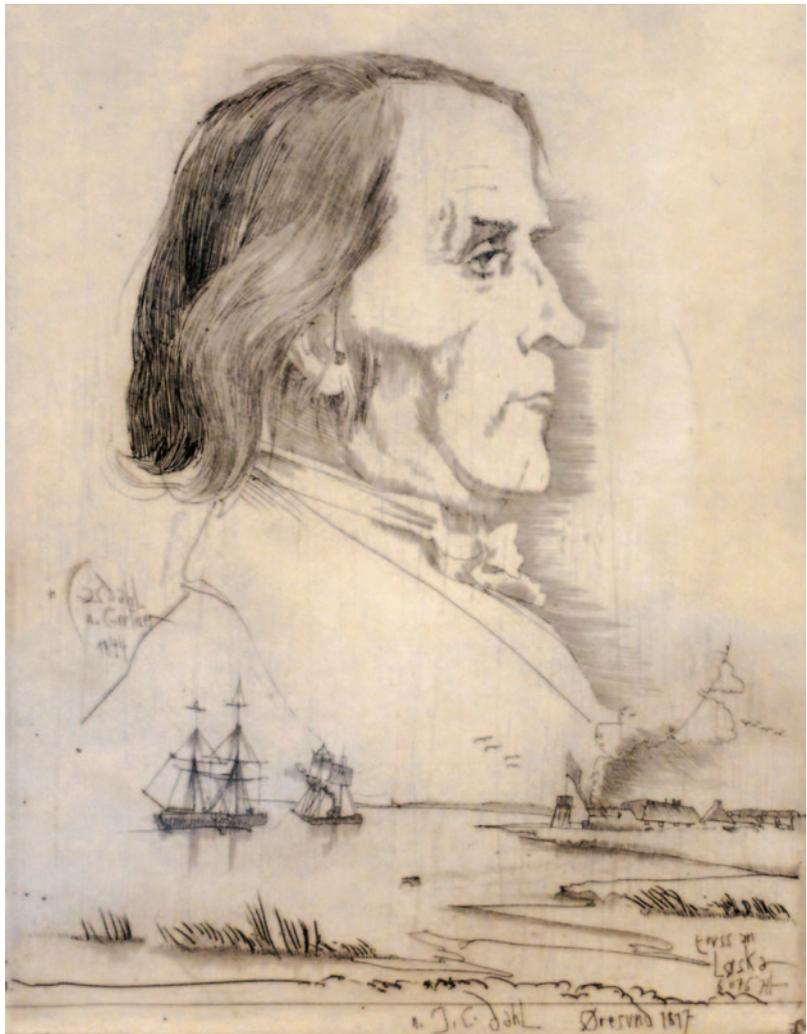
However, it was the renowned Bergener and art enthusiast Lyder Sagen, his teacher at the Latin School, who managed to collect a sufficient amount of money for Dahl to begin his art education in earnest.

Although still the largest city in Norway, Bergen had neither a museum nor an art gallery.

In 1811, at the age of 23, Dahl left Bergen. Later, in the years 1820–1821, the Danish Crown Prince invited Dahl to join him and his companions in Italy. As they travelled, the young artist painted images from Florence, Rome, Naples, Capri and other places.

Only after 15 years did Dahl return to Norway and Bergen. By then he had become a well-known artist, having sold pictures to royal families and prominent collections abroad. Dahl must have been a very industrious man, for in addition to his laborious work as a painter he was concerned about his homeland and the preservation of its cultural heritage, both in Bergen and the rest of the country. In fact, we can thank J.C. Dahl for the preservation of numerous stave churches around the country, and also for the Haakonshallen mediaeval hall in Bergen, the city that was the old capital of Norway.

Dahl also became passionately involved in the efforts to preserve Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim; he often met with resistance, but that did not stop him. On the occasion of the 200 year anniversary of Johan Christian Dahl's birth, former Director Knut Berg of the National Gallery wrote: "Not only is Dahl one of the greatest artistic talents our country has produced, but he is also undis-



*Tegning av Horst Janssen (1929–1995) «J.C Dahl Øresund 1847»*

putedly the single artist who has had the greatest importance for the development of our national artistic identity."

Ironically, Dahl only returned to Norway five times during his stay abroad; in 1826, 1834, 1839, 1844 and again in 1850. Each time he remained for five or six months, making countless sketches to be used for future studio work – such as painters did in those days.

He would travel over the mountains from Christiania to Bergen by various routes, either by foot or on horseback, or by boat one way, then by horse-and-buggy, before returning to the capital again. On his travels he met numerous artists, such as Gerhard Munthe and Thomas Fearnley. In 1844 he travelled with his son Siegwald and his student Peter Balke and visited the Munthe family's residence in Luster on the Sognefjord.

Dahl painted many images from his birthplace Bergen – for instance

the impressive approach to the city's harbour by sea, a subject that was later repeated by other painters, including Theodor Søvig in 1880. Other images range from Isdalen and Svartediket, Lysehorn and beyond Drange (1836), Bergen harbour again (1833 and 1834), Møllendal, Landås and Natland (1840), often with views over the city from a distance, as in the painting in the collection.

Also noteworthy is how much attention J.C. Dahl devotes to the wilderness and natural details, not least the rugged coast line which he often painted with dramatic shipwrecks. There is an excellent collection of Dahl's paintings in the Bergen Art Museum (KoDE4). He is also represented in the National Gallery (NG), Bergen Art Museum/KoDE (BB / BKM), Rasmus Meyer Collection (RMS), Grieg Collection, Oseana, and in a number of Royal Palaces and museums in Norway and abroad.