

Negotiating Images of Virtues in the Danish-Norwegian Enlightenment period

The aim of the project is to develop new knowledge about the transformation of the perception of history in the late 18th century by exploring official history paintings that tell the story of the Danish-Norwegian unitary state and its kings.

About the project

The project “Negotiating Images of Virtues. Changes in the *Magistra Vitae* tradition in the Danish-Norwegian Monarchy in the late Eighteenth-Century” will explore the history paintings in the Great Hall at Christiansborg Palace, painted by Nicolai Abildgaard (1778-91).

The Great Hall was the most ambitious national historic artwork of the century, a pictorial series depicting a dynasty and their achievements, set into a coherent symbolic and historical program. Central political actors were involved in its planning. It shows how the Danish-Norwegian monarchy presented itself in this period by using history, and how visual expressions of the great deeds and virtues of the kings were employed for this purpose.

The paintings will be contextualized by the projects of the Memorial Park at Jægerspris (1776-84), as well as Ove Malling's work *Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere* (1777), all projects originally initiated by the statesman and historian Ove Høegh-Guldberg. The aim of the project is to investigate the transformation of the *magistra vitae* topos in the late 18th century, as it can be seen in the chosen case.

Objectives

My research questions focus on the impact of a modern experience of temporality - progress and historical time - and of Enlightenment ideals about sensibility and civic virtue. Which historical events and virtues were considered important? The paintings no longer depict the monarchs as warrior kings, but illustrate how their virtuous deeds made the Danish-Norwegian unitary state more civilized and enlightened. In what ways can this be seen as the expression of a new perception of history? My overall hypothesis is that the traditional topos did not simply decline, but rather adapted to new ideas of temporality as well as of royalty.