

“Celebrating My Danish Heritage”

by Roger H. Nielsen



A self-portrait, floating on a Viking-themed background: celebrating Vikings as explorers, conquerors, and farmers; recognizing Denmark as the oldest monarchy with a long and colorful history, and the oldest flag in the world; and featuring simple cottages to magnificent castles.

Introduction

When Diya Nagaraj, the Curator at the Museum of Danish America, called and asked if I was interested in displaying my paintings in its galleries, I was flabbergasted with delight. It was an opportunity to not only display my talents as an artist, but to express my pride in my Danish heritage.

I grew up as a middle-class American, but also everything Danish. Our South Minneapolis house was filled with Danish art and artifacts. When my folks entertained, which they did often, they served primarily Danish cuisine on Royal Copenhagen porcelain with Georg Jensen silverware. Most of their friends were Danish; they were active in the Danish-American community and organizations. We attended the Danish American Lutheran Church, where I was baptized and confirmed. Consequently, a lot of my friends growing up were also of Danish descent.

I remember with fondness the wonderful Danish parties that my parents had or attended. They were joyful events, usually with bountiful food and libation. There was an abundance of toasts with aquavit and beer, which, of course, encouraged more toasts and much singing. Kringle and coffee were served at the end to allow time for the joy of the evening to mellow before heading home.

My dad's favorite singer was Lauritz Melchior, the Danish opera singer, who we watched frequently on TV. I can still hear, "If I could tell you of my devotion ...", the theme song for that show, in my head as I write. Oh, we had our favorite Danish actors as well: one was Jean Hersholt, who was best known as Dr. Christian in the popular radio series (1937-1954) and several movies of the same name. Each year, a humanitarian award named for him is given out at the Academy Awards ceremony.

In those days we walked to school and came home for lunch. While we ate, my mother would read to my brothers and me, usually about Danish subjects and quite often, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. We knew "The Emperor's New Clothes," "The Little Match Girl" and many others by heart. When the movie, *The Hans Christian Andersen Story*, starring Danny Kaye, a Danish actor, came out, I sat in the theater watching it with bursts of pride.

I was well-versed in Danish history and mythology. In school, when we were given an assignment, I usually chose a topic relating to Denmark, something I could talk about for hours without hesitation.

My father, one of 15 siblings born to an aristocratic, entrepreneurial farmer, came to America at the age of 16. With only a small footlocker filled with meager belongings, he started his journey in pursuit of the "American Dream." Times were tough at first, but the work ethic his father installed in him allowed him to persevere. Though he was trained as a carpenter, he took any job that was available in order to survive and eventually succeed. He ended up in Minneapolis working at his trade for his future father-in-law, also a Danish immigrant. That's how he met my mother, who became his best friend and helped him overcome a speech impediment and learn English, as she was bilingual.

My mother was the one who really nurtured my interest in art. As a child, I was always drawing. When I stayed at the home of friends or relatives, she would say, "If Roger gets restless or bored, just give him a pencil and paper, and he'll be happy." She encouraged me to take after-school and weekend art classes all through my teens. My dad would have preferred that I pursue one of the trades—not because he didn't admire my artistic abilities, but because he didn't realize that art could be a career. But Mom was fully supportive and constantly encouraged me. Even later, when I was living in art-student poverty while attending school in Chicago, she would send me small amounts of money with her weekly letters to help me survive and continue.

While on the subject of art school, I must admit that I was extremely fortunate to ever be accepted in such a prestigious school. The Art Institute of Chicago, at the time, was rated number two in the country after the Pratt Institute in New York City. My grades in high school were just barely acceptable for admittance, but my portfolio

put me over the top. At that time, most of the instructors were nationally recognized artists, rather than people with teaching degrees, as schools are today. The emphasis was on draftsmanship and learning the basics in color and design, rather than what's considered "creativity" and pushing the limit on cutting-edge concepts, which probably explains why I consider myself more of a craftsman than a conceptual artist.

I think most classically trained artists, if they so desired, could produce successful abstract works, but, in my opinion, very few abstract or conceptual artists, who lack the basics, could produce "realism" with any success. As a case in point, I have a friend who teaches in a very respectable art school and produces very compelling abstracts, but doesn't have the ability to draw anything that resembles a chosen subject or object with accuracy or skill. It's interesting that this person critiques my art as "merely sentimental illustrations," which, to my way of thinking, sounds very complimentary and puts me in good company of previous masters, who, after all, were basically illustrators of their time. One of my favorite American artists, Winslow Homer, developed his "chops" as an illustrator for Harper's Magazine.

To a large extent, my father was more right than I realized. Once done with school and a short stint in the Navy Reserves, I found myself back in Minneapolis with a wife and a baby on the way. The possibilities of making it as an artist with my new responsibilities looked pretty slim. Rather than go in the direction of my father in the building trades, I went to work for a family friend (another Dane), who was expanding his picture framing business and needed help. It was an apprenticeship that served me well. I helped him launch what is now a Warren Buffet-owned company, and he taught me a trade at which I became quite good and allowed me to enhance world-class paintings with my frames.

I eventually launched my own company, Master Framers, that became nationally known for designing and manufacturing fine, handcrafted, and gilded frames for museums and high-end collectors. This gave me a certain amount of "expert" status that allowed me to share my techniques with my peers by giving seminars and workshops at national trade shows and conventions.

I'm extremely grateful for the work ethic that my father drilled into my brothers and me, as his father did to him. "Work is a Blessing" became a credo that we all lived by. Those of my father's siblings who came to the U.S. have all achieved the "American Dream" through hard work and dedication. My parents were successful building contractors and several of his brothers became wealthy restaurateurs. The next generation has built on that. I have a brother who has been very successful in business, and his sons are taking it to another level. Another brother was a musician with records on the charts, and so it goes. All from the "Work is a Blessing" credo drilled into us so long ago.

During my middle decades, making art took a back seat to raising a family and building a business. I had a tiny studio and occasionally made a painting, but the studio was primarily for doing art restoration—something I still do part-time. It wasn't until I retired that I could rekindle my original dream of creating art. *Celebrating My Heritage* is really a collection of paintings illustrating the pride and love I have for my relatives, both past and present. Viewers will see a variety of family portraits referenced from old, faded pictures, as well as from life and current photos. I have scenes of my father's birth farm and landscapes from photos I've taken on my trips to Denmark. I've also paid tribute to the Skagen Painters and the Golden Age of Danish Painting.

My style of painting varies from loose and sketchy to more refined and detailed. I approach each painting as a new challenge, and I continue to grow with each venture.

I hope readers will enjoy viewing my exhibition featured at the Museum of Danish America in Elk Horn, Iowa, June 25 - November 4, 2022. To see more of my artwork, visit my website www.rogerhnielsen.com and like me on Facebook. Thank you, Roger H. Nielsen, 1940-whenever



“Danish American Gothic” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

Portrait of my maternal grandparents, Angel and Marie Iversen, painted from life in 1961 while I was a student at the Art Institute of Chicago. At the time, Angel was being treated for cancer of the adenoids, so his face is somewhat distorted. They were very involved in the Minneapolis Danish community, helping found Danebo, a retirement home for Danish immigrants (now the Danish American Center), and were active members of the Danish Brotherhood and Sisterhood. Both were very hardy people who overcame obstacles without asking for much help.

Grandpa arrived in the U.S. sick with tuberculosis, but still had to work to survive. He was a furniture maker by trade, but due to the dusty conditions in furniture shops, he did mostly carpentry work to be outside in the fresh air, and later he became a home builder and general contractor. One of the projects he was most proud of was that he installed the grand staircase and dining room buffet in the Swan Turnblad Mansion in south Minneapolis, which today is the home of the American Swedish Institute. With tuberculosis, the task was difficult as he had to rest frequently.

Grandma was the daughter of a house servant who died at a young age. Marie's father, her mother's employer, shipped Marie off to work as a nanny at the farm of Hans Nielsen, my paternal grandfather. She left Denmark for America at age 16, crossing the Atlantic in steerage class before arriving in Minneapolis. She worked as a maid for a prominent physician and his family for 11 years, until she married Angel Iversen at age 27. She remained good friends with the doctor's family for many years. The doctor and his wife were present at my grandparents' Golden Wedding celebration.



“My Paternal Grandparents” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

My grandfather, Hans Nielsen, was what many refer to as a “gentleman farmer.” His entrepreneurial nature brought him a fair amount of success. He moved his family several times, each time to bigger farm estates. I’ve been told that my grandfather once bought a royal carriage from King Frederick VIII when he ordered a new one. It must have been quite a spectacle to see the Nielsen entourage drive into Copenhagen for the theater or opera with the King’s old carriage in the lead, being pulled by Hans’s matching team with the other family carriages in tow.

Unfortunately, through speculations that didn’t pan out and the changing of the times, Hans lost it all and died penniless. After his death, my grandmother, Karen, came to America to see her sister, daughter and sons, who due to the Great Depression were living in poverty. It’s surmised that, finding her family in those conditions, she died in the U.S. with a broken heart. Family members mustered up the funds to send her body back to Denmark to be buried next to her husband. If she had survived another decade or so, she would have witnessed several of her children become very successful and achieve the “American Dream.”



“Entrance to Tørp Mill Farm” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

Tørp Mill Farm was my father’s birthplace, located near the town of Tølov on the island of Fyn. It was one of the more prominent farms in the area, and with a windmill, it ground grain for most of the neighboring farms.



“Picnic on the Farm” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

Another view of the Tørp Mill Farm, with the mill in the background, which I painted from an old sepia-toned photograph. Looking at the photo under magnification, I can see that the middle figure of the picnickers was my grandmother, Karen Nielsen. I’m guessing that the figure on the left is one of my dad’s older sisters, but can’t be sure who the others are.



“Mill Farm House from Backside” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

Painted from photos I took on a visit to Denmark in the early '90s. I was invited into the house by the owners, who had restored it to its original condition with period furnishings. At the time my father was born there, the backyard had formal gardens.



“Mill Farm School” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

This thatched-roof, post-and-beam building was across the road from Tørp Mill Farm and housed the school my father attended as a child. My Grandfather, with 15 children of his own, plus the children of his workers, hired the teacher, who also lived in a portion of the school house.

I painted this from photos I took during my visits there. At that time, it had been restored as a residence. Unfortunately, although the farm is still there and being well maintained, I’m told the school house no longer exists.



“He Was a Builder of Houses” – oil on canvas, repurposed and refinished frame

My father, Knud Nielsen, came to America at the age of 16 with nothing more than a small footlocker with everything he owned. He survived the Great Depression, learned the carpenter trade and a new language, and overcame a speech impediment to eventually become an independent building contractor, which allowed him to support his family in a relatively comfortable lifestyle.

My father passed on his work ethic to my brothers and me. “Work is a blessing,” he would say. As kids, we sort of pooh-poohed this saying, but as adults, we learned to appreciate it for what it really means. I feel that any success we’ve achieved, we owe to his example. On the outside, he tried to show his tough, manly side, but he was really a big softy. “Boys don’t cry,” he would say, but I often saw him wipe tears from his eyes while watching a sad movie on TV. As a young man, I was fortunate to have worked with him as a carpenter’s apprentice and, although I didn’t become a carpenter, it was a skill that has served me well my whole life.



“Mom” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

This little sketch of my mom, Lillian Iversen, is done from one of my favorite photos of her, taken at my brother's lake home in Georgia, right after she was diagnosed with cancer. That weekend with my three brothers, we celebrated Mom! It was the first time the four of us had been together without wives, kids, or other distractions. That weekend, Mom had us all to herself, and the four brothers re-bonded.



“Children Hiking” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

In the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, I lived on a rustic, old 80-acre farm in northwestern Wisconsin. Those were the free-spirit days of hippies and rock-and-roll. My children—Christopher, David and Elisa—are a product of those times. This is painted from a small snapshot taken as they were setting out to explore the “back-40” (acres). Although the photo was staged, it was a statement of their freedom, sense of adventure and love for nature. I’m extremely proud of how they have all developed as adults.



“Eli” – oil and metal leaf on canvas, handcrafted frame

My daughter, my baby, is now in her mid-50s and is as beautiful as she was as a child, only with much more character. In my eyes, her face reflects a life that has experienced a lot of strife, but has come through it successfully, with defiance and pride.



“Walter” – oil on birch plywood, handcrafted frame

My youngest brother, Walter, has been very successful in business. I can't help but admire his accomplishments. Aside from his financial success, he's still happily married to his wife of 55-plus years, a successful parent of two sons, and—to a certain extent—a patriarch-figure, helping any family member in need, including myself.

When I was a victim of fraud and didn't know how my business was going to survive, he immediately came to my rescue. Also, through his generosity, I experienced many wonderful hunting trips—one in particular for caribou in the tundra. He has an enormous heart, and I love him to Hell and back.



“Gary” – oil on board, handcrafted frame

No, this is not one of the Bee Gees, it's my brother Gary. He inherited my father's voice and took it to another level. While, in my opinion, his musical career didn't reach its full potential, he did have several records “hit the charts.” He was a product of the “garage band” era during the '60s in Minneapolis, and has performed with some of the top musical stars of his time, including Blues great Muddy Waters, rock legends like Greg Allman and Country icons too numerous to mention. To his credit, Gary has been inducted twice into the Mid-America Music Hall of Fame, and I am one of his greatest fans!



“He Was a Sculptor” – oil on birch plywood, handcrafted frame

My brother Irv was very instrumental in my interest in being an artist. As a child, I was always trying to draw as well as he did. He was seven years older than me, and his talents were more advanced, so it was a challenge. When he graduated from high school, he wanted to pursue a career in art but discovered that he was color-blind, so he changed course and majored in economics and minored in art sculpture. My “big brother” was a mentor throughout my life.



“His Sculpture” – composite

One of my favorite works by my brother Irving.



“Viking” – sculpture in wood

My brother Irving was a talented sculptor, and twice a year he would host what we termed “sculpture weekends” at his cabin on Long Lake in northern Wisconsin. There were usually six to eight attendees, and I was the only painter in the group. One time I decided to sculpt as well, so I went out to his woodpile, grabbed a piece of firewood, borrowed some of his tools and created this piece. It was inspired by a Native American totem pole he had. My thought was, “Why not a Viking totem?”



“Martha” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

My dad’s older sister married a farmer, Ben Petersen, and they lived near the tiny village of Withee, Wisconsin. As a child, I spent a couple of summers “on-the-farm” with her and other relatives in the area. Aunt Martha was a tough old bird who raised four kids without running water or electricity. But as busy as she was with farm and family work, she would still take time to come outside to play with me. I have fond memories of evenings, after the dishes were washed, when the family would gather around the piano and sing songs. To me, it explains the strong family ties her offspring possess.

After she died, the family sent me a photo and asked me to paint her. The photo was of such poor quality that I never got around to doing it, hoping to find a better reference. Well, I never found one, so here she is, a few decades later, from the original photo I was sent. Unfortunately, the family members who requested it are no longer with us.



“You Looking at Me?” – oil on board, repurposed antique frame

This is Karen, one of my Aunt Martha’s descendants, painted from a group photo at one of our family reunions, which we have every three years. (Yes, we’ve had scheduling challenges due to Covid.) While Karen was just paying attention to the conversations at the table, I think the expression on her face is priceless. In addition to her day job, she is a talented musical theater actress and singer.



“Bebsie and Eric” – oil on canvas, repurposed antique frame

Painted from a photo taken on my patio during one of our annual barbecues, my cousin Bebsie and her husband Eric look serious, but they were actually listening to the music of my brother Gary’s band. Bebsie’s dad, Aksel, was my dad’s older brother, who became a successful restaurateur. His son-in-law Eric followed in his footsteps, and, as president of the Illinois Restaurant Association, he was instrumental in producing the “Taste of Chicago,” a major food event.

As an art student, I worked at Aksel’s “Nielsen’s Smorgasbord” restaurant as a pantry chef, doing a lot of the “fancy” set-ups on the smorgasbord table.



“Walter’s Angels” – oil on canvas, repurposed frame

My Dad’s brother, Walter, a successful restaurateur in the Chicago area, had three daughters and one son. Uncle Walter never quite got over the loss of his son, who died in a car accident while attending college, but was very proud of his three girls that he referred to as his angels. When the “Charlie’s Angels” TV show came out, they were dubbed, “Walter’s Angels,” by most of the family.



“Gymnastics” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

My father and his brothers, who also immigrated to America, were all gymnasts, or “tumblers” as my father called it. They were part of a Danish American team with the Minneapolis and Chicago athletic clubs. This painting of Dad, Aksel & Walter (left to right) is a sketch done from an old photograph from my mother’s photo album.

The first time my parents met, Dad was 16 years old, working as a carpenter for her dad. Seeing this cute girl of 13, accompanying her father out on the job, he decided to show off by doing a handstand on the chimney of the house. Seeing this, my grandfather yelled for him to get down from there. Well, he backflipped off the chimney onto the roof and again down to the porch, then finally to the ground with a big grin on his face. Despite my grandfather being upset with him for pulling such a stunt, my mother told me that she was “duly impressed.” It was the beginning of their lifelong relationship.



“Uncle Viggo was a Hero” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

My dad’s oldest sister’s husband, Viggo, was a fisherman with a boat similar to this (minus the modern electronics), that he took out to fish every day. He became a hero when Hitler invaded Denmark and tried to round up its Jewish citizens. Without giving it a second thought, he and the other fishermen in the village of Snekkersten smuggled their Jewish neighbors across to safety in Sweden. A few years ago, I read a book called *A Night of Watching* about the underground movement to rescue Danish Jews, and the Village of Snekkersten played a large part in the story. I couldn’t have been prouder of my Danish heritage and my family’s bravery during those trying times.



“Lost in the Arctic” – oil on canvas board, repurposed stock frame

In 1909-1912, a group of Danish explorers and researchers went to Greenland on the Alabama Expedition. Two men trekked across the ice, suffered many hardships, didn't make it back in time to reach the returning ship home, resulting in waiting for a whole year for its return. These men ran out of food and had eaten their dogs, but managed to survive. One of these men was my grandfather's cousin, Iver Iversen. Two books, *Lost in the Arctic* and *Two Against the Ice*, were written based on Iver's journal of that trip. My mother met Iver in Denmark as a girl and later in Minneapolis when he was on a book tour. He gave her a photo taken of him right after his rescue. It's badly faded, but this is my attempt to capture his image from it. I've read *Lost in the Arctic* and can hardly believe the courage of these men compared to today's expeditions with high-tech equipment. On March 2, 2022, Netflix released *Against the Ice*, a movie based on these books.



“Greenlandic Eskimo with Danish Pipe” - oil on canvas, handcrafted original frame

This was painted in the early '60s. I had been impressed by an illustration of this Greenland native in a book about the Danish colony. What struck me was that he was pictured with a pipe similar to the wonderful collection of these smoking devices that my father had from the “Old Country.”



“Mother and Child: Greenlandic Inuit” - enhanced giclee on canvas, handcrafted frame

The original painting, done in the early '60s, was inspired by another photo from a book on Greenland that my grandfather gave me. He was partial to Greenland, having a family member on the Alabama expedition of 1909-1912. While the original is in a private collection, I've included a giclee with a frame comparable to my original one.



“Copenhagen Harbor” – oil on board, stock frame

A quick sketch based on a photo taken by my former wife, Janet Hawn, when she visited Denmark a few years ago. She made it into a greeting card and sent it to me. Although I’ve been there several times, it was her image that inspired me to create this little painting.



“Sunset on Langaland Beach” – oil on board, handcrafted 22k-gold frame

While on my trip to Denmark with my brother Irving, we took a ferry to the island of Langaland, where my mother’s mother was born. We found the farm, but were unable to locate any family gravesites or records, which had been lost in a church fire, and as is the practice in Denmark, when the family stops supporting the grave, the gravesite is given to someone else. In the evening, we walked the beach where I took the photo that inspired this painting.



“Danish Coastline” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

A fun little painting done from one of my travel photos.



“Fanø Cottages” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

As a child in Minneapolis, I heard stories about the colorful little island of Fanø, off the west coast of Jutland, close to the city of Esbjerg; I was duly impressed with my visit to Fanø on my first trip to the old country. It was like stepping back to another time with the thatched-roof cottages and quaint storefronts. While waiting for the ferry to return, we were in a small tavern, where I noticed that the clock was running backward. When I asked about it, the bartender said it's, “Fanø Time.” I've always wanted to go back with my plein air painting kit and capture the essence of this quaint little island—maybe it could still happen!



“Fanø of Old” – oil on canvas board, repurposed antique frame

As a child, I remember my mother talking about the quaint little island off the coast of Jutland, close to the city of Esbjerg, where her father was born on a nearby farm. She told me of the old-fashioned clothes she witnessed the women wearing and, in particular, the unique head wraps. She even had a small porcelain doll with the Fanø costume that she displayed in her china cabinet. In looking through some of my mother's and grandfather's old books, I came across several examples from which to work as I created this little painting.



“Queen Margrethe” – oil on canvas board, repurposed period frame

I can't have a show of art about Denmark without paying tribute to the Queen. Margrethe, a true renaissance woman. She's extremely well read, a skilled world diplomat who speaks several languages, as well as an accomplished artist who designs her own clothes. We can be proud of her as a role model to the world.



“Holger Danske” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

A sculpture of Holger Danske, a mythological warrior, is in the bowels of Kronborg Castle, which was made famous by Shakespeare in Hamlet. The story goes that, if Denmark is ever in trouble, Holger Danske will rise up from his sleep and fight for her. He is really a metaphor for the Danish people. During World War II, he (the people) rose up to fight. The Holger Danske group was among the largest resistance groups in Denmark, with around 350 members, and was active from 1943 to 1945. Supposedly, it was responsible for over 100 sabotage operations and approximately 200 executions of informants.



“The Little Mermaid” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

Arguably one of the most famous sculptures in the world and one of the most popular tourist attractions in Copenhagen. In the U.S., Hans Christian Andersen’s “Little Mermaid” fairy tale was made even more famous by Walt Disney and other media moguls.



“Hans Christian Andersen” – oil on canvas board, repurposed frame

After a painting by Christian Albrecht Jensen (1792-1870), one of the premiere artists of The Golden Age of Danish Painting, this little oil sketch was done from the catalog of the aforementioned show at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a show I was fortunate to attend in 1994.

You can't talk about Denmark without bringing up one of the most beloved writers in the world. His fairy tales have been the subject of many movies and other media. I grew up with his stories brought to life by Walt Disney, Danny Kaye and many others, including my mother, who read his stories to us children.



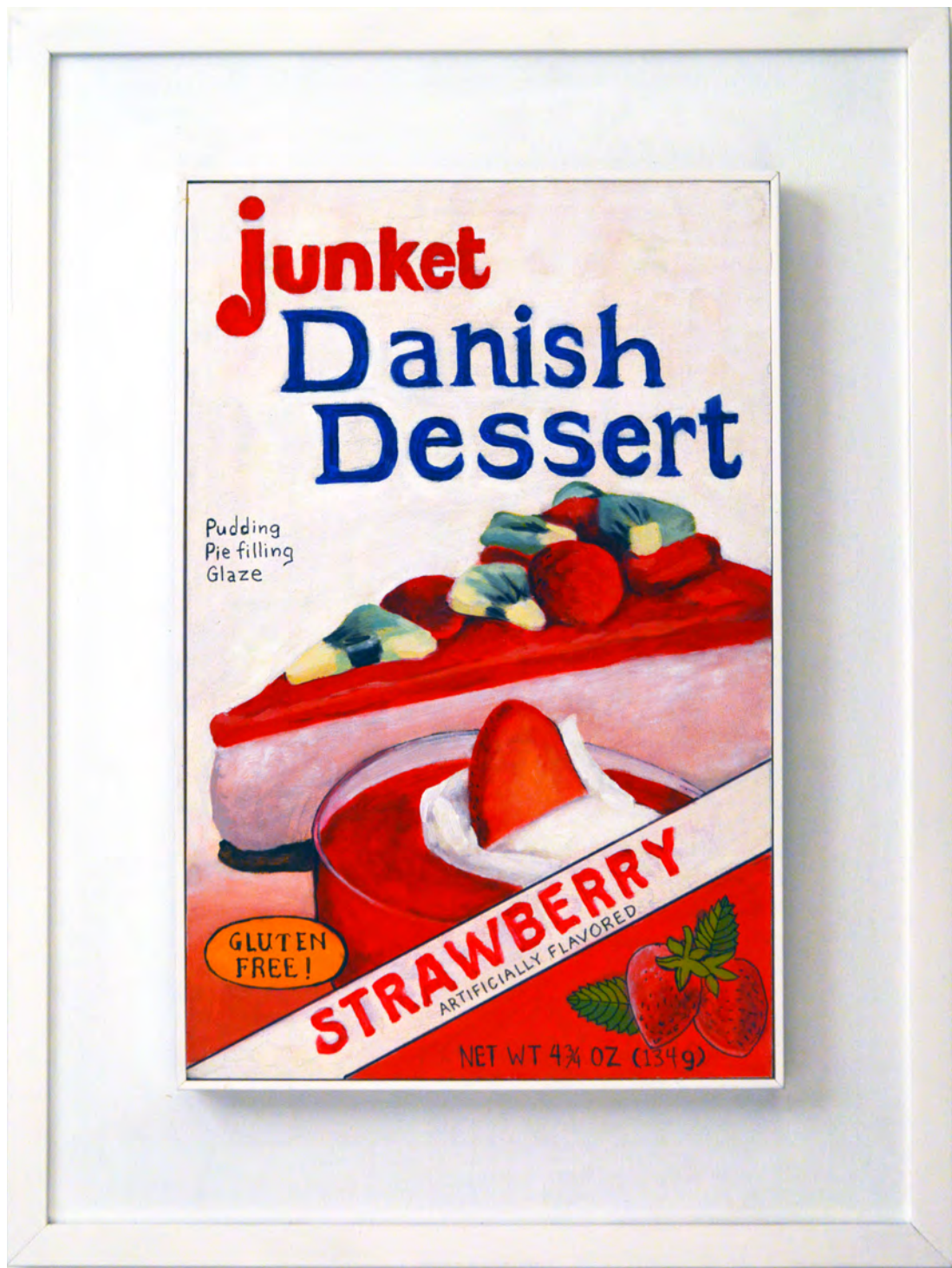
“Little Girl on the Beach of Skagen” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

After a painting by Peder Severin Krøyer; the original was painted in 1884 as Skagen was gaining its reputation as a great place for artists to gather and paint the people and landscapes of this quaint little fishing village at the most northerly point in Denmark.



“Summer Evening on Skagen Beach” – oil on board, repurposed stock frame

A painting after Michael Ancher, one of the Skagen Artists, along with Peder Severin Krøyer and others responsible for putting Skagen on the map as an artist colony. The Skagen Museum is one of my favorites. This piece is one of two paintings I’ve done, paying tribute to the artists of Skagen.



“Danish Dessert” – oil on board, handcrafted frame

I had fun with this one, paying tribute to pop artists, like Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg.



“Swans” – oil on canvas, handcrafted frame

Aside from this exhibition, I’m primarily a wildlife and landscape artist. So, I’m including this image because (1) the first swans I ever saw, living outside of a zoo, were in a castle moat in Denmark, (2) their comeback in the U.S. has been nothing short of amazing, (3) in my opinion, they are the epitome of grace and beauty, and (4) they are also the national bird of Denmark. Thinking also of Hans Christian Andersen’s story of “The Ugly Duckling”, I can’t help but equate the swan with Denmark.

This is based upon a photograph taken by my niece, Heidi Nielsen Meade.



“Viking Rune Stones” – oil on canvas board, repurposed stock frame

Inspired by a pen and sepia drawing by Casper D. Friedrich, illustrated in “The Golden Age of Danish Paintings” catalog.



“Gorm Burial Site” – oil on canvas board, repurposed antique frame

The Danish countryside continues to give up archaeological treasures that date back to the Stone Age. These two burial mounds and two stones have a runic inscription: “King Harold raised this monument to the memory of Gorm his father and Thyre his mother, [the same] Harald who won all of Denmark and Norway, and made the Danes Christian.” The author was King Harald, Bluetooth, whose father, Gorm the Old, died around 959 A.D. These words are the epigraph to the birth of Denmark as a nation.



“Windmill” – oil on birch plywood, handcrafted frame

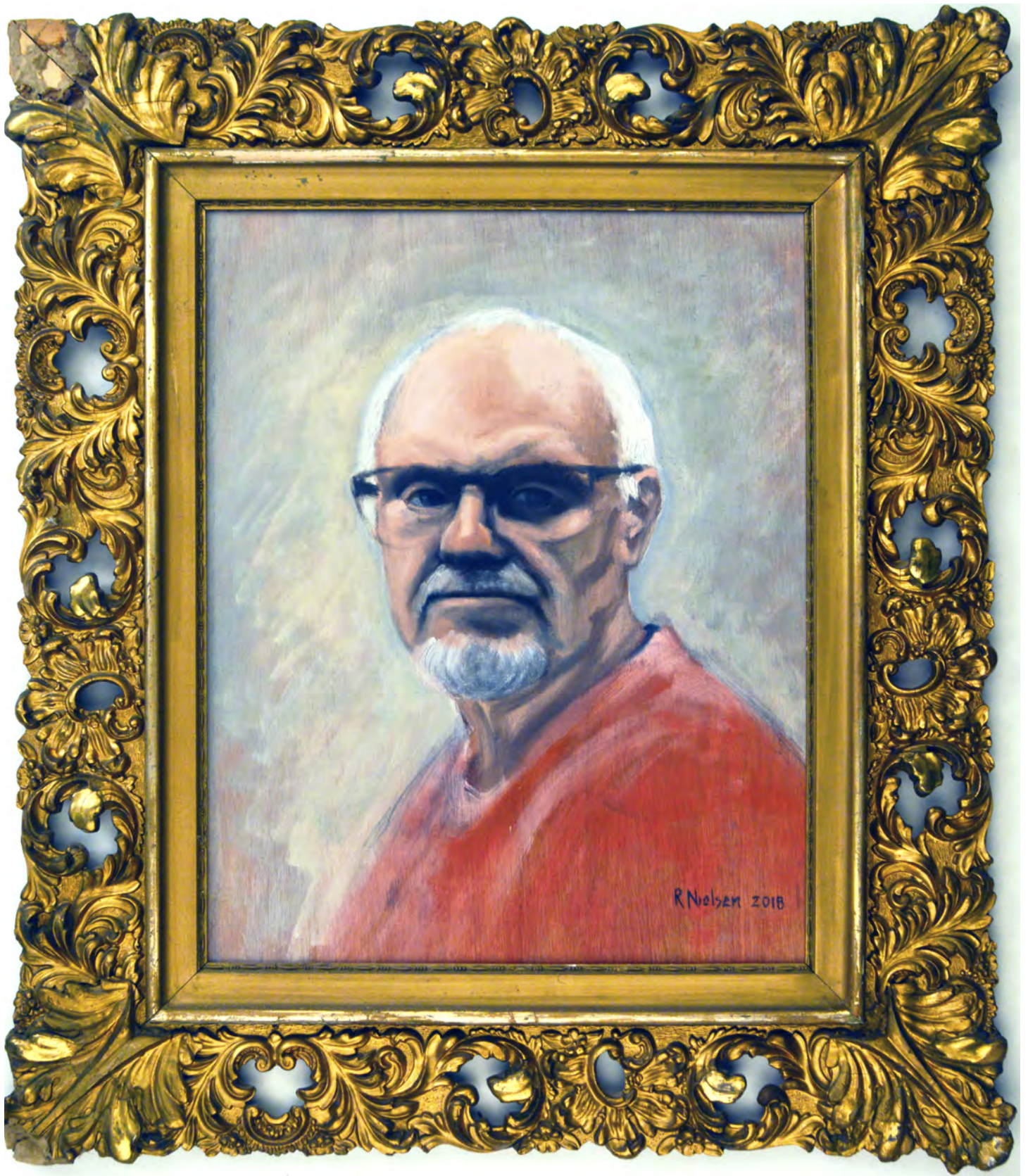
While traveling through Denmark with my brother Irv in the ‘90s, I photographed dozens of windmills from the 18th and 19th centuries. Most were no longer in use, and many were in disrepair. We stayed in one that had been restored and turned into a kro (hotel) and restaurant. It was one of the most interesting places I’ve ever stayed or dined. This is a representation of a windmill that apparently was still in use at the time.



“Old Church” – oil on canvas board, handcrafted frame

Denmark became a Christian country in the 10th Century, yet most Danes I know are not what I would consider religious. I think, because the church is supported by the State with tax revenues, they feel that’s good enough.

Inspired by an old etching I bought in an antique shop on one of my Denmark trips, this image is of an old church in northern Jutland, partially buried by shifting sand dunes.



“Self Portrait” – oil on birch plywood, antique compo and gold-leaf frame

When doing a “selfie” from a mirror, the tendency is to concentrate on what you’re doing, so consequently the result ends up looking like a crotchety old person. As a contrast to the painting, I used an antique, ornate, gold frame that has experienced a lot of wear and tear with its blemishes or scars to show for it—much like the person represented in the painting.

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Museum of Danish America
June 25th-November 5th 2022

