

John Quincy Adams

by

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Despite his name, the artist John Quincy Adams was a native of Vienna and spent most of his working life in Austria. Although largely unknown outside Austria, he is better remembered in his home country than de László, whose position as the leading society portrait painter Adams assumed after de László moved from Vienna to London in 1907, the year that John Singer Sargent declared he would paint no more portraits.

Adams was born on 21 December 1874 in Vienna, son of Charles Runey Adams (1834–1900) and his second^[1] wife Nina Bleyer (1835–1899) from Budapest. He was named for his illustrious kinsman, the 6th President of the United States, although in fact their closest common ancestor was Henry Adams of Somerset (1583–1646).^[2] From 1867 to 1876 Charles Adams was principal tenor at the Hofoper in Vienna. In 1878 he sang the title role in the first American performance of Wagner's *Rienzi* and in 1879 he took his family to Boston where he taught, among others, Nellie Melba and Emma Eames. John was educated in Boston until 1882 when his parents separated and Nina returned to Vienna with her children.

In Vienna John Quincy Adams studied at the Academy from 1892, where he gained a solid grounding in traditional techniques of painting from the arch-conservative Christian Griepenkerl, as well as from Sigmund d'Allemand and August Eisenmenger. After five years he moved to the Munich Academy where he studied with the American-born Carl von Marr and Ludwig von Herterich, the latter introducing him to the principles of *plein-air* painting. In 1898 he entered the Académie Julian in Paris to join the classes of Jean Paul Laurens and de László's former teacher Benjamin Constant, and while in Paris he became influenced by the paintings of Whistler. From this time he travelled regularly to the Netherlands and his impressionistic scenes of Dutch life and landscapes soon gained him the attention of the Viennese public. From 1901 he was exhibiting such works almost exclusively at the Vienna Künstlerhaus to which he was elected member in 1902, the same year as de László. It was most likely at this time that the two became acquainted. The present portrait was probably painted as a record of their mutual regard and possibly on the occasion of Adams winning the Large Golden State Medal in 1906 for his painting entitled "*Wir müssen alle durch viele Trübsale in das Reich Gottes eingehen*" (Acts 14:22 "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God").

During the time that de László and his family were living in Vienna, Adams was better known for his atmospheric genre paintings than as a portrait painter, and those that he did paint during the early years of the century display more the influence of Whistler, or indeed Klimt, than Lenbach, Kaulbach or Koppay, whose style so influenced de László. Indeed, pictures he exhibited at the Künstlerhaus were sometimes deemed too "*sezessionistisch*", in other words better suited to the walls of the more avant-garde Secession than the rival house. Nevertheless, Adams was a great admirer of de László's work (and financial success) and following the older artist's departure for London, Adams turned increasingly to portraiture with his style moving markedly towards that of de László. Especially in the years following the end of the First World

War and the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, Adams established himself as the favoured portrait painter of the now largely emasculated Austrian aristocracy.

On 25 March 1901 Adams had married in Vienna Stefanie Sobotka (1881–1952), the daughter of a factory owner. They were divorced in 1920 and Adams married secondly on 15 July 1932 the Viennese actress Franziska Hudson (born c. 1903).^[3] Of his two daughters by his first marriage, the younger, Harriet (born 1905), married in October 1932 Count Emanuel Walderdorff. Five months later, on 15 March 1933, Adams died of stomach cancer aged 59 in Vienna and was buried in a Grave of Honour in the Vienna Central Cemetery.

EXHIBITED:

•Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, *Wiener Gesellschaft im Portrait: Der Maler John Quincy Adams*, July-August 1986, no. 63, Gesellschaft der Freunde der Bildenden Kunst, Vienna 1986

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[1] His first wife was Kate Holbrook (b.1834).

[2] cf. J. Gardner Bartlett, *Henry Adams Genealogy*, New York 1927, pp.80-94; *New England Historical & Genealogical Register*, 14:360-3; *Burke's Presidential Families of the United States of America*, London, 1975.

[3] See Georg Gaugusch, *Wer Einmal War*, Vol.1 (Vienna 2011), p.361