

# Carl Bloch—Denmark's most famous painter

**C**arl Bloch, (1834–1890) was a Danish painter born in Copenhagen, Denmark and studied with Wilhelm Marstrand at the Royal Danish Academy of Art. Bloch's parents wanted their son to enter a respectable profession—an officer in the Navy. This, however, was not what Carl wanted. His only interest was drawing and painting, and he was consumed by the idea of becoming an artist. He went to Italy to study art, passing through the Netherlands, where he became acquainted with the work of Rembrandt, which became a major influence on him. Carl Bloch met his wife, Alma Trepka, in Rome, where he married her on 31 May 1868. They were happily married until her early death in 1886.

His early work featured rural scenes from everyday life. From 1859 to 1866, Bloch lived in Italy, and this period was important for the development of his historical style.

His first great success was the exhibition of his “Prometheus Unbound” in Copenhagen in 1865. There he finished the decoration of the ceremonial hall at the University of Copenhagen. The sorrow over losing his wife weighed heavily on Bloch, and being left alone with their eight children after her death was very difficult for him.

In a New Year's letter from 1866 to Bloch, H. C. Andersen wrote the following: “What God has arched on solid rock will not be swept away!” Another letter from Andersen declared “Through your art you add a new step to your Jacob-ladder into immortality.”

In a final ode, from a famous author to a famous artist, H.C. Andersen said “Write on the canvas; write your seal on immortality. Then you will become noble here on earth.”

He was then commissioned to produce twenty-three paintings for the Chapel at Frederiksborg Palace. These were all scenes from the life of Christ which have become very popular as illustrations. The originals, painted between 1865 and 1879, are still at Frederiksborg Palace. The altarpieces can be found at Holbaek, Odense, Ugerloese and Copenhagen in Denmark, as well as Loederup, Hoerup, and Landskrona in Sweden.

Through the assistance of Danish-born artist Soren Edsberg, the acquisition of *Christ Healing at the Pool of Bethesda*, was made possible for The Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, United States. A second work by Bloch, an 1880 grisaille version of *The Mocking of Christ*, was purchased by Brigham Young in June 2015.

Carl Bloch died of cancer on 22 February 1890. His death came as “an abrupt blow for Nordic art” according to an article by Sophus Michaelis. Michaelis stated that “Denmark has lost the artist that indisputably was the greatest among the living.” Kyhn stated in his eulogy at Carl Bloch's funeral that “Bloch stays and lives.”

Bloch was said to have brought Danish art on a par with contemporary European history painting.

A prominent Danish art critic, Karl Madsen, stated that Carl Bloch reached higher toward the great heaven of art than all other Danish art up to that date. Madsen also said “If there is an Elysium, where the giant, rich, warm and noble artist souls meet, there Carl Bloch will sit among the noblest of them all!” ■

(Article Source: Wikipedia)



Self-portrait, 1886.

## Samson, the tragic hero

**K**ids love Sunday school stories about Samson. Learning about the source of Samson's strength; his crazy long hair; an Old Testament judge; and someone who definitely liked the ladies. The old flannel graphs from Sunday school pictured Samson looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger or the Incredible Hulk. But there's no evidence for that. In fact, if he were so huge and muscular, what would have been so special about his super-human strength?

Instead, as one author has suggested, try and image your algebra teacher. Now imagine your algebra teacher ripping apart a lion with his bare hands during lunch period.

When Samson was born, God made it clear that Samson was to be a Nazarite and would one day take the Nazarite vow. This was God's way of marking people who were completely devoted to him. Among the basics of the vow included not cutting your hair.

But now you remember the story: “Sunny” Samson runs into trouble with the Philistines but takes them out in spectacular fashion with a donkey's jawbone, piling them up in heaps; makes a move on an unnamed Gaza prostitute, leaving in a hurry with the town's gates on his shoulders, then encounters Delilah (lady of the night), gets a haircut in the devil's barbershop, and with it loses his strength, and for his closing act, brings the house down on the cheering Philistines.

Did Samson have any idea how truly unique he was? If so, then why didn't he live up to the Nazarite vow he made with God? And why was he so quick to sell out the strength of his unique identity to Delilah?

Do you stop and think how unique you are to God? Why do we, like Samson, so often give in to our own weaknesses? Take some time and think through your strengths—those unique gifts and talents God has given you. Remember where

your strengths come from and never, ever, get a haircut in the devil's barbershop. ■

Flemish artist Anthony van Dyck, captures the anguish on Samson's face the moment he realizes, through the betrayal of Delilah, the presence of the Lord has departed and faces the modern truism, “sin will take you farther than you want to go; keep you longer than you want to stay; and cost you most than you want to pay.”



Samson and the Philistines  
Carl Bloch 1863 • 95.5" x 72.25"  
National Gallery of Denmark

