

On C.W. Eckersberg's portrait of Preben Bille-Brahe and Johanne Caroline (1817)

Preben is outshining his wife. His cheeks are glowing. They pulsate. If you cup his face with your hand, you will feel his skin burn. You could fry an egg on it. You could fry his wife on it. She looks pale and egg-like in comparison, even though the painter also gave her a pair of red cheeks to make her look beautiful, young and alive. Johanne Caroline looks calm and composed in her white dress. She has got her sewing. She has got her husband. He even draped her in a red cloth that matches the burning of his cheeks. Everything goes back to the cheeks. They demand your attention. The emotion demands your attention. You wonder what feelings are hidden underneath when the burning stops, and the skin dies, and you peel it off with the tips of your fingers. Is it passion? Does he love his wife that much, or did he read something thought-provoking, wonderful or erotic in his little book? Is he nervous? Is he uncomfortable, over-stimulated and sensing small drops of sweat tickle down his back underneath the jacket? Maybe he doesn't feel anything at all. Maybe he is just bored out of his mind after hours of sitting still, and when he afterwards looked at the portrait, he asked the painter to make him more interesting than his wife. And so the painter grabbed his brush and started burning the skin of his face. It worked on me.