

KAY NIELSEN (1886-1957)

This celebrated artist was born in Copenhagen, his father was the Director of the Royal Danish Theatre, and his mother was a very popular singer and actress. Young Kay was inspired to illustrate the traditional Norse sagas as they were often read aloud by his mother.

He studied art in Paris from 1904 to 1911 at the Academie Julien. A tall, stooping figure, Nielsen was remembered by his comrades in the Latin Quarter as being courteous and friendly, much loved and admired

by everyone he knew. He joined the ranks of Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac in the world of Gift Books when, in 1911 he moved to London and at his first exhibitions all the critics realised that Nielsen's artistic talents were quite original and of a very unusual kind. The incisive use of line was uniquely his own. Kay was a brilliant colourist and a highly decorative Illustrator, able to introduce images that were sometimes strikingly fantastic or bizarre. All his life he had an affinity for the Oriental. He was also a specialist in elaborate rococo motifs and stippling effects which are reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley.

By general consent, Nielsen's most spectacular and celebrated work is old tales from the North translated from Norwegian. The strong colour used contrast to the delicate work he employed in his 1924 work "Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen". An early admirer wrote of this work, 'His most intricate inventions never seemed laboured. Controlled in a measure by Norse ornamental traditions...it is a genuine pleasure to reach the oasis of a Kay Nielson picture in a journey through the printed the printed words of a story...'. Nielsen's unique style and talent for combining the eerie and the fantastic with beautiful decorative effect was at its peak in these illustrations using pen and ink with an immaculate technique.

In 1936 Nielsen settled in Los Angles for two years, occasionally employed as a set designer on movies; one of these was the set design for 'Fantasia'. He went on to collaborate with Walt Disney who celebrated his contribution of concepts and artwork to many projects.

