

EMIL ROSENSTAND

1859–1932

106. *Young Girl in Front of a Mirror*, 1901

(*Ung pige foran spejlet*)

Watercolour and pastel, 19⁷/₁₀ x 14¹/₂ in. (50 x 37 cm)

Inscribed bottom left: E. Rosenstand 1901

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, auction no. 721, 2003, lot 1157, ill.

EXHIBITIONS: Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung 1902; Charlottenborg 1904, no. 451 (described as: *Ung pige foran spejlet*)

A charming young girl at her morning toilette is the motif in this graceful situation portrait. Her hair is taken up and her corset is tightened, but she is still without the dress that will complete her toilette. The young woman sits in her bedroom, taking a close look at her beautiful face in the hand mirror, which she holds in both hands. The painter is in a position that allows him to paint the view from behind her as well, with her figure revealed in the large wall mirror. The viewer is thus drawn into the young woman's intimate sphere.

The picture forms part of the series of idealised portraits of women that have been a familiar genre in painting since the 18th century. The genre was revived in the 1870's by painters portraying the modern age, whose works were given an enthusiastic reception in the Paris Salon and in the major international art exhibitions of the time. The best known of these artists are probably the French artist Albert Besnard (1848–1934), the Belgian Alfred Stevens (1823–1906) and the American John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), all of whom enjoyed a great success in their day. The elegant pictures they created of women were sometimes actual portraits, sometimes anonymous representations of women in which the emphasis was on decorative qualities.

The period from 1890 to 1910, when the decorative element was integrated into the idiom, is particularly rich in paintings of women. The French artist Edmond Aman-Jean (1858–1936) emphasised colour, poetry and eroticism as in the 18th century. In the art of the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), woman and ornamentation constitute an indissoluble whole. His view of woman as a beautiful and compelling being is evidence of the successful liberation of women at that time. The Symbolists of the period, on the other hand, saw woman as at once mysterious, unapproachable and demonic.

Rosenstand's charming portrait of a woman is uncomplicated, a momentary impression that reflects the ideal of a vanished age.

E.F.