

VILHELM ROSENSTAND

1838–1915

107. *Outside the Café à Porta* (*Uden for à Porta's café*)

Oil on canvas, 15²/₃ x 12¹/₄ in. (40 x 31 cm)

Signed lower right: Vilh. Rosenstand

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Vejle, Auction 27, 1993, lot 979, ill. p. 17 (described as *En soldat og hans pige på café à Porta*).

This picture of the dashing guardsman and his bashful lady friend drinking from the same glass exists in no fewer than nine variants of different sizes. Most of them, including that in the Loeb collection, were presumably preparatory studies for a more methodically executed painting of 1882 also entitled *Outside the Café à Porta*, which was exhibited in the Nordic exhibition in Copenhagen the following year and purchased by the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (Fig. A).

Vilhelm Rosenstand spent 1881 and part of 1882 in Paris. Like many other Danish artists, he attended Léon Bonnat's school of painting for a time but was not particularly interested in the instruction there. Instead, he continued producing his genre paintings with anecdotal scenes of everyday life—"now with the addition of a touch of Parisian chic" (Sigurd Schultz). His new French-influenced works charmed people of his day, and one of them even secured him the exhibition medal awarded by the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Once back in Denmark, he continued with Parisian-style subjects such as this good-humored portrayal of life in the famous Café à Porta, which still stands on Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen.

By comparing the many replicas of the motif it is possible to see how the painter has experimented with different visual narrative elements to illustrate the innocent love scene. In some versions, the guards-



FIG. A Vilhelm Rosenstand, *Outside the Café à Porta*, 1882, Oil on canvas, 35²/₃ x 26¹/₂ in. (89 x 70 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

man and his pretty companion seem to be drinking lemonade or perhaps a light wine as refreshment. In this version a small chocolate pot on a low table beside the couple and the color of the glass suggests that they are drinking chocolate. On the table in some versions there is a half-open newspaper on a tray along with an array of objects such as a bottle with a tempting label or a *plat de ménage*—but nowhere is there a sign of the other glass. All nine paintings have in common the psychological factor revealed in the facial expressions and postures of the two figures, which has also been reached through other descriptive details. For instance, the soldier's discreetly amorous intention is reinforced by his masculine boots and an echoing interest on the girl's part hinted by the shining little toes of her very feminine coal-black shoes and by the slightly erotic curve of the café table's cast-iron foot.

The bouquet on the table is unmistakably the bearer of the same message.

S.L.

MARTINUS CHRISTIAN WEDSELTOFT RØRBYE

DRAMMEN 1803 – COPENHAGEN 1848

Rørbye grew up as a member of a Danish civil servant family in Drammen in Norway. The family moved to Denmark after Norway was ceded to Sweden in 1814.

By 1820 Martinus Rørbye was a student in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, where in time he was awarded both the minor and major silver medals and then, after several attempts, the minor gold medal. However, he unsuccessfully competed for the major gold medal. Rørbye was originally one of C. A. Lorentzen's (1746–1828) students, but from 1825 he became a private pupil of Eckersberg, with whom he established a close relationship—so close, in fact, that in 1832 Eckersberg introduced his pupil to the Order of Freemasons, of which he was already a member.

*Rørbye exhibited works at Charlottenborg almost every year from 1824 to 1848. Twelve works, mainly with Italian motifs, were shown posthumously by his widow in 1849. Throughout his life Rørbye was extremely fond of traveling, and he ventured farther afield than any other Danish Golden Age artist. He explored Norway in 1830 and 1832. In 1834, financed by a grant from the Fonden ad Usus Publicos, he went first to Paris, where he admired especially the work of Horace Vernet (1789–1863) but was also taken by Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) *The Raft of the Medusa*, while emphatically expressing disapproval of the works of Delacroix (1798–1863) and viewing Ingres (1780–1867) with great skepticism.¹ After Paris, he went to Rome, where he joined the architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll (1800–1856) and traveled on to Athens and Constantinople. He was back in Copenhagen at the end of 1837. The following years offered more opportunities for travel, which in 1839–1840 included another journey to Italy, this time including Sicily. He also took many journeys within Denmark, and he was presumably the first Danish artist to work at Skagen, which he visited as early as 1833.*

Rørbye was appointed professor in the Royal Danish Academy Life School in 1844. Christen Dalsgaard was one of those for whom he played a significant role during his short career as a teacher. Throughout his life Rørbye's preferred motifs were genre paintings and pictures of everyday life in addition to architectural pieces, all in the manner of Eckersberg. His paintings were factual, almost in the nature of reportage, but his portrayals of people revealed tenderness and sensitivity. He also executed a few portraits and a number of landscapes, these latter frequently inspired by J. C. Dahl (1788–1857) and to a certain extent Casper David Friedrich (1774–1840).

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LITERATURE: Georg Nygaard, *Martinus Rørbyes Rejsedagbog 1830*, Copenhagen 1930; Dyveke Helsted, Eva Henschen, Bjarne Jørnæs, and Torben Melander (eds.), *Martinus Rørbye 1803–1848*, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen 1981; Jens Peter Munk in *Weilbach*, vol. 7, Copenhagen 1998.

¹Kasper Monrad (ed.), *Danish Painting, The Golden Age*, National Gallery, London 1984, p. 179.