

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 had 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-humoured 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 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 colour 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.