

L. A. SMITH

1820–1906

113. *Female Model Before a Mirror*, 1841

(*Kvindelig model foran et spejl*)

Oil on canvas, 47¼ x 36⅜ in. (120 x 93 cm)

Signed: *L Smith 1841* (according to Bruun Rasmussen)

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 727, 2003, lot 1225, ill.

EXHIBITED: *Den nøgne Guldalder*, Den Hirschsprungske Samling, 1994, cat. no. 58 ill. p. 127; Scandinavia House, New York, *Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough, Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2013, no. 34.

LITERATURE: Marianne Saabye (ed.), *Den nøgne Guldalder, Modelbilleder af C. W. Eckersberg og hans elever*, Den Hirschsprungske Samling 1994 (English translation and summary), pp. 27–45 (by Emma Salling), pp. 122–127 (by Marianne Saabye); Philip Conisbee, Kasper Monrad, Lene Bøgh Rønberg, *Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg 1783–1853*, National Gallery of Art, Washington 2003, p. 154; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, p. 56.

This painting is closely related to a painting by C. W. Eckersberg, which is one of the most-loved pictures from the Danish Golden Age, since 1895 belonging to Den Hirschsprungske Samling in Copenhagen. In fact L. A. Smith worked side by side with Eckersberg and other students, all of them painting the same motif: a three-quarter figure of a female model standing in front of a mirror with her back to the viewer and with a length of material draped around her hips.

The dating of the Eckersberg painting and the circumstances surrounding the genesis were unknown until the exhibition *Den nøgne guldalder* at Den Hirschsprungske Samling in 1994. This exhibition was centered on Eckersberg's studies of nude models and started out from Eckersberg's painting. It presented the results of intensive research into Eckersberg's thirty-five-year-long career as a teacher in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, based on a close study of the artist's copious diaries and the Academy archives. As a result, it was revealed that Eckersberg's painting of this model was not the only one with this motif, for it was a product of his summer classes with a group of Academy students, including L. A. Smith, in the late summer of 1841.

In 1822, Eckersberg and his colleague, Professor J. L. Lund (1777–1867), took the initiative to expand the Life School at the Academy so students could work with live models in daylight during the summer. A new feature was that from 1833 it was occasionally possible to work with a female nude. Since his appointment as professor in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Painting in 1818, Eckersberg had had an official residence at the home of the institution, Charlottenborg Palace on Kongens Nytorv, in the heart of Copenhagen. This was where he saw many of the students he taught over the years. They were both Academy students and others coming from outside. Here the model was occasionally a female.

In 1823 the Academy announced a competition for a small cash prize, in which the model was to be portrayed in "suitable surroundings." The students were themselves to arrange the pose of the model. The aim was to learn how to see the model in interplay with the surroundings, subject to the given light and perspective. The nude paintings resulting from this teaching are thus very different from the ordinary classes in the Academy Life School.



FIG. A L. A. Smith  
*Seated Nude, Florentine*, 12.7.-7.8.1841  
Oil on canvas, 35<sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> x 20<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in. (90 x 53 cm)  
Signed: L. A. Smith  
Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 458, 1984, lot 221

From 1839, Eckersberg ran summer classes in the Academy working mainly with female models, and he devoted a great deal of personal energy to this work. Together with the students he himself would often paint the chosen model in a small format while the students produced larger paintings. This was the case in 1841, when L. A. Smith painted the model portrait now in the Loeb collection.

Smith took part for the first time in the summer of 1840, when the classes started on June 21 with Nathalia Stahl as model. No paintings from this class are known today. From 20 August to 1 September and from 14 to 19 September, they worked with a new model with the unusual and rather poetical Christian name of Florentine. She was a well-built young woman whose powerful hips and sculptural form were well suited to nude studies. Some drawings by Eckersberg show her gracefully standing with one leg on the scales and with her arms extended. Together with a circular painting also by Eckersberg (Fyns Kunstmuseum), the sensual qualities of which are quite atypical for a nude study in the Denmark of this time, they are the only surviving results from that session.

Florentine was again engaged in 1841, and from July 12 to August 7, she posed seated with two lengths of fabric draped around her. In L. A. Smith's painting, which is the only one surviving from this class, she is portrayed almost frontally, but her face is seen in profile. It is obvious that Smith, too, appreciated Florentine's gracefulness (Fig. A).

From August 9 to September 16, Florentine was painted standing in a room in front of a beautifully framed mirror, her hand on a table, lightly fingering a necklace lying there. She is holding her chignon in her right hand and turning her head obliquely down to the left. The draping around her hips has classical

forebears and shows that her right leg must be resting on a box. The use of the mirror is a familiar feature in painting. From Eckersberg's diary it is known that Smith took part in the class along with Carl Dahl (1812–1865), who became known as a marine painter, H. J. Hammer (1815–1882), who became a genre and landscape artist, Salomon (Sally) Henriques (1815–1886), who painted genre scenes and later became a decoration painter, and his brother Nathan Henriques (1820–1846), known for his many portraits of Copenhagen's Jewish bourgeoisie.

Three paintings have survived from this class, those of Eckersberg, L. A. Smith, and Sally Henriques. It is not known whether the other participants completed the task. It is both rare and interesting to be able to compare the three paintings. They at once give an insight into the demands made by the exercise and into the different artists' abilities, the possibilities before them, and choices they made. The painting by the experienced master, Eckersberg (Fig. B), is naturally the most harmonious, both in disposition and color and also in the distribution of light and shade. A particularly sophisticated feature is the fact that in the mirror he shows more of the naked model than would be revealed if she had been wearing a low dress. At the same time she is made anonymous, as her arm covers the lower part of her face in the mirror. Eckersberg's painting is the most serene in its composition, as the rear wall is parallel to the surface of the picture. But at the same time he has created dynamism in the painting by stressing the turn of the model's head and the raised right leg. She is apparently standing with her weight on the left leg in the classical position known as *contrapposto*.



FIG. B C. W. Eckersberg  
*Female Model Standing Before a Mirror*, 1841  
Oil on canvas,  $13\frac{1}{5} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$  in. (33.5 x 26 cm)  
Not signed or inscribed.  
Den Hirschsprungske Samling



FIG. C Sally Henriques  
*Female Model Standing Before a Mirror*, 1841  
Oil,  $34\frac{3}{5} \times 24\frac{2}{5}$  in. (88 x 62 cm)  
Signed: *Sally Henriques 20.10.41*  
Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 712, 2002, lot 1419  
This painting was unknown before this auction.

Smith was seated just to the right of the professor, more obliquely in relation to the model and slightly closer to her. From this position he had no other choice but to let the model's torso dominate the painting. He was unable to read and exploit the elegant position of her legs. Instead, he concentrated on portraying her broad back, powerful shoulders, and rounded hips, concluding with the white drapery. As a counterbalance, another piece of drapery can be seen in the left background, a green piece of fabric hanging there—unseen in the other two paintings. In addition, the whole of the model's face is visible in the mirror from Smith's position, as is her left breast. Smith's coloring is darker than Eckersberg's, and his treatment of shape is richer in contrasts, so his concept of the motif seems to be more dramatic.

The farther to the right the painter was sitting, the deeper were the shadows on the model's back. From the Henriques painting (Fig. C) it can be seen that he had been sitting to the right of Smith, so that the conditions under which he was painting were still more difficult. The light from the window dazzled him, so his nude is characterized by sharp contrasts between light and shade. Nevertheless, he succeeded in creating life on the shaded side of the torso, which is illuminated indirectly, and in the white drapery. By leaving the background in darkness, the reflection in the mirror plays a bigger part in the composition. It reproduces roughly the same image as Smith's version.

In other words, Eckersberg himself chose the viewpoint that—artistically speaking—assured him of the best result, and for reasons that we must assume were didactic, he gave his students far more difficult tasks to work with. On the other hand, the nudes of both L. A. Smith and Sally Henriques are more modern in character, something that makes one think of Eckersberg's successors, Wilhelm Marstrand and especially Carl Bloch.

E.F.