

MICHAEL ANCHER

1849–1927

6. Sketch for “The Girl with the Sunflowers,” 1889

(*Skitse til “Pigen med solsikkerne”*)

Oil on canvas, 17 x 15 $\frac{2}{3}$ in. (43 x 39 cm)

PROVENANCE: The painter Viggo Johansen; Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 194 (Viggo Johansen), 1936, lot 2, ill. p. 6; Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 386 (Hans Tobiesen), 1954, lot 1, ill. p. 6; Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 453, 1983, lot 8, ill.p. 39 (described as: *Pigen med solsikkerne, Maren Brems*).

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg, *Michael Ancher*, 1928, no. 38; Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb, Jr.*, 1994, no. 2.



LITERATURE: Hanne Westergaard in: *1880-erne i nordisk kunst*, Copenhagen 1986, exhibition catalogue Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Amos Anderssons Konstmuseum, Helsinki, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, pp. 50–53 (on the motif); Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb, Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994, ill. and discussed p. 11; Elisabeth Fabritius, *Michael Ancher og det Moderne Gennembrud 1880–1890*, Skagen 1999, no. 417, discussion chapter IV.3.

This sketch is very close to the finished painting, one of the artist's most important works. *The Girl with the Sunflowers*, 3½ x 3 ft. (101 x 95 cm), painted in 1889 (Fig. A), was purchased by Statens Museum for Kunst in 1928 after the artist's death.

A young girl standing with a copper vessel filled with sunflowers is a simple everyday motif, which the artist has made monumental by means of the arrangement and grouping within the framework of the picture. The girl is standing indirectly illuminated on the threshold between two rooms. Behind her, from the darkness inside, there is a glimpse of the garden, bathed in fierce sunlight. Warm, golden brown colours dominate the picture and form a powerful contrast to the window and the conspicuously bright shades of blue in the sheer curtains.

Michael Ancher was a great admirer of the Dutch painters from the Golden Age of Dutch Painting, Pieter de Hooch (1629–1683) and Vermeer van Delft (1632–1675), a debt to the 17th century he gladly acknowledged. The fact that here, for the first time, he allowed one shade of colour to dominate is undoubtedly due to familiarity with the colour harmonies of James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903).

The artist had long left his youth behind when he first went on a short visit to Paris in 1885. He was not able to have a prolonged study-visit there until 1889, when he and Anna Ancher spent six months. That year Paris was hosting the great world fair. Here they made a much closer acquaintance with French art as a

result of the retrospective special exhibition of 100 years of French art, and they supplemented this with studies in the Louvre. They also saw the Danish section, in which they themselves were exhibiting, as well as the exhibitions of art from many other countries. There was ample opportunity for discussions with their many artist friends who were also in Paris, and to make new acquaintances.

The Girl with the Sunflowers was painted during the summer afterwards, when Ancher had returned home to Skagen filled with new impressions. The girl in the painting is Maren Brems, the family maid. The flowers grew in Brøndum family's old garden, close to the old garden house, Michael and Anna's first home. The art historian Hanne Westergaard has suggested that the artist's interest in sunflowers might be related to van Gogh (1853–1890), who during these same years was painting sequences of this spectacular flower, and with whom a few Danish painters had connections. E.F.



FIG. A Michael Ancher
The Girl with the Sunflowers, 1889
(*Pigen med solsikkerne*)

Oil on canvas, 3½ x 3 ft. (101 x 95 cm), Statens Museum for Kunst. There is a second version of the motif in the Michael and Anna Ancher House, now a museum in Skagen.