

WILHELM MARSTRAND

1810–1873

133. *A Lady Going Ashore from a Gondola* (probably begun 1854, completed c. 1870)

(*En dame stiger i land fra en gondol*)

Oil on canvas, 58 x 80 cm

Unsigned

PROVENANCE: Anna Lund, née Marstrand (1898); Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 9, 1923 (Consul General V. Glückstadt), lot 57, bought by Consul General C.F. Glad; Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 100 (C.F. Glad's estate), 1931, lot 426, ill. p. 41; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 743, 2005, lot 1045, ill. pp. 40, 41 and cover.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg, *Kunstforeningens Marstrand Udstilling*, 1898, no. 512; Voss Kunsthandel, Copenhagen 1919, no. 28, ill.; Nivaagaard, *Nivaagaard viser Marstrand*, 1992, no. 67, ill.

LITERATURE: Karl Madsen, *Wilhelm Marstrand*, Copenhagen 1905; Gitte Valentiner, *Wilhelm Marstrand, Scenebilleder*, Copenhagen 1992 (on the Venetian motifs, pp. 107–115; the drawing from the balcony to which reference is made in the text is reproduced p. 113); Gitte Valentiner: *Nivaagaard viser Marstrand*, Nivaagaard Malerisamling, 1992 (with texts by Gitte Valentiner, Elisabeth Cederrøm, Kirsten Nørregaard Pedersen, Bent Holm, Claus M. Smidt, Erik Fischer), no. 67, ill.

This charming scene from everyday life in Venice is one of several similar paintings by Marstrand. When the artist arrived in the city late in 1853, he had applied for leave of absence from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in order to recuperate. He made a great effort that year to complete a very large painting containing numerous figures from Dalarna in northern Sweden in which churchgoers come sailing in large boats on Lake Siljan. As expected, this commissioned work, intended for the National Gallery (Statens Museum for Kunst), became a major undertaking. Marstrand really intended to go to Rome but decided on a longer stay in Venice, which he had visited only briefly on his earlier travels. In February 1854 he went home to fetch his wife and little son, who stayed with him until the late summer. (Marstrand had not married until 1850, when he was forty.)

Despite the winter, Marstrand had been captivated by the enchanting character of the city, the colors, the light, and the everyday life that assumes a different aspect in Venice from that of all other cities because so much movement to and fro every day takes place on the water. He discovered Venice through the eyes of a painter and made a careful study of classical Venetian painting, especially Titian and Veronese, of whom the latter was of special importance to his later historical painting. In addition, it was his idea to work intensively with the “*alla prima*” technique.¹

The painting shows a beautiful young woman going ashore from a gondola one lovely summer afternoon on the Grand Canal, the southern buildings of which we can see on the left. The steps in the foreground lead to the Palazzo Loredan, the facade of which is visible at the left. The tall, handsome Renaissance palace farther back, partly obscured by the woman's figure, is the Palazzo Rezzonico. At the back, just behind the bend in the canal, the Ca' Foscari ends the view.

The motif was taken from quite close to the painter's residence in the city. On June 19, he made a drawing of his family, with the painter P. C. Skovgaard and his wife, on a balcony with roughly the same view. Thus it can be determined that Marstrand lived in the *bel étage* of the Case Mainella, next door to the



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Palazzo Loredan. From here, Skovgaard also painted the view toward the east with the church of Santa Maria delle Salute, though not making it topographically correct (Statens Museum for Kunst). The writer Hans Christian Andersen also visited Marstrand here.

Marstrand's painting was considered by Karl Madsen in 1898 to have been finished in Copenhagen toward 1870 on the basis of the sketches he made in Venice. ARoS, Aarhus Kunstmuseum owns a preparatory work of the canal without figures (inv.no. 471). An oil sketch of a variation of the motif shows a different woman giving alms to a beggar in a boat immediately behind her boat (Statens Museum for Kunst, inv.no. 1558). The beggar's boat is found in another oil sketch in Statens Museum for Kunst, where the motif is placed on the other side of the Grand Canal and with the Salute church in the background (inv.no. 2045) (all reproduced in Gitte Valentiner 1992).

Having spent some of his youth studying in Rome and Naples, Marstrand had been fond of portraying the exotic everyday life in brief anecdotal pictures, usually of a humorous nature. But the Italy he had come to know, and which he showed us in his paintings, was undergoing a huge transformation. He did not find so many, nor such picturesque, costumes and headdresses in Venice as farther south; the city was characterized, rather, by the large number of tourists—especially English tourists. It was the contrast between the rich tourist and the poor Italian that occupied his attention.

Apart from the many charming studies of the city, Marstrand also benefited from his long sojourn in other ways. He read Alexander von Humboldt's (1769–1859) scientific works, *Kosmos* and *Ansichten der Natur*, which assumed great importance for him. From Venice he also brought back a number of photographs, which today are rare treasures in the library of the Royal Danish Library, the Danish National Art Library.

E.F.

¹"Alla prima" is direct painting, completed all in one session.