

L. A. RING
1854–1933

148. *Young Woman Harvesting*, 1889
(*En høstpige*)

Oil on canvas, 47¼ x 36¼ in. (120 x 92 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: L A Ring 89

PROVENANCE: Composer, critic and editor Robert Henriques 1910; Barrister Ellis Henriques's estate 1933; Kunsthallen Auction 221, april 1947, lot 191, ill. p. 4; Bruun Rasmussen Auction 880, 2018, lot 41, ill.—Additionally reproduced at the front of the catalogue.

EXHIBITED: *L.A. Ring*. Kunstforeningen 1924, no. 71; *Mindeudstillingen [the Memorial Exhibition] for L.A. Ring*. Charlottenborg 1933, no. 76.

LITERATURE: H. Chr. Christensen, *Fortegnelse over Malerier og Studier af L. A. Ring 1889-1910*, Copenhagen 1910, no. 167; Peter Hertz, *Maleren L.A. Ring*, Copenhagen 1934, p. 196–197 and p. 198–200, ill. p. 199, here under the title: *A Harvest Girl. Fragment. The Village Ring 1887. (En Høstpige. Fragment. Landsbyen Ring. 1887)*; Reproduced on the front page of the magazine *Tidens Kvinder [Women of today]*, 1959, no. 32.

Laurits Andersen Ring's first biographer and acquaintance H. Chr. Christensen writes in his oeuvre catalogue of the painter about no. 167: *A Harvest Girl. In the middle of a cornfield, she stands; with a straw hat, white apron over a bright blue dress and a sheaf in her arms. L. A. Ring 89. 120 x 94.* The year following the death of L. A. Ring, the substantial monograph about the painter by art historian Peter Hertz was published. Hertz, who had also known and appreciated Ring, has an alternative interpretation of The Loeb Collection acquisition. More on this later.

The portrayal of the young harvest girl is beautiful and a little bit peculiar. At first glance, it seems obvious to compare this painting to the monumental depiction from the summer of 1885 of the working harvestman—pastel with the same motif in The Loeb Collection no. 100—where the vast yellow cornfield and the narrow strip, of pale blue, hazy summer sky and tall horizon are divided by a faraway dull green landscape, and where the bright blue colors of the garbs contrast to the golden of the corn. However, the wearisome activity of the harvest worker, his rhythmic, pendulum-like movement pattern, the face, half turned away in introvert, strained concentration stands in clear contrast to the appearance of the harvest girl. Where he closes off around himself and his work without granting himself one moment of rest, the girl seems almost lost in a moment of spellbound reverie in front of the painter portraying her. We see a portly, voluptuous peasant girl in her finest clothes: a bright white apron over a neat bright blue dress, the sleeves of which are covered in part by long, white cuffs tied to her wrists with narrow twill tapes. She stands completely still, wrapped in the corn so to speak, which she, opposed to the description of H. Chr. Christensen, has *not* yet bound into a sheaf.

Her coarse hands, accustomed to manual labor, rest idly upon the straws. On her head she wears a nice straw hat, lavishly decorated with a rose-colored double bow. Her pretty and serious face, partly concealed by the shadow of her hat, is weatherworn and tanned. Thus, the colors of the face and hands of the girl form a decorative triangle—and the same is the case with the white apron and the cuffs.

The two paintings are painted neither at the same time, nor at the same place. The monumental work *Harvest*, that The Loeb Collection pastel is a smaller repetition of, was painted by L. A. Ring in the late sum-



mer of 1885 with his big brother Ole Peter as a model, outside Ole Peter's farm in Tehusene by Fakse. The portrait of *The Harvest Girl* was carried out some years later near Ring, the birth village of the brothers.

Young woman harvesting is dated 1889. The year was eventful for the now 35-year-old Laurits Andersen Ring after many years of struggle against dejection and stifling poverty. First, he had the sorrow of losing his father, then his brother Ole Peter, who had, without warning, died a few years later, whereupon his farm in Tehusene had to be sold. Then the brothers' old mother, who had lived in retirement at Ole Peter's, had been fetched home to the village Ring by her youngest son, who now had the responsibility of providing for her. Last, after consistent lack of interest and thus no buyers of his paintings—after all these troubles, it now finally seemed as though better times would come for the painter.

In March 1889, he got the opportunity to exhibit his works retrospectively, alongside the animal- and landscape painter Niels Pedersens Mols (1859–1921) in the Kunstforeningen in Copenhagen. Life had been kind to both artists, who received much recognition. A small stipend to L. A. Ring had enabled him to take his first trip abroad in the early summer. Along with his friend Karl Madsen, he went through Hamburg, the Netherlands and Belgium to Paris to see the *World Exhibition 1889*. Ring exhibited four paintings in The Danish Pavilion. Information about these paintings other than the following numbers and titles translated from Danish to French does not exist: 141. *Dans le village* (In the Village), 142. *Laboueurs* (Workers), 143. *Village* (Village), 144. *Paysage* (Landscape). Ring's good friend, lawyer and amateur painter Alexander Wilde, exhibited a pastel with catalogue no. 199 and title *Intérieur* (Interior).

The very same Wilde family had brought L. A. Ring into contact with wealthy civil servant- and merchant families, to whom he had begun to sell some of his works. Alexander Wilde did not go to Paris himself, but in a letter from Ring to Wilde's wife, who we know from The Loeb Collection no. 102. *Johanne Wilde at Her Loom*, he writes of his and Wilde's works, that it had taken him some time to locate between the works of other Danish artists on the closely hung exhibition walls. Safely back home again in Denmark we find L. A. Ring in Hornbæk in Northern Zealand at a summer stay with the Wilde family, occupied with painting the aforementioned painting of Johanne by the loom.

The Harvest Girl is signed and dated at an unknown time during the year of 1889. However, not necessarily in the late summer when the corn is ripe, which one could otherwise believe judging from the motif—but it was actually painted two years earlier! We are given this surprising piece of information by Peter Hertz, who in his great and thorough work about the artist has named and dated the depiction of the young woman in the cornfield with the following phrases: *A Harvest Girl. Fragment. The Village Ring. 1887.*

Why 1887 when Ring himself dates his work 1889? Moreover, what is meant by the word “fragment”? The following is the explanation: In his account of the creation of the painting, Hertz writes what he presumably has been told by the painter himself, that *Harvest Girl* was a part of a greater work carried out in 1887, a harvest scene with two figures in full length. Ring was not able to finish this painting, so he put it away in a corner of his workshop. There it had been, stowed away, for a couple of years until one day in 1889 Ring took it back out and decided to cut the part with the harvest girl out of the composition, because the entire painting seemed unusable to him, after which he signed and dated it as an independent painting. Thus the classification “fragment”. Only the figure of the girl is left from the original work. Apart from the young girl who was to pick up the reaped corn and bind it in sheaves, there was a farm hand busy mowing, seen from his back. In H. Chr. Christensen's oeuvre catalogue there is a small pastel showing the farm hand

with his back turned, whose figure Ring had repeated, before the destruction of the big work. Why this first devised harvest scene did not turn out as Ring had imagined, is not explained in detail by Hertz.

By the way, Peter Hertz' mention of *The Harvest Girl* is strangely critical in suggesting, that L. A. Ring for once had decided to make use of a model for the purpose of increasing the salability of his painting, and that the result had become: "a more superficially artistic salon painting than an intimate, distinguishing portrayal". It was, however, far from unusual for L. A. Ring to use models for his works. Not to increase the salability of these, but because he felt closely connected to the people he portrayed. They belonged to the class in society he himself came from, and with which he felt a deep affiliation.

The curious—and almost touching portrait of the very young woman in the bright cornfield bears no mark of salon painting. The tanned hands accustomed to manual labor and the complexion on her face are too predominant for that. The painter had probably planned his painting of the two harvest hands to be a kind of supplement to the narrative of his hard working brother's painting, indicated among other things by the colors in the painting and the tall horizon. His brother had painted that piece a few years earlier. Now Ole Peter had died, and the thoughts of him probably brought Ring more sorrow than lifting his spirit—until one day he saw the old, tossed-away harvest painting and was inspired by the appearance of the girl.

Instead of tying the sheaf, that she is holding together, she seems to have fallen into a reverie in front of the painter. Perhaps she has just realized that it is now her turn to be depicted and this knowledge seems to have stopped her in the tracks of her work, rather than the opposite: "I wonder if the bow on my hat is still in place? Is my laundered dress still clean? I hope the sleeves have not become dusty?" The painter seems to have seen what she is thinking while rendering her outfit, with the glow of the blue color of the dress intensified towards the rolling, golden corn behind her, also discernible through the thin fabric of the sleeves. But who knows, if it didn't dawn on him along the way when creating this work, that the meaning with this painting was not meant to be the depiction of a beautiful girl harvesting alone, but that his portrayal of harvest should actually stand as a tribute to the coarse work-accustomed hands of the girl, because they symbolize the hard life of the peasant?

It cannot therefore be ruled out that Ring himself, back when he painted his first version of the harvest scene, could have asked the young girl to stop the busy activity of her hands for a moment while she was tying the sheaf together, so that he could depict each of her strong fingers as realistically as possible, truthfully and calmly.

In fact, we do not know if L. A. Ring limited himself to repeating his portrayal of the harvest girl from 1887, exactly as she was then carried out—or if seeing her again had inspired him to let the fragmented work develop independently, and grow to the enchanting poetic allegory of the rough conditions of the peasantry, that we see here.

S.L.