

JOEL BALLIN

1822–1885

16. *Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing, 1844*

(*Modelstudie, en ung pige klæder sig af*)

Oil on canvas, 46 x 36¼ in. (117 x 92 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 682, 2000, lot 1424, ill. p. 29 (described in the auction catalogue as painted by Julius Exner, 1825–1910 [*malet af Julius Exner*]). The following research proved the painting to be that of an Eckersberg student, now believed to be Joel Ballin.

EXHIBITED: Bruce Museum of Art and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, and The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, New York, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2005, no. 8, ill.; 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. 8.

LITERATURE: Marianne Saabye (ed.), *Den nøgne Guldalder, Modelbilleder af C. W. Eckersberg og hans elever*, Den Hirschsprungske Samling, 1994 (English translation and summary), pp. 134–137;¹ Patricia G. Berman, “Lines of Solitude, Circles of Alliance, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century” in *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, Bruce Museum, 2005, p. 16; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2007, p. 56, ill. p. 55.

The excellence of this Loeb painting, which is similar to those painted of the same model by three other students in the same summer class in 1844, taught by Royal Danish Academy professor C. W. Eckersberg, prompted the Bruun Rasmussen Gallery to assume that it was from the brush of the renowned Julius Exner. Following the Bruun Rasmussen auction, the owner of the Exner version wrote to gallery officials, enclosing a photograph of it and explaining that the painting they had sold was not the one by Exner, because it was in his possession.

But who would be the artist of the painting in the Loeb collection if not Julius Exner? C. W. Eckersberg was a professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from 1818 until his death 1853. Among the many innovations he introduced into the teaching was the study of a naked female model, something that previously had not been permitted. It was Eckersberg, too, who was in charge of the special summer course in painting from the life. This was introduced because in an adjudication for a competition among the students for the annual money prize, it had been noted that they were not good enough at painting from life. The summer courses, mainly after naked female model painting started at the academy in July 1839 and under Eckersberg’s instruction, continued every year for the next eleven years. The professor’s diaries contain brief but informative comments on the duration of the course, the names of the students, the type of models, etc.

So we know that in June 1844 Eckersberg chose a new female model who, with a few interruptions occasioned by illness, posed for the teacher and four students until September—135 hours in all. The students were Joel Ballin, Julius Exner, Geskel Salomon (1821–1902), and, exceptionally, a private female pupil by the name of Caroline Behrens. (Women were normally not allowed to attend academy classes at that time.)

The very extensive catalogue for the 1994 exhibition *The Naked Golden Age (Den nøgne guldalder)* in Den Hirschsprungske Samling contains the entire entry from Eckersberg’s diary concerning this summer class and also contains a color reproduction of Eckersberg’s own study of the new model (Fig. A). Furthermore, the catalogue contains black and white photographs of one of the pupil’s paintings (Fig. C) and a drawn



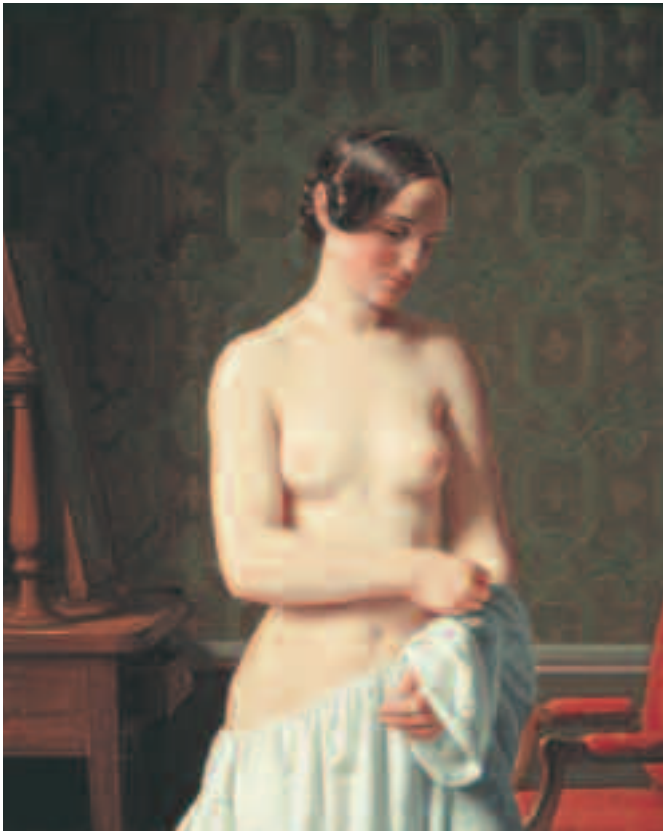


FIG. A C. W. Eckersberg
Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing, 1844
 Oil on canvas, 13½ x 11¾ in. (34.2 x 30.2 cm), private owner



FIG. B Geskel Saloman
Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing, 1844
 Oil on canvas, 50¾ x 40½ in. (129 x 102.5 cm), private owner

preparatory study for it. From these reproductions it can be seen that the life study in the Loeb collection was executed that same summer of 1844, with the same model in the same pose referred to above.

But who painted it? Two of the four pupils can be excluded. After the exhibition in Den Hirschsprungske Samling, several other hitherto generally unknown life studies were discovered. These included two finished versions of *Young Girl Undressing*: one the above-mentioned model by Julius Exner² and the other by Geskel Saloman (Fig. B),³ both painted in 1844.

This means that three of the five works from the summer course in 1844 can now be identified as having been painted by Professor Eckersberg (Fig. A) and his students Julius Exner and Geskel Saloman (Fig. B).

Unless other pupils participated in Eckersberg's summer course in 1844, or unless some of them produced more than one submission relating to the assignment—something that cannot be entirely excluded—we can conclude that the last two life studies were painted by Caroline Behrens and Joel Ballin respectively.

A close examination of the five versions of *Young Girl Undressing* shows various differences. Apart from the fact that the model is seen from different angles depending on where the artist was standing while painting, we observe that there is also variation in the furniture and the wallpaper in the background.

The wallpaper and the red upholstered chair beside the model appear to be identical in the Exner, the Saloman, and the work in the Loeb collection. In contrast to his pupils, Eckersberg has painted a slightly



FIG. C (named as Fig. 10 in the catalogue *The Naked Golden Age*)
Possibly by Caroline Behrens
Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing, 1844
Oil on canvas, 18 x 13 $\frac{1}{3}$ in. (46 x 34 cm), present owner unknown

more precise version of the wallpaper and a chair without gilt paint. In addition, he has amused himself by providing his work with a bare table on which there is a cheval glass.⁴ This latter clearly reflects a section of the wallpaper. The teacher's painting is much smaller than those of his pupils, as was almost always the case in teaching situations.

As for the other model-painting reproduced in the Hirschsprung catalogue, and the drawn preparatory study for it, there seem to be indications that this could have been Miss Behrens's work (Fig. C). We see the same chair as in the other studies, but here it appears behind the model on the left of the picture, which might indicate that she has been viewed from a position some distance from the male academy pupils. With certain reservations this could be interpreted as courtesy to a less practiced and perhaps somewhat self-conscious private female pupil.

In Figure C, there is neither a table with a mirror as in Eckersberg nor a table covered with a green cloth as in the other model studies. Figure C is somewhat larger than Eckersberg's picture and a good deal smaller than the works by the other pupils. The drawn study reproduced in the Hirschsprung catalogue and the accompanying painting (Fig. C),⁵ of which the latter's whereabouts are unfortunately unknown, appear to be the work of a less accomplished and more timid hand than the Loeb collection study and is therefore more likely attributable to Caroline Behrens.

Unfortunately, scarcely anything is known about this private woman pupil. She is not mentioned in any work of reference, and Eckersberg refers to her presence on only three other occasions: on June 14 and 15, 1844, he notes that she is given instruction in perspective drawing; between December 5 and 9 she draws a

portrait of Emilie, the professor's daughter. After this we encounter her name only once more, four years later, when between July 4 and September 22, 1848, she is said to be drawing after "the antique plaster head."⁶

On the basis of the information available today, it can be deduced that the Loeb collection's *Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing* (*Modelstudie, En ung pige klæder sig af*) was painted by Joel Ballin. Ballin eventually carved out a splendid career abroad as a copperplate engraver with special skills. If he had continued as a painter, his reputation would scarcely have spread beyond the borders of Denmark, although he was talented, as this piece in the Loeb collection undeniably indicates.

On October 7, 1844, Professor Eckersberg showed the works by his three male pupils to the Academy Assembly, which inspected them "with particular interest."

S.L.

¹Suzanne Ludvigsen would like to thank Marianne Saabye, director of Den Hirschsprungske Samling, for her important help in identifying the version of *Study of a Model, Young Girl Undressing*.

²Current owner unknown, no photo available.

³Geskel Saloman (1821–1902) was of Jewish-Swedish extraction. After training in Copenhagen, he moved to Gothenburg in Sweden, where he became a very popular portraitist and established his own school of painting.

⁴A full-length mirror with a frame by which it may be moved or tilted.

⁵Cat. 64 in the catalogue *The Naked Golden Age*, p. 137: Pupil of Eckersberg. *En ung pige klæder sig af*. 1844, Lead pencil, gray hatching. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (225 x 168 mm). Inscribed by unknown hand: *Eckersberg del 1844*, private collection. Preparatory study for Fig.C.

⁶Extracts from C. W. Eckersberg's diaries, index of Eckersberg's private pupils by Hanne Jönsson in *C. W. Eckersberg og hans elever*, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen 1983, p. 56.