

C. W. ECKERSBERG

1783–1853

23. *Figure Study of Two Women*

(*Studie af antikke kvindefigurer*)

Graphite and wash on paper, 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (170 x 250 mm)

Signed lower right: *Eckersberg*

PROVENANCE: Private collection, 20 Stenosgade 4A 1616 Kø[benhavn] V (inscription on back); Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 558, 1991, lot 447, ill. p. 175.

EXHIBITED: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 4, ill. p. 4.

LITERATURE: Inger Hjorth Nielsen, *Studier til C. W. Eckersbergs maleri Moses lader det røde hav træde tilbage og Faraos hær oversvømme*, *Kunstmuseets Årsskrift* 1975, pp. 103–118; Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century, from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1994, pp. 4–5.

After the youthful Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg received a major gold medal from the Royal Danish Academy, he left on a six-year-long study journey to Paris and Rome. While in Paris, he received an important commission from home. The wealthy Jewish merchant Mendel Nathanson, for whom Eckersberg was later to execute other important works, wanted a painted composition of considerable size with a subject relating to the Israelites' passage through the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Eckersberg executed a considerable number of drawn sketches for this undertaking, including various arrangements of figures clearly inspired by the neoclassical style of his French teacher, Jacques-Louis David.



FIG. A.
C. W. Eckersberg,
*Figure Study of Three
Young Women and a
Young Man* (Paris, 1812).
Pencil, pen, black ink,
brown and gray wash
on white paper, 9 $\frac{2}{3}$ x
12 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (245 x 324 mm),
Statens Museum for
Kunst, Department of
Prints and Drawings.



FIG. B
C. W. Eckersberg,
The Crossing of the Red Sea,
Rome 1813–1816
Oil on canvas, 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{3}$ ft.
(203.5 x 283.5 cm),
Statens Museum for Kunst.

In her article in *Kunstmuseets Årsskrift*, 1975, Inger Hjorth Nielsen provides a clear account of the young artist's manner of working, often extending over several years to complete a painting. She refers to a number of hitherto unidentified drawings which appeared in 1971 and were acquired by the Department of Prints and Drawings in Statens Museum for Kunst. One of these drawings was identified as the very first sketch for the commission (Fig. A). All of these drawings must be considered as preparatory works for the final painting *Moses Commands the Red Sea to Retreat and Pharaoh's Army Drowns*, 1816, 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ ft. (204 x 282 cm), Statens Museum for Kunst (Fig. B).

Not all the studies shown in Inger Hjorth Nielsen's article were used for the finished commission, nor was the Loeb collection *Study of Two Women*, which came to public attention only in 1991. But the two women, who appear to be looking out to sea where the remnants of Pharaoh's army are drowning, are unmistakably reminiscent in style and execution of one of the drawings of three young women in ancient dress reproduced in the Nielsen article (Fig. 7) and might, in a slightly reworked form, be related to the central figure at the front of the painting.

S.L.