

JULIUS EXNER

1825–1910

27. *Self-Portrait, the Artist's Last Work*, 1910

(*Selvportræt. Kunstnerens sidste arbejde*)

Oil on canvas, 26½ x 23½ in. (67 x 60 cm)

Signed lower right: Exner 1910

PROVENANCE: Artist's estate auction, Charlottenborg 1911, lot 86; Kunsthallen, Auction 256, 1963, lot 44, ill. p. 31; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 552, 1991, lot 209, ill. (described as *Kunstneren i sit atelier*).

EXHIBITED: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 6; 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. 31, 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. 10; Gargosian Gallery, New York, *In the Studio*, 2015.

LITERATURE: Annette Stabell in *Weilbach*, vol. 2, 1994, p. 266; Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994, p. 10, ill.; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2007, p. 129, ill. p. 139.

When Julius Exner reached the age of eighty, he painted himself in his professorial residence in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, elegantly dressed in a suit and waistcoat, sitting by his easel in a corner of his studio beneath the large skylight.¹ Entitled *My Studio, the Artist's Self-Portrait*, the work was exhibited at Charlottenborg in 1906 (Fig. A), sufficient to convince everyone that the old artist was still very capable indeed.

This picture is less tall and somewhat wider than the one with the same motif in the Loeb collection. It provides a view of the spacious, high-ceilinged studio and immediately draws attention to a tub containing a luxuriant small fig tree, whose many light-green leaves reflect the clear daylight entering the room. The wall beside him contains an impressive array of his works, some on easels, some hanging side by side. One of them is *Portrait of Gudrun Reading*, in the Loeb collection. Receiving special attention is one of Exner's magnificently framed principal works from his late years, *The Music Lesson, Interior from Fanø School*,² which had been exhibited in Munich five years before.

In a dark corner in the left foreground there is a glimpse of some article of clothing, presumably the artist's smock, thrown across a high-backed armchair. The Eckersberg school's demand for minutely veracious reproductions of reality was still very much alive in an artist like Exner; it would not allow him to omit such an important detail as his artist's smock, which would have been part of his attire if he had not chosen to portray himself impeccably dressed in a suit.

Four years later, the year in which he died, Exner copied the self-portrait in the smaller version seen here, making certain alterations: the painter is now sitting with his back to the window so that the work he is painting on the easel can benefit from the best light. His dress is just as impeccable, and the smock is still there, this time on a more modest chair, because Exner himself is sitting in the armchair.

The room does not extend so much to the side as in the earlier picture, and it is more difficult to distinguish the motifs of the paintings on the wall. However, the small paintings at the top and bottom near-



FIG. A *My Studio, the Artist's Self-Portrait*, 1906
Oil on canvas, 22¾ x 32¼ in. (58 x 82 cm), present owner unknown.

est the window are identifiable as *A Child in a Cradle*³ and *Old Woman by a Half Door*,⁴ pictures representing two very different stages in his life, the second of which had perhaps only just been finished. As in the earlier painting, the Loeb collection's *Portrait of the 13-year-old Gudrun Reading* is also identifiable.

This time, the large easel on the right holds a work exhibited in 1901 entitled *Young Lad Returning from the Hunt*.⁵ It is an evening scene of a room in a farm in which the mother, grandmother, and younger sister are looking delightedly at the young son showing off his bag for examination and admiration. The fig tree looks bigger, but it has not grown. It still draws the light and retains it in its crown, as does the young hunter's mother as she holds the lighted paraffin lamp out toward her son.

The artist is given a less prominent role than four years previously, as though he is in the process of disappearing into his works.

S.L.

¹Julius Exner, *Min Malerstue, Kunstnerens Selvportræt*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 22¾ x 32¼ in. (58 x 82 cm), private collection. (Fig. A).

²*Musiktimen, Interiør fra Fanø skole*, undated. Oil on canvas, 28½ x 40¼ in. (74 x 102 cm), private collection.

³*Et barn i en vugge*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 9¾ x 12½ in. (25 x 32 cm), private collection.

⁴*Gammel kone ved en halvdør*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 9 x 11½ in. (23 x 29 cm), private collection.

⁵*Ung knøs vender hjem fra jagten*. Oil on canvas, 27½ x 37 in. (69 x 94 cm), private collection.