

## ANNA ANCHER

1859–1935

### 4. *On the Way to Church*, c. 1928

(*På vej til kirke*)

Oil on canvas, 28 x 33½ in. (71 x 85 cm)

Signed lower right: A. Ancher

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 695, 2001, lot 1055, ill.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg Efteraarsudstilling, *Anna Ancher, Mindeophængning*, 1935, no. 66 (described as *Paa Vej til Kirke*, c. 1928); 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. 34, 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. 2.

LITERATURE: 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. 21.

The motif in this painting is of three women from Skagen walking to church on a sunlit road in Skagen Østerby late in the day. There are suggestions of rapid movement as they approach the painter, side by side, clothed almost identically in dark dresses, long skirts, shawls, and cloaks, with white scarves around their heads. They thus form a strong contrast to the dazzling light colors seen on the road, the houses, the dunes, and the sky, where pink, light blue, and light green are dominant.

The countless shades of color found in the farthest outskirts of Østerby at Skagen, where the town borders on the vast stretches of heath leading to Grenen, often tempted Anna Ancher in the latter part of her life. From about 1915 she painted numerous studies and more carefully finished pictures without figures on the sandy tracks out there.

In the 1920s, modern dress was not yet common among the older women of the humble folk, but the three in Anna Ancher's painting are dressed in such a conservative manner that it must be assumed they belonged to Indre Mission. This strict, almost pietistic Christian persuasion had from the 1870s become very widespread in Denmark, especially in the poorer areas far from Copenhagen. In Skagen, where the people were so often faced with death at sea, the movement gained many adherents, and the town was, in a way, divided into two camps. Anna Ancher knew Indre Mission at close quarters because her mother and sisters were deeply committed to the movement. In 1903 she painted *Et missionsmøde A Field Sermon*, a large picture of many figures listening to a lay preacher as he addressed the people of Skagen sitting in the lee of a high dune; it is now in the Skagens Museum.

Anna Ancher was to all appearances a woman with a religious faith, but at the same time she associated with a group of freethinkers. Otherwise, she would never have thought of painting the grotesque contrast between the approaching women in their somber dress and the wealth of color in the calm, sun-drenched landscape.

E. F.