

MICHAEL ANCHER

1849–1927

7. *Potato Harvest*, 1901

(*Kartoffelhøst*)

Oil on canvas, 31½ x 42½ in. (80 x 108 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Michael Ancher 1901

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 452, 1983, lot 13, ill. p. 15.

EXHIBITED: Probably Charlottenborg, 1902, no. 12; 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. 4.

In former times, the population of Skagen was obliged to live primarily on the fish they caught. The sandy moorland stretches around the town were suitable only for grazing cattle, and agriculture was limited. An exception was the undemanding potato, which grows well in just this sort of sandy soil.

Here Ancher gives a detailed pictorial description of the right conditions for potato growing. The brown moorland vegetation takes up most of the painting, while the spot where the potatoes are being dug up is almost pure sand, gray and cold.

After the 1890s, an increasing number of moorland pictures make an appearance in Ancher's oeuvre, often, as here, populated by people at work in dramatic sunset light. Some of his moorland pictures appear to have a Symbolist character, for instance the 1915 painting *Young Harvester Returning Home from the Outfield* (carrying a scythe over his shoulder), in Statens Museum for Kunst. They can be seen as examples of Ancher's lifelong inspiration from such French painters as J. F. Millet (1814–1875) and Jules Breton (1827–1906).

E. F.