

VILHELM KYHN

1819–1903

74. *Evening Atmosphere*, 1861

(*Aftenstemning*)

Oil on canvas, 27¼ x 37 in. (69 x 94 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: V. Kyhn 1861

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 465, 1984, lot 211 (described as *Aftenstemning. Hestene vandes*).

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg, 1861, no. 105; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 17; 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. 26.

LITERATURE: Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994, ill. p. 8; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, p. 186, ill. p. 186–187.

Peace now rests o'er land and town, no sound the earth doth make;
The moon smiles blissful to the clouds, the stars smile to each other.
And radiant and calm the lake embraces the heavens . . .

(*Fred hviler over land og by, ej verden larmer mer;
Fro smiler månen til sin sky, til stjerne stjerne ser.
Og søen blank og rolig står med himlen i sin favn, . . .*)

Such are the first lines of one of the evening hymns by the great Danish Golden Age poet Bernhard Severin Ingemann (1789–1862), a text that quickly became known to every child in Denmark. Perhaps Vilhelm Kyhn had these lines in mind when he painted his picture of evening, and perhaps he imagined that the farm worker riding on the foremost of the horses on the banks of the stream is repeating the words to himself, while his eyes survey the infinite expanse of the evening sky.

It is quite certain that, far from reproducing a specific topographical locality, this work has the sole intention of awakening in the mind of the viewer a feeling of rest and peace, perhaps with a touch of melancholy along with a profound sense of the artist's gratitude for the beauty of his native land. To Kyhn, the Danish landscape was the most beautiful in the world, and almost all his works are concerned with defining and praising the special national character of nature's many phenomena.

It may be that Vilhelm Kyhn borrowed an occasional stylistic feature from the famous German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), a figure by whom few of the Danish landscape artists of the time failed to be influenced; here it is the figure shown with his back to us, intended to represent the viewer of the picture.

Kyhn was otherwise a determined opponent of all foreign influence, especially of German and French art. With all his heart he belonged to the circle of "blond" artists. This term related to a conflict between the nationalist painters loyal to Høyen's principles and those who were more European in their outlook. The two groups were known as the "blonds" and the "brunettes," and the latter had gradually come to dominate both the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and the Copenhagen Art Society, Kunstforeningen.

Vilhelm Kyhn's irreconcilable attitude to the brunettes, whom he attacked publicly, was the reason he was unable to sell a single painting to the Copenhagen Art Society between 1847 and 1856. S.L.