

ANNA ANCHER

1859–1935

2. *Young Girl Reading a Letter*, 1902

(*Ung pige, der læser et brev*)

Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in. (61 x 46 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: A Ancher 1902

PROVENANCE: Attorney Victor Fischer, Ovenlyssalen, Bredgade 34, Copenhagen, Auction 7.3., 1916, lot 27, ill. p. 6 (unpaginated); Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 121 (Hugo Lützau's estate), 1932, lot 124, ill. p. 6 (described as *Ung pige læser et brev*); Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 581, 1992, lot 68, ill. p. 55.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg, 1903, no. 16; 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. 3.

LITERATURE: Inge Mejer Antonsen (ed.), *Michael and Anna Ancher's House, A Short Guide to the Collections*, The Helga Ancher Foundation, Skagen 1998 (on the motif).

Anna Ancher rarely painted outside Skagen Østerby, where she was born and brought up and where she lived throughout her life. She preferred to paint individual figures indoors. Most often she chose women from the fishing population of Skagen as her models, but this painting is different in that it portrays a young girl of the bourgeoisie. She stands reading a letter in a well-lit interior, which gives the picture a narrative content, something rarely seen in Anna Ancher's work. When reproduced at that time by Axel Vincents Kunstforlag, the painting was given an anecdotal title: *Letter from Home*.

The golden-haired model appears to be the artist's own daughter Helga—who was nineteen years old in 1902—and the interior is recognizable as the artist's own home at Markvej 2 in Skagen. In 1967 the house was opened as a museum under the name of Michael and Anna Ancher's House, one of the few artists' homes from this time preserved in its original state. When the Anchers bought their house and moved into it in 1884, this room with its two south-facing windows was at the center of the small old wing. The South Room, as it is called, was used as a living room, and when there were guests, a dining room. In time, all the walls were covered with paintings and drawings of the artists' family and their friends.

The girl in the painting stands at the easternmost of the two windows, by the mahogany sewing table, which is still in the same place today. So is the fine 18th-century looking glass which can just be discerned on the right in the painting, where a Louis XVI console table is almost hidden beneath the bright green leaves. This was later moved to the West Room and replaced by a bookcase, which now stands between the windows.

Anna Ancher often painted here in the South Room, doubtless because of the good lighting. In this picture, the powerful late morning sunlight falls especially on the letter, which gives support to the narrative element, but it also falls on the light summer curtains and the geranium on the window ledge, one of the artist's favorite flowers. At the same time, the girl's face and the room are indirectly illumined by the brilliant sunshine outside. The light green leaves and the light blue sky outside suggest early summer.

Anna Ancher painted similar motifs on various occasions, for instance *Interior*, 1899, in the museum Den Hirschsprungeske Samling, where the young girl is looking at herself in a mirror.

At about the same time, Anna Ancher painted two of her most important works from the South Room. *Breakfast Before the Hunt*, from 1903, portrays Michael Ancher seated on the sofa, eating his breakfast in the early morning light; in 1904 came *Interior with Poppies*, a painting of a family friend, pianist Lizzy Hohlenberg, reading by the table in front of the white wall.

Anna Ancher also painted in the West Room and the North Room, but she was most fond of using the small room known as “The Skylighted Room” on the north side of the house. Not until 1913 did she acquire a proper studio, when Ulrik Plesner (1861–1933) built a modern wing for them on the north side of their house.

E.F.