

## MICHAEL ANCHER

1849–1927

### 9. *Portrait of the Artist's Wife, the Painter Anna Ancher* (early 1900's)

Oil on canvas, 34<sup>3</sup>/<sub>5</sub> x 26<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in. (88 x 68 cm)

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction no. 178 (Helga Ancher's estate), 1965, lot 98; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 729, 2004, lot 1267, ill.

EXHIBITED: 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. 5.

The marriage between Anna and Michael Ancher was a long and happy one, not only in a banal sense but also because Anna was one of the few women of her generation to be given the possibility of developing fully as an artist. At the end of the 19th century, when social equality was still unknown, women normally had to abandon their careers when they married, and many of their talents were lost. Things were different in the Ancher family, where Michael Ancher actually encouraged his wife to paint and exhibit. He admired her talent and acknowledged that it was greater than his own. Although she was ten years younger than he and only 14 when they first met, he always valued her opinion. Nor did any professional jealousy arise between them, as otherwise happens in many marriages between artists. She was likewise respected by the other Skagen painters, who looked on her as a professional and equal. So Anna Ancher could confidently enjoy being an artist and came to exude the self-confidence reflected in this portrait.

Anna was not tall, but she always stood very straight, which together with her personal qualities gave her a natural dignity. Her characteristic profile, due in part to breaking her nose as a child, contributed to this dignity. Michael Ancher often chose her profile when he painted her, for instance in the head and shoulders portrait of 1878, painted on the occasion of their engagement and in the dignified full-figure portrait of 1884 (*Den Hirschsprungske Samling*).

The same applies to the portrait in the Loeb collection, in which Anna is wearing a black dress with a medieval-type silver belt such as was fashionable at the time.<sup>1</sup> A necklace can be seen on the high-necked blue dickey, a chain holding an anchor fastened as a brooch, presumably a symbolic gift from her husband, whose surname in Danish literally means "anchor." This brooch is seen in numerous paintings but has apparently not survived. The pose in this portrait is somewhat reminiscent of that in the one Michael Ancher was commissioned to paint by the Charlottenborg Exhibition Committee (now in the Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle).

The Loeb collection portrait of Anna was among the 200 paintings that left the Anchers' house on the occasion of the first of the two auctions that, in accordance with the will of their daughter Helga Ancher, were held in order to finance the restoration of the house and the works of art so that the artists' home could open as a museum. There is a smaller portrait of her there today that must have been painted on the same occasion. Her dress and the accessories are the same, but in that one Anna Ancher is seen full face.

E.F.

<sup>1</sup>A large amount of such jewelery was made at the end of the 19th century, and this belt has been preserved in the Michael and Anna Ancher's House museum. I am grateful to the art historian Inge Mejer Antonsen for this information.