



Jan Van Beers

1852-1927

After the ball

Oil on canvas signed lower left

Dimensions : 141 x 251 cm

Dimensions : 55.51 x 98.82 inch

Literature : London, Salon Parisien, 1886, as The Awakening Beauty.

Paris, Gallery Durand-Ruel, Spring 1888

Origin : Private collection, Spain



Dimensions with frame : 179 x 290 cm  
Dimensions with frame : 70.47 x 114.17 inch

*Après le bal* is a striking example of Van Beers's work during the Parisian years. In 1886 it was exhibited in London, at the Salon Parisien in New Bond Street, as *The Awakening Beauty*. It was also part of Van Beers's solo-show at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1888, now with its present title. The highly suggestive subject of the painting was shocking to the eyes of many contemporary critics. The painting shows a beautiful young woman stretched out on a furry couch, her sumptuous ball dress carelessly thrown aside, her shoes and light-blue silk stockings on the ground in front of her, next to a book with a yellow cover and what seems to be a green cigarette purse. The woman's nakedness is emphasised by her pearl choker necklace and the bracelets on her arms. A magnificent feathery fan is attached by a string to one of her bracelets, as if she may still need to cool herself with it. The woman shamelessly meets our gaze with one eye and even seems to stretch out an elegant foot in our direction. There can be little doubt as to what she is: she is a beautiful and seductive coquette, literally shown here as a *grande horizontale* who has returned from a ball, where she must have attracted as much attention as she does in the painting. *Après le bal* is more than a titillating depiction of a Parisian demi-mondaine, however. It is also an aesthetic, almost Whistlerian colour experiment. The painting's restrained colour scheme has an extremely limited range: apart from the dark patches on the rug on the couch, colours range from a very pale type of yellow to a soft kind of pink, punctuated only by the green of the purse, the bright yellow of the book cover, the light-blue of the stockings and the red of the woman's mouth. Van Beers was very particular about the sensorial effect the painting would create. At the Salon Parisien in London, where the painting was one of the eye-catchers, it was hung in an especially designed dark alcove, framed by dark green hangings and spotlit

from above with an electrical light behind a stretched piece of pink paper.

## Biography

A painter of portraits, history and genre scenes, Jan Van Beers was born in Lierre (Belgium), in 1852. His father was a famous poet. Van Beers befriended artists such as the composer Pierre Benoit, (1834-1901), whom he portrayed in 1883, and the painter Baron Henri Leys.

Studying at the renowned Antwerp Fine Arts Academy, he soon became the leader of a group of young promising artists, known as the " Van Beers clique ". Among them, Piet Verhaert (1852-1908), Alexander Struys (1852-1941), et Jef Lambeaux (1852-1908).

In his early days, the artist made many historical paintings, such as " The Funeral of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders " (1876, Petit Palais) or " The Witch " (1877). Critics were unanimous in recognizing the technical mastery of Van Beers, comparing him the great masters of Flemish painting.

In 1878, Van Beers moved to Paris and started to work in the studio of A. Stevens. He painted huge historical pieces, landscapes and small genre pictures at the same time. After 1879, he made genre scenes and modern life subjects painted in a photo-realistic style. He painted very small paintings, delicately brushed, hyperrealistic in their details and extremely finished. Success was almost immediate, and, in 1880, when he presented his work " Soir d'Été " in the Paris Salon, art critics lauded his elegant and fine touch.

The following year, at the Brussels Salon of 1881, Van Beers was in the centre of a scandal. He exhibited two paintings at the Salon : " Lily ", a tiny portrait of a girl, and " The yacht 'Sirene' ". For this last painting, the Belgian critics, Solvay and De Mons suspected him to have painted over a photograph, calling his work a " photo-peinture ". On the other hand, the Review " l'Art Moderne "defended him by suggesting that those were merely echoing comments of some artists which were jealous of Van Beers' success. Van Beers asked the critics to have both his paintings scrapped off and checked by experts. An unknown person then vandalised the " Sirene " by scratching off the face of the young woman. After a thoroughful examination, the commission's report cleared Van Beers of all charges and concluded that he was: " an honest man ".

## Museums

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Anvers

Musée des Beaux- Arts, Rouen

Musée du Petit-Palais, Paris

## Bibliography

E.Benezit, Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs, Gründ 1999

Jan Dirk Baetens, " Photography in the Picture : style, genre and commerce in the art of Jan Van Beers (1852-1927) " Image and Narrative, issue 14, July 2006