

Ejner Johansson: I Am Well and Beautifully Portrayed

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Hans Christian Andersen was twenty-eight years' old when he visited Rome for the first time in 1833. The four months he spent there in daily contact with painters and sculptors had a great influence on his subsequent attitude to painting and sculpture. From a Danish point of view, the most important European artists at that time were the German Nazarenes – a view imparted to Andersen by, amongst others, the painter Albert Küchler, who painted the first oil painting of the poet at the very beginning of 1834. This excellent portrait was never very popular, not even with Andersen himself. He preferred a more sentimental drawing that the painter made for himself, undoubtedly because it could to a greater extent than the oil painting be interpreted as a portrait of “a young and highly talented poet”. A quotation from Andersen's novel *O.T.* from 1836 tends to substantiate his conception of portraiture. “The painter ought to give the ugly or insignificant face its own peculiar beauty. Every person has moments when something spiritual or characteristic emerges.”