



William Thomas Smedley

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Title

The Rich and the Poor

Medium

Watercolor and gouache on paper

Date

1891

Catalogue Number

81.22

Credit Line

Purchased with the Museum Volunteers' Fund, 1981

Web Description

The height of William Smedley's career as an illustrator came in the 1890s, after a decade of apprenticeships, academic training, and travel abroad. It was also the time of Smedley's most active participation in exhibitions and his growing involvement in portraiture and easel painting. Smedley was respected in the New York publishing world, and the friends and contacts he met there soon became his patrons. With *The Rich and the Poor*, Smedley offers direct social commentary. At the center of the composition is a wealthy, well-dressed woman, who is out of place in this working class neighborhood. Those around her stare curiously and with some suspicion. Smedley's spontaneous impressionistic technique—although rendered in black and white—has not prevented him from depicting with great accuracy the variety of textures. The artist excels in the masterful representation of the sidewalk's wet sheen, the gleam of the horses' bridles, and the detail in the cast iron ornaments. The light falls clearly on the foreground, while background views are filtered through a misty rain. Smedley demonstrates his technical proficiency but uses this to draw the viewer more deeply into an image of social contrasts.