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Georg Kinzer, Woman at a Mirror (Frau vor dem Spiegel), 1932

John Schneider
Marquette University

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Georg Kinzer
German (1896-1983)
Woman at a Mirror (Frau vor dem Spiegel), 1932
Oil and tempera on canvas
29 x 27 ½ in.
Gift of Marvin and Janet Fishman, 2000.38.8



he studies herself in the mirror while the artist and, through him, everyone who will view the painting from this moment onward, study her. She stands in her slip, facing forward, painfully aware that she is exposed and at the artist's mercy and in need of compassion. She is not beautiful. It is easy to imagine that she is thinking that her whole life can be read in her ravaged face and squat body, that her sins -- and worse, her sorrows, her fate -- are glaringly evident and will subject her to our pity and embarrass her for all time. Did the artist pay her to model and was she desperate for money? Does she regret her choice to pose? Or does she see something different in her face than we see? To what degree do any of us see ourselves as others see us, individually and as a society? This portrait, poised between tragedy and comedy, is profoundly alive. How different it is from the idealized, commissioned portraits of the wealthy and powerful which dominate portrait painting! I love this painting because it is so deeply engaged with social, political, psychological and spiritual questions of the greatest consequence. I use this painting to help my theatre history students understand modernism, and I use it to help my acting students understand the relationship between inner life and external expression.

John D. Schneider
Performing Arts