EXHIBITION OF 19TH-AND EARLY 20TH-CENTURY MASTERWORKS FROM ONE OF WORLD’S PREEMINENT COLLECTIONS OF DANISH PAINTING OPENS OCTOBER 12, AT SCANDINAVIA HOUSE, NEW YORK

Paintings by Hammershøi, Købke, Krøyer, and others document the formative years of Danish art, from the “Golden Age” to the early modern era

Media Preview: Wednesday, October 9, 2013; 9-11 am

Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough: Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr., an exhibition of masterworks by leading Danish painters of the 19th and early 20th centuries, opens at Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America, in New York City, on October 12, 2013. The selection of 37 works traces key developments in Danish painting from the late neoclassical, to the romantic, to the early modern eras—a period of unprecedented artistic creativity that saw the emergence of a distinctive national school of Danish painting.

Organized by The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF), the exhibition is drawn exclusively from the private collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr., regarded as the finest collection of Danish paintings outside Scandinavia. Highlights include an outstanding group of works by Vilhelm Hammershøi, the most celebrated of all early Danish modernists, as well as important paintings by Nicolai Abildgaard, Anna and Michael Ancher, Christen Købke, P.S. Krøyer, and L.A. Ring, among others. Scandinavia House will be the exclusive venue for this exhibition, which remains on view through January 18, 2014.
Edward P. Gallagher, ASF president, states: “It is only in the past few decades that Danish painting has begun to receive the international recognition and study it so richly deserves. In America, there is today no more enthusiastic and astute admirer of the glories of Danish painting than Ambassador Loeb, whose superb collection of Danish masters we showcase in the present exhibition. We are extremely grateful to the Ambassador for sharing these treasures with our public, and for enabling the ASF to further its mission of celebrating the cultural achievements of the Nordic countries in such an important way.”

**Historical Background**

The period covered by this exhibition—roughly the end of the 18th- through early 20th centuries—was one of enormous political and social upheaval in Denmark that saw dramatic changes not only in the character of Danish painting, but in the country’s sense of national identity. The relative peace and prosperity of the 18th century was brought to an abrupt end by Denmark’s involvement in the Napoleonic Wars, which left the country bereft of its once-powerful navy and global prominence. Ensuing decades of political and economic instability, driven by economic collapse and then a rising middle class and rural proletariat, saw the demise of Denmark’s 1,000-year-old absolutism and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. Artists, writers, and political thinkers alike participated in a new nationalistic fervor and the perceived need to redefine what it meant to be Danish.

**Exhibition Overview**

*Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough: Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.* focuses on the extraordinary outburst of artistic creativity that occurred in Denmark from the 1790s to the 1920s, as successive generations of Danish painters sought to create a national school that would rival those of France, Germany, and England. The works on view document the full richness and variety of this period, beginning with important examples of neo-classically inspired history paintings and portraits from the 1780s and 90s by artists such as Nicolai Abildgaard and Jens Juel. Christen Købke’s portrait of

*Jens Juel, Seated Chinese Man in Mandarin Dress, c. 1780s. Oil on canvas, 16 ½ x 13 ½ in.*
Bertel Thorvaldsen (c. 1828) pays homage to Denmark’s greatest neoclassical sculptor, while an exuberant still life (c. 1833) by J.L. Jensen is an early example of the enduring importance of Dutch 17th-century painting in the development of Danish art.

Works from the 1810s to 1850s, the so-called “Golden Age” of Danish painting, reflect the conscious rejection of academic neoclassicism in favor of a new nationalistic art that celebrated the land and its people. Its legacy includes Christen Dalsgaard’s charming image of a young girl writing (1871) and romanticized views of the Danish countryside by Vilhelm Kyhn and J. Th. Lundbye epitomize the idealizing and unabashedly patriotic approach typical of the Golden Age painters. By contrast, L. A. Ring’s Harvest (1886), in which a rural laborer (the artist’s brother) wields his heavy scythe in the hot sun, presents a markedly less idyllic view of rural life, presaging the social realism embraced by many turn-of-the-century Danish painters.

The final section of the exhibition explores the varied responses to modernist innovations at home and abroad—a phenomenon collectively known as “the Modern Breakthrough.” The enormous impact of French Impressionism, with its free brushwork, brilliant effects of light, and emphasis on subjects from everyday life, is apparent in works such as Otto Bache’s sparkling view of Flag Day in Copenhagen (after 1892); Laurits Tuxen's Collecting Mussels at Low Tide at Le Portel, France (1888); and Harald Slott-Møller’s Summer Day (1888). The exhibition also includes a number of works by the influential husband-and-wife painters Michael and Anna Ancher, who participated in an important artists colony at Skagen Beach, in northern Denmark, where they and their fellow painters excelled in plein air views of the town’s beach and fisher folk. Perhaps the most successful and still best known of the
Danish Naturalists was P.S. Krøyer, represented by a vibrant self-portrait (1902) of the artist at his easel on Skagen Beach.

The exhibition culminates with a remarkable group of seven works by Vilhelm Hammershøi, the greatest and yet most enigmatic of Danish modernists. A far cry from the chromatic brilliance of the Danish Impressionists, Hammershøi’s austere and radically simplified landscapes and interiors owe much to Vermeer as well as to Whistler and the Symbolist movement. *Interior, Strandgade 30* (1899) is one of several works on view devoted to the artist’s favorite motif: a room in his Copenhagen apartment in which a somberly clad woman—the artist’s wife—quietly performs a domestic task. For many, these restrained, nearly monochrome paintings, with their subtle explorations of light and mood of psychological introspection, exemplify the unique qualities and character of modernist Danish art.

**Organization**

The exhibition is co-curated by Dr. Patricia G. Berman, the Theodora L. and Stanley H. Feldberg Professor of Art and Chair of the Art Department at Wellesley College and teacher at the University of Oslo, and by Dr. Thor J. Mednick, Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Toledo. Dr. Berman, a leading specialist in early modern Scandinavian art, is the author of numerous important scholarly publications in the field, including *In Another Light: Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. Dr. Berman was the coordinating curator of *Luminous Modernism: Scandinavian Art Comes to America, 1912* and co-curator of *MUNCH | WARHOL and the Multiple Image*, both exhibitions organized by The American-Scandinavian Foundation and presented at Scandinavia House. In addition, Dr. Berman assisted the late Kirk Varnedoe on the landmark exhibition *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, which toured the United States in 1982-83. Dr. Mednick, a noted scholar of modern art and a specialist in Danish art, contributed to Scandinavia House’s 2011-12 centennial exhibition *Luminous Modernism*.

**Publication**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with scholarly précis on each of the works and biographical essays on the artists represented. The
publication also includes an introduction by Dr. Patricia G. Berman and essays by Dr. Thor J. Mednick, on Copenhagen as an international artistic center during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and by Charlotte Linvald, on the contributions of women artists to 19th-century Danish painting.

The American-Scandinavian Foundation

The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) is the leading cultural and educational link between the United States and the Nordic countries. An American nonprofit organization, the ASF works to build international understanding through an extensive program of fellowships, grants, intern/trainee sponsorship, publishing, and membership offerings. Headquartered at Scandinavia House, in New York City, the ASF celebrated its centennial in 2011. For more information: www.amscan.org.

Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America

As the headquarters of The American-Scandinavian Foundation, Scandinavia House presents contemporary Nordic culture through a wide range of programs that encompass the visual arts, music, and literature, as well as business, finance, and technology. Offerings include art, design, and historical exhibitions; films; concerts; lectures and literary programs; symposia; language courses; and programs for children and families. For more information: www.scandinaviahouse.org, Facebook, or Twitter @ScanHouse | #greatdanespainting.

Hours and Admission

Admission is free to the Scandinavia House 3rd Floor Gallery, which is open Tuesday through Saturday, from noon to 6 pm, Wednesday until 7 pm.

* * *

Media Contacts:
For additional exhibition information and photography, please contact Bow Bridge Communications, LLC, New York City; +1 347-460-5566; info@bow-bridge.com.

For additional information about Scandinavia House, please contact Kate Erickson, Scandinavia House/The American-Scandinavian Foundation: +1 212-847-9717; press@amscan.org.