

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI PAINTING TRANQUILITY



September 9, 2015

MASTERWORKS FROM THE COLLECTION OF SMK
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF DENMARK

PAINTING TRANQUILITY: MASTERWORKS BY VILHELM HAMMERSHØI FROM SMK – THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF DENMARK

*Vilhelm Hammershøi's 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces on view at
Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America, NYC*

Media Preview: Thursday, October 15, 9 - 11 AM

September 9, 2015 - *Painting Tranquility: Masterworks by Vilhelm Hammershøi from SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark*, an exhibition of masterpieces by celebrated Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), opens at **Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America**, in **New York City**, on **October 17, 2015**. The selection of 24 paintings examines the practice of an artist who defied tradition and conventional expectations with his enigmatic artworks, eventually earning recognition as one of Denmark's greatest artists of the modern era.

The exhibition is curated by **Dr. Kasper Monrad**, chief curator at the Statens Museum for Kunst/National Gallery of Denmark (SMK) in Copenhagen and a leading expert on Danish and European painting of the 19th century. On view through **February 27, 2016**, the exhibition will be accompanied by a range of public programs for all ages and a new publication.

Drawn entirely from SMK's extensive collection, *Painting Tranquility* features artworks from the main genres in which Hammershøi worked: monumental buildings and churches in Copenhagen, reduced landscapes, intimate portraits, and the quiet home interiors for which he earned the title "de stille stuers maler" (the painter of tranquil rooms). Though Hammershøi's international popularity has grown rapidly in recent years, *Painting Tranquility* will be the first exhibition in New York exclusively dedicated to his work in over 15 years.



Fig. 1: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior with the Artist's Easel*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 33 x 27 1/5 in., Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.

Edward P. Gallagher, president of the American-Scandinavian Foundation/Scandinavia House, said, "We are delighted to present this extraordinary set of Hammershøi masterworks from the

National Gallery of Denmark—a distinguished institution with a legacy of collecting both historic and contemporary art. Prominently featured in two recent Scandinavia House exhibitions—*Luminous Modernism: Scandinavian Art Comes to America, 1912* (2011) and *Danish Paintings from the*



Fig. 2: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Interior in Strandgade, Sunlight on the Floor*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 18 1/3 x 20 1/2 in., Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.



Fig. 3: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Portrait of Ida Ilsted, Later the Artist's Wife*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 42 x 33 7/8 in., Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.

Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough: Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr. (2013)—Hammershøi's work is visionary in its grasp of the modernist aesthetic and has long enjoyed enormous popularity throughout Europe. This exhibition provides visitors with an opportunity to slow down, look closely at these captivating paintings, and enjoy a moment of quiet reflection."

Dr. Monrad said, "While Hammershøi's work reflects the special identity of modern Scandinavian art, the viewer is offered no single clue by the artist—we are never sure of his intentions. The experience becomes a contemplative one in which viewers create their own interpretations. We are delighted to provide New York audiences with that experience while also providing an opportunity to examine Hammershøi's singular compositions, his artistic goals, and the range and consistency of his practice."

Exhibition Overview

Spanning the early years of Vilhelm Hammershøi's career, when his unorthodox work was met with bafflement by the public and awe by his contemporaries, to his later years as an internationally recognized master, *Painting Tranquility* illuminates the artist's trailblazing style. While Hammershøi's choice of subject matter was seemingly typical of the time, his depictions defied conventional expectations that were steeped in the tradition of Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Rather than adhere to realistic interpretations, light and air play major roles, taking on an almost physical tactility even as material objects are dissolved and thereby creating an ethereal sensibility.

Using unusual or irregular compositional strategies, removing people from street scenes, omitting detail and narrative, and embracing a muted, subtle palette, he reimagined the landscapes, interiors, and portraits of the Nordic artistic tradition. As his teacher, the painter Peder Severin Krøyer, wrote, "I have a pupil who paints most oddly. I do not understand him, but believe he is going to be

important and do not try to influence him.”

Hammershøi is best known for interiors of middle-class homes, a popular genre in 19th-century Denmark. In *Interior Strandgade, Sunlight on the Floor* (Fig. 2; 1901) and *Interior: An Old Stove* (1888), exquisitely modulated sunlight falls on the floors, walls, and doors of Hammershøi’s Copenhagen apartment. The paintings’ lack of detail (he substituted sparsely decorated rooms for his comfortably furnished ones) and evacuated narrative evoke an atmospheric vagueness that can be at once contemplative and claustrophobic. This was a departure from his contemporaries who typically painted interiors that suggested a story unfolding and conveyed warmth and harmony.

In his portraits, Hammershøi dispensed with many of the standard elements of the genre, rendering his paintings unusual and unfathomable to his contemporary audiences. In his *Portrait of Ida Ilsted* (Fig. 3; 1890), he chose to depict his future wife sitting idly in a bare room, an indeterminate look on her face, eliminating the details traditionally used to suggest a sitter’s personality, such as portraying an activity or a particular moment. Eschewing commissions, his subjects were almost exclusively his immediate family and close friends.

Hammershøi took a similarly novel approach to his landscapes and paintings featuring local architecture. In depictions of Copenhagen like *The Buildings of the Asiatic Company* (Fig. 4; 1902), he depopulates the busy street scenes favored by Danish proponents of naturalism and realism, inventing a quiet, static city devoid of movement. In *View of Jægersborg Allé* (Fig. 5; 1892) and other landscapes, he rejects the romantic renderings of untouched countryside favored by Nordic naturalists, opting instead to paint isolated scenes of diffused tree tops and dissolved bands of color. Dr. Monrad said, “It hardly seems possible to imagine a vein of landscape art further removed from 1880s Nordic Naturalism than his.”

While Hammershøi’s work received much acclaim during his lifetime, after his death in 1916, it was largely forgotten outside of Scandinavia. Following several key exhibitions in the 1980s in Copenhagen, Washington, and New York, notably Kirk Varnedoe’s landmark 1982 *Northern Light*:



Fig. 4: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *The Buildings of the Asiatic Company, Seen from St. Annæ Street, Copenhagen, 1902*. Oil on canvas, 57 5/8 x 55 1/3 in. Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.



Fig. 5: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *View of Jægersborg Allé, Gentofte, North of Copenhagen, 1892*. Oil on canvas, 13 7/8 x 16 1/2 in., Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.

Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910, appreciation for his work expanded. His paintings can now be found in private and public collections in Copenhagen, Paris, New York, Hamburg, London, and Tokyo. Having steadily collected Hammershøi's work since his lifetime, SMK currently has among the most comprehensive collection of his work in the world.

Exhibition-related Programs

Painting Tranquility will be accompanied by a series of international short and feature-length films; Hammershøi-inspired concerts; an artist talk, symposium, and lectures; kid-friendly workshops led by art educators; and weekly gallery tours.

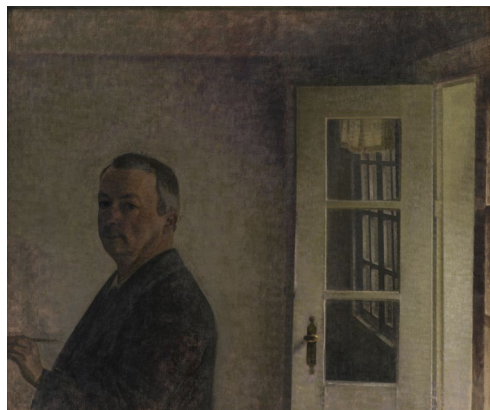


Fig. 6: Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Self-Portrait. The Cottage Spurveskjul at Sorgenfri, North of Copenhagen*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 49 5/8 x 58 7/8 in., Statens Museum for Kunst, smk.dk.

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a 124-page illustrated catalogue, featuring an essay by curator Kasper Monrad.

Curatorial Credits

Kasper Monrad is Chief Curator at SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen. He is a specialist in Danish and international 19th-century painting and has curated and co-curated a number of exhibitions of the art of this period in Denmark and abroad, including *The Golden Age of Danish Painting*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art & Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1993–94; *Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2003; and *Hammershøi and Europe*, SMK - The National Gallery of Denmark, 2012.

Support

Painting Tranquility: Masterworks by Vilhelm Hammershøi from SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark is organized by SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark. Presentation of the exhibition at Scandinavia House has been made possible by the generous support of The A.P. Møller and Chastine Mc-Kinney Møller Foundation, Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr., Daniel B. Strickler Jr. and Ellen Braestrup Strickler, Danske Markets, and The Vincent Mulford Foundation. Exhibition-related programs have been supported in part by a grant from The Consulate General of Denmark in New York. Additional organizational support has been provided by the Oak Foundation, the Ahmanson Charitable Community Trust, Ferring Pharmaceuticals, Møbeltransport Danmark, SAS Cargo, ArcusGruppen, Sotheby's, Henning Larsen Architects, VisitDenmark, The Consulate General of Denmark in New York, and the AFSMK – American Friends of Statens Museum for Kunst.

The American-Scandinavian Foundation

The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) promotes firsthand intellectual and creative exchange between the United States and the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. A publicly supported American nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, ASF has an extensive program of fellowships, grants, intern/trainee sponsorship, publishing, and cultural activities. Headquartered in

New York City, ASF has members throughout the United States, and alumni and donors worldwide.
For more information: amscan.org

Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America

Scandinavia House was created by ASF to be the leading center for Nordic culture in the United States. It offers a wide range of programs that include exhibitions, film series, concerts and other performances, readings, lectures, language courses, and activities for kids and families.
For more information: scandinaviahouse.org | Facebook | Twitter @ScanHouse | #HammershøiNYC

Statens Museum for Kunst - The National Gallery of Denmark

Situated in the heart of Copenhagen, SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark is the country's largest art museum, and displays international artwork from the early Renaissance through to the present. The extensive SMK collections originate from the holdings of the 17th- and 18th-century Danish kings, particularly those of King Frederik V who, in the 1760s, established a large collection of Old Masters which he housed at Christiansborg Castle. Since the opening of the Royal Picture Gallery to the public in 1827, SMK has had an obligation to collect contemporary Danish art, and, thus, several Hammershøi paintings were acquired directly from the artist. Christiansborg Castle burned in 1884, but nearly all of the paintings were miraculously saved. The surviving collections became the founding collection of SMK. SMK now presents between six to eight special exhibitions a year, always based on new research.

For more information: smk.dk | Facebook | Twitter @smkmuseum

Hours and Admission

The Scandinavia House Gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 12 – 6 PM (Wednesday until 7 PM). Suggested admission: \$5 | Free for ASF Members.

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