

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Vilhelm Hammershøi (Copenhagen 1864 - 1916)

Woman before a mirror, Strandgade 30

46 x 38.5 cm (18 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches)

Like the vast majority of his interiors, the present work was painted in Hammershøi's apartment at Strandgade 30, a 17th century building in the Christianshavn district of Copenhagen, where he lived with his wife Ida from 1898 to 1909.

Painted in 1906, the present work belongs to the series of views of the small living room at the back of their first-floor flat, with its window overlooking the courtyard. By times with a figure and pieces of furniture, by times without, lit by sunlight or by moonlight, the effect is one of solitude and introspection, the viewer - as much as the observed figure - sealed in a hermetic world. Here, Ida ties her hair before a mirror set on a dressing table. Rays of morning sunshine filter through the panes of the casement window. The composition is striking for its focus, the upper half of the window cropped and the door to the right omitted completely.

The overall effect merges into a poetic whole which combines a softness of light and tone with a piercingly intense and introverted stillness. As Felix Krämer writes: "As interfaces, windows [traditionally] embody the dialectical relationship between interior and exterior: they stand both for connection with the outside world and for isolation from it...Despite the central position of the window, Hammershøi's painting departs from tradition because it does not turn on the relationship between interior and exterior, nearness and farness. Indeed the windowpanes are so opaque that the world outside can be deciphered only vaguely. Most window paintings contain far-ranging exterior views, but Hammershøi uses the murky panes and the sunbeams to focus attention on the interior." (Exh. cat.

The influence of interiors of the Dutch Golden Age on Hammershøi, particularly the work of Vermeer, is well-documented, and one of the first works in this series was apparently inspired by a painting by Pieter Janssen Elinga in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, of which Hammershøi owned a print. Other prominent works in the series of views of the present room include: Sunbeams of 1900 (Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen); Interior with Two Candles of 1904 (Private collection) [1], The Coin Collector of the same year, featuring the artist's brother Svend (Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo); Interior of 1906 (Tate Gallery, London), and Moonlight, Strandgade 30, acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 2012.

This painting was owned by Klas Fåhræus, (1863-1944), the Swedish writer, art critic, and collector who fraternised with August Strindberg, Carl Larsson, Karl Nordstrom, Oscar Björck, and Nils Kreuger in Grez-sur-Loing in the 1880s. As a shareholder in several thriving Stockholm companies and factories, in 1909-11 he and his wife Olga were able to build the Villa Högberga in Lidingö in the Stockholm archipelago, which served as both their home and an art gallery and which, until the crash of 1929, boasted one of the greatest and most expensive art collections in Sweden.

[1] Sotheby's London: Monday, June 11, 2012, Lot 31

Provenance

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Klas Fåhræus, Stockholm by 1918

Sale, Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen, August 1959, lot 143

Private collection, acquired above, and by descent to 2017

Exhibitions

Exhibited:

Copenhagen, Kunstforeningen, 1955, no. 39

Copenhagen, Kunstforeningen, 1966, no. 22

Literature:

Literature:

Alfred Bramsen & Sophus Michaëlis, Vilhelm Hammershøi. Kunstneren og hans værk, Copenhagen & Christiania, 1918, p. 106, no. 294