

LE CLAIRE

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KUNST



VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864 – Copenhagen – 1916

Fra Jægersborg Allé

Pencil on paper; executed in 1892.

245 x 338 mm

PROVENANCE: Karl Madsen (1855-1938), Copenhagen (1918)¹– Madsen's estate sale, Winkel & Magnussen, Copenhagen, 29 September 1938, sale 237, lot 113 (here wrongly catalogued as a study for Bramsen no. 115) – Viggo Madsen (1885-1954), the collector's son – Private collection, Denmark

LITERATURE: Sophus Michaëlis and Alfred Bramsen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi, Kunstneren og hans værk, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Copenhagen and Christiania 1918, no. 110a (*Fra Jægersborg Allé. Pencil. The last -smaller- piece on the left of the road closest to Jægersborg*) – Paul Vad, *Hammershøi. Værk og Liv*, 1988, p. 141 (ill.)

EXHIBITION: Kunstforeningen, *Arbejder af Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Copenhagen 1916, no. 89 – Kunstforeningen, *Karl Madsen's Drawings Collection*, Copenhagen, November 1927.

This extremely rare and beautiful drawing is a study for the painting executed 1896 and titled *Landskab. Sommer. "Ryet"*. [Fig. 1].² It depicts a tree-lined stretch of the Jægersborg Allé between harvested fields, set beneath a vast cloud-filled sky. Our drawing is a very precise preparatory study for the group of trees seen on the left side of the painting. A second pencil study, depicting the large tree in the foreground together with a group of trees at the left of the painting, is held at the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen [Fig. 2].³ Both drawings are closely related. They were formerly in the collection of Karl Madsen (1855-1938), one of the leading art historians of his time.

The countryside that Hammershøi has chosen – with a road flanked by trees, groves and small woods – is typical of the environs of Copenhagen⁴. However, all this is of minor importance to the painter and the viewer. In his depictions Hammershøi took up the thread from romantic Golden Age landscape art of Lundbye and Skovgård. But with different eyes he contemplated the scenery and selected motifs and states of the light. As in our sketch he very often gave his attention to the middle ground of the motif, strengthening it. No one had ever perceived, painted or drawn a Danish landscape this way previously. Poul Vad notes: "*Hammershøi set himself up at right angles to the road whose low slender ribbon, flanked by*

¹ Karl Madsen was an art historian and painter. He was director of the Statens Museum for Kunst from 1911 to 1925 and director of the Skagens Museum from 1928 to 1938. He also had close connections with the Skagen painters.

² This painting has been sold recently at auction *20th/21st Century Art Evening Sale*, Christie's London, 7 March 2024, lot 44. Michaëlis and Bramsen, op. cit., no. 165.

³ See Poul Vad, op. cit., p. 159, fig. 105, repr.

⁴ Jægersborg Allé is now a main street in the Charlottenlund and Jægersborg neighbourhoods of the Gentofte municipality in the northern suburbs of Copenhagen.

trees, runs straight across the picture field – from edge to edge – in the middle ground. Traditionally the road was regarded as a route into the picture . . . a classic motif in European art since the Dutch landscape painters of the seventeenth century.”⁵

The art historian Mikael Wivel emphasises the unfamiliar in the artist’s work: “*Vilhelm Hammershøi was first and foremost a painter of interiors – of silent, near-deserted rooms peopled by a single, solitary figure, seemingly transfixed, standing or seated. However, he occasionally tried his hand at landscape, infusing it with similar atmospheric intensity. His landscapes inspire a palpable yet unsettling feeling of strangeness. And rank among the most unique landscapes to have been produced in Europe at the turn of the century. [...] Hammershøi had set himself the task of studying the ordinary world with an acute clinical eye – like a stranger discovering the world for the first time. [...] This is true of both his interiors and his landscapes. [...] The viewer recognises every detail – a door, a window, trees, clouds – but the feeling inspired by the whole, and the viewpoint selected always retain an element of the unfamiliar.*”⁶

Hammershøi’s landscapes nevertheless have certain parallels with works by one of the world’s greatest landscape painters. Similar landscapes with empty foregrounds and distant motifs set beneath vast, empty skies – attenuated horizontals stretching from one edge of the image to the other – can be found in Rembrandt’s drawings and etchings [Fig. 3].⁷ Hammershøi will certainly have been familiar with Rembrandt’s work. But the similarities between the physical characteristics of the Danish and Dutch landscape may also account for these parallels. Hammershøi’s landscapes are arguably among the finest and most fascinating works produced in this field.

We would like to thank Jesper Svenningsen, Statens Museum Copenhagen, for his substantial help in cataloguing this drawing.

⁵Poul Vad, op. cit., p. 154.

⁶Mikael Wivel, “Vilhelm Hammershøi, La Route Royale près de Gentofte”, in *Morceaux choisis parmi les acquisitions de la Collection Frits Lugt réalisées sous le directorat de Carlos van Hasselt 1970-1994*, Mária van Berge-Gerbaud and Hans Buijs (eds.), Paris 1996, no. 15, p. 42.

⁷This work and other comparable drawings are reproduced in *Landscapes of Rembrandt, His favourite walks around Amsterdam*, exhib. cat., Gemeentearchief Amsterdam, Institut Néerlandais, Paris, 1998-9, pp. 88-9, 94-5, 123.



Fig.1: *Landskab. Sommer. „Ryet“*, 1896
Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 56 cm.
Private collection



Fig.2: *Landskab med spredte træer. "Ryet" ved Farum Sø*, 1896-97
Pencil (?) on paper, 415 x 533 mm
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen
Inv. no. KKS7921



Fig. 3: Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Small Hamlet of Meerhuizen*,
pen and brown ink; 105 x 195 mm
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett
Inv. no.: C1410