

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864 - Copenhagen - 1916

*A Group of Trees - Landscape on the 'Kongevejen' near Gentofte*

Black chalk on laid paper; executed in 1892.

210 x 285 mm

PROVENANCE: Karl Madsen (1855-1938), Copenhagen (1918)<sup>1</sup>– Madsen's estate sale, Winkel & Magnussen, Copenhagen, 28 September 1938, sale 237, lot 112, repr. p. 37 – Helge Bartholdy Møller (1875-1952), Copenhagen – Thence by descent

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. 116

EXHIBITION: Kunstforeningen, *Arbejder af Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Copenhagen 1916, no. 92 – Forum, *Det Danske Kunststævne*, Copenhagen 1929, no. 766c

This rare and beautiful drawing is a study for the large-scale painting titled *Landscape on the 'Kongevejen' near Gentofte*. Executed in 1892, the work is now in a private collection [fig. 1].<sup>2</sup> It depicts a tree-lined stretch of the 'Kongevejen' [Kings's Road] between harvested fields, and set beneath a vast, cloud-filled sky. Our drawing is a very precise preparatory study for the group of seven trees depicted at the centre of the painting. A second pencil study, depicting the trees at the right of the painting, is held at the Fondation Custodia in Paris [fig. 2].<sup>3</sup> Both drawings are closely related and are identical in format. Both were formerly in the collection of Karl Madsen. Two of the trees appear in both drawings, and were probably included to anchor the composition. An oil study exactly repeating the trees in the present drawing (only one small oak has been added to the curved outline of the group at the right), was recently acquired by the David Collection in Copenhagen [fig. 3].<sup>4</sup>

The countryside that Hammershøi has depicted – with a road flanked by trees, groves and small woods – is typical of the environs of Copenhagen. The village of Gentofte lies to the north of Copenhagen. The 'Kongevejen' leads from Copenhagen to Hillerød, and connects the royal palaces of the Danish capital with Frederiksborg Castle. But all this is of minor importance to the painter and the viewer. Poul Vad notes: *Hammershøi set himself up at right angles to the road whose low slender ribbon, flanked by trees, runs straight across the picture field – from edge to edge – in the middle ground. No one had ever perceived and painted a*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Michaëlis and Bramsen, op. cit., no. 115 – Poul Vad, *Hammershøi, Værk og liv*, Copenhagen 1988, no. 92, p. 140 (english edition: Poul Vad, *Vilhelm Hammershøi and Danish Art at the Turn of the Century*, trans. Kenneth Tindall, New Haven and London 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Michaëlis and Bramsen, op. cit., no. 117 – See *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.), Fondation Custodia, Paris 1994, no. 15, p. 42, repr. – See *De Abildgaard à Hammershøi, 75 Dessins Danois*, exhib. cat., Maison du Danemark, Paris, 24 March - 27 May 2007; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 23 June – September 2007, Fondation Custodia, Paris 2007, no. 26, p. 38, repr.

<sup>4</sup> Michaëlis and Bramsen, op. cit., no. 118 – Poul Vad, op. cit., no. 103, p. 15 – Auction sale, Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen, 1 March 2016, lot 7 (sold for kr. 4,300,000).

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*Danish landscape that way previously. 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.*<sup>5</sup>

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.*<sup>6</sup>

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 [figs. 4 and 5].<sup>7</sup> 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Poul Vad, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Mikael 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.

<sup>7</sup> Both works 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: *Landscape on the Kongevejen near Gentofte, Summer*, 1892, oil on canvas, 115 x 147 cm.  
Private collection.



Fig. 2: *Study for 'Landscape on the Kongevejen near Gentofte'*, 1892, pencil on laid paper, 210 x 272 mm.  
Fondation Custodia, Paris [inv. 1990-T.32]



Fig. 3: Study for 'Landscape on the Kongevejen near Gentofte', 1892, oil on canvas, 32 x 46 cm.  
The David Collection, Copenhagen [inv. 7/2016]



Fig. 4: Rembrandt, *The Small Hamlet of Meerhuizen*, pen and brown ink; 105 x 195 mm;  
Staatl. Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett; [inv. no.: C1410]



Fig 5: Rembrandt, *The House with the Tower*, pen, brush and brown ink; 98 x 216 mm;  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, [inv. no. 83. GA. 363]