

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864 - Copenhagen - 1916

Gaardlænge, Vejle (Barn near Vejle)

Oil on canvas; executed in 1883.

35.0 x 37.5 cm

PROVENANCE: Ida Hammershøi, the artist's widow (1916) – The artist's estate sale, Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 30 October 1916, lot 14 – Wholesaler Abrahamson, Copenhagen - Johannes Carl Bock (1867-1953), Copenhagen – His estate sale, Copenhagen, Winkel & Magnussen, auction sale 380, 19-21 May 1953, lot 35 (as *Mark med Huslænge* [Field with farmhouse], with incorrect measurements 31 x 37 cm) - Zoologist Ole Hammer (1911-96); still in his possession in 1983 - Private collection, Copenhagen – Private collection, United Kingdom (since 1999)

LITERATURE: Sophus Michaëlis and Alfred Bramsen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi, Kunstneren og hans vaerk, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Copenhagen and Christiania 1918, p. 26, no. 8 – Poul Vad, *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Copenhagen 1957, p. 6, pl. I – Hanne Finsen and Inge Vibeke Raaschou-Nielsen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi. En retrospektiv udstilling*, exhib. cat., Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen 1981, no. 6, repr. p. 41 [provenance incorrect] – *Vilhelm Hammershøi. Painter of Stillness and Light*, exhib. cat., Wildenstein, New York and The Phillips Collection, Washington 1983, no. 2, repr. p. 19 [provenance incorrect] – René Bühlmann, 'Tabte horisonter. Vilhelm Hammershøi og storbyen', in *Konsthistorisk Tidsskrift* LIV, no. 3, Stockholm 1985, p. 139, fig. 2 – Poul Vad, *Hammershøi. Værk og liv*, Copenhagen 1988, p. 26 – Kirk Varnedoe, *Northern Light*, New Haven and London 1988, p. 99 – Poul Vad, *Vilhelm Hammershøi and Danish Art at the Turn of the Century*, New Haven and London, 1992, p. 26, no. 25, and p. 451 – *L'univers poétique de Vilhelm Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen and Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1997-8, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York 1998, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Göteborg 1999-2000, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Nationalmuseum Stockholm 2000, no. 1 – Felix Krämer, Naoki Sato and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Royal Academy of Art, London and National Museum for Western Art, Tokyo 2008, no. 2, p. 142

EXHIBITIONS: *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Kunstforeningen (Fine Art Society), Copenhagen 1916, I, no. 9 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi. En retrospektiv udstilling*, Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen 1981, no. 6 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi. Painter of Stillness and Light*, Wildenstein (New York) and The Phillips Collection (Washington) 1983, no. 2 – *L'univers poétique de Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen and Musée d'Orsay, Paris 1997-8, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York 1998, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Nationalmuseum Stockholm 2000, no. 1 – *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Göteborg 1999-2000, no. 1 – *Hammershøi*, Royal Academy of Art, London and National Museum for Western Art, Tokyo 2008, no. 2, p. 142

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This extremely rare and beautiful painting by Vilhelm Hammershøi dates from circa 1883. It belongs to a small group of early works depicting farmsteads near Vejle, a seaport on the Danish coast approximately 250 kilometres west of Copenhagen. The neighbourhood of Vejle, its countryside and farmsteads provided Hammershøi, then only nineteen, with a powerful source of inspiration. The year 1883 turned out to be an important year for him. It was the year in which he entered the 'Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler' after completing a conventional education at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen. The 'Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler' was founded on the initiative of a group of liberal, secessionist students dissatisfied with traditional teaching methods at the Academy. They went as far as to reject academic teaching and focused instead on contemporary French methods such as drawing after life models and painting *en plein air*.¹ At the school Hammershøi was taught by the prominent Skagen painter Peder Severin Krøyer who had recently returned from Paris.

Hammershøi's landscape paintings, like his tranquil interiors, occupy a significant place in his *oeuvre*. His predilection for landscape and the motifs he chose were not prompted by nostalgia for remote, untouched areas of nature. On the contrary, his interest lay in subjects found in developed, inhabited areas – but his landscapes themselves remain uninhabited and evidence of human activity or a human presence is only intimated. Hammershøi was a resolute opponent of the Neo-Romantic tendencies of his time.²

His first ventures into the landscape genre date from the early 1880s. Like the present painting, these early works have little in common with his later landscapes. They are small in format and their central motifs are narrow segments of rural architecture, corners or single wings of farmhouses.³ He dispenses with staffage and reduces the motifs to a few single buildings seemingly devoid of function and dissociated from their context. Details are blurred, as if viewed through a badly adjusted lens.⁴ Paradoxically, his point of departure appears to have been the Danish Romantic landscape of the 1830s and 1840s – particularly the work of Johan Thomas Lundbye.⁵ The present composition verges on abstraction. Paint is applied with short, dry brushstrokes that diffuse the contours. The absence of clear outline in combination with the subtle gradation of colour contributes to the atmospheric effect. Hammershøi focuses on the distinctive quality of the light and it is this that determines the composition. Modelling emphasises the textural qualities of forms and conveys a powerful sense of immutability, countering the transience and fluidity of the moment. It is heightened by his use of a restricted spatial setting - concentrated against the crisp light of a pale sky⁶ - which creates an almost stage-like effect that is a typical element of his work.

¹ Felix Krämer, *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, exhib. cat., Kunsthalle, Hamburg 2003, pp. 9-27.

² Kaspar Monrad, 'Die Entromantisierte Natur', in *Hammershøi und Europa*, exhib. cat., Copenhagen and Munich 2012, 120 ff.

³ See Hamburg 2003, nos. 1 and 2; London 2008, nos. 1 and 3.

⁴ A few years later, Khnopff painted several small landscapes that are closely related to these early paintings by Hammershøi. One of them, executed in 1890, is titled *À Fosset. Pluie* (The Hearn Family Trust, New York).

⁵ See Kaspar Monrad *The Golden Age of Danish Painting*, exhib. cat., The County Museum of Art, Los Angeles and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1993, pp. 17 ff., and pp. 177-190.

⁶ Poul Vad, op. cit., Copenhagen 1988, p. 26.

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This painting was at one time in the collection of Johannes Carl Bock, a noted collector, pharmacologist and professor of medicine. He assembled a collection of over three hundred, mainly Dutch artworks from the period 1880 to 1920. He owned no less than nine paintings, a pastel self-portrait [Fig. 1]⁷ and a drawing by Hammershøi. One of the paintings, titled *Parti fra Vejle, Bondelænge* [fig. 2],⁸ is also almost abstract in its depiction of a farmstead near Vejle. It was in a private collection in England since 2016.

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.*⁹



Fig. 1: *Self-Portrait*, coloured crayons on paper, 300 x 250 mm. Private collection

⁷ With Le Claire Kunst, Hamburg 2012. See *From Robert To Giacometti – Pastels, Watercolours and Drawings by European Masters*, cat. 30, no. 21.

⁸ With Daxer & Marschall, Munich 2016. See *Recent Acquisitions*, cat. XXIII, p. 88.

⁹ Mikael Wivel, 'Vilhelm Hammershøi, La Route Royale près de Gentofte', in *Morceaux choisis parmi les acquisitions de la Collection Frits Luq̄t réalisées sous le directorat de Carlos van Hasselt 1970-1994*, Mária van Berge-Gerbaud and Hans Buijs (eds.), Paris 1996, no. 15, p. 42.

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Fig. 2: *Parti fra Vejle, Bondelænge*, oil on canvas, 50,3 x 66,4 cm.
Private collection