

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864–1916

36. *Study of standing woman, seen from behind* (1884/1888)

(*Studie af stående kvinde, set bagfra*)

Oil on canvas, 21 x 13³/₄ in. (53 x 35 cm)

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 475, 1985, lot 72, ill.; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 712, 2002, lot 1445, ill.

EXHIBITED: Scandinavia House, New York, *Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough, Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2013, no. 13.

LITERATURE (concerning the motif): Sophus Michaëlis and Alfred Bramsen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi, Kunstneren og hans Værk*, Copenhagen, 1918, no. 24 (described as *En ung Pige som hælder af en Kande*), the present painting is not in the oeuvre catalogue; Poul Vad, *Hammershøi, værk og liv*, Copenhagen 1988 (English edition 1992); Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2007, p. 226, ill. p. 225.

A woman seen from behind is a motif that Vilhelm Hammershøi painted in his early youth and to which he returned in variations throughout his life. It is a familiar motif in 17th-century Dutch painting and was popular among other Danish artists, such as Anna Ancher and Viggo Johansen (1851–1935) during the 1880s.

This little study shows a fairly robust woman with reddish hair standing with her head bent, wearing a black dress with sleeves rolled up and a white apron, seen indoors obliquely from behind by daylight. To the right of her a wooden table is sketched in, though it is not continued on her left. Her pose suggests she is concentrating on some manual task. The study is fairly monochromatic, but there are shades of blue and brown in the black dress and delicate suggestions of bright daylight on the model's neck and arms and on her apron.

This study is not found in any of the published catalogues of Hammershøi's work, but it is closely related to several well-known paintings. The motif is identical to the central elements in a rather larger study (25 x 22 in., or 63.5 x 55.5 cm). In Alfred Bramsen's catalogue from 1918, this is listed as number 63, and in 1924 it was bought by Statens Museum for Kunst (Fig. A). It appears to be of the same woman, seen from the same angle and in the same light. More is included of the table on the right, in addition to which the top of a light chair in which the daylight is reflected can be seen on the far edge. It also contains more of the room in which the woman is standing, and on the far left there is the hint of a corner.

Bramsen considers study no. 63 to be a preparatory work for the painting *From a Baker's Shop* (Vejen Kunstmuseum; no. 60 in Bramsen's list, Fig. B). Despite the dimensions 44⁹/₁₀ x 35⁴/₅ in. (114 x 91 cm), Bramsen calls this a study and dates it to 1888. In this painting we see a dark-haired, rather hefty woman in a black dress with long sleeves and a white apron; she is viewed directly from behind, not obliquely. Apart from the color of her hair, the model is similar to the woman used by the artist in the Loeb collection study and in the above-mentioned no. 63.

However, when it comes to composition, the Loeb collection study is rather more like a different and earlier painting, *Living Room, A Young Girl Pouring Tea*, where Hammershøi's mother is sitting on the right; despite its finished state, this painting is quite small, 15 x 12³/₅ in., or 38 x 32 cm (Bramsen's catalogue, no. 23, private collection, Fig. C). And also the more unfinished *A Young Girl, Pouring from a Pot*, which Bramsen



FIG. A *Female Figure*, 1888
Preparatory work for the painting *From A Baker's Shop*
Oil on canvas, 25 x 22 in. (63.5 x 55.5 cm) Not signed or dated.
Statens Museum for Kunst. Bramsen no. 63



FIG. B *From a Baker's Shop*, 1888
Oil on canvas, 44⁹/₁₀ x 35⁴/₅ in. (114 x 91 cm)
Vejen Kunstmuseum. Bramsen no. 60

calls a preparatory work for this, although the format is much bigger, 19⁷/₁₀ x 16¹/₂ in., or 50 x 42 cm (Bramsen no. 24, private collection, Fig. D). This applies in particular to the woman's posture, the daylight, and the chairback in the right of the picture. The woman here is wearing a black dress with long sleeves and a white apron, and the chair is identical to or of the same type as that in the picture belonging to Statens Museum for Kunst. She is pouring tea and there is a cloth on the table in front of her. The model here has dark, not reddish, hair, and she is also slimmer. According to Bramsen, it was the artist's sister, Anna, who posed for the last two of these pictures. It is difficult to believe this, however, for judging from photographs and Hammershøi's pictures of her from 1885 and 1887, Anna was younger, slimmer, and more graceful than this model.

As said above, Alfred Bramsen dates *Sitting Room*, *A Young Girl Pouring Tea* and *From a Baker's Shop* to 1884 and 1888 respectively. But neither painting has been dated by the artist himself, and there is no other indication of the year in which they were painted. Meanwhile, Bramsen was closely associated with Hammershøi, and so we need weighty reasons indeed before rejecting his assertions concerning dating and the relationship between preparatory works and finished paintings. The explanation must be that Hammershøi was free in his use of his model studies when painting his more finished pictures, a manner of working that is typical of an artist of his generation. As for the dating of the study in the Loeb collection, we can scarcely be more precise than to say sometime between 1884 and 1888.

E.F.