

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864–1916

131. *The Artist's Wife Ida* (1895)

(*Portrætstudie af kunstnerens hustru Ida*)

Oil on canvas, 16³/₂₀ x 13 in. (41 x 33 cm)

Unsigned

PROVENANCE: Art historian Karl Madsen (1918); Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 237, 1938 (Karl Madsen), lot 17, ill. p. 12; Madsen's son-in-law, the painter Arne Lofthus; Lofthus's daughter, the assistant museum curator Else Lofthus; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 743, 2005, lot 1070, ill. (described as *Portræt. Brystbillede uden Hænder. En face. Forstudie til den midterste af Figurerne, Ida Hammershøi, i "Tre kvinder" 1895*).

EXHIBITED: Den Frie Udstilling, 1908, no. 71 (*Dameportræt*); Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, 1916, no. 114; Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm, *Nyare dansk kunst*, 1919, no. 430; Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, *L'art danois*, 1928, no. 65; Forum, Copenhagen, *Det danske Kunststævne*, 1929, no. 122; Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm, *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, 1975, no. 12.

LITERATURE: Sophus Michaëlis and Alfred Bramsen, *Vilhelm Hammershøi, Kunstneren og hans Værk*, Copenhagen, 1918, no. 149 (*Portræt*); Poul Vad, *Hammershøi, værk og liv*, Copenhagen, 1988, p. 142f, ill. p. 142; on portraits of Ida: Harald Olsen in *Vilhelm Hammershøi, en retrospektiv udstilling*, Ordrupgaard, 1981, pp. 26–32 (in English); Poul Vad, "Vilhelm Hammershøi, tre unge kvinder" in William Gelius (ed.), *Ribe Kunstmuseum 100 år*, Ribe, 1991, pp. 52–55; Susanne Meyer-Abich, *Vilhelm Hammershøi. Das malerische Werk*, Inauguraldissertation, Ruhr-Universität, Bochum, 1995, no. 131.

The portrait of the artist's wife Ida was painted as a preparatory work for a larger commissioned painting, *Three Young Women* from 1895, which was shown in Den Frie Udstilling that year and is today owned by Ribe Kunstmuseum. Ida (1869–1949) was the sister of the artist's friend, the painter Peter Ilsted, and it was during the summer of 1890 during Hammershøi's visit to Stubbekøbing on the island of Lolland in southern Denmark that she and Hammershøi became engaged. In the large painting, we see Ida flanked by her two sisters-in-law: on the left Ingeborg Ilsted, the wife of Peter Ilsted, and on the right Anna Hammershøi, the artist's sister. The three young women are seen full-length, sitting in a room, which is merely suggested with great simplicity, behind them. As was typical in the 1890s, the design is in the nature of a frieze, with virtually no perspective effect, so that it reminds one both of paintings by James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), an artist whom Hammershøi admired and subsequently sought to contact, and of the Florentine Renaissance painting that he had studied so intensively during the preceding years. After their wedding in 1891, the Hammershøis went to Holland and spent the winter in Paris. In 1893 they visited a number of northern Italian cities including Verona, Venice, Bologna, Siena, and Florence.

There was a strong bond between the artist and his mother and sister, but it was Ida who shared his everyday life, and she appears as a model in many of his later paintings. Hammershøi painted several portraits of her, the first in 1890, where she is sitting indoors, dressed ready to go out (private collection). The double portrait from 1892 of Ida and Hammershøi himself (*Dauids Samling*/*The David Collection*, Copenhagen) says little about their relationship. Things are different in the enigmatic portrayal of the couple from 1898, *Two Figures* (Aros, Aarhus Kunstmuseum), which contains both drama and melancholy.

In this portrait study, which is quite like the finished picture but seems to be more lush in its coloring, we see that Ida has just the hint of a smile. The artist generally abstained from sweetness and personality



in portraits, not only in those of Ida. Hammershøi's biographer Poul Vad points out how the artist has hinted at a flower in her hand, so that the painting relates to *The Girl with the Carnation* (Statens Museum for Kunst), which until 2006 was thought to be a work by Rembrandt and after which Hammershøi made a drawing. Vad also suggests another possible inspiration for this portrait of Ida: Paul Gauguin's *Vahine no te Tiare* (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek), the portrait of a woman from Tahiti, which was included in the Free Exhibition in 1893.

The Loeb portrait study originally belonged to Karl Madsen (1855–1938), who was the spokesman for the painters of the Modern Breakthrough in the 1880s and who praised Hammershøi. Madsen was included in Hammershøi's great *Five Portraits* (Thielska Galleriet, Stockholm). A close friendship between the Madsen and Hammershøi families continued for several generations. Hammershøi was godfather to Madsen's granddaughter Else Lofthus (1909–2004), who owned this picture until her death. Karl Madsen rated it so highly that he included it in the prestigious exhibition in Paris in 1928, where he presented a French public a choice of fine art with what he considered the best of Danish painting.

E.F.