

## SVEND HAMMERSHØI

1873–1948

### 136. *A View from the Stock Exchange of Copenhagen, 1944*

(*Udsigt fra Børsen*)

Oil on canvas, 34½ x 28½ in. (90 x 75.5 cm)

Signed bottom right with initials and dated: 44

On the stretcher: Half of the label from the Charlottenborg exhibition signed by the artist followed by “u. c.” (not subject to censorship).<sup>1</sup>

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen and Børge Nielsen, Vejle, Auction 3, 1990, lot 482; Bruun Rasmussen, Vejle, Auction 113, 2008, lot 369, ill.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg 1945, no. 129 (described as *Udsigt fra Børsen, 90 x 75, 2500 Kr.*).

It was typical of Svend Hammershøi to choose a motif from central Copenhagen on a dark winter day—and to give dramatic dominance to black leafless trees. This painting is therefore an excellent representative of his work. From his early years, architecture was also a favorite motif, and in Copenhagen he had an abundance of old buildings he could choose to paint. His artistic eye was frequently attracted by towers, spires, and other historical details dating from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque period. Unlike many artists who like to paint on bright sunny days, Hammershøi preferred the dark Nordic winter months, when daylight is sparse and colors are few.

At the left in this painting we see a row of trees growing alongside the ramp leading to the main hall of the Stock Exchange, a stately Renaissance building that stands behind the painter and is therefore not in the picture. The base of the ramp is seen at the bottom of the painting, and at the lower end is a statue of Mercury. From his position at the top of the ramp, just in front of the Stock Exchange, the painter had a fine view of the main facade of the Palace of Christiansborg, with its tower rising behind the tops of the trees.

This area of the Danish capital is of major importance in its history. The palace stands on the islet opposite the old strand of Copenhagen where a canal bordered with town houses can be glimpsed at the far right in the painting. The fortified castle was built late in the 12th century by Bishop Absalon, considered to be the founder of Copenhagen. In the 15th century the Danish king Erik af Pommern took it over, and during the following centuries it was periodically repaired and/or reconstructed by later Danish kings. In the 1730s, the Copenhagen Castle was torn down to give place for the first Christiansborg Palace, a symmetrical construction in Baroque style, named after the king, Christian VI. This was destroyed by fire in 1794 but rebuilt in the early 19th century in neoclassical style by Christian Frederik Hansen (1756-1845). Unfortunately, in 1884 the second palace also burned down. However, the domed chapel of the second palace survived and was added to the third palace (which is the one Hammershøi painted), built on the same site as the previous two. The salvaged dome is visible in the painting at the lower right of the palace facade.

The Christiansborg Palace once served as the residence of the Danish kings, but after the devastating fire of the first palace in 1794 and the royal family's evacuation to the Amalienborg palaces, the royals have continued to live there from then on. Today's impressive concrete and granite edifice, designed by architect Thorvald Jørgensen (1867-1946) and erected at the beginning of the 20th century, is the seat of the Danish



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government. The sumptuous rooms are beautifully adorned and are used for official occasions and royal receptions.

Svend Hammershøi chose a dark and cloudy day to paint a fine impression in *claire-obscur* of Denmark's long winter darkness. The electric light visible in the facade windows adds a touch of warmth to the otherwise chilly atmosphere. The color scale is subdued, limited to black, gray, brown, and a bit of clear blue in the sky, where the clouds permit it. Without rendering every detail, his brush convincingly characterizes the trunks and branches of the trees, as well as the sandstone of the ramp and the many-storied palace.

Stylistically the painting belongs to the 1890s more than to the 1940s, and there is a likeness to the art of his brother Vilhelm. Svend Hammershøi confidently pursued this artistic mode, which he found in the beginning of the 19th century and continued painting in for the rest of his life.

E.F.

<sup>1</sup>Censorship of works of art proposed for the annual exhibitions at Charlottenborg was established to guarantee an acceptable artistic quality.