

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI

1864–1916

34. *Study drawing after plaster cast of ancient Greek Aphrodite, torso from c. 500 B.C. (c. 1880)*

(*Studietegning efter gipsafstøbning efter antik græsk Afrodite, torso fra ca. 500 F. Kr.*)

Charcoal, paper, 29½ x 18½ in. (75 x 48 cm)

Signed on right edge: VH

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 698, 2001, lot 1377, ill.

EXHIBITED: Tokyo, Museum of Western Art, Vilhelm Hammershøi, the Poetry of Silence, 2008, no. 1, ill.; 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. 12.

LITERATURE: Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2007, p. 226, ill. p. 224.

Vilhelm Hammershøi received his first professional training between the ages of eight and twelve, when he drew at home twice a week. In recognition of the boy's unusual talent, his mother had engaged the highly esteemed teacher of drawing Niels Christian Kierkegaard (1806–1882), who himself had been trained by C. W. Eckersberg. After this, Hammershøi attended the Technical School, where his teacher Holger Grønvold (1850–1923) was of great importance to him and under whose tutelage this piece was drawn. Grønvold had shortly before this trained in Paris under Henri Lehmann (1814–82), who was a pupil of J.-A.-D. Ingres (1780–1867). In addition to his ability to develop his pupils' drawing abilities, Grønvold had a clear sense of how their artistic abilities could best be stimulated. Several generations of the most important painters of the time have expressed their deep appreciation of the teaching and the understanding they encountered from Grønvold, who personally had no success as a painter.

With support from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art, the technical schools were established during the 19th century to improve the training of artisan craftsmen, and they also had courses leading to admission to the academy. Drawing was an essential discipline, and the methods used were the same as in the academy. The students first copied two-dimensional models and then drew elementary spatial objects before advancing to drawing sculpture proper. At the academy the process ended with the students being allowed to work from life.

This tradition goes back to the Renaissance, which cultivated the Greek and Roman art of antiquity as its ideal. The enthusiasm for antiquity was the central pillar in the acquisition of art and an academic education, a tradition that obtained right up to the beginning of the 20th century. Since its establishment in 1754, the Royal Danish Academy has collected casts of ancient sculptures for use in teaching, and the technical schools also had classical casts at their disposal. Such casts were considered to have a general educational value, an idea that toward 1900 resulted in the establishment of large collections of casts open to the public. In the Royal Collection of Casts from 1895—which today forms part of Statens Museum for Kunst—ordinary people could study three-dimensional reproductions of ancient sculpture. Similar collections are known from other major cities in Europe and the United States.

This drawing is the result of a relatively difficult set exercise. Its size and the hatching technique used suggest that it was done about 1880,¹ while Hammershøi was a pupil of Grønvold and at the same time attending the preparatory class in the academy. The figure is well defined also in a spatial sense, although Hammershøi has taken the liberty of omitting the traditional outline, which was considered indispensable by the authorities at the Royal Academy. Hammershøi worked artistically even in a set exercise such as this and actually expresses his own experience of the beautiful classical female figure. It is easily understood that his teachers and fellow students were quick to realize that his talent was an unusual one. This is no conventional practice drawing but rather already a typical piece of Hammershøi, departing from the traditional.

E.F.

¹Deduced by comparison with other drawings from this period.



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