PETER ILSTED
1861–1933

47. *Portrait of Vilhelm Hammershøi* (1900)
(Portræt af Vilhelm Hammershøi)

Etching, print dimensions 5¹⁄₁₀ x 5½ in. (130 x 140 mm)

LITERATURE: *Fortegnelse over Peter Ilsteds grafiske Arbejder*, Copenhagen, 1924, no. 44; Aksel Jørgensen, *Peter Ilsted* Copenhagen 1945, ill. p. 9; Jørgen Sthyr, *Dansk grafik 1800–1910*, Copenhagen, 1949, p. 214, ill. p. 215.

"In a splendid little etching, Ilsted has provided a portrait of the young Vilhelm Hammershøi dressed in a frock-coat, but bearded and with his hair long in the style of an artist," wrote Aksel Jørgensen[1] in 1945. Hammershøi is described as a quiet personality, introspective and exclusive, but seriously committed to his art. This informal Ilsted portrait shows him as a private individual deep in thought. The portrait was probably created on the basis of a photograph. The Royal Library in Copenhagen possesses two portrait photographs of Hammershøi in which his dress, hair, and beard correspond closely to Ilsted's print. One of them is taken full face and shows Hammershøi together with his wife Ida and the painter Karl Madsen's (1855–1938) son Henry.[2] In the other, he is seen almost in profile, leaning back in just the same way as in Ilsted's portrait and with a similar expression on his face. A photograph of him in three-quarter profile, corresponding completely to Ilsted's engraving, might very well have existed without its being known today.

Peter Ilsted and Vilhelm Hammershøi made each other's acquaintance during their early years while training under P. S. Krøyer in the 1880s. Together with their mutual friend Carl Holsøe (1863–1935), they were preoccupied with the same range of motifs, interiors with figures and trees in the landscape. In 1890, Hammershøi became engaged to Ilsted's sister Ida, and with the resultant marriage in 1891 the friendship between the two artists became even deeper.

Ilsted is known for his extensive oeuvre as a painter, but at the same time he was a remarkable graphic artist. Starting in 1882, he executed a large number of etchings before turning to the demanding colored mezzotint in 1909. As a reproductive graphic artist, Ilsted executed a number of prints after older European paintings, for instance Frans Hals and Rubens. But he also worked independently as a *peintre-graveur*. As in his painting, he found inspiration and exemplars in 17th-century Netherlandish art, which was being studied with renewed interest in the 1880s by the modern artists of the time. Ilsted himself was a keen collector and possessed many fine graphic prints, even some by Rembrandt. Most of Ilsted's graphic oeuvre, however, consists of independent works.

This portrait is certainly closely related to a photograph, but the convincing depiction of personality would scarcely be possible without Ilsted's close relationship to his brother-in-law. The etching is one of the last by Ilsted, one of the prints from about the turn of the 20th century in which, according to Aksel Jørgensen, the artist reached his peak as an etcher. "Such beautiful prints with such a masterful exploitation of the potentials of etching have rarely been executed in Denmark. Now Ilsted had mastered the art—and so it no longer interested him."

This print of the portrait of Hammershøi, with its deep black and huge wealth of nuances, is a fine early example. There are others in the Royal Collection of Prints and Drawings in Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen. The Royal Library possesses Ilsted's mezzotint from 1920 after the self-portrait by Hammershøi from 1913, since 1920 in the Uffizzi Gallery of artists' self-portraits in Florence.

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[1]The painter and graphic artist Aksel Jørgensen (1883–1957) was himself an outstanding technician and art connoisseur. From 1920 he was professor in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and was of particular importance as head of the academy's department of graphic art.

[2]The photograph was the work of a professional photographer with an address in the Christianshavn area of Copenhagen, close to Hammershøi's apartment in Strandgade.