

SVEND HAMMERSHØI

FREDERIKSBERG 1873 – FREDERIKSBERG 1948

The artistic reputation of painter, ceramist, and designer Svend Hammershøi has been overshadowed over the years by that of his more famous brother, Vilhelm, nine years his senior. The artistic quality of Svend's work is indisputably fine, but the disparity in fame may be explained—at least in part—because he was even more reclusive than his brother. Like Vilhelm, he was a very private person, having only a few close friends outside his family circle, to which he was deeply attached. Svend never married, never moved from his mother's home, and even after her death in 1914 went on living there with his sister Anna for the rest of his life.

Surprisingly, Svend Hammershøi's work had greater recognition than that of Vilhelm's during his own lifetime, but that recognition was primarily for the younger brother's work as a designer, not for his painting. Until recently, only a small group of connoisseurs have appreciated and collected his paintings. Among those few was C. L. David (1878–1960), founder of The David Collection Museum in Copenhagen.

On the other hand, Hammershøi's achievements as an inventive ceramicist and silver designer have enjoyed flattering attention from museums and have been the subject of several studies, such as the one in Tove Jørgensen's 1990 exhibition catalogue. In recent years, his artistry in these fields has been featured in several exhibitions, bringing increased interest to his work.

*Hammershøi's education was diverse and thorough. In 1889, at the age of sixteen, he spent a year at the Technological School, where his teacher, the painter Holger Grønvold (1850–1923), was instrumental in developing his technical skills. Svend then trained as a painter at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from February 1890 until the winter of 1892, receiving guidance from his brother Vilhelm in the same period. Soon afterward, he was accepted in the circle of author Johannes Jørgensen (1866–1956), who with his journal *Taarnet* (*The Tower*) defined symbolism in Denmark.*

*From 1892 to 1896, Svend attended Zahrtmann's School, one of Denmark's independent art schools, where he grew as an artist and participated in student exhibitions. With the idealism typical of the 1890s, he and his comrades at that school formed an artist group called *The Hellenes*. At Refsnæs, a scenic region in the western part of the island Zealand, they sought to demonstrate antique Greek ideals by uniting art with improvement of the body through athletics. This artistic fraternity is an early example of the cultural movement that in Denmark is called "vitalism." Among other principles, the followers focused on the healthiness, beauty, and force of natural life liberated from the restrictions of civilization.*

In the same period Svend began working with ceramics at (among other places) Kähler's famous factory in Næstved, where he served as an aide to the designer Thorvald Bindesbøll (1846–1908). Svend Hammershøi was among those who propelled the great interest in decorative art and artistic craftsmanship of the 1890s into the twentieth century.

Over the years, Svend Hammershøi exhibited his work in the *Den Frie udstilling* (The Free Exhibition) side by side with that of his brother Vilhelm. Svend's connection to the most important artists in the *avant-garde* represented by the Free Exhibition can be seen in his inclusion in his brother's monumental painting *Five Portraits* (1901, *Thielska Galleriet*, Stockholm, Sweden). In this picture, he sits with the critic Karl Madsen, the architect and designer Thorvald Bindesbøll, and the painter and sculptor J. F. Willumsen (1863–1958).

Svend Hammershøi's first paintings were strongly influenced by the symbolist movement, for example, a picture of the coast of Refnæs (1904, *Nationalmuseum*, Oslo). But within a few years he had found his own mode of expression through architectural paintings, where the interaction between the leafless trees, historical buildings, and *clair-obscur* (use of marked differences in light and dark, providing a dramatic effect) are dominating features. While Vilhelm mainly painted interiors and chose perpendicular perspectives, Svend often used an inclined perspective.

As had Vilhelm, Svend became very fond of England. In the years from 1907 to 1933 he painted intensively there, especially in Oxford and in Wells, interrupted only by World War I. The Gothic buildings appealed to him, and in the paintings, he created in England we see many different, yet related motifs: tight composition, subdued color scale, and blurred outlines. Stairs and sculptural details are often dominating elements, and the atmosphere he evokes clearly shows the influence of symbolism. Svend Hammershøi won recognition in London with exhibitions at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1929 and at the Royal Academy in 1931.

Svend Hammershøi did architectural painting in Denmark and, primarily in the winter months, painted the castles of Kronborg, Rosenborg, Frederiksborg and the ruins of Koldinghus, Kolding in Jutland. Besides the castles, he also painted several old churches in Copenhagen, *Nikolaj*, *Vor Frue*, *Trinitatis*, and *Sankt Petri*. (His brother Vilhelm also painted several of these churches.) Svend Hammershøi's paintings are to be found mostly at the Museum at Koldinghus, but he is also represented at the *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen.

An important part of Svend Hammershøi's oeuvre is his decorative art. For a brief period in the 1890s, he was one of the artists prestigious enough to sign his work at the Royal Porcelain Manufactory (today "Royal Copenhagen"). Five of his pots represented the company at the 1900 World Fair in Paris, and one was sold to the *Musée National du Céramique* in Sèvres. Later on he worked at Bing and Grøndahl's, designing and decorating ceramics, an art form extremely important to him. In 1910 he renewed collaboration with Kähler, creating a series of original works, some of which were displayed in the Danish Museum of Decorative Arts in 1916. These were unglazed red clay pots with very detailed pictures of plants, as well as pots with asymmetrical rims. In the 1930s, part of his work was decorated with Kähler's trademark: black and white speckles and a softened glaze. Svend Hammershøi's ceramic work is well represented at Næstved Museum, located close to the Kähler factory.

Some of Svend Hammershøi's ceramic shapes were rendered in silver by the goldsmith Holger Kyster (1872–1944) in Kolding. A connection between the two was established in 1906, initiated by Thorvald Bindesbøll. The collaboration lasted until the mid-1920s, with Hammershøi creating mod-

els for silver objects for domestic use, such as jars, and cups. They were much influenced by art nouveau, with leaf ornamentation the most characteristic feature. At the 1925 World Exhibition in Paris, Hammershøi and Kyster were awarded gold medals. Kyster left his collections to the Museum on Koldinghus, which included a wide representation of Svend Hammershøi's decorative art.

E.F.

LITERATURE: Tove Jørgensen, *Svend Hammershøi 1873–1948, maler og formgiver*, Museet på Koldinghus 1990; Hanne Honnens de Lichtenberg, *Hellenerne på Refsnæs* in Svend Eriksen et al. (eds.), *En bog om kunst til Else Kai Sass*, Copenhagen 1978, pp. 399–412; Hanne Honnens de Lichtenberg in *Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon*, vol. 3, Copenhagen 1995; Anne-Mette Villumsen et al. (eds.), *Svend Hammershøi, en kunstner og hans tid*, Skovgaard Museet, Viborg 2008; Gertrud Hvidberg-Hansen, *Hellas under nordlig himmel* in Gertrud Hvidberg-Hansen and Gertrud Oelsner (eds.), *Livslust, sundhed, skønhed, styrke i dansk kunst 1890–1940*, Odense 2008, pp. 159, 160, 162.