

HARALD SLOTT-MØLLER

1864–1937

III. *Summer Day*, 1888

(*Sommerdag*)

Oil on canvas, 48½ x 70 in. (123 x 178 cm)

Signed bottom right: HARALD SLOTT.MØLLER. 1888

PROVENANCE: Jens Udsen, cinema manager, hotelier, Hotel Postgaarden, Slagelse; Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 343 (Jens Udsen), 1948, lot 360, ill. p. 39; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 688, 2000, lot 1481, ill. p. 151.

EXHIBITED: Foreningen for National Kunst, Charlottenborg, *Memorial Exhibition, Agnes and Harald Slott-Møller*, 1938, no. 68 (described as *Sommerdag*, owner Jens Udsen).

LITERATURE: Francis Beckett in Karl Madsen (ed.), *Kunstens Historie i Danmark*, Copenhagen 1901–07, p. 420; Harald Slott-Møller, *Erindringer*, unpublished, The Royal Library, manuscript department; Peter Storm, *Når det igen blev sommer i Danmark*, in Vends, Årbog for Vends Herred, 1998, pp. 19–26 (on Damgaard); Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, p. 166, ill. p. 168–169.

Sommerdag is an unusual painting, which on its incorporation into the Loeb collection can be given its rightful place in the history of art. In brilliant sunshine one warm and slightly damp summer day, two young women are paddling in the shallow water at the edge of a fjord. They are portrayed very simply, almost schematically, in a small number of colors, most of them in the figure on the right, whose summer dress—striped in pink, bluish green, and white—corresponds coloristically to the landscape; there are nowhere near so many in the more distant figure on the left, in whom few details are to be seen. A good deal of energy is expressed in their movements and their contact with each other, in which there is a suggestion of some situation, some action in contrast to the tranquil expanse of water behind the figures and the distant landscape, a view bathed in a sparkling light of striking beauty.

It is remarkable how Slott-Møller consciously has worked here with a simplification bordering on abstraction, the diametrical opposite of contemporary figure painters such as Carl Thomsen or Paul Fischer. By means of large coherent areas of the same color he has partly abandoned the spatial quality of naturalism. This is seen in the forested coastlines and their reflection in the water but especially clearly in the dark green area below the boat on the right, in the blue shadows cast by the figures, and in their reflections in the water, painted in green ochre. With this, Slott-Møller is anticipating the metaphor that gained acceptance in the 1890s, emphasizing the flat quality of the pictures and approaching a manner of painting resembling that of Johan Rohde (1856–1935) from the 1890s.

Sommerdag was painted shortly after the artist's wedding in May 1888. Harald and Agnes Slott-Møller (1862–1937) had decided that they should go to Italy for their honeymoon, but before this they wanted to take advantage of the Danish summer, as they had done in previous years. So they went to Jutland to find landscapes that could inspire each of them, deciding on the beautiful area south of Fredericia with views across to Funen. Here they rented rooms in Henneberg Ladegaard, which belonged to the Damgaard estate, the owner of which, *Kammerherre* Thyge de Thygeson (1807–1905), soon invited the young couple to dinner. This was the start of a relationship lasting for many years, as de Thygeson and his adoptive daughter, Charlotte Trap de Thygeson (died 1934), were deeply interested in art and hospitably invited the artists

to extended visits to Damgaard. After 1900, the composer Carl Nielsen (1865–1931) and his wife, sculptor Anne Marie Carl Nielsen (1863–1945), of whom Slott-Møller incidentally painted several portraits, were frequent guests in the house. Damgaard is particularly beautiful, situated close to Kolding Fjord, with meadows stretching down to Lillebælt, which at this point is very narrow, and a view across Funen and the island of Fænø.

Harald Slott-Møller decided to paint this fine landscape. From a letter dated 26 June 1888 from Agnes to Johan Rohde it emerges that Harald was making good progress.¹ He writes, “I had started on a picture of two young girls ‘paddling’ by the water’s edge in the gentlest bright summer’s day—but alas, the summer did not provide enough summer’s days for me to be able to complete the quite large painting in the open air, as was the narrow and dogmatic demand of the time.”² Harald did not consider the picture to be completely finished, as Agnes also told Johan Rohde on 29 August, which can explain the slightly schematic character of the two figures.

We know that the two female figures, whose facial features are anonymous, are the artist’s wife Agnes on the right and on the left the young painter Marie Triepcke (1867–1940), who became Mrs. P. S. Krøyer the following year. She is wearing the idiosyncratic sun hat also seen in P. S. Krøyer’s 1891 portrait of her and her mother sewing in the garden at Skagen (Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck). Agnes and Marie had become friends some years before, and as the older of the two, Agnes was keen to encourage Marie’s progress. Marie’s friendship with Harald, which had begun as a youthful infatuation, dated back even further. As very good friends, the newly married couple had agreed that Marie should live with them for some time this summer of 1888. Therefore the contact between the two young women at the water’s edge is so comfortable.

E.F.

¹The Royal Library, Manuscript Department.

²Harald Slott-Møller, *Erindringer*, The Royal Library, Manuscript Department.