

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI AT THE *EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE* OF 1889

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Abstract

In 1889, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916) exhibited for the first time outside Scandinavia, contributing four of the 190 oil paintings that Denmark sent to the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, where he was awarded a bronze medal. There has been some confusion, with five extant paintings being proposed for the four pictures that were catalogued and exhibited. These five pictures are:

Portrait of a Young Woman. The Artist's Sister, Anna Hammershøi, 1885, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen. This picture was not exhibited in Paris, but was entered for the Neuhaus prize in Denmark, where its lack of success caused an outcry, and was instrumental in provoking the foundation of *Den Frie Udstilling* in 1891. In contrast to scholarship that suggests works by Christen Købke as a likely role model, I propose an earlier *Portrait of the Artist's Sister* (1847) by Julius Exner.

Étude: A Baker's Shop (En Bagerbutik), 1888, Vejen Kunstmuseum. Catalogue number 44 at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. Evidence is provided to confirm that the work exhibited in Paris as *Étude* is *A Baker's Shop*. Its radical nature is discussed, and proposes links to modern artists like Mondrian, Rothko and Malevich, as well as Gerhard ter Borch and Caspar David Friedrich.

Vielle Femme: An Old Woman (En Gammel Kone), 1886, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen. Catalogue number 45 at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. The removal of all extraneous narrative elements by Hammershøi is analysed, as are the strong links to 17th-century Dutch art, particularly Gerhard ter Borch.

Jeune Fille: Young Girl Sewing. Anna Hammershøi, the Artist's Sister, 1887 Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen. Catalogue number 46 at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. Links to Dutch art, and its regular motif of depictions of women sewing. Discusses Hammershøi's viewing of significant works by Vermeer in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and Nicolas Maes in Rotterdam.

Job, 1888, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen. Catalogue number 47 at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. Discusses the reasons for the non-exhibition of this picture since 1889. Dismisses direct links to other versions of Job and instead proposes a link with a statue of the Egyptian god Anubis that is now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

Keywords

Hammershøi, Exposition Universelle, Danish Art, Nineteenth Century, Vermeer, Maes, Ter Borch, Hirschsprung, Madsen, Bramsen

In 1889, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916) exhibited for the first time outside Scandinavia, contributing four of the 190 oil paintings that Denmark sent to the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris. In the Paris catalogue, the works are listed as follows: No. 44 *Étude*, No. 45 *Vielle Femme*

(H. Hirschsprung), No. 46 *Jeune Fille* (A. Bramsen), No. 47 *Job* (K. Madsen) (*World's Fair of 1889*, 1981, 157).

There has been some confusion as to which pictures were actually exhibited. This article definitively identifies the four works, and discusses their origins, in addition to those of a key painting in 19th-century Danish art, which was mistakenly thought to have appeared. I will examine the controversial picture first (No. 46 *Jeune Fille* (A. Bramsen)).

Paris Salon (No. 46 *Jeune Fille* (A. Bramsen))

In the catalogue of the 1981 exhibition *Vilhelm Hammershøi: En retrospektiv udstilling* at Ordrupgaard (Copenhagen), it was asserted that Renoir (1841-1919) saw Hammershøi's *Portrait of a Young Woman. The Artist's Sister Anna Hammershøi* (fig. 2; 1885) at the 1889 *Exposition* (Finsen and Rasschou-Nielsen, 1981, 163). It further states that this picture was catalogue No. 46 at the *Exposition Universelle*, but later contradicts this by saying that *Young Girl Sewing* (fig. 6; 1887) was catalogue No. 46 (Finsen and Rasschou-Nielsen, 1981, 164-5).

In a further exhibition held at Ordrupgaard (and at Musée d'Orsay) in 1997, *L'Univers Poétique de Vilhelm Hammershøi 1864-1916*, it was stated that *A Baker's Shop* and *Young Girl Sewing* were No. 44 and No. 46 respectively in Paris in 1889 (Fonsmark and Loyrette, 1998, 148), and these facts were repeated in the exhibition catalogue at Gothenburg in 1999 (*Vilhelm Hammershøi*, 1999, 52-54). At the exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2008, it is again detailed that *Young Girl Sewing* was No. 46 in Paris and, more significantly, that *Portrait of a Young Woman. The Artist's Sister* was not exhibited in the French capital (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 143).

However, there is disagreement in two more recent publications. The 2009 catalogue for The Hirschsprung Collection in Copenhagen lists *Portrait of a Young Woman. The Artist's Sister* (fig. 2) as No. 46 at the Paris *Exposition*, and in the catalogue for the major exhibition of 2012, *Hammershøi in Europe* (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen) they include *Portrait of a Young Woman*; Hammershøi's four pictures are listed as *Portrait of a Young Woman*, *An Old Woman*, *Young Girl Sewing* and *A Baker's Shop* (Monrad et al., 2012, p. 142, n. 17). *Job* is thus omitted.

The two candidates put forward for *Jeune Fille* are therefore Hirschsprung's *Portrait of a Young Woman* (fig. 2) and Ordrupgaard's *Young Girl Sewing* (fig. 6). The crucial clue is that *Jeune Fille* was owned by the Danish collector Alfred Bramsen (1851-1932) at the 1889 exhibition as stated in the catalogue, and Bramsen had bought the picture *Young Girl Sewing* in 1888 at a *Salon des Refusés*, following its rejection by the selection committee for the Danish Royal Academy's annual exhibition at Charlottenborg (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 15 & 43). The picture can clearly be seen in a photograph of the Bramsen family home dated 1898 (fig. 1; Svenningsen, 2011, 29). *Portrait of a Young Woman*, on the other hand, belonged to the Hammershøi family; Vilhelm had said that it was not his to sell when Eilif Peterssen (1852-1928) showed an interest on behalf of the Norwegian National Gallery (Vad, 1992, 38). Its "family" nature is emphasised by a photograph from the late 1880s of Anna Hammershøi playing the piano with her own large portrait directly above her as she plays (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 46). Not until 1896 did Hammershøi decide to part with the picture, selling it to Heinrich Hirschsprung (1836-1908) for 1,200 kroner, encouraged in his purchase by Alfred Bramsen in

the face of competition from the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm and Pontus Fürstenberg (1827-1902) (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 143, and Madsen, 2009, 52. Also, Brünniche, Copenhagen, 1933, in Bramsen, 2008, 23).

Paris Salon No. 44 *Étude*

There can be no doubt that No. 44 in Paris was *A Baker's Shop* (fig. 12; 1888), despite the vague catalogue title of *Étude*. In Poul Vad's (1927-2003) seminal work *Vilhelm Hammershøi and Danish Art at the turn of the Century*, the author is surprisingly non-committal about the identity of the four pictures at the *Exposition*; however, he does provide useful evidence from Frederikke Hammershøi's scrapbook showing that Alfred Bramsen bought the work entitled



Fig. 1. Mary Steen, Home of the Bramsen Family, Frederiksholms Kanal 6, 1898.

As published in Jesper Svenningsen, *Hammers Høiana, Drawings, Photographs and Other Memories* (Copenhagen: Hirschsprung Collection, 2011), p. 29.

Young Girl Sewing is in the centre of the five pictures in the bottom row.

Study. A Baker's Shop in 1890 following its appearance at the 1889 *Exposition* (Vad. 1992, 419). Additionally, a label stuck to the back of the picture reads "Studie (bagerbutik)...1889", confirming that its original title was *Study* or *Étude* (Fonsmark and Loyrette, 1998, 148).

Paris Salon No. 45 *Vielle Femme* (H. Hirschsprung)

Vielle Femme was owned in 1889 by Heinrich Hirschsprung (1836-1908) and is universally accepted to be the *Old Woman* (fig. 4; 1886) in the Hirschsprung Collection (Inv. Nr. 146).

Paris Salon No. 47 *Job* (K. Madsen)

Although *Hammershøi in Europe* list Hammershøi's four pictures at the *Exposition Universelle* as *Portrait of a Young Woman*, *An Old Woman*, *Young Girl Sewing* and *A Baker's Shop* (Monrad et al., 2012, p. 142, n. 17), earlier in the text they state explicitly that "At the Universal Exposition Hammershøi himself showed a painting with a subject from the biblical story of Job" (Monrad et al., 2012, 40). In 1889, *Job* was owned by Karl Madsen (1855-1938), and can only be the *Job* in the Hirschsprung Collection (Inv. Nr. 3078). The picture was given back to the Hammershøi family by Madsen, and on the death of Anna Hammershøi (1866-1956) was presented to the Hirschsprung Collection in 1956.

The definitive listing of Hammershøi's four pictures at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* is therefore as follows:

No. 44. *Étude: A Baker's Shop* (1888; *En Bagerbutik*), 113.5 x 90 cm, Vejen Kunstmuseum.

No. 45. *Vielle Femme: An Old Woman* (1886; *En Gammel Kone*), 69.7 x 56.7 cm, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen.

No. 46. *Jeune Fille: Young Girl Sewing. Anna Hammershøi, the Artist's Sister* (1887), 37 x 35 cm, Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen.

No. 47. *Job: Job* (1887), 168 x 126.5cm, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen.

Hammershøi and Krøyer

Hammershøi was in Paris in the spring of 1889 at the same time as P. S. Krøyer (1851-1909), who was arranging the hanging of the Danish exhibits. Apparently, the Danish authorities had twenty bursaries totalling six thousand kroner to assist young artists with their *Exposition* expenses but according to Alfred Bramsen, "they could not even give Hammershøi a paltry 300 kroner" (Alfred Bramsen in Michaëlis & Bramsen, 1918, quoted in Bramsen, 2008, 20). Before a detailed discussion of Hammershøi's four *Exposition* pictures (plus *Portrait of a Young Woman*) it is instructive to consider his relationship with Krøyer, who was his tutor at the newly-founded *Kunstnernes Studieskoler* from 1883 (Tone Bonnén in Monrad et al., 2012, 225). Hammershøi wrote to his brother Otto "As you perhaps know I go to Krøyer's school every day from 8.30 till 4...then it's on to the Academy where I draw from 5.30 to 7.30" (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 14). It is to his credit that Krøyer did not attempt to steer Hammershøi towards his own stylistic methods, saying that "I have a pupil who paints most oddly. I do not understand him, but believe he is going to be important and do not try to influence him" (Vad, 1992, 24).

Krøyer was lively and gregarious, Hammershøi shy and solitary, and this was reflected in their art. Krøyer's vibrant Naturalism, with much of his work sited outdoors, contrasted with

the cool interiors of Hammershøi, who was thirteen years younger than his mentor was. Vilhelm Wanscher, writing in 1915, saw merit in Hammershøi's different approach: "After the torrid summer of Krøyer, it was wholesome for Danish tempers to sense the quiet of winter in Hammershøi's art" (Vilhelm Wanscher in Finsen and Rasschou-Neilssen, 1981, 8). There is a suggestion here that Hammershøi's calm serenity was closer to the Danish character than Krøyer's playful exuberance. However, there is one important connection that binds tutor and pupil irrevocably together, and that is the treatment of light.

Knut Bergh says that Hammershøi's pictures are "filled with an inner tension with an undertone of mysticism and hidden drama" (Edam et al., 1986, 37), and this contrasts clearly with Krøyer's open and immediate style, albeit that Krøyer's works sometimes hint at an unexplained dramatic event. However, Bergh adds that for Hammershøi "light is always the main theme" (Edam et al., 1986, 37), and this is surely something that the two men share. Krøyer's concern was to illustrate his mastery by means of the effect of light on local colour, with sunlight pouring through a window or the glow from a molten ingot altering the "natural" colour of clothes, faces, walls and furnishings. In Hammershøi's early works, the light is much more diffuse and undefined. It drifts into the picture, hinted at by shadow or a subtle change in the neutral background colouration. At the *Exposition Universelle*, Krøyer was awarded a *Grand Prix*, while the lesser-known Hammershøi had to settle for a bronze medal.

Genesis of the five Pictures

Portrait of Young Woman. The Artist's Sister, Anna Hammershøi

Although not exhibited in Paris, in view of its importance, this picture is discussed in the same manner as the four that were. In 1885, Hammershøi decided to paint a picture in order to compete for the Neuhaus prize. Its requirements were "a female portrait, three-quarter view, lifesize" (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 143). To this end, he engaged his nineteen-year-old sister Anna as his model, choosing someone he knew because, as he explained, "I would rather know them very well in order to paint them" (Vad, 1992, 89 & 401).

I propose that there is a Golden Age picture very close to Hammershøi's portrait, namely *Portrait of the Artist's Sister* (fig. 3) by Julius Exner (1825-1910). Exner was a senior figure in the Danish art world by the time that Hammershøi began his painting and he was the first artist whose work was collected by Heinrich Hirschsprung (Saabye, 2011, 110). The Exner portrait possesses a lack of eye contact, a relaxed arm posture and a three-quarter-length format, which, in contrast to portraits by Christen Købke (1810-1848) linked to this work, includes the upper legs. This format is hardly surprising as the picture was Exner's own entry for the 1847 Neuhaus prize, and met exactly the same criteria as Hammershøi's entry nearly forty years later. Exner's picture actually won the prize in 1847, which explains why it would have been a likely port-of-call for Hammershøi.



Fig. 2. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Portrait of a Young Woman. The Artist's Sister, Anna*

Hammershøi, 1885, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen, oil on canvas, 112 x 91.5cm.



Fig. 3. Julius Exner, *Portrait of the Artist's Sister*, 1847,

Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen, oil on canvas, 94.7 x 67.7cm.

Although Hammershøi and Exner's pictures are of a different generation, they share a similarity of both body position and a gaze that does not confront the viewer. In *Portrait of a Young Woman*, Anna Hammershøi is dressed entirely in black, brought forward in the picture plane by a background of white panelling. Her pale red lips provide the only exception to the otherwise muted palette. Hammershøi's philosophy in this regard was explained when he said that "perhaps they can be called neutral and reduced colours. I'm utterly convinced that a painting has the best effect in terms of its colour the fewer colours there are" (Hammershøi in Klausen, 1907, quoted in Krämer and Sato, 2008, 21). Similarly, when compared with Hammershøi's *Interior with the Artist's Mother and Sister* (1884; private collection) painted the previous year, all the extraneous material – cutlery, furniture, apron – has been removed. As with the colours, Hammershøi has pared the elements down until just the body, black clothing and background remain. Anna appears deep in thought and the picture conveys an atmosphere of total silence. Thorkild Hansen (1927-1989) has described the mood of Hammershøi's pictures: "time has stopped, the world been brought to silence, and eternity has commenced – without our having died first" (Finsen and Rasschou-Neilsen, 1981, 17).

The picture is typical of Hammershøi's work in that it depicts a lone woman; he rarely painted solitary men (Monrad et al., 2012, 81). It is of interest that Hammershøi concentrates his detail

upon the face and hands, using the same tactics that Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884) – much revered by artists such as Krøyer – had employed with great success.¹ Unlike Exner, Hammershøi did not win the prize, Felix Krämer proposing that the "muted palette and free brushwork" were not appreciated by the conservative jury (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 143), although the former quality had proved no bar to Exner. Certainly the picture, with its lack of narrative and the figure's spartan surroundings, must have appeared challenging at that time; even Karl Madsen, who was just beginning his career as an art critic, described it as "the strangest picture in that year's show" (Madsen in *Politiken*, 1885, quoted in Finsen and Rasschou-Nilesen, 1981, 26).

However, this did not deter Karl Madsen from becoming one of the forty-one signatories to a letter of protest demanding that Hammershøi be given the prize (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 14, and Saabye, 2011, 201). The letter was organised by the prominent art historian Emil Hannover, finally penned by Karl Madsen and was signed by such artists as Krøyer, Lauritz Andersen Ring (1854-1933), Carl Locher (1851-1915), Bertha Wegmann (1847-1926) and Julius Paulsen (1860-1940) (Vad, 1992, 412-413, n. 34, and Saabye, 2011, 201). In another letter penned concurrently, Krøyer wrote to Madsen describing those who had rejected the picture as "idiots, morons, and the ultimate representatives of bigotry" and urging him to "write something against this with pith and power. Spit on them. They deserve it" (Saabye, 2011, 201). This illustrates clearly the strength of feeling that progressive painters like Krøyer felt against the establishment, and a shared outlook that would lead eventually to an exhibition independent of state control, *Den Frie Udstilling*, in 1891.

In 1886, Madsen wrote of "the notorious Whistler, to whom Hammershøi is said to have a distinct resemblance" (Vad, 1992, 61). This theme was echoed by Andreas Aubert (1851-1913) when he saw *Portrait of a Young Woman* at an exhibition in Oslo in 1887:

Now that I for the first time see a work by Hammershøi, it turns out that his art is so like Whistler's that the correspondence can hardly be explained save through a direct influence... I have therefore now inquired with Krøyer... whether Hammershøi has had occasion to see any painting by Whistler, or whether he has only been familiar with the etching from Whistler's *Mother* in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*. Probably the latter but no more, thought Krøyer. This entire matter thus acquires even greater interest. (Vad, 1992, 414, n. 61)

In comparison with Hammershøi's picture, *Whistler's Mother* (1871; Musée d'Orsay) is positively "busy", with its curtain, pictures on the wall, furniture and white lace additions. However, Aubert clearly noticed the attempt at the creation of a pictorial harmony using a highly restricted palette, a lack of general ornamentation, and air of stillness and solitude. After Hammershøi's death, his widow Ida had asserted that her husband had not been taught anything by Whistler (Vad, 1992, 62). Certainly, Hammershøi would have gleaned little from the black-

¹ *The Beggar* (1880; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek) by Jules Bastien-Lepage was bought by Carl Jacobsen who in the 1880s had a large "house museum", the forerunner of the Glyptotek.

and-white engraving in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* published in 1883 (fig. 9) except subject matter and a sense of stark severity.

According to Karl Madsen, on a visit to Copenhagen the French critic Théodore Duret singled out *Portrait of a Young Woman* and *Young Girl Sewing* as "especially admirable and in a class superior to everything else he had seen of Danish art" (Madsen in Finsen and Rasschou-Nielsen, 1981, 6), and recommended Hammershøi to Paris dealer Paul Durand-Ruel as a painter of the first rank (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 15, see also Vad, 1992, 100-103).

An Old Woman

The earliest of Hammershøi's four pictures for the Paris *Exposition* was *An Old Woman* (fig. 4; 1886), a portrait of the artist's mother. The woman sits far to the left-hand-side of the canvas, a light source from the left emphasised by her illuminated face and the pale but substantial shadow that she casts. There are significant blocks of tone in the picture, but the grainy and irregular muted forms are far removed from the brightly hued slabs of colour that, for example, Gauguin was to employ several years later. The portrayal of an old woman and a curtain in muted tones clearly evokes *Whistler's Mother*, but again this is a far more austere and sparing depiction. In two other portrayals of his mother in 1886, Hammershøi had employed Whistler's horizontally facing format (for example, *The Artist's Mother, Frederikke Hammershøi* (1886; Private Collection)) but in *An Old Woman* he uses a more frontal format, with the subject again avoiding the gaze of the viewer. Poul Vad has likened the woman in her voluminous black dress to "the image of a huge swinging bell" (Vad, 1992, 60), an effect heightened by the shadow to the right of the sitter.

Several of the formal elements appear to have a purpose that is not immediately obvious. The slanting pale-brown skirting board that traverses the lower half of the composition provides an aid to anchoring the woman in position against the back wall; without this element she would float before it. The actual position of the woman, well to the left of the central axis, risks unbalancing the picture, so the artist employs a slender red curtain to provide a counterweight. Upon its exhibition at Charlottenborg in 1886, the large expanse of unadorned wall on the right of the picture provoked the critic of *Dagens Nyheder* to question:

why place her up against an utterly bare wall, which is more than twice as expansive as necessary and in its broad nudity can only give the picture a tedious character of desolation and blankness? (Vad, 1992, 73)

Poul Vad criticised this reviewer who had "not wanted, desired or been able to find any other answer than affectation" (Vad, 1992, 73). Instead, the answer surely lies in Hammershøi's determination to simplify as far as possible without causing a lack of pictorial cogency – hence the skirting board and curtain – and his belief that "the least emphasis has the greatest impact" (Thorkild Hansen in Finsen and Rasschou-Nielsen, 1981, 16). Hammershøi was "seeking through the simplification of shape and colour to endow Naturalism with a new feel" (Monrad and Hornung, 2002, 29), and Madsen described it as a "reaction to the bluff quality of Naturalism" (Monrad and Hornung, 2002, 29). Whereas Krøyer had employed light to clarify,

Hammershøi was now using it less directly, as a filtering and more incidental agent, although scarcely less important to his work.

Hammershøi's mother sits in splendid isolation, with no hint of the existence of another person in the room and a complete absence of narrative; nothing persuades us of something, or someone, hiding behind the red curtain in the manner of Ingres's *Paulo and Francesca* (1819; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers). It is this lack of narrative, or even a clue towards one, that led to the remark that Karl Madsen claimed to have overheard at Charlottenborg in 1886, where a spectator thought that the old woman looked as if she had been evicted from her apartment and was now "sitting out in the lobby meditating over the vagaries of fortune" (Monrad et al., 2012, 14). This story emphasises the public desire to impose a narrative, despite Hammershøi's deliberate removal of all extraneous narrative elements, in direct opposition to the tradition in which he had been brought up. As Kasper Monrad says, "he painted genre pictures without any real genre content" (Monrad et al., 2012, 14).



Fig. 4. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *An Old Woman*, 1886, Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen, oil on canvas, 69.7 x 56.7cm.



Fig. 5. Gerard ter Borch, *Margaretha van Haexbergen (1614–1676)*, c.1666-67, Metropolitan Museum, New York, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 65.1cm.

Hammershøi's type of pictures led critics to consider his close relationship with interior scenes from the Dutch seventeenth century. In addition to Rembrandt (1606-1669), painters such as Vermeer (1632-1675), Jan Steen (1626-1679), and Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) have all invited comparisons with Hammershøi, particularly in respect of depictions of domestic

interiors. Naoki Sato devoted a chapter of the 2008 Royal Academy catalogue to this topic, with a particular emphasis on Pieter Janssens Elinga (1623-1682) (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 39-45).

However, one of the most pertinent criticisms occurred in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* review of the 1889 *Exposition* by Maurice Hamel. Many of the Danish artists at the *Exposition* (Anna Ancher, Michael Ancher (1849-1927), Viggo Johansen (1851-1935), Laurits Tuxen (1853-1927) and L.A. Ring) were simply mentioned by name or in a solitary sentence in the article, with the obvious exception of Krøyer who garnered half a page. However, Hammershøi had obviously made an impression on the critic:

All those who have not gone beyond the horizon of the native school stay faithful to the spirit, the methods, the chiaroscuro of Holland, and in particular we recognise the influence of Terburg [Gerard ter Borch] and Van der Meer [Johannes Vermeer] in the studies of Hammershøi who seeks, by simplifying the touch, by releasing the abstract values of coloured matter, by blurring the contours in an amber-grey envelope, to place a mysterious transparency around his figures (Hamel, 1889, 377-378).

Hamel's review is perceptive, because the painter to whom Hammershøi is closest in his rendition of *An Old Woman* is surely the Dutch artist Gerard ter Borch (1617-81). In the mid-seventeenth century, ter Borch painted a number of pictures of solitary women that foreshadow Hammershøi's painting.² In the example of *Margaretha van Haexbergen (1614–1676)* (fig. 5; c.1666-67), they share a floor and wall that is unpatterned and unadorned; both floor and wall are subject to variations in colour that result from the impact of diffused light. The figure is stark and wears a voluminous black dress, the only difference being a small quantity of jewellery. Like the Hammershøi picture, ter Borch's woman is small in relation to her generous but stark surroundings, and equally the only mass of bright colour that offsets the dour setting is red, in this case a chair rather than a curtain. Hammershøi would have seen many examples of Dutch Golden Age painting in the galleries in his 1885 visit to Berlin, including works by Vermeer and Rembrandt, and a number by ter Borch such as *Paternal Admonition* (1654-65; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Ter Borch was also represented in Hammershøi's other destination in 1885, Dresden (*A Lady washing her Hands*, c.1655; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).

Hammershøi's enthusiasm for these Dutch pictures is reflected in the extensive tour of the Low Countries that he undertook in 1887, the year after he painted *An Old Woman*. There were also Dutch pictures in the Royal Collection in Copenhagen, and Hammershøi is likely to have studied them.³ The Royal Collection included Gerhard Ter Borch's muted *Portrait of a Lady* (1660s; Statens Museum for Kunst), acquired in 1809, and Nicholas Maes' (1634-1693) *Portrait of a Man* (late 1600s; Statens Museum for Kunst), acquired in 1837. Hammershøi's

² Such as *Margaretha van Haexbergen (1614–1676)* c.1666-67, Metropolitan Museum, New York; *Portrait of a Thirty-one-year-old woman*, 1656, Arthur Wiederkehr Collection, Zurich; *Portrait of a Lady*, c.1656, Pushkin Museum, Moscow; *Portrait of a Lady*, 1660s, Statens Museum for Kunst.

³ My thanks to Peter Nørgaard Larsen for suggesting this.

picture was purchased by Heinrich Hirschsprung in the period 1886-88⁴ and, as we know, was certainly in his possession at the time of the 1889 *Exposition*. It remains to this day in the Hirschsprung Collection in Copenhagen.

Young Girl Sewing

In 1887, Hammershøi painted another picture of his sister, much smaller and more intimate than his three-quarter length portrait of two years previously, but no less controversial. Entitled *Young Girl Sewing. Anna Hammershøi, the Artist's Sister* (fig. 6), it is a loosely painted, close-up depiction of his sister in intense concentration. Unlike the previous picture of his mother, the figure occupies nearly half of the picture plane. Just as with *An Old Woman*, there are clear correspondences with Dutch seventeenth-century painting, most notably Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (fig. 8). Hammershøi's work is one of his very smallest (37 x 35cm.), and Vermeer's picture is actually his smallest known work, measuring only 24.5 x 21cm. Although Hammershøi's tour of 1887 did not include Paris, we know from Krøyer that Hammershøi consulted the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, and would have surely seen the article on Vermeer in September 1883 that featured a full-page reproduction of Vermeer's picture (fig. 9).

Hammershøi's palette is particularly narrow in *Young Girl Sewing*, with grey, brown and white predominating. One hand is almost hidden, and even the minutiae of the sewing process are effectively hidden. As Kasper Monrad has noted, the needlework is of minor importance; Hammershøi seems determined to remove as much pictorial content as possible, and in this respect, he stands apart from his Danish contemporaries (Monrad et al., 2012, 14). In contrast, although Vermeer employed a plain background, he offsets this by using primary colours in the yellow of the girl's dress, the dark blue of the cushion and the bright red of the thread. He also shows us the implements of the girl's task, although the two pictures share the intensity of the girl's concentration. It is also noteworthy that, in a significant number of places, Hammershøi has let the canvas become evident to the viewer, with the result that "its visible texture seems to become intermingled with the piece of material the girl is holding" (Monrad and Hornung, 2002, 24). Additionally, the girl appears to be floating in front of the wall, with no sign of chair, floor or wall adornment. However, Hammershøi does achieve a three-dimensional effect, substantially because, as Poul Vad explains, "the light from the left contrapuntally engenders its dark counterpart in the right half of the face, and gives the head's volume against the background a clearly defined plastic effect" (Vad, 1992, 68).

⁴ In *Vilhelm Hammershøi: En retrospektiv udstilling*, Ordstrupgaard, Copenhagen, 1981, p. 164, it is stated that the picture was purchased in 1886 and resold to Heinrich Hirschsprung that same year. However, *The Hirschsprung Collection of Works by Danish Artists. Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture*, p. 52, says that it was acquired in 1888.



Fig. 6. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Young Girl Sewing, Anna Hammershøi, the Artist's Sister*, 1887, Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen, oil on canvas, 37 x 35cm.



Fig. 7. Nicolas Maes, *The Lacemaker*, c.1654-55, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, chalk on paper, 14.1 x 11.8cm.

Vermeer also employs this technique with his *Lacemaker*, this time with the light source coming from the right.



Fig. 8. Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker, La Dentellière*, c.1669-70, The Louvre, Paris, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 21cm.



Fig. 9. Johannes Vermeer *The Lacemaker, La Dentellière*, as reproduced in the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, September 1883, between pp. 214-15.

Vermeer is also comparable with Hammershøi in their two similar works because of the soft-focus effects he achieves in parts of his picture. While not as indistinct or translucent as Hammershøi's painting, the red and white threads in Vermeer's work are far less in focus than the fingers and bobbins of his lacemaker. It has been strongly suggested that this was due to the use of a *camera obscura* in Vermeer's *modus operandi* (Steadman, 2001, 31-40). Hammershøi's picture feels less sophisticated, with looser brushwork and a less finished appearance. Any comparison between the two pictures needs to consider that, although Hammershøi saw further examples of Vermeer's work on his trip to the Low Countries in 1887, he could not have seen *The Lacemaker* before he visited Paris in 1889. His observance of reproductions of *The Lacemaker*, exemplified by the *Gazette des beaux-arts* reproduction of September 1883 (fig. 9), would obviously have provided a much plainer and less distinct image for Hammershøi to consider, which may actually have suited his purpose.

The subject of the lacemaker, along with women performing other small intimate tasks such as reading or writing letters, or performing domestic duties, was a popular one with seventeenth-century Dutch artists. A number of artists had tackled the theme before Vermeer, such as Pieter Coddem (1599-1678), Caspar Netscher (1639-1684), Jan Miense Molenaer (1610-1668), Gerrit Dou (1613-1675) and Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667). One of the most prolific exponents of the theme was Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693), who painted at least five pictures of lacemakers and sewing women (*Pictures and Quotes about Bobbin Lace*, accessed 16 May 2017). In Maes' pictures, the protagonist only occupies a small proportion of the canvas area, but in the red chalk study (fig. 7), the sitter occupies a similar amount of area to Hammershøi's picture, and is – with the exception of one hand – in a very similar pose. Note the dress cut off at exactly the same point, and the head tilted forward and outward from the body with the eyes covered. What is significant is that Hammershøi could have seen this drawing in his 1887 visit to Rotterdam – the work was acquired in 1848 by Museum Boijmans van Beuningen – and noted its affinity to the much-better-known Vermeer work.⁵ The pose, demeanour, mood and simplicity of the Maes drawing is certainly closer to Hammershøi's picture than that of Vermeer.

Hammershøi did not attempt to exhibit *Young Girl Sewing* until the annual spring exhibition at Charlottenborg in 1888, where it received a similar fate as *Portrait of a Young Woman*, being rejected by the selection committee. However, the much larger and darker *Job* (1887; Hirschsprung Collection) was accepted. The further rejection of a work by Hammershøi added additional impetus to the demands for an independent jury. After *Young Girl Sewing* was shown at a later exhibition in 1888 of "refused work" – also at Charlottenborg – it was purchased by Alfred Bramsen for DKK 200, and he was surely delighted when it won a bronze medal at the *Exposition Universelle* the following year (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 15 and 143). When it was shown at the 1891 Independent exhibition – an exhibition which its earlier rejection had helped to inspire – it was both praised and coveted by the important French critic Théodore Duret (Thorkild Hansen in Finsen and Rasschou-Neilsen, 1981, 14).

⁵ Lawrence Gowing suggests that if Vermeer "was particularly indebted to any one of [his predecessors] it was to Nicolaes Maes" in respect of *The Lacemaker*. Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), pp. 144-5.

Job

Job (1888; Hirschsprung Collection) is one of Hammershøi's least discussed works, primarily because its poor physical condition has precluded its exhibition since the 1889 Paris *Exposition*. Upon its display at Charlottenborg in 1888, it was already being described by the correspondent of *Dagbladet* as "a couple of hundred years old, with layers of darkened varnish" (Vad, 1992, 40). Karl Madsen thought that it was "the strangest picture ever painted in our cheerful country" (Krämer and Sato, 2008, 14-15), surpassing his earlier remark that *Portrait of a Young Woman* was the "strangest picture" in the 1885 exhibition. Madsen clearly thought that *Job*, with its gloomy atmosphere and suffering human figure, was at odds with the Danish temperament, but this did not preclude him from buying the work, and lending it to the 1889 *Exposition*. The picture, despite attempts to "recover" it in the 1940s, is very indistinct today, the victim of "an unlucky chemical reaction in the pigments" (Vad, 1992, 39). Perhaps, as his tutor Krøyer had done,⁶ Hammershøi had used bitumen in an attempt to create a darkened atmosphere, but this strategy clearly misfired. All that remains is the outline of a shape in the gloom, and a hand reaching into the only small area of light on the central left-hand side. Poul Vad describes the hand as "a specter's hand, deformed and menacing" (Vad, 1992, 40), and notes the totally rigidity of the figure and the phallic nature of the outstretched arm (Vad, 1992, 40 and 42).

Vad's observations are based on a number of studies that Hammershøi undertook for the work, particularly the charcoal sketch illustrated in fig. 10. This indicates that Hammershøi originally planned a more frontal figure rather than the figure that turns away from the viewer in the final painting. According to Hammershøi's mother, the artist spent some eighteen months working on the picture – presumably including his 1887 visit to Germany, Belgium and Holland – as opposed to the three-year period that had been stated (Vad, 1992, 39). This long, drawn-out process suggests an intense and sustained meditation on the nature of human suffering by Hammershøi. One can speculate on representations of *Job* by other artists that may have informed Hammershøi; Krøyer would certainly have mentioned Bonnat's famous depiction of *Job* (1880; Musée Bonnat, Bayonne), a brightly-lit, Spanish-influenced, expressive, front-facing figure, in marked contrast to Hammershøi's still and rigid human form encompassed in darkness. Closer to home, Kristian Zahrtmann had painted *Job's Comforters* (1887; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), a scene that was a literal representation of a passage from the Book of *Job*, and thus at the opposite end of the spectrum from Hammershøi's exclusion of a motif suggestive of narrative content. Poul Vad rejects Georges de la Tour's *Job being mocked by his wife* (c.1650; Musée Départemental d'Art, Epinal) (Vad, 1992, 42). See also Olsen in Finsen and Rasschou-Neilsen, 1981, 26), another narrative picture which, despite the presence of an additional entity, is certainly closer to Hammershøi's seated figure in composition.

However, it seems that these pictures were influential – if at all – in title only, because the work was only named after it was completed. Frederikke Hammershøi said that "Vilhelm has never thought that it should be a biblical picture", and that *Job* had been chosen because it was "the best designation for a suffering human being" (Vad, 1992, 42). Rather than trying to portray *Job*, Hammershøi had tried to represent a man immobilised by despair, and had then decided

⁶ For example, *A Sardine curing and packing Factory in Concarneau* (1879; Statens Museum for Kunst).

that Job was the best title, representing as it did a man who had undergone great torment. It may be that Hammershøi's knowledge of Job's suffering had been reinforced by artistic representations, and thus the title suggested itself to him but, as Vad points out, the title is an unfortunate one as it leads the viewer to search for a literary source such as that used by de la Tour and Zahrtmann (Vad, 1992, 43).

I propose that instead of looking for a corresponding "Job" painting as a source, we should consider the "Egyptian" nature of the composition. In 1890, the painter Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (1863-1958) wrote to his fellow artist Johan Rohde (1856-1935): "are you enthusiastic over Hammershøi's Job, is it not the model set up in the Egyptian pose..." (Vad, 1992, 42-43). Vad discusses a study for the picture, that of a naked man in a more frontal Egyptian pose, but believes correctly that the raised arm in the final painting disrupts this notion of an Egyptian style (Vad, 1992, 43).

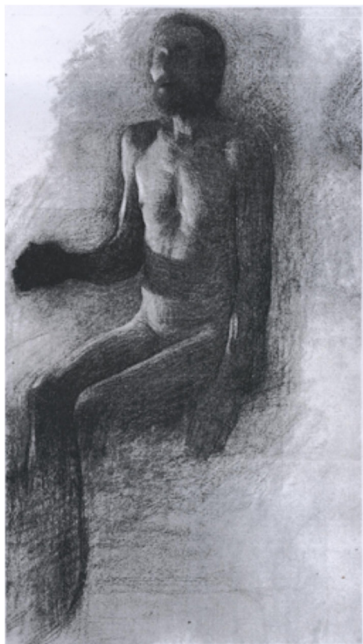


Fig. 10. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Job (A Study)*, 1887, charcoal on card, Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Copenhagen.



Fig. 11. *Anubis. Jackal-headed Egyptian God*, 14th century BC, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

However, there is a figure in Copenhagen that corresponds effectively with Hammershøi's *Job*, particularly in the earlier studies like the charcoal figure (fig. 10), namely the statue of the Egyptian god Anubis that is now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (fig. 11). This figure shares a passive rigidity with Hammershøi's figure, is in a seated position, has a clenched right fist, and stares impassively ahead with blank eyes; such a source would certainly account for the remarked-upon stiffness in Hammershøi's figure if he had this Egyptian statue in mind. Particularly similar to the charcoal study is the left hand of the statue, very large and flat as if

compressed by a heavy weight. Carl Jacobsen had a large number of galleries at his "house-museum" open to the public; around this time, the sheer size of his collection led him to donate it to the state on condition that suitable premises could be found. It is difficult to believe that anyone with an interest in art in Copenhagen would not have visited Jacobsen's prestigious collection, particularly as Hammershøi had a link through Krøyer, who knew the collector so well.

A Baker's Shop

The most radical work exhibited by Hammershøi at the 1889 *Exposition* was the only one then in his personal ownership – it was acquired by Alfred Bramsen the following year. *A Baker's Shop* (1889; fig. 12) was exhibited under the title *Study (Étude)* in 1889. Hammershøi intended the title to mean a considered representation rather than a preparatory sketch. In fact, he had completed a number of studies for his *Study*, before deciding upon a simplified format of horizontal bands of colour, interrupted by the presence of a female figure pictured from behind. In one preparatory picture, *From a Bakery Shop* (1888; Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum), a woman reaches up to a top shelf, while another attends to something with her hands located just above a table. The two women are separated by a central overhead lamp. The basic content of bakery shelves, and a woman seen from behind and dressed in black with a hint of white apron, is established in this study. However, the final picture removes the second woman, table, lamp and upward-reaching gesture, in an act of simplification that leaves the emphasis on a picture composed of horizontal forms. Poul Vad describes this as the first use of the "plane-parallel compositional principle" and enthuses that Hammershøi "brought it off with incredible daring and consistency" (Vad, 1992, 63). This concept was expanded upon by Lena Boëthius who suggested that in Hammershøi's *Study* "one could even think of modern artists like Mondrian or Rothko" (*Vilhelm Hammershøi*, 1999, 54), and by David Jackson, who proposed affinities with Malevich (Jackson, 22 March 2012). Certainly these later artists spring to mind when observing the large block of colour that inhabits the bottom half of the picture; Vad describes this "nearly deep black counter" as "pure inertia, stopped time", giving the form a temporal as well as physical entity (Vad, 1992, 63).

Another study, *Figure of a Woman* (1888; Statens Museum for Kunst), shows what appears to be the same woman as in *A Baker's Shop* in front of a table with a chair at far-right. A significant section of white apron is shown over her black dress on her right side, as well as a white apron cord around her middle and the suggestion of an apron on her left. In the final picture, the large section of white apron disappears completely, and the apron is merely hinted at by a glint of cord around her middle and another brief white line on her left. Despite this minimisation, the hints of white add a three-dimensional bulk to the figure. In comparison with the study, the final human form is much reduced as a proportion of the picture plane, echoing Hammershøi's earlier work *An Old Woman*.

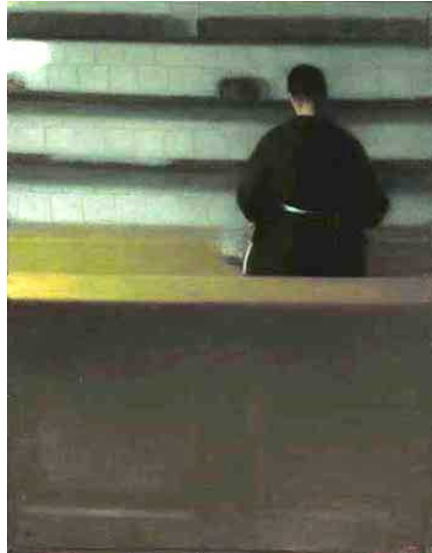


Fig. 12. Vilhelm Hammershøi, *A Baker's Shop (Studie (Bagerbutik))*, 1889, oil on canvas, Vejen Kunstmuseum. 113.5 x 90cm.

The figure in the final picture, described by Vad as a "ponderously sculptural woman's figure" (Vad, 1992, 63) appears too large to be Anna Hammershøi and too young to be her mother. The girl appears almost squashed between the table and counter and her baking accoutrements are as minimal as her features (Hanne Westergaard in Edam et al., 1986, 124). The rear view of the figure again recalls the portrayal of women in pictures by Gerard ter Borch and other artists of the Dutch Golden Age, and also the *Rückenfiguren* of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), whose revival in Norway was being championed around this time by Andreas Aubert (1851-1913). Hammershøi has taken a scene that at least hints at a narrative element, and has then reduced it – in the manner of a chef – until only the concentrated essence of his original concept remains. The picture is not about the preparation and sale of bread, but a study of light and form.

Conclusion

Vilhelm Hammershøi exhibited four pictures at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, the first occasion on which he exhibited outside Scandinavia. Three paintings were owned by art collectors and the most recent by Hammershøi himself. Two of the works showed strong links to Dutch art, one to an ancient sculpture, and one was particularly radical in its composition and style. A fifth painting – the most important of them all in terms of its prominence in the history of Danish art – was wrongly thought by some scholars to have been exhibited, perhaps influenced by its prestigious reputation. This picture demonstrated links to a painting by a Danish artist of the previous generation. Despite being only awarded a bronze medal at the *Exposition*, Hammershøi attracted the attention of the most prestigious art journal in France, where he received more coverage than any other Danish artist except the internationally

renowned Krøyer. The "mysterious transparency" that was then noted by Maurice Hamel imbued his entire subsequent oeuvre.

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