

Press Release

Hauser & Wirth inaugurates new Basel gallery with 'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence'

The first solo exhibition of the 19th- and early 20th-century Danish master in Switzerland



'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence'

Hauser & Wirth Basel

1 June – 13 July 2024

Hauser & Wirth inaugurates its new gallery in Basel at Luftgässlein 4 with the exhibition 'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence'. Curated by art historian Felix Krämer, a leading expert on Hammershøi, it is the first ever solo exhibition of the celebrated 19th- and early 20th-century Danish artist in Switzerland, bringing together 16 works from private collections dating between 1883 and 1914, some of which have rarely been exhibited before. Characterized by their mesmerizing composure and omnipresent minimal color palette, 'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence' devotes its attention to these genre paintings without narratives and is accompanied by a catalog by Hauser & Wirth Publishers, featuring essays from the curator Felix Krämer and art historian and writer Florian Illies (author of 'Love in a Time of Hate' and '1913: The Year Before the Storm').

Alongside the interior paintings for which Hammershøi is highly renowned, including nine works featuring a figure, the exhibition features several of the artist's early farmstead paintings, as well as a rare self-portrait of the artist with his wife. The quiet but radical originality that emanates from these works situates Hammershøi as a precursor to the modern masters who were to follow, including Giorgio Morandi, Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth. Highlighting Hammershøi's powerfully prescient vision, Florian Illies writes, 'The future already spoke through him. More than a hundred years in advance, he intuited the spaces in which our souls now wish to reside.'

About the artist and the works in the exhibition

Hammershøi's timeless paintings defy categorization, visually bridging the art of the Old Masters with that of the modern era. Drawing from both the past and his present, Hammershøi created a highly individual artistic language that has captured the imaginations of contemporary audiences from beyond his native Denmark. Major international retrospectives and exhibitions of his work over the last 20 years have been held at The Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (2008), Kunsthalle München, Germany (2012) and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, Japan (2020), among others.

Born in Copenhagen in 1864, the son of a merchant, Hammershøi remained loyal to his hometown of Copenhagen where he lived until his death in 1916. Through early travels to the European centers of Paris and London with his wife, Ida Hammershøi, née Ilsted, whom he married in 1891, he familiarized himself with

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the rapidly evolving international art of his time. Yet, it was Dutch 17th-century genre painting, particularly the enigmatic domestic interiors of Johannes Vermeer, and the early 19th-century Danish Golden Age, that became a wellspring of inspiration for the artist. Following their travels, the couple settled in their 17th-century apartment, Strandgade 30, in the Christianshavn district of Copenhagen, where they would reside from 1898 to 1909. Described by his contemporaries as a recluse, the artist preferred to paint at home rather than in a studio, resisting the influences and distractions of the outside world. Hammershøi's interior paintings, each depiction imbued with a contemplative stillness, were to remain the artist's enduring fascination and most renowned motif.

Among the works in the exhibition are major paintings of interiors with a singular female figure, most noticeably depicting Hammershøi's wife, Ida. Within the interiors that Hammershøi created, Ida repeatedly appears as an isolated figure with her back turned towards the viewer, giving these paintings a timeless quality by denying any sort of emotional or narrative reading. Certain motifs reappear in different configurations alongside his wife, often in an artificial and dream-like manner, creating an inherent tension between the figure and its environment. The uncanny placement of household objects, such as candlesticks, chairs, desks and mirrors, can be seen as evocative of the still life compositions that Giorgio Morandi painted decades later. In the painting 'Interior with the Artist's Wife, Seen from Behind' (1901), Ida stands ambivalently next to a pianoforte; however, there is no interaction between two. The presence of a musical instrument emphasizes the absence of sound, adding to the profound feeling of stillness. These ephemeral interior paintings conjure a voyeuristic intimacy which anticipates the atmosphere of works by 20th-century artists such as Edward Hopper or René Magritte.

Hammershøi's reductive color palette and masterful use of diffused light give the interiors a contemplative, melancholic quality and stand in stark contrast to the bold expressionists and fauvists of his time. In one of the earliest interiors on view, 'Interior with a Standing Woman' (1898), the artist experiments with brown and ochre tones seen in his early farmstead paintings. In later paintings, Hammershøi began to employ the grey toned color palette that would come to define his minimal aesthetic, as seen in the work 'Woman Before a Mirror' (1906). Although evocative of black and white or sepia photography, his palette was radical since it ultimately alienated his images from realism. Asked about his color use in 1907, the artist replied: 'Why do I use so few and muted colors? Frankly, I don't know. It's quite impossible for me to say anything on the matter. It feels natural to me. In purely coloristic terms I absolutely believe that a painting works best the fewer colors are used in it.' The seriality of the isolated figure, setting and disconnection from verisimilitude are traits that arguably characterize Hammershøi's works as precursors to conceptual and modernist approaches.

Many of Hammershøi's later paintings utilize an experimental approach to perspective, with several works reminiscent of photographic compositions and viewpoints. A rare example of a self-portrait of the artist with his wife, 'Double Portrait of the Artist and His Wife, Seen through a Mirror. The Cottage Spurveskjul'

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(1911) features the artist's own reflection within the confines of an elliptical shaped mirror, allowing the viewer's gaze to merge with the artist's, whilst Ida is distanced from the viewer in the background. 'Morning Toilette' (1914) is one of the latest paintings on view featuring the artist's wife and is in stark contrast to earlier examples; here, Hammershøi crops the figure from the waist upwards. These angular compositions and perspectives imbue the artist's work with a striking contemporary relevance which, alongside Hammershøi's use of the figure and color, reveal a remarkably modernist sensibility that continues to garner new generations of followers who join those steeped in the history of art of the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

About Hauser & Wirth Basel

Hauser & Wirth's new space at Luftgässlein 4 in Basel's historic central cultural district occupies a former silk ribbon factory built in the 1880s and comprises a ground floor exhibition space and showroom. The gallery is under the direction of Carlo Knöll, who joined Hauser & Wirth as Senior Director in September 2023. 'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence' is the first in a series of historic exhibitions at Hauser & Wirth Basel being developed by Knöll.

Since its earliest days, Hauser & Wirth has mounted historically significant exhibitions. The gallery's inaugural exhibition in 1992 took place in the first-floor apartment of an Art Deco villa in the heart of Zurich; it united mobiles and gouaches by Alexander Calder with sculptures and paintings by Joan Miró. Since then, Hauser & Wirth has continued to forge an ambitious and academically rigorous program of historic exhibitions, providing a natural home for a number of major 20th-century artist estates and encouraging a continued and engaging discourse around their oeuvres.

For additional information, please contact:

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Hauser & Wirth Basel

Luftgässlein 4, 4051 Basel

Opening Hours during

Art Basel:

10 – 16 June

9 am – 7 pm

Opening Hours:

Tues – Fri, 2 pm – 6 pm

Sat, 11 am – 4 pm

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Vilhelm Hammershøi
Interior with the Artist's Wife, Seen from Behind
1901

Oil on canvas
45 x 39 cm / 17 3/4 x 15 3/8 in
Photo: Annik Wetter Photographie

Vilhelm Hammershøi
Double Portrait of the Artist and His Wife, Seen
through a Mirror. The Cottage Spurveskjul 1911
Oil on canvas
55 x 76 cm / 21 5/8 x 29 7/8 in

Vilhelm Hammershøi
Interior with a Standing Woman
1898
Oil on canvas
48.5 x 42.4 cm / 19 1/8 x 16 3/4 in

Vilhelm Hammershøi
Interior with a Writing Desk
1900
Oil on canvas
47 x 48 cm / 18 1/2 x 18 7/8 in

Vilhelm Hammershøi
Interior in London, Brunswick Square
1912
Oil on canvas
53 x 76 cm / 20 7/8 x 29 7/8 in
Photo: Annik Wetter Photographie

Vilhelm Hammershøi
Morning Toilette
1914
Oil on canvas
87 x 73 cm / 34 1/4 x 28 3/4 in