



Inv. no. B 318

VILHELM HAMMERSHØI (1864–1916) &NBSP;  
WOMAN KNITTING. THE ARTIST'S MOTHER, 1889  
OIL ON CANVAS

55.5 X 38.7 CM

In formal terms, *Woman Knitting. The Artist's Mother* is a genre painting, but the narrative content has been toned down; we are told nothing about the woman in the picture. She is frozen in mid-movement, and her specific choice of handicraft is essentially immaterial. The most important aspect is woman's immersion: she is turned inwards, towards herself, not outwards, towards the world. In this sense, the painting is an excellent example of one of the most important themes in Vilhelm Hammershøi's art: the loneliness of humanity, portrayed through solitary figures caught up in their own world.

The knitting woman is the artist's mother, Frederikke Hammershøi (1838–1914), who also appears in one of Hammershøi's other works in The David Collection (B 314). She was the mainstay of the Hammershøi family, and it was she who encouraged and supported her son's artistic career right from the outset and throughout her life.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside the artist's younger sister Anna Hammershøi (1866–1955) and younger brother Svend Hammershøi (1873–1948), Frederikke Hammershøi was one of Hammershøi's favourite models in the period before and immediately after he married Ida Ilsted (1869–1949) in 1891. She is often depicted with a piece of needlework or a book, regardless of whether Hammershøi painted or photographed her.

The painting is the earliest dated work by Vilhelm Hammershøi in The David Collection. It is a preliminary study for the painting *Interior with the Artist's Mother*.<sup>2</sup>

**Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916)**  
**Woman Seated on a White Chair, 1899-1900**  
**Oil on canvas**  
**38.7 x 55.5 cm**

If a figure appears in Vilhelm Hammershøi's interior scenes, it is typically a woman clad in a black dress, lost in her own thoughts or in some chore, unaware of being observed. In this sketch we see a woman with her back turned towards us, seated on a white Empire style chair, known from several of the artist's interior scenes.

The woman is presumably Hammershøi's wife, Ida Hammershøi, who was his favourite model and whom he, quite conveniently, had before him on a daily basis. However, one should not regard his works as portraits of his wife as he always anonymised and reduced her to 'just' being a figure, one often cast in various roles: Hammershøi would either emphasise her loneliness and isolation, or he let her become part of a wider compositional arrangement, interplaying with the entire room, its furniture and other elements. In this way, he could alternate between a symbolic narrative and an aesthetic exploration of his chosen subject.[1]

*Woman Seated on a White Chair* is painted on the reverse of *Woman Knitting*. *The Artist's Mother*. Both works are clearly sketch-like, and they can both be considered preliminary studies for later works by the artist. It is striking, however, that the two depictions were done approximately ten years apart. The reason for this is uncertain; possibly the dates are wrong, or perhaps Hammershøi had the canvas with the knitting woman lying around for subsequent reuse.[2]

[1] Kasper Monrad et al.: *Hammershøi og Europa*, The National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen 2012, pp. 76–81.

[2] Henrik Wivel: *Hammershøi in the David Collection*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2017, p. 56.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Frederikke Hammershøi kept meticulously updated scrapbooks in which she collected newspaper articles, mentions, reviews, letter and other materials about Vilhelm Hammershøi. See: Annette Rosenfold Hvidt and Gertrud Oelsner: *Vilhelm Hammershøi: På sporet af det åbne billede*, Copenhagen 2018, pp. 18–23.

<sup>2</sup> *Vilhelm Hammershøi, Interior with the Artist's Mother, 1889*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, inv.no. NNM 1789.

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Henrik Wivel: *Hammershøi i Davids Samling*, København 2017, pp. 56-57;

Eva Pohl: "Se Hammershøi over skulderen" in *Nordisk Tidsskrift*, 2018, 1, pp. 11-18;

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Sophus Michaëlis and Alfred Bramsen: *Vilhelm Hammershøi. Kunstneren og hans værk*, København 1918, cat.no. 73, p. 86;

Knud Voss and Verner Aspenström: *Vilhelm Hammershøi*, Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm 1976, cat.no. 6;

Henrik Wivel: *Hammershøi i Davids Samling*, København 2017, pp. 54-55;

Eva Pohl: "Se Hammershøi over skulderen" in *Nordisk Tidsskrift*, 2018, 1, pp. 11-18;