

Svend Hammershøi *View of Prinsens Palace Courtyard, Copenhagen*
1873 - Copenhagen - 1948

oil on panel
34 5/8 by 32 7/8 inches (88 by 83 cm.)
inscribed and dated lower right: '26'

provenance: with George Kleis Kunsthandel, Copenhagen;
Percy Ipsens, Copenhagen;
Private collection, United States

note: Perhaps best known as a ceramicist and designer as well as the younger brother of the artist Vilhelm, Svend Hammershøi was a serious and accomplished painter in his own right. Born in Copenhagen he received his early training in painting at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from 1890-92 and continued his studies for an additional five years at the *Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler*, run by the noted Danish Artist, Kristian Zahrtman. Concurrent with his academic instruction, Hammershøi was employed at several ceramic factories producing designs not only for the *Kongelige Porcelainsfabrik*, but also for the well-established firms of *Bing & Grøndahl* and *Herman A. Kähler* where works based on his designs are still being manufactured to this day.

After the passing in 1908 of his friend and mentor Thorvald Bindesbøll, the noted architect and fellow ceramic designer, Hammershøi moved away from pottery design and decoration to focus on his painting. The elder Bindesbøll left a large impression on Hammershøi which can be seen in the younger man's work. Bindesbøll was not only one of Denmark's leading architects working in a neo-classical idiom, but in his ceramic works he was also exploring an organic abstraction of design that grew out of an admiration of ancient Asian pottery. In 1946, towards the end of his life, Hammershøi penned a biography on the architect commemorating what would have been his 100th year. In 1910, Hammershøi received a study grant that allowed him to spend the next four years in England drawing and painting the Gothic structures to be found in the towns of Wells and Oxford. He was to return to England between the wars and exhibited at the Royal Institute of British Architects, London and Ryman's Gallery, Oxford in 1929 as well as the Royal Academy in 1931.

While his elder brother Vilhelm's paintings concentrate on single figures set in austere interiors consisting of doorframes, windows and wainscoting, the younger Hammershøi's canvases focus primarily on architectural elements often seen through a veil of barren trees. Although he painted portraits and figural studies, it is the interplay between nature and architecture that dominates much of his work. Installation photographs from his exhibitions reflect the importance he placed on the integration of the arts and nature as his paintings are shown with his ceramic works which are in turn filled with flowers all interspersed with potted shrubs. Much like his silver and ceramic vessels that are clad in flowers, leaves, vines and tendrils found in nature, his paintings of buildings are frequently seen through a scrim of trees and branches.

The courtyard depicted in this work appears in another composition by Hammershøi now in the collection of the National Gallery of Denmark. The title of that work is *Haven ved Prinses Palae*. The present painting shows red-roofed brick buildings, shrouded in a canopy of bare branches of linden trees. A persistent, dim twilight of a Scandinavian winter pervades much of Hammershøi's work and this painting is no exception. The regular, rectilinear forms of the rooflines and window frames of the structures are overlaid with the random twists and turns of the uneven branches. It may appear that the artist is suggesting contrasting antipodes of man and nature's endeavors, but within the scope of Hammershøi's work, it may well be an expression of the harmonious blending of the two. With his fascination on Gothic elements one is tempted to see the trees as the natural extension of the liernes and tiercerons of a Gothic fan vault towering above the building. Additionally, the daubs of greenish gray paint representing the sky showing through the branches, could be seen as the panes of an elaborate stained glass window executed *en grisaille*.