

Carl Holsøe

1863–1935

Denmark

Interior scene with Young Girl Reading (Interiörsцен med ung läsande flicka)

Oil on panel, 54 x 45,5 cm, signed C Holsøe.

Carl Holsøe's artistic career began in 1882 when he was accepted to the Academy of Fine Arts (Kunstakademiet) in Copenhagen. He stayed there for two years before continuing his studies at Peder Severin Krøyer's private painting school. At Krøyer's he got to know Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916), who was to remain a close friend throughout his life. Holsøe, Hammershøi and the latter's brother-in-law Peter Ilsted (1861–1933) would together form a small association, which was particularly interested in the intricate game of light and shadow. Characteristic of all three of them are quiet, atmospheric interior paintings with sparse colour and few, but exquisitely rendered, interior objects.

Holsøe's artistic kinship with Vilhelm Hammershøi is especially noticeable in the subtle, contemplative atmosphere of his works. In comparison with his more internationally famous colleague, however, his pictures often possess a much greater warmth, and the interiors feel more inhabited. The Danish art historian Merete Bodelsen (1907–1986) explained the difference as being that Holsøe "was a more sober narrator than Hammershøi and could, like the old Dutch interior painters, rejoice in the immediate beauty of things." (*Weilbachs konstnärslexikon*, volume I, Copenhagen 1947, p 561).

Throughout his career, Holsøe returned to Danish interior subjects. They practically dominate his production to such an extent that the genre has almost become synonymous with his art. Often, they display interiors from bourgeois homes, where a solitary female figure is the focal point. The woman is usually depicted at a short distance with her back to the viewer, seemingly deeply immersed in a book or in some everyday activity. The pictured room is sparsely but homely and tastefully decorated, illuminated by a gentle daylight filtered through a window nearby. Holsøe was happy to use his own wife, Emelie Heise, as a model, posing in one of the couple's shared homes, either in Jonstrup outside Copenhagen or in Asserbo in northern Sjælland (Zealand), where they later on moved.

Interior scene with Young Girl Reading is in many ways quite typical of the artist, as it depicts precisely such a subject as described above. At the same time, it differs in some essential respects. The model in this case is not his wife Emelie but a young, unidentified girl, pictured from the side so that one can clearly see her fetching profile. The tonality is warmer and the furniture less sparse than in many of Holsøe's other interior motifs, which confers the scene with a more tangible feeling of home. It is as if the artist deliberately wanted to distance himself from the supposed asceticism that characterizes most of Hammershøi's works. What Holsøe does not abstain from, however, is the attention to detail. Through Carl Holsøe's delicate brush, the viewer becomes aware, on an almost physical level, of the individual objects in the room and the texture of their various materials: the velvety smooth surface of polished mahogany furniture, the smooth glaze of porcelain pieces, the matte lustre of silver candlesticks, the sheen of the thin curtains and the roughness of the heavy frills of the heavy gold frame. The living room that Holsøe portrays here is both populated and animated – while at the same time being a room wherein time literally stands still. (CEÖ)

Provenance

Private French collection.