

SEMINAR / FRIDAY 30 AUGUST 2019

NORDIC INTERIORS

*SPACES OF INDETERMINACY IN
LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PAINTING*

BRANDTS
ODENSE

NORDIC INTERIORS

Spaces of Indeterminacy in Late Nineteenth-Century Painting

Friday 30 August 2019, 9:30-16:00 (registration and coffee 9:00-9:30)

Brandts – Museum of Art & Visual Culture, Brandts Torv 1, 5000 Odense C - DK
(enter through the main entrance at Amfipladsen)

Research Seminar on Late Nineteenth-Century Nordic Interior Painting

By the end of the nineteenth century the domestic interior becomes a favorite motif. Painters like Vilhelm Hammershøi, Anna Ancher and Carl Larsson invite us to peek into their private spheres. In Kristiania (Oslo) Christian Krohg uses the interior as a stage for social debate, while the playwright Henrik Ibsen uses architectural metaphors to question the structures of society. By the end of the nineteenth century the interior has become a space of indeterminate and potential meaning.

The widespread presence of interior motifs in late nineteenth-century Nordic painting can be seen as the consequence of an interior cult that developed throughout the nineteenth century. During this century the domestic interior becomes the framework through which the bourgeoisie can express itself. According to the German philosopher, cultural critic and essayist Walter Benjamin this happens between 1830 and 1848 in France under the rule of King Louis-Philippe. Louis-Philippe supports the economical interests of the bourgeoisie, and this gives rise to the idea of the domestic interior as a space of exposure.

At the seminar art historical researchers from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden will cast new perspectives on Nordic interior paintings from the end of the nineteenth century, an area which in recent years has been subject to extensive research and exhibition activity.

With this seminar we want to facilitate a forum where art historians and others can exchange research and ideas that may lead to new knowledge and collaborations spanning national and professional borders. The seminar is organised by the Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies at Aarhus University (DK) and Brandts – Museum of Art & Visual Culture (DK) with support from New Carlsberg Foundation.

Participation

Participation is free. Registration is necessary and closes on 23 August 2019.
Coffee, lunch, refreshments and entrance to the exhibitions at Brandts are included.

Please sign up for the registration here: <https://events.au.dk/Nordicinteriors>

Speakers

Nils Ohlsen, director, Lillehammer Art Museum

Gertrud Oelsner, director, The Hirschsprung Collection

Bente Larsen, professor, University of Oslo

Ellen Egemose, PhD-fellow, Aarhus University and curator, Brandts

Martin Sundberg, curator, Norrköpings Konstmuseum

Øystein Sjøstad, associate professor, University of Oslo

Rasmus Kjærboe, postdoc, Aarhus University and curator, Ribe Art Museum

Jacob Wamberg, professor, Aarhus University

Audience

We hope that the seminar will be of interest to a broad audience.

The seminar might be of interest to you if you are:

- Interested in late nineteenth-century pictorial arts.
- Interested in late nineteenth-century interiors - could be artist's or collector's homes.
- A design historian, historian, architect, designer, or photographer/artist interested in this period.
- Interested in late nineteenth-century literature and drama.
- Working theoretically or practically with art and perception.

Presentations and discussions will be in English.

Questions

Contact organiser Ellen Egemose: ellen.egemose@cc.au.dk

The seminar is organised by /

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Program

Each presentation is followed by a short discussion

- 9:00-9:30: REGISTRATION WITH COFFEE AND CROISSANTS
- 9:30-9:45: **Welcome**
Welcome by Mads Damsbo, director, Brandts
Practical information by Ellen Egemose, organiser, Brandts and Aarhus University
Introduction by Jacob Wamberg, professor, Aarhus University
- 9:45-10:20: **Is there such a Thing as a Nordic Interior Painting?**
Nils Ohlsen, director, Lillehammer Art Museum
- 10:20-10:35: COMFORT BREAK
- 10:35-11:10: **On Vilhelm Hammershøi, Photography and Artistic Processes**
Gertrud Oelsner, director, The Hirschsprung Collection
- 11:10-11:45 **The Silence of the Surface. On Hammershøi's Interiors**
Bente Larsen, professor, University of Oslo
- 11:45-12:45 LUNCH BREAK (THE EXHIBITIONS ARE OPEN ALL DAY UNTIL 9:00 PM)
- 12:45-13:20 **Walls of Ambiguity in Late Nineteenth-Century Nordic Painting**
Ellen Egemose, PhD-fellow, Aarhus University and curator, Brandts
- 13:20-13:55 **Thoughts from Below. Carl Larsson and the Carpet**
Martin Sundberg, curator, Norrköpings Konstmuseum
- 14:00-14:30 BREAK AND REFRESHMENTS
- 14:30-15:05 **Christian Krohg's Studio Interiors**
Øystein Sjøstad, associate professor, University of Oslo
- 15:05-15:40 **Queer Liminality in Kristian Zahrtmann's Interiors**
Rasmus Kjærboe, postdoc, Aarhus University and curator, Ribe Art Museum
- 15:40-16:00 **Wrap-up**
Jacob Wamberg, professor, Aarhus University

Odense International Film Festival Monday 26 August - Sunday 1 September 2019

Fancy seeing a short film in the afternoon or evening after the seminar? Each year Odense hosts the international short film festival OFF. This means one week of intense film watching. The films are presented in the buildings of a old textile factory, in the same complex of buildings as Brandts. Most of the film screenings are free, however booking tickets in advance is recommended. Check out this page for tickets and information: filmfestival.dk/en/programme/

Abstracts

Nils Ohlsen: Is there such a Thing as a Nordic Interior Painting?

Abstract to be announced.

Gertrud Oelsner: On Vilhelm Hammershøi, Photography and Artistic Processes

Abstract to be announced.

Bente Larsen: The Silence of the Surface. On Hammershøi's Interiors

The point of departure of my talk will be an approach to the interiors of Vilhelm Hammershøi as forming a visuality of silence. In focus will be Nancy's formulation of aesthetics as an attraction of the skin formed by distance and touch. It is attraction as *jouissance*, as a relation taking place as skin touching skin, or eyes that caress. Visually, touch implies that the gaze does not penetrate this skin, or painterly surface, but glides along the surface, following it, and disappearing, as Nancy emphasizes. In my talk my claim is that this aspect of visuality is unfolded by some modernist painters both through thematization of the gaze itself and through an insistence of surface as opening up for a reversal of seeing, of not what we see, but the fact that it is seen. It is a visuality confronting the viewer with his or her own gaze, forming a distance that induce silence. I shall claim that an important trait of modernism is that painting itself performs this visuality, opening up a formation a new painterly ontology, and that Hammershøi plays an important part in this modernism.

Ellen Egemose: Walls of Ambiguity in Late Nineteenth-Century Nordic Painting

This presentation considers the play between walls (surfaces), interiors (spaces) and the figures caught between them. In *Ibsen's Houses. Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (2015) Mark B. Sandberg (professor of Film, Media, and Scandinavian Studies at Berkeley) identifies what he describes as a general "thickening" of architectural metaphors regarding the home, house and built structures in late nineteenth-century drama and literature. This, too, goes for late nineteenth century painting. In my talk I show how the use of expanding and semiotically indeterminate wall surfaces becomes a cross-European pictorial trend by the end of the nineteenth century. In my presentation I attempt to categorise the use of indeterminate wall surfaces in late nineteenth century Nordic painting. In the same breath, I investigate how this affects the figure.

Martin Sundberg: Thoughts from Below. Carl Larsson and the Carpet

The Swedish artist Carl Larsson (1853-1919) is famous for his interiors, depicting his idyllic family life in Sundborn. In particular, like in many contemporary examples, the carpet is an important part of the decorative concept. However, it is not only a question of ornament in a superfluous sense. On the one hand, the carpet is part of the depicted interior and therefore rendered amongst other things, such as furniture and flowers. On the other hand, I would claim that the carpet can turn from being a motif into being a function. That is, the carpet, especially through its ornamentation and inherent logic, influences the image overall. Therefore, the depicted ornamental carpet can be used as key to nuance our understanding of the image in seminal ways. That is, thoughts might arise from below.

A close reading of Carl Larsson's *Portrait of Merchant Wilhelm Josephson* (1900) will reveal how the carpet as motif exceeds its common importance as a sign of wealth and of a skillful draughtsman noticeable in the intricate pattern. Indeed, the carpet can become instrumental in an interpretation that tries to leave superficiality behind. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to discuss Larsson's take on the decorative in a broader sense to be able to shed light on individual paintings. His work will provide the main context since ornament lies, as might be understood from the outset, at the core of Larsson's aesthetics. Even though Larsson renders realistic interiors, and ornament and pattern are among his typical ingredients, the underlying concepts are far more important and influential than his realism might suggest at first glance.

Øystein Sjøstad: Christian Krohg's Studio Interiors

Christian Krohg painted his own studio many times, from the 1880s until he died in 1925. In this paper, I want to examine how Krohg represented the studio as a space where different meanings are created. In the 1880s, his studio interiors are about self-presentation and self-promotion. He paints his studio in Kristiania filled with avant-garde artist friends—painters, authors and writers. First of all, the 1880s studio is a bohemian space for fostering networks and creating ideas. Krohg's bohemian studio is a place where different arts converge; the interdisciplinary nature of bohemianism is emphasized and visualized. Secondly, Krohg's bohemian space is a relatively gender-neutral space. Male and female artists are represented together and women are not there primarily as models or lovers.

Then I want to consider Krohg's images from his time as a professor at Académie Colarossi in Paris from 1902 to 1909, relative to the so-called Italian models and model industry in Paris. The studio becomes not only a gendered space but a racial one with asymmetrical power relations.

Finally, I want to look at Krohg's late studio self-portraits from the 1910s and 1920s. These interiors, often ironic and paradoxical, are about psychological self-examination and material experimentation: What is a painter? What is paint? What is a painting? Here the studio is a space for introspection.

Rasmus Kjørboe: Queer Liminality in Kristian Zahrtmann's Interiors

The Danish artist Kristian Zahrtmann (1843-1917) was a celebrity in his time, both as a teacher and as the maker of atmospheric, colourful and psychologically pregnant history painting set in shallow, stage-like spaces of dense and tactile fabrics. Late in life, Zahrtmann lets his own life and his dwelling mesh with his art to the effect that all three come to mediate each other: He deliberately stages his history painting in his own home – also the site for his many self-portraits – while working to put his persona and his house at the centre of numerous articles, photographs and a massive public interest. Again and again, Zahrtmann's blend of art, life and interiority exudes a queer liminality – the feeling that with this painter and his art so many different possibilities for life and pleasure are just around the corner. Thus, my talk will show how Zahrtmann, through the very indeterminacy of his interior painting, carves out a space for thinking and being differently – for himself and for an audience 'in the know'.