

## VILHELM KYHN

1819–1903

### 77. *Summer Meadow*, 1880

(*Sommerdag ved en sø, i forgrunden børn, der plukker blomster*)

Oil on canvas, 31½ x 46 in. (80 x 117 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: V Kyhn 1880

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 300, 1973, lot 117, ill. p. 37; Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 383, 1978, lot 94, ill. p. 15; Sotheby's, London, March 14–15, 1989, lot 19, ill. (described as *Summer Meadows*).

EXHIBITED: Possibly Charlottenborg 1880, no. 142; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 19.

In May 1878, Vilhelm Kyhn went to Paris to see the World Fair for himself. He had been a member of the Exhibition committee and had thus helped decide which Danish paintings were to be sent to Paris. He himself participated with two works, *Jour d'été* (*Summer Day*) and *Au coucher du soleil (hiver)* (*Winter Sunset*).

The Danish artists did not fare particularly well in Paris. In most cases they were totally ignored by the French critics; the leading French art periodical, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, did not devote a single word to the Danish section. In other newspapers, works by Danish artists were scathingly and trenchantly criticized for their lack of skill, their stylistic deficiencies, and catastrophic lack of artistic content. Only a very small number of works was accorded any praise; these included a genre painting by Christen Dalsgaard, a historical composition by Carl Bloch, and Vilhelm Kyhn's landscapes.

During the winter of 1879, the art historian Julius Lange (1838–1896) delivered a series of lectures to Kunstforeningen (the Copenhagen Art Society) in which he considered the World Fair and concluded by comparing the Danish works with those from other countries. Not without reason Lange maintained that Danish art was at a low ebb. The question then was how this period of stagnation could be brought to an end. Should the path to be followed go via Paris in order to acquire a new painterly technique and “by boldly breaking into the secrets of the French studios learn the art of painting a sky so that it shimmers and glows, and discard our own dreary way of reproducing a sky as though it were a matter of painting a wall blue?” Or was there a realistic possibility of renewing Danish art on a national basis?<sup>1</sup>

Lange urged the latter course, but he was given no backing by the younger generation of artists nor, strangely enough, did he receive very much support from the now almost sixty-year-old Vilhelm Kyhn. Despite his legendary resistance to all foreign influence, Kyhn appeared to have adopted plein air painting in the manner of the French landscape artists. He was no longer content to capture the weather and the ever-changing daylight in his small oil studies, as Eckersberg had taught his pupils to do. In more and more cases he started to paint his major exhibition works outdoors. In this respect, Kyhn had suddenly become modern. The portrayal of the children picking flowers in the middle of a Danish summer gives the impression of having been executed on the spot and so anticipates early works by painters such as Hans Brendekilde and L. A. Ring.

The landscape does not appear to be from either Funen or Zealand. It is more likely that we are in the area around Himmelbjerget in central Jutland, which makes it possible to assume that the Loeb collection's



*Summer Meadows* is actually identical with the painting *Sommerdag, Emnet i nærheden af Ry Station* (*Summer's Day, a Subject Close to Ry Station*), exhibited at Charlottenborg in 1880.

S.L.

<sup>1</sup>Julius Lange, *Vor kunst og Udlandets*, Copenhagen 1879, p. 31.