

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



MAX LIEBERMANN

1847 – Berlin – 1935

Self-Portrait

Charcoal on paper; c.1907/10.

Signed lower right in pencil: *MLiebermann*.

213 x 135 mm

PROVENANCE: Theodor Stoperan Collection (1867-1938), Berlin – Galerie Zickel and Theodor Stoperan & Co., Berlin – Sale Auktionshaus Paul Graupe, 2nd and 3rd Nov.1928, lot no. 115 – Acquired there by Carl Schellenberg (1898-1968) – By descent to his daughter Marianne Sogalla

LITERATURE: *Sammlung Th. Stoperan und Beiträge aus anderem Besitz*, 83rd auction, Paul Graupe, Berlin, 2nd and 3rd November 1928, lot no. 115 (ill. plate 20)

Max Liebermann, President of the Berlin Secession and the Academy of Arts, one of the most important representatives of German Impressionism, created sixty-nine self-portraits in oil and countless other drawings and prints form over the course of his life. The special feature of this series of works lies in the moment of their creation, because apart from two early works, Liebermann only devoted himself to this theme from 1902 onwards, when the artist was already fifty-five years old. Liebermann used a large mirror for this, so that in most of his self-portraits he looks at himself or the viewer directly in the eye. He also used to depict himself in isolation, detached from his surroundings.

He usually drew and painted himself in a suit. In our self-portrait he is in his light-coloured linen jacket, which he often wore over a suit with a vest and tie, presumably in sober restraint, carefully registering the changes in his physiognomy. His facial expression is one of critical scrutiny with a raised eyebrow. In keeping with his matter-of-fact sober work ethic, he portrayed himself expressively but also authoritatively. The unpretentious portrait does not testify to an urge for self-portrayal, but is more like an act of self-assurance and thus creates a very personal note. The artist documents his ageing with unbroken sharpness, whereby the focus is on the person and not the dignitary.

The dating of our drawing to the period between 1907 and 1910 can be confirmed by comparable self-portraits. Based on three etched self-portraits from 1906/07, the proximity is also convincing in the pose and the position of the sitter's head¹ [Fig. 1]. An intermediate drawing study for these three etchings, which is in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin [Fig. 2], has also survived and belongs to this series.²

¹ Gustav Schiefler, *Das Graphische Werk von Max Liebermann. Zweite durchgesehene und um das doppelte vermehrte Auflage*, Berlin 1914, nos. 58, 59 and 60, pp 90-92.

² Anna Marie Pfäfflin, Andreas Schalhorn and Evelyn Wöldicke, in: *Liebermann Zeichnet – Das Berliner Kupferstichkabinett zu Gast im Max Liebermann Haus*, 16th December 2022 to 5th March 2023, Berlin, exhib. cat., no. 6.08, p 132 (ill).

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

In the further course of his career, Max Liebermann was commissioned by the director of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Alfred Lichtwark, to paint a major work of this period, a self-portrait dated 1910 [Fig. 3]³. Liebermann's paintings in the museum's collection had secured him a right of residence in the Hanseatic city, so to speak, so that Lichtwark was able to justify a self-portrait of the artist for the "Hamburg Portraits" series⁴.

It is obvious that our drawing was also created in connection with the intellectual and artistic preparatory work for the above-mentioned Hamburg Kunsthalle self-portrait.

Drawing was not a subordinate medium for the artist. He regarded it not only as a preparation for painting, but as an independent form of expression. According to his writings, one even has the impression that he ultimately valued drawing more highly than painting because of its freshness and closeness to nature. In his opening speech to the exhibition he initiated at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 1921 on drawings, he wrote: "It has often been said that drawing leads us into the artist's workshop, but it leads us further into the innermost part of his personality. In the drawing we can follow the artist's imagination from the first moment it takes shape, and it shows itself more clearly than in the finished picture, whose difficult-to-handle material and long labour so often obscure it, alas! to the point of unrecognisability. Only the origin of art is of a divine nature, while the finished work, as a human work, is tainted by an embarrassing earthly residue"⁵.

We would like to thank Dr. Margreet Nouwen, Berlin, for helpful advice and for confirming the authenticity of our drawing.

³ Matthias Eberle, *Liebermann – Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien 1900 – 1935*, Vol. 2, Munich 1996, pp. 784-5, No. 1910/3.

⁴ Alfred Lichtwark, *Briefe 1947*, p 35.

⁵ Max Liebermann, *Vision der Wirklichkeit. Ausgewählte Schriften und Reden*, Günter Busch (publisher), Frankfurt a. Main 1993, p 141.

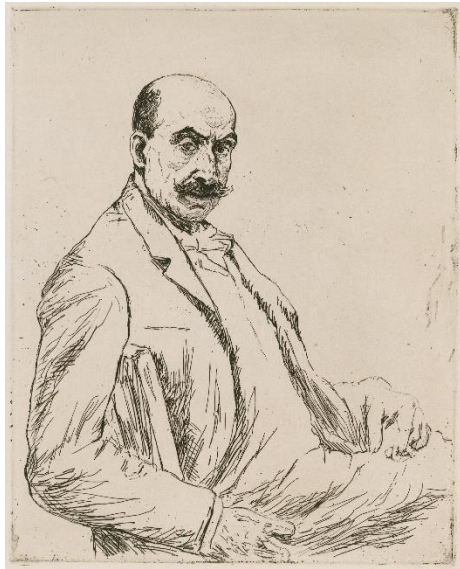


Fig. 1: *Self-portrait*, 1906,
Etching on laid paper, 46.3 x 36.0 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.
Inv. No.: 1992.47.2

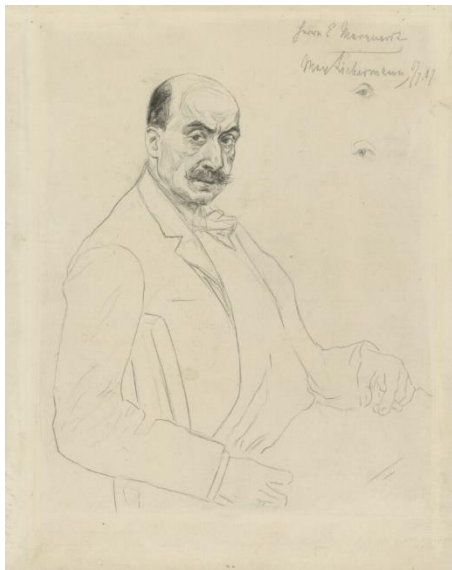


Fig. 2: *Self-portrait*, 1906/07,
(interim study during the work on the etching Schiefler 60)
Pencil on paper, 300 x 220 mm
Kupferstichkabinett, SMB, Berlin.
Inv. No. NG 43/66

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



Fig.3: *Self-portrait*, 1910,
Oil on canvas, 112.0 x 92.5 cm.
Hamburger Kunsthalle.
Inv. No. HK-1590
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