

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



MAX LIEBERMANN

1847 - Berlin - 1935

*Max Liebermann's Kitchen Garden at Wannsee, View to the South-West*

Pastel on paper from a sketchbook,<sup>1</sup> c.1920

Signed in pencil lower left: *M Liebermann*

230 x 292 mm

PROVENANCE: Hertha Schoene Antiquitäten, Berlin-Charlottenburg (between 1952 and 1970)<sup>2</sup> – Gertrude von Meissner, Geneva (acquired from the above) – Gertrude von Meissner-Stiftung, Geneva (until 2018)

In 1909, Max Liebermann acquired a small and quiet estate on the shores of the Wannsee far from the busy centre of Berlin.<sup>3</sup> The large garden was innovative in design and comprised the principles of the formal garden with those of the traditional northern German kitchen and cottage garden. It was to be Liebermann's paradise and his main source of inspiration for the following twenty years. The small neoclassical-style villa became the family's summer residence. The estate, although little more than 7,000 square metres in size, provided enough for the artist's eye. Here, he painted over 400 works in varying techniques.<sup>4</sup> Liebermann was interested in documenting his much-loved garden through the seasons. But he was also deeply interested in the transient effects of light and colour. He frequently used the medium of pastel as a means of capturing atmospheric change. In registering these fleeting impressions he often experimented with new compositional ideas. Many of his pastels were more abstract and innovative than the paintings.

[...] *this garden, kept with the greatest care by the loving hand of its owner, was virtually the extension of the artist's atelier. Here the old man would sit in the warm season of the year, day after day, painting the luxuriant flowers, bringing his oeuvre to a climax comparable to Monet's water lilies. In these paintings of his gardens, with the bright, fiery gleam of their colours, the man in his seventies, even in his eighties, reached the pinnacle of his colouristic and artistic powers [...].*<sup>5</sup>

This pastel depicts a small section of Liebermann's garden. A central path led from the front of the property on the street side straight through the kitchen garden to a flight of steps. The steps led into a large, central entrance loggia on the west facade of the villa. The path was lined with low, narrow box hedges. These created a boundary – a feature typical of northern German cottage gardens – between the path and the herbaceous borders. The back rows of the borders were planted with tall, flowering perennials fronted with a band of deep-blue *Lobelia erinus*. Over the course of the summer

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<sup>1</sup> When the sheet was torn out of the sketchbook the perforations were severed, leaving a row of fine teeth along the left sheet edge. A number of the pastels and black-and-white drawings Liebermann made in the early 1920s were executed in the same format as the present sheet and also have fine teeth on the sheet edge where perforations were severed.

<sup>2</sup> The listing for Hertha Schoene Antiquitäten in the official West Berlin telephone directory [*Amtliches Fernsprechbuch Ortsnetz Berlin (West)*] for the years 1952 to 1968-9 gives the address Fasanenstrasse 13.

<sup>3</sup> Günter and Waldtraut Braun (eds.), *Max Liebermanns Garten am Wannsee und seine wechselvolle Geschichte*, Berlin 2008, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Margreet Nouwen, 'Der Garten im Fluchtpunkt', in *Im Garten von Max Liebermann*, exhib. cat., Hamburger Kunsthalle and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2004-5, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Max Osborn, *Der bunte Spiegel. Erinnerungen aus dem Kunst-, Kultur- und Geistesleben der Jahre 1890 bis 1933*, New York 1945, p. 71.

the perennials formed a lush backdrop to the brilliant profusion of lobelia blooms that carpeted the slender green bands of box.

At the western end of the garden there were two small areas of meadow planted with fruit trees. They flanked both sides of the central path and backed on to the flowering perennials. The present pastel was executed in this section of the garden. To obtain a view to the south-west from the central path, Liebermann had to position himself at an angle. A tiny triangle of the path can be glimpsed in the lower right corner of the sheet [Fig. 1]. The bands of box hedge are almost entirely carpeted with the blue of *Lobelia erinus*, indicating that the season was midsummer. The two fruit trees in the background are very possibly two of the three Gravensteiner apple trees which the Wiesbaden collector Heinrich Kirchhoff had arranged to be sent to Liebermann in early spring 1917.<sup>6</sup>

Max Liebermann depicted this view of his garden in at least one other pastel [Fig. 2] and in an oil painting<sup>7</sup> dated 1920 [Fig. 3].

The authenticity of the pastel has been confirmed by the Max Liebermann-Archiv (Dr. Matthias Eberle and Dr. Margreet Nouwen) in a statement dated 13 November 2018. Dr. Nouwen will include the work in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of pastels, watercolours and gouaches by Max Liebermann.

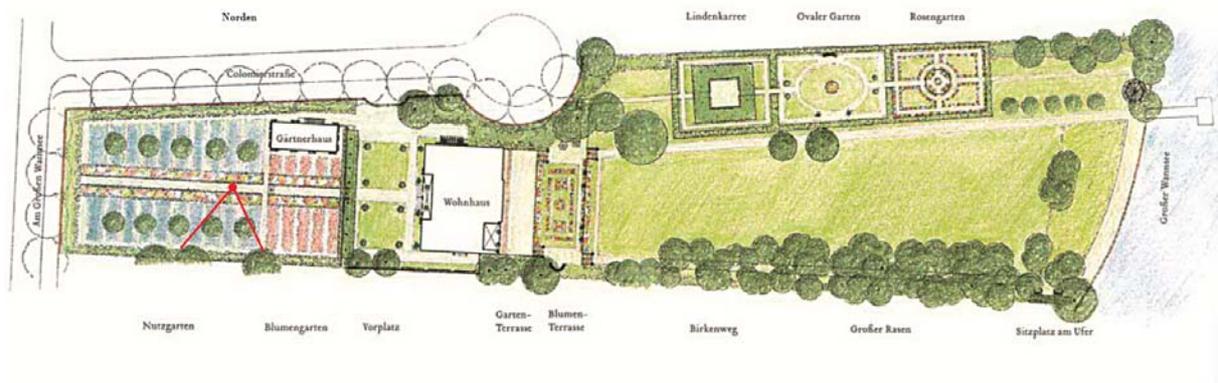


Fig. 1: Reinald Eckert, *Plan for the Reconstruction of Max Liebermann's Garden at Wannsee, as of 1927*, Berlin 1994.<sup>8</sup> Red dot and red lines mark the artist's viewpoint.

<sup>6</sup> In a letter dated 12 December 1916 Liebermann had written to Kirchhoff with a direct request: *The Gravensteiner apples in Wiesbaden were so marvellous. I would be most grateful if you could give me the address of a fruit grower from whom I can order two or three pyramid trees.* The request was successful - he wrote to Kirchhoff on 4 May 1917: [ ... ] *the three Gravensteiners arrived safely and have already been planted: I thank you most sincerely for so amiably procuring them. Although I myself am hardly likely to see them bear fruit, my heirs will have the pleasure of enjoying them.* Cited after Braun, op. cit., 2008, no. 71, p. 74 and no. 113, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Matthias Eberle, *Max Liebermann - Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, II, Munich 1996, no. 1920/18.

<sup>8</sup> The garden has been restored almost entirely to its original state on the basis of this plan. The Liebermann Villa at Wannsee has also been restored and transformed into a museum. The property was opened to the public permanently in 2006. Restoration of the garden was completed in 2014.



Fig. 2: *The Kitchen Garden at Wannsee, View to the South or North*,  
c.1920, pastel on paper, signed, 233 x 300 mm.  
Whereabouts unknown



Fig. 3: *The Kitchen Garden at Wannsee, View to the West*, 1920,  
oil on canvas, signed and dated, 66 x 89 cm.  
Private collection