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MAX LIEBERMANN

1847 - Berlin - 1935

Boys Bathing near Bad Kösen

Watercolour and gouache on paper; c. 1895.

Signed lower left in pen and ink: *M. Liebermann*.

On the original backing card inscribed with the numbers 84 and 2465.

500 x 652 mm

PROVENANCE: Fritz Gurlitt, Munich (1906) – Hugo Reisinger, New York (d.1916) – *The Private Collection of the late Hugo Reisinger*, auction sale, American Art Association, New York, 16 - 18 January 1916, lot 137, repr. – Oskar Dreßler, USA (purchased at the above sale) – Thence by descent (until 2000) – John and Paul Herring, New York – Private collection, Germany (from 2001)

EXHIBITIONS: *Ausstellung der Gesellschaft deutscher Aquarellisten*, Salon Gurlitt, Berlin, March 1897 – *Works on Paper. Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Winter Exhibition 2000*, Shepherd & Derom Galleries, New York, 22 February–22 April 2000, no. 1, title repr.

LITERATURE: Albert Lamm, 'Salon Gurlitt' (about the exhibition of the Gesellschaft Deutscher Aquarellisten at the Salon Gurlitt), in *Das Atelier*, VII/6, Berlin, March 1897, p. 5 – Hans Rosenhagen, *Liebermann*, [Künstlermonographien, XLV, H. Knackfuß (ed.)], Bielefeld/Leipzig 1900, p. 46 f. – 'Der Kunstmarkt. Bevorstehende Versteigerungen; New York, Versteigerung der Reisingerschen Sammlung', in *Der Cicerone*, VIII/1-2, January 1916, p. 35. – 'Der Kunstmarkt. Stattgehabte Versteigerungen. Die Hugo Reisinger-Auktion in New York', in *Der Cicerone*, VIII/5-6, March 1916, pp. 116-8 [for the results of the Hugo Reisinger sale, see p. 118, no. 137] – Gustav Pauli, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, [Geschichte der deutschen Kunst, Georg Dehio (ed.), 'Der Abbildungen vierter Band'], Berlin/Leipzig 1934, p. 343, fig. 473 (as 'Max Liebermann, Badende Knaben, Berlin [location erroneously given as] Nationalgalerie').

From the beginning of his career, Liebermann was interested in subjects drawn from contemporary life and the natural world. It is therefore hardly surprising that he admired and was influenced by the Barbizon painters, the artists of the Hague School and the work of Adolf Menzel. There is a direct link between Menzel's depictions of unpretentious figural subjects and Liebermann's first portrayals of bathers.

As early as 1875, Liebermann depicted a group of boys at a bathing place,¹ an image in which close observation of detail and absence of idealization confirm his awareness of Menzel's Realist approach. A decade earlier, in 1865, Menzel had made a watercolour depicting an outdoor scene – in contrast to his more typical interiors² it is a view of bathers in a vast landscape [Fig. 1]. The setting is none other than the river Saale, which is also the setting for the present work.

¹ *Im Schwimmbad* [Swimmers], oil on canvas, 1875-7, 180 x 225 cm. Dallas Museum of Art, Mrs. John B. O'Hara Fund, inv. 1988, 16. FA. – See Mathias Eberle, *Max Liebermann. Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, Munich 1995-6, I, no. 1875/20.

² Eberle, op. cit., I., pp. 438, no. 1895/15.

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Some twenty years later, Liebermann returned to the theme of bathers but with an Impressionist's sensibility. The present watercolour depicts a group of boys enjoying a dip in the river Saale near the spa town of Bad Kösen. This was a favourite spot for students from the nearby school. Six of the boys are towelling off and dressing on the bank, while three others continue their splashing in the cool water. The composition evokes a carefree moment by the river in the warm sunlight of a summer day.

The present work is datable to circa 1895 and can be compared with several versions of the theme in other media. Each version focuses on the portrayal of movement and the quality of ambient light and mood. Three of the versions – drawings in black chalk – rapidly define the essentials of the composition [Figs. 2 and 3].³ However rather than being preparatory to the present watercolour, they are related to an etching with drypoint executed in 1896 [Fig. 4].⁴ In the print, cows are depicted grazing in the far right distance while they are absent in the present sheet. A further version of the motif is an oil painting executed in 1895. It is slightly smaller than the present watercolour and shows Liebermann at his most impressionistic. Titled *Boys Bathing*, it is painted in swift, broad brushstrokes using a bright palette [Fig. 5].⁵ His obvious pleasure in working the paints is analogous to his appreciation of the transparency of watercolour with its potential for creating translucent layers of wash, as in the present work. Watercolours executed in this format are extremely rare in Liebermann's oeuvre.⁶

In 1899 Liebermann was one of the founders of the Berlin Secession, an organization of progressive artists based in Berlin. Although himself a conservative artist, he championed the anti-academic art of the French Impressionists. He formed an extensive personal collection, owning numerous works by Degas, Cézanne and a large number of paintings by Manet – by 1900, his was the largest collection of Manet's work in Germany.

The authenticity of the watercolour has been confirmed by the Max Liebermann-Archiv (Matthias Eberle and Margreet Nouwen) in a statement dated 11 April 2001. Dr. Nouwen will include the work in her forthcoming catalogue raisonné of pastels, watercolours and gouaches by Max Liebermann.

³ One of the three drawings is the sheet now in the collection of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design; see Hans Wolff, *Zeichnungen von Max Liebermann*, Dresden 1922, pl. LIII; Hans Tietze, *European Drawings in the United States*, New York 1947, no. 157. Another drawing is illustrated in Julius Elias, *Die Handzeichnungen Max Liebermanns*, Berlin 1922, pl. XVII.

⁴ See Gustav Schiefler, *Max Liebermann. Sein Graphisches Werk 1876-1923*, 4th extended edn., San Francisco 1991, p. 220, no. 43.

⁵ Eberle, op. cit., I., no. 1895/15.

⁶ To our knowledge the only comparable large-format watercolour by Max Liebermann to have appeared on the art market in recent years is a sheet titled *View of the Königsplatz and the Siegessäule from the Studio Window*, 1895, 44.9 x 65.1 cm, sold by Villa Grisebach Auktionen, 5 June 1998, lot 3.

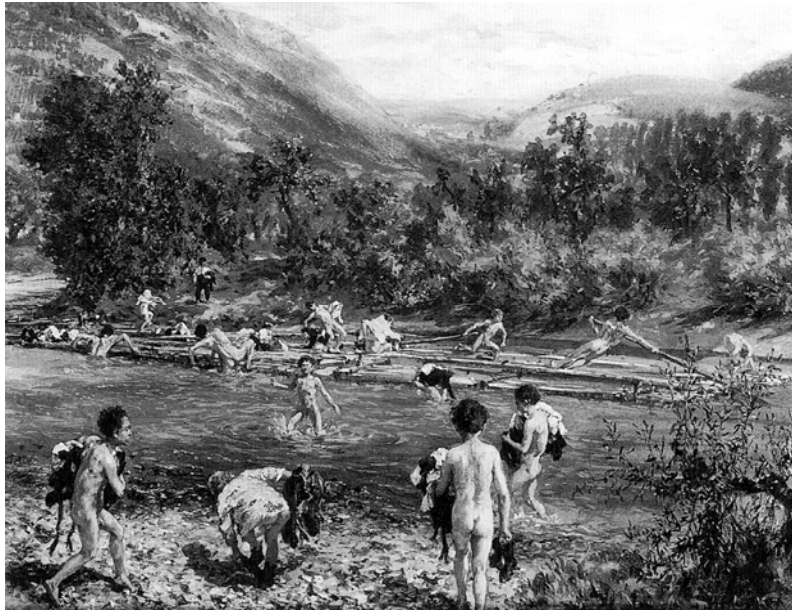


Fig. 1: Adolf von Menzel, *Boys Bathing*, 1865.
Watercolour and tempera.
Present whereabouts unknown.



Fig. 2: *Boys Bathing near Bad Kösen*, c.1896.
Black chalk, 24.3 x 29.7 cm..
Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design.



Fig. 3: *Boys Bathing*, c.1894-6.
Black chalk, heightened with white, 46.0 x 59.7 cm.
Offered on the art market between 1999 and 2003.



Fig. 4: *Boys Bathing*, 1896.
Etching with drypoint and vernis mou; plate: 23.7 x 29.4 cm.
Schiefler no. 43 II c (of II c).



Fig. 5: *Boys Bathing*, 1895.
Oil on canvas, 45 x 54.5 cm.
Private collection.