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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Romana Rouskova entitled "Max Liebermann's Jewish Heritage." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.

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Max Liebermann's Jewish Heritage

A Thesis Presented

for Master of Arts

Degree

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather Frantisek Rousek, M.D., who passed away on 2 March 2008.

Abstract

This thesis asks to what degree Max Liebermann (1847-1935) may be looked on as a Jewish artist. It examines the relationship as it is seen in his Jewish family background, in traditions rooted in *Sittlichkeit* and *Bildung*, such as diligence, and it also finds Jewish themes in a limited number of his art works. The first chapter examines Liebermann's family history and his career as a painter influenced by Dutch and French artists. The second chapter looks at the ways critics have tried to assess this relationship. The opinions of art historian critics from Liebermann's own time, such as Karl Scheffler and Julius Meier-Graefe, , are examined, as are those of contemporary critics such as Katrin Boskamp or Matthias Eberle. Boskamp sees connection between depictions of rural work and Jewish occupational restructuring, whereas Matthias Eberle detects an inclination on Liebermann's part to Lassallean socialism. Both of these views are rejected in favor of a J. A. Clarke's view of Liebermann as a cosmopolitan artist whose openness to the world was rooted in family and ethnic tradition. Liebermann is depicted in this thesis as an artist who placed himself firmly among the ranks of cultivated, assimilated western Jews, who sympathized with artists of the Zionist movement without particularly wishing to join them. Descriptions of particular artworks highlight Liebermann's Jewish side. *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life* describes Liebermann's positive attitude towards traditional Jewish customs. *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* is a collection of etchings and paintings that typify the milieu, the atmosphere, and the symbiosis between Jewish and Dutch people. *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* is a painting which may points to Liebermann's inclination to a modern reform Judaism, and *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend* accentuates his pride of being Jew.

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Introduction

The main goal of my thesis is to portray the problem of Jewish identity in art at the turn of the century in the German empire. I will be looking in particular at the German-Jewish artist Max Liebermann (1847-1935) and trying to specify the Jewish qualities of this art either through looking at his paintings or at his Jewish origin. Were there criteria that made artists "Jewish artists"? My reading has concentrated on the literature on Liebermann and the way it has sought to define identity. Because of the limited extent of the study, I have ignored the voluminous theoretical literature on ethnic identity and have concentrated instead on the man and his art. There are three main chapters. Each chapter will look at Liebermann's relation to his Judaic heritage from a different angle.

In Chapter One I will examine Liebermann's Jewish origins, treating both his Jewish family background and the customs and life style of Liebermann's family. I will also briefly familiarize the readers with Liebermann's artistic beginnings in Berlin, Weimar, Paris and Holland. The establishment of the Zionist movement became an important issue during Liebermann's lifetime, and I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of Liebermann's relation to it and to the dichotomy between "Eastern" and "Western" Jews.

The second chapter will deal mostly with biographers and critics who have tried to define Jewishness through character traits related to Liebermann's upbringing. Even though some of them did not see only a Jewish side but also a German side in Liebermann. For instance biographers of Liebermann such as Julius Meier-Graefe (1867-1935), Karl Scheffler (1869-1951), Ludwig Justi (1876-1957), Julius Elias (1861-1927) and Erich Hancke believed that the Jewish qualities of Liebermann's art do not lie in his iconography or style but rather in the expression of a Jewish spirit and the reflection of distinctively German-Jewish character traits.

The beginning of the chapter deals with anti-Semitic critics who criticized not only Jewish art but also to non-Jewish, avant-garde artists. Unfortunately, Max Liebermann became the target of their criticism for being both a Jewish and avant-garde artist, who moreover found inspiration in Holland and in French Impressionism (Paret 33-34). For instance, in 1913 the anti-Semitic publicist Philipp Stauff published a bibliographical dictionary, *Semi-Kürschner*, where he claims that Jews threaten the art in Germany. In an eleven-page essay, *The Alien Element in German Art- Paul Cassirer, Max Liebermann etc.,* he opens with the pronouncement, "Dealers, critics and painters who are strangers in our land and to our blood, stand today at the apex of the fine art"(qtd. by Paret 33). Because the main goal is to contribute to an objective view of Max Liebermann, most of my arguments are based on the opinions of critics and biographers (Gentile and Jewish) who appreciated Liebermann's art and perceived him either as a German artist, a Jewish artist, or cosmopolitan. My task is to compare their explanations of what constitutes the Jewish artist.

Chapter Three deals with four particular works by Liebermann. The opinions of the critics again differ in regard to the specifically Jewish qualities of the works, but I believe embody the strongest expressions of Liebermann's attachment to Judaism. The first work is *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life (Selbstbildnis mit Küchenstilleben),* which was painted by Liebermann in 1873 and displays food that is exclusively kosher. The second is actually a collection of etchings and drawings which carries the collective title *The Amsterdam Jewish Quarter* (*Die Judengassen in Amsterdam).* Most of these works are dated between 1905 and 1909, the earliest dates back to 1876. The name of the painting was *The Interior of the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam.* Eight years later in 1884, Liebermann made his first painting of the streets in the Jewish Quarter of Amsterdam. The third work is *The Twelve-Year-*

Old-Jesus in the Temple (Der Zwölfjährige Jesus in the Temple), painted by Liebermann in 1879. As I note in chapter two, the painting depicts the young Jesus standing in the temple surrounded by Jewish rabbis. The work generated a lot of criticism from conservative and anti-Semitic critics, but it was also appreciated by non anti-Semitic critics for its use of techniques derived from old Dutch painters such as Rembrandt. The last work discussed is the lithograph *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend* executed by Liebermann in 1923. It portrays women standing in a Jewish cemetery and memorializes all the Jewish soldiers killed during the First World War. The lithograph is one of the strongest expressions of Max Liebermann's attachment to Judaism.

Chapter 1

Family Heritage and Social Backdrop

There are many good biographies of Max Liebermann. The intention of my thesis is not to introduce readers to details of Liebermann's life, but to explore the problem of Jewish identity and the ways critics have assessed Liebermann's relationship to Judaism. Nonetheless, this first chapter offers a brief introduction to Liebermann's family background since he was strongly rooted in Jewish culture and critics have declared this to be a defining factor in his sense of Jewish identity.

In David S. Katz's dissertation, "Max Liebermann: Living History and the Cultivation of the Modern Elite," the phenomenon of Liebermann's Jewishness is set against the general historical background of Jewish families who prospered in businesses. They perceived a flourishing business as a path to success and as a means to secure traditions that could be passed on to future generations. Werner Mosse, in his book, *Jews in the German Economy: The German-Jewish Economic Elite 1820-1935,* identifies the conditions under which the German-Jewish economic elite rose progressively:

> This process required two generations. The first, the father's generation, saw itself emerge from the mass of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, and moved from a provincial town to a larger commercial center. Early on, one or more of the sons would be taken into the business, frequently after having been apprenticed elsewhere in a certain aspect of the commercial enterprise. The sons soon became partners and, eventually, the management passed to them. It was at this point that the firm rapidly climbed to the top of the economic ladder. (Mosse, *Profile* 9)

The components mentioned by Mosse were involved in the story of the Liebermann family, but the success, rather than requiring two generations, came through the efforts of one man, Joseph Liebermann (1783-1860), the grandfather of Max Liebermann. Joseph Liebermann and his brothers, Joachim (1778-1853) and Jacob (1780-1867), were originally members of the small orthodox Jewish community in the Prussian border town Märkisch-Friedland. Joseph's wife, Marianne Callenbach, has been characterized as a strict woman with very strong religious beliefs (Katz 45), and as such she follows a pattern that Mosse has observed: "It was not untypical of traditional Jewish families in the first half of the nineteenth century for the wife to be more expressly conservative and observant in the religious sphere than either her husband or children, and this was certainly true of Marianne" (Mosse, *Profile* 15). In 1823, Joseph and Marianne moved to Berlin, and Joseph's brothers followed them shortly thereafter. After arriving in Berlin, the Liebermann brothers were engaged in trading and selling cotton wares in partnership with Eduard Goldschmidt. After a while they shifted to the production of cotton goods in the Dannenberg cotton factory. Joseph's brothers, Joachim and Jacob, later left the Dannenberg factory and established their own business in the cotton trade. Under Joseph's management, the Dannenberg cotton concern was very successful. First it produced goods for the poorer population, but as the enterprise started to make more and more profit, Liebermann was able to manufacture elegant, fashionable wear. Liebermann's company could compete with the excellent British cotton industry, and his Dannenberg factory belonged to the most profitable and leading enterprises on the European continent (Katz 46). Joseph Liebermann was granted the title of Commercial Councilor (Kommerzienrat) in 1843, and in introducing himself to the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, he supposedly declared: " Ich bin der Liebermann, was verdrängt hat die Engländer von de Continente" (*Die Gartenlaube* 1869 qtd. by Katz 46). The title of Commercial

Councilor was not hereditary and was granted to prominent businessmen; a higher title was Geheimer Kommerzienrat. There were special criteria for granting these titles. The nominee had to possess personal wealth at a prescribed level, he had to be owner or part owner of his firm, and he had to participate actively in its management. Another criterion was active involvement in public life, which meant holding elective office and/or participating in commercial organizations, municipal government, religious communities, and private and public welfare institutions and charitable foundations (Mosse, *Economy* 71-72). The Jews did not seem to be discriminated against in the granting of these titles. For instance, between 1819 and 1900 Jews represented about 18% of the total number of Geheime Kommerzienräte and 15% of the total number of Kommerzienräte (Mosse, *Economy* 3, 83).

In the following generation, the Liebermann family managed to maintain their wealth and the prestige of the upper middle class. Joseph and Marianne had seven sons and three daughters. One of Joseph's sons, Benjamin, became first a Kommerzienrat in 1868 and four years later a Geheimer Kommerzienrat. Three sons were brought into the family firm because Joseph thought they were the most industrious. Benjamin (1812-1901) was sent for a while to England in order to study the most progressive methods of cotton production, and Louis (1819-1894), the father of Max Liebermann, was likewise sent to learn business marketing outside of Berlin. Adolph (1829-1893) left the enterprise very early after the death of Joseph in 1860 (Ellias, *Hause* 24). In 1865 Max Liebermann's family expanded their business into the field of engineering and they established two new factories, the Wilhelmshütte in Sprottau and soon thereafter the Dorotheenhütte in Sagan. Instead of the production of cotton goods they focused their attention on iron products for agriculture and gas works. The Dorotheenhütte manufactured railroad rails and wheels. After these two factories began to thrive, the Liebermanns sold the Dannenberg

cotton factory. They were forced to do this through the combined effects of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 and the founding of the German Reich in 1871. These events had resulted in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and the tariffs that had protected the Liebermanns from Alsace's better and cheaper cotton products were abolished (Katz 52-53).

It is worth noting that Jewish families were very prominent in industry, but not at all in the metallurgical and machine building industries. In the first decades of the century, the metallurgical and machine building industries hardly existed as private businesses and the enterprises under state or royal control discouraged Jewish participation (Mosse, *Economy* 63-65). In addition, Prussian Jews were not permitted entrance into the craft guilds until 1812 (Mosse, *Economy* 62). Mosse also concludes that most Jewish families tended to enter the manufacturing economy by turning to the manufacture of products in which they had previously traded (*Economy* 61-62). The Jews usually bought an already existing enterprise, and such was the case of the Liebermanns, who traded in cotton wares before they turned to cotton production (Mosse, *Economy* 60, 62- 63).

By the 1870s, the family stood at the social center of Berlin's Jewish elite, and this elite consisted mostly of people related to Max Liebermann. According to Mosse, most marriages among the upper middle class Jews involved two related families (Mosse, *Profile* 164). There were eight Jewish families that constituted the core of this Jewish elite: the Liebermanns, the Beers, the Reichenheims, the Marckwaldes, the Dahlheims, the Herzes, the Rathenaus and the Helffts (Mosse, *Profile* 174). The Liebermanns were related to the family Reichenheim through the marriage of Joseph's daughter Fanny to Ferdinand Reichenheim (Boskamp 40). Later the Liebermanns became linked to the Rathenaus when Paulina Therese, the second daughter of Joseph and Marianne, married Abraham Moses (Moritz) Rathenau (Boskamp 156). Their son

Emil Rathenau (1838-1915), Max Liebermann's cousin, was the founder of the AEG company (Katz 57).

Max's father Louis married Philippine Haller in 1841. They had four children: Anna, Max (1847-1933), Felix and Georg. Only Georg continued in the family business because Max became a painter and Felix, after apprenticing for four years in the banking house "Delbrück, Leo and Co." and after being sent to Manchester to learn about the export of cotton, decided to become a historian (Elias, *Bibliographie* 37). The Marckwald family became related to the Liebermann family through the marriage of Max's brother Georg with Else Marckwald in 1873, and in 1884 Max Liebermann married Else's sister Martha Marckwald (Elias 1917, 40). Like the Liebermanns, the Marckwalds stemmed from Märkisch-Friedland, where they had lived for four generations and where they had established their business, "Joachim Marcus and Sons" (the Marckwalds were originally called "Marcus" and thus their business was called "Joachim Marcus and Sons" (Elias, *Bibliographie* 40).

In Jewish families with a lot of wealth, it was demanded of the children that they be well educated and continue in the traditional business, which was passed on to new generations. Louis also expected his sons to be intellectual, industrious and prepared for the career of a businessman who would manage the prospering factories. Only one of Louis' three sons was able to carry out the obligation. Therefore, when Max made known his intention to be an artist, his father at first tried to convince him to accept a compromise solution between art and business, namely an architectural career (Elias, *Bibliographie* 32, 37).

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Max Liebermann went first to the Realgymnasium in the Dorotheenstraße, and later to the Fridrich-Werdersche Gymnasium (Hancke 15; Katz 60). His father's belief in discipline, hard

work, and stability were at odds with Max's desire to find his own way in the world outside of the family businesses. Aware of his son's interest in art, his father nonetheless insisted that Max first must receive an education in all subjects compulsory for everyone in order to graduate from the Gymnasium (Gilbert 23). Erich Hancke, who wrote the biography *Max Liebermann. Sein Leben und seine Werke,* describes Liebermann's childhood as poor. This fact was later refuted by Julius Elias, who in his biography described Liebermann's boyhood as harmonious and in no way poor (Katz 60). Also, the biographers differ in regard to Liebermann's talent for math, but the majority considers his performance in math to be weak. The issue is unimportant in considering Liebermann the artist, but of interest in highlighting familial tensions and relationships. The report card for his final exam in the mathematical section at the Gymnasium in 1866 shows a deficiency, especially in an oral exam (Elias, *Bibliographie* 34; Hancke 60). According to Hancke, Liebermann himself was not troubled by his incompetence at computation, but he was probably tormented by fear of his father's reprimands (Hancke 15; Katz 61). Hancke also says that the young man even came up with the idea of "letting his report card blow away in the wind rather than having to hand it over to his father" (Hancke 15; Katz 61).

As a part of the final exam at the Gymnasium, Liebermann had to write an autobiographical essay. In this essay, he recounted how his talent in drawing was recognized by the artist Gustav Richter (1823-1884), who was quite popular at the time among the nobility (Elias, *Bibliographie* 33; Katz 61). Barbara C. Gilbert argues that the nowadays forgotten artist Eduard Holbein (1807-1875), who had studied at the Prussian Academy of Arts and whose domain was primarily portrait commissions, engraving, and teaching fledgling artists, was also an influence. Liebermann took his first drawing classes with him (Gilbert 24). Some other biographies do not mention the names of either Gustav Richter or Eduard Holbein, because

Liebermann – perhaps wishing to portray the start of his career in more humble terms – decided to connect his artistic beginnings with the less famous artists Antonie Volkmar (1827-1903) and Karl Steffeck (1818-1890).

At the time Liebermann was learning and observing the right painting techniques, he was able to paint his first oil painting, *Portrait of Felix Liebermann* (1865), in which he focuses "on the beauty and sensitive demeanor of his younger brother"(Gilbert 24). Liebermann probably gained this knowledge of drawing and his particular focus on realistic depictions of his immediate surroundings through such exercises under Holbein (Gilbert 24). "Zum erstenmal hatte ich Pinsel und Palette in der Hand [. . .] und ich war Maler geworden" (Liebermann qtd. by Gilbert 24). Liebermann also began visiting the classes taught by Karl Steffeck (1818-1890), part-time during the last year of study at the Gymnasium and full-time after graduation (Hancke 23-25; Katz 61). Steffeck was a highly respected artist, the student of Franz Krüger (1797-1857), and he executed mostly historical paintings with a focus on scenes of horses and hunting. When Liebermann started attending his classes full time in 1866, Steffeck was already head of the Verein Berliner Künstler, which he presided over from 1862 to 1880. When Liebermann reminisced in his work *Die Phantasie in der Malerei: Schriften und Reden,* on the years spent with Steffeck, he recalled that the chief lesson Steffeck imparted to his students was "draw what you see" (Liebermann as quoted by Katz 62). The instruction in the studio was based on that of Paris ateliers, where the lessons were divided between drawing from live models and plaster casts. Liebermann recalled Steffeck's emphasis on the importance of drawing and his interest in works that displayed the observation of nature. Steffeck, who had traveled to Holland in the 1850s, had a passion for the old Dutch masters of the seventeenth-century, which influenced his own aesthetic tendencies toward naturalism; he passed on his enthusiasm for seventeenth-century Dutch art to Liebermann.

The time spent with Karl Steffeck was for Liebermann the starting point of his own career (Gilbert 24). Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929), an art historian and general director of all Prussian museums from 1906-1920, also studied at Steffeck's studio at the same time. Bode was working at that time on his dissertation, "Frans Hals and His School," and both Bode and Frans Hals played a major role in Liebermann's artistic inspirations. In the next two decades, Liebermann copied more than thirty works by Hals, studying especially Hals' choice of themes. Gilbert suggests this revealed Liebermann's attraction to Holland's long tradition as a free and open society (Gilbert 24-25). Liebermann later applied what he learned from Hals, specifically from Hals' realistic paintings of Dutch rural society (Gilbert 25). When Liebermann studied at Steffeck's atelier, he also observed tension between his teacher and Adolph Menzel (1815-1905). Liebermann wrote in *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* that Steffeck warned his pupils against „Menzel's realistic caricatures" (qtd. by Katz 62). Liebermann did not develop as great an aversion to Menzel as his teacher Steffeck, even though he did not always agree with Menzel's techniques of paintings. On the other hand, Liebermann admired Menzel's works.

Karl Steffeck was appreciated by most of Berlin nobility and that also played a big role for the Liebermann family. Max's aunt Fanny and his uncle Ferdinand Reichenheim became patrons of Steffeck and some of his pictures hung in their home. Ferdinand and Fanny were also the first who gave small Max a box of oils as a gift. They believed in Max's talent in drawing and perhaps it was Ferdinand Reichenheim who also arranged Max's artistic instruction with Steffeck (Hancke 22-23; Katz 62). After two years at Steffeck's studio, Liebermann left Berlin in 1868 to study with the Belgian history painter Ferdinand Pauwels (1830-1904) at the Weimar Kunstschule. Düsseldorf and Munich were the leading German art centers at the time, but his parents preferred that he attend the Weimar Academy of Art, which had been established about

ten years earlier by the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar. Liebermann's descriptions depict methods of teaching similar to the other academies in other German cities. The students started with a traditional course of drawing from plaster casts and models and then selected an individual teacher who had expertise in an area of interest. Because the academy's first director, landscape painter Stanislav Graf von Kalckreuth, emphasized landscape and genre painting, the school soon developed a reputation for naturalistic landscape painting (Gilbert 25). Gilbert stated that "Liebermann, who came to Weimar with a lot of ebullience, was disappointed at first" (25) His plan to work with Pauwels was not successful and he was assigned instead to an introductory class with Paul Thumann (1834-1908), a history and genre painter who had recently been named a professor after completing his studies there. Liebermann was struggling to gain self-confidence and to find his own artistic voice. During his second year, he was also disappointed with the instruction provided by Pauwels and he found the teachers cold and pedantic.

Although Liebermann was not happy with the teaching methods and the themes that had to be painted by the students, he found two teachers at Weimar who were closer to his artistic imagination (Gilbert 26). The first, Charles Verlat (1824-1890), a student of Gustave Courbet, favored realism over the school's preference for history and mythology. The second landscape painter was Theodor Hagen (1842-1919), whom had been a professor at the Düsseldorf Academy before joining the Weimar faculty in 1871. Both artists had a great impact on Liebermann's artistic direction (Gilbert 26). A student, Thomas Herbst, who Liebermann knew from Steffeck's studies in Berlin, also joined Liebermann in Weimar. Liebermann and Herbst painted together in the same studio in Weimar and both were closer to each other, especially in painting techniques and themes. It was here where Liebermann saw a sketch of women plucking geese that Herbst had made in the countryside. Liebermann begged Herbst to let him use the idea for a painting and

Herbst gave him permission to do so. *The Goosepluckers (Gänserupferinnen)*, Liebermann's first painting, was done in a style which recalled that of the Hungarian artist Mihály Munkácsy (1844-1909). In 1871 Liebermann accompanied the Weimar academy's director, Stanislav Graf von Kalckreuth, and a the newly appointed professor of landscape painting, Theodor Hagen, to visit the Hungarian-Jewish artist in his studio in Düsseldorf (Hancke 48; Katz 65). Munkácsy's *Goosepluckers* (for more about *Goosepluckers* see Chapter 2) attracted Liebermann mostly because of Munkácsy's style of portrayal (Gilbert 26). Despite controversy and criticism, especially by anti-Semitic and conservative critics, Liebermann's *The Goosepluckers* was displayed in Hamburg in 1872 and the artist was praised for his skilful techniques and the honest realism of his figures. But these positive reviews were overshadowed by hostile responses. Nevertheless, the painting was sold very successfully to the collection of the railroad tycoon Bethel Henry Strousberg and ended up in the National Gallery in Berlin in 1894. Liebermann considered the painting a success, and it was the first painting he submitted to the Paris Salon two years later (Gilbert 26).

Liebermann had a great affinity for French art (Forster-Hahn 169). Liebermann's peasants owe a debt to the social realism of Charles-Francois Daubigny (1817-1878), Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875), and Etienne-Pierre-Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867), mid-nineteenth century French painters whose depictions of pre-industrialized areas with their forests, orchards, and fields provided a sense for nature that served human needs (Forster-Hahn 169). However in the 1870s, the French impressionists shifted their focus from rural to urban landscapes and showed their subjects at leisure rather than at work. Similarly, Liebermann transformed the focus by the 1890s from rural work to upper-middle-class persons and to seaside vacation resorts (Foster-Hahn 169). Liebermann's stay in Paris brought him in contact with the French landscape painters

who frequented the village of Barbizon and the surrounding Fontainebleau forest (Eberle 84; Katz 70). After the stay in Paris between 1873 and 1878 (Katz 69), he went to Munich, where he painted his most controversial painting, *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* (see Chapter 3). In 1884 Liebermann left Munich and moved back to Berlin.

As much as he admired French painting, Liebermann was even more influenced by Holland and Dutch art. His first painting, *The Goosepluckers*, is significant because it documents not only Munkácsy's influence but also the evident influence of Holland. In the 1870s, 1880s, and early 1890s Liebermann spent time almost every year in Holland. His frequent trips there gave him inspiration and shaped his career as a painter (Gilbert 27). His images express an affinity for the Netherlands: "Hier bin ich Maler, hier möchte ich sein" (Liebermann as quoted by Gilbert 27). The art historian Max J. Friedlander (1867-1958), a specialist in Early Netherlandish and Dutch painting who also wrote about Liebermann in the 1920s, recognized the contrasting nature of Liebermann's lifestyle, saying "Liebermann lived like a burgher in Berlin but as a painter in Holland" (Friedländer as quoted by Gilbert 27). The study of seventeenth-century Dutch masters and of nineteenth-century Dutch rural life went hand in hand according to the then-current art-reformist attitude. The artists went back to the masters of the Dutch Golden Age in order to find a way for painting to go forward (Hancke 102; Katz 79). The idea was to learn the principles of the old Dutch masters and to apply them to the depiction of the present day (Katz 79). The life in Holland offered Liebermann good subject matter for application of the old method (Katz 80). During this extended period the main topic of his images was particularly rural Dutch peasants, weavers, net menders, orphans, and the elderly (Foster-Hahn 169). This type of depiction of rural work and countryside was nonetheless accepted by most of the critics in imperial Germany as a manifestation of modern life, and even of socialist ideology (see Chapter

2; Forster-Hahn 169). Julius Elias observed that Liebermann “was married to Berlin but in love with Holland” (Elias as quoted by Forster-Hahn 169).

The most important circle of artists was the Hague School, of which Josef Israels (1824-1911) was a member and then later head. Israels became a source of inspiration for Liebermann. He started out as a historical painter (Historienmaler) and became famous for depictions of the lives of Dutch fishermen and peasants. Israels and Liebermann first met in 1881 and became good friends. The members of the Hague School, with Israels as their leading exponent, depicted the Dutch landscape and they continued in the tradition of French Barbizon school (Millet etc.). Israels was a passionately proud Dutchman and his art was traditional without protest and criticism. “He was no revolutionary, no rebel [. . .] He was not an explorer nor a pathfinder”(Josef Hermann as quoted by Schmidt 54). Although he was influenced slightly by modernist trends, he was most strongly rooted in tradition -- and more Dutch than Jewish tradition. Fritz Stahl, who wrote an article for Martin Buber’s book *Jüdische Künstler*, pointed out that Israels was the painter who moved from the studio into nature (Schmidt 54). The art historian Cecil Roth considers Israels’ Jewish paintings the most important documents of Jewish art of his age. Roth considered his art “as a constant struggle to express without ambiguity both the spirit of Dutch life and that of Judaism” (qtd. by Schmidt 67).

In the 1890s, when Max Liebermann was becoming more and more appreciated, he became a member of the dissident art group Die Elf (Eleven) and then in 1892 a founder and head of the Secessionist movement (Sezession). Other Jewish artists such as Josef Israels, Ephraim Mosshe Lilien (1874-1925), and Lesser Ury (1861-1931) were deeply affected by the newly established Zionist movement. Zionism aimed at the restoration of Jewish national life in

Palestine. Although its origins were earlier, the movement was formally established by Theodor Herzl in 1897, when the first Zionist Congress took place in Basel (Cohen 327-330).

> It represents the first organized endeavour of Jewish people since its banishment from Palestine nearly two thousand years ago to put an end to its alternating lot of oppression, tolerance, or fatal drift, by acquiring the status and dignity of a nation in the land in which its national life first came into being. (Cohen 327)

Theodor Herzl moved his fellow Zionists away from the idea that Jews should limit themselves to the creation of scattered colonies in the Holy Land and towards an organized effort by Jewish people to work for national regeneration. Since the first Congress at Basel, other Zionist Congresses were held, first at intervals of a year and then of two years. The establishment of the Zionist movement led to increased interest in Jewish literature and Jewish art and music (Cohen 329-331).

At the turn of the century, Jewish culture was looked on negatively by many non-Jewish art historians, and at most they would acknowledge a "sick" Jewish culture. Secondly there was a claim during the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly by anti-Semites such as Richard Wagner, that no Jewish art of any kind was possible, because "Jews had no soul" and no firm historical background from which to develop their own culture. "The Zionists wished to discredit this statement and to demonstrate that there were at least the beginnings of a Jewish art" (Schmidt 2). Indeed before the Zionist movement there were forerunners of Jewish art and without them the idea of accentuating the importance of Jewish art would not have been possible. Dr. Gilya Schmidt considers the forerunners of Zionist artists to be Eduard Bendemann (1811-1880) and Maurycy Gottlieb (1856-1879). They became the first artists to favor Jewish subject matter. Gottlieb's *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur* (1878), today in the Tel Aviv Museum

of Art, belongs to the most famous works. On the other hand, the artists of the Zionist movement did not put their emphasis only on Jewishness. Some of them painted non-Jewish topics, as for instance Lesser Ury, whose passion was a depiction of life in the city, particularly Berlin.

Liebermann's reactions to the newly established Zionist movement were very neutral with tentative conviction expressing inclination to the Zionist movement. A letter written by Martin Buber to Theodor Herzl on 24 July 1902 talks about Liebermann's ethnic pride and his appreciation for the newly established movement of Zionism. Buber cites a letter written by an artist of the Zionist movement, E.M. Lilien, to clarify Liebermann's standpoint on Jewishness and the Zionists.

> When I [Lilien] spoke to him [Liebermann] of Zionism and told him that "On to Palestine" is not a turning back but a going forward, and when I told him that I am a convinced Zionist but not religious --*which he hardly believed*-- he decided that he could see nothing but beautiful and ideal elements in Zionism. I have only been strengthened in my conviction that Liebermann will become Zionist by and by. He declared that if Zionism imposes no barriers to his art, he will do all in his power as an individual to counter such misunderstandings as *that every Zionist be a conservative Jew.* He knew Struck,[1] who eats only kosher food and wears tzitzis,[2] and so he felt a strong resistance to professing conscious Judaism, for he thought that then he would have to eat kosher and also wear tzitzis. It might be possible eventually to convert Israels[3] to that, he said, but not him. (Buber qtd. by Schütz 157)

[1] Hermann Struck (1876-1944), a graphic artist, emigrated to Palestine in 1922
[2] Tzitzis (or zizit) refers to the fringed garment worn by observant Jewish men to fulfill the commandments in Num. 15: 37-41.
[3] Josef Israels, see above, pp.13-14.

The letter reveals also Liebermann's almost negative attitude towards Jews he perceived as too traditional, like Hermann Struck; Liebermann did not want to belong to that group. Liebermann showed some inclination to the Zionist movement, but he had a different concept of art than his colleagues from the Zionist movement. In one respect, Martin Buber became the opposite of Liebermann. Buber fought against the stereotype of the materialistic, urban, assimilated Jew, and while acknowledging the cultural assets that Jews had gained from their acculturation in the European world, he called on art to create another image of the Jews as close to the land and to nature. The official postcards from the Second and Sixth Zionist Congresses of 1898 and 1903, for example, combine traditional Jewish iconography with images of agrarian sowing and harvest, suggesting a future for Jewish agricultural productivity in their true homeland, Palestine. For this reason Liebermann's images of labor in the countryside were greatly admired by Buber (Clarke 278). Later Buber talked about Liebermann as an artist "who strongly stressed pride in his Jewishness" and maintained an open attitude towards Zionism (Clarke 278-279). Buber was hoping for Liebermann's entry into the Zionist movement, which never happened, even though he saw in Liebermann a more positive attitude towards the movement. Liebermann's biblical painting *Samson and Delilah (Samson und Delila* from 1902*)* caused Buber to believe that Liebermann would accentuate his Jewish origin in his works (Clarke 279).

Liebermann expressed his attitude towards his religion in a letter written to Richard Dehmel on 22 June 1908. In the letter he describes himself as a Jew for whom religion was a private matter and who, in all else, feels himself a German. Referring to a fictional dialog between a Jewish painter and a German poet that Dehmel had written, Liebermann says: "A Zionist perhaps thinks like your Jewish painter, but I do not wish in my old age to become a painter in Jerusalem, not even a court painter to His future Jewish Majesty" (quoted by Schütz

152). Liebermann's statement confirms his later comment about religion and art: "After all I am only a painter and what has painting to do with Judaism?" (qtd. by Schütz 152)

Another important consideration which must be mentioned in regard to Liebermann's Jewish heritage is the division of the Jewish community into western and eastern Jews. This aspect is decisive in defining Liebermann's approach to his Jewish heritage. Berlin at the turn of the century was a city of both western and eastern Jews. Eastern and western Jews differentiated themselves in looks and clothing. Traditionally, the western Jews were more open to the idea of assimilation, one proof of which was Max Liebermann himself. Between 1901 and 1923, the Berlin-based magazine *Ost und West* promoted European Jewish culture to a Jewish audience in Germany. The goal of the journal was to reverse Jewish "assimilation" in western and central Europe "by forming an ethnic-national identity that included East European or Eastern forms of Jewishness" (Brenner 15). Max Liebermann was a western Jew who distanced himself from the idea of pan-Judaism, and he became a prototype of the assimilated German Jew. Liebermann felt more like a German painter who was at home in the western tradition. He was one of those artists who embodied the problems of the culturally acculturated Jew. He believed assimilation was a good thing and he felt himself as genuinely integrated into German culture (Brenner 40-41).

In Chapter One I looked at Liebermann's Jewish origins, particularly his Jewish family background and the economic status of Jewish upper middle class families, which was very important for the success of the next generations. For the Liebermann family it was very important to keep running their business since this was the source of the family's wealth. Even though Max Liebermann chose the professional path of a painter, he was proud of his ancestors who were able to establish a business which gave him social status and allowed him to pursue his art.

Liebermann's passion for Dutch and French art predominated in the first decades of his long career. Especially Holland, a country where the Jews were fully emancipated earlier than in Germany, was a source of material for Liebermann's paintings. Poor people living in the Dutch countryside and rural labor were depicted in his early works. Painters such as Frans Hals, Mihály Munkácsy or Rembrandt, the painters of The Hague School (for instance Josef Israels) and the painters of The Barbizon School (Millet, Daubigny, etc.) influenced and inspired him. The establishment of the Zionist movement did not seem to affect Liebermann's paintings. Liebermann discussed his relationship to Zionism with adherents of the movement. His response to it was very diplomatic. Liebermann did not feel the need to accentuate Jewish culture in the way the Zionist artists did, and his way of thinking differentiated him from the other Jewish artists who strongly supported the movement. Liebermann's purpose was to become one with his art as an acculturated western Jew in the German cultural environment and not to limit himself to Jewish themes.

Chapter 2

Liebermann in the Eyes of the Critics

The 1880s and 90s were years when Jews were viewed as a "non-creative, parasitic and derivative" by anti-Semitic critics (Clarke 230). Since Jews were suspected of being the driving force behind most of Germany's large capitalist enterprises, they were also thought responsible for the economic depression in 1873 (Katz 145). In the article "From Bezal'el to Max Liebermann: Jewish Art in Nineteenth-Century Art-Historical Texts," Margaret Olin characterizes especially the last decades of the nineteenth century as a strongly anti-Semitic "Jews were written out of art history either as marginal to it, or as people defined by their deficiencies: a lack of art" (Olin 28). Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-1892) described "the Semitic race" as "a race" with "no mythology, no epic, no science, no philosophy, no fiction, no plastic arts, no civic life: there is no complexity, nor nuance; an exclusive sense of uniformity" (quoted by Olin 38).

The anti-Semitic critic Otto Weininger (1880-1903), although himself Jewish, criticized Jews in his book *Sex and Character*. His chapter on Judaism "described the Jew as by turns a communist, dishonest, irreligious, lacking individuality, arrogant and uncreative; revealing a deep hatred for the religion to which he was baptized but later renounced" (Clarke 274). Weininger stated: "The bitterest anti-Semites are to be found amongst the Jews themselves" and then concluded that "the greatest geniuses, on the other hand, have nearly always been anti-Semites." Among these geniuses he named Goethe, Schopenhauer, Wagner, and, though not stated but implied, himself (qtd. by Clarke 274). He claimed that without individuality or originality, Jews could therefore not become artists. He also believed that Jews lacked intelligence and, like

women, were without any trace of genius (Clarke 274). He associated Liebermann's Impressionism with Judaism, because French Impressionism was allied to weakness, decadence and femininity (Clarke 275-276).

The anti-avant-garde environment of Imperial Germany was not hospitable to Liebermann's art either. Liebermann had to confront the hostile critiques of adherents of the Kaiser such as the painter Anton von Werner (1843-1915) or Adolph von Menzel (1815-1905), whose art had been actually a model for Liebermann in the early stages of his career. A good example of Liebermann's avant-garde, modernist thinking is his first painting, *The Goosepluckers* (see the Chapter 1). This work shows two major influences, namely the French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) and the Hungarian Mihály Munkácsy (Katz 140). The most important thing is that Liebermann made selective use of his influences. Courbet, who appealed not only to Max Liebermann but also to the German artist Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900), brought a new style of painting and gained attention in Germany (Katz 141). In particular, the way of depicting labor in Courbet's and Munkácsy's paintings struck Liebermann, and this way of interpreting paintings was atypical for Germany at that time. Negative reactions were more typical:

> über Courbet [. . .] seine unzweifelhafte Begabung hat jedenfalls viel gelitten durch seine Kampfattitüde [. . .] Das ist vor allem keine künstlerische Absicht, und diese Nebenabsichten haben ihn auch weit geführt von der Kunst, die das einmal nicht verträgt um ihrer selbst willen gepflegt sein will. (Karl Schuch as qtd. by Katz 141)

Moreover, Munkácsy's *Goosepluckers* was more than a depiction of work. According to Munkácsy's nineteenth century biographer, F. Walther Ilges, the *Goosepluckers* is "historical genre with a political component: the wounded soldier in the corner is telling of Hungary's (failed) war of liberation against Austria (Katz 141-142). Liebermann removed the soldiers from

the painting in order to “eliminate the politico-historical aspect, and therefore to transfer the emphasis solely to the theme of labor” (Katz 142). This topic of rural work and countryside became a core characteristic of Liebermann’s works in the 1870s and 1880s.

Two art historians, Katrin Boskamp and Matthias Eberle, have sought to explain Liebermann’s preoccupation with this topic of rural labor in two different ways. Boskamp argues that Liebermann’s representation of labor must be interpreted “in the light of philanthropic efforts to promote farming and artisanry as a career choice for German Jews“ (Katz 143). Jews had a reputation as “labor-shy, dishonest and dishonorable hawkers and peddlers” (Katz 143). This attitude was a product of anti-Semitism and had arisen because Jews were restricted in their choice of occupation. Until 1871 in Germany they were not equal citizens in the eyes of the law. In the late eighteenth century, the Jewish movement of Enlightenment, the *Haskala*, promoted the notion of showing Jewish people as honest, hard-working citizens who were useful to the state and who should become citizens with full civil rights. Since honorable labor was symbolized at that early date by the farmer and the craftsman, the Jews saw in these occupations a chance to advance (Katz 144). Boskamp postulated in Liebermann’s themes precisely the aims and efforts of Jewish occupational restructuring and a continuation of the idea of *Berufsumschichtung*. Boskamp also notes that Liebermann’s farmers and artisans wear undistinguished clothing and have nondescript features. Their appearance was definitely not the stereotypic caricature of the Jew. They basically looked like anybody else. She argues that Liebermann’s paintings therefore affirm equality between Gentile and Jew. It does not matter if the farmer is Jew or Christian, both look the same, both should have the same rights and the same choice for an occupation (Boskamp 53-59; Katz 144).

Katz objects to this line of argument. He feels the “neutral” look of the figures means Liebermann did not intend them to be seen as Jewish agrarians. He points out also that Liebermann painted most of his works with rural motifs in the 1870s and 1880s, at a time when occupational reconstruction and the idea of the *Haskala* movement was already over. Historically, legal emancipation for the Jews occurred in several stages, once in 1812, again in 1848/51, and then finally with so-called “full” emancipation in 1869 in Prussia, and in 1871 for united Germany. The Jewish occupational restructuring movement that came out of the ideas of the *Haskala* operated very much from the late eighteenth century up to 1848. After 1848 we do not hear much about this movement and its ideas were renewed only very late in the 1870s as a reaction to a renewed mobilization of anti-Semitism. So there were two periods of occupational restructuring, one from the late eighteenth century to 1848 and again after the 1880s (Katz 144-145).

The second half the nineteenth century brought economic improvement for the Jews. They represented a strong economic force and their social and legal situation had also become more favorable. Emancipation brought unrestricted entrance to German institutions of higher learning and Jews were finally granted the chance to practice a liberal academic profession that earlier had been denied to them (Katz 146). However, between 1848 and 1879, occupational restructuring was a dead issue (Katz 144-145). Boskamps’s arguments are helpful only in pointing out an inadvertent and unintentional reference in Liebermann’s paintings to a long-standing debate on Jewish occupational restructuring that had once been part of a vital discussion (Katz 147).

Eberle sees the labor-motif “as resulting from an enchantment with Ferdinand Lassalle’s (1825-1864) theories about political and social reform” (Katz 143) and in Liebermann’s Dutch experience he sees a reflection of Lassallean views. Eberle, in comparison to the other

biographers such as Karl Scheffler, Erich Hancke, etc., presented Liebermann as "deeply and permanently attracted to Lassalle's vision" (Eberle 162). Eberle's argument that Liebermann reflected Lassallean opinions was based on the Liebermann's conversation with Paul Eipper, which Eipper later reported:

> [Eipper:] Sind Sie oft in Ihrem Leben einer politischen Verzauberung erlegen? Durch wen? Bismarck? Wilhelm II? Liebermann: Nein. Dauernd nur bei einem: Lassalle. Das war unerhört. Als er seine berühmten Reden gehalten hat, war ich noch auf dem Gymnasium, und ich erinnere mich deutlich, mit welcher Begeisterung wir Pennäler sie gelesen haben. Ich habe auch Lassalle, auch einmal persönlich gesehen in Berlin; er war strahlend schön wie ein junger Gott. So populär, dass ihn jedermann auf der Straße erkannte. (qtd. by Katz 160)

According to Katz, Eberle considered Liebermann's words of political fascination with Lassalle as a sign of Liebermann's inclination to Lassalle and perhaps to socialism. Katz objects to Eberle's theory on various grounds.

First, he feels the words Liebermann addressed to Eipper really express distance from the youthful enthusiasm of the high-school-aged Liebermann and represent a misunderstanding of the word *Verzauberung* (Katz 160-162). Eberle also argues that "in Holland Liebermann painted communities in which the common battle against nature had united the folk in a spirit of cooperation and stamped them with a feeling of social responsibility for their children and orphans, their aged and poor" (Katz 154-155). Katz's second objection is that this view of agrarian life was shared by many nineteenth century movements and does not show that Liebermann's preoccupation with labor is related to the main ideas of Lassalle. Eberle asserts that Liebermann shared Lassalle's desire to change the Prussian system of three-class voting to

equal and direct suffrage, but given Liebermann's upper-middle-class Jewish background, it is not likely he supported direct suffrage. He probably appreciated bourgeois rather than proletarian democracy and disproportional representation. For the Liebermann family, the working class was everything that the middle class was not; the middle class was reasonable, materially independent, and cultured. The proletariat was uncultured, materially dependent and not able to reach rational decisions (Katz 156). Like his father Louis Liebermann, Max felt responsible for the welfare of the poor and needy, but he nevertheless found the lower orders repulsive (Katz 156).

Finally, Lassalle believed social reforms must first begin with the industrial working class in the cities (Katz 156). He appealed to workers to cooperate and establish association of workers. By uniting to foster the good of the cooperative, workers would each receive in return more income than they could achieve independently (Katz 152). Ferdinand Lassalle urged the industrial working class to initiate these changes, and only when the campaign was successful among that group would the farmers be inclined to join (Katz 153). Since rural workers did not play an important role for Lassalle's reform, it is hard to argue that Liebermann was influenced by Ferdinand Lassalle.

Eberle's concern with a strand of socialism in Liebermann's works on rural labor does mirror an earlier conflict between the conservative and liberal critics. The conservative critics detected signs of socialism in Liebermann's works and the liberal critics unambiguously rejected this idea (Katz 156-157). The liberal critic Albert Lamm wrote: "keine Spur von irgend welcher Opposition eines Sozialisten, der den Gegensatz dieser Armuth durch die Armuth anklagen will, steckt in ihm" (qtd. by Katz 157).

How did the socialists themselves look at Liebermann's paintings? Leopold Schönhoff, the editor of *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, recognized the truth in Liebermann's depiction of poor people, especially rural workers. He argued that Liebermann's approach to painting the lower classes had nothing to do with criticism of the upper-middle-class and their lavishness (Katz 158). Leopold Schönhoff put the explanation this way:

> Weil die ganz persönliche Art seiner Darstellung nun herb ist, so konnte das Schaffen Liebermanns zum Schluss selbst zu dem eigentümlichen Gedanken verführen: den im Glanz Geborenen hätte es gereizt, den Gesellschaftskreisen, denen er selbst entstammte, wie ein Rächer zu erscheinen, wenn er das Dasein der Mühseligen und Beladenen mit unerbittlicher Wahrhaftigkeit darstellte. Ich meine, das ist eine Folgerung, die übers Ziel schiesst. Was hätte ihn, zum Racheramt [sic R.R.]verführen sollen. An seine Leibe hatte er die Daseinsnoth nie verspürt. Ihn fesselte kein innerliches Band an den proletarischen Schmerz. Er stand nie auf der Strassenecke und bot seine Arbeit feil. Ihm haben die mannigfachen Demüthigungen nie gegolten, die der geistige Arbeit in seinen Lehr- und Wanderjahren hinunterwürgen muss [. . .] (qtd. by Katz 158)

It is clear that Liebermann's rural labor in his works did not convince the socialists that Liebermann could be considered as a typical socialist painter.

According to Katz, both Boskamp and Eberle assumed that Liebermann's images agitate on behalf of a political issue, but their unsuccessful invocation of Lassallean socialism and the restructuring of Jewish occupations motivates us to seek other inspirations which led Liebermann to paint the way he did (Katz 162). Boskamp already put emphasis on the hard work that played a significant role in the Jews' political efforts. Industriousness and hard work were the keys for those who were trying to enter the bourgeoisie, and Katz notes, "We would do better to conclude

that Liebermann's choice is expressive of an attitude towards industriousness which was pressed home particularly in bourgeois Jewish families" (143). This would basically mean that Liebermann's images of rural work were motivated by a positive attitude towards diligence that was so crucial to bourgeois and Jewish identity (Katz 162-163).

According to Shulamit Volkov, in 1870 the great majority of Jews in Germany were bourgeois. Jewish efforts to enter the bourgeoisie were usually a communal and not just an individual affair. *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* served to differentiate the bourgeoisie from the classes above and below it. "*Bildung* combines the meanings of learning and character formation, and *Sittlichkeit* refers to gentility, self-control and diligent use of time" (Katz 163). Even after full emancipation of the Jews, *Bildung* und *Sittlichkeit* served Jews as a proof that they belonged to the German nation as respectful middle class members (Katz 163). To become a privileged citizen in Germany meant to achieve higher *Bildung.* At the end of the nineteenth century, the popular anti-Semitic opinion was that emancipation of the Jews could never have happened because the Jews were not capable of *Bildung* (Katz 164). "Anti-Semites complained that the Eastern Jews lived in filth and exuded a garlic smell" (Katz 165). The normal German-Jewish household was exactly the opposite of the one the Anti-Semites described: clean, odorless and very orderly. The household was important to impart *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*, and that was also the reason why Jewish people fought against stereotypes and tried to prove that indeed Jews were educated people able to adjust to the new living environment (Katz 165). The children had to furthermore learn moderation, modesty, frugality and industry. They learned about Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing, as well as taking roles in German classical plays (Katz 165-166).Work, industriousness, and diligence were the most important qualities and Jews were repeatedly told in

Rabbinical sermons that “Serving the Divinity entails work as a sacred duty” (George Mosse qtd. by Katz 166).

Albert H. Friedländer (1927-2004), another biographer of Liebermann and also a Jewish rabbi, described the Jewish identity of Max Liebermann as remarkable and mostly determined by his grandfather, Joseph Liebermann, and his father, Louis Liebermann. The Liebermann family was for him a typical Jewish family of the upper middle class that was striving especially in the first decades of nineteenth century for full emancipation and equal rights. According to him, the Liebermanns associated Jewish *Verbürgerlichung* especially with extreme diligence (Katz 167-168).

The literature about Liebermann repeatedly stressed his industriousness: he is always busy at his easel, one “trifft [. . .] ihn täglich emsig schaffend” (Philipp Stein qtd. by Katz 172). Friedländer says about Liebermann: “Er war Pflichtmensch aus Herkunft und Erziehung genug, um den etwas abenteuerlichen Beruf immerhin als ein Beruf zu empfinden“ (qtd. by Katz 172). Work was very necessary for him and he was very happy when his labor was useful, but work for him was a duty regardless of the product. When one of his friends Hans Oswald visited the seventy-year-old Liebermann at Wannsee, he was amazed by his industriousness and tirelessness. Liebermann commented:

> Das ist Dressur! Das ist Disziplin! Selbstzucht! Sie kennen doch meine Familiengeschichte? Wir waren aus reichem Hause. Aber unser Vater hat uns streng erzogen. Er sagte: „Ihr müsst euch selbst ernähren [. . .] Da hieß es eben arbeiten! Und das war gut! Da war man genötigt, was zu leisten. (qtd. by Katz 173)

Max Liebermann conformed, therefore, to the requirements of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*; he perceived himself as a perfect bourgeois: “Ich bin in meinen Lebensgewohnheiten der

vollkommenste Bourgeois: ich esse, trinke, schlafe, gehe spazieren und arbeite mit der Regelmäßigkeit einer Turmuhr“ (qtd. by Katz 174).

Also High German was the language of *Bildung.* Its use was necessary in order to participate in scientific discussions and in the bourgeoisie’s cultural discourse. Moreover the fluency in High German indicated membership in the German nation (Katz 164). While the anti-Semitic controversies caused agitation within Jewish communities but they also primed the Jews for success by pushing them to seek a good education and to acquire the German language (Mosse 1980, 253, 255). “The introduction of sermons in German and the founding of German-language periodicals were part of the development of a German-speaking Jewish public sphere” (Katz 164). Yiddish came to be considered “indecent” and during the nineteenth century more and more Jews abandoned Yiddish. For the Eastern European Jewish immigrants it became “an increasing source of embarrassment” (Katz 164-165). An interview conducted for the periodical *Der Tag* by Richard Dehmel, one of Liebermann’s closest friends, emphasizes Liebermann’s attitude towards the use of Yiddish expressions in German. Liebermann particularly dissociated himself from uncultivated Jews who could not speak correct German and who corrupted both the Jewish and the German languages by their mixture.

> Wenn Sie aber mich M.L. [Max Liebermann], als Typus gewordenes Porträt [. . .] was ja für mich äußerst schmeichelhaft ist [. . .] des jüdischen Malers zeichnen, dann lassen Sie mich nicht *mir* mit *mich* verwechseln. *De la langue verte* so viel Sie wollen, aber keinen Accu-Dativ und Judith-Deutsch. [. . .] Lassen Sie mich Berliner Ausdrücke gebrauchen, so viel Sie wollen, aber weder falsches noch jüdisches Deutsch. [. . .] Weil ich ein eingefleischter Jude bin, ärgern mich jüdische Worte im Deutschen, höchstens nebbich

> und meschugge lasse ich gelten, weils dafür keine deutschen Worte giebt. (qtd. by Katz 168)

At the turn of the century, to possess the ability to speak standard German became for most German Jews something that was self-understood (Katz 171). Liebermann distanced himself from all speech that marked Germans as Jews and he made it clear that he did not want to speak German incorrectly. The Jewish German bourgeois was also proud to be recognized as a citizen of a particular municipality and speaking the dialect became an important sign of belonging to a particular locale, and through it, to the nation. Thus Liebermann is happy to be recognized as a Berliner, but Liebermann was very much concerned to make sure that the others saw him as a cultured and fluent speaker of German (Katz 171).

Richard Dehmel was sixteen years younger than Liebermann and was influenced by Liebermann's ideas in his works. He was not Jewish, but he believed that intermarriage between Jews and Germans was fundamentally desirable. Dehmel's first wife was Paula Oppenheimer, the daughter of Julius Oppenheimer, who was a rabbi at the synagogue of the Reform Jewish Congregation in Berlin, and her brother was the economist and sociologist Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943). After the first marriage, Dehmel married Ida Coblentz, who came from a family of Jewish winegrowers in Bingen on the Rhine. In 1894, Dehmel helped found the art association Pan. In May 1908, Dehmel published an essay entitled "Talent und Rasse: Ein Gespräch zwischen Künstlern," which was a conversation between a German writer and a Jewish painter. The model for the German writer was Richard Dehmel himself and the Jewish painter was Max Liebermann (Schütz 149). Dehmel praises Liebermann as "one of the purest German artists who was ever shown in the National Gallery" (qtd. by Schütz 149-150). The fictional German poet focuses on a fictional painting entitled *Judith and Holofernes*, which seems to be inspired by

Liebermann's painting *Samson and Delilah* (1902). Liebermann's painting was shown in the same year at the first exhibition of the Berlin Secession.

> Der jüdische Maler: "Na ja, sehr schön. Aber nicht wahr, die Hauptsache ist doch: das Ding hat Rasse von oben bis unten!
>
> Der deutsche Dichter: „Wenn Sie also doch davon sprechen wollen, dann muss ich Ihnen offen gestehen, ich sehe eher etwas allgemein Menschliches."
>
> Der jüdische Maler: „Sie sind wohl allgemein übergeschnappt? So was kann doch blos einer, der Jude ist, machen!" (Dehmel 169)

Dehmel's dialogue describes a conflict between a universal art and a particularly Jewish art and emphasizes the subject matter of Jewish art which "has race written all over it" and is thus expressive only of a Jewish artist (Schütz 150). Although Dehmel considered Liebermann as a German artist, the whole dialogue in the essay describes the conflict between the Jewish artist and German writer and leads the readers to the ambiguity and clash between the double individuality (Jewish and German) of Liebermann (Schütz 150).

The perception of Jewish versus German qualities in Liebermann's work varies from critic to critic. The Jewish novelist Georg Hermann (1871-1943) expressed himself on the topic in the article *Max Liebermann* published in Martin Buber's edited collection *Jüdische Künstler* (1903). The central question in Hermann's article is how the "full blooded Jew" Liebermann could at the same time be German (Clarke 279-280). In his essay, Hermann attempted to tease out these two elements that he referred to as a *Mischung*, by separating one from the other to foreground the Jewish (Clarke 280). He associated Liebermann with both groups, which he regarded as "races," and he talked also about a *Mischling* (Clarke 280). Hermann first acknowledged the fact that Liebermann was atypical in that he did not image specifically Jewish themes.

> Das ethische Moment mag ihm zurücktreten, das Phantasiemoment fast fehlen; aber seht nur die Landschaft und seht die Menschen, das Einfache ihres Daseins. Empfindens, Leidens, ihrer Verrichtungen! Der für den heutigen jüdischen Künstler spezifische Zug einer leichten Melancholie, einer Gedrücktheit, ja des Kokettierens damit, liegt von Hause her nicht in der jüdischen Rasse, sondern ist ihr in dem zähen Widerstand, welchen sie der Assimilierung mit fremden Völkern bot, aufgezwungen worden. (Hermann 110)

Clarke notes that "the melancholic spirit of the artist genius is here conflated with the exiled condition of the Jew" (Clarke 280). As Clarke interprets Hermann's view, the German element that was missing, and had to be missing in the Jewish artist, "was a strong, organic sense of creative imagination, but Liebermann made up for this in his distinctly Jewish characteristics, namely his feelings, sentiments, temperament and personality and his love for nature and the land" (Clarke 280-281). It was important for Hermann to acknowledge Germanness and Jewishness and in the end to decide that Jewish qualities reigned in Liebermann's art despite its mostly by non-religious subject matter (Clarke 281). Hermann later compared Liebermann with Josef Israels. He saw in both artists commonalities which are embodied in their works:

> Ihre Art des Sehens, des künstlerischen Vortrages, der Urgrund ihrer Begabung, eine spezifische Note der Empfindung, etwas, das in den Nerven liegt und in Ihrer Kunst bedeutsam mitspricht -- das danken sie ihrer Rasse, das ist jüdisch an ihnen [. . .] Es ist die Rasse in ihnen, die sich immer auf die Seite des Fortschrittes schlägt, und die sie dadurch zu Führen prädestiniert. (qtd. by Clarke 281-282)

Other art historians such as the gentile Karl Scheffler (1869-1951) or Julius Meier-Graefe (1867-1935), a Jew, framed their own view about Liebermann not as an artist of Jewishness but

as an artist of Germanness. Meier-Graefe acknowledged Liebermann's debt to the French, but claimed that he "however, was a German."

> Refuting the brands of "ugly" and "dirty" once ascribed to Liebermann Meier-Graefe made him German (not Dutch or French) and did so by asserting his cleanliness, his intelligence and his line. (Clarke 287)

According to him, Liebermann's Jewishness is lost in Germanness (Clarke 287). Similary Karl Scheffler claims about Liebermann:

> Wie Joseph Israels der neuen holländischen Malerei ein Führer geworden ist, hat sich Liebermann an die Spitze der deutschen Kunst stellen können [. . .] weil er im entscheidenden Augenblick, wo die deutsche Kunst Befruchtung von Frankreich her brauchte, als Jude für das Übernationale einen unbefangeneren Sinn hatte. (qtd. by Clarke 289)

Due to his "race," Scheffler claims, Liebermann was able to grasp the new Impressionist world and become a leader of German painting. When Scheffler compared Liebermann's paintings with drawings, he had a different point of view.

> Durch die Anlage, die Liebermann zum Zeichner gemacht hat, unterscheidet dieser deutsche Führer den ganzen deutschen Impressionismus gewissermaßen vom französischen. Liebermann erweist sich ganz als eine deutsche Schwarz-Weiß-Natur; es hat sich in ihm die alte deutsche Kunstveranlagung, die mehr auf zeichnerischen Ausdruck als auf malerische Sinnlichkeit geht . . ., Wer tiefer zu blicken versteht, der erkennt bald, dass auch in Liebermann noch der uralte deutsche Grifflegeist Holbeins und Menzels lebendig ist. (qtd. by Clarke 290)

Wilhelm von Bode (1865-1929), the director of the Berlin state museums, also wrote an article on Liebermann celebrating his Germanness. It was in the year when Liebermann celebrated his sixtieth birthday that Bode referred to him as "einer der deutschesten Maler unter den lebenden Künstlern, mehr als er selbst, weiß und zugeben will" (qtd. by Clarke 292). Bode claimed that Germanness is embodied in the scenes of daily life, which was for him more characteristically German than Dutch. For Bode, Liebermann displayed his nationality best in his prints and drawings: "Seine Art zu zeichnen ist wie seine Malweise eckig, hastig und nervös – echt berlinisch" (qtd. by Clarke 292). As Clarke reads this statement, Liebermann's French Impressionism "was made German by celebrating the hectic nervousness of his native city Berlin – again the epicenter of Jewish neurasthenia" (Clarke 292). The art historian Paul Westheim (1866-1963), longtime editor of the periodical *Das Kunstblatt*, stated in the exile magazine *Das Neue Tagebuch* that it was the distinctively Prussian and Berlin qualities that gave Liebermann's painting its particular character that "these traits were so strong that the Jewishness vanished completely" (Clarke 292).

Contrasted with the view of Liebermann as a Berliner and a Prussian was the idea that exactly the opposite was true and that Liebermann had abandoned the provinciality of Berlin and represented a cosmopolitan style of art. The Jewish critic Emil Heilbunt (1861-1921) – pseud. Hermann Helferich – published one of the first positive evaluations of Liebermann in the essay *Studie über den Naturalismus und Max Liebermann* in 1887 *Kunst für Alle* . Heilbunt began his essay with quotations from Zola's *Germinal*, a text which he referred to throughout his article in order to help the reader understand Liebermann's paintings. According to Heilbunt, Zola and Liebermann believed in the elemental simplicity of nature and described objects with the truth and clarity (Clarke 224). For Heilbunt, Liebermann's "race" was an asset, because it allowed him

to bring something fresh into German art. Heilbunt claimed of Liebermann "daß er von der Kleinlichkeit und dem Philisterium [sic R.R.] des deutschen Genres den Blick zu den Sachlichkeiten der Natur erhob" (qtd. by Clarke 229). Although he praised Liebermann's love for nature, he claimed that Liebermann had to "shake off *Berlinismus*",

> Er streifte den Berolinismus [sic J.C.] ab und suchte, mit Spursinn für neue Wege begabt, nach der Wirkung des Ruhige[sic R.R.] [. . .] wenig Natürlich-ländliches an ihm, wenig Deutsches [. . .] ich finde fremde Beeinflußungen, jüdische, slavische, französische – Zuge [sic R.R.]. Als Jude mochte er Anregungen des Auslandes zugänglicher sein. (qtd. by Clarke 229)

Heilbunt felt that Liebermann was able to "shake off" the mantle of Berlin conservatism and receive "stimuli from abroad," i.e., influences from Holland and France, for German art (Clarke 229-230).

When anti-Semitic critics, as for instance Friedrich Pecht (1814-1903), looked at foreign influence, they emphasized the concept of the exile and the construction of the nomadic Jew (Clarke 230). The Jew as nomad, *unheimlich*, with no culture, was forced to seek foreign influences and "imitate" if not "copy" a style and then "adopt" it as his own (Clarke 231). In 1860 Wilhelm Lübke (1826-1893) wrote in his survey *Outline of the History of Art*: "Jews, having no art-ideas of their own, borrowed architectural forms which they employed on an eclectic principle from the nations dwelling around them" (qtd. by Clarke 231). The idea of having no identity was also ascribed to Liebermann (Clarke 231). The foreign influences mirrored in his art became the principal focus of his anti-Semitic critics. Indeed foreign influences were the signs of no identity and no culture for them.

Thomas Mann described Liebermann as „ kosmopolitisch, nüchtern und artistokratisch" (Wesenberg 28) and evaluated his ability to incorporate outside influences positively:

> Modernität als Zukünftigkeit, Kosmopolitismus als Abwesenheit germanischer Gemütsfeuchte. [. . .] der Aristokratismus einer Nüchternheit von Strich und Fläche in elegantem Hellgrau, eine vornehm untrunkene und im geistigen Sinne unsinnliche Kunst, reinlich, ohne Liebesehrgeiz und Weltbrunst, unmystisch also, unerotisch, antifeminin, das Gegenteil von Wagnerismus mit einem Wort. (qtd. by Wesenberg 28)

One might see that Clarke's dissertation clarifies the argument of Liebermann's cosmopolitism, which was defended also by most of the critics, and it is possible that his tolerance to the other foreign cultures and influences was one of the common argument, on which most of the critics agreed.

I started the chapter with anti-Semitic characterizations of Jewish artisits from the time when Max Liebermann was beginning his career. A principal criticism was that Jews lacked culture and were dependent on foreign influences. Even though Liebermann's first painting, *The Goosepluckers,* was praised by most of the critics for its painting techniques, the anti-Semitic critics saw this painting as dangerous because of its truthful and honest depiction. *The Goosepluckers* was a starting point for Liebermann's frequent depiction of farm workers, especially in a Dutch environment. Modern critics have tried to explain Liebermann's connection to labor in socio-political terms. Katrin Boskamp tries to find connections between Jewish occupational restructuring and Liebermann's interest in painting agricultural workers. Matthias Eberle wants to prove Liebermann's connections with Lassallean socialism. I agree with Katz that Boskamp's argument fails because the campaign for professional restructuring she describes does not fit chronologically with the beginnings of Liebermann's career, and in Eberle's case,

because Lasallean socialism was not interested in agrarian workers. Katz suggests instead that Liebermann, who never rejected his status as a member of an upper-middle-class Jewish family, was inspired in his painting of laborers by the ideals of diligence and hard work that propelled the rise of the Jewish community in Germany in the nineteenth century. There was nothing here, however, which would differentiate the habits of the Jewish bourgeoisie from those of a non-Jewish German bourgeois. His success meant being able to speak very good German, acquiring culture through education, and working hard at his profession.

Critics such as Meier-Graefe or Scheffler argued that Liebermann was a quintessentially German artist. Bode felt the same and found the scenes of daily life in Liebermann's paintings to be evidence for his love for Germany and Germans. Westheim and Bode stressed his Prussian and Berlin origins. This German quality was not necessarily created by the subject matter of his paintings but was ascribed to intangible characteristics such as "the pensive interiority in his paintings"(Clarke 292). Finally, the reference to Berlin city life came full circle to presumed Jewish qualities, since the way of painting –hasty and nervous -- was considered charcteristic of Berlin and the whole hectic nervousness of the city ascribed to the epicenter of Jewish neurasthenia.

Liebermann's artistic life was shaped by influences from abroad and this is the reason why one might call Liebermann a cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitan traits are singled out as being particularly Jewish by older critics such as Hermann or Heilbunt and most recently by Clarke, and here it would seem that Liebermann's Jewish family tradition did play a role in creating an openness to outside influence that did not exist to the same degree in Germans of the same class.

Chapter 3

Individual Works

The previous chapter asks how critics and historians have approached the definition of Jewish elements in Liebermann's works. The final chapter focuses on particular works – *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life (Selbstbildnis mit Küchenstillleben), The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam (Die Judengassen in Amsterdam), The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple (Der zwölfjährige Jesus im Tempel),* and *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend* -- that deal with overtly Jewish themes.

Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life

The first painting that included the traits of his Jewish identity, *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-life*, was painted in 1873. There are connections to the artist's Jewish subculture and private Jewish identity. It was probably painted on the occasion of the wedding of Georg Liebermann to Elsbeth Marckwald, and the painting was afterwards never exhibited. It stayed in the possession of his family and after the death of Liebermann's father, the painting was inherited by his brother Felix. After the Nazis came to power, Max Liebermann's wife committed suicide, and Felix's wife died, the painting was lost until 1956. Today it is in the collection of the Städtisches Museum in Gelsenkirchen (Schütz 161).

In the article "Max Liebermann als Maler der Seinigen" published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentum* in 1917, Ludwig Geiger speaks of Liebermann's inclinations towards customs that he saw and practiced in his family's home. In the *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life*, a happy Max Liebermann, wearing a cook's hat, looks out from behind a table spread with the makings of a beautiful meal, perhaps a soup; there is a cooking pot, cabbage, and an array of

vegetables. There is also stewing chicken that reveals an interesting detail. From its neck hangs a slip of paper with a red tag, a sign of kosher slaughter (Schütz 161). Birds such as duck, goose, turkey and many others are considered kosher, whereas birds such as vultures and birds of prey such as hawks and eagles are not considered kosher. Each kosher bird also must be slaughtered according to strict rules, which actually eliminates the hunting for wild game, unless it is captured alive and ritually slaughtered. The red tag, therefore, carries its own significance. The painting portrays not only the message of Jewishness, but also a typical bourgeois domestic scene (Schütz 161). Supposedly Liebermann wanted to be depicted as a Jew whose priorities were Jewish traditions carried on through the generations.

The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam

This title actually designates a collection of works that shows us Liebermann's passion for Holland and for the life style of the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam. Liebermann formed a lifelong admiration for the Dutch landscape and he came to closely identify himself with the Dutch masters of the seventeen century, particularly with Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Frans Hals (1585-1666), whose work he considered to be the pinnacle of art. Between the years 1905 and 1909, Liebermann devoted his energies to a series of paintings and the production of many etchings that have the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter as their theme. In all, the collection comprises more than twenty prints and twenty paintings of works created in the four years 1905 to 1909 (Clarke 294). These etchings, drawings and paintings are referred to under the name of the whole collection *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam.* If they do not have a specific title, they use the generic title coupled with the date when they were painted.

For the most part, the collection was made when Liebermann was already an experienced painter and his paintings were highly appreciated in exhibitions abroad, such as in France. However, his importance came to be slowly recognized in Germany as well. In 1892 he became president of the Berliner Sezession and later he was also named a member of the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts and was granted the title of Honorary Professor. The city as subject and the life of contemporaneous Jewry within an urban setting were not exactly new themes to him (Cahn 208-209). However, two works that were made much earlier incorporate the same topic and therefore they can be included to the collection as well (Cahn 208). The first object of Liebermann's great interest in the Jewish Quarter was not the streets and the atmosphere of the Quarter as one might assume from looking at the whole collection, but it was the interior of the Portuguese synagogue. He was impressed by the inside of the synagogue so much that he painted a work entitled *Interior of the Portuguese Synagogue* in 1876.

> The composition draws the eye obliquely into a space that is at once crowded with incident, yet largely empty, supplying the eye with cut-off parts of the *bimah*, rows of benches, and an ornamental chandelier. The three men clad in black and engaged in prayer, whose presence in the distance seems almost accidental, tend more to convey a sense of the remoteness of the painter/observer from the event depicted than to alert anyone to its significance. (Cahn 211)

From the reminiscences of one of his friends and his biographer, Erich Hancke, who visited the Jewish Quarter with Liebermann in 1911, there was something in the district that enchanted Liebermann. Hancke's words about Liebermann's visit to the synagogue are quoted by Walter Cahn in the article *Max Liebermann and the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter*:

> Er wollte mir nun auch die Synagoge zeigen, wo er die Studien zu Christus im Tempel gemacht hat. Unterwegs erzählte er von der Zeit, wo er mit Allebé Freitag abends hinzugehen pflegte, in jene alte berühmte Synagoge, wo Spinoza in dem [sic R.R.] Bann getan wurde [. . .] und sahen nach den Fenstern, durch die man die brennenden Lichter erblickte und Liebermann sprach von seiner Familie und deren Frömmigkeit. Auch er selbst sei früher am Sonnabend nie mit einer Zigarre über die Straße gegangen, wozu ich aus meiner Erinnerung ergänzen kam [sic R.R.], als er sogar diesen Freitag zu Ehren stets den Zylinder trug. Als wir ausgeraucht hatten, traten wir hinein, blieben aber am Eingang stehen. (qtd. by Cahn 417).

Liebermann told Hancke that this synagogue gave him the inspiration for *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple.*

Liebermann made trips to Holland nearly annually until the outbreak of World War I. One of his first paintings on this theme besides the *Interior of the Portuguese Synagogue* from 1876 was his first depiction of the street in the Jewish Quarter.. This painting *Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* was undertaken in 1884, after his return to Berlin. It depicts a narrow street closed off at the end by a building which is connected on both sides with the other rows of buildings. The painting reveals also a few sketchy hints of human presence – "a woman with an apron and white headgear in the middle ground, several small and unsubstantial figures in the distance, and a dark, profiled silhouette approaching the doorway on the lower left" (Cahn 214).

According to Walter Cahn, the painting of *Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* (1884) became more the expression of mood and milieu in the Jewish Quarter than the record of a specifiable action. Walter Cahn quotes Matthias Eberle, who connected the particular painting from 1884 with views of streets in Venice made by Liebermann six years earlier. As in the whole collection

of *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* from 1905-1909, this painting also mirrors the influences of the Dutch artists. However, contemporary art historians such as Clarke and Cahn ask about the appearance of Jewish elements in the collection. Walter Cahn is convinced that there really are no specially Jewish elements to be found (Cahn 214). For instance in another painting of *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* (1907), according to Cahn, Liebermann places the emphasis on the depiction of the streets on Friday before the Sabbath. Liebermann's main purpose, he argues, was to describe the streets and Liebermann mainly wanted to transfer the whole atmosphere of the street to the canvas. Therefore, Cahn concludes, *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* typifies the life of Jewish ghetto in Amsterdam but hardly mirrors "Jewish ethnicity." The people gathering on the streets of the Jewish ghetto do not wear the characteristic clothing of Jews. For instance, *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* (1909) depicts people who are dressed just like anyone else (Cahn 219-223).

Although Cahn doubts there are Jewish elements in the collection of paintings, etchings and drawings, Jay Anne Clarke contends in her dissertation, "The construction of Artistic Identity in Turn of the Century Berlin: the prints of Klinger, Kollwitz and Liebermann," that especially twenty prints executed between 1906-1908 by Liebermann have Jewish content. She claims that Liebermann felt sufficiently confident to depict scenes from the Jewish Quarter with a sense of ethnic pride. The etchings shows his love for a part of the city where Liebermann felt at home. The works do not present the ghettoized Jew or rural laborer, but the urban, assimilated Dutch Jew who wears clogs. "The sunlit marketplace, bustling with the activity and friendly conversations between vendors and buyers, is imbued with the sense of communal purpose"(Clarke 293-294). Therefore, Liebermann's main intention in typifying the Jewish Quarter was to show a society of Dutch-Jewish symbiosis which he was seeing in Amsterdam.

Moreover, the collection represents Liebermann's idea of assimilated German Jews who looked as anyone else.

Besides the depiction of a Dutch-Jewish symbiosis, Liebermann had another purpose in painting the streets of the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam. He considered Amsterdam to be the most beautiful city in the world. It was in 1876, during his first extended stay in Holland, when he made his initial visit to the Jewish Quarter (Cahn 209-210).

> The Jews of Amsterdam, initially Sephardic refugees from Spain and Portugal, were settled since the seventeenth century in a warren of streets, alleys, and canals situated along the southeastern rim of the expanding city. Because of Amsterdam's mercantile activities and relative religious tolerance, the area was early on noted for its colorful mixture of people and the exotic character of its religious observances. While other Jewish communities like those of Venice and Frankfurt lived almost entirely hidden behind ghetto walls, the Jews of Amsterdam were visible to an unprecedented degree (Cahn 208-209).

Most of the Jews in Amsterdam were active in the diamond trade and various small businesses. Amsterdam became a city with the mixture of cultures and religions. (Cahn 208-209)

For an evocative description of the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam, Cahn quotes the words of Edmondo de Amici, a traveler who visited the city in the eighteenth century and considered this area "one of the marvels of Amsterdam." Cahn wants to emphasize De Amici's evident sarcasm when De Amici starts his description of Jewish Quarter with:

> [. . .] a labyrinth of narrow streets, foul and dark, with very old houses on either side, which seemed as though they would crumble to pieces if one kicked the walls. From cords strung from window to window, from window-sills, from the nails driven in the doors,

> dangled and fluttered tattered shirts, patched petticoats, greasy clothes, dirty sheets and ragged trousers, flapping against the damp walls [. . .] Old goods were exposed for sale. Broken furniture, fragments of weapons, objects of devotion, shreds of uniforms, parts of machinery, splinters of toys [. . .] things that have no name in any language; everything that has been ruined or destroyed by rust, worms, fire, disorder [. . .]; all those things that servants sweep away, rag-merchants throw away [. . .]; all that encumbers, smells, disgusts, contaminates-all this is to be found there in heaps and layers destined for a mysterious commerce, for unforeseen combinations, and for incredible transformations. In the midst of this cemetery of things, this Babylon of uncleanliness, swarms of a sickly, wretched, filthy race, beside which the Gypsies of Albaycin in Granada are clean and sweet. (qtd. by Cahn 209)

The Jewish Quarter attracted many painters and photographers because of its own charm and uniqueness. As I mentioned, Liebermann was greatly influenced by Dutch artists and it was perhaps Liebermann's identification with Rembrandt's *Amsterdam Jewish Quarter* that brought Liebermann to this theme. The house where Rembrandt lived in the Jewish Quarter was located on the major street of this district. The Jodenbreestraat had become something like a place of pilgrimage in the late nineteenth century. In *Kunst und Künstler* in 1907 Liebermann wrote an appreciation of Rembrandt in the review of Wilhelm Bode's book *Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen*. Liebermann describes Rembrandt in this way: "Mit Rembrandt in Amsterdam! Mit ihm, dessen Genius Shakespeares Dramatik mit der Lyrik Goethes, die kindliche Seele Mozarts mit der grüblerischen Tiefe Beethovens vereinigt" (Liebermann, "Rembrandt" 162). Liebermann himself drew important connections between himself, Rembrandt, and Spinoza (Clarke 239).

> Vielleicht war Spinoza, der selbst zeichnete, von Rembrandt, dessen Haus im Judenviertel in Amsterdam war und der sehr viele Beziehungen zu Juden hatte, beeinflusst, jedenfalls ist beiden gemeinsam das unendliche Mitgefühl für ihre Mitmenschen und vielleicht ist auch in mir etwas davon dank meiner Abstammung, die neben (leider) nur zu vielem Schmerzlichen das eine Gute hat, weniger gefühllos fremden Leiden gegenüber zu sein. (qtd. by Clarke 239)

Liebermann connected his people to his art through Rembrandt and Spinoza. Spinoza, who was expelled from the Amsterdam synagogue greatly influencedLiebermann, especially because of his similar ideas of assimilation of Judaism into realities of daily life (Clarke 242-243). In the same review of Bode's book *Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen* in *Kunst und Künstler*, Liebermann expressed himself on the question of whether Rembrandt was or was not a Jew and hypothesized about the relationship Judaism had to Rembrandt's art:

> Noch misslicher aber, in Rembrandts Kunst das Christentum hervorzuheben. Noch Kolloff [Rembrandts biographer in 1854 R.R.] nahm Rembrandt gegen den Vorwurf in Schutz, ein Jude gewesen zu sein. Nicht nur lebte Rembrandt im Judenviertel, nicht nur entnahm er ausschliesslich seine Modelle dem Ghetto, seine architektonischen Hintergründe der Synagogue, nicht nur wählte er seine Sujets mit grösser [sic R.R.]Vorliebe aus dem alten als dem neuen Testament. Die Kunst hat mit dem Dogma nichts zu thun, denn die Kunst ist nicht Dogma, sondern Religion. Rembrandts Kunst ist der Ausdruck höchster Menschlichkeit. (qtd. by Clarke 293)

Although Rembrandt was not in fact a Jew, Liebermann suggested that he was, since only a Jew could approach nature with such piety and his Jewish subject matter with humanity. The discussion whether Rembrandt was a Jew or was not a Jew seemed to influenced Liebermann so

much that he added his own opinion about it: “I am glad that my face makes it obvious that I am a Jew” (qtd. by Clarke 293). According to Clarke, the scene from the Old Testament *Samson and Delilah* painted by him in 1902 made for the first time a direct connection between his art and his religion (see Zionism Chapter 1) (Clarke 293-294).

The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple

A painting from 1879, *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple,* brought Liebermann a lot of unexpected criticism. He later regretted his choice to paint a topic that created resistance to his works within the German public (Cahn 213). This painting was first exhibited at the International Art Show in Munich in 1879 and caused a sensation because of its unique painting techniques, but even more so because of the “racial” issues it raised. “The work depicts the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple surrounded by stereotypical Jewish figures in traditional and modern dress” (Schütz 153). The depicted temple combines views from two different synagogues, from the old Portuguese synagogue in the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam and from the Scuola Levantina, a synagogue in Venice (Katz 72). According to Eberle and Boskamp, it might not be accidental that Liebermann referenced two synagogues, because both synagogues belonged to the Sephardic congregation. A Sephardic congregation was more open to modern cultural influences and the Bible was more important to them than Jewish law (Talmud) in comparison to the Ashkenazic congregation (Boskamp 101; Eberle 156). Boskamp argues that Liebermann’s painting makes also reference to modern Reform Judaism and are not intended as an historical reconstruction of biblical times. Germany’s first modern reformers took the Sephardic orientation as a model. In mid-century, the reform of Judaism brought a new, more liberal outlook on piety to modern Jewish life. The most important thing was that the Reform

dispensed with the belief in a messiah who would guide the Jews to an independent Jewish state. One member of Jewish Reform congregation in Berlin was Max Liebermann's uncle Benjamin. The congregation was worshipped with the head uncovered. This fact could lead us back to the painting *Jesus in the Temple*. The bare heads of some of the rabbis in the painting function as the most obvious allusion to the present and could be interpreted as a sign of agreement with the Jewish Reform conregation. There has always been a question as to Liebermann's own religious affiliation and attitude. Liebermann said little on this subject, but some observers such as Eberle or Boskamp consider the painting *Jesus in the Temple* as proof of Liebermann's liberal thinking about religion, and it is possible that Liebermann became an adherent of this Jewish Reform congregation (Katz 72-75).

A letter written by Liebermann to Alfred Lichtwark (1852-1914) in 1890 tells us more about his attitude to the Judaism: "[. . .] heute ist aber Sonntag und als guter Jude enthalte ich mich des thätigen Werkes und weiß ich mir nichts besseres, als mich mit ihnen zu unterhalten [. . .]" (qtd. by Katz 75). The statement is strange because Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath not Sunday, and the explanation could lie with the Reform movement since the ultra-liberal Berlin Reform congregation conducted its service on Sunday. This leads Katz to conclude that Liebermann supported and agreed with Reform Judaism, even though he was certainly raised in a traditional Orthodox congregation (Katz 75-76). Boskamp sees in this painting Liebermann's intention to demonstrate his inclination to Reform Judaism and to reconcile Jews and Christians within German culture (Boskamp 112-114). Depiction of a Jewish Jesus in the temple caused many problems with the anti-Semitic critics, because the figure of Jesus emphasized that Judaism was the religion from which Christianity was developed (Frübis 139).

According to Cahn, Liebermann chose the painting style of seventeenth century Dutch artists for *Jesus in the Temple.* Artists such as Rembrandt or Adolph von Menzel painted the same scene, but each of them portrayed and typified a different message. Menzel depicted rabbis surrounding Jesus in the Temple as Jews by giving them a typical Eastern European Jewish look – "swarthy complexions, hooked noses, and demonstrative gestures" (Cahn 214). Menzel's way of depicting Jesus was criticized by Liebermann in one of his letters. He claimed that Menzel's figures in this particular painting were for him too "charakteristisch", "thus tending to lend themselves too much to caricature" (Cahn 214): "Die Juden schienen mir zu charakteristisch; sie verleiten zur Karikatur in welchen Fehler mir Menzel verfallen zu sein scheint" (qtd. by Cahn 214). Liebermann painted *Jesus in the Temple* with a traditional background gained from old Dutch artists, but he wanted to abandon the outlandish look of the Jews (Cahn 214).

The artwork itself aroused great anger and a lot of criticism especially in Bavaria:

> The Crown Prince of Bavaria was outraged, the picture was debated in the Bavarian Parliament, and eventually the painting had to be removed from the exhibition. Court Chaplain Adolf Stöcker, who enjoyed the special support of Kaiser Wilhelm II and was the most vociferous anti-Semite of his time, is said to have later declared that his painting had caused him to become an anti-Semite. (Schütz 153)

In a letter to Alfred Lichtwark (1852-1914) from 5 July 1911, Liebermann wrote:

> The nastiest newspaper feuds ensued. Nauseated by all the clamor that now, in view of the painting, is incomprehensible, I made the decision never again to paint a biblical subject. In the meantime *Jesus* gave rise to the new style of religious painting (qtd. by Schütz 155).

Liebermann's painting *Jesus in The Temple* was also criticized by two influential Berlin critics, Ludwig Pietsch (1824-1911) and Bruno Meyer (1840-1917). Meyer was especially shocked by "astounding truth to nature" in Liebermann's paintings and later called Liebermann the "apostle of ugliness" (qtd. by Clarke 222). The Liebermann's depiction was considered especially offensive by most of the critics since they objected to a Jew painting Jesus. For instance, Fritz von Uhde (1848-1911) painted many scenes from Jesus's life set among contemporary farmers and handworkers. However, von Uhde was not Jewish and therefore his paintings were greeted positively; critics could not condone the treatment of a similar subject by Liebermann the Jew, as the art historian Heinrich Strauss later commented (Schütz 152-153).

However, Katrin Boskamp, in her *Studien zum Frühwerk von Max Liebermann,* discovered an early version of the image in Richard Muther's *Geschichte der Malerei des XIX. Jahrhunderts.*

> The scene is the same as the previous description, but the found sketch depicts Jesus not as a modestly dressed boy with blond hair, surrounded by scholars. Instead, he has prominent features, and his dark unruly hair falls in disarray over his temples; barefoot and disheveled, he confronts the men in the temple. (Schütz 155-156)

Boskamp believed that this, Liebermann's original depiction of Jesus, was more "Jewish" and therefore Liebermann was forced later on to change the look of Jesus.

The blond, long haired Christ child demonstrating his precocious wisdom to the rabbis assembled around him was not what anyone but the most anti-Semitic person would call provocative, though it has recently been shown that the present appearance of young Jesus is the result of modification by the painter of an originally much less idealized and stereotypically Jewish looking portrayal, which is documented by an old photograph. (Cahn 213)

The negative reactions to this painting convinced Liebermann to choose his subjects more carefully then he otherwise might have. That also might be the reason why he devoted his paintings primarily to scenes of labor, Dutch farmers, or market scenes. The interesting fact is that these scenes also evoked in some art historians connections to his Jewish side -- which could have been received negatively by the anti-Semites mentioned in Chapter Two. "Die ekelhaften Anwürfe von Anti-[sic R.R.] und Semiten, als ich den Christus im Tempel gemalt hatte, haben mich für immer von biblischen Stoffen [. . .] abgehalten" (Liebermann to Fritz Stahl 17 April 1915, as qtd. by Cahn 418).

Den Müttern der Zwölftausend

In 1923 Liebermann created a lithograph *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend*, for the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten. The lithograph is a memorial for all Jewish soldiers killed during the first World War and contains without a doubt Jewish subject matter (Frübis 140).

> [. . .] Die Figur einer weiblichen, aufrecht stehenden Gestalt, die im Klagegestus ihre rechte Hand über die Augen legt. Hinter ihr reihen sich bis zum Horizont die Gräber der Gefallen in der Form altjüdischer Gedenksteine. Vor ihr auf dem Boden ist eine Grabplatte mit dem Davidstern zu sehen, die auf die jüdische Konnotation des Gedenkblattes aufmerksam macht, sowie eine kniende junge Frau/Tochter, die ein Reis der Gräber pflanzt. Die Frauengestalt über den Gräbern der Gefallenen tritt in ihren Klagegestus, dem über Kopf und Haar fallenden Trauerschleier und dem halbentblößten Körper aus dem Erzählgeschehen heraus und symbolisiert als Stellvertreterin der klagenden 'jüdischen Mütter' das Volk Israel (Frübis 140-141).

With increasing anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic after 1919, Jews were accused of not serving the nation during the First World War. According to a survey done by the Reichswehr, the Jews served the German army very faithfully and died at the rate at least as high as non-Jewish Germans. The number of twelve thousand Jewish casualties appearing in the title of Liebermann's lithograph work corresponds to the correct number of Jewish soldiers who died in the war. It is interesting that Liebermann had first set the number at ten thousand casualties and then changed it after the correct number was publicized by Jewish organizations (Frübis 140-141).

> Jüdische Organisationen führten eine eigene Statistik nach den Unterlagen der Militär-Archive durch; sie war 1921 abgeschlossen, und vom 1919 gegründeten Reichbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten wurde ein Gedenkbuch unter dem Titel *Die jüdischen Gefallenen des deutschen Heeres, der deutschen Marine und der deutschen Schutztruppen 1914-1918* herausgegeben. (Frübis 143)

Liebermann's ideal was to become a fully assimilated Jew and this lithograph shows us how Liebermann's desires went hand in hand with the effort to defend the Jews in the way that they belonged to and served the German nation. As the liberal rabbi Leopold Stein proclaimed in 1848:

> [. . .] wir sind und wollen nur Deutsche sein! Wir haben und wünschen kein anderes Vaterland als das deutsche! Nur dem Glauben nach sind wir Israeliten, in allem übrigen gehören wir aufs Innigste dem Staate an, in welchem wir leben! (Shulamit Volkov as qtd. by Frübis 142-143)

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I believe that Liebermann's words "Ich bin nur ein Maler, und das kann ein Jude doch auch sein" (Frübis 142) are expressed in his works. Liebermann never denied his Jewish origin and therefore it is hard to leave out the question of Jewishness from the discussions of his works. The works which are included in this chapter became significant especially because of their connection to Judaism, and they convince us that Liebermann's Jewishness played an important role – even if in a very limited number of works.. *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life* mirrors not only Liebermann's Jewish origin, but also points at the importance of Jewish traditions for Liebermann. The collection represented by the *Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam* reflects Liebermann's passion for the Dutch environment and Dutch artists. Liebermann brought the atmosphere and life style of Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam closer. He emphasized especially the importance of a Dutch-Jewish symbiosis in the collection made between 1905-1909, which also shows his aim to be a fully assimilated German Jew. The paintings that depict people on the streets of the Jewish Quarter did not need to have the stereotypical Jewish look, and even though that was decisive for Cahn in claiming that there are no Jewish elements, Clarke interprets this as Liebermann's way of underscoring Jewish assimilation. What he saw in Amsterdam became a kind of pattern for society in Germany. The most criticized painting, *The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple*, incensed anti-Semitic critics so much that Liebermann decided to rework the painting in such a way as to avoid more criticism. And finally, the last work, the lithograph *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend* reflects Liebermann's pride of being Jewish his respect for all the fallen Jewish soldiers, and his empathy for the families of those lost.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to familiarize readers with the Jewish side of Max Liebermann as an individuality and as a painter. Chapter One discusses the Liebermann family as a typical upper-middle-class Jewish family that built its prestige and wealth on stereotypical habits and patterns of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century. Even though Max Liebermann did not continue in the traditional business of the Liebermann family, one can see in him and his lifestyle disciplined Jewish bourgeois behavior and a continuing pride in and appreciation of his family's accomplishments. Liebermann as an artist was heavily influenced by Dutch and French artists such as Rembrandt, Hals, Millet, etc. At the starting point of his career, he drew inspiration from The Hague School founded in Holland and The Barbizon School founded in France. Liebermann never became a member of the emerging Zionist movement, although he was not opposed to it by any means. He at first seems to have felt that the members of the movement were too traditional, but even after he realized there was room for varying degrees of religious belief, he still did not become an adherent. That did not stop the movement from claiming him as a Jewish artist. Given the strong contrast in society between eastern and western Jews, Liebermann was someone who wanted to place himself firmly among the ranks of cultivated, assimilated western Jews. However, his art indeed differed from the art of the other Jewish artists.

Chapter Two begins with a short overview of anti-Semitic critics who did not appreciate Liebermann's art. Such people simply criticized anything Jewish. Katrin Boskamp and Matthias Eberle posed the question relating to the topic of labor in his works during the 1870s and 1880s. Katrin Boskamp queries Liebermann's intention to paint poor workers and she comes to the conclusion that there are possible connections between the workers and Jewish occupational

restructuring. Matthias Eberle was also concerned about the depiction of labor, but his explanation invoked Lassallean ideas and socialism. Neither Boskamp's nor Eberle's claims can be justified simply because Liebermann never showed a real inclination to socialism. As described in Chapter One, he came from a wealthy family, whose traditions were rooted in *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*. These are also related to the diligence and eagerness to become a fully assimilated German that characterized Liebermann's social class, and this, combined with a general sense of social responsibility, provides a more convincing explanation of his interest in laboring figures. His foreign traits were characterized as Jewish signs by Clarke and Heilbunt. Critics such as Scheffler and Meier-Graefe stressed what they saw as Liebermann's German traits, especially in his drawings and etchings. However some critics such as Paul Westheim went even deeper in regard to the question of Germanness and considered his Prussian and Berlin origins as decisive factors in the development of his painting style. His tolerant embrace of foreign influences was crucial for the critics who considered him as a cosmopolitan. Heilbunt and more recently Clarke recognize in Liebermann's openness to foreign influence a characteristic that was very typical of his social group and which differentiated him from the more nationally focused non-Jewish painters of his time.

Chapter Three includes three individual works and one group of paintings and works on paper that deal with specifically Jewish themes. They both display Liebermann's acceptance of his heritage and, in their limited number, they are a reminder of the relatively minor role Jewish themes play in his work overall. The first painting, *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life,* highlights Liebermann's positive attitude towards traditional Jewish customs, specifically kosher cuisine in a homey setting. The second work, *The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam*, is a collection of drawings, etchings, and paintings. The collection is a depiction of the milieu and atmosphere

of the Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam. Liebermann created the collection while under the influence of the Dutch artist Rembrandt. Jewish elements are not as clearly visible as in *Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life*, and for this reason some critics dispute whether the collection has any Jewish themes at all. I agree with those who see the collection as a reference to a specifically Jewish place and Jewish culture that is fully acculturated in a tolerant and accepting society. It presents a vision of Liebermann's hopes for German Jews.

If there is a painting which was considered by critics as Jewish, then it is certainly the depiction of *The Twelve-Year-old Jesus in the Temple*. The painting was highly criticized by anti-Semitic critics. This heavy criticism convinced Liebermann to rework the painting. Liebermann was especially criticized as a Jew because he painted Jesus surrounded by rabbis in a temple. Except for this criticism, the painting include traits which may lead us to believe that Liebermann inclined to support a modern reform of Judaism.

The last work is the lithograph *Den Müttern der Zwölftausend*, which was created in response to false accusations against Jewish patriotism in the First World War and which is a reminder that Jews gave their lives as fully emancipated citizens of the German nation.

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Liebermann Visuals

The Goosepluckers (Die Gänserupferinnen) 1872. Staatliche Museen Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Reproduction Wesenberg 53.

Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life (Selbstbildnis mit Küchenstilleben) 1873. Städtisches Museum Gelesenkirchen. Reproduction Schütz 159.

The Twelve- Year-Old-Jesus in the Temple (Der zwölfjährige Jesus im Temple) 1879. Hamburger Kunsthalle. Reproduction Schütz 154.

Samson and Delilah (Simpson und Delila) 1902. Städtische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main. Reproduction Schütz 150.

The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam (Judengasse in Amsterdam) 1907. Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld. Reproduction Liebermann, *Mit Rembrandt in Amsterdam* 164.

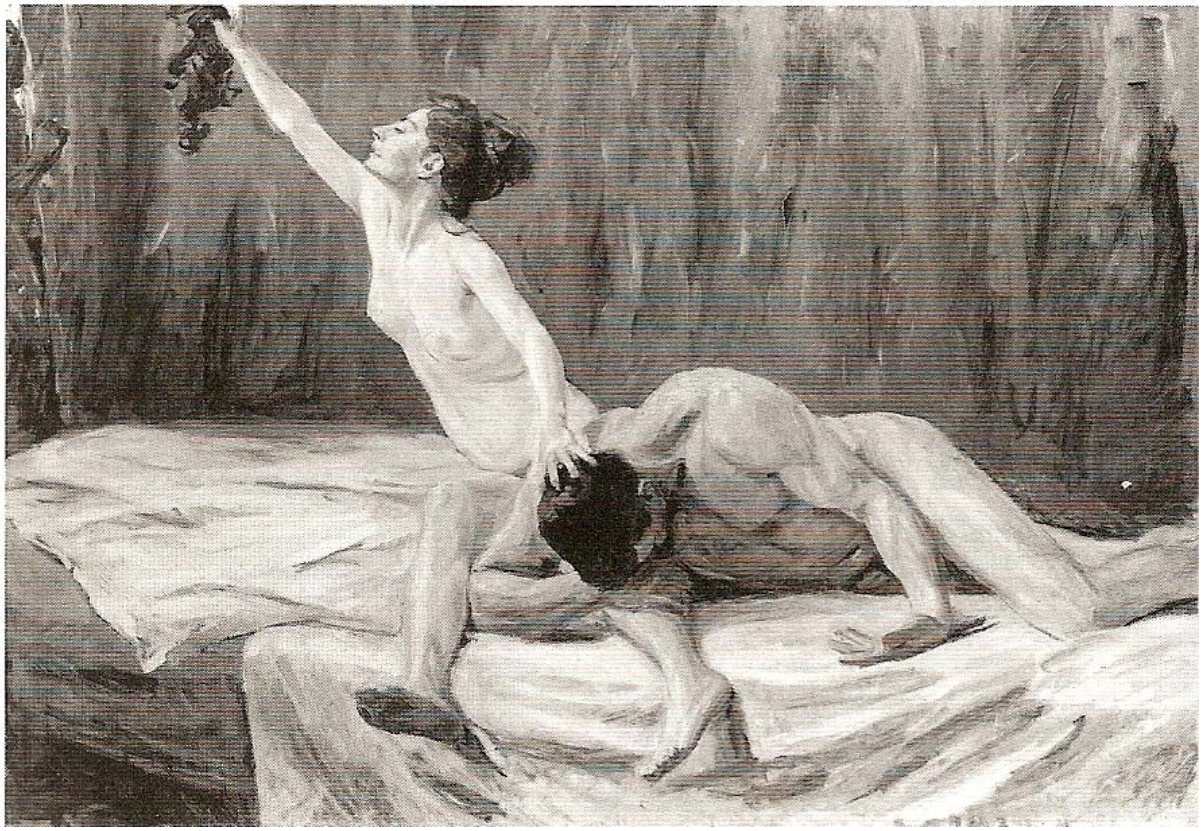
Den Müttern der Zwölftausend. Max liebermann in seiner Zeit. Ausstellungskatalog, 1979. Reproduction Frübis 141.

Appendix

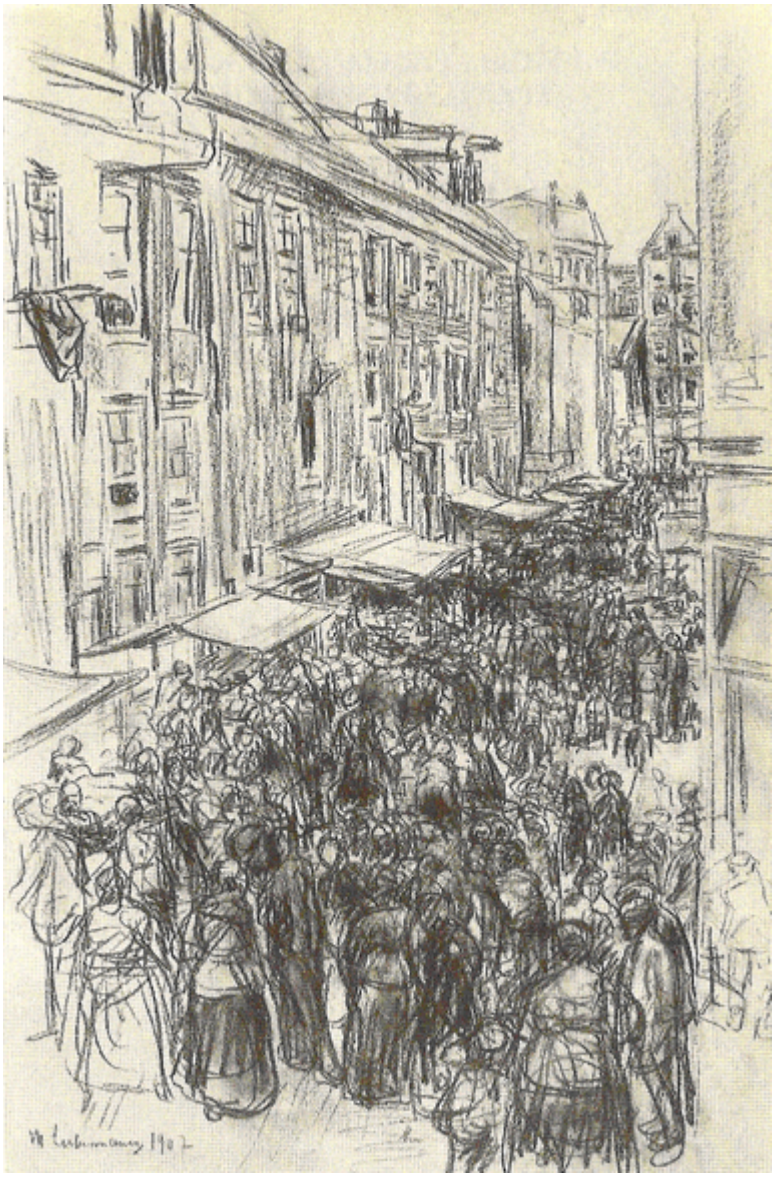
The Goosepluckers (Die Gänserupferinnen) 1872

Self-Portrait with Kitchen Still-Life (Selbstbildnis mit Küchenstilleben) 1873

The Twelve-Years-Old Jesus in the Temple (Der zwolfjährige Jesus im Temple) 1879



Samson and Delilah (Simpson und Delila) 1902



The Jewish Quarter in Amsterdam (Judengasse in Amsterdam)1907

Den Müttern der Zwölftausend 1924

Vita

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