

Max Liebermann: Assimilation and Belonging

Mitchell B. Frank

Volume 45, numéro 2, 2020

Approaching Home: New Perspectives on the Domestic Interior
Vers la maison : nouvelles perspectives sur l'intérieur domestique

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073941ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073941ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Frank, M. B. (2020). Max Liebermann: Assimilation and Belonging. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 45(2), 97–110.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1073941ar>

Résumé de l'article

En raison de la nature très publique de sa vie à l'époque de l'Empire allemand et de la République de Weimar, le peintre juif allemand Max Liebermann (1847–1935) a souvent été considéré comme un représentant exemplaire de l'assimilation juive à la vie culturelle allemande. Plutôt que de traiter Liebermann comme le représentant d'un groupe, cet essai explore la complexité de son expérience individuelle d'appartenance afin de suggérer que son sentiment d'être chez lui, même avant 1933, n'a jamais été complètement résolu. La maison berlinoise de Liebermann, située au coeur de la ville, est un motif central dans cette étude de son sentiment d'appartenance. Cet essai explore également sa position sociale, son sens du langage, la réception de sa peinture et sa pratique d'autoportraits. Souvent mis en scène dans l'atelier que Liebermann avait construit au-dessus de sa maison berlinoise, ses autoportraits engagent un dialogue de proximité et de distance qui est à la base de son sentiment d'être chez lui et au coeur de sa position de peintre moderniste et de juif allemand assimilé.

Max Liebermann: Assimilation and Belonging

Mitchell B. Frank

En raison de la nature très publique de sa vie à l'époque de l'Empire allemand et de la République de Weimar, le peintre juif allemand Max Liebermann (1847–1935) a souvent été considéré comme un représentant exemplaire de l'assimilation juive à la vie culturelle allemande. Plutôt que de traiter Liebermann comme le représentant d'un groupe, cet essai explore la complexité de son expérience individuelle d'appartenance afin de suggérer que son sentiment d'être chez lui, même avant 1933, n'a jamais été complètement résolu. La maison berlinoise de Liebermann, située au cœur de la ville, est un motif central dans cette étude de son sentiment d'appartenance. Cet essai explore également sa position sociale, son sens du langage, la réception de sa peinture et sa pratique d'autoportraits. Souvent mis en scène dans l'atelier que Liebermann avait construit au-dessus de sa maison berlinoise, ses autoportraits engagent un dialogue de proximité et de distance qui est à la base de son sentiment d'être chez lui et au cœur de sa position de peintre moderniste et de juif allemand assimilé.

Mitchell B. Frank is Associate Professor of Art History at Carleton University. He is Editor in Chief of RACAR. —mitchell.frank@carleton.ca

1. Walter Püschel, ed., *Immer diskret!: Anekdoten über Max Liebermann* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1986), 54: "Nachdem Max Liebermann berühmt geworden war, hatte der Berliner Volksmund auf die Frage, wo der Maler Liebermann wohne, die Antwort parat: 'Wenn man nach

The fame of the German-Jewish painter Max Liebermann (1847–1935) was such that the answer to the question "Where does the painter Liebermann live?" was well known to Berliners: "When you come into Berlin, immediately go left!"¹ Liebermann's home on the Pariser Platz, next to the Brandenburg Gate, | fig. 1 | was located in the heart of the city. Diagonally across the square was the Prussian Academy of Arts, where Liebermann served as president from 1920 to 1932. The Pariser Platz was also where the Nazis marched soon after they had gained power in 1933, parades that the artist could have seen through his windows. Liebermann's home thus stood for his integration into German society at one point in time and his expulsion from it at another.

In an often-cited letter of February 28, 1934, to Breslau businessman and art collector Carl Sachs, Liebermann lamented his life-long striving for Jewish equality in German society. "We have unfortunately, unfortunately," the eighty-six-year-old artist wrote, "been awoken from the beautiful dream of assimilation."² Gershom Scholem later suggested that for assimilated German Jews, "the unending Jewish demand for a home was soon transformed into the ecstatic illusion of being at home."³ In this paper, I employ Liebermann's Berlin house as a central motif in a discussion of his sense of belonging. Feeling at home for Liebermann, however, involved not only a physical place, but also a socio-cultural position, language, and, especially in his later years, memories of youth.

In the early twentieth century, Liebermann held a prominent if controversial place as the leading German impressionist painter. In the reception of his work, nation and race figured significantly in claims made by his detractors and champions. From the first decade of the century, he also started to focus more of his attention on self-portraiture. Often set in the studio Liebermann had built on top of his Berlin home, these self-portraits engage in a dialogue of proximity and distance, which are at the crux of his sense of being at home, at the heart of his position as modernist painter and assimilated German Jew.

The concept of assimilation in the German-Jewish context is often understood as what the Jews were to give in return for emancipation or equality, which was granted to Jews by many German states in the nineteenth century before unification and then by the German nation in 1871.⁴ Assimilation could take on a variety of different forms from acculturation (integration into German society while keeping one's Jewish identity) to amalgamation (merger via intermarriage, conversion and name change).⁵ Many assimilated Jews

Figure 1. Berlin, Brandenburg Gate and Unter den Linden (with the Pariser Platz), 1931. Max Liebermann's house is circled in the photo. Photo: Klinko & Co. Digital Picture Archives of the German Federal Archives, Picture no. 146-1998-010-2.



Berlin reinkommt, gleich links!" Liebermann had a second home, his summer residence on the Wannsee. It was completed by the architect Paul Otto Baumgarten in 1910, and it is now the Liebermann-Villa am Wannsee.

2. Max Liebermann, letter of February 28, 1934, to Carl Sachs, in *Max Liebermann: Briefe*, ed. Franz Landsberger, enlarged edition, ed. Ernst Volker Braun (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1994), 70: "Aus dem schönen Traum der Assimilation sind wir leider, leider! Nur zu jäh auf geweckt." In a 1933 letter to Hayyim Bialick, Liebermann similarly wrote about awakening from his dream of assimilation. See Chana C. Schütz and Hermann Simon, "Max Liebermann: German Painter and Berlin Jew," in *Max Liebermann: From Realism to Impressionism*, ed. Barbara Gilbert, exh. cat., Skirball Cultural Center (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 161–162.

3. Gershom Scholem, "On Jews and Judaism in Crisis," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*, ed. Werner J. Dannhauser (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 80.

4. David Sorkin, "Emancipation and Assimilation: Two Concepts and their Application to German-Jewish History," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990): 18.

5. Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 95n3.

6. Sorkin, "Emancipation and Assimilation," 21.

7. Scholem, "On Jews and Judaism in Crisis," 74, 81.

8. Scott Spector, "Forget assimilation: introducing subjectivity

were the guardians of the great German traditions: interpreters of Goethe, Kantian philosophers, Dürer scholars. Liebermann, who often cited Goethe and Kant in his writings, understood assimilation, until his final years, in a positive light, as integration into German society through education, refinement, and self-formation (*Bildung*). Like other Jewish liberals, Liebermann wanted, in David Sorkin's terms, "a *Deutschtum* that would get them political equality and social acceptance alongside a *Judentum* that would preserve their collective identity."⁶ For others, like Gershom Scholem, assimilation, a "turning toward the Germans," was more significantly a "process of estrangement" from Jewish roots.⁷

More recent treatments of these issues, sometimes called "post-assimilationist," follow other "post" theories in trying to move away from structuralist binaries, which assume a homogeneity and purity of category (the German and the Jew). A post-assimilationist approach treats the issue of assimilation through a more subtle reading of subjectivity that emphasizes the complexity of everyday practices and personal experiences.⁸ The efforts of historians, like Marion Kaplan, to understand the great range of ways in which Jews performed identities and preserved practices in Imperial Germany in personal terms (as "private decisions"), have had a strong impact on the understanding of German-Jewish assimilation. Concluding from her research into specific cases, Kaplan explains that, for German Jews in Imperial Germany, Judaism was "the myriad private and public ways in which one connected to tradition, family, and community."⁹ Because of the very public nature of his life in Imperial and Weimar Germany, Liebermann has often been enlisted by scholars as *the* representative of Jewish assimilation into German cultural life. He has been equated, in Peter Paret's words, with the "triumph and disaster of assimilation."¹⁰ Rather than treat Liebermann as the representative of a group, this essay will explore the complexity of Liebermann's individual experience of belonging in order to suggest that his sense of home, even before 1933, was never resolved; it was always familiar and strange, present and distant, real and imagined.

In 1932, Liebermann narrated the story of his youth for a radio program for children, which was recorded in his Berlin home. “What one experiences as a child,” we hear him tell his young listeners, “one does not so easily forget.” In the program, he reflects on his childhood home: “When I was ten or eleven years old, my parents moved into the house on the Pariser Platz, that is, next to the Brandenburg Gate...There they lived until they died. And where since 1893 I have lived again. And it is from where in this moment I am telling the story of my youth.”¹¹ The Liebermann house next to the Brandenburg gate was, on the one hand, the material home in which Liebermann was raised and to which he returned at age 47, and, on the other, a representation of the affluence and social position of this wealthy Jewish family.¹² Liebermann’s narration also suggests how the notion of being at home relates as much to time as to place. Home is as inextricably connected to memory as it is to physical location.

Like his house in the heart of Berlin, Liebermann’s spoken language played a significant role in his self-fashioning. Home and language are, of course, intimately connected, for it is in the home where language is shaped and grounded. In the radio recording, we hear Liebermann’s Berlin accent, which was often commented upon by his contemporaries, as were his witty remarks. Historian Peter Gay, whose own formation took place in Berlin’s German-Jewish world, remarked that Jews often prized verbal culture to gratify both their “traditional yearning for excellence in the world of words” and their “more recent, but no less exigent, love for the country of Goethe and Schiller.”¹³ This was certainly the case for Liebermann as evidenced not only by his many carefully crafted essays, but also by an episode that occurred in 1908. Poet and writer Richard Dehmel published a dialogue “Culture and Race,” which featured a German poet and a Jewish painter, who were modelled on Dehmel himself and his friend Max Liebermann. In the dialogue, the poet argues that art is a universal language, while the painter sees it as intimately connected to race. “Something like that,” the painter says of one of his own works, “can be made only by someone who is Jewish.”¹⁴ As Chana Schütz points out, Liebermann’s attitude toward his Jewishness “was more complex and ambivalent” than Dehmel’s dialogue suggests.¹⁵ Liebermann was, however, certainly concerned with how the fictional painter used language. In a letter to Dehmel, Liebermann wrote:

Let me use Berlin expressions, as much as you like, but neither incorrect German nor Jewish German. Since I’m a dyed-in-the-wool Jew, Jewish words in the German language make me angry; at most I may allow *nebbish* and *meshugge* because there are no German words for them.¹⁶

Liebermann certainly tried to keep his Germanness and his Jewishness comfortably separate in a world in which they were often mixed, a world in which language and accent signified social status and heritage. Such relations between language and personal identity are clarified (if also simplified) in Israel Joshua Singer’s 1943 novel *The Family Carnovsky*, which chronicles the failure of Jewish assimilation into German society through three generations of a Jewish family. David Carnovsky, to whom German “signified light, culture, Moses Mendelssohn, and the highest form of Jewishness,” quickly learned German and spoke it fluently soon after he and his wife Leah moved to Berlin from Melnitz, a small town in Poland. Even when making love, when

to German-Jewish history,” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 349–361. “Post-assimilationist” is also used to describe the attitude of turn-of-the-twentieth-century German Jews, who rejected the goal of assimilation.

9. Marion Kaplan, “Redefining Judaism in Imperial Germany: Practices, Mentalities, and Community,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002): 20–21. See also Till van Rahden, “Jews and the Ambivalences of Civil Society in Germany, 1800–1933: Assessment and Reassessment,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (December 2005): 1024–1047.

10. Peter Paret, “Triumph and Disaster of Assimilation: The Painter Max Liebermann,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15 (2008): 130–147.

11. A recording of the program is included on a CD in Regina Scheer, *Max Liebermann erzählt aus seinem Leben* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2011).

12. Birgit Verwiebe, “Das Haus am Pariser Platz,” in *Max Liebermann: Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Angelika Wesenberg, exh. cat., Nationalgalerie, Berlin (Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1997), 215. On Liebermann’s family, see Marion Deshmukh, *Max Liebermann: Modern Art and Modern Germany* (London: Ashgate, 2015), 34.

13. Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, 154. On Gay’s upbringing, see Gay, *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

14. Richard Dehmel, “Kultur und Rasse,” in *Betrachtungen über Gott und die Welt* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1926), 164.

15. Chana C. Schütz, “Max Liebermann as a ‘Jewish’ Painter: The Artist’s Reception in His Time,” in *Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1890–1918*, ed. Emily D. Bilski, exh. cat., The Jewish Museum, New York (Berkeley: University of California Press), 150.

16. Max Liebermann, letter to Richard Dehmel, February 24, 1908, as quoted and translated in Schütz, “Max Liebermann as a ‘Jewish’ Painter,” 150.

“Carnovsky forgot wisdom and respectability,” the one thing “he did not forget was his German.” Leah, however, “did not speak a good German. She made errors and interjected expressions from Melnitz and caused her husband great embarrassment.”¹⁷

Throughout his lifetime, Liebermann was, to a great degree, able to keep his Germanness and his Jewishness separate. He called himself an “inveterate Jew...who otherwise felt like a German.”¹⁸ As suggested by David Carnovsky’s advice to his son, “Be a Jew in the house and a man in the street,” the home often acted for assimilated Jews as a sphere separate from the public, where identities could be shifted.¹⁹ What is of most importance, for the historical Liebermann and the fictional Carnovsky, is the very idea of separation, that is, the ability to compartmentalize aspects of one’s identity. Liebermann, unlike some assimilated Jews of a younger generation, as we will see below, could articulate such a separation, because his sense of self was only infrequently contradicted by his experiences. He flourished as a Jew and a German in Berlin society. In the early 1870s, when he was only in his twenties, he was selling his paintings for high prices. In 1881, at the age of thirty-four, he won an honorable mention at the Paris Salon. From 1899 to 1911 he was president, and the leading force, of the Berlin Secession. And later, from 1920 to 1932, he served as the president of the Prussian Academy of the Arts.

Liebermann was certainly not blind to German anti-Semitism. How could he have been when many times in his life he was called out as a Jew? In 1880 in the Bavarian parliament, the representative of the Catholic Centre Party objected to his painting *Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* not due to the quality of the work or its modernism, but simply due to the fact of a Jew painting Jesus as a Jew.²⁰ He was attacked with anti-Semitic slurs due to his involvement in the French Centennial exhibition of 1889 and the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.²¹ In 1913, anti-Semitic publicist Philipp Stauff, referring to Liebermann and others, wrote of the “Jewish enemy within” the modern and cosmopolitan German art scene.²²

These anti-Semitic episodes, however, did not injure Liebermann’s sense of feeling at home, or at least Liebermann did not want to show such injury in his public utterances. In a short autobiographical statement of 1889, which mostly outlines his artistic achievements, he acknowledged his position as outsider but refused to give up his belief in classical liberalism: “Even though unfortunately I have often been reminded of the opposing [point of view], I believe that every citizen is equal before the law, as is stated in the constitution.”²³ In a second autobiographical sketch of 1910, he similarly addressed and, at the same time, dismissed anti-Semitic concerns. Liebermann’s Greek teacher at school, German nationalist and anti-Semite Paul De Lagarde, singled out the painter’s Semitic background: “he observed that due to the cut of my eyebrows I was descended from the Assyrian kings.”²⁴ But, in the same sentence, Liebermann denied the importance of such labels: “I only know that my grandfather and father were textile factory owners in Berlin.” He then goes on to describe his “bourgeois” lifestyle as indicated by “the house of my parents, where I spent my childhood, and it would be very difficult for me to live anywhere else.”²⁵

Liebermann’s established, bourgeois Berlin life is well illustrated in *The Artist’s Atelier*, | fig. 2 | a depiction of his studio, which he added to his Berlin

17. I. J. Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, trans. Joseph Singer (New York: Harrow Books, 1969), 11–14.

18. Max Liebermann, letter to Richard Dehmel, February 24, 1908, as quoted and translated in Schütz and Simon, “Max Liebermann: German Painter and Berlin Jew,” 151.

19. Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 7.

20. On this painting and its reception, see Martin Faass, ed., *Der Jesus-Skandal: Ein Liebermann-Bild im Kreuzfeuer der Kritik*, exh. cat., Liebermann-Villa am Wannsee (Berlin, 2009).

21. On the anti-Semitic treatment of Liebermann at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, see Beth Irwin Lewis, *Art for All?: The Collision of Modern Art and the Public in Late-Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 186–189; and Deshmukh, *Max Liebermann*, 11. On Liebermann and the St. Louis World’s Fair, see Deshmukh, *Max Liebermann*, 199.

22. Peter Paret, “Modernism and the ‘Alien Element’ in German Art,” in *German Encounters with Modernism, 1840–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 60. For the many anti-Semitic cartoons of Liebermann, see Immo Wagner-Douglas, “Realist, Secessionist, Jude und Patriarch—Liebermann in der Karikatur,” in *Max Liebermann: Jahrhundertwende*, 267–276.

23. Max Liebermann, “Autobiographisches,” in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922), 10: “Obgleich ich oft genug leider vom Gegenteil überzeugt wurde, bilde ich mir ein, daß—wie es in der Verfassung heißt—jede Staatsbürger vor dem Gesetze gleich ist.”

24. On De Lagarde’s anti-Semitism, see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974 [1961]), 61–64.

25. Liebermann, “Autobiographisches,” 9–10.



Figure 2. Max Liebermann, *The Artist's Atelier*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 68.5 × 82 cm. Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. Photo Credit: HIP/Art Resource, NY.

home next to the Brandenburg Gate. Liebermann's atelier was not constructed without controversy. Designed by architect Hans Grisebach in 1894, the atelier, which extended through the roof of the house, was only completed in 1898 after legal challenges and modifications. The glass and steel design of the addition (described by the Emperor Wilhelm II as "hideous") was considered by some local officials an insult to the Neoclassicism of the Pariser Platz. The atelier was a multi-purpose space. It acted as the room where Liebermann greeted guests, where he hung important works from his collection of paintings, where many celebrated Berliners sat for their portraits, and where his daughter Käthe hosted parties for prominent young Berliners.²⁶ Liebermann's atelier was thus more than his workspace. It was also a sign of his assimilated daily life and of the central place he and his family held in Berlin social and artistic circles.

In *The Artist's Atelier*, the modernity of the arched windows and the contemporary art on the wall (Manet and Liebermann's) contrasts with the bourgeois furnishings. The colourful carpet, the lounging women (Liebermann's wife Martha and their daughter Käthe) on the comfortable sofa, and the sleeping dachshund on the chair are all signs of the painter and his family's middle-class lifestyle.²⁷ Liebermann, whose image appears in the background in a mirror reflection, depicts himself at home in and detached from this world of affluence, a comfortable and private space where the women are at leisure to read and Liebermann to work. The painting thus shows his imagined ideal representation of home. At the same time, its visible, impressionist brushwork and the depiction of his working utensils on the table in the foreground stake a claim to a painterly style, one that goes back to Velázquez. Indeed, *Las Meninas* was likely the model for the painting: the back of the canvas on the left, the depiction of an artist at work, the light streaming in from the right, the paintings on the walls (including Liebermann's copy after Velázquez's *Portrait*

26. On Liebermann's atelier, see Stephan Pucks, "Hier wohnte und wirkte Max Liebermann": Die Stadtwohnung des Künstlers am Pariser Platz und sein Landhaus am Wannsee, in *Eine Liebe zu Berlin: Künstlersalon und Gartenatelier von Max Liebermann*, ed. Christoph Holz (Munich: Bayerische Vereinsbank, 1995), 21–22.

27. Matthias Eberle, *Max Liebermann, 1847–1935: Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, 2 vols. (Munich: Hirmer, 1996), 2: 602.

of *Innocent x*), and the mirror reflection (Liebermann's self-portrait) make for a strong comparison with Velázquez's work.²⁸ In this painting, his home and his impressionist style come together in terms of a sense of belonging, both to Berlin society and to a painterly tradition. At the same time, his reflected image suggests he sees himself, to a certain degree, somewhat apart, as an active observer of this world.

Liebermann's beliefs in classical liberalism and in Jewish assimilation in Berlin society held firm throughout the 1920s. Such ideals are evident in his portraits of some 150 sitters, most of whom came from the cultured and upper middle classes, and many of whom sat for their portraits in the atelier in his Berlin home. | **fig. 3** | After World War I, prominent Jews became a large part of his clientele. They likely went to him, because he held an important place in German society and did not deny his Judaism.²⁹ What is clear in these portraits is that Liebermann depicts his Jewish sitters no differently than his non-Jewish clients. Formulaic as they often are, his portraits rarely specify in any way the sitter's location, profession, or religion. Status is only indicated through dress and pose, and, as importantly, through the style and signature of Germany's most famous painter.

Liebermann's self-portraits, however, are of a very different nature. He often depicts himself in his profession as painter and in a particular location, the roof-top studio in his Pariser Platz home. | **fig. 4** | There was an exponential increase in the number of self-portraits Liebermann executed beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century. Before 1902, he painted two self-portraits; in 1902, two more; and from 1908 (from age 61) until his death, an incredible sixty-eight, usually at least one per year and sometimes three to five.³⁰ Liebermann's frequent turn to his own image in later life is certainly overdetermined. His self-portraits could be read as an aging artist's engagement with his own mortality, as signs of his social status in Berlin society, or as declarations of his continued presence in an art world in which he was no longer at the cutting edge. I would, however, like to read them in terms of his comfort and discomfort of feeling at home, that is, as reflections on the challenges he faced as an individual with discrete identities—Jew, German, and realist painter—especially after the turn of the twentieth century when his critical reception often centred on his membership in a group.

Liebermann's increased attention to his own image began in the first decade of the century when he was, as Liebermann scholar Marion Deshmukh rightly claims, "at the height of his fame and cultural prominence."³¹ His distinction as an artist is evidenced by the fact that in 1902 the Uffizi requested a contribution from him to its celebrated collection of artists' self-portraits, a commission that seems to have spurred Liebermann on to engage more and more with his own image. He was also recognized as a leading contemporary artist by the selection of twenty of his paintings for the 1906 *Jahrhundertausstellung deutscher Kunst* (Centennial Exhibition of German Art), an important exhibition, held at the National Gallery in Berlin.³² The exhibition's significance, as Angelika Wesenberg explains, lay in how it made impressionism "visible as the final word" in the development of nineteenth-century art.³³

The modernist narrative promoted by the exhibition organizers, including Hugo von Tschudi and Alfred Lichtwark, did not, however, go unchallenged

28. On Liebermann's *Artist's Atelier* as a modern version of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and on Liebermann's art theory related to the painterly tradition, see Mitchell B. Frank, "Painterly Thought: Max Liebermann and the Idea in Art," *RACAR* 37, no. 2 (2012): 51–54.

29. Margreet Nouwen, "Vom 'Apostel des Häßlichen' zum Porträtmaler des Bürgertums," in *Max Liebermann: Jahrhundertwende*, 244.

30. The number of self-portraits is based on Eberle's catalogue raisonné, *Max Liebermann, 1847–1935*. It should be noted that Liebermann also made self-portraits in other media (drawings and etchings). On the increase in his self-portraits, see Erich Hancke, *Max Liebermann: Sein Leben und Seine Werke* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1914), 472.

31. Deshmukh, *Max Liebermann*, 257.

32. The only living artists with more paintings than Liebermann in the exhibition were Hans Thoma and Wilhelm Trübner. See *Ausstellung deutscher Kunst aus der Zeit von 1775–1885 in der königlichen Nationalgalerie, Berlin 1906*, 2 vols. (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1906).

33. Angelika Wesenberg, "Impressionismus und 'Deutsche Jahrhundert-Ausstellung Berlin 1906,'" in *Manet bis Van Gogh: Hugo von Tschudi und der Kampf um die Moderne*, ed. Johann Georg Prinz von Hohenzollern and Peter-Klaus Schuster, exh. cat., Berlin, National Gallery (Munich: Prestel, 1996), 364.

Figure 3. Max Liebermann, *The Poet Richard Dehmel*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 115 × 92 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Inv. no. 1592. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur/Hamburger Kunsthalle/Elke Walford/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 4. Max Liebermann, *Self-Portrait*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 112 × 92.5 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Inv. no. 1590. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur/Hamburger Kunsthalle/Elke Walford/Art Resource, NY.



34. Thomas W. Gaehtgens, "Le Cas Böcklin de Julius Meier-Graefe et les débats sur l'art moderne dans l'Empire allemand," in *De L'Allemagne: De Friedrich à Beckmann*, ed. Sébastien Allard et Danièle Cohn (Paris: Hazan, 2013), 210.

35. Henry Thode, *Böcklin und Thoma: Acht Vorträge über neu-deutsche Malerei* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1905), 138. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin und die Lehre von den Einheiten* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1905).

36. Thode, *Böcklin und Thoma*, 101: "Liebermann konnte gerade so gut in Holland oder in Frankreich arbeiten und zu Hause sein, etwas ausgesprochen Deutsches ist bei ihm nicht vorhanden."

37. Liebermann, "Der Fall Thode," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 236–37.

38. Liebermann, "Der Fall Thode," 238. This dispute continued with a text by Jewish art critic Lothar Brieger-Wasservogel, who defended Thode and condemned Liebermann. See Brieger-Wasservogel, *Der Fall Liebermann: Über das Virtuositentum in der bildenden Kunst* (Stuttgart: Schrecker & Schroeder, 1906).

39. Artur Seeman, "Ein Anti-Böcklin," *Kunstchronik* 16, no. 32 (September 1, 1905): 516.

40. Wilhelm Bode, "Max Liebermann zu seinem sechzigsten Geburtstag," *Kunst und Künstler* 5 (1907): 382.

41. Bode, "Max Liebermann," 382, 386.

42. Gustav Pauli, *Max Liebermann* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1911), 39–40: "Deutsch sind nicht nur der kühne, spekulative Gedanke, die ahnungs-volle Mystik und die schwärmende Gefühlsseligkeit. Deutsch ist auch die Freude am Objekte, deutsch ist der zähe Wille, und deutsch ist jene Schamhaftigkeit, die ein starkes Gefühl verbirgt, indem sie es meistert. Zu diesen Deutschen dürfen wir getrost und dankbar Max Liebermann rechnen. Daß er ein Jude ist und sich mit Stolz als den Sohn einer alten reinen Rasse fühlt, kommt für uns, die wir vor seinen Bildern stehen, nur wenig in Betracht, denn diese Bilder reden unsre Muttersprache..." On Liebermann's impressionist style as German, see also Karl Scheffler, "Liebermann als Zeichner," *Kunst und Künstler* 10 (1912): 345; Hans Rosenhagen, *Max Liebermann* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1900), 76.

43. Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1907), 270.

in the first decade of the century, and Liebermann played an important role in these disputes, which consistently had nation and race at their core. The debate surrounding Julius Meier-Graefe's 1905 *Der Fall Böcklin* (*The Case of Böcklin*) "divided a nation," as Thomas Gaehtgens put it, between modernists and traditionalists.³⁴ In a reply to Meier-Graefe's critique of Böcklin's classically inspired landscapes as lacking tonal relationships and formal unity, art historian Henry Thode maintained Böcklin's importance on the basis that he worked from imagination and memory like all great German artists. He also belittled Liebermann and the impressionists, who merely paint "what is fleeting in the appearance of light" and take "that for a work of art."³⁵ Using the trope of the wandering Jew, he suggested that Liebermann could feel equally at home in Holland or in France. "There is nothing," Thode claimed, "decidedly German in him."³⁶ In a strongly worded reply, Liebermann took issue with Thode's claim that impressionism was put on display "by a small circle of Berliners out of business considerations" and accused him of using "the rusted weapons taken from the armory of the anti-Semites."³⁷ Just as importantly, he argued against Thode's narrow definition of German art as only that which is imaginative and spiritual in nature.³⁸

Thode's and Liebermann's positions were described by a contemporary writer as merely different sensibilities, but Liebermann's essay suggests that he took these attacks personally.³⁹ The restrictions Thode imposed on Germanness excluded Liebermann and his art from the nation in which he was born. Liebermann's champions were concurrently arguing for an expansion of German national values beyond the vague nineteenth-century notion of spirituality or inwardness. In a 1906 essay on Liebermann, Wilhelm von Bode, General Director of the Prussian collections in Berlin, pointed out that contemporary art is no longer national, but transnational. With impressionism's arrival in Germany, "no reasonable person," Bode claimed, can call Liebermann "a stranger among German artists."⁴⁰ His paintings have an "intimacy of feeling, which is German in the best sense."⁴¹ Gustav Pauli, director of the Bremen museum, concurred with Bode. If German art is not limited to "bold, speculative thought" and "suspicious mysticism," but also includes, among other things, "the joy of objects," then Liebermann can be "counted among German artists." Pauli also considered Liebermann's Jewish heritage as "of little consideration for us who stand before his pictures, for these pictures speak our native language."⁴²

While Liebermann's champions argued for a reading of his painting in German terms, others saw it as explicitly Jewish. Liebermann's realism, which "emanates from purely sensual conditions," according to anti-Semitic medievalist Josef Strzygowski's 1907 study of modern art, "lies in race."⁴³ A year earlier, he had stated that "Modern Jewish art, with Liebermann at the head," is "absolutely national" in its development of "this racial characteristic [the Jewish imitation of reality]," and that the Zionist movement should recognize this fact.⁴⁴ Indeed, some Zionists had already done just that. In 1903, Martin Buber edited a volume *Juedische Kuenstler* (*Jewish Artists*) with the stated goal "to show what artistic skills there are in Judaism today."⁴⁵ In a chapter on Liebermann, Georg Hermann distinguished the artist from his German counterparts by his realism, that is, by having, like other Jewish artists, "an intimate, almost

44. Adolf Bauer and Josef Strzygowski, "Eine Alexandrische Weltchronik," *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse* 51 (1906): 185, as quoted and translated in Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 19.

45. Martin Buber, "Introduction," in *Juedische Kuenstler*, ed. Martin Buber (Berlin: Juedischer Verlag, 1903), n.p.: "Es soll zeigen, was an bildnerischen Fähigkeiten im heutigen Judentum da ist."

46. Georg Hermann, "Max Liebermann," in *Juedische Kuenstler*, 116: "...eine so innige, schier brünstige Naturliebe, einen so sensiblen Natursinn, und vor allem eine so außerordentliche Naturfrische finden." Margaret Olin has convincingly argued that Jewish art was often defined at this time in perceptual terms. See Olin, *The Nation without Art*, 126.

47. Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 2nd ed. (Munich: R. Piper, 1915), 2; 325: "Ihm [Liebermann] hat es [das Judentum] immer nur geholfen...Der Jude ist Realist aus Notwehr....Nimm das, was du vor dir hast. Mach es allein. Du weißt, was du wert bist...Er ist ein glänzender Organisator seiner selbst, sieht immer nur die Welt von der Stelle, wo er steht." This passage is also discussed in Schütz, "Max Liebermann as a 'Jewish' Artist," 158–159.

48. On the myth of the Jew as restless and clever, see Gay, *Freud, Jews and other Germans*, 101.

49. Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 2: 325–326: "Die Judentheorie...konnte helfen. Als Weltgedanke wird sie zum Fluch und zerstört selbst den Vorteil für die Juden. Die 'Verjudung' wird den Völkern, denen ursprünglich der Jude Mitarbeiter war, ebenso verderblich wie ihm selbst. Unter Verjudung wird natürlich nicht die Rassenmischung verstanden."

50. Paret, "The Triumph and Disaster of Assimilation," 135.

51. Moritz Goldstein, "Deutsch-jüdischer Parnas," *Der Kunstwart* 25, no. 11 (March, 1912), 238, as translated in Steven E. Aschheim, "1912: The publication of Moritz Goldstein's 'The German-Jewish Parnassus,'" in *The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture*, 1096–1996, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 299. Goldstein's essay provoked many replies, which were published in *Der Kunstwart*.

ferent love of nature, a sensitive sense of nature, and, above all, an extraordinarily natural freshness."⁴⁶

The link between Liebermann's realism and Judaism was also emphasized by modernist art historian Julius Meier-Graefe in a remarkable passage in the second edition (1915) of his history of modern art. Liebermann's Judaism "has always only helped him," he wrote. "The Jew is a realist out of self-defence... Take what you have in front of you. Do it alone. You know what you are worth... [The Jew] is a brilliant organizer of himself, who always sees the world from where he stands."⁴⁷ Meier-Graefe, who may have been thinking as much of his own social and cultural position as Liebermann's, uses a somewhat clichéd representation of Jewish restlessness and cleverness to characterize the painter.⁴⁸ The problem for Jewish artists, Meier-Graefe concludes, is that realism is no longer a Jewish doctrine, but has become a "world idea." As such, "it becomes a curse and destroys even the advantage for the Jews. The 'Judaization' becomes just as pernicious to the people, who were originally collaborators with the Jews, as to the Jew himself. With Judaization, racial mixing is, of course, not understood."⁴⁹

Meier-Graefe's recognition of the problem, or even the impossibility, of assimilation occurred when, as Peter Paret claims, "a new anti-Semitism openly based on race" was on the rise.⁵⁰ At this time, some assimilated Jews were feeling more and more isolated from German society. In 1912, literary scholar and Germanist Moritz Goldstein famously called for a Jewish disengagement from German culture.⁵¹ He referred to important recent artistic contributions by Jews, including Liebermann's modernist painting: "We may call this German; others call it Jewish ... If they have to acknowledge the achievement, they do so with reservations, and they wish we achieved less."⁵² Novelist Jakob Wassermann similarly faced challenges in coming to terms with German assimilation. Like Liebermann, Wassermann considered himself German: his mother tongue was German; he attended a German school; and the domestic arrangements of his parents' home "approached those of our non-Jewish neighbors."⁵³ He nevertheless writes of the liminal space he found himself in when he decided for "secession" from the Jews. The Germans "neither received nor accepted me ... Herewith the oppressive weight of my problem began to make itself felt."⁵⁴ Liebermann had experienced progress in the legal and social status of Jews in German society from the mid nineteenth century to emancipation in 1871, from being on the margins to the possibility of being in the social centre. Wassermann and Goldstein were also told that Jews had the same rights of all citizens; they were equal before the law. But their social experience instructed them otherwise. In Singer's *The Family Carnovsky*, Jewish scholar Reb Ephraim tells David Carnovsky that "German Jews wanted to be Jews in the house and gentiles in the street but life turned this ambition completely topsy-turvy. The fact is that we have become gentiles in the house and Jews in the street."⁵⁵

Because of his status as representative of Jewish assimilation, Liebermann has been presented by some scholars as naïve, as unwilling to see the world as it was, blinded by a "reverence for *Bildung*" and by his "uncritical...bourgeois ideology," which kept art and politics separate.⁵⁶ Evidence often cited for Liebermann's uncritical stance is an episode in 1927 when a National Socialist

52. Moritz Goldstein, "Deutsch-jüdischer Parnaß," 286: "Wir mögen das deutsch nennen, die andern nennen es jüdisch... und wenn sie schon die Leistung — mit Vorbehalten — anerkennen müssen, sie wünschten, wir leisteten weniger." On his later recollections on the controversy, see Goldstein, "German Jewry's Dilemma: The Story of a Provocative Essay," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 2, no. 1 (1957): 246.

53. Jacob Wassermann, *My Life as German and Jew*, trans. S. N. Brainin (New York: Coward-McCann, 1933), 16–17. The German edition was published in 1921.

54. Jacob Wassermann, *My Life as German and Jew*, 55.

55. Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, 130.

56. Mason Klein, "Gentleman's Agreement: Belief and Disillusionment in the Art of Max Liebermann," in *Max Liebermann: From Realism to Impressionism*, 175.

57. Lise Leibholz, "Besuch bei Max Liebermann," in C.-V. *Zeitung* (July 15, 1927): 339, as quoted in Schütz, "Max Lieberman as a 'Jewish' Painter," 150.

58. A copy of the book jacket is available on the website of the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin: <https://heartfield.adk.de/node/5193> (viewed June 15, 2020).

59. Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (Pasadena, CA: Published by the Author, 1925), 7. For critiques, from the politically left and right, of Liebermann's portrait of Hindenburg, see Deshmukh, *Max Liebermann*, 317–19.

60. Max Osborne, "Akademie und Secession in Berlin," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 34 (1931): 200. On Nussbaum's painting, see Eva Berger et al., *Felix Nussbaum: Art Defamed, Art in Exile, Art in Resistance, A Biography*, ed. Karl Georg Kaster, trans. Eileen Martin (Bramsche, Germany: Rasch, 1997), 108–114.

61. Hancke, *Max Liebermann*, 472.

62. Liebermann, "Die Phantasie in der Malerei," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 42: "Wir malen nicht die Natur, wie sie ist, sondern wie sie uns erscheint, d. h. wir malen aus dem Gedächtnis. Das Modell kann der Maler nicht abmalen, sondern nur benutzen, es kann sein Gedächtnis unterstützen, wie etwa der Souffleur den Schauspieler unterstützt."

paper called it a scandal that a Jew should paint a portrait of German President Paul von Hindenburg. | **fig. 5** | Liebermann replied: "After all, I am only a painter, and a Jew can surely be that, too."⁵⁷ Like the radical right, the socialist left took issue with this painting. A photograph similar to figure five, of Liebermann with his Hindenburg portrait in his Pariser Platz studio, was reproduced on the back of the jacket cover designed by Dadaist John Heartfield for *Der Goldene Kette*, the German translation of Upton Sinclair's *Mammonart*, published in 1928 by the leftist Malik press.⁵⁸ For those with socialist or communist leanings, it was easy to see Liebermann's painting as taking, in Sinclair's words, "the path to honor and success...through the service and glorification of the ruling classes."⁵⁹ German-Jewish painter Felix Nussbaum's 1931 *The Mad Square* | **fig. 6** | similarly portrays Liebermann as a member of the ruling cultural class without a care for the crumbling conditions of the present day. In the painting, the academic establishment parades into the Prussian Academy of Art past a younger generation of artists, including Nussbaum, who stand outside with their paintings, which have been rejected for the annual exhibition. In the background, Liebermann, who was president of the Academy at the time, paints on the roof of his Pariser Platz home (as if in his studio). Again, Liebermann's house becomes a public symbol of his social and political position. But here, it is in ruins. "Zeus-Liebermann," as Max Osborne called him in a contemporary review of Nussbaum's painting, has his back turned to the crowd, oblivious to the fact that his world of classical liberalism was falling to pieces around him.⁶⁰ Importantly, Nussbaum portrays Liebermann in the act of painting a self-portrait, a sign for Nussbaum of Liebermann's self-absorption and distance from the political realities of his day.

Liebermann's preoccupation with self-portraiture from the first decade of the twentieth century, when the Jewish Question was becoming more and more heated, may suggest, as Nussbaum's painting implies, a disengagement of his art from politics. But involvement and disengagement are not necessarily mutually exclusive. And Liebermann's fixation on his self-image may also suggest his struggles with belonging and estrangement, that is, his comfort in and detachment from a sense of home. His approach to self-portraiture certainly involved proximity and distance. We know from photographs of him in his studio in his Berlin house, | **fig. 7** | the setting for many of his self-portraits, and from Erich Hancke's 1914 biography, that Liebermann always used a mirror and sometimes two when painting his reflection or his double-reflection.⁶¹ Liebermann's act of painting a self-portrait, looking back and forth between his image in the mirror and on the canvas, confirms one of his theoretical maxims:

We do not paint nature as it is, but as it appears to us, that is, we paint from memory. The painter cannot portray the model but can only use it; it can support his memory, like the prompter supports the actor.⁶²

In the self-portraits, the mirror image acts as the support and establishes a distance between Liebermann as painter and model, two roles he negotiates in his creative process and in the painted product.

Liebermann was not the only turn-of-the-century thinker to question a naïve understanding of realist painting as capturing "nature as it is." In his *Philosophy of Money* (1900), Georg Simmel states that realist painting may attempt to



Figure 5. Max Liebermann in his Atelier at Pariser Platz 6 with his portrait of Paul von Hindenburg, ca. 1927. Digital Picture Archives of the German Federal Archives, picture no. 146-1988-100-20.

Figure 6 (above). Felix Nussbaum, *The Mad Square*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 97 × 195.5 cm. Berlinische Galerie, Berlin. Inv. BG-M 8/75. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur/Berlinische Galerie/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 7. Max Liebermann with a Self-Portrait in his Pariser Platz Studio, Berlin, ca. 1930. Photo: Fritz Eschen. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 8. Max Liebermann, *Self-Portrait with Brush*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 72,50 × 60,00 cm. Inv.Nr.: GEM 92/15, © Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin. Photo: Michael Setzpfandt, Berlin.



Figure 9 (opposite, left). Max Liebermann, *Self-Portrait in a Suit*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 94 × 73.7 cm. Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover, Inv. no. KM 1918,10. Photo Credit: HIP/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 10 (opposite, right). Max Liebermann, *Self-portrait in a Painter's Smock*, ca. 1916. Oil on canvas, 113.5 × 85 cm. Neue Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung, Munich, Inv. no. 12.421. Photo Credit: bpk Bildagentur/ Neue Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich/Art Resource, NY.

63. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 473.

64. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 145, 148.

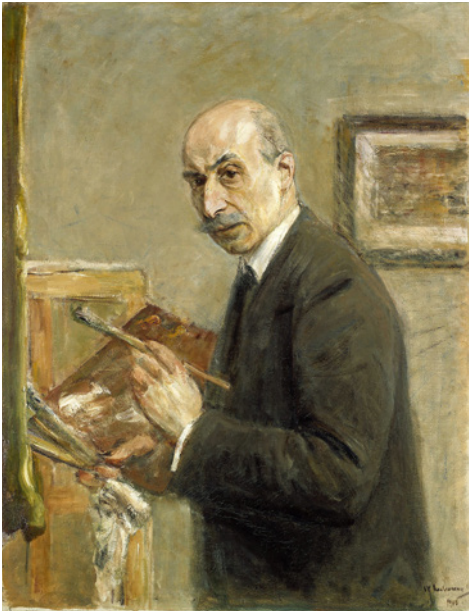
65. Paret and Klein have used the term "detachment" to describe Liebermann's approach to painting. See Paret, *The Berlin Secession* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 44, cited and discussed in Klein, "Gentleman's Agreement," 168–169.

66. Rembrandt's reputation was on the rise in Germany in the late nineteenth century, and Julius Langbehn's best-seller *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) made him the yardstick for all things German, especially notions of inwardness and spirituality. See Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, 116–122. German-Jewish émigré art historian Jakob Rosenberg would later write about Rembrandt's self-portraits: "Rembrandt seems to have felt that he had to know himself if he wished to penetrate the problem of man's inner life." See Jakob Rosenberg, *Rembrandt: Life and Work*, rev. ed. (London: Phaidon, 1964 [1948]), 37.

67. Walter J. Friedlaender, *Max Liebermann* (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, n.d. [1924]), 118; Karl Scheffler, *Max Liebermann*, 4th ed. (Munich:

overcome "the distance between us and reality," but in the end it "conforms to this basic principle of all art: to bring us closer to things by placing them at a distance from us."⁶³ Simmel would later describe in similar terms how the stranger, exemplified by the Jew, approaches the world through "a particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement." The problem for the stranger's integration into society, Simmel believed, was that "strangers are not really perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain type."⁶⁴ Wilhelm Bode may have written in 1907 that "no reasonable person" can call Liebermann "a stranger among German artists," but it seems difficult to reconcile this position with Liebermann's critical reception from the turn of the twentieth century, which consistently claimed him as German or non-German or Jew, that is, as a type rather than an individual. Liebermann's turn to self-portraiture at this time can be interpreted in this context as a repeated claim to his individuality, represented through a process of close looking and stepping back.⁶⁵

Liebermann's self-portraits were often read by his contemporaries not in terms of the depth of self-examination expected in the genre and often associated with Rembrandt's self-portraits, but in terms of Liebermann's reputation as a realist painter.⁶⁶ Walter J. Friedlaender wrote that his self-portraits do not have the "unsettling and driving tension" of portraiture, and Karl Scheffler thought they "were better pictures than portraits, because he is a better painter than psychologist."⁶⁷ Liebermann's self-portraits, however, involved not only his observing himself, but also his being observed, a fundamental aspect of his very public identity. Liebermann's image, "a public head" as it has been recently called, was easily recognizable, like his well-known home next to the Brandenburg Gate. Published photographs and caricatures of him were in frequent circulation.⁶⁸ His self-portraits thus added to his public persona. They



R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1922), 172. More recently, Hermann Kunisch has similarly suggested that Liebermann's self-portraits represent "a cultivated bourgeoisie" as "normalcy without a claim of the extraordinary, the extravagant." Hermann Kunisch, "Max Liebermanns Selbstbildnisse," *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz* 24, no. 7 (1987): 366–367. On Liebermann's self-portraits, see also Christine Hopfengart, "Selbstbeobachtung und Repräsentation: Zu den Selbstbildnissen von Max Liebermann," in *Nichts trägt weniger als der Schein: Max Liebermann der deutsche Impressionist*, ed. Dorothee Hansen, exh. cat., Bremen Kunsthalle (Bremen: Bremer Kunsthalle, 1995), 33–43; and Martin Faass, "Mit Weste und Einstecktuch: Liebermanns Selbstbildnisse," in *Ein öffentlicher Kopf: Max Liebermann in Bildnissen, Fotografien und Karikaturen*, ed. Martin Faass, exh. cat., Liebermann-Villa am Wannsee (Berlin: Max Liebermann-Gesellschaft, 2009), 15–42.

68. See *Ein öffentlicher Kopf: Max Liebermann in Bildnissen, Fotografien und Karikaturen*.

69. Most of Liebermann's self-portraits were either commissioned by museums or purchased by museums or private collectors soon after completion. For their provenance, see Eberle, *Max Liebermann*.

70. Alfred Lichtwark, letter to Max Liebermann, May 30, 1910, in *Alfred Lichtwark Briefe an Max*

may have been made in the intimacy of the studio in his home, but they were intended to be seen by others in galleries and private collections.⁶⁹

In Liebermann's approximately seventy painted self-portraits after 1902, there are only a few in which the painter portrays himself looking at the canvas, absorbed in his work. In the majority, he depicts himself with an outward gaze. In some, he fashions himself for his audience: he looks to the viewer, as he does in his Hamburg self-portrait (fig. 4), with the self-assurance and confidence of a successful artist. Hamburg Kunsthalle director Alfred Lichtwark, who commissioned the work, described the "solid monumental form" of this self-portrait as having the same sense of resignation found in Johann Gottfried Schadow's bust of Goethe.⁷⁰ For Lichtwark, Liebermann portrays himself as resigned to his very public life as a well-established painter. Liebermann confidently leans back slightly, holding a cigarette in one hand with the other in his pocket, at ease both in his home studio and in his position as a central player in the world of modern art.

In most of Liebermann's self-portraits, however, he is depicted observing himself in a mirror. | figs. 8–10 | He is attempting to see himself from a distance as another. These paintings, more painterly in style and more self-probing in their gaze, reveal a meditative and pensive older artist. The ease that one senses in the Hamburg self-portrait has given way to a more critical self-analysis. In these self-portraits, where the private and public meet, where introspection and self-presentation intersect, Liebermann could meditate on questions so relevant to his sense of self and feeling at home: How can I maintain my individuality in a world in which I am constantly defined by types? How can I be a German artist when I paint in an ostensibly French painterly tradition? How can I be a Jew when I work in a world of visual representation that was for so long denied by Jewish tradition? Liebermann's many self-portraits from

age sixty onwards, his repetitive and obsessive act of looking at himself, suggest what was both close and far, familiar and strange in his position as German-Jewish painter.

After 1933, it was no longer possible for Liebermann to question or reflect on his place in German society in the same way. He resigned from the Prussian Academy of Arts, because, as he stated, “my point of view is no longer valid.”⁷¹ And, as we have seen, he renounced his “dream of assimilation.” That Liebermann could go from feeling at home to feeling not at home reminds us that the concept of home is as imagined as it is material. And, as importantly, it has temporal and memorial components. Home can be something different in one’s youth than in one’s adulthood, under a democracy and under a dictatorship, in present experience and remembered. In other words, home is constructed by the individual and the society at large. For Liebermann, changes to the latter resulted in a feeling of loss, a sense that something he had cherished was being taken away. But Liebermann’s sense of belonging was, perhaps, always tenuous. That he described his assimilated life as a dream suggests that he recognized the elusive quality of home. Jacob Wassermann, in his *Life as German and Jew*, similarly found it difficult to describe the phenomenon: “One’s knowledge of home is hard to formulate in words. Undeniably it resembles one’s knowledge of one’s mother. One absorbs it not only through the senses and the atmosphere, but in a mystical and metaphysical manner also.”⁷²

Home as one’s mother, that is, a place of comfort, a house one never leaves (fig. 1). Home as a memory of one’s youth. Home as a dream or a representation of a place one has constructed (fig. 2). Home as one’s body (figs. 4 and 8–10). Liebermann’s life and work as a German Jew makes us reflect on these varied and ambivalent understandings of home. ¶

Liebermann, ed. Carl Schellenberg (Hamburg: Johann Trautmann, 1947), 249: “Mir steht es als ganz feste, monumentale Form vor Augen, unauflöslich, unverrückbar.... Es ist etwas darin von dem, was in Goethes Kopf nur Schadow gepackt hat, Resignation.”

71. Max Liebermann, *Vossische Zeitung*, 219 (May 9, 1933): 2, as quoted and translated in Schütz and Simon, “Max Liebermann: German Painter and Berlin Jew,” 161.

72. Wassermann, *My Life as German and Jew*, 238.