

Preface

"Image of His Soul" – Max Liebermann, Works on Paper is yet another exhibition in a series directly related to artists included in the Hecht Museum's permanent collection. Two main groups make up this collection: French art and Jewish art from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The second group – Jewish art – features four works by Max Liebermann: a lithograph – *Self-portrait*; and three drawings – *Polo players on Horseback*; *Woman and a Small Child on a Bench*; *Woman and Three Children*.

Besides Liebermann's self-portrait the Hecht collection features a self-portrait by Jozef Israels and portraits of Theodor Herzl, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein by Hermann Struck. The Zionist art collector Dr. Reuben Hecht took pride in the figures depicted in these portraits, as all represent Jews who had earned a worldwide reputation, pointing to the achievements of the Jewish people in their respective professions. It was only natural that he should add these works to his collection.

The four works by Liebermann mentioned above reflect Hecht's interest in and appreciation of the artist's work. Hecht was obviously proud of the fact that Liebermann, the Jewish artist, had garnered acclaim in his lifetime and been appointed President of the Prussian Academy of Art. Hecht's admiration for the Impressionists, who had set off a revolution in the arts, was clearly extended to Liebermann, an important German Impressionist painter.

Hecht could easily identify with Liebermann, as they shared a similar family background: both came from affluent German-Jewish families of industrialists and businessmen deeply entrenched in German culture (on the Hecht family, see Zvi Herman, *The River and the Grain*, Tel Aviv, 1989; Moshe Shamir, *Reuben Hecht Vision and Fulfillment*, Tel Aviv, 1945). Their families admired German culture and defined themselves as "Germans of the Mosaic faith". Whereas Hecht turned away from family tradition, forging his proud Jewish identity in his youth and joining Zionist activities in the 1920s while he was a student at the University of Munich, Liebermann was disabused of the deceptive fusion with the German nation and culture only late in life, when the Nazis seized power and his work was banned. Nor did Liebermann identify with the Zionist idea and he never bothered to visit Israel. Nevertheless he influenced many Jewish artists who immigrated from Germany and who chose to be creative in Israel.

The expression *"Image of His Soul"* that is part of the exhibition title is a quote from an introduction that Liebermann wrote about the artist Jozef Israels for the series *Jewish*

Painters (Arieh Navon and Lea Goldberg [eds.], Vol. 3, *Jozef Israels*, Tel Aviv, 1945, p. 6). It speaks eloquently for Liebermann as well:

Israels' works are what every artist's works should be: the image of his soul. He paints plainly, informally, not like "a famous painter". Simplicity is his style. He does not use two words where one would suffice. The beautiful line is typical of his work, which is decorative though not a décor. It seems to me that what he could not clearly express, wasn't clear in his mind either, to use the words of a Frenchman whose name I forgot.

We wish to thank Sorin Heller, the exhibition curator, the Israel Museum, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Haifa Museum of Art, Bar David Museum of Jewish Art in Kibbutz Baram and the private collectors who lent works to the exhibition.

Ofra Rimon
Museum Director and Curator