Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Max Seliger (Bublitz 1865 - Leipzig 1920)

Three Children Drawing

Black chalk on light brown paper.
Signed and dated M. Seliger 1910 at the lower left.
The old mount embossed with the artist's circular monogram.
330 x 252 mm. (13 x 9 7/8 in.) [sheet]

Artist description:

Born in Bublitz in Pomerania (now Bobolice in Poland), Max Seliger was active as a painter, decorator, mosaicist and lithographer. He remains little known outside of Berlin and Leipzig, where he worked for most of his life, and there appear to have been no monographs or exhibitions dedicated to the artist. Early in his career, in 1893, Seliger received the commission for what is probably his best-known work; the decoration of the façade of the German pavilion, the Deutsches Haus, at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Another significant public commission he earned was for a series of mural paintings to decorate the former Royal Gymnasium, or school, in the town of Wurzen in Saxony. Seliger also established a particular reputation as a designer of mosaic decorations. These include a series of mosaics painted for the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin in 1903-1904, while on a more intimate scale is his mosaic on the tomb of his young nephew Fritz Dernburg in the Berlin cemetery of Grunewald, which was completed in 1895.

A member of the Deutscher Künstlerbund, Seliger also worked as an illustrator and graphic artist, providing a design for the title page of the December 1898 issue of the Kunstgewerbeblatt, depicting Dürer's Self-Portrait Adored by the Personification of Art. His most significant and influential role, however, seems to have been as a teacher. Between 1901 and his death in 1920 Seliger served as the director of the Königliche Akademie für graphische Kunst and Buchgewerbe (the Royal Academy of Graphic Arts and Printing) in Leipzig, where painting and drawing were taught alongside bookbinding, lettering, typography and printing techniques. In 1920 his book Kunstbetrachtung und Naturgenuss (Viewing Art and Enjoying Nature) was published.

As part of his teaching, Seliger was interested in the relationship between an artist's handwriting and the way in which he drew, and to this end asked numerous artists of his day to provide him with examples of both their writing and drawing on a single sheet of paper. He eventually amassed a collection of 236 examples, which was posthumously published in 1924 as Handschrift und Zeichnung von Künstlern alter und neuer Zeit (Writings and Drawings by Artists of Old and New Times), and is today in the Altona Museum in Hamburg.

Among the relatively few works by Max Seliger in public collections are ten drawings for the mosaics of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, in the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin, and a group of landscapes, urban views and portraits acquired by the Stadtgeschichtliche Museum in Leipzig from the collection of local collector Armin Hüchelheim. Individual drawings by the artist are in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, while a watercolour once owned by Queen Victoria is today in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.