

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Max SELIGER (Bublitz 1865 - Leipzig 1920)

Study of Trees

Watercolour, pen and grey ink and grey wash, heightened with touches of bodycolour, on paper laid down on a thin board.

Signed, dated and inscribed M. Seliger VIII 1886 Ernsthöhe. in red gouache at the top of the sheet.

Further inscribed, signed and dated Ernsthöhe VII.86 / M. Seliger at the lower left.

316 x 219 mm. (12 1/2 x 8 5/8 in.)

Drawn in 1886, this oil sketch is a fine example of the young Max Seliger's interest in painting en plein air. The inscription 'Ernsthöhe', written twice on the sheet, probably refers to the area near Coburg in Bavaria where the Schloss Hohenfels was built in 1840. The tree on the right, with a smooth whitish bark, may be a European or common beech tree (*Fagus sylvatica*), while the tree at the left is perhaps a Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*).

A similar, slightly larger oil sketch of a single tree by Seliger, also drawn at Ernsthöhe and dated 1886, was with Stephen Ongpin Fine Art in 2008 and is today in a private American collection.

Artist description:

Born in Publitz in Pomerania (now Bobolice in Poland), Max Seliger was active as a painter, decorator and mosaicist, although he remains little known outside of Berlin and Leipzig, where he worked for most of his life. (That he travelled abroad is, however, known from a watercolour view of Florence, dated 1898, which appeared at auction in 1993.) In 1893 Seliger was commissioned to decorate the façade of the German pavilion, the Deutsches Haus, at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Another significant public commission 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 nephew Fritz Dernburg, who died as a child, in the Berlin cemetery of Grunewald, which was completed in 1895.

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 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 und 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 1924 his book *Handschrift und Zeichnung von Künstlern alter und neuer Zeit* was posthumously published; this illustrated a collection, assembled by Seliger, of examples of various artists' handwriting and drawing on single sheet. (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 is today in the Altona Museum in Hamburg.) Among the relatively few works by Seliger in public collections are ten drawings in the *Kunstbibliothek* in Berlin for the mosaics of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, while a group of landscapes, urban views and portraits by the artist have recently been acquired by the *Stadtgeschichtliche Museum* in Leipzig from the collection of local collector Armin Hüchelheim.