



fig. 1
Max Liebermann, *Bleaching (Zweeloo)*, 1882-83,
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum

'... which dazzle many an eye': Van Gogh and Max Liebermann

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Van Gogh, Liebermann and multi-figure naturalism

Art historians researching Van Gogh have so far devoted little more than footnotes to his relationship to the German painter Max Liebermann. It would seem that Liebermann was no more than a fringe figure in Van Gogh's life, and then perhaps only because his brother Theo had written to him in the autumn of 1883 about the work of the artist in such glowing terms.

Nonetheless, Liebermann was one of the artists Van Gogh was aware of, and, as we know, it was often by comparison with his contemporaries and predecessors that he sought to define his own position. In the autumn of 1885, during a personal and artistic crisis, Van Gogh first came into contact with the works of this German painter. At the time, both Van Gogh and Liebermann were finding their motifs in the Netherlands, some of them in the very same place, namely in Zweekloo. Following his failed attempt to start a family, Van Gogh had left The Hague and retreated to an impoverished farming region in the east of the country. His interest in Liebermann is revealing, not least because it can be viewed in the context of a certain historical project of the naturalist movement: the unsentimental, multi-figure study of the lower-class milieu – the very same lines along which Van Gogh had been seeking to achieve artistic success since his time in The Hague. Like Liebermann, he now devoted himself to social genre painting, an art form that had been central to naturalism for more than a decade. As regards its status and the seriousness of its themes, its supporters sought to put it on a par with history painting – indeed, in some sense, this new art was even meant to replace it. Such pictures reached their audience through much discussed exhibitions and, more importantly, in the form of reproductions and magazine illustrations. Van Gogh, too, dreamed of succeeding in this

field, either as a painter or as an illustrator. He studied the tradition of naturalism and the works of its main exponents in France, the Netherlands and England – and now of Max Liebermann as well. Liebermann had developed a particularly unsentimental version of this type of painting. His art never made any direct appeal to humane feelings but rather intensified realistic scenes via the alienating autonomy of an aesthetic that came more and more under the influence of impressionism.

It was precisely on this account that Liebermann's paintings were in complete contradiction to that particular poetic quality Van Gogh sought in this art form during the period leading up to his famous *Potato eaters* (F 82 JH 764), which he worked on in April and May 1885. Indeed, this contradiction is just as telling as the way Van Gogh obstinately remained distant from Liebermann while nevertheless concerning himself with his works. Not for nothing did Van Gogh fail to find quite the right avenue to Liebermann's art. His interest in almost no other significant contemporary artist is so full of conflict, so inhibited by a reluctance strangely mixed with interest.

Although Van Gogh shared Liebermann's rejection of the philanthropic sentimentality overlying almost all socially engaged naturalism until well into the 1870s, he did not adopt a detached approach to his subjects, but rather an almost ecstatic empathy, exaggerating, for example, the natural suffering in the faces of the *Potato eaters*, making them seem coarse, almost bestial, and then inviting us to feel with these dehumanised beings and their elementary will to live – and to recognise in their evening meal a human ritual *malgré tout*. His procedure for ridding the scene of the conventions of sentimental naturalism was based on a provisional identification with prejudice, which in a further step was transformed into identification with those people onto whose bodies social, anthropological, even

Darwinistic clichés and preconceptions had been inscribed. Such an approach was, of course, entirely incompatible with what was acceptable in naturalist art at the time, but Van Gogh continued to dream of achieving recognition *within* the context of the social genre right up until his departure for Paris in the mid-1880s. He was well aware of the fact that his overly empathetic attitude to the impoverished and disadvantaged was something special. What he was not aware of, however, was the fact that he was putting himself beyond the pale of what in the early 1880s was conventionally acceptable as art.

Like Van Gogh, Liebermann sought to reform multi-figure naturalist painting through procedures of empathy beyond the pictorial distance he simultaneously built up; not, however, by empathising with the ugly, feral nature of his subjects but rather by stressing the aesthetic detachment of the artist's eye. The apparent indifference with which Liebermann depicts, say, a cobbler's apprentice or a weaver's family (fig. 5) does in fact establish a human closeness to the persons shown, but one which, through the impressionist aesthetic and the rendering of materialised light with layers of richly pigmented colour, is free from all conventionally practised poses of sympathy. In altogether contrary ways both Liebermann and Van Gogh changed not only the aesthetic of the social genre painting but also the way the viewer was meant to relate to the maltreated peasants. Liebermann's aesthetic aloofness stood in marked contrast to Van Gogh's convulsively heightened empathy. While both mobilised genuine sympathy for their fellow human beings beyond the scope of conventional humanitarian feelings, the one did so by *understating* the sentimental empathy familiar to the viewer from the paintings of Millet, Breton, Israëls and Herkomer, the other by *overstating* it.

Perhaps surprisingly, Liebermann had a similarly conflicting admiration for Van Gogh. Indeed, the relationship between the two artists, who never knew each other personally, was one of mutual regard on the one hand, and of mutual distancing and disregard on the other. It is a relationship that shows how different the paths of two artists can be, despite their proximity of time and place and the fact that both pursued their aims within the same artistic and programmatic discourse. Liebermann and Van Gogh – a revealing story of a nonetheless enigmatically fleeting confrontation.

Van Gogh's first encounter with Liebermann

Vincent van Gogh first makes mention of the paintings of Max Liebermann in a letter to his brother Theo of September 1885. In it he describes the deserted heath around the town of Hoogeveen, where he has been staying after having left The Hague. The letter clearly identifies the artistic context in which Van Gogh places his interest in the work of this German painter. Liebermann's name first crops up, apparently incidentally, within a whole chain of associations of the kind that often accompanied Van Gogh's experience of nature, a kind of never-ending barrage of metaphors. He begins by evoking the poetry of the landscape, with 'the planes vanishing into infinity,' and then continues: 'However, one must not suppose it has to be taken sentimentally; on the contrary, that is what it hardly ever is. In the evening, when a poor little figure is seen moving through the twilight, when that vast sun-scorched earth stands out darkly against the delicate lilac hues of the evening sky, and the very last little dark-blue line at the horizon separates the earth from the sky – that same aggravating, monotonous spot can be as sublime as a Jules Dupré. And the figures, the men and the women, have that very same character – they are not always interesting, but when one looks at them with patience, one is sure to discover their Millet-like quality' [390/325].

Vincent then asks Theo for money, for he cannot confine himself simply to drawing: '[...] painting must be the main thing as much as possible.' And it is in this connection that he mentions Liebermann, whose work he considers – and here he has no doubt been influenced by Theo's description – to be quintessentially painterly. The 'sublime and beautiful' quality Van Gogh sees in the landscape – with the eyes of Jules Dupré and Jean-François Millet – collides with the precision of Liebermann's technique of colouration, behind which, Van Gogh suspects, there is a system, a system that one must 'master.' Van Gogh then moves from Liebermann to the genre and interior painter Gerke Henkes (1844–1927), who has been living and working in The Hague since 1869, and then from him to Hubert von Herkomer (1865–1914), whom he holds in high esteem and whose illustrations and paintings he greatly admires. 'I had already heard something about Liebermann, but your description, especially of his technique, gives me a better idea of him. His colour must be in-

finitely better than Henkes's – you express it very well: "slate colour dissolving into greyish-yellow and greyish-brown." I understand it perfectly. *That* way of painting is delightful if one has mastered it. And the reason I want to paint a great deal is just because I should like to have a certain firmness and system in my technique – though I have heard many people say you must not have a system – such as he and several others have. From your description I see that Liebermann must have something of Herkomer's manner. Especially in systematically carrying through and analysing those patches of light and shadow caused by sunbeams coming through the leaves, which dazzle many an eye. The other day I saw the large engraving after Herkomer's "The last muster." I suppose you have seen it too – what a manly thing!' [390/325].¹

Since in the very next sentence Van Gogh goes on to express his curiosity about Jules Breton's 'Fille d'un mineur',² we cannot help but ask what the connection can possibly be between Herkomer, Jules Breton and Liebermann? The answer, apparently, is that all three sought to depict, in unsentimental multi-figure paintings, a certain social ambience, their subject matter being drawn mostly from the lower strata of society, whether pre-industrial farmhands or factory workers, whether poorhouses, orphanages or old age retreats.

'Pen drawings of types from the people':

Van Gogh's road to naturalism

It is certainly worthwhile taking a closer look at the scene Van Gogh so eloquently sets when first mentioning Liebermann – with all his impressions reworked through other artists' eyes. Let us first turn to Gerke Henkes, whom he considered to be inferior to such painters as Liebermann. In 1875, Henkes, who, like Van Gogh, occasionally frequented the local Hague artists' club Pulchri Studio, had exhibited a painting – *The knitting school* (fig. 2) – both at



fig. 2

Gerke Henkes, *The knitting school*, 1875, The Hague, Museum Mesdag

the Paris Salon and in Brussels. It was subsequently shown in Amsterdam (1878) and then again in Paris – this time at the Exposition Universelle (The Hague, Museum Mesdag). This picture of young girls knitting under the supervision of a strict instructress was highly praised by contemporary critics.³ The humorous exaggeration of the figures, however, places Henke's painting more in the category of a late-Biedermeier genre painting than in that of naturalism per se.

Van Gogh praises Liebermann above all for his *plein air* painting, for his light effects, which, as he says, 'dazzle many an eye.' Other naturalists, too – such as Herkomer – were experimenting with new colouration techniques within the impressionist gamut. Van Gogh appreciated Herkomer primarily as a painter of scenes of a socially concerned nature – old people in public care, for example – which subsequently appeared as wood engravings or lithographs in such publications as the *Illustrated London News*

1 See also Gerhard Eimer, Manfred Fritsch and Dieter Hermsdorf, *Van Gogh Indices: Analytischer Schlüssel für die Schriften des Künstlers*, Frankfurt am Main 1972, p. 78. This book was a valuable source of information for my research into Van Gogh's letters.

2 It has not proven possible to identify the Breton painting to which Van Gogh here refers; the subject was not a common one for the artist. Cf. Holister Sturges (ed.), exhib. cat. *Jules Breton and the French rural tradition*, Omaha (Joslyn Art Museum), Memphis (The Dixon Gallery and Gardens) & Williamstown (The Sterling and

Francine Clark Institute) 1982-83. See also, more recently, Annette Bourrut Lacouture, exhib. cat. *Jules Breton: La chanson des blés*, Arras (Musée des Beaux-Arts), Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts), Dublin (National Gallery of Ireland) & Paris (Somogy) 2002.

3 See Elie van Schendel, *Museum Mesdag: Nederlandse negentiende-eeuwse schilderijen, tekeningen en grafiek*, The Hague 1975, pp. 72-75, and Fred Leeman and Hanna Pennock, *Catalogue of paintings and drawings: Museum Mesdag*, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1996, pp. 221-24.

and *The Graphic*. In the art world surrounding the large, increasingly international exhibitions of the period, it was not just the exhibited paintings themselves that played a significant role, but also their reproduction in the press.⁴ In his letter, Van Gogh mentions Herkomer's famous major work *The last muster: Sunday in the Royal Hospital, Chelsea* (1875, Merseyside, Lady Lever Art Gallery), which was exhibited with enormous success at the Royal Academy in London in 1875 and again at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878. The painting had been preceded by an illustration featuring a not quite identical motif in *The Graphic* of February 1871. Yet another version was published as a wood engraving in the same magazine in May 1875.⁵ Both the prints and the painting depict Chelsea pensioners at prayer in the hospital chapel, lost in thought and completely resigned to their fate; one of them takes hold of the arm of the man sitting next to him in order to make sure he is still alive – but he is not; it is, in fact, *the last muster*.

During his time in The Hague, between the turn of the year 1881-82 and September 1883, Van Gogh had done a great many studies of the modern, industrial and poor quarters of the city's suburbs, mainly watercoloured pen-and-ink drawings. Moreover, in one group (partially executed in charcoal, partially with a thick carpenter's pencil) he also tried his hand at multi-figure compositions for press illustrations or oil paintings. That he modelled these works mainly on English magazine illustrations of the 1870s has long been known from his letters, but only the more recent literature has seriously taken this into account.⁶ In a letter of 7 or 8 January 1882, Van Gogh enthuses over these illustrations, also mentioning Herkomer's wood engraving of the Chelsea Hospital, which he refers to as 'The invalids': 'I got an amazing bargain of splendid woodcuts from the *Graphic*, in part printed not from the clichés but from the blocks themselves. Just what I've been looking for all this time. Drawings by Herkomer, Frank Holl, Walker and others. I [...] picked the best from an enormous pile of the *Graphic* and *London News*. They include some superb things, for instance, Houseless and homeless by Fildes (poor people waiting outside a night shelter) and two large Herkomers and many small ones, and the Irish emigrants by Frank Holl and the "Old gate" by Walker, and above all a girls' school by Frank Holl, and then another large Herkomer, The invalids.' He himself, says Vincent, is

endeavouring 'to make something [...] realistic and yet done with feeling' [198/169]. A short time later, on 13 February 1882, he even mentions his intention of making 'pen drawings of types from the people' for magazines [203/174].

Autumn 1883: Van Gogh on Liebermann's trail in Drenthe

It was quite logical for Theo to have recommended Liebermann to his brother as an ideal painter on whom to model himself, for Liebermann was achieving precisely those artistic objectives to which Van Gogh himself aspired at the time. Realistic studies of the proletarian milieu, social genre paintings often executed with an emphatically painterly gesture: the plucking of geese, the bleaching of cloth, plenty of white, time and again, in all its materiality, or the traditional white, red and black dresses of the girls in the Amsterdam orphanage – these were Liebermann's subjects. His interest in social themes had first been awakened in 1871, after seeing Mihály Munkácsy's *Making lint: an episode from the Hungarian War of Independence 1848-49* (1871, Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria), which depicts women making bandaging for wounded soldiers. Further inspiration then came from Paris – Millet, Courbet and Théodule Ribot, as well as Troyon, Daubigny and Corot – and not least from the Hague School. With his often sentimental, often humorously detached character studies of village life, the Hungarian history and genre painter Munkácsy certainly had different artistic intentions than Liebermann⁷ – here the ne'er-do-wells and the pub brawls, there the seriousness and dignity of labour, an emphasis on the solitariness of the workers despite the communal nature of their task. Since the autumn of 1872 Liebermann had been taking his themes from ordinary working life in the Netherlands, as in his *Goose pluckers* (1872, Berlin, Nationalgalerie). By 1876, through his copying of the paintings of Frans Hals, Liebermann had given his French-inspired style both a historical foundation and a heightened painterly quality. He oriented himself on the Dutch tradition of Rembrandt and Hals, a tradition in which art critics and historians such as Théophile Thoré and Wilhelm von Bode recognised overtones of Dutch republicanism.⁸ It was also in the Netherlands that Liebermann sought and found the motifs for his art. The choice of the country and its tra-

dition lent historical justification both to his socio-political themes and his style of painting, which his Berlin contemporaries scorned as 'dirty.'⁹ In the autumn of 1876

Liebermann painted a number of scenes of Amsterdam – for example, of the old synagogue in Jodenbreestraat – and, later, of the Buergerweeshuis, among them *The orphanage at Amsterdam* (1882, Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut). In 1880 he devoted himself – like Herkomer before him – to an asylum for old men, a work he exhibited at the Paris Salon a year later (private collection).¹⁰ The republican flavour of this painting did not go unnoticed, either in France or Germany.¹¹

It was a bitterly disappointed Vincent van Gogh who left The Hague on 11 September 1883. Lack of funds now forced him to eke out a scanty living in the heath lands of the eastern provinces. All the same, he never wavered in his intention to make his way in the world as an artist. It was not long after his arrival in Drenthe that Theo advised him to follow Liebermann's example. During his short stay here, which lasted only until 5 December, the artist struggled to find a way of achieving his goal.¹²

In a letter to Theo written at the end of September or the beginning of October from the town of Nieuw Amsterdam, 'from the remotest corner of Drenthe,' Vincent returns once again to Liebermann, though not without first describing, yet again, the poetry of the landscape: '[...] imagine the banks of the canal as miles and miles of, say, Michels or Th. Rousseaus, Van Goyens or Ph. de Konincks. [...] The figures that once in a while appear on these flat lands are full of character, [...] lots of Ostade types among

them, physiognomies that put one in mind of pigs or cows.' Here again Van Gogh simply bubbles over with associations – with 'a Daubigny [...],' for example, 'which conveys the effect precisely.' Liebermann, too, has a place here: 'I am quite near Zweeloo, where, among others, Liebermann has been; and besides, there is an area here where you still find large, very old turf huts, which have not even a partition between the stable and the living room. I intend first of all to visit that spot one of these days' [395/330]:

A long letter written in October 1883 testifies to the fact that Liebermann had by now become a firmly established topic in the correspondence between the two brothers, although Vincent conveys the impression he had still never seen any of his paintings. 'You wrote to me about Liebermann: his palette consists of slate-grey tones, principally running from brown to yellowish-grey. I have never seen anything of his, but now that I have seen the landscape here, I can understand perfectly how logically he was led to it. [...] There are Jules Dupré effects, to be sure, but in this autumn season it is exactly that – as you describe Liebermann's palette. And if I do find what I'm looking for [...], I shall certainly often do it in the same way, in that same chromatic gamut' [397/332].

A letter of November 1883, however, shows that the artist was indeed directly familiar with at least one of Liebermann's works, albeit probably only in reproduction: 'I must just tell you about a trip to Zweeloo, the village where Liebermann stayed for a long time and did studies for his painting at the last Salon, the one with the washerwomen. Imagine a trip across the heath at 3 o'clock in the

4 Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler: Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem*, Cologne 1997; Allan Ellenius, 'Reproducing art as a paradigm of communication: the case of the nineteenth-century illustrated magazines,' in Hedvig Brander et al., *Visual paraphrases: studies in mass media imagery*, Uppsala & Stockholm 1983, pp. 69-92.

5 Lee MacCormick Edwards, *Herkomer: a Victorian artist*, Aldershot & Brookfield 1999, pp. 9, 67-70, plate 17; *The Graphic* (18 February 1871), p. 152 and (15 May 1875), pp. 474-75.

6 Ronald Pickvance, exhib. cat. *English influences on Vincent van Gogh*, London (Arts Council of Great Britain) 1974.

7 F. Walther Ilges, *M. von Munkacsy*, Bielefeld & Leipzig 1899, pp. 47-48 and L. Végvári, *Katalog der Gemälde*

und Zeichnungen Mihály Munkácsys, Budapest 1959, pp. 9-10, 46.

8 See Barbara Gaetgens, 'Holland als Vorbild,' in Angelika Wesenberg (ed.), exhib. cat. *Max Liebermann – Jahrhundertwende*, Berlin (Nationalgalerie) 1997, pp. 83-92 and Margreet Nouwen, 'Mal Heimat Holland,' in Uwe M. Schneede et al., exhib. cat. *Max Liebermann: Der Realist und die Phantasie*, Hamburg (Hamburger Kunsthalle), Frankfurt am Main (Städelsches Kunstinstitut) & Leipzig (Museum der bildenden Künste) 1997, pp. 11-20. For a discussion of Dutch painting and its political overtones see Petra Ten Doesschate-Chu, *French realism and the Dutch masters: the influence of Dutch seventeenth-century painting on the development of French painting between 1830 and 1870*, Utrecht 1974.

9 Stefan Pucks, 'Schmutzig, aber talentiert. Max

Liebermanns Frühwerk im Spiegel der deutschen Kunstkritik,' in *Max Liebermann: Der Realist und die Phantasie*, cit. (note 8), pp. 58-63.

10 Matthias Eberle, *Max Liebermann, 1847-1935: Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, 2 vols., Munich 1995, vol. 1, pp. 14-16, 41-44, 193-96, 218-22.

11 See Knut Helms, 'Sanctionnés par la Troisième République: Max Liebermann et la confraternité cosmopolite de l'art naturaliste,' in the forthcoming volume Alexandre Kostka and Françoise Lucbert (eds.), *Grenzgänger/Médiateurs*, to be published in Berlin in 2003.

12 Roland Dorn, 'Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890),' in Roland Dorn et al., exhib. cat. *Van Gogh und die Haager Schule*, Vienna (Bank Austria Kunstforum) 1996, pp. 153-57.



fig. 3
Max Liebermann, *Bleaching (Zweeloo)*, 1882-83, reproduced in F.-G. Dumas (ed.), 1883. *Catalogue illustré du Salon contenant environ 300 reproductions d'après les dessins originaux des artistes*, Paris 1883, p. 160



fig. 4
Vincent van Gogh, *Woman spreading out laundry on a field* (F 1087 JH 200), 1883, private collection

morning in a small open cart [...]. When it was just starting to get light [...] everything became exactly like the most beautiful Corots. A stillness, a mystery, a peace as only he has painted it.' No mention of Jozef Israëls, who had likewise been to Zweeloo and was in fact the one who had recommended this picturesque idyll from bygone times to his friend Liebermann. 'Since there were no painters, I decided [...] to walk back and do some drawings on the way. So I began to make a sketch of the little apple orchard where Liebermann did his large painting' [407/340].

Van Gogh is here clearly referring to Liebermann's painting *Bleaching (Zweeloo)* (fig. 1).¹³ Liebermann, who had stayed in the village of Zweeloo from the beginning of August until the end of October 1882, wrote to his brother Felix: 'I could almost believe that Ruysdael and Hobbema

made their studies here. At all events their paintings bear the mark of this region and nothing has changed in the meantime. The houses have been standing here for the past 250 or 300 years. They live and cook in the same room, and this is also where the pigs, which every farmer slaughters every year, are smoked. You can't get fresh meat here. Sometimes they fetch it for me from a place a good five hours away. The cowherd, the milkmaid, the farmhand and the farmer and his wife all sit around the kitchen table and eat from the same bowl, [...] like one big family. There is no poverty here. My landlord, who is a member of the local council, tells me that two men are on the parish. And so the people here are honest and right-minded.'¹⁴

Liebermann's painting shows two washerwomen spreading out wet linen sheets on the lawn of an orchard

13 F.-G. Dumas (ed.), 1883. *Catalogue illustré du Salon* [...], Paris 1883, *La blanchisserie de Sweeloo (Hollande)*, no. 1527, p. 160 (ill.). Not recorded in Gustav Schiefler, *Max Liebermann: Sein graphisches Werk/The graphic work, 1876-1923*, 4th ed., San Francisco 1991.

14 Hans Ostwald, *Das Liebermann-Buch*, Berlin 1930, p. 110: 'Ich möchte fast glauben, dass Ruysdael und Hobbema hier Studien gemacht haben. Jedenfalls ist der Charakter ihrer Bilder der hiesigen Gegend entnommen und inzwischen hat sich nichts geändert. Die Häuser ste-

hen seit 250 bis 300 Jahren. Wohnung und Küche sind eins, in denen die Schweine, die jeder Bauer in jedem Jahr schlachtet, geräuchert werden. Frisches Fleisch bekommt man hier nicht. Für mich wird es manchmal fünf Stunden weit hergeholt. Am Küchentisch sitzen Kuhhirt, Mädchen, Knecht, Herrschaft alles beisammen und essen aus derselben Schüssel. Alles duzt sich wie eine große Familie. Armut gibt es hier nicht. Wie mein Wirt, der im Rat ist, mir erzählte, werden zwei Männer auf Armenkosten erhalten. Infolgedessen ist die Menschheit bieder und recht denkend.'

for them to bleach in the sun. The fruit trees, silvery green in the matt early morning light of the summer's day, guide the viewer's gaze past the dull red front of a thatched farmhouse into the distance, where several women are hanging blue sheets over a wooden fence and talking as they work. A pen-and-ink drawing done by the artist for the catalogue of the 1883 Paris Salon shows a slightly different version of the scene (fig. 3). In the foreground a woman is shown kneeling next to a wooden tub, straightening out one of the sheets, while behind her another woman approaches with a heavy pail. Liebermann subsequently decided to create more distance in the painting, leaving the foreground empty and hence also conveying a sense of vacancy, alienation and solitariness, and making the figures seem less posed.¹⁵

As he writes, Van Gogh did in fact capture exactly the same scene in a watercolour (fig. 4). In his catalogue raisonné of the complete works on paper, published in 1928, J.-B. de la Faille dates the work to Van Gogh's Hague period, while the new edition of 1992 suggests September 1882.¹⁶ We are convinced, however, that this is the 'sketch' Vincent mentions in his letter to Theo, and that it was made in Zweeloo in November 1883, and not before. The setting and activities fit Van Gogh's description. The earlier dating, made on vague stylistic grounds, seems untenable now that the watercolour can be linked to the artist's own statements. Now, one year after Liebermann, Van Gogh chooses the same orchard, but depicts it completely differently. Liebermann's empty space, given rhythm by the white linen sheets receding into the distance, has now given way to a pattern of sheets running parallel to the picture plane, their brightness contrasting with the dull landscape. The sweeping, uncommonly elegant movements of the strong, sturdy washerwomen in Liebermann's painting have yielded, in Van Gogh's watercolour, to the stiff, stooped posture of the peasant woman, familiar to us from Millet's *Gleaners* (1867, Paris, Louvre) and depicted in a relief-like side view reminiscent of Courbet's *Stonebreakers* (1850-51, formerly Dresden, Gemäldegalerie, destroyed

1945). Although Van Gogh was probably familiar at least with the reproduction of Liebermann's painting from the 1883 Salon catalogue, he makes no attempt to imitate the gestural breadth so characteristic of the German artist's painting.

Weavers

Perhaps Van Gogh did not familiarise himself with Liebermann's work until after he had grown tired of painting such multi-figure scenes as *The public soup kitchen* (F 1020 JH 333) and *Torn-up street with diggers* (fig. 7). All the same, we must still ask ourselves why this encounter was so fleeting, why Liebermann then disappeared from Van Gogh's world. In Zweeloo, both artists had sought to represent the life of the peasant: Liebermann depicting the healthy solidarity of these simple people warding off poverty through their own uncomplicated, socially minded form of mutual assistance; Van Gogh depicting only the stark reality of 'types [...], physiognomies that put one in mind of pigs or crows.' Liebermann finds a model of humanity, Van Gogh a model of inhumanity: at once 'them' out there and those with whom he sought to identify himself, with whom he *had* to identify himself – an irreconcilable conflict indeed.

It was in Zweeloo, too, that Liebermann painted his picture of the weaver's family (fig. 5), a painting which may possibly have inspired Van Gogh to make his own studies of solitary weavers.¹⁷ Van Gogh must have learnt – if only by hearsay – about Liebermann's painting such a motif in this peasant village. Liebermann depicts the individual members of the weaver's family going about their work: the movement of the weaver's hand just after it has passed the shuttle between the warp yarns is captured with the meticulousness of an Adolph von Menzel; sitting at the spinning wheel next to the old gnarled loom is the weaver's wife, turning the wheel powerfully as she spins the yarn; their daughter is winding the yarn in the background, where, on the table, frugal refreshments have been set out. Green

15 Erich Hanke, *Max Liebermann. Sein Leben und seine Werke*, Berlin 1923, pp. 180-88.

16 J.-B. de la Faille, *Vincent van Gogh: the complete works on paper. Catalogue raisonné*, Paris & Brussels 1928 (rev. ed. San Francisco 1992), pp. 59, 278, no. 1087. The watercolour was exhibited in Amsterdam in 1961 (exhib. cat. *Vincent van Gogh: aquarelles et dessins de l'époque 1881-1885 provenant de collections*

particulières néerlandaises, Amsterdam [E.J. van Wisselingh] 1961) and was sold by Kornfeld & Klipstein, Berne, on 13 June 1968. Hulsker, too, dates it to Van Gogh's period in the Hague, cf. *Van Gogh en zijn weg: Al zijn tekeningen en schilderijen in hun samenhang en ontwikkeling*, Amsterdam 1977, p. 54, no. 200.

17 Eberle, op. cit. (note 10), vol. 1, pp. 223-26.



fig. 5
Max Liebermann, *The weaver*, 1882-83, Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut

shutters picturesquely subdue the light. It is a scene that conveys the togetherness of solitary individuals, each working skilfully at his or her job, seemingly oblivious of the others. It is the depiction of the family as a working community and, as such, also a mirror of a much longed-for society, which would, through the strength of its own self-sufficiency and mutual sympathy, be able to achieve a modest degree of prosperity.

In none of his paintings of weavers (fig. 6) – all produced in Nuenen after 1884 – does Van Gogh depict a family. For a long time these works were interpreted all too superficially, either along psychological or humanitarian lines, as though the artist was concerned merely with rediscovering his own loneliness in his subjects, or with depicting them as cursed dehumanised victims of the machine. The fact that Van Gogh depicts an oak loom dating to 1730 testifies to a certain nostalgia for pre-industrial cottage weaving, which at the time was being replaced by factory production.¹⁸ Van Gogh quite literally paints the weavers within the frame of the loom – and within the framework of a morally based, historically all-embracing work ethos. Debora Silverman was certainly right in recognising a link with the puritanical myth of work as part of a religious pilgrimage.¹⁹ Out of this ethical myth, however, Van Gogh makes an aesthetic one: a desperate but thwart-



fig. 6
Vincent van Gogh, *Weaver: interior with three small windows* (F 30 JH 479), 1884, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum

ed religious mission is now transformed into a new way of making art. It is no coincidence that this aestheticising of monotonous 'eternal' labour in the service of God occurred at the same time as its secularisation. Once capitalism had turned the remuneration of labour into a coolly calculable production factor, and labour itself became a negotiable commodity like any other, the work ethos became a private matter. While this reification of labour effectively nullified the theological work ethos, it in effect acquired a new kind of validity in art. The motif of the patient hard-working carpenter Joseph of Nazareth now became an aesthetic 'pathos formula' that could be applied not only outside the religious context but outside the original social context as well.²⁰ The weaver now became a signifier and a cliché, precisely because his way of working – and hence he himself as a social type – were no more than 'phased-out models' in the reality of the outside world.²¹

Van Gogh's solitary weavers are a metaphor of the artist's work in the context of industrialisation. The meagre idyll conveyed by Liebermann's weaver family stands for a timeless ethos that clearly anticipates republican utopianism. While Van Gogh's painting follows a line of development that takes him from the urban life of The Hague via the weavers of Nuenen to the region's peasants, Liebermann goes in the opposite direction, proceeding

from peasant handicraft to industry. His treatment of the theme of work underwent further development with *The flax makers* (1887, Berlin, Nationalgalerie) and *Weaving mill in Laren* (1897, private collection). Whilst Liebermann consistently aestheticises the industrial and social production process, Van Gogh's paintings of peasant life culminate in his *Potato eaters*, a primitivistic, archaising caricature of human beings partaking of their evening meal. Although Van Gogh is here dealing with the same social themes and the same social types as Liebermann, and applies precisely the same aesthetic pathos formula, he oversteps the mark, as it were, confronting us with the ugliest possible depictions of our fellow men and women. In other words, he simultaneously stages both the ethical necessity of such a confrontation and its impossibility.

It was certainly not the aesthetic-social that Van Gogh had in mind when he wrote that he had painted his *Potato eaters* in 'the colour of a very dusty potato, unpeeled of course' [502/405], and that 'the last thing [he] would want would be for people to admire or approve of it without knowing why' [501/404].

Even when he first mentions Liebermann, Van Gogh contradicts himself: he would like to adopt something of Liebermann's systematic treatment of colour and yet, he says, one really ought not to have a system at all. He admires Liebermann, but even this admiration is full of conflict. He values his aesthetic strategy and yet it frightens him. The question is: why?

Van Gogh and the media of naturalism

If we consider Van Gogh's judgment rather than his artistic achievement, there is no doubt that he had a lesser command of the world of naturalist practice than Liebermann. The latter's art-historical and classical educa-

tion stood in sharp contrast to the humanitarian fantasies in which Van Gogh so eagerly indulged. The themes of social genre painting were a carbon copy of Van Gogh's own experience of life. Added to this were the novels he avidly read. As early as the 1870s he had already made a habit of interpreting his own life of poverty against the background of such authors as Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and Charles Dickens. Whereas at first he found confirmation of his evangelical zeal in George Eliot, he later placed the emphasis on the social aspect of her work and identified himself with Felix Holt, 'the radical.' He first took an interest in Dickens while working in Paris and London as an art dealer and turned to him again during his time as a lay preacher in the Borinage; he later became interested in the illustrations of Dickens's books, above all in those by Fred Barnard for the Household Edition. The influences of Eliot and Dickens converge in The Hague, and it is probably against this background that Van Gogh's interest in early illustrated magazines should to be seen.²² It was during his time here, too, that Van Gogh worked his way through the oeuvre of Emile Zola and other French authors, such as Honoré de Balzac, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and Alexandre Dumas, all of whom he revered as representatives of the naturalist tradition.²³ In his art, Van Gogh now became less concerned with conveying the type of sentimental mood he had once admired in the genre paintings of Jozef Israëls, one of the leading artists of the Hague School, than with depicting multi-figure scenes of the kind encountered in the English illustrateds. Again and again, the works produced during Van Gogh's Dutch period manifest tendencies towards naturalist figural compositions, as in his *Women miners* (F 994 JH 253), the charcoal drawing *The public soup kitchen* or the study of the *Potato grubbers* (F 1034 JH 372).

18 Carol M. Zemel, 'The "spook" in the machine: Van Gogh's pictures of weavers in Brabant,' *The Art Bulletin* 67 (March 1985), pp. 123-37; slightly abridged in Evert van Uiterd (ed.), exhib. cat. *Van Gogh in Brabant: Schilderijen en tekeningen uit Etten en Nuenen*, 's Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1987-88, pp. 47-58.

19 Debora Silverman, 'Pilgrim's progress and Vincent van Gogh's métier,' in Martin Bailey (ed.), exhib. cat. *Van Gogh in England: portrait of the artist as a young man*, London (Barbican Art Gallery) 1992, p. 111. See also Max Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus [1904-05]' in idem, *Gesammelte*

Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie, Stuttgart 1988, pp. 17-205.

20 On the secularisation of motifs in religious art see Renate Liebenwein-Krämer, *Säkularisierung und Sakralisierung: Studien zum Bedeutungswandel christlicher Bildformen in der Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 1977. On the 'pathos formula' see Aby Warburg, 'Sandro Botticellis "Geburt der Venus" und "Frühling": Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance [1893],' in idem: *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike: Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. Gertrud

Bing and Fritz Rougemont, 2 vols., Leipzig & Berlin 1932, vol. 1, pp. 1-59, 307-28.

21 Concerning the pre-conditions on which signs can be interpreted at all, and hence can become signifiers, see Charles S. Peirce, *Selected writings: values in a universe of chance*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, New York 1958, pp. 112-22.

22 Pickvance, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 20-41.

23 Judy Sund, *True to temperament: Van Gogh and French naturalist literature*, Cambridge MA, New York & Oakleigh 1992, pp. 46-80.

Whereas Liebermann observed the world of the peasants, the poverty-stricken and workers from the safe distance of the bourgeois gentleman, the pastor's son Van Gogh, although realising he would be unable to bridge the gap, nonetheless desperately sought contact with the other side. One of the main themes of the more recent debate on Van Gogh's Hague period has been the artist's concern with the rapid social changes that were taking place in the city at the time and his unexpected turn towards the archaic pre-industrial world of the peasant from September 1885 onwards. Some scholars have interpreted Van Gogh's retreat into the country as an escape from the present; others have emphasised his puritanical sympathy with working people, irrespective of their social standing but above all with the lowliest, and his desire to be one of them. Some have stressed the distance between the bourgeois Van Gogh and the proletarian world he depicts, others have demonstrated how very much he considered his own work to be as humble as theirs.

By way of Van Gogh's large drawing of road workers in front of a Hague bakery (fig. 7), Griselda Pollock has shown how unskilled the artist still was at incorporating peasant workers into a scene depicting industrialised urban development. The artist's remarks [271/235] concerning his watercolour and gouache sketch *The poor and money* (F 970 JH 222) show, according to Pollock, that Van Gogh saw the city's destitute desperately spending their last pennies on the lottery as 'they' and 'them' – in other words, from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie. For her, this sketch represents a 'stark encounter between the bourgeois artist and the urban poor'.²⁴

Debora Silverman, on the other hand, refers to the continuity of Van Gogh's social commitment from the time of his first attempts at working as a lay preacher to the very end of his life. Starting out from John Bunyan's devotional work *The pilgrim's progress*, published in 1678, which she describes as a 'landmark in the development of English Protestant dissent' and which had inspired one of Van Gogh's sermons as early as 1874, Silverman interprets his work, and not least its technical aspect, as a pilgrimage of the simple working man. She compares the frame of the loom the artist uses for framing the solitary, somnambulist weavers in his long series of oil sketches with the artist's drawing frame, a device used by the topographical



fig. 7

Vincent van Gogh, *Torn-up street with diggers* (F 930a JH 131), 1882, Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz

painters of the 18th century and with which Van Gogh was familiar from Dürer's woodcut.²⁵ Whilst Liebermann was able to sympathise with the weaver's family in Zweeloo (fig. 5) – those 'honest and right-minded' representatives of 'humanity' from time immemorial – only from a distance, the stretcher of Van Gogh's canvas for the *Potato eaters* had already become the loom and his work the fabric. On 30 April 1885 he wrote to Theo: 'I've held the threads of this fabric in my hands all winter long and searched for the definitive pattern – and although it is now a fabric of rough and course appearance, the threads have nonetheless been chosen with care and according to certain rules' [501/404].

Thus, while Liebermann even regards the peasants of Zweeloo as survivors of the 17th century, Van Gogh searches for a way of identifying himself with them. In the *Potato eaters*, we encounter both perspectives: the peasants as 'they' and 'them' and Van Gogh himself as a peasant. In the letter quoted above, he writes initially: 'The point is that I've tried to bring out the idea that these people eating potatoes by the light of their lamp have dug the earth with the self-same hands they are now putting into the dish, and it thus suggests *manual labour* – a meal honestly *earned*. I wanted to convey a picture of a way of life quite different from ours, from that of civilised people.' Then, however, only a few lines further on, the artist himself becomes one

of them: 'No, one must paint peasants as if one were one of them, as if one felt and thought as they do' [501/404].

We thus cannot but assume that Van Gogh identified himself with the peasants precisely because they were so different, so primitively innocent. In his numerous preliminary studies and preparatory portraits for the painting, the artist deliberately developed an unrealistic style.²⁶ The caricature-like exaggeration of originally individual physiognomies, the enlarged depiction of stiff, gnarled toil-roughened hands, every movement of which becomes a bold, larger-than-life gesture, the perspectival inconsistencies and the sombre colouration are still considered grotesque by some commentators today.²⁷ The outlandishness and coarseness of the persons depicted belies the comparatively conservative standards by which the artist himself judged his own work. At all times he remained faithful to a naturalist credo.²⁸

It is in this contradiction that yet another 'stark encounter' manifests itself, not just of the pastor's son with the world of the workers and peasants, but also of a misfit with the world of naturalism, with its paintings and novels, the myths and clichés to which he was helplessly exposed and against which he nevertheless sought to assert himself as an artist. Van Gogh tried to adapt, to become an illustrator and naturalist painter, but the gap could not be bridged. Initially, this gap was the hopeless distance between himself and his fellow artists, the lack of professionalism which he felt and simultaneously suppressed; later, it was his uncompromising insistence on being different, on a humane empathy that cannot simply be dismissed as sentimental humanitarianism, on a sympathy which was always and forever in conflict with the aesthetic detachment required of naturalist art – a sympathy which, no matter how much it

expressed itself through the language of painting, sought, in the final analysis, to reach something that is beyond the scope of any language. And yet Van Gogh's view of every landscape, every figure, was conditioned by his education and cultural background. Like a male Madame Bovary, he was at the mercy of the culture of his time: its exhibitions, its illustrations, its trite novels. However, it was precisely against this background of pathos and sentimentality, emotionality and suggestion, that Van Gogh was determined to fight: hidden behind all his ambitions, reasonings and reflections was not failure or inadequacy but rather the naivety of a man who takes the world seriously, a man who does not feel compassion as an artist or as a man of letters but purely and simply as a human being. Until 1885, Van Gogh's works often seem to be *art brut* expressions of realism. He is part and parcel of the system, and yet he constantly, even desperately, tries to be outside it, to incorporate his Otherness (which he senses but cannot really accept) into his work, and to transcend the clichés and models that confronted him everywhere, even in his own art.

Liebermann and Van Gogh

Liebermann's interest in Van Gogh was likewise full of perhaps unexpected contradictions. It is not known when the artist first heard of Van Gogh. However, as the president of the Berlin Sezession, he was certainly ultimately responsible for the fact that Van Gogh's paintings were shown there almost continually from 1902 onwards. Corinth recalled in 1910 that the society's secretary, Walter Leistikow, and the art dealer Paul Cassirer – there is no mention of Liebermann – had exhibited 'all kinds of Frenchmen' at the Sezession shows, including '[...] a Dutchman, about whom nobody had ever heard a single word: Van Gogh. [...] Van

24 Griselda Pollock, 'Stark encounters: modern life and urban work in Van Gogh's drawings from The Hague, 1881-82,' *Art History* 6 (September 1983), p. 349. See also Griselda Pollock, exhib. cat. *Vincent van Gogh in zijn Hollandse jaren: Kijk op stad en land door Van Gogh en zijn tijdgenoten, 1870-1890*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh) 1980-81 and Michiel van der Mast and John Sillevs, exhib. cat. *Van Gogh e la scuola dell'Aia*, Florence (Palazzo Medici Riccardi) 1990-91, pp. 39, 46.

25 Silverman, op. cit. (note 19), p. 111. See also, more recently, idem, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art*, New York 2000 and idem 'Framing art and sa-

cred realism: Van Gogh's ways of seeing Arles,' *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (2001), pp. 45-62.

26 Hulsker, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 127-75.

27 See, for example, Louis van Tilborgh, 'The potato eaters: Van Gogh's first attempt at a masterwork,' in idem (ed.), exhib. cat. *The potato eaters by Vincent van Gogh/De aardappeleters van Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh) 1993, p. 16.

28 See Evert van Uitert, 'Van Gogh's concept of his oeuvre,' *Simiolus* 12 (1981-82), no. 4, pp. 223-44.

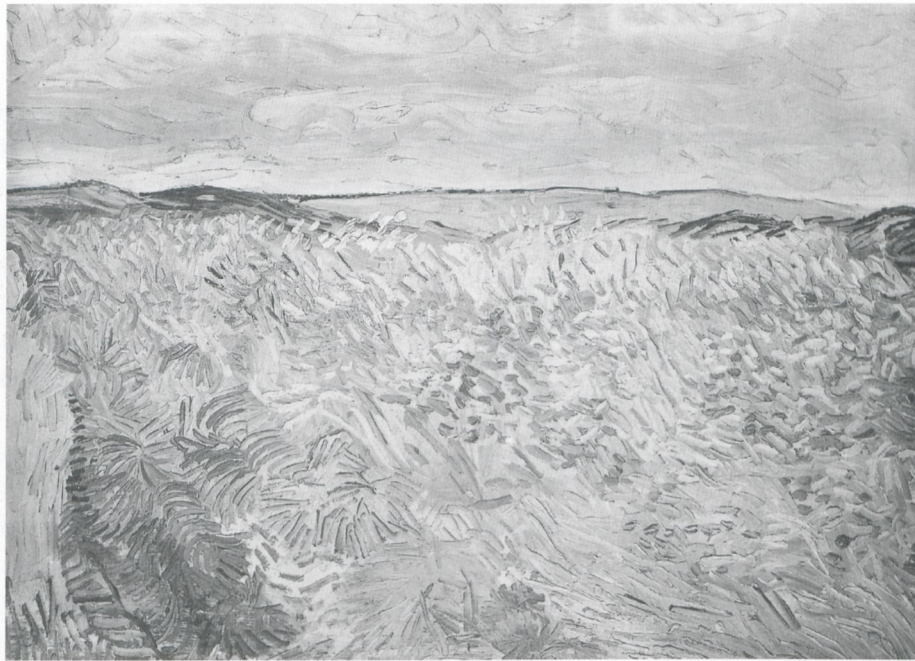


fig. 8

Vincent van Gogh, *Wheatfield with cornflowers* (F 808 JH 2118), 1890, private collection

Gogh's paintings astonished the whole of Berlin at first, and in such a way that they reaped nothing but ironic laughter and a shrugging of shoulders. But the Sezession continued to show new works by this Dutchman, and today Van Gogh counts among the best and the most expensive.²⁹ Five works by Van Gogh had, in fact, already been displayed at the third Sezession exhibition in May 1901, and we may safely assume that Liebermann shared the group's interest in the Dutch artist. As Walter Feilchenfeldt has shown, Cassirer succeeded in convincing a great many Berlin collectors who patronised the Sezession, some of whom were either Liebermann's relatives or close friends, to buy Van Gogh's works. At that time, almost all the collections of more recent French art in Berlin belonged to members of the Jewish upper middle class. They purchased impressionist pictures ranging from Manet to Liebermann, as well work of other painters exhibiting at the Sezession. A Van Gogh would have fitted into their collections – and much more readily than works of the German Expressionists or those of the more recent French avant-garde, in other words, paintings manifesting those tendencies that the gallery owner Herwarth Walden would later promote.³⁰

In January 1907 Liebermann himself finally bought a work by Van Gogh – one of his final ones – for his own private collection (fig. 8).³¹ The 'wheat wave' (Paul Celan) undulating beyond the narrow unploughed ridge beneath a deep blue sky is one of the most painterly studies ever to have come from Van Gogh's hand.

The German painter was not, however, entirely convinced by his purchase, acknowledging the Dutch painter's work only with some reservation. Much later, in 1951, when Ludwig Justi sought to acquire Van Gogh's *Daubigny's garden* (fig. 9) for the Nationalgalerie, Liebermann – by then the *éminence grise* of the Berlin art scene – spoke out vehemently against the acquisition, and in the magazine *Kunst und Künstler* poured scorn on Justi, the director of the Nationalgalerie – and not merely on account of the 250,000 Reichsmark the museum was prepared to pay. Little did Liebermann know that his protest antici-

29 Lovis Corinth, *Das Leben Walter Leistikows: Ein Stück Berliner Kulturgeschichte*, Berlin 1910, p. 55: '[...] einen Holländer, von dem noch nie irgendeiner ein Sterbenswörtchen gehört hatte: Van Gogh. [...] Die Van Gogh'schen Bilder verblüfften ganz Berlin zuerst in solcher Weise, dass überall ironisches Gelächter und Achselzucken war. Aber die Sezession brachte alljährlich immer wieder neue Werke von diesem Holländer, und heute wird Van Gogh zu den besten und teuersten gezählt.' Also quoted in Walter Feilchenfeldt (with Han Veenenbos), *Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cassirer, Berlin: the reception of Van Gogh in Germany from 1901 to 1914*, Zwolle 1988, pp. 45, 47-48, 51. Cassirer had already exhibited 19 works by Van Gogh in the winter of 1901. For general information on the Sezession see Peter Paret, *Die Berliner Sezession: Moderne Kunst und ihre*



fig. 9

Vincent van Gogh, *Daubigny's garden* (F 776 JH 2104), 1890, Hiroshima Museum of Art

pated the 'fervent objections' of the Munich branch of the Reichsverband Bildender Künstler, which would likewise have preferred to see the money spent on the works of impoverished German artists.³² The painting was purchased all the same. When the Nazis began to purge Germany's museums of their so-called 'degenerate art,' the painting was confiscated (30 October 1937). In 1940 it was appropriated by Hermann Göring, who transferred the sum of 150,000 Reichsmark to the Nationalgalerie for the painting, its insurance value having been assessed in that same year at 240,000.³³ The painting later came into the hands of a private collector in New York before finally being acquired by the Hiroshima Museum of Art.³⁴

Van Gogh's reputation had been firmly established in Germany since the beginning of the century, thanks not least to the writings of Julius Meier-Graefe, Emil Heilbut, Fritz von Ostini, Curt Glaser, Karl Scheffler and Wilhelm Hausenstein, among others.³⁵ Nonetheless, in 1931 Liebermann had little esteem not only for the curator

Ludwig Justi, but also put strict limits on his admiration of the artist: 'Van Gogh was a genius whose demonic passion far outstripped his ability, thus preventing him from producing any work that was perfect in itself. It is precisely perfection, the perfect and hence exemplary work, which makes all the difference, both for the public and for the artist himself. Van Gogh's passionate striving cannot be esteemed too highly; but it is not what is striven for, but what is achieved, not what is intended, but what is accomplished that affords the art-seeking and art-loving viewer lasting enjoyment [...].'³⁶

Without a doubt, Liebermann and Van Gogh remained strangers. Both of them knew about, and even took an initial interest in each other's work, and yet they went to great pains to avoid each other thereafter.

Feinde im Kaiserlichen Deutschland, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin & Vienna 1983, pp. 119-36.

30 Feilchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 29); see also Verena Tafel, 'Paul Cassirer als Vermittler deutscher impressionistischer Malerei in Berlin: Zum Stand der Forschung,' *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 42 (1988), no. 3, pp. 31-46.

31 Zurich, archives of Walter Feilchenfeldt, 'Geschäftsbücher Paul Cassirer, Buch I,' p. 78. See also Barbara Paul, 'Drei Sammlungen französischer impressionistischer Kunst im kaiserlichen Berlin – Bernstein, Liebermann, Arnhold,' in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaften* 42 (1988), no. 3, pp. 17, 28; Feilchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 29), p. 122; Claude Keisch, 'Liebermann, Künstler und Kunstfreund. Die

Sammlung,' in *Max Liebermann – Jahrhundertwende*, cit. (note 8), pp. 221-38, here p. 231.

32 Paul Ortwin Rave, *Kunstdiktatur im Dritten Reich* [1949], ed. Uwe M. Schneede, Berlin 1987, p. 19.

33 Annegret Janda and Jörn Grabowski, *Kunst in Deutschland, 1905–1937: Die verlorene Sammlung der Nationalgalerie im damaligen Kronprinzen-Palais. Dokumentation. Aus Anlass der Ausstellung Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie*, 1992, Berlin 1992, p. 107, no. 113.

34 *Catalogue of the Hiroshima Museum of Art*, Hiroshima (Hiroshima Museum of Art) 1978, no. 23.

35 Carol M. Zemel, *The formation of a legend: Van Gogh criticism, 1890–1920*, Ann Arbor 1980, pp. 105-31.

36 Max Liebermann, 'Justi und seine Sachverständigen-Kommission,' in *Kunst und Künstler* 33 (1931-32), pp. 65-71, quoted in Max Liebermann, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei: Schriften und Reden*, ed. Günter Busch, Frankfurt am Main 1978, p. 288: 'Van Gogh war ein Genie, dessen dämonische Leidenschaft seinen Gestaltungsdrang bei weitem überflügelte und ihn so verhinderte, ein in sich vollendetes Werk zu schaffen. Und darauf kommt es für das Publikum und für den Künstler an, auf die Vollendung, auf das vollendete und deshalb vorbildliche Werk. Das leidenschaftliche Streben Van Goghs kann nicht hoch genug geschätzt werden; aber nicht das Erstrebte, sondern das Erreichte, nicht das Gewollte, sondern das Gekonnte ist für den kunstsuchenden und kunstempfindenden Beschauer der bleibende Genuss am Werke.'