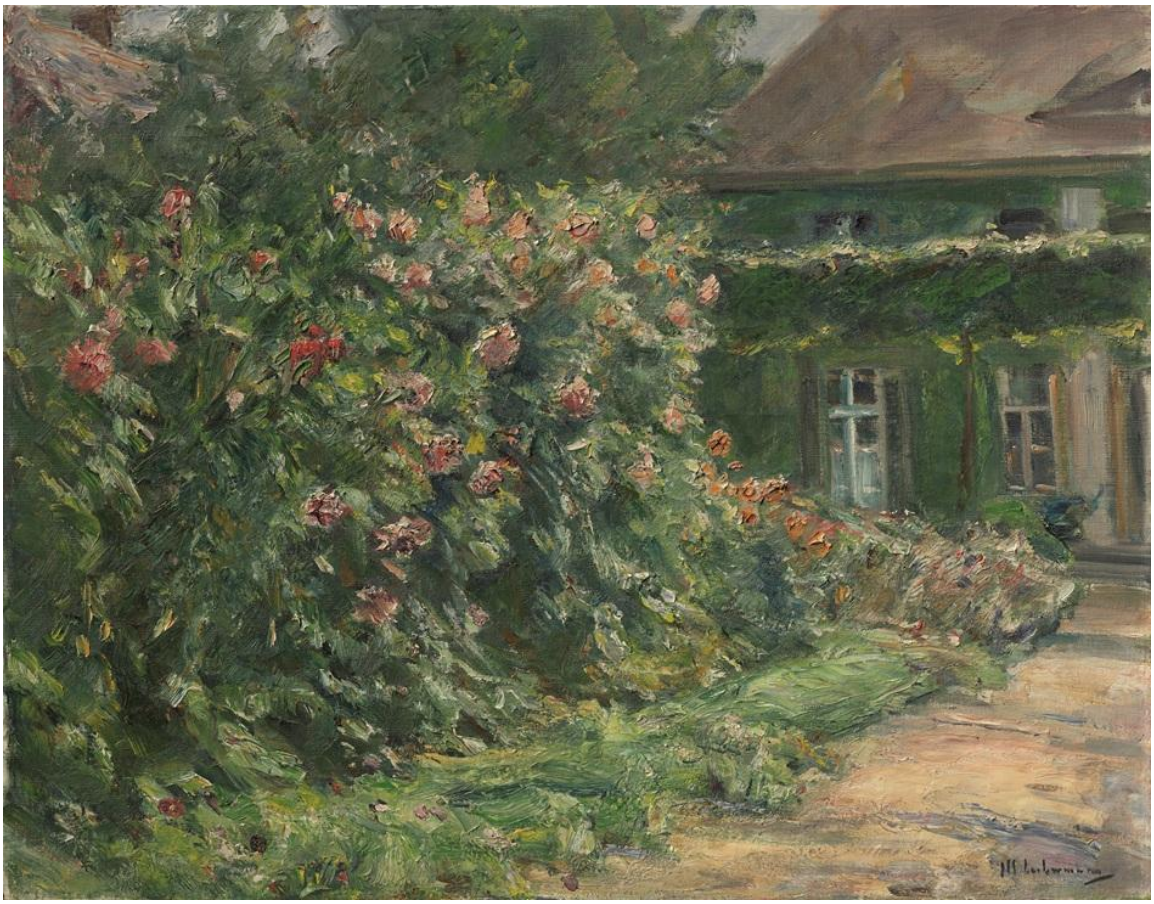
MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA

BADEN-BADEN

PRESS RELEASE

IMPRESSIONISM IN GERMANY: MAX LIEBERMANN AND HIS TIMES

OCTOBER 3, 2025 – FEBRUARY 8, 2026



Max Liebermann, *My House in Wannsee with the Garden,* ca. 1926, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 90.2 cm, private collection

With the exhibition *Impressionism in Germany: Max Liebermann and His Times*, the Museum Frieder Burda devotes itself to one of the most important artistic currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – and the painter who helped it achieve a breakthrough in Germany. Max Liebermann (1847–1935) is considered a pioneer of German Impressionism, a movement whose luminous imagery and modern motifs are still captivating today. 108 works from more than sixty international collections offer fascinating insights into the German manifestation of a style that developed in Paris in the 1860s among artists such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

The exhibition is organized in cooperation with the Museum Barberini in Potsdam and is under the patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

To this day, the brilliantly colored visual worlds of Impressionism exert a fascination unequaled by almost any other art movement. The painting that emerged in France in the 1860s was marked by intense, glowing colors and energetic, sketch-like brushwork. With Max Liebermann (1847–1935) as its pioneer, this revolutionary new approach soon set the tone for the avant-garde in the German Empire as well. Artists explored a wide range of motifs, from sundrenched landscapes and atmospheric figural scenes to meticulously arranged still lifes.

The show *Impressionism in Germany: Max Liebermann and His Times* is one of the largest exhibitions ever devoted to this theme and presents an opulent survey of the entire development of the movement, from the 1880s to the 1920s. World-famous pieces by artists including Max Liebermann, Lovis Corinth, Max Slevogt, and Fritz von Uhde are featured alongside works by painters whose contribution is well worth rediscovering **–** amongst them Dora Hitz, Philipp Franck, Gotthardt Kuehl, Christian Landenberger, Sabine Lepsius, and Max Uth.

From the beginning, the influence of France played a key role in the development of German Impressionism. Liebermann and many other painters drew inspiration from the works of their French colleagues, which they studied during prolonged stays in Paris. Back in Germany, galleries such as the Kunstsalon of Paul Cassirer in Berlin regularly exhibited paintings by Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and others. To the emperor's outrage, the director of the Nationalgalerie, Hugo von Tschudi, acquired important examples of modern French painting as early as the 1890s. Liebermann amassed a top-tier collection of such works, which guests could admire at his villa in Wannsee. Like Claude Monet in Giverny, he also planted an elaborate garden in Wannsee from 1909 on, and its floral splendor became the primary motif of his late Impressionist oeuvre.

The show at the Museum Frieder Burda not only celebrates Liebermann as a central artistic figure, but also illuminates his exceptional influence as a collector, exhibition-maker, and mentor. As president of the Berlin Secession, the Jewish painter was also a courageous advocate for progress, internationalism, and innovation in the archconservative German Empire — and one of the most important cultural-political protagonists in the German capital. Liebermann also played a key role in the increasingly intensive dialogue with France. The French state awarded Liebermann a medal of honor and admitted him as one of the first German artists to the prestigious Société des Beaux-Arts already in the course of the Exposition universelle of 1889, and five years later his genre painting *Beer Garden in Brannenburg* (1893, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) was acquired for the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. In 1896, Liebermann was accepted into the French Legion of Honor, a highly symbolic distinction he had previously been prohibited from receiving by the conservative, nationalistic government of Prussia.

Liebermann died two years after the Nazi rise to power, a political shift that put an abrupt end to the development of modern art in Germany. His widow Martha Liebermann chose suicide in 1943, a few days before her scheduled deportation to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Their daughter Käthe and young granddaughter Maria had already fled into American exile in

1938. Liebermann's extensive holdings of French Impressionist paintings were scattered to the wind and are now found largely in collections on the other side of the Atlantic. Today, his artist's villa in Wannsee serves not only as an important site of cultural heritage, but also as a political memorial.

The exhibition at the Museum Frieder Burda showcases Liebermann's contribution to German art and culture in the broader context of the Impressionist avant-garde. The 108 works by twenty-one artists are arranged into eight thematic chapters: 1) "Elevating Everyday Life: Genre Painting," 2) "Painters of Modern Life: Bourgeois Leisure," 3) "Dramatic Poses: The World as a Stage," 4) "The City as Spectacle: Urban Scenes," 5) "Great Expectations: Portraits of Children," 6) "Dynamism and Freshness: Painting in Nature," 7) "Liberation of Color: Still Lifes," 8a) "Terrestrial Paradise: Liebermann's Artist Garden," and 8b) Hortus Conclusus: The Garden as a Refuge." Among the numerous highlights of the exhibition are icons of German Impressionism such as Max Liebermann's *Samson and Delilah* (1902, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main), Lovis Corinth's *Woman at the Goldfish Tank* (1911, Belvedere, Vienna), Max Slevogt's *The Champagne Aria* (1902, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), and Fritz von Uhde's *Children's Room* (1889, Hamburger Kunsthalle). Another focus is a group of important works by women painters such as Dora Hitz, Sabine Lepsius, Marina Slavona, and Eva Stort, who are largely forgotten today but were able to achieve artistic success in the German Empire.

"Baden-Baden has long fostered a close cultural exchange with France – a connection that was also especially important to our founder, Frieder Burda," notes Dr. Daniel Zamani, curator of the exhibition. "As the first German member of the purchasing commission of the Centre Pompidou, he energetically promoted a dialogue of art across national borders. This exhibition not only explores Max Liebermann's role as a pioneer of German Impressionism, but also illuminates the deep cultural interconnections between Germany and France." Florian Trott, Managing Director of the Museum Frieder Burda, continues: "We are overjoyed at the collaboration with the Museum Barberini in Potsdam. The exhibition is the expression of a vital exchange between two private museums that share a common goal of bringing art to life in its historical and social context. The show focuses on Max Liebermann as a pioneer of German Impressionism – and at the same time sheds light on the complex artistic and social-political environment that influenced him. The heated cultural conflicts that characterized the German Empire and the Weimar Republic also make the exhibition highly relevant in many respects."

About the Exhibition

Curator
Dr. Daniel Zamani
Artistic Director, Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden

Assistant Curator
Christiane Righetti
Research Associate, Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden

Artists (*number of exhibited works)
Georg Burmester (1), Lovis Corinth (14), Dora Hitz (1), Philipp Franck (2), Ludwig von Gleichen-Rußwurm (1), Heinrich Hübner (1), Friedrich Kallmorgen (2), Konrad von Kardorff (1), Gotthardt Kuehl (3); Christian Landenberger (1), Sabine Lepsius (4), Heinrich Eduard Linde-Walther (1), Max Liebermann (37), Franz Skarbina (1), Maria Slavona (1), Max Slevogt (21), Eva Stort (1), Wilhelm Trübner (1), Fritz von Uhde (5), Lesser Ury (8), Max Uth (1).

Lenders:
Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Galerie Bastian, Berlin; Jüdisches Museum, Berlin; Stiftung Stadtmuseum, Berlin; Kunsthalle Bremen; Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz; Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt; Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden; Galerie Paffrath, Düsseldorf; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Kunstmuseum Gelsenkirchen; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Landesmuseum Hannover; Kunsthalle Karlsruhe; Lentos Landesmuseum, Linz; Museum Behnhaus Drägerhaus, Lübeck; Landesmuseum Mainz; Kunsthalle Mannheim; Neue Pinakothek, Munich; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Kunstmuseum Solothurn; Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Klassik Stiftung Weimar; Belvedere, Vienna; Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal; and numerous private collections.

Catalog
The richly illustrated, 288-page exhibition catalog is published by Prestel Verlag in English and German and includes texts by Alexander Bastek, Karoline Feulner, Valentina Plotnikova, Christiane Righetti, Barbara Schaefer, Lucy Wasensteiner, Ortrud Westheider, and Daniel Zamani. Available in the museum's Concept Store for the special price of 39 euros.

Audio Tour
An audio tour of the exhibition is available in English, German, and French (duration: ca. 1 hour, fee: 5 euros).

Program and Events
For information on the extensive program of events accompanying the exhibition, visit museum-frieder-burda.de/kalender.

Press Images and Exhibition Texts
A selection of high-resolution press images is available at museum-frieder-burda.de/presse.
Exhibition texts are found on pages 6–8 of this press release.

Supported by

FONTANA STIFTUNG

Our Media Partners

arte BNN BADISCHE NEUESTE NACHRICHTEN

Press Contact
Daniela Sistermanns
+49 (0)7221 39898-33, sistermanns@museum-frieder-burda.de

Opening Hours
Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Open all holidays, closed December 24 and 31

1) Elevating Everyday Life: Genre Painting

Liebermann and his colleagues developed their Impressionist imagery building on the achievements of Realism. They rejected the idealizing depiction of historical and mythological scenes propagated by the Prussian Academy of the Arts. Moreover, contrary to Emperor Wilhelm II's call for the "national" renewal of German culture, the rebellious Impressionists stood for social change and internationalism – values that were informed by their democratic understanding of art. In their genre paintings, they elevated the everyday life of ordinary people to subjects worthy of depiction. For inspiration, they looked to France as well as to the artistic tradition of the Netherlands, characterized by its quest for the descriptive portrayal of reality.

2) Painters of Modern Life: Bourgeois Leisure

The social ascent of the bourgeoisie was one of the most important developments of the nineteenth century. The French Impressionists recognized the potential of this new class of buyers early on and successfully mobilized it for their own purposes. German artists, too, focused extensively on the modern world of the rising bourgeoisie. Light-filled interiors and colorful depictions of restaurants, beer gardens, and outdoor leisure provided ideal images of identification for progressive viewers. The sketch-like brushwork and glowing palette of the Impressionist style often imbue these works with an atmosphere of carefree pleasure.

3) Dramatic Poses: The World as a Stage

Theatricality was an important theme in early twentieth-century painting. Biblical subjects and scenes from operas were appealing to artists aiming to capture strong emotions on canvas. The Impressionists in Germany used spontaneous brushwork to lend their paintings a sense of performative drama. Their compositions became a resonance chamber for contemporaneous innovations in theater and modern dance. Images of female avengers from the Bible such as Salome took on new meaning in the wake of the first emancipation movement. In response to the figural compositions of Slevogt and Corinth, Liebermann produced his important large-scale painting Samson and Delilah (1902), which impressively brings to the fore the sociopolitical topic of the battle of the sexes.

4) The City as Spectacle: Urban Scenes

The conquest of the street and the emergence of outdoor activities were decisive in the nineteenth century. Liebermann and his fellow artists were fascinated by the dramatic expansion of Berlin, which rapidly developed into a modern metropolis following the unification of the German Empire in 1871. The Impressionists, however, focused their gaze not on tourist attractions or national monuments but on gardens, parks, and lively activity on the street. Their dynamic brushwork was perfectly suited to capturing the hustle and bustle of cities as if in a photographic snapshot. Many of their compositions also reflect ambivalence toward the new anonymity of these urban centers.

5) Great Expectations: Portraits of Children

During the Wilhelmine era, the Impressionists in Germany frequently portrayed the generation of heirs. These works are directly related to the portraits of children by Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Mary Cassatt, which were painted for French and American industrialists who founded bourgeois dynasties during the economic boom. Not only did such patrons harbor great expectations for their progeny; they also took the greatest care with their education – as did the artists themselves with their own children. Sunlight and the free brushwork of Impressionism often express a sense of naturalness and the joyful spirit of a new beginning. In this way, the paintings also bear witness to the liberal impulse of educational reform.

6) Dynamism & Freshness: Painting in Nature

Like their French colleagues, the Impressionists in Germany frequently left their studios and painted their landscapes outdoors, directly in front of the motif. Using the alla prima technique, they dispensed with preparatory studies and sought to capture the subjective impression of nature on the canvas as directly and authentically as possible. Plein-air painting introduced glowing color into their idyllic compositions. Many of the painters drew inspiration from French artists such as Édouard Manet and Claude Monet, whose works had already achieved great prominence in the German Empire in the late 1890s.

7) Liberation of Color: Still Lifes

Still life painting emerged as an independent pictorial genre in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century. There, the decorative arrangement of a wide array of objects was informed not only by aesthetic considerations but also by symbolic associations. The nineteenth-century European avantgardes rejected this allegorizing dimension and instead embraced the genre as an arena for painterly experimentation. The still lifes of the German Impressionists reflect the liberation of color as an autonomous aesthetic element. The energetic brushwork and sketch-like articulation of the surface often lend the works a strikingly abstract character.

8a) Terrestrial Paradise: Liebermann's Artist Garden

In 1909 Liebermann purchased an estate in the Wannsee district of Berlin, where he built a villa and commissioned the planting of an extensive garden. From 1915–16 on, he devoted himself to depicting this luxuriant, self-made paradise, emulating the landscapes of French Impressionism with the immediacy of plein-air painting. Working in series, he created more than two hundred images of various sections of the property, including the flower garden, vegetable garden, gardener's house, Wannsee terrace, and birch grove. Painting in nuanced values of rich green, he skillfully punctuated the scenes with accents of red, blue, pink, orange, and violet.

8b) Hortus Conclusus: The Garden as a Refuge

Until his death in 1935, Liebermann's town house on Pariser Platz in Berlin remained his primary residence. He spent the summer months at his house in Wannsee, where he had planted a spectacular Reformgarten (natural garden) with the help of art historian Alfred Lichtwark. The garden in Wannsee provided him with more than just ornamental floral splendor and inspiration for his painting. Deeply embittered by the growing antisemitism of German nationalists, the garden became an existential refuge for the artist – a modern hortus conclusus where he could retreat every summer into the quiet idyll of domestic bliss. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, Liebermann resigned from his post as Honorary President of the Prussian Academy of the Arts as a sign of public protest.