

Max Pietschmann Tommy Todtmann



GRISEBACH

237 Max Pietschmann

From our auction „19th Century Art“, 27 November 2019, 3 p.m.

Max Pietschmann
1865 – Dresden – 1852

Tommy Todtmann. 1855
Oil on canvas. 105,5 × 80 cm. (41 ½ × 31 ½ in.) Signed and dated lower left (incised into the wet paint): M. Pietschmann Novbr. 85. [3506]

Provenance
From the estate of the artist

EUR 6.000–8.000
USD 6,590–8,790

Anna Ahrens: Tommy Todtmann

Those were decisive years. German art academies were long overdue for reform and the problem had become an obstinate topic of debate in the public arena as well as in student circles. The 1880s saw numerous (secessionistically oriented) initiatives being pursued by artists. The Dresden Art Academy as well, one of the most venerable schools for artists in the German-speaking world, had become mired in stagnation.

The situation had already seen improvement – at least as far as painting was concerned – in 1876, when Ferdinand Pauwels, a Belgian, and Leon Pohle were selected as the respective directors of the Master Atelier for Historical & Genre Painting and of the Preparatory Painting Hall. This was already a refreshing change in itself, given that it marked the replacement of Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who had championed the Romantic-Nazarane aesthetic for nearly a quarter century. Both of the new appointees hailed from Weimar, where Pauwels had taught not only Pohle but also Max Liebermann. This said, the master painter Pauwels did rather less well when it came to serving as an instructor. As the director of the Sächsische Gemäldegalerie, Karl Woermann would recall later, Pauwels was “all too reluctant” to “venture beyond the confines of his own experience” and had a heart “neither for Franco-German open-air painting nor for specifically German art.” Leon Pohle was entirely different, according to the art historian Hans Joachim Neidhardt, who recalled him as “an outstanding teacher” and a “fresh breeze in the suffocating atmosphere of Dresden’s academic routine.” This “refined and rather quiet character” was able to “see through the supposed value of the entire operation,” as the “sarcastic remarks” revealed that he was wont to make.

In the mid-1880s, Pohle’s painting class was where a whole group of talented and very independently minded students congregated that included Max Pietschmann, Osmar Schindler, Richard Müller, and Robert Sterl. Seen from a modern standpoint, Pohle’s fresh breeze stirring up the stale air at the Akademie, and the great “jubilation” (to quote Robert Sterl) with which the younger generation greeted it, is somewhat surprising.

Tommy Todtmann is the name of the handsome man who is shown here, barechested and with a red and gold sash around his hips, standing against a nondescript wall. He is young, probably the same age as the students at the Academy. Well-formed muscles define his chiseled, athletic physique. Arms crossed, he leans back nonchalantly in a place that might be best described as “nowhere in particular.” Well aware of his looks and physical presence – at least that is the impression he gives – he looks left at a point somewhere outside the frame, as if averting his face in an attempt to evade the eyes of those looking him up and down. The view from a slightly lower angle with which Todtmann is presented seems to only reinforce his presence. Our gaze wanders over his picturesquely beautiful body, yet we never doubt for an instant that we are looking

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at an individual character, a genuine person.

The name of the artist who created the portrait is Max Pietschmann. Remarkably assured in his mastery of proportion, composition, and execution, the barely twenty-old student puts his huge talent as a painter on full display. This is not a mere sketch that Pietschmann has painted here, or an academic study meant to exercise his technical abilities. Pietschmann has portrayed a real person in the flesh. He has captured Tommy Todtmann in paint.

In fact our portrait serves to complete a trilogy of Todtmann portraits. During the period in question, Todtmann worked as a model at the Dresdner Akademie, in the painting class taught by Pohle. An outstanding portrait painter in his own right, Pohle had evidently asked his students to take up the challenge of portraiture. As a result, we know of a second, amazingly similar portrait by the well-known German impressionist Robert Sterl (see insert figure). This is currently held by the Robert-Sterl-Haus museum in Naundorf, whose experts have identified a drawing by the artist Erika Streit that expressly names the portrait's subject. Osmar Schindler created a similar portrait of Todtmann in 1885 (which forms part of the artist's estate.) And Richard Müller? He, too, was part of the same painting class, and he also knew Todtmann. Müller became a teacher at the Akademie in 1902, was promoted to professor and eventually became the school's rector. In 1933, while serving in this capacity, he appealed all the way up to the competent ministry to fight the dismissal of a black model. This was not just anyone. It was Tommy Todtmann.



Visual Addition: Robert Sterl, Academy model (African), oil on canvas, 100 x 71,5 cm, Robert Sterl Haus, Naundorf