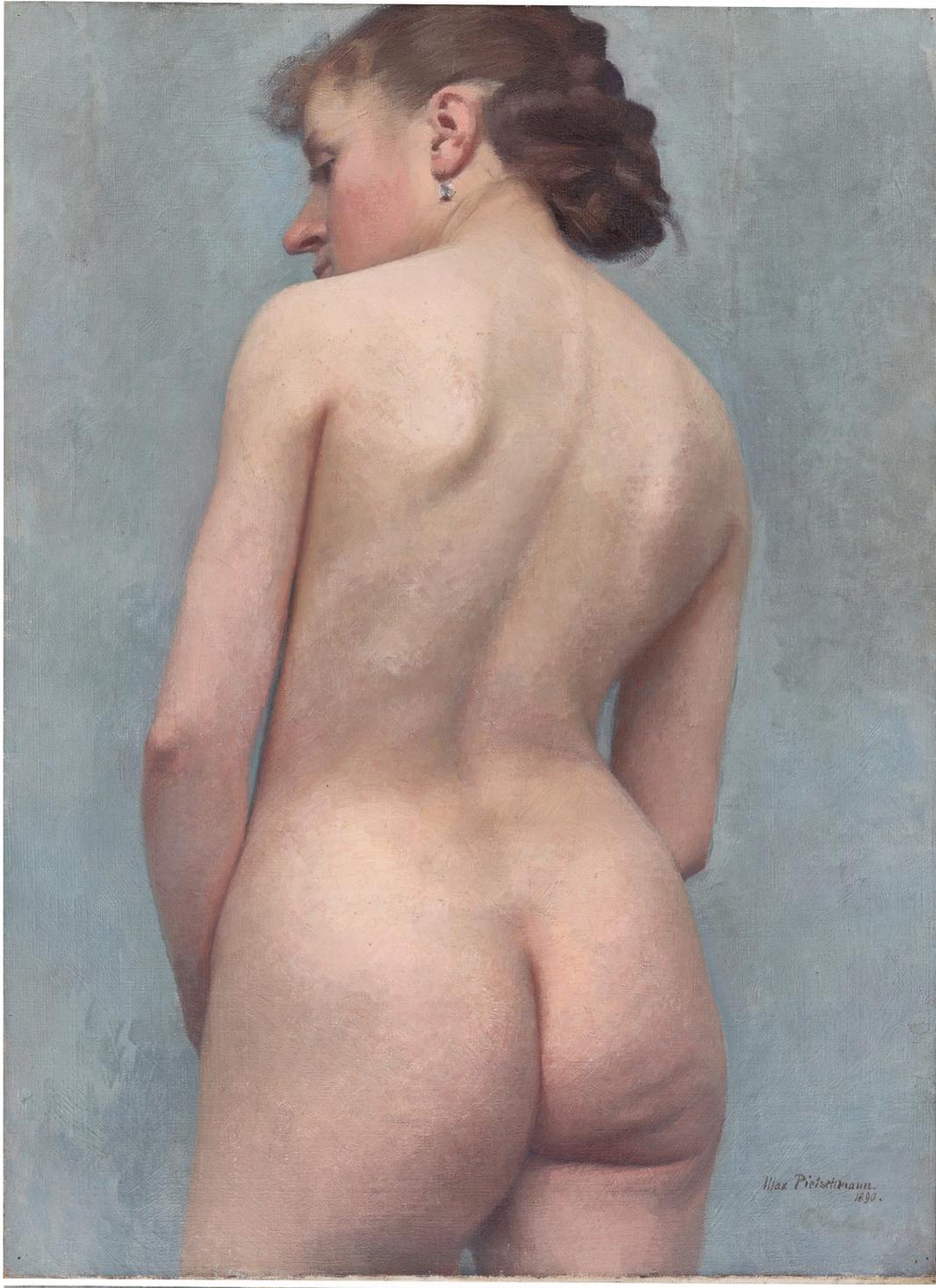


Max Pietschmann Female nude, seen from behind



GRISEBACH

241 Female nude, seen from behind

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

Max Pietschmann
1865 – Dresden – 1852

Female nude, seen from behind. 1890.
Oil on canvas. 81 × 59 cm. (31 7/8 × 23 1/4 in.)

Provenance
From the estate of the artist

EUR 3.000–4.000
USD 3,300–4,400

Karlheinz Lüdeking: Dresden 2.0

Around the year 1800, when Carl Gustav Carus, Johan Christian Dahl, and Caspar David Friedrich were working there, Dresden was the undisputed center of Romantic painting in the German-speaking world. But what did the city have to offer in artistic terms a hundred years later?

The first that comes to mind is the group of four architecture students who, calling themselves the “Brücke,” joined forces to commit their desires and fears “expressionistically” to canvas, thereby exorcizing them, as it were. In so doing, they were following the guiding principle established by Caspar David Friedrich: That a painter should not paint what he sees in front of him, but what he sees in himself. He continued that if a painter were to see nothing in himself, “then he should also refrain from painting what he sees in front of him. Because his paintings will resemble the folding screens behind which one expects to find nothing but the sick and the dead.”

Yet by 1900, there were painters in Dresden who deliberately intended to show only what they saw in front of them. Most of them were professors at the city’s venerable Art Academy. Inspired by the versatile creative output of their teacher Hermann Prell (see Lot 235), they cultivated a detached but sometimes also sardonic realism. It was a style that would later come to be championed by Otto Dix, who trained in Dresden and became an instructor there in his own right.

Among these painters was Max Pietschmann, whose favorite subject was female nudes with their backs to the viewer. One of these (Lot 241) turns her head around to throw an expectant look over her shoulder. She knows that she is being appraised. She is being put up for inspection, and it is not her “beautiful soul” that is of interest here, but solely the physical condition of her body, the connective tissue of which is being scrutinized with unsparing, derma-

tological precision. No empathy here. Instead, a cool, positivistic gaze devoid of illusion, one suited to a world that has long since managed to dispense with romantic introspection.

When people are reduced to their actual, material substrate, this makes it impossible to understand their behavior based on their internal drives. They manage to remain hidden behind the outward roles they play. One can see this quite nicely in the “Prometheus” by Richard Müller (Lot 351 of Grisebach’s “ORANGERIE – Big Animals. Big Shots” auction, to be held at 3:00 P.M. on November 28th, 2019): He doesn’t really look like a heroic rebel, more like the dyspeptic clerk of a bankrupt craft workshop. The “Young Warrior” by Osmar Schindler (Lot 239), on the other hand, does boast the physical stature required of a hero, but his accoutrements – battle axe, Gothic armband, and a helmet which he cradles at waist level – are nothing more than the fake costume props of a film extra.

True, it all seems a bit burlesque, yet none of the main subjects of these paintings are made to look ridiculous. On the other hand, the objective clearly is not to place these strange figures on some sort of celebratory pedestal. They are being depicted just as dispassionately as the three dead partridges (Lot 238) by Richard Müller or the dark-skinned youth (Lot 237) captured with such virtuosity by Max Pietschmann. What is shown is simply what there is to be seen, no matter how eccentric or ordinary it happens to be. It was this approach, a century after the heyday of Romanticism, that gave rise to a completely different kind of painting, one which no longer wanted to be guided by subjective sensitivities. It is only now, another hundred years later, that its true qualities are gradually being appreciated. And so it is fair to say that quite a few hidden jewels from this period await their rediscovery.