



At 62 years of age, the Berlin-based artist and son of a wealthy Jewish textile manufacturer, Max Liebermann (1847-1935), constructed a summer residence and studio in Wannsee. In 1909, he commissioned the architect Paul Otto Baumgarten (1873-1946), who had already built the neighbouring Hampohn Villa (1906) and Marlier/Minoux Villa (1914).

The garden of Liebermann Villa inspired more than 200 of his oil paintings and drawings. The architecture of the interior of the house and the outside garden corresponded in a special way. From 1920 to 1932, Liebermann served as the honorary president of the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, he stepped down from that position, because the academy had decided to no longer exhibit works by Jewish artists. Liebermann spent his final years withdrawn from society and ostracized by the Nazis.

Max and his wife Martha Liebermann spent their last summer at Wannsee in 1934, just a few months before the artist's death. Neither Martha nor her daughter Käthe went back to the villa for long after that. Käthe Riezler emigrated two days after the pogrom of November 9, 1938, with her husband – formerly one of Chancellor Theo-bald von Bethmann Hollweg's closest aides - and her daughter Maria to the USA. Eighty-year-old Martha Liebermann decided to stay in Germany.

On June 14, 1940, Martha Liebermann was forced to sell the villa to the German Reich's postal service, which set up a training centre for female workers in the villa. In the last months of the war, the Wehrmacht used it for a military hospital. Martha Liebermann committed suicide upon receiving the deportation order in 1943 (her story is commemorated in the "Finding Aids" exhibition on the first floor).

After the war, the Liebermann Villa, which was still structurally connected to the neighbouring Hampohn Villa, housed the surgical department of a municipal hospital. Liebermann's daughter, Käthe Riezler, who filed a claim for restitution of her heritage in 1947, sold the estate in 1958 to the State of Berlin.

In 1962, the development plan designated a 40-meter-wide strip on the shores of the lake as a special area for water sports. On June 24, 1972, the German Underwater Club (DUC e.V.) moved into the Liebermann Villa.

In the summer of 1992, the Cologne art collectors Franke approached the DUC with a request for permission to hold a Liebermann exhibition in the villa in Wannsee. For the first time since 1945, Max Liebermann's paintings were to be seen where many of them originated. This three-week event attracted 18,000 visitors to the former summer house of Max Liebermann.

For many - even native Berliners - the villa had been an unknown place until then. A larger public beyond Berlin gained awareness of the house and began to wonder why the summer home of the most important German impressionist was rented to a sports club as a clubhouse. In 1995, a small group of citizens from Berlin founded the "Max Liebermann Gesellschaft" (MLG) to commemorate Max Liebermann and his oeuvre. The same year, the villa was also listed as a national monument. On the 150th anniversary of the painter's birth, in 1997, finally the way was paved for the realization of their project. In Berlin, two large nationally acclaimed exhibitions at the National Gallery and the Centrum Judaicum attracted numerous visitors. New publications dealt with the life and work of Max Liebermann. The exhibition in the gallery of the MLG at "Mother Fourage" documented the history of the Liebermann Villa and the Colonie Alsen for the first time, giving the local government the decisive push to support a Liebermann Museum in Wannsee. Finally, the Berlin state assembly acknowledged the importance of Max Liebermann to the city of Berlin and passed a resolution in November 1997 to designate the villa for cultural use. It took another five years until the MLG was finally able to take over the Liebermann Villa, in the summer of 2002.

Since its opening as a museum in April 2006, more than 80,000 visitors have come each year to visit this place reclaimed and restored in memory of the artist Max Liebermann, to honour him, to see his works and to enjoy the garden.

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