

Max Pechstein
Zwickau 1881 – 1955 Berlin

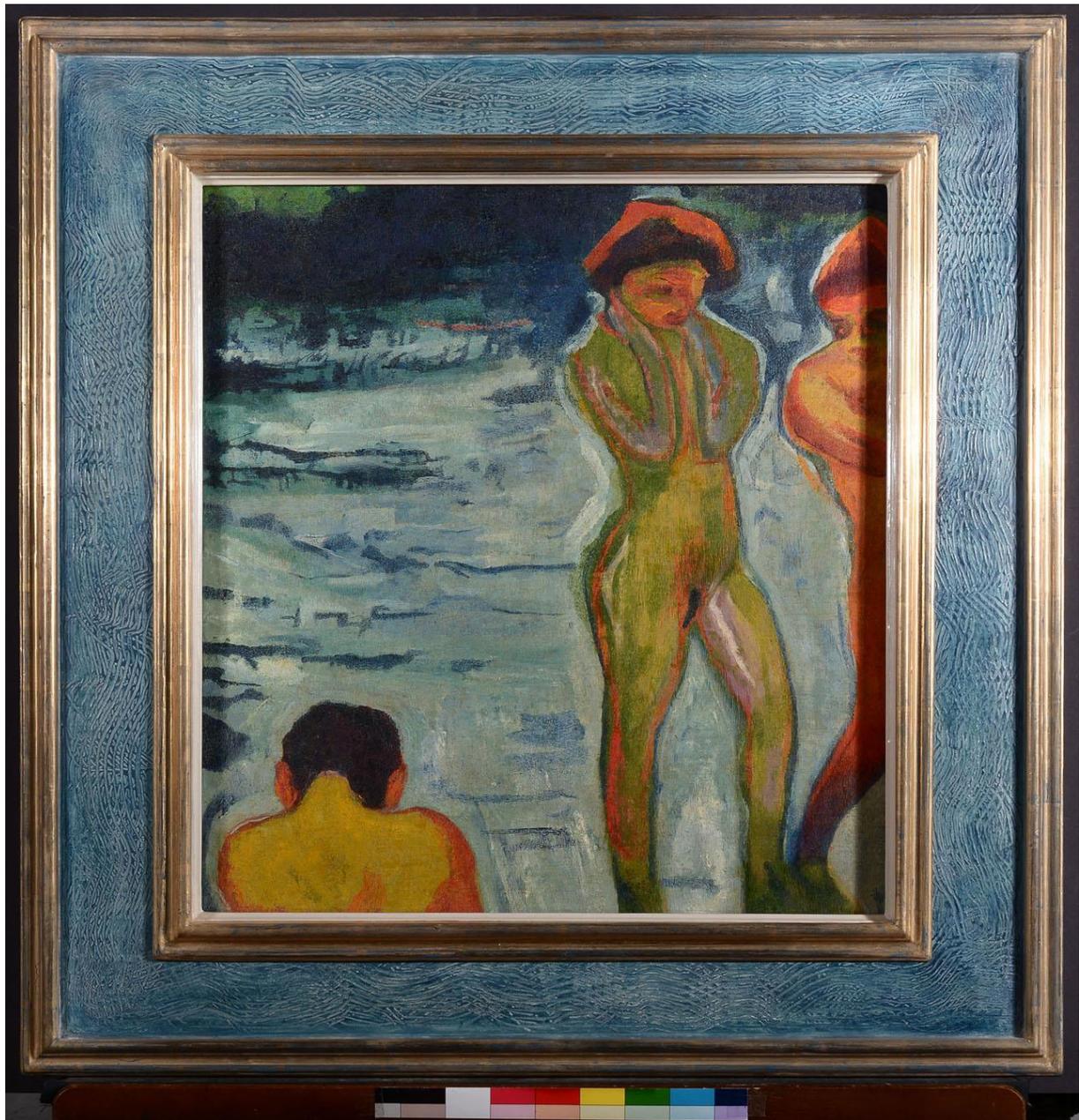
recto: Stilleben / Still life with wine bottle and fruit bowl

signed and dated I.I.: HMPechstein and dated 1917

verso: Sitzender und stehende Akte bei Niggen an der Kurischen Nehrung
Nudes at Nidden on the Curonian Peninsula (painted in 1911 – a fragment?)

oil on unlined canvas 51 x 54cm / 20 by 21 1/4 in.





Provenance:

Kunsthandel Dr Rainer Horstmann, Düsseldorf (acquired by 1965)
Herbert Tannenbaum Gallery, New York (acquired by 1968)
Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York (acquired by 1968)
Galerie Aenne Abels, Cologne (acquired by 1971)
Galerie Thomas, Munich (acquired by 1972)
Private Collection, Baden-Württemberg (acquired between 1973-82)
Sale: Hauswedell & Nolte, Hamburg, 12th June 1982, lot 1161
Private Collection, Germany (purchased at the above sale)

Exhibited:

New York, Leonard Hutton Gallery, *Fauves & Expressionists*, 1968, no. 95, illustrated in the catalogue

Literature:

Aya Soika, *Max Pechstein: Das Werkverzeichnis der Ölgemälde, 1905-1918*, Munich, 2011, vol. I, no. 1917/33, illustrated p. 507

Verso

The present work was executed in the short but seminal period from 1906 - 1912 in which Max Pechstein participated as a leading member of the small Expressionist group Die Brücke. This movement, inspired by the writing of Nietzsche, sought to escape from the repressive social structures of modern society and to return to a more authentic, liberated mode of being – both in terms of living and art making. After initial reticence about joining, Pechstein was to become a key proponent of the group and the first adherent to gain success and recognition. Later recalling the public reception for an early exhibition organised by Die Brücke in 1906, Pechstein proudly declared, 'we caused wild clamouring, not just in the Dresden press, but in the entire art scene. For the well-behaved philistine [...] we were welcome objects for ridicule and derision. But that did not bother us. Proudly we considered ourselves carriers of a mission' (M. Pechstein quoted in B. Fulda & A. Soika, 'Max Pechstein: The Rise and Fall of Expressionism', in S. Denham, I. Kacandes & J. Petropoulos (eds.), *Interdisciplinary German Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, Berlin, 1912, p. 41).

Sitzender und stehende Akte, with its dynamic portrayal of nude bathers in differing poses en plein air, conveys some of the key principles and artistic aims of the Brücke movement, crucially drawing upon the aesthetic breakthroughs that Pechstein had made just a year previously with two founding members of the group, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, during a trip to Moritzburg. It was in this small village at a pond used as a nudist bathing resort by the Society for Community Health, Dresden North and Vicinity, that the artists were able for the first time to freely and legally paint nudes in the open air. The artists made the trip with three amateur models (including Kirchner's girlfriend Dodo) and would often set up their easels alongside one another to sketch and paint the same scene. As Pechstein later recalled in his memoirs, 'early in the mornings we painters would set off, loaded with our heavy gear, while the models would follow behind with bags of eatables and drinkables. We lived in absolute harmony; we worked and we swam. If a male model was needed as an antipole, one of us three would step into the breach' (M. Pechstein quoted in B. Fulda & A. Soika, *ibid*, p. 94).

It was here that the artists established a new-found, gestural style which foregrounded the process of creation over the final product. This sense of spontaneity and sketchiness flew in the face of artistic convention and resulted in an aesthetic hitherto unseen in German art. Aside from the group's aims to break away from the contrived techniques of the Academy, it was in the simplification and immediacy of form that the artists were able to most appropriately describe the 'primitive' lifestyle that they were advocating. Meanwhile the subject of the bather itself, couched within the natural environment, symbolised an alternative space in which man could return to an elementary existence, free from the trappings of civilisation and culture. In this respect the depiction of bathers within nature aptly aligned with key aspects of Nietzschean thought: 'The domestication (the culture) of man does not go deep – where it does it at once becomes degeneration... The savage (or in moral terms the evil man) is a return to nature – and in a certain sense is his recovery, his cure from culture' (F. Nietzsche quoted in his compiled writings, *In Der Wille zur Macht*, published in 1906, quoted in J. Lloyd, *German Expressionism, Primitivism and Modernity*, London, 1991, p. 115).

Realised through the same gestural and fluid handling honed in Moritzburg, Pechstein here depicts his bathers with a consummate sureness of hand and economy of line. While Kirchner and Heckel's works were often characterised by more angular and stylised figures which owed much to their appreciation of African and Oceanic sculpture, Pechstein could sometimes not resist the contours of a female curve. The figures in *Sitzender und stehende Akte* are an example of this sensual handling; curvilinear sweeps of orange and blue deftly form rounded bellies and breasts, muscular thighs and

shapely buttocks, yet this sumptuous depiction of the female form was also no doubt prompted by the fact that the model for the present work was Pechstein's young new wife, Lotte Kaprolat.

In the summer of 1911 Pechstein and Lotte travelled to Nidden on the Curonian Peninsula and stayed there from mid-June until mid-September. The present work was executed during these three months - a period which was for Pechstein immensely fecund both privately and professionally. Writing to his friend Alexander Gerbig on 6 July 1911 Pechstein exclaimed, 'even if we have no money at least we know how to live... so let's dance [...] and jump, everything now is copulating, the roebuck is after the doe, and above our window the cock pigeon is cooing, on the street the rooster is strutting among his harem, so why not we humans, after all it is sensuality within us which creates [and] we owe it our lives and our work' (M. Pechstein quoted in B. Fulda & A. Soika, op. cit., p. 106).

For the first time in his career Pechstein was able to devote himself exclusively to his work and produced more than sixty paintings, making it one of the most productive periods in his life: 'I had many uplifting hours of work which sent shivers down my spine' Pechstein later effused (M. Pechstein quoted in B. Fulda & A. Soika, *ibid.*, p. 107). While the experience of Moritzburg pervaded these new works, Pechstein now considered that he was able to capture the unity of man and nature in a stronger and more mature way. Lotte was a willing model and his sketches from this time show that the sources for his compositions were in fact alternate life studies of her moving through the landscape, which he later synthesised into group bather scenes; a compositional device which can also be seen in André Derain's *Les Baigneuses* from 1907 (J. Lloyd, op. cit., pp. 197 – 199).

Sitzender und stehende Akte is almost certainly a work executed from life of Lotte adopting varying poses within an imaginary landscape. Working swiftly with watercolour and gouache, Pechstein captured the stance and form of his model in a manner which echoed the spirit of the 'quarter-hour nude' life drawing sessions that he had practised with other members of *Die Brücke* during the formative years of the movement in Dresden. At the same time, his lively depiction of the female form, standing, sitting and bending, directly opposed the 'frozen academic treatment of the subject...present[ing] us with an unconventionally active image of female nudity' (J. Lloyd, *ibid.*, p. 199).

The present work is a tantalising example from a key period in Pechstein's oeuvre. Just a year later he was to break away from the *Brücke* group after their collective withdrawal from the *Neue Sezession* (a splinter group of which Pechstein was a founding member). Drawing upon the aesthetic developments established in Moritzburg, it was during the 1911 trip to Nidden that Pechstein was able to articulate the concept of man and nature as one in a new-found imaginary and symbolic mode. *Sitzender und stehende Akte*, with its bold colours, liberated gestures and animated bathers, effectively conveys the principles at the heart of *Die Brücke* and is testament to the exuberant sensuality and productivity of this period for Pechstein: 'this summer of 1911 intoxicated me from beginning to end' he later declared (M. Pechstein quoted in B. Fulda & A. Soika, op. cit., p. 107).