



Lovis Corinth, 'Bacchant', 1913, erworben mit Mitteln aus dem Etat der Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, des Landes Berlin und des Fördervereins der Berlinischen Galerie e. V., Foto: © Fotostudio Bartsch, Karen Bartsch, Berlin

New purchase: Lovis Corinth's "Bacchant"

The Berlinische Galerie has purchased "Bacchant" (1913), a major work by Lovis Corinth, with funds from the budget of the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Senate Department for Culture and Europe and the museum's own association of friends, the Förderverein der Berlinischen Galerie. Berlin's public museum welcomes this new addition to its Fine Art collection, which will be on display in the permanent exhibition.

The Berlinische Galerie already holds six of the eleven paintings that once made up an outstanding cycle by Lovis Corinth (1858–1925), possibly the best-known Berlin artist of his time. A stroke of good luck has now made it possible to add the "Bacchant" (1913). The canvas, for a long time in private hands, was purchased from the Berlin auction house Grisebach in a post-auction sale.

These works were painted in 1913/14 for the Berlin industrialist Ludwig Katzenellenbogen and his first wife Estella to hang in the banqueting hall of their manor house at Freienhagen. The main building on the estate near Oranienburg no longer stands. The commission for Lovis Corinth was arranged by Paul Cassirer, who ran a gallery in Berlin. The Katzenellenbogens took an interest in modern art and owned a substantial collection, including works by French impressionists. After the couple divorced, Ludwig Katzenellenbogen married the celebrated actor Tilla Durieux, who had once been Cassirer's wife. Estella Katzenellenbogen was awarded half the art collection, including the cycle of paintings by Corinth.

Estella Katzenellenbogen, who was Jewish, suffered persecution by the Nazis from 1933. In 1936, as the threat intensified, she moved to Switzerland for three years. She returned to Berlin briefly in 1939 before finally emigrating to the United States in 1940 via Geneva and Genoa. During the Second World War, works from the cycle were stored at Paul Cassirer in Amsterdam. In 1976, six of the works came to Germany for a Corinth exhibition organised by the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum at the Kunsthalle in Cologne. After the show, they were offered for sale to the Berlinische Galerie, which acquired them in 1980. Records indicate that in 1990 the male "Bacchant" was still owned by Estella Katzenellenbogen's son Konrad Kellen (1913–2007). He made a permanent loan of it to Los Angeles County Museum of Art, until it was sold on the art market to private collectors.

“Bacchant” (1913) by Lovis Corinth: the work

Lovis Corinth painted the cycle in his unmistakable style at the peak of his successful career in Berlin. The male “Bacchant” and its female counterpart, the “Bacchantin”, provided an appropriate theme for the banquet hall. The life-sized dancing figure with his crown of vine leaves and grapes is clad in a leopard skin. In one hand the reveller holds a tambourine, in the other the thyrsus or staff of Dionysus. A leopard at his feet is following the movements of the staff. Corinth drew on mythology for the other paintings in the cycle, too. Motifs include the home-coming of Odysseus as recounted by the Ancient Greek poet Homer and scenes from Ludovico Ariosto’s courtly epic “Orlando furioso”, first published in 1516. The artist also painted two tall panels immortalising the two princes among poets, Homer and Ariosto, who are depicted declaiming their verse.

Intoxication, ecstasy, bacchanalia and Dionysian revelry had featured prominently in Corinth’s oeuvre since the 1890s. In a number of works, the artist portrayed himself as a reveller. Corinth’s idiosyncratic interpretation of classical themes mixes burlesque with satire, as here in the “Bacchant”. Rather than transporting the viewer into a distant era, the artist seems to present these scenes as amateur dramatics, relocating the story in the present. Many modern artists were averse to historical painting because of its associations with courtly representation. Corinth adopted a historical technique that liberates his art from classical tradition and creates something new. With his bold compositions and free brushwork, he devised original approaches to traditional themes.

Press Berlinische Galerie

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Admission 10 €, concessions 7€
Wed–Mon 10 am–6 pm
Tue closed