

# KUNKEL FINE ART

Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen  
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts

## LESSER URY

(1861 Birnbaum - 1931 Berlin)

After the early death of his father, Lesser Ury's mother moved with her three sons from the Prussian province to the up-and-coming imperial capital Berlin in 1873. The poor conditions in which the Jewish family lived in both their old and new homeland left a deep impression on the boy. Ury develops into a social outsider and will always have a latently tense relationship with his environment.

From 1879 to 1887, Ury travelled: in Düsseldorf, Brussels, Antwerp, Paris and Munich, he came into contact with various artistic movements, with French Impressionism impressing him the most. Back in Berlin, Ury sought to get close to Max Liebermann. He would not only be appreciated as an artist, but would also exert immense influence on Berlin's art policy in the decades to come as co-founder of the Vereinigung der XI, chairman of the Berlin Secession and president of the Prussian Academy of Arts. The initially friendly relationship between the two turned into bitter enmity after Ury claimed to have helped Liebermann complete one of his paintings acquired by the Nationalgalerie. With this statement - which Liebermann would neither confirm nor deny until his death - Ury did himself a great deal of harm. His former friend and patron succeeded in isolating him for decades and excluded him from all important artistic circles in Berlin.

Ury's repertoire is wide-ranging: he deals with portraits, interiors and still lifes, as well as religious and landscape motifs. His real subject, however, is the metropolis of Berlin. Despite his shyness towards people, the artist travelled to the coffee houses along the magnificent boulevards, where he studied the milieu of the upper classes at close quarters. Later, in his studio, he worked up the sketches he had made on location into shimmering studies of situations and society. But Ury was even more impressed by the dynamism and mobility that dominated the streets of Berlin. With an impressionistic style, he captures a broad spectrum of atmospheric moods at different times of the day and year, allowing the pulsation of the city to be experienced directly. Ury's works became known far beyond Berlin's borders and epitomised a modern urban attitude to life.

After decades of ostracism, Ury received the official recognition he had been longing for. In 1910, the Great Berlin Art Exhibition honoured him with a hall of honour, in 1916 the renowned gallery owner Paul Cassirer organised a special exhibition for him, and in 1921 the Berlin Secession made him an honorary member. When the Berlin National Gallery purchased several of Ury's paintings in 1923, his breakthrough was finally achieved and his place in the canon of 20th century German art was secured.