

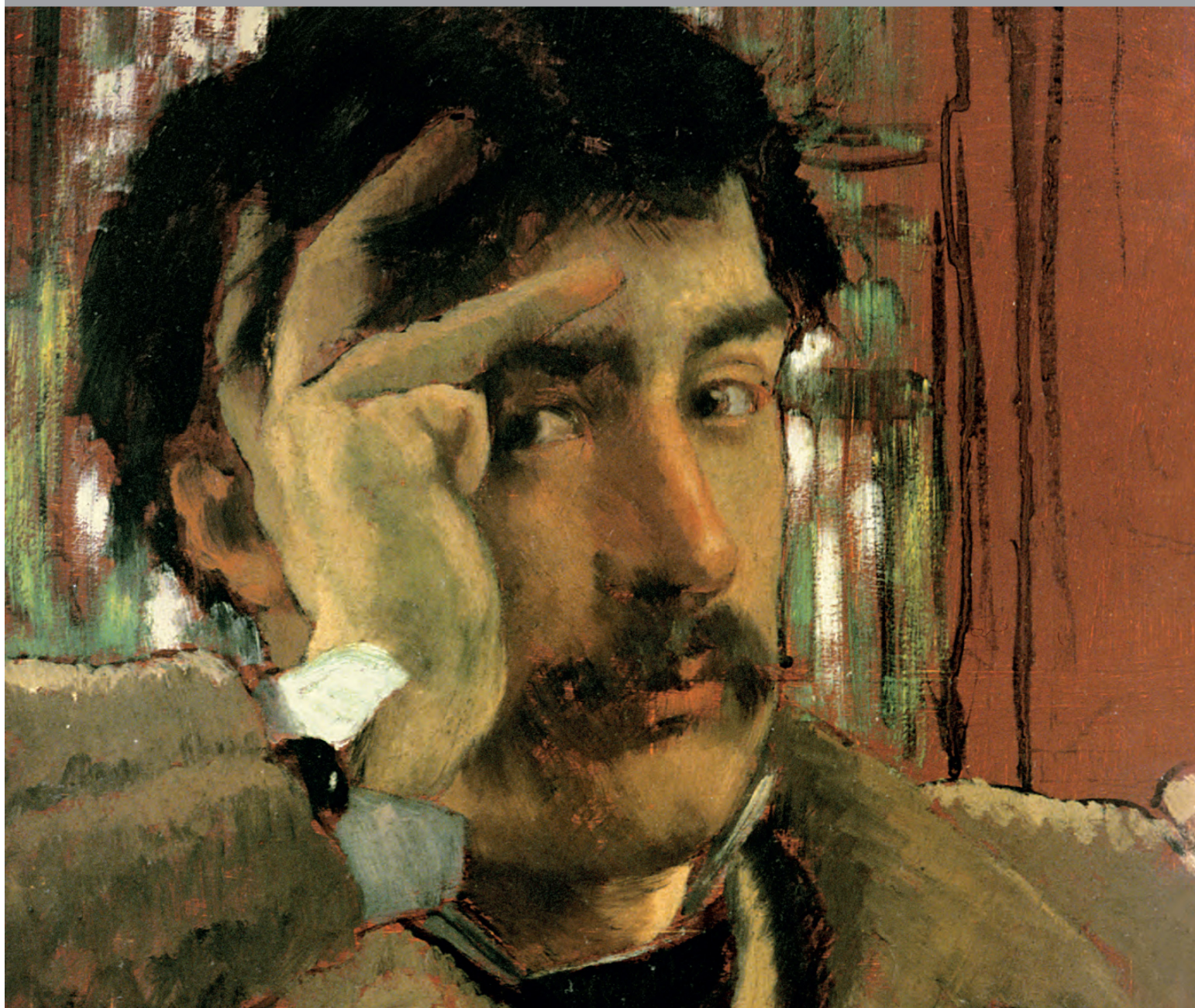
NEW RESEARCH ON ART AND ITS HISTORY

JULY 2020

THE
BURLINGTON
MAGAZINE

Paris 1870–71: Tissot on the front line

Tintoretto's 'Coronation of the Virgin' | Tiepolo's Melbourne 'Finding of Moses' | Van Gogh and Herkomer
The British Galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art | Nicolaes Maes | Edward Hopper | Ketty La Rocca



couturiers from Christian Dior to Pierre Cardin, the pair's aesthetic skill and discernment is opulently showcased in this volume with numerous full-page reproductions of textile swatches, design drawings and fashion photographs.

The book's curious title refers to the name given to Zika Ascher by the press during his parallel career as a professional skier and signals Konstantina Hlaváčková's intention to provide a lively biography. Although the history of the company and its production has been explored in previous publications, the author builds on existing research and adds an examination of the protagonists' family history, formative years and career before the Second World War.¹ Interspersed chapters offer contextual stories of friends and family, which demonstrate the challenges and realities of life as émigrés during the period.

Hlaváčková's account begins in late-nineteenth century Bohemia and traces the Ascher family's burgeoning success in the textile trade, which launched Zika Ascher's early career as a textile wholesaler and retailer in Prague. His life took an abrupt diversion when, in 1939, Germany annexed Czechoslovakia. The son of a Jewish father, Zika and his newlywed, Lida, were forced to flee to London. Despite the Aschers' permanent relocation, Hlaváčková continues to link the narrative back to Prague and wider Czech history, interposing comparative accounts, such as a case study of the Czech textile manufacturer Josef Sochor.

Following their initial years in London and almost immediate triumph with lively patterned dress fabrics (including some made from surplus parachutes), the Aschers commissioned an array of leading artists such as Marie Laurencin and Henry Moore to create designs for a series of silk headscarves later known as 'Ascher Squares'. Straddling the worlds of art and fashion, these continued collaborations became, as Hlaváčková argues, perhaps the most enduring aspect of the Aschers' output. Their relationships with the artists are captured in original correspondence, which is reproduced as facsimiles and where appropriate transcribed or translated, bringing to life notable voices, such as Alexander Calder, Pablo Picasso and Barbara Hepworth.

The volume is a visual joy; the illustrated chronological catalogue of textiles conveys the evolution of the company's designs through the decades, from cheerful printed silks to the innovative so-called 'paper' dresses of the 1970s (which were, in fact, made from non-woven viscose). A closing essay by Zika and

Lida's son, Peter Ascher, adds a personal and intimate insight into the renowned duo. The book stands as a testimony to the company's output and a useful contextualisation of the Ascher legacy.

¹ See V.D. Mendes and F. Hinchcliffe: *Ascher: Fabric, Art, Fashion*, London 1987.

Philip de László (1869–1937): 'I am an artist of the world ...'

Edited by Katherine Field. 90 pp. incl. 90 col. ill. (The de László Archive Trust, London, 2019). £15. ISBN 978-1-5272-4619-5.

by RICHARD ORMOND

The recent exhibition on Philip de László (1869–1937) at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest (closed 5th January), curated by the authors of his catalogue raisonné, led by Sandra de László, Katherine Field and Beáta Somfalvi, with Gábor Bellák of the Hungarian National Gallery, presented this many-sided artist in a choice selection of paintings. The catalogue contains essays and detailed entries that provide an excellent introduction to his work and to the story of his life and times. Once fêted in his native country as a modern master, De László is now all but forgotten in Hungary, and the exhibition was the first display of his work to be held there for more than seventy years. In part, this reflects his expatriate status and the fact that, from a nationalist point of view, his work is insufficiently rooted in the visual culture of his homeland. Like other naturalist painters, he has been cast aside by the tide of Modernist art; his portraits are seen as both elitist and irrelevant, like the trappings of some forgotten era rather than works of art in their own right. He has fared better in Britain, where books and exhibitions, not to speak of the superb online catalogue raisonné, have helped to keep his work in the public eye.¹

Born in Pest in 1869 of humble parentage, De László was the proverbial poor boy made good. Fortunate in his friends and patrons, he was able to study in Paris and Munich (in 1890–92) as well as in Budapest, painting in a variety of genres before devoting himself exclusively to portraiture. His rise to fame and fortune was rapid. Through his friendship with Elek Lippich de Korongh, an influential Hungarian councillor, he received commissions to paint government officials and politicians, including the prime minister Sándor Wekerle in 1893. In 1894

Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria became his first royal patron, to be followed by the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef, the German chancellor and Pope Leo XIII, placing De László firmly on the international stage.

De László's success lay in his high style and painterly panache. The artist conjured up images of people who are tremendously alive and self-evidently important. He humanised the conventions of formal portraiture while giving due weight to the power and prestige of his sitters by portraying them the way they wished to be perceived in the wider world. After residences in Budapest and Vienna, De László moved to London in 1907, settling eventually in Hampstead with his Irish wife, Lucy (née Guinness), who sustained her volatile and temperamental spouse over his thirty-year career in Britain, and their children (he was very much a family man). De László arrived in the very year that John Singer Sargent gave up painting portraits and seamlessly took over his practice. They had more than fifty sitters in common yet whereas Sargent's patrons were largely British or American, De László retained his links with European courts. His subsequent career was not without upsets, including a period of wartime internment as the result of his illegal transfer of funds to Hungarian relatives, but it never stopped him painting and after the war his popularity never waned.

The catalogue offers a representative sample of De László's work. The choice of formal portraits begins with *Cardinal Rampolla* (1900), inspired by Velázquez. Other sitters range from the elderly Duchess of Argyll (1915) and the youthful Duchess of York (the future Queen Elizabeth, later the Queen Mother; 1925) to the ebullient German actress Anny Ahlers in her costume for the musical comedy *The DuBarry* (1933). These are works of quality and personality, and they are matched by a group of vivid and bravura oil sketches, among them Baron Hugo von Reischach, flamboyantly arrayed in a feathered tricorne hat (1899), the German Emperor Wilhelm II – Kaiser Bill – a study for a grandiose 1908 equestrian portrait, a brooding self-portrait (1911) and an enchanting sketch of the artist's wife studying herself in the mirror (1918). Sadly the exhibition will not be travelling, and it must be hoped that some enterprising institution will allow new audiences, particularly in his adopted country, to enjoy his art with a fresh display.

¹ Available at <https://www.delaszlocatalogueraisonne.com/>, accessed 8th June 2020.