



**ELLIOTT FINE ART**

*Nineteenth Century to Early Modern*



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Elena Luksch-Makowsky  
(St Petersburg 1878 – 1967 Hamburg)

*Self-Portrait of the artist during pregnancy (verso)*  
*Two rows of head studies (recto), studies for Die Landeskinder*

Oil on hardboard  
43 x 32.8 cm. (17 x 13 in.)

Provenance:  
Estate of the artist;  
Thence by descent in the artist's family, Switzerland, until 2024.



In this striking self-portrait from early 1901, an oil sketch which the artist kept all her life, Elena Luksch-Makowsky confronts the viewer directly, challenging us to see her as both an artist and a mother-to-be. The self-portrait was painted at the same moment as her gouache self-portrait depicting her pregnancy (fig. 1) with her first child, Peter, and a related ceramic piece (fig. 2). In all three works Luksch-Makowsky wear a gold chain, black shirt, and a red fur-lined overcoat.



Fig. 1, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Pregnant Self-Portrait*, 1901, gouache and pencil on paper, 54.5 x 35.1 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum



Fig. 2, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Pregnant Self-Portrait*, 1901, ceramic, 35 x 18.5 x 18 cm, Private Collection

While her pregnancy is not visible in this bust-length self-portrait, an inscription on the old backing board confirms this fact and reveals how important it was to her psyche at this time. This work, alongside the gouache and ceramic, marks the beginning of Luksch-Makowsky's exploration of the relationship between her roles as an artist and a mother. In this portrait, she exudes confidence, perhaps even defiance, pushing back against the societal belief that one could not be both an artist and a mother.

Throughout her career, Luksch-Makowsky continued to explore motherhood in her art, using it as a form of self-reflection and a way to connect with her three sons. This culminated in her sculpture *Women's Fate* (1910/12) (fig. 3), which depicts a woman with three children seeking refuge at her feet. Her close bond with her children is evident in contemporary photographs and the many portraits she painted of them as they grew from childhood to adulthood.

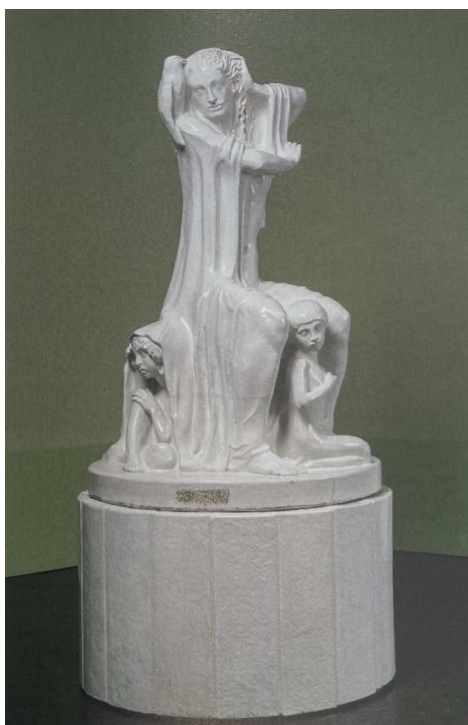


Fig. 3, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Woman's Fate*, 1910/12, glazed ceramic, 202 x 103 x 103 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle



Fig. 4, Elena Luksch-Makowsky with her sons Peter and Andreas, 1910

Beyond the theme of motherhood, self-portraiture was central to Luksch-Makowsky's art from the start of her career. Her 1897 self-portrait (fig. 4), like the present work, is painted in warm earth tones and presents the artist as confident and independent, traits also seen in a self-portrait on paper from around the same time. This strength of character remains a key feature in her later works, such as her 1908 self-portrait with her son Andres (fig. 5), where she appears both matriarchal and indomitable.

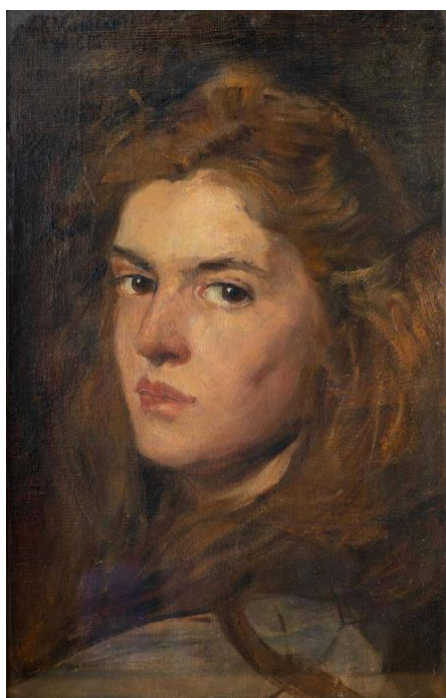


Fig. 4, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Self-Portrait*, 1896, oil on board, 41 x 26.5 cm, Private Collection

Fig. 5, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Self-Portrait with her son Andres*, 1908, Private Collection



On the verso of the self-portrait Luksch-Makowsky has painted two rows of nebulous heads, which serve as a preparatory oil sketch for *Die Landeskinder* (fig. 6).<sup>1</sup> As *Die Landeskinder* was painted in 1900 in Dachau, this sketch must precede the self-portrait on the verso, with Luksch-Makowsky reusing the board a few or several months later to sketch out her own features. The picture depicts ‘the rough and hard-working locals, the true country people, who eye the influx of city dwellers with suspicion, uncertain whether to benefit from them or rather drive the intruders away.’<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 6, Elena Luksch-Makowsky, *Die Landeskinder*, 1900, 38.5 x 198 cm, gouache and pastel on card, Private Collection

Luksch-Makowsky’s fascination with rural life began in Russia, where she first developed an interest in the countryside and its people. This attraction only deepened when she moved to Munich and Dachau, drawn by the promise of artistic independence and the freedom that characterized the local bohemian lifestyle. This sense of liberation was particularly appealing to her and other young women of her social circle. Her letters from the time of her engagement often reflect this yearning. Her self-portraits from this period, as with the present work, featuring her loose, casual clothing and untamed hair, vividly illustrate her desire for freedom.

However, by the time of her final year in Bavaria, Luksch-Makowsky’s perspective had evolved. She had matured as an artist, and a more discerning comparison between the Bavarian countryside and her homeland had refined her observations. In *Die Landeskinder*, she reveals the local people as they truly are—stripped of the façade of unconditional hospitality and simple good-naturedness that tourists both expected and mocked.

Luksch-Makowsky was born in 1878 into a prominent Saint Petersburg artist family, her father and uncle both serving as court painters affiliated with the *Peredvizhniki* (‘Wanderers’). From an early age, she was exposed to art and travelled extensively through Europe with her mother, which helped her become fluent in English, French, and German.

Encouraged by her father, Luksch-Makowsky studied under Ilya Repin at the St. Petersburg Academy from 1894 to 1896, then earned a scholarship to study in Munich with Anton Ažbe. In 1900, she married Viennese sculptor Richard Luksch with the agreement that she could continue her independent work. The couple had a son, Peter, in 1901, and soon moved to Vienna, where Luksch-Makowsky became involved in the Vienna Secession.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally ‘country children’, though translated as ‘natives’ by the Belvedere for their 2020 exhibition, *Elena Luksch-Makowsky: Silver Age and Succession*.

<sup>2</sup> A. Chadzis, *The painter and sculptress Elena Luksch-Makowsky (1878-1967)*, University of Hamburg 2000, p. 96.

As the only woman artist with a monogram in the group, she exhibited prominently from 1901 to 1903, contributing to the 14th Vienna Secession exhibition and *Ver Sacrum*. She also collaborated with the Wiener Werkstätte, designing notable works such as the reliefs for the Burgtheater.

In 1907, after moving to Hamburg, she created *Frauenschicksal* (Woman's Fate), reflecting her struggles. Following her divorce in 1921, Luksch-Makowsky supported her three sons through art commissions. After World War II, she focused on religious iconography for the Russian Orthodox congregation in Hamburg, drawing on her deep connections to Russian and Viennese art movements throughout her career.