

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

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

*Self-Portrait of the artist with her three sons*

Watercolour, ink and pencil on tracing paper  
20.9 x 17.1 cm. (8 ¼ x 6 ¾ in.)

Provenance:

From the artist's estate;

Thence by descent in the artist's family, Switzerland, until 2023.

Literature:

Athina Chadzis, *The painter and sculptress Elena Luksch-Makowsky (1878-1967)*, University of Hamburg 2000, p. 206, reproduced no. 66.



From 1912, this drawing dates to a seminal moment in Luksch-Makowsky's life and career. In 1907 Luksch-Makowsky moved to Hamburg with her family, after her husband was given a professorship at the School of Arts and Craft. The Hanseatic city 'offered her nothing like the stimulating atmosphere and opportunities for artistic cooperation that she had found in Vienna and St. Petersburg'.<sup>1</sup> She remained spiritually very attached to Russia, and this homesickness further complicated her life in Germany.<sup>2</sup> In her work, Luksch-Makowsky continued to mediate on her dual identity as both mother and artist, an integral component to her art since even before the birth of her eldest son Peter in 1901

Both Luksch-Makowsky's maternal identity and spiritual attachment to her homeland clearly manifest themselves in this self-portrait with her children. She depicts herself seated, Madonna-like, with her three children: Peter and Andreas, pressing close on either side; Dima, newly born, lying across her lap. A magnificent Orthodox church, all spires and bells, rises in the background. The symbolism is overt: the Russian church as mother and protector; Luksch-Makowsky as mother and protector.



Fig. 1, Elena Luksch-Makowsky with her sons Peter and Andreas, 1910



The artist maintained strong ties to St Petersburg throughout this period, 'by means of travel, exhibitions and letters'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in January of 1912 she made her third trip to Russia since moving to Hamburg, alone and pregnant with Dima. In the drawing, Luksch-Makowsky's Russian heritage is made clear, not only via the Orthodox Church, but also through the tartan cloth draped around her shoulders and the page-boy style haircuts and clothes of Peter and Andreas. Photographs from around this depict her children in this manner (fig. 1). Stylistically too, there is an overt engagement with Russian culture: the

<sup>1</sup> S. Ewald, 'The Artist Elena Luksch-Makowsky: Between St Petersburg, Munich, Vienna and Hamburg' in *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in Her Circle*, Leiden 2017, p. 186-187.

<sup>2</sup> A. Chadzis, *The painter and sculptress Elena Luksch-Makowsky (1878-1967)*, University of Hamburg 2000, p. 192

<sup>3</sup> S. Ewald, *op. cit.*, p. 185

simplified and strengthened outlines reference the woodcut tradition of Russian *lubok* folk art. This had been a significant influence on her work since at least 1908 (fig. 2).

The drawing is closely linked in composition and spirit to *Woman's Fate*, a monumental sculptural group created in Hamburg in 1910/12 (fig. 3). Luksch-Makowsky herself felt that the sculpture represented her greatest masterpiece.<sup>4</sup> Both *Woman's Fate* and the present drawing were created at the culmination of the artist's long and very personal confrontation between her artistic and maternal identity.



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

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.