

Leo Samberger, Portrait of Julius Frank, oil on wood, signed lower right "L. Samberger 98", 97 x 79.5 cm, framed, written on the backside among others „Leo Samberger fec“ and „biblischer Historienmaler Julius Frank“

Leo Samberger (1861 Ingolstadt – 1949 Munich) was a highly successful portrait painter of Munich's high society around 1900. After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (1880-1887) under Gyula Benczúr (1844–1920) and Wilhelm von Lindenschmit the Younger (1829–1895), he worked as a freelance artist, whose painting style before 1900 was mainly influenced by the painter prince Franz von Lenbach. After the turn of the century, Samberger found his own style, which was accompanied by an opening up to a sketchy, fragile expression with quick, separate brushstrokes. The brushwork remains visible and often gives his paintings a turbulent structure.

Although Samberger was a founding member of the Munich Secession in 1892 and one of Munich's most important painters during his creative peak between 1900 and World War I, he is hardly recognized as such today—unfairly so. This may be due to the fact that his later work is tainted by his failure to distance himself from the Nazis. Although there is no evidence of his membership in the NSDAP, he did sign – like many other Munich painters who went along with the regime – the “Declaration of the German Artists' Association 1933” against “artistic Bolshevism,” which was published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and his works were represented at all the Great German Art Exhibitions in Munich from 1937 to 1943. These paintings included portraits of Reich Governor Ritter von Epp and Director General Dr. Buchner, which Adolf Hitler purchased for 3,500 Reichsmarks. In 1944, Samberger was finally included in the “Gottbegnadeten-Liste” (God-gifted list) of the most important painters of the Nazi regime.

The painting depicts Julius Frank (1826 Munich – 1908 Munich), who was in high demand as a religious history painter in the late 19th century. This focus had already taken shape during his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (from 1842) under Claudius Schraudolph the Elder. He created frescoes for the Bavarian National Museum and for many churches and chapels in the German Empire and Austria, and even at Stonyhurst College in England. He also contributed to the painting of Neuschwanstein Castle. He was a prominent and very active member of several Christian and artistic associations in Munich. After Frank's death in a car accident, Hyacinth Holland dedicated a detailed obituary to him in the magazine *Die Christliche Kunst* (4.1907/08, pp. 239-241), which also mentions and reproduces Samberger's portrait (p. 241). Samberger's painting shows Frank in half-length, seated, as an old man marked by life with a long white beard and a tall round slouch hat – as a characterful head. Overall, the color scheme is very dark.

The painting was sold in 1926 at Hugo Helbing (1863–1938) in Frankfurt am Main in the auction “Oil paintings, drawings, and watercolors by modern masters from a private collection in southern Germany” (lot 25; plate 8) for 850 Reichsmarks to the art dealer Eugen Georg Caspari (1878–1930) (marked “EC” on the back of the panel), who ran the Caspari Gallery in Munich's Palais Eichthal. Both were of Jewish origin. While Caspari did not have to live through the Nazi era, having died in a fatal car accident in 1930, Helbing succumbed in 1938 to the severe abuse he suffered during his arrest on Kristallnacht. After Eugen Caspari's death, his wife Anna (née Aniela Julia Naphtali; 1900–1941), also of Jewish descent, initially continued to run the gallery,

but increasingly found herself in financial difficulties and under pressure from the Nazis, so that the gallery was closed in 1939. She died in 1941 after being deported to the Kaunas ghetto.