

**Leo Samberger, Head of Dante in profile, c. 1920/30, oil on panel, signed lower left "Leo Samberger", 33.5 x 27.5 cm, frame with minor damage (47 x 41.5 cm), minor restoration**

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.

A wonderful example of this is this painting, which testifies to Samberger's intense preoccupation with the Italian poet and scholar Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and is one of more than a dozen oil paintings and drawings from the 1920s and 1930s. The overarching occasion may have been the Dante anniversary in 1921, marking the 600th anniversary of his death, which sparked a renaissance of interest in the Italian poet in Germany and was therefore important for the development of Romance studies. Above all, however, the charismatic figure of Dante, enhanced by the reference to historical depictions through the profile view, represents Samberger's lifelong search for ideal portraits of male characters. Samberger became famous during his lifetime for his male portraits and character studies in particular, whereby his unique formal language, painting style, and use of light not only serve to dramatize his subjects, but also express his difficult, ascetic, and idiosyncratic temperament.

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 comes from the collection of legal scholar Prof. Dr. Hans Constantin Faußner in Munich.