

**Leo Gestel, *Portrait of Jan Wiegman seated on a Chair***  
Woerden 1881 – 1941 Hilversum

charcoal and crayon on paper  
38 ¾ by 28 5/8 inches (985 by 727 mm.)  
signed and dated upper right: '*Bergen 1921*'

provenance: Private collection, Belgium

exhibited: Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, *Gestel in Bergen*, May 18 – October 6, 2002

note: Leo Gestel was one of the leading artists of Dutch Modernism. He first studied with his father, Willem Gestel, the director of an art school, and his uncle, Dimmen Gestel, who had painted with Vincent van Gogh. Later, the young artist was a pupil at the Amsterdam Academy.

During his career Gestel experimented with Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism and Postimpressionism. His early work follows the style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Postimpressionist *Still Life with Fruit* (fig.1). By 1913, he was painting simplified Cubist landscapes and figures such as *Mallorca Harbour*, 1914 (fig. 2). In the same year Herwarth Walden offered Gestel the chance to exhibit his work in the “Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon” in Berlin. Walden, a German Expressionist artist, was one of the most important promoters of German avant-garde art in the early twentieth century.

By the 1920's, Gestel's subjects show the clear influence of Expressionism. As in the present work, his compositions are strongly stylized and tightly composed. Gestel's *Portrait of Jan Wiegman* displays the aesthetics and spirit of contemporary European Expressionism during the crisis years following World War I. The bold handling of line in charcoal and crayon and the subjects striking emotional form depict an essential reality and human personality hidden behind the world of surface appearance. The present work is reminiscent of early oil portraits by Max Beckmann, such as *Self-Portrait with Champaign Glass*, 1919, private collection (fig. 3), and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self-Portrait* of 1914, Brücke-Museum, Berlin (fig. 4).

Gestel spent his summers in the Dutch seaside town of Bergen where he joined the Bergen School. The present portrait, dated Bergen 1921, is of Jan Wiegman, the son of Gestel's friend and fellow artist Matthiew Wiegman. Born in 1912, Jan died in 1925 at the age of thirteen.

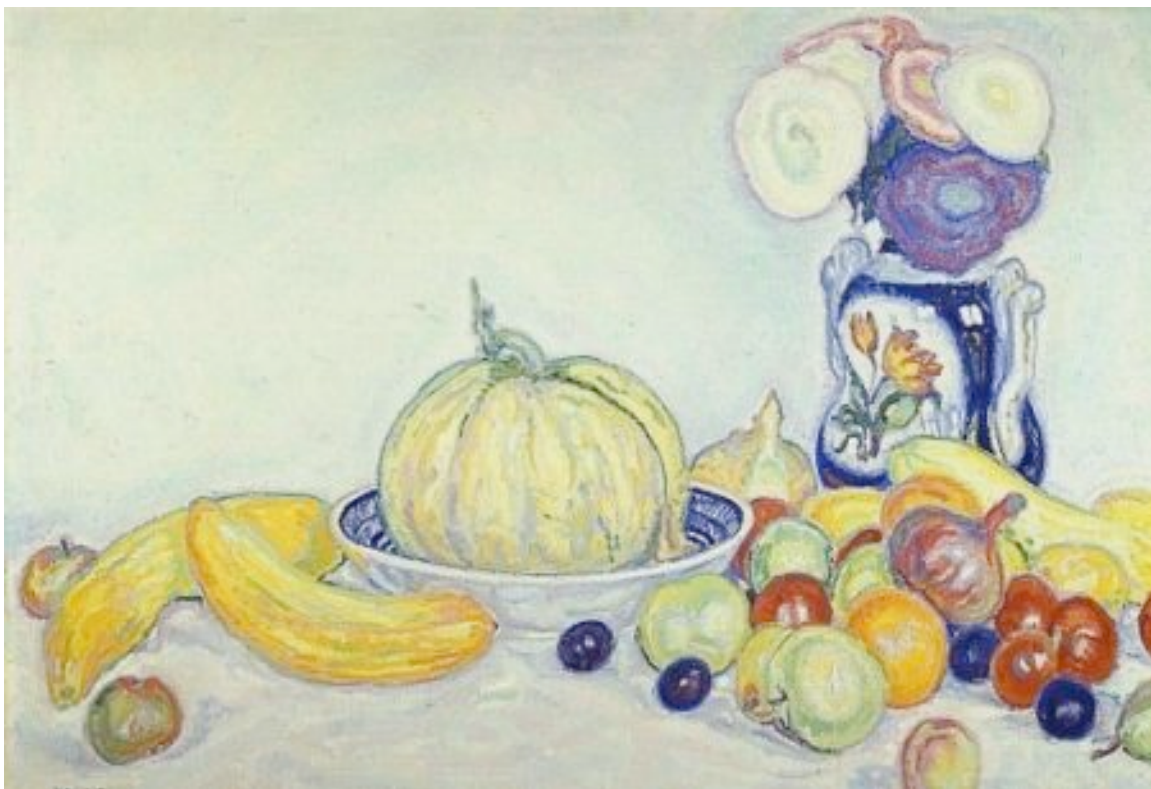


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

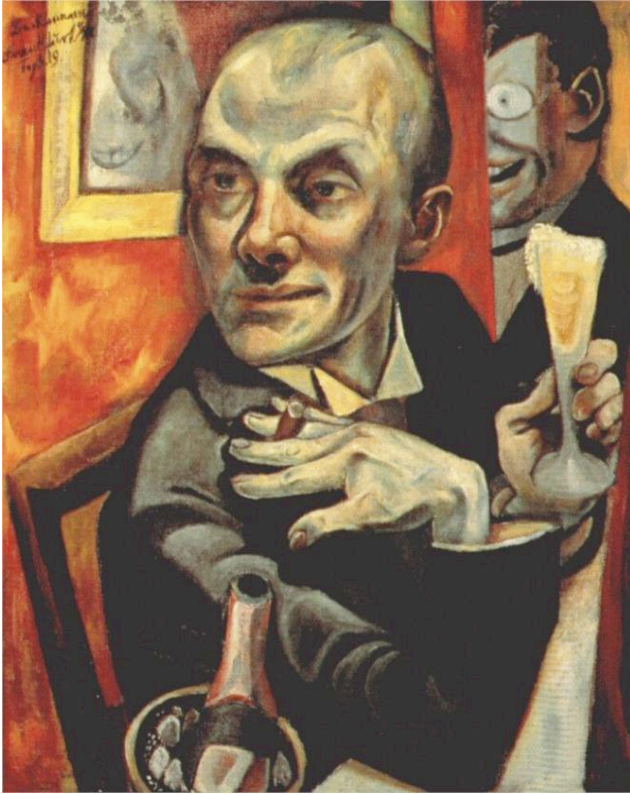


Fig. 3



Fig. 4