

## **Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906-1996)**

**Cornerways, 86 Chestnut Lane, Amersham HP6 6EP**

### **The artist**

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky was born into the cultured high society of Vienna in 1906. Her father Edmund, a Hungarian aristocrat with Jewish roots was a talented amateur cellist, who died when Marie-Louise was three. Her mother Henriette came from a wealthy family whose relations included many distinguished names from the social and intellectual life of Vienna (among them the philosopher Franz von Brentano). In addition to an apartment in Vienna the family owned Villa Todesco in Hinterbrühl on the south-west outskirts of Vienna (Schlenker).

Marie-Louise attended art classes in Vienna, The Hague, Frankfurt, Paris and Berlin, and in 1927/28 was invited by Max Beckmann to join his masterclass at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main. Beckmann had been introduced to the Motesiczky family in 1920. The powerful painter left a strong and lasting impression on Marie-Louise both as a person and an artist and was to become a lifelong friend and influence. She spent a decade quietly developing her artistic skills, exhibiting only once, in 1933, with the Hagenbund. After the Anschluss (the annexation of Austria into the German Third Reich) on 12 March 1938, she and her mother fled Vienna immediately, leaving behind most of their possessions. Her brother Karl, a talented cellist, refused to leave and later died in Auschwitz.

With her mother, Marie-Louise went to Holland where she had her first solo exhibition in 1939. Shortly afterwards they left for England, where their lifelong housekeeper, Marie Hauptman, joined them and after a brief stay in London they moved to Amersham in the latter part of 1940, where they took lodgings with Mrs Meakins in Stubbs Wood, Chesham Bois. Many other émigrés, including the sculptor Mary Duras, a Czech refugee and friend of Marie Louise who had arrived in 1938, had settled in the area (Amersham Museum). Her time there was an important influence on her later work. It was in Amersham that Motesiczky got to know the writer Elias Canetti and his wife Veza, whom she had first met in London in 1939; they later moved to Stubbs Wood. He became her close friend, lover and companion for the next three decades.

In 1943 Motesiczky joined the Artists' International Association and took part in several of their exhibitions. She had always been reluctant to exhibit or sell her work; however in 1943 her first solo exhibition in London took place at the Czechoslovak Institute (Schlenker). She also renewed her acquaintance with the painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), a member of the Vienna Secession movement, founded in 1897 under the chairmanship of Gustav Klimt. Kokoschka, a master of European Expressionism, had been a friend of the family in Vienna and had also settled in London (Baudot).

Marie-Louise became a British citizen in 1948. Her artistic breakthrough in the UK came with the major solo exhibition at the Goethe-Institut in London in 1985 which achieved enormous critical acclaim. By the time the Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere in Vienna held a retrospective exhibition of Motesiczky's work in 1994, the artist had already established her reputation as an important Austrian painter of the 20th century ([motesiczky.org/Amersham Museum](http://motesiczky.org/Amersham)).

The Marie-Louise Von Motesiczky charitable trust was founded by the artist several years before her death in 1996.

## **The house**

Amersham-on-the-Hill started to be developed following the arrival of the Metropolitan Line in 1892 and continued during the first decades of the 20th century. Chestnut Lane was on the outskirts of the town and consisted of modest houses a short walk from the town centre; in 1940 the houses were still surrounded by meadows and there was a small dairy nearby.

86 Chestnut Lane or 'Cornerways' is a semi-detached house on the corner of Chestnut Lane and Chestnut Close. As number 86 was situated on the corner it had a larger garden than neighbouring houses when the Motesiczky's lived there, but part was later sold and now the name Cornerways has been dropped as it is no longer on the corner.

By the time Marie-Louise and her mother arrived in Amersham, the money they had managed to bring from Austria was severely diminished but they did manage to find enough money to purchase Cornerways. Here she was able to paint full time for pleasure, as she did not have to rely on the sale of her paintings for income. The spacious sitting room of the house became her studio.

In 1948 Marie-Louise moved back to London and rented a flat in West Hampstead. Her mother remained in Amersham and was looked after by Marie. However, following the death of their housekeeper in 1954 and with her mother becoming frailer Marie-Louise and Henrietta moved to a house in Chesterfield Gardens, Hampstead in 1960. The Edwardian house had a large plot and Marie-Louise spent time cultivating her garden. The house in Chestnut Lane was initially rented out and was sold in the 1970s (Schlenker).

**The garden** (numbers refer to the online catalogue at [www.motesiczky.org/](http://www.motesiczky.org/))

The large garden (the size of two and a half tennis courts) had a kitchen garden which was used for growing vegetables and rearing chickens (Schlenker). There was also a pond, which featured in her drawing 'Oskar Kokoschka fishing for two nudes' (1945, British Museum). The family may have employed a gardener as Marie-Louise painted 75 'The Gardener' (1945, Amersham). Marie the housekeeper also helped in the garden. She also painted other groups of figures, often in the garden, e.g. 81 'Family in the Garden' (1948: Marie-Louise, her mother and Canetti). The subject matter of her garden paintings was about the 'goings on in the garden', some of which were slightly surreal in nature, rather than images of plants and views. However, she was certainly inspired by her garden which she could see from her ground floor studio window. These paintings include 61 'Morning in the Garden' (1943), 73 'Cyclamen at the Window' (1945), 98 'Deckchair in the Garden', a view through an open window, which includes a few irises and a red bird. She also painted numerous still lifes during her time in Amersham, most of which included vases of flowers, possibly from the garden, for example 62 'Still life with yellow roses' (1943) and 72 'Irises and Peonies' (1945).

## **Significance to Bucks**

Marie-Louise painted the residents of Amersham, including her neighbours, although they were frequently not named, for example 59 'Old Woman, Amersham' (1942) which shows an elderly woman who was said to have lived to over 100 sitting by the fire, and also 74 'Dorothy' (1945). This painting of the woman from Chestnut Lane (Motesiczky Trust) depicts a neighbour, Dorothy Sladen, who modelled for the artist. As she suffered from depression Marie-Louise encouraged her to take up painting. She also depicted some of her émigré friends who had made their homes in the town after they had fled hostilities in Europe, e.g. 60 'Frau Saaler' (1943) and 51 'Frau Seidler' (1940).

Her work is an important record of life during wartime and in particular the people she met in Amersham from 1940 to 1948. Marie-Louise comments on her paintings in her intermittent diary entries during her time in Amersham (Schlenker). These notes, alongside her numerous portraits, provide an insight into the way in which she worked, including the way she was able to penetrate the sitter's personality and portray it on canvas, while the settings, props and their dress also offer clues about their lives, such as 67 'Portrait of a Smiling Woman' (1944).

## References

Baudot, Francois. *Vienna 1900*

<https://amershammuseum.org/history/people/20th-century/marie-louise-von-motesiczky/>

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Lecture by Ines Schlenker of the Motesiczky Trust, Amersham Museum, 2019



*Villa Todesco, Hinterbrühl, Austria – home of the Motesiczky family pre-WWII (Tate Britain)*

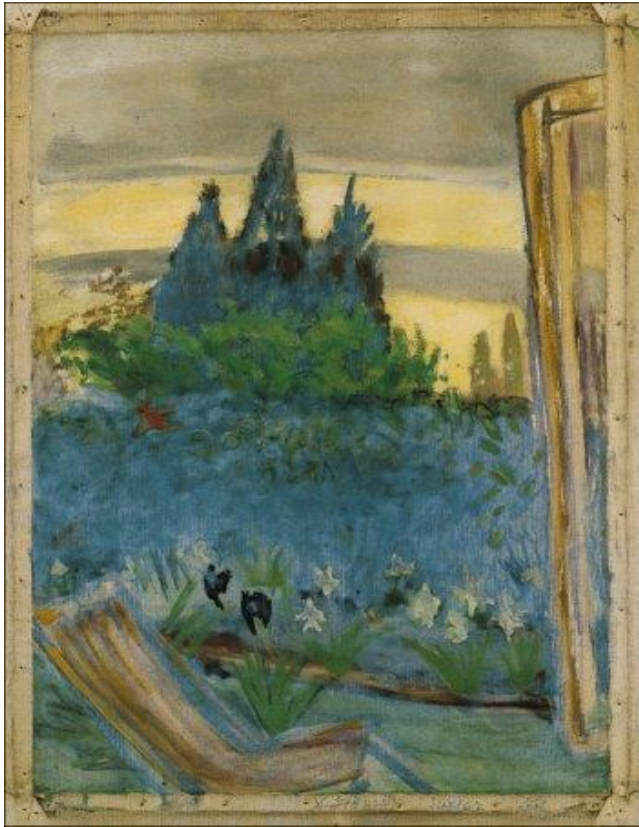


*The garden at Cornerways*



*Ref no: 42 'Girl by the Fire' 1942*





*Ref no: 98 Deckchair in the garden, 1940s*



*Ref no: 134 Marie in doorway, 1954 (Amersham)*



*Ref no: 81 Family in the Garden, 1948*



*Woman from Chestnut Lane (Motesiczky Trust)*



*Postcard – the garden in Amersham (Tate Gallery  
TGA 20129/1/1/194/142)*



*Henriette (L) and Marie-Louise (R) in the  
garden, Amersham 1950s  
(TGA 20129/6/4/13/5)*



*Marie, seated, and Marie-Louise in the garden (TGA 20129/6/5/30/30)*

*C. de Carle 22/12/20*