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**William John Leech
RHA ROI (1881-1968)**

PAINTING IN A GARDEN
oil on canvas
signed lower left; original
inscribed label on reverse
27 by 21 in. (68.58 by
53.34 cm)

Provenance:

Dawson Gallery, Dublin;
Private collection, Dublin;
Whyte's, 16 September
2003, lot 87;
Private collection

Exhibited:

RHA, 1955, catalogue no. 85
(Where it was priced at
£219-0-0, making it the
most expensively priced
painting Leech ever
exhibited at the RHA, up
until his final year of
exhibiting there, in 1967)

Painting in a Garden is one of a series of self portraits that Leech painted from the 1920s until his death in 1968. Inscribed in Leech's handwriting on the reverse of this work is "No. 3 Painting in a Garden, W. J. Leech 20 Abbey Road, London, NW8". This was the address of the fifth floor apartment that his future wife, Mrs May Botterell, had rented in Hampstead from 1938. Leech based himself in the apartment after his own studio space at Steele's Studios was bombed in 1941. Even after Steele's Studio was partially patched up, he remained at 20 Abbey Road, until 1958 when he and May moved to West Clandon, outside Guildford in Surrey. *Painting in a Garden* was thus probably painted during the 1940s when Leech was in his sixties. His annual extended trips to France were no longer possible and his subject matter focused on still-life, flower studies, portraits of his family and friends and his self portraits, which were painted outside in the sunlit garden of his studio.

In this portrait Leech's personality is portrayed in his attention to detail in his dress: his polished shoes, ironed trousers and white shirt – similar clothes to those he is wearing in *Self Portrait (Painting in a Garden)*¹. However, in the present work, Leech has his shirt sleeves rolled up, he is tieless and hatless and his gaze is focusing on the canvas instead of looking out at his reflection in the mirror. In most of his self portraits Leech is formally dressed and in the series he painted in the last ten years of his life he is wearing his overcoat over his open necked white shirt. This work is similar in pose to his *Self Portrait*, painted in Steele's Studios on the back of the canvas, *Flowers in a Vase*, except for the fact that there Leech is wearing a black jacket, a handkerchief in his top pocket, white shirt and tie and holding additional paint brushes in his left hand. In *Painting in a*



Garden he adopts a happier, more relaxed pose as he leans towards his canvas, his right arm extended and his left arm loosely dropped at his side. He captures the sunlight on the grass in vivid greens and yellows framed by the frieze of darker trees in the top one third of the picture. The canvas deckchair, with stripes in Indian red, echoes the diagonal of Leech's body and is the same deckchair seen in *Steps to the Studio*, painted outside his studio at Candy Cottage, West Clandon, Surrey, where he spent the final ten years of his life.

¹ Illustrated on page 235 of Denise Ferran, *William John Leech: An Irish Painter Abroad*, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1996, pp.234-235.

Denise Ferran

€20,000-€30,000 (£16,393-£24,590 approx).