SPIRIT OF AN AGE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY PAINTINGS FROM THE NATIONALGALERIE, BERLIN

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German Painting in the Nineteenth Century

'Close your bodily eye so that you may first see your picture with your mind's eye. Then bring to the light of day what you have seen in the dark, so that it may reflect back on others from outside to inside' Caspar David Friedrich

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BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM

When the French critic Edmond Duranty reviewed the German art exhibition at the Paris World Fair of 1878, he keenly recognised as one of the special features of the 'German School' its diversity, a diversity consequent upon the political and cultural decentralisation of Germany. The Germans do not have — as we do — one single great forum for the arts, one single artistic world; they have separate and therefore diminished centres: Munich, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Weimar and Karlsruhe ... Looking at German art from the outside, the French critic articulated what one of Germany's most effective museum directors, Alfred Lichtwark of the Hamburger Kunsthalle, twenty years later would voice from the inside, on the occasion of the 1900 World Fair: while France and England, he argued, had 'a centre of national life' — and thus of cultural production and aesthetic discourse — there was no such rallying point for the visual arts in Germany. The competitive arena of world fairs, which provided a unique opportunity for critics to compare the visual arts of different countries, must have put into sharp focus the special 'conditions' at the roots of German art in the nineteenth century. Both Duranty and Lichtwark concluded that the lack of a political and cultural centre was linked to the diversity, but also to the fragmentation, of artistic production.

Indeed the attempt to analyse what constituted the 'Germanness' of German art had a long history, itself intricately connected with the course of German politics, with the struggle for national unity and identity. Once the German nation state had been established, however, German art became to some extent at least the pawn of political nationalism, and nationalist expectation would collide, towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the cosmopolitan aspirations of the modern movement. Most recently, in the wake of German reunification in 1990, German art and art history have again been subject to new interpretation, and the issue will no doubt be raised again as a consequence of the exhibition this catalogue accompanies.

Like no other similar institution, the role of Berlin's Nationalgalerie, ever since its foundation in 1861 and opening in 1876, has been intimately intertwined with the discourse of contemporary cultural politics. The Museum is itself a microcosm of the multiple and shifting interpretations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German art. The national mission of the Museum was not only written in golden letters on the pediment of the building's façade, DEUTSCHEN KUNST MDCCCLXXI (For German art 1871 — 1871 being the date of the founding of the German Empire), but, as its visual and textual narratives, its exhibitions and catalogues, disclose, was inscribed into its very conception. In the 1877 edition of the Museum's catalogue, Max Jordan, its first director, explained to his readers that the biographies of artists of foreign nationality would be limited to
their most essential facts, because of the ‘character’ of the Nationalgalerie. After the defeat of the German Empire in the First World War, Ludwig Justi, director since 1909, made it clear in the 1920 catalogue how deeply he felt that ‘these expressions of the German spirit’ (the art displayed) would help to ensure that ‘undamaged by the external collapse, the empire of the German spirit would remain strong and always grow.’ Shortly afterwards, Justi emphasised a national reading of the newly acquired High Mountains by Caspar David Friedrich (Hochgebirge; lost in 1945): ‘...here is personal feeling, German feeling. All the inexhaustible and yet clear, the rare and yet immediate richness of life of this painting is not accessible to the art lovers of other nations – just like the innermost core in the music of Beethoven.’ By ascribing to the German art displayed within it such an outright national meaning, Justi also reasserted the Museum’s national role. Its urban site, architecture and, most of all, its acquisition policies and display strategies not only mirror the course of modern German history, including the conflict between conservative and progressive forces, but also construct a visual narrative at the very centre of the capital city.

‘GERMANNESS’ AND THE GOTHIC REVIVAL

Present-day discussion of the German essence of German culture can be traced back over more than two hundred years to a series of political debates and aesthetic theories in which international openness was opposed to patriotic tradition. The conflict between cosmopolitanism and patriotism, which the historian Friedrich Meinecke and other German intellectuals and artists (such as Harry Graf Kessler – see further below) perceived as crucial in the first decade of the twentieth century, echoes the tension between notions of universality and German national awareness, or Deutschheit (Germanness), which first emerged in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Following the rediscovery of Gothic architecture, the reciprocal relationship between aesthetic discourse and an emerging political awareness is revealed in theories about the nature of Gothic art and its position vis-à-vis French and Italian culture. Goethe’s classic essay on Strasbourg Cathedral (fig. 9), written when he was a young student and first published anonymously in 1772, immediately caught the imagination of a wide audience. As the title, ‘Of German Architecture’, provocatively announces, the text sets out to identify the historical style of a particular monument, then in France, with Deutschheit. In the second section, the author declared: ‘This is German architecture! Our architecture!’

Forty years later, in 1812, with the distance of age and at the height of the anti-Napoleonic Wars, Goethe remarked upon his youthful essay: ‘Since I saw that this building had its foundation on former German soil and had progressed so far at a genuinely German time, and that the name of the master builder on the modest gravestone had an equally native German sound and origin, I took it upon myself ... to change the old, infamous designation “Gothic” architecture, and to claim it as our nation’s “German” architecture. Nor did I fail ... to make my [patriotic] sentiments public ...’11 Clearly, the intensification of the national movement around 1812 also affected Goethe, who is usually seen as francophile and cosmopolitan, and opposed to the creation of a German national state.

The age of Goethe was a period of violent turmoil, of revolution and wars, which engulfed almost all of the entire European continent, leaving no sphere of life untouched. As the ideas and political actions of the French Revolution swept over the continent, dynamic processes of transformation were set in motion: political structure, social organisation and aesthetic traditions would be changed forever. The French
revolution, 'an almost universal earthquake,' to use the words of Friedrich Schlegel, produced such a volatile environment for artistic production that all sense of stability was lost. Whether artists in their search for a new visual language turned for inspiration to classical antiquity or the Middle Ages, or formulated a complex symbolic language - as Runge and Friedrich did - they all were keenly aware of living in a period of transition and participating in something new. As the young Adolph Menzel declared in a letter to a friend in 1836, 'Art has and always will follow the ways and by-ways of general human progress, because the artist, like all humanity, is only part of this development.' The revival of Gothic architecture and of medieval themes and settings was mixed with patriotic sentiment. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's many visions of the Gothic cathedral, such as his paintings Gothic Church on a Rock by the Sea (cat. 3) and Medieval City on a River (cat. 1), are clearly an illusion to the newly articulated Deutschtum. Schinkel also drew up plans for the construction of a 'German' cathedral on the spot near Leipzig where the Allies defeated Napoleon's army in the decisive Battle of the Nations in 1813 (fig. 10). Schinkel's project was planned not only as a memorial to the Wars of Liberation, but also as a symbol of future German unity. As such it prefigures the role that Cologne Cathedral, and the task of its completion, would soon assume in the public's imagination. However, as Cologne Cathedral moved to its completion from 1842 to 1880, patriotism began to shift toward nationalism.

The idea of a 'cathedral of German freedom' (Dom der deutschen Freiheit) and the vision of the Christian Gothic cathedral as an embodiment of national hopes were widespread during the anti-Napoleonic Wars and the early phase of the following Restoration period, when Schinkel painted Medieval City on a River and Gothic Church on a Rock by the Sea (both 1814). Schinkel's towering Gothic cathedrals set in an idealised northern landscape, populated by small figures in medieval costume and immersed in dramatically lit skies, evoke a Gothic Middle Ages both as an act of poetic imagination and as a suggestive signal of political hope.

Unlike Schinkel, whose experience of Italy was as extensive as Goethe's, Runge and Friedrich never went to Italy. Rooted in North German Protestantism, each developed a very personal visual language of complex symbolism that opened their images to multiple interpretation. Both artists had connections to the patriotic movement and its ideologies - Runge designing the title page 'The Fall of the Fatherland' (Der Fall des Vaterlandes) for the magazine Vaterländisches Museum; Friedrich painting the northern German landscape with discreet references to the contemporary political situation.

Like many philosophers, artists, poets and political reformers, Runge was intensely aware of living in a period of profound change and thus of the necessity to produce a new art. His large canvas of Morning (fig. 8), part of the cycle The Times of the Day, was inspired in its
complicated allegorical system by the philosophy of Jakob Böhme. The
painter associated the times of day with the seasons, the Ages of Man
and ultimately with Christian and cosmological ideas. Although the cycle
was never completed, Runge envisaged the paintings displayed in a
Gothic architectural setting while poetry was read and music played.
This conception of an entirely syncretic art form, transgressing all con-
ventional boundaries, was as radical as contemporary ideas of a funda-
mental political renewal.

While Runge developed his theories about the visual arts and his
innovative hieroglyphic pictorial language, Friedrich blended a spiritual
and a political symbolism in his images of the northern landscape. His
art has been subjected to contradictory readings, as either Christian
and spiritual or political and patriotic. But just as Gothic architecture
could signal both Christian and patriotic renewal, so Friedrich’s paintings
embody multiple meanings, often ambiguous and shifting in time.

Friedrich first gained wide recognition during the period of French
occupation, when he showed Monk by the Sea (fig. 11) and Abbey in
the Oak Forest (fig. 12) at the Berlin Academy in 1810. Both paintings
evoked intense critical response and were bought by Prussian King
Frederick William III on the suggestion of the Crown Prince. Not long
afterwards, The Solitary Tree (cat. 6) and Moonrise over the Sea (cat. 7)
were commissioned as pendants by the Berlin banker Konsul Wagener,
as a morning and an evening landscape. The shepherd in the morning
landscape, leaning in a reflective mood against the tree, and the three
figures in the evening scene, sitting immobile on the rocks on the beach,
contemplate the changing phases of the day, the rising light of sun and
moon, and thus the changes of nature. Read as complementary images,
they represent Friedrich’s conception of nature not as a fixed state but
fluid process, changing at every moment, just as historical time is con-
sciously flowing. While today both images may primarily invite a read-
ging focused on the spiritual symbolism, and reflection upon the passing
of time and the mortality of human life, they also contain motifs that
contemporary audience would have decoded as signifiers of a patri-
otic spirit: the solitary tree is a splintered oak—a symbol of Germany
and in Moonrise over the Sea the man closest to the viewer is con-
sciously wearing the Old German (alteutsch) costume, a long coat
and biretta. It was the costume associated with ‘demagogues,’ a term
ruminating in police vocabulary and referring to those who pursued lib-
eral to radical politics. In 1819, when the great reform movement had
come to an end, ‘Old German’ costume was prohibited by decree, and
continued to signify political opposition. In Man and Woman contem-
plating the Moon (cat. 9) the couple (also identified as the painter and
his wife) are standing still in a dark forest between a fir and an uprooted
old oak tree, the branches of which weave a tight net across the moon-
lit sky. The man is wearing oldeutsch costume. As in many other land-
scapes of Friedrich’s, the human figures are frozen in their positions,
passive observers, turning their back to the viewer and contemplating
the changes of nature, but also of history. Associating the man with the
‘patriotic’ opposition to the reactionary politics of restoration, Friedrich
introduced into a timeless scene a concrete contemporary element.

Wedded to the vocabulary of Romantic rhetoric are clichés of "Deutschheit" that are elusive for the present-day viewer, but were easily
decoded by Friedrich’s contemporaries. His landscapes of old heroes’
graves, of Gothic ruins, of the high mountains and of oak trees fuse the
spiritual experience of nature with the new awareness of "Deutschheit.
At a time when political and geographic unity were a vision of the future,
Friedrich pictured in his German landscapes a national and cultural identity that was both highly emotive and patriotic. When Justi in 1920 described Friedrich's Churchyard in the Snow (Klosterfriedhof im Schnee, 1810; lost in 1945), a winter scene similar to Abbey in the Oak Forest, his reading blended German experience of 1920 with that of the artist's own time a century earlier: "White snow covers like a shroud the German plane ...."21

As Friedrich painted the northern region as a German landscape and Goethe identified the Gothic as German, 'not foreign, but patriotic,'22 the young Peter Cornelius, a central figure in the Nazarene group in Rome, represented Goethe's tragedy Faust I as a typically German narrative with a youthful, energetic Faust in an idyllic northern neo-medieval setting (fig. 13).23 Cornelius's drawings linked Goethe's text for the first time with the emerging national consciousness of the anti-Napoleonic Wars and the reform movement, and themselves came to be regarded as a typically German, an altdeutsch narrative. It is within this same context that we should read the creative projects of the young German artists known as the Nazarenes.

The Fashion for Dürer and Yearning for Italy
The German fascination with Italy was poignantly captured by Johann H.W. Tischbein in his portrayal of Goethe in the Roman Campagna (fig. 14), how he is sitting on the ruins contemplating the fate of human works.24 The heroic figure of the German poet is set in an idealised Roman landscape filled with historical allusions and allegorical references. Tischbein not only created an emblematic image of German italiensehnsucht (longing for Italy) and a programmatic aesthetic statement, but the image of a national icon. Goethe's life and work could serve as inspiration both for visions of the 'Gothic as German' and of the Italian heritage as classic and universal. In his youthful hymn to Strasbourg Cathedral, Goethe had already included the Virile Albrecht Dürer in his celebration of a German past. Much later, in his autobiography, he referred to Dürer's time as 'the Deutschtum of the sixteenth century.'25 In choosing Dürer as their guiding model and imitating his dress and hairstyle of his time, the young artists later known as Nazarenes both propagated an aesthetic ideal and made a political— that is, patriotic—statement. Indeed they were known not only as 'Nazarenes' but also as 'Düreristen'.

The first artists' 'secession' crystallised at the Academy in Vienna when two students, Franz Pforr and Friedrich Overbeck, met in 1808 and discovered not only their shared discontent with the mechanical teaching programme, but also their common vision of a future art. Stirred by the spirit of national and religious revival they founded the Brotherhood of Saint Luke in 1809. Vienna was then occupied by the
ench, and the Academy had to close in May 1809. When it reopened in early 1810, the school could admit only a limited number of students, and thereby found a welcome pretext to exclude the 'rebels', that is, the PRINTERS and those who had joined the Brotherhood or had declared their solidarity with its goals. Immediately upon their rejection, these students decided to move to Rome. Three months afterwards they received permission, thanks to the intervention of the director of the academy, to settle in the monastery of Sant'Isido or.

The Brotherhood's adoption of an almost monastic life-style was perhaps not only by the ideal of medieval life and art, but also by the chaos and instability the artists had experienced in their own time. For; called the 'Master' and Overbeck, the 'Priest', formed the nucleus of the group and played the dominant roles. Communal life was regulated by fixed hours of daily chores and quiet creative work. Each member inhabited a cell, in the evening there were gatherings in the refectory for readings and drawing after the model. In fact, drawing assumed the role of a spiritual ritual, replacing the prayer of the tons.

This very regulated rhythm of daily life and work was interrupted by excursions into the surrounding countryside, of which numerous drawings trace the group's creative explorations.

Their close bonding and their common ideals had a profound impact upon their work. Rejecting the narrow ideas of the academic programme, they wanted instead to develop a visual language that would convey their inner feelings, which they regarded as 'the artist's greatest treasures'. Almost in contrast to the ideal of a new collective spirit that was to mould their lives and pervade their work, they insisted upon an expression of the subjective self. The tension between a new awareness of the individual and the longing for a collective identity can be read in their mutual portraits and self-portraits. Overbeck painted the Painter Franz Pfarr (cat. 13) soon after their arrival in Rome, in 1810. According to his explanation in a letter, Overbeck depicted Pfarr in a medieval costume in an idealised environment, an open Gothic arch overlooking a medieval town towards the sea, 'in the situation in which he would perhaps feel happiest'.

Pfarr's own vision of the peaceful solitude of medieval life is perhaps most intensely articulated in his complex painting Sulamith and Maria (fig. 15), executed two years before he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four in 1812. The panel, in its original frame, imitates the medieval diptych. On the left, the imaginary figure of the Sibyl of Sulamith, in the pose of a Madonna and Child, is surrounded by symbols of purity and happiness and placed in an Italian landscape. On the right, Maria sits in a closed chamber with bull-eyed windows, a medieval interior immediately bringing to mind Dürer's famous engraving of St Jerome in his Cell (1514). Pfarr explained that he wanted to recapture the atmosphere of the portrait that his friend Overbeck had painted of him two years earlier. While still in Vienna, Pfarr had composed, in written and pictorial form, an allegorical legend to celebrate his friendship with Overbeck and to express their common ideals. It had been Overbeck's idea '... that each should paint for the other a picture in which the essential beauty and character of their sentiments and the manner of their painting were represented; these could be interpreted through two female figures'. From the Song of Solomon and Friedrich Gottlob Klopstock's Odes, Pfarr developed the figure of Sulamith, Overbeck's bride and image of noble southern art, and Maria, Pfarr's own imaginary woman, cast in the northern medieval mode. Pfarr developed the image in his cell in Sant'Isidoro, when he was already mortally ill. The allegorical figures of the two women represent both
ideal bride and aesthetic programme, the art of Raphael and Dürr; south and north united in harmony. The biographical layer of meaning, the commemoration of an emotionally charged moment of their friendship, would resonate far into the future: Overbeck remembered his friend’s painting that also was a testament, almost sixty years later on his deathbed.

Overbeck responded to Sulamith and Maria with Italia and Germania, begun in 1811, when Pforr was still alive, and completed in 1828 (fig. 16). In contrast to Pforr’s very private enterprise, this project was commissioned by the art dealer and publisher Wenner and as such is more ‘public’ in conception. Its symbolism at first sight has to do with aesthetic concerns: Sulamith and Maria have been transformed into Italia and Germania, fusing the southern Italian with the northern Gothic ideal. This vision of harmony belied the concrete reality of a very conflicted present: when the Nazarenes settled in Rome, the French occupied Italy; the Papal States had been dissolved, Pope Pius VII was a prisoner of Napoleon. In fact, it was Napoleon’s confiscation of Church property that had provided them with a home, since the monks had been forced to leave their monastery of Sant’Isidoro. The Nazarenes lived in exile: a group of German artists forming a community in Rome. They were separated by culture and language from their Italian environment, emphasizing their ‘otherness’ in life-style, dress and creative work. Does the pictured union between north and south not also articulate the longing for a union between their homeland and their land of exile? The unity that did not exist in their concrete historical present was visualized in the idealized state of the work of art. Thus the reconciliation of opposites which Sulamith and Maria and Italia and Germania so poetically configure conveys a harmony that was entirely imaginary.

When Overbeck explicated his painting to his patron in a letter from Rome in 1829, many years after its conception, he reflected upon the melding of two foreign elements in the harmony brought by art, upon the intertwining of memory and present time, and the endurance of friendship: ‘My choosing the idea of a Germania and Italia is explained by my particular standpoint as a German in Italy. These are, as it were, two elements, which indeed face each other on the one side [sic] as foreign, but to blend them, at least in the external shape of my work is and should henceforth remain my task . . . . On the one hand the remembrance of Heimat (homeland) unforgettable imprinted on the soul and on the other hand the charm of everything magnificent and beautiful which I gratefully enjoy in the present: both conceived as separate and mutually exclusive, but imagined as being in harmony and as mutually appreciative. What is meant finally is the yearning which constantly draws the north towards the south, towards its art, its nature, its poetry; and they are in bridal dress, because both represent the yearning as well as the object of their desire, because both are ideas that constantly rejuvenate . . . . one may thus simply name the picture ‘Friendship’.31’ No one has written more perceptively of the dislocation the German artist experienced in Italy – producing work in the south for an audience in the north, the ‘Heimat’; consciously mediating between two foreign and exclusive elements by imagining their unity in a work of art.

In 1815, the Nazarenes received their first joint commission, a fresco decoration in the Palazzo Zuccari, the Roman residence of the Prussian Consul General, Jacob Solomon Bartholdy. Depicting scenes from the biblical story of Joseph in an archaising style, their murals were removed in 1886–7 and are now in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin (fig. 28, p. 40). This commission not only gave the artists their first opportunity to translate their vision of community into a major collaborative project; it also marks the beginning of the revival of fresco decoration for private and public buildings. Such major enterprises as the decoration of the royal residence in Munich, and of churches and public museums in Munich and Berlin, were inspired by this Roman example.

The Nazarenes’ search for a collective identity and for a common aesthetic, both patterned after the past, seems like a last attempt to hold on to a world that was breaking apart around them. By contrast,
Lanz Krüger

* husband at the beginning of the century, 'Art of all periods teaches us that humanity changes, and that a period, once past, never returns. Whatever gave us the disastrous idea of trying to bring back the art of the past? What is the use of reviving old art?  

Similarly, Friedrich, who firmly believed that art is the language of our sentiment *Empfindung*, and that the artist should first see his picture with the *mind's eye*, scathingly criticised the eclecticism and reactionary tendencies of the Nazarenes, and their 'slavish aping' of an earlier period.  

**THE SPIRIT OF BERLIN**: THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE

The diversity of art in Germany that Durante emphasised towards the end of the century came keenly into focus at its beginning, when, in 1801, Goethe criticised Berlin art as 'prosaic' and the sculptor Johann Gottfried Schadow defended 'the prosaic spirit' of his city by stressing that 'here [in Berlin] every work of art is treated as a portrait or counterfeit'; only this approach will enable us to produce works of art in which we Germans will be seen as ourselves.  

While the Nazarenes strove to rejuvenate German art by inventing a utopian ideal modelled on the past and Runge and Friedrich explored renewal of Deutschtum in images of nature, Schadow proclaimed that Germans could be seen as German only in works of art that portrayed concrete reality. In 1822, in his 'Letters from Berlin', the poet Heinrich Heine wrote: 'Berlin is less a city than a place where a lot of people congregate, many fine minds among them, but for whom this place is negligible, for they themselves represent the spirit of Berlin.' In the three decades between the end of the Wars of Liberation and the revolution of 1848 the polarity...
between innovation and tradition, between cosmopolitan openness and an increasing drive towards nationhood, sharpened. The paintings of Berlin and its inhabitants, the cityscapes of Eduard Gaertner, Johann Erdmann Hummel and Franz Krüger; and the 'character studies' of Carl Blechen and Adolph Menzel, all give form to a growing self-awareness in Prussia's capital, to which Karl Friedrich Schinkel's comprehensive scheme of monumental buildings was giving definitive shape. It is the people — the enterprising burghers, the intellectuals, architects, poets, artists, musicians — who shape and occupy the spaces which the painters record in their images. In his monumental canvas The Parade in the Openplatz in 1822 (fig. 17) Krüger did not merely commemorate the visit of Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia, son-in-law of the Prussian King, but proudly displayed in the right foreground people who should represent the spirit of Berlin: Schinkel, whose first civic building, the Neue Wache (New guardhouse; see also cat. 34), frames the picture on the right, the sculptors Schadow and Christian Daniel Rauch, the singer Henriette Sontag, the violinist Niccolò Paganini and ordinary citizens. Krüger, breaking with convention, pushes the tiny royal figures — the Grand Duke riding towards the King, who is positioned on the far left — out of the picture's centre. Most prominent is the lively crowd, which seems to be moving towards the very edge of the picture as if to invite the viewer to participate. Together with the architecture — the official buildings lining the main boulevard Unter den Linden — the citizens themselves, celebrities and otherwise, dominate Krüger's scene, and transform a traditional subject of history into an image of the modern urban crowd.

A few years later, in 1831, Hummel painted with equal topographical precision The Granite Bowl in the Berlin Lustgarten (cat. 37), an image that symbolises the industrial age: raw nature transformed through a sophisticated technical process into a central monument of the city. The bowl was slowly and carefully carved from a giant boulder of 'erratic' granite and placed by Schinkel in the central public square (the Lustgarten) framed by his museum (now called the Altes Museum), the old cathedral, the royal palace and the Zeughaus (Armoury). The highly polished surface of the granite bowl reflects the citizens passing by and their surroundings — upside down and slightly distorted — blurring the boundaries between reality and its mirror image.

When the painter Carl Blechen died in 1840, he was praised in an obituary notice as the 'ingenious inventor of a novel category of "character studies" in landscape painting', well typified by his View over Roofs and Gardens (cat. 26). This term may easily be extended to other Berlin artists and their works, as it echoes Goethe's and Schadow's earlier definitions and captures the essence of much of the art produced in the Prussian capital during the first half of the century. Gaertner, Hummel, Krüger, Blechen and the young Menzel all depicted scenes of their immediate local environment, urban sites and domestic interiors. In sharply focused pictures of public and private life they represented the bourgeoisie of the 'restoration period' in spaces which appear to be contained and safe. Even the urban sites appear as enveloping 'containers' of civic activities. If national unity and a more liberal form of government remained elusive goals, withdrawal into familiar spaces, public and private, offered an alternative sense of identity.

Many of the domestic interiors, often the living room or study-library, present the women of the house as still lifes, completely immersed in their activities — doing needlework, reading, playing music or merely gazing out of the window — almost always oblivious of the observer. Friedrich's Woman at the Window (his wife Caroline; cat. 8) is fixed into a strict pictorial structure of verticals and horizontals, motionless like the austere room itself, the sombre colour of her dress harmoniously blending into those of her surroundings. Her contemplation of nature, the Elbe landscape beyond, mediates between the bare dark interior and the brightly lit exterior. If Friedrich speaks in the Romantic vocabulary of solitude and yearning for the beyond — literally and symbolically — he also pictures the woman's rigid domestic boundaries.

In Menzel's painting of The Balcony Room (cat. 28) all sense of a safely ordered life is ruptured. Menzel pictured the modest living room of his family's Berlin apartment not as the tightly ordered interior of a well-organised life, but as an uncannily empty and disorganised space. The pieces of furniture are haphazardly positioned, the sofa cut off by the picture's frame but reflected in the mirror, which extends the whole space of the room beyond the edge of the canvas. The traces of time show in the peeling colours on the wall, and the picture's centre is completely empty. A gentle breeze blows through the white curtains, filtering the sunshine streaming through the open French windows and illuminating the emptiness of the room. While Menzel depicted '... in the interior the weather of the outside ...', giving light and breeze an almost material quality, he also represented his living room bare of all sense of bourgeois stability and permanence. No Biedermeier Gemütlichkeit (cosiness) alleviates the signs of emptiness and disturbance.

PICTURING THE COURSE OF GERMAN HISTORY

The same sense of fleeting time and disturbance also marks Menzel's painting of contemporary history, The Funeral of the Fallen March Revolutionaries of 1848 (fig. 45, p. 129). He adapted the Berlin tradition of cityscapes, in which the urban crowd has its part, for his image of the most explosive event that his generation experienced, the insurrection of 1848 in which liberals and radicals briefly forced the
Grown to relinquish control of the city. Unlike Delacroix and Meissonier in France, Menzel did not depict the fighting on the barricades, but the aftermath, the funeral of those who had fallen there: their coffins – draped in black – are piled up in a dark pyramid on the stairs of the Neue Kirche in the Gendarmenmarkt facing the disorganised crowd in the foreground. Menzel did not even picture the actual ceremony; the formal ritual of the day-long funeral, but the chaotic hour beforehand, a marginal moment when the citizens of Berlin were still gathering. Menzel captures the dynamic energy of the historic day, which for a short moment seemed to signal the victory of the revolution, the fluctuating movement of the urban crowd, the most prominent part of his composition. The painting remained unfinished – as if the artist was unable to complete it – after the turn in the political events outpaced him, and government troops retook the city. He kept the canvas in the private sphere of his studio. After his death, however, when The Fallen Revolutionaries, together with his other canvases of the 1840s, was publicly shown, the picture was inscribed into the new narratives of aesthetic modernism. The only significant German painting of the 1848 revolution was thus given an aesthetic, rather than a political reading.

Menzel’s Flute Concert of Frederick the Great at Sanssouci (cat. 32), however, finished four years later, became a centrepiece in the fashioning of a new national history, even though it, too, was anchored in the liberal-bourgeois ideology of the years leading up to the revolution of 1848. Like his earlier illustrations of Franz Kugler’s Geschichte Friedrich’s des Grossen (History of Frederick the Great), which was one of the numerous publications celebrating the centenary of Frederick’s coronation in 1840, The Flute Concert and Menzel’s other paintings of the life of Frederick II are not heroic images of great moments of world history. Rather they represent the king with psychological intuition and in ‘daguerréotypical reality’ as ‘a father to his people’.[41] Like most liberals in the 1840s, Menzel saw Frederick as a philosopher-king and as a precursor of reform. While the ruling king, Frederick William IV, was giving the most important public commissions, a series of monumental mural decorations, to Peter Cornelius and Wilhelm von Kaulbach, Menzel pursued his own Frederick project in easel-paintings mostly executed for private collectors or without any commission at all (see further cat. 32).

Cornelius, invited to Berlin in 1841, was commissioned to decorate the Campo Santo, the projected burial chapel for the ruling Hohenzollern dynasty, a grandiose project that was never completed. Wilhelm von Kaulbach designed the murals for the stairwell of the Neues Museum, a new building behind Schinkel’s (Altes) Museum. This equally monumental enterprise, on which he laboured from 1847 to 1863, consisted of six scenes of world history, from The Construction of the Tower of Babel to The Age of Reformation (fig. 18). These abstract and idealised images in strictly hierarchical compositions dominated the public’s notion of what constituted German art well beyond the country’s borders. When the cartoon for The Age of Reformation was exhibited at the Paris World Fair of 1867, it earned Kaulbach a Medal of Honour; but also elicited sarcastic French criticism: it was a painting ‘where the gymnastics of the mind play such a great role … a School of Athens revised and corrected by a German …’. It is against the rhetoric of these monumental murals displayed in public buildings in the centre of Berlin that one has to see Menzel’s history paintings. Executed during the 1850s, they demonstrate the image of Frederick the Great ‘as father to his people’ at a time when the role of this king was beginning to take on a new national function.

Long before the historical event of national unification actually took place, the drive for political unity had been transferred to the cultural sphere. The first ‘German Universal and Historical Art Exhibition’, organised in Munich in 1858 (see further the essay by Claude Keisch), was also the first large exhibition that linked the move toward national unity with the visual arts. Many critics explicitly emphasised the political meaning of the event by stressing the ‘pan-German’ character of the exhibition, which ‘hurries on ahead of politics … because the Academy has adopted the idea of a universal historical exhibition, the celebration [of
the fiftieth anniversary of the Academy] has achieved, so to speak, the breadth of the whole of German art. This ‘epoch-making’ exhibition, as another critic put it, would also assist ‘the strengthening of the national consciousness’ and would help to effect a ‘powerful revival of the national spirit.’ Menzel’s dramatic representation of the surprise nocturnal raid on the Prussians by the Austrians during the Seven Years War, Night Attack at Hochkirch 1758 (fig. 30, p. 44), became the rallying point for a new German history painting. Although the Prussian King relegated this gigantic painting of a defeat to a room where ‘during court balls the lackeys washed the tea-cups’, Menzel’s picture eventually decorated the wall above the desk of the Emperor William II after it had been celebrated as a ‘national work of art’ that anticipated the ‘days of Sedan’, the decisive German victory over the French in 1870. The powerful ‘national uprising’ of the Empire cast Menzel’s paintings of Frederick in the role of national signpost.

While Menzel painted his very private gouaches of the French prisoners of war who passed through the railway stations in Berlin in 1870, Anton von Werner was commissioned to celebrate the victory of the German Armies in panels that were to line the processional route through Berlin in June 1871, and later to produce the designs for the mosaic decoration of the Siegessäule (Victory column). This colossal monument, new accent in the urban lay-out of the city, marked Berlin’s rapid ascent from provincial capital of Prussia to new metropolis of the Empire. It was Werner, director of the Academy and influential advisor to Emperor William II, not Menzel, who became the official chronicler of the Empire. His painting A Billet outside Paris (cat. 48) casts the events of the Franco-Prussian War into an anecdotal scene that entirely excludes violence. Werner was the only artist officially invited to follow the German armies, and to witness the proclamation of the German Empire at Versailles on 18 January 1871 so that he could commemorate the event on canvas. His several versions of The Proclamation of the Empire (fig. 19) shaped collective memory. By manipulating the arrangement of the participants representing the individual German states the artist was able to convey the idea of national unity. Menzel, in contrast, in his Departure of King William I for the Front, 31 July 1870 (cat. 44), depicted the beginning of the war; not its battles or its final victory. In Menzel’s painting the King and Queen are positioned in the middle ground, off-centre – small figures immersed in the crowd of Berlin citizens, who most of the picture’s space. Once in the Nationalgalerie, however, Menzel’s paintings were seen together with the monumental battle scenes commissioned for the Museum, and as part of these installations could be conveniently integrated into the Empire’s invention of a new national narrative.

Fig. 19
ANTON VON WERNER
The Proclamation of the German Empire at Versailles, 1871
(Die Kaiserproklamation im Spiegelbild von Versailles, 18. Januar 1871), 1877
Oil on canvas, 167 x 202 cm
Bismarck-Museum, Friedrichruh

IMPERIAL NATIONALISM AND ESCAPE TO ITALY
After unification in 1871, the individual states retained their cultural autonomy, a series of dynamic fields of energy across the map of the Empire. No German city played such an exclusive role as Paris did for French, or London for English art. The lack of ‘one single great forum for the arts’ and the tension between the periphery and Berlin as the aspiring new centre were also discouraging. Nowhere else was the experience of discontent, the disillusioned withdrawal of the artist from the political and social system, so marked as in Germany; it was art’s ‘imperfect connection to the life of the all-important social class, the bourgeoisie,’ as Lichtwark explained. Anselm Feuerbach, Hans von Marées and Arnold Böcklin spent most of their lives in Italy; Wilhelm Leibl moved out of Munich to live in remote Bavarian villages, and even Menzel, the painter par excellence of modern urban life, felt ambivalent about contemporary conditions and, after the completion of his Iron-rolling Mill (cat. 45) in 1873, withdrew more and more into the private medium of drawing, producing his most subjective and innovative images in black and white. Such withdrawal from the frustrating materialism of
had a long tradition in German art, being an essential part of the history and philosophy of German idealism. The growing feeling of creation both strengthened an intense belief in individualism and found expression in the idea of belonging to a global humanity.

As Conrad Fiedler, close friend and generous patron of Hans von Marées, interpreted the role of the artist and his natural right to create individualism in 1876, ‘Artistic consciousness in its totality does not extend beyond the limits of the individual and it never finds a complete expression’. Although the idea of the artist can never express itself in the form of a work of art, it continuously strives to express itself and in the work of art it reaches for a moment its zenith pitch. A work of art is the expression of artistic consciousness in its totality, as a relative height. Just as the Nazarenes had insisted upon it as an expression of the subjective self and retreated to Italy, where foreigners did not have to engage themselves in the political situation, so a new generation of artists chose Italy and separation from their home country. In their case it was not only, in Overbeck’s words, ‘yearning that constantly draws the north towards the south’, it was to escape.

In 1870, the year of the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Hans von Marées had returned to Germany, working together with the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand in Berlin. But the stifling atmosphere of the capital paralysed his creativity, and he moved to Dresden, where Fiedler built a studio for his friend. While in a state of anxiety and frustration over the situation in Germany, Marées met the young zoologist Anton Dohm, who was about to realise his utopian dream of founding an international marine biology research institute in the Bay of Spées. Dohm envisaged an international ‘republic’ of scientists, who would work at the Naples institute in scholarly and spiritual harmony; the assembly room at the centre of the building was to serve not only as a place for scientific meetings but also for contemplation and spiritual elevations. Marées immediately recognised the artistic potential of the function of such a room possessed, and proposed its decoration with frescoes by his friend Hildebrand. Throughout the summer of 1873 he worked feverishly on this project, completing the cycle of images in November. The Oarsmen (cat. 54) on the north wall is faced by the bark in the Orange Grove on the south wall, contrasting the scenes of calm work, activity at sea and cultivation of the land. Other scenes include Fishermen readying their boat for Departure on the east wall and the Pergola, an open-air tavern where Marées and his friends spent evenings after a long working day – a group portrait immortalising those engaged in the artistic and scientific creativity of the institute – and two men Friends sitting in the orange grove. Except for the athletic fishermen and rowers, the statuesque immobility of the figures in the stillness of each scene evokes longing for a non-existent world. In the tradition of the scholar Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who had associated the strong, youthful, half-naked boatmen of South Italy with the powerful Titans of mythology, Marées’s heroic rowers and fishermen are rooted more in the artist’s vision of the past than in his observation of the working conditions of the present. The Orange Grove, an image that became central to Marées’s later work, is not about the hardships of farmwork in modern Italy, but the artist’s vision of the Golden Age, as he imagined it again in The Ages of Man of 1873 (fig. 20) and in The Hesperides Triptych of 1884–5.

According to Marées, the artist had to remain aloof from the social reality of his own time, as he explained in a letter of 1882 to Fiedler: ‘The meaning of what I recently said (for example, the artist “born” and endowed with an ideal “by nature”) is, that whoever devotes himself to the practice of the arts must attempt to achieve and maintain an
beyond the painting’s frame, as if his pictured persona were displaying the same strong will that had controlled the creative enterprise in Naples and informed his unambivalent formulations of the independence of the work of art from the political and social conditions of his time.

What Marées called ‘the indestructible freshness of youth’ was indeed an essential part of his and Feuerbach’s enterprise. If in Marées’s paintings the motif of men picking oranges merges with the myth of the Hesperides guarding golden apples, and so becomes a garden of the gods, Feuerbach’s image of Iphigenia symbolises the painter’s longing both for his homeland and for the ideal of classical Greece. He produced several versions, both painted and drawn, of Iphigenia, the second one in 1871 (fig. 21). Feuerbach had painted his first version in Rome in 1862, a year before he executed the portrait of Nanna (cat. 49), who also posed as the Greek princess.

The motif of the lonely priestess sitting by the seashore lost in thought and longing for her homeland had developed into an archetype at the end of the eighteenth century, when Goethe wrote his Iphigenia auf Tauris (Iphigenia in Tauris), introducing the theme of yearning in Iphigenia’s monologue:

For, ah! the sea divides me from my loved ones,
And by the shore I stand whole long days through
With my soul searching for the Grecian land,
And only muted tones amid its roaring
Does the wave bring in answer to my sighs.57

In 1870, while at work on the second Iphigenia, Feuerbach wrote to his mother: ‘I have intended the Iphigenia for our house, and I believe that if someone wants a personification of yearning, he has it in this painting.58 The artist so intensely identified with Iphigenia that he wanted to evoke in the viewer those emotions which had inspired its creation. In February 1872, when the finished second version was shipped to Germany, he explained Iphigenia ... by the silence of the sea is a painting in front of which one can sit for hours, mellow, clear and soulful. The fluttering butterfly symbolises the soul.59

These monumental, remote and motionless women seem suspended between their memory of the past and their existence in the present. As the object of their longing is excluded by the picture’s frame, the viewer can easily identify with both intense yearning and the experience of deep dislocation. As in Oberbeck’s Italia and Germania, remembrance of the Heimath, here ‘the Grecian land’, is interlaced with the experience of alienation, biographical and aesthetic layers coalescing in an image of idealised classical antiquity.
The Island of the Dead (fig. 22) is as central to the work of Arnold Böcklin as the Orange Grove is to Mané's and Iphigenia to Feuerbach. Böcklin painted several versions, the one in the Nationalgalerie being the third of five. The picture's title, a perfect match for the public's indulgence in mystifying romanticism, was not the artist's, but the idea of it was shrewd: Berlin dealer, Fritz Guritt. The massive island composed of deep, water-filled cisterns, a white coffin with a black figure shrouded in white and a white coffin approaches the left, disturbing the strict symmetry of horizontals and verticals that determines the picture's structure. Probably inspired at last partly by the cemetery on the island of San Michele in Venice, Böcklin kept the subject vague and ambiguous enough to open the space—the picture's awe-evoking title—to many readings. The vocabulary of Romantic rhetoric—the silence of the sea, the desolate island, cypress trees, the coffin, a night sky: the tiny mysterious human figure turning its back to the viewer—not merely evokes a melancholic mood but also transposes the viewer to a timeless sphere. Divorcing the audience from concrete historical time, Böcklin indeed produced a 'painting to dream upon.' The picture achieved unprecedented popularity: Between 1885 and 1900 reproductions of Böcklin's paintings Island of the Dead, Castle on the Sea, Spring Day ... were not supposed to be missing from any good bourgeois home. At a moment of history profoundly marked by political and economic stress Feuerbach produced an image that was 'the personification of yearning', Böcklin 'a painting to dream upon', and Mané's visual metaphors of a Golden Age.

The same phenomenon of withdrawal marks the art of Wilhelm Leibl, who left Munich in 1873 at the age of twenty-nine. He sought to escape the decadence and jealousies of the art world there by moving to the remote Bavarian countryside, where he executed iconic images of the local peasantry, silent, motionless figures compressed into narrow interiors. Leibl himself identified so fully with the local way of life that he felt it to be necessary to his creative work: as he wrote in 1879, 'Here, in the open country and among those who live close to nature, one can paint naturally. My stay in Munich served to confirm my belief that painting in that town is simply a habit ...'. In Three Women in Church
(fig. 23), on which he laboured for four years, he effectively captured the transience of time and its effect upon human life.\textsuperscript{44} Each representing a different stage of life, the women seem frozen into their poses and, for all their minute verisimilitude, appear as far removed from their local daily life as the fishermen in Marées’s frescos at Naples. If Courbet, in his great Burial at Ornans, had secularised the funeral by transforming a religious event into a social one, then Leibl divorced the ritual of praying, echoing medieval images of kneeling donors, from its sacred context. And yet, by integrating into his painting the allusion to the stages of life, Leibl introduced a metaphorical meaning going beyond the faithful recording of nature.

During the 1870s, the Gründerjahre, the founding years of the Empire, while Werner celebrated the unified German nation in monumental official commissions, while Feuerbach, Marées and Böcklin in Italy and Leibl in Bavaria invented their idealised visions, Adolph Menzel in his Berlin studio painted two of the crucial images of the decade, Studio Wall (fig. 24)\textsuperscript{45} and The Iron-rolling Mill (cat. 45), one a private contemplation of creative work, eros and death, the other a public statement of the dangerous conditions of modern industrial production.\textsuperscript{46}

The Iron-rolling Mill, a monumental scene of modern industry, was begun in 1872, one year after the proclamation of the Empire, and completed after three years of intensive work in 1875. As Menzel himself emphasised, the picture, composed like a triptych, shows together three different shifts in an iron-rolling mill where rails for track were produced. In 1872 Menzel had visited Königshütte in Upper Silesia to immerse himself in studies of the manufacturing process, during a time of explosive unrest there, not only in labour disputes but also in violent confrontations between the Protestant, Prussian hegemony and the Polish, Catholic minority. Far more than demonstrating the so-called Rembrandt-effect in an orchestration of light and shade, or painting a modern version of the classical theme of ‘cyclops’ at their forge, Menzel chose a subject in shift work – the pace of the machines controlling the rhythm of the workers’ everyday lives. Only eight months after its completion, The Iron-rolling Mill moved from a private collection into the public arena, the Nationalgalerie, Berlin’s newly founded museum for modern art. While the Studio Wall, first exhibited in 1885, only gradually elicited critical attention, The Iron-rolling Mill, in contrast, prompted loud debate from the day Menzel first unveiled the canvas in his studio in a private showing. The painting was exhibited numerous times, travelled widely and was subjected to a multiplicity of readings – from the Cyclops of mythology to a socialist manifesto. Neither subject was commissioned; the artist was entirely free in his choice of topic and its configuration.

In the Studio Wall Menzel depicted a segment of his studio wall at night, positioning himself in the darkness below in such a way that the viewer looks up at the three rows of plaster casts, which are dramatically lit by artificial light. The casts, death masks, a female and a male torso and the artist’s tools are hanging from dark boards on a wall of Pompeian red. Whether identified as the Venus de Milo, Praxiteles’ Cnidian Venus or merely the cast of female model, the torso, hollow and sharply illuminated, is the most prominently displayed. While the precise identification of the casts remains uncertain, their intense presence in their severely fragmented forms, in a picture that unlike most of his other larger canvases lacks preparatory studies, seems to convey the
DOLOPH MENZEL
1872
11 x 79.3 cm
Heidelberg, Kunsthalle, Anniburg.
artist's urgency. In his earlier Studio Wall of 1852 (cat. 31), the plaster casts of human limbs are arranged in the configuration of a human body almost as if floating in the hermetic enclosure of the studio. No intellectual or allegorical association, as in the casts of 1872, relieves the claustrophobic mood. In the earlier image the tension between the physical human body — even in its extreme segmentation — and its presence as an object of study in the artist's studio conveys a disturbing, almost shocking effect; the broken bones, the skinned hand, the shut window, all speak the language of negation and loss. In the 1872 version, the dramatic effect of light 'before our eyes transforms ... the illuminated plaster casts to a phantom-like state of wakefulness' — transforms particularly the female nude. The intricate arrangement of the objects and their carefully staged lighting are certainly not casual, but are an intense solitary reflection on sexuality, art and death. In his will, Ménzel, dwarflike and a self-proclaimed bachelor, noted: '... I have also renounced, all my life, any relationship to the other sex as such. In short, there is no self-produced glue between myself and the external world.'

Read together as two interrelated images, the Studio Wall and the Iron-rolling Mill not only indicate the dichotomy between an artist's private and public existence, they also serve as a metaphor for the state of the arts in Germany at the time. If one painting melds the deeply hidden anxieties of private existence and creative work with the experience of the fugacity of human life, the other articulates a keen awareness of 'the social question', despite the ambiguity of Ménzel's own position. However, he surely knew, when he chose the subject of heavy industry for a monumental canvas, that he would make a visible intervention in the political debates of the day. Both images, the multi-layered private contemplation and the rhetorical gesture for the public realm, illustrate the disjunction of the artist's private existence and public life.

INTO THE NEW CENTURY: MODERNITY IN THE EMPIRE

When, in 1889, at the invitation of the French, Max Liebermann organised an independent exhibition of German art for the Paris World Fair, he acted in open resistance to Bismarck's government, which had refused to participate. Having travelled widely and studied Dutch and French art, he brought a truly cosmopolitan approach to his professional career: he firmly believed in the confidantist of the arts beyond national boundaries, in stark contradiction to the increasingly chauvinistic attitude of the Empire. In the exhibition, besides Liebermann's own large canvases, there were works by Leibl, Kühn, Trübner, Uhde and others: it was the first coherent show of German modern art, staged not within, but outside, the Empire, so to speak in the capital of the enemy. Werner, hostile to Liebermann, immediately recognised its pivotal role. The exhibition signalled the 'date of the official proclamation of the new gospel ...'; producing the effect, at least in Germany, of trumpet blasts advertising its glory ...'

Among his large plein-air canvases of the 1880s that Liebermann showed in Paris was The Netzendorf, which Lichtwark subsequently acquired for the Hamburger Kunsthalle. Liebermann places the Dutch women mending nets in the wide, flat landscape in such a way as to lead the eye from the almost life-size woman in the foreground to the diminutive figures along the horizon. A strong sea-wind seizes their dark dresses. Although Liebermann chose a scene of collective work, he isolates each woman from the others. No anecdotal motif alleviates the picture's grim mood. The melancholic tone is intensified by the monumental woman in the foreground pulling a heavy net, who has arrested her work for a moment. Her eyes wander across the wide expanse of flat land towards the horizon as if she were reflecting upon her fate. The intertwining of human figure and nature, of co-operation and solitude, led contemporary critics to see in the picture a new form of naturalistic landscape painting, and even to elevate it to the status of a history painting. In his creative work as well as in his entrepreneurial activities as organiser of exhibitions, as President of the Berlin Secession and an eloquent critic, Liebermann embodied the conflicting traits of the German avant-garde, who promoted modernism in the widest sense of the term, but ultimately strove for its integration both internationally and in the cultural fabric of the Empire.
p. 26 and 27

Just Ludwig Kirchner

a Brücke (Bridge) Manifesto, 1905: frontispiece (Künstler-Gruppe Brücke) and titlepage
towbjects, images 13.2 x 5.6 cm and 15.2 x 7.5 cm
galerie-kabinett, Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

The question of whether and how to mediate between a national
eology and a cosmopolitan vision was critical in contemporary poli-
cal and intellectual discussion. On one side stood Meinecke, whose
osition in his classic work of 1908, Weltbürgerturn und Nationalstaat
Cosmopolitanism and the national state) was criticised by the Princeton
storian Felix Gilbert in 1970 as a ‘dangerous and even repulsive’ glor-
ration of nationalism.72 However, shortly before the publication of
inecke’s book, in an essay for the progressive journal Die Zukunft
The future), Harry Graf Kessler, recently dismissed as director of the
museum in Weimar, had drawn very different conclusions.73 There
contrast, Kessler declared, ‘between being a good German and a
od European; a conflict between national and international does not
exist.’74 But in the aggressive political climate before World War I, the
ement of William II propagated an exclusive nationalism in which
term ‘cosmopolitan’ was turned into an insult. For example, a re-
er sharply criticising Max Liebermann’s ‘unpatriotic’ role as the
rganiser of the German art exhibition at the Paris World Fair singled
out for blame the ‘cosmopolitan artists and bankers who had sup-
ted it’.75

During the 1890s, the complex relationships between official and
modemist art made for considerable ambiguity: not all government
orced art was as rigidly conservative as William II’s own position,
or were all modernist statements purely radical. Liebermann, Lovis
orinth, Julius Meier-Graefe and others often conceal under the rhet-
ic of their modernism a patronising attitude, just as the eclectic nature
most Secession exhibitions in Munich and Berlin blurred the
 polarity between conservative and avant-garde art.76 The language
of modernism was not readily separable from nationalist discourse.

Perhaps typically for his generation, Kessler had discovered the power
which the dream of a united Europe could invoke when, as a young
an, he had read Nietzsche’s Jenseits von Gut und Böse (Beyond Good
and Evil, 1886). In his autobiography, published when he was living in
exile, he quotes at length the passionate passage from Nietzsche that
had ‘opened his eyes’, because Nietzsche’s vision of ‘the encompassing
European nation’ and ‘the European of the future’ had offered a para-
digm for his own life. By identifying with Nietzsche’s ‘European of the
future’, he would finally be able to negotiate between the competing
forces of his existence: the struggle between my English and my German
blood, my English, German and French cultural heritage’.77 Nietzsche’s
‘text inspired in the young Kessler a cosmopolitan conception of both
his professional career and his private life beyond its application to the
general state of the German nation. While Liebermann upheld the
utopian ideal of ‘confrontation in the arts … outside all political con-
sideration’, Kessler believed that ‘the engagement with Europe did not
also mean a renunciation of the national, only its curbing.’78 A restless
wanderer between different European countries and their cultures,
Kessler sought to mediate between a national ideal and a cosmopolitan
vision by defining nationality as a fluid element: ‘After all, nationality is
nothing rigid, dead, there for once and for all – no more than is race,
for instance. Every nationality metamorphoses continuously’.79

Like a conjunction of past and present, the year 1906, when Kessler
published his essay ‘Nationalität’, also marks the date of the Centenary
Exhibition at the Nationalgalerie, a retrospective of German art of the
past century, and of the Brücke manifesto (figs. 26 and 27), pointing
the way into the future. Nietzsche’s writing, so influential on Kessler’s early
conception of culture and modern society, seemed to confirm the
Brücke artists’ insistence upon a radical break with the moral and cul-
tural values of the past. Although Die Brücke was a collective enter-
prise, it was mainly Ernst Ludwig Kirchner who prepared the text of
the manifesto and produced its woodcut frontispiece of a bridge
(Brücke) spanning a stream of water framed by trees. Inspired by
Nietzsche’s Also Sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra),80 the
young artists took as the emblem of their ideal of radical renewal a
bridge leading from the past to the future through creative work.

The Centenary Exhibition in the Nationalgalerie provided a unique
opportunity to reconcile national tradition with international modern-
ism.81 It seemed to impose upon the diversity of ‘regional schools’ a
more coherent history of nineteenth-century German art. However,
no matter how fiercely Berlin competed to become the cultural capi-
tal of the nation, the historical tradition of cultural decentralisation
continued to shape artistic production and its critical discourses. As Duranty had recognized in 1878, ‘the Germans do not have ... one single great forum for the arts’; Berlin, despite political unification, would assume that role only in the 1920s. More successful was the exhibition’s strategy of orienting national tradition with international modernity: Friedrich was recovered for the history of modern art as a German Romantic, and Menzel’s paintings of the 1840s, exhibited for the first time as a coherent whole within an historical narrative, were read as precursors of Impressionism. If even ‘the painter of Friedrich the Great’ offered this dimension, then modernism could be anchored in the German tradition, and the exhibition organizers could not merely deflect the current ‘Francophobia’ but merge their international conception with the prevailing patriotism. The way in which the exhibition was staged is significant: the designer responsible, Peter Behrens, masked the walls of the museum – and much of its patriotic décor – with neutral hangings. The device of masking, not eliminating, the décor of national history was perhaps a strategy congenial to those operating in the public sphere at that moment. Überkleidungskunst (the art of masking) also poignantly envisages the layering of different aesthetic conceptions and political ideologies – a tangible metaphor for the precarious coexistence of multiple national identities.

NOTES

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1 Quoted in Hitz 1974, p. 92.
7 Just 1920, p. 427.
8 Ludwig Just, Kaspar David Friedrich, Berlin 1921, p. 32, just’s booklet on Friedrich is a reprint of the passages from his 1920 catalogue with few changes and additions. The painting is Börsch-Supan and Jäger 1973, no. 317, pp. 39–122.
9 J.V. von Goethe, Von deutscher Baukunst, in Schriften zur Kunst, Schriften zur Literatur, Musik und Reflexionen (Goethe’s Werke, XII, Hamburger Ausgabe, 4th edn, Hamburg 1960), pp. 7–13, 560–4, commentary by Herbert von Einen. (This edition is preferred because my discussion relies on Einen’s commentary.) After its first, anonymous publication, the essay was reprinted in Herder’s collection Von deutscher Art und Kunst, Hamburg 1773, again in 1789 and later in Goethe’s own Kunst und Altertum, 1824.
13 Menzel 1914, p. 13.
19 Börsch-Supan and Jäger 1973, nos. 166 and 169.
24 Tischbein in a letter to Johann Kaspar Lavater quoted in Einen 1978, p. 35.
29 Quoted (with slight modification) from Andrews 1964, p. 27.
31 Overbeck in a letter to F. Winner, January 1829, now in the Rezatkarchiv, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. I owe the reference and the transcription to the help of Dr. Annegret Janda and Dr. Jörn Grabowski.
32 Runges, letter of February 1802, quoted from Einen 1989, p. 143.
33 Hitz 1974, p. 124, 111.
39


64 Munich–Cologne 1994, p. 3463, no. 97.


68 Kuswinn 1919, pp. 92–8, esp. p. 97.


70 ibid.


74 ibid., p. 128.

75 Berliner Politische Nachrichten, no. 112, 15 May 1899.

76 Paritz 1980, Mekula 1990, Forster-Hahn 1999, both where all authors analyze the multifaceted cultural heritage of the 1890s.


79 ibid., p. 129.


82 Franz Dülberg, Die deutsche Jahrhunderausstellung, Leipzig 1906, p. 35.