

CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH

INFINITE LANDSCAPES



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ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONALGALERIE DER STAATLICHEN MUSEEN ZU BERLIN
EDITED BY BIRGIT VERWIEBE AND RALPH GLEIS



Nationalgalerie
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PREFACE

An exhibition marking an artist's 250th birthday is an opportunity to encounter his oeuvre in unaccustomed breadth and depth. Naturally, the Freunde der Nationalgalerie were delighted to support this important endeavor.

Only during the course of preparations did we come to realize we were actually working on something new: a comprehensive monographic exhibition devoted to Caspar David Friedrich has never before been mounted in Berlin. When we recall all of the marvelous exhibitions held at the Alte Nationalgalerie over the past two decades, this seemed extraordinary. Friedrich was a key figure in the fabulous *Pictures of Clouds* exhibition of 2004, as well as in *Wanderlust* of 2018, which included Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. In 2004, it was his painting *The Watzmann* that occupied the center of attention. All of these exhibitions were superb and insightful, but none was a large-scale monographic presentation. But the explanation for our mistaken impression that there must have been an extensive presentation of Friedrich's works in Berlin at some point is easy enough to explain. After all, the Alte Nationalgalerie is home to one of the world's largest collections of Friedrich's work, and has repeatedly organized noteworthy exhibitions on Romanticism that showcased these treasures.

It is a genuine cause for celebration that the moment for this landmark has finally arrived, with more than sixty paintings and fifty drawings by Friedrich being presented in Berlin under the title *Caspar David Friedrich: Infinite Landscapes*. The inclusion of such icons as *The Sea of Ice* and *The Chalk Cliffs of Rügen* is made possible by the generosity of our lenders, and in particular by an amicable collaboration between the great Friedrich collections held in Hamburg, Berlin, and Dresden.

Back in 1906, Hugo von Tschudi, then director of the Nationalgalerie, focused on Friedrich's landscapes in his *Centenary Exhibition*, encouraging a renewed interest in this Romantic artist. Von Tschudi presented Friedrich as a painter of light and atmosphere, celebrating him as a forerunner of modernism. Today, when the Nationalgalerie again calls our attention to Friedrich's landscapes, it is from a decidedly contemporary perspective.

Today, the questions Friedrich posed about the relationship between humanity and nature seem more relevant than ever. His depictions of the timeless beauty and sublimity of nature touch viewers deeply, inviting them to rediscover their connectedness to the natural environment in silent contemplation. In our industrialized, digitalized world, nature — always the basis of human existence — has again become a locus of yearning whose very survival faces unprecedented threats.

Our thanks go to our members: in these turbulent times, it is their steadfast loyalty that allows us to make plans far into the future. They continue to show us the confidence that makes it possible to translate the ambitious and laudable aspirations of the curators at the Nationalgalerie into reality.

For the sagacious and enthralling presentation, our thanks to Birgit Verwiebe and Ralph Gleis, who worked together with Sintje Guericke and the entire team of the Alte Nationalgalerie, all of them laboring tirelessly in a long-term effort to bring this sensational exhibition to fruition. Organizational implementation, including financial planning and all of the multifaceted communications related to the exhibition, along with additional events planning, has been in the hands of the team of the Friends. A special thanks, once again, therefore, to André Odier, Katharina von Chlebowski, Lutz Driever, Sina Jentzsch, Romana Eder-Grabher, and Rebecca Schenzinger for their commitment and dedication.

We gladly accept this invitation to experience the works of Caspar David Friedrich with renewed intensity in this exhibition — in the hope that, at a time when darkness descends in many places, the light of his "Infinite Landscapes" will succeed in enchanting us once again.

Christian Kohorst
Chair, Freunde der Nationalgalerie

FOREWORD

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Given the multiplicity of approaches to the work of Caspar David Friedrich contained in this catalogue, an attempt at a brief characterization of Friedrich's uniqueness as an artist would seem presumptuous. His extraordinary significance for the collections of the Nationalgalerie, in contrast, can be described very simply: Friedrich's visual works were a part of the museum collection from the very beginning, and more have been acquired over time, yielding one of the most important collections of his work in the world. And it was the Nationalgalerie that was primarily responsible for his rediscovery, too. Presenting nearly one hundred of his paintings and drawings, the *German Centenary Exhibition* of 1906 rescued Friedrich from decades of obscurity and reestablished his reputation as an artist. This was followed by an unparalleled record of Friedrich reception that went on to make him one of the central figures of German art history. Today, visitors from around the world arrive at the Alte Nationalgalerie to view the remarkably modern "landscapes of yearning" created by this Romantic artist.

Astonishingly, no comprehensive survey exhibition devoted to Friedrich as a painter and draftsman has ever been organized in Berlin — though it is the site of his early success, as well as his rediscovery. Our exhibition *Caspar David Friedrich: Infinite Landscapes* remedies this lapse, while commemorating the artist's 250th birthday. Both the exhibition and the present catalogue are made possible thanks to many years of meticulous research by exhibition curator Birgit Verwiebe. In this catalogue, Dr. Verwiebe presents a comprehensive account of Caspar David Friedrich's importance for the Nationalgalerie. Her text is complemented beautifully by Anna Marie Pfäfflin's detailed discussion of the Friedrich drawings preserved in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin — our cooperation partner for this exhibition.

The essays in this catalogue analyze Friedrich's visual works and their interpretive possibilities. With his comprehensive yet succinct account of the diverse views of Friedrich researchers to date, Johannes Grave offers an excellent point of departure for contextualizing the remarks of two major Friedrich researchers, namely Hilmar Frank and Werner Busch. Frank explores ambiguities in

interpreting Friedrich's oeuvre and discusses relationships between pictures conceived of as pairs. Werner Busch elucidates the complexity of Friedrich's compositions with reference to mathematical principles, highlighting the precision and sophistication of his art.

The Nationalgalerie has become a key institution for investigations of Caspar David Friedrich's painting technique, thanks to international cooperations and our own research, directed by Kristina Mösl of the Conservation Department. Her catalogue contribution and the exhibition section she curated devoted to painting techniques provide insights into her research findings emerging from still-ongoing conservation measures performed on and studies related to the paintings *Monk by the Sea* and *Abbey among the Oaks*. Gerd-Helge Vogel's discussion of copies and replicas of works by Friedrich is informed by conservation measures on a copy of the lost *Monastery Cemetery in Snow*, carried out by Kerstin Krainer with the assistance of Iris Masson. His discussion not only provides provocative insights into the history of Friedrich's reception, but also identifies important and hitherto unnoticed references within the works themselves. Reception history is a complex and independent topic within Friedrich research, and its fundamental importance is reflected in all the contributions to this volume.

Sintje Guericke devoted her essay to Friedrich's contemporary reception by the artist Hiroyuki Masuyama. His backlit photographic Friedrich adaptations reinvigorate questions on his approach to form and strategies of presentation.

Both exhibition and catalogue seek to convey a sense of the sheer complexity of Friedrich's art, but also its eminently aesthetic and — even more so — sensuous qualities. Through her meticulous planning for this jubilee exhibition, characterized by authoritativeness, passion, and vision, Dr. Verwiebe has succeeded in achieving exactly that. The result is an enjoyable, intelligent, and astonishingly comprehensive survey of Caspar David Friedrich's oeuvre — one that is long overdue at the Nationalgalerie. For this achievement, she has my heartfelt thanks. I want to express my