

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Project fully funded by the Alexander Tustsek Foundation.

Introduction by Dr Christian Hartard.

As long as humans have been building themselves houses to live in, they've looked out of the window. And it's much the same when people visit the museum – oftentimes, the view through the window is more interesting than the exhibition itself.

“A view out of a window is always a view onto the world and life,” wrote German author, Karl Krolow. The same is true about paintings in a museum: In his 1435 treatise “De Pictura,” Italian architect and theorist, Leon Battista Alberti, compared paintings with an open window through which artists view the world (and which, in turn, through which we view the artist). Later, the window appeared in paintings as a reflexive reference to the tension formed between real life and the artistic rendering of reality – as a metaphor for all of the opportunities and adventures that were out of reach for the artist. In works by Jan Vermeer, the window served as a literal symbol of absence. He painted light streaming through a window into a silent room – a room in which the world was present only as a globe or a map. It was a world portrayed as a destination – as the goal to be reached through grand schemes, or as a place located at an unknown distance into which the artist would send letters or receive them.

Similarly for German Romantic painters, the world just beyond the window was a place imbued with longing, such as in Caspar David Friedrichs’ “Frau am Fenster” (“Woman at the Window.”). The painting depicts a woman gazing dreamily out the window from the confines of the four narrow walls of her apartment. Nevertheless, for Friedrichs and his contemporaries, there had been a transformation in their relationship to the world that was looking in at them through the window from outside. When Friedrichs’ friend and fellow artist, Georg Friedrich Kersting, portrayed his friend at work in his atelier, he very demonstratively positioned the easel’s frame across from the window frame in his painting. But the view out of the window was one of empty sky, and the painter – for whom the window had nothing to show – didn’t even lift his gaze in the painting to look out. What use did the real world serve as an artist’s model when the artist could create the images him or herself and put them onto canvas?

All of these elements are perfectly captured within the large glass panes of the windows that artist Garance Arcadias removed from Munich’s Alte Pinakothek museum and installed in her classroom atelier of the Munich Kunstakademie. Her “reinstallation” of these windows reflects upon the history of art, of the “view” and of the window sills across which this view has to extend to see the outside world. The original location of these windows was one that, from one side, provided a view over the city of Munich – and from the other, a view of the museum’s collection of paintings. These windows stood between the real and the painted world – serving as a thin membrane that simultaneously separated and unified the two worlds. In her transformation of these transparent borders into artworks themselves, Arcadias has released us from having to choose between one side or the other. The view onto the world is, at the same time, a view of the artwork that is a virtual representation of real life.

Anyone who has ever been “caught” gazing dreamily out the window instead of concentrating on the room – real life – in which he or she was located, will appreciate the guilt-free pleasure of being able to peer out the window while still not missing the “real life” at hand – whether it’s the real world or the art.

Dr. Christian Hartard.