

**CITY** *and*  
**LANDSCAPE**  
*between dream & reality*

# Exhibition Facts

Duration to 8 August 2021  
Venue Propter Homines  
Curator Dr. Eva Michel, ALBERTINA  
Works ca. 170

Contact Albertinaplatz 1 | 1010 Vienna  
T +43 (01) 534 83 0  
info@albertina.at  
www.albertina.at

Opening Hours Daily 10 am – 6 pm

Press contact Daniel Benyes  
T +43 (01) 534 83 511 | M +43 (0)699 12178720  
d.benyes@albertina.at

Sarah Wulbrandt  
T +43 (01) 534 83 512 | M +43 (0)699 10981743  
s.wulbrandt@albertina.at



# City and Landscape

## Between Dream and Reality

To 22 August 2021

Surveying the past five centuries of landscape painting enables us to quite literally see how human identity has been transformed. Our own visual experience of these perspectives lets us perceive and feel the changes in human beings' self-concept from generation to generation. Those who portray nature also end up revealing themselves in equal measure, which makes for a fascinating journey of (self-)discovery, a search for orientation, a wordless dialogue with our origins and our shared history.

For this largest-ever survey of the history of landscape painting, the ALBERTINA MUSEUM is opening up its treasure trove to show world-famous masterpieces alongside unique works that haven't been seen publicly in decades. Visitors can look forward to strolling through a diverse assemblage of 170 landscape paintings from five centuries. From the beginnings of the autonomous landscape painting and from its pioneers, foremost among them Albrecht Dürer, the historical arc traced here extends to encompass Bruegel, Rembrandt, and the Dutch Golden Age, urban panoramas from the Renaissance and close-up *vedute*, utopian visions of Arcadian landscapes and illusionless, realistic views of nature from the age of industrialization, and images of grandeur and the sublime by Caspar David Friedrich as well as the horrific visions and dystopias of Alfred Kubin and the child-like dreams of playful nature originated by Paul Klee. Key works of romantic landscape and Austrian watercolor painting from the 19th century such as Jakob and Rudolf von Alt's views of Vienna round off this presentation.

## **A New Perspective on the World**

Western art's very first landscape paintings were created all the way back in antiquity. However, the centuries prior to end of the Middle Ages were dominated by the golden background familiar to us from images of Christian saints. The subsequent flowering of the Renaissance then shifted the focus to human beings and nature, with Albrecht Dürer pioneering the autonomous landscape painting along with a new sort of naturalism.

But it was the Netherlands that, during the 17th century, the creation of landscapes eclipsed that of any other country in the world in terms of both quality and quantity, a unique flowering of the arts that is quite deservedly known as the "Dutch Golden Age." That country's Protestant middle class coveted paintings for display at home. And to satisfy the immense demand, artists specialized in the most varied themes including portrayals of flat landscapes extending unfathomably far out to the horizon, urban views, seascapes, and winter scenes.

## **French Heyday**

In 17th- and 18th-century France, the art of drawn landscapes blossomed in a special way. It was not Paris, however, but Rome with its southern atmosphere and picturesque ancient ruins that became a central theme of French art and a second home to many artists. Their works were meant not as faithful representations of nature but to capture atmospheric moods, to which end they employed light effects achieved with washes of various thickness. The style of 18th-century French art known as rococo represents an unparalleled celebration of exaggerated artifice, and rococo landscape portrayals reflect this. François Boucher, the most popular artist of his day, arranged topographical features to create idealized views that matched city dwellers' idyllic conceptions of nature.

## Human Beings Seen through Nature's Mirror

The early Enlightenment, the natural sciences, technology, and expeditions to far-off places gave rise to such contradictory movements and styles as classicism, romanticism, and realism. In reaction to the preceding rococo era's opulent playfulness, idealized classicist landscapes adhere to a purist formal language. Caspar David Friedrich, romanticism's central figure, projected a melancholic yearning for the infinite and unbounded onto nature's sublime countenance. He also showed the rapid growth of Europe's metropolises in his elevated views and urban panoramas, thereby replacing representative *vedute* with realistic views that assumed a pioneering role in the landscape painting of the 19th century.

## On the Eve of Modernism

The intellectual climate surrounding the dawn of the 20th century alternated between faith in progress and an apocalyptic mood. Rapid industrialization and urbanization brought forth a yearning for the romantic that was equaled by the attendant rise in cultural pessimism—two opposite poles that can be sensed in Ludwig Rösch's dreamy charcoal drawings and Alfred Kubin's dystopian world. This period also witnessed the revolutionization of art history as well as a turning point in landscape painting in that art was for the first time liberated from the principle of imitating nature, becoming independent of everything the eye could see. To be sure, Emil Nolde, August Macke, and Paul Klee did do their painting in real places—but creating topographically accurate or picturesque reproductions no longer interested them. Instead, they concentrated on a painting's overall appearance, on shapes and colors lifted from their natural models and arranged with hard contrasts and maximum luminance. It was no longer the visible landscape that they showed, but its expressionist interpretation and abstract reinvention.

## City – Countryside

### From Albrecht Dürer to Paul Klee

Today, instantaneously capturing a landscape or city in pictures with one's smartphone is a matter of course. But when, in times of a pandemic, travelling can suddenly not be taken for granted any more, this sharpens the eye for our own surroundings, as well as for artistic investigations into the landscape, the depiction of which has undergone exciting developments.

With this exhibition, the ALBERTINA Museum invites you to take part in a colourful tour of landscape pictures from five centuries. It spans from the beginnings of the autonomous landscape picture and its trailblazers, headed by Albrecht Dürer, to Bruegel, Rembrandt, and the Dutch Golden Age; from Poussin's and Lorrain's impressive landscape studies to town panoramas of the Baroque. Utopic designs of Arcadian and Romantic landscapes coincide with the sober and realistic image of nature of the industrial age. A new type of realism reached its zenith in virtuoso watercolours by Jakob and Rudolf von Alt. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the focus of artists was on a nature that had stopped being visible, i.e. on its Expressionist interpretation and its reinvention in abstraction. This opens up new perspectives of the landscape and of man-made cities built into nature: whether fantastic, idyllic, idealised, rendered in the guise of antiquity, heroic, or seemingly objectively described – nature has become a projection screen for humans acting in it and looking at it.

All of the works on view come from the holdings of the ALBERTINA Museum. The major part was acquired by the museum's founder, Duke Albert of Saxony-Teschen (1738–1822), who was primarily interested in highly finished, large-size landscape drawings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: for example, he collected landscapes by Adrian Zingg and his students because of their artistic quality and because they reminded him of his former homeland Saxony. During his last years in particular, Duke Albert concentrated on the acquisition of landscapes, an exquisite selection of which is presented here.

## Room 1 (16<sup>th</sup> century: Dürer, Altdorfer, Bruegel, Tizian)

### The Discovery of the Landscape

The very first landscape pictures in Western art date from antiquity. Whereas gold ground was a dominant feature during the Middle Ages, a new development began in the early Renaissance due to a growing interest in the exploration and representation of man and of human environments: realistic landscape elements, mountains, and cities were integrated into pictures as scenic components. A trailblazer of the autonomous landscape picture and of a new type of naturalism was Albrecht Dürer. In his early work he produced both landscape studies and highly precise townscapes and architectural views, all of which were universally referred to by his workshop as a repertoire of motifs and as models for landscape backdrops. In Dürer's diary entry of 5 May 1521 the term 'landscape painter' appears for the first time, which he used to describe the Netherlandish artist Joachim Patinir (1480–1524).

The landscape first became an independent subject proper in the art of Albrecht Altdorfer, who made trees the centre of his compositions, treating them as if they were portraits. Around the same time, the Venetian artist Titian combined figures and landscape to create pictures full of atmosphere. The Netherlandish artist Pieter Bruegel travelled to Italy in 1552 in the company of his friend, the cartographer Abraham Ortelius, capturing impressions gained while crossing the Alps in vast panoramas. The artificial world landscape came to be replaced by a new, plausible image of nature. Bruegel's compositions were widely disseminated in the form of engravings and because of their unprecedented realism served as models for future generations of artists.

## Quotes

*Truly, art is embedded in nature. He who can extract it, has it.*

Albrecht Dürer, *Four Books on Human Proportion*, 1528

*On his travels, Bruegel drew many views from life so that it is said that when he was in the Alps, he swallowed all those mountains and rocks which, upon returning home, he spat out again onto canvases and panels.*

Karel van Mander about Pieter Bruegel, 1604

*Of our hands, you should only fold one*

*And hold it in front of your eye in the form of a perspective;*

*Through the small opening, of the things you see,*

*Part of the general landscape will become a landscape of its own,*

*Of which, if only you could paint, a pretty picture of its own*

*Could be drawn or painted.*

Barthold Heinrich Brockes, *Bewährtes Mittel für die Augen*, 1748.



## Room 2 (The Dutch)

### The Golden Age of the Landscape

In no other country in the world was the depiction of landscape elevated to such a high status in terms of both quality and quantity as in the Low Countries of the seventeenth century, whose unique artistic height is consequently referred to as the 'Golden Age'. Having become independent of the Roman Catholic Southern Netherlands under Habsburg rule, the northern Seven United Provinces formed Western Europe's first federal republic. Pride taken in this status, in the country's maritime supremacy, and in the land wrested from the sea through dams aroused a deep interest in the landscape. Cartography, for which there was a keen demand because of a growing overseas trade, started to boom. Protestant patricians requested pictures for their private homes. To meet their enormous demand, artists specialised in various subjects, such as flat landscapes extending as far as the horizon, townscapes, seascapes, winter scenes, etc. Trade in Amsterdam flourished, and Netherlandish landscape pictures were greatly coveted throughout Europe. Duke Albert and his wife Marie Christine, residing at Laeken Palace in Brussels as governors of the Austrian Netherlands from 1781 to 1792, took advantage of being so near to the scene geographically and acquired countless drawings and prints, with works by Rembrandt certainly ranking among the highlights. They ranged from the realism of plain sketchbook drawings depicting motifs from the surroundings of Amsterdam to etchings of dramatically staged imaginary landscapes intended to be sold on the market.

## Room 3 (Italy: Canaletto, Tironi, de' Barbari, Pannini)

### The Magic of the Lagoon and Fantastic Architecture

In the Renaissance, the Grand Tour, which included visits to European art metropolises and collections, began to become an integral part of aristocratic education. In 1776, Duke Albert, the Albertina's founder, and his wife, Archduchess Marie Christine, also embarked on a journey through Italy of several months, from which they brought back not only manifold impressions, but also a wealth of works of art. Such *vedute* as those of Venice and the surrounding islands on view here used to be popular souvenirs. Like no other artist, Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto, carried Venetian view painting to perfection. His drawings, which he probably made with the aid of a camera obscura, combine a modern realism and sober faithfulness with a delicate sense of atmosphere. Giovanni Paolo Pannini was a leading painter of *vedute* in Rome: in addition to topographic views of squares, monuments, and galleries, he created picturesque scenes featuring ruins. They served as models for artists like the Frenchman Hubert Robert in the eighteenth century and were admired throughout Europe.

### Quotes

*When I think of Venice, it seems to me as if I had heard beautiful music, read a good book, or talked to a dear person.*

Anselm Feuerbach

*Venice was the city of my dreams, and everything I saw surpassed my expectations.*

George Sand

*There are two kinds of cities: all others and Venice.*

Henry James

*All cities are the same, only Venice is a little bit different.*

Friedrich Torberg

## Room 3 (French Art I: Poussin, Lorrain)

### The Light of the South

Landscape drawing flourished particularly in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France – although the central subject of French art was not Paris but Rome, which, with its picturesque ancient monuments, became a home from home to many artists. Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain drew the Roman Campagna with its soft hills and charming river valleys. Their art, however, was not about a fidelity to nature, but meant to capture atmospheric moods: light effects are produced through washes of varying density. These studies served as formal repertoire and were harked back to for paintings, etchings, or other drawings as needed.

## Room 4 (French Art II: Boucher, Fragonard, Pillement, Hubert Robert)

### Artistic Nature

Like no other period, French art of the eighteenth century, which is known as Rococo, celebrates an exaggerated artificiality that also made itself felt in landscape depictions. François Boucher, the artist most sought-after at the time, arranged topographic facts to create idealised views that corresponded to the idyllic ideas of city dwellers, giving viewers an opportunity to identify individual architectural elements. The atmospheric river landscapes by Jean-Baptiste Pillement, who borrowed from Netherlandish art, are similarly characterised by an artistic naturalism. Honoré Fragonard too was a great admirer of Rembrandt's art and carried brush and wash drawings to a new zenith. His flickering, light-suffused views of Rome were highly appreciated, as the Grand Tour, a journey through Italy, was an essential part of aristocratic education. For Hubert Robert, ancient monuments existing in reality became the starting point for elaborate and decorative capriccios theatrically composed of architectural elements and ruined buildings.

### Quotes

*The studies of landscape painters thus consist in the search for beautiful natural phenomena they may need for the composition of their pictures. This is mainly about selecting these beautiful phenomena of nature.*

Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par de principes*, Paris 1708

## Room 5 (Classicism, Romanticism, Realism)

### Nature in Transition

The age of Enlightenment shed new light on the world. Expeditions, the natural sciences, and technological innovation brought new insights, and cities began to grow. This is also reflected in the art of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, oscillating between the poles of idealisation and the mimicry of nature and thus comprising such opposite movements as Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Realism.

A counter movement to the preceding opulent and playful Rococo, classically inspired ideal landscapes established a puristic language of form harking back to models of the seventeenth century, particularly to the art of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Peaceful utopias and antique themes treated in perfectly balanced compositions follow the much-quoted maxim of the art theorist and writer Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) of ‘noble simplicity and silent grandeur’.

Caspar David Friedrich, the principal exponent of Romanticism, associates sublime nature with a melancholic yearning for eternity. On the other hand, bird’s-eye views and city panoramas reflect the rapid growth of European metropolises; stately *vedute* were replaced by realistic landscape portraits that proved groundbreaking for nineteenth-century landscape painting.

Like no other part of the collection, that of the ‘modern’ masters of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is marked by the personality of Duke Albert as a collector, who, in the last two decades of his life, increasingly concentrated on acquiring works by contemporary artists. In line with the taste of his age, he mainly collected highly finished drawings, as he had done in the case of Old Masters. Elaborately washed or coloured, these large-size drawings give the impression of paintings. They had not been conceived as designs or sketches in the first place, but as ‘pictures on paper’.

## RAUM 6 (late 18<sup>c</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century: C. Schütz, Jakob und Rudolf von Alt, Menzel)

### Reality in Focus

Both the far-fetched pathos of Neoclassicism and the dreaminess of Romanticism were alien to an uncompromisingly realistic image of the landscape: meticulous observation, a confident construction of space, and a virtuoso description of light and atmosphere are the inherent qualities of this type of realism of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, which was particularly at home in Vienna. Panoramas and bird's-eye views gave way to urban motifs viewed from closer up. The watercoloured vistas of Vienna by Carl Schütz, spread in the form of coloured engravings, contributed to a revival of watercolour painting and satisfied a growing demand for views of visually attractive places. Joseph Rebell's sunlit pictures were among the first to propagate this new image of reality: close to nature, they were, at the same time, painterly and atmospheric.

This new realism culminated in the dazzling watercolours of Jakob Alt and his son Rudolf, which they made when at home in Vienna and on their travels. Rudolf von Alt's works captivate us with their precision and wealth of painstakingly rendered detail. It is a programmatic and chronicling realism that seeks to represent reality faithfully but shuts out the dark sides of life, such as misery and poverty. And as watercolours could not be executed *en plein air*, i. e. out of doors, in front of the motif, when it was raining, a fair-weather atmosphere usually prevails in them. The artist succeeded in persuasively capturing the changing conditions of light in the open and its effects on nature and architecture.

### Quotes

*No object was too humble for him, and he drew wherever he walked or stood, with an eagerness that was nearly pathological.*

Paul Meyerheim about Adolph Menzel, 1906

## Room 7 (20<sup>th</sup> century: Vienna 1900 – Impressionists & Van Gogh – Ludwig Rösch – Kubin – Feininger – Nolde – Macke – Klee)

### On the Move to Modernism

At the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was a flourishing metropolis with about two million inhabitants. The capital of the Habsburg Empire was a melting pot of nations and a bastion of the arts and sciences. Rejecting the Historicism of the Ringstrasse era, the Secession, an association of artists, became a breeding ground for Viennese Art Nouveau. In its exhibition venue at the Naschmarkt, it presented not only the works of its own members but also introduced international artists like the French Impressionists and Vincent van Gogh, so as to familiarise the audience with the art of modernism. Coloured woodblock printing reached a new zenith. The emphasis of outlines, a stylisation and flattening of motifs inspired by Japonism, and the play of colour contrasts corresponded with the new formal ideals of Art Nouveau.

However, the cultural and intellectual climate oscillated between a belief in progress and an atmosphere of doom and gloom. The more rapidly technology, industrialisation, and urbanisation progressed, the more distinctly a yearning for romanticism and the irrational made itself felt. These poles are reflected in Ludwig Rösch's dreamy charcoal drawings, in Alfred Kubin's dystopian worlds, and in Lyonel Feininger's fragmented, scurrile cityscapes.

In the early twentieth century, art history saw a revolution, in the course of which the landscape picture was reinvented: for the first time, art was absolved from the principle of striving to be an imitation of nature, breaking free from what the human eye perceived. Emil Nolde, August Macke, and Paul Klee did paint in real places, but they stopped concentrating on their topographic or picturesque representation. Rather, they were interested in the phenomenon of the image, in forms and in colours that had detached themselves from the example of nature and mutually intensified their luminosity when placed next to each other unmixed. From now on, the focus ceased to be on the visible landscape, but was on its Expressionist interpretation and reinvention in abstraction.

## Quotes

*Your work is so tremendously rich, fantastic, and thought-based, and you live wholly in a different world... We most certainly are the two poles of that same vast und unfulfillable yearning, I more on the formal side, you on the conceptual-visionary side, and in fact one individual could not combine those two in himself.*

Lyonel Feininger to Alfred Kubin, 21 January 1913

*Proper viewers, of the sort I would like to have, would not only look at my works with pleasure or critique but, as if moved at some secret level, would also have to turn their attention to the rich images in the darkroom of their own dreamy consciousness.*

Alfred Kubin, 1927

*Colour has me. I need no longer chase after it. It has me forever. That is the meaning of this happy hour: I and colour are one. I am a painter.*

Paul Klee on his journey to Tunis, 1914

*I love the sun and the reflections in the water, and I would travel around the world to paint them!*

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

*In painting I always hoped that through me as the painter the colours would take effect on the canvas as logically as nature creates her configurations, as ore and crystals form, as moss and algae grow, as a flower must unfold and bloom under the rays of the sun.*

Emil Nolde, 1934

*I've tried to imbue the landscape with the same sentiment as the human figure; frantically and fervently rooting itself, as it were, in the earth, and yet being half torn up by the storm. I wanted to express something of life's struggle.*

Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo, 1889