

C. G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung

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The Baroque period in Germany, which roughly spans the years between 1600 and 1750, remains a much-neglected area of art historical study. The reasons for this are manifold. One of them is the general dearth of culture following the devastations brought on by the Thirty Years' War of 1618–48. Also, there were hardly any such outstanding artistic giants as Dürer, who could command a whole era to be named after him. The next genius of comparable import was C.G. Boerner's early client Goethe, but he comes later and was a writer. The Dutch and Flemish Lowlands, on the other hand, had Rubens and Rembrandt; Italy had Caravaggio, Bernini, and many others; and the French even created the *Académie Royale* to keep track of their own talent. Furthermore, the German lands were politically fragmented, divided into many principalities and fiefdoms that all maintained, to various degrees, a certain independence from the court of the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation.

All of this makes it difficult to approach this subject in any all-encompassing way. Baroque in Dresden? Yes. But in Hamburg? Hardly, give or take a few splendid churches, most notably the "Michel," the Lutheran church of Saint Michaelis with its prominent bell tower. Prussia needed to wait till the beginning of the eighteenth century to move away from her obsession with tall strong soldiers (especially the so-called Lange Kerls or Potsdam Giants of the infantry regiment No. 6). Only then did their cultured and enlightened monarch, King Frederick II, aka "the Great," create his sorrow-free refuge (=Sanssouci) a few miles outside the capital, in Potsdam. But make no mistake: the "Alte Fritz" (as his subjects lovingly called him) also loved his soldiers –just ask the Austrian Empress Maria Theresia, who fought no less than three wars with him over Silesia! And then there were the devout Catholic Rhinelanders. They remained faithful to their serene Romanesque churches, the majority of which had been built back in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Of a very different ilk, however, were their fellow Catholics south of the river Main, in Bavaria and Austria. While both the Catholics in southern Germany and those along the lower course of the Rhine in, say, Cologne or Düsseldorf drank beer, the Franconians and Bavarians preferred to worship in rocaille-encrusted architectural marvels. The ceilings of these "Gotteshäuser" are usually decorated with painted illusions of blue skies, where the heavenly hosts frolic weightlessly between fluffy cumulus clouds.



It's these frolicking saints who can help me to finally come to the point—in case anyone has been wondering where I was going with all this. So, let's step down from the heavens to the more earthly sphere that is an art dealer's email intended to provide some distraction for friends, colleagues, and collectors.

The drawing shown here is a design for one of those gatherings in the clouds that were so popular at the time. It is part of a small group of works that we have just placed on our website (see the link below). Mostly by lesser-known artists or not (yet) attributed, they cover an interesting array of styles, which can all be subsumed under this ominous term "German Baroque." To highlight a few: there is a night scene of the *Flight into Egypt* that betrays its awareness of the famous compositions by Adam Elsheimer, here adapted to an artistic idiom that belongs already to the eighteenth century; an *Adoration of the Shepherds* that was drawn around 1700 but still maintains the architectural setting of the late sixteenth century; a drawing by the brothers Felix Anton and Thomas Christian Scheffler that shows how the decorative schemes developed for churches could also be adapted to a secular context by transposing the Christian saints tumbling in the clouds with Olympian gods; and lastly, there is the small watercolored drawing of an *Annunciation* that preserves a certain Correggian charm in its overall eighteenth-century style.



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