

# C. G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung  
5 May 2020

Horace Walpole once famously summarized how William Kent (1685–1748) “invented” the English landscape garden by saying that “he leapt the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden.” For Kent, and those that came after him, a garden was no longer a rigorously geometrized arrangement of plants but a “natural” looking scenery—a scenery, however, that remained a highly artificial construct.

This tension between “nature” and “landscape” is inherent in all of landscape art. To perceive nature as landscape always presupposes that the beholder has to position him- or herself outside of his or her surroundings. As long as nature is seen either as something threatening (a dark, dangerous forest or a barren wilderness) or as merely purposeful (fields to be toiled, rivers used as waterways), it cannot be recognized as “landscape.” We have to be able to look at nature, without it having any apparent practical function, to enjoy it with what Immanuel Kant called *interesseloses Wohlgefallen* (disinterested pleasure). Accordingly, the German philosopher Joachim Ritter, in an important essay on the subject, defined landscape as *Natur, die im Anblick für einen fühlenden und empfindenden Betrachter ästhetisch gegenwärtig ist* (nature that gains an aesthetic presence for a perceptible and experiencing beholder).

Needless to say, there are nearly as many opinions about the point in time when this “stepping out of nature and into a landscape” took place as there are academic disciplines trying to determine it. Petrarch’s account of his ascent of Mont Ventoux on April 26, 1336, is often quoted. Intriguing is also the fact that the French philosopher René Descartes, whose *cogito, ergo sum* provided the cornerstone for modern philosophy’s positioning of Man apart from the world, was born the same year, 1596, as Jan van Goyen, one of the foremost exponents of Dutch landscape art.



This van Goyen drawing was believed to be by Esaias van de Velde when it was sold at C.G. Boerner in 1898 as part of the Liphart collection; in 2018 it was given to the Harvard Art Museums by Maida and George Abrams.

The Dutch landscapists were so successful that their sceneries dominated how artists saw landscapes for centuries to come. At German art academies, for example, landscape was taught by emulating the prints and paintings of the Dutch masters well into the eighteenth century. In Dresden, where Caspar David Friedrich would soon turn the artistic creation of landscape into a quasi-religious experience, the crucial turning point was the arrival of the Swiss-born Adrian Zingg in 1764. He had worked in the printmaking studio of Johann Georg Wille in Paris and was hired as a teacher, later professor, for printmaking at the newly founded Dresden Academy. Zingg was among the first to perceive landscape no longer through the eyes of artists such as Jan van de Velde or Salomon van Ruysdael. Instead, he stepped out and began to explore the landscape surrounding the Saxon capital, making sketches *en plein air* and then working them into meticulously executed pen and wash drawings. Zingg gained many followers, and a drawing that clearly originates from his circle is the first in a small group of nineteenth-century German landscape drawings that we are presenting here.



The selection also includes a tender pencil drawing by the young Friedrich Olivier, done while he was serving as a soldier with the *Lützowsche Freikorps*. Its charm is the plainness of Olivier’s approach; he depicts nature as unadorned as possible—this from an artist who would later become an important proponent of the spiritually charged Nazarene movement.



Ernst Fries’ wash drawing, on the other hand, shows a consummate landscapist who is capable of embedding a spontaneously observed landscape into a well calculated compositional structure. The architectural training of Max Hauschild is on display in his village scene from Ischia, in which columns, stairs, and arches command as much attention as the sunny hilltops in the far distance. Oskar von Alvensleben was an early activist for the preservation of historic monuments, an interest that can be sensed in the way he depicts the remnants of a Roman temple near Tivoli with an archeologist’s eye. Friedrich Preller’s perception of nature, on the other hand, appears to be timeless. In his landscapes, populated by shepherds attending to their flock, he continues to hold on to idyllic visions of Homer’s period even decades after the first steam-powered locomotive pulled its carriages from Nuremberg to Fürth. Our selection ends with the autumnal colors of the Erzgebirge—and hence not that far from the environs of Dresden where we had started.



Friedrich / Fries / Olivier

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