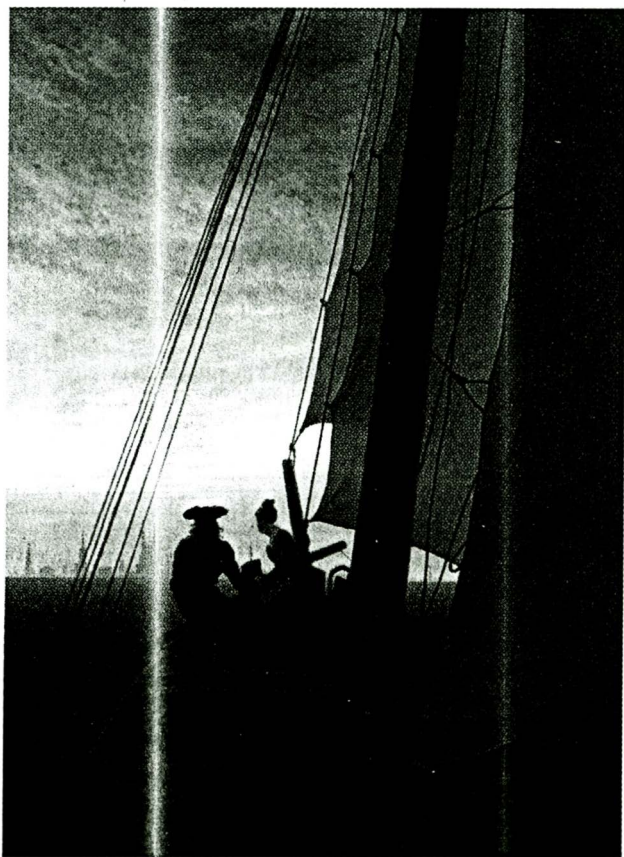


# FRIEDRICH THE ARTIST AND NICHOLAS THE EMPEROR



CAT. NO. 72

In fascinating and often whimsical ways the lives of artists are bound up with those of museums. Today Caspar David Friedrich is unanimously recognised as a great artist. But such was not always the case, even in his native Germany. The modern world is wiser. It has discovered that the romantic mysticism of his landscapes is utterly in keeping with a new view of the world, a new awe in the face of nature, in which man is an outsider. Moreover, his close links with the spirit of German unity have ceased to be a mark of shame.

Fate has decreed that the best single collection of Friedrich's paintings and drawings outside Germany is to be found in the Hermitage. These works by the Romantic artist

were bought by Grand Duke Nikolay Pavlovich, later Emperor Nicholas I of Russia, for himself and his wife, although at first glance it seems that Nicholas was a far from romantic man. Yet the profound Romanticism of Friedrich and other German artists also seems far from the stereotypical view of the mathematically minded German, intent on strict order in all things.

Nicholas purchased his first works by Friedrich directly from the artist's studio, perhaps influenced by his wife, the Prussian Princess Charlotte (known in Russia as Alexandra Fyodorovna). Many of the Romantic pastimes, tastes and ideas that circulated at the Russian court can be traced back to her and the general mood was supported by Russian Romantics, above all the poet – and tutor to the heir to the throne – Vasily Zhukovsky, who was an enthusiast of German poetry. Works by Friedrich were acquired by Zhukovsky and other Russian collectors, and Nicholas too became a Romantic, perhaps under their influence. It seems to me that his idea of building a new home for the Hermitage – designed by Leo von Klenze – and his love for the Museum were manifestations of this Romantic side of his character, a character which was more than a little Germanic. Although his love of an almost military approach to order was to bring the museum significant losses.

Friedrich's paintings, acquired for the imperial couple's private apartments, have come to be seen as symbols of the Hermitage and of our understanding of the artist's place in the world. *On a Sailing Ship* continues to inspire and enthuse, to prompt us to seek answers to its mysteries. Without the paintings in the Hermitage no serious exhibition of the work of Friedrich is possible. Nor is this the first time that they have formed the heart of a special Hermitage exhibition.

The Romantic aspect of the history of the Hermitage's collection allows us to present the broader artistic context within which Friedrich's art flourished. Some of the most notable aspects of that context are also linked with Russian culture and with the Russian court. The architectural and painterly talents of Leo von Klenze, designer of the New Hermitage, were embodied in his celebrated *View of the Valhalla near Regensburg*. The wonderful landscape artist Carl Ferdinand von Kügelgen drew fine views of the Crimea and Finland, two regions that had very important – albeit very different – political resonance for the Russian Empire. Carl Fohr's drawings were brought to Russia by Princess Maximiliana Wilhelmina of Hesse, who married the future Alexander II and became Empress Maria Alexandrovna. She was the daughter of Princess Wilhelmina, patron of Fohr and sister of Alexander I's wife Empress Elizaveta Alexeevna. After the Revolution Fohr's works were lost in the huge tide of works on paper that flowed into the Hermitage but they were eventually identified and studied by several generations of scholars in the museum. Today they are being presented to the viewer in their entirety for the first time.

This exhibition unites both the very highest achievements of art and art historical learning, both the history of the museum and the history of Russia. It is in itself a notable event, and it serves too as a marvellous bridge leading us on towards phase 2 of the Hermitage Amsterdam.

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