

Press release
Zurich, July 2016

Architecture as Image Karl Friedrich Schinkels' „Collection of Architectural Designs“

17 August – 16 October 2016
Opening: Tuesday, 16 August 2016, at 6 p.m.

In his „Collection of Architectural Designs“ [„Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe“], the great architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) skilfully combined the art of drawing with that of architecture. By promoting his own craft through these artfully presented architectural designs, he gained a glittering reputation throughout the whole of Europe within his own lifetime.

Karl Friedrich Schinkel was an influential nineteenth century architect whose iconic Neue Wache memorial, Schauspielhaus theatre and Bauakademie school of architecture made a distinctive mark on the urban environment of Berlin city centre. He was also a leading proponent of neo-classicism in Prussia, lending his name to an entire generation of architects who subsequently came to be known as the „Schinkel School“ [„Schinkelschule“]. However, it was not only as an architect that he sealed his reputation, but also through the publication of his „Collection of Architectural Designs“. This portfolio, which was published in several editions from 1819 onwards, met with enormous interest throughout his life and even beyond, promoting his works and ideas to a wider audience.

Schinkel had his drawings of architectural designs etched and engraved by a number of different artists that he continued to commission throughout. The total of twenty-eight commissions consisted as a rule of six plates accompanied by a one or two page commentary. The great appeal of his „Collection“ is that the 174 engravings are not just designs for works that were later built, but also include unrealised alternatives and prototypes. This gives an intimate and unique insight into the creative thought process of the master architect himself. Moreover, the successive deliveries of the illustrations had the advantage of providing an almost blow by blow account of his ongoing architectural work. As such, they were eagerly studied by everyone who was interested in the progress of public building projects, including the general public and the press.

Schinkel's designs, starting with the Neue Wache memorial in Berlin, are compelling in their finely-wrought clarity and in the quality of their visual mastery. Schinkel staged his works with a keen eye for detail, arranging the various views, floorplans, cross sections and elevations in a way that constituted what can only be described as a gesamtkunstwerk. The designs were further animated by the inclusion of fountains, figures and trees in the surroundings.

The Department of Prints and Drawings is pleased to present an 1858 edition of the „Collection of Architectural Designs“ in this exhibition. The selected exhibits give a rare insight into the work of this great architect, clearly illustrating the craftsmanship and artistry with which he executed his designs.

For further information and visual material, please contact:
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The Department of Prints and Drawings is part of the ETH Library.