

THE FIRST MODERN MUSEUMS OF ART

THE BIRTH OF AN INSTITUTION IN
18TH- AND EARLY-19TH-CENTURY EUROPE

EDITED BY CAROLE PAUL

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FRONT JACKET: George Scharf (German, 1788–1860), *The Townley Gallery* (detail, fig. 2-3), 1827. Watercolor, heightened with white, on gray board, 30.6 × 22 cm (12 1/8 × 8 3/4 in.). London, The British Museum

BACK JACKET: Bernardo López y Piquer (Spanish, 1800–1874), *Isabel de Braganza, Queen of Spain, as Founder of the Prado*, 1829 (fig. 9-5)

FRONTISPICE: Benjamin Zix (French, 1772–1811), *The Wedding Procession of Napoléon and Marie-Louise of Austria through the Grand Gallery of the Louvre, April 2, 1810*, 1810 (detail, fig. 8-6)

PAGE VI: Benjamin Zix, *Dominique-Vivant Denon Supervising the Removal of Paintings from the Kassel Picture Gallery*, ca. 1807 (fig. 5-5)

XI
 ALTES MUSEUM, BERLIN:
 BUILDING PRUSSIA'S
 FIRST MODERN MUSEUM

THOMAS W. GAEHTGENS



The inauguration of the Altes Museum in Berlin marked a turning point for art museums in Germany in particular and for European cultural history in general (fig. 11-1). On the one hand, it set in motion a distinct professionalization of the institution; on the other hand—in Berlin and Prussia, at least—it launched a cultural-political dialogue between the monarch and his people that was to have unprecedented consequences. In addition, the building itself is without doubt a masterpiece of Neoclassical architecture.¹

The significance of any monument—and of any outstanding work of art—depends on the extent to which it breathes new life into existing traditions. In this sense the design of the Altes Museum was certainly informed by that of earlier institutions. Its completion in 1830 was the culmination of a lengthy planning process involving the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) and the members of a committee appointed by King Friedrich Wilhelm III (r. 1797–1840). The idea of building a museum in the center of Berlin was first mooted in the last third of the eighteenth century. However, those early deliberations were founded on a very different concept from the one that was ultimately realized. The early nineteenth century brought with it major changes in attitudes toward art and academic study that crucially influenced the eventual form and contents of the Altes Museum and turned it into a modern art museum. The original debate concerning the Altes Museum laid bare a conflict that to this day has not been resolved and that may, indeed, never find a resolution. The question of how the museum should combine the presentation of the latest research findings with its dedication as an educational institution, in the spirit of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), is still relevant today. The story of the making of the Altes Museum sheds an interesting light on the very similar debate currently surrounding our notion of what a museum should be.

Order and Inventories in the Prussian Royal Collections

When Friedrich Wilhelm decreed that a museum be built, he was moved not only by a desire to bring together and reorder the collections scattered throughout his kingdom; he also specifically intended that these should be opened to

FIGURE 11-1.
 Facade of the Altes
 Museum, Berlin

the artists and the general public. While the former could study the masterpieces exhibited, the collections could “first delight, then instruct”² the latter, to quote Schinkel and the art historian and first director of the Altes Museum, Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794–1868). What may seem a perfectly normal sentiment to us, with two hundred years’ experience of the museum as an institution, was in 1800 the outcome of revolutionary decisions. For it was far from normal that a reigning monarch would part with the collections in his castles and residences. And it was equally unusual that the regime should choose to finance the construction and upkeep of a new museum for the common good. In fact, all this was possible only because in Prussia around 1800—which is rightly described as the era of German idealism—during and largely in response to the Napoleonic Wars, an intellectual elite had emerged that actively promoted far-reaching reforms in matters of state. Besides the reorganization of the law and the militia, which is generally somewhat superficially regarded as typically Prussian, these reforms above all dictated that the main responsibility for establishing schools, universities, and other cultural institutions should be assumed by the monarch and his government.

By the time the museum-planning process began in Prussia, a number of other German states had already opened gallery suites or even whole buildings to the public. In 1745 and 1746 Augustus III, elector of Saxony and king of Poland (r. 1734–63)—an art connoisseur of the first order—had relocated substantial sections of his art collection to the converted stables at the Neumarkt in Dresden, which was open to visitors by appointment.³ In Kassel a brand-new home for classical art and natural history, the Fridericianum, had been completed in 1779 and was now open to the public. However, the royal collection of paintings remained in the galleries in the Schloss Bellevue.⁴ Lastly, Christian von Mechel (1737–1817) had installed a gallery of paintings in the Upper Belvedere Palace, in Vienna, that met the very latest art-historical standards (see chap. 6, fig. 6-3).⁵ The construction of the Altes Museum in Berlin has to be seen in the wider context of these other art institutions.

Documents recording the protracted planning process in Berlin tell of heated debates concerning the construction of a new, dedicated home for the royal collections, followed by even more intense discussions regarding the museum’s content and form. In a speech delivered in 1797, Aloys Hirt (1759–1837), professor of fine art at the Academy of Art in Berlin, was the first to propose that a museum be built in Berlin. He later summed up his thoughts in a memorandum on the subject.⁶ His ideas bore fruit and led to deliberations on the reorganization of existing collections and to the first architectural proposals.⁷ This was the backdrop to Schinkel’s first design, around 1800, consisting of a rectangular building with several cupolas and a substantial temple portico.⁸

Another voice in favor of the reorganization of the royal collections was that of Jean Henry (1761–1831), librarian and director of the *Kunstammer*.

Following the renovation of the *Kunstammer* in 1795, Henry had to assume responsibility for a wide range of new collections. These collections were by no means restricted to paintings and sculptures, for there were others devoted to coins, fish, and oriental and Indian weapons and tools; there was even an Egyptian mummy to be cared for.⁹ In 1805 he presented the king with a plan detailing how these encyclopedic collections could be restructured and more suitably accommodated. Although it was later decided that the Altes Museum should exclusively house Greek and Roman sculptures and the collections of paintings, the inscription in the frieze referring to *monumenta antiquitatis omnigenae* (all kinds of antiquities) presumably dates from the time when the intention was that the museum be home to a number of diverse collections. But this inscription also pointed to the future, to what would become in later decades a collection of museums on the so-called Museum Island in the center of Berlin.

The Napoleonic Wars and the Prussian defeat of 1806 brought museum projects to a halt. At the same time, however, the confiscation by Napoléon of some of the state’s most important collections, their removal to Paris, where they were put on display, and their subsequent incorporation into the Musée Napoléon (as the Musée du Louvre was called between 1803 and 1815) alerted the Prussian populace to the significance of these works of art as part of their national heritage.¹⁰ The Prussian minister of culture, Karl Freiherr vom Stein zum Altenstein (1770–1840), was instrumental in shaping the reforms that were to lead to the wide-ranging renewal and reorganization of matters of state following the disastrous defeat Prussia had suffered at Napoléon’s hands. Freiherr vom Stein also felt that there was an urgent need to reform the Prussian university system and to reorganize the royal art and natural-history collections. As he put it in a written document on this subject: “Large collections that have not been put together in a scholarly manner and cannot properly be used are of no value at all. This was predominantly the case in Berlin. Treasures piled up on top of each other were barely visible and of even less practical use; far be it for anyone even to suggest that guidance might be provided as to their use.”¹¹

It is therefore hardly surprising that in 1810 the king decreed that an inventory be drawn up of all the works of art owned by the royal family. In addition, he made two critical decisions: that Wilhelm von Humboldt should be involved in the process and that the collections should henceforth make up part of the portfolio of the minister of culture. These edicts were to have far-reaching consequences, for this transfer of responsibility to the ministry meant that the museums now became state-run cultural institutions, which Humboldt shaped in keeping with his own humanist principles.

Lengthy debates ensued as to how the various collections were to be redistributed. There was also much discussion as to which collections should be allocated to which institutions—be it the Academy of Art, the university, or

the Academy of Sciences. Only after the authorities had decided to separate the natural-history collections from the art collections could they return to the question of a suitable home for the collections of paintings and classical sculptures. Christian von Mechel played a prominent part in the discussions surrounding the reordering of the collections.¹² Widely recognized for his work on the reorganization of the Viennese collections in the Upper Belvedere Palace, he had subsequently been made a member of the Academy of Art. When he let it be known that he was seeking employment in Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm III entrusted him in 1810 with the task of drawing up a list of all the works of art in the royal family's castles and residences, no doubt with a future museum in mind. Mechel presented the king with his results in 1812, though no immediate action was taken due to the ongoing Napoleonic Wars.¹³

The return in 1815 of the works of art that had been requisitioned from Prussian collections by Dominique-Vivant Denon (1747–1825) for display in the Musée Napoléon, of which he had been the director, once again kindled the museum debate in Berlin. An exhibition of “liberated works of art” in the Academy of Art turned into an event where the retrieval of lost artworks was presented as a duty “to the fatherland.” Art now took on a new meaning in the public consciousness as a legacy from the past that was to be cultivated and treasured. Hirt once again seized the moment and reminded the relevant parties of his plans for an art museum. He also pointed out that the proper approach to art required expertise. In his view, the proposed art museum would have to be run by suitably qualified individuals who had experience with scholarly research. The training enjoyed by visual artists was not enough, because running an art museum “requires much observation, much comparison, and extensive, persistent research, which even the most determined artist may not have the opportunity nor the time to conduct. Expert knowledge of paintings is a discipline in its own right, just like art itself.”¹⁴

Thus the discussions surrounding the reorganization of the collections and the construction of a museum building also raised issues concerning the reception of art and its role as a scholarly discipline. It became clear that there was a need to define the criteria for training the nation's future art experts. Ultimately the reorganization of the collections led to the establishment of art history as a discipline and to the professionalization of the conservation and scholarly appreciation of works of art. These issues also came to the fore in connection with new acquisitions. In 1815 the king purchased in Paris a large part of the Giustiniani collection, thus greatly increasing the number of Italian Baroque paintings in his collections. Without directly questioning the wisdom of this purchase, certain parties nevertheless expressed the view that the collections needed more German paintings. However, despite the best efforts of Humboldt and Schinkel, it did not prove possible to purchase for Prussia the collection of early German and Netherlandish paintings assembled by the

brothers Melchior (1786–1851) and Sulpiz (1783–1854) Boisserée, which was instead bought by Ludwig I, king of Bavaria (r. 1825–48).

For some time the plan was that the art collections should be housed in the Academy of Art; indeed, this had been the intention for some decades and only took on a new urgency in 1815 with the return from Paris of the confiscated works of art and the king's acquisition of the Giustiniani paintings. In February 1818 a number of rooms in the university were set aside so that the public could view the newly acquired works.¹⁵ However, this was merely a temporary solution, for the plan was still to create an art museum within the Academy of Art. In 1820 Hirt was charged with reviewing the royal collections and selecting paintings to be shown in this location.

The Decision to Build a Museum

The construction work in the Academy of Art was the responsibility of the court inspector of buildings, Friedrich Rabe (1775–1856). However, in 1822 Schinkel also became involved. The work itself proved increasingly expensive, since the academy building was fundamentally in need of renovation.¹⁶ Then, in 1821, the purchase of the collection of Edward Solly (1776–1844), an English merchant residing in Berlin, focused attention on the idea of constructing a new, purpose-built museum, since this collection of three thousand paintings could not be accommodated in the academy along with the existing collections. It is therefore not correct to suggest, as some have done, that the Altes Museum was constructed in response to the return to Berlin of the artworks looted by Napoléon. On the contrary, the idea of a new museum had long been in the air. The factors that led to the final decision were, on the one hand, the very considerable cost of the necessary construction work in the Academy of Art and, on the other, the acquisition of the Solly collection.

Schinkel's new plans for a museum building in the Pleasure Garden, which he had been working on since 1822, found general favor. Friedrich Wilhelm III approved the construction of the new museum on April 24, 1823. Work began immediately. Yet it was to be seven years until the opening in 1830.

Hirt was the only one to raise any objections. Once again the conflict grew from different concepts of the function of an art museum. Hirt proposed that the new institution should be incorporated into the Academy of Art, since in his estimation its prime purpose was to enrich the training offered to the young artists at the academy. Meanwhile, Schinkel and his supporters regarded the museum as an educational institution for the whole nation. Hirt considered the Rotunda at the center of Schinkel's building a waste of space, which he would rather have seen replaced with a hall. For Schinkel, who managed to hold his own against Hirt, it was precisely the Rotunda that set the right tone for the moving encounter with art that awaited the visitor inside the

museum.¹⁷ This debate continued for some years, with these two main players formulating their different views on the purpose of the museum partly in their own statements and partly in documents written with others.

Another important voice during the planning stages of the museum was that of the art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen, who had been in Berlin since 1823 and who was subsequently appointed the first director of the Altes Museum in 1830. In 1828 Schinkel and Waagen produced a joint report that perhaps best reflects the views of the architect and the art historian: "In our opinion the noblest and main purpose of the museum is to awaken—where it still slumbers—the public's sense of visual art as one of the most important branches of human culture, and—where it has already been awakened—to provide it with suitable nourishment and the opportunity for ever-greater refinement. This should take absolute precedence over any other purposes that may concern different classes of human society."¹⁸ Schinkel and Waagen famously summed up the function of the museum as "first to delight, then to instruct."¹⁹

It is highly significant that the text inscribed into the frieze at Hirt's suggestion does not reflect this view: FRIDERICUS GUILLELMUS III STUDIO ANTIQUITATIS OMNIGENAE ET ARTIUM LIBERALIUM MUSEUM CONSTITUIT MDCCCXXVIII (This museum was established by Friedrich Wilhelm III for the study of all kinds of antiquities and of the liberal arts, 1828). This inscription was much criticized. The counterproposal by the Academy of Sciences described the museum as a treasure house of art. It is not at all clear why Hirt's text was not questioned before it was inscribed. And it may have been a source of some satisfaction to the classical scholar that although his concept for the museum had not won the day and had not featured in the plans, his conviction that study and research should be the institution's prime concerns was immortalized in the inscription nevertheless.

Schinkel's Building

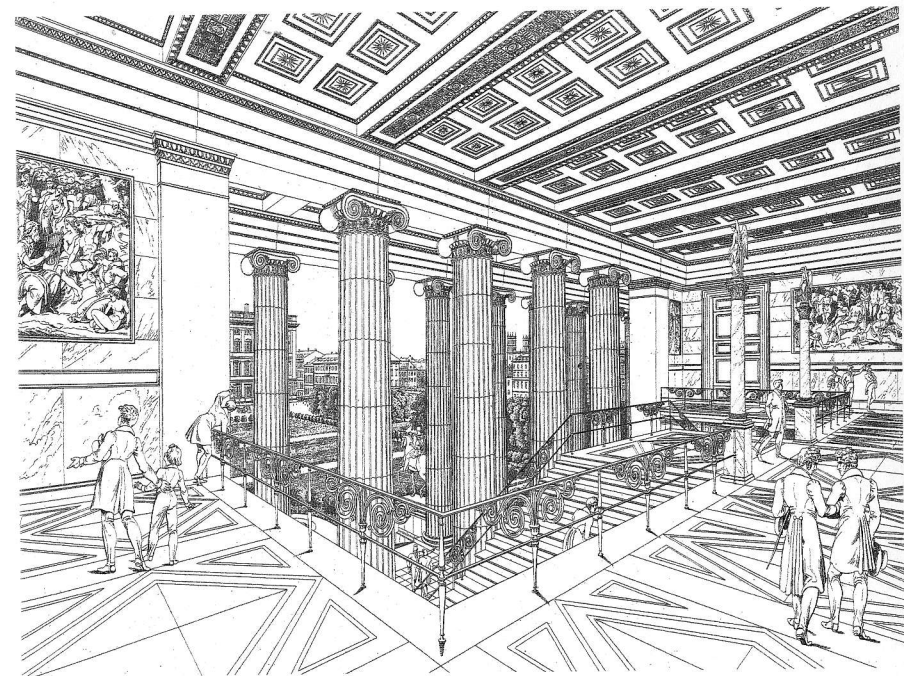
With his design for the Altes Museum, Schinkel created an entirely new architectural form for this type of institution. There were a number of factors that encouraged him to give free rein to his artistic imagination. One of the most important was the favorable location of the museum. Situated at the end of the Pleasure Garden, directly opposite the Schloss (the Prussian royal palace), it is flanked by the Zeughaus (the armory) and the Dom (the cathedral), also designed by Schinkel. A cultural institution now took its place alongside buildings representing the state and the church.

Schinkel's design for the museum is undeniably an inspired response to the location: basically rectangular in form, the building is open along the full length of the facade looking onto the Pleasure Garden. A staircase leads to a peristyle, which the visitor crosses either to enter the central hall with the

Rotunda or to ascend more stairs to the upper level (fig. 11-2).²⁰ This architectural solution is fundamentally different from Schinkel's earlier design from around 1800. Whereas he had previously envisioned a deep temple portico for the entrance, he now sought to actively invite the visitor into the building by opening up the facade along its full length. In addition, the building is adorned by a series of sandstone eagles (the Prussian imperial emblem), each crowning one of the mighty Ionic columns and reminding the visitor of the beneficent monarch and the power and authority of the state that established this institution for the good of the people. Schinkel's open temple front contrasted with the castle's high, closed Baroque facade by Andreas Schlüter (1664–1714).²¹

Having ascended the broad, steep staircase, the visitor enters a wide peristyle, which Schinkel imagined—along the lines of a Greek agora or a Roman forum—as a Prussian hall of honor with statues of important historical figures. The original plans for the museum also made provisions for wall paintings in the peristyle. These were completed by Peter von Cornelius (1783–1867) and his pupils almost twenty years after the museum was opened, but have unfortunately not survived. Schinkel provided exact sketches for the paintings, which were represented, in his words, "the cultural history of humankind."²² The paintings, which continued in the upper stairwell, comprised multifigured scenes—reminiscent of those in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*—depicting mythological

FIGURE 11-2. Karl Friedrich Schinkel (German, 1781–1841), View of the staircase in the Altes Museum, Berlin. From Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1858), pl. 43. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 86-B17591



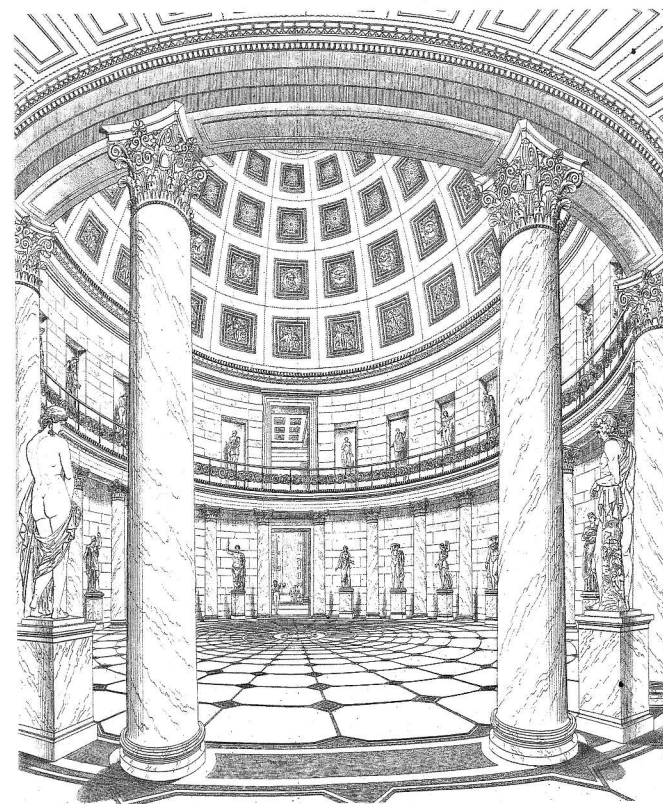
themes from the world of the gods and moments in human history, from its beginnings to the emergence of a civilized society in which culture and the arts are securely ensconced.

It was without doubt a stroke of genius on Schinkel's part to open up the entrance to the museum with a double staircase taking the visitor to the upper level. The colonnade does not—as the visitor might expect—conceal a solid wall; instead, this first “plastic” zone leads into a second that has both height and depth, and is the first indication that this is in fact a two-story building. The staircase extends the hall not only in architectural terms but also in its function as a social space. It is a place of encounters and conversations; at the same time the view from the vestibule on the upper level—looking out onto the Pleasure Garden, Schloss, Dom, and Zeughaus—gives a lively impression of the museum's integration into this urban ensemble.²³

However, the visitor's first point of orientation is the Rotunda, at the center of the main axis of the building (fig. 11-3). As the very heart of the museum, the Rotunda both serves as a museum gallery and reflects the architect's Neoclassicist approach. It contains a circle of Corinthian columns, which in turn support a circular walkway on the upper level. Between the columns there are tall pedestals with classical statues, mostly figures of gods. Niches on the upper level contain more classical figures on pedestals. Above this is the dome with its coffers decorated with paintings *en relief*.

The central space in the building, the Rotunda almost has the feel of a sanctuary, a consecrated space—but one that is dedicated to art rather than to great men. Reference has often been made to the Pantheon in Rome as a model for the Rotunda; Schinkel himself described it as his Pantheon.²⁴ While he must certainly have admired the Roman model, there is a fundamental divergence in the form and proportions of the two designs. Whereas the Pantheon is much higher and wider, Schinkel's reduced dimensions—determined by his quite different concept—create a direct and natural relationship between the visitor and the sculptures and space. It has also rightly been said that Schinkel must have drawn inspiration from the Sala Rotonda in the Museo Pio-Clementino, in Rome, for as an exhibition space within the Vatican Museums, it fulfills a function similar to that of the Rotunda in the Altes Museum (see chap. 4, fig. 4-6).²⁵ The statues are raised up on pedestals in recognition of their status as artistic masterpieces and as depictions of gods and heroes. The visitor looks up to them. Their height and the space between the columns define the overall proportions of the architecture.

All architectural elements in the Rotunda play their part in conveying a sense of harmony. The space between the columns continues upward, to the narrower niches on the upper level, which in turn lead the eye to the painted coffers. The coffering of the floor is aligned with the columns and the bases of the statues, while the circles in the center match the ground plan, the circular gallery, and the calotte. The particular artistry of Schinkel's language of forms



owes much to the delicacy of the architectural elements that support the classical balustrades and staircases. And the same could be said of the coloration, which has distinct accents only in the cupola and never conceals the materiality of the columns and the walls.

The presence of classical gods and heroes on the ground floor and in the niches on the upper level of the Rotunda clearly defines it as an exhibition space. However, in comparison to similar spaces—for instance, one of the classical sculpture galleries in the Musée Napoléon, such as the Diana Gallery—the intention is very different. The barrel-vaulted Diana Gallery, where the sculptures were displayed in front of smoothly plastered walls, was designed solely to provide the best possible view of the sculptures, which stood out clearly against the background. Although there is ample opportunity to study the sculptures in the Rotunda, they are differently integrated into the space—indeed, they are entirely at one with the space, and without them the Rotunda would no longer make artistic or conceptual sense.

The Rotunda is a sanctuary, but not only for art. It recalls the Roman

FIGURE 11-3. Karl Friedrich Schinkel (German, 1781–1841), View of the Rotunda in the Altes Museum, Berlin. From Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1858), pl. 44. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 86-B17591

Pantheon as a sacred place dedicated to the gods, represented in the classical statues on their pedestals. This space is both profane and sacred in atmosphere. Insofar as it is reserved for the presentation of statuary and, according to Schinkel's plans, was to have "a pair of colossal, classical granite bowls in the center," it has all the characteristics of a museum space.²⁶ At the same time, however, the art is seen in a ceremonial architectural context that gives it the air of being consecrated to a higher purpose. The architectural design with its classical forms thus provides an appropriate framework for the works of art on display. The architecture and the art preserved and presented within it are closely related. In that sense, Schinkel's Altes Museum—with its particular external appearance and the Rotunda—is a temple to art. The architect himself made reference to the sacred nature of the space: "This space is entered only once one has passed through the outer hall, and the sight of a beautiful, noble space should prepare the visitor and set the tone for the enjoyment and appreciation of all that is preserved in this building."²⁷

Recent commentary has added another element to our understanding of the Altes Museum and the Rotunda, for it has been suggested that the museum can be seen as the goal at the end of an urban and conceptual path that starts at Unter den Linden, the city's chief thoroughfare. Having passed the Forum Fridericianum, the library, the opera house, the Neue Wache (the guardhouse), and the Zeughaus, the visitor then crosses the Schlossbrücke (the bridge), where figures of Victory bear aloft fallen heroes who gave their lives for the fatherland. Having passed through the Pleasure Garden, the visitor finally arrives at the temple of art that contains the works of art liberated from Napoleonic Paris (fig. 11-4). In 1806 they were removed from Berlin; in 1815 they were returned to Prussia together with the Quadriga that had previously

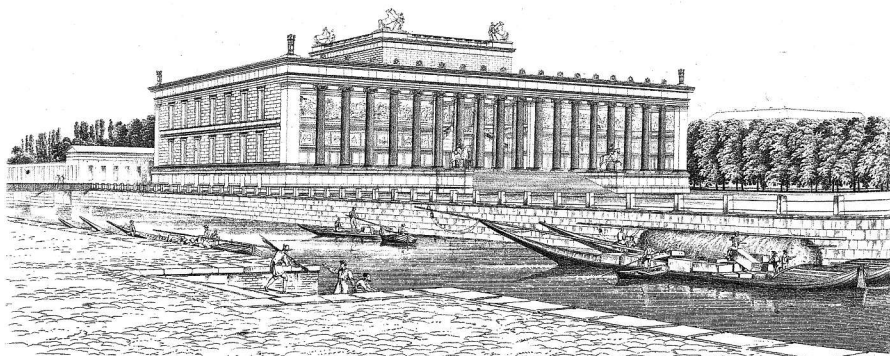


FIGURE 11-4. Karl Friedrich Schinkel (German, 1781–1841), View of the Altes Museum, Berlin, from a vantage point between the Zeughaus and the Schlossbrücke. From Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1858), pl. 37. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 86-B17591

crowned the Brandenburg Gate. Precisely in the sightline of anyone gazing toward the classical gallery beyond the Rotunda was the bronze figure of the Praying Boy. Seen in the Rotunda in the company of two figures of Victory, the Praying Boy was the most important classical sculpture to have been returned from Paris. Thus the Rotunda can also be read as a sacred space where the willing sacrifice of the nation's heroes is remembered.²⁸

Ground Plan and Interior Rooms

To the left and the right of the Rotunda are square courtyards with three smaller rooms on the north side that were intended as workshops for restoring or copying sculptures (fig. 11-5). The actual exhibition spaces extend around the Rotunda and the courtyards on the south side and narrow ends of the museum. On the ground floor the columns give rhythm to the long, open galleries. Hirt was critical of this forest of columns, which he regarded as impractical. Schinkel, however, not only considered them essential for the stability of

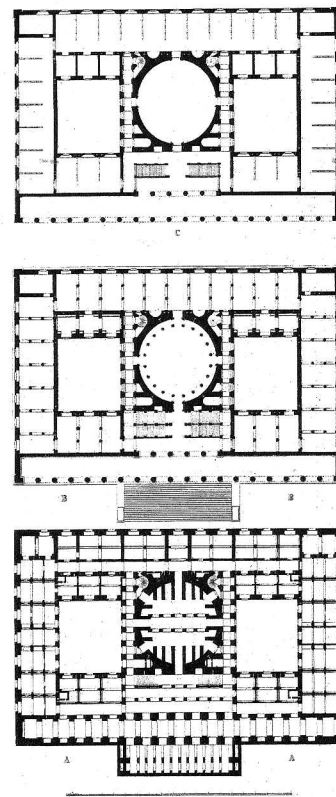


FIGURE 11-5. Karl Friedrich Schinkel (German, 1781–1841), Ground plan of the ground, first, and second floors (from bottom to top) of the Altes Museum, Berlin. From Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1858), pl. 38. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 86-B17591

the building but also felt that statues in the vicinity of the columns would create an aesthetically pleasing effect. A drawing made by Schinkel in 1823 records his vision of statues on pedestals between the columns. Certain aspects of the interiors of the galleries were influenced by those in the Musée Napoléon, which Schinkel had visited as early as 1804.

Staircases outside the entrance to the Rotunda lead to the upper floor. The visitor proceeds from the staircase into a vestibule with wall paintings conceived by Schinkel. From here the visitor progresses to the circular walkway inside the Rotunda and from there to the galleries on either side with paintings. Unlike the galleries on the ground floor, these have partition walls between the windows to provide side-lit hanging surfaces for the paintings. Schinkel's drawings show paintings hanging frame to frame in a baroque arrangement that prevailed well into the nineteenth century.

The partition walls created a series of compartments that were relatively small and provided little space for the visitor to step back from the larger paintings. However, very much in keeping with Hirt's wishes, they made it easy to separate different schools of painting. Comparisons could then be made between the paintings in a particular school, revealing stylistic developments. As he worked out his plans for the museum, Schinkel was apparently not interested in improving the lighting in the galleries by introducing top light. Although this form of light was already the preferred option in Paris and London, he favored sidelight from the windows. The lighting in a gallery lit from the side is always uneven, since the paintings nearer the windows are more brightly lit than those farther away. As soon as the museum was opened the lighting conditions were criticized and by 1861 efforts were being made to see if it was possible to convert the galleries so that daylight could enter from above.

Ordering the Works of Art in the Museum

While Schinkel's plans for the museum building met with a largely enthusiastic response (aside from Hirt's objections), the question as to how the works of art should be ordered within the museum was a source of heated debate throughout the planning process and beyond. The first task was to scrutinize and draw up records for the various collections; following this it was decided that the Altes Museum should be entirely given over to paintings and classical sculptures. The question of the museum's contents became the main focus of attention in 1829, when the king appointed a museum committee led by Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Records of the committee's work have survived, but by far the best source of information is the detailed closing report Humboldt submitted to the king. Besides Humboldt, the committee's members were Schinkel, Waagen, the sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch (1777–1857), who was replaced during his absence by Christian Friedrich Tieck (1776–1851), the painters Heinrich

Dähling (1773–1850) and Wilhelm Wach (1787–1845), and the restorer Jakob Schlesinger (1792–1855). Specific tasks were assigned to each member. Rauch and Tieck were responsible for overseeing the restoration and installation of classical sculptures; Schlesinger was in charge of restoring paintings. Waagen wrote the catalogue and devised the hanging, with the help of Wach and Dähling; Schinkel was responsible for all aspects of the architecture. Hirt ceased to be involved with the planning process in 1829. Another contributor to the preparations for the new museum—particularly with regard to the selection of paintings—was Karl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785–1843). Not a member of the committee as such, he was nevertheless engaged as a consultant in certain matters.

The dominant figure in the discussions concerning art-historical issues was Waagen. His expertise and research experience, combined with his authoritative evaluation of works of art, led to his appointment as director of the new museum. This was a break with tradition, because similar positions had in the past generally been filled by artists.

To those with an interest in cultural history and art history, the discussions between the members of the committee are of great interest, for they mark a watershed in the history of the art museum. The aims of an art museum and how to achieve these by ordering the sculptures and paintings in a particular way were avidly disputed. Schinkel and Waagen took issue with Humboldt, who was supported by Rumohr.²⁹

The fundamental differences between the personalities involved in the planning process receded into the background when it was time to install the sculptures and hang the paintings. They unanimously agreed that the primary purpose of the museum was to serve the general public. This was to take precedence over its role as an institution for artists and art lovers. With this new approach to cultural politics, the committee members bade farewell to an earlier ethos.

Despite having achieved this common ground, Waagen and Schinkel still had different priorities from those of Humboldt. In their view, the arrangement of the works of art should not only awaken the viewer's aesthetic perception but also illuminate historical context. Their mission—"first to delight, then to instruct"—reflected their notion of the didactic function of the institution; they felt it should give the visitor an understanding of the artistic development of a painter or sculptor and an insight into times past. In order to achieve this, exhibits had to be presented in such a way that connections could be extrapolated among them.

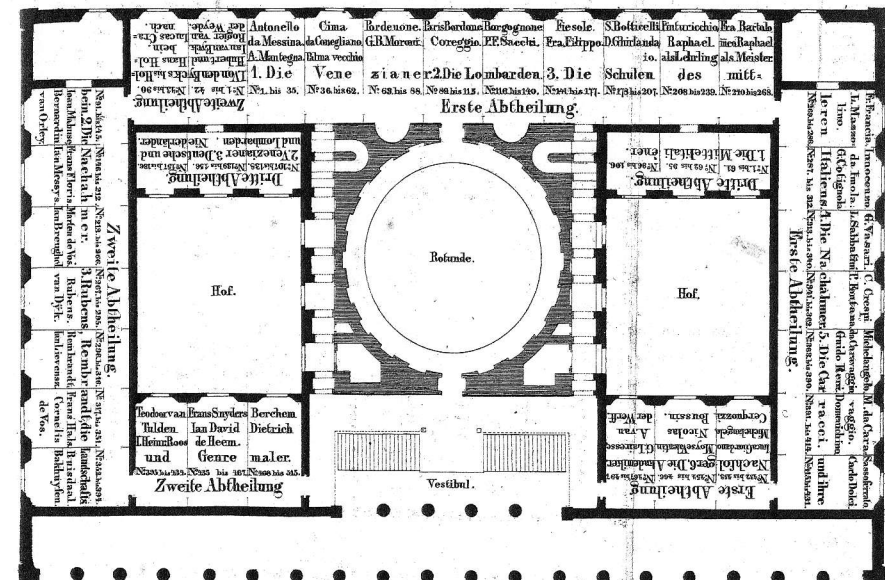
This notion was important to Humboldt, but it was not his main concern. Having played a major part in the founding of the university in Berlin, whose scholars were dedicated to the search for truth, he now sought to promote the role of the museum as a center for aesthetic edification. Rather than con-

centrating on different eras and artistic movements, he wanted to turn the spotlight on those works of art that would have the most powerful emotional and aesthetic effect on the visitor. Nevertheless, he fully supported Waagen's desire to produce a detailed catalogue of the works in the museum, compiled according to the latest scholarly findings. This in turn laid the foundation for the view that the museum should also be a scholarly institution. Humboldt was, of course, in no sense opposed to the idea of scholarly research. After all, he had favored expanding the collection in areas that were not yet represented in the Altes Museum. But he wanted the museum's priorities to be more clearly defined. The tension between these two fundamental roles of the museum persists today and cannot be eased. In fact, it is this tension that accounted for the very modernity of the Altes Museum when it was built in the first third of the nineteenth century, as a landmark in Prussian cultural history and beyond.

With the aesthetic principle of the museum in mind, Humboldt ordered that plaster casts were not to be exhibited in the museum. Although important casts had been acquired in recent years, including casts of Parthenon sculptures, and Schinkel had intended a whole wing for plaster casts, Humboldt decided otherwise: "Plaster casts of statues have naturally had to be excluded from the Royal Museum."³⁰ He took the view that only an original work of art could have the desired aesthetic effect on the viewer. Thus due prominence was given to the most important works, such as the Praying Boy, which was placed in the main axis of the building and was immediately in the visitor's sightline as he entered the Rotunda. Humboldt was not interested in creating a strictly chronological presentation of the kind seen in the Glyptothek in Munich.

In his final report on the committee's work, Humboldt explained the thinking behind the hanging on the upper floor: "When it came to the arrangement of the paintings, various considerations had to be taken into account simultaneously, if the intended aesthetic pleasure was to be combined with artistic instruction. As far as possible every painting was to be placed in the correct light. The beholder should be able to give his full attention to the main paintings on each wall, but above all the presentation should reflect the manner in which paintings relate to their own time and artistic schools."³¹ The final sentence suggests that it was entirely possible to reconcile different opinions. As a result of Humboldt's idealistic notions, certain paintings were placed prominently in a certain area or on a particular wall. Broadly speaking, however, the paintings were arranged strictly according to artistic schools (fig. 11-6). Moreover, these schools were divided into just two main categories, those in northern Europe and those in Italy. The fact that rooms could be entered from different sides meant that it was not possible to define a systematic sequence.

The Italian schools were accommodated in the north and east sides of the museum and extended into one room on the south side. The northern European schools started on the north side and ran in the opposite direction



to the rooms on the west side and also extended into one room on the south side. Since the Italian schools took up more space, the point of contact with the northern European schools was not in the center of the north side but slightly toward the west. Thus the beginning of the Renaissance in North and South was marked by the meeting of Antonello da Messina and Andrea Mantegna with Hubert and Jan van Eyck, symbolizing the moment when "they were at their closest both historically and in their aims," as Humboldt put it.³² In other words, if one takes this point of encounter between North and South as a starting point, it would be fair to say that the hanging was basically chronological, moving in opposite directions.

Despite Humboldt's aspirations, justice was also done to the art-historical criteria that were particularly important to Waagen. The only compromise (regarding a strictly chronological hanging) that Waagen had to make, albeit an important one, was that there was a third department, with medieval paintings and some less highly regarded works from northern and southern Europe, in the two side rooms looking out onto the courtyards on the north side of the museum.³³

The Museum as a Moral Institution

The Altes Museum in Berlin marks a turning point in the history of art museums. Originally conceived in the eighteenth century, it acquired its architectural

FIGURE 11-6. Ground plan and arrangement of the Painting Gallery in the Altes Museum, Berlin. From Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Verzeichniß der Gemälde-Sammlung des Königlichen Museums zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1830). Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 89-B7753

form and internal organization in the early years of the nineteenth century. The long years of planning at a time of political and cultural upheaval gave this institution a new ethos. Aloys Hirt must be credited with the idea of approaching the king for his support. Hirt's thinking was that of a son of the Enlightenment, and in his desire to breathe new life into art and scholarship, even to connect the two, he stated very clearly that the works of art in the state collections should be ordered, made accessible, and used for their didactic potential. As a professor at the Academy of Art, he regarded these collections as a treasure that should be not hidden away in royal residences but opened for the purposes of study. Similar views had already been publicly expressed elsewhere much earlier on. Royal collections in Paris, Vienna, Dresden, and other cities had been accessible to the public for decades. Not least as a result of the long reign, from 1740 to 1786, of Frederick the Great, Prussia was somewhat lagging behind other states in this respect.

Hirt's ideas on how the museum should be conceived were firmly rooted in the eighteenth century. As an archaeologist, he was steeped in the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the archaeologist and historian of antique art. Ever since Winckelmann, the art of the Greeks and the Romans had been regarded as a cultural and artistic high point worthy of emulation. And the ultimate aim of all Hirt's scholarly writings was to show how these historical peaks had come about, so that lessons could be learned for the present.

While Hirt's younger colleagues involved in the discussions surrounding the Altes Museum never questioned his scholarly acumen, they did cast doubt on his aims. Neither Humboldt nor Schinkel was persuaded that the imitation of antiquity could be the real aim of art. Although they, too, revered that period, they felt that every epoch had to develop its own cultural and artistic principles. There could be no general theory for all time, either for architecture, painting, or sculpture. As Schinkel wrote: "[Little can one] lay down rules, painting, and sculpture that prescribe for all eternity how ideas may be expressed, since their realm is infinite; and every new idea will also form a new notion of the rules for its representation."³⁴ Every epoch must leave its own mark on art. However, crucial importance was attached to Schinkel's view that art affects the morals of society in general: "The fine arts affect a person's morals. . . . Without the fine arts, in every respect of his life he will never be anything but a lowly being and will never partake of a higher, happier existence."³⁵ Thus the art museum, as a moral institution, is indispensable to every state system.

The spiritual foundation of the Altes Museum was the conviction that only contact with art can lead a person to self-fulfillment, to the point where he can be truly free and creative. The thinking of writers such as Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) in his letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (On the aesthetic education of man),³⁶ of 1795, and Johann Wolfgang von

Goethe (1749–1832), with his notion of an art religion, largely shaped the idea that the museum should "first delight, then instruct." The Altes Museum was not intended first and foremost for experts. Although the king funded the museum, he was bowing to the will of the new middle classes who would enter this building, with its Neoclassical architectural design, to acquire the learning that would allow them to take their place in a modern society. The Altes Museum was an institution for those who want to enjoy and to be educated. On the other side of the Pleasure Garden, opposite the royal sovereign in his Baroque residence, they could enjoy an aesthetic education that would deepen their understanding of humankind and give them a new self-confidence in their role as citizens.³⁷

It was in this spirit that Humboldt declared that in every epoch the individual has to find a balance between his sensory experiences and his ideas. This can happen only on the basis of the education that state institutions such as the university and the museum can offer him. Accordingly, citizens could be expected to act responsibly only if the king and the regime provided these institutions.

The Altes Museum owes its existence both to the dismissal and to the development of Enlightenment ideas formed in the eighteenth century. Its ultimate realization went hand in hand with reforms that necessitated a fundamental renewal of the Prussian state system in the era during and after the Napoleonic Wars. During this process of reform, the promotion and study of art became part of the definition of the rights and duties of citizens in a modern state.

NOTES

- This essay was translated from the German by Fiona Elliott.
- 1 The literature on the Altes Museum is unusually wide-ranging. The following titles are among the most important: Friedrich Stock, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Berliner Museen: Urkunden von 1786–1807," *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 49 (1928), suppl., pp. 65–174; Friedrich Stock, "Urkunden zur Vorgeschichte des Berliner Museums," *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 51 (1930), pp. 205–22; Sabine Spiero, "Schinkels Altes Museum in Berlin: Seine Baugeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Eröffnung," *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 55 (1934), suppl., pp. 41–86; Paul Ortwin Rave, *Bauten für die Kunst, Kirchen, Denkmalpflege*, vol. 1 of *Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Berlin* (Berlin, 1941); Volker Plagemann, *Das Deutsche Kunstmuseum, 1790–1870: Lage, Baukörper, Raumorganisation, Bildprogramm*, Studien zur Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 3 (Munich, 1967); Christoph Martin Vogtherr, "Das Königliche Museum zu Berlin: Planungen und Konzeption des ersten Berliner Kunstmuseums," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 39 (1997), suppl.; Elsa van Wezel, "Die Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums zu Berlin und das sich wandelnde historische Bewußtsein," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 43 (2001), suppl.
 - 2 Stock, "Vorgeschichte des Berliner Museums" (note 1), p. 211; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 122.
 - 3 Katharina Pilz, "Die Gemäldegalerie in Dresden unter Berücksichtigung der Mengsschen Abgussammlung," in *Tempel der Kunst: Die Entstehung des öffentlichen Museums in Deutschland, 1701–1815*, edited by Bénédicte Savoy (Mainz, 2006), pp. 145–74.
 - 4 Patrick Golenia, "Die Gemäldegalerie in Kassel," in Savoy, *Tempel der Kunst* (note 3), pp. 175–97; Julia Vercamer, "Das Museum Fridericianum in Kassel," in Savoy, *Tempel der Kunst*, pp. 309–31.
 - 5 Annette Schryen, "Die k.k. Bilder-Galerie im Oberen Belvedere in Wien," in Savoy, *Tempel der Kunst* (note 3), pp. 279–307.
 - 6 Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 21ff.
 - 7 Hirt suggested several possible sites for a new museum, if the collections were not to be housed in an existing building. His proposal was for a very simple building, without aspirations to representative splendor. Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 37ff.
 - 8 Illustrated in Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), pp. 12–13. Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 48ff. In 1799 Carl Haller von Hallerstein (1774–1817) also designed a museum and library building. Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin," pp. 47–48.
 - 9 Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), pp. 56–59.
 - 10 On the works of art looted from Prussia, see Bénédicte Savoy, *Patrimoine annexé: Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800*, 2 vols., *Passages / Passages* (Berlin) 5 (Paris, 2003); see also Thomas W. Gaethtgens, "Das Musée Napoléon und sein Einfluß auf die Kunstgeschichte," in *Johann Dominicus Fiorillo: Kunstgeschichte und die romantische Bewegung um 1800*, edited by Antje Middeldorf Kosegarten (Göttingen, 1997), pp. 339–69.
 - 11 Stock, "Vorgeschichte der Berliner Museen: Urkunden von 1786–1807" (note 1), p. 148; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 69.
 - 12 On Mechel, see, most importantly, Debora J. Meijers, *Kunst als Natur: Die Habsburger Gemäldegalerie in Wien um 1780*, Schriften des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien, 2 (Vienna, 1995).
 - 13 Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), pp. 72–73.
 - 14 Aloys Hirt, *Ueber die diesjährige Kunstausstellung auf der Königl. Akademie* (Berlin, 1815), pp. 3–4; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 75.
 - 15 Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 84; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), pp. 53–56.
 - 16 Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), pp. 14–24; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), pp. 95–114.
 - 17 Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), pp. 34–35; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), pp. 119–23.
 - 18 Stock, "Vorgeschichte des Berliner Museums" (note 1), p. 210; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 120.
 - 19 Stock, "Vorgeschichte des Berliner Museums" (note 1), p. 211; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 122.
 - 20 Schinkel himself talked of a "columnated hall," though if anything it is a wide, high-ceilinged walkway. See Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), p. 31; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), p. 59.
 - 21 Various commentators have pointed out that, as a type, the building is less a temple than a stoa, like the Stoa Poikile (Painted Stoa), in the Athenian Agora. See James J. Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (New York, 2000), p. 73.
 - 22 Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), p. 31. Helmut Börsch-Supan, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Schinkels Entwürfen für die Museumsfresken," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 33 (1981), pp. 36–46; Sabine Schulze, *Bildprogramme in Deutschen Kunstmuseen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984); Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 131; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), pp. 88–91.
 - 23 Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World* (note 21), p. 77: "This is a space for conversation and sociability, where people can discuss what they will see or have seen as they come and go between the museum and society—the exterior world into which the figure leaning over the railing at the left is looking. Rotunda and staircase

are like the opposite ends of a bridge between interior and exterior, between private experience and social life, between art's separation from and its connection to the civic order."

- 24 Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), p. 31.
- 25 Wolf-Dieter Heilmeyer, Huberta Heres, and Wolfgang Maßmann, *Schinkels Pantheon: Die Statuen der Rotunda im Alten Museum* (Mainz, 2004), pp. 7–8.
- 26 Rave, *Bauten* (note 1), p. 42.
- 27 Spiero, "Schinkels Altes Museum" (note 1), pp. 55–58. As cited in Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 137.
- 28 Peter-Klaus Schuster, "National und Universal: Zur Begründung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin," in *Wissenschaft und Kultur in Bibliotheken, Museen und Archiven: Klaus-Dieter Lehmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Barbara Schnieder-Kempf, Klaus G. Sauer, and Peter-Klaus Schuster (Munich, 2005), esp. pp. 490–92; Peter-Klaus Schuster, "Die Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin und ihre nationale Aufgabe," in *Positionen zum Thema: Gibt es ein Patrimonium der Deutschen? Sammelband zur Kolloquium der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin und der Kulturstiftung der Länder im Bode-Museum und im Alten Museum, Freitag, 20. Januar 2006*, Berliner Schriften der Museumsforschung, 25 (Berlin, 2008), p. 14: "The meaning is all too clear. The individual serves and sacrifices his life for the fatherland, and is, so to speak, reborn in the museum temple as a Greek, as a human being. The museum as such stands as the *patrimonium* of the people, watched over by eagles" (author's translation).
- 29 The various approaches, which also led to personal disagreements, are evident in many documents from the time. The most important of these are a memo by Waagen and Schinkel on arrangements concerning the Berlin painting gallery, August 1828, see Stock, "Vorgeschichte des Berliner Museums" (note 1), pp. 209–14; Humboldt's memo on the hanging of the paintings, May 1829, in Christoph Martin Vogtherr, "Zwischen Norm und Kunstgeschichte, Wilhelm von Humboldts Denkschrift von 1829 zur Hängung in der Berliner Gemäldegalerie," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, n.s., 34 (1992), pp. 53–64; reply by Waagen and Schinkel, June 1, 1829, see Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), pp. 271–74; and Humboldt's closing report for the king on the work of the committee, August 21, 1830, in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Politische Denkschriften*, vol. 12 (Abt. 2, Bd. 3) of *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1904), pp. 539–66; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 160; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), pp. 98–102.
- 30 Humboldt, 1830 closing report (note 29), p. 551.
- 31 Humboldt, 1830 closing report (note 29), p. 547; Vogtherr, "Königliche Museum zu Berlin" (note 1), p. 180, with a detailed account and analysis of the extant sources on the hanging, pp. 178–213.
- 32 Humboldt, 1830 closing report (note 29), p. 548.
- 33 Humboldt, 1830 closing report (note 29), pp. 547–48.
- 34 Goerd Peschken, *Das architektonische Lehrbuch* (Munich, 1979), p. 29; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), p. 50.
- 35 Peschken, *Architektonische Lehrbuch* (note 34), p. 27; Wezel, "Konzeptionen des Alten und Neuen Museums" (note 1), p. 51.
- 36 Friedrich Schiller, *Kleinere prosaische Schriften: Aus mehrern Zeitschriften vom Verfasser selbst gesammelt und verbessert*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1801) (Google eBook).
- 37 For more on this, see Peter-Klaus Schuster, "Die Museumsinsel: Masterpläne für die Kunst," in *Museumsinsel Berlin*, edited by Peter-Klaus Schuster and Cristina Inés Steingraber (Berlin, 2004), esp. pp. 30–31.