

belvedere

IN-SIGHT  
FAST & FLUID.  
THE FASCINATION OF THE OIL SKETCH

Upper Belvedere  
23 May to 8 September, 2019



Caspar David Friedrich, Cloudy Evening Sky, 1824  
Photo: Johannes Stöll © Belvedere, Vienna

# IN-SIGHT FAST & FLUID. THE FASCINATION OF THE OIL SKETCH

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Oil sketches are loosely captured snapshots. It is through these mainly small-scale works that artists have developed their personal style. The exhibition *Fast & Fluid. The Fascination of the Oil Sketch* is dedicated to this rarely shown genre and demonstrates its special charm by using works from the Belvedere collection.

The series *IN-SIGHT* takes works from the Belvedere collection and considers them anew from an unaccustomed perspective. This time, it will present the public with works that were originally not meant for sale or even for others to see.

Belvedere Artistic Director Stella Rollig says, “*This particular IN-SIGHT exhibition presents works from the Belvedere collection, some of which have either not been seen for decades or are being shown for the first time. With it, we offer, in addition to the Upper Belvedere’s permanent collection, a fresh, new look at some of the treasures of our house.*”

Due to their spontaneity and the unusually intimate insight afforded into an artist’s creative process, oil sketches are cherished in the art world. In this exhibition, curator Rolf H. Johannsen focuses on the development of the oil sketch from the early nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.

He explains: “*The oil sketch is a genre worthy of discovery. To observe the sketches is a ‘visual adventure.’ What gives these works their special appeal is that proverbial glance over the shoulder of the artist.*”

## About the Exhibition

Art history makes a distinction between oil sketches and oil studies. While oil sketches are characterized as independent works of art, oil studies serve primarily as preparatory work for paintings. Both have their origins prior to the nineteenth century – primarily in drafts that served a specific purpose, namely, underpinning the contract between artist and patron. When outdoor painting emerged around 1800, another field of artistic creativity took root along with it: working

in the open air, which finally became established in the impressionist style of plein air painting. In the course of this development, the sketch format gained alongside its previous purpose an unprecedented autonomy.

With the boundaries between sketches and studies being so fluid, the exhibition deliberately breaks through them and shows both juxtaposed with finished paintings in an overarching context. As the original purpose of the format was to capture a fleeting moment, the exhibition's thematic structure takes on "clouds – landscape – figure" as its focus.

**Autonomous cloud studies** emerged around 1800 and were triggered by meteorological observation and the scientific classification of clouds that Luke Howard published in 1803, which are still valid today. As a result, in England around 1800 the artist John Constable set his focus on celestial phenomena and, starting in 1820/21, went on to paint "pure" cloud images. A proponent of German Romanticism in Dresden, Caspar David Friedrich, dealt explicitly with the depiction of clouds, expressing with them the era's predilection for what is merely hinted at and what is always in flux. It appears that cloud studies in Austria only achieved comparable autonomy in exceptional cases, for instance, with the poet Adalbert Stifter.

It is not well known that Stifter, in his early years, defined himself as a landscape painter before devoting himself to poetry. His powerful literary descriptions of nature certainly had their impact on Austrian **landscape painting**, which was driven by Emil Jakob Schindler in the early 1880s painting outdoors with Olga Wisinger-Florian, Tina Blau, and Carl Moll. Schindler, who became a father figure of Austrian Atmospheric Impressionism, maintained a particularly close relationship with Tina Blau. With the emergence of Impressionism, the boundaries between the classical oil sketch and paintings considered "finished" and therefore worthy of sale began to blur, which is particularly evident in Tina Blau's work.

**Figurative studies** became increasingly significant during the "Ringstrasse era," when the wealthy bourgeoisie's growing need for class representation manifested itself in magnificent public buildings and their picturesque furnishings. This led to a revival of mythology and allegory and, consequently, the representation of the figure. During this time, studies served as templates for the interior design of museums and theaters. Protagonists of this period were Hans Makart, Hans Canon, and Gustav Klimt with his Artist Company, who were frequently commissioned by theater architects such as Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer to embellish their buildings with paintings.

Sketches and studies often only came to the public posthumously. Museums, including the Belvedere, would only acquire them much after the fact and usually not in a systematic manner.

## **ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION**

Tina Blau  
Joseph Brunner  
Wilhelm Busch  
Hans Canon  
Ludwig Czerny  
Johan Christian Claussen Dahl  
Caspar David Friedrich  
Friedrich August Mathias Gauermann  
Cecil van Haanen  
Theodor von Hörmann  
Ernst Juch  
Ernst Klimt  
Edmund Mahlknecht  
Hans Makart  
Hans von Marées  
Carl Moll  
Koloman Moser  
Mihály von Munkácsy  
August von Pettenkofen  
Rudolf Ribarz  
Anton Romako  
Emil Jakob Schindler  
Carl Spitzweg  
Adalbert Stifter  
Johann Till der Jüngere  
Ludwig Willroider  
Olga Wisinger-Florian

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	IN-SIGHT: Fast & Fluid. The Fascination of the Oil Sketch
Exhibition duration	<b>23 May to 8 September, 2019</b>
Venue	Upper Belvedere
Exhibits	56
Curator	Rolf Johannsen
Exhibition management	Monica Strinu
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