



# Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism

By James J. Sheehan

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Combining the history of ideas, institutions, and architecture, this study shows how the museum both reflected and shaped the place of art in German culture from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. On a broader level, it illuminates the origin and character of the museum's central role in modern culture.

James Sheehan begins by describing the establishment of the first public galleries during the last decades of Germany's old regime. He then examines the revolutionary upheaval that swept Germany between 1789 and 1815, arguing that the first great German museums reflected the nation's revolutionary aspirations. By the mid-nineteenth century, the climate had changed; museums constructed in this period affirmed historical continuities and celebrated political accomplishments. During the next several years, however, Germans became disillusioned with conventional definitions of art and lost interest in monumental museums. By the turn of the century, the museum had become a site for the political and cultural controversies caused by the rise of artistic modernism. In this context, Sheehan argues, we can see the first signs of what would become the modern style of museum architecture and modes of display.

The first study of its kind, this highly accessible book will appeal to historians, museum professionals, and anyone interested in the relationship between art, politics, and culture.

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#### Review

"Sheehan covers a wide swath of aesthetic, architectural, and social history in his discussion of the growth, the purpose, and the reception of museums by the public in nineteenth-century Germany...the author deftly presents the role of German art museums in all their complexity, yet succinctly summarizes their importance both for nineteenth-century Germans and their legacy today."--*The Historian*

"James Sheehan is indeed a master of the historical craft. Clear organization, lucid prose, and the ability to balance a broadly sweeping narrative with close readings of specific subjects. . This book is especially timely considering the revamping of Berlin museums. Relates such an important and intriguing history that one wishes the story were continued in detail up through the third Reich and into the postwar period."-- *Central European History*

#### About the Author

**James J. Sheehan** is Dickason Professor in the Humanities and Professor of History at Stanford University.

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