

**Florian Illies**

***The Magic of Silence***

Caspar David Friedrich's Journey Through Time

256 pages

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**The adventurous life of Caspar David Friedrich's pictures of yearning – told thrillingly by Florian Illies**

No German painter sparks such strong emotions as Caspar David Friedrich: his evening skies remain icons of longing to this day. He inspired Samuel Beckett to write "Waiting for Godot" and Walt Disney to create "Bambi". Goethe, however, was so enraged by the enigmatic melancholy of Friedrich's paintings that he wanted to smash them on the edge of a table.

In a large-scale journey through time, bestselling author Florian Illies tells the story of Friedrich's paintings for the first time: countless of his most beautiful paintings were burned, first in his birthplace

Greifswald and then in World War II; others, like the "Chalk Cliffs on Rügen," emerge from the mists of history a hundred years after Friedrich's death. Illies tells the story of how Friedrich's paintings end up at the Russian czar's court, among a pile of winter tires in a Mafia car repair shop and in the kitchen of a German social housing apartment. Adored by Hitler just as much as by Heinrich von Kleist, passionately hated by Stalin and by the 68ers – 250 years of German history become visible through Caspar David Friedrich's paintings.

**Press Quotes:**

*"a multi-faceted literary monument (...) brilliantly successful (...) Illies tells stories like these adventurously well"* - ttt - Titel Thesen Temperamente, Max Moor

*"one of the most beautiful books I've read this year. A very, very wonderful book. Clever, readable, light [...] and deeply impressive. Very, very beautiful."* - SPIEGEL Bestseller - Mehr lesen mit Elke Heidenreich, Elke Heidenreich

*"his witty and elegantly written book"* - Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Philipp Meier

*"If you want to get to know Friedrich, you have to read Illies."* - Bild am Sonntag, Walter M. Straten

*"What Illies succeeds in doing is visualising history through short, flash-like literary anecdotes, in which one is led directly into the images as if with a hand-held camera (...)." - Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, Niklas Maak*

*"With verve and a sense of effect. The author's happiness in looking at these pictures is transferred to the reader."* - Welt am Sonntag, Tilman Krause

*"a book that is extremely rich in relationships and very entertaining to read"* - SWR2 lesenswert, Wolfgang Schneider

*"An unconventionally crafted and delightfully beautiful book"* - rbbKultur, Frank Dietschreit

*"This as a warning: the book has a thoroughly intoxicating effect. The reader feels more and more captivated from page to page."* - Focus Spezial, Markus Krischer

*"a captivating and elegantly readable story - a worthy bestseller for the coming Friedrich anniversary year"* - Augsburger Allgemeine, Stefanie Wirsching

*"a clever, marvellous journey through time and we travel along, enchanted by the way Illies manages to bring entire epochs to life with just a few sentences."* - Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, Elke Heidenreich

"Please read Florian Illies' *Magic of Silence*." – ZEIT Wissen

"He jumps back and forth through history in a casual way. This journey through time is as clever as it is entertaining, at times absurd and funny." – n-tv, Juliane Rohr

**Florian Illies** transforms past eras into the living present with elegance and ease. He draws surprising cross-connections between the protagonists and weaves scenes and snapshots into stirring panoramas. His international history, *1913. The Summer of the Century*, with which Illies invented a new genre, topped the SPIEGEL bestseller list for months. Born in 1971, Illies studied art history in Bonn and Oxford. He was head of the arts section of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung and ZEIT, publisher of Rowohlt Verlag, managed the Grisebach auction house and co-founded the art magazine Monopol. Today, Florian Illies is co-editor of ZEIT as well as a curator and freelance writer. S. FISCHER most recently published the epic portrait *Liebe in Zeiten des Hasses* ("Love in Times of Hate"), which has since been translated into 18 languages. His art podcast *Augen zu* (together with Giovanni di Lorenzo) is one of the most popular German-language podcasts.

**Florian Illies**

**The Magic of Silence – Caspar David Friedrich’s Journey Through Time**

**Translation: Alexandra Berlina**

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**On the sailing boat**

It’s a beautiful August day in 1818. Bright sunshine, a glistening sea. Early in the morning, they’d boarded the small sailing boat in Wiek on Rügen, stowed their luggage and Friedrich’s painting materials; since then, they’d been gliding serenely across the sleepy Greifswald Bodden, passing the bright green beech groves of the Hiddensee island on the right, then turning south toward Stralsund. A warm wind is blowing in from the east, from the gentle hills of Rügen and the ancient megalithic tombs, the sails so taut that the ropes are straining. Oh, how he loves this moment when the large piece of canvas suddenly billows up with a whoosh, magically setting the ship in motion! Has the human mind ever conceived of anything more beautiful? That’s exactly what he wants to do when he gets back to Dresden – to animate the canvas with his brush like the wind animates the sail. He snaps out of his thoughts as Caroline speaks up: Look, Caspar, look! There, by the sandbanks, see, seals are coming out of the water! Sorry, Line, he smiles sheepishly, please excuse me, I was lost in my dreams.

It is 11 August 1818. They have just spent their honeymoon on Rügen – he, a rather quirky 44-year-old painter from Greifswald, and she, a 25-year-old from Dresden. All is quiet around their boat. Sometimes, they hear the powerful flapping of wings and the screeching of seagulls; now and again, the spray splashes up at them, and a few salty drops glisten for a while in Friedrich’s mighty red moustache. Caroline, whom he calls Line (pronounced to rhyme with the Latin “sine”), had never been on a boat before. She’d been rather scared to go but then

she said: if I must sink, then I'd rather sink with you. Yes, she really did say that. Caspar David Friedrich can't believe his luck. What did I do to deserve you, he murmurs, holding her hand tightly. "Love is the weirdest thing", he writes to his brother Christian after marrying Line, with whom he'd fallen in love head over heels. He goes on to say that Line, so unused to water and everything that comes out of it, has learned to enjoy the Pomeranian herrings, which Christian had sent to the young couple from Greifswald. Many things have changed in his flat in Dresden since his "I" had turned into a "we", he divulges. For instance, he's no longer allowed to have full spittoons standing around all over the place; that bothers her. But otherwise, all the changes are for the better: "There's more eating, more drinking, more sleeping, more bantering and teasing." This is, "teasing" is what he might have meant – he actually wrote "gelepscht", a creation not to be found in any dictionary; some similar dialect words suggest the meaning of "teasing", but perhaps this was code for something more intimate : Caroline and he went on to have their first child next year.

Their sailing trip through the glittering waters of the bodden, which oscillate between dark blue and turquoise, lasts almost the whole day. Friedrich can't get enough of it, soaking up everything with his painter's eyes – the boats, the ropes, the mast, the rattling sail, the coastlines to the left and right, the lush green trees above the cliffs. As this magical August day slowly fades away, the warmth of the sun still lingers in the wood of the planks beneath them; they wear no coats, no scarfs. Then Stralsund appears before them in the evening haze like a fata morgana. Caroline solemnly puts up her hair. Towers rise out of the reddish light. As their boat glides gently towards the city, Friedrich is full of longing devotion and so, he believes, is Line. He must paint this very moment, he thinks, full of inner fire; he feels utterly happy, perhaps for the first time in his life, with the water beneath him, the land before him, the air around him, and with his hand in hers.

Tonight in Stralsund, Line suddenly asks, can we please eat something other than fish?

## **Chapter 1**

### **Fire**

A balmy early summer night, the sky slowly changing colour from a deep dark blue to a delicate light yellow, the nightingales singing their last song in the lilac bushes... And then, all at once, a glow rises over Munich: bright-red flames shoot up from the huge Glass Palace, reflected in the fronts of the houses in nearby Sophienstrasse and Elisenstrasse. The whole sky seems to be aflame. The night is quiet no more, either: with a deafening crash, huge steel bars and shattered window panes plunge into the maw of the blaze.

In the night of Saturday, 6 June 1931, what Caspar David Friedrich cherished most goes up in flames in Munich's Glass Palace: the painting of the stony "Baltic Sea Beach" – his eternal place of longing; "The Port of Greifswald" – his birthplace, which he so wistfully missed; "Augustus Bridge in Dresden" – the view from the window of his flat, and, worst of all, "The Evening Hour" – a painting of his wife Caroline embracing their daughter Emma, both gazing serenely out of the window into a balmy early summer night in Saxony. The flames greedily devour the dry wood of the stretcher frames, the remains of the canvases swirl up into the sleepy sky – tiny black shreds, blown up again and again by the hot waves of the flames, over and over, smaller and smaller, turning to ash, vanishing.

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As it happens, in 1931, the company responsible for the Munich Glass Palace decided not to renew the fire insurance policy taken out for the building in 1854. The cost was deemed unjustified: after all, glass and steel do not burn.

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Shortly after half past three in the night on 6 June 1931, the telephone rings shrilly in Eugen Roth's flat, just a hundred steps away from the Glass Palace. The editors of *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* are on the line, ordering their local reporter to hurry to the burning building. A sleepy and shaken Roth hastily dresses, puts fresh film into his camera and glances briefly at the two drawings by Caspar David Friedrich slumbering in the twilight above his bed. Even in the dark, he can make out every blade of grass, knowing them by heart as he does. Roth is an obsessive collector, every spare Reichsmark he earns with his writing goes to the city's art dealers, and Caspar David Friedrich is his god. Every evening before going to sleep, he gazes at his small drawing from Saxon Switzerland and, for a longer while, at the quiet, magical Baltic Sea beach that Friedrich had drawn in Rügen.

Last week, Roth had attended the grand opening of the special exhibition "Works by German Romantics from Caspar David Friedrich to Moritz von Schwind" at the Glass Palace: a hundred and ten of the most beautiful Romantic paintings ever, on loan from the best museums. On the afternoon of this off-duty Saturday, he was actually planning to go there a second time and enjoy the paintings again. As it happens, he is rushing there twelve hours earlier than planned, toward horror rather than pleasure. The bell of the Holy Trinity Church chimes four times as he holds out his press pass to the security guards, having made his way from Arcisstrasse, running over the fire brigade's bulging red hoses. The sky above him is dark red. There it is, the Glass Palace, or rather, what's left of it. The giant building – 234 metres long and 67 metres wide – is ablaze, the heat beating down with glowing fists. Roth takes refuge in the entrance of a nearby house, pulls out his pencil and his notebook. He needs to write, but he can't take his eyes off the horrific spectacle. At the break of dawn on this terrible Saturday in June, he thinks of Caspar David Friedrich's nine paintings that are burning up before his eyes: "The

Evening Hour” with his wife and daughter, the port in Greifswald, the landscape of the Giant Mountains ... He thinks of the poor man in the “Autumn Painting ”, gathering barren branches in a deserted field, presumably to light a fire in the evening – and now engulfed by flames. Above all, he thinks of his favourite painting, “The Lady on the Seashore ”, tenderly waving her handkerchief after a boat. He can see this gentle image when he closes his eyes. He was so moved by it when he saw it – and now he knows that the lady was waving her final farewell. Her white handkerchief has become a shred of black ash; she is no longer of this world. Eugen Roth needs to write, or he’ll break down crying. And so he writes: “My gaze wanders over this sea of fire. Tongues of flame shoot up in the air, fire thundering like surf, sinking down, roaring up again, sparkling, quivering, spreading, devouring all around it, ducking back cowardly from the smashing jet of water but starting up at once in a thousand new places, dancing mockingly, waving and whirling.”

Just a few hours later, his poignant eyewitness report will appear in the early edition of *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, and the paperboys will praise it at the top of their voices as they run through the alleyways of Schwabing and across Marienplatz, past people frozen in terror at the news. In his text, Eugen Roth draws a portrait of the fire with the precision and emotion of a Caspar David Friedrich, depicting every flame, every reflection, every seething and hissing – indeed, this text makes him the poet he’d always wanted to be. He is writing furiously under the rain of ashes, and what stops him is not exhaustion or heat – rather, he can no longer watch the desperation of the pigeons, who seem to have gone mad, fluttering through the air in panic and flying right into the flames. Finally, Roth realises that they must be looking for their nests in the niches between the steel bars, where their still featherless young had been sleeping blissfully until last night. Now, they had been eaten alive by fire.

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One can only wonder how Thomas Mann experienced this disturbingly bright Munich morning. The devastating fire happened on his 56th birthday of all days, on the sixth of June. Did he complain to his wife Katja about the noise made by the fire brigade or about the smell of burning that afflicted his nose? Did he take a look at the fire? We can only guess. All we know is that later, in July, he gave a charity lecture at the Munich university to raise money for the fire's victims. Also, his protagonist Adele Schopenhauer raves about the "heavenly David Caspar Friedrich" in *Lotte in Weimar*, a novel written shortly after the fire. We might have known more about Thomas Mann's reaction to the destruction of these great Romantic works had not his 1931 diaries been burnt – by Mann himself, in 1945, in the garden of his exile home in Pacific Palisades, California.

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Adolf Hitler and his niece (his half-sister's daughter) Geli Raubal, with whom he'd been living together in some kind of an arrangement for two years at Prinzregentenplatz 16 in Munich, are woken from their sleep by blaring sirens. Fire engines are rushing in from all over the city; the people of Munich are throwing open their windows in the morning twilight and looking at the giant billows of smoke, which the wind is driving from the city centre as far as Schwabing.

Hundreds of people walk through the streets, drowsy and distraught, torn between fear and curiosity. In the sky, the first sunrays battle with the red reflection of the flames and the sooty clouds of ash. When Hitler reaches the Stachus square, he sees the monumental Glass Palace, the seemingly indestructible proud ornament of Munich, transformed into a seething sea of fire, the thousands of glass panes shattered, the iron girders looking like a huge black spiderweb shot through by flames. The crowns of the tall lime trees surrounding the palace are rustling in the wind caused by the blaze, their bright green leaves scorched, curling up in the heat. Just a few days ago, Hitler had visited the large German Romantics exhibition here, the most magnificent one in decades. Now the fire has

destroyed all the hundred and ten paintings by Runge, Friedrich and Schinkel, snatched them from memory forever. An irrepressible rage grows in Hitler. He swears to himself that he will build a temple to German art here, a "House of Art" that would never perish. And so he will: Haus der Deutschen Kunst will open in 1937. But long before that, three months after the shocking fire at the Glass Palace, on 18 September 1931, the twenty-three-year old Geli Raubal will shoot herself in the shared flat at Prinzregentenplatz 16, whose rent is paid by the royalties for Mein Kampf.

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Back to the early 19th century. Caspar David Friedrich is playing with fire. He keeps drawing figures, though he's no good at it. He'd been ridiculed for his depictions of people at the academy in Copenhagen, and now the same thing is happening in Dresden. The nudes are the worst. He just can't get it right. The legs are always too long, the upper body too limp. "You draw the greatest nudes around here", the painter Johann Joachim Faber mocks, sitting next to him in the Dresden Academy, "I mean: the longest nudes." Friedrich glares at him through his red eyelashes. The Saxon women make all the vowels so long – it fits perfectly if he makes their bodies a little longer, too! Alas, he's only that sharp-witted when he's writing to his brothers. With a naked lady in the room, he loses his sense of humour. He can only give the model a quick glance; then he has to look away for a long time to cool down – no wonder he can't get the limbs right. People are so strange, he thinks. Women especially. Trees are easier. He knows how trees feel. At trees, he can look for hours and paint them in detail.

It's 1802. Caspar David Friedrich, an odd young man from Swedish Pomerania, skinny, sluggish in his gait, with fiery red whiskers, has taken a small room with the widow Vetter on the Festungsgraben in Dresden. He calls her "Madam" and her adolescent daughters a mispronounced version of "Mademoiselles", but they wouldn't forgive him even if his French was better: he

seems such a boor, never speaking to them, never taking them out, never bringing them some flowers from the fair. As soon as he opens his mouth, his whole body tenses up, he can't get a word out, his pale face turns red, and he rarely manages more than a "Good morning" or a "Good evening". Or, even better, just one syllable that can be a greeting or basically anything else: "Nu" (pronounced "noo"), a beautiful universal word he's learnt in Dresden, one that always fits, more of a sigh than a word. Right now, the landlady and her daughters are asleep, and he is sitting in his sparse parlour on this winter night watching a candle burn. It's so cold inside that he's wearing the fur coat his family sent him to help him survive in faraway Saxony. His family home is further in the north, but Saxony tends to be colder. The candles also come from home, directly from his parents' house in Greifswald, where his brother and father make them in their small soap-and-candle workshop behind the cathedral. His father had wanted Caspar David to learn this craft, too, but he was too clumsy and kept burning his fingers. Now, the limbs of the women he draws look rather candle-like. A family tradition.

On this gloomy Dresden winter evening, Friedrich picks up the etching needle and scratches the first fine lines onto a metal plate. He starts with trees, of course: large limes in full splendour – he's good at that. Ruins in front of them, he's not bad at that, either: he's a Romantic, after all. But then he sketches a crouching woman and a man in a hat leaning awkwardly against a pillar. His whole figure is too long. You can clearly see that the artist had a lot of trouble drawing them, and they, too, seem to be in some kind of trouble – however, its nature cannot be clearly deduced from the etching. Only the title explains the situation: "Man and Woman Before the Remains of Their Burnt-Down House" is what Friedrich calls this disturbing artwork. The tragedy must have happened a while ago: there is no smoke or fire in the picture. In fact, the remains of the house look like an ancient ruin, not like a home freshly destroyed. "Man and Woman Before the Remains of

Their Burnt-Down House” – why pick such a depressing topic? Still, he seems surprised that nobody wants to buy the etching...

A few years later, he works on another burnt-down house. He just can't help himself, it seems. This time, he paints in oil, and the fire does actually make an appearance. Smoke, too. It drifts across the painting, rendering it dark and foreboding. Unfortunately, the fire is happening in the night, and you can hardly see the apocalyptic landscape. A charred roof truss is smouldering away. In front, some dark, scraggly trees, dimly lit by the fire. Above it, a church, intact. No people this time: Friedrich appears to have realised that, at this stage of his career, human protagonists do not improve his work. Still, the painting is somewhat strange, and not in a good way. Something is missing. It has no magic. It has no sky.

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One hundred years later, on 10 October 1901, Caspar David Friedrich's family home at Lange Straße 28 in Greifswald burns down in the afternoon twilight. Friedrich's 1802 etching comes alive: now, the "Man and Woman Before the Remains of Their Burnt-Down House" are the grandson of Friedrich's brother, Adolph Wilhelm Langguth, and his wife Therese. The fire starts at around five in the afternoon in the old soap-and-candles workshop in the front building in a vat of cooking wax, then reaches a petrol container, which immediately explodes. From there, "aided by the many flammable substances present", as The Greifswalder Tageblatt puts it, the fire spreads to the stairwell and the upper floors. The local newspaper keeps genteel silence about which flammable substances exactly are involved. By the time the first fire engines arrive via the market square, the rear part of the house is in flames. Dozens of firefighters keep spraying water onto the burning building from eight hoses. The sky over Greifswald lights up, a bright red glow around the black clouds. The heavy smoke makes it impossible for the firefighters to get into the narrow building; all they can do is try and extinguish the

fire from the outside – without much success. The front building burns down completely, and the brigade is now busy protecting the neighbouring houses. Indeed it manages to prevent the fire from spreading further into the narrow alleyways and from reaching the nearby cathedral. The whole scene now looks very much like Friedrich's etching: in front, the charred remains of the roof truss; in the back, a church in its old indestructible splendour.

Three hours later, the fire engines leave, having done all they could. The whole town smells of smoke and soot; steam is rising from the remains of the house. The police had to clear the scene of the accident: a bystander and his adolescent son were complaining and shouting, demanding a better view of the fire. According to *The Greifswalder Tageblatt*, their personal details were recorded.

What the newspaper fails to mention is that among the "combustible materials" on the upper floor of the rear building were nine paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, old family heirlooms. The silence on the matter is not surprising: by 1901, the artist has been quite forgotten in Germany; hardly any public museum possesses a painting, and even his own family here in Pomerania regards him as the quirky, somewhat artsy ancestor who had once fled from the Hanseatic city to Saxony because he'd been too clumsy to make soap and candles.

Only Alfred Lichtwark, the director of the Kunsthalle museum in Hamburg, believes the works by this black sheep to be important and unique. He had been to Greifswald once before to admire them; as he now visits the descendants for a second time in 1902 in order to acquire some works for the Kunsthalle, he is deeply shocked: "Some of Friedrich's paintings, fortunately not the best ones, have been burnt since I saw them in the autumn. I was looking for the house in Lange Straße and discovered a new building rising in its place. The owner took me to the attic, where the ruins of the painting were stored. There was nothing left to save. It was a moving sight. The frames and canvasses were untouched, only the layer of paint itself hadn't been able to withstand the heat." The fire left the nine paintings

covered in blisters and charred with soot; they look like a lunar landscape, dark grey, covered in craters of burst paint. These had been very special, intimate works: two portraits of the artist's wife Caroline, one in the stairway, another with a candlestick in her hand; a painting of the Stargarder Tor gate in Neubrandenburg, his mother's hometown, and one of the dark green gorge called Uttewalder Grund near Dresden, where Friedrich once hid for six days as Napoleon's troops approached. There is also a landscape from Harz and one from Rügen, a ship near the Greifswald shore and the ruins of the Eldena Abbey with its mighty oaks, which Friedrich loved so much. Nine paintings making up an autobiography. Incidentally, the only one that could not be salvaged at all was a large self-portrait. Caspar David Friedrich's depiction of himself burned down completely in his family home.

Spurred on by Lichtwark's interest, hoping to bring back the splendour of the scorched paintings, the family looks for a solution. The one it finds is riddled with Adolfs – the paintings' current owner, Adolph Langguth, the grandson of Friedrich's brother Adolf Friedrich, contacts his relative Friedrich Adolph Gustav Pflugradt, the grandson of Caspar David Friedrich's sister Dorothea . His first name and his being part of the family are not the only things that qualify Pflugradt as a restaurateur: he also dabbles in painting. Thus, he receives the nine ruined works, cleans them and cheerfully paints them over according to his heart's desire, pressing in the blisters with his brush so that his new bright colours fill the holes. Which was worse for the paintings, the fire or Pflugradt's brush, remains an open question. But at least these long-suffering works survive the First World War without any new damage at Lange Strasse 28. Their next owner, another great-grandson of the painter's sister, then goes bankrupt, not without placing an advert in the *Weltkunst* magazine: "Caspar David Friedrich paintings for sale". In vain; nobody shows the faintest interest.

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Somehow, one of the paintings from the burnt-down house in Greifswald, the gloomy "Uttewalder Grund", finds its way to Berlin. It ends up with Wolfgang Gurlitt, a dazzling art dealer, himself often at the brink of bankruptcy, a man about town whose love affairs live up to the image of the golden twenties.

Indiscriminately charming like a puppy, Gurlitt shares a happy life with his ex-wife, his ex-sister-in-law who is also very fond of him, his new wife, their daughters and his great new love Lilly Agoston.

Quite an accomplishment.

Gurlitt's ladies live in changing combination in two flats in West Berlin, between which he shuttles. When his lifestyle becomes too lavish and his creditors sue him, he tries to break even by opening an erotic publishing house, printing depictions of his some-time lover Anita Berber – but this only creates new lawsuits: the distribution of lewd writing is illegal. In 1932, Gurlitt has to declare bankruptcy after all. Meanwhile, in his gallery in Potsdamer Strasse, the badly worn Friedrich landscape, "Uttewalder Grund", has been hanging on the wall for years, ignoring all the ups and downs of life. Nobody wants to buy it, though. Only a fifth of the painting, at best, is by the master's hand; the rest – the dark browns and greens of the Saxon ravine – are the work of Friedrich's descendant Pflugradt and various later restorers filling the burst blisters with colour until all the magic was erased.

Still, Gurlitt guards this painting like the apple of his eye. When he is forced to leave Germany (his grandmother is Jewish), he takes it along to Austria, hiding it in a suitcase between his shirts. Thus, he saves it from a second, final death by incineration: his Berlin flat is destined to burn out after a bombardment in the night of 22 to 23 November 1943.

Luckily, Gurlitt manages to move his entire harem, his daughters and his most valuable paintings to the town of Bad Aussee in good time – as it happens, he settles just a few hundred metres from the salt mines where Hitler stores the

most valuable paintings looted from all over Europe for his planned “Führer Museum”: The Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck, works by Leonardo, Michelangelo and Rembrandt... They all return to their original locations after the war. The charred and mis-restored Friedrich, on the other hand, remains in Gurlitt’s house in Bad Aussee. Gurlitt, a man of great skill and luck, manages to navigate around all the cliffs of life, surviving the Nazi era undamaged and nearly, though not quite, untainted. After the fall of the Reich, he gets right back into the game as director of a newly founded museum in Linz, all the while proceeding with his private art business. In a daring coup, he uses 1.6 million marks of the museum’s money to acquire his own art collection. In the end, he thus sells the burnt, seemingly unsaleable Friedrich to himself for a handsome price: the state pays, and he collects.

Again, quite the feat.

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When Caspar David Friedrich thinks of his childhood and family, he smells smoke and sees blazing fires: his mother’s parents, the Bechlys from Neubrandenburg, were blacksmiths, and from his earliest childhood, little Caspar David marvelled at the embers that melted the metal of horseshoes and steel fittings.

When, as a young boy, he is asked to draw a Greek deity from Preissler’s drawing book given to him by his teacher Quistorp, he naturally chooses Hephaestus, the god of fire, whom he makes smile with pleasure. In his childhood home at Lange Straße 28 in Greifswald, a fire burns every day under the large vat of tallow: his strict father and his associates boil animal remains into soap. Caspar David much prefers the smell from the other cauldron, where wax is kept liquid so that his father and brothers can make candles from it.



Later, when travelling and feeling nostalgic after days of walking through the countryside, he'd pull a home-made candle from his rucksack and smell it. This would always make him feel a little better.

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After Walt Disney travels from Baden-Baden to Munich on 7 July 1935, he and his wife move into the Grand Continental Hotel for a few days. Disney had come to the Third Reich to witness one of his animal inventions on a Bavarian screen as part of the official short film programme entitled *Die lustige Palette – Im Reiche der Micky Maus* ("The funny palette – in the Micky Mouse realm"). Apparently, the Nazis were prepared to tolerate another Reich at the level of mice, if not men. Indeed, Hitler was an explicit friend of Walt Disney productions. After the film screening, the gallant, suave American with his narrow moustache and his pleasant Californian complexion is shown around Munich. He visits two bookshops, the "Christian Kaiser" in the town hall and "Hugendubel" at the Marienplatz – and, to the sellers' delight, buys no fewer than 149 illustrated books on this one day. His plan is to bring the European art of drawing and painting to his studio in Hollywood, to use the ideas of Ludwig Richter, the style of the *Simplicissimus* magazine and the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich to inspire the young illustrators in his ever-expanding dream factory. The books he ships to America range from Georg Jacob Wolf's *German Painter-Poets* to *The German Forest and its Birds*.

Three years later, in the summer of 1938, Disney and Thomas Mann are simultaneously awarded honorary doctorates at Harvard. It seems that at the festive dinner afterwards, Dr honoris causa Thomas Mann mentions a certain book by the Austro-Hungarian writer Felix Salten to Dr honoris causa Walt Disney, who is seated next to him. The book narrates the adventures of a deer called Bambi: isn't that something for an animated film?

Disney gets hold of the story, reads it and is enamoured. At this point, he pulls the books he'd bought in Germany from the company's library shelves and gives them to the illustrators so that they can work in the spirit of German Romanticism. He even brings two real fawns into the studio to model for his illustrators: a male and a female, a Bambi and a Feline. Their motions are captured true to life. In the animation, just like in the book, it is a fire that sets everything in motion: hunters light a campfire, Bambi catches a whiff of the smoke – and soon, the flying sparks set the whole forest ablaze.

When little Bambi is hopping through the large spruce forests and across hazy meadows, the landscape is very close to Friedrich's "Morning Mist in the Mountains". When the fawn is fleeing from the dogs, he is actually fleeing right into Friedrich's "Rocky Gorge": the boulders and tree trunks are modelled on this painting with great precision. And when the forest is ablaze and everything lights up red, Bambi is looking up into a Caspar David Friedrich sky. It is the young Chinese-American artist Tyrus Wong who combines the Asian painting tradition with German Romanticism for the nature scenes in Bambi. He'll go on to leave the Disney studio in favour of Warner Bros. where he becomes, among other things, the storyboard artist for *Rebel Without a Cause* – a film whose title has been translated into German as "For They Don't Know What They Are Doing."

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