

Lulu Salto Stephensen: Thorvaldsen and the Invisible Landscape

Thorvaldsen's drawings contain many outdoor sketches. Landscapes and anonymous architecture are sketched in like exercises in volumes, which are not thereafter incorporated in the plastic works but remain as a suggestive frame surrounding the figures. The concept of "the invisible landscape" in Thorvaldsen's plastic figure compositions may be described as art by way of subtraction: the landscape is not depicted in its topographical totality, but the viewer is enabled with the help of symbols to place an imagined landscape around the figure. The gardens composing Thorvaldsen's immediate environment have undoubtedly helped to form the symbols that were to strike the scenic note. By making the landscape invisible, he left in his works a void to be filled in by the observer himself. With the

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period's strongly developed feeling for nature, the observer automatically built a scenic dimension into the work of art. This feeling for nature had a romantic as well as a scientific aspect, and reflected that time's search for a harmonious world picture – a search that combined the scientific working method with the artistic one. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale "The Bell" from 1845 symbolizes the artists Thorvaldsen and Andersen and the scientist H. C. Ørsted in their common search for truth by way of studies from nature.