



Carl Gustav Carus (Leipzig 1789 - Dresden 1869)

A View of the Sky from a Prison Window

Circa: MDCCCXXIII (1823)

With cinematic clarity, *A View from a Prison Window* conveys a desire to escape earthly confinement. Painted in Dresden in 1823, it is an important addition to the oeuvre of Carl Gustav Carus and German Romantic painting.

The abstract grid and poetic imagery are close in spirit to the works of Caspar David Friedrich, the genius of Romantic art in Dresden. Friedrich introduced the motif of a 'Window Picture' in his 1805-6 drawings, *Views from the Artist's Studio*, (Belvedere, Vienna) and in his 1822 painting, *Woman at the Window*, (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin). From 1817 to 1827 the two artists were particularly close, living nearby to one another on the banks of the Elbe. Carus' evening landscapes and winter views of monasteries and cemeteries under the snow have been mistaken for those of the older artist. Other artists in their circle include the Norwegian Johan Christian Dahl, Georg Friedrich Kersting and Ernst Ferdinand Oehme.

Here, wisps of white clouds diagonally traverse the blue sky seen through iron bars that support a spider's web ready to entrap its prey. Besides the chained bolt in the lower right, the artist paints his name and the date as if etched in stone.

Carus was active and successful in several fields. Trained as a doctor in Leipzig, he moved to Dresden in 1814 when offered the directorship of the Royal Academy of Surgery and Medicine, along with a professorship in gynecology. A naturalist and philosopher, Carus' book *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting*, written between 1815-24 and published in 1831, included an introduction by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Carus corresponded with Alexander von Humboldt, the leading naturalist of the day, and accompanied Prince Friedrich August of Saxony to Naples in 1828. Drawings and paintings by Carus record his 1819 travels to Rügen in Northern Germany, and through Switzerland in 1821.

The yearning for spiritual liberation is a defining element of German Romanticism. In this view behind bars, beauty and freedom are delicately offered and cruelly denied.