

Anton von Werner, *The Opening of the Reichstag in the White Room of the Berlin Palace by Wilhelm II on 25. June 1888* (1893)

Abstract

As with Anton von Werner's three renderings of the Kaiser Proclamation of January 18, 1871, this large-scale painting—it is 3.9 by 6.4 meters in size (12 ft. 8³/₄ in. x 21 ft. ³/₄ in.)—has an interesting provenance. The event itself was orchestrated by the young Kaiser Wilhelm II to show that the recent deaths of his grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm I (in March 1888) and his father, Kaiser Friedrich III (in June 1888) had in no way compromised the stability and power of the German Empire [*Reich*]. Wilhelm II is shown in the red mantle of the Order of the Black Eagle. The second and third most important monarchs in Germany are pictured to the left of the throne: the Prince Regent of Bavaria and the King of Saxony, as are the lord mayors of the three Hansa cities Lübeck, Hamburg, and Bremen. Other royal princes and dignitaries can be seen in the foreground to the right of the throne. Wilhelm II's mother, Kaiserin Victoria, shown here in mourning dress, stands behind him, as does his eldest son, Crown Prince Wilhelm. In the left half of the canvas, numerous Reichstag deputies have assembled to pay eager homage to their new monarch. Notable, however, is the absence of the Social Democrats and the deputies representing Alsace and Lorraine, all of whom have stayed away in protest.

Although Werner executed a preliminary study for the painting in 1888, he would not complete the final version until 1893. The changes that Werner made to the original study between 1888 and 1893—changes requested by the Kaiser himself—are extremely telling. Dramatic events had unfolded in this five-year period—the most significant of which was Bismarck's dismissal from office by Wilhelm II in March 1890. In the final version of the canvas, Werner moved the former chancellor further away from the diplomats and other dignitaries on the right and closer to the Reichstag deputies on the left. He also rendered Bismarck distinctly stooped with age. Unlike Werner's depiction of January 18, 1871, it was not necessary to change the color of Bismarck's white Cuirassier uniform. A few years later, when a black-and-white woodcut of this giant canvas was executed by A. von Baudouin and published in the journal *Moderne Kunst* (1896), one of the artist's intentions was transparent: a three-part foldout was necessary to make the politicians and courtiers as recognizable as possible, and an accompanying identification list was provided.

Source



Source: The Opening of the Reichstag in the White Room of the Berlin Palace by Wilhelm II on 25. June 1888. Photogravure based on a painting by Anton von Werner (c. 1895). Original: Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Schloß Sanssouci, Potsdam. bpk-Bildagentur, image number 00101102. For rights inquiries, please contact Art Resource at requests@artres.com (North America) or bpk-Bildagentur at kontakt@bpk-bildagentur.de (for all other countries).

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