

In a Berlin Living Room (1816)

Abstract

In early nineteenth-century Germany, the tradition of classical antiquity and humanistic learning had a powerful hold on the collective imagination of the educated bourgeoisie. During the Enlightenment, classical ideals had been propounded by the influential scholar [Johann Joachim Winckelmann](#) (1717–1768), among others. Later, these same ideals were advanced by [Wilhelm von Humboldt](#) (1767–1835), the founder of the modern German university. Humboldt advocated a universal education based upon a thorough knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity, especially classical literature. In the drawing below, the bourgeois occupants of a Berlin living room pursue several activities associated with “classical” culture: namely, reading, conversing, and playing music. Still, the clearest testimony to classicism’s influence is the art on display in this home. Two portrait busts mounted on highly ornamental bases and a reproduction of an antique statue assume prominent roles within an otherwise spare Biedermeier interior. Watercolor and pen-and-ink drawing by Carl Friedrich Zimmermann (1796–1820), 1816.

Source



Source: Original: Bremen, Kunsthalle

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