

5th of August – 14th of November 2021

Exhibition on The Cornice/ Das Gesims

In architecture, the cornice is an element that hides in plain sight. Omnipresent as the more or less elaborate junction of roof and wall, or wall and ceiling, the cornice seems to have attracted far less attention from architects, critics or theoreticians than, for instance, columns or the architectural orders. Still, closer scrutiny suggests otherwise. The cornice has incurred the wrath of modernists at the beginning of the 20th century; it has been identified as the most expressive part of architecture, and drawn attention to itself in drawings, etchings and works of art. Hence, a history of the cornice can be told as a key part of architecture. But there are also histories that emerge when we use the cornice to provide an oblique perspective on architecture.

On account of its ubiquity, the cornice does carry several layers of meaning: as an element defined by, and defining building regulations; as the solution to the technical problem of joining wall and roof; and as a site to expression of social aspirations or distinction. As the visual limit of a construction, the cornice is as much about the individual building, as it is about the city or the landscape. As an ornament applied to buildings, it involves matters of taste and aesthetics as much as of craft and industrial production. Finally, as a complex three-dimensional object, it raises questions of representation and communication.

It comes as no surprise, that cornices are often included in paintings, drawings and prints as soon as buildings or ruins are depicted. Therefore, the exhibition will also make the representation of this three-dimensional object in two-dimensional works of art on paper a topic. How do cornices form part of image structures and to what extent do the conventions of image viewing matter? When is a symbolic content emerging?

The exhibition will bring together a unique selection of drawings, etchings and objects in order to tell the history of the cornice, and unfold the various aspects of architecture, urbanism and art it points to.

A collaboration between:

Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, Dr Linda Schädler and

Chair of the History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zürich, Prof. Dr. Maarten Delbeke

With loans from:

GTA Archive, ETH Bibliothek, E-RARA, Niall Hobhouse/Drawing Matter, CCA,

Kupferstichkabinett Berlin, TU Berlin, Art Institute Chicago, Landesmuseum Zürich,

Rietberg Museum, Stiftung Bibliothek Werner Oehslin

