

Schwules Museum*

Press Release | Exhibition

Winckelmann – The Divine Sex

An exhibition commemorating the 300th birthday of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). Curated by Dr. Wolfgang Cortjaens.

June 16th – October 09th 2017. Opening on June 15th at 7 pm.



Johann Joachim Winckelmann (born in Stendal/Germany 1717, killed in Triest/Italy 1768) is considered the founder of modern archaeology and art history. His multivolume work, *History of Ancient Art* (1764), was an international bestseller and translated into several languages. Today it is still regarded as the basis and standard work of art history. Although he came from a poor background, his scholarly journey led him to Halle, Jena, Dresden, and onward to Italy. It was there that he defined his new 'Canon of Beauty' under the influence of the many artistic monuments and sculptures of Greek and Roman antiquity. This set the standard for all future discussion of these works.

Almost as influential as the books he produced was the author himself, clouded in mystery. His thinly veiled homosexuality, which has been mentioned by

contemporaries such as Casanova, Herder, and Goethe, as well as the strange circumstances of his assassination in 1768, have always been discreetly downplayed by recent (heterosexual) art historians. That a homosexual man could redefine the 'canon of beauty' in art history for generations to come, while at the same time developing techniques of camouflaging gay desire in his writings about art, is somewhat ironic. This is the reason why the Schwules Museum* has decided to put on a memorial exhibition about the life, works and fame of Winckelmann in commemoration of his 300th birthday.

The exhibition in the Schwules Museum* is ambiguously entitled *Winckelmann – The Divine Sex*. Using over 100 sculptures and casts, paintings, drawings, engravings and prints from the 18th and 19th century, we will try to reconstruct Winckelmann's discourse on the

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'Canon of Beauty.' In doing so, we want to examine how Winckelmann's homoerotic desires informed his artistic views.

Another aspect of the exhibition concerns gay history in general: 18th century Italy was a famed destination for homosexual travelers and art collectors. How did Winckelmann move around in Italy, whom did he encounter there, and how was gay life in Italy different from Northern Europe?

For this project, we are cooperating with the Klassik Stiftung Weimar. They, in turn, have their own Winckelmann exhibition at the Neues Museum Weimar (*Winckelmann – Moderne Antike*, 7. April to 2. July 2017). Together, we will unite forces in areas of education, public relations, and marketing.

Weimar has supported the Berlin exhibit with high-quality as well. Additional objects come from the Alte Nationalgalerie of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, the German Historical Museum, the Lindenau-Museum Altenburg, as well as from several private collections.

An exhibition catalog is planned which will also give an overview of the many historical objects of the Schwules Museum*, particularly from the Collection Sternweiler.

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Press Preview on June 15th at 11 AM. If you are planning to attend, please notify us under presse@schwulesmuseum.de.