

Handwritten scribbles and faint lines at the bottom right of the page, possibly representing a signature or additional sketch elements.

# 10 Caspar David Friedrich

Greifswald 1774 – 1840 Dresden

“Karlsruher Skizzenbuch”. 1804

Sketchbook with 20 sheets of wove paper (watermark: J Whatman 1801), 33 pages of which with pencil drawings partially washed in sepia. Approx. 18,4 × 11,8 cm (7 1/4 × 4 5/8 in.). Individual pages inscribed and dated by the artist (25<sup>th</sup> April 1804 until 1<sup>st</sup> June 1804). Catalogue raisonné: Grummt 383 as well as 388-392 and 398-412. Paperback with 20 (of at least 29) sheets of wove paper. [3077]

Provenance

Estate of the artist Georg Friedrich Kersting (1785-1847) (thenceforth in family possession)

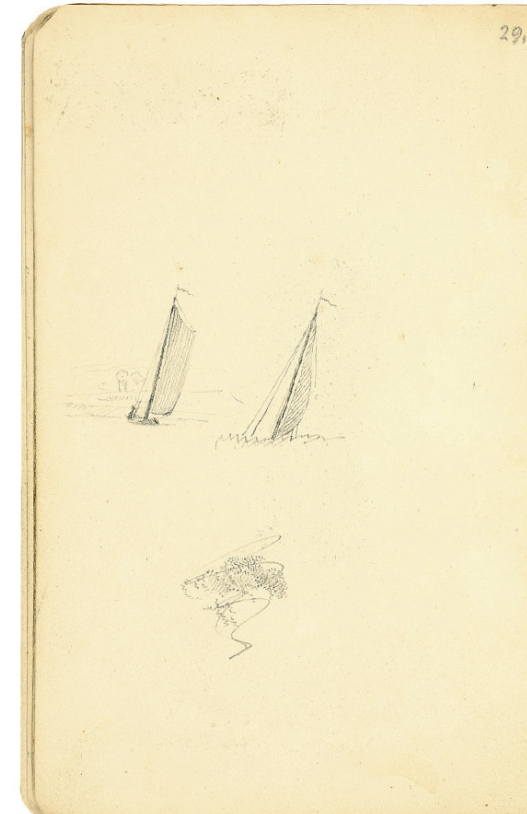
EUR 1,000,000-1,500,000

USD 1,050,000-1,580,000

Literature and illustration

Helmut Börsch-Supan and Karl Wilhelm Jähig: Caspar David Friedrich. Gemälde, Druckgraphik und bildmäßige Zeichnungen. Munich, Prestel-Verlag, 1973, p. 47, note 62

The sketchbook is requested as a loan for the exhibition: Caspar David Friedrich. Wo alles began. Dresden State Art Collections, Kupferstich-Kabinet and Albertinum, 24.8.2024-5.1.2025



Learn more!

27. 18. July 1810. —  
George Kersting



Info Caspar David Fried.  
Georg Kersting 18  
Malerei in Meissen  
d. F. Kersting in d. Kabinett

## Anna Ahrens “... to be what I am”: Caspar David Friedrich’s “Karlsruher Skizzenbuch”

Only a very few German artists have had such a profound and lasting influence on art, to this day, as that great Romantic, Caspar David Friedrich. An uncompromising innovator of German landscape painting, Friedrich played a key role in the dawning of European Romanticism, the harbinger, better yet: the radical manifestation of the paradigm shift that would culminate in Modernism.

Friedrich’s intense sensibility for the landscapes of (Northern) Germany as they looked in real life was based on a systematic study of nature that he would then translate into transcendently metaphoric images. Friedrich is the inventor of the symbolist landscape. His ideations revolve around timeless questions that have preoccupied human beings everywhere as they ponder the purpose that informs both their life and the time after their death, as well as their relationship to nature. Friedrich’s “soul landscapes” speak to our most intimate perceptions – and consistently refer us back to our inner selves.

Drawings record the origins of an artist’s inspiration for a later painting. This holds particularly true for Caspar David Friedrich. Especially for those sketches he created in natural settings. Drawing outside a protected atelier – particularly on solitary walks through the changeable climes of Northern Germany – was a process Friedrich experienced cognitively and contemplatively, but also a palpably physical one, and to which he devoted his full attention. Having selected a natural motif, he was known to look for a spot to sit on. He would pull out a sheet of paper or his sketchbook along with his pencils from the pocket of his travelling coat, and would commune with the natural model he had selected. In these moments, Friedrich surely will have been in close touch with his inner self, both as a man and as an artist: “I have to give myself over to that which surrounds me, to make myself one with my clouds and cliffs, in order to be what I am.” (Caspar David Friedrich 1821 / Hinz 1974, p. 227).

The *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch*, one of only six bound sketchbooks to have survived to the present day, brings us precisely to this juncture, to the very moment of the drawing process in which Friedrich “becomes one” with nature. It is the moment in which his pictures come into being.

From mid-April until early June 1804, Friedrich would put this sketchbook into the pocket of his legendary travelling coat – which he loved enough to wear even while painting inside his studio (Fig. 2) – when he set out on one of his walks through the environs of Dresden, drawing as he went. That the sketchbook has



Fig. 2: Georg Friedrich Kersting. C. D. Friedrich in seinem Atelier. 1811. Oil/canvas. Hamburger Kunsthalle

Fig. 1: Georg Friedrich Kersting. C.D. Friedrich auf der Reise im Riesengebirge. 1810. Watercolour and graphite on paper. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett



Fig. 3: C.D. Friedrich. Hünengrab am Meer. Circa 1806/07. Brush, pencil/paper. Klassik Stiftung Weimar



Fig. 4: C.D. Friedrich. Hünengrab im Schnee. 1807. Oil/canvas. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden



remained so carefully preserved is to the unending credit of his friend and colleague Georg Friedrich Kersting and Kersting's descendants. For it affords us the most intimate insights into the thoughts and imagination of an epochally seminal artist seeking to conceive his images. We recognize the individual motifs that have come to populate his paintings like familiar characters, as well as the motivic groupings that awaken so many associations in our minds because they reach beyond the artist's time and into our own present.

It was in the fall of 1798 that Friedrich first arrived in Dresden at the age of 24, still very much a seeker. He had not yet found a way out of the conventions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, away from the prevailing rationalist focus of Classicism and the Enlightenment, during his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. The first key stimuli for his core artistic ideas came from his encounters with creative young "firebrands" (Neidhardt 1976) like the "concept artist" Philipp Otto Runge – the other leading German Romantic besides Friedrich –, the author Ludwig Tieck or Ludwig Gotthard Kosegarten, a Pomeranian parson dabbling in poetry. But what remained

truly essential for Friedrich was to intensely experience nature and to capture this in his drawings. Between 1798 and 1802, when he made his home in the city by the Elbe, and again from 1806 until 1808, Friedrich often would withdraw into introverted phases. By his precise open-air observation and sketching, he developed a radically innovative visual form all his own based on his subjective perceptions. This would come to shape his entire creative output, but he first perfected it in the medium of drawing. In his first great work, the sepia-ink drawing *Hünengrab am Meer* from 1806/1807 (Fig. 3), we see his symbol-laden visual language almost fully formed. Only now, at the age of 33 years, did he step into the public eye with his very first oil paintings.

*Hünengrab im Schnee* (Fig. 4), an elaboration of the aforementioned sepia drawing, is one of Friedrich's earliest paintings. At its center stand three venerable oaks that have already survived several human lifespans, which are accompanied and mirrored by a group of three saplings in the background to the right. Friedrich lifted at least three of these six trees from the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch*. Thus, the hefty old oak in the left foreground matches the well-known model on p. 9 of the sketchbook (shown here to the right). He used the



Fig. 5: C.D. Friedrich. Abtei im Eichwald. 1809/10. Oil/canvas. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

drawing more than once, doing so prominently in an important work like *Abtei im Eichwald* (Fig. 5) from 1809/10, the counterpart to *Mönch am Meer* (for the oak to the right of the ruins), as well as in the large-scale *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee* from 1817/19 (destroyed in World War II), where the oak again serves as a protagonist in the right foreground. The leftmost sapling in the background to the right of *Hünengrab im Schnee* also matches the folio drawing *Baum* of April 26th, 1804, on p. 7 of the sketchbook (shown here to the right). The rightmost sapling of this same group derives from the folio drawing *Kleiner Baum* of April 25th, 1804, on p. 3 of the sketchbook (shown here to the right).

The *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* was literally a part of Friedrich's entire life, and takes us from his early to his late paintings. He would return to it repeatedly as a source of motifs for his images. Several of its pages can be regarded to have informed *Grosses Gehege bei Dresden* (Fig. 6), for example, a masterwork from 1832: On p. 28 of the sketchbook, we discover the characteristic, rhythmically arrayed tree lines (Fig. on next double page), while the model for the sailing boat can be found on p. 24 (Fig. on next double page). The overall layout for the famous painting, meanwhile, was prepared as early as 1804 on pp. 37 and 38.

The *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* cogently visualizes the key role which the direct impressions that Friedrich recorded on his walks played in his path towards an image. And his studies of nature consistently exhibit the high quality on which such a preparatory function is premised, doing justice to the artist's firm belief "that every object, be it ever so minor, had to be reflected in keeping with the conditions under which it appeared." (Werner Busch, Friedrich 2021, p. 21). This applied not only to plant life, however: it held true also for the features of buildings and the exact rendering of distant silhouettes, sections of landscape views, distant horizons, clouds or birds on the wing. Condensed into outlines, his sketches of nature faithfully convey Friedrich's focused perception and observation of light and shadow and atmospheric effects, just as he had experienced them, while also conveying deeper underlying meanings through his signature symbolic language. It is this forthright and exact reproduction of natural models that forms the warp and woof of Friedrich's understanding of his role as an artist. And it expresses his own deeply felt respect for creation itself, of which he understood himself to be an integral part.



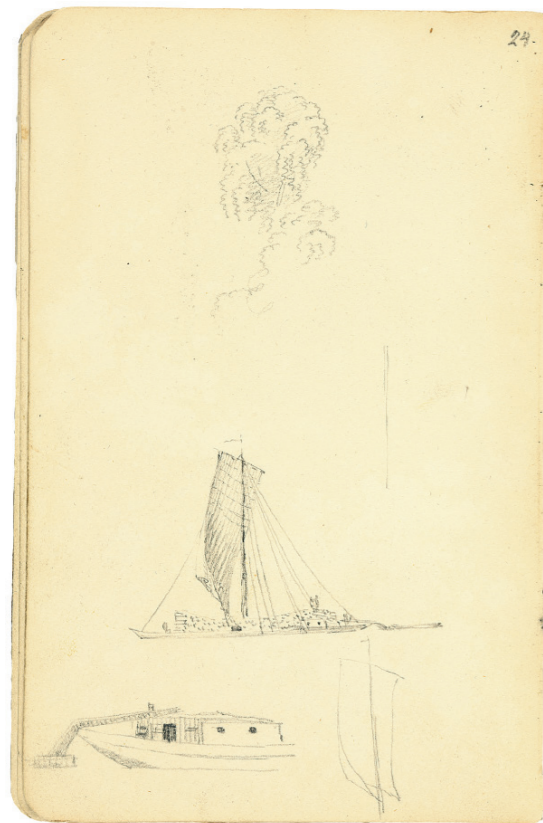
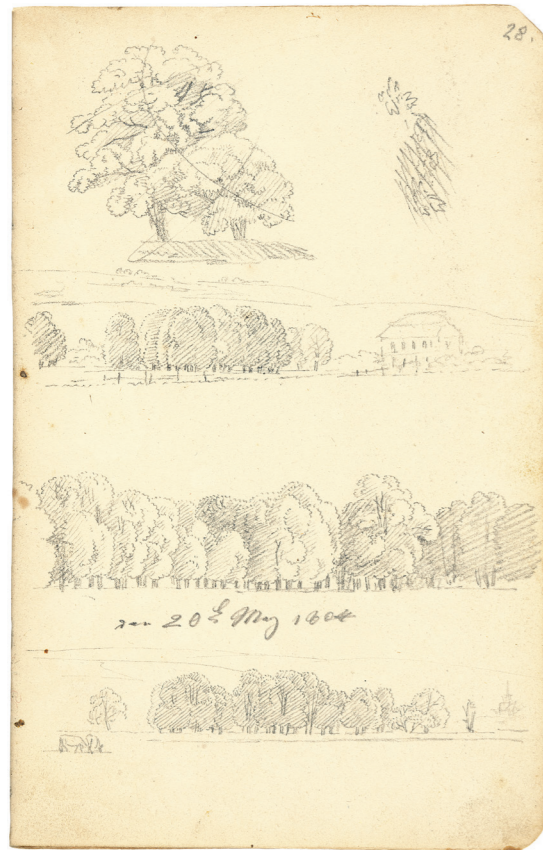


Fig. 6: C.D. Friedrich. Das Große Gehege bei Dresden. 1832.  
Oil/canvas. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

# Christina Grummt A Jewel of German Drawing: Caspar David Friedrich's 1804 "Karlsruher Skizzenbuch"



Fig.1: C.D. Friedrich. Kleiner Baum. 13 April 1804. Pencil/paper. Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung



One spring day in 1804, Caspar David Friedrich opened up his sketchbook, took a brush, and covered three quarters of a page with carefully executed horizontal strokes. He left the upper fourth of the sheet white. As he waited for the brown glaze to dry, he arranged his pencils and turned his attention to a small, double-boughed tree with fine branches standing before him in the landscape that he intended to draw that day. Then he took up a sharpened, soft-lead pencil and began. After completing the study, he made a note for himself on the sheet's bottom left: "Small Tree / April 13th / 1804" (Fig. 1).

An analysis of the paper of *Kleiner Baum*, a drawing now held in Munich, has revealed that it once formed part of the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804, a sketchbook belonging to the estate of Georg Friedrich Kersting. Based on the current state of research, the booklet once comprised 29 folios (G 384–G 412) that can either be documented or at least tentatively identified (allowing for lost pages). This *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804 is one of the twenty sketchbooks which Caspar David Friedrich, one of the most important artists of the German Romantic movement, is currently known to have owned. It is also the oldest of the six bound sketchbooks that still survive (G 422, G 530, G 555, G 722, G 812).

Besides the folio mentioned at the outset, the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804 also contains no fewer than eight pencil drawings grounded in a similar manner (G 383 et seqq.). This is unusual for the artist's early works insofar as the artist generally preferred to use pencil when drafting preparatory sketches (cf. G 327, G 336), which also holds true for the folios of the *Kleines Mannheimer Skizzenbuch* of 1800–1802 (G 240 et seqq.), as well as for the folios of the *Berliner Skizzenbücher I and II* from 1799/1800 (G 100 et seqq. and G 165 et seqq.) That said, the grounded pencil drawings of the 1804 *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* are hardly the first of this type to be produced by Friedrich. Already in the *Kleines Skizzenbuch II* of 1803 (G 348 et seqq.), we find pages grounded in light brown and drawn on with pencil. Still, it seems fair to ask what objective the young draftsman had in mind when he traced his pencil lines onto the glaze.

An answer can be found by examining the remaining pages of the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804, along with other specimens of his drawings. Caspar David Friedrich was one of those artists who discovered their very own aesthetic early on, and who managed to enhance it through continual perfection in the course of their creative lives. This will be demonstrated by the following selected examples.

Take *Kleiner Baum*, dating from April 25th, 1804. It shows that Friedrich worked with pencil tips of varying hardness to highlight the tree shown on the right half of the sheet as the aesthetic cynosure of the image (Fig. left). The artist accomplishes this in two ways: First, the distinctly accented lines make the tree stand out on the sheet; second, light and darkness are distributed in a targeted manner. This approach makes the tree appear closer to the viewer than the other objects shown on the page. The effect is all the more startling, since the tree's positioning is not achieved by locating it in the visual space in keeping with the rules of perspective, but solely through the deft use of line.



Fig. 2: C.D. Friedrich. Landschaftsstudie. 26 May 1804. Pencil, washed/paper. Private collection



Fig. 3: C.D. Friedrich. Mittelgebirgslandschaft mit Brücke und Kapelle. 9 May 1803. Pen, brush/paper. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Friedrich's experimentation with line was to go further, however. One month later (May 26th, 1804), when he came to draw his *Landschaftsstudie* (Fig. 2), he dispensed with a comprehensive grounding in favour of glazing only carefully chosen portions of the natural panorama he was depicting. The innovative landscape study that resulted differed from earlier, comparable studies in a number of other ways that will be addressed below. When *Landschaftsstudie* is juxtaposed with *Mittelgebirgslandschaft mit Brücke und Kapelle*, a drawing now held in Dresden (Fig. 3), two things are particularly striking. For one, we see that the foreground, midground and background of the latter study, which had been created a year earlier, are rendered by transitioning from dark to light. We also find brush-contoured surfaces distributed across the entire sheet. And while internal structural lines executed in pen are visible in the foreground and especially in the midground, the artist has forgone structuring the background in any way. In the *Landschaftsstudie* of May 26th, 1804 (G 407), by contrast, the artist follows a wholly different approach: He dissolves the spatial continuum of the landscape's foreground, midground and background by steering the viewer's gaze past the very bright and, what is more, merely implied foreground, directing it onto the light-brown areas in the mid- and background. What most catches the eye is a strip of landscape in the midground which is accentuated by parallel hatchings and sparse contour lines overlaid in pencil.

We need only look at *Studie eines Waldbaches* (G 627), now privately held, or at *Eingang im Kloster Heilig Kreuz in Meissen* (G 854), currently in Hamburg, to begin to understand the artistic heights to which Friedrich was able to take this drawing technique in his later work. By this time, he was using the pencil as a drafting tool that allowed him to structure surfaces with great aesthetic effect. Thus, the grounded pencil drawings from the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804 can be regarded as an early manifestation of this technique.

It is conceivable that two extraordinary inventions significantly influenced Caspar David Friedrich's draftsmanship. Around 1795, the Parisian inventor Jacques Louis Conté devised a drawing implement made of powdered, purified graphite and liquid clay which he patented that same year as the *Conté crayon*. That this later came to be commonly known as the "lead pencil" was due to a misunderstanding of the actual ingredients involved (Koschatzky 2003, p. 50 et seq.). The other drawing-related discovery was sepia ink, usually credited to the Dresden Professor Jacobus Crescentius Seydelmann, who had begun experimenting with it as early as 1778 in Rome (Koschatzky 2003, p. 142 seq.). Finally, Adrian Zingg, a professor at the Dresden Academy, a virtuosic landscape drawer, may have been an influence within Friedrich's artistic milieu. But the fact remains that Friedrich himself regarded nature as his "best, never-erring guide and teacher."



Fig. 4: C.D. Friedrich. Das Kreuz im Gebirge. Circa 1806/07. Brush, pencil/paper. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett



Fig. 5: C.D. Friedrich. Hünengrab am Meer. Circa 1806/07. Brush, pencil/paper. Klassik Stiftung Weimar

It was in such a phase of searching and trial-and-error experimentation that the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804 came to be. It represents a milestone along the journey that Friedrich would continue to pursue for years to come – exclusively within the realm of draftsmanship, since it was not until 1807/08 that he turned to painting in oil.

Two landscape paintings from 1806/07, *Das Kreuz im Gebirge* (Fig. 4), now in Berlin, and *Hünengrab am Meer* (Fig. 5), now in Weimar, mark the first time Friedrich succeeded in applying his drawing technique so as to master the complex challenges of breaking up the traditional spatial configuration consisting of fore-, mid- and background, and to “assemble” an individually interpreted landscape space from a multiplicity of individual studies.

One aspect becomes readily apparent when considering the importance of the 1804 *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* in the overall oeuvre of Caspar David Friedrich: The trees which Friedrich drew in it over time acquire more and more of the features that eventually typify practically all of his trees, and that could be described as a general depiction of “tree personalities.” The best example is *Eichenstudie* (Fig. right), a study of a leafless oak or, more precisely, the upper half of an oak tree whose living branches grow almost entirely to the left, while its remaining branches are mere stumps. This oak stands out from among the other tree studies in the *Karlsruher Skizzenbuch* of 1804 in that the artist manages to give it a much stronger spatial presence with the most sparing means, namely through an effective distribution of light and shade and accented lines. Caspar David Friedrich was to fall back on this early

tree study no fewer than four times when creating other works: for the oak on the left in his oil painting *Hünengrab im Schnee* (Fig. 7), now in Dresden; for the oak to the right of the ruin in *Abtei im Eichwald*, another oil painting held in Berlin; and for *Klosterfriedhof im Schnee* (Fig. 6), also formerly held in Berlin but since destroyed, in which we recognize the early study in the oak shown in the foreground to the right. In the fourth case, Friedrich used the middle branch and the lower, leftward-growing branch from the 1804 oak study for the sepia drawing *Hünengrab am Meer* (Fig. 5), now in Weimar.

Three of these works number among Caspar David Friedrich’s masterpieces, while the fourth marks the first example of his famous technique of forming composite landscapes. This not only raises the status of the early *Eichenstudie*, it also sheds light on the overall importance which the artist’s sketchbooks held for him during his lifetime.

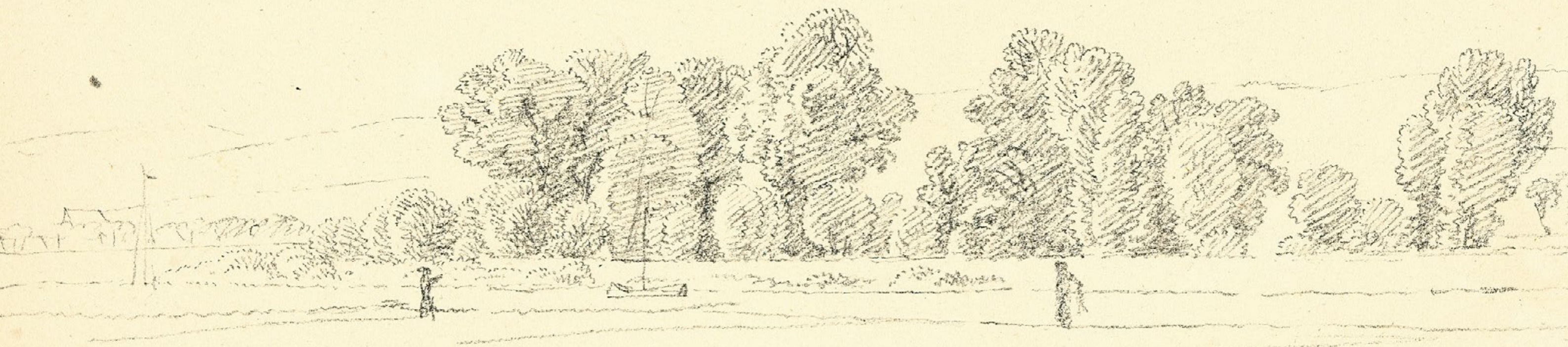


Fig. 6: C.D. Friedrich. Klosterfriedhof im Schnee. 1817. Oil/canvas. Formerly Nationalgalerie, Berlin (lost)



Fig. 7: C.D. Friedrich. Hünengrab im Schnee. 1807. Oil/canvas. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden





Jan 28<sup>th</sup> May 1804