

Views and Impressions of Gdańsk

Gdańsk is a special place: it fascinates its residents and inspires artists. Paintings from the first half of the 20th century convey the city's exceptional ambience.



Official city portrait

Look at the slender towers, brick walls and townhouses reflected in the water.

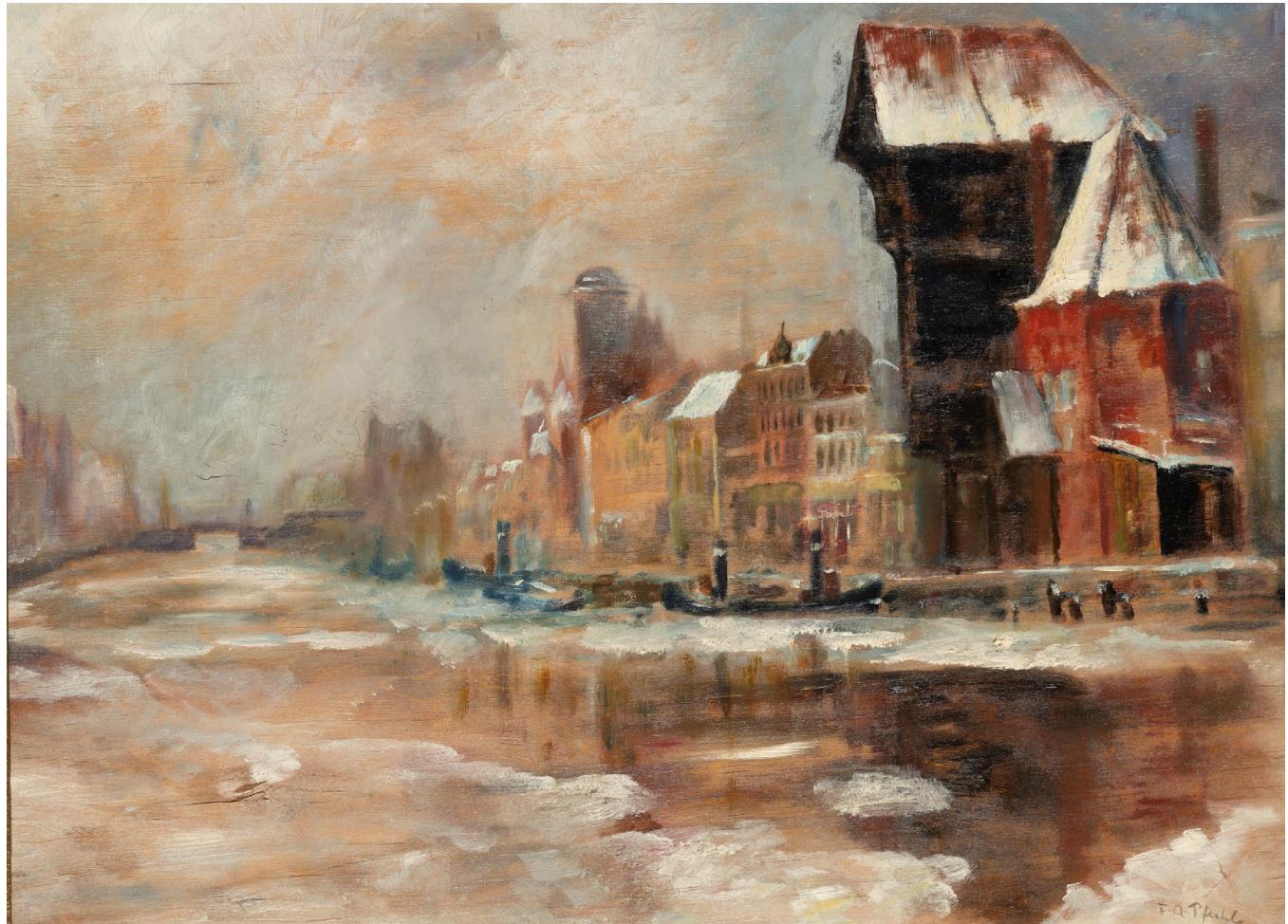
Artists aimed at portraying the unique spirit of Gdańsk, based on historical grandeur and attachment to tradition.

These views of Gdańsk are idealised. Historical buildings, symbols of the city's prosperity, express the residents' ambitions and emotions, as well as their pride of the city's rich past.



Długie Pobrzeże was one of the subjects most favoured by artists portraying Gdańsk. They strived to present the historical character of the city and its role as a port.

The author of this winter view, Fritz August Pfuhle, was a professor at Gdańsk's technical university. As the creator of many depictions of the city, portraits of important citizens of Gdańsk and the interior design of public buildings, he co-created the city's official image.



Local impressions

The people of Gdańsk widely accepted the fashion for Impressionism, a new trend in the art of the late 19th century.

It evoked the mood of the moment with the play of colour and light. Artists learned its rules during studies away from Gdańsk, where there was no school of art.

A variation of this style was German Impressionism. It was more subdued in form and conventional. The works of Alfred Scherres are an example of this style.



Take a close look at this view of sailing ships in port on a winter afternoon. Look at the texture and form of the colourful spots on the canvas. If you move away from the painting, the colours and shapes will combine into a view of a fleeting moment.

In this work by Arthur Bendrat you can find many features of Impressionism: the use of points and spots, a bright colour palette, contrast of light and shade and most of all a subject painted in the open air.



Townspeople's aspirations

The people of Gdańsk expressed their fondness of the city by decorating the interiors of their houses with views of their home town. They often chose well-known views, but also nooks known only to a few. Paintings were regarded as a status symbol as well.

This panorama of Długie Pobrzeże on a lazy summer afternoon was depicted from the unusual perspective of Angielska Grobla street. The figures in this painting are also a rarity. Such views were usually focused on the city and its atmosphere.



This is one of Gdańsk's most famous townhouses: the Speimann house, once owned by the mayor of the city. It is called the Golden Townhouse because of its richly decorated facade. The author of the painting, Willibald Werner, depicted it in a charming and intimate manner.

What do you see? An affluent resident's townhouse? Or maybe an inviting family home, decorated with flowers? Local artists celebrated both the grandeur and the homely feel of their city.



Emotional landscapes

In March of 1945, the historical centre of Gdańsk was destroyed due to warfare.

Paintings depicting views of the city became documentation of buildings that no longer existed. Most of the artists active before the war left Gdańsk.

Erich Scholtis was one of the few artists who decided to stay in Gdańsk. He is the author of valuable drawings documenting the destruction of the city. Notice how the stark drawing contrasts with the opulent gaudiness of pre-war depictions of Gdańsk's historical buildings.



Authors (un)known

Among authors of these views were both educated specialists and amateurs.

The painting method in this work suggests its author was unskilled. We know nothing more about them. They might have been interested in local art, as their work is a copy of an etching by Arthur Bendrat.

This work was donated to the Museum of Gdańsk by a resident of the city whose parents came here in 1945. They were lodged at the home of a German family, who left the city soon afterwards. Before leaving, they gave the painting to the new residents of their home and city.



Exhibition

The presentation is based on the exhibition titled "In a city mood. Views and impressions of pre-war Gdańsk", opened in May 2022 at the Museum of Gdańsk - Artus Court Department.



Illustrations in the presentation are a selection of depictions of Gdańsk and its surroundings from the years 1900-1945 presented at the "In a city mood. Views and impressions of pre-war Gdańsk" exhibition. All of the exhibited works are part of the collections of the Museum of Gdańsk.

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