

## DETRITUS & ART / A personal point of view on Environment and Art by Rainer Stegmann

*Artists seldom provide an interpretation of their own work; they leave this to the observer. Each of us will have his/her own individual view of a specific piece of art, seeing different contents and experiencing a range of own feelings and emotions. Bearing this in mind, I created this page where you will find regularly selected masterpieces from different epochs and I express my thoughts on what the work conveys to me personally. My interpretation will refer specifically to the theme "Environment". Any comments or suggestions regarding this column should be addressed to [stegmann@tuhh.de](mailto:stegmann@tuhh.de)*



**CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH / The Wanderer above the clouds -**  
1817, Kunsthalle (Art Hall) Hamburg, Germany.

What does a well-dressed man with a walking stick alone on a ledge above a sea of fog? The way he stands there gives me the impression of a self-confident, well-situated, successful person. He is looking into the distance. We see nature around with rocks passing through the fog and in the distance gentle mountains. The sky above is lightly clouded and the sun slightly illuminates the scene discretely from the side.

Firstly I brought the person in connection with the anthropocene, the age of humans dominating nature. The way he positioned himself may give the impression that he

looks over "his" territory, all mine in the sense "I am lord of nature".

But thinking more about this masterpiece perhaps there may be things that we do not see on this piece of art are of importance: around 1800 cities grew quite rapidly, people lived closely together with many animals around, there was a lot of noise and dust. Since there was no or only poor waste and sewage collection and no adequate treatment, most of the excrements and rubbish ended up on the streets or areas near the houses. Many of the streets were not paved which - dependent on the weather - created mud and dust. In some cities once a week people - often prisoners and prostitutes - collected waste and swept the dirt. But even then cities were very dirty and stinky and diseases arose inside the city walls.

Maybe this elegant person escaped from this unpleasant atmosphere for a while and hiked in the late morning to this beautiful place with a magnificent view in order to enjoy nature, silence and clean air. The fog made his unhealthy city invisible. Perhaps he wanted to gain new power for his life down in the city. He is not sitting down, which means he is only on a short visit to this place, but he took a long way for enjoying this moment.

We have to a certain extent a similar situation today: in big cities air is often highly polluted, traffic produces a lot of noise and hectic, contaminated sites cover significant areas, a lot of trees had to give way for new buildings. For restoration often an "artificial nature" is created.

This situation encourages many people to enjoy their holidays in nature. But increasing amounts of people visit these natural areas and we have to pay attention not losing them...

*Next issue: I will present another masterpiece from the Hamburg Art Hall: a painting by Karl Kluth "Coast in North Schleswig", which is located in Northern Germany.*

*He was a German artist who lived from 1898 until 1972 mainly in Hamburg. He was member of the "Hamburger Session" a group of artists engaging for new impulses and worked for a while together with Edvard Munch in Norway. Later he became Professor at the Hamburg Art School.*