



Kunstbibliothek
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Tchoban Foundation
Museum für
Architekturzeichnung

Press Release

Berlin, 29 January 2020

Jean-François Thomas de Thomon

Drawings from the collection of the Kunstbibliothek - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Tchoban Foundation. Museum of Architectural Drawing, Berlin

Christinenstrasse 18a, 10119 Berlin

Exhibition opening: 6 March 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Press tour: 6 March 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

Exhibition duration: 7 March – 7 June 2020

Opening times: Mon - Fri: 2:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m., Sat - Sun: 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Admission: 5 euros; reduced: 3 euros

Jean-François Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813) is one of the best-known French architects of neoclassicism. Blessed with drawing talent and endowed with the requisite ambition, he left turbulent revolutionary France for distant Russia and commenced a successful career in its capital city of St Petersburg, where he created his most celebrated works. Thomon possessed the social skills and ability to present himself required to gain access to the high aristocratic circles of Russia, including the court of the tsar, and thus to important and well-paid commissions: his most famous projects include the Big Stone Theatre (Bolshoi Theatre) and the design of the eastern tip of Vasilyevsky Island with the Stock Exchange. Founded in 1703, St Petersburg was being intensively developed and was meant both to be the 'window to Europe' and to look 'European' in its architectural design, which is why numerous foreign architects such as Domenico Trezzini, Andreas Schlueter, Charles Cameron, Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli, Giacomo Quarenghi and many others were from the start active in



the city on the Neva. At the time that Thomon was working in St Petersburg, the imperial neoclassical style, often referred to in art history as ‘Empire’ and in Russia as ‘Alexandrian Classicism’ (after the reigning emperor Alexander I), had come into vogue in Europe. Since Thomon had studied at the Académie royale d'architecture in Paris and spent several years in Italy studying classical models, he not only had the required qualifications as an architect but was also, with his skills and knowledge of neoclassicism, above all the right man in the right place at the right time. He was given a teaching position at the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg and soon made a name for himself not only as an architect but also as a brilliant draughtsman. It is very likely that the exhibited drawings by Thomon from the Kunstbibliothek's collection were a presentation album assembled by the architect for a nobleman, possibly a member of the tsar's family. It consists in a compilation of representative public buildings, including several military buildings (such as barracks, riding halls and officers' houses), hospitals and the Kazan Cathedral. The exhibition is thus an exquisite selection of drawings of important buildings in St Petersburg, not only by Thomon himself but also by colleagues from his circle such as Giacomo Quarenghi (1744–1817), Andrei Voronikhin (1759–1814) and Luigi Rusca (1758–1822), which Thomon copied, miniaturised and collated. Since some of the plans and drawings by the original draughtsmen are no longer preserved, this album is valuable as an important source of architectural history as well as for its artistic quality.

In addition to Thomas de Thomon's drawings, the exhibition shows works by his important rival, Giacomo Quarenghi, and a work by Philipp Elsson (1793–1867) that is reminiscent of Thomon's design for the St Petersburg Stock Exchange.



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The exhibition is made possible by loans from the Kunstbibliothek - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

The Kunstbibliothek, founded in 1867, is a scholarly institution of the State Museums in Berlin, equipped with an interdisciplinary library and large museum collections on the history of architecture, book and media art, photography, graphic design and fashion. Its Architecture Collection includes drawings, designs, plans, photographs and models from the history of architecture spanning the late Middle Ages to the present. It houses archives and extensive collections of important architects from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and from pioneers of modernism such as Joseph Maria Olbrich, Erich Mendelsohn and Heinrich Tessenow.

Tchoban Foundation. Museum of Architectural Drawing

Founded in 2009 by Sergei Tchoban, a passionate draughtsman and collector of architectural drawings, the Tchoban Foundation and its considerable collection serves as a resource for research into the history and nature of architectural drawing. In addition, an extensive reference library with a focus on architectural drawings offers specialists and interested visitors a place to conduct their studies. The prime goal of the foundation is to bring the imaginative and emotionally charged worlds of architectural drawing in the digital age closer to the general public through exhibitions.



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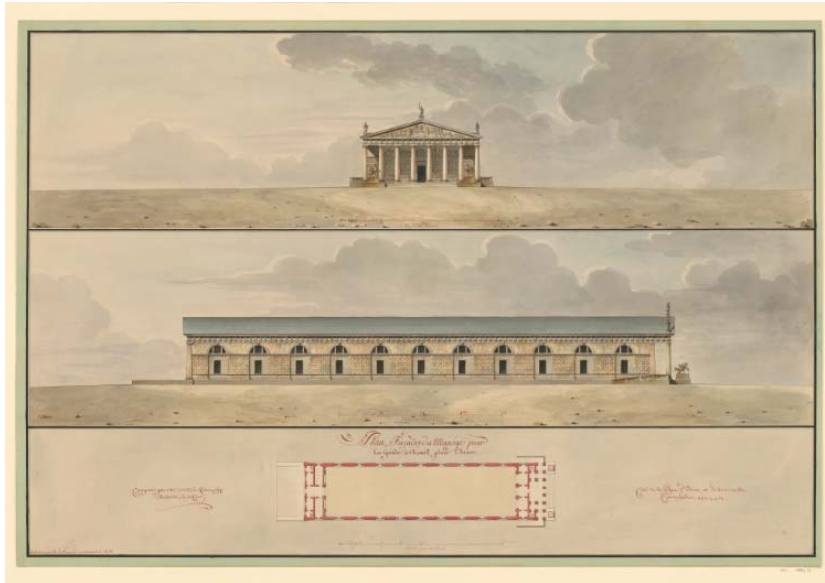


Illustrations



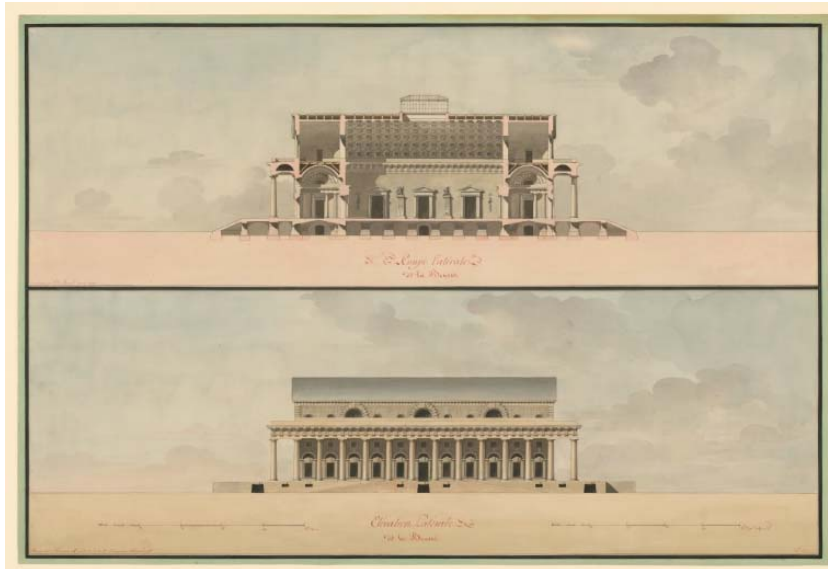
Jean-François Thomas de Thomon (1754–1813)
Andrei N. Voronikhin (1759–1814), architect
Saint-Petersburg, Kazan Cathedral, long section
Ca. 1800
Pen and grey ink, black pencil, coloured render
64,3 × 95,2 cm
Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Hdz. 7888,25

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Jean-François Thomas de Thomon (1754–1813)
Giacomo Quarenghi (1744–1817), architect
Saint-Petersburg, Horseguards' Riding Hall, ground plan, front and side elevations
Ca. 1800
Pen and black ink, black pencil, coloured render
66,0 × 96,6 cm
Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
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Jean-François Thomas de Thomon (1754–1813)
Saint-Petersburg, Stock Exchange, long section and elevation of the side façade
1804
Pen and black ink, black pencil, coloured render
65,5 × 96,2 cm
Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Hdz. 7888,23

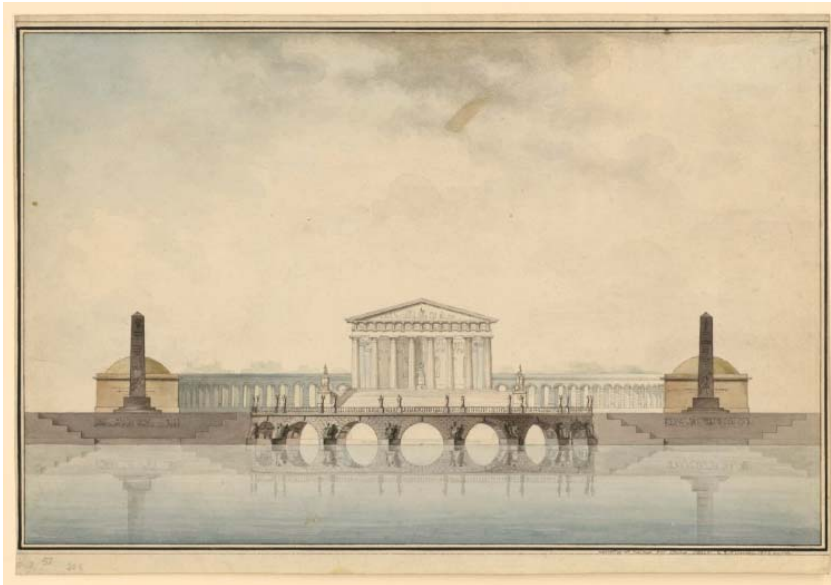
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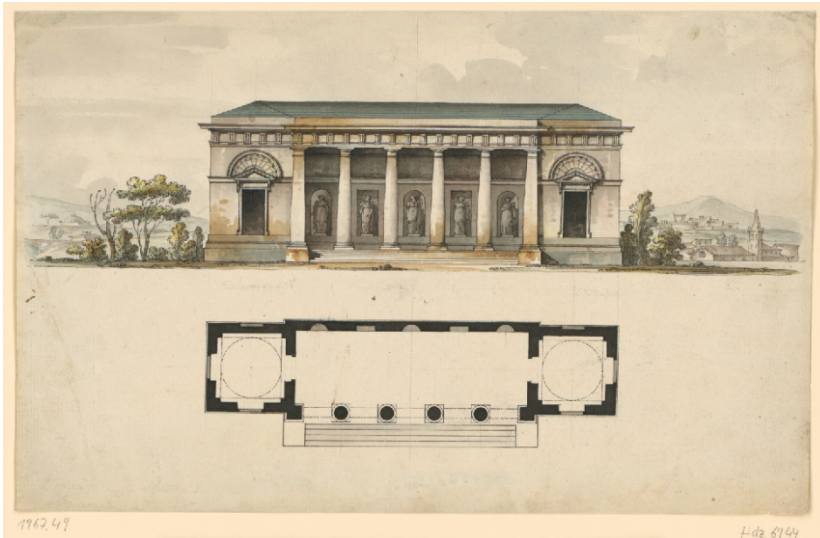


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Philipp Elsson (1793–1867)
Design for a representative building near water
1816
Watercoloured pen and ink drawing
23,2 × 33,9 cm
Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Hdz. 6477

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Giacomo Quarenghi (1744–1817)
Columned pavilion, plan and long elevation
Ca. 1795
Pen and grey ink, black pencil, grey and coloured render
20,3 × 32,2 cm
Kunstbibliothek – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Hdz. 6944

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Foreword

Director of the Kunstbibliothek

The master drawings by the French architect Jean-Francois Thomas, known as Thomas de Thomon (1760-1813), are among the pearls of the Kunstbibliothek's architectural collection. The Kunstbibliothek (Art Library) is both a library and a museum: a huge museum with collections not only about architecture but also on the history of books and media art, design, photography and fashion.

The spectrum of the architecture collection ranges from the Old Masters of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the visionaries of modernity such as Joseph Maria Olbrich, Heinrich Tessenow, Erich Mendelsohn and Fritz Höger. A central role in this panorama of architectural history is played by the holdings on nineteenth century architecture, including drawings by David and Friedrich Gilly, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Friedrich August Stüler and Ludwig Persius. These works document a comprehensive transformation of architecture, which took its beginning with the ideas of the Old Masters and proceeded to radically change the face of architecture and cities all over the world up to the rise of modernism.

Jean-François Thomas de Thomon was an important figure in this transformation. After studies with the architectural visionary and utopian Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in Paris, he enjoyed a brilliant international career, with a long stay in Italy, a stopover in Vienna, and then after 1799 an appointment in Russia at the court of Alexander I. The lucid formal language and geometric elegance of his designs and buildings still look thoroughly modern today. This is why the Kunstbibliothek, founded in 1867 as an innovative educational institution, collected his drawings from the start.



At the very beginning, Thomon's drawings were transferred from the Kupferstichkabinett (Museum of Prints and Drawings) to the Kunstbibliothek for purposes of teaching. This was followed by the acquisition of more of his works in connection with the purchase of the Destailleur Collection in 1879 and a drawing book in the early 1920s. Finally, in 1974, under the directorship of Ekhart Berckenhagen, the purchase of 34 privately owned drawings represented a huge coup. It occurred, incidentally, at the same time that the Kunstbibliothek took over the Erich Mendelsohn archives.

The Tchoban Foundation's proposal to show these holdings in full for the first time in an exhibition celebrating the 260th anniversary of Thomon's birth was immediately greeted with enthusiasm by the Kunstbibliothek. For one thing, we share the Tchoban Foundation's enthusiasm for architectural drawing, which has gained a new aura with the digital turn in architecture; for another, we were excited by the opportunity of adding another partner to the Kunstbibliothek's exhibition network. Over the decades, the Kunstbibliothek, with its rich collections, has been active in many places: at its main location, the Kulturforum; on its exhibition platform at the Museum of Photography; on the Museum Island (here I am particularly thinking of the 2007 project "Berlin around 1800" and the exhibition "Russians and Germans – 1000 Years of Art, History and Culture", organized by the Museum of Prehistory and Early History); and also nationwide as part of the Federal Programme of the Berlin State Museums.

This exhibition would never have been possible without the initiative, inspiration and funding of the Tchoban Foundation. The same applies to the present volume, whose



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careful scholarly presentation makes it a collections catalogue of the first rank. We would like to thank everyone who participated for the expertise and energetic research gathered together here, especially Nadejda Bartels, scholar and colleague at the Tchoban Foundation, and Elke Blauert, the curator of the Architecture Collection of the Art Library. Many thanks also to Volker Linke and Jana Hettmann, who supervised the project with respect to the collection, and to our restorer Halina Fischer, who prepared the many outsized formats for the exhibition with dedication and great care.

Moritz Wullen

Director of the Kunstbibliothek - State Museums of Berlin