

GREAT CENTRES OF ART

DRESDEN



The history of the art collections of Dresden can be traced back to the year 1560, when the Elector Augustus founded his Cabinet of Curiosities which, according to contemporary writers, soon grew to be richer and larger than any belonging to another German court. One hundred and fifty years later Augustus the Strong, supported by his court-architect, Raymond le Plat, began to acquire systematically from all over Europe individual works of art as well as whole collections.

After 1720 the more important museums of Dresden were established in quick succession: first the Green Vaults for the exhibition of the treasures from the Cabinet of Curiosities, then the Gallery of Paintings which, owing to considerable purchases in Prague, Paris and Modena, counted as one of the foremost picture collections of the world as early as the middle of the century. In 1754 Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* came from Piacenza to Dresden.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann praised Dresden as the most outstanding centre of the arts in the North. It was the first of all German towns to have a large collection of classical sculptures, which inspired his thoughts and writings.

The great Porcelain Collection owes its origin to Augustus the Strong's passion for this branch of art. He collected huge quantities of valuable porcelain from East Asia for the decoration of the porcelain palace which he planned to build. The products of the factory at Meissen were collected in Dresden right from the very beginning of the factory.

Since the nineteenth century all collections have been re-assessed by experts and gaps filled through acquisitions so as to form complete and scholarly units. Well-known specialists were entrusted with this work: K. Woermann, Zoega von Manteuffel, M. Lehrs, W. von Seydlitz, T. Graesse, E. Haenel, W. Holzhausen, E. Zimmermann and H. Posse.

During the Nazi regime the art collections of Dresden suffered severe losses and much was damaged in the air raid of 13th February 1945, especially treasures from the Picture Gallery. The majority of the works of art kept in the Second World War in inadequate hiding places was secured by special salvage groups of the Red Army at the end of the war; they were well cared for in Russia by experts and returned to Germany between 1955 and 1958. Thus the Dresden Collections re-attained their former place among the great museums of the world.

The most beautiful works of art from nine museums