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Press Release

The Hidden Horizontal. Cornices in Art and Architecture
25 August–14 November 2021

In architecture, the cornice is an element that hides in plain sight. Omnipresent as the elaborate junction between roof and wall, or wall and ceiling, this ornamental element seems to have attracted far less attention from architects, critics or theoreticians than, for instance, columns or the architectural orders. But in a new exhibition at the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, the cornice will make its long overdue grand entrance, displaying its many incarnations in art and architecture. Over 150 drawings, prints, books and objects from the 15th century to the present day will be united in a new dialogue, some shown for the first time in Switzerland.

Cornices are everywhere. Once you start looking, their ubiquity is almost irritating. Windows, doors, ceilings, mirrors, wall panelling from across the centuries sport elaborate profiles at their edges. The skyline of any city street is a ragtag procession of cornices in various states of materiality, refinement and maintenance. It does not stop there. Cars and clothes, furniture and household objects feature their own cornice-like elements. Strips, bands and lines of paint act like cornices by framing, delineating or crowning almost any kind of artefact. Still, they attract far less attention from architects, critics, theoreticians or even the general public than other building parts. In response, a reappraisal of this underrated element will be presented in the upcoming exhibition at Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, where the cornice will be placed at centre stage. The presentation, jointly organised by the ETH collection of prints and drawings, Dr. Linda Schädler, and the chair of the History and Theory of Architecture ETH Zürich, Prof. Dr. Maarten Delbeke, will bring together a broad variety of prints, drawings and books, some shown for the first time in Switzerland, as well as three dimensional objects from the 15th century to the present day.

The cornice, once an essential part of any classical composition, incurred the wrath of modernists at the beginning of the 20st century. It has, at various times, been identified as the most expressive part

of architecture, as well as the most problematic. It has drawn attention to itself in drawings, etchings and works of art. Hence, a history of the cornice in many ways offers a new window onto the multiple histories of architecture and its representations. After all, on account of its ubiquity, the cornice carries several layers of meaning: as an element defined by, and defining building regulations; as the solution to the technical problem of joining wall and roof; and as a site to expression of social aspirations or distinction. As the visual limit of a construction, the cornice is as much about the individual building as it is about the city or the landscape. As an ornament applied to buildings, it involves matters of taste and aesthetics as much as of craft and industrial production. And as a subject depicted in two-dimensional works of art on paper, it allows us to interrogate the art historical conventions of image-viewing and composition. Finally, as a complex three-dimensional object, the cornice raises questions of cultural representation and communication through material transfers over time.

The exhibition will unite a unique selection of over 150 drawings, prints, books and objects from the 15th century to the present day, some shown for the first time in Switzerland. Authors and artists exhibited include Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Gottfried Semper, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, amongst many others. By bringing works from earlier centuries from the ETH collections into direct dialogue with loans from important institutions in Switzerland and abroad, including the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, the Louvre, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, the Drawing Matter Collections (UK), the Berlin State Museums, the Rietberg Museum Zurich, and more, the exhibition will expose the “hidden horizontal” at the centre of five centuries of art and design thinking.

Featuring works by:

Cherubino Alberti, Daniel Badger, Ottavio Antonio Baiardi, Baccio Bandinelli, Pietro Santi Bartoli, Nicolas Beatrixet, François-Joseph Bélanger, Stefano della Bella, Ferdinando and Giuseppe Galli Bibiena, Jacques-François Blondel, Jan van Bronchorst, Andreas Buschmann, Richard Cahan, Cesare Cesariano, Charles Chipiez, François Collignon, Francesco Colonna, Le Corbusier, Pascal Coste, Marco Dente after Raphael, Deutscher Werkbund, Wendel Dietterlin, Giovanni Dosio, Albrecht Dürer, Louis-Émile Durandelle, Charles Eisen, Theodor Fischer, Domenico Fontana, Johannes Gachnang, George Jackson and Sons, Ludger Gerdes, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Hubertus Goltzius, Karl Adolf Graffenried, Michael Graves, Iain Hales, Herzog & de Meuron, Utgawa Hiroshige, Jacques Hittorff, Daniel Hopfer, Lucas Kilian, Henri Labrouste, Mari Lending, Johann Baptist Marzohl, Johann Matthäus Mauch, Meister GA mit der Fussangel, Nicoletto da Modena, Richard Nickel, Friedrich Ohmann, Ordinary Architecture (Charles Holland and Elly Ward), Andrea Palladio, Manuel Pauli, Georges Perrot, Pablo Picasso, Christiane Pinatel, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Marcantonio Raimondi, Mies van der Rohe, Diego Prévost Sagredo, Antonio Sangallo the Younger, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Gottfried Semper, Sebastiano Serlio, Hermann Spielberg, Philippe Starck, Christian Ludwig Stieglitz, Gabriel Ludwig Stürler, Johann Georg Sulzer, Charles Heathcote Thatham, Philippe Thomassin, Constantin Uhde, Agostino Veneziano, Howard Charles Walker, Frank Lloyd Wright, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Hans Vredeman de Vries, Nicolai Zabaglia.

Useful Information

Curators	A collaboration between the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich, Dr Linda Schädler and the Chair of the History and Theory of Architecture ETH Zürich, Prof. Dr. Maarten Delbeke
Events	Details of the event programme, including guided tours, a lecture series and walks, can be found at https://gs.ethz.ch/en/agenda/
Opening times	Daily, 10:00–16:45 Closed: Monday, 13 September (exhibition closed from 12:00)
Admission	Free
Media contact	Julia Burckhardt, Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich Tel +41 44 632 40 46 presse@gs.ethz.ch
Website	https://gs.ethz.ch
Publications	<p>A special edition of gta papers (the Journal of the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture ETH Zurich) dedicated to the cornice will be published in Fall 2021 to coincide with the exhibition (retail price: Fr. 25.–). The issue is edited by Maarten Delbeke, Erik Wegerhoff and Adam Jasper, and features an introduction by Maarten Delbeke and texts by Richard Anderson, Guido Beltramini, Emma Letizia Jones, Edoardo Piccoli, Linda Schädler, Oliver Streiff, David Bühler, Flavia Crisciotti, Linda Stagni with Claudio Gianocelli, Xu Han and Maxime Zaugg.</p> <p>The September 2021 issue of <i>werk, bauen + wohnen</i> focusses on the cornice as well. It contains an introduction by Maarten Delbeke, the first German translation of Luigi Moretti's text "I valori della modenatura": "Wert und Wirkung plastischer Profile", a text by Mario Rinke, and reviews of projects by De Smet Vermeulen Architecten, 31/44 Architects, KilgaPopp Architekten, Joos & Mathys Architekten, Lütjens Padmanabhan Architekten and Studio Anne Holtrop.</p>