"Picturesque" – Rothenburg ob der Tauber as Landscape Garden
Theme Years 2020 / 2021 “The Picturesque”

Both in terms of topography and morphology, the natural environment of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, at the end of the 19th century, fulfilled all the criteria of the picturesque. The city, which was thus perceived by English artists (architects and painters), takes the picturesque into the modern age. In the second half of the 19th century, Rothenburg ob der Tauber was rediscovered as a medieval gem where time seemed to have stood still. This image was largely propagated by artists such as Carl Spitzweg, poets (Paul Heyse), art historians (Georg Dehio), and architects (Camillo Sitte). In Germany, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl's “Gang durch das Taubertal” (A Walk through the Tauber Valley), published in 1865, marked an important moment; internationally, the pageant entitled “Der Meistertrunk” (1881) and the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in...
Chicago (where the Rothenburg Town Hall was used as a model for the German Pavilion) increased the attention given to Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Already at the end of the 1860s, American painter Toby Rosenthal (1848–1917) had popularized the visual appeal of Rothenburg townscapes and genre scenes among his painter colleagues in Munich. Rothenburg's gates, the market square with St. Mary's Pharmacy, as well as the city's location high above the Tauber valley (the literal meaning of “ob the Tauber”) from the West were recurring motifs in drawings, sketches, paintings, and photographs. Prior to World War One, this motivic material solidified into a firmly established canon widely disseminated in series of picture post cards as well as high-quality photos and graphics. Already around 1900, adjectives such as “romantic,” “fairy-tale,” and “picturesque” had, next to “medieval,” become typical attributes of Rothenburg. Until around 1900, more than 100 years of reflection on art had gone into the Anglo-Saxon understanding of “the picturesque” – indeed, one might go as far as saying that a specific manifestation of the picturesque in painting, landscaping (landscape gardening) and architecture is England's main contribution to the development of modern art. It was precisely this “picturesque” element which British painters such as Elias Bancroft (1846–1924), Arthur Wasse (1854–1930), James Douglas (1858–1911), Walter Tyndale (1855–1943), James Garden Laing (1852–1915), as well as architects like Barry Parker (1867–1947) and Raymond Unwin (1863–1940) discovered in the landscape around Rothenburg, in the city's architecture and its street scenes – effects of strong contrasts; irregular roads and house facades; interesting and variegated architectural ensembles such as the market square; an almost Gothic, albeit also derelict, charm; the amalgamation of natural and artificial features, and much more. In particular, the views into the Tauber valley below what is today the “An der Eich” vineyard were thus perceived as the epitome of the picturesque English landscape garden. Along the meanders of the Tauber river, embedded in the greenery of groups of trees and the garden-like landscape, one finds a string of mills and a series of Gothic churches, as well as a double bridge as the central feature. As Rothenburg’s layout and charms were not only paradigm to Hampstead Garden Suburb but also to Germany’s first Garden City Hellerau near Dresden (”Grüner Zipfel”-buildings by Richard Riemerschmid) this medieval town may well be recognised as an ideal of picturesque modernity – contrasting the later modernity of Bauhaus (1919) and
International Style. In the framework of two, if not three Theme Years (2019) 2020 and 2021, Rothenburg ob the Tauber’s picturesque topography is to be revisualized as an urban and rural landscape. In addition to an exhibition of British painters around 1900, to be hosted in the Medieval Crime Museum, Rothenburg cityscapes from the early modern era to the present day will be shown in the Imperial City Museum. A special exhibition will be devoted to the Rothenburg's influence on Raymond Unwin's English Garden City movement. Garden projects involve the hidden garden treasures of Rothenburg citizens; artists' federations such Künstlerbund and Kunstkreis will present contemporary interpretations of picturesque Rothenburg. What's more, there are artist in residence projects organized by the Protestant Conference Center Wildbad as well as musically picturesque contributions in the framework of an International Song Festival 2020 and the Franconian Summer 2019.

Further information is available at:
Rothenburg Tourismus Service
Robert Nehr / Press & Media Relations
Phone: +49 9861 404 521
Fax: +49 9861 404 529
robert.nehr@rothenburg.de
www.rothenburg-tourismus.de