



---

## Curriculum Vitae Professor Dr Carl Gustav Carus

**Name:** Carl Gustav Carus  
**Lived:** 3 January 1789 - 28 July 1869



Image: Archive | Leopoldina

Carl Gustav Carus was a German medical doctor, painter, natural philosopher and psychologist. He is regarded as one of the most versatile polymaths of the 19th century and was the 13th President of the Leopoldina from 1862 to 1869.

### Academic and Professional Career

Carl Gustav Carus was multitalented from a young age. He began studying physics, botany and chemistry at Leipzig University, Germany, as a 15-year-old in 1804. In 1806, he took up medicine as well and also attended lessons at the drawing academy. He started work at the Jacobshospital in Leipzig in 1809, before graduating as a doctor of philosophy and doctor of medicine and completing his Habilitation in 1811. Carus then began teaching at Leipzig University, where he quickly acquired an excellent reputation through his work in comparative anatomy. He was the first scientist in Germany to treat this field as a subject in its own right.

During the Battle of the Nations in Leipzig in 1813, Carus was put in charge of a temporary military hospital. He narrowly escaped death when he became unwell during a typhoid epidemic. At around the same time, he painted his first noteworthy work of art, "Spring Landscape in Rosenthal near Leipzig". Once he was fully recovered from typhoid, he became director of the Royal Midwifery College in Dresden, Germany, in 1814 as well as a professor of gynaecology at the Medical and Surgical Academy and director of the maternity hospital. In 1820, he published a textbook on gynaecology entitled "Lehrbuch der Gynäkologie", which became one of the most important on the topic at the time.

He was appointed as one of three personal doctors of the newly crowned King Anthony of Saxony in 1827, which resulted in him being awarded the title of privy councillor and medical officer. After giving

up his professorship and position as director of the maternity hospital, he used the additional time available to him to write numerous books and essays on topics relating to medicine, natural philosophy, the natural sciences and art, including “Über den Blutkreislauf der Insekten” on circulation in insects (1827), “Nine Letters on Landscape Painting” (1831), “Ein System der Physiologie” on physiology (1838) and “Zwölf Briefe über das Erdleben” on life on earth (1841).

In total, Carus produced more than 200 pieces of writing and scientific essays on the natural sciences. His wealth of talents brought him into contact with many influential people, such as Alexander von Humboldt, Ludwig Tieck and Caspar David Friedrich.

His association with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had a particularly profound impact on his personal development. The two wrote to each other from 1818 after Carus sent a copy of his “Lehrbuch der Zootomie” textbook on zootomy to Goethe in Weimar, Germany, with a personal dedication. Carus visited Goethe there in 1821 and they remained in contact until Goethe’s death in 1832. In addition to taking an interest in Carus’s scientific work, Goethe also appreciated his paintings. His admiration grew further after Carus sent him two of his oil paintings in 1820 (“Gasthaus auf dem Brocken”, which translates as “Guesthouse on the Brocken Mountain”, and “Dunkler Tannenwald”, which translates as “Dark Pine Forest”). Both paintings can still be found in Goethe’s house in Weimar today.

As King Anthony’s personal doctor, Carus accompanied him to Italy and Switzerland in 1827. Carus also travelled to France in 1835 and to England and Scotland in 1844. He became the chief personal doctor of King Frederick Augustus II of Saxony in 1853. In the same year, he coined the term “unconscious”. Through his work in this field, he is credited as a mastermind and philosophical pioneer of depth psychology.

### **President of the Leopoldina**

Carl Gustav Carus was elected the 13th President of the Leopoldina in December 1862, having been a member since 1818. According to the Academy’s statutes, the President’s place of residence also constituted the Academy’s headquarters, so these were relocated from Jena to Dresden when Carus assumed office.

The Academy’s growing library was still situated in Bonn, Germany, at the time. After its location had been moved several times within the city, alternative premises for the library’s collection were sought in other German cities such as Berlin and Leipzig. Eventually, the library, along with its approximately 7,500 works, was moved to Dresden during Carl Gustav Carus’s term of office in April 1864.

On 2 November 1864, Carus celebrated his 50th anniversary of commencing work in Dresden. In honour of this occasion, members, friends and admirers of the Academy set up a foundation with an initial capital of 2,000 thalers. In Carus’s own words, he wanted the foundation to be used “to support young men after my own heart to dedicate themselves to scientific research”. Following Carus’s death in 1869, the majority of the foundation’s capital was lost due to disputes concerning who should take over as president, which led to some of the Academy’s funds being embezzled by a secretary. By 1896, the Academy’s finances had finally recovered sufficiently for the Carus Award to be instated.

## **Honours and Awarded Memberships**

Carl Gustav Carus received numerous awards for his scientific achievements, including the Grand Cross of the Saxon Albert Order. He was a member of several academies of sciences and the arts in Germany and further afield, including the Academy of Sciences Leopoldina from 1818.

## **About Carl Gustav Carus**

Carl Gustav Carus was born in Leipzig on 3 January 1789 to dyer Gottlob Ehrenfried Carus and his wife Christiana Elisabeth. He grew up in the German cities of Mühlhausen and Leipzig and attended the Thomasschule school in Leipzig as a day pupil from 1801 to 1804. In 1811, he married his aunt, Caroline Carus, with whom he had 11 children, including medical doctor Albert Gustav Carus.

In 1865/66, Carus published his two-volume memoirs entitled “Lebenserinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten”, in which he describes his life in the Classical and Romantic eras. In his will, he wrote: “I have had the pleasure of living a long and rich life and, far from seeing it as a failed work of art, I depart this world with sincere thanks to God and with a genuine love for humankind.”

Carl Gustav Carus died in Dresden on 28 July 1869. His grave is located in the city’s Trinitatisfriedhof cemetery.

In 1954, the Medical Academy in Dresden, which later became the Carl Gustav Carus University Hospital, was named after him. The Carusufer street in Dresden has borne his name since 1993. A new science park in Schweinfurt, Germany, was also named in his honour in 2017.

From 1896, the Leopoldina has awarded the Carus Medal to junior researchers in recognition of important scientific discoveries or achievements in a field represented by the Leopoldina. Since 1961, the medal has been complemented by the city of Schweinfurt’s Carus Award, which is today worth €5,000.