
KUNST
HISTORISCHES
MUSEUM
WIEN



A Masterpiece and Its (Almost) Forgotten Collector

The So-Called Benda Madonna and
the Legacy of Gustav von Benda

POINT OF VIEW #27
23 JUNE TO 12 NOVEMBER 2023

Preface

The majority of artefacts in the Kunsthistorisches Museum bear witness to the connoisseurship and tastes of different Habsburgs. Looking at the wealth of High Renaissance and Baroque artworks, and bedazzled by the splendour of the spectacular museum building opened in 1891, one easily forgets that the museum has not only imperial but also non-aristocratic roots: in the early twentieth century, members of Vienna's haute bourgeoisie gifted a number of seminal masterpieces that enriched the collection. The most important of these patrons was undoubtedly Gustav von Benda, who was knighted in 1911 after having presented the imperial collection with several outstanding artworks, and who, in 1932, bequeathed the majority of his impressive collection to the museum. *Point of View #27* celebrates this almost-forgotten patron and his generous bequest. A masterly depiction of

the Virgin, produced on the Upper Rhine in the late fifteenth century and recently restored, forms the heart of our small exhibition. Known as the Master of the Benda Madonna, the anonymous artist's notname too commemorates Benda. A more or less coeval bronze relief of the Virgin by an Italian sculptor, which was also formerly in the Benda Collection, invites comparison.

We would like to thank Anneliese Földes, who is now working in Munich, for her essay on her restoration of the painting. A small exhibition and this booklet, published in digitized form for the first time, present the starting points for this research.

Guido Messling and Konrad Schlegel
Curators of the exhibition

Contents

	Guido Messling
4	A Masterpiece and Its (Almost) Forgotten Collector
	Anneliese Földes
12	The Restorer's Point of View
	Konrad Schlegel
15	Gustav von Benda's Bequest



Fig. 1: Master of the Benda Madonna, *Virgin and Child* (the so-called *Benda Madonna*), c.1490/1500, oak panel, 54.8 × 39.4 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. GG 6977

A Masterpiece and Its (Almost) Forgotten Collector

The So-Called Benda Madonna and the Legacy of Gustav von Benda

Gustav von Benda (1846, Prague – 1932, Vienna) was among the most important art collectors and patrons of the arts active in Vienna during the late monarchy and the First Republic. As co-founder of a successful firm that dealt in technical supplies, he acquired the means to amass, beginning in the 1880s, a substantial collection of artworks, especially Italian (see the essay contributed by Konrad Schlegel). He was also an early patron of the Kunsthistorisches Museum: already before the First World War, Benda gave an entire series of works to the museum, an institution that was still administered by the imperial court at that time. This was certainly one of the reasons for his being raised to the nobility in 1911 by Emperor Franz Joseph I.¹ His most sizeable contribution as a patron, however, dates from the republican period: when, at a very advanced age, he died in 1932, Benda, who had never married or had children, bequeathed to the museum all the art treasures that he still possessed. However, his wish that they should be exhibited en bloc was one that those who had been so generously thought of would not long feel compelled to respect: in the year 1939, after first being housed in the Neue Burg and then in the main building of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, his collection was broken up, and the sculptures, paintings, and other art objects were dispersed among the various departments of the museum. Most probably, the decision to do so was at least in part due to the fact that Benda, before converting to Catholicism in 1895, had been a member of the Jewish community. And so it is that whoever wanders through the museum today will come across Benda's name almost exclusively when reading the exhibit labels that accompany the works donated by him, most of which are

exhibited in the Kunstskammer. However, the name is also familiar to connoisseurs of early German painting, as it was used to designate an anonymous artist who authored a painting of the Virgin Mary that was among the works bequeathed to the museum in 1932. Admittedly, it has been decades since this work, to which the Master of the Benda Madonna owes his name, was last exhibited; having now been painstakingly restored, however, it can once again be put on public view, at least for a few months, in the 'Point of View' exhibition series.² The fact that this panel painting spends most of its time today languishing in storage is not to be explained by any inferiority of its artistic quality – the quality of the work, quite on the contrary, can truly be said to be outstanding. The explanation is to be found, rather, in the notorious shortage of space in the public collection's exhibition rooms and, no less importantly, in the lack of 'suitable' neighbours: as a panel painting dating from around 1490 or shortly thereafter and produced somewhere in the Upper Rhine region, the work would be isolated in the dense succession of early sixteenth-century paintings by Dürer and his contemporaries, all of whom belong to the Renaissance. The aim of the small-scale exhibition and of the publication that accompanies it is therefore to evoke the memory of one of the few upper-middle-class collectors from whom the museum was able to benefit in the twentieth century, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to introduce an original artist who was one of the most interesting representatives of southwest German late Gothic painting.

¹ Around 1907, Benda donated some significant paintings, including Hans Suess von Kulmbach's *Annunciation* (GG 6045) and Gabriel Metsus's *Noli me tangere* (GG 6044).

² For more on the painting see Alfred Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik, Bd. 7: Oberrhein, Bodensee, Schweiz und Mittelrhein in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500* (Munich and Berlin, 1955), 26f., fig. 48; Alfred Stange, *Kritisches Verzeichnis der deutschen Tafelbilder vor Dürer, II. Band: Oberrhein, Bodensee, Schweiz, Mittelrhein, Ulm, Augsburg, Allgäu, Nördlingen, von der Donau zum Neckar*, published by Norbert Lieb (Munich, 1979), no. 128 (with literature).

The Painting...

The painting is among countless others that portray Mary as a half-length or bust-length figure with the Christ Child, and therefore represents a characteristic type of images of the Virgin Mary that had its source in late antiquity and that can be found in all subsequent periods in numerous variations and executed in various media. All of these portrayals, however, strongly emphasize Mary's central role in the Christian faith: according to Christian doctrine, God chose her to be the mother of his son, Jesus Christ, who, through his actions in his earthly life, and especially by sacrificing himself on the cross, was to be the saviour of mankind, he himself being worshipped as God in the end. The absence of haloes in our painting is doubtless due to the desire to depict mother and child in as realistic a manner as possible; in this, as well as in the three-dimensionality of the figures, the differentiation of various kinds of material, and the inclusion of a landscape in the distant background, the author of the painting shows that he was tributary to the fundamental innovations of early Netherlandish painting, which in the early fifteenth century had developed a new pictorial vocabulary oriented towards verisimilitude. However, a few pictorial elements are at least symbolic references to fundamental aspects of the Christian faith: the pearl diadem, for example, and the cloth of honour behind Mary, both of which are reminders of her rank as Queen of Heaven. In addition, her long hair worn loose, a detail that signified to contemporaries an unmarried woman (one who had not yet 'come under the bonnet', as the German phrase goes), is also an expression of the notion that in spite of her role as mother she remained a virgin, and therefore pure, all her life. Mary's gaze, clouded by thoughts, is directed towards the child, which she is holding before her in both hands – a gaze that prefigures the Passion. The fact that the child is portrayed naked is also a reminder of the fate that awaits him: before being crucified, Christ was stripped of his clothes; the child's nakedness also expresses the notion that this child is the incarnation of God and, being human, vulnerable. As for the transparent cloth on which the child is lying, it is meant to symbolize the reverence that Mary pays to him as the Son of God. Finally, the string of red and white beads that Jesus is holding playfully in his hands is no doubt meant to represent a chaplet, whereby a connection is established not only between mother and child but also between the painting and the pious viewer: such strings of beads made up of links of various kinds (and most commonly referred to as rosaries) are used by the faithful as a means of memorizing a specific succession of prayer formulas, which include above all Hail Marys and personal meditations on the life of Jesus.

A means of personal devotion, this string of beads is also a reference to the intended purpose of the painting itself: as the painting's small dimensions suggest, it was undoubt-

edly created to accompany prayer in a private setting and specifically in the form of a single panel. It is therefore hardly likely that another wing of identical dimensions could once have been attached on the right (corresponding to the angle of Mary's pose), a panel bearing either a portrait of the painting's patron or a *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, the two panels together, in that case, constituting a diptych.³ Both the direction in which the child is oriented, namely, towards its mother, and the wall, which extends to the left and vanishes from the picture, close off the composition here. In the wall there is a large window opening, which affords a view of a hilly landscape and a body of water. A few details such as the path curving off to the right in the foreground, the buildings standing at the water's edge or in the water, and the broad, sandy waterfront all recur, slightly modified but in the same arrangement, in the left background of a large Marian painting in Coburg (*figs. 2, 4 and 5*), which has plausibly been classified as being an early work by the Augsburg painter Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473–1531).⁴ Most likely painted shortly before 1500, the work constitutes the most important piece of artistic evidence of Burgkmair's peregrinations in the Upper Rhine region, where, in 1488, he apparently apprenticed himself to Martin Schongauer (1445/50–1491), who resided in Colmar.⁵ Schongauer, already early in his life, had exerted a fundamental influence on the art of his time with his masterful copperplate engravings and paintings, as witnessed not least and quite impressively by the monumental Virgin Mother figure in Burgkmair's panel painting, which unmistakably echoes Schongauer's *Madonna in the Rose Garden* (1473) in Colmar, a painting of comparable dimensions (*fig. 3*). Moreover, Burgkmair must also have become acquainted with the landscape motif during his apprenticeship in the Upper Rhine region, where, in the unanimous opinion of researchers, the *Benda Madonna* must also have originated. It was only more recently that this localisation, which was

3 Today, the panel itself gives no further clues as to how it was originally used, its reverse side having until recently been parqueted and the panel's frame being modern. During the recent restoration, the parquetry was removed; neither the original reverse side of the panel nor its original edges have been preserved (the wood has been thinned down and the panel has been cropped on all sides).

4 This observation was made by Tilman Falk in 'Naturstudien der Renaissance in Augsburg', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, vol. 82/83 (1986/87), 79–89, here in particular p. 85. For more on the Coburg painting (Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, inv. no. M.412, wood panel, 207 x 142 cm) see Isolde Lübbecke and Bruno Bushart (eds.), *Altdeutsche Bilder der Sammlung Georg Schäfer, Schweinfurt*, exh. cat. Schweinfurt (Altes Rathaus) 1985, no. 6 (Isolde Lübbecke).

5 Burgkmair makes this assertion in an inscription on the reverse side of a male portrait (Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, inv. no. 1027), which in all likelihood is a portrait he did of Schongauer posthumously. See Peter Strieder, 'Einige Feststellungen und Mutmaßungen zum Bild eines jungen Mannes mit der Aufschrift "Hipsch Martin Schongaver Maler" von Hans Burgkmair in der Alten Pinakothek', in *Le beau Martin: Études et mises au point – actes du colloque organisé par le Musée d'Unterlinden à Colmar les 30 septembre, 1er et 2 octobre 1991*, published by Albert Châtelet (Colmar, 1994), 39–47.



Fig. 2
Hans Burgkmair, the Elder, *Madonna and Child on a Grassy Bank*, c.1500. Coburg, Kunstsammlungen der Veste



Fig. 3
Martin Schongauer, *Madonna in the Rose Garden*, 1473. Colmar, St. Martin



Fig. 4
detail from fig. 1



Fig. 5
detail from fig. 2

initially based on stylistic features, was corroborated by scientific investigation: it was found that the panel painting was executed on boards of a southern German oak and that the work dated from a time no earlier than 1487 and probably only after 1490 (see the essay contributed by Anneliese Földes).⁶ Whereas Netherlandish and western German painters typically used oak wood as a support, it was used far less frequently in the Upper Rhine region. Small-format paintings, however, and more specifically paintings done in a minute, elaborate style, seem to constitute an exception in this respect, as a perusal of Stange's index of late Gothic panel paintings from this region suggests.⁷ Our *Madonna* is precisely such a painting, exquisite and elaborately executed, one that owes its splendid aspect above all to the deep shades of red, the luxurious fabrics and precious pearls, and not least to the countless highlights in the form of extremely fine lines and points that have artfully been distributed over the surface of these elements of the painting. Mary herself is seen as an exceptionally delicate figure, with her slender hands, her head with its high, rounded forehead,

her full facial features that express something both dignified and sorrowful. An outstanding feature contributing to the effect here is the high relief given to the flesh tones and their metallic, almost mother-of-pearl lustre.

... and Its Master

The exceptional qualities of the painting (and of its author) had already caught the attention of Ludwig Baldass, one of the curators of the museum's picture gallery, when he discussed individual works included in the bequest that had recently been made to the museum.⁸ Thus, he praised the *Madonna* – which, by the way, was the only German painting included in Benda's bequest – as being the work of a highly individual artist who, after receiving training in the Netherlands, had made his way to the Upper Rhine. It was there, around 1480, according to Baldass, that he produced the panel painting, without, however, showing any sign of having been influenced by Schongauer or his works. Quite

6 Cf. the dendrochronological expertise by Peter Klein (Hamburg) dated 27 May 2012 <<https://rkd.nl/en/explore/technical/5008421>> accessed 4 Jan. 2023.

7 See Stange 1979 (see note 2), nos. 1–172. Of the better known paintings, may it suffice to mention here *The Little Garden of Paradise* in Frankfurt (no. 9), Schongauer's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Berlin (no. 75), his *Madonna and Child in a Window* in Los Angeles (no. 76) and *Madonna in front of the Rose Hedge* by an artist from Schongauer's circle (no. 90) in Leipzig.

8 Ludwig Baldass, 'Das Legat Benda an das Kunsthistorische Museum in Wien', *Pantheon*, vol. 9 (1932), 152–158, here in particular p. 158 with illustrations. It is not known who the owners of the painting were before Benda, nor is it known where he acquired it. The thesis put forth by Hans-Heinrich Naumann in a publication that appeared immediately after Baldass' initial publication seems strange: he suggests that the Vienna panel painting was an early work by Grünewald dating from around 1484–86 ('Le premier élève de Martin Schongauer: Mathis Nithart', *Archives Alsaciennes*, vol. 14 (1935), 1–158 with illust. 109, here in particular pp. 139f.).



Fig. 6 (left)
Master of the Benda Madonna, *Annunciation to Mary* (outer sides of the left and right wings of a Marian retable), c.1490/1500. Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle



Fig. 7 (right)
Master of the Benda Madonna, *Sts Dorothy and Barbara* (inner side of the right wing of a Marian retable), c.1490/1500. Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle



a different assessment of the significance that this exceptional artist might have had in the eyes of our anonymous painter was put forth by Alfred Stange in his survey of late Gothic painting in the Upper Rhine region, a work he published in 1955. In his survey, Stange was able to attribute even more panel paintings to this artist, a circumstance which, in the end, helped the anonymous artist acquire a name of convenience: characterising him as an ‘independently developed personality with a very distinct, highly cultivated sense of form’, Stange infers not only that he was influenced by Schongauer’s engravings, but also that in the 1480s he had spent some time working in Schongauer’s workshop in Colmar.⁹ Stange considered the *Benda Madonna* to be the earliest of the works, it having been produced, in his view, in the 1480s, and further pointed out the markedly hatched application of paint in these paintings. On the basis of this salient feature, he thought it possible that the Benda Master could also have worked as an engraver. The second major work by the Benda Master can be seen in two wings of a Marian retable, each painted on both sides (the two sides of each wing have today been preserved detached from each other), which are held in the Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe (figs. 6 and 7). The other parts of the retable have been lost.¹⁰ Of

these pictures, which found their way to the museum at different points in time, only the two sides of what had originally been the right wing were known to Stange; those of the left wing, which has unfortunately been cropped at the bottom to a considerable extent, turned up only later and at different points in time. In the closed position, in other words, when seen as they were normally seen on

patron – left wing, outer side), Lg 775 (*Mary of the Annunciation* – right wing, outer side), 2957 (*Sts Apollonia and Catherine* – left wing, inner side), and FK 43 (*Sts Dorothy and Barbara* – right wing, inner side); coniferous wood. Today, all the paintings have been cropped on all sides; the wings must originally have measured an estimated 156 x 72.5 cm (see Jan Lauts, ‘Ein neues Werk vom Meister der Bendaschen Madonna’ in *Festschrift Klaus Lankheit zum 20. Mai 1973* (Cologne, 1973), 135–138, here in particular page 135). For more on the parts of the Marian retable cf. Stange 1955 (see note 2), 26f., figs. 50 and 52; Stange 1979 (see note 2), no. 129 (concerning in each instance only the separately preserved sides of the right wing); *Spätgotik am Oberrhein: Maler und Werkstätten 1450–1525*, exhib. cat., Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, (Stuttgart, 2007), p. 260, cat. nos. 145a and b (Markus Dekiert for a discussion of the outer sides); *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, vol. 47 (2010) (Holger-Jacob Friesen, regarding the acquisition of *Sts Apollonia and Catherine*); *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, double vol. 48/49 (2011/12), 153f. (Holger-Jacob Friesen, regarding the acquisition of *Sts Dorothy and Barbara*); finally, Anna Moraht-Fromm, *Das Erbe der Markgrafen: Die Sammlung deutscher Malerei (1350–1550) in Karlsruhe* (Ostfildern, 2013), 280–284. In expertises dated 1929 and 1934, the right wing in its original state before its inner and outer sides were separated was found by Max J. Friedländer and Walter Hugelshofer to be a work dating from around 1490 originating in the Upper Rhine region in the circle of Schongauer. See Jan Lauts (ed.), *Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe: Neuerwerbungen Alter Meister 1966–1972* (Karlsruhe, 1973), p. 8.

9 Stange 1955 (see note 2), 26f., quotation on p. 27.

10 Inv. nos. 2933 (*Angel of the Annunciation* showing the painting’s male

weekdays, the outer sides of the two wings presented a scene spanning both wings representing the *Annunciation to Mary* in an interior; on the left wing, which shows the archangel Gabriel, the upper body of the painting's male patron in the lower part of the picture has been preserved. Contrasting with these, each of the inner sides, which feature a patterned gold ground, is occupied by two female saints standing on a tiled floor: these are, on the left (here too considerably cropped at the bottom), Saints Apollonia and Catherine, and on the right, Saints Dorothy and Barbara. These saints, adorned with magnificent crowns, were all venerated early as virgin martyrs and, with the exception of Saint Apollonia, counted among the group of four *virgines capitales* – the capital or main virgins. In the pictorial arts, these saints are usually shown accompanying the Virgin Mary, which suggests that the lost central part of the retable – most likely executed as a sculptured shrine – was a representation of the Mother of God with the Christ Child. As Stange was early to recognize, these pairs of saints, not only conceptually but also in the manner in which they were painted as well as in details such as the voluminous modelling of their garments, the sumptuous and in part iridescent fabrics, or the locks of hair reminiscent of metal shavings, show close similarities to two wings of a retable – the rest of which has been lost – located in Lichtenthal Abbey, a Cistercian abbey in a locality adjacent to Baden-Baden. Each of these two wings similarly shows a pair of female saints.¹¹ However, the flesh tones and the hands in the Lichtenthal paintings appear more schematic and fail to create the impression of highly detailed three-dimensionality, a quality so characteristic of the Benda Master; one can therefore assume that these panels were executed by an assistant. On the other hand, three other works that Stange linked to our anonymous artist are today no longer attributed to him or to his circle.¹²

The Upper Rhine, Schongauer, and the Netherlands: Tracing the Artist's Path

When and where in the Upper Rhine region the artist was active can only partially be determined on the basis of these few panel paintings attributed to him. To date, the only more or less reliable aid when it comes to establishing dates has been the above-mentioned examination carried out to determine the age of the oak wood used for the Vienna panel: the study suggests that the painting must have been produced after 1490, that is, later than both Baldass and Stange assumed. On the other hand, the artist's selective and clever adaptation of clothing motifs taken from various engravings by Schongauer – about which more will be said below – hardly provides any further clues in this respect: as the Colmar artist indicated no dates on any of the 115 engravings of his that are known today, these engravings themselves can only be dated with approximation or chronologically ordered on the basis of copies done early, watermarks in the paper, and the various forms of the monogram. Thus, there is clear evidence that the engravings on which the Benda Master drew for his *Annunciation* were in circulation as early as 1480/81, a time at which Schongauer must already have produced the major part of his graphic work.¹³ However, establishing such an early date for the Karlsruhe retable would be at variance with the mannerist features and the more voluminous portrayed figures compared with those in Schongauer's works, factors which also explain why the work is altogether considered to have been created in the last decade of the fifteenth century, which places it close in time to the Vienna panel painting. The question as to the location for which the altarpiece was intended must likewise remain without a definite answer, although the fact that two of the fragments were found in Rottweil in the nineteenth century could indicate that this *reichsstadt* was the place in question.¹⁴ As for the retable to which the wings preserved in Lichtenthal originally belonged, it is more than likely that it was created for the abbey's Cistercians themselves. If indeed it was, this circumstance could provide a clue as to where the Benda Master operated his workshop; for the sisters of the order in Lichtenthal had most of the abbey's furnishings brought from Strasbourg.¹⁵ All things considered, there is

¹¹ Coniferous wood, each measuring 150 x 80 cm. Cf. Stange 1955 (see note 2), p. 27, fig. 51 (as being located in Karlsruhe); Stange 1979, no. 131; *Faszination eines Klosters: 750 Jahre Zisterzienserinnen-Abtei Lichtenthal*, exhib. cat. edited by Harald Siebenmorgen, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum (Sigmaringen, 1995), p. 245, cat. no. 73 (Dietmar Lüdke); Karlsruhe exhib. cat. 2001 (see note 10), p. 262, cat. no. 146 (Markus Dekiert).

¹² See Stange 1955 (see note 2), p. 27, figs. 49 and 51; Stange 1979 (see note 2), nos. 130, 132, and 133. The *Descent from the Cross* (fragment) in Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard Art Museums inv. no. 1912.46), is today considered to be a Netherlandish work (<https://hvr.dartmouth.edu/231980>, accessed 1 Jan. 2023); the place of origin of the portrait of a young man dated 1491 in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (inv. no. 23.255) has rightly been identified as Franconia, and specifically Nuremberg (see Maryan W. Ainsworth and Joshua P. Waterman, *German Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1350–1600* (New Haven, Conn., 2013), 251–53, 321–22, no. 58 [Maryan Ainsworth]). Although the location of the third work – a triptych featuring the *Virgin of Mercy* – is unknown, the doll-like, squat shape of the figures' heads differs immensely from heads painted by the Benda Master. Cf. illustration in Paul Ganz, *Malerei der Frührenaissance in der Schweiz* (Zürich, 1924), 89f., illust. 46. Anna Moraht-Fromm, for her part, wanted to attribute two works to the artist's circle: Moraht-Fromm 2013 (see note 10), 284f.

¹³ For more on the dating of the engravings see Stephan Kemperdick, *Martin Schongauer* (Petersberg, 2004), 36–60, especially p. 37.

¹⁴ For more on the provenance of these works see Lauts 1973 (see note 10), 137f., note 3; Moraht-Fromm 2013 (see note 10), p. 282. As for the robed patron in the painting, this cannot be a member of the regular clergy, as he has no tonsure; it is much more likely a secular canon or a scholar (collegial note from Stephan Kemperdick, Berlin). Lüdke's opinion (cited by Moraht-Fromm, 2013 [see note 10], p. 284, note 138) that the view from the window in the *Mary of the Annunciation* panel is one of Rottweil is difficult to accept if one compares it with the bird's-eye view of the town provided by the so-called *Pürschgerichtskarte* of 1564 (Rottweil, Stadtmuseum).

¹⁵ This assumption is made by Dekiert: Karlsruhe 2001 exhib. cat. (see note 10), p. 262, cat. no. 146.



Fig. 8
Martin Schongauer, *Annunciation to Mary*, engraving, c.1470/80.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 9
Martin Schongauer, *Noli me tangere*, engraving, c.1470/80.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

little likelihood of the artist's ever personally having come into contact with Schongauer, who died at the beginning of 1491 – contact in the form of an apprenticeship in Schongauer's workshop in Colmar, for example, as assumed by Stange.¹⁶ What most strongly argues against that assumption is the observation that there is little about our anonymous artist's manner of painting that finds comparison in the work of Schongauer, a reflection that also holds for his use not only of colour but also of light. It follows that Schongauer is hardly likely to have passed on to him the basics of panel painting or other special skills. Indeed, the painted works considered to be by Schongauer's hand display a finely distributed application of paint that is enamel-like in its thickness as well as a subtle orchestration of light, whereas the Benda Master relies on effective highlighting and only selectively employs modelling techniques. This is particularly striking in the contrast between the emphatically sculptural treatment of the areas of flesh and fabrics on the one hand and, on the other hand, the interiors, which have a flat appearance due to the uniform fashion in which the light falls on them – interiors, one might add, in which no shadows are cast. In addition, more than in the case of Schongauer, he applies the brush in the manner of an engraver or a draughtsman, that is, he does not merely outline contours with his brush, but he also makes use of it for structuring outer surfaces and inner forms. The background landscapes in Schongauer's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Berlin and in the *Benda Madonna*, both of which are comparable in terms of dimensions and use of motifs, can serve as examples illustrating these differences in manners of painting (and the results they produced): whereas the Colmar master presents a distant view that is miniature-like in its fineness, one that comes across as realistic and fuses with the rest of the depicted scene to form an atmospherically coherent whole, in the case of our painter, what dominates are streaked brushstrokes in colours that are partly unmixed, a feature that, together with the white highlighting, lends an almost vitreous, abstract character to the work. What the artist could have learned from Schongauer must therefore have been derived primarily from his engravings and in particular with regard to the statuary conception of his saints and above all to the markedly three-dimensional modelling of their garments. Given the existence of this model role, it is not surprising that direct borrowings from Schongauer's works can also be identified. For his *Mary of the Annunciation* in Karlsruhe, our artist availed himself of two of Schongauer's engravings:¹⁷ the right side of the Virgin Mary's mantle, part of which she is shown holding against her body with her

¹⁶ This view is also expressed by Sven Lücken, *Die Verkündigung an Maria im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert: Historische und kunsthistorische Untersuchungen*, text volume and catalogue (CD) (Göttingen, 2000), p. 187.

¹⁷ In this regard see Lauts 1973 (see note 10), 136f.



Fig. 10
detail from fig. 6

elbow, was taken from a corresponding detail in Schongauer's *Annunciation in an Interior* (fig. 8) – it should also be pointed out that the idea of depicting the angel pulling back the curtain was also taken from this print. On the other hand, close observation reveals that a large portion of the left side of the mantle was copied from the cloak worn by Mary Magdalene in the engraving *Noli me tangere* (fig. 9), and more specifically the areas of white drapery underneath the S-shaped edge of the outspread garment. Although the folds in the drapery were copied almost 'word for word', the very fact of drawing on a model foreign to the subject at hand as well as the skilful integration of borrowed elements into a new context testify to a remarkably creative approach to the artistic work. A more personal touch is manifest in the unpolished rendering of the head of the male patron in the Karlsruhe wing-painting of the *Angel of the Annunciation*; this head is no more Schongauerian than the angular head of the Christ Child of the *Benda Madonna*, the jagged contours of the cloth on which the child is lying, or the morphologically comparable linear structure of the Vienna panel's underdrawing, in which straight, swift brushstrokes dominate. A different situation presents itself in the case of the stylized heads of our painter's female saints: for them too, a borrowed model was used; and they are all practically interchangeable, as, for example, a comparison of the face of the



Fig. 11
detail (mirror-inverted) from fig. 1

Karlsruhe Virgin Mary with that of the *Benda Madonna* (mirror-inverted) will show (figs. 10 and 11).¹⁸ After Stange had wanted to trace this type to a close study of Schongauer's engravings, Lauts and subsequently Moraht-Fromm both pointed out the striking similarities between these heads and that of the Colmar *Madonna in the Rose Garden* mentioned above, a painting dated 1473.¹⁹ Her face, however, austere in form, constitutes rather an exception in Schongauer's work, in which the female saints are otherwise portrayed with rounded facial traits more characteristic of young girls. One finds, however, comparable severe faces with high, angular foreheads in the work of numerous Netherlandish painters beginning roughly in the middle of the 1460s – in the work of the successors of Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464), for example, or in that of Hugo van der Goes (c.1440–1482/83). It is therefore possible to infer that, here, the Alsatian knowingly drew on a contemporary Netherlandish type, finding it suitable, no doubt, for his prestigious Marian panel painting, in which he found himself rivalling with Northern prototypes in other ways as well.²⁰ It is assumed that, in the late 1460s, Schongauer visited the Neth-

¹⁸ Such a comparison is found in Moraht-Fromm 2013 (see note 10), p. 285, figs. 53 and 54.

¹⁹ Cf. Stange 1955 (see note 2), p. 27; Lauts 1973 (see note 10), p. 137; Moraht-Fromm 2013 (see note 10), p. 285.

²⁰ See Kemperdick 2004 (see note 13), p. 176.



Fig. 12
Netherlandish, *Madonna Lactans*, woodcut,
hand-coloured (mirror-inverted), c.1470/80.
Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum



Fig. 13
Master of the Benda Madonna, *Virgin and Child*
(the so-called *Benda Madonna*), c.1490/1500.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Fig. 14
Netherlandish or German, *Virgin and Child*,
c.1490/1500. Current location unknown

erlands; a similar assumption can be made in the case of the painter of the *Benda Madonna*, of course at a later time. On the one hand, this can explain more conclusively the type of head characteristic of his female saints than the argument of his having come into contact with one of Schongauer's paintings. On the other hand, there is considerable further evidence that the painter must have been to the Netherlands before settling in the Upper Rhine region. Lüken, for example, has observed that the ornamentation of the small faience vase in the *Mary of the Annunciation* panel in Karlsruhe has parallels in faience manufactured in the Netherlands.²¹ True, our artist could also have become familiar with such faience through having seen imported examples of it in German-speaking regions; but his painting technique shows striking parallels to those of early Netherlandish painters (see the essay by Anneliese Földes). The Vienna painting too evinces a strong Netherlandish influence: one need only observe the long, slender hands, which have close parallels in works by Rogier van der Weyden; or the high collar fold of the Virgin's mantle – an unusual feature for a German painter of this period. The half-length figure of Mary with her hands brought together and the child held in them in a position halfway between sitting and lying are also motifs that derive from a Netherlandish Madonna-type. This type undoubtedly originated in the circle of the Master of Flémalle (c.1410–1440) and was most probably transmitted as it is seen depicted in a large single-leaf woodcut from the end of the fifteenth century (fig. 12) representing a *Madonna Lactans*,

that is, Mary with a bared breast nursing the Christ Child.²² It immediately becomes evident that the Vienna panel painting (fig. 13) is also to be counted among the numerous derivatives of this type when it is compared side by side with the *mirror-inverted* image of this woodcut: thus viewed, the print more closely replicates its model, which, as can be seen in the painterly attention to detail – unusual for such a print – as well as in the mere size of the woodcut, was certainly also a panel painting. The Benda Master even seems to have borrowed the positions of the Christ Child's hands from the model he had consulted, whether that model already showed the Christ Child holding prayer beads or not. A painting of the Virgin Mary that has today been lost, one that is of rather mediocre quality and was probably also done by a German painter (fig. 14), offers a comparable example of this prototype originally depicted as a *Madonna Lactans* and subsequently modified to represent a *Virgin and Child* with the child holding prayer beads. Here again one sees the cloth of honour. That this artist must in all respects have stuck closely to his model is evident in his rendering of the child, which virtually matches that in the woodcut, including the textile material that can be seen underneath it. Thus, the high quality of the *Benda Madonna* is also evinced by the more independent, almost disguising manner in which the artist has translated a Netherlandish model.

²¹ Lüken 2000 (see note 16), p. 393, under note 692.

²² Woodcut, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, inv. no. XV. Einbl. WB 2.12. Cf. Friedrich Winkler, 'Vorbilder primitiver Holzschnitte', *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, 12, (1958), 37–50, in particular 37–46, fig. 1; Dirk De Vos, 'De Madonna-en-Kindtypologie bij Rogier van der Weyden en enkele minder gekende Flemalleske voorlopers', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 13 (1971), 60–161, in particular p. 80, fig. 14; De Vos 1999, p. 318 (regarding the Flémallesque character).

The Restorer's Point of View

A comprehensive technological examination of the painting has revealed pertinent information that allows us to better define the anonymous artist.

The support consists of two oak boards of different width that were tangentially cut from the trunk and have been butt-joined vertically. The dendrochronological analysis has shown that the tree from which they came grew in southern Germany, which means the Master of the Benda-Madonna selected locally available timber for his support.¹ Although oak panels are less common in works produced along the Upper Rhine, it is not unusual for a small-scale painting (see the essay by Guido Messling). This may be a result of a coeval shortage of oak, and we know that its use was restricted at the time.² According to the dendrochronological analysis, the slightly cropped panel may have been painted in 1487 – however, the loss of growth rings moves the presumed creation year to the 1490s. Remnants of an unpainted edge and raised lip or beard of ground indicate a now-lost ‘engaged’ frame from the time the painting was produced. On the panel’s obverse, several layers of a white chalk and glue ground were applied over a multi-part canvas lining; the dried chalk ground was then carefully planned.

The infrared examination offered insights into the artist’s creative process and the multi-step evolution of the composition. It revealed a thin liquid underdrawing limited to linear outlines of the facial contours and the drapery (*fig. A*). Next, a tonal underpainting was applied that obscured and shifted the forms’ outlines, pushing the underdrawing into the background. Already at this early stage, the artist decided against retaining the empty area on the Virgin’s forehead presumably intended for a large gem (see, for instance, Schongauer’s depictions of



Fig. A
Detail infrared reflectogram

the Virgin). We can trace corrections and alterations at different stages of the painting’s build-up that document the artist’s search for a balanced composition. This is most clearly apparent in the genesis of the Infant Jesus: his head was enlarged at least three times.

¹ See the dendrochronological report by Peter Klein (Hamburg) of 27 May 2012 (<https://rkd.nl/en/explore/technical/5008421>, retrieved 28 Feb. 2023).

² See Michaela Rößger, *Holzversorgung und Holzhandel*, in: Sönke Lorenz and Thomas Zotz (eds.), *Spätmittelalter am Oberrhein. Alltag, Handwerk und Handel 1350–1525*, Stuttgart 2001, 225–9, esp. 226.



Fig. B
Macro image, face of the Virgin



Fig. C
Macro image, structured handling of the folds of her robe on her chest



Fig. D
Detail of the robe of the Virgin in the *Annunciation* in Karlsruhe

The Master of the Benda Madonna created a carefully differentiated surface finish through a brilliantly executed stylized rendering of materials.

Note the virtuoso handling and contrasting modelling in light and shadow of the Virgin's face, its mother-of-pearl-like lustre enhanced by a grisaille-like underpainting. In the shaded areas we found fingerprints that bear witness to the fact that the artist blurred and deliberately reduced the uppermost paint layer in these areas. Next to these soft transitions he carefully placed pure white paint in order to create gleaming highlights (fig. B).

The surface of the Virgin's blue cloak and her robe is highly structured: the artist created folds in the drapery by dabbing pastose paint in varying density on a light underpainting, and the hatched-modelling of the folds on her chest created an almost relief-like surface (fig. C). The stylised folds are similar to those of the robe worn by the Virgin in the *Annunciation* now in Karlsruhe (fig. D), and their graphic-linear character is closely related to depictions in engravings (see the essay by Guido Messling). Both the blue robe and blue and green details in the brocade cloth of honour behind the Madonna in Vienna have darkened, indicating an interaction between components containing resins and oils and the copper pigments.

One specific feature of the Master of the Benda Madonna's palette is his use of vivanite, a naturally-occurring blue mineral pigment; until now, there have not been many instances where its presence in a panel or canvas painting could be confirmed.³ We identified this hydrated ferrous phosphate in the lead white-containing underpainting of the Virgin's blue cloak and – together with azurite – in layers of blue paint (fig. E).

An important aspect of the anonymous master's painting method is his use of colourless ground glass, which we found in exceptionally well-preserved areas of red lake (fig. F). The lining of Mary's cloak is painted over a streaky purple-coloured interlayer comprising lead white, red lake and a little azurite, layered over a thin opaque base of vivid orange-red vermillion. The whole was then glazed with a mixture comprising red lake and finely ground vermillion, before lead white was used to model highlights, and bodily red lake to create depth. This complex

³ Recent research suggests the pigment was used more frequently than we have evidence for its use, and that the fact that it is difficult to detect in complex mixtures is the reason it is often overlooked. See Marika Spring, *New Insights into the Materials of Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century Netherlandish Paintings in the National Gallery, London*, in: *Heritage Science* 5/40 2017, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40494-017-0152-3>, 10–1; David A. Scott and Gerhard Eggert, *The Vicissitudes of Vivianite as Pigment and Corrosion Product*, in: *Studies in Conservation* 52/1, 2007, 3–13, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1179/sic.2007.52.Supplement-1.3>.

layering can be found on paintings produced by Early Netherlandish masters and workshops but is somewhat unusual for a German panel.⁴

Note also the virtuosity of the handling of the clouds in the background landscape: the still-wet paint was wiped out with a brush in serpentine lines, almost sgraffito-like, and in some places these lines intertwine, revealing to different degrees the underlying blue paint of the sky (*fig. G*).

The sophisticated and ingenious handling reveals the anonymous painter's unique style, and shows him to have been an original mind.

⁴ See Rachel Billinge, Lorne Campbell, Jill Dunkerton et al., *Methods and Materials of Northern European Painting in the National Gallery, 1400–1550*, in: Diana Davies and Jan Green (eds.), *National Gallery London Technical Bulletin*, vol. 18, London 1997, 6–55, esp. 38–9.

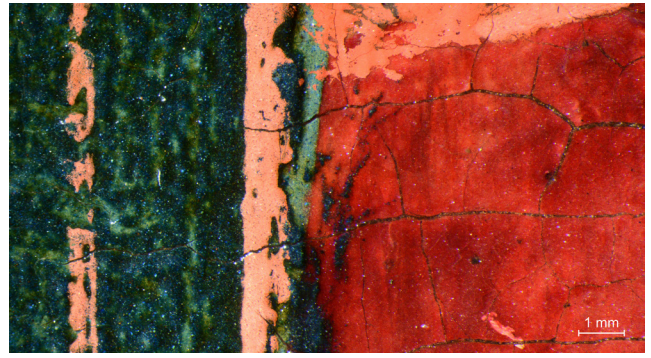


Fig. E
Macro image, detail of the robe of the Virgin with visible light-blue underpainting

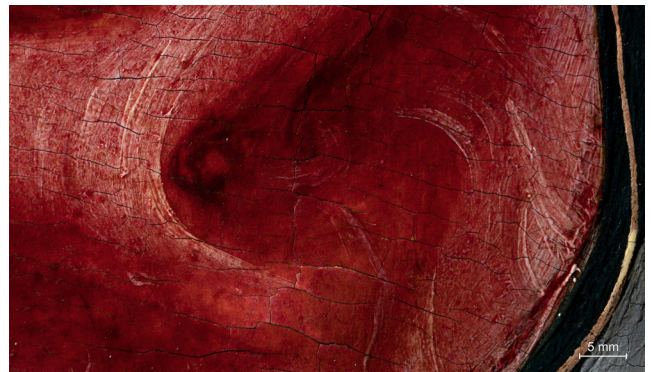


Fig. F
Macro image, red lining of the Virgin's cloak



Fig. G
Macro image, handling of the clouds in the background landscape

Gustav von Benda's Bequest

'On 7 February 1932, Gustav von Benda, one of Vienna's most refined and cultured art collectors of the last fifty years, passed away at a ripe old age' ('Am 7. Februar 1932 ist Gustav von Benda hochbetagt gestorben, einer der feinsinnigsten Wiener Kunstsammler der letzten 50 Jahre').¹ This is how Hermann Julius Hermann, at the time the director of the 'Collection of Decorative Arts' ('Sammlung für Kunstgewerbe' – today's 'Kunstammer' of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna) as well as the museum's 'First Director' ('Erster Direktor'), began his announcement that the Kunsthistorisches Museum had accepted the Benda Collection as a gift, and to introduce and describe a selection of its sculptures (the paintings were discussed by Ludwig Baldass in the same article – see the essay by Guido Messling). At the time, the Benda Collection was regarded as 'Vienna's foremost private non-aristocratic collection' ('die bedeutendste Wiener bürgerliche Privatsammlung').² It comprised numerous sculptures, paintings, pieces of furniture, Renaissance parade arms, gold- and silversmith works, majolica and other artefacts. In keeping with his noble public spiritedness, the single and childless connoisseur Gustav von Benda (1846–1932) decided to leave everything to the Republic of Austria upon his death. In his will he stipulated that the majority of the works in his collection should go to the Kunsthistorisches Museum. His collection of porcelain, ceramics and pieces of furniture went to the 'Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie' in Vienna ('Austrian Museum of Art and Industry', today's MAK – Museum of Applied Arts).

Gustav von Benda was the scion of a wealthy merchant family in Prague. We know very little about his childhood and youth, but around 1870 he moved to Vienna, where he took charge of the local branch of 'Waldek, Wagner und Benda', suppliers of 'technical commodities for Austrian industry'.³ Business was good, and around 1880 Benda began to collect art.⁴

Being offered this collection was a piece of good fortune for the Kunsthistorisches Museum; 265 exceptional artefacts entered the museum's holdings. Benda's taste as a collector is perhaps best described as eclectic. His aim was not to assemble a comprehensive or specialized collection; instead, he acquired outstanding artworks representing various media and produced at different times and in different regions. In a way, he followed the lead of the Habsburg collectors to whom we owe the Kunsthistorisches Museum, but in a more limited, bourgeois way. One focus was on Italian sculpture from the Early Renaissance. In this (too) his collection differed from the grand old imperial collection, in which artworks from the fifteenth century play but a marginal role. But this meant that Benda's collection proved the perfect, complementary addition to the holdings of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, which, following Benda's bequest, boasts sculptures by important artists from the Italian Quattrocento like Desiderio da Settignano and Luca della Robbia, and from the circle of great masters such as Verrocchio and even Donatello (*figs. 1, 2, 3*). The importance of these individual works and their prominent place in the museum's holdings – together with the protagonists' anti-semitism – were presumably the reason why, under Nazi rule and only a few years after Benda's death, the museum management decided to ignore the stipulations of his will and cease to display the artefacts together as the 'Benda Collection', instead dispersing them among the museum's various collections. In his will, Benda had clearly asked that the artefacts should be 'displayed together in their own gallery as the 'Benda Collection', 'if possible in the same way they are at present displayed in my flat (address: Vienna's First District, Opernring 8)'.⁵ In 1932, under Director Hermann, this wish had been respected, and the collection was inventoried together and displayed in its own galleries, appointed like living rooms, in the Neue

¹ Hermann Julius Hermann, *Das Legat Benda an das Kunsthistorische Museum in Wien*, in: Pantheon 9, 1932, 152-8, 152.

² Ibid.

³ Wiener Zeitung, 8 August 1903, 86.

⁴ For a history of the collection, the life of Gustav von Benda, and the fate of his Jewish family during the Nazi period, see: Susanne

Hehenberger and Monika Löscher, *Die Sammlung Gustav Benda*, in: Eva Blimlinger and Heinz Schödl (eds.), *Die Praxis des Sammelns. Personen und Institutionen im Fokus der Provenienzforschung* (Schriftenreihe der Kommission für Provenienzforschung 5), Vienna & Cologne & Weimar 2014, 13-29.

⁵ Last will of Gustav von Benda, March 1930, quoted in Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 21.



Fig. 1
Luca della Robbia, *Virgin and Child*, Florence, 3rd quarter of the 15th century, glazed terracotta, H 53 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9114



Fig. 2
Circle of Andrea del Verrocchio, *Putto, or The Infant Jesus with Fig and Grape*, Florence, 4th quarter of the 15th century, polychromed terracotta, H 65 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9111



Fig. 3
Follower of Donatello, *Virgin and Child with two Angels Making Music*, Florence, c. 1460, polychromed stucco; frame (modern): polychromed wood, H (incl. frame) 90.3 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9101

Burg (fig. 4, a view into one of the galleries). In 1937, however, the collection was moved to the Second Floor of the Kunsthistorisches Museum.⁶ Following the ‘Anschluss’, Nazi Germany’s occupation of Austria in March 1938, the new, Nazi museum management dissolved the Benda Bequest and incorporated the objects into the appropriate collections in the museum.⁷ Even Benda’s name was removed from the labels; this continues to this day.

In his will, Gustav von Benda had identified Desiderio da Settignano’s bust ‘Laughing Boy’ (fig. 5) as his ‘most important and favourite piece’ (‘Haupt- und Lieb-



Fig. 4
View into Gallery II of the Gustav von Benda collection in its 1932 installation at the Neue Burg. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Archive, inv. AR XV 1713

⁶ See Herbert Haupt, *Das Kunsthistorische Museum. Die Geschichte des Hauses am Ring. Hundert Jahre im Spiegel historischer Ereignisse*, Vienna 1991, 108. The 1932 inventory of the ‘Benda Bequest’ is now in the archive of the Kunstammer Vienna. Compiled under the supervision of Director Hermann after receipt of the collection, its datings and attributions better reflect art-historical scholarship compared to the ‘List of objects received from the Benda Collection by the Kunsthistorisches Museum’ (‘Verzeichnis der vom Kunsthistorischen Museum übernommenen Gegenstände der Sammlung Benda’), which had also been compiled in 1932, but earlier, and which reflected the art-historical appraisal of the artworks to which Benda adhered (see note 16).

⁷ Ibid.; see the essay by Guido Messling, and Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 23.



Fig. 5
Desiderio da Settignano, *Laughing Boy*, Florence, c. 1460/64, marble, H 33 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9104



Fig. 6
Historical photograph of the *Laughing Boy* by Desiderio da Settignano, published in: Hermann Julius Hermann, *Das Legat Benda an das Kunsthistorische Museum in Wien*, in: *Pantheon* 9, 1932, 152-8, 156



Fig. 7
School of Desiderio da Settignano, *The Infant St John the Baptist*, Florence, 2nd half of the 15th century, marble, H 23 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9113

lingsstück'): 'I ask the gentlemen of the museum to look after my artefacts with love, and to display my most important and favourite piece, the charming 'Laughing Boy' by Desiderio (or Donatello), well' ('Ich bitte die Herren des Museums, sich mit Liebe meiner Gegenstände anzunehmen und mein Haupt- und Lieblingsstück, das entzückende 'Lachende Kind' von Desiderio (oder Donatello), gut aufzustellen').⁸ Without doubt, this sculpture was the most famous object in the Benda Collection, and it remains a highlight of the Kunstammer of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Small, life-like marble busts of boys, often identified as ideal depictions of the Infant Jesus or St John the Baptist as a child, were a specialty of Desiderio's. The bust now in Vienna is one of the most prominent examples. Note his carefree, unself-conscious laughter that gives the portrait its unrivalled immediacy and vitality. It has even been suggested that this could be a real portrait, and the bust has been described as one of the earliest known portraits of a child in Western art.⁹ Benda had acquired the sculpture in 1892 from another private collection in Vienna, the Miller-Aichholz Collection, for 40,000 guilders.¹⁰ An old black-and-white photograph of the 'Laughing Boy', included in Hermann's

article published in *Pantheon* 9 in 1932, shows that at the time the bust was partially polychromed and adorned with a necklace of large cheap artificial pearls (*fig. 6*). This hid an old, formerly prominent fracture at the bust's neck. Today, it is barely visible to the naked eye thanks to the excellent work of the Kunstammer's restoration workshop (most recently in connection with the new installation of the collection in 2013). The veristic polychromy – presumably dating from the nineteenth century – has long been removed. However, Gustav von Benda's perception of the bust must have differed greatly from ours. In the Miller-Aichholz Collection, and sometimes later too (see the quote by Benda mentioned above), the bust was regarded as a work by Donatello. It was Wilhelm von Bode, the celebrated art historian and director of the museum in Berlin, with whom Benda corresponded regularly and who advised the collector on his acquisitions, who attributed the sculpture to Desiderio,¹¹ an attribution that has never been questioned.

Presumably because he liked his 'Laughing Boy' so much, a few years later Benda bought a second marble bust of a boy – St John the Baptist as a child, identified by his camel-skin dress, the Baptist's traditional attribute (*fig. 7*). As mentioned above, this was a popular subject in Desiderio's oeuvre, but expression, animation and the three-dimensional handling in this bust are much less

⁸ Last will of Gustav von Benda, March 1930, quoted in Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 21. Today, the 'Laughing Boy' is listed as inv. KK 9104.

⁹ See Sabine Haag and Franz Kirchweyer (eds.), *Die Kunstammer. Die Schätze der Habsburger*, Vienna 2012, 88.

¹⁰ Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 19. 1 guilder is worth c. 16 Euro in today's money – see <https://www.eurologisch.at/docroot/waehrungsrechner/#/> (retrieved 8 Feb. 2023).

¹¹ For the attribution, see Hermann 1932 (see note 1), 152. For Benda's correspondence with Bode, see Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 19.



Fig. 8
Antonio Lombardo (modelling), Severo da Ravenna (cast), *Bust of a Girl*, Venice, c. 1505, bronze, H 17 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9098

convincing than in the ‘Laughing Boy’, which is why it was already attributed to the ‘school of Desiderio da Settignano’ in the 1932 inventory of the ‘Benda Bequest’.¹² Many artists imitated the style of Desiderio, who had died young. Benda believed the infant Baptist to be an authentic work by Desiderio and described this bust as ‘truly lovely’ (‘ganz allerliebste’) in a letter to his advisor Wilhelm von Bode.¹³ He even paid almost 8000 guilders more for the St John, which he bought from an art dealer in Paris, than he had paid for the ‘Laughing Boy’ – despite the fact that the latter was then regarded as a work by Donatello. Clearly, the buyer had fallen in love with this St John.

A second focus of Benda’s collection – reflecting his profound admiration for the Italian Renaissance – was on sixteenth-century bronze statuettes and reliefs. The inventory lists an impressive 35 objects. In his article in *Pantheon*, Hermann highlights the ‘magnificent statue of a woman by Tullio Lombardi, of which the Galleria Estense in Modena owns a second exemplar’ (‘prachtvolle weibliche Büste von Tullio Lombardi, von der die Galleria Estense in Modena ein zweites Exemplar besitzt’)¹⁴ (fig. 8), and the ‘statue of a man blowing a horn moving

¹² Inventory of the ‘Benda Bequest’, 20, no. 145.

¹³ See Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 19–20.

¹⁴ Hermann 1932 (see note 1), 155. Today, this Venetian bust from the early 16th century is regarded as a cast by Severo da Ravenna after a model by Antonio Lombardo.

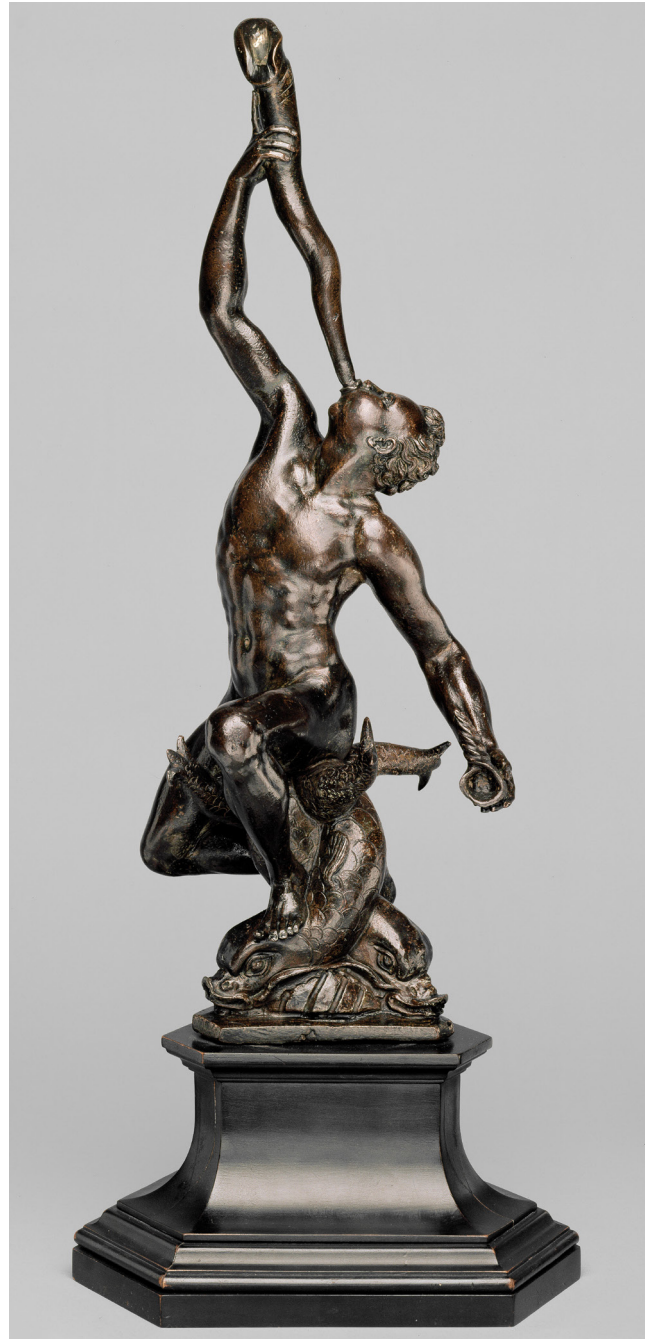


Fig. 9
Circle of Giovanni Bologna, called Giambologna, *Triton*, Florence, 2nd half of the 16th century, bronze, H 44.8 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9115

in an interesting way’ (‘durch ihr Bewegungsmotiv interessante Statuette eines ins Horn blasenden Mannes’)¹⁵ (fig. 9). Benda regarded the latter as a work by Benvenuto Cellini.¹⁶ Hermann, however, already voiced grave

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶ See ‘Verzeichnis der vom Kunsthistorischen Museum übernommenen Gegenstände der Sammlung Benda’ (‘List of objects from the Benda Collection received by the Kunsthistorisches Museum’), 3, no. 80, archive of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, ad Z. 12/I.D. ex 1932.



Fig. 10
 Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *The Virgin and Child with Three Angels*,
 Urbino or Siena, 4th quarter of the 15th century, bronze,
 H 34 cm, W 21.5 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna,
 Kunstkammer, inv. KK 9118

(justified) doubts about this attribution.¹⁷ Today, this triton from the second half of the sixteenth century is believed to have originated in the circle of Giambologna.

We should also single out one of Benda's reliefs that is interesting in connection with the panel 'Virgin and Child', the so-called *Benda Madonna*, by the Master of the Benda Madonna (see the essay by Guido Messling): the relief *Virgin and Child with Three Angels* by the Sienese sculptor Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439–1501; fig. 10). Hermann, too, regarded it as a notable work and relates its recent provenance and the remarkable history of its attribution: 'the foremost bronze relief [in the Benda Collection] is a celebrated seated Virgin Mary with two [sic!] angels, which entered the Aynard Collection in Lyon in 1880 from that assembled by Stefano Bardini [then a celebrated art dealer, painter, collector and patron in Florence]; Benda acquired it when the former collection

¹⁷ Hermann 1932 (see note 1), 156.

was put up for auction in 1913. Bertaux (*Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 1906 I) believed the relief to be an authentic work by Donatello; in the Aynard auction catalogue it is ascribed to the school of Donatello, but Bode identified it as a masterpiece by Bertoldo' ('Unter den Bronzereliefs steht die berühmte sitzende Madonna mit zwei [sic!] Engeln obenan, die 1880 aus dem Besitze Stefano Bardinis in die Sammlung Aynard in Lyon kam, bei deren Auktion sie Benda 1913 erwarb. Bertaux (*Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 1906 I) hielt das Relief für ein Original Donatellos, im Auktionskatalog Aynard wird es als Schule Donatellos bezeichnet, Bode hingegen hat es als ein Meisterwerk Bertoldos bestimmt').¹⁸ Benda had paid the enormous sum of 48,896.- guilders for it – it was the most expensive work in his collection.¹⁹ Like many of Bode's attributions to Bertoldo da Giovanni, this one too did not convince his peers. Already in 1938, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti published the still accepted attribution of the work to Francesco di Giorgio.²⁰

The relief's modelling is fine and differentiated; the height of the figures varies from shallow to almost three-dimensional. The large circular opening below the Virgin suggests the relief was designed as embellishment for the door of a tabernacle or a reliquary. This circular opening may have contained a differently-coloured, ornamented metal plate. The differences in the execution and differentiation of details on the relief's two sides (on the left, the figure of the putto and the Virgin's robe were clearly reworked after casting, unlike on the right) show that it was never completed. It presumably never served its intended purpose.

However, it will have functioned as a devotional image. The Tuscan artist strove for a realistic depiction of the Virgin as a simple young woman and mother: she is humbly seated on the ground – although slightly elevated on a pedestal-like platform (a fold of her robe is draped over the edge, as over a parapet, suggesting height). Embracing her son, she is suckling the Infant Jesus, making this a conflation of a *Madonna humilitatis* and a *Madonna lactans*. Only the three angels flanking the central motif and clutching a garland indicate the divine nature of mother and child. This invites a charming comparison with the more or less contemporary *Benda Madonna* from north of the Alps, although the latter represents a different medium and artistic tradition. Altarpieces and devotional images remained the most im-

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-3.

¹⁹ See the list of prices paid for many of the works in the Benda Bequest – 'Verzeichnis eines grossen Teiles der gekauften Werke' ('List of a large part of the acquired objects') – 6, no. 68, archive of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, ad. Z. 12/I.D. ex 1932.

²⁰ See Manfred Leithe-Jasper, *Renaissance Master Bronzes from the Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna*, Washington D.C. 1986, 65, no. 5.



Fig. 11
 Hans Daucher, *Emperor Maximilian I on Horseback as St. George*, Augsburg, c. 1522, limestone, H 22.9 cm, W 15.6 cm.
 Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 7236

portant motifs in fifteenth-century art. Like many late-fifteenth-century artists, the Master of the Benda Madonna, too, aimed for verisimilitude in his depiction of the Virgin, but he relied on very different means (see the essay by Guido Messling). This perfectly illustrates similarities and differences between the Early Renaissance in Italy and contemporaneous Late Gothic art north of the Alps.

Interestingly, figurative depictions of the Virgin also constitute a focus of the Benda Collection. The inventory lists a total of 17 objects depicting her in different media – paintings, bronzes and wooden sculptures. No other iconographic motif is represented as frequently. However, we cannot say with certainty if this devotion to the Virgin Mary reflects the personal preference of the collector, who converted from Judaism to Catholicism.²¹

Benda's contributions to the collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum did not begin with his bequest. Even before the outbreak of the First World War, he had bequeathed a number of works to the museum (for the paintings, see the essay by Guido Messling). Among the sculptures, the most important and interesting is Hans Daucher's limestone relief 'Emperor Maximilian I on Horseback as St. George' (fig. 11).

On the one hand, the object expands the Museum's small but exquisite holdings of Renaissance sculptures from southern Germany. On the other hand, it is the earliest work in a long line of small-scale Habsburg equestrian monuments, most of which are now in the museum for dynastic reasons. Benda gifted the relief in 1911 when the 'Imperial Court Museum' ('Kunsthistorisches Hofmuseum') still housed the 'Collections of the Most Serene Imperial Family' ('Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses'). At the time, the fall of the Habsburg monarchy presumably seemed inconceivable. With his carefully considered gift, Benda enriched the emperor's art collection, which probably reflects the ambition and pride that motivated this bourgeois collector and connoisseur.

²¹ In 1895, Benda left the Jewish religious community and was baptized later that year into the Catholic Church in the St Leopold parish in Vienna's Second District – see Hehenberger and Löscher 2014 (see note 4), 15, and the relevant entries on Benda, Gustav in the genealogical databank GenTeam: <https://www.genteam.at> (retrieved 3 April 2023).

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Nele Bordt (Karlsruhe), Dominik Cobanoglu (Vienna), Martina Griesser (Vienna), Gerlinde Gruber (Vienna), Ingrid Hopfner (Vienna), Holger Jacob-Friesen (Karlsruhe), Stephan Kemperdick (Berlin), Sonja Kocian (Vienna), Teresa Krah (Vienna), Selma Kurtagić (Vienna), Benjamin Mayr (Vienna), Anna Moraht-Fromm (Berlin), Aylin Nedeljkov (Vienna),

Elke Oberthaler (Vienna), Václav Pitthard (Vienna), Georg Prast (Vienna), Anke Schänig (Vienna), Katja Schmitz-von Ledebur (Vienna), Sabine Stanek (Vienna), Agnes Stillfried (Cairo/Vienna), Ute Tüchler (Vienna), Katharina Uhlir (Vienna), Andreas Uldrich (Vienna), Stefan Zeisler (Vienna) and last but not least Karin Zeleny (Vienna).

Photography Credits

Essay Messling

Figs. 2, 4, and 5: Pictorial quotation from Isolde Lübbecke and Bruno Bushart (eds.), *Altdeutsche Bilder der Sammlung Georg Schäfer*, Schweinfurt, exh. cat. Schweinfurt (Altes Rathaus) 1985, 67

Fig. 3: Archive of the author

Figs. 6, 7, and 10: © Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

Figs. 8 and 9: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Figs. 12 and 14: Bildzitat aus Friedrich Winkler, 'Vorbil-

der primitiver Holzschnitte', *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, 12, (1958), 37–50, figs. 1 (mirrored) and 4

All others: © KHM-Museumsverband

Essay Schlegel

Fig. 6: Pictorial quotation from Hermann Julius Hermann, 'Das Legat Benda an das Kunsthistorische Museum in Wien', *Pantheon*, 9 (1932), 152-8, here: 156

All others: © KHM-Museumsverband

Essay Földes

all: © KHM-Museumsverband

Imprint

Published on the occasion of the homonymous exhibition.

Kunsthistorischen Museum Vienna

www.khm.at

23 June to 12 November 2023

Publisher: KHM-Museumsverband

Edited by: Guido Messling

Texts: Anneliese Földes, Guido Messling, and Konrad Schlegel

Editorial coordination: Guido Messling

Copy-editor: Karin Zeleny

Translations: Shawn Bryan, Agnes Stillfried

Graphic design: Nina Fuchs

Photography: Michael Eder, Anneliese Földes, Christian Mendez, Alexander Rosoli, Andreas Uldrich

Image editing: Michael Eder



This work is licensed under a Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042.

ISBN: 978-3-99020-241-8

© 2023 KHM-Museumsverband