Goethe was clearly entranced with the image he is describing here, and he was not alone. By the time he wrote these enthusiastic words on August 11, 1813, the painting in question, a life-size vision of the Madonna and Child by Raphael, housed since 1754 in the splendid Dresden galleries, had become a pilgrimage site for art lovers and religious devotees alike. Removed from its original ecclesiastical context as an altarpiece in the church of Saint Sisto in Piacenza, the painting had arrived in the Saxon capital just in time for Johann Joachim Winckelmann to include it in his foundational treatise on European Neoclassicism, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-Kunst* (Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture), published in 1755:

*Behold the Madonna! her face brightens with innocence; a form above the female size, and the calmness of her mien, make her appear as already beatified: she has that silent awfulness which the ancients spread over their deities. How grand, how noble is her Contour! The child in her arms is elevated above vulgar children, by a face darting the beams of divinity through every smiling feature of harmless childhood. . . . Time, 'tis true, has withered the primitive splendour of this picture . . . ; but still the soul, with which the painter inspired his godlike work, breathes life through all its parts.*

Like Goethe, Winckelmann could not resist the charms of this Renaissance masterpiece. If these two neo-pagans cherished Raphael’s great work of art for its classicism and debt to antiquity, the younger generation adored it for its spiritual depth. Looking at this image of a majestic yet humble young mother, aloof in her divine glory but intimately close by virtue of her earthly, unassuming beauty, the Romantics replaced the dispassionate eye of the Enlightenment connoisseur with heartfelt piety, effusive emotionality, and sentimental empathy. Many a visitor wept hot tears in front of the Sistine Madonna, as she was called, and artists were no exception. Thus Philipp Otto Runge, that pioneer of Romantic art whose budding talent was cut short by a premature death, found himself shaken to the core in the presence of Raphael’s tender Virgin. For Runge, the canvas marked a threshold, a cultural paradigm shift from the age of Christian history painting to a new era of art, one that he defined as “landscape.” “I am intoxicated,” the painter Alfred Rethel similarly exclaimed, and generations of Germans—from Johann Gottfried Herder to Martin Heidegger, from Novalis to Thomas Mann—would share this sentiment.

The cult of the Sistine Madonna was a quintessentially bourgeois phenomenon. It reflected the cultural changes—including the establishment of the modern art museum— ushered in by the rise of a new urban social class to economic and cultural (although not necessarily political) prominence at the end of the eighteenth century. Dresden stood at the forefront of a long tradition of aristocratic collecting in the German-speaking world, and consequently exemplified a fundamental shift at this time in the purpose of such assemblages. Traditionally, the amassing of precious objects had served primarily as a means of princely self-representation and an expression of regal splendor. By 1800 these older notions had yielded to philanthropic and educational ideals. With their doors opened to a broader audience, art collections were now charged with benefiting the public and serving the people’s common interest. But equally important to this process, if not more so, was the ability to possess these images in the form of reproductive prints.
It was an age of revolution in the world of prints, with new printmaking techniques, new formats—now ranging from elaborate large-scale engravings to heliotypically illustrated gallery guides and small, handheld almanacs—and new strategies of dissemination. And this revolution made available to the cultivated household and the less prosperous alike what had previously been the nobility’s exclusive domain. Raphael’s Sistine Madonna was an especially coveted image, and numerous printmakers would try their hand at its reproduction. Yet only one of the many attempts became itself an icon of almost mythical status: the 1816 engraving by Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Müller (fig. C1).

The artist’s biography is the stuff of Romantic legend. Afflicted since childhood with a fragile constitution, Müller often suffered from bouts of exhaustion after the completion of a particularly demanding plate. This did not bode well for the outcome of his engraving of the Sistine Madonna, a commission he received in 1808 from the Dresden art dealer Heinrich Rittner. Welcomed by the artist as a sacred duty, a form of worship and prayer, the work failed to instill in him inner calm or meditative resolve. Instead, reproducing the beloved image became a physical and mental strain. Over time Müller’s religious enthusiasm rose to a fever pitch, until the Virgin herself appeared to the frenzied engraver in his state of self-inflicted starvation. (Following this vision, Müller believed that he had a divine mission to petition the king, accompanied by twelve maidens dressed in white, for the creation of an academy dedicated solely to engraving.) In 1816 he finally put the last touches to his Madonna plate, which went off to Paris for printing after problems were encountered at local presses. However, the artist was not to see his finished prints. Shortly after the plate was shipped, he went completely mad. By the time the first impressions arrived in Dresden from Paris, Müller was dead, having committed suicide. At his funeral, his masterpiece was displayed prominently behind his bier, an honor that recalled a similar staging three hundred years earlier, when Raphael’s final artistic achievement, the unfinished Transfiguration (now in the Vatican’s Pinacoteca), towered high above the deceased as he lay in state at his house in the Borgo. In death, Müller finally had become one with his revered icon.

Müller’s tragic fate only added to the appeal of his print, which contemporaries hailed as one of the most beautiful achievements of the engraver’s burin. Goethe wrote a glowing review; Balzac cited the print in his novel Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau; and the young Henry Adams, while traveling in Germany, was so eager to purchase a good example of Müller’s engraving that he found it worthwhile to write home to compare prices in Dresden with those in Boston. The popularity of Müller’s achievement did not diminish even after the restoration of Raphael’s painting in 1826 prompted further reproductions, by Auguste Gaspard Louis Desnoyers, Moritz Steinla, and Joseph Keller, among others. Splendid these may have been, but none of the new efforts, as the artist’s great-grandson Berthold Pfeiffer remarked in 1881, received the same artistic consecration enjoyed by Müller’s print, which continued to realize premium prices at auctions.

In the twenty-first century, an age saturated with colorful images of all sizes and pictorial mediums, moving and otherwise, it is difficult to imagine the tremendous effect of these black-and-white masterpieces on the era’s imagination. But their power cannot be overestimated. Ultimately, it was prints, as Stendhal noted with his usual psychological astuteness, and not museum displays or traveling exhibitions, that shaped the century’s visual culture. The French novelist warned his readers about the dangers of buying engravings of the beautiful artifacts they would encounter on their travels, for as he saw it, the reproductive print would soon obliterate the memory of the genuine thing itself. At least, this was what had happened to him: “Müller’s beautiful engraving," Stendhal mourned, "has destroyed [the Sistine Madonna] for me.” In the end, it was not the charms of oil and pigment that provided the nineteenth century with the ultimate image of the Mother...
of God, but the stark outlines, subtle gradations, and gray tonalities delivered in print.

If the cult of the Sistine Madonna was paradigmatic in bringing out the conflict between original work and reproduction, painting and print, public display and private ownership, it was also exemplary in uniting two rivalrous cultural tendencies: aesthetic religion and religious revivalism. Both attitudes were vital to the rise of Romanticism and its long aftermath, and both were nurtured by a similar desire: the yearning for a higher truth and for access to the transcendental. Yet the roles that each assigned to art in their mutual pursuit differed fundamentally.

Aesthetic religion—or what the Germans called Kunstreligion—consecrated art as the sole means of approaching the divine, conceiving it as a substitute for religion altogether. Accordingly, Albrecht Dürer and Raphael knelt before the throne of art, not of religion, in Franz Pforr’s early vision of his revered predecessors, drawn around 1808 or 1810 and widely circulated in its 1832 incarnation as an etching by Carl Hoff.* Granted a life of its own, the individual art object became the locus of epiphanic experience. The result was a theology of presence and an ideology of autonomy,** two concepts that have continued to shape modernist attitudes toward art to the present day. In the decades around 1800 they gave rise to the cult of the artist as visionary, seer, and even saint-like figure. The maker of the Sistine Madonna was henceforth venerated as the “divine” Raphael. Even those Romantics who hailed the Renaissance artist not for his personal divinity, but for the creation of an oeuvre considered the epitome of Christian art, bestowed upon him the epithet “Saint” Raphael and conflated the sensual painter, despite his reputation as an insatiable womanizer, with the Archangel Raphael.†

Religious revivalism, in contrast, treated art as a handmaiden of religion. Thus, when Johann Friedrich Overbeck reimagined the motif of Dürer and Raphael’s meeting, he placed the two Renaissance men before an allegory of the church, not of art, restoring to religion what he felt was her rightful place.‡ For men like Overbeck, the artist was a spiritual crusader, and he appears as such in the opening plate of Ferdinand Olivier’s landscape cycle Sieben Gegenden aus Salzburg und Berchtesgaden (Seven Places in Salzburg and Berchtesgaden; see fig. 38), in which

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* Fig. C2. Carl Ferdinand Berthold (German, 1799–1838). Going to Church, 1832. Etching; sheet (cut within platemark) 10 13/16 x 15 1/4 inches (27.9 x 38.1 cm). The Muriel and Philip Berman Gift, acquired from the John S. Phillips bequest of 1876 to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1985.52.201

† Fig. C3. Wilhelm Oelschig (German, 1814–after 1862), after Eduard Julius Friedrich Bendemann (German, 1811–1889). Going to Church, c. 1841. Etching; plate 7 7/16 x 10 11/16 inches (19.3 x 27.1 cm). The Muriel and Philip Berman Gift, acquired from the John S. Phillips bequest of 1876 to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1985.52.14298

‡ Admittedly, the motto of lived belief were popular not merely for their religious potency, as Wilhelm Oelschig’s charming etching of 1841, Going to Church, demonstrates (fig. C3). Replicating a composition by Eduard Bendemann, the etching creates a scene of enchanting piety, but it also caters to the contemporary taste for idyllic landscapes, folklore, and traditional costume, so that

...
viewer hovers between engaged participant and distant observer. Nonetheless, the Madonna was never far, and she appears here in the upper right corner as a wayside cross, the divine child nestled into her arm. Her appearance in this print is no coincidence. The cult of the Sistine Madonna was but one expression of a rapidly spreading veneration of the Madonna, and the variations in paint and ink were countless (see figs. C7, C9–C11, C13, L9, N6, P1). Only the twelfth century rivaled the epoch in the breadth and intensity of its Marian devotion. Consequently, it was not only mad artists but also many a young girl who experienced visitations by the Holy Virgin.

Certainly, not all Marian visions received canonical approval; nor all visionaries posthumous sainthood. However, those that did had lasting influence. One need only think of Lourdes, still a popular pilgrimage site today, where in 1858 Mary appeared in a grotto to Bernadette Soubirous, the daughter of a humble miller. Four years earlier, Pope Pius IX had pronounced the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which stipulates that Mary was conceived without original sin and was thus, from the first instant of her existence, in a state of sanctifying grace. The passion for Christ's mother was so widespread as to infiltrate Protestant culture, so that even someone like Johann Gottfried Herder—a minister in the heartlands of the Reformation—could not resist the Madonna's charms, although he tried to channel his fascination into poetic outlets.19 It is not surprising, then, that this great German theologian (who was a philosopher, poet, and literary critic as well) would collect, as part of his interest in folklore, a Sicilian fishermen's folksong, "O Sanctissima," praising the "Dulcis Virgo Maria" (Sweet Virgin Mary; see p. 000).20 In turn, Herder's rendition would inspire in 1829 yet another Raphaelsque Madonna, this time painted by one of the minor Dresden Romantics and sensitively translated into print just a year later (see fig. N6).

Gender politics also played an important role in the Madonna craze. Across denominational and national borders, the Virgin was celebrated as a model of ideal womanhood.21 The dreaming girl in Georg Friedrich August Lucas's lithograph of about 1828–29 (fig. C4), pictured as placed above the ruins of Heidelberg Castle, testifies to this fashion as much as the countless images of loving mothers do (see figs. O13, O14), or the smash hit of the 1830s, The Church-Goer, by the Düsseldorf painter Louis Ammy Blanc.22 An instant success, Blanc's mediavalizing portrait quickly entered the modern machinery of reproduction, as August Hoffmann's Kunstraetzer print of 1835 illustrates (fig. C5). In turn, such printed matter would serve an eager audience as sought-after models for other decorative purposes, from the embellishment of coffee cups, pipe bowls, and key boxes to the adornment...
of carpetbags, fine screens, and pearl-embroidered sofa cushions.

In these various evocations of the Madonna and of virtuous maidens and doting mothers, the high and the low converged. The subsequent communion of poetry and theology, scientific inquiry and popular culture, erudite symbolism and pure enjoyment of form also eroded the fault lines between aesthetic religion and religious revivalism. In principle, these two outlooks were antagonistic; in reality, cross-fertilization was common. An allegory by Overbeck, best known as Italia and Germania, exemplifies this cross-over (fig. C6). Today an icon of German Romantic art, its origins were humble, highly personal, and not restricted to the artistic implications of its current title. The project was born of the friendship of the young Overbeck, then seventeen years old and recently enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and Franz Pforr, a fellow student one year his senior. First acquainted in 1806, the two soul mates soon formed a symbiotic working relationship. Their intimate friendship made art history only a few years later, when it became the basis for the first anti-academic secession in modern art, the foundation in 1809 of the Brotherhood of Saint Luke (the Lukanbrüder). Following its relocation to Rome a year later, this small band of rebels quickly attracted further members and—with the completion of a fresco cycle for the Casa Bartolotti, executed in 1806–17 and dedicated to the Old Testament figure of Joseph—international acclaim. Within a decade, those associated with the youthful rebellion became known as Nazarenes and inspired a European-wide movement.

Even before their move to Rome, Overbeck and Pforr had engaged in expansive discussions about the nature, purpose, and theory of art. In January 1808 they formed the idea of making paintings to reflect their artistic ideals. Both artists were indebted to what they saw as a medieval ideal of simplicity and sincerity, "medieval" here encompassing much of what we would call Renaissance today. But while Pforr favored the boldness of the north: the characteristic garments, physiognomic starkness, irrational spaces, ornamental flatness, and angular lines of old German prints, and (in painting) the stark local coloring; Overbeck preferred the gentle idealism of the south: the perfected beauty, balanced compositions, modulated coloring, and lyrical mood of early Italian art. From their involvement a leitmotif was born: the theme of two loving sisters, one a fair-haired German maiden, the other a brunette Italian beauty. In the following months the two artists reworked the motif with an almost obsessive intensity, producing a bewildering profusion of drawings, prints, and paintings of the two women (fig. C7). This proliferation of images was accompanied by a complex elaboration of the women’s identities. At the end of the process the vision of twin artistic ideals (Italian and German Renaissance art) had expanded into a nuptial fantasy (the artists’ ideal brides).
and acquired a biblical framework (Sulamith, the bride of Solomon in the Old Testament Song of Songs, and Maria, her New Testament antitype). This last, profoundly theological enrichment constituted an urgent call for conversion to Christianity that made manifest a core objective of the Nazarene program: to spread God's word and proselytize all those removed from His grace, be they heathens, atheists, lapsed Christians, or, above all, Jews. Thus Overbeck's Sulamith—and not her fair-haired sister—bears the features and attributes of the Madonnina, a powerful visual allusion suggesting the impending transformation of the Old Testament type into her New Testament antitype.

The motif's rich iconography and intimate personal history became buried, however, when Overbeck abandoned his canvas after Pforr's premature death in 1812. Sixteen years later, when the painter returned to the composition in 1828, its personal and biblical allusions yielded to a more obvious reading of the two female figures as embodiments of the artistic styles of the south and north.27 As Italia and Germania, the image acquired instant fame, and reproductive prints such as Ferdinand Piloty's lithographs for the 1828 portfolio of the Royal Bavarian Pina-kothek in Munich and the picture gallery of Schleissheim and reproductive prints such as Ferdinand Piloty's Lithicia and Germania, the image acquired instant fame, and when Philipp Veit imagined allying Artisto's Orlando Furioso or Torquato Tasso's Gerusalemme liberate. Düer held hands with Raphael, Shakespeare stood with Dante; and Ossian sat at the side of Homer (see fig. N5).28 Accordingly, Ferdinand Olivier paired a German sculptor (his identity has been a mystery, but of the suggested names, Peter Vischer and Tilman Riemenschneider among them, the young Adam Kraft seems the most likely; see pp. 000, 000) with Raphael, and the architect of the Strasbourg cathedral, Erwin von Steinbach, with Dante (see fig. 18). And when Philipp Veit imagined Christianity introducing the Fine Arts into Germany in 1818 (fig. C9), he placed Italia and Germania as equal sisters to the left and right of the central panel.29 There they sat in noble monumen-tality, as the outer wings of the colossal triptych, bowing their heads in humble devotion before the allegory of religion, whose sweet grandeur recalls once again the commanding yet comforting presence of the Holy Virgin. Contemporary print culture was vital to these various processes of adaptation. Prints also accelerated the profound changes in taste that occurred between 1750 and 1825, and contemporary print culture was vital to these various processes of adaptation. Prints also accelerated the profound changes in taste that occurred between 1750 and 1825.

Middle Ages (along with the early decades of the Renaissance) stood for more than a specific style or idiom; they incarnated a whole set of ethical values, such as purity, honesty, and childlike naïveté, as well as a way of life that was God-fearing and blessed by community and non-alienated work. Not least, this dream of a restored existence drew Romantic artists, like so many of the urban buyers of their work, to wistful fantasies of tranquil country life untouched by the taint of capitalism and rapid industrialization (see figs. J7, V11).

The Romantic vision of a transalpine union also played an integral part in cultural self-discovery and the formation of national identity (see pp. 000–000). The pairing of Italia and Germania reflected a fervent desire on the part of the Germans to claim cultural parity with the Italians. In the face of the burdensome Italian artistic heritage celebrated with such unrestrained bias by the "Father of art history," the Renaissance painter, architect, and writer Giorgio Vasari, the Romantics promoted a rediscovered world of medieval Germanic culture.28 In the arts, from this point on, the Nebelfinger heroes of German legend fought side by side with the crusaders of Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso or Torquato Tasso's Gerusalemme liberate. Düer held hands with Raphael, Shakespeare stood with Dante; and Ossian sat at the side of Homer (see fig. N5).28 Accordingly, Ferdinand Olivier paired a German sculptor (his identity has been a mystery, but of the suggested names, Peter Vischer and Tilman Riemenschneider among them, the young Adam Kraft seems the most likely; see pp. 000, 000) with Raphael, and the architect of the Strasbourg cathedral, Erwin von Steinbach, with Dante (see fig. 18). And when Philipp Veit imagined Christianity introducing the Fine Arts into Germany in 1818 (fig. C9), he placed Italia and Germania as equal sisters to the left and right of the central panel.29 There they sat in noble monumen-tality, as the outer wings of the colossal triptych, bowing their heads in humble devotion before the allegory of religion, whose sweet grandeur recalls once again the commanding yet comforting presence of the Holy Virgin.

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1810. On the one hand, they introduced a broad audience to the northern Gothic tradition previously considered crude but now honored for its authenticity, meticulous realism, and spiritual depth. A landmark in this realm was the print portfolio of lithographic reproductions of the groundbreaking collection of northern medieval paintings amassed by the brothers Sulpiz and Melchior Boisserée and Johann Bertram in the aftermath of the widespread secularization of ecclesiastical properties at the beginning of the nineteenth century (see fig. P5). Published between 1821 and 1840, the lithographs by Johann Nepomuk Strixner reproducing these paintings enchanted viewers with their velvety shadows and golden highlights, as well as with their careful editing, which stressed the devotional aspect of the originals. On the other hand, the new print albums also altered the taste of the age with respect to established artists, shifting the focus, for example, from Raphael’s dramatic history paintings and famous fresco cycles to his early work, and in particular his sweet portrayals of the Madonna (fig. C10). Reproductive engravings and lithographs provided the models for contemporary artists to update their own visions of the Christian saints, and simultaneously fed the results back into the stream of reproduced images.

The reception of Joseph Caspar’s delicate engraving of a painted Saint Catherine—a work then attributed to the young Raphael—encompasses this cycle (fig. C33). Published in 1825, it was the first print the Swiss engraver executed in Milan under the supervision of the famous Italian printmaker Giuseppe Longhi. A decade later, when the painting was still considered an early work of Raphael’s, it inspired a canvas by the Düsseldorfer artist Ernst Deger, a Nazarene follower, whose Mary Adoring the Sleeping Christ Child transformed the pious figure of the kneeling saint into the Virgin herself. This small devotional picture was such a success that Deger immediately painted a replica, which was, as the influential art journal Kunst-Blatt noted in 1836, “the favorite of everybody who visited the exhibition [at the Berlin academy].” As was to be expected, its popularity called for a reproductive print, and it was none other than Joseph Caspar who was entrusted with the task (fig. C33). With his usual deft combination of etching and engraving, Caspar sensitively captured the particular character of Deger’s Raphaelesque version: a combination of sweet sentimentality, ethereal beauty, and childlike innocence, evoking a gentle Renaissance never-never land as a refuge from the harsher realities of the modern world.

It is worth noting that the reproduction by Caspar is approximately the same size as Deger’s domestically scaled Andachtsbild (devotional picture), a choice that points to the important function of reproductive prints as suitable surrogates for cherished originals in the furnishing of a bourgeois parlor, or in this case bedroom. As a new clientele began to demand high art at affordable prices, prints became a sought-after medium that united decoration and devotion.
In art, as in religion, Romanticism encouraged a sense of quiet yet deep and heartfelt contemplation, a practice of silent worship that opened up that mysterious path of silent worship that opened up that mysterious path of art—whether in prose, print, or paint—not in solitary but in collective terms. In their art we often encounter in the background of familiar scenes small figures who are deeply engrossed in conversation, like those in Overbeck's 1825 painting *Mary and Elisabeth with the Infant Jesus and John* (Neue Pinakothek, Munich), whose identity and discourse remain enigmatic, reminding us of the constant oscillation between aesthetic delight and pious exploration afforded to viewers.34 Georg Jacob Felsing’s engraving of the painting, these background figures are omitted, perhaps for reasons of size, or perhaps because their removal made for a simpler devotional image without any mysterious riddles (figs. C3, C4). Yet whatever the inclination of the individual viewer, the painting on the wall, like the print album on the parlor table, was a communal affair.

Deger’s and Overbeck’s compositions exemplify a hallmark of the nineteenth-century Raphael craze that, in addition to inspiring painted or engraved copies, fostered above all a practice of reworking (rather than imitating) the earlier models, and thus resulted in a broad range of stylistic variations. Many of those works still betray the desire to marry Germania and Italia—Dürer’s hard-edged realism and pronounced, domineering contour and Raphael’s gentle idealism and harmonious fusion of line and color. The forceful emphasis on clearly defined shapes in Overbeck’s painting made it ideal for reproduction, and we do not miss color in Pilet’s lithograph (see fig. C5), not least because his crumbling mark bestows a softness on the composition that eases the austerity of the original’s outlines while playing up its atmospheric quality. Deger shared Overbeck’s linear thinking, yet his work lacks the almost abstract sensibility of the Nazarene’s later work. Instead, the crispness of Deger’s composition, so delicately captured by Caspar (see fig. C6), has a tender sweetness that reflects the artist’s penchant for the purity of the early Raphael and his immediate predecessors.

A third variant of the subject that enjoyed great popularity, a painting by Eduard Steinbrück, reflects the infusion of the Nazarenes’ idealism and enamel-like surfaces with a succinct measure of natural observation. Wilhelm Schadow, a former member of the Brotherhood of Saint Luke, made this “naturalist idealism” (nationalistcher Idealismus) the foundational principle of the Düsseldorf school of painting, which from the 1830 onward attracted students from Norway, Russia, and the United States, including such later luminaries as Emanuel Leutze, Eastman Johnson, and George Caleb Bingham, to name a few.35 Steinbrück’s charming Madonna in the *Workshop Door*, painted in 1830—31 and engraved with great finesse by Eduard Fichau between 1833 and 1835 (fig. C45), embodies the principles of this Düsseldorf style, with even the wood shavings on the workshop floor lovingly delineated.36

In contrast to her Sistine sister, Steinbrück’s Madonna literally steps into the world of the viewer, and the careful rendering of the plants and trading vines, the masonry, and the heavily grained oak door, with its chunky hand-forged nails and up-to-date ironwork, evoke a contemporary setting, perhaps a nearby Rhineland vineyard. When compared with Overbeck’s flattened shapes or the ethereal forms of Deger’s composition, the greater modeling of Steinbrück’s Madonna lends her weight and material substance, and her stylish hairdo adds a touch of 1830s fashion to her newly gained corporeality. While each detail still invokes an allegorical reading—the nails and the grape-laden vine alluding, for example, to Christ’s crucifixion and the Eucharist—this kind of “disguised symbolism,” as Erwin Panofsky once called it in the context of early Netherlandish painting,37 is finely balanced by the “thingness” of the objects, and by the artist’s pleasure in surface description. The otherworldliness of Raphael’s Sistine Madonna has yielded to an everyday appearance in the here and now. We might read in this transformation a gesture toward a very different Madonna, that is, the Virgin in a sixteenth-century painting that was then still attributed to Hans Holbein the Younger (see fig. P1). “The divine Mother does not appear among the clouds. . . . but she tends earthly soil,” a critic gushed of this painting in 1865. “No longer as a vision, but bodily and actually she is represented.”38 And so was Steinbrück’s Virgin.

The modern allusions in Steinbrück’s Madonna were not accidental. Pious women were revered in the Romantic era as bastions of Christian ritual in a period of secularization, and depictions of them on their way to church proliferated in the market (we have already encountered examples in Blanc’s scene above the Cologne cathedral and Olivier’s Sunday; see figs. C5, C4). Feminists have justly criticized this idealized model of saintly womanhood for its anti-emicastic potential.39 Yet both the Raphael cult and the Madonna ideal it fostered could also have the opposite effect, one of unexpected liberation, as demonstrated by two artists from very different backgrounds who were united by their outsider status: Maria Elisabeth von der Forst, one of very few successful women artists of the time, and Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, “Painter of the Rothschilds and
Moritz Oppenheim is perhaps best known today for his depictions of nineteenth-century Jewish life. However, he pursued another aspect of contemporary art with equal talent and acumen, painting biblical history in a Nazarene idiom that challenged, both thematically and stylistically, the proselytizing tendencies of the Brotherhood of Saint Luke and its circle. Both sides of his work came together in a canvas of 1835, *Noah’s Ark*, which was immediately acquired by the heir to the Russian throne, the future Alexander II, and engraved in 1841–42 as the annual membership print of the *Albrecht-Dürer-Verein* in Nuremberg (fig. C16; see p. 000). Once again, the print approximates the dimensions of the original, making it a suitable substitute for the actual canvas. In both painting and print the Raphaelesque qualities of the draughtsmanship, clothing style, and, to some degree, composition recall the Nazarene phase of Oppenheim’s Italian years between 1821 and 1824. Yet the scene’s anecdotal aspect and emphasis on family intimacy make it a quintessential Biedermeier genre subject, cozy and convivial, as does the decidedly contemporary feel of the faces, especially in the case of the dark-haired maiden in the background, who peeks out mischievously, and the young boy leaning on the window ledge, who fixes our attention with his direct, confident gaze. The company’s merry mood lifts the terror of the flood, and so the ark’s lonely voyage morphs into an innocuous adventure akin to a leisurely Sunday boat ride on the Rhine.

If Oppenheim succeeded in preserving his Jewishness while appealing to a non-Jewish audience, Maria Ellenrieder defied gender stereotypes without transgressing the era’s strict boundaries of feminine propriety. As the first...
of her sex to be enrolled at the new Academy of Fine Arts in Munich (the Akademie der Bildenden Künste), which she joined in 1813, she attained the high academic rank of a bona fide history painter, a feat rarely achieved by any of her female peers in the long history of Western art.47

A devout Catholic and dedicated churchgoer, Ellenrieder fashioned her identity, both as a woman and as a painter, on the model of the Madonna, whom the artist imagined—posing her as the poetess of the Magnificat—as an archetype of female creativity.48

Once again, the Sistine Madonna occupied center stage in these efforts. In 1825, while in Rome, Ellenrieder painted an innovative variation of the famous motif, which quickly established her international reputation.49 The composition’s curtain and columns recall the theatrical setting of Raphael’s invention (see fig. C1), but the unusual motif of Mary holding her toddler’s hand as they descend a broad staircase brought the scene into the experiential world of the contemporary viewer. Ignaz Heinrich von Wessenberg, a high-ranking church official in the diocese of Ellenrieder’s hometown of Constance, heaped praise on his young protégée:

“In this exemplary picture, the ideal majesty and beauty of the Raphaelesque is felicitously blended with the pious simplicity and grace of the early Florentine style. . . . The pictorial idea is new and beautiful. Who would criticize her? She is, rather, worthy of admiration. Or why should the Madonna always only be depicted with the boy on her lap or carried in her arms? Here the Christ Child appears more awe-inspiring, authoritative, divine. The setting is of the utmost simplicity. Thus the viewer’s attention is not distracted by anything.”50

The life-size canvas soon became the subject of numerous reproductions, of which the most touching is surely the original etching by the artist herself, executed shortly after the triumphal premiere of her canvas at an exhibition in Karlsruhe in 1826 (fig. C17). The irregular hatching and ethereal lightness of the central figures in the print bring out the image’s naive immediacy and heartfelt nature, qualities much cherished by the Romantic generation.
Although the Raphael cult has withered since its zenith in the 18th, the Sistine Madonna is still with us. Its adorable little angels are ubiquitous in reproductions ranging from high art to pure kitsch (fig. C18). The path to this new visual world of widely disseminated images was largely paved by the print revolution that took place in Europe around the turn of the nineteenth century. Images had circulated in and as prints before, but with the onset of the Romantic era the process of the multiplication and consumption of the printed image attained a new level.52


8. According to at least one account, Müller had jumped out a window, apparently thinking he could fly, or that he would be saved by heavenly intervention. See Allgemeine deutsche biographie, vol. 33 (1885), pp. 670–677.


15. For an illustration of Hubert’s lithograph and a discussion of Pier’s drawing (now lost), see (here Götz and Zeidler, Druckgraphik der Romantik aus den Restituten des Landesmuseums Mainz und aus Privatbesitz), ed. cat. (Mainz: Landesmuseum, 1993), pp. 527–532, cat. 64.


17. Mitchell Benjamin Frank, German Romantic Painting Redefined: Nazarene Tradition and the Narrative of Romanticism (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), p. 19, fig. 43. Traditionally dated around 1810, Mitchell Benjamin Frank has convincingly argued for a later date, namely 1815; for the profound implications of this new attribution and a substantial re-reading of the image’s iconography, see thinham, Friedrich Overbeck and die Bildnerei des 19. Jahrhunderts (Regensburg Schnell & Steiner, 2014), pp. 148–152. See also Grewe, “Religious Revival” (forthcoming).

18. For the pictorial strategies and the text’s conceptualization as a reflection and practice of Christian ritual, see Cornelia Grewe, Tempel der Kunst: Die Geburt des öffentlichen Museums in Deutschland, 1700–1815 (Münster: von Zabern, 2006).
24. Johann David Pasenau made it clear in 1837 that this was an image painted on the inside of one of two outer wings (Flügelthüren) of a small Madonna and Child triptych; the other wing had a painting of Saint Barbara, and the outsides of the two wings carried an Annunciation scene painted in grisaille. Pasenau reaffirmed the triptych to Frei Herrn di S. Marco. See Johann David Pasenau, Repertor von Litho und Lit. Vater Glaubensense (Stuttgart and Tübingen: F. A. Brockhaus, 1839), vol. 2, pp. 407–408.
25. Dorger's original version of 1841 is housed in the Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; the replica of 1840 is in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie. For an illustration, see Ekkehard Mai, "Dorger, Ernst" in Lexikon der Düsseldorfer Maler, 1840–1867 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1886), pp. 391–392.
27. For inexplicable reasons, the caption in the Piloty print reverses the title and thus the identification of the allegorical figures.
30. The symbol of the Brotherhood of Saint Luke, the Leimrute (the modern form of the noun) translates as "lime stick" — ‘aber in aller Ehrlichkeit’: Über einen Aspekt der "ideale Würde und Schönheit des raphaelischen Styls, mit der der Bäuerin das Bild der Peppa hergestellt hat."
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43. Balth Monnikes, "Steinbrück, Eduard Carl (Karl)," in Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architetti... in lithographirten Abbildungen (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1840), part 2, pp. 407–408.
44. For inexplicable reasons, the caption in the Piloty print reverses the title and thus the identification of the allegorical figures.