
**KUNST
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MUSEUM
WIEN**



**POINT OF VIEW #27
A MASTERPIECE AND ITS (ALMOST) FORGOTTEN COLLECTOR
The So-Called Benda Madonna and the Legacy of Gustav von Benda**

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery, Gallery XI
23 June – 12 November 2023

The Kunsthistorisches Museum is indebted not only to the Habsburgs – especially in the early twentieth century, a number of bourgeois collectors helped to grow the collection. With Point of View #27 the museum commemorates one of its most important patrons: Gustav von Benda (1846–1932). In 1932, he bequeathed a splendid collection comprising exquisite sculptures, paintings, and other works to the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The Master of the Benda Madonna

A masterful depiction of the Virgin forms the heart of Point of View #27. Named after this painting, its creator is known by the notname ‘Master of the Benda Madonna’. The anonymous artist is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable painters active in the late fifteenth century on the Upper Rhine, then dominated by the great Alsatian master Martin Schongauer (1445/50–1491). Before moving to the Upper Rhine, our artist clearly spent some formative months or years in the Low Countries; this is suggested both by details of his handling and the clearly Netherlandish character of his Virgin Mary.

Unlike all the other works by the Benda Master, the panel in Vienna features no references to Schongauer’s much-copied engravings. This suggests the anonymous artist painted his *Virgin and Child* before he moved to the Upper Rhine, before he was exposed to Schongauer’s works.

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The Benda Madonna

The composition features a half-length depiction of the Virgin and her son, the Infant Jesus. It is an example of a type of formal depiction of the Virgin that dates back to Late Antiquity and was repeated in countless variations and different media. The exquisite panel produced by our anonymous artist is elaborately worked; it owes its sumptuous effect to a palette of luscious reds, precious fabrics and pearls, and countless highlights that cover these pictorial elements like delicate ridges or points. Mary, too, with her small-boned hands, bulging high forehead, full face, and elegant-sombre expression is exquisite. Note also the unusually strong modelling of the flesh tones and their metallic, almost mother-of-pearl-like lustre. Despite all this splendour, mother and child are depicted without a halo and almost realistically. The three-dimensionality of the figures, the carefully differentiated materials, and the inviting landscape vista bear witness to the fact that the painter was familiar with the fundamental innovations of Early Netherlandish artists who had developed a new, realistic pictorial language in the early fifteenth century. However, some of the pictorial elements reference, at least symbolically, fundamental Christian beliefs.

Recent scientific analyses of the Benda Madonna support the suggestion that the painting was produced after 1490 on the Upper Rhine. Its support comprises planks cut from a southern-German oak tree. Its small size suggests it functioned as a private devotional image.

A Piece of Good Fortune for the Kunsthistorisches Museum

Gustav von Benda (1846–1932) was the scion of a merchant family from Prague. Around 1870 he moved to Vienna, where he headed the local branch of Waldek, Wagner und Benda, suppliers of technical commodities for Austrian industry. Business was good, and around 1880 he began to collect art. His aim was to assemble a wide range of outstanding objects representing different media and types of art. His collection was regarded as the foremost private non-aristocratic collection in Vienna. One of his focal points was early Renaissance sculpture from Italy, a good example of which is the bronze relief *Virgin and Child with Three Angels* attributed to Francesco di Giorgio Martini and on show in the exhibition.

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In keeping with his noble public spiritedness, the single and childless connoisseur decided to leave his collection to the Republic of Austria. In his will, Gustav von Benda stipulated that the majority of works in his collection were to go to the Kunsthistorisches Museum. His collection of porcelain, ceramics, and furniture went to the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (today's MAK – Museum of Applied Art).

Benda's treasures were initially displayed together at the Neue Burg, but as early as 1939 they were – contrary to his express wish – dispersed among the different collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. One reason for this was presumably the fact that Benda was Jewish until he converted to Catholicism in 1895.

Following its recent comprehensive restoration, the *Benda Madonna* is now on show to the public for several months, together with historical photographs and other related works.

The exhibition is curated by Guido Messling, Curator of German Painting at the Picture Gallery, and Konrad Schlegel, Curator at the Imperial Treasury and the Kunstammer Vienna.

www.pointofview27.khm.at

The exhibition series Point of View showcases exceptional works in the collection of the Picture Gallery that are not on permanent display because of a lack of hanging space, or that deserve to be reappraised in the light of recent research.

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OPEN ACCESS PUBLICATION

For the first time, this Point of View exhibition catalogue is published as an open access publication. It comprises essays by Guido Messling on the anonymous master and his work, and by Konrad Schlegel on the collector Gustav von Benda and his bequest. Anneliese Földes contributed the conservator's point of view.

[A Masterpiece and Its \(Almost\) Forgotten Collector](#)

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

German and English (available as of July 2023)

Guido Messling (ed.)

Essays by Anneliese Földes, Guido Messling, and Konrad Schlegel

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

For more information go to: www.pointofview27.khm.at

FORMAL OPENING AND LECTURE

Speakers: Guido Messling and Konrad Schlegel

Thu, 22 June, 7 p.m.

[Reservation required](#)

GUIDED TOURS (in German)

Thu, 27 July, 6.30 p.m. (with Sophie Führer, Art Educator)

Tue, 22 August, 2 p.m. (with Guido Messling, Curator)

Thu, 19 October, 6 p.m. (with Guido Messling, Curator)

PRIVATE GUIDED TOURS

Book a private guided tour through one of our special exhibitions!

For more information call us on + 43 1 525 24 - 5202 (Mon–Fri, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.), or contact us at

kunstvermittlung@khm.at

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PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Press photographs to illustrate articles on one of our current exhibitions can be downloaded free of charge from our website <https://press.khm.at>



Master of the Benda Madonna

Virgin and Child (so-called Benda Madonna)

c. 1490/1500, oak panel, 54.8 × 39.3 cm

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery,
inv. 6977

© KHM-Museumsverband



Martin Schongauer

The Holy Family

c. 1480/90, beechwood, 26.3 × 17.2 cm

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery,
inv. 843

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Desiderio da Settignano

Laughing Boy

c. 1460/64, marble

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9104

© KHM-Museumsverband



Francesco di Giorgio Martini (attributed to)

Virgin and Child with Three Angels

4th quarter of the 15th century, bronze

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer, inv. KK 9118

© KHM-Museumsverband



View into one of the galleries in which the Benda Collection was installed (at the Neue Burg) after its bequest to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1932

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View into one of the galleries in which the Benda Collection was installed (at the Neue Burg) after its bequest to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1932

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OPENING HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

June, July and August:
Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thu, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

From September:
Daily (except Mon) from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thu, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The current admission prices can be found on our website at:
www.khm.at/en/visit/besucherinformation/hours-admission/

All tickets and offers are available in the online ticket shop:
shop.khm.at/en/tickets

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok or register for our Newsletter. Hence you stay informed about the preparations leading up to the opening, first glimpses of the exhibition and the supporting programme.

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NEWSLETTER (in German): khm.at/besuchen/besucherinformation/newsletter/

#BendaMadonna

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We request that, in addition to mentioning your medium, you also specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass. Many thanks for your understanding!

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