

MEDIA INFORMATION

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IMPORTANT NEW ACQUISITION: AN OUTSTANDING PAINTING FROM THE TIME OF DÜRER FOR THE ALTE PINAKOTHEK

Hans Baldung, called Grien (1484/85–1545), *The Virgin as Queen of Heaven*, c. 1516–1518, limewood panel, 35 x 25.5 cm, Alte Pinakothek

Acquired 2025, with funds from Pesh-Stiftung Bayern together with Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung and Pinakotheks-Verein

The Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen is delighted to announce the acquisition of an outstanding painting from the early 16th century. For the first time in decades, the Alte Pinakothek has been able to add an important early German painting to its collection: Hans Baldung Grien's 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven', one of the very few works on panel by this fascinating artist to have remained in private hands until now.

This remarkable addition to the collection was made possible by the [Pesh-Stiftung Bayern](#), which is making its first public appearance as a major sponsor of important acquisitions. The Pesh-Stiftung Bayern, a nonprofit charitable foundation, was established in 1991 by Dr h. c. Rudolf Pesh (d. 2022) and his wife, Maja Robert-Pesh (d. 2008), to support art, culture, and education in Bavaria. Since the founder's death, the foundation has used its funds to support the acquisition of works of art from the Early Renaissance to the mid-1800s for the Alte and Neue Pinakothek of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen and for the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum. Further spectacular acquisitions for these institutions are set to follow over the coming years.

Two further sponsors, who have stood by the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen as dependable and generous partners for many years, joined forces with the [Pesh-Stiftung Bayern](#) to make the acquisition a reality: the [Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung](#), which is dedicated to supporting German museums by providing funding to strengthen their art collections and to preserve outstanding examples of our cultural heritage for the public, and the [Pinakotheks-Verein](#), which not only supports the Alte and Neue Pinakothek in their efforts to expand their collections through new accessions, but also provides additional funding to the museums' public programming and events.

Born into a family of scholars in Schwäbisch-Gmünd, **Hans Baldung Grien (1484/85–1545)** was one of the most significant and at the same time most original and stylistically idiosyncratic artists of the Northern Renaissance. After working for several years in the Nuremberg workshop of Albrecht Dürer, who has arguably overshadowed his art-historical legacy for too long, Baldung Grien settled in Strasbourg in 1509 and opened his own workshop there the following year. His surviving works range from small-format devotional pictures to altarpieces, portraits, mythological and allegorical scenes, as well as other novel secular subjects. Across all these genres, the artist managed to combine painterly sophistication and astonishing pictorial inventiveness with a sound grasp, not only of iconographic traditions, but also of humanist ideas and contemporary theological discourse to produce highly complex, often surprising works, many of which are difficult to decode for today's

viewers. Images of the Virgin and Child constitute an important facet of Baldung's work, and he returned to the subject throughout his life, approaching it from many different angles.

'**The Virgin as Queen of Heaven**' would appear to be a traditional choice of motif, but that impression is deceptive. The work is probably one of the artist's earliest exploration of this subject in the medium of panel painting and can be dated on stylistic grounds to around 1516–1518 – an important period in Baldung's career, as it was in those very years that he completed the prestigious commission of a monumental eleven-panel altarpiece for Freiburg Cathedral.

Nothing is known about possible patrons or buyers of our painting, but it was most likely intended for a discerning and learned client, such as a lawyer or a cleric. Baldung combined the image of the crowned Queen of Heaven with that of the *Virgo Lactans*, the Virgin nursing the Child. Further to the painting's exceptional painterly and colouristic quality, which alone would justify its purchase for the Alte Pinakothek, the painting exemplifies Baldung's singular flair for original, intellectually ambitious pictorial inventions that broke with established conventions. On the one hand, Baldung juxtaposes the idealised yet sensuous figure of the Virgin Mary – all ethereal smile and undulating golden tresses – with a robustly carnal infant, sucking greedily at his mother's breast. At the same time, the transparent, gossamer veil billowing down from the Virgin's hoop crown in a wide arc, as if caught by a gust of heavenly wind – a brilliant display of painterly skill – imperceptibly cradles the two figures, mirroring the physical bond between them. Merging with the infant's swaddling cloth, it poignantly underscores the dual nature of the Christ Child. Equally allusive is the luminous disc with its concentric rings of colour gradations behind the Virgin's head. It can be read as a halo, but at the same time it has the character of a supernatural emanation of light that emphasises the divine nature of Christ as well as the Virgin's eventual Assumption into heaven. The painting thus acquires the aura of a transcendent vision unfolding before the eyes of the viewer. This impression is further heightened by the figure of an adoring and almost pastiche-like cherub, executed in grisaille, that hovers to the right of the Virgin and seems dazzled by the radiant splendour of the central figures.

The accession of such a high-calibre work fills a gap in the collection – the Alte Pinakothek did not own a small-format devotional painting by the artist until now. At the same time, the painting fits so seamlessly into the existing collection – one of the largest and most important of its kind – that it almost seems destined to occupy a space alongside its new companions in the gallery. Acquisitions of this quality are a rare stroke of good fortune and unfortunately almost impossible to finance due to today's prices on the international art market. The acquisition thus highlights the enormous significance of the long-term support for the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen by the Pesl-Stiftung Bayern, whose generous commitment holds great promise for the future of the collections.

Baldung's 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' has a **well-documented and illustrious provenance**.

Having entered the Fürstlich Hohenzoller'sches Museum in Sigmaringen from a private collection in Basel in 1907, it was acquired in 1928 by the Jewish leather goods manufacturer Robert von Hirsch, an enthusiastic and passionate art collector, for his collection in Frankfurt. Advised by Georg Swarzenski, the then director of the Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Robert von Hirsch amassed one of the most important private collections of the Weimar Republic, with a special focus on artworks and craft objects of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In 1933, almost immediately after the Nazi takeover, Robert von Hirsch was able to emigrate to Basel and take his art collection with him (a Cranach painting he had been forced to cede to Hermann Göring in return for his exit permit was returned to

him after the war). As stipulated in von Hirsch's will, after his death in 1977, his entire collection was auctioned off in London in 1978, with numerous works finding their way into the collections of major German and international museums. Baldung's 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' entered a private collection in Germany, where it was held for over 30 years before being acquired by an American private collector in 2012, from whom the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen was able to acquire the painting with the help of New-York art dealer Nicolas Hall.

The painting has been reframed for its new display in Munich. The generosity of the Pesl-Stiftung Bayern made it possible to acquire an authentic, aesthetically and historically appropriate profile frame (Germany around 1500–1550, walnut wood, painted with shellac) from Knoell Rahmen, Basel.

From 5 June, this important new acquisition will be on display as part of the collection presentation **How Pictures Tell Stories: From Albrecht Altdorfer to Peter Paul Rubens** in Room XII in the special exhibition galleries on the Ground Floor West of the Alte Pinakothek, where it will make its first appearance in the Munich collection.

Gabriel Dette, Curator of Early German and Early Netherlandish Painting

Markus Blume, Bavarian State Minister for Science and Art, Free State of Bavaria:

'Heavenly addition for Bavaria: Hans Baldung Grien's 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' becomes a Munich resident! The fact that we can marvel at this outstanding work of Old German painting permanently in the Alte Pinakothek is largely thanks to the work of Maja and Rudolf Pesl. Without causing much of a stir, the Pesls have quietly but prominently left their mark on Munich's art world and have already brought fantastic treasures to Bavaria's art collections in the past. 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' is the first acquisition for the Alte Pinakothek that the Pesl-Stiftung Bayern has significantly supported - but by no means the last. The Pesl-Stiftung will continue to facilitate future acquisitions for the Alte and Neue Pinakothek as well as the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum. We are also grateful to two other strong partners - the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung and the Pinakotheks-Verein, who have once again provided generous support for this acquisition. Patronage has a long tradition in Bavaria - we are proud of that! Together we make great art possible!'

Dr Thomas Weckbach, Chairman of the Board of the Pesl-Stiftung Bayern:

'The purchase of Hans Baldung's 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' perfectly encapsulates our founder's intentions, as expressly laid down in his narrowly defined charter for the foundation in its efforts to sustainably promote the museums by enabling acquisitions of the highest calibre. The acquisition does not just add to the collection in terms of numbers, it positively enriches it. To be able to acquire such an outstanding work is a rare stroke of good fortune. Making this possible was both an obligation and a pleasure for us.'

Dr Martin Hoernes, Secretary General of the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung:

'This is nothing short of a superlative acquisition: Hans Baldung – a creative, learned Renaissance man – has given the Queen of Heaven a technically perfect, chromatically impressive, divine and sensual appearance. Compliments to the curatorial staff at the Staatsgemäldesammlungen who courageously pursued the acquisition and the co-sponsors, who once again show how important it is to also have private backing for our public museums.'

Princess Elisabeth zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, Chair of the Pinakotheks-Verein:

'Driven by a great sense of civic engagement, the Pinakotheks-Verein is delighted to have made this important acquisition for the Alte Pinakothek possible together with the two partner foundations.'

Anton Biebl, Interim Director of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen

'The acquisition of Hans Baldung Grien's artwork 'The Virgin as Queen of Heaven' for the Early German Painting section of the Alte Pinakothek is something very special. I am very grateful to the Pesl-Stiftung, the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung and the Pinakotheks-Verein. There is another reason why we can celebrate today in particular, as we now have the Pesl-Stiftung as another important partner at the Alte Pinakothek's side. This partnership will enable us to develop an acquisition strategy to consolidate our world-famous collection at the highest level.'



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The Virgin as Queen of Heaven, c. 1516-1518,**

limewood panel, 35 x 25.5 cm

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Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen – Alte Pinakothek,
Munich, Photo: Sibylle Forster



ALTE
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