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FRESH PERSPECTIVES *on the Permanent Collection from* DARTMOUTH'S STUDENTS

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CHECKLIST

Albrecht Altdorfer, German, 1480–1538  
*Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, about 1520–26,  
engraving on laid paper

Gift of Dr. Franz H. Hirschland, Class of 1935P and 1939P; PR.948.52.2

Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch, 1606–1669  
*Adam and Eve*, 1638, etching on laid paper

Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935;  
PR.997.5.88

*The Little Jewish Bride (Saskia as Saint Catherine)*, 1638,  
etching and drypoint on laid paper

Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935;  
PR.997.5.114

Master of the Legend of the Magdalen,  
Netherlandish, active about 1483–1530  
*Virgin and Child*, about 1490, oil on panel

Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund and the  
Robert J. Strassenburgh II 1942 Fund; P.985.53

Conrad Meit, German, 1480–1550  
*Eve*, about 1525, bronze

Collection of Roger Arvid Anderson, Class of 1968; EL.S.987.54.5

Hans Sebald Beham, German, 1500–1550  
*Judith Seated in an Arch*, 1547, engraving on laid paper

Purchased through the Class of 1935 Memorial Fund; PR.2002.13

*Adam and Eve Transgress Divine Law*,  
about 1540, woodcut on laid paper

Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Memorial Fund;  
PR.973.273

Heinrich Sintzenich, German, 1752–1812,  
after Domenichino, Italian, 1581–1641

*Saint Cecilia*, 1782, color engraving on paper

Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund;  
PR.2002.21

Unknown, Austrian

*Saint Barbara*, 15th century, polychrome wood and gesso

Bequest of Anton Adolph Raven, Class of 1937H; S.966.163

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A SPACE *for* DIALOGUE



Hans Sebald Beham, *Judith Seated in an Arch*, 1547, engraving on laid paper.  
Purchased through the Class of 1935 Memorial Fund; PR.2002.13.

# CREATING THE FEMININE

## Representations of Biblical Women from Sixteenth-Century Germany



Hans Sebald Beham, *Adam and Eve Transgress Divine Law*, about 1540, woodcut on laid paper. Purchased through the Guernsey Center Moore 1904 Memorial Fund; PR.973.273.

Many artists in sixteenth-century Germany created images of biblical women and female saints. The ultimate woman, Eve, brought life and, through her sin, death to the entire world. Biblical accounts also describe an alternative female trope, the virgin martyr or saint. These two ends of the spectrum did not constitute the only ways women could be depicted, and images varied depending on what

an artist chose to emphasize. Germany itself was changing in the sixteenth century. It was the height of the German Renaissance, a time of individualism and enlightenment influenced by the Italian Renaissance, as well as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. With the invention of the printing press the century before, Germany was also experiencing the rise of literacy, which gave many artists work creating prints to accompany the printed word. Printmaking flourished, and prints like those in this exhibition were widely available. Depictions of women as either powerful or passive would have been seen as manifestations of temptation or pious exemplars.

Eve is frequently represented as an active figure in Christian art—for example, handing the fatal apple to Adam, the act that brought about the fall of man—and she is often portrayed as a temptress in form as well as action. Her idealized, often hypersexualized nude body tempts the male viewer, just as she tempts Adam with the apple. Eve appears doubly powerful, the agent of Original Sin, which introduced death to the world, but also the original desirable woman, created in prelapsarian perfection to give life. Eve also exerts power through her control of the narrative within some images. Her sexuality, primarily shown through her nude body, is generative but dangerous, alluring yet deadly. It is her ultimate sin.

Conrad Meit's sculptural *Eve* (about 1525) takes the form of a Renaissance Venus figure. She is an ideal nude, just like the ancient Roman goddess of love. This Eve, like Venus, is seductive, an object of male desire. Her gentle pose invites the viewer to look at both her body and the apple that she holds and nods her head towards. Her s-curve stance, also seen in ideal beauties like the nudes of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Hans Baldung, is typical of German sculpture during this time period. Her body is elongated and exposed; she is a nude, a piece of art. Eve transcends the original story of a sinful woman to an ideal figure that stimulates the imagination. However, she still perpetuates the biblical narrative by offering the apple to the viewer. Within this context Eve becomes not a just biblical figure but a contemporary fantasy.

Similarly, Hans Sebald Beham's figure of Eve in the engraving *Adam and Eve Transgress Divine Law* (about 1540) displays Eve's body as an object. Her genitals are obscured, though they are alluded to through her nudity. Unlike Meit's sculpture, *Adam and Eve Transgress Divine Law* very clearly details the temptation of Adam. Eve literally acts the temptress as she offers the apple to Adam, who reaches out for it, seemingly unaware of the snake between them coiled around the tree. Yet Eve remains in control of the narrative because she holds the apple. This image stands in stark contrast to Rembrandt's *Adam and Eve* (1638) made a century later.

Rembrandt's engraving depicts Adam taking the apple from Eve as he points upwards in an orating gesture, giving him the power within the narrative. Eve's body is not idealized and her face is far from the sweet, beautiful features of Meit's *Eve*. Rembrandt often eschewed the ideal body when depicting women. His Eve is squat, not slender, with emphasis on her rounded belly and large legs. Instead of her hair being controlled, it cascades down her back in an untamed mess. Her stomach and genitalia are cast in the shadow of the dragon that had tempted her with the apple, connecting her sin with her sexuality. Rembrandt's Eve is not meant as a figure to be admired. The print is more a warning against temptation and assigns Eve a passive role, effectively revoking her power.

In contrast to Eve, images of female saints, despite portraying many different individuals, are somewhat uniform. The statue of Saint Barbara from the early Renaissance is fairly typical of private devotional statues from the time. Her pose forms an s-curve, and her face looks sweetly down upon the viewer. The long hair flowing down her back is a symbol of her virginity, and her crown signals her noble status as a Roman princess. Saint Barbara was a virgin martyr whose father kept her locked in a tower, which she holds in her left hand. Saint Barbara is covered in the heavy folds of a Roman dress, drawing the viewer's eye to her face instead of her body. The

viewer, who would most likely kneel before her to pray, would ask her to intercede with Christ to ask for forgiveness of sins. The sculpture is meant to be interacted with, and, unlike the *Eve* sculpture, it is not just an object of beauty. Saint Barbara is a pious vision that the viewer could admire and emulate.

If there were a continuum from Eve, the temptress and first woman, to Saint Barbara, a virgin martyr, Judith would fall somewhere in the middle. Judith's story is told in the deuterocanonical *Book of Judith*. Judith was a prominent Jewish widow when Assyrians attacked her town of Bethulia. With Bethulia failing, Judith went to the Assyrian camp and told the general, Holofernes, that she was switching sides because she knew Bethulia would lose. After charming Holofernes, Judith got him very drunk, cut off his head with a sword, and brought it back to Bethulia. Judith becomes an odd mix of the two tropes: she is a temptress for seducing Holofernes and using her feminine wiles ultimately to kill him, but she is also pious and faithful, following the Lord's orders to save her people from certain defeat. Beham's *Judith Seated in an Arch* effectively illustrates these two sides of Judith. Framed by the arch, she looks down humbly. Like Saint Barbara she holds her attributes in her hands, but hers are a sword and the head of Holofernes rather than the instruments of her martyrdom. She is also pictured nude, objectifying her and emphasizing her seductiveness rather than her heroic action.

Sixteenth-century artists' depictions of female biblical characters varied depending on the narrative portrayed, the intended viewers, and the artists' medium. As exemplars of sinfulness or saintliness, biblical women often wielded power and authority that was unexpected for females in sixteenth-century society, and their proliferation in religious art gave them a significant role among the characters in the Bible, effectively sealing their importance within religious history.

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Unknown, *Saint Barbara*, 15th century, polychrome wood and gesso. Bequest of Anton Adolph Raven, Class of 1937H; S.966.163.