

# Artists versus art historians? Conflicting interpretations in the Holbein controversy

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Figure 1 Alfred Richard Diethe, *Visitors at the Holbein Exhibition*, 1871.  
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Inv.-Nr. C 1985-84, Photo: Herbert Boswank.

## The Holbein controversy

The picture may seem astonishing, its focus is surprising: four women and a man, partly seen from behind, partly in profile, are united in a shared act of viewing (fig. 1). The group's interest is directed at two pictures, of which the left one is only partially visible; the recognizable detail seems to be identical to the picture on the right. The two paintings are not hanging in parallel to one another; they seem to be angled in such a way that they form a pictorial corner in front of the group of visitors. A young girl is pointing to the picture on the left, while turning her gaze to the other visitors, maybe also to the second painting. All the other viewers are directing their gaze straight ahead: a man with an upward, concentrated gaze; an older woman regarding the scene; a seated woman who examines the picture on the

left using binoculars; and in front of them, a young woman who turns her back to the group while looking at the painting on the right.

The history painter Alfred Richard Diethe drew this image with watercolour and pencil in 1871 in the frame of the large Holbein exhibition at the Dresden Gemäldegalerie. Diethe, who was then a professor at the Kunstgewerbeschule, had studied at the Dresden Academy under Julius Hübner. The latter was appointed director of the Dresden Gemäldegalerie as the successor of Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld shortly before the exhibition began. There is no known evidence that Hübner gave Diethe an official authorization to copy the work — perhaps, because the two Dresden figures knew one another, no written correspondence was necessary — in any case, it can be assumed that the artist/director must have supported his former student in his work inside the museum. Diethe's drawing has only recently been made known again in a publication by Bernhard Maaz.<sup>1</sup> The context, in which this drawing was made, however, is famous: it arose as a result of the so-called Holbein controversy, a dispute that experienced a dramatic apex with the Holbein exhibition of 1871.



Figure 2 'The Dresden Madonna':  
Bartholomäus Sarburgh, copy after Hans  
Holbein the younger, *The Madonna of Jakob  
Meyer zum Hasen*, 1635-1637.  
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Gal. No.  
1892, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen  
Dresden, Photo: Hans-Peter Klut.

The controversy was prompted by the appearance of two versions of the *Madonna of Jakob Meyer zum Hasen* by Hans Holbein the younger: the first and more famous work at that time, from the Dresden Gemäldegalerie (fig. 2); and the second,

<sup>1</sup> See Bernhard Maaz, *Hans Holbein d. J., Die Madonnen des Bürgermeisters Jacob Meyer zum Hasen in Dresden und Darmstadt: Wahrnehmung, Wahrheitsfindung und -verunklärung*, Künzelsau: Swiridoff, 2014. I would like to thank Bernhard Maaz profusely for his support and the stimulating exchange.

a version that had only resurfaced in 1821, which remained in private possession during the entire debate, first, for several years in Berlin, then in Darmstadt (fig. 3). The Dresden Madonna was until that time considered a 'major painting of German art'<sup>2</sup> and was celebrated on a par with Raphael's Sistine Madonna, also in Dresden. Much-discussed exhibitions, publicity-garnering press releases, countless essays, and numerous reproductions were made to unravel the riddle of the duplication. The less popular painting ultimately won out: today, only the Darmstadt Madonna is considered an original by Holbein. It recently made headlines as 'Germany's most expensive artwork'<sup>3</sup> and since 2012 has hung in Schwäbisch Hall. Meanwhile, the Dresden Madonna was attributed to Bartholomäus Sarburgh and dated later, ca. 1635/1637.



Figure 3 "The Darmstadt Madonna":  
Hans Holbein the younger, *The Madonna  
of Jakob Meyer zum Hasen*, 1526/1528.  
Sammlung Würth, Inv. 14910, Photo:  
Philipp Schönborn, Munich.

What first began as a controversy among connoisseurs concerning two artworks quickly developed into a heated public affair. Launched in the midst of burgeoning national movements, the debate was ideologically charged from the outset. While the politically divided German landscape anticipated its unification, nationalist implications in the 'war of the Holbein Madonnas'<sup>4</sup> intensified, and with them, opposition and contradiction. Contemporary commentary persistently

<sup>2</sup> [Announcement] Gustav Theodor Fechner, 'Über die Aechtheitsfrage der Holbein'schen Madonna', *Leipziger Zeitung, Wissenschaftliche Beilage*, 69, 25 August 1871, 368.

<sup>3</sup> Rose-Maria Gropp, 'Deutschland teuerstes Kunstwerk', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 161, 14 July 2011, title.

<sup>4</sup> Georg Hirth, 'Ein künstlerisches Ereigniß', *Münchener neueste Nachrichten*, 21 September 1887, n. pag.; 'Zum Holbein Streit', *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 269, 26 September 1871, 4750.

supported parallels with the socio-political situation: 'the nation that had recently exerted its entire force in defeating the enemy and producing its existence as a state, divided itself into two parts in a controversy about an image, and took the field in advocating either the Darmstadt or the Dresden version of Holbein's Madonna.'<sup>5</sup> Departing from the centre of the authenticity question, the controversy expanded in waves and absorbed an ever greater number of participants. The inflammatory nature of the conflict, and its scope, can also be deduced from the large number of social groups that took part in it. A complex network of figures was involved on either side: representatives of academic disciplines, art historians, art critics, museum directors, representatives of public institutions, conservators, artists, art collectors, natural scientists, politicians, local patriots of every stripe, foreign correspondents, journalists, writers, satirists, all the way to an interested educated public, who gave voice to their opinion in letters to the editor and surveys.

The Holbein controversy was constitutive for the institutionalization of art history; it rightly belongs among the canonical subjects of science studies. The pronouncements could not be more categorical: 'a crisis in art history,'<sup>6</sup> 'the most bitter and most extended [controversy] that has ever been aroused by a work of art,'<sup>7</sup> 'one of the most exciting chapters in German art historiography,'<sup>8</sup> 'the foundational moment of an academic history of art,'<sup>9</sup> etc. Max J. Friedländer's early analysis of the debate decisively influenced its later reconstruction. His determination of the 'supremacy of experts with a historical point of view over artists who go by a canon of beauty which belongs to the nineteenth century'<sup>10</sup> holds to this day. This is the basis for the downright sensationalistic account of the

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Woltmann, 'Die beiden Hans Holbein', *Westermann's Jahrbuch der Illustrierten Deutschen Monatshefte*, 32, August-September 1872, 79–99, here 79. Similarly, Wilhelm Lübke, 'Die Darmstädter Madonna Hans Holbeins und das Dresdener Exemplar' (published in *Schwäbischer Merkur*, 1871), in Lübke, *Bunte Blätter aus Schwaben. 1866 bis 1884*, Berlin and Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1885, 80–88, here 81; Ludwig Pietsch, 'Die Holbein-Ausstellung zu Dresden', *Vossische Zeitung, Beilage*, 216, 217, 220, 8 September, 9 September, 13 September 1871, [printer's error notice in no. 218, 10 September 1871]), col. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Oskar Bätschmann, 'Der Holbein-Streit: Eine Krise der Kunstgeschichte', in Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Peter-Klaus Schuster, eds, *Kenntnis. Kolloquium zum 150sten Geburtstag von Wilhelm von Bode*, Berlin: Mann, 1996, 87–100, here 87.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 91.

<sup>8</sup> Udo Kultermann, 'Original oder Kopie? Der Holbein-Streit – an einer Wende der Kunstgeschichte', *Artis*, 3, 1966, 23–27, title.

<sup>9</sup> Andreas Beyer, *Am Anfang war der Streit. Hans Holbein d. J. und die kunsthistorische Tradition*, in Christian Scholl, Sandra Richter and Oliver Huck, eds, *Konzert und Konkurrenz. Die Künste und ihre Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2010, 201–222, here 201.

<sup>10</sup> Max Jakob Friedländer, 'Artistic quality: Original and Copy', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 78/458, May 1941, 143–145, 147–148, 151, here 144.

triumph of the original, as a result of which the controversy was declared in retrospect as a sign of 'art history on the path to autonomy.'<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, it was (only) the rejection of questions of taste and aesthetic views that enabled the 'scientification of Germanophone art history.'<sup>12</sup> As a stringent attribution dispute, the debate would therefore stand squarely under the sign of the 'authenticity fetishism' of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

The dispute became a classic example of a number of fundamental oppositions that structure grand narratives of the discipline's history: science versus art, original versus copy, image criticism versus image practice, text versus image, etc. The retrospection is marked by astonishingly positivistic leitmotifs. When viewed from a science-theoretical perspective, these assumptions seem all the more astonishing as they were even further developed against the background of studies in image science (Bildwissenschaft): in the words of a symptomatic summary, the Holbein controversy decided 'that the connoisseurship of art historians was valued more highly than the practical experience of artists.'<sup>14</sup> The opposition of iconic criticism and iconic practice, however, not only stands in drastic contrast to contemporary works on the interplay of art and knowledge; it also runs contrary to experiences in the nineteenth century. Dieth's representation of the Holbein exhibition ultimately also provides a vivid testament to this debate. In the midst of a historiography predominantly oriented to written documents, it leads our gaze back to the question of the image.

### **The Holbein exhibition as image experiment**

The Holbein exhibition of 1871 is generally considered the high point of the Holbein controversy. Here, the two paintings were exhibited side by side for the first time. As Francis Haskell notes, the large retrospective represents a significant innovation: 'this was the first time that Old Masters were transported across frontiers for the purpose of being exhibited. It thus signals a dramatic moment in this story.'<sup>15</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> Karl Möseneder, 'Kulturgeschichte und Kunstwissenschaft', in Klaus P. Hansen, ed, *Kulturbegriff und Methode. Der stille Paradigmenwechsel in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993, 59–79, here 59.

<sup>12</sup> Hubert Locher, *Kunstgeschichte als historische Theorie der Kunst 1750–1950*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Stephan Waetzoldt and Alfred A. Schmid, eds, *Echtheitsfetischismus? Zur Wahrhaftigkeit des Originalen*, Munich: Selbstverlag Carl-Friedrich-von-Siemens-Stiftung, 1979, title.

<sup>14</sup> Horst Bredekamp and Adam S. Labuda, 'Kunstgeschichte, Universität, Museum und die Mitte Berlins 1810–1873', in Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, ed, *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden 1810–2010. Praxis ihrer Disziplinen*, vol. 4, *Genese der Disziplinen. Die Konstitution der Universität*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010, 237–264, here 249.

<sup>15</sup> Haskell, *Ephemeral Museum*, 92.

catalogue names 440 entries, but more than 520 objects were exhibited in total.<sup>16</sup> The show was put together with the help of loans from 38 cities in and outside of Germany. Along with private individuals, who provided an important stock, 58 collections and museums also participated.

The exhibition captivated audiences with a wide variety of pictures, picture formats, and comparisons. It included all genres: woodcuts, drawings, watercolours, paintings, etc. Along with original works, numerous 'reproductions'<sup>17</sup> were shown, including 319 photographs and original-photographs, many of which were special commissions. For clarification, the reproductions are differentiated by typeface in the catalogue: 'Descriptions of originals were printed with a larger (Borgeois) type, while exhibited copies and reproductions (etchings, photographs) were printed in a smaller (Petit) type.'<sup>18</sup> In addition, 'representations of a group of drawings wrongly attributed to the master' were presented 'for comparative judgment.'<sup>19</sup> The survey provided information about the production context of the individual works, as well as the history of their reception.

The exhibition was conceived and organized by artists and art historians working together. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Jakob Felsing served as directors, while the committee was strategically composed with advocates for the two paintings: Julius Hübner, Hermann Hettner, Ludwig Gruner, Edouard His, Adolf Bayersdorfer, Carl Schnaase, Alfred Woltmann, Rudolf Eitelberger, Friedrich Lippmann and Julius Dielitz. Albert von Zahn, who himself 'walked the border between art and scholarship,'<sup>20</sup> served as secretary and editor of the catalogue.

Along with important supplemental information on the exhibited objects, the catalogue also offered a 'comprehensive survey of all articles and selected essays on both versions of the Madonna,' with more than 74 sources.<sup>21</sup> The material was compiled by Gustav Theodor Fechner, at the time already a well-known psychologist, physicist, and natural philosopher. He himself published multiple

<sup>16</sup> Albert von Zahn, ed, *Katalog der Holbein-Ausstellung zu Dresden: 15. August bis 15. October 1871*, Dresden: Schönfeld in Comm, 1871.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., III.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., IV.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 37. More on the exhibition and its objects: Lena Bader, 'The Holbein Exhibition of 1871 – An Iconic Turning Point for Art History', in Maia Wellington Gahtan and Donatella Pegazzano, eds, *Monographic Exhibitions and the History of Art*, Oxford: Routledge, 2018, 129–142.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus Andreas Hurttig devoted a remarkable exhibition to Albert von Zahn and his career between art history and art practice: Marcus Andreas Hurttig and Hans-Werner Schmidt, eds, *Albert von Zahn. Grenzgänge zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*, Leipzig: Leipzig Museum der bildenden Künste, 2016. For a more extensive account of the background and course of the exhibition, see Lena Bader, *Bild-Prozesse im 19. Jahrhundert. Der Holbein-Streit und die Ursprünge der Kunstgeschichte*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013, 103ff.

<sup>21</sup> von Zahn, *Holbein-Ausstellung*, 49–53.

articles on the Holbein controversy and placed the debate in the context of an 'experimental aesthetic.'<sup>22</sup> His most important field study also proceeds from this context: with the *Album zur Einzeichnung eines Vergleichs-Urteils* [Album for the Plotting of a Comparative Judgment] Fechner wanted to determine a representative picture of the public mood:<sup>23</sup> 'Thus, instead of individual disputing connoisseurs' voices, one would obtain a type of statistic of the respective aesthetic impression that two pictures that have ever since ranked as the key pictures of the German nation have made on the nation and even beyond.'<sup>24</sup> Holbein scholar Alfred Woltmann reported with palpable scepticism on the mise-en-scene in the space housing the two disputed pictures: 'Off to one side, on a writing desk, can be found a pen, a large book, and a placard above it. Professor Fechner, the highly-regarded physicist in Leipzig . . . intends to enable a decision between the two pictures on the basis of universal suffrage.'<sup>25</sup> If the project was not positively received on the part of art historians – and Fechner himself admitted disappointment after the experiment was completed<sup>26</sup> – the initiative deserves recognition as a pioneering achievement in museum surveying and audience research, being the 'first empirical work on aesthetics in public space.'<sup>27</sup>

Adolph Menzel preserved the memory of the exhibition with a remarkable drawing in his travel sketchbook: it shows neither the two contested pictures nor the

<sup>22</sup> On the 'idea of the supplementation of philosophical aesthetics with an experimental aesthetic': Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Bericht über das auf der Dresdener Holbein-Ausstellung ausgelegte Album*, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1872, 10f; also Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, part 1, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1876, preface. See also Adolf Elsas, 'Zum Andenken Gustav Theodor Fechners', *Die Grenzboten*, 47:2, 1888, 73–80, 113–124; Wolfgang Schönplflug, 'Methodenprobleme einer empirischen Ästhetik – Ein Rückblick auf Fechners Holbein-Untersuchung', *Exakte Ästhetik*, 1, 1965, 4–13.

<sup>23</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Bericht über das auf der Dresdener Holbein-Ausstellung ausgelegte Album*, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1872, 3. The visitor log has survived and can be examined in Leipzig: Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Besucherbuch der Holbein-Ausstellung*, 1871, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, archive, box 68.

<sup>24</sup> Fechner, *Bericht*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred Woltmann, 'Die Holbein-Ausstellung in Dresden I.', *National-Zeitung* 429, 14 September 1871, 8 columns, col. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Significantly fewer entries than expected were assembled; in addition, only a third could be evaluated with respect to the aesthetic question: of 11,842 visitors, 'only 113 entries, which makes approximately 1 in 100'; but the majority of entries were devoted to the question of attribution. See Fechner, *Bericht*, 19. See also the critical review, Fechner, 'Wie es der experimentalen Aesthetik seither ergangen ist', *Im neuen Reich*, 8:2, 1878, 41–51, 81–96.

<sup>27</sup> Helmut Leder, 'Zur Psychologie der Rezeption moderner Kunst', in Bernhard Graf and Astrid B. Müller eds, *Sichtweisen. Zur veränderten Wahrnehmung von Objekten in Museen*, Berlin: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005, 79–90, here 80. See also Sabine Knopf, 'Fechners Rolle im Holbeinstreit', in Anneros Meischner-Metge, ed, *Gustav Theodor Fechner: Werk und Wirkung*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitäts-Verlag, 2010, 167–178.

other items exhibited, but simply two men at the 'plebiscite table' (fig. 4).<sup>28</sup> Menzel is among the renowned figures who visited the exhibition in Dresden in 1871. However he did not support the artists' majority vote and instead openly sided with



Figure 4 Adolph Menzel, "Holbein-Ausstellung, Plebiscit-Tisch" [Holbein Exhibition, plebiscite table] Dresden, 1871. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. SZ Menzel Skb. 36,1871/75, pp. 59–60 © bpk/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett.

the Darmstadt picture<sup>29</sup> (while, among the art historians, Jacob Burkhardt and Hermann Grim themselves voted for the Dresden picture). From a contemporary perspective, it seems all the more symptomatic that, among all the possible motifs that presented themselves to him, the artist specifically chose for his object the public experiment in practical aesthetics: he, too, made an appeal to visual experience.

### The Holbein conference

It is generally considered that the controversy was ended by press release. The communiqué, which began circulating on 5 September 1871, gave the results of the collective image analysis in three points: first, the authenticity of the Darmstadt version; second, 'not insignificant later retouching' through which the 'original state . . . was marred'; and third, the designation of the Dresden picture as a 'loose copy.'

<sup>28</sup> See Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick and Tobias Burg, eds, *Menzel in Dresden*, exhibition catalog, München and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2005, 89f.

<sup>29</sup> Among others, Bruno Meyer pointed out that 'Adolph Menzel always laughed about the designation of the Dresden Madonna as Holbein.' Bruno Meyer, '[review] Bunte Blätter. Skizzen und Studien für Freunde der Musik und der bildenden Kunst von A. W. Ambros [...]', *Deutsche Warte*, 2, 1872, 572–573, here 573.

Prominent art historians signed the press release.<sup>30</sup> Additional observations and theses, and especially the individual views of several participants, were subsequently elaborated in multiple essays.<sup>31</sup> This press release is more than a simple memorandum: it is a programmatic statement made by art historians asserting not only their authority but also the image's epistemological evidence. It aimed particularly at all those artists still in charge of museums and their catalogue entries, but also at all those who insisted that artworks had to be judged 'from the inside outward'.<sup>32</sup> The answer was not long in coming. Just two weeks later, a position paper was published by numerous artists, among them Hübner and Diethel (who were also both represented with several paintings in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie). They argued for the authenticity of the 'improved' Dresden picture, simultaneously raising doubts about the painting from Darmstadt, since a 'fundamental judgment about the extent to which that one is original' was impossible due to its damaged state of preservation.<sup>33</sup> The 'artists' position'<sup>34</sup> also had a programmatic character and was supported by a group of accompanying contributions by significant figures.<sup>35</sup> They argued as 'thinking artists (painters)'<sup>36</sup> against the judgment of the art historians and their claim to connoisseurship.

<sup>30</sup> Adolph Bayersdorfer et al., 'Erklärung', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst. Mit dem Beiblatt Kunst-Chronik*, 6, 1871, 355.

<sup>31</sup> In 1871 statements of position were published by Crowe, His, Lübke, Lützow, Meyer, Pietsch, Schnaase, Vögelin, Woltmann, Zahn. In 1872, by Bayersdorfer, Felsing, Gaedertz et al.

<sup>32</sup> As the position statement by the painter Eduard Engerth demonstrates, the fronts were declared polemically: the artist judges 'from the inside outward,' while 'the scholar' tends to judge 'from the outside inward; he pursues the relationship of the picture to those historical aspects that are appropriate to substantiate its being, its uniqueness, its lineage—in short, its authenticity.' Eduard Engerth, *Zur Frage der Aechtheit der Holbein'schen Madonna in Dresden. Ein Vortrag gehalten im Wiener Künstlerhause*, Wien: C. Gerolds Sohn, 1871, 7f.

<sup>33</sup> Ludwig Theodor Choulant et al., 'Zur Holbeinfrage', *Dresdner Anzeiger*, 276, 3 October 1871, n. pag.

<sup>34</sup> Carl Schnaase, 'Rückblick auf die Holbein-Ausstellung in Dresden', *Im neuen Reich*, 2, 1871, 737–745, here 739.

<sup>35</sup> In 1871 statements of position were published by Dobbert, Engerth, Fechner, K. Förster, Grimm, Hübner, Jansen, Lücke, Magnus, Schasler, Rossmann. In 1872, by Ambros, Breisch, et al., as well as numerous anonymously published contributions.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Lampe, *Holbeins Madonna in Darmstadt und Dresden*, Leipzig: F.C.W. Voge, 1871, 10. Felsing reported on location, 'Today I have also learned that my friends Hübner, Preller, and Schrader will take the lead in signing an article that will attest to the originality of the Dresden picture, and declare the Darmstadt picture as overpainted and overvarnished, so that the latter cannot be judged at all.' Felsing to Princess Elisabeth, 27 September 1871, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt, Abt. D 23 No. 37/9, 11f.

With the knowledge that the Dresden picture was definitively attributed to Sarburgh and not to Holbein in 1910,<sup>37</sup> the victory of the art historians over the artists, ‘the losing group, the non-experts’<sup>38</sup> was celebrated all the more sensationistically in retrospect. But the situation circa 1871 was clearly more ambivalent than later historiography leads us to suspect. The communiqué of the art historians was subsequently misunderstood as an ‘authenticity manifesto’ or ‘declaration of authenticity’<sup>39</sup> in order to give preference to its non-ambiguous findings: the attribution of the original and de-attribution of the copy. Meanwhile, the choice of words in the two declarations already indicates that the question was much more complex: in the formulation ‘loose copy’ and the indication that the ‘original state’ of the prototype was damaged, the complications can already be glimpsed unmistakably. Opaquely formulated but highly suggestive, the declaration puts into words the image-theoretical challenges that inevitably resulted from the juxtaposition of 1871.

The focus on written documentation does not do justice to the Holbein dispute. The three-day conference from which the press release was produced took place inside the exhibition halls, in front of the two paintings. This marks a significant moment in the history of the discipline: the first art history conference arose from an exhibition and took place in front of the pictures, in the museum. Here, cases were opened, magnifying glasses and films were held up to the paintings, photographs and drawings were compared, chairs and step-stools were put to use – and, where hinges were present, paintings were moved back and forth in the light.<sup>40</sup> Because the situation in front of the two contested pictures was more turbulent than Diethé’s elegant mise-en-scene leads one to believe, the conference participants had access to the pictures outside of opening hours, from eight to ten o’clock in the morning, in order to enable concentrated study of the pictures (the exhibition was open from 10 am to 5 pm daily). Along with prominent representatives of art history, art aficionados and enthusiasts from Germany and abroad were present, as well as important publishers. Study *ad oculus* stood at the centre of the event. Numerous reports agree on this point: ‘One should imagine this interesting assembly of outstanding art authorities taking place, not sequestered around conference tables, with board members and an agenda, but rather, standing

<sup>37</sup> Emil Major, ‘Der mutmassliche Verfasser des Dresdener Madonnenbildes’, *Anzeiger für Schweizerische Altertumskunde*, 12, 1910, 318–324.

<sup>38</sup> Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft*, Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1990, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Gottfried Biedermann, ‘Wissenschaft und/oder Kennerschaft’, in Peter Weibel, Christa Steinle and Götz Pochat, eds, *Kontinuität und Identität. Festschrift für Wilfried Skreiner*, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 1992, 157–165, here 162; Kultermann, *Kunstgeschichte*, 141.

<sup>40</sup> Bruno Meyer, ‘Holbein-Ausstellung in Dresden. I. Der Holbein Congreß. II. Hie Dresden! – Hie Darmstadt! III. Resultate’, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 252, 258, 337, 9, September 1871, 15, September 1871, 3, December 1871, 4443–4444, 4554–4556, 5977–5979, here 4444.

in front of the two pictures hanging in the best light.<sup>41</sup> Enthusiasm for the possibilities of intensive image analysis inflects the reports on the exhibition. The focus lies on knowledge gain through visual argumentation.<sup>42</sup>

If the first-hand reports on this ‘modern Batrachomyomachy’<sup>43</sup> by no means seem to correspond to the contemplative scene in Diethe’s representation, his drawing does give precise information about the arrangement in at least one respect. As can be gleaned from numerous discussions, the two paintings hung side by side, the Dresden picture to the left, the Darmstadt picture to the right; selected pictures were also positioned near to them for comparison, including photographs of Holbein’s sketches from Basel. However, the two contested pictures were not mounted to the wall in a fixed position. In his representation, Diethe used shadows to call attention to this: ‘The two main pictures move [...] upon their wall at angles, so that they can be turned obliquely toward the window, in the proximity of which they have placed one immediately next to the other.’<sup>44</sup> This *mise-en-scène* was intended to ensure optimal viewing conditions. The paintings could be angled from one side. The point, however, was not to enable bringing them closer to one another; the hinges allowed moving them in parallel so as to hold each of the two pictures

<sup>41</sup> Jakob Felsing, *Der literarische Streit über die beiden Bilder in Dresden und Darmstadt genannt Madonna des Bürgermeisters Meyer*, Leipzig: H. Vogel, 1872, 18.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Carl von Lützow, ‘Ergebnisse der Dresdener Holbein-Ausstellung’, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst. Mit dem Beiblatt Kunst-Chronik*, 6, 1871, 349–355; Max Schasler, ‘Die dresdener Holbein-Ausstellung und die Madonnenfrage’, *Die Dioskuren*, 16:34–41:44, 1871 1871, 271–272, 279–280, 287–288, 295–296, 302–304, 311–314, 320–321, 329–330, 352–353.

<sup>43</sup> Meyer, ‘Holbein-Ausstellung’, 4444. ‘Each one has its enthusiastic supporters; dense crowds stand before them at all times, perorating, demonstrating, gesticulating, and at times not much is lacking from the final scene of Act II of Wagner’s *Meistersingern*.’ August W. Ambros, ‘Holbein-Ausstellung’, *Neue freie Presse*, 2532, 12 September 1871, 9 columns. Lützow called the scene a ‘marvelous tournament’: Carl von Lützow, ‘Holbein’s Madonna des Bürgermeisters Meyer’, *Chronik für vervielfältigende Kunst*, 1, 1888, I–VIII, here II. It also was reported ‘foreigners and natives, men and ladies, crowd into the room. Such dense crowds form before the two disputed objects that it is literally difficult to get a glimpse of the two pictures except during the quiet midday hours.’ Pietsch, ‘Holbein-Ausstellung’, col. 3; Carl Clauss, ‘Die Holbein-Ausstellung zu Dresden’, *Leipziger Zeitung*, Wissenschaftliche Beilage 79, 1 October 1871, 437–439, here col. 4. Not without exaggeration, but visibly relieved, the newly appointed gallery director Hübner reported that ‘the Madonna controversy, despite passionate excitement of some participants, came to an end without mortal injuries and without intervention of the commendable police, peacefully enough, with the closure of the Holbein exhibition.’ Julius Hübner, ‘Der Holbein’sche Madonnenstreit’, *Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1487, 30 Dezember 1871, 507–508, here 507.

<sup>44</sup> Pietsch, ‘Holbein-Ausstellung’, col. 3 – also discussing the exhibition spaces. See also Charles Eliot Norton, *The Holbein Madonna*, London: privately printed, 1872, 11; von Lützow, ‘Holbein’s Madonna’, II; Joseph B. Atkinson, ‘Holbein’s Rival Madonnas of Dresden and Darmstadt’, *The Art Journal*, 11, 1872, 37–39, here 38.

toward the window. The arrangement was conceived so as to serve both comparative seeing and analysis of details.

Artists and art historians worked hand in hand. It would be wrong to regard the exhibition from the perspective of an opposition of theory and practice. It is precisely because of the interplay of iconic criticism and iconic practice that the controversy of 1871 could not come to an end. The riddle of the Dresden Madonna was not solved as a result of the confrontation in Dresden. After the Holbein exhibition, the Holbein controversy entered its likely most exciting phase, in which the dominant image problems beyond the question of authenticity now became central. When viewed against this background, the drawings by Diethe and Menzel are all the more significant: they are the only pictures known today from the context of the Holbein exhibition, and as such they make an even more emphatic appeal to visual experience. As will be shown in the following by means of selected examples, the Holbein controversy cannot be understood without these experiences in iconic practice: the direct engagement with the images, whether through viewing or making them, stands at the centre of the debate and defines the controversy far beyond the Holbein exhibition.

### The copyist as art-historical authority



Figure 5 Hans Julius Grüder, Copy of the Dresden Madonna, 1860. Kollegienhaus der Universität Basel, Dozentenzimmer, Photo: Florian Wöller/Johannes Grave, 2009.

The painter Hans Julius Grüder was one of the prominent advocates of the Dresden picture. As the catalogue of the Dresden Gemäldegalerie notes, as an artist he possesses 'considerable expertise in this matter,' since he himself produced a copy

of the Holbein Madonna around 1860.<sup>45</sup> His version can be considered an important argument in the Holbein controversy (fig. 5). The copy was a commission for the Basel Museum. His colleagues in Dresden attentively followed the production process, reporting to Basel on a regular basis. From the very beginning, the act of copying was thereby treated as an indication of connoisseurship and expertise: Grüder made his judgment after, following 'the most exacting study of the Dresden picture — as is possible only for a skilled and diligent copyist — [he] went to Darmstadt, not only in order to view the picture there, but rather to examine it as thoroughly as possible for the sake of comparison.'<sup>46</sup> The focus is placed less on external identity than on the study of the picture to be copied. The working process includes an engagement with the original that precedes and forms the basis for any copy, and that here is recognized as a completely valid epistemic process. Parallels to the author of the Dresden picture are not coincidental. Grüder's process was celebrated as a type of reenactment of the earlier reproduction, so as to appreciate this receptive afterlife as a medium of deepened attention. Grüder's position in the Holbein controversy draws from this: the copyist, through the work of copying, becomes an art-historical authority.

Like Diethe, Grüder also signed the counter-declaration of 1871. Their engagements in the Holbein controversy leave a primarily visual trace. Grüder's copy as well is a visual statement on the question subject to dispute. Visual argumentation of this kind was highly significant for the story of the Dresden picture's success. The attribution of the Darmstadt Madonna was confirmed by 1871 at latest. However, the painting did not seem convincing as the original, especially because the Dresden picture, in comparison to it, seemed to be 'a wonder of a copy.'<sup>47</sup> This recurring phrase expresses both fascination and confusion in response to a copy that seemed to be more original than the original itself (and that was evidently reproduced yet further). The question of authenticity appeared to be solved, but the riddle of the pictures remained: precisely because of the interrelationship of the two paintings, which seemed all the more visible in Dresden, the valuing of the copy was not reduced, but rather, strengthened. The comparative viewing side by side made evident the entanglement of the two versions in a shared pictorial history; the Holbein exhibition made their *histoire croisée* visible. The fascination with the copy and the dissatisfaction with respect to the original were entangled in a relationship of mutual conditioning.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Schäfer, *Die Königliche Gemälde-Galerie zu Dresden [...]*, vol. 3, Dresden: H. Klemm, 1860, 794f.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Edouard His 1871, as quoted in Fechner, *Bericht*, 22.

### Correction and interpretation

It was especially the striking differences between the two versions that intensified the authenticity dilemma. One detail was particularly salient: while the Darmstadt Christ child seemed to smile, his counterpart from Dresden seemed relatively melancholy. This small difference affected the centre of the composition and was quickly declared the ‘main difficulty’<sup>48</sup> in the Holbein controversy. From a contemporary perspective, the related discussions are necessarily frustrating since they can no longer be followed on the basis of the original, following the picture’s thorough restoration in 1887. This ‘rebirth,’ which was celebrated as a ‘true miracle’<sup>49</sup> left an interesting trace in Hermann Knackfuß’s monograph on German art (fig. 6). Here, the original was presented in a juxtaposition of its two states: the ‘marred state’ on the left, and the ‘restored, original state’ on the right. Against the background of then current moment photography and the simultaneous discussions surrounding the déjà-vu phenomenon, the image-historical staging of the pair is all the more significant: ‘Whoever has seen the picture before and after its rebirth can hardly believe that he is looking at the same work.’<sup>50</sup>



Figure 6 The Holbein Madonna before and after its restoration, juxtaposition from Knackfuß’s *Deutsche Kunstgeschichte*, 1888. Hermann Knackfuß, *Deutsche Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 1, Bielefeld/Leipzig 1888, figs. 397-398, pp. 674-575.

<sup>48</sup> Bruno Meyer, ‘Neue Holbeiniana vor und von der Holbeinausstellung zu Dresden. II: Hans Holbein der Sohn’, *Deutsche Warte*, 1, 1871, 742–762, here 757.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Muther, ‘Die Wiedergeburt der Holbeinschen Madonna’, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst. Mit dem Beiblatt Kunst-Chronik*, 22, 1887, 721–723, here 723; Ludwig Hofmann-Zeitz, ‘Das wiedererstandene Darmstädter Madonnenbild’, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 23, 1888, 302–307, here 304.

<sup>50</sup> Georg Hirth, ‘Ein künstlerisches Ereigniß’, *Münchener neueste Nachrichten*, 21 September 1887, n. pag.

Unsettlingly, after the restoration the original seemed even more similar to the 'loose copy' (of the not yet overpainted original) than it had before. The Christ child's smile had now disappeared from the painting. The 'question of the Christ child,' which was debated in a staggering volume of texts, is now only visible in reproductions from the time before 1887. The history of the Holbein Madonna requires science historians (*Wissenschaftshistoriker*), like image historians (*Bildhistoriker*), to include the history of its reproductions. Knackfuß's juxtaposition is symptomatic in this respect: by reproducing changes, not only with respect to the original, but also of the original, it formulates a visual problem. The montage is the expression of a dynamic concept of the image: it brings deep historical layers of a suppressed image history into view and brings the variability of the original before our eyes, ultimately giving new value to the role of copies. Original, copy, and reproduction seem related to one another in the manner of a palimpsest.

This is also attested by the glazing of the Darmstadt Madonna, which was carried out after the restoration for its correction. The art press reflected on the 'external transformation' and 'the most recent procedure on the work's effect': 'Especially those friends of art who felt little appeal in the restoration of the picture to 'crystal clarity,' as they say, will be gladdened by the mildness of tone now speaking from the work under the protective glass covering that conjures its previous mood in a surprising way. It is as if a marvellous glaze is spread across the entire picture, which softens any harshness and transforms it into a quiet tenderness. The cause of this surprising effect is, of course, a purely external element: that is, the scarcely perceivable, slight yellowish tint of the glass panel, consisting of the material that is used in Dresden for the protection of the gallery's treasures.'<sup>51</sup> This staging repeats a series of earlier experiments that Hübner had conducted upon the Dresden Madonna with the help of a yellow film; it was his objective as well to convey 'the artwork to its proper effect,' after the painting, in light of the differing states of preservation of the two versions, had been subject to a 'refreshing'<sup>52</sup> in 1840. In both cases, corrections resulted from a comparative viewing of the two Madonnas; their interpretation is based on a practical, experimental art historical analysis.

The numerous original-reproductions of this kind play a part in the story of the Holbein Madonna. In sight of their power, even the restoration of the original that was carried out in 1887 and the subsequent glazing could not diminish the fascination with the copy. The intriguing impression of the Darmstadt Madonna seemed to preserve itself. It is significant that subsequently, a mobile staging was chosen for it a number of times. As a preserved photograph from circa 1900 attests (fig. 7), the painting was also hung with the help of hinges in Darmstadt (at the time

<sup>51</sup> 'Darmstadt. Die Madonna des Baseler Bürgermeisters Meyer von Holbein', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst. Mit dem Beiblatt Kunst-Chronik*, 3, 1892, 77–78.

<sup>52</sup> Fechner, *Bericht*, 28. See also Schäfer, *Königliche Gemälde-Galerie*, 786f., 829.

attached to the subsequently destroyed Baroque frame, which was not the original frame from the time of Holbein, but which contained the painting during the Holbein controversy). Here, too, the mobile mounting elicited variation, inviting the viewer to perceive the painting in motion: its manner of appearance could be modified according to the angle of light and of view. These manipulations to the picture are characteristic of the Holbein controversy; with them, a changing mode of appearance was tested for both original and copy.



Figure 7 Joseph Magnus, Holbein Room in Darmstadt Residenzschloss, photograph ca. 1900. Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt, folder R 4 no. 18764.

## Reconstruction and re-enactment

The surviving reproductions can best be designated as ‘interpretations of effect,’ (*Wirkungsinterpretationen*) using a term of Wölfflin’s.<sup>53</sup> They stage and question the painting according to different hypotheses and thereby suggest a type of authenticity that itself can surpass the original in its present form of appearance. Correction comes into play just as much as interpretation. This is also attested by many designs for the framing of the Holbein Madonna; they emphasize the spatial framing conditions of the experience of the original. Here, too, different modes of appearance are tested, whether in the original or the copy.

An early example dates from 1858 and was produced by Julius Hübner. He designed an elaborate montage to give the Dresden picture prominence as a counterpart to the Sistine Madonna (fig. 8). ‘The idea most readily presented itself to

<sup>53</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, [1915], 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Munich: Bruckmann, 1920, 74, 244.



Figure 8 Julius Hübner, Design for the installation of Holbein's Madonna in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie, 1857.  
German private collection, [www.julius-huebner.de](http://www.julius-huebner.de).

allow a very similar, isolated installation to occur, but the first attempt at this demonstrated the difficulties of such an undertaking and the necessity, given the delicacy of the figures' dimensions, to attempt instead a group installation of related objects with Holbein's Mary as worthy centre points.' The staging conceives itself as a *mise-en-valeur* of the painting, but simultaneously pretends to restore original scenarios: beginning from the 'historically grounded idea [. . .] that Holbein's picture, which was never designated as an altar painting, should rather be imagined on the wall of the home of a Basel aristocrat as a family portrait.'<sup>54</sup> The new combination was inaugurated on Easter 1860 in a German-Dutch arrangement (fig. 9). The design was not received with categorical enthusiasm. Like the protective but disruptive glazings that previously surrounded the paintings in the Dresden Gallery, the frames were also discussed as both a necessary accessory and a disturbing 'medium.' But for Hübner, the objective was to give the Dresden Madonna prominence by excepting it from the standard frame—as had already been done for the Sistine.<sup>55</sup> It was a matter of valuating and correcting the painting; the point was to interpret its effect. Like Diethel and Grüder, Hübner also counts among the signers of the counter-declaration. And like his painter colleagues, he also substantiates his statement with visual argumentation.

<sup>54</sup> Julius Hübner, *Verzeichniss der Königlichen Gemälde-Gallerie zu Dresden [...]*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Dresden: Blochmann & Sohn, 1867, 32.

<sup>55</sup> For more on this point, see Bader, *Bild-Prozesse*, 344ff.

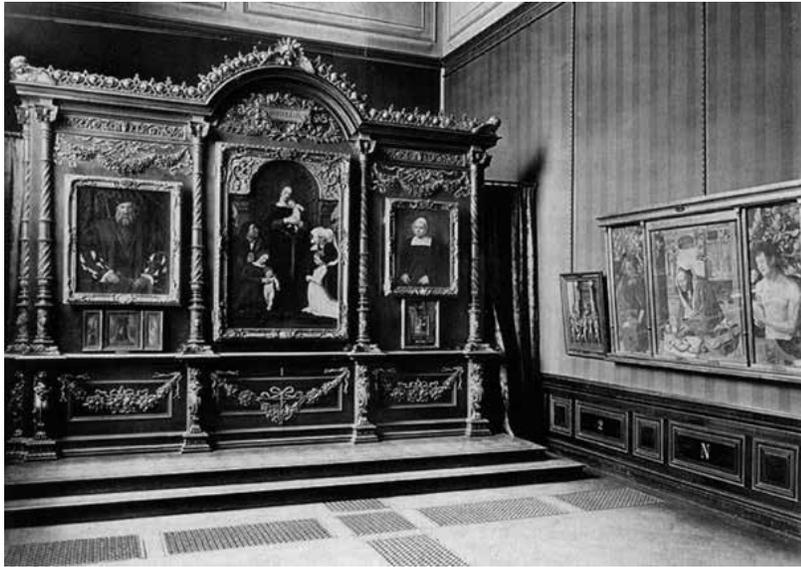


Figure 9 *Mise en valeur* of the Dresden Madonna in the so-called “Holbein-Saal” [Holbein Room], photograph ca. 1900. Harald Marx, *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Dresden*, vol. 2, *Illustriertes Gesamtverzeichnis* (Cologne 2005), 36.



Figure 10 Heinrich Alfred Schmid, sketch for a reconstruction of the original framing, 1896. Heinrich A. Schmid, “Holbeins Madonna,” in *Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft, Sitzungsbericht IV*, (Berlin 27.03.1896), 20-23, here 22 (Staatsarchiv Basel AD V 34 No. 299).

Here, the experts are active as image-makers, regardless of whether they are artists or art historians. For a long period of time, the museum was not merely a space of contemplation and study, but also and above all a site of image production. Around 1896 Heinrich Alfred Schmid, Heinrich Wölfflin’s successor in Basel, began designing the first montages in order to correct the original image’s effect. The art

historian explained the disadvantageous impression as resulting from the painting's lacking its original frame as an 'inalienable part'<sup>56</sup> and therefore designed an alternative to the later, baroque surrounding (fig. 10). In 1954, when the Darmstadt picture went to Basel on loan, Hans Reinhardt used the opportunity to take up this topic himself. Meanwhile, the baroque frame had itself been destroyed, so that Reinhardt as well could not avoid detecting a deficiency in the painting's mode of appearance. He simplified Schmid's design, and on its basis developed an argument for an original hanging of the Holbein Madonna in the chapel space of Jakob Meyer's Basel estate (fig. 11). The description permits no doubt as to the art historian's motivation: once again, the objective is to work against the contrast between the two paintings by relativizing their differences --- even though it had already been 40 years since the Dresden picture was definitively denied attribution to Holbein. At issue here is the image's history and reception, not its attribution.



Figure 11 Hans Reinhardt, reconstruction of the original installation using Grüder's copy of 1860, Basel 1954. Hans Reinhardt, "Die Madonna des Bürgermeisters Meyer von Hans Holbein d. J., Nachforschungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Aufstellung des Gemäldes," in *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 15/4 (1954/1955), 244-254, plates 82 and 83.

A remarkable image process preceded the pictorial montage: in order to reconstruct the original presentation, Reinhard first referred to Grüder's copy in Basel and hung it experimentally in the mansion in Gundeldingen. As already in the case of the restoration, work on the image led to conjuring a type of originality that went beyond the original (in its present state): 'Holbein must have made his

<sup>56</sup> Heinrich Alfred Schmid, *Hans Holbein der Jüngere. Sein Aufstieg zur Meisterschaft und sein englischer Stil. Zwei Textbände und ein Tafelband*, Basel: Holbein-Verlag, 1945, 26.

deliberations according to the situation. Yes, one almost gets the impression that Holbein even painted the picture on site.’<sup>57</sup> This hypothesis about the painting’s genesis can no longer be tested on location, since the building was destroyed a short time later. The pictorial documentation of the image experiment in situ is thus itself an original-reproduction. But the installation is highly curious. By means of a copy that motivated (and legitimated) Grüder to speak out *against* the original, Reinhardt professed to reconstruct the authentic form of appearance *for* the original. The interpretation of the original leads along the route of a copy of the copy: the approach to the original—which was removed from its original location, then overpainted, and subsequently restored—proceeds by way of an original nineteenth century copy of the older (Dresden) copy, which was initially esteemed as the original, and which had been produced in the seventeenth century on the basis of the original before it was retouched. Complex historical connections join to form a dizzying network of image-historical relationships. Instead of competing as alternatives to one another, original and copy merge into one another as simultaneities essential to the image. The real and artificial version, fact and fiction seem entangled to such a degree that categorizations become unstable. What is at the centre here is the work with images, the direct engagement with images. The mobile staging by means of hinges in Dresden and Darmstadt is similar to the relocated copy in Basel in the following respect: iconic criticism and iconic practice go hand in hand in the testing of interpretations of effect.

### **Image history and science history**

In the Holbein controversy, it is not an original and a copy that stand in opposition, but rather, the multiple implications of their manifold relational possibilities. At the centre are dynamic constellations and not fixed categories. The opposition of original and copy does not do justice to the controversy. It negates both historicity and the changeability of images. The Holbein controversy witnessed a series of restorations, overpaintings, framings, lighting experiments, and other interventions for the transformation of the pictures’ particular manner of appearance. More than a dispute over the ‘true original,’ the Holbein controversy is a revealing debate on the theory and practice of reproduction. Amazingly creative image experiments, which were accompanied by a reflection that was at least as engaged as it was complex, determined the course of events. As a dispute over images, with images, and for images, the conflict challenges historiographers to write the history of art history in an object-specific and discipline-specific perspective. Only with a view toward the until now largely neglected image material that accompanied the debate does it

<sup>57</sup> Hans Reinhardt, ‘Die Madonna des Bürgermeisters Meyer von Hans Holbein d. J., Nachforschungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Aufstellung des Gemäldes’, *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 15:4, 1954/1955, 244–254, here 252f.

become evident how the discipline concretized itself through the increasing picturization and permeation of its object.

The Holbein exhibition is also the motor and result of an engaged iconic process. It ensued from the need for a direct engagement with the images and, for its part, enabled new experiences in image practice, to which the drawings by Diethelme and Menzel also attest. The two surviving iconic documents, each in its own way, bear witness to a far-reaching orientation to images that was crucial for the founding of art history as an academic discipline. The institutionalization of the discipline<sup>58</sup> did not take place in opposition to aesthetic experience, but rather, in direct involvement with the program of an art history as visual instruction. This is demonstrated by Anton Springer's text in support of the Arundel Society for Promoting the Knowledge of Art. In order to elucidate the importance of art-historical visual material, and to win colleagues from Germany for the renowned English organization, the art historian wrote in 1860: 'In matters of art there is only one secure basis for a right judgment: a rich and precise viewing. Whoever has not seen much, has not learned to see well, must renounce knowledge of art.' And even more explicitly: 'The image has joined the word as its necessary completion, the principle that only the practiced eye can make sound artistic judgments has become fact. Illustrations are not added to the art-historical works as an external decoration; they belong to their essential contents.'<sup>59</sup> It is against this background that August Schmarsow's warning against a 'dematerialization of art history'<sup>60</sup> should be seen. In his main argument, it is from the specifics of its object that art history's discipline-specific challenges ensue: 'One must only eradicate the error that an art history lecture should be heard in the same way, and sat through, as a lecture in theology, law, philosophy.'<sup>61</sup> In their central demand, Springer and Schmarsow agree—regardless of their methodological differences—in their accentuation of approaches more strongly oriented to culture studies or formal analysis: 'Viewing! Give the words images!'<sup>62</sup> Their appeal is no exception. Both in a theoretical and a practical respect, the self-determination of the discipline follows a program that emphasizes the image. In the Holbein controversy, the orientation towards and the necessity of images come together in a congenial way; here, the programmatic credo of an art history *ad oculos*<sup>63</sup>—not least as the result of deficient written sources—finds a pragmatic counterpart.

<sup>58</sup> Locher, *Kunstgeschichte*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Anton Heinrich Springer, *Die Arundel-Gesellschaft zur Förderung höherer Kunstkenntnisse*, Bonn: n. pub., 1860, 3.

<sup>60</sup> August Schmarsow, *Die Kunstgeschichte an unsern Hochschulen*, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1891, 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Herman Grimm, 'Die Umgestaltung der Universitätsvorlesungen über Neuere Kunstgeschichte durch die Anwendung des Skioptikons. Erster Bericht' (published in



Figure 12 Original reproductions of the Holbein Madonna, selection from 1635 through 1954. Montage: Lena Bader.

The Holbein controversy is the visual testament to a wide-reaching orientation to images (fig. 12). The pleasure in images that emerges from the early representations shows itself as a noteworthy reflection of the dispute: only in the side-by-side viewing of the pictures do the complex interferences between original, copy, and reproduction become manifest. The surviving original-reproductions join together into a revealing composite image, through which the Holbein controversy emerges as a testament to an active will to images. The panorama of 'interpretations of effect' attests to a fascination of creative variation and breaks apart established representational hierarchies between original and reproduction. The images' historical entanglements take precedence over the unique image, and the perspective of inter-iconicity over fetishism of the original. Instead of becoming the projection screen for a one-sided auratization, the single image, in the course of being viewed together with other images, emerges from the iconic cosmos in a state of enrichment.

The scope of this visual material is owed not least to the fact that art historians were often active as image producers, or else worked together with them closely. The results of this image generation mark significant moments of art-historical research. The object is the method, orientation to the image is the program: the Holbein controversy shows that and to what extent the discipline, as a result of visual staging and reproduction of its objects, was confronted with questions of iconic criticism from its beginnings. The influential characterization of the Holbein controversy, in later research, according to dichotomous pairs such as 'art historian versus artist' or 'authenticity versus beauty' comes up short. In this

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Nationalzeitung, 1892), in Grimm, *Beiträge zur deutschen Culturgeschichte*, Berlin: W. Herts, 1897, 276–304, here 294.

perspective, it is necessarily left out of account that the early image controversy revolved around fundamental questions of iconic criticism and methodically exhibited fundamental questions of art history; consequently the close interaction of iconic criticism and iconic practice is necessarily closed off from view. The fact that this reading nevertheless could put itself forward successfully is relevant as a science-theoretical symptom. Here, old ideas of knowledge as a text endure, to which even the historiography of art history as a discipline has for a long time had a strong affinity. In an astonishing deviation from decided positions of the nineteenth century, in regarding the history of the discipline, images were for a long time afforded no appropriately elevated status, either as historical illustrations or as a theoretical problem. In view of this visible 'de-materialization' of the own discipline's historiography, the question is raised to what extend discussions of the (modern) 'iconic turn' made the screening out of the (earlier) image question in the frame of art-historical science history not only possible, but also necessary – thus, to what extent an (alleged) indifference to images inside the art history of the nineteenth century could, or had to, emerge as a necessary contrast to the (programmatic) desire for images inside the image studies of the present? As a double blank of iconic criticism, the art history of the nineteenth century here offers the chance for an all the more fruitful rapprochement of (science) history and (image) theory: 'Viewing! Give the words images!'

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