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ART WORKS.

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- 1. American Art Review 1881, p. 261.
- 2. Strahan 1879-80.
- 3. See Lynn Hunt, "The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution," and Michelle Perrot, "Roles and Characters," in Ariès and Duby 1987–91, vol. 4, From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War, pp. 13–45 and pp. 196–209.
- 4. For the ubiquity of Raphael's types as used by French artists through the early twentieth century, see Paris 1983–84b.
- 5. The provenance of the larger picture is: Sir William Cunleffe (Cunliffe?) Brooks, 1901; Blakeslee Collection sale, Mendelssohn Hall, New York, 10–11 April 1902, no. 73, sold to Gunther; to B. G. Gunther; J. Pierpont Morgan, New York, Morgan sale, Christie's, London, 31 March 1944, no. 79. This may be the same picture that was auctioned at Sotheby's, New York, 7 May 1998, no. 78. The provenance earlier than the 1998 sale is taken from a photograph in the Hugues Merle artist's file, Frick Art Reference Library, New York.
- 6. American Art Association 1934b, no. 15.
- 7. Strahan 1879–80, vol. 2, pt. 3, p. 119, under "The Collection of Mr. Robert L. Stuart."

Meyer von Bremen (Johann Georg Meyer)

German, 1813-1886

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Oil on canvas, 40 x 30.2 cm Upper left: Meyer von Bremen / Berlin 1885 Gift of the children of Mrs. E. Parmalee Prentice 1962.149

Meyer von Bremen was once a much beloved midnineteenth-century artist in his hometown of Bremen and elsewhere in Germany. Unfortunately, today, his early chronology remains relatively undocumented. Throughout his life, Meyer produced paintings, engravings, and lithographs. His career probably started during his brief sojourn in Düsseldorf, where he is believed to have studied at the Düsseldorf Academy with both Karl Ferdinand Sohn (1805–1867) and Wilhelm von Schadow (1788–1862), the well-known German Romantic painters.¹ Schadow had recently brought students, including Sohn, with him from Berlin in order to establish a painting school whose

program focused on the construction of finely detailed allegorical and religiously themed landscapes.

Although Meyer lived and worked primarily in Bremen and had these early ties with the Düsseldorf School, his work is typical of the naturalism of mid-nineteenth-century genre painting, specifically that of the Munich School. Rather than turning to dramatic, tumultuous subjects like those favored by earlier German Romantics, the Munich School artists devoted their canvases to scenes of everyday life and the surrounding familiar landscape. These pictures focus almost exclusively on the representation of quotidian events, often with sentimental overtones: simple goings-on within the walls of the quiet home, intimate moments between mother and child, thoughtful scenes in the family circle. A turn-of-the-century author wrote that the impression Meyer's pictures make is of "pure truth to nature but above all of a gilt and elevated idealism," which makes itself felt as "a necessary result of an ever vivid feeling for the beauty of form and of piety of soul." 2

The Secret depicts just this sort of idealized scene, showing a small child whispering unknowable words into her mother's ear. While seeming to listen attentively, the mother nevertheless continues with her task of preparing a meal. Despite the humble setting, both figures are rosy cheeked, smiling, and impeccably dressed. The palette is appropriately subdued and the interior's décor and carefully placed objects are consistent with the homes of rural workers in southern Germany of that time. While characteristically meticulous in his application of paint, as were most German genre painters, Meyer has here employed slightly thicker touches in his depiction of the wall behind the mother's left knee. This variation in technique serves to heighten the realistic quality of the rough-surfaced wall, just as the strokes of white in the leaves of cabbage give them the appearance of dampness. JR

PROVENANCE Alta Rockefeller Prentice (Mrs. E. Parmalee Prentice), New York and Williamstown (until d. 1962); Prentice heirs, by descent, given to the Clark; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1962.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1979b, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an unlined canvas of moderate weight (19 threads/cm) attached to a four-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The fabric is brittle and darkened to a brown color. Paint on all four tack edges suggests



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that the picture was painted prior to being stretched. There are fine aperture branched age cracks. Random transfer of red paint onto the woman's proper left sleeve seems to have occurred during the final glaze applications. Odd inter-layer tenting in several locations may have resulted from solvents used by the artist to wipe off parts of the image during painting or from the presence of an interlayer varnish damaged by an early cleaning. When the picture was cleaned of a thick yellow varnish in 1987, older varnish residues were discovered, suggesting an earlier cleaning had taken place. There are retouchings in the red skirt, apron, and bodice of the woman, and the hair and faces of both figures. The lower edge may have been repainted by the artist.

The ground is a grayish white commercially applied layer, having a pebbly, possibly roller-applied texture. In infrared reflectography, underdrawing lines were detected most

clearly on the faces. The woman's jawline is a bit higher in the drawing than in the final paint layer. There may be a brown paint imprimatura layer over the entire ground. The paint film is a thin, vehicular paste consistency, leaving a flat surface with only slight impastos. The effects on the right wall were created using a sponging or daubing technique. There are small smears in some details where something dislodged the wet paint. The signature may be applied using black ink.

^{1.} Bisanz 1980, p. 176.

^{2.} Alexander 1910, p. 11: "reinen Naturwahreit doch hauptsächlich der eines altes vergoldenen und erhöhenden Idealismus . . . notwendiges Ergebnis eines stets lebendigen Gefühls für Schönheit der Form und Frömmigkeit der Seele ein."