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## Woodcuts as Wallpaper: Sebald Beham and Large Prints from Nuremberg

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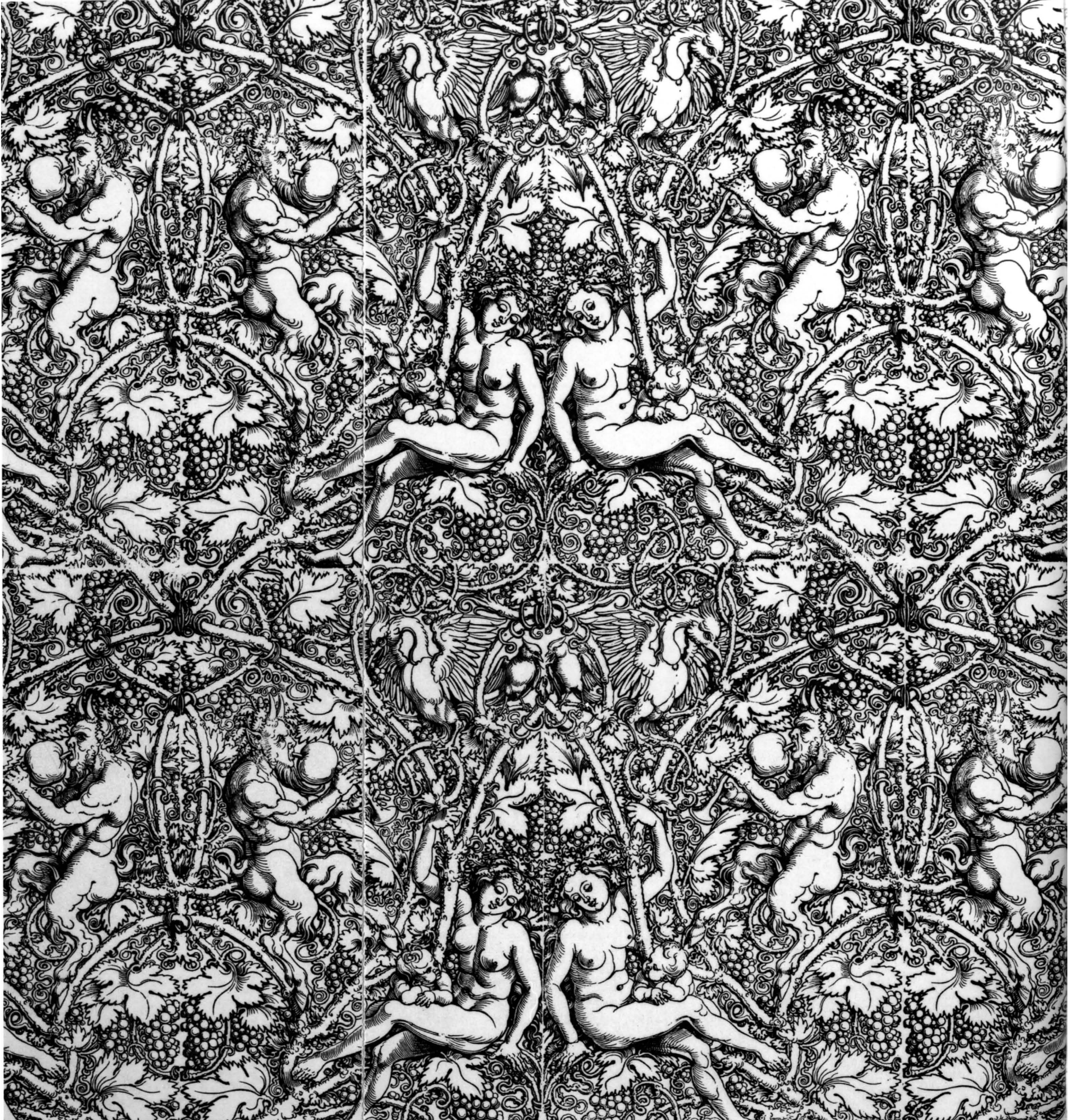


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## WOODCUTS AS WALLPAPER

### SEBALD BEHAM AND LARGE PRINTS FROM NUREMBERG



Large works on paper, in particular ones that covered walls, were new in the realm of printed works of art during the early decades of the sixteenth century. Following in the footsteps of wall hangings and tapestries of the late medieval period, wallpaper became a new concept in the Renaissance. Although wallpaper has generally fallen in and out of favor in the past several decades, it recently has been experiencing its own renaissance with visual artists. At the Rhode Island School of Design, a 2003 exhibition entitled *On the Wall: Wallpaper by Contemporary Artists* featured wallpaper with a variety of patterns and designs, from fisheyes to photo-realist landscapes.<sup>1</sup>

Over the centuries wallpaper's popularity has also waxed and waned. In the final years of Albrecht Dürer's life, thirty years after his Apocalypse series of 1498 changed how woodcuts were perceived in terms of size and importance, Dürer's pupil Sebald Beham rethought what a woodcut print might be and what it could show. This included its use as wallpaper. Where Dürer broke new ground in the exploration of the larger, full-page size for visual image alone and the role of the woodcut designer as publisher, Beham explored subject matter new for the woodcut technique and for large-sized woodcuts; subject matter that had sometimes been executed in engraving before, but never in woodcut in large format, and thereby expanded the audience for large independent woodcuts, including wallpaper prints. I will explore in this essay the use of such woodcuts, and their audiences and sizes. Later I will focus on one of Beham's large woodcuts that was used as wallpaper, showing that the taste for such domestic decoration links the half millenium between the Northern Renaissance and the recent wallpaper revival.



Sebald Beham has often been considered the bad boy of Renaissance Nuremberg. Known as a Little Master because of the small-sized engravings he made, Beham was born at Nuremberg in 1500, two years after Dürer, Nuremberg's leading painter, had achieved international success with the publication of his *Apocalypse* book featuring large woodcut illustrations nearly 40 centimeters high. Beham died in 1550 at Frankfurt am Main after moving there around 1531. Although no written documents confirm that Beham was apprenticed to Dürer, ample visual evidence does so convincingly: a pen-and-ink drawing by Beham of various heads (signed and dated 1518, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton-Ulrich Museum) shows Dürer's influence in the use of curved lines to model forms, seen notably in the arcs of cheek and neck, an approach also evident in Beham's earliest dated engraving, a small bust-length view of a young woman (fig. 1) signed and dated 1518 HSP.<sup>2</sup> Around this time Beham also made a drawing in roundel form for stained glass (fig. 2) showing an amorous peasant couple holding cheese and eggs, a composition that appears to go back to a drawing exercise in Dürer's workshop for his apprentices, who either varied the model or traced and altered the drawing Dürer provided.<sup>3</sup> Using such visual evidence, along with other clues, Beham's apprenticeship to Dürer can be dated to approximately between the years 1515 and 1520.<sup>4</sup>



FIG. 1 Sebald Beham. *Young Woman in Half Length*, 1518. Engraving. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. Photo: Jutta Streiffellner

Dürer played a key role in enlarging the size of independent woodcuts produced outside the realm of book illustration, such as his *Samson Slaying the Lion* from around 1497–98 (38.2 × 28 centimeters; St. Louis Museum of Art). This woodcut used the same large-sized paper as Dürer's *Apocalypse* book illustrations.<sup>5</sup> Dürer undoubtedly learned much about the publishing industry, including standard sizes of woodcuts and papers, when he worked on designs for the ambitious and generously illustrated *Nuremberg Chronicle* (cat. 18), published by his godfather Anton Koberger in 1493. The paper used for this book project was "Superregal" as specified by the contract, and it measured 48.4 × 66 centimeters, which was folded in half for printing two folio pages of 48.4 × 33 centimeters,<sup>6</sup> even larger than the paper Dürer used for his own *Apocalypse* illustrations. By the time Beham produced large woodcuts on his own, like the *Nymphs and Satyrs* wallpaper, he used even larger paper that measured over 53.3 × 32.2 centimeters.<sup>7</sup>

In his workshop Dürer taught apprentices like Beham a number of important skills required for the various media of the German Renaissance painter: grinding pigments and making various paints; preparing and smoothing panels and applying oil paint to wood panels; making preparatory drawings for paintings, stained glass, and woodcuts; designing and cutting engravings and etchings, then printing them on a cylinder press; and designing and perhaps cutting woodcuts, and then printing



FIG. 2 After Sebald Beham. *Peasant Couple with Cheese and Eggs*, original c. 1515–20. Pen and ink with washes. Galerie Siegfried Billesberger, Moosinning/München

them on a flatbed press. Beham would also have learned about making and using a variety of printing inks, and about the types and qualities of different handmade papers produced from linen rags, including paper from the local Nuremberg paper mill owned by the Stomer family. From Dürer Beham also undoubtedly acquired a sense of the print market—which print subjects were popular and sold well and suited the artist’s talents, as well as which sizes worked best for particular subjects. At the time of Beham’s apprenticeship, Dürer had just completed his Master Engravings of 1513 and 1514, including his *St. Jerome in His Study* and *Melencolia I*, and was still overseeing the enormous woodcut project of *The Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I* (cat. 20), which was made from nearly two hundred woodcuts and measured at least 357 × 295 centimeters.<sup>8</sup>

Beham had become a master painter and had established his own workshop by 1525, but Nuremberg records do not indicate whether Sebald worked with his brother Barthel, younger by two years, although they did have a close relationship with shared values. Both made engravings and etchings, yet each Beham specialized in a somewhat different but complementary area: Sebald in the design of woodcuts and stained glass, and Barthel in making panel paintings. By working in diverse media, Sebald followed in the path of his teacher.

Both Behams were young in 1525: twenty-five and twenty-three years of age, respectively. Their training was typical for the time in Germany, apprenticing at roughly age fifteen and becoming a master and setting up shop at twenty-five. Similarly, Dürer began his Nuremberg apprenticeship to the painter Michael Wolgemut in 1484 at age thirteen, and became a master at age twenty-three in 1494 after marrying Agnes Frey, who became his workshop manager. In 1525 the Behams were still young enough to be caught up in the excitement and turmoil of the changing religious and political scene in Reformation Nuremberg. Since 1520 Martin Luther’s new ideas questioning the tenets of the Catholic Church had made inroads in Nuremberg society, and by January 1525 Nuremberg’s town council voted to adopt Luther’s new religion, and were thus part of the spread of the Lutheran approach from northern to southern Germany. This adoption brought with it changing attitudes toward communion, including more inclusive participation; thus the laity and not just priests were permitted to take wine

from the chalice. The new religion also embraced Luther’s new translation of the Bible into the German vernacular, expanding the audience beyond those who could read and understand the Latin translation of St. Jerome.

In January 1525, the month Nuremberg officially became Lutheran, Sebald and Barthel Beham were brought before the town council, along with painter Georg Pencz, for their radical proclamations on religion and about the local authorities. Beham’s radical leanings were recognized by his contemporaries who dubbed him a “godless painter,” a nickname that has stuck into recent literature. Beham’s testimony at his trial before the authorities is best described by Wayne Allen: Beham told the council he could not accept the Lutheran idea of communion, in which the body and blood of Christ are believed to be present in the bread and wine. He rejected communion as a sacrament, and did not feel that God worked in and through water baptism. Beham called these Lutheran rituals harmless displays of piety. He also discounted any beneficial effects of sermons. Beham seems to have rejected the notion of an authority higher than himself both in the religious and secular realms governed by the council, as well as the idea that he belonged to a community of believers, a fundamental Lutheran tenet.<sup>9</sup>

Beham’s repudiation of the outward manifestations of religion, particularly the Lutheran sacraments of baptism and Mass, has been directly linked to the spiritualism of Hans Denck, the schoolmaster of the church of St. Sebald and an acquaintance and perhaps friend of Beham. Denck, in turn, is believed to have been influenced by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, who called for expanding communion to the laity by offering both wine and wafer.<sup>10</sup> Beham also appears to have become acquainted with Sebastian Franck, a radical Reformer and spiritualist whose *Chronicle of the Turks*, printed in 1528, states that spiritualists wanted an invisible church based on inner beliefs rather than an external church based on show and ceremony.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, Franck married Beham’s sister, Ottilie, thereby becoming part of Beham’s family.<sup>12</sup>

The timing of Beham’s trial was unfortunate at best. Nuremberg was an imperial city directly responsible to the Catholic emperor, Charles V. Unorthodox ideas that deviated from the Catholic party line were unwelcome, and the new Lutheran attitudes therefore needed to tread carefully. Sebald’s attitudes

were thus radical enough to cause his expulsion from the city until November of 1525. Whether his attitudes could be gleaned from the prints he made has been debated back and forth, but Beham's business acumen within the print market has not been stressed.<sup>13</sup>

The Lutheran religion also brought to Nuremberg changing attitudes toward religious holidays and celebrations, leading to an attempt to reduce the number of such holidays, among which was the favorite peasant holiday of the time: kermis, the anniversary of a church or the celebration of its saint's day. Kermis imagery became topical and the subject of several large woodcuts that Beham designed in Nuremberg, and which were copied at least twice. Around the time Beham set out on his own as master, he made large woodcut designs for subjects that included peasant festivals or festival-like occasions, including a *Spinning Bee* woodcut showing a place where women would spin wool during the evening hours, and kermis, including one that took place in Mögeldorf, a village just outside Nuremberg. Beham's *Kermis at Mögeldorf* is a frieze-like composition with six sheets, dating to around 1528. It has traditionally been assigned to his brother Barthel; however, I believe Sebald, not Barthel, designed these woodcuts. This large woodcut composition shows peasant couples dancing and celebrating, set to the rhymed couplets below by Nuremberg's shoemaker-poet, Hans Sachs. Sebald reissued the *Kermis at Mögeldorf* six years later, circa 1534, when he was still designing woodcuts for Nuremberg publishers, but the latter version of his woodcut included text in the Frankfurt dialect of his new home. At about the same time he designed a more compact version of a kermis on four sheets, known today in a unique but fragmentary impression in the German University Library at Erlangen. Despite the inclusion of an imperial privilege forbidding copying, his *Kermis* (Erlangen) was copied twice nearly line for line in same-sized copies; each copy exists today in a unique impression, in museums at Oxford and Gotha.<sup>14</sup>

While the *Large Village Kermis* (cat. 28) is the only peasant festival woodcut Beham signed, his *Kermis* (Erlangen) remains unquestioned as a work he designed. In the earliest states, his Frankfurt monogram appeared on the *Large Village Kermis* along with the date: 1535 HSB. Probably soon thereafter Albrecht Glockendon added his name and address to the print, near the

Sun Bathhouse (bey dem sunnen bad). Beham expanded the composition of his Erlangen woodcut by including considerably more detail to make his *Large Village Kermis*. Sebald made the designs for each of the woodblocks that were probably cut and then printed by blockcutters working for Nuremberg printers.

By 1535 Sebald had permanently moved to Frankfurt am Main. After acquiring citizenship in Frankfurt, Beham relinquished his Nuremberg citizenship in 1535, by which time his work designing large woodcuts was coming to an end. The designs he made for the *Large Village Kermis* appear to have been by "mail order," with the blocks possibly sent rather than delivered in person, and the prints issued from Nuremberg sometime that year. After 1535 Beham stopped designing large woodcuts and began working with the Frankfurt publishing scene, taking on such projects as designing illustrations for books published by Christian Egenolff.

The large woodcuts Beham designed during his Nuremberg years feature secular subjects at a time when the Lutheran Reformation was reevaluating and questioning the merit of saints, saint's days, and images of saints, thereby opening up



FIG. 3A Copy after Erasmus Loy. Frieze with Vines and Medallions. Woodcut on a bed frame, Nuremberg c. 1600. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Inv.-Nr. HG9091



opportunities for new themes that were not strictly religious. Such woodcuts were printed onto two, four, or more sheets of paper and glued side by side. Beham's *Fountain of Youth* woodcut of 1531 (cat. 29), printed on four sheets with long text by Hans Sachs dated 1531 added below the image, exists today in a beautiful hand-colored impression, which is unique, at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The impression in the exhibition, from the St. Louis Art Museum, more typically omits the text and is not colored.

Despite their size such large woodcuts must have had a market. Sebald turned to the design of large woodcuts early in his career, perhaps because of his training under Dürer, where Beham must have witnessed firsthand the designing and cutting of blocks, and perhaps the assembling of printed impressions for large woodcut projects such as *The Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I*. Woodcut designers like Beham may have been paid a fee for their designs, which were cut into woodblocks by trained blockcutters working for publishers who, in turn, retained the blocks and rights to them. Although Beham's large prints were more manageable in size than the truly enormous print projects Dürer oversaw for Emperor Maximilian, some of his large woodcut prints, especially those with the subject of kermis, reused sections from one composition to another, suggesting that the prints sold well and were popular. Such repeated use of imagery also points to the fact that what today would appear to be copying was standard practice at a time when copyright did not ensure protection from copying.

As a class of images, large woodcuts offer an example of how prints could be used in everyday life; they serve as

evidence of the material culture of sixteenth-century life in the functional sense.<sup>15</sup> These large works served a variety of useful purposes, and their secular subjects and associations in addition to their large sizes unite them. Anthropologist Richard L. Anderson links such works to the culture of their times and to everyday experience rather than to the customary western notion of fine art.<sup>16</sup> Thus the woodcuts discussed here form an important link between visual art and material culture, a connection art history has traditionally not embraced due to the everyday functional nature of these woodcuts in the secular realm.

The potential for a broad audience is a common thread: these works could have been seen by a large number of people in public locations, such as taverns and public bathhouses, or by a smaller number of individuals who passed through a private household where the woodcuts were on view. In these venues the woodcuts could have been displayed on walls, ceilings, and chimney breasts. Compare these larger numbers of potential viewers to the audience for Beham's small engravings where, due to the extremely small scale of the prints (only an inch or two in size) and the fact they were often collected and displayed in albums, only a very limited number of people could appreciate them at the same time. One case in point of a larger woodcut displayed in a private household is a bed frame decorated with woodcuts showing a frieze of vines and medallions, known in a copy from around 1600 by Erasmus Loy in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (fig. 3A–C). The frame with woodcuts would have been visible to household members, including servants, at a time when bedrooms had not yet become the private spaces they are today. The woodcuts

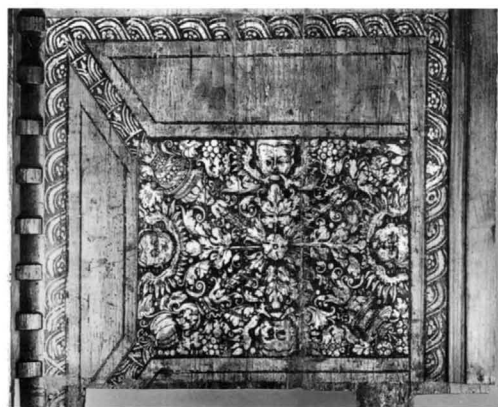


FIG. 3B Copy after Erasmus Loy. Putti and Foliage. Woodcut on a bed frame, Nuremberg c. 1600. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Inv.-Nr. HG9091, Detail



FIG. 3C Copy after Erasmus Loy. Frieze with Vines and Medallions. Woodcut on a bed frame, Nuremberg c. 1600. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Inv.-Nr. HG9091, Detail

decorating the bed may have been seen by more individuals than engravings since beds were often shared by more than one person in the sixteenth century.

Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* has been variously dated between 1515 and 1525, and its design given both to Dürer and to Sebald Beham. In general the older literature assigns the print to Dürer with a date around 1515, while more recent scholars, including Giulia Bartrum, David Landau and Peter Parshall, assign it to Beham and a slightly later date, circa 1520–25.<sup>17</sup> This woodcut is a youthful but accomplished work by Beham, thus with a date of around 1520 to 1525, after Beham had completed his apprenticeship and journeyman travels

and probably during the early years of his being an independent master. For his *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, Beham designed one large woodcut (fig. 4, left half) measuring 53.3 × 32.5 centimeters, with nymph at left and satyr at right, filling the interstices with grapes and grapevines, larger and smaller birds, and thick, vine-like branches. The nymph is accompanied by a small child, and the satyr blows on a bagpipe-like instrument. A second woodcut constituted the right half and is the same size (fig. 4, right half). Its composition reverses the one just described, includes the nymph at right, and was most certainly also designed by Beham, but the design was made after his composition, perhaps from a counterproof of the left half,



FIG. 4 Sebald Beham. *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, c. 1520–25. Two woodcuts printed on dark ground. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1922, 22.97.4.5



as Charles Talbot suggested.<sup>18</sup> Aspects of the line work, especially the shading, appear harsher and more regular, suggesting the involvement of another hand or a different blockcutter. The right half also simplifies detail and shows anatomy in a clumsy manner. For example, the satyr has lost curls in his beard and the arms and shoulders of the small pudgy child appear too high and disconnected.

The subjects here go beyond scenes of everyday life such as peasant festivals and bathhouses to the humanist revival of themes from the ancient world: nymphs, satyrs, and the erotic. The grapes can be linked to Bacchus, Roman god of wine, and the satyr would have been understood as a demigod follower of Bacchus. These subjects belonged to the Renaissance realm of ideas earlier represented by Dürer in prints such as his engraving of a satyr, woman, and child dated 1505 (fig. 5).<sup>19</sup> The satyr was legendary for his sexual interest, his unbridled lust,<sup>20</sup> and his love of music and revelry. His sexual appetite is specifically illustrated in an anonymous Italian woodcut illustration for the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499, and his arousal at viewing a nude woman there is unmistakable. Yet the satyr Beham shows is accompanied by a woman and a child, a combination that has suggested to at least one writer “a way of domesticating the wild.”<sup>21</sup> Beham’s woodcut may, therefore, have appealed to a spirited citizen of Nuremberg who was safely living in the comfort of his middle-class or patrician home or castle.

In Beham’s wallpaper, the satyr’s lust or sexual appetite is underscored by additional elements: by the birds at upper left and by the bagpipe blown by the satyr. Birds and birding (*vögeln*) were common metaphors for the sex act in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany.<sup>22</sup> Bagpipes were similarly understood to carry sexual meaning based on their phallic shape. Although a representation of a bagpipe sometimes indicated nothing more than a bagpipe in art of the time, the context here underscores the broader sexual associations that the bagpipe potentially could hold. As an extremely popular folk instrument in Nuremberg, bagpipes were represented in woodcuts and engravings of the time and played at kermis and other folk festivals, as well as at court and in cities in the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

With a 52-centimeter height, each impression of this wallpaper print slightly exceeds the 50-centimeter minimum size Horst Appuhn and Christian von Heusinger

required for a print to be considered an enormous woodcut or *Riesenholzschnitt*,<sup>24</sup> a size larger than that of the albums used to collect prints during the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup> This pair of prints is one of relatively few examples of extant wallpaper, and would have been printed numerous times and placed side by side, as well as in rows over one another. The two woodcuts face each other to complete one segment of the wallpaper measuring roughly 54 × 65 centimeters.<sup>27</sup> According to Christian von Heusinger the pattern of this wallpaper is complete only when at least four pairs of the print are juxtaposed next to and over each other, at which time the vines form continuous lines suggesting both the female and male sexual organs. Thus satyrs stand inside pudenda and nymphs sit inside erect phalluses.<sup>28</sup> In addition, both the nymphs and the satyrs wear in their hair oak leaves and acorns, which may have been seen as symbols of Germany, but more relevantly the acorn was a not-so-hidden sexual reference. In German the word for acorn, *Eichel*, also referred to the glans of the



FIG. 5 Albrecht Dürer. Satyr with Woman and Child. Engraving, 1505. Clarence Buckingham Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago

male organ. To consider the question whether the suggested reconstruction with its erotic imagery was obvious to the sixteenth-century viewer, it is important to keep in mind that such provocative imagery, although deemed “Freudian” today, would also have been understood in a similar, sexually suggestive manner in Beham’s time.

The possibility that viewers would have understood the imagery as erotic is confirmed by the suggestively shaped objects that without a doubt were deemed erotic in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In his important study of late medieval and early modern language, Henry Kratz cites specific examples from the literature of the time, including carnival plays, of the symbolic use of pipes, sticks, and swords for the male member, and pitchers and tubs for the female.<sup>29</sup> Kratz thus convincingly associated phallic-shaped everyday objects with the male, and round containers with the female.

In order to test the effect of the imagery at its original scale, I recreated the wallpaper to its original size. I enlarged the images published in the Appuhn and von Heusinger catalogue four hundred percent, each pair onto a 24 × 36 inch sheet of paper, and I assembled the sheets next to and over each other to create a large surface area. My aim was to see what a larger area filled with Beham’s woodcuts would look like and how the images would change when blown up to their original size from smaller reproductions. I also wanted to test von Heusinger’s statement that a minimum of four pairs of the print would be needed for the viewer to see the sexually suggestive shapes. Finally, I wanted to test the importance of ink added to the background, in a sense testing Giulia Bartrum’s assumption that the woodcuts would “surely have been coloured for use as wallpaper; the

survival of this and other examples . . . is due to the fact that they were never utilised in this way.”<sup>30</sup> This is another way of saying that if sixteenth-century wallpaper were used, it more than likely did not survive. When used, the wallpaper was likely colored. If uncolored, remaining black and white, then the large woodcuts would not have been used.

My reconstructions indicate that the images changed dramatically in terms of visual impact when enlarged to include at least the four woodcut pairs required to visually create the vine framework, and that ink or color may have been added to accentuate the background, but need not have been. The ink printed onto the ground of the impression in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 4) changed the relationship of foreground and background, pushing forward the figures in the front and creating an aggressive three-dimensionality. We do know that ink was printed on the ground of other contemporary wallpaper prints by Beham, including his *Pomegranate Wallpaper* from around 1520–25. The impression on dark ground, in comparison with the one on white ground (figs. 6 and 7), indicates that the black ground clarified the composition and caused the pomegranates to project forward toward the viewer.<sup>31</sup>

The effect added color may have had for such wallpaper was suggested in a 2002 exhibition, organized by Susan Dackerman at the Baltimore Museum of Art, which demonstrated that woodcuts were often colored during the early sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Color could have been used selectively to accentuate individual areas of the *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, or it might have been added to the entire composition, regardless of whether the background were black or white. One nineteenth-century wallpaper pattern and fabric design by

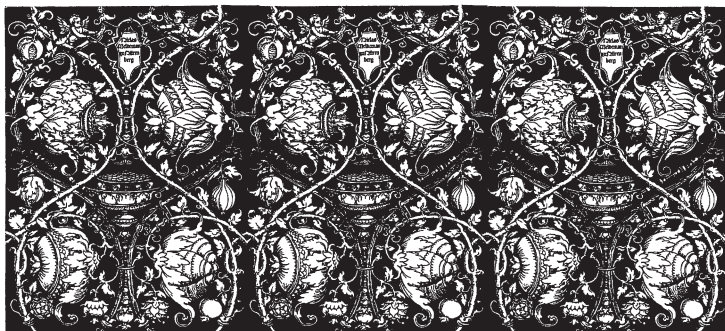


FIG. 6 Sebald Beham. *Pomegranate Wallpaper*, c. 1520–25. Woodcut on dark ground, photomontage reconstruction. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. Taken from Appuhn and von Heusinger (1976), fig. 10

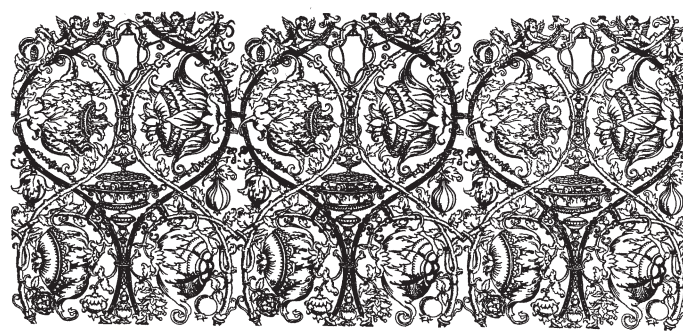


FIG. 7 Sebald Beham. *Pomegranate Wallpaper*, c. 1520–25. Woodcut on light ground, photomontage reconstruction. Formerly Dankó Collection, Pressburg / Bratislava. Taken from Appuhn and von Heusinger, fig. 11



William Morris shows rich pinks that accentuate each snake-head-like form, with the result that the pink forms project forward dramatically against the black background with its blue vines and foliage.<sup>33</sup>

A similar visual illusion occurs with Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* printed on a black background, as the unique impression in the Metropolitan Museum of Art reveals in startling fashion when one stands before it.<sup>34</sup> Uncolored, the *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* is an effective and easily readable image (cat. 30), but with the background printed black, the forms project forward dynamically, creating a sculptural, relief-like effect. This work's importance and impact undoubtedly lie in its large size and its overwhelming physical presence, and it must have helped spread Beham's name and fame.<sup>35</sup> Wallpaper such as Beham's allied humanist themes based in antiquity with the pictorial illusion of Roman wall painting.

The large woodcuts that survive are few in number. The reasons why such "mural woodcuts" (the term Landau and

Parshall use for "large and often complex woodcuts meant for wall display") have survived in low numbers is that most were glued onto walls where the dampness of the northern climate led to their deterioration and eventual destruction.<sup>36</sup> If the walls on which the woodcuts were applied were torn down, the wallpaper would have been lost partially or completely, and if the walls were redecorated and the wallpaper covered up, the wallpaper would most likely have been impossible to recover.

The survival rate for woodcut wallpaper decoration in particular was even lower than that for large woodcuts in general, judging from the handful of impressions known today.<sup>37</sup> Little evidence for sixteenth-century wallpaper remains. Yet with what does exist some art historians have suggested that wallpaper was glued onto ceilings as well as on walls. Beham's large woodcuts in general, and his *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* in particular, could have been glued onto ceilings or walls, and all of these would have benefited from the addition of color when the works were displayed across a large surface (fig. 8). That this

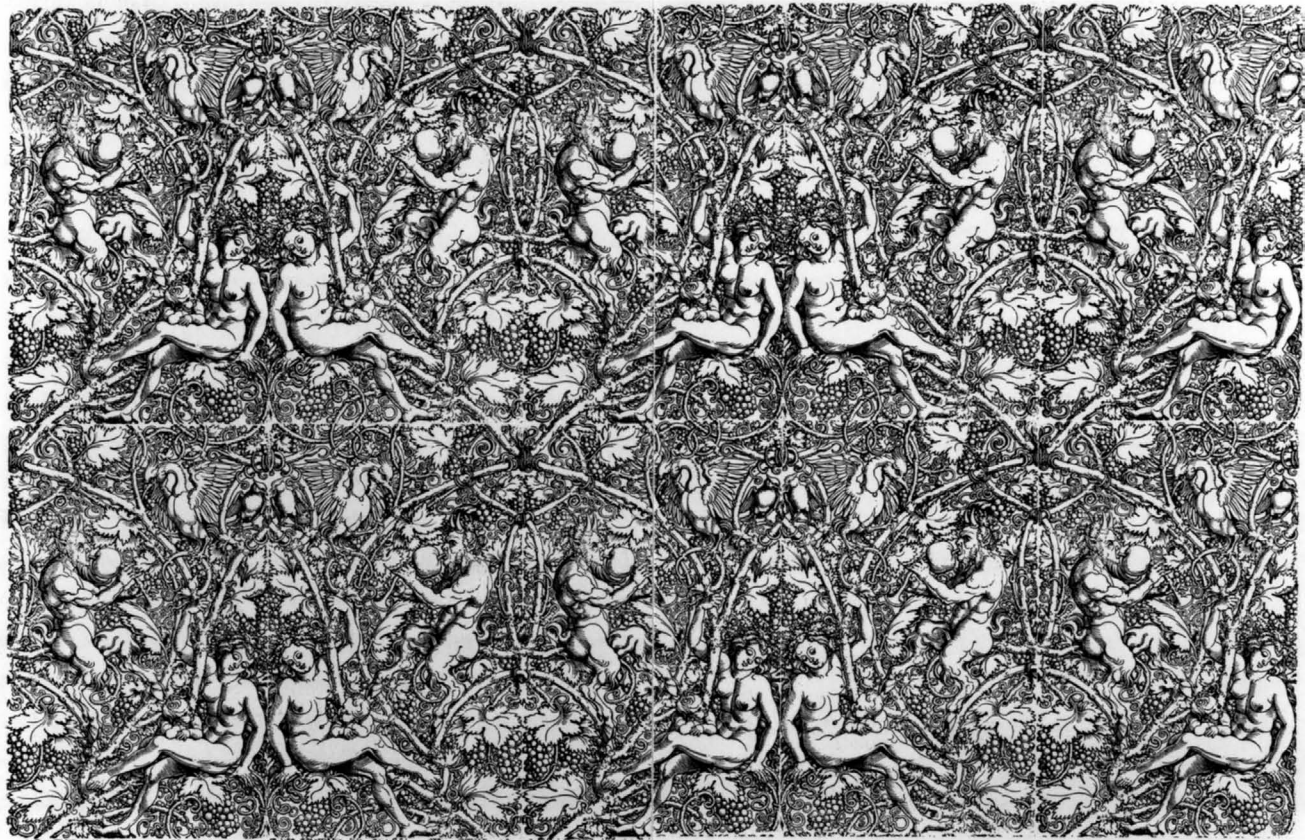


FIG. 8 Sebald Beham. *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, c. 1520–25. Woodcut, photo-montage reconstruction. Herzog Anton-Ulrich Museum, Photo: Jutta Streiffellner

wallpaper might have been glued onto a ceiling is an intriguing idea, and onto a bedroom ceiling even more so.

In addition to low survival rate, large woodcuts have been characterized by Landau and Parshall as having a greater than average sense of what they call “erotic indulgence.”<sup>38</sup> Although this statement may require closer scrutiny for early-sixteenth-century prints in general, it seems more than applicable to Beham’s *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, where the erotic is played out in several ways. The erotic elements include the emphasis on the male and female sexual shapes formed by the outlines of the branches, the shape of the bagpipes, and the erotic meaning of the bird in the colloquial language of the time. And the repetition throughout the wallpaper pattern of these shapes and creatures—with their various sexual allusions and associations—underscores the erotic nature of this wallpaper.

The emphasis on sexuality here also supports an attribution to Beham over Dürer. Although Appuhn and von Heusinger emphasize that the working power and inventiveness of this wallpaper required a creative artistic imagination of which they deemed Dürer, and not Beham, capable,<sup>39</sup> Beham’s inventiveness, revealed in part through his use of sexual references, is far greater than these authors credit. His *Fountain of Youth* woodcut and his *Large Village Kermis* show, for example, that although Beham drew on the work of contemporary artists—including Marcantonio Raimondi for many figures and poses, and Lucas van Leyden for the dentist group at left in the latter—he turned to diverse artistic models and subjects, including images of bathing and peasants. He also cleverly used contemporary issues and ideas as his point of departure. For example, his *Large Village Kermis* offers a visual response to contemporary discussions, both pro and con, about the most popular peasant festival, kermis. Kermis had been reevaluated under the influence of the Lutheran Reformation, and Nuremberg’s town council and clergy members attempted to shut down altogether this celebration that was so beloved by Nuremberg’s population.<sup>40</sup> The prints underscore the popularity of real-life kermis celebrations.

Nearly as striking as his pictorial inventiveness was Beham’s business acumen for turning to the subject of kermis. He repeatedly addressed the subject in various forms using the woodcut print technique between around 1528 and 1535.

Beham explored the physically explicit and inventive aspects of kermis and bathhouse imagery more than Dürer did; Dürer’s art is more decorous and appears to have been more influenced by the humanist values that were gradually taking hold in Nuremberg and northern Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century. Although Dürer documented little about his personal beliefs, he may have shared with another Nuremberg citizen, the physician and humanist Gualther Hermenius Rivius, an interest in classical subjects as well as in harmony and a disdain for the overt rendering of physical processes such as those Beham unflinchingly portrays in his *Fountain of Youth* and *Large Village Kermis*, among others. Rivius may have been directly responding to specific aspects of Beham’s large woodcuts, including his *Large Village Kermis*, when he wrote in 1548 that “Whoever enjoys a picture of a truly drunk peasant, who shits and vomits behind a fence, is improper and has the sense of a peasant, and can [only] undeservedly be called a human being.”<sup>41</sup>

Beham was also more explicit and daring than Dürer when rendering sexuality in visual form. Beham engraved the subject of *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife* twice in extremely small engravings. In 1544 Beham showed Joseph typically fleeing from the reaches of Potiphar’s wife. But in the earlier version of 1526, a roundel measuring only 5.3 centimeters in diameter, Beham renders the subject in most unusual fashion: Potiphar’s wife aggressively jumps over a small unmade bed in an attempt to embrace Joseph, who quickly flees, yet Joseph’s arousal is unmistakable and tinted pink in the impression in Vienna.<sup>42</sup>

The original location for wallpaper with obvious erotic overtones, including the *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, could have included the bedroom, a private room, perhaps a bathhouse, or even a brothel. The subjects of large woodcuts more generally have been related to both private and public buildings and to the sites where they were displayed. Thus, Beham’s large *Fountain of Youth* woodcut could have hung in a bathhouse. In a comparable example, images of women bathing were painted on the wall of the waiting room next to the bathing chamber of Philippine Welser, the learned wife of Archduke Ferdinand, at Schloss Ambras outside Innsbruck.<sup>43</sup> Although a large woodcut’s subject was sometimes specifically related to its intended location, as here, this was not always the case. Beham’s *Large Village Kermis*



may have hung on the walls or on the chimney breast above the mantelpiece inside a burgher's home, in a tavern, in an artisan's workshop, or in other locations altogether.<sup>44</sup>

Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* may also have hung in a burgher's or a humanist's home, possibly in the bedchamber, but would such an erotic subject have been deemed appropriate for what we now consider public rooms? Woodcuts of the time were sometimes used to decorate bed frames (see fig. 3), so had taken on a larger role in domestic decor to include use in the bedchamber and on wooden objects, sometimes imitating intarsia wood inlay on wooden chests, during the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Woodcut prints brought visual art to an increasingly broad audience during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from the expanding middle class to the Holy Roman emperor Maximilian I in the last years of his life. Prints made for him were roughly contemporary with Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, whose audience may have comprised members of the elite, including humanists interested both in its classical subject and in its overtly erotic appeal.

Whoever purchased Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs* must have been a person of means who could afford both the price of several groups of the eight woodcuts needed to form a readable background pattern and a room large enough to allow these woodcuts to be displayed. With dimensions for each woodcut measuring 61 × 30.5 centimeters, the minimum required wall space was around 122 × 122 centimeters (4 × 4 ft.) to begin to establish the vine pattern. Given an estimated minimum viewing distance of 2 to 5 meters (6 to 15 ft.) to make visible the three-dimensional projection of the pictures, the size of the room needed to view the wallpaper adequately takes on even larger proportions.

Giulia Bartrum appears to have been on the mark when she stated that the impressions that survive of large woodcuts such as Beham's *Wallpaper with Nymphs and Satyrs*, *Large Village Kermis*, and his *Fountain of Youth* were never actually used as wall decoration. The low survival rate points to the useful nature of large woodcuts: the more they were used and glued onto walls, the fewer survived to the present. The large prints included in this exhibition are among the few notable woodcut survivors that bear witness to artistic practices of the now distant past.

NOTES

1. Chen 2003, D4. See Tannenbaum and Stroud 2003.
2. Hollstein 1954, 3.119, Pauli 1901, 207.
3. The drawing of a peasant couple appears to be a copy after a design by Beham. The drawing (Galerie Siegfried Billesberger, Moosinning/Munich, Germany) may have been made during the production of a stained glass roundel, and is similar to a drawing copying Dürer (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana) known from a fragment (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) and a copy traditionally given to Dürer and his pupil, Hans von Kulmbach (lost during World War II, Kunsthalle Bremen). See Stewart 2008, ch. 1, for illustrations and discussion.
4. Ibid.
5. Butts, Rassieur, and Weil 1997, 78.
6. Wilson 1976, 188.
7. Butts et. al. 1997, 81. Pauli gives the dimensions of the left half of the *Nymphs and Satyrs* woodcut pair as 520 × 322 mm. See Pauli 1901 (Baden-Baden, 1974), no. 1342, called "Tapetenmuster" or "Tapestry Pattern," where nymph is placed at left and satyr at right. The companion piece, no. 1342a, was cut in mirror image and appears less finely designed or cut. Pauli lists the following collections: Herzog Anton-Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig; the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; the British Museum, London; and the Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Coburg. In the United States, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (against dark background); the St. Louis Museum of Art; and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. See also Hollstein, vol. 3, Pauli no. 1342. See Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 14–15, as montage with several pairs; Landau and Parshall 1994, 235; Bartrum 1995, cat. no. 92 (two pairs vertically arranged backed with linen); and Talbot and Andersson 1983, no. 158. Butts et al 1997, 81; see fig. 4 for two pairs of the print shown one over the other.
8. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 55 and 57.
9. Allen 1985, 35–37, and Kolde 1902, 64. For the trial, see also 49–50, 64–65, and 72.
10. Scribner 1986, 45. For Karlstadt, see Pater 1984.
11. Wollgast 1972, 75, and Williams 1962, 265.
12. Wollgast 1972, 71.
13. On the political content of Beham's prints, see Zschelletschky 1975. Moxey 1989, 35–66, refuted Zschelletschky and argued that Beham's prints could not be political because they needed to respond to market concerns. I expand on this view to include both critical and appreciative views of peasant festivals and kermis, Stewart 1993, 301–50.
14. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Schlossmuseum, Gotha.
15. Schlereth 1990.
16. Anderson 1966, vol. 1, 90.
17. Hollstein, vol. 3, Pauli nos. 1342 and 1342a, give an overview of the attribution, including Passavant's and Heller's to Dürer. Bartrum 1995, cat. no. 92, assigns the work to Beham c. 1520–25. Pauli, Hollstein, and Landau and Parshall 1994, 235 fig. 241, also assign the work to Beham, but von Heusinger firmly attributes the work to Dürer and strongly rejects any association with Beham. See Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 16.
18. On the right half deriving from a counterproof and its rather mechanical quality, see Talbot in Andersson and Talbot 1978, no. 142.
19. On Dürer's engraving, sometimes called *Satyr Family* (B.69), see Strauss 1972, no. 43.
20. Reid with Hohmann 1993, vol. 2 966 ff.
21. Reid with Hohmann 1993, vol. 2, 966. I am grateful to my colleague, Andrea Boland, Associate Professor of Art History, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, for the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* reference. See Silver 1983, 5–43.

22. On “birding” in Nuremberg’s sixteenth-century Franconian dialect, see Götze, 1967, 87, where the word is defined as both hunting and having sex (“mit Falken jagen” and “geschlechtlich beiwohnen”). On birds in late medieval and early modern German literature, see Kratz 1949. For birds in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, see de Jongh 1968–69, 22–74. See also Stewart 1979, 54 and 81, where the obscene meaning of “birding” is cited in several sources.

23. Baines 1960, Salmen 1960, and Salmen 1976, text to figs. 8 and 9.

24. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 35, state that a “Riesenholzschnitt” does not indicate an exact size, but is used to denote a work made from several sheets or blocks, with one block’s large size exceeding 50 cm.

25. The dimensions of sixteenth-century albums used to collect prints falls just below the 50 cm minimum size used by von Heusinger to indicate enormous woodcuts. See, for example, the prints collected by Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol (d. 1595) from Schloss Ambras in albums of brown leather that measure 47 × 38 cm (Dürer woodcuts) and 49 × 32 (Dürer’s *Apocalypse*, *Large Passion*, and *Life of the Virgin*). Parshall 1982, 139–90, esp. 148–49.

26. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 35, and Bartrum 1995, 103, no. 92, who states this work survives because it was not colored for use as wallpaper.

27. Dimensions measured from the double woodcut in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, are: left block: 53.5 × 32.4 cm, and right block: 53.5 × 32.5 cm, total dimensions: 54.5 × 66.5 cm. I am grateful to Nadine Orenstein for her help with the measurements.

28. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 16.

29. On sexual imagery in the late medieval period, see Kratz 1949.

30. Bartrum 1995, cat. no. 92.

31. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, figs. 10 and 11.

32. Dackerman and Primeau 2002.

33. See textiles reproduced as postcards by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, described as *Snakeshead*, furnishing textile designed in 1876, by William Morris (1834–96), block-printed cotton.

34. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s impressions (no. 22.67.4 and 22.67.5) are the only ones von Heusinger was acquainted with that had a dark background. They were published in Byrne 1981, 24–25, and Platzer and Wyckoff 2000, 14–15, who state that this woodcut wallpaper “highlights the connections between fine and decorative arts.”

35. In similar manner, the exhibition *Big Canvas: Paintings from the Permanent Collection* (Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2003) explores the large size of paintings made since the 1950s. Its exhibition wall copy stated, “*Big Canvas* suggests that the meaning of each painting relies, in some manner, on its impressive physical presence and the impact that it has on the viewer, as a means by which the artist declares publicly the authenticity of his or her private vision.”

36. Landau and Parshall 1994, 231.

37. For the impressions of Beham’s *Nymphs and Satyrs* woodcut, see note 7, above.

38. Landau and Parshall 1994, 233.

39. Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, 16.

40. See Stewart 2008, Introduction, for Beham’s sense of invention, and ch. 2 on kermis woodcuts designed by Beham.

41. From Rivius’s *German Vitruvius* (Nuremberg, 1548). See Forssmann 1973, viii and fol. cxxxi–v. For discussion of Rivius’s passage, see Stewart 2008, ch. 3 and 6. See Stewart 2004, 118–37.

42. See Pauli, 14, 15, in Hollstein, vol. 3, for the two prints of 1526 and 1544. The Vienna impression discussed in my text is in the Graphische Sammlung Albertina.

43. See Stewart 1989, 79 and fig. 18.

44. See Frans Huys’s engraving of a lute maker, which shows over the fireplace Beham’s engravings of dancing peasants that date to circa 1537, from the series *Peasants’ Feast*; see Hollstein, vol. 3, Pauli nos. 155–66. See de Jongh and Luijten 1997, no. 5, with illustration. The first state of Huys’s engraving does not include Beham’s dancing peasants, thus raising the question of when they were added to Huys’s plate. Huys died in 1562 at Antwerp. For discussion of locations, see Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, fig. 68; Moxey 1989, 51, and 94–95; and Grössinger 2000, ch. 9: “Display and Collecting.”

45. See Appuhn and von Heusinger 1976, fig. 65. Rooms deemed important, such as the so-called estuarium described by Andreas Meinhard in the Saxon ducal palace at Wittenberg in the early sixteenth century, may have been among the locations where pictures, including large woodcuts, hung. Estuarium indicates a room that was heated, including a bath. See Reinke 1976, 264.