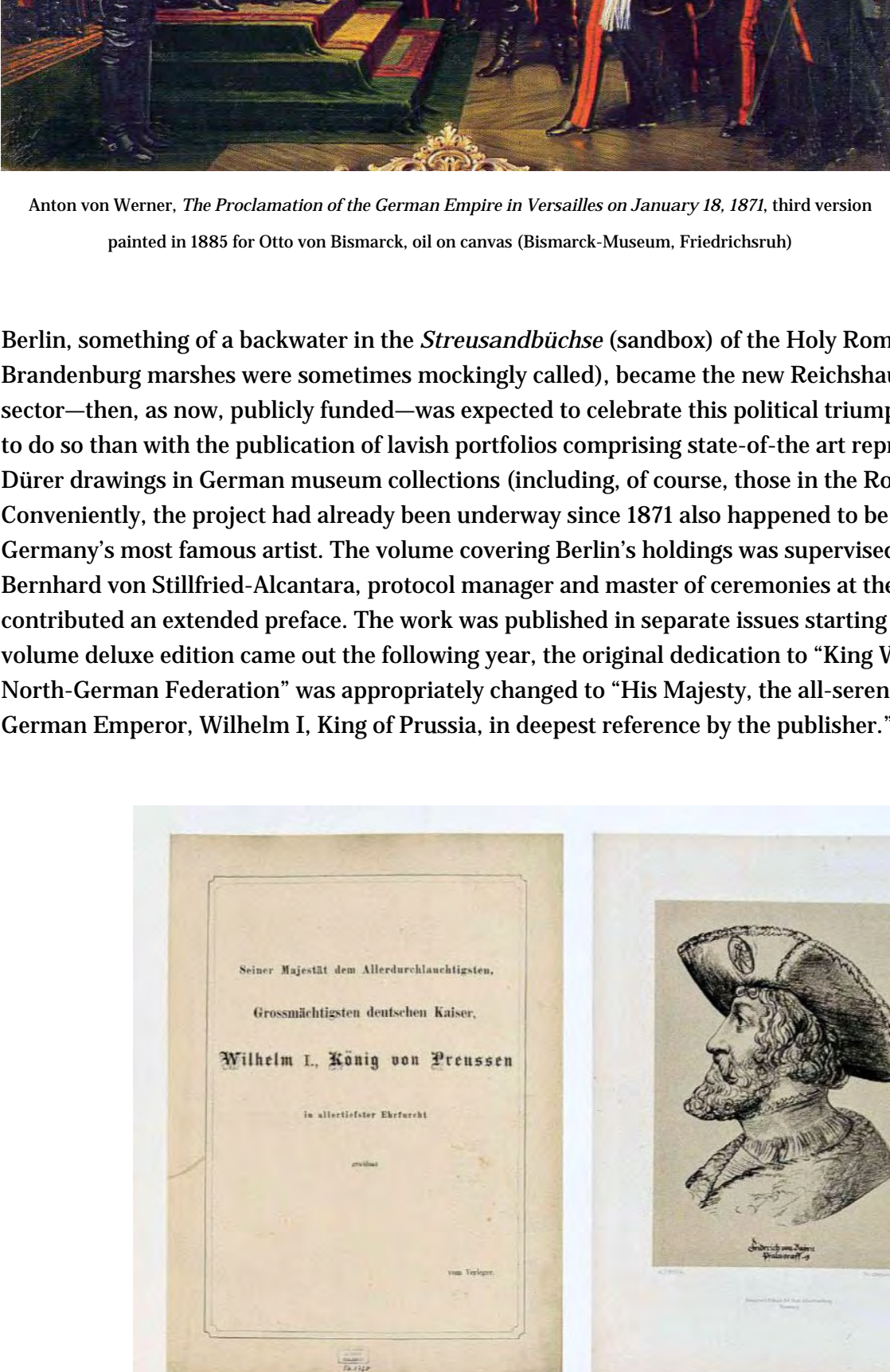


C. G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

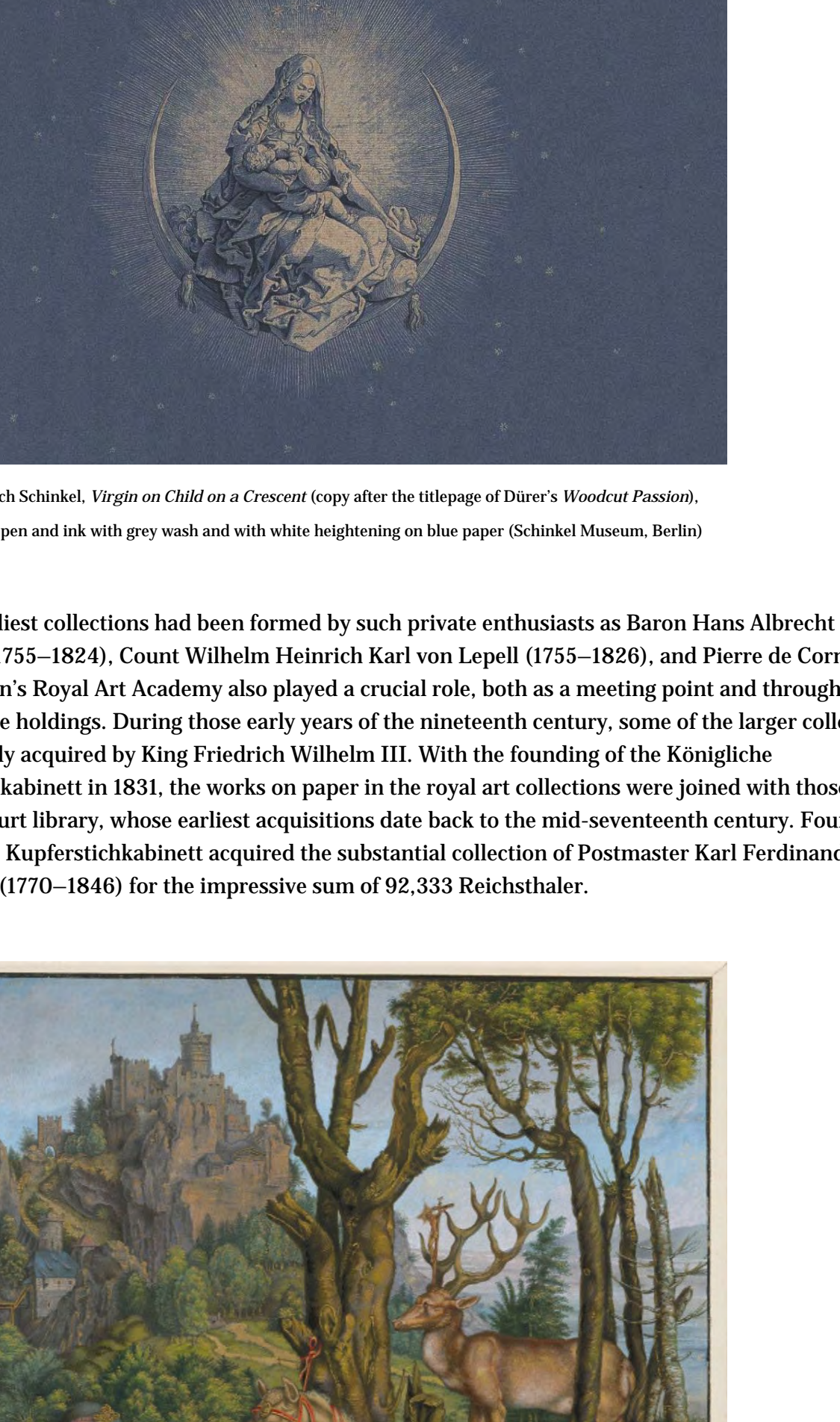
Distraction / Abwechslung  
4 September 2023

In 1871, the Franco-Prussian War had ended with a victory for the German troops under Prussian leadership and the founding of the second German Reich. To add insult to injury for the defeated French, the event was pointedly staged in the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles, where King William I of Prussia was declared German Emperor.



Anton von Werner, *The Proclamation of the German Empire in Versailles on January 18, 1871*, third version painted in 1885 for Otto von Bismarck, oil on canvas (Bismarck-Museum, Friedrichsruh)

Berlin, something of a backwater in the *Streusandbüchse* (sandbox) of the Holy Roman Empire (as the Brandenburg marshes were sometimes mockingly called), became the new Reichshauptstadt. The cultural sector—then, as now, publicly funded—was expected to celebrate this political triumph, and what better way to do so than with the publication of lavish portfolio folios comprising state-of-the-art reproductions of Albrecht Dürer drawings in German museum collections (including, of course, those in the Royal Museums in Berlin). Conveniently, the project had already been underway since 1871 also happened to be the 400th birthday of Germany's most famous artist. The volume covering Berlin's holdings was supervised by Rudolf Maria Bernhard von Stillfried-Alcantara, protocol manager and master of ceremonies at the Prussian court, who also contributed an extended preface. The work was published in separate issues starting in 1870. When the single-volume deluxe edition came out the following year, the original dedication to "King Wilhelm and patron of the North-German Federation" was appropriately changed to "His Majesty, the all-serene and most powerful German Emperor, Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, in deepest reference by the publisher."



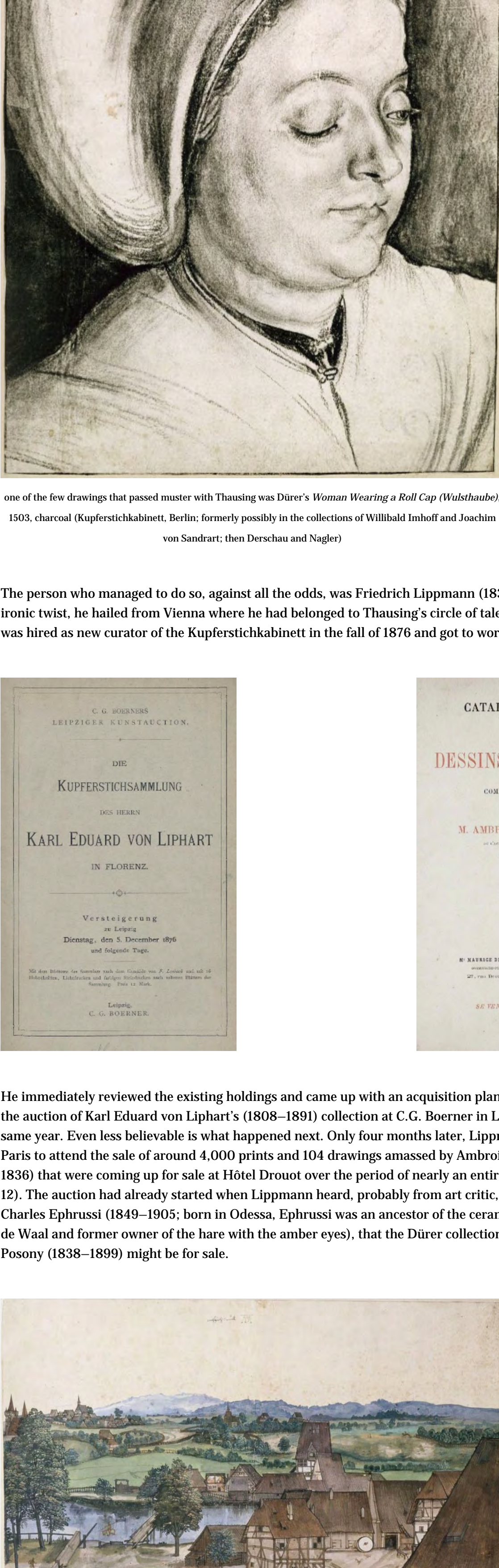
A fascinating exhibition at Berlin's Kupferstichkabinett this past summer told the story of Berlin's relatively (at least by European standards) young collection. Curated by Michael Roth with the assistance of Lea Hagedorn, *Dürer für Berlin* displayed the capital's ample works-on-paper holdings by the artist along the timeline of their acquisition.

Examples of the flourishing Dürer cult that originated in the Romantic admiration of the *altdeutsche Stil* served as the show's prelude: among them Christian Daniel Rauch's portrait bust of Dürer from 1838 and Karl Friedrich Schinkel's exquisite pen-and-ink drawings after Dürer's prints dating from 1813–15.



Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Virgin on Child on a Crescent* (copy after the titlepage of Dürer's *Woodcut Passion*), ca. 1814–15, pen and ink with grey wash and with white highlighting on blue paper (Schinkel Museum, Berlin)

Berlin's earliest collections had been formed by such private enthusiasts as Baron Hans Albrecht von Derschau (1755–1824), Count Wilhelm Heinrich Karl von Lepell (1755–1826), and Pierre de Corneillan (1754–1827). Berlin's Royal Art Academy also played a crucial role, both as a meeting point and through its own considerable holdings. During those early years of the nineteenth century, some of the larger collections were subsequently acquired by King Friedrich Wilhelm III. With the founding of the Königliche Kupferstichkabinett in 1831, the works on paper in the royal art collections were joined with those in the electoral court library, whose earliest acquisitions date back to the mid-seventeenth century. Four years later, in 1835, the Kupferstichkabinett acquired the substantial collection of Postmaster Karl Ferdinand Friedrich von Nagler (1770–1846) for the impressive sum of 92,333 Reichsthaler.



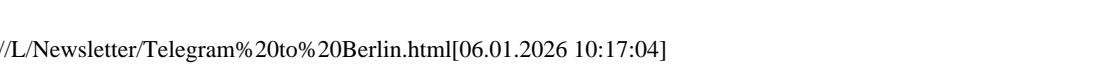
Albrecht Dürer, *St. Eustace*, ca. 1500, engraving, extensively colored (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; ex coll. Nagler)

Nagler's Dürer holdings included, among many other things, a "sehr schätzbare Sammlung von 72 Blatt fleißig mit Deckfarben übermalt" (a very precious collection of 72 diligently illuminated sheets). The hand-coloring of Dürer's prints was mainly a phenomenon of the late sixteenth century, when a family of Nuremberg *Briefmaler* by the name of Mack made such careful illuminations their specialty, often even signing and dating their works in gold. While Nagler did own a signed and dated work by Georg Mack from 1588, the origin of most of his illuminated prints is still unknown. Color analyses seem to suggest that they were made only in the early nineteenth century. Undoubtedly strange to our modern eyes and hence hardly ever shown, it was nonetheless fascinating to see so many of them in this context. They reflect Nagler's all-encompassing approach, one that went far beyond the traditional acquisition of good, early impressions. Following his wide-ranging interests, he also assembled a large group of copies after Dürer as well as decorative objects showing Dürer motifs in metal, wood, or plaster. Conceptually, therefore, Nagler's collecting still predates modern connoisseurship and remains firmly rooted in the Dürer adulation of the German Romantics.



Johann Conrad Krüger, etching after a drawing of St. Sebastian in the collection of King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, formerly believed to be by Dürer, ca. 1770–73 (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; ex coll. Nagler)

Now back to the celebratory mood of the golden age of Germany's *Gründerzeit*. It experienced a considerable damper when Moriz Thausing (1838–1884) published a devastating review of the lavish jubilee publication in the *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*. Thausing was an authority in the field who had worked at the Albertina in Vienna since 1864, then became its chief curator and later its director, in addition to holding a chair in art history at the university, Vienna, of course, was also the capital of the Hapsburg Empire, much older than the newly minted imperial *arrivistes* in Berlin, and the political pliancy was not lost on Thausing when he wrote: "While we regret that Berlin of all places, the capital of the new German Empire, does not own better examples of Dürer's art, this must not make us blind to the wrongs that have been done to the master by attributing such unworthy works to him."



attributed to Hans Schwarz, *Portrait of Felicitas Imhof*, ca. 1519–20, charcoal (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; ex coll. Derschau and Nagler) – Hans Schwarz, *Portrait Medal of Felicitas Imhof*, 1519–20, bronze (Münzkabinett, Berlin, acquired in 1905)

At the center of the dispute was a group of silhouetted portraits in black chalk that made up a substantial part of Berlin's supposed Dürer holdings. And even if Thausing was wrong in his offhand dismissal of these works as later "fakes," he was correct in his observation that they were not by Dürer. (They are now believed to be studies for portrait medals by the sculptor and medalist Hans Schwarz [1492–ca. 1550].)

Now, what to do? By the 1870s, the majority of Dürer's drawings and watercolors were securely sequestered in Vienna's Albertina and London's British Museum, and hence no longer on the market. The last time a significant group had been available was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Antoine-François Andréossy (1761–1828) was able to get hold of one the two *Kunstbücher* with Dürer drawings in the possession of Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen (1738–1822). Andréossy was a French army commander during the French occupation of Vienna during the Napoleonic Wars in 1805–09 and took advantage of the situation thanks to some compatriotic help provided by Albert's French curator François Lefebvre (1762–1835).

Duke Albert's remaining drawings form the basis of the Albertina's extraordinary holdings today, whereas the album obtained by Andréossy supplied the nineteenth-century art market with virtually all its authentic Dürer drawings. However, by 1871, Berlin's prospects for remedying the clear cut Thausing's critical eye had caused in its holdings were dispiritingly slim.



1503, charcoal (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; formerly possibly in the collections of Willibald Imhoff and Joachim von Sandrart; then Derschau and Nagler)

The person who managed to do so, against all the odds, was Friedrich Lippmann (1838–1903). In yet another ironic twist, he hailed from Vienna where he had belonged to Thausing's circle of talented students. Lippmann was hired as new curator of the Kupferstichkabinett in the fall of 1876 and got to work straight away.



He immediately reviewed the existing holdings and came up with an acquisition plan to fill in gaps in time for the auction of Karl Eduard von Liphart's (1808–1891) collection at C.G. Boerner in Leipzig in December of the same year. Even less believeable of what happened next. Only four months later, Lippmann took the train to Paris to attend the sale of around 4,000 prints and 104 drawings amassed by Ambroise Firmin-Didot (1764–1836) that were coming up for sale at Hotel Drouot over the period of nearly an entire month (April 16 to May 12). The auction had already started when Lippmann heard, probably from art critic, historian, and collector Charles Ephrussi (1849–1905; born in Odessa, Ephrussi was an ancestor of the ceramist and author Edmund de Waal and former owner of the hare with the amber eyes), that the Dürer collection formed by Alexander Posony (1838–1899) might be for sale.



Albrecht Dürer, *The Wire Drawing Mill on the Outskirts of Nuremberg*, ca. 1489 or 1494, watercolor and gouache over charcoal (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; ex coll. Joseph Daniel Böhm; Posony; Hulot)

As a successful dealer in Vienna, Posony had taken advantage of the gradual dispersal of Andréossy's loot and the very few other opportunities the rarified market for Dürer drawings allowed. Ultimately, his collection contained no less than 48 drawings by the Nuremberg master. When it was about to be offered at an auction by Josef Maillinger in Munich in November of 1867, Anatole Auguste Hulot (1811–1891) preempted the sale by acquiring the collection in its entirety. Hulot, who had a specialist knowledge in electroplating, oversaw the printing of postage stamps and banknotes for the French government, and what might have attracted him most to Posony's collection were its outstanding impressions of Dürer's prints. A decade later, Hulot, according to Lippmann a man with *launischem* (moody or capricious) character, was looking for a buyer.



Lippmann recognized the urgency of the situation straight away—especially with so many collectors assembled in town for the widely publicized Firmin-Didot sale. It was crucial to act quickly, and on April 22, 1877, he sent a telegram to the administrative heads of the Berlin Museums stating that "the most famous Dürer collection, consisting of around 40 authentic drawings and a complete group of engravings and woodcuts in the finest impressions could be acquired for ca. 80,000 Marks." To stress the uniqueness of this opportunity, Lippmann even offered to abstain from pursuing any of the works he had hoped to acquire in the Firmin-Didot sale.



Albrecht Dürer, *Couple on Horseback*, ca. 1493–94, pen and ink with watercolor (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; formerly possibly in the collection of Emperor Rudolph II; Imperial Library, Vienna; Albert von Sachsen-Teschen; Lefebvre; Andréossy; Posony; Hulot)

Lippmann succeeded—but not before politics intervened once more. One can hardly blame the proud French public servant Hulot that after the shameful defeat in the Franco-Prussian War he had given strict instructions not to sell his collection to the German Reich. Here, the story becomes somewhat fuzzy. Officially, an English agent brokered the deal for a commission; unofficially, though (if one can trust Wilhelm von Bode's memoirs), Hulot's mistress was counted upon to facilitate the arrangement. The final purchase price came to 105,000 Francs, at which level it required a signature from Kaiser Wilhelm, who was unfortunately absent at the crucial moment; in the end, Kronprinz Friedrich Wilhelm signed instead in his role as "protector" of the Royal Museums.



Albrecht Dürer's *Portrait of Barbara Dürer, neo Holper, the Artist's Mother*, 1514, charcoal



(Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; ex coll. Willibald Imhoff; Emperor Rudolph II; Andréossy; Firmin-Didot)

Yet Lippmann’s Paris adventure was not over yet. The Firmin-Didot sale was still in full swing when the acquisition of the Posonyi-Hulot collection had already been secured, and Lippmann had no intention of completely giving up on what the market had to offer. Ultimately, he was able, not least through collaboration with various dealers, to acquire some of the things that had brought him to Paris in the first place. Among them was arguably the greatest and most moving drawing among Berlin’s holdings today, Dürer’s portrait of his elderly mother. Like all the best curators, Lippmann had simply followed that sacred principle of art museums once so perfectly articulated by Andrew Robison: “When the smoke clears, make sure you have the pictures.”

