



## Early Mass - Simon Wortham

Simon Wortham

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At last, Elizabeth realised her own idea. Through these women's discomfiting entanglement, because of the estranging way they echo one another-discordantly rather than harmoniously-Segantini's feminine couples do not epitomise the dichotomy so much as they protest it. They antagonise as much as encapsulate it. Neither fallen nor elevated, they float in between, and drift disconcertingly towards us.

A young art historian, Elizabeth Howe, develops a fascination with a picture by the late nineteenth-century Italian symbolist painter Giovanni Segantini, *A messa prima* (Early Mass), thought to be painted over another image censored by the Church, that of a sinner girl. Elizabeth's study of Segantini's painting leads her to dispute the standard psychoanalytic interpretation of his art by Karl Abraham, who argued it conveys a long-held wish to punish women. Instead, for Elizabeth, Segantini's extraordinary images of floating female bodies register silent protest against masculine desire. Weaving together the life and art of Giovanni Segantini, the writings and correspondence of Abraham and his mentor Sigmund Freud, and the journey from Milan into the High Alps that leads Elizabeth Howe from breakdown to recovery, *Early Mass* is a ghost story, an art-historical detective fiction, and an account of redemption. *Early Mass* is the second book of a trilogy published by MA BIBLIOTHEQUE: the first, *The small*, appeared in 2020, and the third, *Berlin W, or, mesalliance*, was published in December 2022.

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