

Exercise on Ford Madox Brown's unfinished painting "Take your Son, Sir!"

name:

You can find a copy of the painting online at
<http://larevuecycle.free.fr/images/morris/70.jpg>

Before trying to determine the subject and tone of the painting, simply consider some of its individual elements.

1. What typical art-historical subject do the woman and child recall?
2. What do you make of the cloth surrounding the baby?
3. What is behind the woman's head, and what do you see within it?
- 3b. What do you make of its (1) presence and (2) placement?
4. What do you make of the background wallpaper?

There are at least a couple of different ways of interpreting the painting. One is to read it in the context of Pre-Raphaelite "modern social problem" paintings. Can you see any way of interpreting the painting along those lines? How would you use the detailed observations you made above in such an interpretation?

Some historians argue that the woman in the painting is Brown's wife, the baby his baby. In that case, how might you regard the painting's message?