



## 67. Annunciation

Tyrol, Austria  
ca. 1500  
Polychromed and gilded pine  
33 3/4 x 34 2/3 in. (86 x 88 cm)  
M1974.234

**DESCRIPTION:** This carved relief panel depicts the Annunciation as the Archangel Gabriel appears to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Bright green curtains against a brick wall enframe the Virgin Mary as she kneels at her prie-dieu; her right hand is raised and her left hand rests on a prayer book. The dove of the Holy Spirit emerges from behind the curtain on the right as the kneeling angel Gabriel raises his right hand in benediction. The carving is generally low except for the figures' right hands which project from the surface in full relief, adding to the drama and meaning of their gestures. The sharp, angular draperies and the tight ringlets of the figures' hair create beautifully abstracted patterns. The entire surface of the relief is polychromed and gilded.

**CONDITION:** The entire upper-right corner of the wood panel above the Virgin's head has been replaced due to worm infestation. The gilding on the draperies is severely worn and all of the surfaces have been repainted. Mary's right hand has been broken off and reglued. A hole at the top of Gabriel's staff suggests that an ornament was once attached.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased from Schaeffer Gallery, New York.

**COMMENTARY:** Probably a panel from an altarpiece wing, this Annunciation is typical of much Late Gothic Germanic relief sculpture from the Tyrol, a region at the crossroads between Italy and Germany. Its location meant a transitional variety of artisans were employed in the sculpture trade, and consequently the attribution of specific works to individual masters is often impossible.<sup>1</sup> Even though the artist is unknown, there is a general resemblance in figure type and format to the work of two Tyrolean sculptors, Nartzis von Bozen (active 1482/83-1517) and Hans Klocker (active ca. 1480-1500).<sup>2</sup> The provincial style of this Annunciation has a strong visual appeal in its intensified naturalism and the unidealized expressiveness of the figures. The sacred communication between Gabriel and Mary is conveyed with a moving intensity through the linear emphasis of the design, the compression of the voluminously robed figures into the foreground, and the spreading abstract drapery patterns. Similar stylistic and expressive qualities appear in altar wing Annunciations by von Bozen and Klocker.<sup>3</sup>

The Flagg relief conforms to long established traditions for representing the Annunciation.<sup>4</sup> These include the excited gestures of the Virgin and the Archangel; the rays emanating from the dove toward the Virgin; the prie-dieu and book (symbolizing Mary's wisdom), which date back to ninth-century descriptions of Mary reading Scripture as Gabriel appears; and the interior domestic setting. Like many contemporary Annunciations, this relief depicts the Virgin in a state of disquiet, as she hears Gabriel's salutation: "Hail Mary, thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." This state of "disquiet," according to medieval religious literature, came not from incredulity or awe at the sight of the apparition, but wonder at the angel's grand and lofty salutation.<sup>5</sup> EFG

1. Baxandall 1974, p. 38.

2. Müller 1976, pp. 33, 36-37, pls. 153, 155, 168-71; Scheffler 1967, no. 19, pl. 6, fig. 6.

3. Schiller 1971, vol. 1, fig. 118; Müller 1976, fig. 171.

4. Schiller 1971, vol. 1, pp. 38-52.

5. For a fuller explanation of the Virgin's successive spiritual and emotional states, see Baxandall 1988, pp. 48-56.

## Comments