



The Annunciation

Date

ca. 1435-1440

Primary Maker

Bicci di Lorenzo

Medium

tempera and oil on panel

Description

The Annunciation was one of the most popular subjects of Italian Medieval and Renaissance religious painting because of its doctrinal significance as the moment of the Incarnation, the embodiment of Christ in human form.

This large rectangular altarpiece, painting for an unknown church in Tuscany, represents the last phase of the Annunciation drama, following the Virgin's initial reaction of fear and hesitation to Gabriel's pronouncement that she was to be the mother of Christ. The inscription at the bottom of the painting provides the textual source for the events: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy words" (Luke 1:38). The Virgin's humble acceptance of her destiny is indicated by her posture: her head is bowed and her hands are crossed upon her breast. Mary's thoughts are recorded on the pages of the open book on the reading stand in front of her: "My soul [doth magnify] the Lord and my spirit hath rejoined [in God my savior]" (Luke: 1:46-47). The golden rays that extend from the upper righthand corner of the composition are those of the Holy Spirit (in the form of a white dove), sent as a sign of divine love by God the Father (whose figure was obliterated when the painting was cut down approximately five inches at the right). The rectangular format of The Annunciation, the classicizing architecture, and the antique lettering used for the inscriptions demonstrate that Bicci was affected to a limited degree by contemporary Renaissance innovations.

Dimensions

Sight: 57 3/4 x 57 in. (146.7 x 144.8 cm) Framed: 64 x 64 x 3 1/2 in. (162.6 x 162.6 x 8.9 cm)