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An exegetical study of the annunciation of Luke 1:26-38 through text and art

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In historical criticism, the world in front of the text is an important dimension in the exegetical process. The world of the text refers to the role of the reader in the interpretive process. In this research, the world in front of the text refers to the worlds of the artists of the four artworks being examined. This research seeks to understand how the artists understand the theology in the Lukan account of the annunciation for their time, how their thinking is reflected in their artworks, and how their interpretation is influenced by their historical circumstances. The following sections describe the historical contexts of the early European Renaissance period of Flanders and Spain in the 15/16th century and 20th century contemporary Australia.

Historical Context: 15th/16th Century Flanders and Spain

The ignorance of Hebrew and Greek in Western Europe in the Middle Ages helped to establish Jerome’s tradition of the Western Church, and thereby nearly all interpretations and commentaries are based on the Latin text. The Church was the authority on the medieval exegesis that was incorporated into its teachings.103 According to Schwarz, “... every student of theology studied Peter Lombard’s (1100-1160) Sententiae and any rejection of the scholasticism would have the greatest repercussions upon the course of theological studies.”104 Therefore, theoretically speaking, “an interpretation not objected to by the Church was considered to be valid and binding on every member of the Christian community.”105 The basis of Bible exegesis was the scholastic method and the Schoolmen106 had to resist any change of the text in the Latin for on this very wording their philosophical thought was based.107 Regarding the scholastic method Schwarz states:

103 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 45.
104 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 53.
105 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 45.
106 “Schoolmen” refers to a collection of scholars and writers from the eleventh to the fifteenth century who attempted to accommodate the tenets of Aristotle to those of the church fathers. They were usually teachers of theology or philosophy who felt that the inclusion of the classical thoughts in tandem with those of the early Christians were of import in a fair teaching of the curriculum. Robert T. Lambdin, "Schoolmen," in Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature, ed. Robert T. Lambdin (Greenwood2000).
107 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 53.
Its strength lay in its old tradition and a method worked out with greatest logical subtlety. Its weakness was that the very strength of the tradition tended to inhibit the new thought necessary to the maintenance of its impetus.  

By the 1500s the method of Bible exegesis had evolved. “Its basic principle was the fourfold sense of the text: the literal, ... the allegorical, ... the moral and .... the anagogical.”  Despite the many schools of scholasticism, all of them considered their ideas to be in conformity with Holy Scripture, as each school had taken their guidance from the divinely inspired holy Fathers of the Church.

Flanders

Conciliarism, a reform movement in the Catholic Church that lasted from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century was condemned at the Fifth Lateran Council, 1512–17. The movement emerged in response to the Western Schism between rival popes in Rome and Avignon. It was one of many movements that came to an end at the start of the Protestant Reformation, as did spiritual movements, such as the Devotio Moderna which flourished in the Low Countries and Germany. However, it was the influence of three individuals, namely Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) an Italian Dominican friar, John Duns Scotus (c. 1266 –1308) an English Franciscan friar who was a realist philosopher and scholastic theologian, and William of Ockham (c. 1285–1349) also an English Franciscan friar and scholastic philosopher and theologian, that continued through to the fifteen and sixteenth centuries in Flanders in the teachings of the nominalist, Gabriel Biel (1418-1495). Biel called "the last of the Scholastics", lived in the transition period for Christian theology and philosophy. He was appointed in 1484 the first professor of theology at the University of Tübingen. Biel espoused the characteristics of both Scholasticism and Conciliarism, acknowledging the primacy and supreme power of the pope but maintaining the superiority of general councils, insofar as that they could compel the pope to resign. Biel’s thinking was to eventually influence Martin Luther. Biel claimed that the Annunciation was “the

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108 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 52.
109 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 47.
110 Schwarz, "Traditional View," 52.
114 See Murphy, "Gabriel Biel as Transmitter of Aquinas to Luther." 26-41.
moment at which the Word becomes flesh in the womb of Mary; at this moment she becomes the Mother of God.”115

At the time of creation of this manuscript, Biel (1425-1495), was also very well-known and active in the region. 116 Biel (1420 to 1425-1495), belonged to the Augustinian religious community of the Canons Regular of the Congregation of Windesheim, which was an offshoot of the Brethren of the Common Life. 117 He died some five years before the creation of the Flemish Renaissance work, the Rothschild Prayer Book, Folio 84v: The Annunciation. In his sermons and teachings, he taught that Mary was predestined by God to be the mother of Jesus. Biel divided the sanctification of Mary into two parts: firstly, her immaculate conception in the womb of her mother Saint Ann and secondly, her miraculous virginal conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. In response to the Jewish argument that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 does not refer to a virgin but a young woman, Biel argued that it related specifically to Mary’s virginity and her conception of Jesus had to be virginal otherwise the Incarnation would not be a token of God’s omnipotence. Biel viewed Mary as, “the Hope of the World” and “the preservation of her virginity “as a form of restoration which provides humankind with a certain hope in its own future bodily freedom from corruption.”118 Biel identified Mary, who through her humility, was an individual who prepared herself for a great task; that of “co-operatrix.”119 In one of his Marian sermons, Biel explained that Mary’s rule in heaven, given to her by her Son Jesus, was not through her own power but through the influence she has with her Divine Son.120 Biel regarded Mary not only as “the completion of the work of redemption and restoration” but also that “she administers the sacrifice of Christ and applies the fruits of his work.”121 He defended Mary’s co-operation with the Incarnation through her maternity and humble

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115 Oberman, "Mariology," 308.
116 Gabriel Biel was considered a nominalist. Cf. Ryan, "Gabriel Biel."
118 Oberman, "Mariology," 309.
120 Oberman, "Mariology," 311.
disposition as well as her co-operation with the sacrifice of Jesus through her offer of compassion.  

Spain

When Falcó was working in Valencia there were many religious works in circulation including *Vita Christi*, by Francesc Eiximenis, OFM, and, also by the same title but different author, Ludolphus Saxony, both of these were translated into Catalan, and *Corpus Christianorum, Patrologia Latina, and La Vida de la Sacratíssima Verge Maria de Miquel Peres*. All were greatly dependant on *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, a sermon of Bernard of Clairvaux and the so-called Pseudo-Bonaventura, *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, a book which was widely circulated in Catalan.  

Also, at the time there were theology classes given by Dominican masters in Catalan at the town's cathedral.  

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception began to be debated in the Middle Ages and was very prominent in Valencia at the time the altarpiece by Falcó was created.  

Those who supported the doctrine were known as immaculists, and those who opposed it, the maculist.  

For medieval theologians, it was of prime importance because it centred on their understanding of how original sin was transmitted.  

The immaculists tradition in the Christian kingdoms of Spain, especially Aragon and Castile, more than elsewhere in western Europe, is evident in the literature and of the late Middle Ages.  

Poetry competitions were held in honour of Marian devotion, around the feasts of the Annunciation – 25 March – to celebrate Mary’s conception and bearing of Christ and the December Annunciation celebrated on 18 December.  

The other feast was the celebration of Mary’s own conception – 8 December. The Immaculate Conception featured regularly in these competitions. The overarching theme in the Marian theology of the time was Mary’s purity.

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122 Oberman, "Mariology," 310.
123 Hauf Valls.
124 Hauf Valls. Email.
125 "the belief that Mary was, though conceived in the normal human way, preserved from the taint of original sin” Lesley K. Twomey, *The Serpent and the Rose: The Immaculate Conception and Hispanic Poetry in the Late Medieval Period* (Leiden; Boston: Brill; Biggleswade, 2008), ix; Twomey, *The Serpent and the Rose*.
129 Twomey, *The Serpent and the Rose*, 6. Also this feast was allegedly instituted by St Ideophones (d. 667), Archbishop of Toledo. Twomey, *The Serpent and the Rose*, 14.
Isabel de Villena (1430-1490) composed *Vita Christi* for the nuns of the Santa Trinitat convent, of which she was abbess, in response to the misogynistic work *Llibre de les dones*, written by Jaume Roig (d.1478), “which was the principal, longest work of this kind in the whole of Europe.” Roig was an eminent doctor in Valencia and Villena’s contemporary. He was also a benefactor of the convent. Roig wrote the book *Espill o Llibre de les dones* (*Mirror or Book of Ladies*) in which he aims to praise Mary but also vilifies women, for they cannot live up to the standards set by the perfect Virgin. In it, he makes “charges against women such as inconstancy, lust, inability to love deeply, associating with the devil, and stupidity.” In her response, Villena was attempting to change the negative image of women that was emphasised in Roig’s writings. By restricting her account of Jesus’ public life to just those episodes in which female characters figure as the beneficiaries of his words or miracles and by her construction of highly intelligent female characters, she demonstrates by her own intellectual prowess the blatant falseness of Roig’s last accusation of stupidity.

*Vita Christi* was “made public at the request of a queen [Isabella of Castile]” and the printed edition was available in 1497 with the intention “that the purpose of the *Vita* was considered to be didactic, and also two-fold. It has been written so that a simple people can come to knowledge ... but more importantly it has been written to promote meditation in the reader.” Because it was written in Catalan, and not Latin as most theological works were at the time, it is assumed that its appeal would have been to a much wider readership. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the artist, Nicolás
Falcó would have been familiar with this book and the theology it contained, especially given its close proximity to the artist’s work precinct.

**Historical Context: 20th Century Contemporary Australia**

In post-Vatican II Australia of the 1980s, Roman Catholic Christians had displaced Anglicans as the most numerous religious category on the census. However, it was the influx of immigrants from Asia and the Middle East who brought with them from their countries and cultures religions that were historically in the minority in this country. These immigrants were to have the biggest impact on multi-cultural Australian society and culture.\(^{138}\) Also, the advances in communication technology gave the population an even wider exposure to secular and other ideologies. In his address at “A Grain of Eternity: 1997 Australian International Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference” poet and academic, Noel Rowe, discussed how the theologies of evangelisation and incultration which had developed after Vatican II and which represented the possibility of dialogue between gospel and culture, were readily taken up due to the many new opportunities for this to occur (such as theology departments that were created at universities including Flinders University, Murdoch University and Charles Sturt University and the opening of the University of Notre Dame in 1989).\(^{139}\)

Australia, like many other Western countries, was reassessing its identity and addressing out-dated laws regarding the inclusion of its native peoples and equality for women as well as the integration of the massive influx of immigrants. It was a time when many religious orders, seeking to renew and even reinvent themselves, were seriously exploring their connections between the Church and the world, between their own evangelical origins and their contemporary circumstances. Many believed that because of its dogmatico-theological tradition, that (Catholic) Christianity had lost its influence and relevance because it had severed its connections with experience and story. In contrast, others found within dogmatico-theological tradition the seeds of renewal.\(^{140}\) It was in this mixed environment of scepticism and empiricism that

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\(^{139}\) Rowe, "Landing the Sacred." 181.

\(^{140}\) Rowe, "Landing the Sacred," 181.
Biblical historical criticism and feminist criticism began to look at the New Testament in search of empirical proof of Jesus. In 1985, Robert Funk founded *The Jesus Seminar* to renew the quest of the historical Jesus and to report the results of its research to the general public. Thirty scholars were at the initial meeting in Berkeley, California and their findings were later published in a book in 1995 called *The Five Gospels.*

Due to the advancements in modern technology, the world in 1990 was now flooded with visual images and the world of art was now free from any constraints. Public opinion and market demand were now the driving force in the world of art. Christian theology had divided into many groups such as feminist theology and liberation theology. In 1988 Pope John Paul II issued *Mulieris Dignitatem*; a letter advocating the dignity of women and Christian complementarianism to promote the view of the complementary roles of men and women in line with the philosophy of “new feminism.” In 1987, when Jane Schaberg’s controversial book “*The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*” was published it became a focus of interest in the world of academia because it challenged the long established traditional theological understanding of Mary’s conception of Jesus. In her book, Schaberg proposes that Jesus had been conceived illegitimately, probably as a result of a rape of Mary, and that Matthew and Luke were aware of this and had left some hints of that knowledge in their Gospels, despite that their main purpose was to explore the theological significance of Jesus' birth. As a former student of Raymond Brown (who wrote “*The Problem of the Virginal Conception of Jesus*”), Schaberg was well positioned to challenge the traditional pedagogy on Mary from the emerging feminist academic viewpoint having been exposed first-hand to the teachings of one of the most prolific theologians and writers of the era in this male-dominated area of theological study. However, Schaberg was not the only one challenging the status quo in the world of theology and the Incarnation in particular. In his work, *A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation: From Luke to the Enlightenment* Gary Waller regularly refers to a group of fifty-four scholars known as the Jesus Seminar (as noted

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141 Eventually more than 200 professionally trained specialists collaborated to research projects to examine questions about religion that matter. "Westar Institute," https://www.westarinstitute.org/about/. These findings were also featured in an article by David Van Biema in April 8, 1996 edition of *Time* Magazine.
above) who discussed at length the major tropes of typology used in the Bible. \textsuperscript{144} Many of their findings supported the idea that the Annunciation in the Lukan gospel (Luke 1:26-38) was a theologoumenon. \textsuperscript{145} In his book \textit{Sign and Promise} the Australian theologian, John Thornhill discusses the relationship between Mary, the Mother of the Saviour and the Church and the place of Mary in the life of the Catholic communion. \textsuperscript{146} Thornhill acknowledges modern scholarship’s recognition of the theme of “rejoice daughter of Zion” (Zech 2:14; cf. 9:9; Zeph 3:5; Joel 2:21) and “the place of Mary in the Christ-event by comparing her with Eve.” \textsuperscript{147} However, as the Church faces the challenges of the coming age, he sees in Mary a simple and gracious model for the Church to emulate to bring about a personal union with God.

**Exegesis of the Artworks**

In this section, an exegesis of the world of the four artworks will be undertaken. The choice of artworks was dependent on being able to view them at close quarters. Permission to view these works for some length was granted by the curators of both collections: the Kerry Stokes Collection, Collections Administrator, Erica Persak and New Norcia Museum Collections Manager, Marina Baker. The selected artworks include two from the Early European Renaissance; one is from the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century Flanders and the other from Valencia in Spain, and two contemporary artworks from late twentieth century (1990) Australia.

An art analysis will be done after each has been examined for its Historical Context, Material Culture, Iconography (under the headings of Period of the Artwork, \textsuperscript{144} Waller, \textit{A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation: From Lake to the Enlightenment}. 42. “The Jesus Seminar was organised in 1985 in Berkeley California, to renew the quest of the historical Jesus and to report the results of its research to the general public. It was founded by Robert W. Funk. Thirty scholars and more than two hundred professionally trained specialists joined the group at various phases. "Westar Institute".  
\textsuperscript{145} Theologoumenon is a way of speaking of God or divine things without using the name of God. "Theologoumenon," in \textit{A Dictionary of the Bible}, ed. W. R. F. Browning (Oxford Biblical Studies Online).also “Theologoumenon (Gr. ‘theological dimension/ element’) means a nonbinding theological thesis that is found clearly neither in Scripture nor in the definitive teaching of the magisterium. Theses of great theologians can have the status of theologoumena and may later in some way enter the teaching of the church. Some non-Catholic scholars sometimes use the word theologoumenon to distinguish the binding definitions of the first seven ecumenical councils from some subsequent pronouncement of the Roman Catholic Church.” Gerald O’Collins SJ and Edward G. Farrugia, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Theology}, Third ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), electronic resource, 263. 
\textsuperscript{147} Thornhill, "Mary and the Church," 222.
Characterisation of Gabriel, Characterisation of Mary) and followed by an Art Analysis.

The two artworks from the Early European Renaissance were created in cultures which were deeply immersed in Catholicism - from the Low Country cities of Bruges and Ghent is the Rothschild Prayer Book, and Valencia, Spain The Madonna Annuniciate; The Angel Gabriel by Nicolás Falcó. These cities were thriving centres of trade and commerce, heavily engaged with the Mediterranean world where a cross pollination of theological ideas and artistic styles are displayed in the selected artworks. In each artwork, Mary is depicted reading from a book, which is leaning on a prie-dieu. Up until the late eleventh century, in artworks of the Annunciation, depictions of Mary either weaving or spinning yarn was a common motif. Neither activity exists in the stark Lukan account of the Annunciation narrative. The influence of the Italian humanists who advocated the education of women can be seen in Mary’s ability to read. Conversely, according to Schiller, Mary was regarded by medieval theologians as “mistress of all seven Liberal Arts which lead to a knowledge of God.” Schiller also states that “mystics, however saw in contemplation and prayer the preparation for the task which God had willed.” Mary reading a book is only one of the popular motifs found within an artwork on the Annunciation at this time. Others will be discussed later in this Chapter.

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150 Laura Saetveit Miles, "The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation," Speculum 89, no. 3 (2014): 634. Additionally the spinning yarn could also be a possible reference to an activity of a ‘good woman’ in Proverbs 31:19 or the activity Mary would have been expected to do in the Temple in the Protoevangelium of James Chapters 10, 11.
153 Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, 42.

Figure 4: 1
Measurement: 228 x 160 mm. i + 252 + ii folios
Historical Context

Of the many regions of Northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Flanders was the most urbanized, and it became the major centre for trade in Northern Europe. Following the wars between France and England and the Black Plague, a thriving economy emerged in Northern Europe and by the mid-fifteenth century Flemish cities, such as Bruges and Ghent, became nodes for merchants from England, the Baltic, Italy, and France as well as centres of artistic production.\textsuperscript{154} Although religious, Northern Europe was not dominated by the Church, but various and ongoing political factors dominated by kingdoms and aristocrats.\textsuperscript{155} This affected religious practices and private devotional activities played a role in Flemish art. Books of hours became very popular and were important visual influences on larger forms of painting. Able to rely on trade networks that brought raw materials to these cities, artistic crafts


flourished. Bruges and Ghent consequently functioned as a crucible for both the wealthy patrons, highly specialized workshops and crafts-people to produce high-quality paintings, goldwork, textiles, and sculptures. Another major source of patronage came also from the Burgundian court. Wisse states that “the Burgundian court naturally attracted the best artists” for commissions for members of the court for portraits, manuscript illumination of both devotional and secular books, court pageantry, especially ducal weddings, grand civic tournaments, funeral monuments and tapestries to decorate interior spaces of Burgundian palaces and the prevalent court taste for luxury goods.

The Rothschild Prayer Book contains neither arms, emblems nor portraits to positively identify its intended original owner. Scholars believe that the Rothschild Prayer Book would have been commissioned for someone extremely wealthy and well educated, and was produced in Ghent and Bruges between 1505–1510. These two locations had been major centres of production for illuminated manuscripts for hundreds of years, however, with the advent of the printing press, the demand for illuminated manuscripts declined.

The Rothschild Prayer Book is 228 millimetres by 160 millimetres. The folio being examined for this research is Folio 84v: “Annunciation, Hours of the Virgin. Matins, Rothschild Prayer Book. The accepted illuminator for the image of the Annunciation, Gerard Horenbout, had a well-established workshop in Ghent and produced other known similar scenes of the Annunciation. Both Bruges and Ghent were home to

156 Murray, "Fifteenth-Century Flanders".
158 Wisse, "Burgundian Netherlands".
159 Margaret M. Manion, An Illumination; the Rothschild Prayer Book and Other Works from the Kerry Stokes Collection C. 1280-1685, Kerry Stokes Collection (Perth, Western Australia: Australian Capital Equity, 2015), 9.
161 The workshop of Gerard Horenbout also produced a considerably inferior version called The Annunciation, in about 1500, using tempera colours and gold paint on parchment, 15.2 × 11.1 cm now held in The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. See http://www.getty.edu/museum/media/images/web/download/00417901.jpg and the Spinola Hours. The Annunciation. This work was created under the name of Master of James IV of Scotland and it is also in tempera colours, gold, and ink on parchment about 1510 – 1520. See http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/3893/master-of-james-iv-of-scotland-the-annunciation-flemish-about-1510-1520/?dz=0.5000,0.7441,0.50
local aristocracy and patrician classes who were attempting to imitate the Burgundian dukes thus producing demands for luxury objects which included richly illuminated manuscripts.162

Material Culture

The *Rothschild Prayer Book* was made more than half a century after the advent of movable type printing and “came at the end of a long development in manuscript culture.”163 Manuscripts, such as the *Rothschild Prayer Book*, were produced in collaborative workshops by teams of crafts people who painstakingly and meticulously worked on every detail. Known as either a “Prayer Book” or a “Book of Hours,” these fine manuscripts were for personal, devotional use and were treasured for their artistry and content among the Catholic laity. Because the Divine Office is not included in the *Rothschild Prayer Book*, but it does include many other detailed prayers and devotions marking specific saints’ feast days, it is presumed that it was intended for a layperson with a detailed knowledge of the faith. Kate Challis describes books of hours as being “considered to be a required fashion accessory of the wealthy, the *haute couture* of the Middle Ages.”164 Appendix A on page 103 of this thesis details the various features of the Rothschild Prayer Book.

The book is bound in red velvet, which was renewed in the mid-sixteenth-century. The illumination of the *Annunciation folio 84 verso from Matins, Hours of the Virgin*, was created with tempura colours and gold paint on vellum and takes up most of the page. The soft lighting that is recorded within this work is redolent of the naturally lit environment in which it was created. The calligraphy and the binding may have been completed in Bruges. Horenbout was renowned in his day and highly sought.165 He was noted for spatially complex and intellectually sophisticated artwork and was considered a master in his field. His attention to detail is very fine, with reference to the details on the cloak of the angel Gabriel. In fact, the details had to be viewed with

163 Anne Dunlop, *Antipodean Early Modern: European Art in Australian Collections, C. 1200-1600* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), online resource, 29.
164 Challis, "Marginalized Jewels," 269.
a magnifying glass and torch for this research; the writing of the words from Gabriel was so minute that it would have been painted with a single hair. Throughout the manuscript are many decorations that include details of gems and jewellery, such as the ones on Folio 84 verso and 85 recto, and the “jewelled boarders seem to only occur in books designed for worship; no examples have been located so far in secular texts.”  

In medieval Europe, jewels, either owned or worn as bodily ornaments, were certainly objects of desire however, they were also regarded to reflect the Divine Glory and splendour of the Heavenly Jerusalem according to the book of the Apocalypse. Furthermore, Challis states that in “the writings of Saints Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas it was explained that despite the fact that lux (light) was physical, it was essentially regarded as a metaphysical reality ... as gems had the ability to receive and transmit this lux and hence, these transparent bodies acquired a metaphysical reality. This concept was stressed by the medieval lapidaries and treaties and therefore these precious materials could be invoked as an aid for contemplation of the Divine because of their perceived spiritual connotations. The majority of jewelled boarders in medieval manuscripts appear in association with the representations of holy personages, such as the Virgin Mary. Other scholars believe the jewels or gems in the margins are a mnemonic aid used to recall and memorize important liturgical texts.

**Iconography**

**Period of the Artwork**

This artwork is exceptional in its expressivity and economy in conveying many and varied complex theological ideas. Almost every line from the pericope of Luke 1:26-38 can be identified in the “Rothschild Prayer Book, Folio 84 verso: The Annunciation” by either symbol or iconography in this artwork. The compositional format of the Annunciation is inspired by the tradition of past masters such as Robert Campin (c. 1427-32), Domenico Veneziano (c. 1445), and Fra Angelico (c. 1450).

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166 Challis, "Marginalized Jewels," 267.
167 Cf. Revelation 21:18-21
170 Challis, "Marginalized Jewels."
The angel Gabriel on the viewer’s left is in three-quarter profile and Mary on the right, her body slightly twisted but her face is to the viewer, however, the short distance between Gabriel and Mary bring them into a more intense relationship. Their positioning expresses that they have moved beyond a mere greeting to a conversation about a matter of great importance. Mary’s expression suggests an immediate and ready consent. The faces of these figures share the exact same features, implying that each is like the other: heavenly. The pillars of the baldachin are not without significance. Pillars are used in the art to connect the earth with the heavens, and in this case humanity to the divine.\textsuperscript{173} In many ways, this artwork mimics other famous works of the era with which the artist would have been well acquainted, especially the Ghent Altarpiece (see following page) made in 1432 for Ghent’s Cathedral of Saint Bavo by Jan van Eyck, a work regarded as one of the most influential of the era.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{174} Other such works include \textit{The Mérode Altarpiece}, attributed to the Master of Flémalle or workshop, c. 1425-1428. Also see Figure 4: 3 - Ghent Altarpiece; Susan Jones, "The Ghent Altarpiece," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ghnt/hd_ghnt.htm.
Characterisation of Gabriel

Gabriel, who declares that he “stands before the presence of God” (Lk 1:19) must therefore, be pleasing to God. Since the archangel Gabriel holds a sceptre he is seen in this image as one with royal authority, a messenger of God (Luke 1:26a) as he points skyward in the manner of ancient orators as he makes his announcement. Gabriel is in the act of genuflecting in Mary’s presence. His golden cloak (in this context gold is understood as the colour of divine intelligence, marriage, of faith and of fruitfulness) is lined with green, the symbolic colour of hope, regeneration and fertility, and the small diadem on his head indicates his elevated station among the angels. 175 His white

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175 Sill, A Handbook of Symbols, 29, 30.; also cf. Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 151, 53.
tunic refers to him being likened to light. Among the many fine details on Gabriel’s cloak are pearls trimming the edge; the gem that denotes salvation. The angel’s greeting “Ave gratia plena” is in Latin in gold lettering (Lk 1:28) however, it is very difficult to read because it is so small, and a magnifying glass is required to read the text. In the marginalia directly on the left of Gabriel is a ruby and gold cross (possibly a brooch-like) motif which reminds the viewer of the presence of Jesus and draws the viewer’s attention to Gabriel and the significance of this heavenly messenger in this scene. 176 Gabriel’s rainbow coloured wings are a mnemonic prompt for the viewer to recall the description of the glory of God made by the prophet Ezekiel as he recalled his first vision from God (Ezek 1:28).

Characterisation of Mary

In the original text, there is nothing to indicate what activity Mary was engaged in at the time of the arrival of Gabriel, or her state of mind or her physical being. In spite of this lack of information, the artist has depicted Mary’s face is serene and contemplative; her mouth is gently curving upward in a smile. The absence of animation on Mary’s face could be interpreted as the exact moment in which Mary ponders the angel’s greeting (Lk 1:29). Anna Jameson has described such angelic likeness as “the portrait face looks through the angel face.” 177 The sky-blue tunic Mary is wearing symbolizes heaven and heavenly love. 178 The colours symbolic of divine wisdom are either blue or golden yellow and they are portrayed together, with gold details, in the tunic that Mary is wearing. 179 Mary’s left hand draws the light gold coloured cape modestly across the front of her body (Figure 4:4).

176 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 43. Also Challis, "Marginalized Jewels." 267.
178 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 151.
179 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 199.
The blue and white ceramic vase with the white lily behind the figure of Mary and the closed bag (in red which is the colour of Divine Love) are all motifs pertaining to Mary’s virginity (Lk 1:27) and the basket of sewing in the bottom right-hand corner of the image references Mary’s activity of weaving or spinning in Chapter 10 of the
Protoevangelium of James.\textsuperscript{180} Mary kneels on a cushion, which is “the conventional symbol of lust,” and this implies Mary’s “victory of purity over lust.”\textsuperscript{181} The cushion is red, the colour of passion and hate, of power and action and of sin and suffering.\textsuperscript{182} Mary kneeling on the red cushion alludes to her ascendancy over these. The book, if it is a book of Scriptures and not a prayer book, also alludes to God the Father. Behind her head is a pale orange disc and at its centre is a dove from which radiate striations of gold.\textsuperscript{183} Surrounding this disc is an aureole of blue, brushed with white cloud-like wisps. In this illustrated moment of the Annunciation, the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit is taking place during the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary, and God the Son is becoming flesh in Mary’s womb.

There is an open door in the top left background which suggests the angel’s entry point (Lk 1:26) into the scene of an enclosed, intimate and private space or sanctuary (Lk 1:27). Schiller traces the presence of an external town-like structure with a church spire within an artwork from Byzantine art to Western art to refer to Nazareth.\textsuperscript{184} Above the open door is a round window with what appears to be a dull gold coloured glass.\textsuperscript{185} A window in Christian art symbolically “suggests penetration without violation and destruction.”\textsuperscript{186} The glass in the window further emphasizes this concept (Figure 4: 5).

\textsuperscript{180} In Chapter 10, of the Protoevangelium of James, the priests decided to make a veil for the temple of the Lord. The weaving of the purple and scarlet fell by lot to Mary. “Protoevangelium of James.”
\textsuperscript{181} Verdon and Rossi, \textit{Mary in Western Art}, 104.
\textsuperscript{182} Sill, \textit{A Handbook of Symbols}, 29.; also cf. Ferguson, \textit{Signs & Symbols}, 152.
\textsuperscript{183} When Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit was described as being like a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) and thus is the most likely source of artistic inspiration.
\textsuperscript{184} According to Schiller, “the juxtaposition of Mary and the church building ... may simply be an allusion to the church in Nazareth, which was so much visited by pilgrims.” Gertrud Schiller, \textit{Iconography in Christian Art: Christ's Incarnation, Childhood, Baptism, Temptation, Transfiguration, Works, and Miracles}, trans. Janet Seligman, 1st American ed ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 37,38.
\textsuperscript{185} The geometric shape of circle, ring, disc or sphere shape is “universally accepted as the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence” Ferguson, \textit{Signs & Symbols}, 153.; also see Sill, \textit{A Handbook of Symbols}, 202.
\textsuperscript{186} Sill, \textit{A Handbook of Symbols}, 136.
At first glance, the event seems to be taking place inside a medieval structure, possibly the sanctuary in a church, but the presence of the angels and the tall green drapery remind the viewer of the baldachin or tabernacle within the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. The absence of candles on the hexagonal two-step dais contradicts a reference to the church altar setting, but directly references the Holy of Holies which would have had the menorah (a seven branched candelabrum) outside away from the veil of the Temple (Ex 27:20). The green drapery which forms a baldachin over Mary, and the two cherubim (also with rainbow coloured wings) identify her as the living tabernacle and the new Holy of Holies (in the Temple) (Lk 1:31b and Lk 1:32a). The three pillars in the background of the scene are motifs for the Trinity as are the rings of three colours encircling Mary’s head. According to Didron, the idea of the three circles were “an extension of, and the complement of the

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187 Baldachins are “an ornamental canopy over an altar, usually supported on pillars, or a similar form over a tomb or throne.” “Baldachin, Baldacchino, Baldachino, Baldaquin, Ciborium,” in Dictionary of Architecture and Construction, ed. Cyril Harris (New York: McGraw-Hill 2005).79. They are a part of medieval architecture and are used in processions to cover the sacred image or object being carried.

188 “Green is the colour of vegetation and of spring, and therefore symbolizes the triumph of spring over winter, or life over death.” Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 151. In Exodus 25:18-22, God gave to Moses the description of the details of the Ark of the Covenant. Two cherubim were to be made out of gold and were to be positioned to face each other above the mercy seat. It was here that God would meet with Moses and deliver God’s commands for the Israelites.
triangle” indicating the Trinity. However, it is the dove that refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit, by whose agency the virginal conception takes place (Lk 1:35).

**Art Analysis**

In the *Rothschild Prayer Book, Annunciation* can be seen the pericope of the Lukan gospel (Lk 1:26-38). The composition is complex making the eye move quickly all over the page and it relies heavily on the inclusion of traditional established symbolic colouration, artefacts and bodily postures to communicate the many messages and references within it. The colours are vivid, making it a very exciting and joy-filled image. The details are very finely executed. The organic lines of the bodies and the garments of both main figures are graceful and suggest a smooth and gentle movement. Likewise, the two angels with rainbow-coloured wings gently hover in the top part of the scene, as they hold back the curtains of the baldachin in a gesture that signifies the “revealing of the divine.” The pale blue sky on the left side of the image draws the eye to a vanishing point which is an outside town or cityscape in which the spire of a church can be seen. As the outdoor scene is parallel to the nimbus surrounding the head of Mary, the eye is drawn immediately to the white dove overshadowing her as she kneels at a *prie-dieu* with her hand on a book. Underneath the book is the inside of Mary’s pale golden cloak, which in turn is on top of a cloth of green – the colour of hope. The many vertical lines in the pillars, drapery, and interior structure of the space draw the viewer’s attention repeatedly to the presence of the angels hovering above the scene. An even closer inspection reveals the presence of a bed behind the pillars, which has a pale red coloured covering on it. The walls behind it are dark blue

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190 The rainbow colours (on the wings of Gabriel and the two cherubim angels) in this work prompt the viewer to also recollect the rainbow’s presence in the book of Genesis. In this book, God makes two promises both demonstrating God’s mercy toward sinful humankind, one of which is covenantal. The first is in the Garden of Eden when God promises the redemption of humankind through the seed of the “woman” (Gen 3:15) which is the Incarnation. In the second promise made by God, the rainbow is the sign of the covenantal promise given to Noah that never again would God destroy the earth by water (Gen 9:11-17). In this case, the rainbow is the symbolic reminder of that covenantal promise and its effect of the reconciliation between God and the human race. For the “revealing of the divine” see Maya Corry, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Maya Corry, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), 92.

191 According to Schiller, the inclusion of a church may be “... an illusion to the church in Nazareth, which was so much visited by pilgrims.” Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 37.

192 Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 42.

193 The splendor of Mary’s garments shows the honour accorded her and that the communion is desired by God, who calls to Godself the mother from all eternity from whom was God’s son was born.
with an intricate pattern. This is Mary’s inner most domicile, the fabric through which the Holy Spirit has broken. Once realizing that this is no ordinary domestic scene of the Annunciation, the viewer distinguishes the vase with the lilies, closed bag, sewing basket and cushion on which Mary kneels, no longer as props for the scene but can read them as symbols relating to Mary’s virginity (Figure 4:6).

Figure 4: 6 - “Rothschild Prayer Book, folio 84v: The Annunciation. Matins, Hours of the Virgin” - foreground details.

Thus, the artwork implies that in this moment when Mary answers Gabriel with, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) that the Incarnation of Jesus occurs.

The artists’ rendering of this pericope draws the viewer into the story of the Annunciation to Mary and has many symbols to remind the viewer of the significance of this event. Portrayed a Northern European setting, it provides familiarity and

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194 In this artwork contains references to the Old Testament promise of a virgin who would conceive a child (Isa 7:14). In The Birth of the Messiah, Brown lays out why he is not convinced by Rene Laurentin’s arguments that Mary should be regarded as the Ark of the New Covenant. Cf. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: Matthew and Luke, 327-28; also Laurentin, Queen of Heaven: A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary, 27-30. Each of these discuss the various translations of episkiazein (επισκιάζειν) “overshadow” and the implications it has for the claim that Mary is or is not the Ark of the New Covenant.

195 Biel claimed that “this was the moment at which the Word becomes flesh in the womb of Mary; at this moment she becomes the Mother of God.” Oberman, "Mariology," 308.
relativity for the viewer. In the marginalia, the borders are made up of a rinceaux of gilded vines which cover the left side and underneath the artwork framing the Annunciation scene. The Latin words ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI FIAT MICHI run anti-clockwise and translate to “Let me serve the Lord.” It is punctuated by two jewel-like motifs, painted to look like a brooch made up of pink enamel, pearls, ruby and gold and is positioned at the bottom highlighting the words FIAT MICHI. This part of the composition is set against a lighter blue-grey background and complement the miniature scene the Annunciation, emphasising the fact that the event depicted is of great importance. The profusion of the symbols reminding the viewer of key elements of the narrative underscores this momentous occasion.

The realism with which this painting is executed invites the viewer into the scene. Even more than an accumulation of symbols is the closeness of the two figures: the visual and emotional interval that the artist has left between Gabriel and Mary is referred to in the very short space between them. It is a sacred space between Creature and Creator. Here the viewer encounters the divine intimacy. It suggests visually what the text depicts legibly that there is no lack of hesitation in Mary’s response in her eagerness to do the will of God; and therefore, is a visual prompt for the viewer to do likewise.

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197 Pearls symbolize salvation, rubies symbolize the blood of Christ. Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 43. In this context gold could be understood as the symbol of power, the sun and of Heaven. Sill, A Handbook of Symbols, 40-41.
Artwork 2: “The Madonna Annunciate; The Angel Gabriel.”
Falcó, Nicolás. (c. 15th/16th).

Figure 4: 7

Materials: both oil on panel, gold ground.
Measurements: 28.03 in. (71.20 cm) (height) by 10.63 in. (27.00 cm) (width)
Description: pair, framed as one
Historical Context

The pair of altar panels, *The Madonna Annunciate; The Angel Gabriel* were created by Nicolás Falcó in Valencia, during the reign of the Spanish monarchs, Isabella I of Castile (r. 1474-1504) and Ferdinand II of Aragon (1479-1516). They are framed as one and are now housed in the Kerry Stokes Collection in Perth, Western Australia.

The artist, Nicolás Falcó, who had worked on other altarpieces in Valencia that were commissioned by the Church and viewed by the public, was described by O’Neil as “in the general hard style of Spanish artists at that period, who had not studied the beau--idéal of nature in the simplicity of the Italian school.” 198 O’Neil also states that Falcó “had the stiff, vapid manner peculiar to those days, and partaking of the styles of the Byzantine and early Florentine schools.” 199 Nevertheless, Falcó’s Hispano-Flemish style combines intricate Gothic motifs characteristic of the Northern Renaissance with elements of the Islamic-inspired Mudejar style. 200 This combination of influences can be seen in the gold leaf detail design of *The Madonna Annunciate; The Angel Gabriel*. It has been suggested that these altar panels were most likely part of an artwork commissioned by the convent of the Franciscan Order of the Poor Clare nuns, who enjoyed royal patronage and thus the most likely to afford such an elaborate work. 201 The convent was adjacent to the palace, where the Queen had her own rooms. The queen’s cousin, Elinor de Villena who later entered this convent and took the name Isabel, was the first novice to take the veil at The Holy Trinity Convent.

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200 Relating to the Muslim subjects of Christian monarchs during the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors (11th–15th centuries) who, until 1492, were allowed to retain Islamic laws and religion in return for loyalty to a Christian monarch. "Mudejar," in *Britannica Academic* (6 February 2018).

201 Isabel de Villena was associated with the Valencian court of her cousin, the devout Queen Maria, from her early childhood. Cantavella, "Intellectual, Contemplative, Administrator," 98.
Material Culture

It is believed by the curators of the Kerry Stokes Collection that the altar panels by Nicolás Falcó, were probably meant for a private chapel; and this research suggests it was possibly for the Convent of the Trinity in Valencia, which has been run by the Royal Order of Holy Trinity Clarist nuns since the middle of the fourteenth century. Falcó, a native of Valencia, had already produced several other altarpieces, and had completed works for the Master of Perea as well. It is not certain whether the frame itself is more recent than the panels it encloses. The panels do not line up perfectly in their present state however, when viewed as they are currently presented they appear as a completed work. In its original intended location, this artwork would have been illuminated by candles and the size of the panels suggest a small, intimate setting. The flickering of the candle flames would have made the gold leaf in the pressed metal background flicker, creating a very personal, three-dimensional affect, contrasting the solid, coloured figures of Mary and Gabriel. It is not hard to imagine this special effect in the soft, darkened gallery where only the artworks are lit in a particular light that will not injure the works but yet illuminates them to the advantage of the gallery in which this artwork is exhibited. The viewer of this devotional artwork could not help but feel that they were witnessing this unique moment in history.

Iconography

Period of the Artwork

At first sight, there is nothing in this artwork to distract the viewer from this great moment. Falcó has rendered the artwork in much the same way as the text is recorded in the Gospel of Luke but upon closer examination, gradually more is revealed in the artwork just as it is in the pericope. The decorative background, copious folds of the garments worn by the figures of Mary and Gabriel and shallow space combine the painting traditions of the Byzantine and Italian Renaissance.
Its resulting plateresque style, \textsuperscript{202} characterized by profuse surface decoration, was popularized in architecture and decorative arts—particularly metalwork, such as silver or gold-smithing, \textsuperscript{203} when this artwork was being constructed. Hammered and gold-leaf details in the wooden panel, provide the elaborate background against which the figure of Mary stands silently contemplating as she reads a prayer book. The organic pattern design and the motifs incorporated in the background were probably drawn from existing traditions in the Byzantine, Ottoman and Mediterranean cultures active in the city of Valencia. The hammered and gold-leaf design could also replicate the luxurious, rich silk velvets and brocades which were highly prized commodities that were produced and traded in Valencia at the time. The following images show examples of the patterns created in silk textiles from the fifteenth century.

\begin{center}
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\end{center}

\textsuperscript{202} This style has a broad range of description however it primarily refers to “an ornamental treatment of the classical orders in which the various elements, especially entablature mouldings, columns/pillars and bases, were richly decorated, licenses taken with strict Vitruvian rules and a certain preference given among Renaissance motifs to grotesques and foliage” John B. Bury, "The Stylistic Term 'Plateresque'," \textit{Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes} 39 (1976).

\textsuperscript{203} The growth of intolerance, and the eventual expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, forced many of those who stayed to convert to the Catholic faith. These converts became known as “\textit{conversos}” or “new Christians” who were converted from Judaism and “\textit{moriscos}” meaning “little Moors” for those who converted from Islam. These converts adapted and modified their skills and designs as craftsmen and artisans so that they could be accepted by the guilds in order to gain commissions, many of which came from the Catholic Church. Cf. Mark D. Meyerson, \textit{The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade} (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1991). 129.
From: Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Physical description: Textile. Red silk; woven with a repeating design consisting of lobed lozenge-shaped compartments formed by leaves and enclosing floral devices geometrically arranged in green and yellow.

Date: 15th century (made)
Artist/maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: woven silk
Dimensions: Length: 1 m, Width: 0.26m
Place of Origin: Spain (made)

Figured Silk Weave Textile
From: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Date: 15th Century
Culture: Spanish
Medium: Silk
Dimensions: 16.5 x 24.1 cm
Classification: Textiles-Woven
Accession Number: 07.62.72

Characterisation of Gabriel

Gabriel holds a sceptre in his left hand and his right hand gestures upwards. The words of his salutation to Mary “gratia plena, dominus tecum” are legible on the white scroll that elegantly arcs across the panel in which he is depicted. His wings are created in a similar manner to the Italian tapestry stitch called bargello and reflect the naturalistic style and general interest in humanism of the times. His cape is vivid red and trimmed with gold piping; his sleeves are black, and his tunic, which is gathered by a thin cincture, is white, traditionally the colour symbolizing innocence, purity of soul and holiness of life.\(^{206}\) Black and white together symbolize humility and purity of life.\(^{207}\)

The angel’s head is very gently tilted as if to hear Mary’s reply. His face is strong and peaceful, in supplication as he gazes upward, and his body appears to be in the action of kneeling or genuflecting. Gabriel’s attractive face is composed and kindly. His head is surrounded by a halo which is stamped and would have been completely golden in its original state. There is fine brush detailing on his hair and on the head of this angel is a small diadem to acknowledge his position as an archangel (Figure 4:7).

Gabriel is positioned very close to Mary in the artwork however there is a clear division created by the black and gold frame between them, signifying that despite the intimacy of the conversation between them there still exists a barrier – which could be interpreted as Gabriel’s respect for Mary. Or the vertical division might simply be the material demands of the altar panel setting. Because Gabriel’s head is at the same height as Mary, it could be interpreted that they are somewhat equal in their pure, heavenly status. Gabriel is a member of the third triad of angels who are messengers between humankind and God in heaven and who execute the will of God in Renaissance theology.\(^{208}\) In this image he is seen delivering God’s message with graciousness and serenity.


\(^{207}\) Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols*, 151-52.

Figure 4: 10 - Falcó, Nicolás. (c. 15th/16th). “The Madonna Annunciata; The Angel Gabriel” - details of Gabriel.
Characterisation of Mary

Mary is depicted as a young woman, and the deep crimson colour of her tunic indicates that she is of regal status. 209 “Scarlet and crimson were the colour of luxury, of regal and ecclesiastical statues, but they also had a number of other connotations in the fifteenth century.” 210 They were used for the garments worn by bride and bridegroom in Spain, in Renaissance art, and it was traditional to clothe the Virgin Mary in red. 211 Devotion to the Eucharist was central to the Franciscan practice thus regular reference in art is made to it: as in the crimson coloured garments which are associated with both wine and blood of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrificial shedding of blood (Isa 63:1-3). 212 Crimson is also the “blood supplied by the maternal womb to nourish the male seed.” 213 As Mary stands at a small table, perhaps a prié-dieu, her gaze is downward, perhaps in contemplation or possibly reading a prayer book or the Bible.

Gertrud Schiller states that:

the book is more about Mary, as ascribed by medieval theologians, as a mistress of all the seven Liberal Arts which lead to knowledge of God, and since they wished to set her, as the Mother of God, above all creatures, ascribed to her the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. 214

The artist has portrayed Mary’s composure as demure and humble, her face is youthful as she smiles softly, and her hair is beautiful. 215 These innocent features confirm in the mind of the viewer Mary’s purity. However, the viewer of the artwork, like the reader of the text, is left to consider why Mary does not seem anxious of the possibility of a scandal and negative impact on the impending consummation of her marriage. Is there a presumption, by both viewer and reader, of implicit trust in God by Mary? The cloak she wears is blue, the symbol of Heaven and heavenly love, 216 although very deep and intense in hue, suggesting a particularly emotional experience. It is unclear whether the colour pigments have changed over time because, depending on how the

211 Twomey, The Fabric of Marian Devotion.
212 Twomey, The Fabric of Marian Devotion, 117.
214 Schiller, Iconography in Christian Art, 1
215 The face of Mary in this altarpiece is the same face as the face of Mary in Nicolas Falcó’s work Triptych of the Virgen de la Leche which was created at the same time. Cf. http://www.cult.gva.es/mbav/data/es06038.htm
216 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols, 151.
light comes off the panel, there is a deep green colour overlaying the blue colour in the lining of her cloak; if so then the green in this context references Mary’s ‘*gran misericòrdia*’ [great mercy].

Since this image comprises only of the figures of Mary and Gabriel against an elaborate gold background, focus moves to the dove representing the Holy Spirit. Because it is not actually overshadowing Mary’s head, it is realistic to assume that Mary is yet to give her consent or conceive the Christ Child. The Holy Spirit is positioned above Mary’s line of sight, and therefore she is presumably unaware of the Divine Presence. In her ignorance of the dove, Mary is relieved of the pressure of having to make the decision in the presence of the one who offers the invitation; therefore, she is not manipulated, coerced or intimidated into a reply she may think that she is duty-bound to make. She can freely give her assent of her own free will.

Mary’s stillness seems to indicate her contemplation and Gabriel seems to be waiting for an answer. There is both tension and anticipation in this portrayed moment of the Annunciation pericope as Gabriel seems to be waiting for Mary’s response. The gentle smile on Mary’s lips suggests a willing or even a loving acquiescence to the angel’s news.

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217 The details in Twomey’s translation of Isabel de Villena’s *Vita Christi*, state that this colour combination “symbolizes her *‘gran misericòrdia’* [great mercy] (fol. 50r; I, 185).” Twomey, “Reading Red,” 85. In folio 22 verso Twomey translates that one of “the Virgin’s virtuous handmaids, Mercy [is] in green” Twomey, “Reading Red,” 168. Mary herself is in “a mantle of blue brocade” Twomey, “Sor Isabel De Villena,” 85. If the green colouration was deliberately created by the artist, and not discolouration of the paint pigments, which was then overlaid on the blue mantel, then this created garment supports the idea that these panels were intended for the chapel of Convent of the Trinity in Valencia where de Villena and her nuns could be reminded of her writings in *Vita Christi*.

Figure 4: 11 - Falcó, Nicolás. (c. 15th/16th). “The Madonna Annunciate; the Angel Gabriel” - details of Mary and the dove.
Art Analysis

The figures of Mary and the angel Gabriel are created in strong colouration and detail and yet the gentle curves and lines of their bodies and the volumes of fabric in their clothes, imply a very gracious and peaceful encounter between the two. The tightly packed composition within the frames adds to the intimacy of the supernatural event that is occurring between the two figures of Mary and Gabriel. Like the pericope of the Annunciation itself, only the exchange between the virgin and the celestial visitor are recorded. The pericope gives no details of where the Annunciation took place or how it happened. The artist Nicolás Falcó has depicted only the characters involved in the pericope, and through the script on the white ribbon, only part of the dialogue that took place between them. Just as the words and the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary in the pericope were the only clues to the significance to the event of the Annunciation, so too are the artist’s representations of the characters. To the reader of the text, the phrasing of the language used in the pericope give only hints to what was happening and why it was happening; and the details of colour, texture, posture, expression and painted form of these characters communicate much about Gabriel and Mary themselves. Because the direction of the composition is toward the viewer, it makes the viewer personally involved and engaged with what is happening in the image. The three-dimensional effects created by the different textures of the background and the smoothness of the figures make the viewer’s experience more real and more immediate. There are many lines within this work that move the viewer’s eye in a cyclical motion. The swirling red colour in the cloak of Gabriel, the continuation of this colour in the bottom of the work allude to the fast fluid action of the energy of God and then the perpendicular block of the colour of red on Mary’s tunic stabilize the motion. As Mary’s head is bowed in acquiescence to the Holy Spirit, there is an implied line in her sight as she reads. The sceptre held by Gabriel also draws the viewer’s eye toward the book. The dynamism created by the lines within the work meet at the intersection of the Scripture Mary is reading and reference the Word about to become flesh, within Mary.
The two figures are set against a background of hammered gold decorative motif of pomegranates and acanthus leaves.\textsuperscript{219} The traditional Franciscan appreciation of Mary’s close, personal association with the Eucharist is evident and immediately obvious because of the panels’ proximity to the altar. In a chapel space, under this scene, the viewer would have been reminded of the faith of Mary and been offered an opportunity for an intimate experience with God, as the sacrificial bread underwent transubstantiation.

**Artworks produced in 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Australia**

Between the 1980s and 1990s the implementation of the World Wide Web was taking place and this technology changed how the world would interact. The art world of 1990 no longer enjoyed the reliable patronage of the Church, galleries, *Salons* or even museums. Instead it was the internationalization of the European auction houses and the Japanese buyers choosing art for investments as well as the introduction of ever more innovations, such as telephone bidding, and satellite links that opened up the once privileged market to the more open world-wide market. With these changes came greater artistic influences as buyer’s preferences became identified and targeted. Specialised exhibitions, galleries and competitions and the role of the art critic began to take prominence. In 1985 the Mandorla Art Award for contemporary religious art in Australia was established, making it Australia’s most significant thematic Christian art prize. At this time, the biennial Blake Prize, which was established in 1951 was the most well-known religious art competition.

The selected artworks for this section of the research were created in a secular Western society with many and varied Christian denominations and each of these artworks has a seemingly completely different interpretation of the Lukan pericope of the

\textsuperscript{219} The pomegranates in this motif could refer to the pomegranates of the OT in the Song of Solomon or the decoration of the garments of the high priest or the Temple of Jerusalem or refer to the coat of arms adopted by Ferdinand and Isabel as King and Queen of Granada. Jack Freiberg, *Bramante’s Tempietto, the Roman Renaissance, and the Spanish Crown* (West Nyack, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), electronic resource, 33, 129; additionally, “The pomegranate is a symbol of eternity and fertility, because of its many seeds ... the many seeds in blood-red juice also equate to life out of death.” Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols*, 56; also, “The Tree of Jesse is often based on the acanthus.” James Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), electronic resource, 146. Thus, it could be an artistic allusion to the prophecy of Isa 11:1.
Annunciation. Both were submitted in 1990 for a contemporary religious art competition, the Mandorla Art Award.  

Artwork 3: “Ante Lucem”  

Figure 4: 12 - Paul, John. (1990). Ante Lucem.

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220 See www.mandorlaart.com

**Historical Context**

*Ante Lucem* meaning “before the light”\(^{221}\) is by Australian artist, John Paul who is from one of the most isolated cities in the world: Perth in Western Australia. When the maxi yacht, *Australia II* won the America’s Cup in Newport, Rhode Island in 1983 it thrust Perth into the international spotlight because the next challenge race would then

be held in the winning yacht’s home city, Perth, Australia in 1987. In the few years just prior to the creation of this artwork, *Australia II* winning of the America’s Cup was by far one of the most important events for Perth because it drew international attention to the people of that part of the world and helped to stimulate an economy that was recovering from the stock market crash of 1987. For many years during the 1980s, Australia enjoyed many new discoveries in mineral and resource exploration and became a major exporter of minerals. It was also attracting a lot of attention as a tourist destination and a place for higher learning with affordable higher education costs.

Artist John Paul (1953 -), regarded as a figurative painter, studied graphic design and Fine Arts in Perth, Western Australia in the early 1970s. From 1984 to 1994 his work was seen in five solo exhibitions in both Perth and Sydney. In 1990 he won the Mandorla Art Prize for *Ante Lucem* and has been teaching since 1980. In the past, Paul has worked with three different mediums: painting, works on paper and with prints and graphics. Now, however, he works only with monochromatic gouache.

**Material Culture**

John Paul’s body of work demonstrates his many and varied artistic skills. In this selected artwork, the artist’s unique perspective on the Annunciation is captured in acrylic paint which is sometimes thickly applied and could be quite easily mistaken for an oil painting. This relatively small acrylic painting is on a board, 30 centimetres by 24.5 centimetres with a black frame that is 57 centimetres high by 52 centimetres wide, in which the painting is surrounded by a vibrant red mounting with gold trim. Its function or purpose is meant to evoke contemplation or inspiration.

Until quite recently, *Ante Lucem* hung in the Art Gallery of the New Norcia Benedictine Community, in New Norcia in Western Australia. The Mandorla Art

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Award winners are periodically exhibited in the New Norcia Museum and Art Gallery and in 2015 when a full retrospective was held for 12 months, 33,000 visitors attended the gallery. As an acquisitive art prize, all winners of the Mandorla Art Award are housed in the New Norcia Benedictine Community under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mandorla Art Award and the Monks. The winner of the art competition was widely celebrated in many forms of media.\textsuperscript{225}

**Iconography**

**Period of the Artwork**

This scene is played out in a domestic dwelling, in a desert near a mine site located in Western Australia. This is alluded to as the eye is drawn to the opened door revealing the outside red earth, at the edge of a roadside marked by a yellow line. The presence of a FIFO miner with wings and in a hard hat (Figure 4:14), seen running off into a red-earthed desert scape dates it to the end of the twentieth century when the demand for workers at isolated mine sites was so immediate, and so great, that there was no time to construct accommodation for the workers, so they had to be brought in by aircraft from regional towns and cities.\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{225} The winning artworks are celebrated through the associated publications and media outlets of the many sponsors of the Mandorla Art Award; also, through the ABC Radio Program – The Spirit of Things, *Art Almanac* – an online magazine and through various Christian organisations’ chosen media.

\textsuperscript{226} FIFO is an abbreviation for a miner who “flies in and flies out” to work for a period of several days or weeks to a mine site.
Characterisation of Gabriel

The artist has chosen not to use any of the traditional symbols or motifs when depicting the angel Gabriel. Instead, the artist has characterized Gabriel as part Maori warrior with unusual facial markings (Figure 4:15) and part Maori folk-lore character (called "patupaiarehe") with a quiver in which are stems of wheat (Figure 4:15).\(^{227}\) In Maori story-telling, the patupaiarehe would sometimes put people under a spell and steal them away. In this unusual interpretation, Gabriel is in a dynamic posture, as he intrudes (evident by the forceful position of his feet) into the personal space of Mary, whether it is in haste or excitement is unclear. Both figures are looking in the same direction towards the left of the viewer out passed the frame of the image. The brown colour of his shoes and hat has traditionally signified mortification, mourning and humility however, in this case, it would be considered just part of Gabriel’s attire because these attributes are not normally associated with the angel Gabriel.\(^{228}\) The angel Gabriel is wearing some kind of green scaly (printed) undershirt over which it a

\(^{227}\) The absence of Gabriel’s whakapapa – or genealogy as part of the tattoo on his face could be an artistic decision or because Gabriel is an angel and therefore has no ancestry. Furthermore, the absence of any tattooing on centre forehead, which is rank, position in life lines of rank – hapu – is curious because in Tradition Gabriel is considered to be an archangel. See David. R. Simmons and Ko Te Riria, Moko Rangatira: Māori Tattoo (Auckland, NZ: Reed, 1999), 25. Interestingly, Maori weaponry does not include arrows or the need of quivers. See Basil Keane, "Riri - Traditional Māori Warfare - Rākau Māori – Māori Weapons and Their Uses," in Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

\(^{228}\) Sill, A Handbook of Symbols, 29.
green collarless polo shirt. On Gabriel’s pocket is the musical symbol of the treble clef alluding to his position amongst the angelic choirs. His large wings are life-like and extended. He uses one of his wings to cover Mary. This portrayal of Gabriel is very different to what a viewer expects to find in a painting of the Annunciation, but the overall impression is essentially the same. Gabriel’s arrival is generally understood to be sudden and unexpected and his person is understood to be intimidating. In this image these characteristics are achieved by the strength and movement (of his body and wings) and his uniqueness (from the unusualness of his features and of his garb).


Characterisation of Mary

The depiction of Mary in this work is not archetypal. Mary is wearing an inscrutable expression on her rather pallid, strong and mature face on which the corners of her mouth turn slightly downward; her cloche style bonnet is trimmed with lace detail (Figure 4:15). The brooch at the v-join of her collar appears to be made up of a large

229 Just as the rabbis commented (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 39.7; Midrash Ruth Rabbah 3.9) that Ruth was chaste in her wording when she asked Boaz to have marital relations with her by saying to him “I am Ruth your handmaid, spread therefore your cloak (literally, “wing”: kanaph) over your handmaid for you are my next-of-kin” (Ruth 3:9). Tallith, is another Aramaic-Hebrew word for cloak, which is derived from tellal meaning ‘shadow’.
ruby encircled with small pearls. The rubies symbolise the blood of Christ, and pearls which are regarded as “the most precious jewel” are a symbol of salvation, which is “worth more than all the treasures of earth.”  

The brooch draws the viewer’s attention to the grey undergarment. Traditionally, grey is considered a lifeless colour and is used to signify mortification, mourning and humility.  

The use of the colour grey, as seen on Mary’s undergarment and her expressionless face, leaves the viewer wondering why Mary’s emotions would be in such a melancholic state; which is different to Mary’s facial expressions in the other artworks. The original text also makes no inference of Mary being melancholy. Mary is seated in an ornate chair which is on a colourfully designed fringed floor rug in a domestic setting. A posy of banksia flowers, blue Leschenaultia and wattle sprigs, which are a reference to the spring wildflowers of Western Australia, rests on her lap as the winged patupaiarehe warrior-like character grips her right hand (Figure 4:16).  

The other hand is obscured from view by the close proximity of the winged patupaiarehe warrior. Mary’s whole demeanour is somewhat difficult to read because it seems wooden and yet yielding simultaneously. This version of Mary is not of a young woman nor a particularly attractive one, which may surprise or even disappoint the viewer who is used to seeing Mary traditionally portrayed as young and beautiful.

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232 Also known as “tūrehu” - “Some Māori are fair-skinned, pale, albino or red-headed people” or “fairy folk - mythical being of human form with light skin and fair hair” John C. Moorfield, "Tūrehu,” in *The Māori Dictionary* (Auckland: Longman/Pearson Education New Zealand 2011).

“Patupaiarehe” are “fairy folk - fair-skinned mythical people who live in the bush on mountains. Although like humans in appearance, the belief is that they do not eat cooked food and are afraid of fires.” John C. Moorfield, "Patupaiarehe," in *The Māori Dictionary* (Auckland: Longman/Pearson Education New Zealand, 2011). In Māori folklore these pale-skinned, fairlylike, supernatural beings would sometimes put people under a spell and steal them away. The patupaiarehe had light skin, and red or fair hair. Historian James Cowan states that “they were a lighter complexion than Māori; their hair was of a dull golden or reddish hue, urukehu, such as is sometimes seen in Maori of today.” James Cowan, "The Patu-Paiarehe: Notes on Maori Folk-Tales of the Fairy People. Part II," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 30, no. 3(119) (1921). Unlike Māori, they were never tattooed. Martin Wikaira, 'Patupaiarehe - Patupaiarehe and ponaturi', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/patupaiarehe/page-1.
In this artwork, the artist seems to have presumed Mary’s emotions to be in turmoil as she contemplates the magnitude of what she is being presented with by the angel. Or possibly, everything is happening so fast, Mary has yet to process and consider the consequences of what is taking place. In this depiction of Mary, the artist challenges the viewer to see Mary from another perspective and to perhaps see her role in the history of salvation differently as well.

Since the Early European artists were commissioned, they were informed by theologians. This contemporary work was for entry in an art award, so the artist would therefore be personally responsible for researching and interpreting the theology that was to be communicated in the submitted work. This unusual depiction of the Annunciation challenges so many aspects of the Lukan pericope in the mind of the viewer, not in the least is Mary’s response. It is reasonable to surmise that the rushed entry into this confined domestic space by the winged patupaiarehe warrior-like angel has caused everything to be moved from its position, as he accosts Mary, whose legs are firmly crossed, by throwing his leg over her body. This unification of the two figures forms a heart shape and strongly implies a sexual intimacy but the expression on the face of Mary does not indicate that this intimacy is enjoyed or welcomed; in fact, it appears more like resignation or submission or even sheer terror – because
angels in the Old Testament are terrifying. The artist may have been referencing Ruth when she asked Boaz to have marital relations with her by saying to him “I am Ruth your handmaid, spread therefore your cloak (literally, “wing”: kanaph) over your handmaid for you are my next-of-kin” (Ruth 3:9).

The presence of a dog (Figure 4:17) traditionally symbolizes the watchfulness and fidelity of a figure, and by its proximity to Mary is safe to assume it refers to her. The apparent chaos caused by Gabriel’s arrival, evident in the disarranged furniture, the figure of a fly-in fly-out (FIFO) angel rushing off into a desert mining landscape in the background and a dog has not flustered the figure of Mary in any way. Traditional motifs relating to the Holy Spirit, such as a dove hovering above Mary’s head, are linked to what Gabriel said to Mary in Luke 1: 35. None these motifs or symbols of the Holy Spirit are present, and therefore the viewer may be left wondering if Mary’s eventual pregnancy was through the agency of the Holy Spirit or perhaps through the intervention of the angel Gabriel as this depiction of the Maori warrior patupaiarehe angel suggests. Or maybe the absence of the Divine Presence motif is meant to imply no divine intervention in the conception of Mary’s forthcoming child and that the child was conceived normally.

**Art Analysis**

The vibrant and strong colour palette is dominated by Mary’s red dress which is the painting’s focal point (and is further accentuated by the red mounting and black frame). On the aqua coloured table is a knife and a single fish on a plate. In the background, is an open brown carved door, through which a FIFO miner with wings (probably referencing an angel) and in a hard hat can be seen running off into a red-earthed desert scape, with his arms up and holding what appears to be a bow. The many lines and irregular angles in this composition refer to a quick and sudden movement. Other items in the room are to scale. The painting’s surface is a combination of both smooth and rough brush strokes, and details, such as the patterns on the rug and chair are executed in such a way as to give effect rather than information.

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235 Abbreviation for a miner who “flies in and flies out” to work for a period of several days or weeks to a mine site.
At first glance *Ante Lucem* appears to be a modern-day version of a work done by an early Dutch master by the inclusion of the costume on the figure of Mary. However, closer inspection reveals very few recognisable icons traditionally associated with the Annunciation. The many angular lines and the awkward positioning of the furniture, walls and floor within the work, all indicate the environment having been disturbed by strong, rapid movement. Additionally, the presence of a dog, which appears to be circling the chair excitedly in which Mary is seated, has added to the pandemonium created by the arrival of the winged Maori warrior *patupaiarehe* representation of Gabriel. By using the figures in this way, the artist communicates that the arrival of an angel is a tumultuous event. The presence of this Maori folk-lore like character, seems misplaced as the viewer considers the possibility that it is an oblique reference to the Nephilim (who are peoples of gigantic stature with superhuman strength and who the offspring of marriages between "daughters of humans" and "sons of God") in Genesis 6 and Numbers 13.  

It also challenges the idea of Mary’s child being a fusion of two natures: human and divine elements, thus challenging Jesus’ full humanity and full divinity. Its mixture of styles, genres and symbols, and the absence of readily distinguishable iconography, make this artwork challenging to relate to the Annunciation without some kind of commentary.

In this artwork can be seen the many references to the theories, ideas and opinions that were circulating in the world of Christian theology following Vatican II and, in the decades preceding the artwork’s creation when not only the moral authority of the Roman Catholic Church was being questioned but her dogmatic teachings as well. During this time in the last century, the pursuit of empirical evidence was considered fundamental in academic thought, and the historicity of Jesus’ was the subject of much research. Many of the ideas that were the subject of speculation or debate are evident in Paul’s artwork; including the possibility of the virgin being raped by the divine or small text

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236 Nephilim in the Bible, Hebrew word of no known meaning, denoting peoples of gigantic stature with superhuman strength. The term is translated as "giants" in the Authorized Version. The Book of Genesis refers to Nephilim as the offspring of marriages between "daughters of humans" and "sons of God." Paul Lagasse and and Columbia University, "Nephilim," in *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (Columbia University Press, 2018). In Gen 6:4 “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.” As well as, Num 13:33 "There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”
the angelic, to the questioning of the Incarnation itself being nothing more than the stuff of legends or folklore. It seems to be questioning and challenging many previously understood or assumed ideas about the Lukan pericope of the Annunciation: including Mary’s characterisation, her response to the angel Gabriel and his role in the event, the characterisation of Gabriel himself and even the agency of God in this conception. The viewer is left with more questions than answers and a disquietude brought about by having the things one believes in being presented in such a confronting format. The overall effect of this artwork is charged with immediacy, energy and emotion; and in many ways reflects the flux of theories, ideas and opinions in the fast-moving pace of the secular world of 1990.

Artwork 4: “Triptych of the Annunciation”
Figure 4: 18 – Artwork 4 Oldfield, Alan. (1990). “The Annunciation.”
Historical Context

The artwork by another Australian artist, Alan John Torming Oldfield (1943-2004), titled *Triptych of the Annunciation*, was also submitted for the 1990 Mandorla Art Award and presently hangs in the New Norcia Museum and Galleries. The historical context in which this artwork was produced was the same as the previous artist, John Paul. Oldfield has twice won the Blake Prize: in 1987, *A High and perpetual shewing of Christ's mother according to Julian of Norwich* and in 1992 *Raft III & Rosemary Valadon – Before the Fall.* During his life he was an artist (painter), curator and a designer for theatre and film in New South Wales as well as a member of the full-time lecturing staff at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education in Sydney (later known as College of Fine Arts, as part of the University of New South Wales), where he remained until just before his death. In 1991 he was promoted to Associate Professor.

Oldfield’s early work was characterised by “crisp, clean abstract paintings which combined a hedonist sensibility with the austerity of hard edge abstraction.” His open line drawings of interiors were Hockney-like in the casting of strong shadows for the furniture and chairs within. His later paintings were in a more meditative style influenced by Italian Renaissance art and his religious faith. He was also active as a theatre/set designer. Oldfield was born in Sydney’s industrial inner west and left school at the age of fourteen with his Intermediate Certificate and enrolled in the National Art School at East Sydney Technical College. In his youth, he found spiritual solace in the Anglo-Catholic traditions of Sydney’s Christ Church St Laurence. This stimulated him to look more to the great aesthetic traditions of medieval and renaissance Europe. Physical and spiritual, explorations and journeys were a characteristic of much of his later painting. Oldfield created two other artworks titled “Annunciation” in 1980 and also “Annunciation, III,” in 1991; both of these artworks were sold at auction and all of the Annunciation series use the same colour palates. Oldfield has completed many other works with religious themes however he varied the

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237 Alan Oldfield shared the 1987 Blake Prize with Ian Grant’s work “The Monks Cloak.”
239 Bolton et al., "Oldfield, Alan".
240 “He was the designer for Rumours and Afterworlds for the Sydney Dance company from 1978 to 1980, and also designed Beyond Twelve for the Australian Ballet in 1987.” Bolton et al., "Oldfield, Alan".
style and colour palates. He preferred the mediums of painting, paper and with prints and graphics.\textsuperscript{241}

**Material Culture**

The *Triptych of the Annunciation* is an acrylic painting, measuring 78 centimetres by 109 centimetres in size. The black and timber frame in which it is housed has gold coloured acrylic paint that has been applied with a brush around the frames of each of the panels. Because of its size it can be relatively easily moved. Where it is displayed, a viewer can stand before the artwork and comfortably inspect its details at eye level in the gallery which is indirectly illuminated. The work is divided into three panels, each with a specific scene depicting key moments of salvation history.

**Iconography**

**Historical Period**

The clean lines, strong colours and uncluttered minimalism with which each of the scenes are depicted in the *Triptych of the Annunciation* were stylistic features of artists such as Picasso, Hockney and Matisse. In this work, Oldfield has melded all three styles, creating his own unique style, a practice that was common in artistic circles of late twentieth century Australia.\textsuperscript{242}

**Characterisation of Gabriel**

The facial features of Gabriel’s are barely distinguishable. He is wearing a wide-sleeved, long loose garment called a dalmatic, which is a vestment worn by deacons, bishops and monarchs at their coronation.\textsuperscript{243} His feet hang softly showing his elevation is effortless as he hovers toward the top of the image. He is positioned parallel to the other angels in each of the panels of the triptych. The colour purple has always been associated with royalty and the purple sash across Gabriel’s body indicates his elite status among the angels.\textsuperscript{244} His large wings are handsome in their

\textsuperscript{241} "Australian Art Sales Digest". accessed https://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search/?Name=alan+oldfield&all=1&Scope=2&Submit=


\textsuperscript{244} Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols*, 152.
simplicity. The design on the thin scapular is intricate in detail. Even though Gabriel faces the viewer, his eyes are lowered – perhaps in reverence or perhaps in prayer. He has one hand raised with two fingers extended symbolizing the two-fold nature of Jesus: human and divine nature. Three of his other fingers are bent symbolizing the Trinity. His raised hand could also be in the manner of an ancient orator. Gabriel’s physical proportions make him shorter than Mary if they were to be placed side by side. Unlike the gospel account, the angel’s gentle composure is reassuring and commanding as he appears more like a sentinel holding a sabre than a messenger holding a sceptre.

Characterisation of Mary

Stylistically, Mary’s face resembles that of Gabriel. Furthermore, her face is pale, fresh and simple, her eyes either lowered or closed and her mouth in a quiet smile and otherwise lacking the details of the artworks examined earlier. Across her abdomen, which is belted by a red sash, Mary’s arms are gently folded leaving the viewer to speculate why. Is Mary crossing her arms in prayer, as she modestly draws the edges of her veil together? Is she protecting the presence of the Holy Child within her? Or are her arms are embracing her abdomen in longing anticipation for the child she has just consented to have? The white of her veil speaks of her purity and the blue of her dress indicates heavenly truth, her spiritual love, constancy and fidelity. She faces but does not look at the viewer; she is quietly composed, eyes lowered as if in contemplation. The lilies in the deep blue vase beside her (Figure 4:14) refer to her virginity. The purple coloured trim on the collar and hem of Mary’s garment allude to both sorrow and penitence, also love and truth but also reminds the viewer of Mary’s regal status. In this minimalist depiction of Mary, the artist communicates that Mary is an uncomplicated figure; reassuring in her recognisability. There are no motifs or symbols referring to promises in the Old Testament related to Mary other than the branch connecting the centre panel to the panel on the viewer’s left, which refers to the Old Testament prophecy that “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa 11:1).

245 The colour red is associated with “passion, blood, and hate, of power and action, of sin and suffering” has been placed about her waist at approximately where she would carry the Divine Child. Sill, A Handbook of Symbols, 29.
246 Sill, A Handbook of Symbols, 29.
A feature of this artwork is for the viewer to constantly re-evaluate what is seen. Notably absent from this artwork is any readily identifiable symbol or motif that denotes the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, the inclusion of the Holy Spirit in this contemporary work of art is very subtle. It is communicated as a beam of light which is difficult to immediately detect because of the many shadows created by the different light sources. A beam of side light, diagonally crossing the triptych from the top of the first panel [Expulsion from Eden] into the second panel [The Annunciation] and continuing into the third panel [The Resurrection] when the triptych is read from left to right is the way this artist depicts the Holy Spirit. This theatrically dramatic side lighting in this contemporary artwork communicates the existence of the presence of the Holy Spirit before Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden to the resurrection where the side lighting finishes on the side of the angel’s head. Once identifying the presence of the Holy Spirit, the viewer is prompted to consider which moment in the Annunciation pericope the artist has depicted. Is it the time Mary has just given her “fiat” to Gabriel and is about to be “overshadow[ed] by the Holy Spirit” (Lk 1:35)? Or is it the moment when the Holy Spirit is overshadowing Mary, and Gabriel is witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit at Mary’s conception of Jesus? If it is the former moment, then idea of Gabriel’s presence being in the role of guardian of Mary and the Divine Child she now carries, is apposite. The original text of the pericope does not mention Gabriel’s presence or absence at the time of the conception of the Divine Child. Because this artwork should be read in its entirety from left to right, its rendering of the Annunciation pericope is placed only halfway through the story of the salvation history.
Figure 4: 19 - Oldfield, Alan. (1990). “Triptych of the Annunciation” - vase, lilies and Mary in detail.
Art Analysis

The artist’s understanding of the power and dramatic effect of theatre are used effectively in the composition of this artwork. The gold colour of the frame not only highlights the artwork but the importance of the subject matter which it portrays. In the top part of the painting, is a blue sky and what appears to be a faint remainder of a few clouds can be seen through window-like apertures. Hovering in front of these is the winged angel Gabriel holding a sceptre, dressed similarly to the other angels in the artwork. On the far left of The Annunciation painting is a long thin branch which continues through to the adjacent image of The Expulsion from Eden making the link for the viewer between the two events. Alternatively, it could be viewed as the “tree of knowledge (of good and evil)” in Genesis 2:17 or the “tree of life” in Genesis 3:17, 3:22, 3:34 and Proverbs 3:18, 15:4 or Revelations 22:2, 22:14, 22:19. The theme for Mandorla that year was “Annunciation,” so the artist has seen the link between these three events. This is the story of salvation history. Positioned between two tumultuous events, The Expulsion from Eden and The Resurrection of Christ from the Tomb, The Annunciation is by contrast a calm and serene image because the figures are not in a dynamic posture. This work is done in acrylic paint. At the bottom of the painting of the Annunciation is a concave step drawing the viewer into this specific area, an intimate space - possibly that of the sanctuary. However, there is no mention of the sanctuary or of the Temple in the Lukan text and there are no other symbols of the temple. Once focus is on the happenings within this frame of the artwork, a sense of serenity, calm and order is recognised by the viewer. Despite the crisp and clean abstract rendering of The Annunciation painting, the influence of the Italian Renaissance style reveals his religious sensibility within the artwork’s sharp simplicity. Even though there is no visible symbol or motif indicating the Divine Presence, the peaceful atmosphere evoked in this visual narrative suggests it through the use of lighting and challenges the viewer to contemplate the power of God not otherwise obviously represented within this artwork.

By centralising *The Annunciation* in this artwork, it emphasizes the significance of the Incarnation in salvation history as well as providing the viewer with a heightened sense of intimacy in the enclosed and peaceful space. Furthermore, having the image framed within the actual frame itself adds to the viewer’s experience of witnessing the Annunciation event within a private, personal space. In contrast to the figures in the images on either side of her, Mary’s composure is very passive and contemplative (which is consistent with Mary’s disposition in the Lukan text) as she gently leans back against the table behind her, over which a small section of her white veil drapes. Mary’s white veil implies her innocence and purity and the table is an ordinary everyday item; which when combined together allude to the purity of the life of Mary.

In the *Triptych of the Annunciation*, Oldfield has composed a succinct account of the history of salvation in which the Incarnation is central. The repetition of colours used throughout the artwork gives a continuity to the story of salvation. The familiar references to the established artistic traditions of the Italian Renaissance also reinforce the continuity in the narrative.  The stylistically modern interpretation of the Lukan pericope of the Annunciation (Lk 1:28-38) makes it relevant to the viewer by showing this old and well-known story as it is understood in the contemporary context of an art gallery or art competition. Whilst initially the separated panels seem to be connected, closer inspection reveals that they are quite different scenes of an ongoing story. This artwork relies heavily on the emotion it evokes. The contrasts made between the despair and fear created in the Old Testament account of the *Expulsion from Eden*, to the peace and order brought about by the fulfilment of God’s Messianic promise to humankind in the *Annunciation* in the New Testament to the joy and power and excitement of the *Resurrection of Christ* takes the viewer through the spectrum of human emotion before leaving the viewer with a sense of wonder and awe for God. It is important to recognise the centrality of the figure of Mary in this artwork; for within her womb is Jesus, the Christ. Moreover, to her left, at the very centre of the artwork is a blue vase containing a stem of lilies alluding to and acknowledging the virginal purity of this woman, which confirms the identity of the child within her womb.

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In Oldfield’s artwork are echoes of Pope John Paul II’s Papal Encyclical of March 25, 1987 *Redemptoris Mater* regarding the Lukan account of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38). In the centre panel of the triptych, the *Annunciation*, is an allusion to Section 9, *Part I – Mary in the Mystery of Christ Redemptoris Mater* is clear:

This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of man and of the universe: Mary is “full of grace,” because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled.

The positioning of the blue and white vase highlights the point made by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* that “… the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.” 250 Oldfield makes the same distinction in the artwork as John Paul II does in *Redemptoris Mater* – that the Annunciation is primarily Christological because of the identification of the child whom she carries, not Mariological. 251 Thus, Mary’s virginal conception is not only fitting but also fundamental to the identity of Christ. 252

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250 In his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul II explains “election” as “The fruit of this love is ‘the election’ of which the Letter to the Ephesians speaks. On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save humankind through a sharing in his own life (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life.” Part 1 – Mary in the Mystery of the Church - Point 8.
