



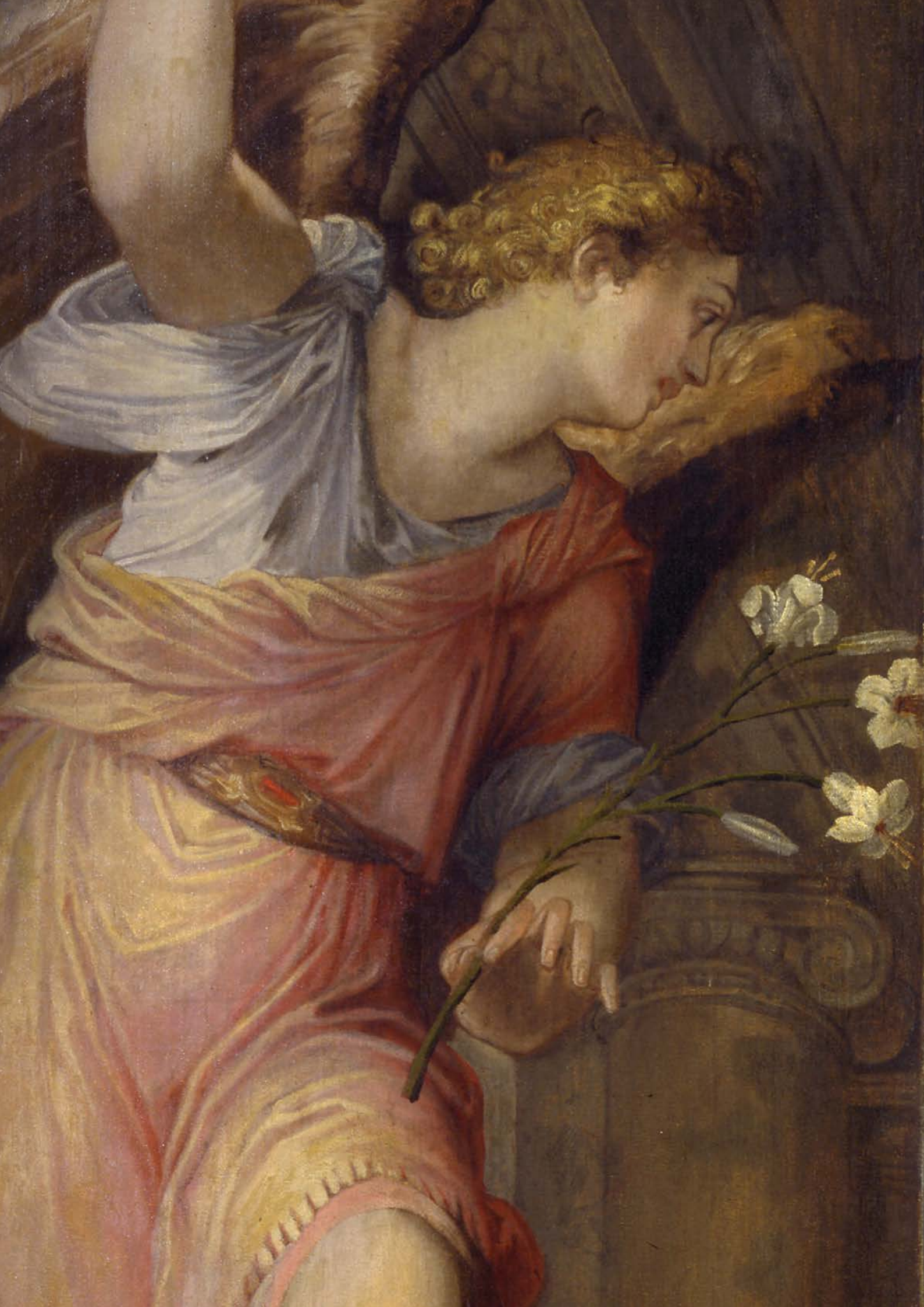
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JENNIFER CANTU
VERONESE'S ANNUNCIATIONS
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Gli **Uffizi**
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Jennifer Cantu

VERONESE'S ANNUNCIATIONS

Paolo Caliari, called Veronese (1528-88), created many paintings of the Annunciation; twenty-six are documented by Veronese or by his workshop¹ *The Annunciation to the Virgin* (figure 1) in the collection of the Uffizi Galleries is the earliest of these works².

Paolo was born in 1528 in Verona. By 1541, he was living in the house of Antonio Badile (1518-1560), whose family had trained painters for generations. Paolo's talent was so exceptional that by 1544 he had left Badile to train with Giovanni Caroto (1488-1563/66), who had more experience than the younger Badile, and was known for his studies of antiquity³. Caroto and Badile were well connected with noble families, which included relatives of the Caliari family⁴. One of Paolo's contemporaries, Gianbattista Zelotti (1526-1578), was an apprentice with Veronese in the workshop of Antonio Badile in the early 1540's.

Michele Sanmicheli (1484-1559), a prominent architect of Verona, was instrumental in Paolo's earliest commissions. In 1545, along with Zelotti and other apprentices, Paolo's first commission was to fresco the vaulted ceilings of two rooms in the palace of Count Lodovico di Canossa in Verona, designed by Sanmicheli⁵.

Over the next five years, Paolo's reputation as a painter and the noble connections of Badile, Caroto, and Sanmicheli garnered him many commissions in both fresco and canvas. These works brought him to the attention of Venetian patrons who commissioned him for works in the city⁶. By 1554, Veronese had left Verona to live in Venice. Among the works of Veronese most valued by Venetians were his devotional narratives honoring the Virgin Mary. Venetian devotion to Mary blended civic and sacred ideas⁷. The myth of the city's founding on Annunciation Day (March 25), 421 CE, when the first stones of the Church of San Giacomo di Rialto were laid, led the citizens to claim kinship with the Virgin and encouraged the Venetian belief that Mary as Virgin of the Annunciation blessed their city and its activities⁸. For Venetians, the wisdom and connection with the divine of their patron saint were a natural part of the city⁹. Present in Veronese's Annunciations is a rendition of a wise Mary aware of her part in the redemption of humanity and ready to respond¹⁰. The city's veneration of the Virgin as patroness and protector called for a woman of strength and wisdom, one



1

Paolo Veronese, *Annunciation to the Virgin*,
1551-56 ca., oil on canvas, 172 x 291 cm,
Gallerie degli Uffizi

able to shield the inhabitants of the lagoon from harm, rather than a young girl who cowers in fear. Placing the event in a version of a contemporary Venetian setting emphasizes Mary's connection to the city. She is a woman of nobility, a representative of the citizens of Venice, themselves pious, obedient, graceful, and, through the vision of Saint Mark, singled out by divine favor.

Veronese's earliest *Annunciation* (figure 1), the horizontal canvas now in the Uffizi, Florence, painted c. 1551-56 was in the collections of the Venetian agent Paolo del Sera in the early 1600s. In 1654, the painting was purchased by the Florentine Leopoldo de' Medici, and it entered the collection of the Uffizi Gallery in 1675. The original patron and purpose for the work are unknown. Its horizontal composition, as well as the sculptural weight of the figures, recalls Titian's scene of *The Annunciation* (c. 1515-1540s), bequeathed by a donor to the Confraternity of San Rocco in 1555¹¹ (figure 2). However, the symmetry and three-part division of the Uffizi canvas are characteristic of central Italian scenes of the *Annunciation*. The figures of the Virgin and the Angel encounter each other within a portico; between them, a passage of monumental columns leads to an enclosed garden. These elements suggest that the Uffizi painting was an early version of the *Annunciation* painted in 1578 for the Scuola dei Mercanti (figure 3).

imagines



2

Titian, *The Annunciation*,
1515-1540 ca., oil on canvas, 166 x 266 cm,
Scuola di San Rocco, Venice



3

Veronese, *The Annunciation*,
1578, oil on canvas, cm 275 x 543,
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice (photograph by J. Cantu)



4 | 5

Gianbattista Zelotti, *Angel of the Annunciation*, *Virgin of the Annunciation*, 1551 ca., each 210 x 91 cm, Museo Civico, Padua (photograph by Giuliano Ghiraldini, courtesy of Musei Civici Padova)

Listed by the Uffizi as a work of Veronese, this Annunciation (figure 1) has also been attributed to Gianbattista Zelotti¹². Examination of the Uffizi painting reveals that the facial features of Gabriel and Mary have the softness of Zelotti, but the folds and highlighting of the clothing are characteristic of Veronese. The dynamic grouping of the cloud of putti with the dove suggest Veronese, although the dove itself resembles the one in the *Angel of the Annunciation* and *Virgin of the Annunciation*, (figures. 4, 5). made for the organ doors of the Church of the Misericordia, Padua.

These were formerly thought to have been painted by Veronese but are currently attributed to Zelotti. Until the 1950s, art historians were divided in their opinions as to whether Veronese or Zelotti was the author of the Uffizi work¹³. The *Angel of the Annunciation* and *Virgin of the Annunciation* in Padua were used to support both points



6

Paolo Veronese, *Coronation of the Virgin*,
1555, oil on canvas, 200 x 170 cm,
Chiesa di San Sebastiano, Venice

of view, while comparison with Veronese's *Coronation of the Virgin* (figure 6) and related works in San Sebastiano completed around the same time led to the consensus that Veronese was the author of the Uffizi's *Annunciation to the Virgin*, which became the prototype for later Annunciation paintings by Veronese and his workshop¹⁴. Though its patron and intended site are unknown, the Uffizi's *Annunciation to the Virgin* (figure 1) seems to have been impressive to the patrons of Venice; the Scuola dei Mercanti *Annunciation* and the multiple paintings derived from that prototype possess the same quality of serene monumentality. The many Annunciations made by Veronese and his shop suggest that patrons sought him out for this theme. By the last decades of the sixteenth century, he had become a specialist painter of Annunciation scenes in Venice.

Provenance of Paolo Veronese, *The Annunciation to the Virgin*, c. 1551-56, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence: by 1654 the painting was in the collection of Paolo del Sera, Venice. Purchased in 1654 by Leopoldo de Medici, Florence, the painting entered the collection of the Uffizi Gallery in 1675; displayed in the Palatine Apartments, Pitti Palace, Florence, from 1677 until 1798, the painting was moved to the Uffizi Gallery on August 21, 1798. During World War II, it was taken to the war shelters of the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano on June 6, 1940. When the painting was returned to Florence (after World War II), it was placed in the Silver Museum, Pitti Palace, and it has been in the Uffizi Gallery since July 11, 1951.

Condition: Restored in 1975.

NOTES

1 Pignatti 1976, vol.1 pp. 107, 111, 114, 144, 161-163, 180, 184, 204-205, 207, 209, 213-214, 235, 243-246.

2 The placement of the Uffizi's *The Annunciation to the Virgin* as the earliest of Veronese's Annunciations is based on my research.

3 Gisolfi 2017, p. 39. For detailed information on Veronese's training in Verona, see chapter 3, "Paolo's Training, First Works, Early Collaboration," pp. 39-69.

4 Ead., p. 40.

5 Rosand 2012, p. 15.

6 Id., p. 16.

7 Goffen 1986, p. 139.

8 Rosand 2001, pp. 12-13.

9 Zamperini 2014, p. 177.

10 Always pure and fully devoted to God, Mary lived in the temple of Jerusalem from the age of three until the age of twelve, and during that time she was granted visions of God and visits with angels, according to accounts in apocryphal gospels and devotional texts. For references to her life in the temple of Jerusalem, see Ehrman - Plese 2011, chaps. 8-11 and de Voragine - Ryan 1993, vol. 2 pp. 152-153.

11 Wethey 1969, p. 70.

12 Between 1654 and 1948 the attribution of the work went from Veronese to Zelotti, to the school of Veronese, to the studio of Zelotti and then back to Veronese (Paolucci 1979, p. 585; Ragghianti 1968, pp. 123-124).

13 Pignatti 1976, p. 107.

14 Id., p. 111.

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