

ART.202

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This painting is a clear depiction of the annunciation of the Virgin Mary: a biblical scene that has been recreated countless times throughout history in different regions, styles, and time periods. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to announce her immaculate conception of Jesus Christ. This particular representation of the story takes place in a domestic, contemporary setting, providing a clue as to when it was created. The figures are set in a rather decadent bedroom; Mary kneeling before the bed, holding a book, as a richly garmented angel appears beside her. The artist also included certain icons that are often associated with Mary, like the lilies in the bottom left corner and the water pot- both symbols of her purity.

Many elements in this painting are unmistakably similar to the central panel of the Merode Altarpiece, a 15th century work by the Master of Flemalle, which also portrays these religious figures and symbols in a contemporary setting. This was something more artists were beginning to do during this time period, especially in Flanders. There was an emphasis on Christ's humanity becoming more apparent in art, allowing viewers to actively participate in these scenes. This was accomplished through more naturalistic portrayals, rather than highly idealized representations seen in earlier time periods. Although Mary is still slightly idealized with her narrow shoulders, long neck, and flawless skin- the use of shading, absence of a halo, and other subtle details give her a much more realistic appearance, highlighting her humanity. In Northern Europe, specifically, artists began paying more attention to detail and symbolism in their works. This painting exhibits such details, from the textures and patterns in the fabrics, floor, and interior structures. The artist also used linear perspective to create the illusion of depth.

True mathematical perspective had not really been employed in Northern European art at this time, so there is still the high placement of the horizon line prominent in this piece. Nevertheless, the use of said horizon line, and the orthogonals receding towards it, successfully gives this painting the depth that the artist was looking to create.

When comparing this painting to works done by artists like Jan Van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, there are extremely notable similarities. The style and techniques used are consistent with that of 15th century Flemish art. Paintings like this were in high demand among merchants and other members of society. As art became more accessible to those outside of the church, especially, it became less glorified and idealistic, and more relatable to a different audience. Depicting these sacred figures, as well as their religious symbols, in a more natural setting was a typical approach that Flemish artists took during this time period. The elements in this painting, composition, subtle use of linear perspective, and attention to detail and symbolism all point to Renaissance art in Northern Europe.

