

RIZI, FRANCISCO (1614-1685)

The Annunciation

Artist and date: Francisco Rizi ca. 1663

Oil on canvas, 205 x 282 cm

Barcelona, Rector's Conference Room, University of Barcelona

Permanent loan from Prado Museum, no. P-5319

Francisco Rizi de Guevara, born in Madrid in 1608, was the son of the painter Antonio Ricci de Ancona, one of the assistants of the Italian master Federico Zuccaro who remained in Spain after Zuccaro's departure. Rizi is considered the most talented student of Vicente Carducho (1576-1638), who trained him to make painstaking preliminary studies and instilled a rigorous sense of composition through the execution of countless preparatory drawings. During his training in Madrid, Rizi's painting developed a dynamic compositional forcefulness that made him one of the leading artists in Spain. He became the foremost representative of Baroque painting in the Madrid school and in 1656 was appointed *pintor del Rey*, or painter to the King.

To the Spanish Baroque, Rizi's innovations brought the free, quick, fragmentary brushwork of the Venetian colourists.

The Annunciation appears to form part of a series of canvases on the evangelical subject that have been inexplicably omitted from the sources. The painter produced various treatments of the subject. The oldest, dating to 1655, hangs in the altarpiece of the cathedral of Plasencia, followed by this work (1663), the example hanging in the Prado Museum (1665) and the painting in the Gil Varela Collection in Madrid (1671).

Our painting reveals Rizi's mastery of composition, perfectly balancing the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Archangel. Rizi uses light to organize the composition and pick out the main motif of the scene, the apparition of the divine messenger on the right-hand side of the canvas. Opposite, the figure of Maria, in half-light, kneels on a rug executed in painstaking detail in the manner of Lotto, and humbly receives the holy message.

The importance and quality of the painting stem from its formal characteristics. The artist's work is marked by technical freedom and dynamism heightening the movement of the vertical folds of the garments and their exuberant colour. The lively gestures of the angel invite parallels with the figures of Rubens. In addition, Rizi's figures reflect his predilection for voluptuous figuration and an interest in mass, borrowed from the work of Ribera. In the background, the marble parapet, backlit, refers back to the grand architectural scenery used by Veronese to emphasize the action in his monumental canvases. Behind, you can see a rosebush, associated with the Virgin Mary. It rises beneath a break in the thick clouds that fill the heavens. A vivid effect of light enhances the heavenly apparition of the angels in stark contrast to the grey sky on the horizon. In the distance, a storm advances, introducing dramatic tension into the scene. Through the use of contrasting light, the picture is captivatingly Baroque in nature, with the works of Tintoretto and Rubens as its most significant influences.

(RB)

Essential Bibliography:

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