



Veronese and Workshop  
Veronese  
Venetian, 1528 - 1588  
Italian 16th Century

## *The Annunciation*

c. 1583/1584

oil on canvas

overall: 98.4 x 75.3 cm (38 3/4 x 29 5/8 in.)

framed: 123 x 99.1 x 7.3 cm (48 7/16 x 39 x 2 7/8 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1959.9.6

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### ENTRY

This is one of a group of relatively small-scale *Annunciations* by Veronese and his workshop, which by common consent date to the last decade of the painter's career. An obvious point of reference is provided by the large altarpiece in the Escorial, which Veronese signed and dated in 1583 [fig. 1]; and although it is not such a close replica of the altarpiece as another, smaller version, formerly in the Kisters Collection, Kreuzlingen, [1] the Gallery's picture shares many features of composition with that in the Escorial. As in the altarpiece, the Angel Gabriel points upward to a vision of God the Father surrounded by clouds and angels; between the figures of God the Father and the Virgin, kneeling at her prie-dieu, is another blaze of light, containing the Dove of the Holy Spirit; and in both pictures the architectural setting includes a tall fluted column behind Gabriel and a marble balustrade, which closes off the paved foreground and leads to a view of the Virgin's *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden. Most of these compositional elements are clearly derived from Titian's *Annunciation* of circa 1536, now lost, but recorded in the well-circulated engraving of 1537 by Gian Jacopo Caraglio [fig. 2] (and, probably more accurately, in a workshop copy in Galashiels, Scotland). [2] In the Gallery's picture, Veronese has added a number of details traditionally associated with the iconography of the Annunciation, including the view of the Virgin's *thalamus*, or bedchamber, on the right, and the crystal carafe in front of her, symbolic of her purity. The cat, here seen crouching in front of the balustrade, occasionally also appears in scenes of the Annunciation, but it is not clear whether in the present case any symbolic allusion is intended. [3]

There exists some critical disagreement about the chronological relationship between the Escorial *Annunciation* and the present picture, and also on the extent of workshop collaboration in the latter. Critics who have insisted on the high, autograph quality of the painting include Rodolfo Pallucchini and Teresio Pignatti; [4] others, however, including Daniel Catton Rich, Edoardo Arslan, Remigio Marini (proposing the intervention of an assistant such as Benedetto Caliari or Francesco Montemezzano), Richard Cocke, and Fern Rusk Shapley (downgrading her own previous assessment), have judged it to be essentially a shop product. [5] Indeed, while the intervention of the master is evident in the energetic brushwork and rich scumbling, especially the execution of the God the Father group and the background is more perfunctory and may be regarded as the work of an assistant. Pallucchini proposed a dating to circa 1580/1583, apparently because he justifiably regarded the altarpiece as a work of collaboration and considered it logical that what he regarded as the finer painting should precede the less fine. He was followed in this opinion by Pignatti in 1976. [6]

In his monograph of 1995, however, Pignatti described the Escorial altarpiece as the first in the series of Veronese's late *Annunciations*, an apparent change of opinion that seems fully justified. The Escorial picture was commissioned as part of the multipaneled *retablo* for the high altar of the royal basilica; [7] and although it was never in fact incorporated, it was clearly painted according to strict instructions regarding subject and dimensions and according to precise information about its intended placing at the bottom left of the ensemble. Commissioned to paint a large *Annunciation* for King Philip II of Spain, Veronese would have found it natural to draw inspiration from Titian's version of half a century earlier. Although he would have known this picture only in the form of Caraglio's engraving, Veronese would have been perfectly aware that Titian had sent the original to Spain as a diplomatic gift to Philip's mother, the empress Isabella. [8] By drawing a parallel between his own version of the *Annunciation* and that by his recently deceased colleague, he would have been paying a gracious compliment to both Titian and Philip, while also perhaps angling to inherit his predecessor's mantle as preferred painter of the Spanish monarch. Then, having met the terms of a major foreign commission, it would have been equally natural for Veronese to have maximized on his invention by producing a number of smaller versions, of greater or lesser quality, for the local market. No longer bound by the intended context of the Escorial altarpiece, Veronese adopted a squarer picture field for the Gallery's picture and showed the light coming from the left rather than from the liturgical south. The pose of the Angel—moving forward, as in Titian's prototype, rather than balletically hovering in

the left corner—may also reflect the change of context and function.

In keeping with the officially sanctioned belief that the city of Venice came into existence on the Feast of the Annunciation in the year 421, the image of the Virgin Annunciate traditionally formed a central element of Venetian political iconography, most notably in the *Annunciation* group represented in the mid-14th century by Guariento on either side of his monumental fresco depicting the Coronation of the Virgin in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Doge's Palace. In a study of Veronese's series of *Annunciations* of the 1580s, Daniel Arasse found it no coincidence that the subject should have found particular success in the context of private devotion in the decade following the destruction of Guariento's fresco by fire (1577) and coinciding with a particularly terrible outbreak of the plague (1575–1577). [9] The author argued that the Venetian authorities, while replacing the *Coronation* with Tintoretto's *Paradise* in the council chamber, actively encouraged the more intimate subject of the Annunciation in the context of private devotion. He also argued that in the post-Tridentine period, the Virgin Mary was more actively promoted as a protector against the plague than the traditional plague saints Sebastian and Roch, and that the dignified, noble style of Veronese was regarded as more appropriate to Marian iconography than that of other leading Venetian painters, such as Tintoretto or Bassano. Although interesting, these arguments remain somewhat speculative, and Arasse did not mention the commission from Philip, which surely provided the most significant stimulus for Veronese's preoccupation with the subject of the Annunciation in the 1580s.

From the time of its earliest known record, at the Carignan sale in Paris in 1742, until its sale at Christie's in 1785, the *Annunciation* was paired with a *Noli Me Tangere* by Veronese of the identical format and dimensions. [10] Since the latter picture has now disappeared, it is difficult to judge whether the two were always intended as pendants. Although their respective subjects are not closely linked, their compositions, involving two figures in close psychological interaction but without physical contact, could have been complementary.

Peter Humfrey

March 21, 2019

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Veronese, *The Annunciation*, 1583, oil on canvas, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo, Escorial, Madrid. Album / Art Resource, NY



**fig. 2** Gian Jacopo Caraglio, after Titian, *The Annunciation*, 1537, engraving, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection

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**NOTES**

[1] For the ex-Kisters picture, see Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocchi, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:448. The authors described it as a preparatory *modello* for the Escorial *Annunciation*, but it seems rather to represent a

derivation from the altarpiece, executed by a member of Veronese's workshop.

- [2] See Aidan Weston-Lewis, "Titian's Lost Annunciation Altarpiece for Murano: An Early Copy," *Artibus et Historiae* 34, no. 68 (2013): 55–59.
- [3] According to George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (New York, 1954), 17, a cat in a representation of the Annunciation may allude to the Devil, who is put to flight by the Incarnation of Christ, or it may refer to a legend that told of a cat giving birth in the stable where Christ was born.
- [4] Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Mostra di Paolo Veronese* (Venice, 1939), 199; Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese* (Venice, 1976), 1:162; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Veronese* (Milan, 1984), 154, 187; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese: Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1991), 290; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese* (Milan, 1995), 2:448.
- [5] Daniel Catton Rich, "An Unpublished Veronese in Chicago," *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (1931): 20; Edoardo Arslan, "Nota su Veronese e Zelotti," *Belle arti* 1, nos. 5–6 (1948): 236; Remigio Marini, *Tutta la pittura di Paolo Veronese* (Milan, 1968), 125–126; Richard Cocke, "Review of *Veronese, L'Opera Completa*, by Terisio Pignatti," *The Burlington Magazine* 119 (1977): 787; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:524–525.
- [6] Terisio Pignatti, *Veronese* (Venice, 1976), 1:162; Terisio Pignatti and Filippo Pedrocco, *Veronese: Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1991), 290.
- [7] Rosemarie Mulcahy, *The Decoration of the Royal Basilica of El Escorial* (Cambridge, 1994), 148–149.
- [8] For the circumstances of the gift, see Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London, 1969), 1:70. Titian's painting, which was later kept at the royal palace of Aranjuez, was destroyed about 1814 during the Peninsular War.
- [9] Daniel Arasse, "Les annonces de Véronèse ou l'atelier de la devotion," in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese*, ed. Massimo Gemin (Venice, 1990), 204–213.
- [10] See Provenance, note 1. As pointed out by Burton Fredericksen (message to Peter Humfrey of Feb. 4, 2009), the two were sold as parts of the same lot at the Carignan, Conti, Poullain, and Vaudreuil sales (see Provenance), while at the Christie's sale of 1785, the *Noli Me Tangere* appears as the following lot (no. 80).

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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*Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*

X-radiographs reveal that strips respectively measuring 7.3 centimeters and 6.4 centimeters wide have been sewn to the original fabric support at the top and bottom. All of the fabrics are plain weave, but these added strips are coarser than the relatively fine main support fabric and were certainly later additions; they were already present by 1781, however, when the composition was engraved. [1] The painting has been lined, and the tacking margins on the left and right edges have been opened up and incorporated into the picture plane.

Microscopic examination has confirmed that the canvas was primed with a dark, reddish-brown ground, and this is visible to the naked eye beneath the thinnest paint layers. The paint was applied fluidly with vigorous brushstrokes.

The rather thick varnish has discolored, obscuring the vibrancy of the original palette. The extensive retouching that covers mild abrasion to the paint and numerous small repairs has similarly discolored.

Peter Humfrey and Joanna Dunn based on the examination report by Jia-sun Tsang

March 21, 2019

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### TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] By Le Grand (in reverse) in François Basan, ed., *Collection de cent-vingt estampes, gravées d'après les tableaux & dessins qui composoient le cabinet de M. Poullain* (Paris, 1781), pl. 78.

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### PROVENANCE

Victor Amédée, 3rd prince de Carignan [1690-1741], Paris; (his estate sale, Hôtel de Soissons, Paris, 30 July 1742 and days following, unnumbered lots, bought in); (his estate sale, Hôtel de Soissons, Paris, 18 June 1743 and days following, no. 101); purchased by Thibaut for Louis François I de Bourbon, prince de Conti [1717-1776], Paris; (his estate sale, Palais du Temple, Paris, 8 April 1777 and days following, no. 104); purchased by Jacques Langlier for Antoine Poullain [d. 1780], Paris; (Poullain estate sale, Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, 15-21 March 1780, 3rd day, no. 4); (Jean Baptiste Pierre Le Brun, Paris); Joseph Hyacinthe François de Paul de Rigaud, comte de

Vaudreuil [1740-1817], Paris; (his sale, Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, 24-25 November 1784, 2nd day, no. 6); (J.P.B. Le Brun, Paris and London); (Le Brun sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 18-19 March 1785, 2nd day, no. 79); Welbore Ellis Agar [1735-1805], London; by inheritance to Welbore Felix Agar and Emmanuel Felix Agar; purchased with the entire Agar collection by Robert Grosvenor, 1st marquess of Westminster [1767-1845], Eaton Hall, Cheshire, England;[1] by inheritance to his son, Richard Grosvenor, 2nd marquess of Westminster [1795-1869], Eaton Hall; by inheritance to his son, Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, 1st duke of Westminster [1825-1899], Eaton Hall; by inheritance to his grandson, Hugh Richard Arthur Grosvenor, 2nd duke of Westminster [1879-1953], Eaton Hall; (Westminster sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 4 July 1924, no. 58); (Buttery, London). (Julius Böhler, Munich and Lucerne); sold 17 February 1925 to Julius H. Haass [d. 1931], Detroit; by inheritance to his wife, Lillian Henkel Haass, until at least 1949.[2] (Newhouse Galleries, New York). (Frederick Mont, Inc., New York), from at least 1956; sold 14 February 1957 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[3] gift 1959 to NGA.

[1] The details of the ownership by Carignan, Conti, Vaudreuil, and Agar were provided by Burton Fredericksen, then Director of the Getty Provenance Index, in letters of 10 August and 16 December 1987 to Suzannah Fabing (in NGA curatorial files). In the first five sales listed, the painting was paired with a pendant depicting *L'Apparition de notre Seigneur à la Magdeleine* (or *Noli Me Tangere*). As pointed out by Fredericksen in a message to Peter Humfrey of 4 February 2009, the two were sold as parts of the same lot at the Carignan, Conti, Poullain, and Vaudreuil sales, while at the Christie's sale of 1785, the *Noli Me Tangere* appears as the following lot (no. 80).

The NGA painting is listed in François Basan, ed., *Collection de cent-vingt estampes*, Paris, 1781, a volume of 120 engravings after paintings that had belonged to the recently deceased "M. Poullain, Receveur Général des Domaines du Roi." Jean Habert discusses the passage of an *Annunciation* by Veronese from the Carignan to the Conti and Poullain collections, with further bibliography, without, however, identifying it with the NGA painting. In all these collections the *Annunciation* was paired with a *Noli Me Tangere*, identified by Habert with the version in the Musée de Grenoble (inv. MG7); but while the two works are consistent stylistically, the latter work is of a horizontal format (67 x 95 cm), whereas in the sale catalogues they are listed as of identical format and

dimensions. (Jean Habert, "Le goût pour la peinture de Véronèse en France à l'époque classique," in *Venise & Paris, 1500-1700: La peinture vénitienne de la Renaissance et sa réception en France*, ed. Michel Hochmann, Geneva, 2011: 321.

The painting was published in the catalogue of a planned sale of the Agar collection (Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 3 May 1806, no. 34), but Grosvenor purchased the entire collection prior to the sale.

[2] The original bill of sale is in NGA curatorial files, sent by the Haass's daughter, Constance Haass McMath, with a letter of 12 February 1962 to NGA curator Perry Cott. Mrs. Haass lent the painting to a 1949 exhibition in Detroit.

[3] Betty Mont wrote to Guy Emerson of the Kress Foundation on 5 November 1956 that they had "a lovely 'Annunciation' by Paolo Veronese" in their studio. The invoice from Frederick Mont & Company to the Kress Foundation, for four paintings including the Veronese, is dated 14 February 1957; three payments for the group were completed in September of the same year. (Copies of the letter and invoice are in NGA curatorial files.)

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1876 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1876, no. 130.

1903 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters and Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1903, no. 52.

1927 Fifth Loan Exhibition of Old and Modern Masters, The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1927, no. 24.

1929 [Loan Exhibition], The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1929.

1939 Mostra di Paolo Veronese, Ca' Giustinian, Venice, 1939, no. 86, repro.

1941 Masterpieces of Art from European and American Collections. Twenty-second Loan Exhibition of Old Masters, The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1941, no. 63.



1949 Masterpieces of Painting from Detroit Private Collections, The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1949, no. 35, pl. 4.

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- 1975 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1975: 364, repro.

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