

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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VIRTUOSO EXAMPLES OF LATE GOTHIC CARVING

BY TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY,

OCTOBER 3, 1999 - JANUARY 9, 2000

Washington, D.C. -- The first major survey in almost seventy years of the work of master sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider (active in Würzburg, Germany, 1483-1531) will be on view at the National Gallery of Art from October 3, 1999 through January 9, 2000. More than fifty virtuoso examples of late Gothic carving in a variety of media will be shown, including elements from altarpieces, independent figures, objects for private devotion, and models he created for assistants. The exhibition will travel to its only other venue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from February 7 to May 14, 2000.

"Riemenschneider's sculptural genius is evident in his inventive manipulation of surfaces and forms based on site, scale, and source of light, resulting in a high sense of drama that immediately engages the viewer," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are pleased to bring to an American audience many of the sculptor's finest works representing his full career, and particularly to reunite here for the first time several figures that once belonged to the same ensembles but were long ago dispersed to different collections."

Many of the figures that Riemenschneider carved from limewood were left unpainted in a sharp departure from the usual practice of polychromy. Among these are: Mary Cleophas and Alphaus (c.1505-1510) from the Württembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart, and Seated Bishop (c.1495-1500) from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Examples of polychromed works in the exhibition include four superb figures: Female Saint (without Book) (c.1505-1510) and Female Saint (with Book) (c.1505-1510) lent by the Historisches Museum in Frankfurt am Main, and Saint Lawrence (c.1502) and Saint Stephen (c.1508) lent by the Cleveland Museum of Art. Originally belonging to the same altarpiece, these works of sculpture are being exhibited together for the first time.

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Exquisite works in alabaster and sandstone illustrate Riemenschneider's mastery of materials other than wood. His five extant alabasters will also be reunited, including Saint Jerome with the Lion (1490-1495) from the Cleveland Museum of Art; Annunciation (c.1485) from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam; and Virgin Annunciate (c.1500) from the Musée du Louvre.

A highlight of the exhibition is the group of twelve works from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, which includes such masterpieces as Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen (*Noli me Tangere*) and the Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) from Riemenschneider's Műnnerstadt altarpiece (1490-1492). The spirituality of these figures is conveyed with delicate gestures and sweeping, sharp-edged drapery that creates a rich contrast of light and dark suggesting the bodies underneath, yet not precisely defining them.

In addition to the survey of Riemenschneider's work, a few particularly fine pieces by his most important predecessors and contemporaries—such as Niclaus Gerhaert von Leiden, Michel Erhart, and Veit Stoss—will allow his achievement to be shown in its proper artistic context.

The exhibition was selected by Julien Chapuis, assistant curator in the department of medieval art and The Cloisters at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The coordinator for the Washington installation is John Hand, curator of northern Renaissance painting, National Gallery of Art. The catalogue, co-published by the National Gallery of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art and distributed by Yale University Press, is the first English-language book to illustrate Riemenschneider's works in color. The catalogue will be available for \$35 (softcover) and \$65 (hardcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-5900 or (800) 697-9350.

Support for the exhibition is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany. Support for the exhibition and accompanying catalogue has been provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Additional support for the catalogue has been provided by The Circle of the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The National Gallery of Art, located on the National Mall at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215; call the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176; or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662.

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• *Chronology of Tilman Riemenschneider* •

• c. 1460 •

Tilman Riemenschneider born in Heiligenstadt im Eichsfeld.

• c. 1465 •

Tilman Riemenschneider the Elder, the sculptor's father, moves with his family to Osterode am Harz, where he becomes master of the mint.

• 1479 •

A Tilman Riemenschneider abandons his position as curate of the altar of Saint Anne in the church of Stift Haug in Würzburg. It is not clear whether this is the young sculptor or another person.

• 1483 •

Riemenschneider finds employment as a journeyman in a workshop in Würzburg, where he joins the Saint Luke's brotherhood.

• 1485 •

Marries Anna Schmidt, née Uchenhofer (d. 1494), acquires citizenship, and becomes a master. His workshop is located in the house "zum Wolmannsziechlein."

• 1490 •

Signs a contract on 26 June with the municipal council of Münnerstadt for an altarpiece for the church of Mary Magdalen; the altarpiece is erected in September 1492 (cat. 13).

• 1491 •

Signs a contract on 5 May with the municipal council of Würzburg for sandstone figures of Adam and Eve for the south portal of the Marienkapelle; the figures are installed in September 1493.

• 1494 •

On 7 April the municipal council of Windsheim commissions sculpture, including a Crucifixion, for the high altar of the parish church of Saint Kilian. The encasement had been provided by a Nuremberg joiner. The figures are delivered in 1496 – 1497 (destroyed by fire in 1730).

• 1496 •

Signs a contract on 21 October with Lorenz von Bibra, prince-bishop of Würzburg, for the funerary monument of his predecessor, Rudolf von Scherenberg (ruled 1466 – 1495), which is installed in Würzburg Cathedral in 1499. The city council of Rothenburg commissions a now-lost Marian altarpiece for the Jakobskirche from a Würzburg sculptor, probably Riemenschneider.

• 1497 •

Riemenschneider marries Anna Rappolt (d. 1506 or 1507).

• 1499 •

Signs a contract on 19 August for the tomb of Emperor Heinrich II and Empress Kunigunde in Bamberg Cathedral; the monument is completed and installed in September 1513.

• 1499 – 1500 •

Produces a Crucifixion group for the choir beam in the church of Saint Kilian in Windsheim (destroyed by fire in 1730).

• c. 1500 •

Riemenschneider and his shop begin carving a cycle of sandstone figures of Christ, John the Baptist, and the apostles for the buttresses of the Marienkapelle in Würzburg, which are installed in late 1506.

• 1501 •

Signs a contract on 15 April with the Rothenburg municipal council for the *Holy Blood* altarpiece in the Jakobskirche. The encasement had been commissioned in 1499 from the Rothenburg joiner Erhart Harschner. The figures are delivered in installments in 1502, 1504, and early 1505.

• 1504 •

Elected to the Würzburg city council.

• 1505 •

Among the delegates of the municipal council to greet Emperor Maximilian on his visit to Würzburg. The municipal council of Rothenburg commissions a Saint Anne altarpiece for its Marienkapelle, of which fragments may still exist (cat. 30); the retable is installed in 1506.

• 1505 / 1506 •

A sculptor from Würzburg, presumably Riemenschneider, carves a crucifix for the castle chapel in Wittenberg, commissioned by Prince-Elector Friedrich the Wise (the sculpture is destroyed by fire in 1760).

• 1506 •

Riemenschneider makes a table for the Würzburg city hall.

• 1507 / 1508 – 1509 / 1510 •

Receives payments for an All Saints retable for the high altar of the church of the Dominican nuns in Rothenburg; figures from that altarpiece may still exist (cat. 32).

• 1508 •

Marries Margarete Wurzbach (d. around 1520).

• 1508 – 1510 •

Works on the decoration of the high altar of Würzburg Cathedral, which is still incomplete in 1519; the altarpiece is dismantled in 1701.

• 1509 •

First elected to the Upper Council in Würzburg. His retable of *Christ and the Apostles*, commissioned by Elisabeth Bachknapp, is installed in the church of Saint Kilian in Windsheim.

• 1514 •

Serves a second term on the Upper Council. Receives a commission for a small altarpiece, no longer extant, for the Frickenhausen parish church.

• 1514 or 1515 •

Delivers a canopy for the bronze baptismal font of the Ochsenfurt parish church (canopy destroyed in 1674).

• 1516 •

Delivers a crucifix for the Steinach parish church.

• 1518 •

Elected to the Upper Council for a third term.

• 1520 •

Signs an estate settlement with his children. Marries his fourth wife, a woman named Margarete (surname unknown).

• 1520 or 1522 •

Funerary monument of Prince-Bishop Lorenz von Bibra (ruled 1495 – 1519) is erected in Würzburg Cathedral.

• 1520 – 1521 •

Riemenschneider is mayor of Würzburg.

• 1521 – 1522 •

Serves as mayor emeritus and a member of the Upper Council.

• 1521 – 1522 •

Works on the *Virgin of the Rosary* for the pilgrimage church at Volkach.

• 1525 •

During the Peasants' Revolt, Würzburg opposes Prince-Bishop Konrad von Thüngen (ruled 1519 – 1530). The city surrenders on 7 June and asks the prince-bishop for forgiveness. Riemenschneider, as a member of the municipal council, is arrested, questioned, and tortured. He is released from the Marienberg fortress on 8 August. A portion of his estate is confiscated.

• 1526 •

Sandstone relief of the *Lamentation* is erected in the church of the Cistercian nuns at Maidbronn.

• 1527 •

Riemenschneider carries out restoration work on altarpieces that had been damaged during the Peasants' Revolt in the church of the Benedictine nuns in Kitzingen.

• 1531 •

Dies in Würzburg on 7 July and is buried in the cathedral cemetery, between the cathedral and the Neumünster; his tombstone is unearthed during street work in 1822.

Adapted from Tilman Riemenschneider. *Frühe Werke [exh. cat., Mainfränkisches Museum Würzburg] (Regensburg, 1981), 20 – 21.*

National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER: MASTER SCULPTOR OF THE LATE MIDDLE AGES
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
October 3, 1999 - January 9, 2000

SPECIAL LECTURES

East Building Large Auditorium
Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

October 3

Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor

Julien Chapuis, assistant curator in the department of medieval art and The Cloisters at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and curator of the exhibition

December 12

German Sculpture at the Time of Riemenschneider

Alan Shestack, deputy director, National Gallery of Art, Washington

GALLERY TALKS

Tours led by a staff lecturer take visitors through the exhibition *Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages*. All groups meet in the Rotunda of the West Building.

November 25, 26, 27, and 30 at 1:00 p.m.

December 2 at noon

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Families will explore the remarkable work of this medieval German sculptor beginning with a tour of the exhibition followed by a hands-on sculpture activity. Advance registration is required. Call (202) 789-3030.

Sundays, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Ages 8 to 12 October 10 and December 5

Ages 12 to 15 October 24

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RELATED PROGRAMS ON SCULPTURE

Anatomy of Art: The Techniques of Sculpture presents a series of lectures, gallery talks, and films throughout September and October exploring how master artists created their sculpture. For a complete listing of programs, consult the September/October issue of the Calendar of Events. Highlights are as follows.

Lectures/Demonstrations

Wednesdays and Saturdays at noon

Michael Curtis, artist and director of *The Studio* in Alexandria, Virginia, discusses and demonstrates sculpture techniques.

Carving: Mastery of the Chisel September 29 (East Building Auditorium)
October 2 (West Building Lecture Hall)

Clay and Wax: The Techniques of Modeling Busts and Statues October 9 (West Building Lecture Hall)
October 13 (East Building Auditorium)

Bronze Sculpture: From Paper to Pedestal October 27 (East Building Auditorium)
October 30 (West Building Lecture Hall)

CATALOGUE

Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages is co-published by the National Gallery of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art and distributed by Yale University Press. The first English-language book to illustrate Riemenschneider's works in color, it will be available for \$35 (softcover) and \$65 (hardcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-5900 or (800) 697-9350.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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Admission to the National Gallery of Art and to all of its programs is free except as noted.

SPONSOR/ORGANIZATION

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