





Florentine Grand Ducal Workshops

The Annunciation

Pietra dura and gilt bronze wall plaque, ebony and gilt bronze frame; 28 x 31 cm

Florence, first quarter of the 18th century

he octagonal plaque, on a black marble ground, encloses two oval reliefs of half length profiles of the Madonna and the Angel made in pietra dura which are surrounded by hard stone cabochons, gilded bronze cartouches, hard stone flowers, leaves and branches in relief. Surmounting the plaque is the original gilt bronze hanger.

The panel was made in the Grand Ducal workshops using as prototype the pietra dura and gilt bronze Stoup decorated with the Annunciation (fig. I) commissioned by Cosimo III as gift for his daughter Anna Maria Luisa, wife of the Elector of Palatine and designed by the court sculptor, Giovanni Battista Foggini (1704).

In Florence, at the twilight of the Medici family, refined devotional artifacts made of precious materials were very popular. For example the plaque representing the Annunciation (fig. 2) executed by Giovanni Battista Foggini (1653 - 1725), appointed in 1694 as the supervisor and artistic director of the Grand Duke's art workshops, which Cosimo III had donated to Pope Innocent XII on the occasion of the Holy Year.

The iconography of the Annunciation was quite popular amongst the florentine population because of the legend about a fresco of the Annunciation in the church of Santissima Annunziata. In 1252 a fresco of the Annunciation had been begun by one of the monks but then abandoned because





Giovanni Battista Foggini, Stoup decorated with the Annunciation.
Florence, Pitti Palace, Imperial and Royal Apartments.

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he did not feel he could create a beautiful enough image of the Madonna. According to the story it was later completed by an angel while he slept (fig. 3). This painting was placed in the church and became so venerated that in 1444 the Gonzaga family from Mantua financed a special tribune. Michelozzo who was the brother of the Servite prior, was initially commissioned to build it, but since Ludovico III Gonzaga had a special admira-



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tion for Leon Battista Alberti, the committon was eventually given to him in 1469. His vision was constrained, however, by the pre-existing foundations. The construction was completed in 1481, after Alberti's death. Even though a Baroque appearance was given to the space in the seventeenth century, the basic scheme of a domed circular space flanked by altar niches is still visible. Pilgrims who came to the church to venerate the miraculous painting often left wax votive offerings, many of them life-size models of the donor.

3. The Annunciation. Florence, Santissima Annunziata.





4. Chiostrino dei Voti, Florence, Santissima Annunziata.

In 1516, a special atrium was built to house these figures, the Chiostrino dei Voti (fig. 4). By the late 18th century there were some six hundred of these images and they had become one of the city's great tourist attractions. In 1786, however, they were all melted down to make candles. The Florentine brides traditionally visit the shrine to leave their bouquets.

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