

Considerations on the Use of Relief Sculpture in Titian's *Annunciation* (Basilica di San Domenico Maggiore, Naples)

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Abstract

After examining Titian's use of painted relief sculpture, it can be concluded that partly influenced by Tuscan-Rome *paragone*, as a result, Titian consciously and consistently develops the capacity of color and the medium of painting. Titian's usage of the painted relief sculpture in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* does not resemble in the artist's other paintings, nevertheless, it relates closely to the artist's long career development. The suggestion that Titian deliberately elevates the role of fictive statue, relief, sculpture can be put up. The theory from *Le Tableau dans Le Tableau* and Images-within-images broadens the ground for the interpretation of Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation* to root in. The approach of the formal treatment, the quoting from the artist's own paintings, the practice of the fused media, and the application of the archaizing style on the embedded image manifest Titian's deliberate utilization of embedding painted relief into painting and the artist's awareness that the embedded images are not just subordinate to the religious functions but express the artist's idea as well through various manners and methods. The pictorial reflexive aspects can be evidently and extensively detected not only in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* but also in Titian's portrait paintings, mythological paintings and religious paintings. The unique handlings related to the painted relief in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* can be considered a midway stop that bridges Titian's life-long attempts at reconciling forms, contents, styles through the versatility of painting. Nevertheless, it is not surprising for Titian who seeks to break through the limitation of the use of color for the contemporary artistic climate of the competition between the Venetians and the Tuscan-Romans not only in the visual arts but also in the humanist culture. The unique treatment and the reflexivity revealed in the work of art demonstrate Titian's self-awareness of himself as a painter, a colorist and a humanist artist.

Keywords: Relief Annunciation Titian Reflexivity

Part I Introduction

Titian's *Annunciation* at San Domenico Maggiore in Naples retains a particular place in the artist's career. The painting, 280 x 193.5cm, prepared and produced in 1557-1562, was commissioned by Cosimo Pinelli for his family Chapel in the Neapolitan Basilica of San Domenico Maggiore. Currently it is housed on the second floor of the Capodimonte Museum. Albeit seldom receiving attention, the work of art not only resembles Titian's more famous *Annunciation* at San Salvatore in Venice but also relates to the artist's pictorial attempts in his entire career. At the contemporary period of painting, Bartolomeo Maranta, the writer, physician, botanist, and literary theorist, praised it highly especially on the representation of the archangel Gabriel in his *Discourse*.¹ As a critic, Maranta spent

lengthy writing on theorizing the depiction of a portrait based on Titian's painting of Gabriel in this work as well as offering the contemporary documentation and reception of Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation*. In modern studies, the work of art is mentioned by many scholars², however specific studies on it are handful. Luba Freedman's study on Maranta's *Discourse* offers the discussion of the patrons, commission in the historical context.³ Italian scholars Anna Chiara Alabiso led a project to reexamine and restore the painting, and rediscovers Titian's underdrawing of the work of art.⁴

Nevertheless, the work of art still leaves out aspects of significance that needs discussion including the composition, the representation of Mary's portrait, the architectural background, and most importantly, the artist's ideas for the painting. Especially, Titian altered the composition of the central space in the picture-plane and changed the row of columns in the underdrawing to the depiction of one column with a discernible painted relief on the plinth of the column as we can observe in the picture today. In another word, the central image on the canvas is deliberately depicted as it is now that the column with painted relief is closely juxtaposed with the portrait of Mary. Although *Annunciation* is one of Titian's frequently painted subjects, the unique handling of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* finds no similarity in Titian's other *Annunciations* or other paintings. The interpretation of the relief and such treatment of the juxtaposition of the portrait and the relief in the *Annunciation* are entirely neglected in the scholarship of this work. In addition to the representation of Mary and the association between Mary and the column as discussed by the author in other articles⁵, Titian's unique approach of using the painted relief sculpture in the *Annunciation* lacks examination and discussion.

As Luba Freedman points out, at Titian's early time, the practice of painted relief sculpture can be considered the demonstration of the artist's skill as a painter and the visual response to Leonardo's *paragone*.⁶ Nevertheless, the use of painted relief in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* manifests Titian's intentionality of unceasingly exploring the approach of painted relief sculpture and such practice can be verified all over Titian's portrait, mythological and even religious paintings. Besides, André Chastel's article *Le tableau dans le tableau* in his book *Fables, Formes, Figures*, Victor Stoichiță's *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* and Pâeter Bokody's *Images-Within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity*⁷ offer paralleling references to rethink Titian's approach of introducing the painted relief sculpture in painting. The study of reflexivity and self-awareness in Titian's art is absent from Titian's scholarship and the self-reflexive aspects in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* is overlooked. By interrogating Titian's use of relief sculpture in the work of art and related paintings, the author firstly examines the formal treatment of the composition in Titian's portrait paintings, then interprets the iconographic function of the relief in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, and at last rethinks Titian's use of relief sculpture through the lens of images-within-images. In fact what the Neapolitan *Annunciation* indicates is indispensable to understanding Titian's artistic career

path. I suggest that the practice of introducing relief sculpture in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* aligns with the development of Titian's pictorial endeavor in his late period as a master of *colorito*.

Part II The formal treatment of the relief sculpture relating to representation of portrait

The relief sculpture on the plinth of the central column in Titian's *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples displays a figure holding a crown towards the image of Mary who is located in front of the central column. (Fig. 1) Among Titian's five *Annunciations* during his career life—the *Annunciation* at Treviso (or the *Malchiostro Annunciation*) in 1519, the *Annunciation* at Scuola Grande di San Rocco in 1530, the lost *Annunciation* in 1535 that can be observed by Jacopo Caraglio's engraving after Titian in 1537, the *Annunciation* at San Domenico Naples in 1557 and the *Annunciation* at San Salvatore Venice in 1562⁸—such handling of a relief sculpture juxtaposed alongside the representation of Mary has no resemblance in Titian's other four *Annunciations*. The use of column almost occurs in all the five *Annunciations* for the iconographic relationship between the colonnade and *Annunciation* rooted in early Italian representations.⁹ (Fig. 2) The bas-relief of putti frieze occurs in the *Malchiostro Annunciation* to decorate the row of the columns.¹⁰ The source of putti might be inspired by the hellenic marble of *Cupid and Psyche*,¹¹ and the patron's escutcheon and the initials B and M are clearly painted.¹² The decorative frieze is more often seen in other examples of Titian's art and the relief in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* functions more than the decorative effect. The significant role of the latter is specified by revealing the artist's idea and interpreting the work of art in three aspects, the composition, the content, and the approach, that will be stated respectively.



Fig 1 *Annunciation* San Domenico Maggiore, Naples 1557.

Fig 2 *Annunciation* Treviso 1519.

Fig 3 *Portrait of Jacopo da Strada* 1567-68.

The composition of the work of art was once altered by Titian. The relief occurs on a plinth of a column in the final representation and the location of the column where the relief situates is partly overlapped with the figure of Mary. The formal combination that the column, more precisely, the relief sculpture and the depiction of Mary merge together to establish a united imagery that allows the examination of Titian's use of relief sculpture not limited to the relief sculpture per se but the portrait of the figure should also be taken into consideration as well. Thus the study of relationship between the representation of Mary and the relief sculpture can be put in a broader scope including portrait paintings

and mythological paintings. The similarities of such united imagery are hardly found in Titian's religious paintings, nevertheless, given the time period that Titian produced the work of art in his late period, I assert that the practice of relief sculpture in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* aligns with the development of Titian's portrait paintings and the relief sculpture projects the intrinsic connection between the portrait and the person who is portrayed.

In Titian's portrait paintings, the usage of relief sculpture is not rare in a general sense. In Titian's *Portrait of Jacopo da Strada*, produced in 1567-68, da Strada is depicted to stand in his studio holding a statue in his hands. (Fig. 3) His lavishly decorated outfit displays his social status as an aristocrat and a courtier. His occupation involves a painter, an architect, a hydraulic scientist, a jeweller, an art consultant, a collector and the one da Strada himself valued most, an antiquarian.¹³ The setting of the studio decorated with books, *torso*, notes and etc. reflects the multiple identities of the versatile sitter. The portrait of da Strada is painted to hold the statue in two hands with one arm cross the chest and turning his head away from the statue he is holding. Freedman points out the crossing arm was a highly valued artistic device and the pose of turning head away relates to narrative and knowledgeable implication.¹⁴ The pose of the figure and holding the statue in two hands establish an intimate physical relationship between the portrait and the sculpture that represents da Strada not merely a collector of antiques but a knowledgeable man on antiques. The formal treatment of the portrait combined with the statue reveals Titian's understanding of stressing the identity as an *Antiquaro* that da Strada wanted to make known to all mostly.

As a matter of fact, portraits including statues are distinctly Venetian in origin.¹⁵ Vittore Carpaccio's *St Augustine's Vision* painted in 1502 is one of the earliest portraits including statues. However by contrast, the statue in Carpaccio's painting was placed in the background of the painting and the role of the statue is not particularly stressed to link to the portrait of *St Augustine* himself necessarily. Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of Andrea Odoni* in 1527 depicting the famous Venetian merchant and collector's portrait. (Fig. 4) The wealthy collector is surrounded with plenty of sculptures and one piece is held by *Andrea Odoni* in one hand with the other hand placed on his chest. The emphasis on the sculpture is undermined by the front portrait and the hand pose intensively referring to himself as the ownership of the antiques. The possession of antiques is clearly conveyed yet the implication of knowledge and narrative about antique is lacked which fits the identity of the merchant collector well. The use of sculpture plays a reasonable role in the Venetian portraits, however, Titian magnifies the usage of the statue to bridge the portrait and the person who is portrayed through the formal treatment that underlines the intimate relationship between the portrait and the relief sculpture.

In *Portrait of Clarissa Strozzi (Clarissa de' Medici)* of 1542, Titian depicts a standing figure of a two years old noble class girl juxtaposed with a marble relief sculpture of two winged putti as a

supporting relief tablet to the main figure portrait.¹⁶ (Fig. 5) The portrait is an innovation by Titian in which the artist presents a portrait of a child reflecting her social status in the scale of an adult state-portrait.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Titian does not lose the childish nature in her portrait. The pure nature and innocence of a child are underlined by the artist through utilizing the relief sculpture of winged putti in a dance.¹⁸ The setting of the room, the exquisite dress, the lap dog and the adorable appearance of the little girl exhibit her noble status and family class whereas the relief sculpture which is intimately placed alongside the figure plays the role in conveying the innate spirituality that belong to a two years old girl. The connection between the sumptuous appearance and native nature is implied by the physical intimacy of the portrait and the relief.

The image of putti is possibly linked to Donatello's bronze relief *The Miracle of the Miser's Heart*. (1453)¹⁹ Titian was called to Padua to work on three frescoes in December 1510. As Sarah Wilk states, the trip allowed him to learn from masterpieces of Paduan frescoes including Giotto's Arena Chapel and Mantegna's Ovetari Chapel.²⁰ Quoting the putti from Titian's early Paduan trip and placing them in *Portrait of Clarissa Strozzi* indicate Titian's attempts at converting real relief sculpture into painted relief sculpture. Titian employs the painted statue and painted relief sculpture in his portrait painting in order to project the nature of the person who is portrayed. Such treatment enables the painted statue and relief sculpture to play an important role in projecting the spiritual portrait of the person. The repetitive utilization of such treatment in his paintings reveals Titian's consideration of elevating of the role of the relief sculpture in his painting, however, in the form of painted relief sculpture.



Fig 4 Lorenzo Lotto. *Portrait of Andrea Odoni* 1527

Fig 5 *Portrait of Clarissa Strozzi* (Clarissa de' Medici) 1542

Fig 6 *The Schiavona* 1512

Fig 7 Domenico Caprioli. *Portrait of a Youth* 1511

The practice of the painted relief sculpture can be traced back to Titian's earlier career period. *The Schiavona* of 1512 is possibly Titian's earliest attempt at combining two different media in one work of art and the painting exhibits a frontal portrait and a profile of the same sitter in the form of painted marble bas-relief.²¹ (Fig. 6) The frontal portrait is connected to the profile portrait physically through the sitter's left hand that is depicted to hold the upper edge of the marble tablet of the relief sculpture. The formal treatment implies the connection between the portrait and the relief sculpture that refers to the same person, in this case such connection in further plays the role in intensifying the intrinsic projection between the portrait and the person who is portrayed.

As a matter of fact, the juxtaposition of the portrait and the relief sculpture has its own tradition

and convention. Classical antiquity represents living persons juxtaposed against sculpted figures. The Roman sculpture *Barberini statue* represents a citizen holding portrait busts of his ancestors.²² The archaic origins set historical ground for the formal combination of the portrait and the relief sculpture to root in. *Portrait of a Youth* (1511) by Domenico Caprioli²³, who produced portraits in the style of Giorgione, possibly firstly revived the ancient heritage on the land of Venice. (Fig. 7) The painting depicts a portrait of a young man whose body is closely juxtaposed with a painted sculpture. The intimate physical relation of the portrait and the sculpture evokes the relief and Mary in Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation*. The formal treatment implies and intensifies the association of what painted on the relief and the Virgin Mary.

Part III The content of the relief relating to subject *Annunciation*

The relief not only relates to the portrait of Mary via its formal composition, but also via the content. (Fig. 8) Here, it refers to what is depicted on the painted relief in brown tone, and what is depicted in the major image in polychrome part. The depiction of the crown painted on the relief is not only explicitly discernible in Titian's *Neapolitan Annunciation*, but it can also be confirmed by a copy painting after Titian's *Neapolitan Annunciation* in the church of San Gines, made by Luca Giordano around 1661-1663.²⁴ (Fig. 9) The copy displays the vivid depiction of the crown and it can be considered a lucid reference to Titian's original work.

The crown in the context of Marian iconography evokes other related subjects like Coronation, Assumption, Mary and Child, and numerous examples from Flemish painters, in which, Mary is more frequently seen as wearing the crown on her head rather than the situation in the *Neapolitan Annunciation*. Nevertheless, Annunciation is closely connected with Coronation, Assumption, and Mary and Child for which constitutes the cycle of the Life of the Virgin. Starting from Annunciation, through Assumption and Coronation, the continuous stages of life, death and resurrection pertaining to Mary are unfolded. Also, Mary and Child is conventionally considered to be a theme of devotional image to Mary. Those subjects are iconographically associated and it is plausible to display those subjects revolving around Mary in the same architectural space or devotional space in order to show the reverence to Mary.

Fra Angelico's paintings for the convent of San Domenico explores such handling. Fra Angelico painted a *Coronation* for the altarpiece at San Domenico in Fiesole around 1427.²⁵ (Fig. 10) There were two alters on the choir screen and both side altars were adorned with altarpieces of *Annunciation* and *Assumption* respectively. The side altarpiece *Annunciation* was also painted by Fra Angelico probably around in 1420s. (Fig. 11) Below the painting of *Annunciation*, there was a predella showing the life of the Virgin including *Birth and Marriage*, the *Visitation*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, *Presentation at the*

temple and the *dormition*. (Fig. 12) Such treatment enables the *Annunciation* to link to Mary's life on the earth from birth through death. The *Annunciation* together with the other side altarpiece *Assumption* and the altarpiece *Coronation*, displays the intense devotion of the worship of Mary. Moreover, in 1423-4, Fra Angelico painted a *Mary and Child*, known now as the *Fiesole Altarpiece*, to adorn the high altar of San Domenico. It was moved to a side altar later where it currently locates. Fra's series of paintings of Mary for San Domenico manifest the Dominican devotion and veneration to the Virgin, and in this aspect, the Dominican church exhibits the devotion through the visualization of the life and afterlife of the Virgin.

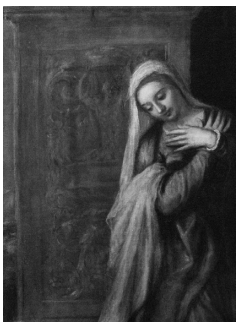


Fig 8 Detail of Fig 1



Fig 9 Luca Giordano. After Titian. *Annunciation*. 1661-1663

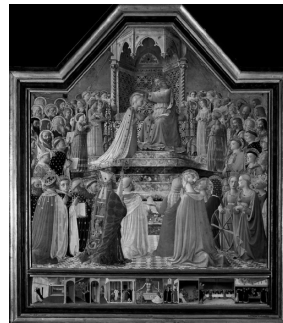


Fig 10 Fra Angelico *Coronation* 1427



Fig 11 Fra Angelico *Annunciation* ca.1420s



Fig 12 Fra Angelico predella of *Annunciation*

In Titian's *Annunciation* that was housed in the San Domenico Maggiore of Naples, such devotion is also visualized by the timeline of the Virgin, however in a more metaphorical way. The relief in the work of art can possibly relate to the cycle of the Virgin. The depicted crown is held by a human-shaped figure of nude male body. (Fig. 8) Although the physiognomical appearance is hard to recognize, the pose and the body of the figure are relatively clearly depicted. The action of holding the crown, more specifically, is rather depicted as an act of lifting. The figure stretches both arms up and the weight of the crown can be felt. The crown almost touches the upper edge of the relief, however not yet on Mary's head. The physical size of Mary actually surpasses the upper frame line of the relief, however with the posture of bending her knees, neck and head, Mary's head is just inserted below the crown so that there is enough room for the crown to be put on the head of Mary within the relief space. In another word, the crown is painted to be lifted upwards by the human-shaped figure much smaller than the physical size of Mary and Mary's head is on the track of the crown that enables Mary to wear it.

Such depiction of a figure lifting up a crown toward Mary evokes Raphael's *The Holy Family* of 1518 that depicts a flower crown about to be on Mary's head. (Fig. 13) Nevertheless, due to the

production time that fell into Raphael's very late year, and the autograph and workshop production problem²⁶, it is questionable if this work can possibly be Titian's direct source. Dürer's engraving *Virgin and Child Crowned by Two Angels* of 1518 depicts two flying angels lifting the crown over Mary. (Fig. 14) The body of the seated Virgin leans slightly leftwards and her head bows a little to the left. The spatial association of the Virgin's head and the crown, together with the pose of the lifting evokes the combination of Mary's head and the crown in the Neapolitan painting. The engraving print was probably known to Italian artists extensively for Dürer's fame and influence. Nevertheless, such lifting crown pose is observable in Titian's own allegory paintings. The nude male body of the human figure lifting the crown recalls Titian's depiction of *The Fall of Man* around 1550. (Fig. 15) The naked mature male body of Adam resembles the body of the figure in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* relief. The posture of Adam putting his hand on the breast of Eve occurs in Titian's one earlier painting *Conjugal allegory* produced in 1530s (Fig. 16). Interestingly, to the right of the painting, a figure possibly identified as Hope is depicted as lifting a basket of flower with two arms up toward the woman in disguise of Venus to the left.²⁷ Although the nudity is not depicted, the posture that Hope slightly looks upwards resembles the pose of the head of the figure in the relief of the Neapolitan painting. Also, the similarity in the brown tone, the similar shape of the crown and the flower basket, and the pose of lifting establish the pictorial connection within Titian's paintings.



Fig 13 Raphael *The Holy Family of Francis I* 1518 Fig 14 Dürer *Virgin and Child Crowned by Two Angels* 1518
 Fig 15 *The Fall of Man* 1550 Fig 16 *Conjugal allegory* 1530-35
 Fig 17 *Venus and Cupid with a Lute Player* 1565-70 Fig 18 *Venus and Cupid with an Organist*

More than that, the crown, the pose of lifting and the mature male body also occur in Titian's mythological paintings. *Venus and Cupid with a Lute Player* (Fig. 17) depicts Cupid, the son of Venus, lifting a crown with two arms upwards and putting it toward Venus's head. Although the mythological painting was produced in 1565-70, years later than the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the representation of the act of lifting a crown toward the head re-occurred. More interestingly, among Titian's series of *Venus and Cupid* with an accompany, *Venus and Cupid with an Organist* (Madrid Prado Museum, Fig. 18) includes a fountain in the center of the background landscape. The painted sculptural figure of Marsyas standing on the fountain exhibits a familiar mature male body that evokes the nude body in the relief of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. Thus, the allegory paintings, the mythological paintings, and the religious painting cross each other. The crown, the pose of lifting, the nude male body articulate Titian's complexity in the depiction of the relief in Neapolitan *Annunciation*. Also, in Titian's *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Prayer* of 1568 (Fig. 19), albeit without a figure lifting the crown, the depiction of the

female figure wearing a crown against a column evokes the pose of Mary and the combined imagery of the column, Mary and crown in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. In essence, Titian quoted from his own representation in form, content and style. In form, the pose of lifting the crown from Cupid to Venus, and the flower basket from Hope to the women in disguise of Venus, showing the worship and veneration of Venus. Such veneration likewise occurs in the relief of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* and coverts to the reverence of the Virgin through the similarity in the pose of lifting crown. In content, the morphological vagueness enables the visualization of the symbolic metaphor, through which, the depiction of the figure lifting the crown is justified in the context of the Christian art and closely associated with Mary iconographically. In style, the nudity of the archaic style is assimilated into the relief of the religious *Annunciation*.

Nevertheless, the crown is not yet coronated. The moment is that Mary hasn't yet worn the crown, and the Coronation is not yet happened. I suggest, the vague depiction and the ambivalent metaphor ultimately lead to not a single subject related to Annunciation, but the possibility of implying the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin starting from Annunciation. The possible subjects of Assumption, Coronation, Mary and Child implied by the content of the relief foretelling the future fate of the Virgin depicted in brown monochrome contrast the vivid *Annunciation* at present painted in polychrome, all of which constitute the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin, and by means of which, the Dominican devotion to Mary is conveyed. Such unique attempt at Neapolitan *Annunciation* enables the likelihood of the complete timeline of Mary exhibited in a limited canvas space. Nevertheless, to Titian, it was nothing more but a normal step in his unceasing endeavor of *colorire*, always using the verb form of color, in his career.

Part IV Titian's approach of painted relief sculpture in painting

André Chastel puts up the discussion of *le tableau dans le tableau* and examines the artistic form of *painting in painting* from the fifteenth century through the twentieth century. He raises the question of *real* versus *representation* and points out the function to unify and the importance of the artist's awareness of the representative power of his art.²⁸ Albeit the media to be examined is limited to framed paintings in framed canvas, André Chastel sheds lights on the interpretations of the artistic form of *painting in painting*. He points out that paintings representing other paintings indicates the self-understanding of art and the artist, and the approach can be connected to the growing freedom and emancipation of the artist. Also, Italian artists tended to use a different style for the embedded painting from that of the major painting to imply or emphasize certain ideas. Victor Stoichita offers an overview of the self reflective pictorial tendencies in the European art between 1522 and 1675 introducing the term "meta-painting" defined as paintings that make reference to painting itself, in the context of which,

self-reflexivity was interpreted as images emancipated from religious functions.²⁹ Pâeter Bokody redefines the notion of image and expands the form of Images-within-Images extensively including not only paintings but also painted frescoes and painted relief sculptures.³⁰ He examines the work of art mostly in the Fourteenth century, explores the roles and functions of the images-within-images, and discusses the primary role of images-within-images as the reality effect and self-reflexivity, that plays in reinforcing the reality effect of the principal work by embedding secondary figurative details in it.³¹

Hence, extensively, the form of images-within-images can apply to works of art that contains at least two media, for instance, a painted sculpture in a painting, or a painted relief in a painting. For such works of art, the artist at least has two pictorial language and two sources of images. The fictive medium, for instance the painted relief sculpture, can possibly have reflexive aspects as well as reality effect. For Italian artists, the reflectivity is conveyed not only in the infusion of the media but also in the styles, such as the style of the embedded image can differ from that in the major image to imply certain various purposes, thereby the reflectivity is also revealed.

Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, in each specific case, the role and function differ according to the various contexts of the work of art. In Titian's portrait paintings, the painted relief sculpture do function to unify, however through Titian's formal treatment. The painted statue held in the hands of the sitter, the painted relief of putti juxtaposed to the little girl, and the painted profile linked to the frontal portrait of the same lady, those of which are depicted by the fictive medium as the painted relief sculpture can be considered embedded images that play role in unifying the portrait and person who is portrayed. Thus, Titian manifests his understanding of art including form, content and medium, at the same time, the artist alerts the viewer's awareness of the comparison of *representation* and *real*.

In the case of the Neapolitan painting, Titian's unique handling of the work of art includes embedding the painted relief depicting the crown, pose and body quoted from his own representations of archaizing style into the main image of Christian *Annunciation*. Certainly, the representation of *Annunciation* cannot be isolated from the theme of the *Incarnation*. Daniel Arasse states in his book *L'Annonciation Italienne* that *perspective* is utilized in the depiction of *Annunciation* in Italian representations to indicate that the Divine invades into the human world. The use of *perspective* makes it possible to put the Divine and the mortal in the same pictorial space. Especially in the representation of *Annunciation*, *perspective* helps to create the architectural space to convey what is significantly crucial however not represented, the *Incarnation*.³² *Perspective* is employed in most Italian *Annunciations*. As Arasse points out, Titian does not seem to rigidly stick to this tradition. Nevertheless, Titian employs *perspective* in his other four *Annunciations* although he utilizes *perspective* quite simply and loosely.³³ Even for the *Annunciation* in San Salvatore of Venice, although weakly, Titian still employs *perspective* to depict the row of the columns. As to the *Annunciation* in Naples, Titian planned

to use *perspective* to depict a row of columns in the underdrawing. However, in the final representation, a frontal column plinth with painted relief situates the central space and *perspective* was almost abandoned. The role of *perspective* in articulating the Incarnation is replaced by the combination of the clouds and the light, the column, and the relief on the column plinth. The approach of the painted relief on the column without doubt takes part in conveying the implication of the Incarnation in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. I suggest that the unique approach is unfolded in two aspects. One is the formal treatment: the intimate formal association between the painted relief and the portrait of Mary. The other is the utilization of the images-within-images. The similar proportion of the canvas size to that of the vertical rectangle frame of the plinth is conceived to establish an intensive formal resemblance of the embedded image frame within the painting image frame. The parallel of the frontality of the framed relief on the column plinth and the frontality of the framed canvas of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* can be observed when the viewer witnesses the scene of Annunciation in the painting. That makes Titian's alteration of the composition in the underdrawing most sensible to the viewer. In this way, apart from the religious function of the work of art, Titian's awareness of independence of the art per se is manifested in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* by Titian's assertion of the representative power and the method of viewing.

In Titian's art, such treatment of fictive media and embedded image can be detected from his earlier career period as exemplified above. The archaizing style is applied to the embedded painted relief sculpture that is different from the major painting, which demonstrates the artist's self-understanding of the medium of painting. From *The Schiavona* of 1512, at the time of Titian's beginning of his successful career, the artist started to practice the fusion of media. The pictorial reflexivity develops as well. The profile of the sitter juxtaposed to the front face indicates the reflexive aspects by two means. One is the fictive marble texture that Titian painted to make it seem to imitate the archaizing bust. The other is the profile. As a matter of fact, the profile does not imitate the "real" either. Although the physiognomical features of the profile resemble those of the front face in the major image, the hair style and outfit actually differ. The hair style and the gown the lady wears in the major image fit into the contemporary fashionable style while those on the profile are more archaizing.³⁴ (Fig. 6) The profile in the fictive marble relief is actually not a representation of *real*. There is always a question to Titian's source of the work of art is *real* or *representation* per se.

Another example is Titian's *Pope Alexander VI Presenting Jacopo Pesaro to St. Peter*, finished around in 1512.³⁵ (Fig. 20) The saint sits on a throne that contains two-levels friezes of classical style carved mythological figures. In the group of figures, Venus, *torso* and the patroness of Victory, Peace and Virtue can be possibly identified.³⁶ It is plausible for Venus, who is also the goddess of the sea, and the patroness Victory, Peace and Virtue to occur in a painting for the donor Jacopo Pesaro won the battle over the Turks at Santa Maura in Cyprus, the legendary birthplace of Venus, on August 30 in

1502. Pesaro was the leader of the papal armada (fleet) and the helmet that symbolizes the victory of the war is displayed closely to the frieze.³⁷ As to the approach of the relief sculpture, the group is painted as deep-carved relief without the frame. Furthermore, the key on the plinth of the throne actually invades into the realm of the relief sculpture. The edge of the embedded image, the fictive relief sculpture group is broken by the key, which belongs with the main image so that the two spaces are integrated.



Fig 19 *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Prayer* 1568

Fig 20 *Pope Alexander VI Presenting Jacopo Pesaro to St Peter* 1512

Fig 21 *Sacred and Profane Love* 1514

Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* was finished a few years later, around 1514. (Fig. 21) It depicts two female figures flanking a fountain (or trough, or sarcophagus). The left figure is lavishly dressed and the right one is nude who is possible reference to Nereids.³⁸ Likewise, a classical style frieze of relief is carved on the front facade. Panofsky provide suggestions on the interpretation of this painting, and the identity of each carved subject is not agreed.³⁹ Titian continues the practice of fused media and uses the treatment of the fictive relief sculpture. Titian depicts a fictive relief sculpture group, and deliberately undermines the completeness of the frieze. The space of the relief groups is partly covered by the portraits of two ladies in the major image. In the center of the relief sculpture, a plant is depicted to block the details of the relief sculpture. Furthermore, water flows out through the faucet which occupies the central point of the relief sculpture group. The embedded image is intervened by the main image by means of the various ways, and the flowing water integrates the image in the image.

In Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* finished around 1559 (Fig. 22), as Ellis Waterhouse points out in his 1951 lecture, a deer's skull is depicted to be placed on the top of the pillar left to Diana in the painting, and also Waterhouse read the meaning of the skull as "a gruesome reminder of Actaeon's fate." Most scholars agree on Titian's deliberation of the occurrence of the stag skull and link the stag skull to Actaeon's tragical final ending. Nevertheless, Warren Tresidder argues that not only the skull, but also the deerskin and remains are depicted to hang on the branches in the upper right corner of the painting and all the deer remains imply Diana's prowess of hunt rather than Actaeon's fate.⁴⁰ Marie Tanner points out that Actaeon was looking at both the skull and the scene of one goddess in white garment chasing a deer in the background of *Diana and Actaeon*.⁴¹ Thus the association among Actaeon, the stage skull and skin, and the chasing scene together can not be ignored. In Titian's *Diana and Callisto* (Fig. 23), which was produced at the same period of *Diana and Actaeon* and was suggested to be viewed together with the latter, two fictive reliefs are depicted and form the base of the putti fountain.

The upper relief seems like a female figure stands in the central area dressed in white flowing garment with one arm raised pursuing a deer or a stag to the left edge.⁴² Another figure to the right edge stands behind the central figure, holding a spear and a shield, or possibly a long arrow or bow and a quiver. The female figure in flowing garment pursuing the stag can be possibly recognized as a representation of the goddess in the act of hunting a stag with her attendant holding hunting tools. The lower relief contains the depiction of a stag and a seated nude female figure, and they are facing each other.



Fig 22 *Diana and Actaeon* 1555-59

Fig 23 *Diana and Callisto* 1556-59 and detail of two reliefs

Fig 24 *Death of Actaeon* 1559-75

The pursuing stag scene in the upper fictive relief of *Diana and Callisto* evidently resembles the chasing scene in the background of *Diana and Actaeon*. Likewise, the lower relief, although no certain narrative or theme can be yet determined, evokes the goddess Diana in both paintings. The representation of the body above the waist of the nude female in the fictive relief evokes the Diana in the same major painting. The pose of the goddess's legs in the fictive relief rather possibly references to Diana's legs in *Diana and Actaeon*. Such approach that the embedded reliefs parallel the major paintings weaves *Diana and Actaeon*, *Diana and Callisto*, even possibly *Death of Actaeon* (Fig. 24), that represents Diana dressed in flowing garment pursuing Actaeon in the shape of a stag, into a circle of complexity narratively, formally and stylistically. As exemplified above, such approach of employing the artist's own representation in the form of fictive relief can be observed in Titian's art especially in his late period.



Fig 25 *Pietà* 1575-6 and Detail

Titian's representational power of art is demonstrated throughout his career. In his assumed final painting *Pietà*, which was to adorn the artist's own tomb, the strong reflexive implication is manifested. (Fig. 25) *Pietà* is to depict the Virgin's grief on the death of her son, the Lord. The central figure group in Titian's painting generally represents the grieving scene. The Virgin, facing outward, holds the body of Christ whose left arm is depicted down to the ground. In the lower-right corner of the painting, a painted tablet is placed leaning against the plinth of Sybil's statue. As Christopher Nygren points out, the painted tablet can be considered to be a votive tablet. On the upper-left corner of the painted tablet, the small image that the Virgin holds Christ is depicted, which resembles the grieving

scene of the central figures group in Titian's own *Pietà*.⁴³ In another word, Titian embeds the representation of his own representation in the same painting. The treatment is without doubt strongly reflexive. The embedded image references back to the major image, and the representation of the embedded image is in essence a representation of the representation in the major painting. In his last painting, Titian amplifies the representative power of his art to the most extent.

Nevertheless, the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, a middle way stop from Titian's ultimate end of pictorial achievement, also unfolds the artist's various attempts at his final goal. The utilization of the varied fictive media to reconcile the forms, contents and styles reveals the artist's representative power of art. In Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the pictorial reflexivity can also be detected. The vertical rectangle shape of the plinth that the relief is painted on is implied as framed by the peripheral lines. However in the actual depiction of the plinth, the peripheral frame is not complete. The right edge is invaded by Mary's portrait, more specifically, the contour of Mary's head. The pose of Mary, especially the posture of Mary's head shapes up a pose of awaiting the crown. The subtle image of Mary's head and the crown lifted by the figure of archaizing style implies the future fate of Mary. However in reverse, what painted in the fictive relief is also implied by the invasion of Mary's portrait into the edge of the column. The content of the embedded image is subtly implied by the subject matter of the major image *Annunciation*. The crown on the fictive relief is testified to be plausible by the vivid portrait of Mary and the intimate juxtaposition of them. Also the archaizing style of the relief contrasts to that of the major painting. I suggest, such handling of the artist discloses Titian's self-awareness and the pictorial reflexivity in the work of art embodied by the approach itself utilized for the work of art, which not only attests to the artist's endeavor as a master of *colorito* but also it unfolds that the artist's representative power is beyond the imitation of *real*.

Part V Conclusion

Titian's *Annunciation* at San Domenico Maggiore in Naples can be considered as a form of image-within-image. Before this work of art of quite late period, Titian had already put a painted medallion portrait of Emperor Augustus to adorn a wall in his *Christ and the Adulteress*.⁴⁴ The approach of utilizing a fictive image embedded into a major image is not unfamiliar to the artist. Specifically, the deliberate compositonal and formal treatment, the painted relief, and the handling of the relief in an archaizing style paralleling to the major painting manifest Titian's awareness of the expressional potentiality of the painted image per se and the pictorial reflexivity is revealed through the approach of the painted-relief-in-painting that is supported by his conscious working method⁴⁵ and dense humanist background. As a matter of fact, the competition of arts in Italian Renaissance is not only happening among the artists but also among the writers, literati and artistic theorists. Manrata's *Discourse* is certainly a mature type for it is the earliest article that focuses on one particular work of art which is

largely different than Vasari's biographies of numerous artists. More importantly, Maranta is not only a promoter of Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation* but also a friend of the Pinelli family, who commissioned it. The commission of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, Maranta's high praise of the artist's painting, Titian's famous visit with Vasari and the frequent contacts with Aretino demonstrate Titian's good relationship with the writers. The "Venetian *paragone*"⁴⁶ among Titian, Sansovino, and Aretino also plays the important role of the communications among writers, rivalries painters and sculptors, which provided abundant source and opportunities for Titian to ponder on the medium of painting and how it could be converted to relief sculpture and vice versa. More importantly, Titian was fully aware of the importance of the various circles and certainly he benefited from that: the promotion, the cultural influence and etc. Another important background is that, in Titian's time Venice had a good humanist environment, albeit as a simplified version of Rome. As Chastel points out, around 1500, Venice had become the great centre of publishing. All important works of classical philology, hermeticism, scientific and musical theory, ancient poetry and philosophy were pushed in Venice. For examples, *Horapollo* in 1505, *De Divina Proportione* in 1508, *De Harmonia Mundi* in 1525. In 1500, Alde Manuce published the original texts of Homer, Virgil, Plato etc., and in 1540 Titian's son Paolo published them in Italian. Titian's quote of *torso* from Francesco Colonna's printed book *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* indicated Titian's understanding of significance of the humanist texts.⁴⁷

Whereas, Nonetheless, such does not stop Titian from developing his Venetian style. Titian was never a faithful follower of those ancient culture and humanist texts. As Chastel and Brendel state, Titian does not cease to demonstrate the independence and innovation of his art. Obviously, here, the independence refers to the independence from the influence of the central Italy, the Tuscan-Roman. Titian strives throughout his career to demonstrate the versatility of color. It is with the aid of the humanist culture Titian uses the painted relief sculpture to challenge the boundary of *real* and *representation*. Hence, it is not surprising for Titian who seeks to breakthrough the limitation of the use of color under the climate of the competition between the Venetian and the Tuscan-Roman not only in the artists but also in the humanist culture. The Neapolitan *Annunciation* as a matter of fact manifests not only the artist's mastery in art, particularly in the painting, but also his familiarity of the complexity of the social circles of art, text, politics, theology and humanism.

Notes

¹ Bartolomeo Maranta, Luba Freedman, and Viviana Tonon, *Bartolomeo Maranta's 'Discourse' on Titian's Annunciation in Naples: Translation*. (Journal of Art Historiography, 2015).

² See AA. VV., "Da mercanti genovesi a baroni napoletani: i Pinelli e la loro cappella nella chiesa di San Domenico Maggiore", in *ESTRATEGIAS CULTURALES Y CIRCULACIÓN DE LA NUEVA NOBLEZA EN EUROPA (1570-1707)* (Aranjuez (Madrid); 2006), pp. 95-110. Charle Hope, *Titian*. (London: National Gallery, 2003). Peter Humfrey, and Titian. *Titian*. (London: Phaidon, 2007). E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic*. (New York, 1969). David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian Complete Edition : I : the Religious Paintings : II : the Portraits : III : the Mythological and Historical Paintings*. (London: Phaidon, 1969), Cat. no.12. Stephen J. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy*. (2019). Daniel Arasse, *L'Annonciation italienne une histoire de perspective*. (Paris: Hazan, 2010).

³ Freedman 2015.

⁴ See Annachiara Alabiso, *Tiziano per Napoli: l'Annunciazione di San Domenico Maggiore : vicende storico-artistiche, tecnica di esecuzione e restauro*. (Castellammare di Stabia (Napoli): N. Longobardi, 2010).

- ⁵ See the author's other related papers. Ying Wang, *Column, light and clouds in Titian's Annunciation in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples and Mary in Titian's Annunciation in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples*
- ⁶ Luba Freedman, "'The Schiavona': Titian's response to the paragone between painting and sculpture". *Arte Veneta / Istituto Di Storia Dell'Arte, Università Di Padova*. (1988) pp. 31-40.
Ron Goffena. *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2005).
- ⁷ André Chastel, *Fables, formes, figures. II* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).
Victor Ieronim Stoichiță. *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Péter Bokody, *Images-within-images in Italian painting (1250 - 1350) reality and reflexivity*. (2017).
- ⁸ Wethey 1969, Volumn I, *op. cit.*, Cat. no.12.
- ⁹ David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *Art Bulletin*, (1936), pp. 480-526. Arasse 2010.
- ¹⁰ Wethey 1969, Volumn I, *op. cit.*, pp.69-70.
- ¹¹ Marsel Grosso, *In the tenderness composed of milk and blood: Titian's theme of the Annunciation*.
- ¹² Wethey 1969, Volumn I, *op. cit.*, pp.69-70.
- ¹³ Luba Freedman and Tiziano "Titian's Jacopo Da Strada: a Portrait of an "Antiquario". (1999). *Renaissance Studies. no. 1*: 15-39.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Wethey 1969, Volumn II, *op. cit.*, pp.142.
- ¹⁷ Luba Freedman. "Titian's Portrait of Clarissa Strozzi: The State Portrait of a Child". (1989). *Jahrbuch Der Berliner Museen / Hrsg. Von Den Staatlichen Museen Zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz*. pp. 165-180.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Freedman 1989, *op. cit.*, pp.172.
- ²⁰ Sarah Wilk, "Titian's Paduan Experience and Its Influence on His Style". (1983). *Art Bulletin / Ed. John Shapley [U.a.]*. pp.51-60.
- ²¹ Freedman 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-40.
- ²² Freedman 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 27.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Alabiso 2010, *op. cit.*, pp. 6.
- ²⁵ Patricia Rubi, "Hierarchies of Vision: Fra Angelico's "Coronation of the Virgin" from San Domenico, Fiesole". (2004). *Oxford Art Journal*. 27, no. 2: 139-153.
- ²⁶ Pierluigi De Vecchi, *Raffaello* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1975).
- ²⁷ Wethey 1969, Volumn III, *op. cit.*, pp.127.
- ²⁸ Chastel 2000, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-77.
- ²⁹ Stoichiță 1997.
- ³⁰ Bokody 2017.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.2-10.
- ³² Arasse 2010. *op. cit.*, pp.48-52.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 305-310.
- ³⁴ Chastel 2000, *op. cit.*, pp. 350.
- ³⁵ Wethey 1969, volumn I, *op. cit.*, pp. 152; Volumn II, *op. cit.*, pp. 15.
- ³⁶ Panofsky 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Otto J. Brendel "Borrowings from Ancient Art in Titian". *The Art Bulletin*, 37:2, (1955) pp.117.
- ³⁹ Panofsky 1969, *op. cit.*, pp.118-119. Wethey 1969, volumn I, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-179. It can possibly be the scenes of the Conversion of Saint Paul, shown falling off his horse, Cain killing Abel, Adam and Eve standing beside the Tree of Knowledge, or a scene of taming the unbridled horse, a famous motif in Renaissance linked to Passion.
- ⁴⁰ Ellis Waterhouse, *Titian's Diana and Actaeon*, Charlton Lectures on Art (London, 1952), 19.
TRESIDDER WARREN. "The Stag's Skull and the Iconography of Titian's 'Diana and Actaeon.'" *Racar: Revue D'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* (1988).pp.145-47.
- ⁴¹ Marie. "Chance and Coincidence in Titian's Diana and Actaeon." *The Art Bulletin / Ed. John Shapley [U.a.]* 56.(1974).pp. 535-550.
- ⁴² WARREN, *op. cit.*, pp. 146. Wethey 1969, Volumn III, *op. cit.*, pp.74. Panofsky 1969, *op. cit.*, pp.155.
- ⁴³ Christopher J. Nygren, "Titian's Miracles: Artistry and Efficacy between the San Rocco "Christ" and the Accademia "Pietà". (Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz / Hrsg.: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut). 57 (2016): 321-2.
- ⁴⁴ Brown Beverly Louise. 2007. "Corroborative Detail: Titian's 'Christ and the Adulteress.'" *Artibus Et Historiae* 73-105.
- ⁴⁵ Brendel *op. cit.*, pp.115-17, 125.
- ⁴⁶ Stott Deborah. "Fatte À Sembianza Di Pittura: Jacopo Sansovino's Bronze Reliefs in S. Marco." *The Art Bulletin* (1982) pp. 370-88.
- ⁴⁷ Chastel 2000, *op. cit.*, pp. 343.