Title of Object

The Archangel Saint Michael in Triumph

Photo of Object (optional)

Object Information

Artist: Giuseppe Sanmartino

Date of Object: c. 1870

Accession Number: 2015.24.2

Material/Medium: Silver, gilt bronze

Department: Decorative Arts, Textiles, and Sculpture

Culture: Italian

Country: Italy

File Created: 1/3/2018

Author of File: Richard Ploetz

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 3/26/2018

Tour Topics

Christianity, archangels, dragon, serpent, storytelling, Al and Mary Agnes McQuinn, power/status, spirituality/sacred, healing, Roman Catholic, Naples, silver, all that glitters

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1.   How might you tell these two sculptures were made by the same artist?

2.   What do you think is happening in this sculpture? What do you see that makes you say that?

3.   How do the archangels compare? What is similar? Different?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

Archangels are found in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The archangels are venerated in the Roman Catholic Church. Saint Michael the Archangel isn't a saint, but rather he is an angel, and the leader of all angels and of the army of God. This is what the title "Archangel" means, that he is above all the others in rank.

St. Michael has four main responsibilities or offices, as we know from scripture and Christian tradition. The first is to combat Satan. The second is to escort the faithful to heaven at their hour of death. The third is to be a champion of all Christians, and the Church itself. And the fourth is to call men from life on Earth to their heavenly judgment.

Very little is known about St. Michael other than what we know from scriptures, which themselves are sparse. The final mention is in Revelation, where St. Michael and his angels, do battle with the dragon. The dragon is a symbol for Satan. (www.catholic.org)

The iconography of Michael slaying a serpent goes back to the early 4th century, when Emperor Constantine defeated Licinius at the Battle of Adrianople in 324 AD, not far from the Michaelion, a church dedicated to Archangel Michael. Constantine felt that Licinius was an agent of Satan, and associated him with the serpent described in the Book of Revelation (12:9).[4] After the victory, Constantine commissioned a depiction of himself and his sons slaying Licinius represented as a serpent - a symbolism borrowed from the Christian teachings on the Archangel to whom he attributed the victory. (Wikipedia)

Silversmiths provided casting, embossing, and assembly of silver parts made on the basis of sketches provided by painters. Very often, clay or red wax models, usually lost in the firing process, were provided by sculptors to the silversmiths. One of the most famous and specialized sculptors was Giuseppe Sanmartino. (de Cavi, Applied Arts) Sanmartino's powerful sculptural style, sensitive carving of marble, combined sentimental poses, and expressive facial features are major characteristics of his work. Many of Sanmartino's works produced in silver and marble were reproduced in other materials, including terracotta and porcelain, from molds that were presumably made under his direction. (Getty Museum)

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

In their original context, these sculptures would have been in a church. Archangels were subjects of veneration, and Raphael and Michael are associated with healing powers.

A pair of two silver statues by Neapolitan artist Giuseppe Sanmartino (1720–93), donated to the museum by long-time trustees Al and Mary Agnes McQuinn, marks one of the most important additions to Mia's silver collection. Executed with amazing detail, the statues testify to a devotion to the two Archangels, an act that goes back to the Early Christian period and continues to flourish in Southern Italy (as well as in the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches) to the present day. Throughout Christianity, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael are venerated for their healing powers. The exhibition celebrates the acquisition of these unique masterpieces, without peer in any American museum collection, and whose only comparables remain in Italian churches. (Artsmia)

Even though Naples is not known for the best examples of church architecture and monuments, the Baroque was the golden age of Neapolitan arts and crafts. Its artists excelled in the beauty and richness of the ornamentation of the sanctuary and the altar. Silver work flourished in southern Italy over the second half of the seventeenth century because of the flow of Spanish American silver, vice-regal patronage and the demand for expensive goods from the local Neapolitan and Spanish aristocracies. Silver was a prime and common luxury and its consumption was widespread in private and ecclesiastic collections. One critic has said: "It could be claimed that the art of Neapolitan silver expressed first and foremost the emotional language of hope and devotion at all social levels." (de Cavi, Applied Arts)

This revival and improvement of silver techniques led to a new professional figure—the silversmith sculptor. The silver guild also included several other different specializations: founders, silversmiths and engravers. The master silversmith generally in charge of the commission guaranteed the product's weight and intrinsic value with his family's stamp. (de Cavi, Applied Arts)

Giuseppe Sanmartino (1720-93) dominated sculpture in Naples during the second half of the 18th century. He was adept at fashioning large-scale ensembles in marble and stucco, elegant funerary monuments and making artifacts such as ornamental putti for altars, models for monumental reliquaries in silver and small figures for Christmas cribs that were specifically Neapolitan in character. He had a busy workshop and his followers imitated his style into the early 19th century. (Donald Garstang, Burlington Magazine)

Sanmartino was influenced by Bernini and is a typical exponent of 18th-century verism, specialising in nativity figures. His works can be found in the cathedral and churches of Naples. In 1753, in the former Sansevero chapel, which during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries became the church of Santa Maria di Pietà dei Sangro, he carved the subsequently famous figure of Christo velato (Christ Veiled). This sculpture was for a long time attributed to Antonio Corradini (who was responsible for the allegorical statue of Modesty in the same location) … The dead Christ is completely enveloped in a shroud, the countless folds of which were originally designed with unusual lighting conditions in mind and which reveal in a manner more theatrical than sorrowful the agonised body and emaciated face. In any case, the initially quite unique combination of circumstances led Sanmartino, in the mid-18th century, to create something much more in keeping with the Romanticism of the fantastic or even with the sophisticated charm of the New Style. During his period in Naples, Antonio Canova tried to acquire the work. (Benezit Dictionary of Artists Oxford Grove Art Online)

Sanmartino was probably trained in the workshop of the sculptor Matteo Bottigliero (fl 1724–54). Sanmartino interpreted the [Dead Christ] model very freely and produced a work of skillful realism, displaying great virtuosity in the execution of a transparent veil that covers the whole body of the reclining Christ. The work demonstrates that Sanmartino had already reached artistic maturity, and it earned him immediate popularity in Naples, especially at the Bourbon court….Sanmartino also designed decorative works, and his masterpiece in this genre is the main altar of the Certosa di S Martino (with two large marble figures of angels bearing candlesticks), a balustrade or low screen with polychrome marble and pietra dura inlays dividing the sanctuary from the nave, and a gilt bronze grille above it (c. 1768). (Grove Art Online)

In 1772, Sanmartino took up some teaching work at the Reale Accademia di Belle Arti in Naples. During the last years of his life Sanmartino also provided designs for silver sculpture; examples are the statues of St. Vitus (1786–7; Forio, island of Ischia, S Vito), executed by the silversmiths Giuseppe del Giudice

and Gennaro del Giudice (both fl 1774–1801), and St. Roch, carried out by Biagio Giordano (1793; Ruvo di Puglia Cathedral). After Sanmartino's death, the same del Giudice silversmiths executed the almost life-size group of *Tobias and the Angel* (1797; Naples Cathedral, Cappella del Tesoro) after his designs. (Grove Art Online)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

No label.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

The Archangels Saint Michael and Saint Raphael: A Pair of 18th-Century Silver Sculptures (Exhibition notice, artsmia.org): https://new.artsmia.org/exhibition/the-archangels-saint-michael-and-saint-raphael/

Giuseppe Sanmartino, biography: www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/benezit/BOO160505

Giuseppe Sanmartino, biography: www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/art/T075756

Giuseppe Sanmartino, biography: http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/3572/giuseppe-sanmartino-italian-1720-1793/

Donald Garstang, "Giuseppe Sanmartino" (Book review), *The Burlington Magazine*, December 2005, pp. 832-3

www.startribune.com/minnesota-museums-celebrate-a-banaza-year-of-important-gifts-in-2015

"Applied Arts in Naples", Sabrina de Cavi, West 86th: *A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture*, Fall-Winter 2012, pp196-230.

The Veiled Christ, http://www.museosansevero.it/en/the-veiled-christ/the-statue

St. Michael: https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=308

Archangel Michael in Christian Art: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangel_Michael_in_Christian_art