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**The invisible in the visible**  
***The Annunciation* by Antonello da Messina from narrative to icon**

A critical reflection on art today cannot ignore the relationship between art history and the history of images, between theoretical and art historical research. In fact, the power of the image and the empathetic relationship engenders with artists and viewers imply a new approach to the aesthetic experience through the sensory and emotional aspects that take place in the process of invention, construction, and interpretation of the artwork.

Such a critical reflection leads to a revision of the traditional critical category of formalism and towards a new approach to the work of art as a system of morphological signifiers, which can be understood as an 'iconology of style'

In this regard the theoretical positions of prominent scholars of the twentieth century rich of interesting insights—such as the warburghian concept of *Pathosformel*, the aesthetic formalism of Roger Fry or the 'geological' approach of Adrian Stokes and the concept of agency of Alfred Gell—today play a crucial role in the interpretation of art as a fluid ongoing cognitive process.

A study of the Annunciation as an artistic subject calls into question problems concerning the re-composition of the biblical narrative into an image, but also the problem of how to figure what is not figurable, which is the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ. How can an artist represent what is not representable? What role do the textual and iconographic traditions play in determining the choices available to the artists? How did art theory and practice deal with the figuration of what is not figurable? Antonello da Messina, an artist at the crossroads between the fifteenth century tradition and the early-modern age, engaged in testing both the albertian representation of space and the narrative iconic mode of Flemish art, created a new kind of Annunciation, as an essential and non-figurable icon capable of incarnating the artist and its relationship with the viewer, and the invisibility of the dogma.