



VIRGIN AND CHILD

Artist	Hans Multscher (circle of) Reichenhofen ca. 1400 – 1467 Ulm
Date	1450–1460
Object type	wooden sculpture
Medium, technique	carved and painted limewood
Dimensions	172 x 52 x 32 cm
Inventory number	84.2
Collection	Sculpture
On view	This artwork is not on display



Catalogue entry

The life-size, limewood statue of the Virgin and Child was purchased in Vienna in the early twentieth century by Emil Delmár, a distinguished Hungarian art collector. Regarding its provenance, we only know that it once stood in a chapel near Vienna. The statue was composed for a front view and hollowed out at the back. It may well have been the central figure of a Gothic altarpiece. In view of the statue's size and its high quality, it may originally have stood in one of the major churches in Vienna. The Virgin is standing on an inverted crescent moon, the arch of which is filled by a face, with his eyes shut and turned downwards. Mary is wearing a red dress with a belt around her waist. On top of this there is a cloak, which is tied at the chest, with traces of blue paint still visible. Her trunk is inclined in an S curve. She is turning her head towards the Child who is sitting on her left arm. Her upper body is slanted the other way, while her own weight is borne by her left leg, which is somewhat concealed by the flowing drapery. Her veil-covered head is adorned with a six-branched crown of lilies. The naked Christ Child is sitting on Mary's arm, with his right hand raised in blessing. His other hand is holding an orb, the symbol of redemption and of divine dominion over all creation. The statue belongs to the specific iconographic type of the Virgin Mary on the Crescent Moon, which is based on Revelation 12:1. In Saint John's vision, the following is stated: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." The woman gave birth to a boy, whom a dragon with seven heads sought to devour, but an angel took the child to the throne of God, while the woman fled to the wilderness. The church fathers had identified the apocalyptic woman as the Church, but from the twelfth century onwards the figure was increasingly identified as the Virgin Mary. There followed a merging of the quintessential images – the endowment of Mary with apocalyptic symbols. In the German-speaking lands, wooden statues depicting the Virgin standing on a crescent moon were common from the end of the fourteenth century. László Éber, who was the first to attempt an attribution for the Virgin and Child stemming from the Delmár collection, looked among a circle of sculptors working with Hans Multscher of Ulm in Southern Germany. From 1427 Multscher led a workshop of many sculptors and painters in Ulm. Numerous statues of the Virgin were produced in his workshop, from among which the Virgin and Child of Landsberg – executed around 1440 and marking the end of the early period in his art – may have been the model for the Budapest statue. Mary's posture, the way that her right hand is pulling the cloak in front of her, and the parallel mode of pleating at the two edges of the cloak accord with the model provided by Multscher. The elongated proportions of the Budapest statue and the manner in which the Child's right hand is raised as if to give a blessing (instead of reaching for his mother's veil) differ, however, from the prototype. The statue was probably produced in a workshop in Vienna, whereby the sculptor seems to have been familiar with works made by the Multscher workshop in Ulm and its followers. Although in the Virgin's graceful form we see a continuation of the soft style of the early years of the century, the treatment of the drapery (Mary's cloak with its firmly carved and almost angular creases) nevertheless ties the work to the "realist" movement of the mid-fifteenth century. Zsófia Vargyas