

E.V. Day (American, b.
Golden Rays/In Vitro, 2018
Aircraft cable, fiber optic cable, gold leaf and hardware
Installation view at the American Academy in Rome

In Christianity, the Annunciation marks the biblical story when the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and announced that she would bear the son of God. It is one of the most commonly-depicted scenes in Western Christian art. Medieval and early Renaissance artists developed a number of visual approaches to representing this encounter, among them the use of golden rays of light to signify the immaterial presence of the Holy Spirit, which would be passed on to Mary through the conception of Jesus Christ. So common, in fact, are the use of golden rays in art that it hardly seems strange to see that a painting which otherwise employs the most advanced techniques of realism might also have as one of its central motifs a geometric line illustration that would be more at home in a treatise on geometry, astronomy, or linear perspective (see plates 32, 35-41). Yet these are also the moments that show us the degree to which Medieval and Renaissance artists might be well-versed in scientific ideas, as it could be impossible to participate in the development and mastery of perspective without studying mathematics, light, and vision.

E.V. Day's *Golden Rays/In Vitro* uses gilded aircraft cable, precisely stretched and anchored, to dramatically transpose the golden rays of Christian art history back into the three-dimensional world. Day playfully notes a degree of continuity between the religious visual motif of the golden rays and Atomic-era sci-fi imagery of laser beams, ray guns, and X-ray vision superpowers. Likewise, the notion of the golden rays as a representation of divine communication from the heavens feels resonant with our current world of satellite communication, fiber optics, and the invisible presence of electromagnetic communication all around us. Was the Immaculate Conception the original high-speed wireless download?

Golden Rays/In Vitro was first presented at the American Academy in Rome, where Day was artist in residence in 2017-18. For that presentation, the rays originated at the skylight of Day's studio and appeared to pass through a large glass window before terminating in the ground outside the building. Day was responding to a common motif in Annunciation paintings, in which the rays pass through a perfectly-placed window, as if the building in which Mary is situated had been designed with this divine encounter in mind. The glass window led to an additional association for Day: in vitro fertilization. Perhaps our closest equivalent to immaculate conception, this process allows for fertilization to take place outside the human body, in a glass petri dish.