

Explanation of “A Bavarian angel”

What you see: A woman angel gazes straight and hard at somebody on the right hand side (who is not in the painting and the identity is unrevealed) and holds a large glass beer mug. Several other objects, not entirely related to angels are also seen.

Background for angels and for angels in the art

Angels are the messengers, attendants, or agents of God in all monotheistic religions and angels are also other sorts of spiritual beings in many other religious traditions. An extra assignment according to Christian tradition is protecting and guiding human beings. The word angel is probably derived from the Greek word "Angelos", which means "messenger".

Angels have appeared in works of art for millennia. Angel-shaped beings appear in ancient Mesopotamian, Persian, and Greek art. These images were probably the inspiration for the popular Christian image of angels in the last 1500 year, since the times of the Byzantine Empire. Most master artists and many other artists to those times depicted angels with wings, as they appear in the Old Testament, sometimes even with more than one set of wings.

Angels, up to the Baroque period in the West, and up to the present in Eastern Orthodox icons, were initially depicted as wearing a basic military dress. Other angels came to be more conventionally dressed in long or partial robes in styles popular in the location of the artist. Most angels, even though they are considered sexless beings, are commonly depicted as men, mostly as young adults. Another twisted and highly proliferated depiction of angels in art is the “cherub”. Cherubs are, traditionally, the second highest ranks in the hierarchy of angels. In the Renaissance, they were converted to “baby angel”; naked little children with halos and wings. They were not initially described as these cute “cupid like” angels depicted by painters and serving as the most common decoration in Baroque churches and palaces all over Europe.

Female angels are uncommon. They are more common as guardian angels in the past century and appear in some more modern artwork. Yet, they can be found, especially in southern Germany, in earlier times in Baroque churches and palaces. These unique woman angels inspired this painting, combined with an artistic tour of Bavaria in 2009.

What is less apparent in the painting

Apart from the fair-haired woman-angel, a basic knowledge of German art, customs, trends in current technology, and historical monuments is needed to identify this specific angel as a Bavarian angel. Bavarians are widely known to consume beer in large quantities. The famous Oktober Fest in Munich is only one

excuse to over-drink beer, but Biergartens (open-air bars and parks) are commonplace. Most are usually full as long as the sun shines or at least, not raining. One-liter mugs are standard drinking containers, similar to the half-consumed beer held by the angel. To keep the beer cold, an over-engineered sophisticated cooling unit is attached. As is common in contemporary Bavaria, where every roof of every barn is a potential site for solar panels, this cooling unit is powered by “green energy”.

Although most angels depicted in art having bird-like wings, other types of wings, some completely imaginary, are known. The dragonfly-type wings selected for this angel, that mistakenly looking fragile and incapable for flying, demonstrate that, despite the calm looking and serene face, this is a fierce angel similar to the predator whose wings she borrowed.

A typical Bavarian Baroque cherub is sitting high on the solar panel. These cherubs are everywhere in Bavaria. This specific one, picking his nose, is from a highly elaborated freeze close to the roof at the Theatine Church (17th century) in the center of Munich. On the other side, a statue of a female angel is held by a young man. This statue can be seen in the Residenz palace-exuberant church complex of the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg (an independent church state in pre-modern Germany in northern Bavaria in the early 18th century). This is only one example of many female angel statues found in Bavaria. At the bottom right is a schematic representation of the Linderhof Palace in a dense forest in Southern Bavaria. This is the only palace finished by Ludwig the Second, the famous tragic king of Bavaria in the late 19th century. This location was chosen to represent Bavaria because of the irony it implies about Bavarian life. Although Bavaria was almost bankrupted by the outrageous construction costs of the three palaces of Ludwig, the tourists flooding them today paid several times over the initial cost. The background of the entire painting is the flag of contemporary Bavaria, with the shield of Bavaria embedded.

(This explanation was written in response to request to explain this work.)