

Monteverde's Resurrection Angel

Background

This ultra-realistic statue of an angel can be found in the Staglieno Monumental Cemetery in Genoa, Italy. It adorns the family crypt of the Oneto family, whose patriarch, Francesco Oneto, was a banker and commissioned the statue in 1882 to honor deceased members of his family.



The artist was the neo-classical Italian sculptor Giulio Monteverde (1837-1917), whose style was called naturalism or realism – in a word, he made amazingly life-like statues!

At first glance, it looks like the statue of a young woman, but the full image reveals that the statue is of an angel, with large wings, standing sentinel in a niche within the family mausoleum. The angel looks slightly melancholic, perhaps symbolizing the grief a family feels at the loss of its loved ones. Yet, the statue is called the Angel of the Resurrection. Her look is pensive but not pessimistic. It is full of hope.

What to Look For

Monteverde's creation is so life-like that the statue seems to be looking back at the viewer. The angel wears a hairstyle reminiscent of late 19th century European fashion. The band about her head features nine stars, symbolizing the nine choirs of angels who will accompany the Lord when He returns at the end of time.

The angel crosses both her arms and her legs in a relaxed but attentive position. She doesn't intend to blow the long trumpet she holds in her right hand. It is not meant for sounding out – not yet. She's waiting. Perhaps she is the angel Paul speaks about who will come at the end of time and blow the trumpet to signal the resurrection of all humanity (1 Cor 15:52).

Arti-Facts

- In creating a female angel, the artist broke away from past sculptural traditions, which generally presented angels as masculine figures or babies (cherubs).
- Following this magnificent work, many other sculptors copied Monteverde's style for funerary angels that adorn monuments in Italian cemeteries.

