

ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

May 2018 – Adam Kraft and his Stations of the Cross

Within the space of little more than ten years four outstanding sculptors were born in southern Germany, whose works mark the beginning of the transition in our region from the Late Middle Ages to the Renaissance. They are the carver of the Engelsgruß in Nuremberg's St. Lawrence church, Veit Stoß, who was born around 1450; Tilman Riemenschneider, some ten years younger, whose outstanding works can be found all over Franconia from Würzburg and Münnerstadt to Creglingen and Iphofen; Peter Vischer the Elder, the sculptor and bronze founder born in Nuremberg in 1455, responsible with his sons for the magnificent bronze shrine in Nuremberg's Sebaldus church; and, finally, Adam Kraft, the subject of a small but fascinating exhibition running until October 4th, 2018 in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

Adam Kraft (* ca 1455/1460 in Nuremberg, † 1509 in Schwabach) left behind numerous works, including epitaphs, stone reliefs, Madonnas and crucifixes. His masterpiece is the intricate tabernacle in the church of St. Lawrence, where he portrays himself as the bearded sculptor at its base:



The subject of this exhibition, however, is the seven Stations of the Cross, which are among the oldest representatives of this genre in the German-speaking world. Seven wayside stone reliefs (later 14 would become the usual number), mounted on plinths, marked the route from Nuremberg's Neutor tower to St. John's cemetery. This corresponds to the distance from the house of Pilate to Calvary Hill in Jerusalem, from the place where Jesus was condemned to death to the site of his crucifixion.

This devotional route dates back to before 1479. Around 1490 seven Stations of the Cross were placed along it. The ensemble was extended to the entrance of St. John's cemetery around 1506/08 with the addition of a monumental Crucifixion group. The six reliefs which were transferred to the museum between 1889 and 1909 to safeguard them from air pollution and the elements survived the Second World War undamaged, having been walled-in for protection in the Carthusian Church. The fourth Station of the Cross, still standing in the town at that time, was badly damaged in 1945 by a high-explosive bomb. Replicas can be found in the original locations along today's Burgschmietstrasse and Johannisstrasse. The art-technological examination of the seven stations took place from 2015 to 2017, followed by their restoration, and this, now completed, gives us an opportunity to admire Kraft's exceptional skill as a sculptor.

I would like to arrange a visit some time, so do watch out for an email from our secretary giving more details.

Frank Gillard