

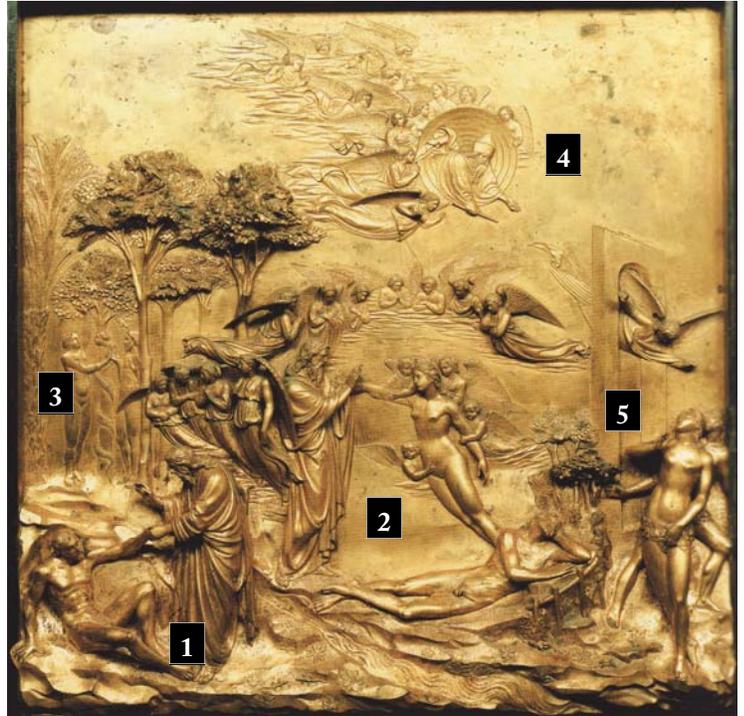
# THE BIBLE IN BRONZE

2 in a series of 3

February 24, 2008

This spring, the Seattle Art Museum is privileged to host a once-in-a-lifetime exhibit of three panels of Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance masterwork, the bronze doors of the baptistry of the Cathedral of Florence. A series of inserts in the bulletin will help us celebrate this event and learn more about "the Gates of Paradise" and our own magnificent bronze doors created by Ulrich Henn. On Monday, March 3, the Seattle Art Museum will host an interfaith panel on Ghiberti's doors. Details coming soon!

Lorenzo Ghiberti chose to depict not one image of the story of Adam and Eve, but multiple moments simultaneously. He is radical in his non-linear approach to narrative. He invites the viewer to "read" the story of our first parents, from creation to the expulsion from the garden—but not necessarily in that order! Chronologically, we begin in the lower left-hand corner, with the creation of Adam, in very deep relief (1). The story continues with the beautiful vision of the creation of Eve in the center, portrayed in "middle relief" (2). We see Adam asleep on the ground, while Eve, supported by angels and encircled above by another flight of angels, is drawn from Adam's side. Next is the temptation in the garden (3), in low relief on the middle left hand of the panel. Finally, we see the figure of God the Father (4), surrounded by angels, commanding his angel to send Adam and Eve from the garden. Their exclusion is represented by a portal (5) through which we see the angel pointing the way out, while Eve looks up in anguish; Adam is barely visible behind her. Wonderful details abound in the panel, including the birds sitting in the trees (look for the wise owl!), and two tiny lizards meeting in the foreground at Adam's feet.



Ulrich Henn, in the ceremonial bronze doors of St. James Cathedral, tells the story of a journey—our journey with Jesus to the heavenly city. The figures themselves form a path, "winding" along the door, from the bottom to the top. The story is told entirely through figures, their gestures and expressions; there is no background, no landscape, no "perspective" as in Ghiberti's doors. The story begins in the bottom left, with the Baptism of the Lord. John the Baptist points to Jesus (1). Next we move to the bottom right (2), where we see Christ gently healing the man born blind (whose hands express both eagerness and hesitation about meeting the Lord). Above, we see Christ (3) healing the man whose friends have lowered him down through the roof on a stretcher. Witnessing this miracle is a figure in the foreground who turns toward us (4), the viewer, and seems to shout, "Who but God alone can forgive sins?" (Ulrich Henn himself has said that this man is the most important figure in the doors, because everything depends on our answer to his question.) Moving on, we see Jesus teaching, surrounded by his followers (5). These figures listen with different emotions to the word of God and reward careful study! Next we see Christ entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (6). He is surrounded by women, men, and children waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!" Jesus himself is represented as somewhat withdrawn in this scene. His hands bless, but they also suggest obedience, resignation. He knows what is so soon to come. **Next week:** *Praying with the Doors.*