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Auction **Fine Art**

Date 19.05.2022, ca. 10:21

Preview 13.05.2022 - 10:00:00 bis
16.05.2022 - 18:00:00

ALPINE MASTER

Early 17th century

Title: Trompe-l'oeil of a Liturgical Scripture.

Technique: Oil on wood.

Measurement: 45.5 x 52.5cm.

Frame/Pedestal: Framed.

Provenance:

Private ownership, Germany.

Masterly trompe l'oeuil depiction of an open liturgical book written in Latin against a dark black background in front of which the book appears to float. The light coming in from the left makes the pages shine brightly and add plasticity. The book looks as if it has just been opened. The clasps of the red leather binding fall into the dark space on the right side of the picture. Neither the eleven initials nor the texts nor the inscriptions of notes can be identified. However, it is probable that the painter wanted to convey the suggestion of a missal here.

The hitherto unknown painting is one of a series of now seventeen very similar pictures whose classification and function remain a mystery to this day.

A group of three paintings, in the Uffizi, at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College and most recently at Sotheby's (January 2020, lot 13) are identical. Part of a canon panel with the Crucifixion is visible here on the right, probably from the circle of Simon Bening in Bruges. These pictures are painted on oak and are now dated as Dutch, early 17th century.

The second, far more extensive group of fifteen paintings, to which our painting belongs, is painted on pine, a coniferous wood, which indicates that it originated in the Alpine countries. Whether the workshop in which these paintings were made must be located in Austria, Switzerland or South Tyrol is uncertain.

Other examples of this group can be found in the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel, at Ambras Castle, at Eltz Castle and in the art trade. They are almost identical to each other and only the intensity of the colouring differs slightly.

The astonishing quality of the trompe l'oeuil painting and the concentration on the motif makes the painting a precursor of still-life painting, which came into full effect in the 17th century. It is conceivable that the painting was painted for one of the numerous *Kunstkammer* popular in the early 17th century. Another possibility could be that it was placed on a liturgical lectern. In Italy, the churches of S. Maria d'Organi and the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Olivieto Maggiore have preserved elaborate reading desks from the early 16th century on which similar depictions are mounted as *intarsia*.

A. Schneckenburger-Brosheck was the first to examine the significance of these paintings and to compile an index of the examples known to her (Cf: *Altdeutsche Malerei: die Tafelbilder und Altäre des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts in der Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister und im Hessischen Landesmuseum Kassel*, Kassel 1997, pp. 269-284). A dendrochronological examination of a copy sold at an auction in Upsale by Prof. Peter Klein has revealed 1609 as the earliest possible date of origin.

We thank Guido de Werd, Cologne, who confirmed the attribution after examining the present painting in the original, for his help in its cataloguing.

Estimate: 10.000 € - 20.000 €; Hammer: 63.000 €
