

Lot 626



Auction Fine Art

Date 17.11.2022, ca. 10:20

Preview 11.11.2022 - 10:00:00 bis
14.11.2022 - 18:00:00

FRANCKEN, FRANS II.
Antwerp 1581 - 1642

Title: The Sword of Damocles.

Noble society at a banquet, in the background a view of Trajan's Column in Rome.

Technique: Oil on wood.

Measurement: 60 x 84,5cm.

Notation: Signed lower left: d.j. Francken J. fec.

Frame/Pedestal: Framed.

Literature:

U. Härting: Studien zur Kabinetmalerei des Frans Francken II. 1581 - 1642; ein repräsentativer Werkkatalog, Diss. Uni Bonn 1982, no. A255.

U. Härting: Frans Francken der Jüngere (1581-1642). Die Gemälde mit kritischem Katalog, Freren 1989, p. 340, no. 348. Here with details of the provenance.

Provenance:

Röhler Collection, Augsburg, until 1948;

Auction Weinmüller, Munich 15/16.04.1953, lot 728;

Private ownership, Germany.

Fastened only with a fine horsehair, the sword, according to legend, hung over Damocles, so threatening that he could not look forward to the sumptuous meal in royal company for which he craved so much. Damocles was a courtier of Dionysius who was dissatisfied with his life and envied the latter's wealth and power. To make him understand that these privileges entailed great dangers, the tyrant invited him as the main person to a luxurious meal - but had the now proverbial sword placed over him so that Damocles had to ask for redemption after a short time and renounced all comforts.

Although this very striking story was already known in antiquity through Cicero it is only comparatively rarely found in art history. Even in the work of Frans Francken and his large workshop, who painted a wide variety of biblical, mythological, historical and allegorical subjects for patrons from all over Europe, this theme is so far only found in this single panel shown here. Ursula Härting dates it in her catalogue raisonné to the 1610s when his workshop was

expanding and the master found his customers in increasingly wider circles of the middle classes and nobility. It is signed in full and shows Francken's great quality in the masterly execution from the composition of the picture to the richness of detail in the embroidery and the feel of the robes. Especially as the opening of the background with the view of Trajan's Column in front of a Roman palazzo also points to the cosmopolitanism and internationality of his collectors.

Of the large Antwerp family of painters who were active for generations, Frans Francken II is the best known. He learned from his father and passed the workshop on to his son Frans III. Thus, on his paintings you can find signatures with the addition "the younger" as well as later "the older". In contrast to his contemporaries, e.g. P.P. Rubens, he retained his own style. Only his son was influenced by them. In addition, he brought new subjects into the contemporary art canon, which have a long resonance: e.g. monkey scenes and especially interiors of art collections. His compositions became freer and more varied with age, the colouring changing from the traditional beginnings to warm reddish colouring to a cooler glaze technique in the later works.

We are grateful to Ursula Härting, Hamm, for her kind assistance in cataloguing the present painting on the basis of a high-resolution digital photograph.

Estimate: 15.000 € - 20.000 €; Hammer: 38.000 €
