



Virgin Of Mercy In Polychrome Stone - France - First Quarter Of The XVIth Century



28 000 EUR

Period : 16th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Stone

Width : 66 cm

Height : 52 cm

Depth : 16 cm

Description

This beautiful polychrome stone sculpture represents a Virgin of Mercy or Pietà. This theme is not present in the Bible but derives from apocryphal accounts. It depicts the moment before the Descent from the Cross during which the Virgin Mary supports the lifeless body of Jesus. This scene differs from the Lamentation of Christ which involves other characters. The iconography of the Virgin of Mercy spreads in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages: the first appearances of the theme are made in the 14th century in Germany and it appears in France and in the northern regions in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, it was in Italy that the theme reached its peak with the famous Pietà by Michelangelo made in 1499 and exhibited in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. In France, the

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iconography of the Virgin of Mercy will be very successful, especially in Burgundy where we still find many examples today. The taste for this theme reflects the religious mores of the time, the faithful wishing to get closer to the human dimension of Christ and the saints. The Virgin of Pity indeed highlights the human condition of the two characters: Mary is represented in her role as a mother who holds the lifeless body of her son. It is therefore the representation of a moment of intimacy, full of emotions, which stems from the movement of the *Devotio moderna*. This current of thought aims to reform the bases of the Church by seeking to bring the faithful closer to God. The intermediaries are removed and the humanity of Christ and the saints is put forward in order to make them accessible models of life and piety. Thanks to this, the faith of the faithful becomes more active and Man becomes a source of his own Salvation. To do this, the faithful seeks to imitate Christ during his life on Earth because by acting in his own way, he deserves Salvation. Our sculpture has the particularity of representing the body of Christ slipping from his mother's knees. The most widespread representation in sculpture is indeed that of the body of Jesus which rests on the knees of Mary as a figure of the Virgin of Mercy dated 1457 and exhibited at the Petit Palais in Avignon. More rarely and in the case of our work, the Virgin struggles to retain the inanimate body of her son, which she supports with the help of one knee and by holding his head and his hand. In this way, the body of Christ appears very heavy and slips from the arms of the Virgin as if to accentuate the weight that the death of the child represents in the eyes of a mother. She is resigned, but accompanies him in his tragic destiny with a tender gesture of the hand. Another element that makes this representation rare: the gaze of the Virgin. She does not direct it towards her son but on the contrary directs it towards the spectator and invites him to reflect and meditate: "I am speaking to you, to all of you who pass here!"

Look and see if there is a pain like my pain, To that with which I was struck! The Lord sharpened me in the day of his fierce anger. » (Lamentations 1: 12) The Virgin is not in the expression of her suffering, a motif however very common to the theme of the Virgin of pity. She is calm and accepts Jesus' sacrifice to save mankind. She is dressed, according to medieval tradition, in a rich garment consisting of a red dress and a blue coat, adorned with golden details. She is veiled but here drops the usual chin strap. This choice of clothing reflects the interest of the time for the textile industry. In certain regions, such as in Champagne, the artists dressed the Virgin and the saints with clothes that were not imbued with historical veracity, but which approached the clothing tastes of their time. This Virgin of Mercy has the characteristics of 16th century Champagne sculpture. This barrel is quite unitary and borrows elegance. The limbs are elongated, as here for the arm of Mary and the legs of Jesus. The Virgin is depicted looking away from her deceased son as she contemplates future stories of the Passion. The face of Mary in Champagne sculpture is also very characteristic with an oval face and a domed forehead. His face is thin and very slightly marked, the cheeks are thin and the eyes are very slightly apart. These eyes are also very characteristic with an eyelid drawn with a small roll. The lips are thin and open with a thin slit. The stylistic particularity of our Pietà lies in the elongation of the fingers of the figures, which are very long. The position of Christ recalls that of the Virgin of Mercy in the Saint-Nicolas church of Saint-Nicolas-de-Port in Meurthe-et-Moselle, also dating from the 16th century. The stylistic work carried out on our sculpture can be compared to the work of the master of Rouvroy. The treatment of the Virgin's hair and of the folds reminds us of that used on the Virgin and Child dated from the first quarter of the 16th century and preserved in the Louvre Museum.