



The Sealed Letter, Oil On Canvas, Attributed To Bernhard Keil



24 000 EUR

Signature : Bernhard Keil(Keilhau) (Keilhau)(Keilhau) dit Monsu' Bernardo

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 76

Height : 96,5

Description

Oil painting on canvas representing two elderly figures looking at each other, 17th century work attributed to Bernhard Keil (Keilhau) also called Monsu' Bernardo (1624-1687), Danish and Italian painter.

A student of Rembrandt in 1642, he was also influenced by Jan Lievens, but it was in 1656 after his arrival in Rome that he was inspired by the spirit of the Caravaggists and the Bambocciantis, these artists of genre scenes crudely representing the modest people in their daily lives. It was during this period that our painting was created.

This painting represents a genre scene typical of Baroque art. We see an old man looking pensive, his head slightly raised, his mouth half open,

Dealer

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seeming to stare into space. He is dressed in a white shirt tied with a lace on the torso and an earth-colored vest, decorated with black edging. He holds in his left hand what appears to be a folded letter, his wrist covers a pile of other sheets of paper, the first of which is already written. At their side, an inkwell and its quill, on the other side of the hand, a letter opener with a black handle is placed on the table. The scene appears to describe an epistolary exchange.

To the left of this man, a woman is standing, lighting a lamp while looking at him. She wears a dress over a shirt and a white scarf in her hair. In her left hand, she holds the candlestick and in her right a match ready to light the candle.

The artist uses a marked contrast between light and shadow to accentuate the scene. It is a specificity of the Caravaggio period which thus highlights the expressive side of the characters. Bernhard Keil is very representative of this particularity. His characters are always very expressive, the brushstrokes are marked and emphasize the movement of the scene a little more.

The faces, rendered with care, testify to the artist's virtuosity in the representation of emotions. The composition led by chiaroscuro gives depth to the scene, drawing the eye to the details of the face and hands.

Our gaze is as if caught by this singularity. Here he explores human interaction with captivating realism and dramatic intensity.

The characteristics of his male character are quite typical of his representations (he possibly had the same model) this is how his Diogenes sold for 43,400 euros in 2007 in Milan, or his Saint Jerome sold for \$31,200 (around EUR25,450) in New York in 2006, take on the physical features of our old man. The pictorial touch of this artist is very distinctive, the hair and beard are worked

touch by touch, the faces are imprinted with a singular marking of the work of light by superposition of brush strokes.

We can find these properties in all his characters, we notice it in his representation of the personified seasons, 4 oils on round panels, sold in Florence in 2021 for 81,250 euros.

Monsu' Bernardo created several paintings of this composition. One of them is part of Italian cultural heritage under the inventory number "Poggio Impériale 1278" and exhibited at the Pitti Palace in Florence with the title: the seal of the letter or of fire. Two old men with a candle. Marco Chiarini (professor, art historian and author of several books on ancient Italian paintings) and Minna Heimbürger (Art historian and Bernardo Monsu' expert) also put forward the hypothesis for this painting, of a symbolism of fire, as opposed to its representation of "washing of hands » symbolism of water, two subjects very popular with the artist.

Other similar compositions have been sold and are now in private collections, such as the oil "A man sealing a letter, a woman beside him" sold for 120,000 DKK (approximately 16,100 euros) in 2006 in Denmark.

Each of them having differences in their pictorial representation and some dissimilarities in the positioning of the scene (paper, hands, letter opener, etc.). Our illustration is particularly interesting because of its large size but also the beauty of the light and the very visible pictorial touches which makes it one of the most eventful compositions.

Bernard Keil is to date referenced in several

major collections, we can thus find other works by this artist representing genre scenes with popular characters (or even religious scenes), in the Prado Museum (Spain) and in numerous European Museums (France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden) but also worldwide, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston or the Ottawa Museum of Fine Arts and many others.

Dimensions: H 96.5cm x W 76cm

Dimensions with frame : H 121 cm x L 100 cm