18th Century Spanish School, Virgin Reading



3 200 EUR

Signature : École Espagnole du début du XVIIIe Siècle

Period : 18th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 49,5 cm

Height : 65 cm

Description

The Virgin Reading, or Madonna Leggente, is a popular religious iconographic theme that appears frequently in artistic representations from the early Christian era. It flourished in European painting from the 14th century onwards, particularly in Spain and in the colonies, where the cult of the Virgin was very important.The work depicts the moment before the arrival of the Archangel Gabriel, the messenger of the Annunciation. He comes to find Mary, to tell her of the imminent birth of her son, Christ, surprising her in the middle of her reading.While this episode is often depicted in the presence of the Archangel, in detailed interior settings, with the book placed on a lectern, we witness here a more intimate scene bathed in a poignant atmosphere of meditation.The sober and dark

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background allows the observer to focus on the figure of Mary alone and to better feel the emotions emanating from the figure. This format suggests that the painting was intended as an object of personal devotion.Mary is shown half-length, with a veil covering her head and falling delicately over her bust, her head crowned by a halo. She is dressed in the traditional red tunic, which recalls the Passion of Christ and emphasises her connection with the earthly world. She wears a blue mantle, the celestial colour of the divinity. It is decorated with a star on the right shoulder, a Syriac symbol of virginity and a reference to her first name, Stella Maris, one of the oldest titles given to the Virgin.Her face, marked by great serenity and tranquillity, is bent over a work, probably a Book of Hours, which absorbs all her attention. This intellectual activity illustrates the development of a humanist culture of women which appeared in the literature and devotional treatises appearing around 1400.The book thus becomes an essential element of her iconography. She was also depicted learning to read with her mother, Saint Anne, in an episode from her childhood, The Education of the Virgin. The iconography of our painting, in which Mary is depicted in a three-quarter view, her head tilted and turned to the left, is inspired by a tradition that appeared simultaneously in Flanders and Italy from the 15th century onwards (see, for example, the panel with the Virgin reading from the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck), and which enjoyed great popularity in Spain and the South American colonies until the 17th century. This iconographic model is particularly common in paintings depicting reading or breastfeeding Virgins, under the name of Virgen de leche in Spain and Virgen de Belén in America.There is a strong resemblance between our painting and the Virgin Mary Reading in the Thoma Foundation in Dallas, previously attributed to Mateo Pérez de Alesio, and today returned to one of his followers.Mary's posture, the delicacy of her features, and the fall of her

veil, are directly inspired by this painting. The latter is itself similar to the Virgen de la Leche, by Pérez de Alesio, which can be admired at the Museo de Arte in Lima. The influence of Pulzone Scipione and his Virgin and Child in the Borghese Gallery (a copy of which is in the Prado) can be seen in these representations. The two artists may have had a reciprocal influence on Alesio who worked alongside him during his stay in Rome.The author of our magnificent painting was most likely in contact with the work of Mateo Perez de Alesio, either directly or through copies that may have circulated in America or Spain.The latter, trained in Italy, in fact pursued a brilliant career in Seville and then in Lima, where his highly regarded style, marked by a certain form of mannerism, had a strong influence on local artistic production until the 18th century.Condition report: Very good condition. Old restorations and relining.