



PROANTIC
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Apollon et Uranie par Michelangelo Maestri



4 200 EUR

Signature : Michelangelo Maestri

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Gouache

Width : 54 cm

Height : 64 cm

Description

Pair of Gouaches Depicting Apollo and Urania by Michelangelo Maestri

Gouache.

Italy.

ca. 1789-1812.

h. 64 cm ; w. 54 cm.

This pair of gouaches is part of the cycle of reinterpretations by the Roman painter Michelangelo Maestri, who reimagined figures and motifs drawn from the history of Roman painting, both ancient and modern.

These paintings belong to a cycle discovered in 1755 in the famous praedia of Julia Felix in Pompeii, a series that includes Apollo Citharoedus and, following him, eight of the nine

Dealer

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Decorative art of the 18th and 19th centuries

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Muses. Although found in Pompeii, these figures were for some time mistakenly considered to be from Herculaneum and were cataloged as such in the second volume of the eponymous collection engraved by Tommaso Piroli. The collection erroneously states that they were discovered during the excavations of Resina. In this work, Apollo is described as follows : "His entire posture exudes repose, particularly his arm bent over his head, as seen in various ancient monuments. His right hand rests upon an eleven-stringed lyre; a long drapery carelessly falls from his shoulder, drapes along his body, and, leaving the upper part bare, gathers around his thighs. The god is crowned with laurel, and beside him stands a branch of this sacred tree. This branch recalls the custom of singers who held a laurel sprig when they were not accompanying themselves on the lyre--hence the Greek proverbial expression, 'to sing to the laurel,' etc." As for Urania, the ninth (here eighth) Muse : "The globe she holds in one hand and the radius with which she appears to indicate it are attributes found in all representations of this Muse. These well-known symbols must have seemed sufficient to the painter, relieving him of the need to inscribe her identity. Urania is dressed in a yellow tunic with short sleeves and a blue mantle; her hair is carefully styled, and she wears bracelets. Like Clio, she is seated on a hemicycle, etc."

Contrary to Piroli's assertion, these two fragments were indeed discovered in Pompeii on July 20, 1755, in Room 97 of the praedia of Julia Felix before being housed in the museum of Portici. They subsequently changed hands multiple times: first to King Ferdinand IV of Naples in 1802, then to Empress Joséphine at Malmaison in 1803. In 1825, they were repurchased by Charles X from Edmé-Antoine Durand, who had acquired them during the Restoration. Charles X then incorporated them into the Louvre's collection.

It is possible that Maestri knew these figures only through engravings, and it is likely that he never saw their true colors. The original fragments are set against an ochre background, characteristic of fourth-style Pompeian painting, rather than the elegant black background favored by Maestri -- possibly inspired by the Pompeian-style figures painted by Raphael's students at Villa Lante. Similarly, the forms, body proportions, and especially the facial features are, as was common in the Neoclassical era, highly idealized. Maestri's technique, as always, is remarkably refined, particularly in the rendering of shading and modeling.

These two gouaches, corresponding to the first and last figures of the praedia of Julia Felix cycle, are sold with a modern passe-partout, hand-painted in the style of Roman decorative arts contemporary to Maestri. They are accompanied by simple blackened wooden frames.

Sources

Tommaso Piroli, *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, vol. II, Rome, 1789 ; Roger Ling, *Roman Painting*, Cambridge, 1991 ; *Eye of Joséphine: The Antiquities Collection of the Empress in the Musée du Louvre*, exhibition catalog, Atlanta, 2008.