



Terracotta Medallion - Italy - 16th Century



18 000 EUR

Period : 16th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Terracotta

Width : 32 cm

Height : 40 cm

Description

This delightful round terracotta medallion depicts a woman from front to bust in high relief. It dates from around 1500, and is of Italian origin. The creation of terracotta medallions depicting a bust and set in a circular frame is inspired by the images clipeatae. They contributed to the rise of portraiture in the Renaissance, and to the new importance given to the individual "who discovered himself in his actions and gestures", symbolizing the humanism of the period. Thus, artists explored a variety of styles to capture not only the physical appearance but also the personality of the subject depicted. Previously, medals had featured gods and kings during Antiquity. This craze for numismatics, in which the figure of the sovereign is privileged, developed progressively between the 16th and

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17th centuries, when medallions gained in autonomy and relief. In addition, the Renaissance saw the emergence of a new class of nobles and wealthy merchants wishing to commission portraits to assert their wealth. While paintings and engravings evoke the notion of presence, sculpture, as here in terracotta, refers to immortality. The circular frame also echoes the medal and royal crown. The Renaissance terracotta technique consisted in coating the medallion with a patina to give it a bronze effect, thus enabling rapid execution and economy of means. The addition of this blackish material lends the work a certain melancholy *terribilità*. The proliferation of this technique led to a great artistic revival, depicting a variety of themes from religious motifs to everyday life, enriching the heritage of the period. We can imagine that this work was commissioned for a major figure of the Renaissance, whom we wished to render eternal in the material. The young woman, full-face, has an oval face surrounded by two wavy locks that escape from her headdress and delicately frame her face. Her upper bust is flanked by a dress with a square neckline, showing the refinement this woman accorded to the fashions of her time and underlining her status as an influential woman. An elegant pearl necklace rests on her neck, adding a sophisticated touch to her outfit. Her role as duchess also had great influence in the political realm of her court, defying the gender norms of her time and demonstrating her ability as a woman to participate actively in the cultural affairs of her duchy. As such, her story is a unique testimony to the life of a woman in high office during the Renaissance. Often immortalized by Renaissance artists, she was even mentioned as a possible figure behind Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of Mona Lisa. She commissioned the painter to create a bust portrait of her, with particular attention to detail and grandeur. In this work, we find many of the characteristics of tondo: the presence of wavy hair on either side of her face with a certain grace. Her straight,

delicate nose accentuates the harmony of her features, as do her fine, well-defined lips. Through this work, Leonardo da Vinci captures the essence of Isabella d'Este, highlighting her role as an influential patron of the arts during the Renaissance. Other artists, such as Francesco Francia, also tried their hand at depicting her. She also has features in common with the tondo portrait. Once again, she wears an elegant headdress, with part of her hair split into two curly locks, framing her face. Her dress also features a square neckline that underlines her status as an influential, refined woman. The pearl necklace adds a sophisticated touch to the piece. Gian Cristoforo Romano also painted her portrait in 1511, taking on several of the attributes already mentioned: two locks of hair that escape from the rest of her headdress, a perfectly defined nose and thin lips that reflect her classical beauty. The square neckline of her dress highlights her noble head carriage, while the ornate necklace encircling her emphasizes her aristocratic status. In an era marked by humanism, all these elements of dress reflect not only aesthetic choices, but above all Isabella d'Este's predominant taste for fashion, and her desire to be represented as an ideal beauty while conforming to the standards of her time. As such, this terracotta tondo follows in the footsteps of these representations, elevating the work as a refined testament to Renaissance art. It embodies the timeless grace and feminine beauty of its time. Thermoluminescence test carried out by the Re.S.Artes laboratory: Period 1470 - 1550 AD