



Basin With Lion Heads - Italy, 15th Century



30 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Marble

Width : 56 cm

Height : 30,5 cm

Description

This Italian marble basin, dating from the late 15th century, brilliantly illustrates the Renaissance's rediscovery of antiquity. Circular in shape and deeply hollowed, it is adorned around its entire circumference with a sculpted relief of great symbolic richness. Four lion heads, symmetrically arranged on the four sides, punctuate the design. From their powerful mouths flow long garlands of fruit, flowers, and foliage, held by delicately sculpted ribbons that meander around the basin. These garlands, rendered with remarkable density and vigor, intertwine bunches of grapes, pomegranates, blossoming flowers, and various leaves, forming a continuous festoon that emphasizes the circular movement of the object. At its base, a central opening, pierced beneath the bottom, suggests that the basin was originally

Dealer

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placed on a pedestal or molded plinth, a common feature for this type of work. The entire decoration is directly inspired by classical antiquity, and more specifically by Roman sarcophagi with garlands, whose festoons of leaves, fruit, and flowers symbolized fertility, the cycle of the seasons, and the hope of rebirth. These ancient models, rediscovered and studied with passion from the mid-15th century onward in Italy, profoundly influenced Renaissance sculptors. Fascinated by the beauty and symbolism of these motifs, they reinterpreted them in decorative works intended to adorn gardens, fountains, or aristocratic residences. Thus, this basin became, at that time, both an object of ornament and an affirmation of an ideal of measure, harmony, and classical beauty. The lion heads, which frame the garlands, play both a sculptural and symbolic role. In ancient culture as in Christian art, the lion is the quintessential guardian, a symbol of strength, vigilance, and majesty. Its powerful features and unwavering gaze convey a presence that is both physical and moral: it watches over the space it adorns, repelling evil forces and protecting the place. In Renaissance fountains and basins, the figure of the lion retains this protective value, but is enriched with a moral and spiritual dimension. The lion's mouth, from which the garlands spring, symbolizes purification, driving away impurities and harmful influences. The vegetal decoration of the basin, for its part, is imbued with multiple allegorical meanings. The sculpted leaves can evoke glory and victory, or refer to power and presence. The bunches of grapes, attributes of Ceres and Bacchus, suggest fertility, prosperity, and the natural cycle of life. The pine cone, meanwhile, is a symbol of immortality and rebirth. All these plant elements together weave a coherent iconographic language, where nature, through its fertility and eternal renewal, becomes a metaphor for the continuity of life and the resurrection of the soul, in the manner of the myth of Ceres and Proserpine. The influence of

this type of decoration can be found in several examples, which testify to the spread of the motif of garlands supported by animal heads in Italian Renaissance sculpture. In Florence, between 1471 and 1477, Mino da Fiesole (1429-1484) created a frieze adorned with festoons and lions (now in the Louvre Museum), where we find the same rigor of composition, the same alternation of solids and voids, and the same vitality of the fruit and foliage decorations. In Siena, Antonio Federighi (c. 1420-1490) developed a similar vocabulary in his decorative basins and columns of the 1460s and 1470s, characterized by an abundance of foliage, fruit, and flowers rendered in a vibrant and luxuriant relief. These works, originating from both secular and religious contexts, share a common goal: the transposition of classical ornamental language into a living, expressive, and meaningful sculpture. This basin, for example, testifies to the ability of 15th-century Italian artists to fuse classical heritage into a profoundly humanist creation. The polished and patinated marble lends the work a tangible and noble presence, while the symmetrical rigor of the decoration evokes the order and measure sought by Renaissance sculptors. Through the vitality of its garlands, the majesty of its lions and the balance of its composition, this vase presents itself as a manifesto of sculpture all'antica: an object that is at once ornamental, symbolic and spiritual, celebrating the power of nature, the strength of the guardian and the ideal of beauty inherited from Antiquity.