



School Of Gillis Mostaert, Winter Landscape With A Swineherd ("the Prodigal Son")

6 100 EUR



Signature : ÉCOLE DE GILLIS MOSTAERT

Period : 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Oil painting on wood

Length : 65 cm

Height : 47 cm

Description

GILLIS MOSTAERT school
WINTER LANDSCAPE WITH A SWINEHERD ("THE PRODIGAL SON")
GILLIS MOSTAERT
Hulst 1528 - 1598
Antwerpen
Tempera on panel 47 × 65 cm / 18.5 × 25.6 in, with frame 61 × 78 cm / 24 × 30.7 in
PROVENANCE France, private collection
No matter which winter landscape we look at in Flemish or Dutch painting, we inevitably compare it to Pieter Bruegel's Hunters in the Snow. Bruegel's cosmic vision of reality -- amplified by the purely technical device of a white, unifying snow cover -- turns the visible world into a grand abstraction. This perception resonates even with more modest compositions such as the present one. Yet within its apparent simplicity, which records the everyday rhythm of

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rural life, lies a deeper metaphor embodied in the solitary figure of the swineherd on the foreground. Through this figure, the artist evokes the parable of the Prodigal Son, investing the scene with a moral dimension. The presence of the pig adds a further symbolic layer: recalling the traditional emblem of Saint Anthony the Hermit, where the animal stands for mercy, healing, and the triumph of spirit over flesh -- a meaning rooted in the medieval order of the Antonines, who raised pigs to aid those afflicted by "St. Anthony's fire." When acquired, the painting was attributed to the Dutch artist Alexandre van Beerstraten and dated to the eighteenth century -- an attribution still preserved on the brass plaque of the frame and on the reverse of the panel, inscribed in old ink.

However, a closer examination of its technique reveals a far earlier origin. The work is executed in tempera rather than oil, a medium already considered somewhat archaic by the seventeenth century. This choice, however, reflects the economic and material realities of Antwerp in the aftermath of the Spanish Fury (1576), when many artists sought more affordable materials and simplified methods of production. Such technical austerity, combined with the small-scale format and the atmospheric sensibility of the scene, situates the painting within the circle of Gillis Mostaert and his followers, active in Antwerp during the late 1570s and early 1580s. Gillis Mostaert the Elder (Hulst, 1528 - Antwerp, 1598) was one of the most versatile and influential painters of the late Flemish Renaissance. Trained in the circle of Frans Floris and Jan Mandijn, he absorbed both the monumental language of Antwerp Mannerism and the observational realism of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, whose vision profoundly shaped his generation. Mostaert established a thriving workshop in Antwerp, producing cabinet-sized landscapes, allegories, and religious scenes for prominent collectors, including François de Granvelle and Archduke Ernest of Austria. His winter landscapes --

animated by miniature figures and suffused with pale, silvery light -- became among the most admired images of his time. Many of his followers and assistants continued to work in this idiom well into the early seventeenth century, extending the reach of his style and moral sensibility. The present painting belongs to this artistic milieu, where narrative content and atmospheric poetry coexisted within the same intimate format.