



## Prague School, Circa 1600, Judith



2 900 EUR

Signature : ÉCOLE DE PRAGUE, VERS 1600

Period : 17th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Copper

Length : 27 cm

Height : 33 cm

### Description

PRAGUE SCHOOL, CIRCA 1600  
JUDITH  
PRAGUE SCHOOL, CIRCA 1600  
Oil on copper 33 × 27 cm / 13.0 × 10.6 in  
With frame: 45 × 39 cm / 17.7 × 15.4 in  
There are three Old Testament subjects that unfailingly command my attention: the Adoration of the Golden Calf, the Feast of Belshazzar, and, of course, the story of Judith. Each time I encounter one of these themes, my eye instinctively lingers. So it happened with this small painting: although it was offered as a work of the nineteenth century, it immediately became clear that we are in fact dealing with a beautiful example of early seventeenth-century Mannerist painting, belonging to what art historians conventionally describe as the period "circa 1600". The aristocratic fragility of the figure, combined with

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the refined elegance of the pose, instantly evokes the memory of the court painters working in Prague at the court of Emperor Rudolf II. The very conception of Judith's pose - the turn of her body and the glance cast over the shoulder towards the viewer - felt strikingly familiar, irresistibly recalling two drawings by Bartholomeus Spranger. The first is *Minerva Crowning an Artist* (c. 1590, Vienna, Albertina), in which Minerva, with her arm extended forward and her gaze directed back over the shoulder towards the spectator, forms an astonishing parallel to our Judith, albeit in mirror reverse. Equally telling is another drawing by Spranger, preserved in the Louvre, depicting Judith: in the background one sees the already decapitated, lifeless body of Holofernes. The compositional structure, the break of the body and the treatment of the severed neck strikingly rhyme with what we observe in our painting. It is tempting to suppose that the painter of this work was acquainted with these - or closely related - Mannerist inventions. A comparable naturalism, which one sometimes encounters in Spranger, also resonates in our painting and inevitably brings to mind the Biblical text itself: "And she took his sword and, gathering all her strength, struck twice upon his neck and cut off his head." It is remarkable that precisely this naturalistic emphasis in the treatment of the Judith theme would take firm root in the art north of the Alps, developing further in the first half of the seventeenth century. It would become an important part of the visual language of the age, echoed in the work of Peter Paul Rubens and Trophime Bigot, and reaching its true artistic triumph in the paintings of Johann Liss, where naturalism becomes not merely an effect, but a crucial expressive instrument of dramatic narration.