



The Stone Of Madness - Egbert Van Heemskerck The Elder (1634 - 1704)



8 800 EUR

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 41

Height : 44,5

Description

Oil on canvas. Dutch School, last third of the 17th century, attributed to Egbert van Heemskerck the Elder. This interior scene, tense like a miniature theater of pain, depicts a man undergoing an operation without anesthesia, his face contorted by suffering. While a surgeon, wearing spectacles, cuts into his skull, an assistant holds him seated. This operation, known as "the extraction of the madness stone," has been practiced since the Middle Ages. It was believed at the time that madness, stupidity, and certain mental illnesses were caused by a stone lodged in the brain. Thus, impromptu surgeons traveled from town to town offering to cure these afflicted people by extracting the supposed stone. The spectacular operation often took place before an audience that gasped when the charlatan

Dealer

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brandished a stone, which he had previously concealed in his pocket. The light, focused on the three protagonists, sculpts their faces in a twilight that absorbs any superfluous background. In the foreground, a bottle, a silver goblet, and a white cloth establish the atmosphere of an improvised doctor's office. The theme of the extraction of the "stone of madness," inherited from the Boschian and Bruegelian tradition, finds here a later interpretation, more intimate than grotesque. The restrained staging, the warm palette, the restrained expressiveness of the figures, and the presence of the bespectacled doctor strongly evoke the world of Egbert van Heemskerck the Elder, a painter attentive to scenes of madness, quackery, and folk medicine. Many of his compositions, often centered on a group immersed in an enveloping darkness, bear a direct resemblance to our painting. Our composition is set within a beautiful guilloché frame with an inverted profile in blackened wood. Dimensions: 31 x 26.5 cm - 44.5 x 41 cm with the frame.

Biography: Egbert van Heemskerck the Elder (Haarlem, 1634 - London, 1704) likely trained with his father, Jan van Heemskerck, before joining the Guild of Saint Luke in 1664. He quickly established himself as a painter of unique genre scenes, centered on madness, medicine, charlatans, and zealous preachers. His style is characterized by a warm, brown palette, tightly framed interiors, and a keen observation of human behavior, oscillating between satire and psychological realism. Around the 1680s, he settled in London, where his biting humor and scenes of madmen met with great success among English collectors. Several of his compositions were then engraved and widely disseminated, contributing to his renown. His abundant and often copied output has sometimes been confused with that of his son, Egbert van Heemskerck the Younger, who worked in a similar style.

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