



Virgin And Child - Lorraine - Early 14th Century



40 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Stone

Width : 38 cm

Height : 103 cm

Depth : 25 cm

Description

This Virgin and Child is a remarkable medieval sculpture, dating from the very beginning of the 14th century, and attributable to a workshop in Lorraine. Carved from very fine and soft limestone, it testifies to the high technical skill achieved by the sculptors of this region, which was particularly active artistically at the time. Slight traces of polychromy remain in the most pronounced folds, reminding us that these sculptures were originally painted and intended for a rich and expressive visual experience. The work is part of a context of widespread Marian devotion, the Virgin and Child being the most common religious image of the Middle Ages, which proliferated from the 10th century onwards. Conceived as an image of the Virgin, it was intended to represent one of the three

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representations of Christ alongside the Virgin in Majesty and the Crucified. The Virgin is depicted according to the classical type of the Madonna: she stands upright, her body slightly inclined in a pronounced contrapposto, while she holds the Child on her left arm. This pose creates a gentle sway in the silhouette, while maintaining an impression of stability. The proportions are intentionally somewhat massive, with a broadening of the lower body, a well-known characteristic of Lorraine Virgins of this period. The cloak, draped over the shoulders, is open, revealing the chest and a belted dress beneath. The belt is a key iconographic element: positioned high on the waist, it is partially concealed by the figure of the Child. It follows the movement of the body and helps to structure the verticality of the composition. In Marian iconography, the belt traditionally refers to the chastity and purity of the Virgin, while also emphasizing the symbolic separation between the upper body, the seat of the spirit, and the lower, more carnal part. The very short veil, with its ample fall, is held in place by a simple diadem, a discreet attribute of Mary's royal dignity. Mary's face, broad and relatively flat, is distinguished by a strong forehead, a small nose and mouth, and a well-proportioned double chin, lending her expression a grave and human gentleness. This physiognomy, common in Lorraine sculpture, departs from the idealized Parisian elegance, favoring a carnal and three-dimensional presence. The statue, sculpted in the round, is indeed designed to be viewed from all sides, fully occupying the space and requiring no architectural frame. The Child's head is now missing, a frequent omission in medieval Marian statuary. Episodes of iconoclasm often primarily targeted the figure of Christ, the direct image of God, while the Virgin was more readily spared. The Child's half-naked body is enveloped in a lavish drapery, whose profusion of folds extends and merges with those of the Virgin's robe, creating a visual continuity between the two

figures and reinforcing their symbolic unity. In his hand, the Child holds a bird, an iconographic motif frequently interpreted as a prefiguration of the Passion, referring to the soul, sacrifice, and the announced death of Christ. Mary's missing right hand likely held a flower-shaped scepter, of which only the tenon remains today. A common Marian attribute, it would have contributed to the overall balance and formal tension of the composition. This work also reflects the intense cultural exchanges that Lorraine enjoyed at this time, under the rule of the Counts of Bar, in connection with Germanic regions, Flanders, and England. The Germanic influence is evident in the solidity of the forms, the sculptural density, and the assertive spatial presence of the figure, while remaining deeply rooted in local tradition. Likely intended for a parish church, cathedral, or monastic chapel, it illustrates the devotional function of these sculptures, conceived as aids to meditation and prayer. Thus, through its monumental presence and human tenderness, this Virgin and Child powerfully embodies the spirituality and refinement of Lorraine sculpture at the turn of the 14th century.