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The Five Senses: Smell - 17th-century Dutch School



7 800 EUR

Signature : École hollandaise du XVIIe siècle

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting on wood

Width : 14.5cm

Height : 19cm

Description

This painting depicts a rather smelly scene - a young boy bent over his father's knee as the older man wipes the boy's bottom. It appears the boy has had an accident on the toilet - positioned in the bottom left, with an unmistakable brown stain on the seat - and requires cleaning. Behind the father and son is the mother, drying a piece of fabric over the fire as she turns her head towards the scene as if she has just smelt the aftermath of the boy's accident.Dutch Golden Age paintings are renowned for their hidden symbolism, and this genre painting is no different. It reflects the popular painterly subject matter of depicting allegories for the five senses - scenes of exaggerated onslaughts against the senses of the painting's subjects. The allegory in this painting is unsurprisingly one for the sense of smell - in fact,

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the image of a boy being cleaned after an accident was a stock representation for allegories for scent. With this in mind, the viewer can't help but imagine the vulgar scent carried by the distinctive brown stains on the boy's bottom and toilet, and how assaulting this smell would be. Additionally asserting the painting as an allegory for the sense of smell is the emphasis on the noses of the figures - the man's bright red nose, and the woman's bulbous one.Despite its humorous subject matter, the painting is truly beautiful. The scene is cast in a low light that connotes a homely domestic interior, additionally emphasised by the proximity of each figure to one another. The boy's bottom is fleshy, with accurate rolls and creases demonstrating a keen eye for anatomical detail. The face of the father stands out too, painted in pale tones that draw further attention to his scarlet nose. The depiction of the bunched fabric of the cleaning cloth and the boy's garments also pay testament to the skill of the unknown painter behind this artwork.