Straw picture - Memento mori

Furniture Collection

Accession Nr.:	79.215.1
Date of production:	18th century (presumably)
Place of production:	Austria (presumably)
Inscription:	A. F. LANGGUTH FECIT 1633
Materials:	canvas
Techniques:	straw intarsia
Dimensions:	height: 97 cm width: 133,5 cm

In the foreground, among ruins, lies a decaying corpse eaten by worms, with a skull-and- crossbones beneath his legs. The man wearing a helmet and armour, who comes upon the corpse, makes a gesture of starting back, his face expressing terror and repulsion. In the background are hills, trees in blossom and buildings. In the lower part of the picture is a narrow band with inscription: QVID . TIBI . PRODEST . ISTE. MUNDUS. O. MISERABILIS . HOMO: QVI . DUM . AMATUR . FUGIT . DUM . / PRAESENS. EST . TRANSIT : DUM. EXALTAT . DEJICIT : DUM . BLANDITUR. DECIPIT . DUM . FLORET. / ARESCIT : DUM. AMATORES . SUOS . EMITTIT AD . PERPETUAS . MISERIAS . TRANSMITTIT

(What do you have from the world, oh miserable man? As soon as it is loved, it vanishes. Even as it is present, is it transient. It elevates you and casts you down. It flatters and deceives you. It flourishes and fades away. It abandons its lovers and brings them to perpetual misery.)

There follows the inscription with smaller letters: A. F. LANGGUTH . FECIT. 1633.

According to the opinion of László Lengyel, the straw picture was made in the 18th century, following an oil painting of the same size, and also reproducing its signature. But it may equally be assumed that the straw picture follows an illustration from a book of emblems. In view of the cutting and proportions of the composition, the model might have been a small-size picture. The style of the inscription and the iconography is characteristic of emblems. Research into possible emblem models may solve the problems of the subject in the future. These are: the contradiction between the characteristically 18th century genre of the straw picture, and the date of 1633, and the question of whether the signature refers to the object itself, or to its model.

Literature

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