Tapestry - Nativity and Death of Christ

Textile and Costume Collection

Accession Nr.:	2012.5.1
Artist/Maker:	Rippl-Rónai, József (1861 - 1927) / glass-engraver
Place of production:	Budapest
Inscription:	balra lent: Rónai; jobbra lent: RR
Materials:	wool
Techniques:	reversed sumak
Dimensions:	width: 125 cm length: 105 cm

This tapestry, which depicts the mystery of birth and death, follows the overall composition of the design held at the Hungarian National Gallery (inv. no. 1935–2834), which has French inscriptions, while altering some of the details. Owing to the weaving technique, the right and left sides are reversed on the tapestry, as compared to the design and the later cartoon (Museum of Applied Arts, Archives, Collection of Designs and Drawings, KRTF 25, see here). The upper panel depicts Calvary, with the standing or kneeling figures of the holy women, Mary and John the Evangelist surrounding the crucified Christ. The scene is framed by a tree on either side and two shrubs in the foreground. The presentation of the hilly view extending far into the background suggests that Rippl-Rónai was familiar with tapestries produced in Tournai and Brussels in the second half of the 15th century. One of their distinctive characteristic is that they suggest distance by ever-smaller trees, planted like strings of pearls on the receding rows of hills. The prominent contours of the motifs, the shroud-like simplicity of the clothes, the large patches of colour (yellow, pink, grey) and the stylized representation of space make for an effective, decorative composition. Katalin Keserű and Judit Pálosi think Gauguin's paintings of Brittany and naive calvaries were among the inspirations for Rippl-Rónai's work, while Ágnes Prékopa identified the influence of Maurice Denis in the palette of the scene and the figures of the holy women. What is certain is that this treatment of a biblical subject, the like of which Rippl-Rónai had shown little interest in, was influenced by the Nabis. This is particularly noticeable in the lower field, a scene in a peasant setting. In a simple village room, among the mundane objects of everyday life, the miracle of the birth of Christ is realized. The Madonna in the centre, cradling her child, is surrounded by kings. The foreground is richer than in the design, with gifts placed on the floor at the feet of Mary: a chalice, a chest and a string of pearls. The pale blue, green, pink and yellow colour surfaces, the rich play of lines, the brighter, but also flat flowers (dahlias) of the border are harmoniously linked to the Calvary scene. The tapestry was woven under the supervision of Artúr Lakatos, in the workshop of the Székesfővárosi Iparrajziskola (Budapest Industrial Drawing School), which was established in 1906.

Literature

- főszerkesztő: Prékopa Ágnes: Contributions to the History of Textile Art in Hungary between the Wars. Artists and Workshops. *Ars Decorativa 33*, 2019. Iparművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2019. - p. 105. Nr. 1. (Semsey Réka)
- Szerk.: Nagy Ildikó, Bernáth Mária: *Rippl-Rónai József gyűjteményes kiállítása*. Magyar Nemzeti Galéria, Budapest, 1998. - Nr. 210. (László Emőke)

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