JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

An Allegory of Autumn; a trompe l'oeil of a stone relief

MARTEN JOZEF GEERAERTS & Studio

Sold

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REF: 374775

Height: 74 cm (29.1")

Width: 176.5 cm (69.5")

Description

1707 - 1791
Flemish School
Oil on canvas, en grisaille

Geeraerts was baptised in Antwerp on 7th April, 1707. He was the son of a jeweller and in 1723, aged sixteen, he started his artistic training under the instruction of the history and biblical painter Abraham Godyn in Antwerp.

His early work comprised portraits and depictions of historical subjects but by the late 1720s he had become inspired by the Dutch painter Jacob de Wit (1695-1794) who had studied at the Academy in Antwerp from 1711 to 1713 and had himself been influenced by the work of Rubens. De Wit would also have seen the three dimensional portrayal of relief sculpture in early Flemish 15th century paintings, a notable example being the masterpiece Ghent Altarpiece in St Bravo's Cathedral by Jan and Hubert van Eyck. De Wit returned to Amsterdam and, from the 1720s onward, enjoyed a steady stream of commissions working on many ceiling and wall paintings into which he incorporated grisaille and white paintings that give an illusionistic three-dimensionality or high and bas-relief. He named these trompe l'oeil grisailles "witjes" which was a play on his surname and the Dutch word for white. The practice involved painting high-quality classical and neo-classical figures to look like three-dimensional sculptures on large panels. These works had tremendous impact on the art world and made trompe-l'oeil paintings very fashionable. Large reliefs can be found in churches, cathedrals and palaces, while smaller paintings were placed over doors or featured prominently above fireplaces in smaller buildings.

It is for his trompe l'oeil en grisaille works for which Geeraerts is best known and he achieved great success for the creation of works that produced the illusion of marble carvings, bronze medallions or wooden bas-reliefs adorning doorways and fireplaces. The inclusion of putti in compositions on the theme of children's bacchanalia that Geeraerts executed in the grisaille technique took its inspiration from the reliefs made by the celebrated Flemish sculptor François (or Francesco) Duquesnoy who worked in Rome.

The popularity of grisaille trompe l'oeils increased and demand for his services grew exponentially. In 1752, he received a commission for several over-door paintings for the Lichtenstein Palace and in 1755 for bas-relief designs in the house of Cardinal Albani in Rome. Franz Ernst von Salm-Reifferscheidt, the Bishop of Tournai, was another patron and Empress Catherine the Great ordered six reliefs. Between 1756 and 1760 Geeraerts produced a number of paintings for various churches such as Cambrai and Ghent and the court of Vienna were regular clients. In 1762 he produced four trompe l'oeil paintings for the Royal Palace in Brussels.

The pair of paintings The Rest of Diana and The Toilet of Venus now in the Hermitage in Moscow, are remarkable in that the artist has reproduced three quite different substances - marble, bronze and wood - in each work and he can be regarded as one of the masters of this genre. The "white school" was continued through other artists such as Piet Joseph Sauvage (1744-1818) who was Geeraerts' pupil, Dominique Doncre (1743-1820) and Louis Léopold Boilly (1761-1845)....

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