

KLAAS MULLER

F R A N S F R A N C K E N I I A N D G I J S E

The Judgement of Midas

The judgement of Midas is part of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and tells us the story of a music competition between faun Pan and Apollo (God of music and poetry).

Apollo won the contest but Midas then questioned this outcome and pointed out Pan -here seen as the lesser God- as winner. Midas was punished for his foolish and frivolous judgement and therefore sentenced to his well known dog-ears. Similar moralising paintings were very popular in the Southern Netherlands. They were a form of triggering conversations and a demonstration of the intellectual knowledge (regarding mythology) of the owner or host.

We are grateful to Ursula Härting for confirming the attribution of the present painting to Francken (figures) and Leytens (landscape). A written certificate, dated 1 February 2022, is available. She dates the present Midas to the second half of the 1620s.

Ursula Härting in her certificate: 'The painting *The Judgement of Midas*, known to me in the original, was painted by Frans Francken the Younger and, based on today's state of knowledge, by Gysbrecht Leytens. The figural staffage in the foreground is by the hand of Francken, while Leytens executed the landscape background with the followers of Pan [...]. Since the eighteenth century, only wintery motifs featuring bare trees have been found as works by the Master of the Winter Landscapes or Leytens, but during his lifetime in the seventeenth century, one could also encounter plain landscapes, in one instance with figures by Francken's hand, or even seascapes under that name. Recently, I have recognised Leytens's hand in dense, woolly foliage and in pale green and very loosely painted leafy landscapes or parts thereof. Starting in March 1627, Leytens rented the studio of the deceased Govaerts for a period of three years. Leytens might have been able to complete unfinished paintings there at a stage when they solely featured staffage by the hand of Frans Francken II, such as probably the present picture, which I date to the second half of the 1620s. So far, the basis of a painting has been seen in its background, such as the present landscape, which would then have been followed by the figure painter's contribution. With its figures by Frans II in the foreground, however, the present painting confirms that the landscape background was painted around the figural staffage, which had been there first.'

oil on panel, 57 x 84 cm

