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J A C O B J O R D A E N S

Study of an Evangelist

Jacob ("Jacques") Jordaens, together with Pieter Paul Rubens and Anthony Van Dyck, belonged to the "big 3" of Flemish 17th century painting. Unlike Rubens and Van Dyck, Jordaens never visited Italy: apart from a few travels to the Northern Netherlands the master remained in Antwerp all his life. He was the son-in-law and student of the painter Adam Van Noort and, in addition to being a painter, a successful businessman. His sympathy for Protestantism was not universally appreciated.

Jordaens developed his own style that is quite characteristic and recognizable: on the one hand realistic with a Carravaggistic influences and at the same time monumental and quite expressive (witness our work for example).

Unlike Van Dyck and Rubens, Jordaens was never an official court painter. His clients were therefore mainly local rich citizens and clergy. It was only after Ruben's death (1640) that royal commissions began to arrive and he became the infallible number one in Antwerp.

This "tronie" or study-head may have been a design for an evangelist, as the man is holding a book. He looks dreamily ahead with the other hand on his chest. Jordaens used the "wet-on-wet" and impasto-technique for this powerful and virtuoso work, which generates a very lively effect.

We can make an interesting comparison with a beautiful and typical drawing by the master that is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (SEE IMAGE): "Evangelist, looking to the left" (black, red and white chalk and brush, 264 x 219mm, object no RP-T-1954-90). The similarities are obvious, but we still see small differences (for example the shape of the nose and beard, the hairline, ect.) and we can ask ourselves whether Jordaens made the drawing first or our painting. Our study is clearly "alla prima" and painted very spontaneously and it was not unusual that after an oil study of life, a drawing - for clarification - was made.

As Ben Van Beneden pointed our man may be the same model as depicted on Jordaens' satyr on "An Allegory of Fruitfulness" (Wallace collection, London) or one of his "4 Evangelists" (Louvre, Paris, elderly depicted).

Our painting is stylistically similar to other study heads by Jordaens such as "Head of a bearded man, possibly an apostle" (Christie's NY, 14/10/2021, lot no 4) or "Head of an old man" (Amiens, Musée du Picardie) and "Job" (Detroit, Institute of Arts, Inv.43418). But also finished paintings such as Jordaens' "Four Evangelists" (Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 1404) or some heads on "Peter Finding the Silver Coin in the Mouth of the Fish" (Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. KMS3198). The work can be dated to around 1625.

We are grateful to Ben Van Beneden for his certificate, confirming the authorship by Jordaens

Oil on panel, 65 x 49 cm (25 ⁵/₈ x 19 ¹/₄ inches)



Circa: ca 1625

Artist description:

Jacob (Jacques) Jordaens was a Flemish painter, draughtsman and a designer of tapestries and prints. He was a prolific artist who created biblical, mythological, and allegorical compositions, genre scenes, landscapes, illustrations of Flemish sayings and portraits. After the death of Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, he became the leading Flemish Baroque painter of his time. Unlike those illustrious contemporaries he never travelled abroad to study the Antique and Italian painting and, except for a few short trips to locations elsewhere in the Low Countries, he resided in Antwerp his entire life. He also remained largely indifferent to Rubens and van Dyck's intellectual and courtly aspirations. This attitude was expressed in his art through a lack of idealistic treatment which contrasted with that of these contemporaries.