

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Italian (18th century)

A Traveller - St John the Baptist

Circa: Circa 1700-1720

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28 cm (11 inches)

The tall, bearded figure, stands naked except for a cloak slung over his left shoulder and back and pulled across his lower body with his languid right arm. He steps forward with his right foot, looking to his right, his face wearing an expressive frown. His contrapposto is balanced by the staff he holds in his left hand and upon which he leans. The figure stands on an integral ivory socle, the tree trunk to the back of his feet also integrally carved. The head, feet and hands are disproportionally small, and the distinctive elongated limbs recall Italian Mannerist sculpture of the sixteenth century.

This magnificent and rare Baroque ivory is directly comparable in subject, handling, and quality, to an ivory identified as 'Winter' in the Victoria and Albert Museum London and which Marjorie Trusted refers to in her article on ivories of this type (which incidentally are very uncommon) as 'one of the most arresting and enigmatic' (see lit.). Winter is dated to around 1700-1720 and so ours can be supposed to be of a similar age. Furthermore, like Winter the present sculpture is clearly Italianate in feel, both in mannerist handling and subject matter. However, given the itinerant nature of Ivory sculptors – who were in any case more prevalent in Spain and Germany rather than Italy – it is most likely that it was produced either in a Spanish workshop for an Italian market, or by a Northern European sculptor whilst in Italy.

The head, feet and hands of this figure are disproportionately small, and wide hips and elongated limbs recall Italian mannerist sculpture of the sixteenth century. Analogous pieces to the present work and also Winter are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: Neptune and Amphitrite. The elongated proportions and poses of the figures are closely comparable, and the facial features and beard of the Neptune in Vienna are very similar to those of the present ivory.

It has been suggested by Theuerkauff (see lit.) that the aforementioned ivories show similarities with the reliefs known to be by Leoni in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich. The proportions of the present figure, with its elongated legs, and small head, also bear resemblances to sixteenth-century Italian bronzes, such as those by Alessandro Vittoria (1525-1608).

The Winter in the Victoria and Albert is unquestionably related to another group of three ivories, belonging to the Portland Estate in Britain. Those depict the other three Seasons: Flora representing Spring, Ceres as Summer and Bacchus as Autumn. All four figures have graceful poses which echo and complement each other, and each have a small symbol of their identity in the form of a basket of flowers, grapes, or Winter's brazier, at their feet.

Provenance

Provenance:

Private Collection, England

Literature:

Comparative Literature:

Theuerkauff, Christian, ed. Elfenbein, Sammlung Reiner Winkler.

Trusted, Marjorie, Baroque & Later Ivories, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2013.

Trusted, Marjorie, 'The Four Seasons in Ivory: A Baroque Group Re-United', in: Miner, H. Carolyn (ed.), The Eternal Baroque. Studies in Honour of Jennifer Montagu, Skira Editore S.P.A., Italy, 2015, pp. 395-407