Manuscript - St. Michael

Object: Manuscript

Place of origin: Paris (probably, illumination)

Date: ca. 1900 (illumination)

Artist/Maker: Spanish Forger (illuminator)

Materials and Techniques: Body colour with gilt enrichments

Credit Line: Accepted by HM Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax and allocated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008

Museum number: E.528-2008

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case MOD, shelf B, box 1

Public access description

The Spanish Forger was a skillful and prolific forger, who capitalised on the fashion for collecting medieval panel paintings and illuminated manuscripts, which was widespread in Europe and the United States between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. His distinctive repertory of sweet faced figures set against a background of steep hills and castles derived from the study of illustrated books on the Middle Ages. His work was exposed as that of a forger in the 1930s, on the basis of a panel formerly attributed to the fifteenth century Spanish painter Jorge Inglés. This association provided the name of convenience by which he is still known, although it is generally believed that he was active in Paris in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

This is one of a group of five or six miniatures of similar size and borders, painted on the back of cuttings from a text page of an Italian choir book of fifteenth or sixteenth century date. It depicts St. Michael. The saint in the left foreground is shown defending a city against invaders while three figures look on from the walls. This miniature has been identified by Voelkle as “Archangel Defending a City against Invaders”. The subject does not refer to any biblical source but is instead a combination of chivalric sources and the biblical figure of St. Michael. The costume of the figures and the castellated landscape are reminiscent of Franco-Flemish manuscripts of around 1400. This anachronistic tendency to combine subjects from different sources is a principal reason why the works of the Spanish Forger are readily identifiable as fakes.

Descriptive line

‘St. Michael’: illuminated manuscript leaf by ‘The Spanish Forger’, ca. 1900.

Physical description

Manuscript

Dimensions

Height: 20.5 cm painting, Width: 14.5 cm painting

Museum number

E.528-2008

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O158217/st-michael-manuscript-spanish-forger/