Plaque - The Fountain of Life and an Allegory of the Church with the Last Judgement

Object: Plaque

Place of origin: Spain (probably Castilian, made)

Date: ca. 1600 (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Ivory carved in relief

Museum number: 277-1879

Gallery location: Sculpture, Room 111, The Gilbert Bayes Gallery, case DR6

Public access description

Ivory was popular as a material for religious subjects, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries. Spanish and Portuguese patrons imported ivories carved with Christian imagery from their territories overseas, such as the Philippines, Mexico and Goa. German and Netherlandish artists were renowned for their dexterity in ivory carving. Their reliefs are masterpieces of composition and virtuosity. This detailed relief was probably made for a Spanish patron. The lower half of the relief is based on an engraving published by G. de Jode in 1585, after a design by Marten de Vos (Estella Marcos, 1984, fig 331). Estella Marcos also remarks that the upper half of the relief is probably inspired by a different engraved source, which would explain the lack of unity in the whole composition between the upper and the lower halves.

Descriptive line

Relief, ivory, depicting an allegory of the Church and the Fountain of Life (The Last Judgement), Spanish, probably Castilian, ca. 1600

Physical description

Ivory, oblong, carved in relief with an allegorical representation of the Christian Church, showing a scene divided into two parts: above, the Fountain of Life surmounted by the crucified Christ. In the basin of the fountain are prelates and rulers, six of whom hold scrolls. Below are crowds of standing figures; on the left and right is a figure, each holding a scroll. Underneath the disproportionately large figure of the archangel St Michael is separating the sheep from the goats. Cherubim and more scrolls are to be seen in the sky.

Dimensions

Height: 16 cm, Width: 10.5 cm

Museum number

277-1879

Object history note

Acquired in Spain by John Charles Robinson, and sold to the Museum for £20 in 1879.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88454/the-fountain-of-life-and-plaque-unknown/