Manuscript - Joseph and Potiphar's wife

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.531-2008

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 Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; a biblical subject taken from the Genesis (39-2). Joseph is shown kneeling in the centre, while two figures behind take off his cloak. He gestures to the figure of Potiphar’s wife who sits on a throne to the left. This grouping is unlike other depictions of the subject, which show Joseph alone with Portiphar’s wife in a bedroom while she removes his cloak and tries to seduce him. The costume of the figures is reminiscent of Franco-Flemish manuscripts from about 1400. However the combination of figures in graceful poses to create a scene that does not follow its previous iconography is a principal reason why the works of the Spanish Forger are readily identifiable as fakes.

Descriptive line

‘Joseph and Potiphar's Wife': illuminated manuscript leaf by 'The Spanish Forger', ca. 1900.

Physical description

Manuscript

Dimensions

Height: 20.5 cm painting, Width: 14.5 cm painting

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URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O158220/joseph-and-potiphar-s-wife-manuscript-spanish-forger/