Basic Detail Report



Five Foolish Virgins

Date

c.1900

Primary Maker

Kathleen Bruce

Medium

Oil on canvas

Description

The narrative of this painting comes from a biblical story, the Parable of the Ten Virgins (also titled the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins) - Matthew 25:1-13. The parable tells the story of ten virgins invited to participate at a wedding with the arrival of the groom and his party expected to occur during the night. Five wise virgins bring with them lamps containing oil, while five foolish virgins bring their lamps only, containing no oil at all. Upon realising their foolish error, the wise virgins advise that they go and purchase some oil for their lamps. But during their absence from the wedding venue the groom and his party arrive and on their return they are prevented from entering the wedding ceremony. Kathleen Bruce has depicted the Five Foolish Virgins staggered within a large vertical composition, accentuating its rising, architectural setting. Each of the virgins hold, or have discarded nearby, their unlit oil lamps and appear here mourning their missed opportunity of entering the wedding ceremony. Stylistically, Bruce's depiction of the five virgins is classically inspired and typical of the arts education she would have received in a London art school during the mid-nineteenth century. Bruce's virgins echo the idealised, sculptural forms represented by the work of Sir Frederick Leighton and the New Sculpture movement, then at its height. Biblical and symbolist subjects were incredibly popular by painters and sculptors c.1900 and are frequently treated with a highly academic and classical approach. Such narrative subjects are often further imbued with romantic and oriental imagery. The story of the Wise and Foolish Virgins has been a popular subject in painting, sculpture, music, and drama throughout Europe. A number of Northern European altarpieces depict the parable. Through their arts school education, Kathleen Bruce and her contemporaries would have been

aware of the popularity of such narrative painting. With its arched top, it is likely that this painting would have been housed within a gilt architectural frame - a choice very popular by artists of this style c.1900. See another work by Bruce in the Southwark Art Collection: The Cup of Death (GA0758). Benjamin Angwin - October 2014

Dimensions

Object/Work: 1390 x 490 mm