



The Cup of Death

Date

before 1892

Primary Maker

Kathleen Bruce

Medium

Oil on canvas

Description

Unfortunately nothing is known of the artist, who is not to be confused with the sculptor Kathleen Scott (née Bruce). The attribution of this painting is by virtue of its appearance in the South London Gallery public exhibition catalogue of 1892, labelled as by Miss K. Bruce. The painting depicts a winged male figure that is an allegory of death. He leans over the shoulder of a young, beautiful and idealised woman and tempts her with a cup to which she leans out to accept. Between 1885 and 1911 American symbolist painter, Elihu Vedder, produced a number of versions of an identical allegorical subject (now held by Smithsonian American Art Museum), one of which was a bookplate illustration for the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám (1883-84) and accompanied by the following

text (translated from Persian into English by the poet Edward Fitzgerald in 1889): So when the Angel of the darker Drink At last shall find you by the river-brink, And, offering his Cup, invite your Soul Forth to your Lips to quaff – you shall not shrink. Such subjects are typical of symbolist painting and literature and it is highly likely that Kathleen Bruce had read Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyám and possibly even seen Vedder's illustration. Bruce painted her version onto a large vertical canvas reminiscent of decorative mural schemes. The painting canvas has a rounded top and is itself contained by a gilt architectural frame – typical of paintings of this style and subject c.1900. Such a symbolist subject is typical of Bruce's work; see another work by Scott in the Southwark Art Collection: *Five Foolish Virgins* (GA0757). Benjamin Angwin - October 2014

Dimensions

Object/Work: 1041.4 x 635 mm