

Finch & C^o



AN ITALIAN NAPLES PRESEPIO FIGURE OF A BLACKAMOOR , PAINTED TERRACOTTA , CARVED WOOD , COTTON , CLOTH AND SILK

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LATE 18 TH CENTURY

SIZE : 40 CM HIGH – 15¾ INS HIGH

LITERATURE

THE LARGEST SCHOOL OF ITALIAN PRESEPIO MODELLERS WORKED IN NAPLES IN THE 18 TH CENTURY WHEN THE FASHION FOR CHRISTMAS CRÍ‘CHE SCENES WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF POPULARITY . THE QUALITY OF WORKMANSHIP , AND THE ELABORATENESS OF THE SETTINGS WAS OFTEN EXCEPTIONAL . THE NATIVITY TABLEAUX WOULD BE BROUGHT OUT IN THE CHURCH EACH CHRISTMAS AND ARRANGED AS INGENUOUSLY CONTRIVED THREE DIMENSIONAL STAGE SETS , OFTEN INVOLVING WHOLE STREET SCENES .

HOWEVER , THESE FIGURES WERE NOT CONFINED TO THE CHURCHES , THEY WERE ALSO USED IN DOMESTIC SETTINGS WITH THE CRÍ‘CHE SCENES SET OUT IN ROOMS OR EVEN ON THE TOPS OF HOUSES ! ROYALTY OFTEN VIED FOR THE BEST FIGURES , THE MOST ELABORATE JEWELLED SETTINGS , AND FOR THE MAGNIFICENCE OF THE COSTUMES , SETS OFTEN INCLUDED PAINTED SCENERY WITH VESUVIUS SMOKING IN THE BACKGROUND .

THERE WERE FAMOUS ARTISTS EMPLOYED AT THE ROYAL COURT BY THE BOURBON KING CHARLES III . SAMMARTINO , KNOWN FOR HIS SCULPTURAL MASTER PIECE OF THE VEILED CHRIST IN THE CHAPEL OF SAN SEVERO IN NAPLES , CREATED MANY PRESEPIO FIGURES WHICH ARE NOTED FOR THEIR VIGOROUS MODELLING . HIS PUPIL GUISEPPE GORI SEEMS TO HAVE MADE HIS LIVING ENTIRELY BY CREATING CRÍ‘CHE FIGURES . SOMETIMES HE WOULD INCLUDE FIGURES WITH THE LIKENESSES OF HIS FRIENDS AND PATRONS IN THE CROWD SCENES .

THE TRADITION OF THESE MINIATURE SCENES OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE CUSTOM OF WANDERING TROUBADOURS PERFORMING NATIVITY PLAYS IN THE CHURCH .