Finch & Co



SOUTH GERMAN CARVED IVORY 'MEMENTO MORI' ROSARY BEAD

A SOUTH GERMAN CARVED IVORY 'MEMENTO MORI' ROSARY BEAD IN THE FORM OF A HUMAN SKULL
LATE 17TH CENTURY
SIZE: 3.5CM HIGH, 3CM WIDE, 4CM DEEP - 1½ INS HIGH, 1¼ INS WIDE, 1½ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

THE POPULARITY OF 'MEMENTO MORI' IS SAID TO HAVE HAD ITS ORIGINS IN THE TERRORS EXPERIENCED DURING THE BLACK DEATH, BUT THE INTEREST IN THE INESCAPABLE NATURE OF DEATH DATES FROM WELL BEFORE 1348. IT COMBINED THE NATURAL ANXIETY FELT OVER THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE FACED BY THE SOUL AFTER DEATH WITH A REMINDER TO DO WHATEVER ONE COULD ABOUT IT. ESSENTIALLY FOR THE FAITHFUL THIS MEANT PRAYER, AND THE SKULL ATTACHED TO A ROSARY ACTED AS A PATERNOSTER BEAD ENCOURAGING THE RECITATION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER. THE INSECURITY FELT OVER THE TIME AND TYPE OF ONE'S DEATH, AND THE DUAL CONCERNS OF PENANCE AND PURGATORY, UNDERLAY MUCH OF THE ARTISTIC PRODUCTION OF DEVOTIONAL OBJECTS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY.