

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Artist: Unknown
Date: 16th-17th Century
Dimensions: 96 x 131 cm
Material: Oil on canvas
Inventory Number: 42284

Total Cost: € 20.200,00

STATE OF PRESERVATION:

Currently, this painting is extremely fragile. The back of the panel is composed of several horizontal boards and crossbars. Unfortunately, the crossbars prevent the natural movement of the wood and have caused several cracks and fissures on the painted surface. The extent of these lacunae has required the application of a temporary Japanese paper cover. The entire pictorial surface is damaged and the colors have faded, making it extremely difficult to get a clear view of the painted subjects.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:

- Consolidation of the wooden structure: removal of old crossbars and horizontal boards
- Creation of a new support system with new crossbars which will allow movement and support the natural elasticity of the panel
- Consolidation of the panel
- Cleaning and consolidation of the pictorial surface
- Touching-up of the pictorial surface

The painting depicts Hagar in the desert with her son Ishmael and an angel. The book of Genesis (21:8-21) recounts that Sarah, unable to have children, offered her husband her slave Hagar who bore Abraham a son named Ishmael. In time Sarah too had a son named Isaac. One day Sarah saw Ishmael playing with her son Isaac. Sarah was jealous and asked Abraham to dismiss the slave woman with her child. Abraham was not happy about his wife's decision but God said to Abraham: "Do not be distressed about the boy or about your slave woman. Heed the demands of Sarah, no matter what she is asking of you; for it is through Isaac that descendants shall bear your name. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a great nation of him also, since he too is your offspring." Abraham then dismissed them. Hagar left and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When they did not have any water left she placed the boy under a bush and sat down a small distance away, unwilling to watch her son die. As she sat there, Ishmael began to cry. God heard the voice of the child, and an angel of



Detail of the damages on the pictorial surface.



God called Hagar from heaven and said, "What is the matter, Hagar? Don't be afraid; God has heard the boy's cry in this plight of his. Arise, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation." God then opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled a skin with water, and then let the boy drink.

In the Middle Ages, the story of Hagar is depicted almost exclusively in connection with the cycles of Abraham. It is only in the 16th century that scenes featuring Hagar, especially the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael by Abraham, and Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, are represented as independent scenes, like this painting in our collection.

This beautiful work of art most likely dates between the end of the 16th and the early 17th century and was completed by an anonymous artist who was probably active in the Roman environment. On the left side of this painting, the slave Hagar is listening to the angel standing on a soft cloud while the child Ishmael sleeps on a red cloth, his head resting on the now empty bottle of water. The entire composition is dominated by the three figures and little space is left for the landscape and the sky. A hint of the Baroque movement appears in the pattern of drapery.