A rare 16th century figural alabaster, English, circa 1520-70

Sold



REF: 4599

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Height: 9.4 cm (3.7")

Width: 14.7 cm (5.8")

Depth: 4.1 cm (1.6")

Description

Modelled in a reclined position, head resting on left arm, the right arm lying across waist, wearing a coif, laced bodice and full-length skirt, mounted on a custom-made ebonised fruitwood stand, alabaster only: height 3.8cm, width 10.6cm, depth 2cm

This tiny carved alabaster female figure is something of an enigma. Her pose is reminiscent of some English tomb effigies of the 16th and 17th centuries. See, for example, the effigy of Margaret Cave Knollys (1549-1606) in St Nicholas Church, Stanford-on-Avon, Northamptonshire; the facial features, although worn, are comparable to those of the surviving children on the tomb of William Willington, St Martin's Church, Barcheston, Warwickshire. However unlike these and many such tomb effigies in churches across England, the dress is very plain and the head, other than the simple coif, unadorned: apparently she is not of the noble classes. A more obvious disparity is the size of this figure: even to make it as a tomb 'attendant' the figure is on the small side. The diminutive size, plain dress and minimal detailing may suggest this carving is a maquette. See The V&A Museum, London, accession number 1170-1864 for an example of an alabaster tomb maquette, from Germany, and accession number A.1-1929 for a later example of an English model for an effigy in terracotta. According to the V&A such working models, perhaps made to show clients as well as to help makers visualise the final monument, hardly ever survived. Is that what this is, crafted resembling what was most familiar to its creator to stand in as a place-holder for a very specific project?

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