A pair of highly unusual Elizabeth I carved oak figures, circa 1580

£3,250



REF: 5151

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Height: 35.5 cm (14")

Width: 13.3 cm (5.2")

Depth: 5.8 cm (2.3")

Description

Each female, their expressive oval head inclined and with naked torso, one designed as Judith, holding the head of Holofernes, symbolising the triumph of the weak over strong, the other holds a turtle, a remarkable 'attribute' representing longevity and wisdom, (2)

The influence of European prints as a source of design inspiration in England began primarily (based on surviving artefacts) during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). A marine turtle, a non-native reptile, as found here is a wonderful testament to the transformation of the visual arts through the expansion of the printing process. See a zoological text by Conrad Gressner, 'Nomenclator Aquatilium Animantium' for a woodcut of a turtle, published by Christoph Froschoverus in 1560, Zurich.

The accompanying figure of Judith represents a further important design influence during the reign of Elizabeth I; the continued onset of the Reformation. The banning of certain kinds of religious devotional imagery, considered idolatrous, was replaced with more 'acceptable' 'historical' narrative biblical subjects, derived directly from religious text, rather than Catholic interpretation and based around faith in Christ and the principle of salvation. Here the story of Judith serves as a powerful allegory of victorious resistance, a theological justification for a minority 'under siege' (represented by the devout, and notably female, Judith) to fight against the Imperial might of the Catholic Church (represented by the powerful Assyrian general, Holofernes)

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