

76 *The Rape of Proserpina*

Oak panel, 80.7 × 62.8 cm

WM 1492–1948

Proserpina (in Greek, Persephone), daughter of Jupiter and Ceres, was gathering flowers in her native Sicily when Pluto appeared in his chariot and, struck by her beauty, carried her off to the nether regions.

The earliest recorded mention of the painting (1796) describes it as a collaborative work by Nicolaas Verkolje and Jan van Huysum. The painting is not signed and there is no contemporary documentation to confirm the attribution, but the stylistic evidence would seem to support it. Known primarily as a painter of flowers, van Huysum also produced a number of Arcadian landscapes similar in composition and atmosphere to WM 1492 (on van Huysum as landscapist see Segal 2006–07, pp. 101–04, 278–304). However, the figures in these scenes are uniformly smaller and sligher than the relatively large and robust figures seen here; moreover these figures distinctly resemble the idealized figures in Verkolje's historical compositions (cf. *Europa and the Bull*, c. 1735–40, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, no. SK-A-4967; or *Dido and Aeneas*, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum).

The treatment of the subject, showing Proserpina struggling in the chariot, is traditional in classical and renaissance art, although comparatively rare in Dutch art. Both for the vigorous gestures of the women and in the forest setting, van Huysum and Verkolje have followed a pattern known in Netherlandish paintings from the sixteenth century; but rather than aiming for the more lifelike rendering of Rembrandt (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, inv. 823; J. Bruyn *et al.*, Stichting Foundation, Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, I, no. A39) or Rubens (Museo del Prado, Madrid), their composition reflects the more refined classicizing tastes of the early eighteenth century. A very close comparison can be drawn with the composition by Jan Soens in the Museum at Valenciennes (S. Béguin, in *Oud Holland*, LXXI, 1956, pp. 217f., fig. 1).

CONDITION The panel is cradled, with a slight convex warp. Slight split in panel upper edge, 15 cm long; otherwise good.

PROV. E. Hooft (widow of Wouter Valckenier) sale, Amsterdam, 31 Aug. 1796, lot 41 (as by N. Verkolje and Jan van Huysum; fl.240, to Brentano); Le Rouge sale, Paris, 27 Apr. 1818, lot 67 (as by Verkolje and 'Jean van Ruisum'); bought for the 1st Duke of Wellington by Féréol de Bonnemaïson for 1267 frs., about £500.

EXH. Tokyo 1990–91 (21)

LIT. Wellington 1901 (as collaboration); *Paintings at Apsley House*, 1965, pl. 43; Kauffmann 1982 pp. 75–76 (as by van Huysum)



ITALIAN

Italian School, sixteenth century

77 *A Sainted Nun*

Inscribed in white, lower right, with inventory no.: 448

Poplar panel, 52.7 × 42.5 cm

WM 1529–1948

The attribution to Andrea del Sarto in the Wellington Catalogue is clearly unacceptable on grounds of both style and quality. Indeed, the hard outlines against a plain background are more reminiscent of Bronzino and his imitators. A date in the mid-sixteenth century remains likely.

The hand and the cross are executed in a different, broader technique and could conceivably have been added later. The Maltese cross, which has an image of the Crucifixion at its centre, could signify that the sitter was a member of the Hospitaller Sisters of St John of Jerusalem, who were linked to the Order of the Knights of Malta, but this form of cross was also used as the insignia of several other orders (see F. Bonanni, *Catalogo degli Ordini Religiosi della Chiesa militante*, Rome, 1707, II, nos. 75, 94, 96).