The Virtues (Virtus Uranica)



Brief description: This medieval panel depicts three angels dressed in white robes with two golden wings, golden hair and white haloes. They are identified by the inscription Â‘virtus uranicaÂ’ (heavenly might) as virtues, and wear diadems and dalmatic clerical robes and albs with apparels. In this rare depiction, all the virtues are shown holding open books, presumably representing the knowledge of God, and what appear to be urine flasks. One of the three Virtues holds up his urine flask to inspect it. The presence of the urine flask is highly unusual, 'Principans Turma' (ruling troop).The Principalities wear crowns, and long-ermine trimmed robes, representing their role in looking after kings, princes and bishops. It was produced in the fifteenth century by an English artist.

Three angelic virtues are labelled with the inscription 'Virtus Uranica' (heavenly virtues) and are shown wearing diadems, dalmatic clerical robes and albs with apparels. They hold open books, sceptres and curiously, urine flasks. The inclusion of the urine flask may be a pun on the word uranica or perhaps indicates the virtues' power to perform healing miracles. The panel would have been one of a series of 9, showing the different hierarchies of Christian angelic beings, according to the beliefs put forward by Pseudo-Dionysius in his 6th century book Â‘De Coelesti HierarchiaÂ’ (On the Celestial Hierarchy). The scale of the panel suggests it may have been for a domestic setting. The entire panel is made from one piece of clear white glass painted with glass paint and silver stain. The style of the panel suggests it is likely 15th century in date, and possibly English. The design may have been copied from a woodcut as the painting style is very linear, and the figures are represented within a border.

Object type: panel

Number of objects: 1

Production date: 1

Production period: 15th century

Designer: English Artist

Dimensions: Height: 178 mm, Width: 154 mm

Acquisition: purchase 18.11.2015

Acquisition source: Bonhams London

Accession number: ELYGM:2015.7.2

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