



Judith with the Head of Holofernes

Date

ca. 1670-1680

Primary Maker

Pietro Dandini

Medium

oil on canvas

Description

The biblical story of Judith, the Jewish widow who saved the Israelites by beheading the Assyrian general Holofernes, was an enormously popular subject in European literature and art beginning in the Middle Ages. In addition to her importance as a heroine and defender of her people, Judith was considered a precursor of Christian triumphs, a prefiguration of Christ's victory over death, a prototype of the Virgin and the Church, and the

embodiment of many sterling virtues. Judith with the Head of Holofernes illustrates the immediate aftermath of the gruesome slaying. Judith holds the bloodied sword with which she has decapitated Holofernes, but she has not yet given the general's head to her maidservant, Abra, to be placed in a basket in preparation for leaving the enemy camp. The heroine's beauty, fine clothing, jewels, and bared breast remind the viewer of the sexual entrapment that led to the downfall of Holofernes, whose lifeless head appears less threatening than the grotesque gargoyle on the stool where Judith is seated.

Dimensions

Sight: 53 x 39 in. (134.6 x 99.1 cm) Framed: 61 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 3 in. (156.2 x 120.7 x 7.6 cm)