Joseph Accused by Potiphar's Wife

Primary Maker
Noël Hallé

Date
circa 1740 - 1744

Medium
Oil on canvas

Dimensions
55 3/4 x 65 5/8 in. (141.6 x 166.7 cm) Framed: 65 1/2 x 75 x 3 in. (166.4 x 190.5 x 7.6 cm)

Credit Line
Purchase from gift of the Mark Morton Memorial Fund, and Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Davidson

Object number
1974.116

Type
Paintings

At the right of Noel Hallé’s emotionally charged painting stands Joseph, who, according to the Old Testament story, rejected the advances of Potiphar’s wife. In their scuffle, she gained possession of his cloak, which she then used to suggest that he had initiated the attempted seduction. The subject of Hallé’s painting was rendered far less frequently than the preceding episode, in which Joseph flees the advances of Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39). The many versions of the more famous scene generally feature two struggling figures, often in half length, and focus on Joseph’s escape and the procuring of his garment. The best-known precedent for Hallé’s theme is by Rembrandt, who depicts Potiphar listening to his wife’s accusations as Joseph looks on from the other side of the bed. Hallé places the figures on one side of the bed in a well-defined space, where the drama is clearly presented. His Potiphar shows astonishment at his wife’s announcement. Hallé added a servant who holds Joseph’s cloak, acting as an accomplice. His painting was well received in critical pamphlets when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1748. An anonymous author admired the novel treatment of the subject and especially the range of expression, “All the various passions in this painting form the happiest contrasts. It is assuredly the most successful work that Hallé has put before us.” <p>Resource: <i>The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art: A Guide to the Collection</i>, Sue Taylor and Richard Born, eds. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990, p. 55. </p>