Milo of Croton Attacked by Wild Beasts

Primary Maker
Pordenone

Date
1534 - 1536

Medium
Oil on canvas

Dimensions
Unframed: 80 1/2 x 93 3/4 in. (204.5 x 238.1 cm)
Framed: 85 x 98 x 4 in. (215.9 x 248.9 x 10.2 cm)

Credit Line
Purchase, The Cochrane-Woods Collection

Object number
1975.31

Type
Paintings

About The Artist
Active during the Renaissance, Pordenone painted mostly altarpieces and large fresco cycles, so easel pictures, especially of non-religious subjects, are extremely rare among his extant works. Assimilating Roman artistic ideas—especially those of Michelangelo—in profound ways, Pordenone achieved breadth of form, the depiction of complex anatomy under stress, and even a ferocity of expression. It was probably those aspects of Pordenone’s art, inspired by central Italian ideas and developed during one or more trips to Rome, that particularly impressed the Venetians and resulted in his becoming the most important early carrier of the ideals of Roman High Renaissance art to northern Italy. He worked on commissions in the Palazzo Ducale and for the political leader Andrea Doria (1466-1560) in Genoa, and he painted numerous house facades, almost all of which have been destroyed. Upon his death in Ferrara in 1539, Pordenone left no important followers, but he nevertheless impressed and influenced numerous artists, from the Venetian artist Titian (ca. 1488-1576)—with whom Pordenone had an almost legendary rivalry—to the 17th-century Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640).

About The Artwork
Pordenone’s Milo of Croton Attacked by Wild Beasts sheds light on a poorly understood aspect of the artist’s career—and on a critical moment in the history of Venetian art. The painting represents the comparatively rare Renaissance subject of Milo, from the Greek city of Croton in southern Italy, who was devoured by wild beasts in the sixth century BC. A story of overweening
pride and its punishment, the attack occurs soon after the great athlete, while walking in the forest, comes upon a tree trunk partially split and held apart by wedges. Too confident of his strength, Milo attempts to pull the trunk apart, causing the wedges to fall out. But he is not strong enough to split the two halves of the tree, which trap him when they snap together, leaving Milo prey to animals, helpless. The painting is thought to date to the late period of Pordenone’s career, spent in Venice, and reveals his attempt to please Venetian tastes by means of rich chiaroscuro effects and a carefully modulated landscape. <p>