



551 Guanyin Songzi

Pair of Large Standing Guanyin Figures with separate Heads

Height: 65 cm

China, Kangxi period (1662 – 1722), circa 1720

Guanyin, known as Goddess of Mercy in English, is among the most popular Buddhist figures. Her ceramic form mostly appears as the ivory-white porcelain made in the Dehua Kilns. According to the Buddhist classic Saddharma Pundarika Sutra (Lotus Sutra), Guanyin is the bodhisattva associated with compassion and blesses people with children - sons or daughters - upon request. She is therefore widely worshiped in Chinese culture.

The Guanyin songzi ('Guanyin Delivering a Baby') first appears in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), and becomes widespread in the households of the Ming and Qing dynasties. An early Ming Dehua Guanyin can be found in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. Her resemblance to the western Madonna and Child is immediately apparent, and ensures the acceptance popularisation of this image in the West.

These Guanyin, with a tall hair-do and loosely knotted robes, stand on a lotus-shaped pedestal. The child held here extends his left palm, which means the prayer has been received, and the yuanbao (sycee, a type of silver or gold ingot currency) in his right hand implies the promised fortune.

Sometimes these figure would be embellished with colour – work most probably done in Europe. The hair and facial features were enhanced with black, and the robes and jewels decorated with bright colours. Similar figures can be found in important noble and royal European collections such as those in Dresden, Burghley House and Drottingholm Castle.

Provenance:

Robson Family collection (since 1890's), United Kingdom
and
Private Collection, Belgium