



Stanislao Lèpri (Rome 1905 - Paris 1980)

Harlequins

Circa: 1944

Born into an aristocratic Roman family of diplomats, Stanislao Lèpri served as the consul general in Brussels and Monte Carlo before dedicating himself to painting in 1942. While in Monte Carlo, he met Leonor Fini, the Italian-Argentinian Surrealist, who accompanied him to Rome during the war and then to Paris in 1946. They later cohabited with a Polish writer Constatin Jelenski in a menage à trois. Fini and Lèpri's paintings share many nightmarish qualities. Both artists also worked on theater designs.

Painted on a plywood panel with a pronounced horizontal woodgrain, *Harlequins* is one of the artist's earliest paintings. It is a response to the terror and deprivation unleashed during the Nazi occupation that lasted between September 1943 and June 1944. Their brutal reign included the deportation of the Jewish community from the Portico d'Otavia ghetto and the Ardeatine Massacre in the Saint Calixtus catacombs.

The successful destruction of human decency is reflected in the malicious grins and relaxed demeanors of the four harlequins who gather around a shroud covered herm. In the center, a figure with a black skull and white cap lifts the knife torn sheet to catch a peek at a fresh atrocity.

First introduced in 17th century Italian comedies, harlequins appear in rococo paintings by Watteau and his followers. Wearing colorful diamond patterned costumes, they embody playful mischief, sexual

innuendo and wistful futility. Cézanne and Picasso incorporated these qualities in their own paintings of these melancholy actors.

In jarring contrast, Lèpri used these same decorative conventions to cloth figures with flesh covered hands and naked skulls. The harlequins now appear to have wandered in from a medieval dance of death to comport themselves in the streets of Rome.

Literature:

The authenticity has been confirmed by Galerie Minsky and Richard Overstreet