



The Ship of Love

Date

ca. 1500

Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

Medium

tempera on wood

Description

The imagery of this painting is unparalleled among surviving secular works of the Italian Renaissance, however, a number of features suggest that it is an allegory about love and marriage. Cupid, the god of love, stands on the bow of the ship, guiding it under the protection of Fortune, represented by a statuette atop the canopy of the throne. Inscribed on the canopy is the Latin phrase: "Poems are praised, but costly gifts are sought; so he [the lover] be wealthy, even a barbarian pleases. Now truly is the age of gold: by gold comes many an honor, by gold is affection gained" (Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, 2.277-78). The sleeping maiden dreams of love, whereas her older companion understands the realities of marriage in the Renaissance Italy: she holds a covered chalice symbolizing constancy and faithfulness, and leans upon the arm of the throne decorated with a relief sculpture of a putto bridling a hybrid monster representing the restraint of lust. The origins of the Ship of Love are unknown, but it probably was part of the lavish furnishings of a bedchamber, antechamber, or study of a patrician's palace.

Dimensions

Sight: 25 x 29 1/2 in. (63.5 x 74.9 cm) Framed: 34 x 38 3/4 x 4 in. (86.4 x 98.4 x 10.2 cm)