

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

CARLO MAGINI

(1720 - 1806)

Still Life with Eggs, Cabbage and Candlestick

Oil on canvas, 23 13/16 x 30 7/8 in. (60,5 x 78,3 cm)



Fig. 1

PROVENANCE

Monte Carlo, Francesco Queirazza collection.

LITERATURE

Véronique Damian, in *Portrait de jeune homme de Michael Sweerts et acquisitions récentes*, Paris, galerie Canesso, 2006, pp. 50-53.

In 1990, Pietro Zampetti carefully compiled a catalogue of the works of the painter Carlo Magini, who

has since then been the subject of several addenda, to which we must add this unknown pair of still lifes¹. Zampetti had catalogued no less than ninety-eight still lifes from among the corpus of the artist, a native of Fano (in the Marches region), whose creation in this domain nevertheless remains nearly undocumented. Thanks to Roberto Longhi's and Luigi Zauli Naldi's pioneering articles (1953 and 1954, respectively), which published paintings signed by the artist, it became possible to identify a coherent group around this nucleus². Magini was documented as a figure painter - of portraits in particular - but he also developed his own speciality, in the form of table settings with different, apparently unrelated, elements in juxtaposition, with a focus on light and visibility. They are all composed along the same severe lines, in antithesis to typical baroque frivolity, and yet have borrowed from a highly original and effective naturalist aesthetic. We immediately take note of the visual patterns: a candlestick either opens or closes each composition. The various objects and food items are displayed in two distinct sections, with the largest ones at the back, while smaller elements are positioned at the forefront, and are therefore more easily accessible to the eye. A knife on one side and a spoon on the other serve to guide our viewing, thereby accentuating the notion of perspective. The cleverly arranged whole stands out clearly from a dark brown wall, which sets off the pale brown tabletop, on which the light originating from the left of the painting is focused. In every piece, each object casts its shadow toward the right, providing a sense of unity to the whole. The notion of verisimilitude presides over the choice of motif, and the artist does not hesitate to reinforce this notion through realistic details, such as the folded paper containing salt or pepper and, once again, those paper stoppers that act as almost "archaeologically" precise annotations of the world of day-to-day life, rendered with a sort of noble beauty. The painter's artistic merit lies in part in his use of a limited repertoire of simple forms, whose arrangement is never repeated from one work to the next. The subtly contrasting hues are shown to advantage in his halftones and in the opportunities afforded by the use of complementary colours, in this case reddish-browns and greens. Through his calculated playing with shapes and colours, as well as through the use of empty space around these motifs, Magini invites the spectator to share in a dialogue between the concrete and the abstract. The establishment of a timeline within this series of still lifes remains elusive, as the works seem never to have been dated and rarely, if at all, documented. The signature in French, "Charles Magini/peintre/Fano", found on several paintings, allowed this group -which, it was also found, dates from later than previously estimated - to reclaim its true author, having previously been attributed to Paolo Antonio Barbieri (1603-1649) and other supposedly French or Spanish Seicento masters. From that point onwards, the artist as individual began to take form and to find his rightful place among such 18th century European Masters of still life as Luis Melendez (1716-1780) or Chardin (1699-1779) - all artists who share the same sense of the object as subject, in silent, almost meditative environments.

Notes:

1- Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Magini. Catalogo ragionato*, Milan, 1990; Pierre Rosenberg, "Une note sur Carlo Magini", *Studi per Pietro Zampetti*, Ancona, 1993, pp. 444-445; Francesca Baldassari, *Fasto e rigore. La natura morta nell'Italia settentrionale dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, exh. cat. Reggia di Colorno, 20 April- 25 June 2000, pp. 228-231, N° 89; *La Natura morta in Emilia e in Romagna. Pittori, centri di produzione e collezionismo fra XVII e XVIII secolo*, Eds. Daniele Benati and Lucia Peruzzi, Milan, 2000, pp. 286-291; Rodolfo Battistini, Emilio Negro and Francesca Eusebi, *Ad vocem "Carlo Magini"*, exh. cat. *L'Anima e le cose. La natura morta nell'Italia pontificia nel XVII e XVIII secolo*, Fano, Edificio Luigi Rossi, 13 July- 28 October 2001, pp. 162-170.

2- Roberto Longhi, review of Charles Sterling's "La Nature morte de l'Antiquité à nos jours", *Paragone*, 39, March pp. 62-63; Luigi Zauli Naldi, "Carlo Magini pittore di nature morte del secolo XVIII", *Paragone*, 49, January pp. 57-60.