GIUSEPPE RECCO

(NAPLES, 1634 - ALICANTE, 1695)

Cod and Herring in a Basket, with Spider Crab on a Stone Shelf

Oil on canvas, 33 × 26 ¾ in (84 × 68 cm).



PROVENANCE

Auction Finarte, Milan, 27 May 1985, lot 487; private collection.

LITERATURE

- Luigi Salerno, *La natura morta italiana, 1560-1805*, Roma, 1984, p. 119, fig. 29.6 (as G.B. Recco);
- Claudia Salvi, in *L'Œil gourmand. Parcours dans la nature morte napolitaine du XVIIe siècle*, cat. exh. Paris, Galerie Canesso, 26 September–27 October 2007, pp. 84-85, no. 20;
- Denise Maria Pagano, *Ritorno al Barocco da Caravaggio a Vanvitelli*, exh. cat. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, 12 December 2009 – 11 April 2010, p. 401, no. 1.234;
- *Ombres de la Renaissance à nos jours*, Victor I. Stoichita, Sylvie Wuhrmann, Aurélie Couvreur, eds., exh. cat., Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermitage, 28 June-27 October 2019, p. 52, no. 21

EXHIBITIONS

- *L'Œil gourmand. Parcours dans la nature morte napolitaine du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 26 September – 27 October 2007, pp. 84-85, no. 20.
- *Ritorno al Barocco da Caravaggio a Vanvitelli*, exh. cat. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, 12 December 2009 – 11 April 2010, p. 401, no. 1.234;
- *Ombres de la Renaissance à nos jours*, Victor I. Stoichita, Sylvie Wuhrmann, Aurélie Couvreur, eds., Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermitage, 28 June – 27 October 2019.

Published by Salerno as the work of Giovan Battista Recco and offered at auction one year later with the same attribution, this still life is definitely by Giuseppe Recco. He has obvious affinities with his master, yet it is difficult to ascertain who was the first to paint these compositions of fish, seaweed, and crustaceans on stone surfaces worn away by time and weather. The key elements of Giuseppe Recco's early style – elegant composition, a strong light that fills the foreground with shadows while producing highlights on the fish, particularly the single *trompe l'œil* herring in the foreground, the soft penumbra of the background, developed in a monochrome palette of brown tones – are all present here. One of the characteristics of the signed painting in a private collection as well as of the *Basket of Lobsters* published by Salerno (together with ours, with which it shares certain qualities) is a luminous, smooth handling, with none of the impasto and directness that distinguishes our work. This time it was most likely Giovan Battista who followed Giuseppe's lead in this concisely refined rendering.

The Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg owns a larger variation of this painting, also attributed to Giuseppe Recco, with some notable differences: there are two herrings (instead of just one) in the lower right foreground, with two fish on the plinth in the background, and a more shapely metal vessel[1]. Brejon de Lavergnée prefers to consider it as by Giuseppe Recco's workshop, not excluding the possibility of the intervention of Elena or Nicola Maria Recco. In any case, this is a painting of great quality and powerful visual impact. The description of the spider crab, the play of light on the vessel and the fish in the background are aspects that the Strasbourg painting lacks and which heighten the impact and expressivity of this one. It is well nigh impossible to reconstruct Giuseppe Recco's chronology: most dated works are from the 1670s, and the painter's early activity can only be established by conjecture. It is likely that this still life was painted at a relatively early date – an opinion shared by De Vito (verbal communication). The difficulty in establishing the chronology of Recco's work is also due to the poetics of his art, summarized as follows by Causa in his essentially unsurpassed essay on Neapolitan still life: "The language of Recco's compositions is unyielding; always decorous, measured, highly refined, and abstract, beyond the conventions of his time" ("Sul piano del linguaggio mai una volta che il Recco ceda; sempre composto, compassato, raffinatissimo, astratto in una sua regola che non è al passo coi tempi").[2]

Claudia Salvi

Notes:

1- Brejon de Lavergnée Arnauld–Volle Nathalie, *Musées de France. Répertoire des peintures italiennes du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, 1988, p.275; Roy Alain-Goldenberg Paula, *Les peintures italiennes du musée des Beaux-Arts, XVIe, XVIIe & XVIIIe*, Strasbourg, 1996, p. 91; Véronique Damian, *L'Œil gourmand. Parcours dans la nature morte napolitaine du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 26 September – 27 October 2007, p. 42, under no. 5.

2- Causa Raffaello, "La natura morta a Napoli nel Sei e nel Settecento", in *Storia di Napoli*, vol. V, Naples-Cava dei Tirreni, 1972, p. 1021.