GIACOMO LIEGI (OR LEGI)

(LIÈGE (?), 1605 - MILAN, 1640/1645)

The Pantry

Oil on canvas, 58 5/8 × 74 in (149 × 188 cm)



PROVENANCE

Sale, Galleria Vitelli, Genoa, *Collezione di Arte Antica J.D.B.*, 20 April 1933, lot 132, pl. I (as "Benedetto da Castiglione"); Genoa, collection of Piero Pagano (1929-2007), by descent, to the present day.

LITERATURE

– Ezia Gavazza, "Protagonisti e comprimari. Acquisizioni e interferenze culturali", in *La pittura in Liguria. Il secondo Seicento*, Genoa, 1990, p. 44, fig. 42.

– Anna Orlando, "Giacomo Liegi", in *Genova nell'Età barocca*, exh. cat. ed. by Ezia Gavazza and Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, Genoa, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola – Galleria di Palazzo Reale, 2 May-26 July 1992, pp. 208-209, no. 111.

– Anna Orlando, "Un fiammingo a Genova: documenti figurativi per Giacomo Liegi", *Paragone*, no. 549, November 1995, pp. 69-70, 72-73, 76, fig. 56.

– Anna Orlando, in *Fasto e rigore. La natura morta nell'Italia settentrionale dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, exh. cat. by Giovanni Godi, Reggia di Colorno, 20 April - 25 June 2000, p. 108, no. 14.

– Anna Orlando, in *Genova & Anversa. Un sommet dans la peinture baroque*, exh. cat. ed. by Marzia Cataldi Gallo, Antwerp, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 4 October 2003 - 1 January 2004, pp. 106-107, no. 30.

– Anna Orlando, in *I fiori del Barocco. Dalla scena di genere al gusto rococo nella pittura a Genova dal '500 al '700*, exh. cat. ed. by Anna Orlando, Genoa, Musei di Strada Nuova, 24 March - 25 June 2006, pp. 52-53, no. 9.
– Anna Orlando, *Pittura fiammingo-genovese. Nature morte, ritratti e paesaggi del Seicento e primo Settecento. Ritrovamenti dal collezionismo privato*, Turin, 2012, p. 94;
– Massimo Bartoletti, in A *Superb Baroque. Art in Genoa 1600-1750*, Jonathan Bober – Piero Boccardo – Franco Boggero (eds.), exh. cat., Washington, National Gallery, 26 September 2021 – 9 January 2022 (canceled), pp. 186-187, no. 42; *Superbarocco. Arte a Genova da Rubens a Magnasco*, Jonathan Bober-Piero Boccardo-Franco Boggero, eds., Rome, Scuderie del Quirinale, 26 March – 3 July 2022, pp. 168-169, no. 25.

EXHIBITIONS

- *Genova nell'Età barocca*, Genoa, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola – Galleria di Palazzo Reale, 2 May - 26 July 1992, no. 111;
- *Fasto e rigore. La natura morta nell'Italia settentrionale dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, Reggia di Colorno, 20 April - 25 June 2000, p. 108, no. 14;
- *Genova & Anversa. Un sommet dans la peinture baroque*, Antwerp, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, 4 October 2003 - 1 January 2004, no. 30;
- *I fiori del Barocco. Dalla scena di genere al gusto rococò nella pittura a Genova dal '500 al '700*, Genoa, Musei di Strada Nuova, 24 March - 25 June 2006, no. 9;
- *A Superb Baroque. Art in Genoa,* 1600-1750, Washington, National Gallery, 26 September 2021 – 9 January 2022 (canceled); *Superbarocco. Arte a Genova da Rubens a Magnasco,* Jonathan Bober-Piero Boccardo-Franco Boggero, eds., Rome, Scuderie del Quirinale, 26 March – 3 July 2022.

This artist, most probably a native of Liège, as indicated by his name, Italianised as "Liegi" or "Legi", was active in Genoa, according to the biographer Raffaello Soprani (1612-1672).[1] It is from Soprani that we learn that Giacomo was a Fleming and the pupil and brother-in-law of Jan Roos, known as Giovanni Rosa (1591-1638), and that he painted flowers, fruits and animals.We are also informed that he died in Milan after having moved there for health reasons. This meagre biographical information was enough to keep the artist's name alive, as he might otherwise have fallen into oblivion. We owe the reconstruction of his oeuvre to Anna Orlando, whose article of 1995 in *Paragone* gave the painter a fairly complete group of pictures, assembled around two compositions in French public collections that had long been attributed to Liegi: the *Young Man in a Pantry* and the *Cook with Game* in the Musées des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux and Orléans, respectively[2]. To this day, no signed painting by the artist has emerged, even if the older literature affirms as much[3]. In any case, as with Jan Roos, it seems clear that Liegi collaborated with other painters for the depiction of figures in his paintings.
The artist's contribution to the still life tradition is characteristically Baroque: the various elements in our picture are arranged both along the horizontal of the table and the vertical of the birds and the calf, hanging from one leg and almost filling the height of the canvas. This is a masterful exploration of subjects, ranging from flowers and fruits to animals, both furred and feathered – *nature vive* juxtaposed with *nature morte* ; and each dish, whether pewter, ceramic or copper, creates sparkling reflections described with generous brushwork. The wealth and complexity of the composition tends to make us forget the fragile crystal vase containing freshly-cut flowers, in the far left background. The kitchen servant has gathered fish and crustaceans, no doubt in preparation for a meal. In the foreground at right, the open drawer, with a knife balanced on the edge, reminds us of the painter's Flemish culture, as does the small cat in the middle, pawing playfully at the dead bird whose head hangs over the edge of the table.
The painting – which bore an attribution to Castiglione in 1933 – was ascribed to Liegi by Piero Pagano,

its last owner, and was published as such by Ezia Gavazza in 1990, followed by Anna Orlando.
It is well known that Flemish artists were active in Genoa during the first half of the seventeenth century. Foremost among these were the De Wael brothers, Lucas (1591-1661) and Cornelis (1592-1667), originally from Antwerp, who took in Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) in 1621; but also Jan Roos, another Antwerp native, who had been trained in the workshop of Frans Snyders (1579-1657).

Notes:

1- Raffaello Soprani and Carlo Giuseppe Ratti, *Vite de' Pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi di Raffaello Soprani, patrizio genovese*..., Genoa, 1768, I, pp. 462-463.

2- Anna Orlando, "Un fiammingo a Genova: documenti figurativi per Giacomo Liegi", *Paragone,* no. 549, November 1995, p. 82, note 56.

3- Anna Orlando believes that the first to point out these signatures was Louis Lampe, *Signatures et monogrammes des peintres de toutes les écoles*, Brussels, 1895, pp. 477, 837, 1089, 1126.