

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

AGOSTINO VERROCCHI

(ROME, 1586 C. - 1659)

An Allegory of Summer and an Allegory of Autumn

Oil on canvas, 38½ x 53⅛ in (98 x 135 cm) , a pair



Fig. 1



PROVENANCE

Italy, private collection.

LITERATURE

Franco Paliaga, in *L'origine della natura morta in Italia. Caravaggio e il Maestro di Hartford*, exh. cat. (Rome, Borghese Gallery, 16 November 2016 – 19 February 2017), ed. by Anna Coliva and Davide Dotti, pp. 196-197, 244, nos. 28-29.

EXHIBITIONS

L'origine della natura morta in Italia. Caravaggio e il Maestro di Hartford, Rome, Borghese Gallery, 16 November 2016 – 19 February 2017, nos. 28-29.

When these two sumptuous compositions made their first appearance at the exhibition held by the Borghese Gallery in Rome (*L'origine della natura morta in Italia. Caravaggio e il Maestro di Hartford*, 2016-2017), both Franco Paliaga (author of the catalogue entry) and the curators ascribed them to Agostino Verrocchi, a Caravaggesque artist who specialized in still life painting. His output, which reveals his proximity to “posed” images (“natura in posa”) painted by the mysterious Master of Hartford (active in Rome around the turn of the seventeenth century) and those produced by the Academy (and hand) of Marchese Giovanni Battista Crescenzi (1577-1635), adopts a repertory of luxuriant subjects, in the present instance allegorically evoking the seasons of summer and autumn.

Displayed on stone ledges, on single planes parallel to the picture surface, baskets full of various fruits, alongside other loose ones, are laid out before us, their foliage extending outwards with an obvious trompe-l’oeil approach. Often conceived as pendants, these are adorned on either side by butterflies fluttering against the dark background, itself crossed from the left by brighter oblique lighting, in the manner of Caravaggio.

Symbols of the soul, the butterflies transform these depictions of earthly nourishment into a *vanitas* theme, alluding to the passing of time and the decay of all things. A snail and a grasshopper enliven the foreground of the still life with a basket of grapes, while another snail moves along the branch of berries in the foreground of the one with the basket of peaches. From one picture to the other, we move from peaches to grapes, from summer to autumn; the artist’s choice evokes the two seasons most favourable to the picking of fruit. The evocation is furthered by only two vegetables: artichokes for the summer and squash for the autumn.

Light is entirely concentrated on the stone surface, pale beige for the summer and whitish grey for the autumn, each marked by the shadows cast by the fruit. The artist dwells on the play of complementary greens and reds, interrupted by the cool tonalities of other fruits, clothed in skins of midnight blue.

Paliaga dates our pair of canvases to around the year 1630, that is, a period still steeped in a Caravaggesque manner, in which the artist’s focus is on the colourful description of fruit, not to mention the crystalline transparency of the grapes, while maintaining a certain archaism of presentation that was typical of Roman pre-Baroque still life painting.

Agostino Verrocchi belonged to a dynasty of Tuscan artists that reaches back to a remote ancestor, Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-1488), the teacher of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Verrocchi’s oeuvre was first reconstructed in the exhibition of still life painting held in Naples in 1964¹, with the discovery of four large pictures on slate signed “Augustinus Verrochius” (Rome, private collection), a significant Latinized signature for a painter who is not mentioned in early sources and therefore totally unknown at

that date. These first secure works were added to by Mina Gregori, who published the *Basket of Figs* (Pesaro, Museo Civico) and several other compositions in private collections². It was thanks above all to her research that we learned that the artist lived in Rome with his brother Giovan Battista (1573-1626), who was also a painter, in the parish of San Lorenzo, between 1619 and 1626, and then from 1630 – by now a married man – to 1636, when the record of his name was crossed out. This implies that he could have settled in another district of Rome, or even in another city, possibly Naples, as Raffaello Causa suggested in 1964.

Other archival documentation has confirmed the central place occupied by our artist on the Roman art scene during the first half of the seventeenth century. A number of new attributions were put forward in 2005 by Bocchi, with Verrocchi's work set in the flourishing context of Caravaggesque still life painting³.

Notes

1-Raffaello Causa, “Augustinus Verrochius”, in *La natura morta italiana*, exh. cat. (Naples-Zurich-Rotterdam, October 1964 – March 1965), p. 40, figs. 21a, 21b, 22a.

2-Mina Gregori, “Notizie su Agostino Verrocchi e un'ipotesi per Giovan Battista Crescenzi”, *Paragone*, 275, 1973, pp. 36-38.

3-Giuseppe Pes, “Nuovi documenti su Agostino Verrocchio e la sua cerchia a Roma”, in *Luce e ombra. Caravaggismo e naturalismo nella pittura toscana del Seicento*, exh. cat. (Pontedera, Fondazione Piaggio, 2005), ed. by Pierluigi Carofano, pp. 252-256; Gianluca Bocchi and Ulisse Bocchi, *Still Life painters in Rome. Italian artists 1630-1750*, Viadana, 2005, pp. 13-42; Simona Sperindei, “Briciole documentarie sulla famiglia Verrocchi à Rome”, in *Atti delle Giornate di Studi sul Caravaggismo e il Naturalismo nella Toscana del Seicento* (Siena, Certosa di Pontignano, 21 May 2005; Casciana Terme, Palazzo delle Terme, 24-25 May 2005), ed. by Pierluigi Carofano, Pontedera, 2009, pp. 291-294; Franco Paliaga, “Su Tommaso Salini, sui Verrocchi e su alcuni pittori di natura morta a Roma al tempo di Caravaggio”, *Valori Tattili*, no. 00, 2011, pp. 62-80.