

# Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

**BERNARDO STROZZI**

*Still life with a bouquet of pink and white peonies in a glass vase, and fruit  
and flowers on a ledge*

Oil on canvas, 21 ¼ x 27 ½ in (54 x 70 cm)



## **PROVENANCE**

Genoa, with the conservator Berlan in 1968 (according to Manzitti, 2013, p. 241); Lugano, collection of Orazio Bagnasco (1927-1999); by descent, offered for sale, Sotheby's, London, 3 July 2013, lot 35; Geneva, private collection.

## **LITERATURE**

- Bertina Suida Manning, "Bernardo Strozzi as Painter of Still Life", *Apollo*, vol. 278, April 1985, pp. 250-51, pl. XVI;
- Piero Pagano, Maria Clelia Galassi, *La pittura del '600 a Genova*, Milan 1988, unpaginated, reproduced fig. 539;
- Alberto Cottino, "Bernardo Strozzi", in *La natura morta in Italia*, 2 vols., Milan, I, 1989, p. 119;
- Daniele Sanguineti, in *Bernardo Strozzi, Genova 1581/82 – Venezia 1644*, exh. cat., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 6 May - 6 August 1995, ed. by Ezia Gavazza, Giovanna Nepi Sciré, Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, pp. 230-31, no. 66;
- Véronique Damian, *Une nouvelle contribution sur la nature morte lombarde: deux inédits. Une collection de natures mortes*, Paris, Galerie Canesso, 2002, p. 20, fig. 2;

-Camillo Manzitti, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Turin, 2013, p. 241, no. 384;

-Anna Orlando, “Genio ed estro. Quadri ‘da stanza’, nature morte e ritratti di Bernardo Strozzi per la committenza privata”, in *Bernardo Strozzi 1582-1644, la conquista del colore*, exh. cat., Genoa, Palazzo Nicolosio Lomellino, 11 October 2019 – 12 January 2020, pp. 148, 152, figs. 95, 98.

## EXHIBITIONS

*Bernardo Strozzi, Genova 1581/82 – Venezia 1644*, Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 6 May - 6 August 1995, no. 66.

This still life of flowers and fruit exudes a remarkable sense of freshness, its festive colours further enhanced by a luminous beige-gold background that recalls Caravaggio’s *Basket of Fruit* (Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana). The generous impasto of vibrant pigment reveals the obvious pleasure felt by the artist as he described each element. Dominated by the marvelous bouquet of pink and white peonies in a clear glass vase – another Caravaggesque reference – the composition is constructed in a triple arrangement, at once symmetrical and spontaneous, and with great freedom of handling, taking advantage of the wooden surface to lend depth to this intertwining of forms and colours. Warm tones contrast with luminous, frothy whites, loaded with pigment, as further demonstrated by the reflection on the vase.

Strozzi has only recently been rediscovered by scholars as a painter of independent still lifes, and our picture was first published in 1985 by Bertina Suida Manning. However, the records of his trial involving the Capuchin friars of his order in 1625-1626 already attest that he was producing independent still lifes (known as “verdure”) while still residing in his native Genoa. He was the first to work in this genre there, undoubtedly influenced by the presence of Flemish still life painters from Antwerp, notably Jan Roos (1591-1638) and his brother-in-law Giacomo Liegi (1605-1640/45). After fleeing Genoa in 1632-1633, Strozzi continued to develop this side of his oeuvre in Venice, with the support of colleagues who disseminated his compositions, as is clear from his posthumous inventory<sup>1</sup>. Daniele Sanguineti has noted our painting could be a candidate for the generically-described item in that inventory: “quadretto piccolo di frutti et fiori” (small picture of fruit and flowers)<sup>2</sup>.

As early as 1984, before this canvas was rediscovered, Luigi Salerno had already identified and presented a small group of still lifes by Bernardo Strozzi<sup>3</sup>. According to him, Strozzi’s interest in this genre could be deduced from the masterful painting of *A Cook* (Genoa, Musei di Strada Nuova, Palazzo Rosso), in which a young woman is surrounded by all sorts of poultry. Salerno also pointed out the garlands of flowers in *The Abduction of Europa* (Poznań, National Museum), the *Allegory of Summer and Autumn* (Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland), and *The Gardener* (private collection). In all these paintings, the highly elaborate still-life elements function as attributes of the principal figures<sup>4</sup>.

Though it is hard to assign a chronology to Strozzi’s still life paintings, Suida Manning, followed by Sanguineti, places our canvas in the last phase of his activity in Venice, between 1633 and 1644, while Camillo Manzitti dates it to the Genoese period, around 1620.

Aged seventeen, Strozzi chose to experience life in the cloister. He entered a monastery and remained there for nine years, until late 1608 or early 1609, a considerable period during which his development progressed at a distance from workshops; but he had already learned the rudiments of his art from the Genoese painter Cesare Corte (1550-1613) and then from the Sienese Pietro Sorri (1556-1622), who arrived in Genoa at the end of 1595 and remained there until early 1598. He must have continued to paint in the monastery, since it was his talent in this field that earned him permission to give up the Capuchin habit and become a priest; hence his nickname in the early literature, “il prete genovese” (the Genoese priest).

He was thus able to work for the two families who were the principal patrons in Genoa, the Doria and

the Centurione. Strozzi moved swiftly from easel paintings to large-scale mural decoration, culminating in the frescoes in the choir of San Domenico, commissioned by Giovan Carlo Doria and his cousin Giovan Stefano. Of this almost completely destroyed project (the last payment is documented in 1622), there survives a preparatory bozzetto for the central scene of the vault, *The Vision of Saint Dominic (Paradise)*, now in the Museo dell'Accademia Ligustica in Genoa. A putative sojourn in Rome may have taken place between the end of April and the end of July 1625, although this is strongly doubted by Camillo Manzitti (2013). The year 1625 also saw his appearance in court when he was accused by the Capuchins of illegally practicing painting as a friar of that order, beyond the monastery. Recalled to the monastery following a possible conviction, he was obliged to remain there for seventeen months before fleeing to Venice in 1632-1633. In the *Serenissima*, finally free, he practiced his art for eleven very successful years. His palette became more luminous, and – drawing inspiration from the work of Paolo Veronese (1528-1588) – more intense. Public commissions and a sustained workload led him to collaborate with other artists, in particular the Paduan Ermanno Stroiffi.

#### Notes:

- 1- For the inventory, see Lino Moretti, “L’eredità del pittore: l’inventario dei quadri ‘al tempo della sua morte’”, in *Bernardo Strozzi, Genova 1581/82 – Venezia 1644*, exh. cat., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 6 May - 6 August 1995, ed. by Ezia Gavazza, Giovanna Nepi Sciré, Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, pp. 376-378.
- 2- Daniele Sanguineti, in *Bernardo Strozzi, Genova 1581/82 – Venezia 1644*, exh. cat., Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, 6 May - 6 August 1995, ed. by Ezia Gavazza, Giovanna Nepi Sciré, Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello, pp. 230-31, no. 66
- 3- Luigi Salerno, *La natura morta italiana 1560-1805*, Rome, 1984, pp. 139-145; idem, *Nuovi studi su la natura morta italiana*, Rome, 1989, pp. 54-59; The question of still lifes has now become essential in the discussion of the artist’s oeuvre; see also the monograph by Luisa Mortari, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Rome, 1995, pp. 174-177.
- 4- Camillo Manzitti, *Bernardo Strozzi*, Turin, 2013, p. 150, no. 177, p. 195, no. 269, p. 207, no. 301, p. 244, no. 390.