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Luca Giordano

(Naples 1634 - 1705)

Shepherds with their Flocks and Herds (The Riches of the Earth)

1684

oil on canvas

233 x 364 cm;

20.6 x 29.1 in.

Provenance

Probably commissioned by Gaspar Méndez de Haro, 7th Marquis of Carpio (1629 – 1687), on the occasion of the Feast of Corpus Domini, May 1684, Naples;
Bombirini collection, Genoa, from whom purchased in 2011 by
Private collection, Rome.

Comparative Literature

R. Lattuada 'Luca Giordano e I maestri napoletani di natura morta nelle tele per la Festa del Corpus Domini del 1684' in R. Lattuada (ed.), *Capolavori in Festa. Effimero Barocco a Largo di Palazzo (1683-1759)*, exh. cat., Naples 1997, pp. 150 – 161.

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This monumental unpublished canvas by the great Neapolitan seventeenth-century master Luca Giordano is believed to have formed part of an important cycle of paintings which were executed by Giordano and other Neapolitan artists working under his direction to mark the occasion of the Corpus Domini Feast, which took place on 25th May 1684 in Naples. This series, for which the first payment was made in April 1684, was commissioned by Marquis Del Carpio, Viceroy of Naples and organizer of the Feast. The project was realized by Giordano in accordance with the wishes of the Marquis, who agreed the details of the extremely ambitious commission and the installation of the works of art and other elements of the accompanying ephemeral displays. These were probably intended not for a public position in the square, but for the prestigious chapel within the viceregal palace (later the Palazzo Reale) where, in addition to the hanging of fourteen monumental oil paintings, the four altars were adorned with elaborate displays of silver.

Giordano, who had probably first met the Marquis in Rome in 1679 when Carpio was the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See, was entrusted with the task of supplying fourteen paintings of the same size (*'di ugual misura'*), representing the riches of the sea, earth and sky; some of the paintings showing scenes of fishing, shooting and hunting - corresponding with the elements of water, air and earth - while others represented fruit, grapes, flowers and vegetables. The iconography chosen by the Marquis probably reflected the ideas of Francesco Verde, who became *vicario capitolare* of Naples in 1685, the teacher of Giambattista Vico and a prominent exponent of a theology rooted in naturalism. These ideas were shared by Dr. Orazio Giannipoli, founder of the Monte del Santissimo Sacramento (the Mount of the most Holy Sacrament) which financed the illumination of the Corpus Domini celebrations in the poorer parishes within the city. Accordingly, Riccardo Lattuada has argued that the decorations for the Feast were probably designed to allude to the expression of Divine Grace through the bountifulness of the world, which was seen as God's gift to man manifested through the incarnation of the Corpus Domini, or body of Christ.¹ This religious idea was given magnificent expression by Giordano and his team of artist collaborators in this series of celebratory canvasses (Triumphs of the Earth) executed for the Feast of Corpus Christi, which in turn provided inspiration for some laudatory poems written by Andrea Perrucci, published in 1695, which provide an important key to our

understanding of this remarkable artistic project (fig. 1).²

In the execution of this ambitious commission, Giordano worked alongside leading specialists in the various genres as recorded by Bernardo de Dominici, author of the famous lives of Neapolitan painters.³ Giuseppe Recco (1634 – 1695) was responsible for painting the fish, sweets and some of the flower paintings; the Flemish artist Abraham Brueghel (1631 – 1690) painted fruits and flowers; Giovanni Battista Ruoppolo (1629 – 1693) depicted the tableware and Francesco della Cuosta (1639 – 1723) the seafood and herbs, all of them supervised (*'accordati'*) by Giordano who acted as artistic director of the whole project. The verb *'accordare'*, which derives from the word meaning 'to tune a musical instrument' is used by Giordano's biographer De Dominici and can be found also in the signature of two other works from the series formerly in the Podio Collection, both *Triumphs of Vegetables*, which are signed *'Jordanus Accord[avi]'*. This explains Giordano's role in supervising the project and overseeing the production of works that were executed by the other artists.

By the first half of the seventeenth century there were plenty of examples of artistic collaborations in Rome, for example in the still lifes executed by Christian Berentz (1658 – 1722) working together with Carlo Maratta (1625 – 1713) for the Marchese Pallavicini. However, examples of this practice in Naples at this date are much rarer. This carefully orchestrated collaborative project of 1684 proved to be a turning point for Neapolitan painting; a group of painters, each experts in their respective genres, came together to collaborate under the 'baton' of a master who *'accordava'* (tuned them), thereby realizing a project which provided a climax to his production of ephemeral *apparati*. It is only after 1684 that the custom of bringing together painters of figures and painters of landscapes and still lifes was practiced in Naples, which makes this commission so important in unravelling the details of an art historical turning point of great significance, both for the art of Naples and beyond.

A remarkable degree of autonomy was exercised by Giordano in this commission, not least in that the painter was allowed to offer these works on the art market even before the

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celebration of the Feast, the only exception being two works by Recco, which were obtained by the Marquis del Carpio, according to De Dominici, together with other unidentified paintings). Prota-Giurleo mentions eight paintings ('two were fishes and figures, two of herds with figures, two fruits and flowers and figures. All of them by Luca Giordano') and says they were sold in April 1684 by the dealer Carlo della Torre to 'Venetian merchants Vincenzo Sannelli and Gio/Batta Bertocchi' for 2400 ducats.⁴ This commercial transaction was followed by many others, such as paintings by Abraham Brueghel and Andrea Maffei del Po that were acquired by the dealer Sannelli. On 2nd December 1684, other paintings by Giordano were sold to the Venetian dealer Simon Giogali, six of which were resold to the great collector Max Emanuel, last Elector of Bavaria (1662 – 1726).

With regard to the distribution of work between the various still-life specialists employed on the Marchese del Carpio commission, De Dominici indicates that 4 of them were painted by Ruoppolo, two representing fruit and flowers and two showing fishes and still lifes of dead birds and animals.⁵ Two other paintings of fish were executed by Recco. The two canvasses of the *Triumphs of the Vegetables* from the del Podio Collection, which passed into the collection of Zacchia Rondandini in Bologna and are now in a private collection in Milan are attributable to Giordano working with Francesco della Quosta and Giuseppe Recco. Riccardo Lattuada believes that these paintings were certainly the group commissioned by del Carpio for the Corpus Domini Feast and their dimensions (250 x 350 cm.) correspond with the measurements recorded by De Dominici. A third canvas, which also came from the Rondandini Collection is the *Pastoral Scene with Horsemen*, now in the Pinacoteca in Bologna (see fig. 2) which, uniquely among the paintings in the Corpus Domani series, is attributed to Luca Giordano working without assistance. Here it is worth recording the very high contemporary esteem in which Giordano was held by De Dominici and others as a virtuoso animal painter. Four other similar paintings by Giordano featuring herdsmen, cattle and sheep can be traced: a *Nocturnal Scene with Shepherds* and *Pastoral Scene* in the Scarpa Collection, Venice, and a *Landscape with Shepherds, Sheep and a Dog* and *Pastoral Scene with Shepherds, Sheep and Cattle* in a Private Collection, Galatina. Among these Lattuada considers the *Pastoral Scene* from the Scarpa Collection to be certainly autograph and suggests that it too may have formed part of the 1684 series.

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Another painting, *Spring*, of the highest quality, whose present whereabouts is unknown, was a collaboration between Giordano and Abraham Brueghel, and is considered by Luigi Salerno to have also been connected with the 1684 commission.⁶ To these can be added two paintings of *The Riches of the Sea (Ricchezze del Mare)* by Giordano and Recco (Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, and present whereabouts unknown), a painting by Giordano, Paolo de Matteis and Giambattista Ruoppolo of *Boys with Grapes (Autumn)* and *Boys in a Garden (Summer)* by Giordano, Paolo de Matteis and Abraham Brueghel, both of which were exhibited in Naples in 1997 where they were listed as having been lent from private collections; two *Fruit and Hunting Still Lifes* by Giordano and Ruoppolo (present whereabouts unknown); and a *Classical Ruins with Figures* (Pinacoteca Nazionale di Cosenza) also exhibited in Naples in 1997.

While a definitive reconstruction of the 1684 commission may not currently be possible, the present work shares compelling similarities with the other canvasses discussed above which have been associated by Lattuada with the 1684 commission.⁷ The depiction of the animals is closely comparable to that in the *Pastoral scene with Horsemen*, in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna,⁸ which, although slightly taller and narrower, provides the closest parallel with the present painting and, interestingly, depicts the same subject matter. Those canvasses depicting animals were the paintings among the Corpus Domini group that were likely to have been executed by Giordano without collaborators. Both paintings show the influence of the Bassano family and the figures of shepherds can be compared with those in one of the two paintings of the *Triumphs of Vegetables* formerly in the Podio Collection which are signed 'Jordanus Accord[avi]t'. The placement of the figures of the animals and herdsman against a dramatically lit landscape background is also comparable to that in the Bologna pastoral landscape. Furthermore, although the height of the present canvas is around 30 centimeters shorter than the "*palmi dieci*" (which approximately translates to 260 cm.) recorded by De Dominici, the canvas could have been trimmed along the upper margin. The width of the canvas, however, corresponds exactly to the "*palmi quattordici*" (c. 364 cm.) recorded by him.

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We are grateful to Riccardo Lattuada for confirming the authorship of the present canvas following first hand inspection, to be entirely by the hand of Luca Giordano. Reference to Luca Giordano's authorship of the canvasses in the Corpus Domini commission that feature animals is provided courtesy of a reference in De Dominici's life of Giordano's pupil (the painter Nicola Maria Rossi), where he describes how in the Corpus Domini commission it was Luca Giordano who 'realized the animals and figures' and how the young Rossi 'working together with Raimondo, called the Maltese, under the instructions of the master Giordano' became 'excellent in the animals, executed after looking at his master's Corpus Domini Ottava and at the fourteen pieces realized for the various paintings which were commissioned by the Viceroy Del Carpio.'⁹ This eloquent testimony, from one of his pupils, signifies the high regard with which Luca Giordano's animal paintings were held and also the importance of the 1684 Corpus Domini commission. The presence in the current exhibition of still lifes by some of the other Neapolitan painters who were associated with this commission enables us to capture something of the flavour of this remarkable project.

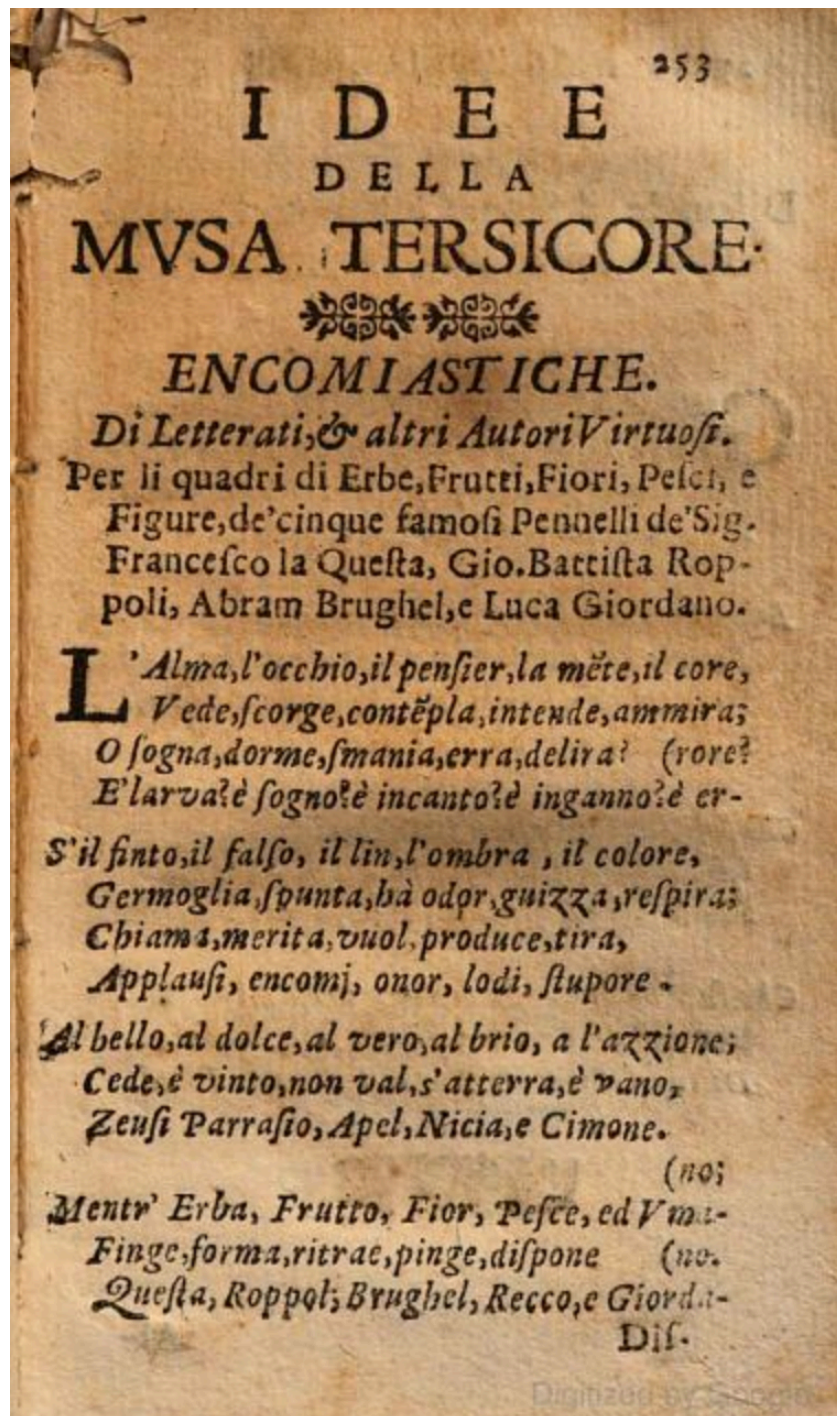


Figure 1. Published in 1695, Andrea Perrucci's poem was inspired by the series of paintings by Giordano and his collaborators that was commissioned by Marquis Del Carpio for the Feast of Corpus Christi in Naples in 1684

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Figure 2. Luca Giordano, *Pastoral Scene with Horsemen*, oil on canvas, 253 x 320 cm.; 19 ½ x 126 in. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna

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Footnotes

¹ R. Lattuada 'Luca Giordano e I maestri napoletani di natura morta nelle tele per la Festa del Corpus Domini del 1684' in R. Lattuada (ed.), *Capolavori in Festa. Effimero Barocco a Largo di Palazzo (1683-1759)*, exh. cat., Naples 1997, p. 150.

² A. Perrucci, *Idee delle Muse, Poesie del Dottor Andrea Perrucci consecrate all'Altezza Serenissima di Carlo Ferdinando Gonzaga*, Naples 1695, p. 253.

³ B. De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti napoletani*, Naples 1742 – 45, vol. III, pp. 394 – 456. For De Dominici's account of the life of Giordano (*Vita del Cavalier D. Luca Giordano, pittore e de' suoi Discepoli*) see vol. III, p. 442.

⁴ U. Prota-Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del Seicento*, Naples 1953, pp. 61-62.

⁵ 'sopra tutto fece belle macchine di Quarant'ore e di Sepolcri, nelle quali insieme con Raimondo, detto il Maltese, furono istruiti dal loro incomparabile maestro [Giordano]. Molto ancora prevalse nel dipingere gli animali, a' quali rivolse tutta la sua applicazione, dopo ch'ebbe veduto quelli dipinti da Luca Giordano, ed esposti nell'Ottava del *Corpus Domini* tra 'l numero di 14 pezzi di gran quadri dipinti in vari generi da valentuomini per ordine del Vicerè Marchese Del Carpio, e tutti accordati da Luca. I pesci, le cose dolci con fiori furono dipinti dal Cav. Giuseppe Recco, la frutta e' fiori dell'eccellente pittor Fiammingo Abram Brueghel, e da Gio: Battista Ruoppoli, famoso in tal genere, e nelli stovigli di rame; I frutti di mare, e l'erbe ortensi da Francesco della Quota, e gli animali, con le figure, da Luca Giordano' (See B. De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti napoletani*, Naples 1742 – 45, vol. III, p. 442).

⁶ Lattuada 1997, p. 156, reproduced p. 150.

⁷ Lattuada 1997, pp. 150 – 161.

⁸ O. Ferrari and G. Scavizzi, *Luca Giordano, L'opera completa*, 2nd ed., Naples 1992, vol. 2, p. 307, cat. no. A332, reproduced vol. 1, p. 643, fig. 436. Dated by Ferrari and Scavizzi to c. 1682.

⁹ B. De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti napoletani*, Naples 1742 – 45, vol. III, p. 442.