

COLNAGHI



Master of Stirling-Maxwell,
Still life with apples and grapes

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MASTER OF STIRLING-MAXWELL
(Toledo, active c. 1610-1640)

STILL LIFE WITH APPLES AND GRAPES

Oil on canvas.
64 x 84 cm.; 25 1/4 x 33 1/8 in.

Provenance

Sale, Abalarte Madrid, April 2017;
Private collection, Madrid.



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The present *Still Life with Apples and Grapes* belongs to the more austere current of early seventeenth-century Spanish *bodegón* painting. Set before a deep architectural recess, the motif is organised as follow: a woven basket of apples at the left edge, several bunches of pale grapes suspended from a spreading vine above, and two fish laid on a brass or silver dish in the lower right foreground. A cool, raking light, entering from the left, isolates each element against the surrounding shadow, sharpening the sense of silence and suspension that is central to Master of Stirling-Maxwell's own interpretation of the genre.

In both conception and pictorial rhetoric the work is directly indebted to Juan Sánchez Cotán. The spare niche, the emphatic ledge-line, and the presentation of produce hanging for storage and preservation evoke the Castilian master's paradigmatic still lifes and help explain why the Master has long been presumed to have worked within Cotán's orbit, probably between Madrid and Toledo. The grapes are handled with particular attention to translucency - each berry catching a pinpoint highlight and fading into half-tone - while the apples' varied bloom and blemishes are rendered with realist insistence.

Such ostensible straightforwardness allows the artist to display technical command in passages where weight, moisture and sheen become the true subject of the picture; and it aligns with contemporary taste for images in which nature appears neither idealised nor arranged to advertise courtly abundance. That appeal, grounded in the legacy of Cotán's innovations, underpinned the early development of still life in central Spain and remained a generative model for subsequent practitioners.

The painter's identity nonetheless remains unresolved. The eponym derives from a work formerly in the collection of the Scottish nobleman and historian of Spanish art, William Stirling-Maxwell (1818-78), and the Master has been associated - without definitive proof - with the Spanish painters Alonso de Escobar (active ca. 1602-37) and Alejandro de Loarte (1590/1600-26), and the Italian artist Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli (1551-1640).

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