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Fede Galizia

(Milan, 1578? – 1630)

*Still life of apples, pears,
cucumbers, figs and a melon*

c. 1625 – 1630

oil on panel

35.3 x 59.1 cm.; 13 7/8 x 23 1/4 in.

Provenance

Possibly Cardinal Cesare Monti (1593 – 1650), Milan;

Possibly by descent to his cousin Giulio Monti, in 1650;

Possibly Count Cesare Monti Melzi, at the Palace formerly called Monti and later known as Sormani-Andreani and Verri, Milan;

Possibly by descent to his family, as suggested by a note in a 1742 inventory (conducted after his death);

Don Sebastián Gabriel Borbón y Braganza (1811 – 1875), Spain, as evidenced by the crowned *SG* cyphers on the reverse;

Noble private collection, Brescia, since c. 1900;

From whom acquired by the present owners.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



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Est. 1760

The present work, of exceptional quality, depicts a wicker basket full of different types of pears laid down on a table; next to it, in random order, are peaches, apples, cucumbers, a plate of figs and a split melon. The painting comes from the prestigious collection of Don Sebastián Gabriel Borbón y Braganza (1811 – 1875), one of the most important collections in Spain. Evidence of this illustrious provenance is provided by the five collector's marks on the reverse of the painting (on the 19th century wood of the cradle) bearing the letters SG with a crown above. Much of his collection was dispersed in various circumstances throughout the years, and the remaining paintings were sold in a series of auctions between 1876 and 1902.¹

This panel has been conserved in the collection of its last owners since *circa* 1900. It already, at that early date, bore the attribution to Fede Galizia. It is therefore not an attribution that has been formulated recently, but was associated with this still life during a period when Fede's name was almost unknown, and the whole genre of still life was still relatively neglected – it is important therefore that we take note of this abiding traditional attribution.

During endeavours to trace the history of the present painting, an interesting lead proved to be the '*Quattro quadretti bislonghi con frutti diversi di mano di Mad. Fede*' ('Four small oblong paintings of various fruits by Fede Galizia') recorded in the 1650 bequest of Cardinal Cesare Monti, and noted as destined for his cousin Giulio Monti (which explains why it was not part of the conspicuous donation by the Cardinal to the Archiepiscopal Refectory of Milan and to Ospedale Maggiore). These four paintings were then recorded again in the 1742 inventory taken after the death of Count Cesare Monti Melzi in the Palazzo formerly called Monti and later known as Sormani-Andreani and Verri in Milan,² before finally disappearing from the family's inventories. The present painting is indeed a 'small oblong painting of various fruits' and I believe that this archival finding is crucial in demonstrating that Madonna Fede painted still lifes other than the usual crystal bowl we have recently been accustomed to identify her with: we can certainly state that the 'various fruits' indicate various fruits spread on a table and not arranged in cups, bowls or baskets alone.³

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

In fact, in the same inventory we find clear indication of a '*Fruttera di doi persichi*' ('Fruit on two perches') by Panfilo Nuvolone: this demonstrates that 'various fruits' therefore referred to a different subject. If this reconstruction of the history of the collection at the Palazzo and the movements of the '*quadretti bislonghi*' is correct, that would mean that the last two paintings by Fede in the Palazzo would disappear from the collection sometime after the inventory of 1832 - 1838 was assembled, following the death of Giovan Mario Andreani (d. 1831). Giovan Mario Andreani had acquired Palazzo Monti in 1784. It was during this exact period that the diplomatic and cultural agent of the Infante, Joaquin José Valluzzi, operated in Milan. Indeed, we know that he was a resident in the 'Calle Torre dei Moriggi' around the year 1835.⁴ We should also not forget that Don Sebastian Gabriel moved to Italy in 1839 and for a long time lived between Rome and Naples until 1859.⁵

The present still life is constructed in accordance with a type of composition that finds its origin in the Flemish-German still life genre: the objects are paratactically arranged on the table with a raised focal point, the effect of which is that the motifs seem slightly compressed. This was the very same compositional device that was employed by the great Northern painters Georg Flegel, Osias Beert and Peter Binoit (figs. 1 & 2), all of whom were contemporary to our artist. The exchange between Fede and these artists is recognisable in details such as the *alzatina* (the gilt *tazza*), emblematic of the Milanese - Trentine painter, and soon adopted by Lombard painters Panfilo Nuvolone and Francesco Codino. The presence of insects, such as the flies visible on the peach in the left foreground and on the apple in the centre of the basket, are another clear testament to the influence of Northern still life painters. It is therefore necessary to consider the influence that Flemish-German still lifes had on our painting, in particular those of the so-called Frankfurt School, of which Binoit was one of the most prominent exponents.⁶ But how? Which paintings by these artists circulated in Milan in the early decades of the 17th century? Did Madonna Fede perhaps see these still lifes in the Sabaudian collection during a possible sojourn in Turin? It is not documented that she spent time there, but her father certainly had close relationships within the Piedmontese court. The 1620-21 documents published by Alessandro Baudi di Vesme⁷ prove that there was indisputably a liaison between the Galizia family and the court at Turin, and this certainly deserves further scholarly attention. The same applies to the discourse

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

around Fede's relationship with Franz Godin (1590 - c. 1635), called Francesco Codino, who contributed to the diffusion of the artistic ideas of Frankfurt masters such as Daniel Soreau and Peter Binoit. Codino is known to have been active in Lombardy between 1620 and 1630. The very early date of 1602 (when Codino was not yet active) that was once visible on the back on a youthful still life by Fede Galizia suggests that the influence and artistic exchange between Fede and Codino might well have been mutual. The structure of the present composition and the handling of the paint, for instance in the definition of the skin of the peaches, reveal similarities between the two artists, although Codino's German origins are visible in his employ of a rather more dry and flat line (fig. 3).

Nevertheless, that the present painting is neither Flemish nor German is of course obvious: the pictorial form is so full, fluid and creamy and thus so different to the icastic imitation and dry brushstrokes of Northern European painters. The chromatic range is also richer and more varied – as demonstrated in the burgundy pigment of the figs and plums and in the refined nuances on the skin of peaches, pears and apples. This sensitivity for naturalism and mastery of optics could easily find its truest expression within a Milanese milieu that inherited the Leonardesque tradition. Leonardo's still life within his *Last Supper* was visible to all Milanese of the time (notwithstanding its conservation issues), and the artist's legacy was being deliberately revitalized by Federico Borromeo, who was surely the force behind the realisation of Caravaggio's (equally optically perspicacious) *Basket of Fruit* (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan). In Lombardy, the appreciation of naturalism found in the genre of still life its indispensable reference point: these precedents and models therefore constituted a genetic component within the artistic language of all Lombard painters, including Fede. This explains why the wicker basket in the present painting employs the same Borromeo-Caravaggio model as the *Basket of Fruit* in the Ambrosiana, although clearly without the classical/symbolic element of Merisi's masterpiece.⁸

Beyond our painting's evident quality and documented history, it shares various discernible stylistic similarities with other works by Fede: for instance, the plate of figs on the right is very close to that in *Still life of plums and jasmine* in a private collection (fig. 4): here it is

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

crucial to notice how the shadow of the plate on the table is almost identical to the shadow of the basket in our painting.

The peaches in the foreground on the left, whose skins are so soft and velvety and are touched by a suffused light; they recall those in the *Still life with peaches, quince and a lemon*, also in a private collection (fig. 5). It is not just these compositional details but also their chromatic gradation (which is recurrent in this and numerous other works by Fede) that are decisive elements in the confirmed attribution of the present work to Fede Galizia.

The strong spirit, both delicate and contemplative, that emanates from this painting – and in general from all the works of Fede and her contemporary Orsola Maddalena Caccia – can be appreciated in the context of the ideas of Federico Borromeo and their widespread hold among Milanese artists (and among artists beyond Lombardy), as I have reiterated repeatedly in my publications. These ideas played a crucial role in the development of both the landscape and still life genres.⁹ Cardinal Borromeo embraced a profound spiritual and theological conception of the depiction of nature in art, and was passionate in his collecting of still lifes. He placed the semantics of a pictorial representation of the natural world on a level comparable to the consideration and contemplation of The Creation, through which he saw the reflection of God. In his *Pro suis studiis*, for instance, he affirmed that when he was in his study:

and it's very hot, I like to see flowers, and some fruit on the table. I especially like the flowers and fruits of Spring time, and the Summer ones - considering the difference of climates - / I like / to keep in the room various vases and change them according to convenience and my preference. Then, when Winter comes and everything freezes, I cheer to contemplate - and even just feel their imaginative, if not real, scent - artificial flowers (...) those depicted in paintings (...) and in those flowers I see the variety of colours, not all ephemeral, that sometimes one finds in the real flower / one can find in nature / but they are steady and they last.¹⁰

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

This sense of contemplation – a direct translation of Borromean concepts – becomes recognizable or can even be said to have created a new ‘typology’ that ended up becoming a visual canon (which paradoxically aspired to reach an ‘abstraction’). Its pictorial eloquence finds its truest and most authentic precedent in the naturalism of Leonardo rather than in the descriptivism of the Flemish masters, both of which were loved by Cardinal Borromeo, who in his *Three books of divine lauds* considers the ‘causes and reasons’ of the variation of light gradation and the consequent mutation of colours.¹¹

Alberto Cottino

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 1. Osias Beert, *Still life of a tazza holding apples, surrounded by plates of other fruits and nuts and a piece of bread.* Musée des Beaux-Arts, Grenoble



Figure 2. Peter Binoit, *Still Life with Birds.* Musée des Beaux-Arts, Mulhouse

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 3. Franz Godin called Francesco Codino, *Still life with a fruit bowl and a raised cup containing plums*. Accademia Carrara, Bergamo



Figure 4. Fede Galizia, *Still life of plums and jasmine*. Private collection

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 5. Fede Galizia, *Still life with peaches, quince and a lemon*. Private collection

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

Footnotes

I would like to thank José Gomez Frechina for the research he carried out in the Madrid archives. I would also like to thank Maria José Pelayo Gonzales, Dirección de Colecciones Reales, Madrid Palacio Real, Professor Paola Volpini, Roma, Sapienza University Rome and, *last but not least*, Candida Lodovica de Angelis Corvi for the continuous generous assistance.

¹ The collection of the Infante included *c.* 900 works of art. Currently however, only less than two hundred are known, recorded and recognised. In the *Catalogue des Tableaux provenant de la Galerie de S. A. R. Don Sebastian Gabriel de Bourbon*, Paris 1890, where no more than sixty paintings are recorded, there is no mention of still lifes. By contrast, various still lifes can be found in the *Catalogue de la collection de tableaux de feu, son Altesse Royale Marie Christine de Bourbon*, heir of the collection of the Infante, Madrid 1902; not his one since most inventories and records of the collection were dispersed or destroyed, as scholarship and archivist knowledge demonstrates.

² L. Basso, 'Inventory of 1638' and 'Instrumentum donationis 1650: documents for a collection', in *Le stanze del Cardinale Monti. La collezione ricomposta*, exh. cat., Milan 1994, p. 115, n. 118; G. Renzi, 'Regesto di Nunzio e Fede Galizia (1573-1809)', in *Fede Galizia mirabile pittoressa*, exh. cat., (ed.) G. Agosti & J. Stoppa, Trento 2021, p. 345. See also L. Facchin, 'I palazzi e le collezioni dei Monti a Milano', in *Lo spazio del collezionismo nello Stato di Milano (secoli XVII-XVIII)*, (ed.) A. Spiriti, Rome 2013, pp. 139 & 186. Two of them can be found in the '2 Piccoli in tavola con cornici come sopra, rapp.ti Frutti' with no author mentioned in n. 185-186 in the *Catalogo de' Quadri of the Casa Sormani Andreani*, realised between 1832 and 1838: see L. Basso, 'Inventari della famiglia Sormani parte seconda', in *Libri & Documenti*, XXXII-XXXIII, Archivio Storico e Biblioteca Trivulziana, Castello Sforzesco Milano 2006-2007, p. 100. The other two evidently had already left the collection or were dispersed by descent. After the death of Count Paolo Monti Melzi (1774), who left no heir, the palace and its contents passed to his widow Maria Loaysa, and from her to her nephew Giuseppe Viani. After the death of Viani, one year later, his widow Margherita Salazar sold the property and its contents to Count Giovan Mario Andreani and from there in 1831 the palace became property of his nephew Giuseppe Sormani (Facchin, p. 199). At least two of the four paintings by Fede Galizia remained in the same palace, after which they are not recorded anymore in the inventory of this Milanese family. About this collection see also A. Morandotti, 'Un dono a Brera e l'eredità di Luisa Sormani Andreani Verri', in *La musica degli angeli. Bernardo Zenale e la cantoria di Santa Maria di Brera. Un dono, un ritorno*, exh. cat., (ed.) Cristina Quattrini, Milan -Venice 2021, pp. 34-51.

³ The painting titled *Cesto di vimini con pesche e gelsomini, rose, ipomea, foglia di gelsomino (con fiore non identificabile) e nasturzio*, a version of a painting attributed to Fede in New York, has been published by J. Stoppa (in *Fede Galizia mirabile pittoressa*, exh. cat., (ed.) G. Agosti & J. Stoppa, Trento 2021, pp. 300-301, fig. 129) but I don't believe it has the right quality and stylistic characteristics to be considered an autograph work by Fede.

⁴ This is what emerges from a dedicated section within the inventory of the Infante don Gabriel's archive, retrieved in Madrid at the Palacio Real: '*Inventario del Archivo del infante don Gabriel de Borbón. Apartado de la Contaduría. Dentro del Legajo 453. En la pagina del libro 471. Certificado de residencia de Joaquín José Valluzzi en la calle Torre di Moriggi en el número 286 de la ciudad de Milán ante Luis Benito Baserga cura párroco de San Alexandro.*' Joaquín José Valluzzi therefore lived in Milan on Torre dei Moriggi street, now known as Moriggi street, where today we find a nucleus of historical buildings still in existence and referred to as the 'House of Moriggi' (via Moriggi 8).

⁵ See L. Ruiz Gomez, 'Borbón y Braganza, Sebastián Gabriel', in *Diccionario Biográfico Español de la Real Academia de la Historia*, Sebastián Gabriel de Borbón y Braganza | Real Academia de la Historia (rah.es).

⁶ See also J. Stoppa, 'Come catturare la vita silente', in *Fede Galizia mirabile pittoressa*, exh. cat., (ed.) G. Agosti & J. Stoppa, Trento 2021, p. 296 and the following pages.

⁷ In her testament dated 1630, Fede Galizia pays tribute to Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy and to the R.mo Prince Vittorio, the future Vittorio Amedeo (see G. Renzi, 'Regesto di Nunzio e Fede Galizia (1573-1809)', in *Fede Galizia*

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

mirabile pittoressa, exh. cat., (ed.) G. Agosti & J. Stoppa, Trento 2021, p. 344). As we know, various works by Fede were part of the Sabaudian collections.

⁸ For Caravaggio's basket, also see, among other bibliographic references, A. Cottino, 'Ancora sulla canestra del Monte/Borromeo: il punto di vista dello studioso di natura morta', in *Atti della Giornata di Studi Francesco Maria del Monte e Caravaggio. Roma, Siena, Bologna opera biografia documenti*, (ed.) P. Carofano, Pontedera 2011, pp. 145-159.

⁹ See A. Cottino, 'Metafore dipinte: le nature morte 'devote' di Orsola Maddalena Caccia', in *Orsola Maddalena Caccia*, exh. cat., (eds.) P. Caretta & D. Magnetti, Savigliano 2012, pp. 37-46.

¹⁰ Quotation in P. Jones, *Federico Borromeo e l'Ambrosiana. Arte e Riforma cattolica nel XVII secolo a Milano*, Milan 1997, p. 68.

¹¹ Milan 1632, p. 63.