

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



MARIO NUZZI, called MARIO de' FIORI
(Rome 1603-1673)

RAFFAELLO VANNI
(Siena 1595-1673 Rome)

THE TRIUMPH OF FLORA

c. 1660
oil on canvas
183 x 281.5 cm.; 72 x 110 7/8 in.

Provenance

Commissioned by Giulio Rospigliosi, later Pope Clement IX (1600-1669), *circa* 1660;
By descent to Giovanni Battista Rospigliosi, I Prince Rospigliosi, I Duke of Zagarolo (1646-1722), Palazzo Rospigliosi Pallavicini, Rome, 1713 (recorded in the inventory dated 26 June 1713);
By descent to Camillo Rospigliosi, III Duke of Zagarolo (1704-1763) (recorded in his posthumous inventory drawn up in 1769);
By descent to Marcantonio Rospigliosi (1726-1784) (recorded in his posthumous inventory drawn up in 1784, misattributed to Gian Giacomo Semenza);
Probably left Rome in the early 19th century during the Napoleonic occupation (1798-1814);
Private collection, Schleswig-Holstein, since at least 1966, until 2022.

Literature

Francesco Solinas, 'Mario de' Fiori e Raffaello Vanni, la Flora Rospigliosi ritrovata e qualche appunto sulla pittura naturalistica a Roma alla metà del Seicento', in *Predella Journal of Visual Arts*, no. 54, December 2023, pp. 33-50

RAFFAELLO VANNI

Marco Ciampolini, in *Pittori senesi del Seicento*, Siena 2010, vol. III, pp. 1029-1087

Silvia Bruno, *VANNI, Raffaello*, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, vol. 98 (2020)
([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/raffaello-vanni_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/raffaello-vanni_(Dizionario-Biografico)/))

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Angela Negro, 'Raffaello Vanni', in *Pietro da Cortona*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Anna Lo Bianco, Rome 1997, pp. 235-244

Stefano Pierguidi, *Alessandro VII, Raffaello Vanni, Ippolito Maracci: la ricostruzione di Santa Maria in Campitelli*, in 'Studi di Storia dell'Arte', 2014, pp. 161-66

MARIO NUZZI

Arianna Petraccia, *Mario de' Fiori*, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, vol. 79 (2013)
([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/mario-de-fiori_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/mario-de-fiori_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/))

Flora romana: Fiori e cultura nell'arte di Mario de' Fiori (1693-1673), exhibition catalogue, ed. E Solinas, Rome 2010

GIULIO ROSPIGIOSI (POPE CLEMENT IX)

Alessandro Angelini, 'Fabio Chigi e Giulio Rospigliosi: testimonianze di un'amicizia nel segno di arte e poesia', in *Lo spettacolo del sacro, la morale del profano*, ed. D. Romei, Florence 2005, pp. 53-65

Angela Negro, *La Collezione Rospigliosi, la quadreria e la committenza artistica di una famiglia patrizia a Roma nel Sei e Settecento*, Rome 2007

Luciano Osbat, *CLEMENTE IX, papa*, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, vol. 26 (1982)
(https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-clemente-ix_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/)

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This magnificent canvas, only recently rediscovered, encapsulates the artistic magnificence of Baroque Rome. Commissioned in *circa* 1660 by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, later Pope Clement IX (1600-1669), it is the collaborative genius of Mario Nuzzi, also known as Mario de' Fiori (1603-1673), and Raffaello Vanni (1595-1673).

The goddess Flora, seated in majesty upon a golden throne, is shown surrounded by seven playful cherubs, set against a backdrop teeming with a rich variety of flowers. The composition unfurls across an expansive landscape, with the nascent glow of dawn in the distance. Flora, her head adorned with a floral coronet, holds a splendid, rare iris (*'iris florentina'*) in her right hand. Echoing the dramatic intensity of contemporary theatre, akin to the stage sets designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), the scene is dynamically captured in the foreground by a soft light from the top left. This clever interplay of light and shadow brings the figures to life whilst also enriching the flowers with an astounding depth of colour and detail.

The exceptional patron of this painting was Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, who commissioned the piece following two landmark events in his life: his induction as Secretary of State on 17 April 1655 to his close friend Fabio Chigi (1599-1667), the then newly appointed Pope Alexander VII, and his elevation to the cardinalate a few years later, on 9 April 1657. Rospigliosi held various positions in the church, culminating with his election as Pope Clement IX on 20 June 1667.

Nuzzi, celebrated during his lifetime for his mastery in floral still-life painting, here meticulously brings to life 120 varieties of flora, while Vanni skilfully renders the figures and the landscape. Their combined talents produced a piece that was both a culmination of Nuzzi's career and one of Vanni's significant late works. Stylistically, this piece highlights a genre pioneered by Mario, notably in his *Four Seasons* series created around 1657 for the pope's nephew Flavio Chigi (figs 1-4). This earlier work laid the groundwork for the *Flora* canvas, blending opulent, almost illusory floral representations with powerful allegorical figures, a style partly influenced by earlier Flemish artists like Jan Brueghel the Younger (1601-1678), Jan van Balen (1611-1654) and Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The *Four Seasons* canvases, notable for their dimensions of 150 x 250cm., were a collective endeavour with prominent figure painters esteemed by the Chigi family: Bernardino Mei (1612-1676), Giacinto Brandi (1621-1691), Filippo Lauri (1623-1694), and Carlo Maratta (1625-1713).

Rediscovery and Restoration

In the spring of 2022, an enigmatic painting attributed to an 'Antwerp Master', possibly Gaspar Peter Verbruggen (1664-1703), or Mario de' Fiori, emerged at auction in Germany. Dr. Francesco Solinas, to whom we are grateful, was able to rediscover the painting as the long-lost work by Mario and Vanni, even though at this time the paint surface's visibility had diminished significantly, obscured by the oxidation of old varnish layers over the years. Its known provenance dated back to the early nineteenth century, when the painting probably left

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Rome amidst the upheaval of the Napoleonic occupation (1798-1814).¹ What is now known is that the painting was originally intended to adorn the Peretti Fiano palace in San Lorenzo in Lucina, which Giulio Rospigliosi rented from Olimpia and Lavinia Ludovisi in 1657, following his appointment as a cardinal.² In 1708, the painting was relocated to the ground floor of the Palazzo Rospigliosi Pallavicini on the Quirinal hill, where it remained until the undocumented sale in the nineteenth century and presumably entered Germany.

At some point after arriving in Germany, the painting appears to have undergone considerable restorations - notably, it was relined and expanded with an additional 20cm of canvas along the top edge. A recent meticulous restoration by Bruno Arciprete has revived the painting to its initial glory. The process involved removing layers of dirt to uncover a surprisingly well-preserved surface, displaying vivid colours and remarkable freshness. This restoration not only reclaimed the painting's original dimensions but also exposed hidden details and pentimenti, reinforcing its attribution to Mario de' Fiori and Vanni.

Raffaello Vanni (1595-1673)

Raffaello Vanni began his artistic career in Siena in the workshop of his father Francesco Vanni (1563-1610) and moved to Rome in 1610 following his father's death. There, he spent eight formative years in the workshops of Bolognese masters Guido Reni (1575-1642) and Antonio Carracci (1583-1618). The goddess Flora's depiction, with her unveiled, voluptuous form, certainly draws from the graceful, tender representations of young women typical of these Bolognese masters. Vanni's artistic journey included a formative stint in Venice from 1618 to 1622 and significant projects in his hometown, Siena. Upon his return to Rome in 1638, he found favour with artists patronised by the Barberini family. This circle included the Roman Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661), the younger Viterbo artist Giovan Francesco Romanelli (1610-1662), and Pietro da Cortona (1597-1669), a Tuscan painter who was a leading figure in the Roman art scene and closely associated with the ruling family.

Between 1638 and 1649, Vanni undertook a substantial commission for Marquis Mariano Patrizi (1599-1654). Patrizi, like Fabio Chigi, was a descendent of an esteemed Sienese family and an avid supporter of both Italian and foreign artists in Rome. Vanni produced an array of large-scale paintings for Patrizi, including historical and biblical scenes.³ He also completed an extensive fresco cycle on the main floor of the Palazzo Patrizi in San Luigi dei Francesi, featuring narratives from the Old Testament and allegorical depictions of the Virtues.

¹ The Rospigliosi family sold parts of their collection in two important sales in 1931 and 1932; the present painting is not recorded in the *Catalogo della vendita all'asta della collezione di quadri, mobile, argenti, tappeti, ecc. In parte provenienti dalla raccolta del principe don Gerolamo Rospigliosi* from 28 April - 5 May 1931 sale held in the Galleria Sestieri, Casa di vendite G. Tavazzi, Rome, nor in the *Catalogo della raccolta di quadri, sculture, arazzi, oggetti d'arte e arredamento che arredava l'appartamento di S.E. il principe don Gerolamo Rospigliosi* from December 1932, held in the same location.

² Negro 2007, pp. 76-79.

³ Today partly preserved in the halls of Castel Giuliano, Bracciano.

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In the summer of 1655, during the early reign of Pope Alexander VII, Vanni, then sixty years old, was summoned to contribute to the new artistic vision of the pontificate; by December, he was deeply involved in these projects (figs 5-6).⁴ Furthermore, Vanni's contributions to the arts were further recognised when he was accepted into the prestigious Academy of San Luca and a few years later, in 1658, assumed the position of “principe” after Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) was refused it.

Mario Nuzzi (1603-1673)

Mario Nuzzi was without question the preeminent painter of flowers working in Italy in the seventeenth century, earning him the pseudonym Mario de' Fiori (Mario 'of the flowers'). In fact, he achieved such fame that the street where he lived in Rome still bears his name (Via Mario de' Fiori). His work, characterised by vases filled with very naturalistic portrayals of flowers, significantly contributed to the recognition of floral art as a distinct and respected genre. Blending precise observation with creative flair and vivid colours, Nuzzi's art not only won the admiration of Rome's aristocracy, including the Chigi, Colonna, Barberini and Orsini families, but also attracted an international audience. Most clearly the influence of de' Fiori left its mark on both Juan de Arellano (1614-1676) in Spain and Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636-1699) in France, establishing a courtly international style of flower painting that enjoyed enormous popularity throughout Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century.

During his early years, Nuzzi was involved in graphic and botanical studies at the first Accademia dei Lincei (1603-1630) in Rome. This experience profoundly influenced his approach to floral painting, taking cues from Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), who was known for his flower and still-life works. Nuzzi's style was clearly highly influenced by the Lincean scientists' detailed botanical illustrations, who often used magnifying glasses or microscopes for precision (fig. 7).

The young Nuzzi also drew inspiration from the botanical illustrations originally created by Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1627) for Francesco I de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, of which autograph replicas were in the collection of the Roman cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte (1549-1626). Nuzzi was also acquainted with Del Monte's protégé, Cassiano del Pozzo (1587-1657), a member of the Accademia dei Lincei and the greatest proponent of the study of all aspects of the natural world. In 1625 Daniel Seghers (1590-1661), a Jesuit priest and renowned Northern floral painter, arrived in Rome - Nuzzi's work was certainly influenced by the Flemish artist who immediately attracted the attention of the city's art connoisseurs (fig. 8). At the time Nuzzi, in his young twenties, was establishing himself as an independent artist in the workshop of his uncle, Tommaso Salini (1575-1625) (also known as Mao Salini). This workshop was a trove of naturalistic drawings, cartoons and *modelletti* and attracted a rich clientele of collectors and passionate botanists looking for 'portraits' of their blooms.⁵

⁴ M. Ciampolini, 'Il repertorio dei "Pittori Senesi del Seicento" a otto anni della sua uscita, con nuovi disegni e pitture di Raffaello Vanni', in *A Tale of Two Cities - Rome and Siena in the Early Modern Period (1330-1750)*, eds S Sperindei, G.M. Weston, P. Carofano, Pisa 2020, pp. 39-64.

⁵ For more on Tommaso Salini and Nuzzi's involvement in his workshop, see Solinas 2010, pp. 29-33.

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Nuzzi reached the pinnacle of his career between 1655 and 1660, a period marked by his invitation to join the Academy of San Luca in 1657. During these years he led a bustling workshop in Rome, fostering collaboration with assistants and artists from all over the continent. The 1660s and 1670s saw his workshop's productivity soar to unprecedented levels, all the while maintaining the high quality of his celebrated floral compositions. This era was characterised by a rich collaborative spirit within his studio, utilising diverse techniques to meticulously replicate the complex details of Nuzzi's original designs.

Mario's workshop became a hub for nurturing emerging artists, who played a significant role in creating a wide array of canvases that celebrated the beauty of floral arrangements. These canvases found their way to collectors and admirers across Europe. His protégés included notable artists like Nicolas Baudesson (1611-1680) from France, Giovanni Stanchi (b. 1608), Bartolomeo Ligozzi (1620-1695), Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648-1729) and Andrea Scacciati (1642-1710) from Italy, and Juan de Arellano from Spain. Through their collective efforts, Nuzzi's stylistic influence was disseminated widely, though he reserved the most prestigious commissions for his own hands.

Among the highlights of Mario Nuzzi's distinguished *oeuvre*, beyond the masterpiece at hand, are several notable works, including the celebrated floral still lifes painted on mirror for Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna around 1660 (figs 9-12). Additionally, the *Portrait of Mario Nuzzi* (fig. 13), a unique collaboration in which Giovanni Maria Morandi captured Nuzzi at his easel, while Nuzzi himself contributed by painting the flowers within the work, is a pivotal piece that cements his status and enduring legacy as a celebrated floral painter.

Giulio Rospigliosi, Pope Clement IX (1600-1669): Patron and Visionary

Among the clients visiting Nuzzi's vibrant studio was the young Giulio Rospigliosi, a noble clergyman and poet who received his early education from the Jesuits in Rome and then studied at the University of Pisa. Rospigliosi was known for his literary talent, diplomatic skills and modesty, and he quickly gained the admiration of Tuscan politicians and the favour of influential patrons, artists, and intellectuals. In 1624, he entered the service of Cardinal Sant'Onofrio, born Antonio Marcello Barberini (1569-1646), younger brother of Maffeo Barberini, later Pope Urban VIII (1568-1644). Among Rospigliosi's many talents and passions were music and theatre, and he immersed himself in the activities of the newly founded Barberini theatre, crafting librettos for musical dramas that garnered European acclaim.⁶ His career flourished under the patronage of Francesco Barberini (1597-1679), who was Secretary of State to Pope Urban VIII until his death in 1644, and he thereafter remained close with the Barberini family.

⁶ His first successful libretto was for *San'Alessio* staged in 1631 at the Palazzo Barberini theatre. This opera was followed by *Erminia Sul Giordano* in 1633, *Theodora* in 1636, *l'Egisto* in 1637, *San Bonifazio* put on for cardinal Francesco Barberini at the Palazzo della Cancelleria in 1638, *Genoinda* in 1641, *Il palazzo incantato* in 1642, and *Sant'Eustachio* in 1643.

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With the advent of the pro-Spanish Pope Innocent X (Pamphilij), Rospigliosi served as an Apostolic Nuncio in Madrid for eight years, after which he returned to Rome in 1652. He aligned himself with the Spanish-supporting princes Carlo and Giovanni Carlo de' Medici, resuming his influential role in Rome.

During his tenure as the Nuncio in Madrid under Philip IV of Spain, Rospigliosi significantly contributed to the introduction of Roman floral art there and it subsequently became very popular within the Spanish Royal Court and among the aristocracy. Nuzzi benefitted hugely, for example with a commission from the Royal Court for five large overdoors which arrived in Spain by 1650, and which today are in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, the Palazzo de Pedralbes, Barcelona, and the Embassy of Spain to the Holy See, Rome.⁷ After his return to Rome and subsequent elevation to cardinal, Rospigliosi clearly continued to champion Nuzzi. His financial records mention numerous pieces by the master across various mediums - canvas, copper, mirror and stone - hanging throughout the cardinal and his family's many residencies. These included the palace in Santa Maria Maggiore, where he resided as a vicar, and the palace in San Lorenzo in Lucina, to which he relocated upon his cardinalate appointment. It is in this latter palace that the painting in question originally hung.⁸

Legacy of the *Triumph of Flora*

The *Triumph of Flora* was a very significant commission undertaken around 1660 by Giulio Rospigliosi, who engaged both Mario Nuzzi and Raffaello Vanni for its creation.⁹ Interestingly Vanni's involvement with Rospigliosi's is not well documented.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Rospigliosi's admiration for Nuzzi's art is well recorded.¹¹ For example, in a letter dated 5 September 1637, Rospigliosi extols Nuzzi, “[il] Nipote del Cavalier Mao che fu molto stimato et hoggi questo non gli resta punto inferiore”.¹²

Alongside the *Flora* in the Rospigliosi collection, there were paintings by renowned artists such as Guido Reni, Guercino (1591-1666), Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), Pietro da Cortona, Andrea

⁷ For more on Nuzzi's fortune in Spain, see Petraccia 2013.

⁸ Although a large part of the Rospigliosi family documents was destroyed in a fire in 1925, some of the surviving volumes were transferred to the Archivio Segreto Vaticano – of these, *Rospigliosi 5* contains the most mentions of artworks acquired by the Cardinal and his nephews. Dr. Francesco Solinas consulted these archives and it is thanks to him that we are aware of these early recordings of the painting.

⁹ There are records of the painting dating 13 November 1669, just before Pope Rospigliosi's death, in the *Giornale della Guardaroba* of his nephew cardinal Giacomo, outlining details of works paid for, or in the progress of being paid for: *A spese di Guardaroba, scudi 150 moneta buoni [versati a] detti [ai banchieri toscani Baccelli] pagati con mandato no. 511 a Mario de' Fiori per il prezzo di un quadro grande di una Venere [sic?] circondata di fiori da lui dipinti per Sua Eminenza, scudi 150* (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Rospigliosi 5*, fol. 105)

¹⁰ The relationship between Vanni and Pope Alexander VII, which led to numerous important commissions both for grand public works as well as private family projects, has been studied by scholars like Angela Negro, Marco Ciampolini, Stefano Pier Guidi, and Silvia Bruno.

¹¹ See A. Negro, 'Fiori Romani, la pittura floreale nelle collezioni romane fra Sei e Settecento; un aggiornamento', in *Fiori. Cinque Secoli di Pittura Floreale*, exhibition catalogue, ed. F. Solinas, Rome 2004, pp. 173-181; see also A. Negro, *La Collezione Rospigliosi, la quadreria e la committenza artistica di una famiglia patrizia a Roma nel Sei e Settecento*, Rome 2007.

¹² Negro 2007, cit. p. 30.

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Sacchi, Giovanni Maria Morandi and Nicolas Poussin - these pieces were collected by the esteemed patron over thirty years. Rospigliosi became Pope Clement IX in 1667 and died shortly after in 1669, after which his impressive collection was transferred in 1708 to the palace on the Quirinal hill, when acquired by his youngest nephew Giovanni Battista Rospigliosi, I Prince Rospigliosi, I Duke of Zagarolo (1646-1722) and his wife Maria Camilla Pallavicini (1645-1710). Approximately half of the works commissioned by Rospigliosi are still in the Pallavicini collection today.¹³ It is thanks to the current Maria Camilla Pallavicini, and the inventory documentation provided by Federico Zeri and Angela Negro, that a broader spectrum of Nuzzi's *oeuvre* commissioned by Rospigliosi has been unveiled.¹⁴ This newly discovered body of work has enriched the understanding of Nuzzi's contributions beyond what was presented at the monographic exhibition on the artist in Tivoli in 2010.

The *Triumph of Flora* occupied a significant place within the Rospigliosi collection, as evidenced by various family inventories. In an inventory, dated 26 June 1713, outlining the collection of Giovanni Battista, our painting is described: "*nella terza stanza de' quadri di sopra: un quadro grande in tela di palmi 11 : 9 per traverso con cornice indorata intagliata rappresenta una Flora a sedere con diversi Putti, che tengono Fiori*".¹⁵ It is again cited, twice, in the posthumous inventory of Camillo III (1704-1763), drawn up in 1769 by his younger brother Marcantonio (1726-1784).¹⁶ In the *post mortem* inventory of the possessions of Marcantonio from 1784 is where the first misattribution of this painting arises – it is given to Gian Giacomo Semenza (1583-1640), who died twenty years before Nuzzi and Vanni came together to create the *Triumph of Flora* – clearly resulting from a mistake by the notary and/or lack of documentation. What is very interesting is the lack of mention of Raffaello Vanni in these inventories – a testament to the fleeting nature of his success and acclaim under Pope Chigi, which already by the eighteenth century seems to have been largely forgotten.

¹³ The important collection was divided between the two branches of the family, Rospigliosi and Pallavicini, following the marriage of Giovanni Battista with Camilla Pallavicini. For details on this division and a record of works by Nuzzi commissioned by Rospigliosi still today in the Pallavicini collection, see Federico Zeri, *La Galleria Pallavicini in Roma*, Florence 1963, pp. 385-86.

¹⁴ See Solinas 2023 for images of these works.

¹⁵ Archivio Pallavicini, A. 3.1, *Inventario della Guardarobba e Palazzo del Signor Duca Giovan Battista Rospigliosi* (...) 26 giugno 1713, fol. 410 r. (Zeri 1963, pp. 299-328); translated to English: "*in the third room of paintings upstairs: a large canvas measuring 11 : 9 'palms' with a carved gilt frame, depicting a seated Flora with various putti holding flowers*" (a Roman 'palm' corresponds to circa 22-24cm.)

¹⁶ In the 1769 inventory, number 13: "*Un quadro grande in tela palmi 11 e 9 per traverso rappresentante una Flora a sedere con diversi Putti che tengono Fiori*" (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Rospigliosi 1140*, fol. 3-112); also: "*Altro [quadro] di 8 e 12 [palmi], per traversa rappresentante una Flora con putti e fiori dipinti da Mario* (*Idem*, fol. 86).

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Figs 1-4. Mario Nuzzi (with figures by other artists), oil on canvas, 150 x 250cm.
Ariccia, Palazzo Chigi.

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Fig. 5. Raffaello Vanni, *Allegory of Faith*, c.1655-1666, oil on canvas, 133 x 170cm. National Trust, Osterley Park.

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Fig. 6. Raffaello Vanni, *Allegory of Faith*, c.1655-1666, oil on canvas, 117 x 155cm.
National Trust, Osterley Park.



Fig. 7. Federico Cesi, *Plantae et Flores*, Ms 976, f.58.
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France.

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Fig. 8. Daniel Seghers, *Still life with roses, an iris and other flowers in a glass vase*, c.1640, oil on canvas, 57 x 32.5cm. Národní Muzeum, Prague.

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Figs 9-12. Mario de' Fiori and Carlo Maratta, *Floral still lifes with putti*, c.1660, oil on mirror, 240 x 166cm. Rome, Palazzo Colonna.

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Fig. 13. Mario de' Fiori and Giovanni Maria Morandi, *Portrait of Mario Nuzzi at the Easel*, 1658-59, oil on canvas, 191 x 262 cm. Ariccia, Palazzo Chigi.