

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Luigi Miradori,
called il Genovesino
(Genoa, c. 1600/10 – 1656/7 Cremona?)

*A vanitas still-life with a baby on
a red velvet cushion resting on a
skull-like bolster, by an hourglass*
oil on canvas
33.5 x 44 cm.;
13 1/4 x 17 3/8 in.

Provenance

H. G. Sperling;
With P. & D. Colnaghi & Co. Ltd., London (as by Guido Cagnacci¹), acquired from the above
9 May 1961, and by whom sold 26 March 1962, to
G. Blair Laing Ltd., Toronto;
Mr. John A MacAuley, Q.C., Winnipeg (by whom acquired from the above circa 1960);
Private collection, England.

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A naked sleeping infant, the very embodiment of youth, fragility and innocence, lies peacefully and comfortably upon velvet cushions. Next to the child is an hourglass – the archetypal embodiment of the *momento mori*. Just as the sand runs through the glass, and will one day run out – the viewer of this beguiling painting is reminded that so too will our time here on earth. Through the juxtaposition of the youthful body next to the hourglass, Il Genovesino invites one to contemplate the ephemerality of life. The peace of the sleeping infant, and the domestic furnishings create a feeling of intimacy, as, too, does the painting's small size — strong indications that this work was created for private contemplation and reflection.

This is a composition that Il Genovesino treated on more than one occasion, and from his other variants we know that the artist was known to include not only the hourglass, but also another vanitas symbol; the skull (fig. 1).² In the present painting he has omitted the skull and included in its place the end of a bolster cushion – but on first glance, the shape of the cushion is very reminiscent of a skull... the silken tassel suggests the nose – the shadows above serve as the eye-sockets. The success of this composition is further demonstrated by the existence of a seventeenth-century woodcut after Genovesino's invention.³

Luigi Miradori was born in Genoa, hence his nickname 'il Genovesino', but was trained in the Milanese tradition of Morazzone, Tanzio da Varallo and Francesco del Cairo. His naturalistic rendition of detail and subtle use of a spotlight effect point to the influence of Caravaggism. He is also indebted to Spanish artists, whose works were well known in Lombardy, where the Habsburgs ruled.

Miradori is first documented in Genoa in 1630 before he moved on to Piacenza, Rome and finally settling in Cremona *circa* 1640. He gave his religious imagery a human face by including everyday contemporary life in the fore and background scenes such as beggars and the poor. Just as here, he has given the great theological reminder of life's brevity the all-too-human appearance of a chubby sleeping baby.

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Figure 1. Il Genovesino, *Vanitas with sleeping child*.
Sold New York, Sotheby's, 26 January 2017, lot 179.

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Footnotes

¹ According to the records in the Colnaghi archives, the attribution to Cagnacci was 'due to Voss', presumably Hermann Voss.

² See also the version published in L. Bellingeri, *Genovesino*, Lecce 2007, reproduced fig. 32.

³ Bellingeri 2007, p. 27.