

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Gaspare Traversi
(Naples c. 1722 – 1770 Rome)

The Sewing Lesson
towards the end of the 1740s
oil on canvas
131 x 158 cm.;
51 5/8 x 62 1/4 in.

Provenance

Anonymous sale, New York, Christie's, 11 January 1979, lot 45;
With Colnaghi, London;
Private collection, London, by 1981;
Anonymous sale, Milan, Christie's, 22 May 2007, lot 47, where acquired by the present owner.

Literature

N. Spinosa in *Sebastiano Conca (1680 - 1764)*, exh. cat., Gaeta 1981, p. 82, reproduced fig. 9;
N. Spinosa, *Pittura napoletana del Settecento, dal Rococò al Classicismo*, Naples 1987, p. 97, cat. no. 83, reproduced p. 226, fig. 103;
N. Spinosa, *Gaspare Traversi, napoletani del '700 tra miseria e nobiltà*, exh. cat., Naples 2003 - 2004, p. 227, cat. no. R18.

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Nicola Spinosa dates this expressive canvas to the end of the 1740s.¹ The influence of Ribera and Caravaggio can already be detected at this early stage in Traversi's career, as manifested here by the striking *chiaroscuro* effect created by the warm light transfused from upper left that casts the figures into dramatic relief.

A sense of peaceful domesticity nevertheless pervades the composition, as the young girl clasping a doll patiently watches the woman sat to the left sew, and the small boy lower right leans sleepily in his mother's lap. The glossy hue of the red cherries in his hand draws the viewer's eye back to the comparable colour of the sewing cushion, therefore contrasting the relaxed pose of the boy with the poised concentration of the young woman as she works. The gestures of this woman in yellow are mirrored by those of the maid who teases thread behind her, and by those of the gentleman in black reaching towards her, who motions with his pinched finger and thumb. The interplay between the poses held by each figure in the group help to emphasise the tight-knit nature of this family unit, while simultaneously demonstrating the different stages of maturity of its younger members.

This scene is representative of the artist's works executed before his definitive move to Rome in 1752. During this period, as in the present painting, his compositions often had discernible moralistic connotations. References to filial virtue are further exemplified in *The Diligent Daughter and the Ne'er-do-well Son* in the de Young Museum, San Francisco, which is dated to c. 1750 (fig. 1).²

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Figure 1. Gaspare Traversi, *The Diligent Daughter and the Ne'er-do-well Son*, c. 1750.
The de Young Museum, San Francisco

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Footnotes

¹ N. Spinosa, *Pittura napoletana del Settecento, dal Rococò al Classicismo*, Naples 1987, p. 83, cat. no 83.

² N. Spinosa, *Gaspare Traversi, napoletani del '700 tra miseria e nobiltà*, exh. cat., Naples 2003 - 2004, pp. 106-107, cat. no. R16.