

JOHN BENNETT fine paintings

An ornamental landscape with a peacock and ducks by a fountain and swags of flowers garlanding a sculpted urn

NICOLA CASISSA

Sold



Description

NICOLA CASISSA D. 1731 Neapolitan School An ornamental landscape with a peacock and ducks by a fountain and swags of flowers garlanding a sculpted urn Oil on canvas, indistinctly signed 154 x 192 cms 605/8 x 755/8 ins Overall framed size 170.5 x 207.5 cms 671/8 x 813/4 inches

Nicola Casissa was a Neapolitan still-life painter, noted for his vibrant portrayals of flowers, often in great abundance, fruit and birds done in an elegant and decorative manner. He followed in the city's great artistic tradition of producing flamboyant and technically excellent still-lives which had largely been initiated by Caravaggio who, having stated that it required as much effort to paint a good flower piece as a figure subject, helped to revolutionise and eventually abolish the closed attitude to genres of painting. Caravaggio maintained that art was the mirror of nature and his superb Basket of Fruit, now in the Ambrosiana in Milan and painted in 1597, marked the birth of European still-life painting. Throughout the 17th century, Neapolitan still-life painting was founded on the principles demonstrated by Caravaggio and these artists seem to have been the only ones to correctly understand and utilise his ideas.

Luca Forte (c.1615- c.1670) was one of the first Neapolitan artists to adopt the Caravaggesque naturalism in this genre of painting and with exceptional creativity sweeping through the city in the 1630s, he was soon followed by Paolo Porpora and Guiseppe and Giovanni Battista Recco and the Ruoppolo family. When Abraham Brueghel arrived in Naples in about 1670, his influence accelerated the transition of the portrayal of still-life to a more baroque style often epitomised by an abundance of flowers, cascading over classical objects like water.

This more baroque style was taken up by a new generation of painters and one of the first and most prominent of these was Andrea Belvedere (1652-c.1732). He taught Nicola Casissa and other artists working in a similar vein included Gasparo Lopez (called Gasparo di Fiori) d. circa 1732 and Nicola Malinconico (1663-1721). Casissa was certainly working in the latter part of the 17th century, evidenced by payment receipts from 1683 and 1691, and his clever combination of different elements makes reference to the Neapolitan Rococo of the mid-17th century but with more consideration given to the individual effects of colour and light. His earlier paintings were still close in style to the 1680s style of Aniell Ascione and Guiseppe Ruoppolo with carefully worked fruit, but over time this evolved into something much more personal with a variety of flowers, depicted in meticulous detail, partnered with verdant leaves. He incorporated ducks, parrots, birds of prey, peacocks, other birds, toads and on rare occasions, children among grasses and thistles and gathered around fountains, marble balustrades or other architectural or sculptural elements, often with an open landscape in the distance.

These paintings which combined the traditional naturalism favoured by the city with the new 18th century decorative style proved highly popular with the more secular Neapolitan middle classes as well as the aristocracy and royalty to furnish their grand homes. They loved the harmoniou...