

BEAUTY, SEDUCTION AND SHARING

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Art Collection
Maria and João Cortez de Lobão

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Giacomo Legi
(Liège, c. 1590-1600 – Milan, c. 1640)

Antiveduto Gramatica
(Siena, 1571 – Rome, 1627)

Woman in a Pantry
c. 1620-1627
Oil on Canvas
96 × 126 cm
Fundação Gaudium Magnum

The painting “Woman in a Pantry”, with which we begin this cycle of exhibitions of works from the Gaudium Magnum Collection, of Maria and João Cortez de Lobão, displays two of the main features of early seventeenth-century baroque: the naturalism of its representation and its expressive use of chiaroscuro.

The exuberant apprehension of reality that was characteristic of seventeenth-century Flemish painting is combined, in this work, with the drama and tension arising from the strongly contrasted light. This aesthetic device was commonly used by Caravaggio in the construction of his work and became the *modus faciendi* of a vast group of painters, both within and outside Italy. Anna Orlando, who has studied this painting in detail, attributed its authorship to a collaboration between two masters, the Flemish painter Giacomo Legi and the Siena artist Antiveduto Gramatica. Gramatica worked, above all, in Rome, where he held the distinguished position of president of the Accademia di San Lucca. While still young, he managed a workshop in the city that specialised in the representation of busts of illustrious characters, where Caravaggio began working during his first stay in Rome. The young painter’s treatment of light influenced him profoundly, especially from the second decade of the seventeenth century onwards, although Gramatica always continued to display a restrained classicism in the portrayal of his figures, which was more agreeable than the revolutionary naturalism proposed by Caravaggio.

Giacomo Legi, in turn, almost always worked in Genoa, where a sizeable community of Flemish painters settled in the early seventeenth century, including such artists as Cornelis de Weal (1592-1667), Jan Roos (1591-1638), who was Legi’s master and brother-in-law, and the most important of them all, Antoon Van Dyck, who lived in Genoa between 1621 and 1627. Like Jan Roos, who was known in Italy as Giacomo Rosa,

or Rosso Giovanese, Legi devoted himself, above all, to the painting of still life, creating compositions that were mixed with figures, and depicting themes of “markets” or “kitchens” influenced by the late sixteenth-century Flemish creations of Peter Aersten and Joquim Beuckelaer. Giacomo had trained in Antwerp with the great painter of still lifes with animals Frans Sniijders (1579-1657) and with Cornelis’ father, the painter Jan de Wael (1558-1633). When Ross (or Rosa) settled in Genoa, in around 1614, after a brief stay in Rome, his workshop became the focal point for the activity of the city’s Flemish artists and his painting decisively influenced the complex compositions of Giacomo Legi, exuberant in their treatment of textures and their accumulation of victuals, mixing birds with luxuriant plumage with vegetables and objects commonly found in kitchens and pantries. The painstaking description of these elements that Legi created in his works was almost always served by a raised perspective that allowed for their broad and highly detailed presentation, moving away to some extent from the typical “tilted plane” distribution found in Flemish still lifes from the previous generation.

The collaboration in this painting between Legi and Gramatica, as proposed by Anna Orlando and generally accepted, raises the question of how and where the two masters first met. It was probably during one of Legi’s stays in Rome, of which we have no documentary evidence, but which is not at all unlikely, especially if we think about the contacts that his master and brother-in-law, Giacomo Rosa, had in the city. Because of the elegance with which she is depicted, with clearly defined shadows and warm colours, the female figure is different from the other human figures that we tend to find in Legi’s various works, pointing towards an episodic collaboration with Antiveduto Gramatica.

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