

# Luca Forte

1600/05 - Naples - after 1670

## *Flowers in a Vase with a Goldfinch, a Melon and a Pomegranate*

Oil on canvas  
62 x 48 cm (24 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>5</sub> by 19 in.)

### *Provenance:*

Private Collection, Bergamo

### *Exhibitions:*

*Paradeisos*, Galleria Lorenzelli, Bergamo 1982  
*In Proscenio*, Regine's Gallery, Rome 1984

### *Literature:*

Veca (1982) pl. XXXIV  
Marini (1984) pl. 8  
Salerno (1984) pl. 28.1

In the first half of the seventeenth century Naples witnessed a vivid transition from Caravaggesque naturalism to mature baroque painting. At the same time Naples saw the birth of one of the most productive centers for still life painting on the peninsula. In this creative environment Luca Forte found his artistic roots. He is to be associated with the first still life painters mentioned like Giacomo Recco. More research is needed adjusting the scholarly opinion on

Recco's painterly style and laying scientific base to the oeuvre of another two Neapolitan painters, Ambrosiello Faro and Angelo Mariano; whose works even today remain without secure attributions. This generation of still life painters was succeeded by Porpora, Giuseppe Recco and Ruoppolo.

Even though Raffaello Causa started the research,<sup>1</sup> many questions remain unanswered about the beginning of still life painting in Naples due to few data given. In 1989 Nicola Spinosa laid the foundation for any further research.<sup>2</sup>

Few documents exist on the life of Luca Forte. It is known that he was the best man to his fellow painter Aniello Falcone, when he was married in 1639, with whom he probably entertained a fruitful artistic association. Two letters from the 1640's by Luca Forte to the collector Antonio Ruffo show that he requested 200 ducati for a still life painting, a notable sum in that time.

Finally there is the statement by De Dominici, criticizing Luca Forte how he arranged and depicted his still lives lacking profoundness in the composition: "...Seeing his paintings, that haven't too much fore- and background, and everything is almost put in one line after another on the same plane..."<sup>3</sup>

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1) compare: Causa (1972)  
2) compare: Spinosa (1989)  
3) compare: Tecce (1989)



cat. no. XIII

Based on this criteria of lacking profoundness in Forte's paintings, which also reflects the changing concept of perspective in the first half of the seventeenth century, scholars as Raffaello Causa, Ferdinando Bologna<sup>4</sup> and Angela Tecce tried to catalogue Forte's work guided by his signed and dated works.

In another research by Guisepe De Vito on Neapolitan still life painting, a new attribution was suggested for a work<sup>5</sup> which has been traditionally ascribed to Forte's early caravaggesque period. Guisepe De Vito reattributed it to Filippo D'Angeli.<sup>6</sup>

But the problem even today does not present itself that simple. More research is needed concerning the questions raised by Angela Tecce in her article, above all in reference to no.1044 and no.1049 illustrated.

The present painting was first published by Veca in 1982 and successively included by Salerno in reference books on Luca Forte.<sup>7</sup> Its archaic composition recalls those of Giacomo Recco. Priority is given to the depiction of a single flower. A bouquet is strictly the result of painting by adding geometrically single flowers.

The radial composition of flowers before a neutral dark background consists of tulips, anemones, roses, carnations and narcissus. The incorporation of a goldfinch with a pomegranate

resting on a ledge lead Maurizio Marini to the iconographical conclusion that Luca Forte expressed a prayer in terms of nature and color with the present painting.<sup>8</sup>

Even though that symbolic meaning was regularly part of seventeenth century still life painting, I personally would not apply it to the present picture. Luca Forte's ambition was to render meticulously the objects and their tactile substance. He desired to show how substance and color react differently when they are struck by light. Evidence to this is provided by the full composition at the lower left. Marini also understood this aspect and emphasized it to the end of his study.<sup>9</sup>

A similar composition by Luca Forte can be found in a pair of signed still lives, formerly with Cyril Humphris.<sup>10</sup> Compared to the present painting they are of a later date due to a more spacious arrangement of the flowers. Also the incorporation of a bird into a still life is a frequent pictorial device for Luca Forte.<sup>11</sup>

Alberto Veca

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4) Bologna (1983/84) no.13-16

5) compare: De Vito (1990)

6) compare: D'Angeli

7) compare: Salerno (1984)

8) compare: Marini (1984)

9) compare: Marini (1984)

10) compare: Luca Forte, *A Pair of Still Lives with Fruit and Flowers*, signed, formerly Cyril Huimphris

11) compare: Luca Forte, *Still Life with Fruit and Birds*, signed with monogram: L.F: commissioned by Don Guisepe Carafa in Naples; Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota



Pl.1 Luca Forte, *Flowers with a Bunch of Grapes and a Pomegranate*, signed: Lucas Fort. f., canvas 79 x 52 cm, London art market