

# Georg Flegel and Workshop

Olmütz 1566 - 1638 Frankfurt/Main

## *A Mouse with Fruits and a Glass of Wine on a Table*

Oil on panel

17,5 x 22,5 cm (7 by 9 in.)

### *Provenance:*

Private Collection, Stuttgart

### *Exhibition:*

*Orbis Pictus*, Galleria Lorenzelli, Bergamo 1986

*Georg Flegel (1566-1638) Zátisi*,

Národní Galerie v Praze, Prague 1994

### *Literature:*

Müller (1956) p.163 as (Flegel?)

Exh. cat., Bergamo 1986, pl.12 as by Jacob Flegel

Exh. cat., Prague 1994, p.90, no.16-I, pl.23 as Georg Flegel ?

Flegel was born in 1566 in Olmütz, Moravia, and came to Frankfurt ca. 1592 where he remained until his death in 1638. According to documents in the Frankfurt archives, Flegel was not a Roman Catholic. Since Frankfurt was known to provide shelter to political and religious refugees, it may well be that Flegel left

his native country for religious reasons.<sup>1</sup> Flegel studied and worked with Lucas van Valkenburgh.<sup>2</sup> Jacob Marrel became Flegel's pupil in 1627. Joachim van Sandrart wrote that Flegel's naturalistic style and the variety of his still life subjects made his work popular, especially among Netherlanders, and even though he painted rapidly, he was unable to keep up with the demands for his paintings.<sup>3</sup> As Claus Grimm thought it to be unlikely that Jacob Marrel was the only pupil of Flegel,<sup>4</sup> he even suspected that Flegel maintained a workshop where one painting was created per week.<sup>5</sup>

Artist's studios in the seventeenth century employing apprentices and assistants were organised like many other craftman's workshops. Work was divided and delegated, and the team would grow in number with an increasing demand for the product. Our twentieth century concept of artistic activity restricts our image of an artist as the permanently creative genius. We refuse to accept that a specialised artist working all his life in one field would not meet our modern time's expectations. Indeed, the seventeenth century creator of still lives aimed to illustrate nature meticulously or to please the beholder with his trompe-l'œil painting, rather than to have any pretentious aspirations to fame.

1) Müller (1956) p.65

2) Müller (1956) p.87

3) Sandrart (1675/1925) p.164

4) Grimm (1993) p.233, in: Exh.cat. Frankfurt 1993

5) Grimm (1993) p.225, in: Exh.cat. Frankfurt 1993



cat. no. XXXXV

Consequently the range of subjects was limited and their depiction became repetitive. With an increasing demand, the master and his workshop relied on approved compositions with variations in the detail.

### *A Mouse with Fruits and a Glass of Wine*

The present picture is known from several replicas.<sup>7</sup> The prototype of this composition seems to be the painting by Georg Flegel *Still Life with a Mouse and a Parrot* in Munich.<sup>8</sup> The other three replicas are of similar size and almost identical composition. These replicas are less ambitious than the Munich version, where the precious glass à la façon-de-Venise is replaced by a simpler 'Noppenglas'. The parrot, the carnation, the beetle and the coins are omitted. The two pears are replaced by two plums. Grapes and candies are moved into a different position. In the Munich prototype Georg Flegel incorporated the parrot and the mouse, symbolising the antithetical principles of good and evil,<sup>9</sup> but in the replicas only the mouse was depicted. The question in this context is whether these replicas were still meant to allude to the transience of life or if they were only produced as decorative paintings for a free market. Evidently this subject was very popular in Frankfurt at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Although the three other replicas were fully catalogued by Wettengl as being autograph

versions of Georg Flegel, with the proviso in those entries that a workshop production could not be excluded.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars have occasionally attributed these works to Jacob Flegel. Müller also found it difficult to integrate these replicas into the oeuvre of Georg Flegel. He decided to award the merit to Jacob Flegel, supposedly Georg's son. But the artistic profile of Jacob Flegel is neither known nor documented. Müller's attribution remains purely hypothetical.<sup>12</sup>

Claus Grimm has initiated a useful and long needed discussion about *authenticity and workshop*. Many of those attributions from the past which are now being questioned will receive their answer from this platform.

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- 7) compare: Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp, panel 17,5 x 23 cm, exhibition cat., Frankfurt 1993, p.111, no.25  
Bob Haboldt & Co, Paris, panel 18 x 22 cm, exhibition cat., Frankfurt 1993, p.111, no.26  
Galerie De Jonckheere, Paris, panel 18,1 x 22,7 cm, exhibition cat., Frankfurt 1993, p.111, no.27
- 8) compare: München, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, panel 22 x 28 cm
- 9) Wettengl (1983) pp.229
- 10) Wettengl (1993) p.111
- 11) compare: Müller (1956)
- 12) Seifertová (1994) p.90, in: exhibition catalogue, Prague 1994