



Cesare Dandini (Florence 1596 - Florence 1657)

The Medici Shelducks

82.55 x 69.85 cm (32 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches)

A pair of hanging shelducks may seem an unlikely motif to prompt thoughts of beauty, transience and abstraction, but these life-size birds, their breasts rotating towards each other in a pas de deux, remind us that a humble subject is no impediment to great art.

Shown in profile and straight on, the double portrait of a shelduck was painted by the Florentine Seicento artist Cesare Dandini, whose subjects include Madonnas, magdalens and saints, but rarely still lifes. Painted between 1637 and 1647, *The Medici Shelducks* was recorded in the 1647 and 1663 inventory of Cardinal Giovan Carlo de' Medici (1611– 1663) [1]. Following his death, the painting was sold at auction, finding its way centuries later to a Midwestern collection. Its appearance and publication in 1989 prompted discussion about the authorship of a famous and closely related gamepiece in the Galleria degli Uffizi, *Two Female Goosanders*, heretofore given to Dandini (2). It is now accepted that our painting is by Dandini and the much publicized and exhibited Uffizi painting is by the Flemish painter Giusto Sustermans and belonged to a different member of the Medici family (don Lorenzo de' Medici 1599 – 1648, Villa della Petraia) (3). The two paintings are so similar in composition as to be considered pendants.

Tuscan 17th century still life painters specialized in kitchen scenes crowded with hanging fowl. Here, the realism and simplicity are more in tune with Spanish still lifes by Juan Sanchez Cotan and Francisco de Zuburan. Suspended from a fantastical metal bracket whose branches end in a winged woman and a dragon, the ducks are brought into trompe l'oeil relief by the grey background and the Medici style frame (4). Following its genetic code, snow-white feathers alternate with bands of black and orange plumage in a rhythm that ends in accents of red. The streamlined curves and tactile brush strokes anticipate French 17th and 18th century still lifes by Alexandre-François Desportes, Jean-Baptiste

Recently alive, The Medici Shelducks invite us to measure space, remove the unessential and savor the beauty and brevity of our visual experience.

[1] Giovan Carlo de' Medici was the brother of Grand Duke Ferdinando II. The inventories of his collection list "due germani reali attaccati ad un ferro lavorato a viticcio" di mano di Cesare Dandini (Mascalchi, 1982, p. 53).

2 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cesare_Dandini_-_Two_Hanged_Teals_-_WGA5904.jpg

3 Dr. Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato, Cesare Dandini (Florence 1596-1657) Two Shelducks hanging from their bills 1637-1647, private report.

4 The pierced, acanthus, gold leaf frame crowned with the emblem of the Medici was built by Richard Ford, who followed a 17th century example in the Palatine Gallery, Florence, attributed to Anton Francesc Gonnelli and illustrated in Marilena Mosco's Cornici dei Medici, no.52.

Literature:

S. Malscalchi, 1982, Anticipazioni sul mecenatismo del cardinale Giovan Carlo de' Medici e suo contributo alle collezioni degli Uffizi, pp 41-82.

S. Perlove, "An unpublished Medici gamepiece by Justus Sustermans", in The Burlington Magazine 131 (1989), pp. 411-414, fig. 47 (as Giusto Sustermans);

E. Fumagalli, "Don Lorenzo (1599-1648)" in Il giardino del Granduca. Natura morta nelle collezioni medicee, Marco Chiarini (ed.), Turin 1997, pp. 83, 87, note 42 (as Sustermans?);

S. Casciu in Natura morta italiana tra Cinquecento e Settecento, Mina Gregori (ed.), exhibition catalogue, Milan 2002, p. 266 (as Sustermans);

S. Bellesi in Il Corridoio vasariano agli Uffizi, Caterina Caneva (ed.), Cinisello Balsamo 2002, p. 127, under no. 16 (as possibly by Cesare Dandini?);

S. Bellesi, Cesare Dandini. Addenda al catalogo dei dipinti, Florence 2007, pp. 32-33, reproduced in color fig. 30 (as Dandini);

E. Fumagalli, "Tendenze della Natura morta in Toscana nell'età di Galileo", in *Il cannocchiale e il pennello, Nuova scienza e nuova arte nell'età di Galileo*, exhibition catalogue, Florence 2009, pp. 252-256, 262, note 11, 375-376, under cat. no. 124, reproduced p. 252 (as Suttermans?);

C. Profeti in *Villa Medicea di Poggio a Caiano, Museo della Natura Morta. Catalogo dei dipinti*, Stefano Casciu (ed.),

Livorno 2009, p. 383, under no. 153 (as Suttermans);

G. Romagnoli in *Per utilità e per diletto. "Cittadini in Villa"*, exhibition catalogue, Livorno 2010, p. 76, under cat. no.19 (as Suttermans).

Dr. Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato, Cesare Dandini, *Two Shelducks hanging from their bills*, private report.