

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Abraham Mignon

(Frankfurt 1640 – 1679 Utrecht)

*Still life of a cockerel, a
partridge, powder horns, a
kingfisher and songbirds
hanging in a stone niche
with a cobweb, a
snail and insects*

1670s

oil on canvas

88 x 68 cm.;

34 5/8 x 26 3/4 in.

signed (lower left): *A. Mignon fe.*

Provenance

Count Lothar Franz von Schönborn (1655 – 1729), Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden, Germany, by at least 1719;

By descent within the collection of the Counts of Schönborn, Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden, Germany, until:

Their sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 17 – 24 May 1867, lot 263, 3700 francs to Moreau;

William Ward, 11th Lord Ward and, from 1869, 1st Earl of Dudley (1817 – 1885), Dudley House, Park Lane, London, by 1868;

By whom sold, London, Christie's, 7 April 1876, lot 105, '*A chef-d'oeuvre* [A masterpiece]', 41 guineas to Waters;

Probably acquired by Sir Francis Cook,¹ 1st Bt. (1817 – 1901), Doughty House, Richmond, Surrey;

By descent to his son, Sir Frederick Cook, 2nd Bt. (1844 – 1920), Doughty House, Richmond, Surrey, by at least 1914;

By descent to his son, Sir Herbert Cook, 3rd Bt. (1868 – 1939), Doughty House, Richmond, Surrey;

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

By descent to his son, Sir Francis Cook, 4th Bt. (1907 – 1978), Doughty House Richmond, Surrey; Cothay Manor, Somerset; and Jersey;

By whom sold, London, Sotheby's, 25 June 1958, lot 100, where purchased by Agnews on behalf of a private collection;

By whom sold ('The Property of a Gentleman'), London, Christie's, 21 April 1989, lot 9, where purchased by a private collection, USA;

By whom sold ('Property from an Estate'), New York, Sotheby's, 15 January 1993, lot 91, where purchased by a private collection, Europe;

From whom acquired by the present owners.

Literature

Katalog der gräfllich von Schönborn'schen Bilder-Gallerie zu Pommersfelden, Würzburg 1857, p. 44, cat. no. 309;

P. F. Gwinner, *Kunst und Künstler in Frankfurt*, Frankfurt 1862, p. 202, cat. no. 9b;

R. N. James & L. Lefèvre, *National Exhibition of Works of Art*, exh. cat., Leeds 1868, cat. no. 833 (as Melchior d'Hondecoeter);

J. O. Kronig, *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond, and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook, Bt.*, II, London 1914, p. 59, cat. no. 288;

U. Thieme & F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 37 vols., Leipzig 1930, vol. 24, p. 548;

M. W. Brockwell, *Abridged Catalogue of the Pictures at Doughty House, Richmond, Surrey, in the Collection of Sir Herbert Cook, Bart.*, London 1932, p. 85, cat. no. 288;

Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter Exhibition, 1952 – 3: Dutch Pictures 1450 – 1750*, exh. cat., London 1952, p. 54, cat. no. 263;

Graves Art Gallery, *Dutch Masterpieces*, exh. cat., Sheffield 1956, p. 9, cat. no. 31;

M. Kraemer-Noble, *Abraham Mignon: 1640 – 1679*, Leigh-on-Sea 1973, pp. 30-1, cat. no. A64, pl. 17;

R. Bys & K. Bott, *Fürtrefflicher Gemähd- und Bilderschatz: die Gemäldesammlung des Lothar Franz von Schönborn in Pommersfelden*, Weimar 1997, p. 26, cat. no. 59;

M. Kraemer-Noble, *Abraham Mignon 1640 – 1679: catalogue raisonné*, Petersberg 2007, p. 254, cat. no. 102, reproduced in black and white on p. 255.

Exhibited

Leeds, *National Exhibition of Works of Art*, 1868, Gallery C, no. 833, lent by William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley (as Melchior d'Hondecoeter);

London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter Exhibition, 1952 – 3: Dutch Pictures 1450 – 1750*, 22

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

November 1952 – 1 March 1953, Gallery V, no. 263, lent by Sir Francis Cook, Bt., and The Trustees of the Cook Collection;

Sheffield, Graves Art Gallery, *Dutch Masterpieces*, 3 March – 5 April 1956, Exhibition Loan Hall, no. 31, lent by Sir Francis Cook, Bt., and The Trustees of the Cook Collection.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

The present painting is a resplendent example of Abraham Mignon's hunting still lifes. The majestic cockerel is surrounded by a multitude of other types of bird, including a partridge, powder horns, a kingfisher and songbirds, whose jewel-like colours provide embellishment to their darker stone surroundings. The same can be said of the vivid blue sash, which contrasts dramatically with the orange tones of the cockerel's headpiece under which it lies.

Mignon was not just a master of colour, but was also shrewd when it came to compositional arrangement: here the cockerel is suspended by only one leg from cords pinned to the top of the niche, allowing the bird to hang slightly off centre and for all of its feathers (including the stiff tail plumes) to unfold into the space.² The second foot – which can be observed in the right margin, curling over the precipice of the niche to create a greater sense of proximity to the viewer – is used to suspend two clusters of songbirds. Hunting accessories, such as the recurring coral amulet, fill the space on the other side of this foot, thus restoring the composition's balance. Insects are also scattered throughout the scene: a spider dangling from its web, a snail, a bumblebee, and flies on the cadaver, which provide the most obvious allusion to decay and to the transience of life.³

Hunting still lifes are relatively rare within Mignon's *oeuvre*; Magdalena Kraemer-Noble has posited that his focus on the genre only took place in the later years of his career, as attested to by the mature style of the present painting. In his earlier years, Mignon had concentrated instead on flower pieces and depictions of the forest floor. His first floral paintings demonstrate the influence of his training in Frankfurt under Jacob Marrel (1613 – 1681). Mignon moved to the Netherlands with his master in 1659 and studied in Utrecht under Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606 – 1684). The latter's opulent and lavish still lifes had a profound effect on Mignon's flower pieces and, in turn, the naturalist detail of Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20 – 1678) was a clear influence on his forest floor still lifes. It appears that Willem van Aelst (1627 – c. 1686) was the source from whom Mignon drew inspiration for his small group of paintings of dead game, as attested to by comparison of the Colnaghi picture with van Aelst's work in the Staatliche Kunsthalle,

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

Karlsruhe (fig. 1). In that painting, signed and dated to 1668, van Aelst has depicted a partridge suspended by one foot in front of a niche, the other leg having curled out to the right hand side, much like the arrangement in the present work. Other comparable motifs include the hunting accessories hung adjacent to the bird, the fly resting upon its outstretched wing, and the bright blue fabric that acts as a backdrop for its head. Furthermore, like van Aelst, Mignon paid particular attention to the anatomically accurate portrayal of each bird, which together with the masterful lighting of both arrangements served to present these animals as hunting trophies.

However, as argued by Kraemer-Noble, Mignon did not slavishly copy van Aelst's hunting still lifes, but instead honed his own unique style.⁴ The Colnaghi painting evidences this: the composition is less formal in feel than examples by van Aelst (fig. 1), particularly on the left side, where some of the cockerel's longer feathers curl out in an eccentric manner. Other hunting works by Mignon, most of which are now owned by institutions, present similar qualities. For instance, the *Still life with parrot* in the Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, lacks the silence usually associated with paintings depicting dead game owing to the playful insertion of a live parrot in the upper margin, which peers down at the animals below (fig. 2). Likewise, the *Still life with game* in the Stiftung Dessau-Wörlitz, Schloß Mosigkau, is an incredibly busy scene that reflects the Baroque taste for abundance (fig. 3).

A copy of the Colnaghi painting appeared at auction in Munich in 1992 (fig. 4).

A note on the provenance

The present painting has impeccable provenance, both in terms of its owners in the 18th and 19th centuries as well as in more recent history. The first traceable owner is Count Lothar Franz von Schönborn, who was Prince bishop of Bamberg, Elector and Archbishop of Mainz, and as such Chancellor of the Reich. Lothar Franz was the second most powerful man in Germany after the German Emperor. He began collecting paintings in 1705 and ten years later, in 1715, installed part of his growing collection for

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

the first time in Castle Weissenstein in Pommersfelden, which he had built between 1711 and 1718.

Lothar Franz liked to compare his collection of about 1000 paintings to the Imperial collections in Vienna and to the Palatine collection in Düsseldorf. The majority of paintings that he owned were by Dutch and Flemish artists including the younger members of the Brueghel family, Van Dyck, Honthorst, Rembrandt, Rubens, Weenix, and Wouwerman. About half as many were from the Italian school by names such as Albani, Giordano, Titian and Artemisia Gentileschi, whose first known painting, *Susanna and the Elders* (1610), was acquired by Lothar Franz and is still in the Schloss Weissenstein collection today, though it was thought at that time to be by her father Orazio (fig. 5). Fewer were by German artists, and only about a dozen were by French artists.

Our painting remained in the possession of the Counts of Schönborn until their Paris sale of 1867. Subsequently, it was briefly owned by William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley, before passing into the esteemed Cook collection. This collection boasted masterpieces by the most famous names in art history: Antonello da Messina's *Christ at the Column*, now in the Louvre, Paris (fig. 6); Diego Velázquez's *Old Woman Frying Eggs*, now in the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh (fig. 7); Titian's *Portrait of a Lady (La Schiavona)*, now in the National Gallery, London (fig. 8); Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Boy*, in the Norton Simon Museum, California (fig. 9); and Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* (fig. 10), among many others. In fact, the present painting by Mignon left the Cook collection in the same sale as the *Salvator Mundi* in June 1958 (fig. 11). Our picture was lot 100 and the Leonardo was lot 40, then thought to be a work by Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 1. Willem van Aelst, *Still life with hunting equipment and dead birds*, 1668.
Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 2. Abraham Mignon, *Still life with parrot*.
Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, gal. no. 860.1.216

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 3. Abraham Mignon, *Still life with game*.
Stiftung Dessau-Wörlitz, Schloß Mosigkau, inv. no. 11

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 4. Copy after Abraham Mignon, *Still life of a cockerel, a partridge, powder horns, a kingfisher and songbirds hanging in a stone niche with a cobweb, a snail and insects.*

Sold by Toter Hahn, Neumeister, Munich, sale A272, 9 December 1992, lot 463

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

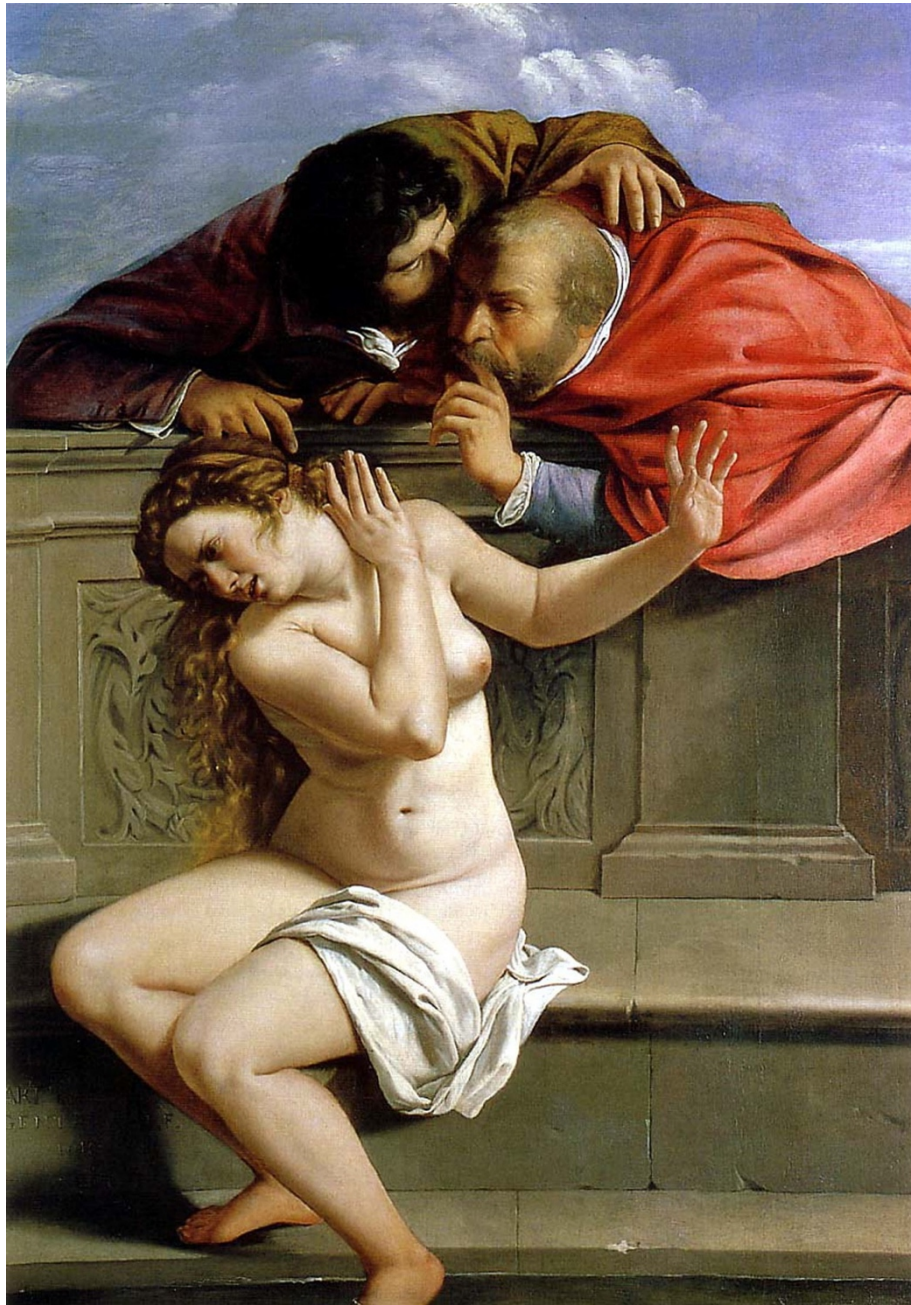


Figure 5. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610.
Schloss Weissenstein Collection, Pommersfelden

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 6. Antonello da Messina, *Christ at the Column*, between 1476 and 1478.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 7. Diego Velázquez, *Old Woman Frying Eggs*, 1619.
Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 8. Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian, *Portrait of a Lady (La Schiavona)*, about 1510 – 12.
National Gallery, London

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 9. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Boy*, 1655 – 60.
Norton Simon Museum, California

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 10. Leonardo da Vinci, *Salvator Mundi*, c. 1499 – 1510.

Acquired by Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism for the Louvre Abu Dhabi.
Currently owned by Mohammad bin Salman

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



THE SALE OF PAINTINGS FROM THE COOK COLLECTION AT SOTHEBY'S, IN LONDON: Up for auction is Lot 6, "The Madonna and Child in a Landscape," by Andrea Brescianino. The picture went for £200. The surprise of the sale, which realised £64,668, was a small picture by Caspar Netscher of a lady at her toilet, which made £6,500. The collection was one of the largest Victorian accumulations of old masters. Since 1940 the more important items from the collection housed at Doughty House, Richmond, have been sold privately. Auctioned at Sotheby's were all the remaining pictures assembled by Sir Francis Cook, except for a small group which the Trustees have decided to retain indefinitely. Among those sold were paintings by Van Dyck and Hogarth.

Figure 11. Photograph of the Cook Collection sale, Sotheby's, London, 25 June 1958

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

Footnotes

¹ Tracing the provenance of other works in Sir Francis Cook's collection has shed light on connections between himself and Waters, our painting's buyer at the Christie's sale of 1876. For example, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *The Virgin of the Annunciation*, now owned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is said to have been acquired by Cook through an agent named John Charles Robinson, for whom Waters is thought to have been buying. See 'Provenance': <https://www.kressfoundation.org/kress-collection/artwork/414ee5a921c4aba60d0a25fb87a3c747ebc01319eb7d6a58d6420d5b7c84613a> and

<https://emuseum.mfah.org/objects/47410/the-virgin-of-the-annunciation>

² M. Kraemer-Noble, *Abraham Mignon 1640-1679: catalogue raisonné*, Petersberg 2007, p. 254, cat. no. 102.

³ Kraemer-Noble 2007, p. 254, cat. no. 102.

⁴ Kraemer-Noble 2007, p. 22.