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BAMBOCCianti SCHOOL (before 1650)

A Shepherd Boy in a Landscape

Oil on canvas

70 x 60 cm



PROVENANCE

Baron Vetter von der Lilie, Hautzenbichl Castle, Knittelfeld, Austria;
from whom purchased by the previous owner in 1950

The *Bamboccianti* were genre painters active in Rome from about 1625 until the end of the seventeenth century. Most were Dutch and Flemish artists, including Andries and Jan Both, Karel Dujardin, Jan Miel and Johannes Lingelbach, who brought existing traditions of depicting peasant subjects from sixteenth-century Netherlandish art with them to Italy. The name, meaning ‘ugly doll’, derived from the nickname of Pieter van Laer, credited with initiating the *Bamboccianti* School, due to his ungainly proportions.

In Rome during this period, the work of the *Bamboccianti* School served as an important countermovement which eschewed the lofty subject matter and grand scale of the conventional art of the time. Artists such as Salvator Rosa lamented that the city had been invaded by a group of painters whose works represented “nothing but rogues, cheats, pickpockets, bands of drunks and gluttons, scabby tobacconists, barbers, and other sordid subjects”¹. Rosa was outraged that

• ¹ Levine, David A. (December 1988). "The Roman Limekilns of the Bamboccianti". *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 70 (4): 569–589

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these paintings were selling for large sums to wealthy collectors, and appearing in cabinets in superbly ornamented frames. He bitterly noted in his satire *Pittura* (c. 1650), about the duality of taste of the aristocratic patrons²;

"Quel che aboriscan vivo, aman dipinto."

"Those they abhor in life, are loved in paint"

The success of the genre is partly explained by a change in the mode of decorating the houses of the upper classes in Rome. Paintings on canvas or panel gradually gained preference over frescoes. This gave foreign artists who were specialized in this technique an advantage. Furthermore, as collectors began looking for a different type of subject matter, the environment was favourable for the reception of *Bamboccianti* art.

Although the *Bamboccianti* found success with their paintings, art theorists and academicians in Rome were often unkind as paintings of everyday life were generally regarded as being at the bottom rung in the hierarchy of genres. Andrea Sacchi, the defender of the classical tradition, wrote to his old master Francesco Albani about the rise of the *Bamboccianti* with their 'lower' genres of painting, and what he saw as a sign of general artistic decline in the city.

The *Bamboccianti* painted small cabinet paintings or etchings of everyday life of the lower classes in Rome and its countryside. Typical subjects included food and beverage sellers, farmers and milkmaids at work, soldiers at rest and play, beggars and shepherds. Giovanni Battista Passeri, a seventeenth-century chronicler of art, described van Laer as follows: "he was unique in representing the truth, in its pure essence, such that his paintings appear to us like an open window through which we can see all that happens, without difference or alteration"³. These characteristics can be applied to the *Bamboccianti* style in general; spontaneous-looking works

² Roworth, Wendy W. (December 1981). "A Date for Salvator Rosa's Satire on Painting and the Bamboccianti in Rome". *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) **63** (4): 611–617.

³ Levine, p 569.

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wholly free from the grandiose rhetoric of conventional Baroque art. The art of the *Bamboccianti* therefore came to be regarded as a chapter in the history of realism, the natural consequence of the trend for *Caravaggism*.

Although some regarded the *Bamboccianti* as realists, an alternative view is that their works should rather be seen as complex allegories, which were a commentary on classical art, with a view to bringing the observer to contemplate elevated ideas. They therefore stood in a long tradition of paradox in which low or vulgar subjects were the vehicle for conveying important philosophical meanings.

The motif of the musical shepherd, as well as being a realist genre study of the common man, could also be said to idealize and celebrate the charms of pastoral life for a sophisticated urban audience. Paintings of this type were made popular in Venice in the early 1500s, when pastoral poetry and drama also began to flower, as seen in Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo's 1525 '*Shepherd with a Flute*' in the J. Paul Getty Museum.



Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, Shepherd with a Flute, 1525, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

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The young boy playing a recorder or flute was a popular subjects among the Dutch painters, as seen in various examples including Henrick Terbrugghen's *Boy Playing a Recorder* in Staatliche Museen, Kassel. This, and its companion piece *Boy Playing a Fife* are among the earliest half-length Dutch paintings of musicians, a motif that quickly became a staple of Utrecht painters and soon entered the repertoire of other Dutch artists. Govaert Flinck's 1654 *An elegant shepherdess listening to a shepherd playing the recorder in an Arcadian landscape* also demonstrates the Arcadian charm which the motif of the musical shepherd allowed.



Henrick Terbrugghen, *Boy Playing a Recorder*,
1621, Staatliche Museen, Kassel



Govaert Flinck, *An elegant shepherdess listening to a shepherd playing the recorder in an Arcadian landscape*,
1654.

The present painting depicts a shepherd boy, in traditional dress with wide brimmed hat, resting in a pastoral landscape, playing a recorder, with a printed paper and fruits in his lap. The recorder often featured in the 17th century in *vanitas* paintings, as a reminder of the passing of earthly pleasures. The fruits, which could be bitter oranges, a well known feature in Renaissance gardens fruit and often deployed in Italian painting for their symbolic quality, could be said to represent

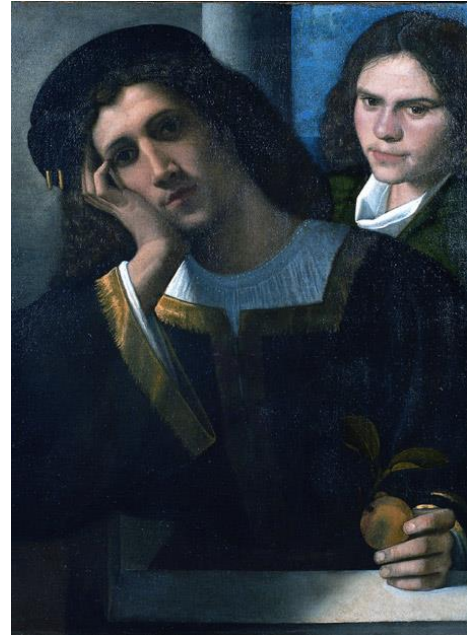
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the sweet and bitter sides of love and life, as also seen in Botticelli's *Primavera*, and Giorgione's *Doppio Ritratto*. The fruits could also be medlars, which have undergone bletting, a process that certain fleshy fruits undergo, beyond ripening. Medlars are one fruit which are sweeter after bletting. This motif links with the vanitas element in the painting, as described in Thomas Dekker's play *The Honest Whore*: "I scarce know her, for the beauty of her cheek hath, like the moon, suffered strange eclipses since I beheld it: women are like medlars – no sooner ripe but rotten."



Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, 1482, Uffizi Gallery, Florence



Giorgione, *Doppio Ritratto*, 1502, Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, Rome.I

Collectors and patrons of the *Bamboccianti* included important figures such as Cardinal del Monte, Vincenzo Giustiniani, papal families such as the Barberini and Pamphili, and female patrons including elite Roman aristocrats and Christina, Queen of Sweden. The success of the genre was not confined to Rome, but extended to Florence and France, as seen in the patronage of figures like the Cardinals Leopoldo de' Medici.

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The present painting enjoys a particularly distinguished provenance, having been in the collection of Baron Vetter von der Lilie, a noble family, and Lords of the Holy Roman Empire, in Hautzenbichl Castle, located in the municipality of Kobenz on the eastern edge of Knittelfeld.