

JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Paolo Porpora (1616 - 1673)

A 'sottobosco' landscape with parrots, a hare, rabbits, a caiman, frogs and wild irises and fungi by a rocky pool

oil on canvas, 128 x 197 cm.

with the original period frame.

The Italian word for paintings that combine still life and animal painting as seen in this large format canvas is 'sottobosco' – 'forest floor.' According to a leading authority on Italian still life painting, John T. Spike, the most original aspect of Paolo Porpora's work are his paintings of wildlife in natural settings. He painted animals with the accuracy of a zoologist but the soul of a romantic poet and although he was born in Naples, the painter spent most of his career in Rome where he was praised for introducing the Baroque into still life painting. His leading patron, Cardinal Flavio Chigi commissioned him to produce 'tele d'imperatore' (literally 'emperor canvases') to adorn his vast collection of still life paintings which was the first of its kind in seventeenth-century Rome. In 2002 our firm discovered a sottobosco by Porpora* in America (see below) that was successfully identified as having once belonged to the Chigi collection and it is tempting to surmise that this hitherto unrecorded painting came from the same commission.

In this imaginary scene, the viewer feels like an eavesdropper beside the favourite watering-hole of a fantastic array of creatures.

*M. Gregori, *La natura morta in Italia*, Elemond, Milan, 1989, p.733