RICHARD GREEN

JACOB BOGDANI

Eperjes 1658 - 1724 London

Ref: CE 112

An assembly of exotic birds in a parkland landscape, including peacocks (Pavo cristatus), a tufted Guinea fowl (Numida meleagris), a yellow-naped Amazon parrot (Amazona auropalliata) and a male northern cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis)

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Signed lower left: *J.Bogdani*
Oil on canvas: 69 ¼ x 59 in / 175.9 x 149.9 cm
Frame size: 78 x 67 in / 198.1 x 170.2 cm

Painted *circa* 1710

Provenance:
Probably purchased by Sir Ernest Salter Wills, 3rd Bt. (1869-1958) for the Boudoir at Littlecote House, Hungerford, Wiltshire;
by descent to Sir David Seton Wills (1939-2023) and Lady Wills

Born in Eperjes, northern Hungary (the present-day Presov, Slovakia), Jacob Bogdani brought an element of Mitteleuropean baroque grandeur to English painting. He spent two years, 1684-86, in Amsterdam, arriving in London by 1688, the year that put 'Dutch William' on the English throne. Bogdani established himself as a painter of flowers and fruit, but in the first decade of the eighteenth century began to produce bird paintings, perhaps inspired by the magnificent Windsor aviary belonging to Admiral George Churchill (1654-1710), the Duke of Marlborough's brother. Churchill was one of his most important patrons; he also worked for William III and Mary II, and Queen Anne.

This work is one of Bogdani's largest and grandest compositions, probably intended to hang in a hall or on a staircase. It groups together an assembly of exotic and native birds by an elaborate fountain in the park of an Italianate house. Several continents are represented in the birds' origins, reflecting the seventeenth and eighteenth century obsession of the elite in stocking their aviaries with rare, colourful species. Crowning the composition are a peacock and a white peahen. Native to India, peacocks (*Pavo cristatus*) were venerated for their spectacular plumage and associated with the gods; the Mughal Emperors ruled from the jewel-encrusted Peacock Throne. In the centre, perched on the rim of the fountain, the brilliant red plumage of the northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)[1], found throughout North America, stands out against the golden-brown carving. To the right is a yellow-naped Amazon parrot (*Amazona auropalliata*) from southern Mexico and Central America. Brought back by sailors from the Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish empires, parrots were particularly popular as pets because of their longevity, playfulness and ability to mimic human speech.

Below the parrot is a pair of hook-billed ducks (*Anas platyrhynchos*), a domestic species originally bred in North Holland in the seventeenth century and also frequently depicted by the celebrated Dutch bird painter Melchior de Hondecoeter (1636-1695). Their feathery crests, not present on all examples of the species, add extra glamour. At foreground left is a female great curassow (*Crax rubra*), a large (40in long), pheasant-like bird with a spectacular crest of black and white feathers, which can weigh up to 10lbs. The species is found in Mexico, Central America, Columbia and Ecuador. To the right of

[1] We are grateful to David Dallas for the identification of the birds in the painting.

this magnificent creature is a tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), a small diving duck found throughout Eurasia and also resident in Britain. Behind them are a northern pintail duck (*Anas acuta*) and a tufted Guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*), originally an African species, but domesticated in Europe.

The Italianate mansion in the distance reflects the taste of late Stuart Britain, a type of architecture equally fashionable in the Netherlands, seen in the backgrounds of Melchior de Hondecoeter's bird pieces and in many northern Netherlandish landscapes. William III remodelled parts of the Tudor Hampton Court Palace in this style, also introducing formal gardens of the type depicted here. Bogdani places his diverse assembly of birds in a lively composition, with the creatures seen almost in conversation with one another. He no doubt studied his birds from life in aviaries – and sometimes from stuffed specimens – keeping drawings or oil studies as *aide-mémoires* in his studio. The same birds appear across several of his paintings. For example, the group of the yellow-naped Amazon parrot and hook-billed ducks are used in mirror image in *Parrots and ducks in a landscape* (private collection), a painting bought directly from Bogdani by the politician and bibliophile Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford (1689-1741). This painting also includes the pintail duck[2].

[2] See London, Richard Green, *Jacob Bogdani c.1660-1724*, 13th September-7th October 1989, no.18, illus. in colour.

JACOB BOGDANI
Eperjes 1658 - 1724 London

Jacob Bogdani was born in Eperjes in the County of Sáros, northern Hungary (the present day Presov, Slovakia), the son of Lewis and Susanna Bogdani, who were probably minor gentry. The threat from the Turks, who besieged Vienna in 1683, and the difficulties faced by the Protestant Bogdani living in a corner of the Catholic Austro-Hungarian empire, sent the young man westward. He worked in Amsterdam from 1684 to 1686, sharing a house with the Hamburg still life painter Ernst Stuven (c.1657-1712). He had settled in London by 1st June 1688 and became known as 'The Hungarian'. Bogdani lived in the Covent Garden area for the rest of his life, marrying Elizabeth Hemmings in 1693.

For a decade or more after settling in England, Bogdani specialised in still lifes of fruit and flowers. In 1694 he supplied flowerpieces (now lost) for Queen Mary's Looking Glass Closet in her beloved Water Gallery at Hampton Court, complementing the exquisite carved flowers and fruit provided by Grinling Gibbons. Charles Hatton commented in 1697: 'I was this afternoon to see ye few best plants yet remaining ye noble collection of plants at Hampton very well painted by one Bugdan, a Hungarian and excellent painter of fruits and flowers'. Among the works were 'very fine tulipps, painted from tulipps growing in my Lord Dovers garden [at Cheveley near Newmarket]'. In 1698 the 1st Duke of Devonshire bought flowerpieces from Bogdani for the decoration of his new country house, Chatsworth.

Around 1691 Bogdani explained his working methods: 'He paint[s] in the Spring flowers & in the Somer flowers & Fruits when they are out Lobsters and oyster pieces. In the Winter pieces of Fowell & plate'. The production of bird pieces gradually became a greater part of his oeuvre. A number were owned by Admiral George Churchill, younger brother of the Duke of Marlborough and Ranger of the Great and Little Park at Windsor, who built a celebrated aviary near his house. Churchill's exotic birds were undoubtedly a great inspiration to Bogdani, who must have made detailed studies, in oils or perhaps in watercolour, upon which he based his deft assemblages of birds.

Queen Anne acquired several of George Churchill's bird paintings by Bogdani after the Admiral's death in 1710; they remain in the Royal Collection. Her brother-in-law William III bought works by Bogdani for his palace at Dieren in Holland; William's favourite Arnold van Keppel, Earl of Albemarle, had twenty-two Bogdanis at his Huis de Voorst near Zutphen. Bogdani's patrons also included Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford and Sir Robert Walpole. Bogdani prospered in England, amassing property at Finchley, Spalding in Lincolnshire and Hitchen in Hertfordshire, becoming Lord of the Manor of Hitchen.

Bogdani's daughter Elizabeth married the Transylvanian still life and bird painter Tobias Stranover (1684-1756), who worked in Bogdani's studio. Bogdani's son William was also trained by him as an artist, although he later took a post with the Board of Ordnance and became a Fellow of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries and a member of

the Spalding Gentlemen's Society. Jacob Bogdani died at his house in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, in 1724. By a quirk of fate, some of his fortune eventually trickled down to the great landscape painter John Constable, as Bogdani's grandson William Maurice Bogdani married Deborah Rhudde, kinswoman of Constable's formidable grandfather-in-law, Dr Durand Rhudde, Rector of East Bergholt.

The work of Jacob Bogdani is represented in the British Royal Collection; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Chatsworth House, Derbyshire; Nottingham Castle Museum; the National Gallery of Hungary, Budapest and the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT.