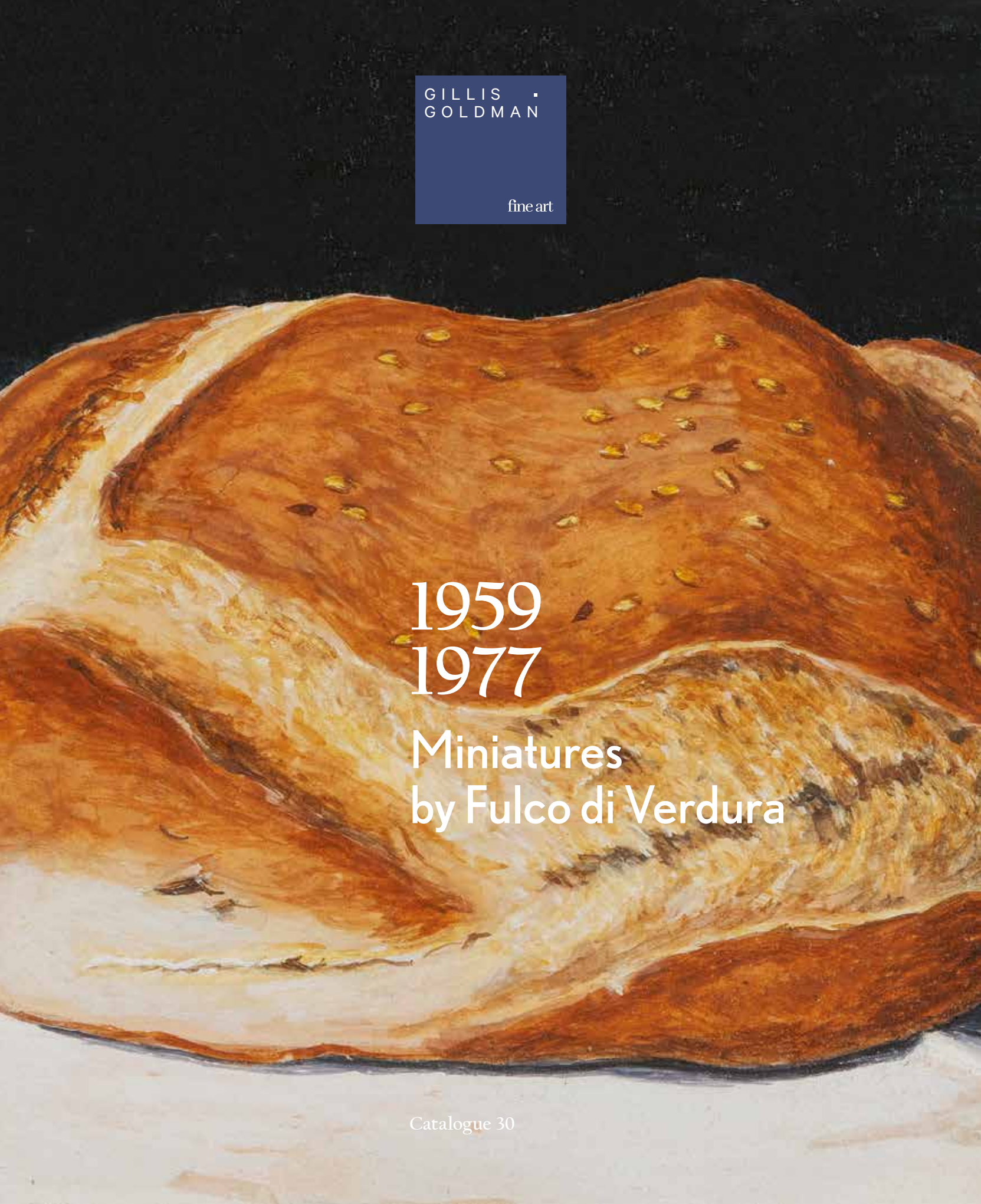




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fine art

1959
1977

Miniatures
by Fulco di Verdura

Catalogue 30



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1959
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Miniatures by Fulco di Verdura

In collaboration with Jack Wakefield

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Fulco di Verdura

Palermo 1898 – 1978 London



fig. 1



fig. 2

Fulco di Verdura is widely celebrated as one of the most talented jewellery designers of the 20th century (fig. 1). His pictorial work, while perhaps lesser known, is just as captivating. Feast your eyes on this lovely and rare ensemble of Verdura miniatures which includes eight oils and gouaches on cardboard.

Fulco Santostefano della Cerda, Duke of Verdura, was born to an aristocratic family in Palermo, Sicily. As a young artist, he was a painter by vocation. However, it was his talent as a jeweller and jewellery designer – along with his enduring association with Coco Chanel, to whom he was introduced in 1925 by long-time friend and songwriter Cole Porter – that earned him international acclaim. Coco was won over by Verdura's irreverent attitude and made him her

jewellery designer (fig. 2). Being the prodigious self-taught artist that he was, Verdura quickly mastered the techniques. Together, Verdura and Coco shattered the status quo by designing enamel and yellow gold jewellery adorned with precious stones, which they recreated in resin and glass paste for Chanel's prestigious customers on Rue Cambon. But the most iconic pieces to come from the Verdura-Coco partnership were the white enamel Maltese Cross Cuffs that Coco wore constantly and with abandon (fig. 3). It was also during these years that Verdura appeared on the House of Chanel ledgers under the name "Fulco de la Verdura" for the first time.

In 1934, Verdura emigrated to Hollywood and started designing expensive baubles for Jeweller to the Stars, Paul Flato (fig. 4). In 1939, just before the outbreak of war, Verdura relocated to Manhattan, where he opened his Fifth Avenue studio, catering to lavish spenders like Linda and Cole Porter (fig. 5), Bill and Babe Paley, and Gianni and Marella Agnelli. Shortly after, Verdura designed the jewellery worn by Katharine Hepburn in the classic 1940 comedy film *Philadelphia Story* (fig. 6), triggering a fresh wave of success. In a 1938 *Harper's Bazaar* article, socialite Elsa Maxwell declared, "There's no one like him." Indeed, Verdura's vivid imagination and superb knowledge of art, history, music, theatre and culture lent his work a uniquely extravagant and attention-grabbing panache.

As the years went by, Verdura further developed his famous nonconformist flair and continued to beguile American high society by drawing inspiration from a rich well: Renaissance ornaments, sketches by Leonardo da Vinci, Mannerist paintings by Jules Romain... But Verdura was also a man of many interests and talents, and his circle of contemporaries included renowned painters, authors and fashion designers. As the story goes, Verdura's love of painting was rekindled during a surreal first encounter with Salvador Dali, with whom



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6

he later collaborated on an exhibition in 1941 (fig. 7-10). Dali told *Vogue* in July 1941: “Fulco and I have tried to discover whether it was the jewel that was for painting or painting for the jewel. We are sure, however, that they were born for each other; it’s a love marriage.” This collaboration resulted in a collection of surrealist jewellery pieces incorporating Dali’s miniature paintings with jewelled settings by Verdura. The collection debuted at New York’s Julien Levy Gallery with an exhibition of Dali’s paintings, before being displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in late 1941 in conjunction with an exhibition on Dali and Miro. The pieces went on to tour at least eight museums across the country, including the Cleveland Museum of Art, the California Legion of Honor and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

After some time, Verdura began to paint once again on his own. In 1955, he exhibited for the very first time a few of his own miniatures at the gallery of Alexander Iolas and Brook Jackson, in New York. Post-war gallerist Arthur Jeffress (fig. 11) also played a significant role. Not only was he the first to exhibit Verdura’s solo paintings (fig. 12) at his London Davies Street gallery in 1958, but as one of London’s “Bright Young Things,” he had connections with other great surrealists of the time, such as Domenico Gnoli and Francis Bacon. What’s more, he was friend to Cecil Beaton and the Sitwells – essentially the UK arm of Verdura’s natural crew of aesthetic aristocrats. From this time on, Verdura continued to paint miniatures, landscapes and still

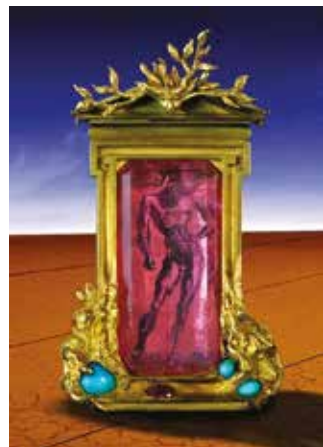


fig. 7



fig. 8

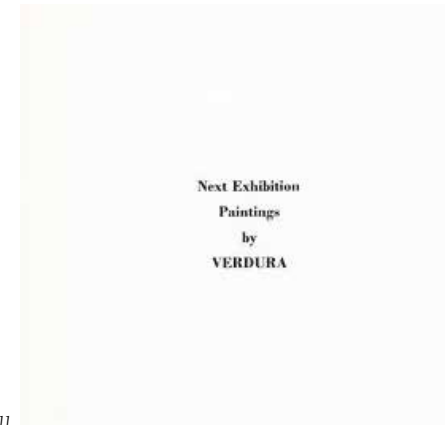


fig. 9



fig. 10

fig. 11



lives, mostly linked to his travels or Sicilian home. More often than not, he gave his paintings away as gifts to his glamorous high-society friends, especially those in New York, Hollywood, Dallas, or in England. Others were sold during exhibitions at prestigious galleries like Wildenstein and Knoedler.

In 1973, Verdura retired and moved to London to live with Tom Parr, former business partner of David Hicks and chairman of renowned interior decorating firm Colefax and Fowler. Verdura started taking his hobby

of painting in miniature more seriously, using a magnifying glass and occasionally applying a coat of clear nail polish to bring out the colours. He frequently selected the frames as well, his favourites being either giltwood and original silk mat, or fancy and sophisticated antique frames. He continued to hold a few selling exhibitions at tony galleries, but mostly painted for his own pleasure – and that of his friends. In fact, Verdura’s miniatures were considered precious gifts in high-society circles. Notable example, both in private collection now, are his *Landscape with two figures*, which was gifted from Brooke Astor to Jayne Wrightsman, or the *Amphora hanging on a door* given to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. It sums up his social status in America.

Fulco di Verdura (fig. 13) died in London in 1978, leaving behind a dazzling oeuvre of exclusive and fashionable jewellery and miniature paintings – all equally sought-after by collectors, jealously guarded, and rare to find.

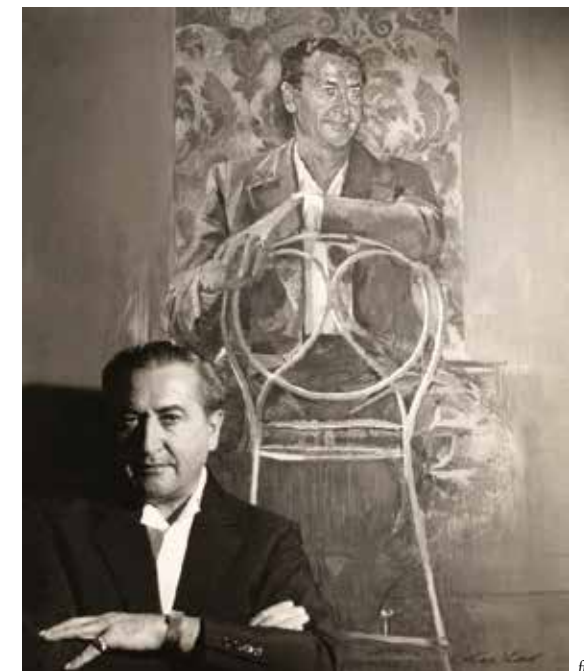


fig. 12



fig. 13

Catalogue

(Pictures are larger than the original miniatures)



1

Bread on a white cloth

Oil and gouache on cardboard, 1959

Signed lower left *Fulco*

Sheet 7.8 × 9.4 cm

Provenance Arthur Jeffress Gallery, London (label); Private collection, UK





2

Gooseberries

Oil on cardboard, ca. 1960-70

Signed lower left *Fulco*

Sheet 6.6 × 12.5 cm

Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom





3

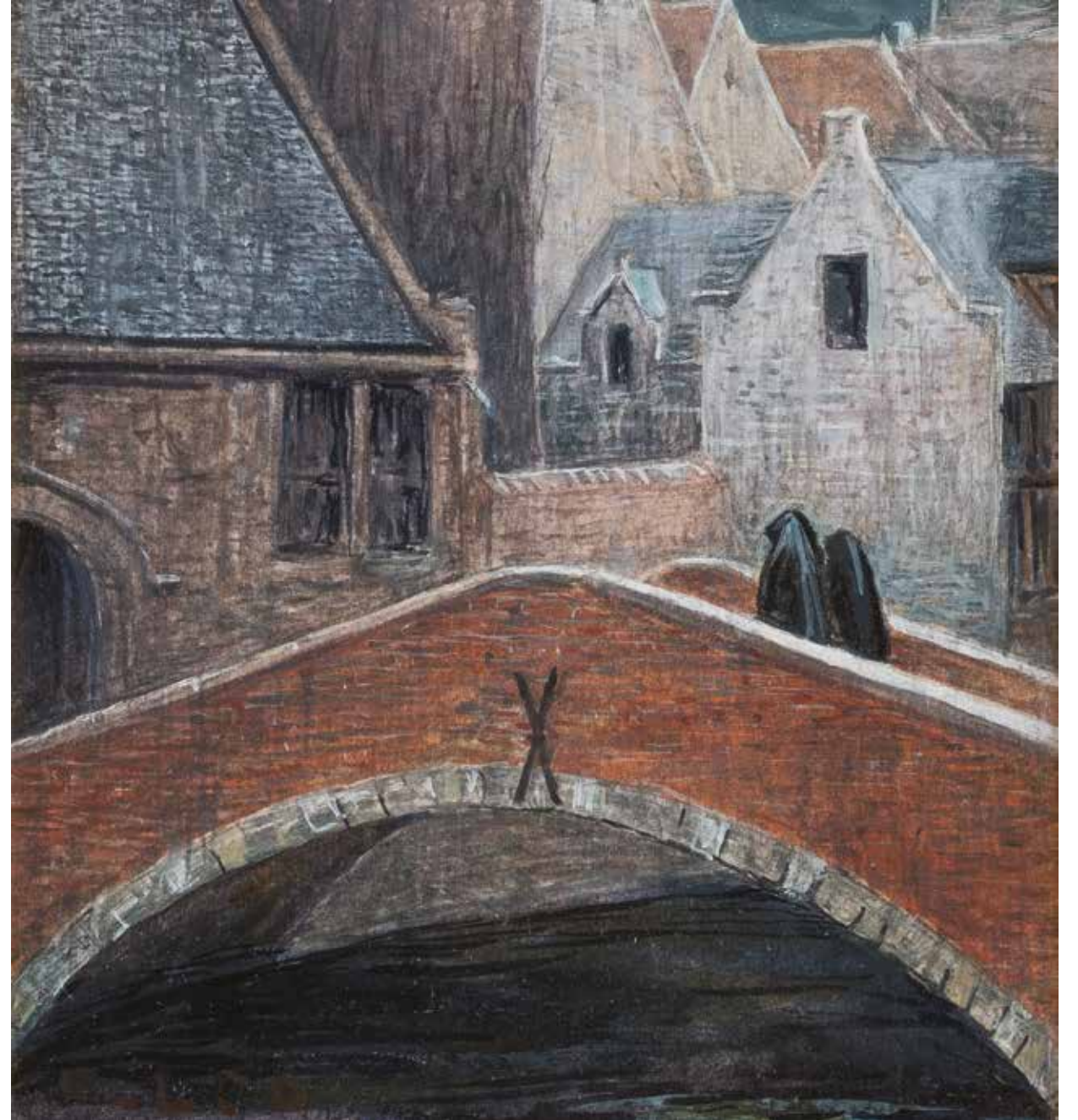
Bruges at Twilight

Oil on cardboard, ca. 1960-70

Signed lower left *Fulco*

Sheet 6.6 × 6.3 cm

Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom





4

Venice

Oil on cardboard, ca. 1960-70

Signed lower right *Fulco*

Sheet 6 × 10 cm

Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom





5

Bouquet of Daffodils

Gouache on cardboard, ca. 1960-70
 Signed lower left *Fulco*
 Sheet 9.5 × 12.7 cm
 Provenance Private collection, USA





6

Three Jewellery boxes

Oil on cardboard, ca. 1960-70

Signed lower left *Fulco*

Sheet 4.8 × 8 cm

Provenance Private collection, France





7

Onions

Oil and gouache on cardboard, 1971
 Signed lower left *Fulco*, and dated *Marlia (?) 71*
 Sheet 8.7 × 9 cm
 Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom





8

The Birds

Gouache on cardboard, 1977
 Signed lower left *Fulco*, and dated 77
 Sheet 6.3 × 7.6 cm
 Provenance Private collection, United Kingdom



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Catalogue entries

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