

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

ABRAHAM HENDRIKSZ. VAN BEYEREN

(The Hague 1620/21 – 1690 Overschie)

A Pronk Still Life with Bowls of Fruit and other Objects on a Table

Signed with the artist's monogram *AB.f.* and dated *A^{No} 1654*

On canvas, 40 x 39 ¼ ins. (101.6 x 99.7 cm)

Provenance:

Souraire, Lorrain

Sale, Petit, Paris, Thirion, 10 June 1907, lot no. 2

Bought by Kleinberger & Co., New York

Marzcell von Nemes, Budapest, by 1907

Karl Lanz, Mannheim, by 1917

Sale, Galerie Fischer, Lucerne, 23 July 1923, lot no. 866

With Vermeer Gallery, London, 1927/28

With van Diemen & Co., Amsterdam-Berlin, 1928

Anton Jurgens, London, by 1929

F. Jurgens, Egham, Surrey

With Reinhardt and Co., New York, 1931

With Duits Ltd., London, by 1973

With Thomas Brod Gallery, London, by 1987

Private Collection, U.S.A

Private Collection, Belgium, until 2012

Exhibited:

Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 1910-1911, no. 44

Aus Rheinisch-Westfälischem Privat-Besitz, Dusseldorf, Alter Malerie,

January-February 1928, no. 6

Dutch Art 1450-1900, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1929, no. 249

Kerst Tentoonstelling Nederlandse meesters uit particulier bezit, Museum

Het Prinsenhof, Delft, 21 December 1952-1 February 1953, no. 4

Literature:

“Notable Works of Art now on the Market”: Supplement, *Burlington Magazine*, LI, no. 297, December 1927, pl. 22.

F. Lewis, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Fruit and Still-Life Painters, 15th to 19th Century*, Leigh-on-Sea, 1973, p. 13, pl. 32.

S. Segal, *A Prosperous Past*, The Hague, 1989, pp. 172-173, 219, note 11, pl. 9.3

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Abraham van Beyeren was born in The Hague in 1620 or 1621. Although he lived there for much of his life, he was a restless soul who moved about often, living at various times in Leiden, Delft, Amsterdam, Alkmaar and finally Overschie, where he died in 1690. Primarily a painter of still lifes, van Beyeren had started out painting seascapes and river views. His broad, flowing brushwork and liquid touch gives his work a distinctive character and sets him apart from most of the still-life painters of his day, who inclined towards a smoother, more precise technique. This

looseness of style probably explains why his works commanded relatively low prices during his lifetime, for it was generally the case in the seventeenth century that the more detailed and polished the execution of a painting the higher its value. As a consequence, van Beyeren regularly experienced financial problems and may have been forced to adopt an itinerant lifestyle in order to escape from his creditors. Nevertheless, it is his very directness and spontaneity that appeals to modern tastes.

This large and impressive still life is one of the most beautiful examples of van Beyeren's art. A profusion of rare and costly objects is arranged on a table covered by a plum-coloured velvet cloth and white linen napkin. Standing at the back on the right, is an elaborate silver flagon and a *façon-de-Venise* glass, while on the left, appears a finely wrought gilt cup, or *krulbeker*, decorated with a silver dolphin and the figure of Fortuna. In the centre of the composition, is a silver *plooi*-platter, laden with peaches, grapes and foliage, while to the left, is a wan-li style blue and white porcelain bowl, filled with bread and an overturned *roemer*, and to the right, is a scalloped-edge silver dish, or *puntschotel*, bearing a partly peeled lemon. Among the other delicacies spread across the table are cherries, a large crab, a lobster and a prawn. In the centre, close to the edge of the table are two full-blown pink roses and an open pocket watch, with a dangling blue ribbon. A curtain is looped up at the upper left, revealing a small niche in which appear two delicate glass vessels. The brushwork is exceptionally free – for example, in the richly modelled folds of the white linen cloth and velvet table cover and in the silver flagon with its reflections of the studio window - and the colour harmonies unified by a soft, natural light. Gilt and silver, porcelain and crystal, velvet and linen, flowers, fruit and crustaceans – all are beautifully observed and rendered in accordance with their intrinsic natures and textures.

In the seventeenth century, opulent banquet-pieces of this type, with their abundant displays of exotic vessels and delicacies, were known as *pronkstillevens*. The word *pronk* is perhaps best translated as “ostentatious” or “showy”, but it also implies an object which is beautiful and rare and not for everyday use. This exuberant genre owes its creation to Jan Davidsz. de Heem, a Dutch-born painter who had settled in Antwerp in the mid-1630s. In the following decade, the grandiose still lifes of rare and costly objects that he painted in his Antwerp studio had an immediate impact on his contemporaries, both in the Northern and Southern Netherlands. Like others of his generation, Van Beyeren succumbed to his influence and began to paint large and ambitious still lifes with *pronk* elements. His works, however, never lose their unique and distinctive character: his palette is always more muted than de Heem's and his handling of paint more fluent and broadly brushed.

This nearly square canvas is an outstanding example of the sumptuous *pronk* still lifes for which van Beyeren is justly renowned. Painted in 1654, it belongs to a group of closely related compositions which the artist executed around that time. Many of the individual elements depicted here recur in other paintings in the group, but in new and varied arrangements. The elegant silver wine flagon, for example, obviously a favourite piece, is repeated in no less than eight paintingsⁱ, while the *façon-de-Venise* glass, gilt *krulbeker*, silver-*plooi* platter and the *puntschotel* all crop up, though less often, in other still-life paintings from this period. In a very similar work, also of 1654, in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, in Rotterdamⁱⁱ, the silver flagon, the *façon-de-Venise* glass and the gilt cup are repeated in more or less the same positions, although certain other motifs, such as the wan-li porcelain bowl, the large crab and the *puntschotel*, have been moved about in order to vary the arrangement. Likewise, the same gilt cup, Venetian-style glass and two silver platters feature in a similarly conceived painting of 1655, in the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusettsⁱⁱⁱ.

Van Beyeren's sumptuous banquet invites us to feast our eyes, but it also contains a moralising message for those who are initiated. For the contemporary viewer, the open pocket watch – an almost obligatory footnote in van Beyeren's *pronk* still lifes - would have suggested the transience of all the lovely objects spread around it. Likewise, the flowers which will soon fade, the overturned wine glass and the figure of Fortuna that decorates the gilt cup, are all *vanitas* motifs that serve as reminders of mortality and the vanity of all worldly things. Ironically, amidst such luxury the timepiece may also have been intended as an admonition to temperance, a theme echoed in the modestly filled Venetian-style glass.

Son of the glazier Hendrick Gillisz. van Beyeren, Abraham was born in The Hague in 1620/21 and enrolled in the guild there in 1636 as a pupil of Tyman Cracht. Shortly afterwards he moved to Leiden, where in 1639 he married Emmerantia Stercke, a girl from The Hague. In 1640, he returned to The Hague and rejoined the local guild. After the death of his first wife, he married Anna van den Queborn, a niece of the fish painter Pieter de Putter (before 1600-59) in 1647. In 1656, he was a founding member of the *Confrérie Pictura* in The Hague, but the following year he moved to Delft and joined the guild there. He returned to The Hague in 1663, moved to Amsterdam in 1668 and then to Alkmaar, where he joined the local guild in 1674. He lived in Gouda in 1675 and in Overschie from 1677 until his death in 1690.

P.M.

ⁱ Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past: The Sumptuous Still Life in The Netherlands 1600-1700*, 1988, p. 176, note 20.

ⁱⁱ Abraham van Beyeren, *Pronk Still Life*, signed and dated 1654, on canvas, 126 x 106 cm, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

ⁱⁱⁱ Abraham van Beyeren, *Banquet Still Life*, signed and dated 1655, on panel, 114 x 85 cm, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts.