

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP4943

AMBROSIUS BOSSCHAERT the Younger
(Arnhem 1609 – 1645 Utrecht)

**A Still Life of a Vase of Flowers and a Basket of Fruit
In a Niche**



Signed, lower right: A. Bosschaert fecit
Oil on panel, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. (35.8 x 46.8 cm)

PROVENANCE

With Cord Heinrich Schwagermann, Schiedam, *circa* 1935
Lady Hollenden, until 1978
Sale, Sotheby's, London, 12 April 1978, lot 15
With Alexander Gallery, London, 1979
The La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, U.S.A.
Sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, New York, 19 January, 1982, lot 87
With Noortman & Brod, London, Maastricht & New York, 1982
Private collection, Germany, 1982-2009
With Johnny Van Haeften Limited, London, 2009
Private collection, Italy, 2011-2020

EXHIBITED

Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings: Catalogue Seventeen, Johnny Van Haeften Limited, London, 2009, cat. no. 4.

LITERATURE

L. J. Bol, *The Bosschaert Dynasty: Painters of Flowers and Fruit*, 1960, p. 96, no. 30

A still life of flowers and fruit appears on a ledge before a niche. On the left, arranged in a simple glass vase, is a small bouquet, comprising two striped tulips, a couple of pink roses, a rosebud, a lily, aquilegias and a yellow daisy: the globular shape of the container provides a satisfying sense of weight that balances the heavy-headed blooms. A fallen petal lies close to the edge of the ledge. On the right, is a wicker basket containing a profusion of red and yellow cherries, plums, pears and black- and white-currants. The basket is tilted forward, causing some of its contents to spill out onto the ledge. Behind, standing upright at the back of the niche are two yellow pears. A large fly has settled on the back wall and a caterpillar crawls across the flat surface of the ledge.

It would perhaps have been surprising if Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger had not become a flower painter, born, as he was, into a family of masters of that art. Baptised at Arnemuiden, near Middelburg, on 1 March 1609, he was the son of the celebrated flower painter, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621), who was a leading figure in the development of Dutch flower painting in the first decade of the seventeenth century. His uncle Balthasar van der Ast (1593/4? -1657) likewise specialised in painting flowers, as did his two brothers, Johannes (c. 1607-1628), and Abraham (1612/13-1643). Ambrosius the Younger spent much of his life in Utrecht, where in 1634 he married a local girl, Maria Streus. Their marriage contract, drawn up on 6 January of that year, bears the signatures not only of his close family members, including his father's widow Maria van der Ast, and his brother Abraham, but also that of his best-man Roelandt Savery (1578-1639), another of the great pioneers of Dutch flower painting. Like his brothers, Ambrosius the Younger died prematurely, being only thirty-six years old when he was buried in the Catharijnen Church on 19 May 1645, leaving behind a wife and child.

Ambrosius initially trained with his father, and although he was only twelve when Bosschaert the Elder died, he had already learnt a great deal from him. That the fledgling artist also benefited from the study of his late father's paintings is evident in his early still lifes, which adhere closely, both in style and composition, to those of the elder Bosschaert. Later, his uncle Balthasar van der Ast, who lived and worked in Utrecht from 1616 to 1632, exerted a powerful influence on his stylistic evolution. Despite this weighty legacy, Ambrosius gradually found his own voice and evolved a more independent manner.

Ambrosius the Younger's early paintings are signed with his father's monogram, *AB*, in Gothic lettering, but from 1631 he began to sign his work, either *A. Bosschaert*, or in full, using a calligraphic script with a Baroque flourish. In the past, his work was often confused with that of other family members and it is only since 1935 that Piet de Boer succeeded in distinguishing his oeuvre from that of his father and younger brother Abraham. In 1960, Laurens Bol was able to produce an oeuvre-catalogue for all three brothersⁱ, which reveals that Ambrosius's oeuvre is more extensive and varied than either of his brothers'. Bol's catalogue indicates that Ambrosius devoted himself largely to flower-pieces, but he also produced fruit still lifes and a few still lifes, which like the present example include both fruit and flowers. This last category was very likely inspired by the work of van der Ast, who around 1620 had created a new type of still life which combined in a single composition a vase of flowers and a dish or basket of fruit. Ambrosius's elder brother, Johannes, who was also doubtless swayed by van der Ast, adopted a similar scheme in some of his paintings, such as his *Still Life of Flowers and Fruit*, dated 1626, in the Heinz family collectionⁱⁱ.

Ambrosius's still lifes of baskets of fruit or flowers and his combined flower-and-fruit pieces belong mostly to the period of his early maturity, encompassing the years from the early to mid 1630s. The present painting can be dated to c. 1633 by close comparison with a dated painting of that year, which was sold at auction in Bern in 2006ⁱⁱⁱ. In that painting, the setting is almost identical, with a ledge projecting forward from a recessed niche let into the back wall. The arrangement of objects is also similar, with a globular vase of flowers on the left and a wicker basket on the right, but rather than tipped forward, the latter stands squarely on its base and is piled high with fruit: meanwhile, the two pears which appear at the back of our painting are there brought forward to the front of the ledge.

These two works and other fruit pieces bearing dates from 1631 to 1635 all share features which are characteristic of Ambrosius the Younger's personal style and demonstrate his increasingly progressive approach to still-life painting. Unlike the baskets and dishes of fruit or flowers by Ambrosius the Elder, which appear in a shallow space on a continuous ledge, in the son's paintings the edge of the ledge is usually visible on the left-hand, thereby creating a greater sense of depth. Also, in contrast to the strong frontal lighting and dark backgrounds that typify his father's work, the son's objects are seen under soft illumination against a neutral background, thus giving his compositions a more spacious and atmospheric feel. Here, for example, light seems to envelope everything, passing through and behind the glass vase. Gradations of dark and light play across the concave surface of the niche and a reflection of the studio window, captured in the curved surface of the vase, gives a hint of the continuum of space beyond the field of vision. A soft chiaroscuro enhances the rounded forms of the fruit, endowing each piece with a convincing sense of weight and volume. Also typical of Ambrosius the Younger, is the low viewpoint and warm palette, with a predominance of yellow, pink and red. Another aspect of Ambrosius's mature work that marks a departure from his father's, is the asymmetrical composition, a feature which he most likely learnt from van der Ast.

ⁱ L. J. Bol, *The Bosschaert Dynasty*, Leigh-on-Sea, 1960.

ⁱⁱ Johannes Bosschaert, *Flowers and Fruit*, signed and dated 1626, panel, 37 x 56.5 ins., the Heinz family collection, U.S.A.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ambrosius Bosschaert II, *A Still Life with a Vase of Flowers and a Basket of Fruit*, signed and dated 1633, on copper, 44 x 67 cm, Dobiachofsky auction house, Bern, 17 – 20 May 2006, lot. 365.