

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP4998

JORIS VAN SON

(1623 – Antwerp - 1667)

A Still Life of a Swag of Fruit hanging before a stone Alcove containing a *Roemer*



Signed and dated in the stone cartouche,
upper centre: *J. Van son f. / 1655*
Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ ins. (53.8 x 45.5 cm)

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Scotland, until 2021

Anonymous online sale, Sotheby's, London, 9th December 2021, Lot 149.

An opulent swag of fruit is suspended from nails driven into a stone surround. The festoon is composed of stems of ivy, tied at each end with blue ribbons, supporting bunches of grapes, apricots, peaches and medlars, together with stems of wild strawberries and blackberries. A large glass *roemer*, half-filled with white wine, appears in a recessed niche behind. The composition is enlivened by a large cockchafer beetle and a cabbage white butterfly.

Although there is no evidence that Joris van Son was a pupil of Utrecht-born still-life painter Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606 – 1683/4), he was undoubtedly one of de Heem's most accomplished followers and may well have worked in his studio at some stage in his careerⁱ. Whether or not this was the case, van Son's work was profoundly influenced by the celebrated master. Like de Heem, van Son specialised in still lifes and is best known for his depictions of fruit, which invariably feature prominently in his paintings. His repertoire includes garlands of flowers and fruit, *Vanitas* still lifes, large-scale banquet pieces and smaller, more modest fruit pieces, of which this painting is a characteristic example. Particularly in the mid-1650s, van Son produced a number of similar compositions that were probably intended for the open market. During this period, we know that he was supplying paintings for the Antwerp dealer, Matthijs Musson: the dealer's surviving accounts books record that, in 1657-58, he acquired five fruit pieces from van Son, destined for export to Parisⁱⁱ.

Van Son's smaller fruit pieces are characterised by compact arrangements of fruit and other objects, displayed as here before the framework of a stone niche, or more often placed near the corner of a table. The artist endlessly varied his compositions within a relatively narrow range of subject matter, sometimes adding a bread roll, or a glass of wine, a herring or a crab, or at other times, a partly peeled lemon, a pomegranate, a handful of nuts or some berries. Indeed, he seems to have relished portraying similar combinations of objects, re-arranging them and re-discovering them time and time again, without repeating himself.

Here, the rich colour harmonies and lavish treatment of textures make an immediate appeal to our senses. The warm, red, orange yellow of the fruits are juxtaposed with the cool blue of the ribbons and the green of the foliage and grapes, while the softly modelled forms convey a sense of volume and ripeness. Throughout, the artist displays the mastery of his craft in the description of textural effects, from the hard polished surface of the great glass goblet, in which the studio window is reflected, to the velvety skin of the peaches and apricots and the milky bloom on the skins of the grapes. At the same time, both the chipped and cracked stonework and the window-like opening, with its deeply recessed niche, enhance the picture's sense of depth as well as its illusionism. Likewise, the artist's signature and the date 1655, which appear above the niche as if inscribed in the carved stone cartouche, enhance this effect. In another time-honoured trick of still-life painters, van Son has carefully positioned certain elements in front of the stone surround in such a way that they seem to project forward into the viewer's space. For example, the large truss of green grapes, appears so close to us that we are almost tempted to reach out and sample one of its sweet, juicy delights.

BIOGRAPHY

Joris van Son was born in Antwerp and baptised in Notre Dame on 24 September 1623. His teacher is not recorded, but he was clearly influenced by Jan Davidsz. de Heem, who was working in Antwerp from 1635/36. In 1643, he was accepted as a member of the painters' guild and, in 1647, he became a member of the pious bachelor society, *Sodaliteit van bejaerde Jongmans*. In 1656, he married Cornelia van Heulens and two years later a son, Jan Frans, was born, who also became a painter. As well as teaching his son, he trained five apprentices between 1652 and 1665, including Jan Pauwel Gillemans II (1618-1675), the son of his friend and colleague of the same name. According to Jan Meyssens, his contemporaries praised his work, noting that he was "excellent in fruits and flowers, ..."iii and Cornelis de Bie, in a facile play on words, compared him (Son) to the sun (sonne)iv. He died in his native city and was buried in the Cathedral on 25 June, 1667.

ⁱ An identical and highly distinctive silver-gilt *bekerschroef*, which appears in several still lifes by Jan Davidsz. de Heem also appears in five paintings by van Son, perhaps confirming the latter's presence in de Heem's studio at some stage in his career. See: Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Still Life with Glass, Glass Stand and Musical Instruments*, c. 1645, oil on canvas, 139.5 x 114.1 cm, The Hague, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, Inv. NK2711 (on loan to the Centraal Museum, Utrecht) and *Banquet Piece with Shells and Instruments*, signed and dated 1642, oil on canvas, 152 x 206 cm, Private collection, Europe. See also: J. Welu in exh. cat. *The Collector's Cabinet: Flemish Paintings from New England Private Collections*, Worcester, Worcester Art Museum, 1983-84 detailing the paintings by van Son which include this elaborate *bekerschroef* with a putto riding on a dolphin.

ⁱⁱ Jan Denucé, *Na Peter Pauwel Rubens, Documenten uit den Kunsthandel te Antwerpen in de XVII e eeuw van Matthijs Musson*, Antwerp, 1949, p. 199.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jan Meyssens, *Images de divers hommes d'esprit sublime*, Antwerp, 1649. Portrait of J. van Son painted by E. Quellinus and etched by C. Lauwers.

^{iv} Cornelis de Bie, *Het gulden cabinet van de edele vry schilder-const*, Antwerp, 1661. Quoted in Marie-Louise Hairs, *The Flemish Flower Painters in the XVIIth Century*, 1985, p. 401.