

# Balthasar van der Ast

Middelburg 1593/94 - 1657 Delft

## *Shells, Crabs and Flowers on a Table*

Oil on panel  
23 x 35 cm (9 by 13<sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> in.)

Signed: B. van d<sup>r</sup>. Ast

### *Provenance:*

With Durlacher, New York  
Coll. Dr. Ten Kate-Hoedemaker, Amsterdam  
With P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 1961  
Coll. Dr. E. Roelofs, Rotterdam  
Coll. S. Dunlop, Wassenaar  
With P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 1979  
Private Collection, Switzerland

### *Exhibitions:*

*The Theme of Still Life*, Atlanta Art Association, Atlanta 1958  
*Bloemstukken van oude meesters*, P. de Boer, Amsterdam 1961, no.1  
*Nederlandse Stillevenen uit de Zeventiende Eeuw* Dordrecht (Dordrechts Museum) 1962, Laurens J. Bol, no.15, pl.30  
*Modernen van toen 1570 - 1639*, Laren (Singer Museum) 1963, R.G.de Boer, no.7, pl.10  
*PICTURA*, Maastricht 1979, pl.30  
*PICTURA*, Maastricht 1994

### *Literature:*

Weltkunst 49(8), (1979), p.956  
Segal (1982) no.37, p.90

Balthasar van der Ast was born in 1593/94 in Middelburg, situated in the province of Zeeland. He was an orphan at the age of 15. However by this age he may have already begun his apprenticeship in the studio of his brother-in-law Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, possibly even living at his house. In 1615 Ambrosius Bosschaert moved to Bergen-op-Zoom. In 1616 he settled in Utrecht. It is not documented that Balthasar van der Ast followed Bosschaert. Yet in 1619 Van der Ast entered the St. Luke Guild in Utrecht. By this time Bosschaert had already moved to Breda. Van der Ast remained in Utrecht until 1632 and then he went to Delft, where he became a citizen and where he married in February 1633. It seems that he lived a comfortable life with his family in Delft. He owned a house and was respected as a versatile painter. When he died at the age of 64 he was buried in the Oude Kerk.

Balthasar van der Ast was qualified by Laurens Bol as belonging to the Bosschaert Dynasty. Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder represented the head of this dynasty. He had three sons who all became respected masters: Ambrosius the Younger, Abraham and Johannes Bosschaert.<sup>1</sup> The work of the Bosschaert dynasty is rooted in the still life paintings of Jan Breughel the Elder. The Bosschaerts, in turn, paved the way for Dutch still life painting.

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1) compare: Bol (1960) p.36-40



cat. no. V

At the beginning of his career Balthasar van der Ast painted entirely in the Bosschaert style: polychrome and with strong local colors, symmetrically arranged, densely filled with flowers in full blossom against a black background. In approximately 1620, after he had settled in Utrecht, he liberated himself from his stylistic dependency on the Bosschaerts, probably also due in part to his enhanced knowledge of Roelant Savery's art. Balthasar van der Ast's independence emerged, but it never fully denied his artistic roots.

His œuvre is extensive and comprises more than 200 paintings of flowers, fruits and shells.<sup>2</sup> Often these objects are combined and animated by insects. To organize his œuvre in a chronological sequence is difficult, because none of his paintings after 1626 or 1628 are dated.<sup>3</sup> The gradual diminishing influence of the Bosschaerts is apparent, the composition becomes looser and the display of the objects varies more often; the arrangement of the flowers seems more naturally depicted; the coloring becomes softer and the contrast between the flowers grows less striking; the change from light to shadow becomes more subtle (pl.1).<sup>4</sup> Van der Ast's application of a clear blue in the flower petals is striking. Two paintings from private collections demonstrate Van der Ast's preference for this particular blue and they are dated by Fred Meijer to the 1640s.<sup>5</sup> Both examples include a combination of flowers, shells, small animals and insects placed on a grey and brown ledge before a lighter background. In his early paintings

Balthasar van der Ast preferred much sharper contrasts in the coloring, setting his compositions against an almost black background. The contours of the objects were supernaturally precise and everything was densely composed. In his later pictures, Van der Ast adjusted his earlier tendencies in order to provide greater spacial atmosphere.

His later paintings no longer convey a need to show off and to appeal to the pride of the owner and connoisseur, but rather, reflect a new and more relaxed pleasure to appreciate the *flora and fauna* of this world.

Ulrike Middendorf

(Translation from  
the German by EL)

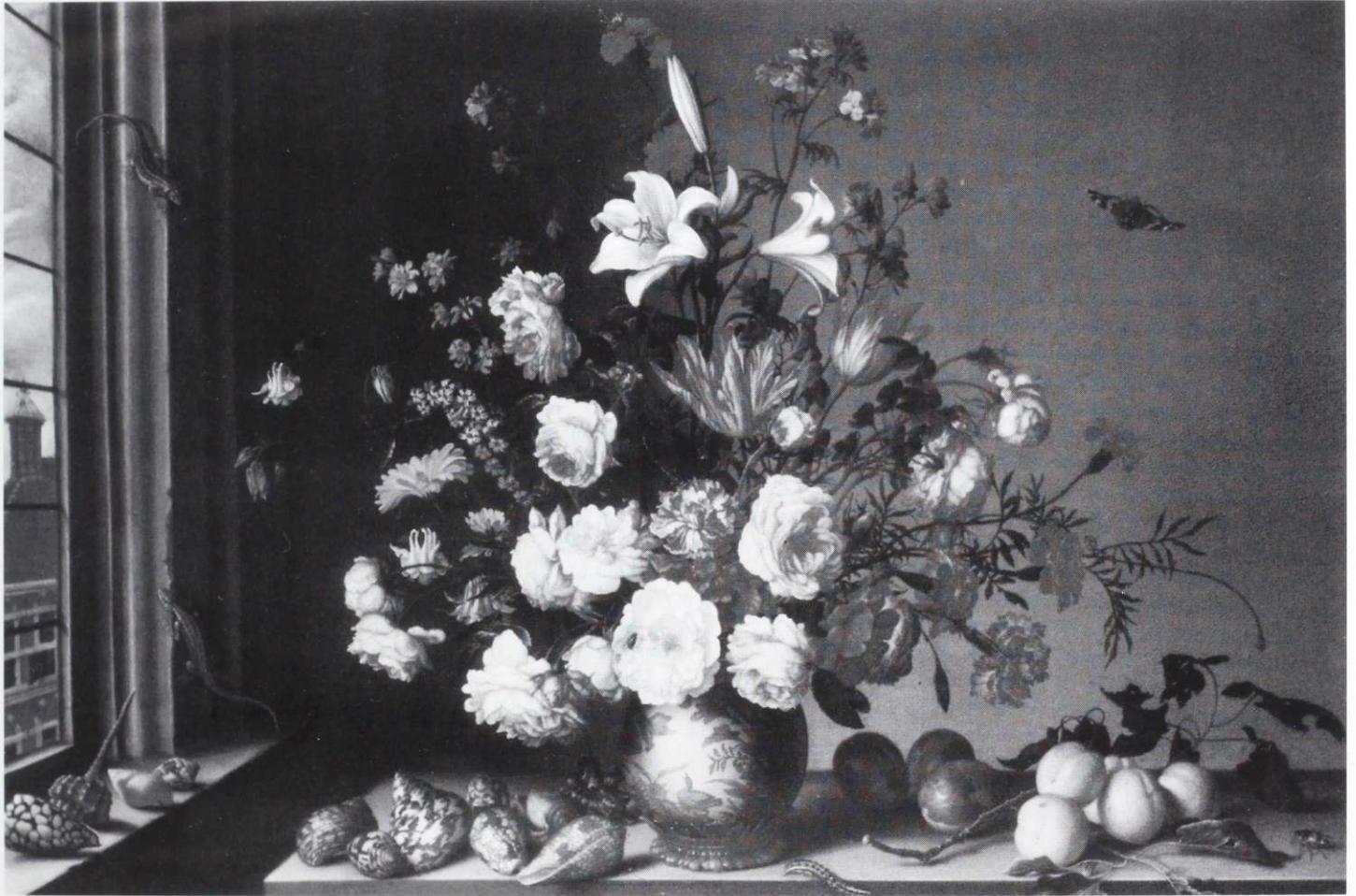
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2) Meijer in: Boeketten (1992) p.56, no.3

3) Brenninkmeyer - De Rooij in: Boeketten (1992) p.18

4) Balthasar van der Ast, *Flowers, Fruits, Shells and Insects in an Interior*, signed at the lower right: B. van der Ast. fe..', oil on panel 67,5 x 37,5 cm, Staatl. Galerie Dessau, Schloß Georgium

5) compare: Segal (1989) p.94 and Boeketten (1992) p.59



Pl.1 Balthasar van der Ast, *Flowers, Fruits, Shells and Insects in an Interior*,  
signed at the lower right: B. van der Ast. fe. 7,  
oil on panel 67,5 x 37,5 cm, Staatl. Galerie Dessau, Schloß Georgium