

Bartholomeus Assteyn

1607 - Dordrecht - after 1667

Flowers in a Glass Vase on a Stone Ledge

Oil on panel

54,5 x 41,5 cm (21 1/2 by 16 1/2 in.)

Signed and dated: B. AsSteijn. 1644

Provenance:

L.M. Charsley

G. Peltzer

With E. Slatter, 1952

With P. de Boer, 1966

Private Collection

Exhibitions:

E. Slatter, London, April-July 1952, no.6, ill.

P. de Boer, Amsterdam February 1966, no.1, ill.

Literature:

Bol (1953) p. 141, cat.no.11, ill.2

Bol (1969) pp.48-49, ill.41

Connaissance des Arts (3/1965) p.157, ill.

The present still life with flowers in a spherical glass vase dates to 1644. Its compositional scheme extends back to Jan Breughel the Elder, Gillis van Coninxloo, Jacques de Gheyn and Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder. It was then passed from Ambrosius to his sons, pupils and many followers: the composition relies on a central axis with roses on the lower level, tulips on the medium level and on top a very decorative flower like an imperial

crown, a lily or an iris. In the present picture it is the yellowish-blue iris coupled with a gladiolus. It is well known that these flower still lives were rarely painted after nature, although it is possible that even the odd flower might have been portrayed in its original. Assteyn is reported to have executed an album of flower and shell patterns.¹ Most of the flowers assembled in such a bouquet quite often do not even blossom at the same time. The fact that the proportions of the represented flowers are not correct, proves also that Assteyn may have worked with pattern.²

If there is a symbolic meaning to the depiction of flower still lives, this is a recurring question. In the early seventeenth century, one can negate any practical use for these paintings, as they would be used today for decorations in the home. Even in portraits, interiors and genre scenes - quite often fitted with fruit still lives or little sculptures - one rarely detects a flower still life. Beatrijs Brenninkmeijer-De Rooij has demonstrated convincingly in the exhibition catalogue *Boeketten uit de Gouden Eeuw* that the painted bouquet of flowers was regarded as a symbol of worship and glorification of God's creation.³ Especially flowers in their purposeless beauty, free from any exploitation and physical indulgence could be interpreted as testimony of magnificence in God's created nature.

Ulrike Middendorf

1) compare: Segal (1989) p.85

2) compare: Bol (1953) p.140

3) compare: Brenninkmeijer-De Rooij (1992) pp.36-41



cat. no. XI