

Abraham Breughel

Antwerp 1631 - 1690 Naples

A Pair of Still Lives

Oil on canvas
41,5 x 33 cm (16 ³/₈ by 13 in.)
with the original octogonal shaped stretchers

Both signed: A. Breughel fe.

Provenance:

Private Collection, England

*A Glass Vase of Flowers on a Stone Ledge
containing*
*- Tulips, Chrysanthemus, Dahlias and
Narcissi*
*- Tulips, Chrysanthemums, Roses and
Bluebells*

It is documented that in the well known collection of Count Antonio Ruffo, who kept a constant and close relationship with Abraham Breughel, there were eight still lives of octogonal size before 1649. This is interesting, because this type of flower still life is rare. Louise Hairs cites only five or six still lives by Breughel of this unique size.¹

This octogonal size recalls the paintings which the young Breughel who had just turned eighteen had painted for Antonio Ruffo. Especially the

reduced size of the present pair of paintings is a reference to Jan Breughel the Younger, who was Abraham's father and teacher. All these aspects indicate that Abraham must have executed the present paintings shortly after his arrival in Italy. Stylistically these pictures reveal the hand of a young painter who was still partly linked to the tradition of Flemish painting. It should also be mentioned in this context that in the 1640s and 50s Daniel Seghers worked in Antwerp and he might well have generated the curiosity of the young Abraham Breughel with his elegant compositions of flowers.² Seghers for his part had studied under Jan Breughel the Elder, who had worked in Italy from 1625 until 1627.

Is it the way the vase is placed on the ledge against a plain background which is partly lit, or is it the choice of glass as a vase for the flowers, in which the light is reflected, despite its transparency, or is it both these things that remind us of the first still lives of the Caravaggesque painters in Rome? Among these painters would be Mao Salini, whose floral compositions we know only from documents, where they are described. Abraham Breughel worked into the two present paintings the elements of traditional Flemish painting, which he had adopted in the studio of his father, together with a consciousness of the new Roman models.

1) compare: Hairs (1985)
2) Hairs (1985) p.131, pl.34



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The natural rendering of the arrangement and the choice of flowers in the vase - tulips, chrysanthemus, dahlias, narcissi, roses and bluebells - is proof again for Abraham Breughel's working method. He describes this method himself in a letter dated January 6th, 1666 to Antonio Ruffo: I would have sent you the flower piece already, but beautiful flowers still have not come out yet. Breughel repeats several times in his letter to Ruffo, that he will stick to his plan of painting flower still lives in order to send them to the wife of his noble Sicilian patron, but that it is still not the right season. This shows that Abraham Breughel painted flowers after the original .³

Laura Laureati

(translated from
Italian by EL)

3) Laureati (1989) pp.788/9



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