Elias van den Broeck
Antwerp 1657 - 1708 Amsterdam

*Flowers in a Terracotta Vase on a Stone Ledge*

Oil on canvas
63 x 53 cm (24 ⅞ by 20 ⅞ in.) unlined
Signed: Elias V Den Broeck

**Provenance:**
Private Collection, Paris

**Exhibitions:**
*Seventeenth Century Still Life Paintings*, Daphne Alazraki, New York, January 1994
*The European Fine Art Fair*, Maastricht 1994

Elias van den Broeck was a pupil of the still life artist Cornelis Kick in Amsterdam. In 1673/74 he entered the Antwerp guild as a master. In 1685 he returned to Amsterdam. In 1700 Elias van den Broeck lived in London.

The influence of Willem van Aelst and his school on the flower pieces of Elias van den Broeck is particularly evident in his diagonal compositions (pl.3). In his paintings depicting forest undergrowth (we refer to this type of painting as sottobosco), he is influenced in form and subject by Otto Marseus van Schrieck, Jan Davidsz. de Heem and Abraham Mignon (compare cat.no. XXXVII). Ernst Stuven referred to the same sources, and this could explain why Arnold Houbraken left us with possibly inaccurate information, that Van den Broeck had been Stuven's first and most talented pupil.

In 1729 the writer and still life painter Jacob Campo Weyerman criticized in his notoriously drastic manner, that *Van den Broeck could be by no means regarded as a magician in painting; in fact most of the paintings would resemble each other, flowers, herbs and green leaves appeared to be made of lead.* Weyerman also mentions another interesting detail of Van den Broeck's still lives: *Van den Broeck probably had to leave Antwerp and to move to Amsterdam, because the "velvet trousered signori" of Antwerp accused him of sticking real butterflies onto the canvas instead of painting them. These "stuffed up wimps" did not understand that the stuck on butterflies appear to be much nicer and more natural than their painted companion, because they conserve all their delicate design and last much longer.*

It is proven that this technique had been well utilized.

1) Houbraken (1953) vol.3, p.301
2) Hy was genootzaakt van Antwerpen te verlaten, dewijl de in fluweelgebroekte Sinjoors van die eerste Stad hem beschuldigden van de Vlindertjes geplakt en niet geschildert te hebben, daar die bemsnyte Hannekens niet overwoogen, dat de geplakte Vlindertjes schooner en natuurlijker zijn als geschilderden, dewijl ze niet alleenlijk hun gantsche tekening behouden, maar ook langer dan degeschilderden duuren. Weyerman (1729) p. 211
The surface was first primed with a light ocre color, he would then apply an adhesive, press down the wing of the butterfly onto this and remove it again. The minute scales with their delicate coloring and precise markings stay. Even unvarnished, they preserve their shimmer. Contrary to Weyerman's statement, these transferred scales are very delicate with a tendency to bleach or even to disappear completely; today one can only see this under a microscope. At one point the illustrated still life by Van den Broeck must have been an abundant depiction of multi-colored butterflies (pl.1).  

**Flowers in a Terracotta Vase on a Stone Ledge**

Slightly removed from the central axis and in front of a subtly painted niche a bunch of flowers rests in a terracotta vase on a red-purple stone ledge. The chromatic scale ranges from a matt green to a warm orange-red. The light background permits Van den Broeck to alternately highlight the flowers: on the left side, light against dark, and on the right, in reverse, with dark against light, the leaves and flowers blossoming into silhouettes. Roses, snowballs, morning glories ascend in a diagonal composition towards a poppy in the upper right hand corner. A peony is subordinated to the lower right in the shadow. Honeysuckles are blue accents amidst the composition. The strong contrast of light and shadow becomes most evident in the depiction of the sharp relief of the green leaves. This has become one of Van den Broeck's trademark, with the veins of the leaves rendered in such a three-dimensional manner, as though they were composed by many brows. Perhaps it was this that Weyerman had in mind, when he described the leaves in Van den Broeck's paintings as "heavy as lead".

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3) Weber (1989) pp. 35, pl. 31c
Weber (1993) pp. 27-29, pl. 10, 11
Pl. 3  Elias van den Broeck, *Flowers in a Glass Vase*
Oil on canvas 62.5 x 53 cm
Private collection, Germany
formerly Galerie Lingenauber
There are very few still lives in which Van den Broeck refrains from fitting in snails, lizards, grass hoppers or stag beetles into his still lives (pl.4).\textsuperscript{3} He is well acquainted with these animals from his sottobosci. In the present picture, the addition of a grass hopper and a snail enhances the beauty of the flowers. The red shimmer of a large beetle, probably a female stag beetle, contrasts with the matt green of a leaf. Elias van den Broeck masters the precise rendering of nature by adding a highly decorative value to his still life.

Gregor J.M. Weber

(Translation from the German by EL)
Pl. 5 Elias van den Broeck, *Flowers in a Glass Vase*
Oil on canvas 54 x 38.5 cm
Private collection, Paris
formerly Galerie Lingenauber