

Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger

Arnhemuiden 1609 - 1645 Utrecht

A Bouquet of Flowers in a Glass Beaker with Shells and Fruits on a Ledge

Oil on panel

65,5 x 47 cm (25 ²/₃ by 18 ¹/₂ in.)

Signed: AB(linked) BoSschaert

Provenance:

Private Collection, Sweden

Th. Acrel, Stockholm

Bengt Berry, Göteborg, 1962

Exhibitions:

LA NATURA IN POSA, Galleria Lorenzelli,
Bergamo 1971, pl.19

Literature:

Bergström (1947) pp.84-86, pl.69

Bergström (1956) pp.76-78, pl.69

Bol (1960) p.94, cat.no. 14

Bergström (1971) pl.19

Veca (1989) p.47, pl.32

Perhaps one way to start an introduction to the life and work of Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger is to briefly sketch the life of his father Ambrosius the Elder who was overpowering the life and their artistic development of his children. Maria Sweerts, the daughter of Ambrosius the Elder, documented the history of the Bosschaert family. Her three brothers, Ambrosius the Younger, Johannes and Abraham were all painters of flowers and fruit.

Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder was one of the first artists in the Northern Netherlands to paint flower pieces in oil. The earliest of his known flower pieces is dated 1605.¹ Considering that Ambrosius the Elder was born in 1573 and that he was a member of the St. Lucas Guild in Middelburg as early as 1593, this being his first dated work raises questions about his former activity. Ambrosius the Elder remained in Middelburg until about 1614. By then his eldest son and namesake Ambrosius the Younger was already born. The Bosschaerts certainly were acquainted with artists working in Antwerp. In fact the flower pieces of Ambrosius the Elder reveal the ideas of Jan Breughel the Elder.

Still under the influence of his teacher and father, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger began painting in the style of his master and even signed his still life paintings with his father's monogram. Ambrosius the Younger probably used this monogram until the early 30s. *Then the austere monogram is replaced by a written signature, A. Bosschaert, which is more flowing than that of his brother Abraham. It possesses a calligraphic style: The letter 'A' acquires a C-like curve and the 'B' is likewise ornamented. Still lives dated from 1633 and 1634 are signed in a transitional manner: A. Bosschaert, written in full, the capitals still in Roman letters, detached from the well known monogram, while the remaining letters in the signature are in handwriting.*²

1) Bergström (1982) p.176

2) Bol (1960) p.44



cat. no. XII

With the third decade of the seventeenth century Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger not only changed the type of his signature, but he also progressed in his painterly style. Already in his early works he outdid his brothers. *In certain respects his œuvre is more modern than that of his brothers. His work, too, reveals renaissance-tràits in the display of objects and in its scientific, naturalistic character. But the linear rhythm, severe with Johannes and stiff with Abraham, tends toward the baroque with him....In his second period we see the introduction of a more flexous line.*³ The first years of his artistic activity which Bol characterized as a tendency towards scientific naturalism, should be seen within the experience of his father's artistic tutorship. His father's famous composition *Flower Vase in a Window Niche* (pl.1) which subsequently had become a prototype, must also have left an impact on him.

A Bouquet of Flowers in a Glass Beaker with Shells and Fruits on a Ledge

The present painting depicts many elements which were also part of the repertoire in the paintings of Ambrosius the Elder. A cylindrical vase compactly holds a sumptuous bouquet of flowers. This glass beaker rests on a pincered foot-rim to a kick-in base. The stem is a cylinder with four rows of applied raspberry prunts. These were blown in one piece together with the stem. Four adorned lion heads mark the boundary between the lower and upper stem. The glass beaker has been abundantly filled with a large number of flowers. Roses and tulips protrude over the rim with some intertwining leaves of ivy. Narcissi, irises, tulips, columbines, forget-me-nots, anemones and a few other flowers add to the radial composition which is crowned by a

German iris. Bosschaert probably painted this bouquet using patterns, because most of these flowers blossom at different times. This was common practice when a depiction of a botanical encyclopaedia was requested from the artist. Illustrations of *Wunderkammern* have shown that pictures like these were often painted for collection devoted to scientific delights. They also served as an optical substitute for the real blossom which was so transient. Today's beholder of this art tends to discover symbolism in the artistic expressions. Occasionally Ambrosius the Younger might have applied symbolism in his paintings, since one large still life by him is an undisguised *Vanitas*, but his choice of flowers evidently followed the taste and demand of collectors. Possibly Ambrosius choose elements for his compositions under the tuton of his father and by established tradition, which were formerly deliberately employed as symbols, but of which the deeper meaning by then only was marginally present or possibly not even conscious any more.

Based on the type of signature and on stylistic grounds the present painting can be dated to ca. 1632/35. These were the years when the Dutch tulip trade reached such dimensions that a special tulip exchange was set up to coordinate it. On the tulip exchange still life paintings depicting tulips had been used instead of the real objects, which only existed potentially in the form of bulbs. Thus the true appreciation of the painting came second to the economic purpose. The Bosschaerts have always been known for their precise and scientific rendering of particular tulips.

A similar composition to the present painting is conserved in a private collection in France.⁴ It varies in some flowers and the arrangement of the shells and fruits on the table ledge is different.

3) Bol (1960) p.44

4) Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger, *A Bouquet of Flowers in a Glass Vase with Shells and Fruit on a Table*, panel 82 x 57 cm, signed (signature is damaged): A. Bosschaert; Collection Jean Riechers, Neuilly-sur-Seine compare: Bol (1960) p.94, no.15, ill. pl.56



Pl.1 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flower Vase in a Window Niche*
oil on panel 64 x 46 cm, signed, Mauritshuis, The Hague