



Balthasar van der Ast
(Middelburg before 1590 - after 1656 Delft)

“Flowers in a Wan-Li Vase”
Oil on copper: 34 x 25,5 cm
painted circa 1620



Provenance

- collection Paul Hartog, Berlin
- Gallery Leeghenhoek, Paris
- sold 1981, to a private German collection
- from a private Dutch collection
- with Douwes Fine Art at TEFAF 2012
- a private European collection

Expertise

- L. J. Bol, 15 April 1979
- Prof. Ingmar Bergström, Paris, 4 November 1979
- Dr. Claus Grimm, 15 March 1981
- Fred Meijer, RKD, The Hague, Oct. 1997

Literature

- ‘Masters of Middelburg’, exhibition catalogue, Waterman Gallery, Amsterdam 1984, p. 54, plate 9, text by Mr. Sam Segal:

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“The greatest care must be taken in interpreting unsigned paintings by a painter who signed almost every one of his works. In fact, most of the unsigned paintings attributed to Balthasar van der Ast which I have seen are not by him: they are copies, pastiches, or fakes. But I will mention three examples in which this is not the case. The first is a bouquet in a gilt-mounted Wan-Li vase decorated with a Spoonbill, with a tulip in the foreground (fig. 9). This is very close in style to the early flower basket signed in capitals, in which some similar flowers are portrayed, the most striking of them being the tulip in the foreground of both paintings. This is, undoubtedly, an early work by Balthasar van der Ast, executed under Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder’s supervision, probably around 1618 or somewhat earlier. This explains the absence of a signature (Sam Segal e.a.).

Art Loss Register certificate:

The painting is accompanied by a certificate by The Art Loss Register, signed by Julian Radcliffe, Chairman, dd. 12 March 2012



Notes

Balthasar Van der Ast is one of the most important Dutch still life painters of the 17th century. His contribution to this genre consists of approximately 200 large and small format paintings, characterised by their finesse and subtlety. The present work is a beautiful example from this Utrecht period, where settled in 1619, and during which time he began to distance himself stylistically from his brother-in-law and teacher, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621). Utrecht at the time must have been a highly stimulating environment for the young Van der Ast. Not only had Roelandt Savery (circa 1576-1639) settled here upon his return from Prague, but soon Bosschaert the Elder's three sons, Ambrosius the Younger (1609-1645), Johannes (1608-1629) and Abraham (1612-1643) would move from Middelburg to Utrecht, making the city a new centre for still life painting from 1620 on.

Unlike canvas, the smooth, rigid surface of copper lends itself particularly well to finely detailed brushwork as can be seen in the present painting. Copper also provides a non-absorbent surface, meaning that colours do not 'sink in' to their ground, and even thinly applied layers of oil paint appear more vibrant and intense. In the 16th and 17th centuries, many artists painting on copper applied a coating of tin or lead to the copper surface before painting, which imbued their works with great luminosity.

The experts Bol, Bergström and Grimm think it is an early work from around 1610. In his report of 1 February 2017, Dr. Fred Meijer dates it to 1620 (or perhaps early 1621).

The most important key to this conclusion is the extremely close relationship with a much larger, signed and dated work by van der Ast from 1620: <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/62919>, with which it shares several flowers, identical in shape and execution.

Also, the painting under discussion here shares the tulip up front with another signed painting by van der Ast, for which a dating to c. 1620 is generally excepted <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/119940>

A painting in Madrid, on which the date has recently been established to be 1620 and not 1628, as it was previously read (van der Ast exhibition, cat no. 7) shows clear similarities in handling <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/119838>

To this group of early works by Balthasar van der Ast also belongs an unsigned painting in Pasadena <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/185390>, with which it shares a tulip (here in front, there included in the bouquet) and the cyclamen leaf.

With all the above works the present painting shares the light-grey of the table and the near black.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

robert.cats@wmmconsultancy.com

+974 55808769 - +31 652026898



In collaboration with Art Gallery Voûte Schiedam & Douwes Fine Art Amsterdam