NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Jan van Huysum
Dutch, 1682 - 1749

Still Life with Flowers and Fruit

c. 1715

oil on panel
overall: 78.7 x 61.3 cm (31 x 24 1/8 in.)
framed: 104.1 x 86.4 x 7.6 cm (41 x 34 x 3 in.)
Inscription: lower right: Jan Van Huysum fecit
Patrons' Permanent Fund and Gift of Philip and Lizanne Cunningham 1996.80.1

ENTRY

Jan van Huysum was unmatched in his ability to capture the sheer joy of viewing a profuse array of flowers and fruit. In this superb example, flowers overflow a putti-decorated terra-cotta vase while peaches and grapes spill over the foreground marble ledge, creating a sense of opulent abundance. Woven in and out of the densely packed bouquet of peonies, roses, carnations, and auriculae are the rhythmically flowing stems and blossoms of tulips, veronica, tuberoses, and hops. The large red bud of the opium poppy, flanked by a hollyhock and a tuberose, anchors the crown of the bouquet.

Van Huysum's lasting fame has centered not only on his exuberant arrangements, but also on his technical virtuosity. He could convey both the undulating rhythms of a striped tulip's petal and the glistening sheen of its variegated surface. He skillfully integrated insects into his bouquets and suggested the translucence of dewdrops on the petals and leaves. He delighted in enhancing the flowers' vivid colors—primarily pinks, yellows, oranges, reds, and purples—with striking light effects that add to the visual richness. As in this instance, he often illuminated blossoms situated at the back of the bouquet, against which he silhouetted darker foreground leaves and tendrils.

This painting is especially rich in its profusion of flowers and insects. Sam Segal has identified in this work some forty varieties of flowers, eight types of butterflies, and seven species of other insects. [1] Van Huysum also included both purple and green grapes, using their colors, as well as the reds and yellows of the apricot and

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peaches, to provide a seamless display of visual interest throughout the image. Just how he assembled such a wide variety of specimens and composed them into a complex arrangement has never been fully determined.

Van Huysum derived his compositional ideals and technical prowess from the examples of two important predecessors, Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606 - 1684) and Willem van Aelst (Dutch, 1627 - 1683). Following De Heem's lead, Van Huysum introduced flowing rhythms to his flowers and rendered their forms and textures with great care and sensitivity to give his bouquets a lifelike appearance. As did De Heem, Van Huysum incorporated a wide variety of plant species in his bouquets, including wheat and fruit, and he grouped together flowers that do not blossom at the same time, for example, tulips and morning glories. From Van Aelst he learned the advantages of concentrating brightly lit flowers to focus the dynamically swirling rhythms underlying his compositions. In this work, he massed his colors and forms to create a sweeping arced flow from the tuberose in the upper right, through the large open tulip, the group of roses, and then back through the array of fruit in the lower right.

The dark background of this painting is characteristic of works the artist produced in the second decade of the eighteenth century, as, for example, a flower piece in Karlsruhe, dated 1714, that depicts a bouquet in a dark niche [fig. 1]. One early critic commented that Van Huysum "painted his flowers and fruit for many years on dark backgrounds, against which, in his opinion, they stood out more, and were better articulated. Everyone praised these pieces as wonderful, as impossible to surpass." [2] Shortly after 1720, in response to the evolving tastes of his patrons, Van Huysum changed his style and situated his floral bouquets against light backgrounds, many of which were outdoor garden settings (see Flowers in an Urn).

Van Huysum was reputedly a secretive artist who forbade anyone, including his own brothers, to enter his studio for fear that they would learn how he purified and applied his colors. [3] Thus, many questions about his painting process remain unanswered. Similarities in the shapes and character of individual blossoms in different still-life paintings indicate that he must have adapted drawn or painted models to satisfy pictorial demands. The auction of his estate in 1749 included "some studies of flower pieces," a "masterful Study of a pot with Flowers," and "Another sketchbook with Studies." [4] Nevertheless, a study of an individual flower made for a specific painting has yet to be discovered. [5] It seems that Van Huysum painted at least some of his flowers from life. In 1742 he wrote a letter to a patron in which he explained that he could not complete a still life that included a yellow

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rose until that flower blossomed the following spring. [6] Indeed, this Amsterdam artist's keenness for studying flowers led him to spend a portion of each summer in Haarlem, then as now a horticultural center. [7]

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April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Jan van Huysum, *Floral Still Life*, 1714, oil on panel, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe. © Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe 2010. Photo: W. Pankoke

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NOTES

[1] Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans.

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Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 154, no. F5.

[2] This comment by Herman Tollius (1742–1822) was published by Roeland van de Eijnden and Adriaan van der Willigen, *Geschiedenis der Vaderlandsche Schilderkunst* (Haarlem, 1816), 1, 312–313: "Deze schilderde zijne Bloem- en Fruit- stukken lang op donkere gronden, op welke hij meende, dat dezelve beter uitkwamen en spraken. Ieder roemde deze stukken als voortreffelijk, als onverbeterlijk." Translated in Paul Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting, 1600–1720* (New Haven and London, 1995), 191.

[3] This information comes from Van Huysum's biographer, Jan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1751), 2:31–32. For a thoughtful assessment of this account, see Mariël Ellens and Sam Segal, "Jan van Huysum: His Life and Family," in Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 21. For information about Van Huysum's painting techniques, see Joris Dik, "Jan van Huysum's Painting Technique," in Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 69–74.

[4] Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 47 n. 29.

[5] Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 47.

[6] Friedrich Schlie, "Sieben Briefe und eine Quittung von Jan van Huijsum," *Oud-Holland* 18, no. 3 (1900): 141.

[7] According to Segal, "No sources suggest that Jan ever lived anywhere outside Amsterdam, but he maintained contact with flower growers in Haarlem who supplied him with material for his garden (Van Gool). Some authors state that he went to Haarlem every summer for this reason,". Sam Segal, *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682–1749*, trans. Beverley Jackson (Delft and Houston, 2007), 16. Only 19.7 kilometers (12.2 miles) separate Amsterdam from Haarlem, and with documented speeds of 5–7 kilometers per hour, Jan van Huysum would have traveled the distance in 2.45 to 3. 55 minutes.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support panel consists of a single plank of oak[1] with a vertical grain. The panel has been beveled on all four sides and thin wooden strips have been added to the left and right sides. The ground is a buff-colored layer that is very thin and

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allows the wood texture to show through. The paint is also rather thin, but there is very slight impasto in some of the highlights. Van Huysum painted wet-into-wet, allowing his brushstrokes to form the shapes of the flower petals. In some areas he used the ground and the dark background to create the mid-tones and the shadows in the foliage. He did not leave many reserves, and infrared reflectography at 1.1 to 1.8 microns[2] revealed numerous artist's changes.

The painting is in excellent condition. An old vertical check extends from the top edge of the panel down to the tip of the uppermost red and white tulip. A small protruding square area at the top edge of the panel is probably the result of the two vertical checks on either side of it. Several nicks and dents exist near the bottom edge of the panel. The paint exhibits a minute crackle pattern that is more prevalent in lighter colors, but completely absent in the pure whites. Very recent inpainting is evident along the split and scattered throughout the composition. It is particularly heavy near the bottom edge, indicating numerous small losses or abrasion in this part of the painting. Examination with ultraviolet light revealed an old varnish that was thinned in the background and on some of the flowers. A more recent layer of varnish was applied on top of the partially removed one

[1] The characterization of the wood is based on visual examination only.

[2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focal plane array InSb camera fitted with H and J astronomy filters.

PROVENANCE

Baron Louis de Rothschild [1882-1955], Vienna.[1] his niece, Baroness Reininghaus [née Bettina Rothschild Springer, 1912-1974]; her husband, Baron Kurt Reininghaus [d. 1984]; sold to (Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna); sold c. 1994 to Mr. and Mrs. Philip Cunningham, Alexandria, Virginia; partially sold and partially given 1996 through (Otto Naumann, New York) to NGA.

[1] This painting was confiscated by the Nazis from the Louis de Rothschild collection in Vienna in 1938 and was destined for Adolf Hitler's planned museum in Linz, Austria. It is listed on the 20 October 1939 *Vorschlag sur Verteilung der in*

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Wien beschlagnahmte Gemaelde: Für das Kunstmuseum in Linz prepared by Hitler's curator, Hans Posse, and also Posse's *Verzeichnis der für Linz in Aussicht genommenen Gemälde* dated 31 July 1940 (OSS Consolidated Interrogation Report #4, Linz: Hitler's Museum and Library, 15 December 1945, Attachments 72 and 73, U.S. National Archives RG226/Entry 190B/Box 35, copy in NGA curatorial files). The records of the Allies' Munich Central Collecting Point indicate that the painting was recovered by the Allies and restituted to Austria on 11 May 1948. It was returned to Louis de Rothschild in 1949 (Munich property card #1665; Austrian Receipt for Cultural Property dated 11 May 1948; copies in NGA curatorial files.). The painting is listed and illustrated in Birgit Schwarz, *Hitlers Museum: Die Fotoalben Gemäldegalerie Linz: Dokumente zum "Führermuseum"*, Vienna, 2004: no. V/1. See also Sophie Lillie, *Was Einmal War*, Vienna, 2003: 113-116.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1999 From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1999, no. 19, fig. 60.

2000 Art for the Nation: Collecting for a New Century, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2000-2001, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

2006 The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum 1682-1749 (De verleiding van Flora: Jan van Huysum 1682-1749), Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, Delft; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2006-2007, no. F5, repro.

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1999 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1999: 67-69, 71, 84, no. 19, fig. 60.

2000 National Gallery of Art. *Art for the Nation: Collecting for a New Century*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2000: 38-39, 304, color repro.

2000 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *The Golden Age of Dutch and Flemish painting: the Edward and Sally Speelman Collection*. Exh. cat. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague. Houston, 2000: 50-51, repro.

2004 Hand, John Oliver. *National Gallery of Art: Master Paintings from the*

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Collection. Washington and New York, 2004: 212-213, no. 171, color repro

2006 Segal, Sam, Mariël Ellens, and Joris Dik. *De verleiding van Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682-1749*. Exh. cat. Museum het Prinsenhof, Delft; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Zwolle, 2006: no. 5, repro.

2007 Segal, Sam. *The Temptations of Flora: Jan van Huysum, 1682-1749*. Translated by Beverly Jackson. Exh. cat. Museum Het Prinsenhof, Delft; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Zwolle, 2007: no. 5, repro.

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