

Mignon, Abraham

German, 1640 - 1679

BIOGRAPHY

The son of shopkeepers, Abraham Mignon was born in Frankfurt and baptized in the Calvinist church on June 21, 1640. When his parents moved to Wetzlar in 1649, Mignon was placed under the care and artistic apprenticeship of Jacob Marrel (1614–1681), a still-life painter and art dealer. Marrell was undoubtedly impressed with Mignon’s abilities, for he entrusted his affairs to him whenever he was away in Holland on business. Furthermore, Marrell asked Mignon to instruct his stepdaughter, Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), in still-life painting. By 1664 Marrell and Mignon had left Frankfurt for Utrecht, and in 1669 both were registered in the Saint Luke’s Guild there. While in Utrecht, Mignon maintained the strong religious beliefs of his upbringing. In 1672 he was elected deacon of the Waalse Kerk of Utrecht, a position he held for five years. He married Maria Willaerts, the cousin of the seascape painter Cornelis Willaerts (Dutch, active 1622 - 1666), in 1675. He died just a few years later, and was buried in Utrecht on March 27, 1679.

Throughout his short career Mignon painted a variety of still-life subjects, but he is best known for his lush compositions of flowers and fruits placed on stone ledges and in niches, or set within ruins and grottos. He developed a distinct style marked by precise detail and drawing. His oeuvre clearly reflects the influence of a number of painters, including Marrell and, most notably, Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606 - 1684). Mignon entered the Utrecht painters’ guild in 1669, the same year that De Heem rejoined the guild after his return from Antwerp. De Heem’s influence is best seen in Mignon’s use of bright colors, assurance of drawing, and increasingly elaborate compositions, making it likely that he studied with the older artist.

Considering that Mignon died before his fortieth birthday, many of the approximately four hundred still-life paintings that have been attributed to him were undoubtedly executed by workshop assistants or followers. Nevertheless, this enormous following attests to the popularity of Mignon’s compositions, which were eagerly sought by collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the Elector of Saxony and Louis XIV of France.

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April 24, 2014

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To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Abraham Mignon," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/6626> (accessed April 19, 2021).