

Abraham Mignon

1640–1679

THE SON of shopkeepers, Abraham Mignon was born in Frankfurt and baptized in the Calvinist Church on 21 June 1640. When his parents moved to Wetzlar in 1649, Mignon was placed under the care and artistic apprenticeship of Jacob Marrell (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 family. 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 Adam Willaerts (1577–1664), in 1675. He died just a few years later, and was buried on 27 March 1679 in Utrecht.

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 importantly, Jan Davidsz. de Heem (q.v.). Mignon and De Heem both entered the Utrecht painters' guild in 1669, and Mignon must have studied with him. De Heem's influence is best seen in Mignon's use of bright colors, assurance of drawing, and increasingly elaborate compositions.

Considering that he died before his fortieth birthday, many of the approximately four hundred still-life paintings that have been attributed to Mignon are undoubtedly the works of followers and imitators. Nevertheless, this enormous following attests to the popularity of his compositions, which were eagerly sought by collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the elector of Saxony and Louis XIV of France.

Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 3: 82–83.
Bol 1969: 320–323.
Kraemer-Noble 1973.

1992.51.5

A Hanging Bouquet of Flowers

probably 1665/1670

Oil on oak, 38.1 x 29.9 (15 x 11³/₄)

Gift of Mrs. Paul Mellon, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

Inscriptions

At the lower left: *AB Mignon f.*

Technical Notes: The support is a single, vertically grained wood board with thin wood strips attached to edges beveled on the back. The lower right corner is chipped and worn. Thin opaque paint is applied over a thin, smooth, pale gray ground layer in layers blended wet into wet with slightly impasted highlights.¹ Abrasion is extensive, particularly in the background. In 1994 the painting underwent treatment to consolidate flaking and remove discolored retouching and varnish.

Provenance: Private collection, England;² (John Mitchell & Son, London); purchased November 1961 by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia.

MIGNON has united this decorative floral piece through the free-flowing rhythms of flowers, fruits, and grains that hang from a blue satin bow. With crystalline clarity and an exquisite sense of design, he has arranged blossoms in such a way that their various shapes and vivid colors complement each other with an easy naturalness. At the center of the composition are the large forms and pale colors of the white viburnum, the light pink carnation, and the white and red variegated tulip. Surrounding these flowers are smaller orange red poppies, crab apple blossoms, Chinese lanterns (*Physalis alkekengi*), amaranthus, and long grains of wheat. While the bouquet hangs gracefully, the whole has an energetic feel as a result of the way various flowers, including the morning glory, yellow rose, and the blue love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*), turn back upon themselves as they reach up to the light.

Mignon painted a large number of such hanging