

Roelandt Savery

Untitled (Flowers in a Vase), 1615

oil on copper
24.8 cm x 19.7 cm

Collection of the Vancouver Art
Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John S.
Davidson
VAG 83.75



Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

Roelandt Savery

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Artist's Biography

Nationality: Dutch

Born: 1576, Kortrijk, Netherlands

Died: 1639-02-25

Rolant Savery was born in Kortrijk, Netherlands in 1576. He was an important Dutch painter of landscapes, animals and flower still-lives. He was a court painter to the emperor Rudolph II. Under the influence of Jan Brueghel and G. van Coninxloo he painted forest landscapes with jungle-like fantastic rocks and ruins, the scene being further enlivened by tame and wild animals, which he was the first Dutch artist to paint, in a somewhat mannered style. The occasion for these was afforded by frequent representations of Paradise, Noah's Ark and the Flood, or Orpheus charming the beasts. Sometimes he also introduced small Biblical or genre-type figures. His hunting scenes and mountain landscapes suggest that he knew the Alps. His very tasteful bouquets are generally depicted in a stone niche and animated with lifelike frogs, lizards, and grasshoppers, beetles and butterflies. They are more tonal and realistic than contemporary flower pictures of Jan Brueghel or Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, which together with them mark the beginning of the great age of Dutch flower painting. He died in Utrecht in 1639.

Source: Bernt, Walter. *The Netherlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1948.

Artistic Context

Nationality: Dutch

Training: Studied under Jacob Savery I; Studied under Hans Bol

Peers: Jan Brueghel the Elder; Balthasar van der Ast; Ambrosius Bosschaert; Gillis van Coninxloo

Group: Northern Renaissance; Flemish School; Old Master; 16th century; 17th century

Provenance: donated by Mr. and Mrs. John S. Davidson in 1983

Subject: decorative; floral still life; exotic animals; mountain scenes

Bibliography

Dutch and Flemish Still Life Painting in the Permanent Collection

Publication

[transcription]

DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL LIFE PAINTING IN THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

Roelandt Savery

Untitled (Flowers in a Vase), 1615



These paintings are part of a small but comprehensive collection of historical art of the European Lowlands owned by the Vancouver Art Gallery. This display has been selected to demonstrate the variety of formats and the changes in style that occurred, in this genre over a brief period of time.

Dutch and Flemish artists recorded in their still life paintings more than just a pleasing arrangement of objects for viewing. These works combined the tradition of the symbolic use of plants and animals together with an interest in the sciences and the acquisition and display of rare and luxurious goods.

The origins of 17th century still life can be found in miniature painting of the late 15th and early 16th centuries in which artists made intricate illustrations for prayer books and took great care to make the images appropriate in quality to these religious books. Increasingly, the artists paid attention to decorative details of flowers and animals used as symbols of religious ideas. Emblem books are another tradition of illustration where animals and plants were used symbolically. These contained poems dealing with moral and philosophical issues, often rooted in medieval spiritualism.

The imagery found in the paintings on display can be interpreted using traditional medieval symbolic meanings. The caterpillar and butterfly represented life and rebirth; the bee, a social animal, indicated diligence and hard work. Based upon ancient Greek ideas of the four elements, the salamander, popular in medieval bestiaries, represented the element Fire; the frog represented Water; flying insects such as dragonflies and butterflies represented Air; the fruit and flowers represented Earth. Usually, the artists used a mix of flowers from the different seasons, and other objects to evoke the five senses, in order to convey the idea of the passage of time, and eventual decay. The four distinct stages in the life cycle of insects—egg, larva, pupa and adult—symbolized inevitable change and the passage of time. Flowers pointed to the briefness of beauty. This theme is referred to by the Latin term *Vanitas*, from which derives the English word *vanity*.

The symbolism is complicated by various objects having specific reference to Christian ideas, derived from the tradition of painting scenes based on Biblical stories. Nuts, such as walnuts or hazelnuts, can be considered as representing the body of Christ by the nutmeat and the wooden cross of the Crucifixion by the shell. Grapes and grapevine also are references to Christ. Flowers, such as the iris and the rose would have been understood to represent aspects of Christ's Passion.

The Biblical scriptures were also a source of ideas on the transient aspects of human life. Vanitas themes were located in many passages.

Job 14:1-2 "Man... is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

Ecclesiastes 9:12 "Like the fish, the net, and the bird, the snare: so Death overcomes Man, at an unseasonable time; and all things pass away, with time."

The majority of the paintings in this room are by artists associated with the city of Utrecht. During the 1620s and 1630s a number of painters worked here and learned from each other. In fact, a lineage of master and student, and of contemporaries can be traced.

Ozias Beert (1570-1624) is associated with the Flemish city of Antwerp and, as the eldest painter in this selection, has a more archaic style. His compositions are noted for the placement of objects side by side, with no concern for overlapping nor depicting great depth. Typical of his style and the use of neutral background colours and a brown table for his floral arrangement.

Roelandt Savery

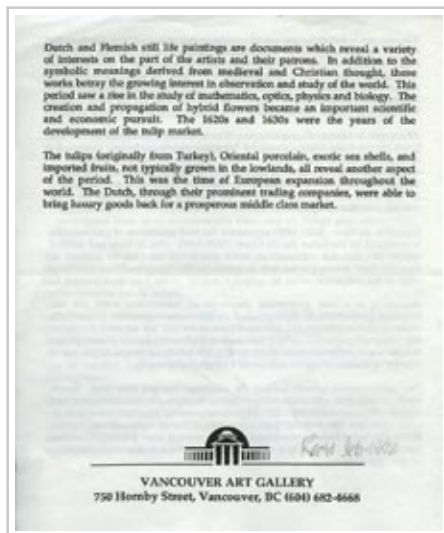
Untitled (Flowers in a Vase), 1615



The Flemish interest in using insects and reptiles to animate the floral study was brought to Middleburg from Antwerp by Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621). He taught two of these artists, his brother-in-law Baithasar van der Ast (1590-1656), and his son Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger (1609-1645). Both men subsequently moved to the city of Utrecht.

Van der Ast is noted for the use of a stone or wooden shelf that parallels the edge of the painting. Onto this shelf he would arrange flowers, fruit and exotic shells. Van der Ast frequently used the sand lizard to suggest an arrested moment of time. The younger Bosschaert is noted for his use of niches into which he would set his arrangements. His paintings are distinguished from his father's by the inclusion of a fly on the table surface. This painting has the characteristic insect.

Also active in Utrecht during this period were Rolandt Savery (1576-1639) and Jacob Marrel (1614-1681). Noted for his small paintings, Savery also used a niche as a site for his display of small bouquets of flowers, animated by reptiles and insects. His work reveals his very careful study of the natural world. He strove to obtain a greater realism than his contemporaries. Marrel (or Marellus) was a contemporary of the younger Bosschaert, and his work reveals a similar compositional format.



Cornelius de Heem (1631-1695) represents the next generation of painters. He was trained by his father Jan de Heem (1606-1684), who, in turn, had studied under van der Ast. Cornelius' work continued his father's interest in asymmetrical arrangements, but is noted for its linear qualities combined with cool harsh tones.

Belonging to a later generation, the work of Amsterdam artist Jan van Huysum (1682-1749) is distinguished by dense arrangements of carefully observed fruits, flowers and leaves. Huysum learned his art from his father Justus van Huysum (1659-1723) who had studied under Jan de Heem. Noted for the use of materials of excellent quality, his luxurious images began a new interest in the use of lighter colours and a light background.

The compositional formats used in the paintings changed over time. Beert's upright and rigid still life is very different from de Heem's horizontal and asymmetrical arrangements. The large floral painting not yet attributed to an artist from the 18th Century presents a very different compositional format. Referred to as a Festoon, the flowers appear to hang from the upper corners, instead of being arranged in a vase. This was a unique formal style not found in the 17th Century.

Dutch and Flemish still life paintings are documents which reveal a variety of interests on the part of the artists and their patrons. In addition to the symbolic meanings derived from medieval and Christian thought, these works betray the growing interest in observation and study of the world. This period saw a rise in the study of mathematics, optics, physics and biology. The creation and propagation of hybrid flowers became an important scientific and economic pursuit. The 1620s and 1630s were the years of the development of the tulip market.

The tulips (originally from Turkey), Oriental porcelain, exotic sea shells, and imported fruits, not typically grown in the lowlands, all reveal another aspect of the period. This was the time of European expansion throughout the world. The Dutch, through their prominent trading companies, were able to bring luxury goods back for a prosperous middle class market.

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Further Reading

Bergstrom, Ingvar. *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1983.

Bernt, Walter. *The Netherlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. London: Phaidon, 1948.

Paviere, Sydney H. *A Dictionary of Flower, Fruit, and Still Life Painters*. Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewish, Publishers, 1962.

Rose, Barbara. *The Golden Age of Dutch Painting*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc, Publishers, 1969.

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Dutch Painting from the Permanent Collection. May 25, 1984 - October 8, 1984.

Exploring the Collection: Still Life. February 13, 1993 - December 6, 1993.

An Attentive Eye: Dutch Painting from the Collection. February 22, 1995 - January 14, 1996.

Long Time: Selections from the Permanent Collection. May 19, 2001 - February 10, 2002.

75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.

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Archival History

Board Minutes
Acquisition Record
1983-11-24

[transcription of excerpt]

THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY ASSOCIATION

BOARD MEETING
Thursday, November 24, 1983.

PRESENT: Robert G. Brodie, President; William Bie, Peter M. Brown, Ann Cherniavsky, Ron Cliff, Gordon Davis, Brigitte Freybe, Maxine Gelfant, Janet Ketcham, Cynthia Levy, Bonar Lund, Gerald McGavin, Frank Murphy, Peter Paul Saunders, Luke Rombout, Michael Smith, Judith Pounder, Recording Secretary.

REGRETTING: Bob Annable, May Brown, Toni Cavelti, John Davidson, Stephen Fane, Bjorn Hareid, Julia Lee Knudsen, Betsey Lane, Margaret Pitts, David Radler, Ronald Shon, Morris Wosk.

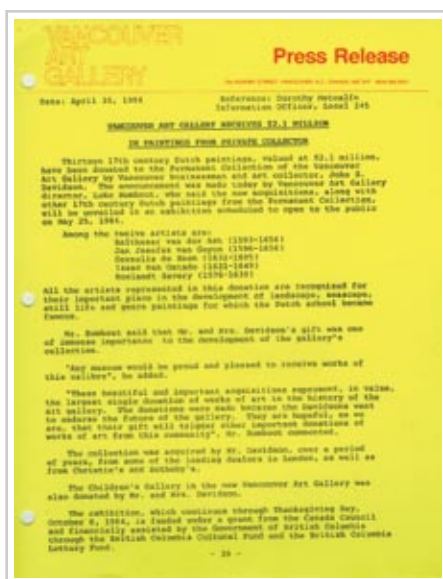
7. ACQUISITIONS COMMITTEE

Dr. Bie reported that there have been a number of donations, all of which were at different stages of processing. Dr. Bie listed the following:

BOARD MEETING
November 24, 1983

ACQUISITIONS COMMITTEE Cont'd

3) Twelve seventeenth century Dutch paintings donated by Mr. John Davidson—\$2,000,000.



Press Release
Miscellaneous History
1984-04-30

[transcription]

VANCOUVER
ART
GALLERY

Press Release

750 HORNBY STREET, VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA V6Z 2H7 (604) 682-5621

Date: April 30, 1984

Reference: Dorothy Metcalfe
Information Officer, Local 245

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY RECEIVES \$2.1 MILLION

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IN PAINTINGS FROM PRIVATE COLLECTOR

Thirteen 17th century Dutch paintings, valued at \$2.1 million, have been donated to the Permanent Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery by Vancouver businessman and art collector, John S. Davidson. The announcement was made today by Vancouver Art Gallery director, Luke Rombout, who said the new acquisitions, along with other 17th century Dutch paintings from the Permanent Collection, will be unveiled in an exhibition scheduled to open to the public on May 25, 1984.

Among the twelve artists are:
Balthasar van der Ast (1593-1656)
Jan Josefsz van Goyen (1596-1656)
Cornelis de Heem (1631-1695)
Isaac van Ostade (1621-1649)
Roelandt Savery (1576-1639)

All the artists represented in this donation are recognized for their important place in the development of landscape, seascape, still life and genre paintings for which the Dutch school became famous.

Mr. Rornbout said that Mr. and Mrs. Davidson's gift was one of immense importance to the development of the gallery's collection.

"Any museum would be proud and pleased to receive works of this calibre", he added.

"These beautiful and important acquisitions represent, in value, the largest single donation of works of art in the history of the art gallery. The donations were made because the Davidsons want to endorse the future of the gallery. They are hopeful, as we are, that their gift will trigger other important donations of works of art from this community, Mr. Rombout commented.

The collection was acquired by Mr. Davidson, over a period of years, from some of the leading dealers in London, as well as from Christie's and Sotheby's.

The Children's Gallery in the new Vancouver Art Gallery was also donated by Mr. and Mrs. Davidson.

The exhibition, which continues through Thanksgiving Day, October 8, 1984, is funded under a grant from the Canada Council and financially assisted by the Government of British Columbia through the British Columbia Cultural Fund and the British Lottery Fund.

The gallery has evaluated the particular historic, aesthetic and contextual merits of each of the works, and their special compatibility within the collection of 17th century Dutch paintings already in the gallery's holdings as follows:

The Jan van Goyen is important because we have in our present collection a painting by Adrien van der Kabel, who was his student, and another by Solomon van Ruysdael a fellow artist in Haarlem who also became a great landscape painter.

Balthasar van der Ast, Roelandt Savery and Ambrosius Bosschaert emigrated to Holland from Flanders, bringing with them the tradition of still-life painting. Savery and van der Ast were particularly important figures in the development of flower and animal painting, van der Ast's work being especially rare. They were noted for their attention to fine details and textural surfaces, together with the implicit use of literary and moral references in the symbolism of the objects presented.

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Cornelis de Heem, Jan van Huysum and Jacob Marrel continued the tradition begun by Bosschaert, Savery and van der Ast each developing his own signature, compositional arrangements and use of Vanitas symbolism. These works would complement our two flower pieces now in the collection, and the breakfast piece by Jan Jansz Treck.

We particularly value the work of Willem van de Velde the Younger, who was highly esteemed by later generations of landscape artists. He spent a considerable part of his life in England and his effect on English painting has been considerable, including Turner, who was impressed by the naturalism of his work.

The genre paintings of Pieter van Slingeland and Isaac van Ostade (son of the famous Adrien van Ostade), add a further dimension to the genre works in our collection by Jan Steen and Israels.

The views of Amsterdam harbour and the architectural study of the church interior by Abraham Storck and Pieter Neeffs are good examples of the manner in which many Dutch artists of that period dealt with the nature of reality. The architectural study by Pieter Neeffs, particularly, is the first such example to enter our collection.



Newspaper Clipping

Miscellaneous History
1984-05-02

[transcription]

Dutch Treasures donated

By ELAINE O'FARRELL

Thirteen mint-condition 17th century Dutch paintings, valued at \$2.1 million were unveiled at the Vancouver Art Gallery Monday, the gift of Vancouver Businessman and art collector John S. Davidson.

"Treasures of this type should be shared with the general public," said Davidson who amassed the collection over a period of 30 years.

The collection, featuring still life, landscapes and marina scenes by the Old Masters, both in value and calibre represent the largest and most important single donation of works of art in the history of the Vancouver Art Gallery, says VAG director Luke Rombout.

The paintings are rare examples of the early Dutch school with hand-built frames and panels. Pigments and canvasses were prepared by the artist, a painstaking task of applying nine or ten coats of chalk and tallow to create a smooth white surface. Among the twelve artist are Balthasar van der Ast, Jan Josefsz van Goyen, Cornelis de Heem, Isaac van Ostade and Roelandt Savery.

"Many of these (Dutch masterworks) were kept in old castles that were cold and damp so it's a miracle a lot have lasted as long as they have," said Davidson.

The economic laws of supply and demand have taken their toll on Dutch paintings, which are scattered in galleries throughout the world, he said.

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The donation was gleaned from dealers in the U.S. and London, including Christie's and Sotheby's auction houses.

"It would certainly have not occurred to me to make this donation (while the art gallery was still at its) Georgia Street location." Davidson said.

The new renovated gallery provides safe guards such as tightened security and environmental controls.

The gallery, to my mind, has now come of age and has the space to house (the collection)," he added.

Davidson, who also donated the Children's Gallery at the VAG, now collects later Dutch paintings and French paintings of the 1800s. He expects to make more donations to the gallery at a later date.

Seven years ago, Davidson donated 42 pieces of turn-of-the-century Western-styled art to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.

"It seems strange that someone would collect 17th century Dutch masters and cowboys and Indians at the same time," he commented at a news conference.

Rombout said the donation will strengthen the gallery's holdings in the 17th century period and encourage other collectors to donate works to the gallery.

The gallery's collection has grown by \$5 to \$6 million in donations since collectors have known the gallery moving to its Hornby Street premises, Rombout said.

Together with 17 Dutch paintings from the gallery's permanent collection, the newly-acquired works will be on display to the general public on May 25. The exhibition, which continues through Thanksgiving Day, October 8, is funded under a grant from the Canada Council.

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