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Juan de Arellano
Bouquet of Flowers in a Conch, 1644

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JUAN DE ARELLANO

(Madrid 1817 – 1870)

BOUQUET OF FLOWERS IN A CONCH, 1644

oil on canvas

57.5 x 43.5 cm; 22 5/8 x 17 1/8 in.

Provenance

José Antonio Cámara, Madrid;

Private collection, Bilbao.

Literature

Cherry, Peter, *In the Presence of Things, Four Centuries of European Still-Life Painting*, vol I, Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon 2010, no. 79, p. 100.

Galerie Terrades, eds. *Trois siècles de peinture espagnole*. Galerie Terrades, Paris 2011, no. 7, pp. 32-33.

Exhibition History

Trois Siècles de Peinture Espagnole. Galerie Terrades, 3 November - 17 December 2011.

On loan to the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, June 2016 - April 2021.

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We would like to thank Prof. Alfonso Pérez Sánchez for his confirmation of the painting's belonging to Juan de Arellano's oeuvre.

Born in Santorcaz, Madrid, under the reign of Philip III, at the age of sixteen Juan de Arellano entered the studio of Juan de Solís. Little else is known concerning his early life, apart from his training as a figure-painter of modest success. By the time he reached his thirties, he began to focus predominantly on flower-pieces, drawing on the popularity that still lifes met at the court and in local high society. Arellano would from then on make this specific subject matter his speciality, as was noted by his earliest biographer, Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco. Not only did he operate much more quickly and easily in this genre, but he was also much better rewarded for his work. He received frequent commissions from churches, monasteries and convents, nobility and private clients. Helped by his success, he established a thriving workshop outside the steps of La Iglesia de San Felipe el Real, helped by numerous assistants including Francisco Camillo, Mateo Cerezo, his own son José and son in law, Bartolomé Pérez. Palomino described his atelier as 'one of the most famous painting shops in this Court' and remarked of Arellano that 'none of the Spaniards surpassed him in eminence of this skill'.¹ He therefore rose from modest beginnings to become the foremost flower still life painter of the Spanish Golden Age.

His first works, until the mid 1650s, denote the influence of Flemish painters, sometimes reminiscent of the traditional manner of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), but especially of Daniel Seghers (1590-1661). From the latter, he took the highly elegant, firm and painstaking brushwork, smooth handling and lively colour, together with his typical garlands and allegories. He was soon after influenced by the works of the Roman painter Mario Nuzzi, called Mario de' Fiori (1603-1673), with his more lively and baroque compositions. Like Seghers and Brueghel, fine examples of paintings by Nuzzi were held in Spanish collections, where Arellano likely saw and copied them. His compositions evolved from predominantly featuring garlands to intricate floral arrangements displayed in baskets or ornate gilded vases. These designs were often inspired by Roman Mannerist prints, such as those by Cherubino Alberti.

Until recently, the earliest known work by Arellano was a 1646 *Flower Garland with an Allegory of Vanity* in the manner of Seghers, executed in collaboration with Francisco Camillo.² Painted two years earlier, the present *Bouquet of Flowers* adds to the knowledge

¹ A. Palomino de Castro y Velasco, *Las vidas de los pintores y estatuarios eminentes españoles* [abridged from Volume 3 of *El museo pictórico y escala óptica, Madrid, 1715-24*], London, 1742, p. 105.

² Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Juan de Arellano 1614-1676, Madrid, 1998*, no.1, pp. 92-93.

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of the painter's early style. As in the present case, he often employed primary colours, his favourites being deep red, intense blue, soft yellow and touches of pure white, juxtaposed to achieve great decorative value.³ His compositions can be divided into two formats: vertical, with bouquets arranged in vases on a bare background, and horizontal in which flowers in profusion are placed in wicker baskets. Our still life belongs to the first category, with the specificity of the container. Differently from the usual transparent oval vase, the *bucaro* (see for example Fig.1), we are presented here with an exotic marine conch, similar to the one visible in the 1641 Arellano's *Flowers in a Conch and Landscape* (Fig. 2) and in the 1645 *Still-Life with Shell Fountain and Flowers* by Juan Bautista de Espinosa (Fig. 3).⁴ The integration of marine elements alongside delicately rendered natural flowers reflects a typically baroque sensitivity, influenced by the contemporary fascination with the interplay of art and nature, as seen in collectors' *Wunderkammer*. This combination imbues the present painting with subtle visual correspondences: the soft, tender contours of the flowers echo the iridescent shimmer of the shell, while the undulating curves of the petals are thoughtfully juxtaposed with the concavities of the conch.

³ Luna, J. J., *From Titian to Goya. Great Masters of the Museo del Prado*, National Art Museum of China-Shanghai Museum, 2007, pp. 383-38.

⁴ Cherry, Peter, *In the Presence of Things, Four Centuries of European Still-Life Painting*, vol I, Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon 2010, no. 56, p. 210.

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Fig. 1. Juan de Arellano, *Flowers in a Glass Vase*, 1668

Oil on canvas, 83 x 62 cm

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

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Fig. 2. Juan de Arellano, *Flowers in a Conch and Landscape*, 1641
Oil on canvas, 60 x 87 cm
Private collection.

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Fig. 3. Juan de Espinosa, *Still-Life with Shell Fountain and Flowers*, c. 1645

Oil on canvas, 65 x 48 cm

Private collection.

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