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CARSTIAN LUYCKX

(Antwerp 1623 - 1658(?))

*A VANITAS STILL-LIFE with an Open Book,
a Casket, a Variety of Shells and Sculptures
on a Table Draped with a Red and a Green Cloth*

Oil on canvas

38.1 x 45.7 cm; 15 x 18 in.

Provenance

With Jean-François Heim Gallery, Paris, by 1962, as *Simon Renard de Saint-André*;

Collection of Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester (1901-2004);

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 22 April 1977, lot 65 as *Edwaert Collier*;

With Robert Noortman & Brod Gallery, Maastricht, by 1979, as *Simon Renard de Saint-André*;

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, Monaco, 6 December 1987, lot 72 as *Simon Renard de Saint-André*;

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 9 December 2005, lot 152 as *Simon Renard de Saint-André*;

With Colnaghi, between 2002 and 2016;

Private Collection, UK (presumably acquired from the above).

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We would like to thank Dr. Fred Meijer for confirming the attribution after the examination of the work.

Carstian Luyckx, also referred to as the 'Monogrammist KL', was a prominent figure in the Antwerp artistic milieu, particularly within the sub-genres of *pronkstilleven* ('sumptuous still-lives'), *vanitas* and depictions of game. He trained under Frans Francken III and Philips de Marlier, eventually working with celebrated contemporaries such as Nicolaes van Verendael and David Teniers II. A notable example of his collaboration with the two masters is *Kitchen Still-Life with a Vase of Flowers, Dead Birds and Fish* now housed in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden (Fig. 1).

Specialising in detailed and symbolic still-life paintings, Luyckx often embedded layers of allegorical references to mortality and the passage of time in his works. In the present *Vanitas Still-Life*, the frontispiece of the first volume of a French edition of Thomas à Kempis's (1380-1471) *De imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi*, the pinnacle of all the writings of the mystical German-Dutch school of the 14th and 15th centuries, is juxtaposed to an assortment of carefully chosen objects. These include a precious orientalist casket, rare shells, small classicizing sculptures, a *pince-nez* and a compass - a series of items clearly referring to a *connoisseur*. Arranged on a table draped with precious green and mauve velvet tablecloths, they suggest the quiet introspection of their owner, surrounded by the trappings of intellectual and artistic curiosity. These treasures and natural wonders also underlie Antwerp's economic success as an international trading centre and the Baroque exuberance that went with it. The contrast between the moral precepts outlined in the treatise and the lavish display of opulence on the same table generates a paradoxical contrast that would certainly not have gone unnoticed by contemporaries. A similar work by Luyckx replicating certain objects of the present painting was recently offered at Dorotheum, 3 May 2023, lot 87 (Fig. 2), while a canvas sold at Bonhams, 4 December 2013, lot 52 (Fig. 3) restituted to Luyckx by F. Meijer, probably shows the very same volume of *De imitatione Christi*. The same combination of the red crayon and the *pince-nez* on the ream of paper can be found on the lower right corner of another still-life painting now at the Birmingham Museum of Art (Fig. 4).

Our painting has long been attributed to the French artist Simon Renard de Saint-André (1614-1677), often credited for Luyckx works for having made some careful imitations, although missing the Flemish master's typical finesse of detail - see for example Renard's canvas published by M. Faré, *le Grand Siècle de la Nature Morte en France, le XVIIIe siècle*, Fribourg 1974, p. 176.

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Fig. 1. Nicolaes van Verendael, David Teniers II and Carstian Luyckx, *Kitchen Still-Life with a Vase of Flowers, Dead Birds and Fish*, c. 1670-1675, oil on canvas. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

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Fig. 2. Carstian Luyckx, *Still-life with playing cards, coral and shells*, oil on canvas. Dorotheum, 3 May 2023, lot 87.

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Fig. 3. Carstian Luyckx (sold as Simon Renard de Saint André), *A still life of an open book, bubbles, coral, a flintlock pistol, playing cards, a pocket watch on a blue silk ribbon and a variety of shells on a table draped with a red and a green cloth*, oil on canvas. Bonhams, 4 December 2013, lot 52.

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Fig. 4. Carstian Luyckx, *Allegory of Charles I of England and Henrietta of France in a Vanitas Still Life*, oil on canvas.

Birmingham Museum of Art.