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Ottmar Elliger the Elder
(Copenhagen 1633 – 1679 Berlin)

*A garland of fruit and flowers
surrounding
a roemer in a niche*

Oil on canvas
111 x 92 cm
43 3/4 x 36 1/4 in.

Signed, lower left: *Ottmar Elliger*

Provenance

Anon. sale, Paul Graupe, Berlin, 23 March 1936, lot 25, reproduced in black and white;
Anon. sale, Lempertz, Cologne, 22-26 November 1973, lot 52, reproduced in black and white;
Private collection, Germany;
Anon. sale, Galerie Koller, Zurich, 3-4 November 1995, lot 3001, reproduced in colour;
Anon. sale, Stuker Auction House, Bern, 12-27 November 1999, lot 180, reproduced in colour;
With P. de Boer, Amsterdam, 2000;
With David Koetser, Zurich, 2004;
With Bernheimer, Munich & Colnaghi, London, 2013;
Private collection, England, 2013 until present.

Exhibited

On loan from a private German collector to the Staatliche Gemäldesammlungen, Kassel & Museum Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, 1973 - 1995, inv. No. L225.

Literature

Erika Gemar-Koeltzsch, *Höllandische Stillebenmaler im 17. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols., Lingen, 1995, vol. 2, pp. 330-331, no. 116/12, illustrated.

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A superabundant garland of fruit and flowers surrounds a central stone niche containing a *roemer*, half-filled with white wine. The garland comprises a wide variety of fruit, including huge trusses of grapes, peaches, apricots, cherries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, plums and medlars. Below the niche appears a cluster of pink and white roses. A few ears of barley and some hazelnuts and acorns complete the exuberant display. Under strong lighting, the vibrantly coloured fruits emerge boldly from the dark architectural backdrop. Skilfully painted reflections of the studio windows appear in the smooth convex surface of the glass goblet.

The Danish-born painter Ottmar Elliger the Elder led a peripatetic life, which took him from his native Copenhagen, to Antwerp, Amsterdam and Hamburg, before finally settling in Berlin, where he served as court painter to the Elector of Brandenburg. Primarily a painter of flower and fruit still lifes, Elliger reportedly trained with the Antwerp flower painter Daniel Seghers (1590-1661), but his earliest works of 1653 show the strong influence of Jacob Marrell (1613/14–1681), who was working in Frankfurt at the time.

This splendid canvas dates from Elliger's maturity and was probably painted in the mid-to-late 1660s, when he was working in Hamburg, or possibly a little later, after his move to Berlin. His still lifes from this period are characterised by a profusion of ripe fruits and leaves, and occasionally vegetables, arranged in huge, tightly packed swags or garlands. Also typical is his penchant for filling almost the entire surface of the canvas with clusters of fruit and foliage, allowing very little space between or around his objects. This love of opulence, combined with a palette of rich autumnal tones, achieves an extremely decorative effect. A similarly conceived garland painting by Elliger, dated 1666, is in the Schleswig-Holstein Landesmuseum at Schloss Gottorf¹.

The tradition of painting floral garlands encircling a central image had its origins in Antwerp in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) was the first to depict religious images adorned by wreaths of

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flowers and fruit, and his pupil, the Jesuit brother Daniel Seghers developed the genre further, making it one of his specialities. In the garlands of Brueghel and Seghers the central image frequently depicted the Virgin Mary, saints, or other religious figures, and were thus intended as devotional images. The genre continued to flourish in Catholic Antwerp well into the second half of the seventeenth century. The decorative potential of the garland form also lent itself to representations of secular subjects and was frequently employed as an ornamental framing device for depictions of mythological and historical themes, city views, landscapes and portraits. Swags, garlands and wreaths of fruit and flowers were also often associated with fertility and the abundance of nature.

Whilst such a sumptuous display was no doubt intended above all to showcase the artist's virtuosity, it may be that Elliger intended to enrich his composition with a deeper meaning. Here, the ears of ripened corn seen in conjunction with the grapes could be interpreted as symbols of the Eucharist, although it seems unlikely that Elliger conceived it as such since he rarely, if ever, incorporated religious images, especially such overtly Catholic imagery, into his garland paintings. Besides, Elliger spent most of his working life in Protestant countries and towards the end of his career was called to Berlin to serve as court painter to the Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick William (1620-1688), a staunch pillar of the Calvinist faith. With the oversized *roemer* at its centre, surrounded by copious quantities of fruits of the vine, it is possible that Elliger conceived this painting as a homage to wine, although the moderately filled goblet might also signify Temperance. In the latter case, the proverb quoted by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1684) and Jacob Marrel '*Niet hoe veel, maar hoe eel*' (not the quantity but the quality) in still-life paintings featuring large, half-filled glasses of wine, would seem to be quite appropriateⁱⁱ. Another painting by Elliger depicting the same elements is in the Pushkin Museum, Moscowⁱⁱⁱ.

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The son of a medical doctor, Ottmar Elliger the Elder was born in Copenhagen in 1633^{iv}, not in Gothenburg, as his biographer Arnold Houbraken stated. Houbraken also claimed that he was a pupil of Daniel Seghers in Antwerp^v, but he may have been misinformed. Elliger worked in Copenhagen for a period in the mid-1650s, later moving to Amsterdam where, in 1660, he married the sister of the still-life painter Jacob van Walscapelle (1644–1727). In 1665, he moved from Amsterdam to Hamburg, where his son Ottmar Elliger the Younger (1666–1735) was born in 1666. In 1670, he took up an appointment as court painter to the Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick William (1620–1688), in Berlin, where he died prematurely in 1679. Although Elliger painted predominantly still lifes of flowers and fruit, he also produced a few portraits. Dated works are known from 1653 to 1678. His son Ottmar Elliger the Younger followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a painter.

ⁱ Ottmar Elliger I, *Still Life of Roses in a Garland of Fruit*, oil on canvas, 117 x 93 cm, signed and dated 1666, Schloss Gottorf, Schleswig-Holstein Landesmuseum.

ⁱⁱ Jan Davidsz de Heem, *Still Life*, inscribed '*Niet hoe veel ... (Not how much)*', 1652, private collection, formerly Kraus Gallery, Paris; Jacob Marrell, *Still Life with a large roemer*, inscribed '*Niet hoe Veel/ Maer hoe Eeel*', formerly, Sale, Fischer, Zurich, 16 November 1979, no. 1368. See: illustrations of both pictures in Sam Segal, *A Fruitful Past*, exh. cat., Gallery P. de Boer, Amsterdam & Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick, 1983, p. 32, fig. 15 & p. 112, cat. no. 21.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ottmar Elliger, I, *Garland of Fruit surrounding a Goblet of Wine*, on canvas, 141 x 104 cm, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

^{iv} According to the RKD, Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague.

^v A. Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburgh ...*, The Hague, 1753, vol. II, p. 293.