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Tomás Hiepes

Still Life with Fruit and Vase of Flowers, c. 1645-1650

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TOMÁS HIEPES

(Valencia c. 1600 - 1674)

STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT AND VASE OF FLOWERS, c. 1645-1650

oil on canvas

67.6 x 89.5 cm.; 26 5/8 x 35 1/4 in.

Signed lower left: *Thomas Hiepes F.*

Provenance

D'Estoup Collection, formed in the mid-19th century;

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, London, 14 December 2000, lot 79;

Private collection.

Literature

A. Marí, F. Q. Corella, J. Y. Gaso et al. *Incólume. Bodegones del Siglo de Oro*, exh. cat., Barcelona 2015, pp. 76-79 and pp. 130-131, reproduced.

Exhibition History

Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, *Incólume. Bodegones del Siglo de Oro*, 9 October 2015 - 28 February 2016.

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This exceptionally refined still life stands among the most accomplished statements of the Valencian still-life tradition and represents a defining work by Tomás Hiepes, the leading figure of that school in the seventeenth century. Within the evolution of Spanish bodegón painting, Hiepes occupies a singular position: while shaped by the ascetic and tenebrist spirit of Juan Sánchez Cotán and the compositional order of Juan van der Hamen, his art replaced their meditative restraint with a luminous, decorative sensibility that reflected the cultivated tastes of mid-seventeenth-century Valencia. In works such as the present example, Hiepes achieved a rare synthesis of clarity, balance, and quiet splendour, transforming humble domestic motifs into an image of serene abundance that secured his reputation, both in his lifetime and thereafter, as the foremost interpreter of nature's bounty within the Valencian still-life tradition.

Hiepes's local fame was considerable. His contemporary Marco Antonio Orti, writing in 1656, noted that the artist 'excelled in the imitation of fruits', describing him as 'the painter who succeeded in acquiring a very singular reputation'. Works such as the present example justify that acclaim. The arrangement brings together the elements that define Hiepes's mature manner: a rich but balanced orchestration of objects, a uniform and radiant light, and an atmosphere of composed serenity that elevates the domestic to the level of the ideal.

The painting may be dated to the mid-1640s to early 1650s, when Hiepes had moved beyond the strict symmetry and closed spatial construction of his earlier works towards more open and expansive compositions. Here, the inclusion of the window casement - through which a pear tree laden with fruit extends into view - introduces a subtle dialogue between interior and exterior, artifice and nature. This device recalls the open windows used by Van der Hamen and Cotán, yet Hiepes transforms their metaphysical austerity into something more celebratory and ornamental. The clouded sky beyond the casement dissolves the boundary between still life and landscape, creating an impression of freshness and immediacy unusual in Spanish painting of the period.

At the same time, Hiepes demonstrates his distinctive eye for surface and material splendour. The richly embroidered cloth, the gleaming gilt ewer embossed with classical scenes, and the monumental platter of fruit all testify to a taste for opulent refinement among his clientele - merchants, clerics, and noble households of Valencia who prized works that combined naturalism with decorative display. Certain elements in the present composition recur throughout his oeuvre: the gilt ewer, for example, is similar in type to those depicted in Hiepes's signed still life of 1654 in a private collection, Madrid. An equally elaborate vase can be found in his 1643 still life, today at the Prado Museum (fig. 1).

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The embroidered cloth upon which these objects stand is likewise a common element throughout Hiepes' career, binding together his still lifes within a distinctively Valencian decorative tradition. While the principal objects, the ewer of flowers and the bowl of fruit, are presented in a traditionally simple frontal arrangement, close to the picture plane, Hiepes has by means of the casement window and the pear tree glimpsed beyond introduced a more complex spatial element into the composition. Such an element is rare in Hiepes' known oeuvre; it can otherwise only be found in the still life of fruit, also signed and dated 1654, in the Arango Collection, Madrid.

The fruit composition - apples, pears, plums, figs, and grapes heaped upon a silver-gilt tray - forms the pictorial and symbolic centre of gravity. Hiepes's treatment of these objects is notable for its restraint: despite the abundance, the forms are clearly delineated, the colours harmoniously balanced, and the light evenly diffused. Unlike the moralising austerity of earlier Castilian still lifes, Hiepes's approach is one of cultivated delight, offering the viewer a vision of nature perfected through art.

When the painting was sold in 2000, Alfonso Pérez Sánchez suggested a date of execution in the 1640s.



Fig. 1. Tomás Yepes, *Vase of Flowers with a Triumphal Chariot seen frontally*, 1643, oil on canvas, 115 x 86 cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

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