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Pedro de Campobin, *Plate of Figs*, c. 1656

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PEDRO DE CAMPROBIN
(Almagro 1605 – 1674 Seville)

PLATE OF FIGS, c. 1656

Oil on canvas.
25 x 30 cm; 9 7/8 x 11 3/4 in.

Provenance

Private collection.

Literature

A. Marí, F. Q. Corella, J. Y. Gaso et al. *Incólume. Bodegones del Siglo de Oro*, exh. cat., Barcelona 2015, pp. 88-91 and pp. 133-134, reproduced.

Exhibited

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

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This intimate yet exquisitely wrought still life presents a shallow Talavera de la Reina earthenware dish, its tin-glazed surface encircled by a cobalt-blue fillet, heaped with ripe figs and set against a tenebrous, undefined background. In the pictorial culture of seventeenth-century Spain, the fig - emblem of late-summer abundance and, in monastic literature, of spiritual sweetness - was a favoured motif in compositions that extol both the sensuous delights of the table and the painter's virtuosity in mimetic description.

Talavera pottery enjoyed extraordinary diffusion throughout Castile during the so-called Siglo de Oro. Contemporary writers - Tirso de Molina, Lope de Vega and Cervantes among them - frequently allude to it, situating such ware in the interiors of respectable, if not opulent, households. While literary testimony has encouraged some scholars to read Talavera as a social signifier, its pictorial appearances are comparatively scarce. The decision to record an object of quotidian utility accords with the post-Tridentine valorisation of *veritas* - the sober portrayal of the material world as a conduit to moral reflection.

The earliest extant Spanish still lifes to feature figs are the two small canvases attributed to Blas de Ledesma (act. 1602–14) in the Masaveu Collection, where the fruit is served in a metallic dish. For a ceramic counterpart one must look to Juan van der Hamen y León, whose Madrid-based workshop, during the 1620s, explored an array of fig presentations: wicker baskets, small hampers, glass and bronze tazze, metal salvers, and - of particular pertinence - Talavera dishes in *Dish of Fruit, Hanging Grapes and Vase of Flowers* (1622, Real Academia de San Fernando), the paired *Still Life with Laid Table* (c. 1624, Düsseldorf; formerly coll. Marqués de Casa Torres), and other variants. Alejandro de Loarte likewise adopted Talavera vessels, though never in concert with figs.

VanderHamen's example proved formative for the next generation of bodegón painters active in both Madrid and Seville from the 1630s onwards. The present canvas, through its measured geometry, raking lateral illumination and minute handling of surface textures, aligns most closely with the Sevillian practice. It has at times been associated with Juan de Zurbarán (1620–49), whose oeuvre consists exclusively of still lifes indebted to courtly prototypes of the same decade. Yet Zurbarán invariably preferred metal bowls; the stylistic divergences in facture and chromatic temperature further weaken that attribution.

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A more persuasive authorship points to Pedro de Camprobín (1605–74). The composition shares striking affinities with his signed and dated *Still Life with a Bowl of Fruit* (1656, private collection, Fig. 1): the vantage from slightly above the rim, the oblique placement of the dish, the calibrated alternation of cool and warm passages, and the distinctive highlights that glint upon both glaze and pulp. These correspondences, coupled with Camprobín's documented activity in Seville and his predilection for single-dish ensembles, justify the assignment of *Plate of Figs* to his mature period, circa 1656.



Fig. 1. Pedro de Camprobín, *Still Life with a Bowl of Fruit*, 1656, oil on canvas. Private collection.

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