



**JACOB VAN HULSDONCK**

(Antwerp 1582 – 1647)

*“Still life with fruit”*

Oil on panel

41 x 55 cm. (16,14 x 21,65 in.)

1625 ca.

**Registered in the RKD of the Hague**

**Thanks to Professor Fred G. Meijer for confirming authorship.**

**Exhibited at TEFAF Maastricht 2022**

For this month of January, we have chosen this wonderful still life by Jacob van Hulsdonck, an important Flemish painter specialized in still lifes.

Jacob van Husldonck was born in Antwerp in 1582. He moved to Middelburg with his parents and it is likely that he received at least part of his training there. For a long time our artwork was attributed to Ambrosius Bosschaert, who was the most important still life painter in the city. However, although his influence on Hulsdonck is undisputed, it is now believed that the artist did not train with Bosschaert, but it is quite possible that he was influenced by the master's work in his early paintings.

In 1608 he returned to Antwerp, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life. In that same year, he entered the Guild of St. Luke in his hometown and a year later, he married Maria la Hoes with whom he had seven children. Between 1613 and 1623 he ran an important workshop that was very successful in his time, where he produced still lifes featuring flowers and fruits.

Following in the footsteps of his contemporaries, the great Dutch and Flemish masters, the author focuses on compositions that, as Charles Sterling clarified in 1992, convey "a poetic emotion in the face of the relationship that the artist has managed to create between the beauty of these objects and their arrangement". He thus differs from

contemporaries such as Frans Snyders, who rallied around the Baroque movement with new scenic compositions. Hulsdonck's work is quite similar to Louyse Moillon's and it is likely that their technique is mutually influenced. These issues can be seen in our painting: the dark background and minimalist setting allows us to focus on the variety, richness and beauty of nature.

Van Hulsdonck's artistic personality is inextricably linked to the specific subgenre of still life. Perhaps he can be considered the most outstanding representative of this genre outside Italy.



Starting from an elevated and deliberately rigid spatial setting, the master manages to create rich compositions that are characterized by the desire to put as much fruit as possible into a container to immediately convey a sense of fullness and fragile balance. Husldonck is strongly influenced by Osaias Beert and Jan Brueghel I, especially with regard to the way he depicts lemons, peaches, leaves, etc.



Our refined still life is not an exception, on the contrary, it masterfully exemplifies the author's style, provoking new comparisons. Based on the artist's way of working, his still lifes can be divided into groups classified according to their setting and genre. Within them, Hulsdonck rearranged and modified some



details, while maintaining a substantial consistency of substance. The variations preserved in the Orleans museum (Fig. 1) and in San Francisco (Fig. 2) are considered twins of our magnificent panel. They differ only in some colors and in the presence of a small vase of flowers. It has long been debated whether these still lifes may have some relation to vanitas, whose most famous example is undoubtedly Caravaggio's Basket of Fruit. Today, however, these observations are not considered to accurately describe van Hulsdonck's art, which instead fits better into the "formalist" style, interested in investigating the inner meaning of the aesthetics of objects in space and what it is able to communicate to the viewer.

Cherries, plums, grapes and lemons come together and give life to a musical composition balanced between realism and abstract ideas. Despite the abundance of fruit, the painter shows a genuine concern to lighten the composition by adding several leafy branches, thus infusing the painting with an ethereal atmosphere. The colors are fascinating, the fruits are lively and appetizing. The artist undoubtedly shows a very strong desire to make everything like a trompe l'oeil, without ever going beyond the limit of a striking and slightly surrealistic deception, a silent deal between the artist and the observer.



Hulsdonck recreates himself as a great master of the technique by making an authentic portrait with only four types of fruit in a simple wicker basket. with only four

types of fruit in a simple wicker basket. In spite of the austerity of the work, it is full of elegance, becoming a great jewel.



In our work, the peach is the protagonist, it evokes immortality, veracity and honor and is represented in a very realistic way. Ripe peaches fill the magnificently painted wicker basket.

On top of the austere wooden table, we find a pair of cherries related to the fruits of paradise, a lemon, which in turn, because of its sour taste is linked to pain and even death, and half a peach.

According to all the documentation preserved from the period, still lifes were highly appreciated by the upper classes to decorate their homes and fill certain rooms with joy, with which they would also delight in searching for the meaning enclosed in it.

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## **PROVENANCE**

- Private collection, Brescia (Italy)

## **MUSEUMS**

There are works by Jacob van Hulsdonck in the collections of museums in the following cities, among others: Bowes Barnard Castle Museum, Teesdale (England) - State Museum, Berlin (Germany) - Dahlem Museum, Berlin (Germany) - J. P. Getty Museum, California (USA) - Metropolitan Museum, New York (USA) - Alta Pinacoteca, Munich (Germany) - Museum of Fine Arts, Orleans (USA) Getty Museum, California (USA) - Metropolitan Museum, New York (USA) - Haute Pinakothek, Munich (Germany) - Museum of Fine Arts, Orleans (USA) - Bredius Museum, The Hague (The Netherlands) - Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede (The Netherlands) - Museum of Art, Cleveland (USA) - National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (USA) - Bavarian State Art Collections, Munich (Germany), etc.