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Galería de Arte

Soraya Cartategui

Dear friends,

In this month of June the gallery presents you with this wonderful panel by the important Dutch painter, Jan Mortel.

Best wishes,
Soraya Cartategui

**Jan Mortel**

(Leiden 1652 – 1719)

“Peaches, plums, grapes on a landscape background”

Oil on panel

33,2 x 26,3 cm. (13,07 x 10,35 in.)

Signed work

1710-15 ca.

Jan Mortel was born in the city of Leiden in 1652. He was a student of the great

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painted mainly still lifes, often combining fruits and flowers with insects and butterflies, which he carried out with great naturalness and detail, where he approached color in a very personal way, introducing points of light that illuminated certain parts of the work, making it even shine.

Also well known for his representation of flowers, which he made with a very correct brushstroke and a wonderful knowledge of the chromatic range, which filled his entire production with color.

As a great admirer of Abraham Mignon and Jan Davidsz de Heem, Mignon's master, we can find some works with a similar composition.

In addition, we know that in 1690 he was appointed official artist of the University of Leiden for his Hortus Botanicus Leiden, where he worked in close collaboration with the prefect, since it was occupied since 1709 by Herman Boerhaave.



In the painting of the Dutch Golden Age, the representation of the genre of still life was of great importance, because it is a good way to show the mastery of the painter when it comes to representing the textures and surfaces with great detail, in addition to the effects of light, which reach great realism in the works. The still lifes are often surrounded by a strong symbolism, which in many cases has to do with religion.

In our work, we find a beautiful still life represented in the foreground, illuminated with a halo of light that gives fruits of great naturalism, on a background that shows us a forest with a loving couple strolling.

As for the symbolism, we see the representation of several fruits such as grapes, peaches, pomegranates or plums.

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The symbolism of the peach has to do with its Chinese origin, the peach tree for its

early flowering was considered as a symbol of the arrival of spring and in turn, a symbol of fertility, virtue and honor.

As for the grapes, their meaning comes from the vine, associated with a symbol of both life and prosperity, linked to religious symbolism and which in turn has to do with the god Bacchus, for lust and impure thoughts.



To the right of the composition, we find three plums whose meaning comes from Japanese culture, symbol of love, beauty and innocence. It also has to do with fleeting happiness, a meaning that is very present in the still lifes of the Dutch Golden Age, linked to the *carpe diem* and the importance of living the moment, due to the transience of earthly life.

In the first place, next to some small flowers, we find two grenades on the ground. This fruit is one of which, has the greatest symbolism in the still lifes of the Dutch Golden Age. Mainly its symbolism falls on fertility and fertility, due to the numerous seeds it has. It is an attribute of Greek goddesses related to agriculture and fertility such as Demeter, Aphrodite and Hera. In Rome had a strong meaning related to marriage, many of the brides wore headdresses or beads in the form of branches of pomegranate, to promote the fertility and prosperity of the new union. As for religion, Catholicism used the pomegranate as a representation of the Church that welcomes many peoples under its mantle, likewise, this symbolism was transferred to political power as a power of dominance over other peoples.

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The composition of the still life is represented on a background of dark tones, showing a forest with tall trees whose leaves and branches appear blurred to give depth to the scene. As for the sky, we observed that it would be sunset because of the pink and orange colors it has. In addition, we find a beautiful scene of a loving couple walking hand in hand, the man puts his hand on the woman and looks at his face. By their clothes we could deduce come from the nobility.



The composition of the work is divided into two clearly differentiated scenes, on the one hand and in the first place, we would find the actual still life, composed of fruits and small flowers illuminated with a halo of light that gives prominence to this main scene. On the other hand, we find the beautiful landscape background and the loving couple strolling. This composition so special doesn't do more than beautify this interesting piece.

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MUSEUMS

There are works by Jan Mortel in the collection of museums in several cities, among others: Amsterdam (Cab. Des Estampes), Berlin Museum, Haarlem Museum, Boymas Museum - Rotterdam, Albertina Museum - Vienna, Schleissheim Museum, Ashmolean Museum - Philadelphia, Stedelijk Museum - Oxford.

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