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Galería de Arte

# Soraya Cartategui

Dear friends,

Dear friends, in this month of March the gallery presents you with this wonderful copper from the important Flemish painter, Jan van Kessel the Elder.

Best wishes,  
Soraya Cartategui



**Jan van Kessel El Viejo**

(Antwerp 1626 - 1679)

*“Study of insects with Borago flower”*

Oil on copper

10,4 x 16,2 cm. (4,09 x 6,37 in.)

1660 ca.

Brueghel the Younger and David Teniers II, of whom he was a disciple. Like his grandfather, he cultivated a wide variety of pictorial genres, among which are still lifes and flowers, animals, landscapes, allegories and religious works. As a flower painter he showed a clear influence of his grandfather Jan Brueghel de Velours. But within this theme, he could also be considered a follower of Daniel Seghers, since he painted a large number of wreaths surrounding gutters, almost always around scenes made by another painter. He also cultivated, although with less regularity, allegorical representations. He also liked to represent animals, probably moved by certain zoo interest. His preference was almost always directed towards small species, mainly fish, insects and birds. For the representation of animals, he was inspired, on multiple occasions, in the works of other painters. Jan Brueghel, Frans Snyders or Roeland Savery are some of its references. On other occasions, a biblical scene serves as an excuse for the detailed representation of a wide repertoire of fauna.



This excellent little copper made by the artist Jan van Kessel the Elder, is a detailed study of insects, a very special category within still lifes.

The work is painted on copper, a soft and bright medium, ideal for the meticulous and refined technique of Jan van Kessel I. When paying attention to each species that appears the work, we can observe that they are represented with great care, after an arduous study of each of them by the artist. They could be easily identifiable by modern entomology.

Although the intention of the author in this work is clearly the study of insects, we know that within the still lifes both of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, the



If we analyze the work carefully, we find several painted insects. All of them surrounding, or even interacting with, a delicate blue Borago flower, whose flowers take the shape of a star.

This plant has medicinal properties known and used since the Middle Ages in Europe. In its stems, it presents a fuzz to protect itself from the herbivorous animals, which we find masterfully painted in our copper

Among the insects that appear in the work, we find two different species of butterflies, the one in the upper right corner, with brown tones, with open wings in all their splendor decorated by two beautiful circles and the one on the left, perched on the stem of the flower, with a different perspective, in profile and with the wings collected.



The symbology of the butterfly is related to the metamorphosis, becoming a beautiful and polychrome insect, it symbolizes the soul, the resurrection. Although also, due to its short life and passing beauty, it is related to superficiality, vanity and frivolity.

We also found a wasp, and many other small flying insects, such as mosquitoes, moths or even a ladybug. This does nothing but accentuate the great knowledge of insects by Jan van Kessel the Elder,



since these species are represented in miniature, in a precious and very detailed way. The wasps, evoke the evil of the human being, corruption and aggressiveness. Ladybugs, on the contrary, are linked to happiness and good luck.

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The dragonfly, of great beauty and detail, is perched on one of the leaves of the flower, with the tail of a bright blue, does not do more than capture the viewer's gaze. The transparent wings are evidence of the artist's mastery. As for the symbolism of this insect, it is related to the maturity and depth of the character, with the deep understanding of the meaning of life, due to its flight.

Also, the transience of life because this insect spends most of its existence as a nymph, only survives two months in adulthood.

Regarding beetles, we see multiple species of different origin due to their color. These are represented from different points of view, giving priority to the exhaustive study of the species.



The symbolism of the beetle throughout the history of art has been of great importance, since ancient Egypt, this species constituted the symbolic concept as a solar emblem and the resurrection, closely linked to the god Kepri, god of the rising sun.



Finally, we also observe a small centipede, whose body seems to undulate and writhe.

Of other tones, with small black specks, we can even see how the artist draws the hairs of the insect with extreme care and the poisonous tweezers from behind the head. Because of its poisonous nature, it is related to magic and death.

This type of still life representations characterized by entomology, were very characteristic of the repertoire of Jan van Kessel the Elder. They are unique pieces, very careful and valued within the market for their exquisiteness. It shows us a series of different insects for their region or time of the year gathered intellectually and exhibited to the viewer as if they emerged from a mental cataloging and completely encyclopedic.

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## PROVENANCE

- Private collection, Italy.

## MUSEUMS

There are works of Jan Van Kessel I in the collections of the museums of the following cities among others: Museum of Fine Arts of Brussels - Prado Museum, Madrid - Thyssen Museum, Madrid - Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp - Museum of the Arts Decorative, Paris - Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

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