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Galería de Arte

Soraya Cartategui

Dear friends,

In this month of October we present you this exquisite interior painting made by the artist Louis de Caullery, a prominent Flemish painter.

Best wishes,
Soraya Cartategui.



Louis de Caullery

(Cambrai 1582 ca. – Antwerp 1622)

“Elegant Interior”

Oil on panel

46 x 35 cm. (18,11 x 13,77 in.)

1620 ca.

Saint Luke of Antwerp appears registered in the years 1593 and 1594 under the name "Loys Soller" as a disciple of Joost de Momper and already in 1602/03 appears as a teacher of the Guild. Later he would marry Maria Adriaenssens with whom he would have several children.

We know that he developed his artistic career in the Belgian city of Antwerp and, for the moment, no documentation has been found that allows us to state that he traveled to Italy despite the fact that his work is full of Italian influences.

Throughout his career he would collaborate on many occasions with Abel Grimmer, a prominent landscape painter. We also observe evident influences of Hieronymus Francken I and Sebastian Vrancx in his figures represented in the banquet scenes, however when he performs architectures they are closer to H. Vredeman de Vries and Hendrik van Steenwijck. As for allegorical themes, his favorite will be the representation of love in line with the School of Fontainebleau of the sixteenth century.

Compositively Caullery took great care of the arrangement of the figures in small groups, all with small and soft oval faces, thin noses, delicate lips and wide fronts. In his paintings the ocher and yellowish tones, as well as the green ones, are constantly repeated, creating a general atmosphere tinged with these colors. All his paintings have a theatrical character, full of elegance, something much in demand by the high bourgeoisie and the aristocracy of that time. On many occasions, his works have been erroneously attributed to Frans Franken II and the anonymous Master of the Crucifixion, while his landscapes of Italian cities have sometimes been confused with those of J. Swaneburgh I, Ronald Ergo, Kerstiaen of Keuninck and Anthony van de Velde.



As we can see, in this oil painting Caullery is representing an interior scene starring a high social class, possibly merchants. The era of the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century was led by economic revolutions and the incipient dissolution of feudal structures in various domains of life. This caused a marked transformation of the scale of values. In the fourteenth century began to emerge the first manufactures that thanks to their efficient production methods ended up ruining craftsmen's guilds because they were able to supply the market with an increasing amount of products. In the sixteenth century Antwerp became the port of greatest capacity, reaching up to two thousand boats anchored in its waters, this made the city the most important financial and commercial center in Europe where daily they unloaded huge amounts of merchandise from overseas, different industries settled around him. This allowed a new bourgeois social class formed by the merchants who lived in the cities, whose growing wealth allowed them to seize the agricultural land of the nobles come to less. This new experience of abundance, with a high consumption of different products, represented for all the social layers a great change and transformation that also wanted to be reflected in the pictorial art. The new wealth was shown many times through an allegory of fertility, something that we can identify later in the description of the picture that concerns us this month.

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Starting from the upper part of the painting we can observe the decoration of the room in which the scene unfolds. In this case it's an elegant room whose wall is decorated with thin stripes in a lively green color and others in a golden tone with vegetal motifs in a darker shade. On the left side we see a circular canopy made in a rich red fabric, these complements were usually placed just above the beds to close them at night and avoid passing the light from the outside while keeping the heat inside the bed. On the right we can identify a collection of decorative arts and antiques placed just in front of a grisaille, all on a chimney. This type of painting is characterized by being done in gray tones and trying to imitate the relief of a sculpture, and in this case we can see a mythological theme. It is incredible how simply with this fragment of the work we can guess that we are facing a space in which distinguished and refined people live, with a certain status that has allowed them to acquire pieces of art but also with the sensitivity necessary to appreciate them.



The four characters that appear in the central part of the painting, placed behind the table, seem to be two couples in love as we can deduce by their proximity and gestures. The girl on the left seems to have a conversation with the man next to her while she timidly touches his arm. Next we see another couple, where the woman listens carefully to what the man is saying in her ear.

In this painting we can appreciate a very important characteristic of the society of this moment, as it is that men and women spent their leisure time together without being a separation by gender as happened in other countries of the Europe at that time. This also gives us an idea of how advanced this region was for its time.

Within this fragment, what most attracts the attention is undoubtedly the rich

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beautiful dress made in green with gold details, almost as if it were made with gold threads, and with a wide neckline framed by a white necklace that matches the cuffs of the dress. Finish her outfit with an elegant hat in light tone decorated with a golden ribbon. His companion also wears delicate clothes in ocher tones with black details, sleeves in light brown and a white collar along with a dark hat decorated with a feather in the same color range.



The other pair on the other hand wears much more sober and simple clothes in black tones with some light detail in gold. In the case of the woman, she breaks this sobriety with a pearl necklace and matching earrings, and unlike the previous couple, neither of them have their head covered by a hat. This would undoubtedly indicate the small social differences within this bourgeois class of merchants. Right next to it we see three other figures, two men and a young girl dressed in the fashion of the time, and that allow the artist to complete the composition leaving it very balanced. It is also surprising how the young girl observes the viewer as wanting to share in the elegant meeting that is taking place.



Inside this elegant interior scene we find a small still life right in the center of the work that, thanks to the white of the tablecloth and dishes, stands out from the rest of the colorful composition. A dish appears full of different fruits among which we differentiate a cluster of purple grapes, oranges and what appear to be figs.

In the first place the bunch of grapes would be referring to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that offers his redemption through his blood, symbolized by wine. On the other hand the oranges would symbolize the fecundity by the abundant seeds that contain in their interior.

Many times it is represented in substitution to the apple because in Dutch the word orange (*sinaasappel*) literally means "Chinese apple" and in fact in China they used to offer oranges to new couples, becoming a symbolic request hand. Finally the figs would also

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Paradise replacing the apple tree, as a symbol of lost purity; in fact, remember that Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover their nakedness. Next to the plate with fruits we find another with what appear to be small fish. Fish has traditionally been related to faith and to Christ, but also, being the symbol of water, it represents life, birth, fertility and regeneration. Finally, in the left end of the painting we see how a young servant brings to the table a plate with what appear to be small breads that, traditionally, refers to the body of Christ. As we can see, in this small still life depicted inside our work there is a multitude of references both to the economic fecundity of this new social class and to Jesus Christ and his salvation.

In the lower part of the painting we see the three most outstanding characters of the whole painting, a man, a woman and a child who carry different musical instruments and a book, making reference again to the importance that the arts had at this moment for this society so refined.

On the one hand we see the man playing a lute, although in Spain it was also called “vihuela de Flandes” because the instrument that predominated at that moment here was the vihuela while in the rest of Europe the lute triumphed. The musician entertains the meeting with his sweet chords while he is accompanied by a child at the other end of the picture playing the violin although he holds it much lower than what is currently done, perhaps because he is still learning. Both, despite being musicians, are dressed sober but very elegant. The man is dressed almost completely in black, with a shirt and a hat in grayish tones and yellowish socks. The boy on the other hand is dressed in a pearly gray color with small details in gold. But undoubtedly, the character that stands out in the whole work is the distinguished woman dressed in a rich red and green dress.

The woman wears an exquisite dress almost in French fashion and undoubtedly draws attention to the rest of the guests. The reddish tones stand out against the white details of the neck, the upper part of the sleeves and the cuffs. In contrast, under the dress appears another layer in green with details in the central area in gold. Both tones contrast with the pale color of her skin that also helps us identify her distinguished position, since at this

not working in the field exposed to the sun.



Although she wears a necklace, earrings and small ornaments in her hair, the jewel that stands out is the one that adorns the neckline of her dress, where we see a central stone that stands out for its exceptionality. She appears with an open book on her legs. The book has always been considered as a symbol of wisdom, knowledge and science, and depending on how they are represented, they will reflect the relationship of each society with culture. In this case, as we can see the book appears open offering its interior to those who wish to read what is indicating the democratization of the culture that this new social class carried out. In the context, perhaps it is a book of scores and the distinguished woman is singing while the two musicians accompany him with their stringed instruments. Although undoubtedly, it is also referring to the great wisdom of the lady.

In short, we see that it is a very representative scene of the society of that time. In this way, we are facing a new bourgeois class that has managed to reach that social position through trade but has developed a great sensitivity for the arts and sciences, as reflected in our work with the collection of antiques, the exquisiteness of their clothes and the presence of music. Despite all this, Caullery shows us a society that has not ceased to be a believer despite its wealth and its luxurious life, something that is very well reflected in the different foods represented in the small still life of the center of the composition.

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PROVENANCE

Private collection, Paris.

MUSEUMS

There are works of Louis de Caullery in the collections of the museums of the following cities among others: Amsterdam- Rijkmuseum, Angers - Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Belfast- Ulster Museum, Bordeaux – Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen - Statens Museum for Kunst, Hamburg - Kunsthalle, Liege – Archeological and Decorative Arts Museum, Macon – Ursulinas Museum, Madrid – Prado Museum, Paris – Louvre Museum, Rotterdam- Boymans van Beuningen Museum.

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