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Galería de Arte

*Soraya Cartategui*

Dear Friends,

We hope you had a great summer!

Returning to the activity of the gallery, this September we present you this magnificent still life made by Abraham van Beyeren, an important Dutch painter of still lifes.

Best wishes,  
Soraya Cartategui



**Abraham van Beyeren**

(The Hague 1620 - Overschie 1690)

*"Still life with fruit and glass of wine"*

Oil on canvas

34 x 49 cm. (13.38 x 19.29 in.)

1665 ca.

Abraham Hendriksz van Beijeren, better known as Abraham van Beyeren was a baroque painter from Netherlands. Although in his time he wasn't known, he is currently considered one of the greatest painters of still life. Abraham van Beyeren was a disciple of Tyman Arentsz in 1636. From 1638 to 1639 he lived in Leiden and there he married with Emmerentia Stercke. A year later he would end up returning to The Hague where he became a teacher of the Guild of Saint Luke. After the death of his first wife he would raise the three daughters they had in common and in 1647 he would marry again with Anna van den Queborn, painter and daughter of the painter Crispijn van den Queborn. Anna's aunt was married to Pieter de Putter, a painter of natures and animals, especially fish. Possibly it was from Putter that Beyeren got the inspiration to create his compositions of still life with fish. In fact, the first works of van Beyeren were marine paintings and these still life with fish. However, these issues weren't very well paid at that time and due to the relative poverty of the painter were forced to change residence frequently. In this way, although he lived mainly in The Hague, he also lived in cities such as Delft, Amsterdam, Alkmaar or Gouda. Finally, in 1678 he would settle in Rotterdam where he would die in 1690.

Unfortunately, Beyeren signed his canvases with the AVB monogram and never included the date of the work, for this reason it has been difficult to make a chronology of his work. We know that in the 1640s he made marine landscapes, where the influence of Jan van Goyen is appreciated, developing a great skill when painting fish; During the 1650s and 1660s he began to make the so-called "pronkstilleven" that is, still life with fine silver, Chinese porcelain, glass and carefully selected fruits. He also began to make a series of still life with floral motifs, paintings with dead birds and Vanitas. Surely the economic need would be what motivated him to make still life because were in high demand among the richest customers. His still life are highly elaborate compositions that show influence of Jan Davidsz de Heem but he was also familiar with the work of other Dutch painters of "pronkstilleven" such as Pieter Claesz or Willem Claesz Heda, specialists in monochromatic still life. In fact, Beyeren usually uses a technique based on brown tonalities but with great precision of detail in his still life. However, despite the influence that the artists of his environment exerted on him, he knew how to develop his own and characteristic style.

The manifestation in the painting of still life developed in Netherlands in the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century, an era characterized by economic revolutions and an incipient dissolution of feudal structures in various domains of life. The theme of these works can be interpreted as an index of a new economic-social situation.

interest the whole society, coming to admire both less affluent homes and in the mansions of the upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy. The compositions of tables covered by delicacies and objects were not painted as mere copies of a group of objects placed at random, but they were compositions studied in detail piece by piece. The shape, the stage and the ingredients become part of an authentic "portrait" of the table, that is also illuminated by a light blow that passes through the window, and makes the metal objects shine in which they are reflected in turn as in a mirror, the elements that give life to the painting. In the numerous and diverse representations of the still life we find certain elements that are frequently repeated, which symbolize the values of the society of that time. Our painting presents various viands, made very carefully and studying their location well. Contrary to what one might think, the work not only shows us the rich viands that Beyeren wants to make us share, but each of these elements has a meaning. All the pieces are presented on a table that fuses with the monochromatic color of the background.



Starting from the left of the painting, a large *roemer*-style glass, very common in the Dutch still life of the Golden Age, captures all attention. The word *roemer* is derived from the Latin word Rome, since the Romans were the ones who initially brought the first grape vines to Germany. However, it could also be referring to the custom of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire to use this kind of glasses to toast. Today, this type of glass is still used to provide as part of the tradition but over the years have evolved aesthetically and

have become increasingly sophisticated. The characteristics of these glasses is that they are

which, in this case, is an allegory of the Eucharist and the blood of Christ. In many cases, in the still life, the crystal of these glasses also served as an excuse for the artist to paint the reflection of the room in which the still life was located, like a camouflaged view inside the main painting.

Right next to the glass of wine we find a bowl of Chinese porcelain with two oranges inside but only one of them can be seen clearly, thanks to the inclination of the porcelain. As we can see, the bowl is made with great skill and seems to be supported on something that allows Beyeren to place it slightly tilted.



On the other hand the orange symbolize the redemption but also the fecundity by the abundant seeds that contain in their interior although in many occasions it appears represented in substitution to the apple because in Dutch the orange word (*sinaasappel*) literally means "Chinese apple". In this way, both the orange and the bowl that contains it would also be referring to the important trade between Holland and Asia during these years.



To the right of the composition we see two bunches of grapes, green and purple, symbolizing the Eucharist and alluding to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that offers his redemption through his blood, symbolized by wine. However, this fruit, when alluded to wine, could also be identified with drunkenness but the problem with this interpretation is that it wouldn't relate to the rest of the composition as it does with religious explanation. As soon as the technique, it surprises how the artist manages to create volume by placing small points of light on the different grapes.

In the lower part of the composition we also identify a half-peeled lemon that stands out for its striking yellow color and its long curly shell that sinuously protrudes from the table. In the still life of the Dutch Golden Age it was very common to find represented a half-peeled lemon



We have to keep in mind, at that time, the lemon was considered an exotic fruit which was also very aesthetic and colorful, at the same time that it provided a delicious aroma and brings refinement and elegance to any composition. Within this context, the lemon would be referring to salvation because it has traditionally been considered an antidote to the poison but at the same time could be talking about the transience of life that may seem beautiful and sweet but its beauty fades soon and its sweetness is transformed into acidity when tasting it. The lemon is presented, along with other elements, on a pewter plate that the artist uses to play with the lights and reflections of the food in it.



Also noteworthy is the way in which Beyeren places the handle of the knife protruding from the edge of the plate thus achieving an incredible depth effect as it gives the impression that the viewer could take the knife if desired. It is in these small details where you can appreciate the great technique of Abraham van Beyeren.

Right next to the knife we find an open chestnut that due to its configuration, with a shell of thorns, has been traditionally related to the torment that Jesus suffered. However, for the same reason it also refers to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and in fact the chestnut is related to the concepts of chastity and purity. The latter has much to do with its Latin name "*castanea*" whose root is "*caste*" that would derive in the current term of chaste.

This citrus is represented among oysters, seafood that suggests a questionable life because at that time they were not considered a delicacy because it was part of the diet of the poor classes and would be representing the carnal desire as an



aphrodisiac food. As we can see they are represented next to the lemon, which represents salvation and bread, which is evidently referring to the body of Christ, therefore the reading we can make is that through Eucharist we will obtain the forgiveness of our sins.

If we admire it carefully, we can appreciate how it was done with quick and almost

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red of the wine and the white of oysters. Definitely, as we can see, this work hides a great symbolism in its strokes. The complete reading of our magnificent work has two aspects, one religious and the other moralizing. The religious meaning would be referring to the forgiveness of sins through the Eucharist while the moralizing message, so typical of Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, is moderation, not giving free rein to the intoxicating effects of the grape that flow in the carnal pleasures and their consequences. Without doubt, we would be talking about the ephemeral, life, death, the passage of time, etc.

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- Vol.I, N.112-115; E. Gemar-Koeltzsch, Hollandische
- Stillebenmaler im 17 Jahrhundert, 1995, 3.vol., Vol.2, pag.90-109.
- A Dictionary of Ducht and Flemish Still-Life Painters, Working in Oils, 1525-1725, pag. 33-34.
- Ducht Painting in the Seventeenth Century Images of a Golden Age in British Collections, pag. 167.

## PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Paris  
Antique Market, Paris, 1988  
Galleria Giorgio Caretto, Turin, 1988  
Dazzi Collection, Turin, 1988-2015.

## EXHIBITION

Turin, Giorgio Caretto Gallery, 29a Flamenco and Dutch masters of the century XVI-XVII exhibition, from 11 to 12 1988. In the position nº 7.  
Soraya Cartategui Gallery, Feriarte 2017, Madrid.

## MUSEUMS

There are works by Abraham van Beyeren in the collections of the museums of the following cities, among others: National Museum (Scotland), Fine Arts Academy (Vienna), Ashmolean Museum (Oxford University), The Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts (Stanford University, California), Dallas Museum (Dallas), Art Institute (Detroit), Art Museum (Honolulu), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Nueva York), The Rhode Island School of Design Museum (Rhode Island), The Royal Castle (Warsaw), Fine Arts Museum, (Brussels), The Cleveland Museum of Art (Ohio), The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Minneapolis), Louvre Museum (Paris), The Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles), The Seattle Art Museum (Seattle), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich, UK), The York Art Gallery (York), Bredius Museum-The Hague, Fine Art Museum-Budapest, Rotterdam Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Sneek-Fries Scheepvaart Museum.

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