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Galería de Arte

Soraya Cartategui

Dear friends,

In this month of September the gallery presents this beautiful still life, made by the outstanding Flemish painter Pieter Casteels III.

Best wishes,
Soraya Cartategui



Pieter Casteels III

(Antwerp 1684 – Richmond 1749)

“Still life”

Oil on canvas

43,5 x 34 cm. (17,13 x 13,39 in.)

Signed and dated

1732

and registered July R.F.

Pieter Casteels III is a Flemish artist from the city of Antwerp. He is the son of the painter Pieter Casteels II, from whom he learned his technique. He specialized in making still lifes, both flowers and fruits and vegetables, we can also find in his production hunting still lifes with birds and other animals. Apart from painter he was a magnificent artist and engraver. He even made textile designs. He moved to England after the invitation of an English dealer, who marketed the works of his brother-in-law Pieter Tillemans. It would be in England where he would work on request, painting both still lifes and animal drawings. Around 1713 he returned for a short time to Antwerp, and dedicated himself to making engravings, in 1726 he published a series that represented different species of birds. He was hired by a major engraving company in Tooting, and moved permanently to the city of Richmond where he would end his days.

A common characteristic in all his works is the opulence of the theme represented, something more than evident in our painting, full of different kinds of flowers, with a careful and balanced distribution, always taking into account the game of the different shades. In the Golden Age, the painting of flowers had a great boom, especially those that represented tulips, it became fashionable to have still life decorating the elegant homes.

Still lifes of flowers always refer to the transience of life, specifically, to the ephemeral beauty, which as time goes by disappears. They could also be considered "vanitas," referring to the futility of earthly possessions, which will be of no use when our time comes. Its most pagan meaning would be to understand them as an allegory of spring, and within the representations of the five senses, as an allusion to the sense of smell. But, being a Flemish painter, religious allusions are inevitable. Each of the flowers has a mystical-religious meaning, which lead us to read the work with a clear Christian content.

Casteels has a great compositional domain, our work is an explosion of different flowers placed with great elegance and composed of very balanced tones. In fact, the color of the flowers also had a symbolism attached to the message enclosed in each type of flower, for example, White symbolizes purity; Red refers to passion; Blue refers directly to the sky.



In our painting we see a careful composition full of flowers of different types that show a scene full of harmony. We know from the date of execution that it would be a late work, carried out at the beginning of the 18th century, but that follows the canons of Flemish painting of the 17th century. As for the many flowers that we observe, we know that in the 17th century the representation of these, carried a strong meaning that we will present below.



The flower that we find most abundantly represented is about the carnation,

a religious nature, thus referring to the nails of Christ, and therefore to the Passion. Another of its meanings has to do with marriage, as a symbol of conjugal love and fidelity for its discreet perfume and the durability of its flowering.

We also found some small stalks of jasmine. These flowers allude to the Virgin Mary. They also refer to grace, elegance and divine love. In addition, in some countries they use it as an offering to the deceased as it symbolizes hope and spirituality.



The touch of bluish color is given by the represented lobelias, which form a beautiful symphony of shades. As for its

symbolism, we find that it has pejorative meanings such as, for example, disinterest or indifference. However, we also find positive symbology such as trust, loyalty or harmony.

Also of blue color, we find represented to the right of the composition, small bells. These symbolize hope and perseverance. In addition to this meaning, some ancient



legends say that whoever hears the jingle of a bellflower (bell) is destined to die evoking reassuring images. This last meaning, transience of life and death, is very common within the symbolism of Flemish painting of the seventeenth century.



On the cusp of the triangular composition that forms our still life, we find three large white lilies. The lily has always been linked to innocence, purity and joy. As for his religious symbolism it has to do with the Virgin Mary for its purity and with the holiness of Joseph.

To the left of the painting we see beautiful pink hyacinths. The symbolism of this



whose protagonists are the god Apollo and the god Zephyr, who fought for the attention of the young Hyacinthos. Its symbolism has to do with joy, representing the constancy and effort values of the human being. In addition, hyacinth is a symbol of Christ.



Another of the varieties that we find in the composition is narcissus, which appears in the lower part on the table. Like Hyacinth,

the name of the narcissus comes from Greek mythology, the young Narcissus who for his vanity was punished by the gods. It is commonly related to self-esteem and the ability to overcome oneself.

The iris flower is shown on the left, blue. This flower is full of symbology, whose origin we find in Greece and in Egypt. In



the case of Greek culture, it shares its name with the goddess Iris, as a symbol of the union between the celestial and earthly world. In Egypt, its symbology was related to wisdom and faith. As for Christianity, the iris is linked to the pain of the Virgin by the death of her son on the cross.



We also find lily flowers represented. Lily means chastity and purity. It appears in the representations of the Immaculate

Conception. It is the attribute of the allegories of Beauty and Modesty.

We see that our work is completely full of the symbolism provided by the flowers so beautifully represented by the author. All of them appear painted on a neutral, black background, which only accentuates the splendor of its colors and shapes. In addition, if we look at the table on which the still life perches, we can see how some flowers are on top of it, these have a great meaning very present in all the still lifes of the seventeenth century, it is linked to the transience of time.



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it has a relief that represents four satyrs. These satyr figures are also loaded with symbolism, since they belonged to the entourage of the god Bacchus, who was famous for his indolence and his



lasciviousness. On numerous occasions he was accompanied by these beings called satyrs especially in the representations of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as a symbol of lust. In our work, we find four satyrs, in different positions, who are starring in a bacchanal, where wine is the protagonist.



As for the signature, we observe that it is in the lower right corner where we can clearly read P. Casteels.

In addition to it, the work also has an inscription in which it appears: July R.F. and the date of creation of the painting, 1732.



According to all the preserved documentation of the time, the still lifes of flowers were much appreciated by the upper classes to decorate their homes and fill certain rooms with joy, with which they would also delight in looking for the meaning contained therein. In this sense, we could interpret the still life in different ways. In the first place, we can see in it a merely artistic object, that is, a set of beautiful flowers that delight our eyes. On the other hand, an allegorical reading can be made, as the ephemeral beauty, the transience of life, with the passage of time the flowers wilt and disappear. And finally, and in a mystical-religious sense it could be interpreted as the triumph of good over evil, of God over the devil, the flowers being by their greatness and importance a direct allusion to God.

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PROVENANCE

- Collection Louis-Simon Domb (1915-2000) Paris

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MUSEUMS

There are works by Pieter Casteels III in the collections of museums in the following cities, among others
Barnard Castle- Bowes Museum, Lübeck (Germany) - St. Annen Museum - National Museum of Havana-
National Museum of Prado, Madrid.

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