

Balthasar van der Ast

1593/1594–1657

BALTHASAR VAN DER AST was born in Middelburg. Although the date of his birth is not recorded, legal action by his guardian and brother Jacob on 30 June 1618 and on 13 September 1619 indicates that Balthasar turned twenty-five (his maturity) around this time. He was orphaned when his father, Hans, a wealthy widower, died in 1609. After his father's death he may have lived with his older sister Maria and her husband, the still-life painter Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573–1621). The precise technique and symmetrical compositions of Van der Ast's early paintings show the impact of Bosschaert's art, which he could have seen in his brother-in-law's studio. He seems to have accompanied Bosschaert when he moved from Middelburg to Bergen op Zoom and then to Utrecht.

In 1619 Van der Ast joined the Saint Luke's Guild in Utrecht. While there he probably trained Bosschaert's three sons after their father died in 1621. He also taught Jan Davidsz. de Heem (q.v.). There too Van der Ast was influenced by Roelandt Savery (q.v.). As a result he began to paint in a softer, more atmospheric manner than previously and to animate his still lifes with small animals and insects. In 1632 he moved to Delft and joined the town's Saint Luke's Guild. Although most of his still lifes are relatively small, his style loosened during his Delft period when he painted a number of larger scale works. Van der Ast died in December 1657 and was buried in the Oude Kerk in Delft.

Bibliography

Bol 1960.

Bol 1982: 52–56.

1992.51.1

Basket of Fruits

c. 1622

Oil on oak, 18.1 x 22.8 (7¹/₈ x 9)

Gift of Mrs. Paul Mellon

Inscriptions

At lower right: *.B.vander.ast . . .*

Technical Notes: The support is a single, horizontally grained wood board with thin wood strips attached to edges beveled on the back. Paint is applied over an off-white ground

in thin, opaque, and translucent layers with minimal brushmarking. Discolored retouching covers scattered minor losses, particularly in the fruit. The ground is visible through small areas of moderate abrasion. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: Probably Princess Amalia van Solms, The Hague, by 1632. Private collection, possibly Mrs. Beaumont. (sale, Christie's, London, 19 March 1906, no. 17). (Fritz Gerstel Gallery, Berlin); his sale, Kunstsalon Keller & Reiner, Berlin, 21–22 January 1908, nos. 36 and 37). (Kunsthandel Gebr. Douwes, Amsterdam, c. 1938). Dr. Hans Wetzlar, Amsterdam, by 1952; (his sale, Sotheby Mak van Waay, Amsterdam, 9 June 1977, no. 5); (John Mitchell & Son, London); sold November 1977 to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia.

Exhibited: *Jubileumtentoonstelling Gebroeders Douwes* [Kunsthandel Gebr.], Amsterdam, 1955, nos. 1, 2. *La Nature Morte et son Inspiration*, Galerie André Weil, Paris, 1960, no. 1.

1992.51.2

Basket of Flowers

c. 1622

Oil on oak, 17.8 x 23.5 (7 x 9¹/₄)

Gift of Mrs. Paul Mellon

Inscriptions

At lower left: *.B.vander.ast . . .*

Technical Notes: The support, a single, horizontally grained wood board, has a slight concave warp. Thin wood strips are attached to edges beveled on the back. Paint is applied over an off-white ground in thin, opaque, and translucent layers with minimal brushmarking. Retouching covers scattered minor losses. Abrasion is moderate throughout, particularly in the darks of the shells. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: Same as 1992.51.1.

Exhibited: Same as 1992.51.1 (no. 2).

BY THE EARLY 1630s, when an inventory of their possessions was made, the Prince of Orange, Frederik Hendrik, and his wife Amalia van Solms, had formed an imposing collection of contemporary Dutch and Flemish paintings. Their taste led them to collect mythological and allegorical paintings, as well as princely portraits. Only four still lifes are listed, two of which hung in a small room belonging to the princess that also contained two allegorical