

JORIS VAN SON

(Antwerp 1623 - Antwerp 1667)

A Still Life with Roses, Honeysuckle and other Flowers and Summer Fruits in a Glass Vase with Shrimps on a Stone Ledge

signed and dated on the stone ledge 'J. VAN: SON./1661' (lower left)
oil on canvas
32 x 25 cm (12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{7}{8}$ in)

Provenance: Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 12 December 1973, lot 91, for £11,500;
with Richard Green, London, 1974;
anonymous sale ("Property from a Deceased's Estate"), London, Sotheby's, 6 July 1994, lot 86, where withdrawn.

Literature: A. van der Willigen & F. G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-life Painters working in Oils*, Leiden 2003, p. 186.

JORIS VAN SON'S EXUBERANT STILL LIFE IS A CELEBRATION of beauty and sensuality. A variety of flowers, picked at the fullness of their bloom, are silhouetted against a dark background, heightening their lustre. A reflection on the vase reveals a window in the room, the source of the light streaming onto the flowers and encouraging their bloom. In amongst the flowers hang ripe and luscious cherries and berries and arranged on the ledge next to the vase are shrimp and figs, one of which is cut open to reveal its tender flesh. Perhaps these additions refer to the abundance of food that is provided by both land and sea. Every element of the composition is treated with exceptional attention to detail and technical skill.

Although van Son's painting appears primarily to be an expression of the miracle of nature and a display of artistic virtuosity, there is almost certainly further significance to elements of the composition. The roses that feature so prominently in the arrangement are fully opened, indicating that very shortly they will wilt and die. One stem has already lost many of its delicate petals. The shrimp and fruit, whilst representing earthly plenty, have been plucked from the trees and bushes and harvested from the sea, and are therefore no longer living. As in the still life paintings of so many of his Dutch and Flemish contemporaries, van Son appears to convey a moralising message to his audience, reminding them of the simultaneously transitory nature of life, and the inevitability of death.

An obvious *memento mori* can be found in van Son's painting in the Hermitage, *The Lamentation with a Garland of Fruit* (fig. 1). Here an ornately framed *pietà* is festooned with an astonishing array of fruit. The abundance and ripeness of the fruit stands out against the severity and darkness of the *pietà*, further emphasising the contrast between life and death. The painting, with its overtly religious imagery, is a stern reminder of the uncertainty of human existence. It also encourages a meditation on Christ's resurrection, and the fruit can be viewed as a promise of redemption for the faithful. In a related composition housed in the Walters Art Museum, *Still Life with Allegory of Human Life*, van Son replaces the Virgin and Christ with a skull, burning candle and hourglass, clear reminders of the brevity of human life and the proximity of death.

Van Son, a specialist in still life painting, became a master in the Antwerp Guild of St Luke between 1643 and 1644. He was greatly influenced by the work of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-c.1683), a Dutch artist, renowned for

his still life paintings, who settled in Antwerp and painted with remarkable colouristic splendour and vitality. In his paintings of religious symbols framed by cartouches and flower garlands, van Son took particular inspiration from the work of Daniel Seghers (1590-1661).



Joris van Son, *The Lamentation with a Garland of Fruit*,
The Hermitage, St. Petersburg; Collection of P. P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky,
Petrograd, 1915 (Figure 1)

