

Bijl-Van Urk

Jan Philip van Thielen

Mechelen 1618 - 1667 Boschoot

A Bouquet of Flowers in a Glass Vase

Oil on panel 48.5 x 35.5 cm

Signed lower right: "I.P. Van Thielen F"

Provenance

Sale Ushaw College et al. (anon. property), London (Sotheby's), 9 May 1973, lot 28, ill.
 With Jacques Leegenhoek, Paris, 1974
 With Richard Green, London, 1974
 With Salomon Lilian, Amsterdam, 1993
 With Noortman Master Paintings, Maastricht
 Private collection, The Netherlands

Exhibited

London, Richard Green Gallery, *Summer exhibition of Dutch, Flemish and Italian old master paintings*, 1974, nr. 24, ill.
 Maastricht, TEFAF (stand Lilian), 1994

Literature

M.-L. Hairs, *Les peintres flamands de fleurs au XVIIe siècle*, 2 vols., Brussels 1985, vol. 1, p. 268
Art & Value 1 (1993; September), nr. 2 (adv. Lilian)
Tefaf, Maastricht 1994, p. 95, ill. (adv. Lilian)

Flowers were Van Thielen's specialty. Following the lead of his teacher Daniel Seghers (1590-1661) he painted them in different formulae. Some of them are festoons, others garlands encircling cartouches framing an image showing a religious figure or scene, often by Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607-1678), with whom he collaborated on a regular basis.¹ The present painting is one of the master's rare bouquets. Marie-Louise Hairs was able to list about twenty of them in her *catalogue raisonné* of Thielen's works (see literature). Dated works are known from 1645 until the year of his death, but almost no bouquets are dated.² It is sometimes suggested that the development of his signature may be used as an aid in dating his paintings.³ For instance, those signed 'I. P. Van Thielen Rigouldts' (after his mother) would from the 1640s, while the signature 'I.P. Van Thielen Heere Van Cowenberch' is are to be found on his late works of the 1660s, when he assumed the title of Lord Cowenberch. The type of signature on our painting - 'I.P. Van Thielen' - is said to be typical for works painted after 1650. All of his life Van Thielen remained faithful to the effective scheme of representing flower bouquets before a plain and empty backdrop, with the edge of a tabletop or ledge defining the pictorial space. Here, the brilliantly illuminated array of flowers is arranged

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in an elegant footed vase. The flowers include roses, tulips, carnations, forget-me-nots, snake's head fritillary and an iris. Even though the periods during which these different species blossom largely overlap it is impossible that Van Thielen could have studied this bouquet from life.⁴ Such artificial bouquets were the rule rather than the exception. Although many of the flowers depicted harbour symbolic meaning, in selecting their flowers the beauty of the species was the most important criterion for Van Thielen and his colleagues.⁵ The varied and sometimes complex shapes of the flowers invited these artists to show off their virtuosity and technical prowess. Such is the case here as well, albeit on a restrained level. The petals are crisply highlighted and leap forward from the dimly lit background. Thielen eloquently counterbalanced the colours and shapes of the flowers achieving a beautiful simplicity.

Jan Philips van Thielen was the son of Librecht van Thielen, Lord of Couwenburgh, and Anna Rigoultz. Van Thielen trained with his brother-in-law Theodoor Rombouts (1597-1637) in 1631-32 and then became Daniel Seghers' only pupil. In 1641-42 he registered in the guild as an independent master. Two years before, in 1639, he had married Francisca de Hemelaer, the sister-in-law of the aforementioned Erasmus Quellinus, and with her had nine children. Three of their daughters became flower painters themselves. On 9 March 1660 the artist was recorded as a *buitenpoorter* (a non resident citizen) in Antwerp and on 14 March he was enrolled in the guild of his native Mechelen, where he would remain the rest of his life.

Notes

¹ For this collaboration, see: J.P. de Bruyn, 'Erasmus II Quellinus en de bloemenschilder Jan-Philips van Thielen: catalogus van een samenwerking', *Bulletin des musées royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1974-80), pp. 207-244.

² In P.C. Sutton et al., *The Age of Rubens*, exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Toledo Museum of Arts, 1993/94, p. 521 Marjorie Wieseman writes that no dated floral bouquets exist but a few are listed in A. van der Willigen & F.G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-Life Painters Working in Oils, 1525 – 1725*, Leiden 2003, p. 195 (Dunkirk, 1654; 'BSG' 1663).

³ This is suggested and explained in an entry of a sales catalogue of Christie's (London, 3 July 2012, lot 38).

⁴ For instance the snake's head fritillary flowers from March to May. Forget-me-nots are spring flowers. The yellow iris and carnations flower from May to June.

⁵ For some remarks on the meanings a flower piece by Van Thielen could elicit, see for instance: P.C. Sutton et al., *A Moral Compass. Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century Paintings in the Netherlands*, exh. cat. Grand Rapids Art Museum, 1999, p. 88.