

Abundant Fruit, Roesen

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ABUNDANT FRUIT ARTIST: ROESEN 1858 G303 2005.96

Summary: American art in the 19th century was similar to 17th century art in Europe. There was demand for paintings which would serve the purpose of decoration as opposed to art to display principles of religion or politics. The rise of the wealthy classes brought with it an interest in leisure accomplishment and beauty and this supported a succession of still life and genre paintings.

Severin Roesen, a German immigrant had been trained as a porcelain painter. His early works are reminiscent of those by Van Huysum (1682 – 1749) or Van Os (1744-1808). The MIA “Still life with Fruit” is a later more personal style (not on view) as well as the “Abundant Fruit”. These incorporate an American flavor such as found in the works of Raphaelle Peale. Roesen has equated beauty with harmony and order in this carefully organized work. The fruits are both local and exotic. In the work of Abundant fruit the sheer size of the painting is remarkable in that there are only six works of this scale attributable to Roesen. (taken from Labels of Abundant Fruit and Still Life with Fruit (not on view))

Possible Questions:

1. What makes this painting appear luscious?
2. What textures might be found in this painting?
3. What scents might this painting have?

Artist Bio: Roesen was born in Cologne Germany in 1815. He immigrated to NY then to Pennsylvania. He died in 1872. Little is known about his life. He was said to be fond of beer and would often invite people to his home and share his pipes and beer with them. One hotelier and brewer, Jacob Flock owned more than fifty paintings by Roesen which were presumably traded for lodging and for beer. The artist became somewhat famous in the last century as the First Lady Jackie Kennedy displayed his work at the White House. .

His paintings show meticulous attention to detail in their precise arrangements and close brushwork however his subject matter did not change throughout his career. Usually he merely rearranged and reassembled stock elements. . The plate of strawberries is a common motif. He may have a glass or bottle of champagne or goblet typically on the side. .Branches of grapes or wine leaves often are composed in an S curve and lead the viewers eye over the display. He does have a painting now at auction for \$600,000. (Wikipedia)

STILL LIFE PAINTINGS!

Definition: A still life is a work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter typically commonplace objects which may be either natural (food and flowers etc) or man made (drinking glasses books vases etc)

The writer thinks that still life's have been unjustly marginalized in the last couple of centuries. Generally artists do not focus on still life but it may be an addition part of their repertoire. . ie Cezanne and Matisse to mention a few. Still Life has not been at the for front of art since the Dutch paintings of the 17th century. Still Life painting is very attractive and can be highly skilled. The viewer can appreciate the composition the use of shading (Cezanne) and possibly the symbolism involved.

The Atlantic Monthly Jan 9 2011 : Robert Musil said that "all still lifes are actually paintings of the world on the sixth day of creation, when God and the world were alone together without man!" . .Still life's have a quieting effect on us. They do not merely invite us to contemplate they actually switch off, however briefly the interior chatterbox. "

Apparently Still Life has been with us as long as art..possibly on the ancient caves of Lascaux France. But the first record in art books was with the Romans and the Hellenistic period about 1-3 century BCE. At this time it was decorative art and an imitation of nature, The Romans had artwork called "the unswept room" mosaics with food in various places on the floor to nourish the thirsting souls of the dead. Roman Villas would have mosaics in their rural villas. They would include motifs of partridges or fruits or fish. They would often signify the opulence of the household. Also beginning in Roman times the tradition of the use of the skull in paintings as a symbol of mortality and earthly remains, often with the accompanying phrase *Omnia mors aequat* (Death makes us all equal). " do not seek escape from earth but truly savor the fruits of earth" (1)A still life may contain fruit and demonstrate the fruit as fresh, ripe and then overripe or waning. This would also signify the brevity of life. The technique of *tromp-l'oeil* began in the roman time and continued. This technique involves extremely realistic imagery in order to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects appear in three dimensions. The still life artform was not so popular during the Middle Ages.

By 1300 beginning with Giotto and his pupils still life painting was revived in the form of religious wall paintings which depicted everyday objects This continued through the Renaissance art. They may be reflected on the shutters of private devotional pictures. Petrus Christus portrait of a bride and groom

visiting a goldsmith is a typical example of incorporation the still life into a religious painting. The painting would be allegorical in nature but with a table of of coins vessels and or flowers .

The sixteenth century experienced an explosion of interest in the natural world and the creation of lavish botanical works. New plants such as the tulip were developed. Paintings and interest changed from the religious content to moral lessons. Sometimes there was a crossover with today what we would refer to as genre painting. Still life developed as a separate category in the Netherlands in the last quarter of the 16th century. The Netherlands lead Europe in both botany and it's depiction in art.

Especially popular in this period were vanitas paintings in which sumptuous arrangements of fruit and flowers books, statuettes vases,coins, jewelry, paintings, musical and scientific instruments, military insignia , fine silver and crystal were accompanied by symbolic reminders of life's impermanence. Additionally a skull, an hourglass or pocket watch a candle burning down or a book with pages turning would serve as a message of the brevity of life also fruits and flowers beginning to spoil would emphasize this message.

The eighteenth century the religious and allegorical connotations were dropped and kitchen table paintings evolved into calculated depictions of varied color and form displaying everyday foods. French aristocracy employed artists to execute paintings of extravagant still life subjects without the moralistic vanitas message of their Dutch predecessors.

STILL LIFE SYMBOLISM:

The most common flowers and their symbolic meanings include: rose (Virgin Mary transience Venus Love); lily (Virgin Mary virginity purity of mind or justice) tulip (showiness, nobility) sunflower (faithfulness divine love devotion) violet (modesty, humility) columbine (melancholy) poppy (power sleep death) As for insects the butterfly represents transformation and resurrection while the dragonfly symbolizes transience and the ant hard work and attention to the harvest. -

SYMBOLISM FOR OUR PAINTING ABUNDANT FRUIT

Strawberry - food of the blessed symbolize heaven

Grapes – Eucharist

Apple – temptation also redemption

Cherry – passion of Christ

Plum – fidelity or dark plum Christs passion and death

Pear – sacred female womb

Lemon – due to yellow color may be golden apples rich in curative properties connote salvation as grown in sunlite bears fruit thru the year . .may mean fidelity many meanings, , thru history

Peach – truth trinity due to seed pit and fruit fruit of salvation if seen in Christs hand

NINETEENTH CENTURY

With the Academie francaise which held a central role in Academic art still life began to fall from favor,. The Academics taught the doctrine of the Hierarchy of genres which held that a painting artistic merit was based on it's subject primarily therefore images of Biblical mythological or allegorical events were favored. Later in the century this all changed with the Salon de Refuse and the Impressionists and other made contributions to still life paintings. ..ie Vincent van Gogh Sunflowers Edouard Manet Carnations and Clematis Henri Fantin Latour White Roses Chrysanthemums in a Vase Claude Monet Paul Gaugin.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

Matisse with bold flat outlines filled with bright colors, Cezanne with his use of shading leading to Cubism.

And we have only touched the surface.. .

Resources:

[Wikipedia.org/wiki/still_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Still_life)

Ebert-Schifferer, Sybille Still Life A History Harry N. Abrams, NY 1998

Mondadori Electa Nature and It's Synbils Getty Pub 2003



Glass bowl of fruit and vases. Roman wall painting in Pompeii (around 70 AD), Naples National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Sunflowers or Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers* (1888), National Gallery (London)

Key words:

Trompe-l'oeil : French for deceive the eye art technique involving extremely realistic imagery in order to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects appear in three dimensions. .the Roman picture below is one example

Vanitas paintings: a type of symbolic work especially associated with N European still life painting of 16 and 17 century. The word is Latin meaning "emptiness" and loosely translated corresponds to the meaningless of earthly life and the transient nature of vanity (Wikipedia)

Bodegon painting: Spanish art a still life painting depicting pantry items often arranged on a simple stone slab

Mimesis: imitation of nature