

Chef-d'oeuvre

Hello good sirs, I am Balthasar van der Ast of the Dutch. I was born in 1593 and painted my masterpiece, *Still Life with Tilted Basket of Fruit, Vase of Flowers, and Shells* in about 1640. Well now on to the meat. My piece is composed of fruits, flowers, and shells from the Mediterranean and Asia inside a green German vase and an angled Chinese bowl. Around the fruit, there are multitudes of animals; lizards scurry around the foreground, a parrot appreciates the beauty on a branch in the middle ground, insects flutter about, and spiders wait patiently in webs. I created a triangle like perspective: the triangle of life. All the animal's hard work in pollinating the plants and keeping away parasites culminates in the creation of the spectacular flowers and fruit in the top of the image.

The strong chiaroscuro between the fruit and the animals creates direct contrast between them. It's natural. Most lizards, spiders, and insects' biological color-schemes are dark. On the other hand, those of flowers and fruits are colorful. I attempted to recreate reality. Whether stark or beautiful.

Why? I was greatly affected by the Dutch Golden age of Painting. Specifically, my teacher: Ambrosius Bosschaert. But rather than painting about religious or portrait images like my peers, I tried to create spectacular still lifes of everyday scenes. Mine did not seem staged. Rather they were natural. Why try to exemplify the unordinary? And why try to deprecate the extraordinary? Indeed, still lifes afforded me an opportunity to display nature, texture, contrast, and value.

I based many of my works upon the amazing scenes that surrounded my Utrecht home. Still, most of my works (such as this one) focus on the life of faraway lands. I wanted to educate my fellow Dutch citizens about the world; just because I can afford to travel doesn't mean they

can. And others seemed to be influenced by them; as time progressed, more and more people seemed to be painting landscapes, scenes of everyday life, and still lifes similar to mine.

An Amsterdam man once summarized my life: “In flowers, shells, and lizards, beautiful.”

