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ADRIAEN COORTE
Middleburg ? c. 1660 – after 1707

A Still Life of Fruit on a stone Ledge

Oil on Canvas, 58 x 46 cm
Signed and dated, lower right: *A. Coorte, i688.*

Provenance: Jan Smit; his sale, A. Mak, Dordrecht, 12-14 December 1950, lot 2;
H. F. van Walsem, Eindhoven, by 1958;
Thence by descent until sold, "The Property of a Gentleman", Sotheby's, London, 8 July, 2009, lot 8 ($560,700);
With Johnny Van Haeften Limited, London, 2009;
Private collection, England, 2010-2021.

Exhibited: Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, *Adriaen Coorte: Stillevenschilder,* 1958, no. 3

Literature: L. J. Bol, 'Adriaen S. Coorte, stillevenschilder', in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, vol. IV, 1952-53, p. 214, no. 8;
L. J. Bol, *Adriaen Coorte: Stillevenschilder,* exhibition catalogue, Dordrecht, 1958, p. 12-13, no. 3, reproduced;
K. Müllenmeister, 'Adriaen Coorte' in *Weltkunst*, vol. DLV, October 1975, p. 1603;
L. J. Bol, *Adriaen Coorte: A Unique Late Seventeenth Century Dutch Still-Life Painter,* Assen 1977, pp. 5, 15 (notes 29, 30, 32), 46, no. 13, reproduced fig. 9;
S. Segal, in N. Bakker *et al***,** *Masters of Middelburg: Exhibition in honour of Laurens J. Bol*, exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam, 1984, p. 90;
Q. Buvelot, *The still lifes of Adriaen Coorte (active c. 1683-1707), with Oeuvre Catalogue,* exhibition catalogue, Zwolle, pp. 32 (note 92), 88, no. 11, reproduced p. 89, no. 11.

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An arrangement of late summer fruits appears on a bare stone ledge. The composition is dominated by a long stem of grapevine, bearing leaves, tendrils and tight trusses of green and red grapes. Two medlars, a white-fleshed peach and half a fig lie on the ledge, together with a small piece of succulent flesh cut from the fig, a branch of apricots, some plums and a melon. The background appears as a dark, neutral space, across which flutters a small, blue butterfly.

A clear light enters obliquely from the left, illuminating the brightly coloured objects in the foreground and the flat surface on which they lie. Strong contrasts of light and shade emphasise the roundness of each fruit and heighten the illusionistic effects, such as the long shadows cast by the items which overhang the front of the ledge and the chips and cracks in the stonework. Meticulous attention has been paid to the description of the textures, from the downy skins of the peach and apricots to the ribbed rind of the melon, the bloom on grapes and the intricately veined leaves. Small pinpricks of white are reflected in the clusters of grapes, which glow like translucent orbs. The subtle lighting produces a warm and mysterious effect.

The paintings of Adriaen Coorte are almost as enigmatic as the man himself, about whom virtually nothing is known. His dates of birth and death have not been discovered, but he was probably born around 1660. As far as we can tell from his many dated paintings, he was active from 1683 to 1705, or perhaps 1707. He may have served his apprenticeship in Amsterdam, since his earliest works from 1683-85 depict birds in park-like settings, derived from Melchior de Hondecoeter[i]. For most of his career, Coorte probably worked in or around the city of Middelburg, where in 1695/6 he incurred a fine for selling paintings whilst not being a member of the local painters' guild[ii]. The regular appearance of his name in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Middelburg inventories and auction catalogues lends weight to this assumption. During his lifetime, he probably enjoyed only local or regional fame and after his death his name was largely forgotten. His skill and artistry were not fully appreciated until the latter half of the twentieth century, when he was rescued from obscurity by the art historian Laurens J. Bol. Today, Coorte's modest but evocative still life paintings are greatly prized by collectors and museums.

The first half of the seventeenth century was the heyday of still life painting in Middelburg. During this period, the city was home to several major artists, including Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621) and Balthasar van der Ast (1593/4-1657). However, by the time Adriaen Coorte began to paint, the tradition had all but died out and few artists were still active in the region: thus, for much of his career, Coorte must have worked in the relative isolation of Zeeland, far from the major centres of art, which may account for his highly individual style. His mature works are characterised by an extreme simplicity and restraint, in complete contrast to the contemporary fashion for luxurious and over-abundant displays.

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Since Coorte dated many of his paintings, it is possible to trace his development with some certainty. This painting of 1688 belongs to his early period, but is already in a style which is unmistakably his own. The artist had begun painting fruit pieces three years earlier. At first he employed a stone table with a moulded edge, partly covered by a cloth, in the manner of Willem van Aelst, or a stone niche, reminiscent of his Middelburg predecessors. By 1687, he had introduced the stark, square-cut stone ledge which was henceforth to be a constant feature in his oeuvre and his motifs appear as if spot-lit against a dark background. Coorte's works from his early phase are larger, more complex and contain a greater variety of objects than his later paintings. Here, for instance, the artist has depicted seven different types of fruit, including a melon and a stem of grapevine, both of which are unique within his oeuvre. Also typical of his early period is the use of a canvas support, whereas from about 1690, he painted mostly on paper, which was later laid down on panel or canvas[iii]. From 1689-1695, there seems to have been a hiatus in Coorte's output, when he produced very little, but in 1696 he resumed painting with renewed vigour. The majority of his works belongs to this later phase of his career which lasted until 1707. During this period, his works have a tendency to decrease in size, becoming simpler and more concentrated: his later still lifes often depict only a single type of fruit, vegetable or nut in almost minimalist surroundings. His series of paintings of seashells was produced between 1696 and 1698.

The renewal of interest in Adriaen Coorte began in the twentieth century with the writings of Laurens J. Bol[iv]. In 1958, during his term as Director of the Dordrechts Museum, Bol organised the first exhibition devoted to the artist's work. The exhibition, comprising twenty-one still lifes, was instrumental in introducing the charms of the "little Zeeland master" to a wider audience. The present painting made an appearance in that show, but subsequently was not seen in public for half a century until its re-emergence on the art market in 2009.

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[i] See Quentin Buvelot, *The Still Lifes of Adriaen Coorte,* Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague, 2008, p. 20-20-24.

[ii] See: A. Bredius, in F. D. O. Obreen, *Archief voor Nederlandsche Kunstgeschiedenis,* vol. 4, 1877, p. 229.

[iii] See: Quentin Buvelot, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-61, who discusses the *marouflé* technique used in Coorte's paintings. Recent research suggests that in many cases his works on paper were pasted on to canvas or panel after they were painted, perhaps after Coorte's death.

[iv] L. J. Bol, "Adriaen S. Coorte, stillevenschilder", *Nederlandsch Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 4 (1952-1953), pp. 193-232 & L. J. Bol, *Adriaen Coorte: A Unique Late Seventeenth Century Dutch Still-Life Painter,* Assen/Amsterdam, 1977.