

Bosschaert, Ambrosius

Dutch, 1573 - 1621

BIOGRAPHY

Ambrosius Bosschaert III (often referred to as Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder) was one of the pioneers of Dutch still-life painting. Bosschaert was born in 1573 in Antwerp, the son of the artist Ambrosius Bosschaert II and his wife, Johanna.[1] He presumably received his artistic training from his father. It is likely that Bosschaert began his career depicting rare and exotic flowers and fruit in botanical gardens, and some of his drawings may have been made for the botanist Carolus Clusius. It is certain that Bosschaert used such drawings to compose his paintings, which often include identical flowers, sometimes rendered in reverse.

Following Antwerp's reconquest by Spanish forces in 1585 and the subsequent expulsion of all non-Catholics, the Protestant Bosschaert family moved to Middelburg in about 1589. There the artist joined the Saint Luke's Guild in 1593. "Ambrosius Bosschaert" is listed as dean of the guild in 1597, 1598, 1603, 1604, and 1613, but it is unclear whether these dates pertain to Bosschaert or his father. Middelburg, a prosperous trading center and the capital of Zeeland, was renowned for its botanical gardens, the most important of which was established in the 1590s by the great botanist Matthias Lobelius. After Lobelius left for England in 1602, his herb garden was transformed into a flower garden and was almost certainly filled with exotic species imported from the Balkan peninsula, the Near and Far East, and the New World. Collectors at this time particularly admired bulbous plants such as the Dutch iris, the narcissus, the scarlet lily, the fritillaria, and, above all, the tulip—all the flowers whose bright colors and dramatic forms frequently accent early seventeenth-century paintings.

In 1604 Bosschaert married Maria van der Ast, who came from a wealthy Middelburg family. Her younger brother, the painter Balthasar van der Ast (Dutch, 1593/1594 - 1657), lived with the couple and undoubtedly studied with his new

brother-in-law. Bosschaert had an extremely successful career in Middelburg, both as a painter and as an art dealer. He was also an effective teacher, which ensured that his distinctive style of painting was carried on by his talented students, who included not only Van der Ast, but also the artist's sons Ambrosius IV (1609–1645), Johannes (1610–1628), and Abraham (b. 1612/1613–1643).[2]

In 1614 Bosschaert III moved to Amsterdam. He remained there only a short time before moving first to Bergen op Zoom (1615) and then to Utrecht (1615–1619), where he joined the Saint Luke's Guild in 1616. Bosschaert and his wife eventually moved to Breda (1619–1621), where the artist executed this painting in the year of his death. Bosschaert died in The Hague on a trip to deliver a flower painting to a member of the court of Prince Maurits, for which he apparently was paid 1,000 guilders.

[1] In the family tree, Bosschaert is known as Ambrosius III Bosschaert. For the complete genealogy of the Bosschaert family, starting with Ambrosius I, see <http://www.bosschaerts.be/genealogy/register.php?personID=119141&tree=W1-bosschaerts&generations=5> (accessed February 6, 2014). The website includes links to biographies.

[2] Bosschaert's son Ambrosius IV (1609–1645) is known in Dutch art history as Ambrosius Bosschaert the Younger.

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