COLNAGHI



Juan van der Hamen y León
Still Life with Pears, ca. 1628–31

JUAN VAN DER HAMEN Y LEÓN
(Madrid 1596 – 1631 Madrid)

STILL LIFE WITH PEARS, ca. 1628–31

Inscribed lower right in cream-white paint: '*109.*'

Oil on canvas
21 x 27.8 cm
8 ¼ x 11 in.

Provenance

Andrés de Villarroel (d. Madrid, 16 March 1659), platero de cámara (silversmith to the royal household) and tasador de las Reales Joyas (appraiser of the royal jewels) to Philip IV, Madrid, by 11 May 1655 (as "otro platillo con çermeños", one of "Quatro fruticos originales de Juan de Valderamen");
Probably his son, Juan Bautista de Villarroel, also platero de cámara and tasador de las Reales Joyas, Madrid, to whom all the movable goods, including the paintings, were assigned in the partition of 7 May 1659; still alive 18 January 1672 (date of his will);
Antigüedades Linares, Madrid, by June 2015;
Private collection, Paris.

Exhibitions

La poesía cotidiana. Bodegón español de los siglos XVII y XVIII / Everyday Poetry: Spanish Still Life Painting of the 17th and 18th Centuries, Colnaghi, Madrid, 11 February – 9 March 2026;
The Danger of Beauty, Colnaghi, Madrid, 1 – 29 October 2026.

Comparative Literature

Jordan, W. B., *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age, 1600–1650*, exh. cat., Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, 1985;
Burke, M. B. and Cherry, P., *Collections of Paintings in Madrid 1601–1755*, Los Angeles, The Getty Information Institute, 1997, vol. I;
Cherry, P., *Arte y naturaleza. El bodegón español en el Siglo de Oro*, Madrid, Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 1999;
Jordan, W. B., *Juan van der Hamen y León y la corte de Madrid*, exh. cat., Madrid, 2005;
Portús, J. et al., *Lo fingido verdadero. Bodegones españoles de la colección Naseiro adquiridos para el Prado*, exh. cat., Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2006;
Luna, J. J., *El bodegón español en el Prado. De Van der Hamen a Goya*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2008;
Ruiz, L., in *Portrait of Spain. Masterpieces from the Prado*, exh. cat., Brisbane, Queensland Art Gallery, 2012.

Archival Sources

AHPM, Prot. 6671, ff. 454r–465r: will of Andrés de Villarroel, 28 April 1655, before the notary Francisco de Morales;

AHPM, Prot. 6919, ff. 405r–410r: autograph Memoria and declaration of the goods of Andrés de Villarroel, signed Madrid, 11 May 1655, inserted in an auto of 13 April 1656;
AHPM, Prot. 6685, ff. 594r–609: partition of the goods of Andrés de Villarroel, 7 May 1659;
AHPM, Prot. 6227, ff. 23r–30v: will of Juan Bautista de Villarroel, 18 January 1672.


109.

About two dozen small pears are heaped on a broad, shallow dish of greyish metal. Some are shown in profile with their long stems, while others are turned to show their undersides, their yellow-green skins flushed with orange red. The dish rests on a dark reddish-brown surface against a near black ground. A raking light from the left picks out each fruit, throws a soft shadow to the right, and lets the warm colours of the pears reflect in the polished rim. These are almost certainly *cermeñas*. The Real Academia defines the fruit as "una pera pequeña muy aromática y sabrosa, y madura al fin de la primavera" (a small pear, very fragrant and tasty, that ripens at the end of spring).[1] The *cermeña* was one of the earliest fruits of the Castilian year, and seventeenth-century documents often give it the masculine form *çermeño*. The tiny size of the fruit, its round shape and its blush match the type closely, and they distinguish the picture from the larger, elongated pears that Van der Hamen usually painted in baskets or hanging from strings.

The canvas belongs to a distinct and still small group in Van der Hamen's work: single plates of fruit, painted on their own, in a cabinet format. Its closest relative is the *Plate with Plums and Morello Cherries* in the Museo del Prado (fig. 1), 20 x 28 cm, acquired from the Rosendo Naseiro collection in 2006 and dated by the museum ca. 1631.[2] The Prado notes that Van der Hamen "produced several *tazzas* de fruta" and that such pictures "could have served two purposes: as sketches or prototypes for specific motifs in larger still lifes and as works that could later be sold in their own right to a less wealthy clientele". The plate-motif reappears within the master's signed compositions. A plate of sloes and cherries comparable to the Prado canvas appears in the large *Still Life with Flowers and Fruit*, signed and dated 1629 (fig. 2). Jordan uses this plate as the touchstone for the Prado picture.[3] Pewter or silver plates of fruit already flank the central basket in the signed *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit, Two Plates of Fruit and Birds* of 1622 (fig. 3). The present picture isolates exactly this kind of motif, as the Prado plate does.

Its format puts it firmly in the last years of the artist's career. At his death on 28 March 1631, the inventory of Van der Hamen's studio recorded twelve small fruit pictures, *bosquejados* (laid in but unfinished), each "un cuarto de vara de alto por un tercio de vara de ancho" (a quarter of a *vara* high by a third of a *vara* wide).[4] Taking the Castilian

[1] Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española*, s.v. 'cermeña', which also records the Andalusian names "pera sanjuanera" and "pera de san Juan" for the cermeña (*Pyrus achras*). The masculine *çermeño* (properly the tree) is commonly used for the fruit in Golden Age documents, as in Villarroel's "platillo con çermeños".
[2] Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P007908, oil on canvas, 20 x 28 cm, acquired from the Rosendo Naseiro collection in 2006 (Inv. Nuevas Adquisiciones no. 2908); Portús et al. 2006, p. 56, cat. 1 (no provenance before Naseiro is given).
[3] Ruiz 2012, pp. 160–161, no. 41; Jordan 2005, p. 280.
[4] Inventory of Van der Hamen's goods, 1631, published in Jordan, W. B., *Juan van der Hamen y León*, PhD dissertation, New York University, 1967, no. 39.

vara (vara de Burgos) at 0.835905 m, this works out at 20.90 x 27.86 cm. That is a near-exact match for the present canvas (21 x 27.8 cm) and for the Prado plums and cherries (20 x 28 cm). Jordan has already used this correspondence to date the Prado picture to the end of Van der Hamen's life and to propose that the small plates owned by Villarroel belonged to such a series.[5] Cherry points out that pictures left unfinished at the painter's death may have been completed by others, notably his former apprentice Antonio Ponce (1608–1677), who entered the workshop in 1624 and stayed closer than anyone to his master's formulas.[6] This possibility has to be taken into account in judging the handling of any small plate of this format, including the present one.

The most intriguing aspect of the picture is that it may be identifiable in a mid-seventeenth-century Madrid collection. On 11 May 1655, Andrés de Villarroel, silversmith to the royal household and appraiser of the royal jewels to Philip IV, signed an autograph declaration of his goods. Among them were "four small original fruit pieces by Van der Hamen, one of roasted chestnuts in their shells and others in wine; of the other three, one has a little silver plate of sloes and morello cherries, another a little plate of cermeña pears, and the third a little plate of sweets or biscuits; all four, with their small gilt frames, valued at 110 reales".[7] Villarroel also owned two larger Van der Hamen still-lifes, a basket of grapes and a basket of peaches, pomegranates and other fruit. It is worth noting that small pictures of silver plates would naturally have appealed to a silversmith.[8] The low valuation, the diminutive "fruticos" and "platillo", and the gilt frames all suggest a set of small cabinet pictures of the kind described in the painter's inventory. Jordan and the Prado have proposed that the *Plate with Plums and Morello Cherries* is Villarroel's "platillo de plata con endrinos y guindos".[9] If that is right, the *cermeña* plate would be its companion. Among surviving pictures, the present canvas is the only one known to the author that matches the document's subject and the series' format.

In 2005 Jordan proposed another candidate: a *Plate of Pears* then in the Naseiro collection (fig. 4). He had earlier given it to an anonymous painter of ca. 1600, and in 2005 he catalogued it as "Van der Hamen (?)", suggesting that it might be Villarroel's "platillo de çermeños". He connected it with a copy of the same pear plate in a still life by an anonymous follower. However, he also acknowledged unexpected

[5] Jordan 2005, p. 280, cat. 59 (as *Plato de endrinas y guindas*, Naseiro collection, unlined, 21.5 x 28 cm, "possibly" the Villarroel picture); the Prado's online entry for the picture likewise notes that the twelve small paintings measured "around 20 centimetres high and 27 centimetres wide, dimensions that correspond closely to this canvas".
[6] Cherry 1999, p. 160.
[7] AHPM, Prot. 6919, f. 405v.
[8] Burke and Cherry 1997, vol. I, p. 534, no. 62; Cherry 1999, pp. 154–155 and 185, notes 209–210.
[9] Jordan 2005, p. 280, cat. 59; Ruiz 2012, p. 160 ("The first of these could be this canvas in the Collection of the Prado").

anomalies: the silver plate does not project over the ledge in the master's usual way, and there are nervous touches along its rim.[10] Two points weigh against that proposal. Its dimensions do not fit the format shared by the Prado plums and the documented series. And its fruit is the larger, elongated pear rather than the tiny rounded *cermeña* of the present canvas.

The composition of the present painting closely follows the master's small-plate formula. The dish is drawn as a confident, flattened ellipse, with reflections of the fruit in the rim. The strong lateral light and the dark, empty ground match the Prado picture and the plates in the bigger compositions. The modelling of each pear, with a highlight on its shoulder and a reflected light at its base, is of high quality. Unlike the Prado plate, which rests on the edge of a stone ledge, the dish here sits on a dark, undefined surface, and the handling is somewhat softer and warmer. Several things may account for these differences. The canvas has been relined, which often flattens impasto and softens edges. And, as with the twelve small fruit pieces unfinished at the artist's death, workshop finishing cannot be ruled out. The missing ledge is unusual for Van der Hamen but not unprecedented in his plate motifs. The most defensible view is a work of Van der Hamen's last years, in which the participation of the workshop, perhaps in completing a *bosquejo*, cannot be excluded.

[10] Jordan 2005, pp. 278, 290 and 292, fig. 19.14 ("Van der Hamen (?), *Plato de peras*", 23 x 32 cm, Colección Naseiro, Madrid); for the earlier publication of the Naseiro pears as by an anonymous painter of ca. 1600, see Jordan 1985, pp. 10 and 13, fig. 15.



Fig. 1: Juan van der Hamen y León, *Plate with Plums and Morello Cherries*, ca. 1631, oil on canvas, 20 x 28 cm (7 ⅞ x 11 in.), Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P007908



Fig. 2: Juan van der Hamen y León, *Still Life with Flowers and Fruit*, 1629, signed and dated, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 131.8 cm (34 x 51 ⅞ in.), private collection



Fig. 3: Juan van der Hamen y León, *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit, Two Plates of Fruit and Birds*, 1622, signed and dated, oil on canvas, 57.6 x 100.3 cm (22 ⅝ x 39 ½ in.), private collection



Fig. 4: Juan van der Hamen y León (?), *Plate of Pears*, oil on canvas, 23 x 32 cm (9 x 12 ⅝ in.), formerly Colección Naseiro, Madrid

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