

A Seventeenth-century Antwerp:

Vase with Tulips by Andries Daniels
and Frans Francken II



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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During the first half of the seventeenth century Antwerp was probably the largest and most productive centre of easel paintings in history. Studios in the city produced paintings of a wide array of subjects and sizes. Their quality ranged from the very best original and innovative art by internationally acclaimed masters, to simple copies and decorations painted by the dozen to sell them for little money at the weekly markets. Unlike in most other artistic centres, Antwerp painters regularly worked together, dividing the work among specialists, and many paintings are the product of more than one artist.

The following is the discussion of the attribution of the still-life of a vase of tulips and other flowers [fig. 1], recently acquired by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, to Andries Daniels and the figure painter Frans Francken II, who painted the decoration on the vase. Also, its place among the many flower pieces that were painted during those decades in Antwerp will be established.

A decorated metal vase containing a dense bouquet that prominently features flaming tulips sits on a plain wooden table. A peacock butterfly (*Inachis io*) that appears to be looking up at the flowers, ready to fly towards them, sits to the left and a ladybird crawls around the right of the vase. The arrangement consists of ten large white and creamy white tulips flamed in shades of red and purple, with a variety of smaller flowers. There are irises, hyacinth, double narcissus, spring snowflake, a papilionaceous flower (possibly golden rain), several varieties of anemone, rosemary, apple blossom, forget-me-not and a few other, smaller flowers. The blooms have been portrayed very accurately leaving little doubt that the artist studied each of the individual flowers in detail. Such a bouquet, however, certainly could not be seen in real life during the seventeenth century since the flowers depicted in the painting do not all bloom during the same season. Most are spring

* With thanks to Beth Vogel for her careful editing of my English text and to Magdalena Kraemer-Noble for several useful remarks.



1. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
Vase with Tulips, 1620-1625
Oil on panel, 55.6 x 40.7 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 08/220

flowers, but forget-me-nots, for instance, flower in the late spring and summer. Also, the stems of some of the smaller flowers could not be so tall as to reach all the way into the vase. Seventeenth-century flower painters regularly drew or painted studies of individual blooms or copied them from other sources. They used these models as aids when composing floral arrangements on their canvases, panels or copper plates. As a result, bouquets often consist of flowers from different seasons, as seen here, and identical flowers turn up in various paintings by an artist, and even in works by different artists.

Painted tulips

Since the seventeenth century paintings such as this one have been highly regarded for their verisimilitude and botanical accuracy. From the late sixteenth century, the interest in horticulture grew among professional botanists who were developing botanical gardens, as well as among amateurs. The merchant fleets that sailed around the world brought many new species to Europe and new cultivars and hybrids were grown in gardens across the continent. To own a flower garden was a matter of status and many types were costly collectors' items. The increase in popularity of such flower paintings during the early seventeenth century can be attributed to a growing curiosity about the many existing varieties of flowers and the possibility to enjoy them the year round once they had been portrayed in an oil painting.

Nowadays tulips are considered a national symbol of Holland, but the flower was first introduced to northern Europe in the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Previously it had been brought to the Habsburg court in Vienna by envoys and merchants travelling to Turkey. How and when precisely the tulip found its way to the Low countries is still a matter of discussion. The Flemish-born botanist Carolus Clusius (1526-1609) probably first saw the flower in Vienna between 1573 and 1577 while working as court botanist to Emperor Maximilian II. He was the first to describe the tulip plant, in his *Rariorum aliquot stirpium, per Pannoniam, Austriam [...]*, published in 1583. Clusius did not return to the Netherlands until 1588, however, by which time tulips were already growing in Antwerp gardens and elsewhere. One unconfirmed story, mentioned by Clusius in 1583, tells us that a cloth merchant in Mechelen in Flanders received some tulip bulbs mixed in with a shipment of cloth from Constantinople. He mistook them for onions and had some of them cut and fried after which he tried them with oil and vinegar. Dissatisfied, he dumped the remaining bulbs in his garden, where an Antwerp colleague who had some knowledge of botany noticed them and recognised them as tulip bulbs, taking them with him to Antwerp. A bouquet including tulips in a glass vase stands among the figures in a group portrait of Antonius Anselmus and his family painted in Antwerp in 1577 by Martin de Vos [fig. 2]. This may well be the first painted image of tulips in the Low countries¹.

During the first half of the 1630s, tulip bulbs became the subject of such financial speculation that a single bulb could be worth as much as a house on an Amsterdam city canal. When the market crashed dramatically in 1637, many people lost their investments and went bankrupt. It is not true however, as is often believed, that tulips completely lost their value; the appreciation for the flower never really dwindled. Floral still-lives with tulips remained very popular and do not appear to have held any negative connotation as a result of the crash, as has been suggested occasionally.

Tulips like the ones in this painting do not exist anymore. Early in the twentieth century it was discovered that a virus, the so-called "tulip breaking virus", produced the flaming of the petals, the exciting patterns that made these tulips so desirable to collectors and speculators. Due to the capricious effects of the virus

¹ Signed and dated 1577, Brussels, Royal Museums for Fine Arts, inv. no. 3689. Unless the bouquet was a later addition to the painting (which to me does not appear to be the case), it can serve as proof that tulips were known, and even fashionable, in Antwerp by 1577. As far as I know this has not been remarked previously. On the history of the tulip in the Low countries see, among many other publications, Goldgar 2007.



2. Martin de Vos (1532-1603)
*Portrait of Antonius Anselmus, his Wife Joanna Hoofdmans
 and their Children Gillis and Joanna, 1577*
 Oil on panel, 103 x 166 cm
 Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels
 Inv. no. 3689

new and different flame patterns were constantly emerging. Seventeenth-century flower enthusiasts labelled all these new types of tulips, until about 600 varieties had been baptised with such fancy names as Generael van Gouda, Pochertje (little boaster), Viceroy, or Admiraal Van der Eyck. The virus was eventually detrimental to the tulip plants as well as to others, and therefore their cultivation was banned. Today several cultivars are grown in which similar patterns have been created artificially, but the countless varieties that we encounter in flower paintings from the seventeenth century no longer exist.

The vase of tulips in Bilbao was painted well before the dramatic crash of 1637. After close analysis, it can be recognized as a collaborative work of the Antwerp painters Andries Daniels and Frans Francken the Younger, painted most probably during the first half of the 1620s². Daniels painted the bouquet of flowers while Francken painted the decoration of the vase.

² Initially, I had attributed the flowers in this painting to another Antwerp artist, Philippe de Marlier (c. 1600-1667/1668), and dated it to c. 1640. Marlier went through a rapid development as a flower painter between c. 1635 and the early 1640s. The present painting appeared to fit in a gap between the rather coarse Brueghel imitations of the 1630s and the more refined pieces, inspired by the work of Daniel Seghers, from the 1640s. The painting was acquired by the museum with the attribution to Marlier and Francken, but during preparations for the present article, I had to conclude that in fact it did not fit in properly in Marlier's oeuvre, while the dating of Francken's contribution —the decoration of the vase— to c. 1640 was also off the mark.

Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after)

Very little is known about the life of Andries Daniels. His place and date of birth are unknown. His name entered the ledgers of the Antwerp painters' guild in 1599, recording him as a pupil of Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1638). Three years later, in 1602, he was registered as a master painter in his own right³. At some point during the following decades, the painter married Jozijnke van der Hoerst, as they had a joint last will and testament drawn up on 25 July 1640⁴. For all we know, Daniels may have died shortly after, or have lived for another number of years⁵. All we can deduct with certainty from the existence of this document is that he was still alive in July 1640. No other (earlier or later) records related to his life have been found in the Antwerp archives thus far.

His paintings are as extremely rare as the information regarding his life. While he is generally known as a flower painter, he most probably started out painting other subjects. In 1599, when Daniels was training with Pieter Brueghel II, floral still-life painting was still in its *status nascendi*. His teacher was a painter of genre and biblical scenes, mostly copies or paraphrases of the work of his famous father, Pieter Brueghel the Elder. His studio produced many such works, often in numerous repetitions, sold under his name, but in fact the products of many different hands⁶. His few known flower paintings prove that Daniels was a talented and skilful painter and it is highly likely that he started out as one of the Brueghel epigones employed by the younger Pieter, painting or at least contributing to genre scenes and history pieces.

The first, and still only known signed painting by Andries Daniels, a garland of flowers around a medallion showing the Holy Family and angels, turned up in the middle of the twentieth century [fig. 3]⁷. Like the painting in Bilbao, this is also a collaboration with Frans Francken II, who painted the central image. This signed painting was first published in 1951 in an article by the Belgian art historian Marie-Louise Hairs, who connected it with a few unsigned paintings⁸. Another painting with an almost identical garland, this time surrounding a Madonna and Child by Jacob Jordaens, is in the State Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg [fig. 4]. On the basis of this similarity, the flowers in that painting were attributed to Daniels by Ingvar Bergström before 1966, but close comparison of the execution of the individual flowers, in fact shows it to be different from the handling of the signed painting⁹. Hairs, in her article from 1951, also suggested that a garland interweaving a complex arrangement of images from the life of the Virgin, with the four apostles in the corners of the panel [fig. 5] is the work of Andries Daniels¹⁰. The garland includes many of the flowers and combinations of flowers from the signed garland and its smooth execution approaches it closely.

3 Rombouts/Lerius 1872 (1961), vol. I, pp. 408 and 418

4 *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon...* 1992-, vol. 24 (2000), p. 149.

5 A last will was often drawn up when one of the matrimonial partners was seriously ill and might die in the near future. I have not seen the document itself, so I am not aware if this explicitly was the case here.

6 On the subject, see the exhibition catalogue Maastricht/Brussels, 2001.

7 The painting first appeared with Kunsthandlung Boehler & Steinmeier, Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1950. In 1954, it was with Newhouse Galleries in New York and it was last seen with Galeria Lorenzelli, Bergamo, in 1967.

8 Hairs 1951 pp. 175-179. One of the paintings for which she suggested an attribution hangs in the Antwerp church of St. James, and represents a Madonna and Child in virtually the same garland of flowers as the one in the signed work. Unfortunately I know that painting only from the small illustration in Hairs's article (her figure 2), which is of insufficient quality to allow proper judgment of the validity of this suggestion, but its handling does appear to approach the signed painting quite closely. In the catalogue that accompanied the third edition of her *Les peintres flamands de fleurs au XVIIe siècle* (2 vols., Paris/Brussels, 1985), Hairs included a total of thirteen flower paintings attributed to Daniels, as well as vase of flowers on which the monogram was read as AD and which bears a date 1610, but which can in no way be connected with the fully signed garland.

9 There are at least two more images of this same garland of flowers, around different medallions. One was published by Klaus Ertz (Ertz 1984, cat. no 299a, ill.), as by Jan Brueghel the Younger (subsequently included as such in sale London, Sotheby's, 7 July 2005 (lot 105, colour ill.). Of the known versions, this painting appears to approach the version by Daniels most closely, but in this case too, I hesitate suggest the attribution. A rather poor copy of the garland was in sale Munich, Hampel, 23 March 2007 (lot 468, colour ill.).

10 Hairs 1951 (note 8), p. 177, figure 3. Oil on panel, 123 x 92 cm. The painting was with Koetser, London, around 1946 with an attribution to Daniel Seghers and Frans Francken, it resurfaced in an auction at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 26/27 November 1983 (lot 1073), as by a follower of Jan Brueghel the Elder. I only know the painting from the good black-and-white photo reproduced here.



3. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
A Garland of Flowers around an Image of the Holy Family and Angels, c. 1618
 Oil on panel, 105 x 75 cm
 Present location unknown



4. Follower of Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Madonna and Child in the Garland of Flowers, c. 1618
 Oil on panel, 104 x 73.5 cm
 The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
 Inv. no. GE-2041



5. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); studio of Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
Scenes from the Life of the Virgin Surrounded by a Garland of Flowers and Images of the four Apostles, c. 1618
 Oil on panel, 123 x 92 cm
 Present location unknown



6. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625); follower of Hendrik van Balen (1575-1632)
Virgin and Child in a Garland of Flowers, c. 1608
 Oil on copper, 27 x 22 cm
 Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan



7. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
A Garland of Flowers around an Image of the Holy Family and Angels, c. 1618
Oil on panel, 105 x 75 cm
Present location unknown
Details



8. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after); Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
Vase with Tulips, 1620-1625
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Details

The attribution to Daniels proposed by Hairs for a garland of flowers around a Madonna and Child in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, previously given to Jan Brueghel the Elder, in its turn, is not convincing [fig. 6]. Close comparison reveals that while there is a formal similarity of the flowers, there is a distinct difference in their execution. In addition to Hairs's suggestions from 1951, over the last half century a vast number of floral bouquets and garlands in the style of Jan Brueghel the Elder (and occasionally in the style of Osias Beert) have been attributed to Daniels, while their execution is substantially different from, and in fact inferior to the signed painting shown in figure 3¹¹. In contrast, the Bilbao floral bouquet clearly includes several tulips found in the signed painting by Daniels, and close comparison reveals that their execution is virtually identical [figs. 7 and 8]. Thus, there can be no doubt that the Bilbao tulips are by the same artist as those in the signed painting: Andries Daniels.

11 Also, many such pictures were attributed to Philippe de Marlier.

Frans Francken II (1581-1642) and his studio

The fact that several of the garlands that were erroneously attributed to Daniels surround central images painted, and occasionally signed by Frans Francken II, or in his style, strongly suggests that those paintings originated in Francken's studio. The same must be true for the numerous uniform bouquets in vases with a medallion by or in the style of Francken.

Unlike Daniels, Frans Francken the Younger is a well-known and well-documented figure among seventeenth-century Antwerp painters¹². Baptised in Antwerp in May of 1581, Francken must have been more or less the same age as Andries Daniels. He was a member of one of the leading Antwerp families of artists. Trained by his father, the history painter Frans Francken the Elder (1542-1616), he became an extremely prolific figure painter who covered subjects ranging from the Bible to mythology and from peasant scenes to high life and collectors' cabinets. He regularly supplied the figures in landscapes and interiors by other artists and over the years he held several important positions on the committee of the Antwerp painters' guild. His elegant, somewhat mannerist style and high quality of execution are highly individual and easily recognized. Francken was clearly a central figure in Antwerp artistic circles of his time and a successful entrepreneur. Next to producing autograph works for the top of the market, he appears to have led a studio that employed a number of more or less talented minor artists producing paintings for a lower sector of the market. The numerous garlands and vases of flowers with central images and vases, partly executed by Francken but mainly in his style, that have incorrectly been attributed to Andries Daniels in the last six decades must be considered as part and parcel of this workshop production¹³. For what little we can deduce from the few (collaborative) works known presently, Andries Daniels must have been one of Francken's more talented employees. The fact that he had the opportunity to sign the painting shown in figure 3, indicates that he held a privileged position. It may be that Daniels signed this particular garland because it was his own invention. If that is the case, the other versions must be the work of other studio hands painting under the aegis of Francken, and therefore not in a position to affix their signatures to the pieces¹⁴.

The collaboration of Francken and Daniels

Andries Daniels became an independent master in 1602, Frans Francken in 1605. Consequently, their collaboration may have occurred at any time between 1605 and 1642, which coincides with Francken's activity as a master, or between 1605 and 1640, assuming that Daniels died shortly after the making of his will. We can narrow the period down, however, on the basis of circumstantial evidence. In the course of his painting career, Frans Francken painted a number of so-called collector's cabinets: paintings that show the viewer an actual or imaginary collection of paintings, often in combination with other curiosities such as sea shells, drawings, sculptures and other products of art and nature. Occasionally, in the background a group of donkeys is depicted, destroying works of art. They symbolise the ignorant (m)asses that are unable to see and appreciate the quality and importance of art objects. One such painting, dated twice, 1618 and 1619, in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, prominently includes a painting of a Madonna and Child and angels that is very similar to the collaborative work in figure 3 [fig. 9]¹⁵. While the proportions

12 On Francken see Härting 1989.

13 In due course I hope to shed some light on this group of works, in collaboration with Ursula Härting.

14 The Antwerp guild records, as published by Rombouts and van Lerijs (see note 3) contain a host of artists' names that cannot be connected with any known paintings. Several of them may never have finished their (demanding) training as an artist, but many others will have worked anonymously in studios such as Francken's, producing work for the daily market without any artistic aspiration to speak of.

15 The painting is signed and dated "F.Franck . IN/ 1619" and it is also dated in 1618 on a book at lower right. It is on long-term loan from the museum to the Rubens House, Antwerp.



9. Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
A Collector's Cabinet, 1619
 Oil on panel, 56 x 85 cm
 Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp
 Inv. no. 816

are different —the central image in Antwerp is relatively large— the composition of the flower garland is virtually the same. Presuming that Francken based the garland in his cabinet piece on an existing painting, we may assume that Daniels's signed garland was executed in or before 1618. The style and handling of Francken's contribution to the painting which concurs with other work from around 1618, confirms this assumption. Interestingly, the cabinet painting also includes a decorated vase of flowers, not dissimilar to the vase in the Bilbao still-life. The bouquet of flowers, however, was clearly inspired by a composition by Jan Brueghel the Elder, painted around 1609 [fig. 10]¹⁶.

The vase of flowers in Bilbao [fig. 1] must have originated somewhat later than the garland. The vivid handling of Frans Francken's decoration of the vase coincides with the artist's work from the first half of the 1620s¹⁷. Both the floral bouquet and the vase itself are of a very high quality that even overrides that of the painting in figure 3. It can clearly be considered as a piece of work destined for the top of the market. As such, one would expect it to be signed, but no trace of a signature can be found on the panel¹⁸. Unlike the mediocre works that have incorrectly been attributed to Daniels, this bouquet is a lively and almost life-like composition of high

16 In other paintings of collectors' cabinets, Francken depicted vases of flowers that even draw closer to Brueghel's painting in Vienna, including the use of the same porcelain vase, which was probably a product of Brueghel's fantasy rather than an existing object.

17 With thanks to Ursula Härting, who confirmed this to me in an email of 23 November 2008.

18 At some point in time, the painting was cradled. As a result the back of the panel offers no information. It is not likely that the panel was reduced in size, but the cradling makes it impossible to establish this with any certainty. Theoretically, if the panel lost a small strip at the bottom, for instance due to some damage, this could have contained Daniels's signature.



10. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625)
Bunch of Flowers in a Blue Vase, c. 1609
 Oil on panel, 66 x 50.5 cm
 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Vienna
 Inv. no. GG 558



11. Andries Daniels (active between 1599 and 1640 or after);
 Frans Francken II (1581-1642)
Bunch of Flowers in a Decorated Metal Vase, c. 1625
 Oil on panel, 60.5 x 45.8 cm
 Present location unknown

artistic merit. In such cases one wonders whether this is the result of a single explosion of creativity of an otherwise subdued talent, or whether other such products of the artist's obvious talent have gone lost.

There is just one other known flower painting that can be connected with Daniels and Francken and that displays a similar high quality [fig. 11]¹⁹. Up to a degree, its composition appears to be related to the bouquet in Francken's *Collector's Cabinet* in Antwerp, and in connection with that, to Brueghel's composition in Vienna. In that respect the Bilbao bouquet is a more original work, the composition of which appears not to have been based on or derived from earlier examples. Unlike the tulips in Bilbao, none of the tulips in the painting in figure 11 are the same as tulips in the signed garland, but their modelling and handling are almost identical. However, due to the great number of flowers, the tulips appear less prominent than in the painting in Bilbao. This may well represent a next step in the development of Daniels's art following the Bilbao flower piece.

¹⁹ The painting was attributed to Jan Brueghel, until shortly before Sotheby's London auction of 12 December 1990, in which it was lot 8 (colour ill.) it was attributed to Philippe de Marlier by Dr. S. Segal, Amsterdam, and independently by myself. As such, the painting served as an argument for my initial attribution of the Bilbao bouquet to Marlier (see also note 2). In the course of the preparations to this article, it became clear to me that this painting, too, must be the work of Andries Daniels

A deeper meaning?

Seventeenth-century culture attached symbolic value to flowers based on the fact that they bloom for a short period of time and then fade. The flowers' short life reminded viewers of the brevity of human life, while their exuberant colours represented the vanity of this earthly existence. In addition, the sheer endless number of species and varieties of flowers was manifest of God's omnipotence. Furthermore, flowers could be regarded as symbols of the element Earth —from which they emerge— in representations of the Four Elements which together symbolized the Creation. In that context, the image of the god Neptune being crowned by a sea nymph on Francken's vase can be considered a representation of the element Water in this painting. Viewed in this way, the painting contains all four elements: the flowers represent Earth, the flying insects Air, and the metal vase Fire, as a product of that element, and its decoration Water.

Above all, such pictures provide a feast for the eye. At the point in Daniels's career when these floral compositions were created his talent had obviously reached its peak. The flower painting in Bilbao is a feat of illusionism: we can imagine without any effort that we are looking at a three-dimensional vase of flowers, rather than at a variety of colours of oil paint carefully spread on a flat oak panel.

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