

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Luis Meléndez

(Naples 1716 – 1780 Madrid)

*Still life with a plate of pears,
plums, melon, and a honey-jar*

c. 1760 – 1770

oil on canvas

36.5 x 49 cm.;

14 3/8 x 19 1/4 in.

Provenance

Private collection, Paris.

Bibliography

P. Cherry, *Luis Meléndez. Still-Life Painter*, Madrid 2006, cat. no. 125, reproduced on p. 505.

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Luis Meléndez is considered one of the most prominent still life painters of eighteenth-century Spanish art. Born in Naples in 1716 into a Spanish family, he was the son of Francisco Meléndez, the Royal Miniaturist painter, and the nephew of Miguel Jacinto Meléndez, the portraitist at the court of Phillip V of Spain.

The family returned to Madrid in 1717, where he would receive an artistic education from his father until he became the apprentice of Louis Michel van Loo, the actual Royal Painter of Phillip V, from whom he inherited an in-depth mastery of the portraiture technique. In 1744, the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando was provisionally inaugurated, and Francisco was made an honorary director of the painting department. Luis was one of the first students to be admitted, and very early started to be outstanding. However, his academic training would soon come to an end. Francisco, Luis's father, openly attacked the director of the Academy and claimed recognition as one of its founders and obliged his son Luis to personally deliver a copy of the denunciation to the Academy. The results were as expected: Francisco stripped of his title and forbidden to enter the Academy, and Luis expelled from it.

After this event, Luis's plan was to travel to Italy at his own expense. Although there is little record of his Italian journey, it is documented that he stayed in Rome and Naples for several years to pursue his studies. That is when Luis got familiar with the new phenomenon of still-life painting, a genre pioneered simultaneously by artists in northern and southern Europe. Furthermore, it is possible that the spirit of Naples in the eighteenth century was key in turning Meléndez from the courtly subjects of his father and master, and in effecting his choice of the humbler subject of food, which he persevered after his return to Spain.

The painting shown above is dated by the time the painter had established his workshop in Madrid for good, between 1760 and 1770. At the centre of the composition, on a wooden table, a plate of pears appears as the protagonist of this still-life. There are some plums scattered around it, a fine decorated honey-jar and a big orange melon in the background. As the rest of his still-lives, the roundness and the volume of all objects are fully realized, and the painter uses a pronounced chiaroscuro to contribute to the plasticity of the forms. Light comes from the left, being the opposite side modelled in shadows.

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It is important to consider that the new fascination with botany blustering in eighteenth-century Europe is certainly reflected in Meléndez's precise representations of fruits and vegetables. Indeed, Meléndez's style is unusual among his contemporaries, for he reflects this scientific objectivity in his art. The painting shown above is no exception to this statement and we can observe how it is repeated in similar compositions, as the one held in Museo del Prado, "Bodegón con sandía y acerolas, quesos, pan y vino".



Luis Meléndez, Bodegón con sandía y acerolas, quesos, pan y vino, 1770, oil on canvas, 35 x 48 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Cat. no. P000915.