

LAWRENCE STEIGRAD FINE ARTS



A Forest Floor with Flowers, Butterflies and Reptiles

signed and dated in ochre calligraphy N Lachtropius 1677 in the upper center
oil on canvas
34 ¼ x 28 ½ inches (87 x 72.4 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, London, November 13, 1963, lot 162, where bought by

"Goyen"

Brod

Presumably Durlacher Brothers, New York & London, circa 1960s

Joseph Verner Reed, Greenwich, Connecticut, circa 1960s and thus be descent in the family until the present time

LITERATURE

Frederick A. van Braam, "Nicolas Lachtropius" in *World Collectors Annuary*, volume 15, 1963, p. 261

"Nicholas Lachtropius" in *Art & Auction*, volume 8, 1964, p. 214

E. Mayer, "Nicholas Lachtropius" in *Annuaire International des Ventes* 1964, ARTS, Paris, p. 288

E. Benezit, "Nicolas Lachtropius" in *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, volume 6, Librairie Gründ, Paris, 1976, p. 360

Adriaan van der Willigen & Fred G. Meijer, "Nicolaes Lachtropius" in *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-life Painters Working in Oils, 1525 – 1725*, Primavera Press, Leiden, 2003, p. 128

There are few facts known about the life of Nicolaes Lachtropius. He was born around 1630 and from 1656 – 1668 worked in Amsterdam. From 1673 to 1700 he was in Alphen aan den Rijn. He painted florals, forest floor pieces and hunting still lifes.[1]

Forest floor pieces called *sottobosco* painting after the Italian word for undergrowth, were at this time extremely popular. Otto Marseus van Schrieck created the genre when working in Italy in the 1650s, and by the 1660s had returned to Amsterdam. In emulation flower still life painters such as Abraham Mignon, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, and Rachel Ruysch all felt the impulse to add toad stools, moss, lizards, snakes, and butterflies along with other crawly creatures to their works.[2] Lachtropius likewise followed suit.

At this time nature held a deep fascination for the general population. The upper classes in the Netherlands filled their homes with natural treasures retrieved from all over the world made possible by the far-flung voyages of the Dutch East India Company. Called cabinets of curiosities, such groupings could also be viewed by the general population as collections of "Naturalia" frequently attached to public gardens. Such interest on this grand a scale created a huge demand for paintings and drawings of "specimens" in their natural environment - in particular the dense foliage of the forest floor.[3] A constant in Lachtropius' work was the red Opium Poppy here in the upper right and center of the composition. Only from 1677 on are butterflies included in these scenes. Executed in evening light, Walther Bernt in his landmark publication *The Netherlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century* described these nocturnal still lifes filled with flowering shrubs, butterflies, lizards and snakes as creating fantasy.[4] These paintings were further intended as memento moris demonstrative of regeneration and the inescapable cycle of life and death.

There is another painting dated 1677 of flowers in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Other works by the artist formed part of the permanent collections of only three museums; Cambridge, United Kingdom; Chambéry and Prague. Lachtropius' paintings rarely appear on the market, so after approximately 60 years in one family its reappearance presents a rare collecting opportunity.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Biographical information taken from Sam Segal & Klara Alen, *Dutch and Flemish Flower Pieces*, volume 1, Brill, Hes & De Graaf, Leiden, Boston, 2020, p. 434.

[2] Erma Hermens, "Crawly Creatures, Forest Floors and Butterfly Wings" in *Crawly Creatures, Little Animals in Art and Science*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2022, pp. 139, 146.

[3] Catherine Powell-Warren, "A Strange Attraction", p. 107; and Maria Holtrop & Julia van Leeuwen, "The World as Possession" in *Crawley Creatures*, op.cit., p. 123.

[4] Walther Bernt, "Nicolaes Lachtropius" in *The Netherlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, volume II, Phaidon, New York, 1970, p. 69.