



A Flower Garland by Daniel Seghers

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Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

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## A Flower Garland by Daniel Seghers

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**The Flemish 17th-century** flower painter Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) was held in the highest regard during his lifetime and is today seen as an important innovator of the genre. The Nationalmuseum recently acquired the artist's *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child* (Fig. 1), one of the most highly valued artworks in the renowned collection of the Swedish merchant Henrik Wilhelm Peill (1730–1797) at Österbybruk.<sup>1</sup>

Born at Antwerp in 1590, Seghers moved north with his widowed mother in his youth, living with Protestant relatives in Utrecht, where he began his artistic training. After returning to Antwerp around 1610, he completed his training under Jan Brueghel the Elder, a pioneer of flower painting, and in 1611 he was admitted as a master in the local painters' guild. In 1614 he joined the Jesuit order as a lay brother at Mechelen. The Jesuits sent him to Rome in 1625–27, and subsequently placed him at Antwerp, where he spent the rest of his life painting in the order's teaching house.<sup>2</sup>

Seghers transformed the painted flower garland first introduced by Jan Brueghel the Elder.<sup>3</sup> Having painted his first garland in Rome in c. 1626,<sup>4</sup> he soon developed a distinctive style, more dramatic and colourful than his teacher's. Dynamic compositions such as the Stockholm *Flower Garland*, with festoons elegantly arranged around a painted cartouche, and relying on strong chiaroscuro effects, became Seghers' trademark.<sup>5</sup> A sculpted Virgin and Child painted in trompe l'oeil



Fig. 1 Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.





Fig. 2 Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Cartouche with Flower Garlands and the Standing Virgin and Child*, signed “D. Seghers. Soctis JESV”, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 86 x 62 cm. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, GG 111.

seems to protrude from an arched niche at the centre of a cartouche in grisaille with Baroque scrollwork. Draped around the cartouche are festoons with a vibrant assortment of meticulously painted blooms, gathered into four separate bouquets interwoven with swirls of ivy. Flowers and leaves are turned in different directions to expose them to strong light from the upper left, and depth is suggested by the use of shadow as well as the curvature of flower stalks and bristling foliage. A convincing three-dimensional effect is created by contrasting flowers in luminous primary colours with the dark grey, deeply shaded scrollwork.

The image of the Virgin and Child was probably painted by Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), a member of a renowned Antwerp family of sculptors. The two artists worked together from c. 1630 until Seghers' death in 1661, producing at least twenty-nine paintings in a form of collaboration between specialists that was common in 17th-century Antwerp.<sup>6</sup> The Stockholm *Flower Garland* may be dated to the mid- to late 1640s, when Seghers had established his signature style, a date consistent with Quellinus' still Rubensian figure types. It may be compared with the Braunschweig *Cartouche with Flower Garlands and the Standing Virgin and Child* of c. 1645–50 (Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup>

Often signed ‘Daniel Seghers Soc[ietatis] JESV’, Seghers' paintings were presented as gifts by the Jesuit order to monarchs and dignitaries across Europe, and must be seen within the context of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Their significance lies in the fact that the festoons encircle a trompe-l'oeil image contained within the painting itself, perhaps a reflection of the contemporary custom of draping flower garlands around devotional images for religious feast days. Seghers' works thus proclaimed the legitimacy of images as objects of veneration, fundamental to Catholic treatises on art following iconoclastic riots in the late 16th century. The roses, anemones,

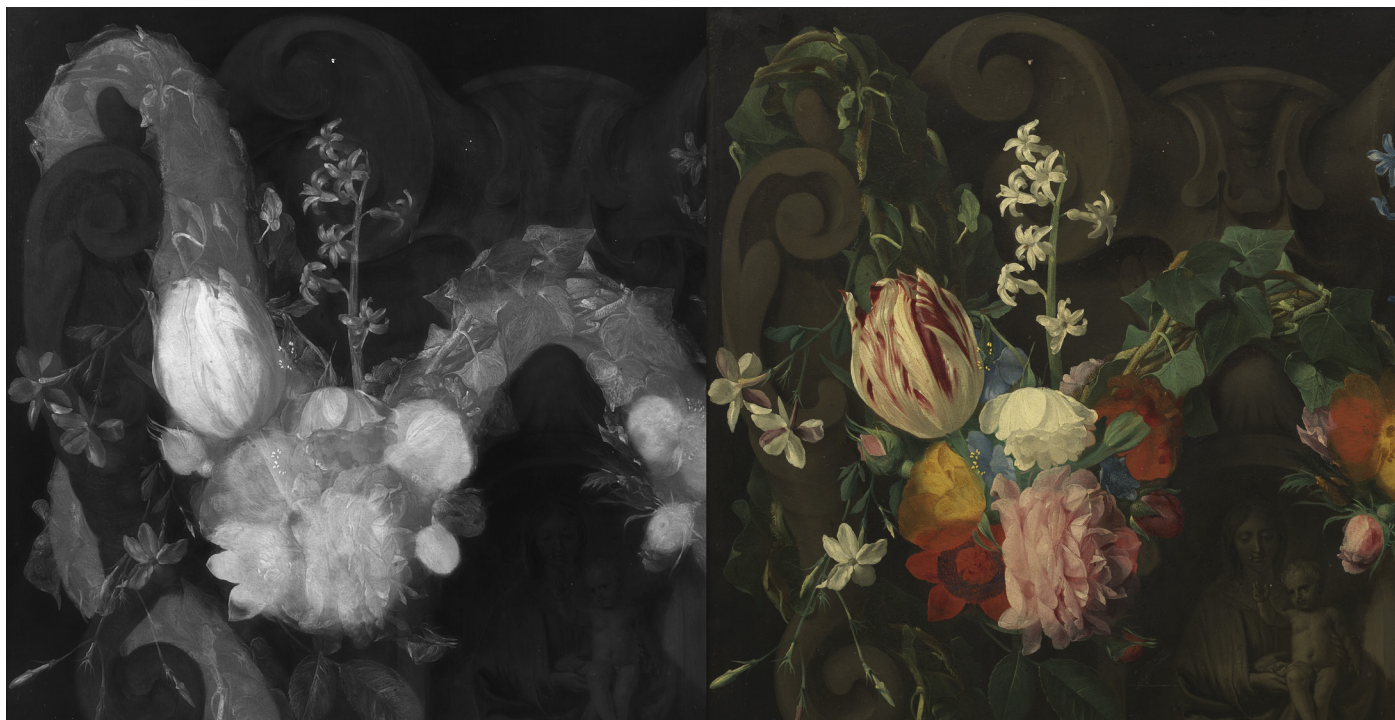


Fig. 3 Infrared reflectogram of Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50 (detail). Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

carnations, orange blossoms, hyacinths, jasmine and ivy seen in the Stockholm *Flower Garland* had specific connotations, alluding to the respective roles of Mary and Jesus in the history of salvation, thus reiterating the theme represented in the central image. The painted flowers also bestowed value on the image through their intrinsic – rather than metaphorical – significance, floral still lifes being among the most highly prized works of art.

The flowers in the Stockholm *Flower Garland* are recorded with near-scientific accuracy. Yet these painted festoons are, taken in their entirety, purely imaginary. Since Seghers' bouquets are composed of flowers that bloom in different seasons, it must be assumed that, like his teacher, Jan Brueghel the Elder,<sup>9</sup> he did not paint them exclusively from life. While there are

no preserved flower studies by Seghers, the repetition of certain floral arrangements and individual flowers, such as the costly red-flamed tulips, over many years would suggest that models – oil sketches, drawings or watercolours – were part of the artist's stock-in-trade.<sup>10</sup> Seghers worked methodically: he knew where to position the garlands and bouquets before the cartouche and central image were put in place.<sup>11</sup> The collaborative nature of his paintings would have been facilitated by the use of painted or drawn models, making it possible to plan compositions efficiently. This may also explain the limited number of pentimenti in Seghers' paintings.

The painting technique of the Stockholm *Flower Garland* conforms to Seghers' known working methods.<sup>12</sup> The painting's

support consists of a thin copper panel in one of several standard sizes available in 17th-century Antwerp, with a smooth surface that allowed the artist to paint minute details.<sup>13</sup> After the thin greyish ground layer had been brushed onto the metal support, there followed the dead colouring stage in which the garlands and principal flowers were positioned, the garlands indicated with green paint<sup>14</sup> and the flowers with monochrome, brightly coloured shapes (Fig. 3). These abstract shapes, smaller than the finished flowers, provided a base tone for the paint layer on top. Next, the grisaille cartouche and dark background were painted in.<sup>15</sup>

The final flowers were painted wet-in-wet and rarely built up with more than one paint layer.<sup>16</sup> Seghers' delicate brushstrokes follow the direction in which





Fig. 4 Infrared reflectogram of Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50 (detail). Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

organic forms flow, suggesting volume. Tulips were modelled by applying grey paint on the shadow side, next to the egg-shaped reddish-orange dead colouring: the dark colour shimmers through the semi-transparent top layer, while the adjacent bright dead colouring provides a base tone for the flowers' sunlit side.<sup>17</sup> The flame pattern was painted free-hand with flowing strokes of red lake, before areas of the underlayer were covered with more opaque white paint (Fig. 4). Pink roses were modelled by applying a dark pink glaze over bright pink dead colouring, the shape of the petals defined by delicate brushstrokes in pink and white, leaving ridges along the contours due to the non-absorbency of the metal support. Dots of

red lake in sepals and stems enliven the greens. Different colours were sometimes layered: the purple anemone was built up by applying a transparent blue layer over pink dead colouring; in between the delicate brushstrokes the underlayer remains visible, creating an effect of pink and purple tones (Fig. 5). Another example is seen in the yellow anemones, where yellow was applied over a bright red underlayer, and details such as stamen and pistils were rendered with slightly impasted highlights.<sup>18</sup> After finishing the main flowers, Seghers completed the festoons by adding in-between flowers and greenery painted directly over the grey cartouche or dark background.

#### Notes:

1. Daniel Seghers and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger, *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50, oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm, signed "D. Seghers Soctis JESV" (bottom right), NM 7505. Purchased in 2019 with funds provided by the Wiros Fund. Provenance: Claes Grill (1705–1767), Svindersvik (according to Roger de Robelin B.A.); Henrik Wilhelm Peill (1730–1797) and Anna Johanna Peill (née Grill) (1745–1801), Österbybruk, Uppland; Pehr Adolph Tamm (1774–1856), Österbybruk, Uppland; Hugo Tamm (1840–1907), Fånö, Uppland; by inheritance in the family; sold (Uppsala Auktionskammare, Uppsala, 11 June 2019, lot 815). Bibliography: Albin Roosval (ed.), *Svenska slott och herresäten vid 1900-talets början*, Stockholm 1923, p. 106; Olof Granberg, *Svenska konstsamlingarnas historia, från Gustav Vasas tid till våra dagar*, vol. 2, Stockholm 1930, pp. 130 and 132; and Claës Tamm, *Österbysamlingen*, Mjölby 2008, pp. 76–77, no. 10.

2. Marie-Louise Hairs, *Les Peintres flamands de*

*fleurs au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels 1985, pp. 117–195; and Adriaan van der Willigen and Fred G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-Life Painters Working in Oils, 1525–1725*, Leiden 2003, p. 180.

3. David Freedberg, “The Origins and Rise of the Flemish Madonnas in Flower Garlands: Decoration and Devotion”, in *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 32, 1981, pp. 115–150. Cf. Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Virgin and Child in a Flower Garland*, oil on panel, 185 x 209.8 cm, c. 1616/18, Munich, Alte Pinakothek, inv. no. 331, for which see Konrad Renger and Claudia Denk, *Flämische Malerei des Barock in der Alten Pinakothek*, Munich 2002, pp. 336–341, ill.

4. Daniel Seghers and Dominico Zampieri, *The Triumph of Love*, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 797, for which see Hairs 1985, pp. 129–130, colour pl. 34.

5. Hairs 1985.

6. Cf. Christine van Mulders, “Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel de Oude: de drijfveren van hun samenwerking”, in *Concept, Design and Execution in Flemish Painting (1550–1700)*, Hans Vlieghe, Arnout Balis and Carl van de Velde (eds.), Turnhout 2000, pp. 111–126.

7. Oil on copper, 86 x 62 cm, signed “D. Seghers. Soctis JESV”, c. 1645–50, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, inv. no. 111, for which see De Bruyn 1988, p. 58, no. 133, colour pl. 3. For the Christ Child, cf. also Jan Philips van Thielen and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger, *Flower Garland with a Seated Virgin and Child*, oil on canvas, 148 x 104 cm, signed by Van Thielen and dated 1648, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 544, for which see De Bruyn 1988, pp. 58, 61, no. 112. The collections of the Nationalmuseum include another collaborative work by the same artists, *Flowers Surrounding a Cartouche with a Bust Portrait of the Virgin*, c. 1650–55, oil on copper, 87.9 x 61.1 cm, signed “Daniel Seghers Soctis JESV” (bottom left), NM 1393, for which see Jean-Pierre de Bruyn, *Erasmus II Quellinus (1607–1678): De schilderijen met catalogue raisonné*, Freren 1988, pp. 62, 219–220, no. 164; and Görel Cavalli-Björkman, Carina Fryklund and Karin Sidén, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings III, Flemish Paintings c. 1600–c. 1800*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm 2010, pp. 311–315, no. 175.

8. Freedberg 1981.

9. Sarah Murray and Karin Groen, “Four early Dutch flower paintings examined with reference to Crispijn van de Passe’s *Den Blom-Hof*”, in *Bulletin of the Hamilton Kerr Institute*, 2, 1994, pp. 6–20; and Beatrijs Brenninkmeijer-de Rooij, *Roots of Seventeenth-Century Flower Painting: Miniatures, Plant Books, Paintings*, Leiden 1996, pp. 47–83.

10. So far, infrared reflectography suggests that Seghers copied his flowers free-hand (or used a material undetectable by IRR), rather than by



Fig. 5 Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50 (detail). Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.



tracing them. By contrast with his teacher, he rarely repeated whole compositions.

**11.** Seghers would have completed his portion of the composition before passing it on to his collaborators: in several preserved paintings the central image was never added and the centre of the cartouche was left blank. See examples from the 1640s and 1650s in Ghent (Museum voor de Schone Kunsten, inv. no. 1886-A), Copenhagen (Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. no. KMSp231), Oldenburg (Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, inv. no. 134), London (Kensington Palace, Royal Coll., inv. no. RCIN 405617), and Madrid (Museo del Prado, inv. no. 1912).

**12.** Findings are based on visual and infrared reflectography examination only; no cross-section analysis or XRF spectroscopy was carried out at the time. Technical specifications for IRR: Camera Osiris, InGaAs line array, 0.9 – 1.7 µm; Opus Instruments, Norwich, Great Britain; light source, Dedolight DLH652, Tungsten GY9.5 / max. 650 W. All infra-red reflectography carried out by Cecilia Heisser. For a more thorough account of Seghers' technique and materials, see Sven van Dorst, "Daniël Seghers, phoenix of flower-painters", in *Bulletin of the Hamilton Kerr Institute*, 6, 2020, pp. 29–45.

**13.** Many of Seghers' flower garlands on copper supports have similar dimensions, measuring approximately 86 x 61 cm; see van Dorst 2020, p. 33. See further Isabel Horovitz, "The Materials and Techniques of European Paintings on Copper Supports", pp. 63–92, and Jørgen Wadum, "Antwerp Copper Plates", pp. 93–116, in *Copper as Canvas: Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper, 1575–1775* (exh. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art; Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1999), New York and Oxford 1999.

**14.** Seghers is known to have used mixed greens containing yellow and blue pigments, mainly lead-tin yellow, azurite, and lead white, with some earth pigments. Cf. van Dorst 2020, pp. 33–34, 37–38.

**15.** The scrollwork cartouche does not continue underneath the dead colouring of the principal bouquets and garlands, and was thus painted *after* the dead colouring had been completed. The grisaille cartouche could have been outlined with chalk before commencing the dead colouring.

**16.** On Seghers' painting technique and pigments used, see van Dorst 2020.

**17.** The procedure was described by the painter and art theoretician Gérard de Lairese in his *Groot schilderboek*, Amsterdam 1707. He recommends painting the garlands first, before positioning the flowers: "When dry, one shall arrange the flowers on it, the most important first, each in their place, indicating these with one singular colour, red, blue, or yellow, of such a shade that one can skilfully

paint their day and shadow from life, or from models" (p. 364), quoted from van Dorst 2020, p. 33.

**18.** Except for the bright yellow narcissus, most of the yellow flowers now appear dull and formless owing to the presence of degraded orpiment, an arsenic-based yellow pigment widely used in the 17th century. Also observed in van Dorst 2020, pp. 36–37.