



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ART & ANTIQUES

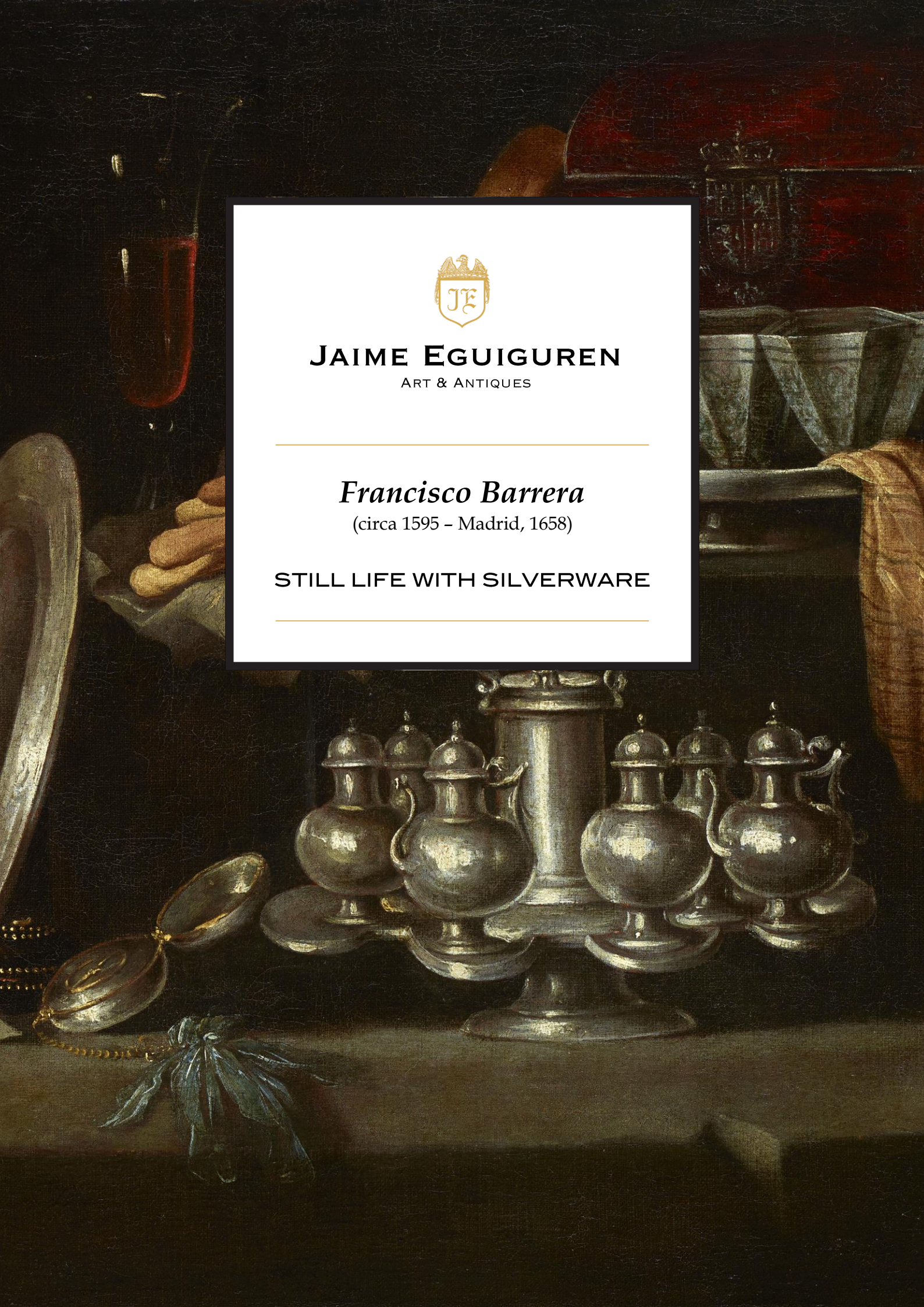
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*Francisco Barrera*

(circa 1595 - Madrid, 1658)

STILL LIFE WITH SILVERWARE

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## *Francisco Barrera*

(circa 1595 – Madrid, 1658)

**Report on a still life with silverware, watch, playing cards, wine glass, biscuits, porcelain cups and a chest with the castile-leon coat of arms on the ironwork**

Oil on canvas

77.7 x 100.5 cm

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## I. Identification of the work

This painting represents a *Still life with silverware, watch, playing cards, wine glass, biscuits, and porcelain*. Oil painted on canvas. Its dimensions are 77.7 x 100.5 centimetres. It has been cleaned and is in an excellent state of preservation. At first sight it has no signs, inscriptions or signatures.

have had the chance to examine it in person on previous occasions and have always considered it a work by painter Francisco Barrera (circa 1595 – Madrid, 1658),<sup>1</sup> based on the varied styles of his signed works and on the inconsistent quality of those ascribed to him. This disparity springs to the eye upon comparing the four *Allegories of Spring, of Summer, of Autumn and of Winter*, signed in 1638 (Seville, Museum of Fine Arts),<sup>2</sup> with the series on the same theme at the Carmen Thyssen Museum in Malaga.<sup>3</sup> However, this evidence does not for the time being help to settle the problem posed by the work of Francisco Barrera, a painter active in Madrid in the second third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I have recently learnt that this still life belonged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to Bernardino de Melgar y Álvarez de Abreu (1863–1942), 9<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Benavites, whose collection was seized during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and that it was photographed in 1939 coupled with another similarly composed still life, characterised by its stepped setting and by the presence of a chocolate pot, a salver with porcelain cups and a striped cloth that looks like a Mexican mantilla<sup>4</sup> [Fig. 2].

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<sup>1</sup> I[smael] G[UTIÉRREZ] P[ASTOR], “Francisco Barrera (Madrid, 1595 – 1658). Bodegón de orfebrería, naipes, reloj, copa de vino, bizcochos, tazas de porcelana y caja de carey (c. 1635-1650)”, *Luces del Barroco. Pintura y escultura del siglo XVII en España* (exhibition catalogue). Vitoria, Fundación Caja Vital, 2002, pp. 62-63 (reproduction). Idem, *Colección Forum Filatélico. Pintura Antigua Española y Flamenca de los siglos XVI y XVII*. Madrid, Fundación Cultural Forum Filatélico, 2002, pp. 24-25 (reproduction).

<sup>2</sup> Oil on canvas, 167.5 x 247.5 cm. Enrique VALDIVIESO; M<sup>a</sup> Jesús SERRANO SANZ, *Adquisiciones de Bienes Culturales. Bellas Artes. Arqueología. Etnografía* (exhibition catalogue), Seville, Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions of Seville. Department of Culture of the Council of Andalusia, Seville, 1990. Enrique VALDIVIESO, *La pintura en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla*. Seville, 1991, pp. 264-266. Salvador SALORT PONS, “Francisco Barrera: aproximación a su biografía”, *Archivo Español de Arte*, no. 271 (1995), pp. 285-298. Peter Cherry, *Arte y Naturaleza. El bodegón español en el Siglo de Oro*. Madrid, 1999, pp. 203-205 (reproductions).

<sup>3</sup> Oil on canvas, 125 x 166 cm. The *Allegory of Spring*, signed: “Fran<sup>co</sup> Barrera”.

<sup>4</sup> Photographed by Vicente Salgado Llorente on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1939, when the collection was deposited at the Prado Museum. Archives of the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute (Instituto de Patrimonio

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Fig. 2 Still life with silverware. *Still life with chocolate pot*. Former collection of the Marquis of Benavites. Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute, Photographic Library, Archivo Arbaiza, ARB-MP-00894. Photograph by Vicente Salgado Llorente.

## II. Description and iconography

This *Still life with silverware...* is exceptional in the context of Barrera's known work, because of the presence of an extraordinary set of secular and civilian precious metalwork, whose colouring suggests it is mostly made of silver.

The composition is arranged by a diagonal line crossing from the top left angle to the opposite bottom left angle, and is the result of the use of boxes or cubic steps that provide a raised exhibition of some objects, while others lie on a thick stone slab with a rough edge that serves as a table. They are laid out on the dark background of the indefinite space, lit from the left by a raking light that highlights round shapes, the metallic shine of metal and the texture of food items. The composition undoubtedly has a clear aristocratic character due to the abundant, varied silver set: an undulating ewer with raised spout and handle beside its washbowl; a pocket watch; a cruet set with a lobed tray shaped like the ewer; a Spanish jug with its spout placed in a forced oblique perspective joining the handle and the spout; and a spoon and a hot chocolate tray with several small bluish porcelain cups, which recall Dutch Delftware.

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Cultural de España), Photographic Library, Archivo Arbaiza, ARB-MP-00894, Return file (*Expediente de devolución*) No. SDPAN 130/02.

At the top, the composition is presided over by a chest, apparently lined with red velvet, characterised by its ironwork shaped like the Castile-Leon coat of arms, with a royal crown and a chain reminiscent of the Order of the Golden Fleece. It shares the space with a pair of round wooden boxes, a white serviette with biscuits and a crystal glass with wine. Between the bowl and the watch there is a hard-to-identify object, perhaps a Mexican piece of pottery, and a pack of cards showing the three of coins and the four of clubs. Vis-à-vis the noble, luxurious character conveyed by silver and porcelain, the pack of cards and the watch might be expressing a certain moral concern about the passage of time and changing fortunes, since they are both common objects in *vanitas* paintings.

### III. Author, style and chronology

From my point of view, the author of this work was Francisco Barrera (circa 1595 – Madrid, 1658), a painter and entrepreneur whose professional career was strongly active during the second third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Madrid, the visible head of a busy workshop teeming with journeymen and assistants who contributed to producing a wide range of paintings of all genres (portraits, religious themes, landscapes, allegories...), of inconsistent quality, as can be seen when comparing signed works with one another, as well as these with other ascribed but unsigned works. He set up shop on the Steps of San Felipe, next to the Puerta del Sol, and he was a major figure in the guild, which he represented on many occasions and for key issues for the art of painting. This activity is very well documented. However, we do not know any work by his assistants that may help identify their respective styles.<sup>5</sup>

Because of its theme, this *Still life with silverware...* can be considered one of Barrera's most exceptional ones, due to the choice of silver objects with sweets instead of food or flowers. Its noble connotations make it resemble the works by his contemporary Antonio de Pereda, whose still lifes are characterised by luxurious, exotic objects, without leaving behind

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<sup>5</sup> On Barrera's biography, see CHERRY, op. cit., 1999, pp. 199-206 and 241-242. Félix SCHEFFLER, *Das spanische Stilleben des 17. Jahrhunderts: Theorie, Genese und Entfaltung einer neuen Bildgattung*. Frankfurt am Main, 2000.

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common features of his own, present in his entire production, particularly the composition with plenty of accumulated objects where the sense of shape and drawing prevails. The limited range of colour typically used by the painter is neutralised by the expressive force of the white shine caused by light on the silver set and its round surfaces, which thus increase in volume.

It is not easy to establish the chronology of a work that is neither signed nor dated, and that stands out because of its rarity within Francisco Barrera's production. However, within the extensive chronology of the painter's production (circa 1630–1658), this *Still life with silverware...* is likely to have been made already in the 1650s. Given the lack of signatures and dates, we should be guided by the style in the context of the painter's dated work, but difficulties arise immediately upon analysing these works. So far, the oldest known works are the four allegories of the seasons of the year, signed in 1638 (Seville, Museum of Fine Arts), which are very original because of the presence of figures amidst a myriad fruits and food items typical of each season. There follows the *Grape basket with several fruits*, dated 1642 (Florence, Uffizi), remarkable for its quality and similarity to some works by Antonio Ponce.<sup>6</sup> In a factitious way, some connection can be established between a refined *Still life with fruit bowl and a vase with lilies and carnations* and another *Still life with large fruit basket with melons and a white ceramic jug from Puente del Arzobispo*, dated 1643 and 1646 respectively (Madrid, Rosendo Naseiro collection).<sup>7</sup> These are very different from another pair of still lifes from the same collection, one representing dead hares and birds on strongly built stepped shelves, and with objects clearly laid out in the setting; and the other, much flatter, with meat and offal. They have earthy, dull colours, and are dated 1646 and 1647.<sup>8</sup> Some of Barrera's most popular still lifes are not dated, such as the four representations of the months of *May, June, July* and *August* (Bratislava, Slovak National Gallery);<sup>9</sup> or the one that used to belong to the Arango collection, representing the month of *February* (Madrid, Prado National Museum), similar to another one for *April* (Madrid, private collection).<sup>10</sup> A recent significant finding are the four

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<sup>6</sup> CHERRY, op. cit., 1999, p. 202 (reproduction).

<sup>7</sup> Santiago ALCOLEA BLANCH; Ángel ATERIDO; Rafael ROMERO ASEÑO: *La colección Rosendo Naseiro*. Madrid, 2014, pp. 18-25.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, pp. 26-33.

<sup>9</sup> CHERRY, op. cit., 1999, p. 206, illustrations XLV and XLVI. Oils on canvas, 102 x 156 cm.

<sup>10</sup> CHERRY, op. cit., 1999, p. 206, illustration XLIV, 2. Oil on canvas, 101 x 156 cm.

*Allegories of Spring* (signed), *Summer*, *Autumn* and *Winter* (Malaga, Carmen Thyssen Museum) [Fig. 3], of great decorative effect<sup>11</sup> and involving figures that recall the allegorical prints of months by engraver Alessandro Temini.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 3 Francisco Barrera. *Allegory of Spring*. Oil on canvas, 125 x 166 cm. Signed. Malaga, Carmen Thyssen Museum.

## IV. Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, and according to my knowledge on the subject, this painting can be catalogued as follows:

**Author:** Francisco Barrera (circa 1595 – Madrid, 4 October 1658)

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<sup>11</sup> Abalarte Subastas. Madrid. Opening auction, 18-19 December 2013, No. 69, 70, 71 and 72 (*Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn*, *Winter*). Oil on canvas, 125 x 166 cm (unsold). Auction No. 3, 7 May 2014, No. 102, 103, 104 and 105 (*Summer*, *Autumn*, *Winter* and *Spring*). The *Allegory of Spring* is signed as “Franc<sup>co</sup> Barrera”.

<sup>12</sup> Luca TREVISAN; Giulio ZAVATTA: *Incisori itineranti nell’area veneta nel Seicento*. *Dizionario bibliografico*. Verona, Università degli Studi di Verona, 2013, pp. 114-115.

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**Theme:** *Still life with silverware, watch, playing cards, wine glass, biscuits, porcelain cups and a chest with the Castile-Leon coat of arms on the ironwork*

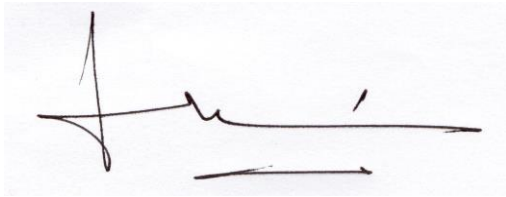
**Technique and dimensions:** Oil on canvas, 77.7 x 100.5 cm

**Chronology:** 1650s

## Final note:

This report contains my personal opinion about the painting concerned, based on sufficient technical, stylistic and historical evidence. I disclaim any liability with regard to other reports and opinions.

In Tres Cantos, on this 20<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ismael Gutiérrez Pastor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ismael Gutiérrez Pastor, PhD

Art History Professor

Autonomous University of Madrid

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