Merian, Pineapple with Cockroaches
Maria Sibylla Merian, *Pineapple with Cockroaches*, c. 1701-05.

Watercolor. Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 921156.

Merian's groundbreaking *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* opens with two engravings of the pineapple, the only fruit to be represented twice. The artist wrote that the pineapple was “the noblest of all the edible fruits,” and this particular watercolor, illustrating the plant alongside native insects, authentically shows the prickly produce in its natural environment. Merian took her detailed sketches and transposed them into printed engravings that were purchased by naturalists and elite members of society who were eager to learn of discoveries in Suriname. The awareness of rare and exotic foods from the new world make items such as the pineapple luxurious foreign goods that served as cultural currency for any family of significant social standing. A hostess's ability to obtain, display, or serve delicacies like pineapple conveyed a household’s discerning taste and financial fortitude, and even those without the means to purchase pineapples would rent them as table centerpieces.

Consulted Sources:


http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/921156
Amazing Rare Things exhibition, 2008; http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/microsites/amazinrarethings/

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