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Juan Sánchez Cotán's San Diego Still Life Painting as Vehicle for Gender Transformation

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Juan Sánchez Cotán's still life paintings produced prior to his entry into monastic life are somewhat of a mystery. Focusing on his "Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber" still life from 1602, an artist's path of personal growth, self-censorship, and most importantly, gender transformation emerges. Vehicle is the hyper-realistic, ecstatic mysticism of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. All elements in this painting can be read in a sensual and sexual context culminating in the uppermost object, the quince, which can be interpreted as a symbol for marriage. These artifacts help the artist to revise his own gender and transform himself into a "female-like" entity with an altered sexuality. Entering a religious community, he would have had to negate his own male sexuality and transform himself into a more passive, "female" role to prepare for his marriage to the divine. This still life painting is a document of Sánchez Cotán's difficult transformation.