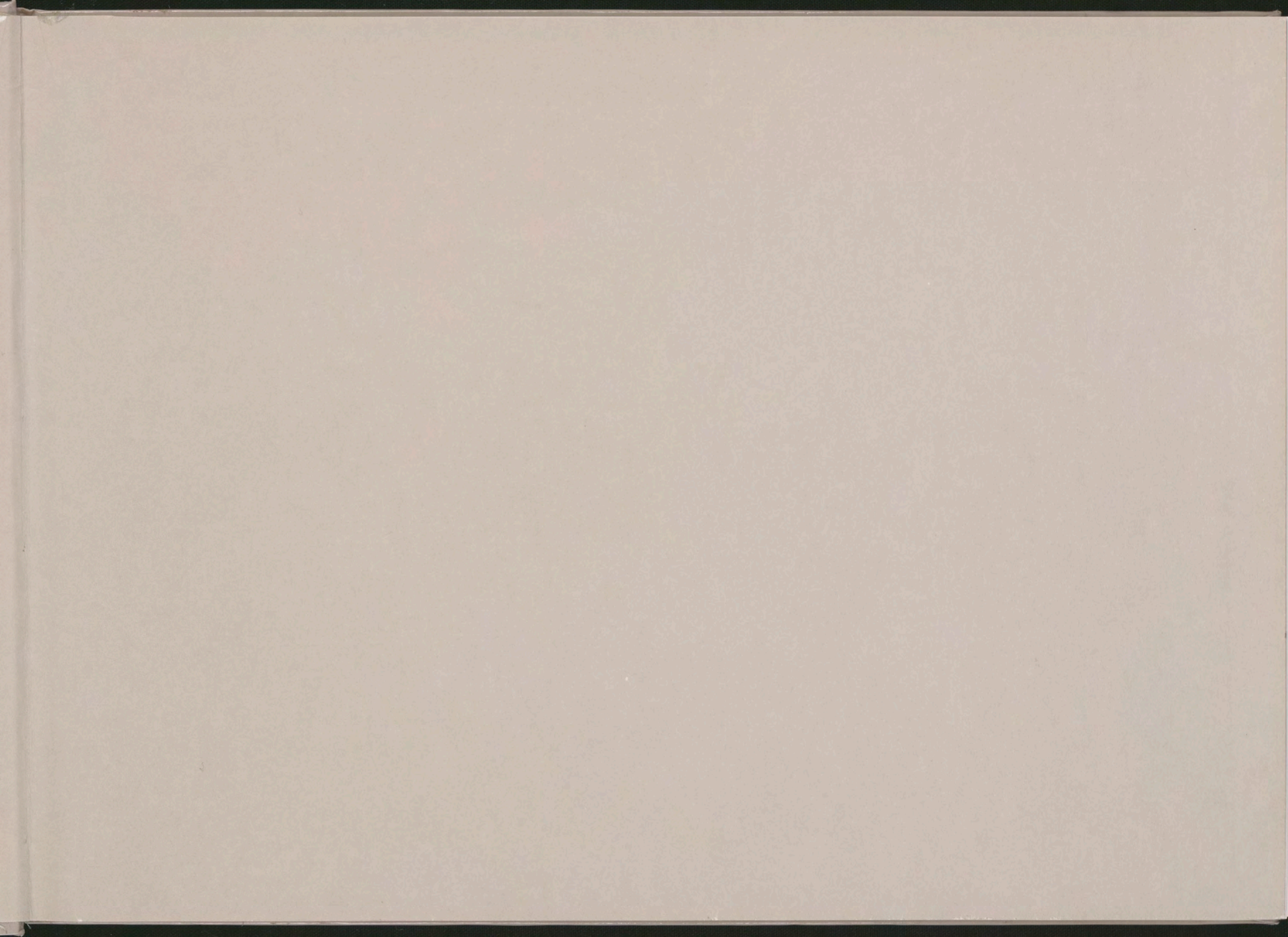


# STILL-LIFE

in the age of Rembrandt









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# STILL~LIFE

in the age of Rembrandt

Auckland City Art Gallery Inc



# STILL LIFE

STILL LIFE WITH CRAB AND SMOKER'S REQUISITES

cover:  
Jan Olis  
*Still-life with crab and smoker's requisites*  
Cat. no. 13



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# STILL~LIFE

in the age of Rembrandt

E. de Jongh  
with the assistance of  
Titia van Leeuwen  
Andrea Gasten  
and Hilary Sayles

Auckland City Art Gallery 1982



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in the age of Rembrandt  
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## Abbreviations

Bergström 1956	Ingvar Bergström, <i>Dutch still-life painting in the seventeenth century</i> . London 1956
Bol 1969	Laurens J. Bol, <i>Holländische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts nahe den grossen Meistern. Landschaften und Stilleben</i> , Brunswick 1969
Henkel-Schöne	Arthur Henkel und Abrecht Schöne, <i>Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts</i> , Stuttgart 1978
Hoogstraeten	Samuel van Hoogstraeten, <i>Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst . . .</i> , Rotterdam 1678
Houbraken	Arnold Houbraken, <i>De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen</i> 3 vols., (editio princeps Amsterdam 1718-1721), bewerkt door P.T.A. Swillens, Maastricht 1943-1953
<i>Stilleben in Europa</i>	Exhibition catalogue <i>Stilleben in Europa</i> , Münster (Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte) and Baden-Baden (Staatliche Kunsthalle), 1979-1980
<i>Tot lering en vermaak</i>	Exhibition catalogue <i>Tot lering en vermakk. Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw</i> , Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1976
Vroom	N.R.A. Vroom, <i>A modest message as intimated by the painters of the "monochrome banketje"</i> , 2 vols, Schiedam 1980
Warner	Ralph Warner, <i>Dutch and Flemish flower and fruit painters of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries</i> , with preface to the second edition and addenda by Sam Segal, Amsterdam 1975

Quotations from the Bible have been taken from the Authorized Version of 1611

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## Foreword

This book is a catalogue to, and a celebration of the exhibition, *Still Life in the age of Rembrandt*, organised for the art galleries of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

The exhibition, one in a continuing series of shows designed to amplify and augment the modest holdings of European art in New Zealand collections, devotes its attention to a number of the finest pioneers of still life painting. The seventeenth century in the Netherlands, an age indelibly coloured by that great master Rembrandt and termed with justifiable pride by his compatriots the "Golden Century" was one of history's richest periods of art production. In it lie the roots of so much that was to follow; the art trade, domestic painting and the middle-class patron amongst it. It is not difficult for today's exhibition audience to identify with the taste and aspirations of the proud and confident Dutch burghers who first owned paintings such as these. We hope that the paintings, prints and books, which make up the exhibition, and this book with its insight into still life painting and the concealed meanings which often lie beneath the surface, will afford both joy and fascination to our public.

The preparation of an exhibition of this scope is a difficult and time consuming task. The organisers are indebted to the authors of the book for their elegant and scholarly essays, the sponsors Northern United Building Society, and Qantas Airways for the support without which the exhibition would not have occurred, and to the Government of New Zealand for its indemnification of the valuable objects entrusted on loan.

Very special thanks must be reserved for the owners of the paintings, prints and books, however. The owners of the paintings are identified elsewhere in this book but not identified are the following generous contributors:

Dr Sam Segal, Amsterdam  
Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna  
Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague  
Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam  
Rijksmuseum Meermanno-Westreenianum, The Hague  
Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam  
Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht.

How apt was the comment made by one contributor in correspondence recently when he observed of the painters; "How astonished the old gentlemen would be if they knew what a long trip their works were making". It is the generous willingness of colleagues and collectors abroad in allowing their works of art to make the long trip to New Zealand that makes exhibitions of this kind possible.

T.L. Rodney Wilson





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## Acknowledgments

Still-life in the age of Rembrandt was developed and organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery, National Art Gallery and Robert McDougall Art Gallery. It has been made possible through the support of the Northern United Building Society, Qantas Airways and the New Zealand Government.



Northern United Building Society

**QANTAS AIRWAYS** 





Jan Davidsz. de Heem  
8. *Still-life with a view of a river*  
Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art,  
gift of Edward Drummond Libbey



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Andrea Gasten  
Dutch Still-Life Painting: Judgements and Appreciation

The genre of still-life painting as it emerged during the 17th century in continental Europe was characterised by the representation of inanimate objects without benefit of narrative context. Attention in these works was focused on the details of the physical world. Judging from the great quantity of still-lives, they enjoyed significant favour with the art-buying public. This development was most pronounced in Holland, where a democratic society and free market conditions furthered a process of artists' mass production and their specialisation in portraiture, landscape, genre, still-life and the officially esteemed category, history painting. Such specialisation, although not given full theoretical approval, was condoned by reference to the specialisation practised in antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

The literature on still-life representations has assumed varied forms during previous centuries. Until well into the 19th century, still-life was regarded in academic circles as an insignificant genre whose practitioners were accorded little status. In writing, it received summary discussion and was often introduced by pejorative qualifiers. In his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst* (Introduction to the Academy of Painting) of 1678, Samuel van Hoogstraeten pointed out that still-life painters must remember that they were only "the ordinary soldiers in the army of art".<sup>2</sup> Some thirty years later the classically oriented Gerard Lairesse opened his chapter on still-life painting by presenting it as an "aid for the weaker minds".<sup>3</sup> A number of modern handbooks on the history of Dutch art continue to reflect a hierarchy of subject matter by reserving for still-life painters relatively small sections at the ends of books after the more important fields of painting have been given fuller attention.

It is interesting to note that this prejudice has a long history within Western thought. Pliny, the authority most often cited by Renaissance and 17th century Dutch theoreticians, made a distinction between the major themes of history and mythology and the minor areas of art such as still-life. Pliny's history of artists stressed an ever increasing technical perfection of the pictorial media. His appreciation for works of art was based on his admiration for technical dexterity. The great master Zeuxis, for example, was praised for his innovations in the depiction of light and shade, while Apelles, the most perfect painter in Pliny's scheme, was lauded for having been able to paint the impossible: lightning and thunderbolts. The ambivalence in value judgement as reflected in the writings of Pliny was perpetuated by the inheritors of this tradition and expressed with particular emphasis by the biographers and theoreticians of the 17th and 18th centuries in Holland. Few of these, while relegating still-life representations to the lowest category of art, failed to find at least some works worthy of praise and admiration. Technical virtuosity was commended by authors who, owing to tradition, could not consider delighting the eye, however necessary and attractive a means, to be the primary end of painting.

A further complicating factor for 17th century writers was the problem of the ranking of the visual arts themselves. Since the early Renaissance, arts requiring manual labour were distinguished from



those for which work of the mind was a requisite, and the relative value of each was the subject of an ongoing debate. Technical perfection was considered no more than a mechanical feat; only use of an artists' imagination, according to many 17th century thinkers, could put painting on an equal footing with poetry and thus assure it a place among the liberal arts. Not until the French theoretician Roger de Piles *Cours de peinture par principes* [Treatise on painting by principles] (1708) was still-life painting thought to exert any demands upon the artist's imagination.<sup>4</sup>

Still-life painting in 17th century Holland thrived within a theoretical vacuum. Before the rise of classicist theory it was not distinguished as a genre. Samuel van Hoogstraeten was the first to deal with it in any systematic way, and then only in 1678, after the period of the genre's greatest flourishing. Considering that Van Hoogstraeten's theoretical convictions reveal a marked discrepancy with his own earlier painting practice, one may well wonder how seriously such notions would have been taken by other still-life painters. The situation with still-life in 17th century Holland was clearly one in which theory and practice did not go hand in hand.

A number of earlier sources and comments are also instructive to consider with an eye to later theory. At the beginning of the century, the first Dutch biographer of artists, Karel van Mander, stated that the painting of figural pieces was the only way "to reach the highest perfection in art".<sup>5</sup> He nevertheless included such artists as Jacques de Gheyn, Joris Hoefnagel, Lodewijk Jansz. van den Bosch and Pieter Aertsen and praised various features which today we would call still-life elements. These works were consistently admired for their accuracy and detail.

The autobiography of the poet and statesman Constantijn Huygens, written about 1630 (first published in 1897), contains twenty pages devoted to the arts of drawing and painting.<sup>6</sup> Although his highest praise was reserved for such history painters as Rubens, the young Rembrandt and Jan Lievens, a significant portion of his text is devoted to still-life painters. He discusses the elder De Gheyn and Johannes Torrentius at some length. Huygens was not attempting to produce an overall view of Netherlandish painting, but rather to mention what he knew. He was a nephew of Joris Hoefnagel and a member of a prominent family which was acquainted with the De Gheyns. Torrentius was, in his time, a singular figure.<sup>7</sup> To some extent, the attention devoted to these personages is fortuitous rather than the result of any explicit value judgement.

Huygens describes the work of De Gheyn and Torrentius as being representations of inanimate (lit.: un-souled) objects. Of the elder De Gheyn, Huygens remarks that "in giving form to the human figure and other living creatures he did not always live up to expectations [ . . . ] But when it came to inanimate objects, as books or paper or sundry objects of utility, he triumphed over all."<sup>8</sup> Huygens' description of the objects depicted in De Gheyn's and Torrentius' works as "un-souled" is not a chance expression but reflects the 17th century conception of the universe in which all products of creation were ranked according to a chain of being. This image of the world is basically a mediaeval one, remaining predominant in spite of discoveries made in the fields of anatomy and astronomy. Within this scheme, man, who possesses both angelic and bestial qualities, forms the link between heaven and earth. The soul was divided into three aspects: the vegetative, the sensitive and the rational. Only man, the microcosmos, contained all three of these levels of the soul and non-growing objects were considered to be "soul-less".

During the second half of the 17th century, a number of other collective terms emerged which were used synonymously with the generic *stilleven* and which were often simply indicative of a lack of motion: "still-standing" or "still-lying" objects. The combination "still-standing model" was also used as in "Een stilstaent leven van Ravesteijn" (a still-standing model by Ravesteijn).<sup>9</sup> The poet





Edwaert Collier  
40. Vanitas still-life  
Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal



Vondel wrote in a panegyric to Willem Kalf that the painter "heeft . . . stilstaende dingen lief" (is enamoured of still-standing objects).<sup>10</sup> The Flemish notary and rhetorician Cornelis de Bie used various labels interchangeably in his *Het gulden cabinet vande edel vry schilder-const* (The golden cabinet of the noble liberal art of painting) of 1662. A laudatory poem which he wrote in honour of the painter "Peeter" van Aelst demonstrates the fact that these terms were not used precisely. De Bie, for example, makes no distinction between "soul-less" and "motionless" in his description of such representations. The poem begins: "All that which nature can express from her bosom/ (By our artists called still-standing objects)/ Wherein a life lies hidden that is without feeling/A life without soul, yet which lives within itself . . ."<sup>11</sup> Such poems indicate that still-life paintings were highly valued.

With the establishment of the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture in Paris in 1648, the ranking of the various subjects of painting became established. Since the time of Alberti, history painting had been the only subject given theoretical sanction; until the middle of the 17th century paintings representing significant human actions remained the only subjects considered worthy of representation.<sup>12</sup> The French academician Felibien's inclusion of other subjects in an official hierarchy of art was an innovation, although it came late with respect to actual practices in the arts. Felibien, was the first to systematically rank art according to subject matter and based his ideas on the above mentioned ranking in nature. He referred to the lowest category of artists as both the painters "des fruits, des fleurs ou des coquilles" (of fruits, flowers and shells) and those "des choses mortes et sans mouvement" (of unliving and motionless objects).<sup>13</sup> (The French term *nature morte*, like the Dutch name *stilleven*, originally had pejorative overtones. The Dutch, German and English terms have fared better, as they were more conducive to positive interpretation. The original meaning of the Dutch word *leven* as model was forgotten and later viewers and art critics tended to read into the term *stilleven* a quality of quietness and restfulness.)

It is not known whether Samuel van Hoogstraeten, the first Dutch author to deal with still-life theoretically, was influenced by the writings of Felibien. Van Hoogstraeten established a hierarchy like Felibien's which relates an object's rank in nature to the demands it makes upon the painter's imagination.<sup>14</sup> He distinguished three distinct levels of painting based upon the tripartite division of the soul. The painters of still-life belonged unequivocally to the lowest grade, those who chose poorly among the potential subjects: "It is however certain that however attractively some flowers, fruits, or other still-lives as we call them, are painted, these paintings may nonetheless never be placed higher than the first [i.e. the lowest] grade of works of art, even if they were executed by De Heem, Father Zegers, yes, even Zeuxis or Parrhasius, to the extent of *trompe l'oeil*".<sup>15</sup> Van Hoogstraeten based his argument for the consignment of still-life to the category of "overmaet of toegift tot het voornaemste werk" (superfluity or adornment to the principal work) on examples drawn from Junius' *De pictura veterum* (The painting of the ancients)<sup>16</sup>. Junius, who was not discussing still-life paintings but subsidiary elements in paintings, related the distress of these painters when not the essence of their work, but a minor detail, was admired. He ends his book with the admonition " . . . yet must we never be so inconsiderate in our judgement, as to preferre the by-work before the work. . ."<sup>17</sup>. Van Hoogstraeten echoed the plea for the judgement of works of art according to their worth and placed independent still-life paintings on the same level as decorative details. Van Hoogstraeten the artist, however, despite his later carefully formulated theoretical convictions, practised the genre himself "to the extent of *trompe l'oeil*" (see plates 25a and 25b.)

Gerard Lairesse revealed an implicit acceptance of still-life as an independent genre. The "virtue"



of a still-life painting lay in the depiction of only "de alleruitgelezenste voorwerpen" (the most select objects); such everyday articles as cabbage or carrots were not worthy of being represented. Lairesse regarded Willem Kalf as the best of the still-life painters; however, he criticised him for neglecting to clarify his deeper intentions. In accepting the genre, but maintaining the old adage that art consisted not only of labour of the hand but also of that of the mind, Lairesse recommended that the still-life painter provide his work with "hidden meanings." For the edification of his readers, he sketched a number of scenes in which this recipe could be put into practice.<sup>18</sup>

Critical approval of still-life painting developed only in the 19th century. In Holland, before the end of the century, the history of appreciation for the genre is difficult to trace, requiring extensive investigation of contemporary Dutch literature. During the 18th and early 19th centuries decorative floral pieces were popular and executed in quantity both for the domestic market and for export. Johan van Gool elaborately praised his contemporaries Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum, both of whom were masters of the flower piece, in his *Nieuwe schouburg der nederlandsche kunstschilders en schilderessen* (New theatre of Dutch painters, both men and women) of 1750-51. Later biographies and dictionaries of artists such as Roeland van Eijnden and Adriaan van der Willigen's *Geschiedenis der nederlandsche schilderkunst* (History of Dutch painting; vols 1-3, 1816-1820, supplement 1840) and Immerzeel's *De levens en werken der hollandsche en flaamsche kunstschilders* (The lives and works of the Dutch and Flemish painters) of 1842-43 reflect a similar taste. Of the still-life painters discussed, most were contemporaries who painted flower and fruit compositions which constituted variants on a tradition that had not significantly altered since the time of Jan van Huysum.<sup>19</sup> Little knowledge of the works or biographical details of the 17th century still-life masters is displayed in these sources; many of the paintings of even the most famous artists seem to have fallen into oblivion. Several comments of Immerzeel's may serve as an indicator of the extent to which older categories of still-life had fallen into disfavour with the art-buying public: with respect to one of Willem Claesz. Heda's still-lives he remarks that "in earlier days a high price was paid for such subjects" and, elsewhere, that "such pieces [i.e. still-lives other than flower pieces] are presently much less popular than they were formerly." Only the works of Kalf appeared to be the exception to this rule.<sup>20</sup>

Since its inception still-life had enjoyed international appeal and by the end of the 17th century it was well known throughout Europe. During the 18th century the influence of Netherlandish still-life was most pronounced in Paris and was emulated by French masters. Owing to the greater opportunities for public display afforded by the Salons, the genre of still-life attracted the attention of critics who were forced to deal with the theoretical problems of such representations. Within the academic circles the predominance of history painting persisted in the 18th century. Official disapproval of still-lives can be discerned in many critical writings of the period. The still-lives of Chardin, the most accomplished French master of this genre were greeted with enthusiasm by the public and forced a major concession from the critic Diderot. Diderot, through disappointment in the history painting exhibited in the Salons and his admiration for the formal qualities of Chardin's works, called the painter a "great man."<sup>21</sup> Chardin was a model for 19th century still-life painters. The interest in this French master was increased by the writings of Pierre Hedouin in the *Bulletin des Arts* of 1846 and the work of Theophile Thore and the De Goncourt brothers.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1820s, still-life painting had begun to emerge as a genre with the sanction of the critics. The most essential factor in this turn of events was the destruction of the hierarchy of the genres; the uncoupling of the artistic value of a work of art from the subject represented. For example, in his Salon review of 1824, Adolphe Thiers observed the decline of history painting with none of the



regrets expressed by Diderot. Thiers claimed that subject matter was of no importance in comparison to talent and that the latter could best be deployed in representations of everyday life. The most significant defence of still-life painting during the early 19th century was that uttered by Laviron in his *Salon de 1833*. This critic not only denounced the old hierarchy of the genres, but mounted an impassioned plea for still-life as an art form possessing its own history and tradition and deplored the lack of sympathy with which it had always been received. The rising interest in cultural history helped to create a base upon which still-life could be defended and was of particular importance for the appreciation of Dutch masters of the 17th century. An important impulse in the writing of the cultural history had already been given by Voltaire's *Le siècle de Louis XIV*.<sup>23</sup> Karl Schnaase, who in his *Niederlandische Briefe* of 1834 was one of the earliest authors to show appreciation for Dutch still-life painting as an expression of the Dutch predilection for the representation of reality, saw expression in art as related to the nation and the period which produced it. Hippolyte Taine recommended that artists respect the facts of real life in their work. In his *Philosophie de l'art dans les pays-bas* of 1869, Taine wrote of Dutch 17th century painters, "That which national feeling demands and that to which it inspires its painters, is the representation of real people and real life, as it meets the eye."<sup>24</sup> This demand for emphasis on the depiction of real life and ordinary people was repeated by other theoreticians and artists of the mid-19th century. The inclusion of still-life into the discussion of art as part of a cultural complex, of which the writings of Schnaase constitute a harbinger, is essentially a 19th century phenomenon. Thore devoted little attention to the genre and Fromentin virtually none.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, cultural-historical considerations formed an important facet of the eventual conception by critics and historians of still-life representations as equal in value to any other subjects of painting.<sup>27</sup>

Johannes van Vloten, an influential 19th century aesthete and litterateur, wrote a history of Dutch art for the Dutch people after the model of Taine and Thore.<sup>28</sup> Van Vloten was perhaps the first Dutch author to incorporate a particular appreciation for the art of his countrymen into his vision of a "complete new order of things" — reminiscent of Thore's "new Holland" — in Dutch society of the 17th century.<sup>29</sup> For Van Vloten the trait which characterises Dutch 17th century painting is a predilection for the pictorial representation of the real world and the artists ability to penetrate into the deeper nature of things: they [the Dutch] were not thinking of coarse reality, of a rough and material conception of men and things which keeps to the superficial externals and which is not able to penetrate to the inner life, the soul itself."<sup>30</sup>

In Van Vloten's vision of Dutch 17th century art, still life was presented in a positive manner. For his 20th century colleagues, the scale or balance began to tip the other way. Idealistic currents in philosophical thought and their influence in art theory played an important role in this development. Schopenhauer was of particular significance, as he was greatly influenced by Goethe's notion of the *Urbild*, an image through which the artist could penetrate the basic types upon which the universe is constructed.<sup>31</sup> Schopenhauer also adopted the notion of *Ur* (type)-phenomena and launched the theory that it had been the contemplative nature of the Dutch people which led to their affinity for still-life. His famous passage on the subject was quoted by the art dealer Jacques Goudstikker in the introduction to the catalogue of an important exhibition of still-life paintings held in Amsterdam and Rotterdam in 1933, where it was used to defend the validity of the subject chosen for the exhibition.<sup>32</sup>

Thus animated on the one hand by interest in cultural history and on the other by the value placed upon the aesthetic and formal qualities of a work of art (above those of its subject matter), art critics



and historians of this century began to devote serious attention to an investigation of the origins of still-life as an independent genre, the historical and formal development of the various motifs and types and, in recent years, the possible symbolic content of the images.

Curiously enough, a tacit assumption that the genre is minor has been perpetuated even into our century. Such handbooks as those of Adolph Philipp (Die Blüte der Malerei in Holland [The flowering of painting in Holland] 1901 and Wilhelm Bode (Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen) Rembrandt and his contemporaries] 1906, which present an overview of Dutch art, devote only a few pages to still-life. In both cases the Dutch predilection for still-life painting was a matter of "künstlerisches Verlangen" (pictorial desire) or, as Bode put it, "a wish, which has roots deep within the soul of the Dutch people, to render pictorially all that which the world of appearances has to offer."<sup>33</sup> Jacob Rosenberg's and Seymour Slive's treatment of Dutch painting in *Dutch art and architecture 1600-1800* (1966) echoes Bode's conviction that the painters of still-life were talented but minor masters who displayed the character traits of their national school. Rosenberg's and Slive's chapter on still-life opens: "Still-life painting is a less conspicuous theme than portraiture or landscape painting, but it is equally typical of Dutch taste and pictorial genius."<sup>34</sup>

Other scholars, such as Ludwig van Baldass (Sittenbild und Stilleben im Rahmen des Niederländischen Romanismus) recognised the affinity between these still-life representations and elements of earlier religious subjects.<sup>35</sup> The debate on the origins of still-life painting will later be divided along these two lines: those who consider autonomous still-life paintings as having emerged from earlier, symbolic contexts and those who search for defence along pictorial lines.<sup>36</sup> The attention of public and critics towards still-life has risen mostly in the 20th century. The first exhibition to be devoted entirely to still-life painting was organised by the Rotterdamse Kunstkring in 1909. W. Martin's review of this event gives evidence of the ambivalence which still existed concerning the subject matter; he observed that many members of art societies still regarded still-life as an inferior genre, and noted remarks made during the exhibition by members of the public to the effect that such effort could better have been devoted to more worth subject matter! Martin praised the "daring" of the Rotterdam art society, which in organising the exhibition did not allow itself to be dissuaded from its guiding ideal of exhibiting art.<sup>37</sup>

During the following years, there was an increasing appreciation of the genre in Dutch periodical literature. Often, as in the articles by J.M. Blok in *Onze Kunst* of 1917, a cultural/historical approach was combined with concepts of art for art's sake. Vermeulen characterised the "new bourgeois society" of the Dutch 17th century as having a "sober state of soul inclined towards the intimate which is directed inwardly", and furthermore stated that it is this "deepening of apprehension which leads to abstract still-life painting."<sup>38</sup> In spite of an awareness of the vanitas theme which constituted one aspect of 17th century Dutch still-life painting, Blok placed his emphasis on the visual and contemplative aspects: "still-life in art is the spiritualisation of the material alone."<sup>39</sup>

G. Knuttel's essay on origins and development of still-life painting (1926) is one of the first attempts at a systematic historical outline of the genre.<sup>40</sup> His discussion may be more extensive than that of his predecessors but is typical of their viewpoints. Knuttel maintained that the motifs chosen for a work of art were less important than the "creative impulse" of the artist which, in his estimation, both preceded the motif and superceded in importance the subject of the work. The essence of the work lay on the level of its expressive and aesthetic qualities. Knuttel realised the popularity of emblematic literature on the 17th century and suggested that "in many still-lives an emblematic representation or symbol is hidden."<sup>41</sup> This "religious element" was for Knuttel all the





Jan Olis  
13. *Still-life with crab and smoker's requisites*  
Private collection, The Netherlands



more reason to consider these works as having a full-fledged status as works of art. H.P. Bremmer, an aesthete and art expert who along with Abraham Bredius had been one of the few private parties to lend works to the Rotterdam exhibition in 1909, saw this question in terms of a contradiction; for him, pondering the meaning of the objects depicted in a still-life, hindered the viewer in his appreciation of its real significance, which lay in the aesthetic plane: "And whoever wears himself out wondering what that little wooden tub with the glass pipe in it means, is not concerned with this work as a work of art."<sup>42</sup> Bremmer defended the integrity of the genre on the basis of its being "one of the purest, in which perceptual intuition can be given in the most impartial manner."<sup>43</sup> He felt disturbed by investigation of iconographic meaning.

Bremmer, in his references to "perceptual intuition" and the ability of the Dutch artist to "strangely dreaming plunge himself . . . into such insignificant objects", betrayed the influence of art for art's sake and philosophical idealism. As late as 1932 he felt the necessity of defending what the layman considered as an inferior genre.<sup>44</sup> A year later, Goudstikker remarked that the subject is not the essence of a work of art. Max Friedländer felt himself similarly confronted with the problem of how such "simple, insignificant objects" could have come to be the subject of autonomous works of art. His rationalisations, ranging from cultural and sociological to formal and aesthetic considerations in an attempt to account for the rise of the genre, betray an overtone of defensiveness.<sup>45</sup>

The first scholar to balance the conception of still-life as an art for art's sake doctrine and to introduce a historical perspective into the appreciation of the genre was A.P.A. Vorenkamp. His dissertation of 1933 analysed the appraisals with which still-life had been received since the 17th century.<sup>46</sup> Vorenkamp's research did much to increase the knowledge of the various individual still-life painters and schools.

J.G. van Gelder's "Van Blompot en blomglas" (Of flowerpots and vases), published in *Elsevier's Geillustreerd Maandschrift* in 1936 is a key article which elucidates the development of flower painting in still-life. It traces the contexts out of which such works evolved and the associations with which individual motifs are charged.<sup>47</sup> Van Gelder's article stimulated the Swedish art historian Ingvar Bergström to write his dissertation on Dutch still-life painting; it was published in English in 1956 and still serves as the standard work on the subject.<sup>48</sup> Bergström's book bears the fruits of his predecessors' work; the history of the various types of still-life is investigated particularly in respect to the vanitas still-life. His study was also the major impulse to further iconographic work on still-life painting.

In recent years, the iconography of still-life has been closely observed. In 1970 Leiden's Lakenhal museum devoted an exhibition to Dutch vanitas representations in which still-lives figured predominantly.<sup>49</sup> A number of still-lives were included in the exhibition *Die Sprache der Bilder* held in Braunschweig, which aimed to present art works within the framework of the Dutch predilection for hiding meanings "under the surface." In the mammoth catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Stilleben in Europa* held in Münster and Baden-Baden in 1979-80, the tools of iconographic research were applied to international still-life representations.

N.R.A. Vroom wrote in the second edition of his well-known *De schilders van het monochrome banketje* (The painters of the monochrome *banketje*), "the majority of still-lives appear to have been painted out of purely pictorial conviction"<sup>50</sup> while the still-life enthusiast and connoisseur L.J. Bol carries his protest further: "but herein [the interpretation of the content of pictures] lies a danger: that decipherment will lead to a loss of lustre. Iconology must remain cognizant of its position as an



auxiliary field of scholarship. It must not take on an attitude of hindrance to works of art, obliging us to listen, impeding our view."<sup>51</sup> Such complaints have been justified by the tendency of some scholars to remain dissatisfied until they have accounted for the presence of every object, plant, insect or flower on the symbolic level. The research of Sam Segal, botanist and expert in the field of still-life, has managed to maintain a degree of balance in the illumination of background meanings while appreciating the pictorial, stylistic and cultural-historical aspects of these works.<sup>52</sup>

The variety of ways in which still-life representations have been analysed, admired, evaluated and criticised reveals the many facets of their appeal. Modern viewers will, while standing before such paintings, not be burdened with forebodings of the transience of this earthly life, nor will they have any compunction as to the status of such representations within a hierarchy of subject matter. A sense of history and insight into the original meanings of the pictures will heighten our appreciation of such works. Scholarly efforts directed both toward an elucidation of the meanings which these paintings could have had for the 17th century viewer contributes to an enrichment of the present-day spectators's estimation and enjoyment of the still-lives of 17th century Holland.

1. See for example Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck*, Amsterdam 1618 (ed. princ. Haarlem 1604), "Voor-reden op den grondt der edel vry schilder-const", fol. 5v. Van Mander's list of the specialties practised in antiquity include not only subject matter, but also aspects of the art of painting which are essentially technical or aesthetic. Only much later in the century would this distinction be made in Holland, and on the basis of it, a hierarchy of genres according to subject matter. See in this regard J.A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, ed. Amsterdam 1979, esp. 143-147. Remarks to the effect that it was preferable to achieve excellence in a lower genre than to practise a higher one poorly were commonplace in later literature; see for example Houbraken on Willem Kalf, vol. 2, 171.
2. Hoogstraeten, 75: "Maer deze Konstenaers moeten weten dat zij maer gemeene Soldaeten in het veltleger van de konst zijn".
3. Gerard Lairesse, *Het groot schilderboek*, Amsterdam 1707, 259: "Dus verre . . . de waardigheid der Edele Schilderkunst verhandeld hebbende . . . zullen wij nu tot behulp der zwakke geesten tot het Stilleven overgaan, . . .".
4. Published in Dutch translation: *Verhandeling over de schilderkunde*, Amsterdam 1756, 34-47. De Piles differentiates between divisions of "the sorts of art" three types of invention (mystical, allegorical and historical) which he likens to the three rhetorical *genera dicendi*, (forms of style). The lowest category, but which nonetheless made demands upon the painter's intelligence and imagination, was comprised of all historical or otherwise recorded tales, portraits, topographical views, animals and "all the products of art and nature".
5. Van Mander, op. cit. (note 1), fol. 196r (Van Miereveldt): "... den History en beelde-wegh/ ter hoogsten volcomenheyt leydende/ . . .".
6. *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens door hemzelf beschreven*, transl. and ed. by A.H. Kan, Rotterdam and Antwerp 1946 (ed. princ. 1897).
7. Johannes Torrentius rose to fame in the 1620's not only as a talented painter but also as a bon-vivant. His name was associated with a heretical religious sect, for which he was imprisoned in 1627. Huygens, as secretary to Prince Frederik Hendrik, was certainly acquainted with the details of his trial.
8. Huygens, op. cit. (note 6), 69-70: "Ik beken, dat hij bij het vorm geven aan menschen en verdere levende wezens niet altijd heeft beantwoord aan de verwachting [ . . . ] Maar waar het onbezielde dingen betrof, zooals boeken of papier of andere willekeurige voorwerpen, die door de menschen worden gebruikt, was hij allen de baas".
9. From the inventory of Jean Larson, 1664. See A. Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare*, vol. 1, The Hague 1915, 325. See further in connexion with the terminology used in the 17th century Lydia de Pauw-de Veen, *De begrippen "schilder", "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de zeventiende eeuw*, Brussels 1969, 141-143.
10. J. van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. van Lennep-Unger, vol. 1671-1679, Leiden (n.d.), 368.
11. Cornelis de Bie, *Het gulden cabinet vande edel vry schilder-const*, Antwerp 1662, 291: "Al t'gen' Natura can uyt haeren boesem dringhen/ (By onse Constenaers ghenoept stilstaende dinghen)/ Waer in een leven schuyt dat gheen



- ghevoelen heeft/ Een leven sonder siel, doch in zijn selven leeft: . . .".
12. See for a discussion of the subjects which were considered worthy of being represented in art, Manfred Boos, *Französische Kunstliteratur zur Malerei und Bildhauerei 1648 und 1669*, Munich (diss.) 1966.
  13. André Félibien, preface to the *Conférences de l'académie royale de peinture et de sculpture. Pendant l'année 1667*, Paris 1669, 14-15. Félibien's first complete statement on the hierarchy of the genres was given in his *De l'origine de la peinture* of 1660. Further references to the hierarchy of subject matter can be found scattered through the *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres* (1666-1688). The passage in the preface to the academy conferences constitutes the most comprehensive formulation of his ideas on this subject.
  14. Hoogstraeten, 86: "Als gy dan met my verstaet, dat'er zoodanige graeden van waerdigheyt en Edelheyt in de voorwerpen der natuere zijn; en daer by, dat'er zoo veel meerder kennis en konst tot het uitbeelden van een leevendig dier, als tot iet onberoerlijx vereyscht wort: dat de konst haer uiterste kracht van nooden heeft in de bedrijven der menschen, en dat de Schilderyen in waerde moeten gehouden worden nae de konst, die daer insteekt: . . ." (If you then agree with me that there exist such grades of value and nobility in the objects of nature, and in addition that much more knowledge and art is required for the representation of a living animal than for something motionless; that art uses her utmost strength in the actions of humans beings, and that paintings should be valued according to the art which goes into them . . .).
  15. Ibid., 87: "Echter staet dit vast, dat hoe overaerdig eenige bloemen, vruchten, of andere stillebens, gelijk wy't noemen, geschildert zijn, deeze Schilderyen evenwel niet hooger, als in den eersten graed der konstwerken moogen gesteld worden; al waerzenze zelfs van de Heem, Pater Zegers, jae Zeuxis en Parrasius, tot bedriegens toe uitgevoerd".
  16. Ibid., 76. Franciscus Junius, *The painting of the ancients in three bookes*, London 1638. Junius's work was first published in Latin: *De pictura veterum libri tres*, Amsterdam 1637; a Dutch translation appeared four years later: *De schilder-konst der oude, begrepen in drie boecken*, Middelburg 1641.
  17. Cited from the English edition of 1638, 354. In his borrowings from Junius Van Hoogstraeten also used the word *parerga*. This term, meaning "extra ornaments," had been employed by a number of antique authors to indicate subsidiary or decorative motifs added to a work of art.
  18. Lairese, op. cit. (note 3), 259-298; see also 355-368 (on flower painting).
  19. For Netherlandish still-life painters active during the 18th and early 19th centuries, see exhib. cat. *Boeket in Willet*, Amsterdam (Museum Willet Holthuysen) 1970. This period in Dutch still-life painting would later be characterized as the "decadent" phase. Thoré voices such an opinion which is later echoed by Van Vloten (see below, note 28).
  20. Immerzeel, vol. 2, 22: "In vroeger dagen werd voor dergelijke onderwerpen een hooft prijs besteed; . . ." (cited is a painting of Heda's which was sold at Dordrecht in 1708); vol. 2, 95: "Ofschoon de smaak voor dergelijke stukken thans veel minder is dan vroeger, maken de schilderijen van Kalf daarop steeds een verdiende uitzondering". It is difficult to know what credence can be lent to Immerzeel's claim that the paintings of Kalf remained more popular than those of other still-life painters, as his statement is based on a remark of Houbraken's (vol. 2, 171): "although paintings of such choice, being at present of little worth, have to clear the field for more worthy subjects, his [Kalf's] works remain in great esteem by all lovers of art". It is not clear whether Houbraken, whose statement dates from more than a century earlier, was referring to theoretical or financial "worth", or whether this had diminished since an (unspecified) former time.
  21. Salon review of 1769. See Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, ed. P. Vernière, Paris 1965, 494.
  22. E. and J. de Goncourt, "Chardin", *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 15 (1863), 514-533 and 16 (1864), 144-167. *Salons de T. Thoré: 1844-48; avec une préface par W. Bürger*, Paris 1868. It was possibly at the urging of Thoré that the Louvre acquired a number of Chardins in the 1860's. On the Chardin revival, see further J.W. McCoubrey, "The revival of Chardin in French still-life painting, 1850-1870", *The Art Bulletin* 46 (1964), 38-53, and G.P. Weisberg and W.S. Talbot, *Chardin and the still-life tradition in France*, Cleveland, Ohio 1979.
  23. Voltaire, *Essai sur le siècle de Louis XIV*, written before 1738, first complete edition Berlin 1751. The visual arts, however, were given only a modest place in his scheme.
  24. Taine, ed. princ., Paris 1869, 159.
  25. As early as 1831 the historian and archaeologist Charles de Lenormant (cf. *Les artistes contemporains, Salon de 1831*, 62-66) asserted that paintings of daily life were among the primary needs of an advanced society. By the 1860's, a multitude of statements by artists, writers and theoreticians emerged to the effect that ordinary people and contemporary events should dominate the stage of art. See in this regard Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, New York 1971.
  26. W. Bürger [Thoré], *Musées de la Hollande*, vol. 1, Paris 1858, "Amsterdam et La Haye. Études sur l'école hollandaise"; vol. 2, Paris 1860, "Musée van der Hoop à Amsterdam et Musée de Rotterdam". Fromentin mentions the word "nature morte" only once in the course of his book; in a recapitulation of all the categories of Dutch art: *Les maîtres*



- d'autrefois, Paris 1876, 235.
27. A seminal figure in this regard is R. van Luttervelt (*Schilders van het stilleven*, Naarden 1947), who attributes the rise of still-life to both the infusion of humanism and the stabilization of Protestantism in 17th-century Holland. For an interpretation of still-life in general as a "bourgeois" theme in art, see Eva Badelt, *Das Stilleben als bürgerliches Bildthema und seine Entwicklung von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich (diss.) 1938.
  28. Johannes van Vloten, *Nederlands schilderkunst van de 14de tot de 18de eeuw, voor het Nederlandsche volk geschetst*, Amsterdam 1874.
  29. Ibid., 191: "gansch nieuwe orde van zaken".
  30. Ibid., 196: "Daarbij hadden zij geen grove werkelijkheid, geen ruwe en stoffelijke opvatting van menschen en dingen op 't oog, dië zich slechts aan 't oppervlakkige uiterlijke houdt, en niet tot het innerlijk leven, de ziel zelve weet door te dringen".
  31. For Goethe, the representation of the human figure remained the primary end of art. Nevertheless, he writes, "so dann doch keinem Gegenstande, . . . das Recht versagt werden, gleichfalls dargestellt zu sein, und im Nachbild ein grosses, ja grössere Vergnügen zu erwecken, als die Urbild nur immer erregen könnte". See *Über Kunst und Altertum* (1817), cited from *Schriften zur Kunst*, vol. 2, Munich 1962, 99.
  32. Exhib. cat. *Het stilleven*, Amsterdam (Kunsthandel J. Goudstikker) 1933. Quotation from Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819): "... those excellent Netherlands who turned such a purely objective eye on the most trivial matters and raised up a lasting monument to their objectivity and tranquillity of soul in still-life, which no aesthetic observer can view unaffected, since it brings home to him the quiet, still, undesiring frame of mind of the artist necessary to so objective a contemplation of such insignificant things". Cited from M.J. Friedländer, *Landscape, Portrait, Still-life*, transl. R.F.C. Hull, Oxford 1949, 284.
  33. Bode, 196: "Die Freude, an der künftlerischen Darstellung der unlebten Natur hat ihren Grund in der tief im niederländischen Volken wurzelnden Lust, alles im Bilde zu gestalten, was die Welt der Erscheinungen nur bietet".
  34. Rosenberg and Slive, ed. 1967, 194.
  35. Von Baldass, in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 36 (1923), 15-46.
  36. The problem of the origin of still-life as an independent genre was not addressed in the 17th century, but is rather a typically modern art-historical question. Until about 1950, still-life painting was assumed to have been "emancipated" from earlier religious or emblematic contexts in which still-life elements had had a subordinate function. Beginning with Charles Sterling in 1952 (cf. "En préparant l'exposition de la nature morte", *La Revue des Arts* 2 (1952), 34ff., and esp. *La nature morte de l'antiquité à nos jours*, exhib. cat. Paris (Orangerie) 1952; published in book form in Paris in 1959) a series of polemical writings on this subject emerged. Sterling, whose visual comparisons as well as his use of ancient sources often leaves much to question, emphasized the pictorial autonomy of these works and suggested that their independence had to do with the influence of Renaissance humanism. Charles de Tolnay (cf. "Les origines de la nature morte", *La Revue des Arts* 2 (1952), 151-152 and 3 (1953), 66-67) seconds his opinion and suggests that the two niches painted in the 14th century by Taddeo Gaddi in the Baroncelli chapel of Santa Croce were the first real still-lives after antiquity. Ernst Gombrich (cf. "Tradition and expression in Western still-life", *Burlington Magazine* 103 (1961), 175-180) agrees essentially with Sterling, whereby he however treats as synonymous the pictorial autonomy of still-life representations and the emphasis placed in antiquity (so he says) on illusionism. Parronchi finally does make this distinction and points out that Taddeo, a disciple of Giotto, was interested in painted spatiality and not in still-life as such (cf. *Studi su la dolce prospettiva*, Milan 1964, 147-150). The problem as a whole has yet to be satisfactorily resolved.
  37. W. Martin, "Tentoonstelling van stilleven in den Rotterdamschen Kunstkring", *Bulletin van den Nederlandschen Oudheidkundigen Bond*, 2nd series, 2 (1909), 145-150: "Des te meer moet men het Kring-Bestuur loven: het laat zich niet storen in de leidende ideale gedachte, 'kunst' te willen laten zien...".
  38. Frans Vermeulen, "De ontwikkeling van het stilleven in de Hollandsche schilderkunst", *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 22, vol. 43 (1912), 353-366 and 451-462. 353: "sobere intiniteitzoekende zielsgesteldheid, die allereerst speurt naar het wezen en buiten den schoonen schijn zich richt op het innerlijke."; 356: "... verdiepen der aanschouwing, die leidt tot de abstrakte stillevenschildering".
  39. J.M. Blok, "Het Nederlandsche stilleven", *Onze Kunst* 16, vol. 31 (1917), 149-164. 149: "het stilleven in de kunst is de vergeestelijking van het stoffelijke alleen".
  40. Knuttel's essay ("Het Nederlandsch stilleven") was written at the request of H.E. van Gelder as an introduction to the catalogue of the "Kunst aan Allen" exhibition as reprinted in the *Mededeelingen van den Dienst voor Kunsten en*



*Wetenschappen der Gemeente 's-Gravenhage* (March 1926), 1-31.

41. Ibid., 7: "Men kan . . . zeker aannemen, dat in menig stillevens een zinnebeeldige voorstelling of aanduiding verborgen is".
42. H.P. Bremmer, in *Beeldende Kunst* 18 (1932), 42: "En wie zich gaat aftobben om te weten, wat dat houten tobbetje met de glazen pijp daarin beteekent, houdt zich ook niet met dit werk als kunstwerk bezig".
43. Ibid., 41: "een van de zuiverste, waarin het Beeldend aanschouwen op de meest onbevengende wijze gegeven kan worden".
44. Ibid., 44: "... vreemd dromend zich verdiepen . . . in zulke onaanzienlijke voorwerpen". Further ibid., 41: "Het stillevens is een vorm van de Beeldende Kunst, waarin de zuiverheid van aanschouwen meer de hoofdzaak is, dan in alle inhouds- en figuratieve voorstellingen; dus een vorm, die niet inférieur is, zooals de meeste leeken meenen . . ." (Still-life is a form of art in which the purity of apprehension is more predominant than in all representational and figurative pictures; thus a form which is not inferior, as most laymen seem to think . . .).
45. Friedländer, op. cit. (note 32). Friedländer's account of the rise of still-life painting is a pastiche betraying the manifold historiographical roots which led to an appreciation of the genre. He summarizes the "conditions" requisite to its emergence in five pairs of antitheses (for this last phenomenon, see E. Gombrich, "Norm and form. The stylistic categories of art history and their origins in Renaissance ideas", in *Norm and form. Studies in the art of the Renaissance*, London 1966) of which three are quasi-formalistic in nature while the other two belong in essence to the realm of cultural history: one is political and the other pseudo-sociological ("energy/need of rest"). Under this last category may be subsumed the philosophical considerations which Friedländer, only half-consciously as it were, also assimilates.
46. A.P.A. Vorenkamp, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Hollandsch stillevens in de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (diss.) 1933.
47. J.G. van Gelder in *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 46, vol. 91 (1936), 73-82 and 155-166. See also Van Gelder's more general publication on still-life: cat. *Dutch and Flemish still-life pictures bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward*, Oxford (Ashmolean Museum) 1950.
48. Ingvar Berström, *Dutch still-life painting in the seventeenth century*, transl. by C. Hedström and G. Taylor, London 1956. Berström also has a whole series of further publications in the field of Dutch still-life painting to his name; a complete list cannot be given here.
49. Exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum "De Lakenhal") 1970.
50. First ed. Amsterdam (diss.) 1945. Cited from the 2nd enlarged ed.: *A modest message as intimated by the painters of the "monochrome banketje"*, vol. 1, Schiedam 1980, 14.
51. L.J. Bol, "'Goede onbekenden'. Schilders van het vroege Nederlandse bloemstuk met kleingedierte als bijwerk" (instalment no. 7), *Tableau* 3 (1981), 583-585: "maar hier dreight een gevaar: dat ontraadseling leidt tot ontluistering . . . De iconologie blijve zich van haar taak als hulpwetenschap bewust. Zij stelle zich niet hinderlijk voor het kunstwerk op, ons verplichtend te horen, belettend te zien".
52. See exhib. cat. *Een bloemrijk verleden! A flowery past*, Amsterdam (Kunsthandel P. de Boer) and 's-Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1982.





Daniël Seghers and Erasmus Quellinus II  
37. *A garland of flowers with the Education of the Virgin*  
Worcester, Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum



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E. de Jongh  
The interpretation of still-life paintings:  
possibilities and limits

One of the most notable characteristics of 17th-century Dutch culture was its relentless addiction to taking everyday things and occurrences and either searching out their inherent deeper meanings (perhaps extracting a moral lesson) or, conversely, using them as vehicles to be loaded with ready-made ideas. We meet the results of this addiction in literature and in the visual arts, its symbolic form being either traditional or unconventional. One blending of these arts, which resulted in the flood of illustrated writings known as emblem books, has yielded countless instances in Holland of far-reaching thoughts embodied in vernacular images.<sup>1</sup>

A good example is the first of Roemer Visscher's *Sinnepoppen* (emblems), which could also be regarded as a useful declaration of the principle in general: a bottle, submerged upside-down in water and not being filled because it contains air, can apparently be made to demonstrate the idea that everything is full of God. The accompanying text ends with the significant words: "*Nihil est in rebus inane*, Dat is: Daer is niet ledighs of ydels in de dinghen" (there is nothing empty or meaningless in things).<sup>2</sup>

This way of making associations was, however, anything but revolutionary in the 17th century. On the contrary, Roemer Visscher's statement can be heard as an unmistakable echo passed on from the Middle Ages. The 16th and 17th centuries may have brought many new concepts — of man's estimation of himself, of the expanding horizon, of cosmological systems — but simultaneously all kinds of medieval views lived on in one way or another.<sup>3</sup> And not only views, but forms of expression as well. Roemer Visscher's emblem also gives us a good example of the visual metaphor, a means of communicating that had stood the test of time and was automatically integrated into a partly-new visual language in the 16th and 17th centuries. One could say of this aspect that 17th-century art, in fact, saw the end rather than the beginning of a tradition.

We must realize that the visual metaphor, the moralization in allegorical disguise, in short, every shrouding of some message in veils, is itself the application of a didactic principle with a built-in element of surprise. Time and again people theorized about this practice. As far back as the 14th century, Petrarch made mention of embellishing the truth of things with beautiful veils ("*veritatem rerum pulchris velaminibus adornare*"), and well-known Dutch authors of the 17th century, such as Jacob Cats and Johan de Brune the Elder, were to recommend highly this concept of veiling. "Experience teaches us," said Cats, who was representative of 17th-century thinking in a lot of respects, "that many things appear to best advantage when not seen completely, but somewhat veiled and in dark shadow."<sup>4</sup> And Roemer Visscher demanded of his readers "*na bedencken ende overlegginge*" (reflection and meditation), not wishing his *Sinnepoppen* to be understood immediately at first glance ("*met het eerste aensien*") by "*Ian alleman*", every Tom, Dick and Harry.<sup>5</sup> Finally there were those who took hold of the fact that Christ had spoken in parables and used that too as an argument in favour of the indirect manner of communicating.



It is of no less importance to us that Dutch art theorists of the period encouraged the application of veiled meaning in paintings. The similarity of this advice to that of the *littérateurs* can be explained by the then current notion of the close relationship between the "sister arts" of painting and poetry. "The most praiseworthy way of decorating [a work of art]," in the judgement of one of these theorists, Samuel van Hoogstraeten, "is with accessories which provide concealed elucidation."<sup>6</sup> That many artists displayed great inventiveness in putting this principle into practice has been clearly shown by recent research.

It is understandable that we should have to call on scholarship in order to recognize not only the veils in 17th-century works of art but also that which they conceal, since we have to take into account the existence of yet more veils, namely those drawn over the past by the passage of time itself. For the language of the symbolical imagery of 17th-century art lapsed into disuse, and has finally become largely incomprehensible. Art historians who specialize in iconology have, during the last few decades, taken it upon themselves to make this visual language readable again.

That success has not always been unqualified, nor the requisite light thrown on the subject, can be attributed to the blind spots of the researchers in question, but is just as probably due to the recalcitrant nature of the material. Some iconography lends itself more readily to being unveiled than other. Allegories, for example, allow their meanings to be explained with greater ease than do genre-scenes, genre-scenes often seem to provide a better grasp than that offered by most still-lives, and still-lives in their turn are more capable of being interpreted than are painted landscapes.

Of the various *kinds* into which we generally divide still-lives — our primary concern here — one, the so-called *vanitas*, is in fact absolutely unambiguous in character. The ravages of time have not destroyed the meaning of the idiom contained in skull, hourglass, and burnt-out candle; this has never been open to an alternative reading. Flower still-lives, breakfast-pieces, banquet-pieces, *pronk* still-lives, or hunting pictures are another matter. Interpreting these works often reveals difficulties of method and iconology, although some present-day exegetes seem to trample quite happily over such obstacles on the road to their desired goal. From what they say one would think that still-life painters had assumed the guise of treatise-writers, with all that this implies.<sup>7</sup> Laurens J. Bol is right to raise his voice in criticism of these exegetes. He, however, in the quests which led him along innumerable still-lives, chose to regard iconology as a negligible quantity, and so threw the baby out with the bath water.<sup>8</sup>

It does not, of course, always make sense to indulge in philosophical reflections every time we come across a flower, a lump of cheese, or a glass lying on its side. And the fact that people in the 17th century were so flexible in associating one thing with another does not give us the right to emulate them in our own way. But it is no more than reasonable that we should take the function of 17th-century art as a vehicle of meaning seriously, and accept the consequences. He who has eyes chiefly for what is offered at face value and shows himself allergic to what is hidden under the surface, fails to appreciate the intention of the 17th-century painter. Two hundred years were to pass before an artist would prosecute his art pure and simply for art's sake.

Contemporary literature, prints with texts, emblems, and pictorial tradition itself can enable us to get some hold on the meaning of individual parts and thence ultimately on the meaning of a still-life as a whole. But, as we have already said, not every 17th-century still-life — nor every painting, for that matter — gives us the chance of formulating a substantial argument about the implications of its iconography. One essential is the presence of "tone-setting" elements which should preferably have some relationship to each other and reinforce each other's meaning.<sup>9</sup> Some elements are sufficient of



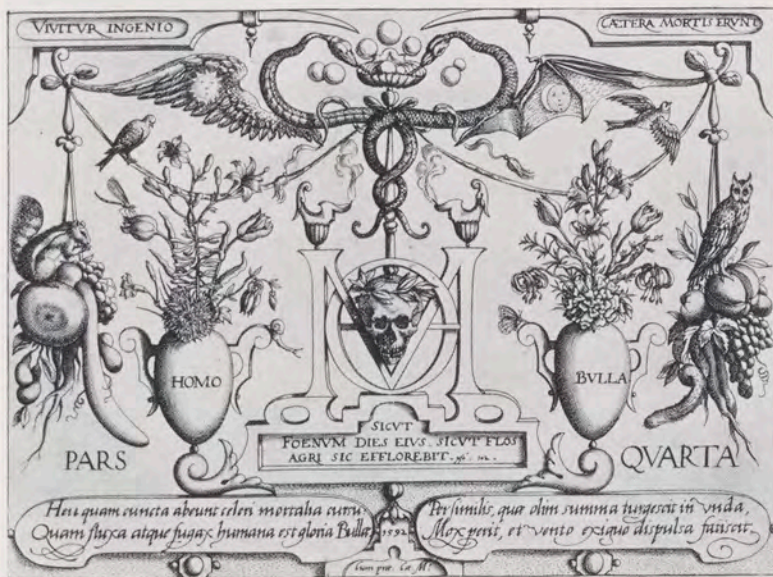


Clara Peeters  
4. *Still-life with cheeses*  
Private collection, The Netherlands





I. Christoffel van den Berghe, *Vanitas with vase of flowers*, Salisbury, the Earl of Chichester



III. Jacob Hoefnagel after Joris Hoefnagel, *Archetypa studiaque patris* . . . , fourth series, titlepage (1592)



II. Jan Saenredam after Hendrick Goltzius, *Allegory on death*, engraving (1592)





IV. Jan Brueghel, *Flower-piece*, London, Richard Green Art Galleries

themselves, alone, to set the tone; such a one is the skull, which immutably stamps any still-life, no matter how much or what else it may contain, with the seal of vanitas. In contrast to most other objects, whose characteristic seems to be the many different ways in which they can be interpreted, the skull always dominates, and permits of only one interpretation.<sup>10</sup>

In a painting by Christoffel van den Berghe (fig. I) we meet a good example of the inductive effect of a skull on other elements. Assuming a certain amount of consistency in the way the artist went to work, we can say that the meaning of the roses and other flowers which occupy the left-hand side of the composition is determined wholly by the skull.<sup>11</sup> Roses themselves are capable of more than one interpretation; they can be used as attributes of Venus, for example, or as symbols of love. Nevertheless, here they refer, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to death. They are a simile in picture form: just as flowers soon wither, so is the life of man short and fleeting.

Other examples of unequivocal intention do exist, especially in vanitas still-lives, but more frequently the visual menu is less unambiguous. All too often the lack of pregnant details renders us incapable of doing much more than mapping out rough areas of association, a diversity of connotations — vanitas, moral, economic, and social — coming to our aid. It is quite possible that our research method is deficient. But it could also be that some artists, instead of indicating a precise meaning, in fact preferred to arouse only vague associations in their public. One could even go so far as to say that in certain works there is precious little or no deeper content at all. Although the 17th century could apparently do what it liked with symbolism, the notion that all still-lives of the period were overburdened with references cannot, peace with Roemer Visscher, be correct.

We were able to determine that the flowers in Christoffel van den Berghe's painting referred to death and transience on the basis of the context in which they had been placed. This interpretation gains conviction, moreover, as it has the support of a number of prints with explanatory texts which show corresponding motifs, i.e. skull and flowers in combination (figs II and III and fig. 29b). The next question which forces itself upon our attention asks how we are to understand painted bouquets which have no meaningful element of the skull's calibre.

It is quite in order to assume that many a 17th-century artist depicted purely floral still-lives with no other intention than that of evoking death. But this can rarely be demonstrated to the same extent as in the painting by Van den Berghe. One of the few bits of hard evidence at our disposal is a painting by Jan Brueghel that includes a quatrain (itself an exceptional addition) in which flowers are explicitly related to the phenomenon of evanescence (fig. IV).<sup>12</sup> We find another piece of proof in a print dated 1635 by Claes Jansz. Visscher, also showing a vase of flowers, with in this case a paraphrase of a text from Isaiah printed above them: "All flesh is hay, which can no fame engender, And as a flower, man, so is your splendour."<sup>13</sup>

Insofar as flower-pieces do permit of being understood, there are still other connotations which can play a role.<sup>14</sup> But even then not much more than general indications can be given: an interest in botany, a reference to creation, hints to tulipomania, allusions to the sense of smell — that is more or less it, though the one explanation does not necessarily exclude the other.

Some researchers are not content with studying a bouquet or a vaseful of flowers as a whole, and, over and above this, they have diligently applied themselves to determining what the individual flowers are and what they are doing. This activity can hardly be expected to yield meaningful results. Though specific associations did become attached to particular flowers in the course of the centuries, the meaning of a painted assortment of blooms can certainly not be arrived at by adding together the separate meanings of all the flowers, even if this kind of sum were possible. The iconography of



other categories has just as many problems in store for us. Do moral intentions lurk behind the displays of foods and costly dishes in the so-called banquet-pieces and *pronk* still-lives? There are art historians who can answer this question in the affirmative without apparent difficulty and see exhortations to moderation in still-lives such as these.<sup>15</sup>

This view does not seem at all unreasonable at first glance. We could even give it support by calling on tracts in which theologians and moralists continually hammer away against excesses and immoderation. All the splendid things and gold and silver objects which we see in still-lives were on the blacklist.<sup>16</sup> And we could also enlist the fact that 17th-century rhetoric recognized not only a direct but also a paradoxical manner of expressing criticism, in which examples of vice could be described or shown with the object of inciting to virtue.<sup>17</sup>

If we look at the iconography of rich living in this light, then it is indeed only logical to understand the many examples as a warning against too-well furnished tables in the first place and, by extension, against other aspects of excess. It is more than probable, in fact, that some 17th-century people of an orthodox disposition did understand it that way. The art historians referred to above could expect ungrudging acclaim for this view of theirs were it not that the visual arts themselves come up with very few instances giving any real evidence in its favour. And there is an added problem, that of communication. If we assume that painters sometimes followed the principles of veiling their messages, and used painting as a medium to condemn extravagance and likewise promote moderation, then we still have to consider whether we are sufficiently well-equipped to receive these messages adequately. And signals emitted by *pronk* still-lives and banquet-pieces certainly come through less loud and clear than those sent out by, for example, vanitas still-lives. Dishes and items of food just do not have it in them to make as strong a semantic impact as skulls.

It is apparent that generalizations only lead us astray, and that every work will have to be judged on its own merits. We are on safe ground, perhaps, with some of Abraham van Beyerens's *pronk* still-lives, in which pocket-watches remind us to exercise control (fig. 7a), and absolutely on terra firma with a still-life by Jan Davidsz. de Heem which contains a text summoning us to honour the precepts of religious fasting.<sup>18</sup> Definite meanings can also be elicited from other religious still-lives. Some refer explicitly to the Eucharist, showing the chalice with the consecrated wafer, ears of corn, and bunches of grapes, and others allude directly to the Virgin Mary, one example being the still-life of 1672 by Dirck de Bray (fig. V) in which Marian symbols, including rosary, crown, censer, a red rose, and a twig of rosemary, — have been grouped together.<sup>19</sup>

Equally easy to understand are still-lives combining the motif of the groaning board and the parable of Dives and Lazarus.<sup>20</sup> A variation of this story is shown in a number of Flemish works that must have been painted around 1600. Here the combination is of a table laden with splendid and costly goods and a death-bed scene, derived from the late medieval *Ars Moriendi*, which is shown in an inset (fig. VI).<sup>21</sup>

An atmosphere of death is also evoked in a still-life by the Frisian painter Petrus Schotanus, who was the son of a minister of the church (fig. VII). Here he assembled a selection of things, including a few dead birds, usually the prerogative of the game-piece. Part of the hand-written text which can be deciphered in the oblong book on which one of the birds is lying paraphrases Ecclesiastes 9:12 and demands our attention: "As the fish by the net and the bird by the snare, so is man surprised by death at an inopportune time." On the scrap of paper projecting from the closed book are written the following words: "Overdenckinge des doots" (Meditation on death).<sup>22</sup>

No one could miss the direct connexion between these texts and the dead birds. The gist of the



V. Dirck de Bray, *Still-life with Marian symbols* (1672), Amsterdam, Ons' Lieve Heer op solder



VII. Petrus Schotanus, *Still-life with dead birds*, Private collection, The Netherlands



Willem Kalf  
10. *Still-life with roemer*  
The Hague, Koninklijk Kabinet  
van Schilderijen "Het Mauritshuis"





Bible text, besides, is reminiscent of a little illustrated verse in the *Groote comptoir almanach* (Great office almanac) of 1667, in which the slaughtering of animals must remind man of death and the Last Judgement (fig. VIII).<sup>23</sup> Large quantities of almanacs were published and distributed, and this simple metaphor must have reached the eyes of countless people. Yet it would be a sign of palpable recklessness on our part if we, on the basis of but a few examples, were to label all pieces showing fish or birds that had been caught as vanitas paintings.

It is the story of the banquet-pieces and *pronk* still-lives all over again: we just do not have enough information to dare to make general statements on what 17th-century painters meant precisely in their game-pieces and fish still-lives, or what their contemporaries wanted to be able to read into them. Admonitions of a moralizing nature account for only one of the various implications that these works might well be capable of containing. There are other possibilities. Paintings showing fish or other foods will undoubtedly have suggested associations with the national economy at that time (fishing and dairy-farming were important sources of revenue), just as game-pieces will have borne some relation to social status (hunting being a pastime of the higher ranks).<sup>24</sup>

How many and what kind of ideas could be deposited in 17th-century works of art and, in particular how far they could go and how complex they could be, are rather problematical factors. Some painters found satisfaction enough in entrusting a bundle of asparagus to the panel or canvas (fig. 31a); here no great depths of profundity are likely to be plumbed. Yet other painters cherished ambitions of representing the whole world in metaphors, as Jan Brueghel, for example, aspired to do in several series of paintings depicting the elements and the senses. They are in fact hybrids, having a profusion of still-life material but also allegorical figures. The series on the senses which he conceived in 1617-1618 is particularly well-known (figs. IX and X).<sup>25</sup>

The great demand there must have been for this kind of work is demonstrated by the fact that after Brueghel's death in 1625 his son Jan Brueghel the Younger continued to do the same subjects in the same style.<sup>26</sup> A letter written by Jan Brueghel the Younger in 1631 to a member of his family who was a businessman in Seville and dealt in paintings, among other things, contains a passage in which an explicit connexion is made between world and senses: "As for the five senses, I am enjoying working on them to do everything after the life, and the subject is also agreeable to having all that is on earth put into it".<sup>27</sup>

The Brueghels' idea of the senses as intermediaries between microcosmos and macrocosmos, far from being exclusive to them, was generally accepted at that time, and it was closely related to the arrangement of the universe then thought to hold good. The five senses, the four elements, the four humours, and the four seasons, which has certain internal relationships and were sometimes combined with other series as well, had their place in one huge involved system.<sup>28</sup>

The way this organization in categories had come to be depicted undoubtedly contributed to the origin of the species still-life.<sup>29</sup> Previously, senses and elements had usually made their appearance as personifications, but in the course of time they were symbolized by the various objects which, as attributes or in some other way, these personifications had always been linked with. This freeing of attributes from their original context was an important step towards independence for the still-life. Given this evolution, we could say that this genre ultimately took its place as a particle in the universal order of things that determined the world view of erudite man in the 17th century. Whether every still-life painter was aware of his work's being part of a greater order is open to question.

When compared with the iconography enjoyed by the elements and senses in the paintings of the



VI. Flemish school, *Still-life with precious objects and coins*, Valenciennes, Palais des Beaux Arts

## November / Slacht-Maendt.



VIII. *November*, woodcut from *Groote Comptoir Almanach* . . . , Amsterdam and Hoorn (1667)





IX. Jan Brueghel, *Sight* (1617; from a series of the five senses), Madrid, Prado



X. Jan Brueghel, *Hearing* (from a series of the five senses), Madrid, Prado



two Brueghels, with its allegorical nature and encyclopedic intention, most still-lives treating these themes seem relatively sober. We find an interesting example of the more sober approach in the Haarlem master, Pieter Claesz.: the senses are symbolized by foodstuffs, divers objects, and an animal (fig. XI). The representations by the Brueghels', due for one thing to their division into separate works, are quite easy to identify. The subject of Claesz.'s painting too would seem to allow of fairly straight-forward decoding, especially because of the presence of the tortoise, an unusual motif in a still-life. This animal was traditionally associated with the sense of touch, but also, however, with the element earth.<sup>30</sup> Does this mean that Claesz. symbolized here the senses, with the addition of the elements? The possibility cannot be excluded, but we now reach the point at which uncertainty begins to make itself felt. The next stage is when recognizability is reduced to a minimum, and we come again face to face with the by now familiar difficulties of communication. The reason why so many aspects of still-life persist in remaining problematic lies partly in the absence of a 17th-century theoretical treatise putting still-life into an iconological perspective, in the same way as Cesare Ripa's handbook *Iconologia*, published in Dutch translation in 1644, explains the significance of allegorical figures.<sup>31</sup> But as this treatise was never written, we can receive no direct 17th-century answer to the crucial question of how we are expected to read a 17th-century still-life.<sup>32</sup> It is essential to bear in mind that we have to resort to a method of interpretation which can produce nothing more substantial than 20th-century reconstructions of possible 17th-century answers. These reconstructions, however, do not necessarily have to be devoid of good sense.



XI. Pieter Claesz., *The five senses* (1623), Paris, Louvre

1. See *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, passim. For emblematics: Henkel-Schöne, passim, and K. Porteman, *Inleiding tot de Nederlandse emblematiliteratuur*, Groningen 1977.
2. Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614, 1.
3. See J. Bruyn, *Over het voortleven der middeleeuwen*, Amsterdam (1961), and idem, "'Doctrina exemplaris' als historisch perspectief voor het 17de-eeuwse 'genre'-stuk" (to be published).
4. Petrarch quoted in Fokke Veenstra, *Ethiek en moraal bij P.C. Hooft*, Zwolle 1968, 151. Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tyt* (ed. princeps 1632), in: *Alle de wercken*, vol. 2, Amsterdam 1712, 480: "De bevindinghe leert ons dat veel dingen beter aert hebben alsse niet ten vollen gesien, maar eeniger-maten bewimpelt en overschaduwet ons voorkomen". Johan de Brune, *Emblemata of Zinne-werck* . . . , Amsterdam 1624, (ii). Cf. Johan de Brune the Younger, *Wetsteen der Vernuftten*, in: *Alle volgeestige werken* (ed. princeps 1643), Amsterdam 1681, 305: "... dat wy meer vermaak scheppen in raadzels, scheutjes en quinkslagen, daar yet heimelix en verborgens insteeckt, als die ter eerster opzicht verstaan worden . . ." (that we have more pleasure in puzzles, witticisms, and jests in which something secretive and hidden has been inserted than in things that are understood first time round).
5. Roemer Vischer, op. cit. (note 2), (iv) en (v).
6. E. de Jongh, "Inleiding", *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 20. Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst*, Rotterdam 1678, 90: "Een eenzaam stuk op 't prijslijckst te versieren, / Geschied op 't best . . . met bywerk dat bedektlijck iets verklaert".
7. Cf. *Stilleben in Europa*, 406 and 410.
8. L.J. Bol, "'Goede onbekenden'. Schilders van het vroege Nederlandse bloemstuk met kleingedierte als bijwerk" (instalment no. 7), *Tableau* 3 (1981), 583-585.
9. See E. de Jongh, *Zinne - en minnebeelden in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1967, 31-21.
10. For polyinterpretability, see E.H. Gombrich, *Symbolic images. Studies in the art of the renaissance*, London 1972, 11-13 ("The dictionary fallacy"). See also Ingvar Bergström, "Notes on the boundaries of *vanitas* significance", in: exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden. Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) 1970, (i) — (v).
11. See Gerard Lairesse, *Het groot schilderboek*, vol. 1, Amsterdam 1707, 187-194, for a comparable instance in which the presence of boys blowing bubbles defines the interpretation of the other figures in a scene and specifies the whole as



- a vanitas. See also De Jongh, op. cit. (note 6), 26-27.
12. Wat kyckt ghy op dees blom die u soo schone schynt  
Endoor des sonnen cracht seer lichtelyc verwindt  
Ledt op godts woordt alleen dwelck eeuwich bloeyen siet  
Waerin verkeert de rest des werelts dan, In niet.  
(How closely you regard this flower which seems to you so fair  
It fades away quite easily in the sun's mighty glare  
Be mindful of the word of God which only aye doth bloom  
The rest of all the world then? It nothing will become).
  13. *Stilleben in Europa*, 330, fig. 175: "Alle vleesch is hoy (Mensch) draacht geen roem, en u heerlycheyt is als een bloem".
  14. See for flower symbolism in general: Sam Segal, "The symbolic meaning of flowers", in exhib. cat. *A flowery past. A survey of Dutch and Flemish flower painting from 1600 until the present*, Amsterdam (Gallery P. de Boer) and 's-Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum), 1982, 12-25.
  15. *Stilleben in Europa*, 410-415.
  16. See cat. no. 7 (Van Beyeren).
  17. De Jongh, op.cit. (note 6), 27-28. In the 16th century there were pedagogues who considred that describing evil would scare youngsters away from it. The effects of this "apotropaic" element in some daring reading-matter was thought to be positive. See P.N.M. Bot, *Humanisme en onderwijs in Nederland*, Utrecht and Antwerp 1955, 219-220.
  18. For the watch as a symbol of temperance, see Bergström 1956, 189-190. For the painting of De Heem, see *Stilleben in Europa*, 415-416, fig. 216.
  19. For Eucharist symbolism, see *ibid.*, 182-190. Some of the examples here seem to be far-fetched.
  20. *Ibid.*, 408-409.
  21. Bergström 1956, 25-26.
  22. B. Haak, "De vergankelijkheidssymboliek in zestiende-eeuwse portretten en zeventiende-eeuwse stillevens in Holland II", *Antiek 2* (1968), 399-411, esp. 410-411. Exhib. cat. *17e- Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, no. 81: "Gelijck den Vis het net, enden Vogel den Strick;/Also overvalt den Mensch den doot, Op een ongelegen tijt. Ecl. IX En alle dinck verslijt, met den tijt".
  23. E. de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw", in: exhib. cat. *Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, Brussel (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) 1971, 143-194, esp. 169-170.
  24. See cat. nos. 4 (Peeters), 18 (Van Beyeren), and 23 (Jan Weenix).
  25. See Klaus Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere (1568-1625). Die Gemälde*, Cologne 1979, 328-356.
  26. Marie Louise Hairs, "De Brueghels van de derde en vierde generatie. Jan Brueghel de Jonge", in: exhib. cat. *Bruegel. Een dynastie van schilders*, Brussels (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) 1980, 226-231, esp. 228.
  27. J. Denucé, *Brieven en documenten betreffend Jan Breugel I en II*. Antwerp and The Hague 1934, 71: "Wat belanct de Vyf sinnen, hebbe die met lust onder handen om alles naert leven te doen, als ooc het subject playsant is om al wat ter werelt is daer in te connen maken".
  28. See Christian Klemm, "Weltdeutung — Allegorien und Symbole in Stilleben", in: *Stilleben in Europa*, 140-218, esp. 142-170.
  29. *Ibid.*, 151-152. See also: Marielene Putscher, "Die fünf Sinne", *Aachener Kunstblätter* 41 (1971), 152-173.
  30. Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane 1450-1600*, vol. 2, Geneva 1959, 384.
  31. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands . . . uyt het Italiaens vertaelt door D.P. Pers*, Amsterdam 1644. See also the introduction to the reprint (Soest 1971) by Jochen Becker. The low status of still-lives in the 17th century probably helps to account for the absence of any writing devoted to the kind of iconology found in them.
  32. It is only fair to say that the second part of *Het groot schilderboek* (1707) by the classically-oriented Gerard Lairesse (see note 11) does contain a discourse on the iconography of still-life. But this is general in character, and Lairesse, moreover, can not be regarded as representative of opinions on symbolism and iconography held before the last quarter of the 17th century.





Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts  
25. Two tidies  
Private collection, The Netherlands



Titia van Leeuwen

## Still-life painting in the Netherlands: Historical Facts and Facets

As a description of a certain category of paintings we encounter the Dutch word *stilleven* for the first time in an inventory of 1650.<sup>1</sup> This term, which has subsequently been literally rendered into the German and English languages respectively as *Stilleben* and still life, has long since entered common usage. If one takes the trouble to consider the combination of "still" and "life", one might easily reach the conclusion that this is a curious, even inherently contradictory word. This is however not the case. The word loses its peculiarity once we realise that one of the meanings of the Dutch term *leven* in the 17th century was 'model'. *Stil leven* ought thus to be understood as 'still model', that is models or objects which are incapable of movement — in the main inanimate articles, flowers, plants and also dead animals.<sup>2</sup>

Still-life existed as a speciality in painting long before the middle of the 17th century when it received its name. Before that time, and for some time afterwards, when the new term was already in use, paintings which could be subsumed under this generic label were described in accordance with the particular subjects represented. These included the *keucken* (kitchen-piece), *banquet* (banquet-piece), *ontbytje* (breakfast-piece), *fruytagie* (fruit-piece), *blompot* (flowerpot) and *dootshoofd* or *vanitas* (death's head or vanitas still-life), but it is instructive to keep in mind that these terms had a more comprehensive meaning in 17th century Dutch than they do in our time.<sup>3</sup>

In rather the same manner as the 17th century descriptions of the various sorts of still-lives, we can roughly divide these works into categories by subject matter: the breakfast and banquet-piece, the flower and fruit still-lives, the *pronk* still-life (a banquet-piece which has as its distinguishing feature a quality of splendour and showiness), the game-piece, the fish still-life and finally the vanitas still-life. Such a categorization is commonly used and will be employed in this catalogue (although strictly speaking vanitas still-lives should not be bracketed with the other types).<sup>4</sup> The words flower or fish still-life refer directly to what is depicted, not to its significance, whilst the vanitas pieces do not say anything about the particular objects represented, but allude to a symbolic significance.

While the term vanitas refers to meaning and flower still-life describes what is represented, *trompe l'oeil* informs us of the manner of rendition: *trompe l'oeil* still-lives aim to imitate reality as deceptively as possible. As with vanitas these works cannot be grouped on the same basis as the other types of still-life. Divisions are made in the interest of order but in the case of still-life painting are functional only to a certain extent. The categories in question are not always clearly distinguishable from one another, whilst there also exist a number of transitional forms, not only within still-life painting but also between the different genres. Still-life elements sometimes occur for instance in portraits or in combination with landscapes or certain religious themes.

The autonomous still-life as it took form during the later half of the 16th, and in particular during the early years of the 17th century had various precursors in works of art in which still-life motifs occurred as subsidiary elements. We encounter the oldest examples in the rare extant fragments of mural paintings from the late Hellenistic period, on painted vases at that time and in later Roman mosaics.<sup>5</sup>



The still-life motifs of ancient Greece, which consist mainly of flowers, fruits and foodstuffs (the so-called *xenia*), had essentially a decorative function. This was also true of some of the intarsias of the Italian Renaissance. The inlaid wood panels in the *studioli* of Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, made during the last quarter of the 15th century, are just such a case. These marquetry panels portraying books, musical instruments and mathematical and astronomical tools, are entirely suitable to the sphere of study.<sup>6</sup>

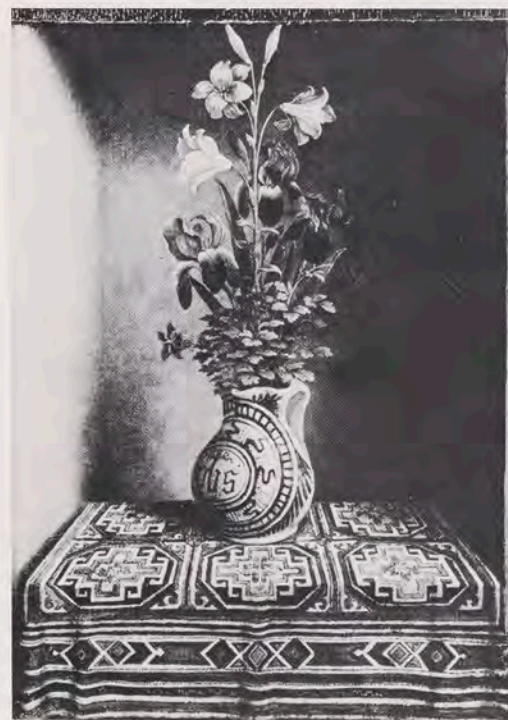
Another well-known early example is the *Still-life with partridge and iron gloves* (fig. 24b) painted in 1504 by Jacopo de Barbari. At first glance this work seems to possess a much higher degree of autonomy, even to the point of resembling some 17-century game-pieces. Nonetheless, it was conceived for a very different purpose and is presumed to have served originally as part of a cupboard. As such it cannot be accorded the status of an independent still-life.<sup>7</sup>

There are other early precursors of still-life which are component parts of larger subjects, although their context need not always be decorative as was the case with De Barbari. As early as the 15th century certain motifs were isolated from religious scenes and moved to the back of a painting or to a separate panel. The result in such cases is a still-life upon which a degree of pictorial autonomy has been conferred. Its independence is however limited by the context within which it must be understood: the skull on the reverse of the Braque triptych in the Louvre in Paris, painted about 1450 by Rogier van der Weyden, is such a case.<sup>8</sup> Some sixty-five years later we again encounter a similar representation on the back of the wing of a diptych painted by Jan Gossaert (fig. 41c).

The first steps toward the autonomous still-life were manifest not only by representations of the human skull, since antiquity a symbol of the transience of life, but also by such attributes of various saints as books and flowers. One of the earliest flower still lifes known is a lovely vase containing blooms typically associated with the Virgin, including the white lily, the iris and the columbine. This painting was executed about 1490 by Hans Memling, and is found on the reverse of a portrait of a young man with hands raised in adoration (fig. 1).<sup>9</sup> During the last quarter of the 15th century an evolution towards a higher degree of autonomy for all sorts of still-life motifs both in painting and in the illumination of manuscripts may be discerned. An example of this development is the miniatures of the Master of Mary of Burgundy, especially those in the prayer book of Engelbert of Nassau.<sup>10</sup>

In the 16th century the Westphalian painter Ludger tom Ring was one of those to contribute to the emergence of the independent still-life. In his works we find bouquets composed of flowers that bloom during different seasons of the year, a practice that was to become common later. Tom Ring appears to have worked from previously made sketches, a method which was to become common studio practice in the 17th century.<sup>11</sup>

Such contemporaries of Tom Ring as Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Bueckelaer painted copious still-lives of vegetables and meats in combination with religious scenes. The proportions between these two components were strikingly different from previous works however, the still-life components receiving more emphasis in their works than the biblical representations (fig. II). It would be wrong to conclude that the religious element is subordinate however, and J. A. Emmens has demonstrated that the religious content in such representations remains primary.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the art of Aertsen and Bueckelaer represents an important milestone along the path to the autonomous still-life and the kitchen and breakfast-pieces which were produced in Amsterdam and Haarlem during the first decades of the 17th century form the final phase of a development that had its inception with Aertsen and Bueckelaer eighty years previously in Antwerp (cat. no. 5).



I. Hans Memling, *Flower-piece* (reverse of portrait of a man), Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza-collection



II. Joachim Bueckelaer, *The well-stocked kitchen, with Jesus in the house of Martha and Mary in the background* (1566), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum





Floris van Dijck  
2. *Still-life with fruit*  
Private collection, The Netherlands



For the artistic changes that eventually led to the flourishing of the art of still-life the humanist ideals of the Italian Renaissance were of signal importance. One of the consequences of this process of secularization was a greater emphasis on profane subjects. In the 16th century scientific developments and discoveries also had ramifications for the arts, and the curiosity of the artist as to the "how and why" of things around him was certainly stimulated by this atmosphere of inquiry. As a result of expanding trade and shipping and of exploratory journeys the knowledge of geography and of the flora and fauna of foreign lands increased. Not only exotic plants, animals, shells and other such products of nature were imported into Europe but also various sorts of foreign utensils and goods found their way to the Lowlands. Of special interest to the painter of still-life was the Chinese porcelain which was delivered by the shipload to Holland by traders on the East Indies route.

Under the influence of the broadening geographical and scientific horizons the so-called *kunstkamers*, rooms containing encyclopedic collections of objects, came into being. In such collections one distinguished *artificialia*, objects made by human hands, *naturalia*, the products of creation, and *antiquitates*, remnants of the past which in the main were concerned with ancient Rome. Almost certainly these collections, which contained the same objects which would later belong to the repertoire of the still-life painter, played an instrumental role in the emergence of the independent still life.<sup>13</sup>

In 17th century Antwerp an iconography was created which was entirely devoted to this type of *kunstkamer* (fig. III). Works of art, shells, stuffed animals, terrestrial and celestial globes, skulls, weapons, books, porcelain and musical instruments are to be encountered in paintings of such collections.<sup>14</sup> Most of the painted collections are however partly or entirely the work of the artist's imagination; only in a few cases was an actual *kunstkamer* depicted. Collectors also occasionally commissioned artists to paint certain objects which their collections lacked and used these paintings as substitutes to fill vacancies — a combination of imaginary and real possessions.

Not every collection contained examples from all of the above categories; some collectors specialized in a particular area. Jan Govertsen of Haarlem for example was known for his collection of precious shells and the portrait that Hendrick Goltzius painted of Govertsen in 1603 portrays him with several of his most beautiful specimens (fig. IV). Collectors did not hesitate to pay good prices for rare shells. That such expenditure did not always meet with approval is evident from one of Roemer Visscher's *Sinnepoppen*, which bears the censorious motto: "Tis misselijck waer een geck zijn gelt aen leijt" (It's sickening how a fool spends his money; fig. V).<sup>15</sup>

The broadening consciousness of history, geography and nature during the second half of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century was one of the reasons why artists began to carefully study all sorts of *artificialia* and *naturalia*. A very precise manner of depiction was one of the results of this practice. Not only did a partially new iconography emerge in its wake, but also the form in which this iconography was manifest was indirectly determined by social phenomena. There are of course earlier examples of artists who painted with scrupulous accuracy — one thinks of the Flemish primitives and of Albrecht Dürer — but the exactness with which the artist of about 1600 rendered their pictures was conceived with a different intention. It is not by chance that one speaks of scientific naturalism in this regard.<sup>16</sup>

One influential practitioner of this naturalism was Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1600), court painter to the Archdukes of Tyrol and Bavaria and later to the Emperor Rudolf II of Prague. Hoefnagel also made several important contributions to the emergence of the independent still-life. The degree of



III. William van Haecht, *The gallery of Cornelis van der Geest* (1628), Antwerp, Rubenshuis





V. "It's sickening how a fool spends his money", emblem from Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam (1614)



IV. Hendrick Goltzius, *The Dutch shell-collector Jan Goversen* (1603), Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen



accuracy with which he worked is evident from a series of prints which his son Jacob made after his designs (fig. VI).<sup>17</sup> The Hoefnagels showed interest in just about everything that nature produced on a small scale, including her anomalies such as an apple with two cores. Such "wonders" would also be recorded in ink and paint during the 17th century. In 1626 for instance an anonymous Dutch master painted a giant radish on a panel of almost ninety centimetres in width (fig. VII).

When, at the end of a long period during which all sorts of precursors had manifested themselves, still-life matured into an actual speciality about 1600, an enormous production of still-life representations rapidly commenced. These resulted in a number of distinguishable types. Not all of the types emerged simultaneously however. The so-called *pronk* still-life and the game-piece, for instance, developed only during the second half of the 17th century. At the beginning of the century the flower-piece and the early breakfast-piece were painted in large quantities. The vanitas still-life also emerged at this time but developed more slowly; it would be a matter of decades before vanitas pictures would be brought on the market in any appreciable numbers.<sup>18</sup>

Of all the types of still-life painting the flower-piece enjoyed the longest tradition. The great accuracy of detail with which many 17th-century still lifes were rendered should not evoke the image of an artist of that century sitting with brush and palette before a vase of flowers and recording with his hand what his eye observes; however for a very long time bouquets were not made in imitation of nature, particularly those bouquets (and these seem to have been in the majority) which combine blossoms which bloom during different seasons. Many artists probably made preparatory studies in ink or watercolour in order to subsequently compose their painted bouquets. A number of such watercolours are extant, including examples by Jacques de Gheyn II and Bartholomeus van der Ast, and a complete sketchbook filled with studies from the hand of the younger de Gheyn<sup>19</sup> is also known.

During the early 17th century the painting of flower-pieces was primarily concentrated in Antwerp, Middelburg, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Delft, The Hague and Haarlem, the latter a centre of trade in flower bulbs. In Middelburg, a city of gardeners and amateur floriculturists, it was Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder who played one of the most important roles, initially as an art dealer but later also as a painter.<sup>20</sup> His influence was great, particularly after he moved to Utrecht in 1616, where he stayed for three years and where a group of similarly inclined artists formed around him. This circle of painters, known in art-historical literature as the "Bosschaert Dynasty", included Bosschaert's three sons and his brother-in-law, the previously mentioned Bartholomeus van der Ast. The painting of Ambrosius Bosschaert exhibited here was made during his Middelburg period (cat. no. 30), but it was when living in Breda that he executed one of his most famous works, the *Bouquet in an arched window* of 1620-21 (fig. VIII), at present in the Mauritshuis in The Hague.<sup>21</sup>

Dutch flower still-lives of the beginning of the 17th century are characterized by the position of the vase on the central vertical axis of the composition and by the symmetrical deployment of the bouquet. One large flower, such as the crown imperial often used by Bosschaert, or an iris or a tulip, crowns the whole. The number of flowers which were chosen varied widely, especially in the case of the larger paintings (which however were in the minority) where the blooms appear to be far too numerous for the vase in which the painter has "arranged" them. In general these compositions show little depth; the flowers seem all to be on the same plane. There is furthermore no discrimination as far as lighting is concerned; all blooms appear to receive equal light and overlappings are kept to the absolute minimum.<sup>22</sup> Each flower is clearly identifiable, leading L.J. Bol, in his monograph on the Bosschaert dynasty, to compare them to individuals in a group



VI. Jacob Hoefnagel after Joris Hoefnagel, *Archetypa studiaque patris* . . . , 1592, third series, no. 9





VII. Northern Netherlands school, *Giant radish* (1626), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



VIII. Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flower-piece*, The Hague, Flower piece



portrait, "each being given its full pound of recognizability"<sup>23</sup>

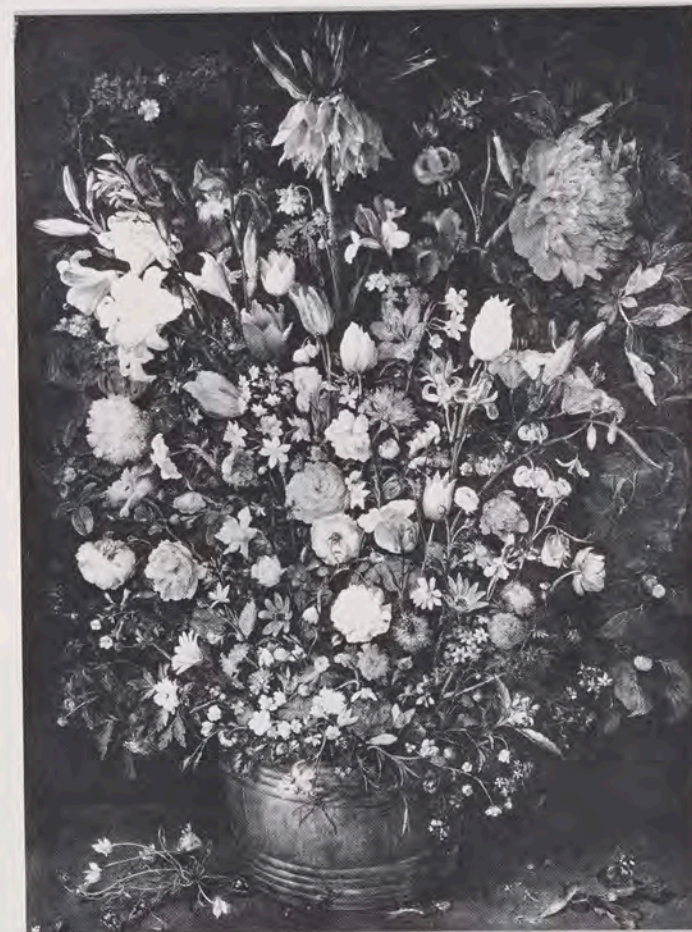
In the course of the 17th century the compositions became freer. More and more attention was devoted to recession in space, an effect which was primarily created by overlappings, light and dark contrasts and a more subtle palette. The greenery also took on a more important function in flower-pieces, certainly toward the end of the century and during the period afterwards, as we can observe in the works of Jan van Huysum (cat. nos. 33 and 34). The relationship between the vase (often a simple glass) and its contents became somewhat less direct and the flowers began to fill the picture space in a more independent fashion.<sup>24</sup> A good example of this phase in the development of flower still-lives is the Cornelis de Heem painting exhibited here (cat. no. 32) in which moreover the same preference for asymmetry is discernible that is manifest in the work of other still-life painters of his generation.

From the time of their inception, flower still-lives were often enlivened by the addition of spiders, caterpillars, butterflies and snails and sometimes also by the inclusion of a single mouse or lizard. During the last decades of the 17th century we see that the fauna is given a more central place in a peculiar sort of 'still-life' in which life dominates as never before. These still-lives are situated out of doors, often in a wood, and their major component consists of unplucked flowers and plants. Otto Marseus van Schrieck is considered the initiator of this genre. During the 1660s and 1670s he owned a house and a bit of land outside the city walls of Amsterdam where he grew certain plants and collected all manner of little animals — "field d collected all manner of little animals — "field work" in the service of painting, as it were.<sup>25</sup> A number of late 17th century artists were unmistakably inspired by Van Schrieck, including the famous woman painter Rachel Ruysch, who started her career by following in his footsteps. In her early works we encounter Van Schrieck's terrarium iconography (cat. nos. 35 and 36).

Dutch flower painting, particularly during its early phase, cannot be viewed without an eye to developments in Flanders. At the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century many Flemish artists migrated to Holland, usually for reasons of religious persecution, their arrival setting its mark upon stylistic developments in Dutch art.<sup>26</sup>

Although one usually speaks of a Dutch and a Flemish school with regard to flower still-lives as well as other manifestations of painting, the distinction is not always clear-cut. In general we can say that Flemish still-lives are more luxuriant and colourful, more decorative and often of larger dimensions than those made in the North. That excess was not avoided in these works is demonstrated by the paintings of Jan Brueghel, one of the most eminent flower painters in Flanders. He executed bouquets in which more than eighty sorts and varieties of blooms are included (fig. IX).<sup>27</sup>

Characteristic of Flanders, or rather of Antwerp, for flower painting was concentrated in that city, is the garland type of flower still-life, which displays flowers draped around a cartouche containing a religious representation.<sup>28</sup> In the Catholic Southern Netherlands there was great demand for such pictures and the work of Jan Brueghel was one of the major stimuli in the development of this genre. His pupil Daniel Seghers, a priest of the Jesuit order, specialized in the making of such paintings, achieving for him great renown in both the Southern and the Northern Netherlands, where his fame was sung by such poets as Huygens and Vondel (cat. no. 37). Among other specialists who employed this popular iconography were Frans Ykens, Jan Anthonie van der Baren, Nicolaes van Veerendaal and Jan van Kessel. The figural painting in the centre of the cartouche was usually left to another artist.<sup>29</sup>



IX. Jan Brueghel, *Flower-piece*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum





X. Willem Claesz. Heda, *Still-life with roemer and oysters* (1634), Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen

Just as was the case with flower still-lives, great numbers of breakfast-pieces, banquet-pieces and *pronk* still-lives were also painted in the 17th century. The duration of the taste for these genres was however shorter; by the end of the century little interest remained in these types of works. Antwerp, Haarlem and Amsterdam were the cities where the painting of such still-lives particularly flourished. They received their respective names in accordance with the objects and comestibles depicted although all shared the common theme of the laid table.

The distinction which 17th century contemporaries made between "breakfast-pieces" and "banquet-pieces" is not always readily discernible to our eye.<sup>30</sup> In the 17th century the term "breakfast-piece" had a wider meaning than our word 'breakfast' would lead to suggest, and referred to representations of a light meal which could be consumed not only upon awakening but at any hour of the day.<sup>31</sup> A painting termed a breakfast-piece in the 17th century usually displayed simple foods such as cheese, bread, fish or fruit accompanied by such objects as an earthenware coal pan, a knife, a wine glass, a goblet or a pitcher. A banquet-piece was the depiction of a meal with somewhat more luxurious ingredients: delicacies such as oysters and less common fruits were depicted as were fine glasswork and Chinese porcelain. The word *pronk* still-life is a post 17th-century invention used for banquet-pieces which are particularly characterized by a show of splendour and ostentation and usually display one or more especially precious objects.<sup>32</sup>

For the development of the breakfast-piece and the banquet-piece the contacts between Dutch and Flemish artists were of particular importance. The earliest breakfast-piece on exhibition here was made during the very first years of the 17th century by the Antwerp artist Hieronymus Francken II (cat. no. 3). To a certain extent it displays affinities to the type painted in Amsterdam and especially in Haarlem.<sup>33</sup> Nicolaes Gillis, Floris van Dyck and Floris van Schooten (cat. nos. 2 and 5) were the most eminent practitioners of the genre in Haarlem but certain works of Clara Peeters, an Antwerp painter from the generation succeeding Francken's, also display traits similar to those of the painters of that city (cat. no. 4).

The evolution of the theme of the laid table has some similarities to that of the flower still-life; initially the objects and foodstuffs were distributed at regular intervals over the picture space, each element in the composition receiving equal attention. To this end the viewpoint was high and the top of the table was tipped sharply forward. In a later phase the viewpoint became lower, the table intersecting the picture plane at a less sharp angle and the objects, which increase in number, overlapping each other. Local colouring, moreover, gave way to tonalities of light-brown and grey tints; one speaks in this connection of "monochrome breakfast-pieces". The Haarlem painters Pieter Claesz. and Willem Claesz. Heda (fig. X) are the most seminal representatives of this current in still-life painting.<sup>34</sup>

Pieter Claesz. is represented in our exhibition not with a banquet-piece but with a fish still-life (cat. no. 19). Fish still-lives are a genre in themselves, and the greatest practitioner was the versatile Abraham van Beyerem.<sup>35</sup> In addition to a fish still-life (cat. no. 18), a flower-piece (cat. no. 29) and a *pronk* still-life of his are exhibited (cat. no. 7). Van Beyerem's *spronk* still-lives are characterized by their well-composed superabundance of objects and foodstuffs rendered in a warm palette and, if one may speculate in this regard, also by the fact that they seem to reflect something of the nouveau riche society, a prominent group in the Holland of his years. As a counterpoint to this sort of work of Van Beyerem's, Willem Kalf's *spronk* still-lives appear restrained and elegant (cat. no. 11). Kalf had a studio in Amsterdam from the 1650s onwards, where he remained until his death, his exceptional talent not escaping the attention of his contemporaries.<sup>36</sup>





Rachel Ruysch  
36. *Arrangement of flowers by a tree trunk*  
Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum





XI. Willem van Aelst, *Game-piece* (1664), Stockholm, National museum

In this connection the Dutch/Flemish painter Jan Davidsz. de Heem, father of the above-mentioned Cornelis de Heem, cannot be passed over. Jan Davidsz. was a protean character who painted in a typically Dutch style while in Holland, but when in Antwerp, where he lived from 1636 onwards, produced very Flemish works. He was extremely influential and had a great following. The two *pronk* still-lives which are exhibited here date from De Heem's Flemish period (cat. nos. 8 and 9).

In addition to the *pronk* still-life the game-piece was another genre which developed relatively late. Representations of dead birds and other game were only painted on a reasonable scale during the second half of the 17th century. In this area of specialism Willem van Aelst, who is represented in this exhibition with a flower still-life and a breakfast-piece (cat. nos. 26 and 6),<sup>37</sup> was a signal figure (figure XI). Jan Baptist Weenix and Jan Weenix, father and son, should also be mentioned in this regard. By both hands we have simple game-pieces, portraying a single dead bird (cat. no. 24) as well as more extensive compositions, such as Jan Weenix's pictures situated in park-like landscapes (cat. no. 23).

It is presumable that some hunting still-lives contain allusions to transience in a general sense. Flower still-lives in particular are often charged with such meanings, although it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether or not this is the case with respect to particular works.<sup>38</sup> Once we realise that notions of the transience of daily life had a central place in 17th century thought, probably to no less a degree than they had in the Middle Ages, it will come as no surprise that death is often encountered in art as a theme in itself. The type of representations in which death and transience play a major role was briefly mentioned previously; they are known in the art-historical literature by a biblical term which was also used in the 17th century to describe such works: "vanitas", meaning vanity and idleness.<sup>39</sup> The most unequivocal specific clue to the existence of an underlying iconographical system in which the notion of the vanity of human life was expressed is the human skull. It was used to this end countless times both within and without 17th century painting. Other objects indicative of transience which recur regularly are a smoking or already extinguished candle, an hourglass, a pocket watch, soap bubbles, smoking accoutrements, books, globes of the earth, prints and musical instruments. To give visual form to the exhortation *memento mori* (be mindful of death) artist employed all sorts of combinations of these indicators. The fact that the better painters never lost sight of the demands of composition and visual effect while transmitting their message is for us a satisfying aspect of their moralizing work.

Leiden, Delft, The Hague, Haarlem, Amsterdam and Utrecht, but also the Southern Netherlandish Antwerp, all had their specialists in this macabre genre. It appears that many more vanitas representations were painted in Holland than in Flanders. Earlier generations of art historians considered Leiden to be the city where vanitas still-life emerged because of the Calvinistically oriented university in that town which allegedly exerted its influence on the artists of the area. This notion has however since been discarded.

Many vanitas still-lives are characterized, in addition to the specific choice of objects, by the presence of all sorts of texts which either directly or indirectly point to the transience of human life and to the vanity and futility of earthly matters in general. The majority of the eight paintings in this category which are present in our exhibition include such painted texts (cat. nos. 38-45).

With the single exception of the panel ascribed to David Bailly all of these works were executed during the second half of the 17th century. The latest of these works, that of Pieter van Roestraeten, dates from 1696. When considering this group as a whole it is striking to note that stylistic



developments appear to be less pronounced than was the case with the other genres of still-life. This impression is also borne out when one takes a larger survey of vanitas still-lives. Some changes in the manner of rendition may be discerned (as is also true of the choice of objects and motifs) but in essence these compositions always seem to be constructed upon the same formulae.

The enormous numbers of Dutch and Flemish still-lives which were produced during the 17th century serve as an indicator of the popularity which they enjoyed with the art-buying public. The contrast with the low valuation placed upon such works by 17th century theoreticians is striking in this regard.<sup>40</sup> Still-lives, one assumes, were primarily painted for the free market and sold at annual fairs and kermesses, sometimes in a special location provided by the guild, and by art dealers and by the artists themselves in their studios. Many artists also doubled as dealers.<sup>41</sup>

Certain restrictions were in effect as to how and by whom paintings could be sold. In the annual fairs anyone could usually sell his products freely, but during the rest of the year that privilege was restricted to masters who were members of the guild of St Luke and who were only permitted to sell in their home towns. The guilds were normally very protective and held a vigilant guard against any kind of competition by artists from other cities.<sup>42</sup>

Most probably only a relatively small number of still-lives were painted on commission. Seventeenth century sources unhappily provide us with a scarcity of pertinent information. It is known for example that Jacques de Gheyn II received the sum of 600 guilders from the States-General in 1606 for a flower piece which was to serve as a diplomatic gift for Marie de Medici. Ambrosius Bosschaert asked no less than 1000 guilders in 1621 for a large 'flower-pot' which he had made for a member of Prince Maurits's retinue,<sup>43</sup> but these were enormous sums of money for the time and cannot be considered typical of the prices which flower-pieces generally fetched.

For some artists of a later generation, such as Jan Weenix, Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum who worked far into the 18th century, we have more information regarding patrons, commissions and the prices which their works commanded. Their still-lives often served a decorative function as chimney pieces or as a *dessus-de-porte* in the homes of the well-to-do bourgeoisie and nobles. That these artists were handsomely rewarded for their work we know from various 18th-century sources and documents.<sup>44</sup>

The purpose for which some other still-lives were made was far less pretentious, serving as sign boards for shops and businesses. This was most probably the function of crude painting by the 17th-century monogrammist JVR bearing the text: "Tis al vant Vercken" (It all comes from the pig; fig. XII). The function of many still-lives in the 17th century is much less clear, however. Most vanitas still-lives would probably have been bought for their moralizing messages while banquet-pieces and *pronk* still-lives, and, on occasion, representations of dead game, were perhaps also considered in a similar light by some buyers. Good composition, colouring and rendition of materials were undoubtedly highly valued in the 17th-century. Still-lives were not collected purely for aesthetic purposes, however, as art for art's sake, for such an approach to works of art was unknown at the time. Museums did not exist, let alone museum exhibitions open to the public. The collecting of dozens of still-lives to hang together in one place, complete with explanatory texts, as is the case on the present occasion, would, in all likelihood, have filled the 17th-century viewer with astonishment.



XII. Monogrammist JVR, Still-life with pig's head Muiden, Muiderslot



1. A. Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare*, vol. 4, The Hague 1917, 1439.
2. For a detailed treatment of the 17th-century terminology in this regard, see Lydia de Pauw-de Veen, *De begrippen "schilder", "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de zeventiende eeuw*, Brussels 1969, 141-157.
3. *Ibid.*, 150.
4. This grouping is also followed in Ingvar Bergström's *Dutch still-life painting in the seventeenth century* (London 1956), which still serves as the standard work in this area.
5. Charles Sterling, *La nature morte de l'antiquité à nos jours*, ed. Paris 1959, esp. 9-15. Felix Eckstein, *Untersuchungen über die Stilleben aus Pompeji und Herculaneum*, Berlin 1957. J.M. Croisille, *Les natures mortes campainiennes*, Brussels 1965.
6. W. Bombe, "Une reconstitution du studio du duc Frédéric d'Urbain", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 72, no. 2 (1930), 265-275. P. Remington, "The private study of Federico da Montefeltro", *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 36 (1941), 3-13.
7. Claus Grimm, "Das Jagdstilleben", *Stilleben in Europa*, 253. See also cat. no. 24.
8. See Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish painting*, vol. 2, Leiden and Brussels 1967, 65-66, plate 46.
9. Sam Segal, exhib. cat. *A flowery past. A survey of Dutch and Flemish flower painting from 1600 until the present*, Amsterdam (Gallery P. de Boer) and 's Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1982, 6 and 9. Possibly this panel of Memling's was half of a diptych of which the other representation was that of a Virgin and Child. However this may be, the flowers must in this case be considered foremost as the attributes of the man portrayed. See Gerhard Langemeyer, "Das Stilleben als Attribut", *Stilleben in Europa*, 222-223 and Paul Pieper, "Das Blumenbukett", *ibid.*, 316 and 318.
10. Identified by some authors with Sanders Bening. See Bergström 1956, 30-31.
11. Langemeyer, op. cit. (note 9), 220-224 and Pieper, op. cit. (note 9), 314-318.
12. J.A. Emmens, "Eins aber ist nötig" — zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts", in *Album amicorum J.G. van Gelder*, The Hague 1973, 93-101.
13. Gisela Luther, "Stilleben als Bilder der Sammelleidenschaft", *Stilleben in Europa*, 88-128.
14. S. Speth-Holterhoff, *Les peintres flamands de cabinets d'amateurs au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels 1957 gives a survey of painted *kunstkamers*. Of importance with regard to the phenomenon of the encyclopedic collections is J. Briels, "Amator pictoriae artis. De Antwerpse kunstverzamelaar Peeter Stevens (1590-1668) en zijn Constkamer", *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten*, Antwerp 1980, 137-226.
15. E. de Jongh, *Zinne- en minnebeelden in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1967, 69-71.
16. Ernst Kris, "Georg Hoefnagel und der wissenschaftliche Naturalismus", in: *Festschrift für Julius Schlosser zum 60. Geburtstage*, ed. by Arpad Weixlgärtner and Leo Planiscig, Zürich, etc. 1927, 243-253. Gerhard Langemeyer, "Die Nähe und die Ferne", *Stilleben in Europa*, 28.
17. Segal op. cit. (note 9), 72.
18. For the various categories, see Bergström 1956, Bol 1969 and Segal, op. cit. (note 9).
19. Sam Segal, "Inleiding", exhib. cat. *Boeket in Willet. Nederlandse bloemstillevens in de achttiende en de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam (Museum Willet Holthuysen) 1970, [6].
20. Laurens J. Bol, *The Bosschaert dynasty: painters of flowers and fruit*, Leigh-on-Sea 1960, 14-56.
21. *Ibid.*, 59, cat. no. 9, and 65, cat. no. 37.
22. Segal, op. cit. (note 9), 27 gives a list of no fewer than twenty-five characteristics of early flower-pieces.
23. Bol, op. cit. (note 20), 20.
24. Segal, op. cit. (note 9), 45-46.
25. Laurens J. Bol, "'Goede onbekenden'. Schilders van flora en fauna in bos en struweel", *Tableau* 4 (1982), 374-381.
26. Jan Briels, *Vlaamse schilders in het Noorden in het begin van de gouden eeuw*, (n.p. [1978]).
27. For Flemish still-life painting in the 17th century, see M.L. Hairs, *Les peintres flamands de fleurs au XVIIe siècle*, Paris and Brussels 1955 and Edith Greindl, *Les peintres flamands de nature morte au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels 1956. For Brueghel see Sam Segal, *Jan Brueghel de Oude: bloemen in een houten kuip*, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, 1979.
28. Hairs, op. cit. (note 27), 42-48.
29. *Ibid.*, 51-81. Segal, op. cit. (note 9), 54-59.
30. Bergström 1956, 98-153. Bol 1969, 13-21 and 62-86.
31. De Pauw-de Veen, op. cit. (note 2), 150.
32. *Ibid.*, 146-149. The term "pronk still-life" in contrast to the terms "breakfast-piece" and "banquet-piece" does not



originate in the 17th century.

33. The fact that this painting was formerly thought to be an early work of Floris van Schooten's (see cat. no. 3) may be considered an indication of the affinities that existed between Dutch and Flemish breakfast-pieces of this period.
34. Vroom, vol. 1, 23-78; vol. 2, cat. nos. 39-177 and 324-392.
35. Bergström 1956, 229-237.
36. Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf 1619-1693*, Berlin 1974.
37. Bol 1969, 281-293.
38. See E. de Jongh in this catalogue.
39. Bergström 1956, 154-190. Exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden. Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) 1970.
40. See Andrea Gasten in this catalogue.
41. G.F. Koch, *Die Kunstaussstellung. Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1967, 62-68.
42. Ibid., 66, note 150.
43. Bol, op. cit. (note 20), 26. Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, E.H. ter Kuile, *Dutch art and architecture 1600 to 1800*, Harmondsworth 1966, 196.
44. For example Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunst-schilders en schilderessen*, vol. 1, The Hague 1750, 78-82 (Weenix), 210-233 (Ruysch); vol. 2, The Hague 1751, 13-33 (Van Huysum). Further F. Schlie, "Sieben Briefe und eine Quittung", *Oud Holland* 18 (1900), 137-143, esp. 143 (Van Huysum).



Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder  
30. *Chinese vase with flowers*  
Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza collection









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## Catalogue

Catalogue entries written by  
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Breakfast-pieces and kitchen-pieces  
circa 1600-1640

## Gillis Gillisz. de Bergh

(?) ca. 1600 - Delft 1669

1

### Still-life with fruit and cheese

Panel, 63.5 x 90 cm. Signed G. de Bergh

Private collection, The Netherlands

Information on Gillis de Bergh is scarce. In 1624 he was registered as a master in the Guild of St. Luke in Delft, and it appears that he had moderate success in his attempts to market his paintings. However, the number of works which are known to be by his hand is small.<sup>1</sup>

This Delft artist was not lacking in talent, as the painting exhibited here amply proves. In certain respects it is reflective of a visual idiom employed by a number of his contemporaries. He does not eschew such well-known pictorial clichés as the peel, in this case of an apple, hanging over the edge of the table, or the carrack porcelain dish of butter which is placed on top of a large cheese. This last motif was also a favourite of some of the Haarlem and Amsterdam masters and of the Flemish painter Clara Peeters.<sup>2</sup>

More personal are De Bergh's refined use of chiaroscuro and the manner in which the various subtleties in colour, especially green and the yellow-greens, are blended and played off against one another. These technical effects give the still-life a rather mysterious atmosphere. Similar experiments in the workings of light and shadow were conducted by other Delft artists — the genre and history painter Leonaert Bramer, of the same generation as De Bergh, carries these out further.<sup>3</sup>

It is instructive to compare Gillis de Bergh's still-life with, for example, that of Hieronymus Francken II (cat. no. 3). Such a juxtaposition makes clear the evolution which the theme at hand, that of tables laden with comestibles, had undergone during the intervening thirty to forty years.

EdJ

1. Vroom, vol. 1, 122-23; vol. 2, 9, no. 3. The author creates confusion by suddenly mentioning "a Haarlem painting" in the middle of his discussion of this Delft painter. On De Bergh's "moderate success" and his membership of the Delft guild, see John Michael Montias, "Painters in Delft, 1613-1680", *Simiolus* 10 (1978-79), 84-114, esp. 104 and 109.
2. For both motifs, see cat. nos. 10, 11, and 7 (Kalf and Van Beyeren) and 4 (Peeters). For the carrack porcelain, see cat. no. 30 (Bosschaert).
3. Examples in E. Wichmann, *Leonaert Bramer. Sein Leben und seine Kunst*, Leipzig 1923.









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## Floris van Dijck

Presumably Haarlem 1575 — Haarlem 1651

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### 2

#### Still-life with fruit

Panel, 28 x 45 cm. Signed and dated 1628

Private collection, The Netherlands

Floris van Dijck belonged to a group of Haarlem artists who, in the first decades of the 17th century, specialized in the depiction of tables laden usually with an ample supply of all sorts of tableware and foodstuffs. The 17th-century term for this type of still-life: *ontbijtje* (breakfast-piece), suggests something more modest than most of the "meals" which it covers.<sup>1</sup>

In this rather small painting, which is the extent of the master's representation in the exhibition, Van Dijck not only diverged from the normal compositional formula, but also from the usual iconography. The diversity of the ingredients as well as their number is limited. Apart from two biscuits exclusively fruit is rendered, among other melons, strawberries, plums and a few cherries.<sup>2</sup>

Viewed in the light of a series of very heavily laden *ontbijtjes* by Gillis, Van Schooten, Koets and Van Dijck himself (fig. 4a), this work makes an almost fragmentary impression. It is also somewhat less refined in texture than Van Dijck's larger compositions of an earlier date. The delicate damask tablecloth is an element which we find in most such representations. The plate of strawberries is reminiscent of a drawing in aquarel and body colour that Van Dijck had made four years earlier, in 1624, for the album amicorum of Jonkheer Cornelis de Glarges, to which David Bailly also contributed (fig. 38e).<sup>3</sup>

The names we encounter in this book of friendship all belong to persons of high standing. Van Dijck was part of this milieu: he came from a patrician family and was wealthy in his own right. He therefore did not have to paint for his living. Perhaps this explains the fact that so few works by his hand are known.

EdJ

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1. Bergström 1956, 98-104. Bol 1969, 13-21.

2. Exhib. cat. *17e-Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, no. 26.

3. See Bol 1969, 16-17, fig. 12.







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## Hieronymus Francken II

Antwerp 1578 — Antwerp 1623

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3

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### Breakfast-piece

Panel, 55 x 105 cm. Signed with monogram H F  
Private collection, The Netherlands

In the large exhibition of Dutch masters in Swedish collections held in Stockholm in 1967, this painting was present under the name of Floris van Schooten. According to the catalogue written for the occasion, it is an early work of his which can be dated to about 1600.<sup>1</sup>

We can agree with this dating in general, although it would seem preferable to speak of the first decade of the 17th century. The authorship of the work is however open to question. Anyone who has some familiarity with the oeuvre of Floris van Schooten will have great difficulty in placing this work in it on reasonable grounds. The painting is not included in the catalogue of Van Schooten's works published by Poul Gammelbo the year before the Stockholm exhibition, nor does it appear in the recent, though less complete, overview given by Vroom.<sup>2</sup>

A convincing alternative has been offered by Sam Segal. He attributes this painting to the Fleming, Hieronymus Francken II and moreover recognizes the monogram "HF" of this artist in the lower left-hand corner of the composition.<sup>3</sup> This case of a justified change of name proves once again that connoisseurship, though removed by sceptics from its pedestal, can still prove valuable.

With the change of authorship comes a change in the location of the workshop as well. Floris van Schooten worked in Haarlem, while for Hieronymus Francken we must move to Antwerp.<sup>4</sup> It begins more and more to look as though Haarlem cannot claim exclusive rights as the birthplace of the early breakfast-piece, although that city did produce a number of eminent practitioners of the genre. During the first decades of the 17th century the breakfast-piece seems to have emerged in several places at once; not only in Haarlem, but also in Antwerp, in Amsterdam and in Frankfurt-am-Main, where a group of Flemish artists was domiciled. We must think in this regard less of a fortuitous parallel development than of contacts between these artists and therefore of influence, although in this last respect few can be precisely traced.<sup>5</sup>

Francken's painting bears all the characteristics of this — in its time — new category of painting. The word "new" in this context is however not meant to suggest that these works had no connexions with earlier art. Typical for the genre is the steeply sloping table: the tabletop fills more than half the picture space of the panel. The viewer therefore sees the representation from above, and



the number of overlappings is reduced to the utter minimum. The elements are evenly distributed over the table; approximately equal attention is given to each one, with proper respect for their particularities in form, colour and material. The only factor which unifies all these individual foodstuffs and objects is the bright blue tablecloth.

EdJ

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1. Exhib. cat. *Holländska Mästare i Svensk ägo*, Stockholm (Nationalmuseum) 1967, no. 146.
  2. Poul Gammelbo, "Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 17 (1966), 105-142. Vroom, vol. 2, 112-122.
  3. Dr. Segal is presently preparing a study on the still-lives of Hieronymus Francken II and his school, in which this painting will be more fully interpreted.
  4. There is little literature on Hieronymus Francken II, who was a member of a large family of artists. Cf. Pierre-Marie Auzas, *Hiërosme Francken dit Franco peintre du roi Henri III et du roi Henri IV*, Brussels 1968, 3. Obsolete is Juliane Gabriels, *Een Kempisch schildersgeslacht: de Francken's*, Hoogstraten 1930, 98-100. See also exhib. cat. *De eeuw van Rubens*, Brussels (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1965, 88.
  5. Bergström 1956, 98. Bol (1969, 13-21) still considers the early breakfast-piece to be mainly a Haarlem invention.



Breakfast-piece



Detail from *Breakfast-piece*







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## Clara Peeters

Active in first half of the 17th century

4

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### Still-life with cheeses

Panel, 49 x 64 cm. Signed with monogram CP

Private collection, The Netherlands

Clara Peeters, the painter of this fascinating still-life, has by the mists of time been somewhat hidden from our view. Divergent opinions have emerged in recent years as to the size and character of her oeuvre. Both the year of her birth and that of her death are unknown. It is generally assumed that she lived most of her life in Antwerp, although her name does not appear in the registers of the Antwerp artists' guild. She is supposed to have worked in the Northern Netherlands, in 1612 in Amsterdam and in 1617 in The Hague, but we possess no documents to verify her presence there.<sup>1</sup>

Against all these unknowns we have an unmistakable point of reference in the certain affinity of a number of paintings which are undoubtedly by Peeters's hand, and a number of breakfast-pieces made in Amsterdam and especially in Haarlem. The painting exhibited here is one of these.<sup>2</sup> Represented is a table laden with foodstuffs and associated objects. A pyramid of cheese and butter on a large tin plate which is placed in the centre of the composition forms the most striking element. Around this central motif are grouped several glasses, an earthenware jug, pewter plates with fancy bread and figs and raisins, a bread roll which is partially hidden under a folded damask tablecloth, a number of decoratively formed biscuits and an expensive knife with a mother-of-pearl handle.

The resemblance to still-lives made in Haarlem and Amsterdam, especially by Gillis, Van Dijck (fig. 4a), Van Schooten, Koets and Hans van Essen is demonstrable in the central motif composed of cheeses stacked on top of one another and in a few other details, as well as in the fact that all the representations are "vegetarian" in nature; meats do not appear.<sup>3</sup>

Although the likeness of these works is strong, it must not blind us to the differences. Clara Peeters works with less detail than the other painters. She chose a more compact arrangement and a more geometrical composition, a lower point of view, and a significantly more sober palette. Her work displays no local colouring; the predominant tone is yellow-brown with an occasional accent of blue. The analytical method of composition of the Haarlem painters of the first decades of the century here gives way to a more synthetic compositional technique, a manner of representation which we also find in monochrome painters such as Pieter Claesz. and Willem Claesz. Heda, the protagonists of the





4a. Floris van Dijck, *Breakfast-piece* (1622), Private collection, The Netherlands



second phase in the artistic development of the laden table.<sup>4</sup> Clara Peeters's still-life can thus be dated with some assurance to the 1630's.

Whether such breakfast-pieces have a particular meaning is not easily answered. In recent years profound philosophizing has been directed at the iconography of these still-lives; sometimes not only profound, but also rather comical. Particular the cheese was to the taste of some students of the scriptures. By reference to Tertullian, not exactly the most-read author in circles of still-life painters and their intellectual cousins, cheese — that is, milk in solid form and in light of the fact that Christ was called heavenly milk — was proclaimed a food of immortality. Together with bread, also a symbol of Christ, cheese was allegedly used by artists as a eucharistic counterpart to rich and festive meals.<sup>5</sup>

Here the iconological dam breaks completely. Even if breakfast-pieces and later still-lives of precious objects were originally intended as a criticism of overabundance and intemperance, or were interpreted as such by contemporaries (and in some cases that is not unthinkable), it is still exceedingly doubtful that 17th-century viewers would have needed such convoluted rationalizations to reach the moral of moderation.<sup>6</sup> Cheese, moreover, was rarely consumed on an allegorical level in the 17th century. An exception constitutes an emblem of the Zeeland Calvinist Johan de Brune who, far removed from Tertullian notions, likens sharp cheese to great sins committed by great minds.<sup>7</sup>

Cheese and butter are products which for various reasons lent themselves less well to symbolization than, for example, a watch, a violin, a globe, flowers or tobacco, and consequently are rarely employed as symbols. With respect to still-lives containing an ostentatious stack of cheeses a trivial consideration seems more relevant: for 17th-century Holland, cheese and butter were of great economic importance. Holland was the land of dairy products par excellence, and both of these foodstuffs belonged to the most important articles of export. Leiden butter and Tessel, Edam and Gouda cheese were internationally popular.<sup>8</sup>

This economic fact is, one might say, automatically brought to light in all the paintings of cheese, or cheese and butter, made from Nicolaes Gillis to Clara Peeters. In addition, such a pyramid of dairy products was of course an interesting motif to depict. Economic and pictorial aspects seem to blend



harmoniously here. To a less harmonious aspect of the combination of butter and cheese we shall direct our attention presently.

In the 17th century, and in fact already in the Middle Ages, cheese was a relatively inexpensive food. Butter on the contrary was considered a luxury item and was usually costly.<sup>9</sup> Cheese was however not always viewed in a positive light. The authoritative physician Johan van Beverwyck showed little enthusiasm for this consumptible in general, and he considered mature cheese to be unequivocally bad for one's health.<sup>10</sup> In a cookbook dating from 1514, more than a century earlier, we also read: "ghenen case es goet/ dan diemen alderminst eet" (the best cheese is that which is least consumed).<sup>11</sup>

The dark green cheese in Peeters's display, which is placed in front of the large yellow one, is presumably a mature Edam, while the uppermost cheese seems to be a ewe-cheese. The combination of these various cheeses with the butter in the small blue plate above may be understandable as an exemplar of the dairy industry; from the viewpoint of 17th-century principals of consumption, it certainly was not. The eating of two dairy products together was generally disapproved of.<sup>12</sup> Illustrative in this respect is a legend regarding Prince Maurits, who supposedly became engaged in a quarrel with a skipper because he, the prince, added a slice of cheese to a piece of bread which was already buttered. Later in the century such luxury was attacked with equal resolution, at least according to Simon de Vries's comedy *De zeven duivelen regerende en vervoerende de hedendaagsche dienstmaagden* (The seven devils governing and tempting the present-day maidservants) of 1682. One of the devils was able to incite a serious transgression, namely to make a servant lay thick slices of cheese on top of slices of bread thickly smeared with butter, although the family used only one or the other: "zuivel op zuivel, is 't werk van den duivel" (butter with cheese is a devilish feast).<sup>13</sup>

Eating butter with cheese was apparently "all too abominable" during the entire 17th century. Is it possible that Clara Peeters, with her *pièce de résistance* of cheese and butter was at the same time alluding to this general criticism of waste, whether seriously or ironically? Could this also have been the case with Floris van Schooten, Roelof Koets, Pieter Claesz. and Gillis de Bergh?<sup>14</sup> After all, they too painted still-lives in which dairy products were piled on top of one



another. Certainly contemporaries who practised moderation must have thought what they would of such representations.

EdJ

1. The available information on this painter is rather confusing and speculative. See for example Edith Greindl, *Les peintres flamands de mature morte au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels 1956, 37. Bol 1969, 18-20. Vroom, vol. 1, 88-100; vol. 2, 99-107. Vroom has attributed a number of works to Clara Peeters which until recently were ascribed to Pieter Claesz. See cat. no. 19 (Claesz.).
2. Bol 1969, 20. Vroom, vol. 1, 93 and 99; vol. 2, 102-103, no. 515a. Nos. 515b-518 constitute one replica and three variants.
3. Gillis and Van Dyck: exhib. cat. *17de-Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, nos. 37 and 25; Van Schooten: Poul Gammelbo, "Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 17 (1966), 105-142; Koets: Vroom, vol. 1, 178; Van Essen: Bol 1969, 19.
4. For Claesz. and Heda, see Bergström 1956, 112-134.
5. Joseph Lammers, "Fasten und Genuss. Die angerichtete Tafel als Thema des Stillebens", *Stilleben in Europa*, 402-429 and 587-588, esp. 406.
6. For criticism of ostentation and overabundance, see cat. no. 7 (Van Beyeren).
7. Johan de Brune, *Emblemata of zinne-werck . . .*, Amsterdam 1624, 51-56.
8. G.D.J. Schotel, *Het oud-Hollandsch huisgezin der zeventiende eeuw*, ed. Amsterdam 1903, 303-305. J.G. van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten. Handboek tot de economische en sociale geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek*, The Hague 1970, 220 and 416. Jan de Vries, *The Dutch rural economy in the golden age 1500-1700*, New Haven and London 1974, 174-180.
9. Lambertus Burema, *De voeding in Nederland van de middeleeuwen tot de twintigste eeuw*, Assen 1953, 40-42, 70, 73 and 89-92.
10. Johan van Beverwyck, *Schat der gesontheydt*, et. Utrecht 1651, 136.
11. Johanna Maria van Winter, *Van soeter cokene*, ed. Bussum 1971, 123-124.
12. Schotel, op. cit. (note 8), 305. Burema, op. cit. (note 9), 91.
13. See the preceding note and P.J. Harrebomée, *Spreekwoordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, Utrecht 1856-70, ed. Amsterdam 1980, vol. 1, 97 and 166.
14. See note 3. For Claesz., see Vroom, vol. 1, figs. 36 and 63; vol. 2, 17, nos. 45 and 48. For Gillis de Bergh, see cat. no. 1.







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## Floris van Schooten

Active in Haarlem, died after 1655

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5

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### Kitchen still-life

Panel, 83 x 128 cm. Signed in monogram and dated FvS 1630  
Private collection, The Netherlands

The compositional formula which Floris van Schooten chose for his painting is familiar. Many 17th-century still-lives were made on a scheme of this type: the configuration of objects on the table gradually increases in height from left to right. The objects on the right are larger and more often situated in depth than the less heavy elements on the left. The imaginary diagonal which the composition delineates therefore lies not on the picture plane but recedes into space, intersecting the plane of the picture at a sharp angle.<sup>1</sup>

Many questions arise in this connexion. Was this compositional formula employed so often because some painters had a preference for it, and — above all — because it was popular with the public? If so, was it popular because it accommodates a particular way of viewing? How much insight did painters have in those days into what we at present call perceptual psychology? A related question is: was the fact that the eye of many viewers moves in analogy to the normal direction of reading and writing, namely from left to right, used as a guideline upon which to compose works of art?<sup>2</sup>

Seventeenth-century sources unfortunately provide no answers to such typically 20th-century questions. Moreover, 17th-century still-life painters often used completely different formulas upon which to construct their works. Van Schooten himself was not limited exclusively to one compositional scheme.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that a number of intriguing problems bear investigation by still-life experts.

Various types of subject matter can be distinguished in Van Schooten's oeuvre: kitchen-pieces with and without human figures, still-lives with kitchen utensils, breakfast-pieces and still-lives of fruit. This large panel of 1630 belongs to the sphere of the kitchen.<sup>4</sup> It can be considered an example from the last phase of a development which had its inception in the first half of the 16th century in Antwerp with the large kitchen-pieces of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer and which later, through the intercession of Aertsen and his followers, continued in Amsterdam and Haarlem.

In Haarlem, where Van Schooten probably worked during his whole life, the genre received new traits, partially through his own personal contributions. Nonetheless, some of Van Schooten's early kitchen-pieces are reminiscent of their 16th-century predecessors in that religious scenes such as Christ in the



house of Mary and Martha play a prominent role in them.<sup>5</sup>

The sorts of objects and ingredients which staff Van Schooten's figural works were also those selected to lay the table of this still-life of 1630. Striking are the two large copper kettles, of which one is represented in a slanted position. This was apparently a favourite motif not only of Van Schooten's, but also of many of his colleagues, including Kalf and Potuyl.<sup>6</sup>

The tipped kettle is an excellent receptacle of light and as such makes a striking contrast with the massive, dark green cabbage. Not only this cabbage, but also the basket of grapes, the plate of strawberries, the plums, the apples and the dead birds make up part of the painter's permanent repertoire. Despite the bright colours of some details the composition as a whole is united harmoniously by one predominant, subdued tone.

EdJ

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1. See for example cat. nos. 8 (De Heem) and 11 (Kalf).

2. See E.W.J. Zwaan, *Links en rechts in waarneming en beleving*, Utrecht (diss.) 1965, 110 and 158.

3. Poul Gammelbo, "Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 17 (1966), 105-142.

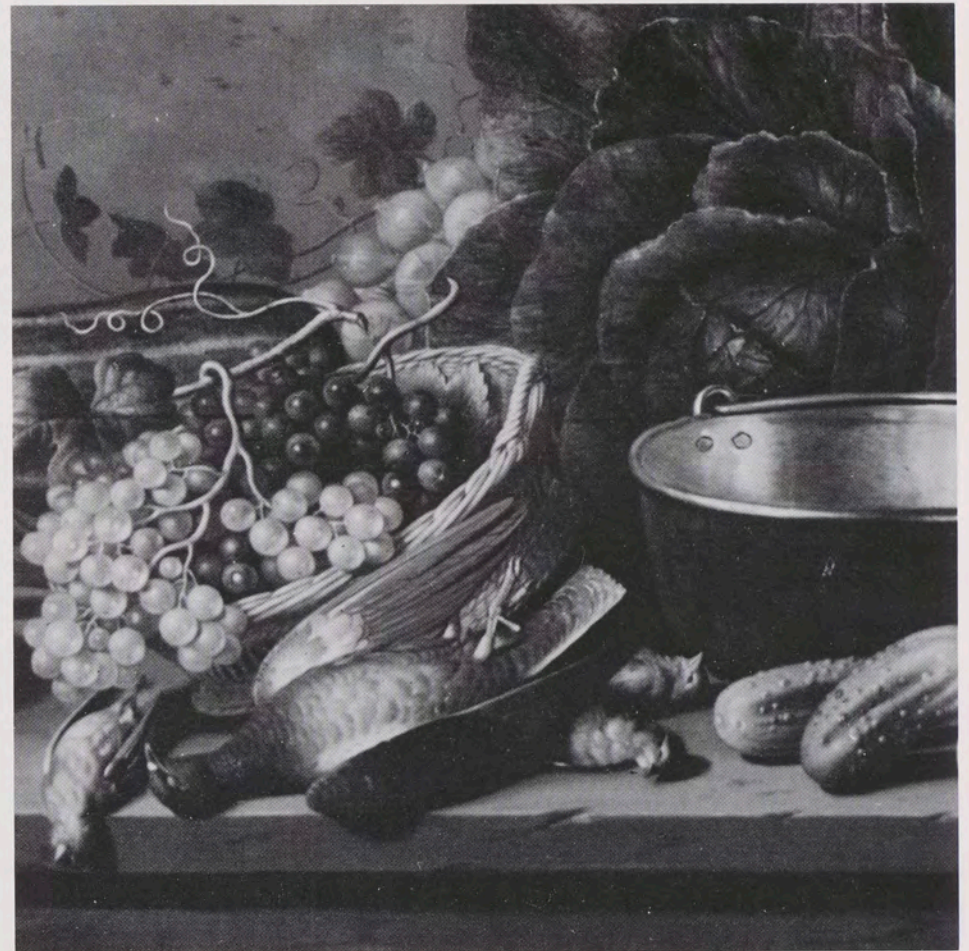
4. Ibid., 121 (cat. no. 40). Exhib. cat. *17e-Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, no. 80. Vroom, vol. 2, 112, no. 564.

5. Gammelbo, op. cit. (note 3), 105-109.

6. Ibid., for example cat. nos. 2, 5, 10, 11 and 42. Vroom, vol. 2, 112-113 nos. 566 and 567. For examples in Kalf's work, see Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf 1619-1693*, Berlin 1974. For Potuyl, see cat. no. 17.



Kitchen still-life



Detail from *Kitchen still-life*









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## Willem van Aelst

Delft ca. 1626 — Amsterdam ca. 1683

6

### Breakfast-piece

Canvas, 50.2 x 42.5 cm. Signed and dated Guill. van Aelst 1680  
Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum

Van Aelst was at the end of his career in 1680, when he painted this arrangement of food and glassware, a kind of subject that his contemporaries called an *ontbijtje*, a breakfast-piece. He had no intention of breaking new ground in this painting. Quite the reverse: he remained true to himself by referring to his older compositions, for instance ones dating from 1657 (fig. 6a) and 1659, a procedure that was not at all unusual in 17th-century artists.<sup>1</sup>

Van Aelst's characteristics are his choice of cool colours and his accomplished manner of painting. The remarkable shining effect visible, for example, in the *roemer* and the Venice glass and on the tablecloth, was obtained by a process called glazing that had already been perfected by that time: thin coats of different transparent colours were applied on top of each other.<sup>2</sup>

Van Aelst's talent was recognized early. When still only seventeen he was admitted as a master to the Delft Guild of Saint Luke. Most artists were older than that before achieving this status. But Van Aelst did not stay in Delft long. In 1645 he went to France, where he was to reside for some years before becoming court painter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in Italy. He seems to have lived in Amsterdam since 1657, where he remained until his death. Even when he was back in Holland he generally signed his paintings in a somewhat romanized manner as Guill. or Guillmo van Aelst, a rather coquettish reference to his successful sojourn in foreign parts.

The breakfast-piece in Glasgow Art Gallery represents only one of the categories in Van Aelst's varied oeuvre. He also — more frequently, in fact — applied himself to making still-lives of spoils of the chase, fruits, and flower-arrangements (cat. no 26).<sup>3</sup> His refined method of painting and his presentation earned Van Aelst the designation "the aristocrat of still-life painters". "There is no other master who has such dignity in his pictures, a common object is rarely to be found, even the insects having a cultured grace", wrote a knowledgeable admirer in the 1920's.<sup>4</sup>

But Van Aelst, without going counter to his aristocracy, never, in his representations of meals, shied away from displaying such common objects as onions and left-over herring on a marble-topped table. This master may have been more down to earth in culinary scenes than in the other genres he practised, but he always plied the same delicate brush.

EdJ



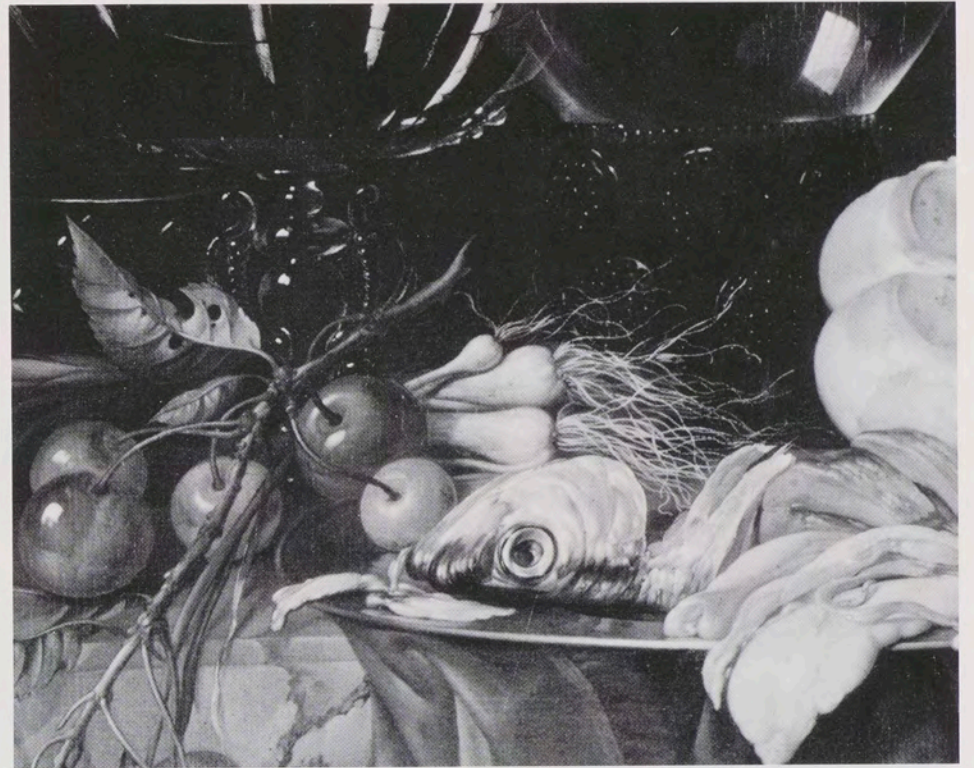
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1. Bergström 1956, figs. 184 and 233. Bol 1969, 324.
  2. Bol 1969, 284.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Warner, 15.



6a. Willem van Aelst, *Breakfast-piece* (1657), Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst



Breakfast-piece









Breakfast-pieces, still-lives with fruit and  
*pronk* still-lives circa 1640-1680



7a. Abraham van Beyeren, *Banquet-piece*, Brussels, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten

## Abraham van Beyeren

The Hague 1620/21 — Overschie 1690

7

### Banquet-piece

Panel, 109.2 x 88.9 cm. Signed with monogram AVB  
York, City of York Art Gallery

Abraham van Beyeren enjoys the reputation of being one of the best-known and admired still-life painters of 17th-century Holland. He was not so highly thought of in his own time. His work did not usually fetch much, and for years his financial situation was far from rosy. He was born in The Hague, moved to Delft, then back to The Hague, and subsequently to Amsterdam, Alkmaar, and Overschie: an unsettled existence that may have been related to his financial difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

Strangely enough, Van Beyeren's name does not appear in Arnold Houbraken's *Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en schilderessen* (Great theatre of Dutch painters, both men and women), the extensive collection of biographies of 17th-century artists which appeared from 1718 to 1721. This is the more remarkable as Van Beyeren not only did not lack talent, he also most definitely did not lack versatility or productivity either. He produced divers still-lives: fish-pieces (see cat. no. 18), depictions of poultry, a small number of flower-pieces (cat. no. 29), and *pronkstilleven*s (elaborate banquet-pieces), not to mention a series of paintings depicting river scenes.<sup>2</sup>

His name is however pre-eminently associated with the kind of still-lives that show conspicuous consumption and an abundance of ostentatious riches, often in the form of precious and costly tableware and the most succulent delicacies, which have come to be known as *pronkstilleven*s, still-lives that are as it were "showing off". In the 1650's Abraham van Beyeren devoted himself particularly to these banquet-pieces, of which the panel in York may be said to be a fairly typical example. These works seem causal enough, but are in fact well thought-out compositions containing layers of fruits, meat, and lobsters alternating with all kinds of glasswork, china, and costly gold and silver objects. These works are in pungent contrast to the lean years Van Beyeren himself was experiencing in the fifties. We must assume that he borrowed his costly artefacts from someone at some stage, for it is unlikely that he owned them himself.<sup>3</sup>

Van Beyeren's banquet-pieces are seldom dominated by one specific detail. The accents are usually distributed evenly over all the component parts. Each object receives the rendering demanded by its nature and material, the warm colours of the broad and flowing brushwork being given strong tone-and-light emphasis. Jan Davidsz. de Heem's work (see cat. no. 8) will have given him his bearings, but it did not infringe on the personal character of Van Beyeren's



still-lives.<sup>4</sup> They are among those paintings which more or less instantly reveal the hand that made them.

The painting from York shows an empty niche as its background, the antithesis of the abundance on the table. This niche motif appears frequently; not only such compositional elements but also various objects recur again and again. No one could miss, for example, his frequent use of the silver wine jug and the silver-gilt Augsburger chalice which towers above all the rest.<sup>5</sup>

Insofar as we can form an overall picture of his banquet-pieces, we may conclude that Van Beyeren undoubtedly grasped the available possibilities of variation but, within this variation, imposed limitations on himself so as to work more efficiently. This kind of specialism within a specialism engendered its own routine, which naturally resulted in greater productivity. The artist's preoccupation with a single specific theme also provided him with the opportunity of improving his composition and perfecting his technique of expressing the qualities of substances and materials.<sup>6</sup>

"These still-lives have nothing of the expository any more", wrote Van Luttervelt in 1947. "What can be found in them is one mighty jubilant exultation at the splendour of the assembled riches . . .".<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, art-historical knowledge has not yet progressed far enough for us to be able to test and assess this opinion conclusively. A certain amount of scepticism seems appropriate, even if only because we know of at least one still-life by Van Beyeren that bears the motto *Vanitas vanitatum*, "vanity of vanities".<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there is the watch that Van Beyeren sometimes included in his display. Bergström was probably correct in taking the watch to be an exhortation to temperance, a little accent on virtue in the midst of such a manifestation of superabundance (fig. 7a).<sup>9</sup>

Excess and ostentation, though practised daily in some circles, were regarded in 17th-century Holland as blameworthy and sinful, certainly in the eyes of orthodox Calvinists and Baptists. The pulpits fulminated against these transgressions, and strongly commended moderation in all things. Church councils continually complained about the misuse of riches and about "pompeuse en delicate tractementen en sumptuose maaltijden" (showy and delectable refreshments and sumptuous repasts). This kind of utterance is legend. In several parts of the country, largely put under pressure by the churches, the authorities felt obliged to intervene and enact laws imposing





7b. Hendrick Gerritsz. *Pot, Old woman with gold and silver objects*, Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum



limits on spending (*leges suntuariae*), which particularly affected weddings and other festive parties.<sup>10</sup>

Many books by theologians (and they had a large reading public) have pages and pages expatiating on the sin of sumptuousness. The Zeeland preacher Godefridus Udemans and the Amsterdam minister Petrus Wittewrongel were two of many who played interminably on this theme, indefatigably collecting not only biblical but also classical arguments against "vuyle bras-malen en suyperie" (stinking orgies of gormandizing and carousing), against all "onnoodigen ende overdadigen Huys-raedt" (all unnecessary and superfluous household furnishings) and "ontallicke goude ende silvere vaten" (countless gold and silver vessels). "We must not be like foolish children", Udemans contends, "and set our hearts on these shining vanities (. . .) for the Lord shall either take them away from us, or us from them".<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes we see criticism of excess and ostentation explicitly reflected in art and emblematics. Hendrick Gerritsz. Pot, for example, did a painting in which, by showing costly tableware, greed is cast in an allegorical mould (fig. 7b), whilst Roemer Visscher in one of his emblems berated the use of "large silver-gilt dishes, cups, bowls, and basins which do not serve the daily wants" (fig. 7c).<sup>12</sup> These are just the sort of objects that we continually come across in Van Beyerens, but there they are placed in a context that does not let itself be easily interpreted; at any rate, not by us.

Whatever the intention of Van Beyerens's banquet-pieces may have been, some of his contemporaries will have regarded these paintings in the light of accepted morality as being not just excellent renderings of comestibles and objects but at the same time remonstrances against excess and ostentation. Reading this kind of meaning out of a work fitted the communication channels that were popular in 17th-century art and literature, in which exhortation to virtue via an attractive presentation of vice was a much-practised rhetorical expedient.<sup>13</sup>

EdJ





7c. "Ad tragoedias", emblem from Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614.

1. H.E. van Gelder, W.C. Heda, A. van Beyerens, W. Kalf, Amsterdam (n.d.), 21-25.
2. Ibid., 26-38. Bergström 1956, 229-246.
3. Van Gelder, op. cit. (note 1), 34, note 1.
4. Bergström 1956, 242-243.
5. The Augsburg chalice was a particular favourite of Van Beyerens's. This was a sort of German drinking cup set on a very high base, which gave it the effect of being double. It was known in German as a "Buckelpokal" because of its heavy bulging protuberances. Van Beyerens used it *inter al.* on paintings now in Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum and private collection), East Berlin (Staatliche Museen), Kettwig (Girardet collection) and Oxford (Ashmolean Museum).
6. E. de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandsse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw", exhib. cat. *Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, Brussels (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) 1971, 143-194, esp. 159-160. Joseph Lammers, "Innovation und Virtuosität", *Stilleben in Europa*, 511-512.
7. R. van Luttervelt, *Schilders van het stilleven*, Naarden 1947, 53: "Tets voorstellen doen deze stilleven in het geheel niet meer. Wat men erin vinden kan is één grote jubeltoon over de heerlijkheid van de bijeengebrachte rijkdommen . . .".
8. Van Gelder, op. cit. (note 1), 30-31.
9. Bergström 1956, 189-190.
10. M.J.A. de Vrijer, "XVIIe eeuwse sumptuositeit", *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, N.S. 33 (1942), 1-48 and 73-92. Tot Lering en Vermaak, 248.
11. Godefridus Udemans, 't Geestelick roer van 't coopmans schip, dat is: trouw bericht, hoe dat een coopman, en coopvaerder, hem selven dragen moet in syne handelingen . . ., ed. Dordrecht 1640, 48-57: "Wy en moeten soo dwaes niet zijn als de kinderen/ dat wy aen dese glimpende ydelheden ons herte soudén hangen ( . . . ) of de Heere sal het ons ontnemen/ of ons daer van rucken . . .". Petrus Wittewrongel, *Het tweede boeck van de Oeconomia christiana ofte christelicke huys-houdinghe*, Amsterdam 1661, 1140-1151.
12. Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614, 53: "groote silvere vergulden Schalen, Koppen, Beckens, Lampetten" die "niet tot de dagelijcxse nootdrift dienen".
13. E. de Jonge, "Inleiding", *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 27-28.







## Jan Davidsz. de Heem

Utrecht 1606 — Antwerp 1683/84

8

### Still-life with a view of a river

Canvas, 59.3 x 92.6 cm. Signed and dated J. de Heem f. A° 1646

Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art, gift of Edward Drummond Libbey

Jan Davidsz. de Heem's talent for adaptation was probably greater than that of any other still-life painter. In his early Utrecht period he followed the precepts of older Utrecht masters, in Leiden, mostly through his sober monochrome still-lives of books, he became a true Leiden artist, and in Antwerp, where he worked for a considerable time from 1636, he burgeoned into an exuberant Fleming with a bright palette.<sup>1</sup>

The painting from Toledo, which is dated 1646, has all the marks of his Antwerp period. The disposition, which is based mainly on the diagonal from his elegant signature on the table at the bottom left to the red drapery in the upper right, can be seen as a last echo of a construction principle that was applied chiefly in North Netherlandish still-lives. But all the rest is unmistakably Flemish in character, although less flamboyant and overfull than many of De Heem's other compositions of this period. The number of details here is relatively limited.<sup>2</sup>

We can ask ourselves whether De Heem, in Antwerp, sometimes painted large canvasses with abundant representations, and sometimes smaller and more restrained ones, according to terms specified, perhaps, in some commission or another. Documents relating to commissions De Heem may have had are not known, but it is unlikely that he would have produced his very largest canvasses, some of which are more than seven feet across, for the open market. They must have been intended for people whose love of abundance was equalled by their generous wall-space.

In the light of this problem of size and quantity it is tempting to consider a still-life by De Heem of 1651 with a huge goblet-shaped vessel on which the inscription "Niet hoe veel" (Not how much) can be read (fig. 8a).<sup>3</sup> Every 17th-century Dutchman who read or heard these three words will undoubtedly have automatically added the next three: "maar hoe eel" (but how noble). "Niet hoe veel, maar hoe eel" which amounted to "quality before quantity", was a common proverb at that time, and we find it quoted not only by Roemer Visscher and Jacob Cats, and in the collection of proverbs called *Het mergh van de Nederlandsche spreekwoorden* (The pith of Dutch proverbs) of 1644, but also, and in a most unexpected way, by Samuel van Hoogstraeten, in his *Hooge schoole der schilderconst* (The academy of art) of 1678.<sup>4</sup>



8a. Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Still-life with a large glass goblet* (1651), Present location unknown



This proverb occurs in an art-theoretical context in Hoogstraeten's disquisition on "Gematichtheyt in 't ordineeren" (Moderation in composition): "For the sake of moderation, I would advise you primarily not to overburden your work with unnecessary things, for *Niet hoe veel, maer hoe eel*, as de Heem wrote. A multitude of images which have no function is loathsome".

Unfortunately we cannot tell whether Hoogstraeten knew this particular picture with the goblet or whether De Heem wrote these words elsewhere as well. But it is more important to see what conclusion we can draw from the inscription on De Heem's painting of 1651. The words "Niet hoe veel" are, naturally, engraved on a goblet holding wine, but do they refer only to the drink? Could De Heem not also, perhaps even in the first place, have meant that he personally regarded a picture such as this, of medium size and showing a relatively small number of elements, as his artistic ideal? At any rate, as Hoogstraeten's reference shows, this ideal of moderation was still, several decades later, attached to De Heem's name.<sup>5</sup>

If we now compare the two paintings by De Heem, then the first thing we observe is that they are typical of the middle size in the artist's work, and that they differ in dimensions by less than a couple of inches.<sup>6</sup> It is not relevant to us here that the one canvas is horizontal and the other vertical. Secondly, we note that the 1646 work is fuller than the one from 1651, but not all that much fuller. Here, too, as we said, the number of details is limited. Therefore we may well deem it possible that De Heem considered his 1646 still-life also to be a specimen of the ideal "Niet hoe veel" formula.

Just as the painting with the big goblet shows, on the left-hand side, a view of a landscape, so the painting on exhibition here offers us an unexpected glimpse of a broad river landscape. Various art historians have suggested that a different artist was engaged to do this bit.<sup>7</sup> It collides, as it were, with the still-life proper.

Opinions vary on the meaning. One or two sailing boats in stormy water, and a church that seems to rise up out of that water — why would this scene be juxtaposed as a contrast to a table laden with food? It has been proposed that the Ship of Fools is intended, "sailing blindly through the dangerous waters of life, its goal to reach the Land of Cockayne, a land of frivolity and gluttony, here represented by a sumptuous display of food".<sup>8</sup> Although there can be no doubts



about De Heem's predilection for symbolism, as evidenced in a number of his still-lives, this interpretation seems too speculative to be acceptable.

EdJ

1. Bergström 1956, 162-165 and 191-216.
2. Ibid., 204. See also H. Gerson and E.H. ter Kuile, *Art and architecture in Belgium 1600 to 1800*, Harmondsworth 1960, 163.
3. Cat. Julie Kraus, Paris 1976, no.5.
4. Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614, 21. Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tyt* (ed. pr. 1632), in: *Alle de wercken*, vol.1, Amsterdam 1712, 560. *Het mergh van de Nederlandsche spreekwoorden* . . . , Amsterdam 1644, 54. Hoogstraeten, 186-187: "Wegens de maeticheyt zoo zal ik u vooreerst raden, dat gy uw werk niet te zeer met onnodige dingen overlast: want *Niet hoe veel, maer hoe eel*, schreef de *Heem*. Een menichte van beelden, die geen werk doen, is walchelijk".
5. Hoogstraeten's remark on De Heem occurs in a disquisition on history painting and not on still-life. Whilst of the opinion that one should observe moderation, the artist was not to come up with something all too sober. De Heem, in many of his paintings, trod the recommended middle way.
6. The 1651 painting measures 24½ by 35 inches; the painting from Toledo, expressed in inches 23⅞ by 36½.
7. Bergström 1956, 204, note 18. One name put forward is that of the marine artist Bonaventura Peeters of Antwerp; see cat. *European Paintings*, Toledo, Ohio (The Toledo Museum of Art), 1976, 75.
8. Ibid. One would be equally justified in suggesting the visualization of two of the four elements, namely earth and water, the earth being symbolized here by fruits. This combination occurs quite often, for example in genre paintings which include a landscape and a seascape or riverscape. It is also known in literature, as in the poem "Houwelijk tusschen Aerde en Water" (Marriage of Earth and Water), written in 1650 by Jeremias Decker: "God voegde, op dat de mensch na wensche wierd gevoed / Het Aerdrijk als een Bruyd in d'armen van de Baren" (So that man would be fed according to his wants, God placed the realm to the earth as a bride into the arms of the waves). J. de Decker, *Rym-oeffeningen* . . . Vol. 2, ed. Amsterdam 1702, 44.







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## Jan Davidsz. de Heem

Utrecht 1606 — Antwerp 1683/84

9

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### Still-life of fruit and oysters

Canvas, 36.5 x 52.7 cm. Signed J.D. de Heem  
Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum

This painting is of more modest dimensions than most of De Heem's works. The representation is constructed on an imaginary diagonal which runs from the lower left to the upper right of the canvas, although this is less conspicuous here than in the Toledo work (cat. no.8).<sup>1</sup> The line is accentuated by several branches in the dish filled with fruit. The light enters through a second diagonal which extends downward from the upper left corner of the work, and not without effect, as we can see by the many glittering details.

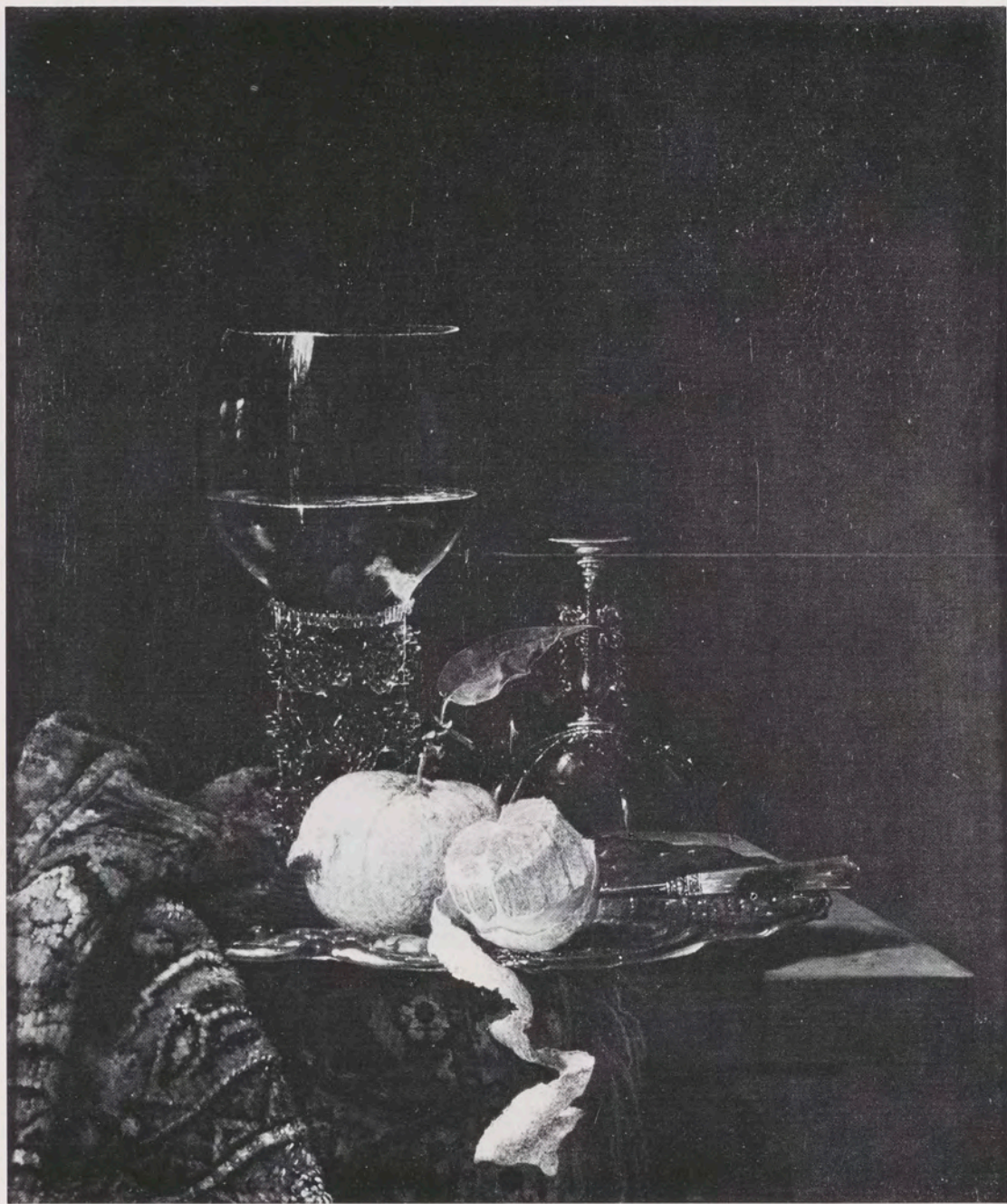
The fruit and oysters are made more lively in this work by the addition of a number of insects, including two butterflies. Most of the fruit is piled up in the dish; probably a Chinese bowl of the sort called *clapmuts* (hood-bowl) in old inventories.

EdJ

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1. Cf. also cat. no. 5 (Van Schooten).







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## Willem Kalf

Rotterdam 1619 — Amsterdam 1693

10

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### Still-life with *roemer*

Canvas, 49.9 x 42.4 cm. Signed and dated W. Kalf 1659

The Hague, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen "Het Mauritshuis"

This still-life was made two years before that from the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection (cat. no. 11).<sup>1</sup> It is smaller, and its plan and composition are even more simple, though not so very different in principle. Here we have again the orange and the eye-catching half-peeled lemon on a silver salver, the rumpled-up table-cover, and a *roemer* with wine which in this instance is large and assumes a domineering position. Next to it is a Venice glass upside-down.

The saturated colours are characteristic for the period around 1660. The way the light is handled, not only here but also in other works, has been associated with Rembrandt's art.<sup>2</sup>

EdJ

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1. Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf 1619 – 1693*, Berlin 1974, 225, no.97.

2. Ibid., 143. Also: H.E. van Gelder, W.C. Heda, A. van Beyer, W. Kalf, Amsterdam (n.d.) 47-48.









11a. Pieter Claesz.(?), *Still-life with nautilus cup*, Present location unknown.

## Willem Kalf

Rotterdam 1619 — Amsterdam 1693

11

### Still-life with nautilus-cup

Canvas, 64 x 55 cm. Signed and dated W. Kalf 1661  
Castagnola-Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza collection

Of all the numerous still-life painters in which 17th-century Holland was so rich, perhaps Willem Kalf enjoyed the greatest reputation. In his lifetime he was sung by poets such as Vondel and Jan Vos, and after his death his work was described in terms of admiration by Lairese and Houbraken, though it must in all fairness be said that Lairese does have some reservations.<sup>1</sup>

First of all he records Kalf as a painter of vanitas still-lives thus: "the celebrated Kalf, who has left many splendid and excellent examples of this, excelled herein, and deserves the highest praise above all others". But only a couple of pages further on we read that Kalf, just like his predecessors and followers, never produced anything of importance "which contained a particular meaning, or which could be applied to anything".

It cannot be denied that the great theorist shows a certain lack of understanding here. His complaint was undoubtedly prompted by his exceptionally unfavourable opinion of still-life as such, and his criticism could be formulated thus — Kalf may well have been an admirable artist, but he was unfortunately the representative of a lesser kind of painting.

Vondel describes Kalf's work more kindly; when writing about "Sint Lukas' Kalf" (The "calf" of Saint Luke) he includes:

Although it (Kalf) seldom stands still itself,  
It loves still-standing objects better:  
Banquet, table-repast, and letter,  
Citron and lemon, glass and platter,  
Ornament, splendour, abundant matter . . .

What the poet here sums up is in fact an epitome of the repertoire that Kalf had to offer in his Amsterdam period.<sup>2</sup>

The poem was written not long after the completion of the painting from the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, which carries the date 1661.<sup>3</sup> At that time, Kalf had been working for some eight years in Amsterdam, having spent many years in his birthplace Rotterdam and in Paris, and lived for a short time in the small town of Hoorn in North Holland. Once established in Amsterdam, he was to remain there until his death in 1693.<sup>4</sup>

During his time in France he had been engaged on two very different themes. He had occupied himself with representing not only heavy and ostentatious



golden and silver objects, but also stables and farm interiors with figures and elements of still-life.<sup>5</sup> It cannot fail to strike one that Kalf in Amsterdam never returned to the genre of low-life. His iconography underwent what one might call a social change. He also turned his back to a great extent on pieces intended expressly to show off with gold and silver, and concentrated on a more restrained and distinguished sort of still-life, of which type the painting from the Thyssen Collection is a good example.

It contains items which appear on many works made during Kalf's extremely productive Amsterdam period: the chased silver salver with a lemon poised on its rim, the tilted white and blue Ming bowl holding fruits, a fruit-knife, a watch, a *roemer* with wine, a slender glass (so-called flute), a nautilus-cup, and an oriental table-cover which has been rumpled up. All this is captured in warm, deep colours, broken by the occasional cool accent, and the light enters from the upper left.

The nautilus-cup was an object much beloved of artists. The big shell, freed of its outer layer and remarkable for its symmetry, once housed a kind of cuttlefish. The stands made by silversmiths for these shells could develop into true artworks in themselves (fig. 11a). Usually they are more spectacular than the one Kalf chose here: sometimes even the shell itself is etched with decoration.<sup>6</sup> The question of whether the artist was also the owner of such an object can be asked about other costly props, with equally unsatisfying results. Kalf and his colleagues probably borrowed what they did not own themselves from collectors and silversmiths. And they will, of course, have made use of sketches.<sup>7</sup>

To further his artistic production Kalf, like many another painter, had ensured a number of basic models for himself, which he could vary at pleasure. Efficiency in the 17th-century workshop was often given high priority. Artists of that century were sometimes of a very pragmatic turn, which, it must be said, did not necessarily have a detrimental effect on the quality of their work. The two paintings by Kalf in this exhibition (see also cat. no. 10) can be regarded as elegant variations on a stereotype pattern.

Lucius Grisebach, in his monograph on Kalf, sums up the latter's use of interchangeable requisites. One good example is the lemon with its hanging twist of peel. This motif returns a number of times, and sometimes in exactly the same way, as if the painter had only to reach for his box of clichés.<sup>8</sup>



Neither was Kalf the only one to show a fancy for this fruit. The lemon with its coil of peel was regarded in painting circles as a kind of touchstone of talent by which one could generally demonstrate one's virtosity and specifically establish one's pictorial handwriting.<sup>9</sup>

EdJ

1. J. van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep-Unger, vol. 1671-1679, Leiden (n.d.), 368. Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten*, Amsterdam 1662, 141. Gerard Lairesse, *Het groot schilderboek*, vol. 2, Amsterdam 1707, 266: "de vermaarde Kalf, die veel heerlyke en uitmuntende voorbeelden daarvan heeft nagelaten, heeft in deze zeer uitgemunt, en boven allen den hoogsten lof verdiend" and 268: "daar een byzondere zin in stak, of 't geen ergens op toegepast kon worden". Houbraken, vol. 2, 171-172. See also cat. no. 18 (Van Beyeren).
2. "Sint Lukas' Kalf": the evangelist Luke was the patron saint of painters and their guilds. His attribute had always been an ox and Vondel is, of course, punning on the painter's name with his "calf" of Saint Luke: "Hoewel het [Kalf] zelden stille staet, / Heeft het stilstaende dingen lief: / Banketten, dischgerecht en brief, / Limoen, citroen en glas en schaal, / Cieraet, en overdaet en prael..." These lines come from a poem entitled "Raetsel" (riddle) which is about not only Kalf but also his wife, Cornelia Pluvier, who was a skilful glass-calligrapher.
3. The poem is generally assigned the date 1663. Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf 1619-1693*, Berlin 1974, 262, no. 109.
4. *Ibid.*, 12-33.
5. *Ibid.*, 39-112.
6. W.H. van Seters, "Oud-Nederlandse parelmoerkunst. Het werk van leden der familie Belquin, parelmoergraveurs en schilders in de 17e eeuw", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 9 (1958), 173-238, esp. 176-178. Marie-Cornélie Roodenburg, *Een Hollands pronkstilleven*, Rotterdam 1959, 15-16.
7. H.E. van Gelder, W.C. Heda, A. van Beyeren, W. Kalf, Amsterdam (n.d.), 54-55. Roodenburg, op. cit. (note 6), 6. Only two drawings by Kalf are known; see Grisebach, op. cit. (note 3), 163-164 and 282, nos. 146 and 147.
8. *Ibid.*, 140-141.
9. Joseph Lammers, "Innovation und Virtuosität", *Stilleben in Europa*, 511-512.







## Isaac van Kipshaven

Amsterdam (?) probably 1635 — ?

12

### Still-life of fruit and precious objects

Canvas, 84 x 73 cm. Signed and dated IVKipshaven 1661

The Hague, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen "Het Mauritshuis"



12a. Barent van der Meer, *Bunch of grapes*, The Hague, Bredius Museum.

Almost nothing is known of the life of this painter, nor do we have more than a few works by his hand. He was active in the 1660's in Amsterdam, where he was probably born. The few works known display a great variety of subject matter: extant are two still-lives, a hunting-piece, a genre painting, two portraits and a representation of St. Sebastian.<sup>1</sup> It is said that Kipshaven was a pupil of Willem van Aelst, who was working at Amsterdam from 1657 onwards and who seems to have undergone the influence of Willem Kalf to some extent, at least as regards the choice of objects depicted in a number of his works.<sup>2</sup> Kipshaven's manner of painting shows some similarity in style to that of his alleged master.<sup>3</sup>

The Mauritshuis painting reflects the tendency after the middle of the 17th century toward a more decorative and luxurious choice of subject-matter in still-life representations. Practitioners of what in Dutch is called the *pronk* ("showy") still-life were to a large extent domiciled in Amsterdam, which was also an important international trading centre. Chinese porcelain was one of the goods imported into Amsterdam in large quantities since the beginning of the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese carafe exhibited in Van Kipshaven's painting is most probably from the period of Wan Li, the last emperor of the Ming dynasty, who died in 1619 (compare the carafe in Van Streeck, cat. no. 16). Other costly goods in this work are the ornate silver plate with a decorative border and a tazza, a silver dish on a high stand, which is resting on its side. The plate is tipped at an angle; supporting it is a crumpled light-brown velvet carpet with golden-yellow fringe. In the silver plate are two peaches and several bunches of grapes which spill out over the plate as well as the edge of the slab upon which all the objects are placed.

All of these elements serve to increase the impression of ostentation and luxury. The still-life further contains a *roemer* half-filled with white wine, a flute glass half-filled with red wine, a whole and half-walnut and a pomegranate which is broken open and several seeds of which are strewn about on the ledge. The light source is outside the picture space and enters from the upper left. The objects on the ledge are directly lit, in contrast to the niche in the background which fades into darkness, hereby functioning as a foil to accentuate the aspect of display in the objects which make up this still-life.

It is obvious that the painter took pride in his rendering of the texture and



polish of the white and blue grapes in this representation. Barent van der Meer, one of the last practitioners of the Amsterdam *pronk* still-life who was active at Amsterdam in the 1680's, made a bunch of grapes, hanging in front of a niche, the central motif of a still-life painting (fig. 12a).

AG

1. Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler*, vol. 20, Leipzig and (n.d.), 345. Walther Bernt, *Die niederländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 4, Munich 1962, nos. 150-151.
2. See Bergström 1956, 285-286.
3. Also noted by W. Martin, *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw. Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, ed. Amsterdam 1942, 432, and A.P.A. Vorenkamp, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Hollandsch stilleven in de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden 1933, 91.
4. See for example D.F. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chinese export porcelain*, London 1974 and T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company*, Leiden 1954.



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Still-life of fruit and precious objects



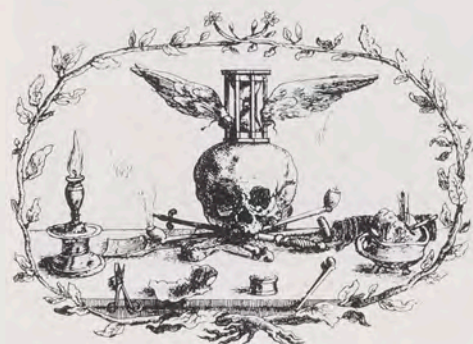
Detail from *Still-life of fruit and precious objects*







PETRI SCRIVERII  
**S A T V R N A L I A**  
 Ofte Poëtisch  
**Vaasten-abond-spel/**  
 Vervatendē het gebruyk ende misbruyk  
**V A N D E N T A B A C K,**  
*Onlangs by den Antem in't Latijn beschreven, ende  
 by eenen Liefhebber in's licht gegeven.*  
**Nu verrijkt, ende herdrukt; mitgaders tot dienst ende**  
*Vermaek van een yder in Neder-Duytsch vertaeld*  
 Door **S A M V E L A M P Z I N G.**



*Hec vite imago, fumus, atq, herbe vapores  
 Humana cuncta: et, verbo ut absolvam, nihil.*

Gedruckt te **HAERLEM,**  
 By **Adriaen Roman, Ordinarius Stads-Boek-drucker.**  
 cl o l o c. xxx.

13a. Petrus Scriverius, *Saturnalia* . . . , Haarlem 1630, title page

## Jan Olis

Gorinchem 1610 —Heusden 1676

13

### Still-life with crab and smoker's requisites

Panel, 43 cm. in diameter. Signed i.o. Fe

Private collection, The Netherlands

Still-lives in the form of what is usually referred to by the Italian name *tondo* were not very frequent in 17th-century Holland. The great exception is the painting of 1614 by Torrentius in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A less well-known exception is the painting by Jan Olis, who made more of a speciality, however, of portraits and genre scenes than of still-lives.<sup>1</sup> He turned it instantly into something quite distinctive. The composition is astonishing in its simplicity. If ever symmetry and construction along diagonal lines were not fudged over, then it is here.

The twist of tobacco, the large North Sea crab, and the round bread roll form a line from lower left to upper right, whilst the open tobacco-box, the crab, and the pewter plate follow a diagonal that cuts the the first one at an angle of approximately 120 degrees. This St. Andrew's cross that provides a frame for the composition is, moreover, repeated in the foreground by the crossed pipe and pipe-lighter situated exactly between the tobacco-box and the screw of tobacco, on which Olis has signed with his monogram.

The way Olis has placed the pewter platter with its large crab in the plane, just off-centre, can be regarded as a *trouvaille*. The artist has played a subtle game with congruencies: the two circular rims round the edge of the platter, and the oval form of the crab, all being foreshortened, maintain a charged relationship with the circle enclosing the picture itself.

The angle of the table to the surface of the painting provides a view from above which reminds us of the way in which the early breakfast-pieces were presented. But Olis's work is of a later period. This method of painting and choice of monochrome (various brown tints set against off-white), which help to intensify the unity of the composition, lead us to surmise that the painting was made in the 1630's or, possibly, the 1640's.

No less remarkable than the composition is the iconography. Combining tobacco and smoker's requisites with a crab is uncommon, certainly in a well-poised arrangement such as we have here. When we consider that, in the first half of the 17th century, tobacco-smoking provoked all sorts of discussion and was treated as a symbol, then it is reasonable to suspect that Olis's contemporaries can hardly have looked at a painting such as this without being sensible of certain related thoughts.<sup>2</sup>



Judgments on smoking varied. All sorts of healing properties were ascribed to tobacco, but smoking for pleasure was generally disapproved of. *Tabaksuigers* (tobacco-suckers) were not infrequently given the same kind of treatment in literature as drunkards received, for example by Constantijn Huygens.<sup>3</sup> A treatise on the use and misuse of tobacco ("... het gebruyk ende misbruyk vanden Taback") was published in 1630, being the Dutch translation of a work written in Latin by Petrus Scriverius of Leiden. The engraved title-page of this book has a vignette in which smoking is linked with death, and this link is reinforced by the Latin motto (fig. 13a).<sup>4</sup>

Here we run up against a 17th-century cliché. It is not surprising that in an age so rich in imagery and so aware of death, the fleeting nature of tobacco-smoke should be compared with the impermanence of the world and the frailty of life. Probably no one did this more consistently than the poet Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch (1630 - after 1674), who frequently called on tobacco for inspiration, even down to the the epitaph that he drafted for himself, the first three lines of which run:

Of Mr. F. the body's in this case;  
Who much did write on fummy trash and smoke  
And of man's life as it were vapours spoke...<sup>5</sup>

An engraving by Hendrick Bary also provides enlightenment. It shows a man smoking (fig. 13b), and comes with this inscription:

Verinas finely cut I smoke with all my might  
And oftentimes I think: So doth the world take flight.

The man is sucking his pleasure from the sort of small pipe that can also be seen in the still-life by Olis. It is not entirely irrelevant to note that Olis, in his quality of genre painter, had given smoking its fair share of attention, often in a context which, according to 17th-century morals at least, could well be designated as vain (*ijdel*). For example, one of the four figures in a scene round a backgammon board (backgammon-playing was said to signify vacuity) is exhaling a trail of smoke like that which wafts from the man on Bary's print (fig. 13c).<sup>6</sup>

Pipes and pipe-smoking came into many expressions in current use. Some of these are relevant to us here, such as "zijn laatste pijp roken" (to smoke one's last pipe, i.e. to be approaching death) and "hij heeft zijn pijp uitgeklopt" (he has



13b. Hendrick Bary after AE, *A man smoking*, engraving



knocked out his pipe, i.e. has died).<sup>7</sup> And tobacco-boxes were inscribed with meaningful inscriptions. *Vita est fumus* was one of them; another, *gloria mundi fumus*, was translated by Focquenbroch as "De Weerelts Eer is niet dan Roock" (the glory of the world is naught but smoke).<sup>8</sup> We can make out smoke on Olis's still-life, though it comes not from the pipe but from the smouldering pipe-lighter that is laid crosswise over it. Pipes were often lit from this kind of lighter.

The main motif in Olis's composition, the large crab, does not offer such easily accessible associations as do the smoker's requisites. But there is one emblem in which the crab is assigned a meaning that harmonizes nicely with smoking as an image of vanitas. The crab too, it seems, can symbolize the transitoriness of earthly life. The emblem in question is in the volume of Camerarius's emblem books that deals with aquatic creatures and reptiles.<sup>9</sup> "Some day we will all emigrate", says the motto, in translation from the Latin, and the appropriate couplet reads: "Nowhere here below do we dwell in safe lodgings, but we shall leave from here for the heavenly kingdom of the Most High".

It cannot be denied that this meaning of the crab was less familiar in the 17th century than the interpretation of smoke as an image of ebbing life. But we must also take into consideration the strength in this painting of the conjunction of crab and smoking-things, that together constitute a visual presentation which no eye can fail to register. This, added to what has been postulated above, justifies the assumption that Jan Olis intended that both tobacco-effects and crab should function as signs of transience.

If we accept this notion, then a weakness in the method of interpretation comes to light: the other ingredients, namely, remain un-indicative of anything, they cannot reasonably be put under one and the same heading. This is one of the contingent shortcomings which we, for a variety of reasons, quite regularly have to contend with. One of its causes is our inadequate knowledge of the likely requirements in method and iconography that would have to be met by 17th-century still-life painters.

As a painter of still-lives, Jan Olis is a fairly recent discovery.<sup>10</sup> Neither former scholarship nor published inventories mention him in this capacity, only as a painter of portraits and genre scenes. He worked for quite some time in Dordrecht, but also elsewhere. Olis is apparently one of the many 17th-century





13c. Jan Olis, *Backgammon players*, Present location unknown.



artists who engaged in other activities as well. In 1657 he became burgomaster of the small township of Heusden in Brabant, and in 1670 he became *convoymeester* (tax-collector) there.

EdJ

1. Ingvar Bergström, "Jan Olis as a still-life painter", *Oud Holland* 66 (1951), 56-58. Bol 1969, 50. Vroom, vol.1, 197; vol.2, 98, no. 491.
2. The preoccupation with tobacco is also apparent in the *toebackje* (tobacco-piece), the 17th-century still-life devoted wholly or chiefly to tobacco. See Bol 1969, 76-81.
3. For tobacco as a medicine see Johan van Beverwyck, *Schat der gesontheydt*, ed. Utrecht 1651, 150-151. *De gedichten van Constantijn Huygens*, ed. J.A. Worp, vol. 5, Groningen 1895, 298. For tobacco in general, Georg A. Brongers, *Nicotiana tabacum. The history of tobacco and tobacco smoking in the Netherlands*, Amsterdam 1964.
4. Petrus Scriverius, *Saturnalia . . . vervatende het gebruyk ende misbruyk vanden taback . . .* in *Neder-Duytsch vertaeld door Samuel Ampzing*, Haarlem 1630. *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 54-57.
5. See B. de Ligt, "Fumus Gloria Mundi", *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 63 (1970), 249-260. W. van Focquenbroch, *Alle de werken*, vol.2, ed. Amsterdam 1766, 165: "Van Mr. F. leid 't ligchaem in dees kas; / Die veel van rook, en damptuig heeft geschreven / Die steeds by rook geleet Het menschen leven . . ."
6. Inscription: "Terwijl ik ijvrig rook Verinis, kleijn gesneen, / Denk ik vast bij mij self; Soo vliegt de Weerelt heen." Verinas, named after the town of Varinas in Venezuela, was a superior quality of roll tobacco (see Oxford English Dictionary). For backgammon-playing: *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 108-111.
7. *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, vol.12, part 1, 1713 and 1714.
8. Brongers, op. cit. (note 3), 61. Georg Böse, *Im blauen Dunst. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Rauchens*, Stuttgart 1957, facing 225. De Ligt, op. cit. (note 5), 258. See also *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, vol. 13, 1255-1262.
9. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus . . .*, Nuremberg 1604, 56.
10. Bergström, op. cit. (note 1), 56-57.







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## Pieter de Ring

Leiden 1615 — Leiden 1660

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14

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### Still-life of a lobster and fruit

Panel, 43 x 36.7 cm. Signed with ring

Kansas City (Missouri), William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Atkins Museum of Fine Arts

The Leiden painter Pieter de Ring was one of the numerous pupils of the influential Jan Davidsz. de Heem, and he imitated in particular De Heem's colourful and flamboyant Antwerp style.<sup>1</sup> It is in his large canvasses that De Ring is most clearly orientated towards De Heem. He never, however, succeeded in equalling his famous example. Long after his death this did not escape the observers of his work. His reputation in art history is not all it might be. Vorenkamp, Bergström, and Bol did not restrain from emphasizing his weaker sides, Bol drawing attention to the expression of materials, which is sometimes strange, glass gleaming like metal, and cherries and grapes shining like glass<sup>2</sup>

This criticism is true to a certain extent for the little painting by De Ring on exhibition here, which was probably done in the 1650's. Anyone willing, however, to look at it in a less traditional way, could quite possibly experience in De Ring's unnaturalistic manner of painting a certain amount of aesthetic pleasure. A remarkable feature of this composition is the branch with cherries which seems to hover above the table laden with grapes, lemons, a few oysters, and a lobster.

Just as the still-life painter Jan Jansz. den Uyl used to insert a little owl in his work to signify his surname, so Pieter de Ring usually incorporated a ring as his signature — that ideogram here is on the far left of the table.

EdJ

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1. See cat. no. 8 (De Heem).

2. A.P.A. Vorenkamp, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Hollandsch stilleven in de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden 1933, 67-68. Bergström 1956, 216. Bol 1969, 300-302.







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## Theodorus Smits

Presumably Dutch, active after 1650

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15

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### Still-life with a crab and grapes

Panel, transferred from another panel, 24 x 31 cm. Signed and dated T. Smits 1657  
St. Gilgen, F.C. Butôt collection

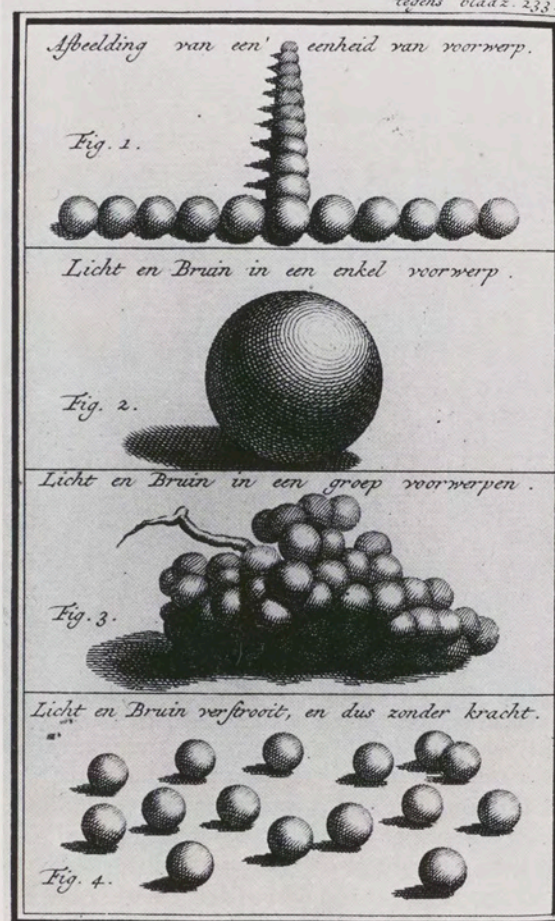
Very little is known of this painter, either of his person or of his oeuvre. In fact, his very identity is uncertain. Paintings which almost certainly are by the same hand have been signed T. Smits, T. or L. Sauts and sometimes with the monogram DS.<sup>1</sup> His works have also been catalogued under the name variant Dirck Sauts. Possibly the artist can be identified with a Caspar Smits alias Theodorus Hartkamp who was working in Dordrecht in 1675-76. A. Bredius, who has brought to light a number of notarial documents concerning this painter, assumes him to be identical with a "Lodewijk Smits otherwise Hartkamp" mentioned by Houbraken and suggests that Houbraken was mistaken as to the artist's Christian name.<sup>2</sup> A Caspar Smits was moreover signalized by Horace Walpole as having worked in England as a painter of Magdalen representations who later moved to Ireland where he became famous as a portrait painter and where he died in 1707. Walpole relates regarding Caspar: "His flowers and fruit were so much admired, that one bunch of grapes sold there (Ireland) for 40 £".<sup>3</sup>

Bredius attributes to Smits/Hartkamp a number of still-lives signed T. Smits or Sauts, including the present work. Since then the oeuvre of the artist has been expanded with a number of further attributions.<sup>4</sup> All of these works show affinity to one another; they all display on a ledge or table the combination of one or more crabs and a *roemer* joined by other elements, often a shrimp, oysters, a walnut and fruit. The bunch of grapes depicted in the Butôt still-life is unique in the known oeuvre of this painter.<sup>5</sup> This work also contains fewer elements than the others by his hand; aside from the bunch of grapes with leaves and vine tendrils only one crab, the *roemer* and a small shrimp are represented.

Interesting is the manner of depiction of the bunch of grapes, namely the explicit play of light, dark and medium tones on the round forms. Painting a bunch of grapes as an artistic tour de force became a tradition in itself. References to the ancient anecdote of the grapes which Zeuxis had painted so illusionistically as to fool the birds into pecking at them appeared in many 17th-century writings.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, an anecdote existed which described Titian's method of studying chiaroscuro from a bunch of grapes. This story, which relates that Titian supposedly knew no better medium than grapes for distinguishing various qualities and effects of lighting, was transmitted in



tegens bladz. 233.



15a. Illustration from Roger de Piles, *Verhandeling over de schilderkunde*, Amsterdam 1756



Dufresnoy's *De arte graphica* (The art of painting) of 1667, which shortly thereafter was translated from the Latin by Roger de Piles.<sup>7</sup> De Piles repeats this principle later in his own *Cours de peinture par principes* (Treatise on painting by principles) and demonstrates various types of lighting studies from individual spheres and compositely from a bunch of grapes (fig. 15a).<sup>8</sup>

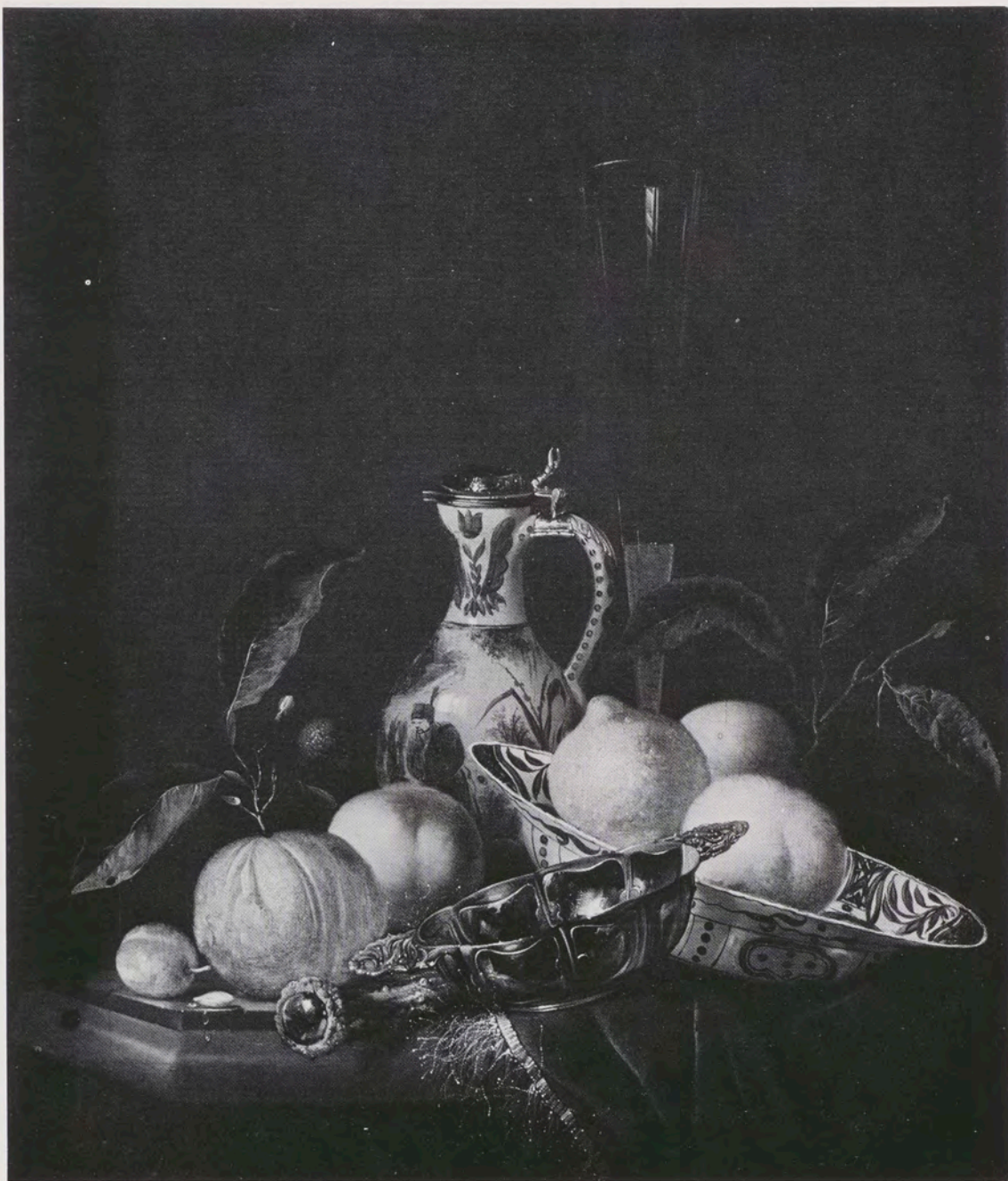
During the 18th century a "bunch of grapes" became a common entry in dictionaries of art as a "term of painting which one uses to express the effect of large groups of shadows and lights".<sup>9</sup> Diderot wrote in his *Pensées détachées sur la peinture* (Odd thoughts on painting), composed after 1775: "One can reduce all the magic of chiaroscuro to a bunch of grapes; it's a beautiful idea and can be simplified. The most vast scene is nothing but a single grape of the bunch..."<sup>10</sup>

Although the present painter could in 1657 have known none of these writings, in actual practice he will have had many examples of this tradition to follow, as the motif was often employed by Dutch still-life painters as a demonstration of their technical prowess.

AG

1. "Sauts" is possibly the result of incorrect restoration; see L.J. Bol and G.S. Keyes, *Netherlandish paintings and drawings from the collection of F.C. Butôt*, London 1981, 10.
2. Houbraken, vol. 3, 67-68. A. Bredius, "Onbekende schilders, o.a. Casparus Smits, zich ook genoemd hebbende Theodorus Hartkamp", *Oud Holland* 33 (1915), 112-118.
3. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of painting*, vol. 2, ed. London 1876, 234.
4. A.P. de Mirimonde, "Une guirlande des fruits par T. Smits au Musée de Gray", *Oud Holland* 72 (1957), 53-56. See also Vroom under "Sauts", vol. 2, 110-111, nos. 555-561.
5. Vroom, vol. 2, 111, no. 557.
6. Cf. cat. no. 25 (Gijsbrechts).
7. Translated into Dutch by J. Verhoek, *De schilder-konst*, Amsterdam 1733. See also on the tradition of "Titian's bunch of grapes", Peter Hecht, "Candelight and dirty fingers, or royal virtue in disguise: some thoughts on Weyerman and Godfried Schalken", *Simiolus* 11 (1980), 23-38, esp. 31-34.
8. Translated into Dutch by Jacobus de Jongh, *Verhandeling over de schilderkunde*, Amsterdam 1756.
9. F.M. de Marsy, *Dictionnaire abrégé de peinture et d'architecture*, Paris 1746, 286. For further examples see Hecht, op. cit. (note 7).
10. Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres esthétiques*, ed. Paris 1965, 802.







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## Jurriaan van Streeck

Amsterdam 1632 — Amsterdam 1687

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16

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### Still-life with a brandy bowl (brandewijnkom)

Canvas, 63.8 x 52.3 cm. Signed (not entirely legible) J.V.Str..  
Private collection, Switzerland

Various writers have played Jurriaan van Streeck off against Willem Kalf, undoubtedly to the former's disadvantage, and one could almost say he asked for it. One of the pathways Van Streeck followed as a still-life painter bordered very closely on Kalf's territory, and Van Streeck was not blind to its attractions.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he has something all his own.

The still-life from a Dutch private collection on exhibition here reminds one of Kalf, and yet it has, at the same time, a completely different character.<sup>2</sup> It differs from the work of the more renowned master in atmosphere, colour, the way textures are rendered, and in what one might call, borrowing a word, rhythm. The colours are brighter than Kalf's, textures are noticeably harder, and the so-called rhythm is tenser. This tension is brought into being most of all by the crosswise positioning of the silver brandy bowl and the blue and white Wan Li dish.<sup>3</sup> One would never find a configuration like this in Kalf. Nor would Kalf have played havoc with the laws of gravity as Van Streeck does with the fruits in the Wan Li dish.

This dish also appears, with some variations, in other works by Van Streeck, as do the Chinese or pseudo-Chinese carafe, the orange with its stem and leaves, and the velvet cloth with the shining golden fringe.<sup>4</sup> The brandy bowl is a rarer object in still-lives, although there must have been plenty of them. Bowls like these were used in the 17th century, especially in Freisland, for handing "boerenjongens" round in. "Boerenjongens", literally "farmer's boys", was the name given to a drink consisting of raisins and the brandy in which they had been steeping, and guests would help themselves in turn with a decorative spoon. Brandy bowls are sometimes engraved with the arms of a man and a woman, which seems to indicate they may have been given as wedding presents.

The brandy bowl painted by Van Streeck could possibly have been made in Haarlem or Freisland. This type was quite common. The horizontal handles were first cast and then engraved, whereas the bowl itself with the eight bulbous segments is embossed.

The selection as a whole — fruits, china, flute glass, and brandy bowl — suggest, in L.J. Bol's term, an atmosphere of bourgeois standing.

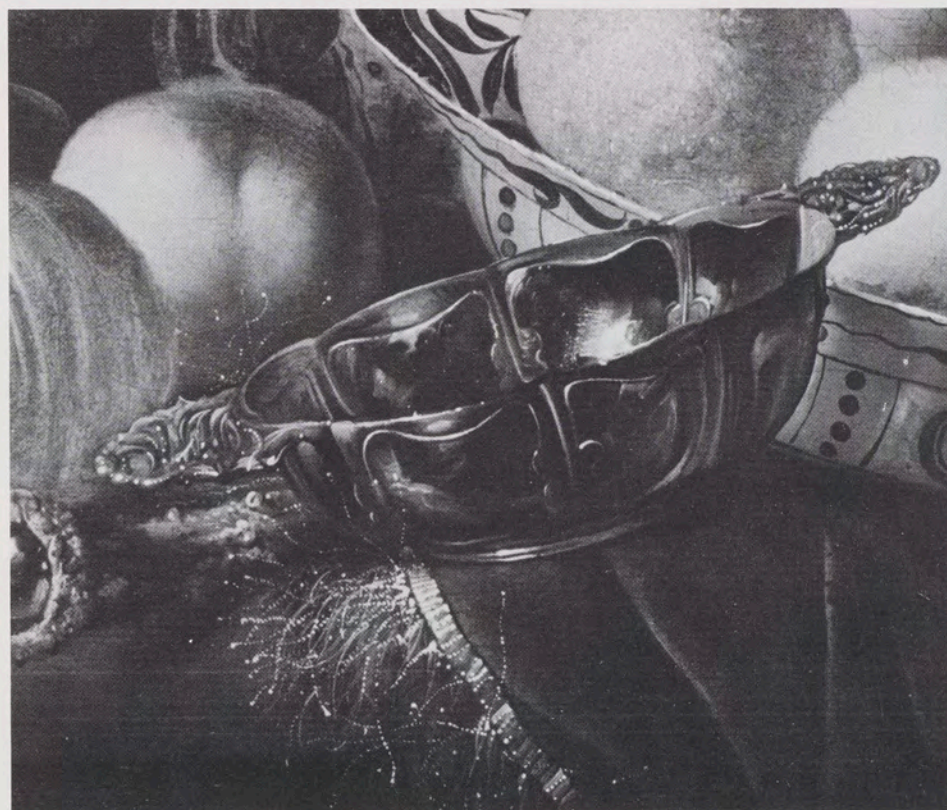
EdJ



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1. A.P.A. Vorenkamp, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Hollandsch stilleven in de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden 1933, 50. R. van Luttervelt, *Schilders van het stilleven*, Naarden 1947, 58. Bol 1969, 347. For another sort of still-life in which Van Streeck specialized see cat. no. 45.
  2. Bol 1969, 347. Exhib. cat. *17de-Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, no.87.
  3. A similar detail in a painting by Van Streeck reproduced in Bergström 1956 (fig. 234). Here there are two large plates loaded with fruit, pushed up against each other, as Bergström puts it (289), "like pack ice or colliding ships".
  4. Cf. for example Warner, plate 98c; Luttervelt, op. cit. (note 1), fig. 29; (J.G. van Gelder), *Catalogue of the collection of Dutch and Flemish still-life pictures bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward*, Oxford (Ashmolean Museum) 1950, no.78; Bergström 1956, fig. 234.



Still-life with a brandy bowl (brandewijnkom)



Detail from *Still-life with a brandy bowl (brandewijnkom)*







## Hendrik Potuyl

Active ca. 1639 — 1649

17

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### Still-life in a stable

Canvas, 77.5 x 65 cm. Signed H. Potuyl  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Most of the interior shown of this stable is filled with a still-life depicting an assembly of objects. The composition follows two diagonals which come from the right and cross each other at a point somewhat left of centre. The first diagonal begins with a barrel on which a white cloth has been thrown, one of its corners hanging down in a point. This kind of barrel was used for making butter in or for washing large pans and dishes.<sup>1</sup> Next there is a massive block of wood, and on it what you might call an extremely simple breakfast-piece: a white cloth laid with a jug, a cut loaf, and a knife. The diagonal continues its way left via a brass preserving pan on its side and, to the extreme left, a pewter dish with a spoon.

The second diagonal runs from a flat earthenware bowl, and a large basket on its side, via an earthenware jug with broken ears of corn, to meet the first one at the preserving pan. Beside this pan is a clay bowl on its side and a small dog that has apparently just licked the bowl clean. Pieces of a clay pipe are scattered on the ground. In the semi-darkness of the background a man is seen on a ladder to the left.

This painting of Potuyl's falls in line with a whole group of Dutch farm interiors which enjoyed a short-lived popularity during the 1640's. Two "schools" can be distinguished, one of which was concentrated round the Van Ostade brothers in Haarlem. The other is represented by painters from Rotterdam, Middelburg, and Dordrecht, the most important being Pieter de Bloot, Hendrik Martensz. Sorgh, Herman and Cornelis Saftleven, and Francois Ryckhals. Willem Kalf is said to have painted such pictures only during his stay in France. Typical of their work, like Potuyl's, is the division into a light foreground and a dusky background, an assortment of objects in the foreground providing the main motif. The light almost invariably comes from some high external source to the left.

One recurring detail in this type of farm interior shows a cat eating from a saucer. We find this, for example, in Kalf, Sorgh, and De Bloot. Potuyl here has painted a dog examining an empty dish, a variation which would remind the Dutch of their saying: "to find the dog in the cooking-pot" (this is said of late-comers, who arrive home to find the pots empty).

There is not much information about Potuyl's life. This still-life in a stable is



typical of the few paintings, chiefly farm interiors, that we know to have been his works.

TvL

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1. Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf 1619-1693*, Berlin 1974, 43.



Still-life in a stable



Detail from *Still-life in a stable*









18a. Abraham van Beyeren, *Still-life of fish*, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen

## Abraham van Beyeren

The Hague 1620/21 — Overschie 1690

18

### Still-life of fish

Canvas, 75.5 x 93 cm. Signed with monogram AVB  
Private collection, The Netherlands

If 17th-century art theorists had but scant admiration for still-lives in general, their opinion of still-lives with only fish as a subject could hardly have been lower.<sup>1</sup> Gerard Lairesse, whose views may be seen as representing those of progressive artistic circles in the last quarter of the 17th century, regarded still-lives as something for weak intellects, and fish still-lives as not worth hanging, not even worth talking about. "We shall pass these over: anyone who likes them can take himself off to the market", he said, and had no desire to waste any further words on them.<sup>2</sup>

That Lairesse's opinion, certainly in the period that preceded him, was far from being shared by everybody, is made more than clear by the impressive number of fish still-lives left to us by the 17th century. Apparently there was plenty of demand. The greatest master of this subject was undoubtedly Abraham van Beyeren; an excellent specimen by him is on exhibition here.<sup>3</sup>

As he had done in his banquet-pieces (cat. no. 7), Van Beyeren organised the production of his fish-pieces, which were made chiefly in the 1650's and 1660's, along very efficient lines. He limited himself to two or three composition themes, and then repeated certain details either exactly or with slight variation.<sup>4</sup> As a means of facilitating this duplication he may have kept sketches or a few pictures in his studio to serve as models for future paintings.

The composition schemes were relatively simple. The work on display here demonstrates a construction often selected by Van Beyeren: running across the plane of the picture there is a trestle-table of wood or stone, which has been divided lengthwise into two distinct visual bands. The nearer band is the front of the table, which is here covered with flatfish including flounder, three cod fillets, a lump of tunafish, and an enormous crab on its back; the farther band is on a somewhat higher level, as fish — in this instance two haddocks and a salmon fillet — have been laid in a basket. It has all been flawlessly reproduced. The colour is restricted mainly to brownish-gray and silver, a tonality against which the only vivid accent, the red of the salmon, stands out in striking contrast. Something of that red is repeated in the crimp-gashes of the two haddocks. A jug, a slanting well-hook (used for drawing water in buckets), and the brass pans from a pair of scales placed on top of a herring-barrel give the composition additional variation and structure.



The basket with the haddock and the salmon, the crab, and some of the bits of cut fish were apparently available as stock material in his studio. We meet them in other paintings by the master, for example in a work in the Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, where the haddock are a mirror image of the ones here (fig. 18a).<sup>5</sup>

The earliest dated fish still-life that we know of Van Beyeren, who seldom dated his works, is from 1651.<sup>6</sup> But two years earlier, in 1649, he had, probably together with Pieter Verbeek, painted a 23-foot-high votive tablet for the Grote Kerk in Maassluis, a town known especially for its cod-fishing (fig. 18b). It had been commissioned by the local guild of fishermen.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the basically religious poem on this tablet is surrounded by depictions of ships at sea and decorative arrangements of fish, which are in fact still-lives in themselves.

The poem gives a summary of the kinds of fish that were caught by the people of Maassluis: chiefly cod, and further flounder, haddock, ray, weever, mackerel, herring, and others. A prayer follows:

Lord, of this scaly herd wouldst brimming vessels give,  
That we and other folk thus frugally may live.

With references to various scriptural passages in the margin, the last part of the text is a reminder that Jesus called fishermen to be his apostles:

Though we be simple people, we fear no shame at all,  
God's son from out our folk disciples once did call,  
He fishers from the sea by Spirit and the Word

Prepared, that they the way of life should spread around, O Lord.<sup>8</sup>

The relationship between word and image in the fishing tablet teaches us again that representations of ships at sea and representations of fish could, in the 17th century, be associated with religious interests. The strict Calvinist congregation of Maassluis was faced with it every Sunday. But whether this provides suggestions for the meaning of the fish still-lives that Van Beyeren made afterwards must remain an open question.

On the other hand, it is not difficult to establish an undoubted connexion with the everyday fact that the catching, selling (fig. 18c), and consumption of fish were of great economic importance in the 17th century, even if that importance



18b. Pieter Verbeek(?) and Abraham van Beyeren, *Votive tablet for the fishermen's guild* (1649), Maassluis, Grote Kerk





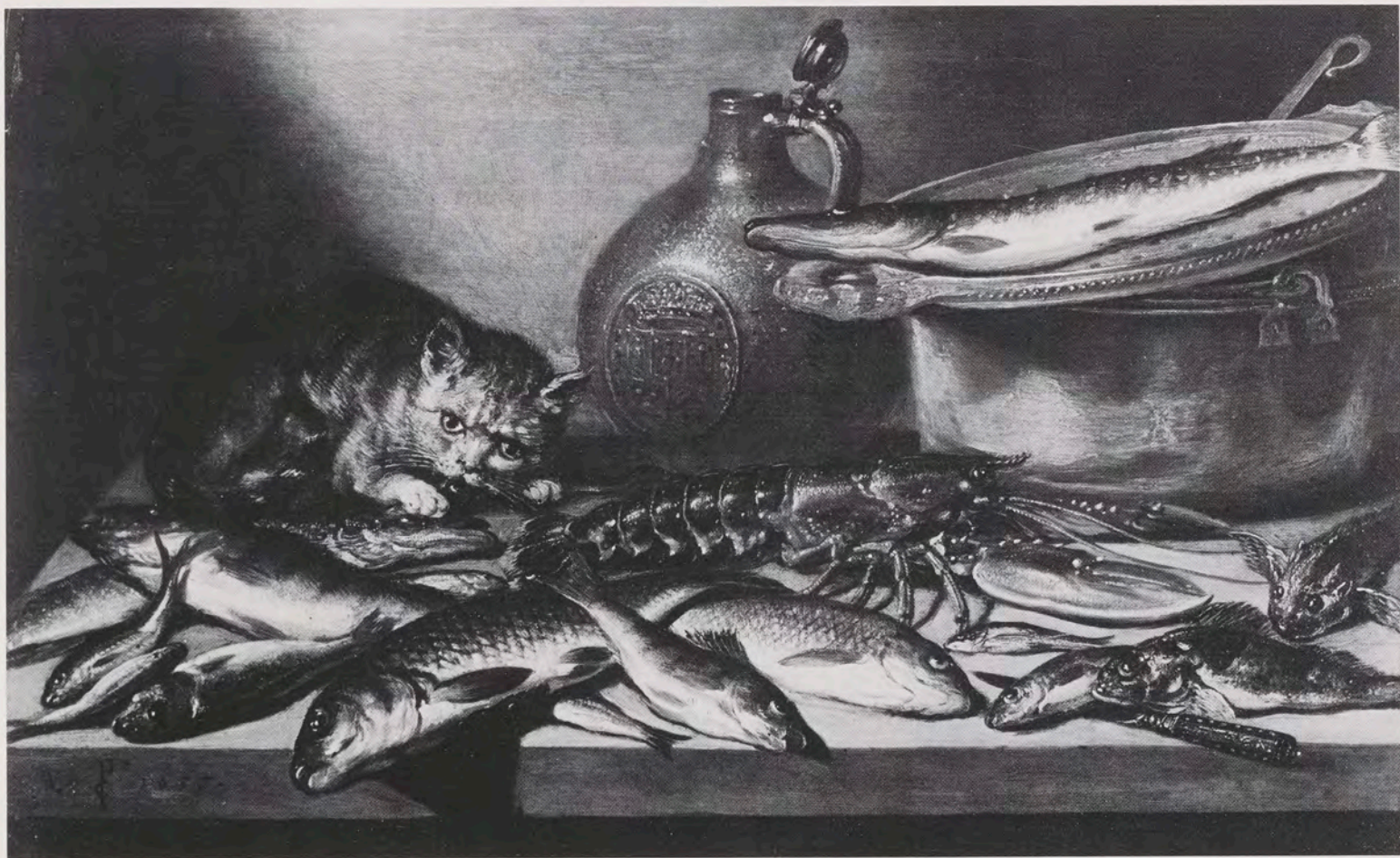
18c. Emanuel de Witte, *A fish market at evening* (1672), Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen

was occasionally exaggerated by the 17th-century Dutchman himself.<sup>9</sup> Van Beyeren, too, will have held the notion that Holland's prosperity was partly due to fish. Regardless of what he may have intended further, he certainly meant to express this notion in his fish still-lives.

EdJ

1. See above, pp.13-22
2. Gerard Lairesse, *Het Groot Schilderboek*, vol.2, Amsterdam 1707, 259-260. As a firm advocate of classicism, Lairesse thought in terms of *verkiezing* (discrimination), a meticulous choice. He considered that the beauty and virtue of a still-life resided exclusively in the most select of objects, "dat de schoonheid en deugd van een Stilleven allenlyk in de alleruitgelezenste voorwerpen bestaat". Fish certainly did not belong there.
3. H.E. van Gelder, W.C. Heda, A. van Beyeren, W. Kalf, Amsterdam (n.d.), 26-29. Bergström 1956, 229-232.
4. R. van Luttervelt, *Schilders van het stilleven*, Naarden 1947, 35-36. See the extensive list of Van Beyeren's fish still-lives in John Bernström and Bengt Rapp, *Iconographica*, Stockholm 1957, 7-34.
5. Other examples of similar repetition in, *inter al.*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; The Hague, Mauritshuis; Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller; Stockholm, Nationalmuseum; Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst; and East Berlin, Staatliche Museen.
6. Bergström 1956, 230. For a chronological arrangement of Van Beyeren's fish-pieces see Bernström and Rapp, op. cit. (note 4), *passim*.
7. 1956, 229. J.P. van de Voort, "Noordzeeverij", in: *Maritieme geschiedenis der Nederlanden* vol. 2, Bussum 1977, 305.
8. The Rev. J.F.N. van Harreveld of Apeldoorn was kind enough to send me a transcript of the text as well as a commentary on it. The two Dutch passages run: "Heer van dit schubbig Vee wil volle Schepen geven / Dat wij en andere Lien, daer Matelick af Leven" and "Al zijn wij slecht en recht ten is niet om te schroomen / Godts soon heeft uijt ons Volck Discipels aengenomen / De visschers uyt der Zee doer Woort en Geest bereijt / Dat sij des slevens wech Heer hebben uijtgebreyt".
9. Van de Voort, op. cit. (note 7), 289-308. J.G. van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten. Handboek tot de economische en sociale geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek*, The Hague 1970, 239-255.







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## Pieter Claesz.

Burgsteinfurt 1597/98 — Haarlem 1660

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19

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### Still-life of fish, with cat

Panel, 52 x 84.5 cm. Signed with monogram Pc and dated 1657

Private collection, The Netherlands

A selection of fresh-water fish including pike, bass, bream, carp, rudd, smelt, and ruff is spread out on a table in such a way as to provide a balanced configuration with several intersecting lines and contrasts of light and dark. Special accent is given to the pike in the upper right corner of the composition, which has been laid on a flat draining dish resting on a pan. An unusual element in this fish still-life is the cat which, alert and crouching, is on the point of making good its opportunity. Two somewhat earlier variations of this theme are known, dating from 1655 and 1656.<sup>1</sup>

Vroom ascribes all three pictures to the Flemish painter Clara Peeters. He bases his arguments of style and apparently, though not specifically for this work, also on the monogram signature, a C curled round the stroke of the P. This signature prompted Vroom to ascribe several paintings, which were generally considered to be the work of Pieter Claesz., to Peeters, with or without a question mark. This problem of connoisseurship, on which the last word has not been uttered, is not our concern here.<sup>2</sup>

Another kind of problem is embodied in the watching cat. Anyone with a knowledge of the function that this animal fulfilled time and again in 16th and 17th-century Dutch painting and graphic art will not observe the cat on this painting with a completely unsuspecting eye. The cat, recognized since antiquity for its sensuality, can be met with as an additional motif in several pictures where the erotic plays an overt or a covert role.<sup>3</sup> Take, for instance, the cat on two paintings by Nicolaes Maes which are more or less contemporary with Pieter Claesz.'s fish still-lives, the *Sleeping Kitchenmaid* (1655) and the *Eavesdropper* (1657), where the cat is apparently in the act of stealing meat or poultry. Several 17th-century expressions spring to mind about thieving cats, and they are distinctly suggestive of erotic situations. The sleeping kitchenmaid, a veritable still-life of pots and pans on display at her feet, symbolizes laziness, and that was a vice which, according to opinions then current, led inevitably to sinful thoughts and emotions (fig. 19a).

The thieving cat, a significant "signal", is placed right above her head.<sup>4</sup>

It is unfortunately impossible to state definitely whether the cat in Pieter Claesz.'s work, like the cat in the painting by Maes, implies more than just its own greed and gives also perhaps some general suggestion of lust. There is obviously no context here, such as the one Maes constructed. And if it was





19a. Nicolaes Maes, *The sleeping kitchenmaid* (1657), London, National Gallery



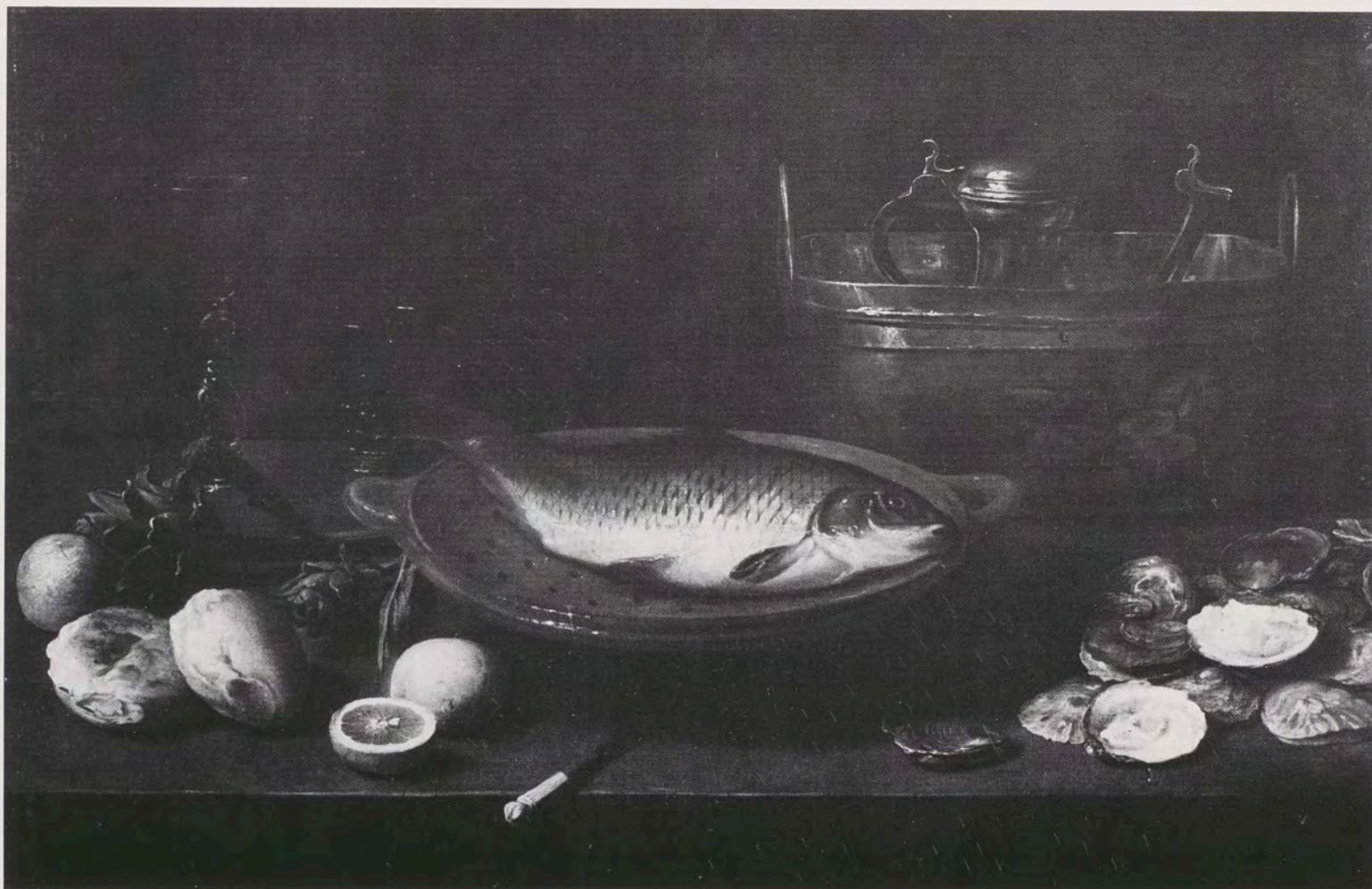
indeed Claesz.'s intention to symbolise the sin of lust then, unlike Maes, he neglected to provide us with any means of control.

In Maes, the significance of the thieving cat is made clear to us and emphasized by the dreamy slumbering of the maid. Pieter Claesz., on the other hand, preferred to leave his public in uncertainty. In this he perhaps wanted to comply with a well-known 17th-century "aesthetic" concept, that of enshrouding the quintessential meaning of some representation to a greater or lesser degree in darkness. Holland's most popular 17th-century writer, Jacob Cats, referred to such an instance as "aengename duysterheyd", or pleasing obscurity.<sup>5</sup>

EdJ

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1. Vroom, vol.2, 107, nos. 535, 536, 537.
  2. Ibid., vol.1, 109. Cf. also vol.2, 99 no. 497, an early work by Clara Peeters. A counter-suggestion to Vroom's attribution to Peeters (and others) of works which are considered to be by Pieter Claesz. can be found in W. van Dedem, "Een Pieter Claesz of Clara Peeters?", *Tableau* 3 (1981), 602-604.
  3. *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 146-147 and 285.
  4. Ibid, 145-149. See also cat. no. 20 (Foppens van Es), fig. 20a.
  5. E. de Jongh, "Inleiding", *ibid.*, 20.







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## Jacob Foppens van Es

Antwerp (?) — Antwerp 1666

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20

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### Still-life of a fish with oysters

Canvas, 61.5 x 96 cm. Signed with monogram

Private collection, The Netherlands



20a. Jan Steen, *A man offering an oyster to a woman*, London, National Gallery.

Still-lives showing a single fish are not particularly common. In this painting by Jacob Foppens van Es the fish, a kind of carp, lies on an earthenware colander and constitutes, in an almost elegant manner, the middle of the composition. To the left we see artichokes, bread rolls, a few fruits, and two glasses, and to the right a number of oysters.

In the 17th century, as now, oysters were considered a delicacy. They were consumed in great numbers, particularly in a port such as Antwerp, where this picture was painted. Meals devoted to the oyster were a favoured subject of the 17th century, though more in Dutch art than in Flemish (fig. 20a).<sup>1</sup>

The celebrated Dutch doctor, Johan van Beverwyck, wrote in his *Schat der Gesontheydt* (Treasury of good health) in 1636 that oysters "whet the appetite, both for eating and for having intercourse, two activities which lusty and delicate persons alike find pleasing". The doctor, however, did not consider oysters all that healthy.<sup>2</sup>

The oysters in the picture are reflected in the brass cooler and to one side of the fish, but this detail does not entirely reflect the painter's capacity. In the cooler there is a pewter jug, the so-called Jan Steen jug (which was known in the 17th century as a *pijpkam* because it had a long thin spout emerging from its base), from which wine was usually poured.

EdJ

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1. G.D.J. Schotel, *Het oud-Hollandsch huisgezin der zeventiende eeuw*, ed. Amsterdam 1903, 323. *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 203-205, 237-239.

2. Johan van Beverwyck, *Schat der gesontheydt*, ed. Utrecht 1651, 141, where it is said that oysters "appetijt verwecken, en lust om te eten, en by te slapen, 't welck alle beyde de lustige en delicate luyden wel aenstaet".







## Jan Fyt

Antwerp 1611 — Antwerp 1661

21

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### Still-life of a hunter's bag

Canvas, 121.5 x 97.5 cm. Signed and dated Joannes Fyt pinx . . 16 . .

The Hague, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen "Het Mauritshuis"

This still-life of dead birds and a hare, which has been dated 1641 by Edith Greindl, is composed on three different levels.<sup>1</sup> The lowest level is formed by a table surface with a hare lying on a cloth, and a duck beside it. Light entering the picture from the top left-hand corner falls directly onto these two animals and, to a lesser extent, onto some dead birds behind them in a basket.

The basket is fairly high, and full to overflowing, so that the birds, one of which (second to the right) can be identified by its crest as a lapwing, constitute the second level. The topmost level is formed by three birds upside down on a piece of stone. The one on the left is a partridge, and the middle one a snipe.

This kind of graduated composition was used by Jan Fyt quite frequently, whereas his master, Frans Snyders, largely continued in the tradition of showing a table with the subjects spread out on it. It is difficult to trace a line of development in Fyt's oeuvre, let alone date individual paintings, as he never restricted himself to any one painting technique at any one time. If this picture really does date from 1641, then it was made when Fyt had returned to Antwerp after a sojourn of many years in Italy. Much of his considerable output can be dated between 1638 and 1661, the year of his death.

Fyt did not restrict himself entirely to painting hunting scenes, game and dead birds. He also depicted flowers (see cat. no. 31), fruit, and choruses of birds.

TvL

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1. Edith Greindl, *Les peintres flamands de nature morte au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels 1956, 160.







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## Cornelis Lelienbergh

The Hague before 1626 — The Hague after 1676

22

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### Still-life with a black rooster and two rabbits

Canvas, 93.5 x 84 cm. Signed and dated C. Lelienbergh f. 1659  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Dead animals are central in the work of Cornelis Lelienbergh, who applied the same principle to this still-life of 1659 as Jan Baptist Weenix had done in his hanging partridge, which was probably made some years earlier (cat. no. 24).<sup>1</sup> There are the same optical tricks, including the falling feathers and drops of blood. Only in this instance it is a domesticated bird, a big black cock, that hangs from some invisible point precisely on the central axis of the composition. In addition, two dead rabbits are shown in a shallow niche, which all adds up to a composition more curious than felicitous.

EdJ

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1. Bol 1969, 286.







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## Jan Weenix

Amsterdam 1640 — Amsterdam 1719

23

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### Still-life with a hare and other small game

Canvas 114.5 x 96 cm. Signed J. Weenix f. 1697

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Weenix's still-life with a dead hare is a good example of the type of game-piece which was made in Holland during the latter half and in particular toward the end of the 17th century. Hanging by its right hind leg from a branch and with its head and forepaws resting upon the ground the hare, which is also the most strongly lighted of the elements of this still-life, forms the centre-piece of the work. Next to it lie two dead partridges and just in front a small song bird. The body of the hare leans more or less against the stone socle of a large Italian garden vase and near its head we see an ornate game-bag. Above this is a hunting horn and several flowers. The background at the left offers the spectator a view of a park-like landscape with statuary. In a work such as this one Weenix shows himself to be a faithful follower of his father and teacher, Jan Baptist Weenix; game-pieces by father and son strongly resemble one another.

The fact that the hunting-piece as a genre flourished only during the second half of the 17th century — relatively late in comparison to other types of still-life — has to do with developments in society at the time, in particular with respect to the role of hunting.<sup>1</sup> By tradition hunting was a privilege of the court and the nobility, and legal strictures pertaining to this sport remained effective until well into the 18th century. These laws determined not only during which seasons what types of animals might be hunted, and in what quantities, but also by whom, for even among the nobility various statuses were recognized. Deer hunting was for example only permitted to members of the court and the so-called bannered nobles,<sup>2</sup> and to the latter only once per annum. On the hunting of hares and rabbits various restrictions were imposed; the nobility were allowed to shoot just one hare or two rabbits per week during the period from September 15th to February 2nd. According to Scott Sullivan these limits might account for the fact that in game-pieces of the time, as those of Weenix, usually only one hare or two rabbits are depicted.<sup>3</sup> An example of this last case can be seen in Cornelis Lelienbergh's still-life (cat. no. 22).

With respect to the hunting of birds, a distinction was made between the larger and smaller species. The larger birds such as pheasants, swans, geese, ducks and the partridges which Weenix also paints were limited to the nobility, while everyone was allowed to bag the smaller species, including finches.

Due to the above-mentioned legal strictures hunting was closely associated with the aristocracy. It is therefore not suprising that the bourgeoisie, which



thanks to a steadily increasing prosperity had become wealthy in its own right in the 17th century and began more and more often to adopt the customs of the nobility, sought all the possible ways in which they could emulate the aristocratic class, including hunting. In actual practice the legal possibilities of achieving this were limited. Titles of nobility were rarely conferred by the princes of Orange and ordinary burghers remained excluded from the hunt. The odd shot will of course have been fired illegally, and well-to-do burghers who possessed country houses may also have hunted on their own grounds.

It seems understandable that burghers who had succeeded in achieving such a status had paintings made of hunting scenes. In this way, about the middle of the 17th century a theme in art flourished under which can be subsumed hunting portraits, scenes of hunting itself, and still-lives of dead game. Through costume, pose and setting the burghers attempted to imitate the nobility in such works (fig. 23d). According to the prevailing fashion one often had oneself portrayed in an Italian or French landscape, an indication of high social status. In this respect the monumental garden vase and the garden with statuary depicted in Jan Weenix's game-piece as well as the handsome velvet game bag, the beautiful hunting horn and the typically "aristocratic" game may be said to be typical.

We know that Weenix received commissions from the higher circles, including the nobility. While in the service of Johann Wilhelm, elector of the Palatinate, he worked for about ten years, beginning in 1702, on the decoration with hunting scenes of a number of rooms in the Bensberg Castle at Düsseldorf. In Amsterdam as well, where Weenix lived during the greater part of his life, he executed such works on commission, there for wealthy patricians.<sup>4</sup> It is not known whether the present painting was made on commission and if so, for whom. Given the fact that Weenix painted a large number of game-pieces which very closely resemble this one, we can assume that they were in great demand.<sup>5</sup>

TvL



23a. Anthonie Palamedesz., *Family group* (1665), Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen



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Still-life with a hare and other game

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1. On the relationship between hunting and art in the 17th century, see Scott A. Sullivan, "Rembrandt's *Self-portrait with a dead bittern*", *The Art Bulletin* 62 (1980), 236-243.
  2. Bannered nobles had received that name by virtue of their traditional right to fight under their own banners.
  3. Sullivan, op. cit. (note 1), 236, note 6.
  4. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunst-schilders en schilderessen . . .*, vol. 1, The Hague 1750, 81. Apart from his mention of Weenix's decoration of two rooms in Amsterdam, Van Gool provides us with additional information on the oeuvre of this artist. He remarks that Weenix's "cabinet-pieces" . . . "by de liefhebbers in hoogachtinge [zijn] en werden wel betaelt" (are held in great esteem by art-lovers and command a good price).
  5. For example a game-piece dating from 1690 in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.







## Jan Baptist Weenix

Amsterdam 1621 — Huys ter Mey near Utrecht ca. 1660

24

### Dead partridge hanging from a nail

Panel, 54.6 x 41.3 cm

Private collection, The Netherlands

There were several Dutch painters in the second half of the 17th century who set themselves to painting still-lives of game, and in particular still-lives of birds.<sup>1</sup> The partridge was an extremely popular subject, not only because of its availability, but also — and perhaps primarily — because of what we might call its artistic properties: handsome markings combined with pleasing colours.

We could make a fair-sized list of paintings showing a single partridge, usually alongside attributes of the chase, but also without them. All these works seek in some degree to deceive us by effects of illusion; some even are outright trompe l'oeil paintings. The hanging partridge from a private collection, painted by Jan Baptist Weenix in the 1650's, is a good example of the second sort.<sup>2</sup>

The pretence of reality of this typical trompe l'oeil is underlined by such insignificant details as fluttering feathers, a few drops of blood dripping to the ground, and a second nail in the wall.<sup>3</sup> The light background accentuates the animal's splendid colours — brown, white, and blue-grey. Its situation on the plane, just left of the vertical axis, increases the feeling of tension and leads us to think that the painter achieved the proportions of the golden section by inspired guess work. Weenix did not paint just one of these pieces. Others are known by his hand (quite apart from works making less use of illusion, with different birds).<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to compare the partridge by Weenix with the hanging black cock by Cornelis Lelienbergh, a contemporary who lived in The Hague, which was painted at the same period and on the same principles (cat. no. 22). And comparison with other trompe l'oeil representations of cocks and partridges, for example by Barent van der Meer or Melchior d'Hondecoeter, the renowned animal painter who was a pupil of Weenix's, demonstrates that this kind of representation continued to appeal to the imagination, but did not undergo much fuller development. None the less, it was to enjoy a very long existence. Anyone wishing to trace this successful artifice right to its end finds himself as far away as 19th-century America.<sup>5</sup>

Although Dutch game-pieces, in the widest application of the term, did not reach full development until the middle of the 17th century, we must not imagine that the relevant iconography was entirely new at that time, nor neglect forerunners of the genre. Rembrandt, for example, made a few important pieces



24a. Rembrandt, *Still-life with peacocks*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



of this kind at the end of the 1630's, although it is only fair to add that these are not still-lives proper insofar as a human figure is always featured (fig. 24a). The most remarkable precursor remains Jacopo de Barbari, whose very much older creation of a trompe l'oeil showing a hanging partridge and iron gloves dates from 1504 (fig. 24b).<sup>6</sup> It is likely that this panel was not painted purely as a still-life, but that it was originally part of a cupboard or a panelled wall, painted with the appearance of trophies of the hunt, in a royal or noble residence, possibly a hunting-seat or a shooting-box.

A number of the later Dutch pieces probably come from these kind of surroundings. For in Holland, as elsewhere, the introduction and function of the game still-life must be associated with the higher echelons of society. And not only the still-life, but also the so-called hunting portrait, in which aristocratic or successful middle-class people were shown beside the spoils of the chase, preferably the more noble spoils.<sup>7</sup>

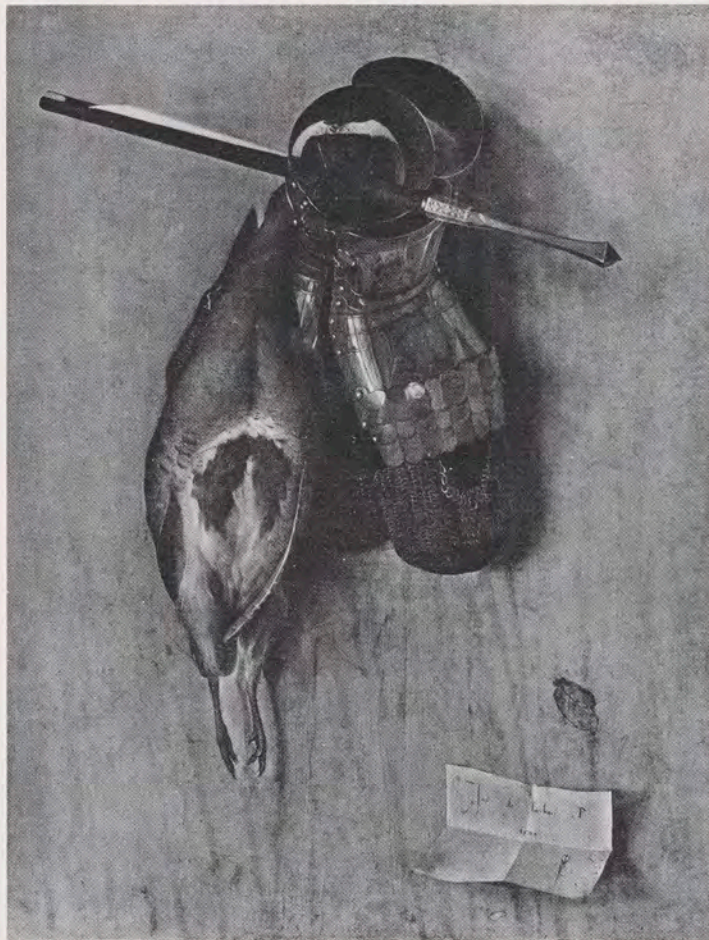
Hunting larger animals and certain birds, including the partridge, may originally have been the privilege of court and nobility (a relatively small section of the community in Holland) but under the influence of social shifts this restriction was relaxed in practice somewhat in the course of the 17th century.<sup>8</sup> Social mobility was, to a certain extent, a characteristic of the 17th century, and it resulted in the taste and certain habits of the aristocracy's being adopted by the growing ranks of the middle class. Those who were rich enough bought a country estate and devoted themselves to the pleasures of the chase. Even the maker of the work exhibited here, Jan Baptist Weenix, could afford to spend the last years of his life in a splendid country house, Huys ter Mey, an old manor near Utrecht, (fig. 24c).<sup>9</sup> It was possibly there, where the neighbourhood could provide him with plenty of fresh material, that he painted a number of his dead partridges directly after life, as it were.

Partridges, in their turn, were noble birds, as we can read in Johan van Beverwyck, the 17th-century physician: "Partridges, have never been so common as other game birds, and have therefore been held in great esteem through the ages". To which the author adds his own version of an epigram by Martial:

You won't find partridge often on our table poor,  
That meat is fare for lords, food for the epicure.<sup>10</sup>



Dead partridge hanging from a nail



24b. Jacopo de' Barbari, *Still-life with partridge and iron gloves*, Munich, Alte Pinakothek

Partridges were not only regarded as a dish for the élite, they were also considered at that time to be exceedingly lustful beasts. Ripa does not leave us in the dark: "For there is nothing more fitting or suitable to demonstrate unrestrained lust and unbridled lechery than the partridge . . .".<sup>11</sup> There is an amusing passage, relevant to us here, in the exchange of letters in 1635 between two learned and famous men, the poet and bailiff Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft and the Amsterdam professor of philosophy Caspar Barlaeus.<sup>12</sup> Some months after Barlaeus had been widowed, he received a brace of partridges in a present from Hooft. The recipient felt himself called upon to give utterance to his mixed feelings (in Latin, of course), and retorted: "That you should send partridges to me of all people, a widower, is curious in every way. You send me the most lascivious bird, symbol and hieroglyph of Venus, so that you summon up in me, when I look at it, the memory of the caresses which I, a celibate have to do without. Is this any different from taking a hungry man, who does not have that which he longs to eat, and putting saliva into his mouth? . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Jan Baptist Weenix will not have had such thoughts in his mind when painting this partridge. He probably intended no more than to immortalize a well-aimed shot as a trophy, by way of the "aangenaam bedrog" (pleasant deception) of a trompe l'oeil. The painting is not signed, unlike the variant in the Mauritshuis in The Hague, which is about the same size, and has the signature "Gio. Batta: Weenix". Like Willem van Aelst, Weenix developed the habit of drawing attention to his stay in Italy (from 1643 till 1647) by signing his works with an Italian accent.

Weenix earned much appreciation during his lifetime. Arnold Houbraken was later to devote much attention to him in the *Groote Schouburgh* and to praise his versatility.<sup>14</sup> And Weenix was certainly versatile. Pictures of dead birds formed only a small part of his repertoire, which consisted further of portraits, Italianate genre scenes, interiors, landscapes, harbours and beach scenes.

EdJ

1. Bergström 1956, 247-259. Bol 1969, 281-293.

2. Formerly attributed wrongly to Jacobus Biltius: see Zoltán von Boér, *Stilleben pa Gavno*, Copenhagen 1964, 17. For Jan Baptist Weenix in general, see W. Stechow, "Jan Baptist





24c. Anonymous Dutch artist, *Huys ter Mey near Utrecht*, drawing (circa 1650), Utrecht, Rijksarchief



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Dead partridge hanging from a nail

- Weenix" *Art Quarterly* 11 (1948), 181-198. Further: Albert Blankert, *Nederlandse 17e eeuwse italianiserende landschapschilders*, ed. Soest 1978, 174-184.
3. For the "bedriegertje", see cat. no. 25 (Gijsbrechts).
  4. In Basle, Kunstmuseum (*Weltkunst* [1979], 1108), Hartford, Conn., Wadsworth Atheneum (Stechow, op. cit. (note 2), fig. 11); The Hague, Mauritshuis (cat. 1977, no. 940).
  5. Barent van der Meer: Bergström 1956, fig. 211; Hondecoeter: Brussels, Kon. Museum voor Schone Kunsten, (cat. 1949, no. 224); The Hague, Mauriitshuis (cat. 1977, no. 968). For 19th-century American examples, see exhib. cat. *Illusionism & trompe l'oeil*, San Francisco (The California Palace of the Legion of Honor) 1949, 60-68.
  6. Claus Grimm, "Das Jagdstilleben", *Stilleben in Europa*, 253-254.
  7. Scott A. Sullivan, "Rembrandt's Self-portrait with a dead bittern", *The Art Bulletin* 62 (1980), 236-243, esp. 236 and 241. Idem, *The Dutch game piece* (in publication). See also cat. no. 23 (Jan Weenix).
  8. See previous note.
  9. Blankert, op. cit. (note 2), 174-175.
  10. Johan van Beverwyck, *Schat der gesontheydt*, ed. Utrecht 1651, 131: "De Patrijsen, oft Veld-hoenderen, zijn noyt soo gemeen geweest als andere Hoenderen: en werden daerom van alle tijden in groote weerde gehouden. Patrijs en wert niet veel op onsen Dis gevonden; / Dat vleesch is Heeren spijs, en kost voor lekker-monden". Martial has: "Perdices. Ponitur Ausoniis avis haec rarissima mensis: hanc in piscina ludere saepe soles" (Partridges. This bird is very rarely served on Italian tables: one often sees it playing in the fishpond): *Epigrams*, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1978, 414-415 (lib. XIII, 65).
  11. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands . . . uyt het Italiaens vertaelt door D.P. Pers*, Amsterdam 1644, 143-144: "Want daer is geen dingh bequaemer noch dat meer past, om de onghemaetigde Wellust en ongetoomde Geylheyte te vertoonen, als de Patrijs . . .".
  12. *De briefwisseling van Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*, ed. H.W. van Tricht, vol. 2, Culemborg 1977, 691-693 and 707-710.
  13. Ibid., 691-692. The translation given here is based on Caspar Barlaeus, *Epistolarum liber*, pars altera, Amsterdam 1667, 627: "At mhi viduo jam perdices mitti, alienum est ab omni ratione. Salacissimam mihi mittis avem, Veneris symbolum, & hieroglyphicon, cujus adspectu memoriam mihi refricas earum voluptatum, quibus coelebs careo. Quod quid aliud est, quam salivam movere homini famelico, qui quod edat, non habet . . ." Barlaeus's letter (no. 306) is dated 20 October 1635. This version varies slightly from the manuscript published by Van Tricht.
  14. Houbraken, vol. 2, 61-65. Further: Stechow, op. cit. (note 2), passim.









25a. Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Old man at a window* (1653), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

## Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts

Active between 1659 and 1678

25

### Two tidies

Panels, 69.7 x 25.7 and 70 x 26.5 cm

Private collection, The Netherlands

Cornelis Gijsbrechts is in his element here, deceiving the eye of the beholder with a formula that was highly regarded in his own time but lost favour among future arbiters of taste.<sup>1</sup> For a long period during the 19th and 20th centuries trompe l'oeil painting was regarded as a more or less vulgar artifice lacking true artistic inspiration. "Un des plus bas échelons de l'art", was the judgement of the Swiss draughtsman and writer Rodolphe Töpffer, and he undoubtedly spoke for many.<sup>2</sup>

Reappraisal of the trompe l'oeil is comparatively recent, dating from the last few decades, in fact.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was stimulated by certain trends in modern art, pop-art in particular, and various kinds of realism in which irony and weirdness were enlisted as aesthetic categories. But this was not so for the trompe l'oeil in the 17th century. The first essential here was what theorists of that time called "aangenaam bedrog" (pleasing deception), and then in its most extreme form.<sup>4</sup>

A common 17th-century word for the trompe l'oeil in Holland was *bedriegertje*, a deception-piece, and this name reflects the quintessence of the phenomenon very well. Trompe l'oeil in painting, at any rate when successful, is basically the creation of the fullest possible illusion in paint, whereby the paint as a material is, so to speak, repudiated, and the demands of style are subjected to the reality of appearance.<sup>5</sup> Gijsbrechts would have taken no exception to a description on these lines.

Samuel van Hoogstraeten, the painter and theorist, wrote in 1678 that a perfect painting "is like a mirror of Nature, which makes things that are not actually there seem to be there, and deceives in a permitted pleasant and commendable manner".<sup>6</sup> A quarter of a century earlier he had himself been one of those in Holland who introduced trompe l'oeil painting. In 1653 Hoogstraeten painted a window, out of which an old man is leaning (fig. 25a), and in 1654, again on the principles of "pleasing deception", a still-life of a cupboard door with things hanging on it (fig. 25b). His pupil and biographer, Arnold Houbraken spoke highly of this sort of work by Hoogstraeten: "... still-life, which he painted so naturally that he deceived many with it"; his still-lives, moreover, had caused a furore at the Viennese court where he had been invited in 1651.<sup>7</sup>

Earning recognition and prestige in the eyes of a prince counted in the 17th century as one of the greatest triumphs that could befall an artist. The success



that Hoogstraeten enjoyed in Vienna was to be experienced by Gijsbrechts in Copenhagen. He must have attracted a good deal of attention there. The Danish kings Frederick III and Christian V even appointed him court painter for several years, from 1670 till 1672, and perhaps for even longer. Among the results of Gijsbrechts's activities at the court of Denmark is a number of exceedingly inventive and witty trompe l'oeil paintings which were presumably intended for the agreeable deception of the guests of the king.<sup>8</sup>

The trompe l'oeil undoubtedly owed much of its status to the many legends about feats of visual deception that circulated among artists and could all eventually be traced back to the famous story told by the Roman writer Pliny, who was regarded in the 17th century as an authority, about the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius.<sup>9</sup> Zeuxis had succeeded in painting grapes so true to nature that the eager birds flew down to peck them. But Parrhasius was more skillful, yet and he deceived even Zeuxis. The curtain on one of his paintings was so faithfully executed that Zeuxis took it to be real.

This antique legend was retold and paraphrased times without number in 17th-century writings and art theory.<sup>10</sup> Artists facetiously accused each other of deceit. Van Mander, for example, called Pieter Aertsen, the 16th-century painter of kitchen-pieces, a "listich bedriegher van s' Menschen oogen" (a cunning deceiver of human eyes).<sup>11</sup> Several 17th-century painters portrayed themselves with a conspicuous curtain, by which means they undoubtedly meant to indicate that their competence was no less than that of the legendary Parrhasius.<sup>12</sup> Adriaen van der Spelt's intention must have been similar when in 1658 he half-covered a flower still-life with a painted curtain (fig. 25c).

Gijsbrechts too experimented with curtains in his still-lives on several occasions. But in the two shaped panels on exhibition here, which can be dated around 1672-73, he has turned his attention to other objects. These panels represent stitched tidies with compartments in which he has stowed brushes, prints, combs, feathers, letters, and documents. Samuel van Hoogstraeten's still-life of 1654 shows a similar tidy and some of the same objects.

It is not clear whether these two panels are companion pieces or different versions of one design. The latter seems more probable, considering the almost identical organisation of the objects chosen. The two representations vary only in the texts and a few details of colour.





25b. Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Trompe l'oeil*, (1654), Vienna, Akademie der bildenden Künste

Elsewhere it has been noted that our knowledge of the career of Cornelis Gijsbrechts, who was a member of the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke in 1659 and 1660, has great gaps, and that there is no documentary evidence that he even stayed in the northern Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> The strong affinity of a number of his works with Dutch art and the fact that Dutch writings appear in some of his works would however lead to the assumption that it is quite possible he worked in the Republic.

In one of the tidies we see a copy of the *Oprechte Haerlemsche* [Courant] jammed in front of the *Groote Comptoir Almanach Op't Jaer ons Heeren Jesu Christi MDCLXXI*, an almanach that was published in Amsterdam. This indicates at any rate that Gijsbrechts could not have painted this panel before 1671. The inscriptions in Dutch are no conclusive proof that it was made in Holland, but it does seem very plausible, unless we assume that almanach and newspaper were sent to him in Copenhagen.

Curiously enough, two texts in the other panel do have Danish connexions: the letter at the bottom is addressed to the inspector of a poor-house in Copenhagen, and the letter at the top bears the address "A Monsieur Mons. Gijsbrechts Konterfyer von Ihr Konigl. maij von Dennemarken". This inscription, on a letter mentioning him as painter to His Royal Majesty the King of Denmark, combines pleasing deception with suitable and equally pleasing pride.

EdJ

1. Poul Gammelbo, "Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts og Franciskus Gijsbrechts", *Kunstmuseets Arsskrift* 1952-1955, Copenhagen 1956, 125-156, esp. 150 (no.29). The work "No. 9" at the bottom right is designated by Gammelbo — incomprehensibly — as hardly typical of Gijsbrechts. See further auction cat. Christie's, London, 9 July 1976, 31 (no.116): both pieces. Also: Georges Marlier, "C.N. Gijsbrechts, L'illusioniste," *Connaissance des Arts* (March 1964), 96-105.
2. Quoted in A.P. de Mirimonde, "Les peintres flamands de trompe l'oeil et de natures mortes au XVIIe siècle, et les sujets de musique", *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten*, Antwerp 1971, 223-272, esp. 223.
3. Ibid., 223-230. See also E.H. Gombrich, "Tradition and expression in Western still life", in: *Meditations on a hobby horse and other essays on the theory of art*, London 1963, 95-105.





25c. Adriaen van der Spelt, *Flowers and curtain* (1658), Chicago, The Art Institute.



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## Two tidies

4. E. de Jongh, "Inleiding", *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 14 and 16.
5. Célestine Dars, *Images of deception. The art of trompe l'oeil*, Oxford 1969, passim.
6. Hoogstraeten, 25: "is als een spiegel van de Natuer, die de dingen, die niet en zijn, doet schijnen te zijn, en op een geoorlofde vermakelijke en prijslijke wijze bedriegt".
7. Houbraken, vol.2, 123-124: "... stilleven, dat hy zoo natuurlyk schilderde dat hy 'er velen door bedroog". Houbraken continued in a passage of no less interest to us here: "Schoon 't schilderen van diergelyke dingen, in dien tyd goed voordeel aanbracht, zoo had hy te grooten geest, om zich daar [veelvuldig] mee op te houden..." (Although the painting of such things had its advantages at that time, his was too great a spirit to dally [frequently] with them...). In other words, great men did not occupy themselves too often with such pleasantries. What is apparently at issue here is the low place of still-lives in the hierarchy of the different categories in painting, a problem that Hoogstraeten considers at great length. Hoogstraeten 75-87; see also above, pp. 13-22.
8. Gammelbo, op. cit. (note 1), passim. Jochen Becker, "Das Buch im Stilleben — das Stilleben im Buch", *Stilleben in Europa*, 448-478 and 589-594, esp. 465-466.
9. Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, lib. XXXV, 65.
10. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler, Ein geschichtlicher Versuch*, Vienna 1934, 70-71.
11. Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck*, ed. Amsterdam 1618, "Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const", fol. 14r. See also Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander. Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, vol.2, Utrecht 1973, 532.
12. As for example Gerard Dou (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, A 86) and Cornelis Bisschop (Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum; see *Niederländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts. Hauptwerke aus Dordrechts Museum*, Recklinghausen & Oberhausen 1970, no. 11). See further Patrik Reuterswärd, "Tavelförhänget. Kring ett motiv i holländskt 1600-talsmaleri", *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 25 (1956), 97-113.
13. See cat. no. 41 (Gijsbrechts).









26a. Rachel Ruysch, *Flowers*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

## Willem van Aelst

Delft ca. 1626 — Amsterdam ca. 1683

26

### Group of flowers on a ledge

Canvas, 31.1 x 25.4 cm. Signed and dated Guillmo van Aelst 1675  
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

This composition is rather unusual for Van Aelst. It is composed of several pink roses and two carnations, one pink and one red, on a marble ledge, deployed along two imaginary diagonals. One runs from the carnation at the lower left to the branch with the caterpillar at the upper right, while the second is formed by a line drawn from the large rose in the centre to the two small ones at its left, and brings depth into the representation. A similar construction, but less balanced, can be seen in his breakfast-piece of 1680 (cat. no. 6), which contains objects displayed on a similar support. The silhouette of this representation is almost identical to that of the flowers.

It has been supposed that Van Aelst painted the flowers in the Cambridge work as a study;<sup>1</sup> they have been rendered rather boldly in contrast to his usual delicate manner of painting which can be discerned in the spider, the caterpillar and the leaves. Comparable flower-pieces are also known from the hand of his talented and successful pupil, Rachel Ruysch (fig. 26a).

Van Aelst was apparently a very famous and well-to-do painter. Not only during his stay in Italy but also after his return to Holland he was very popular with the art-buying public and his works commanded high prices. Houbraken praises this painter some 35 years after the latter's death in his *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Great theatre of Dutch painters, both men and women) with an often-used cliché. Houbraken says that Van Aelst "was able to imitate nature so perfectly, that his brushwork seemed to be not a painting but life itself".<sup>2</sup> The illusory suggestion of reality which was so appreciated in the 17th century is strengthened in this flower arrangement by the subsidiary details: the spider hanging in the upper left-hand corner, the caterpillar on a leaf and the fly with its diaphanous wings on the rose in the centre.

TvL

1. Warner, 15, no. 2c. Bol 1969, 326.

2. Houbraken, vol. 1, 228: "... het leven zo natuurlijk wist na te bootsen, dat zijn pencellwerk geen schilderij, maar het leven zelf scheen to wezen".







## Jan Baers

Active ca. 1625-1640

27

### Vase of flowers in a niche

Panel, 59.5 x 47 cm. Signed J. Baers f  
Private collection, The Netherlands



27a. Jacob Woutersz. Vosmaer, *Vase of flowers* (1616), Present location unknown.

Information on the life and work of this artist is extremely scarce. Possibly he can be identified with a "Hans Baers, friend of the arts" who is mentioned in the 1618-19 registers of the guild of St. Luke in Antwerp. Another possibility is Johannes Baers, whose name appears several times in the Utrecht archives. In an Amsterdam inventory of 1638 a "Johannes Baers of Utrecht" is mentioned as the author of a kitchen-piece and a "soldier with a peasant".<sup>1</sup> The small number of works which we know to be by the hand of this painter includes two flower-pieces in a niche (one of which is dated 1629) and two bouquets composed of flowers and fruit in combination.<sup>2</sup> These works reveal that he was a none too original artist who not only repeated compositional formulae but also literally "quoted" individual flowers.

In his borrowings Baers shows himself to be something of an eclectic. He adopted compositions and motifs most often from the Utrecht Bosschaert group. The combination of a vase filled with flowers and a basket or dish of fruit surrounded by a number of single fruits and flowers is one that had also been used by Johannes Bosschaert and Balthasar van der Ast. In the bouquet of 1629, Baers adopted the motifs of the tulip at the top and a small hanging narcissus from Ambrosius Bosschaert. The most striking similarity however is that between our painting and the flower-pieces of Jacob Woutersz. Vosmaer.<sup>3</sup> The rose, anemone and two tulips at the bottom of the bouquet exhibited here occur in exactly the same positions in works of Vosmaer's. The example illustrated here displays one such tulip and an anemone (fig. 27a).

What Baers is doing here, and which becomes a trademark of his flower still-lives — "plagiarizing" the work of others — was not experienced as something shameful in the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> *Rapen* (scraping together) as one then termed the borrowing of motifs, was not only permitted but even encouraged for pupils of painting in Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*.<sup>5</sup> In 1642 Philips Angel allowed *rapen* in principle to all painters, given the observation of certain limits. To warn against the exceeding of these limits, he cites an anecdote dealing with the famous painter Michelangelo. When shown a painting that had too obviously been scraped together, Michelangelo remarked, according to this story, that if its painter were to return his borrowings, nothing would be left but an empty panel.<sup>6</sup> It was thus a relatively normal state of affairs to borrow one



another's motifs and compositions.

The fact that this bouquet, which was probably executed about 1630, is composed primarily of tulips may have to do with the tulip fever which raged in Holland during the 17th century. In the first decades trade in this flower developed rapidly. The bloom was not indigenous to the Lowlands. In its wild form it grew on the steppes and plateaus of Central Asia, later migrating via Iran to Turkey. In 1554 the tulip was mentioned in the letters of the Austrian ambassador in Turkey, Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, and subsequently it was imported in the form of bulbs and seeds to Vienna. Carolus Clusius, the famous botanist who at the time was director of the imperial herbal gardens at Vienna, was responsible for the dissemination of the tulip in Europe; at first it was sent only to Flanders, where he had many contacts, but after Clusius's appointment as head of the botanical gardens at the University of Leiden, the tulip also came to Holland. Enthusiasts were fascinated above all by the enormous variety of tulip sorts. Only the striped and famed tulips were valued,<sup>7</sup> and these we encounter in great numbers in the flower still-lives of the first half of the 17th century, including those of Baers. Another good example is a flower-piece by the Haarlem painter Hans Bollongier (fig. 27b).

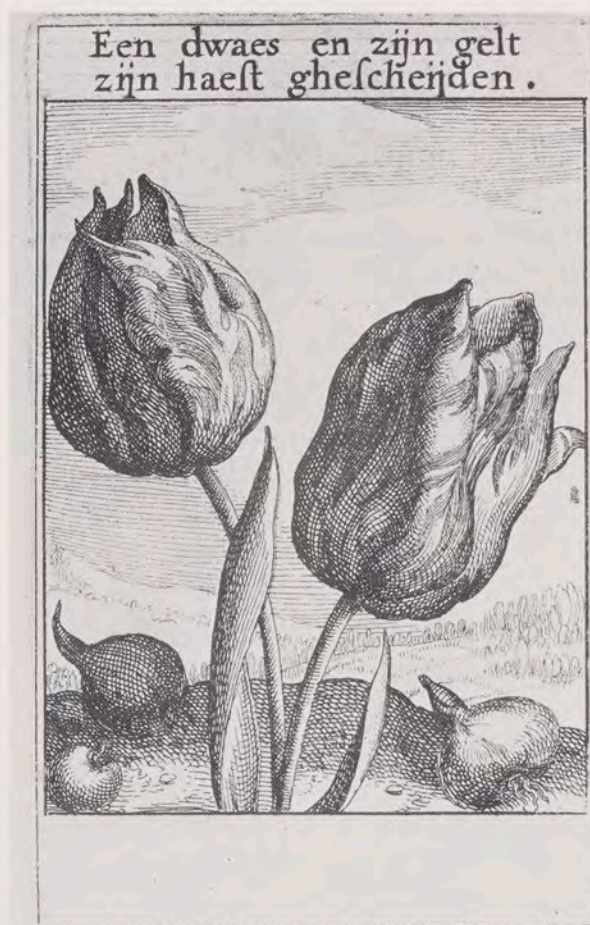
Outside of the period of their blossoming, which lasted three weeks at most, the tulips were marketed as bulbs. This necessitated the aid of a various illustrated catalogues. The so-called tulip books, which were often made by well-known artist such as Judith Leyster and Jacob Marrell, came into existence in this way.

Although trading occurred at the beginning of the century without the onus of speculation which it was to acquire especially in the fourth decade, criticism of the relatively high prices was quick to come. As early as 1614, Roemer Visscher in his emblem book *Sinnepoppen* gave his opinion of the tulip trade in an emblem bearing the motto: "Een dwaes en zijn gelt zijn haest ghescheijden" (A fool and his money are soon parted; fig. 27c). Only during the 1630's did the interest in trading reach the proportions which would later be designated as tulip mania. Prices escalated in dizzying fashion and customers even paid in the form of costly goods.<sup>8</sup> Many pamphlets were published both supporting and ridiculing the tulip lovers, or "florists" as they were called.<sup>9</sup> Finally the inevitable



27b. Hans Bollongier, *Vase of flowers* (1639), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.





27c. "A fool and his money are soon parted", emblem from Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614.

#### Vase of flowers in a niche

occurred and the bottom fell out of the market in February of 1637. Many speculators were ruined financially. The trade in tulips however recovered fairly quickly and even after the crash remained lucrative. The tulip books of Judith Leyster and Jacob Marrell were composed in part before and in part after 1637, and years later, in the third quarter of the 17th century, tulip books continued to be published.

One can only speculate as to whether Baers — as did the pamphletists in their way — intended his painting to carry a warning to his contemporaries as to the vanity and futility of the tulip mania. Flowers were common symbols of transience, and possibly the cracks in the niche serve as an indication of the fact that not only do fragile blossoms fade but also hard stone perishes in the end.

TvL

1. This was the inventory of Cornelis Aertsz. van Beyeren; Laurens J. Bol, "Goede onbekenden." *Schilders van het vroege Nederlandse bloemstuk met kleingedierte als bijwerk* (instalment no. 10), *Tableau 4* (1981), 83-89, esp. 83-84.
2. *Ibid.*, figs. 1-4.
3. As a consequence of this resemblance the *Vase of flowers in a niche* was originally ascribed to Vosmaer: Bol 1969, 43, fig. 37.
4. J.A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, ed. Amsterdam 1979, 131-135.
5. Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck*, ed. Amsterdam 1618, "Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const", fol. 2v.
6. Philips Angel, *Lof der Schilder-kunst*, Leiden 1642, 37.
7. Only in 1927 was it discovered that the stripes and flame-like markings on the tulips were caused by a virus infection.
8. One example: a "Brabanson Spoor" was sold for 700 Dutch guilders — an enormous sum for that time, on top of which was payable another 200 guilders, an ebony chest with a mirror and a "large painting, being a flowerpot". That painting was thus gladly exchanged for real flowers. E.H. Krelage, *Bloemenspeculatie in Nederland: de tulpomanie van 1636-'37 en de hyacintenhandel 1720-'36*, Amsterdam 1942, 36.
9. *Id.*, *De pamfletten van de tulpenwindhandel 1636-37*, The Hague 1942.







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## Jan Anton van der Baren

Brussels (?) 1616 — Vienna 1686

28

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### Flowers in a vase

Canvas, 56.4 x 41.4 cm. Signed and dated 16JVB63  
Manchester, Manchester City Art Gallery

The priest Van der Baren had the good fortune of being able to combine his profession with his artistic aspirations. From 1650 he was court chaplain in the service of the Austrian archduke Leopold Wilhelm, who at the time was regent over the Spanish Netherlands. Leopold Wilhelm owned an impressive collection of art works, of which the Fleming David Teniers was curator. In 1656 Van der Baren moved with the archduke to Vienna, having been appointed "Gallery-Inspector".<sup>1</sup> Three years later Van der Baren made an inventory of the collection, which reveals that he himself was amply represented with thirteen works.

The few paintings by his hand which we still possess today include various types of still-lives, flower garlands and architectural elements being the most predominant motifs. In the Manchester still-life of flowers in a glass vase, roses and particularly tulips dominate the bouquet. The latter were apparently available in Vienna in 1663, which may suggest a still lively trade in these flowers.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Van der Baren will certainly have seen tulips in the famous gardens of the Emperor Leopold I, whose service he entered after the death of Leopold Wilhelm. The tulip had been cultivated in the imperial gardens in Vienna ever since the time of its introduction into Europe.

TvL

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1. A. Hadjecki, "Die Niederländer in Wien. III", *Oud Holland* 25 (1907), 14.

2. See cat. no. 27 (Baers).







## Abraham van Beyeren

The Hague 1620/21 — Overschie 1690

29

### Still-life with flowers

Canvas, 64 x 46 cm. Signed AVB f  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



29a. Gerard ter Borch, *The Hartogh van Moerkerken family*, New York, private collection.

The name Abraham van Beyeren is above all associated with fish still-lives and *pronk* still-lives (cat. nos. 18 and 7) and to a much lesser extent with flower-pieces. This is not surprising, considering that only a few examples of this last category are known from Van Beyeren's hand. These works are virtually all the same in conception and composition. The painting exhibited here from the Rijksmuseum is one of these.<sup>1</sup>

Centred in the picture space, on a table, is a spherical vase containing a variegated bouquet. As so often occurs, these are flowers which bloom during different seasons, which means that the artist had to make use of illustrations or sketches he had previously made. An eye-catching addition is the pocket-watch next to the vase which is depicted with its case removed and its cover open. In Van Beyeren's *pronk* still-lives we often encounter such a pocket-watch, where it probably serves as an exhortation to practise temperance.<sup>2</sup> Combined with flowers however, the pocket-watch is probably meant to be seen as a symbol of transience: time is as fleeting as the existence of flowers.

In portraiture the pocket-watch was employed in a similar fashion, for example in a portrait of a family by Gerard ter Borch, painted during the same period as Van Beyeren's still-life, about 1653-54 (fig. 29a).<sup>3</sup> The moment which is eternalized is striking: the glance of the woman appears to be entirely fixed upon the open watch which her husband holds ostentatiously before her.

The combination of instruments for the measurement of time with flowers was common in art long before Van Beyeren composed his still-life. One of the artists who contributed to this theme was Simon de Passe, who commands our attention with a poignant and effective representation (fig. 29b). His engraving depicts a child pointing to a skull, flanked by a manneristic vase and the symbol par excellence of time, the hour-glass.<sup>4</sup> Almost superfluously, this print bears the motto "*memento mori*" (be mindful of death) and displays a Latin poem which likens the flourishing and decaying of flowers to the birth and death of man.

In the Bible itself we find quotations in which a flower serves as a metaphor for human life. Often cited are the verses from Psalm 103: "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more". Less known is a statement in the letter of James: "... as the flower of the grass he [the rich man]





29b. Simon de Passe after Crispijn de Passe, *Vanitas*, engraving.



shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of its perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways".<sup>5</sup> In this case the notion of transience is bound in particular with the idea of riches. An exhortation to temperance and moderation resounds by implication in this passage, an exhortation which, as stated, is possibly meant to be read in Van Beyerens's *pronk* still-lives.

The association of flowers with transience has in the course of the centuries been frequently employed, not only in the Bible but also in folklore, literature, emblems and prints. Without exaggerating, we can speak in this regard of a cliché.<sup>6</sup> In principle every flower still-life could be conceived of as an expression of impending death, but it is by no means certain that this was always the intention of the artist.<sup>7</sup> That Van Beyerens's intentions leave little doubt is primarily thanks to the fact that he provides us, through the pocket-watch, with a key to the understanding of his work. Not all painters, by far, have made it so easy for us.

TvL

1. H.E. van Gelder, W.C. Heda, A. van Beyerens, W. Kalf, Amsterdam (n.d.), 32-33. Bergström 1956, 244-245. P. Mitchell, *European flower painters*, London 1973, 50.
2. Bergström 1956, 189-190. See also cat. no. 7 (Van Beyerens), fig. 7a.
3. S.J. Gudlaugsson, *Geraert ter Borch*, vol. 1, The Hague 1959, fig. 102; portraits with pocket-watches also in *ibid.*, fig. 101, 222, 252 and 276. In some portraits of princes and other governing officials watches or clocks refer to temperate, that is, wise rule; see E. de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw", exhib. cat. *Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, Brussels (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1971, 143-194, esp. 155 and 157.
4. For the hour-glass, see also cat. nos. 40 (Collier) and 41 (Gijsbrechts).
5. Psalm 103: 15-16. James 1:11.
6. See for example Sam Segal, "Inleiding", exhib. cat. *Boeket in Willet. Nederlandse bloemstillevens in de achttiende en de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam (Museum Willet Holthuysen) 1970, and *id.*, "Inleiding", exhib. cat. *Een bloemrijk verleden! A flowery past*, Amsterdam (Kunsthandel P. de Boer) and 's-Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1982. Further Paul Pieper, "Das Blumenbukett", *Stilleben in Europa*, 314-349, esp. 318-322.
7. See above, pp. 27 - 36.







## Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder

Antwerp 1573 (?) — The Hague 1621

30

Chinese vase with flowers

Copper, 68 x 50 cm. Signed AB

Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza collection

Although Bosschaert did not date this flower-piece, which is painted on copper, we can ascertain with some degree of accuracy when he must have made it.<sup>1</sup> On the reverse of the copper plate are various stamps. In addition to a hand within a circle, the vignette of the city of Antwerp, we can discern the initials P.S. encircled by "Peeter Stas", a printer of that city, and which is of particular importance to us, the date 1607.<sup>2</sup> This fact, taken together with the appearance of the date 1609 on a similar painting in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (fig. 30a), indicates that the work at hand must have been executed in or shortly after 1607. This makes it one of Bosschaert's earliest works. We know of no paintings by his hand dating from before 1606, which might indicate that in this earlier period he was concerned more with the passive than the active side of art. From various sources we know that he was an art dealer as well as an artist.

Bosschaert was born in Antwerp and moved at a youthful age to Holland. Between 1593 and 1614 his presence in Middelburg is regularly documented. Toward the end of the 16th century the enthusiasm for and cultivation of flowers in this city increased greatly as a result of a growing scientific interest in foreign as well as indigenous plants and blooms. Many inhabitants keep carefully tended gardens and tried especially to procure exotic and rare specimens. To this end letters were written to the famous botanist Carolus Clusius, who from 1593 onwards was director of the botanical gardens of the University of Leiden. The extant correspondence reveals that he sometimes responded to pleas for "two, three or four of his beautiful colours of tulips, or even just one".<sup>3</sup> These letters also provide much information as to the cultivation of certain plants. Another botanist of renown was Matthias de l'Obel (or Lobelius, after whom the Lobelia was named), who practised as a physician in Middelburg from 1584 to 1596. He published his *Kruidtboeck* (Herbal) in 1581.

The increasing interest in flowers resulted in a growing demand for flower paintings. Cultivators of blooms had their rare and precious examples depicted. The well-known art collector Melchior Wijntgis had flower-pieces in his possession by, among others, Lodewijck Jansz. van den Bosch.<sup>4</sup> Bosschaert and Wijntgis were acquainted and probably even friends, but we are not certain whether Wijntgis also had paintings by Bosschaert in his collection.<sup>5</sup>

The flowers in this magnificent still-life are represented in a Chinese Wan Li



porcelain vase on a metal foot. Made during the government of Wan Li (1573-1619), the last emperor of the Ming dynasty, this type of porcelain was first shipped to Holland by the Portuguese in their "carrack" or galleons, whereby it acquired the name "carrack porcelain". Chinese porcelain was later imported directly by the Dutch via the Dutch East India Company and auctioned in Amsterdam, Delft and Middelburg.<sup>6</sup>

The bouquet is composed principally of flowers which were cultivated at the time by devotees; it includes tulips, roses, lilies, fritillaries, cyclamens and irises. The most prominently displayed flower is however the crown imperial, which is placed at the top and accentuates the vertical axis of this fan-shaped bouquet. The composition is balanced by the more or less symmetrical arrangement of the flowers and the placement of the vase in the centre of the table. An exotic shell, a cyclamen and two insects are depicted to the left of its base, and at the right lies a tulip upon the stem of which a red admiral alights.

The careful and detailed rendition of the flowers and insects, so that the species of each one of them is determinable, attests to an interest in scientific naturalism on the part of the artist. We presume that Bosschaert painted a bouquet such as this one with the aid of previously executed sketches, as the flowers depicted here as a unified whole in fact bloom during different seasons. In addition, certain examples appear in other flower-pieces in virtually identical positions. The flower still-life as Bosschaert composed it here, namely with roses at the base, tulips in the middle and a rare bloom (often also a tulip) at the top combined with further subsidiary details, remained a common formula in Middelburg until the middle of the 17th century.

TvL



30a. Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Vase with flowers* (1609), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



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Chinese vase with flowers

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1. Laurens J. Bol, *The Bosschaert dynasty: painters of flowers and fruit*, Leigh-on-Sea 1960, 20-21 and 59-60, no. 9.
  2. Peeter Stas was a well-known graphic printer in Antwerp who regularly lent his services to engravers and painters. Bosschaert often used copper as a support.
  3. F.W.T. Hunger, "Acht brieven van Middelburgers aan Carolus Clusius", *Archief van het Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen* (1925), 110ff.: "... twee, drie ofte viere van syne schoone colleuren van tulpaen, jae alwaert maer één".
  4. Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck*, ed. Amsterdam 1618, fol. 139 r.
  5. Bol, op. cit. (note 1), 18.
  6. C.H. de Jonge, "De Noordnederlandsche ceramiek van de vijftiende tot de negentiende eeuw", in *Sprekend verleden*, ed. T.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, Amsterdam 1959, 126.







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## Jan Fyt

Antwerp 1611 — Antwerp 1661

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31

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### Still-life of flowers and asparagus

Canvas, 44.5 x 50.5 cm. Signed Joannes Fyt  
Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza collection

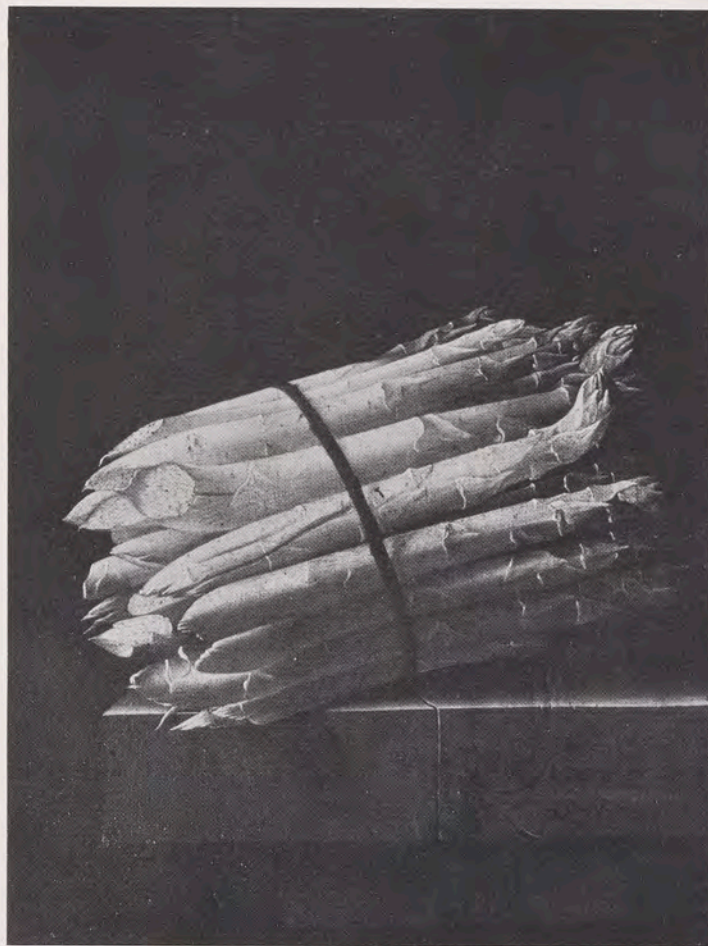
The combination of just flowers and asparagus is most unusual in not only Fyt's work but also that of other still-life painters.<sup>1</sup> Fyt generally painted dead birds, game, and hunting scenes. There are some flower-pieces, dating from the last decade of his life, and most of these show flower arrangements in vases, sometimes with game or fruit alongside.

Asparagus was a (French) delicacy in 17th-century Holland. Trading in out of the way vegetables and fruit was centred chiefly in Flanders. Bundles of asparagus appear in the exuberant vegetable still-lives painted by the Fleming Frans Snyders, whose pupil Fyt was, but only as a minor element in a greater whole.

One painter in Holland, Adriaen Coorte, who worked at the end of the 17th century, painted asparagus on several occasions, sometimes on their own and sometimes in combination with fruits. A fine example is the *Bundle of asparagus* in Oxford, which was painted in 1699 (fig. 31a).<sup>2</sup> Coorte's asparagus is of a thicker and more regular variety than Fyt's, and much more simply depicted.

Fyt contrived to place the two bundles of asparagus in this painting in such a way that they form one harmonious whole with the vase and the three groups of flowers. The stems of the tulips, roses, and viburnums are clearly visible in the glass vase.

TvL



31a. Adriaen Coorte, *Bundle of asparagus* (1699), Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

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1. In 1938 there was a rather larger version of this painting in the J. Singer gallery in Prague.
  2. *Flowers and asparagus* has been dated 1655 by both Hairs and Greindl: M.L. Hairs, *Les peintres flamands de fleurs au XVIIe siècle*, Paris and Brussels 1955, 213; Edith Greindl, *Les peintres flamands de nature morte au XVIIe siècle*, Brussels 1956, 160-161.







## Cornelis de Heem

Leiden 1631 — Antwerp 1695

32

### Flowers in a glass vase

Canvas, 62.5 x 50.8 cm. Signed J.D. de Heem  
Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum

The authorship of this painting is not entirely certain.<sup>1</sup> The signature with the initials J.D. of Cornelis's famous father Jan Davidsz. appears to be false. According to the still-life specialist Sam Segal the painting was made by David de Heem II, a brother of Jan Davidsz., while other experts ascribe it to Cornelis. Jan Davidsz. de Heem headed a relatively large studio with a good number of pupils, which led to a rapid dissemination of his style. He had many followers, of whom his son Cornelis was one of the most faithful. As a consequence it is sometimes problematic to distinguish their works from one another.

The above is not meant to suggest that Cornelis de Heem was an inferior painter. The present flower-piece is a testimonial to the contrary. Within a balanced but assuredly not dull composition a glass vase filled with flowers is placed at the edge of a stone ledge. Not only the flowers themselves but also the butterflies distributed regularly over the picture space and the glass vase as well are painted with care and love for detailed description.

TvL

1. M.L. Hairs, *Les peintres flamands de fleurs au XVIIe siècle*, Paris and Brussels 1955, 141 and 218.







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## Jan van Huysum

Amsterdam 1682 — Amsterdam 1749

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33

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### Flower-piece

Canvas, 80.7 x 64 cm.

Private collection, New Zealand

Jan van Huysum's exuberant flower still-life is far removed from the 17th-century representations in which the picture space was filled with more calmly arranged bouquets in their vases. This decorative painting was made in accordance with the prevailing taste during the first half of the 18th century, which was influenced by trends in France. Van Huysum is said to have painted screens intended for the decoration of domestic interiors during his youth in the studio of his father and three younger brothers.<sup>1</sup> In his long and exceptionally successful career as a painter, Van Huysum's works never lost this decorative element.

His many flower and fruit pieces are virtually all constructed on the same principle, of which the painting at hand is a good example: on a plinth an Italian garden vase is depicted which displays two putti in high relief; the vase contains and is surrounded by all sorts of flowers, principally roses, tulips and peonies. In the left foreground a bunch of red currants also rests upon the plinth.

A closer examination of the flowers depicted reveals that they bloom during different seasons and therefore can only have formed a bouquet through the intercession of the painter's imagination. In an extant letter of July 17th, 1742, written by Van Huysum to A. N. van Haften, agent of the duke of Mecklenburg, the artist remarked with regard to one of two paintings which he was making for the duke: "the flower-piece is very far advanced; last year I couldn't get hold of a yellow rose, otherwise it would have been completed . . .".<sup>2</sup> From this statement we are fairly safe in concluding that he preferred to work after nature, as a consequence of which he might sometimes have had to wait quite a while for a particular flower to come into bloom. In order to paint rare examples, Van Huysum went every summer to Haarlem, a centre of flower cultivation and trade.

It is uncertain whether Van Huysum intended to say more with his decorative flower-pieces than what directly meets the eye. A few paintings do exist in which that was clearly the case. In the Amsterdams Historisch Museum hangs a flowerpiece of Van Huysum's bearing a text inscribed on the vase which reads (fig. 33a): "Aenmerck de leliën des velts, Salomo in al zijn heerlijkheit is niet bekleed geweest gelijk een van deze" (Consider the lilies of the field, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these).<sup>3</sup> On the face of it this biblical





33a. Jan van Huysum, *Flower-piece*, Amsterdam, Amsterdams Historisch Museum.



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Flower-piece

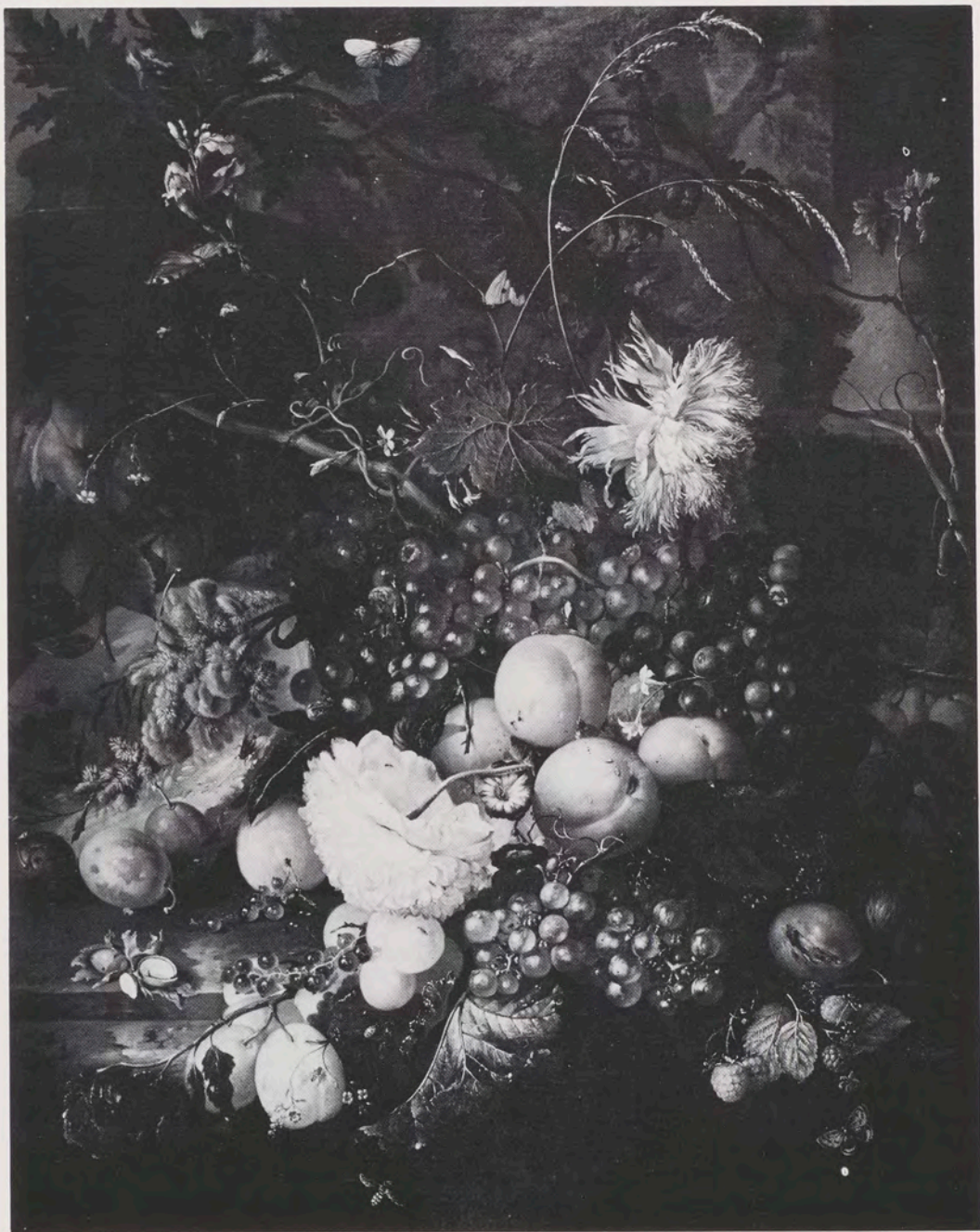
reference would seem to allude to the beauty of flowers above that of men. The quotation comes however from a longer biblical passage and when considered in context has a deeper meaning: "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6, 28-29). The text in this painting must therefore be interpreted as an admonition against concerning oneself overly with earthly matters, for which God will provide; one must concentrate on one's spiritual well-being. Perhaps a hint from Van Huysum intended for contemporaries who were too involved with material wealth?

Van Huysum had many followers, among whom his brother Jacob. The latter lived in London for two years where he copied works of his elder brother Jan and sold them in great quantities. There are therefore many copies in circulation of Van Huysum's paintings.


TvL

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1. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunst-schilders en schilderessen*, vol. 2, The Hague 1751, 14.
  2. F. Schlie, "Sieben Briefe und eine Quittung", *Oud Holland* 18 (1900), 141: "... het bloemstuckye is heel ver geavanceert, voorleede yaaer niet kennen een geele roos kreygen anders hadde het afgeweest..." The receipt referred to shows that Van Huysum received 200 Dutch guilders for these two paintings on June 9th, 1744. For the time this was an exceptionally high sum.
  3. J.N. van Wessem, "Jan van Huysum (1682-1749). Bloemstilleven (1723)", *Openbaar Kunstbezit* 5 (1961), 21.









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## Jan van Huysum

Amsterdam 1682 — Amsterdam 1749

34

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### Fruit and flowers on a marble ledge

Canvas, 82.5 x 64.5 cm.

Private collection, New Zealand

This fruit-piece with flowers shows a general resemblance in composition to Van Huysum's *Flower-piece* (cat. no. 33) and is possibly the pendant to that work. Artists of the period, including Van Huysum, often produced paintings in pairs, because they could be so decorative. The rose, the peaches and the grapes form the major components of the work, both by their central position and by the way the light is concentrated upon them. It is obvious that the painter took pleasure in rendering the play of light upon the grapes.

Several architectural elements are visible in the middle ground, motifs, which are encountered fairly often in the work of this painter. Shrouded in half-darkness on the left side of the picture is a large Italian garden vase which displays two putti in high relief. At the upper right the composition is delimited by a column which extends beyond the picture plane. Further off in the distance the painting brightens somewhat into the grey-green tones of a woody landscape. The relatively light background in many of Van Huysum's works, often a landscape or an expanse of sky, was an innovation which in his own time was recognized as such.<sup>1</sup>

TvL

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1. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouberg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*, vol. 2, The Hague 1751, 17.







## Rachel Ruysch

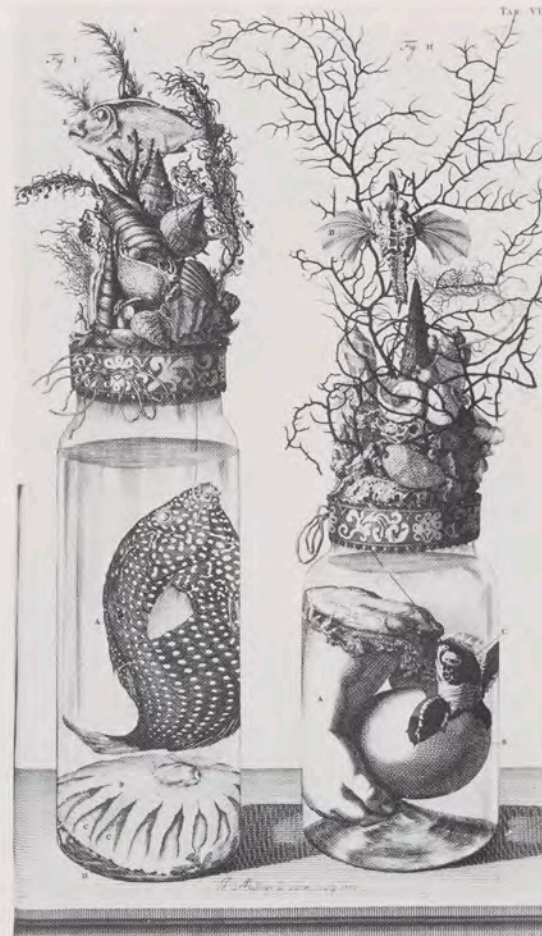
Amsterdam 1664 — Amsterdam 1750

35

### Still-life with a snake

Canvas, 52 x 40 cm.

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



35a. Josef Mulder, engraving from Frederik Ruysch, *Thesaurus animalium primus*, Amsterdam 1710

This painting, which like cat. no. 36 can be considered a youthful work of Rachel Ruysch dating from the 1680's,<sup>1</sup> contains to an even larger extent than comparable works, an "unreal" atmosphere. Not only are the proportions between the plants and animals depicted unnatural but Ruysch has also placed all sorts of animals which in nature would never be found together in this way (and in fact bear enmity to one another) in close proximity. The grasshopper in particular is too large in comparison both to the grass snake which looms ominously above it and to the two mating snails at its left. The smaller snake with protruding tongue is too small when compared to the large snail on a leaf of the flowering thistle plant to the right of the canvas. The field mouse ought also to be larger than the grasshopper in the centre. The way in which the various insects and reptiles are rendered suggests that they were painted after prepared examples. Each detail is visible; even in their flight each leg and wing of the butterflies and grasshoppers can be discerned.

In the light of the academic milieu in which Rachel Ruysch was raised, her scientific manner of description does not seem surprising. Her father Frederik Ruysch, was an eminent professor of anatomy and botany who owned a diverse collection of natural curiosities of which he also had engravings made.<sup>2</sup> These he published shortly after 1700 in instalments of his *Thesaurus animalium* and his *Thesaurus anatomicus*. As is clearly stated on the engraving by Josef Mulder illustrated here, these curiosities were engraved *ad vivum*, that is to say after nature (fig. 35a). One may assume that Rachel Ruysch profited by her father's collection and often painted after natural specimens.

TvL

1. [J.G. van Gelder], *Catalogue of the collection of Dutch and Flemish still-life pictures bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward*. Oxford (Ashmolean Museum) 1950, no. 78.
2. Jaromir Sip, "Notities bij het stilleven van Rachel Ruysch", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 19 (1968), 157-170.







## Rachel Ruysch

Amsterdam 1664 — Amsterdam 1750

36

### Arrangement of flowers by a tree trunk

Canvas, 92.8 x 69.9 cm. Signed Rachel Ruysch  
Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum



36a. Juriaen Pool, *The painter himself with his wife Rachel Ruysch and one of their children*, Düsseldorf, Stadtgeschichtliches Museum

In her time Rachel Ruysch was a famous painter.<sup>1</sup> Her flower still-lives were coveted not only in Holland but also abroad, particularly for their inventive compositions and her careful handling of the brush. In 1708 she was appointed court painter by Johann Wilhelm, elector of the Palatinate of the Rhine, which meant that, in principle from that moment on all her paintings were intended for his personal collection. In this illustrious capacity she made a number of visits, in 1710 and 1713, to the court at Düsseldorf.

Rachel Ruysch's husband, the portrait painter Juriaen Pool, also profited by her association with this patron of the arts. At the request of Johann Wilhelm he painted a portrait of his wife sitting at a table upon which is displayed a bouquet of flowers characteristic of those depicted in her paintings. Pool portrayed himself standing behind her and pointing to a still-life on an easel, while one of their ten children holds up a medallion exhibiting the portrait of the elector (fig. 36a).<sup>2</sup> Johann Wilhelm was never to see the result of his commission. He died just as the painting was finished and ready to be despatched from Amsterdam.

All of these details of the life of Rachel Ruysch have been preserved for us by the biographer of artists Johan van Gool, who had learned them from the artist, as he himself tells us.<sup>3</sup> That was in 1748, when the artist was 84 years of age and apparently still at the easel. The many laudatory pages which Van Gool devoted to her in his book are one reflection of the reputation which Rachel Ruysch enjoyed in her own day.

The Glasgow *Arrangement of flowers by a tree trunk* must, like cat. no. 35, be counted among her youthful works. Neither work is dated, but by comparison with similar compositions which do bear dates, we can ascertain that both these works were probably executed during the 1680's.<sup>4</sup>

It was certainly through Willem van Aelst, of whom Rachel Ruysch was a pupil from 1680 to 1683, that she became acquainted with the work of the recently deceased (1678) painter Otto Marseus van Schrieck.<sup>5</sup> It was the work of this artist (see for example fig. 36b) that she was emulating in both early still-lives exhibited here.<sup>6</sup> Van Schrieck had an unflagging enthusiasm for various species of (usually small) animals, which in the society of Dutch artists in Rome, the "Bentvueghels" (birds of a flock), gave him the nickname "Snuffelaer" (ferreter). He was in fact the initiator of the type of still-life termed by Laurens J. Bol the





36b. Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Still-life with thistles*, Private collection, England.



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Arrangement of flowers by a tree trunk

"forests and dunesoil with lots of little animals".<sup>7</sup>

These outdoor still-lives are usually built up around a tree trunk or on a patch of mossy ground and comprise, in addition to flowers and toadstools, all sorts of insects, snails, reptiles and sometimes a single small mammal; all of which in a combination that rarely or never would occur in nature. Ruysch's Glasgow painting presents us with such a scene which together with several toadstools, butterflies and smaller insects, a snail and a lizard holding a butterfly in its mouth form the accessories of this flower arrangement. The view of nature demonstrated in this picture is curious, just as that reflected in Van Schrieck's works had been. The scene as a whole seems unreal, both because the proportions between the various plants and animals are unnatural and because the vegetation is rendered in a somewhat stylized manner.

However interesting the rather bizarre works of Rachel Ruysch's youth may be, conceived in the footsteps of Van Schrieck, it is not to these that she owes her reputation. She is most famous for her later flower still-lives: bouquets in subdued hues, usually asymmetrically arranged at the top and rendered with attention to the play of light and dark on the glass vases.<sup>8</sup> In the family portrait mentioned above, Juriaen Pool shows us a modest example of such a work.

TvL

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1. M.H. Grant, *Rachel Ruysch*, Leigh-on-Sea 1956.
  2. Juriaen Pool also painted another portrait of his wife. This work is in the Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam (see mus. cat. *Catalogus schilderijen tot 1800*, Rotterdam [Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen] 1962; inv. no. 1672) as is also Pool's portrait of her father, the famous professor of anatomy and botany, Frederik Ruysch (inv. no. 1673).
  3. Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen . . .*, vol. 1, The Hague 1750, 210-233 and 234-235 (Juriaen Pool).
  4. Grant, op. cit. (note 1), 27 (no. 22). Cf. for example *A tree trunk surrounded with wild flowers of 1685* in the Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum (mus. cat. cit. [note 2], inv. no. 1751).
  5. Van Schrieck had for some time collaborated with Van Aelst in Italy and returned together with him to Holland in 1657.
  6. As a consequence of Ruysch's early emulation of the works of Van Schrieck, certain attributions are doubtful.
  7. Houbraken, vol. 1, 282. Bol 1969, 335.
  8. Van Gool, op. cit. (note 3) totally neglects to mention Ruysch's early works in the vein of Van Schrieck.







## Daniël Seghers and Erasmus Quellinus II

Antwerp 1590 — Antwerp 1661

Antwerp 1607 — Antwerp 1678

37

### A garland of flowers with the Education of the Virgin

Canvas, 112.5 x 94 cm. Signed D. Seghers Soctis JESV

Worcester, Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum



37a. Daniël Seghers, *Flower-piece with empty cartouche*, Madrid, Prado.

This type of flower painting is usually called a garland but it actually consists of a number of separate bouquets which appear to be attached to a sculptured stone cartouche. In the centre of the cartouche a religious scene or portrait is presented in a space especially reserved for this purpose. Although it occasionally happens that the flowers are painted around an already existing representation, usually the central motif is added afterwards. Evidence of this is provided by a number of garlands with a cartouche in which the space in the middle was left empty (fig. 37a).

Seghers, who was a member of the Jesuit order, developed this theme to a personally recognizable style and executed a great number of such representations. Before him such typically Flemish flower still-lives were made by Jan Brueghel, nicknamed "Velvet" Breughel, who was Seghers' teacher from 1610 to 1613. Breughel however depicted the flowers as a wreath around the central representation and did not employ architectural ornaments on which to hang them. As a specialist in flower painting he left the figural work, just as Seghers did, to another specialist. He collaborated on several occasions with Rubens who in these cases painted the figures.<sup>1</sup>

A similar collaboration also took place between Rubens and Frans Snyders which resulted in a very different sort of *Madonna with garlands* (fig. 37b). The Madonna and the architecture in this work are rendered very monumentally. Snyders' garlands here consist entirely of fruits and vegetables other painters often composed them of fruit and flowers, while Seghers used exclusively flowers. He usually chose flowers which were cultivated at the time in Flanders and had a particular preference for roses and tulips, as in the Worcester painting. In contrast to other artists Seghers rendered the flowers either as buds or in full bloom and never wilting or with falling petals.

Erasmus Quellinus II was in this case the artist responsible for the central motif, a grisaille of St. Anna and her daughter, the Virgin Mary, who together form a representation of the Education of the Virgin. Originally Quellinus had depicted a different theme, namely the Virgin Mary with Jesus in her lap. We can still see the contours of the baby Jesus with the naked eye (fig. 37c). The reason for this change of subject is not known.<sup>2</sup>





37b. Cornelis Galle after Rubens and Frans Snyders, *Madonna with garlands of fruit*, engraving





37c. Erasmus Quellinus II, *A garland of flowers with the Education of the Virgin* (infrared photograph, detail), Worcester, Mass., Worcester Art Museum.

The entire composition of flowers on the cartouche and the female figures in the niche, as well as the manner in which they are painted, present the viewer with a *trompe l'oeil*. Evidence that this effect was much appreciated by Seghers' contemporaries can be found, among other places, in the following poem by Vondel:

The spirit of Seghers is a bee,  
In which the Netherlands rejoice.  
It sucks its honied delicacy  
And fragrance from many blossoms choice.  
Onto his painting came flying a bee  
Seduced by its redolence and blush,  
And cried: Nature you must forgive me:  
I was deceived by that florid brush.<sup>3</sup>

The content of this poem is a cliché which was often used in the 17th century, and is an allusion to an ancient anecdote. Pliny described how the illustrious painter Zeuxis was able to render grapes so realistically as to even deceive the birds.<sup>4</sup>

TvL

1. For example a *Madonna in a garland* in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich.
2. Seghers did not sell his paintings but gave them away. Most often he made them on commission of his superiors for friends or supporters of the monastery. On the basis of a list which Seghers himself drew up we presume that the present garland was intended for his nephew De Coninck. The latter's mother, a sister of Seghers, was named Anna. Possibly this is the reason that the original Virgin Mary was altered to represent St. Anna. See Walter Couvreur, "Daniël Seghers' inventaris van door hem geschilderde bloemstukken", *Gentse bijdragen tot de kunstgeschiedenis en de oudheidkunde* 20 (1967), 115. Mus. cat. *European paintings*, Worcester (Worcester Museum of Art) 1974, 212-216. On the basis of Couvreur's checklist the painting can be dated to about 1645.
3. Joost van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep-Unger, vol. 1648-1651, Leiden (n. d.), 175-176:

De geest van Zegers is een by,  
Waer op de Nederlanders roemen.  
Zy zuight haer honigheleckerny  
En geur uit allerhande bloemen.  
Een By quam op zijn schildery  
En geur en kleuren aangevlogen,  
En riep: Natuur vergeef het my:  
Dat bloempenseel heeft my bedrogen.

4. Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, lib. xxxv, 65 (see cat. no. 25 [Gijsbrechts]).









38a. Alessandro Vittoria, *Saint Sebastian* (1566), New York, Metropolitan Museum.

## David Bailly (attributed to)

Leiden 1584 — Leiden 1657

38

### Still-life of sculptures and books

Panel, 42 x 68 cm.

St. Gilgen, F.C. Butôt collection

This painting, which was discovered not long ago, has quite reasonably been attributed to David Bailly. It was probably executed in the late 1620's, and shows a number of interesting objects that have been put on a simple table.<sup>1</sup> There are books, both closed and open, two rolls of paper or parchment, a magnifying glass, a compass, a shell, a glass sphere, and a skull, and we are also faced by three pieces of sculpture.

The standing naked figure, half turning round, turns out to be a cast of a little bronze statue of Sebastian by the Italian sculptor Alessandro Vittoria (fig. 38a). This little statue is, in its turn, a reduction made in 1566 from a life-sized work by the same artist in the San Francesco della Vigna in Venice.<sup>2</sup> The bust which marks the middle of the composition was much better-known in the 17th century. It was generally, but erroneously, taken to be a portrait of the Stoic philosopher Seneca.<sup>3</sup> Rubens had a copy of it, to which he accorded a prominent place in the group portrait known as the *Four Philosophers*.

The pseudo-Seneca appears in several paintings, and was undoubtedly included with a specific intention.<sup>4</sup> There are also several drawings and engravings of it. In 1624 David Bailly portrayed the head in a pen drawing, a drawing that has a clear connexion with the Seneca on the painting exhibited here (fig. 38b). We also know a head of Seneca drawn by Jacques de Gheyn II, whose influence on Bailly will be discussed shortly.<sup>5</sup>

Jochen Becker has interpreted the pseudo-Seneca on the panel ascribed to Bailly as an example to young painters, both artistic and, at the same time, ethical. He reinforced the second aspect by referring to the treatise *De brevitate vitae*, in which Seneca urges man to draw back from the "imaginary phantom of fame" and prepare himself in wisdom and virtue for his death.<sup>6</sup> Seneca's popularity in 17th-century art clearly stems from a return to the basic ideas of Stoic philosophy, ideals which were propagated in the Netherlands by people such as Coornhert and the renowned Justus Lipsius (in the painting by Rubens mentioned above it is Lipsius who occupies the most distinguished position). The concepts of reason, and of the control of the emotions, held sovereign sway even in the face of death, as Seneca had demonstrated superlatively when, on Nero's command, he slit his veins open, and these concepts were central not only to the Stoic world of ideals, but also to that of 17th-century Neostoicism.<sup>7</sup>



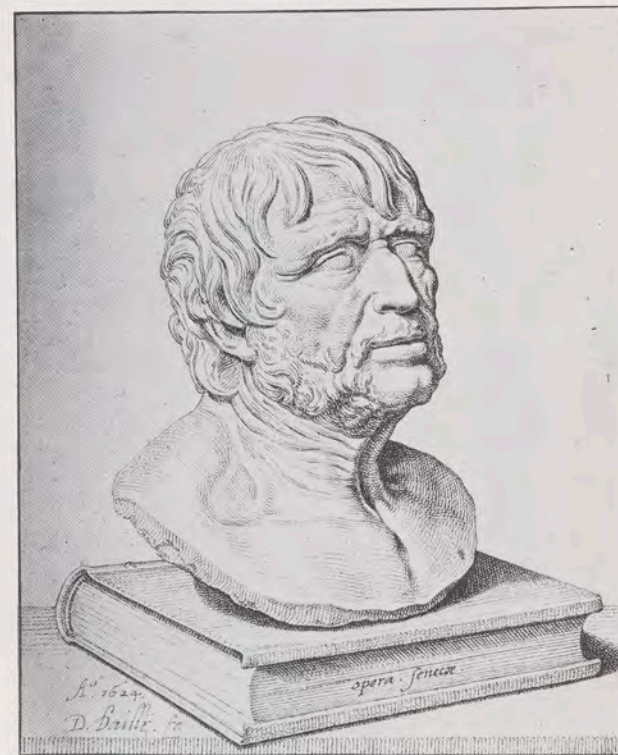
The third plaster cast in the vanitas still-life is leaning against the bust of Seneca; the observer sees the profile from above. It depicts the head of one member of the Laocoön group, a Hellenistic sculpture that was dug up in Rome in 1506 and from that moment on created a furore amongst artists and humanists.<sup>8</sup>

Laocoön was a Trojan priest who besought the Trojan citizens not to drag the wooden horse of the Greeks into the city. Shortly afterwards, he and his two sons were strangled by snakes, an event which the Trojans construed as being ominous, and on which they based their decision to let the now infamous horse in.

Various interpretations of the Laocoön group were proposed in the Renaissance.<sup>9</sup> Some scholars wanted to read heroic agony into it, the maintenance of stoical tranquillity of mind in the teeth of destruction. Counter-reformation theologians went so far as to recommend the study of the Laocoön. Artists who had to depict other instances of resigned suffering, such as the passion of Christ or the martyrdom of certain saints, were well-advised to have a good look at this antique work of art. Sebastian, too, was named in connexion with the antique example.<sup>10</sup>

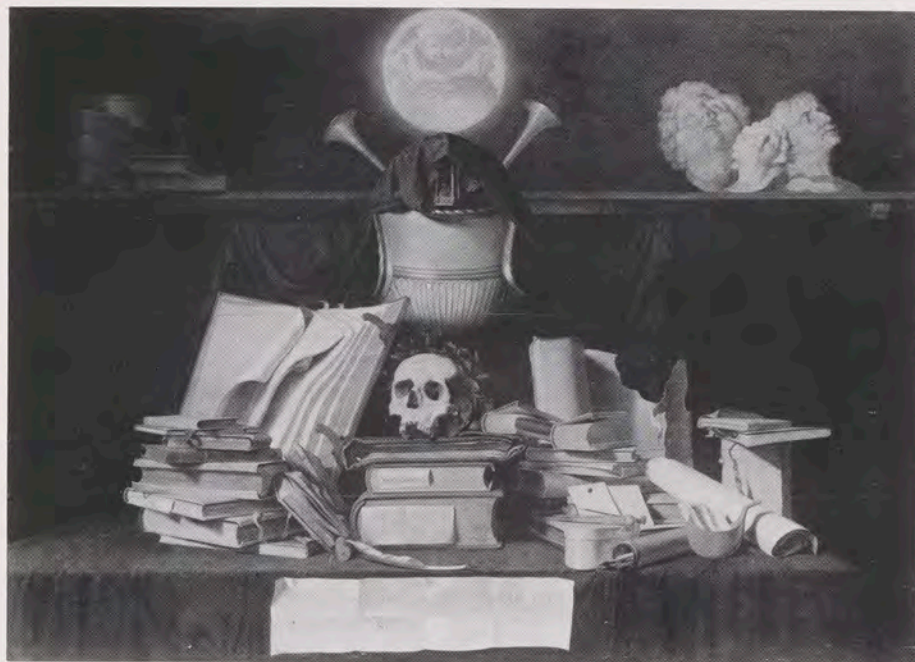
It is still not clear why the head of one of the sons, in preference to that of the main figure in the Laocoön group, should have been used in this vanitas still-life (and also in other works of art, incidentally). But it certainly seems logical, bearing in mind the conspicuous juxtaposition to the pseudo-Seneca, to assume that the Stoic connotations of the Laocoön current in the 16th century obtain here. The more so, since the statuette of Sebastian falls in line with this inference perfectly. This saint was universally recognized as no less an example of patience and constancy.<sup>11</sup>

B.A. Heezen-Stoll has rightly indicated the connexion with a 1621 still-life by Jacques de Gheyn II, whose subject-matter she characterized, on very plausible grounds, as being Neostoical (fig. 38c). The most striking aspect is the fact of meeting again the combination of the bust of Seneca and the head of Laocoön's son in De Gheyn, though De Gheyn has added a third head, which cannot be identified. Here, too, Seneca and the son of Laocoön are leaning against each other for support, and it is difficult to imagine otherwise than that Bailly — assuming he is indeed the painter of our still-life — took his inspiration for this



38b. David Bailly, *Pseudo-Seneca*, drawing (1624), Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet





38c. Jacques de Gheyn II, *Still-life with sculptures and books*, (1621), New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery.

detail from De Gheyn.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of the other objects on the painting ascribed to Bailly cannot be explained along the same lines. The skull is, of course, the most undisguised symbol of human mortality, and its function here is to brand the painting as being a *vanitas*. The shell, the glass sphere, and the magnifying glass can be seen as symbols of vanity.<sup>13</sup> Books have an important place in Stoic thought: worthy reading-matter makes a man wise, and study is an essential part of the virtuous life. But the volumes we see here do not reveal their titles, and the two open books have less to do with the intellect than with art. Presumably they are sketch books.

The figure in the oblong book against the wall cannot be identified, in contrast to the figure in the other book. He seems to be one of the numerous imitations of one of Frans Hals's well-known types, namely the *rommelpot* player.<sup>14</sup> The *rommelpot* player was often a sort of fool, and is usually recognizable as such by his facial expression and a fool's fox tail attached to his hat (fig. 38d).<sup>15</sup> On Shrove Tuesday, but also on other occasions, he appeared with his *rommelpot*, an earthenware jar sealed off by a membrane of pig's bladder through which a damp reed was stuck (revolving the reed, or punching it up and down, produced a dreadful noise).

In an emblem in Jan van der Veen's *Zinne-beelden* of 1642 a *rommelpot* player figures as the classic example of coarseness and absurdity, someone whose "malle kallery", addled prattle, makes even Cicero and Plato give in ("Cicero en Plato doet wijken").<sup>16</sup> The *rommelpot* player as a book illustration in the *vanitas* still-life represents roughly the opposite extreme to what is being proclaimed by the bust of Seneca: here vulgar folly is placed opposite noble wisdom. How we are intended to understand this antithesis in the context of the complete iconography, however, does not make itself obvious.

Finally a word about the composition of the painting. The elements have been arranged along the course of a gently undulating line. The same sort of rhythm is perceptible in a pen drawing that Bailly contributed in 1624 to an album amicorum (fig. 38e), though here the number of objects was restricted to four, which simplified the composition considerably.<sup>17</sup> The content, too, of both representation is similar.





38d. After Frans Hals, *Rommelpot player*, Present location unknown





38e. David Bailly, *Vanitas*, drawing from the *Album amicorum* of Cornelis de Glarges (1624), The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

1. See L.J. Bol and G.S. Keyes, *Netherlandish paintings and drawings from the collection of F.C. Butf*, London 1981, 44, no. 5.
2. Francesco Cessi, *Alessandro Vittoria bronzista (1525-1608)*, Trento 1960, 38-39, 93, fig. 22. John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque sculpture*, London 1963, catalogue volume, 115-116, plate volume, pl. 126.
3. For this bust see Wolfram Prinz, "The Four Philosophers by Rubens and the Pseudo-Seneca in seventeenth-century painting", *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1973), 410-428. More versions of this antique bust are known than of any other, namely over forty.
4. Ibid. For other examples see J.G. van Gelder, "Caspar Netscher's portret van Abraham van Lennep uit 1672", *Zeventigste Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum. Liber Amicorum I.H. van Eeghen*, Amsterdam 1978, 227-238.
5. For De Gheyn's drawing (Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen) see J. Bruyn, "David Bailly, 'fort bon peintre en pourtraicts et en vie coye'", *Oud Holland* 66 (1951), 148-164 and 212-227, fig. 3.
6. Jochen Becker, "Das Buch im Stilleben — das Stilleben im Buch", *Stilleben in Europa*, 448-478, esp. 456.
7. See B.A. Heezen-Stoll, "Een vanitasstilleven van Jacques de Gheyn II uit 1621: afspiegeling van neostoische denkbelden", *Oud Holland* 93 (1979), 217-250. For the death of Seneca as a theme in the fine arts see A. Pigler, *Barockthemen*, vol. 2, Budapest 1956, 409-410.
8. Margarete Bieber, *Laocoön. The influence of the group since its rediscovery*, Detroit 1967. Matthias Winner, "Zum Nachleben des Laokoon in der Renaissance", *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen. Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, N.F. 16 (1974), 83-121. Heezen-Stoll, op. cit. (note 7), 237.
9. L.D. Ettlinger, "Exemplum Doloris. Reflections on the Laocoön group", *De Artibus Opuscula XL. Essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky*, New York 1961, 121-126, esp. 126.
10. Ibid. Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori* . . . (1564), in: *Trattati d'arte del cinquecento* a cura di Paola Barocchi, vol. 2, Bari 1961, 42.
11. John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands*, vol. 2, Nieuwkoop and Leiden 1974, 436.
12. Heezen-Stoll, op. cit. (note 7), 241-242.
13. Ibid. The writer links this compass with the one on De Gheyn's still-life, which she explains as a sign of constancy: 227 and 241.
14. Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, vol. 1, London 1970, 36-37; vol. 3, London 1974, 116-119, figs. 69-74. Bailly's 1651 *Vanitas* Leiden, Lakenhal) includes a drawing after Hals's lute-player. See Bruyn op. cit. (note 5), 217-219.
15. The fool's fox tail is easier to see on the book illustration than in this painting, which is a distant derivation of Hals's original design.
16. Jan van der Veen, *Zinne-beelden, oft Adams appel*, ed. Amsterdam 1659, 166-169.
17. Bruyn, op. cit. (note 5), 157, fig. 1.







## Cornelis Brisé

Haarlem 1622 — Amsterdam 1665/70

39

### Vanitas still-life

Canvas, 107 x 90 cm. Signed and dated C. Brisé. A° 1665  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



39a. Cornelis Brisé, *Documents concerning the treasury of the city of Amsterdam* (1656), Amsterdam, Amsterdams Historisch Museum.

"Op een schilderij" (On a painting) is the simple enough title of a ten-line poem published by Joost van den Vondel in 1660 which now adds its contribution to a little art-historical problem for us.<sup>1</sup> The painting addressed is unknown, but we can nevertheless roughly imagine what it may have looked like, thanks to the still-life of 1665 by Cornelis Brisé on exhibition here. For Brisé included Vondel's poem in that still-life as a compelling eye-catcher.<sup>2</sup> The attentive reader sees that it corresponds with a number of the items shown.

In fact, this textual insertion implies that our still-life must have approximately the same contents, with perhaps also a similar appearance, as the painting that once inspired Vondel to write his verse. Maybe we are intended to surmise that Brisé is also the author of that unknown painting, of which his 1655 work would then be a variant proudly augmented with the very relevant poem, "proudly" because his poet was regarded as the greatest of his time. Vondel had already, in 1657, dedicated a little verse to a picture by Brisé who, like himself, worked in Amsterdam. The subject of this rendering, a trompe l'oeil, was the documents concerning the treasury of Amsterdam. It had been made for the new town hall, and is spoken of with admiration in all 17th-century descriptions of the city (fig. 39a).<sup>3</sup>

Poems in their hundreds were written on paintings, especially on portraits.<sup>4</sup> This genre originated in antiquity, and was, after a renaissance in the 16th century in Italy and France, to flourish profusely in 17th-century Holland. Vondel was one of the *littérateurs* who produced numbers of such occasional poems. It is typical for the period that the attention of the poets was always directed at the subjects and their moral implications and not at the execution of the paintings, except when obligatory compliments on a deceptive imitation of reality seemed to be called for. What is so special about Brisé's painting is that it was probably made in the first place because of the incorporated poem, whereas the poem in its turn had been made because of a (similar) painting. This last sequence of events was the rule, and the first sequence the exception.

Brisé has assembled his objects on the lid of a tomb in an apparently slovenly heap, which at second glance transpires to possess a good deal of balance, and structure. The objects are extremely varied. We can make out, *inter al.*, a spade, a turban (in the sense of an oriental tiara) surmounted by a crown, a lute,



bagpipes, some books and a globe of the world a plumed helmet and a cuirass, a cloth painted with flashes of lightning, a trumpet, a crozier, and finally a marotte (a baton with a bauble — often a little head of a fool — at the end), which was the standard attribute of the jester. The poem, which differs only by a few words from Vondel's original, goes like this:

Death equates both high and low,  
Middling and rich and poor just so.  
Dying is the common lot,  
Bookish knowledge and marotte  
Have equal wisdom in the grave.  
The digger's spade and bishop's stave,  
The bagpipes and the turban crown,  
Are just as fair when life's laid down.  
So let them bustle, those that will,  
It all ends up by standing still.<sup>5</sup>

Six of the objects in the painting are literally present in the poem, book, marotte, spade, crozier, bagpipes, and crowned turban.<sup>6</sup> The last line of the poem, literally "So stands it all, at long last, still", has a gratification of its own. Given the 17th-century infatuation with puns, allusions, and double meanings, it is not inconceivable that there should be a play on words here. "Stilstaand leven" (life standing still) was not an unusual name for still-life in 1660. Vondel was to speak of "stilstaende dingen" (things standing still) in a poem of 1663 on the still-lives of Willem Kalf.<sup>7</sup>

His poem "Op een schilderij" has the additional title "Sceptra ligonibus aequat", and these are words which found much employ in the 17th century, though usually with the addition, of "moors", making the motto "Mors sceptra ligonibus aequat". Death is the leveller who makes sceptre and pick, standing for king and artisan, alike. This theme can be found in tomb inscriptions, in emblematics, in prints (figs. 13a, 39b and 39c), and also, with countless variations, in Dutch compilations of proverbs, including those of the much-read Jacob Cats and Johan de Brune the Elder.<sup>8</sup>

The idea had been embodied previously in late medieval dances of death, but its origins lie much deeper. Artists of antiquity had pictured the equality in



*Pallida mors aequo pede sceptra ligonibus aequat,  
Et Regem ante aulas pulsat et ante casam.*

39b. "Mors sceptra ligonibus aequat", emblem from Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum* . . . , vol. 1 [Amhem 1611]



death of king and beggar, a theme that was formulated, for example, by Horace. "De bleke doodt klopt zoo wel aen der Koningen hoven, als aen der armen hutten" (Pale death knocks at the palaces of kings as at the hovels of the poor) — so runs the appropriate passage from Horace in Vondel's translation of 1654.<sup>9</sup>

It must be apparent that Vondel's poem "Op een schilderij" like Brisé's painting with this poem, belongs to the many variations of a very traditional theme. Vondel, moreover, gave that theme a traditional treatment. Brisé did not. His iconography is exceptional in that — and in the way in which — he quoted Vondel with his brush.<sup>10</sup>

EdJ

1. J. van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep-Unger, vol. 1657-1660, Leiden (n. d.), 354.
2. The similarity between Vondel's poem and Brisé's text, which seems to have escaped notice until now, was brought to our attention by Hilary Sayles.
3. Described in detail by Albert Blankert, *Amsterdams Historisch Museum. Schilderijen daterend van voor 1800*, Amsterdam 1975-1979, 61-63.
4. See J.A. Emmens, "Apelles en Apollo. Nederlandse gedichten op schilderijen in de 17de eeuw", in: *Verzameld werk*, vol. 3, Amsterdam 1981, 5-60.
5. The poem on Brisé's painting runs: "De doot stelt hoog en laag gelyck: / En 'tmiddelbaar en Arm en Ryk. / Het sterven is't gemeene lot, / De Boek Geleertheit en Marot / Zyn even schoon en wys in 't Graf / De Delvers Graaf en Bissopsstaf / De Zackpyp ende Tulbantskroon / Staen al int uiterst even schoon / Laat woelen al wat woelen wil / Soo staat het al ten lesten stil." Vondel, op. cit. (note 1), has "zet" instead of "stelt" (line 1), "wys en stom" instead of "schoon en wys" (line 5), and "De lier, en goude tulbantkroon" instead of "De Zackpyp ende Tulbantkroon" (line 7). There are also differences in spelling.
6. A vanitas of 1652 by Jan Davidsz. de Heem has the following text: "Hoe datje pijpt of hoeje fluyt, o Mensch dit is u erve, 't sy ryck, arm, geleert of bott, dat (leven) heeft moet sterve" (Howe'er you pipe or flute, o man, this birthright doth apply. Though rich or poor, refined or raw, all that (hath life) must die): Prague, Gal. Nostitz, cat. 1905, no.87. The intention is the same as that of the poem on Brisé's painting, but the text does not give a résumé of articles painted.
7. Lydia de Pauw-De Veen, *De begrippen "schilder", "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de zeventiende eeuw*, Brussels 1969, 142. See also cat. nocat. no. 11 (Kalf).
8. On tomb inscriptions, see: D. Roggen and J. Withof, "Cornelis Floris", *Gentsche bijdragen tot de kunstgeschiedenis* 8 (1942), 79-171, esp. 103 (tomb designed by Cornelis de Vriendt in





39c. Jacques de Gheyn II, "*Mors scepra ligonibus aequat*", drawing for the print (1599), London, British Museum



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Vanitas still-life

1557); emblematics: Henkel-Schöne, 1000, 1002, 1306 and 1432; prints: Ingvar Berström, "De Gheyn as a vanitas painter", *Oud Holland* 85 (1970), 143-157, esp. 149-150; proverbs: Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den ouden en nieuwen tyt* (ed. pr. 1632), in: *Alle de wercken*, vol. 1, ed. Amsterdam 1712, 664, and J. de Brune, *Nieuwe wyn in oude le'er-zacken*, Middelburg 1636, 297, 299, 300, 447.

9. Ingvar Bergström, "L'Egalité suprême", *L'Oeil*, no. 95 (November 1962), 24-31 and 94-95: "Dans la composition de Cornelis Brisé, la danse macabre s'est pour ainsi dire transposée en nature morte de vanitas" (95). Jan Bialostocki, *Stil und Ikonographie. Studien zur Kunstwissenschaft*, Dresden 1966, 189 and 218, note 5. Horace, *Carminum liber I*, iv, 13. Vondel, op. cit. (note 1), part 1652-1653, 60-193, esp. 72. Vondel dedicated his prose translation of Horace "aan de kunstgenooten van Sint Lukas, t'Amsterdam, schilders, beelthouwers, tekenaers, en hunne begunstigers" (to the art-companions of Saint Luke, in Amsterdam, painters, sculptors, draughtsmen, and their patrons). See also Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands . . . uyt het Italiaens vertaelt door D.P. Pers*, Amsterdam 1644, 93.
10. It is not easy to say why Brisé situated his still-life in a grotto-like place with a view through to a bare landscape. Perhaps he wished to suggest something in the nature of a burial chamber.







## Edwaert Collier

Breda ca. 1640 — after 1707

40

### Vanitas still-life

Canvas 50.5 x 60 cm. Signed E. Collier  
Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal



40a. Theodoor Matham, *Vanitas*, engraving (1622)

Edwaert Collier, who worked for quite some time in Leiden and is thought to have worked also in Haarlem and London, is known particularly for his *trompe l'oeils* (what the Dutch call “*bedriegertjes*” or deception-pieces) and his *vanitas* still-lives.<sup>1</sup> He had an extreme predilection for assimilating texts into his compositions. Almost all his *vanitas*-paintings include written sheets of paper of open books with an ample supply of reading-matter. The text rarely seem to have been chosen at hazard. Most of them refer directly to the transitoriness of human life, and some of them more indirectly.

In the still-life from the museum in Leiden we meet both kinds.<sup>2</sup> The paper attached to the stand with the globe of the world shows what we might call the “archetypal text” of all *vanitas* still-lives: “*Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*”, vanity of vanity, saith the Preacher . . . all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The rest of the texts, on the other hand, belong to the category in which the reader is lead by indirections to the same moral.

Leaving the words on the two globes out of consideration, there are three books to be examined, two large volumes and an oblong publication.<sup>3</sup> This last, a song book, has a made-up title that seems to be derivative of titles of song books that had indeed been printed: “*Cupidoos lust-hof / Amsterdamze Somer-vreugt / bestaende in verschijde nieuwe voysen-minne . . . Anno . . . 64 door de Vermartse liefhebbers tAmsterdam*” (Cupid’s pleasure-garden; Amsterdam summer delight, consisting of several new songs — amorous . . . Anno . . . 64 by the celebrated devotees, In Amsterdam). The title-page has been printed sideways, a layout which is also based on fantasy, but may at the same time have been intended to make things easier for the reader.<sup>4</sup>

The two large volumes occupy a carefully balanced place in the composition. They are the . . . *Seven boecken van die Joetsche oorloghe en de destructie van Jerusalem* (seven books of the history of the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem) by the late-antique historian Flavius Josephus, in an Antwerp edition with the date 1550, and *De weke der scheppinghe*, a Dutch translation of a then famous work of poetry, *La Sepmaine ou la creation du monde*, by the 16th-century French Calvinist Du Bartas.<sup>5</sup> This translation, by Wessel van den Boetelaer, was published in The Hague in 1622 and Vondel, who himself was influenced by Du Bartas, sang its praises in a eulogy.<sup>6</sup> Du Bartas’s influence on early 17th-century



Holland, however, did not confine itself to Vondel, and *La sepmaine* was translated into Dutch not once but three times.<sup>7</sup>

Educated Dutchmen will have been familiar with this high-flown description of all that creation-work, certainly if they came from Calvinist backgrounds. The same holds for Flavius Josephus's books, which were continually being reprinted, on the history of Jewry and the destruction of Jerusalem. But the fact of their being well-known was probably not Collier's overriding reason for giving these books pride of place in his representation. He will have chosen them for their title and their contents, because they drew attention to the problems of creation and destruction.

It is partly the lack of a 17th-century book on the theory of still-life that makes us incapable of knowing precisely how to set about reading a work such as Collier's (or another painter's). We do not know, for example, whether there is any rational connexion between form and content. Collier's composition, however, would lead us at least to suspect this. We can ask ourselves whether some intention does not lurk in the fact that the globe with the motto "vanitas vanitatum" is placed right in the central position behind the two large books and as it were rises above them.

We could regard this globe of the earth as the key to the meaning of the whole.<sup>8</sup> With the addition of the motto, which everyone must have known, the globe becomes the most unambiguous element in the group, in the same way as the skull often is in other still-lives. The globe is the vehicle of a message which can be readily condensed in the words "creation" and "destruction", words proclaimed also by the title-pages of the books by Flavius Josephus and Du Bartas.

The watch and the hour-glass, which is half-visible to the right of the globe, are scarcely less clear in meaning; they symbolize, of course, the march of time. And most of the other elements are easy to understand. The purse alludes to the ultimate valuelessness of money. The music hanging over the edge of the table, the flute, the violin with the broken string, and the lute (of which only a little bit can be seen) all indicate the parallel between the fleeting nature of music and that of time.<sup>9</sup>

Since long before Collier took up his paint-brush, a display of musical instruments as a metaphor of transience had been a favourite subject in art. An



40b. Albrecht Dürer, *Young couple threatened by Death*, engraving.



## Niemandt en heeft tyvee Hemels.



Kiest een  
Alleen.

40c. "Nobody has two heavens", emblem from Adriaen Poirter, *Het masker vande werelddt afgetrocken*, Antwerp 1646

engraving by Theodoor Matham of 1622 provides us with an eloquent example (fig. 40a); in the background, a company of people is succumbing to earthly pleasures.<sup>10</sup> Matham's scene represents one specific form of vanity, the *voluptas*, which is expressed by Collier in the title of the long book exposed to view. The place of *Cupidoos lust-hof* in the context of a vanitas still-life is thrown into relief when we consider that the combination of love with death, which had been visualized in various ways since the Middle Ages, had certainly stood the test of time by the 17th century (fig. 40b).<sup>11</sup>

Only the celestial globe remains. In our opinion it must be understood figuratively as the opposite pole to the terrestrial globe. The symbols of things worldly and celestial, temporal and eternal, ephemeral and everlasting, are placed in direct opposition to one another here.<sup>12</sup> In emblem books, the contrast between heaven and earth has more than once been represented by globes.<sup>13</sup> In Catholic emblems, the choice remains open. One can choose between a worldly life or a life directed towards heaven. Adriaen Poirter, the popular Flemish Jesuit father, gave the alternatives to an angel with a huge pair of scales who, assisted by personifications of earthly and heavenly love, is weighing the terrestrial globe up against the celestial globe. The celestial one is unmistakably heavier; it literally carries more weight, and must naturally be chosen (fig. 40c).<sup>14</sup>

Beyond this obvious antithesis, it remains unclear what Edwaert Collier intended to express in his painted globes, in particular the celestial globe. In all probability he was not Roman catholic. As a Protestant, he could quite possibly have wanted to imply some notion about earning a place in heaven. In Collier's time there were, as there are today divergent opinions as to the terms of admission laid down by the hereafter. Two of these spring to mind. Collier may have meant the celestial globe to symbolize a heaven which could be earned by the person himself who led an upright life. But he could equally well have intended the globe to symbolize a heaven which, according to a different theological view, was exclusively destined for those who had been chosen since the beginning of time.

Collier's painting comes from his early period, at least, that can be deduced from comparisons with other works by his hand, *inter al* in Amsterdam (fig. 40d) and New York, which are dated 1662.<sup>15</sup> A vanitas by a comparatively unknown



painter called A. Bernardt, which bears the year 1664 (fig. 40e), could give us a closer indication of the date of the Collier from Leiden.<sup>16</sup> The still-lives resemble each other so closely that it is hard to imagine that the one was not based on the other. If Bernardt painted his following Collier's example, then Collier's vanitas must have been made in or before 1664. In that case it may fairly be asked whether the half-legible year "... 64" on the imaginary song book is purely accidental.

EdJ

1. Bergstrom 1956, 180-181. Bol 1969, 296-297 and 394.
2. B. Haak, "De vergankelijkheidssymboliek in zestiende-eeuwse portretten en zeventiende-eeuwse stillevens in Holland II", *Antiek* 2 (1968), 399-411, esp. 410. Exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden, Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal), 1970, no.9.
3. For books in still-lives, Jochen Becker, "Das Buch im Stilleben — das Stilleben im Buch", *Stilleben in Europa*, 448-478 and 589-594. See also Gustav Bergmann, "Buchtitel als Sprachelemente auf Gemälden", *Philobiblon* 18 (1974), 256-271.
4. Cf. *Cupido's Lusthof, ende der Amoureuze boogaert*, Amsterdam [ca 1613]; *Amsterdamsche Vreughde-stroom, bestaende in zoete... deuntjes...*, Amsterdam 1654; *Cupidoos Lust-hof, bestaende in verscheyde nieuwe voysen minne-klachten*, Amsterdam 1662.
5. *Flavii Josephi | des vermaerdt Joetschen | hystorie schrijvers seven boecken van die Joetsche oorloghe en de destructie van | Jerusalem...*, Antwerp..., Claes van de Woueren, Anno MCCCCCL [should be: 1553]. The portrait of a man which is propped up against the book by Flavius Josephus perhaps claims to represent this author. *De weke der scheppinghe van Willem de Salluste, Heere van Bartas, vertaelt door Wessel van den Boetzelaer...* [The Hague] 1622.
6. J. van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep-Unger, vol. 1621-1625, Leiden (n.d.), 48. W.A.P. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah I*, Zwolle 1956, 45 and 56-57. Anna Roemers Visscher (*Alle de gedichten*, ed. Nic. Beets, vol.2, Utrecht 1881, 109) and Constantijn Huygens (*De gedichten*, ed. J.A. Worp, vol.1, Groningen 1892, 213-214) also composed eulogies on this translation of Du Bartas.)
7. Other translations: by Theodore van Liefvelt in 1609 and Zacharias Heyns in 1616-28.
8. This globe of the world was made around 1614 by Pieter van den Kerre and Abraham Goos (information from James A. Welu, Worcester, Mass.) It also appears on other paintings by Collier.
9. Pieter Fischer, *Music in paintings of the Low Countries in the 16th and 17th centuries*, Amsterdam 1975, 45-72. Other aspects are also dealt with here. Words such as these by the



40d. Edwaert Collier, *Vanitas still-life*, (1662), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



# Vanitas still-life



40e. A. Bernardt, *Vanitas still-life* (1664), Present location unknown

emblem writer Jan van der Veen spring to mind: "De vedel of fiool die wert God betert, meer / Gebruyckt tot ydelheyt, als tot Godts lof en eer" (The violin or fiddle serves vanity no less — God save the mark — than God himself to glorify and bless) (*Zinne-beelden, oft Adams appel*, ed. Amsterdam 1659, in the appendix *Raetselen* 17).

10. Fischer, op. cit. (note 9), 63-64.
11. See for example exhib. cat. *Images of love and death in late medieval and renaissance art*, Michigan (The University of Michigan Museum of Art), 1975-76. Sometimes a depiction of Venus is used in 17th-century still-lives to accentuate the relationship between love and death, *inter al.* by Jacques de Claeuw (Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle).
12. Th. A. G. Wilberg Vignau-Schuurman, *Die emblematischen Elemente im Werke Joris Hoefnagles* vol. 1 Leiden 1969, 147 and 140. In this connexion see also cat. no. 45 (Van Streeck).
13. John B. Knipping, *Iconography, of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands* vol. 1, Nieuwkoop and Leiden 1974, 42. Henkel-Schöne, 42.
14. Adrianus Poirters, *Het masker vande wereldt afgetrocken* (ed. pr. 1646), Antwerp 1714, 56-58.
15. Rijksmuseum, A 3471; Metropolitan Museum, 71.19.
16. Bernardt's painting was auctioned at Sotheby's in London on June 14, 1939, no. 152.







## Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts

Active between 1659 and 1678

41

### Vanitas still-life

Canvas 87.5 x 69.5 cm. Signed and dated Cornelius Gijsbrechts. A. 1669  
Private collection, The Netherlands



41a. School of Frans van Mieris the Elder, *Allegory of transitoriness*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Vanitas still-lives come in many guises, as we can see from this exhibition. The means used to visualize the idea of death, and the degree of intensity, vary from example to example.<sup>1</sup> This still-life by Cornelius Gijsbrechts is a good example of what we might call an undisguised vanitas. The central position of the skull, the most obvious symbol of death, establishes the tone right at the outset.<sup>2</sup>

Other elements, grouped around the skull, emphasize its macbre expressiveness: a candlestick with the last guttering stump of candle, a pipe, pipe-lighter, and paper of tobacco, and octagonal passglass with beer (the rings on the communal glass indicated the limit imposed on each partaker), a wickerwork bottle and an hour-glass, a shell, a mussel-shell with a pipe for blowing bubbles, one soap bubble in it and two floating upwards, also — partly under the skull — a pocket-violin (the kind dancing-masters carried around with them), and finally a large document with a seal on which the words "Wir Bürgermeistere" are legible.

The vanitas-meaning of the violin and the smoker's requisites has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The candle burning out was a much-used image of human life nearing its end, both in art and in literature.<sup>4</sup> Equally frequent use was made of the hour-glass, which indicates the fleetingness of time, and the soap-bubble things, which refer to the well-known expression "homo bulla", man is as a soap bubble. A child is often shown in genre painting actively blowing bubbles, and there may or may not be a skull nearby (fig. 41a). In drawings and prints the words "homo bulla" are usually added explicitly, as in Jacques de Gheyn II's allegory on the democratizing effect of death (fig. 39b).<sup>5</sup>

The function of some elements in Gijsbrechts' vanitas is less apparent. The purpose of the large shell in the foreground is certainly not self-evident. The tall passglass with its residue of beer probably alludes to the flatness of this remnant, and suggests that the strength has gone out of it. At the same time, however it gives rise to thoughts on the fragility of glass as a material a motif often played on in symbolism.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the concept "water of life" (Revelation 22:1 and 17) is intended in the wickerwork bottle as there are a few still-lives in which a bottle bears the label "aqua vitae".<sup>7</sup> And the document with the superscription "Wir Bürgermeistere" can apply to the intrinsic valuelessness of such letters *sub specie aeternitatis*, or it can symbolize the ultimate fate of the highly-placed, such as



burgomasters, which is no different from that of ordinary mortals.<sup>8</sup>

The only indisputably hopeful motif in the whole collection is put forward by the ears of corn entwining the skull, which are symbols of the resurrection after death. This is stated time and again in prints and emblems. The emblem writer and publisher of Zwolle, Zacharias Heyns, for example, describes an escutcheon bearing the skull with ears of corn, situated in front of the city gate through which all men will some time have to pass.<sup>9</sup> "Resurrection is a new city, built from the ground up, which is open to all people, where both the evil and the good shall have to appear. Before the gate to the city stands its coat of arms, which is a death's-head lying on the earth out of which new grain grows, with these words:

Melior putrefacta resurget

Just as the seed when scattered, and rotted in the earth,  
Through death itself is altered, and to new ears gives birth,  
Which bloom in greater beauty, and whose grains give increase:  
So fares it with the pious man whose short-lived death shall cease"

Heyns adds that whereas the godly shall inherit eternal life, the resurrection of sinners leads only to damnation.

We find the same thought developed in Camerarius, partially even using the same words. Interestingly enough, Camerarius's illustration, which bears the motto "Mors vitae initium" (fig. 41b), shows us three elements on top of each other which, in the painting by Gijsbrechts, have been placed in a receding diagonal, i.e., the candlestick with its guttering candle, the skull with the ears of corn, and the hour-glass.<sup>10</sup>

To take a niche as the setting for a still-life, and in particular a skull, could by no means be called a novelty in 1669, when Gijsbrechts conceived this work. Jan Gossaert did it as early as 1517, on a panel that constitutes the back of the so-called Madonna of Carondelet (fig. 41c), whilst Jacques de Gheyn II applied the principle in 1603, in the earliest fully Dutch vanitas known to us (fig. 41d). After Gijsbrechts, we meet this setting in, for example, Pieter Roesetraten and Adriaen Coorte.<sup>11</sup>

A painted recess lent itself to the creation of visual illusions and interesting contrasts of light and dark. Gijsbrechts had undisputedly succeeded in making light and shaded parts blend subtly into each other. In addition to this, he has



41b. "Mors vitae initium", emblem from Joachim Camerarius, *Nucleus emblematum* . . . , vol. 1 [Arnhem 1611]





41c. Jan Gossaert, *Skull in a niche* (reverse of right panel of Carondelet diptych; 1517), Paris, Musée du Louvre.

striven to produce reflections in the soap bubbles and in the silver candlestick, in the base of which we can make out the window of his studio in tiny dimensions.

That an artist such as Gijsbrechts should be predisposed towards the architectonic form of a niche becomes even more understandable when we remember that his outstanding speciality was *trompe l'oeil* painting (cat. no. 25).<sup>12</sup> The still-life under discussion is admittedly not a real *trompe l'oeil*, but it does have certain reminiscent characteristics, such as the document hanging over the marble edge.

By this time we should be asking ourselves whether the only reason that Gijsbrechts (or other painters) housed still-lives in niches was so as to obtain particular artistic effects. Spotlighting death in that very place could possibly have been taken from the antique custom of using niches and three-dimensional frameworks for sculpted portraits of deceased persons.<sup>13</sup> The bust of the deceased in the 16th and 17th centuries, sometimes on its own, sometimes in the company of attributes and symbols, including the skull, is regularly found in a niche, usually as part of a commemorative monument, but sometimes by itself.<sup>14</sup> The notion that a certain relationship could exist between a real niche, as the dwelling-place for the bust of some deceased person, and a painted niche, as the surroundings for a death's-head and other vanitas elements, is advanced here only as a hypothesis. Further research would be required to ascertain the feasibility of this hypothesis.

In 1659 and 1660 Cornelis Gijsbrechts was a member of the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp. He spent some of the 1660's very probably in Hamburg, at least in Germany.<sup>15</sup> The German appearance of the words "Wir Bürgermeistere[n]" (We Burgomasters) on the 1669 still-life on exhibition here would lead us to suspect that it originated in Germany, although this spelling does occur in the eastern part of the Netherlands. But there is proof that Gijsbrechts was in Denmark the previous year, where he was building a career for himself as court painter to the Danish kings in Copenhagen. Archive records tell of several payments he received between 1670 and 1672.<sup>16</sup>

How long Gijsbrechts remained in Denmark after that we cannot be sure.<sup>17</sup> There is much, in fact, which is unclear about his doings. For example, there is no documentary evidence to show he stayed in Holland, but none the less there



are two reasons which give good grounds for considering such a sojourn not to be mere conjecture: the reproduction of Dutch documents in some of his paintings, and the unmistakable affinity of some of his works with Dutch art. This second reason is valid to a very high degree for the still-life of 1669.

EdJ

1. See the illustrations in exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden. Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal), 1970.
2. Poul Gammelbo, "Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts og Franciskus Gijsbrechts", *Kunstmuseets Arsskrift 1952-1955*, Copenhagen 1956, 125-156, esp. 148-149, no. 19. Idem, *Dutch still-life painting from the 16th to the 18th centuries in Danish collections*, Copenhagen, etc. 1960, 132, no. 193. Exhib. cat. *17de-Eeuwse schilderijen uit de verzameling Willem Russell*, Amsterdam (Amsterdams Historisch Museum) 1970, no. 38. A.P. de Mirimonde, "Les peintres flamands de trompe l'oeil et de natures mortes au XVIIe siècle, et les sujets de musique", *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten*, Antwerp 1971, 223-272, esp. 239-240.
3. See cat. no. 40 (Collier) and 13 (Olis).
4. E. de Jongh, *Zinne- en minnebeelden in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1967, 20 and 87. A virtually identical candelstick was used by the painter Abraham Susenier of Leiden in a still-life of 1666; see Vroom, vol. 2, 124 (no. 636).
5. *Tot Lering en Vermaak*, 44-47.
6. See cat. no. 43 (Roestraeten).
7. *Inter al.* that of Maria van Oosterwijck of 1668; see exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden*, op. cit. (note 1), no. 20.
8. See cat. no. 45 (Van Streeck).
9. Zaccharias Heyns, *Wegwyser ter Salicheyt* . . . , Zwolle 1629, 53v.: "Opstanding is een nieuwe Stadt vande grond af opgebout / die voor alle Menschen open staet / daer soo wel de quaede als de goede verschijnen moeten. Voor des Stadts Poorte staet haer Wapen / sijnde een Doots Hooft op der Aerden gelegen / daer nieu graen uyt groeyende is / met dese woorden: / *Melior putrefacta resurget* / Gelijck het Saet, verrot, geworpen inder aerden, / Men door't versterven siet nieu Aeren aenvaerden, / Die schoonder staen gebloyt, met meerdering van graen: / Soo sal't den vromen Mensch naet tytlijc sterven gaen". In this connexion see also cat. no. 40 (Collier) re the accessibility of heaven.
10. Joachim Camerarius, *Nucleus emblematicus* . . . , vol. 1 [Arnhem 1611], 21. "Mors vitae initium": death is the beginning of life.
11. Roestraeten, see exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden*, op. cit. (note 1), no. 27; for Coorte: Laurens J. Bol, *Adriaen Coorte. A unique late seventeenth century Dutch still-life painter*, Assen and Amsterdam 1977, fig. 8.





41d. Jacques de Gheyn II, *Vanitas still-life*, (1603), Stockholm, Private collection

12. Gammelbo, op. cit. (note 2, "Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts og Franciskus Gijsbrechts"), passim. Goeroges Marlier, "C.N. Gijsbrechts, l'illusioniste", *Connaissance des Arts*, March 1964, 96-105.
13. W.S. Heckscher, *Weerklinken van de antieke kunst in post-klassieke tijden. Imago. Een geillustreerde kalender voor 1963*, [Utrecht 1963], 16-18.
14. See for example Cynthia Miller Lawrence, *Flemish baroque commemorative monuments 1655-1725*, New York and London 1981, 67, 162, 170, 211, 213, cat. nos. 352, 370, 417. Exhib. cat. *Soweit der Erdkries reicht. Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen 1604-1679*, Kleef 1979, 209, 212, 223.
15. De Mirimonde, op. cit. (note 2), 230.
16. Gammelbo, op. cit. (note 2, "Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts og Franciskus Gijsbrechts"), 140, 155, note 51.
17. A painting exists which has the date 1675 and an inscription from which it can be concluded that Gijsbrechts spent that year in Breslau. See the letter from Tadeusz Wierzejski in *Connaissance des Arts*, July 1964, in response to Marlier, op. cit. (note 12).







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## Anthony Leemans

The Hague 1631 — Amsterdam 1673

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42

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### Still-life

Canvas, 78 x 72 cm. Signed and dated Anthonius Leemans Fecit 1655  
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

It is an open question as to what extent painters of still-life representations — and artists in general in the 17th century — employed a consistent frame of reference while choosing the objects to be depicted in their paintings. In the case of those painters who make use of written texts in their works, examination in many cases seems to bear out that these were chosen so as to accent or elucidate a particular message or moral. Anthony Leemans' Rijksmuseum still-life, however, presents the viewer with a puzzle. In the limited number of works known by the hand of this artist he showed a marked predilection for the rendering in paint of handwritten or printed texts, an inclination of which the present work is the most eloquent example. It includes what appears to be the title page of an early periodical and two other extensive textual documents. Not only is there no readily discernible relationship between the two texts and the objects depicted in the still-life; neither does the content of the texts themselves provide us with any indication of an association with one another.

In addition to the texts mentioned the work itself displays, on a table or ledge, an assortment of objects including a violin, a wooden flute and sheets of music, an earthenware coal pan, a tobacconist's paper filled with dried tobacco leaves and what appears to be the stem of a pipe extending off the edge of the table; further depicted are a table knife and a partially consumed roll of bread and fish and finally a four-sided bottle with stopper, a half-filled glass and, centred in the composition, the breast-plate of a suit of armour.

The title page of the newsletter which is propped up against the bottle is only partly legible and reads: *Numero 8: Wekelycke Waere Mercurius van het Gedenckwaerdichste dat door Europa . . .* (Number 8: Weekly True Mercurius of the most memorable [events] which throughout Europe . . .). The existence of such a periodical cannot be documented. Possibly the title is wholly or in part the fruit of the artist's imagination. Of the other two texts, the larger one which fills the lower left-hand corner of the composition is a carefully copied printed page which is headed by an ornamental letter "S". The document appears to be a broadside sheet, and the text, which is presented in the form of a letter, reads:<sup>1</sup>

received . . .  
1639

SIR

I have just received unequivocal tidings from the hand of Admiral Tromp



himself, dated the 29th of June, according to which he on the previous day, namely the twenty-eighth, seeing three English ships approaching ordered them to strike sail, and upon their refusal bared Emilia's teeth,<sup>2</sup> which caused such fright that they immediately fell into a state of weakness and faintness. The Admiral, seeing this, visited them as a good doctor does his sick and found their bellies to be full of Spaniards, of which they had intended to be delivered in Dunkirk: As the aforesaid fright caused a miscarriage and brought into the world at sea ten hundred and seventy Spaniards which the Hollander mid-wives and Dry-nurses fothwith wrapped in swaddling clothes, they shall speedily be able to taste Rotterdam beer or water, being expected here at any hour. Salutations.  
Rotterdam this 2nd July 1639

No such letter or broadsheet has been preserved, but Admiral Tromp's diary entry of June 29th, 1639 mentions that he indeed had written a letter relating the capture of 1070 Spaniards the day before, and had given two copies to a passing Schiedammer ship's captain bound for the Maas to be delivered to Their High Mightinesses (the Lords of the States-General) and one Heer de Reus (possibly the author of this broadsheet?).<sup>3</sup> The narrative is noteworthy both for its glorification of an insignificant incident preceding Tromp's major victory over the Spanish armada of October 21, 1639 and for the form of its presentation, a humorous account intended to appeal to the popular imagination. Contrary to the expectations of the author, moreover, most of the captured Spaniards never saw Rotterdam.<sup>4</sup>

The name of Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp is legendary in Holland and his fame has in fact hardly waned since the 17th century. Tromp had since 1637 been commander of the Dutch fleet and was an internationally renowned maritime strategist whose naval triumphs and popularity among his people have rarely seen their equal. At the time Leemans executed his still-life, of which we unfortunately know nothing as regards either a patron or any other specific purpose for which it might have been made, Tromp was recently deceased; he was killed during the battle of Ter Heijde on August 10th, 1653. During the year of his death and those immediately following, Tromp's fame was celebrated not only in prints and medals but also in numerous laudatory poems including those



42a. Rombout Verhulst after a design by Jacob van Campen, *Funerary monument of Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp*, (1658), Delft, Oude Kerk



by such illustrious *littérateurs* as Vondel and Jeremias de Decker. Leemans had in that same year made another still-life which more prominently featured allusions to Tromp in the form of a recently published panegyric, to which we shall return shortly. The *Allegory on the death of Tromp* by Pieter Steenwijck exhibited here (see cat. no. 44) is also contemporary to Leemans' two works within a year or so.

Naval heroes had an exceptional status within 17th-century Dutch society. For so far as we know these were the only public figures apart from Prince William of Orange to be honoured by the state with funerary monuments in churches. Tromp is buried in the Oude Kerk in Delft, where a monument was erected to him as early as 1655-58 (fig. 42a). Tromp was also accorded the special distinction of a state funeral, an honour which had been conferred upon only two of his colleagues before him.<sup>5</sup> He is moreover the only naval hero known to figure in still-life paintings, one reflection of the fact that his fame was so great as to be exemplary.

If indeed we can well suppose why Leemans might have had Admiral Tromp on his mind in the years subsequent to the latter's death, we still have no clue as to why, if Leemans' intention had been to allude to the great seaman's fame for whatever purpose, he chose a broadsheet dating from 1639 while so many contemporary testimonials to the deceased commander were available. The event recorded, although in naval history of subordinate significance, does however relate to a triumph of Tromp's over the English fleet. At the time Leemans made his painting, a year after the close of the first Anglo-Dutch war, sentiment against England was running high.<sup>6</sup>

An association of Tromp's military achievement with the title page of the painted newsletter *Wekelycke Waere Mercurius* is tempting, but inconclusive. A possible relationship between the breast-piece and Tromp's naval feats also gives food for speculation. This piece of armour was in biblical and ancient literary writings considered to be an armament of the righteousness and faith with which a wise man animated his deeds.<sup>7</sup> In his *Groot schilderboek* of 1707 Gerard Lairesse advises, on the foundation of such texts, the painter of a still-life dedicated "to a triumphant war hero" or "to a theologian" to employ the breast-piece, describing its symbolic meaning in his suggested scenes.<sup>8</sup>

Any connexion with the other objects represented in the painting is however



obscure. The second text rendered by Leemans, which hangs from the edge of the table in the centre of the canvas next to the broadsheet described above, helps neither to explicate the presence of the latter nor to elucidate any relationship of either text with the still-life as a whole. This second text, which was copied from a handwritten original and marked "T2", possibly a sheet signature for a binder, is a nine-line poem of unknown authorship in 17th century Dutch. It recounts the story of Apelles (the famous Greek painter who lived during the reign of Alexander the Great) and a cobbler, who upon viewing one of Apelles' paintings on public display did not feel obliged to limit his critique of the work to a fault in one of the painted sandals. Apelles chided him for overstepping his domain of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The text reads:<sup>10</sup>

Venus and Cupid wrought of Apelles' hand are visited here by many  
(as we read.)

A cobbler also came to look as well he might  
He approved that which he might call his own  
But that which was not of his trade he criticized.  
Apelles hearing this turned to this man  
And said to him: do not transgress your last  
Let each man attend to the trade which he has learned  
He who disdains another's work is often dishonoured.

T2

Finis Coronat Opus

From this ancient anecdote derives the saying "Schoenmaker, blijf bij je leest" (Cobbler, stick to your last), a maxim which was already known in Pliny's time and which still survives as a well-known proverb in the Dutch language. It warns against judging things of which one has no particular knowledge. Interesting also is that this anecdote deals with the expertise of the artist. While more visual references to the artist's craft do occur within 17th-century Dutch painting, traditional anecdotes presented in textual form on works of art are rare.<sup>11</sup>

On the same painted sheet which displays the poem, Leemans appends the expression *Finis Coronat Opus* (the end crowns the work), an adage of obscure origin which is known in various forms in many languages and also appears elsewhere in the art of 17th-century Holland as well as in its literature.<sup>12</sup>





42b. Anthony Leemans, *Still-life with a broadsheet* (1655), Present location unknown

The presence of the broadsheet, title page, anecdote and the prominently placed maxim *Finis Coronat Opus* in the context of Leemans' still-life cannot thus be unequivocally explained. Is Leemans concerned here with fame, with the transience of even fame, or with something else, perhaps with the value of virtuous living in the light of the relativity of life on earth? What could ignorant criticism, which more than once has been said to be the enemy of virtue in art,<sup>13</sup> have to do with any of the above possible messages? We are in fact left in the dark: we cannot answer any of these questions without knowing more than we do about the artist Leemans and the possible reasons for which he might have made this work.

It is however instructive to note, as mentioned above, that Leemans painted another still-life in the same year 1655 in which Admiral Tromp also figures prominently and in which both allusions to death and transience and those to eternal fame are more explicit (fig. 42b). With respect to the position of the violin on the table and in general composition this painting is similar to the Amsterdam work. It includes however both a skull and an extinguished candle, undeniable symbols of death. The lower left-hand corner exhibits a broadsheet containing a poem by Casparus du Carpentier dating from 1654, in this case a text which can be documented from other sources.<sup>14</sup> In this poem Tromp is particularly glorified as the bringer of peace to his nation and as a martyr for his people, who scorned personal danger in order to insure the safety and prosperity of Holland. His role in helping to bring to a conclusion the first of the Anglo-Dutch wars (1652-1654), during which he found his death, is suggested. Du Carpentier's panegyric is an inherently Christian laudation; like many of the poems published at the time of Tromp's death it couples an antique notion of virtuous deeds leading to immortal fame with a more Christian conception of the practice of virtue as the agency of entry into heaven.<sup>15</sup> The triumphal chariot in which Tromp ascends to heaven is likened to the chariot of Elijah (2 Kings 2, 11), his ascension takes on something of the character of a transfiguration ("a cloak of shining cloth shall hang upon my limbs"; line 18) and his fame is clearly that of a Christian hero: "For a Wreath of Laurel I shall receive a Heavenly Crown" (line 17). The poem further speaks clearly of Tromp's rebirth after death, in which vein the symbols of the transience of earthly life, it would seem, must be interpreted.



If in this last work the relative value of the accent on transience with respect to the perpetuation of fame after death cannot with assurance be determined, the artist in any case seems to have employed an appreciable measure of internal cohesion in his choice of objects and text in composing his still-life. Is it reasonable to assume that Leemans did the same in his Amsterdam work? Are the smoking accoutrements, the flute, violin and partially consumed foodstuffs perhaps subtle symbols of transience within a larger message to which our 20th-century faculties of apperception are no longer readily attuned? Leemans unfortunately leaves us with too few specific indicators, in the work itself at least, to uncover his original intentions.

AG

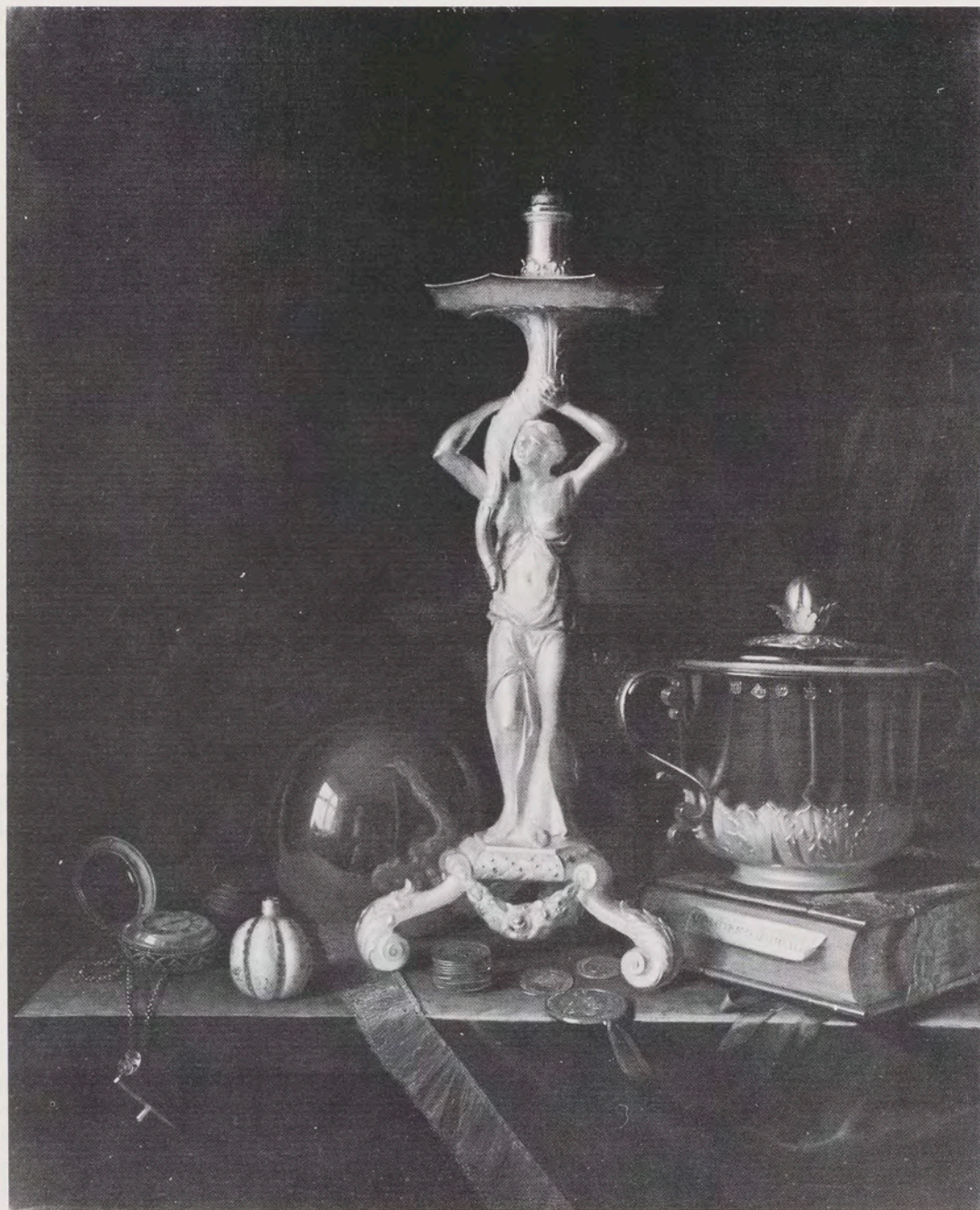
1. "verkregen tege . . . / 1639/ MYN HEER/ Soo terstont krijge ick hier on-getwijffelde Tijdingh uyt het schrijven van den Admiraal Tromp selff/ in dato den 29 Junij als dat den voorgaenden dagh/ namentlick den acht-en twintighsten/ siende aen-komen drie Engelse schepen heeft den selven geboden om te strycken die sulcks weygerende/ soo heeft hij haer doen blincken de Tanden van Emilia dewelckesodanigen schrick causeerden/ dat sy terstont in onmacht ende flaeuwighety zijn gevallen. Den Admiraal sulcx siende heeft als een goet Medicus/ heir sieckte laeten visiteren/ ende bevonden dat sij den buyck vol Spanjaerden hadden/ menende daer van binnen Duynkercken in de kraem te leggen: Daer de bovengemelde schrick heeft een misgeborte gecauseert/ ende hebbe alsoo/ op zee/ aen de Werelt gebracht tien hondert en seventich Spanjaerden/ die De hollantse vroet-wijfs ende Baker-moeren hebben terstont alsoo in de luyren gebonden/ datse haest bequaem sullen sijn Rotterdams bier of water te drincken wordende alle uyre alhier verwacht Vale. Rotterdam desen 2 Julij 1639".
2. The *Aemelia* was Tromps flagship. She was built ca. 1637 and named after Amalia van Solms, wife of Prince Frederik Hendrik.
3. See *The journal of Marten Harpertszoon Tromp*, transl. and ed. by C.R. Boxer, Cambridge 1930, 119.
4. Most of the Spanish militiamen were put ashore at the Bay of La Hougue as Tromp could spare neither the ships nor the provisions necessary to transport them to the United Provinces. Tromp's own account of this event in his Journal entry of June 28th, 1639 is far more businesslike than that given in the broadsheet. He also motivates his rather lenient treatment of the three English ships in a letter to the States-General of August 9th, 1639 (*Archives of the States-General*, Lias Admiraliteiten, no. 5509). In the later maritime historical literature the incident is mentioned only in passing; see J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, vol. 1, Amsterdam and The Hague 1833, 504-505, M.G. de Boer, *Tromp en de armada van 1639*, Amsterdam 1941, 43-46 and J.K. Oudendijk, *Maerten*



## Still-life

- Harpertzoon Tromp*, ed. The Hague 1952, 70.
5. These were Jacob van Heemskerck and Piet Heyn. For the monument dedicated to Tromp, see E.A. van Beresteyn, *Graf-monumenten en grafzerken in de Oude Kerk te Delft*, Assen 1938, 17-18.
  6. Relations with England had completely broken down after the passage of the Navigation Act of 1651, by which Dutch ships were forbidden entry into English ports. We should like to thank Miss Els Jacobs and Prof. J.R. Bruijn of the University of Leiden for their suggestions as to why Leemans might have chosen this broadsheet.
  7. For example Ephesians 6, 13-17 and 1 Thessalonians 5, 8.
  8. Gerard Lairesse, *Het groot schilderboek*, vol. 2, Amsterdam 1707, 269 and 282. With respect to the breast-piece see also Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia of uytbeeldingen des verstands . . . uyt het Italiaans vertaelt door D.P. Pers*, Amsterdam 1644, 616 (*Sapienza Divina*) and Hubert Korneliszoon Poot, *Het groot natuur- en zedekundigh werelttoneel*, vol. 3, Delft 1750, 427 and 486-489.
  9. Anecdote related in Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, lib.xxxv, 85.
  10. "Venus en Cupido van Apelles hant ghewrocht worden hier besocht van vele (soo wij lesen.) Enen Schoenmaecker quam oock kijcken soo hij mocht t'Heeft hem al goet gedocht dat hem eijgen mocht wesen Maerd dat van sijn ambacht niet was heeft hij mispresen Apeeles dit horende is tot hem gekeert  
En gaet over u leest niet sprack hij mits desen  
Maer elck mercke sijn ambacht dat hij heeft geleert  
Die een anders werck laeckt wprt dickwils ont eert"  
This text deviates from the traditional anecdote as transmitted by Pliny, in which the cobbler first criticized the sandal ("that which he might call his own") whereupon the artist corrected the fault. Elated by this, the cobbler then extended his criticism to include other elements of the work and hereby brought the wrath of Apelles down upon himself.
  11. Another example in which this occurs is Samuel van Hoogstraeten's still-life in Karlsruhe, in which the famous anecdote of Zeuxis and Parrhasius is recounted. See also in this regard Jochen Becker in *Stilleben in Europa*, 466-469.
  12. .E.g. Hondius's print bearing the inscription *Memento Mori* overlaid by *Finis Coronat Opus* (Hollstein no. 19). For examples in literature, see F.A. Stoett, *Nederlandsche spreekwoorden, spreekwijzen, uitdrukkingen en gezegden*, vol. 1, ed. Zutphen 1923, 214, no. 542.
  13. See for example, A Pigler, "Neid und Unwissenheit als Widersacher deer Kunst" *Acta Historiae Artium*<sup>1</sup> (1953-54), 215-235.
  14. See D.F. Scheurleer, *Van varen en van vechten*, vol. 1 (1572-1654), The Hague 1914, 455-456.
  15. For examples of other poems published in honour of Tromp, see D.F. Scheurleer, *Onze mannen ter zee in dicht en beeld*, 3 vols., The Hague 1912-1914.







## Pieter Gerritsz. van Roestraeten

Haarlem ca. 1630 — London 1708

43

### Vanitas still-life

Canvas, 71.5 x 57.5 cm. Signed and dated P. Roestraten 1696  
Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe



43a. Pieter van Roestraeten, *Still-life with candlestick and teapot*, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen

Pieter Roestraeten is one of those 17th-century painters who, in terms of efficiency, knew how to extract the last ounce out of a single theme. The painting on exhibition here is a variation from a series which apparently was popular with purchasers, some of whom may also have commissioned the works. It was made in England where Roestraeten worked for a considerable part of his life, and where, in London, he eventually died.<sup>1</sup>

Without their impressing us by their grandeur, his still-lives do certainly have a character all their own. This is not determined by Roestraten's style and brushwork only, but equally by his choice of objects. Some of these are typical for Roestraeten (the only other masters who ever used them were his followers), such as the red and white scent-bottle, the silver candlestick, and the porringer with lid in this picture.

The most important constituent is the candlestick with its almost entirely burnt-out candle, round which the whole picture, in fact, is constructed. It appears on a number of Roestraeten's still-lives, for example on the painting devoted to tea in the Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam (fig. 43a).<sup>2</sup> It is a fascinating thing: a female figure on a hexagonal base supported by three volutes. Above her head she holds a cornucopia on which the candle and the drip tray are resting. This candlestick was no fantasy of the painter's: it was painted exactly from a real candlestick which had been made in 1693-94 by Anthony Nelme, a London silversmith.<sup>3</sup>

The other silver object, the two-handled porringer with lid which has been placed on a book (doubtless the Bible), has its origins in English silver-production at the end of the 17th century, but its maker cannot be identified. As with the candlestick, so with this kind of bowl, which Roestraeten worked into his compositions more than once.<sup>4</sup> They were common enough then, in better-off circles, and their use was not confined to children, for their porridge, since adults would use them as posset-cups for their warm morning drink of milk and wine.

Apart from the scent-bottle, and the vine-branch just visible to the left in the background, the other objects are part and parcel of the standard vanitas-equipment: globe, watch, medals and coins, a Bible with a slip of paper proclaiming the well-known words "vanitas vanitatum" from Ecclesiastes, and



finally a globe of glass with the reflection of the painter sitting behind the easel in his studio.<sup>5</sup> There are no manifest symbols of death, such as skulls or bones.

An attractive touch of egocentricity: a painter who as it were encloses himself in the glass in order to accentuate his own mortal nature. This motif has strong echoes of the personification of "Werrelds Ellende" (Distress of the world) as we find it described in Cesare Ripa (and still obtaining in Hubert Korneliszoon Poot, Ripa's 18th-century Dutch paraphraser): "A woman whose head is in a transparent glass ball . . .", the glass of which "indicates by its fragility the vanity of the world's affairs". The glass also reminds us "how short and brittle are the days of our pilgrimage, while we live on this earth" (fig. 43b).<sup>6</sup>

Many a painter has made grateful use of the transparent globe, not only for its interesting visual potential, but also for the symbolic value that it could be attributed with.<sup>7</sup> In a vanitas by Vincent Lourensz. van der Vinne, who was of the same generation as Roestraeten and, like him, came from Haarlem, the fascinating glass globe has even been elevated to the *pièce de résistance* of the composition (fig. 43c).<sup>8</sup>

Emblems, too, used the symbolism of the transparent ball. Long before the time of Roestraten and Van der Vinne, Gabriel Rollenhagen had embodied the same idea in the same object, though in a slightly different way (fig. 43d). Smoke billows profusely on his visualization of the worthlessness of human life, but we will pass over the question of whether glass balls actually can smoke.<sup>9</sup>

The grimness displayed in Rollenhagen's emblem and in many vanitas still-lives is totally absent from this still-life by Pieter Roestraeten. Quite the reverse: it stands out by virtue of its refinement and elegance. The 20th-century spectator may well suspect a certain discrepancy between the attractive appearance of the objects themselves and the macabre reality of the object-lesson. The quotation from Ecclesiastes, however, guarantees that there is no discrepancy.

EdJ

1. Bol 1969, 350 and 352. The painting has been treated at length by O. ter Kuile: "Een Hollands stilleven door Pieter van Roestraeten in 1696 te Londen geschilderd", *Antiek* 4 (1969), 196-203.



43b. *Distress of the world*, engraving from Hubert Kornelisz. Poot, *Het groot natuur- en zedekundigh werelttoneel*, vol. 1, Delft 1726



43c. Vincent Lourensz. van der Vinne, *Still-life with a glass sphere*, Moscow, State Museum of Fine Arts

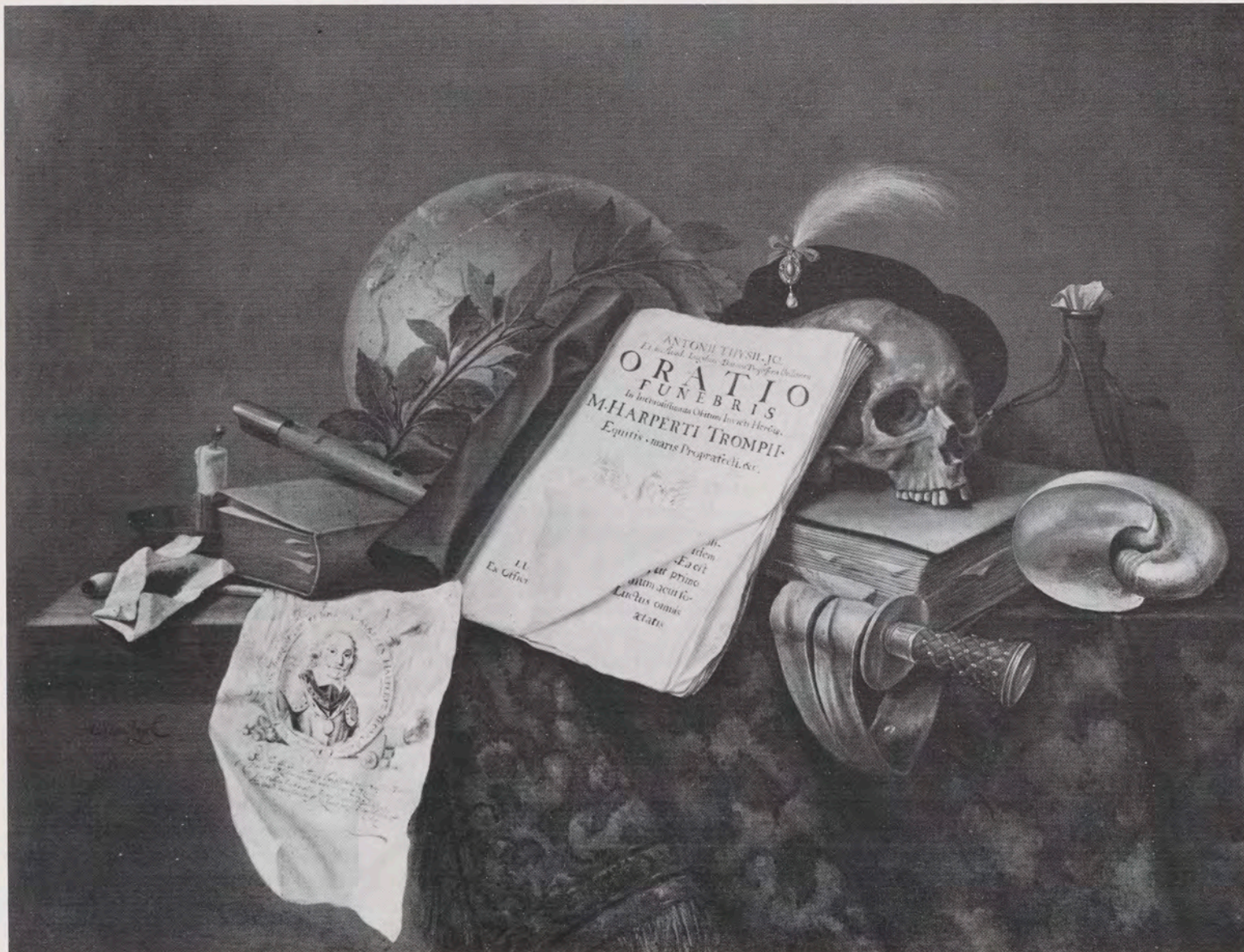




43d. "Humana fumus", emblem from Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum* ..., vol. 1 [Arnhem 1611]

2. Exhib. cat. *Thema thee. De geschiedenis van de thee en het theegebruik in Nederland*, Rotterdam (Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen) 1978, 45.
3. See Ter Kuile, op. cit. (note 1), 200-201.
4. Ibid., 201. See also C.M. Kauffmann, *Catalogue of Foreign Paintings I. Before 1800*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London 1973, 242, no.299.
5. For the saying from Ecclesiastes, see cat. no. 40 (Collier).
6. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands* ... uyt het Italiaens vertaelt door D.P. Pers, Amsterdam 1644, 607: "Een Vrouwe die 't hoofd in een doorschijnende glaesen kloot houd ... [waarbij het glas] door zijne broosheid bediet de ydelheit van des Werrelts handlingen" ... hoe kort en broos de dagen zijn van ons Pelgrimschap, terwyl wy op desen aerde leven". Hubert Korneliszoon Poot, *Het groot natuur- en zedekundigh werelttoneel*, vol.1, Delft 1726, 397.
7. Lieselotte Möller, "Bildgeschichtliche Studien zu Stammbuchbildern II. Die Kugel als Vanitassymbol", *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 2 (1952), 157-177. Other examples in exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden. Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) 1970, nos. 6, 12, and 27 (Roestraeten), and in E. de Jongh, "Pearls of virtue and pearls of vice", *Simiolus* 8 (1975/76), 69-97, esp. 70-75.
8. I. Kuznetsov, *West-European still-life painting*, [Moscow 1966], 189, no.53.
9. Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum* ... vol.1, [Arnhem 1611], 73.







XLIX.  
TUTUS PER SUM-  
MA, PER IMA.



*Nautilus ut placidum & serenum mare sustinet aquæ,  
Sic itidem fortis forte in utraque animus.*

44a. "Tutus per summa, per ima", emblem from Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus* ..., ed. Frankfurt 1654.

## Pieter Steenwijck

ca. 1615 — after 1656

44

### Vanitas still-life (allegory on the death of Tromp)

Canvas, 79 x 101.5 cm. Signed P. Steenwijck  
Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal

Still-lives cannot be read off like rebuses or pieced together like charades. In some of them, however, and particularly in vanitas still-lives, there is a more or less clear alliance between the various elements. Pieter Steenwijck's vanitas, dedicated to the famous naval hero Maerten Harpertszoon Tromp, is a good example of an ensemble with internal coherence.<sup>1</sup> The objects on display can be divided into a group with a general vanitas-meaning and a group which relates to the man who is being brought to mind. The connexion between the two groups is obvious. The remarkable thing about this work, besides its strong *ad hominem* character, is the paradoxical association it presents between homage and transience.

The tobacco and the pipe, the flute, the still-smoking candle, probably the books, and the skull which has been dressed up most bizarrely in a black beret with a white feather pinned to it, these are vanitas motifs in general. The water canteen and the *hartsvanger* (literally "deer catcher", a sort of short-bladed hanger which was frequently borne by naval officers) seem to bring us closer to the personal domain of the warrior himself.<sup>2</sup> The nautilus shell to the right on the table cloth pinpoints him further as having exercised his profession pre-eminently at sea. The painter has indeed employed this attribute to make a double allusion to Tromp.

The word "nautilus" is found in the 17th century to designate a sort of polypus or cuttlefish (opinions were divided as to the exact sort) that was said to sail over the waters in its hard shell as in a ship.<sup>3</sup> The shell depicted by Steenwijck came from the *Nautilus pompilius*, the pearly nautilus that was used in the 16th and 17th centuries as the main component of the kind of splendid chalice that is, naturally, called a nautilus cup.<sup>4</sup> Given the context of our painting, however, we can hardly doubt but that the original Greek meaning of the word *nautilus*, mariner or seafarer, is being brought into play.

This allusion to Tromp gains an extra dimension when we consider an emblem by Camerarius from a book which had run into three printings by 1654, where the sea animal nautilus, sure enough "sailing" like a ship, is presented as an image of constancy (fig. 44a).<sup>5</sup> "Tutus per summa, per ima" runs the motto which accompanies it: safe on the heights and in the depths (the crests and hollows of the waves), and the added couplet compares the constancy of the



nautilus, both in calm waters and on turbulent seas, with a valiant spirit in similar circumstances.

One symbol of honour, which in antiquity was conferred as a sign of glory on the commanders of victorious troupes, is well suited to a valiant spirit. This is the laurel wreath, which Steenwijck has not omitted from his choice of objects.<sup>6</sup> He has, moreover, placed this wreath against a large sphere which, given its ecliptic marked in dark and light blocks, would seem to be a celestial globe. This combination can surely imply no less than the conviction of earthlings that the virtuous and glorious hero deserves his place in heaven.<sup>7</sup>

This conviction was held by a great many 17th-century Dutchmen. In his own lifetime Tromp enjoyed great fame and esteem, and he was also popular with his men, to whom he was known affectionately as "Bestevaer" (literally "dear Father"; we should say "the old man") (fig. 44b). He gained a number of important victories, and was generally known as a very intelligent maritime strategist. Even the battle against the English at TerHeijde, on 10 August 1653, at the beginning of which Tromp was killed, was regarded as a sort of victory in that the enemy had been obliged to retire with heavy injuries.<sup>8</sup>

Tromp's death made a great impression in the Republic. A month and a half later, on 21 September 1653, a large audience attended a ceremony of mourning in the University of Leiden, during which Antonius Thysius, professor of poetry and eloquence, held a funeral oration in Latin in which he expatiated on the merits and achievements of the deceased and also the great appreciation Tromp had won for himself abroad. It is this eulogy, in printed form, which marks the centre of Steenwijck's composition. The title on the title page is easy to read: *Oratio Funebris / In luctuosissimum Obitum Invicti Herôis / M. Harperti Trompii / Equitis. maris Propraefecti, &c.* (funeral oration on the most grievous death of the invincible hero Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp, knight, lieutenant admiral, etc.). The title of knight refers to Tromp's having been elevated to the French nobility in 1640, in the order of St. Michel, and dubbed by the king of England in 1642. As lieutenant admiral since 1637 he had held supreme command over the Dutch fleet.<sup>9</sup>

On the painting, although the black front cover of the book by Thysius has been rolled away, the lower corner of the title page has been folded over itself so that we cannot see it completely. In spite of this, sufficient is visible for us to be





44b. Jan Lievens, Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

able to establish that it shows a large bird with outspread wings. The bird's head is situated exactly in the middle of Steenwijck's composition.

When we look at Thysius's book itself we see that the bird is a phoenix. The phoenix was used as a vignette by Pieter Leffen, the publisher, whose printing shop was "sub signo Phoenicis" in the Klooststeeg in Leiden.<sup>10</sup> By removing Leffen's imprint from our sight, Steenwijck also took away the function of printer's device from the phoenix, which now seems to have attached itself specifically to the title of the oration and, accordingly, to the symbolism of the painting as a whole.

This connexion is understandable enough. A mythical bird which burns itself to ashes only to emerge with renewed youth — one can hardly imagine that a motif like this would be left unused in 17th-century death symbolism.<sup>11</sup> And it was not. The phoenix often had its role to play in funeral orations and odes, especially when the deceased had been of noble blood and left a son who could take over his place. By assuring the listener or reader that the late lamented had a worthy successor, poetry-writers kept to the rules of rhetoric which insisted on a suitable "consolatio" as part of the text.<sup>12</sup> We find examples of this motif *inter al.* in Jan Jansz. Starter, who sang of William of Orange as a phoenix living on in his son Maurits, in Vondel, in his elegy on Henry IV of France who was followed by the dauphin, and in Abraham de Coningh, in his play on the death of that same French king.<sup>13</sup>

It is of no little interest that at exactly the period in which Pieter Steenwijck's painting was made, two medals were struck with the same symbolism, one in 1655 and one in 1657, though this time the old phoenix was William II whose life was being prolonged in the young William III (figs. 44c and 44d).<sup>14</sup> The reverse of the earlier medal shows the bird itself rising from the flames; on the second medal this representation turns out to have been replaced by a poem, of which the middle two lines run: "Dus leeft de vader na syn doot / Gelyk een fenix in syn Zoon" (thus lives the father after his death, like a phoenix, in his son).

The bird on the title page of Thysius's oration, given the way in which Steenwijck has presented it, must perhaps also be understood as a kind of "consolatio", which in this instance would serve to indicate that Maerten Harpertsz. was guaranteed to live on in his son, Cornelis Tromp. Cornelis, whose presence had graced the company at Thysius's funeral oration on 21



September 1653, was known as a competent naval officer, but also as a person to whom ambition and lust for power were certainly no strangers.<sup>15</sup> He proved this when, immediately after his father's death in action, he wrote a letter "humbly and in all amity" to the States General, begging that "since by the death of my lord father the Lieutenant Admiralty is vacant, it may please you to employ me". It is as if the phoenix-idea had been reduced to the level of a job-application. The States turned down the request of the then twenty-four year old captain, but they did promote him to rear-admiral in the admiralty of Amsterdam. Cornelis Tromp was not to be appointed full admiral until 1665.<sup>16</sup>

Is it not conceivable that Pieter Steenwijck should have painted his vanitas still-life — with the allusive phoenix precisely in the middle of the composition — at the request of Cornelis Tromp or one of the other relatives of Maerten Harpertszoon? This kind of commission would not be unique. It was very probably Cornelis Tromp himself who commissioned Willem van de Velde the Elder to make a pen painting of the battle of Ter Heijde in which his father had lost his life.<sup>17</sup>

One of the details in Steenwijck's representation that refers directly to the elder Tromp is, naturally, the oval copy of his portrait on a piece of paper, with the indication "Jo. Livens fec. 1656" — a date which may stand as well for the year in which our painting was accomplished.<sup>18</sup> The portrait, accompanied by a quatrain, is also found in the Dutch translation of Thysius's funeral oration which, like the original in Latin, was published in 1653.<sup>19</sup> The poem there has been signed by one Aegidius Alencon:

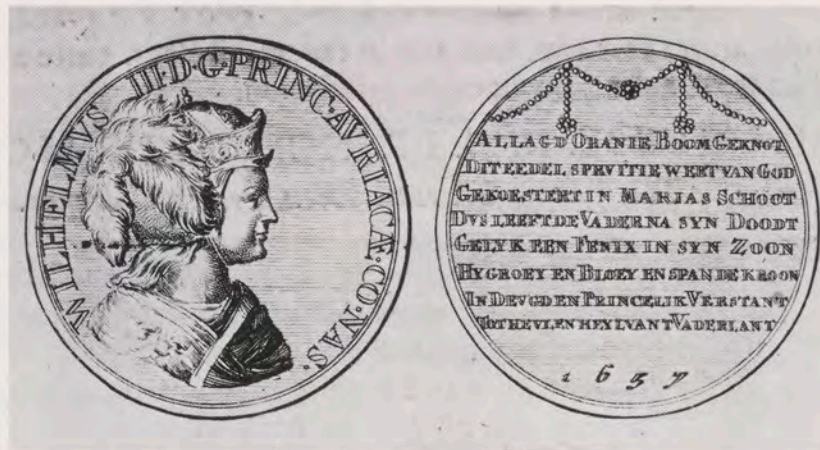
See here great Tromp of whom 'raged Britain stands in awe  
The glory of all heroes, who from heat of war  
Did never flinch; and he fought for his Fatherland  
Until death strikes him, but holds still the upper hand.

This bit of doggerel and the exceedingly long speech by Thysius are only two of the many texts which, even during his lifetime, were written about Tromp. Posthumous homage, however, took other forms as well. The States General at once issued a commission for the execution of a great marble sepulchral monument in the Oude Kerk in Delft. It bears the signature of Rombout Verhulst and the year of its completion, 1658 (fig. 42a).<sup>20</sup>



44c. Engravings of a medal by Pieter van Abeele, in honour of William III, 1655. From N. Chevalier, *Histoire de Guillaume III ... par medailles ...*, Amsterdam 1692





44d. Engravings of a medal in honour of William III, 1657. From N. Chevalier, *Histoire de Guillaume III... par medailles...*, Amsterdam 1692

Pieter Steenwijck, who himself came from Delft, could well have observed the preparations for the construction of the monument at close quarters.<sup>21</sup> In comparison with this creation, his own work is very modest in size and range. In content, though, Steenwijck's allegory on the death of Tromp is far from being the least interesting in the long and varied catalogue of *memoriae*.

It holds our attention also because of the remarkable paradox we touched on at the beginning. Homage magnifies the exploits of the man, but transience stamps these exploits with the seal of worthlessness. Heroism, fame, and success may be highly important, yet they are inevitably outflanked by death. They are therefore all vain things.

We are reminded of this thought, then so common, by the black beret with its pendeloque and white feather, a well-known symbol of vanity.<sup>22</sup> Right at the start this homage to Tromp is forced into a position of ambivalence by a signal as light as a feather.

EdJ

1. Exhib. cat. *Ijdelheid der ijdelheden. Hollandse vanitas-voorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) 1970, no. 32. Cf. cat. no. 42 (Leemans), a vanitas in which Tromp also plays a role but which seems to lack coherence.
2. Steenwijck used the motif of the skull with the beret also elsewhere; see *ibid.*, no. 31. For the beret with the feather see also note 22. For tobacco, see cat. no. 13 (Olis); for the flute no. 40 (Collier; for the candle no. 41 (Gijsbrechts). J.P. Puype of the Scheepvaart Museum in Amsterdam was kind enough to provide information about the sword.
3. P[hilibert] v. B[orsselen], *Strande oft ghedichte van de schelpen... tot lof van den Schepper aller dinghen*, Amsterdam 1614, 36. See also P.E. Muller, *De dichtwerken van Philibert van Borsselen*, Groningen and Batavia 1937, 48 and 207.
4. See cat. no. 11 (Kalf) and Marie-Cornélie Roodenburg, *Een Hollands pronkstilleven*, Rotterdam 1959, 15-16.
5. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et emblematum ex aquatilibus et reptilibus...* (ed. pr. 1604), Frankfurt 1654, 49.
6. See Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane 1450-1600*, vol. 2, Geneva 1959, 233.
7. Cf. the discussion of the celestial sphere in cat. no. 40 (Collier).
8. See J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche zeewezen*, vol. 1, Haarlem 1858, 516-518. J.C.M. Warnsinck, *Twaalf doorluchtige zeehelden*, Amsterdam 1941, 26-38. J.K. Oudendijk, *Maerten Harpertszoon Tromp*, The Hague 1952.



9. See previous note.
10. A.C. Nilsson, *Latijnse spreuken op Nederlandse boekmerken*, The Hague 1952, 40. The motto accompanying Leffen's printer's mark is "ex morte immortalibus". Dr. J. Storm van Leeuwen of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague was kind enough to provide information about Thysius's oration and the printer Pieter Leffen.
11. See Ioannes Pierius Valerianus, *Hieroglyphica* . . . ed. Lyons 1602, 198-200.
12. H.H. Verstegen, *Het phoenix-motief. Bijdrage tot de studie van de humanistische visie op de vorst*, Nijmegen 1950, 98-111. S.F. Witstein, *Funeraire poëzie in de Nederlandse renaissance*, Assen 1969, 268, 270.
13. J.J. Starter, *Friesche Lusthof* . . . , ed. J. van Vloten, Utrecht 1864, 373-374. J. van den Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep-Unger vol. 1605-1616, Leiden (n.d.), 15-24, esp. 23. For Abraham de Coningh, see Witstein, op cit. (note 12), 268-271.
14. See J.A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, ed. Amsterdam 1979, 237-242. Emmens interprets Rembrandt's etching *De vogel phoenix* also as an Orangist symbol. Cf. also the phoenix-motif in Govaert Flinck's allegory, *Mourning for Stadtholder Frederik Hendrik*, painted in 1654: J.W. von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck 1615-1660*, Amsterdam 1965, 92, cat. no. 118.
15. Cornelis Tromp and other members of the family were addressed personally by Thysius in his speech. See *Lyk-Oratie* (note 19), 79. For Cornelis Tromp see Warnsinck, op. cit. (note 8), 100-113.
16. *Ibid.*, 105-106, including the text: "... ootmoedigh en gants vriendelijck versocht, alsoo door 't affstervan van mijn Heer Vader het Luitnt. Admiraelchap vacant is, mij gelieven te imploijeren".
17. Exhib. cat. *Michiel de Ruyter*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) and Vlissingen (Nieuw Tehuis voor Bejaarden) 1957, no. 51. H.P. Baard, *Willem van de Velde de Oude, Willem van de Velde de Jonge*, Amsterdam (n.d.), 26. W. Martin, *De Hollandsche schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw. Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, vol. 2, ed. Amsterdam 1942, 374.
18. For portraits of Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp by Jan Lievens and others see J.F. van Someren, *Beschrijvende catalogus van gegraveerde portretten van Nederlanders*, vol. 3, Amsterdam 1891, 631-632, and E.W. Moes, *Iconographia Batava*, Amsterdam 1905, 481-482 (twenty-five numbers).
19. *Lyk-Oratie, ofte 't leven ende sterven van den uytsteeckende heldt M. Harperz Tromp ridder, in syn leven luytenant admiraal van Hollant ende West-Vrieslant, Uyt-gesproocken in de vermaerde Leydtsche Academie op den 21 septemb. 1653. Door den hoochgel. heer professor Anthon. Thysius, ende vertaelt uyt 't Latyn in onse Nederduytsche spraecke* . . . , Leiden [1653]. The versification runs: "Ziet hier den grooten Tromp, den schrick van 't woedend' Britte / Den aller Helden roem, die nimmermeer de hitte / Des Oorlogs heeft ontsien; hij vocht voor 't Vaderlant, / Tot dat de doot hem treft, en hout noch d'overhant".
20. Reiner Boitet, *Beschryving der stad Delft*, Delft 1729, 201-210, with quotations from Vondel and De Decker inter al. R. Meischke, "Het classicisme van 1620-1660", in: *Delftse studiën. Een bundel historische opstellen over de stad Delft geschreven voor dr. E.H. ter Kuile* . . . , Assen 1967,



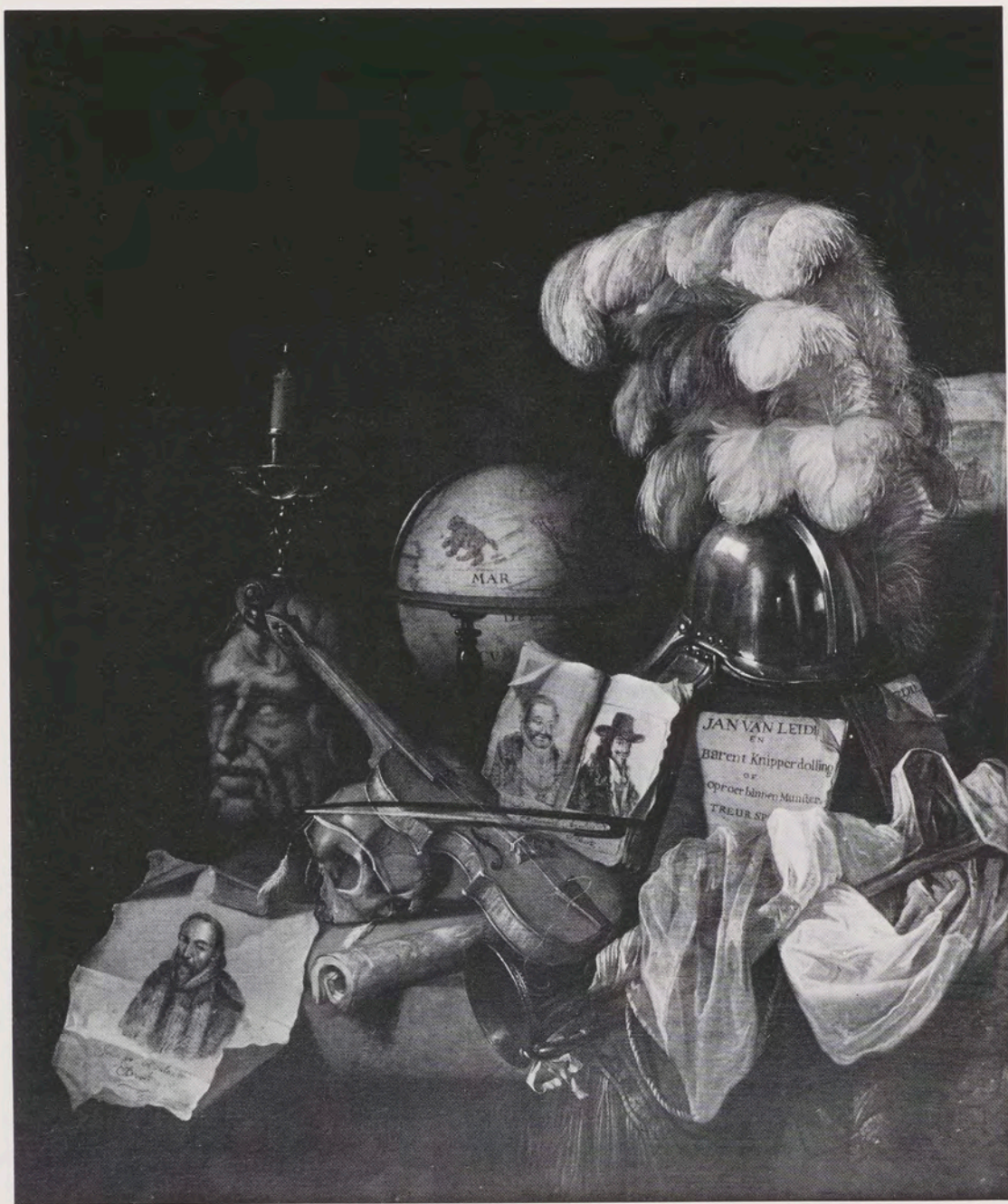
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Vanitas still-life (allegory on the death of Tromp)

171-186, esp. 177-181, where the sepulchral monument of Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp is said to be one of the most festive and magnificent in the land ("Het grafmonument van Maerten Harpertsz. Tromp" . . . "is een van de meest feestelijke en pralende grafmonumenten die we bezitten").

21. Steenwijck, who became a member of the Delft Guild of Saint Luke in 1642, worked in The Hague from 1652 until 1654, after which no trace of him can be found.
22. For feathers as attributes of vanity see for example Samuel C. Chew, *The pilgrimage of life*, Port Washington, N.Y. and London 1973, 93.







## Jurriaan van Streeck

Amsterdam 1632 — Amsterdam 1687

45

### Vanitas still-life

Canvas, 147.3 x 127 cm. Signed Juriaan van Streeck  
York, City of York Art Gallery



45a. Lodewijk van der Helst, *Aucke Stellingwerf* (1670), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

Jurriaan van Streeck made a specialty of two genres of still-life painting. In the first he demonstrates a certain affinity with Willem Kalf, though without equalling the latter's subtlety (cat. no. 16); in the second he shows himself to be a painter of vanitas-pieces in which there is no dearth of ingredients.<sup>1</sup> This painting, which was probably done in the 1670's, is a good example of the second category.

It is interesting to note that the biographer of artists, Arnold Houbraken, spoke in 1719 exclusively of the vanitas paintings in his section on Van Streeck; the works reminiscent of Kalf were completely ignored. Houbraken's characterization corresponds quite closely to what we see here: "helmets with plumes, books, letters, toys and whatever goes with that sort of thing; sometimes a skull or suchlike to make it into a symbol of the transience of human life".<sup>2</sup> The author adds to his description with a reflection on the use of vanitas depictions in general, being convinced that they incite one to virtue, and to a pious life ("tot Deught, en godvruchtig leven").

A number of the objects on the table of the vanitas in York can be more easily linked with each other by their meaning than is possible in some other still-lives. Together they illuminate one specific theme: the death, especially unnatural death, of mighty and famous men. One glance at the skull tells us that the topic is unmistakably that of transience; the skull is the most unambiguous element in the whole collection, and across it straggle a few ears of corn, the standard symbol of resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

The *dramatis personae*, the great men in Van Streeck's painting, are, in order: the Stoic philosopher Seneca (\* A.D.65), Henry IV of France (1553-1610), Charles I of England (1600-1649), the 16th-century Anabaptists Jan van Leiden and Barent Knipperdolling, the Dutch statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), at least, it is almost certainly him, and finally, though this is more of a conjecture, the Frisian admiral Aucke Stellingwerf (\* 1665). The presence of, rather, absence of the last-mentioned is a subject on its own, which will be discussed in due course.

Seneca is represented by a bust, of which there were many replicas in the 17th century, that was wrongly considered to be a portrait of the antique philosopher. The unnatural way in which Seneca met his death, committing suicide on Nero's



orders, was chosen as a subject by a good many 17th-century painters.<sup>4</sup>

On the left of Van Streeck's composition, beneath the pseudo-Seneca, we see the drawn likeness of a man who can be identified as Oldenbarnevelt, the Land's Advocate (one of the highest civil appointments in the Republic), who was beheaded in The Hague in 1619 after a political conflict. It is of particular interest to us that the astounding incident of Oldenbarnevelt's execution should, in a poem of Vondel's which has become famous, be compared with the death of Seneca. It is certainly no accident that the two figures should be placed in such close apposition to each other in the painting.<sup>5</sup>

Henry IV and Charles I, depicted as in well-known portraits, are placed on opposite pages of an open book that probably existed only in Van Streeck's imagination. The popular French monarch, also known as Henry the Great, died of knife-wounds received at an assassin's hand. Henry was regarded by many, not only in his own country but also in 17th-century Holland, as the ideal sovereign. The reputation he enjoyed in the Republic was suitably expressed in a long elegy written by the young Vondel probably in the year of Henry's death, and in the biography written by the poet and historian P.C. Hooft, which appeared in 1626 and was reprinted a number of times.<sup>6</sup>

As unexpected as the death of Henry IV had been, so organized was that of Charles I. The execution of the English king was an event which made an immense impression on Holland, for various complicated religious and political reasons.<sup>7</sup> The same Vondel who had written an elegy on the death of the French king, and had protested violently against Oldenbarnevelt's decapitation, produced an outraged epigram in 1649 against what he called this parricide, *Op den vader-moort in Groot Britanie*, in which Cromwell was exposed directly as a reincarnation of Lucifer. It was circulated as a broadside. At an earlier date, 1646, in his play *Mary Stuart*, Vondel had, though indirectly, attacked Cromwell and defended Charles I.<sup>8</sup>

And Vondel was not the only one who felt called to raise his voice in protest. Joan Dullaart, a rather second-rate playwright, wrote a whole drama round the unfortunate English king, *Karel Stuart, of rampzalige majesteit* (Charles Stuart, or disastrous majesty), which appeared in 1652 and was reprinted in 1653, 1676, 1678, and 1706. The figure of Charles I continued to appeal to the imagination in Holland for some considerable time.<sup>9</sup>



45b. "Sic transit gloria mundi", emblem from Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum* . . . , vol. 1 [Arnhem 1611]



Joan Dullaart is also the author of the tragedy *Jan van Leiden en Barent Knipperdolling of oproer binnen Munster* (Jan van Leiden and Barent Knipperdolling, or insurrection in Münster) of 1660. On the still-life, a copy of this is placed beside the portrait of Charles I. The title-page is clearly legible.<sup>10</sup> The personages of the title, Jan van Leiden and Barent Knipperdolling, were fanatic Anabaptists who had seized power in the Westphalian town of Münster in 1534 and, as so-called king and "stadhouder" (lieutenant), initiated a regime of religious lunacy. When, with much shedding of blood, the town was recaptured by an army of the bishop of Münster, they were taken prisoner, tortured, and put to a horrible death in 1536.

The last person we mentioned in the initial summary of great men was the Frisian admiral Aucke Stellingwerf, who died in 1665 at the battle of Lowestoft against the English. He is not shown, however, nor is his name written anywhere on the still-life, as was the case with the two Anabaptists. The reason that Stellingwerf none the less comes up for discussion is based on pure speculation about the helmet with the billowing plumes which gives such a distinct accent to the composition.

Although Jurriaan van Streeck, as Houbraken says, painted helmets with plumes on several occasions, this particular helmet could be intended especially as a quotation in visual form, referring to the helmet with plumes on the portrait of Aucke Stellingwerf that was painted in 1670, that is to say five years after his death, by Lodewijk van der Helst (fig. 45a).<sup>11</sup> It is more than possible that Van Streeck knew this portrait by Van der Helst who, like Streeck himself, worked in Amsterdam. In any case, the two plumed helmets are extremely reminiscent of each other, not least in the way they have been situated in the plane.

To the right, behind the helmet, we can make out the depiction of a three-master in full sail. Could this detail not also refer to the admiral who had been killed in action? If we assume that the combination of helmet and ship was no more accidental than the combination of Seneca with Oldenbarnevelt, then the hypothesis that Aucke Stellingwerf is the subject implied gains credibility.<sup>12</sup>

A number of elements in Van Streeck's composition can frequently be met in the vanitas genre. This is true not only for the above-mentioned skull but also notably for the candle burning itself out and the violin with its broken string. And both the flag on the tablecloth and the trumpet call up associations with the



transitoriness of military glory or of fame in general.<sup>13</sup>

The celestial sphere, which also figures regularly in vanitas paintings, sometimes together with a terrestrial sphere, is to some extent problematical. Is it intended to convey a hopeful alternative, just as the skull with corn-stalks symbolises the hope of resurrection? This possibility cannot be excluded. It is a fact that heaven and earth, in the form of globes, have more than once been set against each other in emblematics (fig. 40c.)<sup>14</sup> Regardless of whether or not a person would be granted a place in heaven, he was certainly intended to be continually directing his steps towards that end.

If, in conclusion, we wish to summarize in a few words the meaning of Van Streeck's still-life as a whole, then emblematics again can come to our aid. In Gabriel Rollenhagen, for example we find an emblem in which, under the motto *Sic transit gloria mundi* (Thus passes the glory of the world), the attributes of kings and dignitaries are consumed by flames (fig. 45b).<sup>15</sup> A symbolic image of the change and decay of earthly might.

Jurriaan van Streeck, in his way, in the language peculiar to vanitas still-lives, has visualized on canvas, the transitoriness of the power of this world. "*Sic transit gloria mundi*" is a very suitable motto for his painting.

EdJ

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1. Bergström 1956, 286-289 and Bol 1969, 347 discuss only the first genre.
  2. Houbraken vol.2, 227-229: "Gepluimde Helmetten, Boeken, Brieven, Speeltuigen en alles wat daar toe behoort; ook wel een Dootshoofd of iet diergelyk om het ten zinnebeeld van de vergankelykheit des menschen leven te doen strekken".
  3. For the skull with the ears of corn see cat. no. 41 (Gijsbrechts).
  4. Wolfram Prinz, "The Four Philosophers by Rubens and the Pseudo-Seneca in seventeenth-century painting", *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1973), 410-428. See further cat. no. 38 (Bailly). The head of Seneca as painted by Van Streeck is unusual in having been given eyes.
  5. The text under the likeness is largely illegible, apart from the words "Joan van". Joost van den Vondel, "Het stockske van Joan van Oldenbarnevelt, vader des vaderlants", in: *De werken van J. van den Vondel*, ed. by Van Lennep & Unger, vol. 1618-1620, Leiden (n.d.), 14.
  6. *Ibid.*, vol. 1605-1616, 15-24. H.W. van Tricht, *Het leven van P.C. Hooft*, The Hague 1980, 92-96.
  7. P. Geyl, *Oranje en Stuart 1641-1672*, Zeist etc. 1963, 44.
  8. *De werken van J. van den Vondel*, op. cit. (note 5), vol. 1648-1651, 127. W.A.P. Smit, *Van*



- Pascha tot Noah* vol.1, Zwolle 1956, 415-418; vol.2, Zwolle 1959, 56.
9. J.A.Worp, *Geschiedenis van het drama en van het tooneel in Nederland* vol.1, ed. Rotterdam (n.d.), 302. A portrait of Charles also in a vanitas still-life by Vincent Lourens van der Vinne; see Bergström 1956, fig. 180.
  10. Worp, op. cit. (note 9). Behind the Dullaart there is another book, of which the binding has curled round so that the letters "edie" (the ending of "tragedie") are visible.
  11. R. van Luttervelt, "Het portret van Aucke Stellingwerf door Lodewijk van der Helst", *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 2 (1954), 92. For a specific meaning of the helmet with feathers see Julius Wilhelm Zinggreff, *Emblematum ethico-politicorum centuria . . .*, [Heidelberg] 1619, no.54: "Miscetur decori virtus", virtue and grace must be interwoven.
  12. One of the objections which can be raised against the argument is that any similarity of certain details in different works of art does not necessarily imply a similarity in meaning.
  13. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands . . . uyt het Italiaens vertaelt door D.P. Pers*, Amsterdam 1644, 160-161.
  14. John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter-reformation in the Netherlands*, vol 1., Nieuwkoop and Leiden 1974, 42. See further cat. no. 40 (Collier).
  15. Gabriel Rollenhagen, *Nucleus emblematum . . .* vol.1, [Arnhem 1611], 86. For a more democratic application of this message, in which not only kings but also peasants are involved, see cat. no. 39 (Brisé).







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