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Soraya Cartategui

Dutch and Flemish XVI and XVII century art

Dear Friends,

As we welcome the nice weather and the gallery prepares for its second participation at the Spring Masters Show at the Park Avenue Armory, I have the pleasure of sharing with you this special and beautiful still life by the prestigious Jan Jansz de Heem. This painting is available, please contact us for further information or with any inquiries.

Best wishes,
Soraya Cartategui



Jan Jansz de Heem
(Antwerp 1650 – 1695)

"Still Life with Roemer Glass and Fish"

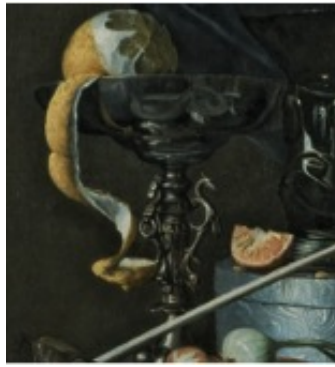
Oil on canvas

50 cm. x 55,5 cm.

1675-80 ca.

Jan Jansz Heem was a Golden Age artist who specialized in still life s and paintings of vases with flowers. Heem was the stepbrother of Cornelisz Jz. and the first son of Jan Davidsz de Heem and Anna Ruckers. He was baptized on July 2 of 1650 in the Church of St. Joris of Antwerp. According to the documentation of the time, it is known that from 1667 to 1672 Heem lived with his family in Utrecht. It is believed that in 1685 he was able to travel to London, where he stayed for a long period of time. Experts and scholars of this art period believe that the artist was trained by his father in Utrecht; Jan Jansz Heem's works are nearly indistinguishable from his father's, and the fact that they both signed their works as J de Heem has led to the misattribution of works in important collections. Heem's still life paintings are characterized by his attention to detail in particular with regards to the objects he chooses to include; they all seem to be disorganized but fit the composition. His works are often simple: fruit-pieces, floral bouquets, festoons and garlands and sumptuous still-lives, only occasionally in large formats. His technique changed from a more refined to a more graphic style. Not too long ago, this artist was relatively less recognized than his stepbrother and father. Soraya Cartategui Gallery is very grateful to Sam Segal's investigation that proves that this magnificent still life is one of only a few works attributed to Jan Jansz de Heem.

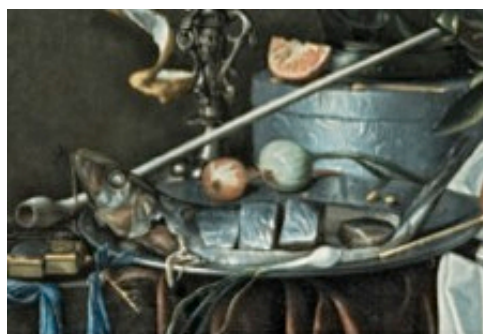
Ontbijtjes is the name given to the Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century of full tables complete with beautiful decorations and a large variety of foods. The literal translation of this Dutch word would be "refreshment," a light snack that can be consumed at any moment of the day. However, these works are much more than images of food; they are representations of the seventeenth century. Still life paintings like this one developed vividly in the Netherlands towards the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century—a period characterized by its economic revolutions and friction regarding the feudal structures. The theme of these paintings can be considered as a kind of catalyst of the acceptance of the new socioeconomic situation enveloping the country. As well, there was a notable increase in the value of art, which came along with general public interest in the new techniques of production. Works with this theme could be seen at more modest homes as well as houses belonging to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie.



By admiring this beautiful work, the viewer is able to learn about the way people from that time period set their tables as well as the type of products consumed by society. This small fragment shows a half peeled lemon on top of a silver goblet. The artist paints the lemon peel in such a way that it is curling below the fruit, it was very common for Dutch Still lives to have a peeled lemon hanging over an object or table. During that period, it was considered an exotic fruit that was both pleasing to the eye but also added a certain ambiance to the composition. Heem was a very skillful artist who primarily focused on technique and showcasing detail. Therefore, it is no surprise that we are able to see the zest painted in such a realistic manner. Besides from the lemon there is also a piece of orange and a small onion. All of the fruits and vegetables look very fresh; their bright orange, yellow, and white colors contrast beautifully against the darker shades of blue, silver, browns, and greens.

One of the most important elements within the composition is the goblet which is painted masterfully. The detailed stem of the goblet shows a lot of work and the upper part portrays the reflection of the roemer glass against the metal.

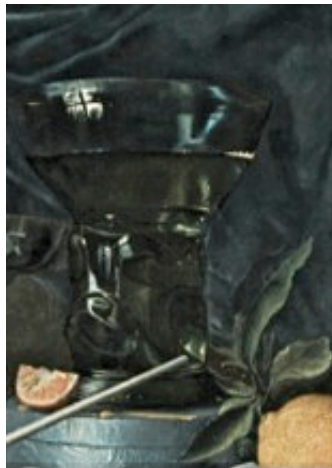
Virtually all still lifes have a moral of some sort, usually concerning the brevity of life. This is known as the vanitas theme – implicit even in the absence of an obvious symbol like a skull, with the inclusion of a less evident one such as a half-peeled lemon (like life, sweet in appearance but bitter to taste).



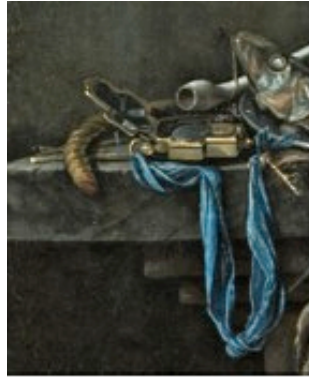
This section showcases some of the most traditional elements within this genre. The centerpiece is the herring, served on a silver platter. The fish is sliced and it appears to be smoked. As mentioned previously, Dutch 17th century paintings serve as witnesses to how people lived at that time and to today's date this type of fish continues to be a main staple in the Dutch diet. Judging by the fish, silver goblet, utensils, fancy tablecloths, this still life shows what the upper class ate. Among the

various representations of the ontbijtjes, there are certain elements that are commonly repeated, symbolizing their value in society at the time. In this case the fish symbolizes the secularization of art as well as the religious representation. For instance, the fish is similarly identified with Christ and when placed between the wine and bread it would be a sign of the Eucharist. These are just a few of the coded Christian messages hidden among ontbijtjes.

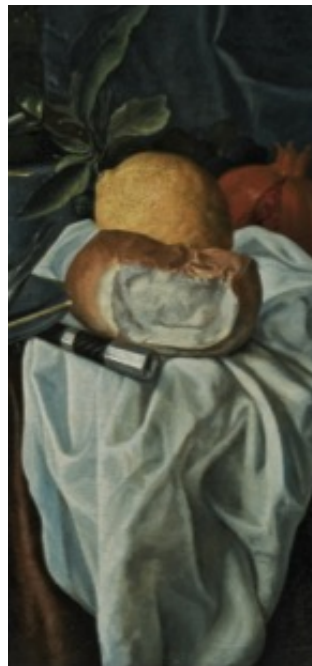
The white item above the herring is a tobacco pipe. Around the 16th century, sniffing, chewing tobacco and especially pipe smoking slowly became the ways to use tobacco in the Netherlands. In the 17th century smoking was becoming more and more common. The Netherlands as a trading nation, with Amsterdam as the center, played an important role in the tobacco trade. In the pubs ready filled pipes were sold. Status and wealth were evident in the smoking tradition. For example, rich people owned a silver tobacco box. Poor people had to do with the ready filled pipes. Amsterdam became the most powerful center of the Western European tobacco trade. At the end of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century the tobacco trade showed a strong expansion.



Once again, the traditional roemer glass is shown in the painting. The word "Röemer" was derived from the Latin word Roma, for Rome and dedicated to the romans who initially brought the first grape vines into Germany. It also refers to the custom of using this style of glass to toast the Holy Roman Emperor. Nowadays, in Germany, the Roemer is regarded as a traditional toasting glass. Over the years, these typical glasses started to look more sophisticated. Engraving was added to the bowls for decoration and sometimes gold was added to the rims. It is very impressive how the clear rim of the glass shows the reflection of the room and window while also preserving its transparency and revealing the blue velvet curtain. The fresh lemon is shown with its green leaves, which blends with the green tint of the roemer glass. The size of the glass is notable in comparison to the other components of the work and by looking closely the viewer can see it is filled with white wine. Next to the glass there is a piece of orange; it was very common for Heem to paint still lives with different elements arranged randomly.



One of the most intriguing parts of the painting is the watch placed next to the fish and pipe. The watch is very symbolic because it is a reminder of time and that everything comes to an end. For example, in this work the artist might refer to the fact that fruits, vegetables, fish, wine, and bread are ephemeral like humans. The watch is small and could be meant as a pocket watch. It is painted very elegantly in gold but its blue ribbon is what immediately captures attention. It is very refreshing to see such a vivid blue; you even feel you can touch the soft material that holds the watch.



Bread rolls were also a very common staple in the Netherlands during the 17th century. They were eaten at all meals and complimented the main dish, therefore frequently they are painted in still lives or genre scenes. In this case, the bread is in the foreground while the lemon and pomegranate are behind it. The pomegranate is considered to have originated in the region of modern day Iran, and has been cultivated since ancient times throughout the Mediterranean region and northern India. Pomegranates continue to be a motif often found in Christian religious decoration. Pomegranates appear in many religious paintings, the fruit, broken or bursting open, is a symbol of Jesus' suffering and resurrection. The white cloth holding the lemon, pomegranate and bread creates a stark contrast against the other colors of the background. Heem's color scheme consisted mainly of monochromatic hues. The background is composed of a dark blue curtain and there is a brown velvet cloth on top of the table. All the fabrics are painted in such a realistic manner that

they appear tangible.

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PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Spain.

Manuel Barbié Gallery, Barcelona.

Private Collection, Paris.

MUSEUMS

Jan Jansz de Heem's works can be found in many museums around the world including: The Hague-Gemeentemuseum. Paris- Louvre Museum.

NOTE

Thanks to the investigation of Sam Segal, this magnificent still life is one of the few examples that can be found nowadays of Jan Jansz de Heem. Segal recently discovered this artist had his father, Jan Davidsz de Heem as his professor. As the viewer can observe, the metallic colors and the clarity of the composition are distinctive attributes of Jan Jansz de Heem. Over the table, the viewer will be able to find a variety of elements; a table clock, a pipe, a key, a knife, lemons, an orange segment, a small loaf of bread, and a pomegranate. The most important elements of this piece are the huge roemer glass, the silver goblet, and the sliced fish on top of the tray; all of these made in a very realistic manner over navy blue curtain as a background.

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