

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART TO PRESENT RARE DUTCH, FLEMISH, AND GERMAN

STILL LIVES FROM THE HEINZ FAMILY COLLECTION

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 8, 1989 - The National Gallery of Art will present Still Lives of the Golden Age: Northern European Paintings from the Heinz Family Collection in the East Building, May 14 - September 4, 1989. The exhibition, organized by the National Gallery, includes forty-four paintings from one of the largest private collections of rare Dutch, Flemish, and German still lifes from the late sixteenth- to early eighteenth-century.

The paintings in the exhibition were collected by the family of U.S. Senator and Mrs. H. John Heinz III (PA). Because many of the works have always been privately owned and have never been exhibited, they are little known to the public. The collection, which now numbers more than seventy paintings, is unique for its wide range of still-life specialists for whom few paintings and little documentation have survived.

"We are grateful to the Heinz family for allowing us to present a selection of their remarkable collection. Northern European still lifes hold a special appeal for Americans, beginning with the nineteenth-century American still-life painters who admired their realism and technical virtuosity," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art.

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Still Lifes of the Golden Age represents the full range of still lifes in the Heinz Family Collection. Among the important seventeenth-century still-life artists included in the exhibition are Balthasar van der Ast, Osias Beert the Elder, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Pieter Claesz., Floris van Dijck, William Claesz. Heda, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, Jan van Kessel the Elder, Cerstiaen Luyckx, Abraham Mignon, and Harmen van Steenwyck.

The exhibition ranges in date from the large (47 x 73 in.) and symbolic Allegory of Summer, painted in the 1590s by Lucas van Valckenborch and Georg Flegel, to the highly decorative floral work, Flowers and Fruit, by the early eighteenth-century artist Coenraet Roepel.

The artists who produced still-life paintings believed that the essence of still-life painting was found in its illusion of reality. Some Dutch artists pushed trompe l'oeil illusionism to its extreme and sought to create illusionistic images to deceive the eye, as in Johannes Cuvenes the Elder's Vanitas with Green Drape and Skull (c. 1655) and Franciscus Gysbrechts' Trompe L'Oeil Window (1670s).

Trompe l'oeil illusionism, however, was only one aspect of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish still-life painting. According to Arthur Wheelock, National Gallery curator of northern baroque painting and exhibition curator, "Many of the paintings in this exhibition, however illusionistic in character, were intended to convey broader religious, moral, and theoretical issues of the day than is apparent to the viewer at first glance."

One recurrent theme throughout the exhibition is the transience of life, conveyed by the use of vanitas symbolism, such as insects devouring leaves on plants, rotting fruit, snuffed out candles, skulls, and watches hidden amid exuberant displays of food and elegant objects made of gold and silver.

After the mid-1600s the work of still-life artists became more decorative, as exemplified by Rachel Ruysch's Vase of Flowers on a Table (1690). Such paintings reflected the changing tastes of Dutch society away from a preoccupation with ethical and moral issues toward an admiration for elegance and refinement. Ruysch, whose paintings exhibited technical virtuosity and a precise observation of nature, influenced the concept of still-life painting throughout most of the eighteenth century.

The National Gallery will publish a fully-illustrated catalogue to accompany the exhibition. The catalogue will include full-color reproductions of all of the paintings in the exhibition in addition to essays by Wheelock, Elisabeth Blair MacDougall, professor of history of landscape architecture emerita, Harvard University, and Lawrence O. Goedde, associate professor of art history at the University of Virginia. Professor Ingvar Bergström of Göteborg University in Sweden, who is one of the foremost authorities in the field of northern European still lifes, wrote the entries on the individual paintings.

The exhibition will also be shown at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, October 18 to December 31, 1989.

# National Gallery of Art

*Washington, D.C.*

## EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER

STILL LIFES OF THE GOLDEN AGE:  
Northern European Paintings from the Heinz Family Collection  
May 14-September 4, 1989

This work indeed yields nothing to life.  
No trained rose arbor gives more beautiful roses.  
No tulips, no narcissus ever met so suitable, so fine a likeness.  
Neither caterpillar nor butterfly will ever put this to shame.

from "On a Flower Pot"  
by Dutch poet Joachim Oudaan, 1646

Northern European artists of the golden age greatly influenced the history of painting, particularly American pictorial traditions in the nineteenth century. Outstanding among these painters were Dutch, Flemish, and German specialists who were primarily responsible for the emergence in the late sixteenth century of still life as a genre separate from landscape, portrait, history, and other types of painting.

Still-life painting in the Netherlands reflected the interest that the Dutch, Flemish, and Germans had for their domestic life, their fascination with the cultivation of tulips and other flowers, as well as their pride in their growing economic prosperity. The paintings also reflect ethical and moral issues central to their societies. The classes of still lifes painted by these northern European artists ranged from realistic floral and banquet pieces to allegorical representations of a variety of subjects.

There are many ironies associated with the position of still lifes in northern European artistic traditions. Though seventeenth-century theorists ranked still lifes at the lowest end of the

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scale of worthy subjects for painting, connoisseurs through the centuries have eagerly sought to acquire these delicately conceived works for their collections. The discrepancy between the theoretical position and market value of still-life painting was largely due to theorists' criticism that still-life painters were primarily craftsmen whose work did not exhibit imagination or attention to moral issues. Because theorists stressed imagination over craftsmanship, still-life painting, whose realism depended upon precise observation and great technical skill, came to represent a genre of painting that was considered the antithesis of history painting.

The low status of still lifes in the hierarchy of painting did not, however, prevent a large number of artists from becoming specialists in this area. In addition to a high market demand for still lifes, enormous prestige was granted to those artists who could depict flowers, fruits, insects, and animals as though they were real. The scientific naturalism of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century still-life masters, including George Flegel (cat. 15) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (cat. 8), was allied to botany, where exciting discoveries were being made.

These artists believed that the essence of still-life painting was found in its illusion of reality. Some Dutch artists pushed trompe l'oeil illusionism to its extreme and sought to create images to deceive the eye, as in Johannes Cuvenes the Elder's Vanitas with Green Drape and Skull (cat. 12) and Franciscus Gysbrecht's two-sided Trompe l'Oeil Window (cat. 17).

Despite their propensity for realism, the still-life painters could be as imaginative as the history painters. One example is Jan

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Brueghel the Elder's Flowers in a Glass (cat. 8), which does not accurately reflect a bouquet that actually existed since it contains flowers from different seasons. While the specifics of such paintings are realistic, the paintings are actually imaginative re-creations of reality rather than accurate recordings of it.

In addition to their *trompe l'oeil* illusionism, many paintings, such as that painted by Cuvenes, were intended to convey broad religious and moral issues, as well as numerous themes related to daily living. A recurrent theme in Dutch still-life painting is the transience of life, conveyed by the use of vanitas symbolism, such as insects devouring leaves on plants, rotting fruit, snuffed out candles, skulls, and watches hidden amid exuberant displays of food and elegant objects of gold and silver. An extensive emblematic vocabulary developed in the seventeenth century that gave abstract associations to fruits, flowers, and other objects from daily life. Flowers, for example, were considered a tribute to Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, or they could symbolize the sense of smell or sight in an allegorical representation of the five senses. Still-life images were also important components in representations of the seasons, as in the imposing Allegory of Summer (cat. 42), executed jointly by Flegel and Lucas van Valkenborch.

Even more complex than the symbolic meanings of objects in the paintings are the religious associations within the paintings. Flower still lifes containing depictions of blossoms that had passed their prime or insects devouring leaves were effective vehicles for conveying the primarily Calvinistic warnings that sensual pleasures found in the beauty and variety of the natural world threatened to distract man from the message of Christ's sacrifice and from the significance of God's word.

However, as the sixteenth century progressed toward its end,

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Catholic theologians began to celebrate the blessings of God's creation. The positive attitude toward God's munificence was strengthened in the north by the pride the Dutch had in their economic prosperity. This was paralleled by the increasing fascination of the Dutch with new discoveries in the plant and animal kingdoms.

It is often difficult to tell whether the objects in a still life were included to demonstrate God's bounty or to provide a warning against excessive attention to sensual pleasures. Some still lifes, such as those by Flegel (cat. 15) and Brueghel (cat. 8), seem to incorporate both messages.

The development of the so-called "breakfast piece" still life in Haarlem reflected the sense of well-being of artists and patrons during the early seventeenth century. The paintings of two originators of this genre, Pieter Claesz. (cats. 9 and 10) and Willem Claesz. Heda (cat. 18), make it clear that delicacies such as cheeses, nuts, sweets, seafood, and fruit were to be consumed and enjoyed.

During the late seventeenth century, flower paintings became more elaborate, as exemplified by the works of Abraham Mignon (cats. 27 and 28) and Rachel Ruysch (cat. 31). Such decorative paintings reflected the changing tastes of Dutch society away from a preoccupation with ethical and moral issues toward an admiration for elegance and refinement.

Still-life artists were among the revered painters of the day. The combined legacy of Jan van Huysum and Ruysch, known for the flowing rhythm of their compositions, for their technical virtuosity, and for precise observations of flowers and fruit, determined the concept of still-life painting throughout most of the eighteenth century.

# National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

## STILL LIVES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE: Northern European Paintings from the Heinz Family Collection checklist

- \* color transparency available
  - o black and white photograph available
1. Balthasar van der Ast  
Middelburg 1593/1594-1657 Delft  
Vase of Flowers, Basket of Fruit, and Shells, 1623  
Oil on panel, 9 3/4 x 12 3/4 in.
  2. Balthasar van der Ast \*o  
Middelburg 1593/1594-1657 Delft  
Basket of Flowers, 1625  
Oil on panel, 14 1/4 x 23 3/4 in.
  3. Osias Beert the Elder \*  
Antwerp c. 1580-1623 Antwerp  
Vase of Flowers with Dishes of Fruit and Drinking Glass,  
c. 1600  
Oil on panel, 19 3/4 x 26 1/2 in.
  4. Osias Beert the Elder \*o  
Antwerp c. 1580-1623 Antwerp  
Fruit, Nuts, Wine, and Sweets on a Ledge, c. 1610  
Oil on panel, 32 3/4 x 25 1/8 in.
  5. Abraham van Beyeren  
The Hague 1620/1621-1690 Overschie  
Lobster, Oysters, and Fruit on a Table, 1655?  
Oil on canvas, 43 1/4 x 42 3/4 in.
  6. Maerten Boelema, called "de Stomme" \*o  
Leeuwarden 1611-after 1664 Haarlem?  
Tabletop with Drinking Glass, Tankard, Bread, Fruit, and  
Shellfish, after 1642  
Oil on panel, 19 1/4 x 25 in.
  7. Johannes Bosschaert  
Middelburg 1610/1611-after 1628  
Flowers and Fruit, 1626  
Oil on panel, 14 1/2 x 22 3/4 in.

8. Jan Brueghel the Elder  
Brussels 1568-1625 Antwerp  
Flowers in a Glass, 1607 or 1608  
Oil on panel, 19 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.
9. Pieter Claesz.  
(Burg) Steinfurt 1597/1598-1661 Haarlem  
Tabletop with Pigeon Pie, c. 1625  
Oil on panel, 14 1/2 x 30 1/2 in.
10. Pieter Claesz.  
(Burg) Steinfurt 1597/1598-1661 Haarlem  
Table with Ham, Fruit, and Drinking Glasses, 1646  
Oil on panel, 18 x 22 in.
11. Edwaert Collier \*o  
Breda c. 1640-after 1706 Leiden?  
Vanitas with Skull and Coronet, 1663  
Oil on canvas, 22 1/2 x 19 in.
12. Johannes Cuvenus the Elder o  
Bremen c. 1620-c. 1656 The Hague?  
Vanitas with Green Drape and Skull, c. 1655  
Oil on canvas, 42 1/4 x 55 3/4 in.
13. Floris van Dijck \*o  
Haarlem? 1575-1651 Haarlem  
Cheese, Fruit, and Bread on a Red Silk Cloth, c. 1613  
Oil on panel, 21 5/8 x 30 1/4 in.
14. Jacob Foppens van Es  
Antwerp c. 1596-1666 Antwerp  
Banquet, c. 1620  
Oil on panel, 22 x 36 1/4 in.
15. Georg Flegel \*o  
Olmütz 1566-1638 Frankfurt  
Vase of Flowers, Wine Glass, and Fruit, after 1595  
Oil on canvas, 34 x 24 3/4 in.
16. Nicolaes van Gelder  
Leiden? c. 1636-1675/1677 Amsterdam  
Basket with Fruit on a Draped Table, 1670s  
Oil on canvas, 24 3/8 x 19 3/8 in.
17. Franciscus Gysbrechts \*o  
Antwerp? active 1637/1638-1676/1677 Antwerp?  
Trompe l'Oeil Window, 1670s  
Oil on canvas, wood, and metal, 53 3/4 x 40 1/4 in.

18. Willem Claesz. Heda \*o  
Haarlem 1593/1594-1680/1682 Haarlem  
Still Life with Ham and Drinking Vessels, 1643  
Oil on panel, 30 x 43 in.
19. Jan Davidsz. de Heem  
Utrecht 1606-1683/1684 Antwerp  
Tabletop with Lemon, Oysters, and Pewter Jug, c. 1633  
Oil on panel, 23 3/4 x 18 1/2 in.
20. Jacob van Hulsdonck  
Antwerp 1582-1647 Antwerp  
Carnations in a Glass, c. 1620  
Oil on panel, 13 1/4 x 9 5/8 in.
21. Jan van Kessel the Elder \*o  
Antwerp 1626-1679 Antwerp  
Flowers in a Porcelain Vase, 1652  
Oil on copper, 30 1/2 x 23 3/4 in.
22. Jan van Kessel the Elder  
Antwerp 1626-1679 Antwerp  
Flowers in a Glass Vase, c. 1652  
Oil on copper, 30 1/2 x 23 3/4 in.
23. Simon Luttichuys \*  
London 1610-1661 Amsterdam  
Allegory of the Arts, 1646  
Oil on panel, 18 1/8 x 25 1/2 in.
24. Cerstiaen Luyckx \*o  
Antwerp 1623-before 1670  
Banquet with Monkey, 1650s  
Oil on canvas, 32 5/8 x 41 1/4 in.
25. Jacob Marrel  
Frankenthal 1614-1681 Frankfurt  
Flowers in a Vase, 1647  
Oil on copper, 15 x 11 1/2 in.
26. Wouter Mertens  
Antwerp? active 1650s  
Tabletop Still Life, 1650s  
Oil on canvas, 46 3/4 x 71 1/2 in.
27. Abraham Mignon  
Frankfurt 1640-1679 Utrecht  
Cavern Scene, late 1670s  
Oil on canvas, 26 3/4 x 32 1/2 in.

28. Abraham Mignon  
Frankfurt 1640-1679 Utrecht  
Still Life with Fruit, Fish, and a Nest, mid 1670s  
Oil on canvas, 36.7 x 28.7 in.
29. Hubert van Ravesteyn  
Dordrecht 1638-before 1691 Dordrecht  
Tobacco Still Life, c. 1664  
Oil on panel, 15 x 11 1/2 in.
30. Coenraet Roepel  
The Hague 1678-1748 The Hague  
Flowers and Fruit, 1726  
Oil on canvas, 28 x 22 1/2 in.
31. Rachel Ruysch  
Amsterdam 1664-1750 Amsterdam  
Vase of Flowers on a Table, c. 1690  
Oil on canvas, 23 x 19 in.
32. Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten  
active 1612-1655 Haarlem  
Breakfast of Mussels, Cheese, Bread, and Porridge, c. 1615  
Oil on panel, 22 x 34 1/4 in.
33. Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten \*o  
active 1612-1655 Haarlem  
Kitchen Scene, early 1620s  
Oil on canvas, 35 3/4 x 47 1/2 in.
34. Otto Marseus van Schriek  
Nymegen 1619/1620-1678 Amsterdam  
Nature Study, 1671  
Oil on canvas, 23 1/4 x 18 1/2 in.
35. Cornelius Schut the Elder  
Antwerp 1597-1665 Antwerp  
Daniel Seghers  
Antwerp 1590-1661 Antwerp  
Garland of Flowers with the Annunciation, c. 1630  
Oil on copper, 39 1/4 x 27 in.
36. Frans Snyders  
Antwerp 1579-1657 Antwerp  
Game, Shellfish, Fruit, and Vegetables, c. 1610-1615  
Oil on panel, 36 x 48 in.
37. Joris van Son \*o  
Antwerp 1623-1667 Antwerp  
Melon, Oysters, Lobster, and Fruit, 1658  
Oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 46 1/2 in.

38. Isaac Soreau  
Hanau 1604-after 1638  
Tabletop with Plate of Fruit, c.1638?  
Oil on panel, 19 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.
39. Harmen van Steenwyck \*o  
Delft 1612-after 1664  
Stoneware Jug, Game, and Fish, 1646  
Oil on panel, 15 3/4 x 18 3/8 in.
40. Harmen van Steenwyck  
Delft 1612-after 1664  
Skillet and Game, 1646  
Oil on panel, 15 3/4 x 18 3/4 in.
41. Jan Jansz. Treck  
Amsterdam 1606-1652 Amsterdam  
Tabletop with Saltcellar, Dishes, and Glasses, 1644  
Oil on panel, 19 3/4 x 26 3/8 in.
42. Lucas van Valckenborch \*o  
Louvain 1535-1597 Frankfurt  
Georg Flegel  
Olmütz 1566-1638 Frankfurt  
Allegory of Summer, 1595  
Oil on canvas, 47 x 73 in.
43. Jan Jansz. van de Velde III \*  
Haarlem 1619/1620-after 1663 Amsterdam  
Breakfast with Cards and Pipe, 1644  
Oil on panel, 36 3/4 x 29 1/4 in.
44. Simon Pietersz. Verelst  
The Hague 1644-1721 London  
Vase of Flowers with Watch and Key, 1720s?  
Oil on canvas, 33 x 26 1/2 in.