

National Gallery of Art News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 12, 1991

CONTACT: Deborah Ziska
Keira Ellis
(202) 842-6353

NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES MAJOR PAINTING BY HEDA

Washington, D.C. -- The National Gallery of Art recently acquired Banquet Piece with Mince Pie (1635), by Willem Claesz Heda, one of the foremost still-life painters of the seventeenth century. The painting was purchased with funds from the Patrons Permanent Fund and is on display in the West Building in Gallery 47.

"This painting is an important addition to our collection of Dutch paintings," said National Gallery director J. Carter Brown. "We had no major work by this master, and, indeed, no still life of this significance. When seen alongside our other Dutch paintings, this work takes on great significance and demonstrates the importance of still life painting for Dutch art."

The previously unrecorded painting, the largest ever executed by Heda, is one of his finest masterpieces. It demonstrates his dexterity in recording the various textures and surfaces of objects, such as the rough peel of a lemon, the translucent glass of a Venetian pitcher, or the sheen of pewter, silver, and gold. His pictorial genius is revealed in the superb harmony of grays of the silverware and the subtle blend of whites in the tablecloth, enhanced by the deep yellow lemon peel.

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"There are some interesting paradoxes in Banquet Piece with Mince Pie. The composition of the painting is powerful, and at the same time the touch is delicate and sensitive. Also, the symbolism is rich, but does not overwhelm the primary focus on the enjoyment of the ensemble," said Arthur Wheelock, curator of northern baroque painting at the National Gallery of Art.

Heda was born in 1593/1594 and is first mentioned in the Haarlem guild records in 1631. His first known work is a 1621 vanitas still life containing objects -- a human skull, an oil lamp, and smoking equipment -- that convey the transience of life. He continued to imbue his paintings with moralizing meanings that were of great importance to Dutch society. He developed the monochrome style of still life in which carefully conceived compositions became unified through subtle nuances of light and color. Heda taught painting to his son Gerrit Willemsz. Heda, and to Hendrick Heerschop Burger, and Maerten Boelema. He died in Haarlem about 1680.

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