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National Gallery of Art is First and Only U.S. Venue for Still Lifes of Dutch Master Pieter Claesz September 18–December 31, 2005



Pieter Claesz
Tabletop Still Life with Mince Pie and Basket of Grapes, 1625
oil on panel,
Private collection

Washington, DC—**Pieter Claesz: Master of Haarlem Still Life** is the first international exhibition dedicated to the work of one of the most important 17th-century Dutch still-life painters. The exhibition will be on view at the National Gallery of Art—the only U.S. venue— from September 18 through December 31, 2005.

Pieter Claesz will feature 28 still lifes by Claesz (1596/1597–1660) from all phases of his career. It includes more than 20 works by his predecessors and contemporaries, as well as glass, pewter, and silver objects of the sort found in Claesz's still-life paintings. The works on view are drawn from museums and private collections in Europe and the United States, and together they provide a magnificent overview of this master's work,

who created visual feasts that delight the eye and whet the appetite.

The exhibition was presented earlier with variations at the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem (November 27, 2004, through April 4, 2005), and at the Kunsthaus Zürich (April 22 through August 22, 2005). The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, and the Kunsthaus Zürich.

“The National Gallery is proud to be the first and only U.S. venue for this exhibition,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “It reveals the intensity of Claesz’s artistic scope and shows how he paved the way for later generations up to Chardin and Cézanne.”

Exhibition Support

The exhibition in Washington is made possible through the generous support of Greg and Candy Fazakerley.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The Exhibition

Pieter Claesz is arranged chronologically and stylistically in the Gallery’s West Building Dutch Galleries and Cabinet Galleries.

Introduction: The earliest paintings by Claesz are carefully composed still lifes depicting food, tableware, and smoking and drinking utensils. While most of Claesz’s still-life paintings are modest in size, later in his career he also painted large banquet scenes brimming with sensuous foods and elegant tableware, such as *Still Life with Peacock Pie* (1627). The Dutch made magnificent game pies for festive occasions, decorating the exterior of peacock, turkey, and pigeon pies with feathers and flourishes. Later in his career, Claesz collaborated on a number of still-life paintings with his Haarlem contemporary Roelof Koets, with whom he painted the large-scale banquet piece *Still Life with Large Roemer and Fruit* (1644). Claesz painted the left side of the composition while Koets executed the grapes and apples at the right. Also present in the first room of the exhibition are works by Claesz’s predecessors and

contemporaries Osias Beert the Elder, Floris van Dijck, Willem Claesz Heda, and Gerret Willemsz Heda.

Pictorial Innovations and Vanitas Imagery: *Tabletop Still Life with Mince Pie and Basket of Grapes* (1625) demonstrates a number of Claesz's pictorial innovations. The vantage point is lowered, the perception of spatial depth increased, and the composition more unified in comparison to the previous generation's work. Around 1625 Claesz began to paint "vanitas" compositions as a reminder of the transitory nature of life. In *Vanitas Still Life* (1625) the candle and watch allude to the passage of time, while the skull and cut flower evoke the inevitability of death. Such images acted as a warning against attachment to material possessions and earthly pleasures.

Monochrome banquets: Claesz pioneered the development of the monochrome tabletop still life (the so-called "banketjes")—quietly restrained works composed in sober tones yet imbued with an extraordinary sense of naturalism. In *Banquet Piece with Pie, Tazza, and Gilded Cup* (1637), Claesz included incidental details, such as crumbs, nutshell remnants, and a disarrayed napkin, to suggest that a meal has been interrupted. In this work he carefully places a spoon on top of a partially eaten meat pie as an invitation to the viewer to participate in the feast. In the "banketjes," Claesz relied on a monochrome palette to present the subtlest refinement of color and tone. The actual cup of the Guild of St. Martin depicted in the monochromatic *Still Life with the Covered Cup of the Haarlem Brewer's Guild* (1641) will be on display alongside the painting.

Sumptuous Still Lives: Unlike the simple repasts depicted in his breakfast pieces, Claesz's later compositions are often quite elaborate, filled with a variety of foods, glasses, and serving platters dramatically strewn across the table, as seen in *Sumptuous Still Life with Roast Capon and Oysters* (1647).

Pieter Claesz (1596/1597–1660)

Pieter Claesz was born in Berchem, a village near Antwerp. Almost nothing is known of his early years, including the names of his parents or the identity of his teacher, though it is likely he studied in Antwerp. Around 1621 Claesz moved permanently to Haarlem, a

major Dutch art center that was home to many distinguished artists, among them several still-life painters, who benefited from the patronage of the town's wealthy citizenry. Claesz's innovative ways soon gained recognition. Leading families of Haarlem acquired his paintings, displaying them prominently in their houses. Claesz was a prolific painter who signed most of his pictures with the monogram PC. Claesz's son, Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem, became an important landscape artist in the mid-1600s.

Exhibition Curator, Related Activities, and Catalogue

The curator of the exhibition in Washington is Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., curator of northern baroque painting at the National Gallery of Art since 1984 and curator of such important Gallery exhibitions as *Johannes Vermeer* (1995–1996), *Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller* (1996), *Gerard ter Borch* (2004), and *Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits* (2005).

Pieter Claesz: Master of Haarlem Still Life by Pieter Biesboer, Martina Brunner-Bulst, Henry D. Gregory, and Christian Klemm is published by Waanders Publishers, Zwolle. The 176-page, hardcover catalogue includes 80 color illustrations and 20 black-and-white reproductions and is available for \$50 from the shops at the National Gallery of Art, by visiting www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>), or by calling (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350.

On Sunday, November 27, at 2:00 p.m., there will be a two-part lecture program on the exhibition: "The Still Lives of Pieter Claesz: Visual Feasts that Delight the Eye and Whet the Appetite" by curator Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and "Food in Pieter Claesz's Paintings: Reflections of Reality?" by author and food historian Peter G. Rose. For the duration of the exhibition, Gallery talks will be given by staff lecturers Eric Denker and Philip Leonard in the West Building. For details, visit the Calendar of Events at www.nga.gov (<http://www.nga.gov/index.htm>) or call (202) 737-4215.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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