NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Jacob van Walscapelle
Dutch, 1644 - 1727

Still Life with Fruit

1675

oil on panel
overall: 40 x 34.7 cm (15 3/4 x 13 11/16 in.)
framed: 58.7 x 53 x 5.7 cm (23 1/8 x 20 7/8 x 2 1/4 in.)
Inscription: lower right on ledge, in brown paint: J:Walscappel / 1675
Juliet and Lee Folger/The Folger Fund 2001.71.1

ENTRY

Though modest in size and compass, Jacob van Walscapelle's *Still Life with Fruit* has a remarkable sensuality and monumentality of presence. The artist's touch is fresh, his brushstrokes fluid, and his color sense unerring, making the image both inviting and accessible. Bathed in soft light, every figural element quietly asserts its essential properties. The elegant eight-sided *façon de Venice* glass filled with white wine sparkles against the dark background, as light accents its complex, delicate form. One can almost taste the ripe pomegranate bursting with red seeds, the hazelnuts, and the purple grapes that seemingly spill over the edge of the stone table into the viewer's space.

Van Walscapelle clearly took great care in the creation of this arrangement, for iconographic as well as compositional reasons. All of the pictorial elements have associations with Christian ideas of death and resurrection. Grapes and wine are infused with the symbolism of the Eucharist. The symbolism of the partially opened pomegranate is more complex but no less profound. The red arils represent Christ's suffering, but when planted they grow, and hence they also have associations with the Resurrection. The many arils contained within an outer skin also represent the unity of the Christian church. By carefully wrapping the stem of the grape vine around the pomegranate, Van Walscapelle suggested the overarching theme of death and resurrection as conveyed by these various compositional elements. The filberts (hazelnuts) at the lower left edge of the stone table—one within its husk, one partially within its husk, and one with its husk removed—carry other important associations. As Sam Segal has noted, medieval exegetes gave the three components of this nut—its husk, its shell or pod, and its

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

edible inner core—symbolic significance. The husk was compared to Christ's suffering on the cross, the shell to the strength of his all-embracing divinity, and the sweet kernel to the eternal truths of his teachings.[1] Van Walscapelle's painting thus would have encouraged the viewer not only to contemplate Christ's sacrifice and eventual rebirth but also to ponder the essence of the Christian message.

Little is known about the trajectory of Van Walscapelle's artistic career, but he seems to have been influenced by the paintings of Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606 - 1684), even though the latter painted in Utrecht whereas Van Walscapelle worked in Amsterdam. Whether or not the two artists had direct contact, their works are similar in the choice of objects depicted and the religious symbolism that infuses them (see De Heem's *Vase of Flowers*). Van Walscapelle also shared De Heem's ability to harmonize his tabletop compositions through light and color while simultaneously suggesting the varied textures of his pictorial elements; here, for example, Van Walscapelle painted both the smooth, translucent skin of lush grapes and the wrinkly, blemished surface of those past their prime.[2] *Still Life with Fruit* nevertheless differs from De Heem's mature paintings in its elegant and restrained simplicity.

Many of the objects in this painting, including the wineglass, pomegranate, and grapes, are found in other of Van Walscapelle's works, although generally in the midst of a more complex arrangement. The artist may have made studies of these objects that he reused in different combinations, and he almost certainly purchased the glass as a prop, since it appears in another of his paintings.[3] The delicate and refined wineglass was probably manufactured in Amsterdam in emulation of the famed Venetian glassware. In 1664 Filips von Zesen wrote in his *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* that a manufacturer on the Rozengracht had succeeded in making glass "quite as beautiful as the glasses made in Venice."[4]

A fascinating element of this painting is the bubbly appearance of the white wine. Whether or not this quality was Van Walscapelle's original intent, however, is difficult to determine. Many of the apparent "bubbles" are created by small pits in the paint, possibly caused by lead soap aggregation, a condition that may have developed years after Van Walscapelle painted this work.[5]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

NOTES

[1] Sam Segal, *A Fruitful Past: A Survey of the Fruit Still Lifes of the Northern and Southern Netherlands from Brueghel till Van Gogh* (Amsterdam, 1983), 36.

[2] Creating a harmonious composition was highly valued in the seventeenth century and reflected an artist's ability to conceive a work with *houding*. See Paul Taylor, "The Concept of *Houding* in Dutch Art Theory," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (London, 1992): 210–232.

[3] The identical glass and a similar bunch of grapes appear, for example, in a tabletop still life (oil on canvas, 49 x 41.5 cm) in Silvano Lodi, *Ausstellung Alter Meister* (Munich, 1969), no. 4.

[4] Pieter C. Ritsema van Eck and Henrica M. Zijlstra-Zweens, *Glass in the Rijksmuseum*, 2 vols. (Zwolle, 1993), 1:15, note that "visitors could see glasses *welche den Venedischen mit nichten weichen*" or just as beautiful as the glass made in Venice. See Filips von Zesen, *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1664), 211.

[5] For a discussion of lead soaps in a painting by Jan Davidsz de Heem, see Arie Wallert and Joris Dik, "The Scientific Examination of a Seventeenth-Century Masterpiece," *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung* 21, no. 1 (2007): 38–51, and Leslie Carlyle and Maartje Witlox, "Historically Accurate Reconstructions of Artists' Oil Painting Materials," *Tate Papers*, Spring 2007 (http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/07spring/carlyle.htm).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a panel made from a single board of oak[1] with a vertical grain. The back of the panel is beveled along all four edges. The ground is rather thin and does not fully obscure the heavy wood grain. It appears white through most of the cracks and losses, but under the fruit it looks gray. The gray color may indicate an underpainting, or Walscapelle could have painted the gray stone ledge without leaving reserves for the fruit. The paint was applied mostly wet-into-wet, but details and highlights were applied wet-over-dry. Impasto is located only in the brightest highlights.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

The painting is in excellent condition. Tiny pitting is visible in the paint, especially in the wine. This may have been caused by lead soap aggregation. A few small, flake losses are located in the paint of the pomegranate. Inpainting is found along the front edge of the stone table, and along the right edge of the glass of wine. Under ultraviolet light, remnants of an earlier varnish can be seen along the top and left edges and in the wine glass.

[1] Steve Wilcox, head of frame conservation at the National Gallery of Art, characterized the wood based on visual examination of the panel and the X-radiographs.

PROVENANCE

(Etienne Le Roy, Brussels). William Tilden Blodgett [1823-1875], New York.[1] (L. Souty Fils, Paris).[2] (Julius H. Weitzner, Inc., New York).[3] G. Huntington Hartford, II [1911-2008], New York;[4] (sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 12 December 1956, no. 34); (Newhouse Galleries, New York); sold to Jean McGrail, New York;[5] by inheritance to her daughter; (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 25 January 2001, no. 219); (Berenberg Fine Art Limited, Isle of Man); purchased 11 June 2001 through (Rob Smeets, Milan) by NGA.

[1] The names of Le Roy and Blodgett are given as former owners in the catalogue of a 1938 exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum that included the painting. Blodgett was a businessman and varnish manufacturer as well as a collector, who became one of the founders of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Le Roy (1808-1878) was a restorer, dealer, and expert advisor to the Musée Royal de Peinture et de Sculpture in Brussels, and one of two dealers who in 1870 sold to the New York museum what became its first painting acquisitions, a purchase approved by the museum trustees the following year. It is possible that Blodgett purchased the Walscapelle painting for himself when he was in Europe for several months in 1870 negotiating on the Metropolitan's behalf. On the two men's dealings at that time see: Katharine Baetjer, "Buying Pictures for New York: The Founding Purchase of 1871," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 39 (2004): 161-245. The painting did not appear in Blodgett's estate sale on 27 April 1876, held at

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

Chickering Hall in New York.

[2] The 2001 Sotheby's sale catalogue lists this owner. The company was a successor business to Maison Souty, well-known framemakers during the 19th century in Paris.

[3] Weitzner, whose name is given in the 1956 sale catalogue, was possibly the dealer from whom Hartford acquired the painting.

[4] Hartford was the lender of the painting to the 1938 exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum. He was an heir to the A&P supermarket fortune, and owned an extensive art collection.

[5] The information about Newhouse's purchase and sale of the painting is provided by Meg Newhouse Kirkpatrick, of Newhouse Galleries, in her letter of 17 September 2001 to Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., in NGA curatorial files. The 2001 Sotheby's sale catalogue indicates that Newhouse owned the painting with the dealer Frederick Mont, and the 1969 and 1980 references to the painting associate it with Mont, but the Newhouse records do not reveal any information about Mont's ownership.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1873 Probably Exposition de tableaux et dessins d'anciens maîtres, La société néerlandaise de bienfaisance, Brussels, 1873, no. 339 (supplement of the catalogue's second edition).

1938 The Painters of Still Life, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1938, no. 24, as The Pomegranate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

1873 Decamps, Louis. "Correspondance". *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 8 (September 1873): 278 (probably the NGA painting).

1873 Société Néerlandaise de Bienfaisance. *Exposition de tableaux et dessins d'anciens maîtres*. 2nd ed. Exh. cat. Société Néerlandaise de Bienfaisance, Brussels, 1873: probably no. 339 (catalogue supplement).

1938 Wadsworth Atheneum. *The Painters of Still Life*. Exh. cat. Wadsworth Atheneum. Hartford, 1938: no. 24.

1969 Bol, Laurens J. *Holländische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts nahe den grossen Meistern Landschaften und Stilleben*. Braunschweig, 1969: 377 n. 488.

1980 Vroom, Nicolaas R. A. *A Modest Messageas Intimated by the Painters of the "Monochrome Banketje."* 2 vols. Schiedam, 1980: 2:317.

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Jacob van Walscapelle/*Still Life with Fruit*/1675,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/119295 (accessed December 20, 2016).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington