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

Willem Kalf
Dutch, 1619 - 1693

Still Life

c. 1660

oil on canvas
overall: 64.4 x 53.8 cm (25 3/8 x 21 3/16 in.)
framed: 83.8 x 69.9 cm (33 x 27 1/2 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1943.7.8

ENTRY

A restrained arrangement of sumptuous objects nestled in a luxurious and exotic Oriental carpet is brought to life by the delicate play of light across their surfaces.[1] With deft touches of his paintbrush Kalf invokes the soft texture of wool, the vitreous gleam of Chinese porcelain, the dense rind of lemon, and the transparent sheen of an elegantly wrought Venetian-style goblet. Viewed individually the objects have no logical relationship to one another, yet orchestrated as they are through Kalf's unerring sense of composition, these and the other items he has depicted come together as a harmonious whole.

As is evident from examining the full extent of his oeuvre, Kalf's style developed in quite distinct phases that parallel, to a certain extent, his periods of residence in Rotterdam, Paris, and Amsterdam. Within each phase a precise chronology is difficult to determine as he dated only a few of his paintings. Because Kalf favored a few compositional types and tended to use many of the same objects in various combinations, however, one can often arrive at an approximate chronology.

This painting, with its pyramidal composition set off-center, is one of the purest examples of a compositional format used by Kalf in Amsterdam in the late 1650s and early 1660s.[2] The presence of the Chinese porcelain fruit bowl, tipped at an angle to reveal its decorated interior, is also characteristic of his Amsterdam period. This Wan-Li bowl was a favorite of Kalf's, possibly because the blues and creamy whites of the interior played off so well against the oranges, yellows, and reds of the fruit.[3] Conservation of the painting in 2010 revealed that a glass bird with spread wings surmounting the tall flute and extensive scalloping on the glass cup on the right, which were previously visible in the painting, were fanciful

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

additions by an earlier restorer [fig. 1].[4]

Kalf's paintings were destined for an elite audience, one that not only took pride in the mercantile prosperity of the Dutch Republic but also had been instrumental in creating that wealth. His still lifes from the Amsterdam period do not contain Dutch cheeses, breads, hams, and pies but rather depict items that had been imported from the far reaches of the world—Venetian glass, Oriental carpets, agate-handled knives, Seville oranges, and, above all, Chinese porcelain.[5] He then placed these exotic objects against a dark, contrasting background that allowed him to illuminate their forms with accents of light.

To judge from paintings such as this, Kalf's primary intent must have been to create an arrangement of elegant and luxurious objects that could be enjoyed for their aesthetic appeal. As opposed to earlier Haarlem still-life painters, he seems to have had little interest in instilling moralizing messages into his works. Confirmation of his attitude can be gained from the writings of Gerard de Lairesse (Dutch, 1641 - 1711), an important Amsterdam painter and theorist who knew Kalf personally and admired his work.[6] De Lairesse writes that paintings of the type that Kalf executed, which include "expensive items, such as gold, silver, crystal and other glasses, pearls, rare stones, and pearl necklaces," are commonly called *Vanitassen,* or vanitas paintings.[7] Nevertheless, according to De Lairesse, Kalf did not include objects in his paintings to convey a specific meaning or moral. Indeed, he decided which objects to paint somewhat according to whim and without any preconceived program.[8]Although the rarity and fragility of the objects might call to mind questions of transience associated with vanitas painting, these were merely by-products of Kalf's work, not the driving force behind it.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 before treatment, Willem Kalf, *Still Life*, c. 1660, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection, 1943.7.8

NOTES

[1] Such carpets were, and still are, often used by the Dutch as covers for tables. In the seventeenth century, they were probably to be found only in the homes of the wealthy because of their high cost. They were imported to the Netherlands from Persia and India by the Dutch East India Company. Because this particular carpet is only partially visible, and because it is possible that the artist has taken some license in its design, its country of origin is difficult to determine. One carpet expert, Mr. Chester Ellis of Kingston, New York, has indicated that he believes it is an Indian carpet (conversation with Mr. Ellis, September 1980). For a fuller discussion of carpets in Dutch art, see Onno Ydema, “Carpets in 17th-Century Dutch and Flemish Painting,” in The European Fine Art Fair (Maastricht, 1988), 15–28; and especially Onno Ydema, Carpets and Their Datings in Netherlandish Paintings, 1540–1700 (Zutphen, 1991).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

[2] Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 114–115, 258, no. 102, uses this painting as the characteristic example of this type of composition. He expressly compares the painting to four other works: three paintings dated 1659, his nos. 95–97, and an undated painting in the Detroit Institute of Arts, his no. 100. The compositional and stylistic characteristics of this work are so similar to those of other Kalf paintings from the early 1660s that I cannot agree with Claus Grimm's assessment that the Gallery's painting is the work of Jurriaen van Streek (1632–1687). See Claus Grimm, *Stilleben: Die niederländischen und deutschen Meister* (Stuttgart, 1988), 223, repro.

[3] Kalf, who seems to have abandoned painting as a profession to be an art dealer in about 1680, may well have collected Wan-Li porcelain, for he depicted many exquisite pieces in his paintings. The bowl in this painting is known as a *clapmuts* in the Netherlands. See T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, as Recorded in the Dagh-Registers of Batavia Castle, Those of Hirado and Deshima, and Other Contemporary Papers, 1602–1682* (Leiden, 1954), repro. 4.

[4] These fanciful embellishments were painted out during the 2010 conservation treatment (see the Technical Summary). For Dutch glass, see Ada Polak, "Glass in Dutch Painting," *Connoisseur* 193, no. 776 (October 1976): 121.

[5] Porcelain made in China during the reign of Wan Li (1563–1620) was highly valued in the Netherlands. Most of it was brought by ships belonging to the Dutch East India Company, which had been founded on March 20, 1602. The real craze for Chinese porcelain occurred after the capture of Portuguese ships carrying a large cargo of Wan-Li porcelain in March 1603. When the cargo, consisting of more than one hundred thousand pieces of porcelain, was sold in Amsterdam on August 15, 1604, buyers came from all over Western Europe. See T. Volker, *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, as Recorded in the Dagh-Registers of Batavia Castle, Those of Hirado and Deshima, and Other Contemporary Papers, 1602–1682* (Leiden, 1954), 22; and Clare Le Corbeiller, *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange, Additions to the Helena Woolworth McCann Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1974), 1–4.

[6] In a document of 1672 Kalf appeared as a witness before a notary in Amsterdam along with a number of other artists, including Gerard de Lairesse (Dutch, 1641 - 1711). The case concerned the evaluation of Italian paintings. See Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 193, doc. 20. How well De Lairesse and Kalf knew each other is not known, but to judge from De Lairesse's laudatory comments about Kalf in his treatise on painting, one would assume that a friendship existed. See Gérard de Lairesse, *Groot schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1740; reprint, Soest, 1969), 266–267: "De vermaarde *Kalf,* die veel heerlyke en uitmuntende

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

voorbeelden daar van heeft nagelaaten, heeft in deze zeer uitgemunt, en boven allen den hoogsten lof verdiend." (The famous Kalf, who left us many delightful and excellent examples of [still-life painting], greatly excelled in this, and earned the highest praise of them all.) Translated by Henriette Rahusen.

[7] Gérard de Lairesse, *Groot schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1740; reprint, Soest, 1969), 266: "Het is die welke in allerhande kostelykheden bestaat, als goud, zilver, kristalle en andere glazen, paerlen, edelgesteentens en paerlemoer, gemeenlyk *Vanitassen* genaamd." ([Another type of still-life painting], containing all kinds of precious items, such as gold, silver, crystal- and other glasses, pearls, precious stones and mother-of-pearl, commonly called *Vanitassen*.)

[8] Gérard de Lairesse, *Groot schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1740; reprint, Soest, 1969), 268: "Hoewel wy hier voor gezegt hebben, dat de vermaarde *Kalf* in de Stillevens boven anderen heeft uitgemunt, heeft hy nochtans, zo min als zyne voorgangers en navolgers, reden van zyne verbeeldingen weeten te geeven, waarom hy dit of dat vertoonde: maar slechts het geen hem in den zin schoot (als een porcelyne pot of schaal, een goude bokaal, een fluit of roemer met wyn, en daar in een citroenschil hangende, een horologie, paerlemoere hoorn op een goude of zilvere voet, een zilvere schaal of bord met persikken, of wel opengesnedene chinaasappelen of citroenen, een tapyt, en diergelyke gewoonlyke dingen) verbeeld, zonder eens zyne gedachten te hebben laaten gaan om iets van belang voort te brengen daar een byzondere zin in stak, of't geen ergens op toegepast kon worden." (Even though we just stated that the famous Kalf was the very best still-life painter, he nevertheless, just as his predecessors and followers never explained the reason for his compositions, why he depicted this or that; but only painted that which fancied him—such as a porcelain pot or bowl, a gold chalice, a flute or roemer with wine, in which dangled a lemon-peel, a pocket-watch, a horn of mother-of-pearls mounted on a gold- or silver base, a silver platter or plate with peaches, or perhaps sliced oranges or lemons, a tapestry, and similar common objects—without ever having considered whether to create something important that had a significant meaning, or that could refer to something.) Translated by Henriette Rahusen.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a fine-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. The X-radiographs show broad cusping along the top edge. The double ground consists of a red lower layer and an opaque beige upper layer.[1]

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

Both thin layers are brush applied and leave the weave pattern prominent.

Paint handling varies according to the surface texture being rendered, from thin opaque layers to richly textured pastes, with glazes confined to carpet details and the dark background. Infrared reflectography at 1.1 to 2.5 microns[2] reveals evidence of a fourth glass. Remnants of this glass became visible when overpaint was removed during a conservation treatment in 2010. It is unclear if Kalf intended for this glass to be seen or if he had painted it out and it was subsequently uncovered by a particularly aggressive restoration at some point in the painting's history.

A large complex tear is present in the upper right quadrant and the background is heavily abraded in this area. Scattered small losses are found overall, with a larger loss in the center of the Seville orange. There is also evidence of damage to some of the glassware, namely the center glass, and the glass on the proper left side. During an earlier restoration, the white highlights in these objects were reinforced, and in some cases, such as the winged bird on top of the center glass, completely invented. The X-radiographs reveal that some of the original lead-white highlights were still present beneath these additions.[3] In 2010, the painting was treated to remove discolored varnish, inpaint, and overpaint and to bring the tear back into plane. During that treatment the restoration highlights in the glassware were painted out and the original highlights were reconstructed using the X-radiographs as a guide.

[1] The painting conservation department used cross-sections to analyze the ground when the painting was treated in 2010 (see report dated July 2010 in NGA Conservation department files).

[2] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with H, J, and K filters.

[3] The additions were analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using air-path X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and confirmed to be of a later date. Some of the other pigments in the painting were also analyzed at this time (see report, dated October 19, 2010, in NGA Conservation department files). The yellow pigment in the lemon had been analyzed previously by the NGA Scientific Research department using air-path X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and found to be lead-tin yellow (see reports dated October 12, 1983, and October 19, 2010, in

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

NGA Conservation department files).

PROVENANCE

Possibly Joseph Daniel Böhm [1794-1865], Vienna; possibly (his sale, Alexander Posonyi, Vienna, 4 December 1865, no. 1682).[1] (Cottier & Co., New York); sold 1889 to Mrs. Henry Osborne Havemeyer [née Louisine Waldron Elder, 1855-1929], New York; (sale, American Art Association, Anderson Galleries, New York, 10 April 1930, no. 46); Chester Dale [1883-1962], New York; gift 1943 to NGA.

[1] Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619-1693*, Berlin, 1974, 258, no. 102, suggests that the *Still Life* might be identified as the Böhm painting auctioned in Vienna on 4 December 1865. The painting in this sale, however, was probably another composition, for it is described in the auction catalogue as having four pomegranates ("vier spanische Granatäpfel").

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1965 The Chester Dale Bequest, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1965, unnumbered checklist.

1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 27.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1930 "Rush at Auction of Havemeyer Art." *New York Times* (11 April 1930): 23.
1943 Poe, Elisabeth E. "The Gift of 11 Paintings to the National Gallery of Art by Chester Dale." *Washington Times-Herald*, (18 July 1943): C-10.
1943 *Washington Times-Herald* (18 July 1943): C-10.
1957 Shapley, Fern Rusk. *Comparisons in Art: A Companion to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC*. London, 1957 (reprinted 1959): pl. 124.
1959 National Gallery of Art. *Paintings Other Than French in the Chester Dale*

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

Collection. Washington, 1959 (reprinted 1965): 15, repro.

1960 Baird, Thomas P. *Dutch Painting in the National Gallery of Art*. Ten Schools of Painting in the National Gallery of Art 7. Washington, 1960: 40, color repro.

1963 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.* New York, 1963: 315, repro.

1965 National Gallery of Art. *Paintings Other than French in the Chester Dale Collection*. Washington, 1965: 15, repro.

1965 National Gallery of Art. *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture*. Washington, 1965: 71.

1968 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings and Sculpture, Illustrations*. Washington, 1968: 63, repro.

1974 Grisebach, Lucius. *Willem Kalf, 1619-1693*. Berlin, 1974: 114-115, 122, 130, 258-259, no. 102, repro. 116.

1975 National Gallery of Art. *European paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. Washington, 1975: 184-185, repro.

1984 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. Rev. ed. New York, 1984: 306, no. 404, color repro.

1985 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. Washington, 1985: 213, repro.

1985 Pelfrey, Robert H., and Mary Hall-Pelfrey. *Art and Mass Media*. New York, 1985: 99, no. 4.18, repro.

1986 Sutton, Peter C. *A Guide to Dutch Art in America*. Washington and Grand Rapids, 1986: 309.

1988 Grimm, Claus. *Stilleben: die niederländischen und deutschen Meister*. Stuttgart, 1988: 223, repro.

1991 Ydema, Onno. *Carpets and Their Datings in Netherlandish Paintings, 1540-1700*. Zutphen, 1991: 161, no. 455.

1993 Frelinghuysen, Alice Cooney, et al. *Splendid Legacy: The Havemeyer Collection*. Exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1993: 351, no. 336, repro. [not in the exhibition].

1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 146-149, color repro. 147.

1996 Pelfrey, Robert H. *Art and mass media*. Reprint. Dubuque, Iowa, 1996: 96-97, fig. 4.16.

1998 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *A Collector's Cabinet*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1998: 35, 66, no. 27.

1999 Brunnenkant, Katja. "Falscher Glanz? Technologische Untersuchung des ‘W. Kalf. 1643’ signierten Prunkstillebens im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Köln und Vergleich mit Werken aus der Pariser Periode Willem Kalfs (ca. 1619-1693)." *Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung* 13, no. 2 (1999): 264-273, fig. 40, 266, repro. of X-radiography.

1999 Schmied, Wieland. *Harenberg-Museum der Malerei: 525 Meisterwerke*

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

aus sieben Jahrhunderten. Dortmund, 1999: 362-363, repro.

To cite: Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Willem Kalf/*Still Life*/c. 1660," *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/12206 (accessed December 20, 2016).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington