Pieter Claesz, the most important still-life painter in Haarlem in the 1620s, was born in Berchem in 1596 or 1597.[1] He was apparently admitted to the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke in 1620, but by 1621 he must have been living in Haarlem, where his son, landscape painter Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem (Dutch, 1620 - 1683), was born.[2] Although it is unknown what date he joined the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, the 1634 guild register lists him as a master painter.[3] After his first wife died, he married Trijntien Lourensdr on August 8th, 1635, with whom he had two daughters, his only children.[4]

Claesz's teacher is unknown, but his earliest dated works evoke the meticulous laid table scenes of the Antwerp painters Clara Peeters (c. 1594–1657) and Osias Beert the Elder (Flemish, c. 1580 - 1624). Claesz stocked his tabletop images with a wide variety of food and drink, smoking implements, and musical instruments. He painted with tangible detail and carefully observed light effects, and sought to enhance the illusion of reality by arranging objects on the table so that they appear to recede in space. Between 1630 and 1640 Claesz adopted a more subdued, monochromatic palette. After 1640, more dramatic colors and compositions return to his paintings, likely influenced by the sumptuous still lifes of Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606 - 1684) and Abraham van Beyeren (1620/21–1690). Claesz’s later paintings occasionally feature vines and leaves painted by Roelof Koets (1592–1655).

Claesz’s innovative compositions and his distinctive ability to recombine the same set of objects into a multitude of original and compelling arrangements influenced artists in Haarlem and beyond. When the Haarlem painter Willem Claesz Heda (Dutch, 1594 - 1680) began producing still lifes in 1628, he looked to Claesz for subjects as well as compositional and stylistic solutions. Samuel Ampzing praised both Claesz and Heda for their still lifes in his 1628 Beschrijvinge ende Lof der Stad Haerlem.[5] Constantijn Huygens included Claesz on a 1647 list of painters skilled enough to contribute to the decorations at the Oranjezaal at the Huis ten Bosch, specifically passages depicting gold and silver objects, although it has never been confirmed that Claesz participated in this commission.[6]


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