



Anonymous Artist

Willem Kalf

Dutch, 1619 - 1693

Still Life with Nautilus Cup

1665/1670

oil on canvas

overall: 68.2 x 58 cm (26 7/8 x 22 13/16 in.)

framed: 90.8 x 80 x 9.5 cm (35 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 3 3/4 in.)

Inscription: probably by another hand, lower left on edge of table: W.Kalf

Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith 1974.109.1

ENTRY

Kalf's renown as an artist was such that during his lifetime he was eulogized in verse by Jan Vos and Joost van den Vondel; in the early eighteenth century, Gerard de Lairesse (Dutch, 1641 - 1711) and Arnold Houbraken wrote about him enthusiastically.[1] Although these sources provide some insight into the character of his art, they say nothing about his workshop practice. Likewise, no mention is made of students, although some artists, particularly Jurriaen van Streek (1632–1687), come so close to him in style and composition that it seems improbable that they did not spend some time in his studio.[2] The issue is of some consequence because two or three versions exist of certain of Kalf's compositions. While later imitations may also have been made, it would have been consistent with seventeenth-century workshop practice for studio assistants, perhaps with the aid of the master, to make replicas of the master's most successful paintings. Even without documentary evidence to confirm the existence of a Kalf workshop, these replicas suggest that he worked with various assistants, particularly during his Amsterdam years.[3]

Even though *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* has many qualities of a Kalf composition, it must be one of these replicas.[4] A comparison with the Gallery's *Still Life*, in which a number of the same objects appear, reveals the differences in handling between this work and an authentic painting by the master. The most obvious disparity is in the depiction of the lemon rind in each painting ([fig. 1] and [fig. 2]). In Kalf's own hand the rind has a three-dimensional presence as it twists and turns in space. Its edges are carefully wrought to show both the irregular cut of the knife and the

thickness of the skin. Finally, Kalf re-created the rough texture of the skin with sure touches of the brush. The illusionism is so complete that the paint seems to take on the character of the skin itself. The lemon peel in *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* exhibits none of these characteristics. Form is simplified, edges give no hint of the rind's thickness, and paint highlights sit on the surface, doing little to create the sense of texture. Comparable differences in technique are evident in the treatment of the Seville orange and the tapestry.[5] Grisebach, who in 1974 was the first to recognize that *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* was a replica, considered Kalf's original composition to be a painting formerly on the art market.[6] That painting, however, is also a replica, but by a different hand.[7] As seems to have happened in a number of instances, Kalf's original is lost.[8]

The compositional elements of the present work indicate that Kalf's original composition must have been executed in the late 1660s.[9] Although the blue-and-white Wan-Li porcelain bowl, decorated with colored biscuit figures representing the eight immortals of Taoist belief, is already found in Kalf's paintings from the early 1660s, most prominently in his *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* of 1662 (Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid),[10] the unusual nautilus cup appears only later in the decade.[11] This cup consists of a polished turban shell mounted on an elaborately wrought, gilded-silver base made in the form of a putto holding a horn of plenty.[12] While the turban shell was especially prized for its mother-of-pearl luminosity, its shape, with the symbolic association with a horn of plenty, made it a particularly appropriate focal point for Kalf's image of wealth and prosperity.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Detail of lemon, after Willem Kalf, *Still Life with Nautilus Cup*, 1665/1670, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith, 1974.109.1



fig. 2 Detail of lemon, Willem Kalf, *Still Life*, c. 1660, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection, 1943.7.8

NOTES

- [1] For Jan Vos' poem, written in 1654, see Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 21; for Vondel's poem, published in 1663, see Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf*, 32. See also Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2:218–219; and Gérard de Lairese, *Groot schilderboek*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1740; reprint, Soest, 1969), 266–268.
- [2] Jurriaen's son, Hendrick van Streek (1659–after 1719), also painted in the manner of Kalf. For a discussion of artists working in Kalf's manner, see Ima Blok, "Willem Kalf," *Onze Kunst* 35 (January–June 1919): 143–145; and Fred G. Meijer, "In der Nachfolge von Willem Kalf," in *Gemaltes Licht: Die Stilleben von Willem Kalf 1619–1693*, ed. Sylvia Böhmer (Munich, 2007), 150–155.
- [3] Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), attributes 147 paintings unreservedly to Kalf. He also lists various copies of these works, copies of lost originals, questionable works, and wrongly attributed paintings. He does not, however, discuss the workshop problem. Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past: The Sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands, 1600–1700*, ed. William B. Jordan, trans. P. M. van Tongeren (Delft, 1988), 180–181, writes that Kalf, "like De Heem, allowed his pupils to make copies of his paintings to which he himself would add the finishing touches." Besides numerous copies by others, we also know of contemporary replicas signed by Kalf himself. Segal, however, does not present the evidence for his claim.
- [4] Technical analysis shows that the signature was a later addition. Thus it is no assurance of authenticity.

- [5] Similar comparisons can be made with other paintings containing identical objects, such as the blue-and-white Chinese bowl in Kalf's *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* in the Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.
- [6] Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 279, no. 140a. He gives no reason for having determined this work to be a copy. Doubts about the attribution have also been expressed verbally by Ingvar Bergström, Sam Segal, Claus Grimm, and Fred G. Meijer.
- [7] Sir Geoffrey Agnew, in a letter dated January 9, 1976, in NGA curatorial files, indicates that after Agnew's acquired this painting at Sotheby's in 1964 (Sotheby's sale catalog, March 11, 1964, lot 70, repro.), they determined after restoration that it was an "old copy." Agnew's subsequently sold the painting at auction on August 18, 1970. Its present location is unknown.
- [8] See, for example, Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 286, nos. B6, B7, B8.
- [9] Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 279, however, explained the weakness of the painting that he considered to be the original by dating it to the end of Kalf's career: "Qualitativ stellenweise recht schwaches Spätwerk."
- [10] For an illustration, see Ivan Gaskell, *Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Painting: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection* (London, 1990), no. 10, 74–77.
- [11] See, for example, his *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* (Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig). Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619–1693* (Berlin, 1974), 160, 276–277, no. 136, repro. 135, dates this painting to the late 1660s because of the dark tonality and the prevalence of gold tonalities in the work.
- [12] Although the bases of the Leipzig and National Gallery of Art paintings are similar, slight differences do occur. The turban shell, for example, sits directly on the head and hand of the putto in the Leipzig painting, whereas in the National Gallery of Art painting it is raised above the putto by three circular forms. Such free adaptations in the shapes of objects are common in Kalf's paintings; a variant of this same base is used as a support for a glass in his *Still Life*, 1663, in the Cleveland Museum of Art (inv. no. 62.292; see Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past: The Sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands, 1600–1700* [Delft, 1988], 195, 249, no. 56).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a medium-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric, is composed of irregularly spun threads and was originally stretched off-square. It has been lined

with the tacking margins trimmed, although cusping present along all edges suggests that the original dimensions have been retained. The paint was applied over a smooth, thin beige ground in thin, fluid layers, with liquid washes and full-bodied pastes employed to simulate surface texture. Smooth surfaces were rendered with highlights blended wet-into-wet, while a thick paint and a fingerprint were used to texture the orange peel.

Dark passages such as the background are moderately abraded, particularly the darker design elements of the rug and sugar bowl. Minor losses are scattered at random. The signature at the lower left crosses over drying crackle but not the age cracks. It was added after the paint had dried, presumably by another hand. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

PROVENANCE

Possibly G.L.M. van Es, Wassenaar.[1] Probably Colonel Towers.[2] (Leonard Koetser, London); sold 1946 to (Edward Speelman, London);[3] sold 1950 or 1958 to (Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam);[4] sold 1958 to Mr. W. Reineke, Amersfoort; re-purchased 1968 by (Kunsthandel P. de Boer, Amsterdam), with a half-share sold to (Newhouse, London);[5] sold 21 January 1969 by (Newhouse, London) to Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Smith, Washington, D.C.;[6] gift 1974 to NGA.

[1] Noted in Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf, 1619-1693*, Berlin, 1974: 279.

[2] The name of Col. Towers is given in the 1950 De Boer exhibition catalogue.

[3] See the letter dated 31 March 1989 from Edward Speelman to Anke van Wagenberg-ter Hoeven, in NGA curatorial files.

[4] The letter dated 31 March 1989 from Edward Speelman to Anke van Wagenberg-ter Hoeven gives the date of his sale to P. de Boer as 1950. However, a letter of 17 April 1989 from H. de Boer to Anke van Wagenberg-ter Hoeven says the firm purchased the painting from Speelman in 1958. Both letters are in NGA curatorial files.

[5] The transactions from 1958 to 1969 are described in H. de Boer's letter of 17 April 1989 to Anke van Wagenberg-ter Hoeven, in NGA curatorial files.

[6] The sale date to the Smiths is given in their collection records; copy in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1948 1948 Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Masters, Eugene Slatter Gallery, London, 1948, no. 13.

1950 Zomertentoonstelling 1950, Pieter de Boer Gallery, Amsterdam, 1950, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1958 Kunstbezit rondom Laren, Singer Museum, Laren, The Netherlands, 1958, no. 106, repro.

1962 Nederlandse stillevens uit de zeventiende eeuw, Dordrechts Museum, 1962, no. 65, repro.

1979 Extended loan for use by Secretary Michael Blumenthal, U.S. Department of Treasury, Washington, D.C., 1979-1980.

1980 Extended loan for use by Secretary G. William Miller, U.S. Department of Treasury, Washington, D.C., 1980.


1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 28.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1948 Eugene Slatter Gallery. *Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Masters*. Exh. cat. Eugene Slatter Gallery, London, 1948: no. 13.

1950 Pieter de Boer Gallery. *Zomertentoonstelling 1950*. Exh. cat. Pieter de Boer Gallery, Amsterdam, 1950: unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1958 Boer, Rudolf G. de , D. P. R. A. Bouvy, and P. Eilers. *Kunstbezit rondom Laren, 13de-20ste eeuw: schilderijen-beeldhouwwerken*. Exh. cat.

 NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

- Singer Museum, Laren, 1958: no. 106, repro.
- 1962 Bol, Laurens J. *Nederlandse Stillezens uit de 17e Eeuw*. Exh. cat. Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht, 1962: 29, 71, no. 65, repro.
- 1965 "Les cours de ventes." *Connaissance des Arts* 166 (December 1965): 161, no. 12, repro.
- 1974 Grisebach, Lucius. *Willem Kalf, 1619-1693*. Berlin, 1974: 278-279, as copy of no. 140.
- 1980 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings: Addenda to Summary Catalogue*. Washington, 1980: no. 2676, repro.
- 1985 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. Washington, 1985: 213, repro.
- 1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 149-152, color repro. 151.
- 1998 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *A Collector's Cabinet*. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1998: 35, 66, no. 28.

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