

# Willem Claesz. Heda

1593/1594–1680

ALTHOUGH documents do not indicate the date or place of his birth, Willem Claesz. Heda was probably born in Haarlem either in 1593 or 1594. This assumption is based on the inscription “aetate 84” found on a 1678 portrait of Heda by the Haarlem painter Jan de Braij (c. 1626/27–1697). Heda’s entire career was spent in Haarlem, where he took an active role in the Guild of Saint Luke. His name first appears on the guild rolls of 1631, the year in which he assisted Salomon de Bray (1597–1664) in its reorganization.<sup>1</sup> Heda was elected *deken* in 1642 and 1652, and was a *hoofdman* in 1637, 1643, and 1651. One of his sons, Gerret Willemsz. Heda (q.v.) was mentioned as his apprentice in a document dated 7 July 1642.

Although he painted some portraits and figural compositions, Heda specialized in still-life painting. He was unquestionably one of the greatest masters of the genre. As is evident from his early vanitas still lifes, Heda was influenced by the Haarlem painter Floris van Schooten (active c. 1617–1655). His breakfast pieces also grew out of the Haarlem still-life tradition of the early seventeenth century, as was already noted during his lifetime by Haarlem historian Theodorus Schrevelius, who wrote that Heda painted “fruit, and all kinds of knick-knacks” in the manner of Floris van Dijck (1575–1651). Heda’s paintings evolved from additive compositions to monumental, monochrome breakfast and banquet pieces, executed with delicate brushwork that captured a wide range of materials and textures.

Heda and Pieter Claesz. (1597/1598–1660) were the principal still-life artists in Haarlem until well after mid-century. Heda also had great influence on painters in other artistic centers, among them the Amsterdam artist Jan Jansz. den Uyl (c. 1595–1640).

## Notes

1. See Taverne 1972–1973, 50–69.

## Bibliography

- Schrevelius 1648: 390.  
Van der Willigen 1870: 156–157.  
Van Gelder 1941.  
Bergström 1956: 123–134.  
Vroom 1980, 1: 53–78; 2: 65–80, nos. 324–392.  
Delft 1988: 121–140.

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## *Banquet Piece with Mince Pie*

1635

Oil on canvas, 106.7 x 111.1 (42 x 43¾)

Patrons’ Permanent Fund

## Inscriptions

On edge of tablecloth at right: ·HEDA· 1635·

On edge of tablecloth at left: unidentified monogram

**Technical Notes:** The support, a medium-weight, plain-woven fabric, is unlined and delicate, with small tears and fraying where folded over the stretcher. Small patched holes are found in the upper right corner and in the glass ewer at center. The paint layer continues onto the original tacking margins, suggesting it was primed on a stretching frame. A thick mustard-colored ground layer is employed as a mid-tone in the tablecloth.

Paint is applied in smooth wet-over-dry layers with impasted highlights, transparent glazes, and thin opaque scumbles. Scattered small losses and areas of slight abrasion have been retouched. A small remnant of an aged varnish remains in the shadows to the right of the fallen tazza. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

**Provenance:** Private collection, the Netherlands, 1948; by inheritance to a subsequent owner; (sale, Ader-Picard-Tajan, Paris, 22 June 1990, no. 39); (Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna; Bruno Meissner, Zurich; and Otto Naumann, New York).

DISPLAYED in this imposing painting are the remains of a sumptuously laden table. The care with which the precious vessels were arranged prior to the meal is still evident despite the disarray of the white linen tablecloth, the snuffed-out candle, the tipped-over silver tazza and glass *roemer*, and the broken one lying on a pewter dish. Heda has led us to believe that the focal point of the meal has been the mince pie, which, flavored with currants, raisins, and exotic spices from the Far East, was a special dish reserved for holidays and lavish banquets. Freshly cut slices of lemon added to its flavor. As an adjunct to the meal were oysters, to be seasoned with vinegar from the shell-shaped Venetian glass decanter. Salt, prominently displayed in the silver salt cellar, and pepper, contained within the paper cone made from an almanac page, were also expensive seasonings available to the guests. Imported olives and a simple roll rounded out the feast,